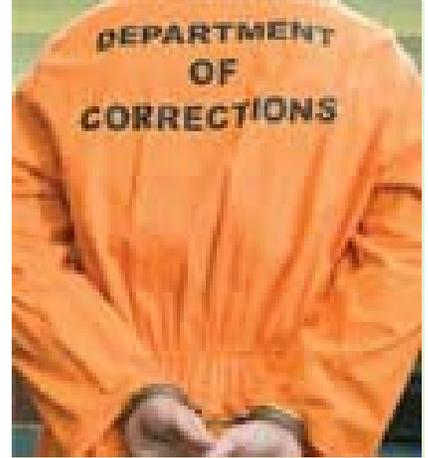


# Improving Reentry For Ex-Offenders in San Diego County: Senate Bill (SB) 618 Third Annual Evaluation Report - Executive Summary

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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### MAJOR FINDINGS

#### Process Evaluation:

- ▶ Good communication and strong collaboration has been the key to successful program implementation.
- ▶ The typical SB 618 participant is a 35-year-old White or Black male in custody for a property-related crime with extensive prior involvement with the criminal justice system and in need of vocational training and substance abuse treatment.
- ▶ Participant needs are assessed within the expected timeframe, reducing time spent in the prison reception center and increasing time available for in-prison rehabilitative services.
- ▶ Over three-quarters (78%) of the treatment group participate in programming while in prison and over two-thirds (69%) receive services in the community during the six months following prison release.
- ▶ Almost all participants have contact with a Prison Case Manager (PCM), Community Case Manager (CCM), or vocational staff while in prison, and four in five participate in prison programs that match their individual needs.
- ▶ During the first six months of community reentry, almost all participants have regular contact with the CCM and this contact occurs during the critical three-day period after prison release for the majority (two-thirds) of participants.
- ▶ Program retention is high, with 91 percent of participants remaining in the program throughout their prison term and the same proportion successfully participating during the six months following prison release.

#### Impact Evaluation:

- ▶ The treatment group is significantly less likely than the comparison group to be returned to prison within the first six months of community reentry.
- ▶ Treatment group participants are five times more likely to be employed six months post release compared to the comparison group, and employed individuals are less likely to have a new arrest in the same period.
- ▶ With respect to risk reduction, preliminary data suggest that SB 618 participation reduces substance use, as well as improves social supports, housing, and employment.
- ▶ Overall, treatment participants, as well as their friends and family members, have a favorable opinion of the program. In fact, the majority of participants would recommend SB 618 to others.

## INTRODUCTION

As historically high numbers of ex-offenders parole to California communities, the issue of reentry poses a significant problem to policymakers, public safety officials, and community leaders alike. Reentry is a key issue facing many communities because over the last 30 years, more individuals have been locked up than ever before, due in part to changes in many jurisdictions from indeterminate sentencing to determinate sentencing (which mandates specific sentence type and length for many crimes) (Austin, Clear, Duster, Greenberg, Irwin, McCoy, Mobley, Owen, & Page, 2007). As a result, by 2008, the United States had the highest incarceration rate in the world with 1 of every 100 adults behind bars (The Pew Center on the States, 2008). Without a commensurate expansion of prison infrastructure, prisons have become overcrowded.

At the same time that more offenders have been locked up for longer periods of time, many in-prison rehabilitation programs have been cut back or eliminated completely due to budget constraints. Thus, many of the issues these offenders entered prison with and which may have been related to their criminal activity (such as substance abuse and few vocational skills) have gone unaddressed during the confinement period, decreasing the chances of successful reintegration (Travis, Solomon, & Waul, 2001).

With researchers and policymakers across the country noting these trends and their implications for communities, there has been more attention paid to determining how this revolving door to prison can be closed for a greater number of individuals, thereby increasing public safety and ensuring best use of citizens' tax dollars. One program resulting from this focus is the Senate Bill (SB) 618 San Diego Prisoner Reentry Program. This

report describes this effort, outlines the research methodology used to evaluate the program's effectiveness, and presents preliminary findings from the evaluation.

