

COMPENDIUM: COMMUNITY POLICING  
AND PROCEDURAL JUSTICE IN JAILS PART 5.2

CASE STUDY

# The Inmate Growth Naturally and Intentionally Through Education (I.G.N.I.T.E.) Program

*Genesee County (Michigan) Sheriff's Office*



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## Genesee County (Michigan) Sheriff's Office

**Current Sheriff:** Christopher R. Swanson

**Number of beds/inmates:** 580

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# Overview

The Inmate Growth Naturally and Intentionally Through Education (I.G.N.I.T.E.) program was established by Sheriff Christopher R. Swanson of the Genesee County (Michigan) Sheriff's Office (GCSO). This program was designed to provide hope and opportunity for the inmate population and to far exceed historical jail education programs beyond just the ability to earn a General Educational Development (GED) certificate.

In addition, I.G.N.I.T.E. was designed to overcome the problem of generational incarceration. The goal of the program is to create a structured and safe environment that is conducive to education. Having this type of environment in place can facilitate the implementation of more diverse educational programming, which can help re-energize inmates, motivate them once again, and provide them with an education and new opportunities once they return to their communities.



Photo courtesy of GCSO

Front of Genesee County Jail



*“We are transforming the incarceration model into education. We’re breaking the chains of generational incarceration, starting right here in Genesee County.”*

— Sheriff Christopher R. Swanson



Photo courtesy of GCSC

#### **Inmates in education wing of Genesee County Jail**

### **Eligibility**

Any person incarcerated in the Genesee County Jail is eligible to participate in the program. Diverse programming allows for participants of all education levels and disciplines to engage in coursework. The I.G.N.I.T.E. program is also open to jail staff to participate, with the hope that their engagement will help drive positive changes in the culture of corrections for staff as well. As an example of the diverse programming, the summer 2022 course schedule will include new classes in art, creative writing, mental health, mindfulness, and music.

Participants are enrolled in class five days per week for two hours per day and are classified upon intake in short-term, medium-term, or long-term educational classes. In addition, inmates can finish their high school diplomas, get their GED, enroll in credit-bearing college courses, earn a certification in food and beverage safety, obtain a Commercial Driver’s License (CDL), and much more.

*“Even if they are credentialed, even if they have a high school diploma from a few years back and they’re still struggling with reading comprehension, we’ll approach that to hopefully make their lives a little bit better moving forward.”*

— Al Peters, Principal, Mt. Morris Schools

*“Good does come out of bad, you know? I’m just thankful and grateful I was given this opportunity. It was a long journey, but I stuck through it. I never would have thought that I’d be the one standing up here before all of y’all and the last man standing.”*

— Leon Mize, I.G.N.I.T.E. graduate

Photo courtesy of GCSO



**Sheriff Swanson and I.G.N.I.T.E. Program Staff**

## Staffing

All deputies assigned to I.G.N.I.T.E. are certified corrections deputies with professional backgrounds in education and leadership. Staffing consists of two deputies assigned full time to coordinate and oversee I.G.N.I.T.E. The lead deputy oversees day-to-day operations of I.G.N.I.T.E., including coordination with educators and vendors, and reports to the sheriff and jail administrator daily. The support deputy assists in daily oversight and scheduling of classes and interacts with inmates to address concerns. The support deputy also reports to the sheriff and jail administrator daily.

## How does the I.G.N.I.T.E. program exemplify the principles of community-oriented policing?

Community-oriented policing is a philosophy that promotes organizational strategies that support the systematic use of community partnerships and

problem-solving techniques to proactively address the immediate conditions that give rise to public safety issues (see figure 1).<sup>1</sup>

I.G.N.I.T.E. was established in response to the problem of intergenerational incarceration and with the goal of breaking the incarceration cycle. The idea behind the program's development was that having more opportunities for educational attainment could better equip individuals to succeed once back in the community. Achieving these goals would require robust educational opportunities beyond the ability to just earn a GED, as well as cultivation of connections with partners in the community. The program's facility-wide implementation also speaks to its organizational transformation aims. In these ways, I.G.N.I.T.E. exemplifies the principles of community-

**Figure 1. Community policing components**



Source: COPS Office, "About the COPS Office," accessed December 9, 2021, <https://cops.usdoj.gov/aboutcops>.

1. COPS Office, *Community Policing Defined* (Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2014), <https://cops.usdoj.gov/RIC/ric.php?page=detail&id=COPS-P157>.

oriented policing by connecting law enforcement personnel with community partners to collaboratively address a culture change for those incarcerated.

## Partnerships, community engagement, and procedural justice



Photo courtesy of GCSC

**Sheriff Swanson and I.G.N.I.T.E. Staff**

**Community partners.** The development of I.G.N.I.T.E. was driven by robust partnerships between the sheriff's office and community partners, of which there are nearly two dozen. For a 12-month period during the development of I.G.N.I.T.E., the Office of the Sheriff engaged the community and partners in planning and development. During this process, the Office of the Sheriff engaged in a rigorous social media and professional media campaign to keep the community up to date on the progress of I.G.N.I.T.E., a practice that still continues.

