

Strengthening Reentry Services and Resources in Erie County, New York



Background

Erie County has long prioritized efforts to improve outcomes for people in the criminal justice system. In 2005, the county established New York's first reentry task force, with funding provided by the state's Division of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS) and support from the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS). In 2014, the county's Department of Probation and Department of Mental Health collaborated on a strategic sequential mapping process to determine the needs of people who have mental illnesses in their system, assess the resources available to this population at each point in the system, and identify system- and service-level responses to the needs of this population. With strong local leadership, experienced and committed reentry service providers, and the technical ability to measure progress, Erie County is well positioned to make significant further improvements to its reentry efforts.

In 2016, the Greater Buffalo Racial Equity Roundtable (RER) partnered with Erie County to request technical assistance from the Council of State Governments (CSG) Justice Center with financial support from the U.S. Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) to conduct an assessment of the services and resources currently available to the county's reentry population. This assessment is intended to assist county leaders in the development of a coordinated, comprehensive strategy to improve the quality and delivery of reentry services to people returning to Erie County after incarceration.

In collaboration with county officials, commissioners, reentry service providers, district judges, and agency directors, the CSG Justice Center conducted a quantitative and qualitative analysis of Erie County's reentry services by primarily reviewing DCJS and DOCCS data, inventorying the reentry services available in Erie County, evaluating how a person receives these services, and assessing the county's funding of these services. Focus groups, surveys, interviews with key stakeholders, and site visits conducted by CSG Justice Center staff provided further insight into how reentry services are currently provided in Erie County. On October 27, 2017, the CSG Justice Center presented its final findings and recommendations to the Greater Buffalo Racial Equity Roundtable (RER) Reentry Coalition—a steering committee organized by Erie County and the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo—and facilitated an open discussion of its findings with key collaborators.

CORE CHALLENGES
Ineffective countywide coordination of reentry across domains, providers, and reentry populations limits the impact of services on the reentry population.
The county’s multiple reentry populations (federal, state, and local) do not have the same access to reentry services because the services they receive are based on correctional status rather than on which services would be most effective to reduce an individual’s likelihood of recidivating.
Reentry services are not consistently of high quality or evidence based.
Reentry service provider contracts are rarely based on performance or adherence to evidence-based practices.
People are not electing to participate in the pre- and post-release programs that exist because there are few incentives to do so, the programs are not promoted well in the facilities, and they are often not of high quality.

Methodology

The CSG Justice Center’s evaluation was based on a stakeholder survey, analysis of administrative data, multiple interviews and site visits, and RER Reentry Coalition meetings.

CSG Justice Center staff collaborated with stakeholders from across the county to conduct a mapping exercise, identify gaps in service needs and system capacity, determine resources currently available for reentry populations, and provide an assessment of core challenges, a summary of overall findings, and recommendations to more effectively use the county’s reentry resources to achieve the highest impact. Table 1 shows the breakdown of the types of data the CSG Justice Center collected as part of its assessment.

Table 1. Types of Data Collected by the CSG Justice Center

Service Provider Data	Corrections Data	On-Site Data
Online Survey	NYS DOCCS	Erie County Correctional Facility
In-Person & Telephone Interviews	NYS DCJS	Erie County Reentry Task Force
	Erie County Probation	Housing Unit Providers
		Workforce Providers
		Federal Reentry Court
		Buffalo Niagara Partnership

For the purposes of this project, several areas of interest were examined: state and federal correctional facility intake processes and pre-release programming; Erie County Mental Health Department intake processes; local jail intake processes; Bureau of Prisons (BOP) funding; DOCCS data, pre-sentence assessment, diversion and parole funding; DCJS data; Erie County probation data, caseloads, and processes; intake points for reentry services into the county; reentry service provider data; and interagency communication.

The CSG Justice Center administered a survey and conducted interviews to identify: available reentry services and overall service capacity; target population, as well as the actual population served; the use of evidence-based practices and screening and assessment tools; how referrals are made; outcome data; data-sharing agreements; program type and funding; and provider feedback on local and systemic barriers to reentry.

To gather the relevant data, CSG Justice Center staff participated in a kick-off event with the RER Reentry Coalition on March 30, 2017. Between June 6-8, staff conducted its first site visit and interviewed several reentry service providers, agency directors, probation and parole officials, workforce board representatives, and formerly incarcerated citizens. During this visit, staff also toured the Erie County Correctional Facility (ECCF), and provided a review of preliminary findings in a presentation on June 8 to the RER Reentry Coalition. In an additional site visit on August 10-11, CSG Justice Center staff focused on determining the flow of reentry populations into the county, court processes, and conducted interviews with the Erie County Reentry Task Force and the Federal Reentry Court.

Crime and Recidivism Trends in Erie County

In 2016, New York State was 1 of 4 states to have its lowest violent crime rate in a decade.¹ In line with this decline in statewide crime trends, Erie County has seen a decline in arrests and sentencing rates. Arrests in Erie County have been decreasing steadily with a 15-percent decrease in total arrests, a 10-percent decrease in misdemeanor arrests, and a 22-percent decrease in felony arrests since 2011.² Direct sentencing in the county decreased by 33 percent between 2011 and 2016.³ Additionally, new charges in Erie County have decreased by 12 percent, and there has been a 49-percent decrease in the number of people booked into jail for probation violations since 2014.⁴

But while overall crime is down in Erie County, there are some concerning statistics that show progress is still needed. Erie County has seen a 20-percent increase in the number of people whose parole was revoked between 2014 and 2016.⁵ Once returned to confinement, corrections officials note that people in this population decline non-mandatory pre-release services at higher rates than other people in state facilities.

