

Executive Summary

WORK AFTER PRISON

ONE-YEAR FINDINGS
FROM THE
TRANSITIONAL JOBS
REENTRY DEMONSTRATION

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BUILDING KNOWLEDGE
TO IMPROVE SOCIAL POLICY

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Overview

More than 2 million people are incarcerated in the United States, and around 700,000 are released from prison each year. Those who are released face daunting obstacles as they seek to reenter their communities, and rates of recidivism are high. Many experts believe that stable employment is critical to a successful transition from prison to the community.

The Joyce Foundation's Transitional Jobs Reentry Demonstration (TJRD), also funded by the JEHT Foundation and the U.S. Department of Labor, is testing employment programs for former prisoners in Chicago, Detroit, Milwaukee, and St. Paul, using a rigorous random assignment design. MDRC is leading the evaluation, along with the Urban Institute and the University of Michigan. The project focuses on transitional jobs (TJ) programs that provide temporary subsidized jobs, support services, and job placement help. Transitional jobs are seen as a promising model for former prisoners and for other disadvantaged groups.

In 2007-2008, more than 1,800 men who had recently been released from prison were assigned, at random, to a transitional jobs program or to a program providing basic job search (JS) assistance but no subsidized jobs. Both groups are being followed using state data on employment and recidivism. Random assignment ensures that if significant differences emerge between the two groups, those differences can be attributed with confidence to the different types of employment services each group received.

This is the first major report in the TJRD project. It describes how the demonstration was implemented and assesses how the transitional jobs programs affected employment and recidivism during the first year after people entered the project, a period when the recession caused unemployment rates to rise substantially in all four cities. Key findings include:

- **The TJRD project generally operated as intended.** The TJ programs developed work slots and placed a very high percentage of participants into transitional jobs. About 85 percent of the men who were assigned to the TJ programs worked in a transitional job, reflecting a strong motivation to work. On average, participants worked in the TJs for about four months.
- **The TJ group was much more likely to work than the JS group early on, but the difference between groups faded as men left the transitional jobs; overall, the TJ group was no more likely to work in an unsubsidized job than the JS group.** The programs provided temporary jobs to many who would not otherwise have worked, but at the end of the first year, only about one-third of the TJ group — about the same proportion as in the JS group — was employed in the formal labor market.
- **Overall, the TJ programs had no consistent impacts on recidivism during the first year of follow-up.** About one-third of each group was arrested and a similar number returned to prison. Most of the prison admissions were for violations of parole rules, not new crimes. In one site, the transitional jobs group was less likely to be reincarcerated for a parole violation.

These results point to the need to develop and test enhancements to the transitional jobs model and other strategies to improve outcomes for former prisoners who reenter society. They also raise questions about the assumed connection between employment and recidivism, since there were no decreases in arrests even during the period when the TJ group was much more likely to be employed. This is not the final word on the TJRD project; both groups will be followed up for another year, with two-year results available in 2011.

Preface

Transitional jobs provide temporary, paid work for individuals who have great difficulty getting and holding employment, in order to prepare them to find jobs in the regular labor market. Among those individuals are former prisoners, who, as they reenter society, must persuade employers to hire them despite their criminal record and lack of recent work experience. But many of these individuals are very eager to work. The straightforward theory behind transitional jobs is that people are best able to learn to work by working, and program staff are best able to identify and address potential problems on the job by observing people working. In addition, by providing an alternative to street life and criminal activity in the form of an immediate source of legitimate income and the daily structure provided by a steady job during the critical period following release from prison, former prisoners might be less likely to commit crimes or violate the terms of parole.

In 2006, The Joyce Foundation initiated the Transitional Jobs Reentry Demonstration (TJRD) to test these theories. Participants — former prisoners in four midwestern cities who had been released within the past 90 days — were assigned, at random, to a program that offered temporary jobs, support services, and permanent job placement assistance or to a program providing basic job search assistance but no transitional jobs. Early results show mixed evidence: The transitional jobs programs dramatically increased employment and earnings, as they provided work opportunities for many who would not otherwise have found jobs. But former prisoners who had access to transitional jobs were no more likely to find work in the regular labor market and were no less likely to return to prison than those who were offered basic job search assistance without transitional jobs.

On the one hand, neither the TJRD results to date nor the results of earlier evaluations indicate that transitional jobs, at least as currently designed and operated, help people get or hold permanent jobs. On the other hand, there were very high rates of employment in the transitional jobs, which suggests that many former prisoners need income support and are willing to work for it. Moreover, these employment results were obtained during the worst recession in 75 years.

