



The Corporation for Supportive Housing's Returning Home Initiative: System Change Accomplishments after Three Years



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Reentry Research at the Urban Institute

In 2000, the Justice Policy Center at the Urban Institute launched an ongoing inquiry into prisoner reentry research to better understand the pathways of successful reintegration, the social and fiscal costs of current policies, and the impacts of incarceration and reentry on individuals, families, and communities. Over the past nine years, the Urban Institute's reentry research portfolio has informed a broad set of policy and practice discussions about the challenges facing former prisoners. The Institute's research includes a range of studies, from rigorous program evaluations to strategic planning partnerships with state and local jurisdictions. More information can be found at <http://www.urban.org/justice>.

The Corporation for Supportive Housing

The Corporation for Supportive Housing is a national nonprofit organization and community development financial institution that helps communities create permanent housing with services to prevent and end homelessness. For several years, CSH has been working closely with a coalition of national organizations interested in criminal justice reform, and is a strong advocate for reducing recidivism by providing supportive housing for people re-entering communities and at high risk of homelessness.

Any opinions expressed in this brief are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Urban Institute, its board, or its sponsors.

Introduction

In Spring 2006, the Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH) launched its Returning Home Initiative (RHI) with a \$6 million grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and additional support from the Conrad N. Hilton, Open Society Institute, and JEHT Foundations. RHI has two overarching goals. First, it is dedicated to establishing permanent supportive housing as an essential component of reintegrating into their communities formerly incarcerated persons with long histories of homelessness, serious mental illness, and other chronic health conditions (including vulnerable people who cycle between homelessness and incarceration and other crisis public systems). As part of this goal, RHI seeks: 1) to develop successful supportive housing models tailored to formerly incarcerated persons; 2) to facilitate the creation of 1,000 units of supportive housing through policy advocacy, scattered site approaches, and production to serve formerly incarcerated persons; and 3) to document decreased recidivism, decreases in homelessness, and related costs of those who live in supportive housing compared to those who do not. Second, RHI promotes local and national public policy changes to initiate and strengthen the integration of corrections/criminal justice, housing, mental health, and human service systems.

The initial focus of RHI was the nation's three largest cities—New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago—but RHI efforts have since expanded to Connecticut, the District of Columbia, Minnesota, New Jersey, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Texas, and Washington State. RHI's work has been guided and promoted by a national Advisory Board led by Martin F. Horn from John Jay College of Criminal Justice, and Justice Evelyn Stratton from the Ohio State Supreme Court.

In November 2006, CSH asked the Urban Institute (UI) to assess the process of system change stimulated by RHI activities in New York, California, and Chicago, the three communities that received significant RHI investment. This brief summarizes the influence of RHI-funded activities in these three communities based on three site visits to each of these cities. It focuses on changes in system functioning and agency interactions that have come about at least in part through the work of CSH staff funded with RHI resources. In addition, the brief identifies lessons learned from RHI to date and provides a summary of the influence of RHI activities on system change. A more detailed report of system change activities overall and in each site will follow in early 2010.

Key Accomplishments of the Returning Home Initiative

Since reentry supportive housing programs must be prepared to provide a broad array of services, developing and operating them involves a high degree of service integration among service providers, property owners and managers, and the array of housing, mental health, and human service agencies that fund these initiatives. Additionally, RHI aims to expand the role of criminal justice systems in creating supportive housing through public leadership and power, direct services, and financial investment. This type of fundamental system change is an evolving, iterative process, and achieving ultimate success often takes years. Yet, RHI has achieved considerable success in the past three years.

New York

In New York, RHI efforts are focused primarily toward city administrators, particularly through the development and implementation of the Frequent User Service Enhancement Initiative (FUSE), as well as a new City-State Reentry Supportive Housing Initiative. Key systems change accomplishments include:

