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Support Services for Inmates Reduce Recidivism Rates, Pitt Study Finds

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Providing services to Allegheny County Jail (ACJ) inmates while they are incarcerated and after their release dramatically reduces the chance of the inmates returning to jail, according to recent data from a study by University of Pittsburgh's Center on Race and Social Problems (CRSP).

Hide Yamatani, professor and associate dean of research in Pitt's School of Social Work, was the lead investigator in a three-year project that evaluated the Allegheny County Jail Collaborative. The 25-member group, whose members represent the ACJ and the Allegheny County Departments of Health and Human Services, provides in-jail services to inmates, including drug and alcohol treatment, GED preparation, computer literacy, stress and anger management, parenting skills, life skills, and vocational training.

The study involved a group of 300 ACJ adult male inmates, half of them Black and half White, who agreed to participate and were among those receiving in-jail services. Upon their release from jail, the men were encouraged to seek support services from more than 60 community-based organizations. The former inmates were then interviewed in face-to-face meetings after 30 days, six months, and one year.

Yamatani found that the group of former inmates had a 50 percent lower recidivism rate (16.5 percent) compared to another group of inmates (33.1 percent) of a similar age one year after being released from the ACJ, prior to the launch of the collaborative.

"This is a good model program for other county jails," said Yamatani, who explained his findings last week in a jail conference room crowded with reporters, Pitt Social Work faculty, foundation representatives, Allegheny County Chief Executive Dan Onorato, and other county officials. According to Yamatani, the ACJ Collaborative, formed in 1999, is the only system of its kind in the nation to help county jail inmates, though there are some programs at state and federal institutions.

"So often, people have the impression that money spent on inmates and former inmates to receive social services is wasted," said Larry Davis, CRSP director, Donald M. Henderson Professor, and dean of Pitt's School of Social Work. "These findings argue strongly that efforts to help those who have been incarcerated result in significant positive returns for the larger society. We are sure that many of the men who participated in this study are now spending time parenting their children—something they would not be doing had they not been provided services by the ACJ Collaborative."

Other highlights of the study show:

- An annual savings for Allegheny County of more than \$5.3 million, with the greatest cost savings in the areas of increased public safety and reduced victimization among county residents;
- No statistically significant differences in the recidivism rate between Black and White collaborative inmate participants, in contrast to national recidivism trends;
- Improved housing for both Black and White inmates one year after their release from jail;
- Higher enrollment in community-based service organizations; and
- Increased employment for former White inmates, and an unchanged employment level for Blacks.

"Were it not for this program, our jail population would be much higher," said Onorato as he publicly thanked Pitt for the research.

"These findings validate the efforts of the ACJ Collaborative to save tax dollars and successfully reintegrate former inmates back into our community, thereby increasing public safety," Onorato said, adding that reducing recidivism helps eliminate the "revolving door mentality," where people get stuck in a cycle they can't exit.

Yamatani's study was funded by the Human Services Integration Fund, which comprises 16 local foundations. More information about the Allegheny County Jail Collaborative can be found at www.alleghenycounty.us/dhs/jail.aspx.