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CURRENT STRATEGIES FOR REDUCING RECIDIVISM

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CURRENT STRATEGIES FOR REDUCING RECIDIVISM

Lise McKean, Ph.D., and Charles Ransford
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August 2004

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Recidivism is the relapse into criminal activity and is generally measured by a former prisoner's return to prison for a new offense. Rates of recidivism reflect the degree to which released inmates have been rehabilitated and the role correctional programs play in reintegrating prisoners into society. The rate of recidivism in the U.S. is estimated to be about two-thirds, which means that two-thirds of released inmates will be re-incarcerated within three years. High rates of recidivism result in tremendous costs both in terms of public safety and in tax dollars spent to arrest, prosecute, and incarcerate re-offenders. High rates of recidivism also lead to devastating social costs to the communities and families of offenders, as well as the personal costs to the offenders themselves. Due to these severe costs, programs for inmates and released inmates that reduce recidivism can be cost effective—even those that have modest rates of success.

In December 2003, the Developing Justice Coalition requested that the Center for Impact Research (CIR) conduct a study to identify the five states that have been the most successful in reducing rates of recidivism and the programs that have contributed to the state's success. CIR's research finds that states vary widely on their formula for determining rates of recidivism. Furthermore, data from program evaluations and measures of the impact of programs on recidivism are uneven in scope and quality.

These limitations in data on recidivism and program evaluation make it impossible to directly compare states and specific programs for their effects on recidivism. Therefore, CIR adopted an approach that reviewed published data and evaluations on programs for inmates and released inmates throughout the U.S. Thus, this study examines program components that were cited by multiple programs and states as being effective in reducing recidivism.

The three components for programs in prison and for aftercare programs in the community that are most frequently cited as key to reducing recidivism include:

- Substance abuse treatment
- Education
- Employment services

Substance abuse is a widespread problem among the prison population, with re-addiction after release a frequent cause of recidivism and a barrier to obtaining stable employment. The report specifically examines the role of drug courts and mandatory treatment, which are associated with a 31 percent reduction in recidivism. It also discusses the new Sheridan Correctional Facility in Illinois, which is a promising and robust model of not only substance abuse treatment in prison but also continued treatment and intensive case management and parole supervision for released inmates.

Educational programs address the needs of released prisoners to attain the skills to find and retain employment and typically include secondary, GED, higher education, and vocational training. Education is reported to reduce recidivism by 29 percent with the completion of high school education found to be the most pervasive need.

Employment services programs address the need of released inmates to find work and typically include job preparedness, career development skills, and job placement. The report specifically discusses New York's Community and Law Enforcement Resources Together program (ComALERT) as an example, which reports recidivism rates of 17 percent compared to 41 percent for those who do not participate in the program.

The report also examines programs that involve multiple components and are used to varying degrees in many jurisdictions. Faith-based programs provide prison chaplain services to entire prisons run by faith organizations. Some faith programs report reducing recidivism by as much as 50 to 60 percent. The potential of parole-based programs is significant because of the large number of people on parole and their unique opportunity to assist released inmates as they are transitioning back into society. Increased accountability within parole programs has been estimated to reduce recidivism by 10 to 20 percent.

Successful programs need to address the fact that inmates and former offenders are a diverse population, and a large proportion face multiple barriers to self-sufficiency—low levels of education, lack of employment experience, physical and mental health problems, and lack of stable housing. Therefore, solutions to the problem of recidivism must be multifaceted. For example, addressing employment issues will not be effective if substance abuse problems remain untreated.

Thus, a range of programs inside and outside prison are necessary to prepare inmates for release, to make referrals and provide services when they return to the community, and to support them in their efforts to find and retain employment and attain self-sufficiency. This coordinated approach geared toward building and supporting self-sufficiency is necessary for reducing the likelihood of former offenders becoming involved in criminal activity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Although the measurement of recidivism may lack clarity, it is clear that high rates of recidivism jeopardize public safety and escalate expenditures on law enforcement and criminal justice. Growing prison populations and high recidivism rates result in enormous individual, social, and economic costs. Prisons are increasingly being expected not only to house offenders, but also to contribute to transforming them into law-abiding citizens. These expectations lead to many different approaches that have the potential to transform prisons. The report outlines three major elements of programs that successfully reduce recidivism: treatment for substance abuse or mental illness can help remove barriers that prevent employment and integration; education provides the skills necessary for inmates to obtain the types of jobs that lead to more successful outcomes; and employment provides released inmates an income as well as supporting integration by increasing stability and self-confidence. Below are some general and specific recommendations.

Accountability

- Evaluate programs and replicate those that are successful and cost-effective.

Careful evaluation of programs is necessary to identify those that merit replication. For example, if the outcomes of the new Sheridan Correction Center are positive, Illinois should consider modeling other programs on Sheridan's comprehensive approach to rehabilitation. The Sheridan model encompasses the other recommendations outlined below, combining treatment with education and employment programs for inmates and improved parole supervision that is coordinated with community-based re-entry services.

- Increase accountability of prison and parole personnel for rehabilitation and recidivism.

Accountability is a current approach to increasing the effectiveness of government expenditure on programs, most notably in the "No Child Left Behind" national education policy. When people in charge of prison and parole programs are held accountable for specific outcomes, it increases the effort directed toward achieving them. For example, increasing parole accountability has been shown to decrease recidivism by 10 to 20 percent.

Rehabilitative Services for Inmates

- Conduct universal screening and assessment of inmates for mental illness and substance abuse.

Rates of substance abuse and mental illness are much higher among inmates than in the general population; prison intake procedures need to identify and refer individuals in need of substance abuse or mental health treatment.

- Increase the availability of effective substance abuse treatment and mental health treatment for inmates.

Treatment in prison has been shown to be cost effective, yet participation of inmates in treatment programs has decreased in recent years from 25 percent in 1991 to about 10 percent in 1997. This is compared to an estimated 70 to 85 percent of inmates who are believed to need substance abuse treatment. An estimated 40 percent of mentally ill inmates do not receive treatment.

- Make educational and vocational programs more accessible to inmates by increasing capacity and removing barriers and restrictions to enrollment.

Given the low levels of educational attainment among prisoners, the need for educational and vocational programs is high. However, access and availability are limited. Increasing enrollment in these programs would improve the employability of participants upon release.

Addressing the Needs of Released Inmates

- Identify prisoners at higher risk for recidivating and develop an appropriate service plan for them.

Any effort to reduce recidivism must recognize that the diversity of the prison population requires solutions that can address a myriad of inmate needs. No single program can reduce recidivism significantly because many different factors affect it. Released inmates encounter a range of common problems that contribute to returning to criminal behaviors.

- Provide effective and intensive parole supervision, case management, and monitoring after release.

Offenders often face multiple problems and challenges upon release—finding a place to live and a job, staying drug free, reuniting with family members, and rebuilding one’s life. Efforts to reduce recidivism require attention to the specific and changing circumstances of former offenders and need to provide access to services that can address them. The recent Illinois initiative, Operation Spotlight, promises to bring much-needed attention and resources to the area of parole supervision.

- Provide linkages to treatment programs outside of prison for released inmates.

The need for treatment for substance abuse and mental illness continues after an inmate leaves prison. Released inmates with substance abuse problems are at risk for re-addiction, which in turn increases the likelihood of involvement in criminal activity and parole violations. Effective linkages to treatment programs outside of prison are vital to the successful re-entry of prisoners. The Sheridan program incorporates this approach through its involvement of TASC clinical case management

- Coordinate parole with substance abuse and mental health treatment.

Better coordination of parole with substance abuse and mental health treatment would improve access and increase treatment options for technical parole violations, which are important since many violations are related to substance abuse and can result in return to prison.

