



A Native-Based Approach to Community Reentry

A Descriptive Evaluation of the Port Gamble S’Klallam Tribe’s Welcome Home Program

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Overview

When individuals return to their communities after being incarcerated in jail, there are a number of services and supports that can help them be successful in that transition. The Port Gamble S’Klallam Tribe (PGST) has been engaging in these community reentry efforts and sought to bring Native American healing practices to the broader community in Kitsap County in its later iteration of a reentry program. In 2019, the Tribe implemented the Welcome Home program, which embraces what it calls a “human dignity” model of reentry.

This model places relationships and community engagement at the center of re-engagement and supports returning individuals through intensive case management with individualized service plans

The program also requires participants to engage in Restorative Circles, a practice rooted in Native traditions that allows people to share their stories and hear the perspectives of other people. The Welcome Home program sought to center these relational and story-telling approaches to community engagement during this transition.

PGST received grant funding from the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) in the U.S. Department of Justice to implement the Welcome Home program. This report details the program model, how the program adapted to the COVID-19 pandemic, program services, participant outcomes, and lessons learned throughout the process.

Introduction

Setting the Scene: Events of 2020 - 2021

The Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribe's Welcome Home program sought to change how the broader Kitsap County, Washington community thinks and feels about community reentry from incarceration. It brought Native American healing practices to the center of reentry efforts in Kitsap County, reimagined reentry services and support, and focused on emotional and mental supports alongside material services to reduce the likelihood that an individual might return to jail or prison.

PGST implemented the program in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic and the nationwide social reckoning related to law enforcement and policing, both of which directly influenced the program's implementation and outcomes.

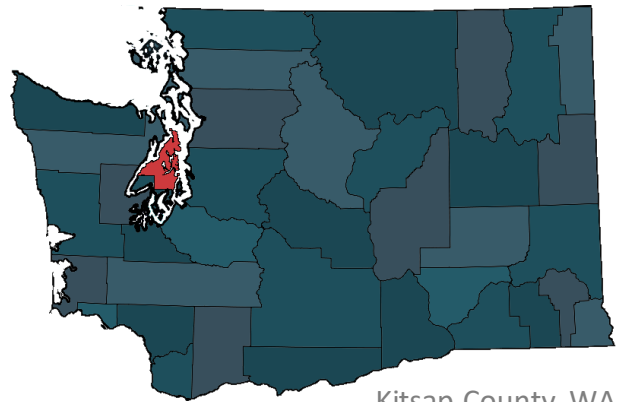
The program sought to serve individuals returning to the community from the Kitsap County Jail. Foundational to the design was hands-on case management and service delivery by trained Success Coaches. These coaches connected participants with services specific to their needs and goals to help them stabilize upon returning home. However, these types of interactions became impractical and, for a time, impossible given social distancing and public health guidelines during the pandemic. Additionally, in response to the public health guidelines, the jail temporarily stopped admitting people to jail for non-violent crimes and did not allow outside partners into the jail. This reduced both the potential pool of program participants and the ability of Welcome Home program staff to recruit individuals who were incarcerated and to provide pre-release services in the jail.

The main objective of the Welcome Home program was to develop and implement a comprehensive and collaborative program to reduce recidivism among people who are entering the community from incarceration who are at medium-to-high risk of reoffending.

More specifically, the program sought to achieve this objective by using individualized case planning to reduce recidivism, develop a universal human dignity model for reentry, and improve relationships between law enforcement and communities. While the program goal remained the same during the pandemic, program operations had to adapt to public health and safety guidelines. Additionally, the broader national reckoning that occurred following the police murder of George Floyd in May 2020 introduced additional intensity to the goal focused on developing relationships.

Local Context and Background

The Port Gamble S’Klallam Tribe implemented the Welcome Home program in Kitsap County, Washington, a peninsula on the west side of the Puget Sound. The county has a population of about 270,000 people, including several small cities and the Tribal lands of two Native American tribes, the Port Gamble S’Klallam Tribe and the Suquamish Tribe. The Welcome Home program’s origins are in the Port Gamble S’Klallam Tribe’s first iteration of a reentry



Kitsap County, WA

program for Tribal members who were impacted by the criminal justice system and faced barriers to employment, which the PGST developed in 2013. The Tribe’s development of a “human dignity model” in reentry seeks to provide a person-centered approach for returning individuals, meaning individuals supported through case management and services that support diverse elements of a person’s life that, when left unaddressed, often contribute to the cyclical pattern of incarceration.¹ Such services include helping participants with transportation, employment and training, mental health and substance use issues, and housing, among others. A key characteristic of this approach is intensive, ongoing communication and contact with program participants. Not only does this level of interaction strongly support participants, but it directly contributes to the relational, person-centered approach of the model.

In 2015, the PGST received a grant from the Bureau of Justice Assistance as a Second Chance Act Adult Demonstration Reentry award to develop reentry services within the Tribal community. With this grant, program managers incorporated mental health professionals into their service offerings and worked with the Kitsap County Jail to provide reentry services pre-release. In 2018, the Tribe received a Second Chance Act Community-Based Reentry award from the Bureau of Justice Assistance to expand program services to populations beyond Tribal members and incorporate a wider group of community agencies to provide services.

