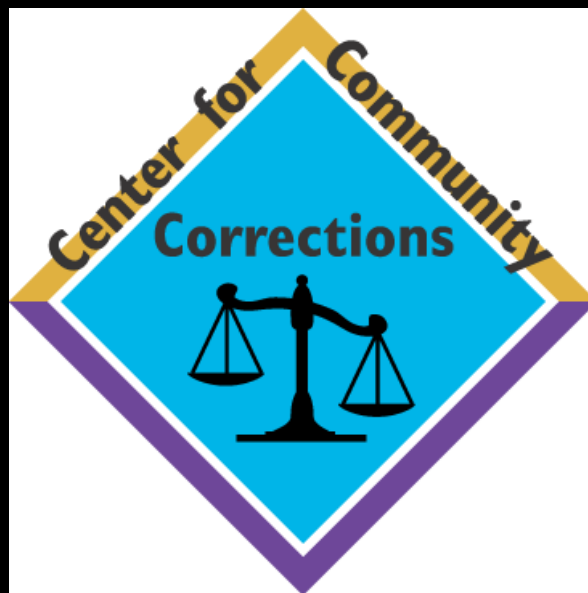


# INCREASING PUBLIC SAFETY THROUGH HALFWAY HOUSES

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## What is a community corrections halfway house?

**H**alfway houses apply the belief that many individuals who are involved with crime, drugs and the criminal justice system will be more likely to resolve their problems and comply with conditions imposed by the court if they have a structured place to live and supportive services to address crime prone behaviors, education and employment needs and behavioral health issues. Such services can be offered in the context of supervised residential living facilities that help offenders gain basic skills, find employment and pay fines and fees.

Halfway houses are often overlooked as an important part of public safety and crime prevention efforts, and members of the public often cannot describe those programs that exist in their communities. This monograph explores the elements of a type of residential community known as halfway houses. It discusses how various efforts across the nation have contributed to what we know about the relationship of halfway houses to improved public safety.

Halfway houses can be defined as places where offenders work and pay rent while undergoing counseling and job training. The term “halfway house” refers to transitional living where a person is not fully incarcerated and at the same time not fully at liberty to move in the community. Because most persons who are in the community will soon be entitled to be fully reintegrated into a neighborhood, they often provide programs for gradual release and connection to families. Therefore they operate in a community context, but seldom with public understanding and approval.

Halfway houses are usually operated by nonprofit or faith-based organizations, but may also be operated by local or state agencies. Whether private or public, or in a few cases for profit, halfway houses are employed by courts, corrections, probation, parole and pretrial diversion programs to develop and implement strategies to address ways to hold offenders accountable and to prevent future crimes in lieu of prison or upon their return after detention.

## What measures do managers take to protect the public?

**W**hen a new client enters a halfway house, the client is screened and assessed for risk to the public, and to himself. A profile of his needs for intervention, health, treatment, work and motivation is developed. Among the screening instruments used are a number of statistically validated tools that help predict potential problems. Although none of these tools are foolproof, and a client is always at risk of re-offending or relapse, community corrections halfway houses do everything possible to reduce that risk on a case-by-case basis. Once the screening and assessment for risk and needs has occurred an individualized work-plan is developed.

Halfway house managers take a number of steps to protect their neighbors and the public from crime. Halfway houses know where their residents are and monitor their coming and going. They also monitor their intake of alcohol and illegal substances. Some halfway houses also use

electronic monitoring and random testing to assure that their clients stay on track. They check with employers to monitor work and other program service deliverers.

Although it is commonly believed that halfway houses “attract a criminal element,” it is more likely that they attract a pro-social element. Such persons include community police officers, probation case managers, community member volunteers and religious leaders.

The research on long-term impact on neighborhood safety indicates that halfway houses have no negative impact on crime. Some case studies indicate that halfway houses may bring more public safety resources to a neighborhood.

In some cases property values improve where halfway houses have been responsible for the cleaning up of a blighted area. They also can help with the installation of attractive and well-kept grounds, improved lighting, and the presence of law enforcement.

## **What kind of voice should the public expect to have in the siting of these programs?**

**T**he public increasingly is asserting its interest in having a voice in the siting and establishment of halfway house programs. Community halfway house managers have developed ways to address organized neighborhood opposition to the introduction of new programs that are viewed with suspicion. There is a need to let the neighbors know who the residents will be, and who will be accountable if there is a problem.

The use of advisory boards is one way to involve community members. Citizens and businesses are invited to become advisory board

members. Often they work to help resolve questions about the feasibility of a particular site or the reason for strong community opposition. Where elected officials and public leaders support new siting, it is helpful for them to work with such an advisory group.

Governments at all levels are increasingly requiring public hearings and neighbor notification. Others have worked with advisory neighborhood commissions to locate halfway houses in industrial areas. These areas can have businesses that oppose the siting and they can often be opposition leaders.

