

Link to the presentation: <https://vimeo.com/airclientvideos/review/528865609/fb7c447246>

I'm thrilled to be here on behalf of the Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO), to talk about reentry employment specifically. And I want to just start off by saying that I'm going to talk about a lot of the challenges that we still have left to work on in reentry employment. But I want to start off just by saying that I wake up almost every morning extremely optimistic about where we're at right now.

We keep hearing from employers about interest. We're in a tight labor market. It is a great time to be working with employers to think creatively about where they're sourcing their talent and finding great people. And if we're able to get them to those opportunities that can help them be on a path to prosperity, that we're going to be in a better place as a country.

So, now I'm going to get into the parts that are hard and where we still have a lot of work to do and where we can keep improving and where we want to help partner with all of you and the NRRC community to do that.

(Slide 1 Displayed at this time: Slide depicts – Two young men sitting on the floor, one resting on a suitcase the other with his eyes covering his face) (0:51)

Coming home from prison and finding a job is really, really hard. We all know the stat, there's 600,000 people coming home every year. Many of you in the room have actually done that journey. And so, I want to commend to those in the room who have come home and found employment and been on a positive path in that way. But for those of us that haven't, I just want to take a second to think about what that might feel like, and really what we're talking about when we talk about coming home and finding a job. I just want to actually pause for a moment and kind of think about what it would be like if we left this meeting today and you got on your train or your plane, and rather than taking you home, your train or your plane just landed you somewhere else, away from your community, away from your professional networks, away from your job. You lose your job, disconnected from family in many ways and you may be there for a year, a couple of years, 10 years, decades. And then at some point, somebody decides that you're allowed to come home. Your sentence ends, a parole board finally gives the go-ahead, policy changes. Something happens that allows you to go home. And every year, 600,000 people go through a similar experience and we tell them to get a job right away. We understand how hard it is to come back after a gap in employment. People talk about this with maternity leave and some of the barriers that people have when they're out of the job market for awhile. But when you really think about what it would be like to come home after 30 years and find a job quickly, it's a crazy challenge that we're putting in front of people.

I'm just talking about the social isolation. That doesn't even get to the stigma of a conviction. It doesn't get to a chronic health, a chronic illness that may have gone untreated for awhile, or just the trauma that comes with incarceration. Just all of those other things that can layer on the challenges, but just thinking about actually what it would be like to be out of your community for a while and have to come home and find a job. It's a little crazy. So not surprisingly, a lot of people really struggled to hit that milestone of finding employment. The data, again, not surprisingly, it's not always great on this. But if we kind of use our breadcrumbs and look across the different data sources we have across the country, my best estimate right now is that if you look three years after release that between a quarter and a third of people are working. Between a quarter and a third are still in the community, but not working, and the rest are reincarcerated. We've got a lot, a lot, a lot of room to grow in this area and a lot of room to improve.

At CEO, that's what we think about every single day. We're a very tight mission organization.

(Slide 2 Displayed at this time: CEO Vision – Our Vision is that anyone with a criminal record who wants to work has the preparation and support needed to find a job and stay connected to the labor force. We believe that everyone, regardless of their past, deserves the change to share a stronger future for themselves, their family, and their communities.) (3:22)

We do reentry employment services just for formerly incarcerated people. We've been doing it for decades, starting in New York and now expanding across the country. We do it through a pretty tightly defined program model.

(Slide 3 Displayed at this time: Model Plus Benchmarks – this slide talks about how Job-Readiness Training prepares and trains individuals to reenter the workforce, plus Transitional Employment provides immediate work experience with daily pay, plus Job and Coaching Placement connects talented employees with quality employers', plus Retention Services for One Year provides ongoing support to ensure participants succeed.) (3:39)

When participants come to us, they're often referred from probation or parole, but also through word of mouth from friends that they know who come through the program before. They come in for a brief job readiness training. No more than a week. We are not doing the level of support at that point that they are going to need if they want to do something more along the lines of college and community fellowship and other programs. This is very much starting point when people come home.

