Introduction

The last year for the Nebraska Department of Correctional Services (NDCS) has been filled with opportunities – to change, grow and transform the agency. Although our day-to-day work is focused on incarcerated people, our primary customers are the taxpayers of Nebraska. Our values guide us in carrying out our mission, and achieving our vision to create safe prisons, transformed lives, and safe communities. When our prisons are safe, secure, and healthy places to live, the people we incarcerate have opportunities to change. Using evidence-based approaches we can focus our resources on those most likely to reoffend, and we can provide interventions proven to reduce the risk to reoffend. With this transformation, people leaving the prison system are better prepared to establish themselves as productive members of the community. This means less crime, fewer victims, and safer communities. NDCS is committed to meeting the needs and expectations of our customers, and to helping Grow Nebraska.

Our 2015 – 2018 NDCS Strategic Plan serves as a framework for decisions and provides a basis for more detailed planning. The strategic plan explains the work of NDCS to stakeholders in an effort to inform, motivate and involve them in our mission. This document identifies the work that has been done over the last year since the initial strategic plan was developed.

The strategic plan’s five leading goals: One Team – One Vision; Transforming Corrections; Transparent & Accountable; Collaborative Community Relationships and Culture of Reentry & Rehabilitation serve as the framework for the work we will highlight in this progress report.
One Team

Staff Safety:
When NDCS team members are asked what they do for a living, the answer is easy, “Keep people safe.” Keep people safe begins in our institutions. Our goal is to have zero staff assaults. We have initiated numerous strategies to meet this objective. Following an incident, we conduct critical assessments, incident reviews and investigations and then develop corrective action plans to ensure follow up. Comprehensive security assessments of all 10 NDCS facilities were conducted and completed in June. We then developed action plans developed to address deficiencies. A 28-item action plan developed to stop staff assaults included specialized training options, approval and purchase of security equipment and establishing more robust methods for communicating with team members throughout the agency. The Intel Network Team we developed earlier in the year has been deployed on multiple occasions to investigate incidents and continues to gain intelligence allowing us to proactively implement measures to keep team members safe. Safe prisons provide an environment where we can work to transform lives and ensure safe communities.

Staff Culture Survey:
A staff culture survey was completed in 2016 using quantitative and qualitative research methods based on interviews with more than 400 team members. The survey verified staff’s greatest concerns: safety, engagement, compensation, training and communication. Actions taken so far include beginning the collective bargaining process early, conducting staff resiliency training, utilizing retention funds to stem staff turnover and initiating staff safety improvements. These and other efforts increase staff engagement and ultimately address many of the issues identified in the survey. Report available: Staff Culture Survey.

Staffing Analysis:
The completion of a custody staffing model and analysis was a 10-month project that began with team members receiving training from the National Institute of Corrections. We created a standard model for staffing based on security classification level and then analyzed the 10 facilities to determine the ‘Custody Post Audit’ for each. This resulted in an identified need for 138 protective services full time equivalents (FTE) positions, the request for which is spread over three years to allow for hiring, training and implementation. The project was completed using existing resources, and with no additional cost to the agency. The custody staffing model will serve the agency for many years ahead, providing established criteria for facility staffing needs.

Retention Funds:
NDCS was appropriated $1.5 million in one-time funds to increase the retention of quality staff. The funds are being used in a variety of ways to engage our team members and keep them on the NDCS team. Team members can earn professional development bonuses after completing online courses related to our work. Resiliency training was launched with almost 600 team members attending the 8-hour training; team members have been identified to become certified trainers to educate the remaining staff. Staff wellness centers are being developed in Lincoln and Tecumseh. Blue Courage training will be launched by May 2017. In the spring of 2017, the behavioral health team members will host an educational conference focused on education and professional growth. Report available: Quarterly Report on the Use of Retention Funds.

Recruiting:
NDCS continues to recruit new team members from a wide variety of venues. Our agency recruiter, along with agency subject matter experts, represents NDCS at career fairs, college campuses, and community events. Applicants can now submit job interest cards or apply on site with the recruiter. We are advertising on radio, billboard, social media throughout the state and midwest region. Agency team members continue to be our best source of new recruits.

