# REENTRY HOUSING OPTIONS:

## THE POLICYMAKERS' GUIDE

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# Reentry Housing Options: The Policymakers' Guide

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# Introduction

When individuals are released from prison or jail, the ability to access safe and secure housing within the community is crucial to their successful reentry. Studies have shown that the first month after release is a vulnerable period "during which the risk of becoming homeless and/or returning to criminal justice involvement is high."[1] Yet, in most jurisdictions to which individuals return after incarceration, accessible and affordable housing is in exceedingly short supply. Additional challenges unique to people with a criminal history make it even more difficult for them to obtain suitable housing.

Historically, the national debate on housing for people returning from prison or jail has been considered within broader discussions of affordable housing. However, as the number of formerly incarcerated individuals has skyrocketed over the last few decades, widespread concern has developed about how to provide them with housing in ways that promote public safety. In 1980, 144,000 individuals were released back to their communities from state prisons;[2] by 2008 that number had more than quadrupled to 683,106.[3] The high costs associated with not providing appropriate housing for the growing reentry population—discussed more fully below—became apparent, prompting many jurisdictions across the country to look for innovative approaches to increase affordable housing capacity for newly released individuals.

The obstacles to securing housing for reentering individuals are significant. Private-market rental housing, for instance, is closed to many individuals transitioning from prison or jail either because they lack sufficient funds for move-in costs or because landlords are unwilling to rent to people with criminal records. Likewise, public housing often keeps out those with a history of criminal activity, based on limited federal exclusions and the generally much broader local restrictions. Even when people who have been in prison or jail are not excluded systematically and receive financial assistance (for example, through housing choice vouchers), affordable units are frequently so scarce relative to need that the options are, effectively, unavailable. And although many people leaving prison or jail would like to live with family or friends, those households may be unable or unwilling to receive them.[4] Therefore, as a last resort, many reentering individuals turn to homeless shelters. According to a study in New York City, more than 30 percent of single adults who enter homeless shelters are individuals recently released from city and state correctional institutions. The study also indicates that many continually cycle in and out of incarceration.[5]

Without a stable residence, it is nearly impossible for newly released individuals to reconnect positively to a community. More often than not, when these individuals are not linked to the services and support that could facilitate their successful reintegration, they end up

reincarcerated for either violating the conditions of release or for committing a new crime.[6] There are significant costs to public safety in the form of increased crime and victimization. In addition, when individuals lack stable housing and fail to maintain steady employment, children and others who depend on them for support are adversely affected. Taxpayer dollars are increasingly being spent on reincarceration instead of much less expensive community services that could reduce recidivism and improve the lives of people returning from prison or jail.*

At a time when so many people who have had no contact with the criminal justice system lack affordable housing, it can be difficult to garner support for appropriate housing options for the recently incarcerated. Yet, clearly the crime prevention concerns alone warrant a more careful examination of what can be done to make the most of existing capacity, and how that capacity can be increased when needed. This guide is written as a resource for individuals and organizations dedicated to enhancing public safety by reducing recidivism—particularly by connecting the reentry population to services and supports that facilitate successful community reintegration.† Elected leaders and agency administrators, especially at the state and local levels, can use this guide to improve their understanding of reentry housing issues and to inform their development of sound policies. Likewise, community and faith-based organizations can increase their knowledge of reentry housing alternatives, which can direct their advocacy for specific approaches.

## How the Guide Is Organized

The guide begins with a short narrative on housing options and a chart that profiles the six different alternatives for reentry housing that are the focus of discussion. The chart includes the features of each of the six housing options, along with their related benefits and limitations. The next section examines three distinct approaches to enhance the availability of these housing options (greater access, increased housing stock, revitalized neighborhoods). Examples of how each of these three approaches has been put into action by a particular jurisdiction are also provided.

The lists of housing options, and approaches for increasing them, referenced in the chart and text are not meant to be exhaustive; rather, they indicate the most commonly accessed housing alternatives identified by professionals in the field. The three jurisdiction examples help illustrate a cross-section of the categories of housing and the types of tactics available to policymakers wishing to increase the reentry housing stock in their jurisdiction.‡ Moreover, the examples were selected because of the broad applicability of their methods to other jurisdictions faced with similar affordable housing shortages for individuals returning from prison and jail.

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* The median daily cost associated with housing an individual in prison is $59.43, compared with $70 for an individual in jail and $30.48 for an individual in supportive housing. See The Lewin Group, *Costs of Serving Homeless Individuals in Nine Cities*, chartbook prepared at the request of the Corporation for Supportive Housing (New York: The Lewin Group, 2004).

† To ensure that the guide would be a practical, valuable document for policymakers and for those working in the reentry field, an advisory group of experts guided the development of this product (a list of advisory group members is included in the appendix). Reviewers also drew on the advisory group's expertise and experience to improve several different drafts of this guide.

