

Presentation to the White House Office of Faith and Community Based Initiatives

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Over the past four years, Public/Private Ventures has worked closely with diverse players—the Department of Labor, practitioners and scholars in prisoner reentry, and program staff of prominent philanthropies—to design and test a set of interventions in the lives of returning prisoners. We wanted to see whether a partnership of government, business, faith-based and community organizations providing jobs, mentoring and wraparound supportive services to returning prisoners might reduce the likelihood of their reincarceration and increase their chances for successful reintegration into their families and communities. With our partners, P/PV launched Ready4Work.

It took a while to get Ready4Work up and running. At P/PV, our mission is to identify and develop promising approaches to tough social problems, and then to *rigorously test* these approaches to determine if they are effective. In carrying out our mission, we work with foundations, the public and business sectors, and nonprofit organizations. And so it was with Ready4Work. We collaborated with staff at the Department of Labor's Center for Faith-Based and Community Initiatives and we drew on the ideas of scholars and policymakers. But our touchstone was always the experience of people who had been in the trenches—organizations like Operation New Hope in Jacksonville, FL, and East of the River Clergy-Police-Community Partnership here in Washington, DC, people like Rev. Sam Atchison, the chaplain at New Jersey State prison in Trenton, and Yolanda McFaddon, director of the Second Chance Program run by the Mayor's office in Memphis, TN. And many others, some of whom are here today.

A variety of stakeholders invested their resources in Ready4Work: the Departments of Labor and Justice, the Ford Foundation and the Annie E. Casey Foundation. President Bush raised the issue to a new level when he invited Julio Medina to the state of the union address in January 2004 and asked Congress to support reentry programs.

All of those involved agreed that the two pillars of the Ready4Work program had to be hope for a better life for ex-prisoners, and a real-world understanding of what it takes to get there. So we started with what experts have known for a long time: ex-prisoners who do manage to find steady jobs and connect with their communities have a much better chance of staying out of jail. Thus, we made jobs and connections an essential part of Ready4Work.

But how to foster these attachments? In developing the program, we applied lessons P/PV had learned through testing interventions for other high-risk populations. And we drew on lessons learned in Harlem from Julio Medina, in Trenton from Sam Atchison, in Anacostia from Rev. Donald Isaac of the East of the River Clergy-Police-Community Partnership and in Florida from Kevin Gay of Operation New Hope, and from so many others who had spent years honing strategies to help ex-prisoners.

The lessons had to do with the intense work that it takes to prepare ex-prisoners for the labor market, the necessity of treating employers as true partners in that work, the importance of providing wraparound services to meet ex-prisoners' many needs and the centrality of supportive relationships—which are crucial for anyone trying to right his or her life.

Ready4Work launched in 2003 in 11 cities around the country. In each place, lead agencies built partnerships among local faith, justice, business and social service organizations. The lead agencies included faith-based organizations, secular nonprofits, a for-profit business, and a mayor's office. Every program provided employment-readiness training, job placement and intensive case management, including referrals for housing, health care, drug treatment and other programs. And to address the need for supportive relationships, the sites worked hard to develop mentoring programs for ex-prisoners—which was relatively uncharted territory.

The local sites had tough targets—those who are most likely to go back to prison: 18- to 34-year-old, nonviolent, non-sexual-felony offenders. Across the country, the 4,500 ex-prisoners who participated in Ready4Work were predominately black men; they had an average age of 26. Half had been arrested five or more times, and a majority had spent more than two years in prison.

Despite the challenges the ex-prisoners brought to the table, the sites demonstrated remarkable progress in each of the major program areas.

First, on Employment:

With employment rates for ex-prisoners at dismally low levels, the Ready4Work sites knew their participants faced serious barriers. They provided intensive job-readiness training and ongoing support, through the job search process and beyond. They also nurtured relationships with employers, identifying job opportunities and following up after participants were placed—to help insure a successful match. Their efforts paid off. Almost 60 percent of Ready4Work participants got a job, and nearly two thirds of them remained employed for at least three consecutive months. A third managed to remain employed for six consecutive months. These accomplishments are impressive, given the many barriers these ex-prisoners face in returning to the labor market.

The sites also developed strong Mentoring programs:

Mentors helped by providing two kinds of support that everyone needs, support that most middle class Americans take for granted, and support that ex-prisoners often lack.

First, they provided emotional support. Reentry can be a time filled with so much fear, anger, isolation, confusion and sadness, it can send people spiraling back down—unless someone is there for them.

