



# OKLAHOMANS FOR CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM

## Interim Study Report: Re-Entry in Oklahoma

Oklahoma House of  
Representatives  
Criminal Justice and  
Corrections  
Committee

September 20th, 2021

Transcribed and Edited by Colleen  
McCarty, Esq., Michael Olson,  
Esq., & Ashley Bender

The following report is a  
compilation of testimony,  
research, and findings from the  
Re-Entry Interim Study  
requested by Representative  
Ajay Pittman

The following report is produced by Oklahomans for Criminal Justice Reform, Inc. Oklahomans for Criminal Justice Reform is a 501(c)3 with a mission to serve as a catalyst for systemic change in Oklahoma's criminal legal system to promote just and appropriate accountability while reducing mass incarceration and its generational harm to families. We are dedicated to providing the most up to date news and research on criminal justice reform in Oklahoma.

The Oklahoma House of Representatives heard an interim study on re-entry on September 20th in the Criminal Justice and Corrections Committee requested by Representative Ajay Pittman. The report compiles the information that was presented by the various experts from across the United States.

Panelists included: Justin Wolfe the Chief Administrator of Communications and Government Relations for the Oklahoma Department of Corrections, Colleen McCarty, Esq. the Deputy Director at Oklahomans for Criminal Justice Reform, Oklahomans for Criminal Justice Reform's four lived experience interns, Damita Price, Zeke Gonzalez, Derwin Romani, and Gina Richie, Michelle Stanley of Georgia Prisoner Re-Entry Initiative, and Alice Johnson a previously justice involved individual.

The study pulled together experts and research and best practices from across the country on this topic. We have compiled the research into this report that deep dives into the research and takeaways presented to the committee.

**"10,000 CITIZENS RETURN TO OKLAHOMA COMMUNITIES EVERY YEAR  
AFTER PERIODS OF INCARCERATION."**



---

# Introduction

---

Over 10,000 people per year return to Oklahoma communities after periods of incarceration. These people are being released because a) their sentences are complete and they have served their time, b) they are moving to a GPS monitor and will serve the remainder of their sentence in the community, c) they are serving their time on lower security so they may serve the remainder of their sentence in a half-way house or community corrections center. The people in the latter group are allowed to leave the facility each day to attend jobs or school.

In other states, policymakers have understood and invested in comprehensive re-entry networks to provide services and job-matching for those folks leaving prison. Re-entry networks and services are key to preventing recidivism and improving outcomes for people returning to society.

Oklahoma has been a top incarcerator in the world from the early 2000's through 2018. After the passage of SQ780 in 2016, the prison population began to come down and we are now number three in the world for incarceration per capita<sup>1</sup>. Oklahoma has over-used incarceration as an intervention for people with drug addictions and trauma who wind up being caught in the criminal legal system. Since we use incarceration so frequently, it is even more imperative that we build a comprehensive re-entry network that allows people to succeed and thrive after they have served their debt to society.

By investing in job placement, housing solutions, mental health and addiction treatment centers, as well as robust case management that allows people to understand the resources available to them, Oklahoma can prevent crime and increase economic mobility.

Of the utmost importance is to understand that returning to society after a period of incarceration is incredibly difficult. The time spent while incarcerated deteriorates a person's connections to the community, their life skills, their ability to be self-sufficient, their executive functioning skills, and their self esteem. Expecting anyone to be able to return to their "normal" state after this experience is unfair and sets them up to fail. This is especially true considering the state of Oklahoma's policies around obtaining employment, expungement, and driver's licenses. Add to these barriers the various registries that people with certain types of crimes are on and the policies of the state have all but obliterated a person's ability to live a healthy, productive life.

As a state we should always prioritize diversion from prison whenever possible and where it would not impact public safety. Keeping someone out of prison is the single largest indicator of their success. Research shows that no matter how robust the re-entry intervention is, it will not ever be as effective as if the person never went to prison in the first place.<sup>2</sup>

The following report is a compilation of testimony given to the Oklahoma House Criminal Justice and Corrections Committee regarding re-entry policy. Representative Ajay Pittman requested the study and organized the lineup of speakers.

Representative Ajay Pittman goes on to begin the interim study by saying, "Welcome and thank you for coming. This is the Criminal Justice Committee and we are doing an interim study over reentry practices and how we can look at those to better our state and better those that have been justice involved in our state. Thank you for being here, we have a program with some amazing speakers that are going to give us some good details about what's going on in the state of Oklahoma currently & what we can be working on. We're going to hear some testimonies from some people that have been justice-involved in the past and then we're also going to hear some best practices from some other states and see what we could do to learn from them."

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/global/2021.html>

<sup>2</sup> Jennifer L. Doleac, "Strategies to productively reincorporate the formerly-incarcerated into communities: A review of the literature" IZA DP No. 11646, IZA Institute of Labor Economics Discussion Paper Series (June 2018).



1 IN 15

## WE NEED TO BREAK THE CYCLE OF OVER-INCARCERATION



According to the Oklahoma Policy Institute, "Oklahoma has the nation's highest Black incarceration rate. One in 15 adult Black men are incarcerated in our state, and we've maintained the nation's highest female incarceration rate for nearly 30 years."

WE CAN  
LOOK TO  
GA, TX, AND  
MANY  
OTHER  
STATES

## HOW CAN WE LEARN FROM OTHER STATES SUCCESSES



In fact, research shows evidence-based reentry support systems reduce crime and lower the likelihood of rearrest. At the moment, Oklahoma funds no comprehensive statewide reentry system. This report will explain how moving towards a evidence-based support system can work in Oklahoma as it has in other states.

IT CAN  
COST UP TO  
\$1500 TO  
REINSTATE  
A DRIVER'S  
LICENSE

## WE MUST KNOW THE CHALLENGES THOSE RE-ENTERING FACE



When re-entering society, people face stigma, difficulty finding jobs or housing, lack of access to formal education, and more. Unless they receive help, they risk getting caught up in a vicious cycle of recidivism and social rejection. This report details the first hand stories of four previously justice involved individuals.

3  
TYPES

## THIS REPORT BREAKS DOWN THE TYPES OF RE-ENTRY



In general, there are three main categories of social reintegration programs: prison-based rehabilitation programs; reintegration and aftercare programmes delivered upon release; and non-custodial, community-based programs. This report details how different ones can be beneficial.





## JUSTIN WOLF

Director of Communications and Government Relations for the Oklahoma Department of Corrections. He is a former prosecutor who has worked for the Pardon and Parole Board as general counsel.

**"I think one of the best examples is when I was talking to my staff about this I said, "We need to know the number of re-entry programs." The immediate response was "all of our programs are re-entry programs."**

Thank you to the Chairman and Representative Pittman and the committee for your time to give us a chance today to talk about re-entry in the Department of Corrections facilities.

