CARE Crisis and Recovery Enhancement **Evidence-based Supports for Reentry**

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Those who are reentering the community after incarceration face multiple challenges—some of which are well known but not often discussed—that can present barriers to community reintegration. Impact Justice recognizes evidence-based practices must occur at every stage of reentry and may include pre-release mental health services, housing and employment assistance, and cultural and technological preparation. This article explores these evidence-based practices and offers concrete recommendations.

Housing. Strong reentry initiatives offer discharge planning, housing, and employment services that foster healthy environments and reduce homelessness. "Housing First" programs—those that prioritize housing stability—are especially useful with returning individuals with mental health or substance abuse concerns.[1] A focus on security deposits and medium-term rent assistance programs—as well as continued tenancy even if the individual does not participate in other services—is critical for housing retention over time.[2]

>   **Recommendation:** Provide immediate housing for high-risk individuals for at least a year (when recidivism risks are greatest). Offer options that allow the individual to return to their pre-incarceration community or a new environment.

Employment. Initial stable housing improves the likelihood of employee retention. Pre-release employment education and opportunities are often overlooked but can provide structured familiarity necessary to succeed in transitional and full-time work. Assisting those returning in finding jobs that provide livable wages, health benefits, and opportunities for promotions and raises improve overall quality of life. Ensuring job-referral networks and non-discriminatory partnerships between intermediary agencies and local employers will prevent low-wage, low-retention job placements.[3] Finally, the personal motivation of a returning individual will be higher if employment offers direct application or acquisition of new skills.

>   **Recommendation:** Bar past offenses as disqualification from employment. Provide high-risk individuals with livable wages, purposeful employment, and benefits.[4]

Family and Community Inclusion Fostering healthy familial (both biological and chosen) and community support systems will be essential to long-term health. But individuals may not always want to return to their previous environments and should be offered options beyond those familiar to them prior to incarceration.[5] This is particularly important across gender. Women, in particular, experience unaddressed mental health issues and trauma.[6] A decade of research suggests that programs that foster structure between a returning parent and their children may greatly benefit the long-term durability of the relationships and positive developmental impacts on the child.[7] Race, gender, and the type of offense committed are critical when considering how to tailor familial support. In the larger community, returning individuals are likely to flourish if they mentor a young person and live in neighborhoods with robust social networks, residential stability, and high organizational participation.[8] The community's ability to reduce stigmatization around the returning individual's past actions is also central to success, part of which may be accomplished in pre-release relationship building.[9] If the individual is returning to their pre-incarceration environment, an assessment of their relationship to that community is vital.

>   **Recommendation:** Provide individuals and families with pre-release and post-incarceration familial and parental counseling. Connect individuals with local "credible messengers" who may offer pragmatic and emotionally beneficial support.

Culture and Technology Especially with longer periods of incarceration, returning individuals may experience significant culture shock amidst changing technology and sociocultural landscapes. Pro-social behaviors and independence occur through gradual habituation and social-emotional learning, and are in stark contrast to the conditions within many prisons and jails.[10] Lack of pre-release access to emerging technologies (that are central to housing searches, employment applications, social networking, transportation, etc.) shapes the experience of many returning individuals, especially those with longer sentences. Increasingly, the technologies used in new prison initiatives themselves are creating substantive barriers to long-term accessibility and cultural integration.[11]

>   **Recommendation:** Pre- and post-release educational sessions that specifically center around technologies central to successful reentry will offer motivation and concrete skillsets to better address reentry in a rapidly transforming society.[12]

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