

The Effect of Prison Education Programs on Recidivism (December 2010)

Included in the Department of Corrections' (SCDC) April 29, 2019 letter to the House Legislative Oversight Committee (LOC). This information was provided in response to the following question in LOC's March 27, 2019 letter to the Department of Corrections: "20. Please further explain why the agency wants the classification system to be more "behavioral" based, as opposed to only based on length of sentence including: (a) what would be needed to make it more "behavioral" based and (b) what are the pros and cons of making it more "behavioral" based."

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The Effect of Prison Education Programs on Recidivism

John H. Esperian

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ABSTRACT

With constraints on budgets everywhere across America, many programs in U S prisons are being closely monitored to determine if costs can be cut and money saved in daily operations. A dramatic example occurred most recently at the College of Southern Nevada where, at a June graduation ceremony for inmates who earned a GED, or a high school diploma, from the Clark County School District, or an AA from C S N. More than 40 students received either a GED or a high school diploma, and only one student received an AA.

This study offers strong support for the argument that it is far more profitable for states to fund education classes for inmates , for two reasons: first, doing so reduces recidivism dramatically, and second because educating felons eliminates the costs associated with long term warehousing.

The study includes not only research into attitudes toward convicted felons, but also statistics which support the argument that it pays to educate. Included also are interviews with professional men and women directly involved in the education of the incarcerated.

Having worked in prison educational programs for ten years, three of them as director of prison education for the College of Southern Nevada, I decided to learn if educational programs fulfilled their goal, namely to educate, and thereby contribute directly to the reduction of crime and the consequences of recidivism, specifically, the attendant costs of locking criminals up. The opportunity to do this study presented itself through the good offices of the College of Southern Nevada and the Board of Regents of the Nevada System of Higher Education which, despite burgeoning system-wide fiscal difficulties, preserved and agreed to underwrite a number of sabbatical proposals for college professors. What follows is that study.

Overview

The last hundred years has seen a continuing debate about how to treat individuals held in American correctional facilities. Are they only to be punished, or is it possible through education and other means to change these people in a way that they can become law-abiding citizens who contribute to the welfare of society? At the very least, can the education of prisoners prevent their return to a life of crime and, eventually, to prison? A variety of thoughts have been expressed in the research on corrections in America. The following is one particularly worthy of consideration when attempting to understand the merit, purpose and success of corrections policy in the U. S.

The consideration extended to the seemingly undeserving person is not intended for his or her personal benefit, but expresses the moral integrity of the one who extends it. It enhances the dignity of human life, especially in situations where extending it appears to be hopelessly misspent.
(E.Bittner, qtd in Schwartz 172)

Early History of Corrections

The early history of corrections thinking, similar to today, reflects the ideas and values of the societies and governments which mandated it. Not surprisingly, historically early attitudes were characterized by retribution and punishment—

and the uglier the better. Consider the following sentence, in 1757, of Francois Damiens, convicted of unsuccessfully attempting to kill King Louis XV of France:

He is to be taken...in a cart, wearing nothing but a shift, holding a torch of burning wax...the flesh will be torn from his breasts, arms, thighs, and calves with red-hot pinchers, his right hand holding the knife with which he committed the said parricide, burnt with sulphur, and on those places where the flesh be torn away, poured molten lead, boiling oil, burning resin, wax and sulphur melted together and then his body drawn and quartered by four horses . . . (Clear and Cole 30)

Until the 19th century, throughout Europe and America, punishments were public occasions and street spectacles. However, with the rise of the penitentiary as a place where offenders could reflect on their misdeeds, repent, and prepare for life as law-abiding citizens, torture, as a public spectacle, disappeared. Accordingly, it was not until the beginning of the Middle Ages in Europe, during the 13th century that forms of legal sanctions familiar to 21st century society appeared.

Response to crime at that time was initially looked upon as a private affair and wrongs were avenged in accordance with the *lex talionis*, or law of retaliation. In England, by the year 1200 AD (CE), a system of *wergild*, or payment of money as compensation for a wrong was developed as a way of reducing the frequency of violent blood feuds. (Clear and Cole 31)

Prior to the 19th century, jails in Europe and England were used primarily for the detention of people awaiting trial. From the Middle Ages to the American Revolution, imprisonment, transportation (to Australia and the American colonies), corporal punishment, and execution dominated the correctional landscape. (Clear and Cole 44)

With the Enlightenment, however, changes began to be made in penal policy: A shift of focus occurred during the later part of the 18th century. Rather than stressing physical punishment of the offender, efforts began to be directed to the reformation of the offender. These changes were first proposed in Europe and later brought to fruition in America, which makes clear the reality that criminal justice in America has deep historical roots preceding the founding of this country.

