



# State of New Jersey

DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS  
WHITTLESEY ROAD  
PO Box 863  
TRENTON, NJ 08625-0863

JON S. CORZINE  
Governor

GEORGE W. HAYMAN  
Commissioner

April 29, 2008

David J. Rosen  
Legislative and Finance Budget Officer  
Office of Legislative Services  
125 West State Street  
Trenton, New Jersey 08625

Dear Mr. Rosen:

Please find the department's responses to the additional questions raised by members of the Assembly Budget Committee.

**Assemblywoman Karrow:**

- *Please provide the committee with a report of victim claims that remain unclaimed and are escheated to the State.*

**Response:**

- |   |                       |
|---|-----------------------|
| • January 10, 2007, Escheated during Fiscal Year 2007 | \$996,307.50          |
| • November 1, 2007, Escheated during Fiscal Year 2008 | \$1,569,265.00        |
| • Total Escheated To Date                             | <u>\$2,565,572.50</u> |

As of April 21, 2008, approximately \$141,749.00 of unclaimed victim funds are available at the Department of Corrections pending the annual escheatment, which will occur on or before November 1, 2008.

**Assemblyman Cryan:**

- *Please provide the recidivism rate for those inmates who have achieved their GED as opposed to those inmates who have not attained their GED.*

**Response:** Included as Appendix A, is a study published in March 2008 which measures the influence of obtaining a GED on rates of recidivism, using data from 403 offenders released from New Jersey correctional facilities from 1999 to 2000. The study found that a person leaving prison with at least the equivalent of a high school diploma is less likely to recidivate. Sixty-four percent of non-GED participants recidivated once released compared with fifty-one percent of GED participants.

- *Please provide the committee with the plan that the department has developed for spending the \$1.5 million in federal and private foundation grants to implement comprehensive discharge planning.*

**Response:** Appendix B.

- *Please provide the committee with a report on the number of offenders who have substance abuse problems upon release from DOC custody on an annual basis.*

**Response:** The NJDOC assesses all incoming offenders for level of substance addiction. Recent analyses indicate that 60% of our male population and nearly 70% of the female population present a moderate to severe alcohol and/or drug addiction. Based on this review, offenders are referred and placed in various evidence supported treatment or educational programming initiatives. Many offenders also benefit from substance abuse programs via community corrections.

The NJDOC does not additionally assess offenders for their level of addiction upon release, as the primary element of the assessment is related to use. It is believed that the offender who has addressed his or her addiction issues while incarcerated is more likely to sustain recovery and a drug free lifestyle than those who have not.

**Assemblyman Johnson:**

- *Please provide the committee with information on collaboration with community colleges and State universities to provide education to State sentenced inmates.*

**Response:** State sentenced inmates are provided educational opportunities through the following colleges and vocational schools;

- **Princeton University:** Students from the University volunteer services at Albert C. Wagner Youth Correctional Facility, Garden State Youth Correctional Facility and Edna Mahan Correctional Facility for Women. They tutor inmates individually and also assist teachers in the classroom working with small groups of inmates who need assistance.

- **Rutgers University:** One volunteer works at Mountainview Youth Correctional Facility offering classes to the inmates. The next class offered will be in the study of African American History. This volunteer has been at this facility for a number of years.

Staff from Rutgers are also conducting research on the Distance Learning Lab that is being offered to the inmates through a Nicholson Foundation grant. Rutgers assisted with the purchase of equipment for this lab.

- **Drew University:** Faculty will be conducting classes through *Project Inside Out*. The classes will be offered to inmates at Edna Mahan Correctional Facility for Women and nine undergraduate students from Drew will also attend the classes. This is scheduled to start September 2008 upon final approval from Commissioner.
- **Union County College:** College courses are offered to inmates at the following facilities: Adult Diagnostic Treatment Center, East Jersey State Prison, Edna Mahan Correctional Facility for Women, Mountainview Youth Correctional Facility, and Northern State Prison. These courses are funded through the federal *Project INSIDE* grant. The inmates must meet certain criteria to participate in this program.
- **Mercer County Community College:** College courses are offered to inmates at Albert C Wagner Youth Correctional Facility, Garden State Youth Correctional Facility, Riverfront State Prison, Southern State Correctional Facility, and South Woods State Prison. These courses are also funded through the federal *Project INSIDE* grant.

Inmates also have the option to individually pay for correspondence courses from a college of their choice. If they do participate in such a program, an education staff member will act as a monitor during the participation. There are a number of inmates taking correspondence courses with several different colleges.

**Assemblyman Malone:**

- *Please provide the committee with the number of officers per inmate per shift.*

All Institutions	1st shift	2nd shift	3rd shift
Custody staff	3,032	2,140	1,090
Average Daily Pop.	22,601	22,601	22,601
Staff per Inmate	1/7.5	1/10.5	1/20.7

**Assemblyman Schaer:**

- *What proportion of New Jersey's population is currently incarcerated? How does this number compare with the incarceration rates of other states?*

**Response:** The *Pew Center on the States* report "One in 100: Behind Bars in America 2008" notes that for State incarceration rates, as of 2005, New Jersey is in the second lowest quintile of inmates per 100,000 residents or 532 inmates. This information is based on Bureau of Justice statistics.

**Assemblywoman Quigley:**

- *Please provide the committee with a report on the department's efforts to address the issues faced by the department in dealing with the aging inmate population.*

**Response:** Over the years the Department has continued to develop its capability for addressing the special needs of its diverse population which includes the elderly. It should be noted that over the last number of years, elderly inmates have not appreciably changed in number in the State correctional system. Currently, the department houses 221 inmates aged 65 or older, or 0.8 percent of the total population. Last year in response to a similar question, the department reported 216 inmates 65 years old or older, again less than one percent of the population. In 2004 this number was 224 (0.8 percent) and in 1998, this number was 158, or 0.7 percent. While the total has increased, the current count in this age range is not significant in absolute terms.

In recent years, institutions such as Riverfront and Northern State Prisons have been constructed with smaller housing units that can better accommodate aging inmates. Additionally, efforts have been made in housing units in the North and South Compounds of New Jersey State Prison to do the same. Finally, there is an Extended Care Unit for chronically and terminally ill inmates at South Woods State Prison.

