

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Not Just a Job: A Career

Implementation of a Sectoral Training
Program for People Impacted by the
Criminal Legal System

Emily Brennan, Chelsea Jackson, and Anna Kyler



SEPTEMBER 2023

FUNDERS

This paper, and the project for which it was developed, are funded by the Reentry Division of the Los Angeles County Justice, Care, and Opportunities Department (JCOD). Prior to November 2022, when JCOD was established by the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, the Reentry Division, its programs, and staff members were housed within the Los Angeles County Department of Health Services, Office of Diversion and Reentry.

Dissemination of MDRC publications is supported by the following organizations and individuals that help finance MDRC's public policy outreach and expanding efforts to communicate the results and implications of our work to policymakers, practitioners, and others: The Annie E. Casey Foundation, Arnold Ventures, Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation, The Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, Ford Foundation, The George Gund Foundation, Daniel and Corinne Goldman, The Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation, Inc., The JPB Foundation, The Joyce Foundation, The Kresge Foundation, and Sandler Foundation.

In addition, earnings from the MDRC Endowment help sustain our dissemination efforts. Contributors to the MDRC Endowment include Alcoa Foundation, The Ambrose Monell Foundation, Anheuser-Busch Foundation, Bristol-Myers Squibb Foundation, Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, Ford Foundation, The George Gund Foundation, The Grable Foundation, The Lizabeth and Frank Newman Charitable Foundation, The New York Times Company Foundation, Jan Nicholson, Paul H. O'Neill Charitable Foundation, John S. Reed, Sandler Foundation, and The Stupski Family Fund, as well as other individual contributors.

The findings and conclusions in this report do not necessarily represent the official positions or policies of the funders.

For information about MDRC and copies of our publications, see our website: www.mdrc.org.

Copyright © 2023 by MDRC®. All rights reserved.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Los Angeles County Reentry Integrated Services Project (LA CRISP) is overseen by the Reentry Division of the Justice, Care, and Opportunities Department (JCOD). JCOD was established by the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors in November 2022 to centralize preexisting justice reform efforts in Los Angeles County, including pretrial and reentry services as well as jail closure work with an emphasis on the non-clinical components of this work. Previously, the Reentry Division, its programs, and staff members were housed within the Los Angeles County Department of Health Services, Office of Diversion and Reentry. We are grateful to many individuals in these offices for their involvement in the facilitation of the research and for their review and input on this report, including Katherine Vacanti, Joseph Wise-Wiley, Jessica Sarriot, Patricia Conklin, Melissa Espiritu, and Vanessa Martin.

The authors would like to express our gratitude to the dedicated staff members in the organizations participating in the evaluation of the Skills and Experience for the Careers of Tomorrow (SECTOR) program. Our sincerest appreciation to the community-based providers and their partners who have tirelessly served SECTOR participants and agreed to be interviewed for our research in advance of this report: Alliance for Community Empowerment, Anti-Recidivism Coalition, Chrysalis, Friends Outside in Los Angeles, Paving the Way, and the Center for Living and Learning.

We are sincerely grateful for the support of the Chief Information Office in Los Angeles County and for their assistance with data acquisition, with special thanks to Irene Vidyanti, Chun Liu, and Ricardo Basurto-Davila.

We appreciate the many other MDRC staff members who played a role in the research that made this report possible. Michelle Manno conducted qualitative interviews. Megan Schwartz and Eli Miller contributed to data collection and analysis. Sarah Picard, Bret Barden, Michelle Manno, Sophie Shanshory, Hannah Dalporto, and Ali Tufel reviewed the report. Jose Morales provided coordination support and fact checking, Luisa LaFleur edited the report, and Carolyn Thomas prepared the report for publication.

Lastly, we thank the individual program participants who participated in the study and shared their experiences. Your voices are invaluable to the research, and we sincerely appreciate your contributions.

The Authors

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Employment is an important factor in determining an individual’s success upon reentering the community following incarceration. When individuals who were formerly incarcerated return home, employment offers benefits for their mental health and well-being, provides structure and stability, and supplies earnings to support them and their families.¹ The benefits of employment are more pronounced when individuals earn higher incomes.² However, individuals who have been involved with the criminal legal system face structural disadvantages in finding high-wage employment, such as difficulty establishing work history or education credentials or developing the skills needed in today’s job market; they must also confront the stigma associated with having a criminal record.³

In 2019, when California’s Reentry Division operated within the Office of Diversion and Reentry (ODR), the California Board of State and Community Corrections (BSCC) awarded the Division a grant from the Safe Neighborhoods and Schools Act (Proposition 47 or “Prop 47”) grant program to launch the Skills and Experience for the Careers of Tomorrow (SECTOR) program.⁴ The SECTOR program provides employment and training services, cognitive behavioral interventions, and connections to mental health and substance use disorder services for people with previous legal system involvement.

