

The Federal Earned Income Tax Credit: Determine Your Eligibility and File

John M. Jeffries

Did you know that the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) lifts more families and children out of poverty than any other federal program? Or that in 2002, the \$32 billion the EITC provided to working families was greater than the amount of money spent on federal welfare (TANF) and food stamps combined?

The National H.I.R.E. Network would like to remind and encourage all workforce development intermediaries, social service agencies, legal advocates and other practitioners working to improve the labor

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NIC Offers Professional Training Series for Practitioners Providing Employment Services to People with Criminal Records

John E. Moore

*Administrator, National Institute of Correction's Office of Correctional Job Training and Placement***

Entering the labor market can be a confusing and sometimes overwhelming experience. Skilled practitioners are well aware that people with criminal records struggle with complicated life circumstances and encounter a myriad of challenges regarding job acquisition, retention, advancement and selection of potential career paths. For successful integration into today's workforce, many people with criminal records are dependent upon the knowledge, skills, and abilities of para-professionals to assist them in developing a life long process for making well informed decisions that is based on information about themselves (abilities, aptitudes, and interest) and about the world of work (occupational, educational and labor market information). Emphasis nationally on preparing people for the workforce and the significant impact of job retention upon recidivism has increased the demand for qualified and trained para-professionals to provide specialized employment services for people with criminal records.

The National Institute of Corrections' (NIC) Office of Correctional Job Training and Placement is the primary source of training tailored specifically for providers of employment services for people with criminal records. The Office has developed curriculum to meet the training needs of employment service providers from entry level (Offender Employment Specialist) through paraprofessionals (Offender Workforce Development Specialist). Most curriculum are available by contacting

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Debbie A. Mukamal

market outcomes of people with criminal records to expose their clients to the benefits of the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). Well-respected and bipartisan research indicates that the EITC is by far one of the most effective poverty ameliorating federal aid programs impacting individuals, families, and children.

The EITC is also considered a compelling incentive for moving individuals from welfare rolls to the labor market because it, in effect, “makes [even low-wage] work pay.” In the aggregate, the EITC reduces income inequality, and at the local level, the credits can stimulate economic development when the receipts are spent to support local enterprises.

Outreach to communities designed to reach eligible individuals and families has expanded significantly, in an effort to make it easier for more low-wage workers to determine their eligibility and file for the credit.

This is the first of a two-part National H.I.R.E. Network newsletter article outlining how the EITC complements workforce development efforts which focus on low income and low wage workers, including people with criminal records. It ends with a selected list of resources on the EITC. The second installment will continue with a few recommendations offered to assist practitioners and their clients as they navigate through some of the more controversial elements surrounding the EITC, including movements within states to offer complementary credits in state codes, the new child pre-certification requirement, and the expansion of private financial concerns that have begun to develop “tax preparation assistance” tools which can compromise the financial benefit of the tax refund to individual low income filers.

What Is the EITC?

Instituted in 1975, the EITC provides tax reductions and wage supplements for low and moderate-income working families and individuals. The initial rationale for the EITC revolved around its potential to offset the burden of social security taxes carried by low-income workers in particular. Major expansions occurred in 1986, 1990, and 1993 and most recently in 2001. With those expansions the arguments for maintaining the tax credit shifted slightly,

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the NIC Information Center at 800-877-1461 or asknic@nicic.org. The Office offers the following training programs:

Offender Employment Specialist (OES) Training. This basic, 36-hour training program, endorsed by the National Association of Workforce Development Professionals, develops and enhances the skills of practitioners in the provision of employment assistance to people with criminal records; Request item 016579.

"Building Futures": Offender Job Retention for Corrections Professionals. This 36-hour NIC Distance Learning satellite/internet broadcast program that aired October, 2002 covered the skills, strategies, and resources to address job retention issues and increase the employment success of people with criminal records. Curriculum materials are available online or on cd-rom; Request item 017699.

