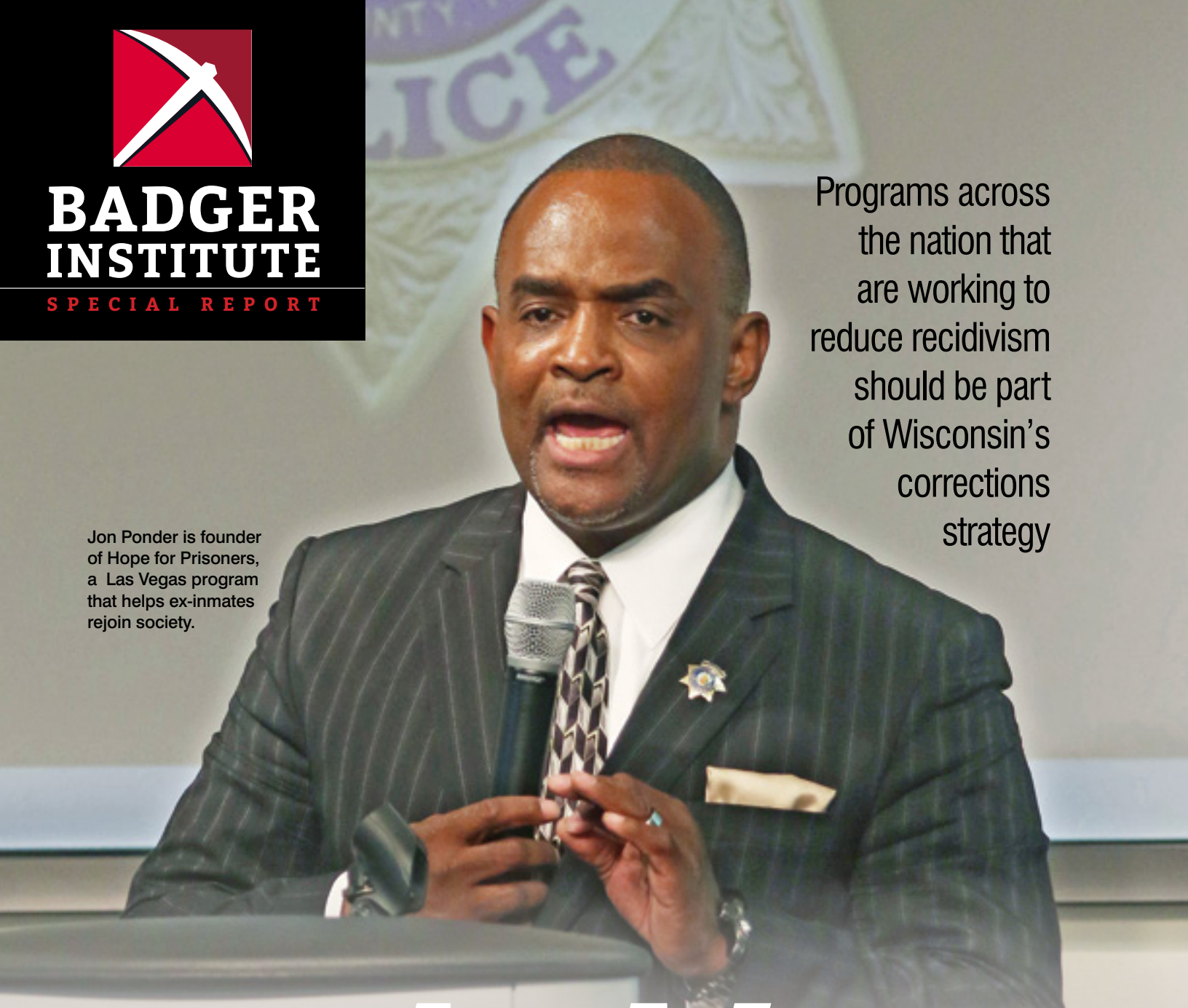
BADGER INSTITUTE

SPECIAL REPORT



Jon Ponder is founder of Hope for Prisoners, a Las Vegas program that helps ex-inmates rejoin society.

Programs across the nation that are working to reduce recidivism should be part of Wisconsin's corrections strategy

Unlocking Potential

Giving hope to prisoners

Breaking the cycle of abuse

Social impact bonds: a new way forward

Executive Summary

We lock up a lot of people in Wisconsin, and usually for good reason. For almost every prisoner, there is a victim. But we don't and can't lock up every offender forever. Only one in 20 men, and even fewer women, are "lifers." The majority will be out in less than five years and return to the same neighborhoods where their victims often live.

This is where we as a state so often fail. About 30 percent will end up back inside within three years. More can be done before they are released. More can be done to ensure they have a decent chance at rebuilding their lives, getting involved in the lives of their children and contributing to an economy that so badly needs them.

We can't afford the status quo. We can't afford the cost, well over $1 billion a year. We can't ignore 90,000 unfilled job listings in a state with, it turns out, about the same number of people in prison or under supervision. We can't afford the cycle of crime and victimization that has gone on for generations.

So at Badger Institute, we've spent much of the past year looking around the country, and sometimes in our own backyard, at programs that are working or that hold promise but haven't been given the attention or resources to succeed. We didn't do it alone. We relied on the advice of people like Bob Woodson, the economic-opportunity crusader (to borrow a description from the Wall Street Journal) who has long advised Paul Ryan on how we can enable poor Americans to become agents of their own uplift.

Woodson pointed us to Jon Ponder, a former felon who founded Hope for Prisoners in Las Vegas. Others pointed us to Kansas, where private companies pay real wages to inmates working inside prison walls and provide a bridge to the outside. In Milwaukee, we profile the Alma Center, where efforts to break the cycle of domestic violence show such promise.

All this is good and well, you might say, but where does the money come from to support programs like Milwaukee JobsWork, the Joseph Project or tech training for inmates? Where do we find the cash to maybe start up a chapter of Hope for Prisoners in Milwaukee or give the Alma Center the boost it needs?

Some of the programs we profile make convincing evidence-based arguments that they've been successful; others provide little more than promise but show what is possible. Some already receive tax dollars and should continue to; others have sprung up in civil society without the help or hindrance of government. What we need in Wisconsin is a way to ensure that any program we're going to invest in has the independently verified data to back up its claims. We need a way to leverage private capital to "bring the same level of focus and entrepreneurial dynamism that we see in the private sector," as one of our authors writes, to what is seen as a public-sector problem.

But we also need to acknowledge that government will always be the prime driver of corrections policy and funding and that it can more effectively and efficiently prepare inmates for successful reentry into society.

We see a way: social impact bonds. We will have a variety of recommendations in the coming months for how the state can address the historical corrections dilemma. Today, our focus is on encouraging the state to use this novel tool to infuse private capital into programs that have a proven track record and, if they don't already exist in the state, to create them here.

We recommend taking a close look at work programs such as the one in Kansas and education programs such as Milwaukee Area Technical College's CNC training for offenders. We also believe the state should review and explore sentence adjustment mechanisms to see whether they can effectively be tied to participation in some of the programs we are highlighting.

We will always need to lock up those who hurt others. But we can't afford to lock up forever the potential of the prisoners who will return to society with, currently, little chance for success.

*– **Mike Nichols**, Badger Institute president*

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Founded in 1987, the Badger Institute is a nonprofit, nonpartisan 501(c)(3) guided by the belief that free markets, individual initiative, limited and efficient government and educational opportunity are keys to economic prosperity and human dignity.

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Shawna Czanstke graduates in July from the Hope for Prisoners program in Las Vegas.

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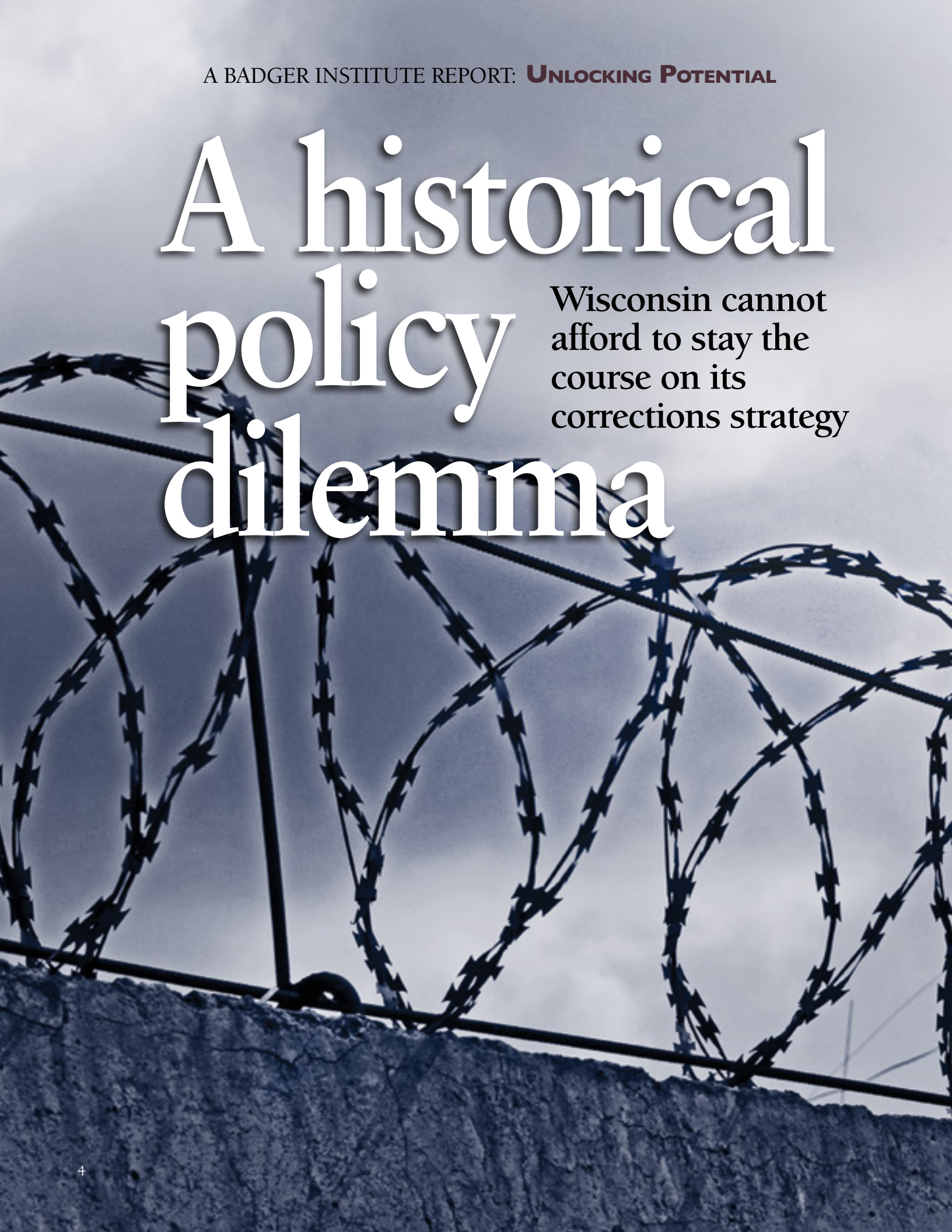
A historical policy dilemma

Wisconsin cannot afford to stay the course on its corrections strategy



By Michael Flaherty and Mike Nichols

The costs of locking up criminals in Wisconsin are enormous — close to $40,000 per inmate per year for males and over $32,000 per year for females, who make up just 6 percent of the state's prison population.

The Wisconsin Department of Corrections budget this year calls for $1.08 billion from state taxpayers, and that doesn't include the cost of police, prosecutors, defense attorneys and the court system, let alone county jails. Nor does it come close to fully capturing the repercussions of incarcerating nearly 23,000 adults in 37 corrections facilities and supervising some 65,000 more who are on probation or parole.

The corrections budget — seven times bigger than it was just a quarter-century ago — is larger than taxpayer support of the entire University of Wisconsin System. At a time when many of the state's businesses are desperate for workers of all skill levels, we spend more money locking up Wisconsinites than helping them earn college degrees.

All of this is worth it if it makes us safer. But there is increasing evidence that Wisconsin can more effectively and more cheaply

accomplish that goal while simultaneously helping our businesses find the labor they need.

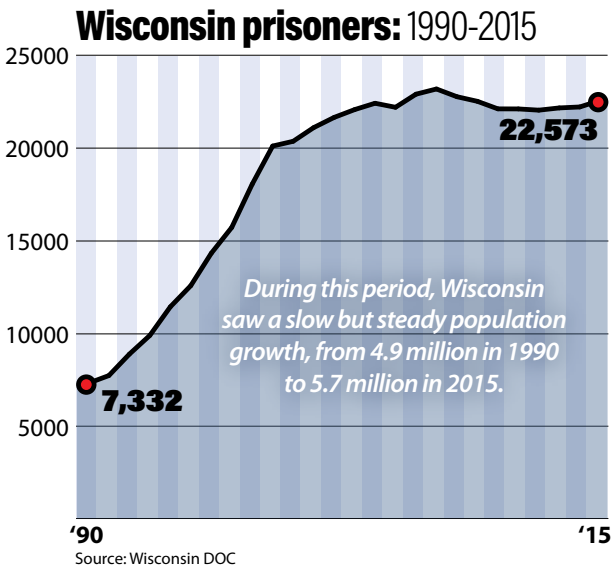
How did we get to this point? Who are all these people we lock up, and what did they do? Why do we spend so much money on them when we have so many other needs? How do we compare to other states? Are the costs worth it? Is there anything Wisconsin can do to remain safe but rein in expenditures and also find a way to help former inmates re-enter their families and society instead of a prison cell, thereby benefiting all of us?

How we got here: The 19th and 20th centuries

The debate over the treatment of Wisconsin's convicted criminals is as old as the state — almost literally. Only three years after Wisconsin was admitted to the union, the Legislature faced a growing crime problem, so it formed a commission to investigate the construction of a prison. That was in 1851.

The next year, Wisconsin opened its first maximum-security prison in Waupun. In the century following, the state added a workhouse in Green Bay (later to become Green Bay Correctional) and the Taycheedah "home for women" in Fond du Lac. But for many years, that was the extent of Wisconsin's prison system. By 1970, there were still fewer than 4,000 people behind bars here. In 1990, that number crept up to about 7,300.

Then, in the last decade of the 20th century, incarceration in Wisconsin exploded. By the end of 1999, the number of state prisoners had nearly tripled to 20,112. Almost all of the growth in Wisconsin's prison system in recent decades, as is illustrated in the accompanying chart, took place in the 1990s. In the 15 years that followed, the prison population grew by 2,100 inmates, at about the same 10% rate as the state's population growth.[1]



Source: Wisconsin DOC

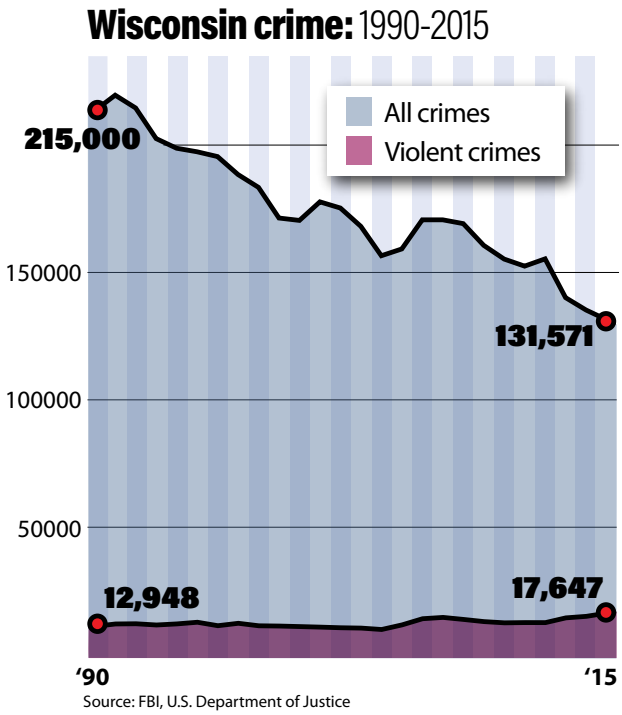
The 1990s boom in imprisonment in Wisconsin was in no way anomalous. Violent crime in America had started rising following the civil unrest of the late 1960s and then exploded in the 1970s and 1980s. Addressing public safety and the public's fear of crime — real and perceived — were national political and policy priorities beginning in the 1970s and lasting for decades.

Every president from Richard Nixon through Bill Clinton mentioned getting "tough on crime" at least once in their State of the Union addresses to Congress, and each took tough federal action to imprison criminals. Nixon launched his "war on crime" in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In the 1980s, Ronald Reagan waged a "war on drugs." In 1994, Clinton signed the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act, which poured $30 billion into tough-on-crime measures, including federal aid to hire 100,000 new police officers, $9.7 billion for new state and federal prisons, mandatory life sentences for some repeat offenders, tough new federal drug laws and federal sentencing reforms such as "three-strikes-and-you're-out."

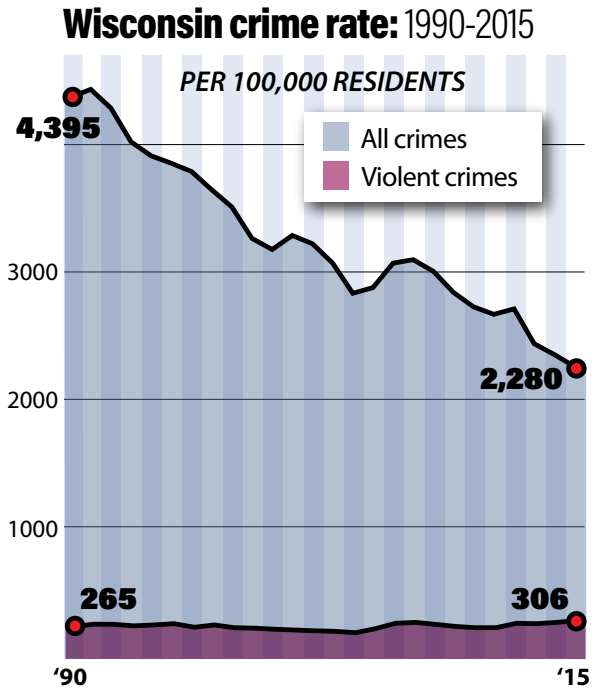
Significantly, the act also provided federal incentives for states to pass tough-on-crime laws, including federal money to help build new prisons for those convicted under the new tougher sentences. Federal policies and incentives drove state-level policy and spending all across America.

The tough-on-crime milieu infused Wisconsin as well. Here in the Badger State, violent crimes more than doubled from 3,792 in 1970 to 8,546 in 1980 and then rose to 12,948 by the end of 1990. Legislators, meanwhile, had passed myriad crime-fighting laws with varying penalties over the prior decades that resulted in a disorganized and uneven criminal code.[2] At least some judges thought that mandatory and presumptive minimum sentences tied their hands and created inequities. Very different crimes such as robbery, burglary and forgery all had the same maximum penalty of 10 years.[3]

Prison populations soared — more than doubling just from 1993 to 1999. Wisconsin politicians quite literally



Source: FBI, U.S. Department of Justice



couldn't build prison cells fast enough, and by the late 1990s, nearly a quarter of all Wisconsin inmates were housed in county jails and other facilities outside the state prison system, many of them in other states. Since the early 2000s, the number of Wisconsin prisoners held in jails or elsewhere has dramatically declined — from a high of 4,997 in 2000 to just 29 in 2015.

