

Reducing Recidivism Through Work



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Introduction

In collaboration with The University of Minnesota Resilient Communities Project, we (six University of Minnesota Graduate students) present our findings from research, interviews, and site visits, to the Carver County Health and Human Services Department for their review. The purpose of this investigation is to aide Carver County in facilitating positive interactions between offenders and business owners in Carver County, thereby reducing recidivism by providing purposeful work opportunities. Our group investigated several unique scopes of information, all of which have been compiled into this document.

This report fulfills requirements for OLPD 5204: Designing the Adult Education Program. Professor Catherine Twohig was the faculty advisor for this project.

A Summary of Literature

A comprehensive, human capital approach captures the research theme of reducing recidivism through work. Improving offenders' job skills, attitudes toward work responsibilities, and self-esteem should lead to increases in post-release employment opportunities. Furthermore, the attitudes of employers and community members towards hiring offenders are relevant to reducing recidivism through work. The literature summary points to the walls and doors of successful reentry after prison.

According to the research, offenders face many barriers that hinder their success in finding a job. These barriers include: low levels of education, lack of 'work-ready' skills, mental health struggles, housing and transportation issues, lack of motivation and

trust in the traditional work culture, and an absence of a proven employment track record (Albright & Deng, 1996; Gigure & Dendes, 2002; Graffam, Shinkfield, & LaVelle, 2004; Holzer, 2002). Moreover, employers see their willingness to hire offenders affected by: the inability to contact job applicants by phone after they leave jail, offenders' lack of social skills, and offenders' lack of critical thinking skills (Place, McClusky, McClusky, & Treffinder, 2000).

Other barriers to the willingness to hire include employers' fear of victimization, and loss of reputation if an offender does not treat customers well, and offenders' lack of job-specific skills needed to fill current job openings. Further, research finds that employers do not have good recruitment plans in place, might be inflexible with offenders concerning start times and days off, and are not familiar with government incentives. Also, employers who have not had social contact with offenders might find their biases and fears make them less willing to hire (Albright & Deng, 1996; Buck, 2000; Gigure & Dendes, 2002; Holzer, 2002; Fahey, Roberts, & Engel, 2006).

The walls to successful reentry can be breached with the help of prison pre-release programs, post-release community based programs, and employer engagement strategies.

Pre-Release Support

Pre-release programs that most benefit inmates and employers focus on training in cognitive skills, such as problem solving and creative thinking. Understanding the problem, generating ideas, and planning for action are the three prongs of creative

thinking. Training in these skills is recommended as a means to helping offenders develop goals and identify self-fulfilling prophecies (Place et al., 2000). Research states that employers feel in-prison general education and training programs are not comprehensive or focused enough to meet their needs. That said, the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS) competencies (www.casas.org) are considered beneficial and could be the focus of an in-prison adult education program (Albright & Deng, 1996).

Employers also report that helping pre-release offenders gather important documents such as photo identification and/or driver's licenses speeds up the hiring process. A practical suggestion that came out of an employer roundtable was to provide job applicants with a pre-paid cell phone (Fahey et al., 2006).

Mock interview training and prison job fairs are crucial for connecting offenders with employers before they are released. These types of activities provide real-world interviewing experience, as well as a platform for offenders to learn about different job opportunities. Employers also provide valuable information and encouragement to offenders seeking work after release through mock interviewing activities (Albright & Deng, 1996). Connecting employers with offenders in this way provides social contact, which has been shown to reduce stigma and fear held by some employers (Buck, 2002; Gigure & Dendes, 2002). Research suggests that the more an employer knows about a job applicant, the more willing they will be to hire that candidate after release. This is the focus of job fairs and mock interview activities (Fahey et al., 2006; Oswald, 2005).

Research states that offenders who have real-world skills as well as a proven work record are more likely to be hired (Holzer, 2002). This is supported by research that suggests providing offenders with menial low-wage jobs might actually harm their already unstable self-esteem (Albright & Deng, 1996). The research urges providing education and skills-based training that leads to skilled and professional work (Albright & Deng, 1996; Holzer, 2002).