‡ Examples are not by their inclusion meant to be considered endorsements or "best practices." They are illustrative of various methods to address housing shortages for people released from prison or jail.

## Housing Options

The vast majority of people in prison or jail expect to live with their families or friends after their release, but many are not equipped to receive them.[7] Those closest to the person returning to the community may lack space or financial resources, emotional bonds may have eroded over periods of incarceration, and housing regulations may limit the ability to provide housing for family members or others with criminal records.* For those individuals who do not own a home and cannot live with friends or relatives, there are six other categories of stable housing options that may be appropriate for supporting successful reentry: private-market rental housing; public housing; affordable housing (nonprofit or privately owned and managed); halfway houses; supportive housing; and specialized reentry housing. The latter three categories are extremely scarce—if available at all—in any particular jurisdiction.† Any effort to address the housing needs of the reentry population must consider the area's overall scarcity of affordable housing.

### The Unmet Demand for Affordable Housing

The lack of affordable housing is one of the most significant challenges that people who are living below the poverty level face. In 2006, nearly half of all low-income households in America spent more than 50 percent of their income on housing, whereas just 11 percent of lower-middle-income households and only 4 percent of upper-middle-income households were spending as much proportionally on housing.

In addition, the 2008 mortgage crisis has forced many former homeowners into an already tight affordable rental housing market. Contributing to the problem is the decade-long trend that has seen the supply of rental housing units available to households earning less than $16,000 (in inflation-adjusted dollars) shrink by 17 percent.

**Source:** *The State of the Nation's Housing*, Harvard University Joint Center for Housing Studies (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 2008).

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* Although studies indicate that the majority of recently released individuals live with a family member, close friend, or significant other, this option is not always possible. In some cases, conditions of parole may also prevent individuals from returning to the home of a friend or family member because of their past relationship or because the family member has a criminal record. Also, due to a combination of federal and local policies, many people with criminal histories are barred from living in federally subsidized housing. As a result, people who live in federally subsidized housing are unlikely to risk their residential stability on a family member recently released from prison or jail. See the Council of State Governments, *Report of the Re-Entry Policy Council*, 265.

† For more information on the types of housing discussed in this guide and for additional types of housing that may be appropriate, see the Reentry Housing Options Comparison Chart (http://tools.reentrypolicy.org/housing) at the Justice Center's website.

# Housing Options

## Private-market Rental Housing

| FEATURES | BENEFITS | LIMITATIONS |
|---|---|---|
| • Individual secures rental property in the private market. | • Most commonly available option in any community.<br>• May be partly or entirely paid for by public assistance.*<br>• Individuals may use a housing choice voucher (Section 8 voucher) to access rental property in the private market.†<br>• Allows individual freedom to choose housing near work, family, supervision, or treatment facility. | • Rental property owners may screen for, and refuse to rent to, people with criminal records.[8]<br>• Public assistance to help pay for housing costs may be denied to individuals with criminal records.[9] |

## Public Housing

| FEATURES | BENEFITS | LIMITATIONS |
|---|---|---|
| • Priority and eligibility for housing is decided locally.<br>• Tenant typically pays 30 percent of adjusted income toward rent.‡ | • May include units specially designated for people with physical or mental disabilities or older people.<br>• More affordable than private-market rental housing. | • Under federal law, public housing authorities or any federally assisted housing provider may refuse to house people who have been convicted of certain offenses.§<br>• The application process may be lengthy and intimidating. Income verification is required.[10] |

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* Individuals returning from prison who are at or below the poverty line may, depending on state and local policies, be eligible for public assistance (welfare) benefits that can be used to secure private-market rental housing. Likewise, many localities (for example, New York City, San Francisco) include a "shelter allowance" for individuals receiving public assistance. These funds can also be used to secure private-market rental housing (Council of State Governments, *Report of the Re-Entry Policy Council*, p. 271).

† Housing choice vouchers, commonly referred to as Section 8 vouchers, can be used to secure housing in the private rental market or in a subsidized housing project. These vouchers subsidize rents based on a fair market rent (FMR) system. HUD pays the difference between 30 percent of the family's income and the FMR for the unit.

‡ Although 30 percent of monthly adjusted income (deductions are allowed for each dependent, for elderly family members, and persons with disabilities) is the most common formula used to calculate rent for this program, tenants are actually required to pay the greater of the following: 30 percent of monthly adjusted income; 10 percent of monthly income (non-adjusted); welfare rent, if applicable; or a $25 minimum rent or higher amount (up to $50) set by a Housing Authority. From *HUD's Public Housing Program*, http://www.hud.gov/renting/phprog.cfm (accessed January 8, 2009).

§ Housing choice vouchers, commonly referred to as Section 8 vouchers, can be used to secure housing in the private rental market or in a subsidized housing project. These vouchers subsidize rents based on a fair market rent (FMR) system. HUD pays the difference between 30 percent of the family's income and the FMR for the unit.

