



Reentry is the process by which incarcerated persons return to the community. The reentry process should begin at arrest and continue through community reintegration. Ninety-five percent of offenders will eventually return to the community.<sup>1</sup>

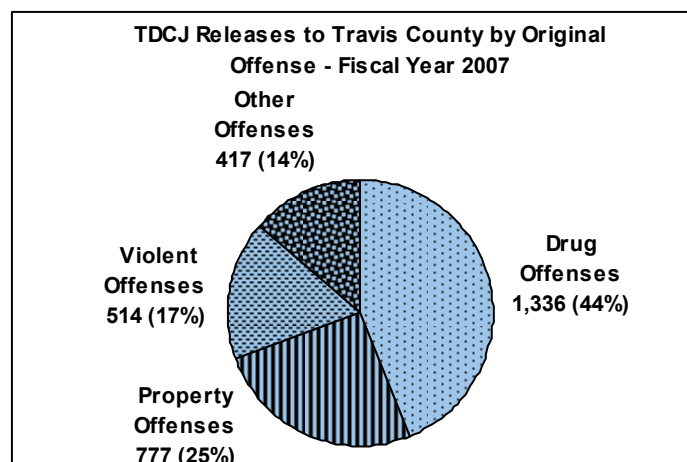
Returning to the community from prison can be a challenging process as individuals face barriers to basic supports such as housing and employment.

### PRIORITY ISSUES

- Successful reentry benefits the public at large in that Travis County is one of the top five counties of release for the Texas Department of Criminal Justice.
- Unstable housing is a major cause of recidivism since, with each move after prison, a person's likelihood of re-arrest increases by 25%.
- Employment is critical to the successful reentry of individuals returning from prison as only 13% of those employed after release return to prison within a year.
- Sixty-one percent of our local homeless population reported having been in jail or prison.

### WHO IS COMING BACK?

Over the past six years there has been a steady increase in the number of inmates within the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ), bringing the current population total to 156,070,<sup>2</sup> second only to California.<sup>3</sup> Travis County has a high number of inmates who have completed their time and are returning to life in our community. In fiscal year 2008, 3,084 inmates who were originally convicted in Travis County were released from prison. Eventually, most of the 5,375 inmates from Travis County still housed within TDCJ will also be released, many with plans to return to our community.<sup>4</sup> These individuals are primarily male. From 1997-2007 Travis County sent approximately 15,964 males and 1,613 females to prison.<sup>5</sup> On average, ex-offenders are 35 years old and have about a 10th-grade education.<sup>6</sup> In 2007 58% of the inmates released to Travis County were not under any form of supervision or parole which prevents them from accessing the typical parole reentry services.<sup>7</sup>



The "Other Offense" category includes non-violent offenses that do not fit within the other categories.

### WHY DOES REENTRY MATTER?

Successful reentry benefits public safety. Well designed transitioning initiatives that provide supports to offenders as they reenter the community reduces victimization, lowers recidivism rates, and breaks the cycle of involvement in the criminal justice system.<sup>8</sup> In 2003, the recidivism rate for Texas prisoners was approximately 28%.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, the financial effect of successful reentry is a reduction of money spent

\* For the purposes of this document, reentry from incarceration refers only to ex-offenders who served time in a state prison.

## Frequently Asked Questions about Reentry from Incarceration

on the correctional piece of our public safety system. Currently TDCJ incarcerates more than 150,000 individuals on an annual budget in excess of \$2.5 billion.<sup>10</sup> While TDCJ spends approximately \$40.06 per day per offender for incarceration, community supervision only costs \$2.27 per day per offender.<sup>11</sup>

