

Pathways to **Success:** Corrections to College

Expanding educational opportunities for individuals living with criminal history through outreach, engagement, and support within Washington State's 34 Community and Technical Colleges.

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SVC | Skagit Valley College



**COMMUNITY AND
TECHNICAL COLLEGE**
Washington State Board

Expanding Educational Opportunities for Individuals Living with Criminal History*

Individuals living with criminal history face daunting challenges. Many come from groups disproportionately experiencing poverty, discrimination, racism, and poor educational opportunities.¹

Difficulties in securing housing, employment, and constructive relationships are significant barriers. Stigma related to a criminal past is a constant weight on their shoulders.²

If a successful community adjustment is not achieved, many will return to incarceration.³ This revolving door has disastrous effects for these individuals, their families, and our communities.

The best predictor of reentry success is employment.⁴ Many of those leaving correctional programs have few marketable skills, and when combined with a criminal record, employment opportunities are limited. Clearly the most productive road to employment is education.⁵ And among educational opportunities, the most realistic and productive path to improving one's chance of success is entry through the doors of one of our state's 34 community and technical colleges.

Pathways to Success is dedicated to expanding educational opportunities through Washington State's System of Community and Technical

Colleges and creating a welcoming and supportive environment for individuals living with criminal history.

**As was noted in the recently released Seattle Reentry Workgroup Final Report: "the workgroup asks that we not dehumanize those living with criminal history by using terms like 'felon,' 'prisoner,' 'inmate,' 'convict,' or 'offender.' These labels invoke images that are often racialized and reduce individuals to a label rather than honoring their full selves. They perpetuate racial profiling on an individual level by government agents and civilians. They serve to justify ill treatment and discrimination of people whose personhood is secondary to their criminal classification in society." (Seattle Office for Civil Rights, October 2018) page 8.*

What has School Meant to Me?

"School has meant a lot to me so far. I have just started but I feel it is a chance at a new start at life in the right direction and a good start at a career that I am looking forward to doing the rest of my life. School is challenging but I like the challenge and am willing to do what it takes to succeed."

– Student Reflection

WA State's 34 Community and Technical Colleges

- | | | |
|---|---|-----------------------------------|
| 1. Bates Technical College | 16. Lower Columbia College | |
| 2. Bellevue Technical College | 17. North Seattle College | |
| 3. Bellingham Technical College | 18. Olympic College | |
| 4. Big Bend Community College | 19. Peninsula College | |
| 5. Cascadia College | 20. Pierce College - Fort Steilacoom | |
| 6. Centralia College | 21. Pierce College - Puyallup | |
| 7. Clark College | 22. Renton Technical College | |
| 8. Clover Park Technical College | 23. Seattle Central College | |
| 9. Columbia Basin College | 24. Shoreline Community College | |
| 10. Edmonds Community College | 25. Skagit Valley College | |
| 11. Everett Community College | 26. South Puget Sound Community College | |
| 12. Grays Harbor College | 27. South Seattle College | |
| 13. Green River College | 28. Spokane Community College | |
| 14. Highline College | 29. Spokane Falls Community College | |
| 15. Lake Washington Institute of Technology | | |
| | | 30. Tacoma Community College |
| | | 31. Walla Walla Community College |
| | | 32. Wenatchee Valley College |
| | | 33. Whatcom Community College |
| | | 34. Yakima Valley College |



Why This Work is Important!