PGST wanted to expand Native healing practices of building genuine connections and relationships into the broader community, calling this approach a “universal way to heal.” The goal was to bring Native practices to the center of the conversation, instead of only infusing elements of Native traditions into current processes of the criminal justice system. The criminal justice system often takes a punitive, individualistic approach to accountability, one that is born out of the western frameworks of crime and punishment. The model at the center of the Welcome Home program positions relational and story-telling practices as a complement to

¹ A previous iteration of this program developed by the Port Gamble S’Klallam Tribe was called “Breaking the Cycle,” an acknowledgement that involvement with the criminal justice is cyclical and providing these various services could be the differentiator/support that can prevent someone from repeated activity considered criminal that results in another offense.

what are considered to be evidence-based models, meaning models that are rooted in and evaluated by Western scientific frameworks.

A key addition to the current iteration of the program and the human dignity model was the introduction of Restorative Circles as a program requirement. Rooted in Native American practices, Restorative Circles bring together individuals impacted by the criminal justice system and community members to make amends, offer support, and welcome the individual back into the community.

In This Report

The Welcome Home program launched in September 2019, about six months prior to COVID-19 being declared a global pandemic. The onset of the pandemic and guidelines for social distancing meant the program had to adapt from its envisioned model to new health and safety guidelines of quarantining and social distancing. The program had to adapt to a virtual environment since people could not meet in person for services and the Kitsap County Jail, the main referral and recruitment source, proactively reduced its jail population in efforts to socially distance and limit the risk of virus transmission. An earlier brief released as part of this project, “Reducing a Jail Population in Response to COVID-19” provides more context for how the county jail responded to the pandemic.²

This report explores how PGST implemented the Welcome Home program in the context of a global pandemic. The report outlines what PGST’s intended reentry service model, what adjustments they made to adapt during the pandemic, how they implemented those adaptations, and how program staff and participants experienced the program. The report also describes participant outcomes, though we note the outcomes are descriptive and not causal. Finally, the report discusses trauma-informed care, how Welcome Home program and provider staff view trauma-informed care as central to their work, and how it played out in service delivery.

Who We Are

The authors of this report were external evaluators that partnered with the Port Gamble S’Klallam Tribe to evaluate and provide findings from the implementation of the Welcome Home program. None of the authors identify as Native American or are Tribal members. We acknowledge the potential gaps this leaves in understanding the experiences of program participants and Tribal members who interacted with the Welcome Home program.

² Jayanthi, Akanksha, Asaph Glosser, and Kimberly Foley. 2021. *Reducing a Jail Population in Response to COVID-19: The Experience of Kitsap County, Washington*. Seattle, WA: MEF Associates.

Methodology

The findings in this report are based on qualitative interviews with program staff and stakeholders, an analysis of program data maintained by the Welcome Home program managers, and an analysis of data provided by the Kitsap County Jail.

- **Interviews with program partners and stakeholder.** We conducted interviews with key stakeholders of the Welcome Home program. Such stakeholders include Welcome Home program management staff, staff from partner organizations and service providers, and program participants. All interviews were conducted over the phone or via Zoom, a web-based conferencing platform, and lasted about 60 minutes. The overarching goal across all interviews was to hear about each group's experiences and reflections regarding the Welcome Home program, particularly given the adjustments made due to COVID. Interviews with program management (two) explored the goals and objectives of the program, and general shifts in program services due to COVID. Interviews with provider and partner staff (seven) illustrated what the program looked like on the ground and how service providers engaged with participants. Interviews with program participants (two) illustrated the experience of engaging with the program.
- **Analysis of program data.** We also reviewed data from the program's Management Information System (MIS) to better understand participant characteristics, service dosage, and outcomes of the overall program. MIS data included information on program enrollment, length of time in the program, and services received from September 2019 through July 2021.
- **Analysis of jail data.** The research team also received data from Kitsap County Jail on Welcome Home program participants, which included the number of arrests and reasons for arrest (e.g., new charges, failure to appear, etc.) since their date of intake into the program. The research team used these data to calculate the percent of participants who returned to jail (including those who were booked and released) within one year of their program start date.

The Welcome Home Model

This section describes the Welcome Home program model, both the model as it was intended to be implemented and the model as it actually was implemented in the context of COVID.

In addition to the core model detailed below, there were various external elements at the county and state levels that played into and supported the goals and implementation of the Welcome Home program. Starting in 2013, Kitsap County authorized a Treatment Sales Tax, increasing sales tax by one-tenth of one percent to supplement funds for organizations and providers offering mental health services, substance use services, and court recovery services.³

³ 1/10 of 1% Sales Tax Program to Fund Mental Health, Substance Abuse and Therapeutic Court Programs and Services. Kitsap County, WA. <https://www.kitsapgov.com/hs/Pages/CAC-LANDING.aspx>

Additionally, the Kitsap County Partnership for Transition Solutions Task Force convenes various Tribal, local, state, and federal agencies and stakeholders to support reentry efforts. This Task Force is part of a larger collective of task forces across Washington State working together to support people's transitions back into their communities after incarceration.

Key Goals

The Welcome Home program's main objective was to develop and implement a comprehensive program to reduce recidivism among people reentering the community from incarceration and who were at medium-to-high risk of reoffending. There were three goals in service of that larger objective.

Goal 1: Reduce recidivism and the likelihood of reoffending by providing individualized case management tailored to the unique, stated needs of people who are incarcerated.

Goal 2: Create a universal human dignity reentry model within Kitsap County that focuses on relationships, including those between individuals returning to the community from jail and program staff like Success Coaches. This also includes the continuation of the Kitsap County Partnership for Transition Solutions Task Force to support this reentry model and to ensure the work is ongoing beyond the end of the grant.

Goal 3: Build and improve relationships between people who are incarcerated and the social workers, correctional officers, and other justice-system professionals that work with them through trauma-informed support and cognitive-based practices. This goal was amplified following the murder of George Floyd and the nationwide reaction to law enforcement-involved deaths.