### WHAT'S NEW

This third annual evaluation report expands upon previous reports by including the following:

- ▶ vignettes highlighting success stories;
- ▶ updated literature review to ensure study findings can be interpreted in terms of current knowledge in the field of corrections;
- ▶ updated description of the SB 618 program and the status of corrections in California;
- ▶ results from the third annual program partner and key staff surveys;
- ▶ analysis of assessment data;
- ▶ analysis of services received;
- ▶ first available outcome data based on prison rule violations and recidivism information, including multivariate analysis;
- ▶ data from a greater number of satisfaction surveys, as well as first analysis of friends/family survey results and data from follow-up interviews with participants; and
- ▶ updated lessons learned and practical implications based on the above information.

## WHAT IS SB 618?

SB 618 (Speier), effective as of January 2006, is one of several efforts across California to reduce recidivism and increase the probability of successful reentry by addressing concerns about the State's correctional system cited by the Little Hoover Commission in 2003 and 2007. Authored by the San Diego County District Attorney's (DA's) Office, SB 618 is based on best practices and the concept that providing tangible reentry support services will increase parolees' chances of successful reintegration into the community (as evidenced by increased completion of parole conditions and desistance from criminal activity). The ultimate goal is to produce law-abiding and self-sufficient members of the community and enhance public safety.

Although SB 618 allowed for the possibility of three California counties to implement a program, San Diego County was the first and, at the time of this report, the only jurisdiction authorized to create a multiagency plan and develop policies and programs to educate and rehabilitate non-violent felony offenders. The diverse group of program partners, led by the DA's Office, includes the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR), San Diego County Probation Department, San Diego County Sheriff's Department (including a subcontract with Grossmont Union High School District to do educational assessments), San Diego County Public Defender's Office, San Diego County Defense Bar, San Diego County Superior Court, and University of California, San Diego.

### **SENATE BILL (SB) 618 ELIGIBILITY**

All participants are selected from the DA's felony prosecution caseload. The opportunity to enroll in the program is offered to both male and female nonviolent offenders as space is available. To be considered, the candidate must be in local custody (i.e., not out on bail) so the assessment process can be completed, be a legal resident of San Diego County, and agree (or "stipulate") to a prison sentence for the instant offense of 8 to 72 months. Those with prior convictions for great bodily injury or murder are excluded, as are arson and sex offender registrants. Candidates with prior violent convictions over five years old are evaluated on a case-by-case basis. All SB 618 participants are housed at either the Richard J. Donovan (RJD) Correctional Facility or the California Institution for Women (CIW) and, therefore, also must meet any housing restrictions at these facilities.

## PURPOSE OF EVALUATION

The Criminal Justice Research Division of SANDAG is conducting both a process and an impact evaluation of SB 618.

The purpose of the process evaluation is to determine if the program is implemented as planned, measure what system changes occur, and assess program operations. More specifically, research questions to be answered include the following.

- ▶ How was the program implemented and managed?
- ▶ How well did the partners work together to accomplish program goals?
- ▶ How many individuals were screened and agreed to participate in the program, and what were their characteristics?
- ▶ Were participants' needs adequately assessed and were gender-responsive and culturally-competent services provided to meet these needs during detention and after release?

The purpose of the impact evaluation is to determine whether participation in SB 618 improves reintegration and reduces recidivism (i.e., return to prison) and to identify the conditions under which the program is most likely to accomplish these goals. Additionally, the impact evaluation will determine whether the reentry program is cost effective relative to traditional procedures and whether positive change is realized in other areas of participants' lives (e.g., employment). The following research questions will be answered.

- ▶ What was the level of prison rule compliance for participants relative to the comparison group?
- ▶ Were there any improvements in program participant needs and family and/or social bonds over time?
- ▶ Was recidivism reduced among participants relative to the comparison group?
- ▶ Was the program cost effective?

To answer the impact evaluation questions, the most rigorous research design possible, given programmatic constraints, is being used and compares SB 618 participants to individuals who would have been eligible to receive services but were not approached to do so. To help mitigate possible confounding factors between the two groups, statistical techniques are being used to ensure equivalency so the effect of receiving SB 618 services can be isolated to determine if goals are met.