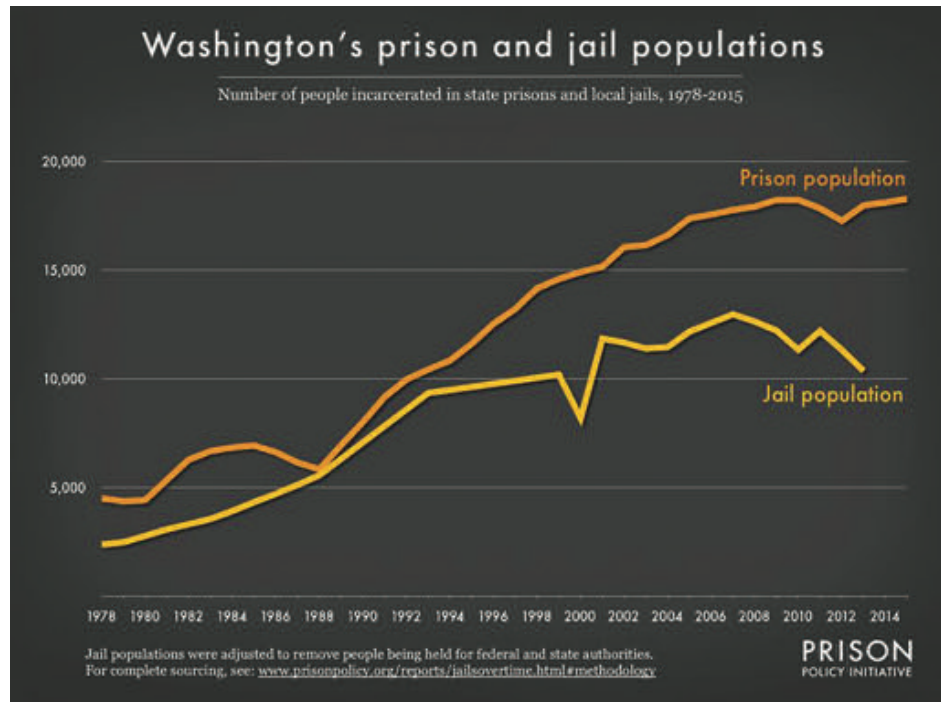
The judicial and correctional system in the United States is in crisis. Over the past 40 years, as policy makers at both state and federal levels adopted more punitive approaches to a rising crime rate, we have seen a growing number of our citizens in jail or prison. From 1972 to 2010, the nation's prison population has increased by 700%.⁶ Of all prisoners in the world, one of every four is incarcerated in this country. We now operate the largest system of imprisonment anywhere.⁷

Additionally, our system of incarceration is not reforming those who enter. As was reported by the Rand Corporation in its 2014 seminal study of this issue, of the more than 700,000 state and federal prisoners that are released back into their communities, approximately 40% commit new crimes or violate their parole and find themselves back behind bars within three years of walking free.⁸ In another report, the Federal Bureau of Justice Statistics notes that, "Overall, 67.8% of the 404,638 state prisoners released in 2005 in 30 states were arrested within three years of release and 76.6% were arrested within five years of release".⁹ In Washington State we are spending approximately \$1.9 billion annually and the annual cost per person incarcerated is \$38,946.¹⁰ In Washington State, DOC reports that in 2014 nearly one in three returned to prison within three years.¹¹ We must do better!

Accompanying the growing number of persons behind bars is the disproportionate representation of ethnic minorities and those who are disadvantaged in our correctional system. Just as the growing total number of inmates in Washington State mirror national trends, persons of color are significantly more likely to be found in prison than their white neighbors.¹²

Communities of color, LGBTQ individuals, people with history of mental illness or substance abuse, and communities denied access to quality education are all severely impacted.¹³

If we are to be successful in building reentry success, these issues must be addressed!



The Time is Ripe for Change

There is a strong movement afoot to move from “Being Tough on Crime” to “Being Smart on Crime”.¹⁴ As we continually see, “tough on crime” policies have been an abject failure. Over the last 40 years, an increasing proportion of our citizens have been incarcerated to the point where the United States locks up more people than any other country in the history of the planet.¹⁵ And, as we know, people of color and people in poverty have borne the highest burden.

Recently, both the federal government and state legislatures have taken steps to end mass incarceration and adopt a “smart on crime” approach.¹⁶ Federal level reform in the area of education can best be illustrated through recent steps to reinstate Second Chance Pell grants for financial aid to students in correctional facilities.

In Washington State we are seeing a number of promising steps to reform and increase opportunities for success for persons living with criminal history.