INTRODUCTION

Recidivism is the relapse into criminal activity and is generally measured by a former prisoner's return to prison for a new offense. Rates of recidivism reflect the degree to which released inmates have been rehabilitated and the role correctional programs play in reintegrating prisoners into society. The rate of recidivism in the U.S. is estimated to be about two-thirds, which means that two-thirds of released inmates will be re-incarcerated within three years. High rates of recidivism result in tremendous costs both in terms of public safety and in tax dollars spent to arrest, prosecute, and incarcerate re-offenders. High rates of recidivism also lead to devastating social costs to the communities and families of offenders, as well as the personal costs to the offenders themselves. Due to these severe costs, programs for inmates and released inmates that reduce recidivism can be cost effective—even those that have modest rates of success.

Attention to rates of recidivism is an important way to monitor the role of prisons in rehabilitating inmates. Prisons have traditionally been designed to punish and confine those who break laws. However, as more and more tax dollars go to correctional budgets, public opinion and public policy increasingly are demanding that prisons expand programs that rehabilitate inmates and prepare them for return to their communities.

The effectiveness of prisons in rehabilitating inmates can be measured in ways besides recidivism. For example, reductions in substance abuse among released inmates and increases in their employment rates and educational levels are other examples. However, recidivism offers a more encompassing measure of a prison's efforts to rehabilitate inmates. Furthermore, recidivism affects a major social and economic concern: the rate of crime. Therefore, although they produce desirable social outcomes in that they educate prisoners or assist in recovery from substance abuse, another important benefit of programs that contribute to reducing recidivism is their effect on reducing crime and rates of re-incarceration.

The enormous and expanding cost in terms of public safety and tax dollars incurred by repeat offenders is a major concern of public policy. A Justice Department study of 15 states found that prisoners released in 1994 had been charged by 1997 with the following crimes: 2,900 homicides; 2,400 kidnappings; 2,400 rapes; 3,200 other sexual assaults; 21,200 robberies; 54,600 assaults; 13,900 other violent crimes; and over 200,000 car thefts, burglaries, and drugs and weapons offenses.¹ Many other crimes committed by released inmates are unreported or do not result in an arrest. Crimes by released inmates require ongoing expenditures on law enforcement and prisons, and reduce the public monies available for other important services such as education and community development. They also impose a tremendous cost on individuals, families, and communities by threatening public safety. Rehabilitation programs in prison and for released inmates provide opportunities for prisoners to change behaviors associated with criminal activity and learn more positive and productive ones. Success in reducing recidivism can translate into improvements in public safety and reintegration of former prisoners into the labor force, families, communities, schools, and religious organizations.²

¹ Heather MacDonald, "How to Straighten Out Ex-Cons," *City Journal*, Vol. 13, No. 2, 2003 Spring, p. 24-37.

² Amy L. Solomon, Michelle Waul, Asheley Van Ness, Jeremy Travis, "Outside the Walls: A National Snapshot of Community-based Prisoner Reentry Programs," Reentry National Media Outreach Campaign, January 27, 2004, http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/410911_OTWResourceGuide.pdf.

Reducing recidivism has scope for far-reaching benefits to communities where released prisoners reside, often their former neighborhoods. These communities typically experience significant disadvantage in terms of high rates of crime and unemployment, failing public schools, and prevalence of low-income households.³

Programs addressing recidivism exist at all levels of government and in the private and non-profit sectors. Due to budgetary pressures, many of these programs and services that affect the causes of recidivism have been severely curtailed or discontinued altogether.⁴ The lack of funding for these programs has adverse short term and long term consequences, particularly given the cost reductions associated with reducing recidivism. The high costs of incarceration heighten the cost-effectiveness of programs that contribute to reducing recidivism. For example, one study finds that “because the cost of failure is high in adult corrections, a program can be economically attractive if it can achieve quite small reductions in recidivism.”⁵

Government officials and community leaders are increasingly focusing on the need to improve services designed to assist released inmates. For example, the Council of State Governments coordinates the Re-Entry Policy Council, which researches and formulates recommendations for improving the transition back to the community of adults released from jail or prison.⁶ The Bureau of Prisons through the National Institute of Corrections is also developing a model for re-entry that will be piloted in nine states.⁷

STUDY DESIGN

In December 2003, the Developing Justice Coalition requested that the Center for Impact Research (CIR) conduct a study to identify the five states that have been the most successful in reducing rates of recidivism and the programs that have contributed to the state’s success.⁸ The original design of this project involved identifying states that were achieving significant reductions in recidivism and programs in these states that contributed to this reduction. The overall objective was to identify which programs have positive effects on recidivism. The initial project framework entailed a state level analysis. However, this level of analysis proved untenable due to two major problems: the diversity of definitions and

³ “Outside the Walls.”

⁴ “Learn about Re-entry,” U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, (no date), www.ojp.usdoj.gov/reentry/learn.html.

⁵ “Research Findings on Adult Corrections Programs: A Review,” Washington State Institute for Public Policy, January 1999, www.wsipp.wa.gov/rptfiles/researchfindingsES.pdf.

⁶ For more information about the Re-entry Policy Council and a preview of its forthcoming report on re-entry policy, see www.reentrypolicy.org.

⁷ Fox Butterfield, “Repaving the Long Road Out of Prison,” *New York Times*, May 4, 2004, p. 25.

⁸ Developing Justice Coalition members include: ACORN; Ambassadors for Christ Church; Brighton Park Neighborhood Council; Chicago Coalition for the Homeless; Community Renewal Society; Developing Communities Project; Foster Park Neighborhood Council; Garfield Area Partnership; Global Outreach Ministries; Inner-City Muslim Action Network; Northwest Neighborhood Federation; Organization of the North East; Protestants for the Common Good; SERV-US; Southwest Organizing Project; Target Area Development Corp.; and West Side Health Authority.

methods for measuring recidivism and difficulties in comparing evaluations of the effects of programs on recidivism.⁹

Variations in the definition of recidivism make it difficult to compare programs and states. Definitions may differ in how they measure recidivism based on the duration of time monitored, the types of offense included, and the inclusion of parole violations. Additionally, the measurement of recidivism can be further complicated because many programs target inmates with particular characteristics, which introduces a bias into data on recidivism. For example, the prisoners who choose to enroll in an education program may be more likely not to be rearrested, regardless of their participation in the program. Although the program may show a reduction in recidivism compared to other prisoners, the reduction in fact may reflect the specific characteristics of prisoners in the program rather than the effect of the program. Without consistent and unbiased data, it is not possible to determine conclusively which states are reducing recidivism most, which programs are more effective, or in some cases if a program is effective at all.

Evaluation data is limited on many programs, especially regarding recidivism. With budget limitations usually cited as the reason, few programs have conducted rigorous evaluations and some have not measured effects on recidivism at all.¹⁰ Additionally, many states do not have a statewide initiative regarding recidivism, which makes it difficult to analyze recidivism data at the state level. Programs are often implemented by individual prisons rather than throughout a state's prison system, and some programs are used in prisons throughout the country. Often program use is not correlated with state boundaries, making state level analysis problematic.

These factors preclude an accurate assessment of which states had the largest reductions in recidivism as well as which programs were responsible for the reductions. This study instead focuses on determining elements that are shared by successful programs. Although evaluation data for programs may not be definitive in regard to recidivism, there is substantial evidence that indicates certain types of programs and programmatic elements contribute to improving outcomes for released inmates and reducing recidivism. These limitations in data on recidivism and program evaluation make it impossible to directly compare states and specific programs for their effects on recidivism. Therefore, CIR adopted an approach that reviewed published data and evaluations on programs for inmates and released inmates throughout the U.S. Thus, this study examines program components that were cited by multiple programs and states as being effective in reducing recidivism.

⁹ The authors would like to thank David Olson of Loyola University Chicago and the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority and Michael Darcy of Gateway Foundation for their helpful suggestions on this research.

¹⁰ "Research Findings on Adult Corrections Programs."

