

# Warden VOICES FROM THE FIELD

## A Prison Reimagined

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Our team at the York County Prison envisioned that our facility could be so much more than a place of brick, mortar, and steel to house people who are justice-involved; it could be a place where we could change lives and the communities where we live. With the support, collaboration, and forward thinking of our prison board, numerous justice agencies, and community partners, our transformation is well underway.

**Opening Our Doors.** Our facility has always had a plethora of programs geared toward behavioral change. However, in August 2021, a unique opportunity arose that allowed us to offer even more programming. We ended our I.C.E. contract and found ourselves in the position of having available space and more time and resources to devote to our local population. We embraced the opportunity, and, with the help of the prison board's newly created Space Allocation

Committee, we explored how we could use our space. The result? Recommendations for a reimagined facility.

We expanded our programming. Prison staff facilitate interventions such as the Freedom Program (a therapeutic treatment community for those with SUD), Relapse Prevention, Batterers Intervention, and Violence Prevention. We also offer educational programs and medication-assisted treatment programs. In addition, we invite other agencies and volunteers to come into our facility to offer programming such as Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, Celebrate Recovery, Beyond Our Walls (geared toward children's literacy and helping parents who are incarcerated stay connected with their children), Parenting Solutions, and Community Reentry.

In reimagining unsecured vacated I.C.E. space, we were able to continue to provide cognitive behavioral programs such as Thinking for a Change, Violence Prevention, and employment skills training to those who are currently under supervision but residing in the community. We also introduced trauma-informed yoga classes to staff and, later, to inmates.



**The R.O.C.** With the reallocation of space and support of the York County Reentry Coalition, we are preparing to open the R.O.C. (pronounced "rock"). The R.O.C., which stands for Reentry Opportunity Center, will collaborate with other agencies and community service providers to offer reentrants a variety of opportunities before and after release. Specifically, the R.O.C.'s objectives are to (1) develop comprehensive reentry case management plans for people that directly address risk factors and social needs, and (2) increase

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collaboration between community and faith-based organizations and corrections, community supervision, law enforcement, and other local reentry stakeholders and service providers. The R.O.C. will serve as a flagship for future reentry service points throughout the county—allowing people easier access by “meeting them where they are.”

**More Than Just Paint on the Walls.** Similar to other prisons, the walls of our facility were all painted white. We saw an opportunity to change our traditional look and started a mural program in our special management units. The goal was to replace the drab walls with colorful images and messages that would offer serenity and hope. When possible, we used people within the facility to paint the murals. The impact has been significant. The mental health department reports that the tranquil scenes lower anxiety, particularly for those with severe mental illness. In fact, one of the artists indicated that painting the mural was the best form of therapy he could have received while incarcerated. We have now expanded the mural program into our educational areas and plan to continue it in other parts of our facility.



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**Reducing the Use of Force.** We looked at our use of force incidents and started to evaluate how to reduce use of force while increasing the safety of our staff and the individuals in our facility. The first step was training staff in crisis intervention. Prior to considering the utilization of force, a Crisis Intervention Team staff member attempts to deescalate the situation, obtain compliance, and help a person in a mental health crisis. As a result of these efforts, we have seen a significant increase in the number of incidents resolved without the use of force. Our next step is to train staff in mental health first aid.

**Conclusion.** We are in the early stages of collecting data but, anecdotally, we are seeing improved outcomes. These include renewed energy, with individuals becoming engaged in programming, and increased staff morale. The improved outcomes are a result of the commitment we have made to our mission of “working with our community partners to provide quality education and evidence-based treatment programs to increase the probability of successful community reentry.” This cannot happen without physical and financial support, as well as buy-in, from members of the justice system and the community.

I have seen firsthand the passion and dedication of forward-thinking leaders, staff, and volunteers from local government, justice agencies, and nonprofit organizations; reentrants; medical and mental health providers; educators; and employers. All simply want to improve the quality of life in their community. I am amazed at their collaborative spirit; every member deserves recognition for their hard work.