

The Journey Home

REST having an impact

No, it's not the lyrics to a song, but rather the strategies the United Way of Dane County's (UWDC) Journey Home initiative deploys to change the lives of citizens returning to Dane County from prison. Over 700 ex-offenders return to our county annually looking for a new start and productive life. Upon their return, many of these individuals face immediate challenges and obstacles that may result in recidivism and return to prison.

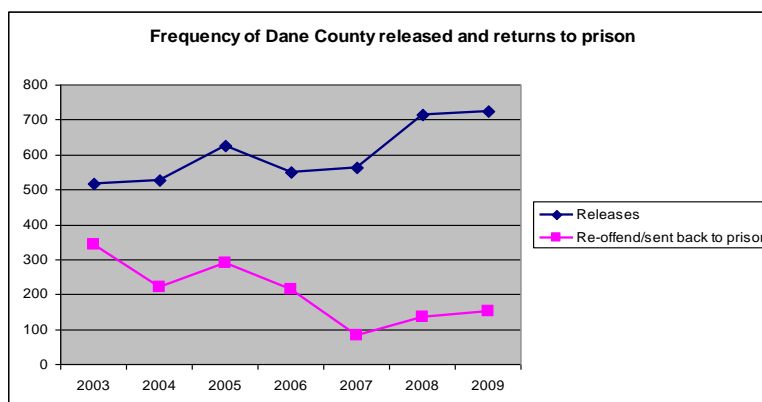
Officially recognized reasons for recidivism include revocation, violation of rules and committing a new crime. In 2003, our county experienced a recidivism rate of 66% for individuals returning to prison within two years of release.

Reducing the recidivism rate in Dane County emerged as an important strategy within the Agenda for Change goal of reducing violence towards individuals and families.

In 2005, after many months of research, meetings and study of reintegration programs in other communities, UWDC created a model using promising practices we believed would work in our county. Four areas that research shows are most important are: Residency, Employment, Support and Treatment (REST). Evidence confirms that former offenders who access three of these four strategies are successful in creating safe and productive lives in the county.

Today, Journey Home is implemented in partnership with the Madison-area Urban Ministry, to effectively connect ex-offenders with county resources to reduce the recidivism rate. The program has two main components: 1) Resource Specialists who provide intensive one-on-one assistance and 2) One-stop monthly "Service Fairs" offering ex-offenders and their family member access to needed services all in one location.

The number of releases has increased annually since 2003



Data source: Wisconsin Department of Corrections - 2009

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Strategies We're Using that Work

(R)esidency

Everyone needs a safe place to live; however, most ex-offenders struggle to locate affordable housing. They find themselves in a Catch-22 situation: they need employment to pay for a place to live but they can't find employment without an address to put on the job application.

Since 2006 we have been successful at finding housing for 102 individuals.

Madison-area Urban Ministry is linking apartment associations and landlords with ex-offenders to place them in housing. We ensure both ex-offenders and landlords know and work within their rights and responsibilities for housing.

(S)upport

A few ex-offenders are able to pick up where they left off and rejoin their families. For most, this is not the case.

Madison-area Urban Ministry provides a unique approach with a continuum of services to ex-offenders without supportive families. In addition to working one-on-one with the Resource Specialists and the agencies that participate in the monthly Service Fairs, ex-offenders can also join a Circle of Support program or the Phoenix Initiative. Twenty-four Journey Home clients are in Circles.

The Circle of Support program links a team of five to seven volunteers with one ex-offender to help upon release. These volunteers come from a variety of church congregations throughout Dane County. The Phoenix Initiative is a support program with a curriculum designed to help women reconnect with their children and make good choices while providing for their family.

The Resource Specialists aid ex-offenders as they work on necessary life and job skills to ensure goals are met.

We now have two AmeriCorps members helping with Circles of Support and Journey Home monthly Service Fairs.

(E)mployment

Finding employment is challenging for many people given our current economic climate. Those who are hiring are very selective in their choices of employees, making it even more difficult for an ex-offender. Most ex-offenders have low skills and often no real work history, which makes positioning them for jobs difficult.

However, with the number of Baby Boomers that will retire from the labor market in the next couple of years, ex-offenders with skills will have a greater chance to find employment. They could represent an untapped market for employment.

The Journey Home initiative has found employment for 262 ex-offenders since 2006.

We have offered training to employers to publicize the available tax incentives for hiring ex-offenders. Included in the training is information about Journey Home support services, providing a liaison between the ex-offenders and their employers. This is an extra incentive to the employers because they know Journey Home has screened and monitored all potential employees.

