



Moving Men into the Mainstream: The Next Steps in Urban Reform

Putting Policy to the Test

This bulletin is adapted from the third panel of three at a Manhattan Institute conference, "Moving Men into the Mainstream: The Next Steps in Urban Reform," held in New York on June 21, 2006. The other panel discussions are available in Civic Bulletins 44 and 45.

HOWARD HUSOCK: I think it is fair to say that, over the course of our discussions at this conference, the content has evolved from a description of the problem to reflections on how to approach the problem. Specifically, I think we have begun to focus on the re-entering ex-offender population as a specific niche that, as criminal justice expert Jeremy Travis said, is something we are going to have to figure out over the long-term. I think this panel will now point us into the apogee of that discussion.

With us now are the guys who are on the front lines, working day-to-day with people coming out of prison, thinking about what are the right strategies. They are here to report to us. I understand that there may be big policy changes that we need to consider, and that the reports that we get from the field may not be the sum total of what we ought to be doing, but I hope that this panel can, at the very least, put a face on some of the statistics that we have heard about and give us some specific information about the approaches they have found to be successful.

Peter Cove and Mindy Tarlow are operating programs that are taking people off the streets and trying to point them toward the mainstream. Fred Davie from Public/Private Ventures in Philadelphia is evaluating an ambitious 17-city program that involves government money and faith-based groups to find out whether that approach is working. Finally, we will hear from Brent Orrell, who works for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and who has been thinking about what role the federal government ought to play. I would like to start by asking Mindy Tarlow to describe the typical person her organization deals with, and how she thinks they can reach him.

MS. TARLOW: The individuals who walk into programs like the Center for Employment Opportunities in New York City are primarily men of color and on average they are in their late twenties. Most of our clients are fathers who are trying to make a connection or a re-connection with their children. Most people who come home from prison

and come to places like CEO or America Works have limited to no work experience, limited educational histories, very low reading and math scores, and—most importantly—fragile family and community ties. Difficult housing situations and tricky relationships can be very hard for anyone to navigate, but those challenges are particularly pronounced when incarceration has literally and physically disconnected someone from his relationships, family, and community. The number one priority of people coming out of prison and to programs like ours is to get a job.

MR. HUSOCK: But why do they come in the door? Do they have to come to you?

MS. TARLOW: I think it varies, and I appreciate you raising that point because I think it is an important one. About half of our clients come to CEO because the criminal justice system has mandated them to come. In many cases, the condition of someone's release is either that they generally seek, obtain, and maintain employment, or a requirement that they show up to a program like CEO. That gives programs like ours an opportunity to engage with a person because he has to come through our doors. Others come to us voluntarily, and perhaps they might be more motivated to work, but we are happy with whatever gets someone in the door because we want the opportunity to engage with as many people as possible, as quickly as possible after release from jail or prison.

MR. HUSOCK: How are you going to get them on the right path?

MS. TARLOW: In our case, the theory is to pay someone for transitional work that leads to full-time employment. We believe that the best way to get a job is to have a job, and the best way for adults to learn is by doing, so in our model we put people to

work immediately in a coached setting so that they can build the basic work skills of showing up on time, working with a supervisor, cooperating with other people, presenting themselves well, and making the effort.

MR. HUSOCK: Do you have actual businesses that you own and operate where you can place them?

MS. TARLOW: In our situation, the transitional work is with supervised work crews that work in and around government facilities throughout New York City. Folks do maintenance and repair work for government agencies each day, and get paid state minimum wage.

MR. HUSOCK: America Works has had a lot of experience with welfare mothers as a contractor to the state. Peter was involved in the first wave of working with welfare mothers, and now I would like for him to compliment what Mindy said about the population she is working with and contrast that with the men.

PETER COVE: First, I want to compliment Mindy on the program, as well as the Vera Institute for having started that program. There is precious little going on with this population, as I think you all know, and this has been a very successful program.

This may surprise you, but my wife and I, in our 25 years with American Works, have seen that the ex-offenders often do better in holding jobs and succeeding than the welfare recipients.

MR. HUSOCK: Men do better than women do?

MR. COVE: It is unproven, and it may be counterintuitive, but our experience is telling us that the men are doing better than the women are. I can give you some anecdotal evidence.

Number one, if you get to the men right as they are coming out of jail, they have learned to take orders, while the women we have coming to us often do not particularly enjoy taking orders from anyone. These men coming to us will be subservient, and when someone asks them to get a cup of coffee, they will do that without giving lip back to the supervisor. We are finding that employers like them, and this is terribly important. Do all employers like them? No, of course not. Is there discrimination in terms of ex-offenders? Of course, but we have had no problem whatsoever finding work for the men.

