

Virginia DOC Administrative Segregation Step Down Program

“Partnering Science with Corrections”

1. How long has this program operated?

Planning for the Administrative Segregation Step Down Program began in early 2011 with pilot implementation beginning in September 2011 and full implementation in August 2012.

2. Describe the program:

Why was it created? What problem(s) or issue(s) was it designed to address?

Over the past 20 years prison systems across the nation have increasingly relied on Administrative Segregation as a housing and management status for offenders deemed a risk to the safety of other incarcerated offenders or prison staff. Typically offenders are assigned to Administrative Segregation due to assaultive and disruptive behaviors at lower security level prisons, escape histories, or extremely violent and notorious crimes. Offenders in Administrative Segregation are managed constitutionally but with high security controls, and are locked in cells for 23 to 24 hours per day. Due to security concerns, programming and out of cell movement is very limited. By national standards, offenders are allowed one hour of out of cell exercise five days per week and are escorted to recreation cages with leg irons and hand cuffs. Some offenders remain in Administrative Segregation for years.

During the 1990s, to manage their growing Administrative Segregation populations, many states built “super-max” prisons designed to house the “worst of the worst” offenders. The state of Virginia was no exception and in 1998 the Department of Corrections opened Red Onion State Prison to manage its growing number of Administrative Segregation offenders. The prison was built in rural southwestern Virginia and newly hired staff received extensive training in operating a high security prison and managing high risk offenders.

Across the nation and in the Virginia Department of Corrections, the benefits of using super-max prisons to house Administrative Segregation offenders were quickly realized. Other prisons in the state penal system became safer for both offenders and staff once the high risk offenders were removed. While the safety of all prisons remains an important objective that today is still well served by Administrative Segregation, fifteen years after the advent of super max prisons corrections professionals are recognizing challenges created by long term Administrative Segregation:

- Administrative Segregation units have by their very nature become a perpetual assignment for some offenders. High security controls combined with limited programming make it difficult for offenders to change or for staff to recognize a change. The units are a catch-22 for prison administrators who cannot risk safety and security by relaxing controls for offenders without evidence of change.
- The longer offenders remain in Administrative Segregation the more likely they deteriorate in their ability to interact with others.
- Staff selection and training has been historically based on skills related to custody and control, with less regard for skills related to human interaction. This contributes to an adversarial we-they mindset at prisons that can escalate tensions and incidents.

- Super-max prisons are highly stressful environments in which to work, as staff constantly interacts with violent and high risk offenders, endure verbal abuse and risk injury on a daily basis. As a result staff can burn out and the use of sick leave increases.
- Administrative segregation units are more expensive to operate than general population prisons due to staffing needs, facility design and added security controls.
- Administrative segregation, although necessary in some cases of proven dangerousness, is counterproductive to long term public safety. Over 90% of offenders complete their sentences and return to the community. Offenders who are released from prison after spending years locked in a cell 23 hours per day are less prepared for reentry.
- Administrative Segregation creates safety in other prisons by removing the more dangerous offenders; as a result the correctional system's reliance on Administrative Segregation may have become overused.

Why is it a new and creative approach or method?

The Virginia Department of Corrections' Segregation Step Down program is a new, unique, creative and effective process to provide a safe and secure way for offenders in Administrative Segregation to earn their return to general population.

In an effort to resolve the problems presented by Administrative Segregation while retaining the system benefits, the Virginia Department of Corrections turned to the body of science called evidence based practices. Evidence based practices (EBP) is a collection of practices proven to reduce criminal behavior by focusing on risk reduction in addition to traditional risk control. The original research on EBP was conducted on offenders on probation in a community corrections setting. With its Segregation Step Down program, the Virginia Department of Corrections is the first state correctional agency to apply the principles and practices of the EBP research to an Administrative Segregation super-max prison population. The program has successfully and safely reduced the number of Administrative Segregation offenders. New and unique aspects of the program are listed below.

