

Promising Practices

Creating Opportunities for Stable Employment: The Last Mile

Lowering Recidivism through Vocational Training Programs

Lowering recidivism for individuals released from prison improves public safety and reduces instances of crime. One crucial component to lowering recidivism is to set returning citizens up for success upon returning to their homes and communities. The Bureau of Justice Statistics released a [2018 update](#) to a research study started in 2005 aimed at determining rates of recidivism for returning citizens over defined periods of time. This study found that 68 percent of individuals released from prison were rearrested within three years and 77 percent of individuals returning from prison were rearrested within five years.

How Did The Last Mile Begin?

In 2010 Silicon Valley businessman Chris Redlitz stepped foot in San Quentin State Prison to deliver a speech about business and entrepreneurship. Inspired by the men he met inside, upon leaving, he rallied his wife and business partner, Beverly Parenti, and they created The Last Mile program. Originally started in California, the program has since expanded to 24 classrooms across six additional states: Indiana, Oklahoma, Massachusetts, North Dakota, Montana and Michigan. The program operates in correctional facilities for men and women.

[Stable employment](#) reduces recidivism, particularly career-driven employment as opposed to positions with little room for growth. One path to stable employment upon release from prison is through vocational training programs, which exist to help individuals who are incarcerated learn tangible marketable skills. [Training opportunities within prisons can vary drastically](#) but can include programs for plumbing, auto detailing, welding, electrical trades, horticulture and culinary arts. [The Last Mile](#) is a promising vocational prison-based program focused on teaching participants how to code and build skills surrounding software and development projects and applications.



How Does the Program Work?

The program, competitive due to limited space, requires an application process consisting of a written personal statement and an in-person interview. Currently, there are two programs available to students: Web Development and Audio and Video Production.

For the Web Development program, participants enter the program in two six-month cohorts: Web Development Fundamentals (WDF) and MERN Development. Participants spend 30 hours per week in the classroom and learn technical skills such as coding, debugging and software development skills that teach industry standard programming such as HTML/CSS, Javascript, Node, Express, Reach and MongoDB.

The Audio and Video Production program also consists of two six-month cohorts: Digital Audio Production (DAP) and Video Editing and Post-Production (VEP). In the DAP program, students learn the fundamentals of sound and hearing, signal flow, music mixing and post-production audio processing. The VEP program teaches video post-production, basics of color science and color correction, working with raw footage, assembling narratives, sound design, grading and workflows for multimedia production. Both the Web Development and Audio and Video Production programs also include a focus on soft skills such as financial literacy, verbal presentation skills, writing a resume and cover letter and collaborating as part of a team.

As an organization, The Last Mile emphasizes reentry support for program participants, aiming to help returning citizens secure paid apprenticeships and pipelines for employment by leveraging strong partnerships with technology companies. Upon graduating, returning citizens are added to TLM’s [Slack channel](#) and are instantly connected with a community of individuals; this community can be leveraged to find fair chance employment opportunities and to mentor returning citizens who start their own businesses.

Program Funding



This technology education program operates across various prison-based sites. Funding for each site, generally, is provided through a combination of private funds, corporate sponsors, charitable foundations and state-level grants.

Do you have a Promising Practice from your jurisdiction you want to share?
Contact us at strategicplanning@ncja.org!

Successes So Far



- The Last Mile is a fair chance hiring organization. Half of The Last Mile’s employees (40) are former program participants.
- Over [1,000 students](#) have completed the program, and over 400 individuals have returned to their communities.
- 85 percent of returning citizens are employed within six months.
- Currently, the program boasts a [0 percent](#) recidivism rate.

In Conclusion

The Last Mile is a promising program with exciting preliminary effects on reducing recidivism and supporting returning citizens with stable employment and skills that can be used to market themselves professionally. To learn more about The Last Mile, please visit the website [here](#).