To this end, the research explores private/public partnerships for providing work in prisons. Prison Industry Enhancement Programs provide minimum wage jobs for inmates in privately run prison-based industries. The emphasis of these programs is on treating the inmate as a real-world worker. Because this work is provided while the offenders are in jail, they are supervised while they develop the skills needed to make it on the outside. This is a win-win situation for employers and inmates. Although these programs are often best suited for state prisons, we believe that using a state-run system as a model for a county jail is possible with due diligence and staff support (Prison Industry Enhancement Programs, US Department of Justice). Hennepin County Adult Correctional Facility is a case in point, having successfully implemented such a program.

Post-Release Support

Post-release encouragement comes in the form of structured support from intermediary agencies such as Minneapolis-based AccessAbility. Examples of support found in the research include mentoring and wraparound services.

Mentoring was consistently cited as an important post-release program. Chicago-based organization Safer Return describes a comprehensive mentoring program that is “intended to be transformative and designed to deliberately address or change negative self-perceptions and low self-esteem” (Fontaine, Taxy, Peterson, Breaux, Breaux, & Rossman, 2015. p. 52). This change in self-perception was beneficial in keeping at-risk individuals from engaging in new criminal activities. Importantly, mentoring creates a buffer between the inmates and their return to the community, which is often filled with people and behaviors that led them to offend in the first place. Mentoring programs recruit and train volunteers from the community. Faith-based organizations are often rich recruiting grounds for volunteers. Former offenders and inmates are also considered good mentors. Mentoring should begin within thirty days of release from jail and may include group or one-on-one interactions (Bauldry, & McClanahan, 2008; Fontaine et al., 2015).

Wraparound services such as job search clinics, resume writing classes, referrals to social agencies, and life-skills coaching are found to be helpful for released inmates (Albright & Deng, 1996; Buck, 2000; Holzer, 2002). Intermediary agencies, which provide these services, serve as a social network for the recently released offender. Agencies that provide support for the development of positive social networks serve as a barrier to recidivism. Research states that finding and keeping a supportive social network may go hand-in-hand with finding and keeping a job (Bauldry, 2008; Shivy, Wu, Moon, Mann, Holland, & Eacho, 2007).

Employee Education and Engagement

A third strategy for reducing recidivism through work is engaging and motivating employers to be willing stakeholders. Employers need to know that offenders who are trained in soft and hard skills, and who have a supportive social network and a positive attitude toward work, can become loyal and valued employees.

Research shows that the first thirty days on the job are the most crucial for job retainment (Buck, 2000). However, these are often the hardest days for recently released offenders who have other demands on their time. Recently released offenders typically have meetings with parole officers and counselors, struggle with securing reliable transportation, and may live far away from the job. Offenders must make personal and family adjustments as they transition back to community living. Employers that are not willing or able to be flexible with start times, late arrivals, or legitimate absences, may become frustrated in the early days of their new hire (Graffam, 2004).

Other research states that informal contact with offenders has been helpful for decreasing stigma and employer bias; yet, in one study, only 15 percent of employers surveyed reported having non-work contact with ex-offenders. As stated earlier, mock interviews and job fairs provide social contacts with offenders that have proven to be beneficial. Since much of the recruiting done by small to medium-sized companies is done informally, these types of activities often lead to jobs (Holzer, 2002).

Employer roundtables and focus groups have been discussed in the literature as effective ways to mitigate the many issues that get in the way of successful hiring. (Fahey et al., 2006; Holzer, 2002). For example, employer roundtables and focus groups have

been used successfully to connect employers with intermediary agencies. Intermediary agencies that have a track record of actively engaging employers in seeking to meet their specific skill needs have more success than programs that do not (Holzer, 2002; Fahey et al., 2006). Building strong relationships with intermediary agencies that support employers has been found to be a strong indicator of willingness to hire (Holzer, 2002). Discovering what employers do not know about the offender workforce is important for understanding how to best encourage employers to hire and support offenders after they have made the commitment to hire (Gigure & Dendes, 2002). Fahey (2006) has provided a detailed Employer Focus Group Discussion Guide in their 2006 work with The Crime and Justice Institute (Fahey et al. 2006, p. 30-32).

