The Joyce Foundation's

Transitional Jobs Reentry Demonstration

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

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WHY IS SUCCESSFUL PRISONER REENTRY A NATIONAL IMPERATIVE?

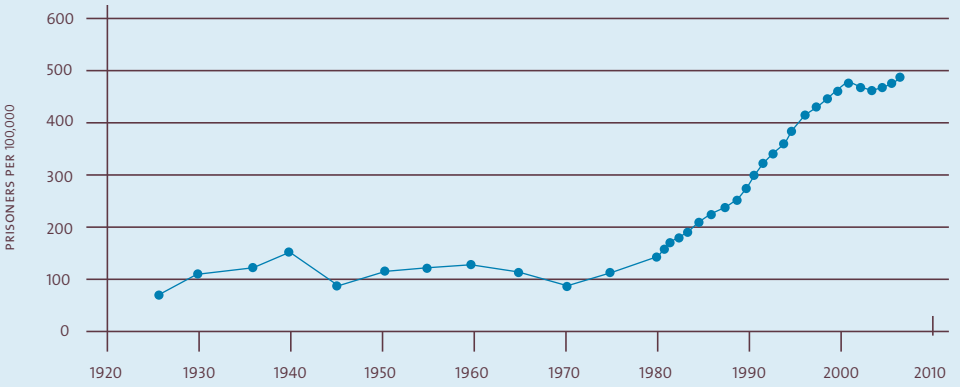
The number of people incarcerated in the U.S. has more than quadrupled in the last three decades. Today, more than 2 million people are incarcerated in federal and state prisons and local jails, and almost 700,000 people are released from state prisons each year. Corrections costs exceed $65 billion per year, with most of this total borne by state and local governments.

Men and women released from prison often face daunting obstacles as they move back to their communities. They frequently have difficulties finding jobs and housing, and experience problems reconnecting with family and other social supports. In addition, former prisoners are concentrated in a relatively small number of distressed urban neighborhoods that lack resources to assist in the reentry process. Not surprisingly, many end up returning to prison, a disastrous result for them, their families and communities, taxpayers, and public safety.

Prisoner reentry has attracted increasing attention in recent years, as states seek ways to reduce recidivism and control surging corrections costs. While most experts believe that stable employment is critical to a successful transition from prison to the community, there is little hard evidence about which program practices are effective at promoting successful transitions or reducing recidivism.

The most recent national statistics show that two-thirds of those released from prison are rearrested, and half are reincarcerated 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.

TABLE 1: PRISONERS IN STATE OR FEDERAL PRISON PER 100,000 U.S. RESIDENTS, 1925 TO 2004



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

TABLE 2: SURVEYS OF GOVERNMENT FINANCES, 1986 – 2001: EXPENDITURES FOR TOTAL STATE CORRECTIONS IN 2001 CONSTANT DOLLARS

YEAR	TOTAL STATE CORRECTIONS	
	TOTAL (IN 1000's)[1,2]	COST PER RESIDENT [3]
1986	$15,595,807	$65
1987	$16,521,216	$68
1988	$18,420,811	$75
1989	$20,309,744	$82
1990	$22,606,549	$91
1991	$24,641,313	$98
1992	$25,388,942	$100
1993	$25,698,979	$100
1994	$27,926,979	$107
1995	$30,650,599	$117
1996	$31,425,488	$119
1997	$32,652,718	$120
1998	$33,862,569	$123
1999	$33,365,328	$128
2000	$36,193,618	$128
2001	$38,164,541	$134

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report, June 2004; "State Prison Expenditures, 2001"; U.S. Department of Justice

Note: Correctional expenditures may be underreported. Interviews with State budget officials by the U.S. Census Bureau for this report produced a revised estimate of State prison costs of $29.5 billion for FY 2001, 1.1% higher than the 2001 Survey of Government Finances.

