



Indiana Implements a Faith- and Character-Based Housing Program

By Stephen T. Hall

According to the Pew Center on the States, the U.S. incarcerates more people than any other country in the world, with more than 2.3 million adults behind bars at the beginning of 2008. Given this situation, an increasing number of correctional agencies are looking seriously at any program that shows promise of reducing recidivism. Faith- and character-based housing programs have received some of this attention during the past two or three years. In fact, these programs have become so popular that the American Correctional Association's Committee on Religion and Faith-Based Services has begun developing standards for faith- and character-based housing programs.

Program Development in Indiana

During the 2005 session, the Indiana General Assembly passed a new law, House Bill 1429 Transitional Dormitories, that allows the Indiana Department of Correction (IDOC) to operate faith-based transitional dormitories at any facility operated by the agency. Before the bill was signed into law, IDOC began developing curricula for pilot programs, named Purposeful Living Units Serve (PLUS), at three facilities.

To comply with Indiana law, the department researched different state correctional models that administer faith- or character-based housing programs to find the most effective way the transitional dormitory concept could be delivered in the Indiana correctional system. Programs in Georgia, Florida and Louisiana were examined because they combined voluntary faith- and character-based housing programs that had passed the constitutional challenge of separation of church and state.

Iowa's InnerChange Freedom Initiative (IFI), a Christian faith-based housing program, was also examined. IFI was challenged in court by Americans United for Separation of Church and State (*Americans United for Separation of Church and State v. Prison Fellowship Ministries*). Arguments made by Americans United against the IFI

program included the use of state funds for religious indoctrination (Christian only), better housing conditions and a number of special privileges not available to the general population. On June 2, 2006, U.S. District Judge Robert W. Pratt ordered an end to the program. Pratt also ordered IFI to reimburse the state of Iowa more than \$1.5 million that had been paid since the beginning of the contract.

Indiana's PLUS program has been designed to mitigate the risk of such a legal challenge by addressing the points that were at issue in programs like Iowa's IFI program. Participants may choose from either a faith track (any religion) or a character track (no religion). Dormitories or cell houses must be the same as other general population housing at the same facility. Also, there are no time cuts or special privileges. All curricula materials are purchased from donated funds instead of taxpayer money or funds generated by commissary and telephone profits.

An additional safeguard to prevent the excessive entanglement of government and religion was accomplished by establishing a diverse Faith- and Character-Based Advisory Board. The board is a 16-member body comprising bipartisan government officials, community leaders, faith leaders from various religions, educators and ex-offenders. Its purpose is to serve as an accountability agent to IDOC. The board, which meets quarterly, also advises the IDOC commissioner on sound structural and operational aspects of the PLUS program.

On June 1, 2005, IDOC opened the first three PLUS units at the Correctional Industrial Facility, Indiana Women's Prison and Plainfield Juvenile Correctional Facility. Since the opening of the three pilot sites, the PLUS program has expanded to 16 facilities, with an average daily population of 1,263 participants. The PLUS program is available at male and female facilities, adult and juvenile facilities and at all security levels. Table 1 shows the locations and average participant numbers of PLUS units during the fourth quarter of 2007.

Table 1. Average Number of PLUS Participants per Month During Fourth Quarter 2007

Facility	Faith	Character	Undecided	Total
Branchville	47	51	0	98
CIF	63	55	0	118
Indiana State Prison	61	35	0	96
Madison	24	13	0	37
Miami	110	80	0	190
Pendleton	53	40	3	96
Plainfield	48	30	0	78
Putnamville	93	48	0	141
Rockville	29	30	1	60
Wabash Valley	67	73	0	140
Westville	55	79	0	134
Women's Prison	19	8	0	27
Indianapolis Juvenile	18	9	0	27
Northeast Juvenile	10	0	0	10
Pendleton Juvenile	2	9	0	11
South Bend Juvenile	-	-	-	0
Total:	699	560	4	1,263

Program Overview

Purpose. The purpose of the PLUS program is to address the risk factors that are known to be contributors to dysfunctional lifestyles and criminal behavior using faith (whatever one's faith is) or character education as a resource and pursuing this transformation in the context of a supportive community. The program, therefore, provides offenders with an opportunity to explore and choose alternatives to criminal thinking and behavior through an emphasis on spiritual, moral and character development, life-skills training and intentional preparation for living as law-abiding citizens who contribute to the well-being of their communities. The key components to the success of the PLUS program are a strong positive peer culture, a curriculum that addresses several criminogenic needs and a mentoring relationship with a positive role model from the community.

