

RESEARCH REPORT

# Investing Justice Resources to Address Community Needs

**Lessons Learned from Colorado's Work and Gain Education  
and Employment Skills (WAGEES) Program**

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*February 2018*

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# Acknowledgments

This report was funded by the Public Welfare Foundation. We are grateful to them and to all our funders, who make it possible for Urban to advance its mission.

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Over the past several months, a wide array of people and organizations committed time and resources to discuss the lessons learned and challenges faced in the Work and Gain Education and Employment Skills (WAGEES) program. Urban thanks the WAGEES program grantees, the Colorado Criminal Justice Reform Coalition, the Latino Coalition for Community Leadership, the Colorado Department of Corrections, state officials, and other stakeholders for your insights, thoughtful feedback, and ongoing dedication to this field as well as our colleagues Nancy La Vigne, Jesse Jannetta, and Julia Durnan for your support and feedback during this process.

# Investing Justice Resources to Address Community Needs

The US criminal justice landscape has changed dramatically over the past decade, with more than half of the states taking steps to adopt evidence-based and cost-effective approaches to sentencing and corrections policies and practices (Harvell et al. 2016). These criminal justice reforms carry the promise of reducing the number of people under correctional supervision and helping to control skyrocketing costs, all while protecting public safety. Frequently, these reforms are accompanied by an up-front investment or a reinvestment of savings into “smart on crime” policies (Harvell et al. 2016). This investment process is a prime opportunity to identify public safety priorities and match resources to need.

Far too often, public safety investments focus narrowly on policing and incarceration strategies, which are not necessarily aligned with community needs and may, in fact, contribute to existing disadvantage and instability. In some communities, states are spending millions of dollars annually to arrest and incarcerate people.<sup>1</sup> However, the communities with the highest incarceration rates are often those most in need of resources for health care, housing, economic development, and social services (Petteruti et al. 2015). Not only does this narrow traditional spending approach fail to adequately address basic public needs related to health and safety, but evidence suggests that it can make these problems worse. Overusing incarceration, particularly when it is concentrated in certain communities, disrupts and destabilizes these communities by cycling people in and out of the criminal justice system and can result in an *increase* in crime rates (Rose and Clear 1998).

In contrast, neighborhoods are safer and experience less crime when residents are engaged in their communities and able to work together toward shared goals (Kubrin and Wo 2015; Sampson, Raudenbush, and Earls 1997). Research shows that local, community-based organizations play a key role in providing services and facilitating engagement that strengthens neighborhoods (Lin 1999; Putnam 1993; Sampson and Groves 1989). In practice, though, these local organizations are often underresourced and excluded from public safety funding.

Although still in their nascent stages, there are emerging efforts to support community-based reinvestment that channel public resources or savings from policy reforms to community organizations. Collaborating with community members and organizations to develop public safety strategies ensures that those directly impacted have a voice in the process and can advocate for priority concerns. Initiatives to collaboratively advance public safety goals are diverse and include crime prevention

programs, services for people who have experienced victimization, services that connect people with social safety net programs, diversion and treatment services, reentry support, and neighborhood economic development. Early results from innovative models are promising (see Jannetta et al. 2014; Rice and Lee 2015).

One particularly innovative example is the Work and Gain Education and Employment Skills (WAGEES) program in Colorado. The program sets aside state resources for grants to community-led organizations that provide direct services to a local client base of formerly incarcerated people who are navigating the reentry process. WAGEES is a leading example of a state department of corrections directly investing in and partnering with community providers, many of which are led by people with firsthand experience in the justice system.

This report provides an overview of Colorado's community investment model and summarizes considerations and lessons learned from the WAGEES program. Understanding the program's challenges and successes can help other jurisdictions learn from the model and use it to inform their own efforts to boost and leverage community capacity to improve public safety and well-being. Key lessons learned include the following:

- Developing relationships with affected communities, community partners, state agencies, and other key stakeholders is time and resource intensive but is instrumental to building a foundation for collaboration and trust. Peer-to-peer learning and frequent communication can help foster these relationships.
- Community partners that reflect the people they serve through experience, location, and service priorities are best positioned to deliver services and provide guidance for resource allocation and support.
- The role of intermediaries is crucial, as they serve as a liaison and translator between state agencies and community partners to develop a coordinated initiative while providing capacity building and accountability.

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## BOX 1

### Key Players

- **Colorado Department of Corrections (CDOC):** The key government agency engaging in the WAGEES program to connect people returning from incarceration to services in their community that encourage stability and successful outcomes.
  - **Colorado Criminal Justice Reform Coalition (CCJRC):** A local nonprofit organization that seeks to eliminate the overuse of incarceration and invest in comprehensive strategies to advance community safety and health.
  - **Latino Coalition for Community Leadership (LCCL):** A national intermediary providing technical assistance to grantees receiving state funding, including assistance with relationship building, financial and data reporting, and information sharing.
  - **WAGEES community partners:** A group of several community- and faith-based organizations funded in part by the WAGEES program that provide a wide array of services to community members, including people returning from incarceration. Staff at the community partners, many of whom have direct and relevant life experience that informs their service provision, provide training and skills development to the WAGEES client population. Additionally, they leverage partnerships in the community to access goods and services that meet the target population's needs (e.g., jobs, housing, and basic goods). For more information on the community partners, see appendix A.
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## The Colorado Experience

On March 19, 2013, Tom Clements, the executive director of the Colorado Department of Corrections (CDOC), was murdered in his home by a person who had been released to parole supervision. This tragic incident represented a crucial turning point for state leadership. Executive Director Clements had come to Colorado from Missouri to implement a reform agenda in corrections policy. Colorado leadership and legislators initially contemplated reactive and punitive measures to reduce the likelihood of a similar tragedy. But a local nonprofit organization, the Colorado Criminal Justice Reform Coalition (CCJRC), and several community reentry organizations saw an opportunity to continue the reform work started by Executive Director Clements. Through information sharing, organized site visits to nonprofit organizations, and advocacy on successful reentry strategies, CCJRC garnered enough support in the legislature to enact reforms. This shift to focus on support and rehabilitation would require a large culture change among both staff and justice-involved people. CCJRC worked to highlight the importance and impact of community-led public safety strategies and to ensure budget priorities included this piece of the reentry puzzle.

