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Training Offenders for Life and Work:  
An Assessment of Texas' Project RIO  
(Reintegration of Offenders)

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**Training Offenders for Life and Work: An Assessment of Texas'  
Project RIO (Reintegration of Offenders)**

by

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## **Abstract**

**Purposes:** The first purpose of this study is to describe the ideal characteristics of a model offender reintegration program based on a review of the literature. The second purpose is to conduct a limited case study and assess Texas' Project RIO (Reintegration of Offenders) using the ideal characteristics. The third purpose is to make recommendations that should assist all offender reintegration programs to assist offenders more effectively in the reintegration process.

**Methodology:** The methodologies used in this limited case study of Project RIO include document and archival analysis. The document and archival analysis include a collection of reports published by Project RIO's operating agencies and several independent reports.

**Results:** Overall, Project RIO does not adhere to the practical ideal type model developed through the literature. Project RIO could improve services by: increasing requirements regarding participation in life skills and educational programming; adding a reintegrative focus to the intake assessment of the offender; creating a method for diverting offenders from a return to prison for technical violations; and developing a method for offenders to earn the reintegration of their rights.

## **About the Author**

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## Chapter One: Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The unspoken fact of the American prison system is that nearly all of the men and women sentenced to prison come home. There are only a few exceptions: those who die of natural causes, those sentenced to execution, and those who are victims of prison violence. Americans are becoming conscious of that fact, and aware that something needs to change, so that the offenders leaving prison succeed and not reoffend (Allender 2004, 4). Until recently, the majority of inmates released from incarceration fell under the supervision of a parole officer. Changes in sentencing procedures, the truth-in-sentencing laws, and the abandonment of determinate sentencing have greatly increased the number of prisoners released unconditionally into communities across the country. Not only are more and more offenders released into the community without supervision, they are released without assistance and without guidance (Allender 2004, 8).

Inmates, since the beginning of prisons, have faced the challenges of reintegration, and officials, prison, political, and bureaucratic, have had to try to help them avoid recidivating (Petersilia 2001, 361). Travis and Petersilia (2001, 296) maintain that a “national crazy quilt“ of sentencing philosophies has led to a misunderstanding of the natural relationship between imprisonment and release. It is true - almost all inmates return to society. The development and exploration of this relationship are essential to understanding why so many released offenders return to prison.

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<sup>1</sup> This Applied Research Project (ARP) is one of several dealing with criminal justice issues. See: Alvarez (1990), Beatty (2002), Cardenas (2002), Castillo (1993), Coporal (2004), Darnall (1996), Ferguson (2005), Flores (2003), Jalufka (1992), Kelm (2005), Kessler (2005), Kopycinski (2006), Lansberg (1997), Lopez (2007), McCormick (1999), Owens (1996), Raffray (1997), Revel (2006), Seiferman (1995), Short (1992), Urrabazo (2000), Waller (1992), Welebob (1998), Withrow (1993).

The number of prisons in American has grown dramatically in the last decade. Since 1995, the average expansion of prison populations per year is 3.1%. From 1995 to the end of 2005 the combined state and federal prison population increased by approximately 650,000 inmates (Harrison and Beck 2006, 2). In 2005, 1,446,269 individuals were under state and federal correctional supervision (Harrison and Beck 2006, 1). Local jails held another 747,529 inmates. As of December 31, 2005, one in every 136 U.S. residents was incarcerated (Harrison and Beck 2006, 1). This growth in the prisoner population has led to an increase in the number of offenders returning to society.

When offenders return to society, they are reintegrating. For incarcerated offenders, reintegration is the process of transitioning from a life in prison to a life in free society (Petersilia 2003, 368). Various programs are available to assist offenders with this process. Seiter and Kadela (2003, 368) describe the programs as ones that focus on the transition from prison to the community. The programs often center on life skills training for reintegrating offenders. Specifically, life skills training includes life skills education, academic education, and job skills development.

Programs dealing with work-related issues are important because of the negative effect a criminal record has on an offender's employment prospects. Pager (2003, 955) found that a criminal record could reduce an applicant's chance of an interview by at least half. This exclusion from the workforce of individuals with a criminal record makes little sense in light of evidence that employment status is an indicator of the likelihood of an individual to commit a crime (Kurlychek et al. 2006, 484). Unfortunately, the literature describes no model reintegration program for offenders.

## **Research Purpose**

The literature describes no model reintegration program for incarcerated offenders. This study is an attempt to address this gap in the knowledge about offender reintegration programs.

The first purpose of this study is to describe the ideal characteristics of a model offender reintegration program based on a review of the literature. The second purpose is to conduct a limited case study and assess Texas' Project RIO (Reintegration of Offenders) using the ideal characteristics. The third purpose is to make recommendations that should assist all offender reintegration programs to assist offenders more effectively in the reintegration process.

## **Chapter Summaries**

Chapter Two discusses the issues surrounding the reintegration of incarcerated offenders and the programs designed to help them on their journey. Chapter Three is the Research Setting chapter. The chapter introduces Texas' Project RIO and its procedures. Chapter Four uses the literature to develop a model reintegration program for incarcerated offenders. The conceptual framework is also introduced in this chapter. Chapter Five describes the methodology used to complete this project and provides the operationalization of the components within the practical ideal type. The chapter also introduces the documents and archives used in the analysis.

Chapter Six discusses the results of the document and archival analysis, and assesses whether or not Project RIO meets the ideal characteristics developed throughout the study. Chapter Seven offers recommendations for the improvement of not only

Project RIO, but also of all offender reintegration programs in order to better serve the needs of reintegrating offenders. The chapter also recommends possibilities for future research and summarizes the project.

## **Chapter Two: Reintegration**

### **Chapter Purpose**

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the issues relating to offender reintegration and reintegration programs for incarcerated offenders in the United States. These issues relate to the development of a model offender reintegration program.

### **Reintegration**

The journey of a convicted offender does not end upon release from prison. Faced with employment restrictions and social stigma, they will be walking a long road to earning a place in legitimate society. When the Walnut Street Jail in Philadelphia expanded in 1790 in order to house the more serious offenders for extended periods, it gave offenders time to reflect on their sins and a new chance in society (Seiter and Kadela 2003, 360). This change in correctional ideology affected the way the entire United States has dealt with inmates ever since. The Walnut Street Jail and the other institutions that followed required the housed inmates to remain silent, doing penance for their crimes. This led to the name “Penitentiary“ for these types of facilities. The Walnut Street Jail established the inspiration that prisons should focus on being places that reformed prisoners (Travis 2005, 7).

Reintegration, or reentry, is a term that describes the iron truth of prisons in the 21st century: Prisoners return home. “With the exception of those who die of natural consequences or are executed, everyone placed in confinement is eventually released” (Petersilia 2004, 4). The reintegration of offenders means that assistance from the state and the community is integral to successfully rejoining society as a legitimate member.

The importance of this much-needed assistance is significant, as many offenders are failing on parole and returning to prison (Langan and Levin 2002).

One major reason that many offenders fail to complete their parole is their lack of social capital. In 1997, nearly half of all state prison inmates did not have a high school diploma or GED (Harlow 2003, 1). Younger state inmates are more likely to have failed to achieve high school graduation or obtain a GED. In 2005, approximately 18% of the prison population was under 25 (Harrison and Beck 2006, 8). More than half (52%) have not completed the 12th grade or taken the GED (7). Harlow's study (2003, 10) also found that less educated offenders, regardless of age, were more likely to recidivate.

Assisting offenders with the reintegration process is important, because the less social capital they have, the more likely they are to recidivate. In their study of 1983 prison releases, Beck and Shipley (1989, 2) found that 67.1% of the sample had a previous incarceration. Langan and Levin (2002, 3) conducted a similar study and found that almost a third (29.9%) of those rearrested within three years of their release were rearrested in the first six months of reentry. By the end of three years, 67.5% of the sample population had been rearrested.

In their analysis, Andrews et al. (1990, 375) found that the most promising intermediate targets included those that focused on changing antisocial behaviors. These targets include promoting family life, increasing self-management skills, reducing chemical dependency, and promoting the rewards of a non-criminal lifestyle through positive familial, academic, and vocational achievements. There are currently limited programs that work to assist offenders with their reintegration journey.

## **Reintegration Programs**

Seiter and Kadela (2003, 368) define reintegration programs or services as:

1. Correctional programs that focus on the transition from prison to community (pre-release, work release, halfway houses, or specific reentry programs) and
2. Programs that have initiated treatment (substance abuse, life skills, education, cognitive/behavioral, sex/violent offender) in a prison setting and have linked with a community program to provide continuity of care.

There are several types of reintegration programs or services: for substance abuse treatment, for reforming sex offenders, therapy for extremely violent offenders, and education. More than 90% of state prisons provide some form of educational reintegration programming (Harlow 2003, 1). The different types of education include basic life skills, GED, vocational, college-level courses, and special education programs. The most effective reintegration programs emphasize continuity of service and focus on helping the offender resocialize to a community lifestyle (Seiter and Kadela 2003, 369). These services are important because parole violators constitute a growing portion of prison admissions.

In 2005, 45% of adults leaving parole in the United States did so successfully (Glaze and Bonczar 2006, 9). This percentage has remained relatively stable since 1995. The parole population, however, has grown substantially from 203,800 in 1995 to 391,300 in 2005. Of this same population, 38% returned to incarceration, either for a new crime (12%) or for a violation of their parole (25%). In 1997, 55% of all state prison inmates had served prior sentences and 76% had a previous sentence imposed (U.S. General Accounting Office 2001, 14). The poor success rate of parole completion is a testament to the need for more personalized reintegration programs.

An analysis (Andrews et al. 1990, 377) of various reintegration programs found that when offenders' needs are the basis for their program placement, they tend to be more successful. Andrews et al. (1990, 379) continue to predict that if an offender's program placement matches their learning style, then their chances of successful reintegration increase. Educational reintegration programs are one area in which matching the needs of offenders might help.

Many types of reintegration programs address varying educational needs. Some are life skills programs. Assorted education programs range from GED completion to college-level courses (Harlow 2003, 4). Another sphere of educational programs is one that teaches job skills, or vocational training. Vocational training is especially important because many offenders have a spotty work history prior to incarceration. One program that works to curb recidivism through works skills and job placement assistance is Texas' Project RIO (Reintegration of Offenders).

Project RIO (Reintegration of Offenders) began as a pilot program in 1985. Services for Project RIO participants include job skills training, education services, gathering employment documentation, and job placement assistance (TDCJ et al. 2006, 5). Project RIO trains offenders for various types of employment.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter discussed the issues relating to reintegration and reintegration programs in the United States. Currently, reintegration of offenders is problematic, as nearly all of them return to society. Reintegration programs work to assist offenders making this journey. These issues are important to the development of a model work-

based reintegration program. The next chapter discusses Project RIO (Reintegration of Offenders). It is the program, which this study assesses.

## **Chapter Three: Research Setting**

### **Chapter Purpose**

The purpose of this chapter is to describe Project RIO. Project RIO is the program that the model reintegration program, developed in Chapter Four, assesses.

### **Project RIO**

Project RIO (Reintegration of Offenders) is a work-based reintegration program run by three Texas state agencies: the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ), the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC), and the Texas Youth Commission (TYC).

“Project RIO is based on the theory – supported by considerable hard evidence – that if inmates can find a decent job after release, they are less likely to return to a life of crime and to prison” (Finn 1998, 4). The agencies work together to refer offenders to the appropriate programs and services, in order to facilitate their successful reintegration into the work force (TDCJ et al. 2006, 1).

The work that the Texas Department of Criminal Justice performs with Project RIO occurs in two divisions. The Institutional Division, charged with managing the correctional facilities, is where inmates are introduced to services offered by the program. The Parole Division of TDCJ refers offenders to Project RIO if they are unemployed. Project RIO’s services are available to incarcerated offenders within eighteen months of release, or thirty-six months if the offender is under age thirty-five (TDCJ et al. 2006, 2). Offenders begin their interaction with and participation in the program on a voluntary basis.

## **Entering Project RIO**

Once the incarcerated individual has started Project RIO, TDCJ staff works with the offender to develop an Individual Employment Plan (IEP). This plan helps the offender identify a career path of interest to them and serves as an evaluative tool (TDCJ et al. 2006, 2). After the offender and TDCJ staff develop the plan, RIO specialists refer offenders to the appropriate work programs and educational opportunities. In addition to employment services, RIO also refers offenders to the appropriate educational services provided by the Windham School District (WSD).

The Windham School District only serves the incarcerated population of Texas prisons. The mission of WSD is to work in cooperation with TDCJ to provide educational services that match the needs of eligible offenders. These services guide offenders toward reducing recidivism by assisting them in becoming responsible and productive members of their community (WSD 2006, iv). The Division of Continuing Education serves those offenders referred by Project RIO. Through the Division, offenders can take various coursework tracks, ranging from auto repair and welding to data processing and web authoring. WSD has contracted with several regional universities to allow offenders to complete their associate's, bachelor's, and master's degrees (WSD 2006, 10). The Windham schools also provide several services geared solely for RIO participants.

Students referred by Project RIO receive help developing their goals and plans for reintegration. One of the key assistance mechanisms provided is helping the offender obtain placement in a job assignment that matches their coursework and interests (WSD 2006, 11). This allows the offender to develop a thorough knowledge of the field

specified in their Individual Employment Plan. Just like the rest of the agencies involved in Project RIO, WSD focuses on developing the work skills of the offender.

