

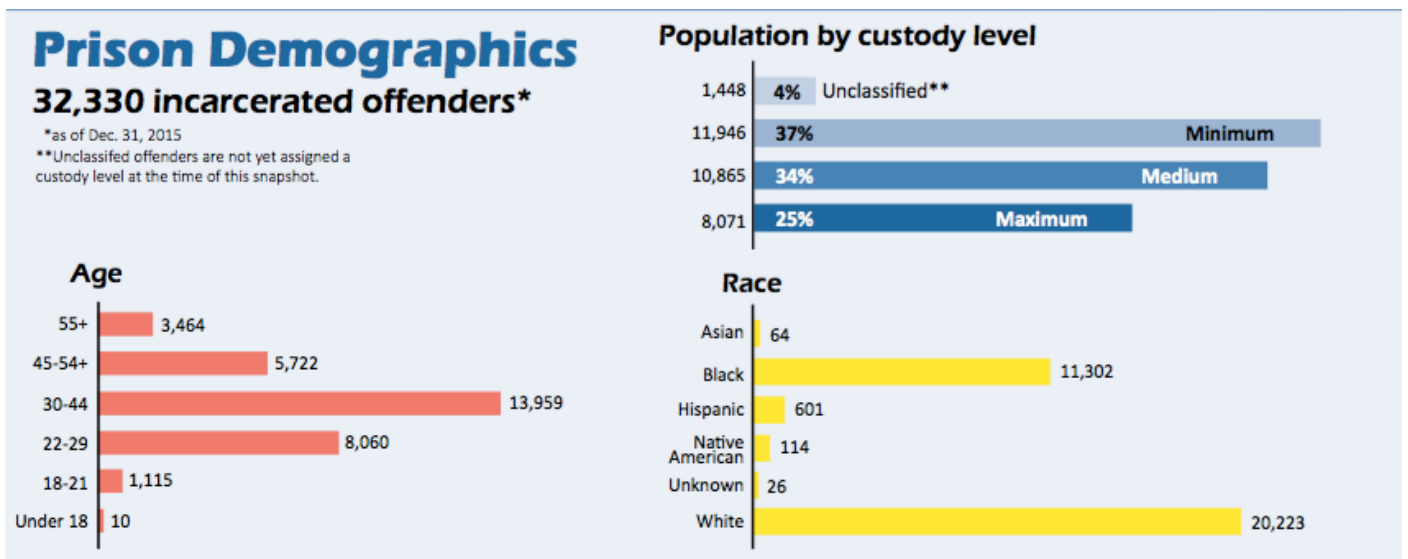
“We need to provide a path for returning citizens and their families to become productive members of our communities.”—Julie Kempker, Missouri Probation & Parole Chief State Supervisor

This week, the Annie E. Casey Foundation released a report—*A Shared Sentence: The Devastating Toll of Parental Incarceration on Children, Families and Communities*—with policy recommendations focused on children of incarcerated parents. At the same time, the U.S. Justice Department designated the week of April 24-30, 2016, as [National Reentry Week](#) highlighting the value of reentry programs and services from state agencies to communities. Missouri KIDS COUNT joins these efforts by offering a two-part series on Missouri efforts, at the state and local level, to support former offenders reentering our communities as well as children of incarcerated parents.

Missouri is fortunate to have one of the best reentry systems in the nation. In this first article, we want to highlight the work of the Missouri Department of Corrections and partnering agencies in assisting former offenders and their families through the [Missouri Reentry Process \(MRP\)](#)—an interagency, state-wide effort to reduce recidivism by providing returning individuals with the resources and tools needed for a successful reintegration into their communities.

OFFENDER DEMOGRAPHICS

In 2015, there were more than 30,000 incarcerated offenders in Missouri.¹ The majority of offenders were White (63%), males (90%), between 30 to 44 years old (43%).



Note. Figure adapted from Missouri Department of Corrections Annual Report 2015 ¹

The Missouri Department of Corrections estimates that 97% of men and women committed to prison will someday return to our communities.² In addition, the recidivism rate has been estimated to be approximately 46% for all releases and 37% for first-time releases in the state. There are many obstacles that prevent former offenders from making a successful return. Having a criminal record can prevent people from obtaining employment, housing, higher education, and credit—all of these barriers contribute to the burden of returning individuals and can ultimately undermine their intentions to turn their lives around. It is exceptionally challenging for former offenders to stay on the right path when they can't access the resources needed to meet their basic needs and those of their families.

Missouri has long recognized the value of supporting former offenders as they transition from prison into the community. Our state has set the standard of excellence in reentry services by taking an integrative, collective approach in addressing the complex needs of returning individuals.

