

# Life Inside and Out:

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A Look at the Rehabilitation of Inmates in the  
American Prison System

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## **Life Inside and Out: A Look at the Rehabilitation of Inmates in the American Prison System**

America is widely acclaimed for being the land of the free where individuals of all shapes, sizes, colors, and backgrounds have equal opportunities to find success and live the American Dream. That freedom applies to each and every American citizen, except, of course, those confined to one of the five thousand federal and state prisons nationwide. In 2011, there were nearly 2.3 million people imprisoned in the United States.<sup>1</sup> That means the number of prisoners confined in America is larger than the entire population of New Mexico. If the number of US residents who are on probation and/or parole is taken into account, the correctional population soars to nearly 7.3 million individuals.<sup>2</sup> In fact, over the past four decades, the number of prisoners in America has increased more than 700%.<sup>3</sup> Further, the number of individuals incarcerated is estimated to increase three times faster than the general population over the next five years.<sup>4</sup>

Every year approximately sixty- four billion US tax dollars are spent within established penitentiaries to house, feed, supervise and medically care for confined individuals.<sup>5</sup> At a time of economic hardship, these tax dollars could be used to improve society through education or medical advancements instead of catering to the needs of millions of restrained prisoners. The amount of tax dollars spent on housing prisoners,

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Teague, "Probation in America: Armed, private and unaffordable?" *Probation Journal* 58 no 317 (2011): 317.

<sup>2</sup> Teague, "Probation in America," 321.

<sup>3</sup> Peter Katel, "Prison Reform," *CQ Researcher* 17, no 3 (2007): 291.

<sup>4</sup> Katel, "Prison Reform," 289.

<sup>5</sup> Robert DeFina and Lance Hannon, "Cruel & Unusual: The True Costs of Our Prison System," *Commonweal* 13, no 2 (2011): 11.

unfortunately, will continue to grow along with the escalating number of convicts who enter, or reenter, the prison system each day. This budget-breaking expense is spent each year in an attempt to isolate hard-core crime within the barbed-wired boundaries and away from the American public. However, despite segregating large numbers of criminals into one location, little is being achieved in the way of decreasing criminal activity and deferring offenders from a life behind bars.

America is leading every other nation in terms of incarceration rates:

Though home to just 1 in 20 of the world's people, America's penal industrial complex incorporates a quarter of the entire planet's prison population, achieving the questionable distinction of the world's highest per capita rate of imprisonment.<sup>6</sup>

This alarming rate of imprisonment is not necessarily an accurate representation of the amount of crime occurring daily in America as opposed to crime existing in alternative nations. Instead, this increase of prisoners is the direct outcome of America's war-on-drugs and tough-on-crime policies as favoring a solution to the soaring crime rates has become a central argument in the country's politics. Lawmakers refuse to be portrayed as soft on crime or to be accused of coddling criminals. Beginning in the 1980s, politicians, both Republican and Democrat alike, have been using harsher prison sentences as a means of attracting the support of the public and, therefore, securing a seat in American politics. For example, in 1984, Congress approved the Sentence Reform Act which increased the consistency in federal sentencing by determining the minimum consequence of all felonies. This ultimately satisfied the public's need for a safer homeland through the demonstration of the government's zero tolerance for

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<sup>6</sup> Teague, "Probation in America," 317.

criminal activities. As a result, a larger number of prisoners with nonviolent criminal records are being sent to prison for longer periods of time. In addition to more and longer prison sentences, there has also been an increase in harsher methods of punishment “such as the return of chain gangs, tougher penalties for young people convicted of crimes, increased panic and legislation concerning sex and drug-related crimes, and an increase in punitive “supermax” facilities.”<sup>7</sup> American politicians avoid any severe changes to the current penal system as many believe it would result in a loss of supporters and/or funding from supporters considering many Americans feel that prisoners already have lenient consequences and below-par expectations. Even though the current state and federal prisons have been deemed insufficient, politicians fear that a drastic change to the penal system would anger financial supports and voters; therefore, providing adequate rehabilitation and support services within the penal system has been and will continue to be overlooked by the government.

Alarming, seventy percent of current inmates are sentenced because of nonviolent crimes and “drug incarcerations jumped an extraordinary 1,000 percent between 1980 and 2005.”<sup>8</sup> In the past these nonviolent crimes, such as drug possession or low-end drug sales, were punished outside of the prison cell with probation and/or drug rehabilitation requirements. Now, however, this trend in conjunction with laws such as the 3-strikes policy requires the justice system to enforce prolonged prison sentences for criminals guilty of multiple infractions. These harsher punishments and longer sentences prior to parole are the primary reason for the overcrowded American prisons.

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<sup>7</sup> Michelle S. Phelps, “Rehabilitation in the Punitive Era: The Gap Between Rhetoric and Reality in U.S. Prison Programs,” *Law & Society Review* 45, no 1 (2011): 34.

<sup>8</sup> Katel, “Prison Reform,” 293.

Across the nation, prisons are full beyond capacity and many institutions have been forced to set up additional dormitory arrangements within prison areas that are not designed to house inmates, thus creating inhumane living conditions. For example, some facilities are currently using dining halls and/or indoor recreations areas for extra sleeping quarters because the number of inmates surpasses the prison's maximum capacity. Throughout the United States, federal and state correctional institutions are confining 720 more detainees each week than are being released back into society.<sup>9</sup> With a large number of criminals in small areas, a high prisoner-to-guard ratio due to overcrowding and an already overburden prison system, tension and conflict develop among the inmates. An increase of penitentiary violence turns American prisons into an environment where violence and criminal activity are cultivated instead of extinguished.

The Federal Bureau of Prisons', an agency of the United States Department of Justice, mission statement claims to:

Protect society by confining offenders in the controlled environments of prisons and community-based facilities that are safe, humane, cost-efficient, and appropriately secure, and that provide work and other self-improvement opportunities to assist offenders in becoming law-abiding citizens.<sup>10</sup>

This promise sounds more like a political campaign than an accurate representation of whom and what can be found within correctional facilities today. The American people put their trust in the federal and state prison systems to protect society and penalize unwarranted behavior; however, the Federal Bureau of Prisons, and similarly state

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<sup>9</sup> Katel, "Prison Reform," 303.

<sup>10</sup> *Federal Bureau of Prisons* [Website] (2012): [www.bop.gov/about/mission.jsp](http://www.bop.gov/about/mission.jsp)/ Accessed 01 May 2012

prisons as well, are failing to meet the established goals of the department and expectations of the American public as a whole. Instead of providing safe environments that offer self-improving restoration services, confined offenders become victimized by an increase of prison violence and are not presented with ample opportunities to partake in effective rehabilitation programs. Many facilities offer occupational/vocational training, general education classes at the high school level and release prevention programs to prepare inmates with the skills needed for obtaining and maintaining employment after prison. However, the opportunities that inmates have to participate in these programs are limited by the institution in which they are imprisoned.

In the 1950s and 60s, education and self-improvement became the ideal method of rehabilitative administration and rehabilitation was “founded on the belief that trained experts could administer individual assessment and treatment that would ‘diagnose’ and ‘treat’ the causes of criminality.”<sup>11</sup> However, since the 1970s, the United States government has been debating over the appropriateness of financially assisting rehabilitation programs and the idea of rehabilitation even became discredited by many professionals involved in any aspect of corrections.<sup>12</sup> There has also been a lack of support from both state and federal lawmakers for improving the education of inmates despite studies conducted by the Vera Institute of Justice, a non-profit, national research organization, that prove “the more education you have when you leave [prison], the better off you’re going to be...You’ll be safer, and you’ll wind up spending less money...because you’ll have fewer people going back to prison.”<sup>13</sup> Support of vocational training, drug/alcohol counseling and psychological therapy has also

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<sup>11</sup> Phelps, “Rehabilitation in the Punitive Era,” 36.

<sup>12</sup> Phelps, “Rehabilitation in the Punitive Era,” 36.

<sup>13</sup> Katel, “Prison Reform,” 296.

decreased significantly due to a lack of financing even though an overwhelming percentage of the national prison population consists of inmates with drug dependencies and mental illnesses.<sup>14</sup>

Each year, well over a half million inmates (approximately 750,000 in 2011) are released from the prison system and thrown back into American society.<sup>15</sup> However, they are thrown back into society still clinging to their old habits, customs and criminal mindsets. Many ex-convicts leave prison without secured housing or employment opportunities and, in many cases, they leave the prison system with drug dependencies. Often, “there is little continuity to bridge the gaps between offenders’ prison programs and activities, offenders’ reentry plans, and the type of supervision and services offenders receive once released.”<sup>16</sup> Ex-convicts are destined to fail in a competitive society without the proper education, job training and/or support services.

It is reported that 52 percent of released convicts recidivate and return to the prison system within three years of the original release date.<sup>17</sup> This high rate of prison returnees is evidence enough of a failing prison rehabilitation system. The current prison system needs to be reevaluated and restructured as the existing rehabilitation programs and confinement methods are ineffective in providing prisoners with the life skills needed to turn them into the law-abiding citizen that the Federal Bureau of Prisons claims to produce. While many institutions have programs to teach the necessary job-training skills to prisoners, they have not been deemed successful in altering a criminal’s attitude and deterring inmates from returning to prison. In an environment

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<sup>14</sup> Katel, “Prison Reform,” 292.

<sup>15</sup> Petersilia, “Beyond the Prison Bubble,” 3.

<sup>16</sup> Kermit Humphries, “Transition From Prison To The Community,” *Corrections Today* 66, no 5 (2004): 16.

<sup>17</sup> Katel, “Prison Reform,” 291.

where the penal system is regressing from its mission into a setting where prison violence and prison gang affiliation is growing with little repercussions, violence breaks out of the prison walls with released criminals and infects society as a whole. By restructuring the US prison system to focus on re-teaching individuals how to be successful, law-abiding citizens instead of simply providing a place to house criminals, there is potential to decrease the number of repeat offenders who continue to violate laws before they find themselves a part of the growing statistic of the failing American penal system.

