

Helping People Find Jobs in Spite of Justice System Involvement



Tania Morawiec
DMH, Regions 1 & 2 IPS Trainer

2009 - 2010 Expert Employment Specialists Group
Johnson & Johnson-Dartmouth Community Mental Health Program



Expert Employment Specialist Project

In 2009, 12 employment specialists from from the Johnson & Johnson-Dartmouth Community Mental Health Program were nominated to participate in a project to learn more about how to help people with justice system involvement.



Expert Employment Specialist Project

- Employment specialists conducted interviews with employers in a wide range of businesses. Interviews focused on hiring people with criminal histories.
- 128 employers were interviewed.



Expert Employment Specialist Project

- Employment specialists met in person with Dartmouth trainers to review surveys and talk about lessons learned.
- Products of the project include a summary of the surveys, a tip sheet for employment specialists, and a worksheet to help job seekers prepare for meetings with employers.



Employer Interviews

- 62% of employers reported that they had knowingly hired at least one person with a felony.
- 38% said they had not ever hired a person with a felony or were not sure (no background checks).



Lesson Learned:

Although many employers report that they prefer not to hire people with felonies, in fact, more than half have actually hired a person with a felony.



Employer Surveys

- 60% of employers interviewed were independently owned businesses or nonprofits.
- Independently owned businesses were more likely to hire people with felonies.



Employer Surveys: Types of Convictions for People Hired

Drug related (15)

Driving under
influence (11)

Theft (10)

Assault (8)

Sex offenses (7)

Domestic violence (4)

Armed robbery (2)

Murder ((2)

Reckless driving (1)

Criminal
trespassing (1)

Manslaughter (1)

Gun-related offense
(1)



Employer Surveys: Reasons for Hiring Person(s) with Felonies

1. Person had the qualifications to do the job (experience, skills or training).
2. Person interviewed well (expressed enthusiasm, dressed well, followed-up with employer).
3. Recommendation from someone whom the employer knew (employee, parole officer, employment specialist).



Employer Surveys: Reasons for Hiring Person(s) with Felonies

4. Belief that the person had changed.
5. Length of time since conviction.
6. Person demonstrated sincerity and honesty when explaining criminal record.



Lessons Learned: We can't change what happened, but we can help people prepare to talk to employers

1. Basic good interviewing skills help (dressing well, enthusiasm for job, following up with employer).
2. Reference from someone employer knows (use our relationships with employers).
3. People need to prepare how they will talk about background (honesty, explaining how they have changed).



Employer Surveys: Length of time since conviction

- Less than one year since conviction or prison release: 9 employers
- 1-2 years: 20 employers
- 2-7 years: 7 employers
- More than 7 years: 12 employers



Employer Advice for Employment Specialists

1. Advise the person to be upfront and honest.
2. Person should take responsibility for his/her actions.
3. Help person describe how s/he has changed.
4. Introduce the person to the employer (use your relationship with the employer to help the person get a job). Make sure you have contact with the person who makes hiring decisions.



Employer Interviews: Policies Regarding Hiring

- 66% reported no formal policy.
- 18% reported a formal policy against hiring people with felonies.
- 9% reported a formal policy against hiring people with certain types of felonies.
- 5% reported a formal policy regarding length of time since last convictions.



Employer Interviews: Background Checks

- 73% of employers reported that they do background checks.
- 27% reported that they do not do background checks.



Lessons Learned:

- Build relationships with employers and use those relationships to help people connect with employers.
- Introduce employers to individuals, rather than asking if they hire people with felonies.
- Help people obtain their records so that they can fill out applications accurately and honestly (because most employers check).



Lessons Learned:

People must have face-to-face contact with employers so they can explain how their life has changed. Don't waste time filling out application after application unless there is in-person follow-up (preferably by both the specialist and the job seeker).



Lessons Learned:

Help people prepare what they will say:

1. Statement about convictions.
2. Brief expression of remorse or responsibility.
3. How person is changing his/her life.
4. Why person would be a good employee.



Step 1: Statement about conviction(s)

“In 2004, I was convicted of breaking and entering.”

“There is something I want to bring up. I have a number of offenses related to drugs and theft.”



Step 2: Take responsibility

“I made a mistake.”

“What I learned from that was...”

“I know what I did was wrong.”



Step 3: Explain how life is changing

“I will never go back to jail again. I’ve decided that my life has to change. I’m going to treatment and getting a job is also part of getting my life back on track.”

