



THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION has developed a comprehensive portfolio of programs to give community leaders — from public, private, faith, business and community organizations — the skills and tools they need to move from “talk” to “action” to improve outcomes for children and families. These results-based leadership programs enable participants to work on real issues in real time, build successful collaborative relationships, and hone their ability to use data to develop action plans and measure progress. The ultimate impact of this work is to sustain efforts to improve outcomes not just for current budget cycles, but for years to come. This case study provides an example of how one such program — the Leadership in Action Program (LAP) — helped leaders in a community work more collaboratively and produce measurable results to improve the lives of children in their community.

HELPING EX-OFFENDERS TURN AROUND THEIR LIVES IN MARION COUNTY, INDIANA

In a packed Indianapolis meeting room on April 22, 2010, top officials including Mayor Greg Ballard and an aide to Governor Mitch Daniels gathered for an update from a group tackling one of the city’s thorniest issues: the many formerly incarcerated people who are re-arrested soon after release and returned to prison or jail.

The group is known as the “Marion County LAP” — 36 leaders participating in the Leadership in Action Program (LAP), which provided hands-on support to help the group develop data-driven strategies to improve “ex-offender re-entry” and reduce recidivism in the Indianapolis-area county of Marion.

“If we don’t have successful re-entry, then crime is going to stay high, quality of life is going to be lessened, and children’s lives are going to be impacted,” says Mark Renner, who was Indianapolis’ public safety deputy director when he participated in the LAP.

And if ex-offenders don’t receive the services, opportunities, and tools to succeed, this “lessens the livability” of Indianapolis and potentially “tears families apart, creating hardships on the city and taxpayers, not only to house the offender in jail and prison but perhaps to provide supports for family members or children,” says Renner, who is now a circuit court commissioner.

Since 2001, a dozen communities have launched LAP, bringing together leaders from various fields to pursue a specific result that helps to strengthen vulnerable neighborhoods, families, and children.

While other communities have zeroed in on school readiness or family economic success, the Marion County LAP, launched in September 2008, is the first to address re-entry. Marion is Indiana’s most populous county (pop. 890,879) and the one receiving the most ex-offenders.

“We hope this LAP’s work will be a national model for other communities,” says Jennifer Gross, Senior Associate with the Talent Management/Leadership Development Unit of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, which partners with local organizations to develop and fund a LAP.

“The neighborhoods that Casey works with to improve conditions for kids and families tend to have more ex-offenders. Our work in places like Marion County becomes more difficult when people leaving prison or jail don’t get the help they need to support themselves or their children and find themselves returning to behavior that can harm their family and their neighborhood.”

Unlike leadership development programs that provide out-of-town training to improve skills or to brush



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*- Mary Leffler, shown above facing fellow
LAPers Marshall Shackelford, Johnie
Underwood, and Thelzeda Moore*

up on an issue, LAP works in a community to expand the skills of local leaders and to spark the alignment of efforts needed to achieve a common goal.

"The people in a LAP are all working on the same goal in the same place," says Gross. "LAP brings together the result you want to achieve for your community with the skills you need to make it happen."

To tackle re-entry, the LAP created an environment that spurred changes in participants' knowledge, behavior, and working relationships, encouraging them to think, communicate, act in new ways, and develop fresh strategies.

"Getting a lot of leaders in the room and getting them to agree on something and work toward something is hard," says Rhiannon Williams-Edwards, Executive Director of Public Advocates in Community re-Entry (PACE), a nonprofit in Indianapolis providing services to ex-offenders and their families, who initially served as Mayor Ballard's Director of Offender Re-Entry during the LAP.

Without LAP's structure, facilitation, and tools, "we would never have the strategies we have now," says Williams-Edwards.

As the initial LAP came to a close in October 2009, the group found – as expected – that its work was unfinished and secured a grant to continue for another 18 months.

"People recognize the power of the process," says Bob Ohlemiller, Marion County Jail Program Director. "They know their time is going to be well spent, which is one reason this has worked, why people have come together and stayed at the table. What we're learning here could someday become lessons learned for the whole country, so you want to do it right."

"Did I originally buy into LAP?" says Mike Lloyd, Transitional Facilities and Community-based Programs Director for the Indiana Department of Correction (IDOC). "No. Do I buy into it now? Yes. I can actually see tangible results of what we're doing. That's what sold me." So much so that Lloyd and others from IDOC and the Indiana Community Justice Institute began exploring the possibility of a second LAP for Indiana in Elkhart County. "This needs to spread to all counties," says Lloyd. The Elkhart County LAP launched in August 2010.

MOVING FROM TALK TO ACTION

During the 14-month initial LAP, Marion County leaders dedicated time to participate in nine two-day LAP sessions. How did the LAP process spur action?

