

Transcript for BJA Second Chance Month video

MILLICENT NEWTON-EMBRY: One of the reasons I support postsecondary education in prison settings is because it protects our citizens. It protects our public.

WILLIAM G. FREEMAN III: 90% of the people in prison now will one day put feet on free soil. How would you have them come home? Would you have them come home antisocial, angry, alienated from family and friends, unable to connect, cannot get housing, cannot get snap benefits?

TITLE CARD: Access to postsecondary education in prison reduces the odds of recidivism by 48%.

JEFF ZMUDA: In collaboration and in concert with our higher ed partners, we offer degrees in everything from alternative energy sources such as solar and wind to general college degrees. In today's society, there's a great need for workforce. These folks are eager and ready to reengage and be a part of that workforce. Providing them the foundation that can help them obtain and hold that good job. That good job provides the resources to help them be successful. And whether that be housing, transportation, access to resources, that good job is that stabilizing factor.

MILLICENT NEWTON-EMBRY: It makes a difference to not only them, but the staff, because oftentimes the staff are dealing with some management problems. They're dealing with people who because they don't have hope, they are not going to behave in a way that keeps the environment safe. But when you see individuals sitting in class every day, coming home, working together, doing their homework, not being a management problem, it makes a difference.

TITLE CARD: Access to postsecondary education makes prisons safer for the people who live and work there.

SYRITA STEIB: My education didn't just belong to me. It belonged to everybody that I was housed with and incarcerated with at the time. Women who were unable to take classes or didn't have access or opportunity to be able to take college courses, became very protective of my education, my study time, and all of the things that are needed in order to go to school. It greatly changes the environment of prison by introducing opportunities that people did not know that they have.

WILLIAM G. FREEMAN III: Sharing knowledge disrupts the flow of what is normal in prison. And it had us in the yard as agents of change first and foremost within ourselves. And that was powerful to see. It was powerful to see gang leaders collectively talking about a class assignment. They're collaborating across lines that are usually drawn in the sand. Now these lines are blurred because they're classmates. It reduces violence because it gives folks a way to mitigate conflict.

TITLE CARD: Postsecondary education improves the culture in the prison and brings hope for improved reentry outcomes.

JEFF ZMUDA: I believe corrections leaders can improve the quality of our education programming in facilities in a few ways. Make it part of the cornerstone of your strategic plan. Identify partners in the higher ed community to ensure that we have quality, meaningful and effective education programs in all of our facilities. To deliver this programming in a way that allows our population the opportunity, affords them the opportunity to change, to see a future and to be better prepared for that return to the community.

SYRITA STEIB: I think when you instill that type of confidence inside of people that are incarcerated, letting them know that they are able to do the same work in the same way and deliver better results than people that are on college campuses, it gives everyone this renewed sense of energy, of wanting to do the right thing, looking forward to completing something.

MILLICENT NEWTON-EMBRY: The recidivism rate for individuals who complete post-secondary education is quite low. We see that also in our career techs, those folks who are able to learn a job skill. Those are not the people who are going to be coming back into your system. So therefore, you protect the public. You decrease the burden on taxpayers. And you provide an opportunity for an individual to go back into their community, to go back into their families. Provide for themselves. And that's a win win for everyone involved.