

AMERICAN

# Jails

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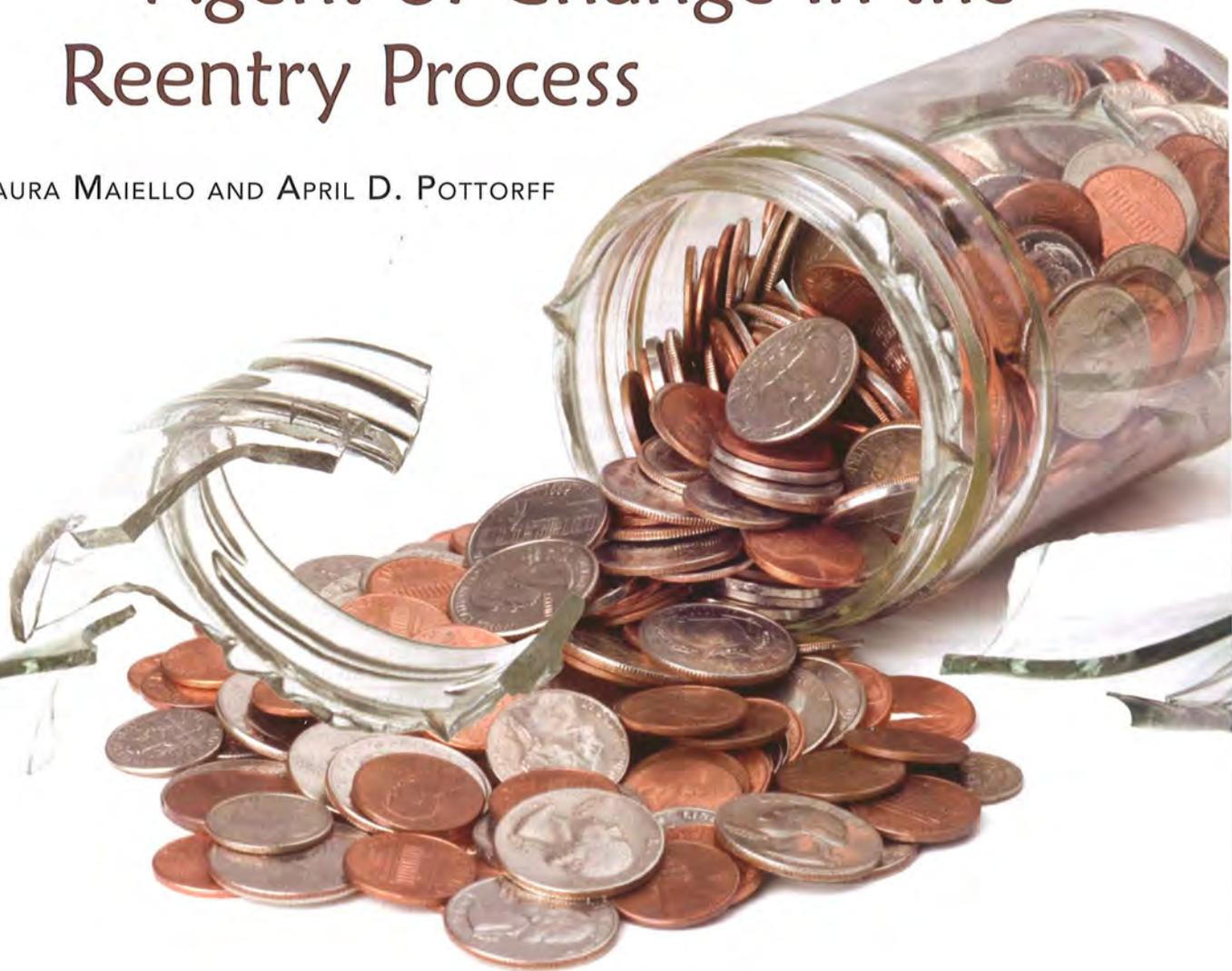


## Dealing With the Mentally Ill Offender

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# The Jail Facility: Agent of Change in the Reentry Process

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**Because county, State, and Federal policymakers** must allocate scarce funds among many competing governmental needs, public agencies are being asked to do more with less. At the same time, officials are being held increasingly accountable for a successful return on dollars spent.