Project RIO's focus on reintegration through work has created many programs designed to help offenders get and keep jobs. When an offender is within two years of release, they can participate in job readiness training. This training includes meetings between the offender and a counselor every ninety days to practice interviewing skills (Finn 1998, 6). RIO enrolls offenders in vocational and apprenticeship programs to help hone their skills for the career identified in their Individual Employment Plan (Menon et al. 1992, 7). To complement the job readiness training, offenders also receive programming in the development of life skills.

Officials use a series of six modules to help offenders develop the life skills necessary to function in today's workplace. Offenders must be within six months of release in order to participate in this stage of training. The six components address the following areas: "Self-concept (including anger management); family relationships (including parenting responsibilities and techniques); civic and legal responsibilities (including paying taxes); victim awareness (including domestic violence); personal health and hygiene (including signs of substance abuse); and job preparation" (Finn 1998, 7). The courses use a variety of materials and classes, and include extensive discussions.

Project RIO also assists with offenders' pre-release by helping them obtain all the necessary forms needed to get a job. Those forms include a Social Security card, birth certificate, Selective Service registration verification, educational achievements, vocational or On-the-Job-Training certificates, employment applications, employment recommendations, and their Project RIO referral form (TDCJ et al. 2006, 3). Once

released, offenders continue with Project RIO's services under the umbrella of the Texas Workforce Commission.

The Texas Workforce Commission handles the majority of the functions of Project RIO relating to vocational training. The TWC also allows Project RIO access to the Local Workforce Boards to assist offenders after their release (TDCJ et al. 2006, 8). In the local offices, the offenders' qualifications and training facilitate their placement. Then they are matched with the employers in the needs of the local area. RIO specialists work to place offenders in jobs suited to their RIO experiences (Finn 1998, 9). The local offices provide other services as well.

### **Project RIO Services in the Community**

The services provided locally by the Texas Workforce Commission focus on helping the released offender find and keep a job. At the local Workforce office, offenders can practice interviewing and receive help with their résumé. The local RIO employment specialist uses the reputation of the Workforce office to help offenders get interviews. In some rural areas, this may be the only way that offenders have a chance to interview.

The community services of Project RIO are not limited to offenders who participated while incarcerated (TDCJ et al. 2006, 8). Offenders who did not participate in Project RIO while incarcerated can begin the program post-release. An offender's parole officer is often the primary referrer (Finn 1998, 11). If a parolee is unemployed, underemployed, or part-time employed, their parole officer will require them to enroll in the program (Finn 1998, 9). Offenders who did not participate in RIO while incarcerated

can participate in the available programs at the Workforce Center in their community. Project RIO is the only employment placement assistance provided to parolees in Texas.

### **Ongoing Project RIO Services**

Offenders can be referred, at anytime, by their parole officer to Project RIO for employment assistance. Immediately prior to release, offenders are required to attend an orientation on the services offered by Project RIO. Often employers accompany RIO specialists to various facilities to work with offenders receiving training in the employer's field (Finn 1998, 12). The services of Project RIO continue even after job placement.

Once placed in a job, offenders continue to work with Project RIO counselors to accomplish their reentry goals. If an offender did not obtain a GED while in prison but decides to after release, RIO staff can refer them to preparation classes for the test (Finn 1998, 10). The RIO counselors also help the offender balance their job and their parole requirements. If an offender's parole office is asking for meetings while the offender is working, it is usually possible for the RIO representative to get the meeting assigned at a better time for the offender (12). If a RIO participant were to relapse into drug abuse, the RIO specialist would work with their parole officer to divert the offender from prison to a 90-day treatment program (11). Paroled offenders can receive Project RIO services as long as they are on parole. All of these aspects help Project RIO achieve recognition as a leader in work readiness programs (Travis 2005; Allender 2004).

## **Project RIO Statistics**

Approximately half (47%) of all offenders released from Texas Department of Criminal Justice facilities in FY 2005 (TDCJ et al 2006, 39) participated in Project RIO. Each of those 32,861 offenders assists in the creation of an Individual Employment Plan. In the community, approximately 15,000 offenders received services from the local Texas Workforce Centers. Of the job-seeking RIO participants, 85% (12,717) obtained employment.

## **Chapter Summary**

This chapter summarized the provisions of Project RIO and the steps/stages undertaken by its participants in coordination with the project's sponsoring agencies. The next chapter develops the model that assesses Project RIO.

## **Chapter Four: Model Reintegration Program**

### **Chapter Purpose**

The current literature documents the benefits of work-based reintegration programs and the components of such a program. Unfortunately, a model that synthesizes the literature does not exist. The goal of this section is to develop a model work-based reintegration program, rooted by the literature, targeted toward the non-violent offender. Once developed, the model assesses Texas' Project RIO (Reintegration of Offenders). The primary categories of the model are:

- Life Skills Training
- Entry and Release Practices
- Continuity of Service
- Diversionary Punishment
- Reintegration of Rights and Privileges

The characteristics of the model are neither sequential nor mutually exclusive. The first section discusses Life Skills Training.

### **Life Skills Training**

The purpose of Life Skills Training is to assist offenders in overcoming the burden that incarceration places on them post-release. The elements are: Life Skills, Academic Education, Job Skills, and Job Placement Assistance.

## Life Skills Education

The primary goal of basic life skills education is to teach offenders the skills necessary to function in a legitimate life. Most offenders enter prison with a weak or non-existent work history and a substandard educational background. Reintegration programs should address these deficiencies. Programs that teach societal norms are doubly important because prison life itself reinforces norms that are counter-productive to effective performance in job environments (Western et al. 2001, 413). The prison experience can have positive or negative consequences for the community; it is a goal of a model reintegration program to ensure that the experience is a positive one for society.

Prison can weaken an offender's ties to their previous illicit network, but it can also strengthen them. The hope is that through life skills programming, offenders can utilize prison as an opportunity to make the "departure from a prior life of antisocial behavior" (Visher and Travis 2003, 107). This is important because a substantial portion of the prison population is young. Approximately half of the incarcerated individuals in the country are under thirty (Harrison and Beck 2006, 8). This means that large numbers of the returning population were not part of the community during their formative years.

Not only are many offenders young, a majority of them have a history of substance abuse and chemical dependency. The portion of the prison population with a history of substance could be as high as eighty percent (Travis 2005, 80). In order to combat this, a model reintegration program should have courses to teach offenders how to avoid chemical dependency. Many times, the stress of reintegration causes offenders to lean on illicit substances.

An effective collection of life skills programming should teach offenders how to handle stress, deal with relationships, plan their finances, fill out basic forms, apply for aid, and avoid chemical dependency. Many of these areas necessitate the teaching of computer skills as well. In addition, there is some evidence showing that participation in multiple programs has an increased effect on reducing recidivism (Seiter and Kadela 2003, 365). All areas of life skills programming should enforce a positive message encouraging the offender to succeed in the free world.

Prisons, by their very nature, do not actively encourage offenders to make positive choices for their well-being in the community (Taxman 2004, 32). An offender's program placement should address their needs. Ideally, as suggested by Andrews et al. (1990, 377), when placing an offender in a program, their criminogenic needs should factor into placement. For life skills education, this means assessing the offender based upon their age, family status, substance abuse history, education, and work experience.

### *In Practice*<sup>2</sup>

The course work for an offender's life skills programming in a model reintegration program encompasses those skills considered necessary to function in a legitimate societal role. These skills include financial planning, stress management, family relationships, how to obtain aid, and skills to cope with chemical dependency. The initial assessment (all offenders in a model reintegration program go through an intake assessment) of the offender determines their placement, as does the length of their

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<sup>2</sup> The author's working knowledge of a model reintegration program is the basis for the development of the "In Practice" sections throughout this chapter.

sentence. Small groups in a classroom setting are ideal for all courses in a model reintegration program. There are varying levels of courses.

The intensity of the life skills programming varies based upon the offender's assessed need. All offenders get help appropriate to their needs. For those offenders with stress-related issues, anger management classes are compulsory. In a model reintegration program, offenders with children take parenting classes, preferably classes relating to all ages of children. Again, the basis for this placement is the initial assessment of the offender. All offenders are required to participate in some substance abuse awareness courses.

At the offender's intake assessment, officials place the addicted offender in the appropriate setting for their level of addiction. To meet the needs of those offenders with specific medical issues, officials assign them to special medical units. Offenders needing moderate treatment are able to get it at every correctional unit.

### Academic Education

While in prison, offenders' educational deficiencies need addressing (Travis 2005, 161). Nationally, statistics indicate that seventy percent of incarcerated offenders function at the two lowest levels of literacy and numeric comprehension. This means that they are unable to complete basic forms, job applications, write a business letter, or perform basic life functions (Petersilia 2001, 366). In short, they are unemployable.

Wilson et al.'s (2000, 361) study found statistical evidence that education programs reduce recidivism; their study assumed a natural rate of fifty-percent recidivism for non-participants. Students of the educational programs studied recidivated at a rate of

thirty-nine percent, supporting the hypothesis that education programming has a positive effect. While evidence of participation in educational programs is important, it is also important that offenders complete them.

Evidence shows that completing an educationally based reintegration program has positive effects. Zhang et al.'s (2006, 566) assessment of one program found that those who completed the course work recidivated at a lower level than those who did not participate or who dropped out. This study also found that the more the programs are available the more likely offenders are to participate. If the programs begin immediately upon intake, it is likely that offenders would succeed at a higher rate (555).

### *In Practice*

The basic educational courses provided to offenders are required for all those who do not have a high school diploma or its equivalent. Officials assign offenders without a high school diploma or GED to the appropriate courses to help them achieve this requirement. Any offenders who have special education needs have the appropriate courses provided. Upon completion, offenders are required to continue taking course work at a post-secondary level. Those offenders who met the diploma requirement (at intake) are required to enroll in post-secondary classes as well. The model does not require that offenders take specific collegiate courses, or even work toward a degree. However, that is strongly encouraged. Offenders are encouraged to continue all educational pursuits, including postgraduate degrees.

The Quakers, in their development of the American penitentiary, believed that work and silence were integral to reintegration. In today's prisons, silence is impossible, but work remains vital to reintegration (Travis 2005, 153).

### Job Skills

While almost every prison has a work program, not many prepare offenders for employment after prison. While paying their debt to society, offenders can develop meaningful skills that should assist them in obtaining and keeping a job in the community. Why waste this time while the offender is in prison? Offenders need to work, and their assignments need to teach them meaningful job skills, and real-world skills (Travis 2005, 151).

Finding a job is usually a chief concern among released offenders. Many offenders have a weak job history and few marketable skills. Without some form of training, many are destined to return to prison. This training can also be helpful for offenders in avoiding a return to chemical dependency (Seiter and Kadela 2003, 367). The main principle is that if the offender can get and keep a job post-release, they are less likely to reoffend.

Job skills programming is essential to the foundation of this model. An examination of the job histories of the offender population makes this entirely clear. Incoming offenders have high levels of unemployment, numerous job dismissals, and a spotty work history. A major obstacle facing offenders when they reenter society is that they have little or no positive work experience. Another impediment is that the skills learned in prison, without job training, are inconsistent with those needed to operate in a

legitimate role outside prison (Western et al. 2001, 413). When combined with the stigma of a criminal record, it makes it hard for released offenders to find, and keep, a decent job (Travis 2005, 158).

### *In Practice*

Work assignments, by design, teach offenders all the skills related to working in legitimate society. Hence, in a model reintegration program, offenders work an eight-hour day, and receive appropriate compensation for their work. The basis for their job assignment is the initial assessment, their age, and their desired profession. For those vocations not available as work assignments (ex., computer programming), instructional courses are available. Enrollment in these courses does not waive the work requirement. Offenders taking these courses still have a mandatory work assignment.

According to Travis and Petersilia (2001, 304), only two-thirds of offenders reported employment prior to their incarceration. Offenders have extensive restrictions on what jobs they can hold, not to mention the overall social stigma of a criminal record. It is therefore imperative that offenders have assistance finding a job upon release (Bazemore and Stinchcomb 2004, 21).

### Job Placement Assistance

Employers are often reluctant to hire someone with a criminal record. Hence, job placement assistance is an essential component of a model reintegration program (Western et al. 2001, 412). The importance of this aspect is accentuated by the bleak employment prospects (due to the stigma of a criminal record) faced by offenders if they

do not have placement assistance (Pager 2006, 505). The immediate time post-release is when an offender is most likely to recidivate (Langan and Levin 2002, 3). If they walk out the doors of prison and into a job, then their risk is substantially lower, and a smooth transition from prison to the job market has begun (Travis 2005, 179).

Job placement assistance is necessary because, when the offender comes out of prison, it is quite possible that any legitimate network they had prior to incarceration no longer exists. Assistance in finding jobs helps offenders avoid the stress of a job search, which is often associated with a relapse in substance abuse behaviors (Western et al. 2001, 413). In addition, the ability to secure a job is a way of establishing income for the offender and their dependants. By giving them a positive role in the community, a job keeps the offender at a distance from illicit influences and opportunities to recidivate (Travis 2005, 162). By placing the offender in a legitimate role, they can work to rebuild their image in the community, and increase their involvement with other positive organizations (Bazemore and Stinchcomb 2004, 14).

