



The Maryland Public Policy Institute

FIVE PROGRAM  
MODELS FOR  
REDUCING  
RECIDIVISM



The Maryland Public Policy Institute

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# FIVE PROGRAM MODELS FOR REDUCING RECIDIVISM

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## **APPROACHING RECIDIVISM AND RE-ENTRY**

Re-entry “success” for released prisoners is hard to define as different stakeholders, including former inmates themselves, disagree on what measures return productive and reformed citizens.

But the narrower and clearer metric for successful re-entry is recidivism, or the rate and nature of re-offense by the released inmate. Still, the more limited term is measured differently by experts, institutions, and policymakers, creating an often-incomparable data patchwork and, thus, a knowledge gap as to what inputs create what outputs for recidivism.

For example, some jurisdictions and organizations track re-arrest rates, others track re-conviction rates, and still others track re-incarceration and do not necessarily adjust for the underlying offense type, such as parole violation or new crime, or the peculiarities of jurisdiction’s rules, i.e. varying leniency for certain crimes or violations based on law or offenders’ history.

By defining these terms differently and over different time frames, comparative analysis is nearly impossible since data sets do not measure the same thing over the same time.<sup>1</sup>

The myriad of variables makes the success of recidivism reduction programs particularly hard, but not impossible, to assess on a purely quantitative basis. This study seeks to build on existing “what works” literature to identify effective strategies and program components. It then applies qualitative analysis to five recidivism reduction programs with diverse approaches and circumstances to determine if those strategies are designed, implemented, and assessed to successfully rehabilitate inmates and reduce re-offense.

Although the perfect formula for successful re-entry remains elusive, extensive research and analysis has identified the primary components of effective recidivism reduction.

A 2019 study by Harvard's Institute of Politics concluded that "interventions must address health, employment, housing, skill development, mentorship, and social networks, as these factors have the most significant impact on reentry success."<sup>2</sup>

Other analyses add critical factors including financial support, transportation, childcare, and motivation. This study categorizes these different components into three pillars that affect recidivism reduction: basic needs, opportunity, and social support and accountability. These categories often overlap, interrelate, and vary based on specific inmate circumstances.

Many of these needs can be satisfied by attaining the other pillars—i.e. an employed returned citizen can acquire housing and transportation. Often one is prerequisite to meeting related needs—i.e. an untreated released inmate cannot work or access other services easily.

1. Basic needs encompasses housing, transportation, health care including substance abuse and mental health care, childcare, and financial security.
2. Opportunity includes employment and education which can provide income, stability, accountability, and, critically, purpose.
3. Support and accountability consists of building and maintaining positive relationships with family, friends, mentors, colleagues as well as authorities—e.g. parole and probation services. These networks can provide both basic needs assistance and opportunity and serve as motivation and accountability for the returned citizen to avoid recidivating.

Each of these pillars requires the inmates' own drive to rehabilitate themselves. They are not passive actors in their own re-entry and no amount of resources or well-designed program can replace the releasees' willing participation in their own rehabilitation. And that commitment to change and preparation for new and successful life on the outside begins behind bars. In many ways, re-entry begins on prison intake, not exit.

Each of the profiled programs – in varying degrees and to varying levels of success – seek to reach

inside the wire to make prisoners' lives more successful on the outside.

The programs examined include:

1. Privately managed program in state facilities—Continuum of Care
2. State-run program/coordinated with outside providers—Georgia PRI cohort (2015 to 2019)
3. Nonprofit program in privately managed, state-owned facility—Prison Entrepreneurship Program
4. Nonprofit program outside prison coordinated with state facilities—Vehicles for Change
5. University-run college education program in state-run facility—University of Baltimore's Second Chance Program

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Broadly, incarceration in prison serves three key societal functions: to punish offenders and deter others; to "incapacitate" criminals or protect the public and prevent future crimes; and to rehabilitate or reform offenders for a safe and productive return to society.

Within those functions, there are basic outcomes that can be assessed.

While punishment and incapacitation can be achieved through physical means and require defined state action—i.e. sentencing etc.—rehabilitation requires significant effort on the part of the inmate, prison officials and staff, and post-release service providers and other third parties to successfully re-integrate the offender back into society.

The chief metric for "rehabilitation" is recidivism or the rate and nature of re-offense by the released inmate.

We are effective at punishing offenders, but not successfully rehabilitating them. Prison time is often not spent productively. But some innovative programs over the past two decades have sought to change that. This paper profiles five recidivism reduction models across the United States based on what other effective programs evince.