- Created additional pathways for Administration Segregation offenders to learn and practice law abiding behaviors through cognitive programming with the opportunity to progress through a conservative step down process to lower security classifications;
- Created an additional step down classification security level as a proving ground for changed behavior;
- Enhanced review of the classification process before offenders are assigned to or removed from Administrative Segregation;
- Added more extensive assessment of offenders upon assignment using multidisciplinary teams of staff and validated instruments to determine criminal risks, underlying reason for behaviors that led offenders to Administrative segregation and motivation to change;
- Established a track for sub-groupings of offenders based on their potential to change;
- Applied evidence based cognitive behavioral programming through all phases of prison operations paired with incentives and sanctions;
- Included a strategy for training Correctional Officers and other prison staff to enhance their communication skills and effectiveness in motivating and supporting offender change;
- Instituted a conservative offender step down practice through a housing unit and program phase process whereby offenders earn more responsibility as they prove the ability to participate in programs and demonstrate control and accountability for their behavior; and
- Designed program delivery formats for high security environments that allow program participation while ensuring the safety of participants and staff.

As a result of the creativity, uniqueness and effectiveness of the program several other state correctional agencies have contacted the Department seeking to replicate the program.

What are the specific activities and operations of the program?

There are two major innovative components that were necessary to achieve results.

First, it was necessary to change the culture of Red Onion State Prison to support programming. Specific strategies mentioned below were used as a model for culture change, moving the prison from its sole focus of risk control to supporting risk reduction strategies.

Second, designing and implementing the process of the Segregation Step Down Program.

Although these two components are operationally intertwined and support each other, the specific activities and operations of each are unique and are discussed separately below.

Prison Culture Change:

To accomplish the goals of this program required a change in the overall culture of the super-max Red Onion State Prison (ROSP). The prison's capacity is 957 high security offenders, 486 of which were long term Administrative Segregation offenders when the project began in 2011. As a first step the Department recognized the need to relieve staff stress and the pressure of working solely with segregation offenders by creating a small general population housing unit at the prison. The VADOC exchanged 170 Administrative Segregation offenders from Red Onion State Prison with maximum security general population offenders from neighboring Wallens Ridge State prison. This allowed Red Onion State Prison to operate with some general population housing units which enabled staff to rotate posts.

The Virginia Department of Corrections has developed a specific model for prison culture change applying the principles of evidence based practices. The following activities and steps occurred in sequence and were successful:

1. The Warden and his executive team of 25 staff completed a 5 day experiential training in Effective Communication and Motivational Strategies provided by national consultant Ray Ferns. The training equipped the Warden and his top staff to lead and model culture change and the desired interactions with both staff and offenders.
2. Following completion of training the ROSP executive team held weekly "Learning Team" meetings to discuss their application of communication strategies and progress in leading the culture of the facility.
3. Staffs were selected to become Subject Matter Specialists (SMS) and lead Learning Teams throughout the facility. As preparation, 30 SMS received the 5 day Effective Communication and Motivational Strategies training. Some of these SMS were also trained to deliver a condensed 2 day version of the training. This training was then provided to all employees of the prison.
4. All prison staff completed the 2 day training in effective communication delivered by SMS.
5. Following completion of the training all staff participated in Learning Teams lead by SMS. Typically Learning Teams were grouped by prison housing unit to reinforce knowledge of and communication about the offender population. Each Learning Team includes multidisciplinary staffs who work within the Unit (security, counselors, unit managers, maintenance, etc). The teams meet bi-weekly before each shift for one hour to debrief actual situations with offenders and discuss the application of effective communication and motivational strategies to motivate offender change.
6. New post orders for "Cognitive Treatment Officer" were created to assist prison counselors in providing programming to offenders. The Treatment Officers can escort and supervise offenders while providing programming. This has the added benefit of helping portray to offenders that uniformed staff are there to motivate, help and support positive change. It also prepares Correctional Officers for promotion to counselor positions.

