Just Out

Early Lessons from the Ready4Work Prisoner Reentry Initiative

Linda Jucovy

Field Report Series

Public/Private Ventures February 2006

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Public/Private Ventures is a national nonprofit organization that seeks to improve the effectiveness of social policies and programs. P/PV designs, tests and studies initiatives that increase supports, skills and opportunities of residents of low-income communities; works with policymakers to see that the lessons and evidence produced are reflected in policy; and provides training, technical assistance and learning opportunities to practitioners based on documented effective practices.

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Introduction

Last year, nearly 650,000 adults were released from prisons in the United States.[1] Many of them went home without solid attachments to their families or communities and with limited prospects for finding jobs. To compound the problem, ex-prisoners often return to the nation's most disenfranchised neighborhoods, where there are few supports and services to help them reintegrate effectively, and where their presence may threaten to disrupt already fragile households and social structures. Statistics show that approximately two out of three returning inmates are rearrested within three years of their release from prison, and just over half are reincarcerated.[2] As these numbers suggest, without intervention, the majority of ex-prisoners will return to criminal activity, contributing further to violence and crime in already struggling neighborhoods.

In an effort to address the challenges facing former prisoners and the communities to which they return, Public/Private Ventures (P/PV) developed and launched *Ready4Work: An Ex-Prisoner, Community and Faith Initiative*. Funded by the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) Employment and Training Administration (ETA), the U.S. Department of Justice, the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the Ford Foundation, this three-year pilot program was designed to help returning prisoners by linking them to organizations that provide effective case management, mentoring, and job training and placement.

When former prisoners leave incarceration and return to their communities, they most often face an immediate need to find work, both to earn income and to develop structure and a sense of legitimacy in their lives. But, at the same time, they may be confronted by interwoven challenges—including, for example, mental health issues, educational deficits and a history of substance abuse[3]—that present significant obstacles to finding and holding a job. In order to address these urgent and complex circumstances, Ready4Work enrolls participants soon after their release from prison and, in some cases, while they are still incarcerated; assesses their barriers to successful reentry; connects them to appropriate services to address those barriers; helps them prepare for, find and remain in jobs; and provides them with mentors who can guide and support their reintegration into the community.

These program components were designed to address two primary and interconnected goals:

- **Improving participants' chances of forming long-term attachments to the labor market.** Statistics demonstrate that, prior to incarceration, most adult prisoners had weak or nonexistent ties to the workforce and that employment rates weaken even further after prisoners are released.[4] Thus, the initiative was designed both to help remove ex-prisoners' barriers to work and to provide support through early post-incarceration work experiences.
- **Reducing recidivism for participants in the initiative.** Research has found that employment seems to play a crucial role in helping returning prisoners avoid criminal behavior and reincarceration.[5] In addition, studies show that returnees are most likely to commit new crimes within the first year after their release.[6] The initiative thus enrolls participants within 90 days before or after their release so that programs can quickly begin to provide the kinds of services and supports that lead to employment and improve returnees' likelihood of making strong attachments to mainstream life.

Importantly, the initiative was also designed to address critical business employment needs. By helping returnees become job ready, linking them with employment and supporting them at the worksite, the initiative is intended to benefit employers as well as returnees. Particularly in sectors where there are high rates of employee

turnover and current or anticipated labor shortages, Ready4Work has the potential to increase employee retention and, ultimately, to expand the workforce.[7]

The initiative is currently operating in 17 sites around the country, 6 of which focus on juveniles who have recently been released from detention facilities. This report draws from the experiences of the 11 sites that work with adult former prisoners. Early in their second year of operations, when this report was written, those sites had already enrolled almost 1,700 participants—all of whom had been convicted and incarcerated for nonviolent, nonsexual felony offences. Eighty-five percent of the participants are male. Approximately 80 percent are African American, 10 percent Latino and 10 percent white or "other." All are 18 to 34 years old; slightly more than half of those participants (54 percent) are 23 to 30 years old.

The Sites and Their Lead Agencies

Ready4Work places faith- and community-based organizations at the heart of a network supporting the reentry efforts of former prisoners. Frequently located in the most deeply affected neighborhoods, and often the only institutions with close ties to members of those communities, these organizations are a unique resource for returning offenders. In some sites, these smaller, grassroots organizations are partnering with larger, intermediary organizations with program experience and technical-assistance capacity, so the two groups can benefit from their collective strengths.

Among the 11 Ready4Work sites that are the focus of this report, there are a wide range of lead organizations. While all had at least some previous experience working with former prisoners or other troubled populations, the kind and extent of that experience varies widely. In Chicago, the Safer Foundation, which works in partnership with five local congregations for this initiative, is a secular organization that has been helping former prisoners for more than 30 years. In Memphis, the initiative is operated through the Second Chance Ex-Felon Program, a public/private partnership between the City of Memphis and local businesses that was created in 2000 by the mayor to help former prisoners successfully reenter the community—Second Chance is now also partnering with a number of community- and faith-based organizations. In Detroit, Ready4Work is being implemented by America Works—a for-profit job training and placement organization that works with hard-to-place populations—in collaboration with the Hartford Memorial Baptist Church, a large congregation that has long been involved in addressing community issues.

At other sites, faith-based organizations serve as the lead agency, and Ready4Work affords them the opportunity to build on their previous work to provide services that are more comprehensive and reach larger numbers of former prisoners. In Houston, Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church, which has a decades-long history of providing services to children, prisoners, the poor and the elderly, operates Ready4Work through its 5C's Foundation. In Los Angeles, the Union Rescue Mission, the largest homeless mission in the country, is similarly operating the program through its foundation, *EIMAGO*. And in Oakland, the lead agency is the Allen Temple Economic and Development Corporation, which operates the program through the Allen Temple Baptist Church, a large congregation with approximately 5,500 members that has a long history of providing services in the community. Milwaukee's lead agency is Word of Hope Ministries, a service organization founded by the Holy Cathedral Church of God in Christ.

The lead agencies at two of the sites are relatively young, small organizations. Exodus Transitional Community, in New York, was founded in 1999 specifically to address the needs of people coming out

of prison. In the same year, Operation New Hope was founded in Jacksonville, FL, as a community development corporation whose primary mission was to provide affordable housing in low-income communities. When the organization found that some of the people it was hiring to rehabilitate the housing were former prisoners, it expanded its mission to include helping this population rebuild their lives.

The other two sites, in Philadelphia and Washington, DC, are both led by collaboratives. The Philadelphia Consensus Group on Reentry & Reintegration of Adjudicated Offenders—which includes representatives from Philadelphia's court and prison systems, the police department and the District Attorney's Office, as well as service providers, faith-based organizations and community groups—is the lead agency for Ready4Work in that city. The collaborative provides subgrants and technical assistance to local community- and faith-based organizations, which, in turn, provide the program's direct services. In Washington, the East of the River Clergy-Police-Community Partnership, a collaboration of multidenominational, faith-based institutions, is the lead agency.

This Report

The purpose of the report is to share early promising practices developed by the Ready4Work sites with other organizations working with former prisoners —including community- and faith-based organizations and their intermediaries.