In 2016, the vast majority (81.5 percent) of people booked into jail in Erie County had previously been involved

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1. Federal Bureau of Investigations, "Crime in the United States by State, 2016," <https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2016/crime-in-the-u.s.-2016/topic-pages/tables/table-3>.
 2. New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services, "Adult Arrests 2007-2016" in *Uniform Crime Reporting system*, <http://www.criminaljustice.ny.gov/crimnet/ojsa/arrests/Erie.pdf>.
 3. New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services, "Parolee/Probationer Arrests: Percent of Total Arrests Within County 2007-2017" in *Computerized Criminal History system*, <http://www.criminaljustice.ny.gov/crimnet/ojsa/parolee-and-probationer-arrest.pdf>, 20.
 4. Erie County Probation Department, in discussion with the author, July 2017.
 5. New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services, "Parolee/Probationer Arrests: Percent of Total Arrests Within County 2007-2017" in *Computerized Criminal History system*, <http://www.criminaljustice.ny.gov/crimnet/ojsa/parolee-and-probationer-arrest.pdf>, 20.
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in the jail system. In addition, one in five people booked into an Erie County jail are likely to return to jail four or more times within three years.⁶

Erie County’s Reentry Population

For the purposes of this assessment and report, the Erie County reentry population is defined as adults returning from federal, state, and local correctional agencies, including the two jails— Erie County Correctional Facility (ECCF) and Erie County Holding Center (EHC). The adult reentry population consists of men and women in the federal, state, and local correctional systems who are supervised by different agencies when they return to the community after incarceration.

The bulk of Erie County’s reentry population is in the county system, either returning from the ECCF, the EHC, or on county probation. The federal reentry population, which is supervised by the Federal Reentry Court and U.S. Probation, consisted of just under 500 people in 2016. The 1,032 releases from state facilities in 2016 represented the second largest share of the reentry population in Erie County and were supervised by the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS). People released from Erie County jails (nearly 15, 000 in 2016) were largely unsupervised unless they were mandated to county probation. [See Table 2.] People on county probation were included in the definition of the population needing reentry services, even though less than 10 percent of those reentering into county community supervision do so directly after release from the local jails or prison. However, people on country probation have similar needs to those returning from prisons and jails as nearly two-thirds of this population has been assessed at a medium to high risk to recidivate, and a significant percentage have been incarcerated in the past.

Table 2. Federal, State, and Local Reentry Populations, 2016

	Average Daily Population	Intakes/Releases
FEDERAL⁷		
Bureau of Prisons	No data available	153 / No data available
U.S. Probation	337	No data available
STATE⁸		
Prison	No data available	853 / 1,032
Parole (DOCCS)	2,300	945 (87 maxed out of state system) / No data available
LOCAL⁹		
ECCF & EHC	1,183	14,692 / 14,693
County Probation ¹⁰	3,250	1,212 / 1,267

6. Erie County Sheriff’s Office, in discussion with the author, July 2017.

7. U.S. Probation, email message to author, July 2017.

8. New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services, email message to author, July 2017.

9. Erie County Probation, email message to author, July 2017.

10. Most people on County Probation are sentenced directly to probation by the Courts. Less than 10 percent of this population enters into County Probation from incarceration. Erie County Probation, in discussion with the author, February 2018.

Findings

1. The agencies that administer supervision for people returning to Erie County after incarceration are funded and operate independently, work with different service providers, and do not coordinate to ensure the county's multiple reentry populations (federal, state, and local) have access to the same services and treatment.

These reentry populations enter the county through varying agencies (such as DOCCS, U.S. Probation, and County Probation) and have different levels of funding associated with the services provided to them. Without coordination among the agencies, the access to service providers and the level of treatment these reentry populations receive are inconsistent. For example, there is currently less funding available for intervention for people in the local reentry population than those in the state reentry population, which vastly limits their access and opportunities for intervention. This lack of coordination among agencies and providers increases the likelihood services will either be duplicated or not provided and that resources will be targeted in ways that are wasteful and ineffective.

While the agencies administering supervision for these reentry populations do not administer post-release services themselves, they do facilitate in-reach services, develop case plans, and make referrals to partnering community-based service providers. Thus, they influence the type and scope of services and treatment the people under their supervision receive.

A NEED FOR BETTER COORDINATION OF POST-RELEASE SERVICES: HOUSING

Housing is one of the major needs among the reentry population in Erie County. While the federal reentry population coming through U.S. Probation and the Federal Reentry Court is primarily sent to the Buffalo Halfway House, the state reentry population is primarily referred to Peaceprints and Saving Grace Ministries (both larger community-based housing providers). The local reentry population that cycles through the ECCF or ECHC mostly relies on small local providers, who do community outreach to identify this population, or local religious-based providers for housing.

The existing housing providers primarily service the state reentry population and report that their ability to provide services for federal or local reentry populations is largely hampered by the contractual stipulations of their DOCCS contract. Since there are relatively few options for reentry-specific housing in the county, the supervising agencies making housing referrals acknowledge that space is prioritized over quality or standard of care. Additionally, the housing needs of these reentry populations put pressure on existing housing providers to increase their capacity, but not their quality.

2. The federal reentry population generally does not receive strong, evidence-based pre-release services, but those who participate in the Federal Reentry Court or are on probation do have access to some post-release services.

While individuals interviewed recalled having minimal pre-release services offered to them while incarcerated in a Federal Bureau of Prisons (FBOP) facility, those people returning to the community who have completed their sentences in prison are not required to participate in post-release services and do not receive transition case plans. People on federal probation and enrolled in the Federal Reentry Court, however, do have some access to post-release services. U.S. Probation funds most of the post-release programming and services that Erie County's federal reentry population receives.

In 2016, nearly 50 percent of people on federal probation among Erie County, Monroe County, and Niagara County were located in Erie County.¹¹ Erie County also represented 30 percent of everyone on federal probation among all 17 counties in the Western District of New York.¹² It is unclear what portion of the Western District's \$1 million reentry services budget¹³ is specific to Erie County.

A number of programs to which this federal reentry population may be referred are not reentry-specific. For example, they are primarily referred to the Buffalo Employment and Training Center (BETC), a workforce training provider administering programming in the county. BETC's workforce training programming is open to the general public and is not reentry-population specific. Much of BETC's programming also focuses on substance use treatment and anger management, which is conducted by another provider that is not trained to work specifically with the reentry population.

