



OVERVIEW: The Next Step program reduces crime by addressing an offender's essential needs for food and shelter through a housing first model immediately upon release from prison.

CHALLENGE: Most felons returning from state prison are supervised by the County's probation department on post-release community supervision (PRCS). Their crimes are often motivated by unmet needs and a lack of skills to meet those needs in a pro-social way. If the causes of their criminality are not addressed, recidivism rates can be high. By either mitigating an offender's criminogenic needs (needs that lead to committing crimes) or by strengthening protective factors (skills or supports that reduce the likelihood of committing crime), the likelihood of recidivism is reduced. Offenders who return from state prison motivated to do well will still recidivate if they are unable to identify a prosocial pathway to meeting their needs. Through the Next Step program, the Probation Department teamed up with the Arcata House Partnership (AHP) to not only frontload services for homeless individuals coming out of prison, but to meet all their essential needs through immediate placement. This is done with a fully stocked residence so they can focus their energy on rehabilitation, employment, and permanent housing goals.

Chief Probation Officer Shaun Brenneman endeavored to develop a scenario where offenders who would otherwise be homeless, have their essential needs met and be provided with achievable means of developing protective factors. It stood to reason that if the pathway to success was also the path of least resistance, that more offenders would have a successful transition back into the community. Through this vision, the partnership was formed with AHP's Executive Director Darlene Spoor. Next Step consists of a five bedroom home dedicated to housing homeless offenders from the time of their prison release until such time as they either successfully complete PRCS or secure permanent housing. Embedded into the shelter is a program which provides services tailored to each participant's needs. Nothing is asked of the participants in return, other than to genuinely participate and follow basic house rules intended to keep everyone safe.

SOLUTION: Participants in the Next Step program learn to maintain a healthy home and enjoy the pride and autonomy that comes with having a private room. A probation officer as well as case managers from the AHP and Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) visit the home regularly. AHP ensures the house is being maintained and the pantry is stocked, that the residents have food vouchers and help meal planning and grocery shopping. The program teaches life skills, connects those who are ready for employment opportunities and for those who are not ready, to volunteer and enroll participants in programs to secure permanent housing. A DHHS case manager helps transport participants to appointments and assists in obtaining right to work documents. The probation officer monitors compliance, provides cognitive behavioral interventions, and connects them to resources to address their criminogenic needs such as mental health case management or addiction counseling.

A probation officer and case managers meet regularly to assess the progress of each participant. Successful members transition into permanent housing, by gaining employment, learning skills to maintain their progress, and develop connections to resources, so they can continue to learn long after their supervision ends. These successes in addressing needs and strengthening protective factors result in a statistical reduction in likelihood to reoffend.

THE NEXT STEP PROGRAM
CSAC 2021 Challenge Award Nomination
County of Humboldt

Category: Administration of Justice
and Public Safety

INNOVATION: The Probation Department thought outside the box by creating and playing an active role in a residential program tailored to the population they supervise. They considered one of the most difficult needs to overcome – homelessness – and sought a partnership with a community partner with expertise in that area. When a homeless offender is placed in Next Step, it's known they will have a personally tailored experience, offering clear attainable means of becoming self-sufficient in a sustainable and pro-social way.

RESULTS: To be released from prison knowing food, shelter and services are awaiting them greatly increases the likelihood an offender will report to probation rather than immersing themselves back into their antisocial circles. Since the program was started, inmates have eagerly requested to be placed in Next Step. For an offender to request participation in a program despite knowing it will result in intensive supervision is a testament to the efficacy of Next Step. Each successful participant positively impacts the community by reducing crime rates and becoming a contributing member.

Next Step results in more efficient use of resources and more robust service delivery. Individuals routed to this program tend to heavily utilize services throughout the county. By coordinating multiple services into one program, it ensures agencies are not duplicating efforts and that each agency is aware of services available. The likelihood of success is higher by enveloping the offender in resources to address multiple needs concurrently while also strengthening protective factors. The success of each client results not only in reduced crime but their healthier lifestyle means less strain on county services.

REPLICABILITY: The Next Step program does not require services beyond those that are already available in most counties. What makes the program possible are the relationships and shared goals and values of the community partners administering it. Probation officers are skilled in the use of evidence-based assessments to identify criminogenic needs and to develop case plans to address those needs. Incorporating this practice into their case management strategy is an established best practice in the field of probation. The partnerships formed through the Next Step program greatly strengthens the quality of service officers provide by frontloading a coordinated and case specific array of services. The program also offers the offender peace of mind that their needs are being met, thereby freeing them to focus on long-term goals. Likewise, the AHP's efforts are reinforced through the probation officer.

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