



The Transition from Jail to Community (TJC) Initiative

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Introduction

Roughly nine million individuals cycle through the nation's jails each year, yet relatively little attention has been given to the unique challenges and opportunities surrounding reentry from local jails. In response, the National Institute of Corrections (NIC) partnered with the Urban Institute (UI) to launch the *Transition from Jail to Community* initiative (TJC) in 2007. The TJC initiative is designed to advance coordinated and collaborative relationships between jails and local communities to address reentry, leading to enhanced public safety, reduced recidivism, and improved individual reintegration outcomes. The TJC initiative works to achieve these objectives through the development, implementation, and evaluation of an innovative and effective jail-to-community transition model.

The first phase of the TJC initiative was devoted to the development, implementation, and evaluation of a model for transition from jail to the community. The TJC model represents an integrated, systems approach to delivering support and services to people released from jail. It involves policy and organizational change and the engagement of jail and community leaders in a collaborative effort. The goal of the TJC model is to improve public safety and reintegration outcomes. As part of Phase 1, six TJC learning sites were selected and received technical assistance in implementing the model. In 2012, six Phase 2 TJC learning sites were chosen to receive technical assistance over a 2 ½ year period, as well as two additional California jurisdictions that will receive TJC technical assistance to help them address the challenges associated with implementation of a package of policy changes known as Public Safety Realignment.

Jail Transition: Challenges and Opportunities

City and county jails touch millions of lives each year. Most of the estimated nine million individuals who cycle through local jails return to the surrounding community within just a few weeks. The needs of these individuals are formidable: the prevalence of substance abuse, mental illness, unemployment, and homelessness is high among the jail population. At the same time, the capacity for treatment and services in most jails is limited at best. These facts underscore the need for an innovative, collaborative, data-driven approach to jail transition. The TJC initiative is a call-to-change rooted in the reality that jails and communities must jointly own and address the issue of local reentry.

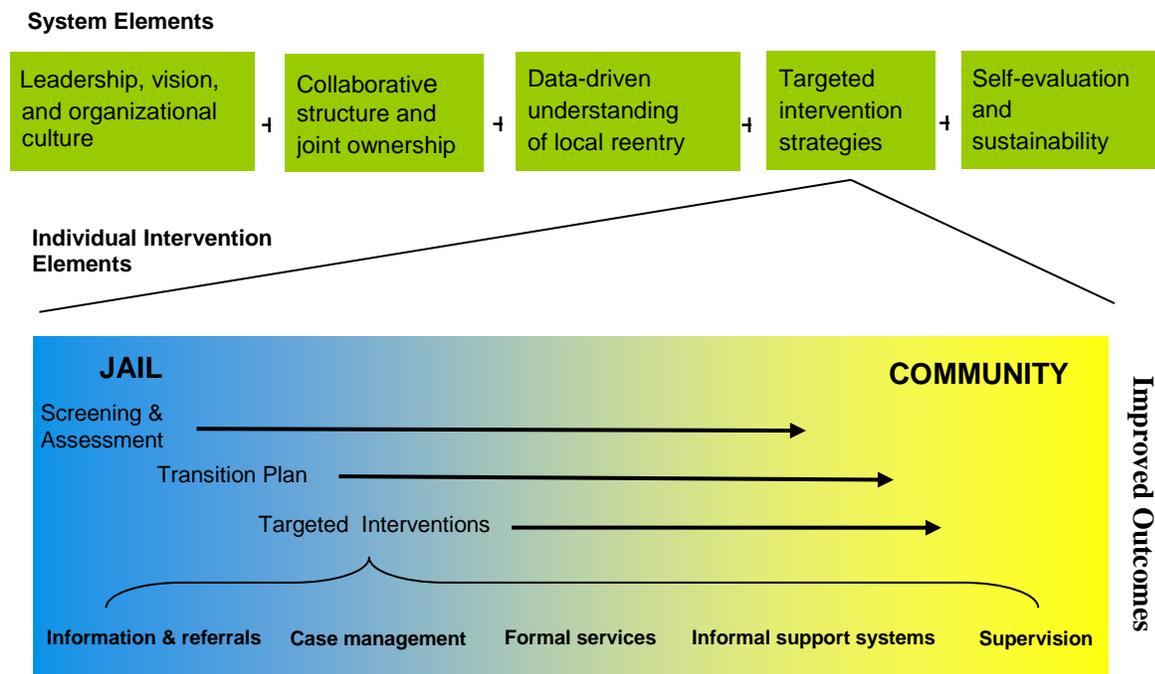
TJC is not a discrete program, but rather is a new way of doing business. To that end, the TJC model provides a road map for collaboration and systems change and charts a clear course for jail and community partners by identifying the essential elements of an effective jail transition strategy.

