New Ideas and Innovative Approaches to Employment Related Reentry Programming

Presented for Discussion to the Illinois Department of Corrections
Stateville Correctional Center
Joliet, Illinois
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By the Program for Prison Reentry Strategies
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Mission

The Program for Prison Reentry Strategies' mission is to advance the employment side of prisoner reentry in the midst of a recession and severe job loss. Its work focuses on developing and promoting new approaches to reentry and to develop new, effective and cost-efficient program models that will connect returning prisoners who need jobs to jobs that need doing.

Emerging Guiding Principles for Employment-Related Prisoner Reentry Programs*

We have derived guiding principles for employment-related prisoner reentry programs from our analysis of programs that are shown to be successful and from research into strategies and programs that are being used to advance economic development and enterprise. There are four:

1. Assure cost-effectiveness by targeting longer-term prisoners who have to be incarcerated and use the necessary period of incarceration to maximum advantage.

2. Design employment-related reentry programs that connect prisoners to jobs

3. Engage private enterprise and create business-corrections partnerships in the design, delivery, funding and follow-up to corrections' reentry programs

4. Integrate reentry programs and strategies with strategies and programs put in place to promote economic development and jobs creation in disadvantaged communities.

*Draft prepared and circulated 5 January 2011
Reentry to Rebuild: A Corrections/Community Development Program

Program Concept

Reentry to Rebuild is less a single program model that it is a strategy for addressing two pressing needs: the need for jobs-producing economic development in disadvantaged communities and the need for jobs for people returning to those communities from prison. Reentry to Rebuild puts returning prisoners to work rebuilding communities and connects returning prisoners to jobs that will be created in those communities. It makes former offenders part of the solution to urban blight.

Participation in Reentry to Rebuild gives businesses who hire people returning from prison a competitive advantage when they apply for public grant funds and contracts for community development. For its part in Reentry to Rebuild, IDOC trains prisoners who have an aptitude for the kind of work that needs be done and who can be released at the time and place where the work will be done in general or specialized skills required for those jobs.

Reentry to Rebuild can do these things by directing the smallest portion of the millions of dollars states and cities are spending to encourage public and private economic development in blighted communities and to bring jobs to urban areas. For example, just one program, called Tax Incentive Financing or “TIF,” generated $1.5 Billion for community development and public projects in Chicago in the years 2000 – 2008. TIF awarded an average of approximately $130-300 million each year to businesses which then invested about five times the TIF award into residential and business construction projects, parks and other neighborhood improvements. The total public/private TIF investment in neighborhood economic development in Chicago has been around $650 – 1,500 million each year. To get an idea of the scale, 1% of these monies, if used to train and hire returning prisoners, doubles to quadruples the amount spent on reentry through the Second Chance Act grant in 2011.

Businesses could be encouraged to train and hire returning prisoners because TIF grants are preferentially awarded to businesses whose applications demonstrate a commitment to hire Chicago residents and hard-to-place workers. If the city, which has been disposed to hire returning prisoners, similarly encouraged businesses applying for TIF grants to commit to hire returning prisoners from the Reentry to Rebuild program, businesses would do so when possible to improve chances of obtaining a grant.

Under Reentry to Rebuild businesses could reduce their training costs and improve their employees’ efficiency by arranging with IDOC to provide training for potential new employees. Businesses could specify the training program, provide the training curriculum or protocols, or assign their trainers of their own choice to conduct skills training within a prison. Because TIF projects must be planned years in advance to go through a grant process, any specialized labor needs are also known by project managers years in advance. The IDOC would have the time to train inmates assigned to Reentry to Rebuild in the skills needed for those projects, ready with a pool of trained candidates at the location of the project at the time needed.
The potential for partnerships between Corrections and businesses in a joint effort to improve local communities is best explained by example: see the text box below and the two pages following that describe “Shops and Lofts at Stony Island and 47th”.

"Shops and Lofts" at Stony Island and 47th

Stony Island and 47th Streets in Chicago is empty, run down, and in distress. In fact, as the location of a new private development partially funded by TIF (Tax Incentive Financing), it was officially determined to be "blighted."

