



Report to the Congress of the United States
on the Activities of the
Office of Correctional Job Training and Placement
During Fiscal Year 1998

January 1999

Introduction

As mandated in its enabling legislation, the National Institute of Corrections' Office of Correctional Job Training and Placement hereby submits its annual report to Congress on its activities during fiscal year 1998 (October 1, 1997, through September 30, 1998).

Background

The Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 directed the U.S. Attorney General to establish an Office of Correctional Job Training and Placement (OCJTP) within the Department of Justice. OCJTP was created as a vehicle to encourage, support, and advance job training and job placement programs that provide services to offenders and ex-offenders.

OCJTP was established in March 1995 within the National Institute of Corrections (NIC), an organization whose primary purpose is to assist state and local corrections by providing technical assistance, training, and information services. NIC's service delivery system provides the necessary organizational support and field contacts to carry out the functions of OCJTP.

As defined by its enabling legislation (P.L. 103-322), OCJTP's functions include:

- Coordinating efforts of the Department of Labor (DOL), Department of Justice (DOJ), and other federal agencies in the areas of correctional job training and placement.
- Providing training to develop staff competencies needed by state and local agencies to assist offenders and ex-offenders in gaining marketable occupational skills and job placement.
- Providing technical assistance related to the development of offender employability to state and local training and employment agencies.
- Collecting and disseminating information on offender job training and placement programs, accomplishments, and employment outcomes.

Status of Offender Job Training and Placement in the United States

Studies have found that up to 40% of all offenders were unemployed or marginally employed prior to arrest* and that 83% of probation and parole violators were unemployed at the time of violation.† Statistics suggest that the failure of offenders and ex-offenders to maintain employment may

*Donna Bellorado. *Making Literacy Programs Work. Vol. I: A Practical Guide for Correctional Educators.* National Institute of Corrections, 1986.

†State of New York Department of Labor. "Ex-Offender Employment Rights." *Your Winning Edge.* Undated.

contribute to high recidivism rates. To obtain current information on job retention by offenders, ex-offenders, and related special-needs populations, NIC awarded a cooperative agreement in FY '98 to an academician to conduct a review of the literature. It is anticipated that this exploratory study will lay the foundation for additional research.

Innovative programs that are showing success with offenders continue to be developed by states, localities, and the private sector. Some of these programs were the subject of descriptive reports developed for national dissemination. They are described briefly on page 6 of this report.

Perhaps the most significant development in the area of offender job training and placement in recent years was the establishment of the Inmate Placement Program Branch (IPPB) within the Federal Bureau of Prisons (FBOP) in 1996. This branch was given the responsibility of developing programs to enhance post-release employment opportunities for federal prisoners. During fiscal year 1998, FBOP announced it would designate an employee as Inmate Employment Coordinator at each of its 93 facilities for sentenced offenders.

Activities supporting IPPB goals in federal institutions include: 1) conducting mock job fairs; 2) posting job opportunity announcements provided by private-sector companies; 3) training inmates to develop and use employment "portfolios," which include a summary of an inmate's educational background and work experience and related documentation; 4) identifying sources of employment for ex-offenders; and 5) providing staff training. The first training program for FBOP offender employment specialists, based on an OCJTP curriculum, was conducted in August 1998.

IPPB recently established an Internet website (www.unicor.gov/placement). It features information on mock job fairs in federal institutions, obtaining a GED, training for offender employment specialists, and federal programs that provide incentives for employers to hire ex-offenders.

Federal Agency Coordination

During fiscal year 1998, OCJTP coordinated activities with other federal agencies involved in offender job training and placement. Two regularly scheduled meetings of the Federal Interagency Working Group on Offender Job Training and Placement were held. This group consists of representatives from the National Institute of Justice (NIJ), the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Correctional Education (OCE), the FBOP's Inmate Placement Program Branch, and DOL's National Occupational Information Coordinating Committee (NOICC), as well as OCJTP.

The group's March 1998 meeting was also attended by representatives of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Human Services Policy; the NIJ-sponsored National Working Group on Children, Families, and the Criminal Justice System; and the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation. (The Mott Foundation works to strengthen families by promoting parenting skills, child well-being, economic development, and reconnecting absentee fathers with their families.) Information was provided by the federal representatives on the activities of their agencies relating to offender job training and placement and the significance of these activities in meeting the needs of families and children.

Highlights of federal activities related to offender employment during fiscal year 1998 follow.

- In 1997, DOL made plans to decentralize its Federal Bonding Program, which had been in existence since 1966 with a 98% success rate, and encourage states and localities to provide such bonds. Because approximately 80% of those covered under the federal program were offenders or ex-offenders, representatives from OCJTP, CURE (Citizens United for the Rehabilitation of Errants), and the Federal Bonding Program met in December 1997 with the Chief of Staff for the Secretary of Labor to discuss DOL's plans and request that DOL consider exploring alternatives that would continue to provide offenders easy access to bonding. In February 1998, representatives of OCJTP, the Federal Bonding Program, and the Federal Corrections and Supervision Division of the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts met to discuss providing bonds to potential employers of federal probationers.

