

**REDISCOVERING COMPASSION**  
An Evaluation of Kairos Horizon  
Communities in Prison

This project is sponsored by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Community Services, Administration for Children and Families, under grant number 90EW0001/01. All opinions are those of the authors and do not reflect the opinion of the sponsoring agency. All questions should be directed to Principal Investigator Dr. Jeanette Hercik at [jhercik@caliber.com](mailto:jhercik@caliber.com). All publications of this project are available from the Welfare Peer TA Network at <http://peerta.acf.hhs.gov>.

## Background

This project, sponsored by the US Department of Health and Human Services, examines the intersection of two critically important aspects of the current social landscape: the dramatic increase in the number of ex-offenders returning to communities each year, and the efficacy of faith-based and community organizations that serve them.

American prisons at the beginning of the twenty-first century are in crisis. Perhaps the most pervasive problem challenging modern corrections is the ominous nexus of overburdened prison systems and record numbers of prisoners returning to communities each year: Today, exponential increases in incarceration have resulted in more than two million prisoners and well over a half million ex-prisoners reentering communities each year.

As the new millennium advances, the total Federal, State, and local adult correctional population, including those incarcerated and those under supervision in the community—has risen to 6.7 million.<sup>2</sup> As these prisoners complete their sentences or are paroled, the increasing volume of returning prisoners presents challenges for communities including public safety concerns, fiscal implications, and social consequences. Recent studies (Langan and Levin) estimate the average recidivism rate at over two-thirds. Strategies for addressing prisoner reentry are essential for handling this problem, especially as the volume of returning prisoners continues to increase in poor, urban communities.

For centuries, faith-based and community organizations (FBCOs) have woven a common thread of compassion throughout the fabric of American society. Whether motivated by moral beliefs or a sense of civic duty, these organizations have provided, and continue to provide, a wide-range of social services to prisoners, ex-prisoners, and their families. Traditionally, these services have included

the provision of food, shelter, and clothing. Over the years, FBCOs have expanded their social services to include education, employment, and housing assistance. And, even more recently, these services have evolved to embrace counseling, substance abuse treatment, and victim assistance in neighborhoods across the nation. Today, the volunteer-led services provided via FBCOs are vital to increasing public safety and improving the quality of life in communities disproportionately impacted by incarceration.

As the new millennium advances, the President's Faith-Based and Community Initiative builds capacity among FBCOs to empower lives, foster families, and contribute to community wellness. In support of the Initiative, the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), within the Department of Health and Human Services, has remained steadfast in strengthening partnerships between the Federal government and FBCOs. As part of ACF, the Compassion Capital Fund (CCF) was established to increase the scale and effectiveness of FBCOs through research and other supportive means. This project aimed to evaluate the efficacy of one such initiative: The *Horizon* program at Tomoka Prison.

The study addressed the following research questions:

- What are the goals of relevant Federal and State agencies for inmates nearing release and their families?
- How does a faith-based program operate in the prison setting?
- What are the effects of the faith-based program on its participants and their families?

Caliber Associates, Inc. ([www.caliber.com](http://www.caliber.com)), and the Horizon program worked collaboratively to complete the research and publish these findings in a series of issue briefs. This publication serves as the third and final issue brief.

## Program Overview

The Horizon program at Tomoka Prison was begun in 1999. The faith-based residential rehabilitation program for prisoners and their families seeks to address the whole person by offering mental, spiritual, and emotional support. Specifically, the yearlong program has three main goals: including increasing individual accountability, family responsibility, and employability in the community. Among the primary objectives of the program are to create a faith-centered community that provides an atmosphere promoting spiritual enlightenment, inner growth, and respect for oneself and others. These goals and objectives are achieved through a variety of volunteer-led courses including anger management and conflict resolution, family relations and fatherhood, financial management and informal mentoring, and substance abuse prevention and treatment. In addition, program participants attend their choice of religious program activities involving daily devotionals, prayer, and praise and worship.

Inmates are eligible for the program if they are reading at an 8<sup>th</sup> grade level, are not taking medications that induce sleep, meet the security level of the designated housing unit, and have been without a discipline report for three months. Once admitted to the program, inmates agree to participate in all program activities, abide by Horizon rules, and live in segregated housing for one full year. At any one time, 128 inmates reside in program.

