

MTC Supports Criminal Justice Reforms that Focus on Rehabilitation and Reducing Recidivism

Introduction

The corrections industry faces multiple challenges. The United States has a higher incarceration rate than any other country in the world.¹ An estimated five million children have had a parent behind bars, placing them at greater risk for emotional, behavioral, and academic problems.² In addition, annual spending on corrections is now over \$56.9 billion annually.³ Despite this high level of spending on corrections, recidivism rates remain high. The Bureau of Justice Statistics found that an estimated 68 percent of individuals released from state facilities were arrested within 3 years of release, 70 percent within 6 years, and 83 percent within 9 years.⁴

A transformative model of incarceration based upon rehabilitation and reintegration is a necessary part of any solution to these criminal justice challenges. Focusing on rehabilitation in corrections can improve lives, improve safety, and reduce the rising costs of incarceration, as:

- Every dollar spent on educational and training programs for incarcerated individuals saves five dollars on future law enforcement and corrections costs.⁵
- Individuals who participate in correctional education programs have been found to have a 43 percent lower chance of recidivating than those who did not participate and have been shown to increase their likelihood of finding post-release employment by 13 percent.⁶

Management & Training Corporation (MTC) advocates for innovation and continual improvement within correctional systems. MTC supports corrections reforms and initiatives that improve safety while creating a culture of respect, provide evidence-based programming, prepare individuals for employment, build family and community connections, and establish metrics that focus on long-term outcomes such as reduced recidivism and increased employment for individuals after release.

ABOUT MTC

Since 1981, Management & Training Corporation (MTC) has helped disadvantaged populations rise above their challenges. MTC began as an operator of residential Job Corps centers, providing low-income youth with academic instruction, technical training, and wrap-around services such as food, shelter, medical care, mentorship, and job placement. In 1987, MTC took the knowledge and experience gained from Job Corps and began operating correctional facilities with the goal of helping incarcerated individuals change their lives.

At MTC, caring about others, giving back, and making a social impact are the foundation of all we do. In 2019, MTC provided rehabilitation programming to thousands of individuals in state and federal correctional facilities, helping 1,390 individuals earn vocational certificates and providing 4,290 individuals with substance abuse treatment.

Corrections Reform Recommendations

Corrections reforms should ensure public safety while improving the circumstances of incarceration. MTC recommends implementing a Job Corps model, including wrap around services, treatment, education and training, placement support, and personalized workforce development plans that start on day one of incarceration. A reformed system should:

- Ensure that each person is treated with respect and dignity
- Provide evidence-based programming that fosters rehabilitation
- Prepare individuals to enter the workforce through education and training opportunities
- Build and maintain family and community connections for individuals
- Establish performance-based goals for all facilities and publish results
- Identify organizations with expertise to implement reforms

Ensuring that Each Person Is Treated with Respect and Dignity

The culture and practices of correctional agencies play an important role in bringing about the goals of criminal justice reform. Reform in corrections needs to focus on creating a culture of respect and dignity for all individuals. This type of culture is reflected in clean, well-maintained facilities, the interactions between staff and facility residents, and the resources and opportunities provided to individuals in the facilities.⁷

LOCKHART CORRECTIONAL FACILITY SHOWS WOMEN RESPECT AND DIGNITY THROUGH PAID EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Women at Lockhart Correctional Facility in Lockhart, Texas, have a unique opportunity through two companies, Onshore Resources and Henderson Controls, to gain on-the-job training while incarcerated. While most prisons offer individuals opportunities to work, the partnership at Lockhart allows these women to earn market wages. They use their income to save money, send money to children, and make fiscal restitution where appropriate. They also learn valuable manufacturing skills and earn industry-recognized credentials. Women gain dignity through the ability to work and provide for their families.



How many people can actually pay child support or send money home to their families while they are incarcerated? Especially for women, that is just unheard of.”
Michelle, Lockhart Correctional Facility.

