

FY 2024 LEGISLATIVE REPORT

**Re-Entry Workforce
Development
Demonstration Grants**

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BACKGROUND

The Re-Entry Workforce Development Demonstration Program (RWDDP) is an initiative administered by Commonwealth Corporation on behalf of the Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development with the goal of improving workforce outcomes for individuals returning to their communities after incarceration (i.e. returning citizens). This grant program is funded through a General Appropriation Act in the Fiscal Year 2023 and Fiscal Year 2024 State Budget (7003-0150). This report describes the administrative functions of the program and client outcomes. It provides an update on grants funded with funds appropriated in the FY23 and FY24 state budgets.

JUSTIFICATION OF NEED:

Across Massachusetts, approximately 13,000 individuals are incarcerated in state prisons and county jails.[1]

In the United States, 50 percent of formerly incarcerated people remain unemployed in the year following their release. Over past decades, prisoner re-entry programs have increasingly provided formerly incarcerated job seekers with services such as job training, job placement assistance, and other job-search-related resources.[2] In Massachusetts, a recent study revealed employment posed a serious challenge for men and women, particularly just after release, with nearly 50 percent of respondents indicating they had not secured full-time employment one-year post-incarceration release.[3] Moreover, as a percentage of the incarcerated population compared to the general population in Massachusetts, Whites are underrepresented, and Black, Latinx, and Indigenous people are overrepresented in Massachusetts correctional facilities.[4] Additionally, Massachusetts has the highest differential between White and Latinx incarcerated individuals in the nation.[5]

Post-incarceration and jointly modeling employment and earnings, Blacks and Hispanics are estimated to have lower total earnings than Whites, even after accounting for health, human capital, and criminal involvement. [6] Indeed, Whites have worse health and higher rates of drug addiction, so accounting for covariates increases the estimated race/ethnicity gap in earnings. A decomposition attributes most of the earnings gaps to racial and ethnic inequalities in employment. Qualitative interviews suggest that Whites, more than Blacks and Hispanics, find stable, high-paying jobs through friends and family. [7]

According to the Massachusetts Department of Correction, the number of people incarcerated in their facilities has dropped by 45 percent over the past decade. Additionally, major cities generally account for the jurisdictions in which formerly incarcerated individuals reside. The cities include Boston, New Bedford, Springfield, Worcester, Fall River, Brockton, Lowell, Lynn, Taunton, and Lawrence.[8]

Commonwealth Corporation, in partnership with the Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development, is committed to addressing equity to ensure that populations, regions, and locations most impacted by incarceration in Massachusetts have access to vocationally centered programs that promote job training and retention.

ADMINISTRATION OF THE PROGRAM

SELECTION OF GRANTEES

This report provides an update on grants funded by appropriations in the FY23 and FY24 GAA budgets. The FY23 GAA budget appropriated \$3.5 million for RWDDP and the FY24 GAA budget appropriated \$2.5 million.

Funds appropriated in the FY23 GAA budget were used to support two groups of grantees, referred to in this report as FY23 Cohort 1 and FY23 Cohort 2. Due to the period of performance listed below, funds appropriated in the FY24 GAA budget were also used to support grantees funded in FY23 Cohort 2. Additional FY24 funding will be issued to new grantees in an upcoming funding solicitation in Spring 2024. This funding solicitation will leverage FY24 and anticipated FY25 funding to maximize the timeline available to provide services to formerly incarcerated individuals.

| BUDGET APPROPRIATION YEAR | GRANT COHORT | # GRANTS AWARDED | \$ AWARDED | GRANTEE PERIOD OF PERFORMANCE |
|---------------------------|----------------------|------------------|-------------|---------------------------------------|
| FY23 | FY23 Planning Grants | 2 | \$40,000 | September 1, 2022 – December 31, 2022 |
| FY23 | FY23 Cohort 1 | 10 | \$1,600,000 | August 1, 2022 – September 30, 2023 |
| FY23 & FY24 | FY23 Cohort 2 | 13 | \$2,430,900 | July 1, 2023- August 31, 2024 |



ADMINISTRATION OF THE PROGRAM

KEY PROGRAM ELEMENTS

In March of 2022, Commonwealth Corporation, on behalf of the Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development, issued a Request for Proposals soliciting applications from eligible organizations to each provide a comprehensive set of re-entry services tailored to assist with workforce training and employment services for the target returning citizen population while strengthening their partnerships to achieve positive outcomes. Eligible applicants had to:



ESTABLISH KEY PARTNERSHIPS

Create a partnership between a regional House of Correction/Department of Correction facility, two employer partners, training providers, and a community-based organization. MassHire Career Centers were recommended partners.



TRAINING DEVELOPMENT

Develop a training program with abovementioned partners to meet the needs of partners and the barriers of formerly incarcerated individuals.



ENGAGE AND RECRUIT PARTICIPANTS

Provide behind-the-wall engagement, recruit program participants, introduce participants to employer partners, and strengthen relationships.



IMPLEMENT SUPPORT SERVICES

Implement wrap-around services and culturally responsive management immediately upon release, designed to support the unique barriers to employment faced by formerly incarcerated individuals.