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## BOX 2

### Methodology

The Urban Institute (Urban) collected information for this report using the following methods:

- a document review of quarterly progress reports from LCCL and the community partners, memos from CCJRC, and state legislation and associated fiscal impact notes;
- semistructured interviews with 29 CDOC staff members, legislators, key staff from the community partners, and other stakeholders in various states and jurisdictions to discuss their role, their state's experience with the reinvestment model, and the successes and challenges they experienced; and
- visits with six of the seven WAGEES community partners in Colorado,<sup>a</sup> which included interviews with key staff at each community partner site, observation of a quarterly meeting attended by community partners and key state agency staff, and a visit to the Division of Adult Parole Reentry Services.

<sup>a</sup> This report reflects the experiences of the seven community partners engaged in the WAGEES grant program as of May 2017. A full list of community partners engaged with the grant program at some point from its inception to present day can be found in appendix A.

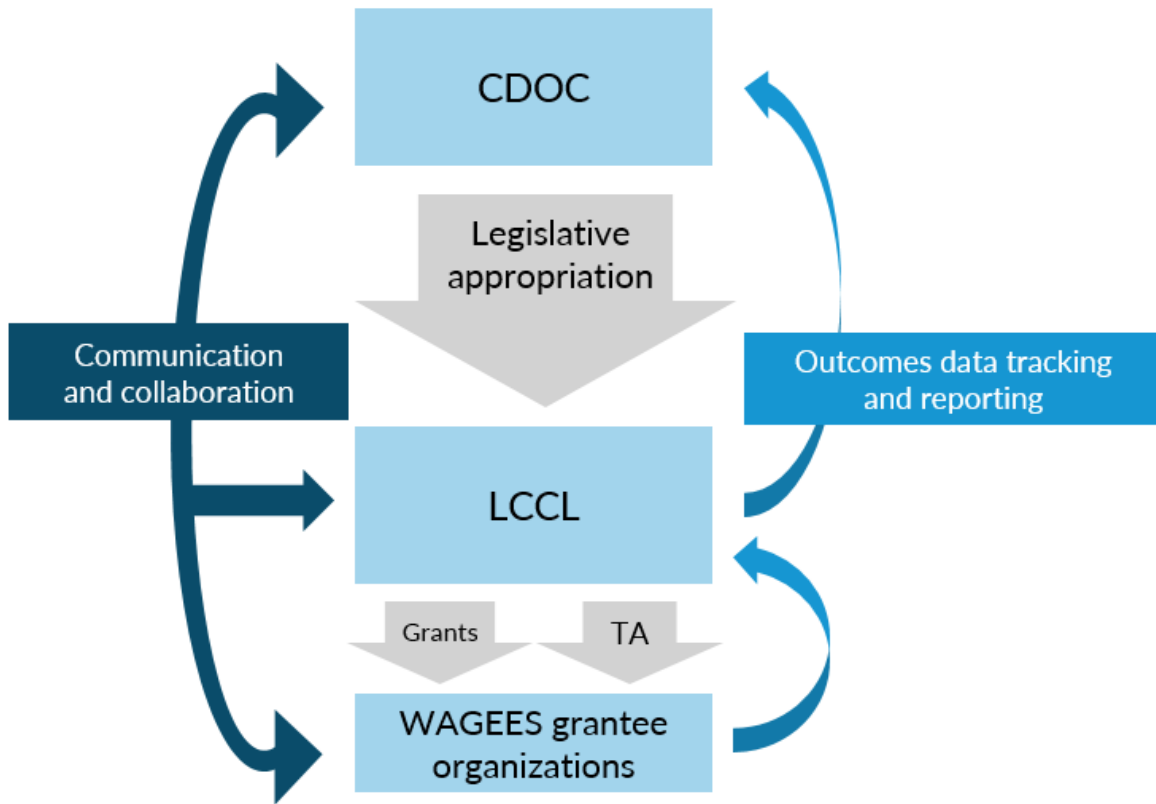
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## Colorado Engages the Community as a Partner in Protecting Public Safety

In 2014, the legislature passed HB14-1355. Among its other reforms, the law created a reentry grant program within the CDOC, the Work and Gain Education and Employment Skills (WAGEES) program, to provide funding to community-based organizations that support people returning from incarceration. Seven community-based organizations, the WAGEES community partners, were selected through a competitive process to provide a wide array of reentry services at eight sites throughout the state.<sup>2</sup> These community partners vary in funding amount, staff size, client population needs and size, and the number of years they have been working in the community and with the reentry population.



**FIGURE 1**  
**Understanding the WAGEES Model**



**Source:** Urban developed this model based on a concept provided by the Colorado Criminal Justice Reform Coalition and our conversations with state partners.

As outlined in legislation, the WAGEES program’s goals are to improve reentry outcomes by establishing a grant program to support community-based organizations that provide services to people returning from incarceration.<sup>3</sup> Although the WAGEES program focuses on employment and education services, the community partners offer a variety of services that clients can access while participating in the program.