Kurlychek et al. (2006, 484) points out a paradox: While mounting evidence shows that holding a job might actually decrease the likelihood of reoffending, the use of criminal background checks has increased in the past decade, and this trend makes finding a job post-release more difficult for offenders. A criminal record makes offenders unattractive to potential employers and bans them from participating in some trades (Travis and Petersilia 2001, 304). The infamy of a criminal record is one of the primary reasons for a coordinated system of job placement assistance for offenders.

The stigma of a criminal record is a major factor in the need for job placement assistance and the development of a network of employers willing to take a chance on

offenders who are attempting reintegration (Visher and Travis 2003, 95). That ignominy is something that an offender has to deal with for life. In one study (Pager 2003, 958), applicants with a criminal record had their chances of any form of interview decreased by fifty percent. If half of released offenders are not finding employment, then high levels of recidivism are all but assured (Pager 2003, 955). It is clear that without assistance the stigma of a criminal record closes doors to meaningful opportunities for offenders (956).

### *In Practice*

Job placement assistance begins at least three months prior to release. At this point offenders attend periodically scheduled job fairs held at the facility. Employers at the job fair match the available vocational options and courses at that particular facility. Placement assistance is always available to offenders, until the completion of their supervision period. Furthermore, released offenders terminated (this includes only firing) from two consecutive jobs are not allowed to partake.

Redeveloping the offender's social capital and teaching them to re-join legitimate society, or even join for the first time is the heart of the programming in this model reintegration program. However, while education and vocational training are essential components of the model, they are of little use if the offender can opt out. As the offender enters, and is released from prison, they understand that their participation is mandatory. Thus, the next component of the model, Entry and Release Procedure, pays specific attention to mandating an offender's participation in the program.

## **Entry and Release Procedures**

Entry and Release Procedures includes two components: Assess Needs upon Entry and Universal Community Supervision upon Release. A key aspect of an effective reintegration program is assessing the needs of the offender upon entry. When needs are understood a more effective life skills program can be developed.

### Assess Needs upon Entry

The intake and assessment procedure usually begins at the state's 'reception center.' At this point offenders are tested, assessed, and sent to one of the state's units. Also at intake, offenders in a model reintegration program receive notification that their participation is mandatory.<sup>3</sup> Miller and Flaherty (2000, 10) found in their exploration of coerced treatment that the results for compulsory admits were usually superior to those of self-admitted participants. All aspects of the offender's needs should account for their assignments.

This model should increase the level of assessment upon intake, and direct involvement of the offender in the planning process. The offender's risk levels should determine the offender's program assignment (Austin 2001, 319). In their analysis of correctional treatment programs, Andrews, et al. (1990, 384) found that placing an offender in an appropriate form of treatment worked substantially better than placement in a generic prison program. An example of this is assigning offenders with substance

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<sup>3</sup> Seiter and Kadela (2003, 365) believe that making the program mandatory would have no adverse effects. Findings also show instances where the results of those whose participation was mandated and those who volunteered were impossible to distinguish. A significant number of cases where offenders participated specifically to impress the parole board demonstrate this effect. Evidence shows little to no difference between the effectiveness of programs that are mandatory and those that are voluntary. Offenders benefit solely by their participation in voluntary programs. The offender's accomplishments are the primary factors in mandatory programs.

abuse problems to treatment programs. Another example is placing offenders with high school diplomas in the appropriate educational program. Ideally, the offender would be involved in the choices of life skills programming.

Offenders should have direct involvement in determining their program placement. If the offender actively participates in the assessment of their criminogenic needs, they can help determine what programs they need most. Offenders placed in programs that interest them have greater potential for a successful reintegration (Taxman 2004, 31). Using the offender's input is important when placing them in the appropriate life skills programming.

As the offender enters prison, the assessment of needs leads to the development of their life skills programming. An offender's history of substance abuse, employment, and education are all significant predictors of recidivism (Visher and Travis, 2003, 95). Along with family ties, mental health, and physical health, those indicators should make up the assessment of the offender. Matching the particulars of the programs to the needs of the offender is an important element of the model. Ideally, as they progress through the program, offenders can earn rights in prison and, once under community supervision, they begin to gain the reintegration of the civic rights they lost upon conviction (Zhang et al. 2006, 553). The purpose of the assessment is to convey the message that prison is an opportunity for offenders to turn their lives around, rather than to accelerate their involvement with criminal elements (Visher and Travis 2003, 107).

### *In Practice*

Because life skills training begin immediately when the offender enters prison, they receive a through examination in order to assess their medical, societal, educational, or vocational needs.<sup>4</sup> Upon assessing the offender, officials place them in a facility with the services that best fit their needs. This assessment facilitates the placement of the offender in the appropriate level of life skills education, academic educational programming, and work assignment.

For instance, an offender who has not completed high school, or the GED, attends courses aimed at rectifying this deficiency. The assessment of the offender, their age, and work experience determine their placement in the appropriate financial-planning course. The assessment of their work history, education and their preferred job path determines their job assignment. Upon release from prison, offenders in a model reintegration program are universally supervised

### Universal Supervision upon Release

Not only are mandatory services provided to offenders while incarcerated, but extensive follow-up services in the community are also compulsory as well in a model reintegration program. Post-treatment follow-up of coerced patients indicated marked improvements in alcohol and drug use, employment, medical, family, and psychiatric problems. By continuing the treatment of offenders post-release, they achieve marked improvement in all aspects of their lives, thus leading offenders further along the path of a successful reintegration (Miller and Flaherty 2000, 11). Findings also show that those

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<sup>4</sup> This model does not explicitly deal with mental health issues. When this initial assessment of needs determines that an offender has significant mental health needs, it leads to the offender's placement in a facility equipped to deal with those needs. If their needs are resolved, then they enter a model program.

whose treatment was mandated responded in ways similar to voluntary admissions, and in some cases better (12).

Travis (2005, 101) argues that “a policy [releasing offenders without supervision] that allows more than 100,000 prisoners to be released without supervision each year seems illogical at best, dangerous at worst.” Hence, a structured release ensures a successful reintegration into the community (Travis 2005, 55). For this reason, the model includes a mechanism to provide services to offenders after a structured release.

Offenders have spent several years in an environment that is nothing like their community, and adjusting without assistance is next-to-impossible for many inmates. The post-release supervision, therefore, follows a universal pattern of service, with a casework mindset. A casework style of community supervision places the emphasis on helping the offender succeed (Seiter 2002, 50). It allows the offender’s reintegration counselor in the community to focus on advising the offender about the problems they face during reintegration. The transition from the total control of prison to the chaotic environment of the modern world is extremely difficult, and often misunderstood by government officials (Visher and Travis, 2003, 107).

### *In Practice*

All offenders are under community supervision at the end of their sentence, regardless of the disposition. Their parole usually lasts at least seven years. The level of supervision generally eases when an offender maintains good standing. During the whole seven years, offenders are subject to periodic and random drug testing. The initial 60

days are an intensive supervision period. Parole counselors require offenders to check in physically twice a week and by phone another three times.

After the initial 60 days and through the two-year benchmark, offenders are required to meet with their parole counselor once a week, and call in one other time a week. Meetings are progress updates and allow the offender to seek assistance if needed. From two years to five years, offenders generally meet with their parole counselor every other week and call in on the opposite week. Meetings at this time, while still mandatory, become increasingly informal. Ideally, they are occasions for offenders to seek advice about frustrating situations. From five years to seven years and discharge from supervision, the offender meets with their counselor once a month, and calls in once a month. During this time, meetings focus on the offender's future and identifying community resources available to the offender for long-term guidance. (See Appendix A for Supervision Intensity Timeline.)

Assessing the needs of offenders at intake leads to placement in the appropriate style of program. Furthermore, the application of a universal form of community supervision continues the principles taught in the prison programs. That continuity of service is one of the key features of this model.

### **Continuity of Service**

The placement of all offenders under community supervision post-release requires that the life skills programming continue in a public setting. This continuity of service is a central aspect of the model reintegration program. Historically, the services provided to the offender while in prison had no direct connection to the services provided post-

release. The differences in the world the offender just left (prison) and their community prior to incarceration, are substantially different from the world to which they are released (Seiter and Kadela 2003, 361). A model reintegration program continues all life skills programming. This includes job placement assistance.

The importance of continuing job placement assistance throughout the community supervision period may actually be one of the most significant aspects of this model. Raphael and Winter-Ember (2001, 281) found in their study that unemployment rates have a direct effect on property crime rates. In other words, they found that increases in unemployment rates lead to increases in property crime rates. Since property crime offenders are a major portion of the population receiving the services of a model reintegration program, it is essential to continue job placement assistance. It is vital to continue all programming in the community as well.

The variety of programming is a significant factor in the success of the reintegrating offender. Those offenders who complete multiple programs fare even better than offenders in just one program (Zhang et al. 2006, 566). In the past, reintegration programming included only a few programs for offenders while incarcerated, and a follow-up service or two in the community. However, this lack of multiple services compounds the already difficult transition from prison back to the community and a legitimate work role (Visher and Travis 2003, 96). The inherent problem with this is that the offender lacks continuous assistance in the community (Bazemore and Stinchcomb 2004, 18). This is problematic because the offender needs assistance re-joining the community (Travis 2005, 175).

In a model reintegration program, the offender's assigned life skills program in prison continues in the community after release. This continuation helps reinforce the goals set forth at the intake assessment. One of the important messages in life skills programming is family, or community involvement.

Dealing with family roles is one of the basic community roles that life skills training teaches. Upon release, officials usually encourage offenders to rejoin their family. If the offender is a parent, then they and their children should become involved in positive community organizations. If the offender has no family, or the family is unwilling to help the offender, or if the family would encourage an illegal lifestyle, the offender should join a supportive community organization (Petersilia 2001, 364). Regardless of their familial status, offenders should become involved with community organizations.

A model reintegration program should develop ties with community organizations to promote positive social roles for reintegrating offenders. Some of those organizations are schools, small businesses, various civic service providers, local government support services, and churches (Travis and Petersilia 2001, 310). In his examination of the issues surrounding reintegration, Lynch (2006, 404) found that promoting these relationships is very similar to psychology's social concept theory. Lynch's application of this theory holds that by promoting positive social norms and connections to legitimate groups, offenders are less likely to recidivate. It is also possible that increased organization of community resources would lower recidivism as well (Bazemore and Stinchcomb 2004, 15). An offender's involvement in the community is essential to achieving program goals.

As offenders achieve programming benchmarks, they earn the right to regain privileges (Zhang et al. 2006, 552). In addition, life skills programs continue to facilitate a shift in the mindset of the offender away from offending (Petersilia 2001, 360). It should also help offenders work to overcome the stigma of being a convicted offender by allowing them to build a role in the community (Bazemore and Stinchcomb 2004, 14).

This continuity also reinforces the long-term goals established upon the offender's initial assessment (Taxman 2004, 32). When coupled with the decreasing intensity of supervision post-release, continuing the services encourages the offender to be independent in a legitimate societal role (Travis and Petersilia 2001, 308). This continuing mindset shift allows the offender to persist in getting their life in order - reducing the likelihood of recidivism (Miller and Flaherty 2000, 10). This is important because offenders, like most people, carry their experiences with them.

The past of a released offender follows them for the rest of their life. The former ties to illicit influences and illegal activity are compounding factors on their reintegration post-release (Visher and Travis 2003, 107). In addition, the habits learned in, and the lifestyle of, prison are inconsistent with legitimate work roles (Western et al. 2001, 413).

### *In Practice*

Offender's life skills programming and services continue during the community supervision period. As during incarceration, their participation is mandatory. The services and programming do change some, post-release. Since their primary purpose is to assist the offender, that is exactly what they do. Instead of a classroom setting, programming now takes the form of a support group and individual counseling. The

same programs that were available to the offender during incarceration (financial planning, handling stress, dealing with family relationships, applying for aid, and avoiding chemical dependency) are available to them and their family post-release. If an offender was unable to complete their GED while incarcerated, they are required to do so in the community.

The educational and vocational requirements during community supervision resemble many professions' continuing education obligations. Enrollment in at least one class of a postsecondary or vocational nature is compulsory (if they have not completed the GED requirements). A model reintegration program works with local community colleges and professional organizations to obtain the classes for offenders at a reduced rate.

Those offenders required to participate in substance abuse treatment during imprisonment join local support groups. The local reintegration officials provide offenders with a listing of groups. All released offenders join an anti-dependency support group.

Because the services continue while the offender is under community supervision, it is detrimental to all progress made if the offender is required to return to prison. A model reintegration program uses a system of diversionary punishments to ensure that reintegration continues uninterrupted.

### **Diversiónary Punishment**

The heart of diversionary punishment is the idea of alternative consequences designed to keep offenders from returning to prison. According to Travis (2005, 112)

alternative consequences such as loss of privileges, downgrading of status, or loss of other rights are successful in a work environment. As previously discussed, offenders face bleak prospects for reintegration without help; their situation should not be further complicated by a return trip to prison (Pager 2006, 505). A model reintegration system does not utilize reincarceration for purely technical violations or substance abuse violations. For example, if an offender misses a meeting with her parole officer, she has to complete community service, in lieu of returning to prison. If she fails a drug test, she is compelled to complete a substance abuse treatment program. On the other hand, the model does not excuse new criminal activity.

