



Department of Corrections Should Maximize Use of Best Practices in Inmate Rehabilitation Efforts

at a glance

The department is following many, but not all, best practices for inmate rehabilitative programs. The department is implementing a new research-based instrument to better target rehabilitative services to inmates with the highest risk of reoffending following release. The department also is providing rehabilitative programs that address most inmate criminogenic needs (i.e., attributes directly linked to recidivism). However, it provides limited therapy to address criminal thinking. The department is planning to restructure the 100-hour transition course that inmates must take before they leave prison to include coursework on changing criminal thinking.

The department's inmate release planning efforts address most transition needs, but do not meet best practices in one key area—providing inmates with valid state identification upon release, the lack of which can hinder their ability to obtain employment and services that can help reduce their risks of reoffending.

The department collects inmate-specific data and has conducted several reviews of its rehabilitative programs over the last 10 years. However, it does not routinely measure the effectiveness of these programs.

Scope

At the request of the Legislature, OPPAGA reviewed the Florida Department of Corrections' rehabilitative programs to determine whether they are consistent with best practices for these programs.

Background

The mission of the Department of Corrections is to protect the public and department personnel, provide proper care and supervision of inmates, and assist inmate reentry into society. Most inmates who enter Florida's correctional system lack basic educational and employment skills and many have substance abuse and mental health problems. National studies have shown that rehabilitative programs that address these problems can help prepare inmates for a successful return to society and reduce the likelihood of their recidivism.¹

As of September 30, 2009, the department housed 101,251 inmates in 146 facilities throughout the state, at an average cost of \$20,272 per inmate per year. Most (88%) of these inmates eventually will be released from prison and data indicates that approximately one-third will return to prison

¹ Recidivism is defined as the percentage of inmates who return to prison for a new offense or technical violation within 36 months after release.

within three years of their release. Programs that reduce recidivism can help reduce state costs.

In Fiscal Year 2009-10, the Legislature appropriated \$29 million for inmate education and drug treatment programs. Due to the state’s budget constraints, funding for these programs has declined by nearly \$10 million over the last three years. Given these limited resources, it is important for the department to use its funds for rehabilitative programs that have the greatest impact on reducing recidivism.

Correctional Rehabilitation Best Practices

National research has identified best practices for inmate rehabilitative programs. Many of these practices are used by state correctional agencies to design comprehensive approaches to inmate rehabilitation.² As shown in Exhibit 1, these

²These best practices are part of the Transition from Prison to Community model, which was developed by the U.S. Department of Justice’s National Institute of Corrections. They are being used by Georgia, Indiana, Michigan, Missouri, New York, North Dakota, Oregon, and Rhode Island. In September 2009, Iowa, Kentucky, Minnesota, Tennessee, Texas, and Wyoming were selected to receive assistance from the National Institute of Corrections to implement these practices.

best practices have four basic components: assessing inmates using validated risk and needs assessment instruments; addressing offender attributes that directly relate to criminal behavior; developing release plans to facilitate offender reentry into society; and evaluating program effectiveness.

The Florida Department of Corrections is following many of these best practices, but can strengthen its activities in several areas. The department has developed a new risk-based instrument to evaluate inmates, and its current rehabilitative programs focus on addressing inmates’ criminogenic needs, although its current programs provide limited criminal thinking therapy.³ The department’s release planning efforts address most inmate transition needs, but do not meet guidelines in one key area—providing inmates with valid state identification upon release. While the department collects inmate-specific data and has occasionally reviewed its programs, it should routinely measure program effectiveness.

³Criminogenic needs are changeable risk factors or attributes that are directly linked with recidivism, such as substance abuse, criminal thinking, and lack of education.

Exhibit 1 National Research Has Identified Several Best Practices for Inmate Rehabilitation

Correctional agencies should assess inmates’ needs using validated risk and needs assessment instruments

Correctional agencies should assess inmates’ criminogenic needs using validated risk and needs assessment instruments. This assessment should identify inmates who have a high risk to recidivate and each offender’s rehabilitative needs so that an agency can direct its resources to offenders with the highest risk.

Correctional agencies should focus programs on inmate attributes directly related to criminal behavior

Rehabilitative services should target offender attributes that are directly related to criminal behavior, such as substance abuse, criminal thinking, and lack of education.

Correctional agencies should develop individualized release plans to facilitate offender reentry into society

Correctional agencies should develop individualized release plans that identify the basic support services the inmate needs after release, such as housing and transportation, and provide strategies for accessing these services.