After building six new correctional facilities in the 1980s, including a maximum-security prison in Portage, Wisconsin went on to build 18 more between 1990 and 2004 — more than one per year.

Truth-in-sentencing

The facts and timeline regarding so-called truth-in-sentencing legislation in Wisconsin belie a common belief and refrain that it was primarily responsible for the increase in prisoners and spending here.

It is true that in the 1990s, prominent lawmakers from both sides of the aisle did push for and eventually pass truth-in-sentencing, which would give victims and society in general certainty that offenders weren't being released after serving small fractions of their sentences.[4]

Legislators also recognized the need to revise the disorganized criminal code that hadn't had a systematic overhaul since the 1970s.[5]

In 1996, it was Attorney General Jim Doyle, the future Democratic governor, who said Wisconsin should adopt a truth-in-sentencing initiative that would require criminals to serve fixed sentences set by judges instead of becoming eligible for discretionary parole after serving as little as 25 percent of their terms behind bars.[6]

In 1997, it was Republican Gov. Tommy Thompson's turn to propose ending parole.[7] In the late 1990s, a young Republican state representative by the name of Scott Walker also pushed tough-on-crime legislation.

Finally, in May 1998, the Legislature passed a bill, commonly referred to as truth-in-sentencing, mandating that felons serve their entire sentence behind bars and eliminating parole and early release for good behavior. Once again, Wisconsin was far from alone. At least 29 other states had or would pass legislation that required offenders to serve a set term of confinement followed by supervised release.

As Thomas Barland, a widely respected reserve judge in Eau Claire County, noted a few years later, "The purpose was not necessarily to send people to prison for longer periods of time than before." The goal was to provide some certainty that inmates would serve the sentence imposed by the court.[8]

Critics didn't see it that way. Rep. Frank Boyle, a Democrat from Superior, predicted the bill signed by Thompson would cause the state's prison population to triple in 10 years.

In fact, deficiencies in the initial legislation may indeed have resulted in a larger prison population, at least for a time. But history proves that Boyle's fear was unfounded. By the time truth-in-sentencing became law in Wisconsin on the very last day of 1999, there were already 20,112 state prisoners behind bars. Most of the meteoric growth in Wisconsin's prisons already had occurred before truth-in-sentencing legislation became a reality.

The 21st century

Wisconsin's prison population did continue to increase for a time in the new millennium — albeit at a much slower rate. The total prison population would rise to 23,183 by the end of 2007, higher than it had ever been before or has been since, before decreasing to where it is today, 22,823 as of September 2016.

Less clear is whether truth-in-sentencing — an umbrella term, actually, for a series of sentencing modifications stretching over many years — played a significant role. The nexus is most plausible for the period of time after the initial legislation resulted in felons serving complete sentences but before the Legislature, a few years later, got around to enacting the long-awaited and always-intended second part of truth-in-sentencing that revamped a disorganized criminal code.

It wasn't until July 2002 that legislators, finally passing what some came to call Truth-In-Sentencing II, adopted the recommendations of a Criminal Penalty Study Committee that altered felony classifications to better match crimes to time. The committee reduced the maximum penalties on many crimes so that the new maximums did not exceed what previously had been the mandatory release dates. It reduced the number of penalty enhancers, and it removed both mandatory and presumptive minimum sentences.[9]

In 2014, 43 percent of adults entering prison in Wisconsin were sent back – not for any new crime but for violating their extended supervision or parole. Another 13 percent were sent back for a combination of a new sentence and revocation.

At the same time, the Legislature allowed inmates convicted of less serious crimes — beginning in February 2003 — to directly petition courts for sentence reductions after serving 75 percent or 85 percent of their time, depending on the offense classification.

Since then, there have been additional truth-in-sentencing modifications — some of which have canceled each other out. In 2009, Act 28 included a variety of earned-release programs and gave the state DOC and the Earned Release Review Commission considerable discretion.

From the beginning, Act 28 had strong critics. Then-Rep. Scott Suder, a Republican from Abbottsford, called it a "dangerous social experiment," noting that two of the first inmates released under the program were already back in prison.[10]

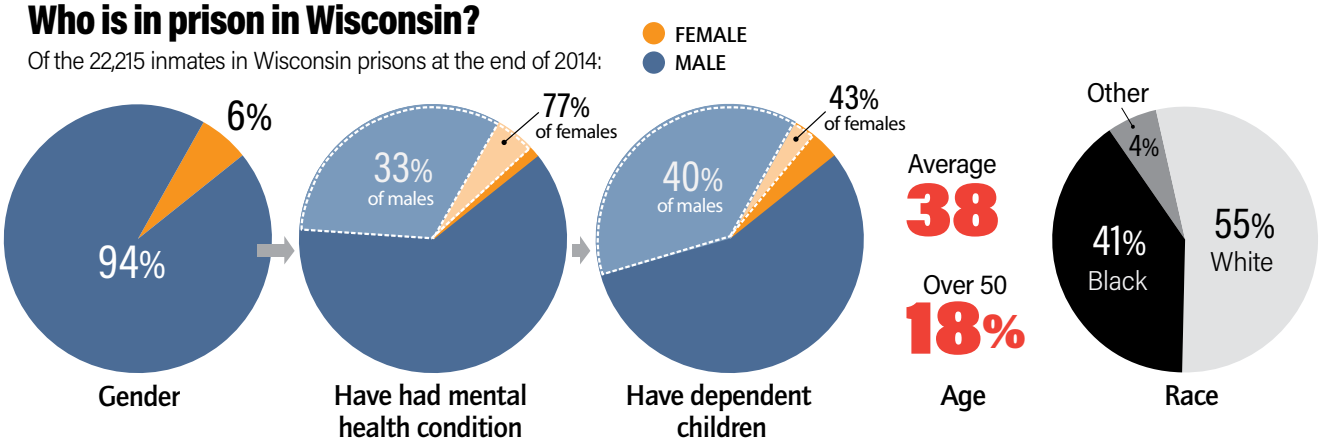
Suder's comment was a harbinger of things to come. In 2011, the tide turned again, and much of Act 28 was erased. The Republican-controlled Legislature and Gov. Scott Walker passed Act 38, which essentially ended most of the early-release provisions of Act 28.[11] At the same time, the provision allowing sentence adjustments that was passed in 2002 — and that had been phased out in 2009 — was reinserted in 2011.[12]

Whether that provision is an adequate or realistic way of allowing some prisoners to earn their way back to society and a job is an important issue that Wisconsin legislators should continue to address.

Early-release mechanisms, proponents argue, can be effective incentives for inmates to participate in counseling, treatment, education, job training and work programs — and, proponents add, they can result in lower prison populations, lower recidivism and lower prison costs. But, of course, such mechanisms must be balanced against public safety, a goal best achieved perhaps by making sure released inmates are likely to get jobs and find meaning in lives focused on something other than crime.

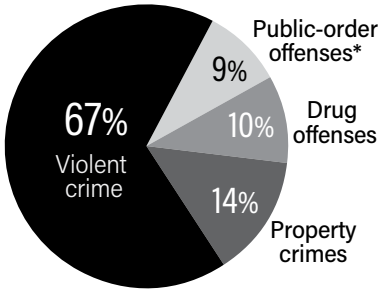
Who is in prison in Wisconsin?

Of the 22,215 inmates in Wisconsin prisons at the end of 2014:



Why are they in prison?

The statistics run counter to the popular belief that Wisconsin's inmate growth is the result of massive convictions for drug use or dealing, although the categories for incarceration are listed by their most serious offense. Many inmates have more than one.



*Such as operating a vehicle while intoxicated, possession of a firearm by a felon and failure to pay child support.

Trends in inmate population

Trends are not always readily apparent because many inmates have more than one conviction, but here are some trends as reported by the Wisconsin Department of Corrections as of the end of 2014:

Since 2000...

Sex offenders +5% to 25%

OWI offenders +6% to 9%

Source: Wisconsin DOC's Prison Point-in-Time Populations: 1990-2014 report, August 2015

Who's in prison, and for how long?

Some inmates are lower-risk than others, of course — and effective risk-assessment tools are essential. But it can't be ignored that a large, and growing, percentage of inmate have violent pasts. The spike in crime rates in the 1970s and 1980s precipitated the spike in the prison populations in the 1990s.

As previously noted, violent crimes in Wisconsin more than doubled from 1970 to 1980 and then grew by half again by 1990 — far exceeding population growth. Violent crime in the state remained static in the 1990s, then started rising again in the 2000s — a phenomena reflected in the prison population. Sixty-seven percent of inmates in 2014 committed violent crimes, up from 59 percent in 2000.[13]

The rest are guilty of property, public-order and drug offenses. Perhaps contrary to common perception, drug sentencings have not been the primary driver of incarceration levels in Wisconsin. About 10 percent of inmates committed drug-related crimes.[14]

Drugs do still play a large role in criminal activity in America. Minnesota, for instance, is considering building a new prison because its methamphetamine problem is resulting in a surge in violent crimes. But in Wisconsin, at least, the bigger picture with crime trends is nuanced: Since 1990, violent crime has increased even as total crime has decreased.

The increase in violent crimes, as well as some sentencing changes perhaps, would explain why Wisconsin's prison population is older than it used to be. The number of inmates over age 50 more than tripled between 2000 and 2014, increasing from 6 percent to 18 percent of the total prison population.[15]

While Wisconsin's inmate profile is older than it once was, the average age is still only 38, and 37 percent of inmates will be released in less than two years. Sixty-five percent will be released in less than five years.

These are, for the most part, relatively young men, many of whom have dependent children, who have long lives ahead of them and will spend at least a portion of those lives back in society.

The cause is clear. Inmates, likely for a variety of reasons, are serving longer sentences than was once the case. Since 2000, inmates with four or fewer years left on their sentences have dropped 50 percent, while those with five or more years left have increased 25 percent.

Still, the fact is that almost everyone who is incarcerated in Wisconsin will get out — and most will get out relatively soon. Only 5 percent of males and 3 percent of females are "lifers."

While the inmate profile is older than it once was, the average age is still only 38, and 37 percent of inmates will be released in less than two years. Sixty-five percent will be released in less than five years.[16] These are, for the most part, relatively young men, many of whom have dependent children, who have long lives ahead of them and will spend at least a portion of those lives back in society.

Many, unfortunately, won't stay out for long if history is a good indication. Wisconsin sends a lot of people back to prison after they've served their sentences and have been out for a time. In 1990, the recidivism rate — criminals who return to prison within three years of being released — was 35 percent. The rate spiked to 47 percent in 2005 before dropping to 31 percent for inmates released in 2011.[17]

The state's revocation rate — violations of parole and probation rules in which offenders can be sent back to prison without having committed a new crime — is also slightly lower than it used to be. But it's still high. In 2014, 43 percent of adults entering prison in Wisconsin were sent back — not for any new crime but for violating their extended supervision or parole. Another 13 percent were sent back for a combination of a new sentence and revocation.

Where we are today

The United States today leads the world in locking up more convicted criminals than any other nation. America's incarceration rate of 693 prison inmates per 100,000 people is roughly four times higher than the rate in most European nations, including Britain (147 per 100,000), with roughly the same crime rates.[18]

Within America, at the same time, Wisconsin's incarceration rate of 371 inmates per 100,000 residents in 2014 is about average among states at 28th, comparable to Illinois' (377) and lower than Michigan's (441), though far higher than Minnesota's (194). *(See related story on Page 12.)*[19]

Milwaukee: The center of Wisconsin's corrections quandary

With about one-tenth of the state's population, Milwaukee reported 8,864 violent crimes in 2014, more than half of all violent crimes committed statewide. The city's violent crime rate was the fifth-highest in the nation among cities with more than 250,000 people, according to the FBI's 2014 Unified Crime Report.

Milwaukee's violent crime rate of 1,476 per 100,000 residents in 2014 compared to a statewide rate of 291. It was more than 14 times higher than the rate in many other Wisconsin cities, and the numbers have only worsened since.

There were 153 homicides in Milwaukee in 2015, nearly double the 86 reported the year before. By November 2016, there were 131, according to the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel's homicide database, which also tracks non-fatal shootings. Those rose from 400 in 2010 to 635 in 2015.

In Wisconsin, the debate over corrections costs and Milwaukee's impact also includes — subtly or otherwise — the state's treatment of African-Americans by law enforcement, the courts, judges and the parole/community treatment system.

For years, Wisconsin's prison population included almost as many black males as it did white males despite the fact that blacks are less than 7 percent of the state population. While the percentage of blacks in the state's prisons is dropping slightly, the fact remains that one in every eight working-age black males in Wisconsin is incarcerated — the highest in the nation and almost double the rate nationwide, according to a study last year by the Wisconsin Budget Project. That's more than double Minnesota's 6 percent rate and 80 percent higher than in Michigan or Illinois, both with large inner city communities similar to Milwaukee's.

A 2013 University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee study found that almost two-thirds of Milwaukee County's incarcerated black males come from the city's six-poorest ZIP codes.

Prison reform advocates argue that blacks are arrested more frequently and sentenced more harshly for certain types of crimes. They also argue that Wisconsin could play a stronger role in reducing the black prison population by expanding job training and rehabilitation programs — and could increase funding to diversion programs that provide alternatives to prison for nonviolent criminals.

At the same time, defenders of current sentencing policies in Wisconsin note that, while it's true that black incarceration rates are high, so are violent crime rates in largely black neighborhoods, where the victims are also black.

The homicide rate for whites in Milwaukee was about 10 per 100,000 residents in 2010 and only slightly higher in 2015. During that same period, the black homicide rate was triple that, hovering around 30 until 2014, then jumping to 53 last year.

In fact, of the homicides reported the last two years by the Journal Sentinel, all but a few of the victims were black.

— Michael Flaherty

Wisconsin's prison population has leveled off in the past 10 years. It was actually lower in 2014 than it was in 2004. But costs are still exorbitant and are expected to continue increasing because the state's prisons are nearly one-third over capacity today.[20]

In Wisconsin, the last three legislative sessions have made minor tweaks in sentencing guidelines to help slightly reduce inmate numbers and costs with some success. Despite increases in some types of crime, Wisconsin's prison population has remained fairly stable, which suggests that modest reforms, such as reducing penalties for drug use by nonviolent offenders, have been a factor in keeping inmate numbers from climbing.[21]

But at the same time, those efforts haven't resulted in significant reductions in the prison population or the cost of the state's corrections system. Wisconsin's history on these issues suggests that nibbling around the edges of corrections policies and sentencing rules won't greatly change the course or the cost of the corrections system.

Regardless of the party in control, many strongly tough-on-crime states with high incarceration rates are experimenting with efforts to reduce inmate numbers, with 12

states reducing their prison populations by double digits from their peaks, led by New Jersey (31.4 percent from 1999) and states as diverse as California, Georgia, Mississippi, New York and South Carolina.

Seven states have reduced their imprisonment rates substantially and have seen their crime rates drop at the same time between 1994 and 2012, led by Democrat-controlled New York, which reduced its incarceration rate by 24 percent, while crime over that period dropped 54 percent.

It can be done — and there are many facets to the issue that go far beyond the Department of Corrections and that deserve ongoing scrutiny. Our starting point today, however, is with issues that the DOC has the most direct control over: what happens within the walls of the facilities prior to release and how the state, including those outside of government, can better help Community Corrections more successfully avoid sending low-risk offenders back into prison cells.

Michael Flaherty is president of Flaherty & Associates, a public policy strategic communications firm in Madison. He teaches a journalism class at UW-Madison's College of Agricultural and Life Sciences. Mike Nichols is president of the Badger Institute.

Minnesota chooses treatment over incarceration

In the early 1980s, Minnesota and Wisconsin — states with similar populations — took distinctly different policy paths in response to rising crime.

Minnesota's 1981 sentencing reforms required prison only for offenders who posed a threat to public safety. As a result, 104,000 of its 114,000 convicts today are managed in community-based settings with roughly the same success in recidivism. That's the primary reason — at first glance at least — Minnesota has only 10 state prisons and a corrections budget this year of $527 million, compared to Wisconsin's $1.3 billion budget. Minnesota, meanwhile, is managing 24,000 more felons than Wisconsin.

Some of the dollar-for-dollar comparisons are misleading. Minnesota's costs are calculated differently as the state shifts substantial community-based corrections costs to county and local governments for management, treatment and training. That's one reason the national drug-abuse counseling group Bluelight calls Minnesota "The Land of 10,000 Treatment Centers."

Other comparisons, however, are helpful.

Minnesota's treatment-based approach is much more cost-effective when dealing with offenders who have mental health issues. The Wisconsin Department of Corrections reports that in 2014, 33 percent of all male inmates and 77 percent of all female inmates — nearly 8,000 people — had mental health issues.

That makes the prison system by far the state's largest mental health institution, a role for which it was not designed nor equipped and in which treatment is vastly more expensive and less effective. In fact, mental health experts note that prison can exacerbate mental health problems, making the inmates more difficult to manage for corrections officials and more expensive for taxpayers.

So while the two systems aren't entirely comparable, the bottom line on differing approaches is real: Minnesota this year will spend $381 million on roughly 10,000 inmates, while Wisconsin will spend nearly $1 billion for nearly 23,000 inmates.

Meanwhile, Minnesota has a slightly higher crime rate and one-fourth more convicted felons, according to the Minnesota DOC.

— Michael Flaherty

Tough-on-crime Texas enacts reforms by necessity

When it comes to a "lock 'em up" approach to criminal justice, no state had been more aggressive than Texas. The prison population in the nation's second-most-populous state jumped from 19,000 in 1975 to over 172,000 in 2010. Inmates were housed in 114 state prisons and jails.

If Texas were a country, criminal justice experts used to say, it would lead the world in the number of people behind bars.

But in 2007, the state's Republican lawmakers changed course. Faced with the reality that they were going to have to spend another $2 billion to build new prisons to handle an additional 17,000 inmates, they began looking for options that would be both cost-effective and that would protect public safety.

Under the Republican leadership in the Legislature and Republican Govs. Greg Abbott and Rick Perry, lawmakers responded with watershed legislation that would slowly but firmly reform the state's criminal justice system, including its criminal code, courts and sentencing structure and how it manages and treats felons.

Since then, Texas has closed three prisons — a first in state history. It has seen its prison population drop by nearly 20,000 to just around 150,000 inmates. At the same time, its crime rate dropped 29 percent from 2005 to 2014, substantially faster than the nation's drop in overall crime and violent crime rates.

What happened?

Instead of spending $2 billion to expand its prison system, lawmakers focused on greatly expanded treatment and education programs for low-risk, nonviolent offenders. They spent $241 million on new probation and rehabilitation programs, including drug courts and more than 3,000 slots for outpatient substance abuse, noted former GOP Rep. Jerry Madden, who helped author the reforms as chairman of the Texas House Corrections Committee.

"The results were lower recidivism and incarceration rates, not to mention billions saved for Texas taxpayers," he wrote this year in a report as a senior fellow for the Texas Public Policy Foundation's Right on Crime initiative. The reforms also included 2,700 new substance abuse in-prison treatment beds, 1,400 new intermediate sanctions beds (90-day programs for probation violations), halfway house beds and a cap on caseloads for parole officers, he noted.

