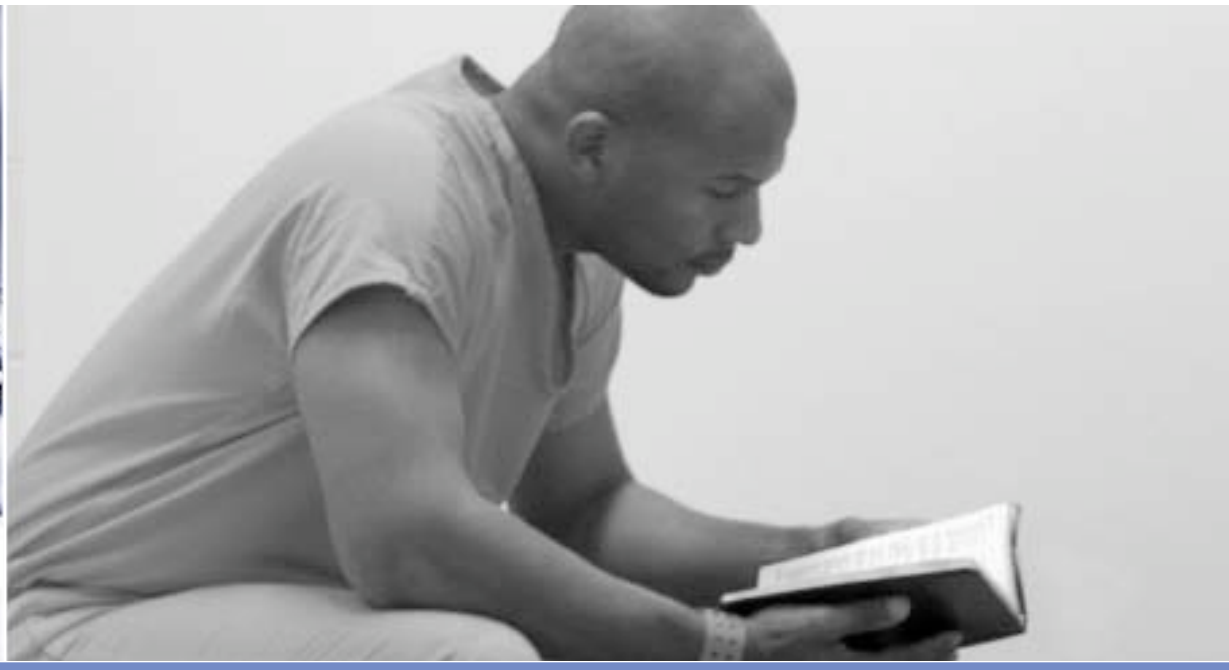

Getting Ready: How Arizona Has Created a 'Parallel Universe' for Inmates

by Dora Schriro

Throughout my years of working in corrections, I began to notice that some things never changed. The "good" inmate stayed on his bunk, kept his head down and followed orders. Upon release, the same "good" inmate too often became a really lousy ex-offender.

Back in the community, the "good" inmate was ill-equipped to make good decisions because the only thing he had learned to do in prison was sit on his bunk and take orders. Not having spent the workday or his leisure time productively while confined, the newly released offender was not prepared to find or keep a job or develop better relationships. Lacking these critical skills, it was more likely that "good" inmates would make bad choices on the outside.

The sad truth is that most traditional corrections systems in this country take men and women who are already clearly imperfect in their decision-making and severely restrict their opportunity to learn to make any decisions. In many ways, this allows them to continue to shift responsibility and avoid accountability for their prior bad acts and for their conduct in general.