Left: A TSCI staff member recruiting at his alma mater, Wayne State College.
Below: Staff representing the Work Ethic Camp in a community parade.
Transforming

Restrictive Housing:
The use of restrictive housing is a national topic of discussion. In Nebraska, it is used in two ways: 1) short-term risk assessment (Immediate Segregation) provides time to assess the risk the individual poses to safety and security and 2) longer-term risk/needs intervention (Longer-Term Restrictive Housing) focuses on individual goal planning, behavior change and treatment that will facilitate the individual’s capacity to live successfully in general population and transition to the community. One way NDCS keeps people safe is by changing behavior. To facilitate behavior change, we are implementing programming for individuals in restrictive housing to encourage personal growth and develop values and responsibility, interpersonal skills, refusal skills, decision making ability and goal setting. These programming activities can be done individually in-cell or in small groups with a facilitator. These changes keep team members and inmates safe inside the facility and ultimately keep families safe in the community.

Security programming chairs allow high-risk inmates to engage in risk-reducing interventions in a group setting.

Corrections

Mission-Specific Housing:
Mission Specific Housing focuses on individual needs and demographics to provide programming for specific populations. It provides a unique opportunity to improve safety by setting expectations for behavior that are enforced by the culture of the unit. Housing people by custody level, demographics, common interests, treatment needs and behavior is an effective method of increasing prison safety. Existing Mission Specific Housing units include active senior units, protective management, residential sex offender treatment, residential substance use treatment, ADA accessible units and an in-patient mental health treatment unit. NDCS will be implementing a Veterans’ Unit and a Faith-Based Unit. Positive peer interaction is beneficial to the safety and security of our institutions and provides an excellent avenue to transform lives and better prepare individuals for success while in prison and upon release.

Justice Reinvestment Initiative:
The Justice Reinvestment Initiative (JRI) is a national project operated by the Council of State Governments (CSG) and funded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance. Nebraska began the JRI process in 2013. Recent legislation, LB 605, adjusted the penalties for lower level felonies to provide fixed terms of incarceration followed by mandatory post-release supervision in the community and created a presumption of probation for the lowest felony class. NDCS implemented a risk/needs assessment tool, made policy changes to reduce the number of mandatory discharges from prison and made changes to the assessment processes to identify inmate’s behavioral health and programming needs sooner. CSG has projected the Justice Reinvestment process in Nebraska to reduce the prison population by approximately 1,000 beds by 2020.

Data-Guided Approaches:
Data-informed performance measurements allow NDCS to regularly monitor whether our initiatives and operations are functioning well. When performance metrics indicate desired outcomes are being achieved, individuals receive the appropriate level of care, staff safety is enhanced, and NDCS can show taxpayer dollars are working towards public safety and rehabilitation. When data indicates NDCS is not progressing toward its goals, NDCS can identify specific areas of concern and make course corrections. The practice of utilizing data and measurements ensures we are constantly aware of the environment in which NDCS team members and inmates work and live, and maximizes our ability to keep people safe.
Agency Budget Submission:
NDCS’ commitment to keep team members and inmates safe was reflected in our fiscal year (FY) 2017-2019 Biennium Budget Request. The biennium budget’s request for 48 custody staff in FY 2018, an additional 48 custody staff in FY 2019 and another 39 custody staff in FY 2020 demonstrates our commitment to keep people safe. Additional requests totaling 37.5 staff in FY 2018 which increased to 69.5 in FY 2019 provides NDCS the resources needed to keep our prisons safe and continue essential operations within our agency.

Sentence Calculation Automation Project:
Sentence calculation errors discovered in 2014 resulted in the incorrect release of nearly 200 prisoners. To fix this, NDCS initiated the Sentence Calculation Automation Project in April of 2015. The programming changes successfully launched on September 24, 2016. This 18-month project automates the sentence calculation process, accurately calculates mandatory minimum sentences, moves from a 360 day calculator to a calendar-based calculation, and updates the software infrastructure to a modern, web-based architecture. Initially started in April of 2015, the project was expanded in the summer of 2015 to include additional reforms including the change from a 360 to 365 day calendar. The project improves efficiency and accuracy by eliminating the need for manual calculations to ensure that each inmate completes his/her sentence as directed by the court. The next step in upgrading the Department’s sentencing software is to automate the process of combining sentences from multiple cases into a single aggregate sentence.

Inmate Health Plan:
Released in July 2016, the inmate health plan communicates to stakeholders the legislative statute governing care, defines “community standard of care” and sets parameters within the many disciplines of health services. It is a baseline summary of Administrative Regulations, Medical Protocols and Operational Memos that govern the complex world of the comprehensive care to set inmates up for success as they transition back into our communities. Report available: Inmate Health Plan.
Collaborative Transition of Parole Administration:
On July 1, 2016 the Adult Parole Administration (APA) successfully transitioned from NDCS to the Board of Parole to become a separate state agency. The new agency is developing parole guidelines that will assist NDCS in providing information to the Board in making release decisions. The partnership between NDCS and Parole Administration focuses on helping people achieve parole when eligible and to be successful while on parole.