7. After staff completed the 2 day training, a cross section of prison staff met regularly to develop an organizational development strategic plan. The organizational development plan addresses operation of the facility as a system based on evidence based practices. It becomes a road map for culture change and implementing programming. This plan addresses the application of evidence based practices in each aspect of prison operation. This includes but is not limited to:
 - Offender risks and needs assessment
 - Housing of offenders according to programmatic needs
 - Creative schedules for programming to maximize space and resources
 - Offender incentives and sanctions paired with program progress or regress
 - Changes to policy and procedures
 - Ensuring Post Orders include new expectations
 - Strategies to marketing changes with the offenders
 - Staff incentives for practicing new skills
 - Measures for on-going evaluation
 - Strategies for prison executive staff to continually enforce culture change
8. The prison's evidence based operational plan was approved by all levels within the Virginia Department of Corrections.
9. Following approval of the Organizational Development plan, the facility began to implement its strategies with oversight from a Statewide Evidence Based Practices Manager.
10. Learning Teams meet regularly as a normal course of prison operation to support continued learning and skill development.
11. During the initial culture change process, weekly conference calls were held between key prison, regional and agency executive staff to maintain a sense of urgency and priority on the difficult task of culture change. A year later, due to the progress made, the calls have been moved to a monthly basis.

Administrative Segregation Step Down Program:

Once the organizational development and culture change were underway at the prison, the Virginia Department of Corrections established the Segregation Step Down Program as a path for long term Administrative Segregation offenders to work their way to general population. The program is designed to maintain public, staff and offender safety by implementing the principles of evidence based practices to reduce risk.

Before creating and implementing the Step Down Program, like most other states the Department of Corrections relied on risk *control* (locking offenders in long term 23 – 24 hour per day segregation) to manage high risk offenders. However, research has demonstrated that risk control is a temporary solution and only works as long as the control is in place. Once the external control is removed the offenders return to their accustomed high risk behavior. With the Segregation Step Down Program, the Department has implemented a process to address the problem by utilizing risk *reduction* strategies. Risk reduction strategies involve enhancing an offender's motivation to change a problem behavior combined with programming to provide new skills, which internalizes and sustains change that cannot be made with risk control alone.

Advanced Security Practices:

As a part of this initiative a number of advanced security measures, beyond required procedures, were put in place to enhance staff and offender safety. Among those practices is the implementation of Therapeutic Modules and Security Chairs. The Modules and Chairs, pictured below, are used as part of the step down process to allow Administrative Segregation offenders to come out of cell for individual interviews or to join small groups (of up to 5 offenders) facilitated by a counselor or Treatment Officer. This increases the effectiveness of programming while ensuring safety for both staff and other offenders.



Therapeutic Modules



Security Chair

The following describes the process of the Segregation Step Down Program. This is also depicted in a chart that follows.

Offender Initial Intake and Assessment:

The Virginia Department of Corrections enhanced its method for assignments to Administrative Segregation by including the approval of the Regional Operations Chief before any offenders can be transferred to ROSP for Administrative Segregation. This level of review is in place to ensure that only offenders truly needing that level of management are accepted for Administrative Segregation.

After being approved for Administrative Segregation and transferred to Red Onion State Prison, each offender receives an extensive orientation to the prison and programming. A primary goal of the immediate orientation process is to begin a positive rapport, motivate offenders to want to participate in the assessment and step down process, and outline the expectations and benefits.

Each offender completes a battery of assessments during intake and orientation to include a COMPAS Risk and Needs Assessment; the URICA to identify stages of change; and Texas Christian University Social Functioning Scales, Treatment Needs and Motivation Scales and Treatment Engagement and Process Scales. Mental health reviews are also completed. The offender is engaged in developing a personal program and management plan.

All information about the offender is then thoroughly reviewed by an inter-disciplinary Treatment Team. The Treatment Team's role is to identify the various needs of the offenders and importantly to recommend each offender's appropriateness for one of two sub-groups that will determine his step down program track: Intensive Management or Special Management.

