

THIS ISSUE IN BRIEF

This September's issue of *Federal Probation* considers the currently hot topic of "Prisoner Reentry"—hot because the record-breaking numbers of offenders entering prison in the past decade or more equals record-breaking numbers of prisoners exiting prison on completion of their sentences. Guest editor James Byrne of the University of Massachusetts, Lowell, has been closely monitoring "reentry" issues in recent years and as editor approaches this complex topic that both affects and is affected by every branch of corrections, the therapeutic community, and the community at large with care in making the many relevant distinctions. We hope you find these articles an enlightening and thought-provoking distillation of what we know and don't know about expediting the successful reentry of prisoners into society.

Ellen Wilson Fielding, Editor

Introduction: Reentry—The Emperor's New Clothes

When I was asked to serve as Guest Editor for this special issue on Offender Reentry, I was unsure how to proceed. The challenge was to produce an issue that would stand apart from other recent attempts to address this topic in a variety of media forms, including journals (e.g., *Crime and Delinquency*, *Criminology and Public Policy*); government documents (e.g., reports from the Bureau of Justice Statistics, Office of Justice Programs, and the National Institute of Justice); and web sites devoted to offender reentry, such as Abt Associates' blog on the National Institute of Corrections' reentry initiative; the Urban Institute's web page devoted to reentry resources; and of course, OJP's own reentry resource page on the web, with links to publications, program contacts, evaluations, and the 68 ongoing OJP-sponsored reentry programs. After reviewing the available information, I realized that our understanding of reentry-related issues is remarkably similar to our understanding of intensive supervision in the mid-eighties and boot camps in the early to mid-nineties: *we know very little about "what works, with whom, and why," but policy makers and practitioners do not have time to wait for evaluators to attempt to answer these questions.* As was true for both intensive supervision and boot camp initiatives, the preliminary, non-experimental evaluation results are positive and there is certainly a groundswell of support for new reentry initiatives.

The danger inherent in our current approach to reentry is that we may be changing the reentry process in ways that actually have negative consequences for both offenders and the communities in which they reside. Rutgers University Professor Jim Finckenauer has spent much of his career decrying the "panacea phenomenon" in criminal and juvenile justice program initiatives. From Scared Straight to Intensive Supervision to Boot Camps to the "Project

Nightlights" of the world, the corrections landscape is littered with the broken promises (and unfulfilled dreams) of program developers "on a last chance power drive" (to paraphrase Bruce Springsteen). Of course, this is not just a corrections phenomenon. Do you believe the hype surrounding almost two decades of *problem-oriented policing*? Before you answer, you may want to take a look at the most recent comprehensive review by The National Research Council (2004). You won't look at a "broken window" the same way ever again. And what is your view of the last three decades of *sentencing reform*, from mandatory minimums, to sentencing guidelines, to parole abolition, to three-strikes legislation?

Anyone even vaguely familiar with the work of Norval Morris, Michael Tonry, and Albert Blumstein recognizes that there's a pattern here: today's panacea may quickly become tomorrow's problem. When viewed in this context, it could certainly be argued that *current* reentry initiatives—although important in their own right—do not address the fundamental *causes* of our current reentry problem; they address the *consequences* of changes in police practices, court processing decisions, and sentencing policies/practices that have resulted in an unprecedented imprisonment binge. Like many drugs on the market today, reentry programs are designed to help communities learn to live with the problem, not to cure it outright.

If we are really serious about "breaking the cycle" (of institution to community to institution, ad infinitum), then we need to rethink our policing strategies, especially those strategies that use "arrest" as the primary response to both drug users and public order offenders. Similarly, we will also need to rethink our sentencing practices vis-à-vis these same two groups of offenders. Even the most "successful" reentry programs will have—at best—a marginal effect on the reentry problem unless we also simultaneously address police and court practices toward these two offender groups, while also developing new strategies

to reduce violence in prison by changing the negative prison culture that exists in many prisons today (NIC, 2004).

It is with this important caveat in mind that I selected the contributors to this special issue—choosing individuals who were not afraid to step back and take a critical look at the offender reentry problem, and who recognized the importance of developing reentry programs that offer more than "smoke and mirrors" to an increasingly impatient public.

Articles were commissioned on three broad topic areas: 1) *Evidence-based practices* for reentry, highlighting research on both offender change and cost effectiveness, 2) *Reentry Program Models*, highlighting programs currently in place for adult and juvenile offenders at the federal, state, and local level; and 3) *Key issues* in reentry design and implementation. To address the topic of evidence-based reentry practice, I asked two experts with very different backgrounds and orientations to contribute: Joan Petersilia, a professor at The University of California, Irvine, best known for her work while at RAND and most recently, for her collaborations with Jeremy Travis on the topic of reentry; and Brandon Welsh, an associate professor at The University of Massachusetts, Lowell and a member of the Campbell Collaborative, a group responsible for the completion of dozens of reviews of evidence-based research on a wide range of criminal justice policies and practices.

