

3 Questions: Culture Change in Corrections

Video Transcript

Nicole Jarrett: Hello, I'm Dr. Nicole Jarrett, and I'm the director of Corrections and Reentry at The Council of State Governments Justice Center.

So, what is culture change? Within the departments of corrections, it's the shift to focusing on reentry. That could include several different things, such as assessing the types of programs that you offer, employing strategies to make sure that you're effectively engaging people, investing in staff so they're up to the task, and thinking about the ways that you collect data to ensure sure that you're on track.

We caught up with Anne Precythe, the director of the Missouri Department of Corrections, to discuss her reflections on culture change.

Anne Precythe: Hi, my name is Anne Precythe, and I'm the director of corrections for the state of Missouri.

[Text on screen: How do corrections leaders promote reentry?]

Anne Precythe: Reentry is probably one of the most important things we can do in corrections. My peers across the United States, we all say reentry begins the day people get off the bus and enter our institutions, and we don't believe that it ends when people leave the institution. We have spent a lot of time bringing the outside in and really connecting our incarcerated individuals to jobs in the communities before they leave.

There are lots of ways that we can promote reentry throughout our organizations. One of those, which is my favorite: people talk about what we talk about. So, the fact that as leaders we're talking about the importance of reentry, making people feel valued and realize that reentry is so key to the success of our incarcerated population.

[Text on screen: How does culture change support successful reentry?]

Anne Precythe: In Missouri, we have spent a lot of time talking about organizational culture change, and I think it has a direct relation to reentry because how our teams treat each and work together inside the workplace, they're observed by the incarcerated population.

Organizational culture has a tremendous impact on where we're headed in the future. In Missouri, we've spent the last four years focusing on how our staff talk among themselves, how they treat each other, how supervisors show value and appreciation, and the next step is how do we get the workforce to show those very same considerations to the incarcerated population?

[Text on screen: Has COVID-19 impacted your culture change efforts?]

Anne Precythe: COVID-19 has had an impact on our cultural change as we were shifting in the department of corrections. Primarily, in the community, we shifted from being office-based to a distributed workforce. What that did for our reentry efforts was that it really changed the approach for our probation and parole officers and how they worked with the population that had been released. They are spending more time in the community; they are spending more time in the homes; they are really getting a handle on what those wraparound services (childcare, community-based activities)—what is it that the population that we serve, what are they doing in the community. So, that has had a tremendous impact.

Over the last year, reentry services have probably been pushed to the limit, because some states released more individuals than they had planned. Other states, like Missouri, we continue to release at the very same rate that we do, about 18,000 people a year. And so, the way communities have stepped up to really help embrace this group has been remarkable. It's part of what helps to make the overall communities a much safer place, and it gives our individuals a really good experience coming home.

Nicole Jarrett: Thank you, Director Precythe, for taking the time to talk with us.

Want to learn more?

Strengthening Correctional Culture highlights examples of how departments of corrections have used BJA [Bureau of Justice Assistance] funding to apply culture change strategies, and *Staffing for Success*, developed in partnership with the Iowa Department of Corrections, is an adaptation of a staff competency matrix to help corrections and community supervision agencies hire and prepare staff to provide effective reentry support.

[Text on screen: Developed for Reentry Week 2021, hosted by the National Reentry Resource Center, the Bureau of Justice Assistance, and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.]

[Text on screen: Track news and updates: #ReentryMatters #ReentryWeek #ReentryWeek21]