

# Colorado Probation Research in Brief

## *Improving the Employment Rates of Ex-Prisoners Under Parole*

**Source Document:** Rakis, J. (2005). Improving the Employment Rates of Ex-Prisoners Under Parole. *Federal Probation*, 69(1), 7-12.

**Key Words:** employment, casework, offender assistance, job placement

### **Increasing Employment Success**

#### **Summary/Conclusions**

In an effort to identify practices in the area of offender employment, a nationwide survey of parole agencies was conducted over a two-month period in 2004. This article discusses the need for offender employment assistance and the results of the survey. Respondents provided a variety of information on addressing offender employment needs, as well as ideas to measure success. In addition, the author makes specific recommendations that include offering a continuum of employment services to offenders, while utilizing improved offender employment rates with increased success and reduced recidivism rates.

#### **Limitations of Information**

The survey results, reported in this article, originated from a set of responses gathered from volunteer agencies, whose identification and geographic location are unknown to the reader. The total number of possible respondents is unknown, and results are based on a small final number of 32. Additionally, the recommendations made to the reader do not appear to result from evidence-based studies but from the frequency of responses to particular questions on the survey.

**Caveat:** The information presented here is intended to summarize and inform readers of research and information relevant to probation work. It can provide a framework for carrying out the business of probation as well as suggestions for practical application of the material. While it may, in some instances, lead to further exploration and result in *future* decisions, it is not intended to prescribe policy and is not necessarily conclusive in its findings. Some of its limitations are described above.

One of the challenges to probationer success is obtaining and maintaining employment. This single issue, when addressed, can have an effect on increased success and reduced recidivism. For example, one study found that unemployed offenders, under U.S. Probation and Pretrial Supervision, were revoked at a rate that was more than 500% higher than employed offenders. This article is the result of a national survey and outlines the practices used in the field to assist offenders with employment issues.

The practices include:

**Vocational Assistance:** Offenders are provided a vocational assessment and develop an individual action plan. A referral to job centers is usually made.

**Job Readiness:** Offenders are taught "soft skills" such as work ethics and problem-solving. Forty percent of surveyed agencies provide job readiness and pre-employment instruction.

**Securing Documents:** Offenders are directed where and how to secure necessary documentation and identification. The survey respondents indicated this is the most frequently provided service.

**Job Placement:** Offenders are matched with jobs that fit their skills. The majority of agencies refer out for this service.

**Fidelity Bonding:** Offenders should be referred for federal bonding. "The program provides fidelity bonds...that protect employers from theft." The author found this service is underutilized.

**Work Opportunity Tax Credit:** Offenders are educated about the WOTC and use it as a hiring incentive. Only 12.5% of respondents advise offenders about this option.

**Post Placement Follow-Up:** Offenders are monitored to maintain the job and assisted with crises that arise. Getting a job may be hard but keeping it is harder. Use office visits to check in on work and troubleshoot crises and conflict.

**Track Employment Rates:** Agencies are tracking the employment rates of offenders. Missouri's U.S. Pretrial office decreased its unemployment rate by 52% in the four years after they initiated this practice.

#### **Practical Applications**

- √ Make a habit of referring to your local Workforce Center for vocational assistance, training, placement, etc.
- √ Assign a volunteer to specialize in employment issues. They can create job logs, maintain lists of community employers, forge ties with the local Chamber of Commerce, and develop resources.
- √ Use [www.cdphe.state.co.us](http://www.cdphe.state.co.us) to determine the best way to advise your probationer on obtaining needed documentation and/or identification.
- √ Visit [www.coworkforce.com/emp](http://www.coworkforce.com/emp) to learn about the bonding and tax credit programs. These are two tools, which probationers can use as incentives when applying for jobs. This site also has a list of employers ready to hire.
- √ Utilize case plans to address the barriers to employment, such as: substance use, medical issues, childcare needs, and transportation.
- √ Consider establishing a base rate of unemployment within the department and measure progress in reducing that rate.

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