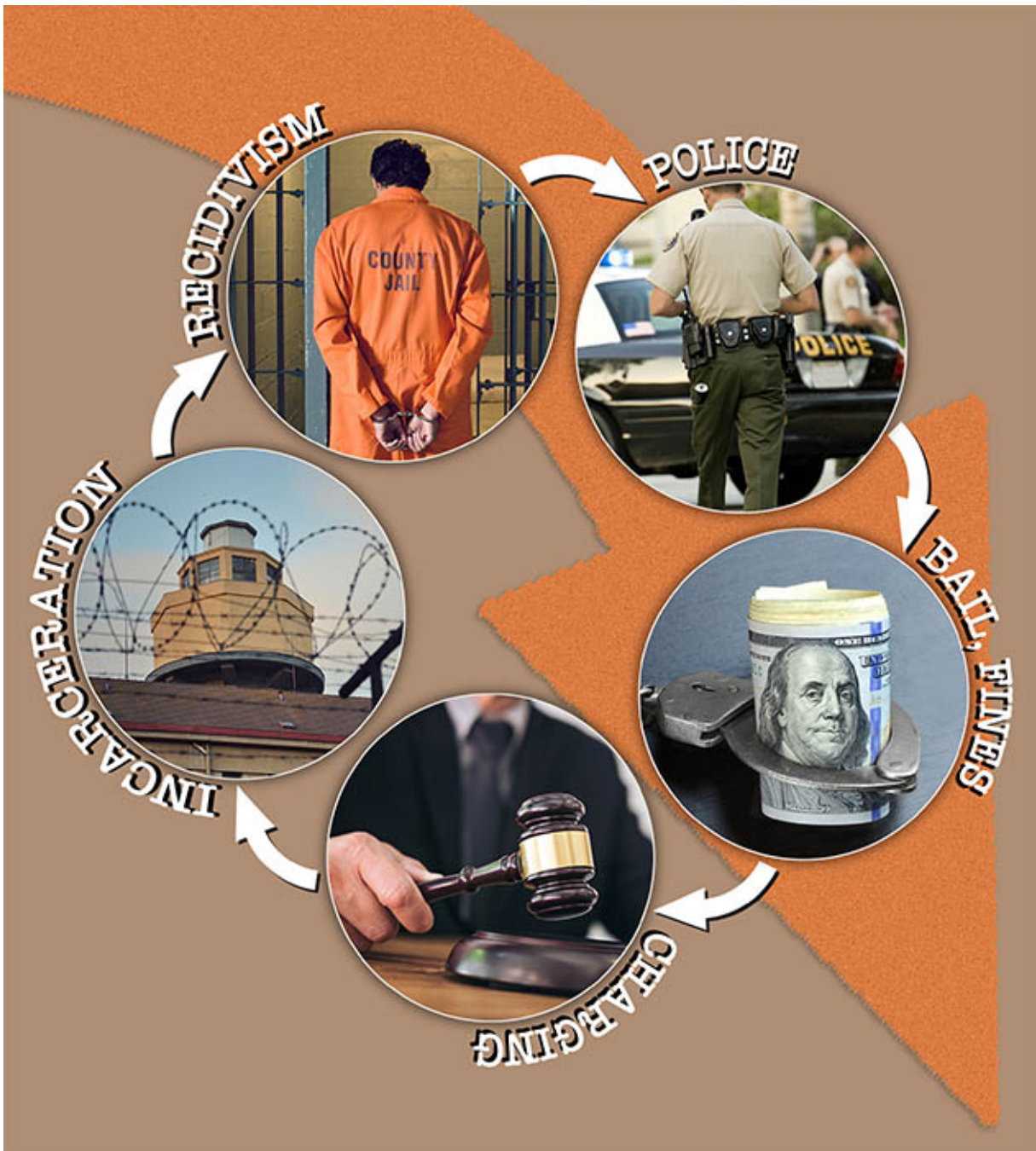


“Criminal Justice in Arizona”

Whetstone Unit Community Town Hall Report

Tucson, AZ – September 13, 2018



CRIMINAL JUSTICE IN ARIZONA

Whetstone Unit Community Town Hall Report

September 13, 2018 – Arizona Department of Corrections, Whetstone Unit

Participants of the September 2018 Whetstone Unit Community Town Hall make the following findings and recommendations. This report reflects the consensus achieved through group discussions by Community Town Hall participants.

GOALS FOR ARIZONA'S CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

Safety is an important goal for the criminal justice system, as is punishment for crimes committed. However, the punishment doesn't always fit the crime. The scales of justice are out of balance. The punishment is not often just, does not allow for a focus on individual circumstances, and does not adequately take into account mental health and other life circumstances.

The system currently also focuses too much on punishment as opposed to addressing the causes of the behavior that landed people in prison.

It is critical that the criminal justice system focus on how to help people interact effectively with their community so that they don't enter the system in the first place, and that they do not return.

