

The Joyce Foundation's

Transitional Jobs Reentry Demonstration

TESTING STRATEGIES TO HELP FORMER PRISONERS
FIND AND KEEP JOBS AND STAY OUT OF PRISON

IMPLEMENTATION AND FIRST-YEAR RESULTS

OCTOBER 2010

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Design: Jasculca/Terman and Associates, Inc.

Dear Colleague,

Thank you for your interest in the Transitional Jobs Reentry Demonstration (TJRD). I hope you find this report helpful as we continue to develop policies and programs to support recently released prisoners in reentering their communities successfully.

The Joyce Foundation funded the TJRD to evaluate the impact of a key reentry strategy: transitional jobs programs. Together with partners in the reentry and transitional jobs fields, we set out to learn if these short-term, subsidized jobs in fact help former prisoners secure longer-term employment and stay out of the correctional system.

With more than 700,000 men and women released from prison each year, we must keep working at developing the most effective reentry strategies. State corrections budgets are soaring because of recidivism. And public safety is at risk when former prisoners revert to criminal activity and fail to become productive, contributing members of their communities.

It is generally believed that stable employment is critical to a successful transition from prison to the community, but we need more rigorous research about which strategies and practices are most effective. To address the paucity of research, we engaged the highly regarded social policy research organization MDRC to test transitional jobs programs in four cities within our Midwest region—Chicago, Detroit, Milwaukee and St. Paul.

Among the study's findings, we learned that while transitional jobs programs have clearly been successful for other populations, we did not find a clear link between transitional jobs and increased long-term employment or reduced recidivism for former prisoners. Obviously I would prefer to report unequivocal success, but the nature of the Joyce Foundation's work is to fund innovation and evaluation, and from that, determine the best next steps for the particular population in need.

Even though we still have work to do to achieve the full promise of transitional jobs programs for recently released prisoners, the study and accompanying interviews did yield encouraging insights. For example, men returning from prison have a high level of motivation to work. Transitional jobs programs created an important period of stability for participants in the weeks immediately following their release. Transitional jobs provided immediate earned income even in bad economic times. We also come away from this research with a number of policy and program implications, which are explained in this overview report.

We hope this study will become part of an important body of high-quality and necessary research in the reentry field. It can inform future research projects on this issue—including those being undertaken by the U.S. Department of Labor and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

When it comes to helping people transition from prison to their communities, gain employment and stay out of the correctional system, doing less is not an option. The stakes are simply too high.

In closing, I would like to express my gratitude to MDRC's Dan Bloom and the entire research team for their dedication and leadership. Their knowledge and insights were invaluable every step of the way. I would also like to acknowledge Amy Rynell and the Advisory Board of National Transitional Jobs Network, whose expertise in the field was a critical factor in ensuring the robust, quality research we have today.

Most important, I want to thank the organizations that volunteered to participate in this research. They put themselves under intense scrutiny so that we could learn more about transitional jobs programs and how to bring about positive outcomes. I am grateful for their participation and commitment and am pleased that they are already incorporating some of the things we learned. Good policy research not only informs us, but it helps us determine where to go next. And that is exactly what this research has achieved.

Sincerely,

Ellen S. Alberding
President, The Joyce Foundation



Overview

Successful prisoner
reentry, a national
challenge

With more than two million people incarcerated in prisons or jails in the United States at any given time, there are also large numbers of people released from prison—more than 700,000 annually. Of primary concern is the fact that two-thirds of those released are rearrested, and half return to prison within three years.

Between 1975 and 2007, the number of people incarcerated in state and federal prisons per 100,000 U.S. residents rose from 111 to 506. Corrections costs also surged during this period and now approach \$70 billion per year, with most of that total borne by state and local governments.

These facts present distinct challenges for our society and explain why prisoner reentry has attracted growing attention in recent years. As a means to control surging corrections costs and improve public safety, states across the country are seeking ways to reduce recidivism (people returning to prison). But the challenge looms large for many reasons.

