The Sustainability of Juvenile Programs beyond Second Chance Act Funding

The Case of Two Grantees

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Approximately 80,000 young people are released from juvenile justice facilities in the United States every year (Sickmund 2010). More than half of released juveniles are rearrested within three years (Barton, Jarjoura, and Rosay 2012), and youth involved in the justice system can confront considerable challenges when they are released into their communities (Cusick, Goerge, and Bell 2009; NRRC 2011). The question of how best to reintegrate these young people and equip them to assume a law-abiding and prosocial life course is receiving increasing attention from policymakers. Some recent efforts to develop and implement comprehensive and collaborative strategies focused on reentry and recidivism reduction have been fueled by Second Chance Act demonstration projects, 14 of which were funded for juvenile offenders in fiscal year (FY) 2010.

The FY 2010 juvenile demonstration sites placed reducing recidivism, protecting the public, and promoting sufficient transition services as their overall goals. Critical is that reentry into the community, as noted in the solicitation, begins when an offender is first incarcerated and should include appropriate evidence-based services based on a plan that incorporates risk and needs assessments. Among the mandatory requirements are establishment of a reentry task force and collaboration with youth-serving non-correctional agencies.

In FY 2012, the Urban Institute was funded to evaluate Second Chance Act federal grantees of juvenile reentry programs. The project involves process and outcome evaluation of juvenile demonstration program grantees, including initial assessments of sites’ feasibility for inclusion in the full outcome evaluation. As part of this process, we visited five different sites for potential inclusion. This brief discusses the efforts and activities of two grantees: Houston, TX, and Sacramento, CA. (These
were not the sites chosen for the full process and outcome evaluation; those were Tulsa, OK, and the Tidewater region in Virginia.) Two primary issues are discussed: how the state or local policy contexts in which the programs worked affected implementation of the programs, and whether the programs were able to sustain the efforts started with Second Chance Act federal funding beyond the life of the grants.

This brief reports on data gathered between 2013 and 2015. Findings are based on semistructured interviews with grantees and community and state stakeholders conducted during process evaluation site visits, phone conversations, and document review. In this brief, we first describe each of the two sites: the contexts in which they operated, their activities, lessons learned, and aspects of the grant programming that were sustained beyond Second Chance Act funding. Then, we compare the experiences of the two sites.

**Houston, Texas: The GitRedy Program**

In response to the increasing number of youth who were placed in correctional facilities for committing serious, gang-related crimes and the unique challenges associated with gang member reentry, the Texas Juvenile Justice Department (TJJD) implemented the Gang Intervention Treatment: Re-Entry Development for Youth Initiative (GitRedy). In cooperation with the Houston mayor’s Anti-Gang Office, the GitRedy program focused on identifying and supporting gang-involved youth ages 13 to 19 who were returning to Harris County, TX, from TJJD facilities.

Housed in the Houston District Parole Office, GitRedy was developed to offer culturally competent, family-focused services to gang-involved youth and their families pre- and postrelease, including comprehensive case management, aggression replacement therapy, functional family therapy, and mentoring, as well as gang-specific services, including gang prevention treatment and tattoo removal services. All gang-involved youth who were placed in TJJD facilities and released to Harris County beginning in January 2011 were eligible to receive GitRedy services. Between 2011 and 2014, GitRedy served more than 450 youth.

**Context of GitRedy Program Development and Operations**

In 2007, the Texas Youth Commission (TYC) was confronted with a series of sexual abuse scandals in state-run juvenile correctional facilities, the effects of which reverberated throughout the agency. The revelations of misconduct demoralized personnel throughout the TYC, degraded public trust in the TYC, and focused attention on the TYC’s supervision practices. Policymakers questioned the nearly $70,000 spent annually by the state to securely confine each youth, as well as the high number of youth confined in state-run facilities in remote areas that were far from their communities and their families (Fabelo et al. 2015). Ultimately, the scandal led to dissolution of both the TYC and the Texas Juvenile Probation Commission (TJPC) in December 2011, as well as to a number of policy reforms intended to reduce the number of youth in state-run facilities in Texas. Passed in 2011, Senate Bill 653 abolished the two agencies and created the new Texas Juvenile Justice Department, charged with prioritizing community-based alternatives over secure confinement.
The GitRedy program welcomed its first participants in December 2010, in the wake of the TYC scandal and the decision to implement major reforms to the agency. Since 2011, GitRedy has operated under TJJD and has survived a number of leadership changes. Amid great change at all levels of the Texas juvenile justice system, GitRedy has been challenged to provide a consistent and effective intervention for gang-involved youth in Harris County.

