

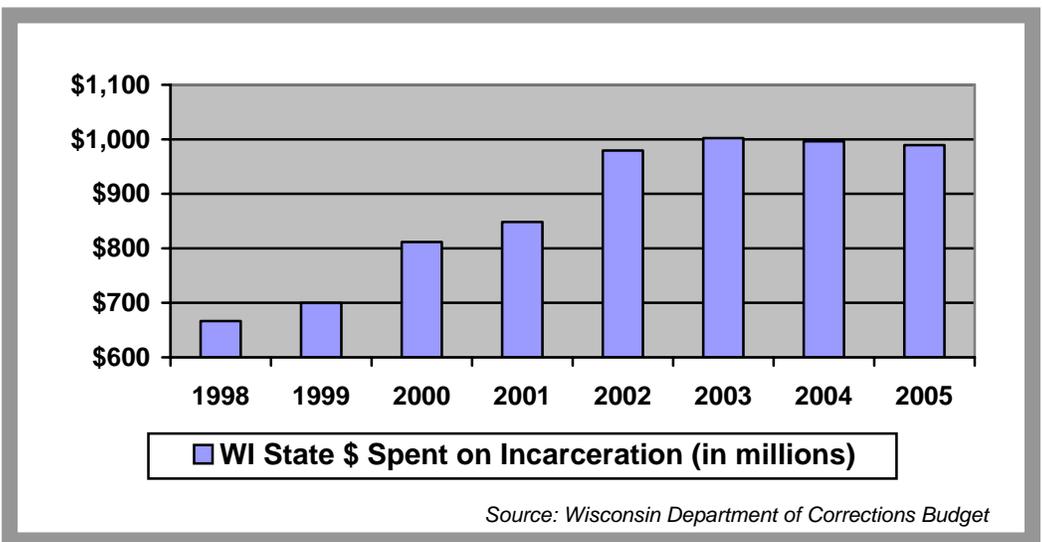
From Prisoner to Neighbor

Stopping the revolving door of prisons

Nearly 1,000 prisoners are released into Dane County each year. They face barriers such as unemployment, lack of affordable housing, no treatment for health issues and little support for reintegration into community life. Over half will return to prison within two years.

The returning prisoner population is not easy to embrace. They committed crimes that hurt our community and people we love. The first inclination of many people is to write off this population as undeserving, too much effort and not worth our community's resources. This, however, is not only socially and fiscally shortsighted, it also fails to take advantage of the progressive traditions and innovative approaches for which Dane County is known.

The cost of corrections continues to rise, as do the costs associated with caring for the families that prisoners leave behind. This issue reaches everyone in Dane County. With proven strategies to increase community reintegration, we can make a difference in the lives of returning prisoners and reduce the cost to our community.



- It costs approximately \$28,000 per year to keep one person in prison.
- In 1999, Wisconsin had the highest growth in incarceration in the nation.
- In 2003, Wisconsin spent \$1 billion on its Department of Corrections budget.

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Social Costs

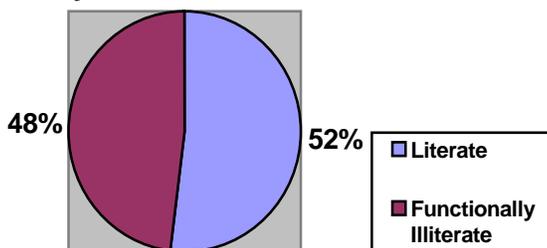
Incarceration costs our community more than just the cost of imprisonment.

- Domestic partners of people in prison often find that they have to turn to public assistance programs (food stamps, W-2) to support themselves and their family.
- The negative effects on children of incarcerated parents create additional needs in our school systems, our human services organizations and our juvenile justice system.
- Domestic partners of prisoners have an increased likelihood of medical and physical illnesses and require no- or low-cost health care options.

Children of Prisoners

- 58% are under age 10.
- 25% witnessed their parent's arrest.
- They are more likely to:
 - Have developmental delays (wet the bed, refuse to eat, poorly perform age-appropriate tasks)
 - Have decreased academic achievement, be truant, drop out of school
 - Show increased criminal or delinquent behavior (affiliate with gangs, drug abuse)
 - Have higher teen pregnancy rates
- They are three to six times as likely to end up in prison themselves.
- Children whose fathers are in prison are more likely to experience multiple stressors in the home such as:
 - Decreased physical and mental health of the mother
 - Increased likelihood of poverty
 - Increased child abuse and neglect

Literacy Skills of Wisconsin Inmates—2000



Returning Prisoners

Statistics on Wisconsin Prisoners

- Approximately 70% lack a high school diploma.
- At least 1/3 have a chronic illness needing treatment.
- 70-80% have alcohol or drug abuse problems.
- 15% have a severe mental illness (2-4 times the rate found in the general population).
- Prisoners are 5 times as likely as the general population to suffer from HIV infection or AIDS.
- Over 50% of released prisoners reoffend within a year of their release.

81.6% of Wisconsin's Prisoners are Men

- 80% of men in prison witnessed or were victims of violence in the home as children.
- 60% lack a high school degree.

18.4% of Wisconsin's Prisoners are Women

- Nearly 2/3 of women in prison have children under 18 years of age.
 - At least half of these women don't see their children during their incarceration.
- 6% of women are pregnant at the time of incarceration.
- Female prisoners have twice the rate of chronic health problems as male prisoners.

With the amount of money we spend on incarceration related costs each year, the Dane County community could:

- Build 113 new homes that would provide affordable housing for families
- Provide health care coverage for 1,610 families in the Dane County community
- Hire an additional 250-300 teachers for our schools

Any of these alternatives does more to solve the root causes of problems in our community than incarceration does.

