



AUSTIN·TRAVIS COUNTY

REENTRY ROUNDTABLE

REENTRY SERVICES LANDSCAPE REPORT

September
2021

Executive Summary

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

01

Identify organizations, programs, and services *available to* the reentry population

02

Identify organizations, programs, and services *targeted at* the reentry population

03

Identify restrictions to accessing programs and services for the reentry population

KEY FINDINGS

14 ORGANIZATIONS IDENTIFIED AS HAVING REENTRY-SPECIFIC PROGRAMS



Downtown Austin Community Court



JAIL TO JOBS



Austin Area Urban League



Austin Oxford House



BUILDING PROMISE USA
"Peer-led, Peer-run & Peer-driven"



Travis County Mental Health Public Defender

*other organizations may identify as having reentry programs but did not complete the survey

KEY FINDINGS (continued)

56

programs across 35 organizations completed the survey

33,061

Estimated total clients with criminal justice background served by all 56 programs surveyed (this number may be duplicated)

77%



of programs surveyed indicated that they do not have formalized partnerships with criminal justice agencies

86%



of programs indicated that persons with an open or pending criminal case are eligible for services.

48%



of respondents identified lack of affordable housing or housing restrictions as the greatest barrier facing persons in reentry

45%



of programs indicated that they could serve additional people with existing resources

Introduction & Acknowledgements

This project was undertaken by the Austin/Travis County Reentry Roundtable in 2021 as part of its funding deliverables to the City of Austin and Travis County. Thank you to work group members David Clauss (American YouthWorks), Tess Fagle (Goodwill Central Texas), Carl Hunter (Building Promise USA), Lori Mellinger (Empowering Women Out of Prison), Hank Perret, Kaleigh Phelan (previously with ECHO), Matt Smith (Aunt Bertha), Don Tracy (ACC) for your time and contributions to this work.

Project Purpose

- Identify organizations, programs, and services available to the reentry population in Travis County;
- Identify organizations, programs, and services targeted at the reentry population in Travis County; and
- Identify restrictions to accessing programs and services for the reentry population.

Long-Term Project Outcomes

- Create a web-based application to provide updated information on reentry services in Travis County
- Highlight existing connections and gaps among providers serving the reentry population
- Highlight the need for more organizations to provide substantive and targeted services to the reentry population
- Launch a community of practice of providers offering targeted reentry services in Travis County

Reentry Service Landscape

The graphic below illustrates the key domains in the reentry service landscape in Austin/Travis County.





REENTRY SERVICES LANDSCAPE MAP

Employment, Training & Education

- 45 of 56 programs indicated that they provide one or more Employment, Training, & Education services in-house
- Most offered services: Soft Skills Building (72%), Basic Job Readiness (63%), and Job Search Services (61%)
- Least offered services: Apprenticeship Programs (15%), English as a Second Language (13%), and High School Equivalency GED (9%)

Family

- 12 of 56 programs indicated that they provide one or more Family services in-house
- Most offered services: Parenting Education/Fatherhood (16%), Family Counseling/Mediation (9%)
- Least offered services: Family Prison Visitation Support (4%), and Child Support (0%)

Basic Needs

- 45 of 56 programs indicated that they provide one or more Basic Needs services in-house
- Most offered services: Transportation Assistance (70%), Benefits Assistance (55%), and Food/Meals (53%)
- Least offered services: Clothing (46%), Temporary Financial Assistance (46%), and Identification Documents (44%)

Physical & Behavioral Health

- 35 of 56 programs indicated that they provide one or more Physical & Behavioral Health services in-house
- Most offered services: Peer Support/Mentoring (45%), Crisis Intervention (38%), and Health Literacy/Health Education (33%)
- Least offered services: Dental Care (0%), Inpatient Medical Care (0%), and Maternal Child Health Care (0%)

Civic & Community Services

- 37 of 56 programs indicated that they provide one or more Civic & Community services in-house
- Most offered services: Community Service/Volunteer Opportunities (52%), Activism/Advocacy (44%), and Leadership Development/Training (36%)
- Least offered services: Street Outreach (25%), Spiritual or Faith-based Support (21%), and Political Education/Civic Engagement (15%)

Legal

- 7 of 56 programs indicated that they provide one or more Legal services in-house
- Most offered services: Driver's License Restoration (9%) and Record Sealing/Expungement (7%)
- Least offered services: Child Custody/Parent Rights Restoration (2%) and Amnesty/Pardon Assistance (0%)

Housing

- 36 of 56 programs indicated that they provide one or more Housing services in-house
- Most offered services: Assistance in Locating Housing (56%), Assistance with Landlord/Tenant Relations (49%), and Financial Assistance with Utilities (45%)
- Least offered services: Transitional Housing (19%), Emergency Shelter (15%), and Domestic Violence Shelter (0%)

The chart below includes the organizations that responded to the survey along with the reentry service domain affiliated with the programs offered by that organization.

