

The Louisiana Prisoner ReEntry Initiative (LA-PRI)

READY4WORK: THE EMPLOYABILITY AND SUPPORTIVE JOB DEMONSTRATION PROJECT

August 2017

Louisiana has the highest per capita incarceration rate in the U.S. - 816 per 100,000 compared to 471; one in 26 adults are under correctional control, compared to 1 in 31 nationally.

- Half of the 36,000 state prisoners are serving their sentences in parish jails at a cost of \$172 million per year.
- 12 parishes account for 67% of state prisoners with the five largest urban parishes (Orleans, Jefferson, East Baton Rouge, Caddo and St. Tammany) accounting for about 40%.
- The statewide 5 year recidivism rate is 42% while the top 12 parishes have a 56% rate; by targeting these 12 parishes, especially the top 5, the statewide recidivism rate will drop.
- For every 10% reduction in recidivism in the state's 12 largest parishes, the state will save over \$3 million.

The LA-PRI creates safer neighborhoods and better citizens by implementing a seamless plan of services and supervision developed with each returning citizen, delivered through state and local collaboration, from imprisonment through transition, reintegration, and aftercare in the community.

- Public Safety is the number one goal of the LA-PRI and it will reduce number of crimes and victims, and the costs associated with crime.
- No approach will totally *eliminate* crime but the LA-PRI will *reduce* crime and the rate of those returning to prisons in Louisiana.
- The LA-PRI approach is based on three decades of research and incorporates evidence-based practices that engage family and human service supports through post-release supervision and accountability.

LA-PRI Vision: Every prisoner returns to their community with the tools & resources needed for success.

- The LA-PRI is a partnership between DPSC, the Board of Parole, the Louisiana Workforce Commission, the Louisiana Housing Authority, other state agencies, the Louisiana Commission on Law Enforcement, the Louisiana Association of Nonprofit Organizations (LANO), state agencies, district attorneys, sheriffs, the business community, the philanthropic community, and parishes throughout the state which have formed Reentry Coalitions and local reentry implementation teams to implement the model locally..
- The goal of the LA-PRI is to cut the recidivism rate for returning prisoners, beginning with the 12 parishes that contribute the highest number of prisoners to the system.
- Fully engaged communities will demonstrate reduced recidivism through improved case planning and case management, built on actuarial risk/need assessment, good data, enhanced human service delivery and, comprehensive planning.
- Returning prisoners need supervision and services to manage and reduce their risk and address their needs – especially for sustainable employment, affordable housing and substance abuse.

WHY EVIDENCE-BASED AND BEST PRACTICES FOR FORMER PRISONER TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT?¹

- As many as 20 million persons have a felony conviction in the U.S., over 1 in 8 adult men for whom employment is difficult – an important aspect of the 7 million men in the U.S. who are no longer looking for work, a work rate that is lower for 25-54 year olds than the Great Depression.²
- Without training and programming specifically aimed at increasing employability and employment for former prisoners, they will not only remain unemployed but will join the ranks of Americans who have given up even trying to be in the work force.³
- Act No. 342, the Offender Reentry Support Act, declares that Louisiana state policy “... promotes initiatives that will provide ex-offenders with the support and services necessary to allow them to find employment and make healthy connections with their families and community. Such initiatives can help ex-offenders to become productively engaged with their communities, to work and support their families, and thus make both their communities safer and their families economically secure”.⁴

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Louisiana Smart on Crime, Louisiana Right on Crime and the Justice Reinvestment Task Force have endorsed the LA-PRI as the framework for improved prisoner reentry in the state. As part of this important work, the LA-PRI is focusing attention on the employability/sustained employment of former prisoners. There is little argument among criminologists and social scientists that employment may be the most essential aspect of successful former prisoner re-integration:⁵

EVIDENCE BASED PRACTICES: WORKING WITH POTENTIAL EMPLOYERS

- Potential employers are educated about the benefits of individualized decisions about hiring.
- People with convictions are provided a documented means to demonstrate rehabilitation.
- Parole officers and community service providers assist employers with the recruiting, hiring, training and management of former prisoners.
- Potential employers and prisoners are provided information about financial employment incentives, such as the Federal Bonding Program, Work Opportunity Tax Credit, and Welfare-to-Work programs.
- Work opportunities and job placements for returning prisoners are developed among industries and employers identified as willing to hire former prisoners.
- Preparations in prison should focus highly on job work habits so that former prisoners are good employees – with less emphasis on technical skills, which employers can train on.
- Community service opportunities and internships are available in the community for people released from prison who cannot find work so that they can acquire real work experience and on-the-job training.

