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# DEVELOPING JOBS FOR PAROLEES

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## "I need a job"

This plea is understandable to anyone who has had to work for a living and support a family. But for an individual in prison who hopes to be released this plea can mean even more — a job for him is often necessary in order to be eligible for release through parole and a meaningful job in many instances can be the critical difference between a successful adjustment in a free life and a return to prison.

Helping parolees find employment should therefore be a concern of all persons associated with the parole system. With this in mind, this pamphlet was prepared to identify some of the various job development programs for releasees which have been instituted by public and volunteer groups so that others might refer to them as examples of ways to set up similar programs in their states or localities.

The preparation of this pamphlet was a joint effort of the National Volunteer Parole Aide Program and the National Clearinghouse on Offender Employment Restrictions. Volunteer Parole Aide, funded by the U.S. Department of Justice, Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, is a project to stimulate volunteerism throughout the country. The National Clearinghouse, funded by the U.S. Department of Labor's Manpower Administration, is a project to assist in the removal of barriers to job opportunities for ex-offenders. Both projects are sponsored by the American Bar Association's Commission on Correctional Facilities and Services, with the National Clearinghouse co-sponsored by the ABA's Section of Criminal Justice and the Parole Aide Program co-sponsored by the Federal Bar Association and the ABA's Young Lawyers Section.

Since projects funded by the LEAA and Department of Labor are encouraged to express their own judgments freely, the views or opinions in this publication do not represent the official position or policy of the LEAA or Department of Labor.

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## THE NEED FOR EMPLOYMENT

Parole is the most common type of release from prison in the United State today.<sup>1</sup> It allows an individual who meets certain requirements to serve out a part of his sentence on the outside.

There are, however no universally agreed upon criteria for parole eligibility, and there is no unanimity regarding what criteria should be used or what characteristics are indicative of parole success.<sup>2</sup>

Despite the lack of such criteria, most parole boards do agree on one requirement for parole — employment. This condition is based on experience and studies which indicate that parolees who find full time employment have much higher rates of successful parole than those who are unemployed or are employed only part-time.<sup>3</sup>

While a job as a condition of parole is therefore understandable, it does place a severe handicap on inmates. According to the National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals "the difficulty of finding employment often is an additional source of anxiety because the most common reason why offenders are held beyond the date fixed for their release is that they have no job to go to"<sup>4</sup>

In many instances, neither the department of corrections nor the paroling agency provides help to the inmate in his need for employment assistance. As a result, incarcerated men and women are severely limited in their job opportunities. Most find themselves relying on the Yellow Pages, newspaper classified ads, and family contacts in particular in their search for employment.<sup>5</sup>

In addition to an offender's difficulty in searching for a job while still in prison he is often faced with other disadvantages that compound his problem. An employer, for example, may not even respond to a request for employment when he sees that the applicant's return address is a prison. And even if the offender is considered, he may be rejected, as so many are, because of deficient education, a history of poor work experience, or a lack of a job skill or training.<sup>7</sup> From the employer's standpoint, why hire an inmate whom he has never seen, who may never make parole, when other applicants are available for the same job?

An offender, moreover, may also find even more insidious barriers to employment in the form of restrictive laws, regulations and practices. One study of such restrictive laws found that persons with arrest or conviction records are barred from employment with many state and local governments, an area of fast expanding job opportunities.<sup>8</sup> A report on state occupational licensing laws revealed that there are over 1,900 statutory provisions affecting the licensing of former offenders in over 350 different occupations, ranging from fortune teller and junk dealer to doctor and lawyer.<sup>9</sup>

In some cases where an inmate does find a job, it may be rejected by the parole board. According to Mel Rivers, former president of the Fortune Society, an organization in New York City to help the ex-offender, "the days get long and tense when you know you could be out but you gotta get a job. I had three job offers — a dishwasher, a porter and a job with the Muslim Mosque. They (the parole board) turned them all down. I know guys who 'maxed out' (completed their maximum sentence) waiting for a response."

Although some state employment agencies have established special units to help ex-offenders find jobs, they work primarily with those individuals who are already released. It is often difficult for those still incarcerated to utilize these services, since personal interviews are generally required by state employment offices or by potential employers. Those in prison obviously do not have the opportunity, much less the flexibility, to appear at scheduled employment interviews. As James W. Wheeler, who was active as an inmate in helping fellow prisoners in Leavenworth find jobs, states: "When a man becomes eligible for parole, it is often required that he have a job before he can be released. In this case it would be totally impossible for him to visit an employment office."

The employment problems of women parolees are equally serious. As with men, many women offenders come from low socio-economic strata, have deficient education, and for the most part have little or no employment skills.

