

How successful re-entry into society helps break the cycle of recidivism Correctional facilities need to build bridges between prisoners and the community to give inmates the best chance for a successful reintegration 11, 2018

By Jinnie Chua, Assistant Editor of In Public Safety

Time and time again, studies and reports describe how America's prison system is broken. The United States still has the highest incarceration rate in the world, harsh sentencing for non-violent drug offenses continues to be debated, and rehabilitation efforts remain by the wayside. These concerns are underscored by the grim reality that two-thirds of released prisoners are rearrested within three years.

The cycle of recidivism has obvious financial consequences – the United States spends \$80 billion a year on incarceration – but also points to deeper fractures within a system that over-emphasizes incarceration and does little to support ex-offenders returning to their communities.

Introducing educational programs and preparing inmates for successful re-entry is not only a step towards reducing recidivism, but it's also vital for creating a safer prison environment for both inmates and staff. (Photo/In Public Safety)
Introducing educational programs and preparing inmates for successful re-entry is not only a step towards reducing recidivism, but it's also vital for creating a safer prison environment for both inmates and staff. (Photo/In Public Safety)

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"If we keep having high recidivism rates, why do we call it a 'correctional' system?" said Robert Hood, who has held four wardenships over the course of his 42-year career in corrections. "If you're only focused on custody and not re-entry, you shouldn't be working in this field."

While the White House is currently working on reforming legislation to improve educational and re-entry initiatives for prisoners, it is not clear who will lead the changes if the bill is passed. The top position at the Federal Bureau of Prisons is once again vacant after the sudden resignation of Director Mark Inch two weeks ago.

"You can't be serious about changing a system if you're not putting someone in there to take the lead," said Hood.

"Employees and inmates have no one to follow in attempts to develop re-entry initiatives."

While systematic prison reform may yet be a long and uncertain road, Hood encourages all wardens to look at what they can do now. Introducing educational programs and preparing inmates for successful re-entry is not only a step towards reducing recidivism, but it's also vital for creating a safer prison environment for both inmates and staff.

PREPARATION, TRANSITION AND STABILIZATION

"To reform prisoners we need to reform our philosophy to include re-entry," said Hood. "We need to have academic, vocational, social and psychological support, but we can't stop there."

Hood's background in education has always underpinned his approach to corrections. After obtaining his masters in special education, he began his career as a prison classroom instructor and eventually became warden of the Supermax, the most secure federal penitentiary in the country. Even at the Supermax, where most prisoners face no prospect of release, Hood saw the effectiveness of increasing communication and educational programs. Inmates behaved better, there were fewer incidents of inmates harming themselves, and staff safety increased.

"I don't like their crimes or what they did, but now that they're here what can I do to work with them?" said Hood. "If I can run the most secure prison in the world and still find the heart and humanity to work with those prisoners, that impact will be much greater in non-Supermax prisons."

In addition to the Supermax, Hood held federal wardenships in Arizona, Oregon and Colorado. He developed a three-phase plan to help prisoners with successful re-entry:

Preparation – "Preparation for re-entry needs to start on the first day of incarceration, not six months before they go home," said Hood. He believes that inmates should have an individualized education plan (IEP), which is a tool he adopted from special education that helps individuals work on their strengths and weaknesses. "It's almost like a social contract based on communication and positive reinforcement," explained Hood. It requires getting to know inmates and setting goals based on what's important to them. For example, if an inmate is a father, Hood might encourage him to complete parenting classes or a program on alternatives to violence in exchange for increased visitation hours. Other incentives could include a better housing unit or a new job in the prison.

Transition – "We can't say we want inmates to stay out of trouble and be self-sufficient without connecting them to the resources to do that," said Hood

President: Robert Kelley
Vice President: Brian Waybrant
Secretary: Jerrin Hickman
Treasurer: Bill Knepper
Meeting Facilitator: "Bo" Diaz-Miller
Staff Advisor: Steve Finster
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Proposal Updates:

<u>Adding additional Tablets</u>	<u>10/12/17 Submitted</u>
<u>Accessing Law Library Info on Tablet</u>	<u>10/12/17 Submitted</u>
<u>Accessing GED materials on Tablets</u>	<u>10/12/17 Submitted</u>
<u>Is there a replacement for the MP4 yet?</u>	<u>11/2/17 Submitted</u>
<u>DRU Microwaves</u>	<u>1/20/18 Submitted</u>
<u>Clear Hot Pot to be sold to population</u>	<u>6/5/18 Submitted</u>
<u>Rain Coats (clear) to be sold to population</u>	<u>6/5/18 Submitted</u>
<u>Donation table for St Jude Children Research</u>	<u>6/5/18 Submitted</u>
<u>Membership book service program</u>	<u>7/10/18 Approved</u>
<u>Ice Cream Sales on yard</u>	<u>6/5/18 Submitted</u>
<u>Drink area in visiting room</u>	<u>6/5/18 Submitted</u>
<u>New chairs in visiting room</u>	<u>6/5/18 Submitted</u>
<u>Visiting room floor repair</u>	<u>7/10/18 Approved</u>
<u>Email Kiosk notification system</u>	<u>6/5/18 Submitted</u>
<u>Incentive Level 3 fundraiser "NON- A-Block"</u>	<u>6/5/18 Submitted</u>

