

Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA)
Comprehensive Opioid, Stimulant, and Substance Abuse Program (COSSAP)

Orleans Reentry Court Program: Persistence, Peers, and Possibilities

Firm in her belief that everyone deserves a chance to succeed, Judge Laurie A. White of the Orleans Parish, Louisiana, Criminal District Court has teamed with seemingly unlikely partners to facilitate life-changing opportunities for incoming inmates to the Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola. Troy Delone, one of those partners, regards the Orleans Reentry Court Program (ORCP) as a place for “broken guys” to gain a new perspective. He has firsthand experience with this transformation, explaining, “I’ve watched the program evolve from its very beginnings, when I was a prisoner at Angola until I was released in 2016.”

Troy was, in fact, one of the first social mentors for the in-jail portion of ORCP. In this role, he built relationships with new inmates, helping them plan for their future. Troy now serves as a reentry case manager with [The First 72+](#), which is a major component of the post-release (probation) portion of ORCP. Therein lies one of the unique features of ORCP: inmates and ex-offenders provide peer support in prison and upon release—a win-win arrangement for mentor and mentee, court and community.

Origin and Operation

ORCP emerged from a desire to equip inmates with vocational, educational, and other skills that could lead to gainful employment, thereby reducing the likelihood of recidivism. Ten years ago, Judge White and Judge

“The Reentry Court Program gave me a second chance at life as far as to redeem myself. I was a drug addict, I was a heroin user, and I had lost myself. I became this monster. I didn’t like my kids, my mother, my family. After joining the program, I’m a father again to my children, a son again to my mother, a big brother, husband, and step-father again. The program gave me a whole new outlook on life. It’s just a unique program, and I’m so grateful that I was selected to be part of it. The support team is awesome. I had a lot of help and a lot of people who didn’t give up on me. Especially the judge. She is an awesome lady, and I love her. God, my wife, and the judge made me who I am today and gave me a way to just live life and be happy. The program is just good, and I will tell anyone that if you want to better yourself and you have to go to jail, join the program. You can be something in life out of jail, because I did, and you are not at the end of the rope.”

—Michael Tillie

Orleans Reentry Court Program participant



Orleans Reentry Court Program Team (left to right): Troy Delone, Case Manager, The First 72+; Judge Laurie A. White, Orleans Parish Criminal District Court; Lindsay Jay Jeffrey, Orleans Reentry Court Project Coordinator; and Chad Sanders, Case Manager, The First 72+.

Arthur Hunter, both of the district court, worked with the Louisiana Department of Public Safety & Corrections (DPS&C) to develop the program; by 2011, Louisiana passed [legislation](#) establishing reentry courts. Now, five parishes (akin to counties in other states) in Louisiana boast reentry courts: Orleans, Jefferson, St. Tammany, East Baton Rouge, and Lafayette.

In-Jail Portion

Defendants with felony charges in the Orleans Parish Criminal District Court who plead guilty to nonviolent crimes, have a sentence of ten years or fewer, and meet other criteria may be eligible for ORCP. Those who are approved for the program are transferred to the Louisiana State Penitentiary for two years. Here, they complete the in-jail portion of the program, which is largely run by prisoners serving life sentences.

During this time, participants must pass the High School Equivalency Test ([HiSET](#)), earn one or more nationally-recognized vocational certifications, and complete more than 100 hours of life skills classes. To help reach these goals, participants are each assigned a vocational mentor and a social mentor. Many of the social mentors, like Troy, are graduates of the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, which has an extension center at the penitentiary. He explains, "What I learned at the seminary while I was in prison, I applied to the guys coming in, to help them navigate the circumstances that led them to Angola."

Probation Portion

Upon completion of the in-jail requirements, participants petition the court to be resentenced. The judge considers their progress; recommendations from in-jail mentors; and the viability of plans for employment, housing, continuing education, transportation, and other forms of support upon

STR Phase 1: Tools

Screening

- ◀ Clinical intake interview
- ◀ Mental health evaluation
- ◀ Medical evaluation

Assessment

- ◀ Texas Christian University Client Evaluation and Self Treatment
- ◀ Texas Christian University Drug Screen V
- ◀ Targeted Intervention to Greater Enhance Reentry

Figure 1

release. Successful petitioners are resentenced to up to five years of active probation under the supervision of the judge, probation officer, reentry court project coordinator, and two reentry case managers from The First 72+. Participation in required monthly “Docket Days” keep the judge abreast of their progress, and weekly meetings with case managers encourage participants to discuss and problem-solve stages of their reentry and recovery process.

