

Incarceration, Reentry and Child Support Issues:

National and State Research Overview

Report



Department of Health and Human Services
Administration for Children and Families
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Executive Summary

Researchers, community organizations and government agencies, including Child Support Enforcement agencies, are seeking effective strategies to make reentry of offenders successful while balancing the needs of communities for safety. This background report presents a synopsis of key reentry research that relates to offenders and ex-offenders with family responsibilities and highlights the findings that apply to those with child support involvement. Reviewing the primary issues and services, the report draws from many sources, such as Bureau of Justice Statistics reports and prisoner reentry studies conducted by the Urban Institute and Vera Institute of Justice. In another report, “Working with Incarcerated and Released Parents: Lessons from OCSE Grants and State Programs, A Resource Guide,” (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2006), we discuss state and local demonstration projects funded by the Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) which address the child support issues of incarcerated parents.

This research overview begins by describing characteristics of incarcerated and released noncustodial parents and their families, most of whom have substantial needs for education and training, medical assistance and substance abuse treatment. Parents with child support obligations tend to have arrears and monthly support orders that far exceed what they can pay while serving their sentences and following their release.

We present examples of the three types of programming offered in state prisons and county jails that are relevant to parental responsibility and child support issues and discuss their limitations: parenting, faith-based and prison-based work programs. We also discuss the major barriers to reentry that offenders face, including criminal records, occupational barriers to employment for felons, and the lack of community resources to assist with reentry. Family support and employment have been identified as two components of successful reentry, and research relating to these topics is examined.

We conclude by examining some of the newest collaborative efforts underway to address the challenges of reentry. These endeavors range from broad Federally-funded programs, such as the Serious Violent Offender Reentry Initiative (SVORI) and the Ready4Work Initiative, to privately-funded research efforts such as the Fathers at Work project, funded by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation. The transitional jobs model is discussed, as is the comprehensive report produced by the Re-entry Policy Council.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	1
2. Characteristics of the Targeted Population	2
3. Prison-Based Programs Dealing with Family and Work	6
Parenting Programs	7
Prison-Based Work Programs.....	9
Faith-Based Programs	11
4. Barriers to Reentry	14
Criminal Records.....	15
Occupational Barriers.....	16
Lack of Community Resources	17
5. Elements for Successful Reentry	18
Family Support and Reentry	18
Employment and Reentry.....	19
6. Current Collaborative Efforts for Reentry Programs	22
Serious and Violent Offender Reentry Initiative.....	22
Ready4Work Initiative	23
The President’s Prisoner Re-entry Initiative.....	23
Fathers at Work Project	24
Monograph: From Hard Time to Full Time	25
Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service.....	25
Pulling for Progress.....	26
CEO Model of Transitional Jobs Programs	26
Report of the Re-Entry Policy Council.....	27
7. Summary	29
References	30

Chapter 1

Introduction

With the realization that roughly 650,000 people are released from federal and state prison each year, community organizations and government agencies, including Child Support Enforcement agencies, are seeking effective strategies to make reentry of offenders successful while balancing the needs of communities for safety (Harrison and Beck, 2005a). For several years, the Federal Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) has assisted child support agencies in their efforts to work with incarcerated and released noncustodial parents with child support obligations. OCSE has awarded ten Section 1115 and Special Improvement Project (SIP) grants for demonstration projects that involve collaboration among child support agencies, Departments of Corrections, and community-based organizations, in order to identify the best approaches to working with this population. At the same time, other government agencies, researchers, and numerous community service providers are studying the reentry process and looking for programs that lead to a lower rate of recidivism.

This background report aims to inform the child support community of the range of initiatives and efforts dealing with reentry, including relevant in-prison programming. We present a synopsis of key reentry research, current and recently completed, that relates to offenders and ex-offenders with family responsibilities. Reviewing the primary issues and services, the report draws from many sources, such as Bureau of Justice Statistics reports and prisoner reentry studies conducted by the Urban Institute and Vera Institute of Justice.

In another report, we focus on research funded by OCSE and programs developed by states and other jurisdictions for incarcerated parents and also consider the policies and procedures affecting reentry efforts through the lens of the child support system and mission. See “Working with Incarcerated and Released Parents: Lessons from OCSE Grants and State Programs, A Resource Guide,” (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2006).

We begin by describing characteristics of the population of incarcerated and released noncustodial parents (NCPs) and their families. Next, we discuss prison programming that is relevant to child support issues. After exploring barriers to reentry, we conclude by examining some of the newest efforts underway to come to grips with reentry. The literature generated by research about incarceration and reentry programs is vast; therefore, we highlight the major findings and the most promising areas of research on these topics that apply to parents with child support involvement. The examples given are not exhaustive but are representative of the studies being conducted in this area.

Chapter 2

Characteristics of the Targeted Population

Of the roughly 1.5 million individuals incarcerated in federal and state prisons at the end of 2004, most (93%) were male, and 41 percent were black (Harrison and Beck, 2005b).¹ The majority of the federal and state prisoners are parents. In a special report that is now the cornerstone for understanding the impact of incarceration on children and families, the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) found that 63 percent of federal prisoners and 56 percent of state prisoners in 1999 reported having one or more children under the age of 18 (Mumola, 2000). The children of these parents totaled close to 1.5 million.

The number of children impacted by incarceration and reentry is strikingly higher when we add in parents who are in local jails or are sentenced to community corrections. Using figures from 1996, 1997, and 2001 surveys of inmates in federal, state, and local correctional institutions, BJS estimates that in 2001, there were almost 3.7 million parents under correctional supervision (*i.e.*, in prison or jail, or on parole, probation, and other forms of community corrections), with 7,333,100 minor children being affected (Mumola, 2002).

The 2000 BJS report provides additional details about incarcerated parents:

- Nearly half (48%) of the parents in state prisons and 38 percent of parents in federal prison reported they had never married.
- The median age of parents in state and federal prisons was 32 and 35 years old, respectively.
- Forty percent of parents in state prisons and 28 percent in federal prisons had neither a high school diploma nor a GED, while less than a third of parents (31% and 27%, respectively) had earned a GED.
- About 46% of parents in state prisons reported living with their child(ren) before going to prison.

Further details from this report involve employment and income, which are important factors for noncustodial parents with child support obligations.

¹ Our discussion concentrates on people who are incarcerated as a result of a criminal conviction and who also have child support obligations, rather than on noncustodial parents who are jailed or imprisoned because of non-payment of child support. See May, 2004; and May and Roulet, 2005 for detailed discussions of incarceration of low-income parents for non-payment of child support.

- Seventy-one and 74 percent, respectively, of parents in state and federal prisons reported they were employed in the month before their latest arrest.
- More than half (59% and 63%, respectively) were employed full time.
- More than half (54%) of state prisoners and close to half (47%) of federal prisoners who were parents reported a personal income of under \$1,000 in the month before arrest.

