Returning to Work After Incarceration

Challenges of Returning to Work after Incarceration, a new issue brief from Metro Social Services, explains that more than 600,000 people are released from state or federal prisons each year, with about 95% returning back to their communities. It describes the challenges that many face, contributing to recidivism, with several states experiencing rearrest rates up to 76.6% within five years after release.

There is a disproportionate number of poor and minority prisoners. The detrimental companions to poverty of untreated addiction and mental illness, severe housing insecurity, chronic unemployment and complicated family relationships put the incarcerated at a disadvantage - before their incarceration and after.

Pragmatism Made Profitable - Guest Column by Bettie Kirkland

Bettie Kirkland is a member of the MSS Board of Commissioners and is Executive Director of Project Return. Project Return, an independent sector organization based in Nashville, is solely dedicated to the successful returns of the men and women who are coming back to the community after incarceration. With a clear focus on their new beginning and the primary goal of employment, it delivers soft skills instruction, hard skills certification, and one-on-one coaching, propelling people into jobs while effectively meeting the workforce needs of employers across Middle Tennessee. It’s a win for the individuals, the companies, and the community.

Dollars and sense were center stage at the Employer Roundtable spearheaded in Nashville on June 1st by Project Return, thanks to the collegial partnership of Metro Social Services, and the generous sponsorship from JP Morgan Chase. We wanted to bring the message of smart hiring into town, so we went straight to two of the nationally known leaders: Johns Hopkins Medicine and Butterball Farms. After all, that’s who Bloomberg Radio
interviews, that’s who The Guardian writes about, that’s who the US Department of Justice puts on stage in a beltway ballroom, that’s who the Pew Center profiles, when they’re looking for the greatest heft of evaluated experience in the realm of putting people with criminal conviction histories on the job.

Between Johns Hopkins and Butterball Farms, there’s about 50 years of experience in hiring motivated job applicants who have criminal records. And for most of those years, these two thriving organizations – one a mammoth healthcare system, and one a mid-sized food production company – have been tracking and analyzing the results.

Here, in a nutshell, is their news: it is a winning move to hire people who have conviction histories! Their employees who have conviction histories have actually done better – meaning they’ve stayed on the job longer and they’ve advanced farther – than their employees who don’t have conviction histories!

This is pragmatism made profitable. These companies had workforce needs, and their applicants’ backgrounds were blemished by criminal justice involvement. Butterball Farms and Johns Hopkins broke from business norms and brought people into their ranks who had made serious mistakes in their past. And the rest is history. Success upon success, by now numbered well into the thousands of employees who have, incrementally and collectively, spelled success for their employers.

For this Employer Roundtable, we were so pleased to have so many Middle Tennessee employers in the room, spanning healthcare and manufacturing and hospitality and construction, to hear this message of success. For those who weren’t able to attend, we ask: What if you could hire people who would work better and stay at the job for more years, and even advance better at the company, than those you’re already hiring? Would you do it?

In the meantime, we at Project Return are thrilled to play a part in connecting hardworking, motivated Nashvillians with successful employers.

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**Millenial Housing Update**

The Millenial generation (born 1981-1997) is now the largest group in the U.S., recently growing larger than the Baby Boom population (born 1946-1964), as described in *Millenial Housing Update* from Metro Social Services.

The U. S. Census Bureau has reported on how the economics and demographic of young adults is changing. In comparison to previous generations, Millenials rank marriage and children lower, delay marriage and are more likely to live with their parents.

Millenials will continue to struggle to afford rising home prices that will rise faster than incomes, so they will be more likely to keep renting. Many have student debt they are trying to pay. It has been noted that older Millenials are more likely to get married, start families and look for a home to buy.

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**Challenges for Adults with a Disability**

Although it has been 27 years since the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), various challenges remain for adults who have a disability, as described in *Challenges for Adults with a Disability*, a new issue paper from Metro Social Services. It provides examples of challenges with recommendations about how these issues might be addressed.

