



Purposeful Neighboring: *Creating Reentry-Ready Communities*

By

Steve Gordon

Rev. 01

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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to my favorite prisoner reentry colleague, Deborah Price. Debbie labored long and hard during her tenure at the **Oklahoma Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives to create a state-wide network of organizations, agencies, ministries, churches, and other groups, to address the blight of recidivism. She did so with class, tenacity, creativity, and charm – and the ability to bring an amazing array of partners into the larger collaborative reentry sphere. Debbie has been a constant inspiration to me – and I suspect, to many others – and I am deeply grateful for her friendship. She also gets the credit for the name of this book: “Purposeful Neighboring.”**

Thanks, Debbie!

PREFACE

The premise of this book is based on a comment I heard several years ago from Richard Wright, a long-time prison ministry volunteer from Weatherford, Oklahoma: “If we want prison inmates to be good neighbors when they get out, shouldn’t we be neighborly to them first?” Good, solid homespun wisdom — simple, yet profound, and the very essence of the reentry solution. I love it!

NOTE:

I have designed this book to be read online, as a Web-based book, distributed free-of-charge to the reentry community and beyond. I hope it will be a catalyst for change in the emerging Reentry Reformation. For a print copy, see Appendix A.

“In a civilized society,
prison should be the last resort,
not the first resort.”

--Steve Gordon

INTRODUCTION

Purposeful Neighboring: Creating Reentry-Ready Communities is not intended to be a long, academic book. It is rather a practical book birthed in the fires of providing prisoner reentry services at the local, county, and state levels. Hopefully, it will inspire to you to see the real problem and be a part of the real solution.

There are many excellent books and websites on prisoner reentry. Most focus on the criminal justice system, rehabilitation, supportive employment, and other strategies, that are, frankly, more government-centered than anything else. Here, I am taking a very different approach. My basic premise is that reentry is **NOT** the responsibility of the local department of corrections — it is **EVERYONE’S** responsibility. Until our communities step up and own the responsibility for reintegrating ex-offenders back into the fabric of society, the bitter cycle of recidivism will continue.

I divide “reentrants” (or returning citizens, or ex-offenders, or ex-felons, take your pick), into three main categories:

- “Career criminals” — those that have no intention of changing their evil ways once they get out (and believe me, they do get out — sometimes with no preparation or rehabilitation at all!)
- “Socially dependent” — these are the inmates who were broken before they ever got to prison; from the mean streets of drug addiction, alcoholism, mental illness, violence, homelessness,

and chronic poverty, often combined with years of institutionalization; when they come out they will most likely be dependent on the welfare system.

- “Rehabilitated citizens” – these are our fellow citizens who got in trouble with the law,¹ have paid their debt to society, found prison to be a dreadful experience, and have done everything they can to rehabilitate themselves, so they won’t ever have to return there. These are the ones we have the most help for, the best candidates for a Second Chance.

The exact percentages of each group are going to vary. Is it 1/3-1/3-1/3? I don’t know. There is no meaningful data on these definitions that I have seen. My personal experience says that close to 50% may fall in to the category of “Rehabilitated Citizens” but I am the perennial optimist and always try to see the best in people. But I think that by treating these three groups as being about equal in size, we’ll be close.

¹ Remember too that a good number are falsely accused, excessively sentenced, or incarcerated as low-risk first-time offenders that diversion programs and community sentencing would have been much more appropriate as a punishment.

The Parable of the Good Samaritan

On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

“What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?”

He answered, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’; and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”

“You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.”

But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “**And who is my neighbor?**”

In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’

“Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”

The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.”

Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

Luke 10:25-37
New International Version (NIV)

CHAPTER ONE: DO WE REALLY WANT REENTRY?

Prisoner reentry has a pretty short history in America. Prior to the turn of the millennium, exiting prison was pretty much defined by the old adage, “\$50 and a bus ticket.” But over the last 10 years or so, we’ve seen a definite shift toward a more pro-active approach to pre-release planning and the social reintegration of ex-offenders. So far, the charge has been led by the corrections community, much to their credit. But at the end of the day, the returning citizen ceases to be their responsibility and quickly ends up in the community, facing desperate and often hostile barriers. So by definition, a corrections-based approach cannot create a sustainable outcome of success. The focus must be on our communities at large, in partnership with the corrections community. And this shift represents a sea change of new priorities.

The paradigm shift required is due to one over-riding factor: **DENIAL**. In many communities where I have worked with prisoner reentry coalitions, it is common for them to deny they even have **Pov-erty**, much less ex-felons coming home from prison! We often have community **leaders** reluctant to admit that it is **their** sons and daughters, grandsons and granddaughters, who are drug-addicted and entangled in the criminal justice system. The shame associated with these facts keeps those same leaders from embracing the need to create real solutions in their local community.

But the good news is that a number of communities are waking up to the reality of prisoner reentry and the fact that a pro-active approach **really can** intervene in the devastating cycle of recidivism. Maybe it is a local probation officer who realizes that the community is asleep to the many returning

WHAT IS REENTRY?

“Reentry” is not a specific program, but rather a research-driven process that starts when an offender is initially incarcerated and ends when the offender has been successfully reintegrated in his or her community as a law-abiding citizen. (*U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics*)

- State and federal prisons held approximately 1,598,780 prisoners at the end of 2011 — approximately one of every 107 U.S. adults.
- At least 95 percent of state prisoners will be released back to their communities at some point.
- During 2011, 688,384 sentenced prisoners were released from state and federal prisons.
- Approximately 9 million individuals are released from jail each year.

[Click here for more facts](#)

citizens and their chronic need for help, even with the most basic needs of life. Sometimes, it is a community that has galvanized around the need to address the blight of poverty or homelessness, and quickly realize that many people in poverty have the huge barrier of felony convictions in their background, blocking them from employment opportunities and other related issues.

Re-entry is still a new consideration for this generation, and most of our communities turn a deaf ear to the subject. But the release of prisoners continues on relentlessly¹ and so, without organized “pro-active reentry” assistance, these men and women returning to our communities practice what I call “re-active reentry,” a sort of do-it-yourself program. Sometimes they succeed, but more often they fail without the help they so desperately need.