FOSTER A SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITY

Provide cohort-based training programs, creating a community of formerly incarcerated to support one another.



JOB PLACEMENT AND RETENTION

Provide job placement support to formerly incarcerated individuals to obtain and retain employment with sustainable wages in a career growth industry at pre-identified partner businesses.

ADMINISTRATION OF THE PROGRAM

ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS

Eligible applicants included (1) community-based organizations, (2) non-profit education, training or other service providers, (3) MassHire Career Centers, (4) MassHire Regional Workforce Boards, and (5) House of Correction/Department of Correction facilities with existing, successful programs with demonstrated positive outcomes for the following target populations:

- Individuals in a Department of Correction facility who will be released within 60 days of a program start date or individuals who were released no earlier than 12 months prior to enrolling in a program or a combination or both.
- Individuals in a House of Correction facility who will be released within 60 days of a program start date or individuals who were released no earlier than 12 months prior to enrolling in a program or a combination or both.

Applicants were required to demonstrate that they had a relationship with an organization that has access to and would provide referrals to the program, including at least one of the following types of organizations: House of Correction Facility, Department of Correction Facilities, Office of Community Correction, Department of Probation (Juvenile or Adult), or Department of Parole.

House of Correction (HOC) Facilities partners included:

Franklin County HOC, Hampshire County HOC, Suffolk County HOC, Worcester County HOC, Plymouth County HOC, Middlesex County HOC and Jail

Department of Correction (DOC) Facilities partners included:

Suffolk County DOC, Essex County DOC, Boston Pre-Release Center, Massachusetts DOC facilities

Department of Parole Partners included:

Hampshire Sheriff’s Office – Parole House

GRANTS SUPPORTED BY FY23 & FY24 APPROPRIATIONS

FY23 Planning Grants

The following chart provides information about the two organizations awarded grants as part of FY23 Planning Grants, including the grant award amount. Both organizations were awarded funds to support their internal development and participation in technical assistance provided by Commonwealth Corporation, which led to both organizations successfully applying for and receiving subsequent implementation funding.

| AWARDEE | AWARD AMOUNT |
|---|--------------|
| College Bound Dorchester dba. Boston Uncornered | \$20,000 |
| We Reach Inc. | \$20,000 |

FY23 COHORT 1

The following chart provides information about the 10 organizations awarded grants as part of FY23 Cohort 1, including the grant award amount and a description of the project. These grants operated from August 1, 2022-September 30, 2023.

| AWARDEE | AWARD AMOUNT | DESCRIPTION |
|---|--------------|---|
| Community Action Pioneer Valley | \$160,000 | <p>Implemented</p> <p>Community Action Pioneer Valley partnered with Franklin and Hampshire County House of Correction facilities to offer a training program focused on the manufacturing industry. The goal was to place successful graduates into production occupational roles at Deerfield Packaging/Mayhew Steel, Hillside Plastics, Quabbin Wire & Cable Company, and The Western MA Food Processing Center at the Franklin County Community Development Corporation.</p> |
| Community Work Services | \$160,000 | <p>Implemented</p> <p>Community Work Services partnered with Suffolk County House of Correction and Department of Correction facilities to offer a training program focused on the hospitality, culinary arts, and green environment services industry. The goal was to place successful graduates into environmental services aide, line cook, and clean energy technician focused on solar and offshore wind roles at Star Market and Finesse Hospitality.</p> |
| Future Hope Apprenticeship and Recovery Program | \$160,000 | <p>Implemented</p> <p>Future Hope Apprenticeship and Recovery Program partnered with Suffolk County House of Correction facility to offer a training program focused on the trades industry. The goal was to place successful graduates into carpenter, painter, and dry wall installer roles at Cross Country Painting Inc. and Built Better 55 LLC.</p> |
| Justice Resource Institute dba STRIVE Boston | \$160,000 | <p>Implemented</p> <p>STRIVE Boston partnered with Suffolk and Middlesex County Sheriff's Offices to offer a training program focused on the health care industry. The goal was to place successful graduates into patient transportation, environmental services, and therapeutic mentor roles at Brigham & Women's Hospital and Justice Resource Institute, Inc.</p> |
| Massasoit Community College | \$160,000 | <p>Implemented</p> <p>Massasoit Community College partnered with Plymouth County Sheriff's Department, MA Department of Correction facilities, and Haley House to offer a training program focused on the diesel technology industry. The goal was to place successful graduates into diesel mechanic/technician roles at Milton CAT, Waste Management, and Boston Freightliner.</p> |

