

HUD EMPLOYMENT LECTURE SERIES
Lecture #9 Script
EMPLOYMENT SERVICES FOR HOMELESS EX-OFFENDERS

**Section 1 Introduction to HUD Employment Lecture Series, Lecture #9
“Employment Services for Homeless Ex-Offenders”**

Colleagues:

This lecture is the ninth in a series of nine lectures that have been developed on employment-related topics. To download lectures from this series, please go to www.hudhre.info. Today’s topic is employment services for homeless ex-offenders—that is, people who have been convicted of crimes and are no longer incarcerated.

In your work with people who are homeless, you are likely to encounter people who have a criminal record, or a history of arrest but not necessarily conviction. Many people who are chronically homeless cycle between jails, shelters, and the street, and many people have difficulty finding or maintaining housing after their release from prison.

As we have discussed in previous lectures, helping people who are homeless obtain and retain employment requires an integrated services approach. You must balance job goals and employment-related activities with other needs such as housing and mental health and substance abuse treatment.

Ex-offenders typically require additional services and supports. For example, a person’s experiences while incarcerated might necessitate additional supports. Employer attitudes must also be taken into account as you help an ex-offender plan a job search, applications, and interviews. Finally, ongoing requirements of probation and parole might influence a person’s ability to take certain jobs. This lecture will discuss some strategies for assisting ex-offenders; these strategies are based on research and interviews with employment specialists.

There are nine sections in this audio lecture. The remaining eight sections are as follows:

- Section 2: The Cycle of Incarceration, Unemployment, and Homelessness;
- Section 3: Understanding Criminal Justice Involvement;
- Section 4: Identifying Job Opportunities;
- Section 5: Promoting the Hiring of Ex-Offenders;
- Section 6: Job Application and Resume Techniques;
- Section 7: Job Interview Strategies;
- Section 8: Supports Needed by Ex-Offenders; and
- Section 9: Conclusion.

A companion pamphlet provides a more in-depth analysis and includes a list of resources and examples of commonly used practices for assisting ex-offenders.

Section 2 The Cycle of Incarceration, Unemployment, and Homelessness

Our series of lectures on providing employment services to people who are homeless has made clear that unemployment and homelessness are interrelated. People who are unemployed are more likely to become homeless, and being homeless creates many barriers to employment. Involvement in the criminal justice system is similarly interrelated. Homelessness and unemployment are risk factors for being arrested for and convicted of a crime, and many ex-offenders face homelessness and unemployment after their release.

First, let's look at how *unemployment and homelessness* can lead to incarceration.

People who are homeless often commit so-called “survival crimes” to sustain themselves. For example, they might steal food or clothing or might break into an abandoned building for shelter. Many people who are homeless also have mental illnesses or substance abuse problems. Behaviors associated with these conditions might lead to arrests for crimes such as assault, drug possession, and public intoxication. Furthermore, police might charge people who are homeless with minor offenses such as urinating in public or having an open container of alcohol, in order to get them off the streets. Such offenses are often called “nuisance crimes” or “quality of life crimes” because they represent acts that might make an area less desirable to residents or businesses.

A recent analysis of data from local jails nationwide reaffirms the notion that people who are homeless are likely to end up behind bars. More than 15 percent of the people in local jails nationwide had been homeless at some point in the year before they were arrested.

Unemployment and low educational attainment are risk factors for incarceration as well. As many as one-third of U.S. inmates were unemployed when they were arrested, and about one-half of them do not have high school diplomas or GEDs.

Next, let's look at how *incarceration* can lead to unemployment and homelessness.

With limited education and work experience and the additional stigma of a criminal record, it is not surprising that many ex-offenders have limited employment opportunities upon their release. With no source of income, they are at risk of homelessness.

Other factors compound this risk:

- Many ex-offenders have strained relationships with families and friends who might provide them with a place to stay upon release.
- Others are able to find short-term living arrangements but quickly strain relationships because of the difficulty of adjusting to life after incarceration.
- Depending on their crime, ex-offenders are sometimes unable to qualify for forms of public assistance, such as Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (or TANF), public housing, and educational assistance.

It is no wonder, then, that ex-offenders make up a significant portion of the homeless population. In some major cities, one out of five people who is homeless has been incarcerated in recent years.

