



EOPS Grantee Profiles

A Process Evaluation of Reentry Programming Enhancement at the Norfolk County Sheriff's Office

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I. Executive Summary

This report presents the results of a Massachusetts Executive Office of Public Safety (EOPS) process evaluation of *Reentry Programming Enhancement (RPE)*, an inmate reentry program developed and implemented by Norfolk County Sheriff's Office (NCSO). The EOPS Research and Policy Analysis Division conducted a process evaluation of RPE to document lessons learned in developing and implementing an inmate reentry program, give research-based feedback to NCSO, and inform future EOPS grantees about best practices to consider when developing a reentry program for their jurisdictions. This is the second in a series of process evaluations that represents an EOPS initiative to fuse research-based programs and best practices with the public safety programs EOPS funds in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

EOPS encourages public safety programs to include and uphold documented best practices. As part of this effort, the EOPS has set aside Byrne Justice Assistant Grant (JAG) funding to conduct evaluations and research best practices so that Byrne JAG funds can be distributed in a manner that most benefits public safety in the Commonwealth.

EOPS selected programs for process evaluation from a pool of Byrne JAG grantees that received over \$100,000 in funds, conducted ambitious programs that aligned with EOPS priority areas, and held the most promise to assist future Byrne JAG grantees. This process evaluation included literature reviews, interviews with NCSO staff, focus groups with inmates participating in RPE, reviews of NCSO documents, and data output reports related to RPE.

Elements of RPE

The NCSO wanted to improve the management of reentry for male inmates being released from the Norfolk County Correctional Center. NCSO saw the need to offer a minimum/pre-release option that incorporated separate housing, programming, and a community service component for inmates who could be classified to a lower security grade while completing their sentence. After reviewing reentry research from the National Institute of Corrections and the Crime and Justice Institute and evidence-based programs like the *Delaware Key/Crest Program*, NCSO developed RPE, a step-down from medium security to a minimum/pre-release. NCSO reopened an unused separate housing unit on its grounds to serve as the physical home for RPE called the Dedham Alternative Center (DAC).

All inmates classified to the DAC to participate in RPE receive a standardized assessment using an objective classification and risk/needs assessment process. At the DAC, inmates receive programming in a therapeutic environment separate from the main correctional center. Eligible RPE inmates also take part in community service outside the DAC.

RPE's separate housing, programming and community service components are designed to help inmates make a successful reentry to the community after release.

Findings

The EOPS conducted literature reviews on the principles of effective correctional programming and reentry and conducted interviews with staff and focus groups with inmates from RPE who volunteered to participate. Based on the information gathered from this process evaluation, EOPS

discovered that RPE aligned with national best practices in reentry and correctional programming on some fronts. Other elements of the program would benefit from some modifications.

Strengths of RPE

The strengths of RPE lie in:

- Incorporating reentry research in the development of RPE,
- Using objective classification to assign inmates to the most appropriate security level,
- Using an objective risk/needs assessment tool to determine inmates programming,
- Utilizing a housing facility separate from the main facility at NCSO, and
- Incorporating the concept of community service into the program.

Limitations of RPE

- RPE does not have a formal work-release or job training component,
- RPE lacks strong program continuity from pre-release programs to post-release programs,
- RPE needs to improve program continuity across security levels,
- RPE does not currently offer education (literacy, GED) programs,
- RPE is not closely aligned with all of the principles of effective correctional programming,
- Research does not play a great enough role in RPE,
- NCSO does not offer training on reentry issues for staff of DAC, and
- Classroom space at the DAC is not conducive to learning for all programs offered through RPE.

Recommendations Going Forward

- Explore adding a work-release component to RPE,
- Work to strengthen ties between DAC staff and reentry service providers in the community,
- Evaluate the programs offered at DAC and try to offer programs that would allow inmates to continue and/or build upon the programmatic work they started in the main facility,
- Increase opportunities for inmates to participate in educational programs, such as literacy and GED programs,
- Determine where the RPE programs do not correspond to the principles of effective correctional programming and address the gaps,
- Encourage NCSO's research staff to focus more directly on the day-to-day needs of DAC and to have a more regular presence at the DAC,
- Encourage NCSO's research staff to continue to collect information on national evidence-based reentry programming and compare this research to RPE,
- Communicate routinely within the NCSO regarding the issues on which the management team is focusing,
- Cross-train staff working at different units or organizations who work as part of the same reentry process, and
- Increase and improve the classroom space. Classroom/program space should be conducive to learning and aim to minimize distractions.

II. Introduction

In 2004, the Massachusetts Executive Office of Public Safety's (EOPS) Byrne Justice Assistance Grant (JAG) Program awarded the Norfolk County Sheriff's Office (NCSO) a grant to implement *Reentry Programming Enhancement* (RPE), a step-down from medium security to a minimum/pre-release reentry program for male inmates at the Norfolk County Correctional Center.¹ NCSO houses the program at the Dedham Alternative Center (DAC), a separate housing facility on the NCSO grounds. The EOPS Research and Policy Analysis Division conducted a process evaluation of RPE to document lessons learned in developing a step-down pre-release reentry program, give research-based feedback to the NCSO, and inform future Byrne JAG grantees about options and best practices to consider when developing similar types of reentry programs. This process evaluation covers the development and first two years of RPE's implementation and does not measure the program's effectiveness in reducing recidivism and improving an inmate's success as he re-enters the community.