Underlying all of these goals, the Welcome Home model intended to center Native American practices related to healing, including culture, community, restorative practices, trauma-informed care, storytelling, and authentic connections and relationships.

The human dignity model to reentry shifts from a punitive approach focused solely on preventing recidivism to a holistic approach that supports individuals' service needs and success once they integrate back into community to break the cycle of justice system involvement.

Target Population

Building off the previous grant, which provided reentry services only to PGST and Suquamish Tribal members, the Welcome Home program managers sought to bring the Native-centered approach to healing to non-Native community members.

More specifically, the Welcome Home program intended to serve people who were incarcerated in the Kitsap County Jail and were at medium-to-high risk of recidivism, and those convicted of a violent offense or have a history of violent offense convictions. In the context of the pandemic, the program needed to adjust eligibility criteria to recruit individuals, so individuals facing charges for lower-level crimes, like petty theft or drug possession or use were also considered. These individuals tended to cycle in and out of jail, as the risk factors of committing those crimes are often associated with poverty or mental and behavioral health challenges. The Welcome Home program sought to interrupt this cycle of justice involvement by addressing these root risk factors.

Individuals were eligible for the Welcome Home program if they:

1. Were assessed to have a moderate- to high-risk of reoffending⁴;
2. Did not have a sex offense;
3. Had an expected released date within 180 days (i.e., short-term jail stays); and
4. Were planning to return to Kitsap County.

Following the start of the pandemic, pre-release recruitment from KCJ was no longer feasible (see “Recruitment and Enrollment”, below). In response the program expanded their recruitment pool to draw from other service providers in the area, such as mental health services providers. Participants no longer needed to be leaving jail to participate in the program; instead, if they had a criminal history, were recently released from incarceration (within six months) and were assessed to have a moderate- to high-risk of reoffending, then they were eligible.

Participant Characteristics & Demographics

There were 50 individuals who enrolled in the Welcome Home program between September 2019 and the end of July 2021 and who consented to share their program data.⁵ Of these, two-thirds were white, and 18 percent identified as Native American.⁶ The vast majority of participants identified as non-Hispanic. Fifty-four percent identified as female and the rest identified as male. Two-thirds (67 percent) were not members of a tribe. The remainder were either members of the Port Gamble S’Klallam Tribe or the Suquamish Tribe, they reported “other”, or they did not respond. The average age of participants at the time of their start date was 35.4 years old.

About a third of participants reported that they had less than a high school diploma, and 44 percent reported they had a high school diploma or GED. The remainder either did not report

⁴ The Kitsap County Jail used the Correctional Assessment and Intervention System (CAIS) risk assessment tool to determine risk of reoffending.

⁵ Program participants signed formal written consent forms, which were reviewed and approved by an Institutional Review Board.

⁶ The remainder of program participants (about 15%) identified as other races, but there were too few to report individually.

their highest education level attained or had some college or a bachelor's degree. At the time of enrollment, over a third (36 percent) reported that they were homeless.

Program staff reported that the most common offenses among program participants were drug offenses and domestic violence offenses. Throughout the course of the program, provider and partner staff noted some of the ongoing challenges participants faced, with the risk of relapsing being a main concern among individuals with histories of substance use. They also noted challenges related to mental health and wellness due to increased isolation as a result of COVID lockdowns.

Program staff also discussed the strengths of many participants, characteristics which often are ignored in discussions of justice-involved individuals and reentry but can be central to understanding how they experience and engage with program services. Program staff noted participants' resilience through the various challenges they were facing, including those like isolation and heightened stress introduced by the pandemic. They said participants quickly learn how to rely on their peers and find and build support systems for themselves, particularly as many participants do not have a lot of trust in the systems.

“It was tough during COVID for everyone. But when you layer that with addiction, incarceration, family struggles, poverty, systemic racism in our correctional facilities, anything and everything they could possibly think of that's already hard for someone to handle without COVID, it's pretty amazing some of these individuals were able to make it during a global pandemic.”

– Program staff member

Program Staff

The Welcome Home program staff included a senior Tribal administrator who provided program oversight, a program manager, Success Coaches, and additional program support members who fulfilled a variety of roles.

Program Leadership

One senior PGST administrator provided oversight of the project as a whole, and one program manager facilitated the development and implementation of the program. In addition to developing the grant, building relationships with key stakeholders and program service providers, and managing the program once it was implemented, the program manager also helped with intake in the early days of the program. Both program leaders were also involved in developing and implementing the Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribe's first reentry program in 2015 and were able to build on that grant and experiences when implementing this version of the program.

Success Coaches

The program had three Success Coaches, one employed by the Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribe, one by the Suquamish Tribe, and one contractor. The Success Coaches were participants' main

points of contact with the program, as they functioned as case managers and connected participants to services post-release. Success Coaches often spoke with participants daily, especially during their first month out of jail.

Success Coaches noted having common lived experience with most of their clients, which they said was central to relationship building and supporting their clients. They said having a similar or shared background was integral to this type of work and their ability to meaningfully connect with and support participants. Their shared backgrounds also meant that they could empathize with participants in ways that people without those similar lived experiences may not be able to. “Who knows better than the people who have gone through it themselves? We know the barriers that are out there. As long as we’re able to be with our clients and let them know that we’re standing right next to them, we’ll get through this together,” said one Success Coach.

“A lot of it is [them] knowing that they have somebody right next to them who ain’t gonna judge them for nothing.”

