



THE BELL POLICY CENTER PRESENTS

Responding to Crime in Colorado:

*A Focus on Economic Mobility
and Community-Based Solutions*

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:

Lisa Pasko, Ph.D.

Chair and Associate Professor
University of Denver

Lisa.Pasko@du.edu • 303.871.2049

Teresa Hurst, MSW

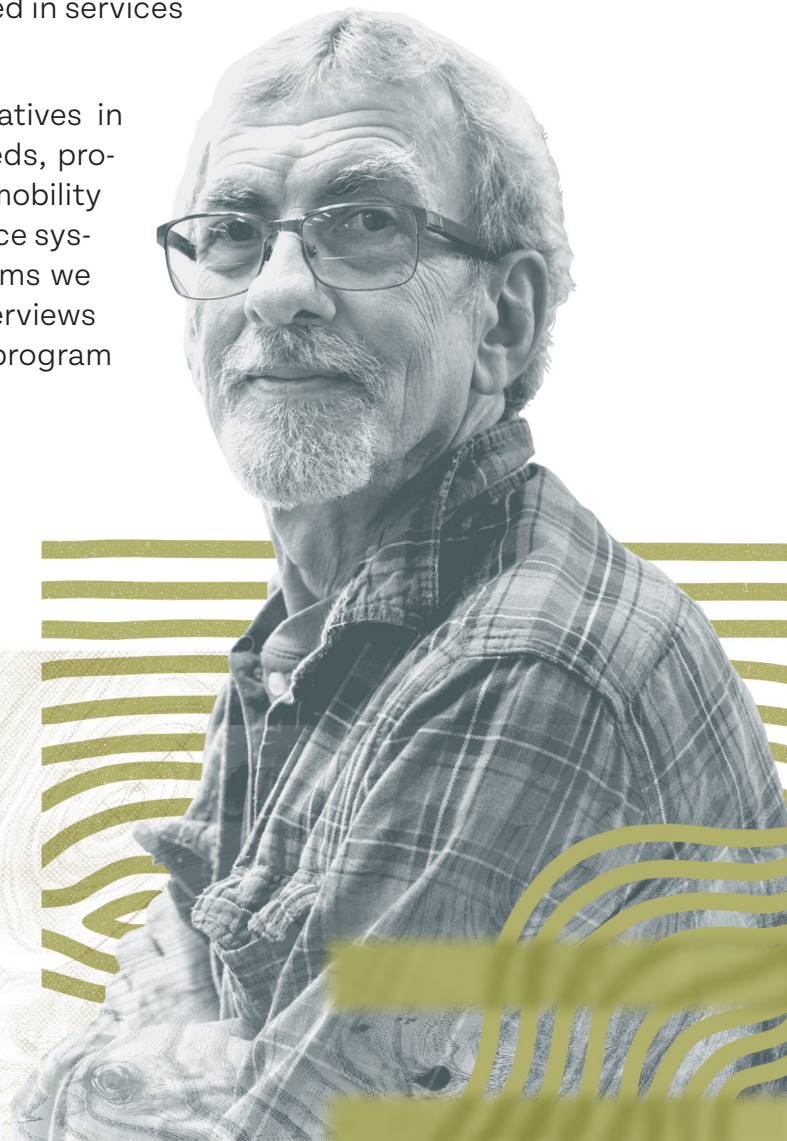
hurst75@gmail.com

Introduction

In May 2021, the Department of Justice recognized that ***a commitment to community-based prevention and intervention programs is key to effectively tackling crime and violence*** and is an essential complement to traditional law enforcement strategies (DOJ, 2021). Evidence-based research has also shown that cooperative partnerships between local governments and community nonprofit organizations are necessary to meaningfully address the needs and risks experienced by system-impacted individuals. Such needs include economic and educational opportunities, medical and mental health care, substance abuse treatment, and housing security. In Colorado, people on parole struggle with many of these conditions: 77 percent have moderate to severe substance abuse treatment needs, and 42 percent have vocational needs. For women, this also includes more pronounced medical (46 percent) and mental health needs (76 percent) (DOC, 2021). Failure to find adequate support services can lead to failure on parole: one out of five individuals on parole in Colorado will be returned to prison for technical violations (e.g., substance use, unemployment, failure to comply with conditions, etc.), while only 13 percent for new crimes (DOC, 2021). Additionally, individuals on probation/diversion from prison also struggle with similar needs: 75 percent experienced unemployment, and 95 percent were assessed as needing mental health or substance abuse treatment, with nearly one out of five not matched in services they needed (ORS, 2018).