When ex-offenders successfully transition back to their community, they have positive personal outcomes related to substance abuse, employment, stable housing, health, and family relationships.<sup>12</sup> Ex-offenders reconnecting with their families provides stability for their children. Parental incarceration affects 1 in every 40 children.<sup>13</sup> In 2005 the Seedling Foundation conservatively estimated that as many as 2,000 AISD children have a parent in prison.<sup>14</sup> When parents go to prison, most families experience financial losses or incur additional financial expenses. Given the financial and social stressors they face, caregivers living in the community and parents in prison may not be able to provide the nurturing, care and guidance that children need. Without the support and attention of these adults, children's own emotional issues can be exacerbated. These children also face social stigma and shame when a family member is incarcerated.<sup>15</sup> Ultimately, 1 in 10 of those children will be incarcerated themselves by the time they reach adulthood.<sup>16</sup>

### WHAT BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES DO EX-OFFENDERS FACE?

Ex-offenders face many barriers and challenges such as acquiring identification, meeting their own basic needs, and obtaining support services. In addition they are plagued by popular myths which makes their successful transition into the community more challenging. A few of these myths are discussed below.

#### HOUSING

**Myth:** Anyone can find housing.

**Fact:** For hundreds of ex-offenders returning to Travis County, the question of where they will live upon reentry is immediate and critical. Where, and under what circumstances, an ex-offender ultimately winds up living has a direct impact on their ability to re-establish family connections and the accessibility of employment and services. If ex-offenders do not have family to return to, then their options are impacted by landlord willingness to rent to them, private and public housing restrictions, and affordability. Landlords and public housing authorities reserve the right to deny housing to persons with criminal backgrounds, and many use criminal background checks as a serious consideration in determining the approval of an application for a rental property.<sup>17</sup> Assuming that ex-offenders can find a place that will accept their criminal history, then they must concern themselves with the issue of affordability. In addition to there being an overall lack of affordable housing in Travis County, most prisoners leave prison without enough money for a security deposit on an apartment.<sup>18</sup>

As a result, former offenders are at risk for homelessness. This has important consequences for society at large. Ex-offenders are more likely to re-offend if they do not find accommodation upon release.<sup>19</sup> In one study, more than a third of inmates returning to Travis County stated that they did not know where they would go upon release.<sup>20</sup> Jobless and unable to afford rent, former offenders may drift from homeless shelters to the couches of friends to low-rent hotels. This lack of stability creates an environment in which crimes flourish. With each move after release from prison, a person's likelihood of rearrest increases by 25%.<sup>21</sup>

#### EMPLOYMENT

**Myth:** People leaving prison don't want to work.

**Fact:** A study of Texas prisoners revealed that 93% felt that finding a job after release was important. Only 15% of respondents reported that they already had a job lined up on the outside. At the same time, most respondents who did not already have jobs lined up thought they would need some help or a lot of help in



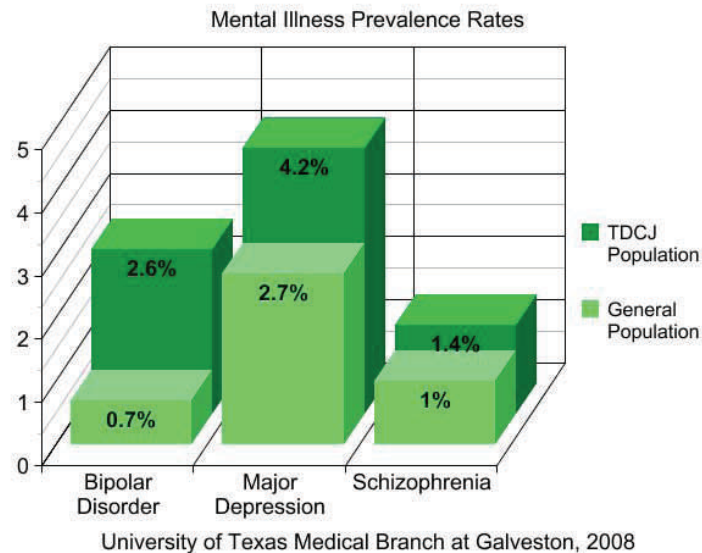
**With adequate resources, a family member returning from prison is better equipped to provide nurturing care and guidance to the children in their lives.**

