

Jul 27th, 3:15 PM - 4:15 PM

# A Hospitality Training Model for Prison Inmates: Lessons learned from a pilot implementation

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Collins, Galen R., "A Hospitality Training Model for Prison Inmates: Lessons learned from a pilot implementation" (2011).  
*International CHRIE Conference-Refereed Track*. 11.  
[https://scholarworks.umass.edu/refereed/ICHRIE\\_2011/Wednesday/11](https://scholarworks.umass.edu/refereed/ICHRIE_2011/Wednesday/11)

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A HOSPITALITY TRAINING PROGRAM  
MODEL FOR PRISON INMATES:  
LESSONS LEARNED FROM A PILOT IMPLEMENTATION

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**Abstract**

In 2002, Northern Arizona University (NAU) implemented a pilot training program for a small group of female inmates at the Arizona State Prison Complex, Perryville. This initiative was made possible through a Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE) grant (\$333,300) entitled the “The Forgotten Population: Postsecondary Hospitality Training for Arizona Prisoners.” This program combined basic culinary skills with training in a set of transition skills, with the goal of reducing recidivism rates. This article discusses the challenges and outcomes of the pilot implementation, a holistic, collaborative approach to prison education for potentially providing the hospitality industry with capable employees.

Key Words: prison education, transition, culinary, recidivism, restaurants

**Introduction**

Research indicates that participants in transitional training programs, which combine effective vocational training with counseling, life skills, job placement, and aftercare contact, are less likely to recidivate (Brazzel et al. 2009). The Director of the Arizona Department of Corrections (ADOC) in 2003, Dora Schriro, described transition programs as an effort to create a “parallel universe,” with inmates practicing skills inside the prison that can be successfully replicated when they are released (Villa, 2007).

In 1999, a survey of the Arizona hospitality and tourism industry conducted by NAU revealed that restaurants were most receptive to hiring released inmates, especially for kitchen positions. Consequently, the NAU pilot program, created and implemented between 2000 and 2004, taught basic culinary skills, which included hands-on training in a prison kitchen. Other program components provided transitional and employability skill training and aftercare follow-up services for released inmates. Three people were hired to create and deliver program content and services: a culinary instructor, a life skills coach, and an aftercare coordinator. Thirty inmates completed the program. An industry advisory committee was formed to help place released inmates in restaurant jobs.

This pilot program was made possible through a \$333,000 FIPSE grant. There were also donations from the Greater Phoenix, Arizona community. The C.W. and Modene Neely Charitable Foundation donated \$10,000. WalMart and Food city donated gift cards for hygiene products. Jane’s Club donated clothing items, which were taken to the main complex warehouse and later distributed to all women released from the Perryville prison. Computers were donated to the program by Multi-Systems, an integrated hospitality technology services company, for delivering computer-based instructional components. Cell phones were donated to the women going into the community so they would have message phones for employers or the ability to dial 911 in the case of emergencies. Hair products were donated by a variety of agencies, along with individual donations from members of the community.

## **Problem**

As the United States (U.S.) prison population has increased, so has the need for prison education programs. The U.S. has the highest incarceration rate in the world, as well as the highest number of prison inmates (Krinsky et al. 2009). The prison population in Arizona grew by 52 percent between 1995 and 2005, to 33,471. As of December, 31, 2009, there were 40,544 convicted felons behind bars. Because of the unrelenting growth in the inmate population, the budget for ADOC has reached a record \$1 billion (FY 2010), approximately 12 percent of a total state budget of \$8.4 billion (Fischer, 2010). These record numbers have spurred the need for new and effective training programs. Life and transitional skills have emerged as a much needed but often ignored area of correctional education. According to Coffey and Knoll (1998), adult inmates often lack the social, survival, personal management, and employment skills necessary to function in the family, community, and workplace. They maintain without such skills, their academic and vocational training alone will not suffice. According to the Bureau of Justice statistics, two-thirds of released inmates will be rearrested.

Most vocational education is supplied by public community colleges (Contardo and Tolber, 2008). The great weakness of this traditional model is that many community college programs lack contact with community and transitional resources to provide a smooth transition into working status within the community. Some community college programs have focused too much on counting full-time equivalents and seats in classrooms for funding, while the vocational training often fails to translate to actual job skills. Many programs lack any sort of job placement component. Finally, many current programs do not suit the large number of prisoners serving short sentences – who constitute a population most likely to succeed in prison education programs, but who are unable to finish semester-length courses or earn degrees before release.

The hospitality and tourism industry is vitally important to the economic growth and stability of the U.S. economy and one the nation's largest industries and employers. The hospitality and tourism industry in Arizona generated more than \$ 16.6 billion in 2009, making it Arizona's largest industry with a significant need for skilled entry-level hotel and restaurant workers (Arizona Office of Tourism, 2010).