Correctional agencies should evaluate rehabilitative programs and provider performance

Correctional agencies should collect inmate-specific data on program participation and use this information to measure and regularly report on program performance, including program completion rates, intermediate outcomes (e.g., earning a general education development diploma), long-term outcomes (e.g., recidivism rate, employment success), and cost-effectiveness. Agencies should also hold providers of rehabilitative programs accountable for client outcomes and regularly report provider performance to the state legislatures.

Source: OPPAGA analysis of national research focusing on correctional rehabilitative program practices.

The department is implementing a new risk and needs assessment tool

The department is implementing a new inmate screening tool that is consistent with the best practice to assess inmates using validated risk and needs assessment instruments. These instruments will be used to evaluate inmates' criminogenic needs and risks to recidivate, and will enable the department to direct rehabilitative resources to these offenders. It is important that these instruments be validated to ensure that they accurately predict inmate outcomes, and screening results should be used to assign inmates to programs when program slots become available.

Consistent with these best practices, the department is developing a recidivism index and a new needs assessment instrument. The recidivism index will assess an inmate's likelihood to reoffend based on both static and dynamic factors that are associated with recidivism. Static factors are those that do not change or change in only one direction, such as an inmate's age at first commitment; dynamic factors are inmate attributes that can change, such as their drug use and employment status. The department will pilot test a new needs assessment instrument, the Correctional Integrated Needs Assessment System, in December 2009 and January 2010 and plans to fully implement it by the end of February 2010. In addition, the department will use a new Automated Inmate Ranking System to rank inmates based on a formula that considers all of their rehabilitative program needs as a whole rather than their needs for individual programs. This system will determine inmates' priority for placement into available program slots.⁴ Once implemented, the department will use the recidivism index and the Correctional Integrated Needs Assessment System to identify the rehabilitative needs of inmates as they enter the prison system as well as to track their progress.

The department plans to hire an independent entity to evaluate the Correctional Integrated

Needs Assessment System six months after its full implementation to determine whether the instrument is having a positive effect on inmate behavior, such as reducing disciplinary reports. To ensure that the instrument remains valid, the department should periodically validate and norm the instrument (i.e., at least once every five years) using a standard research-based methodology that compares projected outcomes to actual results.

The department offers programs that address most criminogenic factors

Most of the department's rehabilitative programs are consistent with the best practice that programs address criminogenic factors. Research has shown that effective rehabilitative programs address attributes that are directly related to criminal behavior, such as substance abuse, criminal thinking patterns, and lack of education (see Exhibit 2). The department's rehabilitative programs address inmate substance abuse and poor academic performance. The department's current programs provide limited criminal thinking therapy, but the department plans to incorporate coursework on this issue in its 100-hour transition course.

The department offers several rehabilitative programs designed to address inmate criminogenic needs, including academic and vocational education and substance abuse treatment. Academic education programs include adult basic education, general education development, mandatory literacy, and special education. Vocational education includes 87 career and technical education courses in 36 distinct career and technical education trades.⁵ The department also offers both outpatient and residential substance abuse treatment programs.

⁴The department will not include inmates with life sentences or inmates on death row in the program.

⁵These career and technical education trades include architectural and mechanical drafting, auto collision repair and refinishing, cabinetmaking, carpentry, masonry, and web design services.

Exhibit 2
To Meet Best Practices, Rehabilitative Programs Should Address Criminogenic Factors¹

Factor	Factors Affecting Recidivism Risk	Need or Desired Outcome
Antisocial Behavior	Early and continued involvement in a number of antisocial acts	Learning noncriminal alternative behaviors
Antisocial Personality	Adventurous, pleasure seeking, low self control, restlessly aggressive	Learning problem solving, self management, coping, and anger management skills
Criminal Associates	Close association with criminals and relative isolation from pro-social individuals	Reduced association with criminals, enhanced associations with pro-social individuals
Criminal Thinking	Attitudes, beliefs, values, and rationalizations supportive of crime; emotional states of anger, resentment, and defiance	Less risky thinking and feelings and adopting a pro-social identity
Employment/School	Low levels of performance and satisfaction	Enhanced rewards, performance, and satisfaction
Family/Marital	Lack of nurturance, caring, or close monitoring and supervision	Reduced conflict, build positive relationships and communication; enhanced monitoring and supervision
Leisure/Recreation	Low levels of involvement and satisfaction in antisocial activities	Enhanced involvement and satisfaction in pro-social activities
Substance Abuse	Abuse of alcohol and/or drugs	Reduced use, personal and interpersonal supports for substance abuse behavior; enhanced alternatives to use

¹ Shaded factors are the most strongly linked to criminal behavior.