MISSOURI REENTRY PROCESS (MRP)

In 2002, Missouri was selected by the National Institute of Corrections as a demonstration site for an innovative transition initiative known as the *Transition from Prison to Community (TPC) model*—later renamed the *Missouri Reentry Process (MRP)*.³ The MRP model is a philosophical framework for facilitating the successful transition of former offenders from prison into the community. The rationale behind MRP is that the state can stop re-incarceration, break the cycle of intergenerational incarceration, diminish new victimization, and increase public safety by providing the resources needed for individuals to reintegrate successfully back into the community.

Strategic partnerships between state agencies and local organizations had to happen in order to successfully implement the overarching goals of the MRP model. The Department of Corrections started by selecting various state agencies whose mission aligned with MRP. Convincing state agencies that they own a piece of the model was crucial to the success of MRP. Reentry efforts were no longer the sole responsibility of the Department of Corrections but rather the product of strategic collaborations between state and local agencies to integrate policies and services that facilitated the transition process of individuals returning to the community.

Bringing together representatives from different state agencies also led to an important discovery—they were already providing services for the same people but often in isolation from each other.⁴ Such realization strengthened emerging partnerships and allowed the team to identify and eliminate duplicate efforts in participating agencies. Simplifying the process through which returning individuals and their families obtain services became a priority for the MRP Steering Team.

In 2009, Governor Jay Nixon solidified MRP efforts by signing [Executive Order 09-16](#) in which he appointed the Department of Corrections to lead a permanent steering team for the MRP known as the *Missouri Reentry Process Steering Team*. The team includes representatives from the Department of Mental Health, Department of Social Services, Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Department of Economic Development, Department of Revenue, Department of Health and Senior Services, Department of Public Safety, Department of Transportation, Federal Probation, and the Office of the State Courts Administrator. It also includes local community organizations, law enforcement, service/treatment providers, the faith-based community, and crime victims.

In the years since its creation, the MRP Steering Team continues to prosper, and its membership is expanding to support their mission: “(to) integrate successful offender reentry principles and practices in state agencies and communities resulting in partnerships that enhance self-sufficiency, reduce re-incarceration, and improve public safety”. In addition to the work conducted in our state, the Missouri Department of Corrections, along with the MRP Steering Team, has provided consultation on best reentry practices for many states including Alabama, Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Texas, and Wisconsin.

MRP EFFORTS AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

In order for MRP to be successfully implemented at the state level, it was imperative to involve local organizations that understood first-hand the needs and issues faced by returning individuals. [The Family and Community Trust \(FACT\)](#) and associated Community Partnerships have been involved in the efforts for MRP from the very beginning. FACT and Community Partnerships are actively involved in *MRP Community Teams* across the state. Currently, there are 26 MRP Community Teams comprised of community organization, local and state agencies, local law enforcement, judiciary representatives, local businesses, treatment providers, victims and ex-offenders along with their families. Members of the MRP Community Teams work together in identifying and prioritizing the needs of former offenders and are also responsible for organizing events to foster collaborations and connections.

A Look at Reentry through a Community Partnership

Pettis County Community Partnership (PCCP) became interested in the Missouri Reentry Process in 2003 after hearing then DOC Director, Gary Kempker, share his enthusiasm for their new reentry process. PCCP formed a broad-based local MRP steering team where everyone has an equal voice, and unique perspectives are valued. PCCP works with many partner agencies and individuals and their family members on all aspects of reentry. Besides resources for the former offenders when they return to the community, the steering team offers benefits and resources to the children and families of people who are in prison. PCCP currently provides resources in Pettis, Morgan, and Benton Counties with a toll-free number for contacting the main office in Sedalia. PCCP offers a non-judgmental, welcoming atmosphere, caring staff, and a listening ear. The resources available to individuals leaving prison include job training programs, emergency food and shelter, and referrals to other community agencies. To returning individuals and their families, PCCP becomes the stable family they never had. PCCP offers accountability, encouragement, kindness and emotional support. Former inmates who have been helped will stop by to visit, send thank-you notes, call and write, because of the connections formed at PCCP.

PCCP Success Story: Responsible Single Father

A single dad of three children came to see us the day after he was released from prison. He had been sleeping in his car before his children arrived to be with him. He needed help figuring out what to do. PCCP staff worked with partner agencies to find emergency shelter for him and his children while searching for suitable permanent housing. With the help of our partners, we were able to obtain copies of their birth certificates, shot records, and social security cards so we could get the children enrolled in school. We worked with CACTUS to acquire school supplies and backpacks. Our local thrift stores provided vouchers for clothing and shoes. Within a week, we were able to find housing. This father was able to complete his education and is now working full-time. He has been

able to repair the relationships with his family and has built a great support network of extended family and friends for him and his children.

