

**More Than a Job**  
**Final Results from the**  
**Evaluation of the Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO)**  
**Transitional Jobs Program**

**OPRE Report 2011-18**

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# More Than a Job: Final Results from the Evaluation of the Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO) Transitional Jobs Program

OPRE Report 2011-18

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## Overview

This report presents the final results of the evaluation of the Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO). CEO is one of four sites in the Enhanced Services for the Hard-to-Employ Demonstration and Evaluation Project, sponsored by the Administration for Children and Families and the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), with additional funding from the U.S. Department of Labor. MDRC, a nonprofit, nonpartisan social and education policy research organization, is leading the evaluation, in collaboration with the Urban Institute and other partners.

Based in New York City, CEO is a comprehensive employment program for former prisoners — a population confronting many obstacles to finding and maintaining work. CEO provides temporary, paid jobs and other services in an effort to improve participants' labor market prospects and reduce the odds that they will return to prison. The study uses a rigorous random assignment design: it compares outcomes for individuals assigned to the program group, who were given access to CEO's jobs and other services, with the outcomes for those assigned to the control group, who were offered basic job search assistance at CEO along with other services in the community.

The three-year evaluation found that CEO substantially increased employment early in the follow-up period but that the effects faded over time. The initial increase in employment was due to the temporary jobs provided by the program. After the first year, employment and earnings were similar for both the program group and the control group.

CEO significantly reduced recidivism, with the most promising impacts occurring among a subgroup of former prisoners who enrolled shortly after release from prison (the group that the program was designed to serve). Among the subgroup that enrolled within three months after release, program group members were less likely than their control group counterparts to be arrested, convicted of a new crime, and reincarcerated. The program's impacts on these outcomes represent reductions in recidivism of 16 percent to 22 percent. In general, CEO's impacts were stronger for those who were more disadvantaged or at higher risk of recidivism when they enrolled in the study.

The evaluation includes a benefit-cost analysis, which shows that CEO's financial benefits outweighed its costs under a wide range of assumptions. Financial benefits exceeded the costs for taxpayers, victims, and participants. The majority of CEO's benefits were the result of reduced criminal justice system expenditures.



## Acknowledgments

The Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO) site in the Enhanced Services for the Hard-to-Employ Demonstration and Evaluation Project has received strong support from CEO administrators and staff and from officials in several New York State and City agencies. While many people have supported the study, space does not permit us to mention everyone who contributed to it.

The study would not have been possible without the ongoing commitment of the funder, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. We are grateful to the many staff at CEO who have steadfastly supported the study and given generously of their time. We owe special thanks to Executive Director and Chief Executive Officer Mindy Tarlow and to Chief Operating Officer Brad Dudding. Thanks also go to Marta Nelson, Sam Schaeffer, Tani Mills, Mary Bedeau, and Patrick Yurgosky for their contributions. S. Rebecca Neusteter, formerly of CEO, played a key role in the study's early stages.

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The Authors





# Executive Summary

## Introduction

The Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO) is one of four sites in the Enhanced Services for the Hard-to-Employ Demonstration and Evaluation Project, sponsored by the Administration for Children and Families and the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), with additional funding from the U.S. Department of Labor. The overall project is evaluating diverse strategies designed to improve employment and other outcomes for several hard-to-employ populations, using a rigorous random assignment research design. MDRC — a nonprofit, nonpartisan social and education policy research organization — is leading the evaluation, in collaboration with the Urban Institute and other partners.