MR. HUSOCK: Peter, we are hearing that the economy is tilted against former prisoners and there is legal and racial discrimination against them. What does the situation look like? What jobs are they taking?

MR. COVE: We heard the same thing about welfare recipients before we established work requirements, but to everyone's surprise, companies were willing to hire welfare recipients, who succeeded there. What employers see are people who are willing to work, and frankly, who will do some of the jobs that other people are unwilling to do, such as heavy lifting. Men who come out of prison are usually physically strong, and physical work pays pretty well and usually includes benefits, and hopefully keeps them away from crime. We are finding that companies are very willing to accept workers coming out of prison, but we have to do it right, and I think America Works learned some important lessons in this respect from its work with welfare recipients. We could never sell welfare recipients to businesses, but instead we sold a service—good employees who would stay—and that is exactly what we do with ex-offenders. We do not approach businesses and ask them to do something good for somebody who has paid their debt to society; we tell them that we found somebody who will come to work on time, who will do the things that they need done, and we will monitor that.

MR. HUSOCK: So you are acting as an employment agency?

MR. COVE: We are very much an employment agency. Think of us as Manpower Inc., but for people who are less likely to get into the mainstream. We have a tough sales force that works for us, and they are paid for performance because we are a for-profit company; the more people they get into jobs and the longer they stay in those jobs, the more money our staff makes.

I would like to make another comment. The issue that we are facing in terms of moving men into the mainstream is the absent father, and until we get at programs that actually bring about a successful re-entry of the man into the family, we are going to continue to discuss peripheral issues. If we really want to look at the root of our societal problems in the inner city, we need to look at fathers; we have seen that their reintegration into their children's lives makes a significant difference in the child's life and in the man's life as well. We are not proposing policies that will reintegrate the man into the family; we are discussing moving men into the mainstream, but have not talked about moving men back into their families.

MR. HUSOCK: Well, at the same time we have to do something first. Large social changes that have evolved over decades are hard to get a handle on quickly. Should we do something about it? Yes, but we have to do some things first. You are not paralyzed because there is such a larger problem—you are doing something to improve the situation.

I would like to ask Fred Davie to tell us about Ready4Work and how that program should be structured to be on a path to success. Do you see promise there, or are these larger conditions trumping them?

FREDERICK A. DAVIE: The project, which we undertook with the Department of Labor, had several objectives: to see if we could build partnerships between faith institutions, community, the criminal justice system, and business; to see if we could recruit participants at the point of exit from correctional facilities; to see if we could get the former prisoners to work and surround them with a set of supports; and finally, to see if we could reduce recidivism. Those were the questions we asked, that was the model that we set up, and we found that indeed we could get faith-based and community-based organizations to partner with the criminal justice system and with businesses to provide a set of services to men and women coming out of prison. We have 17 lead agencies around the country, in 17 urban areas, with about 300 to 400 churches and other community-based organizations as a part of a national network.

MR. HUSOCK: So those churches are putting up volunteers to work with people who are coming out of prison?

MR. DAVIE: Correct. In some cases, the faith institutions are hiring caseworkers and case managers as well, but there are a considerable number of volunteers.

MR. HUSOCK: Let me ask then about the theory. Mindy says the theory is pay transitional work, and in effect, she has government offices to provide that work. Peter is saying that he has an employment agency model and places people in the private sector. What is the theory of getting men from the margins into the mainstream and ready for work?

MR. DAVIE: Given the orientation of this administration, the Department of Labor wanted us to make sure that our participants were put in for-profit jobs, and of the roughly 5,000 people we recruited to be a part of the program, we placed 70

percent of them in for-profit jobs. We recruited about 800 small to mid-sized for-profit businesses around the country that absorb these participants, so we were actually able to place the vast majority of them in for-profit jobs.

MR. HUSOCK: In other words, you are lining up pieces in these different cities. You have churches to talk to these guys and local employers who agree to hire them if they are doing right. Is that it?

MR. DAVIE: That is correct. We learned from Peter Cove, and from some of the work that we had done in labor market and workforce development, that we should really look at the employer as our client as much as we look at the participant as clients. We did a lot of work on the employer development side. We had a job developer that interacted with the employer and the participant, and that proved to be very effective. The only other thing I would say is that many of the employers told us that our labor pool of men and women coming out of jail—primarily African-American men between the ages of 18 and 34—were not that different from the labor pool from which they choose their workforce anyway; the only difference is that our men and women came with a set of supports that the general labor pool does not.

MR. HUSOCK: So it is possible that they will be more attractive. Where do they work? Do they work at Home Depot?