Programs should deliver the three pillars to inmate

participants: meet basic needs, offer opportunity, and provide support and accountability.

Each program both succeeds and falls short of delivering all these equally to their inmate participants, thus have room for improvement. The commonalities and divergences between these models allow for an observer to draw out themes as to what makes any given program successful and what pitfalls often beset even effective ones.

For a recidivism reduction model to demonstrate success, it should:

- Follow a “wrap-around” or “inside-out” approach providing services and support during incarceration, prior to release, and post-release.
- Adhere to the three pillars approach in designing and implementing curriculum and service delivery.
- Strive for continuous improvement through data tracking, evaluation, iteration, and adaptation.
- Demonstrate and expect accountability and transparency from participants, staff, partners, and funders.

### **CONTINUUM OF CARE**

Continuum of Care (CoC) is a prisoner rehabilitation program run by the GEO Group in 18 of its managed correctional institutions.

It seeks to prepare inmates before release and support them during custody and after their return to society, offering both pre-release and post-release programming and support. CoC’s overarching goal, according to its Angela Geisinger, senior director of programs, is “to ultimately reduce recidivism.”<sup>3</sup>

Launched in 2014<sup>4</sup> at the Graceville Correctional Facility, a men’s prison in Florida managed by GEO for the state, the CoC program was developed in concert with University of Cincinnati criminal justice professor Edward Latessa. Based on Latessa’s research into evidenced-based recidivism reduction strategies, it employs the National Institute of Corrections’ (NIC) Eight Guiding Principles of re-entry. These represent a slight variation on the three pillars discussed above.

### **NIC’s Evidence-Based Principles for Effective Interventions<sup>5</sup>**

1. Assess risk and needs according to actuarial standards based on re-offense likelihood and effective intervention types tailored to individual characteristics.
2. Enhance intrinsic motivation by preparing and engaging offenders through counseling, coaching, and incentives.
  - Target interventions to risk, need, responsiveness, dosage, and intensity
  - Risk principle: Prioritize supervision and treatment resources for higher risk offenders.
  - Need principle: Target interventions to criminogenic needs.
  - Responsivity principle: Be responsive to temperament, learning style, motivation, culture, and gender when assigning programs.
  - Dosage: Structure 40-70% of high-risk offenders’ time for 3-9 months
3. Skill train with directed practice using cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) methods that track inmate characteristics and needs.
4. Increase positive reinforcement by ensuring that curricula as well as staff reinforce positive inmate behaviors and traits in every lesson and interaction.
5. Engage ongoing support in natural communities by encouraging and strengthening pro-social relationships with personal networks, especially family, friends, and community members.
6. Measure relevant processes/practices by continuously, consistently, and accurately assessing participant development as well as staff performance toward achieving stated programmatic goals.
7. Provide measurement feedback through evaluation and making needed adjustments-based progress toward desired outcomes for individual inmates and the program as a whole.

CoC’s approach starts on day one with inmate intake assessments and interviews that seek to identify specific motivations for and obstacles to successful re-entry for every offender. CoC staff then develops a release action plan tailored to each

inmate's needs, risk, and desires and that follows them throughout the program and into post-release.

Common needs addressed by the plan and subsequent curricula and counseling include acquiring a high school diploma, employment, and licensing, and receiving treatment for addiction issues and completing court mandates. While some of the in-prison vocational programming varies by GEO facility and its identified regional labor market demand, upon arrival all CoC participants receive case management services and a suite of tailored programming including educational and character courses, substance abuse treatment, and CBT.

Vocational options are partly selected and made available based on inmate release area. Florida's Graceville facility offerings include horticulture and hospitality while other training and licensing programming is chosen based on the occupation or industry's openness to engaging convicted felons—i.e. ex-offenders can more easily become barbers than other more sensitive professions.

Two critical components of CoC's design are comprehensive staff training and engagement and continuous assessment and development tracking of inmate progress toward their individual goals.

Geisinger said that by engaging and training all staff “from the food service manager to the housing officer” all the way up to the prison administrator on how to effectively interact with and support inmates, CoC achieves buy-in from its employees who in turn contribute to the individual inmate's success. As an example, every staffer is trained to aid an inmate in meeting their physical, educational, or personal needs by deploying necessary resources or connecting with the personnel who can.

To aid and assess progress, CoC also emphasizes the strict tracking and evaluation of inmate development data through its own internal database (GEOtrack) and staff communication. This process is meant to ensure programming is proving effective and offender release plans can be adjusted as needed.