## What are their characteristics and contributions to a community?

**H**alfway houses have certain key elements although they vary according to the needs of their communities and clients. The characteristics of halfway houses include:

- 1) an identified process for selecting persons to live in the halfway house;
- 2) involvement, outreach and potential oversight by representatives of the community;
- 3) a local, regional or statewide commitment to funding and oversight of the operations of the halfway house;
- 4) delivery of service of clients within a specified geographic area;
- 5) inter-agency collaboration, shared resources and problem solving concerning offender case management;
- 6) delivery of specific clients' services pursuant to contracts, standards and memoranda of agreement; and
- 7) feedback mechanisms, client case monitoring, follow-up and reporting of outcomes.

### An identified process for selecting persons to live in the halfway house

Most halfway houses developed in response to a need for stable housing for persons who have been involved in the criminal justice system.

Beyond the stable housing, criminal justice professionals know that there is a need for certain services that are likely to reduce criminal behaviors in the future. Generally agencies collaborate and develop a “target group” of offenders who will be screened and identified when they have contact with police and other criminal justice agencies.

Pre-trial services providers, sheriffs, judges and prosecutors have long known that the more frequently an offender has changed residences, the more likely that person is eventually to return to jail. Homelessness and instability of housing are indicators of underlying problems associated with criminal behavior.

Criminal justice agency leaders generally develop screening processes to select which persons are most likely to benefit from a residential halfway house situation. They often examine repeated histories of crimes related to drugs or alcohol as an indication of the need for a more structured living situation. Some communities have focused on mental health needs of offenders, special assistance in learning or cognitive skills and addressing victim impact as criteria for selecting offenders for placement in a halfway house.

Courts may select halfway house placement where there is a need to garnish wages to pay fines, fees, child support and restitution. Halfway house programs often act as a funnel for offenders' earnings and payments as well as advisors to help them become more financially stable at the end of their periods of supervision.

**Involvement,  
outreach and  
potential oversight  
by representatives  
of the community**

Because halfway houses are situated in neighborhoods, the community has a role and a stake in every halfway house program. Agencies and communities vary in how they define the community's role. In some areas community involvement has helped criminal justice officials define what types of criminals are processed through halfway houses. In some places community boards screen cases and make decisions on who is placed in a halfway house.

In Ohio, for example, halfway houses have Boards of Directors composed of elected officials, criminal justice professionals and citizens. These Boards oversee the work of halfway houses and individual members become familiar with the work of the halfway house and its programs.

Many community corrections and halfway houses have community affairs staff and a designated telephone hotline to answer questions about their residents or programs. Other halfway houses use volunteers from churches as mentors, teachers and even connections to work and educational placement. Volunteers assist in writing resumes and working with community businesses and nonprofit groups to develop potential work opportunities.

**A local, regional  
or statewide  
commitment to  
funding and  
oversight of the  
operations of the  
halfway house**

Funding for halfway houses is provided through several types of funding streams. Community- and faith-based organizations such as the Salvation Army and Volunteers of America may fund their halfway houses through private and charitable donations. Other nonprofit halfway houses may receive grants from foundations as well as regular appropriations through a local or state legislature funding allocation.

In more than 30 states, a statutory funding mechanism called community corrections statutes makes it possible for halfway houses to exist. Under these provisions, halfway houses are funded through statewide appropriations to Departments of Corrections, Probation or Parole agencies. Although community corrections halfway houses exist in nearly every state, not all are funded in this way. A list of funding mechanisms and states is available on the Center for Community Corrections' website at **[www.communitycorrectionsworks.org](http://www.communitycorrectionsworks.org)**.

## Delivery of service of clients within a specified geographic area

Halfway houses are local and attached to neighborhoods—yet many neighbors are unfamiliar with the work they do and the clients they serve. There are several different ways that persons can be identified for placement in halfway houses.

- 1. Pre-trial placement:** Some sheriffs, courts and independent pre-trial screening agencies review an arrest record and determine, based on a set of criteria, whether an individual can be placed in a halfway house. This may happen in cases where there is a need for mental health or substance abuse screening and case management or the person has been accepted into a deferred prosecution program. In a deferred prosecution program, the offender goes directly into residential treatment and if he is compliant, the case is held in abeyance pending successful outcomes of treatment.
- 2. Post-plea placement:** In some jurisdictions, prosecution and defense attorneys develop an arrangement to place offenders in halfway houses to serve all or part of their sentences as part of a plea agreement. The judge will review this agreement and make a decision based on the facts of the case and review of the plea agreement. In these instances drug courts may decide that a person needs a more structured living situation and a halfway house is likely to provide the structure and drug treatment necessary.
- 3. Entry through domestic courts or civil court:** In some instances persons who are on probation or parole are involved in domestic courts concerning child welfare, civil disputes or divorce and the court identifies a need for residential treatment. The court may

recommend placement of that person in a halfway house and the community corrections supervision is used as a means of overseeing client compliance.