NCSO was constructed as a 302-bed facility in Dedham, Massachusetts with 374 employees. NCSO has experienced a steady rise in inmates from 2002 to present. The average fiscal year census in 2002 totaled 480 inmates and 644 inmates in 2006. This equals a 34 percent increase in the inmate population. In October 2006, the average daily inmate count for the month was 725. Inmates had an average sentence length of

14.7 months in 2005. This represents a 51.5 percent increase in the average correctional center sentence from 2004. For FY 2006, NCSO classified nine percent of inmates to minimum security, 79 percent of inmates to medium security, and 12 percent of inmates to maximum security.

The report first discusses the elements of RPE and its operations. Next, it looks at staff and inmate perspectives and peer-evaluated research related to reentry and effective programming for inmates and compares this research to RPE. Finally, the report discusses the strengths of the program, areas for improvement, and recommendations made on ways to improve RPE.

Five EOPS staff members reviewed a portfolio of 25 Byrne-funded programs to determine the candidates for process evaluations. EOPS selected the RPE project because it met five important criteria: 1) the project has measurable and ambitious objectives, 2) it addresses reentry, which is an EOPS priority program area, 3) it has the potential to inform future EOPS grantees about effective program practices and operations, 4) the amount of the grant exceeded the EOPS pre-determined minimum threshold of \$100,000 for evaluating grantees, and 5) the NCSO was agreeable to being part of a process evaluation.

¹ Female inmates at MCI Framingham were originally to be served by RPE, but later removed from the project because of low enrollment and logistics. These women are now served by a separate program. NCSO also initially intended to serve male repeat offenders as part of RPE, but that changed and identified repeat offenders are served through the Repeat Offender Reentry Initiative.

Definitions of Key Abbreviations

Norfolk County Sheriff's Office (NCSO) is the implementing agency that developed the step-down reentry program called Reentry Programming Enhancement.

Reentry Programming Enhancement (RPE) is the name of the step-down reentry program developed by NCSO.

Dedham Alternative Center (DAC) is the name of the housing facility where NCSO operates RPE.

III. Elements of Reentry Programming Enhancement

Reentry Programming Enhancement is an offender reentry program created by NCSO to address gaps in housing, community service, and programming needs of inmates before their release into the community.² By addressing these needs NCSO hopes to improve inmates' transition to the community and increase the likelihood for reentry success. The program seeks to match inmates' housing classification and risk/needs assessment with appropriate housing and programming for inmates reclassified from medium security to a minimum/pre-release status. In essence, NCSO is "stepping-down" inmates from medium security to a recently reopened housing facility on its grounds called the DAC. This step-down process is intended to prepare inmates for reentry to the community.

² Before implementing RPE, NCSO released a limited number of eligible inmates to the community through the Electronic Incarceration Program, where inmates could participate in some transitional opportunities at the NCSO Correctional Center and the Community Correction Center, but a minimum/pre-release option did not exist.

NCSO developed RPE with input from corrections research and the expertise of its staff. RPE is intended to be a markedly different experience for inmates as they near their return to the community compared to inmates housed in the NCSO main facility who do not participate in this program. Key differences between RPE and the main facility include a lower security level, special programming, and participation in community service activities.

Program developers at NCSO based *Reentry Programming Enhancement* in part on the *Delaware Key/Crest Program* and reentry research from the National Institute of Corrections and Crime and Justice Institute. The *Delaware Key/Crest Program* is a three-phase, substance abuse program for criminal offenders consisting of 12 months of residential substance abuse and behavior modification programs followed by six months of a therapeutic community work-release and then six more months of aftercare programs. Research suggests that the work-release aspect and the link to follow-up treatment in the community may be the most influential parts of the program (Mathias 1995).

The Crime and Justice Institute research focuses on best practices in offender reentry and implementation of these practices within an existing organization. Their research findings largely advocate for: 1) evidence-based reentry practices, 2) organizational development, and 3) collaboration as a tool to move toward more successful reentry and reduced recidivism. Organizational development enables organizations to implement evidence-based practices by changing the culture of the organization and collaboration among public safety agencies and community-based organizations increases the range of services provided

(Joplin, Bogue, Campbell, Carey, Clawson, Faust, Florio, Wasson, and Woodward 2004).

Elements of Reentry Programming Enhancement Include:

- Standardized Assessment
- Appropriate Classification
- Programming
- Community Service
- Research

Assessment Tools

Research indicates that standardized assessment can help with the referral of inmates to appropriate programming (Serin 2005). In order to institute standardized risk/needs assessment and objective classification, NCSO invested in two software applications. With a grant from the National Institute of Corrections, in 2004 NCSO purchased an objective classification tool, JICS – *Jail Inmate Classification System*. NCSO also invested in a new computerized risk/needs assessment tool, COMPAS – *Correctional Offender Management Profiling for Alternative Sanctions*. To ensure compatibility with NCSO’s existing records management system, IMATS - *Inmate Management and Tracking System*, these new software changes were made at the same time.

Classification

Within 72 hours of arrival, inmates receive an initial classification by a caseworker using JICS, and are reclassified using JICS every 60 days. JICS identifies the most appropriate security level for each inmate upon arrival at NCSO and maintains a record of each inmate’s classification over time. JICS also has analytical capabilities and can provide system-level information on offender classification.