For correctional officials, prisons have a clear mandate of treatment and rehabilitation. However, the nature of the local jail poses somewhat of a quandary for a more fragmented system whose facilities have historically been viewed as turnstiles of justice for short-term offenders awaiting court action.

## Jails Versus Prisons

Jails are distinguished from their prison counterparts in many ways, most notably by the sheer volume of people that they serve. On any given day, the jail population averages 785,000 inmates. Collectively, jails admit and release more than 16 million individuals annually. In fact, the number of jail admissions and releases in *one month* is equivalent to the number of prison admissions and discharges for an *entire year*.

The jail population is transient, a fact that poses practical as well as operational challenges. Most jail inmates are released within a few days of their arrest, and those who remain incarcerated in a pretrial status do not know how long they will remain detained before disposition of their case. This uncertainty makes traditional long-term programming difficult to administer, and anxiety over the unknown can impact an inmate's ability to focus or commit.

Prison populations are assigned to a minimum, medium, maximum, or treatment facility within a statewide system based on a classification assessment of risk and need. In jails, a variety of offenders ranging from violent felons to those committing minor misdemeanors must be served in a single facility. It is also said that jails are the new social service provider, and special needs such as alcohol and drug addiction, psychiatric/mental health issues, and acute medical conditions are often over-represented in jail populations nationally.

## A New Paradigm

In any organization—particularly jails—mission drives operations. The jail has certainly evolved beyond that of a human warehouse, but its mission still lacks clarity. Given the unique challenges posed by jail populations, must jail officials limit their role to that of protecting local communities for the short term while offenders are in their charge? While jails have done this admirably over the years, the new thinking suggests that jails can do more as part of a system to enhance long term public safety.

So what should the vision for today's jails be? If most county jail inmates return to the community, then long-term public safety is predicated on reducing recidivism by preparing inmates to make a successful transition back to the community. Jails can be an active participant in the reentry goal by:

- Providing good in-jail treatment programs.
- Linking offenders to services.
- Collaborating with community-based providers.
- Providing an environment that is conducive to positive change.

The modern jail environment can support this mission both operationally and through good physical design.

## From Mission to Operations

Facilities that focus on both short-term security considerations and long-term public safety goals employ these four components:

- Purposeful intake and assessment on all new admissions.
- A sound inmate classification system and follow-up housing unit assignment.
- Meaningful in-jail treatment programs.
- Proactive transition to community.

**Intake and Assessment.** Transition must begin at admission and inmates must begin to prepare for reentry the moment they enter the jail. Many inmates are released on bail or other early intervention measures within the first 24 hours of admission. But for those remaining, even for a relatively short period of time, intake and assessment is the critical first step in the process. The intake and assessment process, through the use of validated instruments, measures not only risk to institutional security (classification), but also risk to community (pretrial or work release eligibility) and risk of reoffending (to establish rehabilitative program and treatment goals).

The benefits are cumulative. Such an assessment allows staff to match inmates to programs specific to their risk and need. The information system serves as a tool for evaluating, documenting, and planning future program and service needs.

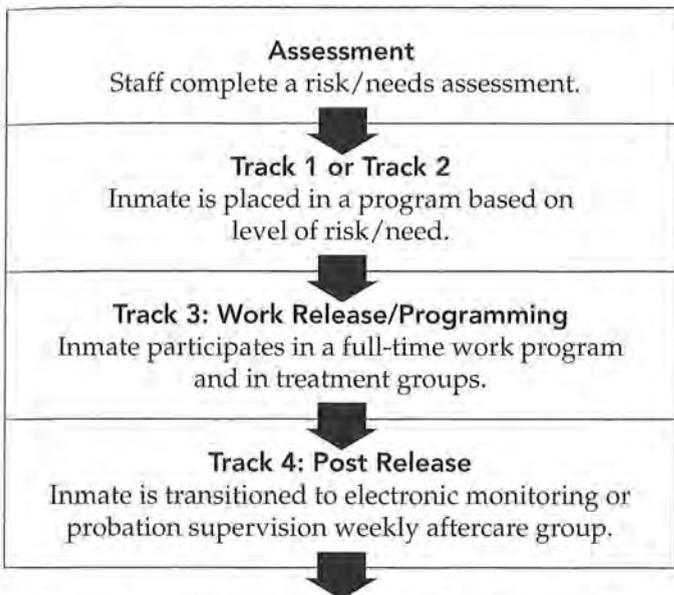
**Classification and Housing.** Objective-based classification systems take behavioral based factors into account, rather than relying solely on charge and legal status classification criteria. A dedicated reception unit for new admissions is an important tool for observing inmate adjustment and behavior firsthand before housing unit assignment is made. Identifying inmates who cannot be managed in the general population is critical to institutional security and treatment goals. When violent or disruptive inmates are separated, general population units are more stable allowing residents to focus on positive behavior change rather than safety concerns.

