THREE

EXPLORING GOVERNMENT PARTNERSHIPS TO IMPROVE OFFENDER REENTRY

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Every year, 650,000 individuals are released from prison in the United States. Department of Justice statistics confirm that two-thirds of those released will commit additional crimes and return to prison shortly after their initial release. This failure in prisoner reentry comes at great expense to society not only in higher crime rates, but increased taxes and spending. In recent years, the government has recognized this dilemma and called upon the nonprofit community to partner with them in creating reentry programs aimed at reducing recidivism. The programs profiled here, the Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency and the Maryland Reentry Partnership, offer a stimulating example of successful nonprofit/government collaborations. Focusing on pre-release and post-release support, both programs have shown a reduction in recidivism rates.

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INTRODUCTION

One out of every one hundred American adults is currently incarcerated (Liptak 2008). Ninety-five percent of them will eventually be released (U.S. Department of Justice 2006b). Two-thirds of that group will recommit crimes within three years of returning to their communities (U.S. Department of Justice 2006a, 1). These statistics reveal the harsh reality that prison reform in America needs a drastic overhaul. Author and founder of the Center for Evidence-Based Corrections, Dr. Joan Petersilia contends, "…we could not have designed a more ineffective system had we set out to do so" (Petersilia 2003, 221). At the heart of the prison reform dilemma are many issues, including crime and sentencing laws, prison overcrowding, parole guidelines and failures, and incarceration rates among minorities.

While all of these issues are worthy of discussion, this analysis will focus on reducing recidivism through partnerships between the government and nonprofit organizations during reentry, the process when prisoners are released into society. Although many partnerships exist, two will be examined: the Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency (CSOSA) in the District of Columbia and the Maryland Reentry Partnership. The CSOSA partnership offers an example of a faith-based partnership while the Maryland Reentry partnership involves a community-based partnership. Research reveals that both collaborative ventures result in decreased recidivism. Focusing on support services such as mentoring, job preparedness, and housing, the partnerships offer a contrast to the common practice of simply releasing ex-offenders to the street to fend for themselves.

UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM OF PRISONER REENTRY

The integration of prisoners back into society can have weighty consequences for released offenders and society. Many conversations on reentry recognize that while prison may provide effective short-term punishment, long-term rehabilitation and integration often falls into the hands of society after prisoners are released. According to Regina Schofield, Assistant Attorney General in the U.S. Department of Justice,

> Most offenders, including the most violent offenders, will eventually return to their communities. Public safety is affected by their return. A study from OJP's (Office of Justice Programs) Bureau of Justice Statistics found that more than two-thirds of all released offenders were rearrested within three years. So, of the 650,000 people who are released from prison annually, over 400,000 are likely to be rearrested. Between the harm caused by their original crimes, the injuries inflicted by their new offenses, and the collective damage they do to both their neighborhoods and their communities, the path of destruction recidivists leave is wide and long. In addition to the obvious threat to public safety, this cycle of crime and imprisonment drains scarce community resources from other essential services (U.S. Department of Justice 2006a, 1).

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Another study revealed similar results, suggesting that 67 percent of offenders are rearrested within three years of initial release. More disturbing, 84 percent of these offenders are rearrested for a felony and 16 percent for a serious misdemeanor (MacLellan 2005, 2).

The costs associated with recidivism are a problem for many states. For example, Solomon, Thomson and Keegan (2004) found that on average, parole failures cost the State of Michigan $117 million a year. The state currently holds nearly 50,000 prisoners and has over 70,000 on parole (Michigan Department of Corrections 2005). On average, states spend 7 percent of their budget on corrections (Liptak 2008). For the country as a whole, the cost of corrections in 2004 was an alarming $40.7 billion (MacLellan 2005, 1).

Repeat offenders are also creating a logistical dilemma. In 2003, twenty-two states reported being at or above prisoner capacity and twenty other states reported being at 90% percent capacity (MacLellan 2005, 2). On a given day, 1.6 million adult prisoners are held in state and federal prisons and 723,000 adult inmates in local jails. (Liptak 2008).

