

Record Clearance Project Service Navigation Reducing Recidivism and Increasing Public Safety and Justice

"Without this program, I don't know where I would be. The road home is harder than most people know, and having someone in your corner during those first critical months can mean the difference between making it and not."

-- Former RCP Service Navigation client

The high-risk period of transition from custody makes a skilled, experienced mentor critical to successful reentry. **The SJSU Record Clearance Project (RCP) Service Navigation peer mentors have guided and supported people leaving custody since 2014. Last year, the RCP Service Navigation team helped 365 people get on their feet; 97% of them did not return to custody.**

The research is clear: programs like RCP Service Navigation provide critical services that **reduce recidivism and promote successful reintegration** -- an essential investment in public safety and welfare.¹

People need assistance as they leave custody

Most people leaving custody need immediate assistance with housing, clothing, cell phones, transportation, and food. Soon after release, they often also need employment, health care, sobriety support, help attending appointments with probation or parole, positive social connections, opportunities for education, and other support, in addition to continued assistance with immediate needs.

Without support or guidance, people often fall back into patterns that led to their incarceration. A person's risk of death in the first two weeks following release from prison is 13 times higher than other residents, the main cause being drug overdose.²

Meeting clients' needs through guidance and experience

To help people navigate employment placement, housing, counseling, educational support and multiple other challenges, people need a comprehensive program with assistance from a trusted mentor who has successfully overcome the obstacles of past incarceration and has broad knowledge of available resources.³ Assisting people to get on their feet post-release requires guidance and care from experienced peers: according to people leaving custody, the most important component in a guide is lived experience with incarceration.⁴

¹ Letter from Professor John Haluska, Ph.D., Justice Studies Department, San José State University May 2026.

² Binswanger, I. A. et al. (2007) Release from Prison — A High Risk of Death for Former Inmates. *N Engl J Med* 2007;356:157-165. <https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/nejmsa064115> .

³ Miller, H. V., & Miller, J. M. (2010). Community In-Reach Through Jail Reentry: Findings from a Quasi-Experimental Design. *Justice Quarterly*, 27(6), Article 922206713. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07418825.2010.482537>

⁴ Matthews, E. (2021). Peer-focused prison reentry programs: Which peer characteristics matter most? *Incarceration: An International Journal of Imprisonment, Detention and Coercive Confinement*, 2(2). <https://doi.org/10.1177/26326663211019958> .

Since its inception in 2014, SJSU service navigation mentors have been formerly incarcerated, had their records expunged, and been trained in trauma-informed, gender-responsive mentoring. Under mentors' supervision, trained student interns assist clients and mentors in meeting individualized goals.

Mentors frequently meet people in custody to plan for release, thereby creating a smoother, easier transition post release. Mentors help clients set short-term and long-term goals, based on clients' individual needs. Together, they assess a client's needs at enrollment and revisit needs and goals throughout the mentoring process.

The RCP Service Navigation program has assisted **over 1,000** clients, with an exponential impact on others as those who have completed their sentences move into the workforce, reunite with families, maintain sobriety and reclaim their lives.

Of the clients whose cases we closed in the year ending June 30, 2026, **97%** had not returned to custody.

Why RCP Service Navigation is essential

Saving lives through guided support **saves money**. Recidivism is expensive: the current estimated annual cost of incarcerating a person in Santa Clara County *jail* is \$120,222⁵; the cost to incarcerate someone in state *prison* last year was \$127,800.⁶ When people are connected to peer mentors with lived experience to help them move forward after incarceration, studies show reduced recidivism.⁷

Trained SJSU student interns provide supervised, individual assistance to mentoring clients as part of their education, thereby saving costs and increasing individual assistance to clients. Interns support the mentors in their work, including assisting clients with specific tasks such as enrolling in college, getting necessary government documents and similar needs.

To meet people's needs as they leave custody, RCP staff teach an 8-hour **"Computers and the Internet" digital literacy course** focused on finding employment; students provide one-on-one assistance to help participants learn and practice the material. Over 100 people have successfully completed the program since 2023, earning the laptops they were trained on.

The **legal services** arm of the RCP offers free record reviews and legal representation (with a 99% success rate in court). Those who complete the RCP Service Navigation program are guaranteed a record review appointment where they receive information about what appears on their criminal records and the next steps in clearing those records. Almost all clients who receive these appointments will be eligible to have their records cleared, removing legal barriers to employment, housing, and other

⁵ <https://sheriff.santaclaracounty.gov/bureaus/custody-bureau>. The California Legislative Analyst's Office calculated a cost of \$127,788 to incarcerate a person in state prison in fiscal year 2025-26.

⁶ The annual cost of \$120,222 is calculated taking the gross appropriation of approximately \$348,644,000 for fiscal year 2026-27 and dividing by average population of 2,900. https://lao.ca.gov/PolicyAreas/CJ/6_cj_inmatecost.

⁷ Treitler, P., DiGioia-Laird, V., & Long, B. (2025). Peer support services for individuals with health-related needs reentering the community after incarceration: a scoping review of program elements and outcomes. *Health & Justice*, 13(1), Article 51. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40352-025-00358-0>

essential needs. By knowing what is on their records, service navigation clients see a clear path to new futures.

RCP Service Navigation has strong, broad community support as community partners, former clients, and others recognize the exceptional client-centered, individualized, holistic assistance that RCP Service Navigation offers and the profound effect of this work in helping clients realize and manifest their full potential.

"The transition from incarceration is often daunting. ... Without [the Record Clearance Project], I can confidently express that I wouldn't have stood a chance."

"These mentors are not only helping people navigate complicated systems, but they are also helping restore confidence, stability, and dignity."

"Without this program I would have been lost."

A "[RCP Service Navigation is] a professional program that completely reforms a person's life trajectory. ... Because of this mentorship, I am now a self-supporting, contributing professional..."

"Without this program I don't know what I would do."

"Let me not forget the kindness and hard work of my mentor"

"A lifeline"

The Record Clearance Project truly believes that your past doesn't have to dictate your future, and that everyone deserves the opportunity to start fresh. The compassion and support they offer creates lasting change and a second chance at life.