### **Section 1: Current Rehabilitation Programs**

The American prison system may have been designed around the overarching objective of restoring convicts to become law-abiding and contributing members of society. However, due to insufficient funds, overcrowded institutions and unforgiving consequences to law violations, there has been a shift in many facilities to concentration more on providing strict punishment instead of offering ample opportunities for prisoners to receive the support and treatment necessary for a complete restoration. As a result, rehabilitation programs are not equally available and accessible to all prisoners who are in need of assistance. All 117 federal prisons managed by the Federal Bureau of Prisons provide basic rehabilitation services in the realms of education, occupational training, release preparation programs, substance abuse therapy, and mental health services. On the other hand, there are over 5000 other correctional facilities nationwide that are not in the economic position to offer a range of self-betterment programs. This puts many American prisoners in a discerning disadvantage in terms of transitioning to



life after prison. Essentially, the future success of the inmate, through the potential reinforcement of rehabilitation programs, is reliant on the inmates' placement into a well-equipped prison environment. The prisoner himself, however, has no voice in prison placement or location. Even when rehabilitation options are offered, there is no guarantee that the current established programs are sufficient in achieving success within the prison community. The following provides a detailed description of current rehabilitation programs that have been attempted in different federal and state correctional facilities.

## **I. Educational Opportunities**

The rehabilitation of criminals through formal education has long been an objective of the American penal system. In 1798, only seven years after the very first American prison was established, inmates were given the opportunity to further their educations while serving time behind bars.<sup>18</sup> Currently, all federal institutions managed by the Federal Bureau of Prisons offer literacy classes, English for speakers of other languages, health/wellness classes, and library services. Unfortunately, the Federal Bureau of Prisons only supervises 117 of the over 5000 correctional institutions nationwide leaving state and private prisons responsible for their own methods of educating convicts. Ample funding does not allow state prisons to offer a standardized educational program similar to that available in federal institutions. As a result, inmates confined to many state prisons are denied the education that is critical for living lawfully outside of the wardens' regulation.

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<sup>18</sup> *US Department of Education, Website. 2012.*  
<http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ovae/pi/AdultEd/correctional-education.html/>. Accessed 08 May 2012.

In most cases, if an inmate does not hold a high school diploma or General Education Development certificate, he/she must participate in a minimum of 240 hours of general education or until the GED is achieved. However, if a criminal is not housed at a facility with available high school or higher education classes, that resident is left without any form of intellectual stimulant. In addition, some facilities offer traditional college course for those which wish to work towards higher levels of education. While college courses were previously easily accessed by all inmates, in 1994 congress eliminated prisoners' ability to obtain Pell grants which resulted in the deterioration of many college programs that were once obtainable by prisoners.<sup>19</sup> Now college classes are solely offered at the expense of the enrolled inmate. The steep financial obligation associated with college courses resulted in a decrease in enrollment numbers as most inmates are not in an economic position to take advantage of the college courses. As a result, many inmates have no means of obtaining a college diploma.

Research has proven that within "the prison population, both male and female, had lower literacy rates than individuals who were not incarcerated."<sup>20</sup> Although crime is not necessarily limited to uneducated Americans, the overwhelming prison population possesses little formal education. A minimal exposure to education does not induce crime; rather, it affects individuals' reactions and their decision-making skills.<sup>21</sup> In fact, according to a 2003 study by the Department of Justice, 68 percent of state inmates have not earned a high school diploma as compared to 18.4 percent of the general

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<sup>19</sup>John Linton, "Inmate Education Makes Sense," *Corrections Today* 60, no 3 (1998):18.

<sup>20</sup> *US Department of Education*, Website. 2012.

<http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ovae/pi/AdultEd/correctional-education.html/>. Accessed 08 May 2012.

<sup>21</sup> Linton, "Inmates Education Makes Sense," 18.

population.<sup>22</sup> Further, over half of inmates housed in federal and state prisons cannot read.<sup>23</sup> In a country that places a heavy emphasis on formal education as a means of bettering oneself and securing a rewarding future, the government is hindering those who could benefit the most from formal education.

In Texas, for example, 35.8 percent of released convicts who do not hold a post-secondary degree, recidivate and return to the prison as compared to the 10.1 percent of returning convicts who have earned a post-secondary degree.<sup>24</sup> In fact, “every degree or certificate that a student earns translates to improved opportunities for employment and a greater likelihood of success in the real world.”<sup>25</sup> These statistics clearly show that higher levels of education positively influence the future of inmates, yet many Republican and Democratic political leaders deny prisons the funds needed to provide education to inmates. If the role of American correctional facilities is, in fact, to correct behavior and discourage crime so that ex-convicts do not return to the prison system, the government should be providing all inmates with the accessibility of self-improvement through education. Prisoners continue to violate the laws because they are not equipped with the academic or social skills that are mandatory to function in the demanding American society.<sup>26</sup> In order to succeed in society, an American needs to possess self-determination, self-control and critical thinking skills – these are all qualities that proper education can provide to inmates. In fact, the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills teaches prisoners how to deal with their

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<sup>22</sup> Ralph Rossum and Constance Rossum, “Rehabilitating Rehabilitation,” *The World & I* 18, no 12 (2003): 24-29.

<sup>23</sup> James S. Vacca, “Educated Prisoners Are Less Likely to Return to Prison,” *The Journal of Correctional Education* 55 no 4 (2004): 300.

<sup>24</sup> Bill Conlon et al. “Education: Don’t Leave Prison Without It,” 48-51.

<sup>25</sup> Bill Conlon, et al. “Education: Don’t Leave Prison Without It,” 50.

<sup>26</sup> Joseph Fong, “Facilitating Education in Prisons,” *Advances in Blended Learning* 5328 (2008): 1.

emotions instead of relinquishing those emotions in the form of violent and/or nonviolent crimes.<sup>27</sup>

At the very least, no prisoner should be released from the prison system without mastering fundamental literacy skills. Basic literacy skills, such as filling out applications, following written instructions, or writing business letters/emails, are required in every possible career. The government's plan to replace educational programs with harsher punishments is not effective in changing defiant behavior without also providing the literacy skills need to obtain an income and maintain a crime-free lifestyle.

Aside from the countless reasons why further education can benefit inmates in the future, literary programs have the potential to improve the current prison environment. By teaching inmates how to correctly manage their emotions, more access to education can decrease the amount of violence occurring inside the prison walls which will result in a "more humane and more tolerable prison environment in which to live and work, not only for the inmates but also for the officers, staff and everyone else."<sup>28</sup> Safety, after all, is a priority of the Federal Bureau of Prison as stressed in the department's mission statement.

In 1997 the New Jersey Department of Corrections spent \$25,000 a year on each inmate; however, less than 2 percent of that cost was dedicated to the education of inmates.<sup>29</sup> Higher educational success results in a decreased recidivism rates; therefore, "the Department's Correctional Education Task Force further maintained that the significant savings gained from reduced recidivism could usually offset those

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<sup>27</sup> Vacca, "Educated Prisoners Are Less Likely to Return to Prison," 299.

<sup>28</sup> Vacca, "Educated Prisoners Are Less Likely to Return to Prison," 298.

<sup>29</sup> Vacca, "Educated Prisoners Are Less Likely to Return to Prison," 301.

modest increases in education spending.”<sup>30</sup> There is no question that improving rehabilitation programs in American prisons and providing all inmates with access to a quality education costs a substantial amount of money. However, considering the alarming rate of criminals who return to the prison system daily, adequate education is something the government cannot forgo as rehabilitation programs will ultimately pay for themselves in the long run as well as reduce the number of repeat offenders in American communities.

### **Parenting Education**

Incarceration affects the entire family unit. As the number of prisoners grows each year, so does the number of children left without one or both parents due to incarceration. In 1999, it was estimated that 1.5 million children had a parent in prison and 58 percent of these children were under the age of ten years old.<sup>31</sup> This can negatively impact the development of a child for years to come. Children who have a parent in the prison system are five times more likely to also be incarcerated when they reach adulthood.<sup>32</sup> In addition, children who have a parent in prison are less likely to earn success in the classroom.<sup>33</sup> Just like obtaining the skills needed for employment, parents who have spent years in prison are in need of stronger parenting skills in order to rebuild their families who have been broken by imprisonment.

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<sup>30</sup> Vacca, “Educated Prisoners Are Less Likely to Return to Prison,” 301.

<sup>31</sup> Kerri L. Clopton and Katheryn K. East, “‘Are There Other Kids Like Me?’ Children with a Parent in Prison” 36, no 2 (2004): 195.

<sup>32</sup> Suzanne Bushfield, “Fathers in Prison: Impact of Parenting Education,” *Journal of Correctional Education* 55 no 2 (2004): 105.

<sup>33</sup> Bushfield, “Fathers in Prison: Impact of Parenting Education,” 105.

All federal institutions offer parenting classes; however, these classes are frequently offered to female inmates only leaving imprisoned fathers ignored by the system. In occasional circumstances, men can participate in these parenting classes if specifically mandated by the court to be enrolled. Similar to most rehabilitation programs, the state prisons may not offer any parenting classes at all depending on the allotted funds and prison clientele. An increase in parent education for both mothers and fathers has been directly related to positive family relationships and has ties in decreasing recidivism.<sup>34</sup>

Like many occupation or educational rehabilitation programs, parenting classes must first alter the prisoners' behaviors and attitudes before effectively teaching the life skills needs upon release. According to a study done at North Idaho's Correctional Institute to measure the impact of a 30-day parenting class on imprisoned fathers, upon completion of the course, experienced overall a change in attitude regarding child development and also recognized the importance of parental involvement on a child's life.<sup>35</sup> By educating both imprisoned mothers and fathers on how to be positive role models and active participants in their children's lives, parents are given the tools essential for recovering family relationships and encouraging healthy outcomes for victimized children.<sup>36</sup>

## **II. Occupational/Vocational Rehabilitation**

Inmates housed in federal prisons have the advantage of obtaining work experience while serving their prison terms. Convicts who are physically and mentally

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<sup>34</sup> Bushfield, "Fathers in Prison: Impact of Parenting Education," 106.

<sup>35</sup> Bushfield, "Fathers in Prison: Impact of Parenting Education," 111.

<sup>36</sup> Bushfield, "Fathers in Prison: Impact of Parenting Education," 105.

capable are often employed in the food service department of the prison, the maintenance department, or even with the grounds crew. This opportunity to work is a privilege given to federal inmates and can be easily rebuked as a consequence of misbehavior.