Often, this means providing resources like education and drug rehabilitation for those who need it. Education programs that address behavior issues and life traumas are also critical. The system should address these issues with programs that teach people how to modify their behavior so they can make better choices in the future. Programs like Second Chance are a good example of programs that work towards these goals. Rehabilitation programs should be individualized to the needs of prisoners. If we target rehabilitation efforts to individuals, using individual interactions instead of algorithms, we will get a better return on our investment and improve safety.

We should also support a change of attitude both within the system and in the broader community. Within the system, we should emphasize policies that reward and encourage positive behaviors and attitudes. In the broader communities, we should focus on changing attitudes away from dehumanizing those who commit crimes and instead addressing the issues that led to criminal choices.

Getting the best return on investment is also an important goal to consider. The best return on investment for money spent and resources applied happens if we work collectively towards solving the issues that led to imprisonment and that cause people to return. This includes treatment as needed, programs to learn life and vocational skills, and support from the community at large once leaving prison so that when prisoners are released they can more effectively reintegrate back into the community.

PRIOR TO INCARCERATION

Arizona's criminal justice system should be more transparent, fair and targeted towards the causes of criminal action. It could be improved prior to incarceration by addressing the circumstances that often lead to incarceration. Often a life of crime starts early when children do not have adequate support. This can be a lack of access to education, lack of family support or lack of positive role models. Substance abuse is also a major factor. Programs that address these issues could have a big impact on reducing the number of people who enter the system, whether as juveniles or adults.

Once someone is in the juvenile system, we could focus a lot more on programs that keep juvenile offenders from becoming lifelong prisoners. This should include mentors who have been through the system.

For adults, both the issues to address and the changes needed are similar.

To improve the system prior to incarceration, we simply need more support for mental health and substance abuse. We should work to destigmatize these areas so the communities will better support those who experience them. Community members and the media can help. They can play a role in providing more well-rounded and less sensationalized stories.

Police are an important part of the community and the criminal justice system. The system could be improved by having police who are better educated to handle mental health, substance abuse and child trauma issues.

More and expanded pretrial services would make a big difference, as would prison diversion services. We should make it easier to get treatment for substance abuse and mental illness so that people don't come into prison in the first place. We should also consider more job skills training and consider the use of military and work diversion programs.

Our legislators need to understand that resources would be better used helping those with substance abuse rather than imprisoning them. Canada has some good examples to consider.

The entire system could be improved by considering substance abuse, mental health issues and other factors more in making sentencing decisions. We need to make the public in general more aware and understanding of the impact of mental illness and substance abuse.

We should change the incentives for prosecutors so that they are not incentivized to file the most serious charges and to convict but instead incentivized to consider individualized needs and rehabilitation. We should consider having prosecutors certified they have disclosed everything under the law and we should consider Grand Jury reform. We need to reconsider the use of priors in giving longer sentences. We also should give judges more discretion to determine sentences that are based on individualized circumstances.

AFTER INCARCERATION

The criminal justice system could be improved after incarceration by preparing released prisoners better for integrating effectively into the community

We should start supportive programs inside the system that can continue outside the system such as the Second Chance programs, a version of twelve steps, substance abuse programs, programs that teach behavior modification or other transitional support systems. We should try to form more partnerships with groups like the Veteran's Administration (VA) who can help support inmates once they are out.

We should also consider methods to increase inmate wages that could be saved up to allow them to more effectively transition once released. Alternatively, we should consider tax credits for employers and others that can help released prisoners make a more effective transition.

We need to look at housing programs like permanent supportive housing and even structured housing programs that allow for a smoother transition into the community.

Effective transportation is also an issue related to effectively integrating into the community and to getting and keeping jobs. We may want to consider an Uber/Lyft type service through community groups to help released prisoners get to work.

Job skills are important for inmates to integrate into the communities. The programs currently in place are good. They can be improved with additional programs and having more individualized selection of the programs by personal preference. We should consider eliminating restrictions on professional licenses that limit job opportunities. We should also consider restoring other rights to released prisoners that keep them from fully integrating back into their communities.

We should look at how to create more supportive social networks, including with families. We need to prepare families for inmates getting out and support families in staying connected both during and after incarceration.

Often, released prisoners are not aware of resources that may be there to assist them. Making released prisoners more aware of resources is critical. It is also important to reevaluate the mental health of prisoners upon release so that they can get proper treatment.

If we set prisoners up with the needed tools—job training, housing, transportation and supportive services for substance abuse and mental illness, we will drastically reduce recidivism.

INDIVIDUAL ACTIONS

Recognizing that the power to change the future begins with each individual, participants committed to take personal actions based on their experience and discussions at the Whetstone Unit Community Town Hall. Below are individual actions that were shared.

I WILL...

