



Cleveland Stakeholders' Perceptions of Prisoner Reentry



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Returning Home: Understanding the Challenges of Prisoner Reentry is a longitudinal study of prisoner reentry in Maryland, Illinois, Ohio, and Texas under the direction of Dr. Christy Visser, principal research associate at the Urban Institute. The study explores (1) the individual reentry experience through interviews with prisoners before and after release from prison; (2) the family perspective on reentry from interviews with family members of returning prisoners; and (3) the community context of reentry based on interviews with key community stakeholders and focus groups with residents.

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This policy brief presents findings from interviews with community stakeholders about their perceptions of barriers to reentry and possible solutions. To learn more about *Returning Home* and to read research reports and briefs, please visit our web site: www.urban.org/justice.

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In 2001, the Urban Institute launched *Returning Home: Understanding the Challenges of Prisoner Reentry*, a multistate, longitudinal study that documents the pathways of prisoner reintegration and examines the factors that contribute to successful and unsuccessful reentry. The *Returning Home* study has been implemented in four states, including a pilot study in Maryland and full studies in Illinois, Ohio, and Texas. Through in-person interviews, the study collects information on individuals' life circumstances immediately prior to, during, and up to one year after their release from prison. The project began with a statistical analysis of Ohio corrections data to examine patterns and trends in reentry characteristics. (See sidebar, *Prisoner Reentry in Ohio—An Overview*.) In addition, interviews and focus groups were conducted with residents and other community stakeholders in Cleveland.

This brief is the fourth in a series of briefs documenting the findings on prisoner reentry in Ohio, specifically men returning to the Cleveland area. (See sidebar, *Findings from Interviews with Former Prisoners*.) The first brief, *Ohio Prisoners' Reflections on Returning Home*, documents the prerelease experiences and expectations of over 400 prisoners selected for the study. The second brief, *Cleveland Prisoners' Experiences Returning Home*, describes former prisoners' experiences in the first few months after release, including whether reentry expectations were met, success with housing, the job market, and family reintegration. The third brief, *Community Residents' Perceptions of Prisoner Reentry in Selected Cleveland Neighborhoods*, presents the views of community residents concerning the impact of prisoner reentry in their neighborhoods.

This policy brief presents findings from interviews with stakeholders—specific persons or organizations—familiar with issues affecting individuals transitioning from prison to the community. We interviewed service providers, local government officials, criminal justice practitioners, and civic leaders. (See sidebar, *Study Methodology*.) The current policy brief expands the prisoner reentry dialog to incorporate the voices of those in the community who are dedicated to improving reentry for men and women returning home. We discuss their perceptions of barriers and issues affecting successful reentry, solutions and suggested changes to policy and practice, and the role that government agencies can play in successful reentry. This research brief is intended to serve as a foundation for understanding stakeholders' perceptions of barriers to reentry and identifying viable strategies for improving the lives of returning prisoners and those affected by their experiences.

BARRIERS AFFECTING SUCCESSFUL REENTRY

In recent years, the barriers prisoners face upon reentry have been well documented. The stakeholders in this study discussed a wide range of barriers facing returning prisoners and a few barriers were singled out as particularly difficult to overcome: a lack of available housing, gaining employment, access to social services, public stigma, and personal barriers. Respondents also stressed that barriers in some areas can create barriers in others—such as a lack of income limiting former prisoners' choices for housing.

Housing

The various groups of stakeholders agreed that finding affordable housing was a major barrier to successful reentry. In Cleveland and other urban areas of Ohio, there are limited options for permanent and transitional housing for special populations.

Respondents also noted that shelters should be viewed as the least favorable option for persons recently released because of their temporary and unstable environment and their reluctance to house returning prisoners.

Several stakeholders indicated that zoning laws that prohibit individuals with felony records from designated residential dwellings create difficulties for former prisoners trying to find housing, especially if family members live in these restricted areas. In addition, legislation prohibiting sex offenders from residing in certain neighborhoods, locations, or housing complexes makes it hard for these individuals to find housing near public transportation or job opportunities. Corrections stakeholders noted that NIMBY (not in my backyard) attitudes make housing former prisoners a more complex scenario, although it is not always community residents that oppose housing ex-offenders in their neighborhoods. Some stakeholders felt that there are neighborhoods that appear willing to allow new housing for returning prisoners, yet local political leaders and council members sometimes oppose such efforts.

