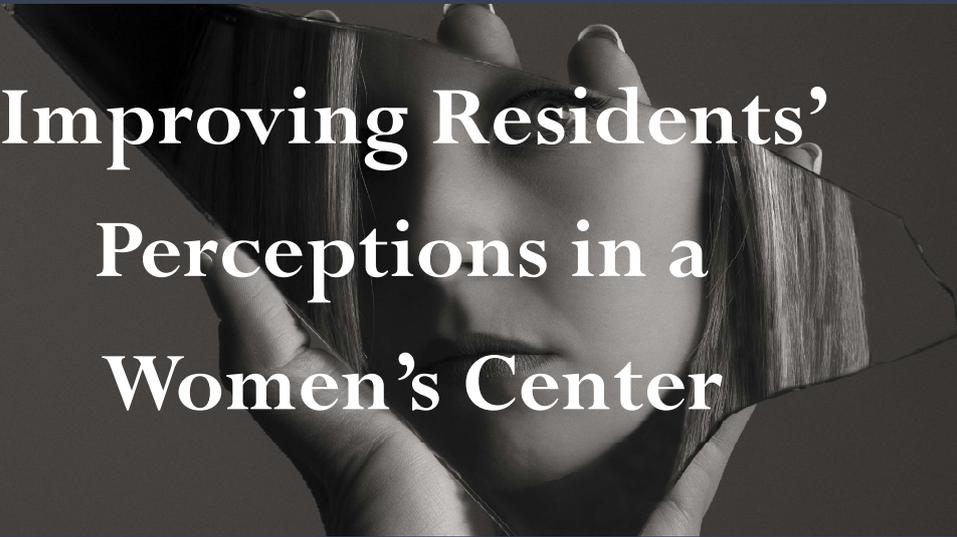




BetaGov
 The Marron Institute of Urban Management
 New York University
 60 Fifth Avenue, 2nd Fl.
 New York, NY 10011
 betagov.org

Improving Residents' Perceptions in a Women's Center



Testing the use of first names

Agency: East Boise Community Reentry Center, Idaho Department of Correction (IDOC)

Project Duration: 05/14/18–01/20/19

Pracademic*: Sergeant Amy Walsh

Context
 Names and how they are used may affect self-perception, which in turn may affect a range of other perceptions and behavior.

Key Finding
 Most residents were not opposed to being called by their first names. Perceptions about safety improved after use of first names was implemented, but perceptions about fair and consistent practices worsened.

*BetaGov provides ongoing training to agency personnel to become research-savvy "Pracademics" who can lead trials.

Background

Negative self-perceptions may be reinforced in carceral settings due to labeling and patterns of interaction. Encouraging a positive self-perception could result in more positive perceptions and behaviors both in and outside the carceral environment. A simple change from calling residents by their last names to their first names may result in a more supportive environment and positive self-perception. The East Boise Community Reentry Center launched a project to evaluate whether calling residents by their first names might result in positive changes in perceptions of the environment. The Center's mission is to help female residents shed their criminal past and ease them into a successful life in the community. This project and the shift to calling residents by their first names is the initial step in testing promising methods for improving the transition to community living and successful reentry.

Design

Residents were surveyed, before (Time 1) and after (Time 2) staff started using first names, about relationships, behaviors, and perceptions about the Center. Prior to this shift, residents were called by last names, akin to a military model.

Lessons Learned

Due to movement in and out of the Center, more residents completed the Time 2 survey (n=47), administered 7–8 months after the change to first names, than the Time 1 surveys, administered before the change (n=32). The table below shows survey responses in percentages. Most residents were not opposed to being addressed by their first names. There was an increase in the percentage of women who reported feeling safe over the course of this trial, but there was also a decrease in perceptions of positive relationships with staff and views of the facility as a positive environment. There was also an

increase over time in perceived unfairness, as reflected in three survey items.

Next Steps

This project was informed by research showing that specific words may have a negative impact when used with carceral populations. To test this hypothesis, facility staff were instructed to refer to residents by their first names. The Center's leadership hoped that using first names would lead to more positive self-perception and perceptions of the Center environment and improved relationships. Survey results did not support these expectations. It may be that a longer period is required to see a change in the Center's culture or that objective measures of behaviors are needed to determine if behavior change has occurred despite the subjective perceptions of the residents. Additional strategies for increasing residents' positive perceptions are being considered.

Do you feel:	Time 1 n=32 (%)		Time 2 n=47 (%)	
	Yes/Somewhat	No	Yes/Somewhat	No
Opposed to staff calling you by your first name?*	12	84	9	89
Safe at the facility?*	90	6	98	2
Recognition of resident negative behaviors is consistent across all residents?*	87	6	56	43
Negative behavior is addressed in a timely manner?*	94	6	65	15
Sanctions given for misconducts are fair?*	90	6	79	19
You have positive relationships with staff?	100	0	98	2
You have positive relationships with other residents?	94	6	86	4
The facility is a positive environment?	94	6	95	2

*Chi-square analyses, statistically significant at p<0.05

Why BetaGov Spark?

Sometimes a rigorous trial of an innovative idea just isn't possible, but with a Spark project a practitioner can learn important information about the idea, the agency, and the sample. What's more, a positive signal may inform a future randomized controlled trial and more definitive results. Spark projects meet Pracademics where they are comfortable—giving them the opportunity to learn about research and apply that learning to internal research projects.