

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON
TRAINING, EDUCATION, AND
EMPLOYMENT SERVICES FOR
OFFENDERS AND EX-OFFENDERS**

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DRAFT**

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A. INTRODUCTION

U.S. prisons release more than 500,000 offenders to their communities each year. While significant numbers of those released will remain crime free, many others will encounter serious difficulties in making the transition from prison to life within their communities. For example, national statistics reveal that within three years of release from the Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP), 4 in 10 former inmates had either been rearrested or had their parole revoked.¹ While there is much debate over reasons for high rates of recidivism and the steps that should be undertaken to reduce recidivism, most experts agree that lack of job training and insufficient work opportunities are critical factors that contribute to recidivism. Already facing steep barriers to securing work because of their ex-offender status, many offenders emerge from prison with serious basic skills deficiencies (e.g., reading and math skills below 8th grade), lack of educational credentials, and few marketable skills. In addition, ex-offenders often bring a range of other problems -- such as, substance abuse issues, lack of reliable transportation, lack of work tools and clothing, and poor understanding of effective job search methods -- which further undermine their efforts at securing full-time, legitimate employment. Without employment and a steady source of income, many ex-offenders return to criminal activity.

With the U.S. correctional population expanding rapidly -- and about one-half million offenders leaving the system each year -- well-structured and intensive education, training, and employment programs could hold the key to reducing rates of recidivism and costs of

¹M. Harer, *Recidivism Among Federal Prisoners Released in 1987*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Prisons, 1994.

incarceration in the U.S. For example, upgrading basic skills, educational credentials, and job-specific skills will likely enhance ex-offenders' prospects for long-term employment (i.e., securing a job with self-sustaining wages and career potential). Job readiness/job search workshops and job placement assistance can enhance the effectiveness of search strategies employed by ex-offenders, shortening search time after release and helping ex-offenders find full-time jobs suited to their abilities and interests. Ongoing tracking, case management, and well-coordinated support services can help to head off problems before they lead to job loss. In addition to reducing prison costs, in-prison, pre-release, and post-prison transition programs may help to reduce long-term costs of criminal activity for society and, in a strong U.S. economy, ease critical labor shortages in specific industrial and occupational sectors -- and ultimately, contribute to overall growth and productivity of the U.S. economy.

This background paper, intended to support DOL/ETA policy and program development efforts, provides information on the U.S. prison population and synthesizes what is currently known about education, training, and employment services to help offenders and ex-offenders make the transition from prison to work. This report relies on existing literature and readily available data sources. It begins with a brief overview of the U.S. prison system, including basic demographic information on the U.S. prison population in federal and state prisons, and local jails. Drawing upon existing research, the paper then describes and assesses broad categories of education, employment, and training programs offered to offenders while in prison and in pre-release programs, as well as post-prison transition activities for ex-offenders. This synthesis is followed by short descriptions of model programs from the federal prison system and selected state or other correctional systems. The paper concludes with a discussion of areas where

experimentation in service design would appear to be most beneficial and options for involvement of federal, state, and local correctional facilities, workforce development agencies, and educational authorities in initiatives to help offenders and ex-offenders transition from prison to work.

B. OVERVIEW OF THE U.S. CORRECTIONAL SYSTEM AND DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CORRECTIONAL POPULATION

1. Overview of the U.S. Correctional System

a. Adult Corrections System

There are two main types of correctional facilities: jails and prisons. Jails are local or county facilities which hold individuals in lawful custody usually while they await trial. In some jurisdictions, jails are used punitively for offenders serving short-term sentences (usually one year or less) or sentences to work release or weekends in jail. Jails range in size from rural jails having a dozen cells to urban jails having thousands of cells.

Prisons are secure state- or federally-administered correctional facilities in which offenders are confined after sentencing for crimes. Prisons are classified as minimum, medium, or maximum security facilities, based on the need for internal institutional fortification. Inmates are similarly classified, by severity of offense and/or other behavior, and are usually assigned to prisons having a corresponding level of security.

In the general flow of individuals through the criminal justice system is a series of steps starting with arrest → pre-trial hearing → pre-sentence hearing (plea) → trial/sentencing → prison/corrections → and parole/release.

A few other terms important to understanding the U.S. corrections system are:

- Parole -- Process of being released from prison before the completion of a sentence. Parole involves supervision and other stipulations and prohibitions on certain activities imposed by a board of parole.
- Probation -- Sentence of community-based supervision. Probation

includes stipulations and prohibitions on certain activities and often includes fines imposed by the court at the time of sentencing.

- Work Release -- An alternative to total incarceration, whereby inmates are permitted to work for pay in the community, but must return to the institution during their non-working hours.
- Halfway House -- Transitional facility where the offender is involved in school, work, training, and therapy. The offender lives onsite while either stabilizing or reentering society.
- Day Reporting Center -- Place where offenders must report while on probation or parole to receive supervision. Day reporting centers may include educational services, vocational training, treatment, or other service providers.

b. Juvenile Justice System

Delinquency offenses are acts committed by a juvenile that, if committed by an adult, would be a criminal act. A juvenile is a youth at or below the “upper age of original jurisdiction” in a state. The upper age of jurisdiction is the oldest age at which a juvenile court has jurisdiction over an individual for law violating behavior. State statutes define which youth are under the original jurisdiction of the juvenile court (versus the adult criminal court). These definitions, which are based primarily on age criteria, vary across states. In most states, the juvenile court has original jurisdiction over all youth charged with a criminal violation who were below the age of 18 at the time of the offense, arrest, or referral to court. Across states, the upper age limits range from 15 to 17 years of age. Many states also have statutory exceptions to base age criteria. The exceptions, related to youth’s age, alleged offense, and/or prior court history, place certain youth under the original jurisdiction of the criminal court (rather than the juvenile

court).²

A profile of the juvenile justice system and characteristics of offenders in the system is provided in a recent Juvenile Justice Bulletin, "Offenders in Juvenile Court, 1996."³ Referral of delinquency cases to juvenile courts comes through a variety of sources -- law enforcement agencies, social services, schools, parents, probation officers, and victims. A total of 86 percent of the 1996 delinquency cases were referred to juvenile courts by a law enforcement agency. Once referred, some juveniles (18 percent in 1996) are held in secure detention facilities before adjudication and disposition. When a delinquency case is referred to juvenile court, an intake officer, prosecutor, or judge determines whether to handle the case formally or informally. Formal handling involves the filing of a petition requesting that the court hold an adjudicatory or waiver hearing. Informal case handling is conducted entirely at the juvenile court intake level, without a petition and without an adjudicatory or waiver hearing. In 1996, slightly over half (56 percent) of all delinquency cases were handled formally. One of the first actions taken during the juvenile court intake process is determining whether a case should be processed in the criminal justice system rather than in juvenile court. In an increasing number of states, cases that meet certain age and offense criteria are excluded by statute from juvenile court jurisdiction and are filed directly in criminal court. In 1996, about 10,000 delinquency cases were waived to criminal

²From Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Internet web page, at <http://www.ojjdp.ncjrs.org/ojstatbb/qa062.html>. Additional details are available on the juvenile justice system at this site.

³Anne L. Stahl, "Offenders in Juvenile Court, 1996," Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 1998 (NCJ175719). This bulletin is available on the Internet at <http://www.ncjrs.org/jjcour.htm#175719>. This section is based in part on information available in this bulletin. An exhibit included in this bulletin provides an excellent overview of the case flow through the juvenile justice system.

court, representing 1 percent of all petitioned delinquency cases.

An adjudicatory hearing is available in all formally petitioned delinquency cases not judicially waived to criminal court. During the hearing, the judge (or a jury) determines whether a youth committed the delinquent act(s) charged. In 1996, 58 percent of all formally processed delinquency cases resulted in an adjudication of delinquency. The court then makes a dispositional decision that may include a fine, restitution, probation, commitment to a residential facility (secure or nonsecure), referral to a treatment program, and/or community service.

2. Size and Characteristics of the Adult Correctional Population

The incarcerated population in the U.S. -- particularly the prison population -- has steadily increased in the 1990s.⁴ Below, we briefly highlight general characteristics of the correctional population.

a. Size of the Adult Correctional Population

As shown in Exhibit 1, there has been a steady increase in the correctional population in the U.S. since 1990. In 1996, the total estimated correctional population -- that is, the number of adults in jail or prison, or on probation or parole -- reached 5.5 million. This total was 27 percent above estimates of the correctional population in 1990 (4.4 million) -- an average annual percentage change over the seven-year period of 4.1 percent. Overall, in 1996, 2.8 percent of the U.S. adult resident population was under correctional supervision.

Over half (58 percent) of the correctional population in 1996 was on probation (3.2

⁴In fact, in part as a result of increases in drug offenders and longer, mandatory prison sentences, the nation's prison population has risen every year since 1973 and has tripled since 1980 (according to Bureau of Justice Statistics).

million). Individuals on parole (about 700,000 individuals) accounted for an additional 13 percent of the correctional population. Hence, nearly four million of the 5.5 million individuals involved with the correctional system in the U.S. in 1996 were on probation or parole.

The total prison and jail population (1.6 million) in 1996 accounted for 30 percent of the correctional population. The prison population (1.1 million) accounted for 20 percent of the total correctional population, with 9 in 10 prisoners incarcerated in state prisons (1.0 million) and the remainder (about 90,000) incarcerated in federal prisons. The total prison population grew rapidly in the early 1990s (an average annual rate of 7.2 percent between 1990 and 1996) -- well above the rates for individuals on probation (3.3 percent), in jail (4.0 percent), and on parole (4.8 percent). Among the factors that have contributed to the surge in the number of prisoners behind bars in the United States over the past decade has been mandatory sentences, reduced plea bargaining, restricted parole, and the construction of hundreds of thousands of new prison cells.

Inmates of county and local jails (about 500,000 persons in 1996) accounted for about 9 percent of the total correctional population. Finally, of the nearly 1.6 million adults in custody in prison or jail in the United States in 1996, 63 percent were in state prisons, 6 percent in federal prisons, and 31 percent in jails. There was a 6.1 percent annual average increase in the number of adults in custody in prisons and jails between 1990 and 1996 -- 8.3 percent in federal prisons, 7.1 percent in state prisons, and 4.0 percent in local jail.

b. Gender, Race/Ethnicity, and Age of the U.S. Prison and Jail Population

As shown in Exhibit 2, of the 5.5 million adults under correctional supervision in the U.S. in 1996, 84 percent were male and 60 percent were white. In terms of the percentage of adults under correctional supervision (2.8 percent of the U.S. adult population overall), males and

blacks were disproportionately represented: 4.9 percent of the adult male population was under correctional supervision compared with 0.8 percent of the adult female population; 9.0 percent of the adult black population was under correctional supervision, compared to 2.0 percent of the adult white population and 1.3 percent of the adult “other” population.

Focusing in on the approximately 1.6 million adults in state and federal prisons and jails, the population tends to be even more disproportionately black and male (when compared with the population under correctional supervision). A total of 92 percent of adults held in custody in state or federal prisons or jails in 1996 were male. Half of this incarcerated population was white, 47 percent black, and 3 percent “other.” Of adults incarcerated in jails and prisons, 48 percent were white males and 45 percent were black males. The percentage of the U.S. adult population in prisons or jails by race and gender underscores the disproportionate numbers of black males incarcerated in the U.S. (not shown in the Exhibit): 6.6 percent of black males compared with 0.94 percent of white males, 0.47 percent of black females, and 0.07 percent of white females. The percentage of the adult black population in custody in prisons or jails has about doubled since 1984 (from slightly over 3 percent to 6.6 percent).⁵ A 1997 Bureau of Justice Statistical Report on the lifetime likelihood of going to state or federal prison underscored the much greater chances of males -- and particularly black males -- of incarceration at some point in their lives:

- If recent incarceration rates remain unchanged, an estimated 1 of every 20 persons (5.1 percent) will serve time in a prison during their lifetime.
- Men (9.0 percent) are over 8 times more likely than women (1.1 percent) to be

⁵Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Correctional Populations in the United States, 1996, April 1999, Figure 1.

incarcerated in prison at least once during their lifetime.