In addition to the emphasis on partnerships and community engagement, the I.G.N.I.T.E. program also emphasizes procedural justice. In designing the program, Sheriff Swanson was committed to

ensuring the inclusion of community leaders, community activists, and individuals dedicated to criminal justice reform. Engaging with and including members of the community from wide-ranging backgrounds has helped cultivate a relationship of trust between the sheriff's office and the community. Community partners and leaders have 24-hour-a-day, seven-day-a-week jail access in the spirit of transparency.

### I.G.N.I.T.E. Community Partners

- **Businesses:** Aramark; Auto Zone, Detroit Region; Randy Wise Buick, GMC; Global Tele-Link; World Global Services, EOS Business Solutions
- **Government officials/organizations:** Chief Justice Bridget McCormack, Michigan Supreme Court; Genesee County Board of Commissioners; Michigan Department of Corrections
- **Nonprofit/social services:** Genesee County Ambassadors; Genesee County Community Action Resource Department, Michigan Sheriff's Association
- **Schools:** Mt. Morris Community Schools; Genesee Intermediate School District; Mott Community College
- **Sports organizations:** Braylon Edwards, NFL Alumni; Coach Jim Harbaugh, University of Michigan Football; Devon Gardner, Fox Sports Detroit; NFL Alumni-Detroit Chapter; The Sports Marketing Agency



Photo courtesy of GCSO



**Program graduate Leon Mize is congratulated by Sheriff Swanson**

*“The I.G.N.I.T.E. Program is what positive change looks like! Saluting Genesee County, Flint, and Sheriff Chris Swanson for providing much-needed educational opportunities that are cutting edge and will hopefully be followed by others around the country.”*

— Jim Harbaugh, head football coach,  
University of Michigan

## Implementation and cost

The I.G.N.I.T.E. rollout took place on September 8, 2020, amid the COVID-19 pandemic. To avoid the program being sidelined by the pandemic, the Office of the Sheriff worked diligently to create an environment in the jail that followed guidelines recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The Office of the Sheriff in Genesee County

was fortunate in that it did not have its first confirmed case of COVID-19 until October 8, 2020, nearly seven months after the pandemic began.

Significant technology upgrades were also needed as the facility lacked a dedicated wi-fi network for both coursework and commissary tablets. To overcome this need, the Office of the Sheriff worked with the network provider and Genesee County IT to install two dedicated wi-fi networks, one for tablets and educational needs and one for dedicated commissary/canteen tablet service. They purchased 600 tablets for I.G.N.I.T.E. participants.

Costs associated with the program are covered by the implementation of commissary tablets for residents to use when not in school. These tablets provide inmates the ability to email, conduct video visits, play games, watch movies, and order commissary items. While inmates were previously provided access to email and video visits, newer additions of games, music, and movie streaming generate additional revenue, while additional items are provided free of charge. Revenue from this initiative covers the cost of I.G.N.I.T.E. programming.

The Office of the Sheriff said they will remain committed to seeing that I.G.N.I.T.E. continues to grow and that it can serve as a model for correctional facilities across the nation.

## Program effectiveness and evaluation criteria

Since the inaugural fall 2020 semester, there has been tremendous growth in the I.G.N.I.T.E. program, although it has yet to be evaluated. The data below delineate the achievements over the first year and a half since the program began.

## I.G.N.I.T.E. Outcomes, through May 2022—By the Numbers

- **Students enrolled:** 2,140 total / 373 current
- **Hours of coursework:** 14,313
- **Teaching hours:** 170,908
- **Students' reading level comprehension improvements:** average increase of almost two grade levels
- **Math grade level improvements:** average increase of almost a whole grade level
- **GEDs achieved:** 27
- **High school diplomas achieved:** 9
- **Job opportunities offered to graduating students:** approximately 45

To ensure that evaluation is possible, the Office of the Sheriff, in collaboration with Mt. Morris Community Schools, has implemented a policy for tracking data to monitor the effectiveness and efficiency of I.G.N.I.T.E. Some of the data collected include the number of students enrolled, hours of coursework and teaching hours, diplomas achieved, job opportunities offered, and recidivism.

**Replication.** The Office of the Sheriff has documented the implementation of I.G.N.I.T.E. from idea to implementation and is currently working with the National Sheriffs' Association to replicate I.G.N.I.T.E. in jails throughout the nation. I.G.N.I.T.E.-based programming exists, or is currently being planned, in Michigan, Minnesota, North Dakota, Texas, and Virginia.

The Genesee County Jail is a 580-bed facility but I.G.N.I.T.E. was designed to be scalable to any size correctional facility. With the proper community partners and technological infrastructure in place, it can be replicated in any size facility, small or large, rural or urban.