Source: Adapted from Andrews, D.A. *et al.*, (2006). The Recent Past and Near Future of Risk and/or Need Assessment. *Crime and Delinquency*, 52 (1) as cited in Latessa, E. J. (2008). *Improving the Effectiveness of Correctional Programs through Research*, Cincinnati, Ohio: University of Cincinnati, Division of Criminal Justice.

The department’s current programs provide limited criminal thinking therapy. Research has found that offender treatment typically fails if criminal thinking and behaviors are not addressed.⁶ Criminal thinking therapy focuses on changing attitudes, beliefs, and values that are associated with criminal behavior. This can be accomplished by identifying errors in thinking and teaching ways to dispel those errors using classroom coaching and role play.

Currently, few Florida inmates receive criminal thinking therapy. The department offers a maximum of 100 hours of criminal thinking therapy to inmates who receive substance abuse treatment. However, only about one in five inmates is released from facilities offering such treatment.

The department is currently unable to determine the percentage of inmates that would benefit from criminal thinking therapy, but acknowledges that most inmates would benefit from it.⁷ To increase the number of inmates receiving such therapy, the

department plans to incorporate coursework on criminal thinking into the statutorily required 100-hour transition course provided to most inmates before they leave prison.⁸ The department is rewriting the course materials to include 40 hours of content related to changing thinking about crime.

While including criminal thinking in the transition course appears promising, its effectiveness may be hindered because many inmates complete the 100-hour transition course via self-study rather than with a facilitator, the intended delivery method. The department reported that at least 5,455 inmates (18.5% of all released inmates who completed the course) took the course via self-study in Fiscal Year 2005-06. By Fiscal Year 2008-09, 8,850 inmates (26.9% of all released inmates who completed the course) took the course via self-study due to factors such as classroom space or size, confinement admissions, instructor availability or vacancy, and increases in the inmate population. Our 2007 report concluded that the lack of facilitators can reduce course effectiveness because the facilitators guide

⁶ Scott, W. *Effective Clinical Practices in Treating Clients in the Criminal Justice System*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Corrections, 2008.

⁷ The department reports that the new needs assessment instrument will allow it to capture data on inmates that would benefit from criminal thinking therapy.

⁸ Inmates released from substance treatment programs are exempt from the required transition course because the material is covered in the treatment curriculum.

inmates through the material and promote participation and understanding.⁹ Additionally, many inmates do not read at the level necessary to independently understand the course materials, which are written at a 7.8 reading grade level. In order to address this issue, the department is developing two versions of the 100-hour transition course curriculum. One version will be used for live instruction and the other will be for inmates completing the course via self-study. The department plans to use inmates' recidivism index scores to determine whether they will receive live instruction or complete the course via self-study.

The department should supplement the transition class with coursework on how to change criminal thinking, preferably using evidence-based material. As funding allows, the department should increase the number of inmates receiving the 100-hour course via a facilitator to ensure that inmates understand and complete the course as designed.

The department's release planning efforts address most inmate transition needs

While the department's inmate release preparation generally meets best practices, it does not provide inmates with valid state identification upon release.

Release planning is intended to help newly released inmates access services important to their success in the community, thus reducing their likelihood of recidivism. Released inmates often have lost family connections and lack basic life skills necessary to function in society. To address these concerns, in March 2006, the department and the Department of Children and Families' Office on Homelessness developed guidelines that recommended that release plans address 10 key elements.¹⁰ These elements include

- a place of residence upon discharge;
- transportation needs;
- aftercare referrals;
- medications, clothing, and other basic resources to be provided at discharge;
- eligibility for and enrollment in public benefit programs;
- employment referrals;
- personal identification and documentation (valid ID);
- risk assessment for homelessness;
- support networks; and
- post-release follow-up contacts.

The Department of Corrections' inmate release plans address most of these elements; however, the department does not meet the guidelines in one key area—providing inmates with valid state identification upon release. Proper identification generally is required to find employment, obtain housing, or apply for public benefits that may be necessary to obtain medication or other treatment services that can help reduce inmates' risks of reoffending.

The department has explored various approaches for providing inmates with proper identification. For example, in August 2007, the department, in conjunction with the Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles, conducted a pilot project to provide state identification cards to certain inmates at Wakulla Correctional Institution. The department obtained identification cards for 31 of 34 inmates who participated, and determined that approximately 85% of the inmates had a record of previous identification with the Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles. However, the department reports that it lacks funding to implement this effort statewide. Additionally, the department reports that inmates who have not established a permanent address prior to release would need to obtain a new identification card within 10 days of release if they were issued a card in prison. This is because such identification

transportation.