- Among men, blacks (28.5 percent) are about twice as likely as Hispanics (16.0 percent) and 6 times more likely than whites (4.4 percent) to be admitted to prison during their life. Among women, 3.6 percent of blacks, 1.5 percent of Hispanics, and 0.5 percent of whites will enter prison at least once in their lifetime.⁶

Data on the number of Hispanic prisoners is incomplete and limited to adults of Hispanic origin in state or federal prisons (i.e., not including local jails).⁷ The number of Hispanic prisoners in state or federal prisons increased from 103,100 in 1990 to 186,761 in 1996. Hispanic prisoners represented about 16 percent of all prisoners in federal and state facilities in 1996.

⁶T. Bonczar and A. Beck, Lifetime Likelihood of Going to State or Federal Prison, U.S. Department of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, March 1997 (NCJ-160092).

⁷Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Correctional Populations in the United States, 1996, April 1999, Table 1.10. Note that data on Hispanic prisoners are based on incomplete counts. Some states were unable to report data on Hispanic origin, others reported estimates only, and others reported incomplete counts.

In addition to being disproportionately male and black, the U.S. prison and jail population is disproportionately young (i.e., under 35 years of age). Exhibit 3 shows the number of sentenced prisoners under state or federal jurisdiction per 100,000 residents by age, gender, and race/ethnicity in 1996. As shown in the exhibit, the highest rates of incarceration were posted for individuals in the age ranges between 20 and 39 (peaking at slightly over 1000 sentenced prisoners per 100,000 U.S. residents in the 25-29 and 30-34 age ranges. As also shown in the exhibit, rates for blacks in the age ranges between 20 and 39 were particularly high (i.e., in excess of 3,300 per 100,000 black residents in that particular age range). Similar to the prison population, a substantial proportion of jail inmates in the United States were under the age of 35: (1) 31 percent were under 24 or younger; (2) 37 percent were 25-34 years of age; (3) 24 percent were 35-44 years of age; and (4) 8 percent were 45 years or older.⁸

It is interesting to note that serious violent criminal activity most commonly begins at ages 15 or 16. According to R. Mendel, violent behavior peaks at about age 18 (e.g., the peak age of arrestees for serious violent crimes in the U.S. is 18) and declines thereafter. Arrests for violent acts taper off drastically by age 29. It is unusual for an individual who has not exhibited serious violent behavior by age 20 ever to become a violent offender.⁹ Hence, many youthful offenders complete incarceration and supervision -- and seem to “age out” of crime (i.e., do not recidivate). Other possible pathways for youthful offenders after their release from prison include the following: (1) they commit new offenses, but are never apprehended or charged; (2)

⁸Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Correctional Populations in the United States, 1996, April 1999, Table 4.1.

⁹R. Mendel, Prevention or Pork? A Hard-Headed Look at Youth-Oriented Anti-Crime Programs, American Youth Policy Forum, 1995.

they commit new offenses of a serious nature, are apprehended, and are returned to prison or jail, (3) they continue to commit offenses, but the offenses are relatively minor, resulting in community-based supervision or other community-based sanctions (e.g., electronic monitoring); (4) they have early mortality, sometimes associated with their high-risk, law breaking (e.g., drug use and dealing; gang crimes).

c. Background Characteristics on Adults on Probation and Parole

At the end of 1997, there were 3.9 million adult men and women (a new record) on probation or parole. Of the 3.2 million adults serving a probation sentence at the end of 1997, 54 percent had been convicted of a felony, 28 percent had been convicted of a misdemeanor, 14 percent were on probation for driving while intoxicated or under the influence of alcohol, and 4 percent for other offense. A total of 1.6 million probationers were discharged from supervision in 1997 (federal, 16,331 probationers; state, 1,612,072 probationers). More than 3 in 5 of those exiting probation (708,200 individuals) had successfully met the conditions of their supervision; 18 percent of probationers (211,800 individuals) who were discharged from supervision in 1997 were incarcerated because of a rule violation or new offense. Of those on probation at the end of 1997, 79 percent were male; 64 percent were white, 35 percent were black, and one percent other; and 16 percent were Hispanic.¹⁰

A 1995 Survey of Adults on Probation, conducted by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, provided several other background characteristics relevant to development of education and training programs for probationers:

¹⁰U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, Probation and Parole Populations, 1997, 1998 (available on the Internet at www.ojp.usdoj.gov).

- About 4 in 10 probationers (42 percent) had not completed high school or a GED.
- While half of probationers received a sentence that included a period of incarceration, 36 percent had actually served time in jail or prison; the remainder had their sentence to incarceration suspended.
- Almost all probationers (99 percent) had one or more conditions to their sentence required by the court or probation agency and 82 percent of probationers were given three or more conditions on sentence. Some examples of conditions include the following (some of which might affect employability and job training): fees, fines, court costs (84 percent); restitution to victim (30 percent); confinement/monitoring (10 percent); driving restrictions (5 percent); community service (26 percent); substance abuse treatment (38 percent); mandatory drug testing (33 percent); employment (35 percent); and education/training (15 percent).
- At some time since entering probation supervision, more than 60 percent of all probationers had participated in some type of special supervision or other program, including the following: drug testing (32 percent), alcohol or drug treatment (37 percent), counseling (12 percent), education (7 percent), basic education/GED program (5 percent), and vocational/job training (3 percent).

Also serving time in the community at the end of 1997 were 685,000 adults released on parole, which is conditional supervised release following a prison term.¹¹ Nearly all parolees had been convicted of a felony (96 percent). One-half of the person entering parole in 1997 had received a mandatory good-time provision that released them from prison and 45 percent entered parole because of a parole board decision. A total of 410,839 parolees were discharged from supervision in 1997 (federal, 21,648 parolees; state, 389,191 parolees). Over 2 in 5 of those exiting parole (179,900 individuals) had successfully met the conditions of their supervision; 41 percent of parole (168,000 individuals) who were discharged from supervision in 1997 were incarcerated because of a rule violation or new offense. Of those on parole at the end of 1997, 89

¹¹It should be noted that federal parole has been abolished, therefore, anyone currently on parole from a federal prison is completing supervision that was ordered several years ago.

percent were male; 54 percent were white, 45 percent were black, and one percent “other;” and 21 percent were Hispanic.¹²

d. Educational Attainment and Literacy of Prison and Jail Population

The 1992 National Adult Literacy Survey¹³ provided some in-depth data on the literacy skills of nearly 1,150 inmates incarcerated in 80 federal and state prisons. The prisons were randomly selected to represent prisons across the country and the inmates themselves were randomly selected from each of the prisons. Some major findings from the study highlight the basic skills deficiencies of the prison population and underscore the urgent need for programs to upgrade basic literacy:

- About 7 in 10 prisoners performed at the two lowest levels (of 5 levels measuring prose, document, and quantitative literacy), on the average substantially lower than the general population.
- On all three literacy scales, white inmates demonstrated higher average proficiencies than black inmates, who, in turn, demonstrated higher proficiencies than Hispanic prisoners. When the variables of sex, race/ethnicity, age, and level of education were held constant, the performance of prison population on the three scales is comparable to that of the general U.S. household population. This suggests that differences in overall performance between the prison and household populations may be attributable to differences in demographic composition and educational attainment of the prison population.
- About half (51 percent) of prisoners completed high school or GED, compared with 76 percent of the general population. Prisoners, in general, attained lower levels of education than their parents. For example, 51 percent of prisoners

¹²Bureau of Justice Statistics, Probation and Parole Populations, 1997, 1998 (available on the Internet at www.ojp.usdoj.gov).

¹³The National Adult Literacy Project was funded by the National Center for Education Statistics within the U.S. Department of Education and administered by the Educational Testing Services, in collaboration with Westat. Findings reported here are from K. Haigler, C. Harlow, P. O’Connor, and A Campbell, *Executive Summary of Literacy Behind Prison Walls: Profiles of the Prison Population from the National Adult Literacy Survey*.

reported having a high school diploma or GED, compared with 64 percent of their parents.

- Educational attainment was found to be highly related to literacy proficiency. Prisoners who had not received a high school diploma or GED demonstrated lower levels of proficiency than those who had completed high school, earned a GED, or received some post-secondary education.
- Over 60 percent of the inmate population reported being involved in education and/or vocational programs in prison.
- Literacy proficiencies of repeat offenders were not different from those of first-time offenders.

Many other studies have also documented poor basic skills of offenders and ex-offenders.

For example, a study by Newman, et al., suggested that using a 12th grade standard that about three-fourths of prison inmates are illiterate; Sperazi found that 65-70 percent of inmates had not completed high school.¹⁴ Bureau of Justice Statistics indicated that slightly less than half (47 percent) of jail inmates had not completed high school: 13.1 percent had completed 8th grade or less; 33.4 percent had some high school; 40.0 percent were high school graduates; and 13.5 percent had some college or more.¹⁵

e. **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Issues**

¹⁴A. Newman, W. Lewis, and C. Beverstock, *Prison Literacy: Implications for Program and Assessment Policy*, National Center on Adult Literacy, 1993; L. Sperazi, *An Evaluation of the IBM Pals Program for the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners*, Evaluation Research, 1990.

¹⁵Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Correctional Populations in the United States, 1996, April 1999, Table 4.1.

Data from the Bureau of Justice Statistics on jail inmates indicates high rates of regular alcohol and drug use among offenders. According to the 1997 Survey of Inmates in State and Federal Correctional Facilities,¹⁶ over 570,000 of the nation's prisoners (51 percent) reported the use of alcohol or drugs while committing their offense. In 1997, over 80 percent of state and over 70 percent of federal prisoners reported past drug use; about 1 in 6 of both state and federal prisoners reported committing their current offense to obtain money for drugs. Over 40 percent of federal prisoners used drugs in the month before their current offense and 20 percent used cocaine or crack. About 40 percent of state and 30 percent of federal prisoners reported a prior binge drinking experience; over 40 percent of both had driven drunk in the past. Overall, the study concludes 3 in 4 state and 4 in 5 federal prisoners may be characterized as alcohol- or drug-involved offenders. Over 50 percent of state and over 40 percent of federal prisoners had ever participated in treatment or other programs for substance abuse; a third of state and a quarter of federal prisons had participated since their admission.

Bureau of Justice data for 1996 on inmates of jails also show high rates of alcohol and drug dependency:

- **Drug Use.** Over four-fifths (82 percent) of jail inmates had used some type of illegal drug and about two-thirds (64 percent) of jail inmates indicated that they used some type of illegal drug regularly. Among the drugs used regularly were marijuana or hashish (55 percent of jailed inmates), cocaine or crack (31 percent), and heroin/opiates (12 percent). Slightly over one-third (36 percent) of convicted jail inmates were using some type of illegal drug at the time of their offense.¹⁷

¹⁶C. Mumola, "Substance Abuse and Treatment, State and Federal Prisoners, 1997," U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report, January 1999 (NCJ 172871).

¹⁷Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Correctional Populations in the United States, 1996, April 1999, Table 4.14.

- **Alcohol Use.** Nearly 60 percent of jail inmates indicated they drank regularly in the past; in the year before their offense, 28 percent indicated that they drank daily or almost daily.¹⁸

A July 1999 Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report estimated that at midyear 1998, an estimated 283,800 mentally ill offenders were incarcerated in the nation's prisons and jails. According to the surveys completed by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, 16 percent of state prison inmates, 7 percent of federal inmates, 16 percent of those in local jails, and 16 percent of probationers were estimated to be "mentally ill" (i.e., reported either a mental or emotional condition or an overnight stay in a mental hospital or program).¹⁹ This report, the first comprehensive survey of its kind, found that mentally ill inmates were slightly more likely to have committed violent crimes than other inmates. The study also found:

- white inmates were more likely than blacks or Hispanics to report a mental illness;
- prevalence of mental illness varied by gender, with females reporting a higher rate of mental illness than males;
- offenders between ages 45 and 54 were most likely to be identified as mentally ill;
- mentally ill state prison inmates were more than twice as likely as other inmates to have been homeless at some point during the year before their arrest and presented more discipline problems for prison authorities than other inmates; and

¹⁸Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Correctional Populations in the United States, 1996, April 1999, Table 4.23.