History of Corrections in America

Corrections in America, during the colonial period, followed laws and practices

transferred from England and adapted to local conditions. As in England, banishment, corporal punishment, the pillory, and execution were the common penalties.

In 1682, however, with the arrival of William Penn, Pennsylvania adopted "The Great Law" which was based on humane Quaker principles and emphasized hard labor in a house of correction as punishment for most crimes. Death was reserved for premeditated murder. Quaker Code survived until 1718 when it was replaced by the Anglican Code which listed 13 capital offenses punishable by death. Fines, whipping, branding, mutilation, and lesser forms of corporal punishments were prescribed for other felonies including larceny. (Clear and Cole 49)

As the penitentiary evolved as a viable corrections institution, the punitive colonial penal system based on retribution was seen as incompatible with a society committed to the idea of human perfectibility. The penitentiary was conceived as a place where criminal offenders would be isolated from the bad influences of society and of one another—so that by reflecting on their misdeeds while engaged in productive labor, they could be reformed.

The post-Civil War period brought more change as reformers became disillusioned with the results of the penitentiary movement—in short, deterrence and reform had not been achieved. The reformatory movement, which took shape in the late 19th century emphasized education and training, and on the basis of their achievement and conduct, offenders moved toward release. Like their adult counterparts, juveniles incarcerated at the turn of the century were supposed to learn a trade that would assist them on the outside.

The next chapter in the shaping of American penology was a result of the progressive movement which evolved during the first two decades of the 20th century. Progressives placed their faith in state action to deal with the social problems of slums, vice and crime. They believed, also, that it was necessary to consider the life history of each offender and then devise a treatment program specific to that individual—in other words, treatment according to the needs of the offender, in contrast to punishment according to the severity of the crime. (Clear and Cole 61)

Current views reflect a pendulum swing back to a preference for retribution. Beginning in the late 1960s, the public became concerned about rising crime rates. Rethinking of corrections emphasized the need to move away from the goal of rehabilitation toward a greater concern for crime control. James Wilson summarized this more recent trend when he declared that society's efforts to understand and curb the rise in crime have been frustrated

by, "our optimistic and unrealistic assumptions about human nature." (qtd in Clear and Cole 68) He further finds it strange that society persists in the view that we can "find and alleviate the 'causes' of crime and that serious criminals can be rehabilitated."(68)

Not surprisingly, the costs, currently, both financial and human, of retributive crime control policies are being reexamined and rethought. Are the costs of incarceration and surveillance justified? Has crime been reduced? Are people more safe? These are questions that far too often elicit negative responses in the 21st century.

Finally, as a footnote to the retributive school of thought, following the 1976 Supreme Court decision in Gregg vs Georgia, 36 states rewrote their statutes so as to provide for the death penalty.

What is Recidivism?

Recidivism is a return to criminal behavior after release, and the effectiveness of corrections is usually measured by *rates of recidivism*. Recognized factors impact recidivism rates. Among them are: the socio economic status, effectiveness of post release supervision (for parolees), length of time incarcerated, severity and seriousness of crime committed, access to data which varies from state to state, and educational level of achievement of each individual . As follow-up is also an important factor, it is understood that as the time of follow-up periods increase, or become less frequent, rates of recidivism grow.

One conclusion that can be made regarding recidivists and their return to criminal behavior has been offered by Harriet Gagliano in her doctoral dissertation where she writes, the fact that 60% of prison inmates cannot read above the sixth grade level "provides some indication of one major reason for their criminal activity" (68).

Steven Klein of the U S Dept. of Education writes, "American prisoners have consistently tested at the lowest levels of educational achievement, and at the highest levels of illiteracy and educational disability of any segment in our society." (qtd in Burton 8). He and his colleagues conclude, "considering the vast numbers of inmates that do not possess the basic social and educational skills that they need to function in society, it should come as no surprise that many of those released from prison or jail will eventually return" (Burton 8).