To answer these process and impact evaluation questions, data are being collected from both archival (e.g., program assessment data, service data, and criminal history records) and original sources (e.g., surveys with key staff, program partners, community members, participants, and friends/family, as well as follow-up interviews with participants). Additionally, the research team is monitoring other factors that could affect SB 618 participants, including changes at the State level (such as fiscal constraints and legislation that releases individuals from parole at earlier points in time), tracking staffing, and observing all key program activities.

## NEXT STEPS FOR EVALUATION

As the evaluation continues, a more complete assessment of program impact will be provided through the following:

- ▶ matching of study groups to ensure that research findings are not biased;
- ▶ larger number of cases out of custody long enough to conduct recidivism analysis;
- ▶ longer term outcomes (i.e., 12 months post-prison release); and
- ▶ cost-effectiveness analysis.

### SB 618 KEY COMPONENTS

Incorporating evidence-based practices, the local SB 618 program is unique compared to traditional California correctional practices in a number of ways, including the following.

- ▶ Participants' needs are assessed before the prison sentence begins and an individualized Life Plan is created by a multidisciplinary team comprised of program staff, in conjunction with the participant. The Life Plan is designed to be modified with participant input throughout the course of program delivery and is created to ensure services meet identified needs.
- ▶ Case management, both during prison and after release, is provided to ensure services meeting identified needs are accessed.
- ▶ Upon release, a Community Roundtable (comprised of the Community Case Manager, Parole Agent, and other individuals identified by the ex-offender) meets regularly to ensure reintegration challenges are addressed.

## PROCESS EVALUATION FINDINGS

### Program Implementation

According to the feedback provided through surveys with program partners (i.e., individuals who have been integral in planning and managing the SB 618 program, whether or not they have direct contact with SB 618 clients), key staff (i.e., individuals who have direct contact with program participants), and the community (i.e., members of the San Diego Reentry Roundtable and the San Diego County DA's Interfaith Advisory Board), it appears that while program implementation and management have included some challenges, especially in regard to recent budgetary constraints (e.g., elimination of most in-prison programming, high unemployment), both have been accomplished well and in line with the original program design. This success is demonstrated by the continued collaboration and communication among local team members that have been sustained over the past three years. Reflecting the willingness of program partners to implement the most effective strategies possible, several modifications were made to the program design including expansion to a second courthouse, as well as refinements to the screening and assessment process, prison case management at the Richard J. Donovan (RJD) Correctional Facility, multidisciplinary team (MDT) meetings, and Community Roundtable meetings. Program components that have been described as most effective have included: the Life Plan, the MDT, the prison programming in the California Institution for Women (CIW), and the Community Roundtable. Further, most of the program partners and key staff have expressed optimism that the program will result in long-term systems changes and has already contributed to a cultural shift that focuses more on rehabilitation.

With respect to program accomplishments, program partners and key staff have noticed positive outcomes in participants during the third year of program implementation, reflecting the larger number of participants released from prison who are working toward their Life Plan goals.

### Participant Characteristics and Needs

As part of the evaluation design, a total of 348 eligible individuals were assigned to the treatment group and 363 to the comparison group. The comparability of these groups was examined to discover any differences resulting from the lack of random assignment that could bias the study findings. The treatment and comparison groups were comparable to each other with respect to age, gender, and prior criminal history. These research findings indicate that SB 618 targets individuals shown in the corrections literature to be at high risk for continued criminal activity (i.e., drug or property offenders with lengthy criminal records) (National Research Council, 2008).

While there were differences related to ethnicity (with a larger proportion of Whites in the treatment group and fewer Hispanics), this difference will be controlled through a statistical matching process as the data become available to ensure that both groups are equivalent and eliminate any potential bias from study findings.

The typical SB 618 participant has the following characteristics.

- About 35 years of age.
- Around four in five are male.
- Three-quarters are White or Black.
- More than half are in custody for a property-related offense.
- Most had served time in jail or prison in the past.

- Almost nine in ten are assessed as high risk due to previous non-compliance and prior criminal involvement.
- Most are released from prison to medium level parole supervision and are required to participate in drug testing.
- Almost all are assessed as having severe or significant vocational or substance abuse needs.
- Literacy is not an issue for most, but two-thirds still have educational deficiencies.
- One-third have medical, mental health, or dental issues.
- Over half have criminogenic risks related to residential instability.

