



Center for  
Behavioral Health Services  
Criminal Justice Research

# REENTRY READINESS OF MEN AND WOMEN LEAVING NEW JERSEY PRISONS

**RUTGERS**  
THE STATE UNIVERSITY  
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### CENTER'S MISSION

The Center for Behavioral Health Services & Criminal Justice Research seeks to improve the availability and effectiveness of services for individuals with mental illnesses who are involved with the criminal justice system.

The Center encourages researchers and stakeholders to work together to ensure that people with mental illnesses, with and without co-occurring substance use problems, receive access to evidence-based treatment services, employment and housing opportunities, and public benefits that will increase their prospects for living and thriving in the community.

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## FOREWORD

The field of corrections has entered a new, “evidence-based” era. In this new era of “evidence,” the new vanguard of correctional leadership has committed itself to three ways of doing business:

1. To develop an array of knowledge about correctional problems and correctional practices, including better knowledge about the needs of people who are under correctional authority and the effectiveness of various alternative strategies for responding to those needs.
2. To mold correctional practice in ways that reflects what has been learned about the nature of correctional problems and the effectiveness of correctional strategies.
3. To design correctional action with a commitment to learning from it—that is, to be continually asking, “What new problems do we face, and how well do our methods perform in addressing those problems?”

In this way, the evidence-based monument in corrections is not merely a technical advance in the corrections system. It is a philosophical overhaul of the correctional agenda.

The evidence-based ethic is, today, particularly fitting for the problems facing New Jersey. On the one hand, the citizens of the state have called upon its justice system to be ever-more cognizant of the need for policies and practice that promote public safety. This is a profound call for a focus on evidence: “What strategies reduce crime, and how can we maximize them?” On the other hand, those same citizens have demanded a renewed accountability for wise stewardship of the public purse: “In what ways can the public interest in improved public safety be achieved at less cost?”

This report by the Center for Mental Health Services & Criminal Justice Research can be understood as an important step in the evidence-based agenda in New Jersey correctional policy. It is the most comprehensive study ever done of the needs of people who are confined in New Jersey correctional facilities, and it can serve as a blueprint for the design of evidence-based practice in addressing those needs.

The report finds that people who are incarcerated in New Jersey struggle with a host of problems that affect their ability to live crime-free lives upon their release from confinement. The range of problems this group faces is daunting, from difficulties in readiness to enter to job market to problems in mental and physical health. The report further finds that far too few of these problems are addressed during the period of confinement. In short, we now know that New Jersey’s correctional population, almost all of whom will be released to our communities, includes many people who are far from ready to succeed in our communities.

In this way, the Center’s report is an invaluable call for us to focus our attention on ways we can improve the readiness of people who are behind bars to take their place as productive fellow citizens.

What do we know about the best ways to do so?

Here again, the report provides invaluable guidance. A consensus has grown in the correctional profession to embrace three ideas of reentry. First, the preparation for release should not be back-loaded, but should begin upon the first day of confinement. Second, investments in community-based correctional strategies pay off in reduced rates of recidivism. Third, because the length-of-stay has little impact on recidivism, a more cost-effective approach is to accelerate the movement of people from confinement to the community and to use the cost savings that result as investments in the public safety infrastructure of those communities.

I am proud to introduce this report. It is not only an important new study of our correctional agenda; it is a first step in the arrival of a new era of evidence-based correctional practice in New Jersey.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We gratefully acknowledge the many people who assisted in the design and implementation of the survey and report.

First and foremost, we thank Commissioner George Hayman for approving the survey and Assistant Commissioner Brigitte Mitchell-Morton and Director Douglas Gerardi for facilitating the implementation of the survey at the releasing facilities under the auspices of the New Jersey Department of Corrections (NJDOC). Together, these administrators demonstrated the vision and leadership necessary to conduct independent research on the performance of the Department's effort to protect the public by preparing people under NJDOC custodial responsibility for their return to the community. Without this level of cooperation and trust, research in correctional settings is impossible.

We would also like to thank the facility administrators and their custody staff for working efficiently and professionally with the research staff to move and secure our computers; set up and break down our research areas each day; and work cooperatively with us in the conduct of a computerized survey that required the movement of over 7,500 people under their custodial responsibility. The administrative and custodial staff of the facilities welcomed us in the spirit of cooperation and in ways that ensured our security and the efficient conduct of the survey. The team work we experienced was simply outstanding and remarkably satisfying.

To the survey respondents, we would like to extend our deepest appreciation. This report was possible only because they were willing to trust us with their experiences, needs, and hopes. We know that their trust is not given easily and for this we can only hope that our work lives up to the trust that they placed in us. We hope that this report will provide the details about what they need while incarcerated to do what is expected of them upon release – to live productively and pro-socially in the community as tax-paying citizens, employees, parents, friends, and neighbors.



*“The world that we left was long gone. The danger was that our ideas had become frozen in time. Prison is a still point in a turning world, and it is very easy to remain in the same place in jail while the world moves on.”*

—Nelson Mandela, *The Long Walk to Freedom*

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Approximately 10,000 men and women leave New Jersey prisons each year. Many of these people return to jail and prison for parole violations or new convictions within days, months, or years post-release. Current efforts to stop the revolving prison door focus on the reentry preparedness of people leaving prison. Special funding has been set aside under federal legislation called the Second Chance Act to improve reentry services across the country.

While reentry-related funding is flowing into states, its target efficiency and ultimate effectiveness in terms of protecting public safety depend on whether it goes to the right people, in the right places, and in the right ways. For this, it is critical to know the population – its needs, strengths, and resources. Equally critical is awareness of the rehabilitation and reentry capability of the institutions that serve as ‘home’ for this population for years and in many cases decades.

The Reentry Readiness Survey was conducted in June through August 2009 and was completed by approximately 4,000 soon-to-be-released men and women housed in the 11 releasing prisons operated by the New Jersey Department of Corrections (NJDOC). Respondents were within 24 months of their expected release date. Data from the survey describe the general state of readiness of soon-to-be-released people in terms of their needs, strengths, and resources, and the responsiveness of prison programming to them.

On average, those who responded to the survey had been incarcerated three to four years, and were expected to be released under parole supervision. While the majority of people completing the survey reported feeling hopeful about their reentry prospects, there are reasons for concern, including:

- A sizable minority of soon-to-be-released respondents has chronic health and/or mental health problems that yield chronic pain and/or will require follow-up treatment in the community.
- The majority of the soon-to-be-released sample will be released with drug-related convictions that may constrain their ability to receive cash assistance, food stamps, and public housing.
- One-third or more of respondents had no one helping them to find housing or a job.
- Nearly half or more of soon-to-be-released men (46.4%) and women (55.0%) indicated that they did not think or did not know if they would be able to support themselves in the community, suggesting that they plan to rely heavily on their family, friends, or charitable organizations for support.

“No one is going to help prisoners. There is at least a 2 to 3 year waiting list for most programs, though not many are offered here. After release, we have very little money saved and only minimum wage jobs as options.

Many of us revert back to selling drugs because of the easy money, which helps us pay off fines, rent, child support, and other living and transportation costs.

This system is fixed.”

- Of the soon-to-be-released sample, three-quarters of male and female respondents indicated owing fines and another half reported owing fees, with 43 percent of female and 57 percent of male respondents reporting that they owed both fines and fees.
- In general, one-quarter or more of respondents reported their mastery of money management, working for a living, being a responsible adult, and managing drug or alcohol problems as fair or poor.
- On average, male and female respondents reported working less than 20 hours per week while incarcerated and their primary job opportunities centered on facility maintenance, landscaping, and food production.

The NJDOC is providing a variety of reentry and skill building programs that respond to the reentry needs and preparedness of incarcerated persons. More specifically,

- Nearly 70 percent or more of respondents reporting that they needed behavioral health services said that they had received the needed services during their incarceration.
- Nearly 70 percent or more of respondents knew about the STARS (Successful Transition and Reentry Series) reentry program. Of those who were either enrolled in or had completed the STARS program, 80 percent or more rated the program as good, very good, or excellent and said they would encourage a peer to enroll in the program.
- Roughly 30 to 70 percent of respondents requesting admission into social functioning skill programs were admitted into the programs.
- Of those who participated in the social functioning skill programs, over 80 percent rated the materials and instruction as good, very good, or excellent.
- Approximately 50 to 85 percent of respondents requesting admission to educational or vocational training were admitted into the programs.

- Of those who participated in the educational/vocational programs, over 87 percent rated the materials and instruction as good, very good, or excellent.
- Employment opportunities were provided to most of the respondents.

To meet the twin goals of effectively preparing soon-to-be-released people to “make good” upon release and protecting the public, the ever-shrinking correctional dollar will have to be spent more efficiently on reentry readiness services. Two recommendations are advanced: (1) maximize the skill-preparedness of incarcerated people during their mandatory minimum terms and (2) improve the efficiency of the NJDOC’s spending practices on reentry readiness services. These recommendations serve to enhance public safety (by appropriately preparing soon-to-be-released people to function responsibly and productively in the community once released) and to ensure the productive use of tax revenues (minimizing the costs of producing reentry readiness and treatment services).

“...programs are offered and the prison has useful information for preparing us to return home, but they aren’t available.”