Public Perceptions and Opinions

Public perceptions and opinions are, to say the least, strong—on both sides of the pro-con spectrum. A letter posted on the internet by a California prison

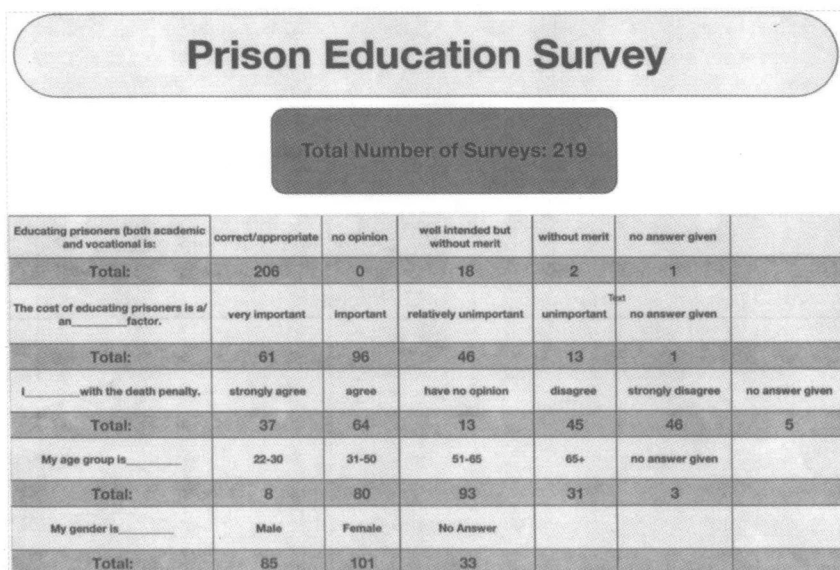
security officer reflects a view of prisons that is more common than some progressive penologists would care to admit. Here are a few lines from a two and one half page single spaced letter from the officer to anyone who is willing to listen.

The typical day in an inmate's life consists of being awoken(sic) at around 6:45am for chow. They walk to the dining hall where they are served coffee and/or juice and a FREE balanced breakfast that would cost my child \$2 at school. They sit and eat breakfast, and socialize with their brethren for about 15-20 minutes, and on the way out, receive their free bag lunch. Then, if they have a job, off they go (the average workday for an inmate is about six hours). If they aren't employed, they go back to their housing unit until the yard opens at about 8:30 or so. Once out to yard, they have a myriad of recreational choices in which to indulge. Some inmates play basketball or run the track. Others prefer handball or tennis. Less adventurous fellows may choose to throw around a Frisbee or participate in a game of horseshoes. Some simply lay their blanket out on the grass and sunbathe. There are softball tournaments to compete in for prizes, (sodas, ice cream, etc.) This scenario is repeated three times a day for a total of about 8.5 hours of daily recreational opportunity, seven days a week. Wouldn't that be nice?

The author is clearly hostile the notion of any kind of effort at rehabilitation effort and more favorable to the retributive approach to corrections. More significantly, he focuses on what are shortcomings and gaps in social welfare in the U S and compares these gaps to "free" food and medical care available in the prisons.

The writer fails to point out that life for prisoners is 24-7 behind locked cell doors and razor-wire topped fences, being told when and what to eat, and when to retire. And if inmates do have a job paying 10-25 cents an hour, the money will go either to victim restitution or to their "account" which can be used for purchase of sundry items from the prison "store". They will not see a nickel until the day they are released.

Interestingly, a straw poll of over 200 teaching faculty at the College of Southern Nevada has a somewhat different outcome. Following are the three questions asked and the teachers' responses. As the table demonstrates, there is wider acceptance among CSN faculty for education, and, interestingly, fairly wide support for the death penalty as well.



The Practice of “Warehousing”

Paul Butler writes that released felons are just as dangerous if not more so than before they were sentenced. Why? Because, he argues, prisoners do not get reformed, and it’s not because they can’t be rehabilitated, but rather because prison is a correctional facility in name only. A “long term storage locker,” he concludes, would be a more accurate description. (30)

Sunny Schwartz, a legal assistant prior to becoming a lawyer, and prisoner-education advocate, agrees. First, she says, many believe that prison should be a horrible experience. Many people, she believes, don’t think of prison as a deterrent, so much as just desserts. “They” hurt us; therefore “we” should hurt “them” (126).