In addition to low educational achievement and lack of work history, homeless ex-offenders often face a number of other barriers to housing and employment. Many have experienced violence in prison and experience ongoing trauma issues. Many entered jail or prison with mental illnesses and substance abuse problems and did not get adequate care while incarcerated. According to some estimates, only one inmate in ten receives substance abuse treatment, even though seventy-five percent have substance abuse problems. Furthermore, one-fifth of inmates have mental illnesses, but mental health services are often under-funded. Compounding the problem, ex-offenders often have difficulty accessing these services upon release, with some programs refusing to serve people with a history of violent behavior.

Because of the complex set of issues faced by homeless ex-offenders, it is particularly important for you to use the integrated services approach that we have discussed in previous lectures in this lecture series. For a comprehensive discussion of this approach, see Lecture 3, which is titled “Using an Integrated Services Approach to Engage Clients in Employment, Housing, and Treatment.”

The “integrated services team” for an ex-offender can include someone from the correctional system, and if the participant reports to a probation or parole officer, that officer should be part of the team’s discussions. The remaining sections describe some of the techniques specific to employment that can be used to help overcome some of the barriers faced by ex-offenders.

Section 3 Understanding Criminal Justice Involvement

This lecture uses the term “ex-offenders” to describe people with past criminal convictions. However, not all offenses have the same impact on a person’s job prospects. Therefore, when a participant tells you that he or she has “a record,” it is important for you to find out more information. You can help a person request a copy of his or her “rap sheet,” or criminal record, from each State’s depository of criminal records. For each offense, it is important to know three things:

- One, was the offense a civil or criminal offense?
- Two, was the offense a misdemeanor or felony?
- And three, was the person convicted of the offense?

First, because employers are generally interested in *criminal* offenses, it is important to distinguish them from *civil* offenses.

Civil offenses might result in an arrest, but are usually punishable by a fine and do not require a jury trial. They can include traffic violations, minor offenses such as trespassing or loitering, and, in some States, possession of small amounts of marijuana. Many police forces have been cracking down on “quality of life” offenses among people who are homeless, including aggressive panhandling, public intoxication, and impeding pedestrians. Because some jurisdictions classify these actions as civil offenses, it is quite likely that the people you are assisting will have been cited for civil violations. However, because civil offenses are not crimes per se, they should *not* be reported as such on job applications.

Now, let’s discuss the difference between misdemeanors and felonies.

Criminal offenses are generally grouped into these two categories, based on the seriousness of the crime.

- Misdemeanors are crimes for which a person may be sentenced to no more than a year of incarceration.
- Felonies are crimes for which a person can be sentenced to more than a year of incarceration.

These classifications are based on the maximum possible sentence, not a person's actual sentence. For example, a person can be convicted of a misdemeanor and be sentenced to probation, while a person can be convicted of a felony and sentenced to less than a year.

Laws often provide guidance as to whether a criminal act constitutes a felony or misdemeanor. For example, theft of property worth more than a certain dollar amount might be a felony. However, in many cases, a prosecutor has some discretion on whether to charge a person with a felony or misdemeanor. Often, a prosecutor will agree to charge a person with a misdemeanor, rather than a felony, if the person pleads guilty.

Misdemeanors and felonies have very different impacts on a person's job prospects. Generally, there are no restrictions on employers asking job applicants about felony convictions. On the other hand, some States place limits on employer inquiries about misdemeanors. Here are some examples of State laws that might apply in your State:

- Employers cannot inquire about convictions that occurred more than five years ago.
- Employers cannot inquire about convictions for which probation or parole has been completed.
- Applicants are not required to report convictions that have been sealed or expunged through legal proceedings.
- Applicants are not required to report first-time convictions for minor, non-violent offenses such as disturbing the peace.
- Employers cannot inquire about convictions for crimes unrelated to job qualifications.

Additionally, many employers in industries with a high demand for employees do not even ask about misdemeanor convictions.

To help guide responses to questions on job applications and in interviews, you should make sure that you and the participant understand whether convictions were felonies or misdemeanors. A person should not report *misdemeanors* when asked about *felonies*.

Next, after determining what kind of crime the person was charged with, it is next important to distinguish whether a person was actually convicted of the crime.