Career Development Theory and Its Application. This self-paced program provides training for those providing clients with criminal records with job skills training or job/career counseling, placement, advancement, or retention services. The program includes a pre-assessment exercise, training modules, a post-assessment, a glossary, resources, lesson plan activities, and practicum assignments. Available on cd-rom; Request item 018513.

Offender Workforce Development Specialist (OWDS) Training. This is an advanced program with a comprehensive curriculum certified by the National Career Development Association that meets all training competencies for trainee certification as Global Career Development Facilitators. This training offers CEU's and graduate or undergraduate credits at in-state tuition rates for qualified applicants. Each team selected for this three-week training initiative returns to their jurisdiction with basic skills training modules on career facilitation for use in training other offender employment service providers. For more information, contact the National Career Development Association at 866-367-6232 or at 918-663-7060; 10820 East 45th Street, Suite 210, Tulsa, OK 74146, dpenn@ncda.org; www.ncda.org.

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emphasizing its poverty reducing impacts and the incentive it provides to move people from welfare to work.

Three features of the EITC have proven to be particularly advantageous to low income earners: 1) the EITC is a *refundable* tax credit; 2) beginning in 2001, the EITC could be augmented by the Child Tax Credit (CTC); and 3) the EITC's benefits have been accompanied by promotional campaigns at the federal state and local levels making it easier for eligible filers to receive reliable information and low cost or free tax preparation assistance.

A Refundable Tax Credit

Not only does the EITC reduce your tax liability and can therefore result in a refund, even if you didn't earn enough to pay income taxes (i.e. if your tax liability equals zero) if it's determined that you are eligible for the credit and claim it, you can receive a refund. The EITC puts cash back in the pockets of poor and working poor individuals whose labor market attachments are weak or otherwise characterized by part time or intermittent wage earning. Workforce development practitioners serving people with criminal records frequently find their clients in precisely this sort of scenario, for a host of reasons. Clients faced with labor market histories of this variety over the course of the tax year should definitely determine if they are eligible and if so take advantage of the EITC.

The EITC Plus the CTC Equals More Money for Poor Families with Children

The federal Child Tax Credit instituted in 1997 made it possible for low and moderate income workers with children to claim a nonrefundable tax credit. In 2001, the legislation made the CTC a refundable tax credit for families.

More Comprehensive and Available Assistance

The expansion of outreach to a range of different organizations and institutions working on behalf of economically disadvantaged communities and individuals has resulted in greater participation of individuals and non-profits dedicated to improving economic well being. The development and importance of the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance centers around the country and the IRS's renewed

The following curriculum are currently being developed or revised:

Women Offender Workforce Development. This e-learning training program will be available through NIC's E-learning Center for the purpose of gaining a better understanding of workforce development issues affecting women with criminal records and appropriate and effective interventions. Projected date for completion: January, 2005. For more information, contact Francina C. Carter at 800-995-6423, Ext. 40117 or 202-514-0117 or e-mail fccarter@bop.gov

Offender Employment Specialist. This basic training curriculum offered since 1997 to develop and enhance skills of practitioners providing employment assistance to people with criminal records is being revised and updated. Projected date for completion: January, 2005. For more information, contact Melissa C. Houston at Houston & Associates, 440-331-2273.

Curriculum for Career Resource Center Clerks. This self-paced and/or group-facilitated curriculum may be used by jails to train volunteers and prisons in training inmates to help transition people with criminal records back into the labor market through career planning and job search assistance provided through the facilities' career resource center. Projected date for completion: July, 2004. For more information, contact Francina C. Carter at 800-995-6423, Ext. 40117 or 202-514-0117 or e-mail fccarter@bop.gov

**The Office of Correctional Job Training and Placement was legislatively established within the National Institute of Corrections in March 1995 to encourage and support employment programs for adults in custody, under community supervision, and others with criminal records through technical assistance, training and information services. For more information about the Office, see <http://www.nicic.org/OCJTP> or contact John Moore, Administrator, at 800-995-6423, Ext. 44278, or 202-514-4278, or via e-mail at jemoore@bop.gov. ❖

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internal commitment to serving low-income populations are a testimony to the EITC's importance. The IRS has begun a practice where it scrutinizes low income tax returns in an effort to determine whether a filer is eligible for the EITC or CTC and has not claimed one or both. If the filer is eligible but has not made a claim the Tax Advocate attempts to contact the filer and offer alternative ways to take advantage of the credits.