For years, Schwartz goes on to say, politicians have won elections by promising to take away cable TV and weight rooms or anything seen to make prisons “cushy”. The prevailing wisdom, she says, is that prisoners deserve to be treated like animals. The consequences of making prison a nightmare, however, are worth considering: prisoners treated this way manifest an inability or unwillingness to take responsibility for committing their crimes, or to feel remorse, blaming others for their circumstances, in particular spending time growing angrier and angrier about being treated like an animal. (127) “They are,” Schwartz concludes, “usually full of rage” when they are released and less

prepared to function as citizens, the predictable product of what she terms "monster factories."

The current term for this corrections policy is "warehousing," and President Obama used it in a speech in 2007 at Howard University where he said that his administration would review drug sentences to see where "we could reduce the blind and counterproductive warehousing of nonviolent offenders" (Butler 182).

Schwartz sums up the cost-sensitive and controversial issue of educating felons thoughtfully and idealistically. What we need to do with prisoners is get them to hold a mirror up to their behavior and their lives, not get them to kneel on pebbles; the first step in holding up that mirror is getting the prisoners a basic education. (191)

This process she refers to as vital steps in the path to "restorative justice."

Recidivism Statistics

Statistics support the claim/hypothesis that educating prisoners contributes significantly to reducing recidivism. [General numbers provided by research suggest 50% to 70% re-incarceration within three years. ("Congressional Leaders" 1 ; Education Newsletter II 2)]

- a.) Three state recidivism studies made in 1997 by Steurer, Smith, and Tracy, conducted in Maryland, Minnesota, and Ohio involved 3600 men and women inmates released from prison at least three years. The study showed that male and female offenders who participated in education programs while in prison reduced re-incarceration by 29%. ("Recidivism Rates" 3,4)
- b.) A 2007 study of incarcerated mothers in Colorado found that recidivism rates of women who participated in vocational programs had a recidivism rate of 8.75%, those who completed their GED, 6.71%, and those who participated in neither a vocational or academic program, 26%. ("Recidivism Rates" 5)
- c.) Another study in 2002 surveyed research in Florida, Maryland, Massachusetts, New York, Ohio, Texas, Utah and Virginia. Results indicated that educational programs cut recidivism from 49% to 20%. ("Recidivism Rates" 6)
- d.) "National studies show," write Keys and Jackson, "that college classes cut recidivism by 30% or more. That would make a good investment for state taxpayers."

- e.) A West Virginia study (1999-2000) found dramatic outcomes. Records of 320 adult male inmates discharged in 1973 were followed. At the end of four years, there were 76 recidivists; 55 had not participated in an educational program, only 7 had completed a GED program, and four were college level participants. (Gordon and Weldon 202)
- f.) According to the National Correctional Association, in a 2009 report, inmates who earn an AA/AS are 70% less likely to recidivate than those who do not complete a program, a GED, 25% less likely to recidivate, and those who earn a vocational certificate, 14.6% less likely to recidivate. (*Education Newsletter 1 n.pag*)
- g.) A recent U S Department of Justice report says that "Prison-based education is the single most effective tool for lowering recidivism. According to the national Institute of Justice Report to the U S Congress, prison education is far more effective at reducing recidivism than boot camps, shock incarceration or vocational training." The report goes on to say that "Other studies sponsored by the Federal Bureau of Prisons find that...the more educational programs successfully completed for each six months confirmed, the lower the recidivism rates. The exact figures indicating these inverse recidivism rates for degree recipients were: Associates (13.7%), Baccalaureates (5.6%), Masters (0%). (*Education Newsletter II 3*)

Interviews with Individuals in Corrections Work

The following comments and observations are from individuals who have worked or who are working directly with prisoners and prison programs in the larger context of the college of Southern Nevada, The Clark County School District, or the Nevada Department of Corrections (NDOC). What seems to be a common denominator among all of those interviewed is not only an appreciation of the need to create a positive outreach for felons through state-sponsored intervention programs, but also a realistic understanding of the numerous, serious barriers to that effort as well.

According to Gretchen Williams, (College of Southern Nevada coordinator of prison education) and Granville Brown, (Manager Technical and Industrial Education Programs CSN Division of Workforce and Economic Development):

"The loss of Pell Grants for inmates in 1994 was a serious setback for prison education. And, due to the Nevada Dept. of Corrections budget reduction, not enough students remained in classes to justify continuation

of them. As a result only four classes would be likely to finish out the Spring 2010 semester."

"The approximate cost of warehousing an inmate in Nevada is \$20,000 a year."

"The Casa Grande facility in Las Vegas is a good example of how education promotes successful transitioning of prisoners to outside life, identification of job opportunities and is generally available to a limited number of inmates during the last 4-5 months of incarceration."