In conclusion, our investigation has revealed that reducing recidivism through work requires all stakeholders to participate in a comprehensive and sustained manner. Assets such as financial resources, political will, volunteer hours and grassroots efforts will be needed. This is the social contract we fill. As one interviewee stated: “If we are a society who puts people in jail, we must be a society who helps them when they are released” (B. Janowski, personal communication, March 3, 2016).

An International Perspective

Today, modern China is experiencing an extremely rapid social transition. Social changes in China are reflected in many social phenomena such as rapid economic growth, the speed of urbanization, and significant changes in urban spatial patterns. It is well known that high crime rates often occur with rapid social transition.

As Xiong (2006) indicated in his book, China is encountering high crime rates due to its profound social transformation. Many people have lost direction due to rapid social change. China is also facing a series of problems caused by rapid social changes coinciding with rapid economic development. These include urban spatial structural spread, social disorganization, increased differentiation between rich and poor, centralized poverty, structural unemployment, frequent population flow, and ethnic heterogeneity. In addition, a large poor population and frequent migration are common reasons for community disorganization.

Regarding increases in crime, reasons for criminal behavior include unemployment, marriage and family issues, residential instability, social justice barriers, social isolation, lack of community cohesion, language barriers etc. Yan (2009) recommends, in order to decrease crime and recidivism, China should: (1) develop economics in rural areas to gradually decrease the differences between rich and poor, (2) implement contemporary education and professional training in rural areas, (3) improve laws, oversight and education, (4) improve social welfare for low-income groups, and (5) improve the management of migrant workers.

From China to Massachusetts

The problem of helping offenders to find employment requires a good macro environment as well as assistance in the short-term. While recommendations from Yan (2009) focus on solving the problem by creating good environments in the long run, Fahey, Robert and Engels' (2006) recommendations focus on what to do in the present.

Here are recommendations for creating employment opportunities for offenders from the Massachusetts Executive Office of Public Safety (Fahey, Roberts & Engel, 2006):

- Make it easier for employers to hire prisoners while they are still incarcerated.
- Review legal barriers to employment of ex-offenders and regulate the quality of public information on criminal history.
- Provide greater funding for the efforts of intermediary agencies to link recently released offenders with the labor market.
- Expand funding and outreach efforts for bonds or tax credits to employers who hire them.
- Expand financial incentives for ex-offenders to accept and retain low-wage employment for a period of time.

U.S. Programs

The United States has one of the highest incarceration rates in the world. The U.S. makes up more than 5% of the world's population, yet we are home to 25% of the world's prison population. In 2014, the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) published a study on recidivism of prisoners released in 2005. In this study the BJS found that of the 400,000+ prisoners released in 30 states, 76.6% were arrested within 5 years of release and of that 76.6%, more than a third were arrested within the first 6 months (U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, 2014). In order to combat such high recidivism rates, many organizations across the United States have created programs to help offenders

reintegrate back into society, especially into the workforce. These programs focus on creating greater access to community and social services for released offenders.

Nonprofit organizations:

- Center for Employment Opportunities: CEO is an organization that provides “comprehensive employment services to men and women with recent criminal convictions” (Ceoworks.org, 2016). CEO’s model helps those with criminal convictions find and keep work by providing life-skills education, short-term transitional employment, full-time job placement, and post-placement services like work-related counseling, crisis management, and long-term career planning. At their New York City office, CEO offers a One Stop program that offers assistance to participants in setting up public benefits; legal assistance; family support services; free tax assistance; and financial counseling. CEO has a total of 11 offices in New York, California, Oklahoma, and Pennsylvania.
- Safer Foundation: This foundation is one of the United States’ largest nonprofit organizations that provide services to those with a criminal record. Safer is host to many support services including education (PACE or GED equivalent), employment, housing, and financial. Safer’s employment support includes transitional employment. Safer has found that the state of Illinois has a 52% rate of recidivism, and Safer Foundation participants have less than a 22% rate of recidivism. Much of that success they attribute to their transitional work program.