MR. DAVIE: Home Depot, yes, and they work at prefab housing manufacturing firms, coffee shops, and those are just some of the ones that I visited.

MR. HUSOCK: Wal-Mart?

MR. DAVIE: Wal-Mart, yes, but they mainly work in small to mid-size businesses—packaging companies and things like that.

MR. HUSOCK: I want to get to Brent Orrell, especially on the issue of scale, but I just want to point out that while we have heard so much about the problem. Fred Davie is telling us that there is a significant initiative going on in 17 cities, so we are not at ground zero.

MS. TARLOW: I would like to clarify something that might not be as clear as I meant it to be. At CEO, and I think with other paid transitional work organizations such as America Works and the Transitional Work Corporation, the point of the transitional work is to lead to unsubsidized, full-time employment. Toward this end, we start out with these paid transitional government-oriented jobs, and then we use that transitional employment experience as a gateway to a full-time, unsubsidized job in many of the sectors that Fred was just pointing out.

MR. HUSOCK: Finally, we have a representative from the federal government who has been helping Ready4Work get off the ground, but Brent, you must be daunted by the issue of scale as you confront this.

BRENT ORRELL: No, I am not. I think that faith-based and community organizations that are active on prisoner re-entry are part of the answer. Grassroots organizations provide a level of intervention in the lives of individuals that larger institutions simply cannot replicate, and a lot of that is related to the mentoring component. If we had to pay for mentors for this population, we could not do it; we have to access the volunteer resources that are available inside grassroots organizations, particularly faith-based organizations. One of the startling findings coming out of the early analysis on Ready4Work is the role that mentoring plays in helping people find and retain employment. In this project, a participant is about 63 percent more likely to find a job and 35 percent more likely to keep a job if they have a mentor. That is an important

finding, and it is especially important because we have so little research on the issue of mentoring adults. When we talk about mentoring, we are usually talking about youth with the Amachi Program or some other program that targets youth or children. The numbers coming in off Ready4Work indicate that having those supports in the form of a friend is going to be extremely important in terms of someone's ability to find and retain employment.

MR. HUSOCK: When you say that you could not do this program without volunteer mentors, some people would say that is because the government is unwilling to spend what it takes, right? They would say that the government needs to spend more because the scale of this problem is too big to trust to informal, spontaneously organized churches that may or may not hit the target, right? What is the plan for getting to the 600,000 people who are coming out of jail every year?

MR. ORRELL: I think if you try to turn this into a money question, you are ultimately going to undermine this.

MR. HUSOCK: I am trying to turn it into a scale question.

MR. ORRELL: The scale question is this: when the President's Prisoner Re-Entry Initiative, which is loosely modeled on Ready4Work, hit the streets we got 500 applications for about 40 grants. There is clearly more capacity out there that we can utilize. We do not know how large that capacity will ultimately be, but the fact of the matter is that Fred and PPV's project management team has been able to help these organizations expand their capacity. There is more to do out there.

The other thing I would note on the mentoring issue is that the other remarkable aspect of this is the

ability of faith institutions to recruit men to be mentors, which is critical when you are dealing with a population returning from prison that is 80 or 90 percent male. You need men to be involved. The pastors have made this part of their mission, and 75 percent of the people who have agreed to be mentors in this project are men. This means that, given the disproportionate number of women versus men who actually attend church, they are effectively mining these congregations for men to participate in this project. This is very important, because there are thousands of grassroots organizations in neighborhoods where there is often no other institution.

MR. HUSOCK: What is a grassroots organization? Give me a name, and where are they?

MR. ORRELL: In Jacksonville, Florida, Operation New Hope is a faith-based, community development corporation that works on housing. They tried to hire ex-offenders to work on projects, but they ultimately transitioned into helping ex-offenders return to the core neighborhoods of Jacksonville, where they link up with other employers and work with the pastors in the surrounding community to find mentors to support those individuals.

MR. HUSOCK: Fred, let me ask you, what is the formula? I think we have to cope with the idea that demonstration projects are nice, but we have a big problem here, and we may not even think it is a good idea to have a major new federal program to do it, right?

MR. DAVIE: Let me just address the scale issue if I can. Another strategy that we are pursuing now is a state-by-state strategy. We have had some early conversations with Brent and others about that because it is our belief that ultimately this is a state issue, because men and women are usually in state

and local correctional facilities. They come back to communities and cities, and it is the governors of the states and the mayors of the cities who really have to grapple with this question, so we are beginning to retool our thinking about this to see if we can develop a state strategy.