"Policies in various states are finally catching up with what we know works," said Marc Levin, director at the Austin-based Center for Effective Justice and a leader in the national Right on Crime campaign, which promotes community-justice solutions. "For most nonviolent offenders, community-based initiatives are much cheaper and have much better outcomes," Levin told Texas News & Politics in an August 2012 interview. "In this time of tight budgets and programs that work, this is the conservative thing to do."

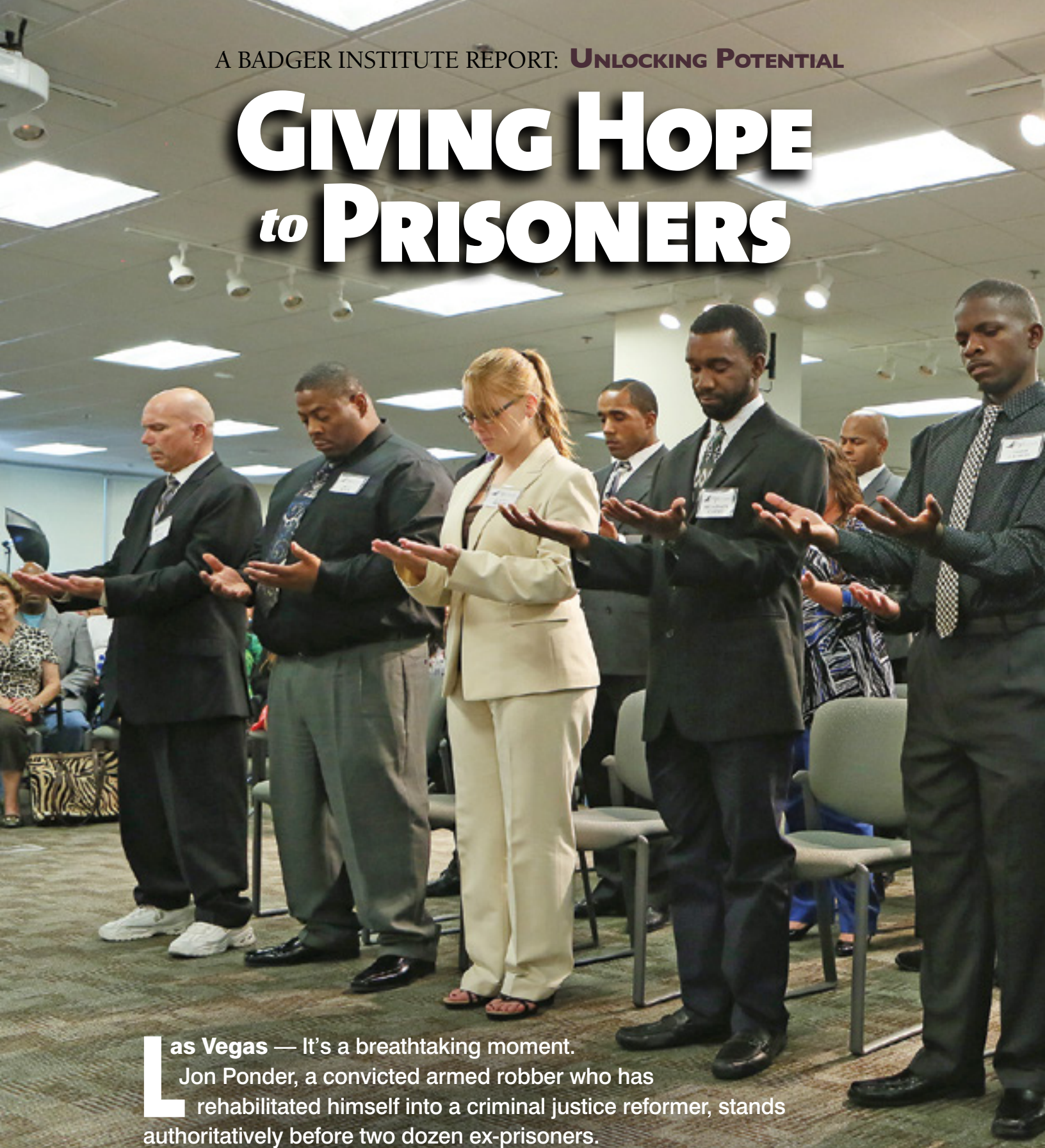
The changes included a wide swath of other program reforms, such as:

- *Specialty courts around the state to tailor sentencing and treatment for drug offenders, drunken drivers, veterans and prostitutes to push them to turn around their lives without going to prison.*
- *More parole officers to keep tabs on their charges with high-tech electronic monitoring technology and new risk-assessment tools to ensure public safety.*
- *Expanded community-based probation programs for low-level, nonviolent offenders designed to curb recidi vism and probation revocations. In Texas, community-based programs are one-sixth the cost of a prison term, and the programs now serve an additional 11,000 people, according to Madden.*
- *Expanded in-prison treatment programs that now treat more than one-fifth of the state's inmates.*

— Michael Flaherty

A BADGER INSTITUTE REPORT: **UNLOCKING POTENTIAL**

GIVING HOPE *to* PRISONERS



Las Vegas — It's a breathtaking moment.

Jon Ponder, a convicted armed robber who has rehabilitated himself into a criminal justice reformer, stands authoritatively before two dozen ex-prisoners.

Desperately wanting to change their lives, these men and women have just completed the first part of Ponder's intensive 18-month program in preparation for rejoining society.

Story by ***Marie Rohde*** *Photos by* ***Ronda Churchill***

Hope for Prisoners founder and CEO Jon Ponder addresses the 26 graduates and a room packed with supporters and mentors.

In a country where police and some minority communities are increasingly at odds, Ponder is leading their graduation ceremony in an unlikely place — an assembly hall at the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department.

The 26 former inmates are a wide variety of ages and ethnicities; six are women, the rest men. All have served hard time in local or federal correctional institutions. Also present at the July 22 graduation — here's the big surprise — are hundreds of upright citizens: police officers, judges, prosecutors, business people and relatives, all of whom have pledged to embrace and guide these ex-offenders to success.

Ponder commands his graduates: "Hold up your hands, palm facing you!"

They each lift their hands, hold them about a foot from their faces. "Closer!" he commands. They bring their palms within a few inches of their faces, nearly touching their noses.

Ponder declares: "You can't see me now, right?"

They call out their agreement. All they can see are their palms.

"Listen to me!" says Ponder, with the fervor of a preacher. "I symbolize your future! Your palms are your past!"

He shouts: "You cannot see your future with your past in your face!"

The packed room is transfixed, enthralled.

In a few powerful words, Ponder has summed up the purpose of his program, Hope for Prisoners.

Everyone in the assembly hall knows that this graduation represents a profound community change of heart and mind toward ex-offenders.

Offenders are normally ignored after their release — given a few bucks and sent on their way with the clothes on their backs and with probation and parole officers offering some help but ready to slap on handcuffs at the first slip-up. Not our problem anymore, society generally says.

But these ex-offenders are being surrounded by an array of caring volunteers, including the police officers who arrested them, the district attorneys who prosecuted them, the judges who sentenced them and the parents and siblings whom they have disappointed.

The implications are profound — not just for these Las Vegas offenders but for offenders across the United States. Many think that Ponder's program, which early research has shown to have a high success rate, could serve as a national model.

In Las Vegas, the public and private sectors have joined to create a new future for released prisoners. Can the country — can Wisconsin, particularly Milwaukee — follow suit?

States seek alternatives

The most recent U.S. Justice Department figures are alarming:

• There are 2.3 million men and women behind bars in the

HOPE FOR PRISONERS

- The community-based, volunteer program was founded by CEO and President Jon Ponder and opened its doors in 2009.
- Some 1,500 ex-offenders have completed the 18-month program.
- 94% of participants who completed the program's job readiness course in 2014-'15 have not returned to jail, according to a recent study.
- Program mentors include some 40 police officers.
- For more information, go to ***hopeforprisoners.org***

United States, costing taxpayers $68 billion annually.
• Of those, 95% eventually will be freed and return home.
• Roughly 40% of the federal and 60% of the state prisoners are rearrested within three years of release for new crimes.

Across the country, states are looking for alternatives to prison that cost less while still protecting the public and holding offenders accountable. Ending the recidivism cycle is critical.

In Nevada, Ponder leads a private-public partnership that draws heavily on volunteer mentors from law enforcement, the judicial system, business and the faith community. The nonprofit Hope for Prisoners, supported chiefly by donations, is generating national buzz as a model that is working to address not only the cost to taxpayers but the insidious long-term effects of incarceration on families and on communities.

A recent study by the University of Nevada-Las Vegas found that of 522 participants who had completed the program's job readiness course during an 18-month period in 2014-'15, an astonishing 94% had not returned to jail; most were working, paying taxes and supporting their families.

The university is continuing its research to determine how those ex-inmates will fare after three years, a benchmark frequently used in such studies to judge success.

Some 1,500 ex-offenders have completed the program since Hope for Prisoners opened its doors in 2009. That's a fraction of the 5,600 who leave the state's prisons and jails every year, about two-thirds ending up in Las Vegas.

But it's a start. Hope for Prisoners continues to grow.

With a $700,000 state grant, Hope for Prisoners recently opened a program in the Clark County Detention Center that will give prisoners its weeklong job preparedness course prior to release. Once out, they will get the same 18-month job preparedness and mentoring that current participants receive.

Hope for Prisoners graduate Isaiah Charles stands during the national anthem.

Many of the participants have been convicted of violent crimes. That's no surprise to criminal justice experts, who say the notion that prisons are overcrowded with nonviolent offenders is a myth.

"The majority of 'nonviolent drug offenders' released by (President Barack) Obama had records for violent offenses," says Clark County District Attorney Steven B. Wolfson, a volunteer advisor to Hope for Prisoners and the man who sent many of the prisoners to jail. "Not all of these offenders are 18-, 19- and 20-year-olds. Many are in their 30s and 40s and got tired of getting in trouble all the time and having to look over their shoulders."

Since relatively few of those in prison are lifers, society

"IT DOESN'T MATTER IF THEY'VE BEEN INCARCERATED FOR 30 DAYS OR 30 YEARS. IT'S HARD TO MAKE IT BACK. THIS PROGRAM GIVES THEM SOMEONE TO TURN TO WHEN THEY NEED IT."

***Steven B. Wolfson** – Clark County district attorney and volunteer advisor to Hope for Prisoners*

needs to do more to make sure ex-inmates succeed after doing their time, he says.

The vast majority of those who enroll in Hope for Prisoners — it is voluntary — want to succeed, and that's key to success, Wolfson says. He met a program participant who was so impressive that he promised to find the man a job if the participant made it through law school.

"It doesn't matter if they've been incarcerated for 30 days or 30 years," Wolfson says. "It's hard to make it back. This program gives them someone to turn to when they need it."

Most of the ex-offenders, Wolfson notes, have no money, no jobs, no skills, no transportation, few family or friends who can help and little hope. And many owe court-ordered restitution and child support.

Supporter Xander Clancy holds flowers for a graduate at the ceremony.

From startup to success

Others agree with Wolfson that Hope for Prisoners is a unique program and that it is working.

"There are a lot of re-entry programs out there," says Robert L. Woodson Sr., founder and president of the Washington, D.C.-based Woodson Center, formerly the Center for Neighborhood Enterprise. "What is different here is that it also addresses character, and that's what these men and women need for transformation, for redemption. That makes it unique."

Woodson, one of the architects of President George W. Bush's faith-based poverty initiatives, has been touring the country with House Speaker Paul Ryan (R-Wis.), advocating Ryan's anti-poverty agenda.

Woodson held a national summit in October in Las Vegas in which Hope for Prisoners was presented as a model that others can adopt.

The charismatic Ponder founded Hope for Prisoners — of which he is CEO and president — with the help of the International Church of Las Vegas, a non-denominational house of worship with more than 6,000 members. Ponder joined the church after his release from prison in 2009.

The International Church's pastor, Paul Goulet, was there for the birth.

"Jon came up to me at church one day and said he wanted to start a ministry for ex-prisoners," Goulet recalls. "I asked him what he knew about prison, and he said, 'I just got out.' "

Goulet enrolled Ponder in a church leadership program. Soon other church leaders joined Ponder in the startup program. It raised enough in donations to get a modest office.

Jon Ponder's journey

Ponder had been in trouble with the law from the time he was 12, when he got involved with the gang life on the streets of New York. "At 16, I was arrested for my first armed robbery," he says. "Drugs and booze were part of the problem."

While in his 20s, he moved to Las Vegas in 1989 to be with his mother, who had moved here in retirement. He didn't leave his life of crime behind.

In 2004, he was drunk and strung out on drugs when, armed with a handgun, he robbed a bank. It wasn't long before he was arrested, kicking and fighting all the way to

Hope for Prisoners alumnus Marcus Jacquette addresses the graduates.

solitary confinement, where he awaited his court date and a possible 23-year prison sentence.

Ponder, then 38, believes he was touched by the hand of God while in that cell.

"One day, a chaplain slipped a Bible through the slot in my door, along with another book, 'Pursuit of His Presence' by Kenneth and Gloria Copeland," he recalls, saying he read them because he had nothing else to do.

Then a fellow prisoner on his way out gave Ponder a transistor radio that he no longer needed. Ponder could only tune in a Christian station. "One night, I heard Billy Graham preach on the Prodigal Son," he says. "At that point, I became a Christian and prayed the sinner's prayer."

By the time Ponder appeared before U.S. District Judge James Mahan, he was sober and had a plan for his life. Mahan, a George W. Bush appointee who exudes law and order and wears a handgun in a shoulder holster beneath his robes, didn't necessarily buy it.

"A lot people come in here at sentencing saying they've found Jesus and they intend to turn their lives around,"

Program helps pair find their way forward

Jeffrey Monroe served five years for a burglary and cashing a stolen check before getting out last year and finding a path forward through Hope for Prisoners.

"The most important thing I got out of the program was how to be a better man, a better father, and it's helped me become the person God intended me to be," he says.

Monroe says he came to realize that it wasn't him against everyone else in the world. "The true enemy was all the demons I had inside of me," he says.

Now 52, he landed a job at Firehouse Subs, where he is the opening manager on weekends. Monday through Friday he also works full time doing air conditioning repairs.

While working at Firehouse, Monroe met Vivian Nehls, another ex-offender who found her way through Hope for Prisoners.

Nehls got off track at the age of 38. Hooked on drugs that she used to mask the pain of childhood abuse, she was caught breaking into cars to finance her habit. Sentenced to four years, she worked in prison to get her high school diploma but, more important, found a way to get past the abuse she experienced as a child. "I realized there was nothing wrong with me."

Once estranged from her family as the result of imprisonment, she says that she is now taking care of her mother and spending time with a daughter who is going away to college next year.

She and Monroe were married on Aug. 14. Hope for Prisoners founder Jon Ponder officiated at the ceremony.

— Marie Rohde

U.S. District Judge James Mahan (left) and Las Vegas Assistant Sheriff Todd Fasulo listen to speakers at the ceremony. Mahan is the judge who years earlier had sentenced Jon Ponder to prison for armed robbery.

Mahan says. "They're either sincere or delusional. You can't tell which it is."

Ponder seemed sincere. "He was very impressive, and I told him that if he accomplished half of what he said he was going to accomplish, he'd walk out of prison a changed man."

Mahan, who now regularly speaks at Hope for Prisoners graduations, sentenced Ponder to six years in prison. "He didn't get a break," Mahan recalls. "That was within the sentencing guidelines."

In prison, Ponder associated with a group of Christians rather than one of the gangs. "I was impregnated with the seed of Hope for Prisoners while in jail," he says. "It became my purpose in life."

Released from prison, Ponder was luckier than most. He moved in with his mother and got a job in the office of a moving company.

A friend took him to Goulet's International Church. Goulet was receptive to the newcomer's idea but had to sell the idea to skeptics in his congregation. Not everyone bought it.

"I tell people that the greatest work is not done within these four walls," Goulet says. "It's done in the community."

By all accounts Ponder, now a certified chaplain by the state, does not proselytize in the traditional sense. He does not use Hope for Prisoners as a platform for converting others to his faith.

"Real faith is in action, not words," Ponder says.

Police role was turning point

The first two years were a struggle. Angela Brookins, a church member who joined Ponder from the program's inception, recalls everyone kept their day job while spending most of their spare time creating Hope for Prisoners.

"It seemed that every month, we'd get a miracle," says Brookins, now the program's operations manager. "We always managed to get just enough (in donations) to pay the rent and the utilities."

Volunteers showed up, but the organization remained small, including a few police officers who were members of the church.

A turning point came about four years ago when Police Lt. Chris Petko and Detective Cindy Williams went to their boss at the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department with a plan to help Ponder's fledgling program.

Petko, then the operations chief in the department's gang unit, had met Ponder at a community meeting. The cop and the ex-con later met for coffee.

"He talked about personal accountability being the first step for ex-offenders turning their lives around," Petko says. "That resonated with me."

Williams met Ponder at a different community meeting and saw something special in him.

"I saw this guy in a suit, and he was very well-spoken," Williams says. "But police officers notice things, you know? I saw he had tattoos on his neck and on his hands. I knew he had a story to tell."

After hearing Ponder's story, she met with Petko, who asked her what she thought of Ponder. "He's the real deal," Williams concluded. "We have to get the department involved with this."

Several Las Vegas police officers who had volunteered with the program had to tread carefully. Department rules forbade officers from associating with felons except at arm's length. It was an understandable policy, rooted in the history of organized-crime influence in some of the casinos.

Petko and Williams proposed that the department fully endorse a mentoring program of trained volunteer officers working with ex-offenders navigating the land-mined path to a successful post-prison life.

Now, some 40 officers participate in the program, joining more than 150 other mentors from various walks of life, including reformed ex-inmates.

Petko retired from the Police Department last year and is now director of Hope for Prisoners' re-entry leadership academy. Williams is the department's volunteer mentor coordinator and a Hope trainer.

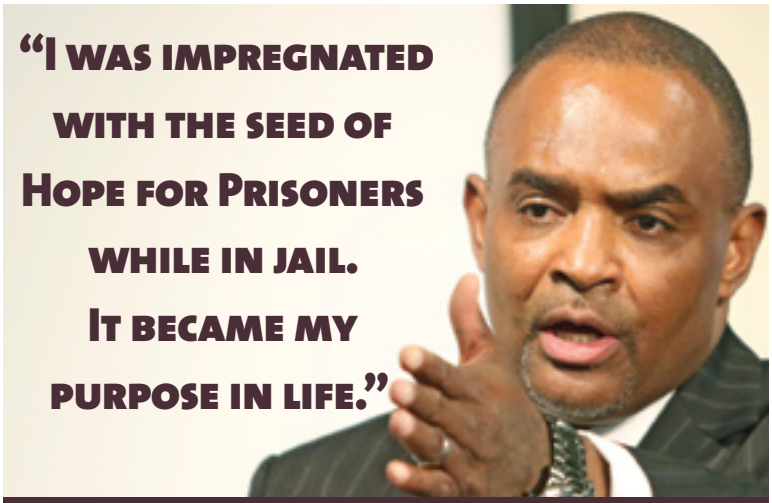
The Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department is seen as progressive in many ways, an early adopter of community policing policies. Still, there has been a chasm between police and ex-offenders — much like the breach between segments of the community and police that has played out violently in cities such as Charlotte, Ferguson and Milwaukee.