The Intensive Management (IM) Track is for offenders who have demonstrated during incarceration the potential for extreme and deadly violence against staff or other offenders and that the intent for such violence may remain despite a pattern of compliance. Offenders in this group may have serious escape histories or have

extremely heinous or publicly notorious criminal offenses. Offenders in the IM track will receive programming and earn privileges but may never progress out of Administrative Segregation due to the risk they pose. . Some IM offenders may progress to a step down pod in Security Level 6, which is highly controlled but provides for additional privileges.

The Special Management (SM) Track is for offenders who are assigned to Administrative Segregation due to violence but with whom the intent was not to kill. Offenders in this grouping may have repeated disruptive behavior patterns, and assaults and fights without intent to kill. They may also be offenders who intentionally commit disciplinary violations to remain in segregation due to fear of general population. These offenders in the SM track may progress further in the step down process and ultimately be returned to a general population at a lower security level.

Throughout the Segregation Step Down Program offenders are housed by sub-group and programming phase within the sub-grouping.

Programming Levels:

Following completion of orientation, assessment, case planning, and Administrative Segregation sub-group assignment, both IM and SM offenders who commit to participate in the step-down program are directed to begin participation in programming based on the case plan.

The primary curriculum used within the Administrative Segregation portion of the program is the Challenge Series, a set of seven journals developed by the Change Companies in collaboration with the Federal Bureau of Prisons.

The offenders also receive the evidence based Thinking for A Change program promoted by the National Institute of Corrections. Anger Management and substance abuse Matrix programming are provided as needed.

An offender's movement through the program is based on structured completion of programming specific to each phase as well as staff assessment of the offender's attitude and behavior.

SM Offender Track:

Programming is delivered in different phases which allows staff to observe offender progress while privileges and responsibilities are incrementally increased in each phase. Each phase becomes a proving ground to move to the next. All housing in Administrative Segregation is single cell. In Administrative Segregation offenders assigned to the SM track have 3 phases they must progress through consecutively: SM O, SM 1 and SM 2. At each step, offenders have higher performance expectations and earn additional privileges.

Within SM O offenders have no privileges and only the basic constitutionally mandated services, without consideration for security level reduction. The only programming is education services provided over close circuit monitors and in-cell faith based materials. To progress from SM 0 to SM1, offenders must commit to completing the first of the Challenge Series Journals in-cell.

In SM1 offenders complete the second set of Challenge Series Journals and participate in programming in-cell and in Therapeutic Modules.

In SM 2 offenders complete the final set of Challenge Series Journals and may be provided programming in-cell, in Therapeutic Modules or in Program Chairs.

After successfully completing the three step down phases within segregation, SM track offenders are eligible for advancement to step down to general population at Security Level 6. While Security level 6 is considered general population it is operated with high security and introduces offenders to limited out of cell pod time and unrestrained movement to showers and recreation. Within Security Level 6 there are two step down phases. Security Level 6 Step Down Phase 1 gradually transitions offenders from using the Security Chairs and Therapeutic Modules for programming to unrestrained small groups of about 5 offenders. In this phase offenders are still housed in a single cell. Security Level 6 Step Down Phase 2 continues the small groups for cognitive programming. A major step in Security Level 6 Step Down Phase 2 is that the offender begins to be housed with a cell partner.