– Success Coach

In addition to their lived experiences, Success Coaches received training related to trauma-informed care, Adverse Childhood Experiences, resiliency, motivational interviewing, and suicide prevention. They were trained as Restorative Practitioners to help facilitate conflict resolution, and some were also Recovery Coaches, non-clinical staff that work with individuals who are in recovery from substance use challenges. They also worked with a behavioral health counselor to better understand changing mental health conditions of their participants as well as how to care for themselves while caring for others in their work.

Program Staff

There was also a staff member who, while not formally considered a Success Coach, conducted intake and carried small caseloads at times. This staff member also took primary responsibility for managing the data for the grant.

Partner Organizations

The Welcome Home program was the result of a combined effort among many organizations, community agencies and incorporated various partners to provide an array of services for clients and trainings for staff.

Port Gamble S’Klallam Tribe

The Tribe was the recipient of the grant and the lead organization that ran the Welcome Home program. The program managers were employed by the Tribe and were central to developing and implementing the first reentry grant in 2015 that laid the foundation of this “human dignity model” to reentry services and specifically served members of the Port Gamble S’Klallam Tribe. This present iteration of the program was built off the initial work done by PGST. The Tribe also leads the Kitsap Community Partnership for Transition Solutions Task Force.

Suquamish Tribe

The Suquamish Tribe funded and employed one Success Coach. Additionally, one person employed by the Suquamish Tribe engaged members of the Tribe in reentry program services.⁷ The staff member from the Tribe also shared information about the program with stakeholders to encourage support of the program and referred Tribal members seeking health services to the program.

Kitsap County Jail

Program managers built on existing relationships with the jail and developed a process that allowed the Welcome Home program to identify program participants and provide pre-release services to interested participants while still in jail. This relationship was instrumental to operationalizing the program, particularly given the pre-release services that were (prior to the pandemic) delivered while participants were still incarcerated. Further, the jail was the intended referral source for the program, as jail staff could identify people who were eligible for the program and interested people could sign up for the program at a kiosk in the jail.

Dispute Resolution Center of Kitsap County

A nonprofit organization providing mediation and education to help resolve conflict. The Dispute Resolution implemented and facilitated both the Restorative Circles and the Community Listening Circles, including inviting attendees and leading the Circles. Once the pandemic started, they transitioned the circles to a virtual format.

Kitsap Strong

Kitsap Strong is a community initiative with the goal of improving the health and well-being of families in Kitsap County. Kitsap Strong trained Welcome Home program staff, Success Coaches, and partners, including staff from the Dispute Resolution Center, on trauma-informed care. Kitsap Strong developed a full-day, in-person training specifically for Welcome Home staff and other members of the criminal justice system. However, they were unable to facilitate the training due to the pandemic, so they pivoted to an online training instead. After the online training for program staff, Kitsap Strong started creating a series of training videos for law enforcement officers discussing the science behind trauma-informed care.

Additional Partner Organizations

The Welcome Home program engaged various local partners and stakeholders throughout the course of the grant, especially when the pandemic required the program to recruit participants from outside the jail. Such partners included mental health providers, substance use disorder professionals, workforce development organizations, and recovery houses. One such partner was the Program for Assertive Community Treatment (PACT), which is an intensive, multidisciplinary team serving people with a first offense and part of Kitsap County Mental

⁷ The Suquamish Tribe employee's work fell under a Memorandum of Understanding (a non-legally binding agreement) between the Suquamish Tribe and the Welcome Home program.

Health Services. This organization helped solicit referrals for the Welcome Home program during the pandemic.

Recruitment and Enrollment

Pre-COVID. In its original design (see Figure 1 below), both program recruitment and enrollment were intended to happen at the jail before participants had been released. Jail staff (a reentry coordinator and officer) helped identify and refer individuals to the Welcome Home program. The program manager and staff also held informational sessions in the jail to discuss the program with potentially interested individuals. For those interested in the program, jail staff conducted background checks to ensure the individual met the eligibility requirements. Staff would then direct eligible participants to a kiosk within the jail to sign up for the program. Individuals could sign up for various non-emergency assistance services at the kiosk, including post-release services like the Welcome Home program.

Once individuals signed up for the program through the kiosk, program staff would meet with eligible participants while still incarcerated to finish program enrollment and intake, which included completing mental health and substance dependency screenings and an individualized service plan (ISP). In the service plans, participants would self-identify the supports they anticipated needing or wanting upon release. Participants also completed various assessments, including the Wheel of Wellness, which measures and identifies an individual's physical, spiritual, emotional, and cultural health goals. Additionally, program staff administered the Adult Hope Scale to measure individuals' self-efficacy and empowerment. Program staff doing pre-release services shared these service plans with participants' Success Coaches, whom participants would meet upon exiting the jail.

During COVID. Following the onset of the pandemic, the Welcome Home program had to change recruitment and enrollment processes, since the jail restricted access for outside providers and jail admissions to reduce the risk of COVID transmission (see Figure 2 below). The jail reduced its incarcerated population by releasing individuals who had low-level offenses and implemented new booking guidelines, thereby severely restricting the pool of potentially eligible participants for the program. Additionally, the jail faced staffing shortages of corrections officers and barred visitors that entered the jail, so program staff were unable to come in and meet with participants for recruitment efforts.

In response, the Welcome Home program expanded the eligibility pool to include individuals who had been formerly incarcerated within the prior six months rather than only individuals who were currently incarcerated. Program staff reached out to service providers in Kitsap County to solicit referrals for the program. Among other providers, program staff worked with PACT, which required that clients at least contact the Welcome Home program, even if they decide to not participate. Information about Welcome Home also spread by word of mouth, as participating clients living in recovery houses – substance-free living environments supporting individuals in recovery from addiction -- shared their successes and experiences with their

Success Coaches with others who then indicated interest in the program. While the program continued to recruit in Kitsap County Jail to the extent possible by relying on jail staff to identify potentially eligible individuals and conduct initial screenings, the program effectively turned to networking and community engagement to recruit participants.