- *Please provide the committee with statistics on improvements made in assisting inmates in obtaining identification cards, driver's licenses, making better arrangements to pay child support, obtaining better transportation options etc.*

**Response:**

**Identification Cards**

In November 2003 the New Jersey Department of Corrections implemented a mandatory requirement that all offenders being released from the custody of incarceration by the NJDOC shall be issued a temporary photo identification card prior to their release. This photo identification card is valid for 30 days. For fiscal year 2008, over 9,000 cards have been issued to date.

In August 2007, the Department, Motor Vehicle Commission (MVC) and State Parole Board (SPB) signed an agreement to add the inmate temporary release identification card to the MVC six point ID verification program to assist inmates overcome the reentry barrier of obtaining official state identification.

Implementation of the SSN Card identification assistance program has resulted in 3,166 inmates receiving assistance with obtaining a duplicate social security card. Offenders can also request assistance with obtaining duplicate birth certificates through the Social Services department.

#### Drivers License

Most ex-offenders will not receive their driver's license immediately upon release from custody. Those incarcerated as a result of CDC or drug paraphernalia offenses are subject to mandatory forfeiture or postponement of driving privileges. Department social workers assist with obtaining a copy of the inmate's driving abstract from MVC to review status of the license. Paralegals then can assist with the legal process for regaining driving privileges, including working with MVC and the courts to negotiate a payment plan for fines and surcharges.

#### Obtaining Better Transportation Options

In June 2005, NJDOC established a uniform method for inmates who are being released the opportunity to purchase discounted New Jersey Department of Transportation transit tickets. The Department of Transportation determines the rate of the discounted tickets. Upon notification of an inmate's release from custody, the Social Services Department interviews the inmate to ascertain his or her transportation needs. During the course of this interview, inmates are asked if they wish to purchase transit tickets. In fiscal 2008, 7,757 offenders have been offered assistance.

Upon request of the offender, NJDOC will also provide the offender with a copy of the NJ driver and CDL manual.

#### Child Support

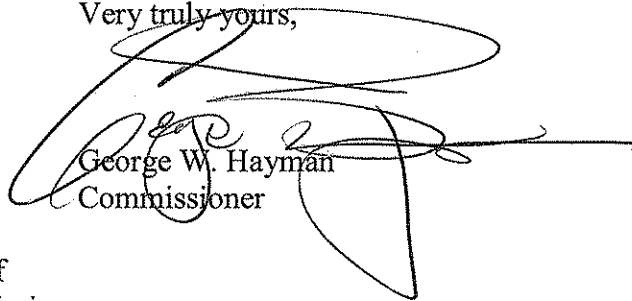
NJ Department of Human Services, Division of Family Development under the Responsible Parenting Program initiative provides for greater family reunification through parenting skills, enhanced employment assistance and improved child support compliance for those inmates under the jurisdiction of the NJDOC who have outstanding child support issues

To date the Responsible Parenting Program has assisted 253 inmates with information pertaining to their rights and responsibilities in reference to child support since December 2007. There have been 173 inmates that have received assistance with child support modification requests.

David J. Rosen  
April 28, 2008  
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Should you have need for additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me at your convenience.

Very truly yours,



George W. Hayman  
Commissioner

c: Thomas J. Moran, Chief of Staff  
Peter T. Roselli, Deputy Commissioner  
James Barbo, Acting Deputy Commissioner  
Carmella M. Elmer, Assistant Commissioner  
Brigite Mitchell-Morton, Assistant Commissioner  
Lydell Sherrer, Acting Assistant Commissioner  
Kathleen Baker, Director  
Patricia Loreti, Supervising Administrative Analyst

## THE INFLUENCE OF GED OBTAINMENT ON INMATE RELEASE OUTCOME

KRISTEN M. ZGOBA  
SABRINA HAUGEBROOK  
*New Jersey Department of Corrections*

KRISTA JENKINS  
*Fairleigh Dickinson University*

The focal point of this study is the effect of GED obtainment on inmate recidivism, using data from 403 offenders released from New Jersey correctional institutions in 1999 and 2000. Results indicate that leaving prison with at least the equivalent of a high school diploma improves significantly the chances that an ex-offender will not recidivate. Although an offender's participation in GED programming is predictive of no recidivism, once an offender does recidivate, the value of the GED participation depreciates and has no discernible effect on the raw number of reoffenses. Therefore, GED participation is an insignificant predictor of the number of postrelease arrests.

**Keywords:** GED; inmate education; release outcome; recidivism

The staggering number of offenders in prisons who have limited or no education continues to grow in America's prisons. Once poorly educated parolees reenter the community, their prospects for obtaining employment and maintaining a noncriminal lifestyle can be imperiled (Hrabowski & Robbi, 2002; Tewksbury & Stengel, 2006). Many who leave prison remain or become unemployed, often not by their own choosing, and they may find the lure of criminal behavior all too enticing. Thus, educating offenders while they are incarcerated could be a worthy investment, and indeed, many state correctional organizations and the Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) have secondary and postsecondary education programs in place (Harlow, 2003, p. 4). Because the correlation between limited education and crime cannot be ignored, this study's focal point is the effect of obtaining a general education degree (GED) on inmate recidivism. The study presents findings from the New Jersey Department of Corrections (NJDOC) concerning GED attainment and recidivism for offenders released in 1999 and 2000.

It is widely believed that offenders who receive additional programming (such as educational courses) recidivate and return to prison at a lower rate than lawbreakers who have not obtained a GED or high school diploma (Hrabowski & Robbi, 2002; Vacca, 2004). According to Travis (2005), if we initially recognize the fact that the majority of incarcerated offenders ultimately return home, we will be better skilled at meeting the challenges of reentry. Therefore, facilitating the development of concrete skills and expertise, such as obtaining a high-school-equivalency degree, is crucial for offenders as they reintegrate back into the community.