Other housing issues mentioned by stakeholders include a general reluctance on the part of landlords to rent to ex-offenders and complex family relationships. Some stakeholders stated that although returning prisoners may be able to live with family members upon return, many such situations become stressful quickly, sometimes leading to an environment where successful reentry is difficult. Stakeholders also indicated that former prisoners often move from place to place over short periods of time—a likely indication that they are having difficulty finding a permanent housing situation.

Employment

When asked to identify the primary barriers that former prisoners encounter when returning to the community, most stakeholders cited employment as the primary barrier. Service providers particularly felt that there are insufficient employment opportunities available to this population, because their skills are not compatible with jobs available in the community. For example, Cleveland used to have many small factories and former prisoners would rely on jobs in those factories once they were released. However, many of those industries have moved or closed, thus reducing jobs available for former prisoners with limited skills. Several stakeholders felt that job training available to prisoners or former prisoners does not reflect current employment opportunities and that the job training that does exist is often inadequate. One stakeholder remarked that computer classes offered to former prisoners do not train persons for the types of information technology jobs that are available.

Civic leaders and local government officials felt that employment was a primary barrier to successful reentry because of laws that prohibit employment of former prisoners in some jobs and negative perceptions of former

prisoners by potential employers. However, criminal justice practitioners felt that the issue was not necessarily finding employment, but rather the difficulty former prisoners have in sustaining and maintaining employment due to their limited technical and interpersonal skills. In particular, the lack of a strong work history, minimal education, or unfamiliarity with understanding workplace interactions all contribute to difficulties former prisoners may have in finding or maintaining a permanent job.

Other stakeholders cited the poor economic situation in Cuyahoga County (particularly in Cleveland) the lack of jobs providing sufficient wages to allow individuals to be self-supporting, and regulations prohibiting some former prisoners from working in specific industries as other barriers to employment. A few stakeholders noted that issues such as not having transportation to get to a job, not having the necessary identification or paperwork required for employment, or not having a mailing address are often overlooked when thinking about job opportunities for former prisoners.

Social Services

Many stakeholders, particularly civic leaders and service providers, felt that limited access to social services is a key issue facing former prisoners. For example, one stakeholder noted that approximately 70 percent of former prisoners have a substance abuse problem but many do not have access to treatment. Furthermore, while some individuals may have received treatment in

PRISONER REENTRY IN OHIO—AN OVERVIEW

- Between 1982 and 1998, Ohio's prison population nearly tripled in size from 17,147 to 48,171, mirroring the national trend in prison population growth. By 2004, Ohio had the 7th largest prison population in the United States and the 25th highest incarceration rate. The increases in the Ohio prison population were due to more admissions and longer lengths of stay resulting from the rise in new commitments for drug offenses and increases in serious violent crime.
- With Ohio's rising prison population came a significant increase in the number of prisoners released annually. In 2005, 24,630 inmates were released from Ohio prisons, three times the number of inmates released two decades earlier.
- Excluding technical violators, nearly two-thirds (63 percent) of the release cohort in 2006 served one year or less in prison, and 85 percent served three years or less; the average time served was one year and ten months.
- The majority of Ohio prisoners released in 2006 were released through mandatory release (84 percent), and 48 percent were placed on supervision.
- Forty-seven percent of the prisoners released in 2006 had been incarcerated in an Ohio prison at least once before. Of those released in 2005, 15 percent were returned to an Ohio prison within one year.

prison, there is no continuity of treatment upon release. Stakeholders felt that a major reason why some individuals do not enter treatment is because they are not linked to services immediately upon release and must wait, sometimes months, before starting postrelease treatment. For other health-related services, many stakeholders also noted that the termination of entitlements or benefits when an individual is incarcerated hinders a person's ability to receive or have access to these services once released.

