

# Surveys of Whatcom County Jail Inmates and Staff: Results & Comparison

**November 2022**

Public Health, Safety, and Justice Initiative Stakeholder Advisory Committee

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## INTRODUCTION

The results of two surveys are presented on the following pages. The first is survey was collected from inmates in both the Whatcom County Jail and the Work Center by the Jail Educator and Stakeholder Advisory Committee member, David Goldman, for the Justice Project Needs Assessment. The survey questions addressed inmates' perspectives on how their lives had changed as a result of incarceration, what they think would have helped them stay out of jail, services they need and services they have received in jail, and community support they feel they need when they are released. Inmates also were asked about whether they think a new jail is needed, and what they think the county's priorities should be when investing in community safety and the criminal legal system.

The Stakeholder Advisory Committee felt it was important to hear from the staff working at the jail to inform the Justice Project Needs Assessment Report. Again, the Jail Educator, David Goldman, gathered survey data. The results of the staff survey are presented in the second section of the report. The questions the staff were asked addressed their feelings of preparedness to do their jobs and job satisfaction, perspectives on services inmates need, whether they think a new jail is needed, what they think the county's priorities should be regarding the criminal legal system, and what they would like to see change in the system.

There were several questions that were asked of both jail inmates and staff. The responses, when examined side-by-side, reveal some interesting similarities and differences. These comparisons are presented in the final section of the report.

**Note:** Direct quotes from the written surveys are presented in *italics* in the sections below.

# Whatcom County Jail Inmates' Perspectives



## Methods

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- Inmate surveys conducted on July 16, 2022 at the Jail and Work Center
- The Jail Educator gave paper surveys to inmates in 15 housing units through a hatch at the unit door and returned later to pick up surveys
  - Inmates restricted to individual cells were not accessible for this survey
  - Housing units surveyed included inmates classified as general population, medical/mental health, sex offenders, inmate workers, and work-crew
- Participation was voluntary
- No incentives offered

## About participants

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# Surveys completed:

109

Daily census:

329

% of total population:

33%

## About participants

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**Location:**

Work Center = 62%

Jail = 38%

**Population:**

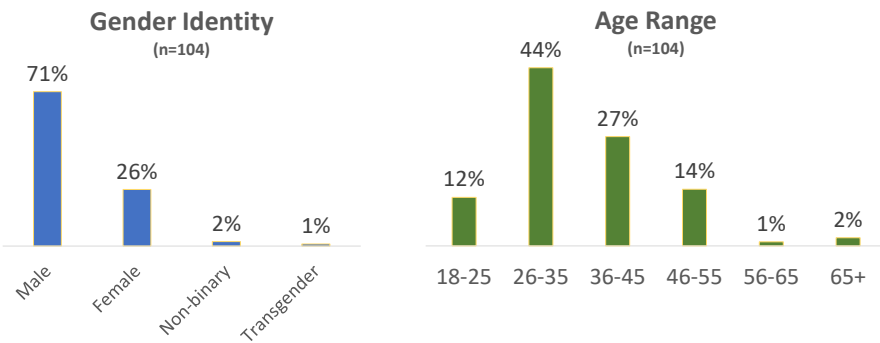
General Population = 78%

Sex Offender = 12%

Medical/Mental Health = 10%

# Participant Demographics

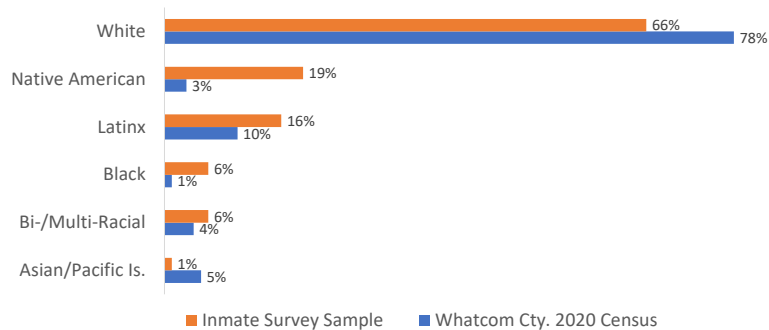
## Gender & Age Range

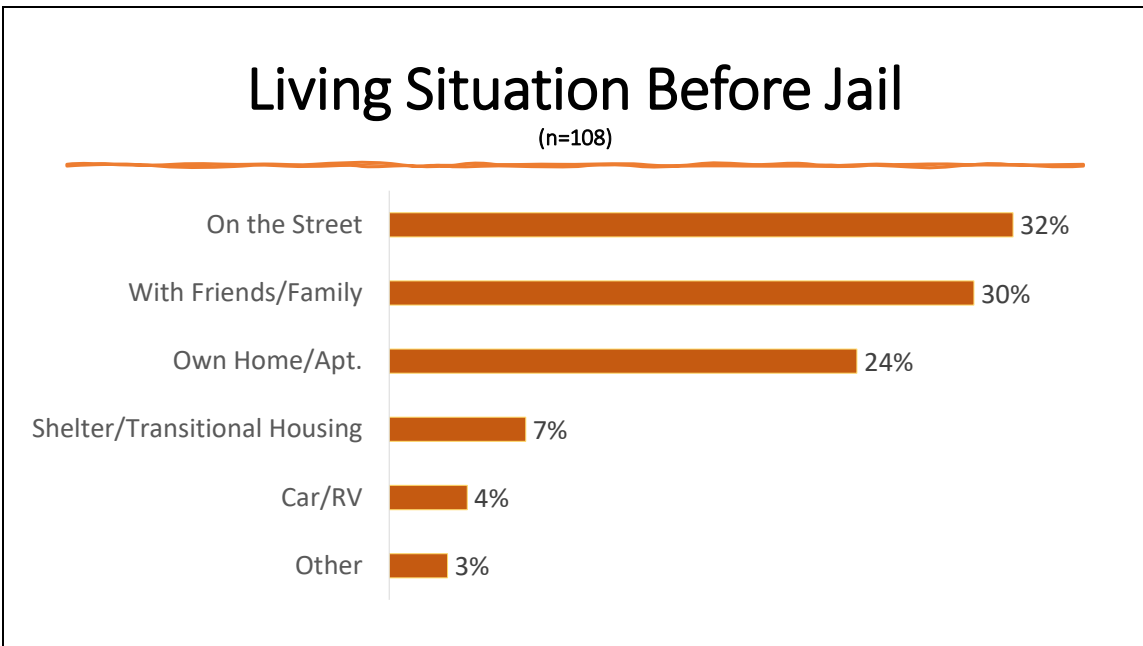
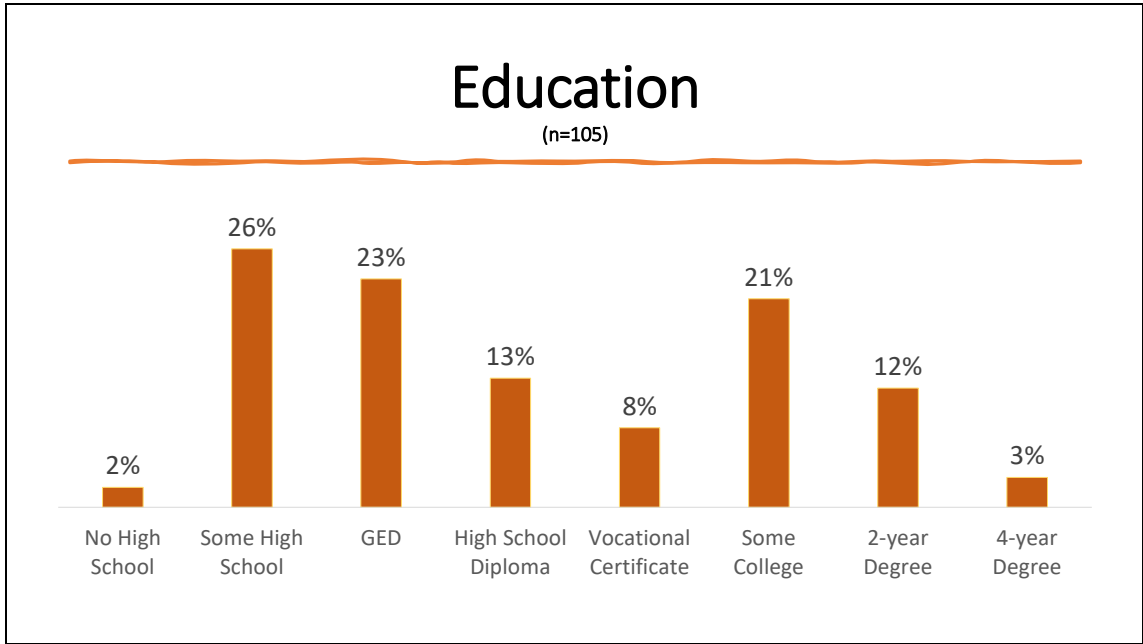


## Race/Ethnicity

(n=104)

Note: 11 respondents marked more than one race/ethnicity so the total is greater than 100%

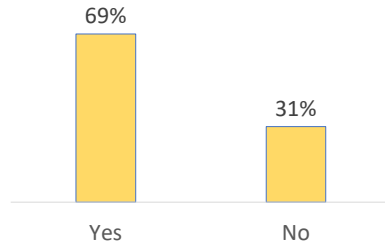




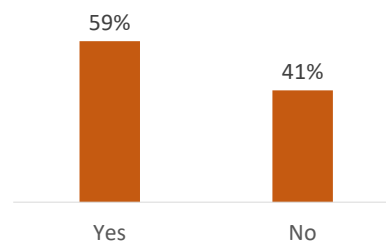
76% of this population are in a living situation other than their own home/apt.