Goals. The goals of PLUS are:

- Better behavior as measured by reduced conduct reports;
- Better adjustment as measured by fewer grievances;
- Restitution in the form of community service;
- Smoother transition back to home; and
- Reduced recidivism rates.

Eligibility criteria: Adult. Eligibility requirements for adult participants in the PLUS program include:

- A reading level of eighth grade or higher to ensure understanding of the material presented in the program;
- Must have enough time remaining on the sentence to complete the program (16 months);
- Must have a conduct history free of any serious rule violations for the past year;
- Must not be in segregation for disciplinary reasons at the time of application or acceptance into the PLUS program (If in segregation for administrative reasons

at the time of application, the offender's status must be reviewed and the offender determined to be suitable for placement in a general population setting);

- Must be willing to participate in a self-help faith and/or character-based program and all associated programs; and
- Must be willing to sign a covenant agreeing to abide by all of the rules of the PLUS program and indicating that he or she will participate in the program to the best of his or her ability.

Eligibility criteria: Juvenile. Eligibility requirements for juvenile participants include:

- May enter the program on any Comprehensive Case Management System level;
- Must have at least 16 weeks remaining until the date of release;
- Must be clear of any disciplinary segregation confinement for at least 15 days prior to acceptance into the program;
- Must be clear of a guilty finding of any assault or battery for 30 days prior to acceptance into the program;
- Must be in general population housing status; and
- Must be willing to sign a covenant agreeing to abide by all of the rules of the PLUS program and to participate in the program to the best of their ability.

Curriculum Materials and Schedule

The Adult PLUS program takes 16 months to complete and is divided into four phases. Criteria for selection of curricular materials include addressing risk factors such as dysfunctional thinking patterns, social and communication skills, and substance abuse. Additional criteria include resources on community development, character formation and tolerance for other cultures and belief systems. Listed below are the topics covered and some of the resources used during each phase.

First Phase:

- Orientation, including core values and core character qualities;
- *The Spiritual Literacy Project: Reading the Sacred in Everyday Life* (DVD series by Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat consisting of 26 half-hour films organized around 26 spiritual qualities of mind and heart for practicing spirituality in everyday life);
- Purposeful life inventory;
- *Houses of Healing: A Prisoner's Guide to Inner Power and Freedom*, by Robin Casarjian;
- Mentoring from a community volunteer;
- Community service project;
- Special programs (e.g., seminars, faith-specific programs); and
- Religious diversity.

Second Phase:

- *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, by Stephen R. Covey;
- Community service projects;
- Mentoring from a community volunteer;
- Special programs; and
- Religious/cultural/racial diversity.

Third Phase:

- Victim impact;
- Healthy living;
- Community service projects;
- Special programs;
- *Commitment to Change: Overcoming Errors in Thinking*, by Stanton Samenow (DVD series with leader's guide); and
- *24/7, Dads* by National Fatherhood Initiative.