- Frequent User Service Enhancement (FUSE). CSH staff worked closely with city agency leaders within the New York City Departments of Homeless Services (DHS) and Correction (DOC) to design and implement the FUSE Initiative. FUSE targets individuals through a rigorous data matching exercise to identify people with multiple stays in both the jail and shelter systems, and places them in supportive housing. In addition to DHS and DOC, this work involves close collaboration with other public agencies including the New York City Housing Authority, the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene and the city Human Resources Administration, all of whom are focused on making the FUSE Initiative a success. The RHI program manager provided strategic oversight for FUSE I; a preliminary evaluation found that FUSE I clients had a statistically significant decrease in the number of days spent in jail after arrest, as compared to similar clients who did not receive FUSE services. For the FUSE II project, the Department of Homeless Services has taken over the coordination, working with the jail and local providers directly. This transfer of program supervision to a public agency, in itself, embodies system change. Additionally, the NYC Department of Corrections has made a financial investment to fund service enhancements. To date, FUSE has created more than 200 supportive housing opportunities, with housing retention rates above 85% and a 54% reduction in jail stay days.
- City-State Reentry Supportive Housing Initiative. Through the leadership of Martin Horn, the DOC Commissioner at the time, and support from CSH, heads of all the major agencies attended a convening in October 2007 to discuss the need for a coordinated city and state reentry partnership to meet the need for reentry supportive housing. Soon after, the City-State Reentry Supportive Housing Initiative was born. This initiative brings together the resources from several city and state agencies, including criminal justice, social service, and behavioral health agencies, to implement the first City-State supportive housing project specifically for those returning from state prisons. This initiative builds on prior New York – New York Agreements and expands it to include criminal justice involved populations. This coordinated investment, if implemented as planned, will result in the creation of 500 units of reentry supportive housing.
- Improved discharge planning. CSH provides key leadership and expertise to the New York City Discharge Planning Collaboration—an interagency, public-private effort to improve discharge planning and re-entry services for individuals leaving local jail system. CSH serves as a member of the Guide Team, which advises and oversees the effort, and chairs several of the collaboration's workgroups, including the Housing Workgroup, the Frequent Users Workgroup, and the Training and Technical Assistance Workgroup.
- Increased provider capacity. CSH provides consistent support to local housing providers, resulting in dedicated supportive housing units for formerly incarcerated people. CSH support has helped build a strong provider network; roughly a dozen providers have learned how to engage the reentry population and how to work through a wide array of regulatory and

statutory obstacles in housing the reentry population—including siting issues and restrictions on public subsidies. This includes provider agencies that were not engaging with the reentry population previously.

- New reentry supportive housing development. RHI supported staff and funding has also been able to spur a single-site development pipeline including four projects in Brooklyn, Manhattan and Queens totaling 128 units of reentry specific housing and 74 units of reentry-accessible affordable housing.

Los Angeles

In Los Angeles, RHI activities have focused heavily on working with the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department (LASD), and secondarily on helping to develop state legislation to support reentry projects. Key systems change accomplishments include:

- Just In Reach. When RHI started in Los Angeles, the sheriff had already taken steps to ease the transition of inmates to the community by establishing a Community Transition Unit (CTU) in 2001. This was an obvious point of connection for RHI staff in Los Angeles, who decided to focus on potential changes within LASD and spent some time with the CTU director designing approaches to link releasees to community-based supports and housing. Ultimately the Just In Reach (JIR) program evolved from this work. In 2008, special appropriations by the County Board of Supervisors for a wide-ranging set of novel interventions and demonstrations known as the Homelessness Prevention Initiative provided the funds to support JIR. Once JIR was funded (by the LASD) in spring 2008, CSH-LA's RHI staff person became and remains very involved in every aspect of JIR. The RHI program manager provides training, facilitates meetings, develops and monitors procedures when necessary, and supports the JIR housing specialists. The RHI program manager also arranged a peer-to-peer visit to New York that included representatives of all JIR agencies, the CTU director and a LASD commander who recently assumed responsibility for inmate services and the CTU, the CSH RHI staff person and several others.
- Statewide funding for reentry in California. An accomplishment of the RHI project so far unique among the three large RHI sites is involvement with several state legislators interested in establishing reentry demonstration projects for state prisoners. CSH and its partners worked very closely with the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) on a \$25 million RFP for wrap-around services and housing for mentally ill parolees.
- Nurturing communication among jail mental health and CTU staff. Communication between jail mental health and CTU staff has expanded access to mental health services for the detainees and potentially expanded access to CTU services for jail mental health patients.
- Building provider capacity. CSH-LA has encouraged developer/service provider teams to create new units dedicated to the reentry population through its Supportive Housing Institute-Opening New Doors (SHI-OND). SHI-OND, which CSH-IL also uses, offers a multi-session course covering every aspect of PSH development. At least two teams

that have gone through recent trainings intend to create housing geared to the reentry population specifically.