FY23 COHORT 1

CONTINUED

| AWARDEE | AWARD AMOUNT | DESCRIPTION |
|--|--------------|--|
| New England Culinary Arts Training | \$160,000 | <p>Implemented New England Culinary Arts Training partnered with Suffolk County House of Correction and the MA Department of Correction facilities, and Roslindale Pre-Release Center to offer a training program focused on the culinary and hospitality industry. The goal was to place successful graduates into line cooks, prep cooks, sous chefs, and first-line food prep supervisors at Encore Boston Harbor, The Smoke Shop BBQ, Dig Inn, Whole Foods, Hyatt Regency Downtown Boston, The Somerset Club, and SRV.</p> |
| Positive Action Against Chemical Addiction | \$160,000 | <p>Implemented PAACA partnered with Bristol County Sheriff’s Office to offer a training program focused on the healthcare and addiction industry. The goal was to place successful graduates into recovery coach/counselor roles at High Point Treatment Center, Common Grounds Café, There Is A Solution, and Seven Hills Foundation.</p> |
| Interseminarian - Project Place | \$160,000 | <p>Implemented Project Place partnered with South Bay House of Correction and various community-based organizations to offer a training program focused on the logistics-warehouse and transportation industry. The goal was to place successful graduates into warehouse associate, material mover, and driver roles at Essendant and New Market Business Association.</p> |
| The Innocent Convicts | \$160,000 | <p>Implemented The Innocent Convicts partnered with Essex County Sheriff’s department to offer a training program focused on the construction industry. The goal was to place successful graduates into carpenter roles at Universal CommonGround, Inc., and Youth for Human Rights International, New England.</p> |
| Quinsigamond Community College | \$160,000 | <p>Implemented Quinsigamond Community College partnered with Worcester County Sheriff’s Office to offer a training program focused on the culinary industry. The goal was to place successful graduates into food preparation roles at Snapchef and the Massachusetts Restaurant Association.</p> |

FY23 COHORT 2

The following chart provides information about the 13 organizations awarded grants as part of FY23 Cohort 2, including the grant award amount and a description of the project. These grants began July 1, 2023 and will provide service through August 31, 2024.

| AWARDEE | AWARD AMOUNT | DESCRIPTION |
|---|--------------|--|
| Community Action Pioneer Valley | \$160,000 | Community Action Pioneer Valley will partner with Franklin County Sheriff's Office and Hampshire County Sheriff's Office to offer a training program with a focus on the manufacturing industry. Successful program graduates will be placed into production occupation roles at Deerfield Packaging/Mayhew Steel, The Western MA Food Processing Center at the Franklin County Community Development Corporation, Quabbin Wire, and Cable Company, Inc. |
| Community Work Services | \$200,000 | Community Work Services will partner with Suffolk County Sheriff's Department to offer a training program with a focus on clean energy solar technology, culinary arts, and hospitality industry. Successful program graduates will be placed into roles as solar photovoltaic installers/technicians and terraponic farm to table workers at Nexamp and Finesse Hospitality. |
| Dorchester Bay Economic Development Corporation | \$200,000 | Dorchester Bay Economic Development Corporation will partner with Suffolk County House of Correction to offer a training program with a focus on the manufacturing industry. Successful program graduates will be placed into roles as production assistants at Cycling 1854 and Chop Value. |
| MassHire Greater Lowell Workforce Board | \$200,000 | MassHire Greater Lowell Workforce Board will partner with Billerica House of Correction to offer a training program with a focus on the social services and manufacturing industry. Successful program graduates will be placed into roles as recovery coaches, outreach workers, and machine operators at Thrive Communities and 4 in 1 Company. |
| New England Culinary Arts Training | \$200,000 | New England Culinary Arts Training will partner with Suffolk County House of Correction, Boston Pre-Release Center, and Norfolk County Sheriff's Office to offer a training program with a focus on the food service and hospitality industry. Successful program graduates will be placed into roles as line cooks, prep cooks, sous chefs, and first-line food prep supervisors at Tatte, Highgate Hospitality, and Travelers Hospitality Group. |
| Norfolk County Sheriff's Office | \$70,900 | Norfolk County Sheriff's Office will offer a training program with a focus on the carpentry industry. Successful program graduates will be placed into roles as carpenters at North Atlantic States Carpenters Training Fund. |

FY23 COHORT 2

CONTINUED

| AWARDEE | AWARD AMOUNT | DESCRIPTION |
|--|--------------|---|
| Positive Action Against Chemical Addiction, Inc. | \$200,000 | Positive Action Against Chemical Addiction, Inc. will partner with Bristol County Sheriff’s Office and New Bedford District Court Probation to offer a training program with a focus on the health care/addiction treatment and services industry. Successful program graduates will be placed into roles as community health workers, recovery specialists, recovery coaches, recovery counselors, peer navigators, and outreach workers at High Point Treatment Center, PAACA – Common Grounds Café, Recovery Connection, Ignite Recovery, Seven Hills Foundation, and There Is a Solution. |
| Quinsigamond Community College | \$200,000 | Quinsigamond Community College will partner with Worcester County Sheriff’s Office to offer a training program with a focus on the culinary industry. Successful program graduates will be placed into food preparation roles at Massachusetts Restaurant Association and Snapchef. |
| Justice Resource Institute dba STRIVE Boston | \$200,000 | STRIVE Boston will partner with Middlesex County Sheriff’s Office and Suffolk County Sheriff’s Office to offer a training program with a focus on the health care and social assistance industry. Successful program graduates will be placed into roles as security, patient transport and attendance, food and environmental services, direct and relief staff, and therapeutic mentors at Brigham and Women’s Hospital and Justice Resource Institute. |
| Bridge Club of Greater Lowell | \$200,000 | Bridge Club of Greater Lowell will partner with Middlesex County Sheriff’s Office to offer a training program with a focus on the manufacturing services industry. Successful program graduates will be placed in roles as warehouse workers, machine operators, and package handlers at Spruce Environmental Technologies Inc. and Westrock. |
| Uncornered, Inc. | \$200,000 | Uncornered will partner with Suffolk County House of Correction to offer a training program with a focus on the health care and social assistance industry. Successful program graduates will be placed in roles as social and human service assistants at InnerCity Weightlifting and Uncornered. |