The program is available to people currently on parole who are assessed by the CDOC Division of Adult Parole as being at medium or high risk to recidivate. People returning from incarceration via parole can join the program through a referral by CDOC or their parole officer or by opting into the program by reaching out to a community partner directly. If a person independently opts into the program, the community partner coordinates with the CDOC to determine if the person is eligible for participation (i.e., has been assessed as medium or high risk). Community partners conduct outreach and recruitment through their community networks, relying on open houses, word of mouth, and so on,

and also hold orientation and recruitment meetings in the prison. In collaboration with the parole officer, the community partner will develop a case plan for each person based on his or her specific needs. The intermediary organization, the Latino Coalition for Community Leadership (LCCL), provides technical assistance and support to enhance collaboration and communication between community partners and state stakeholders.

## **Establishing a Funding Mechanism**

The WAGEES program began in January 2015, and initial legislation provided funding for three years. Similar to various resource allocation strategies used by states that participated in the Justice Reinvestment Initiative (JRI), Colorado stakeholders shifted funds within the CDOC's budget. The WAGEES program started with \$1 million in annual funding beginning in fiscal year 2015 (the 2014 legislative session), with \$710,000 added during fiscal year 2016 (the 2015 legislative session) for a \$1,710,000 annual allocation.<sup>4</sup> Once legislation was enacted and the community partners were selected, funding was disbursed on a cost-reimbursable basis as outlined in the legislation.

## **Providing Oversight and Support through an Intermediary**

Colorado selected LCCL to serve as a grantmaking intermediary, providing administrative oversight as well as leadership, resources, and capacity-building skills to help WAGEES partners meet the needs of their communities. The intermediary role was important to the launch of the program because the CDOC was not in a position to provide this support. LCCL provides guidance for WAGEES community partners and serves as a hub for information and services. Their key responsibilities include

- selecting community-based partners,
- disbursing funds,
- developing and administering program and fiscal data collection systems,
- tracking performance metrics, and
- coordinating the relationships between the CDOC and the community partners.

LCCL staff conduct regularly scheduled site visits to grantees twice a month to provide feedback on performance management, coordinate communication and services between community partners and

CDOC stakeholders, identify and address gaps in services, and train staff in program and fiscal matters. Every quarter, LCCL gathers all WAGEES community partners together to discuss challenges, solutions, and success stories and to share insights and information that shape the program's evolution. These convenings, along with one-on-one meetings and assistance, help the WAGEES community partners learn about and implement evidence-based or promising programming. A key component of LCCL's intermediary approach is maintaining high performance standards while meeting grantees where they are and fostering growth and continuous improvement, rather than imposing a rigid top-down model for all community partners to follow.

LCCL also provides technical assistance to the WAGEES community partners to increase their capacity and efficiency. Some of the community partners are newly established organizations and may have limited capacity. For some community partners, LCCL helps set up entire business systems to ensure they avoid the difficulties that smaller and newer organizations often face. These include business management and payroll system issues, communication challenges, knowledge and skill gaps, and cash flow problems. LCCL also works with WAGEES community partners to sustain employment/retention rates and offers assistance with grant applications, data reporting, housing placements, and developing strategies to reduce recidivism. LCCL works closely with the community partners to track client outcomes and compile performance metrics. As a steward for state funding, LCCL can end a partner's participation in the program if there are ongoing problems or if poor performance inhibits the expected return on investment.

LCCL designed a custom data collection system, Apricot, available to all community partners at little cost, to allow them to leverage successful outcomes and identify problems. The organization provides extensive training and real-time technical assistance to WAGEES community partners to address data collection or reporting issues as they arise. LCCL also works closely with the CDOC to ensure grant participation is accessible for the smaller WAGEES community partners and that reporting requirements are not overly burdensome.

As the program evolves to match the needs of the community partners, so does its infrastructure. To reflect the growth and emerging needs of the WAGEES partners, LCCL is developing a new system to capitalize on the progress of the program and provide community partners with a data platform that is not cost prohibitive to use. *CaseMGR* will track probation data and include additional fields to enhance the partners' capacity to more comprehensively measure outcomes.

## Empowering Communities to Advance Local Public Safety Strategies

The community partners receiving WAGEES funding are diverse in their approach to service provision, structure, and staff, but one unifying factor is that they are local organizations based in the communities they serve. The diversity among organizations is a strength of the program, as it provides the community partners the opportunity to offer unique and complementary services to best meet clients' needs.

A key component of WAGEES is employment as a stepping stone back into the community, and a handful of community partners employ people directly through various social enterprises. For example, some people work in a kitchen or food truck, and others build furniture or maintain outdoor trail systems. Some community partners work with local businesses, such as catering or logging companies, to employ people who participate in the program. Community partners can vouch for their clients and provide references for potential employers. Similarly, some provide housing for clients who, in turn, pay rent to help cover expenses. These opportunities help people build a credit or rental history to assist them in getting back on their feet.

