

*“America is the land of second chance, and when the gates of prison open, the path ahead should lead to a better life.”*

George W. Bush, State of the Union Address, 2004

# Facilitating the Re-Entry of Former Prisoners

Draft

Draft

## The Data

- **The magnitude of incarceration and re-entry.** Almost 1.5 million people are in state and federal prisons. Each day, about 1,600 people leave prison and return to the community. This represents more than 600,000 returnees annually. (J. Travis et.al., *From Prison to Home*, Urban Institute 2001)
- **The community implications of re-entry.** A large majority of formerly incarcerated people return to significantly distressed and working class communities in and around the central cities of metropolitan areas. (J.P. Lynch & W. J. Sabol, *Prisoner Reentry in Perspective*, Urban Institute, 2001)
- **The likelihood of recidivism.** Given the range of issues that confront formerly incarcerated individuals (see below) and the lack of services and supports to address them, recidivism is projected to be almost 66% within three years of release. (J. Travis et.al., above)

## The Issues

- **Lack of programs in prison to foster successful re-entry.** People in prison are disproportionately low income and have limited education and work experience. Only 35% receive the educational programming they need and only 27% receive the vocational programming necessary to improve their post-release prospects. (S. Lawrence et.al., *The Practice and Promise of Prison Programming*, Urban Institute, 2002) About 75% of returning individuals have a history of substance abuse, but fewer than one-third receive treatment in prison. (J. Travis et.al., above)
- **Challenges of family reunification.** Formerly incarcerated individuals often return to families struggling to cope with poverty and related crises as well as the range of emotions that a loved one's imprisonment evokes. Constructive family ties reduce recidivism and homelessness, yet little support is available to ease the reunification process for families. (J. Travis & M. Waul, *Prisoners Once Removed*, Urban Institute Press, 2003)
- **Insufficient community-based supports and services.** Other challenges upon return include the need for housing, substance-abuse treatment, and work. Limited data suggest that in major urban areas, 30-50% of parolees may be homeless, few receive the substance-abuse treatment they need, and only about one-fifth find full-time jobs. (J. Travis et.al., above)
- **Policy roadblocks.** Many state and federal laws pose barriers to successful re-entry, the ability to support a family, and responsible citizenship by putting jobs off-limits to returnees, banning them from public benefits and public housing, and denying them the right to vote after serving their time. (Legal Action Center, *After Prison: Roadblocks to Reentry*, 2004)
- **Lifelong wage penalty.** The majority of state inmates held a low-wage job prior to incarceration. But the economic “cost” of incarceration for men is a loss of \$6,000-\$7,000 annually. (M. Joseph, *The Economic Consequences of a Criminal Background*, 2002)

# Facilitating the Re-Entry of Former Prisoners

Draft

Draft

## Options for Philanthropy

- **Produce local area data for issue identification, intervention, and evaluation.** Each community needs to know which neighborhoods will receive the most formerly incarcerated persons, what their needs are, what resources exist to assist them, what else needs to be done, and what works. The Urban Institute's *Re-Entry Mapping Network* (see below) offers a model for data collection and analysis.
- **Support successful practice and replication of promising interventions.** Organizations like the Fifth Avenue Committee ([www.fifthave.org](http://www.fifthave.org)) address a range of issues faced by returning community members and use the committee's first-hand understanding of what's needed and what can work to shape the programs. Three factors most critical to successful re-entry include steady employment, substance-abuse treatment, and family connections. The Urban Institute's *Outside the Walls* (see below) describes a wide range of programs focused on successful re-entry.
- **Underwrite policy advocacy and system reform.** Besides working on removing barriers to successful re-entry, (see Legal Action Center resource below), research shows successful re-entry must start inside prison. In-prison programming like vocational training and substance-abuse treatment have been shown to be cost-effective by reducing recidivism. (J. Travis et.al., *From Prison to Home*, 2001)

## Key Resources

- **Urban Institute, Justice Policy Center.** Publications on re-entry issues and challenges based on the latest research and data, including *Outside the Walls: A National Snapshot of Community-Based Prisoner Re-entry Programs* and the *Re-Entry Mapping Network*. ([www.urban.org/content/PolicyCenters/Justice/Projects/PrisonerReentry/Publications/pubs.htm](http://www.urban.org/content/PolicyCenters/Justice/Projects/PrisonerReentry/Publications/pubs.htm))
- **Legal Action Center.** *After Prison: Roadblocks to Re-Entry* for policy barriers that prevent formerly incarcerated persons from working toward self-sufficiency. ([www.lac.org/roadblocks.html](http://www.lac.org/roadblocks.html))
- **Re-Entry National Media Outreach Campaign.** Media resources to generate solution-oriented community conversations about a range of family and community issues. ([www.reentrymediaoutreach.org](http://www.reentrymediaoutreach.org))



The Annie E. Casey Foundation



JustPartners, Inc.  
Strengthening Capacity for Measurable Results