Consistent with other research findings (Bloom, Owen, & Covington, 2003), female participants were significantly more likely to report being a victim of abuse (i.e., emotional, physical, or sexual abuse). Based on assessed needs, SB 618 services should focus on vocational training, substance abuse treatment, and gender-responsive programming.

### Service Delivery

Service provision for SB 618 begins with the needs assessment process, completed in local custody (i.e., prior to sentencing) to facilitate provision of rehabilitative services during the prison stay. Based on data collected for the evaluation (Table 1), participants were assessed within the expected window, reducing the period spent in the prison reception center so that prison time could be used efficiently to begin the process of addressing needs prior to prison release. As a result, nearly all participants received some type of program services while in prison. However, the match between needs and services received was less consistent which is probably related to program availability as the following discussion describes.

**Table 1**  
**SB 618 MEETS AND EXCEEDS MANY PROGRAM DELIVERY GOALS**

	Goal	Reality
<b>In-Jail Assessments</b>		
ASI	14 days	12.09 days
CASAS	14 days	10.60 days
COMPAS	14 days	17.16 days
TABE	14 days	10.54 days
<b>In-Prison Vocational Assessments</b>		
Myers Briggs Type Indicator® (MBTI)	90 days	63.91 days
Occupational Information Network (O*NET) Abilities	90 days	61.31 days
O*NET Careers	90 days	64.46 days
O*NET Values	90 days	69.51 days
<b>Time in Reception Center</b>	30 days	41.53 days
<b>PCM Contacts</b>		
Within first three months	100%	68%
Six months prior to prison release	100%	83%
<b>CCM Contacts</b>		
In prison	100%	96%
Within three days after prison release	N/A	63%
Within six months after prison release	100%	99%
<b>In-Prison Services</b>		
Any service related to need(s)	N/A	80%
Education	100% of those with need	38%
Vocational Training	100% of those with need	48%
Substance Abuse	100% of those with need	56%
<b>Community Services/Referral</b>		
Any service related to need(s)	N/A	84%
Education	100% of those with need	42%
Vocational Training	100% of those with need	51%
Substance Abuse	100% of those with need	89%

*SOURCES: SB 618 Database and PCM and CCM Official Records, SANDAG SB 618 Third Annual Evaluation Report*

Overall, the majority participated in prison programs that matched their individual needs (i.e., 80% in custody and 84% in the community), though there was variation between the two prisons. Treatment participants at RJD with a need for vocational programming were significantly more likely than those at CIW to receive vocational programming in prison. However, participants at CIW with needs for substance abuse treatment and educational services were significantly more likely to participate in a

program to address these specific needs in prison (not shown). These differences may be due to how areas of need are prioritized and service availability. For example, CIW prioritizes education over vocational training needs. In addition, program availability has been an issue at RJD, with delays in starting up new vocational programs, limited educational services depending on participant housing assignments, and interruptions in Substance Abuse Programs (SAP).

With respect to services received in the community during the first six months following prison release, participants with substance abuse needs were most likely to be referred to and participate in substance abuse treatment. Employment, clothing, and housing needs were also commonly addressed during this period. Almost all of the treatment group had regular contact with the Community Case Manager (CCM) after release and this contact occurred during the critical three-day period after prison release for the majority (two-thirds) of participants. In addition, about four out of five participants received services from the Vocational Specialist.

Program retention was high, with 91 percent remaining in the program throughout the prison term and the same proportion continuing to participate throughout the six months following prison release. The primary reason for leaving the program while in prison or in the community was lack of compliance (e.g., rule violations in prison and parole violations or new offenses committed in the community).