Other research (Travis 2005) identifies various health, mental health, and addiction problems among the incarcerated population:

- The prevalence of mental illness for prison inmates is estimated between 16 and 25 percent. In 1999, mental health treatment was offered to 60 percent of inmates with major mental disorders.
- Roughly 80 percent of state prison inmates report a history of drug and alcohol use. In 1997, 10 percent of state inmates reported receiving treatment for substance abuse.
- In 1997, 38 percent of Americans with tuberculosis were released from a prison or jail; similarly, 20 to 26 percent of people with HIV or AIDS and 29 to 32 percent of people with Hepatitis C were released from prison or jail.

Recent research funded by OCSE adds to the portrait of incarcerated parents in terms of public assistance and child support:

- The majority of families of incarcerated parents (*i.e.*, custodial parents and children) with child support cases in Texas and Massachusetts are currently receiving Medicaid or public assistance or received one or both in the past; percents range from 55 percent in Texas to 92 percent in Massachusetts (Griswold, *et al.*, 2004; Griswold, *et al.*, 2005).
- The portion of incarcerated parents with child support involvement ranges from 13 percent of inmates in Texas state jails in 2004, to 26 percent of inmates in Colorado state prisons in 2001, and 26 percent in Massachusetts state prisons in 2003. The Texas and Massachusetts counts are of parents with active child support cases, but do not include cases needing paternity or an order established (Griswold, *et al.*, 2004; Griswold,

et al., 2005); the Colorado figure refers to incarcerated parents who were in the child support caseload (Griswold, Pearson and Davis, 2001).

- Current order amounts are high for NCPs in prison with little or no income. In Massachusetts state prisons in 2001, the average monthly child support owed by 973 parents with orders was \$198 per order, or \$227 across all orders for those fathers with children by different women (Thoennes, 2002).²
- Many NCPs enter prison with child support debt. A study of 213 Colorado inmates with child support orders showed that they owed an average of \$10,249 in past due child support when they entered prison (Griswold, Pearson and Davis, 2001). A similar study with incarcerated NCPs in Massachusetts in 2001 found they held an average arrears balance of \$10,543 at the time they entered prison (Griswold, *et al.*, 2004).
- Most NCPs with current support orders pay no child support while in prison. Inmates in Massachusetts prisons in 2001 and 2003 paid 5 percent of what they owed (Griswold, *et al.*, 2004).

Returning to the findings of the Bureau of Justice Statistics (Mumola, 2000), we consider the parents' past involvement with the criminal justice system:

- Almost half (49%) of parents in state prisons and 27 percent of those in federal prisons were on parole or probation at the time of their current arrest.
- More than three-quarters (77%) of state inmates and close to two-thirds (63%) of federal inmates who were parents reported prior convictions.

From these statistics, it is apparent that incarcerated parents with minor-aged children is a population with substantial needs for education and training, medical assistance, and substance abuse treatment. Those parents with child support obligations tend to have arrears and monthly support orders that far exceed what they can pay while serving their sentences and following their release. Additionally, they tend to have a history of criminal justice involvement.

Not surprisingly, many people share the notion that if an individual earns a GED and improves his literacy skills, gains work experience, and is taught

² The majority of NCPs are fathers, and the majority of parents in prison are male. Therefore, we will sometimes use the term "fathers" or male pronouns when referring to the generic incarcerated parent.

socially acceptable methods of communicating and relating with others, he might be less likely to return to a life of crime upon release (Travis, 2005; Jeffries, Menghraj and Hairston, 2001). In the following section, we discuss three types of programs – parenting, faith-based, and work programs – that are available to parents in some, but not all, state prisons and county jails.³

³ State prisons typically house inmates serving longer sentences than do county jails, but systems for incarceration of convicted criminals vary by state.

Chapter 3

Prison-Based Programs Dealing with Family and Work

The sentiments of American society toward incarceration – should it consist strictly of retribution or should it be rehabilitative in nature – have swung back and forth over time (Travis, 2005). Rehabilitation programs are costly, and there is always a question of how effective they are. Although the researcher who pronounced in 1974 that “nothing works” in rehabilitation programs rescinded his views five years later (Martinson, 1974, 1979, as cited in LoBuglio, 2001), high rates of recidivism continue to challenge the notion that individuals who are convicted of crimes and incarcerated can be rehabilitated. Yet the staggering numbers of people moving through our prisons are causing officials and lawmakers to search for prison programming that will lead to “pro-social” behaviors and attitudes in inmates (Caliber Associates, 2004).

Evaluations of prison programming typically contain a number of caveats. The measure of success of prison programs is often lower rates of recidivism and higher rates of employment several years after release.⁴ But, as discussed by Lawrence, *et al.*, (2002), a primary problem with evaluating the success of a prison program is the factor of selection bias. Most prison programs are voluntary and have limited enrollments, and consequently, the programs do not involve random assignments of inmates. Those who participate tend to be the most well-behaved and/or highly motivated inmates. Thus, participants may have better recidivism and employment outcomes than non-participants, but it is difficult to link the outcomes directly to the programs.

Another problem is that studies of prison programs often fail to identify which aspects of program implementation (*i.e.*, staffing, the length of the program, the quality of instruction) are successful in improving outcomes (Lawrence, *et al.*, 2002). Further, studies have tended to blur many types of soft skill and job skill activities under the terms “work program” or “vocational training,” making it difficult to sort out those activities that lead to specific outcomes. Finally, an inmate may take part in more than one program during the same time period (life skills training, vocational training, drug abuse treatment, academic training, and faith-based programs, for example), again making it difficult to ascertain the impact of any one program.

⁴ Defined by Allen Beck (2001) as a “fruit salad concept,” recidivism definitions involve *what* is counted as recidivism (for example, a new offense, a parole violation, or a second offense within the same state) and *the time frame* for what constitutes recidivism, which ranges from one to 22 years. Versions of recidivism vary substantially by state and jurisdiction.

Parenting Programs

Interest in parenting programs for inmates stems from several sources. Research examining the impact of incarceration on the children of offenders finds it difficult to establish whether negative outcomes (depression and emotional withdrawal of family and friends, low self-esteem, disruptive behaviors and lack of engagement in school, likeliness of future involvement with the criminal justice system) are a result of the parent being imprisoned or are reflective of the household patterns in which the child is residing (Travis, Waul and Solomon, 2002). Nevertheless, there is growing interest in working with incarcerated fathers to teach them parenting and communication skills, in the hopes of interrupting generational patterns experienced by children without sufficient parental attention who are struggling to develop, and in some cases are following in their fathers' footsteps (Jeffries, Menghraj and Hairston, 2001).

The interest of the child support community in parenting programs is based on the perception that noncustodial parents with strong connections to their children are more motivated to pay support on a regular basis. Parenting programs for incarcerated fathers and mothers are designed to provide them with new tools for communicating with their children, along with the rationale for shouldering parental responsibility.

Some of the OCSE-funded demonstration projects involving incarcerated parents included a parenting program (Illinois and Texas, for example). These projects are discussed in another report entitled, "Working with Incarcerated and Released Parents: Lessons from OCSE Grants and State Programs, a Resource Guide" (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2006). An example of a state-sponsored project for parents in prison is found in New Jersey. The New Jersey Child Support agency has a Memorandum of Understanding with the Department of Corrections to conduct a Responsible Parenting Program in a corrections facility for women and in five halfway houses.

