

# THE ROLE OF SCREENING AND ASSESSMENT IN JAIL REENTRY

A reentry system must be able to determine which people should be prioritized for intervention and what issues need addressing to enhance their chances of success and reduce their risk to the community. Assessing individual risk and need factors for this purpose is a crucial component of effective reentry work (Andrews, Bonta, and Wormith 2006; Gendreau, French, and Taylor 2002). Measuring risk, which in the reentry context means the likelihood of reoffending after release, identifies who within a population to target for risk-reduction interventions. Assessing individual criminogenic needs, which are factors that contribute to criminal behavior and can be changed, provides individualized targets for change. While many state corrections systems are using validated risk assessment instruments to establish appropriate eligibility criteria for prison-based treatment programs (Simpson and Knight 2007) and to ensure evidence-based parole board decisionmaking (Petersilia 2009), these practices are relatively rare in the nation's jails, which typically focus diagnostic activity on identifying security risk to inform classification decisions and population management.

Consistent with effective correctional practice, jails and their community partners should identify the risk levels and criminogenic needs of returning populations and should focus their resources on individuals with the highest levels of both (Bonta and Andrews 2007; MacKenzie 2006; Lowenkamp, Latessa, and Holsinger 2006). With an estimated 9 million individuals cycling through the nation's jails each year (Beck 2006), the potential impact of

gathering risk and need information to promote effective local reentry is enormous. But gauging risk and need in a jail environment is challenging. Jail populations are diverse (including pretrial detainees, sentenced offenders, supervision violators, and others) and have serious needs in such areas as mental health, substance abuse, and job skills. Further, jail program capacity is limited in most communities, and the window for intervention in the jail is brief, with most individuals returning to the surrounding community within a few weeks (Solomon et al. 2008).

This brief presents the two-stage screening and assessment process to determine risk and need levels that is a core element of the Transition from Jail to Community (TJC) model. In the following sections, we discuss the role of screening and assessment in the TJC model, how to select and implement screening for risk of reoffending and assessment of criminogenic risk and need factors, and how to integrate risk and need information into comprehensive jail intervention strategies. Throughout the brief, we draw upon the implementation experiences of six TJC learning sites, and we conclude with lessons learned from those sites that may assist other jurisdictions in applying screening and assessment to their jail populations. Greater detail about implementation of screening and assessment, as well as tools and examples from the TJC initiative and sites, are available in module 6 of the TJC Online Learning Toolkit, at [http://www.urban.org/projects/tjc/toolkit/module6/section2\\_1.html](http://www.urban.org/projects/tjc/toolkit/module6/section2_1.html).

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The National Institute of Corrections (NIC) partnered with the Urban Institute (UI) in 2007 to launch the Transition from Jail to Community (TJC) initiative with the goal of improving public safety and reintegration outcomes.

TJC involves the development, implementation, and evaluation of a model for jail to community transition. The TJC model is not a discrete program; it is a new way of doing business that entails systems change and the development of collaborative relationships between jail and community partners. The TJC approach is being implemented in six jurisdictions and technical assistance products will be created for communities across the country.

More information is available at [www.jailtransition.com](http://www.jailtransition.com).

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## The Transition from Jail to Community (TJC) Initiative

The National Institute of Corrections (NIC) partnered with the Urban Institute in 2007 to launch TJC in order to address the unique challenges of jail reentry and thereby improve public safety and enhance the success of individuals returning to the community from local jails. The TJC team worked to achieve these objectives by developing, implementing, and evaluating a comprehensive jail-to-community transition model (see box 1). The TJC model represents a systems approach to jail-to-community transition, in which jails and communities jointly “own” local reentry. Jail stays are too short and the issues present in jail populations are too difficult for either the jail or the community to achieve success alone.

The TJC model is intended to be adaptable so it can be applied in a wide variety of jurisdictions with diverse jail populations. Implementation of the TJC model began in Douglas County, Kansas, and Denver, Colorado, in fall 2008. Four additional TJC sites were selected through a competitive application process in August 2009: Davidson County, Tennessee; Kent County, Michigan; La Crosse County, Wisconsin; and Orange County, California. Each site received tailored technical assistance to implement the model through January 2012.

For more information on the TJC initiative, see [www.jailtransition.com](http://www.jailtransition.com).

## Risk and Need in a Triage Approach

The rapid turnover of the jail population and its varied and deep needs require a strategy to allocate the limited intervention resources available to facilitate successful transition. The TJC model uses a triage approach to prioritize interventions based on where resources are most needed or are most likely to be successful. Triage planning helps categorize individuals and identify the appropriate mix, timing, and intensity of interventions for each person based on risk and need information.