DEFINING RECIDIVISM

Generally, recidivism is understood to be a relapse into prior criminal behavior and is measured by a former prisoner's return to prison for a new offense.¹¹ Although there is agreement on the broad definition, a myriad of differences characterize the details of the definition, making the measurement of recidivism "remarkable for [its] inconsistency."¹²

Specific definitions of recidivism differ in three major ways:

- Duration of time monitored
- Types of offenses included
- Inclusion of parole violations

First, the duration of time monitored differs significantly from state to state and program to program. For example, in 2001 released prisoners that committed new offenses two years after release would not be counted for recidivism in Massachusetts but would be counted in Oklahoma.¹³ States consider anywhere from one to 22 years in counting recidivism, with most using between one and three years. Three years is the most commonly used period of time and is generally considered to be sufficient for documenting the most serious re-offenders.

The duration also varies in terms of when agencies begin and end measurement. The measurement of duration may begin with release from incarceration, release from parole supervision, or release from a program. Generally, measurement begins at the time of release from prison, but in some cases, such as for the evaluation of a parole program, duration might be measured starting with release from parole.¹⁴ The endpoint for measuring duration also varies: some jurisdictions stop when a new offense is committed; other jurisdictions stop at the date of conviction, dates that can be more than a year apart.¹⁵ These differing approaches to determining starting and ending dates affect recidivism rates, and their variability complicates comparisons among recidivism rates.

Definitions of recidivism also differ based on the types of offenses counted, including the way in which parole violations are counted. For example, recidivism for the Florida Department of Corrections involves only the return to prison or a new sentence to Community Supervision for a new offense. If the person commits a lesser offense for which he or she is incarcerated in a county jail, the event is not counted as recidivism. Also not counted are technical violations of Community Supervision, which return the individual to prison. Technical violations include such things as failure to report to the parole officer at specified times. In the Colorado prison system, the definition of recidivism includes technical violations.

In some communities, recidivism includes new offenses (including misdemeanors) to which the offender is sentenced to serve local time even though he or she does not return to state correctional supervision. If

¹¹ John Roman, Wendy Townsend, Avinash Singh Bhati, "Recidivism Rates for Drug Court Graduates: Nationally Based Estimates, Final Report," July 2003, www.ncjrs.org/pdffiles1/201229.pdf.

¹² Michael D. Maltz, *Recidivism*, Academic Press, 1984, www.uic.edu/depts/lib/forr/pdf/crimjust/recidivism.pdf.

¹³ Allen R. Beck, "Recidivism: A Fruit Salad Concept in the Criminal Justice World," www.justiceconcepts.com/recidivism.htm.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

a revocation of parole involves a chargeable behavior, such as use of prohibited substances, the incident might not be considered recidivism in some communities. If a parolee commits a new offense that carries a shorter sentence to prison than would be served if parole were revoked, then the judge may choose to revoke parole. Thus, the parolee is not counted as having committed a new offense and it is not counted as recidivism. Some state prison systems either do not count or do not track parolees who commit new offenses in another state and are incarcerated out of state. Thus, a serious crime in another state may not be counted as recidivism.¹⁶

Another problem with the data is that statistics can be biased and therefore misleading because they are culled from samples of program participants who are often inconsistent across programs and with the general prison population. For example, some programs screen applicants to target the potentially most successful candidates. A National Institute of Justice (NIJ) study of boot camps noted this occurrence in recidivism rates for boot camps. These boot camp programs specifically targeted non-violent offenders with limited criminal history, a population which differs significantly from the prison population as a whole.¹⁷ Even for programs that do not screen applicants, participants that self-select to be in a program are often the types of prisoners who are more likely to be successful: "But in reality, the numbers to which they refer are often as dissimilar as apples, oranges, and grapes. Recidivism is a fruit salad concept in the criminal justice world."¹⁸ Such inconsistency can make comparisons of programs difficult and sometimes misleading.

Although the differences in the measurement of recidivism may preclude direct comparison of programs, it is still possible to comment on the effectiveness of individual programs based on their data. Thus, a range of programs can be examined and elements of those programs that may contribute to success can be identified.

Prison Statistics

It is well documented that the prison population in the United States is enormous and growing. At mid-year in 2003, the number of people incarcerated in the U.S. was 2,078,570. State and federal inmates accounted for about two-thirds of this population with the other third in local jails. Since 1995, the average annual increase in the incarcerated population was 3.7 percent.¹⁹

A large prison population predictably means a large number of people who are released back to the community. More than 630,000 people will be released from state and federal prisons this year with hundreds of thousands more released from local jails.²⁰ This number has increased from about 400,000 in 1990.²¹ With only a small proportion of prisoners serving life sentences, 97 percent of inmates will be released.²²

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Paige M. Harrison and Jennifer C. Karberg, "Prison and Jail Inmates at Midyear 2003," Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletin, May 2004, www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/pub/pdf/pjim03.pdf.

²⁰ www.lac.org/lac/main.php?view=overview

²¹ Edmund F. McGarrell, Natalie Hipple, Duren Banks, "Applying Problem Solving Approaches to Issues of Inmate Re-Entry: The Indianapolis Pilot Project, Final Report," February 2004, www.ncjrs.org/pdffiles1/nij/grants/203923.pdf.

²² "Repaving the Long Road Out of Prison."

White males constitute the largest population of prison inmates; however, in terms of the general population, a disproportionate number of inmates are African American. Women account for about 6.9 percent of inmates in 2003, up from 6.1 percent in 1995.²³ By far the most prevalent demographic group is young African American adult males. More than 10 percent of all African American men in their twenties are either in prison or in jail. The rate is even higher for young African American men who did not complete high school; about 60 percent of this group has prison records by their mid-thirties.²⁴ African Americans also make up a disproportionate percentage of the parole and probation population. In 2000, 64 percent of adult probationers and 55 percent of adult parolees were white; 34 percent of adult probationers and 44 percent of adult parolees were African American; and 16 percent of adult probationers and 21 percent of adult parolees were Latino.²⁵

The cost of incarceration is commonly estimated as being around \$30,000 a year for a felony adult male.²⁶ However, states vary in their expenditures.²⁷ For example, in fiscal year 2003, the Illinois Department of Corrections reported an average inmate cost per year of \$20,929 per adult and \$65,236 per juvenile.²⁸

Characteristics of Recidivism

Recidivism rates are estimated to range from approximately 41 to 70 percent depending on the method of measurement.²⁹ The figure cited by many studies reports that approximately two-thirds of released prisoners will re-offend within three years of release.³⁰ The recidivism rate in Illinois is reported to be 54 percent.³¹ California and Utah have the highest rates of recidivism with levels of 75 to 80 percent.³²

Rates of recidivism vary according to type of crime (Table 1). Property crimes are associated with a higher rate than other crimes, but all types of crimes have significantly high rates of recidivism.

²³ "Prison and Jail Inmates at Midyear 2003."

²⁴ Bruce Western, "Lawful Re-entry," *The American Prospect*, December 1, 2003, <http://www.prospect.org/print/V14/11/western-b.html>

²⁵ U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, August 28, 2001, p. 6, Table 5

²⁶ "Research Findings on Adult Corrections Programs."

²⁷ In comparing states' per capita costs, it must be kept in mind that as with recidivism, states calculate average costs of incarceration differently, with variability among states in the inclusion and exclusion of general revenue costs in the per capita costs.

²⁸ Illinois Department of Corrections, "Fiscal Year 2003 Fact Sheet," June 30, 2003, http://www.idoc.state.il.us/subsections/reports/fact_sheets/FY2003.pdf.

²⁹ Cathryn Chappell, "Post-Secondary Correctional Education and Recidivism: A Meta-Analysis of Research Conducted 1990-1999," Ph.D., University of Cincinnati, 2003.

³⁰ "Applying Problem Solving Approaches to Issues of Inmate Re-Entry."

³¹ "Waging War on Relapse," *Chicago Sun-Times*, January 30, 2004, p. 41.

³² "Education the Cure for California's High Rate of Recidivism," *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 13, 2004.