The typical sentences for a parole revocation last only a few months (Travis 2005, 32). In the framework of this model, that is time lost and is equivalent to taking a step backward. The model reintegration program takes into account that the time immediately after release is when the offender is at the highest risk of recidivating (Kurlychek et al. 2006, 498). Hence, during this time the rules are the most flexible. Reincarceration is not only expensive; it places an offender with a good chance of success back in the prison environment, with its extreme amount of counterproductive influences. The positive messages of the life skills programming continue to lead the way in diverting the offender from prison, reinforcing long-term goals, and promoting a positive role in the community (Miller and Flaherty 2000, 10).

It is quintessential to the success of the offender that if he makes a technical breach, or has a substance abuse violation, he is not returned to prison. The transition from prison to free society is already a difficult one (Visher and Travis 2003, 107). Zhang et al. (2006, 567) found that the longer the offender continuously participated in

programming, the less likely they were to recidivate. Therefore, removing the offender from the community portion of their programming is counterproductive to their success. Under the model, offenders return to prison only for committing a new offense or for continually failing to meet specific goals of their reintegration plan. Diverting the offender from a return to prison also allows the offender to keep working and building a body of marketable job skills and experiences. Diversionary punishment programs usually include community service or substance abuse treatment (Travis 2005, 56).

### Community Service

In this model, the primary avenue of punishing technical violations for offenders placed in community supervisions is community service. Historically, the rate of failure while on parole has been about 40% since 1980. This proportion indicates that in 1980, 28,817 individuals returned to prison for a parole violation, and in 1998, 209,782 returned to prison (U.S. General Accounting Office 2001, 8). Technical violations can consist of not keeping appointments with parole officers, failing to keep a job, or leaving the jurisdiction without permission. It seems counterproductive to send offenders back to prison for what might be as simple as missing a meeting. In addition, a return trip to prison is not cost-effective, because assigning the offender community service is free (Petersilia 2001, 367). Another factor is that a return trip for a minor violation does nothing to reduce the risk of the offender's committing a new crime (Travis 2005, 112). If he makes up for his transgression by performing community service, then it solves the issue with a method that reinforces the aspects of his life skills education programming.

### *In Practice*

If, during their community supervision, an offender commits a technical violation, their counselor assigns an appropriate amount, and form, of community service. Ideally, the service project is one located in the offender's neighborhood. This allows the offender to work in their home area and rebuild their image as a productive member of their immediate community.

Another possible kind of violation is failing a drug test. Participants in a model reintegration program should receive treatment, rather than return to prison for failing a drug test.

The commission of a new crime does not qualify as a violation. If an offender habitually fails certain requirements, then revocation is the primary course of action.

### Substance Abuse Treatment

It is widely accepted that substance abuse problems and criminal activity go hand-in-hand. As much as 80% of the nation's prison population could have a substance abuse history (Travis 2005, 203). If the offender is able to avoid the situations that lead to dependence, they have a better chance of reintegrating. With this in mind, the model calls for the mandating of substance abuse treatment for parolees who fail drug tests.

A failed drug test should not send an offender back to prison right away. Miller and Flaherty (2000, 11) found that criminal justice clients, coerced into participating, do just as well as voluntary admissions in substance abuse treatment programs. Hence, a model reintegration program should give offenders who fail a drug test the following option: go back to prison, or go to 6 weeks of treatment for your substance abuse issues.

Furthermore, if their treatment incorporates their plan's goals and benchmarks, they would still be making progress.

### *In Practice*

During their entire period of community supervision offenders are subject to drug tests. If an offender fails one, they are required to complete an intensive treatment program. The second time an offender fails, they must check into a treatment facility for inpatient therapy. The third time, the offender is reincarcerated at a special treatment unit. Officials consider any mitigating factors and any other possible avenues for treatment, prior to reincarcerating the offender.

Diversionary punishments are an important part of a model reintegration program, because they can deter the offender from a return to prison. Hence, the offender is able to continue to reintegrate with legitimate society. As a program participant completes their reintegration, they gain the rights and privileges of a non-lawbreaking citizen.

### **Reintegration of Rights and Privileges**

As an offender completes the goals (set upon entry) of their life skills programming, both in prison and in the community, their rewards are the reintegration of rights and privileges. The purpose of offering a system of incentives is to give the offender the ultimate goal of a legitimate life. A model reintegration program should have a way for offenders to earn privileges, while in prison and in the community, and earn the rights of free citizens while completing their community supervision.

There are many obstacles for offenders trying to lead a life of productive citizenship. Many of these obstacles are restrictions on employment opportunities, the loss of civic rights, and the loss of social privileges (Bazemore and Stinchcomb 2004, 14). The offender's work toward success needs rewarding. In addition, those rewards should be themselves significant goals. The punishments that follow convicted offenders subvert the goals of reintegration programming (Travis 2005, 65). The program should incorporate offender goals that include: regaining various personal privileges, the right to vote, and the sealing of their criminal record. (See Appendix B for a Reintegration of Rights Timeline.)

#### Various Personal Privileges

As the offender achieves the goals set out in their intake assessment, the reintegrating of various personal privileges is their reward. In Lynch's (2006, 406) assessment of reintegration issues, he found that those who recidivate usually don't have any system of goals. If offenders have a considerable reason to achieve a legitimate life, they might have a reason to work for success. This part of the reintegration process occurs both in and out of prison. Offenders can earn additional rights while incarcerated and post-release.

As time passes, released offenders are at less risk of recidivating (Kurlychek et al. 2006, 498). Because an offender's risk level is the highest immediately after release, very few rights are restored during that period. The purpose of reintegrating privileges is to have appealing goals for the offender to work for, and creating a way for society to include the reformed offender in its fold. The rights earned by offenders in prison are

naturally different from those they earn while under community supervision. The rights that an offender earns while incarcerated are unique to the iron rules of penitentiaries. When an offender enters prison, they have very limited privileges. Completion of aspects of their life skills programming would allow them to have restrictions that are more lenient.

### *In Practice*

Various personal privileges are restored as the offender moved through and completes their life skills programming. This occurs during incarceration and after release. In prison, as offenders continue to behave, they earn various privileges. These include more family visits, more choice in work assignment and vocational training, increased access to support services, increased library time, and increased pay. Post-release the rewards are slightly different.

Post-release, offenders' good behavior and standing facilitate the return of various personal rights. As time passes, the offender's travel restrictions relax. Upon completion, they can leave the country if they wish. Any employment or benefits restrictions disappear after five years. Upon completion of the equivalent of an associate's degree, offenders can apply to any four-year college in-state. They have the same access to grant or scholarship funds as a non-offender..

These personal privileges are important to reintegration. However, there is a basic civil right that many offenders cannot exercise upon conviction, and that is the right to vote.

## Right to Vote

The right to vote is a symbol of true integration. It demonstrates society's trust in the judgment of the offender to participate in the civic life of the community. A felony conviction permanently bars approximately four million Americans from voting (Petersilia 2001, 369). This tactic manifests itself as a debt to society that the offender cannot resolve. Johnson-Parris (2003, 110) argues that this form of emasculated citizenship prevents offenders from fully reintegrating as active members of legitimate society.

This disillusionment has the potential to erase any desire to succeed within the offender (Petersilia 2001, 369). The offender's involvement in the community is an important aspect of this model, and there is no greater civic duty than to vote. The right to vote represents the rewards for following society's rules. A goal of reintegration is to teach offenders to be citizens again. Thus, there needs to be a way for them to earn the right of citizens (Travis 2005, 66). Not allowing offenders to reap this reward as they are reintegrating is counterproductive.

### *In Practice*

Once the offender completes the first three years of parole, they can register to vote. Their parole counselor informs them of their renewed right and provides them with a registration form. Offenders are also eligible for jury duty.

The right to vote is a basic civil right that allows offenders to feel that they are a part of society once again. However, there is one hindrance that they still face – their

criminal record. Hence, the ability of an offender to earn the right to have their record sealed is the ultimate reintegrative step.

### Criminal Record Sealed

The stigma of a criminal record is one that an offender should not have to carry with them for their entire life. Those individuals with a criminal history are branded as an unwanted class in the professional world (Pager 2003, 942). In their study Kurlychek et al. (2006, 485) found a growing consensus that disclosing criminal backgrounds did more harm than good for the community at large. Pager (2003, 958) found that if an individual had a criminal record, it significantly decreased the likelihood of a job offer. In some cases, applicants without a criminal record were 65% more likely to receive a job offer.<sup>5</sup> The right to put their offending past behind them is the ultimate goal for the reintegrating offender. When there is no method of removal, a criminal record stays in place, like a scarlet letter, on even the most successfully reintegrated offenders (Pager 2006, 507).

Kurlychek et al. (2006, 488) found “considerable ambiguity about why individuals who have refrained from offending for an extended period of time tend to recidivate at lower rates than individuals who last offended recently.” One possibility, they posit, is that the actual experience of offending has a causal effect on risk of reoffending; the more a life is lived crime-free, the more the offender comes to see the benefits of desistance. Logically then, the offender’s completion of the reintegration process is rewarded with the ultimate goal of a clean slate. The sealing of the offender’s

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<sup>5</sup> This was for African-American applicants. For Caucasian applicants, those without a criminal record were 50% more likely to get a job offer (Pager 2003, 958).

criminal record from public scrutiny accomplishes this goal. Hence, a model reintegration program should include the sealing of the offender's criminal record upon the completion of their community supervision.

### *In Practice*

If the offender successfully completes the seven years of their parole, their criminal record is sealed. The only time that it becomes public is if the offender commits a new crime. At this point in time, the offender's required participation in the model reintegration program ends.

### **Summary of Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework used for this applied research project is a practical ideal type. The development of an ideal type leads to a standard that can gauge a certain program (Shields and Tajalli 2006, 324). The ideal type framework is helpful in the development of the categories included in a model reintegration program. An ideal type is a means to direct the development and improvement of an existing program (Shields and Tajalli, 325).

An assessment of the literature provides a basis for establishing the categories of a model reintegration program. The five components of a model reintegration program include:

- Life Skills Training
- Entry and Release Procedures
- Continuity of Service

- Diversionary Punishment
- Reintegration of Rights and Privileges

Each of the categories (except Continuity of Service) has multiple components. The formulation of each category uses a thorough review of the literature as its basis. The issues developed in this chapter serve as a basis of the assessment criteria used in this project. The conceptual framework table (Table 4.1) illustrates the categories and their components developed in the discussion of a model reintegration program.

**Table 4.1: Conceptual Framework Table**

<b>Ideal Type Categories</b>	<b>Literature</b>
<b>Life Skills Training</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Life Skills Education</li> <li>• Academic Education</li> <li>• Job Skills</li> <li>• Job Placement Assistance</li> </ul>	Andrews et al. 1990; Bazemore and Stinchcomb 2004; Harrison and Beck 2006; Kurlychek et al. 2006; Langan and Levin 2002; Miller and Flaherty 2000; Pager 2003; Pager 2006; Petersilia 2001; Seiter and Kadela 2003; Taxman 2004; Travis 2005; Travis and Petersilia 2001; Visher and Travis 2003; Western et al. 2001; Wilson et al. 2000; Zhang et al. 2006
<b>Entry and Release Procedures</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assess Needs upon Entry</li> <li>• Universal Community Supervision upon Release</li> </ul>	Andrews et al. 1990; Austin 2001; Bazemore and Stinchcomb 2004; Miller and Flaherty 2000; Seiter 2002; Seiter and Kadela 2003; Taxman 2004; Travis 2005; Travis and Petersilia 2001; Visher and Travis 2003; Zhang et al. 2006
<b>Continuity of Service</b>	Bazemore and Stinchcomb 2004; Lynch 2006; Miller and Flaherty 2000; Pager 2003; Petersilia 2001; Raphael and Winter-Ember 2001; Seiter 2002; Seiter and Kadela 2003; Taxman 2004; Travis 2005; Travis and Petersilia 2001; Visher and Travis 2003; Western et al. 2001; Zhang et al. 2006
<b>Diversionary Punishment</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community Service</li> <li>• Substance Abuse Treatment</li> </ul>	Austin 2001; Kurlychek et al. 2006; Lynch 2006; Miller and Flaherty 2000; Pager 2006; Petersilia 2001; Travis 2005; Travis and Petersilia 2001; U.S. General Accounting Office 2001; Visher and Travis 2003; Zhang et al. 2006

<p><b>Reintegration of Rights and Privileges</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Various Personal Privileges</li> <li>• Right to Vote</li> <li>• Criminal Record Sealed</li> </ul>	<p>Bazemore and Stinchcomb 2004; Kurlychek et al. 2006; Johnson-Parris 2003; Lynch 2006; Pager 2003; Pager 2006; Petersilia 2001; Travis 2005; Travis and Petersilia 2001; Uggen and Manza 2002</p>
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**Chapter Summary**

This chapter developed a model reintegration program. This model assesses Project RIO (Reintegration of Offenders). The chapter also summarized the conceptual framework and its links to the literature. The next chapter discusses the methodology used to conduct that assessment.