And finally, in general, the EITC does not negatively impact a filer's eligibility for Medicaid, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), food stamps, or low income housing.

Easily Accessible Resources on the EITC

The range of web-based information on the EITC is considerable, including: summary pieces that provide an overview; analyses and reviews discussing the EITC's impact on social policy; and detailed, interactive guidelines that assist individuals who would like to know whether they are eligible to claim the credit.

If you are interested in learning more about eligibility requirements and other details associated with filing and claiming the credit, the Internal Revenue Service's (IRS) website www.irs.gov is an excellent resource. Click on "Individuals" and you will be linked to a page that will direct you to information about the EITC and the CTC. In the section "Frequently Asked Questions," you will be able to determine if you are eligible. For those without access to the Internet, similar services are available by calling the IRS at 800-829-1040.

If you are interested in policy reviews about the EITC, "Rewarding Work through the Tax Code" (from the Brookings Institution's Center on Urban and Metropolitan Policy) and "Tax Reform for Families" (from the Tax Policy Center, a Brookings

Upcoming Conferences of Interest

Feb. 10-12, 2004

P/PV: Working Ventures

Working with Employers: Partners in Difficult Times

San Antonio, TX

From the Media to Practice

This is the seventh of a series in which we highlight an issue raised by a recent press article.

Roberta Meyers-Peebles

Thirty-three (33) down and seventeen (17) to go! Pennsylvania has become the 33rd state to opt out or modify the 1996 federal welfare law that permanently bars anyone with a drug-related felony conviction from receiving federal welfare benefits or food stamps. (See "State Restores Food Aid for Recovering Addicts," by Steve Levin, Pittsburgh Post Gazette, December 25, 2003; <http://www.post-gazette.com/localnews/20031225welfare1225p4.asp>). While Congress is in the midst of TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) Reauthorization, advocates continue to pressure their state legislatures to opt out or modify this ban that leaves many individuals and their children without vital financial resources or much needed access to drug or alcohol treatment services. The report, *Some Days Are Harder than Hard Welfare Reform and Women with Drug Convictions in Pennsylvania* (December 1999), by Amy Hirsch, a Supervising Staff Attorney at Community Legal Services in Philadelphia, powerfully illustrates the devastating impact this law has on women and their children. See <http://www.clasp.org/DMS/Documents/997993897.158/some%20days%20are%20harder%20than%20hard.pdf>

Pennsylvania's Act 44 of 2003

(<http://www.legis.state.pa.us/WU01/LI/BI/BT/2003/0/HB0044P3148.HTM>), which goes into effect on February 21, 2004, will allow residents of Pennsylvania who have been convicted of a drug felony to apply for public benefits. It requires the state's welfare department to refer individuals for assessment and drug and alcohol treatment if appropriate and available. This is an extremely important victory as it ensures that those individuals who are in dire need of and desire drug or alcohol treatment can receive it. Moreover, for those transitioning from prison back to the community, the change in the law means that many people can now access benefits to help provide food, clothing, health

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Contact: Brian Rolon
Tel: 212-822-2413
Email: brolon@ppv.org
www.ppv.org

Feb. 18-20, 2004**Women Work! 2004 National Conference, Celebrating 25 Years of Transitions & Triumphs**

Washington Wyndham Hotel

Washington DC

Contact: www.womenwork.org**March 14-16, 2004****National Association of Workforce Boards Forum 2004: "A Skilled Workforce-A Stronger Economy"**

Renaissance Washington DC Hotel

Washington, DC

Contact: NAWB

Tel: 202-775-0960

Fax: 202-775-0330

Email: nawb@nawb.orgwww.nawb.org/forum2004.default.asp**March 21-24, 2004****National Correctional Industries Association Enterprise 2004 National Training Conference and Exposition: "Transformation: The Challenge of Change"**