For those individuals who heard about the program through external service providers, a Success Coach met with them in the community and/or virtually to complete the enrollment steps. These steps included intake paperwork, an individualized service plan, and initial assessments. Whether staff and participants completed these initial steps virtually or in-person depended on the comfort level of the participant and staff involved in each component of the process. Later in the pandemic, once it became feasible for the jail to identify participants in jail for the program, the jail staff conducted initial recruitment activities, Welcome Home program staff conducted the initial background check, and then the jail staff would complete their enrollment prior to their release and initial interaction with the Success Coach.

Clients were officially enrolled into the Welcome Home program once they developed an individual service plan, either in pre-release services with program staff prior to the pandemic or once they were assigned a Success Coach during the pandemic. Program staff initially assigned clients to Success Coaches based on shared lived experiences, but as more clients enrolled and Success Coaches' caseloads increased, program managers started pairing participants with Success Coaches based on location. They did continue to assign clients to Success Coaches based on "fit" on a case-by-case basis if there was a specific reason to do so.

Figure 1: Pre-COVID Recruitment and Enrollment

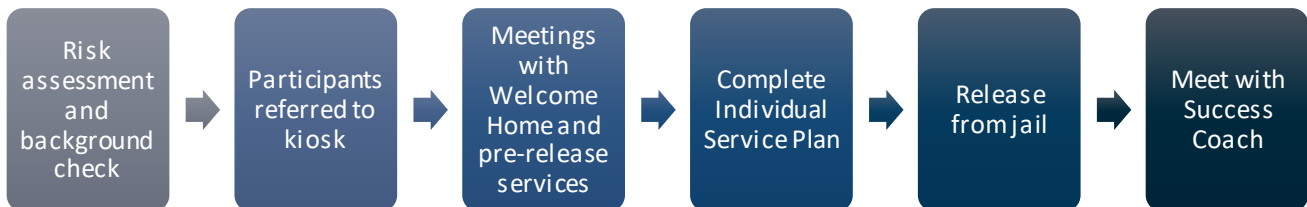
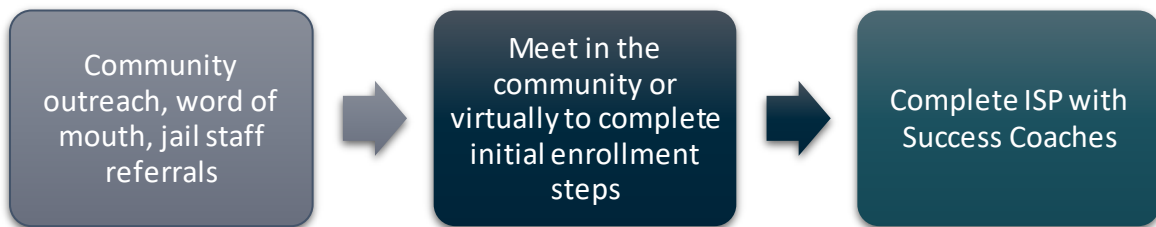


Figure 2: COVID Recruitment and Enrollment Outside Kitsap County Jail



Program Services

A key element of the human dignity model for reentry is that participants identify and set their own goals for reentry instead of requiring participants to engage in specific services. By tailoring services to the unique needs and goals of each participant, the program sought to give participants a sense of agency and autonomy over themselves and their lives.

Pre-release Services

Service engagement with the Welcome Home program began before individuals were released from incarceration (or immediately after referral, during the pandemic). Prior to release, Welcome Home program staff would visit participants to learn more about their needs after release. During these visits (pre-pandemic), program staff worked with the participant to identify services that would benefit them post-release and conduct the various health and wellbeing assessments like the Wheel of Wellness and the Adult Hope Scale. During the pandemic, Success Coaches helped participants complete their ISPs.

Post-Release Services

Upon release from jail – or after enrolling in the Welcome Home program via another service provider during the pandemic – the Success Coaches tailored supports to meet the unique needs of each individual. “Whatever this person needs in their life and their situation, we respond,” one Success Coach said.

Direct Services. Success Coaches said the first week post-release is critical in terms of setting participants up with community supports and services. Success Coaches picked up participants from jail upon release and drove them to wherever they needed to go, including the services identified in the pre-release meetings with program staff or housing that the Success Coach had arranged for the participant prior to release. Success Coaches provided transportation for medical or treatment appointments, court dates, or job interviews, as well as errands like grocery shopping and refilling prescriptions. Success Coaches helped participants secure housing, whether through contacting participants’ relatives or connecting participants with housing providers, and referred them to employment opportunities through workforce programs.

Program MIS data shows that Success Coaches referred participants to a range of services; 40 percent of participants were referred for mental health services, 46 percent of participants were referred to housing services, 50 percent of participants were referred to employment and education services, and 62 percent were referred to substance use services. Program staff noted that this may be an underestimate, given that participants may have been connected with services prior to starting the program and that not all service referrals may have been recorded.

In addition to helping participants access these various services, Success Coaches worked with participants to develop other life skills and strategies to use beyond program completion. For example, a participant noted that his Success Coach helped him develop time management skills that helped him make and keep his various appointments post-release: “They helped me get the structure of my life in order,” he said.

“[My Success Coach was] very encouraging, very helpful in making sure that I get to the things that I needed to in the beginning of my getting out of treatment.”