On release from the institution, many women parolees who are or have been married, find themselves husbandless and with children to support. Not only do they have to contend with the newly de-

veloped emotional ties their children have made with grandparents or foster parents, they must also find employment adequate to support a family. Although many women parolees do find jobs which do not require a high school education or skilled training, their earnings from these low paying jobs are hardly enough to support several people.

## EMPLOYMENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

Many states are beginning to recognize these employment problems of offenders and are taking steps to alleviate them.

Some states, for example, have adopted a system of "reasonable assurance" of employment, under which a definite job is not required before an inmate is paroled, provided there are means to sustain him until one can be found. This gives the offender a chance to look around and be interviewed for a job.

A similar approach to the problem is the "partial release" program. Although still technically under confinement, the offender is allowed to make contacts in the community, be interviewed by employers, or actually begin employment in the community through a work release program.

Another growing activity is to prepare an inmate for release through job training programs in the institution that are related to specific job opportunities on the outside.

A bonding program instituted by the U.S. Department of Labor and administered by state employment agencies provides a bond to a former offender who needs one in order to be employed.

Each year more state legislatures are addressing themselves to the problem of statutory barriers to job opportunities for ex-offenders. At least twelve states have taken action since 1971 to alleviate these restrictions that automatically bar former offenders from government employment or an occupational license.\*

*\*Information on ways of easing offender employment barriers is contained in the pamphlet "What You Can do to Expand Job Opportunities for Ex-Offenders". It is available without charge from the National Clearinghouse on Offender Employment Restrictions, Suite 600, 1705 DeSales Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.*

Some groups have taken even more specific steps to help prepare the offender for his re-entry into society. The following are examples of such programs:

**California State Employment Service, Los Angeles-Watts Special Unit.** The California State Employment Service in Los Angeles has a special unit in Watts to assist parolees in finding jobs. This unit works with a parolee and parole agents to develop a specific "employability" plan prior to release. Any offender in a California correctional institution who is planning to return to Watts to live can ask the unit for help.

Interviews and vocational tests are administered to each eligible inmate in the prison. An employment plan is designed, based on the offender's past work history, training record in the institution and arrest record. If the parolee approves, interviews are scheduled with potential employers. If the individual is hired, there is a 30 to 60 day follow-up on his adjustment to the job. If the individual lacks the necessary skills for a job, the unit tries to place him in an on-the-job training program.

California correctional authorities and the Parole Board have cooperated with this unit and parolees can be released under this parole plan without a definite job at the time of release.

**HIRE — Minnesota.** Inmates in Minnesota can become eligible for job assistance from "Helping Industry Recruit Ex-Offenders" (HIRE) by being referred to HIRE by institutional caseworkers. A HIRE counselor, who is also an ex-offender, then works closely with the prison caseworker to determine the individual's needs. They may include: employment, vocational training, housing, or assistance with family or financial problems.

In addition to individual assistance, inmates participating in the program meet in small groups (no more than eight) with HIRE counselors prior to their release. Particular attention is given to employment problems in these meetings. The groups practice job interviews, filling out job application forms, and dealing with incarceration as an employment handicap.

The Minneapolis HIRE office arranges for job interviews upon release and, if necessary, provides transportation. HIRE also extends supportive services to clients and their families through post-release programs, with assistance from volunteers

providing for personal, financial, educational and legal needs.

**Mutual Agreement Programming (MAP).** This program, funded by the U.S. Department of Labor and sponsored by the American Correctional Association, involves an assessment of the strengths, weaknesses, and needs of the inmate followed by the design of an individualized program that will offer him the necessary resources to prepare for parole and for a successful adjustment to the community following his release. Since a crucial element in this program is the setting of a fixed parole date, contingent upon the inmate voluntarily completing the agreed-upon requirements for parole, close cooperation between the correctional institution and the paroling authority is essential.

Among the resources offered the individual are basic education and vocational training. The program also works with the state employment service in helping the individual obtain a job at the time of his parole or to continue in a vocational program.

For more information about MAP, write to:

American Correctional Association  
4321 Hartwick Road  
College Park, Maryland 20740

**National Volunteer Parole Aide Program.** The American Bar Association's Volunteer Parole Aide Program is an example of how volunteers can help the parolee in his adjustment to society. This program, funded by the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, helps state bar associations enlist their members to work with local paroling authorities in establishing a one-to-one, friendship relationship between volunteer attorneys and parolees. The volunteer assists the parole agency by spending more time with a parolee re-entering society than the parole caseworker can normally provide. Since a parolee often feels confused, insecure and lacking self confidence on his release, a friendly, steady influence can be extremely valuable.

These parole volunteers are encouraged to meet with the parolee prior to his release so they can get to know each other personally and the volunteer can become aware of the readjustment needs of the parolee. Although the primary aim of the volunteer is to be a friend, he may be in a position, because of his contacts in the community, to offer assistance in

finding employment or housing, and in helping with personal, family and social readjustment problems. The relationship, in other words, is flexible and determined by the needs of each parolee and the resources of each volunteer.