**AUTHORS' NOTE:** *The authors would like to thank the New Jersey Department of Corrections as well as the anonymous reviewers. Correspondence regarding this article may be sent to Kristen M. Zgoba, Ph.D., Supervising Research Scientist, Office of Policy and Planning, New Jersey Department of Corrections, P.O. Box 863, Trenton, NJ 08625; e-mail: Kristen.Zgoba@doc.state.nj.us.*

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Some policy makers and stakeholders may question the necessity of correctional education and, specifically, the GED curriculum for offenders. One answer to this question is found in statistics: Every year more than 600,000 convicted offenders reenter society, and only about 60% of them have completed a high school education (Harlow, 2003; Kubrin & Stewart, 2006). Ninety-five percent of all inmates who are sentenced to prison will eventually be released; the question of how well they are prepared poses additional challenges (Schmallegger & Smykla, 2007). Once these offenders reenter society, a stipulation for those who must comply with the terms of supervision (i.e., parole, intensive supervision) is to acquire a job within a certain period. Because most employers require a high school diploma or its equivalent, obtaining a GED while incarcerated becomes a critical factor for soon-to-be released offenders. Having a GED could assist the former inmate in securing and maintaining employment—specifically, a better paying job. For example, the U.S. Census Bureau estimates that the average annual income for individuals without a high school diploma or GED is \$18,734 (Brudevold-Newman, 2007). This is compared to the average annual earnings for a high school graduate of \$32,266. Moreover, attaining an education while incarcerated may also indicate to potential employers that offenders have taken positive steps to improve their lives and are motivated to change their criminal lifestyles (Tewksbury & Stengel, 2006).

The value of an earned GED is immense, as it produces a feeling of accomplishment and increases discipline. Furthermore, the implementation of prison educational courses could lessen the amount of time that an offender has to engage in troublesome behavior within the prison setting (MacKenzie, 2006). Most offenders who receive educational programming in prison leave the facility with a sense of purpose, which, in turn, may improve the transition back into the community. This stabilized reentry may make recidivism less likely and disabuse a former inmate of the belief that life was better “on the inside” than “on the outside,” where opportunities for meaningful work are difficult to find. MacKenzie (2006) assessed recidivism for 13 educational programs and concluded that adult basic education programs do show promise as a means of reducing recidivism. The overall effect size indicated that offenders who participated in education programs (treatment group) had significantly lower recidivism levels than the control group.

According to recent numbers produced by the U.S. Department of Justice (2002), of the 95% of prisoners released from prison, 67% will re-offend. Given these numbers, many correctional systems attempt to develop programs that may deter a return to prison. One type of intervention is correctional education. Since the 1990s, numerous empirical research studies have analyzed GED success and subsequent recidivism. Batiuk, Lahm, McKeever, Wilcox, and Wilcox (2005) cited Adams et al. (1994), the Center on Crime, Communities and Culture (1998), and Wilson, Gallagher, and MacKenzie (2000) studies, which all show a positive correlation between correctional education and reductions in recidivism.

Current research shows that support programs, akin to education, help offenders as they reenter the community. Researchers such as MacKenzie (2006) have examined the effectiveness of rehabilitation and education programs in prisons. MacKenzie offers evidence-based solutions on what works and why certain rehabilitative programs work. Wilson et al. (2000) further emphasized that offenders who participate in programming recidivate at lower rates than nonparticipants and are employable at a higher rate than nonparticipating cohorts. The researchers examined 33 programs by way of a meta-analysis. Although some

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correctional education to this question is reenter society, and now, 2003; Kubrin & prison will eventually face additional challenges stipulation for those on supervision) is to require a high school diploma as a critical factor for inmate in securing parole. For example, the U.S. statistics without a high school diploma is compared to the other, attaining an education that offenders have managed to change their criminal

accomplishment and educational courses could change behavior within educational program. In addition, may improve the recidivism less likely "inside" than "on the outside." MacKenzie (2006) adult basic education program had a small effect size (individual group) had significant

justice (2002), of these numbers, many return to prison. One of the numerous empirical studies. Batiuk, Lahm, the Center on Crime, MacKenzie (2000) studies, and reductions in

help offenders as they examined the effectiveness of evidence-based work. Wilson et al. predicting recidivate at a rate than nonparticipating group. Although some

of the reviews were varied, the majority of the evaluations showed a significant impact between prison programming and recidivism once inmates were released from the correctional system. An analysis of the 33 programs generally showed that offenders who were involved in adult basic education and general equivalency diploma programs recidivated 41% of the time in contrast with the comparison group in which recidivism rates were 50% (Wilson et al., 2000, p. 356).

In addition, educational advancement has long been linked to improved psychological adjustment, resilience, and happiness (Fordyce, 1997; Lane, 2000). Although little research has been done on the impact of prison education and an offender's resilience and psychological well-being, some studies do show a strong correlation between the two. For example, Moeller, Day, and Rivera (2004) explored the concepts of education, attitude, and success in life in a small sample ( $N = 16$ ) of student inmates who were high-minimum-security offenders in a correctional facility in Illinois. The participants were adult offenders (aged 18 or older) enrolled in adult basic education and GED classes. Adult basic education level ranged up to sixth grade; GED students were offenders with an educational range from Grade 6 to a Grade 12.9 equivalency. Although the study does not specifically center on psychological well being, it makes a strong connection between education and success in life, which leads to a happier, better adjusted lifestyle. Fifty-six percent of the students replied that they were self-motivated, and the remainder listed family, friends, and teachers as motivators. One can assume that this motivation is likely tied to psychological fulfillment and happiness, as most participants (75%) in the study indicated that they would like to continue their education beyond a GED.

An equally interesting study—and one with a much larger pool of participants—involved the education and subsequent well-being of prisoners from 12 maximum-security correctional facilities (Craft, 1996). Craft (1996) surveyed 907 student inmates and found a positive correlation between job status, education, and the inmate being a resource in the prison. She made this link to demonstrate that the resources that educated, long-term inmates provide to the prison system increase the self-esteem, confidence, and overall happiness of inmates during incarceration. According to Craft, the educated inmates experienced a positive behavioral change and adopted new behaviors once they were released.

### STATEWIDE STUDIES

The New York Department of Correctional Services (NY DOCS) has reported the results of a study of inmates released in 1996 (Nuttall, Hollmen, & Staley, 2003). The authors tracked all inmates—a cohort of 16,617 inmates in a 36-month period—to monitor whether the offenders recidivated. Obtaining a GED had a positive impact on recidivism rates (Nuttall et al., 2003). Inmates released in 1996 were divided into three groups based on education level: (a) earned a GED in NY DOCS, (b) admitted to and released from NY DOCS with no degree, and (c) admitted to NY DOCS with a degree (Nuttall et al., 2003, p. 91). A group of 2,330 offenders released in 1996 who earned a GED while in prison were returned to custody at a rate of 32% ( $n = 741$ ). Those offenders in NY DOCS who were admitted and released without a degree returned to custody at a rate of approximately 37% ( $n = 3,448$ ), although 32% ( $n = 1,571$ ) who were admitted to prison in New York with a degree of some kind were returned to prison.