- In April of 2016, Governor Jay Inslee issued **EXECUTIVE ORDER 16-05 BUILDING SAFE AND STRONG COMMUNITIES THROUGH SUCCESSFUL REENTRY**. That order addressed community safety, disproportionality, rehabilitation, and expanding opportunities for those released from confinement. It was particularly focused on the importance of employment in reducing re-offense and on collaboration between state agencies in addressing these issues.
- Over the past three years, Washington State has expanded access to educational opportunities for students who are both currently and formerly incarcerated. Educational Navigators have been embedded both within Department of Corrections facilities and on several community college campuses. Educational Navigators within DOC facilities provide academic advising, assist in enrolling students in facility based educational programs, and support in connecting students with community colleges to continue education post-incarceration. Campus Based Navigators work in conjunction with their counterparts inside DOC to process admission applications, secure funding, and enroll students in classes post-release. Campus Based Navigators support students once on campus through continued academic advising, career counseling, and referrals to resources on campus.
- During the 2018 legislative session, several important bills were passed to support reentry

and opportunities for success for persons living with criminal history.¹⁷ They included:

- The Washington Fair Chance Act (Chapter 49.94 RCW), prohibiting employers from asking about criminal records on job applications.
- Legal Financial Obligations (Chapter 269; 2018), reducing interest rates on fines and fees.
- Establishing an Office of the Correctional Ombuds (Chapter 43.06C).
- Housing - Source of Income (Chapter 66; 2018), prohibiting landlords from refusing to rent based on source of income.
- Washington Fair Chance to Higher Education Act (Title 288 RCW), prohibiting an institution of higher education from using an initial admission application that requests information about the criminal history of an applicant.

These are very promising developments that set the stage for us to do more in expanding opportunities and access through higher education.

What has School Meant to Me?

“School has been a cornerstone in my own personal recovery. I have become addicted to learning. I feel that my life is so much more fulfilling now that I am working toward a career. I have taken on a new approach to everything I am involved in, trying to find something new to learn. I also enjoy being recognized for my hard work by my peers & instructors. I have made new friends and relationships at the college that are meaningful to me. I have the opportunity to be involved in organizations that give me the opportunity to be helpful. These things keep me sober and growing as an individual. School has become very meaningful to me and I will never forget my experience at SVC.”

– Student Reflection

Community and Technical Colleges are the Doorway to Opportunity

Washington State’s network of 34 Community and Technical Colleges are the doorway to educational opportunity for persons living with criminal history.

- Every geographical area of Washington is served by a community college!
- Community and Technical Colleges offer an amazing array of educational programs from pre-college to transfer degrees!
- Community and Technical Colleges provide extensive counseling and support services!
- Community and Technical Colleges are building new and expanded linkages with federal, state, and local correctional programs!
- Community and Technical Colleges are working with diverse community resources and with each other to support the success of students!

Expanding educational opportunities for persons leaving correctional institutions is our best hope for turning lives around. Incarceration itself is not effective. Educational programs both within institutions as well as post-release offer great promise for reducing recidivism, strengthening families, and building safer communities. In Washington State, the existing network of 34 community and technical colleges represent a natural resource for expanding education for this group of students. The enrollment of those leaving the correctional system can also contribute to campus diversity bringing a wealth of experiences and perspectives to enrich the college environment.



Pathways to Success at Skagit Valley College

Through **Pathways to Success**, Skagit Valley College has worked with the Skagit County Sheriff’s Office, the Department of Corrections (DOC), United Way, Community Action, and WorkSource Skagit to expand linkages and services for persons coming out of the criminal justice system.

On the basis of this experience, we are again working with the State Board, the Department of Corrections, and our partners across the state to expand educational opportunities in Washington’s Community and Technical College system.

As noted below, SVC has provided training to technical, professional, and instructional staff and secured a dedicated Reentry Navigator through the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges. Outreach services, linkages, and credited classes are offered in Skagit and Island County Justice Centers. The DOC rehabilitation program, Thinking for Change (T4C), is now offered in our college classrooms.

During the past two years, SVC has also led a statewide planning effort to develop an action plan for improving educational opportunities for individuals living with criminal history. The development of this roadmap, **Pathways to Success: Corrections to College**,¹⁸ involved representatives from local jurisdictions, community and technical colleges, students living with criminal history, and the State Department of Corrections. The results of this planning effort outlined and discussed 10 system improvement recommendations which can be found in that report.¹⁹

What has School Meant to Me?