## Behavioral Health Issues

Ever Received Services for  
Addiction/Substance Use  
(n=107)

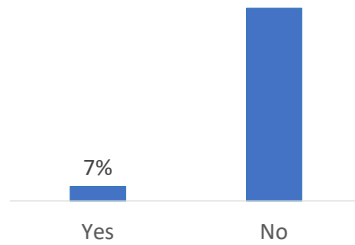


Ever Received Services for  
Mental Health  
(n=102)

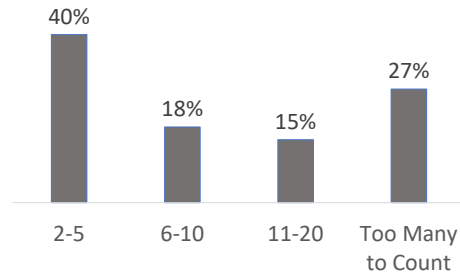


## # Times in Jail

1<sup>st</sup> Time in Jail?  
(n=108)

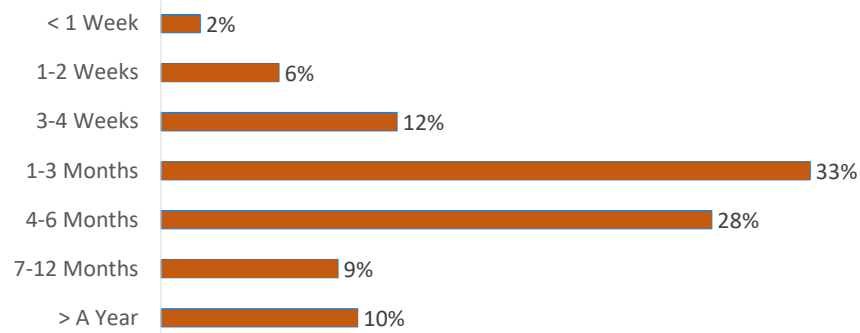


# Times You Spent More Than  
a Day in Jail  
(n=100)



## How long in jail (this time)?

(n=109)





## Time in jail has been longer because...

(n=105)

- 70% – Delays with court system (COVID-related, attorney delays)
- 64% – Not being able to pay bail
- 18% – Dealing with drug/alcohol problems
- 17% – Mental health issues (waiting for evaluation)
- 12% – Discrimination (race/ethnicity, gender, other)
- 1% – Immigration status
- 17% – Other

### Other:

- Awaiting inpatient bed
- Awaiting caseworker assignment
- Waiting on Drug Court
- Cases in multiple counties
- Unable to meet probation demands without transportation/phone
- Lost important info
- Going to prison
- Prior history
- Fighting a case
- Unfair charges
- *Trial & type of charges*
- *2 pandemics: COVID & Fentanyl*
- *Public Defenders refusing to give fair representation*

During your time in jail, how have things changed for you?

## Employment

(n=106)

- 41% I was unemployed before and am still unemployed
- 3% I was employed and am still employed
- ↓ 36% Lost job
- ↑ 13% Have a new job lined up for when I get out of jail
- ↑ 4% Gained job skills

### Other:

- 4% - Disabled, on SSI/SSDI
- 3% - Plan to look for new job upon release
- 2% - Lost customers/contract
- 2% - Lost tools of the trade
- 1% - Retired
- 1% - Own my own business
- 1% - Plan to start school upon release
- 1% - Plan to do something better with my life

# Education

(n=94)

- 66% I have not done any educational activities while in jail
- ↓ 5% I had to drop out when I went to jail
- ↑ 22% I have done some things to educate myself while in jail
  - 10% - Study independently (read, tablet work, podcasts, radio)
  - 2% - Bible study
  - 1% - The Kite Program & educational programs
  - 1% - Listen to other inmates
- ↑ 10% I am working toward a degree while in jail
- ↑ 4% I have participated in some educational classes with a teacher while in jail
- ↑ 1% I have pursued vocational training for a job while in jail

## Education

## Comments

7% There are no educational programs in jail

2% Requested to start GED program, waiting

1% *The only program here sends you packets, does not help everyone, I have IEP*

1% *I wish we can sign up online at any college, especially with tablet and wifi access*

# Housing

(n=99)

- 34% I was homeless before and am still homeless
- 17% I had a home before and I still have a home
- ↓ 44% Lost housing I had
- ↑ 9% Have new housing lined up for when I get out of jail

## Other:

3% - Lost vehicle, parking, possessions

3% - Need help (reentry support)

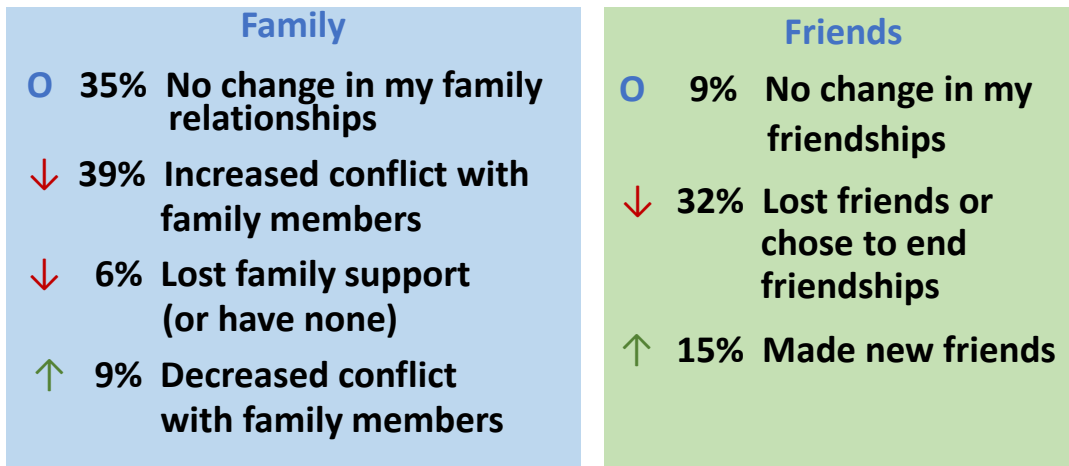
2% - Awaiting housing program placement

1% - *I wish we could apply online and have a release date for landlords*

1% - *Got resources for housing but have no phone time to set up if I had a release date*

# Relationships

(n=104)



## Other / Comments

2% - *Lost the ability to communicate with friends and family*

1% - *Everything fine*

1% - *Complications*

1% - *Getting married*

1% - *My boyfriend in here too*

1% - *Met people to get/use drugs with - better connections*

1% - *My first son is being born in a few days, missing the birth due to attorney's mess up, my fiancé is leaving me now because I am here*

# Finances

(n=104)

- 33% No change in my finances
- ↓ 46% Lost benefits (e.g., SNAP, Medicaid, from job)
- ↓ 35% Went into debt because of legal fees
- ↓ 6% - Lost job/income
- ↑ 2% Got signed up for benefits for when I get out of jail

## Other / Comments

- *I keep getting more in debt from my way over high child support*
- *Brigid Collins was the best outreach and I even could have access to it*
- *I need to be released to continue back to work, I will strive, work hard to get up enough money, might take years but I am dedicated for my financial future, home for my baby.*
- *Damaged credit*
- *Mom pays commissary other than that I'm indigent. Wish to have some cash when released so I won't steal again from non-Christians.*
- *Now many things in storage are gone, my grants are messed up, and now my bank cards and credit cards are all gone.*
- *My wife's (OUR) TANF and EBT were cut in half as a result of my incarceration. Thanks for punishing my family. They were innocent.*

# Physical Health

(n=104)

↓ 39% Physical health has gotten worse

○ 28% No change in physical health

↑ 25% Physical health has improved

# Any Other Changes?

(n=40)

13% - Weight gain – positive for some/negative for others.

