

## Ready4Work: A Business, Community, and Criminal Justice Partnership

### Structure and Purpose

The Prisoner Reentry Initiative (PRI) was designed to expand the elements of an earlier prisoner reentry project called Ready4Work (R4W). Ready4Work was an ETA pilot project that also helped returning offenders by linking them to faith-based and community institutions that help them find work and avoid a relapse into a life of criminal activity. R4W was launched in 2003 and was a three-year pilot program to address the needs of ex-prisoners utilizing Faith-Based and Community Organizations (FBCO). This \$25 million program was jointly funded by the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), the U.S. Department of Justice, Public/Private Ventures — a Philadelphia-based research and demonstration non-profit — and a consortium of private foundations.

Ready4Work placed community organizations at the center of social service delivery to ex-offenders. It placed an emphasis on employment-focused programs that incorporate mentoring, job training, job placement, case management and other comprehensive transitional services. The following select organizations were chosen to provide services to adult ex-offenders in eleven cities:

- City of Memphis Second Chance Ex-Felon Program — Memphis, Tennessee
- Allen Temple Housing and Economic Development Corp — Oakland, California
- East of the River Clergy Police and Community Partnership — Washington, DC
- Exodus Transitional Community — East Harlem, New York
- Holy Cathedral/Word of Hope Ministries — Milwaukee, Wisconsin
- Operation New Hope — Jacksonville, Florida
- SAFER Foundation — Chicago, Illinois
- Search for Common Ground — Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
- Union Rescue Mission — Los Angeles, California
- Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church — Houston, Texas
- America Works Detroit — Detroit, MI

For further information on the R4W program, including participant demographics, outcomes and resources, please [click here](#).

### **New Page: Ready4Work Program Design and Outcomes**

#### **Participants**

Participant eligibility for Ready4Work was determined based on three factors: (1) age of the ex-offender; (2) presenting offense; and (3) length of time pre or post-release. Ex-prisoners between the ages of 18 and 34 who had most recently been incarcerated for a nonviolent felony offense and were no more than 90 days pre or post-release were eligible to enroll in the program.

Once individuals entered the program, they were eligible for up to one year's worth of services. The typical program trajectory began with a week or two of training in "soft skills" such as résumé writing and workplace etiquette to prepare participants for their

job search. Participants were also matched with mentors in one-to-one and/or group mentoring relationships. Upon completion of their initial employment training, most participants began searching for work, though some continued with more advanced training related to specific industries. Case managers and job placement specialists helped participants find jobs and supported them while they were working.

### Participant Demographics

African American males constituted the majority of Ready4Work enrollees. The general returning ex-offender population is approximately 90 percent male.<sup>1</sup> Rates of enrollment for males in Ready4Work tracked that figure closely constituting 81 percent of the program's participants. Seventy-eight percent of Ready4Work participants were African American, 8 percent were White non-Hispanic and 5 percent were Hispanic. The average age of a Ready4Work participant was 26 years old — eight years younger than the average for ex-offenders released from prison.<sup>2</sup> In sum, the program served a predominantly male population that was on average younger and composed of a greater percentage of minorities than the overall population of those returning from prison — statistics that, when combined with non-violent presenting offenses, indicate a higher chance of recidivating.<sup>3</sup>

	<b>Persons Entering State Parole in 1999<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>Ready4Work Participants<sup>2</sup></b>
<b>Average age</b>	34 years old	26 years old
<b>Race/ethnicity</b>		
White non-Hispanic	35%	8%
African American non-Hispanic	47%	78%
Hispanic	16%	5%
Other	1%	9%
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	90%	81%
Female	10%	19%
<sup>1</sup> Source: Hughes et al. 2001.		
<sup>2</sup> Source: R4W sites' management information systems.		

### Education and Work History

Two of the most significant challenges faced by ex-prisoners are lack of education and the absence of meaningful work history. At enrollment, 39 percent of Ready4Work participants had not finished high school or obtained their GEDs. More than half had held a full-time job for one year or longer prior to entering prison, 31 percent had held a full-time job for less than one year and approximately 16 percent had never held a full-time job.

### Criminal History

Ready4Work targeted individuals returning from prison with a high probability of recidivating for enrollment. Ex-prisoners with extensive criminal backgrounds — those

most likely to return to prison — participated in the program. Half of Ready4Work participants had been arrested five or more times. Less than 10 percent had been arrested only once (see Table 2). More than 55 percent had most recently been incarcerated for a drug or property offense. As a result of these criminal records, the majority of participants had spent more than two years in prison, and almost 25 percent had spent five or more years behind bars. Participants averaged 17 years of age at the time of their first arrest.

<b>Presenting Offense</b>		<b>Number of Arrests</b>	
Drug	44%	1	9%
Property	14%	2 to 4	41%
Other	42%	5 or more	50%

Source: R4W sites' management information systems and participant questionnaires.

### **Results**

The Ready4Work pilot program formally ended August 31, 2006. The results of the program, which were verified by an independent third party, are promising. A total of 4,482 formerly incarcerated individuals enrolled in Ready4Work. Of these participants, 97 percent received comprehensive case management services, 86 percent received employment services and 63 percent received mentoring services.