GEO's recidivism reduction efforts intensify as the inmate's release date approaches. Between 12 and 18 months of release, offenders receive enhanced

case management and individual CBT sessions, versus the earlier group therapy. They are also provided monthly behavioral plans designed to set personal goals and meet individual needs—employment, housing, transportation, family reunification, and continuing treatment and educational programming—prior to re-entry. These inputs are developed into an inmate's final release plan which is completed to create a post-release plan at 90 days prior to re-entry.

The pre-release case manager works in tandem with other staff facilitators meet any practical needs like government identification documents and basic needs like housing and job opportunities.

After release from a CoC facility, case managers remain available for 12 months to counsel and assist participants and track their progress—but releasee engagement is entirely voluntarily and drops off significantly. Ramping up since its full implementation in 2015, the program now serves over 8,000 inmates per year across its participating facilities, mostly in Florida and Georgia, and another 2,000 individuals post-release.

A study of CoC's effectiveness at the facilities where it was first implemented found “participation in CoC prior to release had no significant effects on reducing recidivism when compared to the three comparison groups.”<sup>6</sup> Notably, this early assessment only tracked the first-year post-release and CoC's model has evolved significantly since those findings—beginning program on facility intake instead of one-year pre-release. Furthermore, the evaluation did not assess the post-release services delivered by CoC.

But CoC has taken significant steps to improve. Notably, the program's coverage in-prison period has already expanded, and its inmate data tracking and case management have become more robust.

A subsequent analysis by CoC showed its recidivism outcomes for participants to be substantially improvement over those who did not partake. Those who engaged in-prison therapy programming and post-release services recidivated at a 12-month return to prison rate, 35% less than those who refused CoC options. Promisingly, the greater the released prisoners' engagement with

CONTINUUM OF CARE PARTICIPATION (GRACEVILLE, 2018 RELEASE)	TOTAL INMATES	% 1-YEAR PRISON RETURN (FLORIDA)
<b>NONE</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>11.9%</b>
THERAPY & POST RELEASE (ANY)	467	7.7%
THERAPY & POST RELEASE (<\$1000)	386	7.7%
THERAPY & POST RELEASE (<\$2000)	422	8.1%
THERAPY & POST RELEASE (>\$1000)	81	7.4%
THERAPY & POST RELEASE (>\$2000)	45	4.4%

CoC's post-release care, the less likely the individual would reoffend.<sup>7</sup>

The critical components for CofC to hone are immediate pre-release preparation and post-release accountability. GEO does not operate the state's run parole and probation division's supervision thus currently has no mandatory contact with inmates post-release, relying on releasees' willingness to participate in such programming. The significant attrition rates experienced by CoC suggest that this voluntary model is a major barrier to success since effective inside-out reentry programs require robust participation on both sides of the wire.

### Recommendations

**Re-Entry Participation.** CoC should work with state authorities to encourage greater post-release engagement and better structure its post-release programming around satisfying the returning citizens' three pillars in a systematic way. The purely voluntary post-release participation approach fails to deliver a wrap-around model that can be tested for effectiveness by intervention type.

**Data Collection and Differentiation.** CoC should better track its inmate outcomes by facility site, demographics, offense type, and levels of programming engagement. Recidivism should also be tracked for longer intervals—e.g. 18 months, 3 and 5 years—and by different metrics—e.g. re-arrest, re-conviction etc.

### PRISON ENTREPRENEURSHIP PROGRAM (TEXAS)

The nonprofit re-entry program Prisoner Entrepreneurship Program (PEP) in Texas is independently operating inside two all-male Texas state prisons located in the Dallas and Houston metro areas, where it also provides post-release services

for returning offenders.

CEO or Chief Empowerment Officer Bryan Kelley, a former prisoner and program graduate, said the PEP model not only aims to reduce recidivism but seeks “to restore opportunity for some of our country's most marginalized folks: our prisoners and returning citizens.”<sup>8</sup>

With a focus on fostering entrepreneurship and building character in inmates, the PEP model resembles a hybrid between an executive MBA program and tent revival—up tempo, affirming, methodical, intense, and driven. That atmosphere owes itself to PEP's Ten Driving Values that it instills in its participants, graduates, staff, volunteers, and supporters and encourages them to embody daily.

### PEP's 10 Driving Values

1. “Fresh Start” outlook
2. Servant-leader mentality
3. Love
4. Innovation
5. Accountability
6. Integrity
7. Execution
8. Fun
9. Excellence
10. Wise stewardship

Unlike many recidivism reduction models that have no or low-entry requirements, admission into PEP is highly selective. PEP actively recruits from the entire Texas statewide male prison population but limits acceptance and matriculation, which involves relocation to one of the two prisons where PEP operates.