The Federal Reentry Court in Erie County works with U.S. Probation to incentivize people under supervision to participate in the court, which seeks to reduce recidivism for the federal reentry population entering the county. This is a volunteer-only program where participants are incentivized to enroll and participate through a reduction in their supervision requirements and through court-provided letters of support, which can be used to help obtain employment or housing. While the reentry court is most often targeted toward people who are at a high risk of reoffending, it serves relatively few individuals. People who participate in the Federal Reentry Court are connected to treatment and services in the community after undergoing assessments administered by U.S. Probation and Buffalo Legal Aid. The Federal Reentry Court receives pre-sentence reports, which assist in determining the federal reentry population's scope of services, while the court's key local partnerships in the community—Buffalo Legal Aid, Harvest House, and the Erie County Mental Health Department (and the community providers it also funds)—provide some programming to participants.

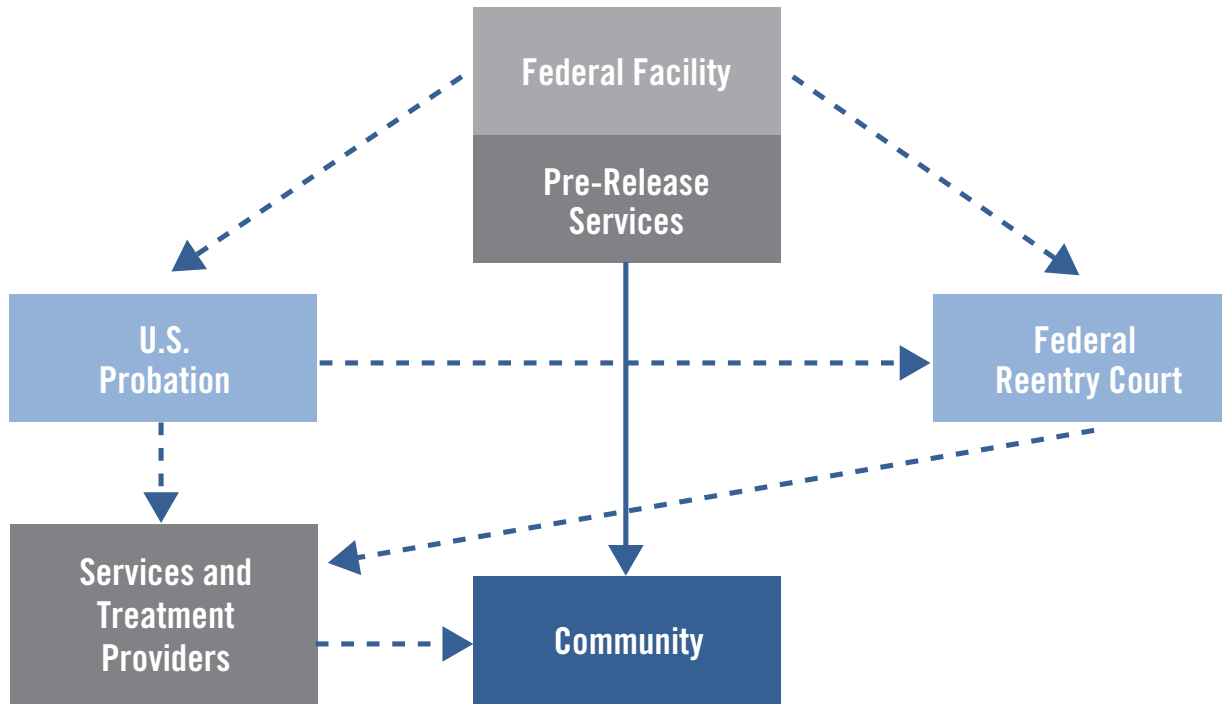
Figure 1 illustrates the flow of the federal reentry population in Erie County. The dashed lines depict the flow of participants among the court, probation, providers, and the community, while the solid line shows the flow of releases from the federal facility directly to the community. People who are released from the federal facility under the supervision of U.S. Probation may be referred to service providers directly or be referred to the Federal Reentry Court and then to service providers. People who are released to the Federal Reentry Court may

11. Anthony SanGiacomo of U.S. Courts, email message to author, October 2017.

12. *Ibid.*

13. *Ibid.*

Figure 1. Federal Reentry Population Flow in Erie County



be referred directly to service providers before returning to the community.

Although Erie County’s federal reentry population is just a small fraction of the larger reentry population in Erie County, there is limited funding beyond what is provided by U.S. Probation and a limited number of reentry service providers available to serve this population.

3. The state reentry population returning to Erie County has greater access to quality services than the other reentry populations, but is still hampered by poor countywide coordination of these services.

Several community-based service options exist for the state reentry population, unlike the local and federal reentry populations in the county. While multiple factors contribute to the inconsistency in services and treatment among the reentry populations, two of the more important factors are that (1) people in state facilities who are assessed as being at high risk of reoffending are automatically assigned to pre-release services while not automatically assigned in the other reentry populations, and (2) more funding is provided for this population and the post-release service and treatment providers that serve them.