There's just a few key things the Department of Corrections is always trying to get out there as far as information regarding our re-entry programs and our programs. I think one of the best examples is when I was talking to my staff about this I said, "We need to know the number of re-entry programs." The immediate response was "all of our programs are re-entry programs." Every program in the Department of Corrections is designed to help enable our inmate population when they get out to better reintegrate into their communities and into society as a whole. It addresses their needs, whatever the particular needs of that inmate may be.

The other message that we always have is that we begin with the end in mind. This is to try and assess an inmate's needs.

Every inmate, when they enter into the Department of Corrections, goes through a process with an instrument called the LSIR. That stands for the Level of Service Inventory and the "R" represents that it is the Oklahoma version. It's a measuring tool that has been validated against the Oklahoma population of incarceration so what that means is that we went through this Level of Service Inventory and it's designed to predict risk of re-entry into prison and then to measure that in a way that we can appropriately assess the needs and meet those needs while individuals are in our custody.

So the instrument has been measured. It's predictive results were measured against the actual population's true results and it has been adjusted, which is why we have that "R" in there. So, the function of the LSIR is to measure an inmate's highest needs so that we can meet those needs, ideally, before they leave our custody. Therefore, that assessment includes a medical work up, a dental workup, social history, educational history, psych history, job skills training, and etc. You know all of those elements are combined and assessed through LSIR and the rest of our admissions process so that we can look at each individual inmate's needs and develop a case plan to meet those needs.

So there is a timeline that addresses this continuum of care and the idea is from the moment they enter our facilities we begin a case plan. That case plan will follow that inmate throughout their time at the Department of Corrections. The inmate has a case manager assigned to them at all times and at all facilities and it's that case manager's job to help coordinate those different needs and the treatment options with that inmate throughout their time at the Department of Corrections.



Our case managers help to manage an inmate's interpersonal interactions with the other inmates and other staff, their job performances, hygiene, cleanliness of their room, everything that an inmate deals with while they're in prison. A case manager is designed to help make sure that they're meeting their goals in a timely fashion with their release date in mind. So, when they get within about eight months of release is when we start looking specifically at re-entry. That's where we shift away from particular needs of the case plan which could be anything from drug addiction services, substance abuse treatment, mental health treatment, anger management, GED requirements, things like that, and we shift away from those particular requirements being met and more into where are you going to stay when you get released, does your home offer a safe environment, do you remember the skills that we taught you on how to avoid the people, places, and things that brought you into prison, so that's sort of the overall outlook at how we monitor that the case manager is required to go over that case plan with the inmate every 120 days so we do it three times a year.

We've seen multiple requests from legislation to ask us to review that at least once a year, but we already do it multiple times, every year, because our goal, like we said, is to begin with the end in mind and to do everything we can to prepare that inmate. We have a number of programs that are available. At the Department of Corrections, we have space limitations within our facilities so even if we know a program is valuable and has worked we can't just apply it everywhere at every facility because there's physical space requirements for those programs.

The other challenge that we have is specific to each inmate. So, our inmates come to us at every educational level, with language challenges, with mental disabilities, physical disabilities, and health concerns. We don't necessarily get the inmate for the amount of time that would be necessary to address all of those concerns, so if you can imagine, drug court programs take somewhere around two years to complete successfully, but we might only have an inmate for a year and a half. Additionally, in that time frame, they could be trying to get a GED and address behavioral concerns or and substance abuse concerns. The length of time in prison is determined by the nature of the charges and the strength of the evidence against that inmate and not necessarily the amount of time that would be required to meet their various needs that they had when they came in through the door.





## COLLEEN MCCARTY

Colleen McCarty serves as the Deputy Director of Oklahomans for Criminal Justice Reform. McCarty is an attorney who worked for the Tulsa County Public Defender's Office and the District Attorney's offices in Tulsa and Wagoner counties.

**"It should be the goal of any state re-entry efforts to set someone returning from incarceration up for success. Oklahoma has not had a comprehensive reentry structure. We need to establish common definitions and language for this concept."**

### What is Re-Entry?

10,000 citizens return to Oklahoma communities every year after periods of incarceration.

Re-entry is the process of transitioning people from a period of incarceration back into their communities. A lack of re-entry support can be overwhelming for someone who has not had to "fend for themselves" in normal everyday life. Without help, people can begin to feel helpless and alone. This can cause a backslide into criminal behavior or risky decision making. It should be the goal of any state reentry efforts to set someone returning from incarceration up for success. Oklahoma has not had a comprehensive reentry structure. We need to establish common definitions and language for this concept.

### Barriers to Successful Re-entry

- Affordable Housing
- Lack of liveable income (employment)
- Lack of transportation
- Lack of financial stability
- Lack of clothing (both work & casual)
- Lack of food
- Lack of education
- Parole fees / UA costs
- Access to affordable Mental Health Services & Substance Abuse treatment
- Fines & Fees
- Access to medical care & treatment



## Collateral Consequences to Conviction

- “As of 2020, the NICCC identifies 1,088 provisions of Oklahoma law that impose these “collateral consequences,” a large majority of which act as barriers to employment for people with criminal convictions”<sup>1</sup>
- Other types of collateral consequences:
  - Unable to qualify for certain loans and educational scholarships/grants
  - Barriers to Occupational Licensing
  - Lack of employment opportunities and upward mobility due to felony record
  - Limitations on safe, affordable housing availability due to felony record
  - Costs to comply with probation/parole/supervision requirements
  - Social label / stigma of felony record
  - The ripple effect of all of the above

## Most Frequently Needed Reentry Services

- Housing (sober living, transitional, low-income, felon-friendly)
- Access to affordable and reliable transportation
- Stable Employment

## What separates success from failure?

- Community, Mentorship & Support System
- Structure (regular schedule, meetings, church or religious community gatherings)
- Financial Means & Stable Employment
- Safe Environment
- Access to Mental Health services

**\*Note: Oklahoma needs a working definition of “success” in re-entry. Many people are trading water, paying their bills, but are a few decisions away from a parole violation or returning to prison. Does success simply mean not returning to prison? Or does it mean thriving and becoming a productive member of society?**

## Data

- According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics (2012-2017) (national data), 68% of individuals released were re-arrested within 3 years, 79% within 6 years, 83% within 9 years
- 46% of individuals return to prison within 5 years of being released
- Recidivism by Age (according to Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2012-2017)
  - 84% of age 24 or younger within 5 years
  - 74% from age 25-39
  - 61% of age 40 and older

## Data (Congressional Research Service 2015)

### “What Works?”: Employment, Substance Abuse Treatment, Education

- “...post-release employment is one of the most important elements for an ex-offender to successfully transition back into the community.” (James 2015, p.14)
- “A majority of research found that prisoners who participated in prison industries had lower levels of recidivism.” (James 2015, p.14)
- “....substance abuse treatment can help to reduce recidivism and substance abuse amongst program participants, especially if the substance abuse treatment is provided in a therapeutic community (TC) setting.” (James 2015, p.14)
- “Research included in the Clearinghouse show that post-secondary education had a strong effect on reducing recidivism, while there was a more modest effect for ABE [Adult Basic Education] programs.” (James 2015, p.14-15)
- “Studies of GED programs show that participants were no less likely to recidivate than non-participants.” (James 2015, p.15)