## The Promise of Community-Based Reinvestment

WAGEES was implemented in early 2015 and has demonstrated promising initial results. As a program requirement, all community partners must report various metrics to measure outcomes. These metrics include enrollment numbers, employment placement and retention, credential attainment, and recidivism rates during program participation. A major success of the program has been overenrollment in every reported quarter. This demonstrates healthy demand but also puts stress on limited resources. Despite heavy enrollment and a concentrated population of people at high risk of reoffending, only 2.5 percent of WAGEES program beneficiaries have returned to prison for committing new crimes while in the program in the more than two years since the program began. Fifteen percent have returned to prison when including technical violations.<sup>5</sup> Table 1 summarizes the cumulative performance measures for WAGEES through September 30, 2017.<sup>6</sup>

TABLE 1

**Key Performance Measures as of September 30, 2017**

<b>Performance measure</b>	<b>Goal</b>	<b>Actual</b>	<b>Description</b>
Enrollment rate	100% N=1,248	150% N=1,870	Cumulative number of people enrolled in the WAGEES program.
Placement rate	60% of participants	63% N=1,176	Cumulative number of participants placed in employment, occupational skills training, postsecondary education, and high school diploma/GED classes.
Employment retention rate	50% of participants	62% N=581	Cumulative number of participants eligible for employment verified as employed.
Credential attainment rate	50% of participants	76%	Cumulative number of participants who participated in a credential program and attained a credential.
		72%	Cumulative number of participants who participated in an occupational training program and attained a credential. Postsecondary education and GEDs take a very long time to complete, which can lower the overall percentage.

## The Pathway to Success

The CDOC and the community partners worked together to make the WAGEES program successful for the state, its clients, and their communities by enhancing public safety and improving the reentry experience for people returning from incarceration. Some of the keys to success in this model include partnerships within the community and government agencies, building support and a constituency for the program, knowledge sharing, flexibility, strategic funding allocations, and building a network for services and support.

### Partnering with Affected Communities

A unique factor of the program is the full integration of each community partner into the neighborhood they serve. Although these community partners define themselves as “community based,” the exact definitions often vary. A community is not solely defined by geography and can also include cultural communities. WAGEES partners strengthen their communities by fulfilling a need, which could be geographically, temporally, or culturally specific.

Additionally, many of the community partners are led and staffed by people with firsthand criminal justice experience, some at the executive director or founder level. Many WAGEES community partners noted that their strong connection with the target client population helps them effectively deliver

services; as one provider observed, “We are them and they are us.”<sup>7</sup> These are not organizations that “parachute” into a community; they are people who are dedicated to serving their neighbors. Engaging people with lived experience in service provision provides an opportunity to leverage that expertise and increases client buy-in. By integrating formerly incarcerated people into their staff, community partners are “role modeling possibilities” for those they serve by showing the opportunities available to them.<sup>8</sup>

## **Building Support for Investment**

Stakeholders’ strategic use of informational site visits, relationship building, reentry reform champions, and organizational partnerships contributed to the WAGEES program’s encouraging early results. CCJRC played a pivotal role in garnering support for the legislation. CCJRC staff not only provided policy expertise during the legislative session, they also drew on a strong network of community-based partners to highlight the critical work already going on in the community. At first, CCJRC staff were met with resistance to change and hesitation to fund organizations outside the formal criminal justice system. To overcome this resistance, CCJRC invited key legislators and CDOC stakeholders to visit the community partners and observe their work and the services they provide. Allowing stakeholders to witness the transformative work of the community partners helped secure their buy-in and made it easier for them to champion the program.

Once the WAGEES program was funded and established, the community partners deepened stakeholder engagement by hosting open houses, celebrations, and community nights. Partners opened their doors to community members and parole officers alike to encourage them to learn more about their work. Partners also encouraged their clients to participate in volunteer activities to build relationships with their neighbors. Not only was this outreach key to garnering support at the front end of the process, stakeholders agree this outreach and engagement must continue moving forward.

## **Developing a Collaborative Partnership with CDOC**

WAGEES brought CDOC staff, parole officers, and community partners together for the first time for a coordinated effort of this scale. Thus, a key component of its success was close collaboration between the community partners, the intermediary, and the CDOC. It was critical for the CDOC, especially parole officers, to trust the community partners, and vice versa, and for all parties to be seen as collaborators working toward the same goal.

Many of the community partners worked with justice-involved populations before WAGEES was launched but did not have experience working directly with parole officers or the CDOC. Initially, there was skepticism on both sides, a lack of support and trust between actors, and in some cases, overt resistance to the new grant program. Some parole officers had concerns about the services offered, and a few feared they would lose their jobs and be replaced by WAGEES community partners that were providing services for people returning from incarceration. To address some of these concerns, LCCL, the community partners, CDOC community reentry staff, and parole officers regularly met to review cases, communicate and coordinate resources, and share expertise.

Key to this new partnership was identifying and solidifying the complementary roles that the CDOC and WAGEES community partners could play in reentry. As the program developed, parole officers began to see the community partners as collaborators with valuable perspectives. The CDOC recognized that it could rely on WAGEES community partners as resources to fill service gaps and work toward the same goals. As part of their collaborative relationship, some community partners began to run the orientation meetings at the parole offices, providing perspectives and service offerings to people returning from incarceration. This relationship and mutual respect allows for a “warm handoff” from correctional officers to the community partners to ensure clients receive the support, services, and treatment they need.

LCCL provides credibility and capacity for WAGEES community partners and serves as a liaison and translator between the partners and the CDOC. The organization builds trust and garners support across state agencies and partner staff. Both partners and CDOC staff noted that the program most likely would not have been as successful without an intermediary to help define roles, build trust, engage multiple actors throughout the social service sector, and provide technical assistance. One example of this trust and support between community partners and the CDOC was an arrangement that allowed staff who had previously been incarcerated and were not under supervision to frequently enter correctional facilities, provide program orientation, and recruit people to participate. This was an exception to CDOC policies, and staff noted that this peer-to-peer outreach arrangement has not been allowed in any other cases.