This report summarizes community-based initiatives in Colorado that are working to address these needs, promote health and safety, and create economic mobility for those most at risk for continued criminal justice system involvement. The information on the programs we highlight in this report was gathered from interviews with the organizations, annual reports, and/or program and website content review.

Community-based programs are effective ways to combat drug abuse, crime and violence through help with employment, housing, and treatment.




WAGEES: Leading The Way

In 2014, the legislature passed HB14-1355, creating a reentry community grant program within the Colorado Department of Corrections—the Work and Gain Education & Employment Skills (WAGEES) program. WAGEES provides funding to community-based organizations that support people returning from incarceration. Their partners provide a wide array of services— from treatment to housing to vocational training and employment assistance—and have leadership and staff with lived experiences with incarceration and successful return to the community. WAGEES partners develop local-specific responses to reentry needs, paying attention to the unique context of the communities with which they work.

The Latino Coalition for Community Leadership (LCCL) serves as WAGEES grantmaking intermediary, providing administrative oversight as well as leadership, resources, and capacity-building skills, and serves as a hub for information and services. Their key responsibilities include selecting community partners, disbursing funds, developing and administering program and fiscal data collection systems, tracking performance metrics, and coordinating the relationship between Colorado Department of Corrections and WAGEES Community Partners. WAGEES partners do not replace the duties of parole, but rather, work in cooperation and coordination with them. As Cory Miskell, Colorado State Director, LCCL, states: “The fact is, we work better together. We get better results when we work in a team-based approach with parole, which is what our community partners do.” WAGEES has shown some great success in its results. During the past year, it

exceeded its enrollment goals (2,164 total enrollments), with 70.2 percent placed in employment, 65.6 percent retaining it, and 86 percent receiving some type of credentials (vocational certificate, GED, high school diploma, or post-secondary education). Indeed, at intake, 72.9 percent of individuals involved in WAGEES were unemployed. Additionally, ***fewer than one out of 20 individuals were rearrested while they were in the program.*** (Colorado WAGEES Fiscal Report FY21-22).

Servicios de La Raza and Second Chance Center are two of the biggest WAGEES providers in the Denver metro area. Servicios’ WAGEES reentry programs work with clients to help them gain access to employment, training, housing resources, and other services, to ensure that they have the tools they need for a safe and successful reintegration into society. Using an incentive-based system, the programs use caring case management, supportive services, and mentoring. In the past year, more than 1000 individuals have been referred to Servicios.



“The fact is we work better together; we get better results when we work together in a team-based approach with parole, which is what our community partners do.”

— Cory Miskell, Latino Coalition for Community Leadership, WAGEES Program

Established in 2012, Second Chance Center, Inc. (SCC) is a Colorado-based nonprofit organization determined to be the state's premier community reentry program, and a model for the nation. SCC offers case management, mentoring, and vital resources to assist formerly incarcerated individuals in reestablishing their lives and becoming successful members of the community. "Success looks different for every one of our clients, but our number one goal is to keep people from going back to prison," notes Candice Spohrase-White, Director of

Programs, SCC. During this past year, they added an apprenticeship program and an employment opportunity lab. Reviewing the recidivism rate over the past seven years, SCC clients reoffended less than 10 percent of the time, while the recidivism rate for WAGEES clients (while they were in the program) was less than 5 percent. SCC's future goals include providing affordable and transitional housing, since nearly two-thirds of WAGEES clients suffer from housing insecurity (Colorado WAGEES Fiscal Report FY21-22).

Other WAGEES partners also offer additional reentry services. The following are a sample of newer partners:

Hazelbrook Community Recovery Center

Hazelbrook Community Recovery Center offers several employment services within a model of programming that emphasizes physical fitness, arts, recovery, and spirituality. These services include employment preparation and placement, work clothing and tool assistance, mentoring, identification acquisition (such as driver's license, birth certificate), vocational training cost assistance, transportation assistance, medical benefits acquisition (medical and mental health), housing assistance (shelter fees, limited housing or hotel, rent), family reunification/parenting support, education assistance (fees for classes and books), substance abuse support groups, and group and individual therapy. The center also has connections to their clients' sober living, currently becoming one of the largest recovery housing and peer coaching organizations in Colorado today, with 19 recovery homes and over 40 recovery coaches/staff. In addition to safe housing environments and recovery programs/coaching, the center's services include self-care, arts, gardening, fitness and health, 12-step programs, and Bible studies. Almost all the individuals who work for Hazelbrook were recently in active addiction and were justice-involved. During this past year, Hazelbrook enrolled 80 clients, with 20 in vocational training placements, 37 with employment, and 18 with industry credentials. Nineteen of their clients maintained 90-day employment retention. ***No one recidivated.*** (Colorado WAGEES Fiscal Report FY21-22).