## **Chapter Five: Methodology**

### **Chapter Purpose**

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the methodology used to assess Project RIO. The methodology is a limited case study employing document and archival analysis. A discussion of the documents and archives used in the analysis follows. The weaknesses of the study are discussed as well.

### **Methodology**

The method to assess Project Rio is a limited case study employing only document and archival analysis. Babbie (2004, 293) defines a case study as an in-depth examination of a unique situation, such as a small community. Yin (2003, 86) contends that document and archival analysis is a relevant methodology because the information is usually precise and accessible. In addition, some findings should lead to important deductions. Yin (87) emphasizes that all documents should be carefully scrutinized for any indications of bias. Archival records include organizational records such as budgets over a given period of time (89). Yin (89) maintains the same concerns as those associated with document analysis.

The fact is that most records' production was for a specific purpose and specific audience, and these conditions in interpreting the usefulness and accuracy of the records should lead the analysis accordingly. Information in these documents is not absolute truth, and biases need consideration. The sole use of document and archival analysis is a weakness of this study. In order to address this concern, a variety of documents is in the study.

## **Documents and Archives**

The variety of the documents used to assess Project RIO is one of the strengths of the study. There are eight items used for the analysis of Project RIO. They include the following titles<sup>6</sup>:

- 2005 Annual Review; Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ 2006a)
- Annual Performance Report 2004-2005; Windham School District (WSD 2005)
- An Evaluation of Project RIO Outcomes: An Evaluative Report; Texas A&M University – Public Policy Resources Laboratory (Menon et al. 1992)
- Offender Orientation Handbook; Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ 2004)
- Parole in Texas: Answers to Common Questions; Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles and Texas Department of Criminal Justice – Parole Division (TBPP and TDCJ-PD 2005)
- A Portrait of Prisoner Reentry in Texas; Urban Institute (Watson et al. 2004)
- Program Focus: Texas’ Project RIO; U.S. Department of Justice – Office of Justice Programs (Finn 1998).
- Project RIO Strategic Plan Fiscal Years 2006-2007; Texas Department of Criminal Justice, Texas Workforce Commission, and Texas Youth Commission (TDCJ et al. 2006).

Project RIO’s operating agencies publish a majority of the documents and archives used in this study. Primarily the reports are from the Texas Department of Criminal Justice. TDCJ published the following reports: “2005 Annual Review” (TDCJ

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<sup>6</sup> Each document listed with the publishing entity and its appropriate citation.

2006a), “Offender Orientation Handbook” (TDCJ 2004), and “Parole in Texas” (in conjunction with the Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles) (TBPP and TDCJ-PD 2005). Along with the Texas Workforce Commission and the Texas Youth Commission, the TDCJ published the “Project RIO Strategic Plan” (TDCJ et al. 2006). The Windham School District is the school system for Texas’ prisons. The district publishes their “Annual Performance Report” and the 2004-2005 (WSD 2005) is in the study. Three reports published by other entities are also used in the study.

In addition to the Texas agencies’ reports are reports from a federal agency, a national research institute, and a Texas university. One of these is from the U.S. Department of Justice - Office of Justice Programs. The office published a series of reports called “Program Focus.” Included in this study is the report on Project RIO (Finn 1998). The Urban Institute conducted a full study of reintegration in the state of Texas. “A Portrait of Prisoner Reentry in Texas” (Watson et al 2004) offers an insight into RIO and all reintegrative issues in Texas. The final report came from the Texas A&M University - Public Policy Resources Laboratory. This report (Menon et al. 1992) is an evaluation of the effect that Project RIO participation has on recidivism. All of the reports offer an insight into Project RIO’s processes. However, the sole use of documents and archives for the analysis is a weakness of this study.

### **Weaknesses of the Methodology**

This limited case study of Project RIO is inherently weak. This is due in large part to the study’s sole reliance on document and archival analysis. Yin (2003, 97) contends that using multiple sources of evidence is advisable. He also asserts that if there

is only one form of data collection, then it should be the most appropriate form. In the case of this study, the number of units in the Texas Department of Criminal Justice makes other forms of research extremely cumbersome. Hence, the methodology chosen was document and archival analysis. Other weaknesses include the natural bias of many of the documents and the age of some of the archives.

As previously discussed, archival items, and sometimes documents, are for a particular audience. This specific preparation can lead to bias in the presentation of the information. Another weakness in this study is that the only published systematic data collection relating to Project RIO was in 1992.

### **Operationalization of the Conceptual Framework**

Operationalizing connects the components of the practical ideal type categories to the assessment criteria. The Operationalization Table (Table 5.1) demonstrates the connection between the framework and the documents and archives used in this analysis. The discussion of the categories and their components lead the development of the assessment criteria. Each criterion seeks an affirmative or negative response. For each component, if all of the criteria are met, then it “Meets Criteria.” If a majority of the criteria is affirmative, then it “Mostly Meets Criteria.” If only a minority of the criteria is affirmative, then the component “Meets in Part.” Finally, if none of the criteria are positive for Project RIO, then that component “Does Not Meet Criteria.”

**Table 5.1: Operationalization of the Conceptual Framework**

<b>Ideal Type Categories</b>	<b>Document and Archival Analysis</b>	<b>Assessment Criteria</b>
<b>Life Skills Training</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Life Skills Education</li> </ul>	TDCJ Annual Report WSD Performance Report Urban Institute Report U.S. DOJ-OJP Report Project RIO Strategic Plan	Are there programs teaching anger management skills and dealing with family relationships?  Does the program teach offenders financial planning?  Does it prepare offenders to fill out basic forms and apply for various forms of aid?  Does the programming adequately address offenders' substance abuse issues?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Academic Education</li> </ul>	TDCJ Annual Report Texas A&M Report WSD Performance Report Urban Institute Report	Are basic education services available for participants?  Can an offender obtain a GED?  Are special education courses available?  Are advanced and post-secondary education services available?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Job Skills</li> </ul>	U.S. DOJ-OJP Report WSD Performance Report Project RIO Strategic Plan Parole in Texas Urban Institute Report	Are participants required to work while incarcerated?  Are the skills learned working these jobs useful in post-release employment?  Does the program work to instill a good work ethic in participants?  Are vocational education programs available?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Job Placement Assistance</li> </ul>	Project RIO Strategic Plan U.S. DOJ-OJP Report Offender Orientation Handbook	Are offenders assisted in finding a job upon release?  Does assistance continue throughout parole?  Is there assistance for finding better jobs?  Does the program have a developed network of employers willing to hire participants?
<b>Entry and Release Procedures</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assess Needs on Entry</li> </ul>	Offender Orientation Handbook TDCJ Annual Report Project RIO Strategic Plan	Are the needs of the offender assessed upon entry?  Is a reintegration plan developed for the offender based upon initial assessment?  Does it plan for their entire incarceration and parole?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Universal Community Supervision Upon Release</li> </ul>	Urban Institute Report Project RIO Strategic Plan U.S. DOJ-OJP Report	Is the offender on community supervision when released?  Is community supervision universal for all offenders?  Is there a set timetable for decreasing the intensity of supervision?
<b>Continuity of Service</b>	TDCJ Annual Report Urban Institute Report Project RIO Strategic Plan Offender Orientation Handbook	Does programming continue after release?  Are post-release services a continuation of in-prison programming?  Are community support services available to the offender?  Is the offender encouraged to get involved with community organizations?
<b>Diversionary Punishment</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community Service</li> </ul>	Parole in Texas	Does the offender receive community service for technical parole violations rather than return to prison?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Substance Abuse Treatment</li> </ul>	U.S. DOJ-OJP Report	If an offender has a substance abuse violation while on parole, is it possible for them to receive treatment rather than return to prison?
<b>Reintegration of Rights and Privileges</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Various Personal Privileges</li> </ul>	Offender Orientation Handbook Project RIO Strategic Plan Urban Institute Report	Can incarcerated offenders earn various privileges?  During parole, are travel restrictions gradually relaxed?  As they complete programming, can offenders have an increased say in which courses they participate?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Right to Vote</li> </ul>		Can the offender earn back the right to vote?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Criminal Record Sealed</li> </ul>		Is it possible for the offender to earn the right to have their criminal record sealed?

## **Chapter Summary**

This chapter described the methodology used to assess Project RIO. The document and archival analysis finds its strength in the variety of documents used. The model work-based reintegration program developed in Chapter Four was the tool used to assess Project RIO. The next chapter discusses the results of the assessment.

## **Chapter Six: Results**

### **Chapter Purpose**

As previously stated, the purpose of this study is to assess Project RIO (Re-Integration of Offenders) as compared to the ideal components of a model work-based reintegration program. The purpose of this chapter is to summarize the findings of the analysis.

Overall, Project RIO adheres to only one category of a model reintegration program: Continuity of Service. Project RIO did meet the criteria for two of the components of Life Skills Training: Job Skills and Job Placement Assistance. In addition, all criteria for Assess Needs upon Entry (in Entry and Release Procedures) were positive.

### **Life Skills Training**

The first category of a model reintegration program is Life Skills Training. This category includes the following components: life skills education, academic education, job skills, and job placement assistance.

### **Life Skills Education**

There are four assessment criteria for the category of Life Skills Education in a model reintegration program. Texas' Project RIO did not meet any of the criteria. However, all aspects of the criteria are available in Texas Department Criminal Justice facilities. Project RIO officials refer participants to the services.

The first assessment criterion for the Life Skills Education component is: Are there programs teaching anger management skills and dealing with family relationships? Project RIO does not provide these services. However, offenders who participate in Project RIO receive referrals to those services that can help them post-release. If an offender has issues with anger management or social roles, counselors can refer them to the CHANGES program.

Through the prisoners-only Windham School District (WSD), Project RIO counselors can refer offenders to the CHANGES (Changing Habits and Achieving New Goals to Empower Success) Program. This program is a 60-day life skills course. Only offenders within two years of release can participate in the CHANGES Program (Watson et al. 2004, 34; WSD 2005, 4). The course consists of six modules, including family relationships and responsibilities, civic and legal responsibilities, basic labor force skills, money management, social skills (including anger management), and personal health and hygiene (including signs of substance abuse) (Watson et al. 2004, 34; WSD 2005, 4; Finn 1998, 7). Completion of the CHANGES program frequently serves as a requirement for release for some offenders (TDCJ 2006a, 17). The courses take place in a classroom setting within the correctional facility, with lectures, discussions, and books. Between 2004 and 2005, more than 28,000 prisoners participated in the CHANGES program (Watson et al. 2004, 34).

The second assessment criteria for the Life Skills Education component is: Does the program teach offenders financial planning? As previously established, Project RIO does not provide life skills education courses. The program does refer offenders to the

needed courses. In the case of financial planning, officials normally refer offenders to the CHANGES program (Watson et al. 2004, 34; WSD 2005, 4; Finn 1998, 7).

The third assessment criteria for the Life Skills Education component is: Does it prepare offenders to fill out basic forms and apply for various forms of aid? This is not a direct function of Project RIO. However, when preparing an offender for their role in the working world, RIO does help offenders obtain all of the necessary forms of identification.

Project RIO helps offenders obtain all the necessary documents for workforce participation (TDCJ et al. 2006, 3; Watson et al. 2004, 27; Finn 1998, 6). The documents that Project RIO helps offenders obtain are necessary to gain legitimate employment.

Those documents include:

- Project RIO referral forms
- Social Security cards
- Birth Certificate
- Educational achievements
- Vocational training certificates
- On-the-Job training certificates
- Industry certification
- Employment recommendations
- Résumé on the Texas state employment website ([www.workintexas.com](http://www.workintexas.com))

The fourth assessment criteria for the Life Skills Education component is: Does the programming adequately address the offender's substance abuse issues? Project RIO does not provide substance abuse treatment. As previously mentioned, they refers offenders to the CHANGES program, which does have a component addressing health issues, including substance abuse issues (Watson et al. 2004, 34; WSD 2005, 4; Finn 1998, 7). Certain facilities in the Texas prison system are devoted to substance abuse

treatment. However, which offenders go there is at the discretion of the sentencing judge (TDCJ 2006a, 43).

**Table 6.1: Life Skills Education Assessment Criteria**

<b>Assessment Criteria</b>	<b>Present in Project RIO</b>
Are there programs teaching anger management skills and dealing with family relationships?	No
Does the program teach offenders financial planning?	No
Does it prepare offenders to fill out basic forms and apply for various forms of aid?	No
Does the programming adequately address offenders' substance abuse issues?	No

### Academic Education

The second component of the Life Skills Training category of a model reintegration program is Academic Education. There are four criteria for assessing this component of Project RIO. The program did not meet any of the criteria. RIO counselors can refer offenders to education courses that should help their employability.

The first two assessment criteria for Education in a model reintegration program are: Are basic education services available for participants? and Can an offender obtain a GED? The services are available; however, not through Project RIO. RIO counselors refer offenders to the courses they need to achieve their desired career goals.

If offenders enroll in Project RIO but do not have the equivalent to a high school diploma, counselors encourage them to participate in courses through the Windham School District (WSD 2005, 3; Watson et al. 2004, 25; Menon et al. 1992, 7). WSD provides varying levels of educational courses. The courses provided for those offenders

seeking a GED operate on a twelve-month academic calendar. Classes are three hours per day (WSD 2005, 3).