[1] US Census Bureau. *Censuses of Governmental Finances*, 1986–1996, Tables 11 and 12; and unpublished data compatible with this series for 1997 through 2001.

[2] Economic Report of the President, February 2003. Bureau of Economic Analysis, Chain-type price indexes for gross domestic product, 1959–2002, Table B-7.

[3] US Census Bureau, Estimates of the Population of the United States to July 1, 1990, Current Population Estimates and Projections, Series P-25, No. 1064. US Census Bureau, *US Population Estimates by Age, Sex, Race and Hispanic Origin*: 1990-1995, PPL-41. Unpublished data 1996–2001, compatible with *Resident Population Estimates for Age, Sex, Race and Hispanic Origin.*

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WHAT IS THE TRANSITIONAL JOBS REENTRY DEMONSTRATION AND WHY IS IT SIGNIFICANT?

A number of states have launched multi-faceted prisoner reentry initiatives – often with a strong emphasis on helping people find jobs after they leave prison – and the federal government has provided special funding to support these efforts, most recently through the Second Chance Act of 2008. Unfortunately, however, there is very little rigorous evidence about which strategies are effective at helping former prisoners find and keep jobs.

The Transitional Jobs Reentry Demonstration (TJRD) seeks to help fill this gap in our knowledge by testing innovative employment programs for former prisoners in Chicago, Detroit, Milwaukee, and St. Paul using a rigorous, random-assignment research design. In each city, one employment program is built around transitional jobs (TJ)—temporary, subsidized jobs that provide participants with a source of legitimate income, support services, and work experience as they return to the community.

The transitional jobs programs in the study are being evaluated against a second set of simpler, less expensive programs called "job search" (JS) assistance programs that help participants look for work but do not provide subsidized jobs.

Ultimately, the study's goal is to determine whether transitional jobs programs are an effective strategy for increasing employment and reducing recidivism among men recently released from prison.

The TJRD project is one of the largest and most rigorous evaluations of employment programs for former prisoners since the 1970s. The results, available in mid-2010, should provide solid evidence about the effectiveness of transitional jobs, which will inform both public policy and program practice at the federal, state, and local levels.

The TJRD project was developed by the Chicago-based Joyce Foundation, whose mission includes reducing poverty and violence in the Great Lakes region. The project is also supported by the JEHT Foundation[1] and the U.S. Department of Labor. The funders are supporting both the employment programs and a careful evaluation being conducted by MDRC, along with the Urban Institute and the University of Michigan's Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy. The National Transitional Jobs Network is providing technical assistance to the project.

[1] *The JEHT Foundation ceased operations in January 2009.*

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WHY PROVIDE FORMER PRISONERS WITH TRANSITIONAL JOBS?

Stable employment appears to be critical to a successful transition into the community, but former prisoners often have characteristics that place them at the back of the employment queue—for example, low levels of education and limited work experience. African-American men are heavily overrepresented in the prison population, and they may also face employment discrimination upon release. Finally, state laws bar many former prisoners from obtaining licenses to work in specific occupations, and studies have found that many employers are quite reluctant to hire people with criminal records. Several studies have tracked employment rates for former prisoners during the year following release, typically finding that fewer than half are employed at any point.

Transitional jobs are seen as a promising employment model, both for former prisoners and for other hard-to-employ groups. Transitional jobs programs rapidly place participants into temporary, subsidized jobs, usually in nonprofit or government agencies, provide intensive support, and then help participants find permanent jobs. When targeted to recently released former prisoners, transitional jobs provide a source of legitimate income during the critical period just after release, and also provide program staff with an opportunity to identify and address workplace problems before participants move to the regular labor market.[2]

[2] *For more information on the transitional jobs model, see the National Transitional Jobs Network's website: www.transitionaljobs.net.*

Transitional jobs are also being evaluated in other major U.S. cities by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and MDRC. Early results are now available from a random assignment evaluation of the New York City-based Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO), one of the largest and most experienced transitional jobs programs for former prisoners. During the first two years of the study's follow-up period, CEO significantly decreased crime convictions, reincarceration, and other measures of recidivism — a result rarely found in rigorous evaluations. CEO substantially boosted employment, though the increase faded over time, after participants left the transitional jobs.