## Affordable Housing (nonprofit or privately owned and managed)

| FEATURES | BENEFITS | LIMITATIONS |
|---|---|---|
| • Subsidized using a variety of government (and limited private) sources. Generally, tenant pays 30 percent of income toward rent.<br>• Mission-driven to serve low-income or disadvantaged people.<br>• Often coordinated or run by community development corporations or neighborhood-based housing organizations. | • Typically more affordable than private-market rental housing.<br>• Depending on source(s) of funding, may not be bound by some of the statutory restrictions that govern public housing.<br>• May provide support services on site. | • Availability is limited, and waiting lists may be long.<br>• Owners may exercise discretion to exclude people with criminal histories. |

## Halfway House*

| FEATURES | BENEFITS | POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS |
|---|---|---|
| • Provides housing for individuals close to or just after release, usually in a highly supervised environment.<br>• May be focused on behavior change, including addressing substance abuse.<br>• Housing may be conditional on compliance with community-based service plans or other conditions. | • Offers transition between the fully secure, structured, monitored environment of incarceration and the community.<br>• May enable individuals to work during their residency while keeping their expenses (if any) very low.<br>• May have alternative funding streams, including Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment block grants from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, which provide loans to help people with substance use disorders secure housing. | • May be available for limited duration only.<br>• Availability is limited, and waiting lists may be long.<br>• May not be desirable to released individuals because of rigid structure, including possible limitations on visitation and freedom to come and go at will.<br>• Does not address post-sentence, post-parole, or longer-term housing needs. |

* Halfway houses are a form of transitional housing. If there are services provided to residents, the facility may also be considered programmatic housing.

## Supportive Housing

| FEATURES | BENEFITS | POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS |
|---|---|---|
| • Tenant pays 30 percent of income toward rent, often from public benefits (e.g., Supplemental Security Income).<br>• Mission-driven to serve low-income or disadvantaged people. Depending on funding source(s), eligibility may be limited to people who were homeless prior to short periods of incarceration and/or to people with disabilities.<br>• Often coordinated or run by community development corporations or neighborhood-based housing organizations. | • Offers on-site services that may include case management, assistance with household chores, and mental health and substance abuse counseling.<br>• May offer permanent housing. | • Under federal law, public housing authorities or any federally assisted housing provider may refuse people who have been convicted of certain offenses. If privately operated, owners may exercise discretion to exclude people with criminal histories.<br>• Availability and funding may be limited from one jurisdiction to another. |

## Specialized Reentry Housing

| FEATURES | BENEFITS | POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS |
|---|---|---|
| • Some form of criminal justice supervision is typically a prerequisite for living in this type of housing. | • Addresses specific housing and service needs of formerly incarcerated people.<br>• Nonprofit staff are trained to interface with criminal justice personnel.<br>• Offers opportunity for peer-support and mentorship among releasees. | • Difficult to create due to lack of dedicated funding streams and because community opposition frequently arises when trying to secure a site for housing for individuals with criminal records.<br>• Very limited availability. |

# Three Approaches to Increasing Housing Capacity for the Reentry Population

For individuals to access any of the six categories of housing options outlined in the chart, each option must be readily available to people leaving prison or jail and in adequate supply. This guide discusses how three approaches can be used to expand these housing options: (1) creating greater *access* to existing housing units (for example, by improving housing placement services), (2) increasing the number of housing units made available specifically for the reentry population (new construction or conversion of existing units), and (3) engaging in a comprehensive neighborhood revitalization effort that includes, at its core, a plan to expand services and supports, including affordable housing, to at-risk populations. A detailed account is provided of the benefits and challenges associated with each approach, followed by a brief description of how it is implemented within a specific jurisdiction.*

## Housing Terms

**Affordable housing:** A general term applied to rental or ownership housing that is developed by nonprofit community-based organizations, private for-profit developers, or quasi-public agencies known as public housing authorities, and is offered at lower-than-market costs either through inclusionary zoning ordinances that require developers to set aside affordable units when they build a particular number of market-rate units, or through public subsidies.[11]

**Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) HOME program:** The program provides the "largest federal block grant funding to state and local governments designed exclusively to create affordable housing for low-income households." Though not directed specifically at a reentry population, each year the program grants more than $2 billion to states and localities nationwide. Communities often use HOME funds to partner with community-based organizations to support such activities as building, buying, and rehabilitating affordable housing units for rent or future sale. HOME funds are also used to provide direct rental assistance to low-income people.[12]

**Housing choice vouchers:**† Assistance to individuals that can be used for rental payments and security deposits (tenant-based vouchers), or direct subsidies to landlords (project-based vouchers). These vouchers can only be used for very low-income residents—those individuals earning less than 50 percent of that area's median income level—who lease housing units in the private market or in

*continued on next page*

* The jurisdictions' efforts were all accomplished within state and federal housing mandates.