Stakeholders cited several other reasons why former prisoners have difficulty accessing services. For example, some former prisoners are unaware of available services, do not know how to access the services that they need, or need transportation to get to an appointment. Regarding mental health services specifically, civic leaders and service providers noted several obstacles. Some stakeholders felt that many former prisoners are misdiagnosed or not diagnosed at all, and there is little acknowledgment that some types of mental health issues (e.g., depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder from seeing violence or from being in prison) warrant treatment or attention. For those that do receive treatment while incarcerated, they are only provided with a minimal supply of medication upon release—which may not be sufficient given the time necessary to contact and schedule appointments for psychiatric evaluation.

In addition to limited access to social services, some stakeholders, particularly criminal justice practitioners and local government officials, felt that the capacity of agencies to assist former prisoners is insufficient. Many agencies are

unaware of the unique issues former prisoners encounter or simply do not have the staff or resources necessary to provide former prisoners with the services they need. For example, one stakeholder remarked that many social service programs in Cleveland are geared toward women and children; programs and services for men are not as prevalent. Another stakeholder noted that many former prisoners need anger management and domestic violence treatment programs but that they are not available for this population.

Community Perception and Public Stigma

When asked how local residents feel about the return of former prisoners to their community, all groups of stakeholders felt that a considerable amount of public stigma and inaccurate perceptions surrounds former prisoners. Some stakeholders noted that there is a false perception that all those who commit crimes are violent and dangerous, and once released, they will have a negative impact on the communities to which they return. Stakeholders provided several examples as to why this stigma exists, including a consistent negative portrayal in the media of persons who commit crimes, a lack of positive news about the lives of former prisoners, and a “tough-on-crime” platform voiced by political officials that creates negative generalizations of former prisoners. These examples make it difficult to change the negative perceptions and public stigma associated with being a former prisoner and can create a backlash that hinders their ability to successfully transition back to the community, to find employment, and to secure housing. One stakeholder also noted that people tend to overlook the fact that many former prisoners are victims.

While many stakeholders felt that local residents have a negative perception of former prisoners, some stakeholders noted that there are residents who are more accepting of former prisoners. For example, in communities with a higher concentration of former prisoners, more interaction occurs with other residents; residents then become aware that generalizations about former prisoners are not accurate. While perceptions are changing somewhat, the consensus regarding the return of former prisoners to the community continues to be “what we don’t know, we fear,” according to one stakeholder.

Personal Barriers

Several stakeholders, across all groups, noted that former prisoners also face personal or individual barriers that impede their reentry process. The individual barrier cited most often was the unrealistic expectations of former prisoners as to what life would be like once released. Overall, many stakeholders felt that former prisoners are not realistic about the challenges of returning to the community nor do they appreciate the obstacles they will encounter. One stakeholder remarked that while prisoners have ideas about changes they want to make in their lives, they are unprepared for how difficult it will be to make those changes.

FINDINGS FROM INTERVIEWS WITH FORMER PRISONERS

- *The men in the study:* 424 men released from an Ohio correctional facility who were returning to Cuyahoga County, Ohio between June 2004 and December 2005; average age is 36 years; 74% are African American, 18% are White, 8% are of other racial groups, and 5% identified themselves as Hispanic. The men served an average of two years in prison -- 47% were incarcerated for a violent crime, 15% for property crimes, 24% for a drug-related crime, and 13% for technical violations of parole. Over half had minor children before prison. (See *Ohio Prisoners' Reflections on Returning Home*.)
- *Two months after release:* 358 men were interviewed. Among the findings, men reported that families had provided critical support immediately after release; about one-third were employed with those on supervision more likely to have jobs; and over half had a chronic health condition. (See *Cleveland Prisoners' Experiences Returning Home*.)
- *One year after release:* 294 men were interviewed, including 56 in prison. Among the findings, nearly half felt that their current living arrangement was temporary, less than half were employed, 40% reported being arrested since release, and 15% were back in prison. (See *One Year Out: Experiences of Prisoners Returning to Cleveland*.)

Criminal justice practitioners noted that former prisoners have unrealistic expectations for several reasons, including false information from their peers as to the opportunities available once released and the process involved in taking advantage of those opportunities, and poor preparation of inmates with regard to tackling real-world scenarios and challenges. Many stakeholders felt that former prisoners often lack the coping skills necessary to deal with real world disappointments, which may include having cognitive deficits. As a result, their ability to make rational choices is affected and they may feel overwhelmed and frustrated when faced with challenges.