For the average prisoner, reentry is complex and strenuous. Many prisoners return to a world far different from the one they left. Upon release, individuals must secure housing, obtain employment, establish a legal identity, receive treatment for substance abuse or mental health, reestablish relationships, find transportation, and procure basic necessities such as food and clothing. The task is daunting, and few government resources support these endeavors. Released prisoners also deal with health issues, discrimination, and unaffordable housing costs.

The most daunting challenge to reentry is often employment. Finding a job can be challenging enough for an individual without a criminal background. A criminal record, lack of new training, and the absence of legal identification (the majority of prisoners are released from prison without proper identification from the State) only further complicate the process. Aukerman and Stangl (2006) reveal that ex-offenders are barred from working in many areas of the labor market, listing government, transportation, healthcare, financial services, and school services as examples. Former Governor Jeb Bush of Florida recognized this problem, revealing that an estimated one third of all jobs in Florida are off-limits to ex-offenders (Basile 2002). Adding to the challenge, half of the released population is illiterate (MacLellan 2005, 4). These statistics reflect the challenges that make successful reentry so difficult.

Ironically, government has created policies to limit the resources available to ex-offenders. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA) prohibits individuals with a drug-related felony from receiving Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) for the rest of their lives (MacLellan 2005). Ex-offenders are also banned from public housing, a significant problem since many private housing complexes do not accept tenants with serious felonies (MacLellan 2005).

The problem is compounded since many prisoners return to areas highly concentrated with ex-offenders. For instance, in the North Lawndale Community of Chicago, Illinois, a staggering 70 percent of males have criminal backgrounds (Williams 2006, 1). Similarly, 59 percent of Maryland's released prisoners settle in the city of Baltimore (MacLellan 2005, 4) and

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in Michigan, 34 percent of the state's prisoners are released to Wayne County (Solomon et al 2004, 40).

For all these reasons, the problem has gained the attention of both the government and nonprofit sector. Both sectors are now exploring avenues to reduce recidivism and encourage successful reentry.

REENTRY PROGRAMMING

Reentry programs often involve an extensive approach centered upon case management. The U.S. Department of Justice states that reentry programming "is intended to assist offenders in acquiring the life skills needed to succeed in the community and become law-abiding citizens" (U.S. Department of Justice 2006c). Reentry programs may seek to address job training, drug treatment, housing needs, mentoring, family reunification, financial planning, and obligations (U.S. Department of Justice 2006c). Some reentry programs begin pre-release and may extend for various lengths of time post-release, others simply focus on post-release services.

An example of a program that offers pre-release and post-release services is the Michigan Prisoner Reentry Initiative (MPRI), a pilot program begun in 2005 (Michigan Department of Corrections 2005). This program is divided into three phases: Getting Ready, Going Home, and Staying Home. The Getting Ready stage begins upon admission to prison and lasts throughout the prison sentence. It involves assessing an offender's risk and assigning programs within prison to address risks and needs. "Going Home" begins approximately six months before release and focuses on housing, employment, substance abuse issues, and parole release guidelines. "Staying Home" is centered on community support, post-release assistance from human service providers, and mentoring. The third phase shifts responsibility for a released offender's success away from the Corrections system and into the community (Michigan Department of Corrections 2006). Individuals are chosen to be part of the program and typically serve short sentences for drug and nonviolent crimes (Michigan Department of Corrections 2007). In August 2007, MPRI reported a "26 percent improvement in total returns to prison" (Michigan Department of Corrections 2007, 21). Post-release programs focus on the concepts similar to those found in MPRI's second and third phases.

Notably, many counties and states do not have reentry programs. MPRI, for instance, is a pilot program that can only be found in eight counties in Michigan. The alternative to reentry programs is often release without support. Prisoners simply return to their community. Depending on the county and state, released offenders may or may not be given financial support upon release. Securing housing, obtaining employment, and finding substance abuse treatment are left to the individual.