finding a job.<sup>22</sup> In a study of prisoners returning to Travis County, 71.5% wanted to improve their educational and vocational abilities by getting more education and job training after release in addition to acquiring a job.<sup>23</sup> Employment is critical to the successful reentry of individuals returning from prison as only 13% of those employed after release return to prison within a year.<sup>24</sup> Travis County and the City of Austin have demonstrated their commitment to enhancing public safety by implementing effective reentry policies that will assist persons with criminal histories to transition successfully back into the community. In 2008 both of these governmental entities removed a significant employment barrier by moving the question about criminal history off of employment applications and to a later stage in the hiring process.<sup>25</sup> While this was an important accomplishment, much work remains within other employment sectors where this barrier still exists. Most local private sector employers have not removed this employment barrier from their hiring practices. Ex-offenders in Travis County who do become employed often earn minimum wage with average yearly earnings of only \$12,636 before tax deductions.<sup>26</sup>

## BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

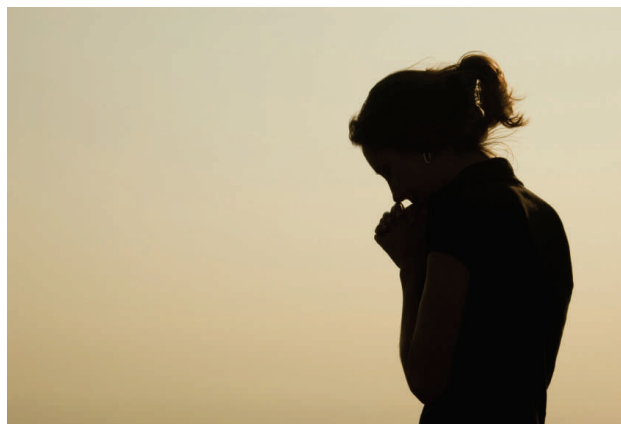
**Myth:** People with mental illness and developmental disabilities are violent and dangerous.

**Fact:** The majority of people with mental illness who are arrested and incarcerated are low-level, nonviolent offenders who are essentially exhibiting symptoms of untreated mental illness.<sup>27</sup> Prisons have essentially become default mental health facilities as institutional health care has declined and community-based mental health services remain severely underfunded.<sup>28</sup> As a result, mental illness is more prevalent among Texas' incarcerated population than it is among our general population (see chart at right).<sup>29</sup> From 2006-2008 approximately 931 prisoners who had either major depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, or a developmental disability were released to Travis County.<sup>30</sup> Returning to the community with mental health issues can further complicate life for ex-offenders, whether they are receiving services or not. Overall, offenders with mental illnesses have poorer outcomes related to housing and employment after release. They also have comparatively lower levels of family support, which studies show is critical for their successful reintegration into the community.<sup>31</sup>



**Myth:** More than anything else, drug addiction is a character flaw.

**Fact:** Continued use of addictive drugs changes your brain typically resulting in compulsive and even uncontrollable drug use.<sup>32</sup> More than 80% of state prison inmates have indications of serious drug or alcohol involvement. Ex-offenders who use alcohol or drugs are more likely to return to prison. This creates a difficult cycle whereby inmates with substance abuse issues remain separated from the mainstream community and confront greater challenges to integration, including having to create reliable ties with new support networks and addressing health and social needs.<sup>33</sup> Substance abuse treatment in prison, which continues once an ex-offender returns to the community, can assist with successful reentry. Studies show drug treatment reduces drug use by 40-60% and can significantly decrease criminal activity during and after treatment. There is also evidence that drug addiction treatment improves the prospects for employment, with gains of up to 40% after treatment.<sup>34</sup>



**Evidence demonstrates that faith and spirituality guide the process of reentry. A study of Texas inmates found that those who participated in a faith-based program were 60% less likely to be reincarcerated.<sup>35</sup>**

## WHAT CAN THE COMMUNITY DO TO HELP?

- Encourage public investment at both the state and local levels for programs to prepare people for re-entry while they are in prison and for post-release services.
- If you are a landlord, explore partnerships with parole or probation agencies to provide supervised housing.
- If you are an employer or housing provider, review your agency's practices to make them more inclusive.
- Explore reentry volunteer opportunities such as mentoring the child of an inmate, working with outreach ministries, or volunteering at a prison.
- Donate to a reentry agency or a social service agency that serves this population.
- Share this FAQ with people you know.
- Join the Austin/Travis County Reentry Roundtable or other local efforts to address these priority issues.