Based in New York City, CEO is a comprehensive employment program for former prisoners, a population confronting many obstacles to finding and maintaining work. CEO provides temporary, paid jobs and other services in an effort to improve participants' labor market prospects and reduce the odds that they will return to prison. The study uses a rigorous random assignment design: it compares outcomes for individuals assigned to the program group, who were given access to CEO's jobs and other services, with the outcomes of those assigned to the control group, who were offered basic job search assistance at CEO along with other services in the community. This report presents the final results of the CEO evaluation.<sup>1</sup> The results presented below and in earlier reports show that:

- **CEO substantially increased employment early in the follow-up period, but those effects faded over time.** The initial increase in employment was due to the temporary jobs provided by the program. After the first year, when program group members had left these transitional jobs, their employment and earnings were similar to those of control group members.
- **CEO significantly reduced recidivism, with the largest reductions occurring among a subgroup of former prisoners who enrolled shortly after release from prison.** The CEO program was designed to serve individuals immediately after release, but the study sample includes both people who came to the program shortly after release and others who came later. Among those who enrolled within three months after release, program group members were less likely than their control group counterparts to be arrested, con-

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<sup>1</sup>For early results, see Bloom, Redcross, Zweig, and Azurdia (2007) and Redcross et al. (2009).

victed of a new crime, and reincarcerated. In general, CEO's impacts were stronger for those who were more disadvantaged or at higher risk of recidivism when they enrolled in the study.

- **CEO's benefits to society outweighed its costs under a wide range of assumptions.** Financial benefits exceeded costs for taxpayers, victims, and participants. The majority of CEO's benefits came in the form of reduced criminal justice system expenditures.

## The Prisoner Reentry Crisis

Over the past three decades, incarceration has increased dramatically in the United States. Consequently, unprecedented numbers of prisoners are released each year. Former prisoners face a range of challenges to successful reentry into the community, and rates of recidivism are high. Within three years of release, two-thirds are arrested, and more than half return to prison or jail.<sup>2</sup> Recidivism imposes huge costs on taxpayers, families, and communities.

Many researchers and practitioners working in the reentry field believe that employment is a key ingredient in determining the success or failure of former prisoners' transition back to society. Positive employment outcomes can help pave the way to better housing conditions and improved relations within the family and community. Moreover, employment may help former prisoners feel more connected to mainstream society and help deter them from criminal activity.

Unfortunately, finding a steady job on release from prison is a major challenge for this population. Many employers are reluctant to hire someone with a prison record.<sup>3</sup> Most people who are recently released also have other attributes, such as low educational attainment and limited work history, which make them less appealing to potential employers, and they may have competing demands from drug treatment programs and curfews or other restrictions on mobility that can exacerbate the problem of finding and keeping full-time employment.

Comprehensive employment services may be critical to ensuring better postrelease outcomes, but there is little rigorous evidence about effective employment strategies for former prisoners. Transitional jobs are seen by many as a promising employment model for former prisoners and other disadvantaged groups. When targeted to people coming out of prison, transitional jobs programs place participants into temporary, paid jobs shortly after release and provide various kinds of other supports and help with finding a permanent job once a person is

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<sup>2</sup>Langan and Levin (2002).

<sup>3</sup>Pager (2003).

ready. CEO in New York City is one of the nation's largest and most highly regarded transitional jobs programs for formerly incarcerated people.

## **The Center for Employment Opportunities**

CEO's model starts with a short preemployment class lasting five days. Once participants complete the class, they are placed immediately into a transitional job in one of CEO's work crews. Crews of about six participants work in city and state agencies throughout New York City and are supervised by a CEO staff person. During the study period, participants worked seven hours a day, four days per week, and were paid each day for the work performed that day. The type of work performed on the work crews is not designed to teach skills for a specific occupation but, instead, is geared toward teaching the soft skills that employers value, such as how to show up to work on time and how to behave on the job. On the fifth day of each week, participants reported to CEO's office and met with their job coaches (case managers) and job developers. They could also participate in other services, such as a fatherhood program and parenting classes. Once deemed job-ready, participants got help finding a permanent job.