– Welcome Home participant

Service delivery continued during the pandemic with a few adaptations to public health guidelines. The different organizations employing Success Coaches had different guidelines and restrictions for COVID; some Success Coaches could continue meeting with clients in-person and driving them in their cars while wearing face masks if they felt comfortable doing so, while others’ organizations temporarily shut down all in-person activities while awaiting health and safety guidance. In the cases where Success Coaches could not directly provide participants a ride, staff would supply bus passes or arrange other transportation plans for participants to meet their appointments. The services provided to participants during the pandemic were similar to those provided prior, though program staff did note an increase in requests for mental health services and rental assistance.

Emotional Supports and Relationships. Success Coaches often had contact with their clients every day (including weekends) during the first month of program services, both because of various service needs and because developing relationships were central to the Welcome Home program’s universal human dignity model. Success Coaches mentioned the importance of informal opportunities for connection, such as simply chatting with participants over coffee or the time spent together in cars as they drove to various service appointments.

“For the transporting, I find it to be the best counseling environment. There is something about sitting straight ahead in the car that makes people talk.”

-Success Coach

Such informal opportunities for connection were somewhat lost during the pandemic. However, program staff noted that they were able to stay connected through phone calls and text messages. Participants noted how they felt like their Success Coaches were more like friends, and they have maintained friendly relationships with them even beyond their service delivery during their time participating in the Welcome Home program. Additionally, participants expressed how their Success Coaches were consistent and active in reaching out to them and offering their support even

when participants were not as responsive. One participant noted a time when his Success Coach visited him at the place he was staying when he was not actively engaging in the program just to check in and hear about what was going on. Another participant recounted the

emotional support that her Success Coach provided: “If you were telling them a story and you were crying about it because you didn’t know where to go or where to turn, they would cry with you. It was like they did that job for a reason – they were there for a reason, not because they had to be.”

Participants said the persistence of the Success Coaches even amid a pandemic indicated to them that the Success Coaches really do care for their wellbeing and their success, and it was this attention and care that also helped the participants achieve their goals. “I wouldn’t have made it without this program because I already tried before I knew [the Welcome Home program] existed, and I only made it a couple of months and went back out, and I’m almost two years clean right now. I never thought I would be where I am today back then.”

Restorative Circles and Community Listening Circles. The Welcome Home program required participants to engage in a "Restorative Circle" after their release from incarceration. Rooted in Native American cultural practices that prioritize listening to others and respecting other views, the Restorative Circles were meant to be a healing experience for program participants, victims of a crime, and participants’ families. Staff from the Dispute Resolution Center facilitated the Restorative Circles and as one Restorative Circle facilitator reflected on the purpose of the circle: “It’s not about healing from the top down but it’s about understanding each other. People realized how little difference there is, or how much other people have experience.”

Each Restorative Circle engaged two to four Welcome Home participants who would identify the individuals they would like to invite to the circle, including family members, the victim of the crime, and other criminal justice system personnel such as law enforcement officers. Success Coaches would ask participants who they wanted to invite, and the facilitator from the Dispute Resolution Center called and invited those people to the circle.

In a Restorative Circle, participants have their dedicated time to speak, and everyone has a chance to share something if they would like. Speakers can share as much or as little as they choose. Facilitators and Success Coaches report that the main goal of the Restorative Circle is to give those coming out of incarceration a chance to make amends with others and start to heal. Facilitators said that even if the participant themselves did not show up, the process can be healing for the other participants in the circle to hear different people’s experiences. During the circles, participants have the opportunity to be welcomed back by their family, friends, and community.


“That’s why we called it Welcome Home,” said one program staff member. “Once you’re released, it’s kind of like fend for yourself...This is a circle that includes law enforcement that says, ‘Welcome home, we hear you, and welcome back to the community.’”

The Welcome Home program facilitated about six Restorative Circles in-person before the onset of the pandemic. Following the pandemic, Dispute Resolution Center transitioned the Restorative Circles to a virtual platform. After some initial hesitation about the ability to feel

human emotion and connection online, facilitators, participants, and their communities found that the online format actually allowed for greater participation. Not only did it make it easier for people to attend the circles because they could access Zoom from anywhere if they had internet access, but the facilitator noted that sometimes having that bit of distance between people can make it easier to say the things they want or need to say, which can be harder to do in person.

Moving the Restorative Circles online and the nationwide conversations around law enforcement and policing following the murder of George Floyd spurred facilitators to develop and facilitate monthly Community Listening Circles. Although these circles were not an original part of the Welcome Home program, they became instrumental in building relationships between criminal justice-involved individuals, law enforcement, and the broader community in Kitsap County. Developing such relationships then became a key objective of the program.

The goal of the Community Listening Circles was to connect individuals from different cultures and backgrounds to share their various experiences with the criminal justice system. Similar to Restorative Circles, people participating in Community Listening Circles have an allotted time to speak and share. Community members including law enforcement officers, Tribal members, and individuals involved in the criminal justice system were invited to these circles. Facilitators from the Dispute Resolution Center shared on the screen a graphic with a circle with participants' names. This Talking Circle indicated whose turn it was to speak next. The facilitator would lead with a prompt question or comment and participants would go around the circle to share their reflections and experiences. Participants are encouraged to share as much or as little to the group. Facilitators saw these Community Listening Circles as an opportunity for circle participants to connect with and better understand others' viewpoints.



“If we cannot build connection between folks, [these issues] cannot improve.”