⁹ *Higher Priority Should Be Given to Transition Services to Reduce Inmate Recidivism*, [OPPAGA Report No. 07-17](#), February 2007.

¹⁰ These elements include many of the transition requirements specified in ss. 944.704-944.707, *F.S.* In addition, correctional literature identifies eight basic needs that inmates have upon release from prison: clothing and food, community support systems, education and employment, financial resources, health care, housing, identification and important documents, and

cards would have the prison's address as an inmate's residence.¹¹

New federal driver license requirements will complicate the issuance of identification cards to inmates. As required by federal law, Florida will begin issuing REAL ID Act-compliant driver licenses and ID cards by January 1, 2010.¹² This process will require individuals to provide documentation such as an original or certified copy of a birth certificate to establish their identity, proof of legal residence, and date of birth. While inmates may obtain birth certificates while incarcerated, many may lack the funds to order these documents. As a result, many inmates may lack the documentation needed to obtain a state identification card upon their release. The department is discussing this problem with the Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles and is exploring options such as becoming a driver licensing agent. This would allow the department to verify an inmate's identity by obtaining needed documents and requesting that an identification card be issued before the inmate is released.

The department should routinely measure the effectiveness of its inmate rehabilitative programs and treatment providers

The department collects information about inmate participation in rehabilitative programs, but does not meet the best practice for conducting routine evaluations of these programs. As a result, stakeholders are not regularly provided information needed to target limited resources to the most cost-effective programs.

The department collects inmate-specific data on its rehabilitative programs, including program participation, program completion, and educational and vocational certificates awarded. It also has occasionally published reports that evaluated its rehabilitative programs during the last 10 years. For example, in January 2001, the

department published an analysis of the impact of inmate programs on recidivism. This report included information on the recidivism rates and program completion rates of inmates in academic and substance abuse programs as well as inmates who earned vocational certificates. Moreover, in March 2006, the department published a report on evidence-based practices to determine which of its rehabilitative programs reduced recidivism. In addition to conducting these program evaluations, the department also monitors substance abuse treatment providers' performance in meeting contract requirements by periodically conducting site visits and reviewing provider records.

While the department occasionally has evaluated some programs, it does not routinely measure and report on the effectiveness of its rehabilitative programs. The American Correctional Association standards for adult correctional institutions recommend that institutional programs be analyzed and evaluated at least every two years to determine their contribution to an institution's mission.¹³ Instead, the department's reviews are conducted ad hoc when requested by department management and program staff or the Legislature. Consequently, department management and the Legislature are not regularly provided with information needed to target limited resources to the most cost-effective rehabilitative programs.

In addition, the department should improve the scope and transparency of its provider evaluation by regularly reporting provider performance to the Legislature. The department's monitoring of providers is limited to assessing a provider's compliance with contract requirements, such as maintaining a policies and procedures manual and proper clinical documentation in client treatment files. The department should regularly report to the Legislature on provider effectiveness in achieving positive client outcomes, such as program completion rates, positive drug testing rates, and recidivism rates. The department could incorporate such information into longitudinal

¹¹ Section 322.19(2), *F.S.*, provides that whenever any person, after applying for or receiving a driver's license, changes the residence or mailing address in the application or license, the person must, within 10 calendar days, obtain a replacement license that reflects the change.

¹² U.S. Public Law 109-13, Title II.

¹³ *Standards for Adult Correctional Institutions 4th Edition*, American Correctional Association, July 2003.

cost-effectiveness analyses of the department's substance abuse programs. OPPAGA recommended the department conduct such longitudinal analyses in a 2007 report, but it has not yet done so.¹⁴

The department also could develop a routine report on the cost-effectiveness of rehabilitative programs similar to the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice's annual program accountability measures. These measures, which were developed by Department of Juvenile Justice, in collaboration with researchers from the Justice Research Center, provide an assessment of the programs' effectiveness in reducing recidivism and providing cost-effective services. The measures give Department of Juvenile Justice leadership and the Legislature standardized and transparent information for comparing the effectiveness of programs and providers. The Department of Corrections should work to develop a comparable performance accountability system. To augment its resources, it should seek to develop the reporting system by partnering with the state university system.

Conclusions and Recommendations

To enhance the Department of Corrections' rehabilitative program services and administration, we recommend that the department take the steps described below.