"Individual Incarceration Grants and Youth Individual Grants (NDOC funded) are currently available to inmates although present economic conditions make their continuation tenuous."

Howard Skolnik, Director, State of Nevada Department of Corrections, offers a variety of observations:

"The offender diversion program is an alternative to law breakers spending time behind bars—as long as no one has been killed or injured (for example, more than one DUI arrests)."

"Hawaii's successful HOPE (Hawaii Official Probation Enforcement) program is being duplicated here in Nevada as OPEN." (Official Probation Enforcement Nevada) (similar to a "scared straight" type of program for probationers rather than inmates).

"High school classes in prison are free to inmates; if the felon is under the age of 15, classes are required."

"The general population recidivism rate for released felons is approximately 70%. This figure is reduced to 6% for those who achieve a college education."

"The idea that corrections officers (aka 'guards')," he affirms, "resent classes offered to felons is a popular fiction—most officers understand the point of schooling in the prison and support it; of course there will be exceptions."

"Education of prisoners has an added benefit which people might not consider," Director Skolnik adds; "it makes management and control of prison populations much easier."

Robert Tarter, Clark County School District Principal at High Desert State Prison points out the following:

"Students at the High Desert Correctional Center secondary program can earn both a GED and a high school diploma."

"At any given time there can be as many as 320 students in the program. The continued movement of inmates is the main problem of course work completion."

"Students learn vocational skills as well as academic credentials. Classes are free to inmates and voluntary; however, students are encouraged to take classes."

"Correctional officers," he believes, "are generally supportive of ongoing educational programs of inmates, and state politicians (Nevada) support education because they seem to understand the dollar ratio of benefits that most often follow."

"In the education of felons, the chief problems, after cost, are physical and mental barriers. Our job is to address those barriers successfully", he concludes.

Rita Arden, CCSD Counselor at Florence McClure Correctional Center (women's prison):

"The state of Nevada mandates literacy," she points out, "but classes are still voluntary; we try to impress inmates that it will be very difficult to get a job without a high school diploma, or a GED."

"Yes, Casa Grande is a successful half-way house facility to transition pre-release felons back into society. Women actually have a small wing at the facility."

"Some educational problems occur," she says, "when inmates attending classes are interrupted to work on road crews, cleanup crews or at fire camp—usually non productive jobs in terms of education, but rather a small step in keeping costs down for the state or county."

"The general attitude toward the education of prisoners runs from extreme negativity (Why TVs? Why allowed out of their cells?) to acceptance; there is not a great deal of enthusiasm for the rehabilitation side of incarceration," she believes.

"Commitment to Change" classes, sponsored by NDOC, are designed to address life skills issues, drugs, poor relationships—too often men, husbands or partners of felons, don't share culpability for the wrong doing, and they should be," she argues.

"The two main concerns of inmates at McClure are how to survive while here, and how to get out."

"Youthful offenders grants, for inmates 35 and under, dried up this year, consequently only two classes were put up this Spring, 2010, semester."

"Records make it clear that a lot fewer former felons return to prison if they have earned at least a high school diploma while incarcerated."

Brian Williams, Warden, Southern Desert Correctional Center brings a philosophical dimension to the problem of recidivism. He says:

"The economy is the key to public, citizens and taxpayers, opinion regarding the education of prisoners. Society goes back and forth. When times are good programs are accepted, even supported by taxpayers; when the economy is down, however, people are not so sure."

"Educating felons definitely contributes to the reduction of recidivism, but many new and different laws today can keep former convicts—such as sex offenders—from getting hired at a good job. Many states also still withhold voting rights for former felons, so the transition to society is considerably difficult despite the acquired education."

"While college classes have been hit hard because of the downturn in the economy, high school classes and programs are pretty much still intact. Removal of Pell Grants for convicts was probably the correct move in 1994; it was easy to see the Pells as being given to law breakers—at the expense of those who never broke the law."

"Nevada had a more punitive correctional mind set 10 years ago when more inmates were from out of state and returned to their home states when released. During the next seven or so years, more felons came from Nevada and stayed in Nevada when released helping to shape the change in public opinion to favor rehabilitation and reentry, efforts which the Urban League has helped to promote and foster."

"There is no question in my mind that the greatest impediment to reducing recidivism, and crime in the first place, is parents. Single parent households account for over 70% of juvenile offender issues, and the most common problem related to these offenders is drug use and/or dealing of drugs. It all goes back to the household and parents."

