

City Spending Rises on Programs To Help Inmates Leaving Jail

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SUMMARY

WHILE RECIDIVISM HAD LONG BEEN A RECOGNIZED PROBLEM among city jail inmates, it was after the commissioners of correction and homeless services realized that nearly a third of the people entering the city's homeless shelters in 2003 had previously spent time in city jails that the Bloomberg Administration began to focus attention on discharge planning. The short length of stay in jail is a challenge for those who seek to address long-standing issues in an inmate's life.

As a result of this new attention the number of programs to help individuals leaving the city's jails has grown, and total city spending on these programs has also consistently risen since 2005, more than tripling to \$14.5 million in the current fiscal year.

IBO's review of the programs created to assist inmates leaving city jails finds a changing mix of initiatives. Among our findings:

- While some programs have been defunded in the past year, several new ones have been created. Programs under the auspices of the Mayor's Center for Economic Opportunity now comprise nearly two-thirds of spending on discharge planning and services for those who have recently left jail.
- The spending is occurring at a variety of city agencies, many not typically involved in correction-related activities such as business services and the city university system.
- There have been a limited number of evaluations of the programs and so far the results are inconclusive. But the programs have the potential to enhance public safety and realize savings by reducing city expenditures on jails, homeless shelters, and hospital beds.

In this difficult economic environment, it is notable that Department of Correction spending on discharge planning has remained fairly steady and, overall, city spending on programs for men and women leaving jails has increased. Whether there will be sufficient funds available to maintain these programs long enough to better evaluate their potential remains to be seen.

INTRODUCTION

In fiscal year 2008, 56,206 individuals were discharged from New York City jails back into the community. The men and women released represented some of the poorest and most at-risk New Yorkers, roughly 40 percent of whom return to jail within a year. In response to the challenges facing those leaving jail, the Bloomberg Administration established programs that operate across the traditional boundaries of city agencies. The Discharge Planning Collaboration, which began in 2003, brings together policy makers and service providers from the government, private, and nonprofit sectors to address the multiple challenges facing those released from the city's jails. The collaboration began with the leadership of Department of Correction (DOC) Commissioner Martin F. Horn and Deputy Mayor Linda I. Gibbs, who at the time was Commissioner of the Department of Homeless Services (DHS). The two agencies came together to address and better understand the significant overlap in the populations they served; a data match in 2003 revealed that 30 percent of all shelter entrants have been in DOC custody.¹ In 2007, the Human Resources Administration (HRA) joined the leadership of the Discharge Planning Collaboration. Due in part to the collaboration, there has been an increased focus on programs which target those leaving the city's jails for assistance.

As part of these efforts, city spending on discharge planning and reentry has increased steadily from \$4 million in 2005 to a budgeted \$14.5 million in 2009. Funding comes from a variety of city agencies and grants. The Mayor's Center for Economic Opportunity (CEO) initiative includes several programs that target individuals leaving jail, and this has been a source of increased spending, even as other initiatives have been eliminated. As the city and state are both facing a worsening economic environment, there is concern that programs for ex-offenders may be in jeopardy. For example, during negotiations for the 2009 city budget, the Adolescent Reentry Initiative was not funded, and in spring 2009 the state defunded a treatment readiness program for women on Rikers Island with substance abuse issues.

This report will focus on programs in the city's jails that prepare inmates to return to the community and programs that provide services in the community upon reentry.²

RIKERS ISLAND DISCHARGE ENHANCEMENT PROGRAMS

In 2003, DOC created Rikers Island Discharge Enhancement (RIDE), a set of programs to provide discharge planning and after-jail services to inmates. In 2008, \$5.4 million was spent on

various RIDE programs and services; \$4 million in city funds is budgeted for RIDE programs in 2009. A key characteristic of the program that distinguishes it from previous reentry programs is the transportation of inmates directly from jail to community-based services, hence the name RIDE.

Originally, the program targeted city-sentenced adult inmates who would be serving time on Rikers after sentencing. Generally, inmates in the city's jails serve terms of one year or less. (Anyone serving more than a year after being sentenced is sent to prison facilities operated by the state.) City-sentenced inmates were the first population targeted because they have a fixed discharge date, which allows for planning. In contrast, detainees who are awaiting trial or have not been sentenced have no fixed release date. In 2008, the average daily DOC population was 13,850, with an average of 2,557 sentenced inmates. While the average length of stay in DOC custody was 48 days in 2008, the median length of stay was under eight days (7.74 days). The median length of stay for sentenced inmates who served time after sentencing was nearly identical to the overall median (7.70 days).