Men and women released from incarceration face daunting obstacles as they seek to reenter their communities. They often have difficulty finding housing and reconnecting with their families and other social supports. Finding steady work can be particularly difficult as former prisoners often have low levels of education and skills and no recent work experience. Many employers are reluctant to hire people with criminal records. Moreover, returning prisoners are

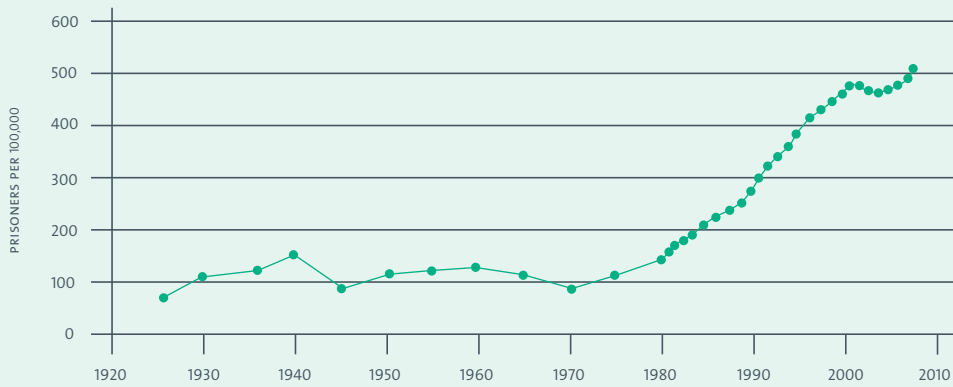
heavily concentrated in a small number of struggling urban neighborhoods that lack resources to assist in the reentry process.

Corrections costs... approach \$70 billion per year, with most of that total borne by state and local governments.

Many experts believe that stable work is critical to a successful transition from prison to the community, and most reentry initiatives include services to help former prisoners find employment. Yet little is known about what strategies are effective in helping former prisoners find and hold jobs.

¹ Walmsley, R. (2007). *World prison population list* (7th ed.). London, England: King's College, International Centre for Prison Studies

TABLE 1: PRISONERS IN STATE OR FEDERAL PRISON PER 100,000 U.S. RESIDENTS, 1925 – 2007



Source: Steven Raphael and Michael Stoll (eds.) "Do Prisons Make Us Safer? The Benefits and Costs of the Prison Boom," Russell Sage Foundation, New York, 2008

The most recent national statistics show that two-thirds of those released from prison are rearrested and half are re-incarcerated within three years of release. In many cases, people return to prison not because they commit new crimes, but rather because they violate the rules of parole supervision.

The Transitional Jobs Reentry Demonstration:

Advancing our
understanding of
successful reentry
strategies

Many states have developed multifaceted “prisoner reentry” initiatives in recent years.

At the federal level, the Serious and Violent Offender Reentry Initiative, the Prisoner Reentry Initiative, and, most recently, the Second Chance Act of 2008 have supported those comprehensive efforts. Many experts believe that stable employment is critical to a successful transition from prison to the community, and most of the state reentry initiatives include a strong focus on helping former prisoners find jobs, but there is limited evidence about what kinds of program strategies are effective at increasing employment for former prisoners.

The Transitional Jobs Reentry Demonstration (TJRD) was developed by the Chicago-based Joyce Foundation to help fill this knowledge gap. Also funded by the JEHT Foundation and the U.S. Department of Labor, the TJRD tested employment programs for former prisoners in four Midwest cities using a rigorous random assignment design.² The project focuses in particular on transitional jobs programs that provide work experience through temporary, subsidized jobs (that is, job wages are subsidized by the program), support services, and job placement assistance. Transitional jobs are widely seen as a promising employment model, both for former prisoners and for other disadvantaged job seekers.

The Joyce Foundation initiated the TJRD in 2006 to learn whether the transitional jobs strategy is effective at increasing

employment and reducing recidivism among former prisoners. One of a number of different subsidized employment approaches that have been implemented or tested in recent decades, the transitional jobs model is based on the need to address lack of work experience and “soft skills” for those who have difficulty finding and holding jobs by teaching people how to work by working. The model also assumes that program staff are best able to identify and address workplace problems — tardiness, difficulty taking direction and so on — by observing participants on the job, and that employers will be more likely to hire someone who has a track record of successful employment.

Finally, in a reentry context, transitional jobs provide a source of legitimate employment during the critical period following release from prison, based on the assumption that former prisoners who have steady jobs, income to meet their basic needs and the daily structure of work will be less likely to commit crimes or violate the terms of parole supervision.

The TJRD is one of the largest and most rigorous evaluations of employment programs for former prisoners since the 1970s. It is hoped that these initial results will provide guidance about the effectiveness of transitional jobs to inform public policy and program practice at the federal, state and local levels.

²The JEHT Foundation ceased operating in January 2009.