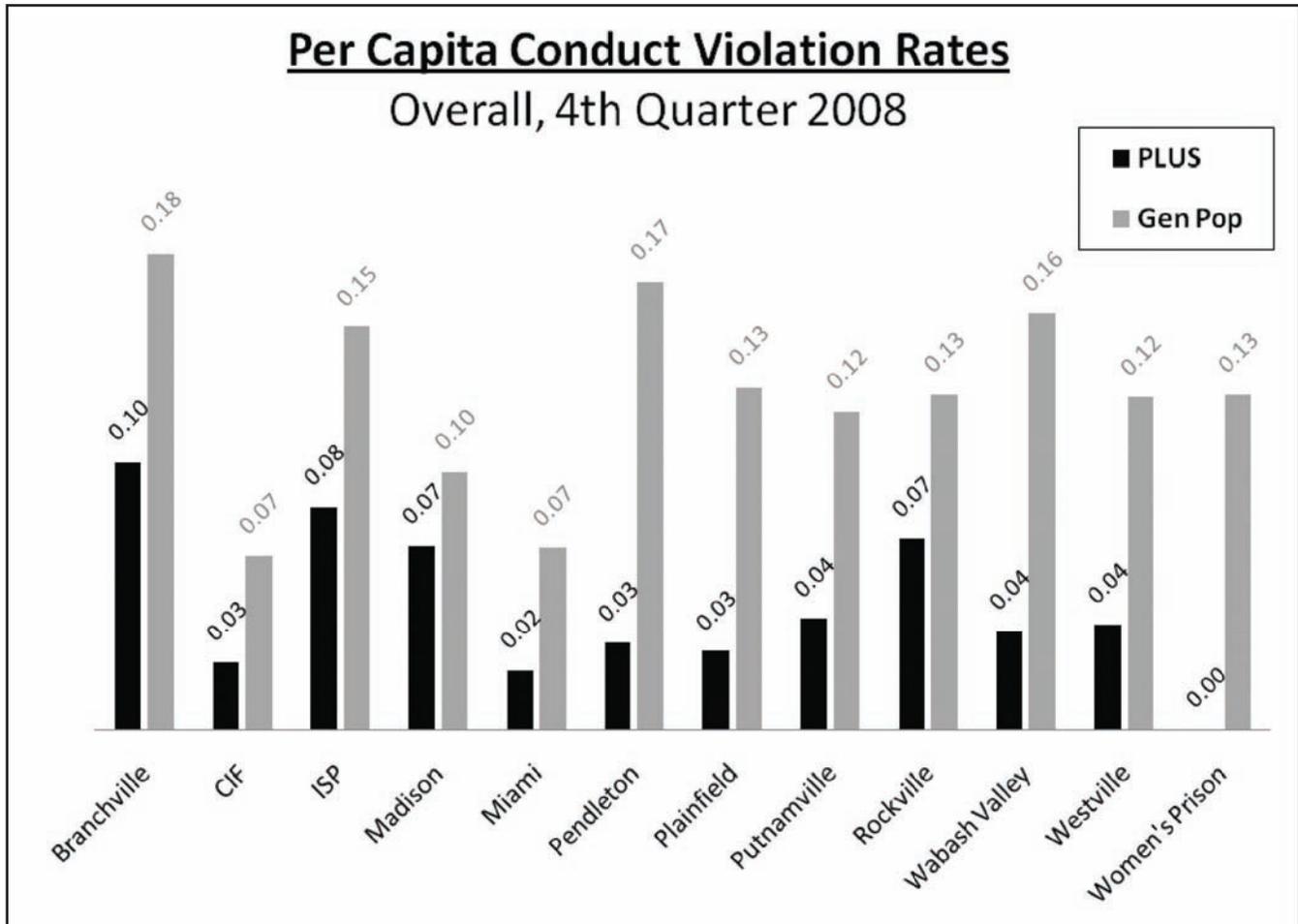
Fourth Phase:

- *Safe People* (video series by Henry Cloud and John Townsend on how to find relationships that are healthy and avoid those that are not);
- Prerelease planning with reentry coordinator;
- Community service projects;

- Conflict management;
- Financial planning;
- Development of a community resource packet;
- Completion of a purposeful life plan;
- A money management education program;
- Special programs;
- Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (marriage enrichment curriculum developed by Howard Markman, Scott Stanley and Susan Blumberg); and
- Marriage enrichment seminar.

The Juvenile PLUS program takes 16 weeks to complete. All juveniles in IDOC are required to work on their education, attend appropriate treatment programs (e.g., substance abuse or mental health counseling) and participate in groups that help address vocational training and behavioral issues. Those in the PLUS program participate in additional programming from a faith- or character-based perspective that enhances the basic treatment program. The PLUS curriculum focuses on helping students integrate the core values of honesty, respect, responsibility, tolerance and compassion into the education they are already receiving. PLUS program staff members and volunteer mentors assist the students in this reflection process.

Figure 1.



The following additional topics or texts are used with juvenile participants from a faith or character perspective:

- Religious/cultural/racial diversity (helps develop the skills for successful living in a multicultural, multi-faith environment);
- Community service projects (provides opportunities to give back to the larger community and helps instill the value of selfless service);
- Mentoring from a community volunteer (a key need is for positive adult role models);
- Victim impact/restorative justice (examines the effect of crime on victims and society and explores restitution);
- *Power Source: Taking Charge of Your Life*, by Bethany and Robin Casarjian; and
- *Commitment to Change: Overcoming Errors in Thinking*, by Stanton Samenow.