Shortly after I arrived in Arizona, staff throughout the Department of Corrections came together as a team to lay the groundwork for developing Getting Ready, a common-sense approach to pre-release preparation that begins on day one of incarceration and continues to the conclusion of every inmate's sentence. The program is a bottom-up, systemwide reform that can be implemented without enabling legislation or new funds. Getting Ready redefines the officer-offender relationship, shifting many responsibilities from the staff to the inmates and empowering both groups to function at

substantively higher levels than in other correctional systems. For example, officers do not tell inmates when to get up and when to go to sleep. Getting Ready does not just preach about what you ought to be doing when you get back to the real world. We bring the real world — what we now call a "Parallel Universe" — into prison so that inmates in every custody level acquire and practice basic life skills from the first to the last day of their incarceration.

Parallel Universe

The remaking of prison life to resemble life in the community is a central premise of Getting Ready. Modifying ordinary facets of life in prison to parallel life outside prison — thus, its name, Parallel Universe — begins with one basic question: How do people in the real world tackle this problem?

Take health care as an example. As most people know, health care costs are rising. In Arizona, we applied the Parallel Universe model by asking, How do we address this problem in the outside community?

If someone in the community adheres to healthy habits — by not smoking, eating healthy foods, exercising and complying with medical directions — he will likely have a lower co-pay. On the other hand, people with unhealthy habits are at higher risk and thus will have a higher co-pay. We applied this same solution in Getting Ready, creating an all-encompassing incentive system that includes wellness, so that healthy habits deliver personal and fiscal benefits for both the prisoner and the system.

We also applied Parallel Universe to inmates' work assignments. Some prison jobs are menial, but because they are important to the system, they tend to pay higher wages. This, of course, is not the way it

Editor's Note

Dora Schriro, former director of the Arizona Department of Corrections, spoke at NIJ's 2008 annual conference. Her discussion about Arizona's innovative Getting Ready corrections program was so well received that we invited her to write an article for the *NIJ Journal*. The Getting Ready program won an Innovations in American Government award from Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government in 2008. Although Getting Ready has not yet undergone an independent evaluation by NIJ, we feel it is keeping with the *Journal's* role as an active participant in the "marketplace of criminal-justice ideas" to continue this discussion with our readers.

EVALUATION OF GETTING READY

by Gerald Gaes

Every year, the Ash Institute — part of Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government — holds a competition to identify government initiatives that improve the lives of our citizens. I was asked by the Ash Institute to prepare a report on the Getting Ready program in Arizona; my report was one of the factors that the committee of judges considered in giving Getting Ready a 2008 Innovations in American Government award.

My report was based on a tour of four of the Arizona Department of Corrections prison complexes; during this visit, I talked with 70 staff members, representing all levels of the organization, and 55 inmates. I also talked with then-Arizona Governor Janet Napolitano, now secretary of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, and with members of several nonprofit groups, such as Mothers Against Drunk Driving, Girl Scouts Behind Bars and the ADC Labor Relations Council, which consists of civilian and uniformed corrections personnel. I also reviewed numerous documents, including:

- ADC policies on inmate discipline, mail, phone calls, visitation, property and recreation.
- Technical manuals on inmate classification and individual corrections plans.
- Policies on Getting Ready's earned incentive program and work activities.
- ADC's 2007 five-year strategic plan.
- Data published by the U.S. Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Statistics.

Objective Outcomes

To determine objective performance measures, I compared data from 2003 (a year prior to the development of Getting Ready) to data from 2007. It is important to note that, from 2003 to 2007, ADC's prison population grew 27 percent.

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is done in the real world. So we turned to the U.S. Department of Labor's *Dictionary of Occupational Titles* to determine job categories and salaries and revised inmate pay to reflect what someone could expect to receive proportionately for performing this work in the community.

The same principle was applied to education. An inmate is not required to complete or further his education, but until he earns a GED — assuming he is academically able, which encompasses the vast majority of the population — he can be employed only in entry-level jobs, earning entry-level wages. However, as in the real world, once he earns a GED, many other employment opportunities open up. In Getting Ready, a GED becomes a prerequisite to job training, better work assignments and higher wages.

