

The “B.E.S.T.” Alternative

Kanoe Medeiros, Employment Specialist and Administrative Assistant
B.E.S.T. (Being Empowered and Safe Together)

Being Empowered and Safe Together, better known as B.E.S.T., is a program administered by Maui Economic Opportunity, Inc. in collaboration with the Hawaii Department of Public Safety designed to assist in the reintegration process of male and female inmates from the Maui Community Correctional Center (MCCC). B.E.S.T. is based on the Federal “Going Home” Initiative. The program’s main goals are to reduce recidivism and enhance public safety. The funding source requires individuals to meet all of the following criteria in order to participate in the B.E.S.T. Program. Individuals must be between the ages of 18-35 years old, have been convicted of a serious and / or violent felony, and have been incarcerated for one year or more. This

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Employment Preparation in Mississippi’s Reentry Program

Gail C. Smith, Branch Director
Mississippi Reentry Program

As a former parole and probation officer, I recall telling more than one offender that, if they didn’t have a job, it was because they didn’t try to find one. I discovered how thoughtless and inaccurate those remarks were shortly after I was appointed Director of the Mississippi Reentry Program. It didn’t take long to come to the realization that, if they didn’t have a job, it was either because no one put forth a real effort to prepare that individual for the workplace or because resources were not in place to provide them with this much needed assistance.

In the Mississippi Reentry Program, we have a part-time staff person whose responsibility is to locate employment for the program participants once they are released from the institution into the community. In addition to that employee, we are fortunate to benefit from a representative from the Mississippi Department of Employment Commission as a part of our advisory board. This agency has appointed an employee from Employment Services to provide us with information and assistance in identifying job opportunities and registering program participants for all eligible services.

One obstacle that we consistently confront is the old “mind set” that people with criminal records can only perform manual labor. I have had to repeatedly advise those staff with the responsibility of locating employment to check our assessment report. We are fortunate that our vocational program at the institution prepares prisoners to enter the community with needed job skills that demand far above minimum wages. In the Mississippi Reentry

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unique reintegration program, first in the state of Hawaii, provides a large variety of services that encompasses all aspects of life's challenges these men and women will most likely encounter as they reenter the community.

In operation since January 31, 2003, the B.E.S.T. Program maintains frequent contact with each participant making sure that participant's needs are being met. Yet, we strongly emphasize that each participant must first be willing to help him or herself. Participants in the program now number 46 individuals.

B.E.S.T. offers complete wrap-around services to ensure the successful return home of participants. B.E.S.T. services include case management, housing assistance, employment training and assistance, cultural activities, mentoring, cognitive restructuring, substance abuse and mental health treatment referrals, family reunification and family support.

B.E.S.T.'s culture component has shown to be a great influence on the participants of the program. In learning about Hawaiian Culture through song, dance and history, participants have voiced an increase of pride in self and culture, an overwhelming feeling of accomplishment, as well as an increase in self-confidence. In November, incarcerated actors will perform their life stories, directed by playwright, actor and director Lane Nishikawa, in a gesture of connecting with the community. B.E.S.T. training coordinator and cultural specialist Debbie Kamali`i will lead the dancers in renderings of the experiences gained through their past, present and their hopes for the future.

Maui has been rated by several tourist-oriented publications as "The Best Island in the World," however B.E.S.T. participants are particularly challenged by the lack of appropriate and affordable housing. Currently, B.E.S.T. is planning transitional housing to relieve its clients of the burdensome task of looking for housing on their own.