Ready4Work sites placed 2,543 participants (57 percent) into jobs, with 63 percent of those placed retaining their job for three consecutive months after placement. On average, program costs were approximately \$4,500 per participant, compared with average costs of \$25,000 to \$40,000 per year for re-incarceration.

### **Recidivism**

Recidivism is defined in Ready4Work as returning to an in-state prison as a result of a conviction for a new offense. This is a common measure used by other studies and programs assessing recidivism rates. However, this definition excludes those returning to prison for violating their probation or parole conditions, as well as those incarcerated in local jails.

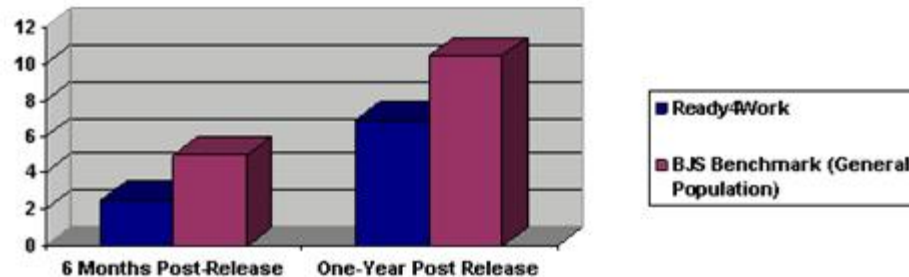
Data analysis on Ready4Work prepared by Public/Private Ventures shows that only 2.5 percent of Ready4Work participants have been re-incarcerated in state institutions within 6 months of release, and 6.9 percent were re-incarcerated at the one-year post-release mark. Though these statistics are promising, it is important to note that a random-assignment study has not been performed, so no strict control group existed for the sake of comparison.

The recidivism outcomes from Ready4Work were, however, compared against the universally accepted recidivism benchmark from the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) re-incarceration study, "Recidivism of Prisoners Released in 1994."<sup>4</sup> Ready4Work recidivism rates are half the national re-incarceration rate of 5 percent at six-months and 34 percent lower than the 10.4 percent national rate of re-incarceration one-year after release.

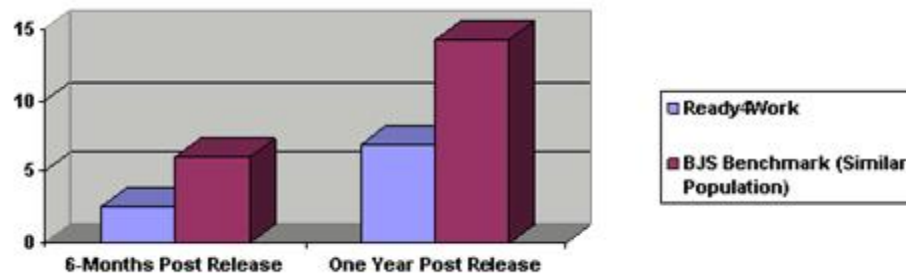
Ready4Work recidivism statistics are of particular significance given the fact that the program's population was at a statistically higher risk for recidivating than the general

ex-prison population represented by the BJS statistic, due largely to age, race and type of offense. When compared against a subset of the 1994 BJS study that includes only African American male inmates between the ages of 18 and 34 released after serving time for nonviolent offenses, the 2.75 percent recidivism rate for Ready4Work participants at 6 months is 54 percent lower than the 6 percent BJS Benchmark figure. The 7.28 percent Ready4Work recidivism rate at the one-year post-release mark was 49 percent lower than this BJS subset at the one-year post-release

**Table 3: Ready4Work Recidivism Rates and Bureau of Justice Statistics Benchmarks**



**Table 4: Ready4Work Recidivism Rates and Bureau of Justice Statistics Benchmarks for African American Male Non-Violent Offenders between the Ages of 18 and 34.**



### Mentoring as a Component of Ready4Work

Over 60 percent of Ready4Work participants received mentoring as part of their services. Participants who met with a mentor at least once showed stronger outcomes than those who did not participate in mentoring in a number of ways:

- Mentored participants remained in the program longer than unmentored participants (10.2 months versus 7.2 months).
- Mentored participants were *twice as likely to obtain a job*. After the first encounter, an additional month of meetings between the participant and mentor increased the former's likelihood of finding a job by 53 percent.
- Meeting with a mentor increased a participant's odds of getting a job the next month by 73 percent over participants who did not take advantage of mentoring. An additional month of meetings increased a participant's odds of finding a job by another 7 percent.
- Those who met with a mentor were 56 percent more likely to remain employed for three months than those who did not. An additional month of meetings with a

mentor increased the participant's odds of remaining employed three months by 24 percent.

A complete analysis of mentoring outcomes can be found in *Mentoring Ex-Prisoners in the Ready4Work Reentry Initiative*, linked below.

## **Publications**

[Ready4Work In Brief: Interim Outcomes Are In](#) provides evaluative information on the program.

[Just Out](#) examines the early implementation of Ready4Work and reports on the best emerging practices in four key program areas.

[Mentoring Ex-Prisoners in the Ready4Work Re-entry Initiative](#) reports on the success of mentoring for ex-offenders.

[Call to Action](#) highlights the accomplishments of three Ready4Work sites: Operation New Hope, The Second Chance Program, and the East of the River Clergy-Police-Community Partnership.