

**FY 2014
Biennial
Report**

**Texas Department of Criminal Justice
Biennial Report of the Reentry and
Integration Division**



September 1, 2014

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Report**

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INTRODUCTION

This report contains an evaluation of data and a summary of activities completed since September of 2012 for the Reentry and Integration Division of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ). As demonstrated throughout this report, the Reentry and Integration Division has continued to grow and adopt practices which ensure effective service delivery for offenders returning to the community following incarceration. However, it should be noted that many other reentry-related programs administered by other divisions within the TDCJ and the Windham School District also contribute to reduced recidivism.

During the 83rd Legislature state policymakers continued to demonstrate commitment to enhancing both state and local level reentry practices. Policy initiatives were facilitated to enhance the development of a comprehensive reentry process designed to eliminate reentry barriers to achieve the goals of increased public safety and reduced recidivism. Measures taken by the Legislature enabled the TDCJ to further implement evidence based practices to assess criminogenic risk and needs, and apply that information to develop effective individualized plans for return to the community. As a result, there were numerous accomplishments, including:

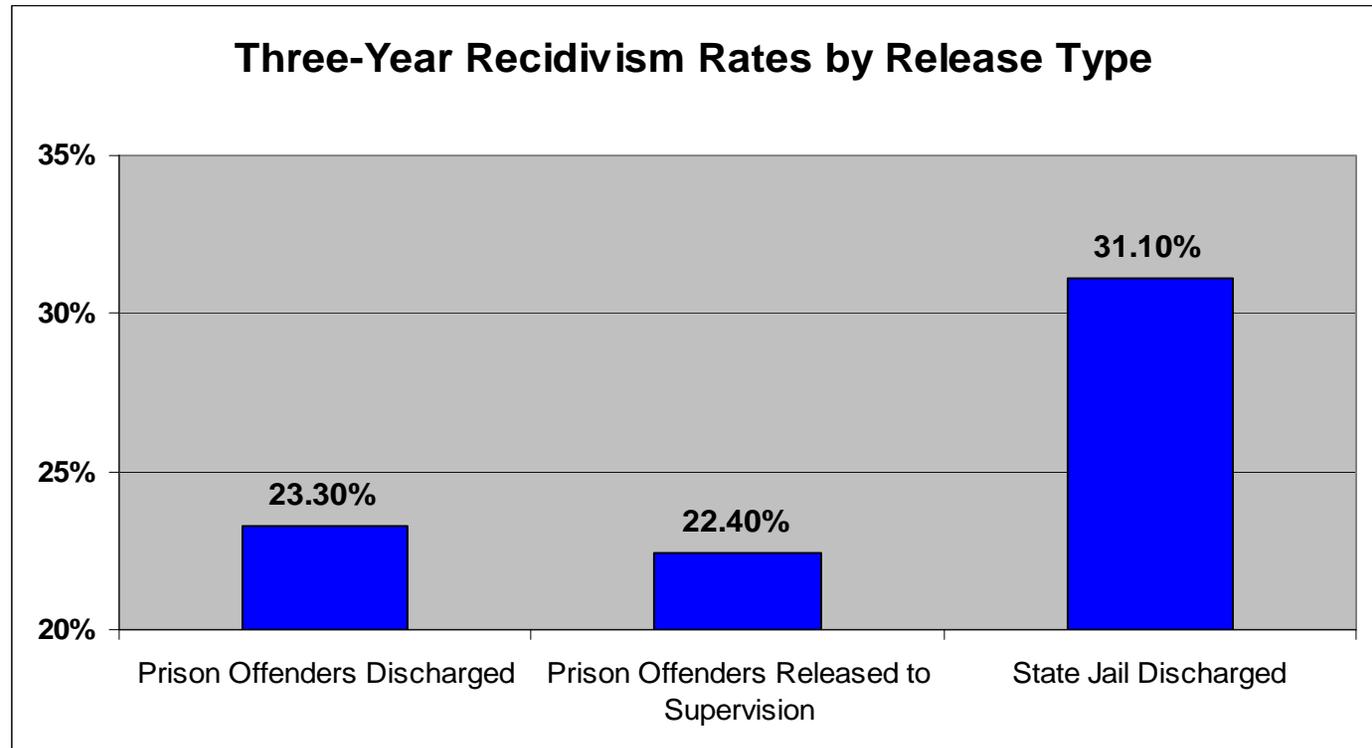
- Continued engagement with the Reentry Task Force;
- Adopted a validated risk assessment instrument;
- Added 75 reentry transition coordinator positions;
- Expanded the Reentry Program into the community;
- Implemented Texas ID card ordering;
- Automated and otherwise enhanced processing of identification documents such as birth certificates and social security cards; and
- Enhanced veterans reentry services