**Change in TJJD, Change in Harris County**

In addition to state-level personnel and management system changes, policymakers passed legislative measures aimed at reforming the juvenile justice system in Texas, including lowering the maximum age of juvenile supervision from 21 to 19 years old and offering financial incentives to counties to decrease the rate at which youth were committed to secure facilities in favor of community-based alternatives. From 2007 to 2012, the state of Texas effectively reduced the average daily population of youth in state-run correctional facilities by over 64 percent, and Harris County decreased its commitment of youth to state-run facilities from 658 to 107 (Fabelo et al. 2015). In addition to the incentives embedded in new policy, evidence suggests that local judges became increasingly hesitant to commit youth to state-operated facilities after abuses came to light.

As the number of youth in state-run correctional facilities decreased in Texas, the number of youth on parole also declined. Between 2005 and 2012, the number of youth under community supervision (including deferred prosecution and probation) declined by 17 percent. In response to the declining number of youth committed to TJJD, the number of parole personnel was reduced. In the Houston District Parole Office, staffing reductions resulted in officers covering larger geographic areas and spending more time meeting with supervised youth closer to their homes and in the community, rather than in the parole office. The shift in responsibilities and the location of the officers resulted in changes in the nature of their contact with youth, as well as in the accessibility and relevance of the parole office. Officers assumed responsibility for youth cases farther away from a centralized office, which made communication among agency staff members more challenging.

The reduction in the number of youth committed to TJJD, and from Harris County in particular, had a significant effect on GitRedy program operations. The declining number of youth committed to TJJD facilities corresponded with fewer youth being enrolled in the program.

Likewise, the shift in the number, roles, and responsibilities of TJJD personnel further affected program support. When GitRedy began operating in 2010, it had the benefit of strong advocates in leadership roles in TJJD’s central office in Austin. As a result, TJJD strongly supported the mission of the program, monitoring program operations through regular site visits to Harris County and advocating for the program during crucial resource allocation and policy decisions. However, this type of support proved difficult to maintain through leadership changes in the central office. Over the years, knowledge of and advocacy for GitRedy appears to have diminished, especially as program operations changed as a result of reduced enrollment and reduced resources.
GitRedy Operations

GitRedy was developed to offer comprehensive case management and service delivery to gang-involved youth, beginning four months before release. In an effort to address the specific challenges of reentry into the community for gang-involved youth, GitRedy emphasized early identification of gang-involved youth by staff members involved in juvenile justice, including the police, courts, correctional facilities, and parole offices. Additionally, community outreach by the GitRedy staff, in collaboration with the Houston Mayor’s Anti-Gang Office, occurred formally through monthly meetings across three Houston neighborhoods and informally through ongoing conversations with youth and families. Once youth were identified as involved in a gang, they could be referred to GitRedy for services.

Individualized case planning was guided by formal risk and needs assessments, using the C-PACT (Community Positive Achievement Change Tool) and R-PACT (Residential Positive Achievement Change Tool). Case planning was also affected by a classification process by which youth were identified as Priority 1 or Priority 2. Priority-level classifications were derived from the type of sentence the youth received and institutional behavior. Youth who were required to serve an extended sentence because of involvement in illegal or aggressive behaviors while in placement, or those who had additional treatment needs, were classified as Priority 1; all other youth, or those who earned release on time, were classified as Priority 2.

Regardless of classification, all youth received a basic level of services. These services included prerelease aggression replacement therapy, gang prevention treatment, voluntary tattoo removal, case management, education, and reentry planning. Postrelease services provided by parole staff and contracted providers included functional family therapy, independent living counseling, educational and vocational assistance, mental health and substance abuse counseling, voluntary tattoo removal, and case management. In addition, Priority 1–level youth received intensive therapeutic case management postrelease.