Table 1
Recidivism: Percent of released prisoners rearrested within 3 years, by offense, 1983 and 1994³³

	All released prisoners	Violent	Property	Drug	Public-order
1983	62.5%	59.6%	68.1%	50.4%	54.6%
1994	67.5%	61.7%	73.8%	66.7%	62.2%

Problematic Orientations to Recidivism

Before examining the programs that have shown successes in reducing recidivism, it is important to address problematic perceptions regarding approaches to recidivism. First, the “get tough” approach to crime in general has not been proven to be effective in reducing recidivism. Offenders entering prison with problems that make criminal behavior more likely will be at risk for returning to criminal behavior upon release if they do not receive rehabilitative services while in prison. Longer sentences might keep offenders out of society for longer periods of time. This approach can be counterproductive as longer sentences have been shown to increase recidivism.³⁴

The overall findings showed that harsher criminal justice sanctions had no deterrent effect on recidivism. On the contrary, punishment produced a slight (3 percent) increase in recidivism. These findings were consistent across subgroups of offenders (adult/youth, male/female, white/minority).³⁵

However, the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority reports contrary findings from its study of recidivism in Illinois, with data showing that the longer the time an inmate served, the lower the recidivism rate.³⁶

Another misperception is that the success of efforts to rehabilitate inmates are undermined because offenders often return to the same communities, where they can easily become involved again in criminal activity. However, studies have shown that recidivism was constant between inmates who returned to their former neighborhoods and inmates who relocated to new communities.³⁷ Although the high crime rates of neighborhoods where released inmates reside clearly affect recidivism—and vice versa—these conditions should not be seen as inevitably causing rehabilitation efforts to fail.

³³ “Recidivism of Prisoners Released in 1994,” Bureau of Justice Statistics, June 2002, www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/reentry/tables/reidivismtab.htm.

³⁴ “Only Education Breaks Cycle for Ex-convicts,” *San Antonio Express-News*, June 14, 2002, p. 6B.

³⁵ “The Effects of Punishment on Recidivism,” Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada, May 2002, www.psepc-sppcc.gc.ca/publications/corrections/pdf/200205_e.pdf.

³⁶ Illinois Criminal Justice Authority, personal communication, July 27, 2004.

³⁷ Laura Vozzella, “Study Finds Jobs after Prison Don't Cut Recidivism,” *The Baltimore Sun*, March 16, 2004, p. 10B.

FINDINGS ON PROGRAMS

Over twenty-five years ago, the New York State Governor’s Special Committee on Criminal Offenders funded a review and reanalysis of studies on correctional programs that has had a strong impact in correctional circles.³⁸ The study reported that “with few and isolated exceptions, the rehabilitative efforts that have been reported so far have had no appreciable effect on recidivism.”³⁹ This study popularized the attitude that criminals could not be reformed.⁴⁰ However, this orientation is beginning to change as a result of mounting public concern over the economic and social costs of incarceration.

In the past twenty-five years, a range of studies indicated that some programs in fact have shown successes, although the successes have been modest overall: “Even programs with the most favorable outcomes demonstrate success rates that many would consider modest. We found the most successful interventions for adult offenders lower the chance of re-offending by 10 to 15 percent.”⁴¹ However, as stated earlier, even programs with modest success have the potential to be cost effective.

This section discusses three specific program components—treatment, education, and employment services—that have been found to have positive effects on offenders and are related to reductions in recidivism. All of these elements address barriers to employment and self-sufficiency. Other factors related to employment, such as health, housing, and race, have independent effects on recidivism as well. The outcomes of programs focusing on these factors have not been well documented. Thus, discussion here concerns the three program components for which there are data showing outcomes and successes:

- Substance abuse treatment and mental health services
- Educational programs, including secondary, GED, higher education, and vocational training⁴²
- Employment services such as job preparedness and career development⁴³

A large proportion of prisoners face multiple barriers and require a range of services to prepare them for release and to assist them after their release. Therefore, effective programs need to provide access to all of the necessary services both while in prison and after release.

Treatment Programs

The prevalence of mental illness and substance abuse is much higher among the prison population than the general population.⁴⁴ Both of these conditions are barriers to employment and are directly related to higher rates of recidivism. For example, substance abuse often involves criminal activity through the use of illegal substances and thus is closely tied to recidivism, especially if parole is violated.

³⁸ D. Lipton, R. Martinson, and J. Wilks, *The Effectiveness of Correctional Treatment: A Survey of Treatment Evaluation Studies*, Praeger, 1975.

³⁹ Michael D. Maltz, *Recidivism*.

⁴⁰ “Lawful Re-entry.”

⁴¹ “Research Findings on Adult Corrections Programs.”

⁴² Testimony before the State of Illinois Prison Management Reform Committee of the Illinois House of Representatives, Safer Foundation, May 4, 2001, www.safer-fnd.org/documents/5_4_01.doc.

⁴³ Testimony before the State of Illinois Prison Management Reform Committee.

⁴⁴ “Outside the Walls.”

Treatment for Substance Abuse

The prevalence of substance abuse problems among inmates has prompted some to argue that drug use is a primary cause of recidivism.⁴⁵ Drugs and alcohol are clearly major problems related to both crime and recidivism. According to some experts, an estimated 50 percent of crimes are drug related.⁴⁶ About 20 percent of offenders report having committed their crime in order to obtain money for drugs.⁴⁷ Additionally, about 36 percent of offenders report using alcohol at the time of their offense.⁴⁸ The percentage of persons arrested in 1998 in 35 cities who tested positive for drugs ranged from 42.5 to 78.7 percent.⁴⁹

Drug treatment programs have demonstrated successful results. Most studies over the past two decades have shown that treatment programs reduce the incidence of criminal behavior and increase the length of time without a crime for released inmates.⁵⁰ Treatment also reduces the frequency and quantity of drugs consumed.⁵¹ Treatment is especially effective for low-level drug offenders who do not have substantial criminal histories.⁵² One study reported that treatment programs produced a 32 percent reduction in recidivism.⁵³ However, specific findings of effects of treatment on recidivism are limited. Cost effectiveness is also positive with one study stating: "Drug treatment programs are so cost effective that the money saved on crimes not committed just while offenders are in treatment is sufficient to offset the costs of treatment."⁵⁴

Despite the extent of the problem and the positive results of effective substance treatment programs, there is a widespread lack of such programs for inmates and released inmates. Only 61 percent of state prisons provide substance abuse treatment. Programs typically either involve residential facilities or counseling.⁵⁵ Participation of inmates in treatment programs has decreased in recent years from 25 percent in 1991 to about 10 percent in 1997.⁵⁶ This is compared to the estimated 70 to 85 percent of inmates who are believed to need substance abuse treatment.⁵⁷

Programs and facilities are being developed to begin to address this lack of effective treatment. One notable new program is the Sheridan Correctional Center in Illinois, which is a prison solely for medium security inmates with substance abuse problems. Its rehabilitative program has a capacity of about 1,300,

⁴⁵ "Consistent Drug Testing, Sanctions Lead to Probation Success," *Corrections Professional*, December 16, 2002.

⁴⁶ Testimony before the State of Illinois Prison Management Reform Committee.

⁴⁷ "Outside the Walls."

⁴⁸ "Criminal Offenders Statistics," U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/crimoff.htm>.

⁴⁹ "Drug Related Crime," Office of National Drug Control Policy, March 2000, <http://www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov/publications/factsht/crime/>.

⁵⁰ Faye S. Taxman, "Reducing Recidivism through a Seamless System of Care," Office of National Drug Control Policy, Treatment and Criminal Justice System Conference, February 20, 1998, www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov/treat/consensus/consensus.htm.

⁵¹ "Reducing Recidivism through a Seamless System of Care."

⁵² Joan Petersilia, "Probation in the United States," *Crime and Justice*, Vol. 22, 1997, pp. 149-200.

⁵³ "Drug Courts Reduce Recidivism by 32 percent," *Daily Record of Rochester*, November 14, 2003.

⁵⁴ "Reducing Recidivism through a Seamless System of Care."

⁵⁵ Daniel P. Mears, Laura Winterfield, John Hunsaker, Gretchen E. Moore, Ruth White; "Drug Treatment in the Criminal Justice System," Urban Institute, January 2003, www.urban.org/url.cfm?ID=410618.