Started in 2002, the program offers 16 weeks of parent education, mixing child support information with literacy, employment and job placement assistance, and post-release community support services. According to a Child Support Enforcement representative, more than 500 parents completed the program from 2002 through 2004. To date, the child support payment patterns of the graduates of this project have not been assessed.

Within county jails and state prisons, there are numerous "homegrown" parenting programs for inmates that are conducted by volunteers or staff from local community organizations. Understandably, these programs operate sporadically, depending on who is available to lead the classes and whether

staffing and security conditions within the facility are amenable to having outsiders come in.

A 2001 overview of parenting programs by the Vera Institute describes seven prison-based programs that appear to be well established (Jeffries, Menghraj and Hairston, 2001). Only one of the programs (Long Distance Dads, described below) is found in multiple states; the others are limited to operating within one facility or within one state. These programs range in method from clinical social work (Parents in Prison; Baltimore, Maryland) to providing basic parenting, nutrition, and child support information and post-release services (Papap and Their Children; San Antonio, Texas) to facilitating family interactions for parents in a pre-release program (Strengthening Families; Rockville, Maryland).

Long Distance Dads (LDD) is perhaps the best known and most widely used parenting program for incarcerated fathers; it is now offered in federal and state prisons and local jails in 19 states. The program consists of 12 modules, each taking two or three hours to cover the material. The sessions are facilitated by a trained peer of the inmates. The focus of LDD is to provide fathers with the understanding of the child development process, the various dimensions of parenting, and techniques for communicating with their children and families. Anger management is also a topic. In the Illinois and Texas OCSE demonstration projects, portions of the LDD curriculum were incorporated into the parenting programs.

The Pennsylvania Department of Corrections LDD program has undergone an outcomes evaluation (Center for Organizational Research & Evaluation [CORE], 2003) and a process evaluation (Skarupski, 2003) by Penn State Erie, the Behrend College's Center for Organizational Research and Evaluation. The outcomes evaluation used pre-test and post-test data from 84 and 42 experimental inmates, 60 and 47 control inmates, and 37 and 18 caregivers, respectively. Addressing the question, "Does the LDD program improve inmates' fathering knowledge, attitudes, skills and behaviors?", the researchers found minimal evidence that the program has an impact. The experimental group showed improvement in only two of 20 variables. The two variables – the number of letters sent to the child and total contact with the child – relied on self-reporting. Interviews with caregivers did not corroborate the fathers' assessments of their behavior.

However, the qualitative process evaluation found that LDD has "some promise," since it is well-received by inmates (Skarupski, 2003). Participants who were interviewed reported gaining knowledge and skills about raising children from the program (roughly 50%) and learning anger management skills

(70%). The researchers made more than 20 recommendations for improving the effectiveness of the program and increasing the visibility and status of the program within corrections facilities (Center for Organizational Research & Evaluation [CORE], 2003). Practical suggestions for improvement included development of a standardized training program for staff, improvement of the environment in which group sessions take place, and updating of program materials and group techniques.

While it seems clear that parenting programs can be useful to many incarcerated parents, there is another aspect of parenting from prison that should not be overlooked. A well-known researcher and advocate of families of incarcerated individuals argues that policies of Departments of Correction and individual prison facilities unnecessarily limit or prevent parents from exercising their parenting skills and strengthening family relationships (Hairston, 2001). Policies that place inmates in prisons hundreds of miles away from their homes make prison visits a matter of humiliation and endurance for family members. Installing unusually expensive telephone systems for prisoners and their families creates even more obstacles for incarcerated parents wishing to maintain contact with their children. Hairston recommends that “Congressional bodies and state legislatures...take ownership of family related incarceration issues as a matter of national interest and make prisoners’ family matters an integral part of the discussion on criminal justice and family policy” (p. 21).

Prison-Based Work Programs

Every prison has a different configuration of vocational training programs, work requirements, and work opportunities for inmates. For example, each Colorado state prison offers training and work requirements and/or opportunities in one or more of these fields: welding, firefighting, food production management, wild horse management, power sewing, drafting, canine behavior modification, graphic media and desktop design, laundry technology, and custodial activities. The income inmates earn from work is typically minimal, averaging from \$0.23 to \$1.15 per hour (Solomon, *et al.*, 2004).

Incarceration seems an ideal time to teach people skills and give them experience in developing useful work habits. But issues of logistics, security, and funding limit the training and work programs that prison facilities make available. As incarceration rates increased in the 1990s, access to vocational training in prisons decreased. Roughly one-quarter (27%) of inmates released from state prisons in 1997 reported they had taken part in vocational programs while incarcerated, compared to 31 percent in 1991 (Lynch and Sabol, 2001).

Statistics compiled for the Reentry Roundtable that was convened by the Urban Institute in May 2003 indicate that almost all of federal prisoners and close to half of state prisoners nationwide are assigned to some sort of work within the corrections facilities (Solomon, *et al.*, 2004). But just 7 percent of inmates worked in traditional industries in 2000, making items such as furniture, license plates, and textiles. The others worked largely at institutional maintenance jobs, which are not highly desired within the employment arena of the “free world.” Additionally, in-prison training programs, which are available to only a small portion of inmates, may not mesh with labor market demand. According to ex-offenders in Illinois who were looking for work following release, the training they had received while incarcerated sometimes involved outdated machines and techniques, and seemed to hold no meaning for employers (Festen and Fischer, 2002).

Illinois offers an example of the limited opportunities for training and employment programs in the state prisons. The Illinois Correctional Industries (ICI) has the mission of providing productive work activities for adults in the state’s prisons, but only 3 percent of the prison population were employed by ICI from July 1, 1998, through February 1999 (La Vigne, *et al.*, 2003). Similarly, the Illinois Department of Correction (IDOC) has 12 residential work-release centers known as Adult Transition Centers (ATCs), designed to help offenders transition from prison to community through a structured program that includes employment, counseling, and various life management programs. Unfortunately, the ATCs have the capacity to serve just 3 percent of state inmates.

Oregon’s work requirements for inmates represent a unique approach. In 1994, voters in Oregon passed the Prison Reform and Inmate Work Act, an amendment to the state constitution that requires that state prison inmates engage in meaningful work or workforce development activities for a minimum of 40 hours a week. In response, Oregon DOC developed a series of work programs that move an inmate from institutional jobs to vocational training, to actual job training, and finally to prison industry jobs. Offenders can spend up to 20 hours per week with education and treatment programming and workforce development training, but must spend 20 hours a week laboring.

Oregon DOC claims a recidivism rate of approximately 30 percent within three years after release.⁵ This is less than the national rate of 51.8 percent, based on a 15-state study of prisoners released in 1994 who were back in prison within three years of release, according to a 2002 report by the Bureau of Justice Statistics (Langan and Levin, 2002). In both cases, “recidivism” is defined as an

⁵ http://www.oregon.gov/DOC/OPS/PRISON/Prisons_FAQ.shtml.

offender returning to prison after committing a new crime or violating the terms of his release and having his parole revoked.