- Continue to work to change the narrative about people with prior convictions in Tucson, Arizona and the United States.
- Work to help released prisoners secure employment, housing transportation, etc.
- Continue to write and work with legislators to promote the emphasis on community safety in the criminal justice field over the promotion of a graduated reentry/release program.
- Expose myself to providers and services available to be eligible for community re-entry; including mental health services; substance abuse counseling and rapid rehousing.
- Continue to advocate and knocking on doors until the right people answer to help me and my efforts in reducing recidivism and guiding fellow inmates to succeed after incarceration.
- Become more knowledgeable of resources available and bring awareness to the prison community of those resources. I will create new connections in the community and also write legislators.
- Share all these good perspectives with everyone and anyone willing to listen. Provide my time, effort, and life to pursuing these goals – a very needed on at that
- Share my new appreciation for the issues and problems within the criminal justice system and advocate for sensible reform.
- Continue to work to change the narrative about people with prior convictions in Tucson and work to help them secure employment, housing, transportation, etc.
- Share my experience and increased understanding about what will make the criminal system work more efficiently.
- Continue to speak with integrity and live a self-aware life that will compel others to be genuine to their selves and others.
- Look into volunteering at Old Pueblo Community Services – an organization that helps newly released prisoners and writing legislators.
- Continue to stay aware of current events affecting the criminal justice system. Advocate and assist with legislative efforts that will bring about positive change.
- Further educate myself on fees associated with the criminal justice system (pre and post incarceration) to understand how they may create a barrier to successful re-entry or result in incarceration and what can be done to remove or lessen the burden they create.
- Help out with my full potential to help change the community and recidivism.

- Stay sober, living through God!
- Continue to support Arizona Town Hall's mission to affect change. Share the ideas I learned today with my circle of influence.
- Continue to speak with integrity and live a self-aware life that will compel others to be genuine to themselves and others.
- Continue to commit myself to changing myself so that I can help these other men that I surround myself to make better choices and find a new direction for their lives.
- Engage in my own recovery and I will maintain a positive attitude when I am released. I will also educate others on the yard about the issues discussed here today.
- Work within the community to help inmates be successful.
- Continue to educate the community regarding state prisons and inmates; emphasizing the positive. Work with the community to build a partnership to develop resources for inmates upon release and emphasize the need for programs pre-incarceration.
- Advocate for others so that not only myself but my peers will not be without a voice. Helping all those that seek it!
- Continue to push more inmates to stop the cycle of going back to prison, to reach out for help before that happens and to find a life coach, someone that can help them in time of need.
- Help with ideas to reduce recidivism on the yard.
- Bring the university community into the conversation.
- Dedicate myself to legislative change to reduce penalties for possession of pocket drugs, and volunteer to help tutor in jails/prisons to increase literacy.
- Write to Senators and Legislators to help promote legislations to reduce prison time, mandatory sentencing, and to suggest an oversight committee on legislation.
- Work towards adding more peer aides for education and substance abuse.
- Continue to be confused on why the Department of Correction allows tobacco products within the system, and try to educate more inmates on quitting! Addictions come in many forms.
- Continue to teach inmates to learn construction and to believe in themselves.
- Try to arrange public speaking opportunities for Department of Correction administration to discuss system challenges and needs.
- Continue the conversation and dedication to change, and help others to make the changes they would like to make to better their lives.
- Make it a practice to learn more about the criminal justice system, and what might be done to make improvements to it. The way I see it, there's much room for a major overhaul to the system.
- Be heard and a voice for my community. Help for a better change and a better understanding and make strong, positive choices.
- Tell my fellow inmates about the things discussed for positive influence on the yard and moving forward to go back home.
- Continually advocate for a more involved method of treatment for people involved in the criminal justice system and advocate for more resources to be directed towards prerelease programs.

- Talk more freely about the issues we have in the justice system. Ask for help before doing another crime.
- Talk to those I know about what I learned today as well as the positives that I heard about and about what we can all do to educate the legislators and citizenry.
- Be an advocate in educating the public about facts with regard to the efforts being made by the Department of Corrections in transitioning inmates back into the community to be a contributing citizen in their communities.
- Spread the knowledge that I learned today about the prison system. Emphasize that prisoners are humans like the rest of us and deserve better treatment.
- Take steps to make changes in the recidivism rate, by thinking of the consequences of my actions before I make a choice.
- Make sure my children and grandchildren are supported and given proper guidance to get an education. Give my family time and love.
- Keep educating myself by listening to others, and keep giving back in my job in the Department of Corrections as a Recovery Support Specialist hoping to also work with individuals getting out when I get out myself. I will speak out for those who don't feel they have a voice. Help all people.
- Continue to facilitate and advocate Recovery Support/Peer Support program in the prison community as well as the outside community.
- Continue to seek information and knowledge on how to better myself as well as others.
- Continue to support criminal justice reform in Pima County.
- Spread the word to fellow inmates and my community. Practice the goals inside and outside to help people understand the deeper problem.
- Continue to be a mentor and positive role model to each individual that come my way.
- Remember these conversations and recommendations and apply them to my own research and work with police departments across Arizona.
- Look into prison chaplaincy work and youth mentoring, skill instruction.

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