¹⁹Previously estimated rates of mental illness among incarcerated populations vary, depending on the methodology of the study, the institution and the definition of mental illness. Estimates range from about 8 percent to 16 percent among studies with more rigorous scientific methods. See Paula Ditton, Mental Health and Treatment of Inmates and Probationers, U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report, July 1999 (NCJ 174463).

- about 38 percent of mentally ill state and federal prison inmates and 47 percent of mentally ill jail inmates were not employed in the month before arrest (compared with 30 percent of other state inmates, 28 percent of other federal inmates, and 33 percent of other jail inmates).²⁰

f. Nature of Offenses Committed by Prison and Jail Population

Exhibit 4 and 5 display the number and proportion of prisoners in state and federal prisons by offense committed. As shown in the exhibits, the types of offense for which individuals were incarcerated in 1996 varied considerably by type of prison. The proportion of individuals incarcerated for violent offenses (i.e., murder, assault, robbery, rape, and other violent crimes) was considerably higher in state prisons (47 percent) compared to federal prisons (13 percent). Property crimes accounted for slightly under a quarter (23 percent) of those incarcerated in state correctional facilities, compared to 8 percent of those imprisoned in federal facilities. One of the key differences between federal and state facilities was the proportion of those individuals imprisoned for drug offenses -- 60 percent of prisoners in federal facilities versus 23 percent in state facilities. The percentage of individuals incarcerated for public order offenses (such as immigration, weapons violations, and escape/violation of court orders) also was considerably higher in federal prisons (17 percent) in comparison to state facilities (7 percent).

²⁰Paula Ditton, Mental Health and Treatment of Inmates and Probationers, U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, July 1999 (NCJ 174463).

Since about 1990, the percent of sentenced prisoners admitted to state prisons by offense type has remained relatively unchanged for the four major crime categories (i.e., property, violent, drug, and public order offenses). However, looking back to between 1980 and 1990, there was a dramatic shift in the types of sentenced prisoners admitted to state prisons, primarily because of a large upward trend in the number and percent of prisoners admitted for drug offenses (from under 10 percent of prisoners admitted to about 30 percent in 1990). The percentages of state prisoners incarcerated for violent crimes (nearly 50 percent in 1980) and property crimes (about 40 percent in 1980), both declined to about 30 percent by 1990.²¹ The types of offenses by jail inmates are fairly evenly distributed among the four categories of offenses, as noted in Exhibit 6.

g. Recidivism Patterns of Ex-Offenders

A key goal of most education and training initiatives for ex-offenders is to reduce rates of recidivism. A study (Harrer, 1994) by the Federal Bureau of Prisons provides extensive analyses of recidivism among federal releasees in 1987. Overall, within three years of release from the Federal Bureau of Prisons in 1987, 40.8 percent of former inmates had either been rearrested or had their parole revoked (i.e., recidivated). Rates of recidivism were similar (about 40 percent) to those reported in earlier release cohorts (in 1978, 1980, 1982). Other findings from this study on recidivism include the following:

- Recidivism rates were the highest during the first year back in the community -- 11.3 percent of the released prisoners recidivated in the first 6 months and 20.3 percent did so in the first year after their release.

²¹Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Correctional Populations in the United States, 1996, April 1999, Figure 5.

- Recidivism rates were higher among blacks and Hispanics than among whites and non-Hispanics -- 58.8 percent of black releasees recidivated compared to 33.5 percent of whites; 45.2 percent of Hispanics recidivated compared to 40.2 percent of non Hispanics.
- Recidivism rates were almost the same for males and females.
- Recidivism rates were inversely related to age at release; the older the person, the lower the rate of recidivism -- 56.6 percent of those 25 years of age or younger recidivated compared to 15.3 percent of those 55 years of age or older.
- Among offense types, persons in federal prison for fraud or drug trafficking had the lowest recidivism rates -- 20.8 percent and 34.2 percent respectively; while those in prison for robbery or other crimes against a person (excluding homicide, manslaughter, and sex offenses) had the highest recidivism rates -- 64.0 percent and 65.0 percent, respectively.
- Time served in prison was unrelated to recidivism.
- Recidivism rates were higher among persons with a pre-prison history of drug or alcohol dependency.

This study also provided analyses which generally suggested that increased education and employment were associated with lower rates of recidivism:

- Generally, the more years of schooling inmates had completed when beginning their prison term, the less likely they were to recidivate.
- Persons who were employed full-time or attended school at least 6 months within two years before they entered prison had a recidivism rate of 25.6 percent, compared to 60.2 percent for those not so engaged.
- Recidivism rates were inversely related to educational program participation while in prison. The more educational programs successfully completed for each 6 months confined, the lower the recidivism rate. For inmates successfully completing one or more courses per each 6 months of their prison term, 35.6 percent recidivated, compared to 44.1 percent of those who successfully completed no course during their prison term.
- Releasees who had arranged for post-release employment prior to release had lower recidivism rates than those who did not make such arrangements; 27.6 percent of those arranging for post-release employment recidivated compared to

53.9 percent of those who made no plans for post-release employment.

- Inmates released through a halfway house had a recidivism rate of 31.1 percent, compared to a rate of 51.1 percent of those released directly from prison. Multivariate analysis found that halfway house releasees were significantly more likely to find post-release employment than persons released directly from an institution.

An earlier Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report examined trends in recidivism of 108,580 prisoners released from prisons in 11 states in 1983, representing more than half of all released state prisoners that year.²² An estimated 62.5 percent of the prisoners released were rearrested for a felony or serious misdemeanor within three years, 46.8 percent were reconvicted, and 41.4 percent returned to prison or jail. Before their release from prison, the prisoners had been arrested and charged with an average of more than 12 offenses each; nearly two-thirds had been arrested at least once in the past for a violent offense; and two-thirds had previously been in jail or prison. By the end of 1986 (three years after release), those prisoners who had been rearrested averaged an additional 4.8 new charges. An estimated 22.7 percent of all prisoners were rearrested for a violent offense within three years of their release. Several other findings from the survey include the following:

- Recidivism rates were highest in the first year -- 1 in 4 released prisoners were rearrested in the first 6 months and 2 of 5 within the first year after their release.
- More than 1 of every 8 rearrests occurred in states other than the state in which the prisoners were released.
- Recidivism rates were higher among men, blacks, Hispanics, and persons who had not completed high school (compared to rates for women, whites, non-Hispanics, and high school graduates).

²²A. Beck and B. Shipley, "Recidivism of Prisoners Released in 1983," U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report, April 1989.

- Recidivism was inversely related to age of the prisoner at the time of release -- the older the prisoner, the lower the rate of recidivism.
- The more extensive a prisoner's prior arrest record the higher the rate of recidivism -- over 74 percent of those with 11 or more prior arrests were rearrested, compared to 38 percent of the first-time offenders. The combination of a prisoner's age when released and the number of prior adult arrests was very strongly related to recidivism -- an estimated 94.1 percent of prisoners age 18 to 24 with 11 or more prior arrests were rearrested within 3 years.
- The amount of time served in prison did not systematically increase a prisoner's likelihood of rearrest.

Finally, Bureau of Justice statistics on the criminal history of jail inmates by conviction status for 1996 indicate that 29 percent of jailed inmates had no previous sentence, 34 percent were violent recidivists, and 37 percent were nonviolent recidivists.²³ At the time of arrest, slightly over half (54 percent) of jail inmates had some type of criminal justice status, including 32 percent on probation, 13 percent on parole, and 13 percent bail/bond.²⁴

h. Employment Patterns of Ex-Offenders

In our review of literature on offenders and ex-offenders, we could find little in the way of systematic data tracking employment patterns of offenders before and after involvement in the correction system. A 1999 Bureau of Justice Statistics study (examining mental health and treatment of offenders incarcerated in prisons and jail) provides some details on employment in the month before arrest and wage income:

- 61 percent of mentally ill inmates and 70 percent of "other" inmates in state prisons were employed in the month before arrest;

²³Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Correctional Populations in the United States, 1996, April 1999, Table 4.12.

²⁴Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Correctional Populations in the United States, 1996, April 1999, Table 4.7.

- 62 percent of mentally ill inmates and 73 percent of “other” inmates in federal prisons were employed in the month before arrest;
- 53 percent of mentally ill inmates and 67 percent of “other” inmates in jails were employed in the month before arrest; and
- With regard to sources of income, 66 percent of “other” (i.e., non-mentally ill) inmates in state and federal prisons and 77 percent “other” jail inmates reported wage income in the month before arrest.

As noted in the study on recidivism of federal prisoners (discussed earlier), persons who were employed full-time or attended school at least 6 months within two years before they entered prison had a recidivism rate of 25.6 percent, compared to 60.2 percent for those not so engaged.

In our review of the literature, we were unable to find reliable estimates of the employment status of ex-offenders at various points after release from prison (e.g., 6 month, one year, etc.). Despite a lack of available information on experiences of ex-offenders, there is some data available on employment outcomes for ex-offenders participating in the Job Training Partnership Act. JTPA’s Standardized Program Information Report (SPIR) provides data on employment status of ex-offenders at placement and follow-up. The entered employment rate at termination for Title II-A adult offenders for Program Year (PY) 1997 was 71 percent. The average hourly wage at termination was \$7.91; about half (52 percent) of ex-offenders earned less than \$7.50 per hour at termination. At follow-up, 70 percent of ex-offenders were employed. Half of ex-offenders were employed with the same employer. The weeks worked by ex-offenders during the follow-up period were as follows: None, 18 percent; 1-12 weeks, 25 percent; and 13 weeks 57 percent. The average weeks worked over the 13-week period was 9.5 weeks. The average hourly wage at follow-up was \$8.43, with slightly less than half of ex-

offenders (47 percent) earning less than \$7.50 per hour. About four-fifths of ex-offenders reported working 35 or more hours per week at the time of follow-up.

3. Size and Characteristics of Youth Offenders Involved in the Juvenile Courts

Juvenile courts handled an estimated 1.8 million delinquency cases in 1996, an increase of 49 percent over the number of cases handled in 1987.²⁵ Between 1987 and 1996, the total delinquency case rate increased 34 percent, from 46.2 to 61.8 cases disposed per 1,000 juveniles in the United States. In half of these delinquency cases, the most serious crime was a property offense (such as burglary, larceny, motor vehicle theft, or vandalism). Other types of offenses included the following: person crimes²⁶ (such as simple or aggravated assault, robbery, violent sex offenses, or homicide), 22 percent; a public order offense (such as disorderly conduct, weapons offenses, or obstruction of justice), 19 percent; and a drug offense, 10 percent). General characteristics of delinquency cases processed by juvenile courts in 1996 included the following:

- Of all delinquency cases processed in 1996, 59 percent involved a juvenile younger than 16. Compared with older juveniles (16 and older), the caseloads of younger juveniles involved a smaller proportion of drug law violations and public order offenses, but somewhat larger proportion of person offenses and property offenses.
- Delinquency case rates generally increased with age of the juvenile. The cases per 1,000 youth in each age category were the following: age 12 (24.8 per 1,000 youth in the age group); age 13 (47.8); age 14 (74.8); age 15 (101.9); age 16 (119.8); and age 17 (119.0).

²⁵Anne L. Stahl, "Offenders in Juvenile Court, 1996," Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 1998 (NCJ175719). This section is based in large part on information available in this report.

²⁶Person offenses accounted for more than 381,000 of these cases -- the largest number of person offense cases to come before America's juvenile courts in a decade.

