

The Amend Resource Team: A Health-Focused Intensive Housing Support Alternative to Solitary Confinement



Corrections departments across the U.S. isolate a great many mentally ill and/or violent residents, often because alternatives that ensure staff and resident safety do not exist.

Residents who are housed in isolated living units often have difficulty transitioning back to the general prison population because they remain at risk of violent behavior or refuse to move. In addition, common practices in isolation units frequently perpetuate violence. For example, a resident reacts violently to a staff attempt to remove him from an isolated cell. Staff in turn meet this violence with more violence, through the use of chemical agents, physical force, or otherwise. As a result, the next time a resident is asked or required to leave their cell, the likelihood of that inmate responding with intensified violence increases, creating a cycle that staff and residents in these highly punitive units may find difficult or impossible to interrupt. As a consequence, many prison systems have mentally ill and/or violent residents who have lived in isolation for years or decades, some of whom are eventually released to the community directly from those units.

For prison staff, it is increasingly easy to view the human beings that live in these isolated conditions as nothing more than a “thing” or a “problem,” a maladaptive response to stressful working conditions which takes its own toll on the physical and mental health of those staff who work these units. When staff dehumanize the people in their care, pride in their work inevitably erodes and the constant threat of and exposure to violence produces anxiety, PTSD, physical illness, and even suicidal ideation or behaviors among correctional staff.

For these reasons, and a host of others, a path out of isolated housing (or “solitary confinement”) back into general population housing for even the most challenging residents is critical.

In response, Amend at UCSF has partnered with the Norwegian Correctional Service to create the *Amend Resource Team*: an approach and training for correctional staff working in these units that creates environments conducive to treatment by providing all residents with daily, meaningful human interaction with an end goal of immediately increasing meaningful out of cell time.



What is Amend?

Amend at the University of California San Francisco Medical School is a public health focused program whose mission is to profoundly transform correctional culture by improving the health and wellbeing of people working and living in United States jails and prisons.

What is the Amend Resource Team approach?

The Amend Resource Team approach is an intensive support model developed by the Norwegian Correctional Service, adapted for use in the U.S. by Amend at UCSF, and successfully piloted at the Oregon Department of Corrections. The model provides correctional staff, as well as adjacent members of treatment and/or case management teams, the necessary education and training to work positively and productively with select residents. These residents have typically been classified to special housing units as a result of violent behavior (often persistent), including individuals housed in behavioral health units due to violent behavior that coincides with serious mental illness. The goal of the Amend Resource Team model is to limit the use of, and ultimately eliminate the need for, solitary confinement for people with serious behavioral and/or mental health issues. It is an alternative approach to the default correctional action of responding to recalcitrant resident behavior with physical force and isolation.

How does the Amend Resource Team approach work?

The Amend Resource Team approach involves training correctional staff to employ a praxis of daily human contact and mutual positive interactions between staff and residents, with the ultimate goal of permanently moving even the most challenging residents out of isolated living.

In our two Oregon pilot sites – the Behavioral Health Unit at the Oregon State Penitentiary and the Administrative Segregation Unit at Snake River Correctional Institution – Amend Resource Team members (correctional staff assigned to these units who have been trained in the Amend) program actively assess risk and problem-solve with input from the prison's treatment teams. Together all staff participants develop a daily action plan for each resident that ensures intentional human connection, communicating to the resident that he/she (or they) is unconditionally safe, thereby building trust over time.

This cultivated trust provides a foundation that a resident can build on with the confidence that they can interrupt the cycle of violence and isolation and progress



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forward. Resource Teams at these two pilot sites have now successfully graduated a number of residents who had spent years – even decades – in highly restrictive specialized housing to general population housing, and have changed the nature of specializing housing for countless others to maximize time out of cell and engagement in positive, pro-social human interaction.

What does an Amend Resource Team Pilot look like?

Amend at UCSF works with correctional system leaders and prison administrators to identify a housing unit with the leadership, staffing, resources, and baseline culture conducive to an effective pilot. While we believe the Amend Resource Team can be effective in any environment, an effective pilot should build on a reasonably strong foundation and face as few cultural headwinds as possible.

We then select a group of pilot participants (15 – 20 persons) that consists predominantly of correctional staff but also includes representatives from the treatment team, case management, and facility leadership. Participants are enrolled in a comprehensive education and training experience consisting of virtual immersion in a variety of Norwegian prison settings, expertly facilitated reflection and discussion sessions, didactics, and scenario-based trainings. The education and training experience requires approximately 40 hours and is best delivered over a 6-8 week period. This experience is followed by a 6-month period of mentorship, technical assistance, and follow-up instruction using problem-based learning methodology.

Amend provides robust evaluation using administrative and participant survey data with measurable outcomes related to incidents of violence, time out of cell, resident programming, staff sick leave, self-reported mental health symptomology, and others.

The Amend team that delivers the pilot comprises physicians, public health professionals, and criminologists with expertise in correctional health and correctional reform working alongside current officers and leaders in the Norwegian Correctional Service.