

Hot Off the Press

One of the lawyers who helped found the Legal Action Center (National HIRE Network parent organization), longtime board member law professor Michael Meltsner, has authored a new book, [**The Making of a Civil Rights Lawyer \(Univ. of Virginia Press\)**](#), (April 2006) acclaimed by one reviewer, Victor Navasky, as "marvelous, nuanced, psychologically penetrating, entertaining and legally sophisticated." Deeply researched and using files that have previously been off-limits, *The Making of a Civil Rights Lawyer* contains portraits of some larger-than-life figures and tells the inside story of law reform that will appeal to anyone interested in social change. Meltsner's account of his experience as a litigator, teacher and Legal Defense Fund lawyer while handling the first anti-capital punishment cases, Muhammad Ali's exclusion from the boxing ring and dozens of civil rights cases is aimed at "anyone interested in civil rights, but particularly those who are or who would become public interest lawyers." On LAC, Meltsner has said, "There is no organization in this country that better illustrates how public interest lawyers can make a difference for the most disfavored and stigmatized populations. I am proud to have been a small part of the Center's work." For further information about the book you can visit www.michaelmeltsner.com.

[**The Power of Work: The Center for Employment Opportunities, Comprehensive Prisoner Reentry Program, by CEP and MDRC.**](#) States and localities across the United States are feeling the aftereffects of a 25-year incarceration binge. In a period of just 15 years, from 1980 to 1995, the number of people incarcerated in federal and state prisons and local jails more than tripled, from about 500,000 to more than 1.5 million. Today, more than 2 million people are behind bars nationwide. Since almost all prisoners are eventually released, an incarceration boom necessarily translates into a reentry boom. In fact, more than 600,000 people are released from prison each year. Unfortunately, most end up back in the criminal justice system before long. With state and local budgets strained by the high cost of incarceration, breaking the cycle of recidivism is one promising way to shrink the prison population — as well as to increase public safety and to improve the well-being of former prisoners, their families, and their communities.

Ex-prisoners face a daunting set of obstacles to reentry, but securing employment may be the biggest challenge of all. The unemployment rate of formerly incarcerated people one year after release may be as high as 60 percent, and there is an increasing reluctance among employers to hire people with criminal histories. Further, studies show that inmates reentering communities are most vulnerable to failure in the early stages after release from jail or prison. Since the late 1970s, New York City's Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO) has addressed the relationship between work and crime. Through a highly structured program of pre-employment training, immediate short-term transitional employment, and full-time job placement services, CEO helps close to 2,000 men and women each year to take the crucial first steps toward staying out of prison and returning to their families and communities. MDRC is conducting a rigorous evaluation of CEO's program as part of a multi-site project, Enhanced Services for the Hard-to-Employ Demonstration, funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Department of Labor. Results from this study are expected by 2007.

With generous support from the JEHT Foundation, MDRC and CEO have written this overview of the CEO program. First, it discusses the link between unemployment and recidivism. Second, it lays out the "what" of the program: CEO's company philosophy and the four phases of the CEO program. Then it discusses the "how" of the program: how it came to be, how it appeals to key stakeholders (including

government agencies and private employers), and how its financial and organizational structures keep it strong. The document concludes with case studies to illustrate early examples of how CEO's model is being replicated and adapted for use in other jurisdictions or with other populations.

[Child Care Assistance Helps Families Work: A Review of the Effects of Subsidy Receipt on Employment](#), by Hannah Matthews at the Center for Law and Social Policy (**April 2006**). Reliable and stable child care helps parents retain steady employment and reduces workplace absenteeism, but the high costs of care challenge many families, particularly low-income working parents. Child care assistance can help. This policy brief reviews relevant research and finds that low-income mothers who receive child care subsidies are more likely to be employed, to stay off welfare, and to have higher earnings. For that reason, increasing investments in child care assistance is necessary to help families move from welfare to work and to help low-income parents continue working.

[Wising Up: How Government Can Partner With Business to Increase Skills and Advance Low-Wage Workers](#), by Amy-Ellen Duke, Karin Martinson, and Julie Strawn at the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) (**April 2006**). Helping low-wage workers upgrade their skills is a critical part of public policies to advance workers and to attract and retain “good” jobs—those that pay enough to support a family and offer health care, sick leave, and other important benefits. One promising approach has states and local governments partnering with business and industry to train workers and encourage the creation and retention of good jobs. This report examines five such training partnerships underway in four states, and offers innovative practices, challenges, and lessons learned for states and localities.