Chicago

In Chicago, the RHI approach to increase access to housing for the reentry population has been both top-down and bottom-up. Specifically, CSH is helping to build capacity among local nonprofit developers and service agencies and is also working with elected officials and public agency administrators to facilitate collaboration and funding for projects to house the jail and prison reentry population. Key systems change accomplishments include:

- Development of the Frequent Users of Jail and Mental Health Services Initiative (“Chicago FUSE”). Modeled and adapted from NYC FUSE, this initiative targets individuals with a history of homelessness and mental illness who also cycle through jail and are currently being released from Cook County Department of Corrections (jail) and links them with permanent supportive housing providers in Chicago. Although this project is a collaboration of multiple city and state partners, the idea originated from and was steadfastly pursued by the RHI program manager in Chicago. CSH staff also secured housing vouchers from the City of Chicago’s Low-Income Housing Trust Fund for Chicago FUSE, and fostered strong support from the Cook County Sheriff, Tom Dart. It is notable that even with Illinois and Chicago’s severe budgetary crisis, the promised subsidies for the units have remained dedicated to the project. This initiative is being rigorously evaluated with funding from the National Institute of Justice.
- New reentry supportive housing project for women. CSH, together with the Cook County Department of Housing, has helped inform the development of a new permanent supportive housing project for women coming from the jail to the community that are seeking reunification with their children. This new project would be the first of its kind in that the County is directly funding and leading a reentry housing project. The Cook County Board has redirected personnel and resources to promote permanent supportive housing. CSH intends to fund case managers for this new project, to coordinate the wrap-around services.
- Statewide reentry planning grants. In collaboration with the City of Chicago, the Office of the Sheriff of Cook County, the Office of the Cook County President, and the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC), CSH issued a Request for Proposals for planning grants targeted to 10 “high-impact” communities, that is, communities in the state that had a high number of individuals returning from incarceration. In the end, the planning grants were provided to 14 communities, which together account for nearly 85 percent of the people returning home from IDOC. The planning grant recipients included urban, rural, and suburban communities, each with the goal of bringing together prison, mental health, housing, and community agencies to figure out how to increase reentry housing in their neighborhoods. The information gleaned from these planning grants will inform IDOC’s efforts to develop more than 120 units of reentry housing.

- The “Collaborative on Reentry.” Formed to bring together reentry workgroups that existed in the Governor’s Office, the Mayor’s Office, and the County, the Collaborative recognized four key reentry issues of which housing was one. The goal of the Collaborative is to bring together stakeholders at the city, county, and state level to develop an action plan for reentry, including recommendations for specific projects, a timeline to implement these projects, resources necessary to implement the projects, and the identification of key agencies to spearhead the plan. For the housing group, the goal is to increase access to housing for the reentry population, specifically—including those coming from the jail and the prison. RHI staff is leading this workgroup, which includes more than 80 city, county, state, and nonprofit agency representatives.
- Discharge Planning Group – CSH assisted in convening a Countywide Forum on Discharge Planning and Homelessness that brought together the three Cook County, IL homeless continuums of care, along with county and state agencies, to discuss the policies of discharging institutions and how they impact homelessness. Panelists included Sheriff Tom Dart and wide array of senior public officials, and it is resulting in several policy reform efforts, including retention of Medicaid benefits, and issuance of state identification upon release.