Community outreach

One of the Police Department's first community outreach programs was an affiliation with RECAP (Rebuilding Every City around Peace), modeled after a faith-based Boston program. Ponder joined RECAP soon after founding Hope.

Pastor Troy Martinez, of the East Vegas Christian Center and chairman of the RECAP board, says church leaders go to the hospital rooms of young victims, often black or Hispanic, after an incident. He and Ponder frequently partner in the ministry.

"Before RECAP, a lot of times when a young person on the street was shot or killed, there was no outcry from the community," Martinez says. "The families, even the churches, were afraid of retaliation. Many times, the churches wouldn't do the funerals out of fear."



***Jon Ponder** – founder and CEO of Hope for Prisoners*

He recalls going with Ponder to one victim's hospital room. The victim's mother said another son was bent on retaliation. The two pastors went to the man's home and caught him just as he was about to leave.

"He decided not to go," says Martinez, recounting how they talked for hours about there being another way. "He told his friends to stand down."

Eventually, three men were convicted in the shooting. The victim is in rehabilitation; the brother who resisted the temptation to retaliate is in the military and a third brother who was in prison at the time is now a Hope grad.

The success of RECAP — there has been a 65% drop in shootings and 40% decline in murders in the targeted area — prepared the department to support Hope.

The department's commitment to Hope for Prisoners was in evidence at the July graduation ceremony. Both Petko and Williams say it was significant that the ceremony was held at the police building.

"A lot of groups ask to use the facility, but we are picky about who we align ourselves with," says Williams.

Nevada Secretary of State Barbara Cegavske, a longtime

Graduate Michael Porter and Hope trainer Barbara Loupe share a hug at the ceremony.

"There are a lot of re-entry programs out there. What is different here is that it also addresses character, and that's what these men and women need for transformation, for redemption. That makes it unique."

Robert L. Woodson Sr.
– founder and president of the Woodson Center

Graduates Jamie Cruz (right) and Isaiah Charles share a laugh. They were among the 22 men who graduated from the program in July.

Republican, attended the July graduation. She was an early supporter, and when she was a state senator she spearheaded passage of a bill that enables ex-offenders to get state identification cards upon release. Ponder pushed for it, saying IDs are an invaluable asset when looking for a job.

"We have got to stop this revolving door of people going to prison again and again and again," says Cegavske, who serves on the Hope advisory council. "I met with Jon, and he told me about his vision. I saw how he had transformed his life. No one else was out there with a plan that worked."

Support from business community

Nevada business leaders are also behind the program. Scott Gragson is senior vice president of one of the world's largest real estate companies, Colliers International Las Vegas. He says that when a friend asked him to help out at Hope, "I figured I'd give them a few dollars."

Gragson visited the program and came away a board member.

"It's not a cure for all the problems, but it's a start," Gragson says.

"We are spending way too much money on prisons. I'm for 'you did the crime, you do the time,' but these people are not coming out of the system any better than they went in. It costs more to keep them in jail for a year than it would to send them to college."

Some are in prison so long that they are "unfixable," says Gragson, a Republican, but adds, "There are many more who want to change, but they don't know how to do it."

Gragson's most recent project was in helping Hope get its own building, a deal he says will be a reality soon.

From contractors to casino operators, local businesses support Hope and are benefiting from it.

Take, for instance, former burglar and recent Hope graduate

Graduate Laura Bryner embraces Officer M. Drew during the Hope for Prisoners ceremony. Bryner was among the six women who graduated from the program in July.

Freddy Duarte. He was a habitual criminal when he got two 10-years-to-life sentences in 2005 after being convicted of burglarizing the home of a federal magistrate.

"In prison, I realized I made a mess of my life," Duarte says. "I did Bible study and whatever else was allowed. I eventually got my associate degree in business."

When Duarte got out in February 2016, he went to see Ponder, who suggested a course in landscaping. "I told him I had a passion for cooking."

Ponder sent Duarte to the Station Casinos headquarters, where he was hired as a line cook. Within months, Duarte was promoted to sous chef and now has hopes to rise in the organization. His goal is to become the company's corporate chef, managing the menus for all Station's facilities.

"I want to keep the doors open for the next guy who gets out," Duarte says.

When they do get out, some of the ex-offenders are introduced to police mentors in the first week of the program. On Thursday afternoons, the officers show up in uniform, not with wagging fingers but with open arms.

Petko adds that it's important that the officers appear in uniform, but the style is conversational rather than confrontational. "We want them to see past the uniform, to see us as human beings."

Police and ex-inmates connect

At a training session this summer, several officers stand before 26 newcomers to the program. Their message: The line that separates the good guys from the bad is drawn by personal choices, not others.

Officer Aden Ocampo-Gomez talks about how he came to California as a child with his family from Mexico illegally and made the transition to U.S. citizen and police officer.

In the states, every kid in his neighborhood learned to run at the first sight of cops, he says. "Most of the people from my high school class are dead or in prison," he adds.

Ocampo-Gomez says he decided to join the military after high school. That's when he got his green card and could legally work in the states. His family, which had seen the violence of police and military as well as the drug cartels in Mexico, was horrified. When he decided to become a cop after leaving the military, his mother "wailed with grief."

He says he believes the department is bridging the gap to the Hispanic community. "We have a lot of outreach to the community, and we're making inroads," he says.

Detective Bernard Plaskett tells the group about how he grew up poor on the streets of the Bronx. Two of his brothers wound up in prison.

"I was blessed because I could run," he says. "Whenever the cops showed up, we all ran. I was fast. They never caught me."

But Plaskett, who is African-American, says he was fascinated by a beat cop, a white man, who had a talent for twirling a baton. "He told me to get off the streets. 'Go to the Boys and Girls Club. Go home.' He yelled that at me every time he saw me. I thought that dude hated me. So did everyone else."

Eventually, Plaskett says, he came to understand that the cop was trying to keep him out of trouble. "That cop saved my life," he tells the ex-offenders. "He understood that if I stayed on the streets, I'd get in trouble. I'd wind up dead or

Ryan lauds community-based approach to fight recidivism

House Speaker Paul Ryan (R-Wis.) sees Hope for Prisoners not only as a model for other communities but as the sort of program that is key to his broader plan to fight poverty.

"When local people like (Hope founder) Jon Ponder see a problem, identify a solution and get others in the community involved and then have the resounding success that they have had, that should be encouraged and facilitated but not controlled by the federal government," Ryan said in an interview.

He met Ponder through Robert L. Woodson Sr., whom Ryan describes as his mentor and whom he has known for over 20 years. Woodson is the founder and president of the Washington, D.C.-based Woodson Center, formerly the Center for Neighborhood Enterprise, and has been on the front lines of fighting poverty for decades.

Ryan sees the broad involvement of the community, including religious leaders, as integral to the success of community-based programs.

"One of the bad aspects of the War on Poverty is that it became so federal, so distant from our communities that it took people out of it," he says. "What Jon Ponder represents is not only a program that reduces recidivism, a program with excellent results, but he also represents the regeneration of the involvement of the community in a way that can be effective over the long term."

"These people can rebuild their own lives, redeem themselves. Then they are better off, society is better off — and, oh, by the way, the taxpayer is better off at the end of the day."

While some people might oppose spending money on programs to help convicted criminals, Ryan notes that money will be spent in other ways with less hope of helping the ex-inmate or the communities where they will live after being released.

"The question is whether we can help people rebuild their lives by getting to the root causes of the problems," Ryan says. "If we can break the cycle of recidivism and poverty, then these people can rebuild their own lives, redeem themselves. Then they are better off, society is better off — and, oh, by the way, the taxpayer is better off at the end of the day."

He sees Hope for Prisoners and programs like it as a poverty-fighting approach that, instead of taking away money and power from communities, restores local control.

"By engaging the people in being the source of their own redemption, enlisting people in their own communities, you are healing our culture and our communities at the same time," Ryan says.

The role of the federal government, he says, is to "get out of the way and let more of these programs happen."

Criminal justice reform is a related issue that can be dealt with in part at the federal level.

"I think that is where we can help," Ryan says. "We need to remove barriers, get out of the way so more of these community-based programs can occur."

— Marie Rohde

in prison."

Capt. Jason Letkiewicz, commander of the homicide division, says everyone makes mistakes, even cops. "We need to acknowledge it when we make mistakes, accept the punishment and move on," he says.

Letkiewicz gives the ex-offenders his cellphone number. "Just don't call me on your way to jail," he says. "That won't work."

Alfred Jackson, a former offender, listens to the officers with his arms across his chest. After they finish, Jackson stands and says, "I'm Alfred Jackson. I want to shake your hand."

Jackson, a former gang member who spent 11 years in prison for robbery, later says: "It's been a long journey. When I saw them before, it was up against the hood of a car, my legs spread and my hands behind my back."

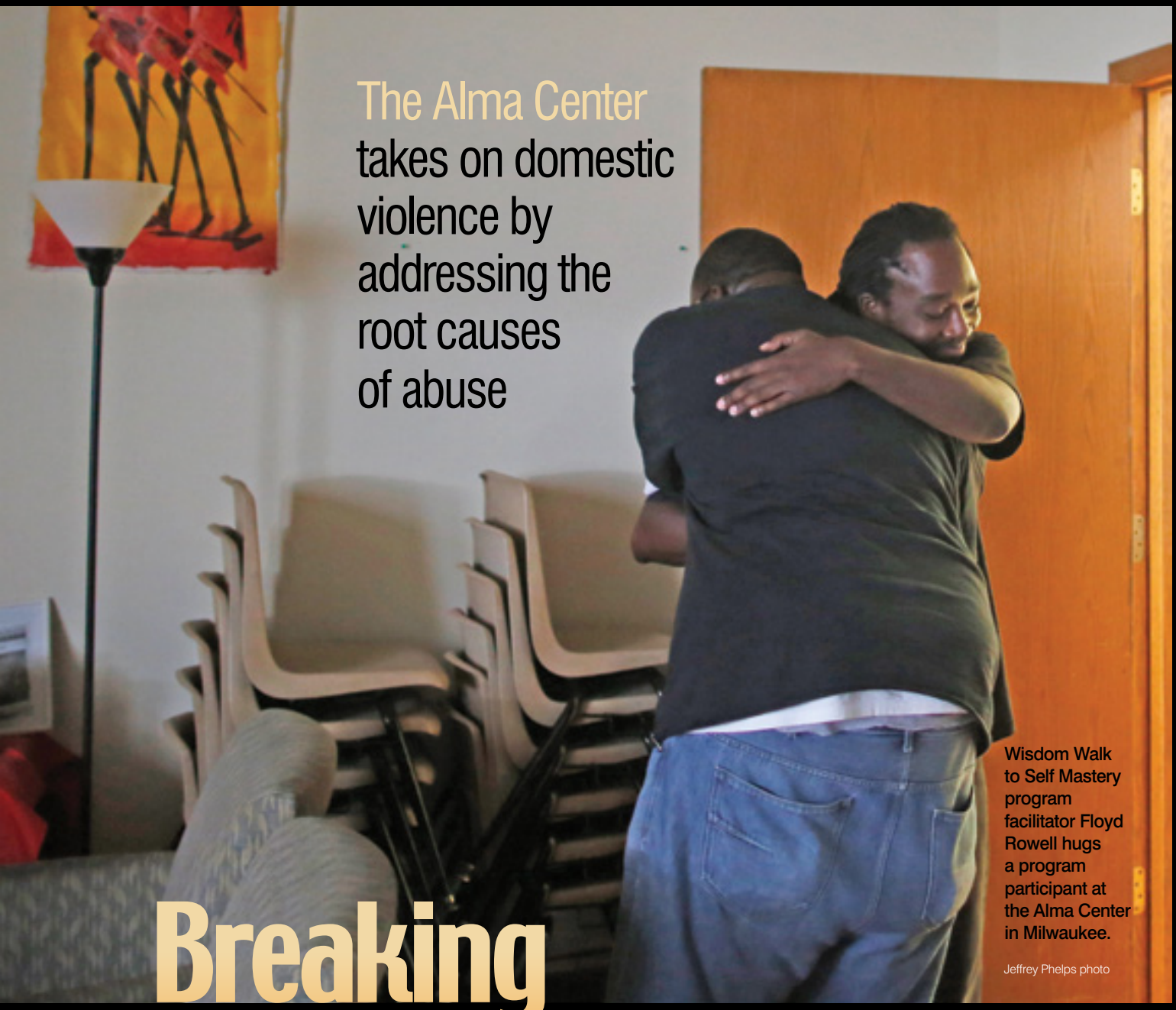
Hope for Prisoners gave him another view. "I didn't expect them to be that open," he says. "I now see that they are not out there to profile me or pick on me."

Many agree that Hope's unique approach is working. At the center of that success is the program's charismatic leader, Jon Ponder.

Are there other Jon Ponders? Can Hope for Prisoners be successfully planted in other communities, in places like Wisconsin, where relations between police and some members of minority communities have deteriorated?

"I have hundreds of Jon Ponders all over the country," says Woodson, the social activist who has worked for decades on poverty issues and has strong ties to the Milwaukee area. "This works in Las Vegas, and it can work elsewhere."

Marie Rohde is a freelance journalist who wrote for many years for The Milwaukee Journal and the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel.



The Alma Center takes on domestic violence by addressing the root causes of abuse

Wisdom Walk to Self Mastery program facilitator Floyd Rowell hugs a program participant at the Alma Center in Milwaukee.

Jeffrey Phelps photo

Breaking the cycle

By Michael Jahr

When Floyd Rowell got out of prison in 2007, he had one overwhelming reason for not wanting to go back: his son.

Rowell had grown up without a father and didn't want his little boy to do the same.

His probation officer directed him to a program at the Alma Center, a research-based agency at 2821 N. 4th St. in Milwaukee that was founded in 2004 to serve men who generally don't elicit much sympathy: perpetrators of domestic violence.

The center's 10-person staff addresses the trauma experienced by men who grow up in the midst of abuse and violence, incorporating "trauma-informed healing," education, social services and peer relationships to help end the cycle of violence in their families.

More than 2,000 men have participated in Alma Center programs. The results appear dramatic.

According to an annual internal evaluation, there is an 86 percent reduction in the recidivism rate for men who complete the center's Men Ending Violence program.

"Check it out," Rowell's probation officer told him. "I've been hearing good things about the place."

Rowell had his doubts.

"I'm from Chicago, Illinois, the projects area," says Rowell, 33. "I'm like, 'That sounds cool and nice, but this ain't no 'Brady Bunch' stuff right here. This is the concrete jungle.' "

Terri Strodthoff, the founder of the Alma Center, was once just as dubious.

Unlike most domestic violence-related programs, the center focuses primarily on the men committing the violence. Tasked with evaluating a similar "batterer intervention" program as part of her graduate dissertation, she was incensed that such an option even existed.

"I just went in kicking and screaming," says Strodthoff, who was pursuing a master's degree in political science at the University of Michigan at the time. "I'm like, programs? What? There's programs for these guys? Why aren't they in custody?"

Her perspective began to shift as the evaluation got underway. During interviews with the men, she realized that their experiences and the root causes of their behavior were at odds with the prevailing theories put forth in the classroom and in academic literature.

"In the field of domestic violence, the approach was, 'This is bad behavior, you're doing it, stop it,' says Strodthoff, the center's president. "It just didn't make any sense to create a program to punish, shame or talk them into changing their behavior because that's not the way that people change. It was clear that we needed to do something different."

Twenty years later, Strodthoff, 50, sits in the rambling, eclectically furnished offices of the organization she created to provide that different approach. Her voice rises with passion — and softens with compassion — as she talks about the men who participate in Alma Center programs.

'It's all about the children'

"We work with men who have a background of mess," she says. "Thev've come from mess; they created mess. They have moved so far away from the truth of who they are and are just living to make it to the next minute."

More than half of them have not lived with or had a relationship with their father. "And that," she says, "is a profound and deep trauma."

Nearly 90 percent of the men who come to the center are fathers themselves, she says.

"It's all about the children," she adds. "There are great programs that work with kids in the community, but at the end of the day, children go home. So if we are not restoring their parents to be nurturing and effective, we're missing something really, really huge."

Restorative Fatherhood is a center program that helps fathers develop compassion, forgiveness, responsibility and positive fathering skills. It reminds men that their decisions and behavior have consequences beyond themselves.

"There might be criminal consequences," says Strodthoff, "but there are also consequences like what's going to happen to your children?"

This focus on men has clear benefits for their children as well as their spouses or partners, she says.

Most women who have been victimized go back to the abuser at some point, says Eloise Anderson, secretary of the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families. And incarceration alone does nothing to prepare him for healthy relationships with his partner or children, she adds.

"We should be concerned about their trauma because we should be concerned about their children," says Anderson. "Ninety-six percent of people in Wisconsin prisons come out. We need to question if they are going to come out better, more equipped to be functioning fathers, partners and community members than when they went in.

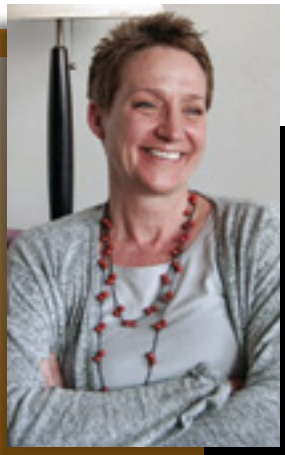
"The reality is, if we don't help people come out and restore themselves, and heal, and be functioning in their family and their community, then we might as well figure out how to lock them up for the rest of their lives because that's what they're going back to."

The Alma Center's emphasis on getting to the core issues of the abuse helps the offender redefine who he is and re-engage with his children, say DCF officials. This produces a long-term, generational benefit.

So, not only is the center dealing with particular individuals and trying to prevent further abuse, it is helping to provide a better role model to children who will be less likely to become the next perpetrators.

"It just didn't make any sense to create a program to punish, shame or talk them into changing their behavior because that's not the way that people change."

— Terri Strodthoff,
founder and president of the Alma Center



A group of men meet at the Alma Center in September. The group, led by Rowell, meets twice a week for six months working to end the cycle of domestic violence. The Alma Center was founded to change the lives of abusive men.

Jeffrey Phelps photo

How it works

Men come to the center in three ways: as part of a probationary requirement after conviction of a domestic violence-related crime, upon release from prison or, increasingly, as self-referrals.

Parole and probation officers have a list of Wisconsin Department of Corrections-approved vendors, such as the Alma Center, where they can direct offenders based on the conviction and identified treatment needs, according to Tristan Cook, communications director for the DOC.

Prosecutors and judges who handle domestic abuse cases also can recommend or require offenders to participate in such programs.

County Circuit Judge Jeffrey Kremers has been aware of the center's work since it was founded and describes its programs as "laudable."

"We require that batterers get treatment, and (the center is) one of the primary resources," he says. "Many victims have relationships with the batterer, so they prefer that they get help that changes their behavior. The hope and expectation is they will unlearn the use of violence in their intimate partner relationships."

The focus on trauma, or adverse childhood experiences, is at the heart of the Alma Center's programs and philosophy. Strodthoff points to a growing body of brain science research that finds adverse childhood experiences have a profound and lasting impact on a child's emotional, cognitive, psychological and even physical development.

Prolonged exposure to repeated and unpredictable violence can create in children responses similar to post-traumatic stress syndrome experienced by war combatants. Boys typically respond with outward manifestations like rage, while girls tend to internalize their feelings.

