

# SECOND CHANCES, SAFER COUNTIES

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT & REENTRY



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## DANE COUNTY, WISCONSIN

### THE OPPORTUNITY FOR CHANGE

Dane County leaders realized that one of the biggest causes of incarceration was actually recidivism – particularly failure during supervision after release. “There are a lot of barriers to success for someone returning to the community from jail,” County Executive Joe Parisi says. “Finding a job is very difficult, people are often dealing with medical or psychological issues that also lead to insurance issues, and something as seemingly simple as finding a place to live isn’t simple at all.” The county decided that it needed to implement a comprehensive approach to help individuals making the transition from jail to home.

### DANE COUNTY’S MODEL

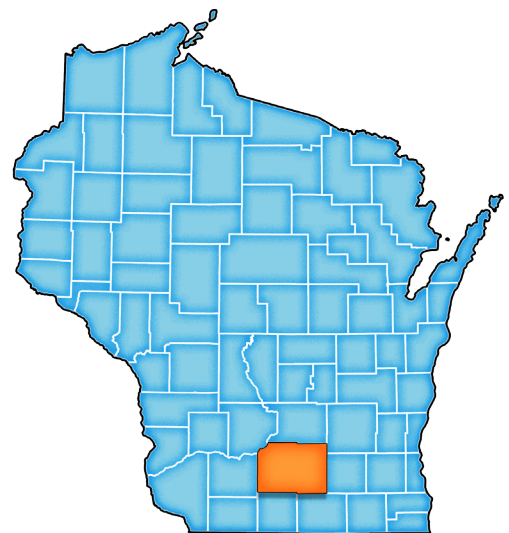
As soon as someone is sentenced and comes into the jail, we want to work right from the start on preparing for reentry and for them to be successful when they leave,” County Executive Parisi says. “Everyone who comes into the jail is going to be back out in the community again in a year. You have to look at that broader picture.”

In 2014, County Executive Parisi created a position for a “jail reentry coordinator,” located in the county’s Department of Human Services. Several social workers already worked in the jail, but the reentry coordinator was brought in to create a more focused, coordinated effort. For the 2016 budget, a “reentry team leader” position has been created, bringing the total number of people dedicated to reentry services in the jail to six, including an individual through AmeriCorps who helps enroll individuals in health insurance. These reentry workers create a plan for every individual based on his or her specific requirements, including any medical issues, housing needs, educational goals and more. “Our reentry team knows the various services in the community and can develop individualized plans for inmates,” explains Lynn Green, Dane County Human Services Director. “The reentry team then passes those plans off to a case manager who provides hands-on assistance to released individuals and support to help stay connected to services in the community.”

The county’s reentry workers collaborate with nonprofit organizations and agencies in the community to advocate for individuals’ needs and to ensure a smooth transition and delivery of services. A case manager can also be assigned to individuals to help with their reentry transition. “It’s one thing to hand someone a list of things to do and expect them to just do it – we know that doesn’t work,” Parisi says. “We have people available to

### DANE COUNTY, WISCONSIN

POPULATION: **516,284<sup>1</sup>**



<sup>1</sup> Dane County, Wisconsin. U.S. Census Bureau State & County QuickFacts <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/55/55025.html>.



To read the full report and the companion case studies, visit the Second Chances, Safer Counties website at: [www.NACo.org/WorkforceAndReentry](http://www.NACo.org/WorkforceAndReentry)

connect folks to the services and supports they need in the community, and help them work through that list.”

Dane County is also investing in housing for individuals reentering the community. In both 2015 and 2016, \$500,000 has been dedicated to the development of additional housing for formerly incarcerated individuals. The county is partnering with a local nonprofit that is already deeply involved in reentry services to create and operate this housing.

Substance abuse programs are also a key component of the county’s reentry programming. These include a jail-opiate program, which provides Vivitrol injections<sup>2</sup> and counseling at a nonprofit mental health center when individuals are released from jail, as well as the county’s Pathfinder program, which provides comprehensive, long-term treatment for adult offenders with alcohol and other drug abuse disorders.

The county has also recently opened a Jail-Based Job Center. Funded through a \$500,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Labor, the Jail-Based Job Center will serve 100 participants over 18 months. Participants will be assigned to a career coach based in the jail and receive pre-release career services including training on general work skills, expectations and financial literacy and assistance with job applications and resumes. The career coach will transition participants to a community job center where staff will provide job retention support, follow-up assistance and additional services in collaboration with other community partners.

“Look at what your current system is costing you. Ask yourself, ‘Is what we’re doing working? Are we making the community safer and being stewards of taxpayer dollars?’ If you’re not focusing on reentry, you’re not doing those things.”

— Dane County Executive Joe Parisi

## SUCCESSSES AND OUTCOMES

County leaders count new and productive partnerships with community entities as some of their greatest success. Examples of these partnerships include an AmeriCorps volunteer assisting inmates to ensure they have health insurance coverage when they leave the jail, and working with community-based providers to utilize Food Share Employment and Training (FSET) funds to develop employment and training programs.

The county’s jail-opiate program has a 50 percent successful completion rate among those who engage in treatment after their release. The Pathfinder program has a 74 percent completion rate, and 74 percent of the participants who successfully complete Pathfinder remain crime free at least two years after the program’s conclusion.

## LESSONS LEARNED

**PLANNING IS AN IMPORTANT PART OF GAINING SUPPORT:** Both Green and Parisi emphasized that the public has been very supportive of the county’s focus on reentry in large part due to the fact that local leaders are able to show that the program has been well thought out and carefully planned. “As long as people know that we’re being careful, that this has been a logical and well-planned process and that we’re continuing to focus on public safety, this makes a lot of sense to the general public,” Parisi says.

**TIGHT BUDGETS DON’T NEED TO MEAN FEWER PROGRAMS:** “We have to justify and find every dollar we spend – these days there aren’t a lot of extra dollars laying around, but that’s been a great driver for us,” Parisi says. “It’s led us to look at the root cause and direct resources there, because that will save money down the road.”

<sup>2</sup> Vivitrol is an injectable medicine used to treat alcohol and opioid dependence. Learn more at <http://www.vivitrol.com/>.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:

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