Another aspect of work programming for inmates involves pre-release activities related to employment services. Pre-release programs are typically offered to inmates who are within 60 or 90 days of release. Topics covered by employment services classes may include job readiness skills (dressing appropriately and completing a job application, for example), appropriate communication and interview skills, and job search skills such as using the resources of a “one-stop shop” career center. In some cases, the employment services programming continues after the inmates are released, in order to provide job search and placement services, and job coaching once the offender has secured employment.

Project Re-Integration of Offenders (RIO), a well-known employment services program, is a collaborative effort among the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC), the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ), the Windham School District, and the Texas Youth Commission. As described in the Project RIO Strategic Plan for 2004 to 2005, of the 72,666 adult inmates released from TDCJ facilities in 2003, 38 percent (27,823) had received services from Project RIO (Texas Department of Criminal Justice, Texas Youth Commission, and Texas Workforce Commission, 2004). Project RIO is a voluntary program, ordinarily offered to inmates when they are within 18 months of release. It is not available in every state prison or jail. A primary function of a Project RIO staff member is to refer RIO participants to appropriate classes, vocational training programs, and work assignments offered within the facility, based on the inmate’s work skills, experience, and career interests.

The Texas Workforce Career Centers are notified when RIO participants living within their service area are released. Roughly 26,600 adult Project RIO participants came to Texas Workforce Centers for employment assistance during 2003. Many of these individuals were referred to the Workforce Center by their parole board. Of these, 70 percent obtained employment, although Project RIO does not track how long an individual stays in a job.

Faith-Based Programs

Faith-based prison programs typically provide the opportunity for parents to experience attitudinal changes so that they take responsibility for their child emotionally and financially; thus, this type of program belongs in a general review of national trends in reentry programs with connections to child support.

Faith-based prison programs often strive to address the “whole person” by providing services around spiritual development, mentoring, anger management training, family relationships, and addiction recovery. While some of these programs are local and small, others are international in scope, and they appear to provide some of the elements of successful re-entry that have fallen by the wayside through budget cuts to governmental social services (such as case management services, employment and training services, and post-incarceration housing assistance).

Horizon Communities in Prison, evolving out of Kairos Prison Ministry, is a faith-based residential rehabilitation program for inmates and their families; the program is now established in several prisons throughout the country (Szekely, 2004a). Inmates who volunteer and are accepted into the program are housed in a separate unit from the general prison population and undergo a 10- to 12-month regime of mentoring, devotionals, and programs that promote life skills, job skills, and addiction recovery.

The original program in Tomoka Correctional Institute in Florida was evaluated by Caliber Associates under a grant awarded by the ACF Office of Community Services through the Compassion Capital Fund program in 2002. The objectives of the evaluation, as spelled out in an issue brief in 2004, included determining “the role of the faith-based program in supporting individual prisoners, their families and communities” (Caliber Associates, 2004a). The research team followed a small percentage of program participants after release for a year or more, and compared their employment patterns and family relationships with a similar group of non-participating prisoners (Caliber Associates, 2004b). Although the limited number of released parents with open child support cases precluded statistical analysis regarding payment patterns, the findings suggested that “program graduates are more likely to meet child support obligations” (*ibid.*, 1).

The InnerChange Freedom Initiative (IFI) is a faith-based pre-release program started in 1997 in a prison in Texas. It is operated by the Prison Fellowship Ministries through a contract with the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ). IFI was one of a number of rehabilitative programs developed by TDCJ at the direction of the Texas Legislature. The legislators also required that the program be evaluated by the Criminal Justice Policy Council (CJCP). IFI has been evaluated by both CJCP and the Center for Research on Religion and Urban Civil Society (CRRUCS).

IFI is located in a prison unit with room for 200 male participants. It is a voluntary, three-phase program that incorporates 16 to 24 months of in-prison programming and six to 12 months of aftercare when the inmate is released and

on parole. The program is designed to substitute a spiritual and moral foundation for “criminal thinking” through the use of Bible study courses, life skills education, support groups, and group accountability. The program relies on volunteers from area churches to be male mentors, bible instructors and support facilitators (Johnson and Larson, 2003). In the aftercare phase of the program, the paroled offender is encouraged to bring his mentor to meetings with his parole officer. The aftercare program provides referrals for housing and employment, helps maintain mentoring relationships, and attempts to link the participants to local church communities.

The outcome evaluation of IFI conducted by CJCP compared the two-year recidivism rate of 177 project participants who were released before September 1, 2000, with that of 1,754 inmates who matched IFI criteria but did not take part in the program (Trusty and Eisenberg, 2003). Participants who completed the program had significantly lower recidivism rates (8% after two years) than the comparison group (20%). Another finding points to the importance of a network of support for released offenders: The recidivism rate was 8 percent for participants whose mentor was known to their parole officer, and 17 percent for those without this relationship (*ibid.*). The researchers note that recruitment of mentors and maintenance of the mentor relationships present a continual challenge.

Unfortunately, neither of the evaluations provided demographic information about the participants except age (52% were more than 35 years old) and race (67% were African-American) (Johnson and Larson, 2003). We do not know the number of participants who were fathers or who had child support obligations, nor was any information given about employment patterns.

Chapter 4

Barriers to Reentry

Whether they did or did not participate in prison-based programming, paroled and released offenders face multiple barriers to employment and self-sufficiency (Petersilia, 2000). Many people emerging from prison lack job experience and work skills. Of 454 fathers in a Massachusetts state prison or a county correctional facility in 2002, approximately one-third (34%) said they were working full-time a year before incarceration, compared to almost half (48%) who reported they were unemployed, and 18 percent who were employed part-time or doing day labor (Griswold, 2002). Slightly more than one-fourth (27%) reported that the longest time they had worked for any employer was less than a year, and 56 percent reported working between one and three years for one employer.

The pervasive deficiencies in education, work experience, and useful job skills held by individuals being released from prison have been well documented (Travis, Solomon and Waul, 2001; Holzer, Rafael and Stoll, 2003). In 2002, 36 percent of state jail confinees and 31 percent of state prison inmates in Texas were tested at education achievement scores of less than sixth grade, indicating their low literacy skills (Texas Department of Criminal Justice, 2003). In the same year, 36 percent of Texas state jail confinees and 47 percent of state prison inmates disclosed they had stopped school before earning either a high school diploma or a GED (*ibid.*). In some cases, the pre-incarceration employment history of inmates consists of poor work habits combined with drug addiction problems (Festen and Fischer, 2002). Any career-building experiences offenders obtained prior to incarceration may be erased by time spent in prison (Street, 2002).

Transitioning back into the community and family presents a host of challenges for someone coming out of prison, beginning with the release process. For example, an offender released from Rogelio Sanchez state jail in Texas is transported by jail staff to the bus station in downtown El Paso unless he has arranged his own transportation from the jail. His canteen account is closed out and he is given a check for the amount he had in his account. If he has no clothing, he is provided with items which have been collected from the Salvation Army by jail staff. An inmate in an Illinois state prison with no savings is given a bus ticket and \$50. Ex-offenders taking part in a study of reentry problems in Chicago reported that \$50 is not enough to cover the costs of looking for work, much less to pay for such basic needs as housing and food until employment is found and paychecks are received (Festen and Fischer, 2002).

