

As rates of crime and incarceration have dramatically increased over the past four decades, the number of individuals coming out of prison has also risen. Each year more than half a million prisoners are released back to some of the most disadvantaged communities in the country. As an increasingly large number of prisoners reenter society, concerns about public safety and ex-offenders' successful re-integration have come to the forefront. In Rhode Island, prison administrators have ten years of experience with a program, called Discharge Planning, designed to prepare offenders for successful reentry. This study asks:

What impact did the Discharge Planning program have on re-incarcerated participants' post-release experience and what, if anything, could the program have done further to prevent their return to prison?

From the qualitative data presented in this study it appears that even for those Discharge Planning clients who are presently re-incarcerated, the program did have a significant, positive, and well-received impact on their lives after release. The program did this by relieving the anxiety about release from prison, by connecting clients to services and programs in the community, and by supporting those offenders who were motivated to "make good" upon release. While these former clients see the impact as significant, it is also clear that the program could do more. Four factors are proposed as determining the degree to which the program will impact ex-offender's lives. Broadly defined these factors are (1) high quality case management, (2) available community resources, (3) reducing institutional barriers, and (4) individual motivation by the ex-offender. Finally, a set of specific set of recommendations based on the research literature and data presented here is offered to improve the program in future years.