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Gentlemen,
 The following is a list of reoccurring expenditures. These are some of the things the Lifer's Unlimited Club cover each year to improve the livability of the men inside, and as a way to give back to the community.

Angel's in the Outfield	\$1,200.00
Santa Claus Project (VR)	\$300.00
Halloween Candy (VR)	\$150.00
Easter Bunny Project (VR)	\$150.00
Holiday Decorations	\$300.00
Wedding Decorations / Setup	\$150.00
Stuffed Animal Project	\$1,000.00
Audio / Video Equipment	\$150.00
Wii Video Game / System (VR)	\$1,500.00
Board Games	\$100.00
Leap Pads (VR)	\$175.00
Books & Magazines	\$75.00
Coloring Contest (VR)	\$80.00
Back Pack Program	\$1,400.00
Death Row Art Project	\$200.00
Cleaning Supplies	\$800.00
Play Room Toys (VR)	\$700.00
I.F.M Hygiene Supplies	\$500.00
Office Supplies	\$1,000.00
I.C.H B.B.Q	\$300.00
Seniors Day	\$1200.00
American Legions	\$500.00
Annual Banquet (club covers)	\$1,400.00
Visiting Room Chair Replacement	\$150.00
Long Term Chair Replacement (VR)	\$20,972.00

So with this in mind, know where the money goes and how your contribution makes a difference.
 Thank you.
 Bill

FROM YOUR PRESIDENT

Greetings,

Lifers' are piloting a Book Service program. Lifers' Unlimited members would be able to purchase books online through our club! Club members would be allowed to submit an Inquiry form for the book(s) they're seeking (*form included in Newsletter*). Staff would look up the book(s) and Lifers' Office would send the inquiring member a cost list. Member would then submit an order form with a cd28. Once the cd28 clears, club account Staff would order book(s).

Rob

Announcements/Upcoming Events

2018 Meeting Dates

June 14th Fundraiser
 July 12th Open – ACLU/OJRC
 Aug 9th Banquet
 Sept 13th Banquet
 Oct 11th Open – Misha Isaac – Clemency; Rep. D. Stark
 Nov 8th Open – Just Outcomes
 Dec 13th Christmas Party

Life is what happens,
 When you make other plans.

Address Label



Chartered 1968
Volume 50 Issue# 7
July 2018
Oregon State Penitentiary
Salem Oregon

Banquet Reminder

The deadline for turning in your banquet information:

August 9th deadline is July 20th.

September 13th is deadline Aug 20th.

This will ensure we have enough food for everyone.

In July Lifers' Unlimited Club hosted another BBQ for the ICH guys here at OSP.

You will find a few pictures below of the men enjoying themselves. They were grateful and ask that we pass their gratitude to the membership for allowing them this opportunity.



Mission Statement

The purpose of the Lifers' Unlimited Club is to unite the incarcerated men of OSP with a goal of improving the quality of life for those inside and outside of these walls. The club will work with charity programs, informational services, youth speaking panels and other positive programs. We cannot change the past, however, we believe through rehabilitation and pro-social behavior we can create a more productive future.

Lifers' Annual Fundraise



Infirmiry Hygiene supplies

Some of you know that each week we provide basic hygiene supplies to men in our infirmiry. Roger donates his time each week to deliver those supplies, and He wanted to pass on a few words of gratitude from those gentlemen.

“Kind gestures from our club members... These go a long way for the men here at OSP Infirmiry. A small gesture of kindness can and does wonders for a person in pain and discomfort. When we don't know if we have a tomorrow, it's a relief to not have to worry about things like deodorant, or toothpaste. What a blessing you, the members, provide these men at a point when they are perhaps fighting for their lives. Your generosity goes a long way at a time when remembering to pick up those essentials is the last thing on your mind. The men on the receiving end of these blessings are extremely grateful and honored to know they are not forgotten. Thank you all.”

In addition to helping inmates find safe housing and a stable job, there are more immediate needs that often get overlooked. Inmates are released with the same belongings they had when they were incarcerated, so many don't have valid ID, appropriate clothing, or access to a phone upon their release. Many prisoners spend decades behind bars, said Hood, and will need to be guided through processes like renewing their ID while they are still in prison. “Some of these guys are used to putting coins in payphones,” said Hood. “They may not even know how to work a cellphone.”