My Father's House

Since 2017, My Father's House (MFH) is a reentry community dedicated to providing a solid place from which to re-launch, to leave behind old mindsets and behavioral patterns, and to explore new opportunities for positive growth and change. Understanding the critical need to provide for people's basic stabilization needs in their most vulnerable moments, this non-profit organization provides a place for men convicted of sexual offenses who are transitioning back to the community. It has been instrumental in assisting over 30 people who might otherwise have been homeless and without resources. In addition to offering transitional housing, MFH also provides support for reinstating official documents such as driver's licenses

and Social Security cards, job skills training/certifications, finding gainful employment, acquiring necessary work equipment and tools, coordinating with parole/probation officers, assisting connection to court-mandated therapy programs, and doing long/short term goal-setting and good decision-making. MFH is also designing a new curriculum to bring awareness and soft skill sets (e.g. healthy relationships and communication), including conflict resolution, parenting, trauma, emotional intelligence, values and boundaries exploration/identification, and stress management. MFH sees these vital skills as helping the residents not only function better in relationships with one another, but also with others in their lives: parole/probation officers, work supervisors, treatment providers, friends, significant others, and especially their own parents, siblings, and children. “MFH recognizes the inherent human requirement for connection and belonging in order to thrive. We also strive to create a community where men can experience trusting and interdependent pro-social relationships,” said Rebecca Anderson, Community Development Coordinator for MFH.

The Don't Look Back Center

With high levels of trauma, medical and mental health needs, histories of abusive relationships, custody of minor children and co-occurring disorders, women face substantial barriers when experiencing reentry. Indeed, nearly 20 percent of WAGEES clients are women (including trans women). The Don't Look Back Center (DLBC) offers gender-responsive programming in order to empower socially and economically disadvantaged women (including trans women) of all racial and ethnic backgrounds to obtain safety, restoration, leadership, courage, tenacity, and health” (Colorado WAGEES Fiscal Report FY21-22, p.7). Their programs include treatment for addiction and trauma, care management, trans woman outreach health, wellness, and safer sex care programs, AcuDetox treatments, relapse prevention groups, DUI classes, competency restoration programs, and other initiatives to help women who are struggling with recovery and criminal justice involvement.

They also assist with safe, trauma-informed housing (Place of RAHAB) and transitional housing, as almost all of their clients struggle with homelessness and live below the poverty line. The recovery, treatment, and safety offered by DLBC are essential in leading women (who are the most vulnerable and marginalized) to employment possibilities. This coming year, The Don't Look Back Center will anchor resources inside Denver Women's Correctional Facility, serve trans women released from Sterling Correctional Facility and Fremont Correctional Facility, and be ready to serve more than 100 individuals returning to the community (Colorado WAGEES Fiscal Report FY21-22, p.7).

Gender-specific programming is vital to assisting women in their return to the communities.



Additional Community-Based Programs

The Road Called STRATE

The Road Called STRATE is another reentry program that underscores the importance of educational opportunities as a means to lower recidivism rates. Founder James Thomas established the organization in 1994 while in prison, as a way to aid underprivileged and system-involved adults and youth in an effort to truncate further criminal trajectories. At The Road Called STRATE, services include, but are not limited to, their Employment and Education program (E&E), which helps individuals with finding felony friendly employment, using a clothing bank to assist job seekers in their searches, resume-building, taking Spanish language classes, computer-training, and preparing for the GED. Additional classes offer training in FAFSA (college financial aid) applications, life skills, and effective problem-solving. Curricula is individually based, creating a noncompetitive learning environment. Outside of the E&E program, services include daily counseling focused on substance abuse issues, disability, mental health, fatherhood, abuse, anger, and family issues. The Road Called STRATE's goal is to change behaviors through the creation of personal and professional bonds. This leads to positive and supportive relationships that place value on all people. Collaborating with other nonprofits to assist their community, The Road Called STRATE's overall goal is to reduce recidivism and promote reentry of individuals into criminogenic lifestyles and justice involvement. "At The Road Called STRATE, we believe in the value of all people and our mission is to improve the quality of life for underprivileged individuals by challenging them to realize their maximum potential for success and to develop and prosper through education, training, and encouragement," said Thomas.



