

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/blog/unlocking-potential/employers-must-understand-their-role-in-post-incarceration-success>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

How does Johns Hopkins serve as an example to other employers who want to hire formerly incarcerated individuals?

What I really find honorable is that JHH/JHHS is committed to serving its community. An example is actively recruiting people within local neighborhoods. JHH/JHHS recognizes the benefits to partnering with the local community. Baltimore City has a lot of formerly incarcerated individuals who are returning home. JHH/JHHS really looks at each individual persons situation case by case to establish a job match. An applicants criminal conviction is considered in the context of its relation to the specific job being sought. For example, an individual with a drug-related conviction who is still enrolled in treatment might be well-suited for an administrative or facilities position, but not for an in-patient pharmacy tech job.

Why do you think some companies are so hesitant to employ people who are formerly incarcerated?

The healthcare industry is highly regulated. Compliance and safety are top concerns for employers. There can be a fear in hiring someone who was formerly incarcerated, because they may not be prepared to successfully meet workplace expectations and challenges. However, JHH/JHHS recognizes that that is a challenge with all employees, whether they have a criminal record or not. Many recently-released individuals are grappling with a host of challenges, including obtaining stable housing, reconnecting with family, acquiring a drivers license, and the emotional toll of being incarcerated. As a result, some are not yet prepared to focus on the requirements for being successful in the workplace. JHH/JHHS is fortunate to work with a network of community-based reentry service providers who assist formerly incarcerated individuals in meeting the array of challenges and preparing for the workplace.

Without employment, formerly incarcerated people could possibly fall back into cycles that lead back to incarceration. They are looking for an employer to take a chance on them. JHH/JHHS does not want to see individuals regain their freedom only to return to being incarcerated. Employers should work with community-based organizations to provide support to individuals re-entering the community. The biggest issue for those re-entering society is being able to provide financially and emotionally for themselves and their families.

How important is providing a college education to people in prison to prepare them for finding a job post-release?

Its critical. Theres a well-known correlation between the level of education and earning power. The more JHH/JHHS is able to assist people in acquiring knowledge, skills, and education to fill needed jobs, the better. Employers need to provide opportunities and support for individuals to pursue their education, so they can make a better life for themselves and their families.

What will change the minds of employers who are hesitant to hire people with criminal records?

While anecdotal stories are helpful, employers want to see data that shows any differences in hiring someone with a criminal record versus someone who does not. If employers are screening and hiring on that case-by-case basis, it should be about making sure that they are putting the right person in the right job at the right time. It is also important to pay attention to the peculiarities of industries. Healthcare is highly regulated, so I think if healthcare can say, Here is how we are able to do this even with all these regulations, compliances, and vulnerable populations, other industries can find ways to do the same.

Whats been your biggest takeaway from seeing the healthcare system work with people who are formerly incarcerated?

Some jobs in the healthcare field have entrance requirements determined by regulatory agencies and/or certifying bodies that preclude individuals with criminal convictions from being considered. For example, in Maryland, a criminal conviction prohibits an individual from getting a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) license. A CNA is an entry-level position for a series of direct clinical patient contact positions that provides living wages and enhanced family economic security inherent in such jobs. I understand why the requirements are there, but I wonder if there are ways to provide more employment opportunities to people who have made mistakes, but are now ready to move forward as productive members of the community.

There are many jobs within healthcare that can utilize skills of people who are formerly incarcerated. Healthcare is not only about doctors and nurses. There are a variety of jobs that require different skill sets, so thats why it is so important for healthcare to take a look at these prohibitive policies. This population has shown to be talented and have a lot of perseverance, endurance, and determination. They just need that opportunity.

How is Veras Pathways Projects helping to expand the higher education efforts in correctional facilities and reentry?

I think theres a wonderful, strong foundation with JHH/JHHS and schools that are represented. Vera is putting higher education in prisons on a platform and bringing attention to the positive outcomes of the program. It is vital to utilize all of our able-bodied citizens in the communities, whether they made mistakes or not. JHH/JHHS is proud to be the trailblazers to come out and say, Here is how you can

do this and look at the wonderful results.

The [Unlocking Potential: Perspectives on Education in Prison](#) blog series explores postsecondary education in prison and its benefits during and after incarceration through the unique experiences and insight of former students, educators, nonprofit leaders, corrections officials, reentry experts, and more.

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