The short length of stay in jail is a challenge for those who seek to address long-standing issues in an inmate's life. Therefore, a major focus of the program has been to link inmates with community-based providers and entitlements so that services can continue after jail. Eventually, the RIDE initiative expanded and became an umbrella for a variety of programs that are available to inmates. Partnering with nonprofit organizations and city agencies, DOC works to increase access to identification documents such as birth certificates and social security numbers, benefits, and a variety of social services. All of the programs are voluntary.

RIDE for city-sentenced adult inmates is the original program and continues today. It provides access to services focusing on four core areas: housing, treatment for substance abuse, family reunification, and employment. While in jail, inmates are provided an opportunity to connect with community-based service providers and create a plan for their release. With the inmate's consent, nonprofit providers are given access to information about the inmate's needs, which is collected at admission by DOC staff. At the time of release, the inmate is transported directly to the service provider or to an after-jail placement agreed upon in the development of the discharge plan. For up to 90 days after jail, the provider engages with the client. Currently, DOC has performance-based contracts with four community-based organization providers: Osborne Association, Women's Prison Association, Fortune Society, and Volunteers of America. These providers perform extensive outreach in the jails to recruit volunteers for the programs. They are responsible for providing city-sentenced individuals

with discharge planning prior to release and case management services outside of jail. In addition, DOC has contracted with other community organizations that have focused exclusively on transitional employment services; these services are currently provided by Managed Work Services.

Over time, RIDE expanded beyond city-sentenced adult inmates to include programs for adolescent inmates and outreach to detainees and inmates with short stays. These programs included the Adolescent Reentry Initiative (ARI) for sentenced adolescents (ages 16 to 18) and a program run by the Fortune Society at the Samuel Perry Building, through which inmates discharged from Rikers pass. The Vera Institute ran ARI, which provided sentenced youth with vocational and career development services on Rikers Island. The Fortune Society provided anyone leaving Rikers who was not a RIDE participant an opportunity to connect with services on their way out. Both of these programs were funded through City Council initiatives beginning in 2006. In July 2008, ARI closed abruptly when funding was not included in the 2009 budget. The Fortune Society program at the Samuel Perry Building was also discontinued in July 2008 after funding was reduced.

To a certain extent new programs under the Center for Economic Opportunity initiative will make services available for those who had been served by ARI. For example, the New York City Justice Corps will provide job training and internships to youth returning to specific community districts from jail; however, adolescents outside of the target areas will not have access to the program. In addition, inmates who might have engaged with services in the Samuel Perry Building may link to services after release by calling 311, which provides referrals. The number of calls to 311 for reentry services increased substantially thanks in large part to a citywide ad campaign promoting the use of 311 to connect to reentry services. In 2008, the number of calls increased by 67 percent to 4,338 calls from 2,604 calls in 2007.

Since the beginning of RIDE, the correction department has made benefits information and applications available in the jails for city-sentenced inmates.³ These efforts have been expanded through the Single Stop Centers, which are privately funded and provide confidential benefits assistance, legal assistance, financial counseling, tax preparation, and short-term counseling and referral services. In addition, DOC, in collaboration with related agencies, has expanded efforts to assist inmates with obtaining identification, food stamp enrollment, Medicaid enrollment and understanding and complying with child support orders. A major development in 2007 was the passage of legislation that allows inmates who were receiving Medicaid before being sent to Rikers to suspend their Medicaid eligibility during incarceration

and then have it reinstated upon their release. Previously, Medicaid was terminated at the time of incarceration.

Impact of RIDE for City-Sentenced Inmates. The impact of the RIDE program on those who participate is difficult to measure. To date, there has been one evaluation of the program, done by the Criminal Justice Research and Evaluation Center at John Jay College. The John Jay study looked at only one outcome—whether or not an individual returns to jail. The John Jay study found no difference in recidivism rates between city-sentenced RIDE participants discharged from DOC during the first six months of 2005 and a matched comparison group of inmates who did not participate.⁴ Limitations in the study's research design suggests caution in interpreting these results, however. Because the study was conducted retrospectively, it was not possible to use random assignment to help ensure that there are no systematic differences—including unobservable differences such as motivation—between the group that participated in RIDE and the group that did not.

While the John Jay study did not find an impact on recidivism between the comparison group and the participants, it did find that those who completed the RIDE program were less likely to return to jail than those who participated, but did not complete the program. Of those who participated for 90 days, 59 percent had not returned to jail over a 12-month period after their release from jail; in comparison, 30 percent of those who participated but did not complete the program had not returned to jail during the period evaluated. In addition to utilizing more rigorous research designs, further evaluations could provide more information on the impact of the program on other areas of an individual's reentry into the community, such as housing, earnings, and health.