Here is some more good news: it does not take a million dollars to create a reentry-ready community. In its simplest form, a great deal can be accomplished simply by forming a broad-based coalition of concerned citizens who will meet together for **one hour a month!** This may sound too good to be true, but read on and learn proven ways of making this happen in your community.

The way to make prisoner reentry work in your community is simple:

- Turn and face the problem (through education such as reading this book and others)
- Embrace the need for your community to create a long-term sustainable solution
- Engage your fellow citizen activists and get involved

¹ National Statistic for Federal and State Releasees per Year (2011): 688,384

Prisoner reentry is a fact of life in the USA – but the majority of our culture is completely ignorance of the facts or the negative impact on our families & communities.



Crime and the criminal justice system touch every family, every congregation, every community. Victims of crime, families of victims of crime, ex-offenders, and the families of the incarcerated – we all have one thing in common: direct impact from crime.



What are you and I going to do about it? In reality, is there anything that we as individuals can do? Read more to find out.

CHAPTER TWO: UNDERSTANDING RECIDIVISM

What is “recidivism” (ruh-SID-uh-vizm) and why is it so important? Recidivism is the academic word used to describe the syndrome of inmates leaving incarceration (prison and jail), returning to freedom on the streets of our communities, then committing a new crime and returning to incarceration. It is used as the measurement of how successful we are in breaking the crime cycle.

We are going to break this down and look at some specific aspects of it. First, let’s use the grid of our “3 groups” to get different perspectives on recidivism:

- **Career Criminals** — This group contributes significantly to the recidivism rate, especially that group which most commonly re-offends within six months of getting out, which is when most recidivism happens. This group is why we need prisons with good security. They tend to decline services and disdain supervision.
- **Socially Dependent** — Because we have so few mental institutions and other similar provisions for the broken people in our society, the prison system has become the catch-all; recidivism is understandably very high in this sector of reentrants. This group needs help that prisons can’t typically provide. They are our “high need” reentrants and need lots of professional attention.
- **Rehabilitated Citizens** — This group has needs but tends to be the sector where reentry success occurs most frequently. Here is where we want to focus our community-based resources to create the happy outcome of successful “self-managed reentry.”

WHAT IS IT?

“Recidivism” is the act of a person repeating an undesirable behavior after they have either experienced negative consequences of that behavior, or have been treated or trained to extinguish that behavior. It is also used to refer to the percentage of former prisoners who are rearrested.

Henslin, James. “Social Problems: A Down-To-Earth Approach” (2008)



The [entry on recidivism at Wikipedia](#) is balanced and not too technical. I especially like the last section on “Alternative Policies.”



Low-risk offenders in reentry could successfully self-manage – without mentors, social workers, etc. – **IF THEY JUST KNEW WHERE THE RESOURCES WERE!**

Recidivism Timeframes & Baselines

Recidivism trackers use different timelines to report their findings, so it is often hard to get an apples-to-apples comparison. Most of the studies I have seen use a 3-year time-line to gauge results. I have also seen 5 and even 10-year time-lines. But what are they measuring? Getting a consistent definition has plagued criminal justice professionals for years. And at what level of granularity?

When we tried for a Department of Labor reentry grant in 2012, they wanted recidivism rates by the neighborhood or “hot spot” – communities that were known as centers for crime and recidivism. But the Department of Corrections only kept data down to the “county” level, which made it impossible for us to present meaningful data in our grant application. The DOL wanted to know that the program to be implemented was having a direct impact on reducing recidivism in that specific community. But if the data is not measured, how would we know?

Data Accuracy

We found out that the recidivism data that existed was not based on the zip code of where the reentrant chose to live when they got out. It was based on the zip code where they lived when they were arrested! I believe this is because the typical inmate is not going to want to tell the Department of Corrections any more details about their lives than they have to. So, the critical piece of data, “release address zip code,” is filled in by the inmate. Some leave it blank, others may lie, many will change their mind once they get out. So the statistics-keepers have to rely on the zip code they “fell from” – definitely not a reliable piece of data, in my opinion. So a key to solving the recidivism puzzle is capturing the right data at the right time in the process, and verifying it for accuracy.

A ROOT OF PRISON OVERCROWDING

Among the many factors that contribute to mass incarceration and prison overcrowding, one factor has emerged as a leader: “Technical Revocation of Supervision (Probation or Parole).” What does that mean? Across the nation, according to leading research

(justicereinvestment.org and others), a main reason for return to prison was because the probationer or parolee violated some condition of their supervision. And most often, it is not a new crime that does it – it is a technical violation of a stipulation, which often originates with the officer, such as “Don’t be with your girlfriend!” The officer catches him with his girlfriend, revokes his case, and off he goes, back to prison. And I must ask, “At what cost?!”

The Cost of Recidivism

In my home state of Oklahoma, we use the average cost of \$20,000 per year for the cost of incarcerating someone in our state prison system. Here is a basic calculation of the cost that re-arrest and a trip back to prison costs. Please note that these are conservative estimates, and research in other states results in much higher figures.

- Cost to re-arrest, adjudicate, and send to prison: \$10,000 - \$15,000
- Cost to incarcerate for 1 year: \$15,000 - \$20,000
- Burden of their family on the welfare system: \$5,000 - \$10,000
- Plus, the loss of taxes on their earnings: \$3,000 - \$5,000
- Conservatively, **\$35,000 loss per year**

A Working Definition

So what definition should we use? How do we know that our efforts are gaining ground? How do we have a consistent measurement of success, one that works for us locally as well as adheres to national best practices? If, in addition to making good neighbors, “**reducing recidivism**” is the goal of our efforts, shouldn’t we have a clear, standardized definition that reflect reality, as an accurate measuring stick of whether lives are actually being changed and society is actually improving?

Can We Know If They Recidivate?

All the definitions I have seen are basically “After releasing from prison in our state, did they go back to prison in our state within 3 years?” Does a revocation count or just a new crime? What about re-arrest and doing time in jail? What if they are arrested in another state? What if they changed their identity or use an alias? And the questions go on.

HOW IT REALLY WORKS

Dr. Ed LaTessa is one of the leading experts on criminal rehabilitation in the world. He is dean of the college of criminal justice at the University of Cincinnati in Ohio. In his presentation, *What Works and What Doesn't in Reducing Recidivism: The Principles of Effective Intervention*, he gives convincing evidence that if you provide “**high-risk offenders**” – those who are at greater risk to recidivate when they get out – with a proven set of rehabilitative programs, you reduce their recidivism rate by 67%.

