

RENEWING COMMUNITIES: California Pathways from Corrections to College

Individuals in California's criminal justice system face substantial barriers to successful reentry, and their likelihood of returning to custody is unfortunately great. This cycle of recidivism damages not only the individuals who are returning to custody, but also their families and communities.

Opportunities for higher education can facilitate successful reentry, lay the foundation for economic stability and mobility, and promote community renewal. Indeed, prisoners who participate in correctional education programs have 43 percent lower odds of recidivating than those who do not have access to and participate in such programs.¹ Yet both in and out of custody in California, college participation and graduation prove elusive because of the absence of robust programs, insurmountable financial aid barriers, and lack of basic academic skills.

The current post-secondary infrastructure for incarcerated Californians is weak. By the end of 2013, California prisons housed more than 130,000 people, and nearly 80,000 were incarcerated in local jails. Yet according to the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR), in the five-year period between 2009-2013 only 219 state prisoners earned AA degrees, while only 16 earned bachelor's degrees and four obtained master's degrees. Thirty institutions offered credits inside CDCR, mostly private colleges, and the vast majority of the credits offered were correspondence courses with little quality review. California jails offer virtually no post-secondary educational opportunities.

Outside the prison walls, more than 400,000 Californians were supervised on probation or parole in 2013. Support for these formerly incarcerated potential students in the community is minimal, and thus their ability to succeed is deeply compromised. Statewide, fewer than ten programs operate at a small number of geographically dispersed institutions, mostly community colleges. They provide tutoring, mentoring and financial aid advice to help formerly incarcerated students succeed and complete their degrees; some also provide assistance transferring from two-year to four-year institutions. Most serve only a few students at a time; the largest struggle to address the needs of fewer than 100 students a year. For the most part their funding is tenuous and they operate in isolation from one another.

The Renewing Communities Initiative

***Renewing Communities* seeks to address the gaps in service and the absence of programs and innovative models for the over 600,000 people who are currently in custody or under community supervision in this State.** The timing is right: California's criminal justice system has changed dramatically in the past two years under Public Safety Realignment, resulting in greater numbers of people under local county control who can

¹ *Evaluating the Effectiveness of Correctional Education: A Meta-Analysis of Programs That Provide Education to Incarcerated Adults*, by Lois M. Davis, Robert Bozick, Jennifer L. Steele, Jessica Saunders, and Jeremy N. V. Miles (2013).

connect with community educational institutions, and greater capacity within the state system to address the educational needs of its population. California historically boasts a prestigious public university system, including over 100 community colleges that benefit from the outspoken support of the Governor. California further benefits from progressive statewide leadership at the executive and legislative level. These facts, combined with national momentum, will allow us to build a bridge between the fields of education and criminal justice for the benefit of criminal justice-involved individuals and their greater communities statewide.

The goals of the *Renewing Communities* initiative are to:

- Educate the public, members of the California State Legislature, and the Governor about the need for and benefit of higher education opportunities for these prospective students;
- Develop and foster high quality programs that will expand higher education opportunities for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals;
- Create partnerships between custodial institutions, local education institutions, criminal justice agencies, and community-based organizations;
- Support educators and educational institutions in their use of best practices to achieve academic success for students both inside and outside custody; and
- Create a sustainable model for long-term positive systemic change that does not rely solely on private funding.

In 2014, the Warren Institute and Stanford Criminal Justice Center will:

- Support the California Attorney General's Back on Track wraparound reentry pilot in Los Angeles, a project that is jointly funded by the Ford Foundation, California Wellness Foundation, Rosenberg Foundation, and California Community Foundation;
- Research existing higher education programs and initiatives to identify what is already working for criminal-justice involved individuals in California;
- Illuminate gaps in service provision, evaluation, quality control, and implementation;
- Convene experts and stakeholders to establish the most effective and innovative methods to achieve the initiative's goals;
- Identify hurdles and opportunities in both the education and criminal justice sectors;
- Suggest policy changes and funding opportunities that will foster the success and support the sustainability of this initiative;
- Develop a Request for Proposal (RFP) that will utilize what has been learned about California's successes, while filling the identified gaps;
- Help build political and public will to support the initiative's goals; and
- Help the Ford Foundation build a braided network of public and private commitments to support these goals.