FY23 COHORT 2

CONTINUED

| AWARDEE | AWARD AMOUNT | DESCRIPTION |
|---------------------------------------|--------------|---|
| Urban Impact Initiative Massachusetts | \$200,000 | Urban Impact Initiative Massachusetts will partner with Hampden County Sheriff's Department to offer a training program with a focus on the building trades, construction, CDL, and hospitality industry. Successful program graduates will be placed in roles as light truck drivers, tractor-trailer drivers, cooks, and customer service workers at S-Cel-O Painting and Supplier and The Artist Café. |
| WeReach, Inc. | \$200,000 | WeReach will partner with Plymouth County Sheriff's Department to offer a training program with a focus on the information technology industry. Successful program graduates will be placed in cyber security support technician roles at Boston Project, Truly Given, Roads Consulting Group, and DPV Transportation. |

COMMONWEALTH CORPORATION PROGRAM MANAGEMENT AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

SERVICE DETAILS

RWDDP, at its core, is designed to support both existing, larger agencies with capacity to implement services immediately, as well as provide training and program design support to smaller agencies that have traditionally been overlooked due to lack of capacity to implement larger-scale projects. These grants are designed to operate with a Program Design window that transitions into full implementation.

Successful applicants will spend the first two to four months in a Program Design phase of their grant period meeting four times as a large network, attending Technical Assistance (TA) Learning Communities facilitated by Commonwealth Corporation. These sessions will follow our program design model, beginning with Pre-Planning, followed by Planning & Program Design, and wrapping up with Implementation & Improvement. In between these four meetings, individual partners will meet with Commonwealth Corporation support staff to focus on partnership/site-specific challenges and strategic planning for the implementation window. Commonwealth Corporation operates this structure through our traditional key components of a successful program design model. This program design window will exist for all successful applicants, whether they have received implementation funds in the past. New grantees will spend this time designing their initial program, while prior funded grantees will spend this time working on program innovations and enhancements. All programs will need to submit an Implementation Plan using a template provided by Commonwealth Corporation before they are eligible to implement services.

Once the implementation window begins, funded partnerships will be expected to begin delivering services. For the next 12 months, sites will meet with Commonwealth Corporation program leadership monthly for TA Learning Community meetings as a network. These meetings will have topic-specific content based on feedback from the field, as well as opportunities to share best practices and external services. Sites may also use this time to present case studies to the network for feedback and support. These regular convenings will also facilitate client sharing opportunities—sometimes clients relocate to other cities or seek other industry focused job trainings based on interests – sites can refer clients to each other if this is something that occurs and may prevent service interruptions.

Ensuring a 12-month implementation window is incredibly important to service delivery for re-entry clients. Many are transitioning back into the community with legal, financial, and court-mandated barriers that can take up to 8 months to stabilize. Allowing extra time for funded sites to provide the important and necessary case management required to support formerly incarcerated individuals in the first few months of their re-entry is key to a client's success in a workforce training program.

During the final 3 months of the grant period, partnerships should be shifting into the placement phase of their program. This allows for a grace period if a client has a setback or is unable to achieve their 30-day employment placement retention outcome during the first attempt. It also provides a window of extended support if a client does successfully obtain 30 days of employment retention early—case managers can stay connected to both the client and the employer during this time.

ANNUAL PROGRESS UPDATE

GRANTS CLOSED IN FY23 PROGRAM OUTCOMES

As of this report's date, the grants funded in FY23 Cohort 1 have concluded and reported final outcomes. This round of funding supported 10 organizations, receiving \$1.6 million to provide services to formerly incarcerated individuals from August 1, 2022, to September 30, 2023. These grants were funded with RWDDP FY23 appropriation funding.

The FY23 Cohort 1 grantees collectively produced the following participant outcomes:

- 261 participants enrolled in training
- 176 participants completed training, leading to a 67% completion rate
- 89 were placed in employment following program completion, leading to a 51% employment placement rate
 - The average placement wage was \$19.01 per hour
 - The average hourly placement wage ranged from \$16.25 to \$21.99
 - More than 58 unique employers hired a program graduate

PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

FY23 COHORT 1, PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC DATA | N=261

| Age | Percentage |
|---------------------|------------|
| Age 18-24 Years Old | 11% |
| Age 25-34 Years Old | 34% |
| Age 35-44 Years Old | 30% |
| Age 45-54 Years Old | 15% |
| Age 55+ Years Old | 11% |
| Average Age | 38 |

| Gender | Percentage |
|------------------------|------------|
| Self-identified Female | 13% |
| Self-identified Male | 84% |
| Non-Binary/Other | 0% |
| Undisclosed/Missing | 3% |

| Race | Percentage |
|----------------------------------|------------|
| American Indian/Alaska Native | 2% |
| Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander | 0% |
| Asian | 0% |
| Black/African American | 38% |
| White | 27% |
| Multi-Racial | 5% |
| Other/Not Disclosed | 28% |

| Ethnicity | Percentage |
|------------------------|------------|
| Hispanic or Latinx | 26% |
| Not Hispanic or Latinx | 61% |
| Other/Not Disclosed | 13% |

DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

CONTINUED

Educational Attainment Level

| | |
|----------------------------|-----|
| Less Than High School | 16% |
| High School Diploma | 28% |
| HiSET/GED | 36% |
| Some Postsecondary/College | 15% |
| Associate Degree or Higher | 5% |

Pre-Program Status

| | |
|---------------|-----|
| Unemployed | 83% |
| Underemployed | 17% |

Other Characteristics

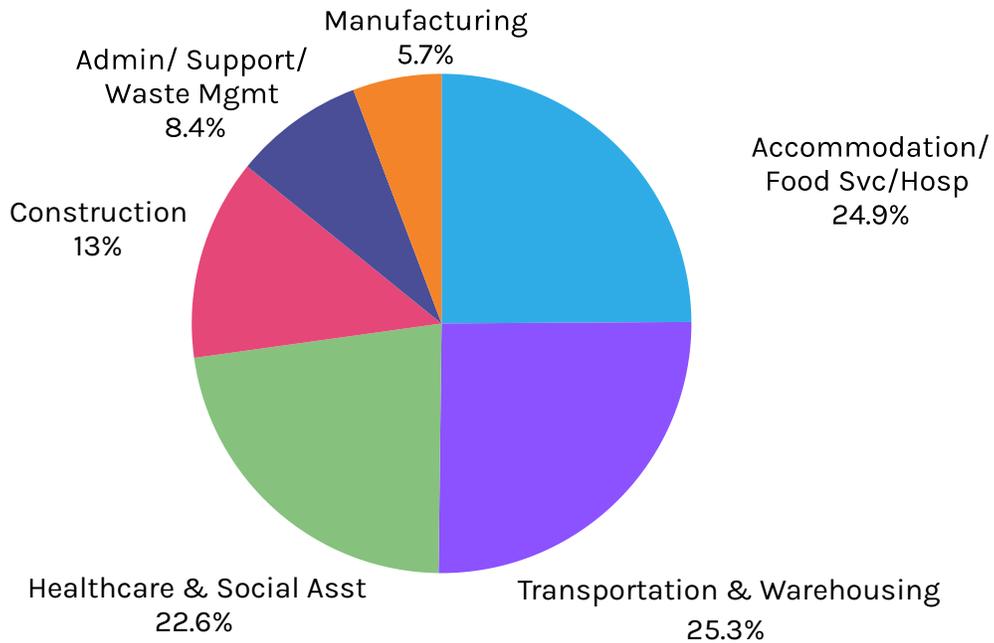
| | |
|--|-----|
| Persons with Disabilities | 17% |
| Immigrant | 9% |
| Language Not English | 7% |
| Receiving at least one form of Public Assistance (TAFDC, SSI, Refugee Assistance, EAEDC, Veteran's Benefits, SNAP) | 52% |

Formerly incarcerated individuals navigate barriers that affect their ability to complete programming and re-integrate into their communities. These barriers may include transportation, housing instability, food insecurity, mental health services/addiction etc. Services provided to mitigate barriers included benefits and housing application assistance, locating government documents (ID, birth certificate), arranging mental health services, arranging transportation, ect. Of the participants who did not complete the program, 26 percent had noted it was due to personal/family Issues and 27 percent having lost contact with the participant.



ANNUAL PROGRESS UPDATE – GRANTS CLOSED IN FY23 PROGRAM INDUSTRIES

COHORT 1 INDUSTRIES



*Total planned enrollments: 297



ANNUAL PROGRESS UPDATE

GRANTS ACTIVE IN FY23- DEMOGRAPHICS

The following table provides characteristics of participants enrolled in grants funded through FY23 Cohort 2, as of 02/26/2024, funded with a mix of RWDDP FY23 and FY24 appropriations. This grant is ongoing and ends August 31, 2024.

FY23 COHORT 2, PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC DATA | N=226

| | | |
|------------|---------------------|-----------|
| Age | Age 18-24 Years Old | 13% |
| | Age 25-34 Years Old | 30% |
| | Age 35-44 Years Old | 33% |
| | Age 45-54 Years Old | 15% |
| | Age 55+ Years Old | 9% |
| | Average Age | 37 |

| | | |
|---------------|------------------------|-----|
| Gender | Self-identified Female | 14% |
| | Self-identified Male | 85% |
| | Non-Binary/Other | 0% |
| | Undisclosed/Missing | 1% |

| | | |
|-------------|----------------------------------|-----|
| Race | American Indian/Alaska Native | 1% |
| | Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander | 0% |
| | Asian | 2% |
| | Black/African American | 44% |
| | White | 26% |
| | Multi-Racial | 4% |
| | Other/Not Disclosed | 23% |

| | | |
|------------------|------------------------|-----|
| Ethnicity | Hispanic or Latinx | 28% |
| | Not Hispanic or Latinx | 66% |
| | Other/Not Disclosed | 6% |