Two other major studies have tested transitional jobs programs in recent years. An evaluation of the New York City-based Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO), which targets former prisoners, found that when compared to a job search program, the transitional jobs program initially generated a large increase in employment, but that increase faded by the end of the first year. This meant that the positive impacts were not sustained after the men left the subsidized jobs. Nevertheless, the CEO program did significantly decrease recidivism—particularly for participants who came to the program shortly after release—and these effects lasted for at least three years. Another study tested a transitional jobs program for long-term welfare recipients in Philadelphia. Like CEO, that program also generated short-lived employment gains that were mostly driven by transitional jobs; it also led to reductions in welfare receipt and payments.

This policy brief, produced by the Joyce Foundation, summarizes the findings in the TJRD project. It describes how the demonstration was implemented in Chicago, Detroit, Milwaukee and St. Paul, assesses how the transitional jobs programs affected employment and recidivism during the first year after individuals entered the project, and presents information on program costs. The research report was prepared by MDRC, which is leading the evaluation, along with the Urban Institute and the National Poverty

Center at the University of Michigan. Some language in this brief is adapted from MDRC’s report.³ The National Transitional Jobs Network provided technical assistance to the project. The full report can be downloaded from the Joyce Foundation website: www.joycefdn.org.

The TJRD is one of the largest and most rigorous evaluations of employment programs for former prisoners since the 1970s.

³ *Work After Prison: One-year findings from Transitional Jobs Reentry Demonstration*, Redcross Et al, 2010

THE PROJECT: BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

The TJRD was designed from the start as a rigorous evaluation. Like the CEO evaluation, the TJRD aims to learn whether transitional jobs programs are more effective than less-intensive programs providing basic job search and referral services but no subsidized employment.

To accomplish this goal, the Joyce Foundation used a competitive process to select and fund employment programs for former prisoners in four cities within its Midwestern grant making area: Chicago, Detroit, Milwaukee and St. Paul. In Detroit, Milwaukee and St. Paul, two different organizations were identified in each city, one to run a transitional jobs program and the second to run a job search program; in Chicago, the same organization provided both types of services. The transitional jobs programs were selected based on their experience with the model and the target population, their ability to raise funds to support the program, their linkages with state or local corrections agencies, and other factors.

The transitional jobs programs all shared some basic features, though they were structured somewhat differently. The Detroit and St. Paul programs were operated by Goodwill Industries affiliates, and participants worked in jobs in existing Goodwill enterprises such as retail stores or a light manufacturing plant. In Chicago, transitional jobs workers were employed by a staffing agency established by the Safer Foundation. The staffing agency contracted with a waste management firm that in turn

had contracts with the City of Chicago to operate garbage recycling plants; almost all program participants worked in those facilities.

Participants in the New Hope program in Milwaukee were placed in positions with local nonprofit organizations or small businesses but remained employed by New Hope, which paid their wages. All of the transitional jobs programs offered an array of support services and helped participants find permanent jobs. The Milwaukee and St. Paul programs also offered bonus payments to participants who found and held unsubsidized jobs; some studies have found that similar kinds of earnings supplements have led to increases in employment.

The demonstration targeted men over 18 years of age who had been released from state prison within the past 90 days.

Starting in early 2007, men who met those criteria and volunteered for the study were assigned, at random, to one of two groups:

- **Transitional jobs group**, whose members were referred to the TJRD transitional jobs program in their city and offered a transitional job, support services and job search and job placement help. This served as the program group.
- **Job search group**, whose members were referred to the TJRD job search program in their city, where they could get help finding employment but were not offered a transitional job. This served as the control group.

TABLE 2: ORGANIZATIONS OPERATING TRANSITIONAL JOBS AND JOB SEARCH ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS IN THE TRANSITIONAL JOBS REENTRY DEMONSTRATION.

SITE	TRANSITIONAL JOBS PROGRAM	JOB SEARCH ASSISTANCE PROGRAM
CHICAGO	SAFER FOUNDATION	SAFER FOUNDATION
DETROIT	GOODWILL INDUSTRIES OF GREATER DETROIT	JVS DETROIT HISPANIC DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION
MILWAUKEE	NEW HOPE PROJECT	PROJECT RETURN
ST. PAUL	GOODWILL/EASTER SEALS MINNESOTA	AMHERST H. WILDER FOUNDATION

PARTICIPANTS: DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

The sites recruited a total of approximately 1,800 men into the study from January 2007 until enrollment ended in late September 2008.

Most of the study participants are African-American men in their thirties. Only about one-fourth had graduated from high school, but about half had earned a General Educational Development (GED) certificate. Most had worked in the past, but only about half had worked six consecutive months for a single employer.