The triage approach incorporates three principles: first, the risk principle, that higher-risk individuals should receive higher levels of intervention (Lowenkamp, Latessa, et al. 2006); second, the need principle, that interventions intended to reduce recidivism must target dynamic (i.e., changeable) issues that drive criminal behavior, known as criminogenic needs (Bonta and Andrews 2007); and third,

### Box 1. The TJC Model

The TJC model incorporates findings from the considerable body of prisoner reentry research and the growing literature on evidence-based practices. The model consists of five elements:

- *Leadership, Vision, and Organizational Culture*—Leaders from both the jail and the community must be actively engaged, articulate a clear vision, set expectations, identify important issues, and involve other key constituencies.
- *Collaborative Structure and Joint Ownership*—Effective transition strategies rely on collaboration and information-sharing among jail and community-based partners and joint ownership of the problem and the solution.
- *Data-Driven Understanding of Local Reentry*—Regular analysis of objective data, including analysis of the jail population characteristics, informs and drives decisionmaking and policy formation.
- *Targeted Intervention Strategies*—The strategy to improve transition at the individual level involves introducing specific interventions at critical points along the jail-to-community continuum.
- *Self-Evaluation and Sustainability*—Self-evaluation involves the use of objective data to guide operations, monitor progress, and inform decisionmaking. Sustainability involves planning to maintain initiative progress despite changes in leadership, policy, funding, and staffing.

low-risk offenders should be subject to minimal intervention, if any. Failure to adhere to these principles can waste valuable resources by expending them on the wrong people or putting the right people in the wrong intervention. Placement of lower-risk offenders into intensive, evidence-based programming can crowd out higher-risk offenders for whom that programming is designed and who are much more likely to benefit. Placing low-risk offenders into intensive intervention programs may even make their outcomes worse (Lowenkamp and Latessa 2004).

Risk screening and risk/needs assessment provide jails and their community partners with the necessary information to carry out a triage approach. They are deployed in two stages: (1) risk screening to determine which inmates are at greatest risk to recidivate; and (2) full assessment to identify the needs that must be targeted to reduce recidivism.

## Risk Screening

Screening involves using a brief instrument to quickly capture basic information about a person's risk to reoffend and is used to determine if a more comprehensive assessment is warranted. In a jail setting, everyone, regardless of legal status, should be screened at booking. Many types of basic screening tools can be used in a jail setting, but one that can be administered quickly, easily, reliably, and with minimal resources is preferable. Risk screening divides the jail population into high-, medium-, and low-risk categories, making it possible to direct intervention resources first to the highest-risk individuals.

“Risk” in the TJC context refers to risk to reoffend in the community after release. In the jail context, “risk” is more commonly used to refer to the risk of institutional misconduct or escape, which is evaluated through jail classification procedures and has different dynamics than reoffending in the community. Risk screening for the purpose of triage and targeted treatment does not replace jail classification. Objective jail classification procedures are essential to establish a safe and secure jail environment in which jail transition services and practices can be realized (Christensen 2008).

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### TJC Screening Principles

1. Risk screening should be done using a valid and reliable tool designed to measure risk to reoffend in the community.
  2. Screening is intended for the entire jail population and should occur at booking or as close to initial entry to the jail system as possible.
  3. Screening should be used to categorize the jail population by risk level, with different intervention tracks for each level.
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### Selecting a Screening Instrument

One of the first risk-screening implementation tasks is the selection of an appropriate instrument. Implementing screening for everyone booked into a jail system necessitates a tool that is quick and easy to apply. Implementation teams in the five TJC sites that did not conduct risk screening when they joined the project (La Crosse County had a risk-screening tool in place to inform judicial decision-making) were clear that selecting an economical tool—both in direct financial cost and workload—was critical to successful implementation. The TJC national team provided

the sites with information about various risk screening tools that met these criteria.<sup>1</sup>

The five TJC sites that implemented screening for the first time while participating in TJC joined La Crosse County in selecting the Proxy Triage Risk Screener (Proxy). The Proxy was selected primarily for its simplicity, predictive validity, and quick administration. Consisting of just three questions (see box 2), the Proxy can be administered by a booking officer in less than a minute, relying on self-reported data. Proxy results are also easy to interpret: scores range from 2 to 8 with scores of 2 to 4 generally indicating low risk, scores of 5 or 6 indicating medium risk, and scores of 7 or 8 indicating high risk (Bogue, Woodward, and Joplin 2005).<sup>2</sup> Lastly, the Proxy is a public domain instrument that can be used free of charge. This factor was very important to sites operating in a difficult budgetary environment. In general, TJC sites were able to select a screening tool and move to implementation quickly.