Classification is completed by using the output from the JICS program along with input from the NCSO Classification Committee (for inmates housed less than 120 days) or the Transition Planning Committee (for inmates housed 120 days and longer). Although NCSO is primarily a medium security facility, it has three security levels to which inmates are classified (see Table 1).³ In addition to a minimum security classification, transfer to the DAC also requires approval by the Director of Classification.

Table 1. Security Level, Location, and Percent of Inmate Population

Security Level	Location	Percent of Inmate Population in FY 2006
Maximum	NCSO Main Facility	12%
Medium	NCSO Main Facility	79%
Minimum / Pre-release	NCSO Main Facility and DAC	9%

Risk/Needs Assessment

Research indicates the importance of identifying and treating the criminogenic needs of inmates. When inmates’ risks and needs are assessed correctly and the appropriate programs are provided, the inmates and the institution benefit (Bonta and Cormier 1999). NCSO uses the COMPAS Risk Assessment to assess an inmate’s risk for recidivism and his programming needs.⁴ COMPAS identifies an inmate’s overall risk potential for violence, recidivism, failure to appear, and community non-compliance. COMPAS also creates a criminogenic needs profile for each inmate (see Appendix 1 for a

³ The three security levels have further subdivisions.

⁴ One or more criminal justice agencies in the following states use or are pilot testing COMPAS for risk/needs assessment: Colorado, Indiana, and New York.

list of the criminogenic needs measured by COMPAS). Since October 2005, NCSO has used COMPAS for inmates who have been classified to the DAC. NCSO may look to expand the use of COMPAS for all inmates admitted for 120 days or longer.

The COMPAS output report indicates whether an inmate is deemed as low, medium, or high risk for violence, recidivism, failure to appear, or community non-compliance. In addition, the output report also gives a low, medium, or high score for all of the criminogenic and needs factors. Case workers then mandate program participation that will best address the risks and needs of the inmate according to the COMPAS output.

Housing

As part of the effort to step offenders down from medium to minimum/pre-release status, NCSO uses a separate and secure housing facility existing on the NCSO grounds, the Dedham Alternative Center. The DAC started housing RPE inmates in September 2004. As the DAC opened, NCSO classified 48 offenders there. As of November 2006, NCSO has increased the number of inmates housed at DAC to 84, with plans to increase the number to 112 in the near future. The DAC has dormitory style sleeping rooms for inmates, a classroom, a security office, several offices for staff, and a common space for programming, meals, and free time. Using a stand-alone facility aligns well with the *Delaware Key/Crest Program*, one of the programs on which RPE was based, by creating a separate therapeutic community for inmates.

Programming

Pre- and post-correctional programs are critical components of the reentry process. DAC offers substance abuse programs, therapeutic life skills programs, and some

educational programs (see Appendix 2 for a list of programs offered at the NCSO main facility and the DAC). The goal is to offer programming that meets the needs of individuals housed at the DAC, based on COMPAS assessments. As inmates transition from medium security to minimum/pre-release, they sign individual classification contracts that detail mandatory program requirements in order to remain at the DAC.

Community Service

Inmates at the DAC not serving mandatory sentences are eligible to leave the DAC facility during the day to participate in community service activities throughout the County. Thirty-three inmates take part in community service from 8:30am-2:00pm each day. Community service includes activities such as highway trash removal and painting public schools.

NCSO Research Capabilities

A fifth element of the RPE program integrates a researcher into the design, implementation, and monitoring of the program. Enhancing the research capabilities allows NCSO to make interim management changes, track progress, and ensure that the program operates according to best practices.

The main elements of RPE – standardized assessment, housing, programming, community service, and research – are intended to increase the chances for successful reentry for participating inmates. This process evaluation will look at what the national research shows about these elements and whether NCSO is implementing the program as compared to the original design.

IV. Research Methodology

This EOPS process evaluation examined the extent to which NCSO is achieving its goals in the development and implementation phases of *Reentry Programming Enhancement*. As a first step, EOPS developed a logic model to map RPE's goals, activities, and projected outcomes to ensure that the process evaluation addressed every one of the program's goals as identified in NCSO's original application (see Figure 1).

For example, the first column in the logic model shows that one of the program goals is "to better understand risk/needs assessment in order to meet reentry needs of offenders." The next set of columns then describes the activity intended to help achieve this goal: the use of COMPAS. The EOPS evaluation tools for this goal include reviewing COMPAS records and interviewing staff. Finally, the anticipated outcome for each goal is listed. In the case of the first goal, the anticipated outcome is that "properly assessed offender will receive the appropriate programming to help reduce recidivism."

The research design for this process evaluation comprised the following four activities:

1. **Literature review** of the key elements and characteristics of reentry and correctional programs to provide a basis for comparison with RPE.
2. **Document review** of RPE materials including output reports from risk/needs assessment and classification software, classification contracts (i.e., a contract signed by an inmate that mandates their programming at DAC), and transition plans (i.e., an inmate's housing and aftercare program plan).
3. **Interviews** were conducted with NCSO administrators, corrections officers, and program staff who are involved with RPE. These interviews contributed to understanding the background for RPE, the assessment and classification processes, the changes made in the program goals from year one to year two, implementation successes and challenges, staff perceptions of the program, and lessons learned.
4. **Focus groups** with inmates participating in the program. EOPS conducted focus groups on-site at the NCSO with a sample of inmates who are housed at the DAC. The focus groups covered topics such as inmates' perceptions of their environment at the DAC, the programming, community-service opportunities, and whether the program impacted their chances for a successful reentry.

