

Stepping Stones to Successful Re-entry
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Albert Einstein once said, "Insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results." Like so many things in a challenging economy, corrections as we know it must change if we want to expect different results. Simply put, corrections must become more efficient and effective in delivering the services essential to reducing the number of inmates returning to overcrowded prisons. Smarter approaches to dealing with those incarcerated and in contact with our criminal justice system must be made a priority if we hope to achieve the best results.

Under Governor Mitch Daniels' leadership, the Indiana Department of Correction (IDOC) strives to provide innovative programming that addresses the underlying causes of recidivism. Emphasis continues to be placed on treating substance abuse and criminal behavior. We also aim to provide opportunities for basic education, as well as job training and job retention skills. The Department created specialized programs and community transitional services to address these specific needs.

In Indiana, 81 percent of offenders have a significant history of chemical dependency. The IDOC has several specialized intensive therapeutic communities (TC) that are designed to treat severe drug addiction. The program includes a minimum of eight months of cognitive behavioral counseling and programming daily to assist in addiction recovery, building social skills, and developing job interview skills. Our TC's demonstrate a positive impact on both recidivism and conduct.

Another program that has received commendation is CLIFF. Clean Lifestyle Is Freedom Forever (CLIFF) is a modified substance abuse program designed specifically for individuals addicted to methamphetamine. CLIFF was recognized by the American Correctional Association, receiving the Exemplary Offender Program award in 2008. Offenders who successfully graduate from TC's and CLIFF units have a much lower recidivism rate than those who do not complete treatment.

To encourage offenders to choose alternatives to criminal thinking and behavior, the Purposeful Living Units Serve (PLUS) program was developed. PLUS, a faith and character based program, focuses on life-skills training, community service and preparation for living as law-abiding citizens. Now in its fifth year, the PLUS program is offered in 14 facilities and more than 1,700 participants have completed the 12 to 16 month program. As of March 2010, the recidivism rate of PLUS graduates was 12.4 percent, compared to the overall offender recidivism rate of 38.4 percent for 2009. Recently, PLUS was recognized by the American Correctional Chaplains Association as the Offender Program of the Year for 2009.

To bring more job opportunities to offenders as they prepare for re-entry, Indiana is expanding its apprenticeship program throughout our correctional facilities. These apprenticeships give offenders structured, on-the-job training in traditional industries in emerging job growth sectors. The partnership between the U.S. Department of Labor Office of Apprenticeship and Indiana's correctional facilities has grown to be the largest state prison program in the country. It is clear that these opportunities provide hope to our offenders and decrease the chance of recidivism. More than 1,000 offenders have earned apprenticeships in more than thirty-one registered job titles. Pursuant to Governor Daniels' direction, the state for the first time is undergoing a review of all obstacles to employment for ex-offenders, with the assistance of the Anne E. Casey Foundation and the Greater Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce.

This review will assist both State government and private employers to take a fresh look at these obstacles with an eye toward protecting public safety while encouraging rehabilitation and reintegration. The goal is to create an opportunity for tax payers, not tax debtors.

It is no secret that there is a statistical significance between education and recidivism. The Department's Research Division found that the number one predictor of recidivism is the lack of employment. To maximize future employment opportunities for those serving sentences in the prison system, the Department has partnered with Ivy Tech Community College to offer basic literacy, GED and vocational programs. Ivy Tech is uniquely suited to provide multiple services post-release, including continuing education, job placement, and counseling service. Once an offender takes a course in the prison from Ivy Tech Community College, he or she is a student in the Ivy Tech system. Upon release, transitioning to the many Associate Degree programs or workforce education programs is easier than before. Academic advising and referral to other services is offered to all students. A recent survey revealed that 80 percent of released offenders live within a 40-mile radius of an Ivy Tech campus. This partnership can increase employment through occupational preparation for middle-skill, high-demand occupations with sustainable wages. While in prison, an offender can learn a productive skill that can be transferred to the workplace. For example, we have many former offenders who enter the workforce trained as carpenters, culinary preparation assistants, and horticulturists. Sitting in Governor Daniels' office is a 900 pound conference table made out of Indiana timber that DOC inmates (with the help of staff) constructed after applying skills they learned in our programs.

Through the teamwork of the Council on State Governments and Pew Center on the States, Indiana is taking a hard look at its corrections and criminal justice system. This project has committed bi-partisan support aimed at improving public safety by reducing recidivism and managing the growth of Indiana's prison population.

As you can see, through innovative programming, Indiana affords more opportunities to offenders, helping them to return to society as productive citizens. Strong, forward-thinking leadership, like that of Governor Daniels and the Department of Correction, allows Indiana to enhance public safety, save precious tax dollars and make our communities a better place to live.