⁵⁶ "Drug Treatment in the Criminal Justice System."

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

making Sheridan the largest facility of its kind. The prison collaborates with four different organizations to help provide rehabilitation services and treatment both in prison and after release.⁵⁸

Another approach to substance abuse problems is to separate offenders with drug problems into a system called a drug court. Drug courts originated in the 1990s largely as a result of prison overcrowding. These courts exclusively hear cases involving nonviolent, drug related offenses. Qualifying individuals are given the choice to participate in an intensive substance abuse treatment program instead of going to prison.

Drug courts are available throughout most of the U.S. According to one study they have been found to reduce recidivism by about 32 percent: "In comparing participants enrolled in six of the New York's oldest drug court programs to similar defendants from each jurisdiction that did not enter a drug court, the study found an average decline in recidivism of 31.7 percent for drug court participants (including both graduates and failures) in the year following program completion. Studies of drug courts in other states, including Maryland, Oregon, Florida and California, echo these findings."⁵⁹

Drug courts as well as other programs that involve court-mandated treatment have also been shown to be more effective than other types of treatment. One study found that 60 percent of drug court participants were still in the program within a year of starting compared to 10 to 30 percent for other programs.⁶⁰ With motivation provided by the criminal justice system, individuals are more likely to participate and complete treatment. A study of drug courts in the District of Columbia found that offenders are four times less likely to continue to use drugs when they are sanctioned, that is when they are punished for drug use or non-compliance and rewarded for good performance.⁶¹

Whether substance abuse treatment is provided to inmates in large facilities such as Sheridan or through drug courts mandating treatment, the expansion of access to treatment both in prison and in the community for released inmates and those mandated by drug courts is one key to reducing recidivism.

Treatment for Mental Illness

Another important need for effective treatment involves the substantial number of inmates with mental illness. Rates of mental illness, including disorders such as schizophrenia/psychosis, major depression, bipolar disorder, and post-traumatic stress disorder, are approximately two to four times greater in the prison population than in the general population. It is estimated that eight to 16 percent of inmates have at least one disorder that requires treatment.⁶² Mental illness often occurs in conjunction with substance abuse, which compounds barriers to employment and successful integration into society.

About 70 percent of state correctional facilities screen incoming prisoners for mental illness; and approximately 60 percent of mentally ill state prisoners have received treatment while in prison. About

⁵⁸ Gateway Foundation will provide treatment services; the SAFER Foundation will provide employment services; TASC Inc., will manage the re-entry process; and the Developing Justice Coalition will provide community outreach, *Chicago Sun-Times*, "Waging War on Relapse," January 30, 2004, p. 41.

⁵⁹ "Drug Courts Reduce Recidivism by 32 percent."

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ "Reducing Recidivism through a Seamless System of Care."

⁶² "Outside the Walls."

half of those receiving treatment have taken prescription medication for their disorder, and 44 percent received counseling services.⁶³

In addition to inadequate screening and lack of access to effective mental health treatment, many of the existing programs for inmates with mental illness do not sufficiently prepare them for release or follow up with them after they return to the community. About two-thirds of prisons provide released inmates with a referral for mental health services, but few assist with arranging appointments and following up to ensure that treatment is received. Parole agencies usually do not address the mental health problems of released inmates; less than a quarter of parole programs reported any kind of special programs for released inmates with mental health problems.⁶⁴

One promising program for inmates with mental illness is the Dangerous Mentally Ill Offender Program (DMIO) in Olympia, Washington. The program began in 2000 and involves enhanced screening of incoming inmates and enhanced treatment for those with identified problems. Results are limited due to small numbers of participants, but they suggest improvements in mental health and substance abuse with 83 percent of DMIO clients receiving treatment compared to 10 percent of clients in other programs.⁶⁵

Educational Programs

Low educational attainment is a major barrier to employment for many released inmates. Education gives individuals basic skills to enter the labor market. It also develops a sense of self-efficacy and accomplishment for released inmates.⁶⁶ These effects of education make it a fundamental tool for reducing recidivism. With their modest requirements for implementation, educational programs are among the most basic rehabilitative programs that a prison can offer. Most prisons have educational programs ranging from coursework to vocational training. However, limited slots and restrictions on enrollment mean that only a small proportion of inmates are able to participate. In 1997, about 35 percent of inmates participated in educational programs, and about 27 percent received vocational training.⁶⁷

A high school degree is the most common educational need among inmates.⁶⁸ In 1997, about 41 percent of inmates in state and federal prisons and 31 percent of inmates in local jails had not completed high school or its equivalent, compared to 18 percent of the general population.⁶⁹ The lack of a high school degree is associated with a higher incidence of criminal activity, with studies linking lower levels of educational attainment to higher rates of crime and recidivism.⁷⁰ However, little research has been conducted to determine the effect of prison education programs on recidivism. One study found that prison education programs such as GED courses reduced recidivism by 29 percent, but the characteristics

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Lou Marano, "Analysis: Prison Education Cuts Recidivism," UPI, September 10, 2003.

⁶⁷ "Outside the Walls." These percentages may include some overlap for inmates that participated in both educational programs and vocational training.

⁶⁸ Heather Mac Donald, "How to Straighten Out Ex-Cons," *City Journal*, Spring 2003, Vol. 13, No. 2, p. 24-37.

⁶⁹ Caroline Wolf Harlow, "Special Report, Education and Correctional Populations," Bureau of Justice Statistics, January 2003, www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/pub/pdf/ecp.pdf.

⁷⁰ "Only Education Breaks Cycle for Ex-convicts."

of participants may bias these data.⁷¹ Other studies have also shown improvements in recidivism, particularly for participants over 26 years old.⁷²

Nearly every prison has GED courses and in some cases vocational training as well. The curriculum is well established and positive results are indicated, especially for older inmates. However, participation is limited. Although further data is necessary to better understand the reasons for low participation, reasons may include conflicts with other activities, restrictions related to age and length of sentence, and lack of capacity resulting in long waiting lists. Limitations on enrollment in programs and long waiting lists can combine to further restrict the ability of a large number of inmates with shorter sentences to enroll in or complete programs. Furthermore, planning for release should include referrals for educational services, so that GED and other educational programs can be undertaken or completed.

Employment Programs

Work programs can be administered while in prison to provide inmates with experience and skills that increase their employability upon release. There is no national program designed to provide inmates with useful opportunities to work while in prison. The types of programs that are in place, however, are not necessarily designed to reduce recidivism.⁷³ Work programs are implemented for a variety of reasons, including earning revenue for the prison and occupying and pacifying inmates. Although the programs were not specifically intended to reduce recidivism, studies of some work programs report reduced recidivism rates, but qualify these findings by admitting biased data. As mentioned earlier, the self-selection process of program participants results in a group who are less likely to revert to criminal behavior with or without the program.⁷⁴ Studies have shown substantial effects of employment programs on reducing recidivism for older men.⁷⁵

Released prisoners need employment to attain self-sufficiency and be better able to avoid involvement in criminal activity. Without income from employment, released prisoners are more likely to turn to crime for economic support. Research has consistently shown this link between post-release employment and recidivism.⁷⁶ Employment, however, is important for many reasons beyond the basic need for income. Employment also provides a stabilizing routine, occupies time that might otherwise be used for illegal activity, keeps individuals responsive to employer's behavioral demands, and provides a non-stigmatized social role.⁷⁷ Although work is important, not all types of employment have the same effect on recidivism. Higher wages are an important factor in reducing recidivism.⁷⁸ Generally speaking, only jobs that are high quality in terms of pay or viable careers have been shown to reduce recidivism.⁷⁹

There is an enormous gap between the need for stable employment that pays self-sufficiency wages and the availability of such jobs to released inmates. Studies have shown that having been to prison reduces

⁷¹ Stephen Steurer, Linda Smith, and Alice Tracy, "The Three State Recidivism Study," Maryland Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services, www.dpsscs.state.md.us/doc/pdfs/three-state-recidivism-study-summary.pdf.