<sup>1</sup>“Oklahoma: A Snapshot of Employment-Related Collateral Consequences,” Center for State Governments Justice Center, January 2021, <https://csgjusticecenter.org/publications/after-the-sentence-more-consequences/state-reports/state/?usState=oklahoma>



## Data (Congressional Research Service 2015)

### “What Works?”: Mental Health, Housing

- “Research on the effectiveness of prison-based mental health treatment suggests that these programs can help reduce recidivism... For example, a program that provided 70 weeks of classes (including a phase that incorporates a cognitive-behavioral approach) that focused on problem solving, goal setting, managing stress and fear, and improving cognitive skills, was found to have a positive effect on recidivism.” (James 2015, p.15)
- “Obtaining housing is complicated by several factors, including the scarcity of affordable and available housing, legal barriers, discrimination against ex-offenders, and strict eligibility requirements of federally subsidized housing.” (James 2015, p.15)
- “...the research on the effect of halfway houses on recidivism is mixed.” (James 2015, p.15)

### Michigan Prisoner Re-Entry Initiative

#### Three Phases:

1. The Getting Ready & Institutional Phase
2. The Going Home or Re-Entry Phase
3. Staying Home Phase

“The lynchpin of the program is the Transition Accountability Plan (TAP) that is prepared for each inmate during the prison intake process and modified as the corrections process unfolds,” said Deputy Director Schrantz.

“The plan revolves around identifying the inmate’s strengths upon entry into the corrections system and building on those strengths throughout incarceration and continuing until the offender’s discharge.”

[https://www.michigan.gov/corrections/0,4551,7-119-1441\\_1476-103248--,00.html](https://www.michigan.gov/corrections/0,4551,7-119-1441_1476-103248--,00.html)

#### Testimonies

##### “Too much too fast”

- A tribal woman (before the McGirt decision) was sentenced to 15 years on drug crimes. She had five children and was in an abusive relationship with her children’s father before being sent to prison. She was commuted so that she could return home because two of her children were being molested by their birth father. Once she returned home, she struggled with the trauma and pressures of daily life and relapsed into her addiction. She returned to prison within one year of her release.

##### “A Job Waiting for Me”

- A young woman was arrested and put in prison for 20 years due to admitting she had an addiction to the arresting officer. She pled into drug court and was separated from her very young child. Upon release, she had completed the RISE program in cosmetology and went straight into a job as a hairstylist in her small town. She has remained out of the system, although she still struggles to make ends meet and pay for court fines and fees. She is currently paying an attorney working on reunifying her with her child.

##### “A Harsh Assessment”

- A tribal citizen was commuted from a 20-year drug crime sentence. One of his supervision requirements meant that he had to receive a drug and alcohol assessment. The assessment indicated that he was at a high risk of recidivism and relapse. Due to his high score, he will have to attend classes, pay for drug tests, and continue therapy for many months longer than a person with a lower score. On top of this, his main transportation is via bicycle, so he has to plan time to get to his appointments on top of keeping steady employment.

**Oklahomans for Criminal Justice Reform now turns their presentation over to their lived experience interns to speak on the realities of re-entry.**

### Zeke Gonzales, Lived Experience Advocate & Aircraft Technician

Mr. Chairman, Representatives, thank you for having me. My name is Zeke Gonzalez. . . . So, [I am] living life after a life sentence. [I was] sentenced to life on the conspiracy charge to Distribute CDS (Marijuana). After four and a half years [I] was granted commutation and released for time served, my re-entry to society was not easy.





[I] went from making hundreds of thousands of dollars to nothing. [I] volunteered at a youth center and delivered tortillas but [I] had a plan and [I] went with that plan. [I] had goals and since [my] release over two and a half years ago, [I have] received [my] bachelor's degree and [am] working on [my] master's degree right now. [I am] an aircraft technician, a trade [I] learned in the air force.

[I am] working on [my] airframe and powerplant license also, and besides that, [I] work as an intern with Oklahoma Justice Reform but **one of [my] most successful goals [I've] achieved to date is [I] opened a community center, a fitness center, appropriately named cell 151. [I] talk to the youth, [I] mentor the youth, [I] offer fitness, agility, conditioning, and boxing. [My] staff is made up of formerly incarcerated and military personnel. [I] believe that a good re-entry program plan is vital to the success of that person.**

As we know, plans sometimes don't work out as we plan so with that [I] had a very very good support system, family, friends, everything, and even then it was still difficult for [me]. So I like to say this: imagine yourself starting all over again, no vehicle, no home, no money, no job, and then the psychological issues that you have from prison, and the anxiety of returning to society. Then you still have that label behind you when you fill in an application that you are a felon.

**That's where [I] think about having centers in different communities. [I] am an American of Mexican descent, a Chicano, so when [I] was released [I] had a lot of pride in [myself] and in [my] culture. [I] have [enough] pride to ask for help outside of [my] community and so [I'm] thinking it would be nice to have community reentry centers in these different communities to cater to them.** This will give them a sense of belonging, safety, and understanding, and with that, it gives them a sense of belonging but being part of the community at the same time. Therefore that's why [I] believe that these centers should be established in these communities to help this society and community as far as being successful in those reentry programs.

## **Gina Richie, Lived Experience Advocate & Crisis Care Center, OKC**

My name is Gina Richie. I had four previous incarcerations, where I was never allowed in a program because my sentence was too short and by the time my name got to the top of the list I was moved to a different facility, where I had to start the process all over again. **I came from a rural community where there were no resources and so I found myself back in substance abuse over and over again. This last incarceration was probably the most profound because as I sat in the county jail, waiting to go to prison for the fifth time, I asked God to come into my life and to change me from the inside out.**

Through this process I was introduced to two programs that were instrumental in me rebuilding my life. One was TEEM. The Education and Employment Ministry which is where I've learned personal development. I went from my lowest, with low self-esteem, to believing in myself. I learned how to empower myself, to rebuild my life after incarceration.

This program started while I was inside and I've been a part of it on the outside. They also gave me job readiness classes and job development and job placement. They have partnerships with second chance employers that I became employed with while I was on work release.

Another program was the Christian Women's Job Corps. It is a faith-based program that allowed me to apply spiritual principles to rebuilding my life. As far as personal life, I learned budgeting. As far as job readiness, I learned mock interviewing, which prepared me for the future. I also was introduced to Celebrate Recovery where I could get grounding from my substance abuse problem.

I was also awarded the 2020 Sybil Bentley Dove Award for transforming my life after incarceration and helping others do the same.