WORKFORCE TRAINING PROVIDERS

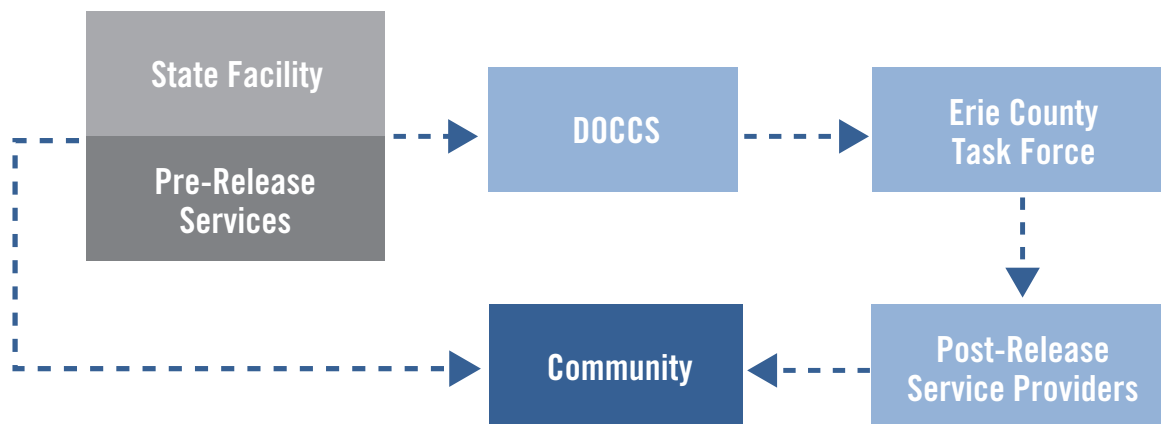
There are several workforce training providers in Erie County that administer employment-related services; however, only a few offer these services specifically to the reentry population—and out of those few, the CSG Justice Center only identified one that was properly tracking its population’s outcomes, adhering to evidence-based standards, and coordinating with business leaders in the community.

Unfortunately, the more successful workforce training providers, such as the Center for Employment Opportunity (CEO), are mostly restricted to serving only the state reentry population.¹⁴ People among the federal reentry population who are maxing out,¹⁵ or are coming through the federal reentry court or U.S. Probation, are sent to BETC for employment services. Unlike CEO, BETC is mainly a soft-skills (e.g., resume development or interviewing techniques) employment services provider that serves the general public, rather than focusing on the reentry population. As is the case for the federal reentry population, the county reentry population lacks workforce training opportunities due to a lack of funding and partnerships with local service providers.

Upon release from a state facility, DOCCS’ Buffalo branch office conducts a general parole orientation with all new individuals on parole. DOCCS also holds information regarding the last known address in the county for people released from a state facility, but not mandated to parole. Although these individuals have maxed out of their sentence and are not directed to services through the Buffalo DOCCS office, provider outreach can still target them for post-release programming. As listed in Table 2, the number of people maxing out of prison without a parole requirement is quite small; 87 out of 1, 032 were released from state prison facilities in 2016.

Figure 2 illustrates the flow of the state reentry population in the county. Pre-release services are offered to people returning from a state facility, but they can decline before leaving the facility. If they are released under the supervision of DOCCS, they will be referred to the Erie County Reentry Task Force to receive post-release services before returning to the community. They will also be released straight to the community if they have maxed out their sentence.

Figure 2: State Reentry Population Flow in Erie County



14. Department of Corrections and Community Supervision, in discussion with the author, July 2017. The Erie County Probation Department has also recently secured funding to allow limited participation with CEO.

15. New York State Department of Labor, *The Road to Reentry: Supplemental Guide*, 2014, 3, <https://labor.ny.gov/workforcenypartners/toolkits/The-Road-to-Reentry-Supplemental-Guide.pdf>. According to NYSDOL, “maxing out” refers to someone who has served his or her sentence of incarceration and is not mandated to community supervision and/or post-release treatment and services.

DOCCS also plays a coordinating role in the county by hosting parole orientations, which they have done for the past 8 years. The orientations are conducted by DOCCS and Spectrum Health & Human Services and include representation from the New York State Department of Labor, the Erie County Social Services Department, 25 participating nonprofit providers from different treatment domains, and prisoner advocacy groups. The orientations include presentations from DOCCS, the Erie County Reentry Task Force, and the participating agencies. Evergreen Health Services provides Narcan training and kits to people on parole who attend the orientation and training, and each person is then connected to service providers by supervising parole officers or a reentry care coordinator, if they choose to enroll in services.

Prior to a person's release, DOCCS provides assistance in acquiring identification and assists them with Medicaid applications. DOCCS also provides a 30-day supply of medication for people taking prescriptions so that they do not miss any dosages of medication as they are transitioning to post-release services.

Several people on parole reported that they sometimes received duplicated programming. One of the reasons for these duplications in programming is because the parole board determines the conditions of an individual's release, such as substance use treatment or anger management programming. These conditions of release may lead to that person being directed to services they already received while incarcerated or prior to incarceration. Parole officers have the authority to modify programming requirements, however, and can intervene to reduce duplication. A number of people on parole also noted the \$30-per-month supervision fee they were required to pay by DOCCS. Even though the fee can be paid on a sliding scale, if a person is having trouble paying, it can represent a hardship to people on parole in Erie County.

After a person spends a period of time participating in programming, a Case Supervision Review tool developed by COMPAS, is used to determine whether supervision intensity can be reduced as a result of successful participation in programming.

4. The local reentry population is the largest reentry population in Erie County, but there is inadequate funding for services and there are fewer opportunities for both pre- and post-release services for the local reentry population compared to the other reentry populations.

The Erie County Correctional Facility (ECCF)—located in Alden, NY—and the Erie County Holding Center (ECHC)—located in Buffalo, NY—are the two largest contributors to Erie County's total reentry population, and together have 15 male units, 3 female units, and 1 minors' unit.

People in the local reentry population have few opportunities for workforce development, housing, cognitive-behavioral therapy, and education services in both the pre- and post-release stages of their reentry. While the Erie County Department of Mental Health, Forensic Mental Health Service offers assessment, individual and group therapy, psychiatric medications, and discharge planning to people with mental health diagnoses and addiction disorders who are in need of those services, the larger local reentry population is less likely to have opportunities to receive pre-release services than those of the people returning from a state or federal facility. Some important reasons for this discrepancy include: (1) participation in reentry programming is not mandatory; (2) few providers offer pre-release services; (3) the local reentry population typically has shorter stays in the facility and therefore insufficient time to participate in or complete programming; and (4) there is currently no reentry liaison to coordinate programming among the ECCF, ECHC, and existing reentry service providers.