With the exception of Detroit, which began operations in November 2004, the Ready4Work sites were in their second year of providing reentry services at the time that this report was written. As Table 1 illustrates, the sites accomplished a great deal during their first 12 to 15 months. While it is too early for definitive outcome findings, the sites, overall, are approaching (and in one category, have surpassed) the implementation benchmarks established for the demonstration—in terms of the percentages of participants who are involved in case management, receive employment services, participate in one-to-one or group mentoring and become employed.

At the same time, as in any new initiative, part of the sites' work during the first year included identifying challenges to the effective delivery of program services

Table 1
Ready4Work Implementation Activities and Demonstration Benchmarks

	As of February 2005*	Benchmark for 2006
Percentage of participants receiving:		
Case management	98%	100%
Employment services—including job readiness training, on-the-job training and placement services	92%	90%
One-to-one or group mentoring	78%	100%
Employment in full- or part-time jobs	59%	70%

* Based on 1,685 participants who were active at least one month during the second year of the program.

and making modifications necessary for strengthening their efforts.[8] Among the sites, these changes included redefining some of their staff roles, developing new partnerships, adjusting their job training and placement strategies, and altering their approaches to the mentoring component.

Future reentry programs will face their own local constraints and opportunities. Thus, there is no single model that can capture the variation that will appear among sites. At the time this report went to publication, 4 of the 11 Ready4Work sites had been awarded funding through the Department of Labor's Prisoner Reentry Initiative, a $30 million project that will fund multiple sites at an average annual award of $800,000 per year over the next three years. This helps ensure the sustainability of current Ready4Work reentry programming at these sites beyond P/PV's involvement with these organizations.

In addition, it is still too early in the process of collecting and analyzing Ready4Work's outcomes data to be able to say that any one strategy the sites have used is "best" or how the different types of lead agencies—secular, faith-based, government and for-profit—might vary in the particular kinds of benefits they deliver to participants. However, there are a number of practices that have emerged from the first year of the initiative that have helped sites strengthen their delivery of services and move toward their program goals. Knowledge of these practices can help other programs run more efficiently and effectively.

The following pages describe these key practices in four areas: recruiting participants; providing case management; building a mentoring component; and developing an effective system of job training, placement and follow-up. Each practice is illustrated with examples from specific sites. A concluding section focuses on communication and coordination among staff members—the essential element that ties together all of those efforts.

Information for the report is drawn from interviews with site leaders, P/PV program officers and research staff, written material from the sites and P/PV's records of the implementation process, including MIS data collected from the sites.

Recruiting Participants

Ready4Work sites are each required to maintain an active caseload of 125 participants—a number large enough to have an impact but small enough that sites can successfully provide comprehensive services to each individual. Participants can be enrolled within 90 days before or 90 days after their release, and they can be served for a year. As people complete their 12-month term and graduate from the program, or if they become inactive and are dropped, they must be replaced with new enrollees.

In order to maintain their full caseload and reach as many people as possible, the sites have found that recruitment needs to be an ongoing process. This involves such practices as having program staff—typically, recruitment is the responsibility of the case manager—go to prisons on a regular basis to make presentations to inmates who are within 90 days of release and forming partnerships with criminal justice agencies that result in a steady flow of referrals of former prisoners who have recently returned to the community.

Given the huge numbers of people coming out of prison and the scarcity of reentry services aimed at helping them integrate back into society, sites have generally encountered only limited challenges in recruiting participants. Two practices, in particular, seem to be key to their success: establishing formal partnerships with Departments of Corrections for pre-release recruiting and using a combination of criminal justice partnerships and broader outreach for attracting potential participants soon after they have been released from prison.

Recruiting

Promising practices:

- Recruit participants both pre- and post-release.

  For pre-release recruiting:

  - Establish formal partnerships with the local Department of Corrections.
  - Begin services immediately, while the participant is still in prison.

  For post-release recruiting:

  - Develop partnerships with criminal justice agencies and court systems.
  - Use newspaper advertisements and other media for broader outreach.

Recruiting Participants While They Are in Prison

Ready4Work sites are asked to recruit up to 40 percent of their participants while they are still incarcerated. Although it is too early in the data-collection process to prove the value of this approach, it is believed that beginning services before participants are released will help solidify the relationship between the participant and the program and, ultimately, mean stronger program retention. Importantly, having the program's support for two or three months before leaving prison and its continuing support afterward could also help ease participants' transition from prison to the community.

Forming Partnerships with Departments of Corrections

At least two sites have built into their program structure strong connections with correctional facilities. The Houston site recruits pre-release participants through its comprehensive partnership with the InnerChange Freedom Initiative, which operates a pre-release program at a minimum-security prison in Texas. The Safer Foundation, the lead organization for Ready4Work in Chicago, administers two adult transitional centers for the Illinois Department of Corrections and, thus, is able to recruit pre-release participants from its own facilities.

Other sites have developed relationships with their local Departments of Corrections to gain access to specific prisons so they can recruit participants, and they have found it important to

have memoranda of agreement with the Departments of Corrections to formalize the partnership arrangements. Jacksonville, for example, has agreements with a number of correctional facilities that allow recruiters to meet with inmates who are eligible for the program. These recruitment efforts take the form of a town hall meeting inside the prison, where inmates gather to hear about the program, and where those who are interested sign consent forms and learn about next steps. Similarly, the New York site entered into an agreement with an adult work-release facility, and program staff go there weekly to describe Ready4Work and enroll participants.

Beginning Services

Once participants are enrolled, it is essential to begin services quickly to establish relationships and lay the groundwork for their transition back into the community. At the Philadelphia site, for example, prerelease services include having the case manager conduct an initial assessment with each inmate to identify barriers to reentry and develop plans to address them. These barriers can range from problems with housing to a lack of government identification—a necessity for getting a job—because the participant lost his right to have a driver's license when he was convicted of a felony. Philadelphia also offers job readiness training through its partnership with Jewish Employment and Vocational Services, which runs several job-related programs in local prisons. In addition, the site provides mentoring to pre-release participants, either one-on-one or in a group, depending on the requirements of the particular facility.

Recruiting Newly Released Former Prisoners

As is true for many programs, word of mouth can be a useful recruitment tool for the Ready4Work sites. Former prisoners learn about the program from family and friends, as well as former inmates who are now enrolled. Congregation members whose churches are involved in the initiative, and who may be involved themselves as mentors, have also been effective in spreading the word. At the same time, to ensure that they reach a broad but targeted audience, sites have established more formal recruitment strategies.

Establishing Partnerships

All the sites have developed partnerships with justice agencies, the law-enforcement community and court systems so they can recruit participants on their release from prison. Los Angeles, for example, has relationships with the parole offices at several corrections facilities, while the Houston and Oakland sites gain referrals from their county probation and parole departments. The Philadelphia Ready4Work program is housed in the same building as the city's Adult Probation and Parole Department, which puts it in a unique position for forming partnerships that bolster recruitment. The site is also involved in an early parole program in which inmates are released directly into the custody of Ready4Work, with the mandate that if they violate the program's requirements, their parole will be revoked.

Conducting Broader Outreach

In addition to recruiting through these partnerships, a number of sites use the media to reach out to former prisoners who might not otherwise learn about the program. Advertisements in the classified section of newspapers have been particularly effective. The size of the ad does not seem to matter: The Detroit site placed a full-page ad in the *Detroit Free Press*, while the Milwaukee site placed a

small ad in the “help wanted” section of its city newspaper, and both received a sizeable response. Other media the sites use to reach the broader community have included local radio and cable-television talk shows and flyers circulated in targeted neighborhoods.