After I left in 2016 and I was released, I went to a faith-based sober living facility, Exodus House, where I was in a safe environment. I didn't go back to my rural community. I stayed in Oklahoma City, in that program, and I got support from my substance abuse program. Also I got to grow in my faith and rebuild my life with God.

Once I graduated from that program in 2017, I became an employee with the Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services where I was a Recovery Support Specialist and went through the Training Institute and became a Certified Peer Recovery Support Specialist. I was also awarded the 2019 Employee of the Year.

So these two programs were instrumental in rebuilding my life outside. I didn't have to allow the felony to define who I was anymore. I could rise above that and become the person that God really wanted me to be.

**I'm also a DOC badge volunteer, so I get to go back into prisons and share my story with those men and women that are still incarcerated and let them know that they too can have success once they're released. That there are**



programs out there that may be faith-based programs, but there's programs out there to help encourage them and support them as they get back on their feet and rebuild their life. What I would wish to gain from this, this speaking out today, is that the state would create policies for re-entry. I know Mr. Chairman talked about different programs to learn a skill, but re-entry or when I was coming out after I was first incarcerated, there was no such thing as that. There was no such thing as these programs. I had to invest in myself and pick the programs too, and most of them were faith-based, invest in me.

Also encouraged me as I journeyed to rebuilding my life. I've now been successful today and I use my life to give back to those that are still incarcerated. With DMHSAS, in mental health, we're providing more resources to help them rebuild their life.

Also thank you Representative Pittman for allowing me to be here to share my story.

## **Derwin Romani, Lived Experience Advocate & Peer Recovery Support Specialist, Student**

I'm really humbly blessed to be up in front of y'all today, especially Representative Pittman and Mr. Justin Humphrey.

I'm gonna share a little bit of my story and hopefully it'll be helpful.

First and foremost, we have mentors, everybody has somebody that has touched our life in this process. So we're here to tell our stories. In my journey, and this is just not sugar coating it, I used to come inside these buildings when I got out on parole, and I had a lady that always inspired me. Every time that I started telling my story and I said the negative side to my story, this Senator, she would turn around in her chair and she would motivate me. She would cut me off mid-sentence, but she was mentoring me and I didn't know it at the time because I hadn't got all the way to the level I wanted to be. It was Representative Pittman. Every time I came in this office, she taught me to be. She taught me that I'm not a convict. She would say, "Don't even talk in those sentences, even as a convict, you're a child of God. You are great. You're fantastic."

She always inspired me so this, to be able to actually sit here and talk to y'all is really like a spiritual thing.

My background goes from a middle-class, black family in Oklahoma, and you know like most of us said today it was just that one turn that changed your life and it could have been anybody else in this room. My father was in the same position as Colin Powell, or he was when he retired in 1976 or 78. My mother has served this city adequately for a long period of time. My mother is actually a retired lieutenant policeman, so the war on drugs did not exempt anybody from being sent to the prison system. Where her son wound up getting on drugs and being hooked on drugs and participating in criminal behavior from a very early age at 16 or 17. I was running away from home, getting this case, getting this felony and that felony.

But what people don't understand, but hopefully people understand in this room, is after former convictions, it can be so minute, or as simple as you being in a place that gets raided and in that place there are six or seven people in there and it's just a baggie. Just a baggie. That's after a former conviction of Controlled Dangerous Substances. But I was determined, so I became a law clerk while I was incarcerated. I became really good at it too.

**At the peak of my addiction, I went to prison. The state was paying about \$37,000 a year for me. I was not a violent offender.** I was continually arrested because I was an addict. I'm not sugarcoating it, I'm not going to give you the woe is me speech, because I was doing criminal behavior and I was a repeat offender of criminal behavior but what do I do now, I'll tell you.

I am a PRSS which stands for Peer Recovery Support Specialist by the Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse. I am a wellness coach. I have taken classes in small business out at TCC Metro Tech. I am a top facilitator of thinking about change. I try to promote that program anywhere I go. I'm trained in DBS & sexual harassment training. I'm a graduate and advocate for TEEM reentry program. I'm a certified facilitator of over six cognitive behavior programs. I'm a graduate of the Pride Therapeutic Community, which is a program that y'all need to bring back into the prisons. It was started by a warden named Dr. Kaiser.

Dr. Kaiser used to work with the state, but some vital programs like his are now missing. Dr. Kaiser came up with a program called the Pride Therapeutic Community. I was a leader on the yard and he came to me and he said "You're a leader of all the blacks on the yard. They all pivot to you, but I can't get any blacks to come to this program."

The idea was that a whole pod would hold each other accountable. We would actually write each other up and you'd have to drop it in a box. You'd then get discipline from the Department of Corrections, such as losing days and things



like that. We also had our own punishments.

These programs like this changed my life. Many years later somebody litigated and the program was stopped. These are programs that we need to bring back. These things had impacts on my life. Of all those things that I just called off, those things inspired me. **I had a 40-year sentence, but what inspired me to keep me strong was that I consistently and constantly had programs.**

As Representative Lewis' says, "be good trouble." My butt was good trouble. I was filing litigation on you, I was fighting with wardens from the grievance all the way to the courts. I had cases that were because I was actually fighting for what we're talking about in this room here today.

I was a person with 40 years. 45 is the equivalent to a life sentence, so I was five years short from having the same thing as a life sentence.

**We're always talking about reentry, but we also need to be talking about prevention.** When the young people get their programs first from an older person, well, I forgot to mention, I am able to go to college, OSU OKC, due to a program that needs to be expanded. It is called the Center for Social Innovation and it's a program for people that have fallen through the cracks.

I'm a facilitator. We, previously justice involved individuals, are actually leaders. So sometimes we need to be the ones facilitating those programs. We need to be the one to give the advice. Put us in the equation. I could talk to those kids in their language. Thank you for letting me speak.

### **Damita Price, Lived Experience Advocate & Theo's Cleaning Service**

Hi, how are you doing? My name is Damita Price. I was incarcerated for 21 years and I've been out about three years now. The success that I have is short term, I've just become successful after my release.

**When I got out, my felonies followed me. As far as working, getting a place to live, a car, just the general things that you need to come out and be successful, on top of having to pay court costs, fines and fees, probationary fees, which take up most of any money that you may get, it was difficult.** I mean if you're able at all, it's even hard to get a job at McDonald's coming out. As a felon, when I was in prison, the programs that they had were not for me. I had received life without parole, so any program that I tried to get into, I was immediately taken out because my term was too long. So I never got to see the part of being prepared for re-entry, even though I got my sentence commuted, by the time it was time for me to actually leave from my commutation, I had no programs that could help me. When I would ask people, they would immediately say you know it's not your time, we have to let the people who have less time go before you.

So everything that I learned, I had to learn on my own. I had to learn from my will to be successful, my will to not want to go back to prison. It was very hard. It's still hard now.

There are a lot of things that I think that need to be done in order for people to come out and be successful, even people that have long term sentences in DOC. If you have anything over maybe 15 years, you're not able to go into those re-entry programs.