New employment initiatives, like the \$45 million that the U.S. Department of Labor has allocated for supporting and studying transitional jobs, might take steps to develop stronger models, with an extra focus on improving long-term employability. Future programs, for instance, could be targeted more carefully to people who are unlikely to find work in the regular labor market and to those who have already tried job search services with no success. Or employment retention bonuses, which were offered in two sites in this study with potentially promising results, could be tested further as a way to help difficult populations remain employed. Programs must also focus more intently on improving the crucial transition to unsubsidized work.

This is the first major report in the TJRD project, and another year of data collection remains. As a starting point, the study offers some direction about testing enhanced models of transitional jobs programs for a difficult population. Thus, these early results, while disappointing in some respects, can create a strong foundation for future research on strategies to improve outcomes for former prisoners and other vulnerable groups.

Gordon Berlin
President

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The Authors

Executive Summary

More than two million people are incarcerated in prisons or jails in the United States, and about 700,000 people are released from state and federal prisons each year. Men and women who are released from incarceration often face daunting obstacles as they seek to reenter their communities; many end up returning to prison.

The prisoner reentry issue has attracted growing attention in recent years, as states seek ways to reduce recidivism as a means to control surging corrections costs and improve public safety. Many experts believe that stable work is critical to a successful transition from prison to the community, and most reentry initiatives include services to help former prisoners find employment. Yet, little is known about what strategies are effective in helping former prisoners find and hold jobs.

The Joyce Foundation's Transitional Jobs Reentry Demonstration (TJRD) is designed to help fill this gap in knowledge. Also funded by the JEHT Foundation and the U.S. Department of Labor,¹ the TJRD project is testing employment programs for former prisoners in four midwestern cities using a rigorous random assignment design,² generally considered to be the most reliable method for assessing the impact of social programs. The project focuses in particular on transitional jobs programs that provide temporary, subsidized jobs; support services; and job placement assistance. Transitional jobs are widely seen as a promising employment model, both for former prisoners and for other disadvantaged groups.

This is the first major report in the TJRD project. It describes how the demonstration was implemented, assesses how the transitional jobs programs affected employment and recidivism during the first year after individuals entered the project, presents information on program costs, and presents qualitative findings for a small group of program participants. The report was prepared by MDRC, which is leading the evaluation, along with the Urban Institute and the National Poverty Center at the University of Michigan.

As discussed further below:

- **The transitional jobs programs dramatically increased employment early in the follow-up period**, as the programs provided work opportunities for many who would not otherwise have found jobs. However, these gains were driven entirely by the temporary, subsidized program jobs.

¹The JEHT Foundation ceased operating in January 2009.

²The TJRD project began in 2006, with random assignment beginning in 2007. The study will end in 2011.

- **Over the full one-year follow-up period, across all four sites, former prisoners who had access to transitional jobs were no more likely to find unsubsidized jobs, and no less likely to return to prison, than those who were offered basic job search assistance without transitional jobs.**

The follow-up period for this project coincided in part with the onset of the national recession, although the recession's effects on the results are uncertain. These early results are not the final word on the TJRD project; the research team will continue collecting data for another year.

Background

After remaining relatively stable for decades, the per capita rate of incarceration in the United States started rising dramatically in the late 1970s. Between 1975 and 2004, the number of people incarcerated in state and federal prisons per 100,000 U.S. residents rose from 111 to 484.³ Corrections costs also surged during this period, and now approach \$70 billion per year, with most of that total borne by state and local governments.⁴

Prisoners returning to the community often have difficulty finding housing and reconnecting with their families and other social supports. Finding steady work can be particularly daunting, since former prisoners often have low levels of education and skills and no recent work experience, and because many employers are reluctant to hire people with criminal records. Moreover, returning prisoners are heavily concentrated in a small number of struggling urban neighborhoods that lack resources to assist in the reentry process. The most recent national statistics show that two-thirds of released prisoners are arrested and about half return to prison within three years.⁵

Many states have developed multifaceted prisoner reentry initiatives in recent years. At the federal level, the Serious and Violent Offender Reentry Initiative, the Prisoner Reentry Initiative, and, most recently, the Second Chance Act of 2008 have supported those efforts. Many experts believe that stable employment is critical to a successful transition from prison to the community, and most reentry initiatives include a strong focus on employment services. And yet, the data on the relationship between crime and employment are mixed, and there is little evidence about what kinds of program strategies are effective at increasing employment for former prisoners.