Given the diversity of jail systems and community settings, jurisdictions tailor implementation of the model’s essential elements to reflect and respond to local needs and capacities.

The TJC Model

The TJC model incorporates lessons learned from prior criminal justice system reform efforts, particularly NIC’s Transition from Prison to Community (TPC) initiative, as well as findings from the considerable body of prisoner reentry research and the growing literature on evidence-based practices. The model’s development was informed by the knowledge and expertise of a diverse group of advisors convened by the TJC project team, including jail administrators, sheriffs, local law enforcement, social service providers, community and victims advocates, formerly incarcerated individuals, corrections policy experts, and researchers.

The figure below illustrates the TJC approach to effective jail transition and identifies the key components of the TJC model at both the **system level** and the **intervention level**. Systems change must be coupled with concrete intervention efforts. The TJC model represents an integrated, system-wide approach to delivering support and services to people released from jail. It involves policy and organizational change and the engagement of jail and community leaders in a collaborative effort.



Leadership, Vision and Organizational Culture

The development of an effective jail transition strategy requires the active involvement of executive-level decision-makers to set expectations, identify important issues, articulate a clear vision of success, and engage stakeholders in the effort. Leadership in the TJC context must guide efforts to build a common vision for systems reform; develop infrastructure for inter-agency and community collaboration, coordination, and information-sharing; align missions and organizational cultures of partner agencies to support transition goals; and clarify and define roles and responsibilities under the local initiative. In addition, champions, or “change agents,” from all levels at key agencies are critical to moving the initiative forward.

Collaboration and Joint Ownership

Transition from jail to the community is neither the sole responsibility of the jail system nor of the community. Effective transition strategies will rely on collaboration and information-sharing among jail and community-based partners and joint ownership of the problem and efforts to address it. Given that many of the people who exit jails are already involved with multiple social service and criminal justice agencies, a collaborative approach is essential to tackling jail transition.

Successful implementation of the TJC model will require formal buy-in from multiple individuals and agencies in a community, from criminal justice and local government stakeholders to community members and organizations. Key stakeholders include:

- jail administrators and/or sheriffs,
- police departments,
- community supervision and pretrial services agencies,
- the courts, prosecutors and public defenders,
- county executives and local legislators,
- treatment and service providers,
- health and mental health agencies,
- housing, economic development, and workforce development agencies,
- local businesses and corporate entities,
- victim advocates,
- members of the affected population and their families, and
- community residents.

Building and maintaining the collaborative partnerships necessary to plan and carry out a TJC initiative requires many different individuals and organizations to play meaningful roles. A clear structure is needed in order for all TJC partners to understand their specific roles and responsibilities in the effort. TJC learning sites have devised collaborative structures that include both executive-level entities to provide strategic direction and oversight, and an implementation body to craft and execute specific elements of the local TJC initiative. This may involve forming a local reentry council or building on existing criminal justice councils.

Data-driven Understanding of Local Reentry

The development of a jail transition strategy must be informed by local data. An understanding of local barriers and assets is especially relevant in the area of jail transition, given that most people exiting jail return to a relatively small number of nearby communities where resources are often scarce and must be efficiently targeted. Accordingly, jurisdictions implementing the TJC model

must: (1) assess the characteristics of the jail population and existing policies and processes related to various aspects of jail transition; (2) identify the specific geographic areas to which the jail population returns upon release; (3) identify those subsets of the jail population likely to consume disproportionate criminal justice and programmatic resources; (4) identify resources that can be leveraged to address key issues, and the appropriate action steps to remove potential obstacles; and (5) track service referrals, engagement, and use, and share that information with partner agencies on a regular basis.

Targeted Intervention Strategies

Targeted intervention strategies form the core of the TJC model at the individual level, and comprise the basic building blocks for effective jail transition. The strategy to improve transition at the individual level involves introducing specific interventions at critical points along the jail-to-community continuum. The underlying premise is that interventions at these key points can improve reintegration and reduce reoffending, thereby increasing public safety. Critical to this approach are the principles that: (1) interventions begin in jail with the booking process and continue, as needed, throughout incarceration and in the community upon release; and (2) interventions are tailored to the specific needs, risks, and strengths of each individual.