While many stakeholders reported that unrealistic expectations impede the reentry process, some stakeholders felt that other personal barriers, such as a lack of pro-social networks, an unstable or unsupportive family environment, or a lack of financial management skills, also hinder a successful transition back to the community. Stakeholders also mentioned child support issues as problematic for some former prisoners. One stakeholder remarked that there can be a cyclical impact of financial problems that eventually limits one's ability to be self-sufficient and sustain a productive life.

SOLUTIONS AND SUGGESTED CHANGES TO POLICY AND PRACTICE

Reentry stakeholders also provided several examples of potential solutions to the barriers to reentry. Solutions discussed by stakeholders varied widely by substantive area (e.g., employment, housing, substance abuse treatment) and systems (i.e., corrections, community corrections, community-based service providers, community residents, family). However, a few specific areas of change were repeated often in the interviews across the majority of respondents. These topics include changes to prison and jail policies and practices, policies and programming addressing housing and employment issues, improving community perceptions, and expanding the role of government in reentry policy.¹

Changes to Prison and Jail Policies and Practices

A number of stakeholders suggested that the corrections system could lead the way in thoughtful changes to in-prison and prerelease programming, as well as the development of comprehensive and coordinated community-based reentry programming for those who face significant barriers. Resources previously dedicated to building prisons could be creatively reinvested to support more intensive—and targeted—prerelease planning and additional community-based services. New or expanded programming based on proven practices would result in significant savings in future corrections budgets.

Respondents remarked that the current leadership of the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (ODRC) and the Ohio Plan represent some of the best approaches to encouraging successful reintegration. If the Plan is fully implemented, it could mark a significant shift in focus for Ohio. A few stakeholders suggested that an

institutional environment based on rehabilitation, not incapacitation, is needed for reentry efforts to pay off in the long run. A broad focus on rehabilitation could entail new reentry education training for all levels and types of prison staff; ensuring a reentry focus and transitional release plan for those in prison for short periods of time; the return of college-level courses; other programming choices, such as cognitive behavioral programs and life skills classes; and redefinition of the role of parole officers to include coordination of service delivery. Reentry stakeholders overwhelmingly agreed that reentry efforts should begin earlier than 90 days before release and perhaps when an individual walks through the door of the prison for the first time. It was also noted that correctional institutions should provide programming that specifically addresses the barriers former prisoners often face in the community.

Several respondents remarked that ODRC is making substantive changes to reentry policies and practices within both institutional settings and community corrections. Specifics include recent changes in policies regarding inmate visitation and mentoring; for example, Ohio prisons now allow community-based mentors to make contact with individuals while they are still in prison. Linking inmates with mentors prior to release would enable individuals to develop relationships that could be sustained in the community. Similarly, respondents felt that corrections could do more to sustain or develop positive family connections for individuals while they are incarcerated. Some respondents specifically mentioned that small changes, like making outgoing telephone calls more affordable, could sustain and enhance communication and support from family members and children.

With regard to community-based changes, respondents across various stakeholders' groups suggested an investment of funds into comprehensive service centers centrally located in areas with high rates of returning prisoners. These service centers are being referred to as "one-stop" centers because they facilitate connections with a broad range of community services, often have computer labs and job-related placement services on site, and can co-locate service providers with supervision officers.

Pre- and Postrelease Programming and Post-release Supervision

Stakeholders held differing views about how well prerelease programming prepares persons for release. For the most part, stakeholders felt that prerelease programming had improved, and that persons receiving prerelease programming were somewhat better prepared than those not receiving programming. Criminal justice practitioners noted that progress is being made and gradually procedures are being put in place to better prepare persons for release. However, there have been some difficulties regarding implementation of prerelease programming, including variability in its delivery and content across institutions and lack of a clear transitional

component, that need to be addressed. And, the most cited concern regarding prerelease programming is that such programming is not available for persons sentenced to short periods of time. Several stakeholders noted that most persons are incarcerated for less than a year and therefore are unable to engage in prerelease programming. Finally, local government and service providers pointed out that there is a long waiting list for other types of programs in prison; thus, many people do not receive programming that might help them successfully transition back to the community.