**Recommendation: Universal Reentry Preparedness during the Mandatory Minimum Term.** The NJDOC is providing less than half of the functioning, educational, and vocational skill building services needed by the soon-to-be-released population. This lack of preparedness puts the soon-to-be-released individual at risk to fail at reentry (increasing recidivism) and compromises public safety. It is recommended that

- (a) A **Reentry Preparedness Checklist** be developed and universally implemented at all New Jersey prisons. The Reentry Preparedness Checklist would measure key skills and resources expected upon release and monitor the individual’s progress towards these goals. Summary statistics on the Reentry Preparedness of all inmates within 6, 12, 18, and 24 months of release by facility would be posted on the NJDOC’s website as a way of informing the public of how the NJDOC is doing in preparing incarcerated people for their return to the community;
- (b) The **Skill-Building Capacity** within the NJDOC be developed and funded to the **scale of need** within the incarcerated population during their mandatory minimum sentence. Skill building programming would be matched to the skill-building needs of the target population and scaled to ensure that all incarcerated persons complete these programs during their mandatory minimum terms; and

- (c) **Reentry Preparedness Standards** be established to determine if an incarcerated person is eligible for parole consideration upon completion of his or her mandatory minimum term.

**Recommendation: Reallocation of Reentry Preparedness Funding.** The NJDOC contracts with a variety of halfway houses to provide community-based residential treatment. The Fiscal 2009 budget allocated approximately \$61 million for residential services that support an average daily half-way population of slightly more than 2,600 people. While it is often argued that a community-based halfway house bed is cheaper than a prison bed (hence, saves money), this is true only if the services provided by the halfway house could not be provided by the NJDOC while the person was serving his or her mandatory minimum term. Adding off-site rehabilitation costs to the back end of a mandatory minimum term adds \$23,000 per year to the incarceration episode. The NJDOC will not be able to develop a “scale to need” skill building capacity if it continues to spend the bulk of its reentry funding on off-site residential rehabilitation received by a minority of incarcerated people. It is recommended that

- (a) The share of the **NJDOC’s reentry preparedness dollar** spent on off-site services be reduced and reallocated to on-site reentry preparedness services. Scaling back its off-site rehabilitation purchases (i.e., contracts) yields funds to “make or buy” on-site skill building programs, which will be universally distributed across all incarcerated persons within 24 months of their expected release dates. On-site reentry preparedness dollars will buy more skill building services per dollar because they are not buying residential services, only skill building;
- (b) The **Reentry Preparedness Performance Monitoring System** be funded through the reallocation of the off-site rehabilitation dollars. Part of the reallocated reentry preparedness funding would be available to design and implement the Reentry Preparedness Checklist and disseminate this information to the public via the NJDOC website; and
- (c) A **Community Service Vouchering program** be developed that would allow people released from prison under community supervision to buy housing, vocational or treatment services as needed in the communities to which they are returning. Contracting for residential services has resulted in a concentration of services in urban areas like Camden, Trenton, and Newark. A vouchering system is consistent with community reinvestment strategies and with goals to distribute service capacity more evenly across the state.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Approximately 10,000 men and women leave New Jersey prisons each year. They leave with a multitude of mental illnesses, addiction disorders, trauma histories, and chronic health problems, as well as with deficits in interpersonal, vocational, financial, and social resources. Not surprisingly many of these people return to jail and prison for parole violations or new convictions within days, months, or years post-release.

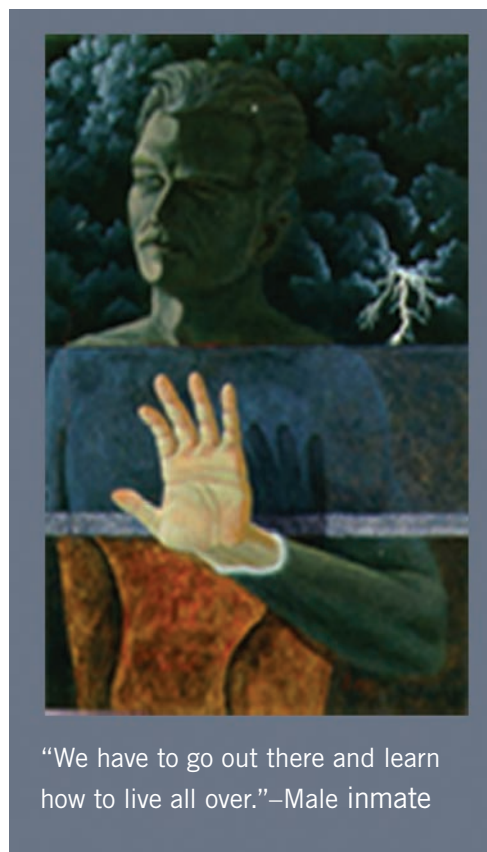
It is well-known that there is a revolving door on the nation's prisons. The revolving door exists in part because this population is unprepared for reentry into communities that are equally unprepared to receive them. Sending legions of people into communities, particularly distressed urban communities, with chronic health and behavioral health problems and few marketable skills or rehabilitative resources creates desperation, which, in turn, causes crime and harm. With recidivism, a vicious cycle of incarceration and crime is reinforced and perpetuated.

Locking people up again and again for crimes instigated by desperation, however, is a less palatable solution under the new fiscal strains and constraints facing state governments. States are learning that they can no longer afford their "corrections habit." According to a recent Vera Institute report,<sup>1</sup> corrections expenditures are the second fastest growing general fund expenditure, second only to Medicaid. Forced by mounting deficits, roughly half of the 50 states have recently reduced funding for corrections. Relatedly, governors in four states (Delaware, Kentucky, North Carolina, and South Dakota), recognizing the cost-deficit dilemma, have established statewide reentry task forces to explore problems and solutions associated with releasing thousands of people from prison to the community. For these task forces to be effective, they must have accurate information about soon-to-be-released persons, including the skills they have, the resources they need, and the challenges they face.

In 2008 and again in 2009, Congress approved funding to support reentry initiatives under the Second Chance Act. The most recent legislation targets funding for reentry-related employment initiatives, mental health services programs, and substance abuse prevention and treatment programs.

While reentry-related funding is flowing into states, including New Jersey, its target efficiency and ultimate effectiveness depend on whether it goes to the right people, in

"We need programs on the outside where people can go for assistance with housing and jobs. There is little support for us on the outside."



Courtesy of Prison Creative Arts

"We have to go out there and learn how to live all over."—Male inmate

the right places, and in the right ways. For this, it is critical to know the population – its needs, strengths, and resources. Equally critical is awareness of the rehabilitation and reentry capability of the institutions that serve as 'home' for this population for years and in many cases decades.

The Center completed a **Reentry Readiness Survey** of the population of soon-to-be-released men and women from New Jersey prisons. It is the first large-scale, population-based survey of reentry readiness of a state prison system. Data from the survey describe the general state of readiness of soon-to-be-released people in terms of their needs, strengths, and resources. This survey serves as both a needs/risk assessment tool and a blueprint for intervention to inform New Jersey's reentry initiatives in ways that yield the most rehabilitation and reentry preparedness out of every correctional dollar.

<sup>1</sup> Scott-Hayward. C.S. (July, 2009). *The Fiscal Crisis in Corrections: Rethinking Policies and Practices*, Vera Institute of Justice. Retrieved August 31, 2009, from [http://www.vera.org/files/The-fiscal-crisis-in-corrections\\_July-2009.pdf](http://www.vera.org/files/The-fiscal-crisis-in-corrections_July-2009.pdf).

## II. PEOPLE LEAVING NEW JERSEY PRISONS

Over 4,000 soon-to-be-released men and women completed the reentry readiness survey (58% of the eligible population, see the appendix for more details on the sampling strategy and methods). The demographic, health, and criminal history characteristics of the respondents are described in this section.

### DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SOON-TO-BE-RELEASED SAMPLE

The Reentry Readiness Survey sample of men and women to be released from prison in New Jersey within 24 months ranged in age from 19 to 79 with a mean age of early to mid 30s (see Table 1). Most were African American or Hispanic, had completed high school or a GED, were single, had children under the age of 18, and had some form of social support. Roughly one-fifth of the sample reported having no family or friends providing social support.

### HEALTH STATUS OF THE SOON-TO-BE-RELEASED SAMPLE

People leaving New Jersey prisons have a wide array of health and behavioral health problems that will require treatment in the community (see Table 2). Most men and women are leaving prison overweight and report that they gained weight while in prison. A significant minority reported fair or poor health, being treated for chronic health and behavioral health problems while incarcerated, and having chronic pain. Once they return to the commu-

**Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Soon-to-be-Released Sample**

Demographic Characteristics	Men (n=3986)	Women (n=218)
Age, mean	33.8*	36.5
African American, %	51.5*	38.3
Hispanic, %	25.2	21.2
White, %	15.4*	29.5
Education, % HS/GED or above	61.5	61.3
Marital Status, % married	12.7*	18.9
Children, % w/ children < 18	57.3	55.8
Some Social Support, %	82.8	82.1
Veteran, %	6.6	3.7

“We need drug abuse classes in prison and more help. Also, we need help finding good drug abuse programs after we are released.”

nity, nearly a half or more of soon-to-be-released women reported that they will need treatment for medical and addiction-related problems, with over one-third reporting that they will need mental health treatment. A sizable but smaller proportion of soon-to-be-released men reported that they will need community-based treatment for medical and behavioral health problems.