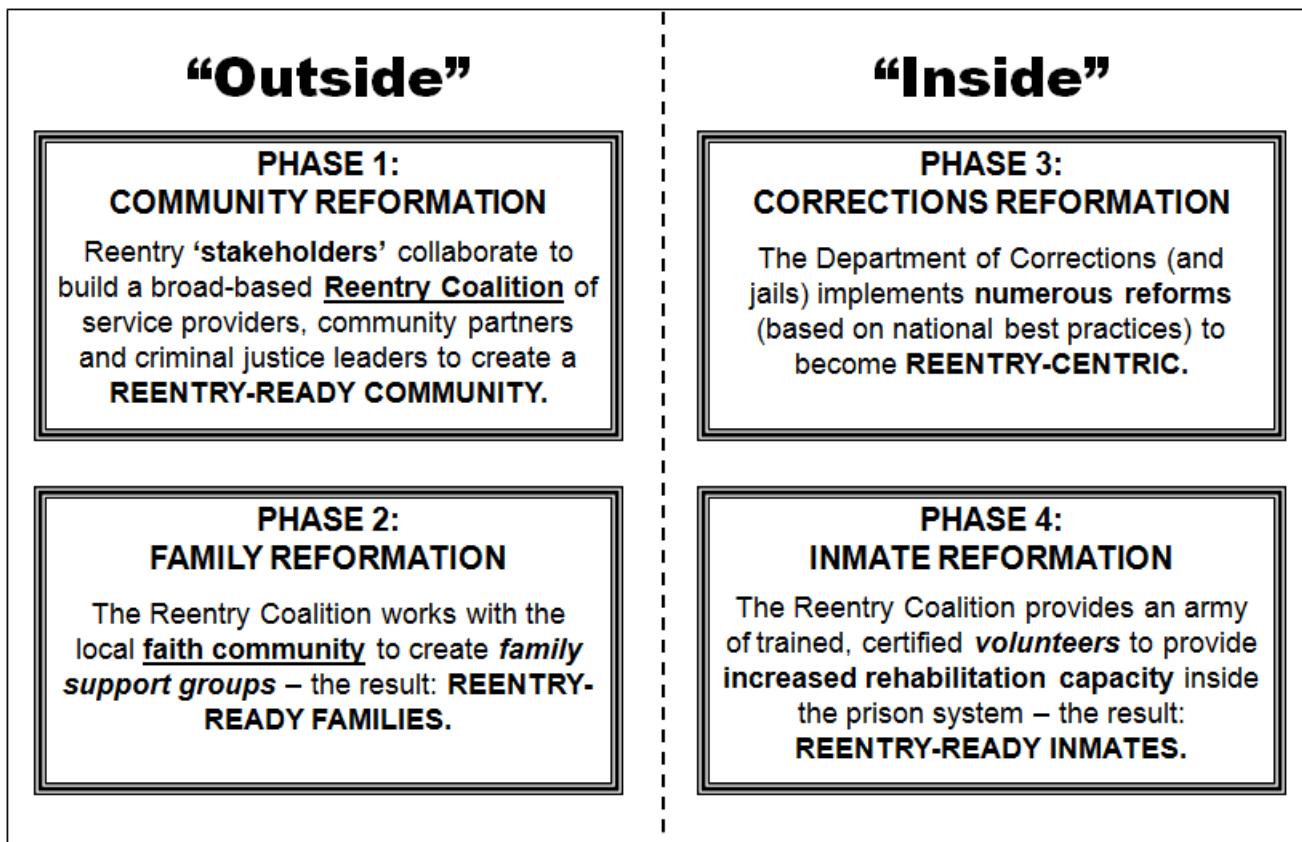
But if you put “**low-risk offenders**” – those unlikely to recidivate when they get out – into the prison system, **their recidivism rate goes UP by 200%!**

Why? Because they are thrust into an environment where they learn criminal behavior from convicts, thugs, and gang members!

CHAPTER THREE: THE REENTRY REFORMATION

I believe we are in the early stages of a “reentry reformation.” And I want this book to be a catalyst for driving it forward. Don’t curse the darkness – light a candle. Better still, how about a thousand candles burning hot and bright all across our land? It’s a calling for me; maybe for you, too?

Here is a diagram called “The Framework for Reentry Reformation”:



EFFECT REAL CHANGE

Research on offenders, correctional sanctions, and correctional programs has been extensive. Six primary risk factors have emerged, called the “Major Criminogenic Needs” by the academics, which must be addressed in order to bring about true change and directly impact the rate of recidivism.

1. Anti-social/pro-criminal attitudes, values, and beliefs
2. Pro-criminal associates
3. Temperament and personality factors
4. A history of anti-social behavior
5. Family factors
6. Low levels of educational, vocational, or financial achievement

If you want to change lives in the prison system, you must address these.

[More About Criminogenic Needs Here](#)

PHASE 1 – COMMUNITY REFORMATION: I have found that the county is an excellent level within which to begin to organize. Depending on your locale, you may choose your town, your city, your metropolitan area, or in a sparsely populated area, it might even be a three-county region.

There are two tiers of “reentry stakeholders” that you want to recruit. If there is any group, organization, or ministry that is providing direct services in reentry (housing, mentoring, aftercare, wrap-around services, etc.), then they **definitely** need to be involved in the forming of the reentry coalition. These are the core members, the ones with the most at stake. I would also put Probation & Parole Officers in this group.

The second tier is the service providers who offer many different kinds of services. Here is a partial list, just to stimulate your creative thinking and networking: Community Action Agency, Drug & Alcohol Recovery Service Providers, Drug Court, Ex-Offenders, Felon-Friendly Employers, Goodwill Industries, Ministerial Alliance Representatives, Local Shelter, Mental Health Service Providers, Police Department / Community Policing Coordinator, Salvation Army, Sheriff’s Office / Jail Chaplain, United Way, Veterans Affairs, WorkForce. (We will cover coalition operations in a later chapter.)

