

Clearinghouse REVIEW

Shriver
Center 4@

July–August 2007

Volume 41, Numbers 3–4

Journal of
Poverty Law
and Policy

What's a Civil Lawyer to Do?

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CRIMINAL RECORDS



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Attacking Poverty by Attacking Chronic Unemployment: An Update on Developments in Transitional Job Strategies for Former Prisoners

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A year ago we wrote to explain the transitional jobs strategy, a very promising strategy to deal with chronic unemployment, and we suggested ideas for federal support.¹ To follow up here we identify the rapidly growing activity over the past year in the use of the transitional jobs strategy for people returning to communities after a time in prison—people in need of an effective intervention in order to avoid chronic unemployment and potential recidivism.

The transitional jobs strategy pragmatically cuts through the complex reasons for a person's unemployment and starts with the desired outcome: employment. The person is placed in a subsidized, temporary wage-paying job. While the person is working and earning an income, case-managed social services are brought to bear on the individualized nature of the factors that blocked the person's success in employment in the past. This pragmatic in-context assessment of the employment-blocking factors allows for immediately helping the person cope with those factors through appropriate counseling, referrals, and services. Job development services facilitate placement in unsubsidized work, and job retention services help consolidate a successful transition to long-term employment.²

¹John Bouman & Joseph Antolín, *Attacking Poverty by Attacking Chronic Unemployment*, 40 CLEARINGHOUSE REVIEW 105 (May–June 2006).

²Comprehensive information about the transitional jobs strategy, its history and performance, its current iterations, and the leading practitioners has been assembled by the National Transitional Jobs Network. See National Transitional Jobs Network, www.transitionaljobs.net (last visited May 28, 2007).

The strategy requires these core ingredients but otherwise it offers a high degree of adaptability to different populations and local conditions. It has been successful in using scattered transitional job placements in not-for-profit organizations, work crews, and social enterprises. Regardless of its particular iterations, it has consistently ended its participants' chronic unemployment.³

Practitioners, figuring out an approach for their most challenging cases, developed the transitional jobs strategy on the ground. Since there has never been a program or budget line for the transitional jobs strategy, the practitioners and a growing number of local and state government officials have cobbled funding together from many different sources. There has been enough funding to operate pilot programs and a handful of statewide programs but not enough to make the transitional jobs strategy as available as it needs to be.⁴

We noted last year that the transitional jobs strategy is particularly suited to the problems of reentry into the community after a time in prison. Here we discuss the developments in the last year on the use of the strategy in the prisoner reentry context.

I. The Federal Level

At the federal level we have seen good progress with proposed transitional jobs legislation. In June 2006 Senators Evan Bayh (D-Ind.) and Barack Obama (D-Ill.) introduced the Responsible Fatherhood and Healthy Families Act that would create a comprehensive set of policies, programs, and funding to promote fatherhood in particular and families in general.⁵ In one of the bill's titles is the most comprehensive transitional jobs enabling legislation ever found in federal legislation.⁶ The language of the transitional jobs provision closely tracks the suggestions in our article last year, and it would constitute a major breakthrough. The funds would be usable in the reentry context. Ultimately the bill did not move in the 109th Congress. The cosponsors refiled the bill in the 110th Congress on June 14, 2007.⁷

The Second Chance Act is comprehensive legislation aimed at ensuring the successful reentry into communities of people after spending time in prison. The legislation includes funds for employment strategies and permits these funds to be used for transitional job strategies. The legislation has broad bipartisan support and came very close to passage in 2006.⁸

³See National Transitional Jobs Network, Research and Evaluations, www.transitionaljobs.net/ResearchEvals/ResearchEvals.htm (last visited May 28, 2007).

⁴See National Transitional Jobs Network, Resources, www.transitionaljobs.net/Resources/Resources.html (last visited May 28, 2007) (funding strategies); see also National Transitional Jobs Network, Programs, www.transitionaljobs.net/Programs/Programs.htm (last visited May 28, 2007) (current programs). Statewide programs are in Washington State and Georgia, and a very large metropolitan program is in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, all relying heavily, but not exclusively, on Temporary Assistance for Needy Families funding.

⁵Responsible Fatherhood and Healthy Families Act of 2006, S. 3607, 109th Cong. (2006), available at www.govtrack.us/congress/billtext.xpd?bill=s109-3607.

⁶*Id.* § 106(B)(2) (creating funding and legislative parameters for substantial transitional job pilots).