These implementation activities, along with other initiatives, are discussed in detail throughout the remainder of this report.



RECIDIVISM

The ultimate goal of the TDCJ's reentry program is reduced recidivism. Recidivism rates for the TDCJ offender population are among the lowest in the country and are noted in the chart below. Three year recidivism rates for participants in the Reentry and Integration Division's new three phase program will be provided in future reports.



Source: Legislative Budget Board, "Statewide Criminal Justice Recidivism and Revocation Rates" January 2013



OFFENDER DEMOGRAPHICS

Throughout Texas, over a million offenders are processed in local jails each year, many of whom transition to the TDCJ supervision. As of July 31, 2014 a combined total of approximately 633,000 offenders were under supervision of the TDCJ. This population includes individuals on probation, in prison, and on parole supervision:

- 395,000 on misdemeanor or felony probation;
- 151,000 incarcerated in the TDCJ facilities; and
- 87,000 on parole supervision

In considering the demographics of the offender population, it is important to also consider those impacted beyond each individual offender. The offender population represents families, communities, and victims from every segment of the state's demographics who must also be served in order for reentry initiatives to realize success. Thus, those affected demographics goes far beyond persons under the TDCJ supervision.

While the numbers alone are staggering, the challenge is magnified by the sizeable geographical area within the state of Texas. It is with those challenges in mind that the TDCJ continued engagement with state and local partners, as well as developing and implementing internal initiatives, that provided significant momentum toward a seamless system where all components work in tandem to achieve the ultimate goal of reduced recidivism.



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REENTRY TASK FORCE MEMBERSHIP

The statewide Reentry Task Force continues to provide a conduit for state and local stakeholders to address reentry practices and provide recommendations for continued enhancement of reentry services across the state. Considering the size of the state and the volume of citizens involved in the criminal justice system, the Reentry Task Force maintained expanded membership of 25 individuals representing a cross-section of Texas agencies, organizations, and communities:

Texas Juvenile Justice Department

Texas Workforce Commission

Texas Department of Public Safety

Texas Department of Housing and Community
Affairs

TCOOMMI Advisory Committee

Health and Human Services Commission

Texas Judicial Council

Judicial Advisory Council

Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles

Windham School District

Texas Commission on Jail Standards

Department of State Health Services

Texas Court of Criminal Appeals

County Judges and Commissioners Association of
Texas

Sheriff's Association of Texas

Texas District and County Attorneys Association

Texas Conference of Urban Counties

Criminal Justice Coordinator, Urban County

Reentry Coordinator, Urban County

Urban County Representative

Urban County Commissioner

Rural County Judge

Rural County Commissioner

Texas Inmate Family Association

Texas Criminal Justice Coalition

Texas Department of Family and Protective
Services

Office of Court Administration

Texas Department of Criminal Justice

Texas Veterans Commission

Faith-Based Volunteer



REENTRY TASK FORCE WORKING GROUPS

The expanded Reentry Task Force designated working groups to addressing specific barriers to successful reentry. Each group was tasked with developing findings and recommendations to address all gaps and barriers identified. Working groups include:

- Community Reentry Working Group: goals included identifying current support program or initiatives and successful reentry practices in operation within Texas communities.
- Housing Working Group: goals included identifying existing housing initiatives that provide services to the formerly incarcerated as well as model housing initiatives or efforts currently in operation in Texas communities.
- Women Offenders Working Group: goals included identifying current gender specific programming or practices in the state juvenile and adult justice systems, as well as gender specific best practices for women within the state and nationally.
- Family and Faith-Based Working Group: goals included identifying current programs or resources available to promote family reunification and advance faith-based and other community-based initiatives focused on family reunification; identify strategies to improve family involvement with offender reentry efforts; and identify strategies to enhance pre-release and post-release support provided by community-based groups.