Most stakeholders had positive views about post-release supervision and postrelease programming (i.e., prearranged community-based services). Service providers and local government stakeholders indicated that post-release supervision can be an important component of a reentry plan.² Supervision officers can direct former prisoners to specific programs that might help them transition back to the community and coordinate with community service providers. Nonetheless, stakeholders felt that high caseloads and lack of resources affects the officer's ability to provide the level of attention former prisoners need. With regard to postrelease programming, many stakeholders felt that programs in place were promising, but that there were not enough of them. Addressing these issues would strengthen the role of post-release supervision and programming in facilitating a successful transition from prison to the community.

Addressing Housing Issues

Several suggestions were provided by stakeholders with regard to more effectively addressing the barriers surrounding finding safe and affordable housing upon release. A number of reentry advocates stated that it is unrealistic to expect housing systems to carry the burden for supporting improved housing options for returning prisoners. Reentry stakeholders suggested that corrections could better assess inmates' risk of homelessness and coordinate with the community to provide rent vouchers to individuals upon release that can be used for first and last month's rent. Some respondents stressed the need for more transitional housing beds to be made available in which the released prisoner pays rent (perhaps on a sliding scale) but also receives services while living there. Transitional housing (also called supportive housing) could be made available through correctional spending or community-based nonprofit agencies.³

On a larger legislative level, some respondents suggested that Section 8 housing or zoning laws should be changed to allow ex-offenders to reside in multiple-dwelling buildings. Across all groups of respondents, there was a consensus that housing legislation needs to be changed. Better attempts need to be made by both the correctional system and government housing agencies to allocate a portion of money appropriated to reentry efforts to housing.

Other solutions mentioned include creating incentives for landlords to lease units to those leaving prisons and

jails, creating an insurance bond program for landlords, and developing partnerships across multiple sectors—the private sector, churches, and community groups—to support permanent, affordable housing in communities for former prisoners.

Addressing Employment Issues

Stakeholders offered a number of potential ideas regarding how to surmount the formidable barriers to obtaining and maintaining employment. A number of stakeholders reiterated their beliefs that most returning prisoners can be successful in finding jobs; it is maintaining employment that should be the focus. Stakeholders suggested numerous ideas that could increase "successful placement" of individuals into jobs. The suggestions ranged from increasing subsidized employment programs and offering community-based programs that nurture entrepreneurial opportunities to better educating employers about hiring individuals who have been convicted of crimes and more communication to employers about available incentive programs for hiring persons with criminal convictions.

Furthermore, a number of stakeholders held strong views that more training opportunities should be available in prison, including bringing back college-level courses. A few stakeholders stated that prisons should make available more certificate programs that train individuals in fields where job opportunities are, such as graphic design and computer programming. One stakeholder suggested that the 2014 Jobs Outlook Report, which provides an overview of job trends for Ohio, could be used to match training opportunities with the projected jobs to better prepare prisoners for employment. A few stakeholders again mentioned that reentry programs should help soon-to-be released prisoners reign in expectations and offer individuals a realistic view of the job culture outside of prison.

Changing Perceptions of the Community

Changing the perception of the community would help diminish stereotypes of ex-offenders and alleviate the challenges associated with negative perceptions. Greater interaction on a personal level, increased attention from local leaders to reentry issues, and more positive media coverage of reentry and ex-offenders could change the way former prisoners are perceived. A number of stakeholders indicated that public awareness and education can go a long way to improve all aspects of reentry. The majority of stakeholders noted that the primary change in the community that needs to be made is an increase in outreach or public service announcements to change public opinion regarding ex-offenders. Ohio has made great strides in doing this by their implementation of Citizen Circles⁴ and holding public forums regarding reentry. ODRC is trying to educate people about the offender population by holding open houses and also educating businesses and other organizations. In addition, some ex-offenders are serving as role models to help transition others into the community.

Several stakeholders mentioned that progress is being made on numerous fronts, mainly because of the increased policy attention that has been focused on reentry in Ohio and Cleveland in recent years. Policy attention has helped increase community understanding and empathy towards the plight of returning prisoners. A number of stakeholders suggested that communities, researchers, practitioners and policymakers should continue to document both successes and failures across the wide range of reentry efforts so best practices can be understood, transferred to other jurisdictions, and replicated with success.

THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT AGENCIES IN ADDRESSING REENTRY

A common theme throughout the interviews was that no one agency or organization should bear the responsibility of reentry efforts. Foundations and reentry advocates remarked that a comprehensive reentry strategy and coordinated efforts are needed to facilitate the successful re-integration of ex-offenders into the community. While respondents noted that the State of Ohio and the City of Cleveland have made great strides in focusing on reentry issues, they believed government agencies can do more to address reentry in a comprehensive framework.

All groups of stakeholders felt that local government needs to set the tone, take a leadership approach, and establish research-based reentry strategies. A number of respondents remarked that the City of Cleveland has taken a step in the right direction with the Cleveland Reentry Strategy. (See sidebar, City of Cleveland’s Reentry Strategy) and the new service guide, *Going Home to Stay: A Guide for Successful Reentry for Men and Women*.⁵ Stakeholders noted that prisoner reentry is not simply a state-level corrections issue but an issue that greatly impacts the viability of local communities. Local government could proactively address reentry by providing employment opportunities for ex-offenders, training staff to work with former prisoners, and changing laws and regulations that create obstacles for successful reintegration. Many stakeholders stressed the importance of learning from other communities that are reinvesting state corrections funding into community-level reentry management expressly with the goal to reduce corrections spending in the long-run.

Local government may also be helpful in addressing the “collateral sanctions” that individuals face when returning from prison and jails. The term collateral sanction refers to a legal penalty, disability, or disadvantage imposed on a person automatically upon that person’s conviction for an offense, even if it is not included in the sentence. According to stakeholders, collateral sanctions are problematic because they limit one’s ability to find employment and housing, key elements of a successful transition back to the community. As mentioned earlier, persons with a criminal history are often prohibited from living in subsidized housing or specific neighborhoods, and are prohibited from being employed in certain occupations due to state regulations.

CONCLUSION

The interviews with reentry stakeholders in the Cleveland area identified a number of possible solutions and changes that would reduce the barriers and obstacles to successful reentry and would increase the chances for success of men and women returning home to the community. Drawing upon these interviews as well as other research, three strategies may offer the best opportunities for a more effective community response to prisoner reentry issues: a focus on changing community perceptions, coordinating service delivery, and expanding employment services.

First, *encourage community understanding and support for returning prisoners through continued community exposure to the topic of prisoner reentry*. Local (NIMBY) opposition can be offset by transmitting information to the public and

CITY OF CLEVELAND’S REENTRY STRATEGY

In 2004, the George Gund Foundation, the Cleveland Foundation, and the City of Cleveland, under the leadership of the Partnership for a Safer Cleveland, developed, coordinated, and began implementing the Cleveland Reentry Strategy. The Reentry Strategy is a ten-year plan, utilizing community efforts to help formerly incarcerated persons successfully reintegrate into the community. A Reentry Advisory Committee identified key components that make up the Reentry Strategy.

The major components of the Reentry Strategy include:

- Create an organizational structure that supports reentry research, community education, advocacy, and best practices in the delivery of services (an Office of Reentry);
- Establish treatment programming that focuses on personal growth, chemical dependency, and mental health;
- Prepare formerly incarcerated persons for sustainable living wage employment;
- Establish a joint task force to create a range of housing options;
- Educate the community on issues related to reentry and incarceration and increase the number of Citizen Circles in the Cleveland area;
- Create a Reentry Resource Guidebook and enhance the current automated call system of services available to ex-offenders;
- Ensure that every person returning to Cuyahoga County has state identification;
- Operate pilot demonstration projects focusing on best practices and aimed at target populations of transitional control and straight release and evaluate these projects;
- Conduct activities that publicize the Reentry Strategy and encourage community participation in the implementation phase; and
- Obtain private and public funding to fully implement the Reentry Strategy.

by showing the community that returning prisoners are making strong contributions to society. For instance, community-based and government agencies could

demonstrate that services are available and constructive in supporting returning prisoners, and that these services can provide a benefit for the overall community (e.g., locating a health clinic in an area without medical services). In particular, engaging the community from the beginning when a new program is being implemented helps build trust and understanding. Community leaders need to assist in building community understanding and interest in the reentry process. Other communication strategies include providing information that shows that locking up offenders does not always make communities safer; dispelling myths that such services as transitional and permanent housing make communities more dangerous and disorderly; and gathering evidence of successful programs that could be transferred to the community.