³Steven Raphael and Michael A. Stoll, "Why Are So Many Americans in Prison?," Institute for Research on Poverty Discussion Paper No. 1328-07 (Madison, WI: Institute for Research on Poverty, 2007).

⁴See Bureau of Justice Statistics online document, "Expenditures/Employment" (2008). Web site: <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/index.cfm?ty=pbdetail&iid=1022>.

⁵Patrick Langan and David Levin, "Recidivism of Prisoners Released in 1994," *Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2002).

The Joyce Foundation initiated the Transitional Jobs Reentry Demonstration in 2006 to learn whether one promising employment strategy — transitional jobs — is effective at increasing employment and reducing recidivism among former prisoners. Transitional jobs programs provide temporary paid jobs, support services, and job placement help to hard-to-employ individuals. One of a number of different subsidized employment approaches that have been implemented or tested in recent decades, the transitional jobs model is based on the assumption that some people have difficulty finding and holding jobs because they do not understand how to function in a work environment, and that people are best able to learn to work by working. The model also assumes that program staff are best able to identify and address workplace problems — tardiness, difficulty taking direction, and so on — by observing participants on the job, and that employers will be more likely to hire someone who has a track record of successful employment.

Finally, in a reentry context, transitional jobs provide a source of legitimate employment during the critical period following release from prison, based on the assumption that former prisoners who have steady jobs, income to meet their basic needs, and the daily structure of work will be less likely to commit crimes or violate the terms of parole supervision.

Two major random assignment studies have tested transitional jobs programs in recent years. An evaluation of the New York City-based Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO), which targets former prisoners, found that the program generated a large but short-lived increase in employment, driven entirely by the transitional jobs; there were no impacts on unsubsidized employment. Nevertheless, CEO significantly decreased recidivism — particularly for participants who came to the program shortly after release — and these effects lasted for at least three years. Another study, an evaluation of the Transitional Work Corporation, tested a transitional jobs program for long-term welfare recipients in Philadelphia. Like CEO, that program also generated short-lived employment gains that were mostly driven by transitional jobs; it also led to reductions in the number of participants receiving welfare payments and the actual dollar amounts of those payments.

The Transitional Jobs Reentry Demonstration

The TJRD project was designed from the start as a rigorous evaluation. Like the CEO evaluation, it aims to learn whether transitional jobs programs are more effective than simpler, less costly programs that provide basic job search and referral services but no subsidized employment. To accomplish this goal, The Joyce Foundation used a competitive process to select and fund employment programs for former prisoners in four cities within its midwestern grantmaking area: Chicago, Illinois; Detroit, Michigan; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; and St. Paul,

Minnesota.⁶ In Detroit, Milwaukee, and St. Paul, two different organizations were identified in each city, one to run a transitional jobs program and the second to run a job search program; in Chicago, the same organization provided both types of services. The transitional jobs programs were selected based on their experience with the model and the target population, their ability to raise public or private funds to support the program, their linkages with state or local corrections agencies, and other factors. Table ES.1 lists the transitional jobs and job search organizations in each city.

The Transitional Jobs Reentry Demonstration

Table ES.1

Transitional Jobs and Job Search Organizations in the Demonstration Sites

Site	Transitional Jobs Program	Job Search Assistance Program
Chicago	Safer Foundation (through Pivotal Staffing Services)	Safer Foundation
Detroit	Goodwill Industries of Greater Detroit	JVS and Detroit Hispanic Development Corporation
Milwaukee	New Hope Project	Project RETURN
St. Paul	Goodwill/Easter Seals Minnesota	Amherst H. Wilder Foundation

SOURCE: MDRC field research.

The transitional jobs programs all shared some basic features, though they were structured somewhat differently. The Detroit and St. Paul programs were operated by Goodwill Industries affiliates, and participants worked in jobs in existing Goodwill enterprises such as retail stores or a light manufacturing plant. In Chicago, transitional jobs workers were employed by a staffing agency established by the Safer Foundation. The staffing agency contracted with a waste management firm that in turn had contracts with the City of Chicago to operate garbage recycling plants; almost all program participants worked in those facilities. The New Hope program in Milwaukee used a scattered site model: participants were placed in positions with local nonprofit organizations or small businesses but remained employed by New Hope, which

⁶Initially a fifth site was selected, but research there was discontinued in 2007.

paid their wages. All of the transitional jobs programs offered an array of support services and helped participants find permanent jobs.