These findings were analogous to the results of the Oklahoma Department of Corrections GED-effectiveness evaluation. The researchers, Holley and Brewster (1998), studied offenders ( $n = 23,879$ ) who were released from prison between 1990 and 1994. Offenders were tracked for a 3-year period; the overall recidivism rate was 32.8% (Holley & Brewster, 1998). Similar to the Nuttall et al. (2003) approach, the Oklahoma Department of Corrections divided the sample into three contrasting groups: those with a high school diploma, GED completers, and those with no high school diploma or GED. The Oklahoma study was noteworthy because it found that those offenders who obtained a GED while in prison were less likely to recidivate than the cohorts who entered prison with a diploma/degree and offenders who did not earn an educational degree while incarcerated under the jurisdiction of the Oklahoma Department of Corrections (Holley & Brewster, 1998).

Studies conducted by the Texas Criminal Justice Policy Council evaluating the prison system's education programs showed comparable results. Texas has the largest correctional system in the United States, with 109 institutions that housed 163,190 offenders in 1999 (Fabelo, 2002). The Texas structure is unique because the Texas Department of Criminal Justice created its own prison school system in 1969 with the intention of educating all inmates in prison. The school system and its programs were evaluated in 2000 for programming efficiency and the impact of education on postprison employment as well as postrelease recidivism. Offenders released for the first time in 1997-1998 were followed for a 2-year period in the community. The study included 32,020 released offenders and looked at their prison educational experience and employment after prison. Fabelo (2002) defined recidivism as the reincarceration of an inmate in a state facility for a new offense or parole violation. The Texas findings showed that offenders with educational achievement in prison had an 11% decrease in recidivism during the 2-year follow-up period. The author concluded that prison education improved the community transitional process for inmates who entered prison with the lowest education.

One of the largest evaluative studies examining the link between recidivism and education was the Correctional Education Association's Three State Recidivism Study, conducted for the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Correctional Education (Steurer, Smith, & Tracy, 2001). About 3,200 inmate records were compiled from Maryland, Minnesota, and Ohio in 1997 and 1998 (Steurer et al., 2001). Offenders were identified and separated into two groups—those who participated in educational programs in prison and a comparison group of nonparticipating offenders. Demographic variables were somewhat comparable for each group, but age and race were significantly dissimilar. Previous research (Schmidt & Witte, 1989; L. Smith & Akers, 1993) surmised that being of younger age contributes to more recidivism, as does being of a non-White race (as cited in Steurer et al., 2001). Recidivism was measured as rearrest, reconviction, and reincarceration; in each category, for all three states, recidivism was lower for those who participated in educational courses than those who did not, and the differences were statistically significant. Conversely, recidivism was higher for nonparticipants, regardless of the state in which they were incarcerated.

The present study attempted to expand on the above findings and determine the extent to which education has a direct and quantifiable impact on an inmate's return to the community and potential reoffending. The study originally examined a sample of offenders ( $n = 507$ ) from the NJDOC who were released from the jurisdiction of the department in 1999 and 2000. This sample was further narrowed down to include only GED participants compared to a sample of non-GED participants. This resulted in a final sample size of 403 subjects. After their release from prisons, offenders were tracked for a 6- to 7-year period to study

recidivism. Tracking rearrests, reconviction, and reincarceration (as cited in Nuttall et al., 2003) examining w

The NJDC and the comparison group. As such, educational attainment is a significant predictor of postprison employment. The NJDC study compared the educational attainment of inmates who participated in prison education programs to those who did not. The study found that inmates who participated in prison education programs had a higher educational attainment than those who did not. This finding is consistent with the findings of the Oklahoma Department of Corrections study and the Texas Criminal Justice Policy Council study.

#### PARTICIPANTS

Approximately 403 inmates were enrolled in the NJDC GED classes (Roberts et al., 2005) in 2005 in the NJDC GED classes (Roberts et al., 2005) without a high school diploma or GED. The NJDC study found that inmates who participated in prison education programs had a higher educational attainment than those who did not.

The NJDC study requested, an analysis of the educational attainment of inmates who participated in prison education programs compared to those who did not. The study found that inmates who participated in prison education programs had a higher educational attainment than those who did not.

The final comparison group consisted of inmates who did not participate in prison education programs. The study found that inmates who participated in prison education programs had a higher educational attainment than those who did not. This finding is consistent with the findings of the Oklahoma Department of Corrections study and the Texas Criminal Justice Policy Council study.

recidivism. The NJDOC used a triangulated methodology to define recidivism by examining rearrests, reconvictions, and reincarcerations. Prior research has suggested that educational programs are most effective in reducing recidivism rates for participating offenders (as cited in Vacca, 2004; Wilson et al., 2000); as such, the researchers were interested in examining whether this statement held true for New Jersey offenders.

### METHOD

The NJDOC's GED study focused on matching the demographics of the program group and the comparison group, as it was impossible to randomly assign inmates to receive education. As such, this study employed a rigorous quasi-experimental design. After theoretical literature reviews were conducted, the two groups were matched on the common predictors and risk factors of recidivism. In an effort to promote equivalent program and comparison groups, the participants were matched on gender, race, employment and marital status, drug and alcohol histories, the type of instant offense, release age, prior arrests, prior convictions, prior incarcerations, and length of sentence. Consistent with a quota-sampling matrix, no statistical differences existed between these two groups in terms of the aforementioned variables.

### PARTICIPANTS

Approximately 15,315 inmates participated in educational classes between 2000 and 2005 in the NJDOC. In February 2006, there were 3,769 inmates participating in education classes (Robbins, 2006). As is common in many states, offenders younger than the age of 21 without a diploma or GED are mandated to attend educational courses, whereas those older than age 21 are placed in educational classes by request. Inmates younger than age 21 can receive a high school diploma, but adult offenders in the educational programs can obtain a GED if they pass the exam. The current study focuses on those inmates who obtained the GED.