Another study is testing Philadelphia's Transitional Work Corporation (TWC), another large-scale transitional jobs program that mostly serves long-term welfare recipients. TWC significantly reduced welfare receipt and welfare payments during an 18-month follow-up. Like CEO, it produced a very large, but relatively short-lived increase in employment, driven mostly by the transitional jobs.

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HOW IS THE TJRD PROJECT DESIGNED?

The TJRD project was designed from the start as a rigorous evaluation to discover the difference transitional jobs can make in the trajectories of former prisoners. In each of the four sites, the research team is comparing a transitional jobs program with a basic job search assistance program. Former prisoners who agreed to be in the study were assigned at random to one program or the other. The project was intended to serve about 400 men in each site – 200 in the transitional jobs program and 200 in the job search assistance program.

The random assignment process created two groups of people – called the TJ and JS groups – that were similar at the time they entered the study. If differences emerge between the two groups over time – for example, if one group is more likely to work or less likely to return to prison – one can be fairly certain that this is because the two groups received different kinds of employment services, not because their characteristics differed from the start. Thus, by tracking the two groups over time, the TJRD evaluation will be able to assess whether the transitional jobs programs led to different employment and recidivism outcomes than the job search assistance programs, and whether one strategy or the other was more effective for particular subgroups of former prisoners.

A random assignment design can provide unusually reliable information about what difference a program makes. Many evaluations track program participants and compare their outcomes (for example, their employment rates) with those of people who did not participate in the program. But if people are not assigned to the program or the comparison group through a random process, one can never be sure the two groups were similar from the start. For example, it is quite possible people who choose to enroll and participate in programs have different levels of motivation or support than those who do not, and that these differences will affect their outcomes as much or more than the programs themselves.

In addition to measuring how the transitional jobs programs affect employment and recidivism, the TJRD evaluation will include three analyses. First, it will analyze how the programs operate and assess their costs. Second, it will include a series of in-depth interviews with about 25 study participants to gain a more detailed understanding of their experiences after leaving prison. And, third, it will provide an opportunity to learn about the operation and impacts of transitional jobs and job search assistance programs in a range of environments. There are important differences across the four cities, for example, in labor market conditions, population characteristics, and criminal justice practices.

Frank's Story

"Frank" was born to a young mother and into a household of substance abusers and distributors. He began stealing goods and selling marijuana when he started high school. By the time he was 17, he was dealing cocaine.

He was first incarcerated in his early twenties, and then spent much of his adulthood cycling between prison and streets. He was released from his last term at age 44 in the winter of 2008.

Upon his release Frank sought out temporary employment agencies to try to begin building a work history. He expressed concerns about adjusting successfully to the world of work.

> **"You get these ideas that, well, ain't nobody going to give me a chance because of my criminal background and my criminal record. It upsets you and it puts you in a bad place in your mind, and you get to thinking, maybe I should do this, or maybe I could pick up a bag and start working at it again."**

> **"If you try to do it by yourself with a background like mine, it's depressing. It's not good, and you've got to take a lot of no's. But, if you can get networking with a group of people, whether it be churches, organizations that offer re-entry programs, you've got a base of people that's trying to work at the same goal, trying to help you. So, that would be a better shot."**

He balanced his comments about how important this social connection was with discussion of the staff in the TJRD-sponsored program. As he stated:

> **"I was already kind of teetering. My thoughts were teetering. I didn't actually put any physical acts in, but I was starting to have bad ideas or bad thoughts. So, without [the TJRD program] and the direction that they're pointing me in, I don't think it would have been good."**

WHICH PROGRAMS ARE PARTICIPATING IN THE PROJECT?