The Milwaukee and St. Paul programs also offered bonus payments to participants who found and held unsubsidized jobs. These payments were designed to give participants a stronger incentive to stay employed — even in a low-paying job — and to stay in touch with program staff. Some studies have found that similar kinds of earnings supplements have led to increases in employment.⁷

The demonstration targeted men over 18 years of age who had been released from state prison within the past 90 days.⁸ Starting in early 2007, men who met those criteria and volunteered for the study were assigned, at random, to one of two groups:

- the **transitional jobs group**, whose members were referred to the TJRD transitional jobs program in their city and were offered a transitional job, support services, and job search and job placement help
- the **job search group**, whose members were referred to the job search program in their city, where they could get help finding employment but were not offered a transitional job

Just over 1,800 men entered the study before enrollment ended in September 2008.

The research team has collected several kinds of data for all members of the research sample. Each sample member completed a brief form just before random assignment to provide information on his demographic characteristics, prior work history, and educational attainment. The transitional jobs and job search programs provided information on sample members' participation in program activities, and state agencies in all four states provided administrative records to measure sample members' employment and criminal justice involvement. The employment data show each sample member's quarterly earnings in jobs covered by unemployment insurance (UI), while the criminal justice records show arrests, convictions, and state prison stays, both before and after people entered the study.

⁷See, for example, Gordon Berlin, *Encouraging Work, Reducing Poverty: The Impact of Work Incentive Programs* (New York: MDRC, 2000). Most of the positive results for earnings supplements have been for low-income single mothers. One study that did not use random assignment found promising results for “youth who have been or who are at risk of being under juvenile or criminal justice supervision”; see Stephen Jenks, Lois MacGilliveray, and Karen Needels, *Youth Offender Demonstration Project Evaluation Final Report: Volume One* (Washington, DC: Research and Evaluation Associates, 2006).

⁸While the number of female prisoners is growing, a large majority of prison inmates are male. The project targeted men for research reasons. If the study had been open to both men and women, the number of female sample members would likely have been too small to analyze separately.

Because men were assigned to one group or the other through a random process, any significant differences in employment or recidivism that emerge between the groups during the follow-up period can be attributed to the different types of employment services they received. These differences are referred to as *impacts* or *effects* of the programs.

The project assessed program impacts for the full sample of about 1,800 men, for each site, and for subsets of the sample defined by criminal history, age, and prior employment. It also examined whether impacts varied for sample members who entered the project after the recession led to a spike in unemployment in all four cities.

In addition to assessing program impacts, the research team studied the implementation and costs of the transitional jobs and job search programs. Finally, 33 men in the transitional jobs group participated in a series of in-depth interviews to shed light on their post-prison experiences.

The Participants

Most of the sample members are African-American men in their thirties. Only about one-fourth had graduated from high school, but about half had earned a General Educational Development (GED) certificate. Most had worked in the past, but only about half had worked six consecutive months for a single employer.

The sample members had extensive histories with the criminal justice system, with an average of nine prior arrests and a total of six years in state prison. Almost all were under parole supervision when they entered the study.

The characteristics of the sample members are generally similar from site to site, though the St. Paul sample stands out in some respects because the programs in that site targeted much of their recruitment to residents in halfway houses. Men living in those facilities after release from prison were often classified as “high risk” and were under a particularly intensive form of parole supervision. As discussed below, this situation has implications for the number of people who were later returned to prison for violating parole conditions.

Program Implementation

- **The TJRD project generally operated as intended; the transitional jobs programs were able to develop work slots and place a very high percentage of sample members into transitional jobs.**

The transitional jobs programs worked hard to place men into subsidized jobs quickly after they were randomly assigned; in three of the four sites, participants were usually at work within a few days. Thus, despite the instability in participants’ lives, about 85 percent of the men assigned to the transitional jobs group actually worked in a transitional job. On average,

those who were placed in transitional jobs worked for 53 days over a period of about four months. Data gathered from other transitional jobs programs in the participating cities suggest that very few men in the job search group worked in transitional jobs.

With few exceptions, the transitional jobs were low-skill positions that were not designed to train participants in particular occupations. Rather, the jobs aimed to teach the “soft skills” that many employers value — such as showing up to work on time, cooperating with co-workers, and taking direction from supervisors. In the in-depth interviews, some participants expressed disappointment about the menial nature of the work on transitional job worksites.

The study found that the transitional jobs programs cost about \$4,000 per participant, on average. Nearly half of this amount went directly to participants in wages and other supports.