For example, one of the job opportunities available to inmates in Arizona who earn a GED is with a company we have partnered with for many years. When the company won a business innovation award, the CEO said that he wished the inmates who contributed to the firm's success could have attended the awards ceremony. So I said, "Why don't you bring the award out to the prison, and we'll replicate the awards ceremony?"

We brought together more than 300 inmates from various housing units in a common yard where the impact of the partnership and shared success was immediately apparent. In addition to friendly banter and lots of laughter, I observed many of the prisoners who were employed in the award-winning business generously praising the officers who had helped make this happen. Both inmates and staff spoke about what they had accomplished. The inmates knew that they did not get the work assignment by accident; they had to get their GED and remain violation-free to participate in the employment program. And the staff knew that they were correctional professionals who had inspired, supported and sustained this change.

Today, three-quarters of the inmate population in Arizona have a GED certificate, and needless to say, this is a win-win for inmates and for the entire community. A GED is a very effective prison management tool in that it improves self-esteem, enabling our population to be more insight-oriented and less action-oriented and thus, easier to interact with and manage day-to-day. This is precisely what the research has shown: Having a GED contributes to reduced violence in the prison. A GED and its benefits — postsecondary job training and premium-pay work assignments, for example — work as well in prison as on the street.

Getting Started

The first step, of course, happens during intake and classification. The staff conducts an in-depth objective assessment of inmate needs and risks. The assessment provides the basis for housing, work and supervision decisions and program assignments — based on acuity of need for intervention, risk to self and others, length of stay and amenability to treatment — and also helps create an individualized corrections plan for each inmate.

Here is an analogy of how I regard an individualized corrections plan: Everyone goes to the same supermarket and everyone gets a cart. But as you walk down the aisles, you take only the things off the shelves that meet your needs. In essence, Getting Ready stocks the shelves with a variety of options. But you cannot just open up any package and sample it as you go — the program ensures that an inmate can add to his cart things that the intake assessment has determined are necessary for growth and development.

As with any good system, Getting Ready's individualized plans — including assessments and a re-evaluation of risk — are updated at least annually throughout an inmate's incarceration.

We cannot afford for inmates to put off discharge planning until the last several months of their sentence. In Arizona, every inmate, regardless of custody level, is expected to work full time toward the completion of the corrections plan prior to release. We call the process by which they do this "7 x 3 x 3." Inmates should be focused seven days a week, during the three facets of every day (school or work, structured self-improvement, and community betterment), and motivated by a three-tiered system of incentives that they can earn throughout their sentence.

You do not have to look hard to see Parallel Universe at work. Unlike the typical prison day, which starts about 9 a.m. and ends around 3 p.m. and rarely extends to the weekend, Arizona inmates apply themselves every day of the week, working to become literate, employable and sober, and during leisure time, focusing on their families and communities and improving their lives. When inmates make the right choices for the right reasons, they benefit in ways that parallel our lives.

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Getting Ready's Incentive System

In most traditional prison systems, inmates can go one way — and that is down. It is usually as good as it is going to get the moment they walk in the door. In most institutions, the staff says, "Here are your uniforms and undergarments, one pair each of sneakers and shower shoes, towels and sheets. Make the most of it because it's not going to get any better. If you behave badly, we will take some of this away. If you do well, we will leave you alone."

Most corrections systems rely predominately, if not exclusively, on motivating the population to not do bad things. This is fundamentally different from purposely motivating prisoners to do good things. Getting Ready uses a three-tiered earned incentive system that changes the traditional paradigm. This system recognizes good behavior — greater acceptance of responsibility and better decision-making — with rewards or incentives that can be earned over time, are appropriate to each custody level, and are prized by the population.

Some of these incentives are not unique to corrections, but we bundled them in a low-cost, or no-cost, way that works. How did we do this? First, we held a series of inmate forums, which marked a significant change in how communication usually happens in prisons. Inmates were asked, "What are the things you miss most? Without compromising security, what things would you want to have back in your life?"