One reason why recruitment through the media is successful is that people who respond are motivated to find work. They find the information either on their own or through a friend or family member and contact the program. With the dearth of services available for those former prisoners who are trying to change their lives, the media is an important tool for letting them know the program is available. However, sites learned early in their media efforts that they must include the specific program eligibility requirements in their advertisements. Otherwise, they attract former prisoners who are motivated to change but ineligible to take part in the program.

Providing Case Management

Case management has been described as the thread that weaves through all pieces of the Ready4Work program or as the glue that holds together the various program components. Whichever metaphor one chooses, the point is clear: Case managers should have the central role in ensuring that participants receive all necessary services and make progress in overcoming barriers, obtaining employment and successfully reentering the community. To fulfill that role, case managers have to be a steady, practical presence in the life of each participant.

The goal of the Ready4Work sites is to provide this kind of intensive case management to a very high percentage of participants. Two key strategies contribute to their efforts: clearly defining case managers' responsibilities, and providing training and supervision for case managers who come from nontraditional backgrounds.

Case Management

Promising practices:

- Have a clear definition of case managers' roles and responsibilities.
- Keep caseloads manageable so there is ample time for ongoing one-to-one contact with each participant.
- Identify the personal qualities, not just the credentials, that will contribute to someone being an effective case manager in Ready4Work.
- Provide training and supervision for case managers who are less experienced or come from nontraditional backgrounds.

Defining Responsibilities

In some instances, sites faced initial challenges in maintaining an effective case management system because the case managers were responsible for too many aspects of the program, including functioning as mentor coordinators, job recruiters and job placement specialists—in addition to their already significant traditional case management responsibilities. The result, not surprisingly, was that it was impossible to fulfill all of these roles well.

This situation is not unusual as new programs evolve: It often takes time to fully identify what is involved in specific staff roles. As the Ready4Work initiative took shape, sites developed clearer job descriptions for case managers. While the details vary somewhat from site to site, case managers are typically responsible for recruitment at parole and probation departments, halfway houses and prisons—a logical role since it helps them form relationships from the beginning as they introduce potential participants to the program. Once participants enroll, the case managers perform the initial assessment to identify their needs for successful reentry, develop individualized service plans and serve as resource brokers by connecting participants with appropriate services, either within the organization or through referrals to other providers. These services can vary widely, depending on the needs of each individual. Across the sites, case managers might connect participants to housing and mental health and substance abuse treatment. They work with partners that provide bus passes for traveling to job interviews, discounts for professional haircuts, and free clothing so participants can dress professionally. The case managers are then responsible for following up with the service providers, closely monitoring participant progress and making necessary adjustments in their service plans, and visiting participants at their job sites once they have become employed.

Case managers are also responsible for maintaining a comprehensive file on each participant. These files—which are, in essence, a developing history of each person's reentry efforts—are intended to be an essential tool for program management. In addition to documents such as

the intake form and individual service plan, the files should also include notes describing the case manager's systematic contact with the participant and his or her service providers. Such files allow the case manager to maintain detailed knowledge about each participant. And they also can contribute to the team effort that is central to Ready4Work, making it possible for anyone on the staff, whether a job placement specialist or another case manager, to "know" each enrollee and to step in and work with him or her effectively.

Keeping Caseloads Manageable

For many participants, case managers are the face of the program. They are responsible for meeting with each participant at least once a week during their first five or six weeks in the program, biweekly for the next month and then at least monthly. In some instances, case managers go far beyond this schedule. Participants at several sites have spoken about their case manager calling almost daily to check up on them, a level of attention they value. In Houston, case managers are known for going out in the community to find and talk with the Ready4Work enrollees. In Memphis and Jacksonville, they sometimes drive participants to job interviews, both to provide transportation and to be there for encouragement and support.

To allow case managers to continue to offer this level of individualized support, sites are taking steps to keep caseloads manageable. A reasonable caseload seems to be about 25 to 35 participants and, thus, sites are hiring additional case managers as their programs grow and the overall number of participants increases.

Providing Training and Supervision

Who makes an effective case manager? Sites have found that people from a wide variety of backgrounds and with a range of credentials have been successful in the role—from grassroots advocates to masters of social work, from people with backgrounds in employment and training to former probation officers and former prisoners.

Focusing on Case Managers' Personal Qualities

An individual's qualities, not his or her credentials, have proven to be most important. Sites have found that successful case managers are connected to the community where the program operates. They know about resources in the community and are able to form relationships with people working at those organizations. They also have the ability to communicate with everyone involved with an individual participant's reentry, including, for example, parole officers and substance abuse counselors.

A key quality case managers must have is the ability to connect with each Ready4Work enrollee. Participants have talked about how they value the personal aspects of the case management relationship. One man described it this way:

> *My case manager…cares beyond the point of professionalism. She isn't clinical, which can scare a person away, acting clinical. Ex-offenders, we have problems, and you need someone that can see beyond the professional outlook. She saw my anger and the impatience that I was having. We like to talk and talk. Sometimes we talk every day; she calls my house and wants to know I am all right.*

Some sites have former prisoners who work as case managers, which can be particularly motivating to participants. As one woman explained, when she learned that some of the staff members had been incarcerated, it made her believe that "if they can do it, so can I."

Strengthening Their Professional Capacity

Given the range of responsibilities case managers have and the varied backgrounds they bring to the position, sites have found it essential to provide training and supervision to case managers who may have all the

qualities necessary for success but limited experience with some aspects of the role they must fulfill in the program.

The Chicago site, where the Safer Foundation is the lead agency, illustrates this approach. The site has a lead case manager, an experienced social worker on staff at Safer's downtown office, who supervises and supports the direct service case managers—called reentry counselors—each of whom works from an office located near one of Safer's five partner congregations around the city. Recommended for the job through their congregations and hired in consultation with Safer, the reentry counselors do not necessarily have a case management background, but they have strong connections with the congregations and other organizations in the community as well as personal qualities that make them effective in working with the participants—not to mention a great deal of commitment to their work.

Building on and complementing the strengths the reentry counselors bring to their position, the lead case manager provides them with training on specific skills (for example, conducting the initial assessment), meets with each weekly to discuss issues that have arisen with their participants and performs weekly audits of their case management files. Using a software tracking system is an important aspect of this approach. Reentry counselors keep the case records for each participant on a networked computer, and the lead case manager at Safer can log in and review the files.

BUILDING A MENTORING COMPONENT

Research has clearly shown that a supportive relationship with an adult mentor leads to positive outcomes for youth.[9] Ready4Work has sought to extend this form of support to former prisoners, who often return to a chaotic and potentially destructive environment in which there may be very few people with whom they can develop a trusting relationship.