LAP's theoretical underpinnings and prescribed format are designed to help leaders focus on a goal, forge new relationships, improve their working relationships with longtime colleagues and new partners, think creatively, collaborate, and take action.

"It's not business as usual. It's a different intensity of collaboration and sometimes different conversations," says Mary Leffler, Community Engagement Director for Volunteers of America of Indiana, a nonprofit that provides re-entry services.

"I knew fifty percent of the people in the room

when we came to the table. LAP allows you to build a relationship with those people that's a little bit different.”

LAP also picks up where previous efforts have left off. In Indiana, Mayor Ballard and Governor Daniels have long focused on offender re-entry and the need to reduce recidivism in order to increase public safety.

The issue is particularly pronounced in Marion County, where in 2007, 49 percent of ex-offenders released from the IDOC back into the county returned to prison within three years – compared to Indiana’s 38 percent three-year recidivism rate; and 55 percent of prisoners released from IDOC to Marion County were re-arrested within a year.

Before a LAP begins, there is several months’ worth of all-important advance preparation by Casey and a top-level state, local or community group designated as an Accountability Partner (AP).

In Marion County, the state AP evolved from a work group convened in 2007 when the National Governors’ Association selected Indiana to receive technical assistance to address recidivism. The local AP is the Marion County Criminal Justice Planning Council, chaired by Mayor Ballard and the county prosecutor, which includes public safety representatives and other city and county government leaders.

LAP is the most rigorous form of the Casey Foundation’s results-based leadership programs. They are based on the Foundation’s conviction that strong leadership – by groups of leaders working together on a shared result – is vital to achieving measurable and lasting improvements in child and family well-being. Program investments and system reforms alone won’t do the job. The Casey Foundation therefore developed a range of leadership development tools and programs to support the capacity of leaders to accelerate improvements for children and families.

“Mid- to high-level leaders from across the public, private, and nonprofit sectors want to and can be mobilized to act together to improve a result for children, families, and communities,” says Gross. “When they feel a sense of urgency, commit to being held publicly accountable, and have the skills to take aligned actions, they are more likely to achieve a result collectively.”

Results-based leadership differs in different places, ranging in intensity, time commitment, and cost, depending on community needs and resources. Not every community opts for a full LAP. But the underlying objective is the same: to help leaders move from talk to action on a result that the community chooses.

CORE STRATEGIES TO SUCCESSFULLY RE-INTEGRATE EX-OFFENDERS

POLICY:

- Implement alternatives to re-incarceration.
- Improve access to securing driver’s licenses and state identification. After the Bureau of Motor Vehicles assumed responsibility for issuing state IDs, 1,971 were issued during 19 days of service in 2009 compared to 300 issued in 2008.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING:

- Work to increase the number of offenders who have their GEDs upon release and who have improved their educational status.
- Ensure that education and technical training opportunities are available to ex-offenders.

EMPLOYMENT:

- Support transitional jobs and other programs that help prepare ex-offenders for employment.
- Work to increase the number of employers who hire ex-offenders.
- Support legislation to remove obstacles for ex-offender employment.

HEALTH:

- Increase access to substance abuse services.
- Educate health, mental health, and substance abuse treatment providers about ex-offenders’ needs.
- Strengthen collaboration for systems of care between criminal justice and broader health community.

SPIRIT:

- Increase cross-agency collaboration, information sharing, and capacity building of community providers.
- Create resource guides for service providers and case managers, plus a website, database, and public service announcement.

The result represents the best-case scenario that the community aspires to achieve for a specific population. So the Marion County LAP's result is: *All adult offenders in Marion County are successfully reintegrated into their community.*

To help LAP participants track the impact of their work and make adjustments, clear data measures to quantify the result are chosen and monitored. These measures also create a sense of urgency and accountability. During the April gathering, two progress measures were presented:

- The percentage of ex-offenders released from the IDOC back into Marion County who returned to prison within six months decreased from 16.2 to 14.4.
- The rate for ex-offenders released from the IDOC back into Marion County who were re-arrested in the county within one year of release decreased from 51 percent to 44.6 percent.

The AP not only chooses the result and the measures but enlists the leaders to do the work. This “call to action” also conveys urgency and helps the LAP focus on achieving the result. The LAP reports back to the AP with updates and can seek input or help.

For the Marion County LAP, state and local leaders were enlisted from the criminal justice and law enforcement fields, as well as from the IDOC, the business community, health care, education, and service providers.

Following this detailed preparation, LAP participants – known as “LAPers” – were given the supports necessary to focus and collaborate; to develop no-cost and low-cost strategies; and to act and measure their progress toward their stated result.

The Indy LAPers met in a room equipped with a wide range of data and pictures to represent the result – all intended to help them stay on task and work together. The sessions were overseen by a five-person implementation team including two coach/facilitators and a project manager.