Second, *build a coordinated service network in the community that shares a philosophy about reintegration and rehabilitation of returning prisoners and has sufficient capacity to serve this population.* Research shows that former prisoners typically must negotiate several different social service systems to address their myriad needs upon release (e.g., housing, health care, employment, and child welfare). Fragmented service systems create considerable frustration among former prisoners as they are shuttled from agency to agency. Some communities are using intermediary organizations to act as a go-between among partner agencies. Using a trusted entity to coordinate a community service network may succeed when other efforts at coordination have failed because trust is higher and conflicts are managed by the intermediary. Research also supports this notion. Intermediary organizations can provide training and technical assistance, manage all administrative activities, and often can focus explicitly on managing the partnership.

Third, *focus on promising practices for employment services for returning prisoners.* A large obstacle to successful reentry in most communities is the lack of employment opportunities at an adequate wage. Stakeholders commented that there is a serious disconnect between the skills of returning prisoners and the jobs that are available. Addressing this problem will require coordinated action between ODRC, communities, and employers. Promising strategies include transitional jobs programs where individuals are immediately placed in temporary jobs for the initial three to six months after release to provide an immediate wage and build good work habits and a sense of responsibility. Job training and placement programs are increasing their focus on job retention skills and incentives. Other communities are combining the use of mentors, often from the faith-based community, with employment services.

Results from the recent Urban Institute report describing the circumstances and experiences of men who had been out of prison for at least a year are sobering. One year after release, the men in the study had little stability in their lives and desperately needed community services to help them succeed. The majority were living in temporary housing, were not working full-time, and had

health problems that required medical attention. A coordinated community reentry strategy that involves not only former prisoners but also those within the context to which they are returning has the most promise for ameliorating the seemingly intractable problems so many face when they return home.

STUDY METHODOLOGY

In 2006, UI conducted telephone interviews with reentry stakeholders in Ohio, primarily from the Cleveland area, in an effort to obtain a wider perspective of prisoner reintegration and reentry issues in Ohio. Stakeholders were selected from various organizations and included services providers, criminal justice practitioners, government officials, and civic leaders. Interviewees were asked questions related to issues that former prisoners encounter when returning to the community such as primary barriers and challenges that former prisoners encounter, solutions to overcome those challenges, and the role of government in reentry.

URBAN INSTITUTE REPORTS OF INTEREST

Prior reports on the Returning Home project in Ohio are available on the Urban Institute web site: <http://www.urban.org>. Readers may also be interested in an overview of the reentry portfolio at the Urban Institute, *Understanding the Challenges of Prisoner Reentry: Research Findings from the Urban Institute Reentry Portfolio*, also available on the Urban Institute web site.

¹ The ODRC is addressing the many challenges associated with reentry. The *Ohio Plan for Productive Offender Reentry and Recidivism Reduction* can be accessed at <http://www.drc.state.oh.us>.

² Fewer than half of individuals released from prison in Ohio are placed on supervision because the nature of their sentence does not require a period of supervision.

³ The ODRC has also established a partnership with the Corporation of Supportive Housing, a national organization dedicated to developing and providing permanent supportive housing to low income populations, to develop and implement a pilot project targeting 100 prisoners. The initiative will serve soon-to-be-released prisoners returning to a range of counties throughout Ohio who do not have an approved home plan.

⁴ Citizen Circles, established in 2001, are community partnerships with ODRC and Adult Parole Authority (APA). Citizen Circles are forums in which a former prisoner and members from the community meet to help the newly released individual transition from prisoner to citizen by promoting social interaction and accountability. To participate in a Citizen Circle a person must complete an application, accept responsibility of past criminal behavior, accept recommendations of Circle members, participate in community service, and set goals focused on law abiding and productive community behavior.

⁵ Another component of the Cleveland Reentry Strategy is to help link offenders with services in the community. The Services Directory Workgroup and the United Way of Greater Cleveland released a comprehensive resource tool in September 2006 to help former prisoners successfully transition back to the community. The resource guide outlines steps to take while in prison as well as once released. Examples of resource listings include housing, employment, transportation, food, case management, money management, child care and parenting, health and dental care, identification and paperwork, and voting.