#### Box 2. Proxy Triage Risk Screener

The Proxy is scored on an eight-point scale, with a higher score indicating a greater likelihood of recidivism. The Proxy score is determined from the following items:

- Current age
- Age of first arrest
- Number of prior arrests

For details on scoring the Proxy, see Bogue, Woodward, and Joplin (2005).

### Administering Risk Screening

After tool selection comes planning the logistics of implementation: where and when (at what point in the legal process) screening will take place, who will administer screening, and how the data will be stored for later use. As the TJC approach is intended to apply to everyone entering the jail system, the TJC technical assistance team advocated risk screening at initial booking. This ensures that risk information is collected for

<sup>1</sup> The TJC initiative does not endorse any particular screening or assessment tools, and the TJC technical assistance team compiled and provided to the sites an overview of validated screening and assessment tools, many in the public domain, to assist with instrument selection. This overview is available in module 6 of the *TJC Online Learning Toolkit*, <http://www.jailtransition.com/Toolkit>.

<sup>2</sup> A more recent iteration of the Proxy is scored on a six-point scale, but the scoring logic is unchanged.

the vast majority of individuals entering the jail, facilitating greater understanding of the jail population and identifying high-risk offenders with short stays for possible intervention by community partners.

By the end of the technical assistance period, five of the six TJC sites were screening for risk at booking, while the sixth site incorporated screening into its classification process instead, due to resource and time constraints. All sites relied on booking or classification officers to conduct the screening. Sites found that integrating screening into existing booking or classification procedures was minimally burdensome, both in required staff training and additional time it added to the process. At the end of the TJC assistance period, the sites that were screening at booking were capturing risk scores for nearly their entire jail populations. Screening at classification generated risk information for a much lower proportion of the population and may be missing important groups to target for intervention, such as individuals repeatedly booked for low-level offenses and released within a few days of booking.

The implementation experiences of the TJC learning sites demonstrated the importance of having screening information integrated into the jail's data collection system. Screening information can only guide decisions and inform the development of the jail transition strategy if it can be pulled from a data system and examined. Therefore, part of planning for screening implementation is determining how this information will be kept electronically and how it can be accessed later. Ideally, screening scores should be integrated into the jail management information system, as Davidson, Denver, and La Crosse counties did. Data extraction and analysis capacity has been an ongoing challenge in every TJC site, and some have had to implement workarounds to record screening information in order to get started. Douglas County, for example, began keeping risk screening data in a separate spreadsheet until it could modify its jail data system to accept the data. Davidson County was unable to expand its jail management system, so it repurposed data fields to incorporate Proxy information.

The ability to readily access screening data allows the jail to verify that implementation is proceeding as planned. Several sites did spot checks of screening data; in two TJC sites, jail leadership was able to fix problems by noting when missing Proxy scores were concentrated during the shifts of particular booking officers.

### ***Norming and Validating the Screening Instrument***

Although the Proxy requires minimal training to administer, it does need to be piloted on a substantial and representative number of jail inmates—ideally, a sample constituted over a period of time (i.e., not inmates in the jail on a single day)—to work out implementation issues, accurately “norm” the scoring to the jail's population, and establish the appropriate scoring scheme. Not only did Denver's pilot testing of its screening and assessment tools provide officials with the information necessary to score the Proxy and establish its feasibility, but the report the pilot produced was a key mechanism for educating stakeholders on what the tool does and the information it provides.

In addition to norming a screening tool at the outset of implementation, it is important to validate it, or test that it predicts the likelihood of recidivism for a given population. While the Proxy has been validated for offender populations (see Davidson 2005 for a validation study from Hawaii), the TJC sites have now been using the Proxy long enough that they can verify that it is valid in their communities and that offenders scored as higher risk are in fact returning to the jail at significantly higher rates than those scored as low risk. Kent and La Crosse counties were able to use existing data to examine jail rebooking rates by Proxy score, and the two counties found the tool was predictive of recidivism for their populations.

### ***Using Screening Data***

Risk screening allows jails to group their inmates by risk to reoffend. How this information benefits a jail transition system depends on how it is used to guide reentry practice. Each TJC site made progress toward establishing a process by which risk information generated through screening would inform the delivery of programs and services to individuals, although sites differ in the degree to which these systems have been fully realized. One such purpose is to determine who will receive a full risk/needs assessment. Because assessments require trained personnel and around an hour to administer, sites did not generally choose to use resources to assess lower-risk inmates. Proxy scores are used to determine who is eligible to receive a full risk/needs assessment—such as a Level of Service Inventory–Revised (LSI-R) or Correctional Offender Management Profiles for Alternative Sanctions (COMPAS)—in Davidson, Denver, La Crosse County, and Orange counties.