An experienced corrections officer at High Desert State Prison who wished to remain anonymous had the following thoughts regarding the education of prisoners: "The turnaround rate (recidivists) is high, and the reason, primarily, is their not being able to find jobs. In this sense, education is a good idea because not working in a suitable job often results in hanging out with old friends and falling into the same bad habits." When asked if there is any resentment among correctional officers for education offered to inmates, he emphatically said there is not, and that education of prisoners has two main benefits. "First," he said, "it gives the inmates something to do other than sit in their cells, or watch television, and second, it reduces tensions, and anything that reduces tensions has got to be good for them and for us." When asked what can be done to reduce recidivism, he suggested that post release programs with reasonably close supervision should be in place for at least one year—mainly to reduce the number one cause of recidivism, violation of parole. (telephone interview, 12 April, 2010)

Patrick Quinn, currently an English professor at the College of Southern Nevada, has taught in the prisons of southern Nevada for 10 years, for both the college and the school district. It continues to be an experience he not only has enjoyed, but also one from which he has derived professional and personal

fulfillment. When asked why he thought prisoners take classes, secondary or college, he had this to say:

"The two primary reasons inmates take classes are to alleviate boredom and to acquire 'good time' which can be earned." He goes on to say that education efforts with prisoners is at best unpredictable as many prison students have few or little writing, reading or study skills at the secondary level. "We have the whole spectrum of ability at the extreme ends of the pole, highly skilled or not skilled, not too much in the middle."

"A critical element in prison education is, unfortunately, an absence of motivation strategies from prison class instructors."

"Highly successful programs in the prisons at both the secondary and college level, programs that generated more enthusiasm, are the vocational programs, like mechanical, small engine repair, and landscaping. This interest, in turn," he says, "generates more motivation and self-direction to develop more basic skills such as reading."

"Another motivating factor," Quinn points out, "is the directive from the Koran for Muslim faithful to learn mathematics"

"All inmates," he believes, "should have the opportunity to take classes, no matter what the offense. Cost is not an especially significant factor as the potential students are incarcerated and management in all of its forms provides the bulk of prison cost."

Finally, he concludes that, "Education is a humanizing process one which clearly would have and ameliorative effect on recidivism rates when one considers that education will only sharpen rationality and critical thinking."

Terry Pippin, Chair Public Safety and Human Services (Criminal Justice) Dept., C S N, also brings a wealth of experience to the job, having served as a police officer in the state of Washington. Here are some of his thoughts:

"With approximately 1500 full and part time students in the CJ program, it's clear that, like the public in general, a majority of students lean more toward the retributive side of criminal justice. However, the more

individuals understand what factors contribute to criminal behavior, the more likely they are to see the merits of job training and education in the prison setting.”

“A proven way to reduce recidivism and reign in rising costs is to develop and provide more programs, not only within prison walls, but in the process of post-release supervision for those under parole/probation (which varies from state to state, eg, Washington state did away with parole in 1985) status.”

“A truly difficult aspect of getting former felons on a non law-breaking track is education of the general public and fostering positive community involvement—a challenge which is enormous, particularly with, say, sex offenders.”

“The greatest obstacle to reducing recidivism is the lack of resources such as drug rehab programs, work release programs, not only cost-wise, but getting the citizenry to not oppose the concept, to change the “not in my backyard” syndrome.”

“To a certain extent, all inmates will do whatever they can to compile ‘good time’ (work and/or study that helps reduce length of sentence), but these programs remain voluntary.”

“Every day, when felons or former felons are being supervised, how one supervises can make a significant difference in his or her (felon’s) life. Most lawbreakers need positive structure, especially those in post-release trying to adapt to changes in the outside world that have taken place while they were incarcerated. Genuine and caring supervision is critical to all rehab programs if we are going to reduce recidivism.”

“You’re not going to help anyone who doesn’t want to be helped. Some people are just evil. Education and work programs are not designed for these types. Change in almost all others begins to occur around age 40—or when the felon makes it clear they have had enough of the criminal life style.”

“Another consequence of ‘warehousing’ that is often overlooked is the cost of caring for the family of the inmate in prison. To this end, bail structure in

all states should be revised in order to make it commensurate with the offenders' earnings."

"It's not about 'good' or 'bad'—it's about people making mistakes. Some learn from these mistakes and some do not. Treating people decently helps in the transition."