State funded programs:

- MCORP: The Minnesota Comprehensive Offender Reentry Program was piloted in 2008 in an effort to reduce recidivism in the state of Minnesota. This pilot project was implemented in 5 counties in Minnesota. A major objective of the MCORP pilot was to “create greater case management collaboration between caseworkers in prison and supervision agents in the community” (Duwe, 2012, p.347). By increasing collaboration between caseworkers and supervision agents, MCORP was able to increase offender awareness to social and community service programs throughout the aforementioned counties. This increased awareness led to a decreased rate of homelessness and an increase or improvement in employment rates.

Based on the information listed above, it may benefit Carver County to invest in more robust work programs for released offenders. MCORP is a well-established program in the state of Minnesota. Looking at their model, along with the nonprofit models in New York and Illinois and modifying practices to fit the characteristics of the Carver County Jail (high turnover rates and small population), would serve them best.

Twin Cities Metro: Site Visits and Interviews

The following were repeatedly identified as crucial to the successful employment and reintegration of offenders into the community:

- Providing offenders with case managers to coordinate wraparound services including housing, transportation, mental health, education, employment training, and problem solving. The case manager is the go-to person to work with offenders on their needs and goals, as well as streamline necessary resources. The case manager should also provide sustained support as a mentor. This is distinct from the role of a parole officer whose primary function is to enforce rules and deadlines.
- The provision of transportation to and from the offender's place of employment for a finite length of time, as well as a plan of action for the offender to manage their transportation thereafter.
- Assistance for the offenders to secure safe and affordable housing.
- Continued access to mental health resources for offenders.
- Training and educational resources for offenders that relate to their goals for employment.
- In-house jail programming such as GED courses and culinary training.
- Life skills and cognitive skills classes in jail to assist offenders in achieving healthy, independent living.
- In-jail job groups that help offenders to navigate issues they've encountered in work settings. These groups facilitate activities such as role-playing, brainstorming, and soft-skills training.
- Counseling to change offenders' attitudes about work, increase self-esteem etc.

- Transitional work programs for offenders while they are in jail. Eligible offenders must be medically cleared to work (no restrictions documented by their judge, etc.) and motivated to participate. These programs provide transportation, uniforms, necessary equipment, and lunch for offenders to work at a particular job. Support, troubleshooting, and conflict resolution are offered as needed. The employers pay the offenders, but approximately half of their hourly wages are turned over to help fund the jail program.
- Networks and ongoing, positive rapport with employers interested in and willing to hire offenders.

Interviews

Emerge, Cheri Moseman, Workforce Coach and Employment Facilitator. March 2016.

AccessAbility Inc., Brad Janowski, Director of Career and Educational Pathways. March 9, 2016.

Goodwill Easter Seals, Marlana Balk, Re-entry Intake Coordinator. March 16, 2016.

David Sheie, Founder of Touchstone Center for Collaborative Inquiry. April 18, 2016.

Private Sector Work Program, Hennepin County Adult Correctional Facility, Gary Printup, Corrections Supervisor, and Bonny Hays. March 22, 2016.

Carver County Employer Interviews

Our team spoke with four employers located in Carver County who either hire or are willing to hire offenders. The interviews were conducted with Quint Thocher of By The Yard, an outdoor furniture company; Leah Conrad with CorTech, a staffing agency; Sandy Armstrong with Elkay Wood Products; and Karen Lennie with TCF Bank. The

interviews were held April 2016 over the phone. Our objective was to gather information and insight on the issues surrounding offender employment from an employer's perspective. We have summarized some key takeaways from these conversations below. Additionally, we have identified underlying themes and issues that were present across all of the employers.

- Offenders seem to lack experience.
- Offenders are lacking basic job skills.
- Offenders do not seem motivated to develop skills needed to keep a job long-term.
- Employers harbored concerns over hiring offenders with a history of violence, theft, or both.
- Some employment policies and processes make it difficult to meet the specific needs of offenders.

