

## **Reducing Recidivism by Investing in Training, Education, and People (RI-TEP)**

### **Principal Point of Contact: K. Ria Hearld (School of Health Professions)**

Collaborators: Henna Budhwani (Public Health), Allyson Hall (Health Services Administration), William Opoku-Agyeman (Health Services Administration), Steve O'Connor (Health Services Administration), Larry Hearld (Health Services Administration)

*Collaborator names are listed in no particular order.*

**Statement of the Problem.** There are over 650,000 inmates released from jails and prisons in the United States each year. Recidivism, or the rearrests of former offenders for a similar offence, is at an all-time high. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, over two-thirds of the ex-offenders will be re-arrested within three years. Returning to a community after incarceration is long and complicated, with both practical and legal challenges for those released. Employment can be incredibly difficult to obtain with laws, both federal and state, barring ex-offenders from many jobs. Further, on average offenders have lower levels of education, poorer social networks, little job experience, mental health and physical health issues compared to non-offenders. Ex-offenders also face the social stigma of having served time in a prison. **One of the great lessons from welfare reform in the 1990s is that one of the best welfare programs is a job.** RAND conducted a study of prison inmates who engaged in academic and vocational training while incarcerated and found that participation in prison education was associated with a 43% reduction in recidivism; moreover, a \$1 investment in prison education reduces costs associated with incarceration by \$4 to \$5 in the first three years after release. Further research indicates that recidivism is reduced by 98% with the completion of a Bachelor's degree.

Alabama's prisons have been in the news repeatedly over the past two years. Allegations of corruption, mismanagement of prison funds, inadequate medical care, a failed plan in the state legislature for a new prison, overcrowding, and inmate riots and violence have all brought to light the many issues facing the state prison system. The homicide rate in Alabama's prisons is more than six times the national average and more than twice the rate of the next most violent state prisons, reflective of overcapacity and understaffing of prison personnel. Along with the rise in prison homicide and violence, an Alabama court in 2017 found that the state failed to provide constitutionally adequate mental health care to people in state prisons, noting that mental health services were "horrendously inadequate" and have led to a "skyrocketing suicide rate" among incarcerated people. **These factors contribute to Alabama having one of the nation's highest recidivism in the nation.**

**Proposal.** Our grand challenge proposal is to develop a multi-component re-entry program for offenders of non-violent crimes. Reducing Recidivism by Investing in Training, Education, and People (RI-TEP) program consists of three prongs. The first prong will focus on immediate educational, medical, and social needs while a person is incarcerated. We will implement educational and vocational training within the prisons, partnering with local industry groups for vocational training and local colleges/ universities for academic training. UAB will be at the forefront of innovative solutions to educational delivery within prisons, applying for funding to develop digital platforms for creative educational delivery within the prison environment. We will educate inmates on student aid available for inmates (Second Chance Pell Grant Program). Second, we will solve the mental health crisis within the prisons by delivering psychological and psychiatric care. We will develop innovative ways to deliver health care to inmates alongside robust organizational and financial strategies for sustaining the programs.

The second prong will be developing an early work release program for non-violent offenders in conjunction with prisons across the state. We will implement glass recycling statewide, allowing qualifying inmates to work collecting glass for recycling, which can then be used to manufacture of glass products. Alabama is ranked number 46 out of 50 states for ecofriendly behaviors, and the state has not had sustainable glass recycling to date. Glass is infinitely recyclable and can offset the state's carbon footprint. Implementing a statewide glass recycling program will integrate two needs of the state: an environmentally conscious solution to glass waste and the integration of ex-offenders in the work force. We will develop a feasibility plan for collecting the glass, which will be used to make new containers, countertops, highway road bases, and water/sewer installations. Once established, glass recycling plants across the state can provide job training for inmates in manufacturing and business development.

The third prong focuses on post release. We will partner with Mayor Woodfin's Re-entry Task Force to assist with transitions from the prison to the community and engaging families and communities to ensure successful release. For female inmates, we will partner with The Women's Fund to find multi-sector approaches to improve the economic security of female ex-offenders by focusing on educational, economic, and leadership opportunities. Upon five years post-release, successful graduates of the program can work as mentors with people newly enrolling in the program.

**UAB partners.** School of Engineering; School of Education; Department of Health Services Administration; Department of Health Organization and Policy; Department of Psychiatry; Department of Psychology; School of Business; School of Medicine; UAB Sustainability

**External partners.** City of Birmingham Office of the Mayor; Birmingham Re-entry Task Force; the Women's Fund of Birmingham, Alabama Department of Corrections