⁷² "Outside the Walls."

⁷³ Shawn Bushway, "Reentry and Prison Work Programs," Urban Institute, May 2003, www.urban.org/url.cfm?ID=410853.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ "Lawful Re-entry."

⁷⁶ "Outside the Walls."

⁷⁷ "Reducing Recidivism through Work."

⁷⁸ "Outside the Walls."

⁷⁹ "Reducing Recidivism through Work."

the wages of released prisoners by 10 to 15 percent.⁸⁰ Former offenders not only face lower wages, but also an array of other barriers such as the stigma associated with a criminal record, employer attitudes, and legal barriers.⁸¹

Additionally, time in prison is time away from the workforce, where valuable skills and experience can be obtained.⁸² Many prisoners do not have access to work opportunities while in prison; of prisoners released in 1997, just over half had a work assignment. Furthermore, prisoners are exposed to forms of prison subculture that can strengthen links to criminality instead of employment. Independent of other factors, the more time a person spends in prison, the less likely he or she will be to obtain employment.⁸³ To be successful, employment programs must assist inmates overcome barriers to obtaining quality jobs that pay self-sufficiency wages.

Job training and placement programs have shown promise in reducing recidivism by helping released prisoners obtain skills and connect with employers.⁸⁴ These types of programs enroll inmates when they leave prison and are attempting to find stable employment. Over the years, a number of federal programs have addressed the issue of employment for those being released from prison, beginning with the Manpower Demonstration and Training Act (MDTA) of 1962. This law supported skills improvement programs for released prisoners. The Transitional Aid Research Project (TARP) of 1963 provided unemployment benefits for newly released offenders for up to a year. The Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) of 1973 provided employment assistance to released prisoners. Some programs have been provided more recently under the Department of Labor as well as the more recent Serious and Violent Offender Re-Entry Initiative under the Department of Justice, which coordinates funding for smaller individual programs provided by government agencies, social service organizations, and community based organizations.

Studies of these federal programs have shown limited reductions in recidivism and cite a variety of reasons for this. One important reason is the lack of job placement assistance, case management, and other follow-up services. Success for employment programs that place released inmates into jobs as soon as they leave prison is often dependent on the prison developing strong relationships with employers who are willing to hire individuals with criminal backgrounds. Follow-up employment services with released inmates allow potential employers to be more comfortable hiring people with a criminal record, knowing that third-party intermediaries are available to assist these employees address and avert problems. A barrier to the success of many of these employment programs is that they did not address the multiple barriers to employment faced by released prisoners.⁸⁵ As stated earlier, services that only address employment will not successfully meet the needs of people who may also have problems with substance abuse or mental illness or who lack education, skills, and work experience. A more comprehensive approach is required.

New York's Community and Law Enforcement Resources Together program (ComALERT) is a notable example of a successful employment services program for former inmates. ComALERT provides services

⁸⁰ "Lawful Re-entry."

⁸¹ "Reducing Recidivism through Work."

⁸² "Outside the Walls."

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ "Reducing Recidivism through Work."

outside of prison to crime-involved youth, drug offenders, and individuals leaving prison. The program involves over 150 community organizations in making job referrals as well as providing jobs through a welfare-to-work organization. The program also offers housing and drug treatment services.⁸⁶ ComALERT works closely with the police and parole officers as well as with community-service organizations. Links to organizations and to the criminal justice system assist individuals obtain the help that they need. These connections help stabilize released inmates during the critical period immediately after release by providing links to jobs, social services, and housing.⁸⁷ The key feature in the ComALERT model is the linkage of the program with the criminal justice system and the community, which creates a network through which released inmates can access the services that assist them find employment and begin to rebuild their lives.

ComALERT has not had a formal evaluation due to lack of funding, but it reports promising program outcomes. After one year, 6.6 percent of ComALERT participants were rearrested compared to about 16 percent of Brooklyn parolees. After three years, the ComALERT recidivism rate was 17 percent compared to 41 percent of parolees.⁸⁸ These results are affected by bias due to the program's focus on those who will most likely respond well to treatment and transitional employment.⁸⁹ Given this bias, it is difficult to conclusively assess the program's success; yet the large difference in rates indicates that the program warrants further evaluation.

ComALERT is a low-cost program. As currently being run in Brooklyn, the program's costs include the salary of one full-time social worker and "a fraction of the time of one prosecutor."⁹⁰ However, the current program is limited in scope with only about 200 inmates enrolled per year.

Other states are also recognizing the need for work programs to prepare inmates for employment after their release. For example, the Illinois Department of Corrections is opening the Greene County Work Camp, a satellite of the Jacksonville Correctional Center. The camp will enroll 200 inmates who are in their final six to 12 months of incarceration; participants will perform work to support municipalities and park districts.⁹¹

Other Types of Programs

Several other types of programs that have been used to address recidivism are discussed below. Although these programs do not have strong data regarding their efficacy, many have reported successes and involve components discussed in the previous section.

Parole-based Programs

Another approach to recidivism involves improving parole programs to help with the released inmate's return to society. After serving part of a maximum sentence and maintaining good behavior in prison, an inmate may be released from prison on parole. The inmate remains in the criminal justice system through

⁸⁶ "Lawful Re-entry."

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ "Governor's Proposal for Department of Corrections Budget," Press release from the Office of the Governor of Illinois, February 18, 2004,

<http://www.illinois.gov/PressReleases/ShowPressRelease.cfm?SubjectID=1&RecNum=2741>.

the parole agency, which provides oversight of the inmate. The policies, practices, and agencies supervising parolees vary across different states and jurisdictions, and these differences affect the rate of recidivism.⁹²

Because violations of parole can result in return to prison, they play a large role in the high rates of recidivism. From 1990 to 1998, the number of parole violators returned to prison increased 54 percent while the number of new offenders increased 7 percent. Since 1998, the number of parole violators returned to prison has increased slightly.⁹³

Parole supervision offers a crucial opportunity to impact released inmates at the time when they are most likely to recidivate. The primary responsibility of parole offices is to prevent released inmates from recommitting crimes. This is largely accomplished by monitoring parolees in terms of curfews, personal contacts, controlled substance use, and employment.⁹⁴

Because funding is limited, in many areas parole caseloads can exceed 100 per case manager, making it extremely difficult to provide adequate attention to each parolee; meetings may occur on regular monthly schedules, but supervision of progress with programs for treatment, employment, or education is rare.⁹⁵ High caseloads make it difficult to enforce the parole requirement of seeking and maintaining employment. In New York City, only 53 percent of parolees are employed.⁹⁶ As stated earlier, higher rates of employment are linked to lower rates of recidivism.

This system could be improved by increasing resources available to parole programs and requiring parole officers and managers to be accountable for rates of recidivism of clients. The federal probation department for the Eastern District of New York is creating a program with this requirement. The program is modeled on the Compstat meetings used by the New York City Police Department to analyze crime patterns and hold precincts accountable.⁹⁷ Reductions in recidivism due to requiring greater accountability of parole officers are estimated to be between 10 and 20 percent.⁹⁸

With its recently announced program, Operation Spotlight, Illinois is increasing resources for parolee supervision and services.⁹⁹ The initiative will double the number of parole agents over a four-year period, improving supervision and monitoring of parolees as well as better targeting higher risk parolees. The focus on community re-entry, including accountability and job placement, has as its ultimate goal reducing crime and recidivism.

Faith-based Programs

Faith-based programs are widespread in prisons. All prisons have at least a prison chaplain available to meet with inmates. Other programs are more encompassing and involve intensive Bible-based

⁹² Michael D. Maltz, *Recidivism*.

⁹³ "Prison and Jail Inmates at Midyear 2003."

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ "Probation in the United States."

⁹⁶ "How to Straighten Out Ex-Cons."