To qualify, the would-be participants must possess or be on track to attain a high school diploma or equivalency, be within three years of their official release date, and not be an active gang member or convicted sex offender. Thus, PEP winnows down its potential recruits to less than 4% of male inmates. Every three months, PEP staff contacts the approximately 5,000 eligible inmates and invites them to apply for the program. One third of those contacted go on to request the PEP application and informational materials, while under one-thousand inmates apply to join that quarter's cohort or "class."

The rigorous application and screening process includes a 20-page application and a 50-question test requiring a 70% passing mark before advancing to in-person staff interviews to assess program fit, with only 25% offered admissions.<sup>9</sup> Some are later excluded from participation and the requisite location transfer for administrative and logistical reasons, including health needs or disciplinary record by the wardens of private contractor MTC that manages the facilities, or the state's corrections authority, the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TCDJ).

The official in-prison program consists of four annual cohorts, and with attrition due to various factors, succeeds in "graduating" approximately 350 participants over the course of each year—up from around 100 only five years ago.<sup>10</sup>

Following the rigorous selection process, participants join a 9-month cohort for a three-month intensive "Leadership Academy" that incorporates both life skills, character building, and academic curriculum focused business leadership. The following six months are dedicated to the hands-on "business plan competition" when PEP participants develop, with the counsel of PEP's network of business leader volunteers, a business concept and prepare to "pitch" it to a panel of executives who pose as potential investors. This "Shark Tank"-like experience provides inmates with feedback and the opportunity to adapt and improve their entrepreneurial ambitions.

Another key component of PEP is culture. The volunteer days, when outside executives visit to provide both business advice and moral support,

feel more like rallies than prison programming. PEP also deploys its still-incarcerated graduates as "servant-leaders" or mentors for current participants as they advance through the program, offering institutional knowledge and support to the latest cohorts.

Upon release, PEP's culture of brotherhood is epitomized by the smallest gesture—PEP picks releases up at the prison gate, gives them a duffel bag of essentials such as toiletries and clothes, and takes them out to the fast-food meal of their choosing to "welcome them home." Graduates are then processed at the PEP offices and assigned a reentry coordinator who finalizes the basic needs process started behind the walls, including assigning housing, facilitating family connections, and employment. PEP runs its own transitional housing and has built a strong network of over 700 businesses that consistently employ its graduates after release.

Since 2010, 100% of PEP graduates were employed within 90 days of release. They often earn significantly higher wages than other ex-offenders and see impressive wage growth over time. Starting wages for PEP graduates are nearly double the Texas minimum wage, and after 3 years post-release, they earn \$55,000 on average. Additionally, many of its 2,600 graduates fulfill their dreams to start their own business with over 500 enterprises launched to date—with over a dozen posting annual revenues over \$1 million.

PEP keeps its graduates engaged through its strong culture of "PEP family" and support from the business community's volunteers. PEP hosts family-friendly social gatherings like barbecues for graduates to mingle as well as hosting regular "eSchool" continuing education courses at its headquarters where business executives and experts lecture graduates on various topics about entrepreneurship and business formation.

The results are impressive. PEP boasts a 3-year reincarceration rate of 7%—one-third the Texas state average. Considering that PEP's demographics largely mirror the state prison population—60% violent offenders, 40% previously incarcerated and approximately one-third black, Hispanic, and white—it is clear that PEP successfully matches the needs of most inmate types.



That said, PEP's admissions model, program intensity, and built-in "guard rails" in the form of service provision, professional and personal networks, and culture of self-motivation and accountability, make it unlikely to effectively expand to a broader class of inmates.

## Recommendations

**Admissions Eligibility and Recruitment.** PEP's success is impressive but is owed, at least partly, to its admissions selection bias by limiting eligibility to a narrow subset of Texas's incarcerated population. The program could expand its size and scope and demonstrate true effectiveness if its programming was promoted to a greater cross-section of inmates, offering the opportunity to inmates who do not immediately qualify. Additionally, programming pathways or introductory curriculum could be offered at other facilities for inmates who are ineligible for the full program.

**Data Collection and Analysis.** To demonstrate beyond any doubt, PEP needs to overcome criticisms that its selection process skews outcomes more than the program's interventions do. Greater and more rigorous data collecting controlling for these factors and deeper analysis into the "why" of PEP's successful interventions would benefit both the program itself and recidivism researchers more broadly.