All of the Ready4Work sites have implemented a mentoring component. Most often it takes the form of group mentoring, in which a mentor meets regularly with the same group of four or five participants or two mentors team up to meet with a somewhat larger group. Sites that have been able to recruit sufficient numbers of volunteers for one-to-one mentoring have mentors and participants meet weekly or biweekly. Sites also have the option of implementing team mentoring, an intensive model in which two or three mentors are matched with one participant and meet individually with that person. Although no site has yet begun to use this approach, it holds promise for very high-risk participants because it increases the chances that an especially wary former prisoner will find someone with whom he or she is comfortable, and it provides built-in support for the mentors, who can rely on one another in their efforts.[10]

Across the sites, mentoring has been the most challenging component to implement. This is not surprising. While most of the sites had at least some experience with job training and placement for former prisoners, very few had previously included any form of mentoring among their services. In addition, mentoring adults—particularly former prisoners—is, for the most part, uncharted territory. While a number of effective practices have been identified for mentoring programs in general, they grew from programs that match adult mentors with youth. The Ready4Work sites are pioneers in learning how to adapt those practices to programs in which the mentees are adult former prisoners.

Mentoring

Promising practices:

- Hire a mentor coordinator.
- Recruit mentors from congregations whose pastors are strong believers in the power of mentoring and will convey that message to congregation members.
- Address the practical and psychological barriers that can hinder participants' involvement in mentoring.
- Provide training in building relationships and other relevant skills and knowledge, to help prepare mentors for their roles.
- Ensure that the case manager has a role in supporting the mentor-mentee relationship.
- Be sure mentors comply with federal guidelines that prohibit the use of federal money for proselytizing or requiring their mentees to participate in any form of religious activity.

Some of the challenges that the sites have faced are typical of the issues that nearly all mentoring programs encounter early on, including recruiting mentors, training them so they can succeed in a potentially difficult role and providing effective supervision and support. However, these issues may be more intense at the Ready4Work sites. It can, for example, be much more difficult to attract volunteers to mentor adult former prisoners than to mentor children or youth. In addition, the sites are facing one challenge that seems particular to recently released prisoners: a slew of practical and psychological barriers that can deter former prisoners from becoming involved in a mentoring relationship. These include transportation or scheduling problems and more complex interpersonal challenges (for example, the difficulty of connecting with former prisoners who may be wary of any new relationship).

Even with these early challenges, there are promising signs about the potential of the mentoring component. While some

Table 2
Mentor Demographics

	Number	Percentage
Total Number of Mentors	491	—
Mentor Gender:		
Male	289	59%
Female	200	41%
Missing Information	2	—
Mentor Race:		
African American	394	81%
Caucasian	61	13%
Hispanic	19	4%
Other	12	2%
Missing Information	5	—
Mentor Age:		
20-29	34	7%
30-39	88	19%
40-49	161	35%
50-59	118	26%
60-69	53	12%
70-79	4	1%
Missing Information	33	—
Average Age = 46		

sites are still working to find the most effective strategies for recruiting mentors, they have, overall, been quite successful in attracting a high percentage of male mentors and, particularly, African American males—a group that most programs find difficult to recruit. One survey of 722 mentoring programs, for example, found that only 40 percent of the mentors were male; at the Ready4Work sites, as a whole, that number is almost 60 percent.[11] And while studies have found that, across mentoring programs, 15 to 20 percent of adult volunteers are members of a racial minority, more than 80 percent of Ready4Work mentors (79 percent of the men and 83 percent of the women) are African American (see Table 2).[12]

These numbers are especially meaningful because the Ready4Work participants are predominantly male and African American. The sites require that mentors and participants share the same gender (although male and female mentors team up occasionally for group mentoring sessions). While there is ongoing debate in

the mentoring field about the importance of mentors and participants sharing the same race, having a mentor who is of the same race may be more effective for former prisoners, who are often resistant to developing trust.[13]

As the Ready4Work demonstration continues, P/PV will look more closely at who makes an effective mentor for adult former prisoners. Are people of the same race most likely to be able to build a long-term, positive relationship? Does it matter if the mentor lives in the former prisoner's neighborhood and, thus, has first-hand experience with some of the issues he or she may face? Does the mentor's educational background matter? What about his or her previous involvement, if any, with the criminal justice system? So far, 39 percent of the Ready4Work mentors are age 50 or older. Is the difference in age between mentors and participants a barrier to their forming positive relationships, or an advantage? Or do all of these characteristics take second place to personal qualities and skills—like being a good listener?

While these are questions for future examination, what is known already is that some supportive relationships have formed; and where they have, participants speak with real feeling about the importance of the mentors in their lives. For example, this 30-year-old participant in a mentoring group described how the mentors contribute to keeping him hopeful and out of trouble:

> *They've been helpful because I got through school, and I might have the opportunity to have a job that's good. They keep my mind on the right track and keep me thinking positive. If I'm feeling depressed, they would give you words of encouragement to keep you from doing stuff that you really don't want to do.*

A 24-year-old woman offered this description of her relationship with her mentor:

> *She [the mentor] works a lot; she works at the chemical plant. I meet with her twice a month. She calls me almost every day; she asks me how I'm doing and how my son is doing. She's making sure I'm okay. We talk about me taking care of my business, talking to people at the college. We meet like a whole day—like, for example, we go to…lunch, then we go see her relatives, then she comes to my parents' house. When I have problems…when I don't have anybody to turn to—me and my mom have a good relationship, [but] my mom's busy raising my 15-year-old-sister, [and] it's hard to find somebody to talk to about my problems—she [the mentor] gives me advice on what to do. I had some problems with child support, and she'll give me a number. How are me and my son going to get diapers? [She'll] call the neighborhood center. [She's] guiding me to the right direction—[she says] if you see old friends, just go to the other direction. It changed me a lot. I wasn't as talkative; I was always hiding things inside. When I found out I was pregnant or in trouble with the law, I didn't tell anybody. She's helping me speak up.*

Sites are encouraged by mentoring relationships like these. And in response to early challenges and a growing understanding about the potential value of mentoring, many sites have drawn from their experiences to modify their initial approaches. While still in the early stages of implementation, several program practices hold promise for contributing to strong mentoring relationships that can support former prisoners as they reenter society. These practices relate to the staffing and structuring of the mentoring component; the approaches sites take to recruiting, training and supporting mentors; and the strategies they use to address barriers that make some participants reluctant to become involved in mentoring.

Hiring a Mentor Coordinator

Some sites faced initial challenges in getting their mentoring components operating effectively because they did not have a mentor coordinator. When responsibilities were divided among various staff members, it became difficult to develop a coherent process of implementation. Sites have thus begun hiring someone who is specifically responsible for implementing the mentoring component, including recruiting, training, matching and supporting mentors. As an alternative, some sites have contracted with intermediaries to run their mentoring component. In Memphis, for example, Hope Works, a local faith-based organization, is responsible for mentoring, and the mentor coordinator is part of the Hope Works staff.

The Washington, DC site which is partnering with eight congregations for its mentoring component, recently implemented the model that has been used successfully in the Amachi mentoring program, an initiative that matches mentors recruited from congregations with children of incarcerated parents.[14] In this model, each church selects its own mentor coordinator, who is a member of the congregation. That person helps to recruit mentors from the congregation and is responsible for checking in with them on a weekly basis to ensure they are meeting with their mentees, to answer questions they might have about the developing relationship and to support and motivate them. Because the coordinator is a member of the congregation, she or he is likely to see the mentors at services or church events, and their conversations about the mentoring relationship can often take place in this more informal setting. Each church receives a stipend, which it can use to pay its mentor coordinator.

