

Redeeming Lives Through Work

“We are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared believe, yet at the very same time we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope.”

- Timothy Keller.

Those returning from prison face enormous obstacles: roughly two-thirds of released inmates are rearrested within three years¹. We believe the Kingdom purpose of our work is to break that cycle through discipleship. By offering returning citizens steady employment, Christ-like compassion, and the skills they need, we will help them meet their practical and spiritual needs.

Equipping people with jobs not only provides income but restores hope and dignity². Research shows well-designed work programs can dramatically improve outcomes³. For example, the Minnesota Department of Corrections EMPLOY program used rigorous matching methods and found that participants' hazard of re-incarceration dropped by 46%⁴. Likewise, the Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO) transitional jobs program significantly cut three-year rearrest rates (by about 16–22%) for participants who enrolled soon after release⁵.

However, such success is rare⁶: of the dozens of programs we studied, only a few showed statistically significant, long-term drops in recidivism and participant outcomes. In fact, a recent U.S. Department of Labor study found that only one of the programs they investigated (from a smaller subset than ours) produced a positive return on investment (from a financial perspective,) and that was the only program that ensured all participants moved quickly to a paid job⁷.

¹ Cindy Redcross et al, *Work After Prison: One-Year Findings from the Transitional Jobs Reentry Demonstration* (New York: MDRC, 2010), ES-1; George W. Bush, *2004 State of the Union Address* (2024).

² RecycleForce, *Building Campaign* (Indianapolis: RecycleForce, 2021–22), 1; Cindy Redcross et al, *More Than a Job: Final Results from the Evaluation of the Center for Employment Opportunities Transitional Jobs Program* (New York: MDRC, 2012).

³ Hannah G. Cortina et al, *Charting the Path to Employment After Incarceration: A Research Synthesis of Employment-Focused Reentry Programs* (Princeton, Mathematica Inc., 2024).

⁴ Susan McNeeley, *A Long-Term Follow-Up Evaluation of an Employment Assistance Reentry Program* (St. Paul: Minnesota DOC, March 2011), Table 4 and accompanying text, 17.

⁵ Redcross, *More Than a Job*, 27

⁶ Hannah G. Cortina, *Charting the Path*, 14-21,39

⁷ Cindy Redcross, Bret Barden, Dan Bloom, *The Enhanced Transitional Jobs Demonstration*, (U.S. Dept. of Labor, 2016). RecycleForce, by far the most expensive program we evaluated, was the only program with a positive return on investment in their study. The non-profitable programs were Parent Success Initiative; Good Transitions - Goodwill of North Georgia; OEWD of San Francisco; Next STEP; Pathways2Work; Supporting Families Through Work

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By focusing on these evidence-based successes, we honor Christ's call to care for prisoners while stewarding our resources responsibly.

Methodology

Our design is grounded in rigorous research. We included peer-reviewed and official reports and excluded anecdotal descriptions or non-quantitative accounts. Programs without clear statistics and follow-up were excluded from our review.

In total, we evaluated over 30 programs and only relied on formal impact evaluations. By focusing on these evidence-based successes, we honor Christ's call to care for prisoners while stewarding our resources responsibly.

Only four of these demonstrated significant, long-term success⁸. Long-term meaning periods ranging from 12 months to 10 years. Two others reported success, but due to the scantness of the data, we were unable to include them⁹.

This select subset shows that when former prisoners find stable work and loving support, communities are blessed with safety and renewal. The biblical principle is clear: just as Christ is transforming us, even the most challenged lives can be transformed (2 Cor.5:17).

Our Findings

Drawing on this evidence, our faith-based reentry program combines rapid job placement with holistic support. Like other effective ministries, we aim to move participants from prison to paychecks quickly – minimizing idle time that can lead back to crime. Similarly, we will integrate career coaching and life mentoring, echoing Paul's call to bear one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2). In short, our ministry will restore whole lives by offering belonging, purpose, and a pathway to a living wage.

⁸ C. William Bowersox, *Employment-Focused Reentry Programs: Summary of Evidence, Design Elements, and Measured Impacts*, (Dalton, EzerWorks, 2025), 2, The four programs are EMPLOY, RecycleForce, CEO, America Works.

⁹ C. William Bowersox, *Employment-Focused Reentry Programs: Summary of Evidence, Design Elements, and Measured Impacts*, (Dalton, EzerWorks, 2025), 2, The two programs are Safe Street Prisoner Release and Allegheny County's Reentry Initiative, Track #1.