## Study Methodology

The aim of the study was to assess the extent to which the Horizon program had a measurable, positive impact on participants and their families. In order to answer the aforementioned research questions, the research team conducted this study in three phases: goals assessment, process evaluation and outcome evaluation.

## Goals Assessment

Preparing for successful reintegration of returning prisoners is a critical priority for Federal, State and local governments and organizations. Because ex-offenders returning to the community can face formidable challenges, their lives may

intersect with government and community-based organizations at various points, including law enforcement, welfare, child support enforcement, housing, substance abuse, job skill development, and family reintegration. The purpose of the goals assessment was to articulate particular metrics (e.g. reduced recidivism, improved employability) various stakeholders might use to gauge the success of a community reintegration program.

The research team identified several stakeholders for participation in the goals assessment. These stakeholders—including Departments of Corrections, Departments of Human Services and faith- and community-based organizations at both the local and national level—were selected based on their history of working with prisoners and ex-prisoners and their commitment to successful reentry. Individual interviewees were identified based on their knowledge of the goals of the identified agencies and organizations.

## Process Evaluation

The process evaluation allowed the research team to measure the extent to which the Horizon program is implemented in accordance with its stated vision, mission and goals. Specifically, the process evaluation answers questions about how the program operates and documents the procedures and activities undertaken in service delivery. Process evaluation assesses the strength of the articulated best practices of the program (e.g. strong interagency collaborative support; holistic programming; credibility of volunteers; focus on family relationships; inclusive faith traditions), making it more useful to practitioners and providers in replication or adapting promising program strategies.

The process evaluation used several data collection methods including program documentation, stakeholder interviews, focus groups and researcher observation. After reviewing over 150 pieces of program literature, the research team used the interviews, focus groups, and observations to improve the richness of the process evaluation findings. Lastly, the research team utilized a case study approach to add even greater detail to the information gathered. The process evaluation included participants from all five classes.

Study Grouping	Research Objective
All program participants classes 1-5	Process evaluation
All program participants classes 4-5	Outcome evaluation: compare program participants to themselves over time (pre-participation through post release)
Participants to general population	Outcome evaluation: compare participants to non-participants
Participants to waiting list sample	Outcome evaluation: compare participants with non-participants wanting to participate (mitigate selection bias)

## Outcome Evaluation

The outcome evaluation examined the effects of the Horizon program on participants and their families. Program participants are compared to themselves over time and to two other groups: a matched sample of inmates drawn from the general population *and* a sample of inmates on the waiting list for the program who did not subsequently participate. Further, the study examines both in-prison effects (e.g. reduced infractions) and post-release effects (e.g. improved self-sufficiency).

In order to allow for the most reliable research findings, study samples were constructed with consideration to program eligibility, data availability and methodological rigor. The Horizon program classes last one year and begin every six months, but participants shift because of release date, transfer, dropout, and expulsion. The research design controlled for the transient nature of program participation. Further, there is a potential selection bias inherent in the nature of all voluntary programs, and thus, to address this concern, the research team used a waiting list sample as a comparison group.

## Study Findings

The study of the Horizon prison program provided valuable insight into the objectives, operations, and outcomes of the program. Key findings are highlighted in the box to the right. Additional findings are presented below.

## Goals Assessment Findings

While the research team anticipated seeing high variability in the goals of the various stakeholders, two goals were

consistent throughout the research: self-sufficiency for ex-offenders and their families and decreased recidivism rates. Respondents agreed that improved employability and community connectedness were the foundations for these important objectives. Respondents lauded the Horizon program for taking a holistic approach to the challenges facing prisoners returning to their communities.