## **Connecting the Dots between Community Partners and Building a Community of Practice**

Many of the community partners were not working together—or even aware of one another—until the WAGEES program was developed. As outlined in appendix A, the community partners vary in the

populations they serve, the services they provide, and their geographic location. With limited resources and large caseloads, the siloed nature of the social service landscape constituted a missed opportunity for collaboration. WAGEES helps fill this gap by enhancing communication and coordination within the social service sector and improving service provision. Community partners benefit, both in the number of referrals received and the increased communication and collaboration, from knowing the other service providers in the state. The CDOC and other state agencies also experience collateral benefits from this relationship. As CDOC staff engaged with the partners and began to understand the unique programs they offer, they learned to refer people leaving incarceration to community partners best positioned to serve their needs, reinforcing a cycle of culture change within the department. The WAGEES program creates a foundation for community partners to more effectively collaborate with the CDOC. The program helps ensure that people receive the tailored treatment and programming that will help them succeed.

The WAGEES program model has also helped facilitate a community of practice in which partners learn from one another and lean on each other in times of need. Each partner has an opportunity to find its niche within the broader social service provider landscape while capitalizing on the resources that other WAGEES partners provide (and making referrals as appropriate). Staff share information across organizations and can refer clients to partners who provide services they do not offer. The quarterly meetings are also an opportunity for community partners to engage in peer-to-peer learning. This collaborative relationship protects the WAGEES community partners from feeling that their resources are at risk because of competition with other service organizations and encourages collaboration when facing challenges.

## **Ensuring Flexibility**

The legislation that established the WAGEES program built in flexibility for the program to evolve based on the needs of the target population. This flexibility affords LCCL the discretion to make decisions about program management. LCCL troubleshoots with grantees to improve performance and build capacity and requires grantees to meet target goals to continue participation. The program's flexibility allows community partners to be more culturally sensitive and gives clients the chance to provide input on the best programming options. The program also encourages innovation in service delivery models and gives partners leeway to correct course when new strategies are not effective.

Clients choose to participate in WAGEES, a reflection of its community-based approach and “we are them, they are us” motto. This opt-in model ensures the relationship between people returning from



incarceration and the community partners is collaborative and adaptive, rather than adversarial and static. Although mandatory participation could add an element of enforcement that would reach a larger population, such an approach would be counter to the underlying tenets of the program.

## **Providing Strategic Funding Allocations**

Just as the community-based programming is tailored for each participant, the level of funding in each WAGEES grant is customized to match the capacity and need of each community partner. The WAGEES model is designed so funding allocations meet the needs of—but do not overwhelm—the partners, all of which are small, community-based organizations. The grants are sizable in relation to the typical funding streams the community partners receive, providing the opportunity to build and staff responsive programs. As stewards of public dollars, community partners receive manageable yet impactful grants and benefit from LCCL’s fiscal management oversight and support. Having a reliable, ongoing source of adequate funding provides stability for the community partners to offer uninterrupted services that are matched to individual client needs.

## **Barriers to Implementation**

As with any new program, WAGEES stakeholders and community partners have experienced challenges and hurdles related to implementation. Some of these challenges include funding delays and issues with communication, collaboration, participation in the program, data collection, service provision, and documentation. Community partners and stakeholders work together to overcome these barriers through collaborative problem-solving.

### **Funding Stream Delays**

As a new program, the WAGEES reimbursement funding structure presented some challenges during the first several months of implementation. Statutory language prevented the grant funds from being disbursed as an up-front payment or directly to LCCL, a process that would have provided more timely reimbursements. Some community partners had funding reserves or other alternative sources, such as business income or other grants, to supplement their WAGEES funding, but others were solely funded by WAGEES resources. In some cases, partners needed to take out loans or remortgage their own

houses for capital until reimbursement was received. Even with other sources of funding, it was difficult for some WAGEES community partners to raise the up-front capital needed to provide services to their clients. But as the program evolved, LCCL worked with the CDOC and the community partners to streamline the process and ensure quick processing and timely reimbursement. Although larger, more established organizations with larger reserves may not have faced these financial hurdles had they been selected as partners, Colorado stakeholders determined it was important to select partners engaged locally in their communities. In the sunset review of the WAGEES program, the Department of Regulatory Agencies recommended the CDOC “release up to one-quarter of grant funds to community partners at the beginning of the fiscal year,” which will provide partners with necessary up-front capital (Colorado Department of Regulatory Agencies 2017, 21).

### **Messaging and Communicating to the Community at Large to Address Stigmatization of the Client Population**

As community-based organizations, WAGEES partners live in the neighborhoods they serve and must be sensitive to how their work and client base is perceived. Some community members are not open to the idea of having previously incarcerated people, especially those convicted of violent or sex offenses, in their neighborhood. This leaves the community partners in a challenging situation, and they must balance providing space and services for people reentering the community with the needs and views of community members. Some community members do not appreciate the need for vital reentry services to support people transitioning out of prison. And although some community members may understand the value of this work, they may also have concerns about crime and other disruption. As such, some partners were hesitant to publicize their work or the people they serve, realizing the community may not be accepting of their services. To try to overcome this hurdle and stigmatization, some hold community events to help people understand the work being carried out, and others offer clients opportunities to engage in volunteer work to help the larger community.

### **Providing for People Who Self-Select into the Program**

Although stakeholders view the voluntary nature of the WAGEES program as a positive and essential component of the model, it does limit the pool of potential clients and the partners’ ability to ensure compliance with program requirements. As noted above, parole officers can refer people to WAGEES partners or people can opt in themselves; either way, participation in the program is strictly voluntary.

Once people are released from prison and referred to the program, it is their responsibility to visit the community partner, sign up for the program, and follow the service plan. Partner staff and parole officers work together to encourage people to follow through with programming, but there are no penalties for not participating.