(T)reatment

We know that about 80% of ex-offenders who are released have mental health issues – including AODA. While in prison, they receive the treatment and support that they need. However, upon release, not all are able to continue with their treatment for a variety of reasons. Mental health and AODA resources are in short supply – most have waiting lists – particularly for those who don't qualify for health insurance.

Since we began this initiative, we have linked 261 ex-offenders to support and/or treatment services.

The Resource Specialists work closely with the community agencies to provide mental health referrals for ex-offenders. They have a listing of agencies with the earliest available openings. Our goal is to refer ex-offenders to programs with the shortest waiting lists without cost.

A Five-Year Retrospective – Successful Service, Great Need and Complicated Tracking

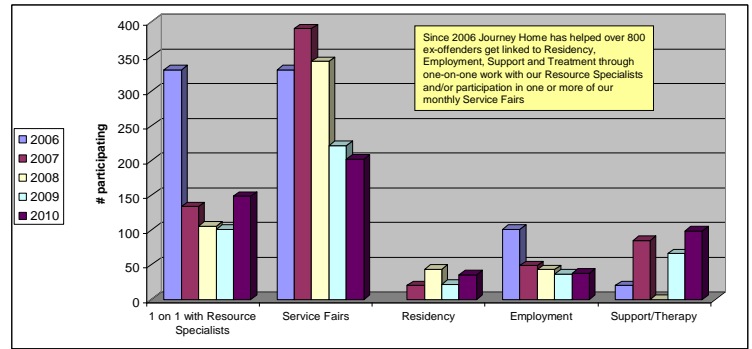
Based on emerging promising practices, we designed the Journey Home program to provide services within two years to those returning to Dane County from prison. We track results on multiple levels: services received by individual participants, program impact on participants and overall recidivism within our community.

Since the Journey Home initiative began, we have seen remarkably low return to prison rate for participants in the Journey Home program: 5.4% in 2006, 9.7% in 2007, 8.5% in 2008, 10% in 2009 and 8% in 2010.

During the same period, the community-level return to prison rate went from 66% in 2003 to 39% in 2006, 15% in 2007, 19% in 2008 and 21% in 2009. We are awaiting the 2010 community-level return to prison rate. We feel confident that implementation of the Journey Home program combined with new programming at the Department of Corrections is resulting in this significant impact on not only the program participants but the overall county-level recidivism rate.

Simply counting persons receiving services and calculating overall recidivism is straightforward. Effectively evaluating the program's impact on participants is more complex. We compare the

Over 800 ex-offenders have been linked to Residency, Employment, Support and Treatment

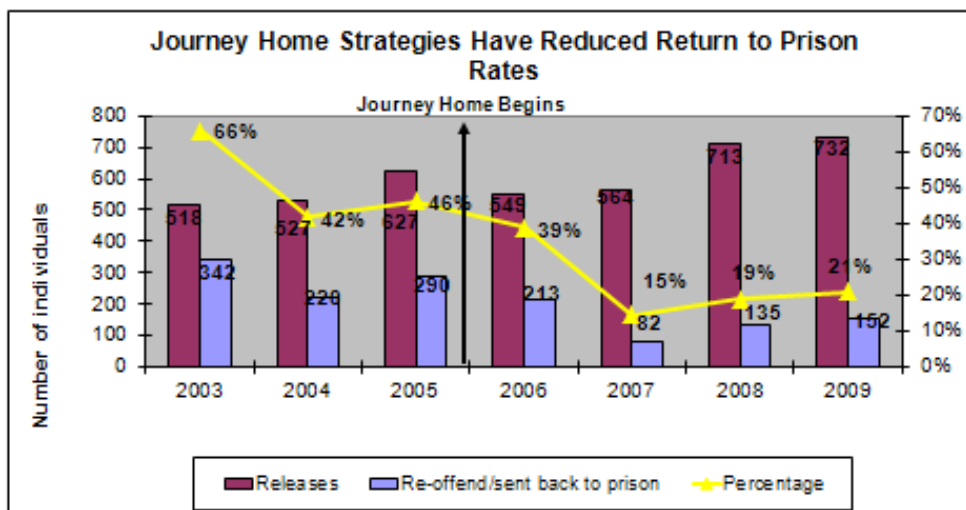


names of our individual participants with those of the Department of Corrections (DOC) to see if participants are back in prison. What we discovered through our five year analysis has been eye opening. Tracking ex-offenders through the DOC is extremely complicated. By tracking individuals through the DOC, we have identified hundreds of former prisoners and those convicted but not incarcerated in need of Journey Home services.