“What the Skagit Valley College and school has meant to me in regard to being incarcerated is a second chance at life. Through school I have developed and made friendships with students who have gone through the same hardships I have in life and also chose a new path. School has also allowed me to grow up in ways I would not have thought possible while I was locked away both mentally and emotionally. Last, but not least, earning a degree and then finding a job in my field of study has allowed me to stay on the right path while earning a living I can be happy with.”

– Student Reflection



SVC Program Elements

Over the past decade, Skagit Valley College has worked with community partners, the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, and the Department of Corrections to expand educational and reentry services for students living with criminal history. SVC services and programs to serve this student population include:

Reentry Navigator

At the heart of SVC efforts is a Reentry Navigator who is the primary point of contact for reentry programs. SVC Reentry works with students throughout their entire course of study, from pre-enrollment to graduation. The Navigator is responsible for: academic advising, case management, supervising student workers, supporting the student club, outreach, and community referrals. In addition to campus-based reentry programs, the Navigator engages in outreach to State Prisons and local Justice Centers, and participates in the SBCTC/DOC Statewide Reentry Navigator Network.

Instruction on the SVC Campus

Through staff and faculty educational efforts, instructors across the campus are increasingly involved in supporting students living with criminal history. Close consultation is always available from counseling and navigation staff.

The DOC course, **Thinking for Change** (T4C), is now offered on SVC's Mount Vernon campus. T4C focuses on developing a positive community adjustment, is mandatory for some individuals releasing from DOC facilities, and creates a pathway to SVC programs. Offering T4C at SVC

also strengthens collaboration with local DOC Community Corrections Officers.

SVC provides **Life Transitions**, a six-week self-esteem and career exploratory course designed to assist students going through a significant life change. Life Transitions is geared towards either additional educational opportunities at SVC or seeking employment. In addition to classes at SVC, Life Transitions is now taught in the Skagit and Island County Justice Centers, where it serves as a pathway to college programs. The course is for credit and funded by the SVC Foundation.

Peer Reentry Navigators

Three Student Peer Navigators assist new students in adjusting to college life. They support other students with admissions, financial aid, registration, and locating resources on campus. These are paid student worker positions and those living with criminal history are preferred.

Student Led Efforts

SVC students living with criminal history assume significant roles in the life of the college and community. These include:

- SVC students, faculty, and staff present at our local Drug Courts, a sentencing diversion program.
- SVC students, faculty, and staff visit local treatment centers to promote education and the Life Transitions Program.
- SVC students, faculty, and staff go into our local justice centers monthly to speak on opportunities available at SVC.



Reentry Success is Facilitated Through the Active Involvement of Students Living with Criminal History

Why it is important to involve students:

- It gives students opportunities to develop skills
- It increases engagement in their education
- Helps students to engage in campus life
- Can provide opportunities for work-study or other employment
- Student engagement should be at the center of our work

Ways to engage students:

- Student clubs
- Conference attendance
- Creating ways for students to explore themes related to their experience in the classroom
- Developing work study and/or staff positions
- Creating extra-curricular projects with opportunities for student leadership

- SVC students, faculty, and staff visit our local DOC field office monthly to speak on opportunities available at SVC.

SVC students lead the student club, **Breaking Free**, which meets weekly and builds a strong support community on campus. Breaking Free is also active through service projects. The club has partnered with local agencies to collect clothing and hygiene items for the homeless and collected toys for children with incarcerated parent(s). The club offers students living with criminal history and their allies a space to engage and welcome new students to campus.

Community Partnership for Transition Solutions (CPTS)

SVC staff and students have been leaders in the CPTS community coalition addressing reentry. Hosted at SVC monthly, CPTS connects persons living with criminal history, community agencies, corrections staff, and individuals in the community. It serves as both an educational network and a group capable of carrying out community projects. Currently, CPTS is supporting the development

of a women's recovery house. CPTS was recently a partner in the production of a community wide educational event—**\$40 and a Bus Ticket**—highlighting the impact of the justice system on individuals, families, and the community.

What has School Meant to Me?

“For me school means another chance at life. Before coming to SVC I was incarcerated for 2 years. School for me is the opportunity to build a foundation for myself and learn a trade that will support me through the ups and downs. AND!!!! I’ve also found myself here learning more and more about myself every day. And me, I’ve made friends!”