The NJDOC's Office of Educational Services oversees all educational programming in all correctional facilities in the state. Transcripts from an offender's last school attended are requested, and placement in academic courses is individualized to address the individual goals of each participant. Offenders are eligible to take the GED examination, and testing is coordinated with the standards set by the U.S. General Education Development Testing Service. The passing rate for offenders taking the GED exam has increased each year since 2000; as of 2005, 69% passed. Figure 1 notes the rates from 2000 to 2005. The public-sector average passing rate is between 52% and 55%.

The final sample includes 403 offenders released from New Jersey correctional institutions between the years 1999 and 2000. The sample of 250 GED participants included all inmates who passed their GED exams and were released during the study years, whereas the remaining comparison sample of 153 included offenders who were matched to the GED group on the above characteristics but with one exception. This group of subjects included non-GED participants who received no further education during their prison stay. This comparison sample was exclusive from the GED sample, as no one in the two groups overlapped. All relevant outcome information was processed in January 2006. This provided an extensive follow-up time, ranging from 6 to 7 years for each case.

NJ DOC GED Passing Rates

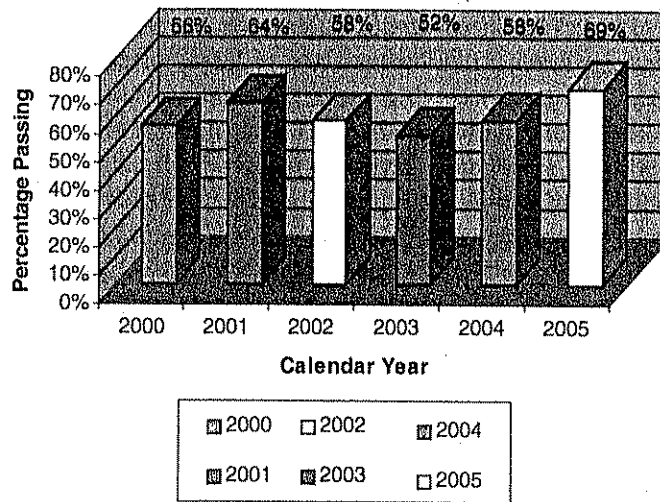


Figure 1: NJDOC Percentage of Inmates Passing the GED Exam

PROCEDURES

Inmate data were collected and coded directly from release files at the NJDOC Central Reception Assignment Facility (CRAF) intake unit. An interrater reliability coefficient was calculated at  $r = .90$  between two research coders. In addition to the matched characteristics, relevant background data included prior offense histories, offender characteristics, release information, comprehensive demographics, and educational information. The offense history data were drawn from the New Jersey State Police Computerized Criminal History System and the National Crime Information Center's Interstate Identification Unit. Through these sources, offending information was obtained for New Jersey as well as all other U.S. jurisdictions during the full 7-year follow-up. In addition, incarceration histories were abstracted from the NJDOC's Offender Based Correctional Information System (OBCIS) to inform the researchers of any parole violations.

To examine recidivism, the outcome variable, this study used a triangulated methodology analyzing the number of rearrests, reconvictions, and reincarcerations. Crimes similar to the instant offense, as well as all other types of reoffenses, were included in the recidivism measure. Additional information was collected on the degree of the reoffense as defined by statute and the level of violence. Furthermore, the date of the rearrest was recorded to analyze the time elapsed between release and reoffense.

RESULTS

The categorical demographics in Tables 1 and 2 present data about the study participants. The variables of inmate race, marital status, employment status, and drug and alcohol

TABLE 1: Cat

Variable
Inmate race
White
Black
Hispanic
Marital status
Never married
Married
Divorced/widow
Employment status
Unemployed
Employed
Drug history
Drug abuse hi
No drug histor
Alcohol History
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TABLE 2: Con

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**TABLE 1: Categorical Demographics for the GED Sample and the Non-GED Dropout Sample of Inmates**

Variable	GED Sample (n = 250)	Non-GED Sample (n = 153)	Full Sample (N = 403)	$\chi^2/(df)$	p
Inmate race					
White	64	42	106	1.783 (2)	.410
Black	124	96	220		
Hispanic	50	27	77		
Marital status					
Never married	204	122	326	.045 (2)	.978
Married	25	16	41		
Divorced/widowed	21	13	34		
Employment status					
Unemployed	135	87	222	.324(1)	.569
Employed	106	76	182		
Drug history					
Drug abuse history	192	123	315	.814 (1)	.367
No drug history	57	29	86		
Alcohol History					
Alcohol abuse history	155	86	241	.946 (1)	.331
No alcohol history	94	64	158		

Note. GED = general education degree. Full sample numbers may not total because of missing cases

**TABLE 2: Continuous Demographics for the GED Sample and the Non-GED Sample of Inmates**

Variable	GED Sample (n = 250)	Non-GED Sample (n = 153)	t (df)	p
Release age (mean)	27.85	27.92	-.094 (401)	.926
Prior arrest (mean)	7.56	7.47	.144 (396)	.886
Prior conviction (mean)	3.77	4.01	-.577 (394)	.564
Prior incarceration (mean)	1.35	1.55	-.874 (394)	.383
Length of sentence (mean)	4.49	4.61	-.403 (401)	.687

history did not differ statistically between GED participants and the comparison group. Fifty-four percent of the full sample was comprised of Black participants, whereas 81% was comprised of unmarried participants. Furthermore, 78% of the sample admitted to a history of drug abuse, and 60% admitted to alcohol abuse histories.

Table 2 further illustrates the efforts of matching the GED sample and the non-GED sample with the continuous demographic variables. Table 2 demonstrates that none of the variables differed significantly between the GED sample and the non-GED sample. Participants in both samples were just younger than 28 years old when they were released, with 7.5 prior arrests, approximately 4 prior convictions, and 1.5 prior incarcerations. The GED sample and the non-GED dropout sample both received sentences of approximately 4.5 years.

The hypothesized relationship between successful participation in the GED program and postrelease behavior receives qualified support in bi- and multivariate analyses presented below. To begin with, a simple bivariate test of the relationship between recidivism and GED participation yields percentage differences that are consistent with the authors' prediction, although the differences between GED and non-GED participants are not as stark as one would hope. Sixty-four percent of non-GED participants recidivated once released, compared with 51% of GED participants.