Figure 1: Logic Model for NCSO Process Evaluation

Program Goals	Activity/Resource			Output (Year 1)	EOPS Evaluation Tool	Anticipated Outcome
	Planned Year 1 (2004)	Actual Year 1 (2004-05)	Planned Year 2 (2005)			
Better understand Risk/Needs Assessment in order to meet reentry needs of offenders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct risk/needs assessment for all offenders 	Same as Planned Year 1	Same as Planned Year 1	COMPAS applied to all offenders who are incarcerated for 4 months or longer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Record review of COMPAS reports and COMPAS implementation meeting minutes if available Record review of COMPAS materials Interview Director of Classification 	Properly assessed offenders will receive the appropriate programming to help reduce recidivism
Improve chances for reentry success by stepping down inmates to minimum pre-release	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Classify up to 48 inmates 	Classified approximately 60 inmates to the DAC by 12/1/2004	Same as Planned Year 1	Inmates stepped down to minimum pre-release status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Record review of files, output reports Inmate focus groups Literature review of standardized assessment Interview: Director of Classification, CO's 	Inmates who gradually take on more responsibility through pre-release are better prepared for reentry and recidivism is reduced
Use programming to prepare inmates for successful reentry into the community, with the intent of reducing recidivism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement education classes in life skills, substance abuse and health issues Implement groundwork crews and community service work Conduct discharge planning and assistance with legal matters 	Same as Planned Year 1	Same as Planned Year 1	Classes conducted and services provided	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interview: Director of Classification, DAC Staff Inmate focus groups Record review of COMPAS reports and transition plans Literature review of correctional programming 	Inmates receive essential tools, resources, and life skills necessary for successful reintegration into society
Enhance research capabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hire Research Analyst Develop performance measures, recommend best practices for data collection, provide feedback on modifications to program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hired Research Analyst Monitors inmate population census Coordinates and analyzes NCSO data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collect data Assure that program operates according to best practices Provide information to management on reentry needs and trends 	Analyst hired to set up database and track performance measures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interview: Director of Classification, Research Analyst Record reviews of reports to management 	Effectiveness of <i>Reentry Programming Enhancement</i> is ensured and program alterations are made on a timely basis
Hire qualified staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hire staff including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Release Preparation Coordinator Contractors to provide programming and conduct risk assessments Research Analyst Caseworker 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hired following staff: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Release Preparation Coordinator Contractors to provide programming and conduct risk assessments Research Analyst Caseworker 	Not Applicable in Year 2	Staff hired	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interview: Director of Classification, DAC staff Record reviews of job descriptions 	Increased number of qualified staff improve success of <i>Reentry Programming Enhancement</i>

V. Staff and Inmate Perspectives

This section presents feedback from staff interviews and inmate focus groups regarding RPE. Inmates were asked to talk about their housing classification, programming, and community service. Staff were asked to talk about these topics, in addition to their work responsibilities and experiences.

Housing

Interviews with staff and focus groups with inmates indicated that while the separate housing facility was beneficial for a pre-release setting, the physical design of the facility impacted the programming and inmate activities. Several staff interviewees stated that they feel there is a need for more classroom space for programming. Currently, the DAC has one classroom that can hold approximately 12 to 15 people and a large communal room adjacent to the building entrance that may be used for programming. Many interviewees viewed the large communal room to be ineffective because of distractions, noise, and the difficulty inmates have staying attentive to lessons in that space.

Other interviewees pointed out the difficulty involved with operating a housing unit with multiple entrances. These interviewees described security and contraband issues related to multiple entrances; specifically, keeping the DAC free of items such as cigarettes has proved difficult.

According to many inmates, one of the benefits of being housed at the DAC is that the environment is much less stressful than that of the main facility. Spending a significant amount of time outside of individual cells and in the common area and the opportunity to go outside of the facility

both were said to improve the overall quality of daily life. However, many inmates thought that the DAC did not match their expectations and that it was not “pre-release enough.”

Inmates mentioned several issues that in their opinion conflicted with the primary goal of improving the chances of a successful reentry. For example, some inmates suggested that work-release opportunities, rather than community service opportunities, would increase their interaction with the community, might allow them to develop some job skills, and possibly increase their chances of establishing post-release employment. In addition, some inmates claimed that recreation time at the DAC was less than that at the main facility. Increasing the amount of “rec time” would, in their mind, enhance the minimum security/pre-release experience. NCSO staff indicated that each housing unit may define “rec time” differently, and the duration of recreation time depends upon the level of programming that inmates receive. RPE’s more structured schedule requires inmates to engage in programs and therefore have less recreation time outside.

Notably, some NCSO staff made similar comments to those of the inmates related to the extent to which the DAC was truly a pre-release facility. The issues of increased recreation time and work release opportunities were mentioned by some of the NCSO staff members.

Programming

Both NCSO staff and inmates were asked their opinions regarding the programming at the DAC. Several inmates believed that there were actually fewer program opportunities at the DAC than at the main facility. In addition, a few individuals stated that they were not able to continue programs

that they had started at the main facility after they had been transferred to the DAC. The perception about limited program opportunities at the DAC relative to the main facility was the most frequently mentioned issue by focus group participants.