Participation in RIDE. As illustrated by the study by John Jay, the level of participation in RIDE varies dramatically from person to person. Some clients may be engaged with a provider in jail only to drop-out when they return to the community. Therefore, to have an accurate understanding of participation it is important to look at a variety of indicators.

One of DOC's key indicators reported in the *Mayor's Management Report* is the number of inmates who have been transported to community-based providers through RIDE. This figure increased from 2,744 in 2004 to 4,829 in 2007. In 2008, however, the number transported decreased to 3,736. This indicator is not useful in measuring inmate participation after jail.

A more accurate measure of participation after jail is the number of inmates with discharge plans for whom the community-

based provider confirmed arrival at the program. In 2008 this was 1,885 individuals. The department has sought to decrease the use of the transportation by inmates who do not intend to engage with service providers. This explains the 23 percent decrease in the number of inmates transported to community-based service sites through RIDE from 2007 to 2008. During the same period, the number of inmates with discharge plans for whom the community-based service provider confirmed arrival at the program decreased by only 7 percent from 2,040 in 2007 to 1,885 individuals in 2008, suggesting that many of those transported by RIDE were only interested in transportation from Rikers Island.

Overall, the number of participants who stay engaged with RIDE is a small percentage of those who participate. In 2007, of the 2,040 who had discharge plans and confirmed arrivals at the provider, 752 (37 percent) remained engaged for at least 30 days, 577 (28 percent) for at least 60 days, and 453 (22 percent) for 90 days.

RELATED PROGRAMS

There are a variety of other programs outside of RIDE that target individuals involved in the city's jail system. These programs are supported by a variety of funding sources and target unique populations that may or may not be well served by RIDE. Programs include a recently terminated substance abuse program for women, a reentry program for young adults, and another program focused on inmates who have had frequent stays in city shelters.

The Office of Alcohol and Substance Abuse Services Treatment Readiness Program in the Rose M. Singer women's jail was funded by the state and provided sentenced women with substance abuse issues an opportunity to begin to address these issues in jail and receive discharge planning. In 2008, \$228,319 was spent on this program. In March 2009 the state eliminated funding and the program closed.

Through a two-year grant from U.S. Department of Justice Prisoner Reentry Initiative DOC will provide reentry services to 200 participants. The grant provides funding for jail staff to facilitate one-on-one and group counseling and work readiness training and targets young adults ages 18 to 24. The program is budgeted to spend \$258,470 this year. The Urban Youth Alliance also received grant money to provide reentry services in the community.

Another program, the Frequent User Service Enhancement (FUSE), is geared towards individuals who cycle between jail and shelter. The FUSE program grew out of the Discharge Planning Collaboration which brought together city agencies and non-profits and like the

collaboration it relies on the support of multiple agencies and non-profits. The program is based on the supportive housing model, which links services to permanent housing.

The criteria for FUSE eligibility has changed over time, expanding the pool of eligible individuals. For the first round of FUSE, eligible individuals needed to have had a minimum of four jail stays and four shelter stays during the previous five years. DHS and DOC data are regularly matched to identify individuals who are eligible.⁵ On any given day, between 800 and 1,100 men and women fit this description, 400 of whom are either in DOC jails or DHS shelters. With a recent change in the criteria for eligibility, individuals must now have a total of 6 stays in the city jails and shelters and have a chronic health issue, either a serious mental illness, a substance abuse disorder, or a combination of both. This change has expanded the pool of eligible individuals. The expectation is that targeting this relatively small group of individuals will result in disproportionately large savings because the group represents some of the most chronic cyclers between the city's jails, shelters, and hospitals.

FUSE is characterized by a high-level of collaboration among city agencies and a mix of funding sources. Through intensive outreach, caseworkers begin to work with clients in the jails and shelters. Service enhancement funds in the amount of \$6,500 per client allow providers to help the clients stabilize their lives and move into permanent supportive housing. In 2009 about \$357,500 in funding from DOC and DHS will support 55 slots. The service enhancement funding is in addition to the baseline operating funds (from \$13,500 to \$20,000 per client), which finance the services tied to supportive housing. DOC and Department of Homeless Services are implementing the program with the support of Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, the New York City Housing Authority and the nonprofit Corporation for Supportive Housing. The housing authority and the Department of Housing Preservation and Development have provided Section 8 vouchers.⁶ The health department provides the baseline services funding and DOC, DHS, and philanthropic sources provide funding for the service enhancement.