## WHERE CAN I LEARN MORE?

- [2-1-1 Central Texas](#)
- [Austin/Travis County Reentry Roundtable](#)
- [Office of Justice Programs: Reentry](#)
- [The Urban Institute's Justice Policy Center](#)
- [Travis County Criminal Justice Planning](#)
- [The Council of State Governments: Reentry Policy Council](#)

The Austin/Travis County Reentry Roundtable implements collaborative community-wide strategies for the effective reintegration of formerly incarcerated persons, thereby reducing recidivism, supporting victims and promoting public safety in Austin/Travis County. State and local organizations were involved in the development of this FAQ. For more information, visit <http://caction.org/rrt/index.html>.

## REFERENCES

- 1 [Austin Travis County Reentry Roundtable](#), 2009
- 2 [Bureau of Justice Statistics](#), 2005
- 3 [Bureau of Justice Statistics](#), 2007
- 4 [Texas Department of Criminal Justice](#), 2009
- 5 [Texas Department of Criminal Justice](#), 2008
- 6 [Texas Department of Criminal Justice](#), 2008
- 7 [Texas Department of Criminal Justice](#), 2002-2008
- 8 [Urban Institute and U.S. Department of Justice](#), 2006
- 9 [Legislative Budget Board](#), 2007
- 10 [Crime Prevention Institute](#), 2006
- 11 [Texas Department of Criminal Justice and the Community Justice Assistance Division](#), 2006
- 12 [Urban Institute](#), 2008
- 13 [National Resource Council on Children and Families of the Incarcerated](#), 2007
- 14 [Seedling Foundation](#), 2005
- 15 [Annie E. Casey Foundation](#), 2007
- 16 [Pacific Oaks College and Children's School](#), 1995
- 17 [Austin Travis County Reentry Roundtable](#), 2008
- 18 [Petersilia, Joan](#), 2003
- 19 [Urban Institute](#), 2004
- 20 [Austin Travis County Reentry Roundtable](#), 2008
- 21 [Austin Travis County Reentry Roundtable](#), 2008
- 22 [Urban Institute](#), 2005
- 23 [Austin Travis County Reentry Roundtable](#), 2008
- 24 [Urban Institute](#), 2008
- 25 [Austin Travis County Reentry Roundtable](#), 2008
- 26 [Austin Travis County Reentry Roundtable](#), 2008
- 27 [Bureau of Justice Statistics](#), 1999
- 28 [Texas Partners in Crisis](#), 2003
- 29 [University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston](#), 2008
- 30 [Texas Correctional Office on Offenders with Medical or Mental Impairments](#), 2009
- 31 [Urban Institute](#), 2008
- 32 [The Partnership for a Drug-Free America](#), 2006
- 33 [Belenko, Steven](#), 2006
- 34 [The Partnership for a Drug-Free America](#), 2006
- 35 [Urban Institute](#), 2004



**CAN PARTNERS:** Austin Area Human Services Association • Austin Area Interreligious Ministries • Austin Community College • Austin Independent School District • Austin Chamber of Commerce • Austin Travis County MHMR Center • Capital Metro • City of Austin • Community Justice Council • Integrated Care Collaboration • St. David's Community Health Foundation • St. Edward's University • Seton Family of Hospitals • University of Texas at Austin • Travis County • Travis County Healthcare District • United Way Capital Area • Workforce Solutions-Capital Area

This document was produced by CAN staff in cooperation with the Austin/Travis County Reentry Roundtable. Copies are available at [www.caction.org](http://www.caction.org). Questions should be directed to Chantel Bottoms, [chantel.bottoms@austinisd.org](mailto:chantel.bottoms@austinisd.org) or (512)414-0327.