Conclusions

Undoubtedly, some individuals—murderers, rapists, child molesters—are either unwilling or unable to live and work as honest, hard working brokers within the framework of society. These dangerous anti-social cases need to be kept in confinement permanently for the safety of the community. As Jeffrey Rosen and Stephen Richards point out, however, in "Beyond Bars", more than 600,000 men and women are released from prison each year. The significance of these numbers is compounded by the fact that the U S represents 5% of the world's population and nearly 25% of the world's prison population. (Rosen 38) Common sense would suggest that it is in society's best interest to do whatever it can to prepare released felons to function successfully in the outside world.

Fortunately, the numbers of those beyond rehabilitation are comparatively small, and most criminals, there is reason to believe, can turn from crime and live a productive, law-abiding life. Unfortunately, there is no litmus test to determine which individuals have the potential to change or to recidivate. And that, it would seem, is the primary reason that the opportunity must be extended to all incarcerated felons. For, as the research suggests, an education is the cornerstone to a structured life of work and learning—for former felons especially. "In a country," writes Vivian Nixon, "where second chances and opportunity are professed values, democratic access to high-quality higher education must include access for people in prison. We cannot bar the most vulnerable people from the very thing that has the greatest potential to change their lives" (qtd in Brazzell et al 41).

An article on inmate participants baseball at San Quentin, by Scott Ostler, concludes that getting prisoners involved in meaningful activity pays valuable dividends. (Clapp)"Every inmate I talk to," he writes, "swears this (SQ) is the Shangri-La of state prisons." Along with the many sports opportunities and work programs, he goes on to say, San Quentin offers the system's only college-education program. The result? According to Ostler, the inmates all say San Quentin has fewer racial and gang problems than other prisons. This is due, in part, to the liberalism of San Francisco and Berkeley, "which manifests itself in

an army (300-plus) of outside volunteers who believe in rehabilitation and who man the various programs." Inmate Chris Rich says that "San Quentin is a life-changing situation for any inmate who recognizes the need to change. You get here and you see some hope."

Why do released inmates relapse? A recent article in the Las Vegas Review-Journal reporting on home invasions quoted police Lt. Clint Nichols who said he was not sure why someone who had just spent eight years in prison for robbery would be so quick to jump into old habits. "I think he probably thought, you kinda (sic) figure out what you're good at, you learn from your mistakes, and then practice it again." (5A) He said, concluding, that he could not comment on how effective the rehabilitation system in prison is.

Most compelling, however, is the premise that education, in the long run, saves the state money. According to Gerald G. Gaes of the College of Criminology and Criminal Justice at Florida State University comes the following assertion:

Education for current and former prisoners is a cost-effective solution to reducing reoffending and improving public safety. The effect of education on recidivism has been well demonstrated, and even small reductions in reoffending can have a significant impact when spread across large numbers of participants.

A final word on Gaes' "cost effective" solution is seen in a chilling alternative for Governor Schwarzenegger of California to early release of over 6000 inmates—as a means of saving money in a "cash-strapped state"(Furillo *Sacramento Bee* qtd in *Las Vegas Sun* 3). The infrastructure of prisons is not only mortar and stone; it includes staffing, utilities, kitchen, medical and sanitary resources, all of which add up. Clearly, the only viable answer to this problem in the long run is to reduce recidivism.

Reported recently in the *The Las Vegas Review-Journal* were the results of a Pew Center study which found that a decline (1.6%) in the number of prison inmates in Nevada, from 2008 to 2009, saved the state \$38 million and helped avoid \$1.2 billion in prison construction costs. (2B)

Cost is the overriding factor in any attempt to foster fiscal stability. Yet, almost ironically, spending for education is exactly what has to be promoted. Progressive thinking on this vital issue has to occur. A good example can be seen in (Nevada) Senate Bill 398—which, according to Senate Majority Leader Steven Horsford, could reduce the state's prison population and save millions

of dollars by creating a two year "intermediate sanction" pilot program for low-risk violators as well as people whose crimes are linked to alcohol or drugs. (Prison Pilot Program B6) this bill mandates life skills and rehabilitative programs to be offered to about 400 participants a year who would stay an average of six months. According to Horsford, the program could save the state more than \$34 million over the next five years. He adds that it costs the state about \$22,000 a year to incarcerate a prisoner.

This is clearly the right kind of thinking, especially at a time when government is making every effort to cut costs

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