Adams Mark Hotel

St. Louis, MO

Contact: NCIA

Tel: 410-230-3972

Fax: 410-230-3981

April 14-16, 2004**Center for Mental Health Services & Criminal Justice Research First Biennial Conference: "Reentry to Recovery: People with Mental Illness Coming Home from Prison or Jail"**

The Sheraton Society Hill Hotel

Philadelphia, PA

Contact: Kristen Gilmore

Tel: 732-932-1225

Email: cmhs&cjr@ihhpar.rutgers.edu**May 12-14, 2004****The National GAINS Center for People with Co-Occurring Disorders in the Justice System 2004 Annual National Conference: "From Science to Services: Emerging Best Practices for People in Contact with the**

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care and other basic necessities they require until they obtain employment.

A noteworthy highlight to this victory is the very strong and effective coalition constructed to help bring this effort to fruition. Amy Hirsh, who was very instrumental in advocating for this legislation, explained this best when stating, "The bill passed after extensive efforts by a bipartisan coalition (the prime sponsors were Rep. Frank Oliver, a Democrat from Philadelphia and Senator Jane Earll, a Republican from Erie), with support from a broad range of groups, including the Pennsylvania District Attorneys Association, the Drug and Alcohol Service Providers of Pennsylvania, the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence, the Pennsylvania Welfare Coalition, Pennsylvania Hunger Action Center, Just Harvest, Community Legal Services and the Women's Law Project, and lots and lots of visits to legislators by staff of women's treatment programs and individual women who were banned from benefits."

This type of broad-based coalition effort can serve as a model for those who are continuing to advocate in the remaining 17 states for similar change in their law. To view how your state has responded to this federal welfare law go to: http://www.hirenetwork.org/State_Responses.htm Again, congratulations to those who worked long and hard on this important achievement! ❖

**Hot Off the Press:
Recent Reports**

Skilling the American Workforce "On the Cheap": Ongoing Shortfall in Federal Funding for Workforce Development, by Robin Spence and Brendan Kiel from the Workforce Alliance (September 2003). This report details the results of decreasing federal government in workforce development programs. Citing data from 19 federal workforce development programs over the last two decades, the report finds that many workforce

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Justice System"Contact: <http://www.gainsctr.com/b/Default.asp>

Tel: 800-311-GAIN

May 19-21, 2004**Pennsylvania Partners 2004 Employment, Training and Education Conference**

Hershey Lodge and Convention Center

Hershey, PA

Contact: www.papartners.org**June 17-19, 2004****The 11th National Roundtable for Women in Prison**

Sheraton Hotel

Atlanta, GA

Contact: www.takingaim.net/2004roundtable

Tel: 404-755-3262

Fax: 404-755-3294

***H.I.R.E. on the Hill*****"Fair and Accurate Credit Transactions Act of 2003"
Bill Signed into Law**

Alexa Eggleston

Last month, President Bush signed into law the "Fair and Accurate Credit Transactions Act of 2003," Public Law 108-59. The legislation was originally introduced in the House of Representatives by Congressman Spencer Bachus (R-AL) and in the Senate by Senator Richard Shelby (R-AL). In general, the law amends the existing Fair Credit and Reporting Act to help prevent identity theft, improve the use of and consumer access to consumer reports, enhance the accuracy of consumer reports, limit the sharing of certain consumer information, and improve financial education and literacy.