John Jay College conducted a preliminary evaluation of the first round of FUSE and initial results suggest that the program has an impact on the housing status of participants. The average number of days in shelter decreased from 58 days per year per participant prior to FUSE to 5 days per year with FUSE in the first year following placement in the program. This decline was over 20 percentage points greater than the 71 percent reduction from 27 days to 8 days in a comparison group. Further evaluation of the program will be conducted by Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health.

Spending on Discharge Planning and Reentry Programs

Dollars in thousands

	Actual Expenses				Projected Budget
	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
RIDE and Related Programs					
Rikers Island Discharge Enhancement Programs Treatment Readiness Program	\$3,757	\$4,664	\$4,995	\$5,425	\$3,954
Prisoner Reentry Grant	205	221	260	228	275
Frequent User Service Enhancement*	-	-	-	62	258
Programs Subtotal	\$3,962	\$4,884	\$5,254	\$5,781	\$4,845
CEO Programs					
Model Education for Rikers Dischargees				\$620	\$850
Employment Works				133	3,329
New York City Justice Corps				360	5,500
Subtotal				\$1,113	\$9,679
TOTAL	\$3,962	\$4,884	\$5,254	\$6,894	\$14,524

SOURCES: IBO; Mayor's Office of Management and Budget; Department of Homeless Services; City University of New York.

*Includes only service enhancement funding (\$6,500 per client), does not include baseline services funding from Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (roughly \$13,500-\$20,000 per client) or private funding.

community. Over the next few years several CEO programs will be evaluated. In addition, FUSE will undergo further evaluation. The outcome of these evaluations may provide more information about what programs work best at reducing recidivism and protecting public safety. If resources are effectively spent, discharge planning and other reentry programs have the potential to both enhance public safety and realize savings by reducing city expenditures on jails, homeless shelters, and hospital beds.

CENTER FOR ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY PROGRAMS

The Mayor's Center for Economic Opportunity, an inter-agency initiative to reduce poverty in the city, includes several programs that seek to increase access to education and job training for men and women in the criminal justice system, both in jail and out of jail. The reentry programs include: Model Education for Rikers Dischargees, Employment Works, and the New York City Justice Corps.⁷ Through these CEO initiatives, a total of over \$9.7 million is budgeted in 2009 for reentry services for ex-offenders and individuals in jail. The programs involve multiple agencies: Employment Works is a collaboration between the Department of Small Business Services and the Department of Probation; the New York City Justice Corps involves the correction department and the City University of New York; and Model Education for Rikers Dischargees is a collaboration between the correction and education departments. All of these initiatives will be evaluated independently providing the city with a better understanding of what works to keep individuals from returning to jail.

THE FUTURE FOR DISCHARGE PLANNING

In this difficult economic environment, it is notable that DOC spending on discharge planning has remained fairly steady and, overall, city spending on programs for those leaving jails has increased. With scarce resources it is essential to utilize the information gathered from ongoing evaluations of new and continuing programs to determine how best to invest in the men and women in jails, who will shortly be returning to the

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ENDNOTES

¹Montero, Gabriel. *Mapping the Universe of Reentry*. August 1, 2007. (p 49).

²This paper does not address the city's multiple alternative to incarceration programs nor does it address the vocational and educational programs available to inmates on Rikers. Furthermore, it does not discuss programs that are designed for men and women returning from state prisons nor the city's discharge planning program for inmates who were receiving mental health treatment in jail.

³This practice was codified in December 2004, when the Mayor signed Local Law 54 into law, which requires that DOC make benefits applications available and assist with the preparation of such applications.

⁴Several studies have evaluated the impact of corrections programs for adults and found that they are effective in reducing recidivism rates. Many of these evaluations look at programs that treat prisoners in state facilities. The jail population is different from the prison population in many ways and programs in prisons frequently have a much longer period of time to engage with a client. Therefore, these evaluations may not be generalizable to jail-based programs, such as RIDE, but they do demonstrate that reducing recidivism through programs is possible and can be cost-effective. See: Steve Aos, Marna Miller, and Elizabeth Drake. (2006). *Evidence-Based Public Policy Options to Reduce Future Prison Construction, Criminal Justice Costs, and Crime Rates*. Olympia Washington State Institute for Public Policy.

⁵Regular data sharing between DHS and DOC is now required by Local Law no. 54, which states that the city must "develop a process for identifying individuals who are repeatedly admitted to city correction institutions and who [...] are housed in shelter provided by the department of homeless services."

⁶The New York City Housing Authority has granted criminal justice waivers to clients whose criminal justice histories would normally bar them from living in NYC public housing.

⁷See CEO's Strategy and Implementation Report for more details on these programs: http://www.nyc.gov/html/ceo/downloads/pdf/ceo_2007_report_small.pdf

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