Approximately 16 percent of federal inmates who are eligible for work programs are employed in factories operated by the Federal Prison Industries.<sup>37</sup> Here inmates learn the skills needed to build furniture, fix electronics or weld machinery. The skills instilled in this type of work environment are extremely valuable in securing long-term employment after being liberated from the prison system. State prisons, however, offer occupational and vocational programs based on funds provided to the prisons. While states with larger prison budgets offer more classes, other inmates of state prisons do not have the privilege of taking part in classes aside from general high school education courses. Luckily, states such as Oregon, Texas and Washington State have recognized the success of and need for rehabilitation program. These states in particular have been working toward increasing and improving their current work/education opportunities while other states still favor punishment over rehabilitation.

In Oregon in 1994, for example, residents voted that all prisoners should work a 40-hour week just like the taxpayers who provide the money necessary to keep prisoners housed, fed and cared for medically. This means that more money is being placed into the prison system by the state of Oregon; therefore, more inmates have access to advanced rehabilitation programs that would have otherwise been unavailable. Inmates housed in Oregon state prisons work in career fields, such as

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<sup>37</sup> Fox Butterfield, "Prison rehabilitation program cuts costs, reduces recidivism," *The Houston Chronicle*, 20 May 2001.

telemarketing or computer sciences, and are constantly monitored and tracked by devices to confirm the prisoners' accountability.<sup>38</sup> Steven J. Icke of the Oregon Department of Corrections says the state places a heavy emphasis on inmate rehabilitation because "we [administrators of the Oregon Department of Corrects] want inmates practicing on the inside what works on the outside to try to undo all of the bad crime-inducing habits they learned in the years before they got [to prison]."<sup>39</sup> Oregon has found success with their programs and other institutions, whether state or federal, should use Oregon's Department of Corrections as a model to replicate.

Organized and appropriate occupational and vocational rehabilitation has proved to be effective. In fact, only 25 percent of prisoners nationwide who were involved with vocational training while imprisoned returned to the prison system.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, most vocational programs result in "lower recidivism rates, lower parole revocation rates, better release employment patterns and better institutional disciplinary records for participants than for non-participants."<sup>41</sup>

Other occupational and vocational training opportunities are often based on the needs of individual inmates. While some inmates are mandated by the courts to enroll in rehabilitation and education programs, other programs offer prisons the freedom to attend the programs in which the prisoners themselves deem as valuable. As a result,

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<sup>38</sup> Fox Butterfield, "Prison rehabilitation program cuts costs, reduces recidivism," *The Houston Chronicle*, 20 May 2001.

<sup>39</sup> Fox Butterfield, "Prison rehabilitation program cuts costs, reduces recidivism," *The Houston Chronicle*, 20 May 2001.

<sup>40</sup> Vacca, "Educated Prisoners Are Less Likely to Return to Prison," 298.

<sup>41</sup> Vacca, "Educated Prisoners Are Less Likely to Return to Prison," 299.



prisoners often choose to enroll in courses that offer the skills directly required to increase their chances of financial success after incarceration.<sup>42</sup>

Vocational and occupational rehabilitation programs prove to be successful because these programs provide a break from monotonous prison routines and many of these rehabilitation programs continue to provide support services after inmates are released by the system.<sup>43</sup> However, despite the proven success of many educational or vocational classes, state and federal lawmakers overwhelmingly continue to pull funds from prison rehabilitation programs resulting in dwindling programs.

### **Money Matters**

Inmates receive monetary compensation for their work at a rate of 12 cents to 40 cents an hour.<sup>44</sup> In regards to prisons run by the Federal Bureau of Prisons, one half of the income earned does not go to the inmate, but rather is applied toward the inmates' court dues, child support fees, or other outstanding legal dues.<sup>45</sup> This plays a part in teaching inmates financial responsibility as it holds prisoners accountable for their debts. In addition to stressing to inmates the importance of paying off debts, federal institutions also offer an Inmate Skills Development course that teaches confined individuals how to make a budget and track monthly expenses.

### **Release Preparation Programs**

After residing in prisons for years, or decades in some cases, many inmates experience some expected anxiety associated with reentering into American society. These anxieties are often connected with the pressures of obtaining a job, reconnecting

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<sup>42</sup> Vacca, "Educated Prisoners Are Less Likely to Return to Prison," 299.

<sup>43</sup> Vacca, "Educated Prisoners Are Less Likely to Return to Prison," 299.

<sup>44</sup> *Federal Bureau of Prisons* [Website] (2012): [www.bop.gov/about/mission.jsp](http://www.bop.gov/about/mission.jsp). Accessed 01 May 2012.

<sup>45</sup> *Federal Bureau of Prisons* [Website] (2012): [www.bop.gov/about/mission.jsp](http://www.bop.gov/about/mission.jsp). Accessed 01 May 2012.

with family and adjusting to community life. In order to calm these apprehensions and prepare inmates for financially and morally succeeding after prison, release preparation programs are offered to all federal inmates throughout their sentences. The Federal Bureau of Prisons claims that the department begins to prepare convicts for release upon an inmate's entrance in to the prison system. The exposure to release prevention programs steadily increases during the last eighteen months of a sentence term. Release preparation programs specifically provide classes that teach prisoners how to obtain and maintain a career. These classes emphasize skills such as searching for jobs, writing resumes and communicating with employers, clients or colleagues. Many facilities even hold mock interviews so prisoners can practice behaving in a professional manner. Further, the Federal Bureau of Prisons provides prisoners' with connections to community job and training possibilities. These are life-long skills that can assist all inmates regardless of education or employment history.

### **III. Drug and Alcohol Rehabilitation**

“Drugs and crime are inextricably interrelated. Not only are drug trafficking and possession illegal, but many other offenses are also drug-related (e.g. burglary to obtain money to purchase drugs) are committed while an individual is under the influence of drugs.”<sup>46</sup> Drug and alcohol addiction is a brain disease that can negatively affect behaviors for months after an individual has broken the substance addiction. As a result, more individuals are likely to relapse without constant support and effective

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<sup>46</sup> Matthew L. Hiller, “Prison-based substance abuse treatment, residential aftercare and recidivism,” *Addiction* 94 no 6 (1999): 833.

treatment.<sup>47</sup> Even though decades of scientific research proves drug/alcohol rehabilitation is effective in the criminal justice system, prisoners who are in need of drug/alcohol rehab are still not receiving the support and treatment required for proper recovery:

Although the past several decades have witnessed an increase in providing substance abuse treatment services for criminal justice offenders, only a small percentage of offenders has access to adequate services, especially in jails and community correctional facilities.<sup>48</sup>

In fact, nearly 50 percent of all prisoners, including those who have non-drug related criminal record are reliant on drugs and/or alcohol; however, of the inmates who have a history of drug abuse or dependency, less than 20 percent (approximately 14.8 percent in state facilities and 17.4 percent in federal institutions) receive some type of treatment for their addictions.<sup>49</sup> That leaves over 80 percent of the addicted prison inmates either suffering from withdrawal without proper supervision or unethically resorting to smuggling substances into the prison system simply to appease their drug habits. Scientists have deemed substance addiction a type of mental illness; however, since the criminal justice system does not view addiction as a medical condition, convicts are often deprived of the appropriate treatment.<sup>50</sup>

Effective drug and alcohol treatment not only benefits the health of the individuals involved but also improves the safety of both the American public and the community confined behind bars by reducing violent and nonviolent drug-related crime. Substance

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<sup>47</sup> National Institute of Drug Abuse, *Principles of Drug Abuse Treatment for Criminal Justice Population*, (NIA Publication, 2006), 1.

<sup>48</sup> National Institute of Drug Abuse, *Principles of Drug Abuse Treatment for Criminal Justice Population*, 14.

<sup>49</sup> National Institute of Drug Abuse, *Principles of Drug Abuse Treatment for Criminal Justice Population*, 13.

<sup>50</sup> "Drug Rehab Absent in Prisons," Philadelphia Tribune (2009).

abuse rehabilitation often results in reduced recidivism, reduced relapse, reduced inmate misconduct, and improves the education levels and employment opportunities after reentry into the community.<sup>51</sup> Prison is the ideal location to administer drug and alcohol rehabilitation. The seclusion provided by a prison cell removes an inmate from the social and community pressures that often encourage substance abuse. Proper rehabilitation requires lengthy periods of time devoted to recovery, and fortunately time is a factor that comes with every prison sentence. Adequate time (i.e. at least three consecutive months) is necessary to break old, unhealthy habits and to recreate a lifestyle that rejects drug use and criminal activity.<sup>52</sup>

Similar to how a prison's population fluctuates in inmate demographics and criminal histories, the needs of inmates to give up habits of drug and alcohol also vary. Not all individuals respond to substance rehabilitation in the same ways; therefore, in order for drug and alcohol rehabilitation within the prison system to be effective, the rehabilitation must be modified to meet the needs of the individual addict. To begin with, all criminals should be tested for substance abuse upon entering the prison system as an early assessment can determine the type and intensity of program an individual requires in order to achieve personal success. All rehabilitation programs should address matters of motivation, problem-solving skills and skill development needed to break the cycle of drug use; however, the incorporation of these foundational program requirements should vary based on the progression of the individual inmate.<sup>53</sup> When programs meet the personal needs of an inmate, he/she is more likely to feel inspired and can also develop positive relationships between drug-addicted convicts and

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<sup>51</sup> Federal Bureau of Prisons [Website] (2012): [www.bop.gov/about/mission.jsp](http://www.bop.gov/about/mission.jsp). Accessed 01 May 2012.

<sup>52</sup> National Institute of Drug Abuse, *Principles of Drug Abuse Treatment for Criminal Justice Population*, 1.

<sup>53</sup> National Institute of Drug Abuse, *Principles of Drug Abuse Treatment for Criminal Justice Population*, 2.

program facilitators, cohorts and/or family members. These positive, interpersonal relationships have the ability to give former drug users the motivation to continue a life without crime and drugs. Similarly, when the display of appropriate behavior, such as resisting temptation, is rewarded with positive reinforcement, such as extra recreational time or additional visitations with family members, individuals are more likely to strive for achievement.