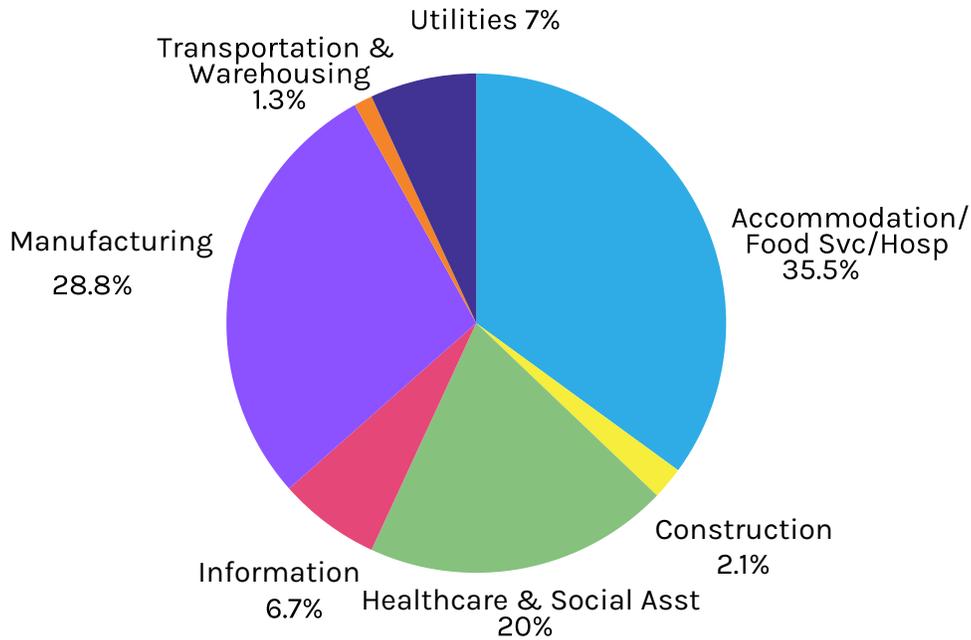
| | | |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------------|-----|
| Educational Attainment Level | Less Than High School | 31% |
| | High School Diploma | 25% |
| | HiSET/GED | 28% |
| | Some Postsecondary/College | 12% |
| | Associate Degree or Higher | 4% |

| | | |
|---------------------------|---------------|-----|
| Pre-Program Status | Unemployed | 87% |
| | Underemployed | 13% |

| | | |
|------------------------------|--|-----|
| Other Characteristics | Persons with Disabilities | 17% |
| | Immigrant | 11% |
| | Language Not English | 7% |
| | Receiving at least one form of Public Assistance (TAFDC, SSI, Refugee Assistance, EAEDC, Veteran's Benefits, SNAP) | 47% |

ANNUAL PROGRESS UPDATE – GRANTS ACTIVE IN FY23 PROGRAM INDUSTRIES

COHORT 2 INDUSTRIES BY GOAL



*Total planned enrollments: 330



INSPIRING NARRATIVES OF **ACHIEVEMENT**



NECAT's culinary training program equips formerly incarcerated individuals with essential skills, boosting workforce development and reducing recidivism. →

SUCCESS STORY

Cooking Second Chances at NECAT

A 2011 study revealed that employment was the single most important factor for decreasing recidivism. In fact, studies show recidivism rates can be nearly cut in half for returning citizens who have full-time jobs compared with those who are unemployed. And where do they find jobs? According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, some of the major industries employing formerly incarcerated citizens include waste management services, construction, and food service. For the New England Culinary Arts Training (NECAT), this offers a great opportunity to fulfill its mission of empowering adults facing barriers to employment.



“The restaurant and food service industry have traditionally been more welcoming,” says Barbara Platt Johnson, Grants Manager at NECAT. “Employers are really open to working with us, and they are CORI-friendly. There’s always a need for employment and good opportunities to advance.”

In Fiscal Year 2024, NECAT received a \$200,000 Re-Entry Workforce Development Demonstration Program grant to train individuals in food service and hospitality at Suffolk County House of Correction, Boston Pre-Release Center, and Norfolk County Sheriff’s Office. Successful program graduates are placed into roles as line cooks, prep cooks, sous chefs, and first-line food prep supervisors.

“The culinary arts job training track is a 14-week program,” explains Barbara. “During the first seven weeks, they learn safety and culinary math, they learn how to read recipes, they are taught the five mother sauces, and they prepare to obtain their Serve Safe certification. In the second portion, they work in the kitchen learning recipes.”

Participants successfully conclude the program with a capstone project where they are tasked with creating a menu and preparing a flavorful lunch. “It’s truly amazing what they come up with,” says Barbara. “They go from learning to use a knife to creating fancy meals. The skill development and teamwork are amazing.”