A conviction can mean the person pleaded guilty or was found guilty at trial. Some States prohibit employers from asking about past arrests if the person was never convicted of the crime. Make sure that a person knows about any laws restricting employers' ability to ask about arrests and understands that he or she does not have to report an *arrest* when asked about *convictions*.

Finally, in addition to understanding a person's offenses, it is helpful to know a little bit about their experiences in the correctional system.

People who have been convicted of a crime sometimes pay only a fine, but they often are sentenced to incarceration in a jail or prison. These terms are often used

interchangeably in everyday conversation, but the facilities are quite different. A jail is locally run and can hold people who have been arrested while they await trial, as well as people convicted of misdemeanors and sentenced to a year or less of confinement. Prisons, in contrast, are run by the States and the U.S. Bureau of Prisons and can hold people sentenced to more than a year of incarceration.

Depending on the type of facility in which a person has been incarcerated, he or she might have had very different experiences. Urban jails tend to be large and chaotic, while jails outside of major metro areas tend to be quite small. Due to their transitional nature, jails typically offer few structured activities, and an inmate might not have access to educational or vocational programs, counseling, or adequate mental health and substance abuse treatment. Prisons, on the other hand, hold people for longer periods of time, and they might offer opportunities for working in the cafeteria, laundry, or so-called “prison industries,” which usually manufacture license plates or items for sale. Many prisons offer other types of vocational and educational activities such as training for specific professions, soft skills training, and GED and adult education classes.

Both jails and prisons can be violent places. A significant percentage of male and female inmates experiences violence, including sexual assaults. The combination of violence and confinement can be traumatizing, and thus many ex-offenders might need counseling or mental health treatment as part of their overall service plan. Additionally, gangs are active in correctional institutions, and inmates are exposed to many career criminals. Therefore, serving time in jail or prison can create an attachment to a criminal lifestyle, and an ex-offender might not see the value in starting over in a low-wage job.

People who have been convicted of crimes can also be subject to community supervision. The two major categories of community supervision are probation and parole. A judge can sentence a person to probation in lieu of jail or prison time, while a parole board can release an inmate on parole prior to the end of his or her sentence. In either case, a person must report to a designated officer of the court and usually must meet certain requirements after being released. These requirements might include regular drug testing, commitment to working or looking for work, curfews, travel restrictions, and limits on driving.

If a person is on probation or parole, it is important for you to include the probation or parole officer in planning for employment as well as job retention. Probation and parole officers are generally supportive of work. However, probationers and parolees may be subject to requirements that can limit their ability to hold certain jobs, restrict where they can work, and conflict with their work schedule.

Section 4 Identifying Job Opportunities

While ex-offenders often have a difficult time finding work, there are plenty of employers who do hire them. Given that as many as one in 15 Americans will serve time in prison during his or her lifetime, ex-offenders represent a significant segment of the available labor pool. To help ex-offenders re-enter society, the States and the Federal government have tried to encourage employers to give ex-offenders a second chance. Additionally, many employers have difficulty meeting their hiring needs and turn to ex-offenders out of business necessity.

Whenever you are doing job development for homeless participants, it is helpful to be on the lookout for employers that will hire ex-offenders. The companion pamphlet lists some of the industry segments in which employers are more likely to hire ex-offenders. Some

examples include the construction, telemarketing, transportation, and automotive industries. On the other hand, some employers, such as day care centers, banks, and casinos, have legal restrictions on hiring ex-offenders.

While identifying industry segments can serve as a good starting point for job development, employment experts say that individual characteristics of employers are better indicators of whether they will hire ex-offenders. Employers/agencies with the following characteristics are more likely to hire ex-offenders:

- Employers with diverse workforces;
- Organizations with a social mission;
- Employers with personal or family experience with the criminal justice system;
- Employers with no HR department;
- Minority-owned businesses;
- Employers with many minority job applicants;
- Employers hiring large numbers of workers;
- Employers hiring mostly unskilled workers;
- Employers that use temp agencies; and
- Employers that hire welfare recipients.