To elaborate and further explain the list above, one issue highlighted during the interview process was the difficulty employers faced hiring offenders who were motivated to change and work on a longer term basis. While many of the employers were willing to take a chance on an employee who might not stay, some emphasized a real overall need to recruit for long-term employment. Q. Thocher mentioned that “short-timers” (offenders with shorter sentences) were harder to hire because they have higher turnover and more behavioral issues than offenders serving longer sentences (personal

communication, April 4, 2016). He explained that offenders who are incarcerated for only brief periods are less motivated to change when they reenter the community than those who spend more time in prison. He emphasized that a key component to successfully employing “short-timers” is to develop some incentives to motivate the offenders (Q. Thocher, personal communication, April 4, 2016).

Furthermore, the interviews revealed, “Not all employers are created equal.” Some types of employment such as working in a bank setting require strict adherence to legal regulations with regard to hiring an offender. Such lengthy processes create additional barriers for offenders. One employer remarked that “The process to hire an offender can take months, for most candidates who potentially meet the requirements, getting through all the red tape isn’t worth it for \$15 dollars per hour” (K. Lennie, personal communication, April 7, 2016).

Additionally, some employers we spoke with were willing to hire offenders, but didn’t seem to fully comprehend the specific needs that should be met to support their long-term employment. Others understood those needs, but didn’t have the necessary structure or process to meet them. One employer we interviewed was a former mentor through a program called the InnerChange Freedom Initiative run by Prison Fellowship. The program serves to train mentors who work with offenders seeking to make lifelong changes and incorporate new value systems (Q. Thocher, personal communication, April 4, 2016). He offered that it was important that employers who hire offenders are selected on the basis of their ability and motivation to work with and support offender needs. In other words, while it is important to recommend offenders who meet specific criteria

employers are looking for, employers should also meet some criteria to ensure a good employment match between the offender and employer (Q. Thocher, personal communication, April 4, 2016).

An additional issue that surfaced through the interviews focused on accommodating offender needs, such as providing time off for court appearances, drug testing, or meeting with parole officers. One employer suggested that providing time off for many of these things was difficult to do and unrealistic to enact (S. Armstrong, personal communication, April 4, 2016). Furthermore, the employer went on to highlight that taking time off to travel and perform all of their expected duties was additionally difficult for the offender. Because Carver County is so large and spread out geographically, traveling to and from employment becomes an additional stressor for both the offender and employer. It was recommended that perhaps some tasks such as drug testing or meeting with parole officers be brought on site to the job location. This would reduce missed work caused by travel time for the offender (S. Armstrong, personal communication, April 4, 2016).

All of the employers were willing to hire offenders. Some have previously sought out services to aide them in hiring offenders. One employer mentioned that other companies in neighboring counties were also seeking services to address the issues surrounding hiring offenders, but that these services don't seem to exist (S. Armstrong, personal communication, April 4, 2016). Most employers were willing to be a part of a transitional work program if it led to opportunities for long-term employment. The

employers expressed a desire for greater involvement from Carver County by providing a sustainable program that offers assistance in hiring offenders.

Several of the employers felt that offenders often deal with additional issues that require some kind of support. It was recommended that not only could offenders benefit from support systems such as mentorship and wraparound services, but also that such support was vital to the long-term success of the offender to hold a job and re-enter the community (Q. Thocher, personal communication, April 4, 2016).

A bigger takeaway is that securing employment is only one piece of the larger issue of offender reentry into the community, to which offenders face several barriers. Addressing these barriers when considering the development of an offender employment program would support the larger issue of reducing offender recidivism.

Transitional Work Programs

Research has suggested that work can positively impact the lives of offenders on multiple levels, including individual, family, and social (Solomon, Johnson, Travis, & McBride, 2004). Employment can increase and broaden skill levels and experience, provide wages, boost self-esteem, and encourage offenders to resist criminal behavior (Saylor & Gaes, 1997; Solomon et al., 2004). With such positive outcomes, it is obvious why many correctional facilities have taken an interest in programs designed to connect offenders with employment.