One thing they identified was the ability of family members to bring food on visitation days. Most corrections systems prohibit food items from being brought in because it presents an opportunity to smuggle in contraband. In Getting Ready, an inmate has to work very hard to earn a visit in which family members are allowed to bring food, and not all inmates in every custody level are eligible. But we have found that these visits are also so meaningful to the inmate's family that family members themselves have become an effective "policing authority." These visits have taken place at a number of Arizona facilities with not a single untoward incident reported.

Another thing inmates said that they missed from the outside was the chance to have dinner and a movie, so we built this into the earned incentive system. Now inmates have the possibility of eating their meals in a less

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regimented setting, followed by a show or televised sports event, and the opportunity to buy snacks not ordinarily sold in the commissary.

The things the inmates identified during the forums were not difficult to provide. In fact, their suggestions were normal and, to me, indicated not that the inmates were trying to get comfortable being in prison, but that they wanted to try to normalize their lives as much as possible.

Free Time

Recidivism studies show that, even when an inmate gets a job or acquires other skills in prison, how he spends his free time is crucial to his long-term success. Therefore, Getting Ready contains a two-part component for free time. The first focuses on self-improvement and includes classes in conflict resolution, cultural diversity, spiritual pursuits, arts and recreation, and relapse prevention, such as Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous. The second leisure-time component is dedicated to community betterment and family reunification.

Community betterment can include a number of different activities, but in Getting Ready, crime victims are a key constituency. Crime victims represent the segment of our community that has been most directly affected by the inmates' unlawful conduct; crime victims are united in their desire that others not become victims of crime when these inmates are released. Inviting Arizona's crime victim community to actively participate in the Getting Ready program has enabled us to build a striking sense of accountability and responsibility in the prison population.

Although victim classes are not unique to Arizona, we have coupled them with other Getting Ready components. For example, inmates are involved in fundraisers and other activities that support victims' organizations. In fact, the inmates themselves select victims' organizations and then, working with staff, seek advice from these organizations on how best to support them. Inmates also become better community members by making donations to charities — and those who do not have money can get involved in other ways. For example, inmates have donated their hair to Locks of Love and walked their facilities' perimeter to raise awareness for breast cancer survivors. I have seen these activities empower inmates, men and women alike, raising their awareness of the impact of their prior bad conduct on others and also increasing their awareness of the powerful positive impact of good conduct on themselves and their families. That can be truly transformative.

I have also witnessed greater responsibility among Getting Ready inmates for their criminal conduct and its impact on crime victims; in the past four years, for example, inmates in Arizona have raised more than $1.4 million for crime victim agencies, and court-ordered restitution has increased 14 percent per inmate.

Another benefit we have seen is enhanced civility in the population and between staff and inmates. Let me be clear: This is not about being more "familiar"; it is about striving to be more effective. Today, inmates seek out staff members; inmates want the approval of staff members, and they value their opinions. It is also rewarding for staff to be recognized as role models.

Outcomes

Since we implemented Getting Ready in 2004, Arizona's corrections system has experienced significant positive outcomes.[1]

Violence has been reduced with inmate-on-inmate assaults decreasing 46 percent, inmate-on-staff assaults down 33 percent, suicides down 67 percent and sexual assaults down 61 percent.

Inmate problem-solving is demonstrably better, with grievances falling 27 percent and inmate lawsuits over conditions of confinement down 63 percent.

I also believe that the community is safer. The average one-year return rate for all releases in the two years before and after Getting Ready started improved 2.75 percent. Within this group of releases were 1,500 inmates who completed Getting Ready in its entirety. This group has done considerably better, as much as two years after release, than inmates of comparable risk who did not have access to the program during the phased implementation. Inmates completing Getting Ready have committed 35 percent fewer new crimes and had 5 percent fewer parole revocations.

As with any innovative program however, many measures of success are anecdotal and more difficult to measure with numbers. One of my favorite stories concerns inmate art.