EVIDENCE BASED PRACTICES: EMPLOYMENT UPON RELEASE

- Work-release programs are available as a transition between work inside prison and work after release.
- Community members and community-based services act as intermediaries between employers and job-seeking individuals, who are incarcerated.
- Returning prisoners receive written information about prospective employers in their community and/or community employment service providers well in advance of the anticipated release date.
- Prior to discharge, prisoners receive official documentation of their skills and experience, including widely accepted credentials and/or letters of recommendation.
- Employers visit the correctional facility to meet with prospective employees before release.
- Facility, parole staff and community-based workforce development resources assist people in prison initiate job searches *prior* to release.
- Community networks are in place to support prisoners who participate in work release programs.

EVIDENCE BASED PRACTICES: JOB DEVELOPMENT AND SUPPORT UPON RELEASE

- All agencies engaged with prisoner reentry promote supportive transitional employment programs.
- Agencies charged with supervision of offenders post-release require their staff to work towards sustainable employment for former prisoners.
- Prisoners receive assistance with surmounting legal and logistical obstacles to employment.

Based on these evidence-based practices, a partnership has been formed between the Louisiana Association of Business and Industry (LABI), the Network for Opportunity, the United Way of Southeast Louisiana, the Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections (DPSC), and the Center for Justice Innovation to design and implement a demonstration project in Southeast Louisiana. These partners would build an approach adapted from the successful “Ready4Work” Model developed by Public Private Ventures and funded by the U.S. Department of Labor.⁶ The team will work with the National HIRE Network on the program design (Helping Individuals with Criminal Records Reenter through Employment).⁷

The Greater New Orleans Foundation (GNOF) has expressed interest in becoming one of the funding partners to work with returning citizens from southeastern Louisiana. A full proposal and budget will be developed in the winter of 2017 and, as a result, cost-per-person and Return On Investment analyses can be determined.⁸

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DEVELOPMENT OF A READY4WORK MODEL IN LOUISIANA

The Ready4Work Model being adapted in Louisiana is comprised of three main elements: soft skill and employability training before release, job placement with a partner from Louisiana business and industry, mentoring and case management post-release in a transitional job – leading to full time employment for those that meet job standard. Ready4Work requires significant community support, which is already in place in Louisiana under LA-PRI local Steering Teams, and guidance from the business community as the program is designed, implemented as a demonstration project in two parishes, and evaluated. The specific program components for Ready4Work include:

- *Identifying employment partners:* The partner organizations will host a “think tank” and partnership development forum in 2017 in Southeast Louisiana, building on LABI’s successful Criminal Justice Summit in November 2016 that attracted hundreds of LABI members interested in criminal justice reform and its link to employment. As a result of this session, several employers in Southeast Louisiana will become partners in the Project. **These employers will participate in the design of the approach and the timetable for implementation so that a full proposal and budget can be developed.**
- *Identifying and screening prisoners for participation:* The partner organizations and the employers identify candidates – moderate to high risk/need prisoners who are expected to be released within six months to parishes in Southeast Louisiana – who meet the minimum requirements for the program and possess the attitude and willingness needed for success.⁹ Given the time commitment needed to participate in the program’s various elements, it’s critical that those who enrolled do so freely and because they desired to improve their circumstances after release from incarceration.
- *Soft skill and employability training prior to release:* Employers agree that the development of technical skills can be achieved during the first few months of supportive employment and the focus during incarceration and prior to release should be on “soft skills” and what it takes to be a successful employee: work ethic, timeliness, respecting the workplace and the employment hierarchy are aspects of employability that many former prisoners are unprepared for. Current soft skill development program efforts in Louisiana, particularly within the prison system, will be examined to determine their effectiveness and, along with a review of national evidence-based approaches, will result in a design for the demonstration project. Instituting a team-building approach with groups of participants at the releasing institution will be included in the design.
- *Recruiting, screening, training and supporting group mentoring:* The project will employ a strategy to recruit and retain mentors who are then matched with returning prisoners in a group setting. The goal is to match every adult Ready4Work participant with an appropriate mentoring team, who is primarily responsible for supporting a group of former prisoners back to the community, especially to the workplace—offering support, guidance and assistance with personal and work challenges. The lead agencies will work closely with the statewide faith and community-based organizations which are partnering with the LA-PRI to design the mentoring approach. Mentors will be screen according to national standards, matched with program participants, and will be part of a regional effort to provide ongoing support and case management through Goodwill of Southeast Louisiana.
- *Providing Case Management and referral and/or direct wraparound services as needed:* Case management is the component that holds Ready4Work’s various other elements together. Goodwill of Southeast Louisiana will provide case managers to work individually with participants to maximize their likelihood of job retention and progress, establish successful mentoring, and identify other services needed to successfully reenter society, such as substance abuse treatment, housing, transportation and mental and/or physical health services. Areas of special emphasis include health-related concerns such as HIV/AIDS support, services for parents and families, and assistance with obtaining identification.

