

REENTERING THE WORKFORCE

RHODE ISLAND'S RHODE TO REENTRY INITIATIVE

The vast majority of men and women imprisoned in Rhode Island are serving short sentences for non-violent offenses. Many come from backgrounds of physical or emotional abuse, substance abuse, or neglect. Guidance, opportunities, positive role models, and healthy relationships have been lacking in many of their lives. Most want nothing more than to become productive citizens, to earn an honest living, and to provide for their families. A decent job can be the deciding factor as to the direction their lives will take when they leave prison.

BENEFITS OF HIRING AN EX-OFFENDER:

- A Federal Work Opportunity Tax Credit of up to \$2,400 for each ex-offender you employ may be available to you. Information is available at www.doleta.gov/business/Incentives/opptax.
- In Rhode Island, there is money available through the Governor's Workforce Board to employers who hire between eight and ten ex-offenders. For more information, visit www.rihric.com.
- Often ex-offenders are required to undergo mandatory drug testing, which might set your mind at ease if you are concerned about those with a history of substance abuse.
- A federal bonding program can provide insurance for you if you hire a convicted felon. Information is available at www.Bonds4jobs.com.
- Those leaving prison have good job readiness skills thanks to the work preparation they've received, an advantage which might not be available to others.
- By employing an ex-offender, you are contributing to the public safety and financial stability of our state.
- In Rhode Island, the vast majority of those leaving prison do so on probation, and a small number on parole. A Probation and Parole Officer is a direct point of contact for you and can assist you and the employee in making the relationship work.

DISPELLING THE MYTHS

Ex-offenders represent a cross section of the workforce and have useful skills and qualifications. Don't let the following stereotypes deter you from hiring a potentially valuable employee:

MYTH *Ex-offenders are only capable of doing manual or repetitive work.*

TRUTH People with criminal records come from all areas of society and bring a wide range of skills and experience.

MYTH *Ex-offenders are uneducated.*

TRUTH Many have graduated from high school and some have post-secondary education. Many take advantage of educational opportunities in prison which may include earning a GED and developing English language skills.

MYTH *Ex-offenders are unreliable.*

TRUTH In general, ex-offenders are no less reliable than other workers. They are often more committed to succeeding because there is more riding on their success.

MYTH *Ex-offenders will always need to be watched.*

TRUTH Ex-offenders have served their time and want a fresh start.

MYTH *Other employees won't want to work with ex-offenders.*

TRUTH No one other than the direct supervisor or manager needs to know the employee's past.

MYTH *Our company policy excludes ex-offenders due to legal restrictions or the type of work involved.*

TRUTH It is a common misunderstanding that certain professions bar people with criminal records. Refusal is actually determined by the type of offense, not the existence of an offense.

IF YOU ARE CONCERNED ABOUT SOMEONE'S CRIMINAL HISTORY, PLEASE CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING:

- How much time has passed since the offense occurred?
- Is the offense relevant to the specific job being applied for?
- How many offenses has the person committed?
- What is the nature and seriousness of the offense?
- What is the person's attitude regarding the offense?

ANOTHER OPTION FOR EMPLOYERS: WORK RELEASE

Inmates on Work Release leave for off-site jobs during the day and return to Minimum Security at night. These inmates are carefully selected and have ongoing supervision. Employers who hire Work Release inmates have a direct point of contact with Minimum Security staff. The Rhode Island Department of Corrections Work Release Program is designed to help inmates who meet its criteria to pursue further training and vocational opportunities before they have completed their sentence. This increases their marketability in preparation for a successful release. There are several conditions that must be met in order for an inmate and an employer to qualify for the program. Both parties must sign a contract agreeing to adhere to all rules and regulations prior to job placement. Under the best of circumstances, this work relationship can continue after the inmate's release to his or her home community, immediately eliminating one of the burdens of successful reentry.



JOB READINESS TRAINING AND EDUCATION

As a result of ongoing partnerships between the RIDOC, the Department of Labor and Training, the Community College of Rhode Island, the Urban League, and the Family Life Center, job readiness training is offered to Rhode Island inmates who are nearing release. Contractors from these agencies work full time in the state's prisons, offering résumé writing and other job skills preparation. We invite the business community to join in this partnership. With your involvement, we can help those who are transitioning back to their communities realize success, thus lowering the recidivism rate and benefiting all Rhode Islanders.

RIDOC provides formal training in construction, OSHA safety and certification, computer skills, carpentry and cabinet making, metal fabrication, welding, computer-assisted drafting (CAD), asbestos abatement, food service/ServSafe certification, barbering, and automotive so that offenders who qualify can leave with marketable skills. Less formal training opportunities exist throughout the institutions in warehouse and distribution, needle trades, furniture refinishing and manufacturing, panel system manufacturing and installation, auto body work, printing, landscaping, and janitorial services.

On the outside, ex-offenders can visit local netWORKri sites or other community service agencies who are working hard at the ground level to assist them in finding employment once they are released. The need for the business community to provide employment opportunities is the key to positive outcomes for many of these individuals.



BRIAN MILLER It's a struggle to pay the bills when he's earning \$8.50 an hour, but Brian Miller, a father of three, isn't complaining. Living in a Providence apartment with his girlfriend and young daughter is a whole lot better than doing time. Brian puts in 40 hours a week at Riverdale Window & Door, where he's learned many valuable skills on the job. "As soon as I got locked up," he notes, "I said, 'I've got to get a job.'" Fortunately for Brian, there are employers like Ken Cato, who have given jobs to hundreds of work release inmates and ex-offenders. Brian feels fortunate that he's been able to turn his life around, saying, "Perseverance is something we all have to strive for."

" I'VE HAD CLOSE TO 300 GUYS WORKING FOR ME OVER THE PAST 20 OR SO YEARS, BOTH WHILE THEY WERE IN PRISON AND AFTER RELEASE. THEY'VE BEEN AMONG THE BEST EMPLOYEES I'VE HAD. MOST ARE VERY PROFESSIONAL, RELIABLE, AND EAGER TO PLEASE."

KEN CATO, OWNER, RIVERDALE WINDOW AND DOOR



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HELPFUL CONTACT NUMBERS
 netWORKri (888) 616 JOBS
 RIDOC Work Release (401) 462 3175
 Governor's Workforce Board RI (401) 462 8714