Four developers received a parcel of land from the city for One Dollar. They were awarded TIF grants toward their cost of the project in the amount of $8,833,328. The developers will invest the balance of the projected $85 million cost of completing a mixed-use development project that will have 140-170 residential units, 28,000 square feet of grocery-anchored retail space and 10,000 square feet of small shop space in 1,200 – 4,800 square foot units. There will be street and on-site parking. A later phase of development will add 18,000 square feet of retail space.

To improve their competitiveness in applying for TIF grants, applicants could be required to commit to hiring returning prisoners for portions of the work to be done. On a project of this type, developers and contractors could work with the IDOC to identify the kinds of job skills needed, and then arrange with IDOC to train prisoners in those skills who would be available to work at the time the developers need them.

Private investors are confident about success: in the past, 90% of all local dollars were being spent outside the neighborhood. But with an Albi Market expected to occupy the grocery space, restaurants, a coffee shop and shops serving retail needs of local residents, the buying patterns and the condition of the neighborhood should change. As was the case during construction of the project, new businesses can be encouraged to hire returning prisoners, particularly those who are specifically trained to work in grocery stores and restaurants.

On the two following pages: a portion of a Developer’s brochure depicts one TIF-funded project pending construction at Stony Island and 47th Streets in Chicago, IL.
SITE INFORMATION:

- Grocery-anchored development located at 47th and Cottage Grove
- 28,000 square feet of retail with 10,000 square feet of small shop space available for lease
- 1,200 - 4,800 square foot units available
- Delivery to retail tenants in 2011
- On-site and street parking
- 120 apartments available in 2011
- Phase II will include an additional 18,000 square feet of retail space

HOUSING GROWTH:

- New housing construction and renovation doubles the city average

DAILY TRAFFIC COUNTS:

- 13,900 cars on 47th Street
  Source: Illinois Department of Transportation

SIZE:

GLA: 46,000 square feet (Phases I & II)
Development targets Cottage Grove corridor

A proposed development aims to bring shops and condos to the under-retailed Cottage Grove corridor on the city's Southside.

The project is in the early stages, being developed by Mohagony Ventures, a partnership between Columbus-based firms of Skilken and Troy Enterprises. It will bring 50,000 square feet of retail and 170 residential units to the city block between Cottage Grove and Evans avenues, and 47th and 48th streets.

"With this project, the retail will be an equal partner to the residential," says Frank Petruziello, a managing partner with Mohagony. "In a lot of developments, the retail is an afterthought, put in the place where no one wants to live. Retail is the prime reason for this; we're trying to revitalize the Cottage Grove area."

Currently in the entitlement stages, Petruziello expects to have construction start in one year.

Leasing will be handled by Mohagony, which is hoping to find a coffee shop, a convenience store, some restaurants and other local retail uses.

When asked why target the city's Southside, Petruziello is quick to answer.

"Because 90 percent of the retail dollars are going elsewhere," he says. "We're just trying to bring the basic services back to that neighborhood."

—Staff Report

PUBLISHED

Illinois Real Estate News Journal,
September 2006
IDOC's New Foods/ New Markets Initiative

Program Concept

Innovations and change in the way food is produced, distributed, prepared and served are creating new employment opportunities in locations as diverse as high end restaurants to urban farms and food cooperatives in disadvantaged communities.

The New Foods / New Market Initiative expands IDOC's existing horticultural vocational program. Programs will grow a variety of edible, marketable herbs, fruits and vegetables, beans and legumes. They will grow produce in quantity, expanding what are now greenhouses and restricted, small fields into larger plots capable of producing small crops. The New Foods / New Market Initiative will attempt to enter produce into the market, targeting food cooperatives, local green and farmer's markets in urban areas such as Champaign-Urbana and Chicago. It will seek out high-end consumers.

By harvesting and selling produce in a growing alternatives food industry the New Foods / New Market Initiative will be able to teach not just planting and growing techniques (and patience and the value of getting one's hands in the dirt) but marketing, transportation, the economics of the business.