—Kenneth Axe, Vice-Chair
 United Way of Dane County
 Safe Communities, Strong Neighborhoods Team

Stopping the Revolving Door

Successful community reentry is complex and difficult. Without help, a person is more likely than not to return to prison within two years. A returning prisoner needs to reconnect with family and friends whose lives have changed in their absence. They must find work and affordable housing. To be successful, they must also address ongoing health and addiction issues that were often left untreated during prison time. Complicating all of these challenges is the stigma of being an ex-convict.

Successful community reintegration occurs most often when returning prisoners have three to four of the following resources:

- **A place to live**—Affordable, permanent housing provides stability and connection to the community.
- **A job**—Employment not only provides legitimate income, it offers a sense of purpose, a positive support network and a productive daily activity.
- **Somewhere to turn**—Support networks, formal or informal, assist returning prisoners by helping to negotiate the difficulties in daily life. Group, community or family support provides moral support and positive reinforcement, can be a vital link to needed resources and can provide early intervention if there are concerns.
- **Treatment of AODA and mental health issues**—Addressing addiction or mental illness is essential to making progress in other areas of reintegration and keeping people from returning to prison. Someone who suffers from major depression or who is battling alcoholism will have a much more difficult time keeping a job. Without employment, the likelihood of maintaining housing decreases. Support networks are much harder to maintain when the returning prisoner is consumed with addiction or mental health issues.

My Personal Experience

*by Tamra Oman
Voices Beyond Bars*

As someone who was a prisoner and has returned to the community, I am intimately familiar with the support systems such as alcohol and drug treatment, training for employment, mental health treatment and housing assistance programs that exist.

The first few months following release are when returning offenders are more likely to re-offend. This is the critical time period for successful reintegration. When help and guidance are needed most, many prisoners are returned to the community with a small amount of money, small amount of prescriptions, find housing in areas that are filled with drugs and alcohol, and are armed with only a few suggested places to go for assistance.

I was fortunate. I have an education, received alcohol and drug treatment in prison and had a strong willingness to change my life despite adversities. I found a job (not a small feat considering that 65% of employers say they won't hire someone with a criminal record), was able to live with family and connected to a 12-step recovery program.

I also participate in Voices Beyond Bars, a Madison-area Urban Ministry program that engages returned prisoners in educating the community, advocating for reform in the criminal justice system and developing positive leadership and networks among returning prisoners.

These opportunities have been monumental in my ability to become a caring, compassionate and contributing member in this community. I once again feel that I have something of value to offer myself and others in my community.

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Measuring Our Impact

Through the work of United Way and community partners we hope to change the pattern of release and recidivism we see now. What will Dane County look like when we accomplish this? Outcomes measured will include:

For former prisoners:

- Decreased number of repeat offenders
- Decreased parole/probation violation arrests
- Increased percent of ex-offenders who are employed

For the children of incarcerated parents:

- Decreased disciplinary referrals
- Increased self-esteem
- Lack of criminal behavior
- Decreased child abuse

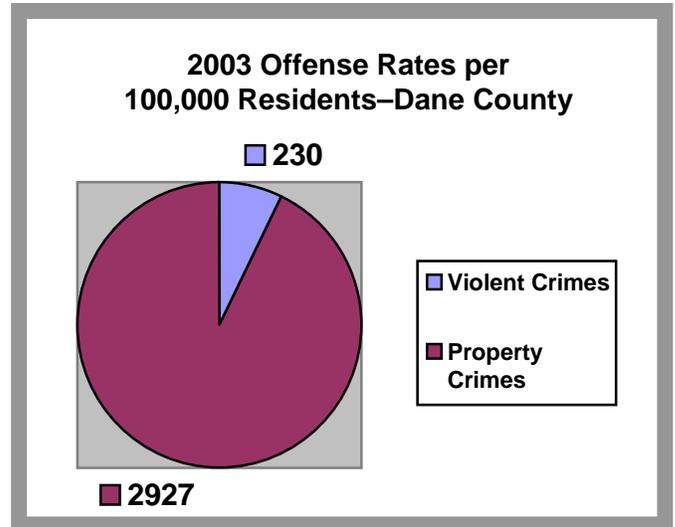
For the community:

- Decreased crime rate
- Decreased percentage of state prison population from Dane County
- Increased percentage of parolees who are successfully discharged from parole

You Can Make a Difference

- Provide mentoring to children of incarcerated parents
- Be a part of a "Circle of Support" for a returning prisoner
- Tutor prisoners to obtain their GED before being released from jail
- Work with ex-offenders to build job skills and prepare for employment

To find out more about these and other ways you can help increase the percentage of ex-offenders able to reintegrate effectively into our community, contact the Volunteer Center through United Way 2-1-1 or visit our web site, www.unitedwaydanecounty.org, and select VolunteerYourTime.



Inspirational Models

Safer Foundation—Illinois

Reduced the recidivism rate from over 50% to under 25%.

- Long-standing partnership with Department of Corrections
- Provides pre-employment/employment services
- Offers health resources and information
- 6-week basic skills training
- Ongoing case management support for one year to address housing, employment, addiction and other reintegration issues

Women's Prison Association (WPA)—New York
Almost an 80% success rate helping addicted offenders stay drug-free.

- Addresses specific population of offenders
- Case managers develop individualized plans with clients—before release from prison
- Makes connections between clients and community service providers with whom WPA has formal agreements
- Provides emergency funds for basic needs (housing, utilities)
- Develops relationships with community employers to increase the likelihood of returning prisoners finding employment
- Provides parenting skills class

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