In mid-2006, the Joyce Foundation conducted a competition and ultimately selected four sites to participate in the project.[3] Each site received about $600,000 over three years, and the grantees were also expected to raise funds from state or local agencies to support their programs. The Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin Departments of Corrections are all active partners in the project and are providing funding to support the employment programs.

Table 3 shows the organizations that are operating the transitional jobs and job search assistance programs in each city. In three of the cities, separate organizations are serving the TJ and JS groups, while in Chicago, the same organization serves both groups.

There are some basic similarities across the transitional jobs programs. All provide participants with temporary, minimum-wage jobs that offer 30 to 40 hours of paid work each week; all aim to identify and address behavior or performance issues that emerge at the work site; all provide a range of ancillary services and supports to participants; and all help participants look for unsubsidized jobs to follow the transitional jobs, often with the help of job developers who reach out to employers to identify job openings for participants.

However, there are also important differences in the transitional jobs models. In Detroit and St. Paul, TJ participants are employed directly by the Goodwill agency running the program, and they work in existing Goodwill enterprises. In Detroit, most work in a light manufacturing plant, and in St. Paul most work in jobs related to collecting, processing, and selling merchandise in the agency's retail stores. In Chicago, most of the Safer Foundation TJ participants work in garbage recycling plants operated by Allied Waste Industries under contract to the City of Chicago;[4] they are directly employed by Pivotal Staffing Services, a staffing company established by Safer. In all three of these sites, the transitional jobs are in enterprises that earn revenue for the sponsoring agency, partly offsetting the cost of wages for TJ workers.

The Milwaukee program uses a "scattered site" model: the New Hope Project is the employer of record and pays all wages, but TJ participants are placed in various nonprofit organizations and businesses in the community. The worksites are not asked to pay for the TJ workers, but they are expected to provide supervision and to stay in close contact with the New Hope staff, who are responsible for identifying and addressing workplace problems.

[3] Initially a fifth site was selected but research there was discontinued in 2007.

[4] The Allied Waste Industries contract ended in 2008 and some of the TJRD participants moved to another transitional job as Pivotal employees.

In addition to these differences in the transitional jobs models, two of the four sites – Milwaukee and St. Paul – offer relatively generous bonus payments to participants who get and hold unsubsidized jobs after working in a transitional job. These payments are designed to supplement the earnings of participants who obtain relatively low-paying jobs and to encourage participants to keep working.

The job search assistance programs also differ from each other in some key respects, but, at a minimum, all of them help participants prepare a resume, learn how to fill out job applications and interview for jobs (including how to answer questions about their convictions), and identify job leads.

TABLE 3: 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 (through Pivotal Staffing Services)	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

WHO ARE THE TJRD PARTICIPANTS?

The TJRD project targets men age 18 or older who were released from state prison within 90 days prior to enrollment in the study. It is widely believed that the first weeks after people are released from prison are a critical period in determining whether their transition will be successful. Men with all types of criminal histories were accepted into the project, with no project-wide restrictions based on the number or type of previous offenses (there were some limitations in individual sites).

The sites recruited men into the study from January 2007 through September 2008. Slightly more than 1,800 men entered the study in all, with the site totals ranging from about 375 to 500. Table 4 provides a snapshot of the study participants across all four sites at the time they entered the project.

As the table shows, the study participants were 35 years old on average when they enrolled, and a large majority are African American. About half are fathers, though few lived with their children (a substantial proportion of the fathers owed $5,000 or more in back child support). Most reported that they had worked at some point, but only half had ever held a steady job. Only about one in four participants had a high school diploma, but nearly half had a General Education Development (GED) certificate; it seems likely that some of the men earned a GED while incarcerated.

As expected, almost all of the study participants were under parole supervision when they enrolled in the study. They had served an average of six years in prison over their lifetimes.