Drug rehabilitation within the prison system is not enough to ensure success upon reentry into the community. Continued support, mentoring and counseling should be available and easily accessible in order for a smooth transition to life on the outside. Although a relapse to drugs and alcohol is likely to occur despite treatment, studies have shown that rehabilitation throughout a prison term in conjunction with reinforcement after release can result in reduced recidivism rates and a lower likelihood of returning to a life dependent on drugs, alcohol and criminal activity.<sup>54</sup>

Drug and alcohol rehabilitation programs are undeniably an expensive process to incorporate into all five thousand plus federal, state, and private correctional facilities nationwide. The essential costs would include counseling, medication, drug testing, occasional hospitalization, and additional staff among many other expenses. It was estimated that in 2007, drug-related crimes across the country cost the American government nearly \$113 billion. On the other hand, “the cost of treating drug abuse...was estimated at \$14.6 billion, a fraction of these overall societal costs.”<sup>55</sup> If treating the drug abuse at the source of the problem is a less expensive process and

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<sup>54</sup> National Institute of Drug Abuse, *Principles of Drug Abuse Treatment for Criminal Justice Population*, 21.

<sup>55</sup> National Institute of Drug Abuse, *Principles of Drug Abuse Treatment for Criminal Justice Population*, 26.

will provide safer communities and a lower prison population as an outcome then, in the long-run, the results are worth the steep financial investment.

#### **IV. Mental Illness Services**

The United States penal system has recently seen an excess of individuals with a variety of mental illnesses who are being sentenced to lengthy prison terms. It is estimated by the American Psychiatric Association that one in five confined in the American prison systems suffers from a serious mental illness.<sup>56</sup> This statistic is not completely alarming as research shows that mental illnesses are often linked with deficiencies in social skills, self-control and problem-solving abilities. These deficiencies can increase an individual's frustration levels and provoke negative emotions (such as aggression) and consequence in poor, and often illegal, decisions.<sup>57</sup> An increase of convicts with mental illness is also the result of multiple factors including the termination of many state mental institutions, the lack of sufficient support in the community for individuals with mental illnesses and the government's harsher policies toward law violations.<sup>58</sup> In fact, people who experience mental illnesses are 67 percent more likely to be arrested than individuals who do not display symptoms of mental illnesses.<sup>59</sup> Not only are individuals with mental illnesses more likely to be confined, but the prison environment can also contribute to the development or intensity of mental illnesses. Prisons "are brutal places where conditions of confinement and inmate on

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<sup>56</sup> "United States: Locked Up; Mental Illness," *The Economist* 369, no 8350 (2003).

<sup>57</sup> George Ronan, "An analysis of survival time to re-arrest in treated and non-treated jailers," *The Journal of Forensic and Psychiatry & Psychology* 21, no 1 (2010): 103.

<sup>58</sup> Irina R. Soderstorm, "Mental Illness in Offender Populations," *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation* 45 (2008): 3.

<sup>59</sup> Soderstorm, "Mental Illness in Offender Populations," 12.

inmate violence inflict lasting and debilitating psychological damage.”<sup>60</sup> Even if mental illnesses are not present in an inmate at the entrance into the prison system, mental health instabilities (such as depression) can progress throughout the prison sentence.

Sometimes these mental illnesses are identified by the prison system, other times these mental illness go unnoticed and untreated. Regardless, “it is the mentally ill offenders who are the most likely to fall through the cracks of the treatment, habilitation, and rehabilitation components of the criminal justice system.”<sup>61</sup> A Human Rights Watch reporting on American prisons noted:

Our research suggests that few prisons accommodate their mentally ill health needs. Security staff typically view mentally ill prisoners as difficult and disruptive, and place them in barren high-security solitary confinement units. The lack of human interaction and the limited stimulus of twenty-four-hour-a-day life in a small, sometimes windowless segregation cells, coupled with the absence of adequate mental health services, dramatically aggravates the suffering of the mentally ill...[this] is acting as an incubator for worse illness and psychiatric breakdowns.<sup>62</sup>

Prolonged isolation and heightened psychiatric breakdowns risk the overall safety of the institution and can make mental illnesses more difficult to care for when they finally do become identified. Eastern Penitentiary in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania was the first

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<sup>60</sup> Thomas F. Geraghty, ‘Prisons and After Prison,’ *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* 94, no 4 (2004): 1150.

<sup>61</sup> Soderstorm, “Mental Illness in Offender Populations,” 2.

<sup>62</sup> Soderstorm, “Mental Illness in Offender Populations,” 8.

American prison to isolate prisoners in 1829 and the prison was harshly criticized by the public for the insanity that resulted from solitary confinement.<sup>63</sup>

Maintaining the overall safety of a facility is a primary goal of both state and federal correctional centers; however, the system must likewise provide adequate treatment for the physical and mental needs of the inmates. Without the proper psychological treatment, inmates with mental illnesses (such as bipolar disease, schizophrenia, mental retardation, etc.) often become violent and pose as a safety risk for not only themselves but for fellow inmates and prison staff as well. Suicide is a reoccurring concern that affects the safety of both mentally ill inmates and non-mentally ill inmates. Among the entire prison population, suicide is the third leading cause of inmate death, following death by natural causes and death as a result of the AIDS virus.<sup>64</sup> However, suicide is the dominant safety concern in regards to inmates with untreated mental illnesses.<sup>65</sup>

Luckily many states have mandated the incorporation of suicide prevention plans into the prison systems. These programs are designed to screen inmates for mental illnesses, provide psychological counseling, and maintain close observation of at-risk prisoners. In 2004, Omaha, Nebraska made great advances in the treatment of mentally ill prisoners after an offender with a psychological disability failed to take medication and was beaten to death by a fellow inmate.<sup>66</sup> The Omaha Judiciary Committee presented the bill (LB1000) in order to change the prison system by

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<sup>63</sup> David A. Ward and Thomas G. Werlich, "Alcatraz and Marion: Evaluating super-maximum custody," *Punishment and Society* 5, no 1 (2003): 53-75.

<sup>64</sup> Soderstorm, "Mental Illness in Offender Populations," 10.

<sup>65</sup> Soderstorm, "Mental Illness in Offender Populations," 10.

<sup>66</sup> Soderstorm, "Mental Illness in Offender Populations," 2.



recognizing and correcting the psychological deficiencies of many felons in the state's prison system.<sup>67</sup>

Mental illnesses are not limited to poor or minority inmates; it affects all areas of the prison demographics. African Americans, Caucasians, Asians, Hispanics, young, old, poor, wealthy, male and female can all display characteristics of mental illnesses. Because of the often hidden symptoms of mental disorders, all federal and state prisons should be providing an in-depth screening of all inmates not only upon entrance into the facility but also throughout their term of incarceration. This identification process will assist in reducing the number of prisoners who are quickly dismissed from fundamental treatment and supervision. Also, communication between guards and psychologists should be unobstructed so that inmates are receiving routine treatment in all areas of the prison. This proper treatment, constant supervision/support and routine distribution of prescription medicine can assist in making prisons a safer environment while providing the care necessary to ensure the future success of the inmate after reentry into American society.

## **V. Faith-Based Rehabilitation Programs**

The public often associates criminals with a lack of morals and defiance to societal expectations. Because criminals are frequently linked to a tainted way of life, the penitentiary system in the United States was originally created on the foundation that criminals would not be punished for their actions but rather given ample time to

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<sup>67</sup> Soderstorm, "Mental Illness in Offender Populations," 2.

repent for their sins.<sup>68</sup> As a result, prisoners would reconnect with God, be forgiven of their wrongdoings, and return to a Christian way of life as an upstanding and honest citizen. However, by the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, “scientific knowledge replaced religion as the paradigm for explaining and controlling criminal behavior.”<sup>69</sup> This shift in criminal restoration policies has caused overwhelming doubt in communities across the nation in regards to the effectiveness of faith-based rehabilitation programs in comparison to educational and/or occupational rehabilitation. Opponents of government-funded programs argue that virtuous reclamation is not something that can be learned through formal education or skills training, but instead must be acquired from the prisoner’s own self-examination of their personal lives, morals, and self-worth. Because of this claim, many correctional facilities have integrated rehabilitation programs that are centered on spiritual development in order to reconnect criminals with an ethical conscience and spiritual core.

One example of a successful faith-based rehabilitation program is headed by the Nation of Islam and has reached out to the nearly 600,000 African Americans housed behind bars.<sup>70</sup> This organization focuses on African Americans in particular as an alarming two million black citizens are either currently in prison or are limited by parole/probation.<sup>71</sup> This program offers spiritual strengthening as well as provides additional support services once a prisoner is released into society. The Nation of Islam claims Malcolm X to be its most widely-known success story within the African-American community.

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<sup>68</sup> Kimberly D. Dodson et al, “An Evidence Based Assessment of Faith-Based Programs: Do Faith-Based Programs ‘Work’ to Reduce Recidivism?” *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation* 50, no 6 (2011): 367-368.

<sup>69</sup> Dodson, “An Evidence Based Assessment of Faith-Based Programs,” 367.

<sup>70</sup> Katel, “Prison Reform,” 302.

<sup>71</sup> Teague, “Probation in America,” 318.

Another example of a fruitful religion-orientated program is the InnerChange Freedom Initiative, a program organized by the Prison Fellowship Ministries (PFM). Although the program was not named InnerChange until 1996, Prison Fellowship Ministries began in 1976 with just 93 inmates confined to an Oxford, Wisconsin prison. The faith-based program quickly grew until it was incorporated by select facilities located in all 50 states and in 110 countries around the world. InnerChange is the largest faith-based program that is currently in place within the American prison system. PFM, an evangelic Christian organization founded in 1976 by former chief counsel and ex-Watergate felon Charles W. Colson, is committed to restoring prisoners and ex-prisoners through the demonstration of “the redemptive power and transforming love of Jesus Christ for all people.”<sup>72</sup> According to this faith-based program, a human being is capable of leaving a life of crime and transforming with the assistance of Jesus Christ. This program, which is available to the entire prison population regardless of religious affiliation, reaches out to not only the inmates but also their families as well as incarceration affects an entire community not just the convicted individual. InnerChange also provides a mentoring program to children who are affected and are in need of a role model when their own parent(s) are incarcerated. In addition to spiritual growth and community initiatives, PFM teaches inmates the leadership skills and responsibility needed to re-enter society and obtain employment after a completed prison term. Follow-up care, drug counseling, and mentoring is easily accessible for one year after the ex-convicts’ release date from a correctional facility.

Religious-based rehabilitation programs have experienced substantial success within the American prison system:

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<sup>72</sup> Prison Fellowship International [Website] (2012): [www.pfi.org/](http://www.pfi.org/). Accessed 15 May 2012.