The study participants had extensive histories with the criminal justice system, with an average of nine prior arrests and a total of six years in state prison. Almost all were under parole supervision when they entered the study.

The characteristics of the study participants are generally similar from site to site, though the St. Paul sample stands out in some respects because the programs in that site targeted much of their recruitment to residents in halfway houses. Men living in those facilities after release from prison

were often classified as “high risk” and were under a particularly intensive form of parole supervision. This situation has implications for the number of people who were later returned to prison for violating parole conditions.

TABLE 3: CHARACTERISTICS OF TJRD STUDY PARTICIPANTS AT THE TIME OF ENROLLMENT

AVERAGE AGE	35
RACE/ETHNICITY (%)	
WHITE	10
BLACK/AFRICAN AMERICAN	81
OTHER	9
HAS CHILDREN (%)	52
HAS HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA OR GED (%)	75
LIVING ARRANGEMENTS (%)	
OWNS/RENTS HOUSE/APARTMENT	17
LIVES WITH FRIENDS/RELATIVES	48
TRANSITIONAL HOUSING	30
SHELTER/OTHER	5
EVER WORKED 6 CONSECUTIVE MONTHS FOR ONE EMPLOYER (%)	52
ON PROBATION OR PAROLE (%)	97
AVERAGE TOTAL TIME SPENT IN PRISON (MONTHS)	72
AVERAGE TIME SPENT IN PRISON IN MOST RECENT SPELL (MONTHS)	33

TJRD: PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

The TJRD project generally operated as intended; the transitional jobs programs were able to place a very high percentage of study participants into transitional jobs.

The transitional jobs programs worked hard to place men into subsidized jobs quickly after they were randomly assigned; in three of the four sites, participants were usually at work within a few days. Thus, despite the instability in participants' lives, about 85 percent of the men assigned to the transitional jobs group actually worked in a transitional job. On average, those who were placed in transitional jobs worked for about four months. Data gathered from other transitional jobs programs in the participating cities suggest that very few men in the job search group worked in transitional jobs.

With few exceptions, the transitional jobs were low-skilled positions that were not designed to train participants in particular occupations. Rather, the jobs aimed to teach the “soft skills” that many employers value — showing up to work on time, cooperating with co-workers, and taking direction from supervisors. In the in-depth interviews, some participants expressed disappointment about the menial nature of the work on transitional job worksites.

The study found that all services provided by the transitional jobs programs cost \$3,500 to \$5,000 per participant, on average. Nearly half of this amount, about

\$2,000, went directly to participants in wages and other financial supports.

The transitional jobs programs initially focused on recruiting participants and, if necessary, tailoring the subsidized jobs to fit this population. Activities designed to move participants into unsubsidized jobs took longer to develop.

All of the sites had established linkages with local corrections agencies before the project began. Nevertheless, during the initial months of the project, most of the sites spent considerable time and energy working with their criminal justice partners to develop and refine referral and enrollment procedures for the demonstration; in some sites, these procedures were revised several times.

Similarly, while all of the programs already operated transitional jobs programs, most found that changes were needed to accommodate the TJRD population. For example, in St. Paul and Milwaukee, the programs needed to develop new worksites to accommodate sex offenders who were not permitted to work in particular occupations.

The sites were generally able to overcome these early challenges, but such difficulties diverted attention away from the task of developing strong job development and job placement activities for TJRD participants. The organizations running the transitional jobs programs already had experience with

these activities, but in some cases, their existing staff had not worked extensively with former prisoners, a population that presents special job placement challenges. Although job placement services improved over time in most of the transitional jobs programs, the research team concluded that these services were generally of average quality.

In three of the sites, the staff working with the job search group had as much experience providing job placement services to former prisoners as the staff working in the transitional jobs programs. The job search programs used a variety of approaches but, at a minimum, all of them helped participants develop a résumé and learn job-seeking skills. Thus the subsidized jobs themselves were the key element of the “treatment difference” between the groups.

Despite the instability in participants’ lives, about 85 percent of the men assigned to the transitional jobs group actually worked in a transitional job.



