

OPENING DOORS:

Benefits of Reclaiming a Workforce, Restoring Lives, Growing businesses

According to the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), each year more than 650,000 men and women are released from federal and state prisons in this country. Over 7 million are released each year from jails. In Ohio, one in every 25 adults is now confined in a correctional institution. No matter the institution they are released from, they all return to their communities and families. But do they return to productive employment? Unfortunately, too often the answer is no.

Brought to you by the Franklin County Reentry Task Force

HIRING EX-OFFENDERS, GOOD BUSINESS

Because of a person's criminal record, a great number of employers are reluctant to hire ex-offenders. Approximately 25% of the adult populations have a criminal record with a high number of those convictions being non-violent, such as drug offenses. However, the value-added benefits and opportunities to an employer (and employee) far outweigh the risks.

Many employers have found that hiring ex-offenders makes good business sense:

- The ex-offender population offers a fresh source of qualified workers to meet the needs of local employers.
- Ex-offenders are grateful for work opportunities and in return offer a strong work ethic, loyalty, and reduced turnover.
- Many ex-offenders have learned valuable skills while incarcerated, including, but not limited to; administrative office technologies, web design, drafting, horticulture, cosmetology, carpentry and emerging green technology fields.
- Through innovative workforce development programs in our communities ex-offenders are being trained and certified for specific employers needs.



“Working to fully reintegrate returning inmates to our community is the perfect example of Tikkun Olam - Repairing the World. Together, we are strengthening our workforce, enhancing our productivity, and increasing our base of taxpayers. We are empowering people to take responsibility for themselves and their obligations, removing them and their children from public assistance. We are making our neighborhoods safer by systematically redirecting people from illegal activity to legal productive work. And, we are healing our community and our residents by restoring dignity and self-worth to individuals and rebuilding families.”

Marilyn Brown, Franklin County Commissioner and member of the Franklin County Reentry Task force



Gary Smith

Escaping the “label” of ex-offender was a process which began with a changed heart, and subsequently a changed mind, which led to a changed man.

I graduated from The Ohio State University and went on to earn a Masters of Business Administration after my release. I have been employed with major employers in insurance and healthcare industries as a Project Manager. I give back to my community everyday in the work I do, and the life I lead.

I am a husband, a father, a grandfather and a pastor. I am an asset to any employer; to my community, to the world.



Ken Prunty

Administration Officer
Serenity Street
Foundation

Ken sees himself as a mentor, community advocate, and an honest hardworking leader. I

never miss an opportunity to support people in recovery, or a day of work. I was in prison for 23 years before I was given a new lease on life, but it was a lease that came with its own hindrances' caused by my criminal record. I worked hard and persevered, always in the belief that the man I am now, not the past criminal record is what should be seen. I am proud of who I am today and my employer is proud and grateful to have me on their team.

“Franklin County’s efforts to help former inmates become productive members of society are crucial to strengthening communities. Second Chance Act programs, in collaboration with faith-based and community organizations and local reentry coalitions, empower people released from prison to turn their lives around and encourage employers to look beyond their past transgressions and give them a second chance to start anew, work hard, and contribute to the greater good of the local economy. In addition, putting former inmates back to work means that, taxpayers will no longer be footing the costs associated with incarceration.”

U.S. Senator Rob Portman

Interpreting Criminal Background Checks

There are many ways to obtain criminal background reports. Employers who order criminal background checks on prospective employees should know that the accuracy of such records varies widely. Even the best companies' background checks contain errors.

In 2012 The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) updated its enforcement guidance on criminal background checks. This guidance is expected to hold significant sway in court in deciding potential discrimination lawsuits.

To avoid potential violations, The EEOC suggests employers incorporate three business necessity factors in their evaluation of applicants' criminal record:

- Age of offense
- Seriousness of offense
- Relationship to the job

We would further suggest the following considerations:

Review employment or character references and any other information regarding applicant's fitness for particular position.

Notify applicant that he/she may be rejected because of criminal record

Give applicant an opportunity to respond

Consider what the applicant has said on his/her behalf

Following these simple suggestions will ensure you are not passing on a potential asset to your company or violating EEOC guidelines.

