

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/blog/continuing-the-reentry-journey>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

There's a proverb that says "The journey only belongs to you until you take the first step." I was reminded of this last week in a discussion about why some kids don't immediately link with community-based services after they leave a facility. Specifically, we were talking about the importance of every youth having a written plan for re-entry services.

I agree that it helps to write things down. It's often the best way to track whether things are done or ensure that the information travels from one place to another when you're talking about a kid's transition from a facility to home, information transfer is essential. But even the most comprehensive plan can become little more than a record of past thinking after the first steps of the re-entry journey.

When those first steps go in an unexpected direction, it's crucial to not waste a lot of time pointing at the plan and debating who's at fault for it not working out (there always seems to be time for that later). Sure, this seems obvious. But it's incredibly easy to get stuck there. The stakes are high in re-entry work, and no one wants to be responsible when things don't go smoothly.

Instead of looking backward, we have to point forward and be nimble enough to create a new path towards the same destination. Once the work is in the real world, and not just on paper, we are challenged to remember that sometimes we have to abandon the route we planned in favor of continuing the journey.

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