*“By using Proxy, it really helped us hone in on who it was that needed the services versus who was volunteering for them to get out of their cell....Even though it’s still voluntary for everybody, we’re more apt to tap someone on the shoulder and tell them, “This is what you should be doing.”*

*--TJC Stakeholder*

Proxy scores also guide who receives certain types of programming or who gets directed to program tracks that include assessment. In Denver, only sentenced misdemeanor inmates scoring medium or high risk on the Proxy are eligible for the jail-based Life Skills program, which offers assessment, case management, and programming. Similarly, in Kent County the Proxy is used to identify potential participants for the jail’s reentry pod and programming; in La Crosse County, risk score is used as a criterion for placement in Thinking for a Change classes. Sites also moved to share screening information with community partners, particularly for high-risk inmates who are released from jail before receiving needed interventions. For example, Denver’s Community Reentry Project checks Proxy scores for clients who come to its community-based intake to guide program decisions. Davidson County expanded its use of the Proxy from jail inmates to its pretrial services program as well.

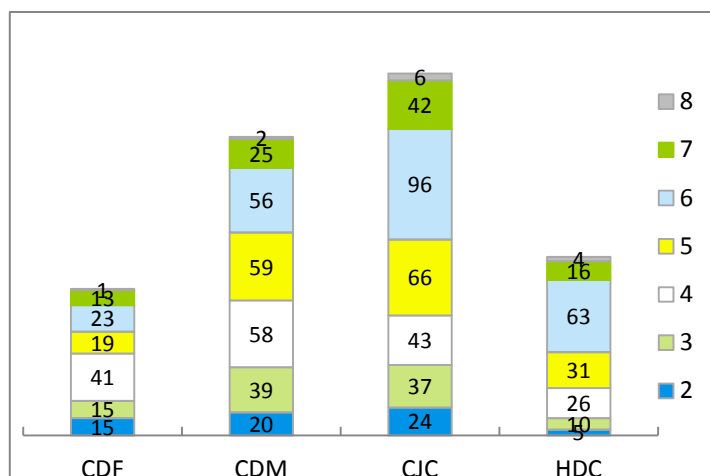
Screening information is also extremely valuable for the strategic planning of a jail transition strategy. TJC sites knew that they wanted to deliver their interventions to higher-risk inmates, but they did not have the information necessary to put this plan into practice. Once the sites began collecting screening information, the data made the conceptual categories of high-, medium- and low-risk offenders concrete, and implementation accelerated. Jail reentry partners also found it much easier to understand and engage in the TJC collaboratives when they were presented real data on the risk profile of the jail population. As an example of how this information could be helpful, Davidson County analyzed the populations of its different facilities by Proxy score (see figure 1) because program availability varied across facilities. As a second step, the county looked at its intensive programs to see if they were serving substantial numbers of low-risk offenders, and found that 25 to 30 percent of participants fell into this category. Davidson County is now exploring how many of these placements were under the control of jail administration and how many were the result of judicial orders.

Reviewing screening data is fundamental to evaluating the progress of a jail transition effort. These data can be used to monitor processes, such as verifying that higher-risk individuals are receiving full assessments, receiving case plans, and enrolling in programming, and that lower-risk individuals are not. The data can also be used to assess performance and outcomes of various parts of the jail transition system relative to the appropriate baseline. Gathering risk information allows a transition system to answer such questions as, If a program’s participants return to the jail at very low rates, is it because the program is effectively reducing their risk or because the program enrolls the lowest-risk offenders, who are less likely to return anyway? Both risk-screening and risk-assessment information can be used for this purpose, but risk screening allows for broader comparisons because it is applied to the entire jail population.

**Key Implementation Lessons Learned: Screening to Determine Risk of Reoffending**

- *Putting risk screening in place is an essential first implementation step for a systems approach to jail reentry.* Implementing screening both generates the risk information necessary to begin devising other elements of a triage approach and provides a concrete “early win” for the effort. Screening information is a fundamental data element that makes all discussion of resource allocation more “real” to stakeholder partners and aids in understanding system outcomes.

**Figure 1. Davidson County Jail Inmates by Facility and Proxy Score**



- Screening at jail booking is feasible in varied contexts. TJC sites with very different jail populations and operational environments were able to implement the Proxy quickly and with minimal resource burden.
- *Screening should be conducted as close to jail entry as possible.* Doing so generates information for the entire jail population, ensuring that no one in the population is missed by the jail transition system.
- *Jails should develop methods or practices to collect screening data electronically as a normal course of operations.* Collecting screening data will confer the greatest benefit to a jurisdiction if it is collected consistently and correctly, and if the data can be accessed readily.