- **The transitional jobs programs initially focused on recruiting participants and operating the subsidized jobs; activities designed to move participants into regular jobs took longer to develop.**

All of the sites had established linkages with local corrections agencies before the project began. Nevertheless, during the initial months of the project, most of the sites spent considerable time and energy working with their criminal justice partners to develop and refine referral and enrollment procedures for the demonstration; in some sites, these procedures were revised several times.

Similarly, while all of the programs already operated transitional jobs programs, most found that changes were needed to accommodate the TJRD population. For example, in St. Paul and Milwaukee, the programs needed to develop new worksites to accommodate sex offenders, who are not permitted to work near vulnerable populations.

The sites were generally able to overcome these early challenges, but such issues diverted attention away from the task of establishing strong job development and job placement activities for TJRD participants. The organizations running the transitional jobs programs already had experience with these activities, but in some cases, their existing staff had not worked extensively with former prisoners, a population that presents special challenges. Although job placement services improved over time in most of the transitional jobs programs, the research team concluded that these services were generally of average quality.

In three of the sites, the staff working with the job search group had as much, or more, experience providing job placement services to former prisoners as the staff working in the transitional jobs programs. The job search programs used a variety of approaches but, at a minimum, they all helped participants develop a résumé and learn job-seeking skills. Thus, as expected, the transitional jobs themselves were the key element of the “treatment difference” between the groups.

Program Impacts

- **The transitional jobs group was much more likely to work than the job search group early on, as the programs provided temporary jobs to many men who would not otherwise have worked. The difference between the two groups faded as men left the transitional jobs, however, and the transitional jobs group was no more likely to work in an unsubsidized job than the job search group.**

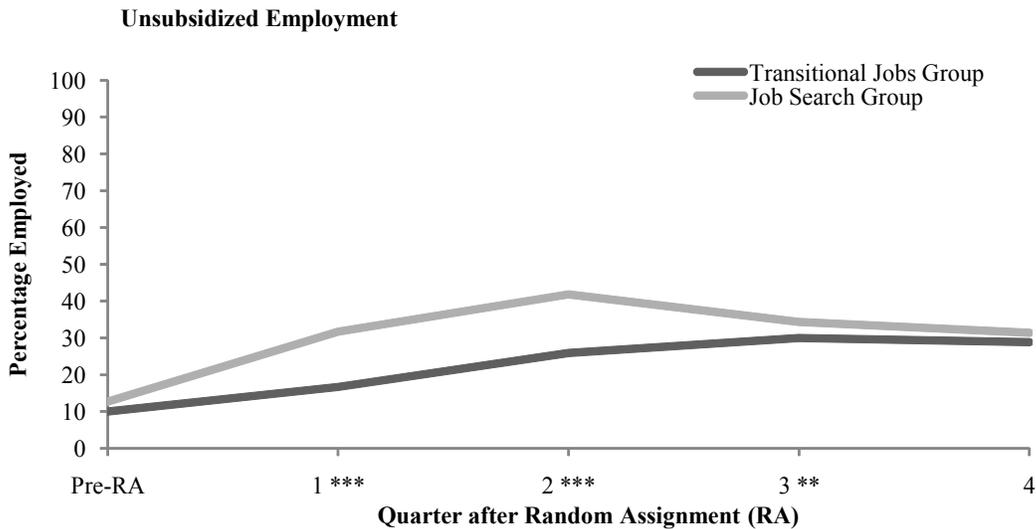
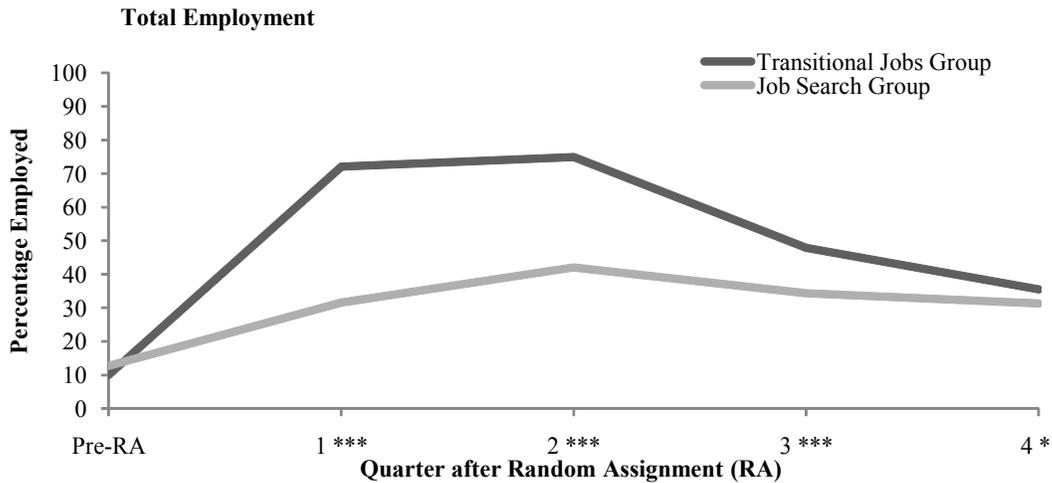
The top panel of Figure ES.1 shows the percentage of people employed in each quarter of the one-year follow-up period.⁹ The dark line shows the employment rate for the transitional jobs group and the lighter line shows the employment rate for the job search group. In this figure, a sample member is considered to be employed if he worked either in a TJRD transitional job or in any other job covered by unemployment insurance in a particular quarter. The asterisks at the bottom of the figure indicate quarters in which the difference between groups is statistically significant, meaning that it probably did not occur by chance; that is, it was very likely driven by the differences between the transitional jobs and job search programs.