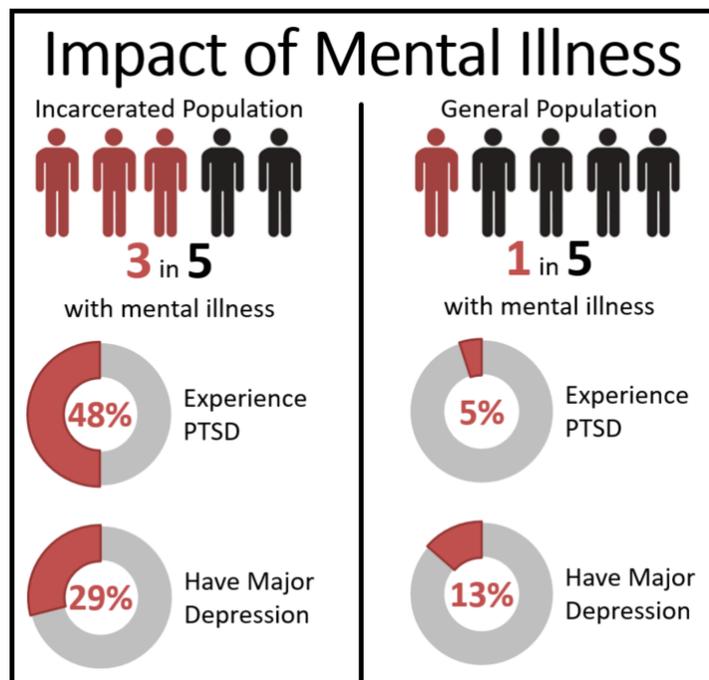
Providing Evidence-Based Programming that Fosters Rehabilitation

Incarcerated individuals should be fully engaged in a pro-social learning environment with an array of treatment and programming opportunities to address thinking errors, change habits, and return them to society better equipped to lead productive and law-abiding lives. Evidence-based programming and treatment can reduce recidivism, save money, and decrease disciplinary issues for incarcerated individuals.⁸

Cognitive and Behavioral Skills and Emotional Regulation Programming

A rehabilitation model needs to improve the mental health, thinking patterns, and emotional regulation of individuals who are incarcerated. An estimated 56 percent of the state prison population, 45 percent of the federal prison population, and 64 percent of the jail population have a mental illness,⁹ compared with about 19 percent of the total US adult population.¹⁰ Seth Prins of Columbia University analyzed more than 20 years of research and found that incarcerated individuals have higher rates of attention deficit disorder, bipolar disorder, anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), schizophrenia, and obsessive-compulsive disorder than the general population.¹¹ Many correctional facilities lack the expertise and resources to support these mental health needs.¹²

Studies have also found that in some prison populations, up to 48 percent of incarcerated individuals have PTSD, and up to 29 percent have major depression.¹³ These numbers are significantly higher than for non-incarcerated individuals. In the general population, the same researcher found that up to 5 percent have PTSD and up to 13 percent have major depression.¹⁴ These mental health challenges are often a result of trauma an individual has experienced during their childhood.¹⁵ Multiple studies have identified a relationship between exposure to trauma and an increased likelihood of arrest and incarceration.¹⁶ Therapy and programming need to assist individuals in managing their emotional responses to difficult and traumatic events.



Cognitive-behavioral interventions have been found to be effective interventions in addressing these mental health needs. Cognitive-behavioral interventions can also play a role in reducing recidivism. In a study spanning 20 years, incarcerated individuals who received Moral Reconciliation Therapy (MRT), a cognitive-behavioral therapy that increases moral reasoning, were significantly less likely to be rearrested, were more likely to stay drug-free, and were less likely to be re-incarcerated.¹⁷

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Substance Abuse Education and Treatment

Nearly half (49.5 percent) of the federal prison population and 15.7 percent of the state prison population are incarcerated for a drug-related offense, more than for any other type of crime.¹⁸ As many as 65 percent of incarcerated people meet the medical criteria for drug or alcohol dependency and another 20 percent were substance involved (i.e. under the influence, stole money to buy drugs, or broke drug laws) at the time of their arrest.¹⁹ Many offenders have both mental health and substance abuse problems that, if left untreated, contribute to behavioral problems in custody and increase the likelihood of reoffending after release. Substance abuse programs need to form an integral part of rehabilitation efforts in a correctional setting. Programs that address substance abuse have both an economic and a social impact. In 2007, the National Drug Intelligence Center (NDIC) estimated that drug abuse costs society \$193 billion through drug-related crimes.²⁰