† These vouchers are commonly referred to as Section 8 vouchers; named for the section of the U.S. Housing Act that authorized them.

## *continued:* Housing Terms

subsidized housing projects. Tenant payments in the Section 8 program generally are limited to not less than 30 percent of their income.[13]

**"High-stakes neighborhoods:"** Some areas within communities are typically plagued by high crime, low employment, lack of adequate housing, and other factors that make it particularly challenging to receive large numbers of people returning from prison or jail and to engage children and families who are at risk of becoming involved in the criminal justice system.[14] Development efforts in these areas allocate resources throughout the community to improve housing opportunities for the entire neighborhood, not just the reentry population. A broad-based development strategy pulls together stakeholders from many different systems (such as workforce development, behavioral health, and public assistance) to coordinate resources they are allocating to the same individuals or families.* In this type of strategy, these systems unite to support collaborative efforts to sustain community safety and health.

**Housing placement assistance:** Assistance with all efforts associated with locating, obtaining, moving into, and maintaining housing (as distinct from financial rental assistance). Specific services provided by state housing agencies, nonprofit housing providers, and community-based organizations (including faith-based organizations) may include recruiting landlords for participation, directly contacting the leasing authority and negotiating the rental terms, as well as providing individuals with money to help cover move-in costs.[15]

**Public housing:** Housing assistance offered under the provision of the U.S. Housing Act of 1937 or under any state or local program that has the same general purposes as the federal program.[16] This type of housing is limited to individuals and families whose income is below 80 percent of the median income in the county or metropolitan area in which they live.[17]

**Public housing authorities (PHAs):** "Any state, county, municipal, or other governmental entity or public body authorized under state enabling legislation to engage in the development or administration of low-rent public housing or slum clearance."[18] Typically, PHAs are the entities that administer both public housing and housing choice vouchers in any community.

**Supportive housing:** Supportive housing combines affordable housing with services that are provided on site to help people live more stable, productive lives. Tenant participation in the services offered, which range from assistance with household chores to mental health and substance abuse counseling to employment services, is voluntary. Supportive housing works well for people who face the most complex challenges, including serious and persistent issues such as substance use, mental illness, and HIV/AIDS.[19]

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* For example, in 2004, residents of one city council district in a midsized city received $8.7 million for food stamps, unemployment insurance, and Temporary Assistance to Needy Families. An additional $11.4 million was spent during the same year to incarcerate individuals from this area. Despite this convergence of public resources, city and community leaders agreed that conditions in the district had not improved demonstrably. See the Council of State Governments Justice Center publication, *Justice Reinvestment, State Brief: Kansas,* http://justicereinvestment.org/states/kansas/pubmaps-ks.

## Laying the Groundwork for Increasing Reentry Housing Capacity

Regardless of the approach that a jurisdiction decides to pursue to increase housing capacity for individuals released from prison or jail, there are several preliminary steps that can help guide decision making and lay the foundation for implementation. These steps, though not sequential, include the following:

- Documenting the housing options available in a community and categorizing them by eligibility criteria.
- Collaborating with housing experts to obtain feedback about past strategies to expand the housing options available to released individuals, including both tenant-based and project-based assistance, as well as any concerns about engaging in new efforts.
- Exploring the feasibility of coordinating governmental and private entities to develop and manage affordable housing, including integrated financing.
- Meeting with criminal justice supervision authorities to determine if resources can be leveraged to help housing providers manage the risks associated with providing residences to recently released individuals.
- Educating elected officials and community leaders on the need for housing for released individuals and the challenges in securing it.
- Enlisting the help of community-based organizations to determine their capacity to locate the most appropriate housing options for identified individuals in prison or jail well in advance of their release.

# I. Greater Access

To make the most of existing housing stocks, jurisdictions must facilitate returning individuals' finding and maintaining affordable living arrangements. Jurisdictions can improve the chances of this happening by partnering with nonprofit housing agencies, for example, that have worked successfully with landlords in the past to secure housing opportunities for special-needs populations. These nonprofit agencies can serve as mediators when tenant-landlord disputes arise and can also administer both housing placement and rental assistance programs.

## *Key Benefits*

- Housing placement and rental assistance strategies use existing available housing.
- Rental assistance can be provided on an as-needed basis. It might simply fill a gap in housing options available during the critical months directly after an individual's release from a corrections facility, or it can extend throughout a person's period of supervision.
- It makes greater fiscal sense to use rental assistance to make the most of existing housing rather than spending funds on new building projects. Positive outcomes for all, including reduced recidivism rates, can be achieved at lower costs.
- Although an individual typically receives only short-term housing assistance, placement specialists can help him or her to identify and apply for longer-term benefits, such as Section 8 (housing choice) vouchers.
- In some cases, once a tenant becomes employed or qualifies for Section 8 benefits, he or she can remain in the housing unit and simply assume the lease and rental payments.*

## *Challenges*

- Existing housing stock is often limited.† In some large urban areas, where many newly released individuals return, the vacancy rate for affordable housing may be extremely low.[20]
- Identifying and selecting eligible tenants for the limited spaces available in a program can be a labor-intensive process.

