

# The Best Little Reentry Program in America

Amazing Journey Inc.

Volunteers Supporting the Sheriff's Reentry Services

Every year over 600,000 convicted felons in the U. S. are released from prison. Many of these men are high school dropouts; few have any marketable skills. As a result, over 40 percent are re-incarcerated within 3 years\* and the prospects for those who remain free are also poor. Men with criminal records account for about 34 percent of all nonworking men ages 25 to 54, according to a recent New York Times/CBS News/Kaiser Family Foundation poll. Two major factors driving this result are the strong bias against men with felony convictions and their lack of suitable work skills

It is clear that without an attractive skill set, the released inmate will have a very difficult time making a living. The Sheriff of Georgetown County SC has, in partnership with the County Director of Public Services, developed a program that overcomes these barriers.

The Georgetown County Sheriff's Reentry Services (RES) provides the means for incarcerated felons near the end of their sentences to obtain journeyman certification in over 15 trades. **In the past ten years over 275 men have completed their training and none have returned to prison.** This program is also remarkable in other ways:

- The training program is run by one salaried employee and nine volunteers. All testing and certification takes place within the Georgetown County Detention Center.
- All of the program participants work as apprentices for the Georgetown County Public Services Department to fulfill their training requirements for journeyman certification under expert supervision. This effort saves the county hundreds of thousands of dollars per year over the cost of incarceration and training.
- RES students learn how to write resumes and take interviews. They can interview with prospective employers while still in detention and being hired prior to release is not uncommon. Most released graduates find full time employment within six months.

\*Schmitt, John and Warner, Kris, 2010, "Ex-Offenders and the Labor Market", *Center for Economics and Policy Research*, pp 1-4

## The Process

The State of South Carolina permits prisoners with good conduct records to request transfer to other correction facilities within the state near the end of their sentences. The transfer is granted if the both state and receiving facility agree to the request. Georgetown County Detention Center (GCDC) has accepted transfers for a number of years to obtain a very low cost source of unskilled labor. Over the past decade the aim has been to obtain good candidates for the RES. Requests to participate in the RES are evaluated to determine suitability and selected men become RES candidates.

## Education and Training

The education program is conducted in the GCDC and has two goals; to prepare the student to successfully integrate into society and to begin the learning process for the trade he has selected.

Life Skills learning begins with helping candidates rehabilitate themselves to societal norms. Through cognitive behavioral therapy sessions the men learn to take responsibility for their offences, determine the motivating causes and situations that led to past offences and learn how to prevent future occurrences. They also learn the social skills needed to succeed in gaining employment and fitting into the community. Math and communication skills are taught in the context of work needs and typical transactions in life, e.g., household budgeting.

Trainees begin On-the-Job-Training (OJT) under supervisor/mentors in the Georgetown County Public Services Department (GCPSD) who teach the participants how to function as an employee as well as required tradecraft. Journeyman certification requires a significant investment of time and effort. In the case of Heating Ventilation and Air Conditioning (HVAC) the term of apprenticeship requires 6000 hours of reasonably continuous employment and OJT, supplemented by 432 hours of job related education.

## Finishing Touches

The RES also offers participants the opportunity for self-improvement and personal development. Some complete the requirements for the GED, a bible study class is popular and there is an art class offered by one of the volunteers. A recent grant for improved library facilities will also provide audio/visual capabilities. Occasional visits by program graduates who are doing well is a real morale booster.

Men close to the end of sentence receive help in obtaining personal documentation such as birth certificates and Social Security cards. They also participate in classes to develop resumes and prepare for employee interviews which are often scheduled ahead of release. Help in obtaining work clothes, tools and transportation is provided.

For more information visit our website <https://amazingjourneyinc.org/>