"We know from neuroscience that what happens to people affects their emotional, psychological and physical development because they are human, not because they are bad people," says Anderson, who once ran a perpetrator-focused nonprofit organization in California.

Both she and Strodthoff have observed the tendency of many domestic violence programs to treat child victims differently according to their sex. Girls receive empathy, compassion and thoughtful interventions that help them heal and cope. Boys, however, tend to be medicated, isolated and eventually incarcerated.

The theory of social learning assumes that men act out in rage and abuse because that's what was modeled for them during their formative years. This mindset leads to interventions that are punitive and rarely address root issues, says Strodthoff.

"The center was founded to provide more holistic programming for men, taking seriously the experiences that they had (as children)," she says. Of the first several men to come through the Alma Center doors, "every single person was a survivor of childhood sexual abuse that they really hadn't talked about, had never been treated. They'd only been kicked out, punished and incarcerated.

"We began to understand that our program had to take an even deeper approach to help people recover and heal from what happened to them, so that hurting another person doesn't make sense to them," she adds. "The Alma Center works to support men in the criminal justice system to heal from hurt they have experienced, make amends for the hurt they have caused and restore themselves to their purpose and the truth of who they are."

This approach is what makes the center successful and stand out from the rest, Anderson says.

"The Alma Center is so different," she says. "They listen to men. They try to figure out what men need. What they do is allow men who are perpetrators to be free and liberated because they become

independent, responsible people. When they enter the Alma Center, they get a kind of respect that they've never had."

'It changed my life'

One of those men was Jason Bennett.

In 2011, Bennett was nearing the end of a prison sentence for a probation revocation related to the battery of his then-wife. When a caseworker asked him what he planned to do upon release, he said he only knew that he didn't want to return to the dysfunction of his outside life.

She handed him a pamphlet for the Alma Center. Though he already had participated in several state and private programs, he thought the center looked more promising than the alternative, so he signed up.

"It changed my life," says Bennett, a 43-year-old Native American. "I've probably been in trouble most of my life, all my adult life. The Alma Center changed my perspective on everything."

Bennett said the center's focus on identifying intergenerational trauma helped him better understand his relationship with his father, a Vietnam War veteran, as well as the trauma his grandparents' and great-grandparents' experienced as Native Americans, all of which shaped his childhood experiences.

"They put me in touch with the history and traditional teachings of my heritage," says Bennett about the Alma Center team. "It really grounded me. They are an essential part of my life. I never felt that way in a state-run program."

In addition to its existing trauma- and healing-focused programs, the center once provided employment services. Now it partners with Milwaukee JobsWork, a workforce and small-business development program that helps the chronically unemployed find — and keep — jobs.*(See related story on Page 30.)*

The decision to hand off the employment program was an easy one, says Strodthoff. The two organizations, which operate out of the same building, were philosophically aligned and could focus on their respective strengths.

"They do (workforce development) really, really well," she says. "We're very close in our understanding of people."

Funding for the center is provided by state grants, foundations, individual donors and fundraising events. Grants are provided by both the Wisconsin DCF and DOC.

The center has a purchase of service contract with the DOC to provide domestic violence intervention programming in Milwaukee, Washington and Ozaukee counties, and offer services through the Milwaukee County domestic violence courts. The Division of Milwaukee Child Protective Services in the Children and Family Court, and its associated service providers, also work with the center.

DOC's approach evolving

The Department of Corrections hasn't always taken an approach with which Strodthoff agreed.

"In my opinion, DOC wholeheartedly fell in line with the reigning tough-on-crime punitive and vindictive approach of the last four decades and believed their primary purpose was to lock up the criminals," she says. "The hiring and training of DOC agents, officers, workers and staff followed this approach. Until very recently, revocation (of parole) was seen as a success.

Strodthoff says she has heard longtime DOC agents describe this training and philosophy as "trail them, nail them, jail them."

"It seems pretty wrongheaded to me," she adds. "Evidence would strongly indicate it's also been ineffective and counterproductive."

About 31 percent of inmates released in 2011 were reincarcerated in three years, according to DOC data. And approximately four of every 10 people entering a Wisconsin prison on any given day are not there for new crimes but for violating rules of supervision — an exceedingly costly phenomena.

Strodthoff believes that improvement can be made to supervision requirements that sometimes result in counterproductive reincarceration of low-risk defendants — an issue that needs more extensive research and one that the Badger Institute is helping to pursue.

Strodthoff adds that she is encouraged by changes she has seen at the DOC in recent years and welcomes "a more evidence-informed, supportive and less punitive model of supervision."

"Collaboration across system players has been very helpful; enhanced and advanced training of agents and staff has been critical; and a willingness to take some risks has been important," she says.

She applauds the DOC's "positive, forward-thinking and engaged leadership in Milwaukee," including Niel Thoreson, regional chief of the Milwaukee County Division of Community Corrections. "I have trust in (his) commitment to improving conditions for the success of people on probation and re-entering our community," Strodthoff says.

Thoreson has worked with the Alma Center from its beginning, steering men to its programs when he was a Milwaukee probation and parole officer. He continued to interact with the center when he was promoted to field supervisor and does so now in his capacity as regional chief.

Programs like the Alma Center are a component of the DOC's mission "to provide the men and women under our supervision with the life skills they need to repair the harm that they have done both to the people in their immediate family and to the community at large," says Thoreson. "There has been a paradigm shift such that we recognize that if you really want someone to change their behavior, it can't just

"We should be concerned about their trauma because we should be concerned about their children."

— Eloise Anderson,
secretary of the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families

> **"I knew right then and there that what they were talking about at the Alma Center does apply to us, too. I was like, 'I just stopped a murder from happening!' "**
>
> ***— Floyd Rowell,***
> *Alma Center staffer and former participant*

all be a stick. You have to have a carrot as well."

This shift is underway throughout the DOC, affecting community supervision, prisons and juvenile corrections facilities, according to Cook. The initiative will incorporate tenets of trauma-informed care and adverse childhood experiences into their operations.

"Secretary (Jon) Litscher has really emphasized to staff the importance of focusing on rehabilitating offenders and inmates to the extent possible," says Cook. "You want to create opportunities for inmates and offenders to change their behavior and really be able to make substantive life changes to successfully, safely reintegrate into the community."

Cook adds that the department over the past few years has pursued "evidence-based" programming that uses "scientifically rigorous methods to learn what's effective" in terms of helping offenders safely integrate into the community.

Both Cook and Thoreson emphasize that family and community safety will remain paramount throughout this process. But even as it holds people accountable for their actions, the department will work to "give them the skills necessary to keep them from coming back into the system," says Thoreson. "It's a different way of looking at our role."

Evaluation shows success

The good news is that overall reincarceration rates have dropped steadily since 2005. Cook says that research-based, trauma-informed programs such as the Alma Center likely have contributed to the decline, adding that they are one part of a "very large and very complex equation."

The center's own numbers indicate that its approach is having an impact. An annual evaluation study conducted by the center over the past six years found that completion of its Men Ending Violence program reduces domestic violence recidivism by between 84 and 89 percent.

Strodthoff stresses that the study is an evaluation, not a research project. The evaluation compares the program graduates with those who were referred to the program but failed to show up or who dropped out along the way. The evaluation uses a broad definition of recidivism: if a man has been charged with a domestic violence-related incident (whether or not there is a conviction), if additional restraining orders are filed or if his probation is revoked for any reason.

The center is working with a Case Western Reserve University professor to provide an independent analysis, Strodthoff says.

In the meantime, the program is being testing where it counts — out in what Rowell called "the concrete jungle."

Shortly after going to Alma, Rowell visited a friend and found him coming out of his house enraged and armed with a gun. Rowell stopped him and asked what he was doing. His friend felt "punked" because someone owed him money.

The situation was similar to the one that had gotten Rowell incarcerated. He had served a three-year sentence for firing a shotgun at rivals outside a Milwaukee restaurant and for fleeing police.

"And I'm like, 'You're going to throw your life away for a little money?' " Rowell remembers. "I backed him into the house, and I started talking to him and started using reflective listening," a technique he had learned at the center. Rowell managed to get his friend to sit down at the kitchen table and began asking questions.

After a half-hour, his friend set down the gun on the table. Minutes later, a tear rolled down his cheek. Soon, he was crying and said, "Of course it's not worth it.' "

"I knew right then and there that what they were talking about at the Alma Center does apply to us, too. I was like, 'I just stopped a murder from happening!'

"The next time that I had class, I was front and center, saying 'OK, teach me, tell me more,' " Rowell remembers with a laugh. "I can use this stuff. I can stop murders. This stuff works."

Rowell completed the required program, but he came back as a self-referral to take the others. "I did every program that the Alma Center had to offer," he says. He eventually became a peer mentor to other men.

The center's leadership took notice of Rowell's transformation and engagement. In 2012, he was asked to join the staff.

Rowell now leads the center's Wisdom Walk to Self Mastery program, where participants engage in activities to transform the debilitating effects of trauma into strengths that help them assume responsibilities in their families and communities.

He never lost sight of his original motivation. Rowell's son, now 12, is a regular fixture at the center. "He really, really loves this place and everyone here," says Rowell. "He's been running up and down the hall since he was 7 and a half."

"When I did the fatherhood program, I was really soaking it in because I wanted to be the best father I could be for my little boy."

Michael Jahr is co-founder of the Better Yes Network, which connects and strengthens nonprofits that focus on personal and community restoration.

Milwaukee JobsWork photo

Michael Adams, director of employee development at Milwaukee JobsWork, leads a job readiness workshop.

Removing barriers to employment

By Michael Jahr

Milwaukee JobsWork takes business approach to helping ex-inmates and the chronically unemployed

In his seminal book "Toxic Charity," longtime urban activist Robert Lupton highlights the destructive consequences of treating people in poverty as if they were helpless and have nothing to offer. Compassionate people and organizations, he writes, should "never do for the poor what they have the capacity to do for themselves."

It is this premise that guides the efforts and mission of Milwaukee JobsWork (MJW), a workforce and small-business development program focused on helping chronically unemployed people living in generational poverty.

More than 50% of the job-seekers the program has helped have felony convictions, says MJW President Bill Krugler.

"Our whole goal is not to take care of people in poverty; it is to help people help themselves get out of poverty," Krugler says. "By taking care of people, we're holding them down. We're not allowing people to be what they were created to be."

MJW pursues a multi-level business strategy based on the conviction that sustainable employment leads to self-sufficiency and local business growth is necessary for expanded opportunities. The program connects "hard-to-employ" job-seekers with small businesses and, in turn, connects small businesses with larger anchor institutions that use their services.

Krugler initially focused on small-business development, a natural segue after 30 years of work at private equity firms helping to grow and improve small and medium-sized companies. He retired with a vision to apply his business acumen

to urban challenges.

He began by asking large Milwaukee employers to steer contract work to small central city businesses that then could hire additional workers. After recruiting a half-dozen anchor institutions and a handful of small businesses, he turned to existing workforce development programs to find the employees. He quickly discovered a significant gap.

"Most jobs programs are not set up to work with individuals who have truly significant barriers to employment success," Krugler says. "Many times, the person is placed before they were actually prepared to keep a job and succeed at a job."

As a result, employees often would become frustrated and quit or do something that got them fired, fueling a cycle of unemployment and discouragement.

So MJW expanded its portfolio, adding a program that provides training, job opportunities and ongoing support — both to the employee and employer. It was at this time that Krugler connected with his partner, Michael Adams, a business owner with human resources and career development experience. Adams helped develop MJW's unique Employee Development program, which he currently leads.

JobsWork is financed through foundations and individual donations. It does not accept government money in order to maintain flexibility and avoid "solutions" imposed from afar. MJW, which was incorporated in 2013 and received nonprofit status a year later, now has five full-time employees; Krugler hopes to hire three more this year. "It's just been really in the last six to nine months that we really started to build a little bit of momentum," he says.

"Most jobs programs are not set up to work with individuals who have truly significant barriers to employment success."

— Bill Krugler, *Milwaukee JobsWork president*

Long-term approach works

The program's long-term, relational approach made all the difference for Robert, a 35-year-old Milwaukee resident who discovered JobsWork in May 2015. Robert had participated in job readiness programs before and had even landed good jobs, but says he always ended up losing them as a result of "incarceration" or "personal trials."

It became clear that the JobsWork experience was different when Robert started the training workshop: two weeks of sessions that provide life skills, identify personal barriers to stable employment and emphasize spiritual renewal and motivation.

"It was therapeutic," Robert says. "We got the résumé side, but we also asked questions like, 'Why can't I keep a job?' or 'Why can't I get along with co-workers?' or 'Why do I always have an attitude?' "

He completed the workshop last July and was hired by Outpost Natural Foods, one of MJW's "stability employers." He has been with Outpost for around a year, gaining the stability he needs to land a position that will allow him to become self-sufficient.

As is often the case with the chronically unemployed, there were occasional setbacks.

At one point, Robert was designated as a "no contact" with his parole officer and found himself back in jail. During a weekly checkup with the employer, Adams discovered that Robert hadn't showed up for work. Adams was able to iron things out with the parole officer and the employer, and Robert was soon back on the job.

"I could have lost my job," Robert says. "Having JobsWork advocate for me helped a lot."

Krugler says JobsWork now asks all of its jobseekers under supervision for the names of their probation agents and then proactively contacts the agents to establish a relationship.

The stability employers — janitorial services, landscaping companies, painting businesses and the like — combine both grace and accountability when working with those who have been chronically unemployed, says Krugler.

"The stability employment … is an opportunity to work in a supportive environment," he says. "When you make a mistake, you're not yelled at. Rather, the employer is going to help the individual learn from mistakes.

"People are chronically unemployed, typically, because they're making the same mistakes over and over and over again," he adds. "Nobody ever took the time to teach them from their mistakes."

Criminal records, combined with a lack of references and work experience, make it nearly impossible to land a good-

Milwaukee JobsWork photo

Milwaukee JobsWork provides training, job opportunities and ongoing support, both to the employee and employer.

paying job. Stability jobs provide employees with something to discuss at an interview besides their prison time and spotty work record.

The stability employer, in turn, gets "a complete wrap-around of support" from the JobsWork team, all of whom have business backgrounds. Central city entrepreneurs gain connections with larger customers, a pipeline of screened, trained and supported employees and business mentorship.

'They care about you'

Larry, 39, has worked for Trotter Industries for about two years. Wheaton Franciscan Healthcare, now Ascension Wisconsin, had contracted with two MJW stability employers including Trotter, which provides professional cleaning services.

Larry earned his pharmacy technician certification and, with the help of MJW, secured a volunteer position at a pharmaceutical dispensary at a church-based health clinic. Now, in addition to his nighttime janitorial work, he has a second job in a pharmacy technician program. He's looking for a full-time position in that field.

"They care about you," says Larry about the JobsWork team. "Other people, they help you find a job and then let you go." But the MJW staff works with you "no matter what. Whether you've been there for a month or a year, they still stay with you."

And the benefits are more than economic.

Consider the case of D'Andre, a 30-year-old man who showed up at Milwaukee JobsWork with tattoos, gold teeth and a felony record. After demonstrating his determination to change, D'Andre was hired by a landscaping company, one of MJW's stability employers. He worked there two months when someone close to him was murdered.

Adams

"I was able to talk to him that very night," says Adams. "I asked, 'How are you doing?' and 'What are you going to do?' And he said, 'I know what I would like to do — be out on the street retaliating.' But, he said, 'That's not me anymore. I realize where that's going to take me, and that's not where I want to go.' "

"It was a very tragic situation," says Krugler. "But it was so rewarding to know that he had started this process of separating himself from his past and starting to make a better choice. That was a big step."

An individual's determination to better himself or herself is essential for the JobsWork model to work, he adds.

"We combine the discipline of a for-profit business with the heart of a nonprofit," he says. "We're not here to drag anyone along. Do you live in poverty, and do you want to change your life? Then we provide a pathway. Restoring human dignity is at the core of what we do."

Michael Jahr is co-founder of the Better Yes Network.

An unlikely alliance

Milwaukee workers wait outside the Greater Praise Church of God in Christ to board a van that will transport them to Sheboygan-area jobs. The church is led by Pastor Jerome Smith (center).
Tom Lynn photo

The Joseph Project connects Milwaukee job-seekers with employee-hungry businesses

By Michael Jahr

Christopher Lane's employment prospects were bleak. In 2015, the 45-year-old former felon lost a Milwaukee city government job when he was arrested on a charge that later was dropped. With a 20-year prison term for armed robbery on his record, Lane found his opportunities limited to temp work and side jobs.

Then a chance encounter rekindled his hope.

"I was going to see my probation officer when I ran into an old friend," Lane says. That friend, Willie McShan, told him about the Joseph Project, an unusual partnership between an urban Milwaukee church, a handful of Sheboygan County manufacturers and a U.S. senator's office.

The career placement project had helped McShan, 53, land a full-time job with Nemak, an automotive components manufacturer in Sheboygan. The position paid nearly $15 an hour, much more than he had been making at temp jobs. Better yet, it provided stability, benefits and opportunities for overtime.

In 2014, just over 51% of working-age African-American males ages 16-64 in Milwaukee were employed, according to Marc Levine, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee professor

McShan connected Lane with Pastor Jerome Smith of the Greater Praise Church of God in Christ, at 5422 W. Center St. in Milwaukee. The church is the fulcrum in the partnership between employment-seeking Milwaukeeans and employee-hungry businesses in the Sheboygan area.

Pastor Smith starts by conducting a vigorous background check. Applicants who pass then must complete a week of preparatory workshops. Greater Praise partners with other area churches to offer job-seekers instruction on financial fitness, conflict resolution, spiritual well-being and stress management. Those who complete the coursework are guaranteed an interview with one of the participating businesses.

Although the course participation meant a week without pay, Lane decided it was too good an opportunity to pass up. "My heart said, 'Try the workshop.' "

"It was very positive," he says. "They keyed in on job interviews; they keyed in on good attitude." The training was humbling, he adds, "because there were people whose circumstances were even worse than mine."

The church plays another critical role in this intercommunity partnership. Three times a day, seven days a week, the church's 13-year-old, 15-passenger van delivers employees from the Greater Praise parking lot to the Sheboygan manufacturing facilities of Nemak, Kohler Co., Polyfab Corp., Johnsonville Sausage and Pace Industries (in Grafton). Riders pay $6 round trip.

After completing the workshops, Lane interviewed with Johnsonville. He was hired in March as a sanitation technician and earns just over $16 an hour, plus a $1 hourly premium for working third shift. He also puts in a lot of overtime.

"It's definitely a good experience," he says. "The company looks out for their employees."

Tackling two problems at once

More than 40 Milwaukee residents are working full time for Sheboygan-area companies through the Joseph Project. The first cohort of employees started work in October 2015. Dozens more are applying as word spreads.

The concept began to germinate last year as Orlando Owens, the southeast regional director for U.S. Sen. Ron Johnson (R-Wis.), wrestled with two different — and seemingly intractable — regional problems.

One was the high unemployment rate of African-Americans in Milwaukee. In 2014, just over 51% of working-age African-American males in Milwaukee (ages 16-64) were employed, according to Marc Levine, professor of history, economic development and urban studies at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Of white males in that age group, 80% were employed.

Smith

The other challenge was a recurring refrain from outstate Wisconsin manufacturers: We can't find enough people for our growing workforce. The problem is particularly acute in Sheboygan County.