⁷Responsible Fatherhood and Healthy Families Act of 2007, S. 1626, 110th Cong. (2007), available at www.govtrack.us/congress/bill.xpd?bill=s110-1626.

⁸See Second Chance Act of 2005, H.R. 1704, 109th Cong. (2005), available at www.govtrack.us/congress/billtext.xpd?bill=h109-1704. Representatives Danny K. Davis (D-Ill.), Christopher Cannon (R-Utah), and Stephanie Tubbs Jones (R-Ohio) are among 112 cosponsors of the bill, which passed the full House Judiciary Committee by voice vote in July 2006 and was sent to the floor. House leaders committed to move the bill if the Senate passed it. A companion bill was introduced in the Senate. See S. 1934, 109th Cong. (2005). Senators Arlen Specter (R-Pa.), Sam Brownback (R-Kan.), and Joseph R. Biden Jr. (D-Del.) are among thirty-four cosponsors of the bill. There was a strong push to call the bill and pass it both before the election and during the lame-duck session. However, Sen. Tom Coburn (R-Okla.) personally stopped the measure by putting a hold on the bill; under Senate rules a hold prevents a floor vote. His objection to the bill involved his attitude that the federal government has no proper role, especially financially, in state prisoner reentry issues.

As the 110th Congress convened in 2007, House sponsors refiled the Second Chance Act with Representatives Danny K. Davis (D-Ill.) and Christopher Cannon (R-Utah) as chief cosponsors and a long list of other bipartisan cosponsors.⁹ On March 28, 2007, one week after reintroduction, the bill passed the House Judiciary Committee and was sent to the floor, where a vote is expected in summer 2007. A Senate bill will also be filed.¹⁰

II. State and Local Developments

Transitional job programs have been gaining ground in a number of states, including Illinois, North Dakota, Massachusetts, Washington State, Minnesota, and California. These programs have been successful in moving reentering workers into employment.

A. The Joyce Foundation Transitional Jobs for Ex-Prisoners Demonstration Project

In 2006 the Joyce Foundation of Chicago, Illinois, awarded grants totaling nearly \$5.4 million to six sites to test transitional job programs working with men with criminal histories.¹¹ To evaluate the programs, Joyce also funded the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation in collaboration with the Urban Institute and the University of Michigan.¹² The evaluation initiative totals over \$14.5 million, with additional support from the JEHT Foundation and the U.S. Department of Labor. This project is the first large-scale controlled study of whether the transitional jobs strategy does improve employment outcomes and reduce recidivism for the growing number of people who have criminal histories and return from prison each year.

The study has five sites. Each site selected for the evaluation began random assignment in 2007; the evaluations will continue through 2008. Preliminary results of the evaluation are expected in 2009. The five sites are listed below.

1. Goodwill Industries of Greater Detroit, partnering with Jewish Vocational Services, the Wayne County Michigan Prisoner Reentry Initiative, and the Michigan Department of Corrections, will identify prisoners, as part of the state's prerelease planning program, and randomly assign some to transitional jobs in Goodwill's light manufacturing plants, while others will receive job placement assistance from Jewish Vocational Services. The Michigan Department of Corrections is contributing \$1.36 million to the program.
2. Goodwill/Easter Seals Minnesota, St. Paul, partnering with Amherst Wilder Foundation, the Minnesota Department of Corrections, and the Ramsey County Community Corrections Department, will have Amherst Wilder Foundation assign people leaving prison either to Amherst Wilder's own standard employment services or to a transitional jobs program at Goodwill/Easter Seals' administrative, retail, and warehouse operations. The state and county corrections departments will each contribute \$252,000.
3. A subsidiary of Heartland Alliance for Human Needs and Human Rights, Heartland Human Care Services Inc., Chicago, partnering with Behavioral Interventions and the Illinois Department of Corrections, will assign prisoners arriving at its new report-

⁹Second Chance Act of 2007, H.R. 1593, 110th Cong. (2007), available at www.govtrack.us/congress/billtext.xpd?bill=h110-1593.

¹⁰A comprehensive summary of the history of the legislation can be found at the website of the Re-Entry Policy Council, a federal interagency and private agency entity dedicated to reentry problems. See Re-Entry Policy Council, Re-Entry Legislation: Second Chance Act, www.reentrypolicy.org/reentry/Second_Chance_Act_of_2005.aspx (last visited May 28, 2007). The National H.I.R.E. Network also has materials on the Second Chance Act. See National H.I.R.E. Network, Issues & Policy, www.hirenetwork.org/nationalpolicy.html (last visited May 28, 2007).