Other RHI Activities across the Country

- New reentry pilots in Ohio and Minnesota. In Ohio, CSH has launched its re-entry supportive housing pilot program in partnership with the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction. The pilot has placed more than 100 people into supportive housing to date, and continues to place more people every week through its network of four supportive housing providers. In Hennepin County, Minnesota, CSH committed more than \$100,000 to launch a “FUSE” demonstration program, together with Hennepin County Community Corrections and St. Stephen’s Human Services. The initiative includes a dedicated probation officer working with the target population, jail in-reach services, and connections to permanent housing and supports in the community.
- Federal policy work. At the federal level, CSH has pursued an ambitious system change agenda that has produced a few key successes, including the following:
 - Inclusion of housing as an eligible use of recently authorized and appropriated funding under the Second Chance Act.
 - Revisions to HUD administrative policy, including the expansion of the definition of “homeless” to people who are in a public institution (i.e., jail) for less than 90 days—the old rule was 30 days, so the new rule significantly expands opportunities to connect people leaving institutions with appropriate reentry supports that include homeless system resources.
 - Statutory language in of the HEARTH Act (McKinney-Vento reauthorization and expansion) that passed in 2009 codifies a broader definition of homelessness, which includes more of the reentry population.

Lessons Learned

System change as a goal comes with numerous challenges, regardless of the substantive field; CSH and its dedicated RHI staff worked hard to diminish or remove a range of statutory, regulatory, and bureaucratic obstacles and pursue success. As in many other arenas, it is clear that system change is an ongoing process that can take years to achieve. Some of the lessons learned, highlighted below, are unique to reentry housing, and others will also be relevant to policymakers, administrators and advocates in other fields.

Policy Level Lessons

- Have someone whose job is system change—It is critically important to have someone “minding the store”—facilitating, coordinating, stimulating, reminding, organizing, assessing progress, bringing in new players, and keeping the many actors from corrections/criminal justice, behavioral health, and housing moving in the right general direction. This is the role the RHI staff has played in RHI sites—RHI pays for someone to pay attention.
- Be flexible and capitalize on opportunity—In New York City “opportunity” was the combined interest of cabinet-level directors of corrections and homeless services; in Chicago it was the emergence of housing as a key reentry issue for several working groups across different levels of government; in Los Angeles it was state legislators and ultimately LASD.
- Cultivate a champion within corrections—Having a key advocate/champion in a high-level position in corrections is critical to success given the often-held belief that housing is not under the purview of criminal justice. When a corrections leader shows that reentry housing is a priority, other key leaders are likely to follow suit. Contrary to conventional wisdom, the vast majority of leaders in the criminal justice and corrections systems are committed to addressing the re-entry issue and make for very good and powerful allies. In fact, many see collaboration as absolutely essential because they understand that they are held responsible for many reentry issues, yet lack the resources and expertise necessary to help people to successfully re-enter the community.
- Framing the issue in terms of costs and public safety is powerful – Focusing on the concrete costs of people to specific crisis systems (like corrections and homelessness) is an influential approach to engaging and sustaining involvement and investment from these systems. Additionally, framing the discussion as a public safety issue is also powerful.
- Collaboration begets collaboration—Collaboration among local leaders/officials nurtures an environment of which other local leaders want to be part, particularly when there is positive media attention to the issue at hand. It is important to utilize existing supportive housing models and systems integration to inform and expand the approach for the criminal justice system involved populations.
- Negotiations with housing authorities increase access—Federal law has only narrow prohibitions about eligibility for people with criminal histories. Housing authorities are prohibited by federal law from providing housing to people with certain criminal records. However, many housing authorities impose

restrictions related to criminal record far more than federal restrictions require. Some communities have been able to get housing vouchers for former offenders by working through points of resistance with housing authority staff and boards. Another route is working with PHAs to create more favorable provision of the HUD-mandated annual administrative plan that must be approved by HUD. Persistence pays off.

- Use public partners to make your case—Bring leaders, advocates and caseworkers from new, emerging, or interested communities to visit places that have already shown some successes. Seeing success first hand can go a long way toward getting leaders from other communities to understand that change is possible in their own locations. Note that it is important to have not only the local leaders on the site visit, but also the casework staff who would be working with clients regularly.
- Use data up front to inform the policy/program response — Conducting data analysis and matching client records across systems to disaggregate the problem and concretely document and detail the scale and scope of the overlap between the homeless system, mental health, and corrections is a powerful tool that can be used as the foundation to build research-based policies and programs, and also facilitate dialog toward a shared program mission among the wide array of stakeholders (with differing organizational missions).
- Gather data to document impact—To achieve sustainability, progress must be tracked and showcased. Documentation should include costs and benefits of programs and policies. Progress must be measured in terms that local leaders from the different fields can understand and benefit from.
- Generate positive publicity—Media attention and publicity that highlight successes can go far to create a positive atmosphere. Use documentation of success to get this publicity. Even small successes can make good news stories, such as a provider’s success with one formerly “hard-to-house” client.