## IMPACT EVALUATION FINDINGS

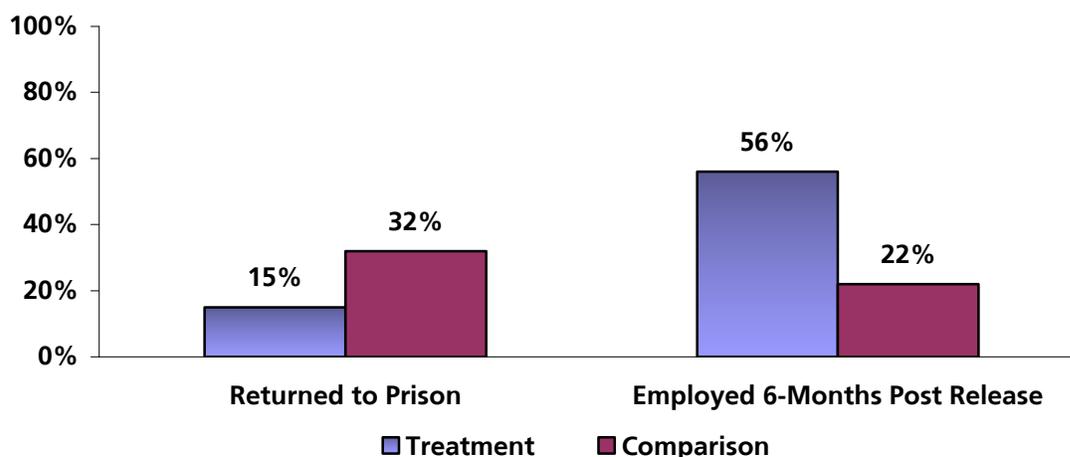
### Recidivism

To determine the impact of SB 618 on an ex-offender’s behavior, information is being collected regarding in-custody rule violations, as well as arrests, convictions, parole violations, and return to prison rates six months post-prison release.

Preliminary results reveal that the treatment group is significantly less likely (15%) than the comparison group (32%) to be returned to prison during the first six months of community reentry (Figure 1). Further, individuals who had been employed at least once during the six months post-release are less likely to be re-arrested (not shown). In addition, SB 618 participants are more likely than the comparison group to have been employed, highlighting the value of the workforce development aspect of the program.

Figure 1

### TREATMENT GROUP LESS LIKELY TO BE RETURNED TO PRISON AND MORE LIKELY TO BE EMPLOYED



SOURCES: San Diego County Sheriff’s Department and Parole Official Records, SANDAG SB 618 Third Annual Evaluation Report

## Risk Reduction

Addressing the needs of offenders (e.g., substance abuse, education, employment, and housing) has been found to facilitate the reentry process and relate directly to lowering recidivism rates. This process is referred to as risk reduction (Travis, Solomon, & Waul, 2001). For the treatment group, it appears that SB 618 is associated with risk reduction in terms of improved relationships with family members, secured stable housing, employment, and association with positive peer groups. Participants reported improved family relationships and association with peers not involved in anti-social activities. Over three-quarters of the treatment group were living in stable housing and over half were employed.

- receiving thorough information about the program from defense attorneys and probation officers;
- developing an individualized Life Plan that included personal input;
- participating in substance abuse treatment, education, and vocational programming while in prison;
- being motivated to change;
- interacting with CCMs and Vocational Specialists;
- participating in Community Roundtable meetings; and
- receiving services brokered through community-based agencies (e.g., education, housing, substance abuse treatment).

## Program Satisfaction

An important measure of program impact is participant satisfaction because the level of satisfaction can impact engagement in services and ultimately program effectiveness. Overall, treatment participants, as well as their friends and family members, had a favorable opinion of the program. In fact, the majority of participants would recommend the program to others. Specifically, aspects of SB 618 that appeared to have the strongest positive impact on participants included:

### ◆ SB 618 PARTICIPANT PRISON EXIT CSQ ◆

*"No one ever cared what happened to me in the past!... SB 618 is good support and gives positive inputs for a stable Life Plan (structure). Thank you so much!"*

## LESSONS LEARNED

The accomplishments and challenges experienced through the implementation of SB 618 have provided valuable lessons to guide others considering implementation of similar prisoner reentry programs.

### ▶ **What Has Worked Well?**

**Ensuring ongoing communication between program partners:** Since program inception, a culture of open communication has been fostered among program partners and key staff across agencies. Operational Procedures Committee meetings were first convened in November 2005 and have served as one vehicle for communication. These meetings are regularly attended by key individuals to discuss issues, brainstorm possible solutions, and come to agreement on the best course of action.

**Obtaining support throughout all organizations involved in partnership:** Findings from the process evaluation indicate that individuals who have direct contact with program participants (i.e., key staff) feel they can give input and communicate well with program management. Further, individuals who have been integral participants in planning and managing the SB 618 program (i.e., program partners) are committed to the program. This degree of support from all levels provides a foundation for successful program implementation and systems change.