Given the diversity of the jail population, unpredictable lengths of stay, limited resources, and principles of evidence-based practice, it is not feasible or desirable to provide the same level of intervention to everyone who enters the jail. Instead, jurisdictions will need to prioritize their resources and determine "who gets what." Triage planning helps classify individuals and identify the appropriate mix of targeted interventions for each individual based on information about risks, needs, and strengths, as well as anticipated length of stay. The main intervention elements to incorporate into the triage planning process are screening and assessment, transition planning, and targeted interventions.

Screening and Assessment

Routine screening and assessment of individuals' risks, needs, and capacities is an essential component of an effective jail transition intervention strategy. TJC implementation requires the institution of a universal brief screen for risk to reoffend in the community during the booking process. Screening information will inform decisions about classification and placement in the jail, and indicate whether a more comprehensive assessment of risk and need factors is warranted. Comprehensive risk and needs assessment identifies targets for change, and is fundamental to developing an individual's initial jail-to-community transition plan and subsequent revisions to that plan.

Transition Plan

A transition plan is essential in preparing individuals for release and enhancing long term reintegration, particularly for those who are assessed as moderate- or high-risk/need. The plan specifies the types of interventions an individual needs, when and where interventions should occur and who will deliver them, and the activities for which the individual needs to take responsibility. Transition plans should be informed by an individual's initial screening and assessment and regularly reviewed and updated as necessary in jail and after release. Transition plans will typically specify pre-release interventions to be delivered either by jail staff or community-based providers conducting jail "in-reach." Plans will also include discharge interventions to address the moment of release—those critical first hours and days after release from jail—and to facilitate the provision of needed services in the community. The plans may target issues such as housing, employment, family

reunification, educational needs, substance abuse treatment, and health and mental health services. In many cases, a discharge plan may be the primary intervention for individuals released within hours or a few days of entering jail.

Targeted Interventions

A growing body of research about what works in reentry suggests that interventions properly targeted by risk and need level and based on empirical evidence of effectiveness can substantially reduce the risk of recidivism. The TJC initiative encourages jurisdictions to incorporate these and other evidence-based practices into the design of their intervention strategies.

The scope of a jurisdiction's targeted interventions may range from formal treatment to, more commonly, access to community-based providers who conduct "in-reach" into the jail. Some interventions will occur in jail, while others will take place in the community after release. Many interventions will begin in jail and continue with a community-based provider after the individual's release from jail, facilitating greater continuity in service delivery and leading to improved outcomes.

Pre-release interventions, delivered either by jail staff or community-based providers, can range from provision of informational resources - such as resource packets for low-risk inmates - to intensive, cognitive-behavior programming for higher-risk individuals. Work done while in jail to begin treatment, develop relationships with service providers, and connect individuals to service appointments in the community will have little impact after release without follow-up in the community. Accordingly, it is important that community-based organizations and support networks provide continuity of care—or in many cases, initiate care—through services, training, treatment, and case management when an individual is released. Case management based on shared transition plans plays a key role in coordinating jail-based and community-based interventions for the greatest possible effectiveness.

Self-Evaluation and Sustainability

The final element necessary to ensure success in developing a jail transition system is ongoing self-evaluation and sustainability planning. Self-evaluation refers to the ability and commitment of local stakeholders to monitor progress and make needed modifications throughout the process to ensure that both intermediate and long-term goals are met. Routine assessment of the initiative's efforts should include data on key outcomes that are of interest to partners and potential funders to show progress in achieving desired improvements. Jurisdictions are encouraged to establish mechanisms—such as forums, routine reports from partner agencies, or client satisfaction surveys—to obtain early and frequent feedback from partners and constituents regarding key aspects of the initiative.

The ultimate goal of the TJC initiative is to build jail to community transition efforts that last. Sustainability depends on both formal and informal mechanisms employed by the local initiative to ensure the longevity and legacy of their efforts. Formal information-sharing and resource-sharing agreements that delineate how agencies and organizations work together over time are examples of mechanisms that promote sustainability. The continued involvement of local reentry or criminal justice councils in jail transition can also facilitate the sustainability of efforts over time.

Tools for the Field

A comprehensive guide to implementing the TJC model, including examples from the learning sites, is available through the web-based *TJC Online Learning Toolkit*. Evaluation reports and associated policy and practice briefs provide detailed lessons learned from TJC implementation in all the learning sites. These resources can be accessed via the TJC project website: www.jailtransition.com.

For more information and updates on TJC, visit www.jailtransition.com or contact:

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