## VEHICLES FOR CHANGE (MARYLAND)

The Maryland-based non-profit Vehicles for Change (VFC) is a post-release training, support, and employment agency for returned citizens seeking to become auto mechanics.

VFC's president Martin Schwartz explained the intent is to "give these [ex-inmates] access to life. We do that by providing a holistic approach to career employment."

But that was not Vehicles for Change's initial mission nor its exclusive focus, according to president Martin Schwartz. Over two decades ago, Schwartz observed how much transportation was a prerequisite for low-income individuals and families to achieve financial security and independence.

In 1999, Vehicles for Change was launched as a car donation service, receiving gifted vehicles, re-

pairing them, and distributing them to the needy at low cost.<sup>11</sup> Soon, demand for Vehicles for Change's services had expanded so rapidly, there was a backlog of donated cars while client demand went unmet.

The outside mechanics who repaired the donated cars at a discounted rate for the charity could not keep up with the increased volume—there were too few qualified auto technicians available.

Schwartz's team had to troubleshoot a labor market problem on their own—meet their own demand for qualified labor to fulfill their primary mission. VFC knew that there was a willing, able, and untapped pool of mechanics—behind bars.<sup>12</sup>

The state of Maryland's Department of Corrections operates in-prison auto repair training programs that can earn occupational certificates in diesel automotive technology at three facilities and automotive maintenance and inspection at five sites.<sup>13</sup> Each cohort consists of 10-15 inmate students at any given time with approximately 70 across the state.

VFC decided to tap into that pipeline of able ex-offenders to meet its workforce shortage and open up a working training facility that both apprentices ex-inmates and repairs vehicles for its donated car enterprise. VFC calls it the "Full Circle" reentry program.

After nearly a decade of preparation and construction, VFC opened the training facility in November 2015 located in Halethorpe, Maryland outside of Baltimore. On average, the program graduates 30-40 students per year and with the support of the local Abell Foundation will double its capacity in the coming years.

Behind those prison walls, VFC does not control which inmates can participate or their training curriculum, and does not provide re-entry preparation or other services, but VFC is engaged nonetheless. It works directly with the prisons department and Maryland's Department of Labor to recruit qualified and interested candidates for its program.

Full Circle program manager Janell Johnson and her team visit each prison facility with an auto training program three to four times a year to

publicize the program and explain the admissions process and its outcomes. Schwartz said that word-of-mouth has led to a surge of interest from inmates as well. VFC receives “about a letter a day” inquiring about joining the program.

Admission is open to all former inmates, including women, regardless of their in-prison training, although the vast majority participate in auto, diesel, or the body shop programs. While most participants are on full release with or without probation or parole restrictions, VFC also accepts work release inmates who are within 8 months of their final release from a correctional institution.

Upon arrival at VFC, prospective students tour the 30,000 square foot state-of-the-art garage and retail shop built specifically for the program. They are asked about their goals and understanding of the program’s expectations. Admissions is on a rolling basis without timed cohorts. If they wish to join, applicants are asked to provide a letter of recommendation from their in-prison instructor or appropriate alternative, and complete a needs assessment with staff including reviewing their criminal history, work history, and mental health or substance abuse status—none of which are a bar to admissions.

Next, applicants appear for a “shadow” or training day. They will take a practical hands-on skills test, a basic aptitude exam, and partner with a current student for a floor rotation through the garage’s stations. Staff interviews the applicant to again gauge their interest and program fit. If either the applicant or VFC do not wish to proceed, VFC still offers the ex-inmate help connecting with other employment agencies or resources to aid their re-entry.

Students who do enter the Full Circle program arrive the next Monday for the four-month program. Every day at 7 am, students receive their daily assignments and attend a 90-minute theory class.

The program builds toward automotive repair certification’s gold standard, the ASE exam, administered by the National Institute of Automotive Service Excellence. VFC offers 10 ASE subject component tests and aims for students to pass at least four. The average student completes five while many pass all 10.

Throughout their time with VFC, students are evaluated on a monthly basis on their skills progress and on their outside needs in staff-led one-on-one “counseling sessions.”

During the program, students receive various types of re-entry support that address the three pillars framework including help getting transportation, a driver’s license, resolving child support and court fees, and access to mental health and substance abuse resources.

For those that fall short, VFC’s ethos is one of positive reinforcement. An informal mentoring system has developed with more advanced students taking on “rookies” and counseling them independently.