By September 30, 1998, DOL had decentralized the Federal Bonding Program but was offering a limited number of free bonds to state and local agencies. It was anticipated that jurisdictions would offer bonding on their own in the future.

- OCJTP and NOICC entered into an interagency agreement to develop a training curriculum for vocational counselors from state and local public and private organizations that provide services to offenders entering or transitioning back into the labor market. The joint effort will produce a six-week competency-based training program that could train agency trainers and lead to certification of offender vocational counselors or career development specialists by a professional organization. The program will consist of four weeks of classroom instruction interspersed by two weeks of on-the-job experience. Those who complete the full training will then serve as trainers for their agencies and in their jurisdictions. It is anticipated that the first program will be presented next year.
- OCE received a \$12 million supplemental Congressional appropriation to award grants in fiscal year 1999 to develop vocational training and educational programs for youthful offenders committed to state adult corrections facilities who are within five years of parole. The activities supported by the grants could potentially be continued through parole.
- In March 1998, representatives of OCJTP and the Discretionary Grants Division, Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA), met to explore the possibility of initiating a collaborative effort to sponsor projects related to offender job training and placement.

Training

Offender Employment Specialist Training

During fiscal year 1998, OCJTP coordinated three training seminars at the NIC Academy in Longmont, Colorado, which were attended by a total of 86 offender employment specialists. Most of the training participants were from state and local agencies, but several FBOP administrators and trainers also attended.

The 36-hour seminar is designed primarily for two people from the same jurisdiction—one from public corrections and the other from a government agency or private organization—who work

together to place offenders in jobs. It advances their skills in assessing and teaching job readiness skills, identifying potential employers and job opportunities, and coordinating with community and business resources.

Evaluation of Training. Formal evaluation procedures were implemented during the training seminars in February and May. At the end of each seminar, participants were asked to determine the increase in their knowledge in six areas: 1) providing job retention skills programs, 2) marketing offenders in the community, 3) job development, 4) job placement, 5) providing pre-employment and job readiness skills programs, and 6) coordinating community resources. The average overall increase reported in the February seminar was 26% and in the May seminar, 24%.

Follow-Up Questionnaires. Four months after each seminar, questionnaires were sent to participants. They were asked to assess the success of, or barriers to, implementation of the action plans they developed during the seminar, the extent of their collaboration with other agencies after the training, changes experienced as a result of attending the training, and resource availability.

Fifty-one of the 86 participants returned the questionnaires. All of them identified one or more actions implemented to improve offender job training and placement services. Results cited by many respondents included 1) sharing of the new skills and knowledge acquired in the training both within and outside their organization, 2) development of new relationships and working partnerships outside their organization, and 3) contact with peers from the seminar. Barriers to implementing improvements included staffing levels, fiscal allocations, and time constraints.

Training Through Technical Assistance

Training related to offender employment was provided through technical assistance by the NIC Community Corrections Division, as follows.

- A 12-hour workshop was presented for 33 participants from the Florida Department of Corrections and 11 from the Florida Department of Labor and Employment Security. As a result of the training, participants made plans to develop an offender-specific job readiness and retention class, institute cross training between the two agencies, and pilot a partnership between the agencies in one region of the state that could later be replicated in other regions.
- A 15-hour workshop was presented for 37 offender employment specialists from Iowa's Sixth Judicial District. As a result of the training, plans were made to develop a job readiness and retention class for unemployed probationers and offenders in residential centers. The district is also considering conducting a mock job fair and creating a position with responsibility for planning, organizing, managing, and evaluating its offender employment services.

Other Training Activities

OCJTP workshops, adapted from the 36-hour Offender Employment Specialist training, are available for presentation at professional conferences to fit various time periods. Three workshops were conducted at national conferences during fiscal year 1998.

- *American Vocational Association Convention* (December 1997)—a 2-hour workshop for 25 participants.

- *National Employment and Training Association Conference* (May 1998)—a 2-hour workshop for 20 participants.
- *53rd Annual International Correctional Education Association Conference* (July 1998)—a 1¼-hour workshop for 30 participants.

Planning for National Forum

OCJTP and the Safer Foundation* will co-sponsor a 2½-day National Forum on Offender Job Training and Placement in March 1999 in Chicago for selected administrators of offender job training and placement programs throughout the country. The forum will address issues affecting their ability to provide services and will promote networking among participants.

To help design the content for the forum, a planning meeting was held in August 1998 and attended by representatives of a state department of labor; a state department of education, division of corrections education; private, non-profit organizations; a prison work camp; prison and jail industries; and state probation. The group identified several issues that the forum will address, including legislation that directly or indirectly affects the integration of offenders and ex-offenders into the workforce, networking and partnerships, funding sources, and job retention strategies.