Through implementation of previous findings and recommendations as well as the body of work produced by the Reentry Task Force throughout the current biennium, the Reentry and Integration Division, alongside agency leadership, has created expanded and refined reentry service delivery systems.



VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT EFFORTS

The TDCJ is proactive in seeking and recruiting volunteers and faith-based groups to assist in reentry strategies. The reentry program designated a full-time Resource and Volunteer Coordinator to assist in this endeavor. The coordinator is responsible for soliciting reentry resources while maintaining a resource directory for use by the TDCJ staff, recruiting and tracking reentry volunteers, and attending conferences, forums and similar events which provide an opportunity to simultaneously share information regarding the program and solicit resources and volunteers.

Representatives from the TDCJ regularly attend and participate in conferences, gatherings and meetings hosted by various faith-based groups. These groups consist of Christian denominations and churches, non-Christian faith groups, and non-profit faith-based groups.

The faith-based community in Texas is generous and quick to respond to community needs, major disasters and emergencies. However, like many individuals, much of the faith-based community may not fully understand the crisis of families and individuals facing incarceration and reentry. The faith-based community continues to benefit from education and awareness activities which increase their knowledge of the needs and struggles for which tens of thousands of Texas families go through every year when their loved one enters prison or re-enters the community after release.

The faith-based community in Texas is numerous, resourceful and autonomous of each other. In most cases, the working group has found that local faith-based communities agree that something must be done regarding reentry, however, struggle to find ways to collaborate amongst the autonomous groups to address these needs. Continual identification and communication with local faith-based groups will be a constant challenge in the face of turnover within leadership and volunteers.



TEXAS RISK ASSESSMENT SYSTEM

In keeping with continued efforts to ensure evidence based reentry practices are implemented, the TDCJ implemented the Texas Risk Assessment System (TRAS). The TRAS was adopted from an instrument initially developed and validated by the University of Cincinnati as an instrument for accurate assessment of criminogenic risk and need. This instrument includes tools for assessing at each juncture of the criminal justice system: probation, prison intake, reentry from prison to community and parole supervision.

The TDCJ's reentry program implemented the TRAS Supplemental Reentry Tool. After training provided by the University of Cincinnati, the tool was piloted amongst 10 case managers. Upon conclusion of the pilot phase, state-wide implementation was initiated and by April 2013 all reentry case managers were administering the TRAS Supplemental Reentry Tool. Currently, results from the tool determine whether an offender is eligible for enrollment in reentry case management pre-release. Those who score moderate or high risk are offered enrollment.

The TDCJ Information Technology Division developed an automated means for displaying assessment results. Assessment scores from the TRAS Supplemental Reentry Tool are entered into the electronic offender record and are available on each offender's Individualized Treatment Plan, making that information available to all stakeholders as offender needs are addressed throughout incarceration and into parole supervision.



THREE PHASE REENTRY PROGRAM

Eighty-third Legislature appropriations provided funding to add 75 reentry case managers to the 64 existing positions. Currently, 126 case managers provide pre-release and 13 case managers provide post-release services to offenders across the state. With the increased staffing, an opportunity was realized to develop a new and more efficient service delivery structure. A three phase program system was devised including:

Reentry Phase I:

- Ordering a replacement social security card, certified birth certificate, and certificate of release or discharge from active duty for those within six months of parole eligibility for prison sentenced offenders, or within one week of arrival to the TDCJ for state jail offenders;
- Upon receipt of a social security card and certified birth certificate, ordering Department of Public Safety (DPS) identification (ID) card for those with parole approval or ordering for state jail offenders upon receipt of documents;
- Both components of Reentry Phase I are denoted on the Individualized Treatment Plan and the information is available to stakeholders throughout the TDCJ continuum.