While people leaving the local facilities are not required to receive reentry programming, the most successful in-house service providers (based on enrollment and active participation) are the Buffalo Public School District and the Alden Public School District. Both providers promote and provide adult basic education services within these facilities. Once a person has acquired a GED or its equivalent, he or she may take college-level courses offered by Erie Community College, which also provides assistance in enrolling as a full-time student upon release. People housed in the ECCF overwhelmingly stated in interviews that the education services available in the county facilities are crucial to their preparation for reentry and noted that the local reentry population should receive stronger incentives to participate in the existing services within the facility (specifically education, trauma-informed counseling, and domestic violence prevention).

Generally, the lack of funding, strong incentives to participate in programming, and overall coordination between service providers and corrections give very few incentives to local providers to create in-house programming. While programs such as Narcotics Anonymous and Alcoholics Anonymous are offered in the local facilities, providers that offer programming such as employment services or cognitive-behavioral therapy are not providing pre-release services for the local reentry population.

THE ERIE COUNTY REENTRY TASK FORCE AND COUNTY COORDINATION

The Erie County Reentry Task Force operates according to the statewide model implemented in 2005 that was based on the national Transition from Prison to Community (TPC) initiative.¹⁶ DCJS established 18 county reentry task forces across the state. Initially, these task forces were intended to provide a more effective delivery of services by building relationships with leaders and service providers in local communities and strengthening and coordinating community supports for the reentry population.

In 2011, DCJS additionally mandated the use of evidence-based practices, validated risk assessment, and performance-based contracts with service providers, as well as a system for tracking the outcomes from their referrals. As a consequence to the mandate, the task forces became narrowly focused on serving one reentry population that had funding affixed to it. This mandate shifted the Erie County Reentry Task Force's focus from supporting all corrections officials and community-based service providers to mainly focusing on the state reentry population and added objectives to meet specific enrollment goals and milestones for services. The changes reoriented their purpose and stretched thin their abilities to effectively manage county collaborations around reentry.

When interviewed for this project, many reentry service providers reported that the task force was currently narrowly focused on case management for people on parole with high risk and high needs. These reentry service providers also reported a need for an interagency coordinating body to help guide reentry planning.

Post-release programming for the local reentry population is mostly limited to people returning to the community on probation or people sentenced to, and released from, jail and then enrolled into post-release programming through community outreach enrollment. The short amount of time people spend in jail awaiting trial makes it more difficult to provide case planning or pre-release programming for this population, both of which impact whether a person receives post-release programming upon release. Limited funding further

16. Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services, "Transition from Prison to Community (TPIC)," <https://www.oasas.ny.gov/cj/TPIC.cfm>.

reduces the opportunities for post-release services for this population (see Finding #6). As a result, there are little to no employment, housing, or health care providers that work solely with Erie County's local reentry population.

AN INEFFECTIVE TRANSITION FROM PRE-RELEASE TO POST-RELEASE SERVICES: EDUCATION

When surveyed, education service providers expressed concerns that corrections officials and other reentry service providers were not utilizing the education services sufficiently. Education services provided inside local jail facilities have relatively large enrollment numbers and voluntary participation, but the transition to post-release education services is inefficient because participants are not reengaging with the service providers upon release from jail.

The local reentry population also has opportunities for post-release programming when sentenced to Erie County Probation supervision. Upon release from jail, Erie County probation officers refer some people to CEO and also administer cognitive behavioral therapy themselves. Erie County Probation also administers the COMPAS risk tool to determine a person's risk of reoffending; in 2017, more than 63 percent of Erie County Probation's total caseload consisted of people assessed as being at a medium or high risk of reoffending.¹⁷

Service Domains and Prominent Providers

Erie County has a robust set of providers that specialize in treatment and services for its reentry populations. Many of these providers have a history of working with reentry populations and coordinating with county or state officials to provide services specifically for reentry populations.

Several of these nonprofit service providers have noted strengths: Saving Grace Ministries developed a useful electronic database that keeps current profiles of participants, including their prior programming and the agencies from which they are presently receiving programming. CEO is the primary workforce-training provider in the county and is known for its evidence-based programming, along with how well it prepares the reentry population for employment. The adult basic education branch of the Buffalo School District in Erie County offers both pre-release and post-release opportunities to county reentry populations, and receives some referrals for state reentry populations. Peaceprints incorporates evidence-based practices in the support it provides participants in its well-regarded housing program.

Some local providers, such as Spectrum Health and Human Services and BestSelf Behavioral Health, also tap into Medicaid and other insurance to help cover the costs of services and pay for programming for the local and state reentry populations through a mixture of Medicaid and DCJS funding from the Erie County Mental Health Department.

However, even when these providers are available to multiple reentry populations, the amount of funding to service each population is inconsistent. For example, while Peaceprints is a housing provider for both the state and local reentry populations, it receives more funding to service the state reentry population and therefore engages and enrolls more people from that reentry population than from the local reentry population. Table 3 shows the service domains and the providers working within those domains and their coordinating agency entry point for reentry populations into Erie County.

17. Erie County Probation, in discussion with the author, February 2018.

Table 3. Agency Partnerships and Service Providers/Domains

Average Daily Population	Provider and Domain
Federal Reentry Court and U.S. Probation	Back-to-Basics (Mentors, Housing) Buffalo Employment Training Center (Workforce) Legal Aid (Case Planning) Mid-Erie Counseling and Treatment Services (Health Services) Salvation Army (Domestic Violence)
DOCCS/state facility	Back-to-Basics (Mentors, Housing) BestSelf Behavioral Health (Mental Health, Addiction Care, and Housing) Buffalo Public School District (Education) Buffalo Urban League (Workforce) Catholic Charities of Buffalo (Human Services) Center for Employment Opportunities (Workforce) Erie County Department of Social Services (Social Services) Erie County Mental Health Department (Substance Use, Mental Health Services) It Takes a Village (Workforce) Mid-Erie Counseling and Treatment Services (Health Services) Peaceprints (Housing) Saving Grace Ministries (Housing) Spectrum Health and Human Services (Case Planning, CBT, Mental Health, Addiction, and Housing)
Erie County Correctional Facility, Erie County Holding Center, and County Probation	Alden Public School District (Adult Basic Education) Back-to-Basics (Mentorship, Housing) BestSelf Behavioral Health (Health) Buffalo Public School District (Adult Basic Education) Buffalo Urban League (Workforce) Catholic Charities of Buffalo (Human Services) Center for Employment Opportunities (Workforce) Department of Labor and Buffalo Employment & Training Center (Workforce) Erie County Community College (Postsecondary Education) Erie County Department of Mental Health (Mental Health, Substance Use, Psychiatric Medications, and Discharge Planning) Horizon Health Services (Mental Health, Substance Use) Mid-Erie Counseling and Treatment Services (Health Services) Peaceprints (Housing) Spectrum Health and Human Services (Mental Health, Housing)

5. There are gaps in the services provided to Erie County’s multiple reentry populations because the utilization of evidence-based programming and research-driven practices is inconsistent and funders are not holding service providers accountable for meeting performance metrics.