Harm Reduction Action Center

Harm reduction is critical to keeping people who use drugs alive and as healthy as possible. Such organizations incorporate myriad strategies in order to meet people “where they are” on their own terms and serve as a pathway to additional prevention, treatment, and recovery services (SAMHSA 2022). The mission of the Harm Reduction Action Center (HRAC) in Denver is to educate, empower, and advocate for the health and dignity of Denver’s people who inject drugs, in accordance with harm reduction principles. Since 2002, the organization has provided direct services that curb the spread of HIV, Hepatitis C, and accidental overdoses among people who inject drugs. Data from 2012 to 2022 have shown 12,458 unique clients enrolled, 170,817 + syringe access episodes (each opportunity for someone to dispose properly of used syringes, or access sterile syringes/pipes), 103,324 referrals made (testing, treatment, etc.) and 6,142 trained in overdose reversals, with 3,323 lives saved. “We are so proud that we continue to be Colorado’s largest harm reduction organization, working with people who inject drugs and smoke drugs. Another large success is that a few years ago, we won an award from our neighborhood association (the oldest and largest in town), the Award for Creating a Safe Neighborhood, so we are award-winning,” said Lisa Raville, Executive Director.

To bolster direct service efforts, the Harm Reduction Action Center also works closely with lawmakers, healthcare providers, law enforcement, and the general community toward a common vision of a healthy and safe Colorado. It has committed itself to serving Colorado’s public health by working to reduce the harms associated with drug use. Harm reduction initiatives, especially when partnering with other service providers, have been shown to open access for individuals who struggle with substance abuse and negative impacts of health to life skills and vocational rehabilitation.



“We are so proud that we continue to be Colorado’s largest harm reduction organization working with people who inject drugs and smoke drugs. Another large success is that a few years ago, we won an award from our neighborhood association (the oldest and largest in town), the Award for Creating a Safe Neighborhood, so we are award winning neighbors.”

— Lisa Raville, Executive Director

LEAD (Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion/Let Everyone Advance with Dignity)

LEAD was launched in Seattle, Washington in 2011 as an alternative to the traditional criminal justice practice of booking, detaining, prosecuting, convicting and incarcerating people who have an interaction with law enforcement for low-level offenses such as drug possession, sales and sex work. LEAD has since been replicated in numerous cities across the country and is shown to be a promising practice. As a result of funding and legislation in 2017, Colorado began implementing LEAD in 4 locations (Alamosa, Denver, Longmont and Pueblo), with Lakewood beginning in 2020.

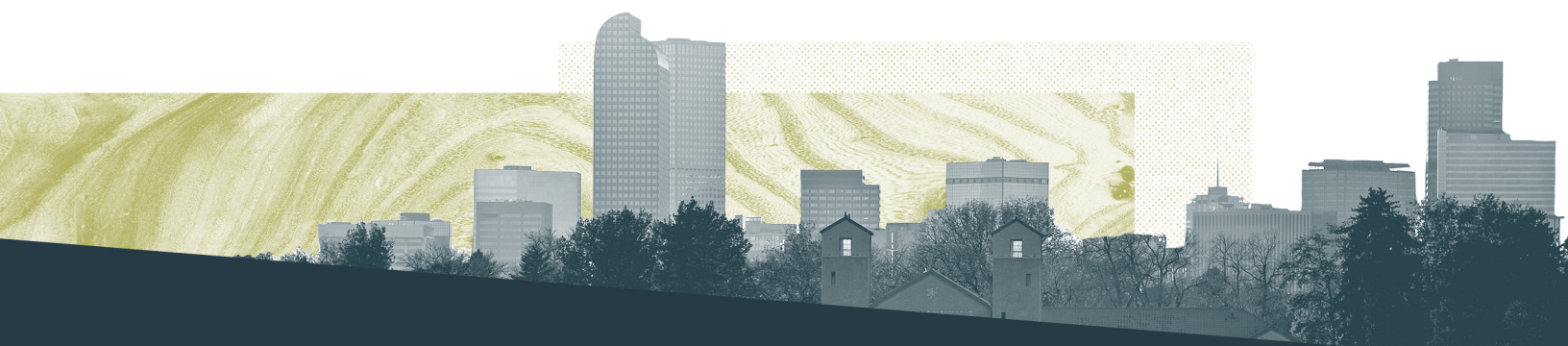
LEAD is a pre-booking diversion program that aims to improve public health and to end the cycle of recidivism. Instead of being charged and booked following an arrest, the arresting officer identifies the arrestee as a potential participant for the diversion program and subsequently connects them with a case manager. The case manager then provides participant-centered support to the individual, which may consist of housing, medical care, behavioral health services, or other social services. Harm reduction is a central tenet of LEAD, which means that a participant is not required to achieve sobriety in order to receive services. The main principle of LEAD is collaborative partnerships between local law enforcement, district attorney's offices, sheriffs, treatment providers, and other community stakeholders. Individuals may be "diverted" into the program in lieu of arrest, or they may be placed in the program through a "social referral," where an officer may believe the person would benefit from receiving services through LEAD.