- 4. Post-incarceration release:** When a prisoner has been confined in jail or a prison for a length of time, correctional authorities may use their discretion to release the inmate to a halfway house while he is still under supervision and before he is eligible to be released directly into the community. In these instances, the correctional officials develop agreements with halfway houses for ensuring that offenders are monitored and their whereabouts are known. As offenders prove themselves and get closer to their full release date, they may take leave or furloughs into the community as part of their preparation for full release from supervision. This type of placement is often referred to as “re-entry.”
- 5. Intermediate sanction placement:** In some cases, when a person is on probation and parole but is not fully compliant, the court or parole authorities may determine that placement in a halfway house is a more appropriate sanction than incarceration. The offender will serve the remainder of his term, or even a shorter period, as part of a “halfway back” sanction.

## Inter-agency collaboration, shared resources and problem solving concerning offender case management

Halfway houses may be large and positioned within large systems, nonprofit groups or agencies. They can also be small and local. Because of the nature of the work they do, they are networked with criminal justice advisory boards, local

substance abuse and mental health planning, courts administrators and other groups that collaborate. They may work with community policing, as in Washington state. They may also work with community courts, as in Brooklyn, New York. In North Carolina, halfway house collaboration includes a coordinated community correctional system that works closely with the substance abuse and mental health service delivery system on the county level.

**Delivery of specific clients' services pursuant to contracts, standards and memoranda of agreement**

Halfway houses differ in the type and focus of client services, and this is one area where standards and accreditation are helpful. The American Correctional Association and several states have standards, accreditation or licensing procedures for halfway houses that require sophisticated program accountability systems.

A growing number of halfway houses provide staff training and programs that are based on cognitive behavioral practices supported by research in the field. The International Community Corrections Association and the American Probation and Parole Association have disseminated information and training materials about what works for clients who may be in halfway houses or community corrections


supervision. These approaches are rapidly changing the methods of treatment and augmenting more traditional approaches.

**Feedback mechanisms, client case monitoring, follow-up and reporting of outcomes**

Most halfway houses share case management information with their oversight and referral agencies. They have developed ways to attain behavioral and client health care while respecting both client confidentiality and agency oversight needs. The development of integrated case management systems and electronic networking has made transfer of information more efficient and accurate between agencies and programs that serve halfway house clients.

Halfway houses do have an impact on demand for services for offenders because many of their clients are chronically under-employed, without housing and in need of healthcare services. However, halfway houses do not create large bureaucracies to administer them. They tend to work with the private sector and faith-based groups. They leverage existing funding and public behavioral health systems to assure that services get to those who are most critically in need of them. They provide a way of focusing on a difficult problem and using various approaches and resources for this group of persons.

## Why are halfway houses important?

 Over the past several decades there has been a lively debate about the importance of halfway houses as crime control measures. The debate has focused on their purposes and how to assess their effectiveness. The debate over effectiveness relates to:

- ★ the intended impact of a criminal punishment;
- ★ the necessity of increasing public safety and future crime reduction; and
- ★ the needs of states and localities for cost-efficient correctional programs.

With respect to punishment, most think of halfway houses as “less punitive” than jail. However, research has revealed that many offenders point out that they view halfway houses as very stringent

and more punitive because they require changed behaviors.

Another criminological debate has focused on whether the use of halfway houses is effective as a potential “intermediate punishment.” This means that offenders are required to make reparations, perform public services, resolve conflicts with victims and stay connected to the community without the isolation of a prison-based punishment.

Halfway houses have also been used to shorten prison terms and to alleviate pressures on states and localities with crowded jails and prisons. In this context nonviolent offenders have been sentenced to time in a halfway house at the end of time served in jail or prison. Such transitional programming might also be followed by a period of home detention, where the offender is monitored for compliance.

## What has been the experience in terms of effectiveness?

**H**alfway houses have been evaluated in terms of their impact on public safety and rehabilitation of offenders. Most halfway house evaluations have focused on program components and their relationship to recidivism. The Massachusetts Furlough and Pre-release Program evaluation over 15 years indicates that returns to custody were reduced in a study of 13,000 cases of placement of those returning from prisons. D. LeClair and S. Guarino-Ghezzi, "Prison Reintegration Programs: An Evaluation," 1997 *Corrections Management Quarterly*, 65.

Ohio has invested in a statewide infrastructure of community-based halfway houses as a result of evaluations indicating that they reduce recidivism. A recent finding underscores that they are beneficial for certain offenders who are rated as

high or medium risk based on risk predictive screening. Christopher Lowencamp and Edward Latessa, *Halfway House and Community-Based Facility Evaluation, University of Cincinnati* (2002).

The Federal Bureau of Prisons conducted a large case study of offenders released through halfway houses in the United States. Miles D. Harer, *Recidivism Among Federal Prison Releases in 1987: A Preliminary Report*, Washington, D.C., Federal Bureau of Prisons, 1994. This study noted that the employment and residential components of halfway houses were associated with improvement in recidivism. Similar findings have been made in Canada that support gradual release through residential programs and success after release. Correctional Service of Canada, *Protecting Society through Community Corrections* (1995).

## Where can you find more information about halfway houses?

**Y**our local city zoning department is a good source of information about where the halfway houses exist in your community. State departments of corrections have listings of halfway houses that

they utilize and some of these are available on the Internet. A list of community corrections contacts in the states is available on the Center's website at **[www.communitycorrectionsworks.org](http://www.communitycorrectionsworks.org)**.