Faith-Based Programming

Treatment models should also incorporate diverse faith-based programming. This programming can include religious services, classes dedicated to changing lives through religious principles and study, and programs and instruction that helps individuals develop positive character traits and change thinking patterns. Providing an individual with an opportunity to engage in his or her religious practices and focus on a faith-based programming can reduce behavioral problems. In a review of 273 studies on crime and religion, Byron Johnson and Sung Joon Jang concluded that religion and religious involvement is associated with decreased levels of crime and delinquency.²¹

EAST TEXAS TREATMENT FACILITY PROVIDES INCARCERATED INDIVIDUALS WITH EXTENSIVE REHABILITATION PROGRAMMING

TDCJ's East Texas Treatment Facility in Henderson, Texas, can support 2,320 individuals and is dedicated entirely to providing treatment and programming that prepares individuals for re-entry. During their stay at the facility, men and women receive cognitive behavioral therapy, emotional regulation education, substance abuse treatment, and faith-based programming. Each individual receives an integrated treatment approach that addresses substance abuse and mental illness.

Using this and other treatment models, Texas had 11,000 more people on parole in 2017 than in 2007; however, 17 percent fewer crimes were committed by parolees than in 2007 (Haugen, M. 2017, August. Ten years of criminal justice reform in Texas. *Right On Crime.*)



"We are broken down a lot in society, and coming here helps build our confidence."
Shanice Griego, East Texas Treatment Facility

Preparing People for the Workforce through Education and Training

Individuals who are incarcerated need educational and training opportunities. Over 41 percent of people who are incarcerated lack a high school diploma, compared with 18 percent for the general population.²² Once released from prison, a lack of education, vocational skills training, and steady work experience affects peoples' ability to find meaningful employment.²³ Eight months after release, 74 percent of men are still searching for jobs.²⁴

Vocational training can increase employment opportunities and decrease recidivism. Individuals who participated in correctional education programs have been found to have a 43 percent lower chance of recidivating than those who did not participate and have been shown to increase their likelihood of finding post-release employment by 13 percent.²⁵ A meta-analysis of correctional programming outcomes identified that every dollar spent on educational and training programs for incarcerated individuals saves five dollars on future law enforcement and corrections costs.²⁶



PRISON ENTREPRENEURSHIP PROGRAM IMPROVES EMPLOYMENT

In TDCJ's Sanders Estes Unit in Venus, Texas, and Oliver J. Bell Unit in Cleveland, Texas, individuals can participate in the Prison Entrepreneurship Program (PEP). This mini-MBA, offered through Baylor University, uses college textbooks and business cases from Harvard and Stanford. Throughout the coursework, participants have the opportunity to meet with business leaders. Approximately 500 incarcerated individuals throughout the Texas correctional system are chosen to participate each year in this program. Participants apply through a written application and an interview with PEP staff members. Graduates of PEP have only a 7 percent three-year recidivism rate, and every PEP graduate has achieved a job within 90 days of release.

(Little, L. 2017. Opening Doors. *Baylor Magazine*. Retrieved from <https://www.baylor.edu/alumni/magazine/1504/index.php?id=942352>).



"One of the coolest things about being here is that I've learned the ability to put my goals, my vision down on paper and watch all of those things come to life." John Gibson, Oliver J. Bell Unit

Focusing on Family and Community Connections to Assist with Successful Transitions

Nearly all incarcerated individuals will reenter their communities at some point. When they do, they face multiple barriers to accessing housing, education, employment, substance abuse treatment, health care, and mental health treatment. Failure to address any of these barriers greatly increases an offender's chances of reoffending. The Charles Koch Institute estimated that after being incarcerated, individuals face more than 48,000 legal barriers that prevent them from securing employment, housing, occupational licenses, and other community resources.²⁷

Lack of family support also puts individuals at an increased risk for future criminal behavior.²⁸ Programs and services connecting individuals to the family and community resources that they need for successful reentry must begin in custody and continue after release into the community.