Based on data and interviews, CSG Justice Center staff identified five key takeaways of how Erie County’s service providers view their practices and the overall quality and impact of their programming:

1. Respondents to the surveys report that less than half of service providers administer evidence-based programming.
2. Twenty-five percent of service providers report staff understand rationales and practices of the organization and programming.
3. Seventy-three percent of providers reported that staff have been trained on how to deliver interventions, treatment, and services effectively and in accordance with program models.
4. Eighty percent of providers report that their organizational leadership is skilled and adaptive in providing guidance and serving reentry populations.
5. Fifty-three percent of service providers plan to expand services to reentry populations.

Table 4. Service Gaps and Deficiencies in Erie County

Service Domain	Service Gaps and Deficiencies
Housing Providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inadequate information collected from referring agency • Few housing options for special reentry populations, i.e. people convicted of sex offenses and women • Limited access for county probation clients • Lack of accountability • Waitlist for housing services
Education Providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People leaving jails/prisons without TASC¹⁸ or basic literacy • Students who receive pre-release services may not continue with post-release education • Not always a clear distinction between reentry population and general population in post-release programming, with instructors often unaware of or unsure how to address the specific needs of the reentry populations • Adult Basic Education (ABE) is underutilized during the post-release stage

18. “Test Assessing Secondary Completion”, <http://www.tasctest.com>. TASC is a high school equivalency exam.

Service Domain	Service Gaps and Deficiencies
Employment Service Providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some service providers restricted to the state reentry population • Inadequate transportation to employment training or new employment • Data is shared inconsistently with partners • Insufficient communication between employment service providers and parole officers
Social Services and Medical Care Providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to comprehensive background information on clients referred to them for social services and medical care • No pre-arraignment diversion to treatment for people who have substance use disorders or mental illnesses • Small number of providers who offer cognitive behavioral therapy

There are existing Workforce and Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA) grants in Erie County, which are used to target special populations for workforce training, but are not necessarily focused on reentry populations. For example, BETC receives WIOA funding and receives reentry population referrals from both federal and state agencies; however, BETC’s employment services are not currently research or evidence based, and it mixes the reentry population in with the general population when providing services.

6. People in all three reentry populations in Erie County are primarily assessed for risk of reoffending and criminogenic needs with the COMPAS risk tool, but the results from the assessment are not consistently being used to inform general case planning during pre-release or transitional case planning during post-release programming.

People in the federal reentry population are assessed by U.S. Probation and Legal Aid, which partners with the Federal Reentry Court and U.S. Probation. People in the state reentry population are assessed at several points: while incarcerated, by DOCCS when they are released, and by Spectrum and the Erie County Reentry Task Force, unless they have completed their sentence while incarcerated and refused all pre-release programming. People in the local reentry population have very few opportunities for assessment unless they are screened at the Erie County Holding Center or assessed for risk by an agency that enrolls participants through community outreach, like Back-to-Basics. The ECCF does allow county probation to assess for risk and needs, but generally only receives assessment results from ECHC.

While results of these assessments are sometimes provided to service and treatment providers in the county, additional screenings—such as for health, substance use, housing, or employment needs—may be administered by the agency the person has been referred to. In cases where these nonprofit providers do not receive risk scores, they typically administer their own assessment or request risk assessment results from other reentry service providers. Even when the risk scores are provided to them, these nonprofit providers are not consistently using this information to inform their case planning and programming.

Many survey respondents also expressed concern that some agencies were not consistently referring people to appropriate treatment based on the results of risk and needs assessments. Many service providers voiced concerns that with limited oversight of the assessment process, there is potential for some agencies to manipulate assessment results to obtain more funding through referrals into their own programs.

7. Though multiple agencies reported that their contracts were based on their performance, the metrics provided to funders are often limited to recruitments and referrals (i.e., meeting a certain number of recruits per month and meeting enrollment milestones), not actually on the outcomes of the people obtaining the services or being treated.

According to interviews conducted by CSG Justice Center staff, several entities that receive funding to provide reentry services in the county are not adhering to proper performance-based metrics and outcomes when dispensing contracts or overseeing current contracts. While the Erie County Department of Mental Health reports that the contracts they hold for many local providers require meeting certain outcomes, only a few providers reported tracking the outcomes of their participants. As a result, according to their own reports, several service providers appear to be receiving contracts based on relationships with funders, instead of quality of care or successful outcomes associated with their programming. Table 5 shows the key funding streams for services provided to Erie County’s reentry populations.

Table 5. Reentry Services Funding in Erie County, by Source and Reentry Population

Source	Amount	Reentry Stage	Population Served
County Probation	No dedicated funding for reentry services ¹⁹	Community Supervision	Local reentry population
DCJS/Erie County Reentry Task Force	\$367,000	Post-release	State reentry population
DOCCS	Cannot exceed \$23,000 per person	Post-release	State reentry population
	\$995,968 (local housing provider)	Post-release, housing	People convicted of a sex offense and state reentry population
	592,500 (local housing provider)	Post-release	State reentry population
U.S. Probation	\$1,000,000	Post-release	Federal reentry population
SAMHSA	\$975,000 per year over a 3-year period	Alternative-to-incarceration	Targets high users of opioids, people who have substance use disorders, mental health disorders, and chronic health disorders

19. While County Probation has no dedicated line item for reentry services, people on probation can access the numerous social services provided by the county and state that are available to all county residents. As mentioned previously, more than 90 percent of people on probation are sentenced directly to probation by the court and do not serve a period of incarceration prior to their term of community supervision.

