



After Incarceration Support Systems Program (AISS) is located inside the W.W. Johnson Life Center, 736 State Street, Springfield, MA 01109

HAMPDEN COUNTY SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT'S AFTER INCARCERATION SUPPORT SYSTEMS PROGRAM (AISS)

FROM SHERIFF MICHAEL J. ASHE, JR.

“We here at the Hampden County Sheriff’s Department believe successful reentry begins on ‘day one of incarceration,’ where we assess the needs of the inmate and map out a comprehensive plan by which we direct strategic services. Housing, employment, and support services, the ‘three legged stool’ if you will, are the key areas where we focus our efforts around successful reintegration of these individuals back into the community. All other efforts fail if one of the three legs of the stool is missing.”

WHAT IS THE AFTER INCARCERATION SUPPORT SYSTEMS PROGRAM?

HCSD provides quality and comprehensive reentry services through the After Incarceration Support Systems (AISS) program. The three primary goals of AISS are to:

- Reduce Recidivism,
- Improve Public Safety, and
- Support the Whole Person.

The program delivers these outcomes through a bustling Reentry Center located in the heart of Springfield’s Mason Square and numerous initiatives reaching both “behind the walls” at HCSD facilities as well as out into local communities. The Reentry Center acts as a dynamic hub, providing one-stop shopping to connect returning citizens to community resources that address key reentry needs. These linkages work due to effective relationships with offenders and ex-offenders characterized by

respect, accountability, and support. Through the continuum of services, AISS empowers individuals to be responsible and productive members of their communities and to avoid recidivism (return to jail).

AISS educates, prepares, and assists releasing inmates in transitioning to their home communities. The program sustains and enhances the positive growth that occurred during incarceration. AISS continually assesses outcomes and effectiveness of services provided, with the ultimate goal of positively impacting public safety and healthy communities.

AISS had its inception in August of 1996, the first program of its kind in the United States. At that time, the program was located at the old York Street Jail and consisted of 4 staff. In 1996, the program served a total of 234 ex-offenders. Since then, AISS has grown by leaps and bounds. In December of 2007, the AISS program moved to the WW Johnson Life Center, located at 736 State Street. AISS now has more than two dozen available staff, and in 2013 saw 3,000 ex-offenders, 60% of them voluntary (without parole or probation stipulations). Never static, this program is always actively evolving to better meet the challenges of offender reentry as a vital area of impact on public safety.

According to federally published “Guidelines for Successful Reentry of People with Behavioral Health Disorders from Jail and Prison” effective reentry efforts follow Risk-Needs-Responsivity principles. HCSD uses current evidence, collaboration, and communication to make the most effective use of scarce resources to benefit clients and public safety (GAINS Center, November 2013, http://gainscenter.samhsa.gov/topical_resources/reentry.asp). The program also advances information-sharing as a means to effective continuity of care. Inter-agency agreements allow for case record continuity (with client consent.)

Because 69% of those re-arrested after release from jail do so within the 1st 90 days out, service intensity is greatest immediately before and after release. With that said, challenges and barriers may occur at any point in time, so each ex-offender may return for support at any time as needed, essentially making AISS a potentially lifetime membership.

CORRECTIONAL CENTER COMPONENT

AISS During Incarceration Offers.....

- * Connection * Education * Role Modeling
- * Hope * Information * Resources

At HCSD, reentry planning begins on Day One of incarceration. A thorough assessment guides facility staff to specifically challenge each person through mandatory and individualized Service Plan driven programs. Everyone in custody is challenged to answer the bell and face the challenge of productive engagement every day. Every sentenced offender is released with an individualized Release Plan that expands upon the Service Plan work and carries out into the community.

*How do we accomplish the goals of the
Correctional Center component of AISS?*

RESOURCE ROOM

Offenders (as well as staff) are encouraged to utilize the Resource Room, located in the Programs Building of the Hampden County Correctional Center Main Institution. The Resource Room has open hours each week and is staffed by a Reintegration Counselor for assistance. Offenders at the Women's Correctional Center access a similar resource collection in the Programs area as well as through their assigned case managers.