Reentry Phase II:

- Parole approved offenders with moderate/high risk intake assessment are scheduled for reentry assessment;
- Those scoring moderate or high risk on reentry assessment are offered enrollment and receive individual case planning to address needs, goals, action steps and resources targeted toward equipping the offender for successful return to the community;
- Offenders are referred to Phase III upon release from the TDCJ.
- Enrollment is denoted on the Individualized Treatment Plan and the information is available to stakeholders throughout the TDCJ continuum.

Reentry Phase III:

- Available to clients enrolled in Phase II pre-release, or with moderate or high risk assessment score who are self referred or referred by a parole officer.
- Those who agree to enrollment receive continued individual case planning, if referred from Phase II, or have case planning initiated when entering service post release and may participate in group activities.



REENTRY SERVICES IN THE COMMUNITY

While several components of the three phase program existed previously, Phase III, or Community Reentry, is in its infancy. Development of the Community Program became possible with the added positions resulting from 83rd Legislature allocation.

Community Reentry services are provided by 13 case managers located in District Reentry Centers or parole offices statewide. The community program provides individual case planning to address each need, barrier and goal of the Individual Reentry Plan. Additionally, community case managers:

- Actively seek and engage employers willing to consider hiring the formerly incarcerated.
- Actively seek sustainable housing options for the formerly incarcerated.
- Coordinate the distribution of the identification documents in the event documents are not delivered to clients pre-release.
- Liaison with parole officers, local service providers, unit reentry case managers and other stake holders to ensure client needs are addressed.
- Provide group employment readiness classes, using curriculum adopted from the United States Department of Labor. The course prepares clients for employment by teaching skills such as: basic hygiene, determining job qualifications, identifying employment opportunities, job interviewing skills, appropriate interview attire, appropriate use of acknowledgements post-interview and basic interview coaching.
- Plan, coordinate and facilitate job fairs to include identifying employers willing to participate, scheduling job-ready clients to attend, coordinating with parole officers and halfway house staff to encourage their engagement in the client's employment process and providing follow up case management for clients post-job fair to ensure sustainable employment is acquired.



AUTOMATED BIRTH CERTIFICATE AND DPS IDENTIFICATION CARD IMPLEMENTATION

Pursuant to Texas Government Code section 501.0165, and in culmination of a multi-year effort, the TDCJ, in cooperation with the Department of State Health Services (DSHS) and the DPS, successfully implemented automated birth certificate ordering and the offender DPS identification card process.

Through an agreement with DSHS, the TDCJ was able to implement an automated birth certificate ordering process. Instead of completing hard copy birth certificate applications, case managers use a computerized application to complete offender demographic information, and use a signature capture tool to attach offender signature to the application. The automation will allow for improved efficiency for DSHS and reduce the time between ordering and receipt of the birth certificate by the TDCJ. Automated birth certificate ordering was implemented as of July 2014.

The TDCJ and DPS entered into an agreement whereby the DPS Offender Identification Card System is used by the TDCJ reentry case managers to submit applications for DPS identification cards for eligible offenders. The TDCJ acquired computers, scanners, cameras, signature pads and fingerprint scanners to allow case managers to capture the information required by DPS. Upon the case manager submitting eligibility criteria, the offender is reviewed for eligibility by DPS, and if the offender is eligible, the case manager submits the required information to request a DPS ID card. The first offender DPS ID card was issued in February 2014.



VETERANS REENTRY SERVICES

The TDCJ's collaboration with veterans service organizations continues to grow. In addition to the long-standing partnerships with Veterans Integrated Service Network, Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC), and Texas Coordinating Council for Veteran Services; the TDCJ has partnered with Texas Veterans Commission (TVC), Military Veterans Peer Network and the Veterans Administration (VA).

The TDCJ and HHSC have entered into an agreement for electronic verification of veteran information, as per Texas Government Code section 501.023. Through electronic file transfer, HHSC will provide the TDCJ with verified veteran information from the Public Assistance Reporting Information System (PARIS). This will enable the TDCJ to provide services to veteran offenders based on verified data as opposed to the current self reported information. The electronic file transfer process is scheduled for implementation in the fall of 2014.