Focus groups with inmates generally suggested that they like the programs currently being offered at the DAC and thought that these programs were worthwhile. Although, inmates expressed an interest in additional programs related to job skills and education. Most of the education programs currently consist of basic financial skills and computer skills.

NCSO has stated that an increasing number of inmates present with substance abuse problems (76.6% in FY 2006). To address this need, staff suggested implementing special programming to target the substance abuse needs of younger inmates. NCSO staff also supported the notion of increasing programming at the DAC not just for the purpose of increasing the chances of successful reentry but also, and in their minds more importantly, to keep inmates busy and limit the amount of “idle time” at the pre-release facility. Specific recommendations made by one or more staff members include:

- Offer programming that is a continuation of the programs offered at the medium security facility, education classes in particular,
- Increase the amount of time spent in programs to reduce the inmates’ idle time,
- Improve the physical space for the DAC to allow for a better classroom setting for programming, and
- Design program plans that are tailored to meet the specific risks and needs of individual inmates.

Community Service

As discussed earlier in this report, some inmates in the focus groups expressed a preference for programs that allowed them to develop or enhance marketable work skills through work-release opportunities. Inmates also said they would favor work-release opportunities where they may be paid for their labor, rather than the community service opportunities. However, several inmates still had a favorable attitude toward the current community service opportunities and were grateful for the chance to be in the community and outside of the DAC.

Staffing

NCSO hired new staff and transferred some existing staff members from the main facility to accommodate the additional staff needs at the DAC. Positions associated with RPE include a Reentry Planning Coordinator, a Caseworker, Correctional Officers, a Unit Manager, and a Research Analyst. During the interviews, a few staff members commented on the fact that RPE represents a new approach and philosophy to reentry at NCSO and indicated that they would like to be more informed about the overall plan and vision for the DAC and *Reentry Programming Enhancement*. There was one suggestion to dedicate one individual as a full-time unit manager who could communicate “big picture issues” related to the DAC and be available at the DAC to handle day-to-day management issues.

Almost all NCSO staff are accustomed to working with inmates in a medium-security setting. However, many of the staff members have little to no experience working in a minimum/pre-release setting. Several interviewees expressed an interest in training and professional development opportunities associated with working at the DAC. Some believed that training on the differences between the main facility and the

minimum/pre-release facility and how those differences impacted staff/inmate interactions and daily facility operations would be beneficial. Training staff at the DAC as to the differences involved with the mission of the RPE and how it differs from the main facility at NCSO would benefit the DAC environment.

The daily population at the DAC has risen steadily since the unit first opened its doors over a year ago, from 48 inmates in September 2004 to 84 offenders as of November 2006. (This number will increase to 112 in the near future.) The number of inmates at the DAC is more than double its initially proposed size in terms of daily inmate population. Additional increases in the inmate population at the DAC will put further demands on staff, as the staff size has not increased.

VI. Best Practices

This section discusses best practices identified by research on inmate housing, principles and components of correctional programming, community service for inmates, and research involvement in correctional programming.

Housing

Appropriate housing that can separate minimum/pre-release inmates from the general population can play an important part in a reentry program. Manageability and functionality should be the basis for the design of inmate housing. Housing units designed to control for distracting, background noise can help enhance inmate/staff communication (Smith 1993).

As stated earlier, the *Delaware Key/Crest Program* is a three-phase substance abuse program for inmates that incorporates 12 months of residential treatment in a separate housing facility followed by work release

and post-release programming in the community. However, the first phase focuses on separation of inmates from the general population where they can learn to help themselves and one another to change their negative behavior (Mathias 1995). By creating housing separate from the general inmate population, inmates can focus on their programming and issues related to their reentry.

Programming

A significant body of research exists on the effectiveness of programs that are conducted in a correctional facility. Research on this topic can generally be grouped into one of two categories: characteristics about the nature of the programs, and actual program content. Many, but not all, of the programming-related suggestions by NCSO staff and inmates are in line with the research. The following sections describe what the research says are “best practices” and compares these with RPE.

Key Principles of Correctional Programs

It is well documented that programs that target dynamic risk factors of individuals, also referred to as criminogenic needs, are the most effective programs (Bonta and Cormier 1999). A literature review of research articles identified principles of effective programs. Gaes, Flanagan, Motiuk, and Stewart (1999) identified eight key principles of correctional treatment. The following list is a brief summary of those principles.

- 1. Criminogenic Needs.** Programs should address such things as pro-criminal attitudes, pro-criminal associates, impulsivity, weak socialization, below average verbal intelligence, risk seeking, weak problem solving and self control skills, early onset of antisocial behavior, poor parental practices, and deficits in

educational, vocational, and employment skills.

2. **Multimodal Programs.** Programs should treat all the criminogenic deficits of an inmate. Inmates often have multiple deficits and therefore are at an increased risk of recidivism. Addressing only one or two deficits for an inmate with many deficits reduces a program's effectiveness.
3. **Responsivity.** Program administrators should consider the learning styles of inmates and match those with the teaching styles of the staff.
4. **Risk Differentiation.** Programs should target the higher-risk inmates, who have the most needs and are more likely to benefit from programs than lower-risk inmates.
5. **Skills-Oriented and Cognitive-Behavioral Treatments.** Program administrators should teach social learning principles and skills that help individuals resist anti-social behavior.
6. **Implementation and Continuity of Care.** There should be coordination between correctional programs and aftercare programs. Programs that started in a correctional facility will be more effective if they are continued after release.
7. **Dosage.** Although there is limited research that specifically addresses the issue of dosage (i.e., exactly how much programming is the right amount of programming), it is generally agreed that programs should be of sufficient duration.