In the first two quarters of the follow-up period, the transitional jobs group was much more likely to be employed. For example, in Quarter 2, the employment rate was 75 percent for the transitional jobs group and 42 percent for the job search group, a difference of 33 percentage points, which is statistically significant. However, the difference between groups narrowed quickly as people left the transitional jobs and, by the end of the year, the two groups were almost equally likely to be employed.

The bottom panel of Figure ES.1 shows the percentage of each group working in an unsubsidized job in each quarter. Unsubsidized jobs are defined as jobs that are covered by unemployment insurance but are not TJRD transitional jobs. This figure shows that, for the first three quarters of the follow-up period, the job search group was significantly more likely to be working in an unsubsidized job. This pattern suggests that some people in the transitional jobs group could have found a regular job fairly quickly if they had not been given a transitional job. It also means that the impact on overall employment shown in the top panel was driven entirely by the transitional jobs. It was sometimes difficult for the programs to determine which potential participants “needed” a transitional job. It appears that some people may have volunteered for the study in the hope of getting an immediate paid job but, once they were assigned to the job search group, found a job on their own or with help from the job search programs.

⁹A small percentage of sample members were employed in the quarter before they were randomly assigned. This could have occurred, for example, if an individual was released from prison in February, found a job right away, but lost it in March, and was randomly assigned in April.

The Transitional Jobs Reentry Demonstration
Figure ES.1
Quarterly Impacts on Total and Unsubsidized Employment



SOURCES: MDRC calculations using payroll data from each site and unemployment insurance (UI) wage records from each of the states in the demonstration (Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin).

NOTES: Statistical significance levels are indicated as follows: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

Results in this table are regression-adjusted for pre-random assignment characteristics.

The pre-random assignment quarter includes only data for Illinois and Wisconsin because complete UI wage records were not available for Michigan and Minnesota.

Random assignment took place in Quarter 1.

Table ES.2 summarizes the impacts on employment and earnings. The transitional jobs group was much more likely to work overall during Year 1, but was less likely to work in an unsubsidized job. Similarly, total earnings were significantly higher for the transitional jobs group, but earnings from unsubsidized jobs were higher for the job search group.

- **The employment results were similar across sites and across subgroups of participants; there is preliminary evidence that the use of employment retention bonuses may have led to stronger results, and that the transitional jobs programs may have been more effective in weaker labor markets.**

The research team examined the employment results separately for each site. While the site-specific results are less certain owing to the smaller sample sizes, the general pattern is similar in all sites, with a large but short-lived increase in overall employment. The results were also similar for subgroups of sample members defined by age, prior employment history, and criminal history.

The pattern of impacts on unsubsidized employment differed somewhat across sites. In St. Paul, the job search group had a much higher rate of unsubsidized employment than the transitional jobs group. This may be because the transitional jobs program in that city placed men into transitional positions very quickly. Also, the employment rate for the job search group was unusually high in St. Paul, perhaps because the local economy was relatively healthy for much of the follow-up period, and because there was a strong, experienced job search program in place. In contrast, in Detroit, the transitional jobs group did not have a lower rate of unsubsidized employment than the job search group, probably because relatively few people in the job search group were able to find jobs in a labor market that was weak even before the recession began.