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Program information is gathered from the participant while he or she is incarcerated and copies of certificates are obtained. We then locate potential employers and provide an introduction of sorts before the participant is released. As a forerunner in the fight to reduce recidivism in December 2002, the Mississippi Department of Corrections (MDOC) offered rehabilitative services to maximum-security inmates. In spite of the agency's deficit budget, vocational programs are in place. Recently an article appeared on our website announcing the accomplishments of the inmates at our state penitentiary. It reads: "Inmates at the Mississippi State Penitentiary (MSP) in Parchman, Miss., participated in a graduation ceremony on Sunday, February 29, 2004, at 2 p.m. The graduation ceremony was held for inmates who completed classes offered by the vocational school at MSP. The vocational school offers classes in auto mechanics, auto body and fender, carpentry, cooking and baking, diesel mechanics, industrial electricity, trowel trades, plumbing, sheet metal, welding, marine maintenance, radio and television, air conditioning and refrigeration, and GED."

Graduation ceremonies take place quarterly; Sunday's graduation ceremony was the first one scheduled for this year. Of the 78 graduates, 39 received their GED, three graduated from auto body and fender, one from auto mechanics, one from carpentry, eight from cooking and baking, five from diesel mechanics, two from industrial electricity, three from plumbing, one from sheet metal, two from trowel trades, one from welding, two from marine maintenance, four from radio and television and seven from air conditioning and refrigeration. Inmates were presented certificates at the ceremony.

"Part of the Mississippi Department of Correction's mission is to provide effective treatment for offenders," said MDOC Commissioner Christopher Epps. "Education and job training are vital in our effort to reduce the recidivism rate and the classes offered through the vocational divisions, like the one at MSP, are crucial in reaching that goal. I commend the staff at MSP. They teach the vocational and academic classes daily contributing to the success of these programs." Epps added, "I am also extremely

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B.E.S.T. is working with a team from the Delancey Street Foundation to replicate various components of that successful program's strategy. As part of its mission, the Delancey Street Foundation "provide[s] a structured educational and living environment in which men and women, most of whom are ex-felons and substance abusers, can learn the skills they need to rebuild their lives." The Delancey Street Foundation has been in operation for over 30 years and has successfully graduated more than 14,000 people from America's underclass into society as successful taxpaying citizens leading decent, legitimate and productive lives. After an average of four years, individuals leave Delancey Street with an academic education and at least three marketable skills. The source of the success and framework of Delancey Street is the family as a structure and on the principal of "each one, teach one." Co-founder Mimi Silbert and staff emphasize to each resident that life in Delancey Street is not about the individual; instead, the focus is on the family.

As part of the replication of the Delancey Street Foundation, the B.E.S.T. Program's transitional housing will base its operation on many of the original principles, yet make necessary changes that will work best for our community and people. B.E.S.T. finds that this will suit the Maui community because of the strong ties to the 'ohana' or family unit. The B.E.S.T. transitional housing residents will be trained in marketable skills through a number of on-site businesses it hopes to operate, eventually using the income from the businesses to sustain the entire program.

The Federal government realizes the importance and need for reintegration programs like B.E.S.T. and has set aside funds for communities throughout the nation to develop and operate reintegration programs. Maui Economic Opportunity, Inc. has confronted the many issues individuals being released from prison face on a daily basis and offer these individuals alternative solutions. President Bush, in his 2004 State of the Union address said, "America is the land of second chance, and when the gates of the prison open, the path ahead should lead to a better life." The B.E.S.T. Program is a positive step in building a better future for everyone and an opportunity for newly released prisoners to succeed.

For further information about B.E.S.T., please call Kanoe Medeiros at (808) 249-2990. ❖

proud of the offenders who have strived to successfully complete these training programs. All inmates upon entry into our system are administered the TABE test. Most of these inmates test out on the fifth grade level. We believe a better educated person is more likely to become a productive citizen and a tax payer instead of a tax burden. This is what MDOC is striving to accomplish day in and day out."