To go another step, the New Foods / New Market Initiative could equip prisoners for employment in the food industry through a redesigned educational/vocational program that would track through more than one correctional facility. For example, a prisoner could begin the program in a rural, farm-land-based medium security prison such as Sheridan with courses in all aspects of farming. After graduation from that program, he would be transferred to a minimum security work camp to commence introductory training work in the restaurant business.

Moreover, IDOC should attempt to work with farmers and transporters involved in the fresh foods movement. Some new farms and cooperatives are still struggling financially; the New Foods / New Market Initiative might intentionally market its produce to urban and local farmers at below-market rates as a kind of state-sponsored short term subsidy to those new businesses.

Existing Models and Resources

The IDOC has two potentially exemplary vocational programs: culinary arts and horticulture.

There are a number of Local Farm, organic and fresh seasonal food-producing cooperatives in Chicago. Most of these deliver produce to individual consumers, to specialty markets and to restaurants, the preferred customer for any farming enterprise.
The Urban Farming movement has many leaders; in this area one lead organization is Will Allen’s “Growing Power” headquartered in Milwaukee with a local office in Jackson Park, Chicago. Another organization, “Growing Home,” is already a contractor to the IDOC.

Recently, a major effort to establish an Urban Farm on the south side at 103rd Street received considerable publicity. The farming operation is directed by Growing Power. Many of the staff were paid from a federal-sourced state program called Illinois Works. This program has now been cut. So there is a need for employees simply to build and maintain the farming infrastructure. Prisoners trained in the Department’s Horticultural Program and housed in a work release center could perform this work while in training. They could be paid very modestly especially while in training. In this and other ways the IDOC could become a contributing partner in a neighborhood economic development program while connecting prisoners to jobs that will benefit economic development and the health of their own community.

Implicated Changes in IDOC Policy and Operations

IDOC needs to be willing to expand horticultural programs to the point at which they can place produce in the market stream.

IDOC needs to lift artificial restrictions on what can be grown inside prison walls.
An Overarching Strategy: Corrections Connecting Inmates to Jobs

Program Concept

Corrections Connecting Inmates to Jobs is simply proactive job placement. The IDOC prepares prisoners for jobs its staff know need to be filled, matches one prisoner to one job through outreach, knowledge of the field and cultivated relationships with employers, and supports the prisoner’s application much as would the placement office of a community college, technical school or graduate program.

The traditional approach to employment-related reentry has been to prepare prisoners to compete in the open job market. Job-readiness and workforce preparedness programs such as the Safer Foundation provides to all Sheridan inmates teach personal, interview and social skills, resume writing, and general job skills. Vocational and some educational programs provide prisoners with marketable skills. All of this is important. But in a recession, leaving prison with as strong a resume including a GED and certificates in one or another job classification is not enough to move a former prisoner to the head of line of applicants.

Corrections Connecting Inmates to Jobs requires corrections or contract staffs who know one or more industries well to work with small numbers of prisoners who have successfully completed training or vocational programs. While it presents an additional cost element, Corrections Connecting Inmates to Jobs makes sense if the intense effort to connect a prisoner to a job helps avoid wasting the resources spent on training and education.

Existing Models and Resources

The IDOC already has programs that proactively attempt to place prisoners into jobs before they leave their correctional facility. Two examples are the Sheridan Jobs Fairs which have brought employers to interview prisoners for jobs prior to their release and the jobs developer, hired over the summer of 2010 by the Homebuilders Institute at Sheridan. The jobs developer takes resumes and descriptions of prisoners who are completing the Homebuilder’s training program at Sheridan to potential employers around the state and to locations to which inmates will be released.

The Safer Foundation provides community-based follow-up employment-related services for returning prisoners in some locations.

