

Community Re-entry

Pierce County One-Stop-Shop

Prison 2 Society

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TSOCW 532: Advanced Integrative Practice II

University of Washington, Tacoma

March 13, 2014

Dedication

I dedicate this capstone project to my loving husband and family who have supported me on my MSW journey.

Abstract

Returning to the community from jail is a complex transition for most offenders, as well as for their families and communities. Upon reentering society, former offenders are likely to struggle with substance abuse, lack of adequate education and job skills, limited housing options, and mental health issues. This project illuminates the difficulties that adults face as they transition out of jails back to the community and presents a model of a one-stop-shop that is designed to include all the transition resources an adult may need to successfully re-integrate back to the community after incarceration, all housed at one, easily accessible location. Community providers in Pierce County need to facilitate meeting the basic needs of adults transitioning out of jail in order to reduce recidivism and increase community safety. Community re-entry goals are to increase public safety through reduced recidivism (long-term goal), to maximize opportunities for former offenders returning to the community (short-term goal) and to support family and community reintegration for persons previously incarcerated. The core objectives that can be expected as a result of participation in the Pierce County One-Stop-Shop are that ex-offenders will be able to meet their basic needs and meet release requirements for court and/or community supervision. Offender re-entry, the transition from life in jail or prison to life in the community, can have profound implications for public safety. Given the number of individuals under criminal justice supervision in the community, offender reentry continues to garner considerable attention from researchers and practitioners alike.

Prison to society

In 2011, approximately 1,885 individuals a day were released from state or federal prisons (Carson & Sobel, 2012). Returning to the community from jail is a complex transition for most offenders, as well as for their families and communities. Upon reentering society, former offenders are likely to struggle with substance abuse, lack of adequate education and job skills, limited housing options, and mental health issues. Congress recognized the importance of this social issue by passing the Second Chance Act of 2007. The Second Chance Act offers federal grants for programs and services that work to reduce recidivism and improve offender outcomes (Cornfield, 2013). Grant monies have also been provided to support research and evaluation on a variety of aspects related to offender re-entry. Offender re-entry, the transition from life in jail or prison to life in the community, can have profound implications for public safety. Given the number of individuals under criminal justice supervision in the community, offender reentry continues to garner considerable attention from researchers and practitioners alike.

Needs statement

On a macro level, crime is rampant and efforts to reduce crime are always underway. Crime prevention has been a long-discussed topic in politics, with numerous programs aimed to aid these efforts. There are also federal initiatives, as mentioned previously, targeted at reducing recidivism through community re-entry efforts. While these efforts exist in other parts of the country, such as Florida, there are little services offered in Washington State (Gazal-Ayal, 2013). The current needs statement is: community providers in Pierce County need to facilitate meeting the basic needs of adults transitioning out of jail in order to reduce recidivism and increase community safety.

Goals

Community re-entry goals are to increase public safety through reduced recidivism (long-term goal), to maximize opportunities for former offenders returning to the community (short-term goal) and to support family and community reintegration for persons previously incarcerated.

Objectives and objective indicators

The core objectives that can be expected as a result of participation in the Pierce County One-Stop-Shop are that ex-offenders will be able to meet their basic needs and meet release requirements for court and/or community supervision. The outcome indicators for meeting basic needs include ex-offenders being able to obtain insurance benefits, transportation, food, clothing and employment assistance from participation in the program, which can ultimately help sustain individuals in the community. The outcome indicators for meeting jail release requirements include ex-offenders being able to meet with their assigned Department of Corrections (DOC) officer within 24 hours of release, as the DOC offices will be located at the One-Stop-Shop (located walking distance from the jail), which will ultimately lead to a reduction in criminal activity as DOC officers will have increased contact to provide support to offenders who attend the One-Stop-Shop.

Theoretical assumptions

Kohlberg's theory of moral development is one of the theories upon which this intervention is based, as well as citizenship theory and conflict theory. Moral development is often a factor in crime, as pro-social individual moral development is closely related to conforming to the values of society and following societal norms. When moral development is

delayed, individuals ignore ethical values of society for the pursuit of their own selfish desires, leading to hindered moral development that can spawn into criminal behavior (Myers, Bennett, & Doerr, 2012). However, not all crime is committed irrationally, as many crimes are committed as a means of survival, such as those crimes committed out of economic or emotional desperation. Legal and legislative policymakers have identified the main barriers surrounding successful prisoner re-entry, which include addiction, mental illness, physical health, employment barriers, and access to stable housing, all of which could be helped by increasing social services focused on meeting basic needs. Increasing services and even access to services in Pierce County will help adults transitioning out of jail meet their basic needs, which could ultimately lead to a reduction in crime and an increase in community safety.