For additional information about the Mississippi program, please contact Gail Smith at (601) 960-0574 or GASmith@mdoc.state.ms.us. ❖

Race: Another Barrier for Job-seekers with Criminal Records: New Research Forthcoming from Important NYC Study

Glenn Martin

Most of us know the impact of having a criminal record on a person's ability to find employment, but many times we discuss this problem without mentioning the compounding barrier that race can add to the job search process. Devah Pager, a sociologist at Princeton University and the author of "The Mark of a Criminal Record" (see <http://www.northwestern.edu/ipr/publications/papers/2003/pagerajs.pdf>), provided detailed and objective evidence of the increasing obstacle race discrimination creates for the employment prospects of people who have criminal records. After sending out matched pairs of black and white testers to 350 employers in Milwaukee, Pager's findings delineated a troubling trend by employers of making race a major factor when deciding whether they would call an applicant back after initial contact. In fact, her study showed that a white applicant with a criminal record had a higher average of 'callbacks' from an employer than a black tester without a criminal record.

Ms. Pager and her colleague Bruce Western, an associate professor and faculty associate at the Office of Population Research at Princeton University, recently replicated the study in New York City, adding Hispanic applicants to the teams of jobseekers and

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Shout Out!



This month the H.I.R.E. Network salutes the work of **Jimmy Nicholas** and his company **TanaSeybert** for having fair hiring practices. Jimmy's first experience employing an individual with a criminal history began 20 years ago when one of Jimmy's employees was convicted of a crime. After serving a 10-year sentence, the individual's parole officer contacted Jimmy and asked if he would consider giving his former employee another chance at a job, and Jimmy said "yes." His answer that day is just a small example of Jimmy's commitment to support those who are less fortunate and his company's longstanding program to employ individuals with criminal backgrounds.

In 1912, Jimmy's grandfather opened the New York City-based printing company of TanaSeybert, formerly Seybert, Nicholas and in 1962 Jimmy began his career with the company. Around the same time, TanaSeybert became an employer partner in the Fountain House project, an initiative aimed at placing individuals who suffered from mental illness into jobs. TanaSeybert became one of the first companies in New York City to hire people from the Fountain House program and to this day remains an employer partner with the organization.

About 10 years ago, Jimmy was approached by the Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO), one of the largest workforce development programs in the country providing job readiness and placement services to former inmates. Jimmy agreed to have TanaSeybert become one of the CEO's employer partners and thus provide jobs for individuals with past involvement in the criminal justice system.

Jimmy's commitment to employ former inmates continues today. On a rolling basis Jimmy's company employs approximately 14 people referred from CEO. Over a half-a-dozen of those placed by CEO, some from the inception of the program, have stayed on at TanaSeybert and have been promoted to work in the bindery and printing press areas. When needed, the company also arranges for CEO program employees to have time off during the workday to meet with their parole officers.

The H.I.R.E. Network asked Jimmy why he chose to work

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increased the amount of audits conducted to over 1200 interviews. In addition, Pager included the factor of a higher education credential to research whether this would be a mitigating factor when an employer considers someone with a criminal record for a job. Preliminary data from the audit portion of the study implies that the pattern of discrimination in New York City is similar to the findings in Milwaukee.

As an organization that supports objective research in the area of employment for people with criminal records, the National H.I.R.E. Network is excited to be closely affiliated with the principle researchers on this important study and we look forward to sharing the results with our membership sometime next summer. Stay tuned...❖

Life Insurance: Can People with Criminal Records Be Denied Coverage?

Glenn Martin

You land a good job despite your conviction record and while it may be entry level, there is potential for growth in the company. You begin conversations with the Human Resources Department about your benefits package and are told that the company offers a life insurance policy to its employees. After some thought, you decide this option is a way of protecting your family in case of an emergency. You fill out the necessary paperwork to enroll, only to be charged a higher premium than the human resource professional quoted you initially or you may have been outright denied. What happened?