Evaluation Process

The ultimate goal of offering the PLUS program is to help reduce recidivism. Data are collected monthly by IDOC's Division of Planning and Research, and observations by research staff are completed semiannually. The following variables are reviewed and analyzed:

- Recidivism rates;
- Number of grievances;
- Number and level of conduct reports;
- Program accomplishments; and
- Social, community and institutional impacts of the program.

Reports are submitted quarterly to the DOC commissioner and an annual report is submitted to the state Legislature as per the statutory reporting requirements.

Multiple data collection methods are used in order to provide a more thorough account and cross-validation of the findings. The following is the data collection process for all PLUS units:

- Entry and exit program surveys are used to measure factors such as participant satisfaction, motivation, likelihood of re-offending and effectiveness of staff as role models;
- Monthly data are collected on the number of participants, transfers, withdrawals, expulsions, staff (both noncustody and custody), program hours and training hours for both staff and volunteers, community service hours, PLUS members participating in other programs outside of the PLUS units, donations, grievances, conduct reports, and program completions (successful or unsuccessful);
- Removals from program for conduct code violations are tracked as well as voluntary withdrawals by participants;
- Site visits are conducted by program managers and research staff;

Table 2. PLUS Grads, Releases and Returns

Dec-08	PLUS Grads	PLUS Releases	DOC Returns	RECIDIVISM RATE
Branchville	91	31	3	9.68%
CIF	217	76	7	9.21%
ISP	57	1	0	0.00%
Madison	40	10	0	0.00%
Miami	217	47	5	10.64%
Pendleton	69	3	0	0.00%
Plainfield	27			
Putnamville	110	12	1	8.33%
Rockville	20	1	1	100.00%
Wabash Valley	157	9	0	0.00%
Westville	130	32	3	9.38%
IWP	29	5	1	20.00%
Adult PLUS	1,164	227	21	9.25%

- Written records of participant progress are reviewed by counselor/chaplain; and
- Staff surveys are conducted to determine if PLUS staff believe the program is meeting its goals and objectives. These measure staff opinion on the strength and weaknesses of the program and also allow staff the opportunity to provide ideas for improvement in the program.

Conduct Reports and Statistics

Although the ultimate test of program effectiveness in corrections is reduced recidivism rates, which take two to three years to measure after release, one predictor of recidivism is the behavior of the offender while incarcerated. The higher the rate of facility-rule infractions (conduct reports), the higher the likelihood of behavior problems upon release. Conduct reports are part of the permanent record of every offender. Figure 1 shows the rate of conduct reports for the period being reported by each facility. As illustrated, the behavior of those in the PLUS units is much better than those of the general population at the same facility. This not only translates into a higher probability of future success, but also represents a safer and healthier environment in the present.

Since the program's inception in 2005 through the end of 2008, 1,164 adult PLUS participants completed the program. Of these, a total of 227 have been released back into their respective communities. Of these 227, only 21 (9.25 percent) have been returned to IDOC (see Table 2).

Volunteers

Volunteers are vital to the PLUS program. In addition to providing the necessary staffing to teach classes and lead discussions, volunteers provide positive, pro-social role modeling that is crucial to the rehabilitation process. Mentors spend an hour each week talking with and listening to participants process what they are learning in the PLUS program. The purpose is not merely to coach on the content of the course, but also to guide them along the journey of transforming their lives with new purpose and goals. Another



PLUS participant quilters present a commemorative patriotic quilt to Carolyn Cummings in honor of her grandson who was killed in action in Iraq.

role for mentors is to assist the participants when the time comes to make the transition from prison to community. This may involve helping to arrange transportation to important appointments, such as the first parole office visit, a job interview or a visit to the Bureau of Motor Vehicles.

Research shows that the first few hours and days after release are the most crucial. This is when discouragement can replace hope and relapse into former ways of behaving can easily occur. IDOC policies and procedures in the past have made it difficult, if not impossible, to use volunteers in the transition from prison to community phase of incarceration due to a prohibition of contact. The agency has recently revised its policies and procedures regarding contact between volunteers and offenders to allow mentors to assist offenders both during and following incarceration.

From Jan. 1 through Dec. 31, 2007, the average number of PLUS volunteers in all facilities was 161. The peak number of volunteers in one month was 254. The total number of volunteer hours for 2007 was 13,697. According to the The Independent Sector, the monetary value of volunteer hours based upon a national average for the year 2006 is \$18.77 per hour. This means the value of these hours, not counting preparation or travel time, was \$257,092.69. Cash donations to the PLUS program in 2007 totaled \$10,065.

