

DRUGS, CRIME, AND CONSEQUENCES: ARRESTS AND INCARCERATION IN NORTH LAWDALE

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Center for Impact Research (CIR) prepared this report at the request of the North Lawndale Employment Network (NLEN). Made up of a coalition of groups and agencies in the North Lawndale community, NLEN works to ameliorate poverty through the full employment of North Lawndale residents.

City, county, and state governmental entities provided the data on arrests, sentencing, parole, and probation that are presented in this report. To complement the data on arrests and sentencing and learn about the specific situations of ex-offenders in Chicago's North Lawndale community, CIR interviewed staff, consultants, and participants in the Ex-Offender Employment Service Network (EESN) program of NLEN. These interviews provide a contextual framework for the North Lawndale data, particularly about how drug addiction is implicated in crime.

NLEN will use the information in this report to advocate for community-based services that individuals need to successfully negotiate re-entry to the community from incarceration, and to advocate for alternatives to incarceration.

North Lawndale Adults in the Criminal Justice System

New Involvement in Criminal Justice System in 2001

Sentenced to the Department of Corrections	2,442
Sentenced to Probation	3,857
Total	6,299
Percentage of total North Lawndale population 2000	up to 24%

Total Adults Involved in the Criminal Justice System in 2001

Sentenced to Department of Corrections	2,442
Sentenced to Probation	3,857
On Parole	2,487
Still serving time at DOC (approximately)	9,893
Still on probation	3,458

Total North Lawndale individuals in Criminal Justice System* **22,137**
% of all North Lawndale adults in Criminal Justice System **up to 57%**

*The data provided are not unduplicated. The total may be an overstatement in that there might be duplication in an undetermined number of cases.

Service Needs of Ex-Offenders

The interviews with EESN staff and participants reveal that before and after arrest and incarceration, this population of ex-offenders struggles with drug addiction, poverty, low levels of education, unemployment, unstable housing, and homelessness. However, intensive case management and substance abuse treatment programs combined with job readiness training can break the cycle of addiction, crime, and incarceration and lead to positive results for ex-offenders. All of the staff agreed that the current level of resources are inadequate for meeting the needs of ex-offenders for stable housing, adequate nutrition, employment, substance abuse treatment, and family reunification. Staff members said that there is a need for more community corrections programs and adult transition centers, and better case management for those on parole and probation.

Both EESN staff and participants spoke at great length about the destructive impact of substance abuse on individuals and the community and how drug sales and use are implicated in much of the criminal activity in North Lawndale. One staff person said, “this is a drug habituated environment. People become desensitized by constant exposure to the drug users and drug related crime. Drugs are a major cause of the downward spiral of individuals and communities.” Staff and participants emphasized that more resources must be directed toward services for at-risk children. Speaking from their own experience, participants also spoke of the need for parents to be actively involved in the daily lives of their children and the negative consequences of the lack of parental or adult attention and guidance.

Recommendations

It has been widely recognized that low-income communities have high rates of involvement in the criminal justice system. The magnitude of this involvement is clearly delineated by the data in this report: nearly one-quarter of North Lawndale’s adult population became involved in the criminal justice system in 2001, and nearly three-fifths of all North Lawndale adults in 2001 were on probation, parole, sentenced to prison, or incarcerated. In order to address this issue through policy changes on sentencing and by increasing the resources and services for ex-offenders, NLEN plans to continue and expand its efforts directed at:

- Increasing public awareness about the interconnected problems of substance abuse, crime, unemployment, and poverty.
- Increasing awareness among government and community agencies of the need for pre- and post-release services.
- Advocating for basic reforms within the Illinois Department of Corrections in order to improve the employment prospects of ex-offenders.
- Advocating for increasing transitional services for the incarcerated and post-incarcerated.
- Advocating for wider implementation and ongoing improvements in community-based employment services for ex-offenders, with continued participation of NLEN in the Best Practices subcommittee of the State Workforce Board’s Taskforce on Ex-offender Employability.
- Advocating for alternatives to incarceration for non-violent, drug-related crimes.

Further research needs to be conducted to assess the complex consequences of so many adults being involved in the criminal justice system and of the large numbers of ex-offenders returning

to the community from prison. Effective advocacy for alternatives to incarceration for non-violent offenses requires accurate information not only on the need for alternatives, but also on the forms these alternatives might take, and the resources necessary to support them.

Authorization of sentencing alternatives is the first step; however implementation requires allocation of adequate resources. For example, Illinois HB 1961 provides Cook County judges with the authority to sentence women detained in Cook County Jail for certain nonviolent felony offenses to a pilot Residential Treatment and Transition Center rather than state prison. As yet, no funds have been allocated to support the pilot Center. NLEN is planning to work with the police, courts, the Department of Corrections, legislators, community organizations, and funders to build support for a demonstration project in North Lawndale that offers an alternative to incarceration for non-violent offenses.