**I'm saying maybe you need to have a system that addresses everyone that's incarcerated, regardless of how much time that they have.**

When people are released, the stipulations that are placed on them is very rough. It's hard to pay your costs, your fines and fees. Additionally, trying to find a job that can keep you above ground because, honestly as hard as I tried, I couldn't even get a minimum wage job. That's not a lot of money to pay court costs, fines and fees, and then to live. We come out and our families, they say that they want us, but they really don't know what it means to help us after incarceration.

We just try to figure it out. I met TEEM by accident, because when I got my sentence commuted from Mary Fallin, commuted from life without parole, I met them when they were just passing out a flyer. I signed up for it, but my case manager called me and she was like technically you have a life sentence so you really can't go to TEEM, but we're gonna try and if they kick you out then you know why. But I was allowed to take the program and it changed my life, it really did. So I'm grateful for that because through TEEM, I was able to learn how to fill out an application or do a resume, just the simple stuff that I needed to learn.

It's still hard for me to work. I mean to get a good job, so I just go to different places that allow me to work regardless of my felony. That's my story. Thank you.



**Oklahomans for Criminal Justice Reform went on to give legislative recommendations and potential policy changes.**

### **Legislative Recommendations**

- Department of Reentry embedded into DOC and properly funded/staffed
- Statewide and regional coordinators to provide resources and follow up support
- Three Phase Reentry process (institutional, short term, long term)
- Reduce felony lookback period for expungements, occupational licensing, etc.
- Require occupational licensing restrictions have a nexus to the original crime type (i.e. if crime was embezzlement, cannot be a loan officer // if the crime was a drug crime, cannot be a pharmacist, etc.)

### **Potential Policy Changes**

- Allow automatic enrollment in SNAP, Medicaid, SSI, etc.
- Require extensive re-entry training for Case Managers in DOC - every DOC case manager should be able to build a complete re-entry plan no matter where the person is resettling
- Incentivize property owners to reduce renting restrictions against those with felony convictions.
- Create a more complete statewide network of "felon friendly" housing and other re-entry services





## ALICE JOHNSON

Johnson was convicted in 1996 of trafficking cocaine and sentenced to life in prison. Kim Kardashian went to the White House on behalf of Johnson to advocate for commutation. In 2018, after serving 21 years, she was commuted by President Donald Trump and released. In August of 2020 Trump granted her a presidential pardon. She now is national advocate for criminal justice reform across the United States.

**“One thing that I saw that was very much lacking is that people who were serving long sentences had no opportunity to be a part of those classes. I questioned, ‘how do you tell a person not to hope?’ I fought for the rights of the women who had long sentences.”**

Thank you so much Representative Pittman for inviting me to come and be a part of this today. This is really something that so many other states need to do if they're not already doing it. So I'm so happy to be a part of what Oklahoma is doing and how you are not forgetting those who are and were incarcerated are also citizens. They have families who have been impacted and one day most of them are going to rejoin their communities. So I'd like to tell you a little bit about my story.

In case you don't know, since it was on national news, Kim Kardashian went to the White House on my behalf and advocated for me. She heard about my story and she took action. She saw the president and when he saw my story and they vetted my case, I was granted a commutation. Later in 2020, I was granted a full pardon. But before prison, I guess you could say I lived a pretty ordinary life. I married my high school sweetheart and we had five children. It was very tumultuous marriage. I lost my job, I had been a manager with FedEx before I got involved in something I should not have been involved in.

By no means was I a leader, but because of the conspiracy guidelines, I was offered three to five years and went to trial and was found guilty. Then I was sentenced to life plus 25 years and in the federal prison system. Life means life but for me.

There were many obstacles to me being able to take classes, but I really fought. I fought very hard to get into classes. In fact, one of the first prisons that I was sent to, which by the way was 1,500 miles away from my family, I worked in vocational technical. I was assigned to help those who were re-entering society even though I didn't have a re-entry date myself. I was meant to prepare them for job readiness and I taught them typing, computer skills, and more.

One thing that I saw that was very much lacking is that people who were serving long sentences had no opportunity to be a part of those classes. I questioned, “how do you tell a person not to hope?” I fought for the rights of the women who had long sentences. Fought for them to be able to take classes. And the prison agreed and allowed a certain percentage of people serving long sentences to be able to sign up for those classes which had an impact way beyond the prison where I was incarcerated at.



I served almost 22 years in prison but throughout the years I took programming classes, I took electrical. I'm afraid of electricity, but I took electrical because I found that that was one place where women would have a better opportunity for jobs so I became certified in electrical. I took additional computer classes, I took building classes, I took so many classes in readiness for my return even though I didn't have an out date. I just believed that one day God was going to set me free and that to die in prison would not be something that would happen to me. So I just held on to my faith and kept taking the classes, but one thing that I found while I was in prison was that it became a revolving door for way too many women when they were released.

**There are so many obstacles to successful re-entry. It also has to do with your release guidelines, many of them, like Damita said, were so afraid that they were going to make any type of technical violation that could end up being a new prison term. Where you have to go back to prison. That fear is truly like having shackles on you. Being free but not truly being free.**

This is really what I feel now having those shackles removed by receiving a full pardon. Because even though I was granted a commutation, I still had five years of probation to complete and I had to report into probation. There were, of course, travel restrictions, but I came out on such a large platform that I made a promise to the women who are left behind that I would never stop fighting for them. I've had opportunities to speak on multiple platforms about the need for prison reform which includes re-entry.

Re-entry plays a huge part in this because it is to the benefit of not only that individual and their families to have a good re-entry plan in place, but it's also better for our communities, safer streets. We have safer communities and plus it helps break that cycle to see family members working hard who've been incarcerated. It changes the landscape in the household. Re-entry is extremely important.

In my own experience, coming out of prison was horrible for me. This included not having any insurance. When I walked out of the prison, within my first two weeks home, I became very ill on the food that I was eating because I been used to over two decades eating a certain type of food. I had to be hospitalized and I had absolutely no insurance. It took me two years and with the help of family, I was able to get some forgiveness on some of the hospital bill, but I came out after over two decades in prison and still didn't have any insurance.

Also, it was very hard with my re-entry process to get identification. I don't know what Oklahoma provides for their returning citizens to help them get ID, but an ID played a very important role in my being able to integrate back into society. I couldn't get a bank account, I couldn't do anything because it was hard for me to get identification.

I've advocated for the release of women and men. As people were released, I became their person, their mentor to help them reintegrate back into society. I just believe that sometimes when people are released, the ball is dropped.

**If there's not a good re-entry plan in place, then the chances of that person returning back to prison is extremely high. I'm a big advocate of not only having re-entry programs in prison to help them have job readiness, but to also assess what the market is in a particular area are you preparing them for to ensure it's not something totally unattainable. For example, if there was no market for that particular skill in their community, their re-entry should be based on realities of what that person is re-entering back into.**

I really do appreciate what Oklahoma is doing and thank you so much Representative Pittman for putting this together so that our voices could be heard. So that the public will be aware of some of the obstacles that we face.