A study by Vera Institute found that offenders often cannot secure employment, housing, or public assistance because they lack basic proof of identity papers (Nelson, Deess and Allen, 1999). Released and paroled offenders typically face significant financial obligations, too. In addition to making restitution payments, the offender may owe current and past child support, court costs and fines, halfway house room and board expenses, drug treatment and testing costs, and, in some cases, supervision costs.

A great deal of research has focused on barriers to reentry that released offenders experience (Lynch and Sabol, 2001; LaVigne, *et al.*, 2003). In the following paragraphs, we will briefly examine the topics of criminal records and employment, occupational barriers to employment, and the lack of community resources to assist with reentry.

Criminal Records

Employers are understandably cautious about hiring a released offender, regardless of the nature of the crime. Recent studies find that employers tend to avoid hiring individuals with criminal backgrounds, despite laws limiting the use of criminal history records in employment decisions (Holzer, Rafael and Stoll, 2003). A carefully structured experiment in Milwaukee used matched pairs of individuals to apply for real entry-level jobs in order to study how employers respond to criminal records (Pager, 2003). Two teams of two testers each, one with white males and the other with black males, conducted job application audits of 350 employers. The testers of each team were selected for similarities in appearance and style of presentation. They were given identical background characteristics and rotated having a criminal record or not.

The researchers found that, “in the absence of other disqualifying characteristics,” released offenders with criminal records are only one-half to one-third as likely to be considered by employers as are people without these records. In response to these findings, groups such as the National H.I.R.E. Network and the Council of Advisors to Reduce Recidivism through Employment (C.A.R.R.E.) in Illinois are calling for states to examine their policies with regard to correcting, expunging, or sealing criminal records in some cases, and under certain conditions to provide certificates of rehabilitation for released offenders after a specified number of years with no further criminal convictions (Matthews and Casarjian, 2002).

Several cities (Boston, Chicago and San Francisco) have taken steps to revise their hiring policies for city jobs, so that ex-offenders are not immediately eliminated from consideration (National Employment Law Project, 2006). These cities share a commitment to helping the reentry process succeed by removing

unfair barriers to employment. For example, Boston's ordinance, which takes effect July 1, 2006, prohibits the city and its vendors from conducting a criminal background check until the job applicant is determined to be a qualified candidate. The employer is required to consider the age and seriousness of the crime. Additionally, the ordinance puts in place an appeals process for individuals who are denied employment as a result of their criminal records. Chicago's policy requires that city agencies take into account a person's rehabilitation record, and the age and seriousness of the crime. Similarly, San Francisco recently removed the requirement that criminal histories be included in initial job applications for public employment. Jobs where state or local laws specifically prohibit people with convictions from employment remain exceptions to these new policies.

Occupational Barriers

A further set of barriers for released offenders seeking employment involves federal and state employment restrictions that bar individuals with criminal records from certain professions and occupations (Dietrich, 2002). Federal agencies are permitted to establish personnel policies that fit their mission and employment needs. Thus, the IRS has stringent policies regarding the employment of individuals with criminal histories involving taxes (Matthews and Casarjian, 2002). A recently enacted restriction is the new federal regulation for people with commercial driver's licenses who must apply for a "hazardous material endorsement," or HME, also known as a HazMat license. HMEs are required for a variety of drivers, including municipal trash collectors and interstate truckers hauling chemicals. Under the U.S. Patriot Act, there are 24 felony offenses that will disqualify a person from receiving a hazardous material endorsement, either for a number of years or for a lifetime. Applicants for the license are now required to provide fingerprints for a national criminal records search (Emsellem, 2005).

Similarly, every state has its own set of employment laws, licensing practices, and hiring restrictions concerning individuals with criminal records. Often, states require that criminal convictions be considered when renewing or issuing licenses for specific occupations. In Illinois, more than half of the 99 statutes that regulate licensing of occupational and professional employment contain stipulations for granting licenses to ex-offenders (DePaul University Legal Clinic and Safer Foundation, 2002). The restrictions range from absolute barriers to employment in some professions (for conviction of certain crimes) to consideration of a conviction when determining moral character in others.

At the same time, the federal government is encouraging employment of released offenders by offering a federal tax credit to employers who hire people with felony records. The states of California, Iowa, Louisiana, Maryland, and Texas provide additional state income tax credits to employers who hire people with criminal records, according to the National H.I.R.E. Network.⁶

Lack of Community Resources

It should come as no surprise that the communities in which many offenders were raised and to which they return when released have high unemployment rates, few housing options, above average crime rates, and limited social services available. A study of reentry patterns in Illinois found that 62 percent of inmates released from Illinois state prisons in 2001 returned to Cook County (La Vigne, *et al.*, 2003). Of these 18,377 inmates, 34 percent returned to six of the 77 Chicago communities. Of the various service organizations in Chicago serving ex-offenders, only 24 percent were located within these disadvantaged neighborhoods, and two of the six communities lacked any such services (*ibid.*). Thus, access to programs for substance abuse treatment, employment and training, and mental health is not readily available for residents of these communities.

A similar pattern is found in Houston, where one-fourth of all prisoners who were released in 2001 returned to Harris County, and roughly one-fourth of the supervised (under mandatory supervision) ex-offenders returned to five ZIP codes in Houston (Watson, *et al.*, 2004). As is true with Chicago, the Houston communities receiving the highest numbers of released offenders tend to have the fewest services to help individuals with reentry. A recent demonstration project in Texas involving incarcerated and released fathers also identified limited public transportation in the Houston area as a factor that contributes to the difficulties that these men have in obtaining employment (Griswold, *et al.*, 2005).

⁶ http://hirenetwork.org/state_tax_credits.htm

Chapter 5

Elements for Successful Reentry

In the past few years, judicial personnel, officials in the criminal justice system, legislators, and community activists have developed an intense interest in creating, testing, and funding successful reentry programs. The reason for this interest has been well documented: the high rate of incarceration in the U.S. is causing tremendous impacts on communities and resources as increased numbers of people are coming out of prison (Travis, 2005). Roughly 650,000 people are released from prison each year, according to the U.S. Department of Justice.⁷ Research suggests two elements play an important role for released offenders who succeed at reentering society and avoid returning to prison: family support and employment (Buck, 2000; Travis, 2005).

Family Support and Reentry

A study completed by the Vera Institute of Justice in 1999 followed 49 individuals for 30 days from the time they were released from a New York state prison or a New York City jail (Nelson, Deess and Allen, 1999). The researchers found that a primary indicator of successful reintegration was a supportive family. Having a strong family connection correlated positively with the success of individuals to find work, stay away from drugs, and make new friends.