– Student Reflection



Efforts to Expand College Opportunities are Growing in Washington Colleges and Across the Nation

Community colleges in Washington State have a history of developing innovative programs to engage and serve students living with criminal history. Examples include:

South Seattle College has one of the most established reentry programs in WA State and has been a leader in this area for over 15 years. South Seattle has learning centers off campus that run on their own schedule. They offer many transition related classes and short-term trainings focused on employment.

Tacoma Community College New Chances Program provides individualized support to students living with criminal history. It understands that education is an important stepping stone to a better life and a reduced chance of recidivism. New Chances Bridge Support helps students before and after release, assists with enrollment and accessing financial aid, and makes community resource referrals.

Edmonds Community College Next Steps provides services at their campus north of Seattle. Edmonds serves a mixed rural/urban area near the Monroe State Prison Complex. In addition to other services, Next Steps offers "Inside Out" working with parents who are mandated by the state to participate in a parenting class. This is an important service as many of those experiencing reentry are parents.

The STAR Project serves individuals in the Washington State Penitentiary and Columbia County. STAR staff work within the State Penitentiary facilities conducting pre-release services with individual residents. Within the scope of this project, STAR connects clients to colleges in the student's home community.

The Department of Corrections and State Board for Community and Technical Colleges are funding reentry navigators on college campuses across the state. Navigators are serving students at Renton

Technical College, Seattle Central College, South Seattle College, Bates Technical College, Tacoma Community College, Clark College, Skagit Valley College, Edmonds Community College, Spokane Community College, and Evergreen State College.

There are many **national examples** of expanding educational opportunities for persons living with criminal history – including:

Project Rebound at San Francisco State University, founded in 1967, offers a range of student supports, including an alternative admissions process. Students in the program must have been incarcerated and be motivated to continue their education. Supports of Project Rebound include orientation to the University, in-house admissions, advocacy and support, academic advising, assistance in applying for funding, mental health counseling, and peer mentorship. These combine to make Project Rebound a powerful and long-standing program that has spread these practices to other California campuses.²⁰

The Prisoner Reentry Institute (PRI) of the John Jay College of Criminal Justice, New York City, helps

make the college dreams of formerly incarcerated and court-involved men and women a reality by providing guidance and practical assistance as they enroll and succeed in college. With access to the rich resources of college scholars and professionals, PRI provides greatly expanded support and opportunity for students living with criminal history. Services include: opportunities to participate in degree programs, academic counseling, support in getting loans out of default, college and financial aid application assistance, and peer mentoring through the first two semesters of college.²¹

Mountainview Communities and Transitional Supports at Rutgers University initiated college programs for previously incarcerated students in 2007. Mountainview was chosen as one of three sites for the Pathways to Postsecondary Education Project, supporting student reentry. This program was expanded to a second campus and has more recently served as a demonstration site for a Second Chance Pell award. Rutgers provides transition services to NJSTEP students inside prisons, halfway houses, and at local community colleges.²²

Recommendations for System Improvement

The following recommendations are suggested based on our collaborative work that has involved representatives from the criminal justice and educational systems, as well as from students living with criminal history.

- Each college is unique. Thus, while there will be common elements, efforts to strengthen programs will call for an individualized approach at each college.
- Build upon existing strengths!
- Recruit champions from staff, faculty, and student communities.
- Involve students living with criminal history in all phases of program development and operation.
- Garner administrative support – from the president on down.
- Promote the perspective that serving persons living with criminal history is central to the mission of the community college.
- Assess current policy and practice, and work toward the elimination of college admissions screening and employment practices that could discriminate against students with criminal history.

- Racism, prejudice, and mistreatment of marginalized groups have resulted in their overrepresentation in the criminal justice system. We must take specific steps to reach out and design programs to proactively engage marginalized groups and support their success in the academic community.
- Collaborate and partner with representatives of the criminal justice system, including local correctional programs and offices of the Department of Corrections.

What has School Meant to Me?

“School means to me the future. If you have education, you will get much further in life. You will be more confident, be able to talk to people and not be afraid to do so. Education has had a big impact on my life. Because of this I was able to pass high school and further my education and have the courage to go to college and better myself.”

– Student Reflection

Endnotes

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