PHASE 2 – FAMILY REFORMATION: This is a brand new area of reentry reformation; one that I believe will cause our reentry efforts to multiply rapidly. Let’s harness the untapped energy and wisdom of Christian inmates, ex-felons, and the families that love them. Let’s get these families (especially those who are awaiting the arrival of their loved one from prison) organized and mobilized. This is the area where the faith community can help so much (e.g., www.MercyHeart.org). Be sure to read the sidebar on the next page for more details.

THE GOOD NEWS

It does not take a million dollars to start making a direct, positive impact on reentry and recidivism in your community. In fact, if you will form a local reentry coalition, and meet with like-minded folks for just **ONE HOUR PER MONTH**, you will do a world of good!

Your mission as a local coalition is to “coalesce” (to unite into a whole, to unite for a common end, to join forces) – to network together and share resources.

And the resources you share are combined into your “Local Reentry Coalition Resource List.” And you need to keep the list updated. As any social worker will tell you, there are resource lists everywhere, but most are outdated.

PHASE 3 – CORRECTIONS REFORMATION: My vision for this started when I attended the Prisoner Reentry Summit at the Oklahoma Department of Corrections in August of 2011. They had undergone a months-long effort to distill 23 national best practices into manageable components. ODOC stated emphatically that its goal is to re-engineer the entire system of incarceration around rehabilitation and reentry. And the startling revelation that came out was that they could not do it without the full cooperation of “the community.” About one-third of all of the later tasks and activities, according to their Prisoner Reentry Initiative model, happened in the community.

The big question was, and still is, in my opinion, “Who is the community?” Who would the Department of Corrections turn to when they are ready to connect with community partners, pass data on about reentrants about to emerge from the prison system, and so forth. They were essentially firing a warning shot to the public, saying, “In the very near future, we are going to need a host of community partners in order to truly effect a new approach to reentry. Please be preparing. Get ready!”

One of the most exciting things I’ve ever been involved with was the 12 reentry coalitions that we either started or connected with in 2012 across Oklahoma. We were getting the communities organized, but it was thrilling to see the effect it had on the corrections community, too. We had probation officers, parole officers, and community corrections leaders excited and agreeing that our community coalitions were the most energizing thing they had seen in corrections in years.

So, a big piece of the *corrections* reformation is tied to the *community* reformation. A main factor that connects the two is that the community **must** consider the dramatic **shortage** within the corrections facilities of proven, reliable rehabilitation programs. The typical Department of Corrections has neither the funding nor the manpower to fully staff all of the programmatic needs of the inmate

CREATING A FAMILY REENTRY SUPPORT GROUP

There are family support groups that have sprung up around particular prisons around the country. These groups learn everything there is to know about that prison, its operations, its visiting policies, and other useful information for the loved ones of the incarcerated.

Then they make it known that when a new family comes on the scene, there is a central clearinghouse of information that family can tap into, to support their efforts to support their loved one.

These groups serve as a model for reentry family support groups. Better still, reentry could become an extension of their existing group.

population at all their facilities. Remember, the primary purpose of the prison system is to keep the public safe by locking up – very securely – criminals. There is usually very little “bandwidth” left to provide classes, treatment, therapy, education, and all the host of pro-active rehabilitation that the typical offender needs to change his/her life. So what is the answer?

I believe very strongly that once the local communities have organized and the family support networks are in place, there is still more work to be done. The next place to focus our efforts is in raising up an army of volunteers to go into the prison system as teachers, mentors and program supervisors, providing the desperately needed training and skills which the corrections facilities are unable to provide for their inmate population. (Of course, these need to be qualified, trained, and approved to be effective.) There is not room here to expand on this important topic but suffice it to say that the **CORRECTIONS** and **COMMUNITY REFORMATIONS** are tied very close together.

PHASE 4 – INMATE REFORMATION: (Note: I know that the corrections community prefers the term “offender” but the general public still thinks of them as “inmates,” so for now, we are going to stick with that term. I believe it is more powerful and descriptive, for a variety of reasons.) Doesn’t it make sense that, once our communities are better organized, we should then seek to move “upstream” as far as we can to create a “Better Inmate”? The higher quality the inmate behind bars, the better the potential when he is released that he will become the good neighbor we want to welcome to our community.

There are two levels at which **INMATE REFORMATION** occurs: the *spiritual* level and the *practical* level. Yes, we want to continue providing many chapel services, evangelism outreaches, Bible studies, and discipleship programs. These can be very transformational. But as Rev. John Leonardson,

**THE GOLD
STANDARD OF
REENTRY HOUSING
PLANNING AND
OPERATIONS**

When I read Rev. John Leonardson’s book, *Starting and Operating a Post-Prison Aftercare Facility*, I was blown away. His 30 years of reentry housing experience is all combined into a thorough, clear, and practical system. As he teaches, “Most prisoner reentry housing projects fail within the first year. People naively think they can just get a house and start housing people. Wrong!”

Surf over to www.mentorcare.org (his website) and check out the excellent and very affordable materials. I highly recommend them all!

The book also includes a supplemental CD of 1,300 pages of material. Not bad for \$46!

in his landmark book, *Starting and Operating a Post-Prison Aftercare Facility*, states so eloquently, “Probably the most important factor you try to determine is if they have had an ‘Ah ha!’ moment — meaning they had an awakening and are determined to go straight. This is separate from being born again. Lots of born again people go to [or return to] prison.”

The bottom line is, that “Ah ha!” moment — the motivation behind true personal reformation — can come from either a spiritual experience or from a “natural” experience. Sometimes, an encounter with the Living God is the key. Many times though, inmates who have had dramatic spiritual encounters and experiences continue to struggle. It is my firm conviction that the missing piece in their puzzle is good, practical education, therapy, vocational training, or other component of the rehabilitation equation. They have missed some critical piece of their emotional or intellectual development. We must get much better at creating environments where “Ah ha!” moments can happen.

Another revolutionary idea that I predict will have a significant impact on the reentry reformation in general and fuel the rapid growth of the INMATE REFORMATION is that of “Inmate-Led Reentry Clubs.” We have seen several instances of these forming independently within our local prison system and it is thrilling to glimpse the possibilities.