The Longmont and Lakewood examples have shown promising practices in community-based justice responses to reducing crime. Longmont Department of Public Safety (LDPS) officers use their discretion to redirect those suspected of crime associated with drug use to intensive case management services instead of jail. Instead of defaulting to the justice system, this alternative uses a harm-reduction approach along with community-based support services and coordinated care. Of the 133 LEAD participants evaluated as part of a city review of the program, there was a 59 percent reduction in the number of illegal incidents after first contact with LEAD case managers. **There was a 50 percent reduction in the arrest rate** after first contact with LEAD, 33 percent were not arrested again, and 32 percent did not receive another summons after first contact, according to a city report on the program. The program also reports a 25 percent reduction in trips to the emergency room, especially for those who received peer counseling. (LEAD Interim Evaluation Report, Fy18-20; see also Longmont Leader reporting)

Lakewood LEAD launched in 2021 and has programmatically been able to create a temporary housing program and outreach and community resource building with organizations such as Benefits in Action and Recovery Works. Although Lakewood LEAD is fairly new, they have already shown promise in police interactions, rethinking how police engage the community and problem-solve (instead of just ticket-writing). Currently, they are working with 15 individuals, who are showing improvement with self-care (hygiene, sobriety, etc.).

Conclusion

Economic independence and mobility are essential in helping individuals reenter the community successfully and avoid future arrest. Although this report is not an exhaustive review of programs that work with system-impacted individuals, the examples reviewed have shown that community-based approaches have been promising and effective in delivering the services needed to reduce continued justice involvement. Such vital services that promote health, safety, and economic well-being incorporate vocational training, employment support, mentoring, treatment, housing assistance, and/or harm reduction. As the demand for services grows, future initiatives from WAGEES partners and other organizations working with individuals at-risk for arrest include promoting fair chance hiring to Colorado businesses, shrinking the gaps in behavioral health in reentry, improving and expanding affordable and transitional housing, and expanding more services to rural parts of the state.



Organizations in this report: _____

WAGEES
COLORADO

Hazelbrook
COMMUNITY CENTER

**My Father's
House**



The Don't Look Back Center Inc.



LEAD

References & Resources

Colorado WAGEES - *Fiscal Report FY21-22*. Denver, CO: Latino Coalition for Community Leadership. wageesco.org

Department of Corrections (DOC) - 2021. *Annual Statistical Report*. Denver, CO: Colorado Judicial Branch.

Don't Look Back Center Programs - thedontlookbackcenter.org

Harm Reduction Action Center - harmreductionactioncenter.org

Hazelbrook Community Recovery Center - hazelbrookcommunity.org

LEAD Interim Evaluation Report FY18-FY20 - <https://digital.auraria.edu/work/ns/8b059887-c07b-4d04-986f-0281477c8e3f>

see also: <https://www.longmontleader.com/local-news/longmont-lead-program-helping-people-reducing-recidivism-per-city-report-2657155>

My Father's House Transitional Housing - myfathershousedenver.org

Office of Research and Statistics (ORS) - 2018. *Community Corrections in Colorado*. Denver, CO: Division of Criminal Justice.

Road Called STRATE - theroadcalledstrate.com

Second Chance Center Home - secondchancesdenver.org

Servicios de La Raza - serviciosdelaraza.org/services/re-entry-services/

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) - 2022. Harm Reduction. Washington DC: Department of Health and Human Services. www.samhsa.gov/find-help/harm-reduction