PRIVATE/PUBLIC COLLABORATION

The backbone of most reentry programming is collaboration. While both the government and nonprofit sector are interested in reducing recidivism, who is ultimately responsible for this substantial problem? Is the government's role simply to punish? Is recidivism society's problem

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or should a burden fall upon families and communities? When exploring who is responsible for various policy issues, Salamon and Anheir (Powell and Clemens 1998) suggest it is common to assume only two possible avenues exist: dependence on the state or dependence on the private sector. On many occasions, burden and blame are placed exclusively on one sector over the other. Salamon and Anheir believe this way of thinking is faulty, asserting, "a third route exists… a route that involves neither sole reliance on the state nor sole reliance on the private sector, but rather a partnership between the two" (Powell and Clemens 1998, 151). In the case of prisoner reentry, this third route may be the best option.

To explain the potential relationship between the government and private sector, Salamon and Anheir (Powell and Clemens 1998) rely upon a model developed by Gidron, Kramer and Salamon. Although the model is designed to explore the social welfare system, it can be applied to other areas including prison reform, and specifically prisoner reentry. First, the researchers define the *government-dominant model*, which involves the government as the chief funder and deliverer of human services. Next, they describe the *third-sector-dominant model* in which the nonprofit sector is responsible for both financing and delivering human services. The *dual model* involves active roles for both the government and the nonprofit sector but with little interaction between the two. Lastly, the *collaborative model* entails equally active roles but with much overlap, often with government financing the nonprofit delivery of services (Powell and Clemens 1998).

According to Gidron, Kramer and Salamon (1992), the degree of discretion held by nonprofit organizations can vary within the collaborative model. The nonprofit organization can be an agent of the state and perform defined tasks or can exhibit more authority and have greater voice in how to deliver services. Gidron, Kramer and Salamon (1992) suggest that as the complexity of the activity increases, so does the authority given to the deliverer of the service.

Young (Boris and Steuerle 1999) offers a similar theory about the relationship between the government and nonprofit organizations. He describes potential relationships as supplementary, complementary, or adversarial. In a *supplementary* relationship, the nonprofit sector fulfills a need left void by the government. In a *complementary* relationship, the two sectors work together, often through financing from the government. The final relationship, *adversarial*, involves an attempt to influence another sector. For example, a nonprofit may advocate for policy change or the government may regulate the services of a nonprofit. These relationships are not exclusive (Boris and Steurle 1999, 33).

Using the two frameworks, how can current partnerships between the government and nonprofit sector be described in the area of prisoner reentry? Hundreds of reentry programs exist throughout the United States. Some are small local efforts by nonprofit agencies and others are large-scale federal programs. The most common relationship is a collaborative relationship, in which complementary and supplementary relationships occur, both exclusively and simultaneously.

Partnerships aiding reentry are also classified as faith-based or community-based. Faith-based organizations include congregations, synagogues, or religious affiliated social service providers. Community-based agencies provide social services without the faith-based

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perspective. Both have become central to reentry by providing support services. Little research has been conducted to describe the difference in success rates among faith-based and community-based initiatives. This area of research needs to be developed.

The two case studies presented show the success of the programs as well as the differences among collaborative relationships. One faith-based model and one community-based model are provided. Both offer an example of a collaborative relationship that is both complementary and supplementary.

CASE STUDY OF A FAITH-BASED PARTNERSHIP: COURT SERVICES AND OFFENDER SUPERVISION AGENCY

Consider the Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency (CSOSA), a federal government branch serving the District of Columbia. The organization's mission is "to increase public safety, prevent crime, reduce recidivism, and support the fair administration of justice in close collaboration with the community" (Quander 2006a). The CSOSA offers a multitude of services for released offenders. Over $135 million is spent by the agency each year. Paul Quander, head of CSOSA, states, "treatment is expensive. Seven days of detox, 90 days of residential care and 54 outpatient visits costs $17,141 for one person; the cost of a year in prison approaches $30,000" (Pierre 2007). There is a clear gap in funding, as the $135 million is not able to cover expenses for every released offender as well as the other clients CSOSA serves. Therefore, partnerships with other organizations are critical.

In 2002, the Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency, CSOSA implemented a partnership with local churches and other faith-based organizations. Each partnering organization is asked to provide at least three individuals from their congregations to become mentors to the ex-offenders (Broadway 2002). As of June 2007, 94 faith-based organizations were part of the program, 580 community members were trained as volunteers, and 537 offenders participated in the program, which focuses on post-release services (Quander 2007). The 537 in the CSOSA program represent a significant percentage of the 3,000-4,000 inmates held in DC jails annually.