Depending on age group, one-seventh to nearly one-half of soon-to-be-released people reported needing some type of behavioral health services (see Table 3). Reported need was highest among respondents who were 36 or older and female. Of those respondents indicating a need for behavioral health services, nearly 70 percent or more reported receiving the needed services, with the notable exception of female respondents younger than 26 or older than 35 who self-reported needing substance abuse treatment. Over 85 percent of female respondents reporting a need for mental health services reported receiving mental health services.

**Table 2. Health Status of Soon-to-be-Released Sample**

Health Status Characteristics	Men (n=3986) %	Women (n=218) %
<b>Weight Problems</b>		
Overweight	47.7*	32.9
Obese	30.1*	41.7
<b>Self-rated Health</b>		
Fair or Poor	16.5*	24.4
<b>Taking medications for</b>		
Chronic medical problems	22.1*	40.6
Emotional/mental problems	5.9*	19.8
<b>Other Limitations</b>		
Disabilities limiting work	10.6	11.5
Chronic pain	20.9*	33.2
<b>Community Treatment for</b>		
Medical problems	41.6*	60.1
Mental health problems	17.6*	37.6
Alcohol/drug problems	25.9*	49.5

\* Statistically significant results comparing men to women based on t-test or Chi-square test, p < 0.05. All percentages are based on weighted valid numbers.

**Table 3. Behavioral Health Need and Use of Soon-to-be-Released Sample**

Behavioral Health Services Need and Use while Incarcerated	Men by Age Group (n=3986)				Women by Age Group (n=218)		
	18-25 (n=1012)	26-35 (n=1465)	36-45 (n=905)	46+ (n=516)	18-25 (n=36)	26-35 (n=67)	36+ (n=114)
<b>Substance Abuse Treatment</b>							
Need treatment	17.7%	26.1%	42.1%	33.7%	33.3%	46.3%	38.6%
Received services	24.7	31.1	39.7	35.2	25.0	38.8	29.8
Received services among those who reported needing treatment	70.8	68.7	69.3	73.9	50.0	67.7	59.1
<b>Mental Health Treatment</b>							
Need treatment	14.7	16.7	22.4	26.8	38.9	44.8	44.7
Received services	13.8	16.1	19.6	23.4	36.1	47.8	43.0
<b>Received services among those who reported needing treatment</b>	76.8	79.9	79.6	80.6	85.7	96.7	92.2

## CRIMINAL PROFILE OF THE SOON-TO-BE RELEASED SAMPLE

On average, soon-to-be-released respondents reported serving three to four years in prison on their current conviction (see Table 4). Their criminal convictions varied from drug-related to violent offenses. Well over half of the soon-to-be-released men and women reported a drug-related conviction. Type of criminal conviction differentially impacts access to social services as well as employment opportunities. Civil consequences are especially severe for people with drug possession and distribution convictions.<sup>2</sup> People leaving New Jersey prisons with drug convictions may be denied access to public housing, cash assistance, and federal aid for higher education, as well as have their driver's licenses suspended for up to 24 months. Individuals convicted of drug possession charges qualify for cash assistance if they are enrolled in or have completed a state-approved drug treatment program.

Roughly one in seven male (n= 553) and one in eight female (n=28) respondents reported being back in prison on a parole revocation. As shown in Table 5, the primary causes of revocation for male respondents were dirty urine, failure to report, and a new crime. Less than 10 percent of male respondents indicated being returned to prison due to fighting, possession of a cell phone, associating with

felons, transportation problems, violating a restraining order, not paying child support, or being in a restricted area. The sample size for female respondents was too small for analysis. There is no meaningful age pattern to the number or causes of parole revocations.

**Table 4. Criminal History of Soon-to-be-Released Sample**

Criminal History Characteristics	Men (n=3986)	Women (n=218)
<b>Years incarcerated since age 18, mean</b>	8.0*	5.3
<b>Years incarcerated on current conviction, mean</b>	3.9*	2.7
<b>Returned on parole violation, %</b>	14.4	12.9
<b>Type of conviction, %</b>		
Drug possession	32.1	30.0
Drug distribution	33.6*	22.6
Property offense	19.3*	25.4
Fraud/identity theft	2.5*	10.6
Violent	24.6*	18.4
Sexual offense	5.6	3.7

<sup>2</sup> Pogorzelski, W., Wolff, N., Pan, K., & Blitz, C. (2005). Are second chances possible? The reality of public policy on reentry for ex-offenders with behavioral health problems. *American Journal of Public Health*, 95(10), 1718-1724.

**Table 5. Parole Revocation of Soon-to-be-Released Sample**

Characteristics of Parole Revocation	Men Reporting Parole Revocation by Age Group (n=553)			
	18-25 (n=119)	26-35 (n=216)	36-45 (n=145)	46+ (n=73)
<b>Returned on parole violation, %</b>	11.9	14.7	15.9	14.1
<b>Number of revocations, mean</b>	1.1	1.1	1.3	1.7
<b>Cause of parole violation, %</b>				
Dirty urine	22.8	24.1	32.4	31.2
Failure to report	41.9	31.2	34.3	28.5
Breaking curfew	14.8	5.5	11.7	5.3
Address change without notification	9.4	17.3	15.7	12.2
Escape or termination from halfway house	7.0	10.3	10.5	8.9
Termination from treatment program	11.6	5.5	8.3	14.1
Committed new crime	40.0	46.0	39.2	31.0
Other	19.7	17.6	18.7	14.2

### III. REENTRY ASSISTANCE REPORTED BY SOON-TO-BE-RELEASED PEOPLE

People leaving prison rely on people inside and outside prison to help them make plans for their transition back to the community. The New Jersey Department of Corrections (NJDOC) provides reentry-specific services that include employing a cadre of social workers who are assigned reentry responsibilities, including but not limited to assisting people within six months of their release to obtain social security cards and birth certificates, to restart public benefit entitlements that may have been terminated prior to incarceration, and to find housing. The NJDOC's Office of Transitional Services also offers a 12-week reentry program called STARS, Successful Transition and Reentry Series. Together, these initiatives are designed to ensure that, according to the NJDOC's vision statement for reentry, "every offender released from prison [is] prepared to reenter society as a productive, law-abiding citizen of New Jersey."

#### WHO'S HELPING SOON-TO-BE-RELEASED PEOPLE?

Most male and female respondents (more than 80%) reported having family and friends who were providing them with some reentry-related support (see Table 7). Yet one-fifth to one-half of all respondents reported that no one was helping them with reentry planning or with finding housing or a job. The respondents reporting reentry support were generally younger (aged 35 or younger) and indicated receiving help with planning their release.

The vast majority of male and female respondents indicated that they will ask family members to help them when they return to the community (see Table 8). A sizable proportion of respondents also plan to ask for assistance from friends, parole officers, other professionals such as representatives from public agencies and religious leaders.

*The reentry mission of the New Jersey Department of Corrections is "to enhance public safety by reducing the risk that offenders will reoffend and return to prison by providing comprehensive services from the time they enter prison through their reintegration back into society."*

#### HOW IS THE NJDOC HELPING WITH REENTRY ASSISTANCE?

Table 6 shows the reentry assistance from the NJDOC that was reported by the soon-to-be-released sample by months to expected release. In general, people closer to their release date were more likely to report that they had a meeting with a social worker to discuss reentry. However, less than one-third of females and slightly more than one-third of males within six months of release reported having a reentry preparation meeting with a social worker and of those, one-half to two-thirds rated the assistance received as good or better. Most of the respondents knew of the NJDOC's STARS reentry program but less than one-third had been enrolled in or completed the program. Of those who completed the STARS program, 80 percent or more rated the program as good, very good, or excellent and 85 percent or more said that they would recommend the STARS program to their peers.



Photo by Nancy Wolff

*Expo Day at Edna Mahan Correctional Facility for Women in Clinton, New Jersey, January 2009. Graduates of Community 101, a research-based reentry program, shared what they learned with community visitors and later to over 300 residents of the facility.*

**Table 6. Experience with In-Prison Reentry Services**

Experience with NJDOC Reentry Services	Months to Release (Max or Parole Eligibility Date)					
	Men (n=3986)			Women (n=218)		
	6 months or less (n=1533)	7-12 months (n=1031)	13 or more months (n=1422)	6 months or less (n=109)	7-12 months (n=46)	13 or more months (n=63)
Met with a social worker to begin reentry planning, %	36.7	16.6	13.1	28.4	13.0	17.5
Rating of assistance, % Good, Very Good, or Excellent	54.5 N = 562	63.8 N = 172	62.7 N = 189	61.3 N = 31	66.7 N = 6	63.6 N = 11
Know about STARS program, %	75.2	75.1	72.1	64.2	73.9	69.8
Enrolled in or completed STARS, %	27.3	26.0	19.5	22.0	17.4	15.9
Rating of reentry help from STARS, % good, very good, or excellent	84.9 N = 410	87.8 N = 265	85.5 N = 277	95.8 N = 24	87.5 N = 8	80.0 N = 10
Recommend STARS to an associate, % definitely yes	85.8 N = 410	86.6 N = 265	85.2 N = 277	87.5 N = 24	100 N = 8	90.0 N = 10