["Prisoner Reentry and Community Policing: Strategies for Enhancing Public Safety"](#) (NCJ 213801) (94 pp.) (**April 2006**) describes the effects of prisoner reentry on communities and the impact on community safety and public perceptions of crime. The report highlights specific examples from the field regarding how new police roles in prisoner reentry have been put into practice across the nation. (COPS)

["Whatever It Takes: How Twelve Communities Are Reconnecting Out-of-School Youth,"](#) published by the American Youth Policy Forum (NCJ 213653) (196 pp.) (**April 2006**) provides background information on high school dropouts and describes what 12 communities are doing to reconnect these youth to education and employment training opportunities. (OJJDP)

[Disparity by Design: How Drug-Free Zone Laws Impact Racial Disparity—and Fail to Protect Youth](#) by Judith Greene, Kevin Pranis and Jason Ziedenberg, The Justice Policy Institute (**March 2006**). The report, “Disparity by Design: How drug-free zone laws impact racial disparity – and fail to protect youth,” examines drug-free zone laws in a variety of states through a national policy lens. Building on research from New Jersey and Massachusetts, the report also reviews data and recent developments in Connecticut, Washington, Utah, Texas, and considers the history of the laws as well as the growing chorus of criticism from lawmakers, law enforcement, prosecutors and advocates. The JPI report, authored by Judith Greene, Kevin Pranis and Jason Ziedenberg, was commissioned by the Drug Policy Alliance.

[Understanding the Challenges of Prisoner Reentry: Research Findings from the Urban Institute's Prisoner Reentry Portfolio](#), by Amy L. Solomon, Christy Visser, Nancy G. La Vigne, and Jenny Osborne at the Urban Institute (**March 2006**). The four-fold increase in incarceration rates in America over the past 25 years has had far reaching consequences. In 2003 alone, more than 656,000 state and federal prisoners returned to communities across the country,¹ affecting public safety, public health,

economic and community well-being, and family networks. The impact of prisoner reentry is further compounded by the returning jail population with its unique set of challenges and opportunities. Research in the last decade has begun to measure the effect of reentry on returning prisoners, their families, and communities. Two-thirds of released prisoners are rearrested within three years of release. One and a half million children have a parent in prison. Four million citizens have lost their right to vote. Men and women enter U.S. prisons with limited marketable work experience, low levels of educational or vocational skills, and many health-related issues, ranging from mental health needs to substance abuse histories and high rates of communicable diseases. When they leave prison, these challenges remain and affect neighborhoods, families, and society at large. With limited assistance in their reintegration, former prisoners pose public safety risks to communities, and about half will return to prison for new crimes or parole violations within three years of release. This cycle of removal and return of large numbers of adults, mostly men, is increasingly concentrated in communities often already deprived of resources and ill equipped to meet the challenges this population presents.

[Just Out: Early Lessons from the Ready4Work Prisoner Reentry Initiative](#), by Linda Jucovy (February 2006). Just Out examines the early implementation of P/PV's prisoner reentry demonstration, Ready4Work, and reports on emerging best practices in four key program areas. While P/PV provided the basic program design to the 17 lead organizations participating in the project, each site was given creative latitude to build programs unique to their own organizations, resources, partnerships and missions. Through this work, many innovative and promising approaches to effective prisoner reentry emerged, as did challenges for which solutions were sought. Just Out focuses on Ready4Work's 11 adult sites (the other six sites serve juvenile offenders). It offers practical advice about recruitment, case management, mentoring and employment, and documents early lessons in this growing area of study, policy and advocacy.

[Learning from the Youth Opportunity Experience: Building Delivery Capacity in Distressed Communities](#) by Linda Harris (January 2006). In 2000, the U.S. Department of Labor awarded significant Youth Opportunity (YO) Grants to 36 high-poverty urban, rural, and Native American communities. The grants were designed to serve all young people in these areas, regardless of income or connection to school or work. Communities were required to assess and integrate existing youth-serving systems and agencies to support education, work exposure, youth development, and other services for young people. Despite evidence of considerable community accomplishments, the YO grants were ended in 2005. This report, based on a survey of 22 of the 36 sites, examines the approaches' strengths, challenges, and lessons learned, and offer recommendations for policy and practice. A four-page Executive Summary is also available by [clicking here](#).