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# Ensuring Successful Offender Reentry: Umatilla/Morrow County “Reach-In” Services

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Community corrections practitioners need a practical tool for implementing practices that are consistent with the larger process of offender reentry. The process of reach-in is such a tool. It provides a simple method of contacting an offender prior to release from prison or jail custody for the purpose of coordinating services upon release, thus reducing the anxiety of both the offender and the supervising officer on the day the offender comes back in the community. Though measuring outcomes for reach-in can be difficult, employee performance indicators can help ensure that the process occurs. By taking a big-picture review of system data, we can reasonably accept that the reach-in process is beneficial in the transition process.

Umatilla and Morrow Counties are adjacent to each other in eastern Oregon. Each is rural in nature, and of the counties’ joint offender population of about 950 persons, about 10% live in Morrow County. Our two-county offender population constitutes 2.95% of the Oregon State offender population. (By contrast, Multnomah County provides services to 22.5% of the state’s supervised felony offender population.) Oregon has 36 counties and a felony offender population of approximately 35,000. Currently, 32 county entities provide services to the felony population, as some of the smaller counties have agreed to establish multi-county offices.

Umatilla/Morrow Community Corrections is within the county government under the Sheriff’s Office. We have 17 probation/parole officers and 2 field supervisors. Our agency operates two full-time offices located in our eastern and western population sectors. The east region office also provides jail services and operates the Umatilla County Program Center, a 30-bed facility used for treatment, workforce development, and other programs. The west office provides outpatient treatment programs and staff facilities. Unique to Umatilla/Morrow counties is a single judicial district that provides for three separate court facilities, two in Umatilla County and one in Morrow County. The offender population is essentially split between the east region and west region offices, with 56% of the high/medium-risk offenders in the east and 44% in the west.

Also in Umatilla County are two state prison facilities, located in the east and west regions. Neither prison is currently designated as a “releasing facility,” though this may be a possibility in the future. Most prison releases come from the northwest part of the state, 170 miles from our county.

An organizational chart for our county system can be viewed online at [http://www.co.umatilla.or.us/corrections/pdf/CC\\_ORG\\_Flow\\_Chart.pdf](http://www.co.umatilla.or.us/corrections/pdf/CC_ORG_Flow_Chart.pdf).

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## **Oregon's Model for Post-Prison Supervision**

New law was adopted in 1997 that changed how supervision services are delivered. The Oregon Department of Corrections (ODOC) would no longer provide offender field supervision, and each county would instead develop their own plans for supervision and services, to be approved by the state. In addition, felons sentenced to 12 months or less—who formerly would have served time in a state prison—would remain under local control in each county with a designated supervisory authority. The supervisory authority is designated by the county commissioners and may vary from county to county. Supervisory authority is defined as the state or local corrections agency or official designated by that county's board of commissioners or county court to operate corrections supervision services, custodial facilities or both. In Umatilla County the sheriff is the designated supervisory authority and has delegated supervision services to the Director of Community Corrections.

Management of offenders who have been convicted of a felony, have been sentenced to 12 months or less, and have a condition of post-prison supervision requires sentence calculation, release planning activity, and post-prison supervision orders. Management of state prisoners has the same requirements. Our transition and reach-in process for these populations are similar, except that local offenders are seen face-to-face and state prisoners are contacted telephonically. For offenders serving more than 12 months, the ODOC conducts the sentence calculations and provides release plans to the local offices, and the State Board of Parole and Post Prison Supervision provides for the conditions and actual post-prison order.

It is during this release planning process that our local office makes contact with the offender and the release counselor to provide the releasing authority the information required in the release plan and post-prison order. The two populations are termed "prison releases," and "local control releases." Although the processes for reach-in may vary between the releasing authorities, the content and information gathered remain the same.

### **What Is Reach-In?**

As the state of Oregon continues to redefine its mission with respect to offenders and reentry, our county personnel have begun to redefine our roles as probation/parole officers (in the field) and release counselors (in prison). Policies and practices are changing to accommodate transition. Officers and counselors work together to reach a formidable release plan with the offender's engagement and support.

Our procedure and practice defines reach-in as "an important part of the transition process when the field Probation/Parole Officer makes contact with an inmate to discuss his/her upcoming release." Umatilla/Morrow counties became involved in reach-in services in 2001 through Byrne Grant funding for alcohol and drug treatment programming. A local program developed for the grant, known as "New Life," provided programming as well as contact with the offender while in

custody. The grant required that services be delivered to offenders in transition from prison or jail to the community. The grant also required offenders in prison to have received alcohol and drug services while in custody, with a continuation of alcohol and drug services upon release. These proved to be challenging requirements, mainly due to the small number of inmates receiving alcohol and drug treatment while in custody. Either the services were not readily available, or inmates were able to avoid them by manipulating the system or acting out to avoid attendance. We learned many lessons from the New Life program, one of which was the importance of defining the reach-in process. We also realized the need for broader programming and saw opportunities for expanding our services, both locally and with our state partners. In 2005 we expanded the target population for reach-ins to include all releases from prison and or local jail that had a condition of post-prison supervision. This includes an average of 8 or 9 prison releases and 10 to 15 local control releases per month.