## **Overcoming Gaps in Housing Provision**

Colorado is facing a lack of affordable housing, which makes it difficult for people, especially those returning from incarceration, to find a place to live. Some partners provide housing in the building where services are provided, similar to a dormitory. Others rent entire houses for clients to live in and manage. But in some cases, there are no housing options available for their clients, presenting a major barrier to longer-term stability. Even for community partners that do have housing options, there often is not enough space for all their clients. To provide a little support and stability, some community partners offer emergency assistance to fund shelter fees and, in some instances, short-term hotel stays of one or two weeks. This assistance is useful to people who have just returned from incarceration but does not contribute to sustained stability.

## **Using Data Systems and Reaching Performance Metrics Goals**

WAGEES community partners are required to collect, input, and report data on a set of metrics in order to receive funding. Although performance reporting is critical for program oversight, some partners had no experience collecting data and reported challenges using Apricot. LCCL provides technical assistance to partners to simplify processes, prepare and analyze data, and support and train staff to ensure unified and timely reporting. LCCL teaches community partners how to use the data to improve service provision, increasing data fidelity and grantee buy-in. These metrics are also used to flag issues that need to be addressed. For example, one issue uncovered by the data reporting system was a lack of CDOC referrals to some community partners. To ensure that partners were not missing opportunities to be matched with clients who would benefit from their services, LCCL worked with CDOC staff to understand the reason behind the lack of referrals and monitored the metrics to ensure the numbers increased.

## Documenting Long-Term Success

All programs, especially newly established ones, struggle to document and disseminate success, making it difficult to build the case for continued support and funding. WAGEES requires partners to collect and report on a limited range of key metrics to ensure that grantees are accountable for their outcomes. Community partners can often see the impact of the services they provide firsthand, but they find it hard to capture individual success stories in high-level data to communicate the importance and impact of the program to stakeholders.

Community partners offer a long list of services to deliver wraparound support and conduct regular check-ins with clients to ensure stability. Because of the high demand for services that exceeds their current capacity, it is difficult for case managers to continue checking in with clients after they complete programming or discontinue program participation. WAGEES grantees can provide an initial support system for people returning from prison, but if clients no longer want to participate after their immediate needs are met, staff have no mechanism to support their long-term success.

Stability and recidivism reduction are key components of the program, but they cannot be measured comprehensively because data are not collected once someone ends their participation in the program. This logistical hurdle is one of the challenges WAGEES community partners face when trying to document and report on success across the system. To help address this data gap, the CDOC is exploring ways to link WAGEES and state data to allow analysts to examine long-term outcomes, such as arrests or returns to prison for a new crime or technical violations, once someone completes the program.

## Next Steps for Colorado: The Crime Prevention Initiative

Drawing on the support and promising start of WAGEES, in 2017, CCJRC helped develop and support the passage of HB17-1326, the Justice Reinvestment Crime Prevention Initiative, to reinvest savings from criminal justice reforms to fund community-based crime prevention strategies.<sup>9</sup> The legislation is twofold: (1) enacting parole reforms and (2) establishing a new grant program and a small-business lending program to improve quality of life, safety, and opportunity in two neighborhoods that have historically experienced higher rates of crime and criminal justice system involvement.

As a first step, the legislation imposes a revocation cap for some offenses, which limits the number of days a person on parole may be reincarcerated for a technical violation. As a result of the reforms and the discontinuation of an ineffective parole program, the state projected annual savings in the prison

budget of \$6,628,401.<sup>10</sup> The second piece of the legislation establishes a Justice Reinvestment Crime Prevention Initiative in the Department of Local Affairs. The department will partner with a community foundation and several community development financial institutions to fund pilot crime prevention initiatives in two communities: North Aurora and Southeast Colorado Springs. The financial institutions will provide small-business lending in those communities. On the programmatic side, the community foundation will serve as the intermediary for a new grant program that establishes local planning teams to develop crime prevention priorities. Strategies will be determined by the teams and can include improving academic achievement, providing direct services, increasing the use of outdoor and common spaces, and other priorities. Because community members are intimately involved with the needs of their communities, they provide unique perspective concerning the strategies that will have a crime prevention benefit. The community foundation is also responsible for contracting with a third-party evaluator. HB17-1326 is designed as a three-year pilot, and \$4 million a year will be appropriated. The savings realized from parole reforms will be appropriated to DOLA to carry out the grant and small-business lending programs. Although similar in nature to WAGEES in that it encourages the community to act as the driving force for the programs, the Crime Prevention Initiative goes beyond solutions that have been traditionally supported in the criminal justice space. The program will also foster strategies to prevent crime and address other problems the community prioritizes through noncriminal justice interventions.

## A New Vision for Public Safety Investment

Colorado's WAGEES program is an innovative justice reinvestment strategy that directs money from the CDOC to affected communities and empowers community partners to play a more active role in developing solutions to public safety problems. Although it is still in its early phases, this program model is promising and offers a number of lessons for other states interested in justice reinvestment to strengthen communities. WAGEES shows how expanding public safety investment to include community organizations can increase cooperation and collaboration among previously unconnected groups; develop a community of partners that share information, lessons learned, and challenges; and demonstrate the importance of incorporating a strong and experienced intermediary. Staff at the WAGEES community partners, many of whom have been directly involved in the justice system themselves, understand the unique needs of the clients they serve, and the program helps engage stakeholders, legislators, and community members to improve the reentry process.