Targeting employers that are more likely to hire ex-offenders can get you going in the right direction. However, talking with the employers' representatives can help you to identify whether they are willing to hire ex-offenders and whether there are any specific characteristics of ex-offenders whom they would or would not hire. Here are some questions that you can ask employers:

- Do you do background checks, and if so, what do you check for?
- Do you ask applicants about felony convictions?
- Do you ask applicants about misdemeanor convictions?
- Do you have any legal restrictions on hiring people convicted of crimes?
- Are there any specific crimes (such as theft or sex crimes) that would disqualify an applicant?

Keep in mind that many employers that conduct background checks do not screen out all ex-offenders, so it is important to find out employers' standards. For example, some employers might be particularly concerned about crimes involving theft, while other employers are mostly concerned about crimes involving children. Many employers are concerned only with felonies and not misdemeanors or civil offenses.

On the other hand, some ex-offenders might be particularly difficult to place due to the nature of their crime. Sex offenders, for example, have great difficulty finding employment. Understandably, employers are concerned about the safety of fellow employees and customers. Additionally, parole officers might place a number of restrictions on released sex offenders. Here are several examples:

- They may be prohibited from traveling to homes or other businesses;
- They must be closely supervised;

- They cannot have supervisory duties; and
- They cannot have contact with potential victims.

The companion pamphlet offers some suggestions for placing people with certain types of convictions.

Section 5 Promoting the Hiring of Ex-Offenders

Once you've identified potential employers, there is much you can do to promote the idea of hiring ex-offenders generally. The Federal Government has several programs designed to help promote the hiring of ex-offenders, and local or State governments in your area might as well. These programs include "bonding," which protects an employer from financial loss, and "tax credits," which save an employer money at tax time. Through the workforce system, local, State, and Federal governments also support training for ex-offenders. Perhaps most importantly, you can promote the hiring of participants by addressing employer concerns and explaining how you can work with employers to make sure that participants succeed on the job. We will discuss some of these programs as well as the types of supports valued by employers.

First, the Federal Bonding Program is a program that is administered by an agency in each State. This program helps to stimulate the hiring of ex-offenders, people with negative credit histories, and others whom employers might be reluctant to hire.

When an employee is "bonded," it means that a private company will cover any financial losses caused by the employee. For example, the bond would cover money that an employee steals from the cash register. As you might guess, it is very difficult for an employer to obtain a bond from a private company for an employee with a criminal record, so the Federal Government established the Federal Bonding Program to fill the void. Under the program, an employer who hires an ex-offender can receive up to five-thousand dollars in coverage free for six months, and the employer can purchase continuing coverage if there are no incidents within that six months.

While the Federal Bonding Program has many benefits, it is not a cure-all. Keep in mind that an employer would usually prefer to hire someone whom the employer thinks is honest rather than have to get compensated for a financial loss. Additionally, when employees act dishonestly, it can affect the business in other ways. For example, if an employee steals something belonging to a customer, the employer's business reputation can be damaged greatly. Therefore, try to get employers to think of the bonding program as a safety net for hiring people who have already begun to demonstrate a change in their ways.

Another program that the Federal Government has established to promote the hiring of ex-offenders is the Work Opportunity Tax Credit.

A "tax credit" is a reduction in the amount of taxes that an individual or business owes. An employer can qualify for a tax credit of up to twenty-four hundred dollars by hiring someone within one year of his or her release. The amount of the credit is based on the number of hours the employee works and the wages paid. The credit is structured so that employers are encouraged to hire people to work more hours.

The Work Opportunity Tax Credit is also available to employers who hire low-income veterans, people receiving public assistance, and other members of disadvantaged groups. However, many eligible employers do not apply for the credit. This may be

because employers are less interested in financial incentives to hire particular individuals than they are in getting good employees.

You can make your biggest impact on the hiring of ex-offenders by providing employers with good employees.

Programs that successfully place ex-offenders into employment typically focus on what they do to help participants succeed, rather than dwelling on barriers such as homelessness or offender status.

Talk about the training that participants receive, possibly including training that they receive while incarcerated. Make sure that employers know about any additional supports that you are able to provide employees once they are on the job, such as tools, uniforms, or transportation assistance. Employers want to know that employees will show up on time and be properly equipped to work.

Many employers that hire ex-offenders are smaller businesses that do not have a human resources, or HR, department. They often appreciate the assistance that an employment program can offer them. You can promote relationships with employers by describing the type of support that you can provide both to participants and to the employers if the employer wants your support.

