

# Immediate Access to Employment Reduces Recidivism

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More than half a million people are released from federal and state jails and prisons in this country each year. Following their release, roughly two-thirds of ex-offenders are arrested for a new offense within three years resulting in a seemingly unbreakable vicious cycle.

After more than three decades of working with large populations of ex-offenders, we asked whether employment reduces recidivism to crime. Approaching think tanks and scholars, we were surprised to find that little research had been done on the subject. The idea that if you provided employment for those leaving prison might reduce their going back seems logical. But that is just not enough to convince policy makers that a new approach must be developed.

Following years of speculation and anecdotal evidence, it was time to study the actual impact employment has on recidivism. We joined forces with the Manhattan Institute to address this pressing issue. Our company, America Works, operated the program and an independent research organization conducted the study.

The Manhattan Institute recently released the study results, and yes, they support our original thesis. Work reduces recidivism but there's an important caveat that we must point out - the sooner ex-offenders are employed, the less likely they will commit future crimes resulting in further jail and prison time.

The study revealed that there was a 20 percent reduction in return to crime by non-violent offenders (who constitute the majority of incarcerated individuals). To put the findings in context, acclaimed NYU Professor of Politics and Public Policy Larry Mead said, “In most random social studies there are usually little or no positive effects. The results are huge.”

To further supplement this study, we looked within our own prison-to-work programs in six cities across the United States. While they were not controlled studies, the results have been consistent and impressive. Statewide rates of recidivism range from about 31 to 70 percent, while the rates for those placed in jobs shortly after their release ranged from 3.3 to eight percent. One could claim that these were self-selected to be more employable and less likely to recidivate. But in High Point, NC, only violent offenders who were identified by the police as most likely to reoffend were referred to our office for jobs. The North Carolina statewide recidivism rate was 40.7 percent, while the recidivism rate for individuals referred and placed in jobs was five percent.

Our Maryland office had equally successful results. The state’s recidivism rate hovers just over 40 percent. We found that there was zero recidivism for ex-offenders who reached six months of employment.

It costs about \$5,000 to place and retain an ex-offender in a job. It costs, depending on the state, more than \$31,000 on average to keep someone in prison for a year. New York State, for example, spends as much as \$60,076 per inmate. The cost/benefit is immense and should not be lost on legislators interested in reducing budgets.

To replicate these achievements, there are two crucial components to a program if it is to succeed. First, it must have work first, or rapid attachment to employment, rather than lengthy classroom training.

Second, those providing the services must be paid only for results. That is, an ex-offender must be placed in a job and retained for some minimum of time before a program provider receives any money.

These two prerequisites will ensure success. National and local policy makers should take heed.

It's time to break the cycle. The results are in - work reduces recidivism.

### **In conclusion...**

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