LAPers completed a personality preference inventory assessing how they perceive themselves, use data, make decisions and collaborate with others, then shared this information. The facilitators followed a format designed to help LAPers develop the important skills and competencies necessary to collaborate, including:

- Developing and tracking their work by using results-based accountability, which includes defining the result, engaging partners to achieve the result, and using data to assess progress.
- Integrating issues regarding race, class, and culture into their work to reduce disparities.
- Identifying and promoting practices to take back to their home organization.
- Making group decisions and building group consensus to take aligned actions.

This format provides a contained, safe, environment where participants feel free to engage in frank conversations that can lead to fresh thinking and breakthroughs.

During facilitated discussions, LAPers identified barriers affecting ex-offenders' successful re-entry; the needs of ex-offenders; and opportunities to improve re-entry. They determined five core strategies and divided into work groups that designed aligned actions to achieve a strategy and identified performance indicators.

USING DATA TO PINPOINT STRATEGIES

Compelling data drove one LAP work group to make a change.

“When we really started digging into the data, we realized ‘Gosh we’re sending a lot of people back not because they committed new crimes but because they’re not good at living within the narrow restrictions of probation and parole,’” says Mary Leffler. “Could we do an intervention that’s less invasive than incarceration?”

The result is a new pilot program for ex-offenders who have committed a “Technical Rule Violation” (TRV). Instead of re-incarceration, ex-offenders receive intensive services and attend a remedial program, which keeps them learning and working. The program improved upon and is built around an earlier discontinued TRV center. The goal is a community-based model offering a continuum of services, both residential and nonresidential.

The community experienced a downward trend in people returning to prison due to technical violations, thanks to the new program that is used by two major felony courts and will be expanded to seven.

“These are people who just need to be directed, better supervised, to have much more intensive programming to change their attitudes and thinking,” says Mark Renner.

“The LAP work group went ‘Okay, we’ve got this data. We see there’s a huge need. Where would these individuals get the programming they need? Where can we partner, within the criminal justice system, to make this a reality?’” recalls Renner.

The group brainstormed with each other and also used their contacts to network and collaborate with new partners outside of the LAP. Community Corrections helped identify the correct candidates. An influential judge set an example by buying into the program. Leffler wrote a successful grant for funding.

LAP also provided “the energy, the desire to really make a difference and to make a change,” Renner says. “It was the non-stop effort to continue to bring these other folks together. They had their silo approach. What we offered was this opportunity to have a framework with which these other criminal justice entities could work together.”

Next, the LAP will use data to see if the TRV program strategy works. “The power is that LAP leaders now have real-time data that will show improvement or not,” says Jolie Bain Pillsbury, whose *Theory of Aligned Contributions* is the basis of many of the Foundation’s

results-based leadership programs.

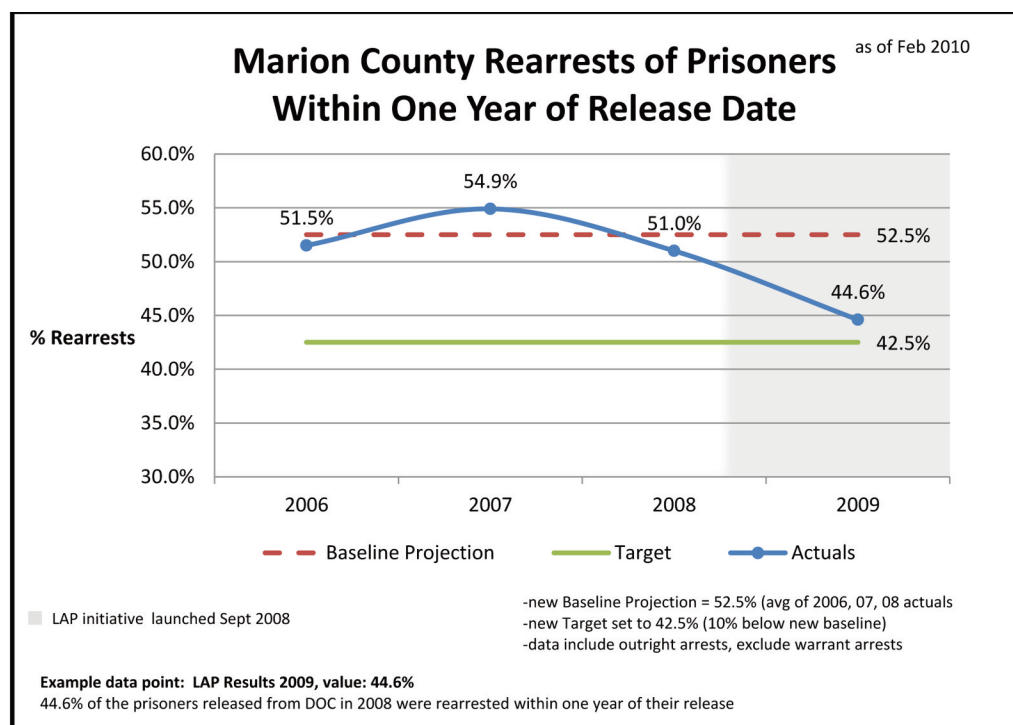
“Indy LAPers are holding themselves accountable for solving the problems and addressing the issues to achieve measurable improvement over time,” says Pillsbury, who co-facilitated the Indy LAP.