The basic idea is simple. Inmates who have achieved a certain level of personal reformation realize that their fellow inmates on the yard are generally clueless about making proper preparations for going home. So they organize an informal group and begin to accumulate resources and information. They format these into resource lists and checklists and the next thing you know, they have some real help to offer their fellows! We should encourage this and help them organize into Clubs.

**ATTRIBUTES OF AN
INMATE REENTRY
CLUB**

- *Staff Sponsored*
Like any prison club, a staff member must sponsor its charter.
- *Volunteer Supervised*
The best clubs have an outside volunteer who oversees and supports them.
- *Well Governed*
Formed with a charter, some by-laws, and the regular election of officers. You want a group that will go on, even as leaders come and go.
- *Organized:* Reentry preparation in prison is mostly about printed resources. Keep the following organized: a general packet for everyone going home, and a specific packet for each major urban area.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE VISION FOR A REENTRY-READY COMMUNITY

I had the privilege of traveling all over the state of Oklahoma in 2012, attending coalition meetings and presenting my vision for a reentry-ready community. It was very well received each time, and so I share it with you in almost the exact form it started out in. Here are the nine attributes of a reentry-ready community:

#1 - A local prisoner reentry coalition with broad representation

We have discussed this at length above. Also see the later chapter, “How to Run a Coalition.”

#2 - A completed “Resource List”

Once your Coalition has met for several meetings, you should be able to complete the first working version of your Local Reentry Coalition Resource List. Once it is ready, you are ready to distribute it as a community resource. (Please keep in mind that there are probably already some lists floating around your community. If you do yours the right way, yours will be better and be kept updated better.) See Chapter Five for the template of the list you should use.

#3 - The local Community Action Agency office “on board” and “trained”

The Community Action Agencies network was created back during the Johnson Administration in the 60’s, to address issues of poverty. There are 1,000 of them in the U.S. (See Wikipedia for more details.) Your local CAA office is a logical place to begin to “centralize” community-based efforts to organize for prisoner reentry collaboration, because they are already

TWO DIFFERENT TYPES OF COMMUNITIES

As I traveled around the state in 2012, I found that there are generally two kinds of communities: “open” and “closed.” My experience is that there are more “closed” than “open.” The typical community likes to think of itself as generally “a good place to raise a family.” This typically means that they don’t want to admit that there could be significant levels of drug addiction, alcoholism, and poverty in their midst. So they certainly don’t want to embrace the fact that people are coming home from prison, and thus are resistant to reentry initiatives. Other communities, though, I am glad to report, are embracing their returning sons, daughters, grandsons, and granddaughters. They are open to reentry!

unknowingly serving returning citizens, through their variety of community-based programs (jobs, food, utilities, etc.). Since there is typically a CAA office in every county in many states, they represent a “central point of contact” to which you could refer “returning citizens.” When we say, “on-board and trained,” it is very simple. The director, who should be part of your Coalition by the way (and may even agree to host your monthly meetings!), needs to be invited to be supportive of the prisoner reentry coalition effort (they usually are, in my experience). Then, once their support is gained, post your Resource List on the bulletin board at the CAA office. The training is as simple as this: The receptionist is taught, “If someone comes in and says, ‘Hey, I just got out of prison and they told me to come here,’ then point them to the Reentry Resource List on the bulletin board and help them make a copy of it.”

We have also looked at creating a “Prisoner Reentry Kiosk” at the CAA office, which would consist of a computer workstation, a printer, a telephone, and a brochure on “Welcome to our community. Here is how to access local resources.” These tools would greatly assist in the individual’s “self-managed” reentry journey. Ultimately, especially in large urban areas, the CAA office could consider hiring a part-time or full-time *prisoner reentry case manager*, if there is a demonstrated need for extra support.

#4 - The local ministerial alliance “on board”

Most communities have a local ministerial alliance, typically made up of the more active and larger churches in the area. While these churches are typically not directly involved in reentry, they are providing indirect reentry services every day, just by having members in their congregations that are either ex-offenders starting their lives over or families of the incarcerated,

THE LIBRARY SOLUTION

I have been pleasantly surprised by a recent development in community-based prisoner reentry that I call the “Library Solution.” Public libraries have been embracing the needs of returning citizens with innovative services. From computer, Internet, and email access (including teaching those that have been locked away for a while how to set up and use their email!) to seminars on employment strategies for disadvantaged workers, local libraries have been getting involved. This is a great trend that I hope will spread everywhere! To enhance your local coalition, be sure to invite your local library.

For more information, Google “Public and Prison Libraries: Important, Often Overlooked, Partners in Reentry”.

planning for or working on the reentry of their loved one. You should invite one or more leaders from the ministerial alliance to be a part of the Coalition. Whether they participate at first or not, you should at least present at one of their monthly meetings what the Coalition is doing and what the Community Reentry Reformation is all about. In the future, you will probably need the direct support of the ministerial alliance to create sustainable programs such as those mentioned below.

#5 - At least one church empowered to be a “Reentry Oasis”

So many churches are doing “reentry” in an informal, indirect way today. A few are more fully engaged, offering programs, support, etc. But for your community to be “reentry ready,” you need at least one church that has fully embraced prisoner reentry as a core ministry. This might include: an associate pastor of reentry (often an ex-felon who has now been trained and ordained in the ministry), volunteers sent to formal training on mentoring of adults in transition, and possibly even a men’s or women’s transitional house funded by the church. Prison Fellowship has some great materials on this, if you need additional support.

#6 - A local Christian halfway house or prison aftercare ministry/facility

So many returning citizens have nowhere to go when they get out. So we can see that prisoner reentry work is really, in one sense, *homelessness prevention*. You are going to have to provide some housing for “homeless” returning citizens in order to have a truly reentry-ready community. Outside of large urban areas, most communities in the U.S. won’t have that many individuals in this condition to deal with at one time, so a home that can house 6-8 men at a time should be ample.

**WHAT DOES A
REENTRY-READY
CHURCH LOOK
LIKE?**

A lot of practical reentry happens in the faith community today, but typically on an informal basis, rather than a formal one. Many churches, communities of faith, and houses of worship serve inmates, ex-offenders, and the families of the incarcerated in their congregations today. But some churches want to be more intentional about the need to be pro-active in the social reintegration of ex-offenders. This could include forming a ministry team (often made up of successful ex-offenders), appointing an associate pastor of reentry, providing training on mentoring of adults in reentry, or establishing a benevolence fund for basic needs.

