

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/blog/why-a-michigan-law-enforcement-agency-employs-formerly-incarcerated-people-to-bridge-the-police-community-divide>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

A key goal of the Policing Program at Vera is to elevate innovative approaches to policing that employ alternatives to enforcement.

The Washtenaw County Sheriffs Office (WCSO) in Michigan is doing just that in its community outreach program employing formerly incarcerated people, which is spearheaded by Sheriff Jerry L. Clayton and Derrick Jackson, director of community engagement. [Vera has published a case study highlighting WCSOs approach and the programs suitability for broader implementation.](#)

The case study, which draws on interviews with WCSO employees, highlights a unique approach to reducing recidivism and improving police-community relations. Since 2009, WCSO has been employing formerly incarcerated individuals as outreach workers to local communities. Outreach workers serve as liaisons with local community members and help those members access available resources based on their needs. The program in turn offers outreach workers access to support services and training to help them remain free from criminal justice involvement.

The presence of formerly incarcerated community members within WCSO has fundamentally altered how the agency relates to the community. Outreach workers play the vital role of bridge builders, connecting WCSO to the community it serves, improving overall police-community relationships. Recently, for example, outreach workers facilitated a sit-down between the mothers of gun violence victims to address the situation and attempt to prevent additional acts of retaliatory violence. Today, outreach workers along with the outreach services they provide serve as a valuable alternative to enforcement within WCSO.

Vera's case study includes information gathered through agency documents and interviews with various WCSO actors. It provides an overview of the program, as well as a discussion of the impact and outcomes it has had on outreach workers, the community, and the sheriff's office. Importantly, it also highlights the implementation hurdles, lessons learned, and transferrable strategies for success in overcoming them.

PUBLICATION

PUBLICATION

Transformative change, sent to your inbox.

Vera Institute of Justice. All rights reserved.