**Remaining committed to instituting best practices, despite challenges and roadblocks that may occur along the way:** Although there have been a variety of constraints during the first three years of SB 618, program partners continue to pursue the goal of full implementation of all program components.

- Regarding duplicate screenings and assessments, the Medical and Mental Health Receivers and SB 618 program partners (including CDCR) continue to communicate in the hope of allowing local screenings to further reduce the length of time in the reception center.
- To increase the availability of in-custody programming, program partners have worked with the Division of Community Partnerships at RJD to implement Commercial Class B driver's license and food handler's certification programs.
- To increase access to services in the community for participants with co-occurring mental health and substance abuse issues, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was initiated between UCSD and over 20 community-based agencies for in-patient and out-patient behavioral health services on a fee for service basis.

**Conducting thorough needs assessments:** As part of SB 618, assessments are conducted locally, beginning before a participant is transferred to the prison reception center. During program development, partners thoroughly discussed which assessments should be conducted and agreed that additional information would be useful regarding participants' substance use and vocational needs. The information gained from these assessments is used in the creation of each participant's Life Plan. As previously mentioned, key staff and program partners surveyed indicated that these assessments are effective. In addition, the relatively high proportion of participants receiving services matching their needs also suggests the effectiveness of these assessments.

**Utilizing an interdisciplinary team approach:** Research on prisoner reentry has highlighted the beneficial role of collaboration in the provision of services through partnerships across systems (La Vigne, Davies, Palmer, & Halberstadt, 2008). The primary method of collaboration used in the SB 618 program involves incorporating interdisciplinary team approaches at two key points in a participant's progress, both of which have received positive feedback from staff and participants. The first of these is the MDT meeting held prior to participants' sentencing to review eligibility and discuss screening and assessment results. These meetings are staffed by a Probation Officer, CCM, PCM, and a prison classification counselor. The second of these interdisciplinary forums, the Community Roundtable, is convened on an ongoing basis from the participants' release to their exit from the program. The Parole Agent, CCM, participant, and any other individuals significantly involved in the participant's reentry effort attend these meetings.

**Creating a timely information sharing mechanism:** One of the more behind-the-scenes successes of the program is the development of a Web-based data management system designed specifically for the local SB 618 program. With frequent input from program partners and key staff, the DA's Office Information Systems experts created a user-friendly database that captures data on each participant from screening/assessment through program exit. The database includes automation of the Life Plan to allow it to be updated online and shared among program staff, facilitating timely communication between all key staff working with each participant. The database also has proven crucial to

program partners, key staff, and the evaluators in monitoring program implementation.

▶ **What Could Have Been Done Differently?**

**Anticipate, to the greatest degree possible, the logistical needs and possible pitfalls for service delivery:** Due to a number of very real constraints prior to and after program implementation, in-custody vocational programming has not been available at the level that was desired or anticipated. As such, it would be beneficial for other jurisdictions to take stock of their existing programming resources and fully develop their capabilities prior to implementation or develop alternative strategies should barriers be more difficult to overcome than anticipated. Being proactive in this regard could help avoid time-consuming, bureaucratic hurdles delaying full implementation, as well as direct more realistic information regarding resources available to participants upon program entry.

**Consider that while existing resources may be easier to implement, they might not always be the most effective and can impact successful program implementation:** Originally, the role of PCM at CIW was filled by social workers and by educators at RJD. This staffing difference was debated early in the design stages of the program, with CIW staff emphasizing a history of using social workers for any type of case management. RJD staff felt their educational personnel were qualified to provide appropriate case management services and the program partners agreed to implement the program with this staffing difference in place. However, over the course of

program implementation, qualitative differences between the prisons' case management became more apparent and program partners concluded that the PCM role could be better suited to social work staff.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LOCAL CONSIDERATION

While these preliminary findings from the process and impact evaluation highlight the many successes of the SB 618 program, areas for program improvement also have been identified through the research findings. The following new recommendations are provided for consideration as program partners continue to refine the program and maximize program effectiveness.