According to PFM, a 2002 study showed faith-based prison programs produce significantly lower recidivism rates than vocation-based programs – 16 percent vs. 36 percent, and a 2003 University of Pennsylvania study found that graduates of InnerChange in Texas were 50 percent less likely to be rearrested, and 60 percent less likely to be re-incarcerated than a control group.<sup>73</sup>

The federal government, in particular the George W. Bush administration, financially supported InnerChange by supplementing the program with approximately \$1.7 million in public funds between the years of 1999 and 2006.<sup>74</sup> Despite the success of faith-based rehabilitation programs, the federal government denied the organization of any funding claiming the program “violated the First Amendment ban on state-supported religious indoctrination.”<sup>75</sup> Even though the PFM is open to any prisoner, regardless of religious affiliation, who has a desire to strengthen their spirituality, the federal government claims that religion is too essential in the program’s policy and, therefore, cannot be reward monetarily. The absence of financial support is a representation of the government’s lack of commitment and failing mission of transforming prisoners into ethical and law-abiding citizens. Religious-centered rehabilitation programs are forced to supply private funding and rely on 20,000 volunteers around the world in order to fulfill the rehabilitation responsibilities that the federal government refuses to accomplish.

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<sup>73</sup> Katel, “Prison Reform,” 297.

<sup>74</sup> “Federal Appeals Court to Hear Important ‘Faith-Based’ Rehabilitation Case From Iowa,” *US Fed News Services*, 07 Feb 2007

<sup>75</sup> “Federal Appeals Court to Hear Important ‘Faith-Based’ Rehabilitation Case From Iowa,” *US Fed News Services*, 07 Feb 2007.

## **Section 2: The Impact of Incarceration on the Future of Inmates**

When the prison cell swings open and inmates are released from the barbed-wire boundaries, prisoners must either chose to set out on the path toward future success or return to the familiar road of crime and corruption. Many convicts vow to straighten out their priorities and readjust their lifestyles so that they never again will be forced to return to the desolate and unforgiving prison system. However, the best of intentions do not always persist as the pressures of life frequently create stumbling blocks for former prisoners to overcome. Life is not easy for anyone, let alone an individual with a record of crime. Jobs, money, and equal opportunities are often hard to come by, but with the assistance of families, drug/alcohol treatments and other support services, former inmates are given the needed reinforcement to resist temptation and continue on the right path in life.

### **I. Employment Opportunities**

Anyone who has ever been convicted of breaking the law and has been sentenced to time behind bars carries a stigma that cannot be ignored by employers, neighbors or even friends/family members. Like a bad tattoo, the label of “ex-convict” becomes visible to all and cannot be easily hidden. This public branding ultimately places barriers on the future that inmates can achieve especially in regards to potential employment opportunities and obtainable pay scale. As soon as an inmate takes his first step off of the prison grounds and into the free world, he is forced to fend for himself for the first time in years by finding a place to live and a suitable job. In order to attain the necessities of life, like food, shelter and clothing, an inmate must rely on his

occupational skills that he has not used since prior to incarceration – that is, of course, if the inmate maintained an honest job prior to sentencing. Approximately two-thirds of prisoners report holding jobs prior to conviction; however, “their education levels, work experience, and skills are well below national averages for the general population.”<sup>76</sup> Even if a former prisoner was employed legally before incarceration, few ex-convicts have the knowledge, experience, and interpersonal attributes needed to survive in a fast-paced and competitive job market.

During the transition back into American society, employment is essential to assist ex-criminals in advancing toward a lawful lifestyle. Meaningful work that provides an honest income is an underlying factor in positive reintegration back into society because constant employment helps to create a change in identity while functioning as a social control that helps an individual to resist criminal activities.<sup>77</sup> According to an article published in *Alaska Business Monthly*, when ex-convicts are determined to improve their own circumstances, they hold the potential to be dependable and hard-working employees.<sup>78</sup> Former convicts are accustomed to “working for 50 cents or 60 cents an hour, and working with difficult people. They have more to prove, more at stake.”<sup>79</sup> However, the work ethic that was developed within the prison system can only be displayed if employers are willing to give former inmates a chance to learn and develop the required abilities.

Considering that some inmates have worked in the maintenance or food service departments within the strict prison system and are eager to restart their lives, ex-

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<sup>76</sup> Christy A. Visher et al, “Employment After Prison: A Longitudinal Study of Former Prisoners,” *Justice Quarterly* 28, no 5 (2010): 699.

<sup>77</sup> Visher, “Employment After Prison,” 699.

<sup>78</sup> Schmitz, Richard F. *Alaska Business Monthly* October 2005 (Saved in favorites)

<sup>79</sup> Richard F. Schmitz, “Work After Prison,” *Alaska Business Monthly* 21, no 10 (2005).

convicts still struggle to find secure jobs as they are considered to be high-risk employees. Employers become liable for any damages or expenses caused by ex-felons who interact with the public, handle sums of cash, or work with valuable products. This alone would automatically make any employer cautious when hiring an ex-convict. In addition to the employer's personal beliefs on hiring ex-felons, state laws and professional licensing requirements also place limitations on the nature of jobs and the settings in which people with any type of criminal background can be employed.<sup>80</sup> In many cases these laws protect the public from unsafe situations, such as ex-convicts working with children or near school building, other times these same laws discriminate against criminals who do not have violent or drug-related backgrounds from working in choice career fields.

While most inmates at federal institutions have been granted the opportunity to gain work experience while confined in the prison system, many other prisoners in state or private facilities have been denied the privilege of participating in similar work-study programs due to a lack of funding and inconsistent practices within the overall penal system. Studies have shown that prisoners who receive a high school equivalent diploma during prison are more likely to obtain jobs up than release inmates with no high school education; in addition, inmates who participate in occupational/vocational training are more likely to earn high wages than those inmates who were not enrolled in work rehabilitation programs.<sup>81</sup> Even though some prisoners do receive job training, it is argued that the occupational training provided by select prisons is not readily accessible or satisfactory in training prisoners for life after prison as compared to individuals

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<sup>80</sup> Visher, "Employment After Prison," 700.

<sup>81</sup> Joan Petersilia, "Prison Bubble," *Federal Probation* 75, no 1 (2011): 3.

without a criminal history. In fact, even when available, “prison is unlikely to have given individuals new skills that they can use to launch a conventional career.”<sup>82</sup> When inmates are lucky enough to be housed in facilities that offer occupational and vocational training, most ex-felons still have previous work and educational deficiencies which causes in 60 percent of employers in major metropolitan areas to admit they are unlikely to hire any individual with a criminal background.<sup>83</sup>

Oregon’s Coffee Creek Correctional Facility is taking the expectation of occupational and vocational training to a new level. Hand-chosen, female inmates housed in this facility complete a LIFE (Lifelong Information For Entrepreneurs) class that teaches inmates how to open and run their own small businesses upon prison release. This eight-month program gives inmates the opportunity to create business goals, establish plans and strengthen leadership skills. It may be too early to recognize the long-term effects of this business course, but currently only 3 of the 100 graduates from this program have return to prison system.<sup>84</sup> While this type of rehabilitation program is by no means common of the American prison system, it offers inmates the possibility of achieving more than just a low-income, hourly job. The hope that this program can instill in inmates can increase the self-value and self-confidence that many inmates lack considering their prior educational and occupational shortages.

For those who have not participated in the LIFE course, the act of filling out applications and submitting resumes is an intimidating undertaking for many ex-felons who have never worked previously or who have only been staffed within the prison’s

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<sup>82</sup> Visher, “Employment After Prison,” 700.

<sup>83</sup> Visher, “Employment After Prison,” 701. \*Survey conducted of roughly 3,000 employers in several metropolitan areas

<sup>84</sup> Prichep, Deena. “Prison Grooms Inmate Entrepreneurs.” *Voice of America News* 15 June 2011.



boundaries. The application process frequently reminds offenders of their intellectual insufficiencies and the interview process forces individuals to display mature interpersonal skills that for years have been discouraged by concrete barriers and inmate isolation. Few prisoners across the nation are fortunate enough to participate in sponsored job fairs, such as Project Rio in Texas, that attempt to place current prisoners into paying positions prior to release or by getting prisoners in contact with past employers. Because of these programs that form relationships between inmates and neighborhood businesses, these inmates “may improve their prospects for post-release employment and a specific job offer before release is likely to be an important step toward successful integration.”<sup>85</sup> For prisoners who have been out of touch with the ever-changing world, any assistance from the prison system can make a difference in readjusting to the demands of the work field.

Nevertheless, even when ex-convicts are fortunate enough to obtain employment, their annual income is, on average, less than other individuals who have similar skills but have no prior history of incarceration.<sup>86</sup> A conducted study of prisoners in the Chicago, Cleveland and Houston metropolitan areas found non-white ex-convicts were less likely to obtain jobs and many were more likely to be discriminated against in the search for employment immediately following release.<sup>87</sup> Darlene Lewis, a non-profit career counselor who focuses on linking employers with ex-convicts, told the *Arkansas Times* that “people with a felony background have such a hard time finding jobs. If it was a drug crime they can’t even get food stamps... You have fines and fees to pay, you have child support. People who can’t find jobs go back to crime, because that is what

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<sup>85</sup> Visher, “Employment After Prison,” 698.

<sup>86</sup> Visher, “Employment After Prison,” 699.

<sup>87</sup> Visher, “Employment After Prison,” 712.

they know.”<sup>88</sup> It is a vicious cycle; without help, offenders are less likely to find jobs and without jobs, offenders are more likely to return to their criminal ways.

Aside from obtaining jobs, ex-convicts also struggle to uphold the jobs that they do find: “eight months after release, 65% of respondents said that they had been employed at some point since incarcerations but less than half were currently employed.”<sup>89</sup> Many companies are hesitant to hire individuals labeled as felons as a criminal record is often assumed to represent a personal lack of morals, a lack of self-control and/or a lack of respect for policies and authority figures – all qualities which are unacceptable in any work setting. Further, at eight months after release, the median income of ex-felons in 2011 was only \$700 dollars a month – hardly enough to afford accommodation, nourishment and necessities in the current economy.<sup>90</sup> This small salary is discouraging for many former inmates as individuals who have higher wages (greater than ten dollars per hour) immediately following prison release are more likely to avoid reentrance into the prison system.<sup>91</sup> It is not enough to simply find a job without being able hold steady employment long enough to provide necessary income and to learn the discipline and responsibility needed to maintain a crime-free lifestyle. Many criminals and former criminals know that full-time employment and financial responsibility can aid in smoothing the transition between being an offender and law-abiding citizen, yet the hurdle of finding steady employment and the temptation of quick and easy money that crime can provide are often the catalysts that place ex-convicts back behind bars.