And then when they finish that initial class, they get a pair of steel-toed boots, a pay card, an ID card. And as long as their paperwork is in order, they're actually hired by CEO. So they become our employees and following that orientation class can go out and begin earning and working every day. We have contracts with Cities and States across the country to offer what's called a transitional job to people coming home. So within a week of walking in CEO's doors, people can be out getting back into the habits of work. And a couple of features of that really built around what we know people in reentry are looking for. So we run daily payroll for everybody on our work crews. So you're able to just get that money in the pocket right away. It is a modest check. It is not large amounts of money, but it's a starting point for people who are coming home.

They're also working on a work crew with other people in reentry and they're working with the site supervisor who's giving daily feedback and kind of providing some of that on the job coaching to help them get back into that mindset of work. I think the other piece is just that they're going through the routines that all of us go through every day when you get up and you go to work. In some cities, that's riding the train or getting a cup of coffee from the coffee cart or reading the newspaper and seeing everybody around you going through that routine too. Which I think is just all a part of this process of feeling like you're a part of something new again and a part of the working community.

Participants are out on crew for two or three days a week and then they're getting support the other days of the week from our job coaches and job developers in the office who are working with them on finding that first job post-incarceration and also resolving any of those final needs, barriers to employment. That can be anything ranging from updating a resume all the way up to resolving housing instability and the other barriers that come up.

It's not a cohort model. Some people, this is a one-month process. For some people this is a two-year process that involves getting violated and coming back out. The timeline just varies depending on where somebody is at. But once a participant gets that first full-time job placement, then we keep

working with them for a year afterwards. We find that that's really when we're able to start having some of those conversations more about, okay, what about education? What's it going to take to grow for you professionally now that we've gotten you into this first starter job, how do we keep going from there. For some participants, they stay at that first job for a long time, but for most participants, it's not their forever job. It's a starting point but then we're working with them on figuring out what's next.

(Slide 4 Displayed at this time: CEO's National Footprint – showing 27 sites in 10 states) (6:38)

We started off in New York city many years ago as a pilot project of the Vera Institute of Justice before becoming our own 501-C3. We're now in 27 sites in 10 States and we've done that growth over the last 10 years and are continuing to grow. I know that we're in a lot of cities where you work and also a lot of cities where BJA grantees are working. I'm happy to be kind of part of that network of the reentry community in those spaces. I know that we have a lot of evaluation nerds and data nerds in the audience, so I've only included two impact slides, but happy to talk more about it.

(Slide 5 Displayed at this time: Fewer Days Incarcerated – This slide quotes MDRC by saying “By using employment as an immediate engagement strategy after release, CEO intervened early on and placed people on a different trajectory, deterring future criminal activity. Reductions in recidivism are difficult to achieve and have rarely been seen in rigorous evaluations such as this one.” The slide also has a bar graph that highlights a 30% decrease in the number of days spent in confinement with help from the CEO Group) (7:10)

Part of what made our expansion possible is our randomized control trial that we did in partnership with MDRC about 10 years ago, that showed significant decreases in reincarceration. This is just one slide on the data, but 30% decrease in the number of days spent in confinement. And then our long-term impact on employment is continuing to kind of evolve and grow. But this is a more recent quasi experimental design evaluation that we conducted.

(Slide 6 Displayed at this time: DCJS Combined Outcomes – This slide shows a line graph showing the Percent Employed over the Month Since Enrollment and displays how CEP Participants were above the Comparison group for the duration of the evaluation which occurred from 2010-2012) (7:35)

In partnership with the department of criminal justice services in New York state across a couple of our offices. That's all I'm going to say about CEO. Talk to me later, if you want to talk about CEO.