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* Any housing option that provides permanent housing will need to anticipate and plan for how to address future needs after the available units have been filled (for example, by continuing to add more housing units, or having realistic expectations about how many people will be able to access housing as some units turn over each year).

† In Montgomery County, Maryland, for example, there have been more than 16,000 names on a waiting list for the housing choice voucher program and affordable housing (9,800 were on the waiting list for housing choice vouchers and 6,300 were on the waiting list for public housing); *The Housing Opportunities Commission of Montgomery County, MD, Strategic Plan FY 2006–2011*, p. 12, www.hocmc.org/About_HOC/Documents/StrategicPlan.pdf (accessed on October 2, 2008).

- Available units may be concentrated in areas that lack the resources to meet the other service needs of the reentry population—putting additional pressure on neighborhoods already struggling to address high rates of unemployment and behavioral health problems.[21]

## Greater Access Approach in Practice: Homeless Assistance Rental Project

### (SALT LAKE COUNTY, UTAH)

In early 2005, Salt Lake County Mayor Peter Corroon identified jail overcrowding as a priority issue for his administration. At his urging, the Salt Lake County Council committed $300,000 in HUD HOME funds later that year to help people with special needs (such as mental illnesses, substance use disorders, and histories of incarceration) to secure housing. The county homeless coordinator recommended that the funds be used to seed a housing placement and rental assistance program that could ease overcrowding in the county jail as well as in substance abuse treatment and mental health facilities.

As a result of this funding, the Homeless Assistance Rental Project (HARP) was launched in January 2006. To reduce recidivism, the project focuses on providing housing to homeless individuals who have a history of involvement in the criminal justice system. Some of these individuals may come directly from the jail or may already be homeless. HARP also moves people awaiting release from mental health or substance abuse treatment facilities to subsidized housing. Jail inmates who cannot be released into the community until they receive mental health or substance abuse services can then take the treatment beds, thus freeing up jail space.

Both housing placement and rental assistance are critical to the success of the "greater access" approach taken by Salt Lake County leaders. Without housing placement assistance, people who have criminal histories lack significant financial resources or stable housing histories and are unlikely to find landlords willing to rent to them. They may select inappropriate places to live, and in some cases may endanger the stability of their families if they attempt to return home. Without the rental assistance offered by HARP, these individuals are unlikely to be able to pay security deposits or meet rent obligations in the initial months after release. Failure to meet rent obligations has an impact not only on the tenant, but can have consequences for other people released from prison or jail. When tenants who have recently been released from corrections settings default on rent, landlords are less likely to accept future tenants with criminal records, further tightening the housing market for this group of individuals.[22]

As leaders from Salt Lake County began to plan the program's implementation, they needed to find a partner with extensive knowledge of housing availability in the county and strong relationships with area landlords. The county found such a partner in the Housing Authority of the County of Salt

Lake (HACSL). Through an intergovernmental agreement, HACSL agreed to provide housing placement services to eligible candidates and to serve as an intermediary between tenants and landlords.*

HACSL's housing placement process involves identifying landlords who are willing to rent to candidates (with the backing of HACSL). HACSL subsidizes (with HARP funds) the share of the rent above what the tenant is able to pay.† As part of their agreement, HACSL mitigates landlord risk by insuring landlords against damages or eviction proceedings—which can be costly—and mediating landlord or tenant concerns. The county hopes to transition some tenants over time from HARP rental subsidies to HUD Section 8 vouchers, which HACSL administers.

After one year of operation, HARP had placed tenants into fifty-five housing units; 51 percent were female-led households and 32 percent of the households had children living with them.‡ The average annual income reported was $5,595. In 2007, due to the success of the program, the Salt Lake County Council committed another $300,000 in HOME funds and $250,000 in Salt Lake County general funds to the project.[23] By October 2009, there were ninety HARP households in Salt Lake County.[24]

* This process involves several additional agencies, including the County Division of Criminal Justice Services, which refers candidates to HACSL.

† Over the first year of the program, more than half of HARP tenants were able to pay more than the minimum monthly rent of $50.

‡ Of the sixty-nine clients who began the program, one year later fifty-five had been placed in housing, and the remaining fourteen had quit the program.

# II. Increased Housing Stock

Communities with tight housing markets may opt for building new properties or converting existing structures into housing units specifically for the reentry population. This option entails finding property on which to place a facility and developing plans for building housing units from the ground up, or converting an existing structure into affordable housing units. Both require that the housing plan is appropriate for individuals reentering the community and may call for leveraging funding from multiple private and public sources willing to support such a project.