**Table 7. Who is Helping the Soon-to-be-Released Sample**

Who is helping you now to ...	Men by Age Group (N=3986)									
	No assistance needed, already have		No one		Someone inside prison		Someone in the community		Both someone inside prison and in the community	
	18-35 (n=2477)	36+ (n=1421)	18-35 (n=2477)	36+ (n=1421)	18-35 (n=2477)	36+ (n=1421)	18-35 (n=2477)	36+ (n=1421)	18-35 (n=2477)	36+ (n=1421)
Make plans for after you are released			32.2%	39.9%	5.1%	7.9%	41.6%	34.6%	20.3%	16.6%
Find housing	38.6	30.6	31.3	38.9	1.9	4.0	23.8	19.2	3.6	6.4
Find a job	12.9	14.6	44.2	51.5	1.8	2.0	32.7	24.1	7.5	6.2

Who is helping you now to ...	Women by Age Group (N=218)									
	No assistance needed, already have		No one		Someone inside prison		Someone in the community		Both someone inside prison and in the community	
	18-35 (n=103)	36+ (n=114)	18-35 (n=103)	36+ (n=114)	18-35 (n=103)	36+ (n=114)	18-35 (n=103)	36+ (n=114)	18-35 (n=103)	36+ (n=114)
Make plans for after you are released			20.4%	34.2%	9.7%	10.5%	41.8%	31.6%	27.2%	21.9%
Find housing	30.1	32.5	30.1	31.6	3.9	7.0	23.3	19.3	11.7	7.0
Find a job	5.8	13.2	49.5	50.9	1.9	2.6	32.0	21.1	8.7	9.7

**Table 8. Sources of Assistance upon Release for the Soon-to-be-Released Sample**

Who will you ask to help you when you get out?	All (n=4204)			
	Men by Age Group (n=3986)		Women by Age Group (n=218)	
	18-35 (n=2477)	36+ (n=1421)	18-35 (n=103)	36+ (n=114)
<b>A family member</b>	85.7%	76.9%	89.3%	79.8%
<b>A friend</b>	47.8	45.8	49.5	43.9
<b>A parole officer</b>	33.5	35.9	62.1	46.5
<b>A professional you know</b>	35.6	36.3	24.3	31.6
<b>A religious leader</b>	33.9	46.2	43.7	50.9
<b>Someone known in the community</b>	29.3	33.6	33.0	37.7
<b>A case manager</b>	12.5	23.5	26.2	29.8
<b>Government employee</b>	12.8	20.1	19.4	21.1
<b>Other</b>	17.3	19.7	21.4	26.3
<b>No one</b>	4.1	4.8	0	1.8

“Social services and other people from programs tell us to ‘do our best’ but if we’re trying to climb out of a hole, we don’t know how to stay off the streets when we get out.”

## IV. SELF-ASSESSED REENTRY READINESS OF SOON-TO-BE-RELEASED PEOPLE

Rarely in correctional settings are self-assessment or service satisfaction surveys conducted. Even though research shows that self-assessment and satisfaction scores predict outcomes in terms of treatment compliance and behavior. Without this type of information, it is difficult to determine if the billions of public funds spent on reentry, health, behavioral health, and educational services are cost-effective. This section describes the overall reentry readiness of people leaving New Jersey prisons as reported by male and female respondents who were 24 months or less from release.

### ARE THE SOON-TO-BE-RELEASED READY FOR REENTRY?

As shown in Table 9, when asked about their readiness to live independently in the community, three-quarters or more of male and female respondents reported their readiness as good or better. Roughly one in five women and one in four men reported their readiness as poor or fair. However, when asked if they thought they would be able to support themselves in the community, nearly half or more of soon-to-be-released men (46.4%) and women (55.0%) indicated that they did not think or did not know if they would be able to support themselves in the community, suggesting that they may plan to rely heavily on family, friends, and charitable organizations.

“Prison is not equipped to train or educate us. So when we leave and go home, with no training or skills or support, we wind up repeating past mistakes. The prison should provide more programs for reentry.”

This uncertainty about being able to support themselves in the community may be in part a consequence of their debt situation. People often leave prison owing fines, fees, and child support payments. Of the soon-to-be-released sample, three-quarters of male and female respondents indicated owing fines and another half reported owing fees, with 43 percent of female and 57 percent of male respondents reporting that they owed both fines and fees. Half or more of soon-to-be-released sample reported owing more than \$1,000 in fines and 34 percent of male and 22 percent of

**Table 9. Self-Assessed Readiness of Soon-to-be-Released Sample**

How would you rate your readiness to live independently in the community?	Men (n=3986)	Women (n=218)
Excellent	20.8%	19.7%
Very Good	24.4	26.6
Good	28.1	33.0
Fair	20.3	16.1
Poor	6.3	4.6

female respondents also reported owing more than \$1,000 in fees. In addition, child support payments were owed by nearly 30 percent of male and 14 percent of female respondents.

Respondents were also asked specific questions about their reentry readiness in terms of having personal identification, housing, transportation, money, employment, social support, and medications for chronic conditions. This picture of reentry readiness varies by age and gender (see Table 10). Overall, younger male and female respondents reported being better prepared to return to the community than their older counterparts. On a 10-point scale of readiness (the sum of the rows in Table 10), the majority of younger men and women reported having 7 or more points of readiness, with a job, money, and transportation being areas of least readiness. Identification, housing, job, money, transportation, and social support were areas of readiness that were more problematic for older male and female respondents.

Soon-to-be-released women, compared to their age-matched male counterparts, were more likely to report having a place to live, transportation, and supportive family or friends but were less likely to have a job paying a living wage (particularly for those women older than 35) and \$500 upon release. Half or more of soon-to-be released men and women across all age groups with chronic conditions reported not expecting to have medications or referrals to treatment for chronic medical conditions upon release, although women were more likely to report that they expected to have medications and referrals than their male counterparts.

When asked more specifically about whether they expected to have standard forms of identification upon release, 50 to 70 percent of those surveyed expected to have their social security cards and birth certificates (see Table 11). Only about one-third of respondents expected to have a driver's license. It is important to note that one-third or more of men and women surveyed expected to be released without a birth certificate or social security card.

### WHAT GIVES HOPE TO SOON-TO-BE-RELEASED PEOPLE?

Most of the survey respondents reported being hopeful about “making it” in the community upon release (see Table 12). The sources of their hopefulness were in domains of self-efficacy and prison-related growth, enhanced by support received or promised from family, although soon-to-be-released women were more likely to report hopefulness from these sources and other sources than their male counterparts.



**Table 10. Dimensions of Reentry Readiness for Soon-to-be-Released Sample**

Dimensions of Readiness	Men by Age Group (n=3986)				Women by Age Group (n=218)		
	18-25 (n=1012)	26-35 (n=1465)	36-45 (n=905)	46+ (n=516)	18-25 (n=36)	26-35 (n=67)	36+ (n=114)
Overall readiness score, <sup>1</sup> mean	7.5	6.9	6.1	6.3	7.4	6.5	6.6
Care about being ready	98.2%	98.7%	98.4%	97.7%	100%	98.5%	99.1%
Photo ID upon release	71.5	62.1	58.8	60.5	72.2	58.2	68.4
Have safe place to live for 6+ months	86.4	80.2	68.4	66.0	88.9	76.1	73.7
Have job paying a living wage <sup>2</sup>	44.1 N = 990	41.6 N = 1436	37.5 N = 895	44.9 N = 482	42.9 N = 35	40.6 N = 64	33.6 N = 107
Have at least \$500 upon release	56.8	48.6	36.4	50.5	44.4	23.9	38.6
Have reliable transportation	64.0	51.7	41.2	45.7	66.7	59.7	52.6
Have supportive family/friends	90.0	84.5	77.6	75.2	94.4	82.1	79.0
Have trusted person to talk with	83.9	83.7	78.9	81.2	83.3	80.6	82.5
Have one-month of medications <sup>2</sup>	40.1 N = 356	32.7 N = 625	30.1 N = 537	42.9 N = 415	50.0 N = 16	44.4 N = 45	50.0 N = 82
Referrals for chronic conditions <sup>2</sup>	37.7 N = 415	32.2 N = 672	30.4 N = 586	39.0 N = 426	45.0 N = 20	50.0 N = 50	50.0 N = 88

<sup>1</sup> Overall Readiness Score: Summation of ‘yes’ and ‘don’t apply’ responses to 10 sub-dimensions of readiness.

<sup>2</sup> Excludes respondents where the scores does not apply.

**Table 11. Status of Personal Identification of Soon-to-be-Released Sample**

At release, expect to have immediate access to your....	Months to Release (Max or Parole Eligibility Date)					
	Men (n=3986)			Women (n=218)		
	6 months or less (n=1533)	7-12 months (n=1031)	13 or more months (n=1422)	6 months or less (n=109)	7-12 months (n=46)	13 or more months (n=63)
Birth certificate	66.9%	63.3%	59.7%	66.1%	71.7%	60.3%
Social security card	66.0	60.0	57.9	67.9	65.2	54.0
Driver's license	32.0	30.8	28.7	32.1	37.0	34.9

**Table 12. Source of Hope Reported by Soon-to-be-Released Sample**

What gives you hope about your readiness?	What gives you hope about your reentry readiness? Percent Reporting											
	Support Received or Promised from					Prison-related Growth			Self-Efficacy			
	Nothing	People inside prison	Family	Friends	Community Programs	Work done on self	Ability to survive prison	Programs completed	Job Skills	Commitment to succeed	Inner strength	Faith in God
<b>Men (n=3986)</b>	1.5	11.1*	53.8*	17.1	9.9*	42.0*	23.2*	25.0*	48.4	57.3*	55.6*	54.3*
<b>Women (n=218)</b>	0.5	20.6	63.8	20.2	22.0	62.4	39.9	46.3	47.3	71.1	72.0	74.8

\*Statistically significant results comparing men to women based on t-test or Chi-square test, p < 0.05. All percentages are based on weighted valid numbers.

