

Presentation from the Vera Institute to the Statewide Family Council on September 19, 2020

Safe Prisons, Safe Communities

From Isolation to Dignity and Wellness Behind Bars

Washington State Department of Corrections

Vera Institute of Justice

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OF JUSTICE



Overview

- Background on the Partnership
 - Progress Pre-COVID-19
 - Impact of COVID-19
 - Moving Forward
 - Family Engagement
 - Q & A
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Background on the Partnership

Vera Institute of Justice



At a time of unprecedented challenge, we're fighting for justice reform built on bedrock American values and grounded in action at the state and local level.

Vera is committed to



Securing Equal Justice



Ending Mass Incarceration



Strengthening Families and Communities

Vera's Overarching Goals

1. Ultimately, **end the use of restrictive housing as we know it** in prisons and jails across the U.S., through the use of safe and effective alternative strategies.
2. Ensure that whenever people *are* separated from GP, conditions of confinement:
 - ✓ **are not isolating** or harmful
 - ✓ provide sufficient access to **socialization, programming, and treatment**

WADOC and Vera

- **2011** – WADOC and Vera worked together on Vera's *Segregation Reduction Project*
- **2012-2019** – WADOC implemented reforms
- **2019** – New partnership began
- **2020** – COVID-19 crisis
 - Partnership extended through end of 2020

Goals of the Project

- **Eliminating** the use of restrictive housing for **non-violent and low-level behavior**, and for **particularly vulnerable populations**—including people with serious mental illness.
- **Significantly reducing people's lengths of stay** in restrictive housing, moving towards a long-term goal of ending prolonged restrictive housing.
- **Improving conditions in restrictive housing**, including a less isolated environment, additional out-of-cell time, opportunities for meaningful human interaction, and access to programs and services.

Goals of the Project

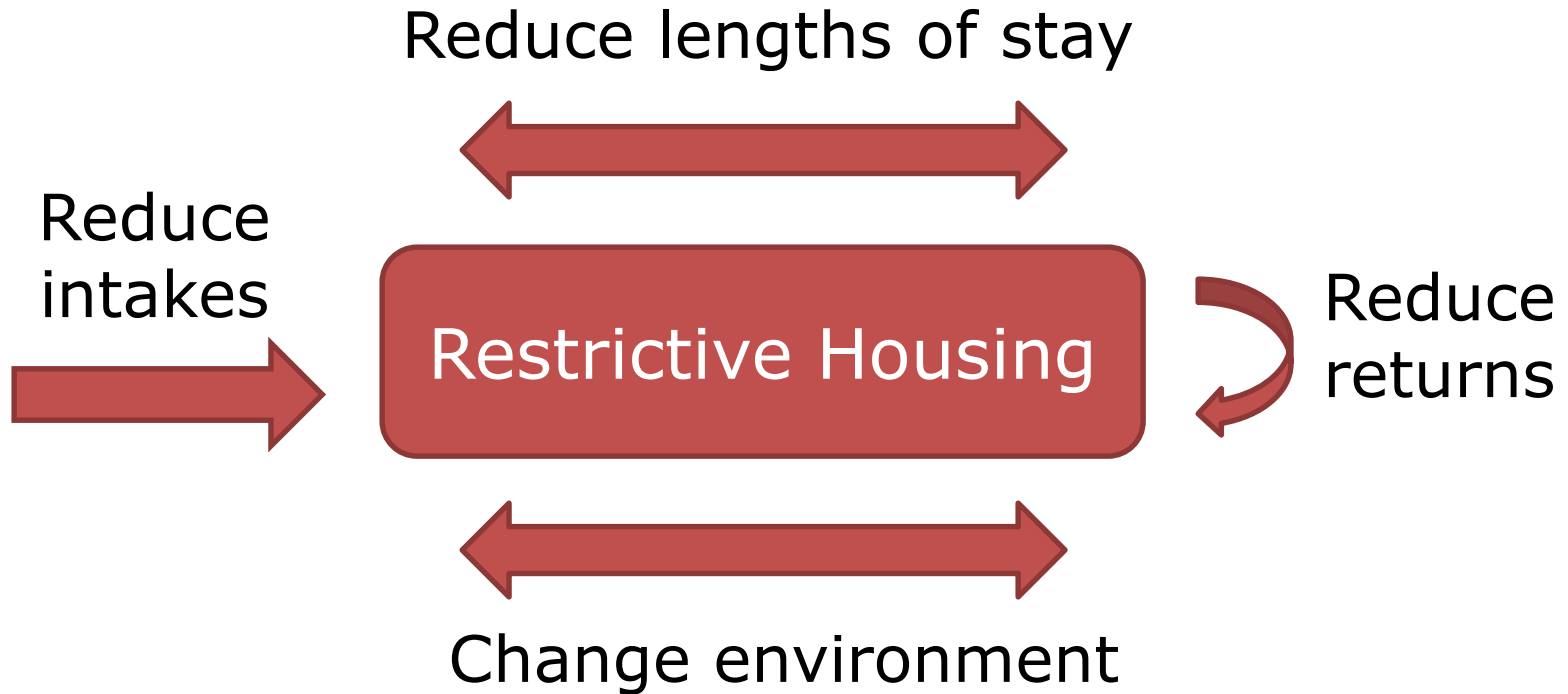
- **Addressing racial and ethnic disparities** in the use of restrictive housing.
- **Achieving at least a 20% decrease** in total restrictive housing population by the end of the project, putting the DOC on the path to a long-term goal of reducing the population by **at least 50%** in the next four years.