The Resource Room contains hundreds of brochures in both English and Spanish. The brochures are from numerous agencies regarding services they provide in the community. Some of the services emphasized include residential programs, clothing / food assistance, vocational training, parenting, substance abuse programs, mental health services, etc. There is also information available related to AA and NA meetings held locally in Hampden County.

INDIVIDUAL RELEASE PLANNING

An offender's Release Plan is a universal plan developed based upon a thorough and individualized risk-need assessment, reflecting from the inmate's primary Correctional Counselor, Forensic Mental Health Clinician if applicable, Vocational and Educational staff, and the Employment team. Some areas addressed on a Release Plan include employment, housing, education, substance abuse, support groups, mental health / health services, etc. These components are generated through individual and group interaction with staff from all disciplines. During the final phase of release planning, each offender has an opportunity to review his Release Plan and meet with a Reentry Case manager staff member from AISS.

EMPLOYABILITY PREPAREDNESS

Data drives strategy at AISS. For example, as Peter Finn states in an August 2013 U.S. Department of Justice publication, "*unemployment is consistently associated with high recidivism rates.*" Moreover, "*60% of recently released offenders who secure employment upon release (nationally) will lose that job within 6 months or sooner*" (Finn 2013, DOJ). For these reasons, HCSD operates a four-pronged strategy, including coordinated involvement from all facilities, Job Readiness skills, Job Placement, and most recently Job Retention support.

HCSD's department-wide coordinated effort combines the best talents of job developers, employment and vocational staff, and inter-disciplinary collaborations to assist job seekers with Job Readiness skills, Job Placement, and Job Retention. Many clients have had little to no experience in holding a steady, legitimate job. Some have few vocational skills, and others may have skills but now have barriers due to their criminal history. The team works in a coordinated way to meet this range of needs. Partnership with the Regional Employment Board adds to the success of the program, as do case conferences with clinical staff, the housing team, and others. Jobs within the facilities mirror the real world in terms of applying efforts daily, showing up on time, communicating appropriately, and demonstrating a commitment to get the job done. Transitional work opportunities help offenders practice and strengthen their skills as employees. These and more technical skills are transferable to reentry to the job market. A specific employment-related section of the Service Plan helps clients and staff members highlight how program efforts assist each individual to build his or her capacity for sustainable employment in the community.

IN-FACILITY GROUPS at MEN'S CORRECTIONAL CENTER

AISS staff also presents groups in various housing units to make a connection with the offenders. These groups take place in the Mandatory Transitional program, in the Accountability Pod, Responsibility Pod, and Community Reentry Units in medium and minimum security levels. Every offender has the opportunity to leave the Correctional Center with a welcoming introduction to AISS and a Release Plan specifically designed to address the risks and needs for which they were incarcerated. Many take the opportunity to actually visit the AISS Reentry Center prior to or immediately upon their release.

COMMUNITY REENTRY UNIT

In October 2007, the Hampden County Sheriff's Department started a new initiative by creating a Community Reentry Unit for offenders who were close to release (45 days or less) and would not be eligible to complete their sentence in a lower security setting. The AISS program took on a large role by assigning each offender housed on the Reentry Unit an AISS Case manager who would work intensively with them to address case management issues related to their individual release plan. In addition, AISS provides connections to housing specialists and the employment team. Finally, offenders are released with an appointment to meet with their primary AISS Reentry Assistant in the community, within 48 hours of their release from custody.

REENTRY ASSISTANTS

A strategic initiative started in 2007, intensive individual Reentry Assistant case management provides direct and focused guidance immediately prior to release that continues once the offender is out in the community. Relationship-building through two or more engagements prior to release provides an important link that can sustain individuals as they face the inherent stressors of transitioning from institutional settings to their home communities. The Reentry Assistant helps the client apply skills and navigate systems and connect to services and natural supports.