Community Service

Another major component of the PLUS program is community service. The goal is to provide opportunities for offenders to develop the value of giving back to the community. Participants may work in the dorm, facility or in the community, depending upon their security level. In addition to the familiar road crews that clean up trash from roadsides and parks, a number of creative ways of reaching out have been reported. For instance, residents at Indiana Women's Prison have made quilts for distribution to the homeless in Indianapolis during the cold winter months. Another project at the women's prison is making toys and dolls for children who come to visit their mothers at the Family Preservation Center. Participants at Miami Correc-

tional Facility organized a walk for the American Cancer Society, which raised more than \$500. At Branchville Correctional Facility, participants made Christmas stockings that were distributed to children in the visitation room. In the summer, they planted an organic vegetable garden and donated fresh produce to local nursing homes. Girls at Indianapolis Juvenile Correctional Facility knit baby blankets that are donated to domestic violence shelters.

At Wabash Valley Correctional Facility, PLUS participants have designed a special patriotic quilt. These are made for and presented to family members of Indiana soldiers who have been killed in action in Iraq or Afghanistan. More than 100 of these quilts have been distributed and the Indiana Army National Guard has agreed to help locate families and make quilt presentations on behalf of the PLUS unit.

In 2007, the director of mental health established a Suicide Prevention Companion program that uses specially trained inmates to provide companionship for other inmates identified as at risk for suicide. Due to the positive reputation of PLUS program participants, all Suicide Prevention Companions throughout IDOC are drawn exclusively from the PLUS program.

In June 2008, Indiana was hit with several days of extreme weather, including tornadoes and major flooding, which temporarily displaced thousands of Indiana citizens from their homes. Many lost everything they had. In response to this crisis, inmate participants of the PLUS program displayed creativity and generosity. Many donated money from their inmate trust accounts, some bought bottled water from commissary and donated it, and a group of female juveniles prepared baked goods in the culinary arts department, which were sold to staff and volunteers for donation to flood victims.

Promoting Responsible Fatherhood And Healthy Marriages

IDOC applied for and was awarded a grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. The grant, which covers a five-year period, focuses on strengthening the marriages of incarcerated fathers. Couples participate in a two-day marriage enrichment seminar during which they receive skills-based training in communication skills, problem-solving skills and how to prepare for a lasting and fulfilling relationship. The curriculum being used is the Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program. Grant funds pay for curriculum materials, facilitator training and the cost of transporting, feeding and housing the spouses during the seminar weekend. Approximately 250 couples receive the training each year. This program has been selected by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services as one of five healthy marriage programs in the U.S. to participate as an impact site in a five-year evaluation of program effectiveness.

Implementation Lessons Learned

After policies were developed and curriculum selected, the primary focus of the program during the first year was training staff, selecting participants and rolling the program out to additional facilities. Selection of staff turned out to

be even more critical than originally anticipated. Since this program is based upon a set of core values, the staff involved must exhibit those values themselves or the program suffers. Some personnel turned out to have traits that were incompatible with the goals of the program and had to be removed.

Selection of appropriate volunteers was also a challenge. The multifaith nature of this program requires individuals who are comfortable working in an environment with people of diverse beliefs without pressuring them to conform to one's own beliefs. Some volunteers had difficulty with this and needed coaching about not proselytizing or encouragement to volunteer in a faith-specific environment. Another challenge regarding volunteers was finding enough of them to provide mentors for every participant.

Raising funds for curriculum and supplies proved to be a major challenge during implementation. Although there were many generous donations from faith-based groups at the start of the program, the needs are ongoing, which makes it difficult to find ever-increasing sources of donations. Raising funds through food sales to inmates has turned out to be the most effective renewable supply of funds.

The program design assumes that participants will be released shortly after completion with the skills and knowledge that will prepare them for successful reentry. At long-term facilities, however, many participants complete the program and go back into the general population with years left on their sentence. One option for some is to remain on the unit for a second term as a PLUS Program Aid to serve as tutors, teacher's aides and small group leaders. Also, beginning in the summer of 2009, IDOC will launch the PLUS Graduate Program, a second-year program extension that continues the goals of the first year.

As the IDOC PLUS Program enters its fourth year, staff and participants are excited and optimistic about continued success. Addressing risk factors related to recidivism, applying promising practices, establishing community partnerships and measuring outcomes is proving to be a solid platform from which to launch a successful reentry initiative.

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