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ENDNOTES AND CITATIONS

¹ Summarized from the [LA-PRI Framework \(2014\)](#) and the [Report of the Re-Entry Policy Council \(U.S. DOJ\)](#) Pgs. 293-316; 383-389; <https://csgjusticecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Report-of-the-Reentry-Council.pdf>

² [Men Without Work: America's Invisible Crisis](#), Nicholas Eberstadt (Templeton Press, 2016)

³ A review of employment programs that meet a high level of evaluation rigor resulting in a statistically significant reduction in recidivism and increased levels of employment produces 9 programs: Florida Work Release, Washington State Correctional Industries Program, Minnesota's Prison Work Release Program, Federal Prison UNICOR, the Texas Rio Program, the NYC Center for Employment Opportunities, the Ohio DOC Vocational Training Program, The National Jobs Reentry Demonstration Project, and the Minnesota Affordable Homes (Construction) Program. These evaluations illustrate the value of the evidence-based approaches detailed here. Summaries can be found at www.miccd.org/centerforjusticeinnovation (under construction).

⁴ <http://www.legis.la.gov/legis/ViewDocument.aspx?d=912802>

⁵ A 1995 meta-analysis of 400 studies found that employment was the single most effective factor in reducing recidivism. Lipsey, Mark W. *What Works: Reducing Reoffending*. West Sussex, U.K.: Wiley, 1995

⁶ See J. Good and P. Sherrid. *When the Gates Open; Ready4Work; A National Response to the Prisoner Reentry Crisis*. Public/Private Ventures, October 2005; and especially, S. Bauldry and W. McClanahan. *Ready4Work: Final Research Report*. U.S. Department of Labor, September 2005, which examines the employment experiences of a multi-state sample of former prisoners, and identifies the individual factors influencing the likelihood of employment after release from prison, using data gathered from interviews with prisoners before and at multiple times after release. Findings indicate that consistent work experience before incarceration, connection to employers before release, and conventional family relationships improve employment outcomes after release.

⁷ The National H.I.R.E. Network offers the following types of technical assistance ([H.I.R.E. Network](#)):

- Provides model legislation and briefing papers to support specific policy priorities that improve labor market outcomes for people with criminal records, including anti-discrimination, certificates of rehabilitation, or occupational licensing and employment standards. For the model policies, see [advocacy toolkits](#).
- Offers smart solutions to employers to help them access qualified workers, protect themselves from negligent hiring concerns, and maximize cost-savings. For a list of the benefits employers can accrue in hiring people with criminal records, see [Employer Resources](#).
- Provides peer-to-peer exchange of ideas and innovative practices that can be utilized by communities or states.
- Advises individuals, practitioners, researchers, and policymakers with information about barriers to employment, including state laws that affect individuals with criminal records and effective strategies to address them. For resources discussing these issues, see the [Clearinghouse section](#).
- Informs its members about research efforts that are relevant to workforce development and criminal justice initiatives. See the [Clearinghouse section](#) for information on current research.
- Provides information about federal legislation that directly impacts harder to employ populations, including people with criminal records. For information on our federal priorities, see the [advocacy page](#).

⁸ The average costs for training programs with a case management component have a high range – literally from \$1-\$2,000 per participant to over \$20,000. Most supportive job programs, like the one envisioned here, are found to be cost effective. (See, for example, *The Cost-Efficiency of Supported Employment Programs: A Literature Review*; Robert E. Cimera, 1999. Welfare to Work Programs, somewhat similar to the model suggested here, have found to be effective and cost in the \$4,000 per participant range. One program, the Portland, Oregon JOBS program, was found to be very effective even with persons with little experience who needed significant assistance and represents a good example for the LA-PRI. <http://evidencebasedprograms.org/1366-2/portland-job-opportunities-and-basic-skills-jobs-training-program>

⁹ The LA-PRI begins implementation this summer with the identification of six cohorts of 20 moderate to high risk and need prisoners who will be targeted several months prior to release and receive the benefit of the DPSC's new ReEntry Accountability (REAP) case planning and management system that includes community resource "prison in-reach" so that robust REAP plans are designed prior to release. The six cohorts of 20 prisoners include 5 groups of men returning to the first LA-PRI pilot communities (Caddo, East Baton Rouge, St. Tammany, Orleans and Jefferson) and one group of women returning to those same five parishes. St. Tammany and Orleans Parish are ready to participate in Ready4Work and their 20 prisoner cohorts (40 men) are the target population. Since Jefferson Parish has only recently agreed to support the LA-PRI and have not set a timetable for their participation, it is unclear when they'll be ready participate in this project. It is expected that with the continued support from Southeast Louisiana United Way, their 7 parish region can be organized in 2018.