The evaluation of another study from the Vera Institute provides details on the positive impact that families can have on released offenders (in this case, convicted drug users) but also highlights the strains in family relationships that such intense involvement can generate (Sullivan, *et al.*, 2002). Since 1996, La Bodega de la Familia has provided family case management services to drug users and their supporting family members. For an assessment of the program, subjects for the study were interviewed when they entered the program and six months later. Arrest and conviction data for the study participants and comparison group were analyzed. The researchers compared outcomes for a sample of program participants (88 drug users and 69 family members) with outcomes for a comparison group of 91 drug users and 47 family members. After six months of being in the program, there was a reduction in illegal drug use by the program substance abusers from 80 to 42 percent, which was significantly more than in the comparison group, where usage dropped from 61 to 48 percent.

⁷ <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/reentry/learn.html>.

One of the unexpected findings was that the drop in drug usage by Bodega participants was not accompanied by increased drug treatment, as was the case for the comparison group, but instead appeared to be linked to pressures and attention from family members and case managers (Sullivan, *et al.*, 2002). At the same time, the successful reduction in drug usage often came with the exacerbation or reopening of old family issues and tensions. The drug users in the program reported less satisfaction with family living arrangements at the end of six months, while the comparison group's satisfaction stayed the same. Researchers linked the disaffection felt by the participants to the adjustments both users and family members must make in the process of recovery from addiction. Finally, although a reduction in recidivism was not a goal of the original project, the evaluation indicated the project participants experienced fewer arrests and convictions than did the comparison group.

Employment and Reentry

What is the relationship between post-release employment and successful reentry? A review of employment programs for ex-offenders conducted in the past three decades turns up mixed findings (Buck, 2000). Studies conducted during the 1970s, such as the evaluation of the National Supported Work Demonstration, found that this program of unsubsidized employment in a supportive work environment had an initial positive impact on ex-offenders, but by the end of the first year, the outcomes for the treatment and control groups were roughly the same (p. 3).

In contrast, an evaluation of Project RIO (described above on page 11), showed promising results (Menon, *et al.*, 1992). Project RIO provides vocational and job preparation services to inmates, and refers offenders to local Workforce Commission Centers following release. A year after release, 69 percent of RIO participants were employed, almost double the portion of those employed in the comparison group (36%). Additionally, 23 percent of RIO participants were returned to prison within the first year, compared to 38 percent from the control group (*ibid.*). A more recent report on Project RIO provides similar employment results (Texas Department of Criminal Justice, 2003).

Harer's study of 1,205 federal inmates looked at the impact of employment on recidivism rates (Harer, 1994). Rather than focusing on employment program content, Harer took into account pre-prison, prison, and post-prison experiences of the subjects, and demonstrated that people who were employed full time or attended school prior to incarceration had a lower recidivism rate (25.6%) than those who were not so engaged (60.2%), and that inmates who lined up employment before release returned to prison at a lower rate (27.6%) than those who made no such arrangements (53.9%). Those

individuals who as inmates completed a training program for each six months of their time spent in prison also had a modestly lower recidivism rate (35%) than inmates who did not complete such courses (41%).

A more recent review of programs involving employment services for hard-to-place individuals was completed in 2004, and involved 11 sites. The Welfare-to-Work (WtW) grants program, funded primarily by the Federal government, was designed to help disadvantaged welfare recipients (primarily women) become employed and self-sufficient. The program was based on the notion that placing individuals quickly into the workforce and providing support services is more useful than providing training prior to placing people in jobs. Congress mandated that the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the Department of Labor (DOL) evaluate the grants program (Fraker, *et al.*, 2004). The results of one of the sites (Milwaukee, Wisconsin) are relevant to this report. Unlike the other sites, which primarily worked with females who were receiving welfare, the Milwaukee program served 276 men who were noncustodial parents on parole or probation. The Wisconsin Department of Corrections was in charge of this program, called the Nontraditional Opportunities for Work (NOW) Program.

Employment, training and support services were provided to the NCPs through four Wisconsin Works (W-2) agencies. Two of these agencies added parenting and fatherhood classes to the services, and included discussions about the child support system (Nightingale, Pindus and Trutko, 2002). Less than half of the NOW project participants received job readiness training (40%) or job search assistance (45%), which were the primary WtW services (Fraker, *et al.*, 2004). One-third (33%) took part in education or training programs designed to enhance work skills, and 28 percent took part in peer support and discussion groups.

Two years after entry into the program, 33 percent of the Milwaukee participants were employed, up from 26 percent at program entry. As was the case with the participants from other sites, the Milwaukee participants remained poor throughout the project, although they had the highest mean monthly income (\$1,816) and the lowest incidence of poverty (59%) of the 11 sites. In Milwaukee, as in the majority of sites, employment for participants decreased between the first and second years after program entry.

Following analysis of the project data, researchers declined to say whether enrollees in the WtW grants program “made better employment progress” than they would have with no program. Noting that the outcomes indicate there is “room for considerable improvement” in current approaches to move people into viable employment with the potential for wage growth and away from a

state of poverty and the need for public assistance, the authors call for more research and experimentation to see if factors such as a greater use of job training, health care and child care would make a difference (Fraker, *et al.*, 2004, pp. 116-117).

One researcher points out that the role of work in lowering recidivism rates is not straightforward (Piehl, 2003). In a review of data and literature, she suggests that crime is not necessarily an alternative to work. Data from the 1997 National Longitudinal Survey of Youth indicate that 85 to 90 percent of young people who had an income through crime were also employed (p. 3). Other studies raise the question as to whether having a job will impact the behavior patterns of individuals who are fully invested in a lifestyle with antisocial and criminal patterns. Further, for ex-offenders who lack education, communication skills, work skills and job experience, any employment they secure is likely to be limited in wages and opportunities for wage growth. Most released offenders have an immediate need for employment, often as a stipulation of parole and in order to meet financial obligations such as child support, and they cannot afford to wait for the long-term benefits that might come from vocational training or more schooling. According to this review, employment programs can surely be structured to assist ex-offenders who are motivated to change, but we should not expect employment to provide more than “a modest reduction in criminal activity” (p. 13).

Chapter 6

Current Collaborative Efforts for Reentry Programs

In the previous sections we discussed prison-based programming that centers on parenting and work, barriers to reentry, and elements that appear to contribute to successful reentry. In the final section of this report, we look at a range of collaborative efforts aiming to develop effective reentry programs. Some of these projects involve federal agencies; others are funded through private foundations. The projects listed here are indicative of the significant resources being poured into reentry. They were selected to show the scale of interest at the national level, and how this interest translates into local projects. For a number of the projects, such as those funded by the Serious and Violent Offender Reentry Initiative, the evaluation process is underway but outcomes will not be available for several years.

Serious and Violent Offender Reentry Initiative

The Serious and Violent Offender Reentry Initiative (SVORI) is funded by the U.S. Departments of Justice (DOJ); Labor (DOL); Education; Housing and Urban Development (HUD); and Health and Human Services (HHS). The intent of SVORI is to help states develop new or expand existing programs that provide integrated supervision and reentry services to adults and juveniles leaving correctional facilities. In 2003, this extensive collaborative project granted awards to 69 grantees, located in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. The 69 grantees, which include state and local agencies, are operating 89 distinct programs, of which two-thirds (67%) have both pre-release and post-release service components (Winterfield and Lindquist, 2005). The primary goal of SVORI is to increase public safety by reducing recidivism among the population served by reentry programs.