Defy Ventures:
This program is an example of the collaboration between the community and NDCS. Defy is financially backed by local business people and entrepreneurs. They believe there is an opportunity to use the skills people come to prison with to transform the entrepreneurial nature of criminals and equip them to go 'legit' by providing training, development, Shark Tank-style pitch competitions, startup incubation, and executive mentorship. Defy graduates in other states have a 95% employment rate and a less than a 5% recidivism rate, and Defy has incubated and financed 150 of its graduates’ startups. Starting in two Nebraska prisons in 2016, Defy will grow to seven facilities by 2018, reaching over 1,000 people. The community financial commitment is targeted for $2.4 million over four years. The University of Nebraska – Omaha will conduct a research project to determine the effectiveness of the program, a mandatory component of evidence-based practices.

Discharge Review Team:
This multi-disciplinary team is charged with screening high risk discharges from NDCS who may meet criteria for mental health board commitment, notification of local law enforcement, Tarasoff (public safety warnings) or who need further supportive or assessment services prior to discharge. The team includes licensed psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers and mental health practitioners. Individuals are referred to the team by clinical staff, any NDCS team member and/or external stakeholders. A promulgation of the rules and regulations is underway and a nationally-known UNL forensic psychologist is consulting with the team to ensure best practices are followed.

Community Relationships

Vocational & Life Skills Programming:
NDCS partners with eight community-based organizations through a grant process to provide vocational and life skills (VLS) training and support to inmates, parolees and probationers while under supervision and for up to 18 months following discharge. Some programs are provided in NDCS facilities with a connection made to the organization on the outside for a smooth transition from prison to the community. The participating community-based organizations are: the Center for People in Need; the Mental Health Association; Metropolitan Community College; ResCare; Western Alternative Corrections; Associated Builders and Contractors; Williams Prepared Place; and ReConnect.

The vocational and life skills program is in its second grant cycle, which began July 1, 2016. The previous grant cycle began in February 2015 and ended June 30, 2016. During that time, 2,449 individuals participated across all reentry programs. Participant surveys were administered toward the end of the grant cycle and found that:

- 89% of participants either agreed or strongly agreed that the skills they gained in the program improved their chances of getting a job and/or continuing their education.
- 59% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that the program they were in helped them to reenter the community.
- Participants identified barriers that would impact their reentry to the community as lack of computer skills (32%); lack of safe and affordable housing (30%); and lack of reliable transportation (38%).
- 81% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that a vocational and life skills program helped them change negative habits or behaviors.

The table below represents the first quarter of the current grant cycle (July – September, 2016), and provides a breakdown of the of the participants.
Culture of Reentry

Evidence-Based Practices:
Evidence-based practices require multiple components:

- Assessment
- Classification
- Programs
- Quality Assurance
- Measurement & Research

Assessment of Risk/Needs/Responsivity:
The STRONG-R is an actuarial tool that assesses a person’s risk to reoffend, as well as what can reduce the risk and the person’s responsibility or readiness to change. It will be utilized to engage offenders in programs based on their highest risk. The STRONG-R will individualize programming needs, measuring an individual’s risk for recidivism in the categories of violence, drugs, property, and overall felonies and ranking the risk level as high, moderate or low. Individuals identified as high risk will be referred to clinical core risk reducing programs. Those identified as medium risk will be referred to non-clinical programs. As capacity allows, those identified as low risk may participate in programs. An individualized case plan will be developed from the STRONG-R scores, which will allow NDCS to be more strategic in identifying what are the best risk reducing programs.

Classification:
Classification instruments are used to determine the security level needed to appropriately house individuals throughout their incarceration. The current classification tool is undergoing a revision so offenders are more appropriately identified by custody and security risk. Dr. Zach Hamilton is working with UNO to create an instrument validated on Nebraska inmates. Some case managers and Unit Administrators have been trained on the new classification tool. The instrument will be beta tested on 500 inmates to determine accuracy and effectiveness before going system wide. It is critical that inmates have the right custody level and are assigned to the right facility for program participation. A better classification system will enhance staff safety and effective prison management.

Programs:
Sound correctional programming helps to reduce prison violence and lowers the return to prison rate for offenders. Reducing idleness can make prisons safer and contribute to the well-being of team members and inmates. Programming is a broad term that includes mental health, substance abuse, cognitive/behavioral, self-betterment, educational and prosocial treatment and classes.