One service that you can offer employers is pre-screening potential applicants before you present them to an employer. Recruiting and hiring new employees is expensive for employers. The fact that you are screening applicants, even if they have blemishes on their records, is important. You will be a lot more familiar with a participant than the employer could be with any applicant who walks in off the street. Also, it would cost the employer time and money to interview the applicant, assess strengths and weaknesses, and run background checks. If you are able to fully discuss the participant's strengths and weaknesses and directly address any concerns that the employer might have, you are providing the employer with a valuable service.

Employers might also appreciate the support you can offer them, or the support you can provide to participants once they are working. If you have the resources to provide these types of supports, be sure to promote this service. Keep in mind, however, that some employers are hesitant to collaborate with outside agencies on HR matters. Be sure to explain that your role is a supportive one. Reassure the employer that you will not interfere with the employer's ability to make disciplinary or staffing decisions.

For participants who are on probation or parole, you might also wish to discuss potential benefits to the employer. People under community supervision can be subjected to drug testing, curfews, or other requirements. Employers benefit from drug testing without incurring any costs. Some employers even like the fact that employees will not be out all night before coming to work.

A final consideration when promoting the idea of hiring ex-offenders is that people who have criminal histories become excellent, good, fair, or poor employees, just like any other applicant. Employers with a track record of hiring ex-offenders typically find that the ability to perform one's job is unrelated to one's criminal record. In fact, they find that outside training and screening of applicants can help ex-offenders become some of their most reliable employees.

Lecture 7 in this lecture series is titled "Employment Retention: Customization and Other Strategies." It provides a fairly comprehensive discussion of retention and, in particular,

offers ways that you can work with your clients and their employers to increase your clients' ability to keep their jobs and advance their careers.

Section 6 Job Application and Resume Techniques

Even if you have identified employers willing to hire ex-offenders, it can be a challenge to help individual applicants, each with his or her own strengths and weaknesses. People use a number of strategies for helping ex-offenders develop resumes and apply for and interview for jobs, but a common theme emerges—you should counsel people to be absolutely honest about their criminal history, but find ways to divert attention from it. Help them identify positive steps that they can point out to potential employers, such as job training they completed while incarcerated or personal lessons they have learned.

Many ex-offenders will be applying for jobs requiring a written application or an application completed at a computer kiosk. Often, these applications include an “acknowledgment” section, in which the applicant is asked to verify that all information is complete and accurate and acknowledge that any omissions or inaccuracies can lead to termination of employment.

Make sure that participants understand that when the application includes an acknowledgment, they must provide a complete, honest answer. If the application does not contain an acknowledgment, some employment specialists advise ex-offenders to leave questions about criminal convictions blank and wait to see if the question comes up during an interview.

However, a person should almost never falsely answer “no.” There are two possible exceptions to this rule. A person might have the right under State law to deny certain misdemeanor convictions, and a person might be able to answer negatively about sealed or expunged convictions. Be very sure of your State’s law before you counsel ex-offenders to answer “No” to conviction questions.

Job applications differ in the type of information requested. Some might ask about felony convictions only, while others might ask about any criminal offense, or even about arrests. Volunteering more information than is requested calls negative attention to the applicant. Thus, it is helpful for participants to have a list of how to respond to different types of questions. For example, a sheet of paper could spell out how the participant should respond to questions about felonies, all criminal offenses, and all offenses other than minor traffic violations.

Some employment programs prefer to use a “conviction letter” that the participant attaches to any job application. In the letter, the applicant is able to put the conviction in the context of the positive steps that he or she has taken since committing past offenses. A typical letter includes the following six elements:

- One, the offense and date of conviction;
- Two, what the ex-offender has learned;
- Three, how the ex-offender has taken responsibility;
- Four, steps taken toward self-improvement, such as education, training, drug rehabilitation, or anger management;
- Five, personal strengths and job skills; and
- Six, potential benefits to the employer, such as bonding or tax credits.

