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**White House Hosts Compassion in Action Event on Prisoner Re-Entry**

On March 22<sup>nd</sup>, the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives convened its third Compassion in Action Roundtable, “Improving Prisoner Re-Entry Services through Faith and Community-Based Partnerships.” The program highlighted the Administration's efforts towards improving the success of ex-offenders re-entering their communities after incarceration. Specifically, the event focused on two U.S. Department of Labor programs, Ready4Work and the Prisoner Re-Entry Initiative, which are demonstrating positive results in reducing recidivism.

Elaine L. Chao, Secretary of Labor; Robert J. Portman, Director of the Office of Management and Budget; and Frederick A. Davie, President of Public/Private Ventures shared remarks at the

event. The keynote addresses were followed by a panel of community leaders who discussed effective mentoring programs for adult ex-offenders.

More than 100 participants joined the keynote speakers and panelists to examine effective strategies for supporting ex-offenders.

Each year more than 650,000 inmates are released from Federal and State prisons to be reunited with their communities and families. Statistics have shown as many as two out of three returning inmates will be re-arrested within three years of release and about half return to prison.

**Ready4Work Program Demonstrates Positive Results**

At the March 22<sup>nd</sup> White House event, PPV President Fred Davie described the origin and process of implementation for Ready4Work, a \$25 million three-year pilot program funded by the U.S. Departments of Labor and Justice, P/PV and a private consortium of foundations. Ready4Work utilized faith-based and community organizations (FBCOs) to address the needs of ex-prisoners. Through programs at 18 sites (11 adult and 7 youth) around the country, Ready4Work has shown that the devastating cycle of recidivism can be interrupted.

Mr. Davie shared encouraging early-stage results from the Ready4Work program, “Based on our latest analysis, which includes incarceration data

from all 11 adult Ready4Work sites, we found recidivism rates that are at least one third below the national average. Just 2.75 percent of

Ready4Work participants returned to state prison within six months of their release, compared with 5 percent nationally; and only 7.28 percent did so within one year, compared with 10.4 percent nationally. When we looked specifically at African American nonviolent felons, ages 18-34, who represent the bulk of Ready4Work participants, just 2.9 percent return to state prison within six months, compared to 5.6 percent nationally. And only 7.6 percent return to state prison within one year, compared to 13.3 percent nationally.”



OFBCI Newsletter

In addition, Ready4Work is saving taxpayer dollars—the average cost per participant for Ready4Work is \$4,500 a year-while the cost of Federal incarceration is between \$25,000-40,000 a year.

The Ready4Work program demonstrates the importance of placing mentors in the lives of ex-offenders returning to their communities. Ready4Work participants who met with a mentor

remained in the program longer; were twice as likely to obtain a job; and were more likely to stay employed than participants who did not meet with a mentor.

Ready4Work has demonstrated that investing in young ex-prisoners yields huge dividends, for the people trying to put their lives together, for their communities, and for the nation.

## Building Effective Mentoring Programs for Adult Ex-Offenders

The panel at the March 22<sup>nd</sup> White House event focused on building effective mentoring programs for adult ex-offenders. Dr. Byron Johnson, of Baylor University, moderated the panel. He was joined by Yalanda McFadgon, Executive Director of the Second Chance/Ready4Work Program for the City of Memphis; Kathy Lambert, Co-Founder and Executive Director of Connections to Success (CtS) in St. Louis, Missouri; and Douglas Burris, Chief U.S. Probation Officer in the Eastern District of Missouri who spoke about their experiences with serving ex-offenders.

The three panelists highlighted the need for offering relevant services to ex-offenders to ensure they transition successfully into a new life. Ms. McFadgon shared the story of a Second Chance participant who credited daily calls from a mentor for enabling her to stay drug free and succeed in the program.

Mr. Burris reported positive results from the Eastern District of Missouri's Offender Employment Program. Since the program began in 2000, the case load for unemployment has decreased from 12.1% to 2.1% for the most volatile



cases. Currently the offender unemployment rate is less than the lowest recorded rate in the state of Missouri (2.6% in 2000). Additionally, since the program's inception, the number of

people who have returned to prison has dropped drastically; from 40% higher than the national average to 20% lower than the national average. These results have so inspired federal probation offices that close to thirty new programs are being implemented around the country.

Mrs. Lambert began Connections to Success (CtS) as a small non-profit helping recipients transition off of welfare. In a short time, CtS expanded its reach to serve ex-offenders and was awarded several federal grants, including the Prisoner Reentry Initiative and a special Department of Justice initiative targeting ex-offenders. Mrs. Lambert is now a well known expert on this issue and is relied upon by state and federal officials to help shape policy.

## Press Coverage of Compassion in Action Roundtable

The issue of ex-offender reentry has become one of growing public interest and concern. Coverage of

the Roundtable has been extensive. Below are excerpts from just a few of those articles.

**March 27, 2007**

***Roundtable on Religion and Social Welfare Policy***

***“White House Touts Pilot Program for Ex-Prisoners”***

**By Anne Farris**

The White House last week held the third in a series of presentations that showcase the successes of its' six-year-old Faith-Based and Community Initiative.

The two-hour "Compassion in Action" session at the White House featured lots of numbers and

testimonials touting the success of a government- and private foundation-funded pilot project called Ready4Work. The project relied on small grassroots organizations to help reintegrate ex-felons back into the community, with mentoring, job training, housing and case management.

**March 26, 2007**

*Religion News Service*

**"Daily Digest : Chao: Program Involving Faith-based Groups Produced Lower Recidivism Rates"**

**By Adelle M. Banks**

U.S. Labor Secretary Elaine Chao announced the results of a "Ready4Work" project at a gathering of policymakers, faith-based and community leaders and government and foundation officials on Thursday (March 22). It showed recidivism rates

for program participants were 45 percent lower than the national rate after six months and 30 percent lower than the national re-incarceration rate a year after release.

**April 7, 2007**

*World Magazine*

**In-house training**

**Religion: Inmates need hope plus opportunity; faith-based prison program helps with both |**

**By Becky Perry**

Skeptics of the faith-based initiative have long questioned the evidence that faith-based prison ministry really works. Are the stories of success mere accidents? Or do the anecdotes indicate measurable progress in the fight against federal recidivism rates?

At a White House-sponsored roundtable late last month, Fred Davie of Public/Private Ventures announced the results of the Ready4Work program: Prisoners who participated in the faith-based reentry program are 45 percent less likely to return to prison within six months of release and 30 percent less likely to return to prison after a year. After three years of operation at 17 sites, Davie declared the results "preliminary, but very promising."

According to Department of Justice benchmarks, the prospects for prisoners who complete their sentences remain grim. Federal and state prisons release some 650,000 offenders annually. By year three, 60 percent of those offenders will be charged with new crimes, and 40 percent will be back behind bars. Davie credits his success in eroding those recidivism statistics to the emotional and practical support offered by the mentoring component of the Ready4Work program. He stressed that—in contrast to the demographics of similar programs—85 percent of the Ready4Work volunteer mentors are African-American.

**March 28, 2007**

*The American*

**"The End of Fatalism"**

**By: Paul Howard**

One of the most promising experiments in prisoner rehabilitation, known as Ready4Work (R4W), concluded last September. ... There were two key innovations: First, mentoring helps. Men who met with mentors remained in the program longer, were twice as likely to find a job, and were more likely to stay employed than those who did not meet with

mentors. Second, close links with the business community are important. More than 800 medium and small businesses hired participants in the program. Having a trusted community group to vouch for prospective employees made hiring ex-prisoners an easier decision—and gave employees an extra incentive to keep their jobs.