AISS IN THE WESTERN MASSACHUSETTS REGIONAL WOMEN'S CORRECTIONAL CENTER (WCC)

During the first two weeks of incarceration, the women at WMRWCC are introduced to a program called "Discovery," focusing on the concept that release planning starts on Day One of incarceration. AISS staff presents a group to the women encouraging the development of a release plan and the need for them to utilize their Correctional Counselors to refine it. The women inmates are also educated on the AISS program and how to utilize services upon their release. "Transitions," the Phase II program, further emphasizes these messages and offers strategies for positive life change. Participants also meet Mentorship staff and volunteers and begin to create a personal plan of action for building a support system. Regular meetings with Volunteer Mentors are available. Reentry staff members engage clients on a one-to-one basis as the release date nears. Those with community access privileges begin utilizing services at AISS prior to release, and every incarcerated resident of Hampden County is offered a tour of the AISS Reentry Center prior to her or on the day of their release.

COMMUNITY REENTRY COMPONENT

AISS In the Community Offers.....

- * Advocacy *Education * Relationship Building in support of Positive Lifestyle
- * Employment Readiness, Job Search, and Job Retention Support
- * Decision Making Skills * Mentoring * Role Modeling * Coping Skills
- * Crisis Intervention * Networking * Case Management *Accountability
- *Support Groups * Linkage & Referrals*Intensive Outreach *Support

As of FY13 **19,366 ex-offenders** have actively participated in and received community-based services from AISS since the program's inception in 1996.

AISS assists ex-offenders in all aspects of their lives as they transition from incarceration into the community. The majority of the offenders that we work with are faced with many issues ranging from addiction, mental health, lack of identifying documents, employment obstacles, financial concerns, limited education, poor (or none) housing situations, etc. They also cope with a lack of familial support, poor self-esteem, fear of failure, and a constant pull to return to the criminal lifestyle. Going back to what is familiar is a powerful temptation, necessitating positive supports for positive intentions and aspirations.

In order to meet the needs of the ex-offender population, AISS provides numerous services. They are as follows:

- 1. WW Johnson Reentry Center:** AISS provides supportive services to any individual who is a resident of Hampden County and has had a history of incarceration (anywhere), right at the main office at 736 State Street. A formal intake is completed with all ex-offenders, and they are assigned a primary AISS Case manager at that time.

Drop-in Hours for Intakes at the following times:

8am-11am Monday-Friday & 12:30-2pm each Weekday except Thursdays.

The AISS Case manager works with the ex-offender to address his/her needs for assistance and makes appropriate community connections, both at the Reentry Center where many local agencies hold office hours and throughout the community. The "one stop shopping" approach makes the most of the supportive relationship. AISS leverages the trust that staff earns from offenders to strengthen their connection with positive supports in their home communities. Old, negative associations from former lifestyles do not disappear upon incarceration, so AISS helps build a support network with new possibilities other than returning to negative people, places, and things.

- 2. Employment Team:** Phase II / Job Readiness and Phase III Employment Search services occur every day at AISS, supported by an energetic and committed team of professionals. Challenges to employment opportunities for ex-offenders are real, and demand effective strategies for preparedness, interviewing skills, and job search strategy. In FY13, HCSD supported 500 actual placements, in addition to preparing many more for independent searches and for job retention skills. On-site employment services build on the Employability Plan work completed while in HCSD custody and continue through Phase IV, Job Retention support.