To provide readers with an overview of current reentry program models, four of the country's leading experts on program development contribute articles. First, Professor Gordon Bazemore (in conjunction with his colleague, Jeanne Stinchcomb from Florida Atlantic University) provides an overview of how the principles of restorative justice and service can be integrated into a civic engagement model of community reentry. Bazemore and Stinchcomb's article addresses important questions about how and why offenders change, while describing how life

course research can help us understand the importance of *informal* social controls at key points in the offender reentry process. Next, Dale Parent (and his colleague at Abt Associates, Liz Barnett) provide a description of the National Institute of Corrections' Transition from Prison to Community Initiative (TPCI), which is currently being implemented in eight jurisdictions across the country: Oregon, Missouri, Michigan, Indiana, North Dakota, Rhode Island, New York, and Georgia. Our third contribution on program design issues is authored by Dr. Faye Taxman (now a professor at Virginia Commonwealth University), who has directed the multi-site process evaluation of several "model" reentry partnership initiatives (RPI's) for OJP. Based on this review, she has developed a new reentry model founded on the notion that offenders need to be treated as "active participants" rather than "active recipients" in the reentry process. And finally, The Administrative Office of the U.S. Court's Timothy Cadigan highlights the current reentry strategies for federal offenders released from prison, while examining the changing role of federal probation officers in the reentry process.

The third substantive area covers key issues related to the design and successful implementation of offender reentry initiatives, including: 1) the role of technology, 2) the role of police, 3) offender targeting, 4) mental illness, and 5) overcoming resistance to change.

Dr. April Pattavina, author of the forthcoming text, *Information Technology and the Criminal Justice System* (Sage Publications, 2005), describes the "new technology" of reentry. The "bells and whistles" associated with the latest wave of reentry programs include electronic monitoring, drug/alcohol testing devices, and information systems designed to track an offender's progress in a number of areas (such as compliance with treatment, employment, institutional/community conduct) as he/she moves from prison back to the community. Pattavina also highlights several issues associated with the application of this new technology to reentry, including: 1) capacity building for information technology; 2) organizational

culture and resistance to change; 3) legal and political considerations, and 4) the need to link IT development to ongoing performance measurement/evaluation activities.

The article by Dr. Arthur Lurigio, one of the country's leading experts on the mentally ill offender population, addresses the need for reentry program developers to recognize the unique problems associated with reintegrating mentally ill offenders into communities that often lack the resources and expertise this population will need. In conjunction with his coauthors Angie Rollins and John Fallon, Dr. Lurigio describes both the type and extent of mental illness among prisoners returning to the community (i.e., schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, major depression) and then identifies the key elements of a reentry program targeting this offender population. Using a case study of an existing program—The Thresholds' Prison Aftercare Program in Illinois—Lurigio and his coauthors offer a detailed strategy for addressing the multiple problems presented by those offenders released from prison with serious mental health issues.

This focus on offender targeting issues is continued in the article I coauthored with Faye Taxman, which presents the results of our examination of targeting decisions across several model reentry partnership initiatives. We point out that it is likely that only a small fraction (less than 1 percent) of the 600,000 plus prisoners released from federal and state institutions this year will actually be placed in one of the new reentry initiatives sponsored by The Office of Justice Programs. With such a restricted target group, it is critical to carefully consider the potential impact (both positive and negative) of location-specific, offender-specific, and offense-specific inclusion/exclusion criteria.

This *Special Issue* also highlights the emerging role of local police in reentry partnership initiatives. In conjunction with my coauthor, Dr. Don Hummer, an expert on community policing issues, we explore the expanding role of police in the reentry process and discuss the implications for institutional corrections, community corrections, treatment providers, victims, offenders and the community.

Finally, Doug Young and his colleague Theodore Klem from The University of Maryland's Bureau of Governmental Research address the myriad of issues associated with the design and implementation of reentry programs targeting juvenile offenders as they return to the community.

I hope that this issue will provide readers with a critical review of 1) reentry evaluation research, 2) existing and emerging reentry program models, and 3) the most significant "key issues" facing policy makers, legislators, program developers, and program administrators attempting to design reentry programs that actually make a difference in the lives of prisoners and the quality of life in the communities to which they return.

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Guest Editor

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