## *Key Benefits*

- Relevant funding streams can be channeled to subsidize housing units specifically for reentering individuals, facilitating long-term planning by ensuring a constant number of dedicated, affordable units that are accessible to this population.
- Potential exclusions are not as sweeping as those from private landlords or public housing.*
- If the housing that is set aside for reentering individuals is not needed, the overseeing authority can make it accessible to anyone in need of affordable housing, creating a permanent asset to the community.
- Congregate housing (multiple independent units in one location) that prioritizes people released from prison or jail for tenancy allows supervision and services to be concentrated and made available where the releasees live. Such supportive housing can reduce recidivism and produce other positive results, such as improved efficiency. It may also promote peer support and mentorship among releasees.[25]
- Nonprofit operators and staff of new housing stock may be trained to coordinate with criminal justice personnel; such collaboration can help both groups anticipate problems and seek appropriate solutions promptly.

## *Challenges*

- Communities may be resistant to building projects that benefit people released from prison or jail. In addition, it may be hard to get funding from non-criminal justice sources for these projects.
- Finding a skilled development partner willing to focus on affordable housing for reentering individuals may be difficult.
- Criminal justice system policies, parole requirements, or simply public pressure may limit the number of reentering individuals who can live together in a new housing development.

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* Although fewer exclusions apply to this type of housing than public housing, some prohibitions still exist. For instance, if the facility is built within a particular radius of a school or other area in which sex offenders are precluded from living, they will be excluded.

- Creating new supportive housing stock carries its own set of specific challenges. This type of service-intensive housing is expensive and requires long-term operating and service financing. Because supportive housing typically draws on funding streams for which tenants qualify on the basis of a disability, many recently released individuals are ineligible.

## Increased Housing Stock Approach in Practice: St. Leonard's House/St. Andrew's Court

### (CHICAGO, ILLINOIS)

In 1994, forty years after St. Leonard's Ministries in Chicago began offering reentry services to residents in the community, the nonprofit service provider partnered with Lakefront Single Room Occupancy (SRO), the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC), the City of Chicago, and the Illinois Housing Development Authority to build its first long-term housing facility specifically for men recently released from prison. By working with Lakefront SRO, the partnership was able to leverage the knowledge and skill needed to undertake housing development (for example, assembling financing, siting, constructing, or buying and renovating a building). In addition, the Corporation for Supportive Housing provided guidance during the planning stages of the project.

Funds to create and maintain the housing units came from a range of sources, including both traditional housing organizations and criminal justice agencies. Initial financing for the project took three years to amass, during which time the partners took important steps to plan and situate the housing. Critical financing components were secured from the Illinois Housing Development Authority, which provided a loan of federal HOME funds. Chicago's Department of Housing and the National Equity Fund both provided federal housing tax credit equity as well.

To establish the new housing facility, the project partners acquired property adjacent to St. Leonard's House, which is where St. Leonard's Ministries program for "male ex-offenders" is located. This plan facilitated a continuum of care for future residents through the co-location of services and housing. Selecting the adjacent property site also capitalized on the positive community relationships that St. Leonard's Ministries had built over its years of service delivery.

The new housing facility was called St. Andrew's Court. It opened in 1998 and continues to provide long-term supportive housing for forty-two men with histories of homelessness and incarceration. Each tenant has a private living space, with a kitchen and bathroom facility. As of 2009, St. Leonard's Ministries has employed one full-time director of supportive services and one full-time property manager at St. Andrew's Court.

The IDOC subsidizes the cost of twelve of the forty-two housing units in the building that are reserved solely for men serving parole sentences (considered "specialized reentry housing"). The subsidy remains constant even

when the amount that St. Andrew's Ministries collects from the tenant varies. St. Leonard's Ministries' rent collection from each of these twelve housing units is directly proportional to increases or decreases in resident wages. The remaining thirty units of supportive housing at St. Andrew's Court are subsidized with HUD Shelter Plus Care funding, which is for homeless and disabled tenants.* Often, many of these thirty units have tenants with histories of incarceration, though criminal history is not a requirement for admission. With an average annual household income of $6,100, St. Andrew's residents pay an average of $153 per month toward rent.

In 2008, St. Leonard's Ministries reported that clients who completed their program during FY 2006 had a recidivism rate of 26 percent.[26] This rate compared favorably with a research brief issued by the Urban Institute in August 2008 that cited a statewide recidivism rate of 59 percent for the three-year period following individuals' release in 2002.[27]

* Shelter Plus Care is a program designed to provide housing and supportive services on a long-term basis for people who are homeless with disabilities (primarily those with serious mental illness, chronic problems with alcohol or drugs, or AIDS) and their families. See the Council of State Governments, *Report of the Re-Entry Policy Council*, 415.