What is Critical for Program Success

- **Immediate engagement after release:** Participants should start within 90 days of release. No group that started later had any significant improvement in life outcomes¹⁰.
- **Real work and retention support:** Rapid attachment to work is critical to success¹¹. Both a subsidized job or weekly job search support/placement help until a job is obtained have been seen to be effective. After a job is obtained, long-term retention support (coaching, intervention, case management, and/or financial incentives¹²) help ensure the participant stays engaged with the program and work.
- **Wraparound Supports:**¹³ A case manager must be assigned to each participant to help them manage their reentry into society. This includes helping them navigate available support from government agencies.

What Causes Programs to Fail

- **Classroom or vocational training alone** causes no gains in recidivism.¹⁴
- **Subsidized jobs without mentoring and retention support** do not improve public-safety outcomes¹⁵

¹⁰ Hannah G. Cortina, *Charting the Path*, 22; Cindy Redcross, *Work After Prison*, Executive Summary and chap. 3, esp. ES-2, 35–41; Grant Duwe, *An Outcome Evaluation of MINNCOR's EMPLOY Program*, 6-8

¹¹ RecycleForce, *Building Campaign*; Cindy Redcross, *Work After Prison*, 107

¹² Cindy Redcross, *Work After Prison*, 103, Some indications that retention bonuses reduced the propensity to violate parole rules in the first 6 months of employment - before anyone was actually eligible for the bonus. This reduction disappeared after participants became eligible for the actual retention bonuses.

¹³ Grant Duwe, *An Outcome Evaluation of MINNCOR's EMPLOY Program* (St. Paul: Minnesota Department of Corrections, 2011), 6-8, provided a release-meeting portfolio (resume, job leads), bus fare, interview clothing, and scheduled follow-ups at 1, 3, 6, and 12 months; Hannah G. Cortina, *Charting the Path*, 7, 17, 24, Notes wraparound services are associated with stronger outcomes; Cindy Redcross, *Work After Prison*, 40–41, 45–47, 66, 117–118, shows how differences in service intensity and supports across sites affected outcomes;

¹⁴ Hannah G. Cortina, *Charting the Path*, 10-12, 19; Cindy Redcross, *Work After Prison*, 92.

¹⁵ Cindy Redcross, *Work After Prison*, ES-2, 69, Notes employment gains without corresponding recidivism improvements when retention/placement supports weren't present; Hannah G. Cortina, *Charting the Path*, 14, 25, Although early research shows group peer support has positive impacts on recidivism, peer programs face policies restricting peer mentor access to participants due to prior felony convictions. Peer mentors help participants navigate their reentry from a unique perspective as they have gone through similar lived experiences and hold experiential knowledge.

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- **Not providing jobs** to all participants leads the unemployed to see no improved life outcomes.¹⁶
- **Delayed engagement after release** dilutes or reverses effects seen with rapid-start models.¹⁷
- **Inconsistent contact** - brief classes and thin, non-regimented follow-up fail to improve lives.¹⁸
- **Group services without 1:1 support** causes participants to see no benefit to the program.¹⁹
- **Missing wraparound supports.**²⁰ Case Managers help fill gaps in transport, IDs, legal/child-support, or housing and discourage program dropout.
- **Fidelity slippage at partner sites.**²¹ Programs fail when there is no quality control after the program expands beyond the pilot.

Conclusion & Spiritual Foundation

Together, by God's grace, we will help formerly incarcerated men walk in Christ, bearing fruit that honors our Lord and serves His kingdom.

¹⁶ Hannah G. Cortina, *Charting the Path*, 18

¹⁷ Cindy Redcross, Dan Bloom, Gilda Azurdia, Janine Zweig, and Nancy Pindus, *More Than a Job: Final Results from the Evaluation of the Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO) Transitional Jobs Program* (New York: MDRC, 2012), 34–36, 41; Cindy Redcross, *Work After Prison*, Box 9.1 and discussion (esp. p. 155); Hannah G. Cortina, *Charting the Path*, 29-30, highlights timing as a factor that moderates program impacts and observes that studies with later or weak engagement failed to affect recidivism.

¹⁸ Hannah G. Cortina, *Charting the Path*, 17, 29; Cindy Redcross, *Work After Prison*, 40–41, 66; Grant Duwe, *An Outcome Evaluation of MINNCOR's EMPLOY Program*, 16.

¹⁹ Hannah G. Cortina, *Charting the Path*, 18.

²⁰ Hannah G. Cortina, *Charting the Path*, 18

²¹ Redcross, *More Than a Job*, 76; Cindy Redcross, *Work After Prison*, 40-41, 66