- The Horizon program participation promotes a safer correctional environment, particularly during and immediately following program participation.
- Horizon program participants had significantly lower rates of discipline reports and segregation stays—compared to both the matched and waiting list comparison samples.
- Horizon program participation appears to promote public safety—less than one-third (32.7%) of participants were rearrested during the follow-up period and program participants had fewer total charges across all arrests.
- Among Horizon program participants less than a fifth (19.2%) were rearrested during the first six months after release and less than a third (30.4 %) were rearrested in the first year following release.
- Horizon program participation generally delayed the onset of rearrest—participants had significantly longer periods of time to first rearrest compared to the matched comparison sample (3.5 months and 1.4 months, respectively).
- Horizon program participation potentially improves outcomes for children and families—program graduates are more likely to fulfill their child support obligations.

## Process Evaluation Findings

The process evaluation captured findings on several measures related to the operations at the Tomoka Correctional Institution.

The Department of Corrections offered strong support for program establishment. Prison administrators were interested in the program's promise for increasing prison safety and reducing recidivism, particularly at minimal cost. Prison officials saw the advantage of segregating a relatively low-risk, self-accountable population, thereby freeing up correctional officer time and labor to focus on higher-risk segments of the prison population. While some correctional officers were initially skeptical of allowing inmates to have roles of authority over others, and questioned if inmates were potentially taking advantage of the program to get an "easier time," most officers have witnessed positive program outcomes and have confidence in the program.

When the program first started, I didn't think it would work. I didn't have any expectations. But, I was wrong. It definitely did work. I didn't think it would do anything on any of the [targeted] dimensions. Initially, [support among correctional officers] was more mixed and skeptical, but now that they've seen how easy it is to work and to staff, the officers are growing to support it and like it.

Correctional officers reported that the Horizon dorm didn't have the same problems as their other dorms, such as fighting, substance abuse, sexual behavior, and a general disrespect for prison staff. Staff found that the Horizon dorm is easier to work because the inmates are policing themselves as peers. This self-management results in less paperwork and less need for correctional officer involvement in the dorm. In the words of one correctional officer, "having seen the difference compared to the other dorm, this dorm is the smoothest I've seen since I've been in corrections."

The Horizon program has enjoyed a high demand since its first class began. The opportunity to participate in a program that enjoyed more programming, lower security, and increased contact with the outside world appealed strongly to inmates. Participants also noted that all activities are done

as a dorm, enhancing the sense of community and personal accountability. As one Encourager (peer mentor) stated, "We hold ourselves to a higher standard." The Encouragers also discussed reasons for participants leaving the program including a zero tolerance policy for violence, drugs, and sex acts. Also mentioned was an inability to "get real" about the program or face the problems that brought them to Tomoka in the first place. There is no tolerance for "faking it." Staff and participants alike observe that it is not the various programs that make the Horizon program work, but the local volunteers who run those programs.

One of the main goals of the Horizon program is to increase family responsibility. The program therefore has a number of activities that are focused specifically on strengthening family relationships. Many program staff noted that these activities helped to re-establish contact with family members—whom some inmates have not spoken in years. Specific family-oriented activities include:

- Family Reading Ties — an 8-week module that addresses fatherhood issues through a structured course and concluding activity: reading a children's book on tape to be sent home with the book itself.
- Family Relations — a 12-month activity that involves strengthening family bonds through weekly letter writing to children and families. The Salvation Army helps track down family members with whom the inmates have lost contact. However, letters are written even if there is no place to send them or they are returned. A Family Day is held for each class to visit with their family members and introduce them to Horizon volunteers. Many meaningful reunification experiences are reported over the course of the year, and especially on Family Day.
- *Kairos Outside* is recommended to female family members. This is a program for women impacted by incarceration, and has been an important part of family strengthening among Horizon participants.

Prison staff noted the importance of strengthened family ties as a key factor in keeping inmates out of trouble once released from prison.

In addition to these family-oriented programs, the Horizon program also provides programming that targets other aspects of in-prison and outside life. All programs are facilitated by outside volunteers. A sample of the types of programs offered is presented here. Encouragers described these as the “pain programs” that weed out “fakers” because they require introspection, grieving, forgiveness, recognition for error, taking responsibility, and a commitment to reconciliation.

- Quest – a 7-month module that focuses on improving anger management, conflict resolution, and relationship building skills.
- Making Peace with Your Past – a 12-week course designed to help recognize compulsive behavior, forgiveness, and finding release from shame.
- The Way Home – Focused primarily on substance abuse, the tenets of this program can be applied to any addiction. The program is volunteer-led and based on a 12-step concept.