The next assessment criteria for the Education component is: Are special education courses available? Project RIO does not provide educational services. Windham School District offers classes for those students with assessed special needs and who are deficient in their basic cognitive skills (TDCJ 2006a, 17; Watson et al. 2004, 25).

The final criteria for the Education component is: Are advanced education services available to participants? Project RIO does not provide these services. However, offenders can participate in college courses through the Windham School District.

The Windham School District offers two-year college degrees and four-year degrees. The programs work in conjunction with area colleges, and offenders must meet the institution's academic requirements (WSD 2005, 8; Watson et al 2004, 25). Offenders are required to cover the costs associated with these programs<sup>7</sup> (TDCJ 2006a, 17). Two-year degrees available include Associate in Arts, Associate in Science, Associate in Applied Science, Associate in General Studies and Associate of Science Technology degrees (WSD 2005, 9). Only thirty-five correctional facilities provide the classes. Four-year degrees available are Bachelor of Science, Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Applied Arts and Sciences, and Bachelor of Business Administration degrees (9). Bachelor-level courses were available at only four correctional units.

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<sup>7</sup> Offenders can pay using their Inmate Trust Fund. They can apply for a federal youthful offender program grant, or a scholarship through the college or university. Another option is for the offender to reimburse the state after parole, as a condition of release (TDCJ 2006a, 17).

**Table 6.2: Assessment Criteria for Education**

<b>Assessment Criteria</b>	<b>Present in Project RIO</b>
Are basic education services available for participants?	No
Can an offender obtain a GED?	No
Are special education courses available?	No
Are advanced education services available for participants?	No

### Job Skills

The third major component of Life Skills Training is Job skills. There are four assessment criteria for this section. Project RIO met all four criteria for a model reintegration program in this area.

The first of the assessment criteria for Job Skills is: Are participants required to work while incarcerated? In order to qualify to participate in Project RIO, an offender must meet the proper security qualifications, which also allow them to have a work assignment (TDCJ et al. 2006, 2; TBPP and TDCJ-PD 2005, 55). None of the examined documents expressly state that an offender must work. However, at least 85% of all offenders incarcerated have work assignments (Watson et al. 2004, 23).

The second of the assessment criteria for Job Skills is: Does the program work to instill a good work ethic in participants? While there is nothing specific in the examined materials, the mission of Project RIO refers to effectively reintegrating offenders into the workforce (TDCJ et al. 2006, 1). The referral services of Project RIO also accomplish this goal (specifically, the previously discussed CHANGES program).

The third of the assessment criteria for the Job Skills component of Life Skills training is: Are the skills learned working these jobs useful in post -release employment? RIO employees can use referrals to have offenders assigned to relevant work duties.

Approximately 90% of all RIO participants receive a job assignment that allows them to further their workforce training or their career goals (TDCJ et al. 2006, 12).

The final Job Skills assessment criterion is: Are vocational education programs available? An extensive array of vocational courses is available. If an offender enrolls in one of these courses, they are required to enroll in Project RIO (Finn 1998, 8).

The Windham School District offers a variety of vocational programming. The two primary mediums are Career and Technology Education (CTE) and Two-Year College Credit-Hour Vocational Programs or Workforce Non-Credit Programs. The courses in CTE provide training to industry standards for entry-level positions (WSD 2005, 5). There are two types of CTE classes: Full-Length and Short-Term. The Full-Length classes are 600 hours and the Short-Term are 200 hours. Full-Length courses cover more than twenty-five trade areas (See Table 6.1), and classes are six hours per day, five days per week (TDCJ 2004, 29). Short-Term courses relate primarily to prison jobs.

**Table 6.3: Available Full-Length CTE Courses**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Automotive Specialization</li> <li>• Bricklaying</li> <li>• Building Trades I</li> <li>• Business Computer Information Systems</li> <li>• Business Image Management and Multimedia</li> <li>• Computer Maintenance Technician</li> <li>• Construction Carpentry</li> <li>• Culinary Arts</li> <li>• Custodial Technician</li> <li>• Diesel Mechanics</li> <li>• Diversified Career Preparation</li> <li>• Electrical Trades</li> <li>• Heating, Ventilation, Air Conditioning &amp; Refrigeration</li> <li>• Horticulture</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction to Construction Careers</li> <li>• Landscape Design, Construction &amp; Maintenance</li> <li>• Machine Shop (CAD/CAM)</li> <li>• Major Appliance Service Technology</li> <li>• Mill and Cabinetmaking</li> <li>• Painting and Decorating</li> <li>• Personal and Family Development</li> <li>• Piping Trades/Plumbing</li> <li>• Plant Maintenance</li> <li>• Sheet Metal</li> <li>• Small Engine Repair</li> <li>• Technical Introduction to Computer-Aided Drafting</li> <li>• Truck Driving</li> <li>• Welding</li> </ul>
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(Source WSD 2005, 6)

The course regimes for the two-year college programs are either Credit-Hour Vocational Programs or Workforce Non-Credit Programs. The Credit-Hour programs take place through shop training and classroom instruction. The Workforce Non-Credit programs are a broad-base series of courses offered in a competency format (WSD 2005, 10).

**Table 6.4: Assessment Criteria for Job Skills**

<b>Assessment Criteria</b>	<b>Present in Project RIO</b>
Are participants required to work while incarcerated?	Yes
Does the program work to instill a good work ethic in participants?	Yes
Are the skills learned working these jobs useful in post-release employment?	Yes
Are vocational education programs available?	Yes

### Job Placement Assistance

The final component of the category of Life Skills Education is Job Placement Assistance. There are four assessment criteria for this area. Project RIO met all the assessment criteria for this section. As stated in the “Offender Handbook” (TDCJ 2004, 30), “Project RIO helps offenders get a job after release.”

The first assessment criteria for the Job Placement Assistance component is: Are offenders assisted in finding a job upon release? Once an offender enrolls in Project RIO, the program works to help the offender find and keep a job after release from incarceration. Once an enrolled offender is within two years of release<sup>8</sup>, a RIO specialist

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<sup>8</sup> Offenders cannot enroll in Project RIO unless they are within eighteen months of release, or thirty-six months if they are under 35 (TDCJ et al. 2006, 2).

meets with them, and again every ninety days to help them to develop their interviewing skills (Finn 1998, 6).

The second assessment criteria for the Job Placement Assistance component is: Does the assistance continue throughout parole? Project RIO placement assistance services are available the entire time an offender is on parole, and for an additional year (TDCJ et al. 2006, 59). The primary goal of Project RIO is to decrease recidivism, which is accomplished by helping offenders find a job upon release and keep one while on parole.

The third of the assessment criteria is: Is there assistance for finding better jobs? The Texas Workforce Commission operates Project RIO's community services through the Texas Workforce Centers (TDCJ et al 2006, 8). The multitude of functions at these centers allow offenders to have their specific needs addressed. This includes helping them find a better job.

The final assessment criteria for the Job Placement Assistance component is: Does the program have a developed network of employers willing to hire employees? RIO specialists work to match the offender's skills with those needed by one of the 35,000 companies who have a relationship with the program (TDCJ et al. 2006, 9). RIO also helps prepare offenders for placement by helping them obtain all the necessary documents for workforce participation (TDCJ et al. 2006, 3). Project RIO's reputation is helpful for many potential employers because it allows them to have better information on the background and skills training of Project RIO applicants (Finn 1998, 10).

**Table 6.5: Assessment Criteria for Job Placement Assistance**

<b>Assessment Criteria</b>	<b>Present in Project RIO</b>
Are offenders assisted in finding a job upon release?	Yes
Does assistance continue throughout parole?	Yes
Is there assistance for finding better jobs?	Yes
Does the program have a developed network of employers willing to hire participants?	Yes

The category of Life Skills Training has four major components: Life Skills Education, Academic Education, Job Skills, and Job Placement Assistance. Project RIO meets all of the criteria for two of the sections: Job Skills and Job Placement Assistance. RIO did not meet any of the criteria for Life Skills Education or Academic Education. However, all of the criteria for those sections are met by other entities in the Texas Prison System, and RIO specialists usually refer participants to those services. Overall, Life Skills Training mostly meets the criteria for a model reintegration program.

**Table 6.6: Life Skills Training Overall Results**

<b>Life Skills Training</b>	<b>Document/Archive Source</b>	<b>Analysis</b>
<b>Life Skills</b>	TDCJ Annual Report WSD Performance Report Urban Institute Report U.S. DOJ-OJP Report Project RIO Strategic Plan	Project RIO specialists refer participants within two years of release to a program called CHANGES. Six modules teach some of the aspects of a model reintegration program (anger management, family relationships, and substance abuse awareness).
<b>Academic Education</b>	TDCJ Annual Report Texas A&M Report WSD Performance Report Urban Institute Report	Offenders enrolled in Project RIO who do not have a High School equivalency are encouraged by counselors to participate in the courses offered through the Windham School District. Higher education courses are available through the WSD in conjunction with area community colleges.
<b>Job Skills</b>	U.S. DOJ-OJP Report WSD Performance Report Project RIO Strategic	A requirement for having a work assignment is a proper security level, which is also required for participation in the program. RIO specialists meet with offenders within two years of release to practice

	Plan Parole in Texas Urban Institute Report	and develop skills necessary for obtaining employment. A variety of vocational education classes is available through the WSD.
<b>Job Placement Assistance</b>	Project RIO Strategic Plan U.S. DOJ-OJP Report Offender Orientation Handbook	This service begins with incarcerated offenders and is available to released offenders. The service is available the entire time the offender is on parole. Project RIO works with a network of employers to find a potential employee who meets their needs.

### **Entry and Release Procedures**

The category of Entry and Release Procedures in a model reintegration program includes: Assess Needs upon Entry and Universal Supervision upon release. Project RIO is not the managing authority of incarcerated offenders in Texas.

#### Assess Needs upon Entry

The first component of Entry and Release Procedures is Assess Needs upon Entry. There are three criteria for assessing this section. Project RIO met all three of the criteria for a model reintegration program in this area.

The first assessment criterion for the component of Assess Needs upon Entry is: Are the needs of the offender assessed upon entry? The primary intake procedure in Texas prisons focuses more on security than it does reintegrative needs.

The State Classification Committee is responsible for the initial assessment of incoming offenders. The committee recommends unit assignment and security level based upon their assessment (TDCJ 2006a, 28). At the intake unit or at the assigned facility, officials interview offenders to determine several histories, including criminal, social, institutional, educational, employment, family, military, and drug/alcohol (TDCJ 2004, 3). The primary purpose of these assessments is to determine security classification.

The committee can request testing to identify the most appropriate job or career for them (TDCJ 2004, 27). If an offender is eligible to sign up for Project RIO, a RIO specialist assesses them. The assessment by the RIO official leads to the development of the offender's Individual Employment Plan (IEP) (TDCJ et al. 2006, 2). The IEP identifies a career path and serves as an ongoing assessment tool.

The second of the assessment criteria for this component is: Is a reintegration plan developed for the offender based upon initial assessment? As previously discussed, when offenders enroll in Project RIO they go through an assessment, which leads to their Individual Employment Plan. This plan serves as an assessment tool for the course of the offender's reintegration (TDCJ et al. 2006, 2). However, the plan addresses only the offender's needs as they pertain to finding a job. The plan does not address substance abuse issues or other reintegrative issues.

The final of the assessment criteria for this component is: Does it plan for their entire incarceration and parole? The Individual Employment Plan covers the entire working future of the offender (TDCJ et al. 2006, 3). The IEP also records all of the program choices made by the offender. When the offender returns to the community, the IEP follows them. It is the basis for their placement assistance in the community.

**Table 6.7: Assessment Criteria for Assess Needs upon Entry**

<b>Assessment Criteria</b>	<b>Present in Project RIO</b>
Are the needs of the offender assessed upon entry?	Yes
Is a reintegration plan developed for the offender based upon initial assessment?	Yes
Does it plan for their entire incarceration and parole?	Yes

## Universal Supervision upon Release

The second component of Entry and Release Procedures is Universal Supervision upon Release. Project RIO did not meet any of the four assessment criteria for this component.

The first two of the assessment criteria for this component are: Is the offender on community supervision when released? and Is the community supervision universal for all offenders? Project RIO is not a supervising authority. Offenders on parole are eligible for Project RIO, but they are not required to participate (TDCJ et al. 2006, 59).<sup>9</sup> Project RIO's services are also available to offenders with completed sentences, if it has been less than one year since their release. The Texas Department of Criminal Justice does not require universal supervision for all offenders.<sup>10</sup> Just over half (55%) of all released offenders are under supervision when released (Watson et al 2004, 45).

The next assessment criteria of the Universal Supervision upon Release component is: Is it a casework style of supervision? As previously stated, Project RIO is not a supervising authority. However, RIO staff does work with parole officers if there are certain concerns about the offender (Finn 1998, 12).

The final assessment criterion of this section is: Is there a set timetable for decreasing intensity of supervision? The Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles determines the intensity of supervision upon release, and considers the offender's security risk, not their reintegrative needs (Watson et al. 2004, 48).

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<sup>9</sup> Project RIO is mandatory for those released offenders who are unemployed, underemployed, or have special employment needs (TDCJ et al. 2006, 4).

<sup>10</sup> In fact, in 2005, 19.3% of all incarcerated offenders in Texas were released under no supervision at all (TDCJ 2006, 29).

