

Improve Public Safety by Positively Changing Lives

Amend: Changing Correctional Culture

Working together for safer communities



The [Washington State Department of Corrections \(DOC\)](#) and [Amend](#) at the University of California San Francisco (UCSF) have partnered to improve staff wellness, job satisfaction, and continue efforts to make the Washington correctional system safe and humane.

DOC's mission is to improve public safety by positively changing lives and an important part of this involves partnering with other organizations to actively find ways to live out the mission. Amend at UCSF is an initiative dedicated to transforming correctional culture to improve the health of people working and living in America's prisons.

DOC's partnership with Amend works to bring a health-focused approach to transforming the culture inside Washington's prisons and reentry centers with an emphasis on increasing staff wellness while working to better support and prepare incarcerated individuals and residents for their return to society. Amend's primary program partner is the Norwegian Correctional Service, which believes that "people go to court to be punished, they go to prison to become better neighbors." This partnership's goal is to bring that belief system to Washington DOC.



Partners from the Norwegian Correctional Service and the Stafford Creek Resource Team.

The Amend program and its Norwegian partners train staff, engage with residents, and develops and mentors pilot projects centered on Norway's public-health focused principles of normalization, dynamic security, and progression.

- The concept of normalization is that punishment is the deprivation of liberty, no one should serve a sentence under stricter circumstances than necessary, and life inside prison shall resemble outside life as much as possible.
- Dynamic Security is achieved through staff actively and frequently interacting and engaging with the incarcerated to gain a better understanding and awareness of each individual they are responsible for and to constantly assess the risks and needs that still need to be met.
- Progression is the belief that people should move through incarceration along a progressive path towards increasing freedom alongside increasing responsibility. The goal is to transition people from high security to transitional housing with the hopes that no one releases directly from maximum security to the community.

To promote these principles, Amend trainers meet with key stakeholders including line staff, leadership and incarcerated individuals, to identify challenges and opportunities, and facilitate structural changes specifically tailored to the needs of the particular environment. Amend is selective in its partners, choosing to work only with

state prisons systems that they believe are primed to lead the U.S. correctional community forward in identifying new, humane, health-promoting approaches to working with incarcerated people. Washington is one of only four such partners.

“At Amend, we recognize that U.S. prisons have had a devastating impact on the physical and mental health of residents and staff alike,” said Dr. Brie Williams, Founding Director of Amend. “This initiative seeks to improve public health by supporting policy and correctional leaders to rethink the purpose of prison, to help correctional staff demand more from themselves and their profession, and to guide staff in helping people who are incarcerated reconstruct their lives for the better.”

This partnership represents an initial step in a joint effort to enhance Washington’s ongoing innovation and correctional leadership. Amend brings training and technical assistance to the Department to support the growth of healthier environments for staff in their day-to-day work and for individuals as they prepare to return to their loved ones and reenter society. Over the past year, the partnership has expanded to the development of pilot projects at prisons and reentry centers across the state.

Over the last year, DOC leaders and staff, Washington state legislators, and policymakers have traveled to Norway (philanthropically funded by Amend) to participate in an immersive training program and see these principles in action firsthand. All travelers have returned with many exciting ideas to implement in Washington.



Leaders and policymakers from Washington, Oregon, California, and North Dakota visiting Halden Prison in Norway.

Key goals of the partnership are:

- Self-reported improved health, well-being and job satisfaction among staff;
- Self-reported improved readiness for return to the community among residents;
- Anecdotal evidence of improved wellbeing among staff’s families.
- Reduction of use of force (reactive and planned);
- Reduction of staff assaults and reduced violence among residents;
- Reduction in use of solitary confinement.

The current pilot areas the partnership is focused on are:

- Staff Wellness, Dynamic Security Training, Updated PREA Training - coming July 2023
- Reentry Centers
- Women’s Facilities
- Stafford Creek Corrections Center
- Washington State Penitentiary

What are DOC Staff saying in response to Amend’s initial training?

“I have worked in corrections for over 25 years. Since day one, it has been an us against them mentality. Getting staff to understand times have changed and our tactics and training does not seem to be working. But this course

shows that building relationships (currently taboo) with residents may actually increase the effectiveness of security. I hope everyone will be able to see this.” – Lieutenant, Men’s Facility

“This is a great opportunity to learn and create a better foundation for the work we continue to do. Our statistics on recidivism are dismal and what we’ve done up to this point is not accomplishing what we want, which is to positively impact lives. Time for new ideas and energy!” – Supervisor, Reentry Center

“This training shows how important it is to have more positive interactions with staff and the incarcerated and how to redirect the conversations to be more solution oriented.” – Officer, Women’s Facility

“I’m excited about this because changing lives has always been a big part of why I got into this career.” – Sergeant, Reentry Center

“I enjoyed learning about creating positive interactions within the prison environment and how we can better our training with new ideas from an international prison system.” – Officer, Women’s Facility

Videos:

Amend: Improving Washington's Correctional System for Staff & Incarcerated

Amend: Creating Better Neighbors