Reentry planning was designed to begin approximately 120 days before a youth’s release. At this time, GitRedy staff members ideally would begin to visit a given youth on at least a monthly basis and initiate a reentry staffing plan in which a multidisciplinary team, including institutional and community workers and the youth and his or her family, would come together to develop an individualized community reentry plan. Once the youth transitioned back into the community, GitRedy staff members would continue to meet with the youth and his or her family to ensure that services were being implemented and that the youth’s needs were being met. Case plans were reviewed and updated as necessary approximately every 30 days.

In part because of TJJD’s organizational changes and restructuring, the GitRedy staff struggled to implement the program as intended. Significant downsizing of the Houston District Parole Office increased caseload responsibilities, and the GitRedy staff struggled to maintain prerelease engagement, which diminished the frequency of visits with GitRedy youth and involvement in institutional case planning meetings. The staffing needed for reentry planning 120 days before scheduled release was particularly difficult to coordinate because of a lack of communication and information sharing between
institutional and parole office staff members. As a result, reentry planning rarely began at 120 days prerlease; in some cases, it did not begin until after a youth had returned home.

Service delivery also was affected. Aggression replacement therapy, which was intended to be offered both pre- and postrelease, was discontinued in the community as a result of a lack of participation by youth and families, in large part because of difficulties associated with finding transportation to the Houston District Parole Office, where the service was offered. Aggression replacement therapy continues to be offered to youth during prerlease. Most notably, the services unique to a gang-involved youth reentry population were significantly affected and, in some cases, discontinued. Because of financial cutbacks, gang prevention treatment was not offered at all juvenile facilities; in facilities where it was offered, it was not fully implemented. Subsequently, gang prevention treatment was replaced with the New Freedom program, which serves a broader population. The most critical loss was the discontinuation of pre- and postrelease tattoo removal services for GitRedy youth in 2011 through 2014 as a result of licensing issues with the Food and Drug Administration. Intensive therapeutic case management also was discontinued, as was functional family therapy, which is no longer funded at the Houston District Parole Office.

Lessons Learned in Houston

Since the end of the Second Chance Act grant in September 2014, GitRedy has not continued funding the staff positions of project reentry specialist and gang intervention specialist, and as such the program has been formally terminated. Nonetheless, aspects of the program remain, and some services initiated under the grant continue. Importantly, and as a result of widespread support among the staff for voluntary tattoo removal services, TJJD acquired a tattoo removal machine in 2014, which is centrally located at the Giddings State School facility but is available to all TJJD youth both pre- and postrelease. Also, educational and vocational training efforts offered in halfway houses where some GitRedy participants were housed are being sustained for youth through a local provider of higher education, a partnership begun through the grant. Finally, GitRedy efforts to work with families in group sessions held at the Houston District Parole Office are being incorporated into home evaluations.

One of the successes of GitRedy has been that it has raised awareness of gang-related issues in Harris County and throughout the state. Although some components of GitRedy predated the grant, GitRedy marks the first time that the state agency and parole offices adapted gang awareness and reentry strategies in a coordinated fashion to a focused population and with specialized funding. As a result, GitRedy expanded the definition and identification of gang-involved youth within TJJD, and interagency coordination on gang-related issues increased.

The GitRedy experience also increased the parole staff’s overall knowledge of issues related to funding, implementation, and management and the staff’s recognition of the value of evidence-based programming. For example, the knowledge gained has increased staff support of and training for the implementation and use of formal risk and needs assessment. Support was also expressed for training provided through grantee meetings and the National Reentry Resource Center.
Sacramento, California: The Juvenile Reentry Program

Sacramento’s Juvenile Reentry Program (JRP) received Second Chance Act funding from January 2010 to January 2014. The program used a collaborative services provision strategy to serve moderate- and high-risk youth ages 16 and 17 returning from the local detention facility to their Sacramento County homes. Many JRP youth had a felony offense, drug issues, and gang affiliations. As of June 2013, 248 youth had been served, and 55 to 60 were active in the program. All youth who had wanted to participate in the program had been admitted.