Johnson said VFC is “not an environment of consequence and punishment, I am here to support you through it. Most of them have not experienced the level of support.” Occasionally, students who do not abide by the rules (i.e. 7AM daily arrival, no drug or alcohol use etc.) are suspended from participation and referred for community assistance if needed. We provide each person who enters an opportunity to complete successfully, so we offer as much support as we can. Schwartz adds, “our whole goal is to get every single person through this program that enters. That’s why we see a 96% completion rate.”<sup>14</sup>

For those who do finish, VFC has a 100% job placement with the vast majority entering the automotive field although a handful pursue construction. Before graduation, VFC conducts employment coaching and identifies job opportunities tailored to the applicant. Staff build each student a portfolio demonstrating their work readiness and qualifications that is sent on to prospective employers. Many regional employers now seek out Full Circle students directly for their qualifications and high level of motivation and work ethic. On average, VFC graduates are employed within seven to 10 days of finishing the program.

By the summer of 2020, VFC’s program had graduated over 170 former inmates including about 5% women. Of those who finished the program in the last four and a half years, only two are known to have been reincarcerated subsequently.<sup>15</sup>

Vehicles for Change is currently seeking to expand its model to other sites across the country. While the model's success is admirable and demonstrable, significant challenges exist for other organizations seeking to replicate it.

First, the program's small scale and narrow focus are limiting factors for engaging large numbers of inmates or returned citizens. Second, the program has little to no input into the curriculum, treatment, or other interventions for inmates prior to matriculation. This makes its exceedingly difficult for VFC to be a full-service re-entry provider and must rely on informal services or referrals to outside resources. Third, the unique admissions process, small capacity, and lack of cohorts create a distorting selection bias as participants themselves already display many of the attributes of successful re-entry.

## Recommendations

### **Formalized In-Reach and Partner Coordination.**

VFC's current model requires systematization so that its success can be extended beyond the tenure of its current leadership and staff. Much of the institutional knowledge and practices of VFC are intuitive and idiosyncratic which makes its replicability and scalability difficult. Relations with correctional facilities and state authorities including coordinated recruitment, curriculum design, and re-entry preparation and post-release services should be formalized and all parties held accountable for upholding.

**Data, Transparency, and Research.** As VFC grows and matures beyond its current start-up model, the organization must track data rigorously and adopt a "continuous improvement" approach to specific interventions based on lessons learned. Armed with such data and analysis, the program can adapt to better deliver outcomes for participants and can be both transparent and accountable to its funders.

## **UNIVERSITY OF BALTIMORE'S SECOND CHANCE PROGRAM (MARYLAND)**

The University of Baltimore (UB) offers enrolled inmates bachelor's degree courses in fulfillment of the college's general education requirements. Students are conferred a degree in human services

administration if they graduate prior to release or may switch to other majors if they complete their studies post-release. In addition to education, the UB Second Chance provides re-entry and case management support to participants prior to and following release.

Following the 1994 prohibition of federal Pell grants for the incarcerated, higher education opportunities inside prisons plummeted. But a pilot program by the Obama administration re-instated limited Pell funding to a few dozen in-prison college programs in 2015. With access to the necessary funding to serve inmates, UB's Second Chance Program, based at an all-male maximum security prison in Maryland, launched in 2016.

Participation is selective and limited, with 60 inmate-students enrolled each semester out of a total prison population of 1,800. The program's prestige among fellow inmates makes "new students feel pressure to do really well based on reputation of the program. [That reputation] prepares them and makes them realize the expectations," according to the program's executive director Andrea Cantora, a UB professor.<sup>16</sup>

Students must possess a high school diploma and positive disciplinary record to participate. Unlike many programs, UB does not limit enrollment to students with near-term release dates. Courses like Writing 101 and math are taught by volunteer faculty at Loyola University Maryland, Georgetown University, and the University of Baltimore. Tutoring and remedial instruction are provided by faculty and other student-inmates during daily study hall hours in the prison library, set aside for the near exclusive use of the UB program.

Additionally, the Second Chance program provides case management and re-entry support to its students. Because the UB program was created as a pilot project with an initial five-year lifespan, these services, especially post-release, were limited to a part-time social worker. Subsequently, UB hired a full-time re-entry specialist with experience working with ex-offenders. The coordinator meets with inmates 2-3 times a week on one-on-one basis prior to release and helps inmates find jobs, reconnect with family and support networks, and acquire housing and government identification. After prisoners leave Jessup, staff continues

to follow up on a regular basis, doing check-ins even with those who have disengaged with UB.