The Fair Credit Reporting Act was initially created to ensure the accuracy and fairness of credit reporting by creating a mechanism for investigating and evaluating the credit worthiness, credit standing, character and general reputation of consumers. In the case of employment, consumer report information may be used by an employer when considering an application. The report may include information about civil suits, civil judgments, and records of arrest over the last seven years, unless the report is going to

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training programs, particularly those that target low-income youth and adults, have faced significant cuts. To read this report, go to

<http://www.workforcealliance.org/twa-funding-analysis-09.pdf>

Welfare Reform, Work, and Child Care: The Role of Informal Care in the Lives of Low-Income Women and Children, by Virginia W. Know, Andrew S. London, and Ellen K. Scott of MDRC (October 2003). Analyzing rich data from in-depth ethnographic interviews, Next Generation researchers documented the challenges that low-income families face as they patch together a variety of arrangements to meet their childcare needs -- including the unregulated or minimally regulated informal care that typically plays a central role in these families' lives. The studies point to policy directions that can promote the well-being of children while helping vulnerable low-income parents to sustain employment. To view this report, go to

<http://www.mdrc.org/publications/353/policybrief.html>

Service Delivery and Institutional Linkages: Early Implementation Experiences of Employment Retention and Advancement Programs, by Jacquelyn Anderson and Karin Martinson of MDRC (October 2003).

Describing the initial experiences of 15 employment retention and advancement programs in eight states, this report emphasizes implementation issues and focuses on connections among the agencies and institutions that deliver retention and advancement services to low-income workers and hard-to-employ populations. To read this report, go to

<http://www.mdrc.org/publications/356/overview.html>

Patterns of Criminal Conviction and Incarceration Among Mothers of Children in Foster Care in New York City, by Miriam Ehrensaft, Ajay Khashu, Timothy Ross, and Mark Wamsley of the Vera Institute of Justice (December 2003). Over the past decade, the numbers of women in prison have increased substantially, and the majority of these inmates are mothers. For agencies that often bear the responsibility of protecting these women's children, understanding the relationship between maternal incarceration and the placement of children in foster care is crucial. In this report, researchers from Vera present data that can help agencies prepare for the needs of these children and their caregivers. To read the report, go to

http://vera.org/publications/publications_5.asp?publication_id=210

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be used in connection with a job that has a salary of \$75,000 or more, in which case the time limit does not apply. Records of conviction may be considered regardless of the amount of time that has passed. The "Fair and Accurate Credit Transactions Act of 2003" would not alter the existing provisions which address time limits or use of arrest and conviction records, but would include provisions to help ensure the accuracy of the information that is included in a consumer report, as well as help protect individuals who have been the victims of identity theft from further persecution.

Key provisions of the law include:

- Establishing guidelines and regulations to identify possible identity theft risks to account holders or to the safety and soundness of an institution or customers;
- Prescribing regulations requiring financial institutions and other users of a consumer report to notify the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) of unauthorized access to records which compromises the security, confidentiality, or integrity of consumer information;
- Requiring a consumer reporting agency to block the reporting of information that the consumer alleges resulted from identity theft;
- Coordinating regulations governing the accuracy and completeness of information provided by furnishers of consumer information to consumer reporting agencies;
- Revising limitations on liability and enforcement in connection with willful and negligent noncompliance by furnishers of consumer information to consumer reporting agencies;
- Conducting ongoing audits of the accuracy and completeness of consumer reports prepared or maintained by consumer reporting agencies; and independently verifying report accuracy and completeness;
- Creating guidelines for FTC treatment of consumer complaints of incomplete or inaccurate information maintained by a consumer reporting agency;
- Requiring consumer reporting agencies which determine information is inaccurate, incomplete, or unverified to delete or modify such information; and notify the information furnisher of such action with the requirement that it will delete or modify the information.

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The Informal Economy: Latino Enterprises at the Margins, by Elaine L. Edgcomb and Maria Medrano Armington of the Microenterprise Fund for Innovation, Effectiveness, Learning and Dissemination (FIELD) (September 2003). This report examines the informal economy experiences of 38 New Jersey and New York area Latinos -- including undocumented immigrants -- participating in a wide range of small-scale, income-generating activities. The report also considers implications for related practices and policies, and explores the barriers that Latinos face in stabilizing and growing their businesses in the informal economy. To read the report, go to