The grantee programs tend to be small, with roughly half (53%) planning to serve 100 or fewer individuals per year (Lattimore, *et al.*, 2004). Almost all (95%) of the programs offer employment and/or education services, and more than 90 percent provide substance abuse treatment and mental health counseling. A comprehensive multi-site evaluation, being conducted by RTI International and Urban Institute, will include an implementation assessment, an impact evaluation, and a cost-benefit analysis (Lattimore, *et al.*, 2004). The impact evaluation will compare outcomes for a sample of returning offenders who receive SVORI services before release and during the first two years after release, with a comparison group who do not receive these services. Details of the grantees and the evaluation plans were provided in a report presented at the

first National Conference on Offender Reentry in Cleveland in 2004 and posted on the Internet at the evaluation website.⁸ The evaluation period runs until 2008.

Ready4Work Initiative

Ready4Work (R4W) is a three-year, \$22.5 million program to assist faith-based and community programs that provide mentoring and other transition services for men and women returning from prison. R4W is jointly funded by the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), and a consortium of private foundations. R4W was designed to generate successful reentry and reduce recidivism of released offenders through the provision of case management, job training and placement, soft skills development, and mentoring services to individuals. The initiative is aimed at bringing local businesses, faith-based organizations, criminal justice agencies, and community non-profit social service agencies together to address the problems of reentry and employment barriers.⁹

Public/Private Ventures (P/PV) received a grant in 2004 to evaluate 16 R4W sites across the country. The 16 sites are a mixture of non-profit and for profit organizations, some faith-based and others secular. The program is in the second year of operation; consequently, there is little to report in the way of outcomes. But P/PV released a one-page report saying that as of February 2005, 2,700 individuals have been recruited for the program, and close to 60 percent of R4W adults have become employed.¹⁰ Demographic information and child support involvement of participants is not available at this time.

According to a P/PV administrator, the use of faith-based organizations is what sets R4W apart from standard reentry programs. Their contribution is the provision of volunteers who mentor individuals and groups. For example, Safer Foundation, the lead organization for the Chicago site, relies on four churches to recruit, train, and retain 15 to 20 mentors per congregation.

The President's Prisoner Re-entry Initiative

R4W served as the model for President Bush's four-year, \$300 million prisoner re-entry initiative announced in his January 20, 2004 State of the Union Address and contained in his fiscal year 2005 budget. The Prisoner Re-entry Initiative is a collaboration of the Departments of Labor, Justice, Housing and Urban Development and Health and Human Services.

⁸ <http://www.svori-evaluation.org/>

⁹ <http://www.dol.gov/cfbci/ready4work.htm>

¹⁰ www.ppv.org/ppv/community_faith/community_faith.asp

Working together with faith-based and community organizations (FBCOs), this initiative is designed to help ex-offenders find and keep employment, obtain transitional housing and receive mentoring in urban centers and areas of greatest need. FBCOs will offer job training and job placement services in coordination with business and other employment providers. They will also provide post-release mentoring and other services essential to reintegrating ex-offenders in coordination with the corrections, parole, and probation structure. Grants would be available to organizations providing housing services or vouchers to individuals to partially subsidize transitional housing.¹¹

In 2005, DOL awarded 30 grants totaling \$19.8 million to faith-and community-based organizations to assist non-violent ex-offenders returning to their local communities. DOJ is holding a limited grant competition in the 20 states where the DOL grants were awarded to conduct pre-release services for program participants.¹²

Fathers at Work Project

Fathers at Work is a three-year initiative funded by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, which is currently being conducted at six sites throughout the country. Launched in 2001, the workforce development program is designed to provide services to young, low-income, noncustodial fathers in order to improve their employment and earnings, response to child support obligations, and involvement in their children's lives. Two of the sites work specifically with released offenders. Of the 1,222 men who enrolled in the six programs, roughly three-quarters have criminal records (Kotloff, 2005).

Program outcomes for Fathers at Work have not yet been completed, but the evaluators (Public/Private Ventures) recently released a qualitative study of 27 fathers who relied on illegal activity or "hustling" (either selling drugs or committing robberies and burglaries) as a source of income prior to entering the program (Kotloff, 2005). Recruited for the qualitative study several weeks after they enrolled in the project, the men were interviewed individually several times over a three-month period. The interviews explored their experiences with illegal activity, legitimate employment, fatherhood, and the child support system. Almost all of the interviewees had experienced a series of low-paying short-term jobs, and cited the need for full-time employment as a reason for enrolling in the program. Only three of the men were employed when they enrolled in the program, and their jobs were part-time.

¹¹ <http://www.dol.gov/cfbci/reentryfactsheet.htm>

¹² <http://www.dol.gov/opa/media/press/eta/eta20052123.htm>

As participants in the Fathers at Work program, men were given job readiness training and help in locating and retaining employment. Of the 27 respondents, employment information for 18 of them was retrieved in the 12 to 18 months following their enrollment (the other nine men could not be located). The average hourly wage of the 18 men was \$8.18. Fourteen of the men were employed full time at their 12-month enrollment anniversary, working at the same job on an average of nine months (Kotloff, 2005). Thus it appears that the majority of men for whom information was available made gains in employment. However, this is a very small group of individuals and the time frame is relatively short. Without analysis of the broader program outcomes for the larger sample, it is premature to draw conclusions about the effectiveness of Fathers at Work.

Monograph: From Hard Time to Full Time

Funded by the Division of Welfare-to Work of the U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration (ETA), the monograph “From Hard Time to Full Time” was produced in 2001 to assist service providers and workers in TANF offices and workforce development organizations who are trying to place ex-offenders in jobs.¹³ The booklet, written by a legal advocate for released felons seeking employment, explains the barriers to employment for released offenders: criminal records, occupation exclusions, employment discrimination, and lack of documentation. The worker is coached to work with employers as well as ex-offenders, to become familiar with relevant laws and to help clients clean up their criminal records (Mukamal, 2001).

Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service (CSREES)

As part of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service (CSREES) agency provides links between Federal and State components of the national agricultural, education, research and extension system. The system is designed to address problems relating to agriculture, the environment, human health and communities. Depending upon state and local interests and resources, the Cooperative Extension system may be a resource for general adult education materials addressing such topics as parenting, financial management and nutrition. State and county Extension agencies which are part of the network set their own priorities, and in some cases this involves working with incarcerated parents and their families.

¹³ http://hirenetwork.org/pdfs/From_Hard_Time_to_Full_Time.pdf

One example of an Extension agency working with incarcerated parents is the 4-H Living Interactive Family Education (LIFE) program. This program, sponsored by the University of Missouri Outreach and Extension, serves children of incarcerated parents by involving the children in 4-H programming and by developing “an enhanced visitation environment” at one state prison facility in southeast Missouri. Fathers taking part in the program attend monthly parenting training classes, which interface with the children’s 4-H activities. The program has been operating for six years, and serves about a dozen fathers and their children at any one time. Pre- and post-assessments of the life skills of the children who participate indicate the program improves their social competencies, communication skills and decision-making skills (Dunn, 2003).