Upon release, students can complete their degree with the credits they earned at UB or transfer to another institution of higher learning. According to Cantora, most of those release continue their studies on UB's campus where they find more resources to aid their successful re-entry. Of the 96 students served to date, 25 participants have been released from prison, although UB maintains the right to put an "educational hold" with the student's consent preventing release or transfer before they complete coursework. Two of UB's released students have been re-arrested for new offenses and one student has been re-incarcerated since 2017.

The UB program is an outlier as a recidivism reduction program since its design and implementation are not exclusively focused on preventing re-offense. Instead, it promotes educational attainment as a goal and welcomes reducing recidivism as an added benefit. As the much-touted 2016 RAND meta-study on correctional education links prison learning to a 13% reduction in re-offense, such programming has value but is not in and of itself a proven recidivism reducer.<sup>17</sup> Other inputs discussed in the Three Pillars framework may more significantly weigh on the particular offender's likelihood of recidivating.

Cantora concedes that UB's program "didn't have it all figured out" on managing reentry initially. This humility from a new and evolving program that is considering expanding to other facilities is refreshing and holds out promise that, with time, the Second Chance college model pioneered by Cantora and her colleagues will grow into an effective and scalable reentry model.

## Recommendations

**Structured and Coordinated Re-entry Planning.** UB's program would benefit from a rigorous and regimented approach to recidivism reduction by addressing the inmates' re-entry needs directly and consistently. The ad-hoc approach of a program admittedly not exclusively intended to reduce recidivism should evolve into a comprehensive and intensive regimen for participants both pre- and post-release.

**Outcomes Follow-Up and Data Tracking.** The Second Chance initiative should institute data tracking systems that measure inmate success inside, preparation for re-entry, and post-release outcomes as its program expands. Transparent and reliable data will help the program as well as funders and other stakeholders to better assess its resource and structural needs going forward.

## PRISONER RE-ENTRY INITIATIVE (GEORGIA)

In the decade before 2012, Georgia's prison population rate doubled while its recidivism, or reconviction rate, remained stable. Without an effective strategy to curb this, project inmate growth would overwhelm the prison system. Governor Nathan Deal and the state legislature enacted a series of reforms including the Justice Reinvestment Initiative (JRI) to focus on sentencing reform and recidivism reduction. Under the aegis of the Governor's Office of Transition and Re-Entry Services (GOTSR), the Georgia Prisoner Re-Entry Initiative (PRI) was launched in 2014 with federal grant support.<sup>18</sup>

PRI fit well with the agency's "our mission to improve public safety," according to Michelle Stanley, the director of reentry services for the Georgia Department of Community Supervision (DCS).<sup>19</sup>

PRI was designed as a three-stage process: 1) needs and risk assessment and program delivery (intake and pre-release); 2) needs fulfillment and release preparation (immediately pre-release); and 3) supervision (post-release).

The first element consists of identifying individual inmate needs and directing in-prison programming on identified recidivism risks including "substance abuse, cognitive thinking, vocational/educational (GED), mental health, and other criminogenic needs."<sup>20</sup> Prior to release, PRI provided services and resources to aid released inmates in re-entry including assistance in "employment, housing, ancillary services, and aftercare." The supervision stage provides monitoring and directs resources to former inmates in the high-risk early period post-release.

The program, which launched in 2014 and was fully instituted in 2015, had over 22,000 participants during its operational period. The program

was subsequently reconstituted in early 2019 due to policy changes at the state-level. To be eligible for PRI inclusion, inmates had to be legally resident, qualify as medium or high risk under Georgia's New Generation Assessment (NGA) tool, and plan to be released to one of the 13 participating counties where post-release PRI were available.

Rigorous data tracking and frequent needs and risk assessments guided in-prison services for inmates under the PRI. This allowed the program to adapt and target interventions effectively. Additionally, the PRI innovated in several ways including sending prisoners to pre-release facilities near their release destination and delivering the release preparation services there via "In-Reach Specialists."

This newly created function served to bridge the gap between in-prison programming and post-release service providers and county-level community coordinators. In-Reach staff worked with closely with them to prepare inmates and monitor their needs. With a community supervision officer—i.e. parole and probation—and other tailored specialists, the community coordinator and In-Reach specialist serve as the inmate's "transition team" and meet together with the inmate and separately coordinate to establish a plan for their successful re-entry.

PRI participants were also assigned to special supervision with designated officers for an intensive 90-day monitoring period immediately post-release. Participants were also engaged in faith-based initiatives and mentoring and support group programs and directed to community organizations for additional resources.