The Case Study findings illustrate high satisfaction with the overall program (8.11 out of 10) Godparents (outside volunteer mentors), and various curricular modules. Case study participants also discussed the value of less tangible benefits including how they changed personally and spiritually as a result of the program. Participants noted the challenges of completing the program, including learning to get along with other inmates, and grappling with personal issues. “You have to learn to look down deep and see things you have to release,” said one. “Kairos helped me come out of a lot of denial and change my way of thinking.” When asked about

the post-prison impacts of the Horizon program, participants assigned the following scores on the scale 1 (changed for the worse) to 10 (changed for the better): see table below.

The process evaluation found a strong connection between the Horizon program’s stated goals and their daily operations. Staff and other stakeholders observed improved attitudes, increased self-esteem and self-worth, and an increased commitment to reach out to family members among program participants. The participants are less prone to violence, substance abuse, sexual behavior, and theft. Perhaps the most compelling in-prison outcome is that the program participants, both during and after the program, have become “identifiable.” Qualities of respect, positive attitudes, and positive behaviors are recognized by prison staff as associated with the Horizon program. Often, graduates not nearing release—while posing an evaluation challenge—are important to creating a positive in-prison environment as they volunteer as mentors and improve the overall quality of the prison community.

### Outcome Evaluation Findings

The outcome evaluation focuses on the program’s impact on its participants (causality). Did the program have its intended effects? If so, who was helped and what activities or characteristics of the program created the outcome? Did the program have any unintended consequences, positive or negative? In answering these questions, analyses were conducted to assess the effect of the Horizon program on in-prison and post-release measures. First, descriptive analysis indicated the behavior of all study sample members before treatment, during incarceration, and after release.

Factor	Score	Comments
Level of satisfaction of supervisor at work assignment	7.52	Respondents “cared more about” what they were doing and “learned to be more patient”
Level of participation in prison-sponsored activities	6.44	Many described funding cuts resulting in less programming.
Interaction with corrections officers	7.29	“I don’t see them as the enemy anymore.”
Interaction with other inmates	7.77	Increased tolerance, heightened care, and increased levels of trust.
Interactions with family members	7.37	Better communication, forgiveness, and/or reconciliation

These “within-sample” changes were measured by comparing baseline measures of discipline reports, segregation stays, and job assignments to follow-up measures collected after participation. Next, comparisons were made between the treatment and the two comparison samples at each in-prison data collection point and after a post-release follow-up period. These result in “across sample” changes.

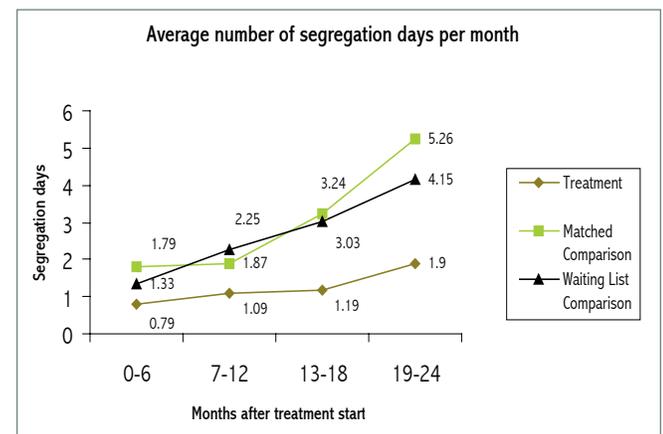
### In-prison Outcomes

In-prison outcomes include discipline reports and segregation stays. Within sample, Horizon participants had **significantly lower rates of discipline reports** and experienced reductions in the number of discipline reports each month during the follow-up period than would have been expected without the program. Baseline information on discipline reports was collected at 7-12 months prior to program start to avoid any bias associated with program eligibility requirements. Across sample, participants also experienced **significant reductions in the incidence and frequency of discipline reports compared to matched and waiting list samples**. These results indicate that the Horizon program does have a positive impact on prison safety—reducing the incidence and frequency of discipline reports.

