



**Transition Planning for Homeless Persons  
Leaving Local Jails Initiative in Austin/Travis County, Texas  
September 10<sup>th</sup>, 2012**

**PROJECT PARTICIPANTS/ INFORMERS:**

A New Entry  
ARCH/Front Steps  
Austin Police Department  
Austin Travis County  
Integral Care  
A/TC Reentry Roundtable  
Caritas  
Catholic Diocese of Austin  
City of Austin Health & Human Services  
Downtown Austin Alliance  
Downtown Austin  
Community Court  
ECHO  
Family Eldercare  
Goodwill of Central Texas  
Healthcare for Homeless Veterans (VA)  
NAMI Austin  
SafePlace  
Salvation Army  
Travis State Jail Advisory Committee  
TC Adult Probation  
TC Commitment to Change  
TC Criminal Justice Planning  
TC District Attorney's Office  
TC Health & Human Services & Veterans Services  
TC Inside Out  
TC Mental Health Public Defenders Office  
TC Sheriff's Office/Jail  
TDCJ-Parole  
TDCJ Travis State Jail  
TDCJ-Reentry and Reintegration  
UT at Austin (Dr. David Kirk)  
Turning Point (Travis State Jail)

**JANUARY-AUGUST  
2012**

**Homelessness has a major impact on the Travis County Jail:**

- Between October 2006 and June 2009, there were **6,473 unduplicated homeless persons** booked into jail 15,813 times and who utilized 284,719 jail bed days that **cost the jail \$4,133,787.\***
- 2,539 of these persons had two or more bookings.\*
- 23% of all rebooked mentally ill persons in the study were homeless.\*
- On 01-22-12, there were 370 homeless persons in the Travis County Jail.\*\*

*\*Travis County Jail Population Management Initiative;  
Data Analysis by Justice Policy Center of the Urban Institute, Nov. 2009  
\*\*Austin Point in Time Count/ECHO*

**KEY FINDINGS OF PROJECT:**

There is currently some reentry planning services happening for homeless persons prior to leaving the Travis County Jail and TDCJ-Travis State Jail but there are significant gaps in the number being served and homelessness is not a specific trigger for service planning.

There has not been a full analysis of the impact of homelessness or service needs at our local jails due to relevant data not being collected and/or the lack of system technology or enough resources in place that would allow information to be captured and analyzed.

All informers and partners in the project report a significant need for housing resources for persons leaving these facilities.

There are gaps in information and lack of partnerships regarding available resources and referral services to help jail-based reentry planning for homeless persons.

*Factors that lead to homelessness include frequent institutionalization of individuals with mental illness and substance abuse problems, inadequate pre-release preparation, insufficient resources for safe, affordable, and stable housing, and creation of laws that specifically target homeless persons.*

*Best Practice Review Finding*

**KEY RECOMMENDATIONS:**

**Explore the development of an effective homeless services coordinated information and referral system** that will allow the creation of appropriate transition plans and referrals at jail release.

**Provide resources in jails to ensure transition planning services** for persons who have a history of homelessness or substantial risk of homelessness prior to their release.

**Establish more formal working relationships between community-based providers and local jails** to ensure sustained relationships and effective coordination as well as set accountability measures and goals.

**Develop/enhance strategies that will help connect homeless persons to effective services and housing options upon release** including supportive housing (permanent, transitional and recovery housing options) as well as reunification with families and utilization of affordable market housing units.

## PROJECT OVERVIEW

This project was co-sponsored by the **Austin/Travis County Reentry Roundtable (A/TCRR)**<sup>1</sup>, a local collaboration that promotes effective reentry and reintegration of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated persons, and the **Ending Community**

### Goal of Initiative:

To develop recommendations for enhancing transition planning for homeless persons leaving the Travis County Jail and Texas Department of Criminal Justice—Travis Unit (Travis State Jail)

**Homelessness Coalition (ECHO)**, our local HUD Continuum of Care entity and non-profit homeless planning organization<sup>2</sup>. More than forty persons representing twenty-five organizations participated in this project. Information about what is currently happening around reentry planning in general from the **Travis County Jail and the TDCJ-Travis State Jail** was collected with a special focus on what services were provided for homeless persons. In addition a national best practice review was completed by Dr. David Kirk, UT at Austin (School of Sociology) and PhD Candidate Carmen Gutierrez. Partners were engaged in March 2012 and

agreed on work plan and processes. A work session held over two days occurred in May 2012 where all information gathered was reported and ideas for how to enhance what we are currently doing were discussed. A small work group was formed to draft a final document summarizing the work and recommendations. A final partner meeting was held in June 2012 to reach consensus on key findings and recommendations and the work group created an action plan for next steps.