The county is "growing economically faster than any other county in the state," says Dane Checolinski, director of the Sheboygan County Economic Development Corp. (SCEDC). There are about 3,300 unfilled jobs in the county, he says.

Owens recalls talking with an SCEDC representative about the human capital shortage when a light bulb went on. "I said, 'Listen, man, I'm from Milwaukee. I have adults right now who are looking for work. So, if you've got all these jobs and we've got all the people, let's make something happen.'

"So, they came down, did a presentation right here at the church with Pastor Smith and maybe three other pastors and more members of the faith community. After that, we went up there and took a tour of maybe three companies. From there, it just exploded."

Pastor Smith sees the project as a common-sense solution. "Sheboygan had a problem," he says. "They had more jobs than they had people. Milwaukee had a problem.

They got more people than they got jobs. So, let's fix both problems at once."

A win for employers and workers

Anne Smith, corporate public relations manager at Kohler Co., describes the partnership as a "win-win." Kohler so far has hired 13 employees through the Joseph Project, she says.

"The associates working at Kohler are doing well, and we are expanding the opportunity to additional area residents who are interested in employment with Kohler," the company said in a statement.

Lakeesha Lofton is one of those employees. Lofton, 37, was looking for work when her stepfather told her about the project. He had gone through the workshops and landed a job at Kohler. Lofton followed his lead. She is now working 58 hours a week packing materials.

"It's an opportunity to get your life together," she says. Rick Gill, president of Polyfab, says, "I'm just glad that people have taken this initiative. This would be difficult to do by ourselves."

"We know that our individuals may have some bumps and bruises, so the best thing we can do is try to have them as prepared as possible."

— Orlando Owens, *southeast regional director for U.S. Sen. Ron Johnson*

The SCEDC is so happy with the results that it is donating two vans to the Greater Praise Church, according to Checolinski. He notes that no company has dropped out of the project and that the employee retention rate is higher than when the companies did their own recruiting.

"I really, really love this program," he says.

Checolinski offers three reasons the Joseph Project has been successful when other employment initiatives have failed: grass-roots recruitment, the project's vetting and training process, and the incentive of a guaranteed interview for those who complete the workshops.

Owens agrees: "It's an all-hands-on-deck approach that benefits everyone. We know that our individuals may have some bumps and bruises, so the best thing we can do is try to have them as prepared as possible."

This relational, empowering, market-based approach is the key to effective engagement with people in need, says Robert L. Woodson Sr., president of the Woodson Center, formerly the Center for Neighborhood Enterprise, based in Washington, D.C. The Joseph Project derives its name from a 1998 book written by Woodson, "The Triumphs of Joseph: How Today's Community Healers Are Reviving Our Streets And Neighborhoods."

The Joseph Project "is resurrecting common sense," says Woodson. It creates "an expectation that people will be agents of their own uplift."

Differs from government models

Woodson cites several ingredients that distinguish the Joseph Project from government models:

- *The leaders are in the same community as the people they're serving.*
- *The leaders recognize that people aren't seeking a safety net but an avenue out of poverty.*
- *The goal is not to get people comfortable with poverty but to get them out of poverty.*
- *The project is motivated by love.*

"This pastor's love comes through," Woodson says of Smith. "You can serve people without loving them, but you can't love them without serving them."

In an era when discourse on poverty and welfare issues often devolves into partisan rancor, the Joseph Project provides a model that transcends racial, regional, sectarian and political divides — all while providing opportunity and transforming lives.

"This model is trans-political, trans-ideological," says Woodson. "The best ones are. That's what the country is thirsting for."

The initiative runs entirely on individual donations; it doesn't accept state or federal money. The cost for paying drivers and maintaining the van averages about $6,000 a month, according to Pastor Smith. Contributions come from "the general public that sees the value in what we're doing," he says.

Lane is spreading the word to other job-seekers. "I say, 'This is an opportunity you're not going to see all the time. They don't baby-sit you; they don't hold your hand. They put it out for you to grab.' The whole program is geared to let us take charge.

"This program is like a second birth, like a second hope," he adds. "A lot of times you get stuck in dead-end jobs. This is a second chance."

Michael Jahr is co-founder of the Better Yes Network.

Michael Williams works during a CNC class at MATC's Downtown Milwaukee Campus.

MATC photo

Training for a new life

Goal of MATC machining program is to reduce recidivism and put offenders on career path

By Janet Weyandt

Michael Williams was a smart kid with an interest in technology and a bright future. He did well in school and started college-level classes when he was only 15, eventually earning an associate's degree in electronics from Milwaukee Area Technical College in 2002.

Then his progress stalled.

As a young man with a low-paying manufacturing job and a baby on the way, he took a shortcut to earning more money and ended up behind bars for selling marijuana.

Now 33 and living in Milwaukee, Williams was incarcerated on and off between 2005 and 2015, mostly for a string of probation violations that followed his initial drug conviction. He'd already begun the career he wanted, but a decade out of the workforce plus a criminal record threatened his future.

He was finishing his last stretch of time in a work-release program when he learned about MATC's CNC (computer numerical control) training program for offenders. He jumped at it.

With the help of the 14-week pilot program, he gained the skills necessary to complete a higher degree in machining and compete for better-paying work. Nearly two years later, he has a good job, is buying a house and is building a future that he's proud of.

"I wanted it and I needed it, so I was very determined to make it happen," Williams says. "(The program) opened a lot of doors for me."

Inmates as students

The CNC program at MATC started in 2015 as a pilot program designed to give inmates who were near release the coursework, experience and support they would need to secure good jobs after they got out of prison. Funded by a state grant and supported by the Wisconsin Department of Corrections, the program was set up to offer a 14-credit CNC technical education certificate to eligible offenders who planned to return to the Milwaukee area. The goal was to reduce recidivism and put offenders on a path to a solid career with living wages.

Inmates eligible for the program were incarcerated at the Marshall E. Sherrer Correctional Center, the Felmers O. Chaney Correctional Center and the Milwaukee Women's Correctional Center. In addition, offenders who were under the Division of Community Corrections supervision in Milwaukee were eligible.

Inmates at work-release centers are within two years of release and are eligible to leave the facility for jobs and educational opportunities as long as they abide by the rules of their facility, says Cheryl Randall, vice president of economic and workforce development and grants at MATC.

The program participants were committed to bettering themselves, says Dorothy Walker, interim dean of MATC's School of Technology and Applied Sciences,

"They are very dedicated," she says. "They concentrate on the work they need to do to learn the skill sets they need to get hired by a company, make sustainable wages and support themselves and their families."

The CNC program is a good example of what proper assessment and solid education and support can do for offenders who are dedicated to changing their lives.

"This is pretty technical, relatively difficult training, and math skills really need to be at a higher level," says Silvia Jackson, the state DOC's re-entry director. "Training builds confidence. Some of these people have never succeeded before in their life. Now they've graduated, received a certificate and have a marketable skill," she says.

Five rounds concluded

Originally, the plan was to offer four rounds, or cohorts, of the class, including one exclusively for women. Because there were funds remaining after the fourth cohort, the college added a fifth, which concluded Aug. 19.

"To us, they're students," Walker says. "They're people who are still incarcerated and have an opportunity to change and transform their lives. There is security, but we want them to feel as though they are a college student on a college campus."

The first cohort attended class on a third-shift, 10 p.m.-to-6 a.m. schedule, and subsequent cohorts moved to a second-shift schedule, Walker says.

"They're with the instructors, taking classes just like everybody else," she says. "We don't want to treat them any different. We want them to acclimate to being in a normal setting because when they get into the workforce, they will be in a normal setting."

The first two and last two cohorts were all male, and the third cohort was all female, but they all followed the same curriculum: classes in machine trades math, blueprint reading, metrology, introduction to CNC, manual vertical milling machining and CNC vertical machining.

Williams, who graduated with the first cohort in April 2015, returned to MATC after his release from corrections to continue his education. He expects to graduate in December with a CNC technician diploma.

"By me taking the course, I was able to make more money than I made before," he says. "I'm on my way to purchasing my first home."

Williams works for Snap-On Tools and hopes to advance to supervisor before long. He's also considering a career in real estate. In the meantime, he is able to be the kind of influence for his 11-year-old son, Loron, that he always wanted to be.

"I'm an excellent example now," Williams says. "I've got a good job. I'm buying a house for him. It's really for him, something I can leave to him. Instead of having to struggle, he'll have something. It worked out for me because I took this program."

"I'm an excellent example now (for my son). I've got a good job. I'm buying a house for him. It's really for him."

– Michael Williams, graduate of MATC's CNC program for offenders

Who pays?

The first five cohorts were funded by a $703,500 Wisconsin Fast Forward-Blueprint for Prosperity grant from the state Department of Workforce Development and $23,000 from the state DOC.

That funding ends in December. Early this year, MATC officials began looking for funding to continue the program.

In June, MATC was one of 67 schools chosen for the U.S. Department of Education's new Second Chance Pell pilot program, an experiment to determine whether making financial aid available to inmates increases their participation in educational opportunities.

Though the federal Pell Grant program for low-income students has not been available to federal or state inmates since 1994, the Second Chance Pell program is specifically for people who are incarcerated.

A 2013 study by the RAND Corporation funded by the U.S. Department of Justice found that educational opportunities for offenders decreased by 43 percent the likelihood they would return to prison within three years. In addition, the study found that every dollar invested in correctional education programs saves $4 to $5 on three-year reincarceration costs.

"That's a very big deal," Randall says.

"We are very excited about that. While they're still in correctional centers, even though they have more freedom, they're still considered to be incarcerated. While they're incarcerated, in the past there hasn't been an opportunity for them to apply for Pell Grants," she says.

The Second Chance Pell program will provide roughly $30 million in grants nationwide, which is less than 0.1 percent of the overall $30 billion Pell program, to incarcerated students in 27 states. The funds are available to prisoners who are eligible for release within five years of enrolling in a college program; 12,000 students are expected to participate nationally.

The Second Chance Pell program at MATC will be available to 250 inmates, though those funds can be used only for tuition. The support component of the program, which is essential to the success of the students, has to be funded some other way.

Support includes an educational assistant, a lab assistant and a student specialist who mentors the students and guides them as they start to plan for a different sort of life. The support has proven to be so important, Walker says, that MATC is looking at ways to implement that into its regular educational programs.

"That's what really, really makes this all work," Walker says.

"What we're looking at now is how we will be able to put this together. Is there other grant money we can use? We know this is the tipping point on this. Attendance is not a problem because (students) are still within the system, but support is critical.

"(Support) helps with the recidivism rate for incarcerated students, and we feel over time it will also help with retention rates here at the college," she says. "This is something I feel very passionate about. We're going to find the monies to keep it going."

Randall says one way to judge the success of the support

MATC photo

Williams expects to graduate from MATC in December with a CNC technician diploma.

component is to look at the completion rate for the CNC program for offenders. In its first five cohorts, it had an 82 percent completion rate, higher than the rate for the regular ed program, which she declined to spell out. However, the two programs are not identical, so exact comparisons cannot be made, she notes.

To qualify for the next round of the CNC program, offenders will have to complete the FAFSA requirements (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) in addition to being within five years of release. Walker expects the next cohort to begin before the end of the year.

As with the first round, the DOC will provide transportation for students to and from MATC.

The five completed cohorts had 68 participants, and 56 of them completed the training and received certification in CNC machining operations — milling. That far exceeds the initial goal of the program, which was to graduate 48 students, according to a progress report prepared by MATC for the Wisconsin Fast Forward-Blueprint for Prosperity program.

Of the graduates, 29 are working in manufacturing in a variety of areas: assembly, packaging, welding, machine operators as well as CNC. The students who have been hired as CNC operators or CNC machinists had experience in the field prior to receiving the training at MATC.

Several of the graduates are working in fields not related to manufacturing, and three more, including Williams, have returned to MATC to complete their educations.

'A stepping stone'

One of the graduates who did not stick with manufacturing is Gary Curtis, 45, of Milwaukee. But that doesn't mean the program didn't change his life.

Curtis was 29 in 2000 when he was sentenced to 20 years in prison for four felony burglary charges. His then-wife was expecting their child when he was sentenced, and he met his 5-month-old son in the visitors room of Waupun Correctional Institution.

Curtis took all the classes he could during his 15 years in a series of prisons. As his son was growing up without him, Curtis was determined to do whatever he could to be the role model Jaydon deserved.

"I told myself I had to do something totally different in life," he says. "I always liked the law, but unfortunately I was on the wrong side of the law."

Since his April 2015 release, Curtis has started his own business as a paralegal and process server and is considering law school. Although manufacturing was not his destiny, the CNC re-entry program helped him get a job in machining after his release.

"I pretty much used (the income from the CNC job) to finance where I am now," he says. "I used (the program) as a stepping stone to learn a new skill as well as to do what I actually wanted to do. It helped me catapult to where I needed to go."

Support from business

Employer buy-in is a critical part of the re-entry process, Walker says, and field trips to area manufacturing plants are part of the MATC program.

"Some employers are willing to train; some have an appren-

"What they do impacts not just them but the people around them. It also changes what happens within the community — it makes the community safer."

— Dorothy Walker, interim dean of MATC's School of Technology and Applied Sciences

ticeship process," she says. "We're working with employers to see how successful (program graduates) are on the job site. We'd like to recruit more employers. Not every employer is offender-friendly."

Michael A. Mallwitz, president of Busch Precision Inc. in Milwaukee, is on the CNC advisory committee at MATC and strongly supports the re-entry program.

Because Busch Precision does custom and advanced machining, it's not a destination for entry-level operators such as new graduates of MATC's program, Mallwitz says. But students have toured the facility and have impressed him with their commitment.

"They're getting that good foundation through MATC," he says. "We want to encourage them, not be a roadblock for them. We're excited to help. You could not tell, from the two cohorts of men and one of women we had through here, they had been incarcerated."

Mallwitz says MATC's re-entry program is helping to solve two problems: It is creating a new pool from which to draw skilled employees, and it is providing a showcase for what modern manufacturing is all about.

"There's a shortage of people, and this is a great pool," he says.

According to the state DWD, Wisconsin is experiencing its lowest unemployment rate in 15 years and there are more than 90,000 job openings statewide.

"The re-entry program is much more than a workforce program; it is an emerging talent development strategy," says Ethan Schuh of the DWD in an email. "With experienced or latent skill sets waiting to be developed and released to the local labor market, DOC, DWD, technical colleges and workforce partners view the offender population as an untapped talent pool that has proven to be capable of quickly developing technical skill sets through standard training programs."

And as that untapped pool becomes job-ready, the changes affect more than just the offenders.

"We realize if in fact we can get them this training, they realize they can change their lives and what they do impacts not just them but the people around them," Walker says. "It also changes what happens within the community — it makes the community safer. And people don't go back in (prison) because they have something that sustains them."

For that reason, MATC's goal for the program — to educate a certain number of inmates in CNC machining — has a larger purpose.

"We want people to be employed," Walker says. "We want them to be able to turn their lives around in a positive way regardless of what happened in the past. It's simply the right thing to do, to provide opportunities for them. It's part of our mission."

Janet Weyandt of Sheboygan is a freelance writer.

Pilot project to link corrections, workforce efforts

While Milwaukee Area Technical College was designing its CNC program for offenders, a larger effort was underway to combine the efforts of corrections, re-entry personnel and workforce professionals to create a more promising outlook for a larger pool of released offenders.

Wisconsin was chosen to participate in the Integrated Reentry and Employment Strategies (IRES) pilot project by the Council of State Governments Justice Center, thanks largely to efforts that already were being made to set up offenders for success outside prison.

Jackson

Four prisons were selected for the IRES pilot project: Fox Lake Correctional Institution in Dodge County, Oakhill Correctional Institution in Dane County, Milwaukee Secure Detention Center and Racine Correctional Institution.

"We'll triage about 600 people returning to Milwaukee in the pilot, sorted into different groups," says Silvia Jackson, the state Department of Corrections re-entry director. "MATC is on my steering committee, advising us on technical training in high-demand fields, delivering CNC training, helping us think through other fields where we might be able to train offenders."

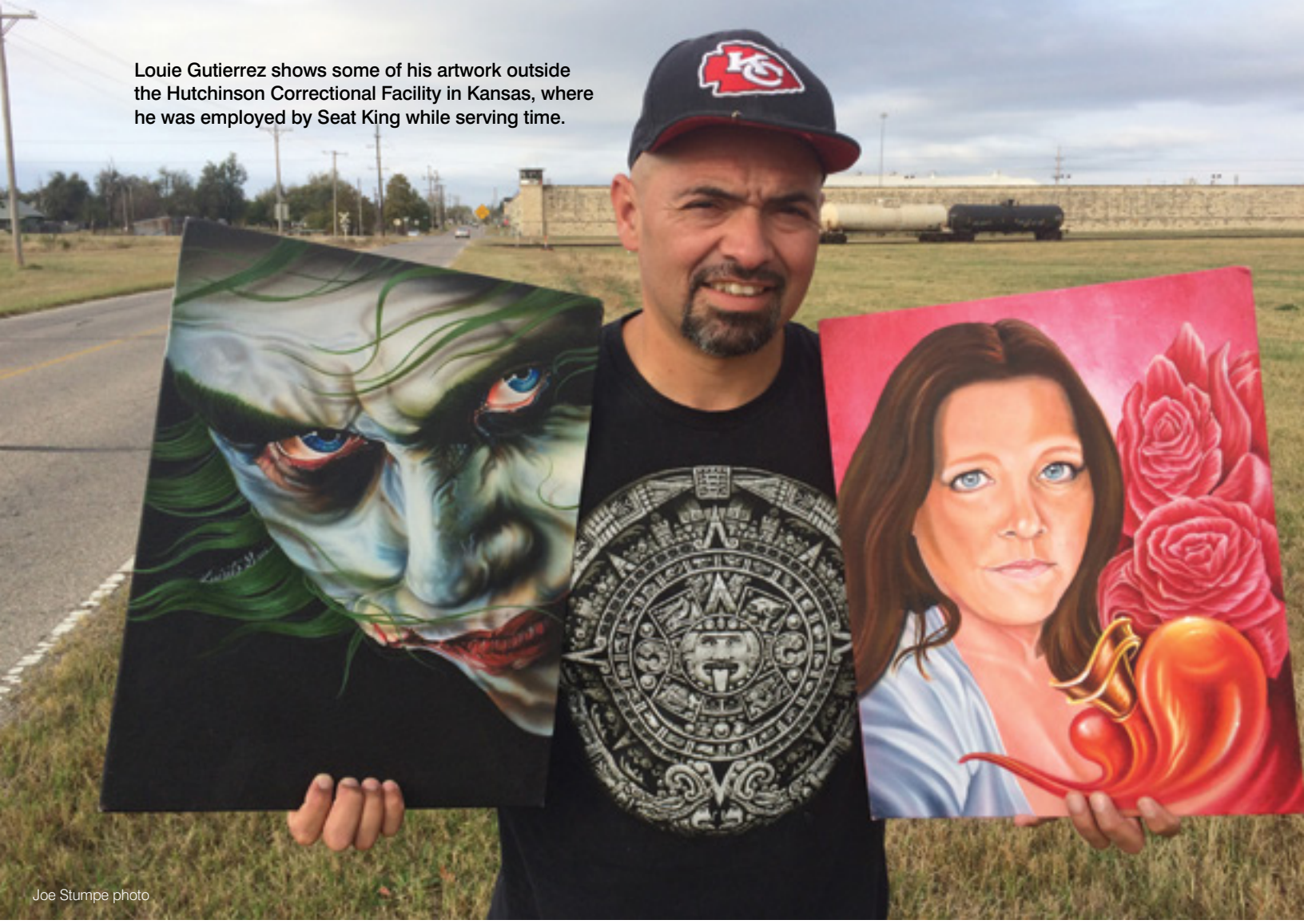
The IRES program is similar to the CNC program at MATC, only bigger, Jackson says. Its purpose is to show that research-based assessment of inmates and strong collaboration between the corrections system and workforce programs are the best ways to reduce recidivism.