- Of all delinquency cases processed in 1996, slightly over three-fourths (77 percent) involved a male. Delinquency case rates for males in 1996 were 92.9 cases per 1,000 male youth, compared to 28.8 cases per 1,000 female youth.
- Of all delinquency cases processed in 1996, two-thirds (66 percent) involved a white juvenile; 30 percent a black juvenile, and 4 percent a juvenile of an “other” race. The delinquency case rate for black youth was nearly 2.5 times the rate for white youth in 1996 (124.1 compared with 51.0 per 1,000 youth).

On February 15, 1995, there were 108,700 juveniles in detention, correctional, or shelter facilities.²⁷ Juveniles held for law violations either as accused or adjudicated offenders made up 84 percent of the overall custody population; non-offender youth (referred for abuse, neglect, emotional disturbance, or mental retardation, as well as voluntarily admitted youth) made up the other 16 percent of custody population. Of the total juveniles in custody, 64 percent were held in public facilities. The average length of stay for juveniles released from custody in 1994 varied by facility type and custody status, ranging from a few days to several months. For public facilities, the average stay per facility for juveniles in detention was two weeks and for committed juveniles it was five months.²⁸

²⁷Melissa Sickmund, “One Day Count of Juveniles in Public or Private Custody Facilities,” adapted from M. Sickmund, H. Snyder, and E. Poe-Yamagata, *Juvenile Offenders and Victims: 1997 Update on Violence*, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 1997.

²⁸Melissa Sickmund, “One Day Count of Juveniles in Public or Private Custody Facilities,” adapted from M. Sickmund, H. Snyder, and E. Poe-Yamagata, *Juvenile Offenders and Victims: 1997 Update on Violence*, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 1997.

C. OVERVIEW AND EXAMPLES OF EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT, AND TRAINING PROGRAMS FOR OFFENDERS AND EX-OFFENDERS

With prison populations rapidly expanding over the past decade -- and many jails and prisons operating at or beyond capacity -- states and localities have increasingly looked at ways to reduce the inmate population and skyrocketing corrections costs by reducing recidivism. Underlying the design of programs established for individuals involved with the correctional system is (1) an assumption that if inmates can find a decent job at the time of release or soon after, they are less likely to return to a life of crime (i.e., that there is a correlation between lack of employment and recidivism) and (2) that education, training, and employment services can make the critical difference in helping ex-offenders to overcome difficult barriers to finding and keeping jobs. In this section, we examine evaluation findings on past initiatives (dating back to the 1960s) to assist ex-offenders in making the transition from prison, including synthesis of the basic types of service offerings made available and brief synopses of current, promising model programs for offenders and ex-offenders.

1. Overview of Services Offered in Education, Training, and Employment Programs for Offenders and Ex-Offenders

Programs for offenders and ex-offenders both within and outside of prison walls look to overcome a wide range of barriers that adversely affect the ability of offenders to secure and keep jobs and remain crime-free. These programs have many of the same program components as other education, employment, and training programs for disadvantaged and special target populations (such as homeless individuals) facing a multiplicity of barriers to employment.

Some programs, particularly those within prison systems, focus primarily on combating illiteracy and lack of basic reading and math skills. These programs are often aimed at assisting offenders and ex-offenders in obtaining a GED and providing individuals with the reading and math skills needed to obtain occupational skills and ultimately jobs. Some programs move beyond basic skills development to provide job training activities (e.g., in prison industry programs) and assistance with obtaining credentials (e.g., degrees and certifications) to enhance job prospects and wage rates. Other programs primarily focus on enhancing job search skills (e.g., through job readiness workshops), operating job clubs, providing job leads, providing referrals for support services, and helping offenders to make the transition from prison into a work setting (e.g., through mentoring, ongoing case management, and troubleshooting problems as they arise in the workplace). Some programs strive to pull together all of these components to enhance employability, supplemented by direct provision and referral to a wide range of support services.

Below, we provide a basic overview of the range of services available through programs targeted on offenders and ex-offenders and synthesize evaluation findings about these services.

This discussion is followed by examples of model programs.

a. Basic Education/GED/Literacy Programs

Efforts to improve basic literacy and employment prospects of prison and jail inmates in the United States as a strategy to lead individuals out of criminality date back well before 1900 and have intensified since the 1960s:

...Historically, the situation in prison literacy is a 150-year-old narrative of reforming energies with uneven results, spotty application, and meager support....The present scene is acted out before the backdrop of social reforms during the Johnson Administration of the mid-1960s, the significant turning point for prison education in the second half of the 20th Century. Despite even the ripening of legal and social opinion in favor of inmates

greater rights to literacy and education since the Great Society, practice still lags far behind statute. The federal system and a few state systems are best-organized to deliver educational services to inmates, followed by most state systems, and the local jails bring up the rear.²⁹

A majority of offenders enter and leave correction facilities with poor academic skills that make it difficult upon release to secure and keep full-time work with self-sustaining wages even within a strong economy. As discussed earlier, prison inmates score at relatively low levels on literacy tests (and below the general population) and many lack educational credentials necessary within the workplace (e.g., high school, GED, occupational training certification, or associate or B.A. degree). The research has identified a number of constraints to providing education and training within prison settings:³⁰

- Problems of overcrowding, as well as inadequate funding, equipment and materials for programs confound implementation of programs (Paul, 1991).
- Many prisoners are likely to have had negative early schooling experiences -- and so lack self-confidence or have poor attitudes about education (Paul, 1991).
- The prison culture may provide special challenges: routines such as lock-downs and head counts, and inmates' hearings or meetings with lawyers may disrupt regular classes; teachers and students are sometimes locked in a room and monitored by guards; peer pressure may discourage attendance or achievement; and the prison environment is unlikely to provide much stimulus for educational achievement (Shethar, 1993; Haigler, et al., 1994; and Paul, 1991)
- Even in facilities where the philosophy is more conducive to rehabilitation (rather than emphasizing punishment), education is secondary to security (Shethar, 1993).

²⁹A. Newman, W. Lewis, and C. Beverstock, *Prison Literacy: Implications for Program and Assessment Policy*, National Center on Adult Literacy, 1993.

³⁰A. Newman, W. Lewis, and C. Beverstock, *Prison Literacy: Implications for Program and Assessment Policy*, National Center on Adult Literacy, 1993. Note: Citations noted in these bullet points are included in the Reference section at the conclusion of this report.

The federal prison system began mandatory literacy in 1982, and in 1991 raised the achievement standard from 8th to 12th grade. This requirement has resulted in some success in terms of GED completion within federal prisons, though the inmates in these institutions represent a small proportion of the prison population. Ryan and McCabe concluded that there was little significant difference in achievement between mandatory and voluntary instruction.³¹

An Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) digest article summarizes some of what seems to work best in terms of literacy programs in prisons:³²

- Successful prison literacy programs are learner centered, recognizing different learning styles, cultural backgrounds, and multiple illiteracies (Newman, et al., 1993). Model literacy programs should include post-release services that reinforce the view that literacy is a continuum and that skills can erode.
- They are participatory and educators recognize and use learner strengths to help them shape their own learning. Literacy should be put into a meaningful context that addresses learner needs. For example, Boudin (1993) used concerns about AIDS in prison as an organizing issue for instruction.
- Literacy programs should be tailored to prison culture. For example, according to Sperazi (1990), the Principles of Alphabet (PALS) computer-assisted instruction program worked in a prison setting for several reasons: it was advertised as a reading laboratory; learners were paired according to race, ethnicity, or prison “pecking order;” and computer disks afforded inmates an opportunity for privacy.
- Honeycutt (1995) found in interviews with reading program learners that inmates preferred teachers to facilitate after they taught skills and that they liked less formal classroom arrangements, but wanted well-organized and structured instruction.
- Incentives can serve as important motivators within basic education programs,

³¹T. Ryan and K McCabe, “The Relationship between Mandatory vs. Voluntary Participation in a Prison Literacy Program and Academic Achievement,” *Journal of Correctional Education*, Vol. 44, No. 3, September 1993, pp. 134-138.

³²S. Kerka, “Prison Literacy Programs,” ERIC Digest No. 159. Note: Citations noted in these bullet points are included in the Reference section at the conclusion of this report.

such as sentence reductions, parole considerations, preferential prison employment, pay for school attendance, and grants for higher education (Jenkins, 1994; Thomas, 1992).

- Community and peer tutors can reduce costs of basic education programs, as well as serve as role models and provide prisoners with links to the outside world (Boudin 1993).³³

In analyzing the effectiveness of basic education programs for prisoners, it is important to keep in mind the modest success of basic education programs for the general population and disadvantaged groups. Given the generally lower levels of literacy among prison/jail inmates and the range of serious obstacles to employment they face upon release, it would not be surprising that they fair no better than the general population (and in all probability are not as successful). The economic returns to education have been extensively analyzed over the years. As one might expect, educational attainment is positively correlated with lifetime earnings, and there is a clear correlation between low literacy levels and poverty. A national survey by the Department of Education found that adults in the lowest literacy level are ten times more likely to be poor than those in the highest level. Research also has found substantial returns to post-secondary education for the general population. Among the effects of post-secondary education cited in a 1995 U.S. Department of Labor review³⁴ were the following:

- A year of post-secondary education is generally estimated to generate increased earnings in the range of 6 percent to 12 percent, and these earnings increases appear to last throughout one's career. These estimates adjust for differences in preexisting ability levels between college students and others.

³³The Correction Education Association (1994) provides a handbook of literacy assessment and instructional techniques that work best in a correctional setting.

³⁴U.S. Department of Labor, Office of the Chief Economist, *What's Working (and What's Not): A Summary of Research on the Economic Impacts of Employment and Training Programs*, January 1995.

- The income returns per year of credits completed are roughly similar for 2-year community colleges and 4-year colleges.
- Substantial earnings increases appear to result from completed post-secondary credits whether or not students finish formal degree programs.

The DOL report also indicates that the returns to post-secondary education occur not just for young persons who enter college immediately after high school, but also for older adults who return to school.³⁵

Despite the important role that education plays as a determinant of lifetime employment and earnings, recent research also suggests that basic education and GED programs for educationally-deficient adults have little or no direct effect on employment or earnings (at least in the absence of further post-secondary education and/or job training). However, there is a modest positive impact of obtaining a GED on receipt of further post-secondary education and training, and this additional training does produce some earnings gains. In general, though, GED recipients appear to fare only slightly better in the labor market than seemingly comparable high school dropouts. In response to these research findings, Strawn (and other researchers) suggests that program operators should view basic education and achieving a GED for disadvantaged populations (such as ex-offenders) as a step in the direction of obtaining additional education qualifications and not an end in itself:

...Activities to improve basic education skills are...important but should be provided as part of a broader range of employment and training activities. Given the limited economic benefits of basic education alone, new ways of combining basic skills

³⁵In 1991, 33 percent of all undergraduates enrolled in post-secondary education were over the age of 25. Many of them were workers returning to school to improve their earnings. For community colleges, the proportion was even greater -- almost half (44 percent) of undergraduates were over 25.

instruction with work and training need to be developed. At a minimum, the GED should not be promoted as an end goal but rather as a step toward obtaining job training or other postsecondary education. For those unlikely to get a GED or otherwise gain access to job training, alternative credentials should be developed that certify an individual's mastery of basic and "soft" skills needed for entry jobs in specific business sectors.³⁶

b. Employment and Training Programs for Ex-Offenders

Most analysts agree on the substantial hurdles ex-offenders encounter in making the transition from prison back into their communities, but there is much less consensus on what can effectively be done to enhance long-term employability and to reduce the probability of recidivism. Berk, Lenihan, and Rossi -- and many other researchers-- have enumerated some of the most difficult obstacles that ex-offenders must overcome as they emerge from incarceration and attempt to find work:

...Employment prospects are equally grim. Few prisoners have attractive work histories, having spent very large proportions of their adult lives in prison. Correspondingly, they have few marketable skills, "human capital" or contacts that would facilitate the job search process. Moreover, the stigma of a criminal record hampers efforts to find legitimate employment. Indeed, given their lengthy day-to-day involvement with other criminals in prison and their record of previous criminal activity, a rational course of action might well lead directly to renewed participation in illegal activities.³⁷

Over the years, and especially since the early 1960s, there has been considerable testing of various approaches to enhancing employability and reducing recidivism of offenders and ex-offenders. Overall, studies of the links between employment and recidivism suggest that ex-offenders with jobs commit fewer crimes than ex-offenders without jobs and that those with

³⁶Julie Strawn, *Beyond Job Search or Basic Education: Rethinking the Role of Skills in Welfare Reform*, Center for Law and Social Policy, 1998, p. v.