Findings

Program Impacts

1

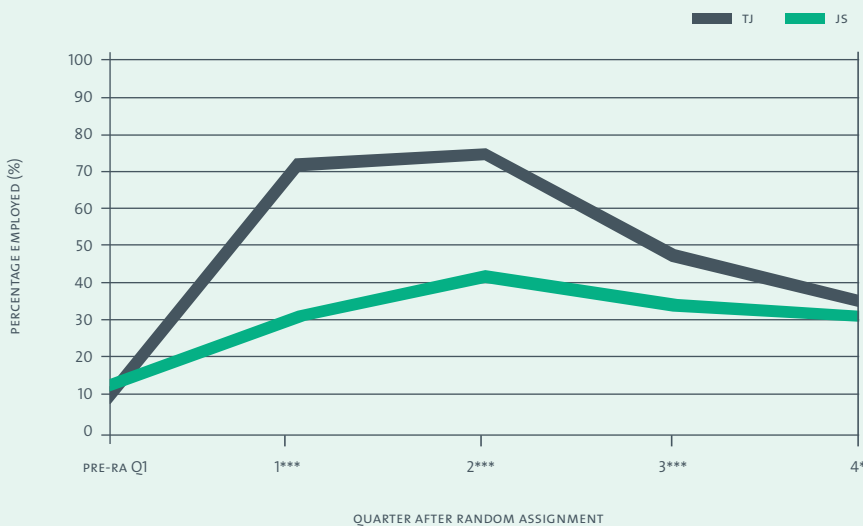
By design, the transitional jobs group was much more likely to work than the job search group early on, since access to jobs was part of the program. However, men were not more likely to be employed after they left the transitional jobs programs.

Table 4 shows the percentage of people employed in each quarter of the one-year follow-up period. The gray line shows the employment rate for the transitional jobs group and the green line shows the employment rate for the job search group. In this figure, a study participant is considered to be employed if he worked either in a TJRD transitional job or in any other job covered by unemployment insurance in a particular quarter. The asterisks at the bottom of the table indicate quarters in which the difference between groups is

statistically significant, meaning that the difference is probably not due to chance.

In the first two quarters of the follow-up period, the transitional jobs group was much more likely to be employed. For example, in Quarter 2, the employment rate was 75 percent for the transitional jobs group and 42 percent for the job search group, a difference of 33 percentage points, which is statistically significant. However, the difference between groups narrowed quickly as people left the transitional jobs and, by the end of the year, the two groups were almost equally likely to be employed.

TABLE 4: PERCENT EMPLOYED, ALL SITES



2

The employment results were similar across sites and across subgroups of participants; there is preliminary evidence that the use of employment retention bonuses may have led to stronger results, and that the transitional jobs programs may have been more effective in weaker labor markets.

The research team examined the employment results separately for each site. Site-specific results reveal interesting information but are somewhat less statistically reliable because the sample sizes are smaller. The results were similar for subgroups of study participants defined by age, prior employment history and criminal history.

Because unemployment rates rose dramatically in all four of the cities beginning in mid-2008, the analysis also compared results for people who entered the study in 2007 and early 2008 (the early cohort), with those who entered the study after March 2008 (the late cohort). Since the study followed each person for one year after he entered the study, those in the late cohort more directly experienced the effects of the U.S. economic recession. The impacts on overall employment were similar for

the two cohorts but, the pattern of impacts on unsubsidized earnings differed. In fact, in the late cohort, the transitional jobs group had significantly higher earnings from unsubsidized employment than did the job search group in the last half of the follow-up period. As with the site-by-site impacts, this pattern may reflect the fact that the job search group had more difficulty finding employment as the economy weakened; it may also reflect improvements in the operation of the transitional jobs programs over time.

The use of the employee retention bonus payments is an area where results are promising. For example, in St. Paul, the transitional jobs program offered participants bonus payments for getting and holding unsubsidized jobs. The payments could total up to about \$1,500 over six to nine months. These bonuses show a promising effect in that employment and earnings results were better for those who were eligible for the bonus. This bears further study as an element of employment programs that may encourage continued participation in the programs and also strengthen relationships between participants and case managers through more frequent contact.

3

Overall, participation in transitional jobs did not reduce the number of men returning to prison during the first year of follow up.

In Chicago, Detroit and Milwaukee, the transitional jobs did not consistently produce better results for the men during the first year of the follow-up period. Those who received transitional jobs and those who received basic job search assistance all returned to prison at similar rates.

However, St. Paul was somewhat different. While the percentage of participants who returned to prison for a parole violation in St Paul was actually higher when compared to the other sites, this fact may be attributed to St. Paul's more intensive form of parole supervision. Within the St. Paul site, though, the transitional

jobs group was significantly less likely to be incarcerated for a parole violation than the job search group. This may be a result of the parolees being somewhat less likely to violate the terms of supervision while working in transitional jobs. Alternatively, it may be that the parole officers were less likely to send someone back to prison for a relatively minor parole violation if that person was working when the violation occurred.