## V. REENTRY READINESS SKILLS OF SOON-TO-BE-RELEASED PEOPLE

Having social, educational, and vocational skills is critically important if successful reentry is to be likely for people leaving prison. The NJDOC offers a wide variety of social service, educational, and vocational programs (see textbox). This section describes the skills that soon-to-be-released men and women think are important to master prior to release and their access to and assessment of the social, educational, and vocational programs provided by the NJDOC.

### WHAT SKILLS ARE IMPORTANT TO MASTER PRIOR TO RELEASE?

Respondents were first asked what skills they thought were important and most important to master prior to their release and then to assess their skills in these areas on a five-point scale ranging from excellent to poor.

Table 13 shows the skills identified as important to master prior to release, ordered by skills identified as important by the largest to smallest percentage of respondents. Over 50 percent of male and female respondents identified the following skills as important to master: money management, working for a living, being a responsible adult, and attitude management. For most of the female age groups, skills also identified as important to master prior to release were time management, parenting, parole supervision, coping skills, and managing drug or alcohol problems.

The three most important skills to master prior to release and self-reported levels of mastery are shown in Table 14. Of those skills identified as most important to master, one-quarter to one-third of male respondents (except for males older than 45) rated their mastery level at fair or poor. Particularly low mastery levels were identified for skills related to working for a living among younger male respon-

“We need better reentry programs for people here for over 20 years. We need to learn job skills. I feel so unprepared.”

dents. Although only a small minority of male respondents indicated that managing drug or alcohol problems was most important to master, of those that did, one-third to nearly one-half depending on age group reported fair or poor levels of mastery.

Female respondents identified similar skills as most important to master, although compared to their male counterparts, female respondents were more likely to report managing drug or alcohol problems as most important to master prior to release (see Table 14). One-third or more of female respondents assessed their mastery levels as fair or poor in areas of money management and managing drug or alcohol problems. Over half of female respondents older than 45 rated their skills as fair or poor in areas of managing addictive behaviors and coping skills (not shown).

### ACCESS TO SOCIAL FUNCTIONING SKILL PROGRAMMING

The NJDOC offers an assortment of social functioning skill building programs (i.e., programs that focus on managing anger and anxiety, parenting, positive thinking, and victim empathy) to incarcerated persons. Survey respondents were asked if they knew about the NJDOC programs, whether they had requested admission to the programs and if so, how many times, and whether they had been accepted into a program.

*The NJDOC offers a variety of social, educational, and vocational programs. To provide these services, the NJDOC benefits from in-kind donations from educational institutions, private, nonprofit service agencies, and faith-based organizations, as well as grant funding based on partnerships with universities, other state agencies, private, nonprofit service agencies, and faith-based organizations.*

*Some of the NJDOC's social service, health, and educational programs are funded by grants from the National Institute of Mental Health, the National Institute on Drug Abuse, Office of Justice Programs, and the Bureau of Justice Assistance.*

*Many of the NJDOC's educational programs are provided by the State's institutions of higher education, including Drew University, Mercer County Community College, Monmouth University, Princeton University, Raritan Valley Community College, Rutgers University, and Union County Community College.*

**Table 13. Important Social Functioning Skills to Master Prior to Release for Soon-to-be-Released Sample**

Important skills to master prior to release	Men by Age Group (n=3986)				Women by Age Group (n=218)		
	18-25 (n=1012)	26-35 (n=1465)	36-45 (n=905)	46+ (n=516)	18-25 (n=36)	26-35 (n=67)	36+ (n=114)
Money management	75.3%	75.6%	72.2%	61.6%	91.7%	74.6%	71.9%
Working for a living	72.7	72.2	66.2	60.4	72.2	79.1	67.5
Being a responsible adult	69.1	71.9	67.7	63.1	80.6	85.1	68.4
Attitude management	60.7	59.9	59.4	51.1	66.7	70.2	62.3
Time management	48.8	48.7	45.0	40.8	41.7	50.8	50.9
Nutrition and health	40.8	45.4	45.7	47.7	38.9	46.3	53.5
Parenting	40.3	53.4	48.2	28.6	44.4	65.7	32.5
Parole supervision	40.3	39.8	36.4	41.3	72.2	50.8	44.7
Coping skills	32.0	36.4	43.6	43.2	50.0	56.7	54.4
Managing drug/alcohol problems	29.6	34.5	45.3	43.6	55.6	58.2	57.9
Computer literacy	27.3	40.6	48.5	44.9	27.8	40.3	50.9
Coping with stigma	15.1	21.4	25.7	27.8	19.4	23.9	28.1
Illness management	10.4	14.4	18.3	28.0	16.7	26.9	21.1
Trauma	7.3	8.2	10.2	11.6	22.2	43.3	25.4

**Table 14. Mastery of Social Functioning Skills Considered Most Important for Soon-to-be-Released Sample**

Three most important skills to master prior to release	Men by Age Group (n=3986)							
	18-25 (n=1012)		26-35 (n=1465)		36-45 (n=905)		46+ (n=516)	
	% Respond	Rate Skills Fair or Poor <sup>1</sup>	% Respond	Rate Skills Fair or Poor <sup>1</sup>	% Respond	Rate Skills Fair or Poor <sup>1</sup>	% Respond	Rate Skills Fair or Poor <sup>1</sup>
Money management	55.8%	28.8%	51.4%	34.0%	46.3%	33.1%	41.6%	27.4%
Working for a living	47.0	34.5	47.6	33.4	44.4	21.0	37.0	14.1
Being a responsible adult	40.4	23.3	39.9	25.9	37.0	27.5	29.8	18.1
Managing drug or alcohol problems	9.7	37.9	13.9	44.0	24.6	46.9	26.6	35.2
Three most important skills to master prior to release	Women by Age Group (n=218)							
	18-25 (n=36)		26-35 (n=67)		36-45 (n=76)		46+ (n=38)	
	% Respond	Rate Skills Fair or Poor <sup>1</sup>	% Respond	Rate Skills Fair or Poor <sup>1</sup>	% Respond	Rate Skills Fair or Poor <sup>1</sup>	% Respond	Rate Skills Fair or Poor <sup>1</sup>
Money management	41.7%	36.4%	34.3%	44.0%	42.1%	39.0%	36.8%	43.5%
Working for a living	41.7	26.9	37.3	18.9	42.1	24.0	44.7	29.6
Being a responsible adult	38.9	31.0	47.8	15.8	25.0	15.1	31.6	28.0
Managing drug or alcohol problems	36.1	35.0	28.4	33.3	43.4	31.9	36.8	52.6

<sup>1</sup>Percentages are among those who think the skills are important.

The majority of male respondents reported knowing about the functioning skill building programs offered by the NJDOC (see Table 15). Of those male respondents who knew about these programs, roughly half had requested admission to programs on anger management, behavior modification, and positive thinking. In general, male respondents requested admission to a program at least twice and 50 to 60 percent reported that they were eventually admitted into the program. Reasons for not being admitted into a program varied but most common was insufficient program capacity.

As shown in Table 16, 80 percent or more of female respondents were aware of the various functioning skill building programs (with the exception of the anxiety management program). Of those who knew about a program, one-third or more of these female respondents requested participation. The most frequently requested programs were behavioral modification, parenting, and positive thinking. On average, those females seeking access to skill building programs requested admission two to five times, with roughly 55 to 76 percent eventually gaining access to the program, with the exception of the victim empathy program. Although a sizable proportion of the respondents reported not knowing why they were denied access, the most common reason given for not being admitted into a program was again insufficient program capacity.

“The wait list for reentry programs is too long. There’re only 12 seats available in each program.”

### ASSESSMENT OF SOCIAL FUNCTIONING SKILL PROGRAMMING

For those admitted into programs, the survey asked them to rate the material and instruction on a five-point scale ranging from excellent to poor.

Of those male and female respondents who were eventually admitted into a functioning skill building program, the majority completed the program and rated the program’s materials and instruction as good or better (see Table 17). Less than 20 percent of male and 6 percent of female program participants rated the program materials or instruction as fair or poor.



Photo by Nancy Wolff

*Community 101 graduation ceremony at Edna Mahan Correctional Facility for Women. Graduates spoke to community visitors, the media, and correctional staff about what they learned in Community 101 and how the class got them ready to reenter the community.*

### ACCESS TO EDUCATIONAL AND VOCATIONAL PROGRAMMING

While most male respondents were aware of GED and vocational training (trades) opportunities, considerably fewer reported knowing about other educational opportunities, such as college and distance learning (see Table 18). The most frequently requested educational program by male respondents was vocational training that focused on building trade-related skills. On average, males interested in these programs reported requesting access to the programs at least twice and roughly half or more were admitted into the program.

Female respondents were generally aware of the educational programming available at the women’s prison, particularly that related to GED, college, and office skills training (see Table 19). Access to these programs was requested between two and four times by at least 30 or more percent of female respondents. For most programs, with the exception of the GED program and video training, roughly two-thirds of females requesting access to an educational program were admitted into the program.