COLLABORATING TO ADDRESS CHALLENGES

Among the challenges ex-offenders face soon after re-entry is finding housing, clothing, transportation, mental health services, education, and substance abuse treatment. To address these challenges, a LAP work group created a database loaded with reliable, up-to-date information.

“I would not have spent that many hours putting this together without LAP,” says Christina Trexler, Vice Chairman of the Marion County Community Corrections Advisory Board and PACE Deputy Director. “I felt like ‘I’ve got a group of peers here who are going to make this happen.’”

LAPers brainstormed about possible solutions, which led to the development of a website that includes the database as well as re-entry information for the community. A public service announcement was created to help develop community awareness and understanding about people with felony convictions.



“People are able to access real-time information on where they can go for services,” says Rhiannon Williams-Edwards. “Also we wanted to educate people on what’s really going on with re-entry in our city, to get more people engaged and energized.”

Williams-Edwards credits LAP with bringing together people who have long focused on re-entry – such as corrections, probation, and parole staff, as well as ex-offenders – and giving them designated time for fresh thinking. “LAP pulls you out of your day-to-day job and forces you to look at the big picture,” she says.

The LAP also included participants – such as employers, faith community service providers, and educators – whose everyday work doesn’t center on re-entry and who, therefore, offer a valuable outside perspective.

While many groups offer services to ex-offenders, connecting ex-offenders with these services had been difficult. Print booklets listing services quickly became outdated. Ex-offenders, often without transportation, struggled to find conveniently located services.

Today, when an inmate is discharged, a case manager can use the database to provide a customized one-page report on where to best find services, which reduces frustration and increases the chances of successful re-entry.

CREATING NEW RELATIONSHIPS

A new partnership to help Marion County jail inmates earn the equivalent of a high school diploma was forged during the LAP when people from the jail connected with people from Ivy Tech, Indiana’s state-wide community college.

“The light bulb went on in that room – hey, Ivy Tech might be a perfect partner,” says Bob Ohlemiller, who works at the 1135-bed Marion County Jail, operated by the county sheriff’s department. “It’s a vital program because inmates who have not completed their high school education are obviously not going to do well in the job market or community.”

Since December 2009, Ivy Tech has provided General Equivalency Diploma (GED) instruction and testing, as well as Adult Basic Education (ABE). To date, 187 jail inmates have gone through the program. Each inmate has a personal education plan and im-

provement will be measured, based not just on GED attainment but on improvement in functional literacy.

“Until the LAP, Ivy Tech wasn’t aware that the jail needed ABE/GED programming,” says David Garrison, Ivy Tech’s Corporate Executive for Government Services.

“We’re very into the re-entry process,” he adds. “Our primary goal is workforce and economic development and helping the state create an educated workforce that will drive our economy. If we’re helping re-entering individuals get their GED, that makes it more likely they will become employed and taxpayers as opposed to recidivists and tax-drainers. We’re helping individuals and the state.”

This aligned action was devised with an eye toward statistical research – showing that the main cause of recidivism is unemployment, followed by a low educational level.

Crucial funding came from federal stimulus dollars, which officials competed to obtain. “Being able to put together a credible proposal with a credible partner like Ivy Tech was a great thing,” says Ohlemiller. “A lot of us are too busy in our day-to-day business to even conceive of doing anything to bring a problem down to something that seems do-able.”

The LAP continues, albeit in a new way. Now well-schooled in the LAP process, Marion County participants are able to focus even more on achieving results. Also, five Indy LAPers traveled to Casey’s Baltimore headquarters over a six-month period to receive additional capacity-building training. The LAP now meets one day a month and is led by participants, not facilitators.

The group is focusing on strategies that lead to jobs for ex-offenders, a particular challenge given the recession. “We need more employers to come forward and be willing to take a chance,” observes Marshall Shackelford, a LAPer who is the Manager of Warehouse Operations for Mays Chemical Company in Indianapolis.

The LAP also is focusing on making re-entry a priority across state and local agencies, not just public safety agencies, and continuing to pursue its five core strategies. “We’re just going to keep doing this important work,” says David Garrison, of Ivy Tech.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation is a private charitable organization dedicated to helping build better futures for disadvantaged children in the United States. Its mission is to foster public policies, human-service reforms, and community supports that more effectively meet the needs of today’s vulnerable children and families. For more information, visit the Foundation’s website at www.aecf.org.

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