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<sup>88</sup> Cheree Franco, “Finding Ex-cons Jobs,” *Arkansas Times*, 15 Feb 2011.

<sup>89</sup> Visher, “Employment After Prison,” 712.

<sup>90</sup> Visher, “Employment After Prison,” 713.

<sup>91</sup> Visher, “Employment After Prison,” 713.

## II. Family Support

Readjusting to life outside of the prison cell can be a trying time for any ex-convict who has become accustomed to the strict boundaries and restricting lifestyle provided within American penitentiaries. Once released, former prisoners must relearn how to provide for themselves, live within a law-abiding community, and reconnect with former friends and family members. It becomes a stressful time not just for the inmates themselves but also for the family members who support them and encourage them to live a healthy and legal lifestyle. As previous stated, the regular routine and responsibility that steady employment provides can encourage former inmates to strive for their goals even when surrounded by temptations. Employment is a crucial aspect in maintaining a responsible and orderly lifestyle; however, employment alone is not the only factor that can prevent recidivism. The reinforcement of family support, counseling, and drug/alcohol treatment along with constant employment can encourage former criminals to display an appropriate code of ethics while resisting the former temptations that can potentially result in a lengthy prison term.

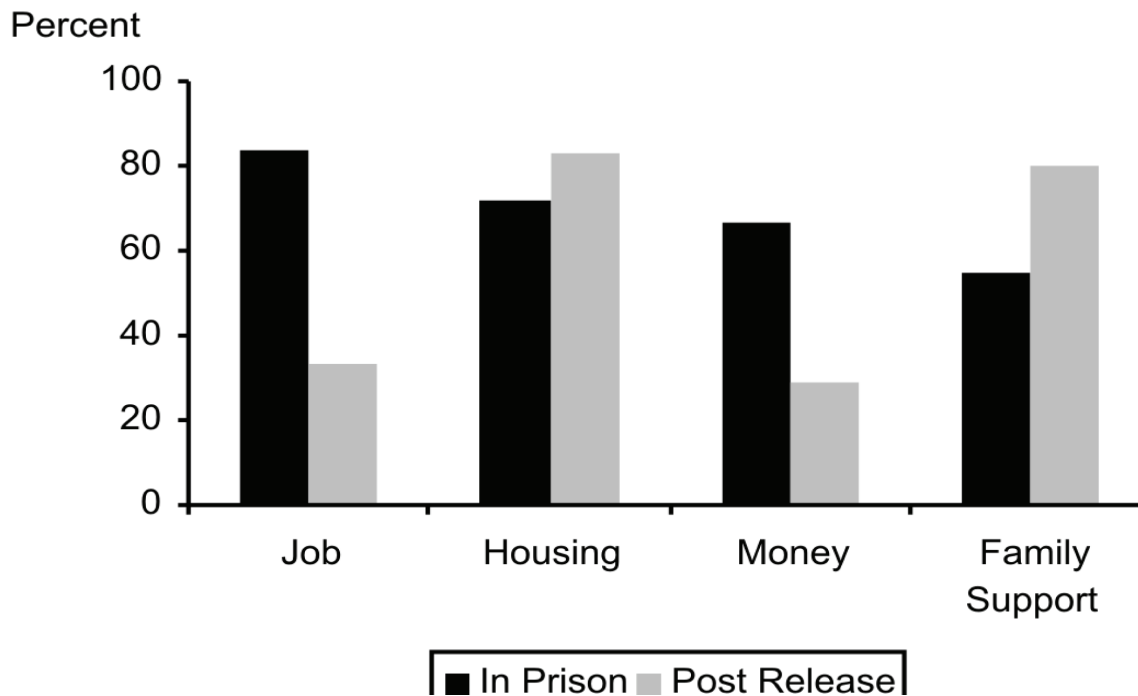
The support of one's family members largely influences an individual's path of chosen lifestyle and his attitudes toward participating in criminal activities. Positive family support is undeniable influential in the lives of prisoners:

Early social scientists examined the impact of an individual's family structure, parental care, and childhood experiences on criminal activity, finding that histories of inadequate parenting, 'poor home environments,' 'broken homes,' and familial criminality influence criminal behavior, whereas more positive family environments and attributions serve as protective forces against

criminal behavior.<sup>92</sup>

Because of a family's ability to effect attitudes and behaviors, positive family support is crucial to ex-felons upon release from the prison system. In fact, 55 percent of currently imprisoned inmates and 80 percent of recently released inmates identified family support as one of the primary factor that would keep individuals from returning to the prison system.<sup>93</sup> The following chart, figure 1, represents a variety of factors believed by inmates to affect their resistance to recidivism.<sup>94</sup>

**Figure 1: Important factors in staying out of prison**



<sup>92</sup> Rebecca L. Nasher and Nancy G. LaVigne, "Family Support in the Prisoner Reentry Process: Expectations and Realities," *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation* 43, no 1 (2006): 93.

<sup>93</sup> Nasher and LaVigne, "Family Support in the Prisoner Reentry Process: Expectations and Realities," 101.

<sup>94</sup> Nasher and LaVigne, "Family Support in the Prisoner Reentry Process: Expectations and Realities," 102. \* Results of a 2006 study of 413 adult, male prisoners both pre and post prison release dates

Following the first few months of release, ex-felons often depend on family members for financial, housing, occupational, and/or emotional support.<sup>95</sup> In fact, two-thirds of ex-convicts rely on family for financial support within the first eight months of release and an additional one in five former inmates also relies on public assistance.<sup>96</sup> Studies conducted throughout the past decade have concluded that ex-prisoners who have more support from and more contact with the family unit have better post-release outcomes.<sup>97</sup> In particular, former felons who have emotional support from families on average have higher employment rates, lower substance abuse, and a lower risk of reconviction.<sup>98</sup> This is exceptionally true as the love and assistance provided by close friends or family members, both during the prison term and upon release, can encourage offenders to break the cycle of crime and abide by the expectations of the family unit and society as a whole.

The love and connection with family members do more for an individual than lower recidivism rates and reduce criminal behaviors. Studies have shown that ex-felons who spend frequent quality time with parents, spouses, siblings, and/or children often see positive health benefits as well. The prison experience and the release from prison are both trying and traumatic experiences as many life-altering changes are happening at a fast pace. Because of this, many prisoners experience higher levels of stress and depression upon release from the prison system. However, a strong family relationship

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<sup>95</sup> Visher, "Employment After Prison," 703.

<sup>96</sup> Visher, "Employment After Prison," 708.

<sup>97</sup> Nasher and LaVigne, "Family Support in the Prisoner Reentry Process: Expectations and Realities," 94.

<sup>98</sup> Nasher and LaVigne, "Family Support in the Prisoner Reentry Process: Expectations and Realities," 94.

at the time of and immediately following release can reduce post-release depression and encourage active and social identities.<sup>99</sup>

Overall, inmates have high expectations in terms of the amount of and type of support that they will receive from family members after their release from prison. Additionally, inmates anticipated substantial family assistance in all realms of the reentry process including financial, housing, employment, and emotional support. Of those inmates studied:

Over two-thirds (69%) expected to live with family after their release from prison...Of those respondents who planned to look for a job after their release, 61 percent expected to talk to family as a means of finding a job. Forty-one percent expected to receive financial support from family after release, but only one-third of these respondents anticipated that support would last for more than a month.<sup>100</sup>

These expectations held by prisoners reemphasize the need for proper family support during the transition stage.

However, many ex-felons, unfortunately, are not lucky enough to have the support that they expected from their legal or blood relatives. It is common for family members to feel ashamed of their imprisoned relatives and, as a result, cut all family ties. Other times, families lose communication with the inmates due to established visitation policies or the physical locations of the correctional facilities. Not all inmates are housed anywhere near their permanent neighborhoods and often families are forced to travel long distances exclusively to visit incarcerated relatives. This can make

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<sup>99</sup> Nasher and LaVigne, "Family Support in the Prisoner Reentry Process: Expectations and Realities," 94.

<sup>100</sup> Nasher and LaVigne, "Family Support in the Prisoner Reentry Process: Expectations and Realities," 98.

visitations difficult, if not impossible, for families who do not have the methods or means to provide travel arrangements.

Not all family relationships are positive –some consist of verbal or physical abuse and others consist of generations of criminal activities. Interestingly, it has also been reported that more inmates of Hispanic backgrounds suggested that their expectations of support and family relationships were less likely to be met.<sup>101</sup> Family support can only have a constructive impact on the future of inmates if the support is an overall positive experience. Family support has proved to be affective on the future of ex-convicts, yet it is up to an inmate to recognize the difference in positive role models and negative adversaries. Only when the inmate can distance himself from the negative forces can he rely on others for the necessary support. Considering that not all prisoners experience a tight-knit family unit that is willing to support each other despite past mistakes, some prisoners may require additional support services upon reentry into American society. Prison-sponsored mentorship and counseling can fill in the void in families who lack strong bonds. While a supportive and attentive family is irreplaceable, governmental programs should be set in place to provide extra encouragement, reinforcement, and mentoring for all criminals in need of a support system in hopes of reducing recidivism rates, lowering American crime rates, and relieving the overcrowded prison system.

### **III. Continued Support Services**

The government's tough-on-crime policies are successful in removing a high number of criminals from the streets and neighborhoods, but once those criminals are

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<sup>101</sup> Nasher and LaVigne, "Family Support in the Prisoner Reentry Process: Expectations and Realities," 103.

behind bars, the prison system fails to rehabilitate and prepare inmates to live an ethical lifestyle. Strict punishment is simply not enough to alter behaviors and encourage a prolonged restoration without the reinforcement of continued counseling services and treatment plans. As previously stated, some criminals are fortunate to receive the needed counseling and drug treatment while behind bars, but how do former convicts continue to be supported when released back into the same neighborhoods surrounded by the original temptations and addictions?