13% - Not getting needed medical care

- *In some ways I'm a healthier weight but my seizures are getting worse and they do nothing for me about them.*

15% - Complaints about food (e.g., hungry)

15% - Dealing with pain &/or illness

- *More pain now than ever. I've had COVID twice since I've been in here.*

13% - Mental health is worse

13% - Getting Subutex treatment for opioid addiction

10% - Mental health is improved

- *I am free, I am myself, I am clean, I am hungry.*

5% - Dental issues

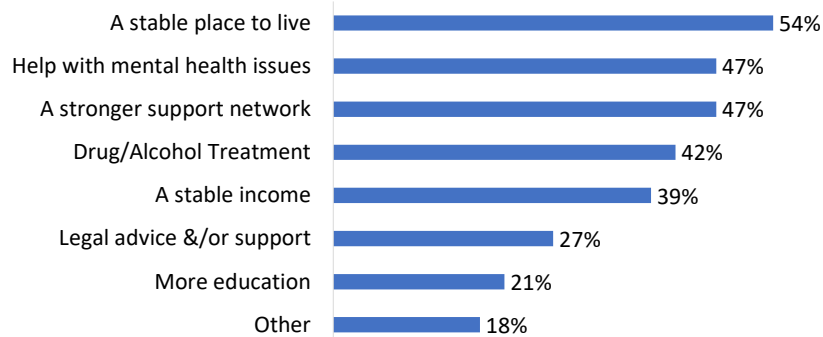
17% - Other comments

- *Haven't been able to communicate with people due to poor disability services.*
- *They are doing more with my medical problems.*

## Services (needed & received by inmates)

### What Would Have Helped You Avoid Jail?

(n=105)



### What Would Have Helped You Avoid Jail?

#### Other

##### 7% - If case were handled differently

- The state dropping no contact order when girlfriend asked
- Fair treatment from the legal system and how men are treated in Washington State

##### 3% - Making better choices

- Not being stupid

##### 2% - Housing

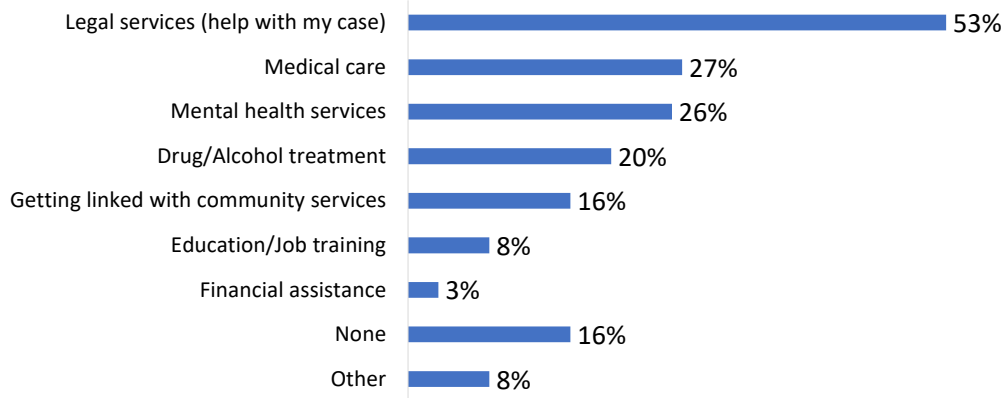
##### 7% - Other

- We need many, many clinics that provide Subutex and Buprenorphine



# Which Services Are You Getting in Jail?

(n=86)



## Services Received in Jail

## Other / Comments

### 6% - Waiting for needed services

- I am waiting to be contacted by mental health
- I need help with my case
- Haven't heard from my public defender once
- Asked for help with community services but haven't gotten any yet

### 4% - Poor medical care

### 1% - Other

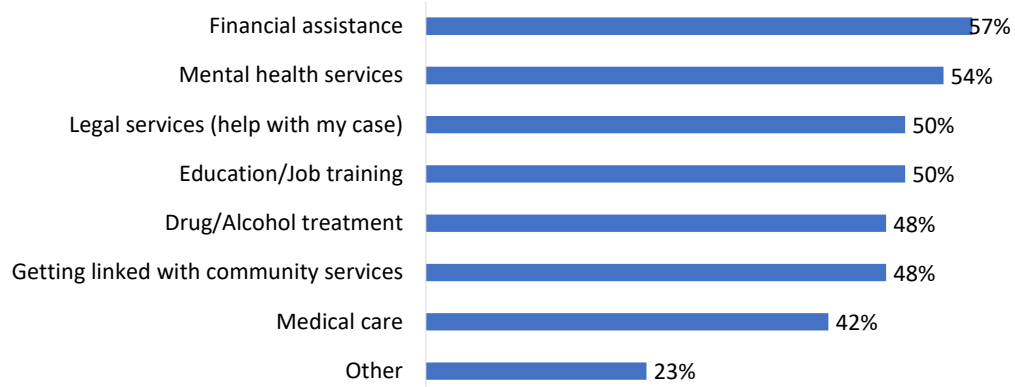
- Family services - parenting (Brigid Collins)

### Comments

- Need treatment/Re entry program, not prison
- The jail keeps making excuses and blaming COVID but even before COVID there was no help

## Services You Need More of or Wish You Had While in Jail

(n=103)



## Services You Need More of or Wish You Had in Jail

### Other / Comments

#### 16% - Specific Community Services Needed

- 7% - Housing
- 3% - Family / DV Services
- 2% - Documents & Benefits (SSI, ID, birth certificate)
- 2% - Medical / Dental

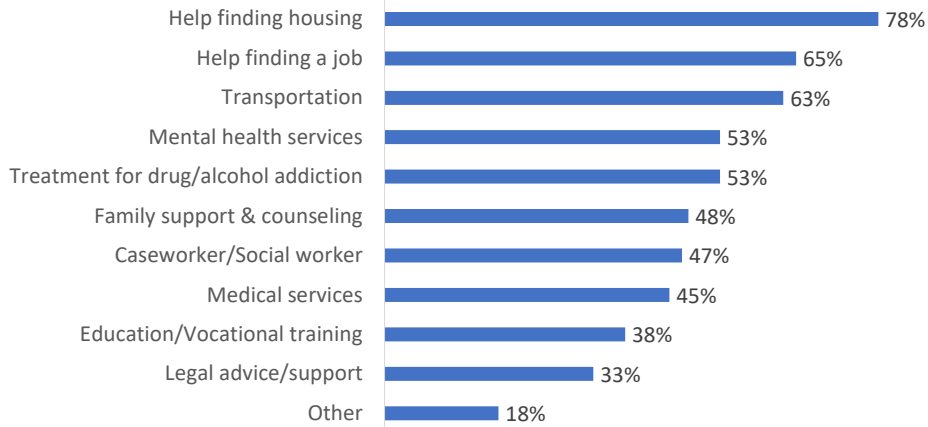
#### 4% - Other

- *...Better diet, fresh air, more rec time and games*
- *...Work to make money and gain skills. Outside rec time. In person and electronic visiting.*
- *More communication.*
- *Having things set up while I'm in here instead of just giving me a list.*

#### 3% - Services Are Not Available

# Community Support Needed to be Successful When You Get Out of Jail

(n=104)



## Community Services Needed for Success

## Other / Comments

### 4% - All of the above (for others who need them)

- *I'm all set up but I'm circling em all on behalf of others cuz I remember when I needed this all*
- *Help rebuild people so they can help rebuild the county*

### 4% - Specific Community Services Needed

- 2% - Money / Benefits
- 1% - Dental

### 8% - Other

- *A stable place to live, eat, work, worship, and thrive*

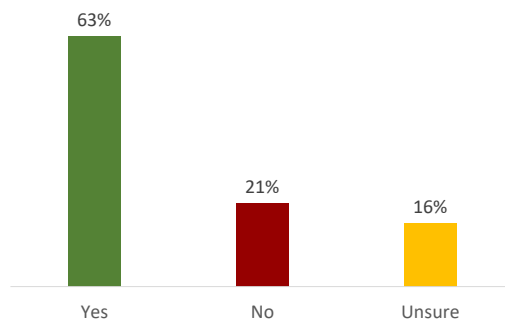
### Comments

- *Not all are by choice, and some aren't needed, but wise to look into.*
- *If you ask the re-entry lady for help, she will ask how long you've been locked up and if it's longer than 90 days she will tell you that you don't qualify for any housing assistance which is the most backwards thing I've ever heard.*

# Thoughts About Building a New Jail

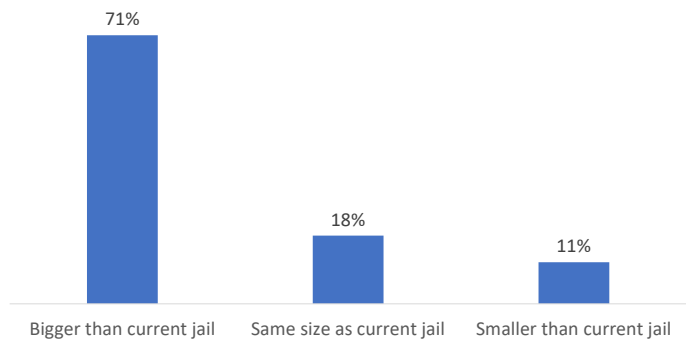
## Does Our County Need To Build a New Jail?

(n=105)



## If a new jail were to be built, what size should it be?

(n=92)



# Why a New Jail Should be Bigger

(n=59)

## 34% - It is currently overcrowded

### 19% - Make space for more services

- To hold more vital things that are important to rehab success: treatment, detox, education/school, and re-entry classes.
- Need gym equipment, schooling, counseling center.

### 14% - Accommodate increasing populations (increasing crime rate)

- More people are getting in trouble.

### 10% - Building is in bad shape

- This jail is condemned! We have black mold on the walls and water stains.
- Outdated, very unhygienic, its like a dungeon.

### 8% - Make outdoor recreation space available

- Maybe so we could have some outdoor rec area. I haven't seen the light of day in 4 months.

### 7% - Separate people with different needs

- For different mind states/level of offender's status: min, med, max.