Because unemployment rates rose dramatically in all four of the cities beginning in mid-2008, the analysis also compared results for people who entered the study in 2007 and early 2008 (the early cohort) with results for those who entered the study after March 2008 (the late cohort). Since the study followed each person for one year after he entered the study, those in the late cohort experienced the recession more directly during the study's follow-up period. The impacts on overall employment were similar for the two cohorts but, once again, the pattern of impacts on unsubsidized earnings differed. In fact, in the late cohort, the transitional jobs group had significantly higher earnings from unsubsidized employment than did the job search group in the last half of the follow-up period. As with the site-by-site impacts, this pattern may reflect the fact that the job search group had more difficulty finding employment as the economy weakened; it may also reflect improvements in the operation of the transitional jobs programs over time.

The Transitional Jobs Reentry Demonstration

Table ES.2

One-Year Impacts on Employment and Earnings: Full Sample

Outcome	Transitional Jobs Group	Job Search Group	Difference (Impact)	P-Value
Transitional employment in Year 1 ^a (%)	85.2	0.0	85.2 ***	0.000
Unsubsidized employment in Year 1 (%)	50.3	59.2	-8.9 ***	0.000
Total employment in Year 1 (%)	92.8	59.5	33.2 ***	0.000
Number of quarters employed	2.3	1.4	0.9 ***	0.000
Employed in all 4 quarters (%)	20.2	11.6	8.6 ***	0.000
Transitional job earnings in Year 1 ^a (\$)	2,044	0	2,044 ***	0.000
Unsubsidized earnings in Year 1 (\$)	2,292	2,917	-625 **	0.013
Total earnings in Year 1 ^b (\$)	4,336	2,917	1,419 ***	0.000
Sample size (total = 1,774)	893	881		

SOURCES: MDRC calculations using payroll data from each site and unemployment insurance wage records from each of the states in the demonstration (Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin).

NOTES: Statistical significance levels are indicated as follows: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

Results in this table are regression-adjusted for pre-random assignment characteristics.

^aEarnings and employment from transitional jobs are based on payroll data from each of the sites.

^bTotal earnings may not be equal to the sum of transitional job earnings plus unsubsidized job earnings due to rounding.

Another area where results may be more promising relates to the use of employment retention bonus payments. As noted earlier, both the Milwaukee and St. Paul transitional jobs programs offered participants bonus payments for getting and holding unsubsidized jobs. The payments could total up to about \$1,500 over six to twelve months.

It is difficult to draw conclusions about the bonus offer in Milwaukee because the bonuses are only one of many factors that distinguished that site from the others. In St. Paul, however, the bonus offer was implemented part-way through the study period, so it is possible to compare results for sample members who enrolled early and were not eligible for the bonus with results for those who enrolled later and were eligible for the payments. It appears that the employment and earnings results are significantly better for those who entered the transitional jobs program after the bonus offer was in place. It is not possible to attribute the stronger results to the bonus offer alone, however, since other aspects of the transitional jobs program and the local economy also changed over time. Moreover, there is no way to know whether the stronger

results could have been obtained with bonuses alone, without transitional jobs. Nevertheless, the results are promising enough to suggest that further testing would be worthwhile.

- **There were no consistent impacts on recidivism during the first year of the follow-up period, though, in one site, the men in the transitional jobs group were less likely to be reincarcerated for a parole violation.**

Table ES.3 shows the impacts on several measures of recidivism: arrests, convictions, incarceration in state prison, and a combined measure that includes all of these events. There is only one statistically significant difference between the groups: the transitional jobs group spent about seven fewer days in prison than the job search group, on average, during Year 1.

Further analysis (not shown) found that the reduction in prison days is concentrated in the St. Paul site, where the transitional jobs group was significantly less likely than the job search group to be incarcerated for a parole violation. As noted earlier, most of the sample members in St. Paul were on an intensive form of parole supervision and the percentage of sample members who returned to prison for a parole violation overall was much higher in that site than in the other sites. It may be that parolees were somewhat less likely to violate the terms of supervision while they were working in transitional jobs. Alternatively, it may be that parole officers were less likely to send someone back to prison for a relatively minor violation if he was working when the violation occurred. There were no statistically significant impacts on recidivism in the other three sites.

Conclusions

The first-year employment results from the Transitional Jobs Reentry Demonstration are generally consistent with earlier random assignment studies of transitional jobs programs. They confirm that transitional jobs programs can be operated at a relatively large scale and can create temporary work opportunities for hard-to-employ populations, resulting in large increases in employment rates and earnings. However, there is little evidence that working in a transitional job, in and of itself, improves participants' prospects in the regular labor market. Indeed, participants who were interviewed for the qualitative study who were working a year or two after entering the study typically reported that their experience in transitional jobs did not lead to their unsubsidized job.