The contracts awarded to task forces across New York State have been performance-based since a 2011 DCJS requirement. The current performance-based contracts issued by DCJS for the Erie County Reentry Task Force stipulate that the task force receives money for intakes, milestones, and discharges. It also receives additional funding for cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) enrollment and completion. Erie County then bills DCJS based on their enrollment, milestones, and discharges; receives reimbursement; and then pays the CBT provider on behalf of the referrals they received from the Erie County Reentry Task Force. All of these reimbursements are dependent on meeting the above milestones with different rates attached to each. The Erie County Reentry Task Force primarily enrolls people assessed as being at a medium to high risk of reoffending from DOCCS, but the contracts also allow for “special populations,” (i.e., women with high service needs and people convicted of sex offenses) even if they are assessed as low-risk by the COMPAS tool, to be qualified for programming through the task force. These groups are largely excluded from effective services and treatment across county providers though performance-based contracts through the Erie County Reentry Task Force do allow for their enrollment. The Erie County Mental Health Department oversees the performance-based contract for the task force and is responsible for overseeing eligibility, performance, and enrollment.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1

Consider developing a coordinating committee to advise agencies and providers that administer reentry services

A new reentry advisory coordinating committee composed of cross-agency leaders would provide guidance in coordinating treatment and services and advise funders and reentry service providers on efforts such as engaging existing reentry populations, developing eligibility criteria, and improving relationships with existing and new stakeholders. It would also assist funders in administering accountability standards to the Erie County Reentry Task Force and provide clear, accurate metrics for measuring outcomes. Better coordination across county providers and leaders will also provide additional opportunities for merging funding streams and collaborating across reentry populations for necessary funding.

This committee should be responsible for tracking the agencies through which each of the reentry populations enters the county, what they are assessed for, and which services they receive; the funding associated with reentry services; and the coordination between the agencies that largely supervise the three reentry populations in the county. It should also be tasked with creating a shared set of reentry goals in Erie County among corrections officials, nonprofit organizations, community-based service providers, local agency directors, employers, and local government. Additionally, the committee should advise the reentry service providers in the implementation of evidence-based practices and performance standards.

PROMISING PRACTICE: PENNSYLVANIA'S COUNTY CRIMINAL JUSTICE ADVISORY BOARDS

Pennsylvania's Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD) established a Criminal Justice Advisory Committee (CJAC) whose mission is to support a comprehensive strategy to reduce recidivism by prioritizing evidence-based policy and practice at every stage of the justice system. CJAC develops long-term strategies that are implemented across the state by a County Systems Subcommittee and a Local Systems Subcommittee with funding provided by PCCD.

CJAC assists each county in establishing a County Criminal Justice Advisory Board (CJAB) that conducts local planning and problem solving on countywide initiatives to make systemic changes to the criminal justice system and the reentry experience. Top-level county officials and leaders often participate in the CJABs, which work collaboratively with state agencies, community groups, and service providers; recommend best practices and research-driven approaches; and promote communication across systems in the county.

Recommendation 2

Explore the possibility of establishing a physical or virtual reentry hub to ensure that all reentry populations have access to services and treatment in the county

To reduce duplicative services and unnecessary treatment once a person completes pre-release programming and transitions into post-release services, Erie County should explore the possibility of establishing a reentry hub that co-locates provider services and provides initial risk and needs assessments for the reentry populations returning to the county. This reentry hub would store and receive data from corrections, nonprofit providers, and supervising agencies and make that information accessible through a shared database. While it could be a physical space or a virtual one (depending on the resources available to the county), most importantly, the reentry hub should serve as the first point at which data is collected and people are assessed for needs after they are sent by DOCCS, U.S. Probation, the Federal Reentry Court, Erie County Probation, Erie County Correctional Facility and the Erie County Holding Center.

The reentry hub could conduct all initial assessments of people returning to Erie County after release from corrections facilities and use that information to determine what reentry services are needed, much like the treatment team in the C.O.U.R.T.S. program²⁰ administers screenings and evaluations to individuals and provides information to help determine the scope of services needed and whether that individual qualifies for an alternative-to-incarceration (ATI) program. Figure 3 shows the different services that should be available to people who are referred to the reentry hub.

20. Court Outreach Unit: Referral and Treatment Services (C.O.U.R.T.S.) is a collaborative program between the Buffalo City Court and the city of Buffalo that provides on-site treatment and referrals teams to inform judges' decisions on potential treatment and service outcomes for individuals. The program also links individuals to services. <https://www.courtinnovation.org/articles/buffalos-courts-court-outreach-unit-referral-and-treatment-services-program>.

Figure 3: Reentry Hub and Necessary Services



Referrals coming out of this reentry hub should be based on an individual’s assessed needs and case plans, their geographical location and proximity to services, and sometimes, the person’s ability to pay for the services. Additionally, since housing options are often limited for all reentry populations in Erie County, this reentry hub **can** provide some limited emergency shelter if it is a physical space or provide emergency shelter options through an external partner, if virtual.

PROMISING PRACTICE: SHELBY COUNTY (TENNESSEE) OFFICE OF REENTRY

The Shelby County Office of Reentry connects local and state government, reentry agencies and service providers, and local civic leaders together in a multi-disciplinary collaborative, called The Justice Group, which participates in a single hub where reentry-specific resources are centralized and easily accessible for the reentry population through the Office of Reentry in Shelby County. Key service providers operate out of the hub and also receive referrals directly from the hub.

Service providers utilize the hub for referrals, guidance on best practices, and grant assistance, while people returning to the community after incarceration use the hub to connect with reentry service providers in the community. The community benefits because the hub itself stores data related to the providers and the clients and also assesses whether desired outcomes are more successful when people are referred to specific providers. This assessment enables staff who work at the reentry hub to direct clients to the most successful programs.