Program Level Lessons

- Different program models will work in different places—Given that much variation exists among communities in provider capacity, service and housing resources, connections, and interested parties, it is important to tailor the program to the local context. It is most useful to start with a community’s strengths and branch out once there is evidence of success.
- Service providers should be able to adapt services to the reentry population. Supportive housing providers must understand the unique experiences and challenges of people with histories of incarceration, and adapt service models to include very intensive services upon release to effectively serve the population.
- Anticipate NIMBY issues even with past successes—NIMBY presents significant hurdles at the community level, but can sometimes be overcome when dedicated and experienced partners are involved in demonstrating, through the use of similar projects, that community “fears” were not always realized. Program partners willing to collect data on successful past projects that can be used to allay fears will be a key tool in gaining community support.

- Connect with people while they are still incarcerated—The risk of losing people if they are released without a strong connection to the reentry program is quite high. It is far better to engage, screen for eligibility, enroll, and begin post-release planning while a person is still incarcerated (Los Angeles), including having a system to flag frequent users when they enter jail or prison (Chicago). Even if permanent housing is not available immediately, the ability to offer some type of immediate post-release housing, with someone to meet a person at release and provide transportation to that housing, increases the odds that those enrolled will still be active participants once released.
- Use available funding for new reentry staff that operate within corrections, if possible—Related to the bullet directly above, for some jurisdictions, it may only be possible to achieve change within jails and prisons by adding a staff person (or more than one) whose sole responsibility is to identify and connect incarcerated persons to community-based providers with housing and supportive services. In Chicago, CSH used RHI funds to create two staff positions within the Cook County jail to facilitate FUSE enrollment and connection to services. This helped to ensure fidelity to the program model, a critical factor in achieving intended program outcomes. In Los Angeles, new case management and housing specialist positions in nonprofit agencies were trained and supported to work in the jail with CTU staff. It is important to note that simply adding more responsibility to an existing position within the jail or prison is not optimal in that the “new” program-related responsibilities may take a back seat to business as usual.
- Expect and anticipate program implementation hurdles—The design and implementation of any reentry supportive housing initiative may take twice as long to implement as expected at the outset, which will impact the timing of when public resources need to be made available and when other stakeholder commitments will be necessary. Programs that do not build in the possibilities of delays can jeopardize their resources.
- Devise efficient ways to identify frequent users—Programmatic needs for identifying multiple system use are different from the types of data matching that are done to assess the scope of overlap, to know whether it has changed, and to plan for an adequate level of resources to address the needs of frequent users. The program question is, “Has Person A, who just came into jail, used jail multiple times and also used other systems?” Mechanisms that allow program staff to answer this question every day, for everyone who just became incarcerated, will be different from those that are trying to answer questions such as “How many people are frequent users of corrections, shelters, and hospital emergency rooms?”
In the ideal world, RHI project staff would be able to access all the systems used by potential clients, to assess eligibility based on the extent of multiple system use.
- Data systems should be real time, up-to-date, and accurate—The ideal rarely happens, but sometimes it can be approximated, as the Chicago Frequent Users program is doing. Having a “live” system could greatly facilitate release planning from jail, as release from jail can happen quickly,

sometimes in a day or two. A live system available to jail release planners might provide the data and impetus to seek far-reaching changes with regard to planning for supportive housing (and other housing options) upon release (or within a few days of release).

- Help providers collect relevant data—Nonprofit organizations and local leaders could benefit from technical assistance from research partners with regard to data gathering, data sharing, performance measurement, and evaluation. Evaluation reporting should be set up with the assistance from outside research partners. In addition, the development of plans for evaluation reporting and the incorporation of evaluation should be part of initial discussions of program development, not an after-thought.