KYLE CORRECTIONAL FACILITY CONNECTS PARENTS TO CHILDREN

TDCJ's Kyle Correctional Facility in Kyle, Texas, hosts Day with Dads events. Fathers at the facility invite their children to spend the day with them. Prior to the event, fathers take parenting classes and create a gift for their children. When the children come, they play games and participate in activities together. Fathers and children have time to converse on important topics related to changes and good choices, and fathers are encouraged to make commitments to their children.

This facility also started a project to facilitate communication and relationship building between incarcerated men and their children. The men read a book to their children on video and then the facility sends it to their loved ones.



"I had a wonderful time with them, being able to show them different things and learn different things about them; as well as [what] they are learning about me. This was a blessed opportunity for each and every man that was in the program."
Ruben Williams, Kyle Correctional Facility

Establishing Goals for All Facilities and Publishing Results

Establishing goals to reduce high levels of recidivism is a key component for corrections reform. The Bureau of Justice Statistics identified that recidivism is an ongoing problem in the criminal justice system. In a 9-year study tracking individuals released from state prisons in thirty states, 83 percent of those released were arrested again within the nine years.²⁹

The current federal corrections system focuses on statistics related to safety and security and access to programming, healthcare, and other services.³⁰ These metrics remain important in a reformed model.

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However, the statistics regularly tracked and disseminated by the Bureau of Prisons do not currently include outcome metrics such as recidivism rates by facility. As a result, individual federal facilities are unable to identify effectiveness of their treatment and programming as it relates to recidivism, housing, and job placement.

When implementing cultural improvements, treatment programming, and education and training opportunities in corrections, these reforms must be tied to rehabilitation and reintegration metrics. Organizations that identify and track both leading metrics and lagging metrics tend to show more improvement and have greater success achieving goals.³¹ Of course, tracking outcomes is only effective when those outcomes are used for decision-making. In a rehabilitation and reintegration corrections model, facilities should be held accountable for the outcomes of the individuals who spend time in their facilities.

Tracking and sharing metrics widely will also provide opportunities to share successful practices across the correctional system. Correctional agencies can identify successful facilities and replicate the models used in those facilities.

Identifying Organizations with Expertise to Implement Reforms

Comprehensive corrections reforms require expertise in mental health treatment, substance abuse treatment, education and vocational training, community outreach, and job placement. Partnering across sectors with public officials, community members, mental health providers, and education & training institutions can provide the cross-section of expertise necessary and can lead to more equitable and inclusive solutions.

The Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) provides an example of utilizing a public-private partnership model to implement reforms. In 2006, Texas determined to make changes to its ever expanding prison population, and the state embarked on a series of reforms to the correctional system. These reforms included adding 2,700 substance abuse treatment beds in correctional facilities, 1400 intermediate sanction beds, and 300 halfway-house beds.³² Texas lawmakers also passed reforms to divert thousands of individuals from prison to probation, creating short-term programs for parole violators, rather than sending them back to prison.³³

Overall, the reforms have reduced recidivism, reduced incarceration rates, and reduced the state's crime rates.³⁴ These reforms have also resulted in reducing the number of probationers who return to prison by 14.7%³⁵ and reducing juvenile incarceration by 76%.³⁶ TDCJ has closed 8 prisons in the last decade, and has plans to close two more. State Senator John Whitmire (D-Houston) noted these changes came due to a shift from incarceration to treatment and diversion.³⁷ To implement these reforms, TDCJ contracted with companies with expertise in treatment and rehabilitative programming to implement these reforms and achieve these results.

Several scholars have suggested that a change in the structure of contracts could support the rehabilitative goals of criminal justice. Under the current predominate approach to contracts, the state or federal government pays a contractor a per diem rate for each individual in the facility. Legal scholar Alexander Volokh suggested that instead of a per person rate, performance outcomes (especially

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recidivism reduction) should be used as the basis for awarding prison contracts and that both public and private entities should be able to compete for all contracts.³⁸ Using performance to select operators would also help policymakers better express what outcomes the criminal justice system expects from *all* prisons.³⁹

This performance-based approach has been used successfully in multiple correctional systems.⁴⁰ Pennsylvania uses performance-based contracts for some community corrections centers, which has resulted in a 11.3 percent decrease in recidivism. Contracts are set up so that the state can cancel a contract if the recidivism rate increases over two consecutive years. Contractors receive bonuses if recidivism rates decline past a defined threshold.⁴¹ Incenting effective programs that reduce recidivism and increase job placement for formerly incarcerated individuals could ultimately offer communities cost savings and increased public safety.