**Table 6.8: Assessment Criteria for Universal Supervision upon Release**

<b>Assessment Criteria</b>	<b>Present in Project RIO</b>
Is the offender on community supervision when released?	No
Is community supervision universal for all offenders?	No
Is it a casework style of supervision?	No
Is there a set timetable for decreasing the intensity of supervision?	No

For the category of Entry and Release Procedures, there are two main components: Assess Needs upon Entry and Universal Supervision upon Release. Project RIO met all of the criteria for Assess Needs upon Entry, but none of the criteria for Universal Supervision upon Release. Overall, Project RIO mostly meets the criteria for this category of a model reintegration program.

**Table 6.9: Entry and Release Procedures Overall Results**

<b>Entry and Release Procedures</b>	<b>Document/Archive Source</b>	<b>Analysis</b>
<b>Assess Needs upon Entry</b>	Offender Orientation Handbook TDCJ Annual Report Project RIO Strategic Plan	The primary purpose of an initial assessment upon entry is to determine the security risk posed by the offender, not their reintegrative needs. Participation in Project RIO is not mandatory. An Individual Employment Plan is developed for offenders when they enroll in Project RIO, but it is not associated with any benchmarks for the reintegration of rights and privileges.
<b>Universal Community Supervision upon Release</b>	Urban Institute Report Project RIO Strategic Plan U.S. DOJ-OJP Report	Project RIO does not supervise offenders. There is no uniform supervision for released offender in Texas, nor is there a timetable for decreasing supervision.

### **Continuity of Services**

The central category of a model reintegration program is Continuity of Service. This category has four assessment criteria, but no individual components. Project RIO meets three of the assessment criteria for a model reintegration program.

The first two of the assessment criteria for the component are: Does programming continue after release? and Are post-release services a continuation of in-prison programming? Those offenders who participated in RIO while incarcerated are directly referred to a RIO counselor in their community (Watson et al. 2004, 27). The job placement assistance functions of Project RIO take place primarily in the community (29). If an offender did not partake in RIO services in prison, they can participate post-release. The offered placement assistance relates directly to the training completed by the offender while incarcerated (TDCJ 2004, 30). The programming of Project RIO provided to offenders during incarceration and post-release are inherently linked.

The job referral service provided in the community is based upon the skills the offender learned while incarcerated (TDCJ 2006a, 35). Project RIO staff offer participants a variety of services through the Texas Workforce Commission's Local Workforce Development Centers. Those programs include job fairs, job search workshops, and courses on résumé building and interviewing (Watson et al. 2004, 29). RIO staff calls various employers to let them know about the availability of potential employees (TDCJ et al. 2006, 9). The services for those offenders who are continuing RIO after prison follow the offender's Individual Employment Plan (Watson et al. 2004, 27).<sup>11</sup>

The third of the assessment criteria for the Continuity of Service is: Are community support services available to the offender? In the community, Project RIO provides services geared toward helping offenders find and keep a job. RIO clients also have many social needs as well. Project RIO provides only work-related services. RIO

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<sup>11</sup> Menon et al. (1992, 7) found that there is some evidence that offenders who enter Project RIO while incarcerated are slightly more likely to find employment and stay employed, than those who enter the program post-release.

specialists can continue to refer offenders to programs deemed necessary to their employability. Through the Texas Department of Criminal Justice – Parole Division, officials can refer offenders to COPE (Continuing Opportunities Programs in Education). COPE is for parolees for with low academic achievement levels or those who do not have a GED (Watson et al. 2004, 26). RIO specialists can also refer offenders to rehabilitative treatment (TDCJ et al. 2006, 8).

The fourth of the assessment criteria for Continuity of Service is: Is the offender encouraged to join community organizations? There is no evidence to determine that this criterion exists in Project RIO.

**Table 6.10: Assessment Criteria for Continuity of Service**

<b>Assessment Criteria</b>	<b>Present in Project RIO</b>
Does programming continue after release?	Yes
Are post-release services a continuation of in-prison programming?	Yes
Are community support services available to the offender?	Yes
Is the offender encouraged to get involved with community organizations?	No

Project RIO meets three of the four assessment criteria for the Continuity of Service component of a model reintegration program. The only criterion that it did not meet was encouraging offenders’ involvement with community organizations. Overall, Project RIO mostly met the criteria for a model reintegration program in this category.

**Table 6.11: Continuity of Service Overall Results**

	<b>Document/Archive Source</b>	<b>Analysis</b>
<b>Continuity of Service</b>	TDCJ Annual Report Urban Institute Report Project RIO Strategic Plan Offender Orientation Handbook	The job placement assistance functions of Project RIO continue for enrolled offenders post-release. Referral to reintegrative services continues in the community.

**Diversionsary Punishment**

The category of Diversionsary Punishment in a model reintegration program includes: Community Service and Substance Abuse Treatment. Project RIO does not meet any of the criteria for this category. However, the counselors do work with offenders to try to avoid a return to prison.

Community Service

The criterion for assessing this aspect of a model reintegration program is: Does the offender receive community service for technical parole violations rather than return to prison? None of the documents examined indicated that this was a possibility in the Texas prison system. There is no system in place to divert them from returning to prison. At the discretion of the parole office, an offender who commits a technical violation may be eligible for a perfunctory punishment (TBPP and TDCJ-PD 2004, 51). In most cases, this is a letter of reprimand placed in the offender’s file.

**Table 6.12: Assessment Criteria for Community Service**

<b>Assessment Criteria</b>	<b>Present in Project RIO</b>
Does the offender receive community service for technical parole violations rather than return to prison?	No

## Substance Abuse Treatment

The criterion for assessing this section is: If an offender has a substance abuse violation while on parole, is it possible for them to receive treatment rather than return to prison? Project RIO cannot mandate that an offender do anything. However, if an offender does have a substance abuse problem, RIO counselors work with the offender's parole officer to send the offender to a 90-day treatment course (Finn 1998. 11).<sup>12</sup>

**Table 6.13: Assessment Criteria for Substance Abuse Treatment**

<b>Assessment Criteria</b>	<b>Present in Project RIO</b>
If an offender has a substance abuse violation while on parole, is it possible for them to receive treatment rather than return to prison?	No <sup>13</sup>

Overall, Project RIO did not meet any of the criteria for Diversionary Punishment for either Community Service or Substance Abuse Treatment.

**Table 6.14: Diversionary Punishment Overall Results**

<b>Diversionary Punishments</b>	<b>Document/Archive Source</b>	<b>Analysis</b>
<b>Community Service</b>	Parole in Texas	Project RIO does not supervise offenders, and no system of diversion exists in Texas.
<b>Substance Abuse Treatment</b>	U.S. DOJ-OJP Report	Project RIO is not the community supervision authority; however, if an offender has a substance abuse problem, then RIO counselors work with the offender's parole officer to divert them to treatment.

<sup>12</sup> None of the more recently published documents references this.

<sup>13</sup> Substance abuse treatment is not directly available through Project RIO. However, RIO counselors can refer offenders to treatment options.

## **Reintegration of Rights and Privileges**

The category of Reintegration of Rights and Privileges in a model reintegration program includes: Various Personal Privileges, Right to Vote, and Criminal Record Sealed. Project RIO met none of the assessment criteria for this category.

### Various Personal Privileges

The first component of Reintegration of Rights and Privileges is Various Personal Privileges. There are three assessment criteria. Project RIO met none of the criteria of a model reintegration program for this section.

The first assessment criterion is: Can incarcerated offenders earn various privileges? The privileges that offenders have while incarcerated depend solely on their behavior (TDCJ 2004, 10). There is nothing to indicate that offender participation in reintegrative programming allows them to gain any privileges.

The second of the assessment criteria for this section is: During parole, are travel restrictions gradually relaxed? There is nothing to indicate that a paroled offender can earn any relaxed travel privileges.

The final of the assessment criteria of this section is: As they complete programming, can offenders have an increased say in which courses they participate? The offender's Individual Employment Plan includes their input (TDCJ et al. 2006, 2; Watson et al. 2004, 29). However, nothing indicates that they ever get more say in what they chose to do.

**Table 6.15: Assessment Criteria for Various Personal Privileges**

<b>Assessment Criteria</b>	<b>Present in Project RIO</b>
Can incarcerated offenders earn various privileges?	No
During parole, are travel restrictions gradually relaxed?	No
As they complete programming, can offenders have an increased say in which courses they participate?	No

Right to Vote

The assessment criterion for this component of a model reintegration program is: Can the offender earn back the right to vote? The voting disenfranchisement of an offender ends when their sentence ends, meaning that all periods of supervision are over. This occurs for all offenders in Texas, and it is not specific to the completion of any reintegrative goals.

**Table 6.16: Assessment Criteria for Right to Vote**

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Present in Project RIO</b>
Can the offender earn back the right to vote?	No

Criminal Record Sealed

The final component of Reintegration of Rights and Privileges, Sealed Criminal Record, has only one criterion: Is it possible for the offender to earn the right to have their criminal record sealed? Texas has no method at all for sealing one's criminal record.

**Table 6.17: Assessment Criteria for Criminal Record Sealed**

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Present in Project RIO</b>
Is it possible for the offender to earn the right to have their criminal record sealed?	No

When offenders begin their participation in Project RIO, counselors help them develop an Individual Employment Plan. This plan does set up the offender's reintegration into the workforce, but it does not include the reintegration of any privileges or rights. The response to all criteria for this component is no. Overall, Project RIO does not meet the criteria for this category of a model reintegration program.

**Table 6.18: Reintegration of Rights and Privileges Overall Results**

<b>Reintegration of Rights and Privileges</b>	<b>Document/ Archive Source</b>	<b>Analysis</b>
<b>Various Personal Rights</b>	Offender Orientation Handbook Project Rio Strategic Plan Urban Institute Report	Nothing like this exists
<b>Right to Vote</b>		Nothing like this exists
<b>Criminal Record Sealed</b>		Nothing like this exists

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter synthesized the results of the analysis of Project RIO using a model reintegration program. While Project RIO does not meet the exact specifics of a model reintegration program, some of its components match those of the model. The next and final chapter discusses recommendations for Project RIO. These recommendations focus on making Project RIO more like a model reintegration program. The final chapter also provides suggestions for further research.

## **Chapter Seven: Recommendations**

### **Chapter Purpose**

The purpose of this research had three parts. The first was to describe the ideal components of a model reintegration program based upon a review of the literature. Second was conducting a preliminary assessment of Texas' Project RIO using the developed model. The final part was to make recommendations to assist not only Project RIO, but also all reintegration programs that aid offenders in their return to the community.

The fourth chapter of this study described the ideal characteristics of a model reintegration program. Chapter Six presented the results of the assessment, employing document and archival analysis. The purpose of Chapter Seven is to discuss recommendations for Project RIO based upon the assessed results. In addition, this chapter will offer recommendations for future research involving Project RIO.

### **Recommendations for Project RIO**

The conceptual framework in this study presents the ideal categories for a model reintegration program. The propositions in this chapter strive to improve Project RIO. However, the suggestions are not limited to Project RIO, as any reintegration program could implement them to increase the effectiveness of their procedures.

The primary recommendations (See Table 7.1) for Project RIO include:

- Increasing Project RIO requirements regarding participation in life skills and educational programming
- Adding a reintegrative focus to the intake assessment of an offender

- Creating a method for diverting offenders from a return to prison for technical parole violations
- Developing a method for offenders to earn the reintegration of their rights

**Table 7.1: Project RIO Recommendations Summary**

<b>Ideal Type Categories</b>	<b>Evidence Supports</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
<b>Life Skills Training</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Life Skills</li> <li>• Academic Education</li> <li>• Job Skills</li> <li>• Job Placement Assistance</li> </ul>	<p>No</p> <p>No</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make participation in life skills education a requirement of Project RIO.</li> <li>• Create standards of educational attainment for participating offenders.</li> </ul>
<b>Entry and Release Procedures</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assess Needs upon Entry</li> <li>• Universal Community Supervision upon Release</li> </ul>	<p>Yes</p> <p>No</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At an offender’s intake assessment, add criteria relating to the offender’s reintegrative needs.</li> <li>• Increase the collaboration between RIO specialists in the community and parole officers in order to promote a casework style of supervision.</li> </ul>
<b>Continuity of Service</b>	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expand the continuity to all life skills training services.</li> <li>• Develop a network of community organizations for participating offenders to join.</li> </ul>
<b>Diversions and Punishment</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community Service</li> <li>• Substance Abuse Treatment</li> </ul>	<p>No</p> <p>No</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a method for diverting offenders from a return to prison for technical parole violations.</li> </ul>
<b>Reintegration of Rights and Privileges</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Various Personal Rights</li> <li>• Right to Vote</li> <li>• Criminal Record Sealed</li> </ul>	<p>No</p> <p>No</p> <p>No</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop and implement a system rewarding the completion of reintegrative courses by incarcerated offenders.</li> <li>• Link the re-earning of the right to vote to reintegrative achievement.</li> <li>• Create a method for successfully reintegrated offenders to have their criminal records sealed.</li> </ul>

## **Life Skills Training**

Based upon the document and archival analysis, Project RIO met all the criteria for Job Skills and Job Placement Assistance, but not for Life Skills Education and Academic Education. However, all of the criteria for both components are present in other entities within the Texas Department of Criminal Justice. Project RIO should develop a required regime of courses for participating offenders. In addition, Project RIO should require that participating offenders obtain a GED. If they do not complete this while incarcerated, it should be a condition of release. Offenders can already take these courses through the Windham School District.