In addition to specific questions about convictions, other elements of a job application can potentially elicit information about criminal history. For example, a complete response to a question about employment history would include work done in a correctional facility. Applications often ask questions about reasons for leaving employment, which can potentially reveal information about arrests or jail time. Here are four suggestions for answering honestly without drawing attention:

- First, if a correctional facility uses a name for its prison industry or employment program, list the name, rather than the correctional facility, as the employer. For example, Nevada’s prison industries are called “Silver State Industries.”
- Second, if the correctional institution itself was the employer, abbreviate if possible. For example, use “C.F.” instead of “correctional facility.”
- Third, if a person was paid extremely low wages while in prison, list “minimum wage” or “training wage,” rather than the exact figure, in response to questions about pay.
- Fourth, use “relocated” as the reason for leaving jobs that a person left due to incarceration.

Working with the participant in advance to create a “standardized” job application, from which he or she can copy information, is particularly helpful to ensure that the person maximizes their chances of being hired without providing any inaccurate information.

Let’s now turn our attention to resumes.

Some of the same principles for completing job applications are also relevant in helping ex-offenders develop resumes. This includes the techniques for diverting attention from periods of incarceration. However, unlike a job application, a resume should *never* list a conviction.

Of course, employers are usually cautious when they see a resume with gaps in employment history, so many employment specialists prefer to help ex-offenders develop “functional resumes.” This type of resume is organized according to job skills, rather than chronologically. For example, it might have a section on “customer service skills,” which lists several past job accomplishments, and a section on “computer skills,” which lists past job experience and training courses completed.

Many employers check an applicant’s references—something that can pose a problem for ex-offenders. Employers generally prefer to have employment references rather than general character references. Thus, while ministers, correctional officers, and others who know about a person’s character might be willing to provide positive references, employers really want to hear from someone who observed a person in a work setting. Consider people who observed the participant while working in a correctional facility, if necessary. However, be particularly careful to talk to references before a participant gives their names to potential employers.

Section 7 Job Interview Strategies

Preparation for the job interview is especially critical because the participant has a limited time to make a good impression. He or she needs to make the employer see his or her strengths and look beyond any past mistakes. Additionally, the applicant is likely to be nervous during the interview, especially when questions about criminal history

come up. How the person handles the question will ultimately help decide whether or not he or she gets the job.

An ex-offender should not go into a job interview without knowing exactly what he or she will say about past criminal convictions and incarceration. Practice the participant's response until he or she seems comfortable talking about the subject. The participant's response should "sandwich" the answer between indications that the person has made some positive changes. For example, a person could answer:

I'm glad you asked, because I want you to feel comfortable about hiring me. When I was younger, I fell in with the wrong crowd. In 2003, I was convicted for stealing a car. My time in prison gave me time to realize that my life was headed in the wrong direction and I needed to turn my life around. I finished up my GED, took computer classes, and worked in the laundry plant to keep out of trouble. I've been keeping out of trouble by spending my time with positive people and really want an opportunity to prove myself.

As you help people craft responses to questions about criminal history, try to elicit the following types of information:

- How has the person's attitude changed as a result of serving time in the correctional facility? For example, have they gained a respect for authority, learned the value of work, or made a spiritual connection?
- What types of education and training opportunities has the person taken advantage of?
- What personal insight did the person gain, such as identifying negative influences in one's life or identifying the need for counseling or treatment?
- What changes has the person made in his or her lifestyle, such as avoiding "people, places, and things" that lead to trouble?
- What other steps has the person taken to prevent future trouble, such as anger management classes?

An important point to stress to participants is that they should not attempt to "re-try" their case. If someone have been convicted and served time, he or she should not attempt to convince the interviewer that the conviction was wrongful. That will only leave a bad impression. As you practice the person's response, also make sure that he or she does not dwell on the conviction or provide too much information. Stick to simple facts such as the name and date of the offense and time served.

Some employment specialists prefer ex-offenders to bring up the conviction on their own, rather than waiting for interviewers to ask. The theory is that the ex-offender has more control of the discussion. Others prefer that ex-offenders not volunteer the information because the question often does not come up. Careful practice can help the applicant keep control of the discussion, even if the interviewer is the person who brings up the question.

Section 8 Supports Needed by Ex-Offenders

In addition to assistance with the job search, a homeless ex-offender might need a number of additional supports in order to obtain and maintain employment. When developing an integrated services plan, it is important to determine additional supports

that a person might need as a result of a criminal record, experiences in the correctional system, or risk of re-offending.

One of the primary supports needed by ex-offenders is encouragement.