In response to this type of complaint from our constituency, the National H.I.R.E. Network has conducted research to find out why people with criminal records are being charged higher premiums or denied life insurance policies from major companies. We initially contacted five major insurance carriers to ask their underwriting and/or legal staff directly. While most of the agencies neglected to respond, two sent brief outlines of their internal policy. One provider said "There is no

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with organizations like Fountain House and CEO. He said he was grateful that he had been given the opportunity to lead a comfortable lifestyle and thus wanted to give back to ensure that others who may have had difficulties or made mistakes in the past are also afforded opportunities to succeed in the workplace. Jimmy believes anyone who is an honest and hard working employee deserves a chance, and Jimmy's lifetime has been dedicated to giving those who are often disenfranchised that important chance. ❖



H.I.R.E. on the Hill

Alexa Eggleston and Gabrielle de la Gueronniere

President Signs the “Mentally Ill Offender Treatment and Crime Reduction Act of 2003”

On October 30th, 2004 President Bush signed into law the “Mentally Ill Offender Treatment and Crime Reduction Act of 2003.” The House of Representatives unanimously passed S. 1194 without any member objecting in early October. S. 1194 was initially introduced in the Senate by Senator DeWine and passed the full Senate by unanimous consent in October of 2003. S. 1194 would provide resources to states and local areas to foster collaborations within the criminal and juvenile justice system for nonviolent adults or juveniles who have a mental illness or co-occurring mental illness and substance abuse disorder and face criminal charges that are a result of the individual's illness. Funds provided by S.1194 could be used for:

- creating or expanding mental health courts or other court-based programs for such individuals;
- programs that offer specialized training to criminal or juvenile justice agency officers and employees and mental health personnel to be able to identify and respond appropriately to individuals with mental illnesses;
- programs that support cooperative efforts by

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official policy, and determinations are made on a case by case basis. People who are still on probation are not eligible for policies at all. Whether or not someone is eligible depends on the crime. We generally look more favorably towards white-collar crime, but it depends on the individual. It doesn't really matter how much time has passed since someone was convicted if the crime is serious. As an example, he said it's "very unlikely" that someone with a murder conviction would ever be eligible for a policy.” Another provider stated, “[We] utilize a variety of health, lifestyle and occupational factors, among others, in the underwriting of individual life insurance applications. Criminal activity of the proposed insured may be considered in underwriting depending on the facts of each case.

H.I.R.E. also wrote a letter of inquiry to the General Counsel at the New York State Insurance Department (NYSID) asking for an official response to this issue. The question presented was: *Do the New York State Law and the regulations promulgated thereunder specifically address discrimination against individuals with a criminal record history with respect to obtaining life insurance?* The response from their Senior Attorney was “It is the Department’s position that an insurer may use objective underwriting guidelines, which are uniformly applied and reasonably related to the risk, to determine insurability. If an individual feels that he or she has been discriminated against, the individual may file a complaint with our Consumer Services Bureau to determine whether the insurer acted in accordance with its objective underwriting guidelines...”

In short, as long as the decision is based on risk assessment and is applied evenly, providers are able to take criminal conviction into account when making a decision about coverage. However, the NYSID did make a point of ensuring us that our constituency has a right to file a claim if they believe they have been discriminated against by an insurance carrier. H.I.R.E. would like to hear from the field if you have similar stories concerning insurance policies or other benefits for employees with criminal convictions that are being denied or applied differently. Please contact Glenn Martin at gmartin@hirenetwork.org with your story. ❖

criminal, juvenile justice, and mental health agencies to promote public safety by offering mental health and substance abuse treatment services; and

- programs that support intergovernmental cooperation between State and local governments with respect to the mentally ill offender.

Congress Passes Clean Six-Month Extension for Welfare/TANF Program

Both the House and the Senate have approved H.R. 5149, legislation to authorize the current Welfare/TANF program to continue to operate through March 31st, 2005. The extension was clean, which means that no legislative or policy changes were included. This is the eighth extension of the TANF program. Although there was significant progress this session towards passage of legislation to reauthorize the TANF program the full Senate was unable to approve their version of a bill, making it highly unlikely that reauthorizing legislation will be signed into law before the end of the current session.