Context of JRP Implementation

JRP was developed from a pilot program created in 2009 to support youth being released on furlough from the Sacramento County Boys Ranch. The pilot study comprised 10 youth classified as high-risk, high-need repeat offenders, and it provided participants with connections to targeted community-based services, such as vocational training, employment training, prosocial activities, and counseling, before being released into the community. Youth were each assigned a deputy probation officer who helped coordinate and manage reentry plans. Introductions to community organizations were made while youth were at the boys ranch facility, which helped ensure an early connection to assistance once released.

The pilot program was intended to be expanded with Second Chance Act grant funding; however, during FY 2009 and FY 2010, the Sacramento County Probation Department experienced a 29 percent budget reduction, resulting in a decrease in the number of staff positions and the closing of facilities, including the ranch.¹ The only remaining locked juvenile facility was the Sacramento County Youth Detention Facility. Once the grant was awarded, modifications were made to the target population, and JRP was redesigned to work with youth returning from that facility.

The change in focus from youth in a commitment facility to youth in detention created unique program operation challenges. Lengths of stay were generally shorter and, because of a local furlough policy, youth were eligible for release after serving 50 percent of their time. Many youth returned to the community before extensive JRP prerelease programming or services could take place. In fact, the furlough policy meant that many youth were released just as program staff members were identifying them for JRP or, if identified before release, just as their service needs were being identified. Consequently, the majority of JRP programming and services took place after release into the community.

JRP—Then and Now

By design, JRP involved coordinated pre- and postrelease service components. Four probation staff members were dedicated as JRP officers and carried JRP-only caseloads. Youth were assessed as eligible for the program—moderate- and high-risk youth were targeted—on their arrival at the facility and during the intake process using PACT (Positive Achievement Change Tool).² JRP youth were housed in a single transition unit at the detention facility when possible. Before release, a designated
JRP probation officer was to meet with each youth and his or her family to start developing pre- and postrelease service plans. During this time, a staff member from the Sacramento County Office of Education was supposed to meet with each youth to inform each juvenile of his or her educational placement.

As implemented, however, prerelease services for youth were limited because of an inability to consistently predict release dates given the county's furlough policy. Thus, most JRP services were conducted postrelease. The services focused on counseling and family therapy, education, and participation in prosocial activities. Youth (and their families) were referred to one of two evidence-based counseling programs: functional family therapy or multi-systemic therapy. Counseling agencies provided basic wraparound service and housing support if needed. JRP youth also received educational assistance and academic transitional support across the county through the Sacramento County Office of Education. JRP youth were eligible for post-secondary education support and resources through Linkage to Education, a program providing resources to youth formerly involved in the juvenile justice system who were seeking a college education. JRP youth were also eligible for vocational training through the Northern California Construction Training program, which provides GED classes, construction work training, and work experience to individuals at no cost. The Boys & Girls Clubs of America also provided prosocial activities and case management services.

When the Second Chance Act grant ended, the Sacramento County Probation Department retained a substantial part of the JRP, with minor modifications. JRP participants inside the detention facility continue to be housed in the same unit, and the program was able to retain three of the four dedicated probation staff positions. However, JRP eligibility criteria changed. Age requirements were expanded from youth up to 17.5 years old to age 18, which has increased the number of youth receiving services. Youth on electronic monitoring also were added to the target population.

Although the core services of JRP have remained in place, program components that were largely underused during the time of the grant were discontinued after its end. These components included wraparound and housing services provided through counseling agencies. But counseling services have continued to be a pressing priority. Referrals to the family functioning therapy and multi-systemic therapy programs continue; however, changes in financial resources have reduced the number of slots available. These services continue because of funding secured through a California Title IV-E waiver for a child welfare capped allocation demonstration project. This is a federal program with a flexible understanding of child welfare services and grant funding opportunities to prevent out-of-home placements. Once Title IV-E was implemented in Sacramento County, the probation department was able to secure resources to continue supporting JRP components.

Other program priorities, such as education, took a different form once the Second Chance Act grant ended. The partnership with the Sacramento County Office of Education continued, but it became narrowly focused on youth returning to specific schools, not to the larger group of JRP participants. Referrals to Linkage to Education stopped entirely. There has also been an increased volume of referrals made to the Northern California Construction Training program. Collaboration with the Boys & Girls Clubs to develop prosocial activities has expanded since the grant's end and has grown to

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include a summer camp housed at a community school. The school delivers an educational curriculum and social activities to youth during the summer. The relationships that formed as a result of this association have led to stronger cooperation between the probation department and school officials.