CEO's model is based on the assumption that people recently released from prison have an immediate need for income and help finding a job. The program's transitional jobs are designed to serve two purposes: (1) the jobs provide stability and income, which may reduce the incentive to turn back to crime in the critical period just after release; (2) the experience of working in a transitional job may teach participants how to work. Specifically, the soft skills learned on the work sites may make participants more appealing to employers by demonstrating that the individuals were able to show up to work on time and could perform satisfactorily in the program jobs. Employers might then be more willing to overlook a criminal background and hire CEO participants. Participants might also be better equipped for the regular labor market, which, in turn, could make them more likely to hold a job. The model assumes that better employment outcomes will help deter future recidivism.

## **The Research Design and Methodology**

The CEO evaluation aims to determine whether CEO's transitional jobs and other services are more effective than basic job search assistance. The evaluation was designed as a rigorous random assignment study whereby former prisoners who were referred to CEO by their parole officers and reported to the program were randomly assigned to one of two research groups:

- **Program group.** Individuals who were assigned to the program group were eligible for all of CEO's services, including the preemployment class, the transitional job, job coaching, job development, parenting classes, and post-placement services.

- **Control group.** Individuals who were assigned to the control group began with a shorter version of the preemployment class and were given access to a resource room with basic job search equipment, such as computers and fax machines. A staff person was available to assist them with aspects of the job search if needed. Control group members also had access to other services in the community.

Study enrollment was conducted between January 2004 and October 2005 and resulted in a sample of 977 former prisoners: 568 in the program group and 409 in the control group. (Due to the random assignment design, described in Chapter 1 of this report, the sizes of the program and control groups in the overall study sample are not the same.) The research team tracked all sample members for three years following random assignment, using a number of data sources. The CEO program provided information on sample members' participation in program activities. State, city, and federal agencies provided administrative data reporting on criminal justice involvement as well as employment in jobs covered by unemployment insurance (UI). A subset of sample members also participated in a survey.

Because the study's sample members were assigned at random to one group or the other, the two groups, on average, were similar on all personal characteristics at the start of the study. Therefore, one can be confident that any statistically significant differences in outcomes that emerge between the groups over time can be attributed to CEO's core components. These differences are known as *impacts*. All impacts are regression-adjusted, using ordinary least squares, controlling for characteristics of sample members prior to random assignment. Tests of statistical significance were performed on all impacts presented in the report, to determine whether an impact could confidently be attributed to the CEO program.<sup>4</sup> All analyses use an "intent to treat" framework that compares the outcomes for all program group members with the outcomes for all control group members. No one for whom data were available was excluded from the analysis.

The evaluation examines impacts for the full study sample and for subgroups of the sample. Subgroups were defined using pre-random assignment characteristics, including the time between release from prison and random assignment, age, educational attainment, criminal history, and risk of recidivism (based on a risk index) — all variables that are hypothesized to affect impacts. Because of small sample sizes, subgroup impact estimates are considered less precise than full-sample impacts and, therefore, should be interpreted cautiously. Subgroup

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<sup>4</sup>An impact is considered statistically significant if there is less than a 10 percent probability that the estimated difference would have occurred by chance, in the absence of any effect of the program. The report's tables and figures use asterisks and daggers to indicate statistical significance at the 10 percent, 5 percent, and 1 percent levels, as explained in the notes for each exhibit showing impacts.

impacts also require an additional test of statistical significance to assess the magnitude of differences in impacts across subgroups. Whenever such differences are statistically significant, one can have greater confidence that the underlying impacts for the subgroups involved are actually different from one another.<sup>5</sup>

In addition to the impact analysis, the evaluation includes an implementation study (Chapter 2) and a benefit-cost analysis (Chapter 4).

## Characteristics of the Research Sample

The research sample is similar in many ways to the parole population in New York City.<sup>6</sup> The vast majority of sample members are male, and most are African-American or Hispanic. On average, sample members were 34 years old when they enrolled in the study; 43 percent were age 30 or younger. Just over half the sample had completed a high school diploma or a General Educational Development (GED) certificate. About half the study sample had at least one child under age 18, but only a small number lived with any of their children at baseline. Most had worked in the past, but only three out of five had ever worked six consecutive months for a single employer. About one-fourth of sample members had worked in a UI-covered job in the year *before* random assignment.