## Assessment of Criminogenic Need

Risk and needs assessments evaluate an inmate's criminogenic need factors, which are the changeable factors related to their likelihood of reoffending. Assessment results identify targets for change and form the basis for case planning and decisions about program placement in both the jail and the community (Mellow et al. 2011). Simply stated, risk screening identifies appropriate target populations, and assessment tells you what to do with them.

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### TJC Assessment Principles

1. Assessment is provided for inmates who have been screened as medium or higher risk for reoffense.
  2. All assessment must be statistically valid and reliable.
  3. Assessments of criminogenic need must guide case planning, case management, and targeted treatment.
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Unlike simple risk screening, actuarial assessments provide insight into dynamic, or changeable, criminogenic needs and related treatment targets for each individual. Criminogenic needs include antisocial peers, antisocial thinking, antisocial personality, criminal history, employment/vocational skills, family dysfunction, education level, substance/alcohol abuse, self-management/life skills, and use of leisure time (Andrews et al. 2006). Interventions that focus on at least four criminogenic factors can net effect sizes of up to 30 percent, while focusing on non-criminogenic factors does little to change the likelihood of recidivism (Gendreau et al. 2002).

### Selecting an Assessment Instrument

Various assessment tools can effectively identify criminogenic needs and have been validated for correctional

populations. As with screening, the TJC initiative does not recommend any particular tool for assessment. Instituting assessments of criminogenic risk/need places some burden on jail organizations, system stakeholders, and staff (professional, volunteer, sworn, civilian) and requires careful budgetary deliberations regarding costs such as training, user fees, licenses, and staff time (Fuller and Martin 2004; White 2004).

With several good assessment instruments to choose from, TJC sites carefully engaged in these deliberations. The most obvious resource implication is the cost of proprietary instruments, and this was a significant factor in several TJC sites' decision to select an instrument available in the public domain. The resource impact of implementing risk/need assessment goes far beyond usage fees, however. Quality assessment generally requires an hour with the individual being assessed, and both initial and refresher training is necessary to conduct a productive clinical interview and maintain quality and accuracy in the assessment. The staff time necessary to do this may be the scarcest resource in a jurisdiction.

Among the TJC sites, Denver, Douglas and La Crosse counties used versions of the LSI-R,<sup>3</sup> Kent County used the COMPAS, and Davidson and Orange counties adapted versions of the Wisconsin Risk/Needs tool. The LSI-R and COMPAS are proprietary instruments, and a license to use them must be purchased. The Wisconsin Risk/Needs tool is in the public domain. Some justice agencies have developed their own assessment tools using data that they collect. Development and validation of such a tool is time and resource intensive, and none of the TJC sites elected to do so.

TJC sites identified strategies to reduce the resource impacts of implementing assessment. One was selecting an instrument already in use by other criminal justice or human services agencies in the jurisdiction. This confers several benefits. It may be possible to obtain training in using the instrument from a partner agency, as the Colorado State Judicial Branch provided to Denver Sheriff Department and Community Reentry Project staff when they selected the LSI. Using the same tool across agencies also lays a foundation for staff in those agencies to discuss risk and criminogenic needs with the same language, and sharing assessment information can reduce workload for each agency. Probation, for example, can refer to assessments conducted in the jail, or the jail may not need to assess a probation violator if she or he has a recent assessment on

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<sup>3</sup> Denver implemented the LSI, Douglas and La Crosse counties the LSI-R. La Crosse County was using the LSI-R before joining TJC.

file with probation. La Crosse County values this consistency in assessment use so highly that it decided to migrate from the LSI-R to the COMPAS because the Wisconsin Department of Corrections, which operates probation and parole supervision, adopted that instrument. Sharing an assessment tool builds a common knowledge base in a jail reentry collaborative. At the strategic level, TJC stakeholders in every site emphasized the importance of developing a common language around key reentry concepts, and a common assessment tool contributes to that.

### ***Administering Assessment***

The first assessment implementation question, and the one the guides answering all the others, is who should be targeted for assessment. Screening can peel away the lower-risk part of a jail population to a more minimal intervention track, identifying the remaining higher-risk portion as the target population for assessment. Of course, how much of the medium- and higher-risk jail population will receive assessments and subsequent targeted treatment depends on a jurisdiction's capacity to conduct assessments and/or deliver interventions. It makes little sense to assess 45 percent of the population in a jail system if interventions targeting criminogenic need can only be delivered to 25 percent of that group.