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# About the National Sheriffs' Association

The **National Sheriffs' Association (NSA)** is a professional association, chartered in 1940, dedicated to serving the Office of Sheriff and its affiliates through police education, police training, and general law enforcement information resources. The NSA represents thousands of sheriffs, deputies, and other law enforcement agents, public safety professionals, and concerned citizens nationwide.

Through the years, the NSA has provided programs for sheriffs, their deputies, chiefs of police, and others in the field of criminal justice to perform their jobs in the best possible manner and to better serve the people of their cities, counties, or jurisdictions.

The National Sheriffs' Association headquarters is located in Alexandria, Virginia, and offers police training, police information, court security training, jail information, and other law enforcement services to sheriffs, deputies, and others throughout the nation. The NSA has worked to forge cooperative relationships with local, state, and federal criminal justice professionals across the nation to network and share information about homeland security programs and projects.

The NSA serves as the center of a vast network of law enforcement information, filling requests for information daily and enabling criminal justice professionals—including police officers, sheriffs, and deputies—to locate the information and programs they need. The NSA recognizes the need to seek information from the membership, particularly the sheriff and the state sheriffs' associations, in order to meet the needs and concerns of individual NSA members. While working on the national level, the NSA has continued to seek grass-roots guidance, ever striving to work with and for its members, its clients, and citizens of the nation.

The NSA has through the years assisted sheriffs' offices, sheriffs' departments, and state sheriffs' associations in locating and preparing applications for state and federal homeland security grant funding. The NSA record and reputation for integrity and dependability in such public safety programs among government agencies is well recognized and has led to continuing opportunities to apply for grants on the national, state, and local levels as well as management of service contracts.

To learn more, visit the NSA online at [www.sheriffs.org](http://www.sheriffs.org).

# About the National Policing Institute (formerly known as the National Police Foundation)

The **National Policing Institute** is a national, nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to pursuing excellence through science and innovation in policing. As the country's oldest police research organization, the National Policing Institute has learned that police practices should be based on scientific evidence about what works best, the paradigm of evidence-based policing.

Established in 1970, the National Policing Institute has conducted seminal research in police behavior, policy, and procedure and works to transfer to local agencies the best new information about practices for dealing effectively with a range of important police operational and administrative concerns. Motivating all of the National Policing Institute's efforts is the goal of efficient, humane policing that operates within the framework of democratic principles and the highest ideals of the nation.

To learn more, visit the National Policing Institute at [www.policinginstitute.org](http://www.policinginstitute.org).

# About the COPS Office

The **Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office)** is the component of the U.S. Department of Justice responsible for advancing the practice of community policing by the nation's state, local, territorial, and tribal law enforcement agencies through information and grant resources.

Community policing begins with a commitment to building trust and mutual respect between police and communities. It supports public safety by encouraging all stakeholders to work together to address our nation's crime challenges. When police and communities collaborate, they more effectively address underlying issues, change negative behavioral patterns, and allocate resources.

Rather than simply responding to crime, community policing focuses on preventing it through strategic problem-solving approaches based on collaboration. The COPS Office awards grants to hire community policing officers and support the development and testing of innovative policing strategies. COPS Office funding also provides training and technical assistance to community members and local government leaders, as well as all levels of law enforcement.

Since 1994, the COPS Office has been appropriated more than \$20 billion to add community policing officers to the nation's streets, enhance crime fighting technology, support crime prevention initiatives, and provide training and technical assistance to help advance community policing. Other achievements include the following:

- To date, the COPS Office has funded the hiring of approximately 130,000 additional officers by more than 13,000 of the nation's 18,000 law enforcement agencies in both small and large jurisdictions.
- More than 800,000 law enforcement personnel, community members, and government leaders have been trained through COPS Office-funded training organizations and the COPS Training Portal.
- Almost 500 agencies have received customized advice and peer-led technical assistance through the COPS Office Collaborative Reform Initiative Technical Assistance Center.
- To date, the COPS Office has distributed more than eight million topic-specific publications, training curricula, white papers, and resource CDs and flash drives.
- The COPS Office also sponsors conferences, roundtables, and other forums focused on issues critical to law enforcement.

COPS Office information resources, covering a wide range of community policing topics such as school and campus safety, violent crime, and officer safety and wellness, can be downloaded via the COPS Office's home page, <https://cops.usdoj.gov>.



Jails are communities in and of themselves, whose members are the individuals incarcerated and the correctional staff employed there; they are also part of the broader communities in which they are located, where the correctional staff live and to which the incarcerated population will eventually return. Community-oriented policing is as important in jails as it is in towns, cities, and counties; this compendium of community policing and procedural justice practices and programs, developed by the National Policing Institute and the National Sheriffs' Association, features research and promising practices as well as eight successful programs operated by seven sheriffs' departments that will be illuminating for other agencies nationwide.



**COPS**  
Community Oriented Policing Services  
U.S. Department of Justice

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**National Policing Institute**  
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