Three geographic areas were created within the District of Columbia based on the distribution of released offenders and the location of participating faith-based organizations. Each geographic area was given approximately $100,000 for administrative costs (Snipes 2007). The volunteers help released offenders reintegrate by building relationships with them and helping with basic necessities. They help bolster family relationships, offer counseling, provide clothing for job interviews, supply meals, find housing, and assist individuals with other needs.

For lesser crimes such as traffic offenses or parole violations, the recidivism rate for CSOSA participants is similar to the national average. However, the recidivism rate for participants is significantly lower than the national average for more serious crimes. The CSOSA recidivism rate, or rearrest rate, is 14 percent for violent crimes, and 22 percent for drug-related crimes (Quander 2006b). The national re-arrest rate is 67 percent for all crimes (MacLellan, 2005, 2).

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The CSOSA partnership with faith-based organizations demonstrates a complementary relationship because the two sectors are joining forces to address the problem of failed prisoner reentry. But it is also a supplementary relationship that calls upon the faith-based community to deliver services. The partnership illustrates that the government's role is corrective and aimed at getting individuals through the punitive system, and the role of the faith-based community is to provide support and help individuals return to society in a more successful manner.

Promoters of the CSOSA partnership with faith-based organizations firmly believe the program is viable because of the amount of assistance the faith-based community is able to offer (Sipes 2007). The faith-based community may be a logical fit since many organizations already provide social services. According to Chavez (2002, 290), 58 percent of congregations currently offer programs ranging from food-related projects to GED classes. Many assist with housing, job training, mentoring, and clothing distribution—all necessities for successful integration.

Moreover, successful reentry is an arduous process requiring a unique level of support, including accountability to refrain from substance abuse and guidance to maintain emotional and mental stability. Unlike government agencies, churches may know their neighborhoods well, allowing for a more holistic approach to rehabilitation (Earley 2005). For example, faith-based organizations may be influential in helping ex-offenders rebuild relationships with family members.

Berger and Neunhaus (1977) refer to this concept by calling faith-based organizations mediating structures. The organizations help bridge the gap between public and private life. The case study exemplifies this role that faith-based organizations can have in influencing public good. They also acknowledge that government and public policy do not always meet realistic needs. Ex-offenders need more than just incarceration to become profitable members of society.

While there are positive outcomes, programs such as CSOSA's faith-based partnership are not flawless. Foremost, it is important to note that the faith-based partnership program is only a small portion of CSOSA's programming. While CSOSA recognizes the value of the partnership, it tries to reduce recidivism by offering many services without the assistance of the faith-based community. Additionally, having been launched in 2002, the program is relatively new. Although preliminary recidivism rates have been published, concrete success rates and the true impact of the program may not be known for many years. The impact of faith-based partnerships on reentry will not be understood until more time has lapsed and greater research is conducted to compare the service delivery of faith-based organization to community-based organizations.

Issues of church and state separation also need to be considered since the government cannot solely rely on religious partnerships due to the Charitable Choice provisions incorporated in PRWORA. Charitable Choice pertains to religiously affiliated organizations that receive federal funds. The provision requires that individuals be allowed to choose between service providers that are religiously affiliated and those that do not have any religious affiliation (Wuthnow 1999).

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CASE STUDY OF A COMMUNITY-BASED PARTNERSHIP :
MARYLAND REENTRY PARTNERSHIP

A similar program, the Maryland Reentry Partnership, is funded by a federal grant and provides an example of the complementary and supplementary relationship between a nonprofit organization and the prison system. Comparable to CSOSA's program, the program uses a case management approach and offenders are matched with community-based service providers before and after release. The length of service depends upon the needs of the released offender, but typically does not extend beyond two years (Roman et al 2007). Similar programs can be found in cities throughout the country, such as New York, San Francisco, San Antonio, and Savannah (Reentry National Media Outreach 2006).