Either way, the results in St. Paul suggest that future research should include evaluating the role of relationships between employment programs and the Departments of Corrections and Parole, as those relationships may be a factor in reducing the number of parole violations and, ultimately, reducing recidivism.

TABLE 5: ONE-YEAR IMPACTS ON RECIDIVISM

OUTCOME	TJ	JS	DIFFERENCE
ARRESTED (%)	38.8	35.3	3.5
CONVICTED (%)	13.6	14.5	-1.0
ADMITTED TO PRISON (%)	35.1	36.4	-1.3
DAYS INCARCERATED IN PRISON	40.2	47.5	-7.3**
ARRESTED, CONVICTED, OR INCARCERATED (%)	53.5	56.1	-2.6

STATISTICAL SIGNIFICANCE LEVELS: * =10%, **=5%, ***=1%



A Perspective
from the
Joyce Foundation

Implications of
the TJRD

Going into this research, we had hoped that the transitional jobs programs would have more substantial effects on recidivism and long-term employment. Instead, we learned that more research about how to best help former prisoners reintegrate with their families, communities and economies is essential. There simply isn't much known about what works best to help them make this transition.

The TJRD is now part of a body of high-quality and necessary research for the transitional jobs field. This study has advanced our thinking about the kinds of support mechanisms we should evaluate in the future to help men coming out of prison successfully reenter their community.

Organizations participating in this study report that it has helped them adapt their transitional jobs models and experiment with additional services to ensure the strongest possible outcomes for this population. For example, in Chicago, as of March 2010, the Safer Foundation decided to put a stronger focus on building skills and helping participants move into unsubsidized jobs. And in St. Paul, Goodwill/Easter Seals adapted their program to provide an upfront assessment to determine whether program participants would benefit from receiving a transitional job, or if they should move directly to receiving services for job placement.

The TJRD is also informing additional studies, including research to be conducted by the U.S. Department of Labor and the U.S. Department of Health and Human

Services. It is this kind of vital research and experimentation that will ultimately help us reduce the number of people returning to prison and increase the number of people released from prison who successfully re-integrate into society, obtain employment and go on to lead productive lives.

The TJRD is now part of a body of high-quality and necessary research for the transitional jobs field. This study has advanced our thinking about the kinds of support mechanisms we should evaluate in the future to help men coming out of prison successfully reenter their community.

As we took a hard look at these findings to evaluate and interpret what we learned, we engaged national experts in the transitional jobs field, including the National Transitional Jobs Network, in order to benefit from their insights and experience in the field.

THERE ARE A NUMBER OF USEFUL INSIGHTS AND IMPLICATIONS TO BE DERIVED FROM THIS RESEARCH:

Former prisoners face profound challenges. The study reinforced the fact that the former prisoner population faces unique challenges, such as the stigma of a criminal record and years away from mainstream society, family and community support systems. They also face daunting challenges when looking for work. Employment strategies must be tailored to address their time away from the formal labor market, their lack of basic skills and low education, and the social stigma associated with spending time in prison and laws that restrict them from entering certain occupations. We must continue to refine our strategies to meet this population's unique needs.

Men returning from prison have a high level of motivation to work. Transitional jobs programs were able to put people coming out of prison immediately to work who, most likely, would not have been working otherwise. About 85 percent of the men who were assigned to the transitional jobs programs worked in a transitional job, providing concrete evidence that men coming out of prison are strongly motivated to work. And, transitional jobs programs are a good engagement strategy.

Transitional jobs programs created an important period of stability post release. Engaging men immediately upon their release from prison is a critical component of reentry. Evidence gathered through the qualitative interviews showed that many men found the transitional jobs to be of great value by providing them with a rare period of relative financial and emotional stability in an otherwise chaotic reentry process. Many men said they benefited from belonging to a supportive community immediately upon release from prison.

Transitional jobs provided immediate earned income even in bad economic times. The transitional jobs programs successfully provided income and employment for the men in this study before and during the recession, showing that even in times of economic crisis, transitional jobs programs can serve as a much needed source of income and stability. This earned income helped these men to meet basic needs. Given that the labor market is not expected to recover quickly or strongly in the next two years, this finding has real salience and import for programming now.