For any person who has been out of the workforce for a significant period of time, a job search can be discouraging. A homeless ex-offender often must apply for numerous jobs before getting an interview. Additionally, a person who has made a living through criminal activity might not think searching for, or working in, a low-wage job is worth the effort.

A particularly effective method of encouragement is linking a person to a mentor who can help to reaffirm the value of work, offer suggestions, and assist with adjustment to work. The companion pamphlet lists information and resources for starting mentoring programs.

Many ex-offenders also need support in addressing unmet substance abuse and mental health needs.

Engaging people in needed services helps them attain the stability needed to work and also demonstrates to potential employers a commitment to change. Often, the need for services will be related to trauma, including sexual trauma, experienced while incarcerated. Additionally, ex-offenders have experienced violence outside of correctional institutions at much higher rates than non-offenders. Some ex-offenders might also need ongoing counseling related to their own anger management issues or violent behavior.

Another support that some ex-offenders might benefit from legal assistance related to their criminal records.

Arrests for which the person was never charged or for which the person was acquitted sometimes continue to show up on a rap sheet, and an attorney can help to remove these arrests from a person's record. Under very limited circumstances, some States may allow people to have records of convictions "expunged" or "sealed." When a record is *expunged*, it is removed from a person's rap sheet; when records are *sealed*, they can only be accessed through a court order. These options are typically available only to someone who committed a single, minor offense in a prior year.

Some States also offer a "certificate of rehabilitation" to ex-offenders, which is essentially an official assessment that the person does not pose a significant risk of re-offending. These certificates allow people to enter certain professions that require a clean record of character and might reassure some employers. However, employers are free to make their own judgments regarding a person's reliability and character.

Finally, before a participant starts work, it is important to come up with a plan to help the person stay employed.

This plan should take into account several potential issues:

- Stresses from being in a work setting "outside" the prison environment;
- Tensions at the workplace due to behavior that has been learned or reinforced while incarcerated;
- Triggers that may tempt the individual to relapse or need additional treatment supports; and
- Coordination with the probation or parole officer, when applicable.

Many local governments have established offices for assisting ex-offenders with their re-entry into society. Establishing links with these offices, as well as the local correctional system, can be helpful in developing relevant supports for homeless ex-offenders as they return to employment.

After returning to work, it is critical to support ex-offenders during their first weeks on the job. For in-depth information about post-employment supports, please refer to Lecture 7 on employment retention. When working with ex-offenders, it is particularly important to be in frequent contact to ensure that people are showing up for work. Rather than allowing excuses, help them get the supports they need, such as child care or transportation assistance.

Track 9	Conclusion
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Homelessness, incarceration, and unemployment are part of a complex cycle that often includes substance abuse, mental illness, and trauma. Having a criminal record makes finding a job and housing more difficult, and one's experiences in the correctional system can have a lasting effect on motivation and ability to work successfully. Helping a homeless ex-offender get and keep a job poses many challenges and requires an integrated services approach.

When a participant informs you that he or she has a criminal record, it can be useful to help the person obtain a copy of his or her rap sheet so that you can review it together. It is important that the person understands the rap sheet and can distinguish between criminal and civil offenses, felonies and misdemeanors, and convictions and arrests without conviction. You might wish to consult with legal assistance agencies if there are errors on the rap sheet or if you have questions about the status of any of the offenses.

As you engage in job development for homeless participants, it is helpful to always be watchful for employers who might be willing to hire ex-offenders. Certain industries, such as construction, manufacturing, and transportation are more likely to hire ex-offenders, and individual employers might have some characteristics, such as frequent hiring needs, that make them more likely to hire ex-offenders. When doing job development, you can stress some of the advantages to hiring participants, including tax savings, financial protection through bonding, and most importantly, the work that you do to ensure that employers are getting reliable employees.

As you assist individual ex-offenders, you should stress how important it is for them to avoid providing any false information. At the same time, they should not volunteer any unnecessary information or call attention to their past. You can use some of the specific techniques described in the companion pamphlet to help people prepare their resumes, develop their responses to written job applications, and practice their responses to interviews. The participant should learn to stress the positive changes that he or she has made rather than trying to change the past. Although ex-offenders will have to try harder than most applicants, there are employers who are willing to give people another chance.