

## Prison Partnerships Goals: Prepare Offenders for Re-entry, Save Money

By J. David Donahue

**T**he Indiana Department of Correction's (IDOC) "Road to Re-entry" program for adult male offenders is under way with the recent opening of the Plainfield Re-entry Educational Facility (PREF). The first of its kind in the country, the program focuses on education and vocational skill building during the final 18 months of incarceration.

IDOC serves a growing adult population of more than 24,000 offenders and a juvenile population of approximately 1,000. Releasing more than 16,000 adult and 1,200 juvenile offenders each year, the IDOC recognizes the need for a program that trains and educates these individuals. Current recidivism (defined as a return to the IDOC system within three years of release) rates in Indiana are 39.3% for adults and 32.8% for juveniles. Indiana taxpayers will save millions of dollars if the IDOC can reduce those rates by just 5%. Current funding for PREF is \$15.7 million annually.

"PREF is the first program of its kind to give offenders the best tools to be successful, law-abiding citizens in their communities," Gov. Mitch Daniels notes. "It's long overdue that we recognize those sent to prison eventually return to their communities, and it's in the best interests of public safety and communities that we prepare for their return."

IDOC is taking strides to reduce the barriers to re-entry by building bridges with state agencies, private companies and educational partners. Each of these partners is integral to the success of PREF. Thus far, they include the Bureau of Motor Vehicles (BMV), Department of Workforce Development (DWD), ARAMARK Correctional Services and Ivy Tech Community College.

### Keys to success

Finding employment after release is key to reducing recidivism. "The Department of Workforce Development is excited to participate in this innovative effort. We will do all we can to ensure that program participants are equipped with the necessary job skills to gain sustained employment," says DWD Commissioner Ronald L. Stiver.

"It is a fact that the sooner a released offender finds meaningful employment, the less likely that individual will return to a life of crime," adds Tim Campbell, president of ARAMARK Correctional Services. "Our Inmate to Workmate program (including culinary and food service instruction) provides participants with hands-on training and certification. By providing offenders with education and life skills, everyone wins."

Another ingredient for successful re-entry is valid identification documents. This is one more step that can help smooth the transition of released offenders into working communities.

"Obtaining a valid identification card (state ID or driver's license, where applicable) is a critical first step to reducing recidivism and helping individuals fit back into society. A successful transition into the community is a win-win for all Hoosiers,"

comments BMV Commissioner Joel Silverman. "The Indiana Bureau of Motor Vehicles is pleased to partner with the Department of Correction as we go forward with this innovative program."

Another key is the assessment of an offender's financial debt. Many offenders have debts that prohibit or inhibit them from receiving benefits upon release. IDOC is developing a plan to determine an offender's debt status upon incarceration. Then, as part of the offender's Re-entry Accountability Plan, the offender can work toward paying the debts he owes while he is incarcerated.



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### Communities and beyond

Lincoln Bank President Jerry Engle agrees that this program (allowing PREF residents to own and manage a facility bank account and receive guidance in financial responsibility) will be a benefit to many. "Being a community bank, we live and work in the neighborhoods where these men will be released. Lincoln Bank wants to play its part in the successful re-entry of offenders (who have served their sentences) back into the community, and we feel simply that this is the right thing to do."

Ivy Tech believes a successful re-entry program can be an economic driver. Communities throughout Indiana will benefit by providing offenders with the tools necessary to succeed.

"Through Ivy Tech's partnership with the Plainfield Re-Entry Educational Facility, exiting offenders will be equipped with the skills needed to obtain good paying jobs and successfully contribute to Indiana's growing economy," contends Rob Jeffs, Ph.D., vice president for workforce and economic development with Ivy Tech Community College. Areas of study available to offenders in the program include building trades, entrepreneurship, logistics management and hospitality.

Developing an integrated re-entry process is ultimately vital to every state. The ability to bring state agencies together on this program will remind everyone that re-entry is a statewide interdisciplinary issue affecting every community.

Public safety is best achieved through the partnership of state agencies and the public, as well as the education of both society and those seeking a second chance. It's all about promoting public safety while creating a second chance for changed offenders.

### INFORMATION LINK

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