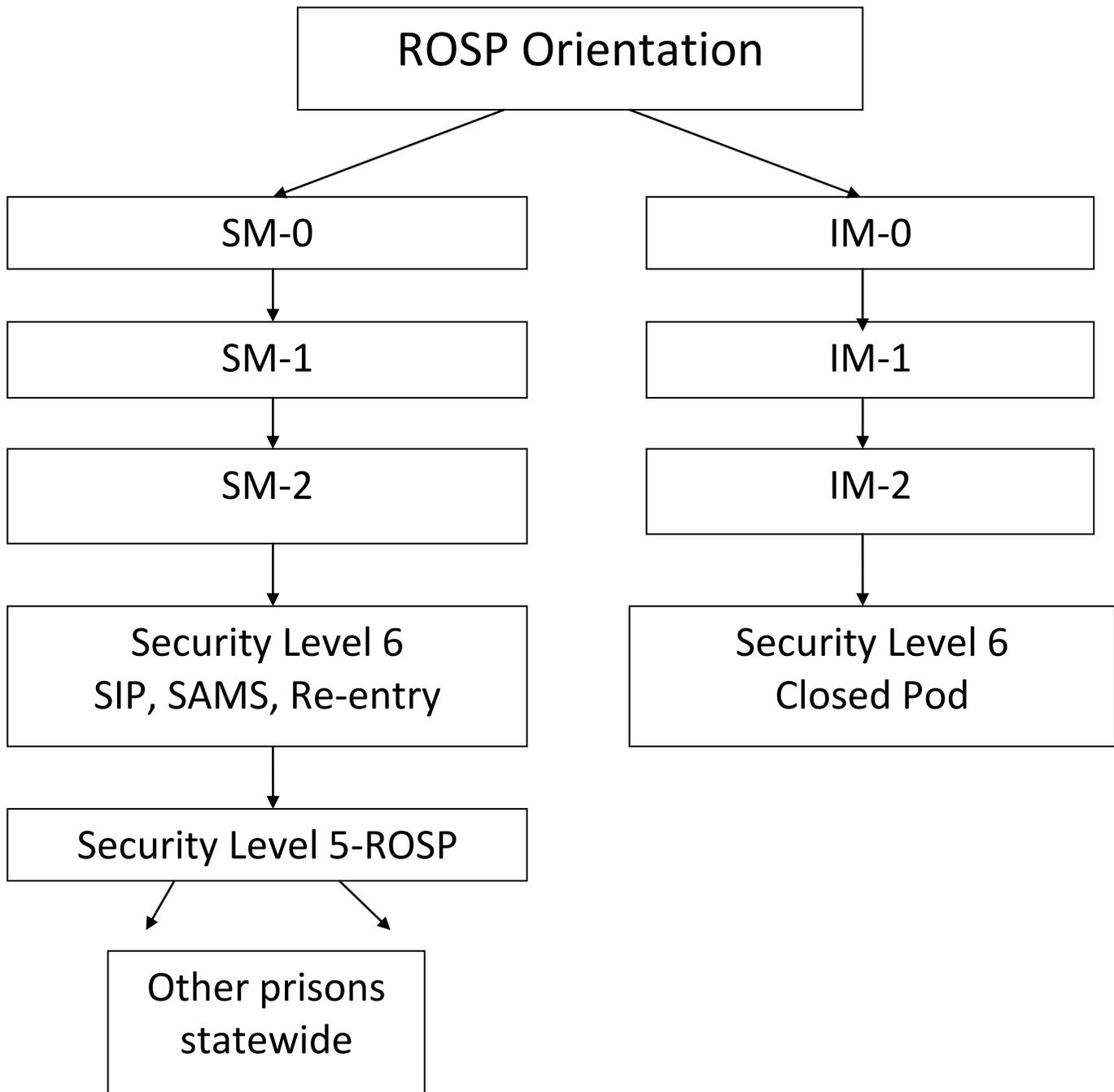
Within Security Level 6 in addition to a general housing pod there are two special programs: the Secure Allied Management Pod (SAM) and the Secure Integrated Pod (SIP). These pods were developed to group Security Level 6 offenders according to common program and management needs to best support their continued positive behavior.

Security Level 6 SAM pod: The SAM pod is designed for offenders who are easily bullied and manipulated by other offenders, such as offenders who are developmentally disabled, young or with mild mental health issues. Mental Health staffing is intensive on this pod.

Security Level 6 SIP pod: The SIP pod was developed in Security Level 6 for offenders who have a pattern of intentionally committing numerous minor disciplinary violations to ensure they are retained in segregation rather than returning to general population. Programming within this pod focuses on strategies for social reintegration, building confidence and developing interpersonal skills.

