FOUR PRINCIPLES OF EMPLOYMENT RETRЕНTRY

Research and observation led us to develop a set of principles to guide our quest for innovative approaches and more powerful program models. Still evolving, these are:

First Principle: Successful and cost-effective prisoner reentry depends upon sentencing laws, policies and courts that minimize incarceration and maximize diversion. Diversion is accomplished through policy changes including alternatives to arrest and charging for less serious offenses, court diversion programs, a reduction of mandatory minimums especially for low-level drug offenses, rapid disposition without incarceration of minor offenders, and the use of alternatives to incarceration for more serious or intransient offenders. Reentry programs become prohibitively expensive and overloaded when they are used as a substitute for diversion and treatment or services provided in the community.

Second Principle: The goal of employment-related reentry programs must be to connect returning prisoners to jobs. A person leaving prison with only general workforce preparation or training in skills that are not in demand has an uphill battle competing for jobs in a recession economy which has lost traditional assembly and manufacturing jobs and in which new jobs require specialized and technology training.

Third Principle: Engage private enterprise as a partner in the design, delivery, funding and follow-up to employment-related reentry programs. As do competitive trade and technical schools and colleges, reentry programs must meet the needs of an evolving labor market if graduates are to gain employment. Corrections must partner with business entities to design and deliver training programs that will equip prisoners to compete in any open hiring process, help inmates who are entrepreneurs to develop legitimate business models, and to otherwise perform well enough to justify financial support for reentry programs from business.

Forth Principle: Address the problems of employment reentry and economic development together. A disproportionate number of prisoners return to the same distressed communities now being redeveloped with combinations of private and public funding. Through training inmates in needed skills, providing businesses tax credits for hiring returning prisoners and preferences for training and hiring returning prisoners in the grant process, returning prisoners can be employed in their own neighborhoods rebuilding the communities their crimes diminished.