

E-Career Counseling for Offender Re-entry

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Background

Our Background

- ▶ Counseling Psychology Professors at UCA
- ▶ Femina P. Varghese, Ph.D., has expertise in vocational psychology with offender populations; most of my work has been with adult male offenders, and most recently with juveniles as well.
- ▶ Elson Bihm, Ph.D., has expertise in prevention, addictions, child psychopathology



Recent Work: Mentoring Juveniles

- ▶ Worked with the Faulkner County Courthouse with Judge Troy Braswell and Ms. Faye Shepherd
- ▶ Graduate students and undergraduates from the University of Central Arkansas mentored juveniles for 9 weeks
- ▶ 1 hour a week of mentoring to help juveniles with career development
- ▶ 1 hour a week mentors were trained and provided weekly supervision to deliver mentoring
- ▶ Mentoring was structured and focused on career assessment and exploration, problem solving and overcoming obstacles, pro-social behaviors, building supports, and attitudes toward school and work
- ▶ Preliminary analysis of pilot data - better overall outcome in recidivism and the juveniles showed decreases in acting out behaviors





Current Crisis and Solution

Current Problem: Parolees and Recidivism

- ▶ Arkansas - 48.8% of parolees released from Arkansas prisons return to prison within 3 years (ADC report, 2011).
- ▶ It costs \$23,089 per year to incarcerate one offender in an ADC prison (ADC Report, 2014)
- ▶ Welfare costs the state of Arkansas per family \$17,423 per year (Tanner & Hughes, 2013).
- ▶ Council of State Governments Report: Arkansas has the highest rate of recidivism (parole violators are largest contributors).
- ▶ CSG recommends more community based programs

Our Solution

- ▶ Community based career counseling program to help parolees obtain jobs and maintain positive career orientation as this is one of the leading factors in desistance from crime.
- ▶ Quality services
 - ▶ Use Best Practices done with fidelity
- ▶ Accessible throughout the State of Arkansas (such as through technology)
 - ▶ eCareer Counseling Services

Benefits

- ▶ Save taxpayer dollars related to recidivism as technology is cost-effective in the long-term.
- ▶ Increase public safety.
- ▶ Help offenders contribute back into society through taxes from gainful employment.
- ▶ Provide Individualized attention
 - ▶ Evidence indicates that the most effective interventions for job obtainment involve career counseling, with individualized attention and feedback.
- ▶ Training the next generation of Arkansas leaders (i.e., our university students) - to work with this population with enthusiasm, skill, and knowledge.

Why Career Counselors?

- ▶ There is more to job obtainment than just handing a parolee a job.
- ▶ Work ethic, criminal thinking, and a realistic view of work influence getting and keeping a job.
- ▶ For example, parolees with antisocial attitudes about work, such as an unwillingness to work an entry level job or a poor work ethic, or poor coping skills are more likely to recidivate.
- ▶ Career counselors can help with this, as their job is to develop prosocial and accurate attitudes and behaviors regarding work.

Our Proposed Program

- ▶ We will help offenders obtain jobs by pairing them with trained career counselors who will provide individual counseling on a weekly basis, 1 hour a week, until the offender is employed.
- ▶ We will teach skills to help them keep a job, by targeting risk factors.
- ▶ Offenders need to obtain jobs and not recidivate. In order to do so, we are asking for support to develop an innovative e-career counseling program that integrates science in criminal justice, vocational psychology, and social psychology literature.

Our Goals

- ▶ We will develop a scientifically-based intervention specifically for Arkansas parolees that
 - ▶ Decreases recidivism
 - ▶ Increases job obtainment
 - ▶ Increases public safety
 - ▶ Increases cost savings related to incarceration
 - ▶ Is replicable across the state



Methods

- ▶ *Participants:*

- ▶ Adult male parolees from the Arkansas Community Correction.
- ▶ Ph.D and M.S. students in the Department of Psychology and Counseling of the University of Central Arkansas will be trained and given weekly supervision to provide career interventions to parolees.
- ▶ The career interventions will be tailored to the risk levels (risk of recidivism) of offenders. Therefore, length of treatment for the offender will vary in connection with the offender's risk to recidivate.