- ▶ **Maintain program fidelity across components:** This overall recommendation is a challenge given fiscal constraints. However, lack of program fidelity is a primary threat to program effectiveness. Program partners will want to maintain their commitment ensuring consistency with the program design based on best practices despite restricted funding to preserve positive program impact. Areas of particular concern are discussed in the following recommendations.
- ▶ **Establish a liaison between the local SB 618 program and CDCR headquarters:** With the loss of the SB 618 program manager and assistant program manager from CDCR's Office of Community Partnerships due to budget cuts, CDCR representation during Operational Procedures Committee meetings is restricted to local prison and parole staff. This lack of representation from CDCR headquarters impacts the ability of program partners to communicate the status of program

implementation up the chain of command and to address issues related to CDCR programming.

- ▶ **Expand program implementation to include all county courts within San Diego:** There is local interest in offering SB 618 services to all eligible offenders throughout San Diego County. Given the statewide policy changes that may reduce the quantity of felons sent to prison and assigned to parole supervision, this expansion may be necessary to ensure that the program remains at capacity.
- ▶ **Explore reasons why offenders refuse SB 618 services:** As the program is expanded to other courts within San Diego County, program partners may want to examine if refusal rates vary by jurisdiction to help determine the factors holding people back from getting needed assistance with the process of reintegrating into the community following release from prison.
- ▶ **Examine utility of vocational assessments:** Program partners rated the effectiveness of vocational assessments more highly than key staff. Further, the match between vocational assessments and actual jobs obtained varied across tools. As program partners grapple with fiscal constraints, while striving to maintain program fidelity, they may want to solicit additional feedback from staff to ensure that the most useful and relevant tools are being utilized.
- ▶ **Expand in-prison programming to focus on gaps highlighted by participant needs:** Data from the evaluation indicate a need to increase programs within the prison to meet the assessed needs of participants. Specifically, substance abuse treatment services and additional education programming are needed at RJD, as well as vocational training at both prisons, but

particularly at CIW. In this economically challenging time, continuing to coordinate with the Division of Community Partnerships within the prisons may be the best avenue for such expansion.

- ▶ **Improve program fidelity related to PCM services in RJD:** While modifications in the PCM component were made to improve consistency between the two prisons, service levels continue to be higher at CIW compared to RJD. Further, feedback from participants suggests that improvement is needed in getting people into programs quickly and making the prison system less complicated. The ability of PCMs to help participants navigate the prison system is directly related to having programs in prison, as well as adequate PCM staffing and supervision. Given the fiscal crisis in California, program partners will need to influence institutional priorities in order to positively impact this situation. The process of navigating across governmental systems (i.e., County versus State) is challenging and may not be easily accomplished in the short term.
- ▶ **Continue to refine the prison exit process:** Experts in reentry have concluded that the “moment of release” from prison, and specifically the first 72 hours, can be the most critical time for ex-offenders as they transition from a controlled environment to civilian life (Ball, Weisberg, & Dansky, 2008; Travis, Solomon, & Waul, 2001). Nearly two-thirds (63%) of the treatment group had contact with their CCM within three days of their prison release. Individuals transitioning directly into a residential treatment or sober living program are often not allowed outside contact for up to 30 days, so it is not expected that these participants will interact with the CCMs during this period. However, less than

half (44%) of those who did not transition directly into a residential drug treatment or sober living program were met at the prison gate by their CCM and transported to appropriate housing. When participants were asked about this process during follow-up interviews, 28 percent (20 participants) indicated that they were on their own immediately upon release from prison. Since the ability of CCMs to provide this service is directly related to accurate information regarding the date of prison release, program partners have spent considerable efforts to obtain accurate prison release date information. Based on these research findings, program partners may want to explore additional methods for facilitating this process.

- ▶ **Explore alternatives for substance abuse treatment and improve engagement in these services when accessed:** With fewer resources available for substance abuse treatment in prison and in the community due to statewide budgetary constraints, there is a need to develop creative methods for accessing substance abuse services (e.g., similar to how the gap has been filled related to behavioral health programming). In addition, engagement in this service upon program entry is particularly critical given the chronic nature of addiction.

In addition, the following recommendations shared in earlier annual reports remain relevant.