We have encountered individuals and organizations which provide assistance to returning prisoners who are looking for jobs. A very few of these engage in direct, proactive, person-person advocacy with potential employees for their clients. These proactive placement workers make it their business to know employers who do hire people coming home from prison. They track openings and match applicants to the jobs as they become available.
Highlighted Changes in IDOC Policy and Operations

The IDOC should replicate the Homebuilder’s job developer position to promote employment for graduates of each vocational or educational program.

IDOC should permit prisoners access to filtered, monitored internet resources from within prisons for the purpose of facilitating job searches.

The IDOC should allow regulated follow-up contact between a staff representative who provide placement assistance and former prisoners engaged in active job searches. At present, some Community College employees use home computers to do job searches, provide prisoners the information and facilitate an application to found employs. They bring the information back to the prison and assist the prisoner in writing or approaching the employer about a job. But once the prisoner actually leaves and returns to his or her home community, they are not allowed to have contact with Corrections staff and Community College instructors to follow up on applications. As one result, the educational professionals at the Community College do not know the outcome of most prisoners’ job searches and are unable to evaluate the effectiveness of their own efforts or the quality of prospective employers.

Source of Funding
Second Chance Act grants may support some of the steps or personnel increases required to fully implement this program model. Otherwise, additional hiring of an undetermined number of job placement advocates would be required.
Tracked and Targeted Skills Training

Program Concept

Tracked and Targeted Skills Training involves a partnership between IDOC and an established business that is expanding or a new business or industry which can anticipates a need for workers with specific skill sets at time two or more years in the future. In the course of their partnership, the IDOC and the business design an academic/technical/vocational programs of at least one year duration to teach skills or techniques that the business will be seeking in employees. Prisoners who are identified by the IDOC and who wish to participate may be given an appropriate amount of time in which they will address issues including substance abuse or literacy before entering the Tracked and Targeted Skills Training program.

Among the many types of companies which might make good partners with IDOC are: emerging “green energy” industries, hi-tech companies in developing fields, Fresh Foods or other large scale grocery stores, fast-and convenience store enterprises, new bakeries and food services, grocers and retailers who will be opening up in underserved communities. Partner companies need not be large; see the text box below, “BeeLine Industries.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BeeLine Industries</th>
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<td>Brenda Palms Barber is the CEO of the North Lawndale Employment Network, a non-profit organization dedicated to expanding employment opportunities for residents of one of Chicago’s more disadvantaged neighborhoods. She is also the CEO for BeeLine Industries which makes honey and other products such as lip balm and skin care lotions from bee’s honey and wax. BeeLine employs about ten disadvantaged workers and returning prisoners. It trains returning prisoners in the business of bees and honey; it also strives to instill an entrepreneurial spirit in the returning prisoners that come to it for work.</td>
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BeeLine’s hives are inside Chicago city limits, in fact behind the NLEN offices. Brenda Palms Barber is a great interview; she has been on NPR, local radio shows, and in national and local print media. She talks about “marketing” as if it was the most natural human endeavor. She thinks constantly about how to expand her business. She envisions a million-dollar a year enterprise in multiple locations.

When we asked Ms. Palmer what she wanted to do to improve BeeLine’s contribution to prisoner reentry, she responded without a moment’s delay: “Get the Department of Corrections to let me bring hives and the business into a prison!”

If the IDOC accepts Ms. Barber’s offer, BeeLine Industries would likely be a good example of a Tracked and Targeted Skills Training Program. BeeLine’s hives would occupy some corner of a prison yard or field. Its processing plant would take up at most one room 20 feet x 30 feet with tables, jars and equipment. The program would need a class room or possibly two.

Classes would teach the business, the care of bees, the economics of a profit-making marketing enterprise. Barber’s staff would train, supervise and educate. Upon graduation, prisoners returning to Chicago might work at BeeLine, but others might open up aviaries in different communities. As is the case at BeeLine in Chicago, students who do not wish to continue in the bee business have at least learned something about their entrepreneurial, self-help side.
The key to a Tracked and Targeted Skills Training program is that when it commences, participating inmates are moved to a unit or wing of a correctional facility dedicated the program. Inmates are put through classes, given reading periods, may work with equipment, take tests and may work part time for training purposes much as the employees of a major company or students in a vocational training program would do. They will also receive drug counseling and other services relevant to individual needs during the course of the program.