"The (IRES) grant is assistance from the CSG Justice Center," she says. "There are national consultants working with us, doing assessments locally, analyzing our data, making recommendations on how we can change our system so we can better serve people.

We want to target our resources to where there's the greatest need and make sure providers in Milwaukee are giving the right type of services to the right offenders."

The IRES program is being designed now, and Jackson expects it to be implemented early next year.

— Janet Weyandt



Louie Gutierrez shows some of his artwork outside the Hutchinson Correctional Facility in Kansas, where he was employed by Seat King while serving time.

Joe Stumpe photo

Private industry, prisons team up

Kansas inmates work inside prisons for private companies – earning their keep and learning skills for the outside

By Joe Stumpe

Hutchinson, Kan. — Louie Gutierrez has lived in this medium-sized south-central Kansas city for nine years, but he still calls his girlfriend for directions. That's because for most of that time, he was incarcerated in the maximum-security Hutchinson Correctional Facility here.

"Private industry (employment) is probably one of the best rehabilitative efforts we have ever made."

— Sam Cline, *warden at the prison in Lansing, Kan.*

Guiding his dusty SUV by the prison, he tells an interviewer how he was sentenced to life in prison at the age of 16 for the murder of a friend — a crime he says he deeply regrets. He served 25 and a half years behind bars.

Today, Gutierrez, 42, works full time airbrushing cars an hour down the road in Wichita. He's also training to become a certified tattoo artist, with the goal of opening his own business.

He hopes to be married in the next year and is in frequent contact with the daughter he helped put through pharmacy school in Kansas City. He keeps a couple of fishing poles in the back of his SUV, stopping to drop a line in the water whenever possible.

Pearce

Gutierrez says he is lucky.

"They didn't have to let me out — ever. A lot of the guys I was in with will never get out," he says.

While that may be true for the inmates Gutierrez knew, nationally at least 95% of all state prisoners will eventually be released back to their communities, according to the Council of State Governments Justice Center.

Gutierrez, who was paroled in July, says his transformation likely would not have happened without a program that allows inmates in the Kansas Department of Corrections to be employed by private industries on prison grounds.

Working for a private industry definitely can help inmates — including those serving life terms — be released on parole, says Josh Pearce, human resources manager for Seat King, a Kansas manufacturer that participates in the program.

The parole board considers such factors as a prisoner's disciplinary record, vocational training and financial resources. "How much money you have in your pocket can be a factor in how likely you are to come back," Pearce says.

Program isn't widespread

The private industry program is unusual in the United States. It is not a work-release program, in which inmates are employed by private companies outside prison walls. In work-release, participants are typically on parole and living in closely supervised community-based housing.

Instead, in Kansas, more than 500 inmates work for private companies with facilities located on prison grounds. At the end of the workday, the inmates return to their cells.

The program was a life-changer for Gutierrez. Working for Seat King, which makes seats for riding lawnmowers and tractors, he earned about $11 an hour as a welder. That allowed him to send money to family members on the outside and save some for himself.

But the program did much more than put money in his prison account, Gutierrez says. "All I knew was just gang life," he says. The program "changed my whole perception of things. I saw that if I set myself to something, I could achieve it. It built confidence in me."

Kansas is one of only a few states that operate such a program, although the concept is receiving attention as figures across the political spectrum call for reforms in the judicial and corrections systems.

In June, Seat King CEO Peter Ochs testified about the program before a U.S. Senate committee chaired by Sen. Ron Johnson (R-Wis.). In early November, Kentucky Gov. Matt Bevin, a Republican, visited to learn about the program.

"It's such a powerful thing that it needs to be rolled out across the country," says Ochs, who was present for that tour in November.

In Wisconsin, according to the Department of Corrections website, about 600 inmates work in the state-run Badger State Industries in 11 facilities, along with four farming operations and a dairy, earning what the site calls "a small income." The Badger State enterprises "have been designed to limit direct competition with private sector businesses," the site says.

Wisconsin statute governs the DOC's ability to employ prisoners and to establish industries for the employment of inmates, and allows the DOC to lease space within state prisons to not more than two private businesses after ap-

"Not only does it create profit, but it also creates social good," says Peter Ochs, CEO of Capital III, referring to the Kansas Department of Corrections' private industry program that employs inmates. Ochs is shown at the company's headquarters in Valley Center, Kan.

Joe Stumpe photo

proval from the Joint Finance Committee. Authorization of more than two private businesses to do that would require a change in state law. In Wisconsin, there are no inmates employed by private companies on prison grounds.

In June, Johnson lauded the Kansas program as "creative and effective," praise that he reiterated in a November email. "One of the most harmful things we can do is denigrate jobs in manufacturing and the trades as second-class," he says.

"They are not. All work has value and offers the dignity of earning one's success. When people are looking to turn their lives around, we should utilize our creativity to connect them with opportunity," especially when employers have a hard time finding people to fill jobs at competitive wages, he continues. Kansas' program, he says, is "a model that other states should consider."

In Wisconsin, inmates can earn up to $1.60 per hour working on DOC correctional facility grounds. Inmates on work release, of which there are currently 738, earn a market wage, and inmates working for a private business on prison grounds would also earn a market wage, the Wisconsin DOC says.

Program's origins in Kansas

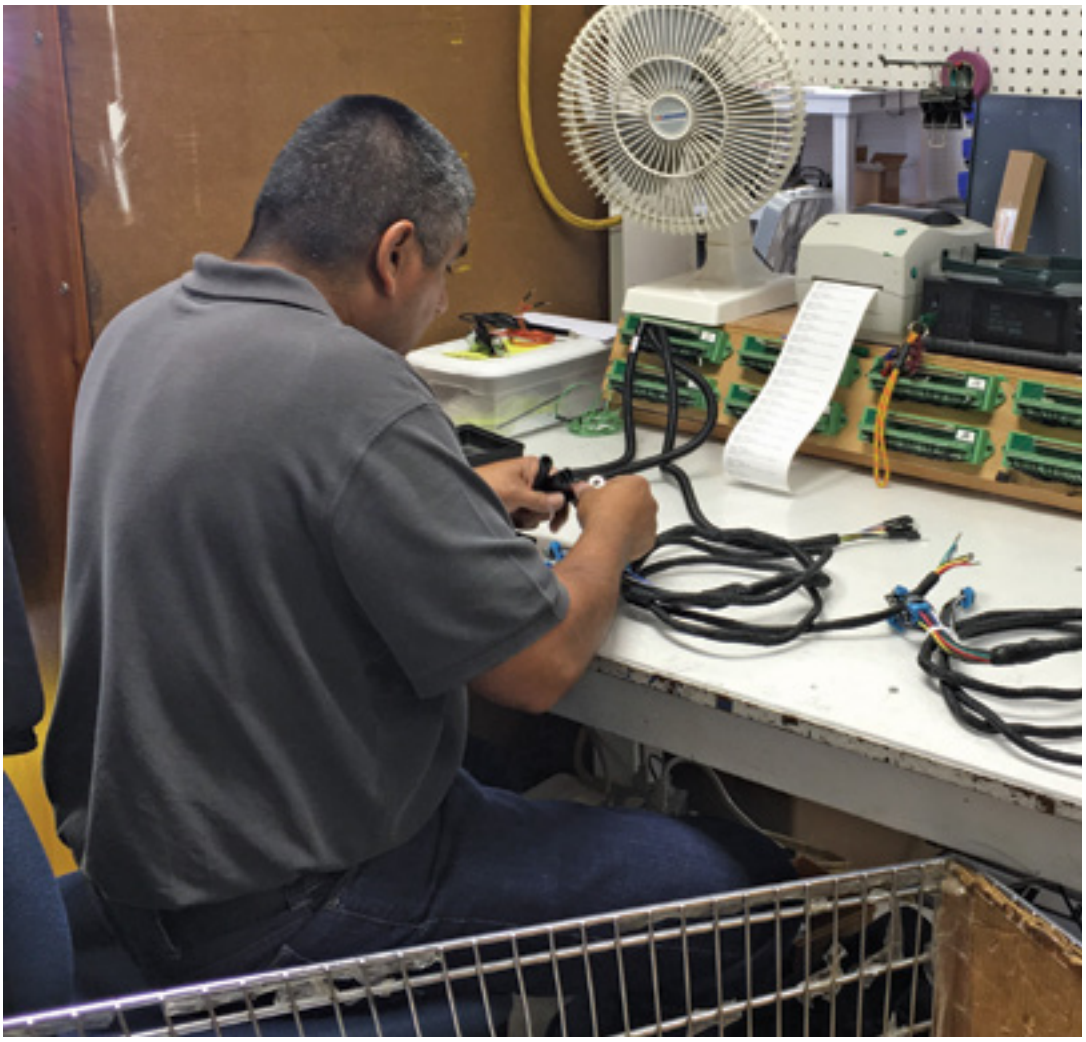
The Kansas program dates back to 1958, when Kansas Correctional Industries was established. According to a recent report, 798 Kansas inmates work for private companies, 527 of them in 11 facilities on prison grounds. Another 271 minimum-security inmates work in businesses located near prisons.

Additionally, 326 work in "industries" such as a woodworking shop and garment factory run by the Kansas DOC. Altogether, the numbers represent 12 percent of the prison population. Seat King and its sister company, Electrex, which makes electrical harnesses for mowers and tractors, employ about 150 inmates, among the top employers of the participating companies.

The program is designed to provide vocational training as well as "soft skills" such as being on time and following directions. Kansas officials say the program is self-supporting. In fact, it generates income.

Since 2011, the program has generated about $1.5 million a year, chiefly through the room-and-board charge the state assesses inmates who are able to pay. It amounts to 25 percent of their salaries.

Kansas prison officials say the program has many other benefits, from reducing inmate idleness and recidivism to helping inmates pay child support, crime-victim reparations



A former inmate at the Hutchinson Correctional Facility, Fred works on an electrical harness at the Electrex/ Seat King plant in Hutchinson, where he has been employed for three years. Fred, who worked for Seat King as an inmate, says the program enabled him to support his daughter and sister. "It made me feel better that I was able to help my family," he says.

Josh Pearce photo

and court-ordered restitutions. Inmates pay income tax on their earnings and sales tax on commissary items.

For the inmates, there is a big difference between working for private companies and working for the DOC-run industries.

Inmates make anywhere from 25 cents an hour to $3 an hour working for traditional prison industries, producing items such as clothing and furniture for use by government agencies, according to the Kansas DOC. They make 45 cents to $1.05 per day in "facility" jobs such as working in the prison laundry. The inmates who work for Seat King make $8 to $15 an hour.

Telephone calls from prison — much in demand by inmates — cost them 17 cents a minute. Some Seat King inmate-employees talk on the phone a half-hour nightly, helping their children with homework, Ochs says. "They have better family relationships."

Opposition or lack of interest

So why, given its apparent success, isn't a program like the Kansas DOC's private industry program in operation in more states? Ochs offers a couple of theories.

One is that opposition exists from people who believe employing inmates may take away jobs from law-abiding citizens or who object to inmates being paid at all. In Wisconsin, where many employers report worker shortages, this could be less of a concern.

The other theory is that private companies may lack knowledge of the program or interest in it. Ochs concedes that employing inmates "is a little messier than just straight-up hiring civilians," mainly because of the security procedures required. While there is little more chance of inmates escaping from prison workplaces, private employers must follow strict protocols to prevent contraband being smuggled in or tools being stolen.

Ochs believes working with the Kansas DOC is worth it, primarily because he sees it as part of his duty to his fellow man. He is also president of Capital III, based in Valley Center, Kan., just outside Wichita. He describes it

as a "social impact investment company" run on Christian principles.

Ochs started Electrex in 1994. In 2005, he began using some work-release inmates from the Kansas DOC. Shortly thereafter, then-warden Sam Cline asked Ochs to consider hiring more inmates, and the decision was made to move a portion of Electrex's operations inside the medium-security part of the prison. Ochs started Seat King in 2010, locating all of its manufacturing facilities inside the maximum-security section of the prison.

Ochs initially was motivated by profit — "I was greedy" — but within a few months realized the program could dramatically improve the lives of inmates and their families, he says.

Inmates create capital

Working for Seat King and Electrex allows inmates to create three types of capital, Ochs says.

The first is economic: money. The second is social, which he describes as "all the things money can't buy: family, friends, learning how to live in society." The third is spiritual: "the moral code by which you live."

"I love seeing these guys change, because they really change," he says.

Ochs says the inmates typically need lots of training, and not just in skills such as welding and sewing. "Most of them have never worked in their life," he says.

> *"I love seeing these guys change, because they really change... Most of them never worked in their life."*
>
> **— Peter Ochs,**
> *Seat King CEO*

Many inmates have mental and behavioral problems. Yet the incentive for inmates to work for private companies is so great that they are well-behaved, Ochs says. There's been "a fistfight or two but no major criminal activity," he says. The state provides guards for the workplaces.

The program also helps reduce inmate discipline problems away from the job, because inmates can't participate for four months after a disciplinary action.

The jobs are highly sought by inmates, Ochs says, mostly because of the salary but also because they give inmates a break from their cells, a chance to do something productive and even a sense of "freedom."

The company offers inmates classes on personal skills such as fathering, finances and interpersonal relationships, all in the hope of making the inmates "better people," Ochs says. That helps down the road with re-entry into society.

"If you're on the line and a guy needs help, we expect you to go help him. If your family needs money, we expect you to send it to them. If we need to meet a deadline, we expect you to work overtime."

Seeing reduced recidivism

In Kansas, about 35 percent of inmates are rearrested within three years of release, a recidivism rate about half the national average. Wisconsin's three-year recidivism rate is 31 percent for inmates released in 2011.

While no overall study has been done of the Kansas inmates in the private industry program, Ochs says 14 former inmates have gone to work for Seat King after being released. Two of them have been reincarcerated — a 14 percent recidivism rate.

He says inmates have created spiritual capital in several ways. Inmates often make contributions to charitable causes serving victims of the same type of crimes they committed. And when Seat King raised money to build a home for a needy family in Ecuador, inmates pitched in so much cash that three homes were built. Inmates also have donated to an $800,000 spiritual life center at the prison that Seat King is raising money to build; it is about half-finished.

This past summer, eight inmate-employees graduated from a three-year seminary program that Seat King established in the prison. Ochs says they have become a valuable, volunteer part of the prison's mental health counseling staff, which has been reduced because of state budget cuts.

While the spiritual side of Seat King's approach is important to Ochs, participating inmates are not required to profess any kind of belief, he says. The inmate work program could work on a purely secular basis and in fact does with other private companies in the program, he says.

More than just jobs

Like Ochs, Pearce says the inmate work program is about much more than providing incarcerated men with jobs.

He tells the story of an inmate who sent his mother money

for an air conditioner. "He looked at me, and he was crying. He said, 'That was the first nice thing I've ever done for my mom in my life.' "

The model makes economic sense for private companies, too, primarily because it provides them with a reliable workforce that can be ramped up or down depending on demand for a product, Pearce says. Fluctuations in hiring and hours for inmate-employees aren't as disruptive as they can be for civilian employees, who have house payments and other expenses.

For any state considering such a program, Pearce says, buy-in from prison officials is key.

Fred orders parts at the Electrex/Seat King plant in downtown Hutchinson.

Cline and current Hutchinson warden Dan Schnurr have been "fantastic" to work with, Pearce says. "If you didn't have that, it would be difficult to succeed."

Cline is now the warden at Kansas' prison in Lansing, just north of Kansas City, which has 407 employees working for 10 private companies. "Private industry (employment) is probably one of the best rehabilitative efforts we have ever made," he says. "The inmate feels he's moving his life forward. They have hope."

Under state law, Cline says, inmates are not allowed to displace civilian workers. Private companies participating in the program do so because they've had trouble attracting and maintaining a stable workforce.

The private industry program is limited to inmates with eight years or less on their sentences or three years or less until their parole eligibility dates in the case of indeterminate sentences, such as 20 years to life. Pearce and Ochs would like the see that pool of potential workers expanded.

"Lifers are some of our very best employees," Ochs says, possibly because a job offers them incentive for good behavior and the only semblance of life outside prison they'll ever experience again.

Gutierrez certainly felt that way, although he eventually earned parole. Once a high-ranking gang member, he had spent three long stretches in solitary confinement for violating prison rules, one lasting three years and eight months.

He still recalls the day that Ochs sat down with inmate-employees and told them that together they could make Hutchinson's maximum-security unit "the best prison in the United States."

"I looked at my friend and said, 'This guy's crazy,' " Gutierrez says. "Slowly, he started proving it to us."

Twice, Ochs appeared on Gutierrez's behalf at his parole hearing. The second time, Gutierrez got out, went to work and now is focused on his next step in a productive life.

"I want to model my business after Pete," he says.

Joe Stumpe is a freelance writer in Wichita, Kan.

Skilled trades program offers a second chance

A student attends class during the 10-week training at Pro Trade Job Development on Milwaukee's north side.

Pro Trade Job Development photo

Milwaukee's Pro Trade teaches former inmates technical and life skills

By Michael Jahr

Rashaad Washington knows that no individual is a lost cause. He recognizes this from his own life experience, as well as from watching hundreds of formerly incarcerated and jobless Milwaukee residents transform their lives through a remarkable program he established on the city's north side.

> **"I went to jail, and I realized this was a system designed to keep me in jail."**
> **– Rashaad Washington,**
> founder of Pro Trade Job Development

Washington, 33, is the founder of Pro Trade Job Development, a construction trade training program that provides technical and personal skills to men and women facing barriers to employment. Pro Trade trains students in carpentry, painting, masonry, roofing and other skills at its 17,000-square-foot facility at 3227 N. 31st St.

This entrepreneurial, community-based model has gained the attention of Milwaukee parole officers, the Wisconsin Department of Corrections and the Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of Commerce. But the plaudits and partnerships would have seemed unlikely 15 years ago when the only attention Washington was likely to receive was from local law enforcement.

His parents divorced when he was very young. His father was a drug abuser, says Washington, and he followed in his footsteps, using illicit drugs by the eighth grade. His GPA was 0.8 when he dropped out of high school at age 17. By 18, he had a child on the way and was living the life of the streets.

"I hung out with friends who were young and fatherless as well," says Washington. "We were misguided. We didn't have a lot of positive examples. Some of my friends robbed people, some killed people, unfortunately, and some were killed."

Every indication was that he was on the same path.

But the convergence of three milestone events in 2002 and 2003 caused him to reassess his lifestyle. His daughter was born, he became a Christian and he served a short stint in jail.

"I went to jail, and I realized this was a system designed to keep me in jail," says Washington, who had received a weeklong sentence and 1.5 years of probation for smoking marijuana. He knew he had to take steps to avoid the cycle of incarceration that traps so many young African-American males.