The two key questions addressed in this article are:

1. Can a transitional training program for prison inmates reduce recidivism?
2. Can a transitional training program produce skilled and reliable entry-level employees for the hospitality industry?

## **Pilot Program Description and Implementation Challenges**

This program created a public-private partnership between three entities:

- The School of Hotel & Restaurant Management at NAU.
- Arizona Department of Corrections.
- Compass Group USA and its subsidiary, Canteen Correctional Services, the ADOC foodservice vendor (also vendor for 18 other state prison systems).

As the project began, a prison site had to be chosen from among the ADOC prisons. The site selected was Arizona State Prison Complex (ASPC) Perryville for women. At Perryville, there are four yards: Santa Cruz, San Pedro, Lumely and Santa Maria. The Santa Maria Yard was chosen as the destination for this prison-to-work program because it is a minimal security yard and inmates housed there are serving short-term sentences. This targeted a population ready to work upon release back to society.

A building on the Santa Maria Yard had to be adapted to house this program. Thus, kitchen Building 35 on that yard was remodeled from a production kitchen to include three separate learning spaces: a kitchen to allow for hands-on training; a classroom with desks, chairs, and white boards for classroom instruction; and a separate room with computer workstations for the computer-based training applications. ADOC worked with Canteen Correctional Services to re-outfit this building, and Canteen purchased the kitchen appliances, equipment, and

supplies needed for the hands-on training. Together with the ADOC maintenance crew, this building was totally redesigned to make the program operational. This retrofit took several months to complete.

Security is a major factor and central to all programs in a prison setting. This focus on security ensures the safety of the staff and inmates as well. Security was the primary consideration in the launch of this program down to the last detail. The classroom material as well as kitchen supplies had to be purchased according to ADOC security precautions. Cabinets as well as chemical supplies, pots and pans, knives (which are considered a class A tool), utensils (which are considered a class B tool) and all other miscellaneous supplies had to be considered at length, in terms of both purchase and storage. The implementation of this process took more time than anticipated, with security the overriding concern.

To market this new program, a short video about the program was created and shown for several weeks on the prison TV channel to inform inmates of its availability. In addition, posters were displayed throughout the Perryville complex advertising the start of the program. Program staff also met and conversed with inmates in the yard to discuss the program and generate interest.

The inmates that were targeted for admission had to meet certain protocol to have their names submitted and approved for enrollment. The enrollment criteria established for admission, according to ASPC Perryville Education Department, were as follows:

1. A participant must be within 5 to 12 months of release.
2. Must have passed Mandatory eighth grade level equivalency exam.
3. Must have a General Education Diploma (GED), a high school diploma, or be concurrently enrolled in GED classes.
4. Have no major or minor violations in prison.
5. Have a schedule that permits them to be in the evening class from 5 to 8 pm every night except Tuesday.

ADOC insisted that this program be designed as an Open Entry-Open Exit program, so that inmates can start and stop (if they need to), then take up where they left off. Initially, only the classroom portion of the program could be taught in Building 35. The kitchen renovation was not yet complete; in fact it was not until early 2002 that the hands-on kitchen lab training could be started. It took several months just to get the gas hooked up on the stove, in accordance with federal regulations, and for the class A and B tools to be hung and secured.

Kitchen tools and utensils had to have numbers etched on them along with the NAU logo to signify, for security purposes, where, what, who and how many tools and utensils belonged in that facility. The class A tools (knives) had to be secured twice, once in a locked room and then in a cage. Each tool had to be "shadowed" (paint technique) so that whichever officer was assigned to secure the building could periodically check and make sure all knives were secured. The class B tools were processed in much the same way except they did not have to be secured in a locked room. They were installed on the wall in the computer room, located behind the kitchen.

Participants were taught a nationally recognized food safety and sanitation program (ServSafe). Students could not be in the kitchen preparing food until they passed the ServSafe exam, since the food they prepared was often served to prison staff. Health code regulations in the state of Arizona specify a food handler's card or ServSafe certification prior to working in a kitchen.

Another initial barrier to starting the program was excessive noise caused by a loud speaker and intercom system that caused constant noise in Building 35. Eventually, the work order was processed by ADOC staff to disconnect the speakers.

In 2003, due to severe overcrowding at the Santa Maria Yard, ASPC Perryville had to confiscate kitchen 35 (that had been specially outfitted for the pilot program) and turned it back into an operational eating unit. Consequently, the hands-on portion of this program was moved to the Main Complex.

This adjustment meant that participating inmates had to have clearance in order to leave the Santa Maria Yard and travel to the Main Complex kitchen. Due to the kitchen location change, the classroom was moved from building 35 to the library, causing class meetings to shrink from five nights to four because the library had to be open to all inmates on Tuesday evenings.