TABLE 3: GED Effect on Recidivism

Without GED Participation	With GED Participation	$\chi^2$ Difference Between Models
Log likelihood = 466.61	Log likelihood = 454.36	12.25*
$\chi^2 = 65.10$ (13)	$\chi^2 = 77.35$ (14)	
Nagelkerke $F^2 = .21$	Nagelkerke $F^2 = .24$	
% correctly predicted = 66	% correctly predicted = 72	

\*Sig.  $\leq .01$ .

However, a true assessment of the extent to which GED participation leads to a reduction in the likelihood of recidivism involves accounting for other known contributory factors such as race, number of years served while incarcerated, and substance abuse, to name just a few. To do this, we employed logistic regression and included a variety of other important variables<sup>1</sup> along with GED participation, and we used a categorical recidivism measure as the dependent variable. What is telling in Table 3 is an omnibus test of the significance of adding GED participation to the equation, devised by contrasting the log likelihood of the logistic model without GED participation to the log likelihood of a model including GED participation. That difference, 12.25, is distributed as a  $\chi^2$  with 1 degree of freedom, and as shown in the last column of Table 3, is highly significant ( $p < .01$ ). Thus, leaving prison with at least the equivalent of a high school diploma improves significantly the chances that one will not recidivate, even after considering the other risk predictors in offender research. Other factors that help to mitigate recidivism rates include race (e.g., White), serving a shorter sentence, age at arrest (e.g., older as opposed to younger), violent offense charges, and being married at the time of one's arrest.

The findings begin to change when the categorical dependent variable is replaced with one that measures the number of times that the offender was rearrested following release from prison. The dependent variable under consideration is not just the extent to which GED participation mitigates recidivism rates but also whether it helps to reduce the number of times an individual is rearrested. (See multivariate analyses presented in Table 4.) Using ordinary least squares regression, we find that GED participation loses its statistical significance, leaving other variables to help explain who among the sample is likely to reoffend a second, third, fourth, or even fifth time. Table 4 indicates that if an inmate has a history of drug use<sup>2</sup> and/or is a person of color, then the inmate is more likely to recidivate. Having a previous criminal history predicts future recidivism as well. Furthermore, inmates reporting histories of unemployment were more likely to commit a reoffense when released from incarceration.

The Kaplan-Meier survival analysis provided a second multivariate approach to examining the reoffense patterns of the GED and non-GED samples. This method compares the time between the offenders' release from incarceration and the outcome measure (offenders' rearrest date). Figure 2 shows the survival curves for the GED and non-GED samples. The shapes of survival curves are similar; GED sample participants have a mean survival time of 18.2 months compared to the mean survival time of 17.9 months for the non-GED participants. The survival times between the two groups were not significantly different, indicating that both samples recidivated within similar time frames (log rank statistic = .292,  $p > .05$ , Breslow statistic = .000,  $p > .05$  and Tarone-Ware statistic = .038,  $p > .05$ ).

TABLE 4: GEI

Variable
GED participatio
Age at release
Gender
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Offender's use o
Length of incarc
Number of prior
Number of prior
Age at arrest
Violent versus no
Marital status
Employment stat
Adjusted $F^2$
N

Note. Coefficient significant at .05

The failure of GED participation to reduce recidivism rates suggests that the value of a high school diploma may be mitigated by other factors that influence the career reoffense rate.

LIMITATIONS

As with most research, there are limitations to this study. One limitation is the lack of control (and unethically) it was necessary to use a non-experimental design of validity that is below the standard of many other studies.

Data inadequacy is another limitation. Inadequate official criminal history information, the frequency of criminal history data, and the most reliable source of criminal history data are research agency reports while in custody, rearrests, recidivism state record cl

TABLE 4: GED Effect on the Number of Rearrests

Variable	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standard Error
GED participation	-0.16	0.21
Age at release	-0.38	0.78
Gender	0.14	0.39
White	<b>-0.40</b>	0.24
Offender's use of drugs	<b>0.49</b>	0.28
Offender's use of alcohol	<b>-0.43</b>	0.23
Length of incarceration	1.41	1.03
Number of prior arrests	0.46	0.96
Number of prior convictions	<b>2.55</b>	1.18
Number of prior incarcerations	0.46	0.96
Age at arrest	-1.43	0.94
Violent versus nonviolent offense	-0.08	0.23
Marital status	-0.06	0.33
Employment status	<b>-0.41</b>	0.21
Adjusted $R^2$	0.13	
N	389	

Note. Coefficients in **bold** are statistically significant less than .10; coefficients in **italicized bold** are statistically significant at .05 or less.

## DISCUSSION

The failure of the GED measure to hold up as a significant predictor of lowered recidivism rates suggests one of two things. First, it is possible that once an offender recidivates, the value of a GED depreciates and has no discernible effect on the raw number of reoffenses. But another equally plausible reason for the nonfinding is that GED participation mitigates the frequency of being rearrested among those who are the least likely to be career reoffenders.

## LIMITATIONS

As with most studies, this study has a few limitations worthy of mention. Most important is the lack of a randomized, controlled design. Because it would be impossible to control (and unethical to assign) whether offenders were placed in an educational class or not, it was necessary to rely on alternate sampling. As such, the nonrandom sampling methodology employed here was quota sampling. Although quota sampling cannot ensure the level of validity that random sampling provides, it was a reasonable substitute for maintaining a standard of methodological integrity.

Data inadequacies are another limitation. This study relies on information drawn from official criminal records. Although it is well known that official records underrepresent the frequency of criminal behavior in the community, incident reports continue to provide the most reliable and readily available measure of criminal offenses. Considering the present research agenda, it was necessary to rely on the official measure of criminal offending reports while recognizing that many incidents go unreported and undetected. Counting rearrests, reconvictions, and reincarcerations, in combination with both in-state and out-of-state record checks, was expected to increase the level of validity.

ance Between Models

12.25\*

leads to a reduction in contributory factors such as substance abuse, to name a variety of other factors. A categorical test of the significance of the log likelihood ratio test with 1 degree of freedom ( $p < .01$ ). Thus, the model improves significantly. Risk predictors include race (e.g., younger), violent

is replaced with the following release. The extent to which reduce the number in Table 4.) Using statistical significance, likely to reoffend. A mate has a history of recidivate. Having reported, inmates report when released from

approach to examine the method compares the measure (offender-non-GED samples. We have a mean survival for the non-GED significantly different, rank statistic = .292, 38,  $p > .05$ ).