- ▶ **Ensure clear communication of program expectations with participants:** While feedback from participants indicated an overall positive view of SB 618, the importance of informing participants of how SB 618 works and building rapport from the beginning cannot be overemphasized, especially during times of changing

policies to accommodate budget constraints. In addition to providing information during MDTs, program partners have held forums with participants in prison and the community to obtain feedback (both positive and negative) about how the program is doing and provide updates regarding the status of services available in prison.

- ▶ **Implement a system of incentives:** Consistent with the literature on the value of using incentives to reward positive behavior, as well as consequences for violations (National Research Council, 2008), program partners have considered developing a system of incentives and graduated sanctions to support treatment goals and facilitate program compliance. With respect to sanctions, California's Parole Violation Decision Making Instrument is used, which recommends an appropriate sanction level (i.e., least intensive, moderately intensive, or return to prison) for all parole violators in California. However, there is no clear system of incentives..
- ▶ **Implement cognitive-behavioral therapy:** Studies have shown that recidivism is cost effectively reduced when dysfunctional thinking and patterns of behavior are identified and skills are developed to modify these negative behaviors (i.e., cognitive-behavioral therapy) (National Research Council, 2008). Efforts have been made by program partners to implement a cognitive-behavioral program within SB 618, with instructors trained in the Thinking for a Change curriculum (a cognitive-behavioral approach). Program partners anticipate that classes will begin in 2010 at RJD.
- ▶ **Emphasize vocational training over education services:** Since assessment data suggest that SB 618 participants have a functional level of education and

possess significant life skills, their time in prison may be best used for vocational programming rather than educational services. Specifically, vocational training should provide job skills in industries with local job market growth where local employers are willing to hire ex-felons.

- ▶ **Enhance outreach to employers:** While the treatment group was significantly more likely than the comparison group to be employed, the average hourly rate for these individuals was still below the living wage for San Diego County. Employment outreach has not only included efforts to identify job leads, but also has focused on developing relationships with employers. Beginning in November 2009, outreach to employers also promoted the use of Work Opportunity Tax Credits for hiring ex-felons within one year of prison release. These efforts are consistent with feedback from participants indicating a need for more employment assistance specifically related to ex-offenders and the local job market. Program partners also may want to include community members already linked to the SB 618 program (i.e., the Reentry Roundtable and Interfaith Advisory Board) in this process. Further, program partners have discussed the idea of reaching out to labor unions in particular.
- ▶ **Extend efforts to integrate social supports:** Research studies indicate that involving family members and positive peers in ex-offenders' reentry plans will improve their successful integration into the community (La Vigne, Davies, Palmer, & Halberstadt, 2008; La Vigne, Visher, & Castro, 2004). The assessment process at program entry indicates that participants have few considerably close relationships, suggesting a need for assistance in strengthening their support system within the community. While the SB 618 program design includes mechanisms for

facilitating this process (e.g., Community Roundtable meetings), the level of involvement has been relatively low suggesting an area for enhanced efforts. Outreach to the faith community may be helpful in the process, as almost all of the follow-up interview respondents who indicated involvement with a faith-based group reported that this relationship was supportive.

Partners should be commended for continuing to develop and implement best practices and encouraged to maintain their commitment to full implementation of the SB 618 program design to ensure maximum program effectiveness.

prison vocational services exacerbates the barriers to employment for offenders. The impact of these forces on outcomes and the process of how program partners attempt to fill these gaps will be examined.

## SUMMARY

Based on the preliminary research findings in this third annual evaluation report, the SB 618 Prisoner Reentry Program in San Diego has had many successes and program partners are committed to continuing to address new and on-going challenges to service delivery. The recommendations shared in this chapter are provided to assist local program partners as they continue to refine the program, as well as guide others interested in implementing similar reentry programs in other jurisdictions. Over the next year, the evaluation will continue to document the process of program implementation and further assess program impact. As the treatment and comparison groups have longer periods in the community following release from prison, more long-term outcome data will be available for a larger number of participants. Given California's fiscal crisis, particularly in the area of corrections, the continued results from the evaluation will be of particular interest. Most in-prison programs have been eliminated, some of which directly impact the ability of offenders to access services upon release from prison (i.e., substance abuse). Further, the lack of in-