“I’ve been volunteering as a way to give back to my community. I also want to support myself.”



Step 4: Describe reasons would be a good employee

“I’m a person who really wants to work. In my last job, I did not miss work.”

“I would be a good employee because I have experience as an assembler.”



Putting it all together:

“I have a sexual assault charge on my record. I know that what I did was wrong. I used poor judgment and made a life-changing mistake. I’m in counseling now and I understand how to avoid making the same mistakes. I am eager to start a new job and continue down a more positive path. I have supports--I’m an active member of my church and my family is behind me. I would be a good employee because I am extremely reliable and I have experience driving a forklift. I am eager to work and my schedule is flexible.”



Putting it all together:

“I have several convictions related to drugs and burglary. I understand that I’ve made a poor choices. I am older now and I for the past few years I have been focused on living a different kind of life. I have not committed any crimes since 2007. I am currently a volunteer at a soup kitchen and I never miss a day that I am scheduled. I’ve always been a person who wanted to work and I never complain on the job. I’d like to work for your company because...”



Help people practice:

- Many people have to overcome shame, hopelessness and/or anger when talking about their histories.
- Help people remember their strengths (make lists, review strengths).
- PRACTICE until people can give their statements in a manner that sounds sincere.
- Consider an opportunity for the person to practice with a stranger (even another employ specialist) to see how that goes.



Help people practice:

- Some people have trouble taking responsibility. Take your time in helping them come up with a statement that seems fair and accurate from their perspective.
- Use the worksheet developed by the group.



Give people hope

- Give examples of other people who have gone back to work in spite of serious criminal histories. (Observe rules about confidentiality.)
- Share information from this survey
- Make hopeful statements, “I believe you will get a job.”
- Introduce a person who has been able to go back to work in spite of a criminal history.



Participants in the project:

- Janet Dickerson, DC
- Tim Dunn, OH
- Crystal Ganat, CT
- Kevin Kearns, VT
- Susan Klunk, MC
- Stephanie Kruger, MN
- Tammy Guest, OR
- Tania Morawiec, IL
- Cathy Pennington, OR
- Kristin Tracy, OH
- Andrea Wigfield, MN
- Peggy Wolfe, KS
- Sandy Reese,
Dartmouth PRC
- Sarah Swanson,
Dartmouth PRC



Expungement and Sealing of Records

Expungeable Dispositions: Acquittals and Dismissals
Sentences that can be expunged: Supervision &
710/1410 Probation

Felonies must be pardoned-some can be sealed:
prostitution, possession of cannabis, possession of a
controlled substance & UUW btw 1/1/95-12/2/99

Most misdemeanors can be sealed-some cannot:
violation of an order of protection, violent crimes
(article 12), sex crimes (article 11), violation of
Humane Care for Animals Act, dog fighting, sex
offender registration crimes



Helpful Links

- ❑ How to Read My Rap Sheet

http://www.illinoislegalaid.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=home.dsp_Content&contentID=4926

- ❑ Common Abbreviations on RAP Sheets

http://www.illinoislegalaid.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=home.dsp_content&contentID=4289

- ❑ What Type of Sentence Did I Receive?

http://www.illinoislegalaid.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=home.dsp_content&contentID=4925



Helpful Links Cont.

- **Expunging Your Criminal Record**

http://www.illinoislegalaid.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=home.dsp_Content&contentID=4646#

- **Sealing Your Criminal Record**

http://www.illinoislegalaid.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=home.dsp_content&contentID=5201#

- **How to File for Executive Clemency**

http://www.illinoislegalaid.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=home.dsp_content&contentID=5185#



To obtain an FBI multi-state record:

(When a state record has index “III MULTISOURCE” at the top, there is a record with the interstate identification index maintained by the FBI)

- Send a written request including name, place and date of birth, fingerprints (full-set), and a certified check or money order for \$18 to:

**Requests must be made by the individual to whom the record belongs*

U.S. Department of Justice
Federal Bureau of Investigation Information Services
Division
Attention: SCU, Mod. D-2
1000 Custer Hollow Road
Clarksburg, WV 26306



Other Resources:

- ❑ Sacredtransformation.com—offers grants for tattoo redo's
- ❑ Privacy Rights Clearinghouse
<http://www.privacyrights.org/ar/rosencrim.htm>
- ❑ Expungement Program, Office of the State Appellate Defender
Chicago Office-(866) 787-1776
Springfield Office-(866) 431-4907
- ❑ State Attorney General (to find out specific info about occupational bars)
312-814-3000