Ninety five percent of convicted offenders nationwide will return to the streets after serving time behind bars.<sup>102</sup> However, without providing easy accessibility to proper services after release, the prison system is setting up these ex-convicts for recidivism. In 2000, Janet Reno, former Attorney General of the United States, sought \$145 million to increase the supervision of and provide a larger safety net for released convicts as the culture of violence cannot be terminated until suitable supervision and guidance is established.<sup>103</sup>

The United States' current methods of parolee supervision and persistent support services are exhausted and thereby ineffective in treating criminals for future success. Due to the overburdened penal system and the shrinking budget devoted to upholding quality rehabilitation amenities, current parole officers are experiencing heavy case loads and fewer opportunities to provide ex-felons with required services. In the year 2000:

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<sup>102</sup> Peter Slevin, 'Without Services, Life after Prison a Life of Failure,' Pittsburg Post Gazette, 07 May 2000.

<sup>103</sup> Slevin, "Without Services, Life after Prison a Life of Failure."



Four out of five inmates released from prison or jail receive some form of supervision, ranging from a monthly appointment with a parole officer to more frequent visits, drug tests and other requirements. Probation and parole officers, traditionally overburdened, have not seen their resources keep pace with increased reporting rules or the rising number of people under supervision – 4.1 million at last count.<sup>104</sup>

While four out of five ex-convicts do receive some type of parole services, the amount of supervision is not nearly as critical as the quality of supervision. Overloaded case workers, social workers, and parole officers with endless bureaucratic paperwork results in poor supervision as ex-offenders are lost in the massive work load. Currently, “overworked parole officers and underfunded social agencies are part of a patchwork that offers no comprehensive approach to the difficult task of integrating ex-convicts into a workaday life.”<sup>105</sup> In addition, an insufficiently trained staff and a highly strained department find it difficult to balance the countless responsibilities in order to devote adequate time and attention to convicts transitioning back into the community.

Prisoners are being released from correctional facilities with the hope of creating a better life, yet when they finally experience the obstacles that life offers to those who hold a criminal record, the transition stage becomes a daunting task to accomplish single-handedly. The result: those individuals who once found themselves housed behind bars now feel the unfamiliar insecurities associated with adjusting to a progressing society and, therefore, now must fend for themselves by any means possible.

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<sup>104</sup> Slevin, “Without Services, Life after Prison a Life of Failure.”

<sup>105</sup> Slevin, “Without Services, Life after Prison a Life of Failure.”

While all former inmates should be receiving continued support services upon reentrance, many ex-convicts with drug and/or alcohol dependencies are also in need of additional services and prolonged treatment to overcome substance abuse. Ex-felons who suffer from drug addictions find the most success with continued supervision and treatment:

Continuing drug abuse treatment helps the recently released offender deal with problems that become relevant after relapse, such as learning to handle situations that could lead to relapse, learning how to live drug-free in the community, and developing a drug-free peer support network.<sup>106</sup>

Because the majority of crimes currently committed in the United States are nonviolent crimes, many of which are drug-related, the prison system will see a reduction in repeat offenders if time and services are easily available within the prison system and after release. Further, effective drug treatment can also help to reduce the spread of infectious disease found in prison and in the community by decreasing the inmates' likelihood of displaying inappropriate behaviors such as participating in unprotected sexual activity or sharing needles during drug intake.<sup>107</sup>

Even with treatment those who have a history of drug/alcohol use are at risk of relapsing back into old habits especially during stressful situations such as throughout transition stages. It is easy to assume that being released from the prison setting would be more liberating and exhilarating than stressful; in actuality, small decisions that must

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<sup>106</sup> National Institute of Drug Abuse, *Principals of Drug Abuse Treatment for Criminal Justice Populations*, 3.

<sup>107</sup> . National Institute of Drug Abuse, *Principals of Drug Abuse Treatment for Criminal Justice Populations*, 24. \*

Over

14% of HIV-infected individuals are imprisoned each year

be made on a daily basis can be extremely overwhelming for individuals familiarized with the highly controlled and monitored inmate experienced.<sup>108</sup> However, when taught the proper techniques of handling stress, former drug abusers will be able to turn to other methods of relaxation instead of relying on drugs and alcohol to cope with the pressures found in daily life.

### **Section 3: Solving the Problem**

Many standard operating procedures have been implemented by prisons throughout the nation in an attempt to control the undesirable behavior and the violent outbursts caused by imprisoned offenders. A certain degree of misconduct is inevitable when dealing with overcrowded prison and harsher punishments:

Jam 4,000 men into an aging prison designed for fewer than half that number...then leave them with too much time on their hands, what with education and job training programs all but shut down. The outcome? More tension and conflict.<sup>109</sup>

The United States does not have a unified prison system; it is merely a collection of a federal system and 48 sovereign state structures.<sup>110</sup> As a result, punishment and rehabilitation are consistently inconsistent. However, one method that all correctional facilities appear to have in common is the way prison authorities automatically respond to the increase in tension and conflict with immediate and severe discipline. Currently, the focus of all correctional centers has been situated around punishment, leaving the

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<sup>108</sup> National Institute of Drug Abuse, *Principals of Drug Abuse Treatment for Criminal Justice Population*, 19.

<sup>109</sup> Katel, "Prison Reform," 291.

<sup>110</sup> Charles W. Coulter and Orvo E. Korpi, "Rehabilitation Programs in American Prisons and Correctional Institutions," *The Journal of Criminal Law, Criminology and Police Science* 44, no 5 (1954): 611.

idea of rehabilitating criminals to be a suppressed afterthought. The favoring of stern consequences over rehabilitation is the direct outcome of the government's tough-on-crime policies resulting in a setting where unacceptable behaviors are simply maintained instead of eliminated. These punitive procedures of punishment result in rage and resentment toward fellow inmates and prison staff alike, but more importantly, strict reprimands fail to solve America's crime problem or lower the overall number of confined Americans.<sup>111</sup> It is not surprising "to learn that we have a correctional system that does not correct."<sup>112</sup> Rather, "statistics have shown that out of the 750,000 prisoners that were released in 2011, approximately 495,000 will be rearrested."<sup>113</sup> This alarming rate represents the thousands of criminals who have been released from the prison system without acquiring the proper support or knowledge needed for a smooth reentry. As a result, these released prisoners quickly fall back into illegal activity and ultimately find themselves yet again confined within the American penal system.

Is rehabilitation alone effective in reducing recidivism, eliminating unwanted behaviors, and correcting the troubled penal system? Unfortunately this question cannot be easily answered with a simple 'yes' or 'no' as many outside factors (such as funding, quality of programs, inmates' willingness to change, etc.) contribute to the overall success rate of prison rehabilitation. While rehabilitating through formal education was once considered to be the only tool necessary in reforming criminals, the current whirlwind debates of the effectiveness of prison rehabilitation now suggests otherwise. The shift in prison policies from the original prison system which focused on

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<sup>111</sup> D.A. Andrews and James Bonta, "Rehabilitating Criminal Justice Policy and Practice," *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law* 16, no 1 (2010): 39.

<sup>112</sup> Petersilia, "Beyond the Prison Bubble," 3.

<sup>113</sup> Petersilia, "Beyond the Prison Bubble," 3.

rehabilitation and restoration to a system that favors strict discipline is thought to be the result of a “lack of evidence that the prison treatment programs could reduce recidivism and political attacks on the determinant sentence model.”<sup>114</sup> In the early 1970s, a variety of criminology reports suggested that there was not an effective link between significant treatment and prison rehabilitation.<sup>115</sup> In turn, an outbreak of anti-rehabilitation beliefs argued that rehabilitation was merely a way of coddling prisoners and excusing their wrongdoings. In fact, it is a common misconception that criminals cannot leave their pasts behind in order to transform into model American citizens. Rehabilitation is not favored by all within the prison system, but without the proper implementation, delivery and evaluation, the American penal system is ultimately placing limitations on a reasonable and potentially successful system of eliminating unlawful behaviors, decreasing the burdens placed on the current prisons and making the prison system a safer place to house criminals.

Without making the proper attempt to institutionalize adequate rehabilitative services, the American penal system will simply never know the potential effects of rehabilitation on the future of inmates. In order to seize illegal conduct, criminals themselves must be trained how to handle their emotions, such as rage or jealous, in non-destructive ways and be retaught the expectations and laws of society – all of which can be accomplished through proper rehabilitation. However, it is unrealistic to assume that rehabilitation will prove to be successful for every criminal within the American penal system. Certainly there are some criminals who have no desire to depart from their destructive ways and, therefore, some criminals do require harsh

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<sup>114</sup> Phelps, “Rehabilitation in the Punitive Era,” 36.

<sup>115</sup> Phelps, “Rehabilitation in the Punitive Era,” 36.

punishment and seclusion behind bars. Not all criminals are eager or even capable of reforming, but it is the responsibility of the prison system to recognize those individuals who are willing to conform to society so that upon release, ex-prisoners will have the skills needed to maintain a lawful lifestyle. When reformed inmates leave the prison system with the proper training, education, and support, the rate of recidivism will decrease. As the rate of recidivism decrease so will the overall expense of maintain a correctional facility – for each prisoner who leaves the prison systems, taxpayers can save between \$52 - \$92 dollars per prisoner and per day depending on the state.<sup>116</sup> This is a significant benefit of reaching lower recidivism rates. Further, because of the benefits associated with lowered recidivism rates, the prisoner himself must be evaluated as a number of variables such as type of crime committed, history of criminal activity and the overall effectiveness of current rehabilitation programs should be considered when determining appropriate placement and methods of discipline.

While many lawmakers and law enforcement agencies support stern consequences and maximum security environments, social workers, and criminal psychologists are favoring a new age of holistic rehabilitation.<sup>117</sup> Instead of determining the level of consequence an inmate receives solely based on the crime committed, many psychologists favor viewing a person as a whole entity including his/her criminal history, environment, social status, family support, vocational skills, and level of formal education. All of these factors influence a criminal's ability and readiness to rehabilitate and reform into a law-abiding citizen.

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<sup>116</sup> John Irwin, "After Prison," *Stanford Social Innovation Review* 6, no 4 (2008): 33.

<sup>117</sup> Petersilia, "Beyond the Prison Bubble," 3.