Transitional work programs can be implemented before or after offenders are released from their correctional facility. A program such as the Center for Employment

Opportunities (CEO) is one example of a successful transitional work program. CEO implements a program that works with state agencies to employ offenders to perform work such as building and grounds maintenance. Offenders work in crews with a supervisor who teaches skills needed to perform the job, as well as basic job skills like how to dress appropriately and show up on time. The program acts as a pre-employment boot camp that works to prepare offenders for other employment (Buck, 2000). A similar program implemented here in Minnesota is the Hennepin County Private-Sector Work Program (PSWP), titled Productive Day. This program connects offenders to employment prior to release. The benefits of this program and others like it are that they provide relevant work and skills, expand financial and employment opportunities, and have a positive psychological impact. As previously stated, research has suggested that using a state-run system (like the Hennepin County program) as a model for a county jail is possible (Prison Industry Enhancement Programs, US Department of Justice).

All of these things combined can work to help establish positive habits, motivation, and opportunities for offenders to find and keep employment once released from prison (Solomon et al., 2004). It should be noted that while work assignments in prison, such as prison custodial duties, can offer some of these benefits, these jobs do not always provide work experience that appeals to employers on the outside (Solomon et al., 2004).

Transitional work programs often include the development of job readiness and life skills (Buck, 2000; Solomon et al., 2004). The development of these additional skills is critical. Research has demonstrated that what is important for the long-term success of

offenders is not only whether they are able to obtain a job, but also whether they can keep one for a significant period of time (Solomon et al., 2004). As previously stated, the most significant period for an offender to hold a job is the first thirty days (Buck, 2000). “As a result, the single most important thing that any ex-offender can do for long term success is to get and keep one job for a significant period of time (possibly one year)” (Solomon et al., 2004, p. 13).

With the consideration of our research and interviews, we believe that a transitional work program implemented prior to an offender’s release could address some of the barriers offenders face upon reentry into the community. By working through barriers such as lack of motivation and resources, offenders will have more support while developing positive skills and knowledge. Additionally, they can be held accountable, which ensures greater security for employers involved.

We suggest Carver County develop a pilot transitional work program with the following framework:

1. **Establish relationships with employers:** Create and deliver guidelines that provide realistic expectations for offender selection criteria, performance, and commitment. Identify employers who might work well under the decided guidelines.
2. **Enroll eligible offenders:** Recruit offenders to participate in the program who are eligible. Immigration cases, medically restricted offenders, and offenders serving sentences of less than 30 days, would be examples of individuals who might not

- be eligible to participate. The offenders who take part in the transitional work program must demonstrate motivation and a willingness to work.
3. **Contracts:** Create and implement contracts for the offenders and employers to sign. Hennepin County's PSWP program has a contract that is a valid model.
 4. **Implement a support system for employers and offenders:** Use a caseworker or trained volunteers to act as mentors. The role of a mentor would be to act as an intermediary between employers and offenders by handling any issues that may arise. This person could additionally act to provide support by teaching offenders basic job and life skills. There is also potential for this role to extend to offering assistance during offenders' transition into the community.
 5. **Provide essential equipment, lunch, and transportation to and from job sites:** This takes the burden of transportation off the offender and ensures that offenders show up on time and have everything they need to perform the job. As a result, offenders may show greater consistency in job performance.
 6. **Create motivation for change through work and financial incentives:** Allowing offenders to work in a transitional program would create motivation by providing them with the opportunity to make a financial gain. In the process of earning money, they would have the additional opportunity to learn valuable skills, develop positive habits, gain work experience, and potentially secure employment.
 7. **Supplement transitional work with wraparound services and support:** The road to reentry for offenders is often complicated and riddled with additional

barriers. As previously stated, such barriers include housing, health care, drug treatment, transportation etc. For these reasons, several reentry programs include wraparound services targeted at aiding or eliminating barriers for offenders. Often, these services are coordinated and managed with the help of a case or social worker (Buck, 2000). “Getting and holding a job requires a set of skills and attitudes—willingness to follow a schedule, work well with colleagues or team members, and set long-term goals—which are needed to succeed in a variety of activities and responsibilities in society” (Solomon et al., 2004, p. 5). We recommend that any employment program implemented by Carver County be supplemented by programs or services designed to address the additional needs of offenders.