The fact that there were reductions in unsubsidized employment in some TJRD sites suggests that careful targeting is critical; it is not efficient to use scarce resources to provide subsidized jobs to people who can find unsubsidized jobs with much less intensive assistance. This issue appears to be less salient when the unemployment rate is very high, since former prisoners are less likely to be able to find unsubsidized jobs.

The Transitional Jobs Reentry Demonstration

Table ES.3

One-Year Impacts on Recidivism: Full Sample

Outcome	Transitional Jobs Group	Job Search Group	Difference (Impact)	P-Value
Arrested (%)	38.8	35.3	3.5	0.119
Convicted of a crime ^a (%)	13.6	14.5	-1.0	0.556
Convicted of a felony	9.0	7.9	1.1	0.393
Convicted of a misdemeanor	4.3	4.9	-0.7	0.489
Conviction categories ^b (%)				
Convicted of a violent crime	2.3	2.7	-0.4	0.556
Convicted of a property crime	4.7	4.9	-0.2	0.864
Convicted of a drug crime	3.8	3.0	0.8	0.356
Convicted of a public order crime	3.7	4.2	-0.6	0.547
Admitted to prison (%)	35.1	36.4	-1.3	0.537
Admitted to prison for a new crime	6.2	4.8	1.4	0.201
Admitted to prison for a parole/probation violation	22.4	23.9	-1.5	0.407
Admitted to prison for other reason	8.9	9.7	-0.8	0.512
Total days incarcerated in prison	40.2	47.5	-7.3 **	0.040
Arrested, convicted, or admitted to prison (%)	53.5	56.1	-2.6	0.250
Sample size (total = 1,808)	909	899		

SOURCES: Calculations based on data from unemployment insurance records in each demonstration site, Michigan State Police, Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension, State of Wisconsin Department of Justice, Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority, and the Department of Corrections in each state.

NOTES: Statistical significance levels are indicated as follows: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

Results in this table are regression-adjusted for pre-random assignment characteristics.

Subcategories may sum to more than the total due to multiple arrests, convictions, or prison admissions per person during the follow-up period.

^aEach conviction date is counted only as a single event. If there are multiple convictions on the same date, only the most serious conviction is recorded in the analysis. Some convictions may have been associated with an arrest that occurred prior to random assignment. These convictions are counted in the analysis as occurring after random assignment. Total includes convictions for felony, misdemeanor, and other crime classes.

^bThe categorization of charges is based on definitions from Langan and Levin (2002).

It is interesting that the TJRD transitional jobs programs did not generally reduce recidivism in Year 1, since many people assume that employment and recidivism are causally related. If this were true, some difference would have been expected between the groups in arrests during the period when the transitional jobs group had an employment rate that was 40

percentage points higher than the rate for the job search group. Of course, this study measured UI-covered employment only, and it is possible that a more complete measure of employment — including informal jobs — would show a smaller difference between groups. Moreover, the recidivism results might have looked different if there had been a large increase in unsubsidized employment rather than an increase only in temporary minimum-wage jobs. At a minimum, however, the results suggest that the relationship between employment and recidivism is more complex than many assume.

In considering future directions, it is important to note that transitional jobs programs may have multiple goals. The immediate goal of these programs, like many other subsidized employment programs, is to provide income support to struggling people in a way that is seen as consistent with American values — that is, through work. The very low employment rates for the job search group in this study suggest that such support is needed for many former prisoners, and the high rates of participation among the transitional jobs group show that TJRD sample members were highly motivated to work. When thinking back, some of the study participants who were interviewed remembered their time in the transitional jobs program as a rare period of relative stability in an otherwise chaotic reentry process.

However, transitional jobs programs also have a goal of increasing unsubsidized employment, and here the research record is much more sobering. The findings from this study to date suggest that the next round of evaluations in this area should test different approaches — for example, a “beefed up” transitional jobs program with more effective approaches to job placement and post-placement services, models that mix work and skills training or literacy programming, or different ways of using subsidies to build links to permanent jobs.

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- Improving Public Education
- Promoting Successful Transitions to Adulthood
- Supporting Low-Wage Workers and Communities
- Overcoming Barriers to Employment

Working in almost every state, all of the nation's largest cities, and Canada and the United Kingdom, MDRC conducts its projects in partnership with national, state, and local governments, public school systems, community organizations, and numerous private philanthropies.