

Opening Avenues for Reentry Success (OARS)

The OARS Program is managed by the Wisconsin Department of Corrections' Reentry Unit in partnership with the Department of Health Services. It was developed to enhance public safety by supporting the community transition, recovery, and self-sufficiency of offenders with mental health needs. The OARS Program is available in 37 Wisconsin counties, and served 261 participants in FY2016. The program's Average Daily Population (ADP) was 149 participants this fiscal year, (50% increase over the ADP for FY2015).

Program Overview

Eligible inmates at any Division of Adult Institution (DAI) facility can be referred to the Department of Health Services (DHS) OARS specialists for consideration six to nine months prior to release from prison. DHS OARS specialists will conduct interviews and enroll participants based on the program capacity.

Once enrolled, contracted community case managers work with the inmate, facility staff, and the agent to develop an individualized case plan and prepare for community transition. After release, the OARS program provides participants assistance with obtaining and maintaining safe and affordable housing. Case managers work closely with community providers to develop access to quality psychiatric care and medications. The OARS team also works toward healthy and meaningful structured activities, including educational programs and employment.

Intensive supervision begins immediately after release. Medication compliance, sobriety, and participation in scheduled treatment and therapy are closely monitored. As offenders begin to acclimate to community life, supervision begins to taper. The focus of case manager involvement changes to sustainable community resources and participant independence. The OARS team evaluates and determines when the goals of the program have been met and the participant is ready to discharge from the OARS program.

Community Case Managers

DHS contracted OARS case managers work with the participants and core team members in the pre-release and post-release phase. They develop rapport, conduct assessments, and identify risk services, and update the core team.

DAI Social Workers

Social workers coordinate participant involvement in institution treatment and activities and participate in core team meetings and staffings. They further prepare participants for release. Social workers communicate participant behavioral and health updates to the team.

Division of Community Corrections (DCC) Agents

DCC Agents provide community supervision and participate in plan development. They help identify risk factors, treatment needs, and communicate supervision concerns to the team.

DHS OARS Program Specialists

DHS OARS program specialists facilitate program involvement. They act as liaisons, consultants, and resources to the OARS teams and to the Department of Corrections (DOC) reentry unit. The program specialists oversee program operations and administer the program contract with case management providers.

OARS Participant Eligibility

Inmates releasing from Wisconsin state correctional institutions who meet the following criteria:

- Rated moderate to high on the COMPAS (actuarial tool) risk level recommendation
- Diagnosed with a serious and persistent mental illness code Mental Health (MH) Code 2 (with priority consideration for MH-2A classifications)
- Six months post-release supervision remaining with the Division of Community Corrections (DCC)
- Releasing to the OARS program coverage territory
- Offenders must volunteer for the program and demonstrate a general motivation to engage in programming, as evidenced by their involvement in pre-release activities and cooperation with institution treatment recommendations.

Moreover, the referring institution staff should ensure potential participants have no pending interstate compacts, significant jail time to serve following release, pending criminal charges with bail, or other legal status commitments.