

NEWARK PRISONER RE-ENTRY DEMONSTRATION PROJECT

Over the past three years, the U.S. Department of Labor has been the lead agency for implementing President Bush's Prisoner Re-entry Initiative (PRI). This project assists offenders being released from prison in finding jobs and supportive services upon their return home. PRI grantees are currently operating in 30 cities across the country with very promising results including recidivism rates that are two-thirds below the national average. At the same time, these projects are reaching only a small fraction of the total number of returnees in the communities they serve. The question has arisen as to whether the PRI approach can be brought to sufficient scale to help reduce recidivism as it affects an entire community

To help answer that question, the Department of Labor is investing \$2 million in a partnership with the City of Newark, New Jersey and a consortium of foundations and other private organizations to develop a PRI community-saturation model. With matching and leveraged resources from foundations, federal, state, local and private organizations of over \$12 million, this project will test whether a fully developed and integrated re-entry program that relies on community- and faith-based organizations as front-line service providers can help reduce criminal recidivism on a community-wide basis.

For many reasons, Newark is an excellent test site for such a demonstration. The city has the highest per capita number of parolees of all U.S. cities; the Mayor Cory Booker of Newark, elected on a reform agenda, has made re-entry a signature issue; the Governor of New Jersey has also made prisoner re-entry a priority in his administration, with Newark being one of three demonstration sites for the State's *Another Chance* re-entry program; and the Nicholson Foundation has already invested over \$8 million in the City of Newark for prisoner re-entry.

Under this demonstration, the City of Newark will serve 1,345 returning prisoners over a two-year period using a combination of federal, state, and foundation funds. A number of different partners will be charged with implementing key aspects of the project:

- Five faith- and community-based organizations will be the "front door" for returning prisoners to receive help in finding employment, mentoring, and other supportive services. Public/Private Ventures, one of the nation's leading authorities on community-based re-entry and mentoring for adult offenders, will provide oversight and technical assistance to the faith- and community-based organizations.
- The New Jersey Institute for Social Justice will help provide employment opportunities in partnership with Mayor Booker's Transitional Jobs Program.
- Under a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Department of Labor, the New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development will coordinate linkages between the Newark re-entry grant, the State's *Another Chance* program, and the local One-Stop Career Center.

- The Nicholson Foundation will provide grants to Goodwill Industries and America Works, a private, for-profit job placement agency, to support services and job placements for ex-offenders returning to Newark.
- Other partners in the demonstration include DOL's Northern New Jersey WIRED grantee, Offender Aid and Restoration, the Prisoners Self-Help Legal Clinic, the Bloomfield College/Rutgers Prisoners and Their Families Project, the New Jersey Institute of Technology, and the Newark Comprehensive Center for Fathers.

An important aspect of the Newark-PRI Demonstration will be the creation of a special technical assistance program that recruits elected officials and other leaders from cities around the country to observe, learn from, and advise to the City of Newark. This so-called "fishbowl" will provide a platform for sharing learning and practices between and among jurisdictions that are working to implement their own re-entry projects.