I don't recommend the local homeless shelter as the solution unless they have a program specifically for assisting returning citizens with their social reintegration and employment. This is primarily because the returning citizen would be living with people in all kinds of states of homelessness, with a high occurrence of mental illness, which can be too stressful and distracting for someone who has enough challenges and barriers to deal with already.

When you are talking about housing, that is where cost and funding start to come into the picture. There is not space enough here to discuss it thoroughly, but here are some pointers:

- There is a way to structure the home so that "guests" who have become employed pay a program fee to stay there, which helps fund those "guests" who have not gained employment or other means of income
- If it all falls to one church or ministry to open and run the home, it can be overwhelming; now is the time to consider involving the ministerial alliance
- Refer to the sidebar on page 16 for a helpful resource

#7 - At least one "sober living house"

Once the returning citizen has had a chance to begin to restore their lives and save up some money, they usually want to launch out and get a place of their own. Others may want to move from the reentry home but still desire a certain amount of structure and accountability. The perfect answer is a sober living program. They typically charge \$100 per week, all bills paid, and the residents are all in recovery and reentry together, providing a supportive environment. The "Oxford House" model is recommended, and there are other good ones, as well.

A HOME OR A FACILITY?

As my good friend, John Leonardson, says, "You don't want to reinstitutionalize them."

In other words, if you really want to create a healthy graduate from your local reentry program, don't go get an old nursing home or motel and fix it up, and then put them into an impersonal, regimented program.

Most returning citizens really need a home-like environment, based on the model of how a healthy nuclear family works. How will they know how to create a successful household and a healthy family if they have never seen one?

I am very inspired by this concept and hope that we will have dozens, hundreds even, of reentry homes emerging

#8 - A “Celebrate Recovery” Christian 12-step recovery program hosted by a local church

The great thing about CR is that they are becoming more and more widespread all the time. This church-based 12-step recovery program has proven very successful. CR also offers a strong piece of the reentry solution, since many prisons have CR groups on the inside. This allows the returning citizen to experience more of a “seamless transition” (our ultimate goal), if they can belong to a CR group inside, and then plug right into one when they get out.

RESOURCE: If there is not a CR group in your community, here is a resource to help you learn what it takes to start one: www.shbctulsa.org/cr/How-to-start-cr.pdf

#9 - A “Reentry One-Stop Center”

The final piece of the reentry-ready community is a Reentry One-Stop Center (ROC). In a large urban area, it should be a walk-in storefront setting, typically in a strip mall. (Other options include an unused church, a large house, or a street-front office near the Probation & Parole office.) It should be on the bus line and staffed by one or more trained reentry professionals, who can receive returning citizens, assess their needs, and guide them to resources in the community. The ROC is the ultimate achievement of a reentry-ready community.

In a smaller community, you might investigate creating a ROC at the library, the Community Action Agency office, or at a large church that is involved in the community. Be sure to involve representatives from the Probation & Parole office and your local WorkForce agency, as well as any other agency or organization that would be of value to returning citizens.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SUPPORT GROUPS

In my reentry work, I constantly emphasize the need for returning citizens to find a new set of friends. Returning to the old neighborhood and the old friends is the quickest path back to the criminal lifestyle.

If one wants to flee that lifestyle, a key is to find a new circle of (non-ex-offender, pro-social) associates.

The quickest way to do that is to join a recovery-and-reentry-friendly support group. These come in various forms, but the most common is a 12-step group, such as Celebrate Recovery (my favorite), AA, NA, etc.

By attending such a group on a regular basis, a returning citizen will receive both vital support and make new friends!

CHAPTER FIVE: HOW TO RUN A COALITION

I believe that the local prisoner reentry coalition is **THE** critical success factor for the Reentry Reformation. From much first-hand experience, I believe it is a straightforward way of organizing and having a significant positive impact in the community. Here is the formula for how to do it:

1. Gather a small group of concerned individuals for the *formative meeting*. This can be as few as three or four people. (I encourage you to have the local Probation & Parole officer there if at all possible. They make such a good anchor for reentry organizing.)
2. Get a room at a local church, the library, the community center, etc.
3. Go through the material in Chapter Four: *The Vision for a Reentry-Ready Community* together.
4. Get everyone's name, organization (or "private citizen") and email address on a sign-in sheet.
5. Assign everyone to read this book by the next meeting.
6. Set the time and place for next month's meeting.
7. Encourage everyone to invite one other "reentry colleague" for the next meeting. (This can include ex-offenders who are successful in their reentry journey and wanting to "give back," and family members of the incarcerated.)
8. Create an email mailing list. If you can, indicate on it "those who have attended" and "those to whom you are reaching out for future participation."

"COALESCE": A verb, pronounced 'coh-ah-LESS', which means to network together, build relationships, and share resources.



TOP 10 LIST FOR GETTING INVOLVED WITH PRISONER REENTRY

(Part 1)

10. Read this book!
9. Donate a basic need item to a reentry project.
8. Learn about Restorative Justice on Wikipedia.
7. Start a "Restorative Justice" discussion group in your community or at your church.
6. Visit a friend or family member who is in prison and discuss their plans for getting out.

(continued...)

9. Send out an email reminder one week before each monthly meeting. Always include the date, time, location, directions, topic of next meeting, special speaker if any, and an encouragement to bring a colleague and to forward the email to anyone who might be interested.
10. At the second meeting, assuming you have several new faces around the table, go over *The Vision for a Reentry-Ready Community* again.
11. Distribute a copy of the Prisoner Reentry Resource List template. (A free version is available for you to customize at www.strategicreentrygroup.com/pro-class.) Discuss with the group how most communities have various resource lists floating around (might be from United Way, social services, homeless shelter, etc.) and that they tend to become outdated and stale.
12. Encourage everyone to bring any resource lists they already have to the next meeting.
13. At each monthly meeting, at least 15 minutes of the hourly meeting should be dedicated to updating your local Prisoner Reentry Resource List. This is so vital. Filling in the categories with meaningful data and keeping it current is one of the best things you can do to facilitate successful prisoner reentry in your community!
14. Here is a list of discussion topics for the next 10 meetings:
 - Who Should Be on the Coalition?
 - Creating a Poster to Promote the Coalition
 - Emergency Housing

**TOP 10 LIST FOR
GETTING INVOLVED
WITH PRISONER
REENTRY
(Part 2)**

5. Find out the nearest jail or prison to you and get to know the Chaplain; ask who is the Reentry Coordinator or contact person at that facility.
4. If there is not one, write to the Warden or Sheriff and encourage them to appoint one.
3. Volunteer with the Dept. of Corrections to be a pre-release mentor on a reentering inmate's Transition Team.
2. Mentor an ex-felon in your community to help them start their life over on a strong foundation.
1. Hire an ex-felon and pay them a living wage.