¹¹See Press Release, The Joyce Foundation, \$5.4 Million Awarded to Test Employment Strategy for Ex-Prisoners (July 26, 2006), available at www.joycefdn.org/Programs/Employment/NewsDetails.aspx?NewsId=41 (listing grantee sites and cofunders).

¹²See Press Release, Joyce Foundation, Hard Way to Go (May 1, 2006), available at www.joycefdn.org/Programs/Employment/NewsDetails.aspx?NewsId=42.

ing center either to transitional jobs to be developed with nonprofit and for-profit employers or to standard job placement services offered by Behavioral Interventions.

4. The New Hope Project, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, partnering with Project Return, the Kaiser Group, and the Wisconsin Department of Corrections, will identify prisoners prior to release, as well as walk-ins to its Milwaukee facility, and assign them either to transitional jobs at nonprofit and for-profit employers or to employment services offered by Project Return. The Kaiser Group will help place participants completing transitional jobs in unsubsidized employment. The Wisconsin Department of Corrections is contributing an initial \$177,000 to the project; other funding comes from Making Connections Milwaukee (an initiative of the Annie E. Casey Foundation), the United Way, the Greater Milwaukee Foundation, and other private foundations.
5. Safer Foundation, Chicago, will assign participants either to its job placement services at scattered employment sites or to a transitional job at its Pivotal Staffing Services LLC, which manages employment opportunities in recycling with Allied Waste Transportation. After the initial period, participants will be placed in long-term employment opportunities with gradually declining supports. Major funding for Safer comes from its staffing services contract with Allied Waste (which funds salaries) and a Title XX Social Service Block Grant.

B. Other Initiatives

Six other initiatives emerged in 2006:

1. With technical assistance support from the National Transitional Jobs

Network, the Fargo, North Dakota, Transitional Jobs Task Force was launched with support from community providers, employers, and city and state government officials. The task force is working toward the development of a city-based transitional jobs program for persons with criminal histories and to gain support of legislators at the state level toward the development and eventual funding of a state-level transitional jobs coordinator. The task force gained the support of the North Dakota Department of Corrections commissioner for the expansion of a state-funded transitional jobs pilot project early in 2007.¹³

2. The Massachusetts Transitional Jobs Task Force was seeded with technical assistance support from the National Transitional Jobs Network. Partners include state public safety officials, providers, employers, policy advocates, and Boston's mayoral support. The group is drafting a plan for the development of transitional job pilot projects for a number of population groups including youth, people with criminal histories, public welfare recipients, persons experiencing homelessness, and refugees.
3. Washington State pioneered the transitional jobs strategy ten years ago when it established the statewide "Community Jobs" program in its implementation of welfare reform.¹⁴ In 2006 Washington expanded Community Jobs to serve more public welfare recipients. New legislation supporting the transition of persons with criminal histories into Washington communities was passed in 2007—offering fertile ground for the expansion of transitional job programs for this population.¹⁵

¹³Information about all of these developments can be obtained from the National Transitional Jobs Network, and contact information is available at www.transitionaljobs.net.

¹⁴See generally Washington WorkFirst Partners, www.workfirst.wa.gov/community/jobs.htm (last visited May 28, 2007).

¹⁵See Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill 6157, 60th Leg., 2007 Reg. Sess. (Wash. 2007), available at <http://apps.leg.wa.gov/documents/billdocs/2007-08/Pdf/Bills/Session%20Law%202007/6157-S.SL.pdf>.

4. The Illinois Department of Corrections issued a request for proposals to service providers across the state to seed seven new transitional job programs for individuals who have criminal histories and are at risk of a technical violation of their probation or parole.
5. The Minnesota Department of Corrections issued a request for proposals to service providers in Minnesota to provide transitional job programs for former offenders.
6. The Back on Track program was developed and launched as a criminal justice intervention program, offering first-time, nonviolent drug offenders in San Francisco a comprehensive workforce development program as an alternative to a felony drug sale conviction. The transitional jobs program is key within this com-

prehensive strategy. Goodwill Industries of San Francisco, San Mateo, and Marin Counties is the lead agency, with such partners as the Office of the San Francisco District Attorney, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Bank of America, the Richard and Rhoda Goldman Foundation, the William Hearst Foundation, the JEHT Foundation, and the San Francisco Foundation.



There has been a great deal of progress on both the federal and state levels to establish effective transitional job programs for reentering former prisoners. This momentum must continue so that more former prisoners can avoid recidivism and successfully reenter their communities and rejoin their families with the advantage of employment.

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