After completion of the Step down Phases in Security Level 6, through SIP, SAM or the general housing pod, SM offenders may progress to a Security level 5 housing Unit at the prison. Security Level 5 is general population and operates with additional movement, recreation and programming. After a successful period of proving appropriate behaviors at Security Level 5 at ROSP, offenders are able to transfer to general population housing at other prisons across the state. Particularly desired is offender transfer to the eastern part of the state near metropolitan areas.

Diagram of the Segregation Step Down Program



IM Offender Track:

It is recognized that offenders in the IM track require a significantly longer time with in-cell programming before staff observe behavior and motivation changes that earn progression to programming in the Therapeutic Modules or chairs. IM offenders will receive a high level of scrutiny before earning step down phase to Security Level 6 Closed Pod. The Closed Pod is general population but with high restrictions. For IM offenders, the Closed Pod is the final step down. Each IM offender is reviewed on-going to determine his individual readiness and level of safety.

Programming Tools by Phase Level

IM Management Path	IM Program Delivery	SM Management Path	SM Program Delivery
IM0	In-Cell	SM0	In-Cell
IM1	In-Cell Therapeutic Modules	SM1	In-Cell Therapeutic Modules
IM2	In-Cell Therapeutic Modules Program Chairs	SM2	In-Cell Therapeutic Modules Program Chairs
SL6 IM Closed Pod Level 1	In-Cell Therapeutic Modules Program Chairs (not small groups)	SL6, SIP, SAM, Step Down Level 1	In-Cell Therapeutic Modules Program Chairs Small Groups
SL6 IM Closed Pod Level 2	In-Cell Therapeutic Modules Program Chairs Small Groups	SL6, SIP, SAM, Step Down Level 2	In-Cell Therapeutic Modules Program Chairs Small Groups

Reentry:

Despite the best efforts of staff, a number of offenders are released from Administrative Segregation to the community each year. It is the goal of Virginia Department of Corrections that no Administrative Segregation offender be released directly from segregation without the opportunity for reentry preparation. Most of these offenders pose a risk, especially those that meet IM criteria. The Department believes the prison should assume the risk of programming the offenders without restraints rather than releasing them directly from segregation onto an unsuspecting community citizenry. In cases where the offender is within a year of release, the Department makes every effort to encourage the offender's progresses through all phases of the program.

What equipment, technology and software are used to operate and administer this program?

As a part of this initiative a number of advanced security measures, beyond required procedures were put in place to enhance staff and offender safety. Among those practices is the implementation of Therapeutic Modules and Security Chairs. The Modules and Chairs, pictured previously, are used as part of the step down process to allow Administrative Segregation offenders to come out of cell for individual interviews or to join

small groups (of up to 5 offenders) facilitated by a counselor or Treatment Officer. This increases the effectiveness of programming while ensuring safety for both staff and other offenders.

What are the annual costs of the program? How is it funded?

The only additional operational cost is the purchase of program manuals. These costs are nominal and done through the Department's existing funding. Initially the Department received consultant assistance in designing the program and implementing initial training.

Has the program been effective at addressing the problem or issue?

Yes we believe the program is a model that can benefit the correctional field nationally. It has been very effective in addressing the noted challenges and problems. The offenders that have completed the program have not returned to Administrative Segregation. Thus far the program has:

- significantly reduced the number of offenders in Administrative Segregation by 53%
- increased safety by reducing prison incidents by 56%
- reduced staff stress and improved morale as evidenced by a decrease in use of sick leave
- increased offender morale and effective staff communication as evidenced by 23% lower grievances
- increased offender program participation from 0 in Administrative Segregation to 460

What measurable impact has the program had? Has it created a significant change in your state?