The sample members had extensive histories with the criminal justice system, with an average of seven prior convictions and a total of five years in state prison. All were under parole supervision when they entered the study.

Most of the people served by CEO come to the program either immediately after release from prison or shortly thereafter. However, just 41 percent of sample members enrolled in the study within three months after release. This occurred because contractual obligations required that the evaluation target a subset of CEO's overall client base.<sup>7</sup> Because the CEO model was intentionally designed to serve ex-prisoners immediately after release, and because most of CEO's broader population fits this profile, the impact results presented in this report are examined separately for the subgroup of people who came to CEO soon after release and those

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<sup>5</sup>A statistical test was used to test for statistically significant differences in impact estimates across subgroups. Statistical significance levels for differences in subgroup impacts are indicated in the impact tables using daggers, as follows: ††† = 1 percent; †† = 5 percent; † = 10 percent.

<sup>6</sup>New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (2009).

<sup>7</sup>Graduates of New York's Shock Incarceration (boot camp) program and participants in some other special programs were excluded from the study for contractual reasons. Individuals in these special programs almost always come to CEO just after release. Those in the study sample came to CEO after referral by a parole officer who was not involved in special programs. Parole officers base their referral decisions on a wide variety of concerns and circumstances. Some ex-prisoners are recently released, and others are not.

who came later. As described above, because the subgroups are based on characteristics of sample members at baseline (prior to random assignment), the subgroup analysis is fully consistent with the experimental research design.

## **Program Implementation**

- **CEO's program operated as intended during the study period, and most program group members received the core services.**

Program tracking and payroll data show that almost 76 percent of the program group completed the initial five-day preemployment class and that 71 percent worked in a CEO transitional job for at least one day. The average time spent in transitional employment was about nine weeks, which generally occurred over about four months of engagement with the program. About 91 percent of program group members who worked in a transitional job also met with CEO job coaches or job developers at least once. About 44 percent of those who worked in a transitional job were placed into permanent jobs, according to CEO's records.

- **The program group was more likely than the control group to receive specific kinds of employment services but, as designed, many control group members got help with job search at CEO or elsewhere.**

CEO offered some help with basic job search assistance to control group members. But CEO's core program components, including transitional jobs and job development services, were offered only to program group members. In addition to the services that CEO offered to research sample members, it was expected that members from both research groups might seek out assistance from other organizations in the community.

Responses from a client survey that was fielded an average of 20 months after study entry provide information on participation in programs and service receipt for both the program group and the control group. Not surprisingly, the program group was substantially more likely to receive some kinds of employment help, such as referrals to specific job openings — the kind of help provided by CEO job developers. About 32 percent of program group members reported that they were referred to a specific job opening, compared with about 18 percent of control group members. In other areas, however, such as advice about filling out job applications or résumé building, the differences between research groups were much smaller because, as intended, many control group members received these services from CEO or another organization. Very few control group members worked in a transitional job at CEO, but a small number reported that they worked in similar jobs at other organizations. As noted above, because the offer of a paid transitional job is a substantially more expensive service than more individual and commonly offered program strategies like job search assistance, the CEO evaluation was

designed to determine whether CEO's transitional jobs and related services were more effective than basic job search assistance alone.

## Impacts of CEO on Employment and Recidivism

### Impacts for the Full Sample

- **For the full study sample, CEO substantially increased employment early in the follow-up period, but the impact faded over time as program group members exited the transitional jobs.**

Figure ES.1 shows CEO's impacts on overall employment, which is defined as working at least one day in a quarter, in either a CEO transitional job or any other UI-covered employment in New York State. CEO's largest impacts on employment occurred early in the first year of the study period, when the increases in employment were driven entirely by the transitional jobs themselves, and the impact faded as program group members left the transitional jobs.<sup>8</sup> There were no impacts on employment for the remainder of the three-year period (the postprogram period). After the first year, employment rates for both research groups were low; only about 30 percent of sample members worked in a UI-covered job in each quarter.