Challenges are discussed in the areas of mainstream banking, voting access, health issues, employment. It further notes that everyday challenges also continue with accessible transportation, physical environment, attitudes, communication and policies that do not facilitate the full participation of people who have disabilities.
Update from the Financial Assistance Coalition

In August 2013, Metropolitan Social Services joined with Rooftop and NeedLink to create the Financial Assistance Coalition. The Coalition included more than two dozen organizations that served clients who could not meet their basic needs, particularly rent and utility bills. In 2014, the Coalition collected data about requests for financial assistance to demonstrate that the need was far greater than the combined resources in Nashville.

The Financial Assistance Coalition continued to meet and shared information, improved coordination and communication among organizations. The Coalition is reviewing its own purpose and goals, along with the purposes and goals of related organizations in the community. The Coalition, led by Chair Julia Gildemeister of Rooftop and Co-Chair Jann Seymour of NeedLink, has identified a need that continues to grow in both volume and scope, as wages remain low for many working families. Despite this increase in demand for assistance, the number of providers is not growing.

The Coalition is considering a realignment/affiliation to most effectively serve the people who are in need. It also recognizes that PREVENTION services have many benefits to providing services after problems have already occurred. Prevention, in all areas, is usually most effective and more cost-efficient, as shown in these example below.

Emergency Assistance can prevent unnecessary evictions for vulnerable households. Keela and her two kids live in East Nashville. She was recently told by her doctor that she would not permitted to work toward the end of her pregnancy, as it had become high-risk. Keela's income-based rent will be reduced to $50 next month, but the paperwork takes a while to process, and she was at risk of being evicted, 9 months pregnant, because she owed $193.

Prevention is a good investment for our city. It costs approximately $1,200 per month to provide shelter, food, and services for a homeless person in Nashville. By paying to keep Keela and her children housed, NeedLink Nashville prevented 95% of what our city’s homelessness agencies might have otherwise invested in her family, if they had lost their housing.

Prevention is a good investment in our future. According to research by the National Housing Conference: “The younger and longer a child experiences homelessness, the greater the cumulative toll of negative health outcomes, which can have lifelong effects on the child, the family, and the community.” NHC’s analysis of the impacts of prenatal and post-natal homelessness demonstrates the longer-term impacts of keeping a family like Keela’s housed.

CEO Pay Increases Faster than Other Workers

The Economic Policy Institute (EPI) compared CEO compensation to that of typical workers in America (CEO pay remains high relative to the pay of typical workers and high-wage earners, July 20, 2017). It found that in 1965, based on options received, CEOs were paid 20.2 times as much as a typical worker. By 1989, CEOs were paid 53.7 times as much as typical workers, compared to 1995 when CEO pay jumped to 122.6 times as much as a typical worker.

In 2000, CEO pay was 376.1 times as much as a typical worker. Since then, there have been fluctuations with a trend down to 270.5 times as much as a typical worker projected for 2016. While that is considerably lower than the peak in 2000, it is still more than 13 times as much as it was 50 years before.

EPI explains that such high CEO pay demonstrates that economic growth over the last 38 years does not benefit typical workers because it is diverted to the top. CEO pay increased 937% (70% faster than the stock market), while typical worker pay increased only 11.2%
New Know Your Community Now Available

The 2017 Know Your Community Report is now available online. It features current objective data about the 35 Metropolitan Council Districts from the U. S. Census Bureau.

The data can be used by residents who live in each of the Council Districts, as well as by elected officials and policy makers. Maps also visually demonstrate the distribution of characteristics in Nashville.

Printed copies are available at MSS offices while supplies last.

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2016 Tennessee Nonprofit Compensation Survey Available Online

The 2016 Tennessee Nonprofit Compensation Survey has been released by Watkins Uiberall CPAs, supported by United Way’s Center for Nonprofits, Center for Nonprofit Management and others. Among Tennessee nonprofit organizations, 87.3% have CEOs. In terms of compensation, 26% were paid $50,000-$75,000, followed by 24.4% paid $76,000-$100,000, 21.4% paid $101,000-$150,000, 12.2% paid over $150,000, 9.2% paid $30,000-$49,000 and 6.9% paid under $30,000.

The report provides demographic and salary data for employees, benefits, retention, professional development and more. It compares pay by organizational revenue and geographic location. The data shows the compensation and pay disparity for nonprofit CEOs is far less than for the for-profit organizations described in the EPI report.

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