

# Nev. hopes inmate programs yield post-prison success

By Michelle Rindels, AP

Nevada prisons are going to start planning for their inmates' successful release back into society on the first day they get into prison, rather than waiting for the end of their sentences.

The changes taking effect Jan. 1 are part of the Nevada Department of Corrections' effort to reduce recidivism and are supported by two new federal grants. About 12,000 inmates who are in Nevada prisons today will return to the community in the next 15 to 18 years.

The goal is to reduce re-offense rates in a targeted group by 15 percent over the first two years and 50 percent over a five-year period. The Board of Examiners approved a \$232,000 agreement with UNR allowing the university to evaluate the effectiveness of the new strategy.

"If we do a better job of re-entry, that means there will be less victims of crimes," state prisons director James Dzurenda told the Nevada Board of Examiners at a meeting earlier this month.

Support comes from a nearly \$1 million federal Second Chance Act grant. Nevada was one of three states to get the money.

Since 2014, the state has been studying the impact of its existing programs to help inmates adjust to life after prison. The review found that about one-third of that work was making little or no impact on inmates' drug addiction problems or overall crime rates, Dzurenda said.

The department will be scrapping those old programs and

refocusing on a group where interventions might be more effective – male inmates between ages 18 and 55 who were convicted of property crimes and are thought to have a moderate to very high likelihood of re-offending. The target group includes drug offenders and inmates whose substance abuse played a role in their crime.

Property crimes accounted for 80 percent of all crimes committed in Nevada in 2014.

“It makes sense to begin focusing our evidence-based programming on those offenders who commit the majority of crimes in order to have the most significant impact on public safety,” Dzurenda said in a statement.

Part of the plan is to develop a data management system that allows the Department of Corrections to share information more easily between agencies.

Nevada is also starting a partnership in 2017 with the New York-based Vera Institute, which runs a Safe Alternatives to Segregation Initiative. The institute has a \$2.2 million federal grant to work with states over 21 months and help them reduce the use of solitary confinement.

The new initiatives come after the department changed its mission statement earlier this year. Its new goal is to incorporate “proven rehabilitation initiatives that prepare individuals for successful reintegration into our communities.”

“In the past it was just supervising and watching offenders assigned to us by the court,” Dzurenda said.

Gov. Brian Sandoval, who chairs the Board of Examiners that approved the grant-related spending, applauded the new direction.

“I think this is extraordinary,” he said at the meeting. “It

makes for a safer community but it also allows those individuals to have a second chance.”