The Office of Reentry quadrupled the number of people served in Shelby County within the reentry hub's first year of operation; cultivated a network of accountable providers to refer people to; provided key services on-site, such as housing and workforce training; established relationships with appropriate correctional facility staff; and collected data that is used to guide internal decision-making. Building a reliable referral network for effective services allowed the reentry hub to ensure individuals received the best treatment they could among service providers. Allowing key services to be housed in the reentry hub's location ensured that all clients received some important in-house services before being referred to other external partners.

Recommendation 3

Determine whether correctional agencies and service providers are uniformly using evidence-based practices and providing high-quality programming

The county should determine whether the current quality of programming, treatment, and housing provided by Erie County correctional agencies and reentry service providers meets the standards of being evidence based and of high quality. This information should be reported to the oversight committee, county executives, and state, legislative, and judicial officials to identify which service providers need to expand capacity and/or improve their standards. The correctional agencies and service providers that are not meeting requirements for programming, quality of care, and housing should be given the opportunity to make improvements or risk exclusion from any future contracts.

The county should also aim to understand the existing gaps in services, offer uniform assessments, improve continuity of services during the pre-release to post-release transition, and implement clear accountability standards across providers to ensure high-quality programming.

PROMISING PRACTICE: MARICOPA COUNTY (ARIZONA) CONTINUOUS QUALITY IMPROVEMENT (CQI) STRATEGY

Maricopa County's adult probation department used funding from a Second Chance Act grant to strengthen the quality of its existing services—such as housing and education—specifically targeting reentry populations. First, Maricopa County examined the quality of the services they provided, which revealed several inconsistencies in how they were delivered to participants. Maricopa County probation leaders then met with local reentry service providers to discuss these inconsistencies and created working groups that spent several weeks developing strategies to standardize their services. Following these meetings Maricopa County officials formally required all service providers to adopt these changes and adhere to them across the county.

Recommendation 4

Determine standards and performance measures to guide funding decisions

To improve accountability among the reentry service providers receiving county and state grants for Erie County's reentry populations, funding should only be directed to providers that can demonstrate improved outcomes for the reentry population.

County leaders and funders should determine new standards, such as designating that contracts are based on meeting performance outcomes and mandating that service providers report their performance progress. They should develop adequate performance metrics and reporting requirements (besides just measuring the total enrollment numbers) and set programmatic milestones and targets for nonprofit providers receiving funding. These leaders and funders should also provide training, support, and guidance to service providers receiving funding for reentry populations to help ensure the standards are being met.

By establishing these standards, county leaders and funders can ensure that treatment is targeted to high risk and high needs reentry populations and reduce the wasteful use of limited resources by programming that is ineffective on the reentry populations. Implementing performance-based contracts and accountability standards will also help to improve the quality of programming administered to reentry populations in the county.

PROMISING PRACTICE: WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS OFFENDER CHANGE DIVISION

The Washington Department of Corrections (DOC) created an Offender Change Division that is responsible for the implementation and oversight of evidence-based and research-based practices and programs across agencies and providers in the state. This division is responsible for keeping providers accountable and determining where funds are associated with successful outcomes across the state. The Offender Change Division implemented a new policy in 2009 that would identify and standardize all Offender Change Programs and Reentry Programs in Washington State DOC facilities. All programs had to be responsive to risk, need, and gender-specific factors to reduce the likelihood of reoffending and increase successful reentry for all participants. The Offender Change Division also implemented a process that would approve all programs prior to funding and also conduct regular quality assurance reviews of existing programming every three years for reentry populations. An Offender Change Programs committee was incorporated to obtain input from all stakeholders and to regularly inform future programming and standards.

Recommendation 5

Investigate incentives for people to participate in pre-release reentry programming

Several opportunities for reentry programming currently exist within the federal, state, and local correctional agencies (such as education services); however, there are low rates of participation by people housed in these

facilities because the programming is not strongly incentivized. Table 6 suggests potential incentives corrections professionals and nonprofit service providers can use to increase the number of people who participate in pre-release reentry programming and programming offered during their period of community supervision. For example, people on probation in the county can “earn” early closure of the period of time under community supervision if they comply with all requirements. Commonly, people on probation earn two years off a five-year probationary sentence.

Table 6. Potential Incentives Corrections Agencies and Nonprofits Can Use to Increase the Number of People Participating in Programming

Corrections Agencies	Nonprofit Providers
Early release from probation or parole	Motivational interviewing ²¹
Home passes	Wage subsidies ²²
Good time served	Transportation tokens
Greater independence	

Including incentives with pre-release programming in the ECHC and the ECCF should encourage more enrollment in the pre-release programming currently available in the facility. The incentives and the population eligible to participate in these incentives should be guided by governing state statutes, state and local policies and procedures, and various stakeholders including corrections and law enforcement to ensure legality, safety, appropriateness, and effectiveness.

PROMISING PRACTICE: PROJECT 180, LOS ANGELES COUNTY (CALIFORNIA)

Project 180 in Los Angeles County is a treatment provider for the Los Angeles Co-Occurring Disorders Court. The program offers intensive treatment for people who have behavioral health needs and supervision during the duration of treatment. Project 180 increased its program participation by offering incentives (such as legal assistance and help with applying for healthcare) for the participants’ charges. In 2016, staff conducted in-jail outreach to explain the programming Project 180 offered, as well as the incentives given to people who joined. By the end of the year, only 29 of the 186 people who were offered to participate declined.

21. National Institute of Corrections, *Motivational Interviewing in Corrections: A Comprehensive Guide to Implementing MI in Corrections* (Washington, DC: 2012), <https://nicic.gov/motivational-interviewing-corrections-comprehensive-guide-implementing-mi-corrections>. Motivational Interviewing is counseling that centers on the participant and emphasizes empathy, optimism, and personal choice.

22. Wage subsidies partially subsidize a new employee’s wages. Wage subsidy programs provide an incentive for employers to hire someone whose earnings are partially subsidized by a wage subsidy.

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