8. **Researcher Involvement.** When researchers are involved in program development, implementation, and evaluation, programs have been found to be more effective. Examples of how researchers can be beneficial include: designing programs that are based in best practices, enhancing the integrity of implementation, tracking progress to help make "mid-course corrections," and evaluating whether the programming is working as intended.

Targeting dynamic risk factors, or criminogenic needs, should be the focus of programming that attempts to follow current best practices. In addition to these eight principles, Andrews, Zinger, Hoge, Bonta, Gendreau, and Cullen (1990) suggest that programs that focus on reducing chemical dependency and increase rewards for non-criminal activity in home, school, and work may all help reduce motivation to commit crime by giving the inmate more to lose by choosing to be involved in criminal activity.

Table 2 indicates the extent to which RPE upholds and aligns with the eight principles that Gaes, et al. (1999), identify as key to effective correctional programming.

Table 2. Comparison of Key Principles of Correctional Programs from Gaes, et al. (1999), and *Reentry Programming Enhancement*

Principles of Effective Programs	RPE
<p>1. Criminogenic Needs: Intervention efforts must be linked to criminogenic characteristics</p>	<p>NCSO uses the COMPAS Risk/Needs Assessment tool to determine an inmate's criminogenic needs. NCSO then mandates programming according to this risk/needs assessment. It is unclear the extent to which RPE targets criminogenic needs.</p>
<p>2. Multimodal Programs: All criminogenic deficits should be treated</p>	<p>NCSO seeks to meet the needs of inmates by objectively assessing their risks and needs, but the limited menu of programs cannot meet the needs of all inmates residing at the DAC. NCSO attempts to satisfy this principle by offering more than one program to inmates.</p>
<p>3. Responsivity: Program instructors should match client learning styles with staff teaching styles</p>	<p>There has not been special effort to test individual inmates and gear classes towards particular learning styles. For example, making classes more visual and less text oriented for visual learners.</p>
<p>4. Risk Differentiation: Higher risk clients are more likely to benefit from treatment than lower-risk clients; the highest level of treatment intensity should be used for highest risk clients</p>	<p>NCSO conducts a risk/needs assessment to determine inmates' risks and needs and offers programs to each inmate based on the results of their assessment. Although, RPE is focused on low-risk inmates, and high-risk inmates are not eligible for the DAC.</p>
<p>5. Skills-Oriented and Cognitive-Behavioral Treatments: Treatment providers should use programs that teach clients skills that allow them to understand and resist antisocial behavior</p>	<p>NCSO offers classes that teach life and coping skills – “Thinking for Change” and “Coping with Loss” are classes that teach inmates how to deal with frustration and hardship in day-to-day life.</p>
<p>6. Program Implementation and Continuity of Care: Clients should be treated in well supported programs</p>	<p>Inmates cannot always maintain the programs they began at the medium security facility. This is particularly true for education classes. NCSO attempts to refer inmates released from the DAC to appropriate aftercare to continue their treatment and programming needs, but the DAC has a limited capacity to link pre-release to post-release programs.</p>
<p>7. Dosage: Interventions should be comprehensive and of sufficient duration</p>	<p>NCSO has not attempted to individualize and calibrate the length of programs to the needs of each inmate. Logistics and uncertainty around release dates make calibrating dosage difficult.</p>
<p>8. Researcher Involvement: Researchers should be involved in both program development and evaluation</p>	<p>Although NCSO reviewed research on different reentry programs, it did not involve a researcher in the development phase. Since the inception of RPE, the NCSO has attended to some of the original RPE research goals, but has placed much of their research focus on the needs of the medium security facility. Several staff members indicated that there is room for an augmented research role in RPE.</p>

Incorporating and meeting all the principles described in Table 2 is an ambitious goal, especially for any new reentry program in its early stages. However, any new reentry program in its beginning phase should use these principles to guide its development.

Key Components of Correctional Reentry Programs

Principles of correctional programming guide and shape the components, or elements, of correctional programming. The Office of Justice Programs indicates that institutionally-based correctional reentry programming should include the following: mental health treatment, substance abuse counseling, basic adult education programs, job training, batterer intervention, family counseling, and mentoring (Office of Justice Programs 2006). In its proposal, NCSO indicated that it would include many of these components in RPE.

Educational, vocational, and labor programs have shown modest effects on reducing recidivism, but have a positive effect on inmate behavior (Gaes, et al. 1999). Other research has shown that if inmates improve their reading and language skills, they are less likely to be rearrested after they are released (Piehl 2002). An analysis of evaluation results of seven in-prison basic adult education programs by the Washington State Institute for Public Policy indicates that these programs lead to a 5.1 percent drop in recidivism rates for program participants (Aos, Miller, Drake 2006).

Many DAC inmates expressed interest in taking part in education programs such as GED and college readiness classes. Staff interviewed for this study also suggested that inmates would benefit from stronger education programs. Staff expressed that most DAC inmates lacked solid reading and

writing skills and would benefit from more academic programs.