Books and materials were ordered for the classroom portion and support staff was sought. PowerPoint presentations were created on the culinary training as well as basic life skills. The customer service program from NAU was loaded into the computers along with resume and basic food programs.

The curriculum and instructional delivery were adapted to the learning styles of the inmate population and to entry-level restaurant kitchen jobs. Inmates who completed the program entered the job market bearing three certificates:

- Certificate in Basic Culinary from the NAU School of Hotel & Restaurant Mgmt.
- Certificate in Customer Service from the NAU School of Hotel & Restaurant Management
- ServSafe Certification from the National Restaurant Association.

The transition component of the program addressed life problems in such areas as: Relationship Repair, Anger Management, Problem Solving, Communication, Listening Skills, Personal and Professional Boundaries, Grief and Loss, Domestic Violence Education and Self-esteem. The students were required to journal on a daily basis on their own personal issues. These issues entailed problems they dealt with “on the yard,” current problems, problems from their past, or those they feared upon release. Many issues related to self-esteem and the damage done by incarceration. Students were required to be in group therapy once a week.

The employability component required that each student produce a working resume, ready for distribution upon release from prison. Along with training in “Barriers to Getting and Keeping a Job,” participants learned how to fill out and complete a job application – something some have *never* done – and learned how to seek employment. Upon release from the program, each participant was given a general hygiene basket containing self-care products donated by community organizations, including soap, shampoo, toothbrush/toothpaste, and deodorant. Other organizations donated professional dress outfits for job interviews.

The aftercare component included a case plan based on each individual’s needs. This plan was transferred to the aftercare coordinator after inmates were released, who worked the case plan along with the participant to ensure its success. The tracking of the individual began upon release from prison and lasted for the duration of one year, a delimitation of project findings. The aftercare coordinator often met with and spoke to each participant’s probation and parole officer. The individual meetings with released program participants entailed an assessment of where and what the graduate has been doing since release. All information obtained was documented on a contact and counseling form.

A resource list was developed to provide information on different needs released inmates may experience in the community, including: Department of Economic Security, welfare contacts, clothing donation sites, food boxes, homeless shelters, low-cost housing, rental repair, the ministry for the incarcerated, domestic violence shelters, suicide hotlines, mobile counseling units, and many others.

Over 100 employers from numerous areas of Phoenix agreed to hire program graduates, such as Macayos Mexican Restaurants (12 in Arizona). When a graduate approached release, the major crossroads of their post-

release housing destination were given to the aftercare coordinator. The aftercare coordinator went to the surrounding area and spoke individually with possible employers. Generally, the response was favorable to hiring ex-felons from this program.

### **Evaluation and Project Results**

This project laid out a series of evaluation questions when it began, which are listed below along with responses now that the grant is completed.

1. Does the program reduce recidivism?

In the first year (2003) of participant releases from this program, the recidivism rate was 7% (2 of 27 women) – far below the national average recidivism rate of 67%. The first recidivism lasted four days, and the second lasted one month – neither very serious. Both of these women resumed the original jobs they had prior to their probation violation; employers were understanding and cooperative. Both of these women were with their same employer and 100% clean after one year of tracking.

The year 2004 began with one current recidivist at ASPC Perryville. This participant was incarcerated until her sentence end date of June 2006. This case raised the program's recidivism rate to 10% - or a 90% success rate. A number of the graduates were repeat offenders (some incarcerated 4 or more times), but they too were successful post-releases at the conclusion of the pilot implementation.

Of the 30 women released from this program to the community in 2004, 24 women were either working, going to school or both. Three were actively looking for employment. Four program graduates were currently enrolled in college, and three of them were employed at the same time. Eleven were completely “off paper” or no longer reporting to ADOC, and nine had successfully completed one year tracking. Three of the women were working two jobs; 8 of the 24 were working in the restaurant and hospitality industry.

The project demonstrated the desperate need for life and transition skill training while inmates are in prison, so that they are equipped with skills and community contacts to help them when they get out of prison. Inmates who were not part of this program get \$50 when they are released from prison in Arizona; with this little assistance, most have little hope of succeeding; rather, they resume their old lives and often end up back in prison. Furthermore, in several cases, the post-release or aftercare contact made the difference on re-offending or staying clean.

2. Does the curriculum produce the desired educational outcomes? Do participants acquire the skill sets needed for successful job placement?

Program evaluation forms were completed by program participants, with these findings:

- 60.7% ranked the program as “exceptional”
- 30.9% ranked the program “above average”
- Only 7.9% ranked the program as “average.”
- No one ranked the program “below average.”

Their 100% passage rate on the ServSafe® food safety exam, the healthy job placement rate for released program participants, and positive reports from employers all testify to the success of the holistic and collaborative transitional training program.

3. Do program graduates satisfy employers' needs for trained workers? Does the Arizona restaurant industry support the program?