Recruiting Mentors

All of the sites are, thus far, turning to congregations as a primary source of mentors, and they are finding that their recruitment efforts are far more successful when pastors are strong advocates for the effort. The Amachi mentoring initiative also found this to be true: Faith is a powerful motivator, and when pastors explain to congregation members how mentoring contributes to fulfilling the mission of the church, people step forward and volunteer to serve.[15]

The role of the pastor can be seen at the Detroit site, which recruits mentors through a partnership with the Hartford Memorial Baptist Church. Its pastor, who for more than a decade has addressed the needs of young African Americans in that city's prisons, calls on the congregation at services every Sunday to volunteer to become a mentor. The site's mentor coordinator—a former prisoner who is a member of the congregation and who was, as a prisoner, mentored by the pastor—also speaks during services about the importance the mentoring relationship has had in his life.

Because the Detroit site has far more male than female participants and, thus, particularly needs male mentors, the pastor specifically asks men in the congregation to become mentors. And this large congregation is responding. In only the first three months, the pastor recruited approximately 80 mentors, about 60 of whom are men.

Addressing Participants' Barriers

Many of the participants in Ready4Work face legitimate barriers that can make it difficult for them to meet with their mentor or, if they are part of a group mentoring program, to attend the sessions. They may work two jobs and have very real time constraints or have work schedules that conflict with group meeting times. They may also have transportation needs or problems arranging child care. As sites have identified these barriers, they have begun taking practical steps to remove them. They have, for example, provided participants with stipends

to cover transportation and scheduled group mentoring meetings at more convenient times and places.

But sites are also learning that removing concrete, practical barriers may not be enough. There are additional reasons why some participants are resistant to becoming involved in a mentoring relationship. Attending a mentoring group session or meeting with a mentor one-on-one can feel like yet another form of "reporting"—something akin to mandated counseling sessions or having to meet regularly with a parole officer after release. In addition, some former prisoners see having a mentor as a sign of weakness, a statement that they cannot make it on their own. As one 30-year-old male participant explained: "For people that are kind of like not as strong as other people, it takes guys like mentors and people to talk to them, especially if they don't have a father figure. But for people who are strong, it takes themselves."

Renaming "Mentors"

The Washington, DC Ready4Work program provides an illustration of how sites can begin to address those psychological barriers to participation. One strategy has been to replace the word "mentor" with "life coach," a term that both mentors and participants seem to prefer. To some people, "mentoring" might imply a hierarchical relationship, with the mentee being in a childlike role. And, for participants especially, the word "coach" may have more familiar and comfortable connotations. There is a difference between saying to a family member or oneself "I'm going to meet with my mentor" and saying "I'm going to meet with my coach."

Taking Advantage of Characteristics of Group Mentoring

The Washington, DC site is also attempting to structure its mentoring component in a way that helps remove barriers to participation. Like most of the sites, it uses a group mentoring model. To some extent, the reliance on the model has been a practical response to the challenges of recruiting mentors and, particularly, male mentors. But in addition, there are potential advantages to having group mentoring sessions, where there is peer interaction and the consequent support that can develop among members of the group, and where participants have the opportunity to feel that they are giving—sharing their own knowledge and experience—so that involvement in the group does not feel like a sign of weakness.

The Washington, DC site, like other sites, also tries to ensure that one-to-one mentor-participant relationships develop within the group context—relationships that might further motivate participants to attend the sessions. The groups are kept small—each one includes a life coach and three participants—and they meet twice a month. The first monthly meeting takes place at one of the eight churches involved in the initiative; after the group session, there is time for the mentor to meet individually with each member. The second monthly meeting consists of an activity in the city, during which there are opportunities for individual conversations. In addition, mentors telephone each member of their group on a weekly basis.

Allowing Participants to Determine the Content of the Mentoring Meetings

To change the perception that the group sessions are just another reporting requirement, the DC site works to ensure they are unlike any sessions participants have attended in prison or a halfway house. The monthly meetings at the church have no curriculum or preplanned topic. In fact, during the very first meeting, the life coach focuses on finding out the issues participants want to address. The participants decide what is important to discuss, while the coach's role is to listen, guide and support.

Similarly, the monthly group activity is intended to be useful to participants; they decide how to spend the time. The group might go to a restaurant or to a museum, or they might spend their time together learning to navigate challenges that the participants have identified. They could, for example, go to a library and learn how to use computers to access information over the Internet, or they might spend time refamiliarizing themselves with how to use mass transit after years in prison.

While this approach is still in its early implementation, it is grounded in the belief that if participants find the meetings valuable, they will attend. That, in turn, will provide the life coaches and participants with the opportunity to build trusting relationships that can make a positive difference in people's lives, beyond even the specific support they receive in the meetings themselves.

Beginning Mentoring While Participants Are Still in Prison

An additional way sites attempt to break through former prisoners' barriers to becoming involved in mentoring is to offer their services to pre-release participants. Sites in Philadelphia, New York and Houston provide mentors for participants while they are still incarcerated in an effort to develop supportive relationships that can continue to grow after participants are released. The Washington, DC site designed a unique mentoring program for its pre-release participants who are in the federal prison system and housed in a prison in North Carolina. The site conducts group mentoring through videoconferencing, allowing mentors and mentees to meet "face-to-face" and develop a relationship despite the distance.

Training Mentors

Serving as a mentor is typically both rewarding and challenging. It can be particularly difficult to form a positive, supportive relationship with an adult former prisoner who has only recently been released from prison and may still have what one participant referred to as "the penitentiary thought," which can include both a distrust of others and a tendency to be untrustworthy. Successful mentoring relationships can be a powerful force in helping participants make the transition to a productive life in the community. But as research into mentoring programs has demonstrated, these kinds of relationships do not necessarily happen automatically. Mentors benefit from training that helps them develop the skills and acquire the knowledge they need to be successful in their roles.[16]

The Ready4Work sites have developed approaches to mentor training that combine practicing mentoring skills with the provision of information that mentors may need in their particular program. Milwaukee, for example, created a training curriculum that prepares mentors to develop nurturing relationships with their mentees and includes presentations by representatives of the city's police and health departments to help mentors understand some of the issues the former prisoners face.

Other sites have arranged for outside training. In Washington, DC, for example, a P/PV staff member developed a curriculum to train new mentors in relationship-building skills, such as active listening, and in the specific group-facilitation techniques needed for the DC program. The training also focused on issues that are essential for Ready4Work mentors at all sites. These included helping mentors learn to recognize crises that participants may experience and know how to respond if a participant indicates that he or she is considering committing a crime.

Mentors also receive clear instruction on the federal guidelines that prohibit the use of federal money for proselytizing or requiring their mentees to participate in any form of religious activity. In order to fully respect the religious freedom of all

program participants, mentors can answer questions but cannot impose their religious viewpoint in any way.

Involving the Case Manager in Supporting the Relationship

While sites have found it important to have a mentor coordinator, it is also becoming clear that the case manager should have a role in supervising and supporting mentoring relationships. In fact, recent research on mentoring indicates that relationships last for a longer period of time and are more likely to result in positive outcomes when the case manager has an active role in them.[17]

The mentor coordinator is immediately responsible for making sure relationships are developing, but the case manager has the deepest knowledge about each participant and is best positioned to address serious issues that may arise. Thus, part of the mentor coordinator's duties when regularly checking in with mentors should be to identify problems and contact the case manager if a participant appears to need additional help.