PCCP Success Story: Model Employee at City Road Crew

In his 50's, a former offender, helped through the Highway Heavy Construction job training program, was older than any of the other trainees. The teacher decided to include him in the class because he had an offer of a job from one of his friends in southwest Missouri, once he obtained a Class B Commercial Driver's License. He turned out to be a model student and put his heart into successfully completing the course and earning his certifications. He lived at a local faith-based "restoration ministry" house for male ex-offenders and also received services from a local mental health provider. He worked two part-time jobs when not in class. Once he had completed the training, he decided to stay in the area and work instead of returning to where he had come from to avoid returning to his old ways. Now, this man with 17 felony convictions on his record, is a model employee for a city road crew in a suburb of a metropolitan area. He now delights in witnessing and giving charitably to others, including sending daily emails of faith and encouragement to PCCP.

Missouri Reentry Conference

The Department of Corrections, the Department of Social Services, Family and Community Trust (FACT) and ARCHS sponsor the annual [Missouri Reentry Conference](#). This state-wide conference brings together representatives of state and local agencies as well as community partners with the purpose of fostering collaborations, sharing information about best reentry practices, and learning about the needs of the community. The Missouri Reentry Conference has attracted high-caliber speakers and keynote presenters, including representatives of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Department of Justice, Drug Enforcement Administration as well as highly regarded community leaders. Last year marked the tenth anniversary of the conference—which originally started in St. Louis in 2005 with only 75 participants. The 2015 conference featured 330 attendees, 60 speakers, 4 keynote presentations, 25 breakout training sessions, and 3,778 individual training hours. Over the years, more than 3,500 people have benefited from the conference. Missouri is only one of a handful of states that host an annual statewide reentry conference and has served as a model for other states to replicate.

DATA-INFORMED PROCESS

Since the beginning, MRP has relied on qualitative and quantitative data to make informed decisions at every step. For example, the MRP Steering Team relied on data collected at baseline to identify factors that promote success during reentry and reduce recidivism. The factors identified included: substance abuse treatment, medical and mental health, transportation, education, employment, housing, family and information sharing. The Steering Team developed strategies to address these factors through comprehensive case management plans and continues to use data to evaluate and tailor efforts to assist former offenders in reintegrating successfully into the community.

Factors for Recidivism or Criminal Behavior



Note. Figure adapted from Missouri Reentry Process Brochure ⁵

PROGRAMS AND SERVICES OFFERED

According to the Department of Corrections, an average of 18,000 offenders returns to our communities annually.⁶ While in custody, all offenders are required to work towards passing their high school equivalence tests unless they are deemed unable to do so. Involvement in reentry services is voluntary but highly encouraged. Offenders have a *case management plan* that identifies their assets and liabilities, outlines goals and plans of action. Staff and services providers use this plan to determine the reentry programs and services that address the specific reentry needs of returning individuals. Currently, Missouri offers more than 200 reentry programs through various organizations ranging from parenting classes to vocational training, to substance abuse treatment.

Missouri Core Reentry Programs

- Pathway to Change
- Impact of Crime on Victims
- Anger Management
- Parenting Classes



For offenders who complete:

- At least 1 core program: **6.1% reduction in recidivism**
- At least 2 core programs: **9.8% reduction in recidivism**
- At least 3 core programs: **15% reduction in recidivism**

In 2015:

- **3,720** inmates completed at least one core Reentry Program
- **1,464** completed at least 2 core Reentry Programs
- **542** completed at least 3
- **71** completed 4



On average, there is a **7.4%** reduction in recidivism for all offenders who complete the reentry process through a Transitional Housing Unit




That's **1,757** offenders who were diverted from a prison sentence due to reentry programs in FY 2015.

Note. Information obtained from Missouri Reentry Process⁶

One of the major innovations of MRP is the delivery of reentry programs and services at *Transitional Housing Units* (THUs). Offenders receive intensive pre-release preparations at THUs six months prior to their release date. Staff and the offender work together in developing a 'toolbox' of skills that will promote the success of the offender after release. Some of the services offered at THUs include ensuring continuity of care for providing mental, medical and substance abuse treatment, helping find employment, assisting in obtaining personal identifications, exploring of community connections, assisting with child support and child care arrangements, developing transportation plans, addressing educational needs, promoting cognitive skills and any other needs identified by the staff and offender.

Reentry programming and services are offered throughout an individual's incarceration in all facilities and are intensified within the last six months of incarceration in those locations that do not have THUs.

The table below includes some examples of reentry programs offered by MRP in partnerships with other state agencies and local organizations. This is by no means a comprehensive list, but rather a brief summary of some of the latest programs and services associated with MRP. To learn more about the programs listed, please visit the [MRP webpage](#).