The SECTOR program uses a sector-based approach, which involves connecting individuals to training opportunities that offer a livable wage, career advancement opportunities, and benefits for job seekers. Through partnerships with five community-based Los Angeles County organizations, SECTOR aims to (1) increase employment and earnings, (2) improve behavioral health

-
1. Joe Graffam, Alison Shinkfield, Barbara Lavelle, and Wenda McPherson, “Variables Affecting Successful Reintegration as Perceived by Offenders and Professionals,” *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation*, 40, 1–2 (2004): 147–171; Sheila Maguire, Joshua Freely, Carol Clymer, Maureen Conway, and Deena Schwartz, *Tuning In to Local Labor Markets: Findings from the Sectoral Employment Impact Study* (Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures, 2010). Website: <https://ppv.issuelab.org/resources/5101/5101.pdf>.
 2. Aaron Yelowitz and Christopher Bollinger, “Prison-to Work: The Benefits of Intensive Job-Search Assistance for Former Inmates” (New York: Manhattan Institute, 2015). Website: <https://www.manhattan-institute.org/html/new-report-enhanced-job-placement-programs-reduce-recidivism-rates-among-non-violent-offenders>.
 3. Lucius Couloute and Daniel Kopf, “Out of Prison & Out of Work: Unemployment Among Formerly Incarcerated People” (Northampton, Massachusetts: Prison Policy Initiative, 2018). Website: <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/outofwork.html>.
 4. In 2015, the Los Angeles County Department of Health Services established the Office of Diversion and Reentry within the Los Angeles County Department of Health Services. In 2022, the Board centralized preexisting justice reform efforts in Los Angeles County, including pretrial and reentry services, as well as jail closure work (with an emphasis on the non-clinical components of the work) by establishing the Justice, Care, and Opportunities Department (JCOD). The original Reentry Division within the Office of Diversion and Reentry, (hereafter referred to as the Reentry Division) transferred over as an entire unit (that is, all their contracts, programs, funding, and staff members) to JCOD in November 2022.

and well-being, and (3) reduce participant recidivism. The model anticipates that behavioral health, well-being, employment, and earnings improvements will reduce future interactions with the criminal legal system. Participants in the SECTOR program are eligible to receive five core components of the model:

1. Job readiness services, including career coaching by staff members with shared lived experience of criminal legal system involvement, and referrals to supportive services, including mental health and substance use disorder services.
2. Cognitive Behavioral Interventions–Employment Adult (CBI-EA), a series of employment-focused group sessions, informed by Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), to develop problem-solving skills for the workplace and prevent recidivism.⁵
3. Labor market demand-driven skills training and paid work experience that results in industry-recognized credentials.⁶ The employment sectors include healthcare and social assistance, information technology, advanced manufacturing, construction, leisure and hospitality, green jobs, arts and entertainment, government, and transportation and logistics.
4. Financial assistance, including stipends for skills training participation, wages earned from paid work experiences, and incentive payments tied to program participation and job retention.
5. Job placement assistance with employers upon completing a skills training program or a paid work experience.

This report presents the findings of the SECTOR program evaluation as part of the Los Angeles County Reentry Integrated Services Project (LA CRISP), a multi-year, multi-study evaluation of the Reentry Division’s programs led by MDRC. The SECTOR evaluation includes an implementation study and an outcomes study. The implementation study describes how the community-based organizations implemented the SECTOR program, whether it was implemented as intended, and whether it met its intended service quality and outcome goals. The outcomes study tracks one-year outcomes for the cohort of participants enrolled between January 1, 2021, and December 31, 2021 (the study period and first year of operation). The outcomes study focuses mainly on employment and criminal legal system contact and whether SECTOR successfully connects individuals to mental health and substance use disorder services.