Pulling for Progress

The U.S. Department of Labor awarded a WtW grant to Hillsborough Community College in Tampa, Florida, to train noncustodial parents with criminal justice histories for entry-level jobs in the telecommunications industry. Described by the program director as a faith-based business model, the program consisted of one week in job skills training (for example, dressing and conversing appropriately and being at work on time), and two weeks of technical training and on-the-job training. The project also offered job placement services. From 2000 to 2004, the Pulling for Progress program trained 423 NCPs in a Level 1 cable installer course. Of these, 390 students were employed and had some income for at least three consecutive quarters, and 180 participants received certification from Building Industry Consultants Service International (BICSI). According to the program director, project staff accompanied participants to court for child support hearings, and worked to inform the state CSE agency and judges of the merits of the training program.

CEO Model of Transitional Jobs Programs

Transitional jobs programs have the potential to help released and paroled offenders and other hard-to-employ populations by providing time-limited, wage-paying jobs to individuals while they are developing skills, overcoming barriers, and accruing experience in the workplace (Szekely, 2004b). A promising model comes from the nationally known employment services agency for released offenders, Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO) in New York. CEO has contracts with a number of public agencies to provide maintenance services.

Released offenders who enter the program attend a four-day life skills class, which concentrates on workplace behavior and job search skills. They are then placed at one of CEO’s worksites, where they work four days a week and

are paid minimum wage on a daily basis. The parolees spend the fifth day of each week in the CEO office, meeting with job developers and coaches, and taking part in activities such as a fatherhood program. In this way, the project participants learn basic work skills as they prepare for full-time, unsubsidized employment. The agency works with roughly 1,800 participants a year, and estimates that 40 percent are noncustodial parents.

CEO has received foundation grants and is part of several federally funded demonstration projects aimed at developing a strong program for transitional jobs that meshes with responsible fatherhood activities. For example, CEO is one of four sites which make up the project “Enhanced Services for the Hard-to-Employ,” funded by HHS, DOL, and several private foundations. The goal of the project is to increase employment and reduce dependency on public assistance for the hard-to-employ population. The study with parolees is designed to compare the effectiveness of the core elements of CEO with the standard job search services offered.

Parolees who come to CEO are randomly assigned to the Neighborhood Work Project (NWP) group and receive a full set of services described above, or are assigned to the Resource Room Group as part of the control group. Individuals in the Resource Room Group attend a 1½-day Life Skills class, and then have access to a staffed resource room with computers, phone, voicemail, a printer, and other job search tools. The Resource Room is staffed with someone to assist the parolees in learning how to use the equipment and develop a resume. Over time, the evaluator MDRC will use a combination of surveys and administrative records to measure employment, criminal justice involvement, and other outcomes of the two groups.

Report of the Re-Entry Policy Council

Another extensive effort to address issues of reentry is the final report of the Re-Entry Policy Council (Re-Entry Policy Council, 2005). Designed to assist policymakers dealing with funding and safety issues, this report was sponsored by the U.S. Departments of Justice, Labor, and Health and Human Services. The report is the result of a series of meetings among 100 respected workforce, health, housing, public safety, judicial, family, community, and victim experts working throughout the country.

The Re-Entry Policy Council offers hundreds of consensus-based, bipartisan recommendations for reducing public spending and increasing public safety by promoting the safe and successful return of released offenders to the community. Beginning with a discussion of how to prepare for a reentry program, the report identifies many of the challenges found in collaborative

efforts for reentry, such as conflicting organizational missions of participating agencies, difficulties in delivering services in the communities where released offenders reside, and identifying sufficient funding streams for sustaining the program.

There are 35 policy statements in this report, covering the general topics of admission procedures to a corrections facility, range of programming in facilities, managing the early (and key) transition period of release, community supervision, and effective health and social services systems. The topic of child support is given serious consideration in numerous policy statements. For example, the report recommends that intake staff identify new inmates with child support obligations soon after admittance, and that staff encourage inmates to “initiate the process to update their support orders” (Re-Entry Policy Council 2005, p. 129). This suggestion is followed by a paragraph describing the approach taken by Massachusetts to modify orders of incarcerated NCPs (p. 130).

In the section “Children and Families,” several pages are devoted to the importance of collaboration between Child Support Enforcement agencies and Departments of Correction. The authors outline a compelling rationale for drafting state policies on child support and incarceration and they explain the need for timely responses to requests for review and adjustment by inmates (pp. 198-200). Arguing that responsive child support policies can help released offenders/NCPs maintain steady employment and meet their monthly child support obligations, the section “Victims, Families and Communities” calls for the creation of “policies of child support debt management and collection that encourage payment and family stability” (p. 327). The authors cite as evidence the finding that released parents coming to the Colorado John Inmann Work and Family Center whose orders or payment arrangements were adjusted to fit their current circumstances paid a higher portion of their child support than did parents who did not use the Work and Family Center (Pearson and Davis, 2003, cited on p. 328).

The Report of the Re-Entry Policy Council reflects an optimistic view of the ability of communities to manage the phenomenon of reentry. It threads a number of critical topics for the child support community among the various discussions of best practices for reentry programs. Although many of the programs described in the report lack outcomes information, the report is an excellent resource for any organization or agency considering launching or expanding a reentry program.

Chapter 7 Summary

Incarcerated parents with minor-aged children enter prison with many problems, including low levels of education, few job skills and often little work experience, few financial resources, and typically a history of substance abuse. In many cases, their children are receiving or have received public assistance. Incarcerated parents with child support involvement often have monthly support orders and arrears that total far more than they can pay while serving their sentence.

Given that parents are expected to take financial responsibility for their children, prison seems an ideal time to educate and train offenders who have children. Yet in reality, access to parenting and work programs in any facility is limited to a small percentage of the population. Parenting programs, usually well received by inmates, are often led by volunteers or staff from community organizations, and are subject to the vagaries of prison scheduling and security. While it is estimated that roughly half of all state prisoners have work assignments, most of this work is custodial or it has limited utility in the outside world. The number of inmates with work assignments in corrections industries is under 10 percent, and only a portion of offenders receive vocational training.

Parents who are released face multiple barriers as they seek employment and a stable living situation, including the stigma attached to having criminal records, the lack of work skills, the lack of training for the current marketplace, and often a return to a neighborhood lacking needed social services. Although a strong family support system and viable employment are predictors of successful reentry, these two items are not necessarily available to most released offenders. An overview of several collaborative efforts demonstrates the interest of the federal government and other organizations in addressing the problems associated with reentry. Various federal agencies are now investing in pilot projects that involve employment services for small numbers of ex-offenders. Transitional job programs appear to be one of the most promising ideas being tested, although they, too, operate on a small scale and currently lack evaluative data.

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