

There are relatively few community-based organizations that specialize in linking former prisoners to work; they are mostly locally based, and cannot begin to accommodate the national demand for services.

Such job placement programs show promise for improving outcomes for people returning from prison and jail, but exist only in a handful of communities.⁶⁶ The Safer Foundation, for example, is a Chicago-based organization that provides job training and placement, as well as transitional housing and other supportive services for released individuals. They place nearly 1,500 individuals each year, and report significantly lower recidivism findings for their clients than nonparticipants.⁶⁷ An evaluation of Safer found that 29 percent of clients who completed the program (in 1996) committed a new crime in the first 180 days of release, as compared to the 40 percent recidivism rate statewide that year.⁶⁸ The Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO) in New York City is another example of a large-scale job placement program, which serves an average of 1,800 clients per year (nonviolent felony parolees, individuals on work release, probationers).⁶⁹ CEO clients have an average annual placement rate of over 60 percent and average earnings nearly 50 percent above minimum wage.^{70,71} The CEO model consists first of preparing the person through job readiness training and an in-depth assessment with a job counselor, then providing them with paid transitional employment to establish their self-sufficiency and a sense of accomplishment. During their transitional employment, participants receive job development training based on the feedback from their temporary supervisors. Then, the individual is placed in a permanent job placement and, for the next twelve months, receives support from a counselor. After the one-year period has passed, CEO will continue to provide support and training as is necessary.⁷²

recommendations

A | Initiate job searches before people in prison or jail are released using community-based workforce development resources.

As an inmate nears the date of his or her release, the transition planner should be spearheading a comprehensive job-search effort on his or her behalf. Workforce and employment services providers from outside the walls should be engaged in this job search. Trained corrections staff should also be able to help inmates take advantage of community-based resources and develop basic job searching skills through the use of technology.

⁶⁶ For more information on these and other programs that provide job training and placement services to released individuals, see Reentry National Media Outreach Campaign, *Outside the Walls: A National Snapshot of Community-Based Prisoner Reentry Programs* (Washington, DC: The Urban Institute, 2003).

⁶⁷ Safer Foundation, available online at www.safer-fnd.org.

⁶⁸ Illinois Department of Corrections, "Departmental Data" (Springfield, IL: Department of Corrections, 1999), available online at www.idoc.state.il.us/subsections/reports/fact_sheets/FY1999.pdf.

⁶⁹ Available online at www.ceoworks.org/about.htm.

⁷⁰ Mindy Tarlow, Executive Director of CEO, interview with editor, February 2004.

⁷¹ Peter Finn, *Successful Job Placement for Ex-Offenders: the Center for Employment Opportunities*, National Institute of Justice, Program Focus (Washington, DC: 1998), NCJ 168102.

⁷² Available online at www.ceoworks.org/ceo_model.htm.

EXAMPLE: Educational and Vocational Programs, Orange County Jail and Mid-Florida Technical School (FL)

The Orange County jail has two prerelease job assistance programs. The first program, staffed by four full-time corrections employees, helps inmates search for work. The second program, staffed by two job developers from Mid-Florida Technical School, helps inmates enrolled in Phoenix vocational courses find employment and addresses their medical, housing, and transportation needs.

One-Stops provide one source of employment assistance for individuals preparing to leave correctional facilities. Prisoners are eligible for the basic job-listing and search services available through One-Stops under the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), which is designed to provide “universal” service to all job seekers and employers. Many, if not most, prisoners meet the criteria for intensive services provided by the One-Stops, which include assessments, job counseling, and other assistance. Access to skills training programs offered in the community may also be available to some inmates under WIA.

Due to many programmatic limitations or reporting and evaluation disincentives, people in prisons or jails may not receive the type or level of services envisioned under many of the programs and services available through One-Stop career centers. Rather, many of these programs and services tend to go to incumbent and dislocated workers in the community who have some experience in the local job market and who can conduct self-directed job searches more easily than people who are incarcerated. People who are in prison or jail need more assistance and access to be able to truly benefit from the advantages of a One-Stop.