### 5% - Combine Jail and Work Center into one facility

### 8% - Other

## Other (8%, 5 Responses):

- Regardless, county officials have no interest in rejuvenation(?)
- I think having 60/70 men tank is better than 20 men tank
- I believe in solitary confinement. It changes people. We need more single man cells.
- It's too little too late. The end of the world as we know it is here.
- A few diff gen pops would be great as I liked to history with others as DV or incarceration

# Why a New Jail Should be Same Size

(n=8)

- So we have room for crime but not too much room that we lock up petty criminals.
- The goal is rehabilitation, not to make us better criminals.
- The jail downtown is falling apart. They don't need a bigger jail, they need less incarceration.
- This county doesn't need a BIGGER jail, we need a more HUMANE jail.
- Needs to have more people actually helped that need it and not just released, also release more people instead of as high as bails.
- Because the staff ratio to inmate is important i.e., Subutex.
- It needs to be updated...
- If not smaller

## Why a New Jail Should be Smaller

(n=10)

- *Build a mental health drug rehab first.*
- *We need more solutions, jail should not be a mental hospital. It's sad.*
- *Housing people in jail is not a cure, it is a cop out to helping people. Rebuild the people to rebuild the county.*
- *Petty crimes would be released.*
- *Maybe it could help give alternatives rather than constantly incarcerating citizens for any reason possible.*
- *Stop putting so many innocent people in jail. Reel in the crooked cops. This many people should not be in jail.*
- *I think the county keeps arresting a lot of people that should not be incarcerated and this is even known at time of arrest.*
- *Workers can't keep up with their job description.*
- *Educate more.*

## Why We Should Not Build New Jail

(n=6)

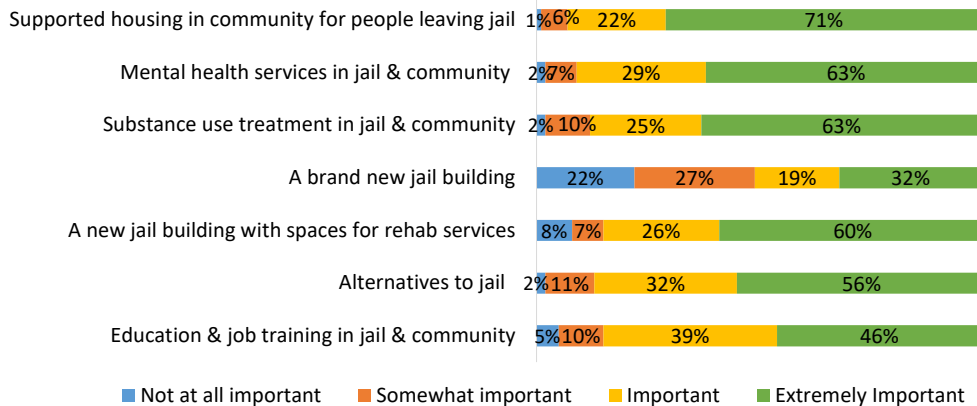
- *Jailing people for property crimes or drugs is wrong. Should be reserved for monsters!*
- *Funds should go towards prevention not prosecution.*
- *Don't need new jail. Need programs to keep people out of jail and getting the help they need.*
- *Don't waste tax \$. Build clinics to save America from the fentanyl pandemic with Subutex and Buprenorphine!!!*
- *They just need to run this jail better, more med staff so we can get meds everyday.*
- *This place is historical and should stay where it is.*

# Criminal Legal System Priorities

Imagine that you are in charge of the county budget and you have to prioritize how you spend the money that is available. Your main goal is to keep the community safe and healthy. Where do you think the county's money should be spent?

## How important is each of these priorities?

(n=104)



## Other Priorities / Comments

(n=22)

### 32% - Emphasize need for housing

- *Housing can be key to end crime for some grownups ready for change.*
- *Housing coupled with job training/placement with goal of permanent housing made available.*
- *Too bad supported housing couldn't be offered prior to jail. If these 4 things were set in place crime would fall 80% i voila! No need to build a new jail.*

### 25% - Negative statement about the system or jail

- *...Incarceration is a failed idea.*

### 14% - Desire for job / job training

- *Offer convicted criminals a place to work (like farm or production) instead of jail.*

### 14% - Want alternatives to incarceration

- *Continued mental health and drug treatment and different means of serving sentences.*

### 27% - Other

#### Other (27%, 6 Responses)

- *An end to unwanted no contact orders that destroy families and demoralize men*
- *Counseling for families to help understand why people become repeat offenders in this system.*
- *Disability services*
- *Free medical*
- *Phone banks avail more online addresses and communication vid email to teachers, housing, jobs, pub., deb., etc,*
- *Stop attacking local families and stop monopolizing the co. Local families are being destroyed and they're not being allowed their riteful heritage are family lands.*



# Additional Comments

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The final question asked for “Anything else you would like us to know.” There were 67 responses. These open-ended comments are presented in the following slides grouped by topic. Many respondents commented on multiple topics and each topic is counted separately.

## Additional Comments

### 24% - Criminal legal system is unjust

- *I know this isn't a Whatcom only issue but cash bail criminalizes being poor. If I had money to bail out, I would still have a job and home and be a productive member of society. Because I'm poor I'm stuck, lose everything which works to keep me poor.*
- *The Whatcom County judicial system is unfair and completely biased. The point system is broken and the lack of help for felons almost guarantees reoffending.*
- *In this county its guilty until proven innocent because some of us have a record. We basically get charged twice cause of our past. Sometimes it seems like the public defenders don't want to put in the work for us to get better deals. And our court dates get pushed out months apart, with no sign of progress.*
- *I have been incarcerated for 21 months due to backup of court systems and cases. My bail is 1.5 million. I am seriously innocent of the charge pressed on me and I feel it was way too easy for the legal system to just put a charge on me and then leave me stuck in here until I can prove my innocence...*
- *...what surprised me, and sickens me ... is them using Covid (when there isn't, and hasn't been, a Covid mandate since March) to take away our speedy trial rights. We don't get our court paperwork, we don't have to sign anything, the public defenders won't answer our calls, we aren't told about omnibus and trial...*

### 16% - Suggested improvements for the jail

- *The tablets if used right can help inmates... Maybe offer a free subscription monthly if they do x amount of self help... Incentives for better behavior.*
- *They should offer sweatshirts and underwear and bras and a workout program.*
- *Prices for store and media should be more reasonable (they would make more money) -Our religious nights should be similar to in prison (i.e., more materials available and to be sent in) - We should be able to access an open line phone so we can call outside services that aren't able to answer collect (banks, churches, etc.) -More access to substantial legal help -Print out of all available services.*
- *To be able to have access to more books!*
- *Outdoor time for appropriate individuals, a functioning garden grown by inmates, group/one on one counseling. The tablets help with mental health, anything that would make being incarcerated not cause more mental health issues.*

### 16% - Complaints about jail food; hungry

### 10% - Want caffeinated coffee

### 12% - Compliments/Expressions of gratitude

- *I think you are doing the best you can with the limited staffing and resources you have.*
- *Thanks for taking our needs/wants into consideration.*
- *I have really enjoyed the school in jail program and appreciate the effort taken to provide that program to inmates.*

#### **9% - Consequences of incarceration**

- *If you go to jail for 90 days or less and you lose your job and house. There is no help when you are released. You are just left to the streets. Getting back on your feet once you are homeless with nothing is extremely difficult. How can you keep your job when you can't do work release till you are sentenced? But it takes months to get sentenced since you only get 1 court date a month if you're lucky.*
- *I've lost everything the last couple months.*
- *By the time I am freed it will be over two years of my life and my kids lives that I cannot get back.*
- *I have been in 1 year and I have lost my property my house and my wife. You make me totally depend on being in jail because I have nothing left so it is my home and I have always owned my own house but I have lost it. Because all my bills come in and I am unable to pay so I lose it.*

#### **6% - Suggested services**

- *I think our county should put more effort into creating programs like Lake Whatcom Center/Opportunity Council.*
- *Please don't focus on building new jails to compound on an already dire problem. 80% of current inmates are in jail for crimes directly related to drug use but especially fentanyl. Folks are using drugs to treat mental and physical pain. Subutex w/ a transition to Buprenorphine mental health and housing would help greatly - financial support and more high paying jobs would be amazing.*
- *Just that there should be not just a new jail built but it should be another jail alternatives. Because just building a jail and locking people down all day all that is going to happen is negative effects. No one is going to learn how to work on oneself.*
- *To put services in will help inmates learn new ways to help stay out.*

#### **7% - Need outdoor recreation/exercise**

- *I have not seen or felt the sun in three months!!! More consistent time outside rain or shine.*
- *Years in county jail without vitamins to buy and lack of sun isn't good. ... We need exercise equipment to possibly create healthy atmosphere.*

#### **7% - Difficulty getting needed services**

- *Receiving the right treatment for medical reasons is so hard most of the time... When treated medically here, I am usually asked how long do I think I will be incarcerated for before they decide next steps.*
- *I need treatment for mental health but they're saying my restitution is too high so I don't qualify.*
- *I don't get how jail is about rehabilitation if we don't have these services. Lacking these critical things will cause more crime.*

#### **4% - Desire for work/wages**

- *Lack of jobs for most inmates gives them no motivation. Jobs would give purpose and pride and get them ready for work life when released.*

#### **4% - Treatment is inhumane**

- *You need to treat your inmates like people, not trash!*

## Additional Comment

... A lot of people who can't afford commissary here at the jail depend on the meals we are served. Most of the time the food is not cooked all the way. Financial assistance is very important cause half us people who come to Jail are homeless and unemployed and most of us don't have family / friends putting money on our account to buy better food. If there was some way we could pay for our food on EBT cards through Dept. of Social Health Services that would be so great. I also wish we had some counselors that would come talk to us about our mental health or past trauma from child abuse or family issues. I wish we could get a TV in this jail cause the work center has free TV and tablets! We have tablets, but like I said, a lot of us don't have financial assistance to pay for these things. I really hope we get this help cause we are humans. **We deserve second chances. We are humans. We need people who won't give up on us.**

# Whatcom County Jail Staff's Perspectives

## Methods

28  
Respondents

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Paper surveys put in the mailboxes of all staff in the Jail & Work Center in September 2022.