Work Opportunity Tax Credit Reauthorized by Congress

H.R. 1308, the Working Families Tax Relief Act of 2004 was recently signed into law as Public Law 108-311 by President Bush. Included in the bill is a provision to extend the Work Opportunity Tax Credit as well as the Welfare to Work Tax Credit through Dec 31, 2005. The bill was introduced by Congressman William Thomas (R-CA) in October of 2003.

The Work Opportunity Tax Credit is a tax credit that is available to employers who employ people from one of eight targeted groups, including “qualified ex-felons.” A “qualified ex-felon” is defined as an individual who (1) has a state or federal felony conviction; (2) is a member of an economically disadvantaged family and (3) is hired within in one year of release from prison or from

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Hot Off the Press: Recent Reports

From Prison to Work: The Employment Dimensions of Prisoner Reentry, by Amy L. Solomon, Kelly Dedel Johnson, Jeremy Travis, Elizabeth C. McBride of the Urban Institute (October 2004). This report represents the discussions, presentations, and papers forming the basis of the Urban Institute’s fifth Reentry Roundtable held in May 2003 focused on employment issues.

To read this report, go to

http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/411097_FromPrison_to_Work.pdf

Criminal Neglect: Substance Abuse, Juvenile Justice and The Children Left Behind, by the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University (October 2004). This report is a comprehensive analysis of substance abuse and state juvenile justice systems. The report found that 1.9 million of 2.4 million juvenile arrests had substance abuse and addiction involvement and that only 68,600 juveniles receive substance abuse treatment. To read this report, go to

<http://www.casacolumbia.org/pdshopprov/files/JJreport.pdf>

The Opportunities for Service Integration Under Current Law by Mark Greenberg and Jennifer L. Noyes. This article, which appeared in the Summer 2004 issue of Focus—published by the University of Wisconsin–Madison, Institute for Research on Poverty—identifies barriers to social services integration. The National Governors Association, Hudson Institute, and CLASP initiated a project to examine several key areas in which states wanted to promote service integration and then identify legal issues and potential legal barriers to such integration. As part of the project, the authors developed a set of joint recommendations for federal action—legislative, regulatory, and administrative—to support state and local service integration efforts. The entire journal issue is available at

www.ssc.wisc.edu/irp/focus/focus.htm.

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date of conviction. For more information on this piece of legislation, please visit <http://thomas.loc.gov/>. For more information about the Work Opportunity Tax Credit, please see the "Employer Resources" section of our website at www.hirenetwork.org. ❖

Upcoming Conferences of Interest

Nov. 11-13, 2004

Applied Research Center:

"Race and Public Policy: A Proactive Agenda for 2005 and Beyond"

University of California at Berkeley
Berkeley, CA

Contact: <http://www.arc.org/rapp/rappconf2004.html>

Dec. 1-4, 2004

National Legal Aid and Defender Association
Annual Conference:

"Breaking Barriers to Equality and Justice"

Omni Shoreham Hotel
Washington, DC

Tel: 202-452-0620 Ext. 207

Email: a.bullock@nlada.org

[http://www.nlada.org/Training/Training/Train Annual/Train Annual Home](http://www.nlada.org/Training/Training/Train%20Annual/Train%20Annual%20Home)

Dec. 11-12, 2004

Center for Policy Alternative 2004 Summit on the States:

"Restoring the Promise of America"

Washington Court Hotel
Washington, DC

www.cfpa.org/summit/

Feb. 13-16, 2005

American Probation and Parole Association Winter
Training Institute:

"Riding the Wave of Innovation – Merging New Ideas
with Evidence-Based Practices"

Hyatt Regency Orange County
Anaheim, CA

Tel: 850-244-8204

Email: kchappell@csg.org

Information: [http://www.appa-net.org/institutes/2005_anaheim/promo Anaheim.pdf](http://www.appa-net.org/institutes/2005_anaheim/promo_Anaheim.pdf)