- Listening Circle facilitator

Program Completion

To complete the program, participants had to complete key intake activities and remain in the program for at least six months. The required activities included:

- ✓ Completion of CAIS (risk and needs) assessment
- ✓ Completion of mental health and chemical dependency screening
- ✓ Completion of individualized service plan
- ✓ Initial intake meeting with success coach
- ✓ Completion of six months of program services

At the time of this report, seven individuals in the data analysis sample (14 percent) had completed the program. The remainder were either still in the program (16 percent) or had left the program without completing (70 percent). For those who had left the program without completing, over 60 percent had “lack of engagement” as the reason listed. Other reasons

included relocation, absconding (leaving a jurisdiction to avoid arrest or prosecution)⁸, and criminal/court involvement. Of those who entered the program more than a year before the end of data collection, 20 percent had completed, and the rest had left the program.

Program staff reported that the duration of the program was determined by the needs of the client – some clients stayed up to 12 months in the program. Of those who completed the program, the average length of time spent in the program was 306 days. Of those who had left the program but had entered the program a year or more prior to the end of data collection, the average number of days spent in the program was 91.

Outcomes

Because this is a descriptive study, this evaluation did not explore the *impact* of the Welcome Home Program on participant outcomes. Instead, it describes the outcomes aligned with program goals that were possible to measure using existing data.

Recidivism. Reduced recidivism was a main goal of the Welcome Home program. For this program, recidivism is defined as returning to Kitsap County Jail within one year of program enrollment. However, given the pivot in program structure and the intentional reduction of the jail population due to the pandemic, the calculation and interpretation of recidivism rates is not as simple as reporting the number of program participants who returned to Kitsap County Jail.

The program team gathered information from Kitsap County Jail as of late August 2021. There were 35 individuals who had enrolled in the program at least one year prior to the date of data collection. Of these 35 participants, 15 (43 percent) returned to Kitsap County Jail on a new charge within one year of enrollment. This includes arrests in which individuals were booked and then released, as the jail was not taking new admissions for low level offenses for much of 2020. It is important to note that the interpretation of this recidivism outcome is challenging given the changing circumstances and policy landscape during the pandemic. The general shift in law enforcement, court, and jail practices during COVID makes it difficult to compare and/or interpret recidivism rates.

Developing a Universal Human Dignity Model. The goal of creating a “human dignity model” of reentry focused on developing and fostering relationships. Participants’ relationships with Success Coaches proved to be integral to a participants’ success according to interviewed participants. They noted how relentless Success Coaches were to make sure they could access the services they wanted and needed. Additionally, the emotional support and genuine relationships that developed between Success Coaches and participants meant there was a level of trust between the two parties that participants said made them feel cared and advocated for. Participants also noted that at the outset of the program they did not really have

⁸ Defined by Cornell Law School’s Legal Information Institute.

a sense of what the program was or what to expect, but by the end of their time working with their Success Coaches they felt this support.

Participants reported that their Success Coaches were critical in providing emotional support. One participant noted how she does not remember particular services she accessed; she is just grateful for her Success Coach. Another said that with the help of his Success Coach he achieved stability in his life and could stop living from couch to couch.

Relatedly, program staff and partners noted the importance of focusing on individual successes of participants. The success of one person is a success for the community. “If you just save one life, it was worth it. If you’ve had an impact on five to ten people, that’s success,” one program partner said.

Improved Relationships Between Participants and Community Through Trauma-Informed Support. The Welcome Home model centered on the idea of using Native American traditions of community listening to build connect and heal. Both the Restorative Circles and the Community Listening Circles were a central part of introducing Tribal healing practices to the broader, non-Native community. Some program staff noted that some participants, particularly non-Native participants, might not have been ready for or interested in engaging with the Restorative Circles, whether because of their personal readiness to start healing or feelings of discomfort around the type and level of engagement that Restorative Circles entail. Participants also noted that they initially did not know what to expect, but ultimately felt the circles helped them reconnect with their families and communities and to let go of feelings of shame.

When reflecting on the Restorative Circles, one participant who identified as non-Native said that initially, the circle “made me feel somewhat out of place,” but that “it felt like it was something trying to reconnect me with my family.” Another participant who was unfamiliar with Restorative Circles before this program said she did not know what to expect, but ultimately the circle allowed her to candidly express and process her feelings without feeling embarrassed or ashamed: “I was able to process everything that’s happened throughout the years and accept the fact that it’s happened and move on I’m not ashamed of being a drug addict anymore like I was.” Overall, participants appreciated that the Restorative Circles gave them a space to acknowledge and communicate their feelings. One participant who participated in both a Restorative Circle and a Community Listening Circle said that she felt empowered to speak in front of members of the community and share her backstory with people like police chiefs and firefighters. “They got to see this side of a recovering addict,” she said.

Trauma-Informed Care

A core element of the Welcome Home program’s universal dignity model was incorporating trauma-informed care into its service approach. This report focuses on the experiences of program staff and partners as they sought to integrate trauma-informed care into this reentry

model. While the Restorative Circles and Listening Circles were rooted in Native-based healing and culture for participants, trauma-informed care embodies an approach to service delivery that specifically outlines how to work with people who have trauma. In the context of the Welcome Home program, discussions of trauma-informed care mostly fell within two lenses: (1) the cultural and historical understanding of trauma-informed care, as practices now labeled as “trauma-informed” have long been rooted in Tribal culture and (2) the scientific lens of how experiences of trauma and oppression affect human development and actions.

Cultural and Historic Lens

The Welcome Home program’s universal human dignity model’s approach to trauma-informed care is rooted in relationship building, whether between participants and their Success Coaches or participants and their broader communities. At a base level, trauma-informed care refers to engaging with people with an acknowledgement of their experiences and traumas and understanding that people’s histories – personal and ancestral – directly affect how they interact with the world. Program staff – some of whom identify as Native -- emphasized that while the term “trauma-informed care” has gained traction in broader conversations, it has long been closely aligned with Indigenous culture and traditions.