Brent Orrell mentioned the President's Re-Entry Initiative, and you all should know that Brent pretty much single-handedly got a request for 300 million dollars over four years to support this work into the President's January 2004 State of the Union Address. Unfortunately, Congress did not fund it to that degree, but it put the whole re-entry question on the national agenda in a way it had not been before. It led *The New York Times* to opine that they were surprised that this was even of interest to the President at all. Unfortunately, there is not the political will on the Hill right now to really support this kind of work.

MR. HUSOCK: Maybe you would agree with Reverend Goode that looking to state corrections budgets might be a good way to go?

MR. DAVIE: I got the idea from him.

MR. HUSOCK: If we are going to talk about scale, I would love to ask Mindy and Peter, what are the mistakes that we might make? What are the mistakes that you have made, and what causes people to go off the rails programmatically?

MS. TARLOW: First I think you can make a big mistake in thinking that boutique programs can go to scale. You know, you can spend many resources on a couple hundred people and have some fairly good outcomes, but then to say that we want to do the same thing for 20,000 people is probably not going to happen. I think we have made those mistakes, in trying to figure out what is and what is not scalable. I also think that when you are looking

to scale you have to be very clear about what works in one place and what works in another. We are trying to avoid those kinds of mistakes at CEO by not being doctrinaire about the CEO model. We want people to be able to adapt to their own jurisdictions, and to their own political and geographic landscapes, which can be an important difference between urban and rural communities. There are many things to think about community by community and jurisdiction by jurisdiction—such as the availability of public transportation—that really matter when you are trying to bring these projects to scale.

Finally, I will say a word about one of the things that works, and I appreciate Peter mentioning the Vera Institute of Justice. I think organizations like Vera and PPV bring in the capacity to experiment and do demonstration projects, and then to prove that they work so that government agencies can actually help us bring things to scale.

MR. HUSOCK: Peter, do you want to answer the question about where we could go off the rails?

MR. COVE: Yes, I do. America Works fought very hard against education and training as a first strike in getting welfare recipients off welfare. We knew we were right, but Senator Moynihan fought us for years until Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC) finally said that it did not seem to work. It is not that education and training are not good ideas, rather it is a matter of where you place it, and we always felt work first was the best way to go, and the welfare reform bill that Clinton signed reflected that.

It is the same thing with transitional jobs; it is our belief that you first want to try to get a person into a private-sector job. If that does not work then you use the transitional jobs or public jobs as a way to reintegrate the individual into the world of work.

America Works has not been against transitional jobs or against education and training, it just depends where you place it along the way, because if you pay people a lot of money for transitional jobs, you will get a lot of people in transitional jobs. Some of them might find their way to the private sector, but if you put the emphasis first on attachment to the private labor market and then use the transitional jobs as a back up, I think you will find greater success. Welfare reform proved this, and I do not want us to repeat mistakes in working with ex-offenders.

MR. ORRELL: I want to pick up on that point because the Administration for Children and Families (HHS) just published another study showing that education and training does not help people find and retain jobs or increase their earnings. In fact, education and training programs seem to make a negative difference. Attachment to work is extremely important as the very first principle, and that is what we have tried to do in Ready4Work. America Works has a great theory of operation, which realizes that somebody is not necessarily going to attach permanently to the first job, they may have four or five jobs until they find something that suits them. Everybody should have a choice about what they do in life, even ex-offenders, and the principle of getting people attached to the workforce first is extremely important with this population.

MR. HUSOCK: Would you speak to whether we need to be tough using the probation system, manipulate child support enforcement, and make work mandatory, as other speakers at this conference have suggested? Fred, how do you think the guys that you see in Ready4Work would react? Would you like to have those tools, or do they strike you as onerous and counterproductive?

MR. DAVIE: I think you need all of the above. I think you are essentially talking about accountability,

and that you recognize that the Left made a mistake in terms of how it has dealt with people in distressed situations. That is, it forgets the agency or the industry that I think a lot of these men and women bring to life itself. If the Right has made a mistake, I think it has been much too punitive, and I think we should find the middle ground. I think this middle ground can center around accountability; believe that you can hold people accountable for what they do, and then try to provide them a set of supports. We should provide what Brent Orrell has called the iron fist of accountability in the velvet glove of social supports. If we do that, I think we get the best of both worlds, so all of those things should be a part of a package that we deliver to these men and women who are re-entering communities after a time in prison.