March 30-April 2, 2005

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Working Hard, Falling Short: America's Working Families and the Pursuit of Economic Security, by Tom Waldron, Brandon Roberts and Andrew Reamer of the Working Poor Families Project (October 2004). More than one in four American working families now earn wages so low that they have difficulty surviving financially. This report finds that too many jobs pay poor wages and provide no benefits, and that American workers are poorly prepared and supported to move into better paying jobs. To view the report, go to http://www.aecf.org/initiatives/jobsinitiative/workingpoor/working_hard_new.pdf

Guide for Developing Housing for Ex-Offenders, by the U.S. Department of Justice Office of Justice Programs (May 2004). This report is the result of a focus group organized by the Office of Justice Programs to examine innovative approaches for housing people with criminal records. It presents a step-by-step approach, including tips for obtaining funding and case studies of successful models. To read the report, go to <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ccdo/pdf/txt/NCJ203374.pdf>

Lost Opportunities: The Reality of Latinos in the U.S. Criminal Justice System, by the National Council of La Raza, the Center for Youth Policy Research, and Michigan State University's (MSU) Office of University Outreach & Engagement (October 2004). This report is the first comprehensive examination of Latinos in every facet of the criminal justice system – from arrest to sentencing, including juvenile justice. It presents policy recommendations – including community-based strategies that offer alternatives to incarceration – for addressing criminal justice issues that affect Latinos and which provide models for states to replicate. For information about this report, go to <http://www.nclr.org/>

Crime in the United States, 2003, by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (October 2004). This report presents a compendium of data on offenses known, clearances, arrests, and law enforcement employment at national, regional, state, and agency levels. To view this report, go to <http://www.fbi.gov/ucr/O3cius.htm> ❖

16th National Youth Crime Prevention Conference and International Forum

Radisson Miami Hotel
Miami, FL
Tel: 305-670-2409

May 1-4, 2005

**National Association of Workforce Development Professionals 16th Annual Conference:
“Riding the Workforce Wave”**

Fontainebleau Hilton Hotel
Miami Beach, FL

Contact: www.nawdp.org

Note: Now accepting workshop proposals

May 18-19, 2005

**The Workforce Alliance 2005 National Conference:
“What’s the Big Idea? Workforce Development Policy
for the Next Four Years”**

Renaissance Hotel
Washington, DC

Contact: www.workforcealliance.org

July 24-27, 2005

**30th Annual American Probation and Parole Association
Training Institute**

Marriott Marquis
New York City, NY

Contact: <http://www.appa-net.org/Training%20and%20Tech%20Assistance/callfor1.htm>

Note: Now accepting workshop proposals❖

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**Kernels that Pop: Lessons
from the Field**

This is the third edition of a quarterly column that highlights “kernels” of information the H.I.R.E. Network staff gathers from our membership and others all over the country engaging in policy and practice related to the employment of people with criminal records. If you have a “kernel” of information you would like to share with our members, please send an email to Roberta Meyers-Peebles, our Field Educator and Organizer, at rampeebles@hirenetwork.org.

- Is part of your organization’s mission to assist people with criminal records? If it is, your own hiring policies should mirror your mission and some members of your staff should include qualified people with criminal records..
- Do not overlook your local politicians to assist you in creating policies that create employment opportunities for people with criminal records. Good local initiatives that prove successful can lead to statewide initiatives being undertaken.
- Remember that job applications ask the question about criminal histories in two parts: (1) answer “yes” or “no” and (2) explain the details. Job seekers must give a definitive answer. Practitioners should not advise individuals to omit information or leave the question blank and job seekers should not assume they will get the opportunity to explain the information in an interview.
- Seek innovative ways of accessing funding. That may mean considering untraditional partners for accomplishing a specific goal.
- Remember that tax season immediately follows the upcoming end-of-the-year holiday season. Prepare to take full advantage of the Earned Income Tax Credit if you qualify. ❖