Based on descriptive analyses of administrative management information system data, qualitative data from semi-structured interviews with staff members from SECTOR providers, program participants, training providers, employers, and Reentry Division staff members, and an analysis

-
5. CBT is a psychological treatment that helps individuals examine their thought patterns and emotions that lead to unwanted behavior and apply strategies to alter those thoughts and emotions.
 6. Paid work experiences can take many forms, including transitional subsidized employment, which allows individuals without recent work experience or who need more experience overcome barriers and gain basic workplace skills and experience. Other forms include apprenticeships, internships, or Career and Technical Education work-based learning programs.

of official planning and program documents, this evaluation finds that the SECTOR program offers a promising approach to help participants with previous criminal legal system involvement in finding employment in high-growth sectors. The SECTOR evaluation findings include:

- SECTOR providers successfully recruited and enrolled participants in the program. In its first year of implementation, the SECTOR program aimed to enroll 578 participants. During the study period, SECTOR providers exceeded this goal, enrolling 591 participants. This is a particularly impressive achievement given start-up challenges related to COVID-19.
- Participants spoke very highly of the SECTOR program. Participants overwhelmingly had positive feedback about their relationship with SECTOR staff members and noted that the financial support made their participation in the program possible. Participants also spoke highly of the CBI-EA sessions and the training opportunities to help them build careers.
- Participation in the SECTOR components varied. Most participants engaged in some program components. Notably, about 62 percent of participants started a skills training program or a paid work experience opportunity within one year of enrolling in SECTOR. About 49 percent of participants began a skills training program, and among those participants, most completed it (70 percent). About 24 percent began a paid work experience, and among those participants, most finished it (80 percent). About 10 percent completed a skills training program and a paid work experience. The program's service delivery structures, the many demands and life circumstances participants faced, and the COVID-19 pandemic likely influenced participation rates in the different components. Moreover, it often takes time for programs to hit a steady state of implementation, suggesting that engagement may improve as the SECTOR providers gain more experience implementing the services.
- Within one year of enrolling in the SECTOR program, at least 92 percent of participants had at least one one-on-one career coaching meeting with a SECTOR staff person, one-on-one therapy sessions with a Licensed Clinical Social Worker through the provider, mental health services received in the community, utilization of county Mental Health Services Act-funded mental health services or participated in CBI-EA, which are all considered mental health services.⁷
- Within one year of enrolling in the SECTOR program, at least 13.7 percent of participants received services for substance use disorder (SUD), either through referrals from SECTOR staff members, or through Los Angeles County Substance Abuse Prevention and Control.
- The SECTOR program showed promising results on criminal legal outcomes compared with overall trends in re-arrests and convictions in Los Angeles. Within one year of enrolling in the SECTOR program, about 87 percent of SECTOR participants were not arrested, and about 96 percent had no recorded new convictions.

7. A mental health service, as presented, was defined by JCOD in partnership with BSCC.

- Program staff members reported that approximately 47 percent of SECTOR participants found employment within one year of enrollment in SECTOR. About 71 percent of employed participants were employed in a high-growth sector, suggesting providers focused job placement assistance on target employment sectors. Overall, hourly wages increased by about \$2.20 following enrollment in SECTOR.

In the future, the SECTOR program could benefit from focusing on strengthening participant engagement and completion of services. As currently designed, the study allowed for a detailed analysis of the implementation of SECTOR and the outcome findings. A study design with a comparison group to rigorously measure the impact of SECTOR against outcomes for those who did not participate in the program may benefit future research.

ABOUT MDRC

MDRC, a nonprofit, nonpartisan social and education policy research organization, is committed to finding solutions to some of the most difficult problems facing the nation. We aim to reduce poverty and bolster economic mobility; improve early child development, public education, and pathways from high school to college completion and careers; and reduce inequities in the criminal justice system. Our partners include public agencies and school systems, nonprofit and community-based organizations, private philanthropies, and others who are creating opportunity for individuals, families, and communities.

Founded in 1974, MDRC builds and applies evidence about changes in policy and practice that can improve the well-being of people who are economically disadvantaged. In service of this goal, we work alongside our programmatic partners and the people they serve to identify and design more effective and equitable approaches. We work with them to strengthen the impact of those approaches. And we work with them to evaluate policies or practices using the highest research standards. Our staff members have an unusual combination of research and organizational experience, with expertise in the latest qualitative and quantitative research methods, data science, behavioral science, culturally responsive practices, and collaborative design and program improvement processes. To disseminate what we learn, we actively engage with policymakers, practitioners, public and private funders, and others to apply the best evidence available to the decisions they are making.

MDRC works in almost every state and all the nation's largest cities, with offices in New York City; Oakland, California; Washington, DC; and Los Angeles.