

Contact: hhs@usc.edu

Tip Sheet: Re-entry into Society for Justice Involved People

What's the Problem?

Each year, more than 600,000 people in the U.S. are released from state and federal prisons. However, more than 450,000 are arrested again within five years, often due to technical violations or non-criminal behavior. In many cases recidivism is a direct result of the collateral consequences of having a criminal conviction. For example, justice involved people often face barriers to finding housing and employment when they re-enter into society.

Significant roadblocks, on top of the social stigma, justice involved people encounter include:

- Employers who are hesitant to hire individuals with a criminal record
 - Some states allow employers to deny candidates who have been previously arrested, whether they were convicted of a crime or not
- Limited education and/or work experience
 - Only about half of incarcerated adults have a high school degree or its equivalent
- Housing policies which ban justice involved people from renting apartments, while limited finances make it difficult to afford a home

Because of these challenges, justice involved people often are forced to take low-wage jobs such as those in manufacturing and food service which do not pay a living wage. Many are required to pay exorbitant court fines, probation/parole fees and restitution, which makes it difficult, if not impossible, to support themselves and their families.

Many end up homeless due to these factors. A 2018 report by the Prison Policy Initiative found that justice involved people were 10 times more likely to be homeless than the general population.

Who Is at Risk of Reincarceration?

Justice involved people with low levels of education and minority groups—particularly people of color, are disproportionately affected. Re-arrest rates are 59% among Black offenders and 60% among offenders without a high school education. Those with substance abuse disorder and mental health issues face additional obstacles during re-entry.

How Can Recidivism Be Reduced?

Assistance for justice involved people should start at the onset of incarceration and continue post-incarceration during the re-entry process.

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Prison programs which provide:

- Job skills training and educational opportunities
- Counseling and addiction treatment
- Mental health treatment

Re-entry programs which provide:

- Short-term and long-term housing
- Job-training and job placement assistance
- Continued mental health and addiction therapy
- Diversion for technical violation of probation and parole

Educational opportunities, counseling and addiction treatment while in prison can help prevent people from reoffending and reduce recidivism rates. A 2016 study by the RAND Corporation found that incarcerated people who participated in education programs were 43% less likely to enter prison again in the future than those who did not— a reduction in risk by 13 percentage points.

Bottom Line

After incarceration, justice involved people are inhibited in their pursuit of meaningful employment and access to adequate housing by a variety of obstacles, which can result in homelessness and contribute to recidivism. Re-entry programs can assist during this transition, but they are most effective when they are combined with in prison rehabilitative programs which provide pathways for successful integration into society. Finally, society must change the dominant narrative that justice involved people are unredeemable and remove the bias which restrict opportunities for people to thrive post incarceration.

Case Example

While serving his sentence, Jermaine, a 25-year-old Black man, enrolled in an education program and earned his GED. Upon release, he became discouraged during his search for work as employers were hesitant to hire him, with his criminal history and lack of experience. Similarly, landlords rejected his applications after running required background checks. Jermaine stayed with a friend for a few weeks, but knew he had to find his own place soon. He reached out to a re-entry program which provided career resources. Because of this assistance as well as his earned degree, Jermaine is now working full-time and has secured stable housing.

Resources

[National Reentry Resource Center](#)

[Prison Policy Initiative](#)

[Root & Rebound](#)

[Just Leadership](#)

[Jobs for Felons](#)

[70 Million Jobs](#)

[Honest Jobs](#)