The program chooses individuals returning to three targeted zip codes—areas with the highest recidivism rates in the state (Reentry National Media Outreach Campaign 2004). Additionally, walk-in clients who are ex-offenders comprise 15 percent of the individuals in the partnership (Roman et al 2007, 3). Data from spring 2001 through the beginning of 2005 reveal that the program served 337 former prisoners (2007, 3).

The model used by the Maryland Reentry Partnership addresses prisoner reentry problems at an individual, community, and local level. Community-based organizations provide services and state corrections agencies coordinate services and share information. Case managers meet with the ex-offenders to determine their post-release needs, develop a plan of action, and assist the individual in reaching goals. Transitional housing needs, vocational training, education, and counseling are the most common elements of the partnership. Case managers also help the individuals with tasks such as obtaining legal identification, finding medical help, and applying for social services.

Positive results have been seen. Participants in the program have a 30 percent recidivism rate, significantly less than the national recidivism rate of 67 percent. (Reentry National Media Outreach 2006). The program may also save money. The Maryland Reentry Partnership costs $3,000 per participant; it costs the state of Maryland $25,000 per year to incarcerate an offender (Mikulski 2005, 1). The program could potentially save the State of Maryland $72 million per year (Roman et al, 18).

Limitations do exist within the Maryland Reentry Partnership. While Senator Barbara Mikulski (D-MD) reports a 30 percent recidivism rate, smaller sampling reveals only a 7.3 percent reduction in rearrests. Comparable to CSOSA, the Maryland Reentry Partnership is still relatively new and limited statistical evidence about its long-term effects exists. Even so, supporters applaud the reduced recidivism rate and financial savings of the program.

These case studies show that collaboration can have many benefits. In each situation, the government or the nonprofit community could not exclusively improve recidivism. Najam explains, "much of NGO [Non-government organization] action and aspiration can be boiled down to NGOs doing, or wanting to do things the government either refuses to do, does not do enough of, is incapable of doing, or is unable to do" (Najam 2000, 380). In the cases of CSOSA

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and the Maryland Reentry Partnership, the government has recognized its inability to remedy a problem and called upon the nonprofit community for assistance.

CHALLENGES OF PARTNERSHIPS

The CSOSA and Maryland Reentry Partnership offer examples of collaborative relationships that appear beneficial. However, such partnerships do not exist without challenges. Common challenges may include issues of liability and coordination. Consider again the CSOSA partnership program. Who is accountable for the success of the program—the faith-based organization or CSOSA? It is certainly in the interest of CSOSA to promote programs effective at reducing crime. Taxpayers would be more content, government agencies would respect CSOSA more, and additional revenue could be directed to the District of Columbia. Faith-based organizations, on the other hand, would likely appreciate the credit for success but would not find as many benefits. However, community recognition and congregational support are always welcomed and provide a form of accountability.

On the same note, blame for failures in the program could certainly be passed to both parties. Faith-based organizations such as those working with the CSOSA typically have limited resources. The government could easily be criticized for not supporting the organizations enough or failing to provide them with necessary means to achieve their end goals. As partnerships between the government and nonprofit community evolve, the government not only needs to establish responsibilities, but also develop policies to address these liability and accountability issues. These concerns impact both faith-based and community organizations.

Lack of coordination is also a problem. While government correctional facilities often allow nonprofit organizations to come to their facilities, collaboration is not always seamless, especially when it involves faith-based organizations. Joe Walker of Grand Rapids, Michigan has been volunteering for three years at the Richard A. Handlon Michigan Training Unit in Ionia, Michigan where he leads a Bible study for prisoners. He says,

> One obstacle we face is the close, time-consuming scrutiny involved in getting relevant videos, books, and/or CD's, rosaries, etc. approved so we can show or give them to prisoners. If a prisoner were found after class with any printed materials I were to hand out, he would be disciplined, and I most probably would be forever banned by [Michigan Department of Corrections].[1]

Prison administrators may identify benefits to Walker's Bible study but cannot facilitate his efforts. As with all departments of the government, the Department of Corrections must be mindful of the separation of church and state.