The experience of the Volunteer Parole Aide Program has demonstrated one overriding constant for successful completion of parole — personally satisfying employment. Parolees have repeatedly voiced the employment problem as the most difficult and crucial aspect of their readjustment. It is the principal gauge by which they measure themselves as successful or not.

For more information about the program, write to the National Volunteer Parole Aide Program, 1705 DeSales Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

## CONCLUSION

A meaningful job is important to the parolee not only to aid his parole eligibility, but also to assure his reintegration into society. But, in his search for employment, the parolee faces many obstacles, such as a lack of a job skill, inadequate opportunity to seek employment, and arbitrary job barriers.

Although only a few state agencies, to date, have attempted to deal with these problems, changes are underway. In recent years, some states have done away with the definite job requirement for parole and now require only a "reasonable assurance" of employment. Work release programs have been authorized in forty-eight states. And state legislatures are beginning to alleviate statutory restrictions on job opportunities for ex-offenders.

The National Alliance of Businessmen has established a special program to encourage businessmen to hire the former offender, and the AFL-CIO has co-sponsored several skill training programs for re-leased prisoners.

The Watts Special Unit, HIRE, MAP and VPA are a few of the existing programs which are actively seeking to ease the difficulties in finding employment and overall adjustment to life outside the institution. They also demonstrate the important fact that the employment problems of former offenders can be overcome when people are willing to commit themselves to this effort.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> More than sixty percent of adult felons for the nation as a whole are released on parole prior to the maximum term of their sentences. *Task Force Reports: Corrections*, p.60 (The President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice, Washington, D.C. 1967)
- <sup>2</sup> William Parker, *Parole: Origin, Development, Current Practices and Statutes*, p.7 (American Correctional Association, College Park, Md., 1972)
- <sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, *The Invisible Prison, An Analysis of Barriers to Inmate Training and Post Release Employment in New York and Maine*, p.157 (RCA Institutes, N.Y., N.Y. 1972)
- <sup>4</sup> "Parole failure is closely related with the lack of employment and economic status. Parolees with full-time jobs succeed four to one as compared with parolees with only occasional employment or no employment," *Guidelines and Standards for the Use of Volunteers in Correctional Programs*, p.205 (National Information Center on Volunteers in Court, Boulder, Colorado 1972)
- <sup>5</sup> *Corrections*, p. 411, (National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals, Washington, D.C. 1973)
- <sup>6</sup> George A. Pownall, *Employment Problems of Released Prisoners*, p. 136 (Report to Manpower Administration, U.S. Department of Labor, Washington, D.C. 1969)
- <sup>7</sup> "Placing Parolees", *Manpower*, September 1971
- <sup>8</sup> Herbert S. Miller, *The Closed Door: The Effect of a Criminal Record on Employment with State and Local Public Agencies*, (Institute of Criminal Law and Procedure, Georgetown University Law Center, Washington, D.C. 1972)
- <sup>9</sup> *Laws, Licenses and the Offender's Right to Work*, (National Clearinghouse on Offender Employment Restrictions, Washington, D.C. 1973)



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## Commission on Correctional Facilities and Services

1705 DeSales Street, N.W. ■ Washington, D.C. 20036 ■ 202/223-1528

TO: Correctional and Criminal Justice Journals  
and Information Services

RE: Developing Jobs for Parolees

~~The attached is for your information and possible mention in your~~  
publication.

The referenced publication was prepared by the National Clearinghouse on Offender Employment Restrictions and the National Volunteer Parole Aide Program. Both are projects of the American Bar Association's Commission on Correctional Facilities and Services.

The pamphlet points out the pivotal role which employment plays in favorable parole decisions and parole success, and delineates both practical and statutory restrictions which prisoners face in securing employment. The pamphlet also describes several programs, including the ABA Volunteer Parole Aide Program, which seek to alleviate such difficulties. These are examples, rather than a definitive list.

A general statement of purpose is contained on page 1 as follows:

Helping parolees find employment should therefore be a concern of all persons associated with the parole system. With this in mind, this pamphlet was prepared to identify some of the various job development programs for releasees which have been instituted by public and volunteer groups so that others might refer to them as examples of ways to set up similar programs in their states or localities.

Single copies may be obtained without cost from the National Clearinghouse on Offender Employment Restrictions, or the National Volunteer Parole Aide Program, both at 1705 DeSales Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

DANIEL L. SKOLER  
Commission Staff Director



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A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Daniel L. Skoler', written over a horizontal line.

DANIEL L. SKOLER  
Commission Staff Director

**END**