As a society and as a community, let us give those who have done their time, paid their dues to society, let us give them a second chance. Let us not be the ones who place more obstacles in their way where they can't be successful or can no longer successfully re-enter.





## MICHELLE STANLEY

Michelle Stanley is the Director of Re-entry Services. Previously, Michelle served as the Deputy Director of Field Operations for Reentry Services and the Director of Juvenile Services. Prior to joining the Department, Michelle served for 21 years in various capacities with the Department of Juvenile Justice to include Director of Operations for the Division of Community Service, Division Office Director, Assistant Office Director, Assistant District Director, Program Manager, Transition Counselor, Juvenile Probation/Parole Officer Senior, and Juvenile Probation/Parole Officer.

**“We chose to focus our attention on employment, physical health, mental health, and housing. With those area of focus, when we think about employment, we don’t just build capacity of individuals willing to hire our individuals...We feel that if you’re able to get an individual to the table and you’re able to allow them to meet with someone and they walk out the door with the job in hand they have been more successful in sustaining that position than individuals that we may just link to an employer or send them out as a referral to an employer.”**

Good afternoon. I’m Michelle Stanley. I serve as the Director of Re-entry Services with the Georgia Department of Community Supervision. We had the pleasure to go through the Georgia Prison Re-entry Initiative back in 2011 after we had criminal justice reform recommendations. I just want to give you guys an overview of what we did from 2011 till now and how we’re moving forward with our re-entry work.

We had a three-part strategy. In 2011, the Georgia Council on Criminal Justice Reform was created and they were tasked with conducting an annual comprehensive review of issues related to criminal laws and proceedings in the state.

It was done as a three-part strategy:

1. Reducing adult correction population
2. Specifically, reducing the sentencing threshold, looking at detention center caps, and additional funding for accountability courses.
3. Juvenile justice reform
4. Specifically, a full rewrite of the juvenile justice code in the juvenile court system, transforming how that process worked as well as making additional resources available for individuals coming through the system on the juvenile level.
5. Enhancing re-entry and reducing recidivism
6. This is where our division stemmed from and what I will be mostly touching on today

In 2013, our then governor, Nathan Diehl, asked the council to focus their attention on re-entry. The council found that people being released from prison were most vulnerable immediately following their release. As well as there were barriers to accessing community resources.

Throughout the process, we always had to be mindful to ensure that it was promoting public safety through collaborative partnerships.



So very early on, we started this process where all commissioners, for all agencies, came to the table to work on what we felt we would need to be able to roll out a very comprehensive re-entry program with everyone being on board. Through senior management and leadership and commissioners, we were able to alleviate some of those challenges or barriers of policy because everyone was at the table as we went through the whole process together.

Additionally, we had committees. The committees were tasked with working on issues around employment, housing, and special populations. Then they, in turn, made recommendations back to the council on criminal justice reform.

**The [Georgia] governor did an executive order where he established the Governor's Office of Transitional Support and Re-entry and, at the time, this office was attached to the Governor's Office, but over a span of six years it moved under the Department of Corrections. Next it was moved under the Department of Community Supervision as an admin of supportive function and then later in 2015 it fully merged into the Department of Community Supervision where it lies today. We've become a division of re-entry services.**

So what is Georgia PRI (Prison Re-Entry Initiative). We started trying to develop our strategic plan and framework and what we should look at. It was a collaborative plan that included community coordination, meaning support from our service providers, law enforcement, our faith community, our Sheriff's Office, our attorneys, our prosecutors, and families.

Everyone came together to create a continuum of care from prison to community supervision. We want to ensure they're wrapped in support, under supervision, of course. We took into consideration public safety. We also ensured that we engaged our community. There was a case management component that was built out and we ensured that the services put in place were evidence based.

We provided training to all our community service providers when we rolled out the initiative to ensure they understood the system and what it offered. We vetted those providers to ensure they would be willing to be a part of the process and be able to provide resources to those returning home. It also allowed us to gain buy-in from our community by bringing them together through training and through stakeholder meetings to ensure that we were meeting not only just what was needed for the individuals returning but we also were protecting the efforts of those that were coming on board to provide community resources for us.

We are separate entities, the Department of Corrections and the Department of Community Supervision, here in Georgia. The Department of Corrections manages our prison population and the Department I currently work for, the Department of Community Supervision provides supervision to felony offenders. Then the board of pardon and parole deals with pardons as well as parole.

So on to phase one, as I mentioned, dealing with accountability, was the getting ready phase that starts in the Department of Corrections after an individual has been sentenced. They're sent through assessment and classification, their risk level is determined, as well as their needs are determined, as to what they will need to work on while they're serving their sentence. Then the second phase is that possibility phase, that going home, we're getting them ready to transition, and we typically get involved and start working with individuals in this phase at least 180 days out. We continue to work very closely with them each month to make sure they are ready. We had individuals that were in the prison that actually worked with the individuals that have been identified in phase two. They start that work preliminary at least a year out but the work is more intensive when it is down to the last six months.

Then phase three is your sustainability phase, which is staying home, and what we're looking for while they're under supervision with us is that they're also supported with community resources as well as family support to ensure that they're able to remain home. We all know that the period of time when they're first released is the most vulnerable time so we try to ensure that we've wrapped them with supportive services to help them meet all the needs that have been identified based on the assessment. We want to make sure we have a warm handoff from the facility back to the community and ensuring that everything has been met

Just to share a little bit with you all about the funding as to how we were able to do this initiative. We were awarded three federal grants that were awarded in 2014. The statewide recidivism reduction grant, the JRI maximizing state gains grant, and the smart supervision grant. So with the Statewide Recidivism Reduction Grant we were awarded three million and that was over a three-year period of time. With that grant we were able to hire community coordinators and those are the individuals that were responsible for building resource capacity that would be available for the individuals releasing. We were also able to firm up our reentry partnership housing, we also needed to look at record expungement.

Under the Maximizing State Gains Grant we were awarded \$1.7 million also over three years and we were able to hire our prison in reach specialists. These were individuals that we placed in the prison that work solely with individuals that have been identified in that year, up to six months away from release and they provided the transitional services and transitional plan with them.





Something that we found that was very important when we were rolling out the implementation of Georgia PRI was to engage our statewide community stakeholders and we formed a steering team. Our steering team was made up of individuals in the community such as the Department of Corrections, our Labor Department, our community affairs, vote rehab, and human services as well as other reentry coalition members, including our civil legal aid as well as workforce and economic development.

We did this on two different levels. We did a statewide steering team and we did local steering teams. Our statewide steering teams were made up of more of your department heads and your commissioners but our local steering teams got to the meat of the individuals that are on the ground doing the work. We wanted to ensure that we have a good mix of individuals, agencies and local organizations, making up those teams because it allowed them to share what's available in their communities. They can use the steering teams to ask questions, as well as, during difficult cases, bring those cases before the steering team and staff it collectively.