### ASSESSMENT OF EDUCATIONAL AND VOCATIONAL PROGRAMMING

As shown in Table 20, of those male and female respondents who were enrolled in or completed the various educational/vocational programs, nearly 90 percent or more reported the materials and instructor as good or better.

**Table 15. Access to Social Functioning Skill Building Programming, Male Respondents**

Social Functioning Skill Building Programs	Participation in Programs, Men (N=3986)			
	Program Available (% yes)	Requested Program <sup>1</sup> (% yes)	Number of Requests <sup>2</sup> (mean)	Accepted <sup>3</sup> (% yes)
<b>Anger management (PN=882; DN=577)</b>	77.2	47.8	2.3	61.0
<b>Anxiety management (PN=68; DN=78)</b>	18.8	20.5	5.0	47.2
<b>Behavior modification (PN=801; DN=474)</b>	67.5	48.7	2.3	63.3
<b>Parenting skills (PN=516; DN=419)</b>	63.4	37.4	2.0	55.5
<b>Positive thinking (PN=803; DN=710)</b>	73.3	51.9	2.3	53.3
<b>Victim empathy (PN=424; DN=442)</b>	59.8	36.8	2.3	49.6

<sup>1</sup> Percentages are among those who said programs are available.

<sup>2</sup> Means are among those who had requested the programs.

<sup>3</sup> Percentages are among those who requested the programs.

PN: the number who were accepted into the program; DN: the number who were denied admission.

**Table 16. Access to Social Functioning Skill Building Programming, Female Respondents**

Social Functioning Skill Building Programs	Participation in Programs, Women (N=218)			
	Program Available (% yes)	Requested Program <sup>1</sup> (% yes)	Number of Requests <sup>2</sup> (mean)	Accepted <sup>3</sup> (% yes)
<b>Anger management (PN=49; DN=31)</b>	87.6	42.1	2.6	61.3
<b>Anxiety management (PN=18; DN=7)</b>	35.0	32.9	4.9	72.0
<b>Behavior modification (PN=51; DN=41)</b>	84.8	50.0	2.2	55.4
<b>Parenting skills (PN=72; DN=23)</b>	87.6	50.0	1.9	75.8
<b>Positive thinking (PN=58; DN=48)</b>	87.1	56.1	2.6	54.7
<b>Victim empathy (PN=18; DN=44)</b>	79.3	36.1	3.4	29.0

<sup>1</sup> Percentages are among those who said programs are available.

<sup>2</sup> Means are among those who had requested the programs.

<sup>3</sup> Percentages are among those who requested the programs.

PN: the number who were accepted into the program; DN: the number who were denied admission.

**Table 17. Evaluation of Social Functioning Skill Building Programming, All Respondents**

Social Functioning Skill Building Programs	Participation in Skill Building Programs					
	Men (N=3986)			Women (N=218)		
	Enrolled in or Completed <sup>1</sup> (% yes)	Rate Material <sup>2</sup> (% Fair or Poor)	Rate Instruction <sup>2</sup> (% Fair or Poor)	Enrolled in or Completed <sup>1</sup> (% yes)	Rate Material <sup>2</sup> (% Fair or Poor)	Rate Instruction <sup>2</sup> (% Fair or Poor)
<b>Anger management (MN=1046;WN=56)</b>	80.9	17.8	18.5	90.3	5.5	5.5
<b>Anxiety management (MN=88;WN=19)</b>	87.8	16.5	16.5	90.5	5.6	5.6
<b>Behavior modification (MN=852;WN=55)</b>	80.5	14.6	15.5	90.2	3.7	3.7
<b>Parenting skills (MN=445;WN=78)</b>	71.9	5.9	9.3	89.7	3.8	2.6
<b>Positive thinking (MN=623;WN=53)</b>	64.8	11.1	11.8	82.8	3.7	5.6
<b>Victim empathy (MN=299;WN=17)</b>	62.3	8.0	11.0	85.0	0	0

<sup>1</sup> Percentages are among those who were accepted into the programs.

<sup>2</sup> Percentages are among those who were enrolled or completed the programs.

MN: the number of men who participated in the program; WN: the number of women who participated in the program.

**Table 18. Access to Educational Programming, Male Respondents**

Educational Programs	Participation in Programs, Men (N=3986)			
	Program Available (% yes)	Requested Program <sup>1</sup> (% yes)	Number of Requests <sup>2</sup> (mean)	Accepted <sup>3</sup> (% yes)
<b>GED (PN=823; DN=308)</b>	89.6	31.8	2.2	72.9
<b>College (PN=283; DN=324)</b>	44.1	33.6	2.6	46.5
<b>Distance learning (PN=43; DN=48)</b>	14.5	16.0	2.1	47.8
<b>Vocational training, trades (PN=802; DN=559)</b>	58.1	58.9	2.5	59.3
<b>Vocational training, office (PN=206; DN=218)</b>	44.9	23.9	2.8	48.5
<b>Vocational training, video (PN=61; DN=64)</b>	18.7	17.3	2.5	48.7

<sup>1</sup> Percentages are among those who said programs are available.

<sup>2</sup> Means are among those who had requested the programs.

<sup>3</sup> Percentages are among those who requested the programs.

PN: the number who were accepted into the program; DN: the number who were denied admission.

**Table 19. Access to Educational Programming, Female Respondents**

Educational Programs	Participation in Programs, Women (N=218)			
	Program Available (% yes)	Requested Program <sup>1</sup> (% yes)	Number of Requests <sup>2</sup> (mean)	Accepted <sup>3</sup> (% yes)
<b>GED (PN=59; DN=10)</b>	94.5	33.7	3.1	85.5
<b>College (PN=38; DN=22)</b>	87.6	31.6	4.3	63.3
<b>Distance learning (PN=45; DN=22)</b>	71.9	43.0	2.6	67.2
<b>Vocational training, trades (PN=37; DN=21)</b>	68.7	38.9	2.2	63.8
<b>Vocational training, office (PN=46; DN=30)</b>	77.9	45.0	2.1	60.5
<b>Vocational training, video (PN=1; DN=2)</b>	24.9	5.6	23.3	33.3

<sup>1</sup> Percentages are among those who said programs are available.

<sup>2</sup> Means are among those who had requested the programs.

<sup>3</sup> Percentages are among those who requested the programs.

PN: the number who were accepted into the program; DN: the number who were denied admission.

**Table 20. Evaluation of Educational Programming, All Respondents**

Educational Programs	Participation in Programs					
	Men (N=3986)			Women (N=218)		
	Enrolled in or Completed <sup>1</sup> (% yes)	Rate Material (% Fair or Poor)	Rate Instructor (% Fair or Poor)	Enrolled in or Completed <sup>1</sup> (% yes)	Rate Material (% Fair or Poor)	Rate Instructor (% Fair or Poor)
<b>GED (MN=1221;WN=56)</b>	82.6%	8.4%	10.1%	77.8%	1.9%	9.3%
<b>College (MN=234;WN=30)</b>	69.2	11.3	8.1	76.9	0	7.1
<b>Distance learning (MN=36;WN=40)</b>	62.3	0	5.2	83.3	3.6	2.5
<b>Vocational training, trades (MN=696;WN=36)</b>	71.8	8.8	10.3	90.0	8.3	5.6
<b>Vocational training, office (MN=197;WN=38)</b>	75.2	9.5	12.5	80.9	0	5.3
<b>Vocational training, video (MN=53;WN=1)</b>	71.9	5.1	3.9	100	100	100

<sup>1</sup> Percentages are among those who were accepted into the programs.

<sup>2</sup> Percentages are among those who were enrolled or completed the programs.

MN: the number of men who participated in the program; WN: the number of women who participated in the program.

## VI. EMPLOYMENT READINESS OF SOON-TO-BE-RELEASED PEOPLE

Respondents were asked about their employment experiences prior to and during incarceration and the vocational skills they practiced while incarcerated.

### EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCES PRIOR TO INCARCERATION

The employment experiences of soon-to-be-released men and women were remarkably conventional (see Table 21). Most of the men and women reported that they had held a job for at least a year during their adult life and more than half reported that their last job prior to incarceration was a legal job for which they received a paycheck. Less than half of these individuals, however, were working full-time prior to their arrest, although men compared to women were more likely to be employed full-time at the time of their arrest. At least two-thirds of those employed prior to their arrest were making a living wage (i.e., enough to pay their bills).

### EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCES DURING INCARCERATION

As shown in Table 22, the majority of male and female respondents reported working at least 15 to 20 hours per week for pay and had held their current job for 4 to 16 months, depending on the age group. Male respondents, on average, reported holding jobs for longer periods of time than their female counterparts, which may reflect the shorter sentences served by women and their greater programming options.

**Table 21. Employment Experiences Prior to Incarceration, All Respondents**

Employment Characteristics	Men (n=3986) %	Women (n=218) %
<b>Worked full-time prior to arrest</b>	43.7*	33.6
<b>Held job for at least one year</b>	78.5	78.8
<b>Last job prior to incarceration</b>		
Legal job, received paycheck	57.6	58.1
Legal job, paid under the table	13.6	8.8
Illegal job, paid cash	16.3	19.4
Other type of job for pay	5.0	6.0
<b>Not working, legal or illegal job</b>	7.6	7.8
<b>Job paid enough to pay the bills</b>	72.4	67.3



Photo by Nancy Wolff

*Edna Mahan Correctional Facility for Women has two peer-staffed Community Centers. The Community Centers are used by the residents and have computers and printers for preparing letters for community assistance, resumes, and cover letters; resource binders by county; a self-help library; and other resources to help them get ready to return to the community.*

The average respondent was assigned two jobs during their period of incarceration. Overall, the primary reasons for leaving a job were relocation to another prison or halfway house or better opportunities at the same facility.