³⁷R.A. Berk, K Lenihan, and P. Rossi, "Crime and Poverty: Some Experimental Evidence from Ex-Offenders," *American Sociological Review*, 45, 1980, pp. 768.

higher earnings commit fewer crimes than those with lower earnings.³⁸ Despite the apparent links between employment and recidivism, evaluations of vocational training and employment-oriented programs have generally not proven (at least through rigorous experimental design) to have a positive effect on recidivism. However, some recent initiatives (some of which are profiled later in this report) which have offered more intensive services appear to be promising (though, as yet, systematically evaluated). Below, we briefly discuss some of the most important research findings on employment and training programs for offenders and ex-offenders.

Government programs to assist offenders in making the transition from prison and jail into the labor market can be traced back to the Manpower Development and Training Act of 1962 (MDTA) and the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964. As a result of this legislation, hundreds of employment and training programs for offenders and ex-offenders were created. Shortcomings in the evaluation methods used made it difficult to determine if these early initiatives improved employment opportunities or reduced recidivism among ex-offenders.³⁹ In general, the evaluations that were completed -- mostly process studies -- did not provide strong indications of success and most found no effect on employment or recidivism. The reasons for the lack of success of these early programs for offenders and ex-offenders were not definitively established though among the problems were: (1) persuading correctional institutions to focus on education and post-release objectives and (2) great educational deficits of offenders, who were

³⁸R.A. Berk, K Lenihan, and P. Rossi, "Crime and Poverty: Some Experimental Evidence from Ex-Offenders," *American Sociological Review*, 45, 1980, pp. 766-786.

³⁹P. Finn, "Chicago's Safer Foundation: A Road Back for Ex-Offenders," part of the Program Focus Series, U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Corrections, Office of Correctional Education, 1998.

often high school dropouts reading several years below grade level with no discernible skills.⁴⁰

During the 1970s, several controlled experiments of offender and ex-offender employment programs were undertaken, including the supported work demonstrations implemented by the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation. With few exceptions, research results again indicated that job training and employment services programs for offenders and ex-offenders failed to improve participants' earnings or reduce recidivism. One exception was a 1972 study conducted by the Vera Institute of Justice, located in New York City, which evaluated work crews for chronically unemployed ex-offenders and former heroin addicts. The model involved closely supervised employment on work crews consisting entirely of employees at the Wildcat Services Corporation. Wages were subsidized; participants did real work but were sheltered from the full demand of the workplace; stress was gradually increased; and counseling was available after hours if need. Using an experimental design, researchers found that program participation increased ex-offenders stability and earning capacity significantly during the three-year follow-up period; however, while participants were arrested less often than the control group during the first year, by the end of the third year the difference in recidivism had evaporated.⁴¹

Also, during the 1970s, the Department of Labor tested short-term, income-support strategies coupled with job placement assistance for ex-offenders during the period immediately following release from prison:⁴²

⁴⁰R. Rovener-Piecznik, *A Review of Manpower R&D Projects in the Correctional Field (1963-1973)*, Manpower Research Monograph, No. 28, U.S. Department of Labor, 1973.

⁴¹L. Friedman, *The Wildcat Evaluation: An Early Test of Supported work in Drug Abuse Rehabilitation*, National Institute on Drug Abuse, 1978.

⁴²See R.A. Berk, K Lenihan, and P. Rossi, "Crime and Poverty: Some Experimental

- **LIFE Experiment.** Using an experimental design, two key interventions were field-tested in Baltimore under the LIFE experiment: (1) special job placement and counseling for ex-prisoners and (2) eligibility for short-term transfer payments similar to unemployment insurance benefits. Ex-prisoners were followed for up to two years to gauge immediate and longer-term effects. The placement and counseling intervention had no apparent impact on re-arrests, but the transfer payments intervention reduced re-arrests for property crimes by about 8 percent.
- **TARP.** Under the Transitional Aid Research Project (TARP), approximately 4,000 men and women who were released from state prison in Texas and Georgia over a six-month period in 1976 were randomly assigned to four treatment groups and two control groups (based loosely on the treatments delivered in the LIFE experiment). Three “payment” treatment groups were formed under which there was variation in the number of weeks (26 or 13 weeks) in which unemployment benefits would be provided and variation in the tax on earnings from employment (100 percent or 25 percent). There was also a job placement treatment which consisted of special counseling efforts and grants of up to \$100 for the purchase of tools, special work clothes, and other work-related expenses. This experimental design tested whether relatively modest changes in an ex-prisoner’s economic circumstances affected post-prison behavior. A key finding of the study was that “membership in any of the three experimental groups eligible for payments had no statistically significant impact on either property arrests or nonproperty arrests.” The authors suggest investigation of alternative ways of reducing work disincentives of payments through testing of generous tax rates and positive incentives for employment.⁴³

In 1982, with the end of funding under the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA), employment and training programs targeted on offenders and ex-offenders largely

Evidence from Ex-Offenders,” *American Sociological Review*, 45, 1980, pp. 768 for additional background on the links between crime and poverty and details on the results of the TARP evaluation.

⁴³Through additional analyses of the data, the authors were able to analyze the complex relationship between poverty and crime among ex-offenders. These additional analyses led to the conclusion that: (1) experimentally-induced unemployment does increase arrests for both property and non-property crimes -- ex-prisoners who are unemployed have more difficulties with the criminal justice system; (2) modest transfer payments appear to reduce arrests for property and nonproperty crimes; and (3) modest income transfer payments, especially when made conditional upon unemployment produce substantial work disincentives.

disappeared.⁴⁴

Under the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA), enacted in 1982 to replace CETA, funding for job training and other employment-related services was targeted on disadvantaged individuals (including ex-offenders meeting the eligibility requirements). An evaluation of the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) at 16 JTPA sites using an experimental design (comparing treatment and control groups) failed to find evidence of positive effects on subsequent arrests for out-of-school youths, including a subgroup of youths with arrest records.⁴⁵ Finn and Willoughby's comparison of employment outcomes of ex-offender and non-offender trainees terminated from JTPA program in 1989 and 1990 in Georgia found that ex-offender status had no influence on employment at termination or during follow-up.⁴⁶ Similar to Barnow's findings in his review of JTPA evaluation studies,⁴⁷ Finn and Willoughby reported that training in a specific occupation or in response to a specific employer's need (i.e., on-the-job training and customized training) increased the likelihood of employment at termination and resulted in high wages at termination.

Overall, with few exceptions, evaluations of employment and training programs for ex-

⁴⁴The Target Jobs Tax Credit (TJTC), initiated in 1978, provided federal tax incentives to employers who hired ex-offenders. Jacobs, et al. (1984) concluded that ex-offenders did not benefit significantly from TJTC, citing that ex-offenders constituted only 4 percent of all hires.

⁴⁵H. Bloom, L. Orr, G. Cave, S. Bell, F. Doolittle, and W. Lin, *The National JTPA Study. Overview: Impacts, Benefits, and Costs of Title II-A*, Abt Associates, Inc., 1995.

⁴⁶M. Finn and K. Willoughby, "Employment Outcomes of Ex-Offender Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) Trainees," *Evaluation Review*, Vol. 20, No. 1, February 1996.

⁴⁷Burt S. Barnow, "The Impacts of CETA Programs on Earnings," *The Journal of Human Resources* 22, 2, Spring 1987: 157-193.

offenders over the past 40 years have either generally shown no effect on employment or recidivism or lacked sufficient experimental controls or sample size to make definitive conclusions. A common problem in evaluations of offender and ex-offender programs is that involvement in these programs is often voluntary on the part of participants -- hence, it is often difficult to determine if project success is primarily the result of attracting the most highly motivated individuals to the interventions. Bushway and Reuter⁴⁸ conclude that programs targeting at-risk youth (except Job Corps) and pre-trial diversion programs do not seem to work, but vocational education programs for adults offenders may hold some promise:

- There have been numerous, well conducted evaluations of well-executed short-term programs targeting at-risk youth. These have repeatedly found no effect on earnings and crime rates. High attrition rates appear to be a reflection of lack of motivation and perceptions of weak employment opportunities on the part of participating youth.
- Two evaluations of pre-trial diversion programs suggest that pre-trial diversion programs do not work, at least in part because the programs tend to get co-opted by the procedure or for purposes other than the intended purpose of rehabilitating offenders.
- The one class of program aimed at high risk youth for which positive results have been demonstrated is Job Corps, but it is very expensive.
- Prison-based vocational education programs aimed at adults are promising, but largely unproven. Current evidence suggests that something works, but no random control trial has found an impact; few studies have been able to pinpoint exactly what works.

Despite a history of relatively unsatisfying evaluation results, there are some emerging pre-release and post-release programs (some of which are profiled later in this report) offering well-

⁴⁸S. Bushway and P. Reuter, "Labor Markets and Crime Risk Factors," in L. Sherman, D. Gottfredson, D. Mackenzie, J. Eck, P. Reuter, and S. Bushway, *Preventing Crime: What Works, What Doesn't, What's Promising*, Research Report, U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, 1997 (NCI 165366).

coordinated, intensive, and comprehensive services that may hold the keys to better long-term employment and recidivism results.

c. Prison Industry Programs

Prison industries, using inmate labor to manufacture goods for private firms, were thriving enterprises in the early 1900s. The unregulated use of prison labor led to complaints of unfair competition from organized labor and competing manufacturers. As a result, the sale of open market prison-made products was banned in the 1930s and 1940s by Congress and the states. In 1997, Congress lifted its ban on interstate transportation and sale of prison-made goods for prisons that met the conditions of a specially created Private Sector Prison Industry Enhancement Certification Program.⁴⁹

Today, most jail and prison systems sponsor some type of industry program that provides work opportunities for incarcerated individuals. These programs are typically aimed at: (1) generating products and services that enable prisoners to make a contribution to society, help offset the cost of their incarceration, compensate crime victims, provide inmate family support, and provide “gate” money to ease the transition upon release; and (2) providing a means of reducing prison idleness, increasing inmate job skills, and improving the prospects for successful inmate transition to the community upon release. Evaluation data are not available to determine the effectiveness of these programs, although several studies have described the services and participants.

⁴⁹G. Sexton, “Work in American Prisons: Joint Ventures with the Private Sector,” part of the Program Focus Series, U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Corrections, Office of Correctional Education, 1995.

A survey sponsored by the National Institute of Justice provides some background information on the nature and extent of work programs in jails.⁵⁰

- 18 percent of inmates at the jails surveyed worked 6 or more hours per day.
- The average inmate workweek was reported to be 39 hours; of those facilities that paid inmates, the average daily wage was \$4.08.
- Leading types of work performed by inmates were the following: cleaning, laundry, groundswork, and food services

Another survey of jailed inmates indicated that about one-fourth (26 percent) of jailed inmates had participated in some type of work assignment the week preceding the survey. Among the types of work assignments were the following: general janitorial (9 percent), food preparation (9 percent), maintenance - repair or construction (4 percent), grounds/road maintenance (3 percent), laundry (2 percent), services like library, barbershop or office (3 percent), and goods production (1 percent).⁵¹

⁵⁰CRS, Inc., *NIJ Provides First National Profile*, available on the Internet at <http://www.corrections.com/crs/bja.htm>. Note: Surveys were mailed to all of the nation's 3,500 jails in 1993, with 386 responding (an 11 percent response rate).