http://www.fieldus.org/publications/IE_Latino.pdf

The Informal Economy: Experiences of African Americans, by Jan L. Losby, Marcia E. Kingslow, and John F. Else of the Institute for Social and Economic Development (ISED) Solutions (September 2003). This report examines the attitudes and behaviors of 55 African-Americans who either operate informal businesses or work within the informal economy. The study, which looked at participants working in Chicago and Baltimore, explores the reasons that people engage in the informal economy, the advantages and disadvantages of doing so, and the implications for microenterprise development programs. To view the report, go to

http://www.fieldus.org/publications/IE_AfrAm.pdf

Seeking a Workforce System: A Graphical Guide to Employment and Training Services in New York, by David Jason Fischer, Jan Henessey, Neil Scott Kleiman, Rick Tomisman, and John Twomey of Center for an Urban Future (December 2003). This report maps job training in New York, tracks each funding stream from its source, and divides the total dollars to allow you to see just how New York spends its workforce development funds. To view the report, go to

http://www.nycfuture.org/content/reports/report_view.cfm?repkey=130&search=1. ❖

Are you interested in submitting an article to H.I.R.E. Network News? We are looking for guest writers on a range of subjects, including a first-person account of a person with a criminal record looking for a job and/or successfully working. Please email Debbie Mukamal at dmukamal@hirenetwork.org if you are interested in contributing to our newsletter. We look forward to hearing from you.

For more information on the rules governing the use of consumer reports to access criminal record information, see our summary "Employer Use of Consumer/Credit Reports to Obtain Criminal Record Information" at <http://www.hirenetwork.org/consumerreports.html>



FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES!



Child Support Enforcement's Special Improvement Project (SIP) Grants. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families (ACF) announces funds for special improvement projects which further the national child support mission to ensure all children receive financial and medical support from their parents and which strengthens the ability of the nation's child support program. Eligible applicants include state and local government entities, nonprofit organizations, community- and faith-based organizations, and historically black colleges and universities. *The deadline for applications is March 3, 2004.* Approximately \$1.5 million is available to fund 13 awards, ranging from \$100,000-\$200,000. For further information contact, Jean Robinson at (202) 401-5330 or jrobinson@acf.dhhs.gov; or go to: <http://a257.g.akamaitech.net/7/257/2422/14mar20010800/edoc.ket.access.gpo.gov/2003/03-31375.htm>.

Statewide Family Network Grants. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services/ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) announces funds for applicants to develop or enhance their service system infrastructure in order to support effective substance abuse and/or mental health service delivery. The purpose of the program is to enhance state capacity and infrastructure to be more oriented to the needs of children and adolescents with serious emotional disturbances and their families. Eligible applicants include private, nonprofit entities, including faith-based entities and currently funded Statewide Family Networks grantees that: (1) are controlled and managed by family members; (2) are dedicated to the improvement of mental health services statewide; and (3) have a Board of Directors comprised of no less than 51% family members. *The deadline for applications is February 27, 2004.* Approximately \$2.8 million will be available to fund 43 awards in FY 2004, with a limit of one award per state. For further information, contact Elizabeth Sweet, SAMHSA/CMHS, Child, Adolescent and Family Branch, Center for Mental Health Services, 5600 Fishers Lane, Room 11C-16, Rockville, MD 20857; (301) 443-1333; or esweet@samhsa.gov; or go to: <http://a257.g.akamaitech.net/7/257/2422/14mar20010800/edoc.ket.access.gpo.gov/2003/03-31158.htm>.

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H.I.R.E. Network Achieves Membership Goal!

Several months ago when our website was launched, the National H.I.R.E. Network established a goal of attaining 1000 members by January 2004. We are thrilled to inform you that we have reached our goal! To date, we have more than 1000 members, the majority of whom are direct service providers and government organizations. Our membership reflects a diverse cross-section of workforce development, criminal justice, and human services professionals, policymakers, and researchers, as well as concerned citizens from all over the country! We are delighted that our members have been willing to share information with one another about interesting initiatives they are undertaking, as well as challenges they are facing in doing the work of promoting the employment of people with criminal records.