The characteristics of the study participants are generally similar from site to site, but there are some key differences. For example, the St. Paul site is serving a larger proportion of white men, and a much larger proportion of the study participants there were living in halfway houses when they entered the study. In Chicago, about 40 percent of the study participants had no high school diploma or GED, compared with 20 to 25 percent in the other sites. Michigan study participants had served more than four years in prison, on average, during their most recent stay, compared with about two years in the other sites.

TABLE 4: 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

WHAT ARE THE EARLY IMPLEMENTATION EXPERIENCES?

The research team visited the transitional jobs and job search programs several times to interview staff and participants, visit transitional jobs worksites, and observe program activities. Although the grantees had varying amounts of experience working with former prisoners and faced some operational challenges, they were able, for the most part, to operate the transitional jobs and job search assistance programs as designed.

Key early observations and lessons include the following:

1

The programs worked closely with corrections agencies to recruit participants.

The programs recruited men by holding information sessions in prisons for men about to be released, building linkages with parole officers who could refer their clients to TJRD, and by posting flyers and posters in parole offices and other locations in the community. It was sometimes challenging to find men who had been released from prison very recently – many former prisoners do not seek assistance immediately after release – but, ultimately, the programs were able to meet the study's enrollment targets.

2

Despite the instability in the participants' lives and living situations, the programs were able to place a very high percentage of the men in the TJ group – about 85 percent – into transitional jobs.

In most cases, the programs sought to place participants in transitional jobs very quickly – usually within a week or less after enrollment – in order to rapidly engage a highly mobile group of clients. Because the number of enrollees varied from week to week, this required having a flexible pool of transitional jobs. Also, in most cases, the programs did not seek to match participants with particular transitional jobs based on their skills or interests. On average, participants worked in transitional jobs for about four months.

3

Most of the transitional jobs are designed to teach general employability skills, not to train participants in specific occupations.

The transitional jobs model gives program staff an opportunity to observe participants in a work environment in order to identify and address workplace problems – for example, lateness, difficulty taking direction or criticism, or inappropriate interactions with co-workers. Normally these issues might cause an employee to be fired, but in a TJ worksite they are used to teach employability skills. All of the programs provide this type of job coaching, though in different ways. However, most of the project's transitional jobs are not designed to provide training in a particular occupation. Most of the work is quite basic and requires minimal skills. One site (St. Paul) offers some opportunities for paid training in construction, automotive skills, and other occupations (other sites may refer participants to training provided elsewhere).

4

It has been challenging for programs to place participants in second (post-TJ) jobs, particularly with the weakening economy.

As noted earlier, many former prisoners face a range of obstacles to finding jobs, including both personal factors, such as lack of work experience, and systemic issues, such as discrimination by employers. Thus, it is not surprising that many of the transitional jobs and job search assistance programs have struggled to place participants in permanent jobs, particularly jobs that pay substantially above the minimum wage. This challenge is particularly daunting in a weak labor market. The project's random assignment research design ensures that the TJ and JS groups are experiencing the same labor market conditions. However, extremely high unemployment rates could potentially affect the study results by dramatically reducing the availability of jobs for men in both groups.

WHEN WILL THE RESULTS BE AVAILABLE AND HOW WILL THEY BE USED?

The research team is tracking the TJ and JS groups using data from state agencies to measure both employment and recidivism during a period of at least one year. The employment data will measure earnings in jobs covered by state unemployment insurance programs, and the criminal justice data will measure arrests, convictions, and admissions to state prisons. A report describing the programs' effects on employment and recidivism, their implementation and costs, and the key findings from the ethnographic interviews, will be completed and released in summer 2010.

The TJRD project will provide the strongest and most reliable kind of evidence to inform the design of policies and programs for former prisoners. For example, the impact results and cost estimates may shape future federal and state funding for reentry services. At the local level, the information on program implementation and impacts will be a valuable resource for those who design and operate reentry programs. The Joyce Foundation and the research team will work together with other key partners to disseminate and explain the results to policymakers and program operators in the region and nationwide.

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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.

RESEARCH PARTNERS

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