8. **Build offender/employer relationships:** Transitional work prior to release can create a relationship between offenders and employers early on. Employers may be more willing to hire an offender whom they have already worked with and know. Additionally, by being placed in a work environment prior to release, offenders will be exposed to a community within which they can network and build relationships.
9. **Future directions:** The structure of this program has been left as a framework. It is our intention to provide ideas for the foundations of a program that can be adjusted and adapted to fit the current and future needs of Carver County, however it will be up to Carver County to fill in the details. This allows flexibility for Carver County to incorporate additional programs such as counseling, GED,

life-skills, cognitive skills classes, in-jail job training (e.g., culinary certificate) as needed.

Entrepreneurship

Another employment option for offenders that we have explored is entrepreneurship.

Offenders who are interested in starting their own business may now find a variety of resources available to provide them with support, both nationally and in Minnesota.

These resources include organizations that provide small business loans and grants, as well as training and advice to entrepreneurs. For many offenders, starting their own business is a great option given the difficulties they frequently encounter in the job market. While there are no business grants designed specifically for offenders, there are resources available to help them obtain equal opportunity business funding. These resources include:

- The US Small Business Administration (SBA)
- Cultural and Affiliation Grants
- Private Grant Funding
- Education Business Grants
- Networking and Mentoring

SBA: The SBA offers advice for business startups, including templates for business plans, training, checklists and links to federal grant listings. Many offenders can qualify as new business owners for the same kinds of funding available to people who don't have criminal records. Grants are often available to certain kinds of businesses, such as those working in the fields of green technology, health or education.

Cultural and Affiliation Grants: Offenders can often find grants that are offered in connection to their cultural backgrounds, particularly minorities. Federal and state grants are also categorized for age-related circumstances. An offender's small business startup could easily qualify for a grant pertaining to race, age or a culturally specific business venture.

Private Grant Funding: Private companies, corporations and organizations regularly offer many grant and funding opportunities to new small businesses. Individuals and private business operations also offer grant resources for people who fall within certain levels of income. Because offenders are usually lower income upon re-entering the community, they could easily qualify for these opportunities. Furthermore, organizations such as Accion, Zopa and Prosper specialize in providing microloans, and may be willing to help an offender even if he/she has debt or bad credit.

Education Business Grants: Some organizations offer free training for business startups that is also linked to funding opportunities. In Minnesota, the Southwest Initiative

Foundation offers a microenterprise loan program that provides customized support for entrepreneurs through ongoing technical assistance and training as needed for the length of the loan. The program offers loans up to \$50,000.

Networking and Mentoring: Offenders might find business grant money through networking activities with private groups and organizations. For example, corporations and trusts often participate in social activities designed for the betterment of the communities in which they serve. Award money is offered by these organizations regularly. Offenders can find this funding through using a networking strategy and contributing to these efforts themselves. Mentoring is another way that offenders can find small business grants. Mentorship programs, such as the Prison Entrepreneurship Program (PEP), founded in Houston in 2004, offer training and advice, along with special connections to financial resources. According to PEP officials, they raise up to \$2 million a year from private foundations and individuals, and estimate that the program has saved the state of Texas roughly \$6 million in reduced recidivism.

Based on the success of business mentorship programs like the Southwest Initiative Foundation and the Prison Entrepreneurship Program, Carver County may benefit from starting its own business mentorship program for offenders. Furthermore, consolidating resources related to small business loans and grants, perhaps through a workforce center, would aid offenders in pursuing their entrepreneurial goals.