The ORCP team collaborates to arrange comprehensive wraparound services based on individualized case management needs, which may include:

- ◀ Securing housing and employment.
- ◀ Reinstating a driver’s license.
- ◀ Resolving other legal issues, such as child support or consumer debt.
- ◀ Obtaining a [Transportation Worker Identification Credential \(TWIC\)](#) card (an important tool for accessing higher paying jobs).
- ◀ Treating mental, physical, and substance use needs.

Introduction of MAT

After ORCP had been established and hundreds of people were sentenced to the Orleans Reentry Court, Judge White recognized that something was still missing. Participants suffering from opioid use disorder were not receiving the necessary services to maintain their recovery and successfully complete the program. To address this, the Orleans Parish Criminal District Court applied for and received an FY2018 Comprehensive Opioid Abuse Program grant. (The program evolved into the Comprehensive Opioid, Stimulant, and Substance Abuse Program, or COSSAP, in 2020.) The ORCP Enhancement Project was launched to reduce participants’ recidivism by introducing enhanced substance abuse treatment, including medication-assisted treatment (MAT) services, and more wraparound case management services into the existing reentry court model.

MAT services are now offered to reentry court participants in both portions of the program.

In-Jail Portion

Upon intake, case managers interview ORCP participants regarding their substance use, and share that information with DPS&C for screening and assessment (see Figure 1). This process occurs within three months of arrival at the penitentiary. It constitutes the first of four phases of the DPS&C’s Opiate Substance Treatment Program (STR), which progresses through prerelease substance abuse treatment (phase 2) and transition planning and MAT (phase 3) to post-release substance abuse treatment (phase 4).

Probation Portion

In preparation for release, participants receive any prescriptions they will need immediately. Within days of release, they meet with case managers to schedule appointments with community service providers who can provide medication (Vivitrol, oral naltrexone, or Suboxone) and associated therapy (e.g., cognitive behavioral therapy, 12-step facilitation therapy). For participants who are unsuccessful in their outpatient MAT maintenance or recovery, “setback” options include withdrawal management, short- or long-term inpatient treatment, and/

or transitional housing in the community; court sanctions; and the [Steve Hoyle Intensive Substance Abuse Program](#).

Lessons Learned and Next Steps

COSSAP funding covers the cost of MAT in the probation portion of ORCP; DPS&C provides MAT for the in-jail portion. This arrangement exemplifies one of the lessons that the ORCP team has learned along the way: leverage resources strategically. Judge White recalls, “We started from scratch. In the beginning, we had little-to-no support, but we persisted and eventually won over the legislature and the community. We accomplished so much with so little, and the COSSAP award gives us the freedom to enhance the program.”

Chad Sanders, reentry case manager at The First 72+, agreed. “Before COSSAP, there was no money for case managers in the community. Now, ORCP has more teeth. We can do more, such as advocate for our participants when they encounter on-the-job issues. We are de-risking the workforce, we are helping people get healthy, we are reducing recidivism.” Dr. Marcus Kondkar, Sociology Professor at Loyola University, expects to confirm notably low recidivism rates with his multiyear evaluation of ORCP, which is supported by the COSSAP grant.

Dr. Kondkar and each member of the ORCP team bring different skill sets and viewpoints to the program, which enables them to maximize the value of participant services. Lindsay Jay Jeffrey, ORCP project coordinator, whose

position is also supported by COSSAP, notes, “Participants can tailor the program to their own needs by tapping the many resources we offer during custody and beyond. And we’re actively planning even more: providing Narcan and training to participants’ families, implementing the [Risk and Needs Triage \(RANT\)](#) tool for more standardized screening, and contracting with a peer support specialist who will work with case managers to provide support to participants with opioid use disorders.”

“Our goal is to provide our participants the resources they need to succeed, to live happy fulfilled lives.” “No one wants to be in and out of prison. We strive to help them help themselves get the life they want, rather than the one they’ve been conditioned to expect.”

—Lindsay Jay Jeffrey
ORCP project coordinator

For more information about the Orleans Reentry Court Program, contact Lindsay Jay Jeffrey at LJeffrey@criminalcourt.org or 504-658-9490.

For more information on COSSAP, including technical assistance opportunities, go to <https://www.cossapresources.org/>.

Visit the COSSAP Resource Center at www.cossapresources.org.

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