Stabilization – “When they're physically out there we can't forget about them and say they're not our problem,” said Hood. Instead, he suggested correctional staff work with probation and parole agencies to provide released prisoners with a continuum of care. This involves making sure they have access to halfway houses or drug treatment centers, as well as educating the public on why these facilities might be needed in local areas. “We're sensitive to the fact the public is the victim in many ways, so we need to send correctional staff out into the communities and create some kind of understanding,” said Hood.

INVOLVING THE COMMUNITY IN RE-ENTRY INITIATIVES

More than 650,000 inmates are released from U.S. prisons every year. That's almost 2,000 people every day. “The reality is these prisoners are going to be your neighbors, so we need a re-entry game plan,” said Hood.

Perhaps one of the most successful re-entry initiatives that Hood oversaw during his wardenship in Oregon was organizing job fairs where members of the public, including CEOs in many cases, were invited into the prison to meet and recruit inmates approaching the end of their sentences. In the lead up to the event, staff helped inmates write their resumes and coached them to improve their interview skills.

“The inmates cleaned up their uniforms, buttoned their shirts properly and to be candid, every inmate did extremely well,” said Hood. “I could see the public was scared at first when they walked in, but it was amazing to watch that civility and humanity kick in and it was just like any other job fair.”

In addition to inviting the public into the prison, carefully selecting low-security inmates to participate in supervised programs out in the community can also help change the public's perception of offenders. The key to getting the public on board, said Hood, is developing programs that cost little to nothing to run and are impossible to criticize. There are many re-entry programs that can simultaneously educate offenders, prepare them for re-entry, and give something back to the community.

Some of the programs and initiatives that Hood oversaw include:

A woodwork workshop where inmates built desks, bookshelves, and furniture for government buildings or local schools;

A “Toys to Kids” program where inmates built thousands of toys a year to bring to the local children's hospital;

A horticulture center for inmates to grow flowers to bring to nursing homes;

A forestry program where inmates cleared hiking paths for the public;

Sending inmates to clean up local schools and repaint their bleachers over the weekend;

Sending inmates out to distribute sandbags during a flood;

Talent shows that inmates' families were invited to attend;

An inmate choir to sing with elderly folk during the holidays.

“These kinds of things get to the heart of the inmate and it gets to the heart of the public,” said Hood. Without building these bridges between the prison and the community, prisoners are more likely to struggle to reintegrate. “The prison environment doesn't replicate enough of the real world to let them successfully transition,” he said.

IMPROVING COMMUNICATION WITH PRISONERS

To work on IEPs and encourage inmates to participate in educational programs, correctional officers must be willing to build relationships with prisoners. In prisons that are only focused on custody and security, this can be a difficult thing to inspire. However, having been in the position before, Hood knows that wardens can lead by example to change the mindsets of their staff and the attitudes of their prisoners.

Hood has conducted transformational leadership seminars with the Warden Exchange for wardens with a variety of different philosophies and although re-entry initiatives are becoming the norm, he occasionally encounters those who are understandably resistant to the idea.

“Some prisons are so reactive in nature where every day wardens are putting out the fires, the fistfights, the stabbings. They're not thinking about re-entry, they're thinking about survival,” said Hood. “When I speak to those wardens, I say you don't have to listen to me, keep doing what you're doing, but it's not working.”

Implementing change starts with better communication, said Hood. He encourages wardens and staff to personalize their approach to inmates by looking in their file or simply asking them questions about themselves. Subtle changes such as referencing their family and calling them by their first name, rather than their last name or inmate number, can make a big difference.

“I don't want them hanging around with the guys thinking about how to sneak in contraband. I don't want them to get into the gangs. I want them thinking about family, community, things like that,” said Hood.

Ultimately, prisoners and staff are working towards the same objective – successful re-entry. Not only does better communication set the foundation for re-entry initiatives, but it also creates a safer prison environment. “We've got to realize we're putting people at risk when we push or curse at an inmate and another officer gets harmed because that inmate's angry,” said Hood. “How can we encourage them to change their behavior when they go home if we can't do it in our prisons?”

Successful re-entry initiatives are in the interest of inmates, correctional staff and the wider community. While prisons will always need to be disciplined, controlled environments, Hood believes it's about striking a balance. From giving a prisoner a handshake to reinforce good behavior to working with the public on re-entry initiatives, hood hopes the correctional system will soon live up to its name.

About the Author: Jinnie Chua is the assistant editor at In Public Safety, an American Military University sponsored website. She graduated from New York University in 2016 with a bachelor's degree in Journalism and Sociology. At In Public Safety, Jinnie covers issues and trends relevant to professionals in law enforcement, fire services, emergency management and national security.