Examples of Programs and Services Offered by MRP Partnerships	
	<i>Training and Employment</i>
Missouri Vocational Enterprises provide apprenticeships and certificates recognized by the U.S. Department of Labor.	
Father Support Center provides training and certification in industry and manufacturing fields.	
State Technical College of Missouri provides training and certification in healthcare, manufacturing, and information technology through the MOWINS program.	
The Division of Workforce Development provides career training, employment, and training services at correctional facilities prior to release.	
Department of Corrections provides the option of developing a video resume after completing the Employability Skills Program to demonstrate the skills learned to potential employers.	
	<i>Mental Health and Substance Use</i>
Department of Mental Health connects offenders with severe mental illnesses with mental health services in their receiving community through the Seriously Mentally Ill Offender Program and the Community Mental Health Treatment Program.	
Department of Mental Health provides medication-assisted treatment for eligible offenders with opiate and/or alcohol addiction prior to release.	
Department of Health implements a new referral process to expedite clinical assessments and placement in the appropriate level of care in the receiving community.	
	<i>Access to Social Services</i>
The Department of Social Services provides assistance to apply for Medicaid prior to release.	
Social Security Administration assists disabled offenders to apply for Supplemental Security Income and/or Social Security Disability Insurance prior to release.	
Missouri Veterans Commission and the Department of Veterans Affairs inform about services available and assist in applying for benefits and services before release.	
Department of Health and Senior Services, Social Security Administration, and the Department of Revenue assist in obtaining birth certificates, social security replacement cards, and identification cards prior to release	
Department of Mental Health and the Governor’s Committee to End Homelessness help caseworkers find housing resources for ex-offenders by creating a web-based interactive map.	

Note. Information obtained from Missouri Reentry Process Report to the Governor 2015

NATIONAL AND STATE PROGRESS

Criminal justice reform is receiving national attention in Congress and with current presidential candidates. In the past few years, work has been done at the federal, state and local levels to ease the barriers for individuals with criminal records. Policy changes like ‘ban the box’ are helping to break the cycle of recidivism. Twenty-three states and over 100 cities and counties have endorsed some form of ‘ban the box’, or fair chance hiring laws, policies, and practices. Federal agencies joined the movement last year.⁷

Missouri Governor Jay Nixon recently signed [Executive Order 16-04](#) ordering state agencies to remove questions relating to an individual’s criminal history from employment applications. This policy will place questions related to an individual’s criminal history later in the hiring process with the goal of providing all applicants a fair opportunity to compete for state employment (effective April 11, 2016)

“These men and women have paid their debt to society and are attempting to successfully return to their communities as productive, law-abiding citizens. By giving these Missourians a fair chance to get a job and support their families, ‘ban the box’ policies can help to break the cycle of crime and incarceration” —Gov. Nixon⁸

FOCUSING ON CHILDREN

According to reports from the Department of Corrections, at least 47,612 children in our state have an incarcerated parent or caretaker.⁶ **Our next article** will focus on programs assisting children and families affected by incarceration—including success stories from parents, children, and families. We will also discuss the policy recommendations outlined in by the Annie E. Casey Foundation to support children of incarcerated parents and how Missouri has programs in place to address these recommendations.

Suggested Citation

Martinez, M. M., Hines, L., & Kauffman, M. (2016, April). Missouri Reentry Process: Finding the Right Path for Returning Citizens. The Family and Community Trust (FACT)—Missouri KIDS COUNT. Available at: <http://mokidscount.org/missouri-reentry-process-finding-the-right-path-for-returning-citizens/>

Acknowledgments: We would like to thank everyone who contributed to the article, whether through interviews or stories. We are grateful to the University of Missouri Center for Family Policy and Research for their expertise.

Funding for Missouri KIDS COUNT is generously provided by the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

¹ Missouri Department of Corrections Annual Report 2015 http://doc.mo.gov/Informational_Resources.php

² Missouri Reentry Process Report to the Governor 2015 <http://doc.mo.gov/Documents/mrp/GovReport2015.pdf>

³ Missouri Makes Its Move Towards a New Reentry Philosophy <http://nicic.gov/library/022787>

⁴ MO KIDS COUNT Interview with Julie Kempker, Chief State Supervisor at Division of Probation and Parole

⁵ Missouri Reentry Process Brochure http://doc.mo.gov/Documents/mrp/mrp_brochure_duplex.pdf

⁶ MO KIDS COUNT Interview with Dena Sikoutris, Reentry Manager at Missouri Department of Corrections

⁷ Ban the Box: U.S. Cities, Counties, and States Adopt Fair Hiring Policies <http://www.nelp.org/publication/ban-the-box-fair-chance-hiring-state-and-local-guide/>

⁸ Office of Missouri Governor Jay Nixon <http://governor.mo.gov/news/archive/gov-nixon-signs-executive-order-%E2%80%99Cban-box%E2%80%99D-state-employment>