Organization	Services
A New Entry, Inc.	Basic Needs Health Housing Family Civic & Community Employment & Education
American YouthWorks	Basic Needs Health Housing Family Legal Civic & Community Employment & Education
Austin Area Urban League RCAP	Basic Needs Health Civic & Community Employment & Education
Austin Community College District	Basic Needs Health Family Civic & Community Employment & Education
Austin Oxford House Reentry	Basic Needs Health Housing Family Legal Civic & Community Employment & Education
Building Promise USA	Civic & Community Employment & Education
Capital IDEA	Basic Needs Housing Civic & Community Employment & Education
Communities for Recovery	Basic Needs Health Housing Civic & Community Employment & Education
Downtown Austin Community Court	Basic Needs Health Housing Civic & Community
Empowering Women Out of Prison	Basic Needs Health Housing Family Civic & Community Employment & Education
Ending Community Homelessness Coalition (ECHO)	Basic Needs Housing Civic & Community
Family Eldercare	Basic Needs Health Housing Legal Civic & Community
Front Steps	Basic Needs Health Housing Civic & Community Employment & Education
Goodwill Central Texas	Basic Needs Health Housing Family Legal Civic & Community Employment & Education
Housing Authority of Travis County	Basic Needs Housing
Integral Care	Basic Needs Health Housing Family Civic & Community Employment & Education
Jail to Jobs	Basic Needs Health Housing Family Civic & Community Employment & Education
Skillpoint Alliance	Employment & Education
Sobering Center	Basic Needs Health Civic & Community
Texas Reach Out Ministries, Inc.	Basic Needs Health Housing Family Legal Civic & Community Employment & Education
Texas RioGrande Legal Aid	Housing Legal
Travis County Mental Health Public Defender	Basic Needs Health Housing Civic & Community
Workforce Solutions Capital Area	Basic Needs Health Housing Civic & Community Employment & Education
YWCA Greater Austin	Basic Needs Health Housing Family Legal Civic & Community Employment & Education

Key Survey Findings

Finding #1: Austin/Travis County has a relatively small foundation of targeted reentry services and a larger ecosystem of other social services that persons in reentry can access.

- The survey data represents 56 distinct programs across 35 organizations operating in Austin/Travis County.
- The estimated number of total clients with criminal justice background served by all organizations was 33,061 (median response was 295 clients). Overall, survey respondents indicated serving a total of 173,075 clients.¹
- 40% of programs (representing 14 organizations) identified as reentry-specific programs. These reentry-specific programs indicated serving 70,105 total persons annually. For reference, in 2020, the Roundtable estimated that each year approximately 40,000 individuals experience reentry from prison or jail, and/or are on some form of community supervision.
- 57% respondents indicated that their organization's geographic area covers Central Texas; 41% respondents cover only Austin/Travis County, and 1 organization targets a specific neighborhood.
- There is relative longevity in services offered with some new programs emerging more recently. 26 organizations (70%) have been around longer than 10 years; 4 organizations (11%) have existed between 5-10 years; 2 organizations (5%) have existed 3-5 years; and 5 organizations (14%) have emerged in the past 1-3 years (of those five programs, three provide targeted reentry programming).

Finding #2: Most programs do not have formal partnerships with criminal justice institutions.

- Most programs surveyed (77%) indicated that they do not have formalized partnerships with criminal justice agencies.
- 13 programs (23%) provide services in a correctional facility (pre-release or a halfway house). Of those programs, 4 provide reentry case management, 5 provide education, training and employment services, 2 provide housing related services, 2 provide legal services, 1 provides family services, 1 provides intake services and 1 provides spiritual development.
- Programs indicated they have financial partnerships with the following criminal justice agencies: Substance Abuse Felony Punishment Facility (SAFPF) Reentry Court; Supervision and Monitoring for Alcohol Related Treatment (SMART) Reentry Court; Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) Reentry & Integration Division/Texas Correctional Office on Offenders with Medical or Mental Impairments (TCOOMMI); and TDCJ – other division.

¹ This figure excludes clients served by the Central Texas Food Bank, which serves approximately 337,000 individuals annually. This figure is likely to include duplicated clients, that is, clients who access services from more than one program surveyed.