MR. COVE: Just to give you a quick history lesson, we had a company in Albany about 12 years ago, and we were running a welfare-to-work program. We also had a company in New York City running a welfare-to-work program. In Albany, the Commissioner decided that he was going to make enforcement and requiring work a centerpiece, and he was willing to cut people off if they did not go to work. In New York City, on the other hand, Mayor Giuliani was not in office yet, and we did not have the same requirements as in Albany. We looked at our retention rates after placing people in jobs in Albany and in New York City, and to no one's surprise, they were much higher in Albany than they were in New York City. Having that stick is critical to the success of any efforts to reintegrate people.

LINDA MILLS: I am a consultant with the Annie E. Casey Foundation. With welfare reform the stick was that you would not get the grant if you did not comply. In Florida, for instance, the vast majority of people released from prison have completed their sentences—Florida has truth in sentencing—and they will not get parole, so there is no analogous

stick. I am wondering, in that case, what is the stick that you use, or is it all carrots?

MR. DAVIE: I guess I would respond by saying that, if you are a returning offender, despair is its own stick. People are in dire need of making this transition, so they try to find their way to organizations that will help them. If they have a requirement to get a job within two weeks, which most ex-offenders do, they are looking for people who can help them find work.

MR. HUSOCK: I think that is one of the open questions that comes out of this gathering. What are the sticks, and what would be too punitive? Is child support enforcement arrears a form of stick?

MR. DAVIE: We cannot believe that the people who are coming out of jail do not have some desire to improve their lives; it just happens that very often when they take that step there is nobody to support and help them. I think that if we start with the assumption that people have industry, agency, and imagination, and they really do dream about doing well once they got out of prison, we can capture that and try to help people make that happen when the harsh realities of what it means to be an ex-offender confront them.

ERIC WHITE: I work with Catholic Charities USA in Washington, D.C. The *Washington Post* recently ran an article that I think had relevance for many of us. In the opening paragraph it said there are three Black boys, each about 6 or 7 years old, and in ten years one boy will be dropping out of school, one boy will be on track to the mainstream, and one will be in the valley of decision. I have a question, because we have been talking about the boy who has dropped out of school and is a criminal, but we have not talked about public policies to influence the young man who is in the valley of decision. If you think about it from an economic

prospective, what is a greater return on investment, the young man who is in trouble and has dropped out—as tragic and deserving of our attention as that is—or the young man who is still in the valley of decision? Is there any conversation from a public policy standpoint that will capture those young men before they make the decision to drop out or become criminals? I ask because, while there are a number of men of color who are criminals, not all of them are; yet they still find themselves disconnected from the mainstream.

MR. HUSOCK: Reverend W. Wilson Goode Sr., director of the Amachi Program, focused on the fact that the best re-entry is no entry into prison at all.¹ His idea is to mentor children of incarcerated persons because they have a far greater likelihood of going to prison, so that would be his answer to your question.

MR. WHITE: Seven of those eight children that do not go to jail have an absent father, so they also need a mentor. I recognize that. My question is will there be conversations regarding those other children, or are we going to wait until they fall into prison?

MR. HUSOCK: Professor Ron Mincy and Abbie Thernstrom have discussed how to structure education to do that.²

MR. DAVIE: Most of the resources currently focused on communities of distress are for prevention work and not on the kind of intervention that we are discussing here. I do not think we have done it very well as a public. We did an analysis of 50 top foundations that give in the areas of children and youth, and most of the money goes to 0 to 12 year olds, and after age 12 it drops off precipitously, and once you get to 16 year olds there is almost

nothing. Federal money is probably about the same, except I suspect once you factor in what goes into corrections it is tilted a little. I think the problem here is not a lack of resources or attention on that child in the valley of decision, rather, I think it is the quality of alternatives. One of the things that we are going to wrestle with at PPV over the next year is the question of how to get values in the social programming so that a kid who is trying to choose between messages they hear from us and what they hear from 50 Cent decides to choose our side. That is the real struggle, and there is not a quality program out there to help prepare that kid to make the right decision.

STEVENSON DUNN: I am from the National Society of Black Engineers. The issues that we are discussing are mainstreaming Black men, the struggle of Black men, and the plight of Black men in society. How do we help address the active involvement of Black men?

MR. DAVIE: Initially when we set out to recruit mentors for the programs that we have launched and studied, we really focused on trying to recruit African-Americans from the urban core, and we were not very successful. Instead, we discovered that there was a great desire on the part of African-Americans who had done well and moved out of the urban center to "give back." So we worked with the pastors of local congregations and with fraternities, and we were able to recruit for Ready4Work. In fact, the majority of the men who volunteer in the Ready4Work program are Black men.

Clearly, Black men are under-represented in places where we really want and need to be, and over-represented in other places where they obviously should not be.

1. See Civic Bulletin 45.

2. See Civic Bulletin 44.

NOTES

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