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ "Governor's Proposal for Department of Corrections Budget," Office of the Governor of Illinois.

rehabilitation as well as entire prisons run by faith-based organizations.¹⁰⁰ The nation's first faith-based prison for women opened in Florida in April 2004.¹⁰¹

The Prison Fellowship program in Texas has reported a 50 percent drop in recidivism.¹⁰² As with other programs, findings must be considered cautiously because the possibility for biased data based on the participant's self-selection into the program.¹⁰³ One study for a program targeting at-risk youth indicates that faith-based organizations face many challenges related to personnel policies, hiring practices, revenue, fiscal management, and communicating with the secular world about their work.¹⁰⁴

The federal Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives under the current administration is charged with involving faith-based programs in efforts to address social issues. With new federal funding for faith-based approaches, many programs have been introduced that use faith-based approaches to address recidivism. Thousands of faith-based and community organizations currently provide released inmates with services such as food, housing, job placement, substance abuse treatment, and mentoring.

One important advantage of faith-based approaches is their existing tie to the community in which the released inmate resides and the credibility that these organizations generally have within the community.¹⁰⁵ This strong community tie enables faith-based organizations to help released inmates reintegrate themselves while protecting the local community.¹⁰⁶

An example of a faith-based program addressing recidivism is the InnerChange Faith Initiative, run by the Prison Fellowship and currently active in Minnesota, Iowa, Kansas, and Texas. This Christian-based rehabilitation program is open to any inmate. The program involves Christian worship, with up to 16 hours of religious teachings per day, seven days a week, as well as work and mentoring from members of local churches. Educational instruction is also available and is combined with prayer and Bible study.¹⁰⁷

Studies of this program suggest greatly lowered recidivism rates, but again because of the self-selection of participants, these findings involve potentially biased data.¹⁰⁸ One study of Prison Fellowship programs found that after one year in the program, participants were three times less likely to be rearrested. The InnerChange Faith Initiative specifically has shown reductions in recidivism of about 60 percent.¹⁰⁹

Other Programs

There have been many other approaches to reducing recidivism. A program in Baltimore pays parolees \$25 per month to stay crime free.¹¹⁰ Other programs call for more accountability for prison wardens regarding recidivism.¹¹¹ Another approach attempts to rehabilitate inmates through behavioral therapy.

¹⁰⁰ "Outside the Walls."

¹⁰¹ April 26, 2004, www.jointogether.org/sa/news/summaries/reader/0%2C570670%2C00.html.

¹⁰² Craig Gustafson, "Minnesota Launches Faith-Based Prison Initiative to Reduce Recidivism," Associated Press, July 16, 2002.

¹⁰³ "Outside the Walls."

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ "Minnesota Launches Faith-Based Prison Initiative."

¹⁰⁸ "How to Straighten Out Ex-Cons."

¹⁰⁹ "Outside the Walls."

¹¹⁰ Robert Redding Jr., "State to Pay Parolees Who Behave Selves," *Washington Times*, November 19, 2003, p. B1.

¹¹¹ "How to Straighten Out Ex-Cons."

One example is Moral Reconciliation Therapy (MRT), which seeks to address crime by increasing participants' reasoning abilities so they become less self-centered and more concerned for the welfare of others. MRT has been used in association with programs for substance abuse, drunk drivers, and perpetrators of domestic violence. It covers subjects such as parenting, job attitude, treatment readiness, and antisocial thinking.¹¹²

MRT currently is used in 30 states and has reported reductions in recidivism rates of 25 to 60 percent.¹¹³ The effects of this treatment are reported to last up to ten years and also to translate into improvements in disciplinary issues, with incidence rates for misconduct in prison, on parole, or on probation reduced by 28 to 50 percent, as well as enhanced employment. The program's cost effectiveness is estimated to be substantial, with every \$1 translating into \$11.48 in savings.¹¹⁴

Other approaches concentrate efforts on inmates who are about to be released, working on individual needs to improve integration. One such program is the Re-Entry Initiative through the Utah State Prison system. This program targets individuals who will be released within six months and teaches them living skills and assesses barriers in terms of education, housing, and employment. Once on parole, individuals in the program have increased contact with parole managers. This program has reported reductions in recidivism of 9 percent with a total savings of over 18 months of \$5 million.¹¹⁵

The Department of Justice through its Office of Justice Programs (OJP) has a similar program that targets high risk, serious, and violent offenders called Serious and Violent Offender Re-Entry Initiative or the Going Home program. This program targets inmates as they are about to be released and provides life skills training and other needed services. The program also calls for long term support to ensure continued reductions in recidivism.¹¹⁶

RECOMMENDATIONS

Although the measurement of recidivism may lack clarity, it is clear that high rates of recidivism jeopardize public safety and escalate expenditures on law enforcement and criminal justice. Growing prison populations and high recidivism rates result in enormous individual, social, and economic costs. Prisons are increasingly being expected not only to house offenders, but also to contribute to transforming them into law-abiding citizens. These expectations lead to many different approaches that have the potential to transform prisons. The report outlines three major elements of programs that successfully reduce recidivism: treatment for substance abuse or mental illness can help remove barriers that prevent employment and integration; education provides the skills necessary for inmates to obtain the types of jobs that lead to more successful outcomes; and employment provides released inmates an income as well as supporting integration by increasing stability and self-confidence. Below are some general and specific recommendations.

¹¹² Gregory L. Little, "Cognitive-Behavioral Treatment of Offenders," *Addictive Behaviors Treatment Review*, 2000, Volume 2, p. 12-21.

¹¹³ "Research Findings on Adult Corrections Programs."

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ Michael N. Westley, "Program Helping Parolees Stay Out," *Salt Lake Tribune*, May 6.

¹¹⁶ <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/reentry/learn.html>.

Accountability

- Evaluate programs and replicate those that are successful and cost-effective.

Careful evaluation of programs is necessary to identify programs that merit replication. For example, if the outcomes of the new Sheridan Correction Center are positive, Illinois should consider modeling other programs on Sheridan's comprehensive approach to rehabilitation. The Sheridan model encompasses the other recommendations outlined below, combining treatment with education and employment programs for inmates and improved parole supervision that is coordinated with community-based re-entry services.

- Increase accountability of prison and parole personnel for rehabilitation and recidivism.

Accountability is a current approach to increasing the effectiveness of government expenditure on programs, most notably in the "No Child Left Behind" national education policy. When people in charge of prison and parole programs are held accountable for specific outcomes, it increases the effort directed toward achieving them. For example, increasing parole accountability has been shown to decrease recidivism by 10 to 20 percent.

Rehabilitative Services for Inmates

- Conduct universal screening and assessment of inmates for mental illness and substance abuse.

Rates of substance abuse and mental illness are much higher among inmates than in the general population; prison and intake procedures need to identify and refer individuals in need of substance abuse or mental health treatment.

- Increase the availability of effective substance abuse treatment and mental health treatment for inmates.

Treatment in prison has been shown to be cost effective, yet participation of inmates in treatment programs has decreased in recent years from 25 percent in 1991 to about 10 percent in 1997. This is compared to an estimated 70 to 85 percent of inmates who are believed to need substance abuse treatment. An estimated 40 percent of mentally ill inmates do not receive treatment.

- Make educational and vocational programs more accessible to inmates by increasing capacity and removing barriers and restrictions to enrollment.

Given the low levels of educational attainment among prisoners, the need for educational and vocational programs is high. However, access and availability are limited. Increasing enrollment in these programs would improve the employability of participants upon release.

Addressing the Needs of Released Inmates

- Identify prisoners at higher risk for recidivating and develop an appropriate service plan for them.

Any effort to reduce recidivism must recognize that the diversity of the prison population requires solutions that can address a myriad of inmate needs. No single program can reduce recidivism significantly because many different factors affect it. There are common problems that many released inmates encounter that contribute to returning to criminal behaviors. According to one study, based on what is known about these problems, “researchers and practitioners can classify groups of offenders according to their relative likelihood of committing new offenses with as much as 80 percent accuracy.”¹¹⁷

- Provide effective and intensive parole supervision, case management, and monitoring after release.