Lessons Learned in Sacramento, California

The Second Chance Act grant allowed the Sacramento County Probation Department to strengthen its community partnerships, experiment with a different model of reentry into the community, and give birth to departmental cultural change, creating more buy-in from probation officers, who were previously skeptical of an integrated reentry model. Although the grant ended in January 2014, Sacramento County has been able to sustain efforts initiated through JRP.

Although previous relationships with community partners existed before JRP, including many that participated in the project, the grant highlighted the importance of relying on these connections for the department’s work. During JRP implementation, the department gave increasing emphasis to establishing relationships with community partners, which continued to develop beyond the funding period. For example, the work with the Boys & Girls Clubs continues, along with the adoption of new programs, such as summer camp.

Close collaboration with community partners reflects the importance of adapting and expanding programs to meet both youths’ needs and expected outcomes. For instance, the grant demonstrated the effect that additional funding has on developing early relationships with youth and stronger relationships with their families. Before the grant, immediate links with families were not made. JRP allowed for earlier connections between the probation officer and a youth, resulting in stronger trust between the youth, his or her family, and the probation department.

Finally, the financial cushion provided by the grant’s resources propelled the Sacramento County Probation Department to implement an integrated reentry model. Staff members throughout the department, including those not directly involved in JRP, witnessed the success of linking youth to services before their release, when possible, and developing relationships with community partners. As a result, more line staff members became advocates for this new reentry model, regardless of whether they were directly involved in the original grant. Various stakeholders in Sacramento believe the entire probation department has moved closer to an integrated reentry philosophy.

Discussion

The Houston and Sacramento experiences, as described in this brief, offer distinct contrasts. Not unlike what has occurred in many other state and local jurisdictions, the circumstances affecting the implementation of the Houston and Sacramento reentry programs changed dramatically and unexpectedly.
Contextual Changes Affecting Implementation

In the Houston and Sacramento juvenile reentry demonstration programs, fundamental system-wide changes were made, and the implications for the two programs were equally substantial. With the Sacramento program, between the time the funding proposal was submitted to the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention of the US Department of Justice, and the program’s start-up, the juvenile corrections landscape in California experienced considerable restructuring. In Texas, the currents of change in juvenile corrections unfolded while the program was being implemented. In no small measure, these changes and other systemic developments encountered during program implementation contributed to the differential ability of these two jurisdictions to sustain their juvenile reentry reform efforts.

Sacramento’s original funding proposal focused on reentry into the community of juveniles from the Sacramento County Boys Ranch. This concept was built on the expansion of an already-launched pilot program at the ranch. As noted, incorporating the pilot program into Sacramento’s JRP was envisioned in the grant proposal. However, because of a budget reduction in FY 2009–10, a number of correctional facilities were closed, including the Sacramento County Boys Ranch. Consequently, JRP was redesigned to work with youth returning from the locked Sacramento County Juvenile Detention Facility. Shorter lengths of stay at the detention facility than would have been the case at the ranch meant, among other things, that programming, services, and prerelease planning would have a compressed time frame within which to occur. The result was that the majority of programming and services occurred after release into the community rather than before. Although a shorter length of stay and the closing of a facility that is farther from a juvenile’s home community can potentially benefit a juvenile in various ways, the constraint on providing sufficient preparation for release was not anticipated and it posed quite a challenge.

The Houston program confronted a dramatic upheaval when two Texas juvenile corrections agencies were abolished and a new one was established just as the city’s reentry demonstration effort had begun. Although the reforms were intended to both reduce reliance on state-run facilities and promote alternative community-based programs, concomitant reductions in the number of juveniles on parole meant that the GitRedy initiative would not be immune from unanticipated statewide changes. Like Sacramento, where the prerelease reentry effort as envisioned was unable to get started and had to be adjusted, the statewide changes in Texas also clearly affected the ability of GitRedy to maintain prerelease engagement, although in Houston changes in prerelease engagement occurred after program start-up, not before. In both jurisdictions, broader statewide changes that could not have been anticipated impeded the ability to fully implement what had been proposed in the Second Chance Act grant application. At the same time, the experience of local programs having to accommodate broader statewide changes is hardly uncommon, and their ability to weather the changes—and to what extent and how—is instructive.

