

## Nashville selected for jail to community study

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By:

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NASHVILLE — For the next two years, national consultants will be looking closely at how Davidson County jail inmates fare when they leave confinement and how Nashville's sheriff's office prepares inmates to be released.

Eventually, officials hope the pilot project can help them do a better job of providing inmates with services like drug treatment, anger management and job placement that can help keep them from reoffending and eventually make their communities safer.

The U.S. Department of Justice's National Institute of Corrections and The Urban Institute Justice Policy Center are sponsoring the pilot project. They began their work in Nashville on Tuesday.

Local agencies in California, Michigan and Wisconsin were also selected to participate. Agencies in Colorado and Kansas were selected for the pilot program last year.

Davidson County Sheriff Daron Hall said his jail has about 3,200 people behind bars on any given day and releases about 100 a day. The sheer volume of people entering and exiting the system can make intervention difficult, but it also provides a lot of opportunities.

Humphries said one goal is to get social service agencies and community nonprofits to do "in-reach" into the jails, something Davidson County has already begun to do. Those agencies can then continue to work with the offenders after they are released.

Humphries praised Davidson County for the work it has already done, calling it "far advanced over most jurisdictions."

Jail programs director Paul Mulloy said the sheriff's office looked at recidivism rates in 2007 and found that 64 percent of those who did not receive help had returned to jail within a year while only 36 percent of those who received help reoffended in that period.

Since then, he said, the jail has improved its interventions and is redoing its statistical research to see if recidivism rates have also improved.

But intensive intervention requires help from volunteers and nonprofits as well as funding for government programs, all of which is in short supply in a bad economy.

People like restaurant owner Michael King are vital, Hall said. King, who owns the local restaurant chain Monell's, talks to the inmates while they are in jail and helps them with job placement once they are out.

"We need more people like him. People who can help get offenders to AA meetings or take them to job interviews or even hire them," he said.

According to information on the Transition from Jail to Community Initiative from the Urban Institute, "In an average three-week period, local jails have contact with as many people as state and federal prisons do in an entire year."

The think tank cites Bureau of Justice Statistics numbers that indicate 68 percent of jail inmates have drug or alcohol problems, 60 percent do not have a high school diploma or GED, 16 percent have a serious mental illness and 14 percent were homeless at some point in the year before their incarceration.

Because people are often in jail only for days or, at most, months, intervention has to begin right away, Hall said. Inmates'

needs are assessed as soon as they enter the system, and, ideally, help continues even after they leave the jail.

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