Direct supervision housing units where the officer is located directly in the unit supports this concept, by providing proactive intervention rather than reacting to an event after it occurs. Professional correctional officers act as a role model for appropriate behavior and mutual respect—necessary tools for coping in the community.

**Treatment Programs.** When transition begins at admission, treatment programs are essential. In most instances, the focus of intervention is on the sentenced population, but pretrial inmates may benefit as well, especially given that many county jail inmates have substance abuse

histories, low education levels, high unemployment, and other challenges that often lead to failed reentry. Some jurisdictions are incorporating treatment requirements (substance abuse, etc.) into criteria for supervised pre-trial release programs.

To be successful, treatment programs must be targeted and consistently applied. For example, one county jail in New England requires sentenced inmates to complete an in-house substance abuse intervention program before allowing them to participate in work release. This is after recognizing that most work release violations were substance-abuse related. The flow diagram below illustrates this approach.



Successful treatment programs are also multidisciplinary, which has direct implications for facility planning and environment. Numerous examples exist where community-based program volunteers are willing and able to provide in-jail services, but cannot due to lack of adequate program space and/or where the physical environment of the facility reduces incentives for visiting. Along these same lines, many county jails report inmate waiting lists for in-jail programs because they simply do not have the space to run the number and type of programs required to respond to the need.

### An Environment Conducive To Change

The facility's role in meeting the mission of successful reentry is to create an environment that is conducive to change. This means planning and designing the physical space that is in concert with philosophical and operational goals.

Once the commitment is made to facilitate the successful reentry of inmates into the community, how well does your building support your program and mission? In existing facilities, one challenge is identifying space to conduct support programs in an already cramped envi-

ronment; or in some instances the building may have been designed to support a different operational and supervision philosophy. In addition, adjacency of spaces within the building may not be conducive to supporting your new mission without exercising a high degree of creativity. One new jail superintendent would not let the absence of program space in his facility deter the organization from providing much needed programs to inmates. One of his first actions as new superintendent was to purchase a trailer from the inmate commissary account for exclusive inmate program use.

When you are in the fortunate position of planning a new jail, you can tailor your new building specifically to support your mission, encourage collaboration, ensure safety, and reduce stress among staff and inmates. For your new jail to meet your mission, early definition of operational and space requirements are critical. Jails are operationally driven buildings. Not only is planning and designing for adequate and appropriate program accommodations critical, but so is defining the method for delivering programs and services, as both impacts a building layout.

For instance, will staff move inmates to and from a centralized location for visitation, dining and recreation multiple times every day? Doable, but this process can be staff intensive and may increase the opportunity for an incident to occur. Decentralized delivery of programs



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and services (e.g., recreation, dining, visitation, etc.) occur at the housing unit, therefore inmates are moved around the facility less, thus reducing risk and staffing requirements.

Decentralized visitation may be accomplished two ways: video visitation or a noncontact visitation booth located at the housing unit. For video visitation, an inmate utilizes equipment located within the dayroom of a housing unit while the visitor is located in a non-secure area of the jail or at a remote site. In the case of noncontact visitation, the visit booths are located at each housing unit. Inmates access the secure side directly from the housing unit dayroom. Visitors access the non-secure side, unescorted, via a nonsecure corridor located outside the secure perimeter. The benefits of this scenario far outweigh the disadvantages. It reduces staffing requirements as it reduces the processing requirements of visitors because they never enter the secure perimeter. It also eliminates the need for staff to escort visitors and inmates around the facility. Minimizing movement of inmates around the facility reduces security risks.

One of the greatest benefits supporting normative environments and the reentry mission is it increases opportunity and frequency of visits from family, friends, community support representatives, and legal counsel.