Recommendations

Below is a summary of recommendations we offer to Carver County for improving offender employment programs:

1. **Employ Case Managers and Trained Volunteers:** Our research repeatedly indicated the benefits associated with the use of caseworkers to help manage wraparound services, as well as act as supportive mentors to offenders. Additionally, caseworkers can help manage offenders' applicable paperwork and ensure that it is ready at the time of release (identification, social security number, prepared resume, etc.) We cannot emphasize enough the importance of designating individuals to assist offenders in managing barriers related to all wraparound services, including housing and transportation.

Furthermore, we recommend Carver County reduce the number and cost of hired caseworkers by training volunteers to work under the supervision of a professional caseworker. Carver County can estimate the return on investment associated with using volunteers through a leadership network called Independent Sector. Their website (www.independentsector.org) allows organizations to calculate the value costs as they relate to the number of hours worked by volunteers.

2. **Build Relationships with Select Employers:** Open communication with employers can help to address issues associated with hiring offenders. We suggest Carver County hold frequent employer roundtables. We also recommend that Carver County partner with the various intermediary agencies such as AccessAbility and Goodwill Easter Seals to support employers that have expressed a willingness to hire offenders.
3. **Facilitate Job Clubs:** Job clubs act as support groups for offenders, which help offenders work through job-related struggles and improve basic job skills. Hennepin County Adult Correctional Facility hosts in-jail job clubs for offenders to gain and sharpen soft skills, including conflict de-escalation and resolution. Offenders bring their real-world experiences to the group for role-playing, brainstorming and expert advice.

4. **Provide In-House Job Skills Training:** We recommend that Carver County partner with Adult Basic Education sources such as the Southwest Metro Educational Cooperative to bring volunteers to Carver County to provide job skills training to inmates. During our tour of the Carver County Jail we were informed that the jail is in the process of finalizing in-house culinary training and certification. We offer the suggestion that in-house training be expanded to include carpentry and automotive repair skills, administrative skills etc. This would provide inmates with the option to pursue a wide range of professions post-release.
- **Provide In-House Counseling:** Providing behavioral counseling to offenders was a repeated theme in the research we encountered. Counseling would help offenders to learn strategies for dealing with negative thought patterns, as well as make motivational shifts. These changes would support the furthering of their education, and skill development.
 - **Work Collaboratively with Surrounding Counties:** Our research showed that issues related to offender employment are not limited Carver County. We recommend Carver County begin a dialogue with surrounding counties to explore the possibility of partnerships, for the purpose of combining resources and addressing barriers.
 - **Implement a Pre-Release Transitional Work Program:** We believe that the implementation of a transitional work program would help prepare incarcerated offenders for work and develop practical life skills. Additionally, such a program could help drive motivation for change and strengthen relationships with employers, which may result in long-term employment opportunities upon release.
 - **Retain Current VISTA Program:** We suggest that Carver County work to retain their current VISTA volunteers. In doing so, we believe that there will be more consistency in program development for offenders.
 - **Explore Options for Funding:** We suggest that Carver County explore a variety of options for funding new offender employment programs. These options include:
 - The Federal Department of Labor: The FDL offers a variety of grants for funding adult reentry programs. These grants are awarded to nonprofit

organizations, as well as state and local governments. Information about these grants can be found on the Reentry Employment Opportunities page of the FDL website: https://www.doleta.gov/REO/training_to_work.cfm

- Receive compensation for housing inmates from other counties.
- Receive compensation for housing federal inmates.
- Garnish inmates' wages to self-fund transitional work programs.

Program Evaluation

The following are methods for evaluating new offender employment programs:

- Track recidivism rates
- Track the rate and average length of employment for offenders post-release
- Track the rate of participation of offenders in transitional work programs
- Track the rate of participation of employers in transitional work programs
- Track the rate of participation of volunteers and mentors in transitional work programs
- Encourage feedback from offenders, employers, jail staff, volunteers, mentors etc. This feedback can be gathered via surveys and interviews.
- Track the number of small businesses started by offenders, the length of time they've been operating, the degree of success they've achieved etc.
- Monitor investments made in offender business startups

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