What's more, sites are encouraged to have the case manager speak with each mentor once a month for at least the first six months of his or her involvement with the program so the two can directly discuss any concerns the mentor may have. Because case managers talk to participants regularly—and, thus, can touch base with them frequently about the mentoring relationship—they are also in a position to give mentors feedback about how participants feel they are benefiting from the relationship. This can be important for helping mentors remain motivated and committed.

Developing an Effective System of Job Training, Placement and Follow-Up

While a key objective of Ready4Work is to place participants in jobs, sites like Memphis and Jacksonville explicitly emphasize that the ultimate goal is not just jobs, but jobs that offer a good salary and benefits. Memphis, in fact, distinguishes between transitional jobs—entry-level positions that are valuable because they allow participants to acclimate or reacclimate themselves to the world of work, develop job skills and establish a work history—and more permanent, higher-skilled and better-paying jobs that people ultimately need to support themselves and their families.

Achieving this goal is obviously a complex task that requires a range of strategies and practices, strong partners and persistence on the part of the Ready4Work sites. At all the sites, training includes a job readiness course, a necessity for people who are reentering the work world after being in prison or, in some cases, entering the work world for the first time. Sites also provide opportunities for education, particularly adult basic education and GED courses, and hard skills training either in a classroom or on the job. But while many participants would ultimately benefit from these forms of ongoing training and education, they also face a significant need to get jobs quickly so they can begin to earn money.

Building on their early experiences, sites have been modifying their approaches, strengthening their staffing and forming new partnerships as they work to integrally connect job training and placement and to accommodate the varying needs and priorities of both participants and employers. Accomplishing this is a difficult task, but five interrelated practices seem promising: providing a range of opportunities for education and job training; achieving a balance between participants' need to find work quickly and their often conflicting need to have the time to become work-ready or prepare for better-paying jobs; hiring a specialist in employer recruitment; matching the "right" participants with job openings; and following up with participants after they begin working.

Job Training, Placement and Follow-Up

Promising practices:

- Develop partnerships to provide a range of opportunities for education and job training.
- Work to achieve a balance between participants' apparently conflicting needs to find a job quickly and for training and education.
- Hire a staff member whose job is to recruit employers and who has professional experience in that role.
- Think like a job placement organization—use a strategy to match the right participant with each job opening.
- Follow up with participants, and their employers, after they have been placed in a job.

Providing Opportunities for Education and Job Training

Participants who enroll in Ready4Work enter the program with a range of educational backgrounds, job histories and skills, and with a range of expectations about their work futures. Thus, while participants need to get a job quickly—and programs feel pressure to connect them with work as rapidly as possible—a number of sites provide a range of education and training opportunities so participants can ultimately move into full-time jobs with good salaries and benefits.

Requiring Job Readiness Training

All sites require participants to take a job readiness course that focuses on soft skills such as interviewing, including the issue of responding to questions about their criminal background; résumé writing; and work attitudes and behaviors. In sites such as Oakland, job readiness includes some training in computer literacy. And Houston, among other sites, also has a life skills course that addresses issues such as anger management.

Encouraging Education

Because 40 percent of people who leave prison have neither earned a high school diploma nor completed their GED[18]—and, therefore, face a significant barrier to long-term employment—all sites also provide access to GED classes and, in some cases, to adult basic-education classes for people who are not yet ready to start work toward their GED. While most sites refer participants to outside providers for education services—either city colleges or community- or faith-based organizations—several sites provide the classes themselves. In Milwaukee, for example, Word of Hope Ministries, the lead agency, provides classes through its Family Resource Center, which offers services to members of the local community.

Partnering for Skills-Training Opportunities

Some sites are working to develop partnerships that can provide skills-based job training opportunities for participants who are ready for them. In Memphis, Ready4Work participants are co-enrolled in the Workforce Investment Network (WIN), a One-Stop Career Center that can connect them with training opportunities. Through its partnership with a city college, the Chicago site is able to enroll participants in its truck-driver training program.

Stipends are an important strategy in making it possible for participants to complete hard skills training programs, providing some financial support while they prepare for better jobs in the future. Identifying and forming partnerships with stipended training programs is obviously a challenge—such programs are relatively rare, and where they exist, they are in high demand—but sites are working to make the connections. Memphis is developing relationships with several labor unions that have apprenticeship programs. And the Safer Foundation, in Chicago, built a partnership with the Illinois Manufacturing Foundation (IMF), an organization that provides hard skills training in the manufacturing field to people who are hard to employ. Participants receive a stipend while they complete IMF's 14-week training course, and IMF then places them in jobs with starting wages that can be as high as $14 an hour. While relatively few participants are able to enroll in this type of long-term training, Safer also obtains state funding for stipends that will support participants for three months as they get on-the-job training and experience with private employers in areas that include food service, construction and manufacturing.

Finding the Balance

While sites work to have a range of options available for training and education that can help participants get work, succeed and ultimately find jobs with higher wages and benefits, they simultaneously have to address the reality that participants need to find jobs quickly. Developing strategies to balance these apparently conflicting interests is an ongoing process.

What is the "right" amount of time and training? There is obviously no single or simple answer to this question. At the very least, participants need job readiness training that is sufficiently intense and of sufficient length so they develop the soft skills that will enable them to find and hold an initial job. But, as one participant noted, a short, required course, while adequate for some people, may not be sufficient for others:

> *[It's] a very good class. It's my second time taking it; they came…while I was in prison. I already knew them, and they are high-powered and get yourself together. It's three days. For people who have worked before and those that have been through interviews and have had jobs, it is [a] refresher. But for those that have never worked, they need longer training. They need to understand the importance of wearing the appropriate clothes; they can't wear their pants hanging way*

down or women showing their midriff. They teach them, but it may need to be more. They need [to understand] the importance of language.

Building in the Flexibility to Meet Individual Needs

Several sites have developed flexible approaches for dealing with new participants' varying levels of job readiness. Memphis, for example, has a required one-week job readiness orientation, with some participants then immediately placed in jobs or beginning job search activities through the WIN's One-Stop Career Center. Participants who need additional job readiness training or help with skills such as anger management meet for one-on-one sessions with the Memphis job counselor, and the site also has a partnership with Hope Works, a faith-based organization, to provide a 13-week program that includes a focus on employment barriers, such as work attitudes and behaviors, for participants who need extended training in this area.

The Jacksonville site uses a similarly flexible approach. All participants enroll in a two-week job readiness course when they enter the program. After the first week—which includes training in topics such as interviewing, résumé writing and anger management—participants begin to meet individually with the job placement specialist to start their job search. During this time, they also receive one-on-one job readiness counseling from her. If they are not placed in a job quickly, they continue with individualized counseling and return to the job readiness course for additional training.

While the sites have found that they need to offer job readiness training that allows for different levels of intensity and duration based on individual participants' needs, they are trying to develop similarly flexible strategies for delivering education and hard skills training. Many sites have found that participants sign up for hard skills training but soon drop out because they have found a job and need the income. Similarly, while a number of sites strongly encourage participants to earn their GEDs, education is often not a priority for people when their immediate need is to earn money. One approach is to offer more flexible scheduling of GED and hard skills classes so participants will be able to attend while they hold jobs. Providing stipends for job training is also an important strategy, although one that will inevitably be limited in its ability to reach large numbers of participants.