- Periodically validate its Correctional Integrated Needs Assessment System (i.e., at least once every five years) using a standard research-based methodology that compares projected outcomes to actual results.
- Supplement its 100-hour transition course with coursework on how to change criminal thinking, and, as funding permits, increase the number of inmates receiving the course via a facilitator to ensure that inmates understand the course's content.
- Routinely evaluate its key rehabilitative programs, including tracking the outcomes of participants over time, and use the data to provide cost-effectiveness analyses similar to those included in the Department of Juvenile Justice's Program Accountability Measures report. To augment its research resources, the Department of Corrections should cultivate partnerships with the state university system.

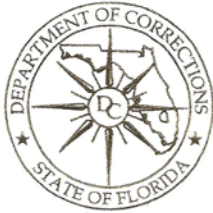
Agency Response

In accordance with the provisions of s. 11.51(5), *Florida Statutes*, a draft of our report was submitted to the Secretary of the Department of Corrections for his review and response.

The Secretary's written response has been reproduced in Appendix A.

¹⁴ *Corrections Rehabilitative Programs Effective, But Serve Only a Portion of the Eligible Population*, [OPPAGA Report No. 07-14](#), February 2007.

Appendix A



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December 17, 2009

Gary R. VanLandingham, Director
Office of Program Policy Analysis and
Government Accountability
111 West Madison Street, Room 312
Claude Pepper Building
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-1475

Dear Director VanLandingham:

Thank you for the opportunity to review and respond to OPPAGA's report entitled *"Department of Corrections Should Maximize Use of Best Practices in Inmate Rehabilitation Efforts."* We agree that because many inmates who enter Florida's prison system lack basic educational and employment skills and come into the system with a myriad of substance abuse and mental health issues, rehabilitative programs are critical in addressing these issues and increasing the likelihood of successful re-entry into our communities and reduce recidivism. Overall we are pleased with your report and appreciate the opportunity to provide the following response to the findings in the report.

Finding 1: Periodically validate its Correctional Integrated Needs Assessment System (i.e. at least once every five years) using a standard research-based methodology that compares projected outcomes to actual results.

Agency Response: Concur. We agree that the Correctional Integrated Needs Assessment tool should be validated using standard research-based methodology that compares projected outcomes to actual need. The operation of the system will be monitored to ensure that data is collected and results are monitored to ensure results are analogous to projected outcomes. The department will validate this instrument every five years.

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Finding 2: Supplement its 100-hour transition course with coursework on how to change criminal thinking, and, as funding permits, increase the number of inmates receiving the course, via a facilitator to ensure that inmate's understand the course's content.

Agency Response: Concur. The 100-hour transition course curriculum has been updated to include 40 hours of criminal thinking principles. Each lesson contains possible errors in thinking associated with the given topic and common techniques for overcoming each error. The Department plans to release the new 100-Hour transition curriculum in January or February 2010.

The Department also concurs that it would be beneficial to increase the number of inmates receiving the course via live instruction and will do so as funding becomes available. In the interim, the Department will use the newly developed recidivism index to place inmates with a higher risk to reoffend into facilitated classes and lower risk inmates into the self-study program.

Finding 3: Routinely evaluate its key rehabilitative programs, including tracking the outcomes of participants over time, and use the data to provide a cost-effectiveness analyses similar to those included in the Department of Juvenile Justice's Program Accountability Measures report. To augment its resources, the Department of Corrections should cultivate partnerships with the state university system.

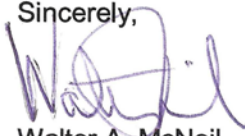
Agency Response: Concur. The effectiveness of the Department's inmate substance abuse treatment programs is routinely measured and reviewed both quarterly and annually. The Department's Bureau of Research and Data Analysis and the Bureau of Substance Abuse Program Services compile program data and outcome data annually and includes in its Annual Report which includes demographics, numbers served, completion rates, and comprehensive recommitment data by programs and facilities. The report also reflects the provider for each facility. Data is reviewed by Department staff and treatment providers to determine areas for improvement. The Department also collects data relating to its educational and vocational programs and uses this data to track recidivism rates and identify areas for program improvement.

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The Department will review the feasibility of expanding our program evaluation process to include a "scorecard" similar to what is used by the Department of Juvenile Justice.

Thank you again for the opportunity to respond to the report. As always, it was a pleasure working with you and your staff. Please do not hesitate to contact me if additional information is needed.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in purple ink, appearing to read "Walter A. McNeil".

Walter A. McNeil
Secretary

cc: Gene Hatcher, Department of Corrections Inspector General
Kim Mills, Director of Auditing, Executive Office of the Governor

The Florida Legislature

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