NECAT understands that career deployment is just one piece of the pie. “NECAT operates under three pillars: culinary, career readiness, and wellness,” says Barbara. “While participants undergo training, we incorporate both wellness and career. They receive literacy training and learn how to use the Google Suite, make presentations, make resumes, and get ready to apply for a job. This means that while they are incarcerated, they are already working on their career goals, so it’s a much smoother transition. We also offer yoga, train them on conflict resolution, and help them develop interpersonal skills; our goal is to really set everyone up to be successful moving forward.”

For program graduates like Kevin, this program isn’t just a steppingstone – it’s a lifeline. Having grappled with the revolving door of incarceration and missing pivotal moments with his children, he realized it was time to break the cycle. “I’m tired of starting over,” says Kevin. “Every time I got out, I was starting over with relationships, housing, and I wasn’t there for my boys.”



KEVIN WORKING AT A RESTAURANT-
NECAT SUBMITTED

As a father of four boys, ranging from age 4 to 18, Kevin knew he owed it to his children to be present. “I know they need their father, and I need to settle down and be a father,” he says. “I was missing my kids’ birthdays, and this was my first Christmas and my first Thanksgiving home in 4 years.”

Kevin has been in the food industry his entire life, from growing up in the kitchen to working several restaurant jobs. “My family is very oriented in the food industry. My uncles and dad all worked in restaurants, so I grew up in the kitchen and have worked in restaurants.”

Since graduating from NECAT, Kevin’s journey has been nothing short of remarkable. He has worked diligently at a prominent restaurant in Framingham. He is currently working as a sous chef, with a salary of nearly \$90,000 with benefits – a big accomplishment he is very proud of. “This is my first manager position and the highest-paying job I’ve ever had. As I’m getting older, I don’t want to have to work two jobs and work 100 hours to live comfortably.”

Along with this career opportunity, Kevin was able to achieve stability for himself, his children, and his girlfriend. “Now I am trying to build my credit and trying to buy a house,” he says.

He is now looking forward to returning to NECAT to give back to the program by doing a demonstration for participants very soon. “I am very grateful for NECAT and all the experience that I had. They taught me more about baking and making desserts, they helped me get on the right track to hit the ground running, and I was able to earn a stipend while taking class. I have been trying to get there to do a demonstration.”

As individual success stories like Kevin’s demonstrate, programs like NECAT not only transform lives but also play a vital role in bolstering the workforce and addressing systemic barriers to reintegration faced by those re-entering society after incarceration.

“These programs are really important because they train people, and as you are earning a stipend, when you get out, you could save for the down payment of an apartment and have a job lined up,” says Kevin. When you go into jail, a lot of guys don’t get a lot of trades to come home with. NECAT helps them get job opportunities when they get out. They are really trying to help.”

INSPIRING NARRATIVES OF ACHIEVEMENT



From incarceration to community integration, PAACA offers a lifeline through comprehensive support and workforce training, helping individuals rebuild their lives beyond prison walls. →