Just a little bit about our local teams. They were responsible for developing, overseeing, and monitoring, the implementation process, as well as helping to coordinate the local community involvement. Lastly each steering team had three co-chairs and we wanted to make sure those co-chairs was comprehensive of a good mix of the team to have everyone's perspective heard and presented

What made the Georgia PRI framework so successful was a strategy around community coordination. **We could not do this work with individuals releasing without having community and housing coordinators in place who are responsible for building local resources and capacity in their areas. They worked very closely with their steering teams to determine what gaps were available, what gaps were presented in those areas, and they worked to address and build on those successes.** Our inreach coordinators were invaluable, being there in the prison working alongside the prison staff, as well as, being that point of contact between the offender and the family. They also engage stakeholders and mentors when we run across individuals that we knew that would have or needed a little bit more support.

So the first step in the process is staging and this allows us to look at the risk assessment. We use the next generational sex assessment, which we call the NGA. The NGA is done by the Department of Corrections. Any individual that was identified as being medium or high risk of felony arrest was eligible to participate in this initiative. In the original model, if a participant met the criteria, GDC transferred those individuals from their prison to a prison closest to their home, which allowed us to have more intimate transitional planning so that we were able to actually identify and link them directly with resources in their home area.

As a part of the transitional teams, once staged, in reach encounters can occur and that's when every specialist begins their work by visiting the prison and working with local treatment providers to meet the participants' needs. They also contacted the correction personnel inside the prison to ensure that those individuals are on task with their programming and also we made sure we participate in any transitional teams for post release. We ensured that the community coordinator was engaged and brought on board within the last 60 days of that individual's time so that we had that warm handoff from prison to the community so it was a seamless continuum of care.

Another thing we thought was important was to ensure that we had a designated community supervision officer that was set aside for the program. This just gave us one point of contact for individuals that had been tasked to go through the initiative. We had one officer that was providing supervision to those individuals, and that allowed us to have one officer that we were ensured were aware of the resources that had been put in place as a part of transitional planning, as well as any infractions or any other support or needs that came up as the officers started to work with the individual. It just again continued us to have that seamless continuum of care by having one identified officer, although our officers currently have their caseloads prioritized by geographical locations versus the offender's status, we thought it was important enough to maintain the seamlessness with the one officer through this initiative.

So some successes from the three grants and our successful implementation allowed us to not only be able to hire community housing coordinators through the grant but we were also able to fully roll those individuals into the Department of Community Supervision under state appropriated funds. So we did not lose any of those individuals and we were able to expand the re-entry partnership housing program. To date we have roughly about 50 programs that participate in this program and it gives us a capacity to be able to serve roughly about 1,700 individuals yearly. We typically place about 120 individuals a month in our housing programs and it costs us roughly about \$3 million to sustain those individuals. If we continue to keep our placements at \$120 a month we roughly spend about \$3 million a year.

There is also a transitional service document repository. The repository allows all those vital documents that we know an individual will need once they return to their community such as their birth certificate, their ID card on their driver's license, if they had one, any pertinent documents we knew they would need to be able to access housing or employment, were kept at the repository. We ensure that we got those documents prior to individual releasing and ensure that repositories sent them from the repository site to the release site in prison to ensure that offender walked out of the doors with that information in their hands to try and alleviate those barriers



Another way that we continue to engage our community and get individuals involved, is we held a Georgia reentry summit. We did that for two years. The first year we had roughly about 400 individuals in attendance but by 2018 we drew over 700 attendees which included organizations from the community, from the faith based community, and from other state partners, as well as some of our federal partners, and from employers. Everyone came together that had a vested interest, both nonprofit and private sector, to engage in what we were doing in re-entry services. We had keynote speakers, we had a leadership panel discussion, as well as we hosted roughly about 14 workshops during this summit, that ranged from topics that addressed everyone's need to include collaboration, employment, transportation, supportive services, housing, and things of that nature. We wanted to make sure that we represented every entity that was engaging from a re-entry perspective and it just gave us an opportunity to continue to gain that community buy-in and what we saw as a result of hosting these two summits was we had individuals coming to us. It used to be where we had to go out and literally knock on doors, and make phone calls, but we had individuals reaching out to us asking how can I get engaged? How can I work with this population? We have not held one since 2018 just due to the size, the cost, as well as things that we've been experiencing in the world. We have not brought everyone together but we have continued this process in a virtual setting.

So all that I've shared I've shared some successes and some great things, but of course, there are always challenges as well. We'll take a look at a few challenges that we face during this initiative implementation. We did have some policy and legislative barriers and this was mainly around our special needs population, such as our sex offenders. In Georgia, we have a thousand foot rule, where sex offenders can't be within a school a church and things of that nature. This created a big barrier for us as Georgia has a church or a school on every corner. So it makes it very challenging to be able to have services for our sex offender population, particularly around housing, so we continue to try and work through those barriers, and continue to try to build capacity to be able to serve those individuals. We also had the inability to implement the inreach-outreach model as it was designed and that had a lot to do with the population as a whole.

It got to be a little challenging for the Department of Corrections to be able to stage every individual in a prison closest to their home, just based on their levels. So we had to deviate from that model. We also saw a challenge of some duplication of positions and overlapping of services and of course we wanted to identify what those things were and work through them to ensure that we didn't have community coordinators and housing coordinators doing the same thing. So we wanted to ensure that we redirected those job classes to further be able to expand our community coordination. Also socio-economic factors also play a part and it just comes down to every area, doesn't have resources. For example, our metro areas have a plethora of services and resources. However, if you go to south Georgia, you're not going to find those same levels of resources, so that creates barriers and challenges but we continue to work even to the day to try and expand the capacity we have even in our rural areas.

So the last thing I want to share, as it relates to the initiative, is the evaluation that was done. The outcomes. Our evaluation was done by an independent provider. We actually contracted with applied research ARS systems to do the evaluation for us. We thought it was important to have a neutral party and they spent time doing surveys, not only of the staff, but of the offenders that went through the initiative. They also did surveys of our community partners and those surveys weren't all just done digitally. They actually went out and met with individuals and knocked on doors. What they were able to determine in the evaluation was that the model was implemented as designed for the most part and we were able to implement it. We did make a few adjustments along the way but we were able to see a reduction in our recidivism and we were able to meet our goal that had been identified when we applied for the grant by the Bureau of Justice, of a 14% reduction. We also were able to build capacity around employment and housing that allowed us to ensure that everyone releasing had access to employment and stable housing either by way of the re-entry partnership housing or through outdoor directory or through community housing that had been built with individuals that were willing to lease and rent to those who are justice involved.