- Programs indicated they have formalized partnerships but no financial contract with the following criminal justice agencies: Travis County Adult Probation; Travis County District Attorney; Travis County Public Defender; Travis County Mental Health Public Defender; TDCJ – Parole; TDCJ Reentry & Integration Division/TCOOMMI; TDCJ – other division; Federal Bureau of Prisons; SMART Reentry Court; Substance Abuse Felony Punishment Facility (SAFPF) Reentry Court; Downtown Austin Community Court; Office of the Attorney General; Travis County Juvenile Justice; and Travis County Sheriff’s Office.

Finding #3: Most programs serving persons in reentry are informed, at least to some extent, by consumer voice and/or specifically by formerly incarcerated persons, but there is room for expanded voice, contributions, and leadership by persons with lived experience in the justice system.

- With regard to engaging persons with lived experience in programming, the top utilized strategy was soliciting and responding to consumer feedback on services (70% of respondents); partnering with and/or supporting agencies and programs led by formerly incarcerated persons (58% of respondents); and collaborating with formerly incarcerated persons to co-design programs or other reentry solutions (50% of respondents).
- The least utilized strategies to engage persons with lived experience were ensuring that formerly incarcerated persons are part of staff or leadership (39% of respondents) and having an advisory council made up of or including formerly incarcerated persons (25% of respondents).
- Three organizations indicated that they did not use any of the strategies above to engage with persons with lived experience in the criminal justice system.
- Language access appears to be generally available in most of the programs surveyed. Most organizations have staff that speak languages other than English (92%), with Spanish being mentioned most often as the additional language spoken. One or more programs mentioned that they have staff who speak the following languages: Arabic, French, Hebrew, Portuguese, Korean, Farsi, Chinese, Danish, Vietnamese, and American Sign Language (ASL).

Finding #4: Most programs serving persons in reentry are available regardless of current or past criminal background, although some programs do deny access based on certain offenses and eligibility requirements.

- 86% of respondents indicated that persons with an open or pending criminal case are eligible for services.
- A small percentage of programs indicated prohibitions on persons who have been arrested or convicted of arson (2 programs do not allow individuals to have been

arrested or convicted of arson, 2 programs indicated that it may depend on the training or occupational guidelines of the desired employment program, and 4 programs indicated an individual can have an arrest but not a conviction for arson). These bans are likely to be due to receiving federal housing-related funding.

- A somewhat larger percentage of programs indicated prohibitions on persons who have been arrested or convicted of sex offenses (8 programs do not allow individuals to have been arrested or convicted of sex offenses, 3 programs indicate that it cannot be the most recent arrest, 1 program indicated an individual can have an arrest but not a conviction for sex offenses, and 5 programs said that it depends.)
- Many programs have additional specific eligibility requirements including age, housing status, medical diagnosis, risk or need level, military or veteran status, or referral source.
- A number of specialized services appear to be available for subpopulations of persons in reentry including women, immigrants, LGBTQIA individuals, veterans, seniors/older adults, persons with disabilities, youth & young adults, persons experiencing homelessness, and persons with behavioral health conditions.

Finding #5: There is a broad array of in-house and referred services offered within the Austin/Travis County's reentry services ecosystem. A substantial number of providers appear to have additional capacity which we need to learn more about to better understand.

- The most commonly provided services were soft skills building (72% of respondents), transportation assistance (70%), basic job readiness (63%), job search services (61%), computer/digital literacy (58%), assistance in locating housing (56%), benefits assistance (55%), individualized career counseling (55%), job placement services (54%), food and meals (53%), computer access (52%), and community service/volunteer opportunities (52%).
- Services that were not provided in-house by any survey respondent included dental care, inpatient medical care, maternal child health care, domestic violence shelter, child support, and amnesty/pardon assistance. This does not mean that these services are not offered in Austin/Travis County, just that the survey respondents do not provide these services.
- Organizations are providing a variety of case management services. The highest proportion of programs (68%) provide resource management - connecting to other agencies as appropriate - with no intentional follow-up. 61% of programs provide triage case management, or dealing with immediate barriers. 46% of programs provide long-term case management for at least a year; 43% provide intensive case management (at least twice weekly); 14% provide no case management; and 13% provide medical case management.

- Basic needs are the most common service to be either provided in-house OR referred out. Depending on the need, only about 10-15% of programs are not providing basic needs services at all.
- In general, there is a relatively small representation of programs who provide legal and family services directly. The number of organizations that refer out to these services is also lower for these areas than for other areas.
- Almost half of programs (45%) indicated that they offer in-house peer support/mentoring, and 34% of programs refer to other peer support programs. 28% of programs don't provide peer support at all.
- 45% of programs (25 programs) indicated that they could serve additional people with existing resources. This is an important finding as it indicates that there may be additional capacity to serve persons in reentry. However, all but seven programs indicated that they have additional specific eligibility requirements to participate in the program, so it is possible that there could be a mismatch in terms of the individuals who may be eligible and the additional available program capacity.
- The organizations that identified as offering reentry-specific programming were more likely to offer more comprehensive services to clients, including services in each of the identified domains.