Going forward, we would like our members to play a more active role in projects that we undertake. In the next couple of weeks, we will be circulating a survey to identify issues that are important to you and to assess your satisfaction with our work. Stay tuned! ❖

Meet the H.I.R.E. Network Staff:

DEBBIE A. MUKAMAL

As the person who sends out our emails to National H.I.R.E. Network members, my name, or at least my email address, is familiar to you. In addition to trying to keep our members informed about funding opportunities, interesting developments in Congress, relevant press, I also have the privilege of co-directing the National H.I.R.E. Network.

Many people ask me how I came to work on issues related to people coming out of prison. When I made the decision to apply to law school ten years ago, I had a simple professional goal: to acquire skills that would enable me to promote social justice in a formidable way. While I could not have predicted then that my vision would lead me to co-directing a national initiative to promote the employment of people with criminal records, the path has seemed, at least to me, very organic and simple. My initial interests and internships in law school revolved around fighting employment discrimination on the basis of race and gender. During an internship at the U.S. Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division, I participated in

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New York State Department of Labor has issued a rolling RFP for "Securing Prosperity for New York's Workforce" that will allocate \$3.5 million to training organizations to create projects designed to train unemployed and underemployed Family Assistance and Safety Net recipients for jobs in the local job market. The program will provide up to \$6,000 per trainee based on a milestone payment structure. The RFP can be downloaded from:
<http://www.workforcenewyork.org/rfp45-j/rfp45-j.htm> ❖

National H.I.R.E. Network Staff

Debbie Mukamal, JD
Co-Director
dmukamal@hirenetwork.org

John Jeffries, PhD
Co-Director
jjeffries@hirenetwork.org

Roberta Meyers-Peebles
Field Educator and Organizer
rampeebles@hirenetwork.org

Susan Hallett
Program Analyst
shallett@hirenetwork.org

Glenn Martin
Policy Analyst
gmartin@hirenetwork.org

Alexa Eggleston, JD
Policy Associate
aeggleston@lac-dc.org

Michelle Harrison
Membership Coordinator/Webmaster
mharrison@hirenetwork.org

Contact us:
 National H.I.R.E. Network
A Project of the Legal Action Center
 153 Waverly Place
 8th Floor
 New York, NY 10014
 (212) 243-1313 (P)
 (212) 675-0286 (F)
info@hirenetwork.org E-mail
www.hirenetwork.org Website

The National H.I.R.E. Network is generously supported by the Charles Stewart Mott, Joyce, Public Welfare, and Annie E. Casey Foundations.

litigation against a municipal's police department for having racially discriminatory hiring practices. At the National Employment Law Project, I was able to engage in policy work related to the implementation of the then new welfare law.

But it was an internship at the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Jobs Initiative that introduced me to the unique employment challenges facing people with past arrest and conviction records, a population who could rely on few legal protections and was growing larger, and whose need to work was critical. While conducting research for the report I was to write for the Foundation, I learned about the important work the Legal Action Center (LAC) had been engaged in since the 1970s and was continuing to conduct to address employment discrimination faced by people with criminal records in New York. During my third year at New York University Law School, a student internship became available at LAC and I jumped at the opportunity to work alongside colleagues who were addressing the issue creatively from both a legal and policy perspective. I was even more thrilled when the Director, Paul Samuels, offered me a job as a staff attorney after graduating.

The six years I have been at the Legal Action Center and working on the legal barriers faced by people with criminal records have coincided with a shift in the nation's attention towards prisoner reentry issues. This has presented opportune moments for enacting policy change. Personally, it has meant that I have been able to collaborate with and learn from a range of fascinating people.

During the last year, although my work and responsibilities continue to mount, I have stopped several times to reflect on the work we are doing and the network of practitioners, policymakers, researchers, and concerned citizens we are bringing together to learn from one another. I have been overwhelmed by the passion, dedication and drive of my colleagues (that you have probably witnessed firsthand if you have met them or read their "In the Spotlight" biographies in previous versions of our newsletter) and the interest, active involvement, and enthusiasm of our Advisory Board members, foundation partners, and Network members. It has all made my vision when applying to law school feel a little more real and attainable. ❖