The TJC sites decided who would be assessed based mainly on capacity. Both Douglas and La Crosse County are smaller jurisdictions (with average daily jail populations of less than 200), but La Crosse County has built community corrections capacity in the form of a Justice Sanctions agency within County Health and Human Services, allowing them to assess a much larger proportion of their jail population. Justice Sanctions staff conduct the LSI-R assessments. In Douglas County, responsibility for jail transition work was initially assigned to the Douglas County Sheriff's Department's Reentry Coordinator, which limited assessment capacity for the jurisdiction to what a single person, with many additional work responsibilities, could do. Near the end of the TJC assistance period, Douglas County was able to hire two jail-based case managers who have responsibility for conducting assessment, and this increased the feasible target population. Similarly, Davidson and Denver counties have jail populations of roughly equivalent size, but Davidson County has a substantial jail-based case management and program staff that can conduct assessments, whereas Denver relies on a much smaller program staff to do its assessments. Regardless of the size of its target population for assessment, each site's approach to assessment was consistent with the TJC approach: the important thing is to have a clear target population based on risk,

assessment capacity, and available services and/or interventions.

Criteria for determining which individuals receive an assessment varied among the sites and included not only the Proxy score, but other factors such as length of stay, housing location, or crime type and adjudication status. La Crosse County began assessing all those scoring five or higher on the (eight-point) Proxy scale. Denver assessed everyone in their facility for sentenced offenders scoring five or higher on the Proxy. Davidson County was in the implementation stage of its Davidson County Needs Assessment as the TJC assistance period ended and was planning to target people scoring four or higher on the Proxy. Douglas County's initial plan for assessment was to target people scoring seven or higher on the Proxy, with a particular focus on those having sentences of 30 days or longer. Orange County is targeting assessment to people scoring five or higher on the six-point version of the Proxy scale.

With a large proportion of the jail population having brief lengths of stay and jail assessment limited, it is important to establish capacity to assess people in the community as well as the jail. In Denver, Community Reentry Project staff conduct the LSI for higher-risk individuals accessing their services, if no assessment was conducted in the jail. Justice Sanctions staff in La Crosse County may conduct assessments in the community if one was not completed before release from jail. It is not possible to do this unless assessment information can be shared with community partners, allowing them to know who has a completed assessment. Justice Sanctions staff in La Crosse County and community providers in Kent County also conduct assessment for the population in jail.

Even if an assessment has been conducted, criminogenic risk/need is dynamic. In fact, once interventions are in place, a reentry system should expect to see it change for the better. This suggests that reassessment to track progress should take place. At the conclusion of the TJC assistance period, this was happening rarely in the TJC sites—primarily in those that had focused their resources on establishing initial assessment for their intended target populations.

### ***Using Assessment Information***

Assessment information has important uses at both the client and the strategic level. At the client level, the TJC model stipulates the use of assessment as the basis for case planning, tying recommended interventions and goals to identified criminogenic need. This ensures that case

managers, program staff, community providers, and the individuals returning from jail focus on addressing criminogenic needs.<sup>4</sup> The six TJC sites all had some type of case plan when they began TJC work, or at least an intake form for jail- or community-based programming that collected much of the information generally contained in case plans. Each site revised, expanded, or adapted those forms to incorporate the assessment information they were collecting. Assessment results were also used in different ways across the six TJC sites, but typically to inform placement into jail-based programs and referral decisions.

A key strategy for effectively implementing assessment into case planning, without overly burdening staff, is to integrate assessment into existing processes. Most TJC sites had an intake process in which a case manager or program staffer sat with individuals, gathered information from them, built rapport, and began a plan for them. Best practice in conducting assessments suggests that it be done in the context of a rapport-building, two-way discussion with each offender, so conducting the assessment can become the basis for this first meeting.

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*“We had programming previously that was all over the board. Now we can target programming based on what people need.”*

*--TJC Stakeholder*

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Just as assessment helps a system understand client issues in terms of criminogenic need, the jail reentry system needs to understand its programming in those terms as well. While planning for how to use assessment data to create case plans, a parallel process should categorize programs and interventions (both in the jail and in the community) by the criminogenic needs they are designed to address. A case manager or service broker with a completed assessment in front of him/her needs to know what interventions address the higher-risk needs flagged by the assessment in order to create a good case plan. Training for case planners and program staff in the jail and community will be necessary to ensure that they understand what assessment information means and how to use it. TJC sites found that they needed to regularly review this information with staff and other stakeholders to ensure retention of the knowledge and its incorporation into practice.