The skill sets that inmates learned in this program were designed to satisfy employers' needs for trained workers. They also enabled participants to enter service industries other than culinary, such as telemarketing, retail,

and housekeeping. The Arizona restaurant industry, and several restaurants in particular, were extremely supportive. Restaurants that hired released inmates included Red Lobster, Subway, McDonald's, Perkins, and Love's Truck Stop.

4. Can ex-offenders conform to workplace rules and be dependable employees? Do they pose special risks to employers, or is the perception of heightened risk a perception without foundation in fact?

The graduates of this program demonstrated that they could be responsible citizens and dependable employees. One released inmate who violated probation was re-incarcerated, but her employer kept her job for her and she returned to it after serving a short sentence for the violation. No special risks were posed for employers by hiring inmates.

5. What are the program's effects on minority and female prisoners in particular? Are they disproportionately helped by the program as other programs have found?

Because of the relatively small number of inmates who completed this program, no broad generalizations could be made in this area. Of graduates, approximately one-fourth were minorities: 17% were Hispanic and 7% were Native American. These individuals were some of the most successful in the program. At the end of this pilot program, they were all working and had 100% completion or had been off-paper and successfully working for one year after release.

6. What can we learn about operating on-line and in cyberspace in secure environments that will be useful for public schools, libraries, and other places where controlled Internet access is an issue?

We discovered that inmates are not allowed to operate a computer on-line; the Arizona prison system will simply not allow it. Therefore, we were not able to test this theory.

7. Finally, is the program cost effective and can it be replicated nationally?

The program definitely demonstrated its cost-effectiveness. With one culinary instructor, one life coach, and a part-time aftercare coordinator, total program costs were modest (\$140,000 per year), especially when one considers the programs' successes. NAU donated considerable time and effort; Canteen Corporation donated equipment, food and other goods to the program; and Arizona Department of Corrections donated program space/buildings, building renovation, and some administrative assistance.

As the original FIPSE grant approached an end, additional funding to extend the program was sought from ADOC and from Canteen Correctional Services, which offered a sum of \$50,000 contingent on the program acquiring a similar matching sum of \$50,000. ADOC then approved this match, with \$25,000 awarded for the first six months of 2004 and the remainder for the last six months of 2004 (straddling state fiscal years).

ADOC added the program to its operational budget and planned to replicate the program on other prison yards. Canteen Correctional Services, the foodservice vendor, likewise adopted this program and planned to provide financial support for its continuation. Canteen Correctional Services also expressed the desire to replicate this program in other states. However, the program was terminated by ADOC in January of 2005 because of budgetary problems due to the significant growth in the prison population. Unfortunately, training frequently is among the first things cut when an organization is grappling with dwindling financial resources.

## **Conclusion**

The practical and policy barriers are many when providing education programs in a prison setting. Overcrowding, state budget shortfalls, changes in personnel, and other practical and financial constraints must be confronted.

The extreme emphasis on security means that change must occur slowly. The two-week hostage crisis that occurred in Arizona's largest male state prison in 2004 strongly confirms this – a hostage situation that began in the kitchen. Working under conditions of extreme security is unusually frustrating to anyone wanting to establish an educational program in a prison. Accommodations must be made to the prison environment and attention paid to the counsel of prison officials if any real progress or reform is to take place. It took two years to implement the pilot program, which was much longer than expected.

The holistic and collaborative transitional training program described in this article appears promising, as reflected in the evaluation statistics. However, the small sample size and the short evaluation period of inmate progress after release limit the strength and generalization of the pilot implementation outcomes. In general, departments of corrections currently do not have good mechanisms for recording information related to correctional training programs. Better documentation of program outcomes and issues will enable them to make better cases for expanding or improving programs (Lawrence et al., 2002). Educators who have information about what happens to their students after release can gauge whether their methods are being successful and how they might better prepare their students for reentry (Brazzel et al., 2009).

When the pilot program was terminated due to budget cutbacks, there was a class in progress with a maximum capacity of 17 and 8 on the waiting list. Unfortunately, effective prison training programs are often hampered by the need to contain rising costs (Lawrence et al., 2002). Furthermore, allocating space and resources for correctional programs has not been a top priority for correctional managers (Travis et al. 2001). Michael Santos, a long-term prisoner and noted author who writes about the prison experience, maintains that “too many prisoners conclude their terms with finely-honed skills necessary to survive in prison which are inimical to legal and social success outside” (Santos, 2010).

Finally, if it were not for the supportive administrative staff at ASPC Perryville and the warden and staff of the education department, this program would not have been implemented. In addition, the strong support of Canteen Correctional Services and the community were critical to the successful outcomes of this program. The pilot program demonstrated that opportunities exist to build partnerships among a diverse group of organizations for improving the work and life skills of prisoners and their ability to obtain gainful employment when released from prison.

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