Community Service

The Reentry Policy Council advocates that correctional staff should encourage inmates to participate in community service (Reentry Policy Council 2006). Community service that helps inmates build or improve productive skills that will eventually allow them to find meaningful work is ideal. Research from The Urban Institute indicates that work opportunities and job training programs are key to placing inmates on the path to a successful reentry by giving them needed job skills and work experience (Visher, LaVigne, and Travis 2004). According to this descriptive Urban Institute study of reentry participants, inmates were more likely to work after release if they participated in work-release programs and job training prior to release.

VII. Findings

This section presents the findings from the process evaluation of *Reentry Programming Enhancement* to further encourage best practices in developing and implementing reentry programs, and to give constructive research-based feedback to NCSO. The findings from this process evaluation show that the development and implementation of the first two years of *Reentry Programming Enhancement* (RPE) generally followed NCSO's original plan, with a few exceptions. The program has some strengths from which other jurisdictions may be able to learn and benefit. NCSO should be recognized for attempting to implement a more progressive reentry process for inmates. Although, RPE does have a few areas that this evaluation finds could be improved.

Strengths

Developing and implementing RPE represents a significant change for the better in the way that NCSO considers inmate reentry. NCSO deserves recognition for conducting such an ambitious new reentry program while the correctional center underwent a large increase in inmate population. The willingness to alter the way it thinks about reentry while resources are stressed at the facility indicates a highly progressive attitude and underscores NCSO's enthusiasm for approaching reentry in a new and potentially more effective way.

The strengths of RPE are:

1. Incorporating reentry research in the development of RPE,
2. Using objective assessment to assign inmates to the most appropriate security level,
3. Using objective risk/needs assessment tool to determine inmates programming,

4. Utilizing a housing facility separate from the main facility at NCSO, and
5. Incorporating the concept of community service into the program.

In developing RPE, NCSO reviewed research literature on reentry to inform its operations. Considering best practices and research represents an important first step for correctional centers to take when developing and implementing reentry programs.

NCSO views objective classification and risk/needs assessment as important elements to managing inmates. To help uphold this goal, NCSO uses specific classification and risk/needs assessment software to assign inmates to the most appropriate security level and help determine programming. NCSO incorporated recommendations from National Institute of Corrections by purchasing software compatible with their current records management system to avoid any compatibility issues. The Reentry Policy Council suggests that databases and information systems of criminal justice agencies are often incompatible. As part of the process of streamlining software tools and maximizing their use, the Reentry Policy Council proposes addressing these software issues early on in the software implementation process (Reentry Policy Council 2006).

The community service component of RPE allows eligible inmates to leave the DAC and participate in community service around the county. An Urban Institute study cites that community plays a role in the reentry process. Community focus group participants who informed the Urban Institute study stated that the community should play a role in addressing the needs of ex-offenders (Visher, et al. 2004). This research affirms that NCSO is on the right track with RPE by having eligible DAC

inmates become involved with the community.

NCSO affirmed its commitment to more progressive and structured reentry by allocating staff and physical space to RPE. The DAC staff demonstrated a positive and open attitude by freely participating in the process evaluation and sharing their thoughts on reentry and RPE during interviews. Staff involved with the project expressed willingness to accept feedback and consider recommendations for RPE's operations. This open attitude towards welcoming research feedback into RPE bodes well for the program overall.

Areas for Improvement and Recommendations

RPE has many strong points for an early stage reentry program seeking to incorporate national best practices and evidence-based research. However, based on reviews of national research and interviews with staff and focus groups with inmates, there are several areas where NCSO could improve or enhance the program.

Work-Release/Job Training

Several studies have remarked on the benefits of work release and job training for inmates. The Washington State Institute for Public Policy stated that job training, vocational education programs and work-release have produced modest but statistically significant reductions in recidivism (Aos, et al. 2006).⁵ The Urban Institute found that inmates who took part in work-release jobs, received job training, and worked as a condition of supervision were

⁵An analysis of evaluation results of three in-prison vocational education programs conducted by the Washington State Institute for Public Policy indicates that vocational education programs lead to a 12.8 percent drop in recidivism rates for program participants.

more likely to have a job after release. Currently, RPE does not have a work-release or formal job-training component. Implementing a formal work-release component would support the tenets of the second phase of the *Delaware Key/Crest Program*.

Recommendation: Explore adding a work-release component into RPE

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Continuity of Programs Pre- and Post-Release

Research points to the important link between programs offered during incarceration and follow-up programs recommended for post-release inmates. Initial studies of the *Delaware Key/Crest Program* state that therapeutic programs during incarceration that link to follow-up programs in the community may be the most important piece of the program (Mathias 2004). This highlights the importance of programming continuity from pre-release to post-release. The Reentry Policy Council also discusses the importance of concentrating reentry resources on programs immediately before and after release (Reentry Policy Council 2006). Currently, NCSO makes an effort to recommend the appropriate programs to DAC inmates, before their release, but post-release program availability and accessibility for inmates lies outside of the control of NCSO.

Recommendation: Work to strengthen ties between the DAC staff and reentry service providers in the community.

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Continuity of Programs across Security Levels

Interviews with staff and focus groups with inmates also yielded information on the gaps between programs offered at the main facility

and the DAC. Some inmates and staff expressed frustration regarding the inability to complete or build upon programs started at the main facility (see Appendix 2 for a list of programs offered in both facilities).