- **Felon-Friendly Employers**
- **Planning a Local Reentry Conference (or Symposium)**
- **What is Going On in Our State? (maybe a representative of DOC?)**
- **Self-Employment Opportunities for Ex-Felons**
- **Working with Law Enforcement (maybe a representative from the Police?)**
- **Building a Local “Roadmap to Employment”**
- **What About Sex Offenders?**

You don't have to be overly formal with the organization of your coalition. You don't have to incorporate, elect officers, seek non-profit status, etc., although you are certainly free to do so, if there is enough interest and momentum! But you should be businesslike and organized in the way you run your meetings. The best way to do this is with a formal Agenda. If you can send it out ahead of time, even better.

A Note On Special Speakers: A special speaker can add a lot of value to a coalition meeting, but don't overdo it. One per quarter might be enough. Remember, the goal is to create a high-impact coalition with a group of volunteers who give One Hour Per Month. Keep it simple!

In conclusion, I have created a website on which I have posted all the sample documents mentioned above including a Sign-In Sheet, a sample Email Reminder, a Meeting Agenda, the Resource List template, and the *Roadmap to Employment in Oklahoma City* (as an example to inspire you to create the same for your area). The address is www.pnbook.strategicreentrygroup.com.

**SPECIAL NOTE
ABOUT WOMEN IN
REENTRY**

Female inmates by definition have more challenges than their male counterparts. It is common to see their parents (the grandparents of their children) desperate to be free of the forced childcare responsibilities they have shouldered during the time of incarceration say, “Here, take these kids. We can't do it any more!” And this often happens on the very first day they have gotten out of prison! So now they have intense parenting responsibilities – often of two or more small children – on top of possible homelessness, poverty, lack of transportation, and other barriers. It's no wonder they seek out a man to help them right away! And sadly, the cycle of abuse and crime often starts right back up at that point.

CHAPTER SIX: FITTING IN TO THE LARGER PLAN

Depending on where you live, your local prisoner reentry coalition may be the only thing going in the area of helping ex-felons with their social reintegration journey. But let's hope not! Usually, there are pockets of activity and often we don't know about each other, and can even overlap and duplicate if we are not careful.

If there is a local, citywide, regional, or even statewide "Anti-Poverty" initiative (often these are based on the 'Bridges Out of Poverty' or 'Getting Ahead' movements), it can create the perfect context for prisoner reentry. If there is a mature anti-poverty coalition already serving your community, your prisoner reentry coalition could easily be a subset or special interest group of that larger group. The same can be said for any sort of Anti-Homelessness coalition, since pro-active prisoner reentry work is a part of homelessness-prevention.

If your state has a Prisoner Reentry Initiative, or something with a similar name, that is even better. Then your community coalition can just be an extension or "chapter" of that larger group. In the ideal world, the Department of Corrections (or whatever the government's prison system is called in your area) will have a long-range strategic plan for prisoner reentry. It should call for strong representation from the local community, especially those larger urban areas to which inmates tend to migrate, once they get out (due to the easier access to jobs and social services).

In our state, DOC is planning to create an electronic data file with all the information about who is coming out and returning home to our state (with the inmate's permission, of course), 60 days in advance. Wouldn't that be great to know? Who is a sex offender. Who is needing mental health ser-

SHOULD AN INMATE RETURN HOME WHEN THEY GET OUT?

Well, that depends. If that hometown or family situation was a direct contributor to their criminal behavior and lifestyle, then most reentry professionals that I know strongly recommend starting life over somewhere else, making a fresh start.

Also consider that there are many more jobs and resources in a large urban area compared to a rural one (albeit many more temptations as well!). The amount of free services available in the typical urban city is vast, compared to a small town or rural community.

So, my advice is, they should only go home if there is positive environment, a job, a bed, and a support network waiting for them!

vices. Who needed to get substance abuse treatment while they were incarcerated but did not. And so forth. All the reentry folks I've talked to have unanimously agreed this data would be invaluable.

The problem is: Aside from Probation & Parole, to whom else should DOC transmit this electronic data file? Community partners working in reentry would be the logical targets for this information. Will the community partners unify and provide DOC a single point of contact for community collaboration? Or will they — and this includes the faith community, for sure — remain disconnected, disorganized, and ultimately, ineffective? Our local communities must unify and collaborate to effectively attack the devastating problems of recidivism. What will you do to assist your community to address the associated problems of poverty, homelessness and unemployment? Remember, “Desperate People do Desperate Things.”

Beware how you take away hope from another human being.
Oliver Wendell Holmes

Love recognizes no barriers. It jumps hurdles, leaps fences,
penetrates walls to arrive at its destination full of hope.
Maya Angelou

To love means loving the unlovable.
To forgive means pardoning the unpardonable.
Faith means believing the unbelievable.
Hope means hoping when everything seems hopeless.
G. K. Chesterton

Faith has to do with things that are not seen
and hope with things that are not at hand.
Thomas Aquinas

**LETTER TO THE
EDITOR**

(FloridaToday.com, 4/5/13)

I would like to add support to the writer of the recent letter, “Support measure aiding newly released prisoners,” about prison reentry programs.

As a volunteer in prison ministry, I can attest to the fact that many incarcerated individuals sincerely desire to return to support their families with a legitimate vocation, but do not have the wherewithal to do so. For many, this is the reason they are in prison in the first place. They know they missed many opportunities and regret this.

While they are in prison, we citizens of Florida have their undivided attention. We pay their room and board anyway. Why not put this time, which we are paying for, to a good use?