Interweaving Jobs and Work-Readiness Training

The Detroit site takes a different approach that emphasizes getting an entry-level job first and addressing longer-term needs second. America Works, the for-profit employment service that is the site's lead agency, developed its model through its work with women making the transition from welfare to work and its previous experience with placing former prisoners. Participants begin the program with a week-long job readiness training that addresses topics similar to those at the other sites, but the focus from the start is on rapid attachment to work. From the first day, participants learn about job openings; and with business clothes and bus passes provided by the site, they begin going to job interviews as early as their third day in the program. The program expects that it may take five or six interviews for participants to get a job, and they continue with job readiness training while their search continues. People with major barriers, such as substance abuse, are referred to services quickly through their case manager, but much of the work in addressing needs and additional job training is done through the case manager after the participant is already working.

There are early indications that the site's rapid-attachment strategy may be effective. Participants work in areas such as telemarketing, clerical services, construction cleanup, food services, supermarkets

and manufacturing. While some make only $6.50 an hour, other jobs pay $8.00 to $10.00 an hour. As the initiative continues, it will become possible to gauge the success of this approach in terms of job retention and moving participants into higher-wage jobs.

Hiring an Employer Recruitment Specialist

Early in the initiative, some sites relied on case managers or job training staff to recruit employers. That arrangement generally proved to be a challenge because developing relationships with employers and proactively identifying job openings requires a specialist who can devote full-time hours to the effort.

Sites now take several different, promising approaches to this issue. The Philadelphia Ready4Work program contracted with the Transitional Work Corporation, a local nonprofit organization that recruits employers and provides job training and placement services to entry-level workers, to handle some of its job placement activities. Several other sites have hired a staff member—called either a job developer or a salesperson—who has experience in employer recruitment and employment services for hard-to-place populations.

Using a Business-to-Business Approach

At sites like Detroit, which uses an employer-recruitment model developed by America Works, the salesperson uses a business-to-business approach. Because companies generally have enormous turnover in entry-level jobs, the salesperson emphasizes that Ready4Work participants have been screened, trained and are, in fact, ready for work. This approach builds on the fact that companies often prefer to hire through networks because that means they have a recommendation from a reliable source. The site in this way functions as a network for participants, vouching for their reliability and suitability for the job. The salesperson helps employers see that it makes sense to hire through Ready4Work rather than go through the expense and uncertainty of placing help-wanted ads and screening unknown applicants.

Other sites also emphasize the potential tax benefit, through the Work Opportunity Tax Credit, for hiring former prisoners, and the security provided by the Federal Bonding Program, which protects employers from the risk of financial loss when they hire someone who has been convicted of a crime. Some of the sites also make clear to employers that they will serve as a resource after the participant is hired—that they follow up regularly with participants once they start a job and are available to address any problems that may arise.

Casting a Wide Net

While the first job placement for many participants is an entry-level position, job developers at some of the sites have been able to recruit a wide range of employers, including a number with jobs that offer good wages and benefits. Some have immediate job openings and, at times, multiple openings so sites can make several placements at the same workplace. Others may not have anything currently available but will become potential sources of jobs in the future. In Memphis, for example, which has a full-time staff member dedicated to employer recruitment, the site has placed participants in jobs in restaurants, hotels, the city's animal shelter, a construction company and a university, among other organizations and businesses. The Jacksonville site, which has a salesperson whose approach is similar to the one used in Detroit, has relationships with employers that similarly include restaurants and building contractors, along with a supermarket, health care organizations and other businesses.

Matching the Right Participant with Each Job Opening

In one sense, Ready4Work sites are job placement organizations. Houston, for example, emphasizes that employers are the consumers for their services, and employer satisfaction is as important as participant satisfaction. Sites have to maintain a positive relationship with each employer in order to have opportunities for additional placements at that worksite and so they can develop a strong reputation in the community as a source of good employees. If a participant does not appear for a scheduled job interview or proves unsatisfactory on the job, it reflects negatively on the entire program.

To increase the likelihood that participants will be hired and perform well in the workplace—and that employers will be satisfied with placements—some of the Ready4Work sites have developed specific strategies for screening participants before deciding whom to send on an interview for a particular job opening. Houston assesses general factors such as work readiness as well as focusing on specific job skills that can contribute to a successful employer-employee match. In Jacksonville, after participants complete the first week of their job readiness training, they meet one-on-one with the job placement specialist to develop their individual employment profile. The placement specialist then matches the participant with a potential employer, speaks to the employer to discuss the candidate and often drives the participant to the interview. If requested by the employer or participant, she also joins them for the interview.

Detroit uses a somewhat different approach, basing its matching decisions primarily on observations. During the job readiness course, the trainer keeps careful tracking notes about each participant's reliability, attitudes and performance. And while the site's salesperson is recruiting employers, he pays close attention to the workplace environment, the kinds of people who work there and the characteristics of the person who will be the new employee's manager. What kind of employee is more likely to succeed in that workplace? A person who shows initiative or someone who is best in responding to direct orders? Someone who is quiet or someone who interacts easily with the other employees? The salesperson is responsible for understanding the worksite, and the trainer is responsible for understanding the strengths and drawbacks of each participant's workplace attitudes and skills. Using these perspectives, they match participants with job openings.

Following-Up with Participants and Their Employers

When a participant is placed in a job, it should be a beginning, not the end of program services. Case managers and job specialists are expected to perform regular follow-up visits to the workplace to provide coaching and support to the new employees and address issues that might be arising. These visits are intended to provide support to the employers as well—one of the points sites make in recruiting employers is that they will be available to handle problems that affect new employees' performance on the job.

At the Jacksonville site, the job placement specialist and case managers perform monthly visits to each worksite to support the employer-employee relationship. In most cases, the placement specialist has a preexisting relationship with employers because she has recruited them, and this can make communication easier. In Detroit, where participants often are placed with less job readiness training than at other sites and, thus, may need more intensive support early on, the case manager is responsible for visiting the job site at first weekly, then every other week, with the frequency of visits gradually diminishing as the employee's tenure increases.

Whatever the schedule of visits, they can provide an opportunity to observe the employee in the workplace to identify possible sources of problems. How, for example, does the manager talk to employees? Is he brusque? Inconsistent in the kinds of instructions he gives? The case manager can then coach the employee on how to deal with these issues before they become a problem. The visits may also allow the case manager to talk directly to the employer about any concerns. Is the employee returning late from breaks? Hanging out with fellow employees who stretch the rules? The case manager can then work with the employee to modify behaviors and attitudes that are creating problems on the job. In addition, case managers can use the visits to help employees deal with other issues, such as court appearances, so that external complications in their lives do not affect their job performance.