John Rush/CleanTurn

"We firmly believe individuals with a criminal background can and will succeed and thrive in a company culture characterized by accountability, integrity, loyalty and a positive, solution-oriented mind-set. CleanTurn believes there is such a thing as positive transformation, and when the right structures are in place for recruiting, training and employing any population there can be quantifiable positive results that not only help the individual and family unit of society, but the community and broader society as a whole-- and in the end help businesses grow and thrive. "

Estelle Carter/ co-owner Urbanscape, LLC

"We have found people with past criminal involvement to be no different than any other employee when it came to performing the functions of the job. Loyalty, responsibility, commitment, eagerness to learn and be trained, and gratitude for an opportunity for work, these are all prime characteristics of a good employee regardless of background."

Resources

There are many local non-profits that provide training, job-placement, and support services to ex-offenders. Employers seeking qualified workers, or looking for services to support current workers should consider contacting the following organizations:

- Africentric Personal Development Shop: (614) 253-4448 www.apdsinc.org
- Alvis House: (614) 252-8402 www.alvishouse.org
- Center for Vocational Alternatives (COVA): (614) 294-7117 www.cova.org
- Central Ohio Workforce Investment Corporation (COWIC), www.cowic.org
- Columbus Area Inc – Bell Center (614) 372-3000 www.columbusarea-inc.org
- Columbus Urban League: (614) 257-6300 www.cul.org
- Goodwill Columbus: (614) 294-5181 , www.goodwillcolumbus.org
- IMPACT Community Action Agency: (614) 252-2799 www.impactca.org
- Metropolitan Community Services, Inc./T.O.U.C.H: (614) 338-8733 www.touchimp.org
- Neighborhood House: (614) 252-4941 (614) 252-4941, www.neighborhoodhouseinc.org
- RecycleForce Columbus – Sustainable Business Ventures: (859) 227-0263, Recycleforce.org
- Rehabilitation Service Commission - Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation <http://rsc.ohio.gov/index/services/employment/bureau-of-vocational-rehabilitation>

If you or someone you know is interested in creating opportunities for successful reintegration into the community of Franklin County, please contact Franklin County Reentry Task Force: (614) 525-5955, www.franklincountyohio.gov/reentry/

The Task Force is dedicated to creating opportunities for positive transformation by restoring lives, rebuilding families, and improving communities. We encourage and invite all those with an interest to consider participating in one of the below Task Force Committees:

- (a) Employment and Education Subcommittee
- (b) Housing and Behavioral Health
- (c) Faith, Family and Community
- (d) Juvenile

Together, change is possible.



As the Franklin County Reentry Task Force Employment & Education Subcommittee's Chairwomen, I want to thank you for taking an interest in the issues that impact our County, city, state and nation.

The dawn of the 21st century brought with it a new global reality, accompanied by great challenges, and opportunities to improve our education and workforce development systems that support and prepare ex-offenders for their successful reintegration into society. There's not a community in America that isn't suffering from crime. If every business owner hired just one ex-offender, it could make a world of difference within the community. Helping people get that second chance is our great opportunity and our great challenge. Putting an ex-offender back in the work force quickly benefits not only that individual, but, Society as a whole.

I am humbled to serve and look forward to working on your behalf to strengthen, educate and empower our ex offender workforce and employers to thrive now, and into the future for the benefit of all.”

- Elisha G. Thomas

TASK FORCE MISSION

The mission and overarching goals of the Franklin County Reentry Task Force are enhancing public safety, reducing recidivism and improving reentry outcomes. The Task Force mission is to provide research, planning, training, and coordination of service delivery, oversight, and guidance concerning grants to internal and external partners working in the field of reentry.

Our **vision** for the Task Force is creating safer neighborhoods and productive citizens by increasing the success rates of ex-offenders transitioning from correctional and rehabilitative institutions into the community.

The Task Force and all sub-committees within wholeheartedly embrace the idea that strategies created to address the needs of the reentry population should, whenever practical concomitantly address issues involving economic stability, housing, development of public safety and holistic health and make it a priority to examine ways to pool resources and funding streams to promote lower recidivism rates; collect data, and identify best practices in offender reentry.