ALTERNATIVES

The discussion concerning alternative reentry models is multi-faceted. Within reentry programming, considerable variations can be debated: pre-release versus post-release or a combination of both; faith-based, community-based, or a combination of the two; supplementary, complementary, or both; federal, state, or local. These variations represent one of the main

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problems with accurately researching the topic. Many types of programs exist and little coherence can be found among them. Throughout the United States, every county and state has a slightly different approach. The two case studies provided represent only a small fraction of reentry programs in the United States. Furthermore, even if all approaches were similar, it is unclear how success of reentry programs should be measured. Reductions in recidivism could be used, as could factors such as employment, training, and substance abuse treatment.

The alternative to collaborative partnerships goes back to the government-dominant or third-sector dominant models explained by Salamon and Anheir. Should communities stop trying to address the issue? This is unlikely. Should the government give the nonprofit sector responsibility? This is equally unlikely. The potential impact on reducing recidivism would be minimized. It appears that the government cannot be solely responsible for the problem of recidivism. California, for instance, has one of the highest rates of incarceration in the nation and only 12 percent of its prisoners participate in some form of reentry programming (Petersilia 2003).

WHAT IS THE GOVERNMENT'S ROLE IN REDUCING RECIDIVISM?

While the nonprofit community can advocate and collaborate, it does not hold the power to change the government's procedures for incarceration or rehabilitation. The government needs a more proactive approach and should reevaluate its effectiveness in preparing offenders for reentry. Joan Petersilia, a leading expert on the topic of prison reform, suggests that there are many steps the government can take. For instance, she calls for reform within prisons and urges prison administrators to take ownership of the recidivism issue (Petersilia 2003).

Prison administrators should strengthen employment and education programs, while encouraging inmates to take responsibility rather than forcing compliance. Along this line, prisons should simulate real life scenarios. In her book, *When Prisoners Come Home*, Petersilia describes a prison that requires prisoners to order and reorder prescriptions, balance their bank accounts, attend classes, and work while in prison. These responsibilities help prepare offenders for life outside of prison and are often taught by community volunteers (Petersilia 2003).

She also contends that prisoners should engage in prerelease planning programs. These activities should focus not only on needed skills, but also values and attitudes. Families and friends should be involved in the process. Petersilia calls for discretionary parole to be reinstated, suggesting that it will offer incentive for prisoners to rehabilitate. She contends that states need to avoid mandatory sentences which utilize a "one size fits all" approach. According to Petersilia in recent years, the rate of crime only went up 12 percent while the incarceration rate increased eighty-eight percent. This is a direct result of policy changes in sentencing and parole laws.

Legislation pertaining to reentry is being passed at the state and federal level. For example, in August 2006, Illinois passed Public Act 094-1067. The Act provides tax credits to employees that hire ex-offenders and allows the Department of Corrections the opportunity to provide pre-release training (Safer Foundation 2006). At the federal level, on March 11, 2008, the U.S. Senate passed the Second Chance Bill of 2007. The Second Chance Bill is based upon President Bush's 2004 State of the Union Address, which proposed a $300 million initiative to

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reduce recidivism and help prisoners reintegrate into their communities (U.S. Department of Justice 2006a). The bill, which focuses on reentry programming such as health and substance abuse treatment, job training, housing, and case management, was signed in to law in April 2008. It relies upon partnerships with community and faith-based organizations (Justice Center 2008).

When exploring partnerships with the government, it is necessary to have alternatives to faith-based partnerships. While faith-based partnerships can be effective, they may not be well accepted by the ex-offender population. The CSOSA should not assume that every individual will feel comfortable or be responsive in a religious setting. According to Charitable Choice, ex-offenders must be given alternatives to religiously affiliated organizations. Charitable Choice permits use of federal funds for faith-based organizations to provide social services to the community but prohibits use of federal funds for religious purposes (Wuthnow 1999). The nature of the ex-offender program may make it difficult to draw a clear distinction between religious and non-religious purposes since rehabilitation may involve emotional, spiritual, and mental support. For these reasons, community-based programs without religious backgrounds are needed.