Horizon Impact on Segregation Days	
Time after treatment	Segregation days/month
Baseline	1.2 days
0-6 months	.57 days
7-12 months	.98 days
13-18 months	1.00 days

Within sample, Horizon program participants had **significantly lower rates of segregation stays**, particularly during and immediately following program participation. This effect was most powerful in months 0-6 after program start with a modest (2-5%) reduction in incidence beyond month 6 after program start. A negative exit reason and spending fewer than three months in treatment consistently predicted a higher incidence of segregation stays compared to other treatment and background covariates. This effect was most evident during and immediately following the expected

program period (12 months). Across sample, Horizon program participants **had significantly fewer segregation stays** (approximately 15% less than comparison group segregation stays) compared to both comparison samples in all periods except 19-24 months, most likely due to the low number of sample members available for observation at that time. Over time, the power of this effect diminishes, as participants return to the general population. This finding argues for focusing the program on those who will reach release within 18 months of program finish, or 30 months of program start. In addition, this finding appears to indicate the need for an aftercare model of services, either at time of release or upon return to the general prison population.



### Post-release Outcomes

The primary post-release outcomes reviewed in the study were rearrest and fulfillment of child support obligations. Rearrest maps directly with one stated goal of most of the stakeholders and child support payment serves as a corollary measure for family connections. Less than one-third of Horizon program participants were rearrested during the follow-up period. Notably, while similar proportions of participants and comparison sample members were rearrested, Horizon **program participation appears to delay the onset of rearrest**. The average length of time to rearrest for program participants was 6.7 months after release, compared to 1.6 months for matched sample members and 4.3 months for waiting list sample members.

Measure	Treatment (N = 42)		Matched Comparison (N = 33)		Waiting List Comparison (N = 92)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Rearrested						
Yes	8	19.0%	5	15.2%	18	19.6%
No	34	81.0%	28	84.8%	74	80.4%
Rearrest type*						
Violent	0	0.0%	1	20.0%	1	5.6%
Property	3	37.5%	2	40.0%	3	16.7%
Drug	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	6	33.3%
Other	7	87.5%	4	80.0%	12	66.7%
For those rearrested:						
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Number of rearrests	1.375	0.744	1.800	0.837	1.333	0.594
Months to first rearrest	3.503	3.907	1.393	0.973	3.198	3.205
Average number of charges per arrest	1.292	0.452	1.167	0.236	1.972	1.529
Total number of charges across all arrests	1.875	1.356	2.200	1.304	2.556	2.007

About 40 percent of released Horizon participants had an open child support case during the study period. Those with open cases were obliged to support between 2.5 children (no accrual during study period) to 3.3 children (accrual during study period), on average. Horizon program participants with a positive program exit reason (i.e. graduated, released) paid a **significantly greater portion of their total and current child support charges**. Program participants paid 41% of total child support obligations, compared to 32% for the matched comparison sample and less than 1% for the waiting list comparison sample.

## Conclusions

This evaluation concludes that the Horizon Communities in Prison program is a promising intervention to improve prison and public safety outcomes. The purpose-driven Horizon program model is being implemented as specified, and program operations do not differ from those initially planned. Increased in-prison productivity, employability, and family relations were supported through the process evaluation.

Results of the outcome evaluation lends preliminary evidence in support of the goals of reduced, or delayed, recidivism and family connectedness. Thus, the Horizon program is **effective at enhancing in-prison safety and promising for promoting public safety**. Future research should continue to address the impact of faith-based programming, and a longer period of follow-up is critical to examine the impact of the program on individual and family self-sufficiency.

The lessons learned as part of the Horizon program evaluation are of great value to many constituencies. The volunteer-led services provided via FBCOs are vitally important to the success of the Horizon program. However, ongoing support to these prisoners in the community—in-prison or “outside”—appears to be critical to re-entry success. State and local administrators, corrections, human services, child support, job training, and community development personnel can all glean useful information from this study. Stakeholders interested in designing, implementing, expanding, or evaluating a faith-based program may find these publications useful in supporting or expanding their missions.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Hughes and Wilson

<sup>2</sup> Glaze, 2003

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