Reach-in is designed to reduce the tension, fear, and frustration offenders may experience, as well as to remove any opportunity to manipulate the process as offenders transition from a custodial setting to the community. It allows our staff to establish a working relationship with the offender, gives the offender information to smooth his/her transition to the community, and helps our officers understand each offender's risks and needs to better prepare him or her for return to the community. By providing the supervising officer the information needed to develop an offender's case plan, reach-in shortens the first field visit with the offender. Appointments can be created during the reach-in process, and the offender can better know what to expect regarding supervision, treatment, housing, employment, and other requirements.

### **The Reach-In Process**

The procedure followed in reach-in is a simple, step-by-step outline that allows officers to collect important information regarding the offender. Risk and need information can also be obtained through interview, which provides a quick screening method for determining a reasonable action plan for the offender upon his/her release.

In brief, the step-by-step method is as follows.

1. The office receives a release investigation from the institution or supervisory authority.
2. The investigation is immediately assigned to a field PPO for investigation and reach-in.
3. Within 30 days of assignment, the PPO contacts the institution and sets an appointment to complete the reach-in. This information is captured through electronic, chronological notes.

4. Reach-in is completed; the PPO uses the reach-in risks/needs assessment form for guidance on assessment requirements.
5. The PPO e-mails our local Transition Team indicating that the reach-in is completed and attaching any referrals to programming.
6. The PPO enters a detailed, electronic chronology with an overview of each area on which the offender was assessed.
7. Reporting instructions are given, and the reach-in process is complete.

Detailed reach-in procedures and instructions for staff can be reviewed online at [http://www.co.umatilla.or.us/corrections/pdf/UCCC\\_Reach-In\\_Procedure.pdf](http://www.co.umatilla.or.us/corrections/pdf/UCCC_Reach-In_Procedure.pdf).

Based on the information received during the reach-in, the officer may refer the offender to a number of treatment services and/or programs. The early risk/need assessment during reach-in is only screening in nature, and the officer will schedule an appointment for a Level of Service Case Management Inventory (LS/CMI) upon the offender's release and report to the Community Corrections office. Findings in the LS/CMI will determine a referral to our programming intake staff, who further assess the offender's needs regarding program services. Several modules of program services are available within our office and are intended to be responsive in nature to the need.

A flow chart showing available correctional programming is online at [http://www.co.umatilla.or.us/corrections/pdf/CC\\_Program\\_Flow\\_Chart.pdf](http://www.co.umatilla.or.us/corrections/pdf/CC_Program_Flow_Chart.pdf).

### **Partnership Between Counties and the Oregon Department of Corrections**

Oregon Governor Ted Kulongoski in May 2007 established an executive order instructing a council to produce coordinated approaches for assisting released inmates as they reintegrate into society. The order came after substantial progress made through the ODOC Transition Project, which has been active for several years. The Re-Entry Council consists of 19 members, including the Governor and department heads.

The council is charged with creating a common vision for transition and reentry of offenders upon release. Its tasks include:

- ◆ Reviewing existing policies and practices and making specific recommendations for improvement in such areas as institutional case planning, institutional transition planning and preparation, information sharing, the continuum of services following release, housing, and employment;
- ◆ Coordinating the state reentry initiative across Oregon;
- ◆ Removing barriers that impede successful transition and reintegration; and

- ◆ Recommending changes in funding to support the reformed transition process.

This statewide leadership group will collaborate to improve the success and safety of offenders' incarceration-to-community transition. It also will define state-level performance goals and create a system for measuring performance. The council will develop system-wide agreement on what is to be accomplished at the state level to improve transition. The decision to implement the council was driven in part by the work of the ODOC and the Oregon Association of Community Corrections Directors. These groups have worked in collaboration to overcome internal systems problems and barriers.

The following description was written by Heidi Stewart, Oregon Department of Corrections Program Manager.

