

BUREAU OF PRISONS: REENTRY WEEK FACT SHEET

WASHINGTON – The Bureau of Prisons provides reentry programming to tens of thousands of inmates each year, thereby reducing crime and enhancing public safety. More than 160,000 inmates are in federal prisons, 12,500 are in community based facilities and 22,500 are held in privately-operated prisons under contract with the Bureau. The 39,000 professional law enforcement officers in the Bureau are deeply committed to improving the lives of those who are sent to prison as punishment, not for punishment. In fact, serving time in federal prison presents an opportunity for many individuals to gain the treatment and training they desperately need to avoid returning to a life of crime.

Bureau reentry programs target a broad variety of needs that are risk factors for future criminal behavior, including substance abuse treatment, education, job skills training, mental health treatment, criminal thinking and much more. These programs have been proven to be highly effective in preventing recidivism and are the reason for the federal recidivism rate of 33.6 percent, half the rate reported for most of the state departments of corrections.

EDUCATION

One third of federal inmates lack a high school diploma. Every federal prison offers a myriad of education programs and inmates who participate in such programs are significantly (16 percent) less likely to recidivate than inmates who do not. Current offerings at all prisons include GED, English as a second language, adult continuing education, vocational and occupational training and post-secondary education courses. The Bureau is presently engaged in an extensive review of its educational offerings and intends to further improve and expand education programs at all facilities, with a particular focus on inmates with cognitive or learning disabilities.

More than one third of all inmates in federal prisons participate in one or more education programs, including vocational and occupational training. In many cases, inmates who complete the program receive a certificate from an outside entity (including the Department of Labor, trade association or a college or university), qualifying them for skilled jobs in the community. All prisons also offer parenting programs that include opportunities for inmates to engage with their children in positive and meaningful ways.

SUBSTANCE ABUSE

Approximately 40 percent of inmates who enter federal prison suffer from a serious to moderate substance abuse history, and many more have less severe problems with drugs and alcohol. All federal prisons offer substance abuse treatment provided by highly trained doctorate-level psychologists. Inmates are strongly encouraged to participate in the treatment, ranging from a 40-hour drug education program to a 500-hour Residential Drug Abuse Program (RDAP), which is proven highly effective in reducing recidivism (participants are 16 percent less likely to recidivate than comparable inmates who are not treated) and relapse (participants are 15 percent less like to relapse compared to non-participating inmates). RDAP includes “after-care” provided in the residential reentry center as inmates transition back the community and face opportunities for relapse not found in the prison environment. Non-violent inmates who complete the program earn a reduction in their sentence of up to 12 months. The Bureau recently

decided to expand the program and the opportunities to earn a sentence reduction with new regulations to be published during reentry week.

JOB TRAINING

For more than 80 years, federal prisons have provided inmates highly effective job skills training through work assignments in Federal Prison Industries, also known as UNICOR. Inmates who work in UNICOR are significantly less likely to recidivate (UNICOR participants are 24 percent less likely to recidivate than their non-participating peers) and more likely to be gainfully employed; additionally inmates who work in UNICOR rarely engage in misconduct, thereby increasing safety in federal prisons. Inmates who work in UNICOR earn wages that allow them to fulfill financial obligations, including support for their families. Participating in UNICOR is purely voluntary and there are long waiting lists of inmates who recognize the value of this unique inmate training program. The wholly-owned government corporation recently implemented a strategic plan to reestablish inmate job opportunities lost as a result of a downturn in sales.

MENTAL HEALTH TREATMENT

A significant percentage of inmates come to prison with mental health histories ranging from serious mental illness to bouts of depression. Upon admission to federal prison, all inmates undergo screening conducted by professionally trained staff to determine the need for treatment and/or medication. Those with a need are referred to appropriate treatment programs ranging from residential modified therapeutic communities, such as the Challenge Program for high security inmates who have substance abuse and other mental health issues, BRAVE for young higher security inmates facing their first term of incarceration, Resolve for inmates with histories of trauma, STAGES for inmates with personality disorders, SKILLS for inmates with intellectual difficulties and social deficiencies, Sexual Offender Treatment and more. In addition to leading these evidence based programs, the 600 Bureau psychologists conduct one-on-one counseling and group treatment sessions for inmates.

In addition to the programs described above that are detailed in the [Directory of National Programs](#), every prison offers many programs tailored to the needs of the inmate population. The Bureau maintains a catalog of evidence-based programs that institutions can implement using local resources. The director of the Bureau recently encouraged all wardens to enhance the program offerings at each prison by adopting programs from this catalog that address important issues, including anger management, trauma, criminal thinking, money management, health and fitness and much more.

The Bureau understands the importance of inmates maintaining ties to their families and has recently enhanced the opportunities to do so. Traditionally, inmates have been able to communicate with family and friends through the phone, email, postal mail and in-person visits. Recently, the Bureau has started offering video-visiting to female inmates – and plans to expand to male inmates in the future – as a means to address difficulties many families face in traveling to federal prisons.