Inmates graduate from Tracked and Targeted Skills Training as a class. The business, whose representatives have had opportunities to observe participants during the course of the program, are obligated to consider, but not required to hire, all prisoners who satisfactorily complete its training program. The business receives full federal and state tax credits for any prisoners hired.

Inmates will be paid for any time spent in on the job training, apprenticeships, or supervised employment. They will be required to use some portion of earnings for relocation, housing, transportation and other costs associated with starting a new job.

A Tracked and Targeted Skills Training program should produce high employment and high retention rates for prisoners because each inmate who completes the program will have been trained to do the specific job or set of jobs for which he or she will apply before or immediately after release from prison.

Existing Models and Resources

IDOC has elements of a Tracked and Targeted Skills Training program model in place at Sheridan Correctional Center. The Sheridan program requires a minimum of a year left on time to serve, selects inmates according to criteria, and operates as a designated, "campus" facility.

The Illinois DOC Five Year Plan is reported to include designating correctional facilities for particular uses such as: drug treatment, vocational and educational training, and medical care. With only a modest variation in the Plan, the Department could designate a correctional center or set aside a wing or unit as the residential and class area for inmates in Tracked and Targeted Skills Training.

As envisioned, the Tracked and Targeted Skills Training is remarkably similar to a concept announced in a grant solicitation by the Bureau of Justice Assistance, "Second Chance Act Technology Careers Training Demonstration Projects for Incarcerated Adults and Juvenile." Applications are due 3 March 2011.

A variation of this Tracked and Targeted Skills Training could involve collaboration with various departments of the University of Illinois or other academic institutions. The University of Illinois
could be a resource for designing training programs, designing training equipment, and otherwise advising in the establishment of a program intended to meet specialized business needs.

**Implicated Changes in IDOC Policy and Operations**

The Department would presumably have to make a number of changes in its classification and assignment system for inmates. The model envisions inmates housed in one location or in a campus-type setting convenient to classes, equipment, vocational or training programs.

The Department might have to negotiate new collective bargaining agreements so as to allow training and teaching by university, industry or business personnel.

IDOC needs to establish an administrative mechanism through which it can connect to and explore relations with businesses with whom it might partner. In Kansas, a Deputy to the Director has this responsibility.

**Source of Funding**

The previously-mentioned Second Chance Act grant solicitation offers one source of up to $750,000 over one year for a pilot project very similar to **Tracked and Targeted Skills Training**.

A **Tracked and Targeted Skills Training** program has the potential to support itself partially or fully through the contract or arrangements with business partners. Businesses could be expected to provide teaching faculty, training personnel and equipment unique to their needs. It might be possible to obtain an agreement with local business to agree to pay other charges since they benefit by being relieved of much of the costs of training inmates.
IDOC Private Industry Program

Program Concept

Illinois engages in "Prison Industries" to the extent that it manufactures certain goods, such as uniforms or furniture, for government use, paying prisoners' wages far below minimum wage. The state has soundly rejected the federally-authorized PIE (Prison Industry Enhancement) Program under the terms of which private industries operate within or in proximity to prisons, use prison labor paid something close to prevailing wages, and sell goods on the open market as well as to government agencies.

It might be time to reconsider.

The PIE program was first authorized by the federal government in 1979. Since then it has been poorly understood. PIE has been described as carrying forward a tradition of encouraging work practices and job readiness for state prisoners. But it has done so imperfectly, the PIE program goals in most states not having included prisoner reentry. PIE programs kept prisoners occupied and produced goods at what some argued were below market costs to industry. They often did not contribute to inmates' marketable skills. Unions opposed PIE programs. They are non-existent in Illinois.

But a case can be made that private businesses can train and hire prisoners for work within and outside prison walls to the advantage of both the business and the prisoner. The case can also be made that in certain circumstances, bringing private businesses into prisons or allowing prisoners to work outside the walls in private companies can be to the advantage of: the prisoner; the business; the state for financial reasons; the Department of Corrections for program reasons; and, the economy and jobs creation within the state.