Partnership Activities

- Technical Assistance (TA)
 - 7 site visits
 - Working with department and facility-level committees
 - Developing and implementing reforms
 - Internal communications plans and trainings
 - Providing expertise, and connection with resources
 - Study trip to Norway

- Research
 - Administrative data – analyzed quarterly
 - Survey of everyone in RH

Strategies for Reform



Strategies for Reform

- Reducing admissions to Ad-Seg
- Shortening lengths of stay (Ad-Seg and MAX)
- Repurposing RH units
- Transforming conditions in RH
- Communication and training – culture change

Progress Pre-COVID

Reforms Implemented: Policy Changes

- Ad-Seg:
 - Narrowed reasons for placement (“significant risk” to the safety of others)
 - Maximum time period reduced from 47 days to 30

- MAX:
 - Narrowed language on reasons for placement
 - Reduced the number of levels from 4 to 3
 - Transition Pods

- All RH: visits from *any* approved visitors (not just immediate family)

Reforms Implemented

- Training for all RH staff
 - Reasons to reduce RH
 - Overview of partnership with Vera
 - Details on RH policy changes
- Communications/messaging to staff

Reforms in the works

- Repurposing RH units into GP units
 - Transfer Pods
 - Transition Pods
- Continued focus on changing conditions in RH
 - More out-of-cell time
- Implementing lessons learned from Norway
- Webpage with info and data on reforms

Progress Made

- Before COVID, WADOC was making progress towards the goals.
- From Dec. 31, 2018 to Dec. 31, 2019:
 - Reduced total RH population by **5%**
 - Reduced lengths of stay in RH
- As of Dec. 31, 2019, **62% of people in RH** spent an average of **less than 30 days** there.

Impacts of COVID-19

2020 Data

- Data from first two quarters show that, despite the challenges of COVID-19:
 - ✓ WADOC has *not* significantly increased overall use of restrictive housing.
 - ✓ WADOC has continued to make progress towards some RH reform goals.

Dec. 31, 2019 vs. June 30, 2020

- Total RH population *remained stable*
 - 742 to 749 people (0.01% increase)
- Ad-Seg population *decreased substantially*
 - 485 to 435 people (10% decrease)
- Median LOS in Ad-Seg *decreased*
 - 16 days to 15 days (6% decrease)

Dec. 31, 2019 vs. June 30, 2020

- MAX population did *increase*
 - 257 to 314 people
 - (3 large-scale violent disturbances)
- Median LOS in MAX *decreased*
 - 158 to 140 days (11% decrease)
- Reducing MAX population and shortening LOS remain areas of focus for reforms.

Dec. 31, 2019 vs. June 30, 2020

- The proportion of people with SMI in RH has also *decreased*
 - **Ad-Seg:** People with SMI made up **9.9%** of the population in Dec. 2019, but this decreased by almost half to **5.1%** in June 2020.
 - **MAX:** People with SMI made up **15.6%** of the population in Dec. 2019, but **13.7%** in June 2020.
(Note: Many are in Special Offenders Unit)

Moving Forward

Next Steps of the Partnership

- Extended through end of 2020
 - Implement plans to repurpose RH units
 - Prepare to end disciplinary segregation
 - Continued communications and training
 - Webpage with information and data – coming soon!

Family Engagement

Questions & Answers

Thank you!

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For more information on RH reform:

www.safealternativestosegregation.org

COVID-19 Response

- Medical Isolation:
 - Phone calls – DOC bought portable phones
 - Personal property allowed
 - Commissary access
 - Mental Health rounds 3 times per week

- Quarantine:
 - Generally in a GP unit/same housing
 - Personal property
 - Commissary (and access to microwave)
 - Time in dayrooms and yards – in small groups, with social distancing