3. **AISS Case Management:** Case management includes linkages to community agencies. Agencies utilized most often include the Department of Transitional Assistance, Registry of Motor Vehicles, Department of Revenue, Department of Children & Families, One Stop Employment Centers, local shelters, local health and mental health agencies, and substance abuse providers. The list of local agencies keeps growing, and referrals are tailored to the specific needs of each client.
4. **AISS Outreach:** Outreach involves providing clients with support, teaching appropriate coping skills, empowering them with appropriate decision making, and ultimately achieving behavior modification. For example, staff accompanies clients in navigating local service entry points with patience, assertiveness, and appropriate communication skills.
5. **Housing Support:** Key to long-term stability is solid, appropriate housing, and such arrangements do not occur overnight. Connection to local Shelters is offered, and there is often more work to be done to achieve a suitable living situation. A “Housing First” workshop is available at the Reentry Center and at each HCSD site. AISS offers information, support and education to staff and offenders throughout the department on housing-related issues. Individual housing needs are assessed according to a 4-Category evaluation tool and matched with an appropriate pathway, including benchmarks toward further progress. Those eligible for and interested in long-term intensive services may wish to apply for the **CHESS** program, which means Community Housing that is Earned, Safe, and Supportive. Through CHESS, a pathway to success is laid out and supported by structured case management services for women and men looking to make a substantial commitment to meeting goals and building a better future.
6. **AISS Community Support Groups:** Support groups for both men and women, in English and Spanish, occur weekly. Upon successful participation, the participant is given a certificate of completion. After completion, the participant is always encouraged to continue his/her involvement with the group process for continued support and success.
7. **AISS Mentorship:** AISS offers a Mentorship Program through which offenders meet and can be matched with a Volunteer Mentor prior to release or when they return to the community. The program offers both Faith-Based and Community Volunteer Mentors, many of whom are themselves former offenders who have demonstrated that they are serious about wanting to live a better life. Volunteer Mentors receive training and ongoing support in how to make a positive impact on individuals in the process of change. The program features women and men of many cultural backgrounds (including many Spanish speakers) with a passion to help. Interested individuals may contact Mark Mitchell at mark.mitchell@sdh.state.ma.us or 413-781-2050 x8303 to find out more about how to become involved.
8. **Community Providers:** human service agency partners occupy about half the office and meeting space on a given day at 736 State Street. This dynamic tapestry of talent provides AISS clients with “one-stop shopping.” Access is available on a scheduled basis to mental health clinical services, intensive outpatient addiction treatment, parenting (for women and men), Access To Recovery, Recovery Coaching, Faith-based Support, SNAP registration, Relapse Prevention, Peer Support, Triage Nursing, and many other services and providers.

OTHER AISS INITIATIVES & HIGHLIGHTS

High Risk Offender Initiative

Since October 2006, specially trained AISS staff members have worked with offenders who are deemed “high risk,” based on proven criminal history factors such as age, weapons charges, institutional behavior, and gang involvement. High Risk Release Planning Specialists meet with the inmate on a release plan, based on the individual’s needs, and coordinate both services and local law enforcement input. The Case manager will also schedule an appointment within 48 hours of his release from custody. This population has been a challenge, but the statistics demonstrate that 50% of these offenders did follow-up with AISS in the community, and the recidivism rate for this group is, impressively, within two percentage points of the general population.

AISS Annual Graduation / Recognition Ceremony

Several hundred people convene each fall for the AISS Graduation / Recognition Ceremony traditionally held at the local Greek Cultural Center in Springfield. The event allows AISS participants to be recognized for taking positive steps in living a productive lifestyle, free of criminal thinking and behaviors. Recognition is also given to Providers and Mentors for the important work they do with AISS. Former graduates are always encouraged to return to this dynamic and positive homecoming event.

Foundation House

A transitional living program located in the Western Massachusetts Correctional Alcohol Center at 26 Howard Street, in Springfield. The Foundation House provides for a safe and stable environment post incarceration for men and women working towards a clean and sober lifestyle. The philosophy of the Foundation House is based on a work-therapy and social model approach to changing addictive behaviors. Foundation House opened its doors in 1998 and to date has served over 876 individuals. Foundation House is operated in collaboration with the Hampden County Sheriff’s Department and The Corporation for Justice Management.

**If you would like any additional information about AISS, you can contact
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