Your building can support reentry mission by creating a normative environment that encourages positive behavior. For example, when recreation is centralized and shared by many housing units, then access to the area must be based on a shared recreation schedule. This generally results in limited access on a daily basis. In a direct supervision setting with recreation yards accessible at each housing unit dayroom, the inmate is in a position to make the decision to participate in a passive activity in the dayroom or to take part in physical recreation in the adjacent recreation yard. Which of these scenarios is likely to result in positive behavior—waiting for the one hour of recreation at 2 p.m. every day or participating at leisure around other scheduled activities? Some facilities elect to provide recreation yards at the housing units and also provide a centrally located gymnasium for supplemental, scheduled recreation. Such “amenities” may be utilized as an incentive for program participation, personal responsibility, and positive behavioral change—all necessary for successful reentry in the real world.

These are just a few examples of how philosophy, programs, and operational decisions impact the physical building layout so that the jail facility becomes a tool for meeting its mission of rehabilitation and successful reentry.

### **A Tranquil Environment**

Close your eyes and think of a space that invokes emotion in you. Are you inspired... energized... tranquil? Do you feel safe and secure? If so, describe what

that space is like. Is it sunlit? Is it quiet? What color is it? How is it furnished? Now imagine spending a day in a building that lacks natural daylight, is loud, and is dismal in color. Do you now feel anxious? Stressed? Fatigued? Our building environment may have a direct impact on our mood, how we feel physically, whether or not we want to be productive within that environment, and ultimately how we interact with others.

Introducing and maximizing access to daylight throughout the facility has a great impact on the quality of space, human spirit, and perception of one's safety. This not only applies to inmates and staff in the housing units, but to volunteers, medical personnel, counselors, and visitors. If a facility is clean, has access to daylight, managed acoustics, and calming colors, occupants will be more comfortable and will feel safe. Raising ceiling heights, especially in large rooms, eliminates spaces that are oppressive by creating ones that are pleasant and inspiring. These design features are “normative” and may result in fewer incidents among inmates, reduced staff turnover, better interaction between personnel and inmates, increased visitors, and more community volunteers—all essential for an inmate's smooth transition back into the community.

A recent tour of one such facility reinforced the importance of these design philosophies. The director reported a 50 percent reduction in violent incidents since moving into the new center. He directly attributed the reduction to the quality of the space and how it impacted stress levels and emotions of every occupant.

### **Good Neighbor**

How does the location of a jail support reentry missions? If a facility is convenient to public transportation and to social support services offering assistance, it is likely inmates will be visited by family members more frequently and will have more access to social and counseling services.

Jails are civic buildings. The process of identifying a site for a new jail often launches a debate within a community. Many times it is located in an urban context or in proximity to residential communities; therefore, the challenge is to design a facility with aesthetic qualities sensitive to the environment and context in which the jail is located. Unfortunately, at the first mention of the word “jail,” imagery of razor ribbon atop of a security fence (or two) with a watchtower is often the first picture that enters many people's minds. With that image in mind, home, business, and property owners are going to defend the value of their properties and investments. However, with effort and an open design and planning process, the community can be enlightened on how modern jail facilities make good neighbors.

A basic element of creating a good neighbor is incorporating the secure perimeter at the building envelope and eliminating the need for security fencing. Utilize



Denver Detention Center: OZ Architecture, Hartman Cox Architects, RicciGreene Associates



Union County Juvenile Detention Center: RicciGreene Architects, Architect



Lexington-Fayette County Detention: DMJM Design Architect, CMW Architect of Record, RicciGreene Associates—Program Manager



Orange County Correctional Facility: Jacobs-Wyper-Ricci Architects, Joint Venture

materials that soften or eliminate the secure appearance and take their cues from the surrounding building environment and local vernacular (e.g., masonry colors and patterns, aluminum clad/stainless steel security windows, pitched metal roofs, window sizes, and proportions, etc.).

In addition, what does a visitor experience when arriving at your facility? Is it easy for him/her to navigate and understand where to park? Is it easy to distinguish where the main public entry is located? Is visitor parking separate and shielded from view of where arrestees/inmates in transport and building services are circulating the grounds and accessing the facility? These are important considerations when planning and designing a new facility.

### Conclusion

A jail facility evokes positive or negative perceptions for staff, inhabitants, family, counselors, community volunteers, and others who are essential to the transition process and the extent to which they engage in the shared mission of successful reentry. The operational

and physical environment of a jail facility relative to its ultimate mission of successful community reentry must be considered early in the planning and design process to maximize its potential as a tool for meeting this mission. 📄

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