Survival Functions

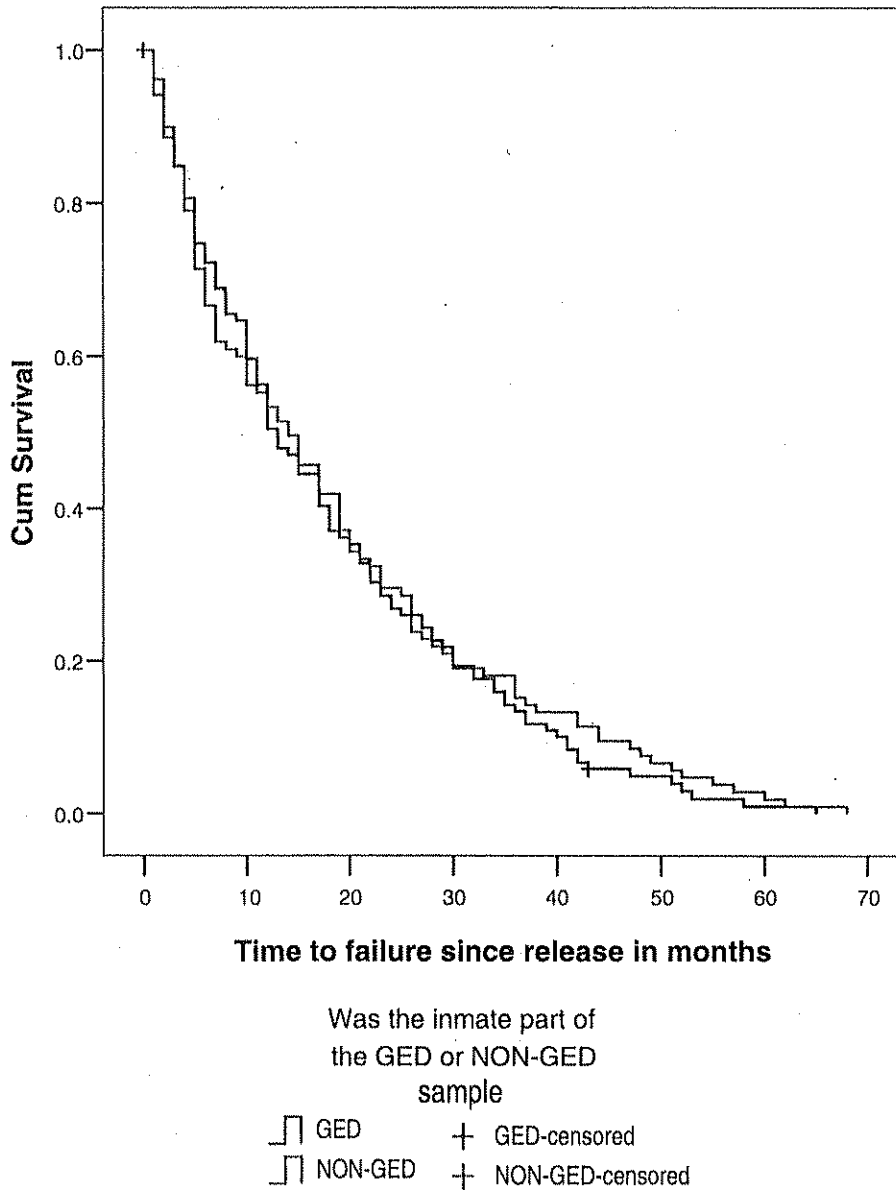


Figure 2: Kaplan-Meier Survival Functions

Although an attempt has been made to increase the reliability and validity with a triangulated measure of recidivism (rearrest, reconviction, and reincarceration), one particular drawback should be noted. To operationalize the dependent variable, recidivism, a decision had to be made as to whether rearrests, reconvictions, or reincarcerations would indicate a reoffense. The multivariate logistic regression model used to identify the causal predictors

of recidivism (or not?). This was chosen for the various reasons: the possibility of charges may be a "representation" of a "reoffense." Offenders may simply be re-arrested for a reoffense.

Despite the fact that inmates do not do more work, they are a high risk group and increase in school equity. Diploma Program at least some with a high school diploma. It is inside. It is there are no inmates with a felony certificate may be an inmate certificate.

Related to the 20th century. With the technological revolution, a GED program. Under the program may be found in the program have any effect committed.

It is also related to the 1980s, crime and "frills"

of recidivism necessitates a dichotomized dependent variable (Did the offender recidivate or not?). To satisfy this necessary step, one of the three recidivism levels of measurement was chosen. Ideological arguments exist on either side as to the validity and reliability of the various measurements. Employing "rearrest" as the measure of recidivism allows for the possibility that the offender was wrongfully accused, arrested, or charged, and the charges may have been subsequently dropped. This would accordingly lead to an overrepresentation of rearrests. Conversely, employment of the terms "reconviction" or "reincarceration" as the levels of measurement may produce underrepresentation of true reoffenses. Offenders may plead their cases down, charges may be changed or dropped, or offenders may simply be funneled out of the criminal justice system. For purposes of this study, we opted to run the risk of erring on the side of overrepresenting reoffending rather than understating reoffenses.

#### CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Despite these limitations, the present study raises questions regarding why a GED does not do more to mitigate the likelihood of reoffending once a former inmate is reintegrated back into his or her community. On this question, we can only speculate. Perhaps our findings are a reflection of the times. That is, as formal education has become more available and increasing numbers of citizens attend college, the relative worth of a diploma or its high school equivalence, a GED, has lost its purchasing power on the job market (The American Diploma Project, 2004; Murnane, Willett, & Tyler, 2000; T. Smith, 2000). Individuals with at least some college are today filling jobs that were once deemed worthy of nothing more than a high school diploma or its equivalency. As a result, former inmates are leaving prison with a persistent educational deficit, despite participating in a GED program while on the inside. It is possible that the diminishing effect of the GED could be because of the fact that there are no requirements to master a particular curriculum. When this effect is combined with a felony conviction, the majority of offenders who return to society with a GED certificate may not find a job. Employers are looking for a highly skilled workforce, and former inmates simply may not have an advantage when looking for a job, even with a GED certificate.<sup>3</sup>

Related to this, the U.S. economy has undergone a sizable restructuring in the past half century. What was once largely a manufacturing and service economy is today one in which technological and intellectual capital is paramount for success on the job market. Simply put, a GED cannot be expected to get one a job that earns a living wage in today's economy. Under these circumstances, recidivism rates would be expected to experience relatively marginal declines given the reduced worth of a GED or high school diploma. As found in the study, the GED obtainment only mitigated a recession into crime; it did not have any effect on the number of reoffenses. It is important to note that once the sample committed a reoffense, the strength of obtaining the GED was diminished.