Some program staff described trauma-informed care as already integrated into the work they are doing. “In many ways, people of color can say, ‘You’ve finally caught up. We’ve been dealing with this for a really long time,’” said one program staff member. “We don’t really need the training,” one Success Coach said, mentioning the historic and cultural trauma that Native Americans have endured throughout history. “In the formal training, it’s kind of the white men’s words. It’s such a buzz word,” one program staff member said.

A representative of the criminal justice system also felt that trauma-informed care put a label on approaches they have been implementing for a long time, including methods to de-escalate situations. “There is a reason for why people are doing what they’re doing,” she said. “It’s not that they just woke up one day to rob or to do drugs. There is always some underlying issue.” Understanding these issues, this program partner said, is part of de-escalation tactics and is a key component of trauma-informed care.

Human Development Lens

The scientific lens of trauma-informed care examines how trauma affects human development, namely how the brain and body responds to trauma. Staff from partner organizations involved with trainings suggested that understanding this neuroscience can provide insight on why people respond to situations in certain ways. This insight -- understanding the reasons for someone’s actions -- can help responders like law enforcement officers respond to situations in a more effective manner because they have more information on what is happening. The trainings focused on exploring these scientific and developmental elements of trauma. As one program partner said, “Becoming trauma-informed is a means to an end – to the human dignity

model. Unfortunately, one of the barriers for humans working within the system to see each other as humans is the failure to see how trauma impacts human development.”

The Welcome Home program operates at the intersection of these two approaches to trauma-informed care. Through the Restorative Circles, Listening Circles, and individual relationships with Success Coaches, the program sought to build and repair connections that are at the root of community and interaction. On the science side, the trainings for law enforcement and justice system community sought to provide insight as to why they use certain tactics and modes of engagement with individuals. All program and partner staff agreed that these various elements of trauma-informed care, regardless of the labels or scientific approaches, were critical in serving individuals in the Welcome Home program in a universal human dignity model.

Lessons Learned

Because of the pandemic, PGST was not able to implement the Welcome Home program as they initially proposed and designed it. However, it still provided supports to individuals in the community and yielded lessons learned for future attempts to support the needs of individuals returning from incarceration.

Participant-Led Individualized Service Planning

All program staff and partners emphasized the importance of working with individuals to self-identify needs rather than prescribing them specific services. Success coaches said this approach helps participants gain a sense of autonomy and self-direction.

Trauma-Informed Care with Law Enforcement

The program, especially as it was implemented amid the nationwide focus on law enforcement and policing, presented an opportunity for program staff to focus on the program’s goal of engaging law enforcement in the universal human dignity model. The introduction of Community Listening Circles was one way program staff did so. Additionally, based on feedback after its initial training to program staff, Kitsap Strong is developing a series of trauma-informed care training videos for law enforcement to address this need.

Community Listening Circles and Restorative Circles

The Community Listening Circles that began as a response to the racial justice movement and COVID-19 were an important adaptation to the program model, notably because of the broader community participation and engagement with this Native practice. The success of Restorative Circles and Community Listening Circles have also led one facilitator to reflect on the diversity of those who facilitate these circles. Connecting to the theme and importance of having shared experiences, she believes that having facilitators who can relate to participants would create more just opportunities to spread the restorative justice approach to non-native populations. “We’re just trying to expand so that it crosses a lot of barriers. Being the only person up until

recently that has been doing restorative work, it feels super lonely. We can restore. There is a lot of reckoning that needs to be done. I just believe that is the way of the future.”

Technology

Technology was in turns helpful and limiting with regards to Welcome Home program services during COVID. On one hand, access to technology like Zoom teleconferencing allowed more people to participate in Listening Circles by eliminating the need to commute and allowing people to join from wherever they were, even if they were out of the area. As some provider staff noted, the slight separation introduced by technology meant people may have felt more comfortable expressing some of their thoughts to the Restorative Circles instead of saying those same things face-to-face. Additionally, given how many appointments and meetings many participants have in the week after release, being able to attend all those appointments online meant participants could more easily make all those appointments. However, the lack of in-person services also meant less in-person interaction, which provider staff said can be difficult while in recovery, particularly for outpatient treatment.

The Welcome Home program was implemented during unprecedented times: a global pandemic that shifted what it meant to interact with people and a nationwide – even global – reckoning with the intersection of racial justice and policing. Even in this context, the Welcome Home program provided key services to both Tribal members and non-Tribal individuals who were reentering the community from jail, and it strengthened community connections between these individuals, other community members, law enforcement, and other representatives of the justice system. This program built on previous iterations of the human dignity model that the Port Gamble S’Klallam Tribe has developed and continued to contribute lessons learned, engage partners, and develop an understanding of how to support a holistic approach to reentry for a diverse service population.

Disclaimer

The contents of this report represent the view and understanding of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Port Gamble S’Klallam Tribe.

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About this Brief

The Port Gamble S’Klallam Tribe contracted with [MEF Associates](#) in 2018 to evaluate the Welcome Home program the Tribe operates in Kitsap County, Washington. Funded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance in the U.S. Department of Justice, this grant focuses on supporting re-entry for individuals incarcerated in the Kitsap County Jail.

To describe the Welcome Home program, study authors interviewed various stakeholders involved with the program, including program leadership, program staff, partner staff, and program participants. The authors also collected quantitative data from the program to review participant demographics and engagement and data from the jail to assess recidivism.



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