## KEY FINDINGS

### Findings from What is Currently Happening Now Report:

- While there is some reentry planning services happening for homeless persons prior to leaving the local jails, there are significant gaps in the number being served and homelessness is not a specific trigger for service planning.
- Neither the Travis County Jail nor TDCJ-Travis State Jail has a relationship (informal or formal) with any homeless shelter or homeless service provider.
- Typically, when homeless persons exit the Travis County Jail, they normally do not receive buses passes or direct transportation services. Homeless persons released from the TDJC-Travis State Jail will be transported by TDCJ and dropped off near the downtown homeless shelters.
- There are gaps in information about available community-based services for homeless offenders being released from these jails to make appropriate referrals or continuity of care plans for persons being released from both correctional settings.
- Because homelessness information at both jails is not systemically collected or analyzed about these persons, we do

### Current Formal Reentry Planning Services at Local Jails:

#### TDCJ-Travis State Jail:

Commitment to Change; TDCJ-Reentry Coordinator; TC Inside Out

#### Travis County Jail:

Goodwill Peer Support; TC Mental Health Public Defender's Office; TC Reentry Specialist (newly created position)

### Impact/Cost of Homelessness on Travis County Jail:

Between Oct. 2006 and June 2009, 6,473 unique homeless persons were booked into jail 15,813 times and who utilized 284,719 jail bed days:

15,813 bookings x \$175/booking=	\$2,767,275
284,719 jail days x \$48/day=	\$1,366,512
<b>TOTAL JAIL COSTS:</b>	<b>\$4,133,787</b>

*Travis County Jail Population Management Initiative; Data Analysis by Justice Policy Center of the Urban Institute, Nov. 2009*

not have a clear understanding of how homelessness impacts these facilities. However, one study of the jail population in Travis County Jail in 2009 by the Urban Institute, found that there were 6,473 unique homeless persons booked into jail 15,813 times utilizing 284,719 jail bed days

<sup>1</sup> [www.reentryroundtable.org](http://www.reentryroundtable.org)

<sup>2</sup> [www.austinecho.org](http://www.austinecho.org)

TRANSITION PLANNING FOR HOMELESS PERSONS LEAVING LOCAL JAILS

between October 2006 and June 2009 that cost the jail \$4,133,787.

- Few community based service providers offering services in these jails have formal working agreements jeopardizing continuity of services or development of agreed upon accountability measures to help monitor impact of our work on preventing homelessness at release.
- There is clearly a lack of housing and income stability resources to serve all persons leaving these jails but making housing connections and income stability planning for persons who have a history of homelessness and gaps in employment to help sustain/pay for housing at release is more problematic.

**Findings from Best Practices Review:**

- Factors that lead to homelessness include frequent institutionalization of individuals with mental illness and substance abuse problems, inadequate pre-release preparation, insufficient resources for safe, affordable, and stable housing, concentrated relocation to metropolitan areas, and creation of laws that specifically target homeless persons.
- Most transition jail planning programs have not been rigorously evaluated.
- Planning and intervention services should begin while in jail but continue in the community with linkages to appropriate services.
- There were two broad transition planning models identified: Transition from Jails to Community (TCJ)<sup>3</sup> and the Assess, Plan, Identify, Coordinate (APIC) Model (which is a model for planning for persons with co-occurring disorders<sup>4</sup>).
  - Each model advocates for coordination and collaboration between jails and community support organizations to enhance transition planning; this includes information sharing and data integration.
  - These models also articulate setting standards, expectations, and accountability as key to implementing collaboration.
- Many communities have proposed transition programs that include a “one-stop shop” of services after release which could allow for integrated and ongoing planning post-release in the community but few have implemented this strategy.
- Strategies to help divert persons who are mentally ill or have co-occurring conditions from jails is important to reduce utilization of correctional settings and increase likelihood that they will be linked to community-based services.
- There are many transition planning programs/projects in jails across the U.S. but few target homelessness as a standalone factor. Those who do will target homeless persons with mental illness, substance abuse issues, or other special needs that make them more vulnerable and often lead to chronic offending.<sup>5</sup>

**Challenges to Transition Planning from Jails Include:**

Lack of time, lack of accountability, lack of standardized practice, lack of adequate training, lack of data sharing, financing, planning must be tailored to community characteristics, relapse, eviction prevention, stigma and discrimination.

**KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ENHANCING TRANSITION PLANNING FROM TRAVIS COUNTY JAIL AND TDCJ-TRAVIS STATE JAIL**

- 1. Explore the development of an effective homeless services coordinated information and referral system that will allow the creation of appropriate transition plans and referrals at jail release:**
  - a. Connect local jails/transition service providers to the current exploratory efforts led by ECHO; and

<sup>3</sup> A project of the National Institute of Corrections and the Urban Institute: <http://nicic.gov/JailTransition>

<sup>4</sup> A model encouraged by the Gains Center: <http://gains.prainc.com/pdfs/reentry/apic.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Frequent User of Jail projects identified including in New York City, Hennepin County, and Washington D.C.

**TRANSITION PLANNING FOR HOMELESS PERSONS LEAVING LOCAL JAILS**

- b. Explore how current “centers” could be better utilized now to provide emergency transition services or links to services for homeless persons released from these jails without a transition plan including: ARCH, Salvation Army, PES/The Inn, Downtown Austin Community Court, Community or Neighborhood Centers (City and County), and/or 2-1-1.

**2. Provide resources in jail to ensure transition planning services for persons who have a history of homelessness or substantial risk of homelessness prior to their release including but not limited to:**

- a. Increase transition planning services at both jails that will serve persons who were homeless prior to incarceration and/or will be homeless or at risk of homelessness at release;
- b. Develop/ utilize appropriate screening/needs assessments including development/utilization of an appropriate housing needs assessment tool;
- c. Provide intervention services while incarcerated and link homeless persons to coordinated community based services at release in a cohesive strategy; and
- d. Build capacity to provide income stability planning services that would include employment readiness and/or benefit enrollment/re-enrollment/maintenance strategies.

**3. Establish more formal working relationships between community-based providers and local jails to ensure sustained relationships and effective coordination as well as set accountability measures and goals:**

- a. With existing providers providing services now within both jails;
- b. With local homeless shelters and homeless service providers;
- c. With ECHO and the local Continuum of Care (including the Homeless Information Management System); and
- d. Develop cross or shared training opportunities with correctional staff, community based case managers and homeless service providers to expand the knowledge and information.

**4. Develop/enhance strategies that will help connect homeless persons to effective services and housing options upon release including supportive housing (permanent, transitional and recovery housing options) as well as reunification with families and utilization of affordable market housing units:**

- a. Explore development/utilization of housing specialist and/or benefit specialists to support transition planning and case management programming at these jails;
- b. Increase the supply of permanent supportive housing for frequent users of criminal justice system/jails and enhance/maximize funding for longer term transitional housing to adequately develop community intervention services including long term housing plan;
- c. Develop advocacy strategies to encourage more landlords/housing providers to reduce the barrier of criminal backgrounds;

**KEY RECOMMENDATIONS:**

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TRANSITION PLANNING FOR HOMELESS PERSONS LEAVING LOCAL JAILS

- d. Develop strategies that will increase our local capacity to provide effective behavioral health services for persons leaving these jails to enhance continuity of care services that will lead to stabilization and reduce acute crisis and repeat offending; and
- e. Explore reentry strategies in public housing that encourages family reunification.

**NEXT STEPS—FOR NEXT SIX MONTHS**

The following are key action steps that the partners have agreed to take and will provide a status update at a partner meeting in six months:

<b>KEY ACTION STEPS IN NEXT SIX MONTHS:</b>
• Share this report and key findings/recommendations with key stakeholders
• Include representatives from relevant criminal justice entities in ECHO's exploratory conversation regarding the development of a homeless services coordinated information and referral system.
• Connect local jails to ARCH and Salvation Army to determine how they can more effectively work together for transition services.
• Set up meetings with Travis County Jail and TDCJ Travis State Jail to assess how we can assist them in development of any strategies to increase transition planning services for homeless persons.
• Collect examples of existing MOUs between jails and service providers and share with jail staff to launch conversation on how we can develop more formal working agreements with community based service providers who work or are willing to work in jails.
• Host a brown bag lunch with correctional staff, probation, reentry planning case managers/specialists, behavioral health partners and homeless service providers to determine what cross or shared training opportunities they believe will help them work more effectively with each other.
• A/TC Reentry Roundtable and ECHO will reconvene stakeholders in January 2013 to update status of all recommendations for actions/next steps.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THIS INITIATIVE AND NEXT STEPS:**

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