Materials

- ▶ *Materials:* The counseling will take place electronically through computers and the web, through Good Grid.
- ▶ *Place:*
 - ▶ Parolees will be at the Parole office in Little Rock of the Arkansas Community Correction.
 - ▶ Counselors will provide services from the Psychology Clinic at the University of Central Arkansas.



Procedures

- ▶ Trained and supervised Ph.D. and M.S. students will serve as career counselors and will communicate via tele-health technology with parolees.
- ▶ Every parolee in the program will meet with a counselor individually each week for 1 hour for electronic sessions.
- ▶ All interventions will utilize best practices from criminal justice and career counseling. After obtaining the recidivism risk level of the offender through the parole office, and through clinical evaluation of risk and need, counselors will provide career interventions based on individual needs.
- ▶ All career counselors will work with Arkansas Community Correction and Good Grid to connect parolees with available resources to overcome work barriers (e.g., transportation, clothing, etc.).

Risk Need Responsivity

- ▶ As a crucial part of this program we will follow best practices in corrections, the Risk Need Responsivity model of service provision.
- ▶ Risk: Assess for risk (ACC will provide risk level); Moderate to high risk parolees will need longer services that targets more criminogenic needs
- ▶ Need: Target criminogenic needs: Criminal Thinking; Peers; Antisocial Personality; Work and education; Family; Substance Use; Recreation as they intersect with work.
- ▶ Responsivity: Use what is helpful to offenders. Individualized and personalized treatments work best.

Five Components for Effective Career Intervention

- ▶ The project will also include the five components for effective career intervention:
 - ▶ Modeling
 - ▶ Building social supports
 - ▶ Individualized assessment
 - ▶ Providing accurate information on the real world of work
 - ▶ Written exercises

Values Affirmation

- ▶ Finally, values affirmation will be used to reinforce the integrated career counseling to increase motivation for employment and desistance consistent with personal values.
- ▶ Reminding people of their values makes people want to live consistently with them.
- ▶ Helps in motivating people to change.

Procedures

First Year
Develop

Second Year
Implement

Third Year
Analyze
Results

Results of Three Year Approach

- ▶ Develop an innovative and effective program for helping offenders obtain jobs.
- ▶ Parolees from this program will be examined on recidivism, employment length, and career development factors to see the strengths of the approach as well as to examine the weaknesses so that any weaknesses can be changed for a more effective treatment.
- ▶ At the end of 3 years a manual will be developed so that this treatment can be replicated with other parolees throughout the state.



Value of this Project

- ▶ ADC report in 2011 noted that 440 offenders returned to prison within 6 months. Considering incarceration for one inmate costs the state \$23,089 per year, this costs the state \$10,159,160 per year (over 10 million dollars per year) to incarcerate those 440 offenders who recidivate.
- ▶ ADC report in 2011, 3,308 offenders returned to prison within 3 years, costing the state \$76,378,412 per year (over 76 million dollars).
- ▶ Indeed, if this proposed program reduces recidivism in just 5 parolees, the state would save \$115,445 per year in incarceration costs. In 10 years that would be a savings of over 1 million dollars.

Uniqueness of the Program

- ▶ Innovative—combines best practices with accessible technology
- ▶ University of Central Arkansas has the only APA Accredited Ph.D. Counseling Psychology program in the State of Arkansas that trains Ph.D. level psychologists to work with a variety of populations
- ▶ Most of our students stay here in Arkansas, and this is an opportunity to expose them to a real needed area in Arkansas.
- ▶ Our plan is to create a program that could be replicated throughout the state.
- ▶ Using technology is more cost effective in the long-term than face to face services
- ▶ Increases access to care in a rural state such as Arkansas.
- ▶ Individualized weekly counseling and assessment is not something these parolees would likely receive otherwise.

Quote

- ▶ *"...corrections is a field that needs psychologists...And what components of society could be more deserving of the best efforts [of] psychologists...than public safety."* -Kathleen Hawk-Sawyer, Former Director of the United States Federal Bureau of Prisons