Mentors also provided returnees with practical support to meet the dozens of everyday challenges that years in prison can make so daunting: finding a place to live, getting a driver's license, figuring out how to commute to work. One young man participating in group mentoring had this to say about the experience, *"They keep my mind on the right track and keep me thinking positive. If I'm feeling depressed, they would give you words of encouragement to keep you from doing stuff that you really don't want to do."*

Local sites recruited a committed set of volunteer mentors. Mentors ranged in age from 18 to 80, most were male, and more than 85 percent of mentors were African American. That fact bears repeating: 85 percent of the Ready4Work mentors were African American. Traditional mentoring programs have often found it difficult to recruit a diverse body of volunteers. This effective involvement of African American mentors is a tribute to the pastors of the many African American congregations who got involved in Ready4Work and from their pulpits called parishioners into action.

Parishioners who answered the call and became mentors went through extensive training and preparation. Mentors and their sponsoring organizations were well versed in prohibitions against proselytizing and the requirement to offer services to all, irrespective of religion, in keeping with government regulations prohibiting discrimination in service delivery. Our research shows faith as a motivator but rarely a means for mentoring men and women returning from prison.

Finally, in the area of Supportive Services:

Case management, provided by each of the lead organizations, was in many ways the glue that held the other program components together. Case managers provided participants with a range of direct and referral services to address critical needs, whether it was navigating child support and custody issues, helping ex-prisoners obtain government identification necessary for work or connecting them to drug rehabilitation or other health services. Case managers also worked to support the employment and mentoring components of the program, helping ensure that they ran smoothly.

So, five years into the Ready4Work demonstration and evaluation, what have we learned?

First, former prisoners will work and business will employ them. There are 800 small and mid-size business leaders across the country who put these men and women to work, who took a risk to give them a job. Many of those businesses were concerned about the appearance of hiring ex-prisoners. What would customers think? But, in the end, they reported that Ready4Work participants were not that much different from the labor pool they typically employ. The added value of a program like Ready4Work is that it brings a community of support with the employee and the imprimatur of a local faith or community organization to vouch for and support the new hire. Small and mid-size businesses were the backbone to the employment success of this program.

The second lesson, a hugely important lesson, is the power of mentoring.

Because about half of Ready4Work participants received mentoring, we were able to compare the experiences and outcomes of participants who were mentored with those who were not mentored. You'll read the details in the materials we've released today, but several findings stand out and bear highlighting here.

Ready4Work participants who met with a mentor:

- Remained in the program longer;
- Were twice as likely to obtain a job; and
- Were more likely to stay employed than participants who did not meet with a mentor.

And this is not surprising: One of the key findings from P/PV's work over the course of 30 years, studying various kinds of social programs, is that a strong relationship with a supportive, responsible adult improves the life chances of people in high-risk circumstances.

The juvenile reentry sites in Ready4Work afforded P/PV the opportunity to test and refine an effective model to address the needs of young offenders. Juvenile Ready4Work results have shown highly encouraging outcomes for education, employment, program retention and mentoring:

- Mentoring was associated with a 62 percent reduction in the odds of leaving the program in the following month;
- Juvenile participants who were mentored were twice as likely to achieve an education outcome; and
- Juvenile participants who were mentored were about 70 percent more likely to have jobs.

The third lesson from Ready4Work is that there is hope to break the devastating recidivism cycle. Recidivism rates collected at eight of the eleven adult Ready4Work sites show six-month and one-year recidivism rates between 40 and 50 percent lower, respectively, than the national average reported by the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS).

For the sub-sample of African American, non-violent felony offenders ages 18 to 34, recidivism rates for Ready4Work participants were 48 and 43 percent lower than the national average at the six-month and one-year marks.

Costs

Ready4Work cost about \$4,500 per participant, per year—a whole lot less than the \$25,000 to \$40,000 it costs to keep someone in a federal prison for a year.

Ready4Work and other programs demonstrate that investing in young ex-prisoners yields huge dividends, for the people trying to put their lives together, for their communities, and for the nation. But that good work could wind up as a footnote to history, and we might never reap those dividends.

All of us—the faith community, secular organizations, nonprofits and businesses, red states, blue states—must work together to forge and support job training and placement, social services and mentoring. That’s the best way to increase the odds of turning despair into hope and failure into success.

P/PV continues to work with mayors’ offices, municipal agencies, governors’ offices, state agencies and other nonprofit and philanthropic institutions to implement the core components of the Ready4Work model and to bring the model to scale.