Pro Trade Job Development photo

Pro Trade trains students in carpentry, painting, masonry, roofing and other construction trades at its Milwaukee facility. The program has graduated 120 students.

At the same time, his newfound Christianity taught him that "faith without works is dead." His internal faith, in other words, needed to produce outward fruit.

His greatest motivation, though, was his newborn daughter. "I wanted to create a comfortable life for my daughter," Washington says. "That meant I needed to have a good-paying job."

"I had to disassociate from my friends," he adds, "and basically start a new life."

Training program is born

Determined to get some practical experience, he approached a construction firm and volunteered to work for free. Over the next few years, he also worked for Master Lock and became a real estate investor, appraiser and consultant. When the economy crashed in 2008, he returned to construction.

In 2009, he established Pro Paint, a house-painting business. Before long, he was approached by a young man who had just gotten out of prison and was looking for work.

Hiring him made good financial sense to Washington. Through a Wisconsin Department of Corrections program, his business would receive a $1,500 tax credit and $3,000 tax refund. At the same time, Washington thought the opportunity might keep the young man from returning to jail.

Over the next few years, Washington continued to hire former inmates and others facing employment obstacles, equipping them with marketable skills, emphasizing integrity and professionalism, and addressing personal issues such as goal-setting, substance abuse, time management and self-discipline.

Out of this was born a training program that eventually became Pro Trade Job Development, launched in 2013. Since then, nearly 200 people have participated in the 10-week training program that Washington developed.

The goal, he says, is to create "agents of change" — role models and mentors who will positively affect their households, neighborhoods and city.

Of the 120 people who have completed the program, only 10 percent have returned to prison, says Washington, though there has been no independent analysis of the program's success. Seventy percent of the graduates are working in the construction trades.

While most of Pro Trade's participants are men, women also have graduated from the program. One is Jesika Anderson, 25.

She earned a carpentry certification and recently finished her first assignment, working on a freshwater construction project. Anderson was the only black woman on the job site.

While Anderson does not have a criminal record, she notes that most of the people in her class were felons. Their determination inspired her. "They've been incarcerated but were trying to keep their dreams alive," she says.

Building up people and skills

It's the combination of practical training and personal development that caught the attention of MMAC President Tim Sheehy, who is a Badger Institute board member. He heard about Pro Trade after the August riots in the Sherman Park neighborhood.

Sheehy recalls someone saying, "We shouldn't react to Sherman Park; we should respond." As he was looking for ways to do so, a mutual friend introduced him to Washington. Sheehy was impressed.

"Rashaad has an entrepreneurial way of connecting young men with themselves and with job opportunities," he says. "This is as much about building themselves back up as it is about carpentry and masonry skills."

> "This is as much about building themselves back up as it is about carpentry and masonry skills."
>
> **– Tim Sheehy,**
> president of the Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of Commerce

Most of Pro Trade's funding has come from government job-training programs or nonprofits, which often means strings are attached. MMAC has contributed about $40,000 for a pilot project that allows Pro Trade to accept 10 individuals to the program without restrictions.

When Sheehy first visited Pro Trade, he was struck by how many idle young men he saw throughout the neighborhood. Inadequate day care options, failing schools, high incarceration rates and a lack of economic opportunity all stack the deck against young African-American males in these communities, he says.

"You can't look at a group of young men in the city and write them off," he says. "This is way too much talent to have on the sidelines of Milwaukee's economy."

Terry Triblett, 23, of Milwaukee may well have been one of those on the sidelines were it not for Pro Trade.

Triblett was released from prison in June 2015, after serving 18 months for felony possession of a firearm. His case manager recommended that he look at Pro Trade as an opportunity to get on his feet. Triblett enrolled a week later.

The course was very strict, he says, and taught participants as much about life as it did about a job. The self-described former "stone-cold drug dealer" graduated as a certified mason and has worked for Greener Roofs & Gardens for over a year. Triblett is considering pursuing a degree in business management and administration at Milwaukee Area Technical College.

He attributes the program's success to Washington's own experiences. "Rashaad understands people," Triblett says. "He's been there."

Michael Jahr is co-founder of the Better Yes Network.

BADGER BONDS

A smart approach to reducing recidivism and increasing employment in Wisconsin

By Gerard Robinson

What happens to the 2.2 million people living behind bars in the United States without a high school diploma?[1] Some earn a GED, but few gain the degree, licensure or workforce skills necessary to participate in today's knowledge-based economy.

Once out of prison, one-third are rearrested during the first year out, 57 percent within three years and over 75 percent within five years. Nearly half remain unemployed for up to a year.[2] While that is a national snapshot, what does recidivism and unemployment look like for former inmates in Wisconsin?

Similar to the national trend, Wisconsin's three-year recidivism rate declined from 43 percent to 30 percent for 140,911 inmates released between 1990 and 2009.[3] Still, a lot of work needs to be done identifying successful programs and approaches to re-entry — and finding a way to fund them in a state where corrections-related expenditures are already high.

One potential solution: social impact bonds.

What is an SIB?

A social impact bond is a contract between government and private-sector investors seeking to solve a social problem.

Goldman Sachs, a global investment firm and pioneer in the SIB arena, provides a good overview of why a public-private partnership matters to societal progress:

> City, state and federal budgets may be declining, but the social challenges those governments face aren't going away. To fill the gap, policy-makers are turning to a new financing mechanism called a social impact bond. It's a public-private partnership designed to deliver ambitious social programs to underserved communities.[4]

An SIB is technically not a government bond. Rather, it is a social impact investment. Here is the difference: A bond is issued by the federal, state or local government to raise money to pay for public services such as transportation or social service programs. Bonds are backed by the creditworthiness of a government entity, which makes them risk-free. At the same time, government bonds are subject to an ever-changing financial market. Fluctuations in interest rates, for instance, can negatively affect traditional bond investments.

This quandary encouraged lawmakers to search for an alternative to public-only financing and gave rise to social impact investing. The practice began in the 1960s as a way to infuse more venture capital into government-sector-driven social projects, and it matured into the SIB market that we have today. A statement from a pair of U.S. and United Kingdom leaders in social impact investing described the allure:

> Poverty, homelessness, crime, unemployment continue to plague even the wealthiest of nations. Imagine if in addition to existing efforts, we could leverage trillions in private capital and bring the same level of focus and entrepreneurial dynamism that we see in the private sector to meet the pressing needs for better schools, more job opportunities, improved public services, safer streets?
>
> We don't have to imagine. It is already happening — and it is called impact investing. The idea is simple enough — to invest in efforts that not only provide a return on investment, but also target specific social needs. We can dramatically accelerate the growth of this important market by partnering with government to remove roadblocks.[5]

How they work

Reducing recidivism is a good example of a goal that helps explain the SIB ecosystem.

When a city, county, municipality or state government is unable to curtail the revolving prison door despite millions of taxpayer

dollars invested annually, it can engage non-government stakeholders to identify a solution.

The first significant step the government usually takes is issuing a request for proposals from organizations interested in working as an "intermediary" between the government officials, private investors and social service organizations with a track record of reducing recidivism.

Most intermediaries are nonprofits, though not your typical ones. They have gravitas in the fundraising and project management arenas. Boston-based Third Sector, for example, is an intermediary for an SIB program in Cuyahoga County in Ohio. Enterprise Community Partners is an intermediary that works in both Ohio and Denver. The United Way is an intermediary for an SIB program in Utah.

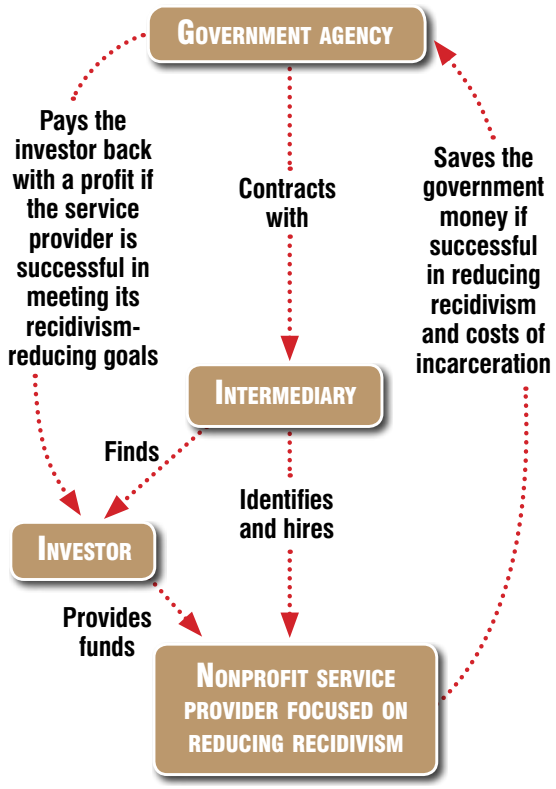
The government uses a RFP process to find the right intermediary, which is crucial to the success or failure of the SIB. It weeds out the bad actors. After negotiating a contract with the government for its services and potentially receiving government start-up funding, the intermediary's initial responsibilities include identifying nonprofits that work directly with returned citizens to reduce recidivism, and working with an evaluator to determine if evidence justifies seeking private capital to invest in the nonprofits. The intermediary also uses independent assessors to help set up specific program goals.

The intermediary then seeks private-sector capital to pay the nonprofits to reduce recidivism within a specified timeframe.

Investors could include either traditional for-profit entities such as Bank of America or philanthropic organizations. The investor generally pays the intermediary for ongoing work, but most of the private capital is funneled to the nonprofits that must try to meet predetermined objectives.

If the nonprofit is successful in meeting the objectives (for example, reducing recidivism two points in one year), the government is required to make an initial payment to the investors. The government pays nothing to an investor if the nonprofit doesn't achieve its objectives, but pays the investor a profit if the objectives are exceeded.[6] The more successful the SIB is in reducing recidivism, the more money government can save by reducing its investment to pay for prisoners' cells, guards, food and medical care.

How a social impact bond works



Unlike a government bond, where payments are made to service providers whether or not goals are met, an SIB permits the government to pay for results — which is why some states call this model pay-for-success.

Philanthropic and other private-sector assets can be used to buffer risk. Investors know this and, to borrow the words of two thinkers on this subject, "Ultimately, impact-seeking rather than return-seeking capital will spur the growth of PFS (Pay for Success)."[7]

The track record

SIBs were launched in Britain in 2010 when the United Kingdom's Ministry of Justice contracted with nonprofit Social Finance UK to reduce recidivism rates for 3,000 former Peterborough Prison inmates over a five-year period. Results showed an 8 percent reduction in reconviction for the first 1,000 prisoners in the program relative to a comparable baseline in 2014.[8] An evaluation from RAND Corporation's European division also identified promising results in 2015.[9] Those early results persuaded others to give SIBs a try.

According to Social Finance, 15 countries launched 60 SIBs between 2010 and 2016. The UK has nine, England and the Netherlands each have five, Australia and Israel each have two and several countries including Canada, Sweden and Germany each have one. Sixty SIBs are in operation as of June 2016, and 22 have performance data: 21 show positive gains; 12 have made payments to investors or have recycled the payments into service delivery; and four have fully paid investors.[10]

SIBs in the United States

As of June 2016, at least 10 states and the District of Columbia have enacted SIB legislation focused on several issues: Alaska (criminal justice), California (criminal justice), Colorado (general services), Idaho (education), Maine (education), Maryland (criminal justice), Massachusetts (general services and workforce development), Oklahoma (criminal justice), Texas (government contracts), Utah (education) and the District of Columbia (general services).[11]

The first three SIBs in the U.S. focused on reducing recidivism, increasing employment or both. Those were in Massachusetts and New York City in 2012 and in New York state in 2013. The SIB

in Massachusetts has shown promising initial results. Results for New York City's Rikers Island Initiative, meanwhile, were mixed, leading to its closure in 2015 after failure to meet its goal. Still, it's a good example of how such programs can work, and also fail.

In 2012, the New York City Department of Correction, in partnership with local government officials, created an initiative to reduce recidivism by 10 percent for all 16- to 18-year-old males entering jail. The government hired MDRC, an education and social policy research organization, as its intermediary. MDRC secured $7.2 million from Goldman Sachs. Bloomberg Philanthropies backed $6 million of the Goldman Sachs amount.[12] MDRC identified two service providers: Osborne Association and Friends of Island Academy.

The program operated from 2012 to 2015. While it did not meet its 10 percent goal, it did reduce recidivism.[13] The city did not lose money on the SIB, though Goldman Sachs did. It lost $1.2 million for two years' worth of work and could have lost over $9 million had the initiative been allowed to move to its fourth year without reaching its objective.

Why did the Rikers SIB fail? One reason could be the sheer number of stakeholders involved, or failure to select the right intermediary — one that properly identifies and evaluates nonprofits, which is a crucial factor in an SIB's success.

Two SIB programs focused on recidivism, employment or both

2012 Massachusetts Recidivism Reduction and Employment

- **Goal:** Reduce days spent in prison for 929 males ages 17 to 24 and improve employment opportunities
- **Approximate cost per participant:** $23,000 over four years
- **Intermediary:** Third Sector Capital Partners
- **Service provider:** Roca
- **Evaluators:** Urban Institute and Sibalytics
- **Assessor/validator:** Public Consulting Group
- **Technical assistance:** Harvard Kennedy School
- **Evaluation design:** Randomized control trial

INVESTMENT

$21.3 million

Goldman Sachs
Kresge Foundation
Living Cities
Arnold Foundation
New Profit
Boston Foundation

2013 New York State Recidivism Reduction & Employment Initiative

- **Goal:** Reduce recidivism and produce positive earnings for former inmates in the fourth quarter of release
- **Approximate cost per participant:** $6,750
- **Intermediary:** Social Finance U.S.
- **Service provider:** Center for Economic Opportunities
- **Evaluator:** NYS Department of Corrections and Community Supervision
- **Assessor/validator:** Chesapeake Research Associates
- **Evaluation design:** Randomized control trial

INVESTMENT

$13.5 million

Bank of America Merrill Lynch
Robin Hood Foundation
Rockefeller Foundation

Source: readynation.org

Other issues tackled by SIBs

SIBs have shown success in addressing a variety of social issues. For example, Santa Clara County in California and the City of Denver use SIBs to reduce chronic homelessness. South Carolina has an SIB to help 1,200 low-income mothers with neonatal care for newborns, partnering nurses with mothers living in 29 of 46 counties statewide. In four years, the program is expected to double in size.[14]

Early childhood SIBs are popular, too. In 2013, Utah created an SIB to serve 595 low-income 3- and 4-year-olds. After putting the first cohort through the program, initial results show that 109 of 110 preschoolers did not need special education services. This saved the state $281,550, and the private investors will receive payments equal to 95 percent of those savings.[15]

Chicago has an SIB to expand preschool for 4-year-olds, thanks to a $16.6 billion investment from the private sector. In 2016, Goldman Sachs and others investors qualified for a $500,000 "success payment" because a majority of 374 preschoolers in the program were deemed kindergarten-ready. Results from both early childhood programs have received a mix of praise and criticism.[16]

SIBs in Wisconsin?

Wisconsin politicians, philanthropists and business leaders need to reimagine how private capital and free-market principles can reduce recidivism and increase employment. Although it is worth noting that a demand for outcome-based contracts in Wisconsin is not new,[17] the SIB concept is.

In 2015, state Rep. Dale Kooyenga (R-Brookfield) and state Sen. Alberta Darling (R-River Hills) introduced a pay-for-performance contract initiative to be managed by the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families to address recidivism in Milwaukee.[18]

Language from the Darling and Kooyenga SIB initiative is included in the 2015-'17 biennial budget (Act 55). It allows the DCF to issue an RFP for a pay-for-performance contract to reduce

The government chooses the intermediary, and the RFP process to find the right intermediary is crucial to the success or failure of the SIB.

recidivism. After a term of five years, the contract allows for an agreed-upon payment on the condition that the contracting organization can demonstrate savings realized by the state (and not by local or federal government bodies) for reducing rates of recidivism by offenders living in Milwaukee. Any contract between government and an outside entity must also ensure that no payment is made unless a certain minimum level of success is demonstrated.

Here are some thoughts for moving ahead.

• Contrary to popular belief, SIB success depends a lot on government. This includes an initial investment that a government must make before recidivism and employment program begins. The same is true for the payment of costs not covered by private or philanthropic investors, such as initial payments to an intermediary.[19]

• Wisconsin should launch a pilot program — call it Badger Bonds. The transitory nature of the state's target population, challenges with poverty and education, coupled with a concentration of former inmates returning to certain Milwaukee ZIP codes, make a pilot a necessity. However, Wisconsin stakeholders should not initially make too large a claim about outcomes for recidivism or employment of returned citizens.

• SIBs have hidden costs. For instance, estimation of cost savings in the form of a pilot are "just too small to have any meaningful impact on the fixed costs of government agencies."[20] A need for government funding also remains: An SIB allows the government to tap an intermediary to capture new funders. In the interim, the government continues to pay for services including early investment into a pilot. The set-up funding should be less than a quarter of start-up cost if structured properly.

• Thinkers on this topic have identified five criteria stakeholders must consider before moving with an SIB:

High net benefits to taxpayers and investors: NYC did not lose money, generally speaking, but Goldman Sachs lost millions. Wisconsin lawmakers must be upfront that losses are as real as possible gains.

Measurable results: Wisconsin must require a government entity to hire an intermediary with a proven track record, or real potential, to do the work.

Well-defined population to serve: Lawmakers must decide to focus on youth or adults, male or female, or both.

Credible assessments: Randomized control trial is considered the gold standard for research because it compares control and treatment groups.

Safeguards to protect the population: Lawmakers must protect all stakeholders involved in an SIB pilot.[21]

Wisconsin could find intermediaries by: 1) inviting one from another state; 2) identifying a Wisconsin-based nonprofit with a track record in addressing recidivism as well as respect from state funders; and 3) asking two or more nonprofits, inside and outside of Wisconsin, to partner in the endeavor.

A wealth of resources about SIBs exists, including information from the Center for American Progress and American Enterprise Institute.[22] Wisconsin stakeholders should make good use of them. At the same time, Wisconsin stakeholders must be aware of SIB critics.

For instance, the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) raises legitimate questions about SIB metrics and impact given the over-reliance as a "risk-free silver bullet" to address systemic government challenges.[23] AFSCME Council 94 opposed an SIB in Rhode Island because "the impetus for this was created by a large Wall Street corporation that obviously has something to gain, ideologically and financially, from the implementation of these bonds. It seems wrong that already very wealthy individuals should be able to make money off of reducing recidivism."[24]

SIBs in effect

Sixty SIBs are in operation as of June 2016, and 22 have performance data: 21 show positive gains; 12 have made payments to investors or have recycled the payments into service delivery; and four have fully paid investors.

Closing thoughts

Wisconsin's executive branch should proceed with putting an SIB in motion by: 1) determining how best the state DCF should design an RFP for a social impact bond; 2) identifying ideal characteristics of an intermediary for a Milwaukee-focused pilot program; 3) drilling down on the type of population to be served; and 4) providing proof to private-sector investors that this is a serious effort.

With this information, a government agency can contract with an intermediary to solicit funding (grant, loan, etc.) to pay for a two- to five-year pilot program.

The pilot should include a limited number of nonprofits with a verifiable track record of reducing recidivism.

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Endnotes: A historical policy dilemma (Page 4)

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