We served roughly a little over 20,000 medium to high-risk offenders in the three-year period of time. As I mentioned, we were able to see a 14% overall reduction in reconvictions. We also saw, in some sites, as much as a 30% reduction. We also saw 11 percent risk of arrest reduction in our phase 1 sites and we saw a 20% reduction in our phase 2 sites. We often like to say that in phase one we were just getting our feet wet, it was the implementation phase, but by year two, we had already been in six sites. As we rolled into the next five sites we had learned from mistakes that had been made, as well as we had improved upon some things that had been identified. We were able to see more of a reduction as we brought on our phase two sites. We also were able to see a 15% reduction of risk of a felony arrest in our phase one sites and up to 21% reduction in our phase two sites. So overall we were very pleased with the rollout of the initiative. We still continue to work today and we were very pleased even with some of the challenges we met with the initiative, such as being attached to three different entities, with us having to reduce the staging phase of the program, as well as having to look at some of the barriers that we faced. We were still able to meet what the Bureau of Justice asked us to meet for the grant as well as the target goal that we set for ourselves when we were able to reduce our recidivism rate by 14%.

We were able to absorb and fund all the established positions that were started by the grant. We were able to combine our faith housing and community coordination roles.



That just allowed us to have more individuals able to work on community coordination. We redefined our inreach coordinators role as well, as we adapted a framework from the pilot initiative, and it allowed us to move to a circuit model instead of a county model. So we went from 17 counties to 55 counties which allowed us to cover 17 circuits, as well as we pushed our faith-based initiatives to be handled more at the local level rather than the state level.

We'll get into just kind of where we are today in our area focus as to how we're meeting our re-entry needs. So as much as we know there are several areas that we could focus on in re-entry as a division. We chose to focus our attention on employment, physical health, mental health, and housing. With those area of focus, when we think about employment, we don't just build capacity of individuals willing to hire our individuals, but we actually host job and career fairs quarterly, where we ask employers to come out on site and actually conduct on-site interviews and do on-site hiring and on-boarding. We feel that if you're able to get an individual to the table and you're able to allow them to meet with someone and they walk out the door with the job in hand they have been more successful in sustaining that position than individuals that we may just link to an employer or send them out as a referral to an employer.

With our physical health we tapped into the Affordable Health Care Act so we ensure that we provide health care enrollment assistance to every individual released from prison to ensure we alleviate the barrier of them not being able to meet their medical needs. With mental health we are doing an assessment of those individuals as soon as they come through our intake process and we're making referrals for mental health services for any individual that needs mental health services. Of course, with housing we're tapping into housing before they're released. Individuals are unable to be released or paroled without having a residence plan that's been approved. So we ensure that if the individual doesn't have housing to return to with their family that we tap into community placement assistance through rpa store or our community capacity around individuals that will rent are leased to individuals.

Our last fiscal year we served a little over 8 000 individuals in re-entry services and we break that out by looking at direct linkages and direct linkages are individuals we referred for services. We ensure they receive the service that's what we call a direct linkage in our portal, which has a little over 8,900. That's how we document all of our interactions that are made on behalf of the individuals that we're serving. We were able to bring on 191 new employment resources and that was even during a pandemic that brought our total employment resources up to 725 and we were able to link 2473 individuals directly to employment in 2021. We were able to place 615 individuals in housing in 2021, and increased our available housing resources by 35 percent. We were able to refer and directly link 1657 individuals to housing resources.



# CASE STUDY: GEORGIA INITIATIVE

MANY OTHER STATES HAVE DEDICATED AGENCIES WHO WORK ON HELPING PEOPLE WHO HAVE BEEN INCARCERATED TRANSITION BACK TO EVERYDAY LIFE. THESE PROGRAMS HAVE BEEN SUCCESSFUL IN REDUCING RECIDIVISM AND INCREASING THE ECONOMIC MOBILITY OF PEOPLE AFTER PERIODS OF INCARCERATION. GEORGIA HAS EFFECTIVELY IMPLEMENTED A PLAN LIKE THIS, SERVING OVER 8,000 INDIVIDUALS IN 2020.

14%

The program saw an overall 14% reduction in re-convictions. The highest rate in reductions was up to 30% in some areas. Additionally, there was up to a 21% reduction in felony arrests specifically.



2,473

They have a face-to-face approach. They ask employers to come conduct on-site interviews and do on-site hiring and on-boarding. Through this they've connected 2,473 people straight to jobs.



1,657

Individuals are unable to be released or paroled without having a residence plan that's been approved. With this in mind, the program was able to directly link 1,657 people to housing.



Michelle Stanley, the Director of Re-entry at the Georgia Department of Community Supervision. She says the following about their overall mission, "We chose to focus our attention on employment, physical health, mental health, and housing. With those area of focus, when we think about employment, we don't just build capacity of individuals willing to hire our individuals, but we actually host job and career fairs quarterly, where we ask employers to come out on site and actually conduct on-site interviews and do on-site hiring and on-boarding. We feel that if you're able to get an individual to the table and you're able to allow them to meet with someone and they walk out the door with the job in hand they have been more successful in sustaining that position than individuals that we may just link to an employer or send them out as a referral to an employer."



# Summation

**Oklahoma is currently number three in incarceration per capita in the world. In fact, 10,000 people return to their communities after periods of incarceration each year in Oklahoma**

## Recidivism by Age...

When a previously justice-involved individual is re-arrested, it is called recidivism.

According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics (2012-2017), 68% of individuals released were re-arrested within 3 years, 79% within 6 years, 83% within 9 years.

84%

The Bureau of Justice Statistics goes on to say, 84% of age 24 or younger are re-arrested within five years.

74%

The Bureau of Justice Statistics' data shows that 74% from age 25-39 are rearrested within five years.

61%

Finally, their data shows that 61% of previously justice involved individuals age 40 and older are re-arrested within 5 years.

**\*These numbers are all without re-entry programs.\***

- People who are sentenced to long sentences in Oklahoma are not eligible to receive classes, training, or reentry services. This causes low morale and low skills for the population serving on long sentences. It is also demoralizing for those individuals who want to better themselves inside and have no resources to do so.
- At the same time, the converse is true -- people in the Department of Corrections on short stays often move facilities frequently and are taken away from programs they have been on the waiting list for. There is no "continuity of care" for training and programs that applies system-wide.

## People returning home face barriers in almost every area of society...

These areas include education, employment, housing, substance abuse treatment, mental health care, driving privileges and so much more. Just to highlight one area, previously justice-involved people are twice as likely to have no high school credentials at all and 25%, nation-wide, have no high school diploma, GED, or college.

## Actions

01

Oklahoma Department of Corrections does not have a comprehensive "continuum of care" for people in their facilities. People often exit facilities having gotten no training, classes, or programs.

02

Job placement is the single largest indicator of success for someone leaving prison. Having a stable source of income becomes an insulator against most other reentry barriers.

03

States with more robust re-entry programs have lower recidivism, higher quality of life for those leaving prison, and accelerated economic mobility.