Of the 3,066 individuals receiving services since 2006, only 10% (317) of these clients were released in the year they sought assistance from Journey Home.

The remaining 2,749 individuals were released in a prior year or had never spent time in the Wisconsin prison system. As a result, we have faced a growing waiting list for services, which challenges our desire to supply services promptly after the ex-offender is released.

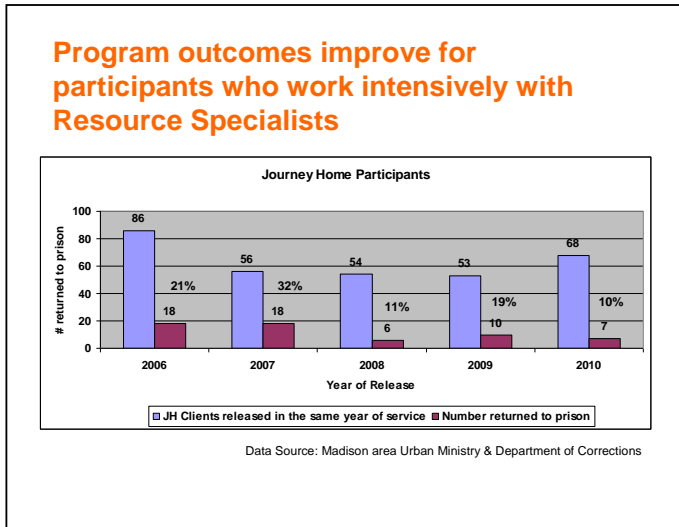
Journey Home participants have a 10% return to prison rate helping to reduce the community level rate to 21%



Data Sources: Department of Corrections and Madison area Urban Ministry

Program analysis

1. Program outcomes improve for ex-offenders who work intensively with Resource Specialists. As shown in the chart below, recidivism dropped to 10% for those individuals – our overall goal.



2. The Journey Home program has been highly cost effective when compared with the cost of incarceration.
 - a. A five-year total investment of \$475,749 averages out to about \$580 for each of the 821 participants.
 - b. A typical year of incarceration runs about \$30,000 per inmate.

Lessons Learned

1. A growing number of DOC clients are seeking help.
 - a. We are seeing gradual increases in the number of annual releases from prison.
 - b. There is a pent-up demand from those released in earlier years.
2. The service model with a tiered approach is appropriate for the levels of need we see.
 - a. We are providing intensive Case Management through our Resource Specialists.
 - b. One-time assistance to clients is also provided through the Resource Specialists.
 - c. Monthly assistance is centered around REST strategies and providers through the monthly Service Fairs

3. Our open-door policy creates challenges to implementing best practices due to the high need.
4. Qualification for a Department of Corrections number includes more than being a former prisoner in the Wisconsin State system.
 - a. DOC numbers are given to individuals who have spent time in jail and are released on probation.
 - b. Interstate Compact transfers qualify for DOC numbers.
5. Journey Home's small staff is stretched in meeting demand for services.
 - a. We have three part-time Resource Specialists providing services.
 - b. We have two AmeriCorps members working full-time on Circles of Support and the Service Fairs.
 - c. Madison- area Urban Ministry's Executive Director and Program Director both spend time working with JH clients.

With limited resources, we are most effective focusing on clients who have been recently released. We need to evaluate the relative effectiveness of these strategies for people who have been out of prison for a longer period of time. However, giving more ex-offenders a fresh start should reduce the incidence of crime and leave more resources for serving other safety needs.

New Tool

As part of a new evidence-based community policing strategy, the Madison Police Department is introducing a "Focused Deterrence" initiative. We have begun working with the Madison Police Department's Special Investigations Unit (SIU) to provide services to our community's most violent offenders, many of whom have returned from prison but have not chosen to work with Journey Home. Our plan is to use a "call-in" meeting with 8 to 10 violent offenders. The "call-in" is designed to place these offenders on notice that no further violence will be tolerated and they will be very closely monitored by SIU. They will be able to link to needed community resources at the "call-in" and begin working with these services to ensure no violations occur. Any further violations will result in an immediate return to prison.

Your Help Is Needed

To learn how you can help with The Journey Home program, call the United Way Volunteer Center at 2-1-1 or visit our website at www.unitedwaydanecounty.org or www.VolunteerYourTime.org Key word: Safety.