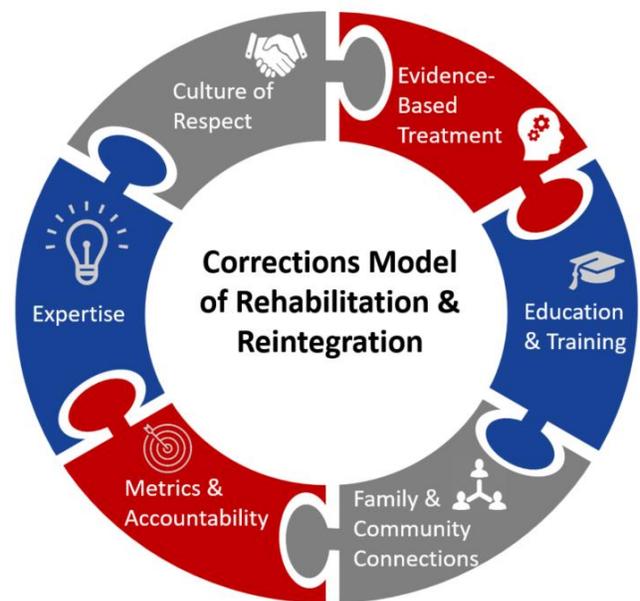
Although some reform efforts target contractors as a primary problem in the corrections industry, contractors only play a small role in operating correctional facilities. Only eight percent of the US prison population is secured in contract prisons.⁴² The Federal Bureau of Prisons operates 122 facilities, and only 11 of these are operated by contractors.⁴³ Within the criminal justice system, the role of contractors is limited to safely securing the individuals that government entrusts into their care, with direct oversight from public corrections agencies. Even if all state and federal prison contracts were cancelled today, America would still have the largest prison population in the world, and all of the problems associated with mass incarceration would still exist. Eliminating the private sector for problems caused by public policy distracts from the real issues that continue to contribute to mass incarceration.⁴⁴ Switching to performance-based contracts would eliminate these concerns. Only companies that can show they reduce recidivism should be awarded contracts to prepare individuals for reentry.

Conclusion

Effective corrections reform will require a shift from a custodial corrections model that focuses primarily on safety, order, and discipline to a correctional model focusing on rehabilitation and reintegration. Such a shift will need to include changes in culture and practice. It also requires contractors with expertise to provide the services that individuals need to change their lives: education and training experts, treatment providers, and job placement specialists.

Currently, individuals serve sentences and upon release face significant barriers to reintegration. Failure to address any of these barriers greatly increases an individual's chances of reoffending. Programs and services connecting offenders to the resources they need for successful reentry must begin in custody and continue after release into the community.⁴⁵

MTC's recommendations for reform align closely with the ideals shared in the Biden Plan which focuses on substance abuse treatment and "making sure formerly incarcerated individuals have the opportunity to be productive members of our society."⁴⁶ However, to implement these reforms, providers who can support rehabilitation treatment models, offer academic credentials, train individuals for high-demand jobs, and build connections that help individuals find employment and housing will become increasingly important. The Job Corps program provides a potential model for these reforms. This program leverages contractors to operate residential centers, provide training, and offer intensive, wrap-around services.



When implementing reforms in corrections, government agencies should leverage all entities to drive the needed innovation and change. Removing the ability of government to utilize organizations with expertise in rehabilitation and reintegration could slow reform efforts and limit their success. As policymakers institute reforms within corrections systems, MTC encourages them to hold all correctional institutions to the highest standards in providing for the safety, security, and lasting rehabilitation of individuals. To implement real change in corrections, policymakers should focus not on *who* provides services, but on *how effective* those services are in rehabilitating and reintegrating individuals. Only with a focus on results can meaningful criminal justice reform be achieved. MTC invites policymakers to visit both public and contractor-operated facilities and to identify model programs that lead to rehabilitation.

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