Recommendation: Evaluate the programs offered at the DAC and try to offer programs that would allow inmates to continue and/or build upon the programmatic work that was started in the main facility.

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Availability of Educational Programming
Interviews with the staff and inmate focus groups indicated that everyone involved would like more regular and better structured educational programming (e.g., literacy, GED). Educational programming has demonstrated lasting effects on inmates (Piehl 2002). Classes in which inmates learn and build productive skills have been shown to improve inmate behavior.

Recommendation: Increase opportunities for inmates to participate in educational programs, such as literacy and GED programs.

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More Continuity with the Principles of Effective Correctional Programming
NCSO has attempted to follow some of these principles, but could increase the effectiveness of the programming in RPE by better incorporating the principles listed by Gaes, et al. (1999).

Recommendation: Determine where the RPE programs do not correspond to the principles of effective correctional programming and address the gaps.

Aligning RPE programs with the principles of effective correctional programs will be a

long process, but the principles will serve as a good guide to improving and strengthening the RPE programs.

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Research

As part of their guiding principles on effective correctional programming, Gaes, et al. (1999), highlight researcher involvement with program development and execution. From the beginning, NCSO intended to incorporate an active research component in RPE that included researchers making observations at the DAC and determining the progress of RPE. Through staff interviews, it became clear that the research staff faces demands that go beyond RPE. The research staff is not exclusively engaged with the RPE program at NCSO, despite the original goals of RPE.

Recommendation: Encourage NCSO’s research staff to focus more directly on the day-to-day needs of DAC and to have a more regular presence at the DAC.

Recommendation: Encourage NCSO’s research staff to continue to collect information on national evidence-based reentry programming and compare the research to RPE.

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Staffing

Talking with the staff at the DAC, it became clear that they are committed to helping inmates successfully reenter the community. Hiring staff dedicated to the philosophy of reentry and the mission of the reentry program is essential if an organization wants to change the way it manages reentry.

Interviews with staff indicated that while NCSO offered training on the software application for objective classification and standardized risk/needs assessment, there

was no special training or instruction on reentry in general for staff working at the DAC. Staff should have special training or experience in working with pre-release inmates and issues. This will help foster a distinction between the DAC and the main facility at NCSO. Conversations with staff also pointed toward a general lack of communication related to the overall plans and vision for RPE and the DAC. Cross-training staff could also help bolster communication between staff involved in various phases of the reentry process. Research from the Reentry Policy Council supports the following recommendations:

Recommendation: Communicate routinely with NCSO staff regarding the issues on which the management team is focusing.

Recommendation: Cross-train staff working at different units or organizations who work as part of the same reentry process.

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DAC Facility

Throughout the staff interviews and within the inmate focus groups, the topic of the DAC's physical structure came up regularly. Both staff and inmates suggested that using the large main room for programs was distracting and not conducive to learning.

Recommendation: Increase and improve the classroom space. Classroom/program space should be conducive to learning and aim to minimize distractions.

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EOPS conducted this process evaluation during the development and early implementation phase of RPE and it does not reflect RPE's potential impact on reducing recidivism among the inmates who participate in the program. NCSO has indicated a plan to increase the number of inmates taking part in RPE. Further study is required to determine the optimum number of inmates who should participate in the program and the length of stay for each inmate participating in RPE.

Further Reading: Reentry Policy Council Report

This process evaluation and resulting report focus on *Reentry Programming Enhancement*, the program NCSO set forth to facilitate more successful reentry for inmates at the Norfolk County Correctional Center. There are other issues to take into account when developing and implementing a reentry program. The Reentry Policy Council has outlined the necessary elements and factors for any correctional center or supporting organization to consider as it begins a reentry program for its jurisdiction. The 35 relevant policy statements and the subsequent recommendations outlined in The Reentry Policy Council's report offer sound advice from start to finish when developing a reentry program. Their full report may be viewed at www.reentrypolicy.org.

Appendix 1

The COMPAS Risk/Needs assessment identifies the following:

- Criminal History Factors
 - Criminal Involvement
 - History of Non-Compliance
 - History of Violence
 - Current Violence
- Criminal Associates Peers
- Needs Assessment
 - Substance Abuse
 - Financial Problems/Poverty
 - Vocational/Education Problems
- Criminal Attitudes
 - Criminal Thinking
- Social Environment
 - Family Criminality
 - Social Environment
 - Leisure and Recreation
 - Residential Instability
 - Social Adjustment Problems
- Higher Order Factors
 - Socialization Failure
 - Criminal Opportunity
 - Criminal Personality
 - Social Isolation

Appendix 2

The following table compares the programs offered at the NCSO main facility and the DAC. The list of programs was provided by NCSO.

Programs Offered at NCSO	
NCSO Main Facility	DAC
Adult Basic Education	Anger Management
Addictions Group / Men's Health	Career Development
Advanced Computers	Computer Free Time
Anger Management	Financial Literacy
Computer Lab	Life Skills
Critical Thinking	Recovery Literature
CT Computers	Relapse Prevention
Domestic Relations Program	Spiritual Toolkit
Employability Skills	Thinking for Change
GED	
HVAC	
Introduction to Computers	
MV Offender Group	
PC- Sex Offender Treatment Group	
Pre-GED	
Special Education	
TABE Testing (literacy)	
U. S. History Through Film	

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