⁵¹Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Correctional Populations in the United States, 1996, April 1999, Table 4.26.

Across states, prison industry programs are fairly standard in terms of the types of goods produced -- e.g., license plates, signs, furniture -- though some facilities have developed specialized niches. For example, the Texas Department of Criminal Justice operates 45 factories or plants at 35 units, which include the following facilities: license plate plant, woodworking factories, records conversion, card board box factory, shoe factory, tire retread plant, print shops, bus repair, highway sign factory, soap factories, validation sticker plant, garment factories, mattress factories, mop and broom factory, stainless steel factories, and textile mill. In addition, the prison system in Texas operates agricultural work programs which include production of edible crops, swine, poultry and cattle, a beef processing plant, a packing plant, a vegetable canning plant, feedmills, and cotton gins. Goods and services produced within the Texas system are for internal use and for sale to other state agencies. The Wisconsin prison system provides an illustration of some of the main features of prison industry systems:⁵²

- about 20 percent of prison inmates participate in the prison industry program, which is voluntary;
- inmates apply for a position like they would a job in the private sector; they are interviewed for a position (some positions have special requirements, such as educational qualifications), and a committee approves each placement;
- work is a daily job (usually 6 ½ - 7 hours per day) with average wages about \$0.95 per hour (ranging from about \$.20 to \$1.50 per hour);
- work at maximum and medium security prisons is at factories/plants within the prison walls; those in minimum security facilities may be involved in work at sites in the community;
- a portion of earnings must be saved for when the inmate leaves the facility (i.e., as “gate” money); the remainder may be spent at the prison canteen or to support

⁵²Based on a recent interview with a prison official from the Wisconsin Department of Correction.

families.

d. Other Types of Programs/Services

Case Management. Increasingly programs targeting ex-offenders have adapted case management techniques, a service delivery approach developed by mental health and social services workers in the 1960s and 1970s.⁵³ Case management of offenders is most likely to be supervised by probation and parole officers. Case management strategies are increasingly being employed to link inmates returning to the community with drug treatment programs, mental health services, and social service agencies prior to release. The fundamental activities of criminal justice case management include engaging the client in the treatment process, assessing the client's needs, developing a service plan, linking the client with appropriate services, monitoring client progress, intervening with sanctions when necessary, and advocating for the client as needed. Healey notes the often expansive role of case managers in working with offenders and ex-offenders:

...Case management within a criminal justice context requires the case manager to take on additional tasks beyond those assumed by traditional social service case workers. In the original social work setting, the case manager served exclusively as a broker of services but did not become involved in counseling the client. In the criminal justice setting, case managers broker services but also are likely to provide informal guidance to their clients.

Case managers closely monitor ex-offender progress in programs and typically use graduated sanctions for participants who fail to comply with service plans. A key role of case managers centers on assessment of participant needs and referral to appropriate services. For example, case managers may refer ex-offenders on probation or parole to community or government agencies

⁵³Background material in this section is based in part on K. Healey, "Case Management in the Criminal Justice System," part of the Research in Action Series, U.S. Department of Justice,

that can assist with problems/issues related to substance abuse, domestic abuse, housing, health care, public assistance, mental health, HIV/AIDS, lack of available transportation, developmental disabilities, basic skills, and job training.

Studies of the effectiveness of case management approaches have been mostly by observation and process evaluation. According to Healey (and others), “case management as a tool for use with criminal justice populations is strong among experts, administrators, program directors, and case managers themselves.” Healey observes that case management programs require clear lines of communication and cooperation between probation/parole and treatment staff. Failure to develop this rapport can, according to Healey, result in increased paperwork, lack of managerial control of cases, and poor supervision of client progress through treatment and court-order sanctions.

Federal Bonding. In 1966, DOL initiated the federal financing of Fidelity Bonds under the Federal Bonding Program to provide for the delivery of bonding services to assist the hardest-to-place job applicants, including ex-offenders. Fidelity Bonding is a form of business insurance usually purchased to indemnify employers for loss of money or property sustained through the dishonest acts of their employees. State Employment Services served as the primary delivery system for issuing bonds. Beginning in 1997, a new process was initiated under the Federal Bonding Program for the decentralized purchase of bonds by state and local agencies using their own resources (including federal funds allocated to state and local level entities). Any state, ES, JTPA program, one-stop career center, or other service delivery agency could now acquire Fidelity Bonds to be issued free-of-charge to employers as an incentive for hiring ex-offenders

Office of Justice Programs, 1999.

and other high risk job applicants.

Between 1966 and 1996, nearly 37,000 persons were bonded and placed in jobs under the Federal Bonding Program. The insurance claims default rate for this period was 1.21 percent. In FY 1998, a total of 677 persons were bonded and placed in jobs. Several studies have suggested that bonding is a tool that helps to promote job placement of ex-offenders and other high risk individuals. For example, a study of “Employer Attitudes Toward Hiring Ex-Offenders” determined that employers were much more willing to hire ex-offenders who were bonded.

2. Descriptions of Model Programs

This section provides brief descriptions of potentially promising model programs that promote education, training, and/or employment services for offenders and ex-offenders. Most of the literature on these programs is of a case studies nature. It is difficult to put these programs into prospective and to determine which states and localities are most active and innovative in their approaches. Further, it is difficult to determine through a review of the literature and without more systematic contacts to states and localities, the extent to which these programs are typical or unique.⁵⁴ A March 1997 National Institute of Corrections publication, Annotated Bibliography on Offender Job Training and Placement, provides brief overviews of several hundred studies (mostly conducted in the 1980s and 1990s) of education, training, and job placement programs for offenders and ex-offenders. Some states are cited on multiple occasions in this document as sponsoring such programs, though it is not possible to determine without

⁵⁴In informal discussions with several knowledgeable individuals, Washington State, Texas, and Wisconsin were identified as states that were involved in recent experimentation with education and employment initiatives.

additional follow-up as to whether such states are on the cutting edge.⁵⁵

Within the literature, the projects profiled below are characterized as fairly innovative and unique, but the studies that report on these initiatives do not report extensively on other related initiatives.

- **Texas's Project RIO (Re-Integration of Offenders)⁵⁶**

Operating through the Texas Workforce Commission, Project RIO make job placement and a range of other services available to every parolee in Texas (on average, about 16,000 parolees per year). The program has more than 100 staff members in 62 sites, serving 92 cities and towns in Texas. Three main types of offices are operated: (1) full-service offices in each of the state's seven largest cities, which offer clients a week-long job search workshop, one-on-one assistance with job placement, use of a resource room (including computers with job listings, telephone books, and telephones), and postplacement follow-up; (2) balance of state offices in smaller jurisdictions, which consist of one part-time to three-full-time RIO staff members who work out of the local Texas Workforce Commission office; and (3) itinerant service providers, who travel periodically from a Balance of State office to spend one or two days a week in communities where there are a substantial number of parolees.

Project RIO's first point of contact is within the state's 108 prison facilities. Project RIO's principal presence in prisons is through the Windham School District, which is a school operating within the state prison system. The Windham/Project RIO team provides inmates with the following services: (1) assessment and testing, which culminates in the development of an employability development plan that reflects the availability of jobs and occupational demands in the community where the inmate will be released; (2) documentation (e.g., birth certificates, Social Security cards, educational credentials); (3) job readiness training; (4) employability and life skills workbooks; and (5) a 90- to 120-hour, 65 day life skills program provided for RIO participants who are within 6 months of release.

Although Project RIO's first contact with clients is usually while they are still in prison,

⁵⁵Among the states cited on several occasions as sponsoring training and job placement programs were the following: California, Florida, Massachusetts, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, New York, Texas, Washington State, Wisconsin. Source: LIS, Inc., Annotated Bibliography on Offender Job Training and Placement, National Institute of Corrections, U.S. Department of Justice, 1997.

⁵⁶For additional information, see P. Finn, "Texas' Project RIO (Re-Integration of Offenders)," part of the Program Focus Series, U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Corrections, Office of Correctional Education, 1998.

its primary mission is to place participants in jobs after release. Project RIO enrolls parolees and inmates released from 2-year jail facilities, and serves them while they are under supervision. Project RIO prepares participants for job interviews through the in-prison “Changes” program and, when needed, through a week long, all-day life skills and job search course given at the seven full-service offices that serve most Texas parolees. Project RIO employment specialists match participants with specific job openings on the basis of skills and temperament. Employment specialists also provide all participants with an up-to-date directory of local social and community services (e.g., medical services, food, clothing, housing resources). Employment specialists telephone employers at 30, 60, and 90 day intervals to check on progress of participants. If participants lose jobs due to layoffs or factors beyond their control, RIO’s employment specialists help with finding another job.

Some evaluation data are available on Project RIO. During FY 1995, RIO served 15,366 parolees, about 40 percent of all ex-offenders released from prison that year. Since 1985, the project has placed 69 percent of more than 100,000 ex-offenders. Almost 74 percent of clients in 1995 found (employment at an average wage of \$5.15 per hour). Participation in Project RIO was found to be a statistically significant predictor of post-release employment. Based on a one-year follow-up, 69 percent of program participants found employment compared with 36 percent of non-RIO parolees. According to a Texas A&M University study, ex-offenders who found jobs through RIO had lower recidivism rates than unemployed ex-offenders who did not enroll in RIO, with demographic factors and risk of recidivism taken into account. During the year after release, when most recidivism occurs, 48 percent of RIO high-risk clients were rearrested compared with 57 percent of non-RIO high risk parolees; 23 percent were reincarcerated compared with 38 percent of non-RIO parolees.⁵⁷ The program spent an average of \$361 in 1995 for every client who found a job.

- **State of Wisconsin Department of Corrections Nontraditional Opportunities for Work (NOW) Program**

The Wisconsin Department of Corrections (DOC) received a three-year grant (of \$1,092,959) from the Governor’s Welfare-to-Work (WtW) 15 Percent Discretionary funds to design and implement the Non-Traditional Opportunities for Work (NOW) Program in Milwaukee County. The Governor’s discretionary funds are being matched by \$828,207 from the Department of Corrections, providing a total budget for the program of nearly \$2 million. The program, which began enrolling participants in April 1999, will provide a comprehensive range of employment, training, parenting, and support services for non-custodial fathers through July 2001. The program’s target population is probationers and parolees in the community and inmates in minimum security correction centers nearing release who are non-custodial fathers meeting Welfare-to-Work eligibility criteria. The goals

⁵⁷It should be noted that one problem with the research design was that researchers were unable to determine whether the parolees who were most likely to succeed on their own were the ones who join RIO.

of the program are to: (1) serve 900 probationers or parolees over the three-year period of the contract; (2) successfully employ 455 of these participants for a minimum of six months, and (3) during their period of employment, for employed participants to pay child support. In addition to enhancing employability, job retention, and capacity to pay child support, the program seeks to re-connect non-custodial fathers with their children and to enhance parenting skills.

The NOW program is designed so that DOC provides front-end services -- recruitment, initial assessment, and referral of eligible individuals for services -- and takes a lead role in providing ongoing case management. NOW participants are referred by DOC to one of five Wisconsin Works (W-2) agencies serving Milwaukee County for a comprehensive range of services, including job search/placement assistance, subsidized employment, post-employment education and training services, parenting skills development workshops, child support and visitation mediation, and a long list of support services. W-2 agencies coordinate service delivery with the Wisconsin Technical College Systems, the University of Wisconsin-Extension Program, or other educational programs (e.g., area literacy councils, Even Start Family Literacy Programs) to provide a variety of Adult Basic Education (ABE) and short-term job skills training opportunities. Although no evaluation data are available as yet (because the program was initiated in April 1999), there are plans to examine net impacts of the program (i.e., comparing results of a treatment and control group) as part of the national WtW evaluation being conducted by Mathematica and The Urban Institute.