As many people know, inmate art is unique, and it can be fairly violent. At one of our prisons, inmates painted a mural of a fleet of boats — we often refer to ourselves as a correctional system moving toward flagship status — and each boat depicted a unit at the prison and a facet of the Getting Ready program. Onboard are staff and inmates together, steering the ships and raising their sails. That is the degree to which inmates see themselves as part of the Getting Ready team. At another prison, there is a mural showing the metamorphosis of an inmate coming into prison, going through Getting Ready, then walking out: a grown-up in a suit, carrying an attaché, with his family waiting for him.

Getting Ready imposes real-world expectations on inmates. Although the program focuses on the 97 percent of a state's correctional population that is sentenced to a term of years and then goes home, it is no less applicable to those serving a life or a death sentence.

We instituted Getting Ready with no new monies — we simply used our scarce resources of staff, space and time more wisely. I think the fundamental fairness behind Getting Ready has played an important role in the program's widespread acceptance in Arizona. Fueled by the principle of Parallel Universe, Getting Ready does not ask anything of inmates that we do not ask of ourselves in the real world. And as is the case in the real world, Getting Ready does not mandate inmates, per se, to do anything ... just like in life on the outside. You can "opt out" if you want to, but with fewer than 2 percent of the population opting out, it is clear that inmates recognize its value, too.

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To listen to NIJ's interview with Dora Schriro regarding the Getting Ready program, go to www.ojp.usdoj.gov/nij/journals/263/getting-ready.htm.

Notes

1. Schriro, D., "The Arizona Plan Getting Ready: Keeping Our Communities Safe," Phoenix: Arizona Department of Corrections, 2008, available at www.azcorrections.gov/adc/PDF/plan3_FY2008.pdf.

About the Author

Dora Schriro, Ph.D., J.D., was director of the Arizona Department of Corrections for six years and director of the Missouri Department of Corrections for eight years. She is now special advisor on Immigration and Customs Enforcement and Detention & Removal to Secretary Janet Napolitano at the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Schriro earned her Ph.D. from Columbia University and her J.D. from St. Louis University. She has been honored by the National Governors Association for her recidivism policies, and in 2008 Getting Ready received an Innovations in American Government award from the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University.

EVALUATION OF GETTING READY

(continued from page 3)

Some metrics are reported as raw numbers and other metrics as rates or percentages.

Sexual assaults (confirmed):
2003: 20
2007: 7

Suicides:
2003: 6
2007: 8

Major rule violations:
(down 12.5 percent)
2003: 522 (per 1,000)
2007: 457 (per 1,000)

Inmate-on-staff assaults:
down 51 percent

Inmate-on-inmate assaults:
down 37.5 percent

Inmate grievances: down 17 percent

Medical grievances: down 19.8 percent

Inmate lawsuits: down 41.5 percent

Positive random drug tests:
2003: 6.2 percent
2007: 3.3 percent

GED graduates:
2003: 791
2007: 3,306

'Softer' Outcomes

Staff members and inmates — including those who were initially skeptical when Dora Schriro first announced her approach to re-engineering ADC management strategies — described dramatic changes in the culture, safety and attitudes of both inmates and staff. Although a few correctional officers said that they preferred the system before Getting Ready, they were in the minority. Most of the staff told me that, pre-Getting Ready, ADC was typical of many correctional systems that have extremely rigid and harsh procedures that institutionalize an "us-versus-them" mentality, in which inmates must rigidly follow rules, many of which are infractions that would not rise to the level of a misdemeanor in state or federal criminal codes and that can be arbitrarily interpreted. This approach gave correctional officers the discretion to choose when they wanted to enforce rules and when they wanted to ignore them. Getting Ready redesigned the misconduct policy so that it is more like the Arizona criminal codes, just one element of the program's "Parallel Universe" concept that emphasizes similarities, rather than distinctions, between prison life and the free community.