Kansas has the largest percentage of its prisoners employed in prison industries – about 1/6. Data sheets from 2008 follow this page to show that a substantial amount of revenue is generated by about 30 industries which employ Kansas prisoners. Most work within prison walls but a substantial number work in private businesses outside the walls each day.

In Kansas and nationally the struggle about PIE centers on concerns that prisoners are paid less than prevailing rates and that prison-based private industries have a competitive advantage while the community suffers from depressed wages. The concern is legitimate although there are reasonable analyses in Kansas showing that businesses do not always gain a competitive advantage by employing prisoners.

In Illinois, and elsewhere, it might be time to reconsider and to allow prisoners to work in private businesses, earning better than minimum wage. It may be true that a business that
hires prisoners incurs lower labor costs. (It may also not be true.) In that case, labor and competing businesses have grounds to oppose the practice.

But if we regard whatever financial breaks a business that hires and pays prisoners fairly may receive as the equivalent of a tax credit or a government grant awarded to attract a business to a location or to retain a business in a location, all for reasons of economic development, we see things differently. First of all, the company that is hiring prisoners may have no more competitive advantage than a company that wins a government grant or negotiates a tax credit as an inducement to come to or stay in a state or jurisdiction. Second, if the arrangements to hire prisoners do help bring a company to a location, or retain one that had contemplated leaving, than perhaps there is a net gain to the tax base, to the number of jobs available in the community, and to economic development.

The Kansas PIE programs, notably the Workman Fund programs operating outside of prisons, do contribute to employment reentry. Prisoners leaving prison from those programs frequently do so with marketable skills, work experience, accumulated savings and a lot of self respect.

The recession hit Kansas hard. At least two businesses of a type that left the state for the south or Asia remained because of the advantage to them of working with prisoners on their labor force.

Private prison industries offer a solid model for prisoner reentry. They may also help bring in, or retain businesses that are struggling in the recession, pulled away by economic and competitive pressures. By permitting prisoners to receive intensive hands on training past the point of mere competency and to the point of being a solid asset to employers, it is quite possible that we can also help build new businesses and retain older ones, aiding rather than harming the economy.

It may be, then, that a smart reentry strategy is also a smart economic development strategy. For that reason, Illinois should take a close new look at private prison industries.
Impact Design is a garment wholesaler and contract decorator combined into one company. From basic tees to premier polos, everything the customer needs is in stock, and they have the embroidery and screen print capacity required to support their customers' demands. Promotional products distributors can finally purchase their wholesale apparel and contract decoration from the same source. Impact Design began operations at the Lansing Correctional Facility in October 1995 and currently employs 264 inmates.

Heatron is a global leader in design, integration and production services for thermal management and heat generation systems used in original equipment manufactured products in a wide variety of industries. Heatron supplies a wide range of major industries including: Medical - kidney dialysis equipment, fluid warmers, DNA sequencing; telecommunications - satellite antennas, UPS and control devices.
FY 2008 Kansas Correctional Industries Private Industry Data

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<tr>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Hours</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gross Pay</td>
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<tr>
<td>Net Pay</td>
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<tr>
<td>Federal Tax</td>
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<td>State Tax</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social Security</td>
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<tr>
<td>Court Ordered Restitution</td>
<td>$235,209</td>
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<tr>
<td>Crime Victims Reparations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Room and Board</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mandatory Savings</td>
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<tr>
<td>Net Pay After Obligations</td>
<td>$4,207,976</td>
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(Note: Court Ordered wage garnishments for child support payments not reflected.)

Public benefits range from monies being placed into tax supported programs such as the Crime Victims Reparations Board to inmates' mandatory savings. Typically, upon release, an inmate receives a $100.00 "gate check" and is immediately responsible for rent, utilities, transportation and food. The money in the inmate's mandatory savings account allows the inmate a better opportunity to succeed upon their release from prison.