Public Information and Clearinghouse Activities

Public Information

In its ongoing effort to disseminate information and develop partnerships with public and private organizations, OCJTP initiated first contacts with the following groups during the year.

- The National Association of Workforce Development Professionals (NAWDP), headquartered in Washington, D.C. The 1,800-member association publishes a newsletter and topical documents, coordinates workshops at its national conferences, maintains a membership directory, and is developing a training curriculum and a certification process for workforce development professionals. NAWDP is considering establishing a network of offender employment specialists and administrators within the association.
- Participants in FBOP's first offender employment specialist training program, who were encouraged to join the network of offender employment specialists being developed by OCJTP.
- Administrators and staff of the Education Branch of FBOP's Division of Industries, Education, and Vocational Training.
- The International Correctional Education Association, which invited the OCJTP coordinator to participate in a discussion group at its annual conference.

*The Safer Foundation, located in Chicago, Illinois, is the largest community-based provider of employment services for ex-offenders in the United States.

Clearinghouse Services

OCJTP clearinghouse services are housed within the NIC Information Center, which is operated by a contractor and located in Longmont, Colorado. Services provided by the Information Center respond to Congress's mandate that OCJTP collect and disseminate information on offender job training and placement programs, accomplishments, and employment outcomes. During fiscal year 1998, the Information Center responded to 254 requests for materials on correctional job training and placement and related topics. Those requesting information were from state and local government agencies, academia, and the private sector.

A September 1998 inventory of NIC Information Center holdings identified 665 items directly related to offender employability and employment, 54 of which were added during the past year. These materials cover the topics of offender job counseling, training in job readiness skills, vocational education, inmate industries, job placement, and related services for offenders. Formats range from curriculum materials, to program descriptions and evaluations, to offender self-help materials. Prominent in the collection are practical materials developed by those working in the field.

Publications

NIJ, OCE, and NIC entered into a second interagency agreement to support the development and publication of Program Focus reports that feature promising programs for integrating offenders into the workforce. The programs highlighted are deemed to have potential for replication in other jurisdictions. Four reports were published during 1998.

- *Successful Job Placement for Ex-Offenders: The Center for Employment Opportunities* features a unique New York City program that provides day labor for participants, thus preparing them for placement in a permanent, unsubsidized, full-time job. Work crews provide participants with structure, instill good work habits, enable them to earn a daily income, and test their readiness for placement in a permanent job. The program has been successful in finding jobs for as many as 70% of participants.
- *Texas' Project RIO (Re-Integration of Offenders)* features an Austin-based program that began as a two-city pilot in 1985 and became one of the most ambitious state government programs devoted to placing parolees in jobs in the nation. Operating through the state employment agency, Project RIO provides job placement services to nearly 16,000 parolees throughout Texas each year and job preparation services to prison inmates. An independent evaluation estimated that the program saved Texas more than \$15 million in 1990 alone by reducing the number of parolees who may otherwise have been rearrested and returned to prison.
- *Chicago's Safer Foundation: A Road Back for Ex-Offenders* features the Safer Foundation, founded in 1972. The Safer Foundation runs a private school in the Cook County Jail and operates a work release center at a separate site that provides extensive educational and employment readiness programming. Safer uses a small-group, peer-based approach in its basic education skills programs, developed especially to overcome the barriers to learning faced by most offenders and ex-offenders. Case managers are available to help clients address transitional problems for one year after they have secured employment. In 1996, Safer helped 1,102 clients find jobs. Of the 721 participants who completed Safer's basic education course for 16- to 21-year-old ex-offenders, more than two-thirds entered school or vocational training

or found employment in the community. Half a year after completing the course, 58% of those individuals maintained their placements and only one participant had been convicted of a new crime.

- *The Delaware Department of Correction Life Skills Program* features an innovative four-month program, offered twice a year in four state prisons. It focuses on three major components: academics, violence reduction, and applied life skills. At its core is Moral Reconciliation Therapy, a systematic, step-by-step process of raising one's moral reasoning level through a series of moral and cognitive stages. An independent evaluation of the first year's programs showed that 19% of program graduates had reoffended within a year of release compared to 27% of non-participants.

In addition to these Program Focus reports:

- OCE published *Consumer Guide to Life Skills Curriculum* for corrections agencies seeking to develop a life-skills program for offenders. The document is based on results of OCE life-skills demonstration projects over the past several years.
- NIJ published a document entitled *The Orange County, Florida, Jail Educational and Vocational Programs*. The programs provided by this 3,300-bed jail include adult basic education, GED preparation, vocational training, life skills development, psychoeducation groups, and substance abuse education. Courses are tailored for the short periods of time jail inmates are incarcerated and typically run six hours a day, six days a week.