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The Jail Educator visited the facilities several times over 4-weeks to encourage staff participation.

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Participation was voluntary.

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No incentives were offered.

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To ensure anonymity, survey questions did not ask for demographic information.

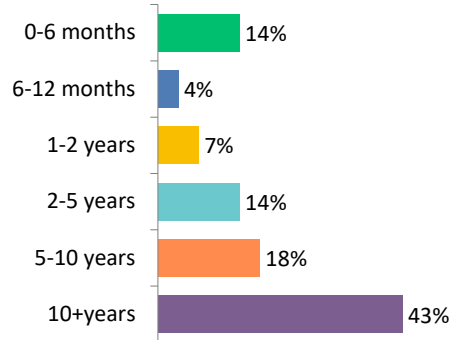
The results must be interpreted cautiously given the small sample of staff.

# Jail Staff's Experience



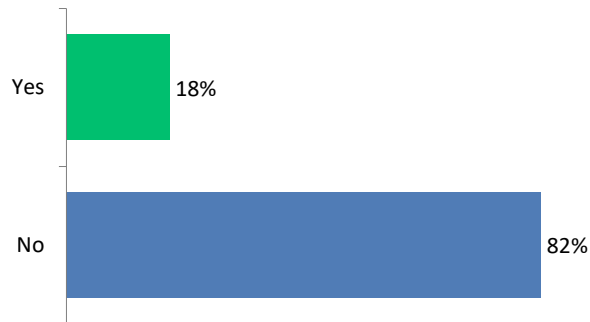
### How long have you worked in the Whatcom County jail?

Answered: 28 Skipped: 0



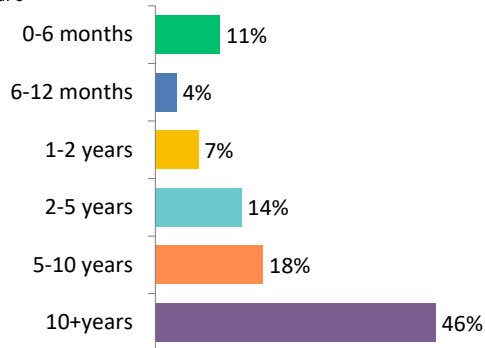
### Have you had other jobs in the criminal legal system in Whatcom County or elsewhere?

Answered: 28 Skipped: 0



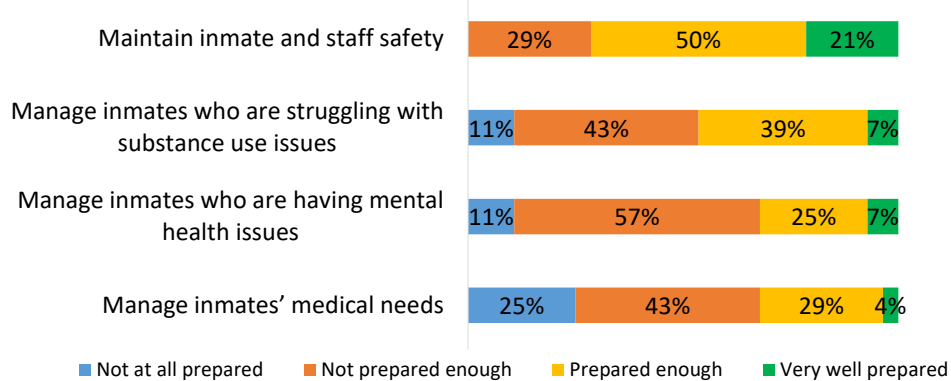
### In total, how long have you worked in the criminal legal system (including Whatcom County jail)?

Answered: 28 Skipped: 0



## How Well Prepared Do You Feel You Are To...

Answered: 28 Skipped: 0



## What Would Help You Feel More Prepared?

Answered: 27 Skipped: 1 Note: Some people gave more than one response.

- 56% - More medical & mental health staff, 24/7
  - *24/7 nursing staff. More close watch/observation cells. More corrections/medical/mental health staff.*
- 30% - More training
- 26% - A better facility
  - *A facility with adequate housing, a facility that isn't failing...*
- 15% - Other

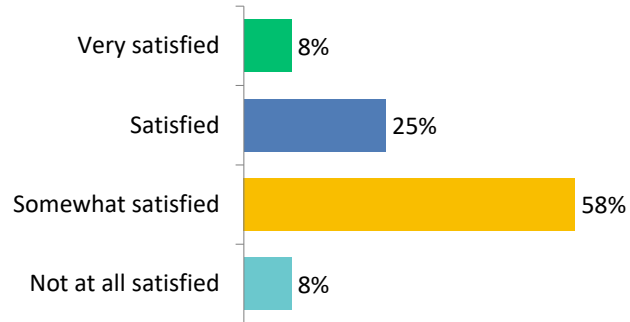
### Other (15%, 4 Responses)

- *People with serious mental health issues usually deteriorate when not medicated. We either need to be able to force medicate and also bring back state mental hospitals.*
- *More practice and time dealing with these people will come.*
- *Better work hours.*
- *More pay.*



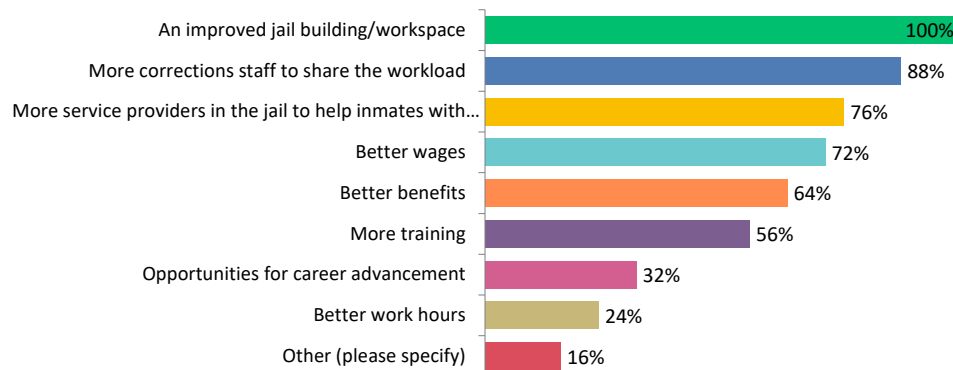
## On a typical day, how would you rate your job satisfaction?

Answered: 24 Skipped: 4



## What would make your current job more satisfying?

Answered: 25 Skipped: 3



### Other (16%, 4 Responses):

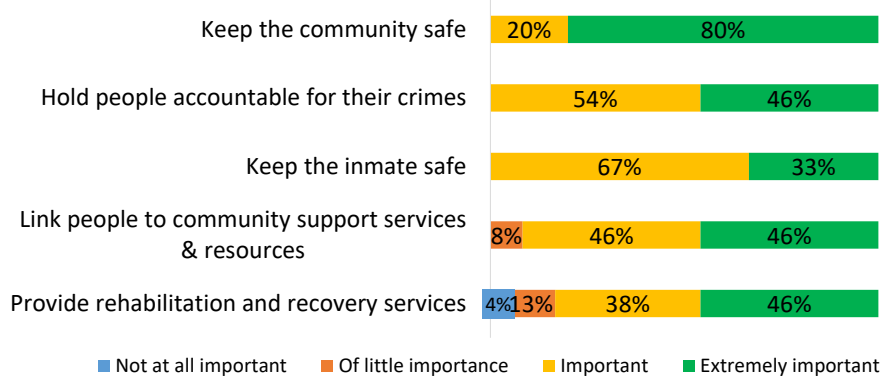
- *24 hr. medical services.*
- *More shift briefs.*
- *Elected officials who will keep their promises.*
- *Public defenders communicating with all of their clients regularly.*

# Feelings about the Jail & Incarceration



## How Important is Each of These Purposes of the Jail?

Answered: 25 Skipped: 3



## Main Reasons You Think People Wind Up Involved in the Criminal Legal System

Answered: 22 Skipped: 6 Note: Some people gave more than one response.