(Slide 7 Displayed at this time: Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA), and has an image of a passport and multiple identifications including a Armed Forces of the United States and multiple drivers licenses) (7:52)

The picture is a spoiler, but we can do so many things. I could get anything delivered to me right now if I wanted to and we still have not figured out how to get every single person coming home from incarceration the paperwork they need in order to get hired for a job. That is crazy. It is crazy. I can't believe we still have to talk about it.

We know this, you all know this, you're seeing it, but I think it's important for those who haven't worked at this intersection of workforce development and criminal justice. You cannot assume this is getting done. We recently surveyed our participants in California who had been released from state prisons, so they had definitely served a significant amount of time. Certainly, enough time to figure out

this problem. 60% were getting released from prison without a state ID, which is also crazy because they were issued a prison ID and then you have to turn that in upon release. So, don't even get me started with how illogical some of this is. A state ID doesn't even get you to I9 compliance. So, when we're talking just about really what would it take to make a more seamless transition from incarceration to employment? We're still really struggling with this basic of getting people the I9 paperwork that they need in order to get hired.

Another area that I learned quickly about when I joined CEO, but is very niche within this world of reentry employment is around issues with selective service. So in the United States, men have to register with selective service between the ages of 18 to 25 in the case of a draft. Many, many, many, people at CEO were not working or in school between the ages of 18 to 25, I should say we're not working on the books. And so never registered for selective service, didn't realize it was something that they had to do. If you don't register for selective service, it really makes it difficult to access some of our very limited sparse employment safety net services in the United States. Federal student loans, WIOA services, a lot of these things that we say, well, the workforce development system is there. But if they can't tap into those resources within the workforce development system, then we're really struggling. There are some changes and revisions going on within the federal system around selective service, but it's still just one of those basic fights that we have to fight every day.

(Slide 8 Displayed at this time: Shows the images of the inside of a courtroom, a Parole Agent walking up to a house, and the inside of a jail cell) (10:09)

The other area of basics that I want to talk about is, I'm on a little bit of a mission to make sure that every American knows that jail and prison isn't the same thing. That every American knows that probation and parole isn't the same thing. Just the vocabulary that we're working on in the field is just, there's a lot of gaps. I think we've been on the road a lot, doing a lot, especially in the state of California where there's a lot of investment around reentry employment right now. But doing a lot of trainings for generalist service providers who are trying to get better reentry. We just spend a lot of time on the 101 of the criminal justice system. Because you have a lot of people providing workforce services who when a person says I have an open case, they don't actually know what that means. And they're a little bit frightened to ask and they don't really know how to navigate that conversation. I think especially as we welcome new providers into the reentry community, who are now interested in getting involved in it, we have to like really as a community work to be educating everyone else.

(Slide 9 Displayed at this time: Ready for What? – There is a graph that shows the Start of a Job, leads to Keeping the Job, and then leads to Succeed in the Workforce Long Term) (11:05)

Okay. I'll try to make this sound innovative, but my two innovative ideas that I want to talk about. The first, we throw around this term job readiness a lot in the field. I know that within BJ language and stuff, everybody's talking about work readiness and we talk about it too. At CEO, we call it the JSR, Job Start Ready, we have an assessment. There's nothing groundbreaking in there. It's what you would kind of expect it to be. A resume, I9 documentation, strong performance on our work crews and stuff like that. But we've really been revisiting that lately. I think one thing that's important to highlight, for those of you that have primarily worked in the criminal justice system, there's been a level of rigor that's gone into questions around being able to predict the future.

Regardless of how you feel about risk assessments, there's been a lot of investment in researching them, grounding them in data, aligning them with future outcomes. My kind version saying this about the workforce system is they haven't brought that level of rigor to thinking about what work

readiness looks like. I'm familiar with one work readiness assessment that's actually been validated against future labor data. That's the only one that we've found. So just this question of what do we really mean when we say ready for work and do we have the data that we need in order to measure that? We're breaking it out at CEO really into different stages. I think it's important to note that it is a different thing to be ready to start a job than it is to be ready to keep a job. And that's very different from being ready to succeed and prosper in the workforce long-term. We are very self-aware at CEO that we are at the start. We can maybe start getting people into phase three, but it's a whole community effort to get people into that stage where they're ready for success in the long-term.