Citizenship theory describes membership of a nation, where one is a citizen of the country where they were born. Citizenship offers certain rights to individuals, including benefits to social resources. Active citizenship includes people working together to improve their quality of life and provide for others to enjoy the same benefits (Laakso, 2013). In citizenship theory, there are basic human needs that need to be met, and the government must play some sort of role in seeing that these needs of the people are met. There are three levels of citizenship: full, second-class, and non-citizenship. In full citizenship, individuals have strong connections to mainstream societal resources, have rights (i.e., voting, freedom), and responsibilities. Second-class citizenship includes individuals having marginal connections to mainstream institutions, as well as marginal rights and responsibilities of the nation. Non-citizens are severed from mainstream society and thus have little contact, as well as few rights and responsibilities. Historically, the mentally ill, developmentally disabled, poor, homeless, and immigrants were excluded from becoming full citizens of a nation (Laakso, 2013). Individuals serving time in jail

or psychiatric institutions are then considered to be excluded from the rights of citizenship. Inmates have few rights, and they are cut off from society by being locked in jail. This same line of thinking aligns with conflict theory, in that the rich and powerful members of our society make the rules and social values, and then impose these values on the rest of society.

According to conflict theory, social structures of inequality impact the criminalization process in ways that advance the interests of the social elite at the expense of those who are disadvantaged. The primary causes of crime are the social and economic influences working within society (Akers & Sellers, 2009). The criminal justice system is presumed to be operating for the good of the elite and powerful, with rules and policies that aim to control the economically disadvantaged. In conflict theory, the criminal justice system then imposes the values of morality created by the rich and powerful upon all members of the society and imprisons those who fail to conform to these societal standards or values. Karl Marx was largely known for his development of the idea of conflict theory, and he believed that some people in society will rule, while others will be ruled (Akers & Sellers, 2009). He went on to explain that crime is the result of the helpless expressing their anger against the unjust conditions in which they live. He believed that if a person is ruled, they will eventually come into conflict with those that do the ruling in a struggle to survive (Akers & Sellers, 2009).

Conflict theory views the world as undergoing continual conflict and change. Society is replete with competition and struggle, and there are always winners and losers, rich and poor, morally sound and morally stunted (Akers & Sellers, 2009). There is an emphasis on stress and discord and the way they contribute to social change. Competition for scarce resources is at the heart of all relationships, and competition rather than consensus is characteristic of human relationships. There is inequality in that those who have power and get the rewards strive to

maintain them, including incarcerating and punishing criminals. Criminals may be committing crimes to gain access to resources to survive in society. Based on key informant interviews conducted for this project; most offenders served by the Community Re-Entry Program at Greater Lakes Mental Healthcare are indeed poor and are struggling to find the resources necessary to survive.

Intervention description

Adults returning to the Pierce County community after years, months or weeks of incarceration in prisons are often disconnected from their communities. They lack the skills, training and education needed to re-establish themselves successfully into their communities. Many become recidivists to finance basic necessities. The Pierce County One-Stop-Shop enables such individuals to go to one central location for assistance in obtaining everything they need – employment training and preparation, education, housing, DOC officers, clothing and food banks, help applying for insurance and food benefits and access to mental health and substance abuse treatment. It is a rather collaborative re-entry approach that maximizes effective use of the existing resources in Pierce County by bringing together the community agencies that can offer support to people in need. The benefits of this project include: integrating human services and public safety, and addressing both system change and service needs. The One-Stop-Shop project is developed around four primary principles: pre-release planning, interagency level coordination, and integrated service delivery. The core services the One-Stop-Shop provides are employment training, assistance with locating housing resources, bus passes, linkage to community mental health agencies so adults can enroll in mental health and substance abuse treatment, a clothing and food bank, DSHS liaisons to help individuals apply for insurance and food benefits and access to DOC officers to help offenders meet the release requirement of

checking in with their assigned DOC officer within 24 hours of being released from jail. The Pierce County One-Stop-Shop will be located within walking distance from the Pierce County jail as a means to reduce the barrier of accessing services. Advertising in the jails will help increase awareness that offenders can go to one central location to access the services they may need in order to successfully transition back into the community.

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