In a study documented in the article entitled “Rehabilitating Criminal Justice Policy and Practice,” common factors have been identified in the cognitive and/or social perspectives, and general personalities of individuals with a history of criminal activity.<sup>118</sup> In this study in particular, heavy emphasis is placed on the risk-need-responsivity (RNR) model when assessing and rehabilitating criminals. The RNR model identifies the risk level that an inmate has of falling back into a life of crime – the higher the risk, the more services an inmate requires to succeed. The model also identifies a prisoner’s need to become involved in crime or substance abuse in order to determine the criminal’s need for treatment. The final step of this model examines an inmate’s responsivity levels. This indicates the type and frequency of treatments that are best suited for the individual inmate in order to improve the likelihood of success after release from the confinement and supervision of prison.<sup>119</sup>

The underlying principles of the RNR model theory is that by psychoanalyzing and assessing prisoners upon entry into the facility, the prison psychologists are more equipped to identify specific personality traits, cultural influences and learning capacities that would better place prisons within the appropriate facilities, educational programs, and rehabilitation services. By quickly identifying these qualities upon entrance and reevaluating throughout the prison term, programs and curriculum can be developed that are appropriate in treating the individual needs of the prisoners instead simply providing programs intended to appease the masses. Implementing this identification model in all federal and state prisons could result in a positive shift in regards to the number of prisoners who reenter the prison system, the current overcrowding issues,

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<sup>118</sup> D.A. Andrews and James Bonta, “Rehabilitating Criminal Justice Policy and Practice,” *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law* 16, no 1 (2010): 43.

<sup>119</sup> Andrews and Bonta, “Rehabilitating Criminal Justice Policy and Practice,” 45.

the success rate of rehabilitation programs, and the amount tax dollars being spent to house criminals.

Considering the current overcrowded prison system, the increase in prison violence, the spike in recidivism rate, and the decrease of funding available for rehabilitation services, it is imperative that improved conducts of mainstreaming prisoners back into the American society becomes a priority over seclusion and punishment. However, correcting the prison structure and rehabilitating inmates is not just a matter of throwing more money into the crumbling system to house, feed, and supervise criminals. Instead, a uniform, nationwide plan must be established so that the ways in which the criminal justice system deters crime is restored and a heavy emphasis is placed properly rehabilitating convicts beginning the first days of confinement. With the implementation of appropriate and successful rehabilitation programs, the criminal justice system has the potential to decrease the high number of inmates and cut the extreme costs that the government and taxpayers are forced to financially compensate in order to house, feed, supervise and medically care for the 2.3 million confined individuals across the nation.

Prisons across the nation should design rehabilitation programs that are not only customized to the needs of the inmates but also emphasize higher education in terms of academic and occupational skills, individual responsibility and accountability, and provide a network of continued support services. Continued education is crucial in a penitentiary as “more than half of the adults incarcerated in American federal and state prisons can neither read nor write and they have less than an eighth-grade



education.”<sup>120</sup> At least a high school education, if not higher, is required in entry-level positions in most American companies, and, therefore, the need for quality education and high levels of academia in the prison system cannot go ignored.

Education within the prison system will not be effective if learning is solely based around formal, text-book learning; instead the education process must also include real-life experiences (like balancing a checkbook or upholding a monthly budget), interpersonal skills (such as interacting with employers or other authority figures), and strengthening critical thinking skills so that convicts will be properly equipped to make ethical and moral decisions. Accountability, similar to education, is an ethical responsibility that has been overlooked within the American society let alone the United States penal system. Inmates need to be held responsible for their own actions and their own rehabilitation by developing merit-based programs which would enable offenders to receive privileges (e.g. extra recreational time) by completing goals and successfully completing each level of rehabilitation. Incentives and extra privileges hold inmates accountable for their own rewards and thereby their personal actions – this places accountability on the individual level instead of on the administrative or group level. This also allows inmates to fully understand how every action results in a reaction – just like in everyday life. Even if inmates are educated and accountable for their actions, an extended support service encourages inmates to continue down the road to success even when the temptation of crime seems to be lurking. Friends, family, and mentors can provide the morals, values, and/or resources that ex-convicts may require to stay afloat within the pressures of mainstream America.

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<sup>120</sup> Vacca, “Educated Prisoners are Less Likely to Return to Prison.”

If the goal of the federal prison system, as state in the mission statement, is to transform prisoners and to rehabilitate them on all levels into pseudo-model citizens, significant changes must be made within the individual's psychological and faith-based outlook, educational levels, and occupational skills. Rehabilitation will only be successful if prisoners have access to and are open to assistance outside of the prison environment such as medical care by doctors who are qualified to provide and perform drug therapy, counseling services, and high-quality educational programs. These services are not only vital during incarceration but also require a continued commitment throughout the period of parole to ensure personal success and reduce the chances of returning to a life of crime.

### **Conclusion**

Without the proper treatment, "a young man sent to prison in the United States has a poor prognosis for becoming a productive member of society."<sup>121</sup> There are many rehabilitation programs that, if taken the time to develop and implement effectively, hold the key to providing a smooth transition after prison and decrease the number of criminals who return to the prison system each day. Realistically, however, rehabilitation has not proved to be successful for every American inmate. An inmate must be open to rehabilitation and be willing to work toward recovery in order to be successful upon release. After all, breaking the habits of drugs and crime is not something that can happen overnight; it requires constant effort, determination, and support for years to come. However, those individuals who have the capability and drive to restore their lives should be given every opportunity not just for their own futures but also for the safety and betterment of the entire nation.

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<sup>121</sup> Thomas F. Geraghty, 'Prisons and After Prison,' *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* 94, no 4 (2004): 1150.

Currently, the United States penal system is nothing more than money-pit of public house that is subsidized by state and federal funds and does nothing more than confines crime within a location. Tax dollars are being spent on correctional facilities, but the existing system is doomed for failure. Millions of dollars are being spent to capture and house criminals, yet an adequate percent of this money is not used to fix the issues that our current offenders possess.<sup>122</sup> Subsequently, penitentiaries across the nation have become a society within itself where criminal activities continue and prisoners themselves have little opportunity to improve their current circumstances. The judicial system has regressed from its original goal of self-restoration and personal repentance into an environment of anger, conflict and retribution. As a result, individuals who show promise of restoring themselves to a crime-free lifestyle are often deprived of the accessibility to education and support services and are therefore ignored by the system.

Criminal behavior is often associated with poor family attributes such as inadequate parental supervision, broken home environments, and unethical role models.<sup>123</sup> Therefore, it easy to understand how many of America's prisoners were already sentenced to life's many injustices prior to incarceration. Many come from disadvantaged circumstances that include: improper occupational or vocational training, little or no formal education, little to no income, substandard housing, and unethical or nonexistent role parents/role models. Being brought up and influenced by these inadequate conditions from the early stages of life often results in an individual's conformity into a life of crime, as a means of fitting into the family lifestyle, rather than

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<sup>122</sup> Katel, "Prison Reform," 292.

<sup>123</sup> Nasher and LaVigne, "Family Support in the Prisoner Reentry Process: Expectations and Realities," 94.

seeking out more publicly acceptable avenues to social and monetary success.

Therefore, proper rehabilitation services can provide inmates with the life-skills and knowledge needed to support themselves and their families without turning to corruption and thereby breaking the cycle of recidivism.

The amount of rehabilitation that American prisons are currently in need of would require unavoidable funds to create and implement suitable programs within state and federal prisons nationwide. However, in long run, restoring criminals and reducing the number of repeat offenders will prove to be a smart and economical decision in the long run as “a chronic offender may cost society more than \$7 million in the course of his criminal career.”<sup>124</sup> However, in order for the penal system to be successful for future generations to come, money must be spent today to ensure rehabilitation programs and prison reform address the following criteria: emphasize treatment and skills needed for reentry, increase the accessibility of community-based support services, and address and treat mental illnesses or erratic cognitive thought processes during the prison term and post incarceration.<sup>125</sup>

In addition, by restructuring current laws that sentence offenders with minor drug charges or lesser crimes, those individuals who have committed nonviolent crimes and pose no threat to the safety of the surrounding community should face consequences such as probation, drug counseling, and random drug testing as opposed to lengthy and costly prison sentences. By incorporating court-mandated community service, such as assisting at food banks or cleaning the neighborhoods, as opposed to harsh sentences, non-violent criminals would still be receiving a punishment for their actions while serving

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<sup>124</sup> Petersilia, “Beyond the Bubble,” 2-4.

<sup>125</sup> Harry Wexler et al, “Reforming the Criminal Justice System in the United States: Issues and Recommendations,” *The Prison Journal* 91, no 3 (2011): 3.

the community and assisting other members of the community. As a result, individuals would be supporting the community while saving the lofty tax dollars that would have been required if confined to a correctional facility. The offenders themselves, at the same time, would be developing the social skills and responsibility needed for dealing with society in a desirable manner.

Educating criminals while imprisoned about the life-skills and responsibility is simply not enough to provide the drastic change needed in America society. Instead, community-based services that extend after imprisonment are another important aspect to successful restoration that can relieve the overcrowded and overburdened criminal justice system. Similar to the prison system, services already in place such as probation, half-way houses, and inmate counseling also require restructuring to fit the needs of ex-convicts. Probation officers must be highly trained and qualified in areas of law enforcement and counseling, but they also need continued education on support services and a lighter case load to be attentive and influential in the lives of ex-prisoners. Mentoring programs and drug/alcohol services that promote support and networking, such as Alcoholics Anonymous, need to be included in providing positive role models for offenders in order to hold them accountable for their actions while promoting self-esteem and self-worth.

Educating criminals is more than just acquiring the knowledge offered within a text book; it encompasses self-exploration, mental awareness, skill development, social interactions, and the ability to decipher between socially acceptable and unacceptable behaviors. Teaching criminals will encourage critical thinking skills revolving around cause and effect (i.e. the effects of unlawful behavior include job loss and/or

incarceration). Continued education would also reinforce appropriate life goals and values in relation to others and the world around him/her. Finally, furthered education has the potential to teach inmates the responsibility skills that are needed in all areas of life. By continuing to educate and support America's misguided youth and first-time adult offenders, the nation will only then be able to lower the national crime rate, decrease prison population numbers, and reduce the amount of tax dollars spent on the overcrowded and the underachieving penal system.

In George W. Bush's 2004 State of the Union address, the former president assured listeners around the world that "America is the land of the second chance, and when the gates of prison open, the path ahead should lead to a better life."<sup>126</sup> Right now, all Americans are not given the opportunity for a second chance; instead, residents who have made some unlawful mistakes are repressed by a system that claims to restore and transform wrongdoers into law-abiding citizens. A better life will not be in the future of many criminals unless the prison system effectively teaches inmates the skills and knowledge needed to make their own success.

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<sup>126</sup> Katel, "Prison Reform," 306.

## Life Inside and Out

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