These workplace visits provide an additional benefit. Experienced job placement organizations like America Works expect that a participant is likely to have two or three jobs before the right one sticks. He or she may lose a job or may leave due to frustration or boredom and want a job that is more challenging. Losing or leaving the first or second job is not necessarily a negative event. Participants can work with program staff from the perspective of what they learned from the experience. Do they have to become better at communicating with their manager? Do they need to develop negotiation skills so they can handle situations that come up in the workplace? Do they want to develop specific work skills so they can find a more challenging job? The experience of being with and observing participants at the workplace is valuable for case managers or employment specialists as they work to help the participant benefit from that initial job loss.

Bringing It All Together: Communication and Coordination

In interviews, participants across Ready4Work sites often spoke about a characteristic of the program that was especially important to them. One 33-year-old man put it this way: "The people themselves grabbed my attention—it's like no matter how much they are doing, they always have time for you as an individual."

In fact, a key to Ready4Work is that each participant is an individual—cared about, cared for and accountable. Participants are expected to be responsible in taking the steps necessary to make a change in their lives. The program, in turn, does whatever it takes to help that person become job-ready. That may involve providing anger-management classes or training in specific job skills, or getting them appropriate clothes for a job interview, or buying them tools they need to be hired for a particular job. It also means accessing resources for participants to deal with any of the many issues that may be barriers to their successful reentry—including substance abuse problems, physical and mental health issues, and housing.

Accomplishing that, and keeping each participant at the center, requires ongoing communication among the site's staff, and between staff and other people who are involved in the reentry effort. Successful sites have a system in place that fosters communication and coordination. This includes regular staff meetings to discuss the progress of participants and their existing needs. It also includes conversations between the case manager and the job trainer, the job developer, the mentor coordinator and the mentors, as well as ongoing conversations between the job developer and job trainer so their work is coordinated.

When a site's services take place primarily at one location, as they do, for example, in Jacksonville, it is somewhat easier to ensure there is a system of ongoing communication. Sites like Chicago, where the program is decentralized and operates out of both the Safer Foundation's downtown office and through offices near each of the five partner congregations, have to take additional steps to ensure that the reentry counselors at the churches are in regular communication with the training and employment specialists at Safer. And sites that contract out services to other organizations—including mentoring, job training or job placement—have to be sure there is a system in place that ensures ongoing communication.

Reentering the community after spending months or years in prison is a journey fraught with obstacles. To help former prisoners keep moving along that passage, staff have to coordinate with one another and stay connected to each participant. As one participant explained, giving voice to both his struggles and his determination: "Sometimes I don't want to go, but I say, 'I have to do this, it's what I'm a part of, it keeps me focused.' Ain't nothing going to come to me—they help me see that life, in order to make it, you have to get up and do these things."

Endnotes

1 "Learn About Reentry." Serious and Violent Offender Reentry Initiative. U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs. http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/reentry/learn.html.

2 Bureau of Justice Statistics. U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs. http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/reentry/recidivism.htm.

3 *Report of the Re-entry Policy Council: Charting the Safe and Successful Return of Prisoners to the Community.* The Council of State Governments. New York, 2004, xviii.

4 Data from 1997 show that nearly one third of adult prisoners were unemployed in the month before their arrest, compared with 7 percent unemployment in the general population, and that 5 percent of state prisoners and 3 percent of federal prisoners had never been employed. Postincarceration, employment rates only worsen—unemployment among ex-prisoners has been estimated at between 25 and 40 percent. See Joan Petersilia. *When Prisoners Come Home: Parole and Prisoner Reentry.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.

5 S. B. Rossman and C. G. Roman. "Case-Managed Reentry and Employment: Lessons from the Opportunity to Succeed Program." *In Justice Research and Policy.* 5(2), 2003, 75–100.

6 Svenja Heinrich. *Reducing Recidivism Through Work: Barriers and Opportunities for Employment of Former Prisoners.* Chicago: Great Cities Institute, University of Illinois at Chicago, 2000.

7 *Economic and Employment Projections.* Bureau of Labor Statistics. http://bls.gov/news.release/ecopro.toc.htm. According to the Bureau's findings, the service sector will have the largest increase in jobs, and worker shortages, during the next four to eight years.

8 Because *Ready4Work* is a demonstration project, it includes a systematic process of identifying challenges so that sites are continuously learning about where and how to modify practices to meet the specific program requirements. P/PV program officers regularly visit the sites for monitoring and technical assistance, and ongoing data collection enables sites to track their progress toward goals and to immediately see how changes in practices contribute to intermediate program outcomes, such as the number of participants matched with mentors and the number who are placed in jobs.

9 Joseph P. Tierney, Jean B. Grossman, and Nancy T. Resch. *Making a Difference: An Impact Study of Big Brothers Big Sisters.* Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures, 1995.

10 For a description of team mentoring as it was implemented in an initiative that focuses on youth involved in the juvenile justice system, see Susan Blank and Fred Davie. *Faith in Their Futures: The Youth and Congregations in Partnership Program of the Kings County (Brooklyn, NY) District Attorney's Office.* Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures, 2004, 25-29.

11 Cynthia L. Sipe and Anne E. Roder. *Mentoring School-Age Children: A Classification of Programs.* Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures and The National Mentoring Partnership's Public Policy Council, 17.

12 Jean E. Rhodes. "What's Race Got To Do With It?" *Research Corner.* National Mentoring Partnership. www.mentoring.org/research_corner/mar_background.adp. March 2002.

13 For a summary of the arguments about whether mentoring matches should be between people of the same race, at least when the mentees are children and youth, see Linda Jucovy. *Same-Race and Cross-Race Matching.* Portland, OR: The National Mentoring Center at Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory and Public/Private Ventures, 3-8.

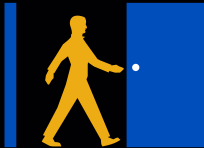
14 Amachi, a partnership of secular and faith-based organizations, provides mentoring to children of incarcerated parents. Faith institutions work with human service providers and public agencies (particularly justice institutions) to identify children of prisoners and match them with caring adults, who are primarily recruited from congregations. Designed by Public/Private Ventures in partnership with Big Brothers Big Sisters of America and first implemented in 2001, Amachi now operates at 110 sites across the nation.

15 Linda Jucovy. *Amachi: Mentoring Children of Prisoners in Philadelphia.* Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures and the Center for Research on Religion and Urban Civil Society, 2003, 21-22.

16 Cynthia L. Sipe. "Mentoring Adolescents: What Have We Learned?" In *Contemporary Issues in Mentoring.* Jean Baldwin Grossman (ed.). 1999. Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures, 18-19.

17 A study of high-risk youth involved in mentoring relationships found that when there was intensive case management of the mentor pairs, the matches met for a longer period of time. See Shawn Bauldry and Tracey Hartmann. *The Promise and Challenge of Mentoring High-Risk Youth: Findings from the National Faith-Based Initiative.* Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures, 2004, 25. In addition, a study of the InnerChange Freedom Initiative found that when the parole officer was involved in the relationship between an former prisoner and mentor, the former prisoner was much less likely to be rearrested or reincarcerated. See Byron R. Johnson, with David Larson. *The InnerChange Freedom Initiative: A Preliminary Evaluation of a Faith-Based Program.* Philadelphia: Center for Research on Religion and Urban Civil Society, 2003, 21-22, 34-35.

18 *Report Preview: Report of the Re-entry Policy Council.* The Council of State Governments. New York, 2004, 1. Some of the Ready4Work sites report even higher percentages of participants without these basic education credentials.



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