A Veterans Services Coordinator has been assigned to manage data identifying veterans near release, and forward referrals to the Veterans Integrated Service Network and the Military Veterans Peer Network, and to case managers. This coordination provides linkage to county service officers and to a peer network and initiates the benefit application process prior to release. The coordinator also facilitates pre-release appointments with veteran offenders for these entities. In conjunction with the TVC, the TDCJ has trained all reentry case managers to complete veteran benefit applications. Case managers also provide offenders a VA publication titled "Federal Benefits for Veterans, Dependents and Survivors", information regarding Hazelwood Act benefits, and a veterans information sheet with contact information for the Military Veterans Peer Network representative and TVC county service officer for the area where the offender plans to reside upon release.

Most recently, in partnership with Military Veterans Peer Network, the TDCJ has opened the first TDCJ veterans reentry dorm. Guidelines were established for assessment and enrollment in the program. The veteran specific program curriculum includes Seeking Safety, Bringing Everyone In the Zone, Brief Solution Focused Therapy, Tai Chi, and Group Sessions focused on Home Readiness activities. The program began with its first group of participants in July 2014.



REENTRY INITIATIVES

Beyond the implementation steps described thus far and their benefit to the state's reentry efforts, growth and development of the reentry program was demonstrated through numerous other endeavors throughout the biennium including:

- Process was implemented for tracking common reentry barriers and resources to provide a mechanism for trend analysis and reporting of related data.
- Case manager training curriculum was formalized, meeting agency training standards, and tracking through the agency training database was implemented.
- Revised the Individual Reentry Plan to create a detailed individual case plan, requiring the offender and case manager to work together to identify needs, goals, action steps and to provide a link to necessary resources.
- Implemented scanning of reentry documents into the TDCJ imaging system, enhancing information sharing among pre-release case managers, community case manager, and parole officers.
- Assigned reentry case managers to additional release processing duties on prison units, including issuing of release certificates as well as reentry packets and identification pouches.
- Coordinated with the Windham School District to include commercial driver licenses, industrial training certificates and vocational training certificates in the reentry release packet to ensure the offender leaves custody with all pertinent documents in hand.



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LOOKING FORWARD

The implementation steps and initiatives detailed thus far - additional staff, automating birth certificate ordering, providing offenders with a DPS ID card, and adding a community component to aid in offender transition upon release, and a list of other activities - mark tremendous growth and development of the reentry program. That momentum will continue, with the following planned for the immediate future:

- Certify the TDCJ staff as TRAS trainers, ensuring that all TRAS training for reentry case managers is provided by a certified trainer.
- Coordinate with the DPS to modify the Offender ID Card System to allow for a request of a DPS ID card for offenders with a valid or renewable ID or driver license in order to expand the DPS ID eligible population.
- Implement use of the automated TRAS case management system allowing for automated assessments and case tracking.
- Further develop partnerships with local providers, agencies and organizations through the efforts of the Resource and Volunteer Coordinator and the Community Reentry Case Managers.
- Expand the utilization of Employment Job Fairs to assist Reentry Phase III parolees participating in the community reentry program.



CONCLUSION

Significant progress has been realized since inception of the Reentry and Integration Division in September 2009. Through collaboration with partner agencies and organizations, the TDCJ has implemented a validated risk assessment to ensure services are targeted appropriately, provides offenders with identification documents which help to make them employment ready as they walk out of the TDCJ, provides transition to a community case manager to close the gap that occurs upon release to the community, has enhanced services for veteran offenders and achieved countless other measures. The goal of developing a seamless system continues to be realized as barriers to information sharing are broken and stakeholders coordinate throughout implementation periods. The next steps articulated in this report will continue to advance the TDCJ toward the goals set forth.

While those efforts are commendable, they in no way indicate that the work is complete. It is imperative that local and state level partners continue to collaborate, addressing immediate any future steps necessary to keep Texas on target toward the goal of continued reduction in recidivism.

