

Breaking the Cycle: Re-entry Supportive Housing and Rockefeller Drug Law Reform

Policy Briefing presented by the Corporation for Supportive Housing and
The Supportive Housing Network of New York, October 2009

By dedicating \$5 million of the OASAS-administered Rockefeller drug law reform service dollars, 250 additional units of re-entry supportive housing can be created.

Rockefeller Reform Needs to Include Housing

With the historic reform of the so-called Rockefeller Drug Laws on April 7th, 2009, the State took an important step toward a treatment-based approach to crime prevention and rehabilitation. In addition to the over 300 prisoners expected to petition for reduced sentences beginning October 7th, reforms will also likely result in judicial diversion to alternatives to incarceration for over 1,500 individuals each year. To meet this challenge, implementation must successfully address the needs of the most vulnerable among those who will be released or diverted from prison.

Individuals with histories of mental illness and/or homelessness face higher risks of re-incarceration than almost any other group.^[1] A recent study showed that parolees without housing are 7 times more likely to be re-arrested,^[2] and mentally ill re-entrants who stay in a shelter after release face a shocking 53% rate of re-incarceration in the first two years.^[3] For those who face persistent barriers to stability, such as mental illness, HIV/AIDS, and co-occurring substance abuse issues, successful re-entry and diversion from prison will hinge on reducing the risk of recidivism by linking services with permanent, affordable housing. For a significant subset of people affected by Rockefeller reform, stand-alone services and treatment will not be effective. They need the foundation of housing and services offered by Re-entry Supportive Housing.

Investing in Supportive Housing Reduces Recidivism Among Other Benefits

Re-Entry Supportive Housing, which combines quality affordable housing with comprehensive support services, has proven enormously successful in helping people involved with the criminal justice system to build lives in the community, significantly reducing recidivism and improving housing retention.

A pilot program conducted in New York City, called the Frequent Users Service Enhancement (FUSE) Initiative, exemplifies the model's success with populations at highest risk for cycling between homelessness and incarceration. The FUSE Initiative identifies some of the highest users of both jails and shelters^[i] and offers them affordable housing combined with comprehensive support services including relapse management, entitlements assistance, education and employment assistance.^[4] An evaluation of the first year of the initiative showed a 91% housing retention rate, a 53% reduction in the number of jail days, and a 92% reduction in the number of shelter days one year later.

The positive effects of supportive housing for re-entrants from the State prison population are even more striking: a landmark study by University of Pennsylvania's Dennis Culhane found that for individuals with prison records, supportive housing reduced re-incarceration by 85% over the two year study period.^[5] These results are substantiated by a number of independent studies around the country recording 45%, 76% and 100% reductions in jail and prison use resulting from placement in supportive housing.^{[6],[7],[8]}

ⁱ Eligibility for FUSE requires a minimum of four jail and four shelter stays over the five years prior to housing and a clinical disabling condition, either mental health or addiction.

By breaking the cycle of expensive shelter, prison, and hospital stays, Re-Entry Supportive Housing also allocates scarce public resources where they have the most positive impact. Among the most impressive findings from the FUSE Initiative is that each housing unit cut its residents' cost of services by \$20,000 to \$24,000 annually. Additional studies in Colorado, Maine, and New York have shown that supportive housing essentially pays for itself in the first two years.^{[9],[10],[11]}

While ineffective or insufficient re-entry policies clearly harm those at high risk of recidivism and waste precious City and State resources, the impact on communities is staggering. A recent study by the Justice Mapping Center shows that 50% of State prisoners from New York City come from only 17% of the city's neighborhoods, communities with some of the highest rates of TANF, foster care, and youth disconnected from schools.^[12] Seen in this context, investments in individuals returning to these communities represent investments in the most vulnerable children, families, and neighborhoods in New York City. To the extent that these patterns of concentration exist in other areas of New York State, re-entry and diversion resources will perform double duty as relief for the state's most distressed communities.

Recommendations

- **Dedicate \$5 million of the OASAS-administered Rockefeller drug reform service dollars to fund 250 additional units of permanent re-entry supportive housing.**
The bulk of these units should be scattered-site supportive housing which can be brought on line rapidly, in order to have housing linked to comprehensive services ready as judges begin resentencing and diversion under new law. A portion of the units could be through set-asides in mixed-use supportive housing development.
- **Begin service planning and identification now, in both prisons and courts, of those that could benefit from re-entry supportive housing.**
Research indicates success is strongly impacted by working with re-entrants as early as possible. The Re-Entry Supportive Housing Initiative should create guidelines for public defenders, district attorneys, and judges as they seek to divert or discharge offenders.
- **Measure outcomes for recipients of housing and support services, including reductions in recidivism, crisis and healthcare service utilization, and homelessness from the first year.**
Investing in measuring outcomes gives the opportunity to track cost avoidance in these systems and helps in future resource planning.

^[1] Metraux, Stephen P. and Dennis Culhane. "Homeless Shelter Use and Reincarceration Following Prison Release." *Criminology and Public Policy* 3.2 (2004): 139-160.

^[2] Nelson, Deess, and Allen. "The First Month Out: Post-incarceration Experiences in New York City." The Vera Institute, September, 1999.

^[3] Cho, Richard. "All the Way Home: Re-entry and Housing." Presentation at the NAEH Conference July 13, 2005. p.5

^[4] Metraux, Stephen P. and Dennis Culhane. "Homeless Shelter Use and Reincarceration Following Prison Release." *Criminology and Public Policy* 3.2 (2004): 139-160.

^[5] Culhane, Dennis P., Stephen Metraux, and Trevor R. Hadley. "The Impact of Supportive Housing for Homeless People with Severe Mental Illness on the Utilization of the Public Health, Corrections, and Emergency Shelter Systems: The New York-New York Initiative" *Housing Policy Debate* 13.1 (2002): 107-163.

^[6] Downtown Emergency Service Center. "1811 Eastlake: Preliminary Data on One-Year Outcomes" (2007) Quoted in "'Housing First' Approach to Homelessness Brings Hope to Hard Lives." Office of Mayor Gregory J. Nickels, City of Seattle (2008)

^[7] Perlman, Jennifer and John Parvensky. "Denver Housing First Collaborative Cost Benefit Analysis and Program Outcomes Report." Colorado Coalition for the Homeless (2006)

^[8] Noqaski, Alyssa, et al. "Supportive Housing in Illinois: A Wise Investment." Heartland Alliance and Mid-America Institute on Poverty (2009)

^[9] Perlman, Jennifer and John Parvensky. "Denver Housing First Collaborative Cost Benefit Analysis and Program Outcomes Report." Colorado Coalition for the Homeless (2006)

^[10] Mondello, Melany, et al. *Cost of Homelessness: Cost Analysis of Permanent Supportive Housing*. Corporation for Supportive Housing/Maine Department of Health and Human Services (2007)

^[11] Culhane, Dennis P., Stephen Metraux, and Trevor R. Hadley. "The Impact of Supportive Housing for Homeless People with Severe Mental Illness on the Utilization of the Public Health, Corrections, and Emergency Shelter Systems: The New York-New York Initiative" *Housing Policy Debate* 13.1 (2002): 107-163.

^[12] Cadora, Eric. "High Resettlement Neighborhoods: New York City." Justice Mapping Center. [Available online: <http://www.justicemapping.org/expertise/>]