

## CHESTER COUNTY, PA

# EBP SPOTLIGHT

## Effective Interventions Lead to Improved Outcomes

The Chester County Criminal Justice Advisory Board (CJAB) decided to take action when they learned that 45% of people under supervision were rearrested.<sup>1</sup> The CJAB sought to implement innovative evidence-based programs to address technical violations and rearrests, impacting both the Chester County prison population and the budget.

To address the challenge, the CJAB developed a Reentry Strategic Planning Project to evaluate programming aimed at improving the behavior of people in the prison. A key finding of that evaluation was that none of the programs focused on cognitive behavioral interventions.

Cognitive behavioral intervention (CBI) is an evidence-based practice that is strongly correlated with positive behavioral change and decreased recidivism. In fact, numerous studies have proven CBI's effectiveness when compared to other types of programming and interventions. CBI focuses on a person's thoughts, feelings, and associated behaviors. It recognizes that thought patterns can be observed, managed, and redirected to improve decision making and avoid harmful behavior. CBI uses skill-building activities and practice to strengthen the learning experience.

Chester County's CJAB tasked the Probation, Parole, and Pretrial Services Department with seeking funding to bring CBI programming into the prison. As a result of Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency grants and local funding, they were able to start the following programs from 2013 to 2015:

- **THINKING FOR A CHANGE (T4C)**

Training for T4C facilitators was funded by the first grant in 2013. T4C is an integrated cognitive behavioral change program that incorporates cognitive restructuring theory, social skills development, and problem-solving skills. It is comprised of 25 lessons that build on each other.<sup>2</sup>

- **MOVING ON**

This program was funded through a grant in 2015. Moving On is an evidence-based intervention for women who are at risk of recidivism. It was built on relational theory using a strength-based and trauma-informed approach to help women mobilize and build personal and social resources.<sup>3</sup>

- **SAFETY, EMOTIONS, LOSS, AND FUTURE (S.E.L.F.)**

S.E.L.F. was also funded through a 2015 grant. It is a trauma-informed and trauma-responsive curriculum developed by Dr. Sandra Bloom which uses group settings to focus on addressing fundamental problems surrounding exposure to violence.<sup>4</sup>

- **EQUINE-ASSISTED PSYCHOTHERAPY PROGRAM (EAP)**

The county contracted with a nonprofit organization that used a trauma-informed equine-assisted psychotherapy approach to complement the CBI programs.

“The skills that I have learned in this class have made me feel comfortable around others and, most importantly, given me hope that I can change how I think. And when I think differently and act differently, I can and will have a better life.”

TESTIMONY FROM CBI PARTICIPANT

<sup>1</sup> See <https://www.cor.pa.gov/About%20Us/Statistics/Documents/Reports/2013%20PA%20DOC%20Recidivism%20Report.pdf> for the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections' 2013 Recidivism Report.

<sup>2</sup> For more information, see <https://nicic.gov/projects/thinking-for-a-change>.

<sup>3</sup> See <https://www.orbispartners.com/interventions-women>.

<sup>4</sup> See <https://sandrabloom.com/self-curriculum/>.

# OUTCOMES

## DISCIPLINE REPORTS

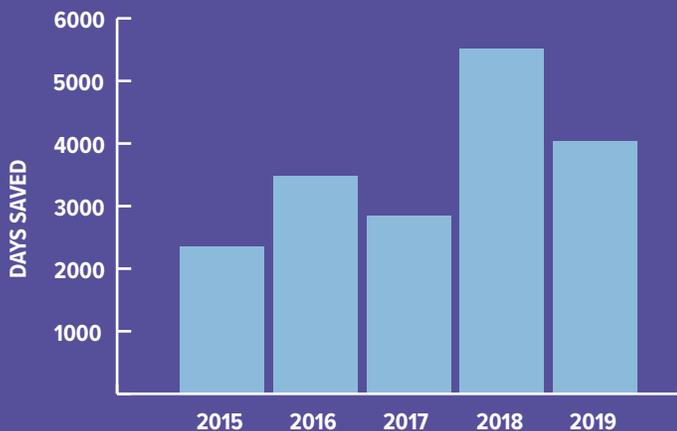
The county compared the discipline reports of people in the prison who had graduated from the CBI program with the reports of people in the prison who did not participate in the program. Only 12.9% of graduates were written up post-graduation. In comparison, there was an average of one write-up for each person who did not participate in the program.



**% OF CBI GRADUATES WHO WERE NOT WRITTEN UP POST-GRADUATION**

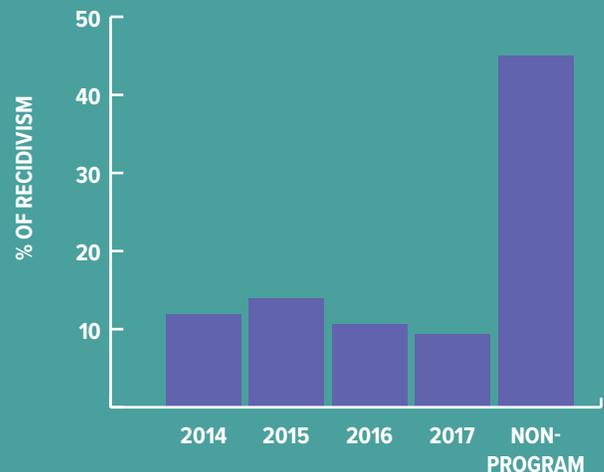
## JAIL BED DAYS SAVED

CBI program participants were offered early parole as a reward for graduating. As a result, an average 4,033 total bed days were saved annually which, at a cost of \$100/day, equated to a savings of \$403,300 per year.



## RECIDIVISM

CBI positively impacted graduates' behaviors after release from prison as measured by technical violations and new arrests. The results were astounding. Graduates' recidivism rates averaged 11.5% when compared to the recidivism rates of people released without CBI programming (45%).



Chester County's CJAB continues to identify other opportunities to implement evidence-based practices in their justice system. Research-informed policymaking has now proven its value in reducing costs and improving community well-being and safety.

As a result of this collaborative, data-driven, and evidence-based approach, the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania recognized Chester County with the 21st Century Criminal Justice Best Practices Awards in the large jail category for its Cognitive Behavioral Equine Enhancement program. The program continues to be supported by the county.