

SUPPORTIVE HOUSING FOR RETURNING PRISONERS: THE RETURNING HOME OHIO PILOT PROJECT

In 2006, the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (ODRC) partnered with the Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH) to design a reentry supportive housing pilot, Returning Home – Ohio (RHO) – that provided pre-release coordination and post-release supportive housing to individuals with a disability who were homeless at the time of arrest and/or at risk of homelessness upon release. For the pilot program, disabilities were broadly defined to include developmental disorders, severe addiction, and serious behavioral health problems.



Evaluation of the Pilot

A rigorous evaluation was conducted by a team of researchers at the Urban Institute to measure the effect of the pilot on rearrest, reincarceration, residential instability, and service use outcomes and to determine the pilot's cost-effectiveness. The final report was released on August 15, 2012 and is available on the Urban Institute website.

The researchers analyzed administrative data from ODRC, the Ohio Department of Mental Health (ODMH), the Ohio Department of Alcohol and Drug Addiction Services (ODADAS), and the homeless management information systems (HMIS) from the five cities where the pilot was implemented. A treatment group of 121 RHO participants was compared to a comparison group of 118 persons, who did not receive RHO services.

Impact of the Pilot

The quasi-experimental evaluation, using propensity weights, demonstrated that during a one year follow up period:

- **RHO participants were 60% less likely to be reincarcerated**, although few individuals in the total sample returned to prison. During the one year follow up period, 6.6% of the RHO participants and 11% of the comparison group returned to prison.
- **RHO participants were 40% less likely to be rearrested for any crime.** The lower rates of rearrest were driven primarily by a reduction in misdemeanor arrests – RHO participants were 43% percent less likely to be rearrested on a misdemeanor charge than the comparison group. However, among those who were rearrested, RHO participants had, on average, more arrests than comparison subjects. The significant difference in the number of rearrests may have been due to the increased supervision of RHO participants as a result of living in the supportive housing. It is also worth noting that RHO participants were in the community significantly longer than the comparison group before their first rearrest.
- **RHO participants received more mental health and substance abuse services and received them sooner than comparison subjects.** Data provided by ODMH and ODADAS showed that the RHO participants received an average of 290% percent more service days than the comparison group. In addition, the time to the first delivery of services following release from prison was shorter for the treatment group than the comparison group—approximately 2.9 months and 3.4 months, respectively.
- **Very few individuals – in either the treatment or comparison group – used emergency shelter following release.** Only 25 individuals returned to emergency shelter following release, across the treatment and comparison group. As a result of the low numbers, it was not possible to detect a statistically significant impact of the program for this outcome.

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Cost Analysis

The cost of each individual at one year post-release was computed to be the sum of the cost of ODMH and ODADAS services provided, the cost of the RHO program, and the estimated costs associated with any new criminal justice system involvement (rearrests and reincarceration). The researchers determined that RHO participation was associated with an increase in system costs of about \$9,500 per person per year. However, RHO participants had lower criminal justice system costs and higher mental health and substance abuse system costs than comparison group subjects. Given the results of the impact evaluation — that RHO participation increased access to state-billable services and decreased reincarceration and rearrest — the findings from the cost evaluation are not surprising.

Limitations of the Research

The evaluation results may have underestimated the impact of the program for a variety of reasons: (1) Though statistical techniques to reduce the selection bias were used by the research team, sociodemographic differences in the treatment and comparison group suggest that RHO participants may have been at a slightly higher risk of recidivism and relapse than comparison subjects; (2) some RHO participants were not housed for several months following release; and (3) a follow-up period of one year may not have been sufficient to detect the long-term cost savings to the criminal justice system that the RHO model expected, which could result from decreased rates of reincarceration and rearrests over time.

Next Steps

The ODRC has established the following goals for Returning Home Ohio:

1. **Expand upon initial research completed by Urban Institute**, by 2015. Specifically, we will extend the follow-up period to three years, in order to collect longer-term data on reincarceration rates, rearrest rates, and costs. In addition, individual programs will be evaluated to identify characteristics of the most successful programs.
2. **Identify the most effective and efficient means to refer appropriate offenders** to the RHO program. This will be accomplished by early 2013 through a new work group comprised of PSH providers, Community Linkage staff, prison unit and behavioral health staff, CSH and ODRC Bureau of Community Sanctions staff. The workgroup will be responsible for identifying the target population, adopting a screening tool and training appropriate staff.
3. **Expand RHO through collaboration with other state agencies**, adding programs in two additional cities by the end of 2014.
4. **Expand RHO to serve the prison or jail diversion population**, by creating a pilot program in collaboration with a Common Pleas or municipal court by end of 2014.

In addition, CSH has brokered a partnership with the Ohio Housing Finance Agency, which has resulted in the development of a new rental subsidy program, Home for Good. This program is designed for successful graduates of the Returning Home Ohio program who need a longer-term rental subsidy than that provided by RHO, in order to maintain housing stability. In PY 2013, CSH will work to expand the Home for Good subsidy program, to make more housing opportunities available to ex-offenders with disabilities.

CSH will also continue to provide technical assistance and training to RHO provider organizations, and in PY 2013 will offer training on the Critical Time Intervention case management model, to support providers in delivering the most effective case management services immediately after the individual is released from prison.

For More Information

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