# III. Revitalized Neighborhoods

The revitalized neighborhoods approach focuses the combined resources of government agencies and nonprofit and for-profit organizations on a specific geographic area to improve the services and supports available to all community residents. Typically, the neighborhoods to which most people released from a correctional facility return are urban areas that lack adequate services and suffer from high crime and disorder. This approach seeks to transform these neighborhoods by increasing the community's capacity to integrate reentering individuals and by enhancing the quality of life and safety for all who reside there. Key to these transformations is the addition of affordable housing units.

## *Key Benefits*

- Unlike a dedicated reentry housing program, which residents may perceive negatively as prioritizing limited resources for people released from prison, broad redevelopment efforts are viewed generally as benefiting everyone in the community regardless of their involvement in the criminal justice system.
- The kinds of coordinated systems needed for neighborhood revitalization efforts can address regulatory and other barriers that agencies or organizations acting alone cannot. For example, affordability problems are most acute in housing markets with the strictest land use regulations; systems leaders acting collectively may be able to work with state and local policymakers to reform these regulations.
- Revitalization efforts place reentry in an appropriately broad context of families and communities. The visible, lasting change these efforts may bring to a neighborhood can encourage enthusiasm for a comprehensive reentry initiative and make the most of investments from non-criminal justice sources.
- Unlike most reentry housing strategies, this approach casts a wide net, and has the potential to positively affect a larger number of reentering individuals, as well as their families and neighbors.

## *Challenges*

- Neighborhood-based strategies require proportionately larger investments of resources than other approaches. Small organizations may have trouble attracting initial funding, as well as building the capacity to implement efforts at this scale.
- Systems-level coordination requires leadership, thoughtful planning, and persistence, which may be difficult to cultivate or sustain over the long periods of time needed to implement redevelopment initiatives. Additionally, focusing on a group of individuals with complex needs can carry

political risks, which policymakers must be careful to acknowledge and address.*

- Increasing the number of necessary funding sources—each with their own mandates—typically bring greater restrictions on spending, which may result in project goals becoming diluted. In a comprehensive revitalization strategy, improving reentry outcomes is just one of a number of objectives. Partners must be careful to ensure that people with histories of incarceration do not get de-prioritized or even excluded from the benefits of development projects.
- Long-term success and sustainability is dependent on developing and correctly using evaluation measures. These measures must allow the array of agencies involved to examine recognized outcomes that will help them determine if their diverse missions and objectives are being met; however, such data can be difficult and costly to collect.
- It may take relatively long periods of time to develop this strategy, get people into housing, and realize positive outcomes for the corrections system and public safety.

## Revitalized Neighborhoods in Practice: Central Northeast Wichita

### (WICHITA, KANSAS)

In 2006, Kansas state leaders recognized that without significant policy changes, the state would need to spend an additional $500 million to establish and operate approximately 1,292 new prison beds over the next ten years. As an alternative to prison expansion, Kansas policymakers decided to identify and address the root causes of the projected ten-year, 22-percent increase in the state's prison population. An analysis by the CSG Justice Center revealed that 65 percent of the new admissions in FY 2006 were individuals who had violated their conditions of parole or probation.

This group of individuals alone consumed 27 percent of the state's prison capacity at an annual cost to the taxpayers of $53 million. Further analysis revealed that 32 percent of parole and probation revocations were related to alcohol or drug use, whereas fully 58 percent of individuals who had their parole or probation revoked demonstrated a need for substance use or mental health treatment. If these individuals were given stable housing options and necessary supports and services that reduced corrections spending, the savings could, conceivably, be reinvested in vulnerable neighborhoods.

Having identified substance use disorders as well as parole and probation revocations as factors driving the projected increase in the Kansas prison population, state policymakers enacted a comprehensive legislative package designed to increase access to community substance use treatment. Among other provisions, it offered incentives to community supervision authorities to appropriately decrease their rates of revocation when alternative linkages to treatment were warranted. Specifically, the legislative package included a performance-based grant program for community corrections programs to help

* Policymakers can use strong outcomes or other program evaluation data as a buffer against politically driven reactions to isolated incidents, such as when a released prisoner receiving housing or other benefits commits a particularly heinous crime. See Council of State Governments, *Report of the Re-Entry Policy Council*, 87.

reduce recidivism; a sixty-day program credit to encourage individuals to successfully complete educational, vocational, and treatment programs before release; and the restoration of earned time credits for good behavior for nonviolent individuals.

Legislative leaders, with the governor's support, decided to reinvest a portion of the state dollars that would have otherwise been spent on prison construction into the redevelopment of neighborhoods where a disproportionate share of the state's prison admissions come from and where the majority of released individuals return. The leaders decided to initially focus their efforts on a specific geographic area in central northeast Wichita that has the highest incarceration rate in the state. This area, although approximately one-sixth the total area of the city of Wichita, accounts for $11.4 million (39 percent) of the $28.9 million the state spends on corrections for the entire city.