EXAMPLE: Offender Reentry Program, Suffolk County House of Correction (MA)

The Offender Reentry Program (ORP), available to selected inmates at the Suffolk County (MA) House of Correction, demonstrates that, with enhanced support, One-Stop centers can effectively serve released individuals. Funded by the US Department of Education, ORP provides individuals intensive support services during and after release. Job counselors under contract from TheWorkplace, a One-Stop career center in Boston, provide employment readiness classes both at a halfway house and at the Workplace’s downtown office, giving students the opportunity to become familiar with center resources. Halfway house residents also participate in weekly job-support meetings at the One-Stop for 12 weeks or until they find work.

States should also facilitate access to One-Stops for people in prison by developing satellite One-Stops in correctional institutions. When financial constraints prevent the placement of actual, staffed One-Stops in the institutions, corrections administrators should consider installing “virtual” One-Stops in the institution. The virtual One-Stop would consist of computer terminals with network links to the local One-Stop’s

THE WORKFORCE INVESTMENT ACT AND ONE-STOP CENTERS

What is the Workforce Investment Act?

The Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA) replaced the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) as the nation’s guiding federal legislation on the training, retraining, and employment of youth, adults, and dislocated workers.

What is a One-Stop?

One-Stop career centers are either physical or virtual resources for employers and job seekers to find the assistance needed to realize positive and appropriate employment. WIA requires that local workforce investment areas establish at least one physical One-Stop to serve employers and job seekers. Local workforce boards may establish more than one physical One-Stop, and may also create virtual One-Stops at partner agencies, in community-based organizations, or in other facilities, such as prisons or churches.

website and job listings. Inmates could connect with One-Stop staff and the One-Stop job databases using the computer.

Prison staff members also need to know about general community resources that will be available to help people transition back to their community upon release from correctional institutions. Even apart from virtual One-Stops, the Internet can facilitate comprehensive job searches from within the correctional institution. State employment agencies and private employment services routinely post current job listings online, as do individual employers and media outlets such as local newspapers. A computer with an Internet connection will allow any inmate access to these listings, which can be sorted by region. While security is always a concern within correctional institutions, monitoring and blocking software is readily available that can be used to limit an inmate's ability to use the computer for unintended purposes. Software currently used in some libraries, for example, restricts access so that the computer user can visit only websites that are on a preset list.

Finally, inmates need assistance while incarcerated with the writing of résumés and the creation of work portfolios for use in the job search and interviewing process, and for the benefit of job coaches and employment counselors at One-Stops and community-based organizations.

EXAMPLE: Corrections Clearing House, Employment Security Department (WA)

The Washington State Corrections Clearing House (CCH), a branch of the Employment Security Department, works with corrections officials to provide services to enable inmates to secure employment, including educational courses, vocational training programs, offsite community service opportunities for minimum security inmates, and both prerelease and post-release job-search assistance. At five prisons, CCH instructors register their students with the Employment Security Department, enabling them to access the department's JobNet computerized job databank so that they can get job leads while still in prison. In job preparation programs, students are encouraged to use JobNet as a resource and place calls to the job leads that they find using the database.

B | Encourage employers to visit the correctional facility and meet with prospective employees before they are released.

Bringing employers to the correctional facility enables prisoners to establish connections with these employers prior to release and to build valuable professional networking skills. In addition, seeing employers in the institution encourages inmates to begin job searching prior to release. To these ends, corrections administrators should provide job fairs, private sector joint ventures, guest speakers, or mock interview sessions, or other programs that will engage employers.

EXAMPLE: Inmate Transition Branch, Federal Bureau of Prisons

The Federal Bureau of Prisons' Inmate Transition Branch assists in the implementation of job fairs and mock job fairs in federal prisons and (by request) in state prisons or jails. Its precursor, the Inmate Placement Program Branch, assisted with over 350 job fairs in 100 federal prisons. The Branch also distributes instructional publications such as a *Mock Job Fair Handbook* to corrections staff nationwide.