Behavioral Health:
The new behavioral health administrator is working this year to rebuild her team following a number of challenges and intense scrutiny of her division. They are developing processes to incorporate the STRONG-R risk assessment to identify high and medium risk individuals who need screening for clinical programs. Programs provided by licensed clinicians include the Violence Reduction Program (VRP), Residential and Non-Residential Substance Abuse Treatment, Anger Management, Aggression Replacement Therapy, Depression groups, Inpatient and Outpatient Sex Offender Treatment and individual crisis intervention as needed. In addition, the behavioral health team operates a secure mental health unit and an inpatient mental health treatment unit. Together, they work to reduce recidivism through a renewed focus on the highest risk individuals and reallocating limited resources for the best outcomes.

Cognitive/Behavioral Programming:
The goal is to have individuals placed in risk-reducing programs as early in their sentence as possible. Individuals will have a specific track that identifies what their high and medium risks are and the corresponding programs for them to complete. Their sentence will be divided into thirds working back from their parole eligibility date (PED). Their case plan will identify what programs will be taken so that all programs will be completed by their PED.

Moral Reconciliation Therapy (MRT) is a cognitive/behavioral skills program where participants work individually and in a group setting to focus on thinking errors and is directed specifically at changing criminal thinking.

Thinking for a Change (T4C) is a higher level, more intense cognitive behavioral intervention designed to use role play and thinking reports.

Ancillary Programs:
Beyond Anger: Connecting with Self and Others is a four-week curriculum that addresses anger, reconciliation, and emotion management while providing guidelines for daily living. From the Inside Out: Taking Personal Responsibility for the Relationships in Your Life is a 12-week curriculum that provides tools for building, strengthening, and maintaining relationships. Living Skills is a program in restrictive housing, divided into two unique components: personal growth and practical guidance. Living in Balance is a flexible psychosocial treatment program, which draws from cognitive-behavioral, experiential and "Twelve Step" approaches to achieve lifelong recovery.

Beyond Trauma is a gender-specific trauma-informed program currently offered at NCCW in partnership with Prison Fellowship Ministries.

Cornhusker State Industries (CSI):
CSI continues to foster a culture of reentry and rehabilitation. New training and certification programs were started for safety awareness, safety data sheets, OSHA 10, certified washroom technician and Federal Department of Labor apprenticeship. These successful implementations will be expanded to additional CSI locations. At TSCI 7,500 square feet of manufacturing space is nearly completed with an additional 10,000 proposed to provide additional inmate employment opportunities.

Quality Assurance, Measurement & Research:
We are building a system to ensure programming and assessments are conducted with fidelity. This is accomplished through monitoring and review, and rigorous data collection and analysis.

The woodshop at TSCI produces quality furnishings for tax-based entities.
**Capital**

**Community Corrections Center – Lincoln (CCC-L) Expansion Projects:**
Current capital construction projects will provide increased design capacity. A 100-bed unit will provide temporary increased capacity at CCC-L in September 2017. A second project will provide 160 additional beds and major programming and infrastructure improvements. It is scheduled to be completed by February 2019.

**Reception & Treatment Center (RTC) Project:**
The RTC project proposal would provide improvements to intake, medical and food service areas and offer highly functional beds, living space and treatment areas for seriously mentally ill inmates. This $75 million project consolidates the Diagnostic and Evaluation Center and the Lincoln Correctional Center into one facility. A programming statement has been completed and this project was submitted with the FY18-19 biennium budget.

**Improvements**

**Facility Maintenance:**
NDCS has committed the resources necessary to complete overdue facility maintenance projects and enhancements to security. Projects completed include replacing HVAC systems and electrical switchgear as well as repairing and replacing roofs. In addition, NDCS has upgraded surveillance cameras and intercoms, which contribute to safety for team members and inmates.

**Tecumseh State Correctional Institution (TSCI) Today:**
The 2015 disturbance at the Tecumseh State Correctional Institution required many staff and monetary resources to bring the facility back to its pre-disturbance state. The work at Tecumseh included rebuilding walls, replacing doors, windows and flooring and security enhancements such as cameras.
Each leading goal includes three outcome measures. The metric documents provide a snapshot of the status of various outcomes and goal completion within NDCS. This document represents the outcome ‘Retaining Employees’, which is a part of the “One Team One Vision” goal. The measures used are objective indicators of the accomplishments and areas in need of improvement within the agency.