Program targeting and in-depth assessments are crucial components of the next phase of transitional jobs programming. Not all former prisoners need a transitional job. Transitional jobs programs may be most effective when they focus primarily on those most likely to benefit from the intervention as opposed to individuals with better prospects of finding work on their own. For instance, transitional jobs may be most effective for those who will have the most difficulty finding a job on their own due to little or no work history. Up-front screening can help target transitional jobs to those who would benefit the most and in-depth assessments are a key element in designing a service and employment package tailored for the job seeker's needs.

Retention bonuses show a promising effect on employment. This study suggests that retention bonuses, which were given to study participants who were able to secure and hold an unsubsidized job, may impact the likelihood that a person continues to stay employed. This bears further study as an element of employment programs that may encourage continued participation in the programs and also strengthen relationships between participants and case managers through more frequent contact.

Relationships with Departments of Corrections and Parole are critical for success, but they take time.

For many employment programs working with people returning from prison, developing productive long-term relationships with the criminal justice system may be critical to ensuring participant success. This can help target individuals who will benefit most from transitional jobs, improve outcomes through better coordination between program staff and criminal justice staff, and increase compliance with terms of parole in order to prevent re-incarceration due to violations, which is by far the most common reason for return to prison in this study. These relationships and systems often take time to mature.

A more holistic re-entry approach may be needed. This study reinforced that the needs of individuals returning from incarceration are complex, requiring policy solutions and program strategies that are holistic, flexible and responsive to the needs of individuals and their environments. Despite their desire to work, it is very difficult for these men to find long-term employment. As we continue to make advancements in the field, we need to test a more holistic approach to help these men better transition. In addition to job placement, this includes a variety of essential support services, including education and life skills training, psychological and substance abuse treatment and housing and financial counseling, to help these men better transition to a productive life.

The link between employment and recidivism is complex and needs further study. This study raises new questions about the relationship between employment and recidivism. Work alone may not make enough of a difference for reentering former prisoners when they are faced with so many other profound challenges. We need to continue to further test and understand the factors and program strategies that reduce recidivism for people returning from incarceration and help create a path for these men to lead productive lives.

A number of enhancements could be made to the TJ model in an effort to increase positive outcomes. The sites that participated in this study are already adapting their models and experimenting with additional services as they look for ways to continue improving outcomes on recidivism and permanent employment. Potential future strategies include:

- Integrating literacy programming and/or skills training with transitional jobs to increase preparedness for employment and further education.
- Combining the transitional job with on-the-job training in industries where high math and reading levels are not prerequisites.
- Lengthening the transitional job portion for those whose chances of success in the private labor market are limited.
- Improving quality, time and resources applied to helping former prisoners find permanent unsubsidized jobs.

Doing less is not an option. Too much is at stake to turn our backs on this problem. We need to continue working to better understand what aspects of programs make a difference in reducing recidivism and helping men released from prison find employment.

“Without them...I would have been lost. I wouldn't have known how to come out here and adjust to the job situation on the streets. Transitional jobs do help you...because it motivates you to work...and then, through [the] four months that you're working, you realize 'yeah, I get a pay check...I ain't got to go sell drugs...I work for a living now!'”

Chris, 38

Former Prisoner and TJRD Participant

“Helping former prisoners get on the right track requires a commitment from all of us who play a role in the criminal justice system. Departments of Corrections Institution and Community staff need to work hand-in-hand with transitional jobs programs staff in order to provide men the best chance for success. Regular communication and strong relationships make a difference and it’s up to all of us to make that happen.”