Yes, initial outcomes have shown that the program has:

- significantly reduced the number of offenders in Administrative Segregation by 53%
- increased safety by reducing prison incidents by 56%
- reduced staff stress and improved morale as evidenced by a decrease in use of sick leave and correctional office shift call ins
- increased offender morale and effective staff communication as evidenced by 23% lower grievances
- increased offender program participation from 0 in Administrative Segregation to 460

Additionally staff report high job satisfaction and morale. The prison has experienced less use of staff sick leave. Offenders have reported that they feel staff including Correctional Officers care about their progress and success.

3. Did this program originate in your state? If yes please indicate the innovators name, present address, telephone number and e-mail address.

Yes this program originated in Virginia and was created by numerous staff within the Virginia Department of Corrections and consultants. This program is an outgrowth from the Department of Corrections project to follow the current science in corrections and implement evidence based practices in all its prisons and community corrections sites.

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4. Are you aware of similar programs in other states? If yes which ones and how does this program differ.

We are not aware of an Administrative Segregation super-max prison fully applying the principles of evidence based practices. We have talked with several states that have implemented partial segregation reduction efforts but those states have not incorporated the sub-groupings, extensive behavioral programming, or step down process track created and utilized in Virginia.

5. Is the program transferrable to other states? What limitations or obstacles might other states expect to encounter when attempting to adopt this program?

This program is transferable to other state or local prison facilities. The prison culture change and program implementation require strong commitment and laser focus to achieve results.

For replication the following is important:

- Thorough understanding of the correctional science of evidence based practices
- Organizational development and strategic planning to apply practices as a system within prison operations
- Leadership from an outside consultant may help lead the organization in the uncomfortable activity of thinking outside of the box
- Strong leadership is needed at all levels of the agency, including executive staff to support change and a Warden who can strongly lead the change process. The effort is not without risks and needs to be owned by all levels of the agency.
- Specific training in Effective Communication and Motivation Strategies or similar model of correctional motivational interviewing and cognitive interventions
- Training in specific program curriculum

The Cognitive Community Model for Offender Reentry - Executive Summary

In 2011 the Virginia Department of Corrections (VADOC) began the planning process to implement the Cognitive Community Reentry model at ten (10) designated reentry sites across the Commonwealth. Implementation training began February 14, 2011 and was completed December 2012. In addition to these 10 sites two pilot sites were started in 2004 and 2006; these sites demonstrated the efficacy of the model and supported the decision to extend the Cognitive Community model to all offenders leaving from security Level 2 and 3 facilities. In January 2013, an additional institution was added to the original ten (10), bringing the total number of sites operating a Cognitive Community model to thirteen (13).

The establishment of the Cognitive Community has created a unified evidence based practice system of reentry preparation that services almost 3,000 offenders each year from security Level 2 and 3 facilities. Offenders are also tracked as they transition from the institution to the community to help ensure successful reentry.

The Cognitive Community is an intensive 24-hour residential milieu, isolated from the general offender population. This approach is unique in that it combines and fully integrates elements of a Social Learning model (Therapeutic Community) with the Cognitive Restructuring tools of a Cognitive Behavioral approach. It is designed as an intensive 6-month experience where offenders practice new thinking and behaviors in a supportive environment while preparing for the challenges of reentering society.

The Cognitive Community model was designed to 1) impact offender anti-social thinking patterns and subsequent behavior, 2) be applicable to all offenders, and 3) be of sufficient dosage and intensity to reduce the duration of treatment to 6-months instead of the typical therapeutic community timeframe of 9-18 months. This allows more offenders' access to intensive reentry services, improves public safety and decreases overall cost by reducing the duration of treatment. Costs for the program are approximately \$1,000 above routine correctional costs per offender.

For a reentry initiative to be successful a high degree of collaboration between the institutional setting and the community where offenders are returning is necessary. VADOC has been fortunate to have an extraordinary level of support for its reentry efforts from the Governor and local reentry councils. VADOC has reached into the community and found support for the transition of offenders back into their communities through the creation of Community-based Reentry Councils consisting of concerned citizens, faith-based groups, social service agencies, community employers, and both probation and institutional VADOC staff.