OBSERVATIONS

Several conclusions can be drawn from the research provided on partnerships. Both the CSOSA and the Maryland Reentry Partnership have shown preliminary success, regardless of differences in how the government complements or supplements community organizations. It appears that both complementary and supplementary relationships may be effective. Yet little attention is given to the topic of adversarial relationships. Faith-based and community organizations have the potential to reduce recidivism though government must play a critical role. Now, each partner must learn to stimulate and persuade the other partner. Collaboration must involve communication during all levels of the reentry process. Prison administrators should listen to counselors, practitioners, pastors, program facilitators, and other members of the community who work directly with released offenders. Administrators need to model programs based upon the expertise of these individuals, in conjunction with their own experience. Likewise, community agencies offering post-release support services need to understand and identify the processes taking place within the prison system. Conversations must include action steps for providing a seamless continuum of support for offenders.

One of the first steps needed to improve the reentry process is to educate society on the effects of prisoners integrating back into communities. Petersilia (2003) reveals that while most citizens agree with the concept of rehabilitation, they are more likely to support sending an individual to prison for $23,000 a year (average cost in California) than sending them to a community rehabilitation program for $2,000 per year.

Understandably, community members may not be concerned with the well-being of a released offender. But many citizens fail to understand the severity of the problem. Many tax dollars are fed into the prison system each year, yet crime continues. It is the job of both the government and the nonprofit community to inform the public of this reality. The government should continue researching the issue and providing data to its partnering agencies and the public. The nonprofit community that works with released offenders should engage in

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discussions with constituents such as the media, local congregations, and neighborhood agencies and associations.

Increased awareness is also needed among community organizations, especially in the faith-based community. According to Chavez (2002), only 3 percent of congregations in America take advantage of federal funds under the Charitable Choice Bill. The impact of more congregations and religious organizations utilizing these funds for reentry programs could be significant. Community-based programs should also explore government and private funding options.

Alternative financial support is needed because state and federal funding is not guaranteed. Earley (2005) observes that when government cuts have to be made, correctional budgets are often the first to be affected since they are perceived to be a low priority of the public. For better reentry programming to be developed, federal, state, and local legislatures need to delegate more money to prison reform—not just by way of building more prisons or arresting more individuals but by seriously revamping their budgets and increasing allocation to reentry programs offered while individuals are still incarcerated. This initial investment can be promoted as a way to provide long-term savings.

CONCLUSION

Across America, prisons are becoming overcrowded and costing millions of dollars to operate. According to Regina Schofield, Assistant Attorney General in the U.S. Department of Justice (2006, 1), approximately 650,000 prisoners are released annually. By 2010, this is expected to rise to 1.2 million prisoners per year (Basile 2002, 1). As these individuals return to their communities, they are faced with significant challenges such as employment and segregation into low-income communities. Many return to prison a short time after release, with many unintended consequences to this cycle.

The government has recognized the problem and made several attempts to address it. Realizing its inability to properly rehabilitate and prepare individuals for assimilation into their communities, the government has called upon the nonprofit sector partner in this aspect of prison reform. Using a collaborative model, numerous cities and states have established reentry programs. Many of these programs utilize faith-based and community-based agencies as the foundation of their initiatives. The CSOSA and the Maryland Reentry Program represent reentry programs that collaborate with the government to reduce recidivism and improve communities.

The two programs in the analysis offer several findings. Most importantly, the partnership model of prisoner reentry can work successfully. Yet despite the need for the nonprofit community to be involved, the government must remain the driving force behind the effort. Consequently, more awareness of the topic is needed and the two sectors must cultivate increased collaborative efforts. Lastly, one must recognize that these partnerships do not come without challenges such as liability issues, lack of cooperation, and inadequate funding.

Nonprofit partnerships with the government are indeed an improvement to the status quo. Preliminary statistics demonstrate that individuals participating in the two programs examined

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are less likely to commit crimes and return to prison. They are more likely to obtain employment and experience stability on a variety of levels. The partnerships are also building evidence that there is a better way to facilitate prisoner reentry. While punishment is necessary for those who commit crimes, more resources should be offered to criminals—not only for their benefit but for the benefit of greater society. When criminals are sentenced to prison, little is done to ensure that they will not commit more crimes or create greater burdens on their communities after their punishment. Nonprofit partnerships may offer an answer to this vicious cycle.

ENDNOTES

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