Although the parties involved in WAGEES faced challenges during implementation, they built a trusting and collaborative relationship that facilitates problem-solving. As a testament to the success

and impact WAGEES has demonstrated, an October 2017 report recommended WAGEES be continued until 2023 (Colorado Department of Regulatory Agencies 2017). Challenges are to be expected with a new program, but they provide an opportunity to shape the program in a way that would be most beneficial to the clients and help them “not just reenter, but reintegrate” people exiting prison into the community.<sup>11</sup>

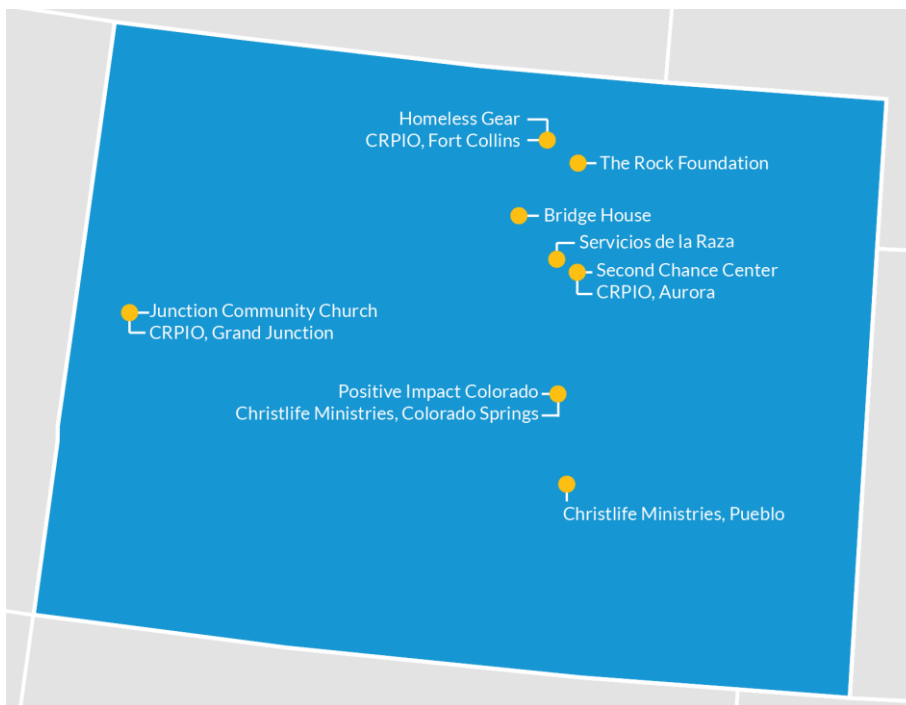
As jurisdictions across the country consider how to invest their public safety resources most effectively, WAGEES offers an example of the benefits of bringing community partners to the table in support of that goal. Community organizations reside in the neighborhoods they serve, building trust with local residents and offering opportunities for neighbors to help realize their strategies for better public safety. In addition, these organizations provide services that are critical to public safety but fall outside the traditional purview of law enforcement and corrections agencies, such as health care and behavioral health treatment, employment assistance, and trauma-informed case management. State and local governments can leverage and enhance local organizations’ expertise, relationships, and capabilities by including them in public safety budget planning processes, providing funding to support their activities and engaging them as partners in addressing local needs.

# Appendix A. Descriptions of the WAGEES Community Partners

The following community- and faith-based grassroots organizations engaged in the WAGEES grant program at some point between its inception in January 2015 to present. All community partners closely collaborate with the Colorado Department of Corrections to provide reentry services. The services they provide in general, not just for the WAGEES program, as well as the total number of clients served as of September 30, 2017, are outlined below.

FIGURE A.1

## Locations of WAGEES Partners



### The Rock Foundation

Greeley, CO

September 2015 to present

Number of clients: 97

The Rock Foundation is a homegrown nonprofit providing services for people returning from incarceration. A unique part of the Rock Foundation is its two social enterprises that employ people to provide wages, prosocial mentoring, and a source of income to support the organization. These

businesses are a BBQ truck and furniture workshop. In addition to employment opportunities, the Rock Foundation also provides peer mentorship, group therapy, Moral Reconciliation Therapy, and employment preparation. It also provides housing for approximately 20 people.

**Community Re-Entry Place Inside/Out**

Fort Collins, Grand Junction, and Aurora, CO

<http://insideoutministry.net>

Fort Collins: September 2015 to September 2017

Grand Junction: September 2015 to July 2017

Aurora: September 2015 to September 2017

Number of clients: 303

Community Re-Entry Place Inside/Out (CRPIO) offers services in Fort Collins and Aurora specifically for formerly incarcerated people as a path toward reintegration into the community. It also partners with another faith-based organization in Grand Junction. CRPIO provides transitional housing as well as immediate needs such as identification and clothing, counseling, educational attainment services, transportation services, and behavioral health programs.

**Bridge House**

Boulder, CO

<https://boulderbridgehouse.org>

January 2015 to present

Number of clients: 43

The Bridge House is an organization providing people facing homelessness and poverty with housing, employment, and support services, and it recently began to carve out specific services for people returning from incarceration. The Bridge House was formed in 2012 and began providing transitional housing and started the Ready to Work program in 2015. Approximately a third of the beds available are for people returning from incarceration, but it provides the same services regardless of whether people are or are not returning from incarceration to encourage integration. Bridge House residents are employed up to 29 hours a week in one of its social enterprises providing supplemental sanitation and landscaping or culinary arts in the community.

**Servicios de la Raza**

Denver, CO

<http://serviciosdelaraza.org>

January 2015 to present

Number of clients: 236

Servicios de la Raza, formed in 1972, provides support services for community members, including employment services, HIV/AIDS services, services for survivors of domestic violence, and mental health



and substance use services. Additionally, it provides specific services for people returning from incarceration, but these people also have access to the wide array of other services. Servicios de la Raza aims to empower the community by providing educational employment services for participants and offering services to youth in the community.