As a jurisdiction moves to an assessment-based systems approach to delivering interventions to the jail population, how to share assessment data will become very important. If people have multiple needs that must be addressed (and many will), and if interventions will be delivered by people from multiple agencies or organizations, both in the jail and the community, many people will need to have access to and use assessment information. Having the assessment information in a shared data system will make this easier (though it may be difficult to set up), but this will likely require creation of release-of-information protocols. Several TJC sites also developed training and information sessions to educate stakeholders in the community to understand assessment information and what it means. Perhaps the stakeholder group whose buy-in to the use of assessment information is most important is the transitioning jail inmates. Their commitment to address their criminogenic needs is indispensable to their successful transition. Several TJC sites therefore included time to explain assessment results to clients and stress the importance of working on criminogenic need areas as part of their case planning and program intake processes.

As a jurisdiction conducts assessment, a system-wide criminogenic need profile begins to emerge from the aggregate assessment data (see figure 2). This is important data to inform system planning. Transition partners need to see the gaps in their menu of interventions relative to the prevalence of criminogenic needs among jail inmates returning to their community. For example, partners might see that 65 percent of the assessed population has a medium to high need in the alcohol or drug dependency area. The strategic question that follows is whether the capacity exists to meet that level of need and, if not, what should be done. As with screening information, this kind of analysis can only happen if assessment information is collected electronically and available to the partnership. Analyzing assessment information should guide engaging new partners to ensure that the system can address the criminogenic needs it is identifying, or finding resources to add new interventions. For example, four TJC sites received training from NIC to implement the cognitive-based Thinking for a Change curriculum, which filled a gap in their ability to address criminogenic needs such as antisocial cognition.

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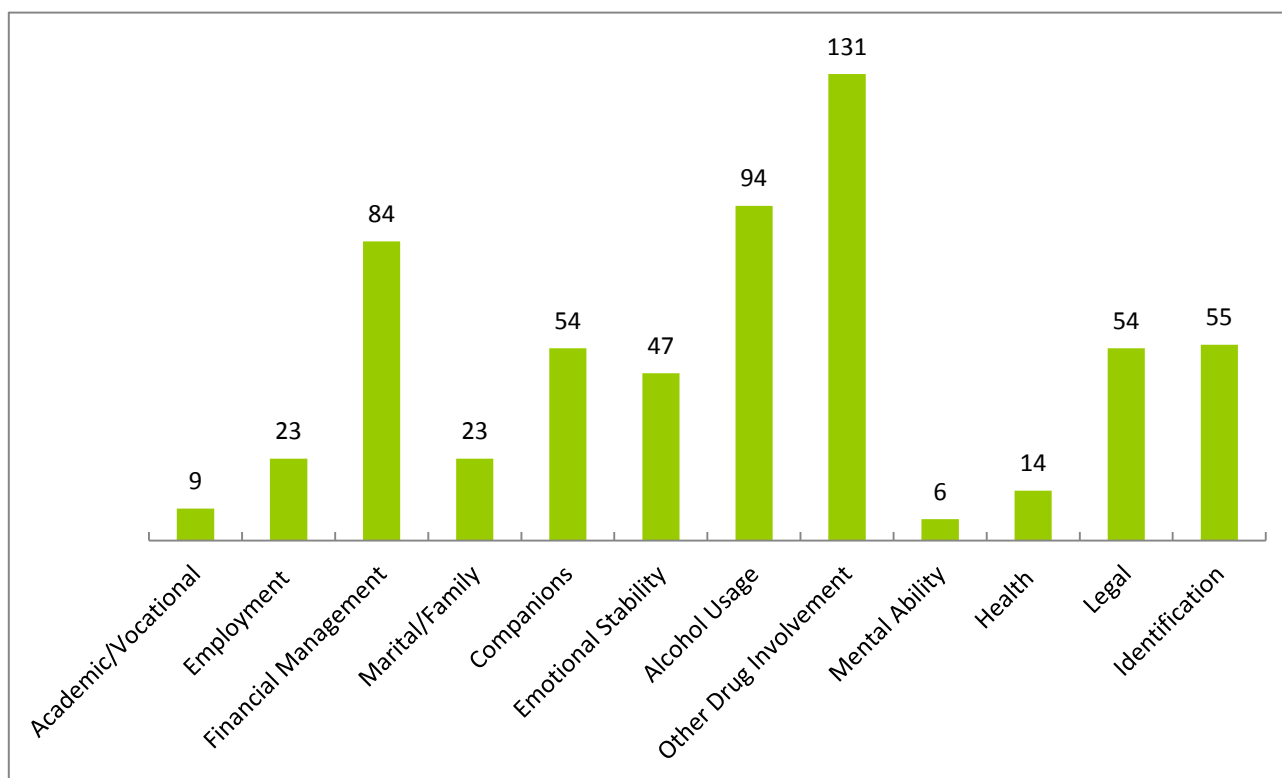
*“Sometimes clients have trouble identifying the LSI risks and needs as being something they should focus on. If they’ve lost their home or are dealing with substance abuse, they’re not thinking of other things.”*

*--TJC Stakeholder*

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<sup>4</sup> A complementary TJC brief will discuss case planning in detail.