The job experience gained during incarceration was largely in the areas of food production, maintenance, and landscaping (see Table 23). Manual labor was the typical job experience among soon-to-be-released inmates. Less than 20 percent of responding inmates had jobs that involved office, computer, or educational skills. Workers most likely to have these job opportunities were older than 35.

Most of the vocational skills reportedly acquired during incarceration were in the areas of food service, construction trades, landscaping, and maintenance (see Table 24). Male respondents, compared to their female counterparts, were more likely to report acquisition of trade-related vocational skills that would likely lead to employment in areas of construction, landscaping, and facility maintenance. Barbering and cosmetology were skills most likely acquired by male and female respondents younger than 35. Computer and word processing skills were most likely to be reported by female respondents and respondents younger than 25.

**Table 22. Employment Experiences During Incarceration, All Respondents**

Jobs During Incarceration	Men by Age Group (n=3986)				Women by Age Group (n=218)		
	18-25 (n=1012)	26-35 (n=1465)	36-45 (n=905)	46+ (n=516)	18-25 (n=36)	26-35 (n=67)	36+ (n=114)
Never assigned job that pays, %	17.7	13.2	11.7	15.0	16.7	6.0	7.9
Hours worked/week, <sup>1</sup> mean	16.8	18.2	18.3	17.5	22.7	21.9	21.9
Number of jobs, mean	1.7	2.0	2.1	1.9	1.1	1.7	1.8
Average months/job, mean	7.4	10.3	13.3	15.8	4.0	6.8	9.9
Reasons for leaving job, <sup>2</sup> %	N = 497	N = 778	N = 488	N = 272	N = 12	N = 31	N = 44
Moved to another facility	29.4	33.6	33.4	35.2	16.7	6.5	13.6
Got better job	19.4	20.7	21.2	21.5	8.3	19.4	18.2
Started new program	10.1	8.6	11.0	11.9	33.3	16.1	20.5
Other	22.3	19.8	20.7	17.6	25.0	22.6	36.4

<sup>1</sup> The mean reported excludes those who did not report working.

<sup>2</sup> Only applies to those respondents who reported leaving a job.

**Table 23. Type of Employment Experiences During Incarceration, All Respondents**

Jobs During Incarceration	Men by Age Group (n=3986)				Women by Age Group (n=218)		
	18-25 (n=1012)	26-35 (n=1465)	36-45 (n=905)	46+ (n=516)	18-25 (n=36)	26-35 (n=67)	36+ (n=114)
Facility Maintenance	35.2%	38.4%	38.3%	39.6%	41.7%	25.4%	25.4%
Grounds/landscaping	33.5	38.3	38.9	34.6	13.9	17.9	20.2
Dietary	17.0	22.4	24.4	17.2	11.1	37.3	27.2
Production/distribution	10.6	11.9	15.1	15.6	8.3	25.4	23.7
Program aide	10.9	9.0	13.8	11.9	5.6	4.5	7.9
Office work	7.2	8.4	7.8	9.2	5.6	6.0	18.4
Road crew	0.8	1.2	1.4	1.2	0	0	0.9

**Table 24. Type of Vocational Skills Acquired During Incarceration, All Respondents**

Vocational Skills	Men by Age Group (n=3986)				Women by Age Group (n=218)		
	18-25 (n=1012)	26-35 (n=1465)	36-45 (n=905)	46+ (n=516)	18-25 (n=36)	26-35 (n=67)	36+ (n=114)
Cooking	34.6%	31.0%	30.4%	25.1%	16.7%	37.3%	20.2%
Construction	26.5	20.8	18.6	21.9	5.6	9.0	11.4
Electrical	13.0	9.7	7.2	10.6	8.3	4.5	8.8
Electronics	12.2	7.5	6.0	8.5	13.9	3.0	3.5
Masonry	6.9	9.0	8.2	10.5	0	3.0	4.4
Painting	15.8	13.1	10.6	12.7	0	7.5	9.7
Plumbing	8.0	7.5	6.8	8.7	0	3.0	5.3
Landscaping	20.8	16.9	13.1	15.5	8.3	9.0	11.4
Maintenance	22.6	20.1	17.0	21.6	5.6	9.0	12.3
Barbering	27.5	26.7	21.0	18.1	16.7	19.4	7.9
Cosmetology	15.6	11.5	7.5	6.2	19.4	16.4	7.9
Sewing	10.0	10.1	9.6	11.5	8.3	26.9	32.5
Upholstery	6.1	3.7	2.6	3.9	5.6	7.5	7.9
Microsoft Office	15.6	10.8	9.2	13.4	36.1	14.9	22.8
Basic computers	24.4	19.5	15.7	20.3	36.1	28.4	32.5
Business writing	11.7	8.2	6.8	8.4	19.4	13.4	15.8
Webpage design	8.9	5.6	3.9	7.4	13.9	4.5	15.8
Video production	4.1	3.7	2.4	3.3	0	3.0	4.4

## VII. SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

People are leaving New Jersey prisons in record numbers. Overall, according to data reported by the NJDOC, half of the people incarcerated in New Jersey prisons are serving time on a violent conviction, while another 30 percent are serving time for narcotics violations. On average, the majority of people inside prison (69%) must serve their entire minimum sentence before being considered for parole (referred to as “mandatory minimums”). Although 20 percent of people with mandatory minimums are serving minimum terms of 15 years or more, the typical mandatory minimum term is five years. People with mandatory minimum sentences cannot earn time off their minimum sentences by engaging in good behavior, such as completing social, educational, or vocational programs, working, or gaining minimum security status.

The Reentry Readiness Survey measured the reentry needs and preparedness of people within 24 months of their expected release from a New Jersey prison. On average, those who responded to the survey had been incarcerated three to four years, and were expected to be released under parole supervision. While the majority of people leaving prison reported feeling hopeful about their reentry prospects, there are reasons for concern, including:

- A sizable minority of soon-to-be-released respondents has chronic health and/or mental health problems that yield chronic pain and/or will require follow-up treatment in the community.
- The majority of the soon-to-be-released sample will be released with drug-related convictions that may constrain their ability to receive cash assistance, food stamps, and public housing.
- One-third or more of respondents had no one helping them to find housing or a job.
- Of those within six months of release, only 37 percent of male and 28 percent of female respondents reported meeting with a social worker to discuss reentry planning, and less than one-third had been enrolled in or had completed the STARS reentry program.
- Nearly half or more of soon-to-be-released men (46.4%) and women (55.0%) indicated that they did not think or did not know if they would be able to support themselves in the community, suggesting that they plan to rely heavily on their family, friends, or charitable organizations for support.
- Of the soon-to-be-released sample, three-quarters of male and female respondents indicated owing fines and another half reported owing fees, with 43 percent of female and 57 percent of male respondents reporting that they owed both fines and fees.

“Survey was good but no one will listen.”

- Half or more of soon-to-be-released sample reported owing more than \$1,000 in fines and 34 percent of male and 22 percent of female respondents also reported owing more than \$1,000 in fees. In addition, child support payments were owed by nearly 30 percent of male and 14 percent of female respondents.
- In general, one-quarter or more of respondents reported their mastery of money management, working for a living, being a responsible adult, and managing drug or alcohol problems as fair or poor.
- Nearly 60 percent or more of respondents were not working full-time prior to their arrest.
- On average, male and female respondents reported working less than 20 hours per week while incarcerated and their primary job opportunities centered on facility maintenance (e.g., cleaning up housing units), landscaping, and food production.
- The majority of respondents had not acquired vocational skills that would lead to community-based jobs paying a living wage.

There is, however, evidence that the NJDOC is providing a variety of reentry and skill building programs that respond to the reentry needs and preparedness of incarcerated persons. More specifically,

- Nearly 70 percent or more of respondents reporting that they needed behavioral health services said that they had received the needed services during their incarceration.
- On average, 60 percent of those respondents who met with a social worker to discuss reentry planning rated the assistance they received as good, very good, or excellent.
- Nearly 70 percent or more of respondents knew about the STARS reentry program and of those who were either enrolled in or had completed the program, 80 percent or more rated the program as good, very good, or excellent and said they would encourage a peer to enroll in the program.
- Roughly 30 to 70 percent of respondents requesting admission into social functioning skill programs were admitted into the programs.
- Of those who participated in the social functioning skill programs, over 80 percent rated the materials and instruction as good, very good, or excellent.

- Approximately 50 to 85 percent of respondents requesting admission to educational or vocational training (with the exception of video training) were admitted into the programs.
- Of those who participated in the educational/vocational programs, over 87 percent rated the materials and instruction as good, very good, or excellent.
- Employment opportunities were provided to most of the respondents.
- A sizable minority of male and female respondents reported access to college programs, training in computers and computer-related software, and training in the trades including masonry, electronics/electrical, and plumbing.
- Skill building and educational/vocational programming offered by the NJDOC has benefited from classes donated by New Jersey universities and colleges, as well as funding received from federal and charitable grants.

Several important conclusions can be drawn from the survey findings.