#### **Christlife Ministries**

Pueblo and Colorado Springs, CO

<http://mychristlife.org>

Pueblo: January 2015 to present

Colorado Springs: July 2017 to present

Number of clients: 221

Christlife Ministries focuses its services on people returning from incarceration by providing wraparound support, Moral Reconciliation Therapy, Parents on a Mission, work readiness classes, life skills programs, Supplemental Security Income benefits support, vocational training, and therapy. It also offers housing to people to provide stability and support during reentry.

#### **Positive Impact Colorado**

Colorado Springs, CO

<http://positiveimpactco.org/>

September 2015 to June 2017

Number of clients: 138

Positive Impact was formed in 2005 as a response to the relocation of Hurricane Katrina survivors and has since provided services to people returning from incarceration. It provides education services and assistance, Moral Reconciliation Therapy, and employment services. The nonprofit also connects people to social safety net benefits and partners with a local workforce development center to provide employment opportunities.

#### **Second Chance Center**

Aurora, CO

<https://www.scccolorado.org>

January 2015 to present

Number of clients: 798

The Second Chance Center, started in 2012, provides cognitive restructuring, addiction counseling and support groups, mentoring, transportation, and employment preparation, among other services, to formerly incarcerated people. It provides client-centered support while engaging families to help reduce a person's likelihood to recidivate. Many staff members were previously incarcerated and can provide relevant experience to support people returning to the community.

**Junction Community Church**

Grand Junction, CO

<http://jctcc.net>

July 2017 to present

Number of clients: 17

Junction Community Church offers a variety of services to people returning from incarceration, such as education, training and employment assistance, housing assistance, access to food and clothing banks, and supportive services such as transportation and help obtaining identification.

**Homeless Gear**

Fort Collins, CO

<http://homelessgear.org>

September 2017 to present

Number of clients: 21

Homeless Gear is the lead agency facilitating collaboration among 17 independent community providers offering 38 programs and supports to people and families who are homeless or are at risk of becoming homeless. Collectively, organizations provide a wide variety of programs to help returning citizens meet their basic needs, including mail and laundry service, clothing, food, and housing assistance. This is in addition to services that help with entry to employment, such as training and education assistance and placement services.

# Appendix B. Key Findings

Colorado's experience with WAGEES illustrates one community partnership model that other jurisdictions can learn from. Key findings include the following:

- The role of an intermediary is crucial.
- Community partners should reflect the populations they serve.
- Local community advocacy organizations can be catalysts and create momentum for change.
- Building relationships across agencies, communities, and people most impacted by the criminal justice system is key to success.
- Sharing information across partners and within the community fosters shared goals and a culture of building knowledge.
- Each community has unique needs and, as such, programs should give community partners the opportunity to address those needs in a way best suited to the community.
- Funding should provide community partners with the resources and support to build capacity to meet the needs of the community.
- As the program reflects the community needs, funding should reflect the community partners' need for regular and timely payment because they are often organizations with smaller financial capacity.
- Engaging with the community at large through community events or open houses lets community partners message the program and services in a way best suited to their communities.
- Collecting and synthesizing relevant and useful data creates opportunities to demonstrate successful outcomes.
- Community partners are not able—and should not be expected—to provide every service a person needs upon reentry, but they should use the resources available to offer what services they can.

# Notes

<sup>1</sup> Laura Kurgan, Eric Cadora, David Reinfurt, Sarah Williams, and Leah Meisterlin, “Million Dollar Blocks,” accessed January 10, 2018, <http://spatialinformationdesignlab.org/projects.php%3Fid%3D16>.

<sup>2</sup> This report reflects the experiences of the seven community partners engaged in the WAGEES grant program as of May 2017. A full list of community partners engaged with the program at some point from its inception to the publication of this report can be found in appendix A. After May 2017, two partners discontinued their participation. Two new organizations submitted proposals and were selected to provide services at those locations.

<sup>3</sup> H.B. 14-1355, 69th Gen Assemb., Reg. Sess. (Colo. 2014).

<sup>4</sup> “HB 14-1355 Final Fiscal Note,” Colorado Legislative Council Staff, July 23, 2014, [http://www.leg.state.co.us/clics/clics2014a/csl.nsf/billcontainers/535B1BDD5BE99FC187257CA7005A703E/\\$FILE/HB1355\\_f1.pdf](http://www.leg.state.co.us/clics/clics2014a/csl.nsf/billcontainers/535B1BDD5BE99FC187257CA7005A703E/$FILE/HB1355_f1.pdf); “SB 15-124 Final Fiscal Note,” Colorado Legislative Council Staff, October 13, 2015, [http://www.leg.state.co.us/clics/clics2015a/csl.nsf/fsbillcont3/0FBB07461F36BEFB87257DB10065DA22?Open&file=SB124\\_f1.pdf](http://www.leg.state.co.us/clics/clics2015a/csl.nsf/fsbillcont3/0FBB07461F36BEFB87257DB10065DA22?Open&file=SB124_f1.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> From LCCL quarterly progress report through September 30, 2017. Recidivism is only tracked while a participant is active in the program, and comparisons to the department’s recidivism rate should not be made. As noted on page 16, the CDOC and LCCL are exploring ways to connect state and WAGEES partner data to examine longer-term outcomes.

<sup>6</sup> From LCCL quarterly progress report through June 30, 2017. Metrics used originally from the US Department of Labor Reentry Project.

<sup>7</sup> Interview with Hassan Latif, Second Chance Center executive director, May 19, 2017.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> H.B. 17-1326, 71st Gen. Assemb., Reg. Sess. (Colo. 2017).

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Conversation with a WAGEES community partner, May 2017.

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