

## CASE STUDY: GEO REENTRY SERVICES

# How the Tennessee Department of Correction Pivoted to Remote Reentry Programming



For years, people on probation or parole in Tennessee faced a simple but frustrating reality: reentry programming required long drives, if transportation was available at all. Many simply couldn't attend, and as a result, missed out on evidence-based support designed to help them stay on track.

### A CRISIS FORCES ACTION

In 2021, the Tennessee Department of Correction (TDOC) was forced to confront these gaps head-on when COVID-19 abruptly shut down in-person programming statewide. With thousands of participants suddenly cut off from support and no clear timeline for reopening, the urgency was undeniable.

Rather than pause services, TDOC partnered with GEO Reentry Services to launch a digital programming platform at full capacity. There was no pilot, no drawn-out planning phase, just an immediate response to an immediate need. Participants could log in from anywhere, join group sessions online, and progress at their own pace.

This flexibility was especially critical for those living far from reporting centers or facing transportation barriers.

### REMOTE ACCESS FROM HOME

For clients like "James," who live in a rural county with no public transit, remote access means the difference between receiving critical reentry services and trying to succeed on their own. Instead of a weekly two-hour commute, James could complete cognitive behavioral programming from home, check in virtually with his case manager, and avoid disruptions to his job or family life. He could keep working, stay present for his family, and still get the support he needed to move forward.

### LESSONS LEARNED

The TDOC program model highlights how an urgent need led to a rapid, large-scale transition from traditional to digital reentry programming. The process surfaced practical lessons: rapid staff training and collaborative problem-solving were essential, and flexibility, both in program format and case management, helped maintain continuity for participants. While technology opened doors for many, it also required ongoing attention to access and support.

As agencies consider approaches to reentry programming, Tennessee's shift underscores both the possibilities and the complexities of using digital tools to increase reach and participation, especially in areas where in-person options are limited.

### SYSTEM-WIDE RESULTS

James's story is just one example. Across Tennessee, the shift to digital reentry programming brings measurable, statewide impact:

- In FY 2025-2026, traditional programming had a **successful completion rate of 54.6%** while digital/remote programming saw a **69.8% successful completion rate**
- More than half of digital participants showed **significant gains** in key areas like **decision making, social support, and self-esteem**

These results highlight the effectiveness of both formats in reducing risk factors and boosting protective factors that support lasting positive change and successful reintegration into the community.

Importantly, individuals who face technology challenges are still able to participate. Case managers have the flexibility to move clients between digital and in-person groups as needed, ensuring access to programming.