A highly visible aspect of the challenges facing the Central Northeast Wichita revitalization is the landscape of many abandoned and blighted properties and houses that line its streets. To counter this problem, the city has made funds available to for-profit and nonprofit groups who have redeveloped a small number of scattered-site properties to use as affordable housing. Such groups have also taken advantage of federal financing programs such as housing tax credits. However, these efforts have generally lacked coordinated support and enough resources to have a large impact on ameliorating blight or reducing crime or recidivism.

In the summer of 2006, the CSG project staff invited the mayor (when he was a member of the city council), another city council member, the city's housing director, and the Secretary of the Kansas Department of Corrections to view the results of a comprehensive community transformation that had taken place in St. Louis, Missouri. After that trip to St. Louis, Richard Baron, of the St. Louis-based development firm McCormack Baron Salazar, was invited to a community meeting to outline the vision for comprehensive community development for Central Northeast Wichita. After the meeting, policy leaders from state, county, and city government met and decided to partner on this initiative.

After consulting with other experts, state and local leaders formed a policy group made up of officials from both the public and private sector that would guide a collaborative approach to improve conditions in Central Northeast Wichita called the New Communities Initiative (NCI). The policy group includes the mayor of Wichita, the county manager, seven state cabinet secretaries, the president of Wichita State University, local business leaders, foundation officials, and other representatives from both the public and the private sectors.

In the fall of 2007, city and county staff identified and reported to the policy group that more than 800 vacant houses and more than 1,400 tax-delinquent properties (with an estimated annual loss of $631,000 in tax revenue) existed in the target area. Additional challenges that faced this area included relatively low student graduation and achievement rates, a 2006 unemployment rate of nearly 8 percent among people over the age of sixteen (compared with the citywide rate of 3 percent), and a disproportionate share of its citizens either in prison or under community supervision.

The policy group decided in 2007 that a comprehensive plan including both physical housing/building development and human capital components would enhance the ongoing work and provide a framework to move the NCI forward. The city set aside $250,000 for creating a detailed strategic plan for this initiative. At this writing, the city plans to issue a formal request for a proposal from urban planning and development consultants experienced in creating such housing and community

redevelopment strategies to help prepare this plan.

NCI hopes to further include housing and other infrastructure improvements, as well as address service delivery and creation of employment opportunities. Already, the community has built a new school and increased the types of available family supportive services (including transitional case management services for people released from incarceration). City leaders hope the NCI will create an environment much more likely to support successful reentry in addition to other measurable positive outcomes, such as decreases in crime and a reduction in the unemployment rate.

# Conclusion

In the United States, more than 735,000 people are expected to be released from state and federal prison each year[28]—and an estimated nine million individuals released from jail.[29] Many of them lack stable housing, which can increase the likelihood that they will be rearrested.[30] Community supervision is also more difficult when the released individual has no fixed housing address. Government officials and policymakers are fast becoming aware of the potential risks that a shortage of affordable reentry housing presents to the safety and security of a community. They also recognize the impact it can have on individuals and their families when efforts to become a law-abiding, contributing member of a community are frustrated. It is hoped that the three outlined approaches to increase reentry housing availability discussed in this guide—greater access, increased housing stock, and revitalized neighborhoods—illustrate how a community can improve the chances that individuals will reenter the community safely and successfully.

Although it is doubtful that any single housing approach, including those described in this guide, will be a perfect fit for any particular jurisdiction, it is likely that most communities can learn from and apply particular aspects of these options. A successful reentry housing initiative will tailor those aspects that can address the specific characteristics and needs of the community, and meet both planning and implementation goals.*

* Any jurisdiction making such plans should turn to the resources of the Urban Institute (http://www.urban.org) and the Corporation for Supportive Housing (www.csh.org) on housing for people released from incarceration, as well as to the complete *Report of the Re-Entry Policy Council* and other resources at www.reentrypolicy.org. The National Reentry Resource Center website (www.nationalreentryresourcecenter.org) contains links to many housing resources, publications, and tools that policymakers will find valuable. Kristina Hals's publication, *From Locked Up to Locked Out: Creating and Implementing Post-release Housing for Ex-prisoners* (Seattle: AIDS Housing of Washington, 2005), is also a resource for community organizers and policymakers considering developing a response to reentry housing needs for the first time.

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# About the Bureau of Justice Assistance

The Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA), a component of the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, supports law enforcement, courts, corrections, treatment, victim services, technology, and prevention initiatives that strengthen the nation's criminal justice system. BJA provides leadership, services and funding to America's communities by:

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The Council of State Governments (CSG) Justice Center is a national nonprofit organization serving policymakers at the local, state, and federal levels from all branches of government. The CSG Justice Center provides practical, nonpartisan advice and consensus-driven strategies—informed by available evidence—to increase public safety and strengthen communities.

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