Starting a job, I think is a lot of that tactical stuff. Do they have paperwork? Do they have documentation? Confidence for going out on interviews, ready to discuss their conviction history if it comes up in an interview. Feeling good about that process. Different from keeping a job. There are some skills that we want to make sure that people have before they go out on interviews. We want to make sure that they know how to show up consistently, that they're going to show up that first day on time in the right clothes with the right attitudes, stuff like that. But there are also some skills that you just have to learn on the job and we're very aware of that. So every workforce also has its own peculiarities. So being ready to keep a job in the company or hired into is something that you just have to deal with once somebody started. But what we're really pushing towards at CEO is, what are we doing at CEO and what can we do as a community to build the skills that are necessary for that longer-term success?

That can be tactical. We tell people to quit a job professionally, but do we actually talk to people about what that looks like and what a resignation letter looks like and why you should read your employee handbook about when you should quit and why you should wait to quit until the first of the month, so your health insurance stays until the end of the month. All of these things that it doesn't make sense to cover when somebody is in their first days coming home because they might not even believe they're ever going to get a job. It's not that we want to cover it up front, but we need to talk about it at some point.

And it goes on from there. I think that's when we're starting to have a lot more conversations about what does the future look like? Are you in an occupation that setting you up for a career that you want to have? And how do we think about economic mobility?

(Slide 10 Displayed at this time: Serving High Need Individuals – This bar graph looks at how CEO reaches individuals immediately after release from incarceration, at their most vulnerable time, and how their participants face multiple barriers entering the workforce) (14:36)

Just as far as what that looks like for participants who come to CEO and one of the reasons, we know we're just starting place is, half of the people who come to us have never worked on the books before. It's a start. Half of the people who come to us don't have a high school diploma. When we think about this need for education and where education fits into the pathway, there's a real big need there. Work readiness somewhere I think there's a lot of room for learning and growth and trying new things in reentry employment.

The last thing I want to close on is really thinking about isolation and loneliness and what that means for long-term employment. Because I think it's easy to think just about skills that you need to build in order to stay fulfilled and happy and moving forward in your career. I think we always imagine that somebody's first day at their job is going to be a victory lap and they're high-fiving people when they walk through the doors and somebody's packed their lunch. That it's this moment of victory. I think that is one kernel of truth for our participants. But the other classic scene that I think of is that scene of people eating lunch in the bathroom stall, because they don't know who they're allowed to talk to. The

loneliness of going into a place by yourself when you're not sure if you're going to be understood or embraced is something that we're hearing about a lot.

(Slide 11 Displayed at this time: Slide that shows the Number of family and Friend Connections for fathers and looks at the difference between the National average number of 25 vs the Average reported by PACT fathers of 5) (16:10)

And again, we never have great data on this, but I was really struck by some data that came out a couple of years ago, just on the number of social connections that people in the communities that we serve have. And so, this was a study of young fathers that 80% of them had criminal convictions. It jumped out to me because I was like, this probably has a lot of overlap with who come to CEO. But nationally, if you ask the average American, how many close social connections they have they can go to for help, the average answer is 23 friends and family members they can turn to.

Among this study population, the average was five and 15% of the young fathers had zero. For me, this makes me sad on many, many, many levels. When I just think about it from an employment perspective though, it's like, that's your job network, that's who's telling you about openings, that's who's encouraging you when you lose a job and need to bounce back. At CEO, we're really thinking about through our program model and through places in the community and places like Just Leadership and places that are out there that want to build this community. How do we more consistently think about how to build social capital for our participants? And really think about that as a driver of long-term employment.