Shifts in philosophy and organizational culture are not easily accomplished and can take a long time. Such an effort is particularly challenging in juvenile reentry, which involves multiple levels and branches of government, facility and community corrections, public and private organizations, and a variety of
disciplines. The different players who have authority to make various decisions along the reentry continuum can have conflicting goals and attitudes. The orientation, priorities, and perspectives of the decisionmakers and other stakeholders and parties are frequently not in alignment and can even be incompatible. The Sacramento and Houston reentry programs illustrate what can happen when realities such as these are confronted. Although Sacramento’s reentry programming and services took place mostly after release and not before, both were reportedly able to operate in the postrelease stage and to some degree in earlier stages in a highly collaborative fashion. The probation department’s engagement with the families of youth who were incarcerated, and with community organizations such as the Boys & Girls Clubs, was no small feat.

**Sustainability beyond Demonstration Project Funding**

Houston’s reentry program lost its momentum through a series of major changes that included a statewide agency reorganization and turnover in executive leadership. The erosion of advocacy for GitRedy services from agency leadership did not bode well for continuation of the reentry program once demonstration project funding ended. In contrast to the Sacramento experience, the Houston District Parole Office had to eliminate the two dedicated staff positions central to GitRedy. Even before the expiration of demonstration funding in Houston, two reentry services (functional family therapy and tattoo removal) were suspended. Some of the other services that were originally provided postrelease (such as aggression replacement therapy) had to be conducted prerelease because of challenges with getting youth, as well as families, to the parole office. Reductions in parole staff generally also diminished the ability of the Houston District Parole Office to oversee the provision of particular services, which were also available to GitRedy youth.

Some noteworthy aspects of the demonstration project in Houston have survived. The partnership between the Houston District Parole Office and the Houston Mayor’s Anti-Gang Office has persisted, as well as educational and vocational programming. It is important not to lose sight of the integrated reentry model, with reentry beginning on admission to a facility and continuing throughout placement and after release back into the community. Nonetheless, it is also important to realize that progress with respect to active engagement with families during probation or parole, with community-based youth-serving agencies, and with others while youth are in placement is a big step forward. So too is getting probation and parole offices and families more connected to what is happening at placement facilities. Moreover, keeping the focus for placed youth throughout the placement period on achieving positive outcomes when back in the community represents another step forward.

Rather than focusing on reentry throughout all reentry stages, funders and program planners must recognize that any steps forward represent a move in the right direction. Given unanticipated contextual changes such as those described in the Texas and California cases, funders and program planners need to be realistic in their expectations on how much reform can be achieved in relatively short time frames and need to make adjustments that accommodate contextual changes over which little control can be exercised. To these ends, sustainability can be regarded as an incremental process in which the stage is set as much as possible for fundamental system changes that may not be fully
realized during the life of a demonstration project. More time may be required, and backsliding,
setbacks, and unevenness are likely. Although sustainability cannot be conclusively judged at the end of
a demonstration project, it can be analyzed in terms of which aspects of a reform effort have taken hold
during the life of the demonstration effort. High expectations are noble and necessary, but partial
achievements cannot be regarded as an indication of failure.

Ironically, two contextual factors that made it difficult to implement the Houston and Sacramento
programs as designed were themselves positive developments for youth involved in juvenile justice—
namely, declines in the confinement and placement of youth and shortened lengths of stay. Yet these
positive developments have a bearing on reentry and the potential for reentry programs to be
successful. These broad changes create numerous ripple effects and require flexibility in adaptation,
even as the need for effective juvenile reentry remains urgent. Demonstration programs can be used to
lead the way on how best to design and implement reentry into the community in different jurisdictions
and under various circumstances.

Notes
1. This information comes from the Sacramento County JSCA grant application.
2. Sex offenders, arsonists, and youth with mental health challenges were excluded from the program.
3. “Title IV-E California Well-Being Project,” California Department of Social Services, accessed February 2,
4. This program was in transition as of July 2013. Challenges finding stable funding led to the end of the
collaboration.

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