9 Yards

Ending the cycle of crime and incarceration by going the whole 9 yards
A NEW APPROACH TO PRISON REENTRY

Every year, people are released from prison with almost a guarantee that they will end up back inside before too long. We know that, for whatever reason, they will not avoid reoffending, that society will bear the cost of that future incarceration and criminal behavior, and that they will, unfortunately, spend many more years behind bars. Programs have tried for decades to stop this cycle and there have been considerable successes, but they have not been able to establish a proven model for rehabilitation— one that creates verifiable, life-long change with participants.

54% OF PEOPLE LEAVING PRISON RETURN IN 3 YEARS, most for committing new crimes

1/30 OF ALL PEOPLE IN RI ARE ON PROBATION— IN SOME NEIGHBORHOODS OVER HALF OF THE ADULT BLACK MALE POPULATION

WE SPEND CLOSE TO $60,000 PER YEAR TO INCARCERATE SOMEONE

HOW MANY VICTIMS AND HOW MUCH MONEY COULD WE SAVE BY INVESTING INTO A PROGRAM THAT COULD KEEP PEOPLE FROM COMMITTING CRIMES AFTER PRISON?

For more information and video, go to opendoorsri.org/9yards
Our goal is at least a 50-75% reduction in recidivism, and we are on track to accomplish this.

9 Yards is a pilot program funded by the Governor’s Workforce Board, the City of Providence, the Rhode Island Foundation, and the Damiano Fund to work with 15 men for about a year and a half, doing everything possible to support them finding the right path. If they work hard for 9 months in prison, participants will receive a big helping hand when they get out. It’s a unique program that is putting established ideas into practice in a new way.

“We are in one of the great shifts in correction policy. 9 Yards reflects the more sophisticated thinking that’s evolved in our profession.”

AT Wall, Director of RI Department of Corrections*

A Unique Strategy for Achieving High Rates of Life-Long Change

- **Support in all risk areas**, including education, employment, housing, behavioral therapy, mentoring, and addiction treatment.
- **Support with continuity**: working for 9 months in prison and at least 6 months after release.
- 9 Yards follows the well proven principle that reentry programs should **work with high risk individuals**, not low risk ones, to have the best chance of preventing future incarceration. The program criteria was developed to hone in on people that need support but also have the potential to succeed.
- **Turning incarceration into an opportunity**: while incarcerated, people have a lot of time to begin the process of change. 9 Yards demands that they put that time to use and provides them the tools to do that.
- **Scientifically testing results**: 9 Yards is a randomized controlled study that will compare the progress of participants to those not selected so we can prove whether or not it worked.
THE PARTICIPANTS

The 15 participants were randomly selected based on a starting criteria. We wanted people the right age—old enough to be mature enough to start over and young enough to still be able to. And we wanted people with long enough sentences to be in the program for 9 months inside prison. The rest was chance, and this avoided the common pitfall of just enrolling people that were already self-motivated.

- Initially, all but 4 had a GED
- Starting reading level of 5.6
- 2/3 are people of color
- Average age is 27
- Almost all have at least 1 violent felony
- Average sentence length of 4.4 years
- Many had recidivated in less than 6 months after last release, some in less than 1 month

“Having gotten involved in this program, it’s like I’m chasing education. Education is like my drug now.”

Derek Leblanc
PHASE I  In Prison Services

9 Yards started in July, 2013 with 15 men in a Medium Security prison in Rhode Island. For 9 months in prison, services focused on individualized education, occupational training, behavioral change, and family therapy.

OUTCOMES

• Prison rule infractions decreased from 8 to 1 from first half to second half of program
• On average, participants improved two grade levels in prison
• Classes:
  » Around 8 hours of instruction per week (increased from 3 hours at the start of the program)
  » Average class size of 4
  » Classes include: personal finance, computer literacy, Thinking 4 Change, and others, and 9 Yards clients also take classes offered by the Department of Corrections, such as community college classes and addiction treatment.
• 8 clients finished a total of 40 college classes and as a group maintained a B+ average

PHASE II  Reentry

After release, participants are immediately placed into part-time jobs, provided with fully-subsidized supportive housing, case management, mentors, and wrap-around services. The program provides support for at least 6 months with the goal of moving clients onto the path towards skilled employment and higher education.

OUTCOMES

• Retention: only 3 dropped out
• 11 clients were working or in school by end of program
• Clients had a high success rate completing parole
• Six participated in vocational training programs and six enrolled in college after release
• Nine lived in 9 Yards transitional housing after release and after six months all had their own stable housing.
• Recidivism results are preliminary, but so far show a complete reduction in new felonies versus the control and point to a substantial reduction in overall days in prison.
Profile: Ed Coulter

Ed started the program with a 6th grade reading level and a 5th grade math level. He was serving a 4 year prison sentence for robbing someone with a knife and has been incarcerated twice for short sentences previously. He has been dealing crack cocaine for much of his life as well as struggling with alcoholism. When Ed began the program he was resistant and discouraged, saying “You can’t run from your past because your path will always catch up to you.” He said he would rather spend his time in prison “lifting weights, running ball, doing what I want to do.”

After six months in the program he had decided to strive to go to college to study business. He was enrolled in 9 Yards Algebra, 9 Yards personal finance class, 9 Yards Commercial Drivers License Class, and 2 community college classes and voluntarily coming to class whenever possible. He ultimately earned a B- and C+ in his first two college classes ever and now has a 3.0 GPA with 12 credits. After release, he enrolled as a full-time student at CCRI.

Profile: Wilfredo Cintron

Wilfredo has been incarcerated eight times previously, most recently for vehicular assault. He has been struggling with addiction for many years of his life. He recidivated in 45 days after his previous release. He started the program with a 6th grade reading level and a 5th grade math level. He had previously tried to enroll in college twice, both times testing into pre-credit classes and then dropping out. In 9 Yards, Will studied for 6 months, tested into credited community college classes, and earned a C+ and A- in his first two classes. Will states, “This program reminded me how smart I really am.”

He has worked in food service consistently since his release, and after the program he moved into his own apartment. In addition to work, he is also a full-time student at CCRI in culinary arts.
OpenDoors is working with researchers at John Jay School of Criminal Justice on an independent controlled evaluation of the first pilot, to be finished approximately June 2015. The Governor’s Workforce Board has granted a second round of funding, to begin another pilot group in late 2014.

Ultimately, if the model proves successful, it could serve a larger number of inmates and pay for itself with criminal justice savings. OpenDoors estimates that if the program were fully scaled up and achieving its goals, it would cut Providence’s violent crime rate by 25% and save the state $18 million a year in criminal justice savings alone.

For more information, updates, and to see our documentary film project on 9 Yards, go to opendoorsri.org/9yards