## **Entry and Release Procedure**

In a model reintegration program, the procedures for entering and leaving prison are an important category. This category has two components: Assess Needs upon Entry and Universal Supervision upon Release. Project RIO met all of the criteria for the former, and none for the latter. Project RIO should add the offender's reintegrative needs to the initial intake assessment of the offender. Project RIO should also lift the requirement that offenders be within two years of release to participate in its services. This would allow offenders to begin working on their needs immediately.

When offenders leave prison, they should leave in a uniform fashion. In Texas, offenders leave prison in many ways. Once released, some offenders are not under supervision. Project RIO is not a supervising authority. However, that does not mean that they cannot take a leading role in offenders' supervision post-release. Project RIO should increase collaboration with the Parole Division of the Texas Department of

Criminal Justice. This would allow a shift to a casework style of supervision. This increased collaboration would help strengthen the next category of a model reintegration program.

### **Continuity of Service**

Continuity of Service is the central category of a model reintegration program. This category has no individual components. There are four assessment criteria for this category, and Project RIO met three of them. Project RIO should utilize its strength in this area by applying it to other reintegrative services. For example, if an offender does not complete their GED while in prison, a requirement of their release should include getting one. Requiring involvement with positive community organizations should be another requirement of release for Project RIO participants.

In addition to the network of employers willing to hire Project RIO participants, the program should develop a network of community organizations willing to support reintegrating offenders. Several organizations are already involved with assisting offenders with the reintegration process (Watson et al 2004, 24). Project RIO should work with these organizations to develop networks in the communities to which offenders are returning. This would help strengthen the offender's ties to the community and keep them from slipping up and returning to prison.

### **Diversionsary Punishment**

The category of Diversionsary Punishment in a model reintegration program has two components: Community Service and Substance Abuse Treatment. In 2005, 23%

(9,885) of all offenders received by the Texas Department of Criminal Justice, Institutions Division were community supervision revocations (TDCJ 2006, 15). Of this population, 23% were revocations for technical violations of their parole. Project RIO should develop a system of diversionary punishments for its paroled offenders. Instead of revoking their parole and sending them back to prison, offenders need community service assignments. If an offender begins to violate their parole for substance abuse, then officials should enroll them in a substance abuse treatment program in their community. Not only could this help offenders avoid a return to prison, but it would also lower the prison population. Thus, this tactic would also save the state money. When offenders work successfully toward reintegrating themselves, their rewards are the rights and privileges of free citizens.

### **Reintegration of Rights and Privileges**

The final category of a model reintegration program is Reintegration of Rights and Privileges. This category has three components: Various Personal Privileges, Right to Vote, and Criminal Record Sealed; Project RIO met none of these criteria. The reintegration process needs to have tangible rewards for participants. Project RIO agencies should work together to develop such a system. Project RIO's primary mission is to effectively reintegrate offenders into the labor force, "thereby promoting public safety and reducing recidivism" (TDCJ et al. 2006, 1). To do this, there need to be rewards for those offenders who work to make Texas a better place.

## **Recommendations for Future Research**

This study conducted a preliminary assessment of Project RIO using a model reintegration program. As discussed in Chapter Five, a major weakness of this limited case study is that it employed document and archival analysis as its only methodology. However, the developed framework offers a platform for the continuation of research involving Texas' Project RIO. Future research should strive to build upon the work begun here.

To carry on the examination of Project RIO's procedures, site visits and survey research are recommended. The site visits would allow researchers to confirm that what the documentation states about Project RIO's procedures is actually what occurs. The survey research could explore the view of Project RIO participants on how well it works. Ideally, future research would attempt to verify the information included in the documents regarding Project RIO.

This is not the only research possible when it comes to Project RIO. A logical alternative is to analyze the employment rates of Project RIO offenders and compare them to state and national employment rates of offenders who did not participate in reintegrative programming. This would allow for the determination of the effect Project RIO actually has on the reintegrating/job-seeking offender. Another possible study is exploring correctional officials' attitudes regarding Project RIO and its potential growth. The trends of opinions regarding Project RIO could offer valuable information into potential improvements in the procedures, and the program's relationship with offenders.

In order to compensate for the size of the Texas prison system, future research should encompass a particular region or function of Project RIO. An example is to

examine only the functions of Project RIO for offenders on parole. Project RIO's policies and structure allow it to be an ideal candidate for any research.

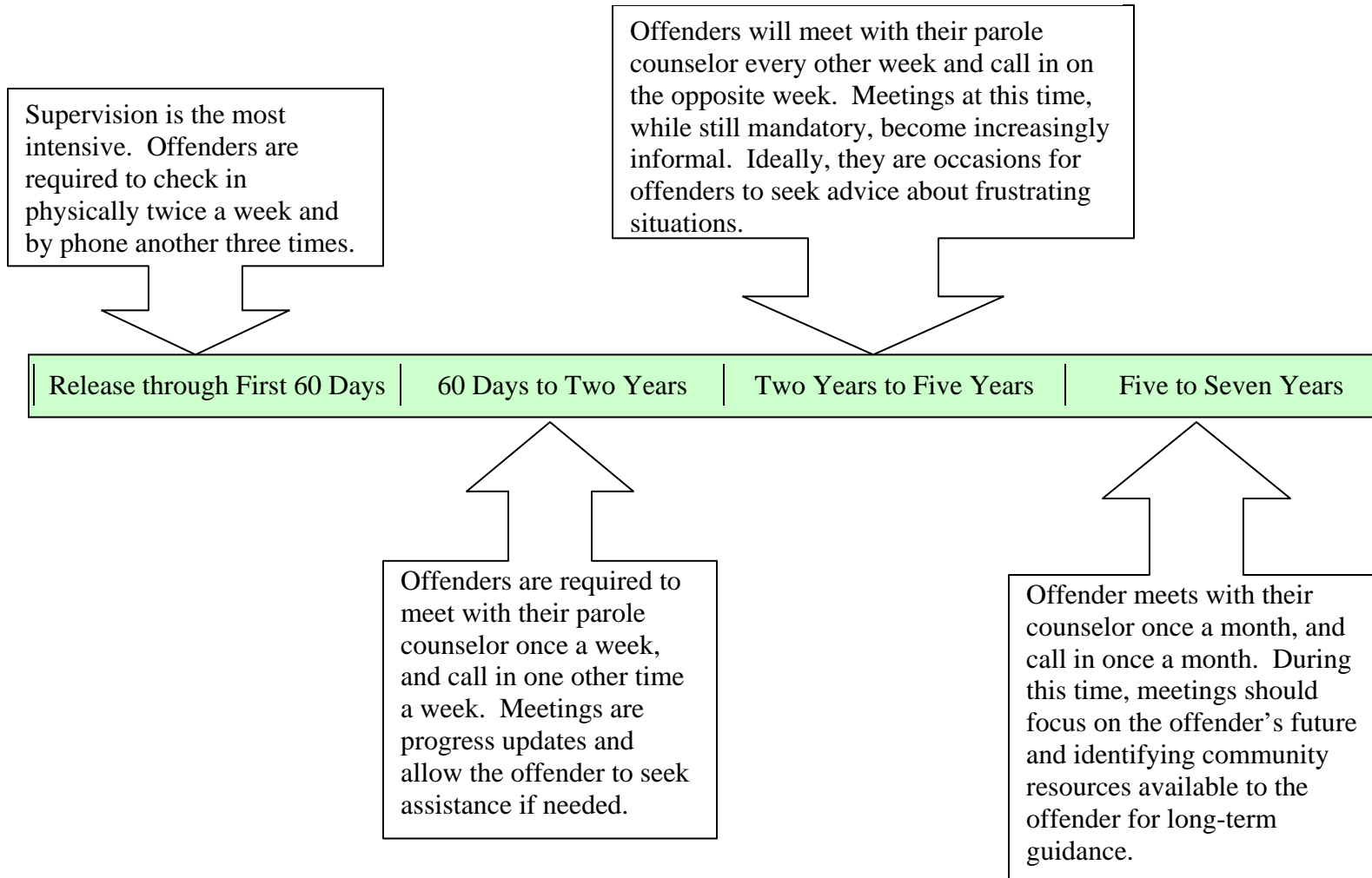
## **Conclusion**

As the nation's prison systems grow, more people will leave prison and return to the community. The mixture of sentencing philosophies in America creates a situation where this natural cycle of prisoners returning home is misunderstood. The prison experience does not end at release. Offenders carry prison with them for the rest of their lives. Without some form of assistance, many will fail to successfully reintegrate into the community, and have no choice except for a return to crime and a return to prison.

The model reintegration program discussed in this applied research project had four major categories. Project RIO met all of the criteria for only one of the categories, Continuity of Service. However, it did meet the criteria for some of the categories' components. Specifically, Project RIO adhered to the criteria found in Job Skills, Job Placement Assistance, and Assess Needs upon Entry. Project RIO is designed to help offenders by referring them to educational (life skills, academic, and vocational) services, and linking them to a job in the community. Hence, it was natural that it met the criteria in these areas. Texas' Project RIO, as well as other reintegrative programs, can build upon the recommendations outlined in this applied research project in order to help offenders successfully return to the community and a legitimate work role.

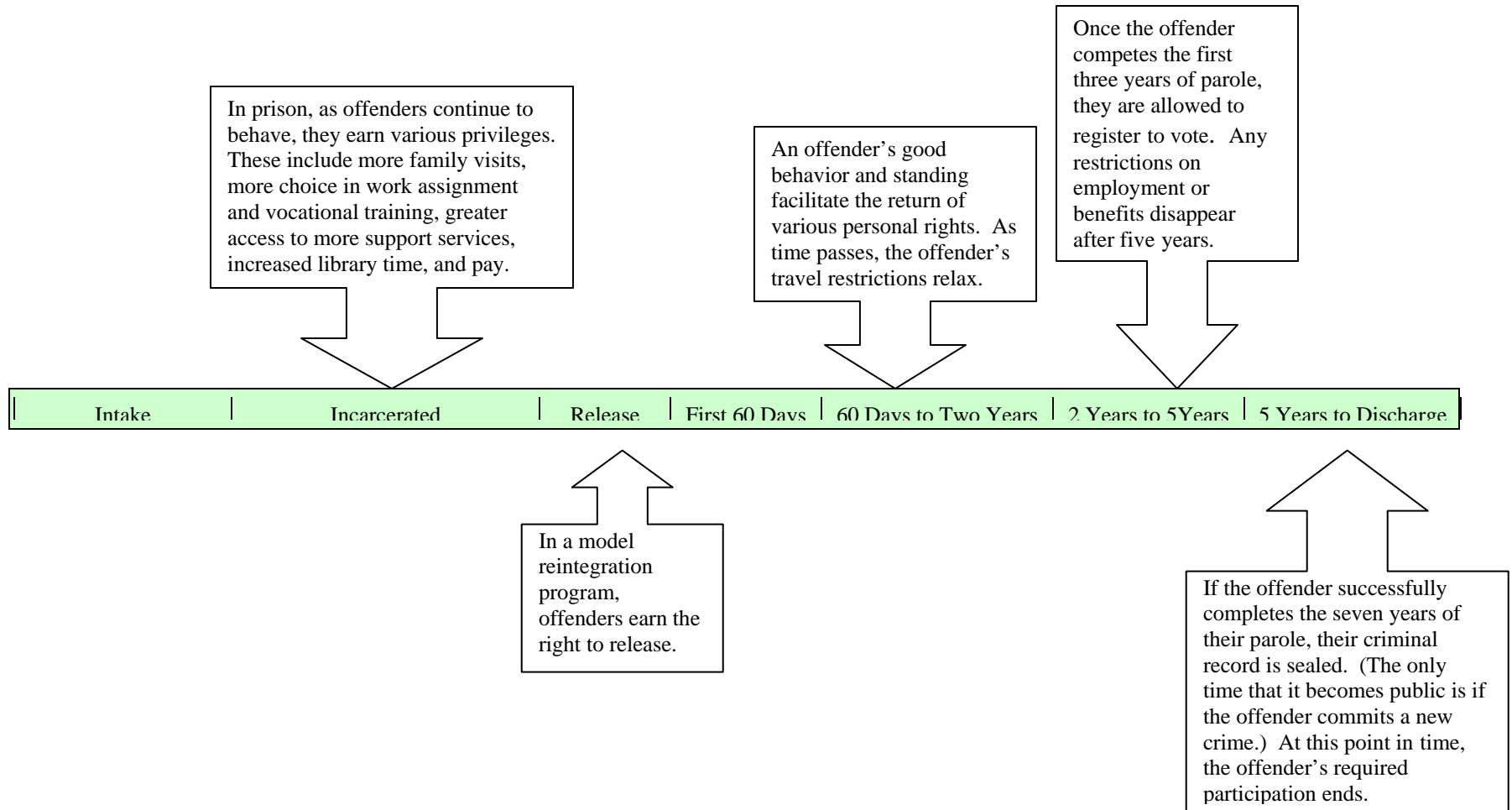
# Appendix A

## Schedule of Supervision Intensity



## Appendix B

### Reintegration of Rights Timeline



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