Finding #6: Most organizations do not appear to have a strong understanding of evidence-based reentry practices and there is an opportunity to convene reentry providers to build a stronger network of supports to people returning to the community from jail or prison.

- 57% of programs surveyed indicated that they do not utilize Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) "Principles of Effective Practice."²
- Of those programs that do utilize the BJA principles, 38% target higher risk individuals; 28% practice enhancing intrinsic motivation (e.g. motivational interviewing); 21% use Cognitive-Behavioral Interventions; 19% determine dosage and intensity of services; 15% address offenders' greatest criminogenic needs; and 4% objectively assess criminogenic risks and needs using validated assessment tools.
- Of the 29 organizations that responded to the question, eighteen organizations indicated that they would be interested in participating in an ongoing community of practice to develop a stronger network of reentry service providers in Travis County, 9 organizations answered maybe, and 2 answered no.

² Department of Justice: National Institute of Corrections. *Evidence-Based Practices*. <https://www.nicic.gov/projects/evidence-based-practices-ebp>.

Policy Barriers

Participants were asked to identify the primary policy barriers that individuals returning from prisons and jails face in Travis County. Categories of barriers are listed below in order of the frequency of response.

16	Housing - lack of affordable housing and/or housing restrictions due to criminal background
7	Employment barriers/licensing restrictions
4	Requirements and/or restrictions related to being on parole or having a criminal record
2	Public stigma of having a criminal background
2	Access to benefits and/or healthcare
1	Challenges with obtaining identification
1	Specific barriers due to having a sex offense

Follow-Up Recommendations

- Build a community of practice, starting with targeted reentry providers. An important opportunity to convene reentry service providers will occur with the City of Austin's new Reentry Service Grant program.
- Consider convening sub-groups of providers in specific practice areas to better understand and address services for persons in reentry in specific areas (e.g. workforce development, housing, etc.). There may be a specific opportunity to convene homeless service providers to address the intersection of homelessness and reentry.
- Consider technical assistance opportunities for the community of practice focused on the Bureau of Justice Assistance Principles of Effective Practice.
- Publish a system map of providers on the Roundtable website and develop a mechanism for an annual update.
- Continue to engage organizations that did not complete the survey.
- Analyze the reasons for specific offenses being deemed ineligible for services, including and in addition to exclusions for arson and sex offenses.
- Conduct further research to better understand whether some providers actually have additional capacity to serve persons in reentry.
- Engage with the Reentry Advocacy Project to assess whether the findings from this survey align with the experiences of persons with lived experience in the criminal justice system.

Methodology

Process:

- Present process overview to Planning Council and obtain feedback (January 2021)
- Research survey options (January 2021)
- Convene working group to design survey, finalize universe of reentry service organizations and select survey tool (February 2021)
- Survey preparation (February/March 2021)
- Survey open (April 2021)
- Additional survey outreach (May/June 2021)
- Draft summary of process and preliminary findings (June/July 2021)
- Draft final system map and findings (August/September 2021)
- Redesign the Reentry Roundtable Get Help web page to link to Gethelp.org (August/September 2021)

Survey Scope: Organizations providing services in Central Texas that provide any kind of programs, direct services, or resources to people who are or have been involved with the criminal justice system. This was interpreted broadly, including organizations providing education, training and employment, basic needs, physical and behavioral health, housing, family well-being, legal issues, or community engagement. The survey was expected to take approximately 15-20 minutes per program to complete.

Incentives: All organizations that completed the survey were offered a \$25 VISA gift card in appreciation for completing the survey. Two organizations completing the survey were selected at random to receive a \$500 gift card.

Survey Outreach: Seventy-six organizations providing services to persons in reentry and/or with criminal backgrounds were identified as the universe of programs for the survey. A representative for each organization was contacted by email in advance of the survey to announce the survey launch and to request participation. The questions for the survey were shared in advance. The communication explained the way that organizations were identified for participation in the survey: *“Although we know that your organization may not provide services targeted at the reentry population, it was identified as an organization that is likely to be serving a significant number of folks in reentry and/or with criminal backgrounds.”* Organizations were also offered the opportunity to decline participation in the survey if they did not provide services to the reentry population. Organizations were sent the survey link as well as multiple reminders if they had not completed the survey or had only partially completed the survey. In late May and June, organizations who had not completed the survey were contacted by email and phone and personally invited to participate.

Limitations: At least two organizations known to provide targeted reentry services in the community did not respond to the survey. The Roundtable will continue to engage these organizations to include their data in future efforts.