**Figure 2. Individuals Indicating Highest Level of Need by Domain, Davidson County June–October 2011**

Note: Individuals may have the highest level of need in multiple domains.

As with screening data, timely aggregate assessment data will allow the system to monitor whether the identified target population is being assessed as planned. In addition to attention to *whether* assessments are done, the greater complexity of assessment relative to screening entails a focus on monitoring *how well* assessments are done. The assessment tool should be validated for the implementing jurisdiction's population to verify that it predicts likelihood of recidivism. A quality assurance process to regularly check the accuracy of assessments is required to maintain the integrity of assessment over time. This can be time consuming (involving supervisor or peer observation of assessment interviews, for example), but it is vital to the sustainability of good transition work. The identification of criminogenic needs to target through intervention is the backbone of a triage approach to jail transition; deterioration in the quality of assessment undermines the effectiveness of the entire TJC strategy.

#### **Key Implementation Lessons Learned: Assessment of Criminogenic Risk/Need**

1. *A clear target population, based on risk screening results, should be identified for assessment. Few if*

any local jurisdictions have the resources to assess their entire jail population. A jail transition system needs to determine what population it intends to assess, and risk to reoffend as determined by screening should be a primary criterion.

2. *Developing a system understanding of assessment information is an ongoing effort.* Building a good understanding of criminogenic need and assessment information, and how to use that information to inform system operations, requires consistent communication with TJC stakeholders. A single training is insufficient.
3. *Case plans are the primary vehicle for matching assessed criminogenic need to available interventions.* Case planning is the way to consistently use assessment information to guide interventions across a jail transition system.
4. *Assessment information must be shared with various partners.* Many different justice and community agencies and organizations will play a role in delivering interventions to meet criminogenic need. They will therefore need the assessment information. If that information is incorporated into a case plan, sharing that plan may be the best way to accomplish

this. Sharing assessment information routinely will only be possible if it is captured in a data system.

## Lessons Learned from TJC Site Implementation

The work of the six sites in implementing the TJC model has generated many global implementation lessons related to the key processes of screening and assessing for risk and need. The following six are among the most important:

- *Implementing screening and assessment in a jail context to support reentry is feasible.* Despite many implementation challenges, including the fiscal environment during the TJC assistance period, every TJC site was able to fully implement risk screening and implement risk/needs assessment for at least an initial target population.
- *Providing risk and needs assessment to TJC community partners is a key strategic planning step.* While all TJC site collaboratives strongly agreed with the principle of instituting a triage process that targets interventions based on risk and need, only abstract discussions of how to do this were possible until there was risk and needs data to use for planning. Once those data were available, the speed of TJC implementation accelerated considerably.
- *Continuous cross-training and reinforcement is necessary to build a system understanding of risk and needs information and how to use it.* System partners need to understand risk and need at the outset of implementation of screening and assessment, but all training or discussion of jail transition strategies should be tied back to risk and need to ensure that partners drive the triage process and build a common system language.
- *Limited capacity to extract and analyze data can impede the effectiveness of screening and assessment.* Extracting data was both time and resource intensive for each TJC site. Further, once data were extracted, sites often struggled with analyses because of either insufficient technical expertise or extensive competing demands on the time of skilled analysts. Plans for implementing screening and assessment must consider the challenges to extracting and analyzing the data the tools will produce.
- *Monitoring quality of screening and assessment is crucial.* Producing screening and assessment information is an important and difficult step in implementing the TJC model. The information will not fully pay off for jurisdictions, however, unless they moni-

tor that the processes for screening and assessment are occurring as planned, and that the information produced is accurate and timely.

- *The use of consistent case plan forms and assessment instruments, and the sharing of these forms among agencies, are key strategies to ensure continuity of service delivery during the transition process.* A great deal of work in the sites focused on mechanisms to foster a consistent and coordinated approach to interventions with their TJC populations. Case plans based on assessment and shared among partners, along with commitment to implement common curricula and program approaches that address criminogenic needs, are pillars of an effective coordinated approach.

The most consistent advice from stakeholders in the TJC sites to others seeking to implement the TJC model is the need to be patient and persistent. Building a system approach to jail transition is effective, but it is not quick, and it is not easy. It requires learning as you go and adjusting course when faced with new information. Determining the risk and need profile of the jail population through screening and assessment is a foundation of this process, providing diverse partners engaged in collaborative jail transition work with a common framework to understand the jail population. It is this information that will foster effective work both with individual inmates and with designing the best possible jail transition system, leading in turn to a safer and healthier community.

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