Summary

Given the breadth and extent of RHI activities over the last three years in New York, Chicago and Los Angeles, as well as in other jurisdictions, it is clear that CSH staff have accomplished system change across multiple systems including corrections, behavioral health and housing, and continue to work on many others. In each of the three main cities, RHI program managers have succeeded in putting the issue of reentry housing “on the map.” They have worked with local elected officials and public administrators to reach agreement that the issue of reentry housing needs to be a priority across multiple agencies and to begin to take concrete steps to formulate solutions through, at minimum, the dedication of resources to support reentry housing programs. Each city has a collaborative body, of which CSH’s RHI program managers are a part, where there is a focus (such as a subcommittee or a working group) on the provision of supportive housing to individuals who have been involved with the criminal justice system. In terms of concrete resources being dedicated by agency administrators, CSH program managers have been able to obtain housing subsidies dedicated to frequent users of jail and shelters (Chicago, New York), facilitate a shift in agency grant-making approaches by getting agencies to write RFPs that explicitly request supportive housing services targeted to individuals coming out of prisons and jails (Chicago, Los Angeles), and use agency staff to manage programs (New York) and collect data and report on program progress (New York, Los Angeles).

In taking on the role of the intermediary, CSH has developed new programs, proven it could be successful managing pilot initiatives, achieved results, and continually innovated to move the policy agenda forward. As a consequence, city and state agencies have been willing to put hard resources on the table that can be used for units and services. CSH has also successfully leveraged private support that has made city and state agencies more willing to take the risk of committing their own dollars. The commitment from city, state, and private agencies has opened avenues for providers to obtain and appropriately use the resources to work with a high-need population. With CSH efforts and financial support—most often in the form of technical assistance or a planning grant—an extraordinarily large number of providers have either stepped forward on their own or agreed to collaborate.

CSH had built a solid reputation with providers before RHI, a reputation that continues to grow through its work on RHI. As all providers we interviewed made clear, CSH was a catalyst in solidifying providers' involvement in the area of reentry housing. A few providers had been trying to connect with formerly incarcerated people before CSH involvement, but it appears that CSH's involvement brought targeted programmatic efforts to fruition. CSH staff has shown that CSH can be trusted to assist in building sustainable collaborations that benefit all stakeholders involved. The creation of peer support networks in RHI sites has been enormously successful with regard to overcoming typical obstacles, such as NIMBY, eligibility and benefits problems for clients, and problems with landlords. The providers have a vehicle that minimizes the potential for feelings of isolation with regard to the challenges encountered in serving the formerly incarcerated.

Undoubtedly, having flexible philanthropic resources has allowed CSH to maximize the RHI impact by investing in the best available local opportunities. CSH staff has used funds for strategies and resources that include: funding staff positions within corrections facilities, conducting training and technical assistance for public and nonprofit agencies, re-granting funds to help community-based providers develop programs or slots for reentry housing services, funding enhanced services for providers, disseminating successes through conference presentations, facilitating peer-to-peer visits, and other activities. Most important is use of RHI funds to support full-time coordinators in each city, who know the systems well enough to plug many system holes, and innovate by attempting new strategies to target and serve the criminal justice-involved population that would benefit from supportive housing. Along the way, they have also elevated the importance of housing as a key service for all reentry populations. When CSH launched RHI, across the nation reentry housing was given minimal attention among the myriad "pressing" reentry issues. Today, housing and supportive housing are much higher on the radar screen of criminal justice agencies and other stakeholders.

In sum, RHI activities have helped CSH become the "go to" organization when information or experts are needed related to reentry housing. Indeed, CSH has earned the title of expert through innovative thinking and strategic planning around a difficult issue. Furthermore, the FUSE model has become a nationally-recognized model, worthy of replication, and as such, roughly half a dozen communities are attempting to replicate it. CSH has astutely leveraged resources and obtained evaluation resources to develop, in partnership with outside researchers, five rigorous evaluations of their programs. These evaluations, combined with CSH staff's diligence in staying at the forefront of dissemination, are helping to build a knowledge base around the country of best practices in reentry housing.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON CSH'S RETURNING HOME INITIATIVE, PLEASE SEE [HTTP://WWW.CSH.ORG/](http://www.csh.org/)

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THE RESEARCH PROJECT ASSESSING SYSTEM CHANGE, CONTACT CATERINA ROMAN - CROMAN@TEMPLE.EDU

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