*In keeping with the department's mission of "holding offenders accountable to their actions and reducing the risk of future criminal behavior," the Oregon Department of Corrections (ODOC) embarked on a project to increase the rate of successful offender transition into the community.*

*A steering committee was formed and charged with providing direction for the project. The steering committee comprised ODOC employees from every division as well as members from the county community corrections offices, the Board of Parole and Post Prison Supervision, sheriffs, victims' advocacy groups, and other state and local agencies. Planning efforts identified key issues interfering with successful inmate reentry and components that are necessary for successful transition to occur.*

*One of the necessary components identified was "reach-in" by the Parole and Probation Officers (POs) prior to inmates' release. Historically, the ODOC system did not allow POs easy access into the institution. County ID cards were not accepted, ODOC ID cards were not easy to obtain, POs had to be escorted at all times, and there was no sense of partnership between staff of ODOC and county community corrections. POs simply did not want to deal with the ODOC barriers, nor did they see value to the reach-in process.*

*Today, as a matter of practice, many Oregon counties do reach-in prior to inmates releasing. This is possible because, in partnership, barriers to reach-in were identified and addressed. ODOC modified its facility access rule to allow POs to enter the institution by using their county ID and not requiring them to go through metal detectors. Once POs are familiar with the institution, they may enter the institution without an escort. Although much progress has been made, there are still areas for improvement. One remaining issue is that institutions have not consistently implemented changes. ODOC is modifying its facility access rule again in order to provide more clarity to the institutions.*

*Institution staff now see POs as a partner in reentry and welcome reach-in. In addition, POs have realized the value of reach-in. One Oregon county found that abscond rates dropped approximately 14% for offenders just released from prison and reporting for the first time.*

ODOC and the counties are developing additional programs to improve and measure the success of offender reentry. By intergovernmental agreement, two counties and the ODOC have developed pilot programs that allow for coordinated transition. These counties not only allow reach-in, but also provide for in-custody treatment within the local county facilities and close collaboration of case planning, assessment, and transition.

The Umatilla and Klamath County program:

- ◆ Requires reach-in prior to accepting an offender into the program;
- ◆ Identifies the needs and risk,
- ◆ Moves the offender to local custody 90 to 120 days before sentence completion;
- ◆ Coordinates treatment while in local custody,
- ◆ Transitions offenders to minimum-custody program center facilities 30 days prior to sentence completion; and
- ◆ Coordinates community services prior to the actual release date.

Participating offenders can access services that are vital to successful reentry—treatment, workforce development, housing opportunities, and community support—all while they are still in DOC custody.

### **Indicators of Success**

With these innovations now established, we can ask, “Is it working?” There are a number of indicators to look at.

- ◆ Data from the Umatilla/Morrow County program do not show a significant correlation between reach-in and improved reporting to the office after offenders leave prison or jail. In periods before and after reach-in began, no-shows in Umatilla/Morrow County remained around 3%. However, Multnomah County statistics demonstrate a 20% no-show rate for persons not receiving reach-in, compared with only 1% no-shows among those receiving reach-in.
- ◆ Recidivism for the post-prison supervision population in 2001, before we began reach-in, was 37.5%. As of this writing, the recidivism rate is 23%. We do not attribute this reduction to reach-in alone, but we consider reach-in a contributing factor to an overall increase in performance.
- ◆ Treatment compliance for this population is currently at 77%. (Treatment compliance is defined as engagement in or completion of a behavioral treatment program.)

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- ◆ In addition to these outcome measures, our office has developed a Continuous Quality Insurance (CQI) model that tracks identified performance measures. Included in the CQI is an audit process, which reviews compliance with the reach-in process, allowing continued monitoring that the reach-in process is occurring.

Though local evidence to date is anecdotal, we believe reach-ins work and are an effective tool. One reason is the advantage of establishing an early relationship between the offender and the supervising officer. During the reach-in process, the supervising officer will review all conditions of supervision and discuss what the offender might expect upon release. As they explain their general and special conditions of supervision, the supervising officer will articulate exactly what they mean in plain terms, identify common violations that occur in relation to conditions, and provide advice on how to avoid common pitfalls based on past experience. By the end of the interview, the offender is more comfortable with the conditions of supervision and has had a chance to get his or her questions answered.

The reach-in process also allows for the involvement of the offenders' families and/or their community to support to the offender upon his/her release. We find that inmates often talk with their family members and/or a community support person about their contact with the supervising officer, and will explain to them the conditions of their supervision and their requirements for treatment and reporting. These support people sometimes will call the supervising officer for clarification. This gives the supervising officer an excellent opportunity to provide detail and elicit support, and it also reduces the chances that the offender will manipulate the system or his or her supporters. Contact with the family and other community support people helps them understand our system and our approach to supervision.

**T**he reach-in process itself is simple. Contacting the offender prior to release gives the supervising officer and the offender information that furthers the possibility of success during transition from custody to the community. Reach-in saves time through collaboration with the offender and the involved agencies and provides for an immediate case plan for action. Risk factors are reduced by holding the offender accountable to the responsibilities of their supervision and, at the same time, reducing the fear and anxiety associated with not knowing what to expect.

Reach-in is only a small segment of evidence-based supervision techniques, and the practitioner must consider the other components necessary to complete an evidence-based supervision model. However, our experience verifies that the reach-in process complements other evidence-based approaches, including motivational interviewing, risk/need assessment, treatment, and continuous quality improvement. ◆

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