



## Preparing to Return Home: Tribal and State Reentry Collaborations Webinar Q & A

**Moderator:** Tammy Woodhams (National Criminal Justice Association)

**Presenters:**

Kimberly Cobb (Program Director, American Probation and Parole Association)

Peter Ortego (General Counsel, Ute Mountain Ute Tribe)

John Walsh (United States Attorney, District of Colorado)

Ed Ligtenberg (Director of Parole, South Dakota Department of Corrections)

Bradley Lewandowski (North East Supervisor, Parole Field Services, South Dakota Department of Corrections)

Joan White (Director, Sex Offender Registry, Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate)

1. Have you incorporated the healing ceremony for when people are welcomed back into the community? Maybe, as a way of welcoming them back in a good way?

**Joan White:** *We actually have not done that. That was one of the recent suggestions from one of our wellness team members; not necessarily hosting a healing, but something along the lines of a lunch welcoming them back into our community as a more positive event for them.*

2. What types of circumstances would lead the tribe to not accept the referral. Has that ever been an issue?

**Joan White:** *No, it has not. We pretty much, at this point, accepted everybody that has asked to return.*

**Brad Lewandowski:** *No. I think early on at one of the meetings we had, that was brought up and the group decided that they were going to extend this opportunity to everybody that wants to return because they did not think it was fair to pick and choose. So, to date, everybody who has come back has been part of it.*

3. Does that mean the Wellness Team works with all the individuals that come there?

**Joan White:** *The Wellness Team does not meet with all of the parolees—they primary address violations or specific referrals. . If the parolees are doing well and complying with their conditions of release, the Wellness Team may never meet with them.*



## ***State and Tribal Collaboration Project***

**Brad Lewandowski:** *We do. This program is in the beginning stages. If a parolee wants to address the Wellness Team for whatever reason they let the agent know and they will set that up. The team is always available to whoever needs them. The agent will sign them up and start supervision. They will get into their programming that is already set up for them and if there is not a problem, they generally don't go in front of the team. But they can, and family members can.*

4. Do you involve the victims of the crime, in that planning? Or give them notifications? What about those who have housing restrictions?

**Brad Lewandowski:** *There is a victim notification process in place through the Department of Corrections, so those victims who want to know when someone is released is notified by them. .*

*Generally, some of that is sorted by the agent in the field initially when they are doing the release planning investigation. To-date we have not had an issue where it rose to the point where it would have to go in front of the committee to look at alternatives to the place that they wanted.*

5. Has the program increased eligibility for parole for tribal members? Do you know if that's the case, given that the state has a priority to reducing the population or rerouting people out of the prison system? Do you know if it is having an impact on the number of people who would be paroled?

**Brad Lewandowski:** *I do not know what the exact numbers are. With this program in place, inmates have a much better chance of setting up a reentry plan that is approvable. I think in that sense, it is going to be helpful and impact the number of people who are paroled. In time's past when a State Agent would check out a release plan, if it was coming back to a residence that was not suitable - whether there's drug activity, alcohol activity or something else going on—the tribal member would have to look at an alternative placement, say in Sioux Falls, a bigger city, or maybe a halfway house. Or he would have to start out in a community transition program. We are getting a lot of emails from case managers that are hearing about the program who have inmates that are asking to be involved so they can return to tribal areas.* 6. Is there a way to collaborate with Healing to Wellness Courts?

**Peter Ortego:** *Over here at Ute Mountain, we do not have a Wellness Court but we have been looking into a Drug Court or Wellness Court. I think that a wellness court could be extremely helpful in addressing some of these problems, particularly if there is a new offense.*

**Kimberly Cobb:** *There are a lot of rural jurisdictions that are looking into using either a Drug Court or a Wellness Court as a re-entry service provider as well. I think this provides a valuable service so it serves clients from the front end as well as the back end of the system. I think the one cautionary thing is to really manage your eligibility criteria. A lot of Drug Courts have some pretty strict criteria on who can be involved in the program. The other thing would be, you would have to manage it feeling like a double prosecution as far as with the judicial involvement. I think it is a great way to manage, as Peter said, maybe those re-offences that would typically send someone back to the institution. That revolving door that could be managed through the Healing to Wellness Court process as a graduated response would be a great use of that kind of program, but I think there would have to be some nuances that would have to be dealt with for a re-entry purpose.*



## ***State and Tribal Collaboration Project***

6. You had mentioned a little bit about data sharing and the South Dakota pilot project. What are some of the unique challenges that are present in the Tribal Community as it relates to data sharing for a person transitioning out of the justice system especially as it relates to accessing health care?

**Brad Lewandowski:** *We are not currently involved in a data sharing project , but are preparing to get involved. We are anticipating that we are going to need releases from individuals in order to get their health care information. Our understanding is that even IHS has difficulty getting health care information so that in particular, will be highly problematic as far as sharing information.*

**Peter Ortego:** *For example the Federal Bureau of Prisons is often not all that good, in fact, can be very bad about getting the returning prisoners records back to the Tribe. And that is something that can be undertaken in our office to see if we can make some progress.. I'm sure that is replicated in some state systems as well.*

7. I am assuming when you are coming back to the South Dakota pilot project and you have done your planning, connections have already been made pertaining to the issues of medication and/or mental health?

**Brad Lewandowski:** *Typically, those connections are made pre-release. Our institutional staff will set up appointments ahead of time (both for Mental Health and CD programming). So, the agent really does not have to do the footwork on that. Once the inmate comes out, they know what day and what time to show up for their intake. Also, a tribal parole agent, like Joan said, is connected to our database and the DOC database so they have all the same information that any state agent has.*

8. What tribal programs and departments have you worked with in Indian Country that have traditionally taken the lead in coordinating key elements of re-entry?

**Kimberly Cobb:** *Yeah, I would point you to that Muskogee Creek Nation Reintegration Program. That is a full-fledged on its own program that I believe initially started with grant funding but now receives a considerable amount of support from within the Tribal budget itself. They have a full-blown re-entry program where they enter a whole multitude of services for people re-entering their community. They also provide programs and housing within the prison system that Tribal Members participate in. Carrie Wyatt, one of the Program Managers, goes in and does some cognitive behavior programs. A couple of tribal members that are involved in their re-entry program actually go into the facilities and work with the release folks to develop a re-entry plan, provide programming inside the facility and then also manage supervision and service provision once they are released from the facility. They work closely with state and Federal Probation and Parole, while they do that. So I would point you to that program.*

9. How often is the faith community engaged or leading a re-entry initiative?

**Kimberly Cobb:** *I think it really depends on the community, and kind of how they involve their services. It is also based on what the individual needs are for the people coming out so the thing about re-entry is that it has to be*



*very individualized. I know somebody had asked a question about the welcoming home ceremonies or the reunification ceremonies. I know the Muskogee Creek tribe offered that but again, that is kind of based on if the individual wants that. Some prefer not to have that kind of ceremony or welcoming back, others do. So, I think you really have to look at the individuals you are serving and what their wishes are. Try to hook them up with whatever kind of service they would like.*

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