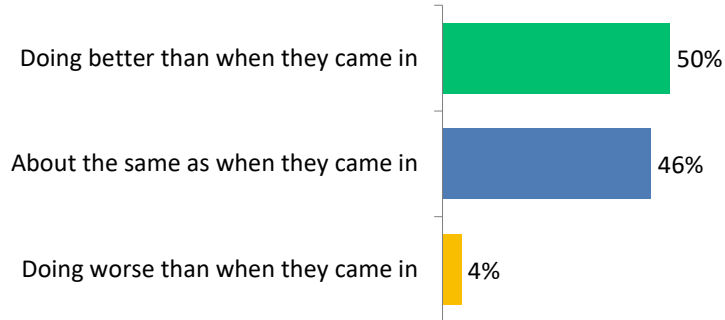
- 64% - Substance use and mental health issues
- 23% - Difficult situations & poor choices  
*Some make mistakes, some do not know any other way of survival. For them this is life.*
- 18% - Poor upbringing
- 14% - Lack of needed services
- 9% - Homelessness
- 14% - Other

### Other (14%, 3 Responses)

- *Lack of accountability for lower-level offences*
- *The state of the world.*
- *They are self-centered and only care about their own happiness and desires, the libtard left continues to push mental health illness and drug use are normal.*

## How Are People Doing When They Are Released from Jail?

Answered: 24 Skipped: 4



### Comments (11 responses)

#### 3 – Better, sober

- *They are often off drugs and healthier*
- *They are sober.*
- *Usually sober and/or stabilized on medications*

#### 3 – Return to drugs when they are released

- *95 percent go back to Fentanyl.*
- *Initially better but there is a sharp decline once they get off their meds and/or "self medicate" with street drugs.*
- *But while they are in they make new acquaintances in the criminal world.*

#### 3 – Depends on the person

- *Depends - varies by person really*
- *Depends on if they participated in needed MH services, got on Subutex, and engaged with re-entry to connect with services outside of jail.*
- *It could depend on the person and crime. First timer DUI or simple assault probably won't come back. Habitual re-offenders - jail doesn't do much and is just social networking for them.*

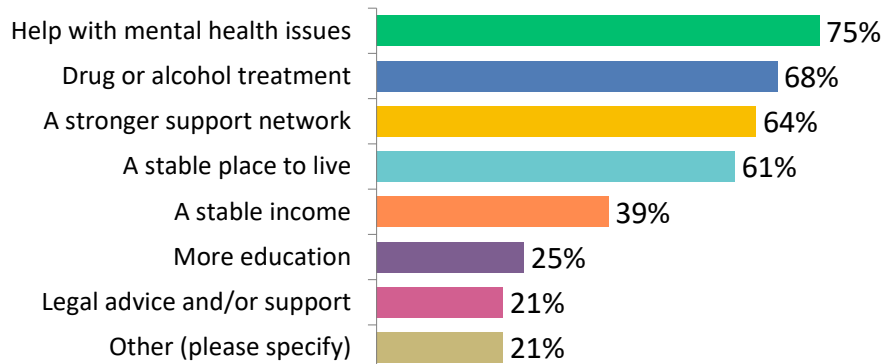
#### 2 – The same or worse

- *Some are slightly better, but most are the same or worse.*
- *Both (worse & same) 1 - many are still on drugs while they're in jail seems as if pharmaceuticals are pushed as well as Suboxone. 2 - Not enough mental health professionals in the jail.*

# Service Needs

## What Services Would Help People Avoid Going to Jail?

Answered: 28 Skipped: 0



### Other (21%, 6 responses)

2 - All of the above.

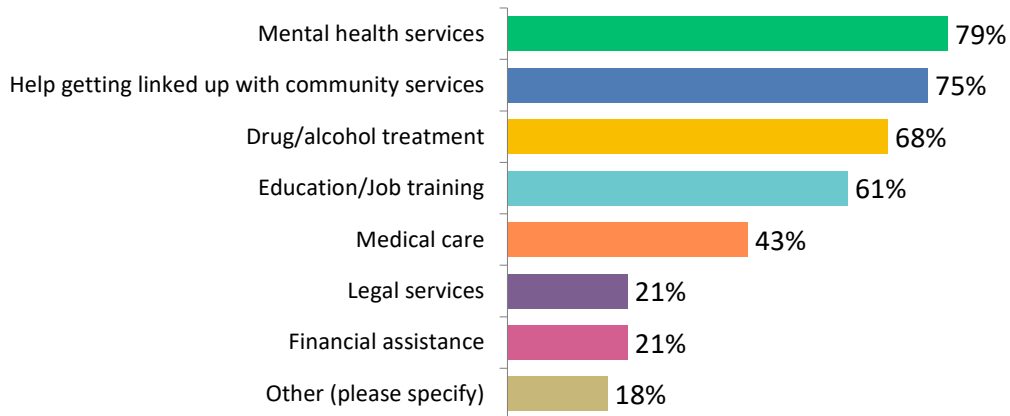
2 - A stable home while growing up ("proper values," two parents)

1 - *Care about others more than themselves teach ethics and right from wrong early in life.*

1 - *No "one size fits all"*

## What Jail-based Services Would Help People in Jail for 30+ Days Be More Successful in the Community?

Answered: 28 Skipped: 0



### Other (18%, 5 Responses)

2 – All of the above

1 - Access to medication (free)

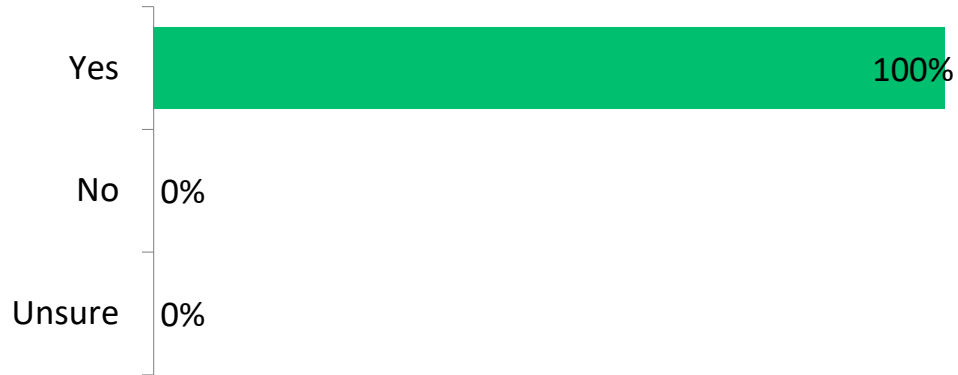
1 - Learn the effect of dysfunctional home life. Learn work ethic.

1 - Nothing helps until they are ready to change their life.

# Jail Facility

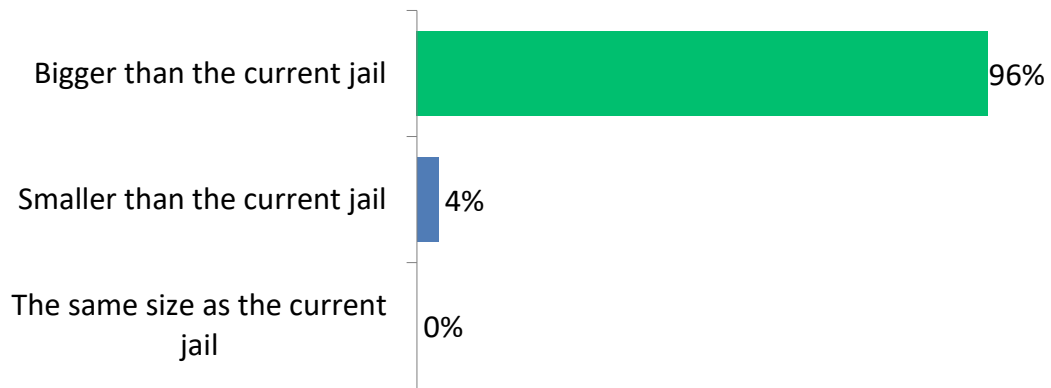
## Do you think that our county needs to build a new jail facility?

Answered: 28 Skipped: 0



## If a new jail were to be built, what size should it be to accomplish all the goals you think are important?

Answered: 28 Skipped: 0





## Why?

Answered: 26 Skipped: 2 Note: Some people gave more than one response

**35% - To address increasing crime rates by holding people accountable**

*Make the community feel safer by holding criminals accountable.*

*No room to book people and help them before they get to serious crimes.*

*Ignoring law and order creates more criminal activity.*

**31% - More space to safely house inmates**

*So that we are not over capacity in 5 years. We scramble EVERY DAY with where to properly house inmates now.*

**27% - More space for inmates with mental health issues and staff to support them**

*The state is not building mental health facilities. Jails are now being used more for housing the mentally ill than active criminals. You need a large jail, one section to house the mentally ill and the other section to house non-mentally ill criminals.*

**8% - For jail staff safety**

*Bigger would allow for less blind corners, and would be safer for all.*

**12% - Other**

### **Other (12%, 3 Responses)**

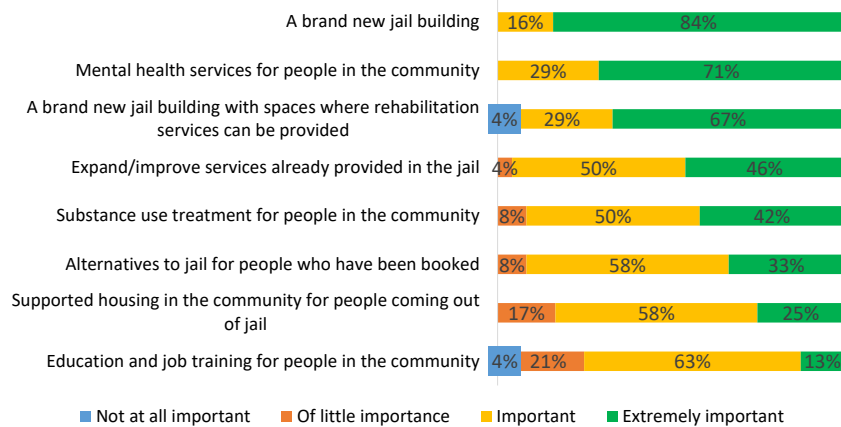
- *We are functioning in 2 buildings and triage center. All 3 need to be combined into one facility. We need to build for next five year's growth, not what we have right now.*
- *The current inmate population are also not getting through court fast enough so there are people (mainly mental health) that are just sitting here and nothing is being done with their cases.*
- *The county is growing, we would be shortsighted not to anticipate that.*

# Criminal Legal System Priorities

Imagine that you are in charge of the county budget and you have to prioritize how you spend the money that is available. Your main goal is to keep the community safe and healthy. Where do you think the county's money should be spent?