Inmates described the pre-Getting Ready environment as one in which there was nothing to look forward to, little opportunity for self-improvement and no consideration for their needs or views. Getting Ready dramatically changed this paradigm. Inmates stated that there was more communication with staff, and some described a job fair at which 15 inmates who were being released found a job, a practice that never occurred before Getting Ready.

I spoke with inmates who worked at a telemarketing firm that was located within the prison compound, just one Getting Ready job opportunity for inmates who had earned their GED. Many of them told me that this work opportunity had "changed their life." Another inmate told me that, before Getting Ready, there was no way to solve problems; there was little or no staff guidance. "You just did your time," she said. Now, she continued, time is spent constructively and inmates have a greater sense of pride. One very articulate inmate told me that, before Getting Ready, she thought of herself as lying in a glass coffin, watching the world go by, decaying and wasting away; now, she said she feels that she has self-worth and she sees opportunity not only within the prison environment but when she returns to the free community.

Safer Communities?

The Getting Ready program was designed with specific, clearly stated goals:

- Improve the safety and security of staff and inmates.
- Increase public safety in the community by reducing recidivism.
- Enhance civility between and among staff and inmates.
- Promote greater inmate participation in productive work, schooling and treatment.
- Increase inmate concern for victims and acts of civic responsibility.

The objective and subjective ("softer") outcomes that I was able to measure clearly indicated that Getting Ready had dramatically improved the prison environment for inmates and staff alike. But the important policy question remained: Does Getting Ready improve community safety?

Recidivism can be measured many different ways. Most correctional agencies compute the percentage of prisoners released in a fiscal year who return to prison — for technical violation of community supervision or committing a new crime — within a particular period of time. The average one-year return rate for ADC in 2002 and 2003 was 30 percent; that is, during the two years before Getting Ready was implemented, 30 percent returned to prison within one year of their release. The average for the four following years was 27.25 percent, a difference of 2.75 percent.

Although this may seem like a small impact, the Getting Ready program was still rolling out when I performed my review for Harvard, and even if this figure represents the recidivism impact over a longer time period, it could be considered significant. Because implementing Getting Ready required little additional funding — and considering the fact that prison costs $30,000 or more per inmate per year — even small reductions in prisoner returns produce significant taxpayer savings. Considered on a nationwide basis, such a program could have a large impact.

An Innovative Program

It was not possible for me to judge all aspects of Getting Ready during my two-day site visit and review of written data; for example, I did not visit segregation cells where the most aggressive and difficult-to-manage inmates are held. I visited only four of ADC's 10 complexes; however, these four managed inmates at all security levels, and I had no reason to suspect that there would be significant differences.

Make no mistake about it: ADC still operates prisons. There are fences, razor wire, correctional officers and guns on the perimeter. Inmates wear orange jump suits. Correctional officers wear brown and beige uniforms with gold star badges. ADC conducts counts four times a day to ensure that inmates are where they should be. But, in my assessment, Getting Ready is a successful program innovation. Its innovation lies in the integration of many individual components that are used in other modern progressive penal systems, such as offering classes in victim awareness, involving both line staff and inmates in strategic planning, conducting needs and risk assessments, instituting an earned incentive program, and keeping inmates productively occupied. Getting Ready is a model program that proves that changes can be made with little or no additional resources and that they can be made in a relatively short period of time.

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About the Author

Gerald Gaes, Ph.D., received his doctorate in social psychology from the State University of New York at Albany in 1980. He worked for the Federal Bureau of Prisons for 20 years, including as the director of the Office of Research. He served as a visiting scientist at NIJ for five years; he also served a two-year detail at the United States Sentencing Commission. Gaes is first author of Measuring Prison Performance: Government Privatization and Accountability; *he has published extensively in professional journals, including* Crime and Delinquency, Criminal Justice Review, Criminology and Public Policy, Justice Quarterly, *and* Punishment & Society. *In July 2000, Gaes received the U.S. Department of Justice Attorney General's Distinguished Service Award for the correctional research that he conducted during his BOP career.*