- **Chicago's Safer Foundation**⁵⁸

Chicago's Safer Foundation reaches many offenders while they are still incarcerated by operating both a private school in Cook County Jail in Chicago and a work release center for the Illinois Department of Corrections. A wide range of ex-offenders and incarcerated persons are eligible to receive Safer's employment, educational, and support services, including juvenile and adult probationers and parolees, community corrections residents, and persons in the county jail. The foundation uses a small group, peer-based approach in its in-prison and post-prison basic education skills program, and it provides case managers to help clients address transitional problems for up to a year after they have secured employment. Safer's primary educational course is a 6-week basic skills program offered at the organization's Chicago headquarters, at two of its satellite offices, and at its work release facility. In addition to basic skills development, employment specialists drill students on how to complete job applications and prepare for interviews. During and after the course, employment specialists help students find employment (or, with younger students, continue their education), while case managers follow participants for one year to help them maintain success.

Courses are based on a peer learning model developed by Safer in which students help each other in groups of three to five members supervised by professional facilitators. Participant

⁵⁸For additional information, see P. Finn, "Chicago's Safer Foundation: A Road Back for Ex-Offenders," part of the Program Focus Series, U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Corrections, Office of Correctional Education, 1998.

interaction takes the place of textbooks and worksheets as the medium of instruction. Facilitators make frequent but relatively brief contact with each group to assess progress, diagnose difficulties, answer questions, and provide information. While there is impetus for activity, facilitators strive to avoid becoming the focus of group attention.

Job placement and retention is a key focus of the project. It typically takes about 3 weeks for Safer employment specialists to place clients in a job. As an incentive bonus, Safer job development staff members have the opportunity to share in a pool of about \$25,000 that is distributed based on the proportion of official placement they make and the starting salaries their placements earn. Employment specialists help to prepare and motivate clients to remain on the job, and they take an active role in following placement with telephone calls and site visits to prevent attrition. After clients have been on the job or in school for 30 days, lifeguards -- specially trained case managers -- track them for one year, offering help with emerging problems ranging from finding child care to entering substance abuse counseling to resolving conflicts with employers. The lifeguard either telephones or visits the participant at the workplace, school, or home at least weekly for up to 3 or 4 months (depending on the participant's need for help), and every 2 to 4 weeks thereafter. Participants may also leave voice mail messages with the lifeguards 24 hours a day for a response the following workday.

Safer has helped more than 40,000 participants find jobs since 1972, (including about 1,100 in program year 1996). Over 90 percent of participants are minorities; 70 percent have a history of untreated substance abuse; and three-fourths are functionally illiterate. Using a job placement criterion of 30 days of continuous employment, 59 percent of program participants in 1996 were placed in jobs. Safer's cost per participant placed who remained employed for at least 30 days was \$1,956. Safer has recently begun to track clients' work histories for 10 months after they have found a job. Among a partial sample of clients who remained employed 30 days, 81 percent were still employed (with the same or another employer) after 2 months, 75 percent after 3 months, and 57 percent after 9 months.

- **Orange County (Florida) Jail and Vocational Programs⁵⁹**

The Orange County, Florida, Corrections Division provides intensive educational and vocational programs for most inmates in its 3,300-bed jail. Staffed by 70 full-time instructors, programs include adult basic education, GED preparation, vocational training, job readiness and placement services, life skills development, psychoeducational groups, and substance abuse education. Courses are tailored to the short period of time that jail inmates are incarcerated, typically running six hours a day, five days a week. The educational and vocation programming is linked to two other innovations in the jail designed to work together to reduce corrections costs, improve inmate conduct, and lower recidivism: (1) direct supervision in the facilities

⁵⁹For additional information, see P. Finn, "The Orange County, Florida, Jail Educational and Vocational Programs," part of the Program Focus Series, U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Corrections, Office of Correctional Education, 1997.

architecturally designed to allow maximum direct contact between staff and inmates without physical barriers; and (2) behavioral incentives in the form of privileges inmates earn if they participate in programming and avoid misconduct.

Types of vocational training provided include auto maintenance, desktop publishing, carpentry, culinary arts, warehousing, electrical wiring, and other occupations and trades. Every vocational course devotes time to resume writing, mock job interviews, and other job readiness skills. Life skills courses address employability skills, job search techniques, money management, and parenting and relationship skills. The courses are self-paced and the sequence of topics is flexible. Inmates with alcohol or other drug problems must enroll in Moral Reconciliation Therapy (MRT), a nontraditional psychoeducational course in which participants complete a series of 16 structured tasks and workbook exercises.

Research evidence suggests that the combination of programming, direct supervision, and incentives reduced staffing needs, construction costs, and violent incidents, while increasing inmate educational levels and job readiness. An independent evaluation found that as long as 18 months after release, inmates who were housed 6 to 45 days in direct supervision facilities were less likely to re-offend than inmates who were housed in these facilities less than 6 days.

- **Opportunity to Succeed (OPTS) Program (in Kansas City; New York City; Oakland, St. Louis, and Tampa)⁶⁰**

The Opportunity to Succeed (OPTS) program is designed to reduce substance abuse relapse and criminal recidivism by providing comprehensive aftercare services to felony offenders who have alcohol and drug offense histories. OPTS programs were initiated in 1994 as three-year demonstrations in five communities -- Kansas City, New York, Oakland, St. Louis, and Tampa. The program model was developed by the National Center on Addictions and Substance Abuse; demonstration programs were funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the Bureau of Justice Assistance at the U.S. Department of Justice.

The OPTS project pairs local probation/parole departments with lead service agencies that provide case management and other social services. Service providers directly delivered some job-related services and referred OPTS clients to one or two employment/job training entities with whom the site established close working relationships. Among the core services were the following: (1) assessment of client skill and career interests, (2) basic job search skills training, largely focused on how to develop a resume, fill out applications, identify job openings, and conduct job interview; and (3) job referral and placement services. A few agencies offered more extensive services, such as adult basic education or GED courses, vocational skills training, apprenticeship programs or other opportunities for on-the-job training, or support services for work related needs.

⁶⁰For additional information, see: S. Rossman, S. Sridharan, J. Buck, *The Impact of OPTS on Employment Success*, The Urban Institute, 1998.

Preliminary employment outcome data are available from an evaluation of OPTS. The OPTS evaluation collected self-reported information from a sample of 398 substance abusing felony offenders, randomly assigned either to OPTS (the treatment group) or routine supervision (the control group). OPTS was found to have a statistically significant positive effect on full-time employment:

- OPTS clients were employed full time for an average of 6.4 months during their first year, as compared to 5.1 months average full-time employment for the controls during the same time frame.
 - More OPTS clients reported improvements in their abilities to identify job openings, fill out job applications, and know how to have a successful interview.
 - More OPTS clients reported improvements in their abilities to consistently arrive on time for work, get along with the supervisors and co-workers, and receive positive reviews or increased responsibilities for doing a good job.
- **Washington State's Work Release Program⁶¹**

Washington State's work release program, created by legislative action in 1967, gave the state permission to allow inmates to serve sentences in the community for purpose of work training and experience. The work release program is the responsibility of the Division of Community Corrections within the State Department of Corrections (DOC). The actual operation of the work release facilities is done on a contractual basis, with contracts renegotiated every two years. DOC contracts with providers for buildings, plus the day-to-day activities, including staff, meals, shelter, inmate sign-in and sign-out procedures, urinalysis, and job checks. DOC contracts with 15 residential work release facilities, which house more than 350 offenders (mostly adult males) on any single day throughout the state.

Inmates may not enter work release sooner than six months prior to discharge. Inmates generally apply for work release within 12 to 17 months prior to their release date. Inmates can apply for work release only if: (1) they have a minimum security status, (2) they have less than two years to be served on their minimum term, including anticipated good time credits, (3) they have not been convicted of rape in the first degree or, if so, are beyond the first 3 years of confinement, and (4) they have not been convicted of murder in the first degree or, if so, have the written approval of the Secretary of Corrections. Once DOC judges an offender eligible for work release, the work release facilities' Community Screening Board (consisting of work release staff

⁶¹For more information, see: S. Turner and J. Petersilia, "Work Release: Recidivism and Corrections Costs in Washington State," part of the Research in Brief Series U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, 1996.

and local citizens), must agree to accept the inmate for admission to their local work release center.

Under the program, offenders must obtain gainful employment or training and must pay about \$10 per day for room and board. Participants are ultimately responsible for finding work in the community, although DOC community corrections officers and staff provide referrals. Residents also pay support to their families and court-ordered restitution. The average length of stay in the work release facility is about four months. While on work release, offenders must abide by their work plan, remain in the work release facility at all times except those approved for work and other appointments, remain alcohol and drug free, be employed or have resources in order to meet financial needs, report all earnings to DOC and obey all federal, state, and local laws.

Two National Institute of Justice evaluations of the Washington State's work release program were conducted between 1991 and 1994. The results of the evaluations were mostly positive:

- Nearly a quarter of all prisoners released in Washington made a successful transition to the community through work release.
- Less than five percent of the work releasees committed new crimes while on work release -- 99 percent of which were less serious property offenses, such as forgery or theft.
- Under heightened supervision, many work releasees incurred infractions (most for rule violations and drug possession), and a quarter returned to prison.
- 56 percent of the 965 work releasees in the cohort studied were termed "successful" -- they incurred no program infractions or arrests; another 13.5 percent were "moderately successful" -- their infractions were not serious enough to return to prison; and almost 30 percent were "unsuccessful -- they returned to prison.
- Older offenders were more successful than younger ones, and whites were more successful than either Hispanics or blacks. Success was also associated with having no prior criminal record.

- **Pima County (Arizona) Amity Project⁶²**

The Amity Project, a collaborative effort between Amity, Inc., and the Pima County

⁶²K. Healey, "Case Management in the Criminal Justice System," part of the Research in Action Series, U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, 1999.

Department of Probation, was funded in 1990 by the Center for Substance Abuse Treatment of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The program targeted offenders who were at high risk of probation revocation due to substance abuse. The program incorporated key elements of a therapeutic community into a day-and-evening program.

The program design featured escalating sanctions, including urine screens and varying supervision levels, case management (assessment and support), educational or vocational training, family support and counseling, health service coordination, intensive aftercare, and a community-based site housing both probation officers and treatment staff.

After two years, drug use relapses were reduced and probationer employment increased. Across the program, positive urine tests decreased by more than 50 percent in the first year, and the employment component was so successful that the project developed night and weekend services to accommodate employed offenders. However, despite promising results, the program was terminated due to lack of funding.

- **Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO) in New York City⁶³**

The Center for Employment Opportunities in New York City is one of many programs that help ex-offenders prepare for, find, and keep jobs. CEO is unique because it provides day labor for participants, most of whom have been released the previous week from boot camp. The work crews, designed to prepare participants for placement in permanent job, offer several advantages: (1) they provide participants with structure and activity; (2) they instill good work habits, (3) they enable participants to earn a daily income, (4) they test participants' readiness for placement in a permanent job, and (5) they generate income that helps cover day-labor expenses.

CEO's approach includes an emphasis on intensive job placement services and providing such services early.

Most CEO participants are ex-offenders released from New York State's shock incarceration (or boot camp) program who are required to enroll as a condition of parole. About one-third of participants are on work release, probation, or nonviolent parole status. Program participants spend the first 4 days at CEO attending all-day job readiness class. Program life skills educators help participants secure child care, housing, clothes, Medicaid documents, a driver's license, and any other need documents. On the day following the end of the life skills course, participants meet with their employment specialist to map out a strategy for finding self-sustaining employment.

Each participant is assigned to a work crew until they find permanent employment. Work

⁶³For additional information, see P. Finn, "Successful Job Placement for Ex-Offenders: The Center for Employment Opportunities," part of the Program Focus Series, U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Corrections, Office of Correctional Education, 1998.

crews provide participants with short-term, low-skilled, minimum wage, day-labor employment. In mid 1996, 40 crews with a total of more than 200 participants were operating each day in more than 25 locations. Crews generally operate from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. or from 4 p.m. to midnight. Each participant takes one day a week off from the crew to meet with their employment specialist and pursue job leads the employment specialist has developed.