1. **Window of Opportunity for Skill Building.** The majority of incarcerated persons are held for at least three to four years prior to their eligibility for parole or release. This provides a window of opportunity to deliver a wide variety of skill building programs to people while they are incarcerated; skills that will enhance their ability to successfully reenter the community.
2. **Motivation towards Skill Building.** The majority of soon-to-be-released people were interested and participated in skill building and treatment-related programming.
3. **Ability to Provide Skill Building Programs.** The skill-building programs provided by the NJDOC were favorably assessed in terms of materials and instruction by the people who were enrolled in or had completed these programs.
4. **Match Skill Building Programs to Skills Identified as Important by Soon-to-be-Released People.** Many respondents indicated below-average functioning skills in areas that are critically important to successful reentry, including money management, working for a living, being a responsible adult, and managing drug and alcohol problems. Programs are needed that respond to these skill areas.
5. **Scale Up Skill Building Programs.** There is a greater need for skill-building and treatment-related

programs than the NJDOC currently provides as indicated by the number of times people request admission and the refusal rates into programming. Program capacity needs to be scaled to the need within the incarcerated population.

6. **Engage Social Workers in Reentry Planning.** A significant number of respondents indicated that they (a) had no one helping them find housing or a job and (b) had not met with a social worker to discuss reentry planning even though they were six months or less from their release date. Getting people stable housing prior to release is critical for reentry success.
7. **Scale Up Employment Programs.** People become institutionalized as a consequence of incarceration (i.e., they learn to condition themselves to the movement of the facility). People are not institutionalized to work during their incarceration. Many incarcerated persons are working less than 20 hours per week and at jobs that are unrelated to jobs available in the community (e.g., cosmetology, barbering (due to licensing restrictions associated with felony convictions), sewing, upholstery, or cleaning their units). Conditioning people to normal work routines and engaging them in viable employment activities that pay a living wage in the community are vital for their reentry success.

These conclusions yield several recommendations that are geared towards improving the skill building capacity and efficiency of the NJDOC in two ways. First, the recommendations are designed to maximize the preparedness of incarcerated people during their mandatory minimum term. And, second, to improve the efficiency of the NJDOC's spending practices on skill building and treatment services. In these ways, the recommendations serve to enhance public safety (by appropriately preparing all motivated people inside prison to function pro-socially in the community once released) and to ensure the productive use of tax revenues (minimizing the costs of producing skill building and treatment services within correctional settings).

**Recommendation: Universal Reentry Preparedness during the Mandatory Minimum Term.** On average, it costs the New Jersey taxpayer approximately \$38,000 per year to incarcerate an individual, of which approximately \$1,500 (4%) funds skill building programming. At this level of spending, the NJDOC is providing less than half of the functioning and vocational skill building services needed by incarcerated people within two years of their release date. This lack of preparedness puts the soon-to-be-released individual at risk to fail at reentry (increasing recidivism) and compromises public safety. It is recommended that

“Hopefully the availability of the reentry programs gets better.  
The waiting list is too long.”

- (a) A **Reentry Preparedness Checklist** be developed and universally implemented at all New Jersey prisons. The Reentry Preparedness Checklist would measure key skills and resources expected upon release and monitor the individual’s progress towards these goals. Summary statistics on the Reentry Preparedness of all inmates within 6, 12, 18, and 24 months of release by facility would be posted on the NJDOC’s website as a way of informing the public of how the NJDOC is doing in preparing incarcerated people for their return to the community;
- (b) The **Skill-Building Capacity** within the NJDOC be developed and funded to the **scale of need** within the incarcerated population during their mandatory minimum sentence. Insufficient program capacity limits the ability of the NJDOC to adequately prepare incarcerated persons for community reentry. Skill building programming would be matched to the needs of male and female inmates and scaled to ensure that all incarcerated persons complete these programs during their mandatory minimum terms; and
- (c) **Reentry Preparedness Standards** be established to determine if an incarcerated person is eligible for parole consideration upon completion of his or her mandatory minimum term.

**Recommendation: Reallocation of Reentry Preparedness Funding.** Each year approximately 10,000 state inmates are released to halfway houses under parole supervision (n~2,500), the community under parole supervision (n~2,500), and the community without parole supervision (n~5,000). These individuals may receive reentry services and assistance while in prison, at halfway houses, and/or through parole supervision. The NJDOC contracts with a variety of halfway houses to provide community-based residential treatment for state prisoners released under conditions of community supervision. The Fiscal 2009 budget allocated approximately \$61 million for residential services that support an average daily halfway population of slightly more than 2,600 people. The annual average cost of a community-based rehabilitation bed is approximately \$23,000. While it is often argued that a community-based halfway house bed is cheaper than a prison bed (hence, saves money), this is true only if the services provided by the halfway house could not be provided by the NJDOC while the person was being held during his or her mandatory minimum term. Adding off-site rehabilitation costs to the back end of a mandatory minimum term adds \$23,000 to the incarceration episode. The NJDOC could save the residential costs associated with off-site (halfway house) rehabilitation

by providing reentry preparedness services on-site during the mandatory minimum term. It does not make economic or rehabilitation sense to hold people for years, providing them minimal to modest access to skill building services, and then purchase community-based services for some of those who meet the criteria for halfway house programming (typically state prisoners with violent convictions or who do not meet minimum security status are excluded from participating in halfway house opportunities). The NJDOC will not be able to develop its reentry preparedness capacity to the scale of population need if it continues to spend the bulk of its skill building funding on off-site residential treatment during community supervision. Off-site services are allocated to approximately one-quarter of the people released to the community from New Jersey prisons. These community-based residential beds could be alternatively used for people convicted of non-violent, drug-related crimes; people who would be more cost-effectively treated through diversion to mandatory residential drug treatment in lieu of prison. It is recommended that

- (a) The share of the **NJDOC’s reentry preparedness dollar** spent on off-site services be reduced and reallocated to on-site reentry preparedness programming. Scaling back its off-site purchases (i.e., contracts) yields funds to “make or buy” on-site skill building programs, which will be universally distributed across all incarcerated persons within 24 months of their expected release dates. On-site reentry preparedness dollars will buy more skill building services per dollar because they are not buying residential services, only reentry preparedness skills. The NJDOC will be more efficient if a “multi-tasking” approach is applied to the mandatory minimum period.
- (b) The **Reentry Preparedness Performance Monitoring System** be funded through the reallocation of the off-site rehabilitation dollars. Part of the reallocated reentry preparedness funding would be available to design and implement the Reentry Preparedness Checklist and disseminate this information to the public via the NJDOC website; and
- (c) A **Community Service Vouchering program** be developed that will allow people released from prison under community supervision to buy housing, vocational, and treatment services as needed in the communities to which they are returning. Current contracting practices for residential services have resulted in the concentration of services in urban areas like Camden, Trenton, and Newark. By contrast, vouchers follow the soon-to-be-released person and stimulate service capacity building more generally across communities of New Jersey. A vouchering system is consistent with community reinvestment strategies and with goals to distribute service capacity more evenly across the state.

## APPENDIX: REENTRY READINESS SURVEY METHODS

### SAMPLING

The study's population was all inmates housed at 10 adult male prisons and one female prison within 24 months of their parole eligibility or maximum sentence date. Excluded from the eligible population were inmates housed in the hospital, administrative segregation, halfway houses, or residential treatment units. Also excluded were individuals off-site the day of the survey due to court, medical appointments, or work assignments. In addition, individuals were excluded if they were being deported, had detainers for new charges, or otherwise had release eligibility dates that were outside the 24-month window based on recent parole hearings. Roughly 25 percent of the population was ineligible for these reasons. In all, 7622 inmates (three-quarters of the soon-to-be-released population) were eligible to participate. Data were collected from June 2009 through August 2009.

All inmates who meet our eligibility criteria ( $n=7622$ ) were invited to participate in a survey about the readiness for reentry. Response rates across all facilities ranged from 46 to 64.9 percent, with a mean response rate of 58.2 percent (SD: 6.9). A total of 3986 male (mean age = 33.3, SD = 10.3) and 218 female (mean age = 36.5, SD = 10.0) aged 18 or older participated in the study.

### PROCEDURES

The consent procedures were approved by the appropriate Institutional Review Boards and Department of Correction. Subjects were not compensated for participating.

The surveys were conducted at the female facility during the first week of June, 2009, and at male facilities from June through August of 2009. The survey was administered using audio-computerized assistance survey instrument (CASI) and was available in English and Spanish. Subjects responded to a computer-administered questionnaire by using a mouse and following instructions shown on the screen or provided by audio instructions delivered via headphones. Thirty-three computer stations were available and research assistants helped participants as needed. On average, subjects completed the survey in approximately 60 minutes.

### VARIABLES AND MEASURES

The survey was divided into six parts: reentry readiness, personal well being, prison time, prison programs, employment experience, and background information.

### WEIGHTS

Weights were constructed to adjust the sampled population to the full population for different probabilities of selection due to different response rates among facilities and non-response bias. Then final weights were rescaled to reflect the actual sample size.

### ANALYSIS

Both weighted and unweighted analyses were conducted and because the results were similar, only weighted results are presented. Unless otherwise indicated, the significance level used to assess the validity of the null hypotheses is  $p < 0.05$ . Mean and percentages were estimated based on weighted valid numbers. Respondents were classified into groups according to age, time to release, and other criteria.