## How important is each of these priorities?

Answered: 25 Skipped: 3



### Comments (6 Responses):

- *\*(under "supported housing in the community for people coming out of jail")\* This is ABSOLUTELY CRITICAL!! We are releasing inmates with no housing options and occasionally provide an inmate or two with a tent and sleeping bag! We are setting them up to FAIL the minute they walk out the door and it is the most FRUSTRATING AND DISHEARTENING aspect of my job!!*
- *Rehab center attached to jail run by same providers as in-custody so released inmates can continue treatment without hiccups.*
- *24/7 mental and medical health services at jail.*
- *Training law enforcement, mental health resources, jail facility.*
- *Elected officials who stand up for people's rights rather than a popularity contest of saying the right phrases.*
- *They all need to get jobs and support themselves.*

## One Thing You Would Like to See Change in the Criminal Legal System

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Answered: 23 Skipped: 5

### 52% - Faster resolution of cases

*I would like to see cases resolved quicker, rather than an inmate sit in jail for months with a million continuations then finally get sentenced on a random Thursday to "time served" and released 2 hours later. It makes my job EXTREMELY DIFFICULT!*

*Get people through the court system within 60 days. No more continuing cases.*

### 17% - More services for inmates with mental health issues

*People with mental health issues need to be dealt with in the community/hospital, not just thrown in jail and forgotten about (which is the common practice).*

### 17% - Hold people accountable for crimes/Tougher sentencing

### 9% - Lawyers doing more for their clients

### 17% - Other

#### Other (17%, 4 Responses)

- *Better/more sentencing alternatives (drug/MH treatment)*
- *The criteria for people being held, sentencing, etc... it is all over the place and some people are not being help for very serious offences while others (less serious) are being kept longer.*
- *Large more modern jail. Jails for the mentally ill who commit crimes.*
- *I think tablet use should be limited, I think mental health or other resources we can offer them rather than use the tablets all day would be better for them.*

# Anything Else You Would Like Us to Know?

## Comments about Facilities:

- *A new jail is needed. To maintain safety of the incarcerated and staff. As our population grows the need for a bigger jail is a must to hold criminals accountable and to make the community members feel safe.*
- *A new jail would greatly help the motivation of staff and inmates to be better.*
- *I'm not sure just how many Band-Aids you can throw at the jail, delaying the inevitable building of another facility. In the future this jail will be unsafe and unfit for staff and inmates. Will you wait until someone is hurt.*
- *The current jail is too small and depleted(?) to be safe for inmates and staff!*
- *Whatcom county needs a larger more modern jail that works with us rather than against us. Whatcom county also needs a mental health jail separate from a criminal jail.*

## Comments about Needed Services:

- *24-hour medical care*
- *Corrections Deputies and support staff work very hard under worsening conditions and stretched resources. Most of us just want more staffing so we can live our lives and see our families a normal amount of time. Root things we need to address is the MH and substance abuse rampant in our community. We need a more serious, funded support network, in the jail and out.*
- *We cannot provide the proper services or programs to help prevent recidivism.*
- *The mental health program needs to be greatly expanded; jail staff need more training to deal with individuals with severe mental illness; and there needs to be better communication all around to ensure continuity of care.*

**Other:**

- *I don't think legalizing drugs is benefiting anyone and then telling the patrol side they can't pursue for anything makes the issue bigger. I don't know the answer but there was/is no planning for how the county is being affected by drugs and crime.*
- *THANKS. People need to be responsible for themselves. You can't spend your way out of this.*
- *The community talks a big game about mental health but actually does nothing to help. The burden falls to the jail. BPD and St Joes' way of dealing with them is waiting for a slap then charging assault 3. The person then sits in filth for a year waiting for competency. I fully expect that this "SAC" will talk a lot but actually accomplish nothing.*
- *The whole system has swung so far left - that common sense does not exist - victims must get rights back - now!*
- *We have a system that enables dependency, medical system that pushes more drugs than healthy lifestyle. Every addiction is replaced by another addiction. Lawyers and judges make way too much money, have no real oversight and are disconnected from the reality of the world they live in. Judges are elected officials, they have to look out for their political career rather than doing what they said during elections. Elected officials are so far removed. Every elected official must do a ride along and spend an entire shift in jail. Not just a tour. Ride along where they are making contact. If someone that needs to be held responsible, it's the policy makers who give in to gated communities.*
- *With the inflation of our economy and the cost of living in our area, many of us live paycheck to paycheck. Some move across country to more affordable areas and the rest of us grind away looking forward to a dismal 30yr retirement. Many think of us "corrections deputies" as baby sitters but yet members of our community do not realize the mental abuse we take as corrections deputies and the volatility of our inmate population. Our community has shown time and time again that they do not support us. This is disappointing, given the fact that we house these non-productive members of our community in our outdated facility to keep our communities safe for the time being and yet we corrections deputies risk our safety with an outdated correctional facility.*

## **Letter from a Jail Staff Survey Respondent:**

*This letter may be of an unsolicited length, so I apologize for that, but you (or someone) asked for my thoughts on a new jail and the services that surround it and I find that difficult to summarize in a few words.*

*To cut directly to the heart of the matter, yes, I believe a new jail is critically needed. The size, overall function, and services included in that maybe something that can be debated, but overall, there must be a new jail if we intend to have any sort of care about inmate welfare. As it is now, this jail meets the basic needs of inmates, but only at the most marginal level. Food, water, basic comfort and basic medical care is about all this facility can manage without running into logistical problems such as lack of room, lack of storage for materials, lack of electronic infrastructure for technology, and the list goes on.*

*I have heard people talk about how we don't need a jail because we should focus on diversion, decriminalization, and other means of preventing people from getting arrested in the first place. This ties into question ten on the survey, which asks what would help people avoid going to jail. I agree with the sentiment, although I think it is somewhat reductive in that, in my opinion, there is no one reason people go to jail. There are many different reasons, and sometimes it seems like trying to fix that must be like slapping at a fire with a fly swatter. No one solution will fix it all, and seems more likely to let other problems spread.*

*In my time with the jail, I have seen people who are in jail because drug abuse problems have driven them to criminal acts of theft. I have seen many who have mental health issues and can't stay on their medications. I have seen anger control issues, alcohol abuse, poverty, and probably a good number of other reasons that I could not wrap my head around. I think that a lot of these people, with the right intervention at the right time, could have avoided coming to jail. And with the right support and help, could probably be very successful once they leave.*

*But I have also seen people who are just mean and broken. What caused it or how they got that way, I certainly do not know, but they are predators who are really only interested in self-service, and they don't care who they hurt or deceive along the way to accomplish whatever it is that gives them satisfaction. At its most mild and common form, the people I've seen like this are simply uninterested in changing. They might be part of criminal gangs, addicted to drugs, and stealing to make ends meet, but it doesn't matter what services and support is out there, they will continue doing those things because they like the lifestyle. I don't know what you can do for people like that. Whatever you offer them, it is never enough and they will take without ever putting effort into changing. At the extreme end are people who victimize others without remorse. I cannot think of any ethical solution beyond a jail and prison. It's people like that who drive a need for some sort of imprisonment. It's hard for me to fathom not having some means of keeping people who are remorseless predators from roaming society.*

*One of my least favorite tasks I do as a Corrections Deputy is domestic violence victim notifications. When releasing someone who has been arrested for a domestic violence charge, we call the victim, giving them a notification that their aggressor is being released from jail. In all the talks about crime and jails, it seems that these victims of crimes are talked about the least, and there is nothing that makes me feel more powerless than calling some victim on the phone to tell them that the person that abused them the night before was being released, only to have them start crying, fearful for*

*their safety. Not every call is this dramatic, but it has happened a few times in my career, and I feel awful for the victim. However, there was at least a little solace in that the jail was able to give that person at least one night (or however long) of a reprieve from the fear they had been in. All that is not to say we should be quick to lock people up and throw away the key, but I can at least see the necessity in keeping people safe by securing those who would do harm. There is, of course, the other side of the coin.*

*I never see the success stories, I only see the failures. I literally could not tell you the number of people who have come to jail, either learned their lesson or got connected with the resources needed, and never came back. I have no idea because once they don't come back, I don't know what becomes of them usually. There are few exceptions. We used to have a homeless man who was booked into jail quite often for being disorderly. Then, suddenly, he stopped being booked in.*

