
OAR Offender Aid & Restoration of Tompkins County, Inc.
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Review & Update**

About OAR

Offender Aid and Restoration is an independent non-profit agency that welcomes community involvement and support. We advocate for the rights and welfare of incarcerated community members and their families in Tompkins County.

OAR began its mission in 1976 as a volunteer organization run by a small and dedicated group of Tompkins County residents concerned with local incarceration issues. The agency initially functioned as a visitation service for prisoners in county jail, striving to mitigate the negative effects of institutionalization through simple humane acts. OAR now operates with a core staff of four paid employees and a number of volunteers and interns. Our mandate has expanded from jail visitation to include a range of support and advocacy services for former and current prisoners, as well as for their families and friends.

OAR's present services include: arranging interest-free bail loans for qualifying pre-trial detainees; facilitating inmate contact with their families, significant others, employers, schools, etc.; increasing clients' awareness of and access to appropriate community services and criminal justice resources; providing a community presence at Tompkins County Jail to promote humane and legally required treatment of incarcerated persons; providing Tompkins county jail inmates with assistance problem-solving and therapeutic dialogue to mitigate the stress, isolation, and depression associated with incarceration.

Reentry Programming, 2006

In 2005, jail and prison populations increased throughout the nation. Our community was no exception. Additional pressures on the administration of the Tompkins County Jail include New York State's decision to withdraw variances allowing the jail to house up to 103 people. Such housing limitations require the jail to "board out," or house inmates at facilities in surrounding counties at a cost of \$85 per day per person. In 2005, this cost Tompkins County taxpayers nearly \$360,000. In the first quarter of 2006, the county has already spent \$214,000 on "boarding out." Like elsewhere in the country, our jail population exhibits rates of mental illness and substance abuse, homelessness, unemployment and poverty

that dramatically exceed rates found among the general population of Tompkins County.

On a national level, well-structured reentry programming has been demonstrated to promote public safety and to diminish recidivism, as measured in re-offense. To provide incarcerated community members with every opportunity to enjoy meaningful and productive lives, OAR is channeling its energies and resources into the creation of evidence-based forms of reentry assistance. In conjunction with the Tompkins County Department of Social Services, the Sheriff's Department, and the Department of Probation, OAR will initiate a Reentry Pilot Project at the Tompkins County Jail from July-September, 2006. During this period, DSS staff will maintain a daily presence at the jail conduct comprehensive intake screens with every person entering the jail. OAR staff will then assist each client who wants to devise an individualized discharge plan that highlights both their strengths (i.e., family connections) and the community resources they plan to access – from mental health counseling to family mediation and educational opportunities. OAR staff will provide each client post-release case management support services, including referrals to a network of county agencies and service providers equipped to meet this population's needs.

Drop-in Re-entry Center

As of September, 2006, OAR's offices at 518 W. Seneca Street host a Drop-in Re-entry Center replete with internet access, message board, free local phone line, magazines, books, and newspapers. Clients will be able to use the center to make appointments, stay in touch with family, conduct job and housing searches, get referrals to other human services agencies, and stay up to date on current events. Staff will be available to assist clients with implementing their plans for transition and to help with follow up case management. The center will offer hot coffee and a safe space to ensure clients without jobs or homes have sanctuary from the streets and a place they're welcome. Because of staff flux, the Drop-in Center was closed from 2004 through 2005.

OAR Clients

In 2005 over 1,056 inmates served time at the Tompkins County Jail. 896 of these people were men, 160 women. OAR serves an ethnically and educationally diverse population. A minority of our clients are youth and women. The majority of our clients are white, rural, and economically disadvantaged. Many of our clients at the Tompkins County Jail are pretrial detainees. They have neither been convicted of a crime nor sentenced, but remain in jail because they lack the means to post bail. Others are incarcerated due to parole or probation violations. All clients sentenced to the jail are, in general, incarcerated for less than one year. Inmates with felony sentences typically sentenced to a state corrections facility.

OAR as Liaison

OAR acts as a liaison between our clients and other entities within the community that can provide them with support. These include organizations that provide legal, social, mental health, substance abuse and recovery, general health care, religious, housing, employment, and educational services. This kind of network makes it possible for our clients to maintain family and community ties and to access resources and support which allow them to more successfully complete their sentences and transition back into the community without negative outcome.

OAR maintains a direct line for receiving phone calls from clients in jail, which allows staff to relay messages to their lawyers, employers, landlords, and family members. OAR provides clients' with free writing supplies and reading materials, as well as assistance with banking and tax preparation, or monitoring their children's health and progress in school. OAR also helps clients navigate the grievance procedure at the jail and potential legal action surrounding their individual cases and/or family and custody issues.

OAR Direct Services Program

By maintaining an almost daily presence at the jail, OAR helps clients to navigate services within the jail, maintain their households and relationships while incarcerated, and plan for life upon release. In 2005 OAR staff began a new intake process. Staff conducted 249 intake interviews with newly incarcerated clients. 72 of these clients were youthful offenders. These interviews allowed OAR staff to help clients assess their individual needs and learn about services available inside and outside the jail. In 2005, OAR staff visited clients at the jail 580 times. Inmate requests and their follow-up activities yielded 10,473 services provided to clients. In 2005, staff enrolled 563 clients for the legal services of Assigned Counsel. OAR also provided over 100 clients with assistance in submitting Medicaid applications.

OAR Bail Funds Program

The Bail Funds Program addresses the economic stratification in our community by providing interest-free bail loans of up to \$1,500 to rigorously screened Tompkins County residents, who lack the means to post bail. Applications for bail may be denied if the prospective bailee has: 1) been issued warrants or detainers; 2) violated parole, probation, or orders of protection; and, 3) been determined to be a flight risk. The Bail Fund Program Coordinator cannot review specifics of the internal review process with the client. Bailees must maintain weekly contact with OAR pending resolution of their cases and are encouraged to use our services while they go through the court process.

Bail loans are made from private monies donated or loaned to the agency by community members explicitly for this purpose. A large number of OAR bailees are acquitted, have their charges dismissed, or are given non-jail

sentences. Without bail assistance, these individuals would have spent unnecessary time in jail at considerable taxpayer expense.

In 2005 OAR provided 40 interest-free bail loans to clients who did not have the economic means to provide their own bail. 12 of these clients were youths. Only one bailee forfeited a loan. The Bail Fund Program saved both our clients and the county 3,886 incarceration days. This translates into a real economic benefit for Tompkins County, which would have paid \$330,000 to house these individuals at the jail.

Volunteer Program

In 2005 OAR's volunteer program was reassessed in response to the impact of "boarding out" inmates to surrounding counties. The result is a new service model that is expected to be a critical component of OAR's transition services. The model focuses on community mentoring, one on one visitation, and (potentially) educational programs. In 2005 volunteers from the Friends Meeting continued to provide rides to the jail for visitors. Volunteers also provided gift bags for 75 incarcerated clients last holiday season. OAR's volunteers help incarcerated clients to establish and maintain ties to community, mitigating the anxiety, boredom, and isolation that incarceration breeds and giving clients the skills to succeed after release.

Rides for Family & Friends

Through the generosity of members of the Ithaca Friends' Meeting, OAR continues to facilitate rides to the Tompkins County Jail for family and friends.

Budgets and Funders

Our 2005 expenses were 82% for personnel and 18% non-personnel. Our revenues totaled \$170,956 and were comprised as follows: 76% Tompkins County, 16% United Way Fund, 7% donations/fundraising/rollover. We are currently attempting to diversify funding by applying to national foundations that support jail and prison reentry initiatives.