

Reintegration of prisoners - is it possible?

[Law](#), [Criminal Justice](#)



Reintegration of Prisoners — Is it possible? The reintegration of prisoners back into “ normal” everyday living is a difficult and seemingly impossible task. The challenges offenders on probation or parole face are great in number and size. Each criminal faces different hurdles based on their demographic, gender, length of stay, individual background, racial background, offense history, and the strength of their support system upon release. I believe that reentry is a realistic expectation; however, we must consider each case and focus on the support provided the offender as they enter back into a society that has shunned them. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics over 4. 9 million adult men and women were under Federal, State, or local probation or parole in 2005. Approximately 4, 162, 500 of those were on probation and 784, 400 on parole, an annual 0. 6 percent increase for 2005 [Bureau of Statistics, 2005]. These numbers are staggering. The goal of reintegration is for prisoners to safely return to the community as law-abiding citizens.[Rosenthal and Wolf, 1] With so many prisoners attempting to reenter society it is certain that not all of them will, but can any of them at all? I believe that reintegration is possible and that the rate of successful reentry will improve with more attention paid to the support system provided those attempting life on the outside. Also, probation and parole officers must take into account all the differing factors of each case. For instance, the length of the offenders stays in prison or jail - the longer an offender spends behind bars, the more difficult it may be for them to reintegrate successfully. Of those on parole in 2005, 94% had been incarcerated for more than one year [Bureau of Statistics, 2005]. A popular movie, The Shawshank Redemption, showcases the difficulties of

reintegration for one prisoner. The prisoner was released after a fifty year sentence. Unable to cope, he commits suicide. Other factors like racial and ethnic backgrounds, economic status, family, job opportunities all affect the prisoner's chances for successful reentry into society. Efforts to improve the support system through probation and parole are being made. The Prisoner Reentry Initiative employs reentry programs that begin in correctional institutions and follow the offender as they attempt to transition and stabilize themselves in the community. These programs focus on individual reentry plans that address issues offenders will face as they return to the community. The initiative includes three phases. The first phase, Protect and Prepare, is meant to help prepare the offender for reentry while institutionalized. This phase includes education, mental health, substance abuse treatment, job training, mentoring, and full diagnostic and risk assessment programs. Phase two, Control and Restore, focuses on community based programs. Programs include job skills training, life skills training, monitoring, education, mentoring, mental health treatment, and substance abuse treatment. The third and final phase, Sustain and Support, focuses on long term community based programs. This third phase is designed to keep those individuals who have left the supervision of probation or parole connected with community and social services [Reentry. gov]. Another program implemented to help those individuals on probation or parole a better chance at succeeding is the Interstate Compact Agreement. The agreement was initially signed by twenty five states in 1937 and then by all fifty in 1951. The agreement allows for those offenders who have been released from jail or prison and placed on probation or parole, to move

outside the state of original jurisdiction if it is believed that this will aide them in their reintegration. The offender must have gainful and verifiable employment opportunities in the state they intend to move to, family or support system residing in the state, be a resident of the state, or the move must offer the offender a better chance of success. The offender is bound by the probation or parole restrictions of both the sending and receiving states, and can be asked to return to the sending state when necessary. In 2000 and oversight committee was created to ensure that all states adhered to the same set of regulations. The committee also imposes sanctions for those states failing to adhere to those regulations[CSOSA]. I believe that the creation of this agreement greatly improves the chances for success for those in the program because they are given the chance to be in the environment best suited for their success. A policy brief proposed in 2004 by Alan Rosenthal, J. D. and Elaine Wolf, Ph. D. suggests the use of six stage model of reentry beginning at the arrest of the offender. The six stages of their model are pretrial release, plea bargaining/sentencing negotiations, sentencing, self-development/perpetration for reentry while prison, release after serving sentence, and parole provocation. The plan is devised to be implemented at any stage at which a person is released as well as during the sentencing phase. If a defendant is released prior to trial the reentry plan would be used to help reintegrate the person at that point if sentenced to jail or prison time and not immediately released the plan would be used to help prepare for reentry while the prisoner is incarcerated [Rosenthal and Wolf, 3-4]. I believe that the implementation of this policy could help improve the chances of reintegration by providing advocacy and support for the offender

throughout the justice process. As an offender attempts to reintegrate themselves into society after a stay in jail or prison they face a multitude of challenges. These barriers are different for each prisoner and depend on the individual background of the prisoner as well as many other factors. An effort in reentry should be focused on the individual characteristics of each case. Female offenders face issues different from those of their male counterparts. Mentally ill offenders are up against yet different struggles in reintegration. Gang affiliated prisoners, elderly, sex offenders; murderers are all dealing with different issues of reintegration. It may not be possible to reintegrate every different demographic or group of prisoners, however, I believe that with focus paid to the unique aspects of each case and greater support upon release, successful reintegration is very real possibility.