*Months later, we got a letter from New York, with a picture of the man, cleaned up and surrounded by smiling faces. Apparently, his family had just happened across his name on the jail roster after he had been missing for years, and they had flown out to Bellingham to collect him. It was nice to hear a happy ending to the tale.*

*There was another young man who used to get booked in a lot, usually for misdemeanor crimes. He had mental health issues, and when he was off his medications, he didn't seem to understand things well, often times being catatonic. I liked him. He was always as polite as he could manage, and, while sometimes rather vacant, did not seem to be trying to do anyone wrong.*

*This place failed him in one of his last stays here. Our lack of space meant he had to go into a cell with a White Supremist who convinced the mentally ill young man to get a swastika tattooed on his face in exchange for some candy. It was many years ago now, but it still makes me angry that it happened, that he had to carry a symbol on his face, which I doubt he had any real understanding of, and certainly had no conviction. I heard he died of an overdose on the streets. I'm not exactly sure why, but I still think about him from time to time, and I wonder what system would have had to be in place to keep him from falling the way he did. I know the jail is not the reason for his overdose, or his mental health problems, but I hate that we could not have put him on a better path while he was here by having better housing options for him or better connection to resources.*

*The best definition I have ever heard for the word "stress" is "the perception that there are not enough resources to effectively overcome a situation or obstacle". This place is the epitome of that stress. It's the feeling of never having a true solution to the problems that arrive, never having the appropriate cell available, never having needed medical or mental health personnel to respond to an inmate's crisis, never having the tool needed for the particular situation.*

*Of course, it's not always true. Sometimes it is just a feeling more than reality. We do overcome the obstacles, we do find solutions, but they are inelegant, imperfect solutions and leave us with the feeling that things should be better.*

*It is difficult to put into words how stifling this building is in so many ways. Hopefully anyone reading this is familiar with the obvious deficient lack of natural light, the almost claustrophobic feel of the halls and cells, the completely inadequate medical facilities. But one thing that might not be apparent is how difficult it is to get even simple tasks done in this building.*

*For instance, if an inmate on third floor accidentally soils their uniform and needs a new one, this*

*involves going through a security door, taking an elevator ride (while wondering if the elevator is going to make it without an unscheduled stop due to maintenance issues), walking to a supply room, seeing if the correct size uniform is available, then a return elevator trip (with more wondering) and back through a security door (which requires a control booth operator to open) and finally walking back to the inmate and delivering the item needed. This is not a monumental task, but could take 5-10 minutes depending on how long you have to wait for doors to open and elevators to run. Imagine having to do that for a dozen or so items a day. Our facility has no storage space for things inmates need near the cells they are in, requiring a surprising amount of travel time just to provide these basic needs.*

*I will not reiterate all of the reasons a new jail is needed. I feel those reasons have already been written and spoken about by many more eloquent people than I, but I hope this letter will at least provide a different perspective than the ones that have been offered.*

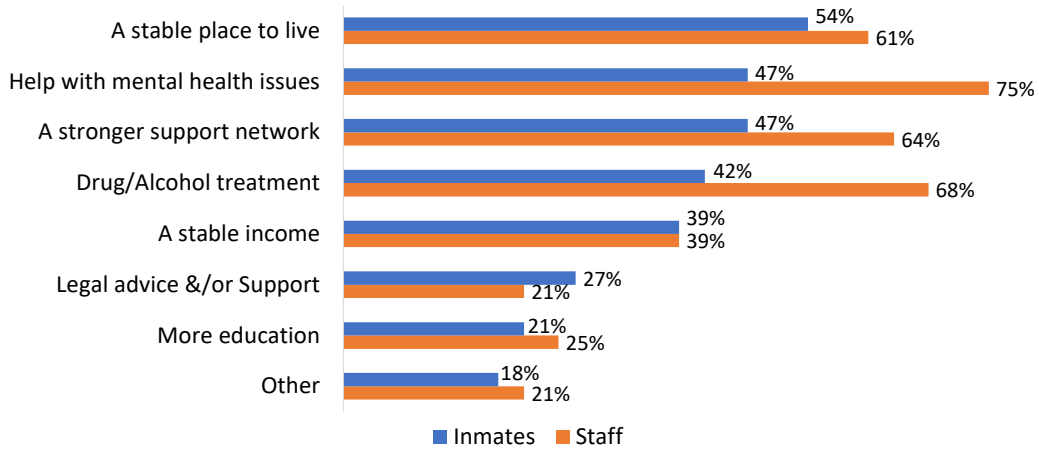


# Comparison of Inmate & Staff Perspectives



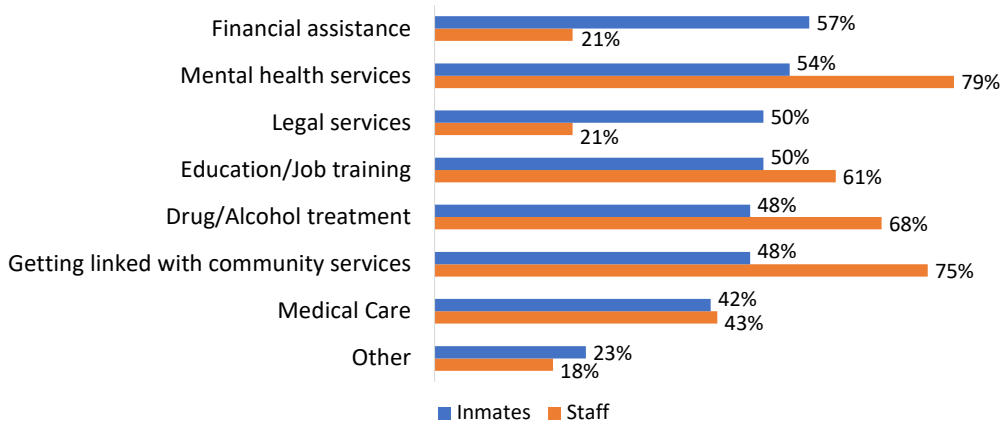
## What Services Would Have Helped You/Help People Avoid Going to Jail?

Answered: 105 Inmates; 28 Staff



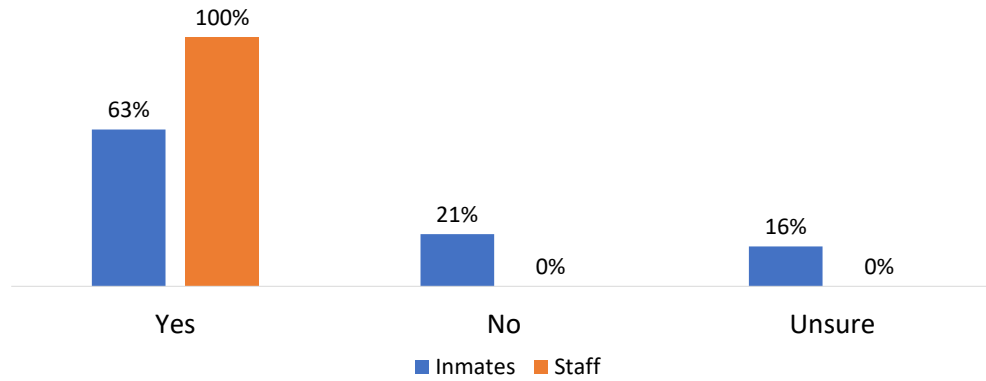
## Services You Need in Jail/Services That Would Help People in Jail Succeed in the Community

Answered: 103 Inmates; 28 Staff



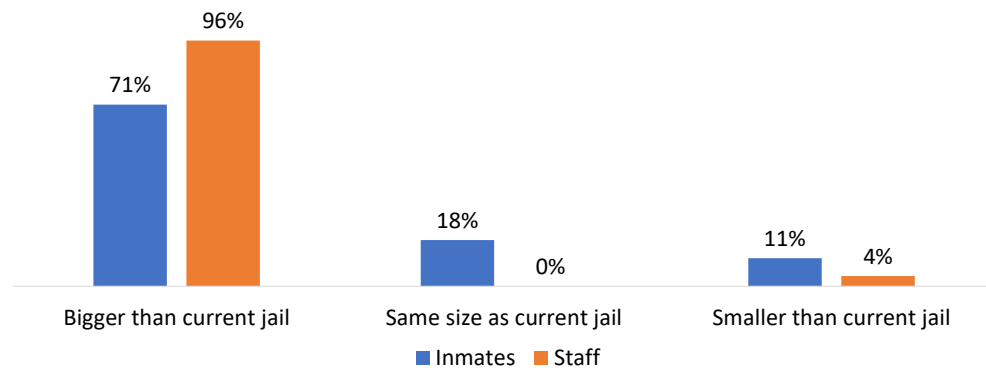
## Do you think that our county needs to build a new jail facility?

Answered: 105 Inmates; 28 Staff



## If a new jail were to be built, what size should it be?

Answered: 92 Inmates; 28 Staff



Both jail inmates and staff were asked to “Imagine that you are in charge of the county budget and you have to prioritize how you spend the money that is available. Your main goal is to keep the community safe and healthy. Where do you think the county’s money should be spent?”