CEO offers employers a number incentives for hiring program participants -- such on-the-job training wage subsidies and Work Opportunities Tax Credits -- which has helped to enable the program to find jobs for as many as 70 percent of its ex-offenders. Once placed in a job, the program continues to monitor the employee's performance for six months, including telephoning the employer, visiting the work site, and counseling the employee.

D. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

It is perhaps not surprising that programs to enhance employability of offenders and ex-offenders have not met with great success given the mixed track record of education, training and employment service programs for other disadvantaged populations. Among disadvantaged populations, there are few groups that face greater hurdles to employment than ex-offenders. While past studies have established links between unemployment and crime, very few studies employing rigorous evaluation designs have linked basic education, job training, or employment initiatives with substantially improved employment outcomes or lower rates of recidivism for ex-offenders. More recently -- though as yet not formally evaluated -- there have been a number of employment and training initiatives that have shown promise, such as Project RIO and others profiled in this report. Only careful evaluation over an extended period of time will show whether these initiatives are more successful than past programs in easing the transition of ex-offenders into communities. In formulating policy and programs, three important questions emerge: (1) Who among the offender and ex-offender population should be targeted for services? (2) When should assistance be provided? (3) What types of assistance should be provided?

With regard to the first two questions, the literature on recidivism provides some helpful information. The high rates of recidivism within the first three years after release (and especially during the first year) suggest the need to better prepare offenders in the months prior to release -- offenders need the skills and education to find legitimate work. For example, the two studies cited earlier found that offenders lacking a high school education were more likely to recidivate. The study on recidivism of federal offenders found that releasees who had arranged for

employment prior to release had lower recidivism rates than those who did not make such arrangements (e.g., 27.6 percent of those arranging for post-release employment recidivated compared to 53.9 percent of those who made no plans for post-release employment). The studies on recidivism also identify the types of individuals most likely to recidivate (e.g., an estimated 94.1 percent of federal and state prisoners age 18 to 24 with 11 or more prior arrests were rearrested within 3 years) -- suggesting that intensive employment and education efforts are required for those most likely to recidivate.⁶⁴

The delivery of education and training services should be timed at a point at which (1) opportunity costs of training are low, (2) the justice system has maximum leverage to compel attendance and completion, and (3) the knowledge/skills can be used and reinforced, before they erode and are lost. At the time offenders are serving time, the opportunity costs of attending training are relatively low -- especially when compared to when they are released from prison and are seeking or have found employment). In fact, prisoners are likely to have large amounts of time available that could be used for building basic and job-related skills. However, that training should not be provided so far before release that it is wasted. For example, while remediation of basic skills deficiencies and GED preparation would likely be appropriate for individuals who have long periods of time remaining in their sentences, it would make little sense to enroll such individuals in job search workshops or occupational skills training to build skills that will not be applied in the near future. The likelihood of completion of education, training, job search

⁶⁴However, it is important to note that the studies of education and training programs for offenders and ex-offenders have not shown much in the way of positive impacts on long-term employment or on recidivism -- so it is an open question whether resources would be better spent on those most or least likely to recidivate.

workshops, and other activities is greatest when the correctional system still has the ability to apply incentives and sanctions -- that is, when the offender is serving time, on probation, or on parole.

With regard to the third question -- how to best structure initiatives -- there has been much experimentation, but the evaluation results (often disappointing) do not provide a clear direction on how to proceed. However, some lessons emerge from the body of literature that has accumulated over the years to help guide experimentation in service design and options for involvement of federal, state, and local correctional facilities, workforce development agencies, and educational authorities in initiatives to help offenders and ex-offenders transition from prison to work. Some key lessons follow:

- **Test Longer-Term and More Intensive Approaches.** One of the questions that has dogged research over the years is whether interventions have been ineffective because of a lack of service intensity, comprehensiveness, and duration. For example, given the formidable barriers that many ex-offenders face to obtaining well-paying jobs and time that they formerly spent involved in criminal activity, it is probably unrealistic to expect that a one-week job readiness class and job placement assistance is likely to have much of an impact on recidivism and long-term employment outcomes. Hence, if resources permit, it would be important to test effectiveness of various levels of service intensity -- including programs that provide longer-term, intensive assistance and follow-up. The TARP experiment in the 1970s provides an illustration of the ways in which several treatment groups can be formed with varying levels of treatment and results tested in comparison to a control group.
- **Employment and Training Programs for Offenders and Ex-Offenders Must Be Linked to Substance Abuse Treatment Programs.** Given the high levels of drug and alcohol use among offenders/ex-offenders, it is imperative to build in careful monitoring of drug/alcohol use and to make substance abuse counseling and treatment available. High levels of pre-prison use of alcohol and drugs is evident in virtually any prison/jail population -- and it is frequently a major contributing factor to why a particular individual has been incarcerated. To avoid wasting program resources, it is essential for transitional programs targeting offenders and ex-offenders to assess/test participants for substance abuse

problems before enrollment in long-term education or training programs. Ongoing monitoring of individuals with alcohol and drug problems is also an important ingredient to program success -- for example, through extended case management (for a year or longer) and regular drug testing. Programs that repeatedly refer individuals with active drug and alcohol problems to employers are likely to experience a rapidly declining list of employers willing to accept placements. Finally, given the likelihood of relapse for substance abusers, programs must have close linkages to comprehensive drug treatment and counseling programs.

- **Substantial Basic Skill Deficiencies Should Be Expected; Emphasize the Importance of Gaining a GED as a Means for Obtaining Additional Education/Vocational Credentials.** As indicated earlier, basic skills deficits and illiteracy are often major impediments to ex-offenders obtaining decent paying, long-term employment. In addition, basic skill deficits can make it difficult, if not impossible, to obtain additional vocational training and for job advancement. Hence, it is crucial to include a basic skills/GED preparation component in virtually any jail/prison program (i.e., either through direct provision of services or referral to an existing GED preparation program). However, GED preparation should be viewed as a means to obtaining additional education and training, and not an end in itself. Studies have suggested that a GED alone is of little benefit for improving employment outcomes, unless accompanied by additional training or educational qualifications. The economic returns to two- and four-year post-secondary education are particularly high.
- **Look for Possibilities of Connecting Programs for Ex-Offenders to Other Workforce and Welfare Initiatives, Such as Welfare-to-Work.** The 1996 Survey of Inmates in Local Jails indicated that about two-thirds (64 percent) of jail inmates had children (58 percent indicated they had children under the 18 years of age). About 4 in 10 jail inmates indicated that they lived with children under 18 years of age before entering prison; 81 percent of these jail inmates (with children) indicated that the current caretaker of their children was the other parent and 18 percent indicated that it was a grandparent. These statistics underscore the importance of parenting and child support issues for offenders and ex-offenders. They also point to the possibilities of connecting prison-based initiatives to other state and local initiatives, such as DOL-funded Welfare-to-Work, state TANF (Work First) initiatives, expanding numbers of responsible fatherhood projects, and other faith-based and community-based initiatives aimed at disadvantaged individuals. The NOW project in Wisconsin (profiled earlier) is one example of how a state corrections department can link to the workforce development and welfare system both to obtain additional funding (through Welfare-to-Work) and develop a comprehensive range of services. In addition, DOL should look closely at the experimentation that is currently being undertaken as part of the Welfare-to-

Work formula and competitive grant programs for potential examples of approaches and strategies that might work for individuals facing multiple barriers to employment. For example, it may be particularly useful to examine experiences of states such as Oregon and Washington that have been successful at connecting a high proportion of welfare recipients to the workplace. WtW initiatives are also experimenting with a range of approaches to serving non-custodial parents that would be applicable to the ex-offender population. This includes use of intermediaries to link hard-to-serve individuals with employers and offering a range of supportive work experiences to build skills and move individuals toward unsubsidized employment.

- **Use Incentives and Sanctions as a Way to Reduce Program Attrition.** One of the problems that have plagued employment and training programs for offenders and ex-offenders is attrition, particularly when individuals are removed from correctional supervision. This suggests the importance of targeting education, employment, and training initiatives on individuals while they are still in prisons, on probation, or on parole. As discussed earlier, incentives and sanctions can be of great utility in motivating participants and combating program attrition. Among the incentives that should be considered are the following: sentence reductions, parole considerations, preferential prison employment, pay for school attendance, and grants for higher education.
- **Emphasize Links with Employers and Employer-Based Training.** Corrections and workforce development agencies should look for creative ways to combine work, education, training, and a range of support services. Wherever possible, a key to such combinations of work and skill development is close linkages with employers in the development of workplace-based training programs. It is essential that the basic and job-specific skills training is up-to-date and transferable to unsubsidized jobs readily available within the workplace. Working closely with employers will not only improve possibilities for enhanced skill development among ex-offenders, but also help pave the way to identification of an expanded range of job openings, increased chances of job retention, and leveraging of private-sector training dollars.

Some example of ways in which work and education/training can be combined include: (1) on-the-job training, where the wage of new workers is partially offset by the public sector in exchange for training provided by the employer; (2) formal apprenticeship programs, in which employers (often in collaboration with unions) provide a combination of structured classroom and on-the-job training over generally a two- to four-year period; and (3) flexible scheduling of work hours, such as employers allowing individuals to work four days and have one day off per week for training, which may or may not be paid by the employer.

Agencies can facilitate skills development and career advancement of ex-offenders by:

- encouraging employers to provide employer-based training, including recruiting employers to provide such programs, providing funds to off-set costs of training, linking employers with training providers to assist with curriculum development and instruction;
 - developing case management plans that identify each participant's skills deficits and series of steps participants (and employers) should undertake to build basic and job-specific skills;
 - providing resources to help offset the cost of training for participants and employers, such as training vouchers, wage subsidies (such as OJTs), and financial assistance with curriculum development;
 - providing a range of support services tailored to help ex-offenders overcome barriers to starting or completing training, such as help with transportation and child care; and
 - monitoring participant progress toward completion of training and providing ongoing services to troubleshoot problems as they occur.
- **Expect Some Degree of Negative Program Terminations.** If reducing recidivism is a major goal of transitional employment and training programs -- and it is nearly always a key measure -- then policymakers should be prepared for a considerable level of failure in programs targeting offenders and ex-offenders. For example, the literature suggests that 40 percent or more of ex-offenders (at least those within state and federal prisons) will be rearrested and returned to prison within three years of release. Programs, even those offering comprehensive and intensive services, are likely to experience a considerable number of failures. Unsuccessful program results can also be expected when measuring employment outcomes -- particularly in the area of job retention results. As noted earlier, because of their criminal records, basic skills deficits, and a multiplicity of other problems, ex-offenders face substantial barriers to finding and keeping jobs (even when compared to other disadvantaged groups).

Hence, it is important to not be overly focused on the failures of programs targeting ex-offenders, but rather to examine how program services contribute to successful outcomes, especially in relation to what might have happened in the absence of such services. What is important is to examine net program impact, using, whenever feasible, experimental or quasi-experimental evaluation designs that can distinguish differences between outcomes for randomly-selected

treatment and control groups.⁶⁵ DOL should look for opportunities to link with the Department of Justice on sponsoring employment and training initiatives targeting offenders and ex-offenders. In addition, DOL may be able to collaborate with the Department of Justice on rigorous evaluation of such program initiatives.

⁶⁵There are a number of factors that would seem to facilitate rigorous evaluation of programs targeting offenders and ex-offenders, particularly if such studies were conducted in collaboration with the Department of Justice. For example, with large numbers of offenders being released each year from the correctional system (over 500,000 per year), excess demand (for services) would facilitate formation of treatment and control groups. Ongoing tracking of ex-offenders that are part of the parole/probation system would likely facilitate tracking of program participant outcomes over an extended period. Finally, there is a tradition of evaluation and experimental design at the Department of Justice -- reflected in the body of literature on recidivism and evaluation of employment and training initiatives -- that DOL could build upon.

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