Offenders often face multiple problems and challenges upon release—finding a place to live and a job, staying drug free, reuniting with family members, and rebuilding one’s life. Efforts to reduce recidivism require attention to the specific and changing circumstances of former offenders and need to provide access to services that can address them. The recent Illinois initiative, Operation Spotlight, promises to bring much-needed attention and resources to the area of parole supervision.

- Provide linkages to treatment programs outside of prison for released inmates.

The need for treatment for substance abuse and mental illness continues after an inmate leaves prison. Released inmates with substance abuse problems are at risk for re-addiction, which in turn increases the likelihood of involvement in criminal activity and parole violations. Effective linkages to treatment programs outside of prison are vital to the successful re-entry of prisoners.

- Coordinate parole with substance abuse and mental health treatment.

Better coordination of parole with substance abuse and mental health treatment would improve access and increase treatment options for technical parole violations, which are important since many violations are related to substance abuse and can result in return to prison.

¹¹⁷ “Learn about Re-entry,” U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, www.ojp.usdoj.gov/reentry/learn.html.

APPENDIX

The following list of sample programs is from “Outside the Walls: A Snapshot of Community-based Prisoner Reentry Programs.”¹¹⁸

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS

America Works, Inc.—Criminal Justice Program	NY, MD and DC
Center for Employment Opportunities	New York, NY
Center for Young Women’s Development	
—Girls’ Detention Advocacy Project	San Francisco, CA
Delancey Street Foundation	CA, NY, NC, NM
Enhanced Job Skills Program	Lafayette, LA
Fundamentals of Construction and Understanding Self	Austin, TX
Goodwill Industries of the Chesapeake	
—Supporting Ex-Offenders in Employment	
Training and Transitional Services	Baltimore, MD
Institute for Social and Economic Development	
—Microenterprise Training for Women	
in Corrections	IA
National H.I.R.E. Network	National
Offender Re-Entry Program	MA
Pioneer Human Services	Seattle, WA
Project RIO	TX
Safer Foundation	IL and IA
South Forty and Fresh Start	NY
The Center for Fathers, Families, and Workforce Development / STRIVE	MD, CA, CT, DC, FL, GA, IL, MA, MI, NC, NY, PA
Welfare to Work Partnership Law Project	IL, CA, FL, LA, NY
Women Arise—PROVE Project	Detroit, MI

¹¹⁸ Urban Institute in collaboration with Outreach Extensions for the Reentry National Media Outreach Campaign, http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/410911_OTWResourceGuide.pdf.

TREATMENT AND RE-ENTRY PROGRAMS

Centerforce—Get Connected	CA
Case Management Support Services —Community Reintegration of Offenders with Mental Illness and Substance Abuse	PA
Dangerous Mentally Ill Offender Program	WA
Hampden County Correctional and Community Health Program	Springfield, MA
Iowa Re-entry Court	Cedar Rapids, IA
KEY-Crest Substance Abuse Program	DE
Mental Health Services Continuum Program	CA
Project Return	New Orleans, LA
Project Success	Largo, FL
Rhode Island Prison Release Program & Project Bridge	Providence, RI
Risk Reduction—HIV/AIDS Services	NY
Thresholds Jail Program	Chicago, IL
Tuerk House, Inc.	Baltimore, MD
Winners' Circle—TASC, Inc.	IL

HOUSING AND RE-ENTRY PROGRAMS

Bethel New Life	Chicago, IL
Cameo House	San Francisco, CA
Dismas Charities	KY, GA, FL, MI, NM, TN, TX
Dismas House of Massachusetts	MA, IN, NM, TN, VT
Fifth Avenue Committee —Developing Justice in South Brooklyn	Brooklyn, New York
The Fortune Society	New York, NY
Health, Housing and Integrated Services Network	CA
Kintock Group	NJ and PA
Prisoners Aid Association of Maryland	MD
The Ridge House	Reno, NV
Sarah Powell Huntington House	New York, NY
Volunteers of America-Delaware Valley	Camden, NJ

FAMILY AND RE-ENTRY PROGRAMS

Aid to Children of Imprisoned Mothers	East Point, GA
Center for Children of Incarcerated Parents	National
Chicago Legal Advocacy for Incarcerated Mothers	Chicago, IL
Community Re-Entry	Cleveland, OH
Families in Crisis	CT
Family Life Center	Providence, RI
Family Re-entry Program	Norwalk, CT
FamilyWorks	NY
Girl Scouts Beyond Bars	AZ, CA, DE, FL, KY, MD, NJ, OH
John C. Inmann Work & Family Center	Denver, CO
La Bodega de la Familia New York, NY	
National Fatherhood Initiative	
– Long Distance Dads	PA, AL, AZ, CA, FL, IL, IA, KS, KY, ME, MI, MN, MO, NC, ND, NJ, OH, PA, TN, TX, UT, VT, WA, WI, WV
Public Action in Correctional Effort, and Offender Aid and Restoration	Indianapolis, IN
Salvation Army	
– Aftercare Transitional Services Program	Philadelphia, PA
Women’s Prison Association and Home, Inc.	NY

RE-ENTRY AND PUBLIC SAFETY PROGRAMS

Boston Re-entry Initiative	Boston, MA
Community Orientation and Reintegration Program	PA
Greater Newark Safer Cities Initiative	Newark, NJ
Harlem Parole Re-entry Court	Harlem, NY
Indianapolis Violence Reduction Partnership	Indianapolis, IN
Knoxville Public Safety Collaborative	Knoxville, TN
Maryland Re-entry Partnership Initiative	MD
Ohio Community-Oriented Re-entry Project	OH
Parolee Orientation Program	Sacramento, CA
Project Greenlight	New York, NY
Resolve to Stop the Violence Project	San Francisco, CA
San Antonio Fighting Back	
– Young Offenders Re-entry Coalition	San Antonio, TX
Savannah Impact Program	Savannah, GA
Southside Day Reporting Center	Chicago, IL
Transition Project	OR
Vermont Restorative Re-entry Partnerships	VT
Wisconsin Going Home Project	WI
Women in Transition	Salisbury, MA

FAITH-BASED PROGRAMS

Amachi	Philadelphia, PA
Conquest Offender Reintegration Ministries	Washington, DC
Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency	
– Faith Community Partnership	Washington, DC
Detroit Transition of Prisoners	Detroit, MI
Episcopal Social Services	
– Network Program	New York, NY
Helping Up Mission	
– Spiritual Recovery Program	Baltimore, MD
Inner-City Muslim Action Network	Chicago, IL
Kairos Horizon Communities in Prison	FL, OH, OK, TX
Keystone Ministries	Vicksburg, MS
Men of Valor	Oakland, CA
New Horizons Ministries	Cannon City, CO
Prison Fellowship Ministries	
– InnerChange Freedom Initiative	TX, IA, KS, MN
Prodigal Ministries	Louisville, KY
Project Blanket	Pittsburgh, PA
St. Leonard’s Ministries	Chicago, IL
Teen Challenge	National
Wheeler Mission Ministries	Indianapolis, IN
Woman at the Well House Ministries	San Antonio, TX

DEVELOPING JUSTICE COALITION

The overarching goal of the Developing Justice Coalition is to provide a platform that educates and empowers residents and local clergy to take leadership roles in addressing the current policies in the administration of justice in Illinois. These local leaders work in partnership with politicians, public officials, and other community leaders to dismantle discriminatory policy and to develop new policy that helps to sustain and promote healthy urban communities.

Developing Justice Coalition
Reverend Patricia Watkins, Convener
TARGET Area Development Corp.
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CENTER FOR IMPACT RESEARCH

Founded in 1975, the Center for Impact Research (CIR) focuses its work on issues of economic and social justice. CIR uses community-based research to advocate for and achieve changes in public policy and programs. The Center works collaboratively with diverse partners, who are all striving to eliminate the fundamental causes of poverty and injustice. CIR is focusing its current work in four project areas: Working Families; Children and Adolescents; Seniors; and Alternatives to Incarceration.

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