SUCCESS STORY

Empowering Lives: Carlos's Reentry with PAACA

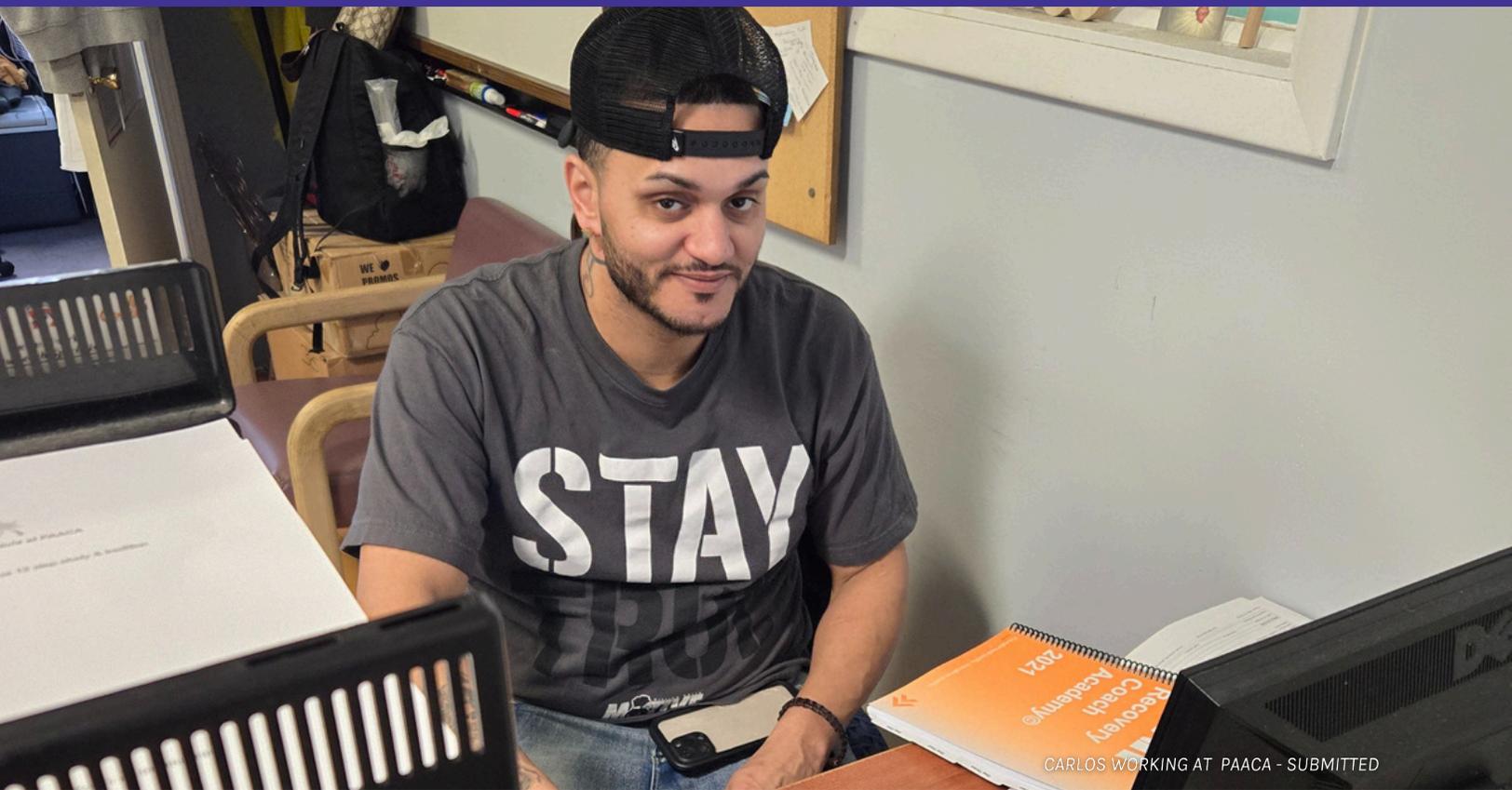


Annually, in the United States, more than 650,000[1] individuals face the challenge of returning to their communities post-incarceration. As they step back into reality, they encounter a spectrum of challenges, from confronting old habits and meeting family obligations, to navigating housing instability while attempting to integrate into a workforce that doesn't always welcome them with open arms. The journey of reentry is daunting, and the pursuit of avoiding recidivism adds an extra layer of complexity. Carlos, a former program participant at Positive Action Against Chemical Addiction (PAACA), Inc., a non-profit organization based in New Bedford, captures his reality, emphasizing, "It's a work in process and a journey."

Today, living in a full circle moment, sitting on the other side as a staff member at PAACA, he says it was his willingness to embrace transformation and being met halfway with the right resources that positioned him at the right place and time for real change. "It was a process that I was willing to take," he says. "Going through the experience and finding out there are resources available, I was happy to be at the right place and time."

PAACA partners with Bristol County Sheriff's Office and New Bedford District Court Probation to offer a training program focusing on health care/addiction treatment and workforce development. Successful program graduates like Carlos are placed into roles as community health workers, recovery specialists, recovery coaches, recovery counselors, peer navigators, and outreach workers at High Point Treatment Center, PAACA - Common Grounds Café, Recovery Connection, Ignite Recovery, Seven Hills Foundation, and There Is a Solution.

Carlos remembers arriving at PAACA completely empty-handed but willing to do the work. "I didn't have anything on my back. They clothed me, they fed me, gave me access to hygiene products... It takes time to get to where I am." He is now a Recovery Specialist at the same place where he met people who continue supporting and mentoring him, like Albie Cullen, Adult Services Director at PAACA.



CARLOS WORKING AT PAACA - SUBMITTED

“It truly takes two, and Carlos was willing,” says Cullen. “He was patient, and the reality is that people who get released from incarceration can be faced with overwhelming situations,” says Cullen. “They are often individuals who are not welcomed by society. They are on parole and probation, don’t have housing, don’t have income, they face food insecurities, and they face family challenges and child support. Facing that can be overwhelming, and having a place to come that can assist with those issues can be reassuring. It takes work, and the real benefit is seeing people like Carlos get to the other side.”

Remembering the day when he took the courage to ask Cullen for support, Carlos says he couldn’t agree more, “It’s a lot of work,” he says. “I was stuck; I did not know what to do. The fact that there are people that I can talk to, relate to, open up to make a connection— this is great space to open up, show up and let go.”

With a grassroots and holistic approach tailored to each participant, Cullen, Carlos, and the team offer essential support, including mental health council and training sessions in Conflict resolution, ethics, and boundaries. These comprehensive measures are geared towards success in the workforce and are aimed at empowering individuals to become productive citizens in their communities, understanding that recovery is a lifelong journey.

“I am still working under the wing of somebody, but wanting to be able to help someone the way they did is something I can’t explain,” says Carlos. “I wish I had known then the information and the resources available the way I know now. “

Cullen, a former criminal defense attorney, joined PAACA four years ago, bringing over 20 years of experience in justice to support reentering individuals. “No one sets out to be in jail; it maybe people just need to pour in addressing these issues,” says Cullen. “We can’t expect people to get out of jail if nothing changes. If they don’t have somebody to help them at the root of the problem, it’s not really going to change. By working together, we can help people get back on track, and people can get back on track; it takes resources. Everybody needs a little help, and programs like this are very important. We have to support each other.”

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