It is also worth suggesting that the meager findings related to a GED's worth might be related to the quality of the educational programs that are used to train inmates. Beginning in the 1980s, the American public experienced a "get tough on criminals" shift in attitudes toward crime and consequences. According to Travis (2005), many educational programs deemed to be "frills" were eliminated or reduced in prisons. This shift away from rehabilitation toward

punitive ideologies would result in less oversight and decreased importance in educational programming. As such, it would be understandable if standards became diminished and learning was strained. It should be noted, however, that during the past few years there has been an increased recognition that all inmates will return to society (Travis, 2005). As researchers and policy makers acknowledge this reality, they have begun to recultivate the foundations necessary for successful inmate reentry. With reentry now holding a prominent position in sentencing and correctional discourse, one can only believe that the increased attention placed on treatment and education will hold subsequent value for society.

## NOTES

1. Other factors include the age of the offender at the time of his release, gender, race, substance and/or alcohol abuse, amount of time served, number of prior arrests, number of prior convictions, number of prior incarcerations, age of the offender at his time of arrest, whether the offense committed was violent, and marital and employment status at time of arrest.
2. Not drinking led to more future arrests, and it is believed that this is because of the influence of drugs. Interaction effects were placed in the models but were removed when they added little.
3. Adding to the complexity of evaluating a GED's worth are the effects of race. In a study for the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy, Tyler, Murnane, and Willett (2000) indicated that there were small effects gained from the GED on the labor market. The researchers only analyzed the results from lower skilled GED dropouts and compared the GED scores of young non-White dropouts with young White dropouts. The results indicated that young White dropouts with a GED certificate earned up to 19% more than young non-White dropouts with a GED.

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## **Appendix B**

### **Federal Grant 2006 Presidents Prisoner Reentry Initiative** **(PRI 2006) Project R.E.S.P.E.C.T. (Reentry Employment Service Program** **Enhancing Community Transition)**

\$900,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Justice (USDOJ) over a three-year period. Commenced July, 2006 ends June, 2009.

Project RESPECT provides for the provision of reentry services and post-release linkage to U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL) funded community based organizations: Goodwill Industries and Career Opportunity Development Inc. Grant regulations only allow services to be provided to those offenders who have a non-violent history released from Northern State Prison, Mountainview Youth Correctional Facility, Southern State Correctional Facility and Bayside State Prison returning to Atlantic, Essex, Hudson, Passaic or Union counties. Staff includes four (4) social workers and one (1) project coordinator who are responsible for comprehensive assessments and discharge planning for the eligible offenders. Offenders are afforded the priority enrollment in social rehabilitative programming that address an inmate's identified needs. Inmates are linked to a partner that provides post-release employment centered services that may include workforce preparation, employment placement and retention services and links to education and job training. Funding supports staffing costs, and start-up costs of Workforce Learning Link Labs at Mountainview and Southern State as well as supports the project evaluation conducted by Rutgers University.

### **Federal Grant 2007 Presidents Prisoner Reentry Initiative** **(PRI 2007) Project C.O.R.P (Camden Offender Reentry Project).**

\$430,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Justice over a two-year period. Commenced October, 2007 ends September, 2009.

Project CORP provides for the provision of reentry services and post-release linkage to USDOJ/USDOL funded faith or community-based organizations (FBCO) to be selected through a competitive bid process. Grant regulations only allow services to be provided to those offenders who have a non-violent history released from Riverfront State Prison returning to Camden County. Staff include one social worker, who is responsible for comprehensive assessments and discharge planning for the eligible offenders, and a NJ Department of Labor and Workforce Development (LWD) Employment Counselor who is responsible for employment planning and placement assistance. Offenders are afforded the priority enrollment in social rehabilitative programming that address an inmate's identified needs. Offenders will be linked to the FCBO Case Manager who will assist in finding and maintaining post-release employment as well as refer to or directly provide social services. Assistance may also include links to education and job training. In addition to the FCBO Case Manager, the offender will be assigned an Employment

Specialist for services which may include, but are not limited to, workforce preparation, employment placement and retention services. Funding supports DOC and LWD staffing costs and FBCO contract costs, as well as supports the project evaluation conducted by Rutgers University.

**Nicholson Foundation and NJDOC P.R.E.P.A.R.E. initiative**  
**Providing ReEntry Prequalification and Referral for Ex-Offenders.**

\$150,000 grant from The Nicholson Foundation over one year with an option to renew based on outcomes. Commenced June, 2007 ends August 2008.

Project P.R.E.P.A.R.E. provides offenders returning to participating counties (Essex, Camden, Passaic and Mercer) the opportunity to pre-apply for post-release public assistance (GA, TANF, and Food Stamps) benefits. The grant also allows eligible inmate veterans to pre-apply for veteran's benefits. Eligible offenders are assisted in the benefit application process and receive comprehensive discharge planning services. Staff includes two (2) social workers funded by the Nicholson Foundation and two (2) social workers funded with Direct State Services dollars. Staff are responsible for comprehensive assessments and screening of the offenders as outlined by the issuing authority. However final eligibility for benefits is determined by the issuing agency; NJ Department of Human Services and the Veteran's Administration, and not the New Jersey Department of Corrections. Funding supports staffing costs.

**Nicholson Foundation Project J.O.I.N.**  
**Jobs 4 Offenders in Newark**

\$145,000 grant from The Nicholson Foundation over a two-year period. Commenced July, 2007 ends June, 2009.

Project J.O.I.N. provides for the provision of reentry services and post-release linkage to Goodwill Industries for eligible inmates released from Northern State Prison who are returning to the City of Newark. Offenders are screened for eligible criteria and upon accepting the services receive comprehensive discharge planning and referral services. Staff includes one social worker funded by The Nicholson Foundation. Services offered prior to release include comprehensive assessment and discharge planning. Inmates are linked to Goodwill Industries, Inc who provides post-release employment centered services that may include workforce preparation, employment placement, retention services and job training. Funding supports staffing costs.