Renee Snead, operations manager for re-entry services, said PRI was intended to "ensure individuals have the resources to be successful by working with providers and doing the necessary capacity-building so that the program moves the needle" on recidivism.<sup>21</sup>

But as the independent evaluation report on PRI states, "Georgia had no budget for community services thus making [re-entry service] providers volunteers" unlike other states that compensated organizations for assisting inmates. Without budget strings to compel these reentry organizations

to fully participate in the transition teams [and monitor and follow-up with releasees], the underfunded model could not maximize its impact or do so uniformly.

Under the terms of the grant, PRI sought to reduce participants' 2-year reconviction rate by 15% (rate of change) compared to non-PRI inmates. It reduced it by 14% but unevenly across the 13 participating counties. For example, DeKalb County in metro Atlanta saw significant reductions in risk over the 24-month period while other more rural counties saw almost no change. The evaluators also found that the In-Reach model, as implemented by DCS, was not responsible for the reduced reconviction and rearrest rates in the PRI cohort nor did it improve rates of substance abuse, housing, or employment.

That report concludes that DCS's planned "a seamless hand-off from the institution to the community" using highly qualified, coordinated, and engaged staff to direct timely resources and intervention to returning offenders "never materialized as designed." Instead, the overworked community coordinators were tasked to be temporary In-Reach specialists at first, in addition to their other duties, and later asked to supervise the specialists who themselves were stretched thin and had minimal contact with inmates before handing them off to volunteer community organizations who had little to no accountability to DCS.

Good intentions and even effective design could not compensate for the lack of resources that made it impossible for PRI's In-Reach model to realize its full potential. In a sense, the relative success of PRI suggests the overall reentry strategy to assess, meet needs, and support inmates is effective even when not implemented perfectly.

## Recommendations

**Partner Organization Coordination.** Since PRI's components were redeployed or reconfigured after 2018, the model itself cannot be improved but other organizations and entities can still learn from the PRI's experience. Chiefly, the PRI failed to deliver its desired outcomes due to incomplete implementation of the model. Specifically, the intended supported transition of inmates into

returning citizens was not adequately resourced, lacked partner buy-in, and was poorly coordinated by state agencies who effectively siloed their roles and failed to cooperate with one another.

## **CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR RECIDIVISM REDUCTION**

Each of the profiled programs that seek to reduce recidivism adhere to the parts, if not all, of the three pillars framework but do so in uneven and often insufficient ways. While they all have had modest success in improving the lives and promoting successful reentry for some individuals, the results are not consistent or not entirely reflective of the program's unique impact.

Across the programs, critical challenges remain including:

- Selection distortions limiting replicability and scalability
- Limited data-tracking and rigorous evaluation to determine outcomes and effectiveness
- Consistent and quality interventions and service provision
- Integrated program intake and delivery with reentry preparation and follow-up
- Accountability mechanisms and metrics for participants, managers, and staff

None of challenges are unique to any one of the profiled programs nor do they suffer them equally. These organizations are not alone as program studies of the federal Second Chance Act, a grant that seeks to promote innovative and effective recidivism reduction and reentry systems, found, "Those in the program group were no less likely than those in the control group to be re-arrested, reconvicted, or re-incarcerated; their time to re-arrest or re-incarceration was no shorter."<sup>22</sup>

Those evaluations concluded similarly to this report that accountability, data and assessments, adaptability, and, crucially, "comprehensive" reentry models that include both pre- and post-release service provision, support, and monitoring are essential to effective recidivism reduction. But designing, executing, iterating, and adapting this system is no simple task when coupled with limited resources, bureaucratic hurdles, funder interference and priority shifts, and the unpredictable

factor of human agency on part of both the staff and the inmate participants.

No specific organization type—i.e. state-run, privately managed, or non-profit—is best suited to deliver desired outcomes per se. For example, critics of for-profit correctional facility management models fail to note that these models, if provided the proper incentives and accountability, have both the resources and the flexibility to deliver high-quality, programming that reduces recidivism both effectively and efficiently.

On the other hand, nonprofits are highly adaptable but lack predictable revenue streams and proven systems to sustain their efforts over time. And as the Georgia experience has shown, government programming is subject to both political whims and bureaucratic challenges that hinder even a well-designed model from being successful.

Thus, reducing recidivism, measured by whatever chosen metric, requires a commitment to mission and not to any specific means or inputs. Organizations should promote a culture of adaptability and accountability. They should incorporate responsiveness to feedback and a willingness to adjust to successes and failures alike, using the three pillars as guideposts for effective reentry policy.

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