Many will return to society having even less of an opportunity to support themselves. We don't need them to be in prison and they don't want to come back. A few dollars for reentry programs are a wonderful investment that will return dividends.

Concerned citizens also can contribute time volunteering to teach vocational classes at prisons. To those on the inside, any volunteer from the outside is welcomed like a fresh cup of water or a fresh breeze on a hot, dry day.

More than 30 percent of all incarcerated will be released to your hometowns this year. Will they be better equipped to support their families as law-abiding citizens? And do we care? — *Wendell Koontz*

CHAPTER SEVEN: THE REENTRY RESOURCE DIRECTORY

As I mentioned previously, the primary job of the local prisoner reentry coalition is to create and maintain the Reentry Resource List. But even if you are extra-diligent, it still runs the risk of becoming just another outdated community resource list. Wouldn't it be great if there was an online directory of resources that was kept updated at all times, not by local volunteers, but by paid staff whose sole mission was to document all the resources in our community?

Well, that's been my dream for a long time, and I think we are getting closer. I think most states have implemented the 2-1-1 call center concept, so that citizens in need can call and find out where to find the services they require. My proposal is that 2-1-1 also becomes the "directory of record" for all things reentry (except maybe employment). I've had some very promising discussions with the 2-1-1 folks in my home area and I think it can be done, and done right, within their current structure. Maybe someday, I'll be able to publish an updated version of this book that tells how we got that done!

In the meantime, please keep in mind that neglected lists get outdated and people often use these community resource lists to make major decisions about their lives. It may not be a "life or death" issue, but it IS important.

NOTE: If you are interested in learning more about how to develop a Web-based reentry resource directory for your state or organization, please contact me. The information on how to do so is in Appendix B.

One project that I am especially proud to be associated with is the Tarrant County Reentry Resource Directory in Ft. Worth, Texas. You can see it online at www.tcreentry.org.

Reentry: Back to work, school and family (*The Cincinnati Enquirer*, 4/4/13)

Upon release from prison, many ex-convicts receive a handshake and a one-way bus ticket, then head home to face a perilous transition.

They are 13 times more likely than the average person to die in the first few weeks out, and more than 40 percent of them will be back behind bars within three years. They have trouble finding housing and work. Someone with a criminal record in Ohio, for instance, can't fit people for hearing aids or own a salvage yard.

Now Ohio is at the forefront of a national effort to help ex-offenders reintegrate into society, and Hamilton County is a leader statewide. This month, the county agreed to add 3 staffers to its Office of Reentry, which helps ex-offenders get drivers licenses, find jobs and fill prescriptions.

The effort represents a radical shift from the get-tough-on-crime policies popular in the 1980s and '90s. Those policies doubled the prison population in the state and exploded the corrections budget while emphasizing punishment over rehabilitation. But eventually, notes Ed Rhine, deputy director for the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction, "we recognized that much of what had gone on in the last 20 years in corrections wasn't working. That whole time when we were getting tough on crime, crime rates were going up."

The counties surrounding Hamilton can learn from its efforts to help ex-offenders reintegrate. Ohio hopes to have such programs in every county in the state eventually...

In Ohio prisons, the emphasis is evolving toward preparing offenders for re-entry from the moment they enter prison, probation or community-service programs.

CONCLUSION

Thank you for persevering to the end. Hopefully, *Purposeful Neighboring* has painted a clear picture for you on exactly why we need a “reentry reformation” and how to get involved at your local level. Remember the famous bumper sticker, “Think Globally. Act Locally.”

In conclusion, I’d like to personally thank some of my most inspiring reentry colleagues for all of the great work you are doing to help the least, the last, the hurting, and the lost. A heartfelt THANK YOU to Faye Tucker, Donna Herrod, Gene Naukam, Terri Miller, Randy Garrison, Richard Wright, Rachel Foreman, Roddy Youree, Phyllis Norwood, John Pearson, Randy Hendricks, Jon Cordeiro, John Leonardson, Bay Haralson, Gerald Scott, Rodney Fowler, Todd Rivers, Wes Young, Nancy & Lowell Lefebvre, Rhonda Bear, Ilinda Jackson, Rachel Dorsett, Marcia & Bud Manning, Edna Keith, Rabbi John Rogers, April Williams, Amy Boulware, Carri Adams, Beth Batman, Justine & Aaron Cosar, Shannon Hazen, Rebecca Walkup, Scott Martinson, Mary Leslie, Worley Holmes, Floyd Long, Nicole Mayes, Burt Patadal, Robert Scott, Paula & Andy Wood, Marguerita Shaw, Donna Thompson, Don Williams, Tony Zahn, Wayne Bowers, and last but definitely not least, Beverly Leflore-Woodson, the Queen of Jobs for Ex-Felons in OKC!

Finally, I want to thank my beloved wife, Karen. You are my best friend! Thank you for believing in me, supporting me, and encouraging me through all the hard times. The best is yet to come!

APPENDIX A: ABOUT THIS BOOK

Purposeful Neighboring: Creating Reentry-Ready Communities is provided as a Web-book free of charge to the prisoner reentry community, concerned citizens, families of the incarcerated, and anyone wanting to learn about the latest trends in reentry.

For a print copy of this book, please mail a check (made out to “SRG”) or money order for \$25 to SRG, PO Box 1112, Bethany, OK 73008-1112 USA. We will provide a professionally bound edition via first class mail. Be sure to include your mailing address!

APPENDIX B: ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Steve Gordon is an independent prisoner reentry consultant with extensive experience working with local community coalitions, faith-based reentry initiatives, and corrections-based reentry programs. Steve is a champion of collaboration across diverse groups of stakeholders, a pioneer of strategic information sharing strategies, and creator of the *Framework for Reentry Reformation*. A successful computer consultant for 35 years, a brush with the criminal justice system ignited a fire within Steve to “solve” the prisoner reentry dilemma. He is known for his creativity, innovative products, and out-of-the-box thinking. A senior systems analyst with a degree in Computer Systems Analysis from Oklahoma State University, he is a conference speaker, author of five books, and founder of the *Strategic Reentry Group*. Steve is a member of the *Association of Reentry Professionals*. He can be reached at info@strategicreentrygroup.com or at the mailing address above.