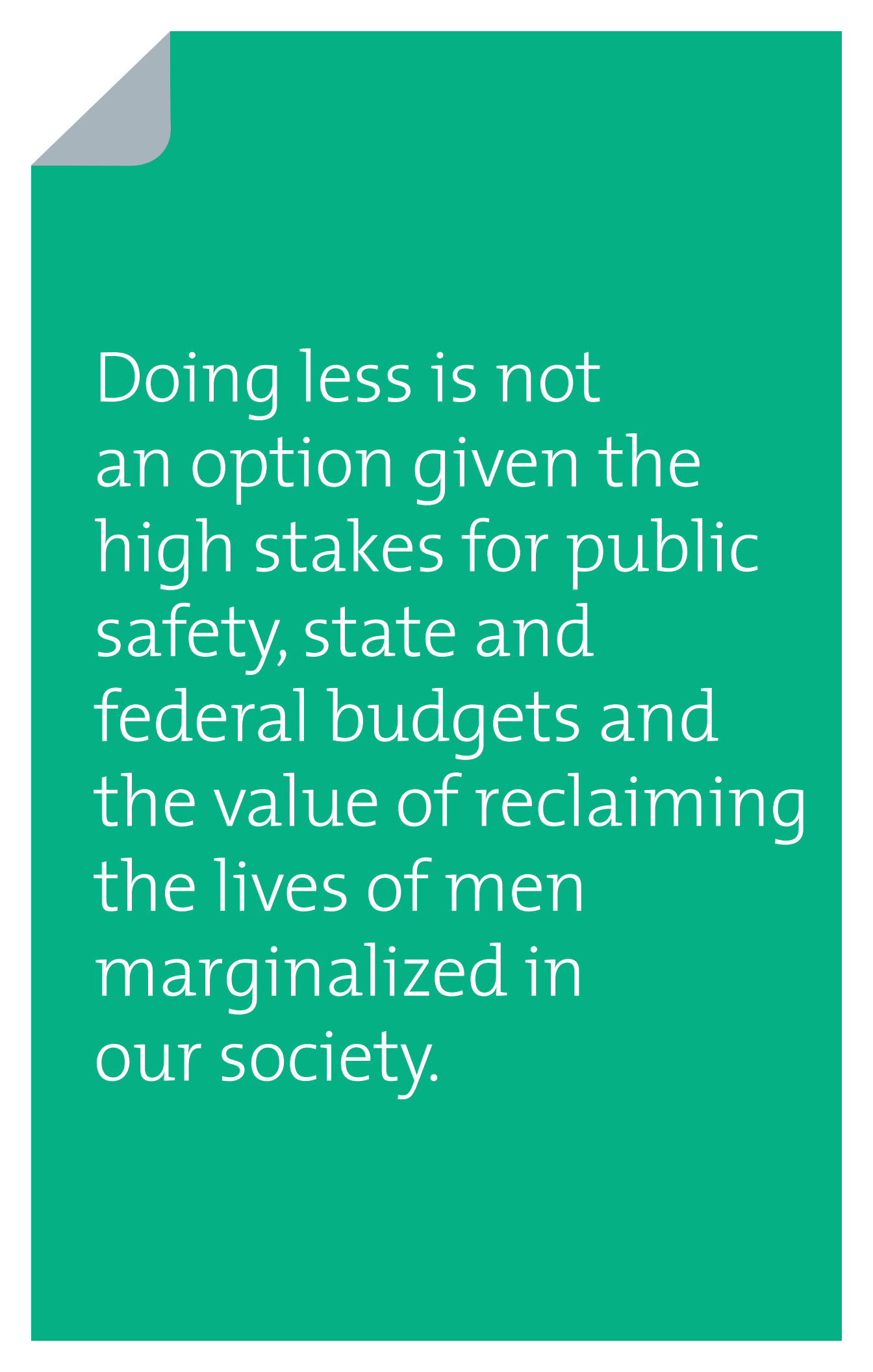
Mary Kay Kollat

*Reentry Director
Wisconsin Department of Corrections*

“We participated in this study because it’s important to know what employment strategies and program practices are most effective. While there isn’t a one-size-fits-all strategy, we have benefited greatly from sharing information, identifying good practices, experimenting with new ideas and extracting information from well-executed research. Now we can use what we learned to adapt and improve upon what we are currently doing to help these men transition and get on a productive path.”

Sheila Olson

*Vice President Mission Services
Goodwill Easter Seals, St. Paul, Minnesota*



Doing less is not an option given the high stakes for public safety, state and federal budgets and the value of reclaiming the lives of men marginalized in our society.

We hope that you will share this report with colleagues, researchers, policymakers and other experts in the reentry field as we continue to develop policies and programs to help recently released prisoners reenter their communities successfully.

There is much work to be done and we hope that this research has added to the collective understanding about what is needed and where to go from here in the effort to bring about the best possible outcomes for this population in need.

THE JOYCE FOUNDATION

The Joyce Foundation supports efforts to protect the Great Lakes, to reduce poverty and violence in the region, and to ensure its residents have access to good schools, decent jobs, a strong democracy, and a diverse and thriving culture.

THANK YOU TO OUR RESEARCH PARTNERS

MDRC

MDRC is a nonprofit, nonpartisan education and social policy research organization dedicated to learning what works to improve programs and policies that affect the poor.

THE URBAN INSTITUTE

Established in 1968, The Urban Institute is a nonprofit, nonpartisan policy research organization that examines social, economic and governance issues.

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN'S GERALD R. FORD SCHOOL OF PUBLIC POLICY

The University of Michigan's Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy is one of the nation's top-ranked policy schools, offering undergraduate, master's, and doctoral degrees in public policy.