- **CEO reduced convictions for new crimes and incarceration over the three-year follow-up period.**

Table ES.1 shows CEO's impacts on several measures of recidivism (arrest, conviction, incarceration). Over the three-year follow-up period, the program group was significantly less likely than the control group to be convicted of a crime and to be incarcerated. Rates of recidivism were high but are similar to what has been found in national studies and to the rates among parolees released from New York State prisons during the same time frame.<sup>9</sup> CEO reduced overall recidivism; during the three-year follow-up period, 70 percent of the control group experienced some form of recidivism, compared with 65 percent of the program group.

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<sup>8</sup>The data from the evaluation suggest that program group members left the transitional jobs for numerous reasons, including placement in unsubsidized employment or reincarceration. Many disengaged from program activities for unknown reasons.

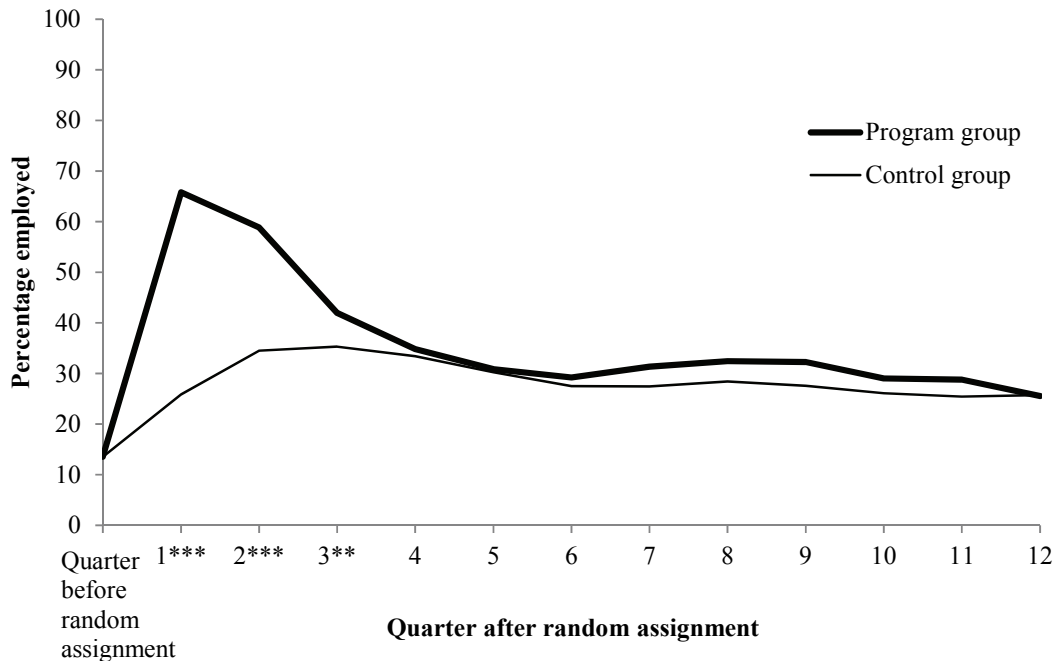
<sup>9</sup>Among the recently released subgroup, 50 percent were convicted of a new crime; this is similar to the proportion found among a national sample of prisoners released in 1994, in which 47 percent were convicted of a new crime within three years of release (Langan and Levin, 2002). Among the 24,520 offenders released from New York's state prisons in 2006, 11 percent were reincarcerated for a new felony within three years, which is similar to the recently released subgroup's average of 12 percent (New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services, 2010).

The Enhanced Services for the Hard-to-Employ Demonstration

Figure ES.1

Quarterly Impacts on Overall Employment

Center for Employment Opportunities



SOURCE: MDRC calculations from unemployment insurance (UI) wage records from New York State.

NOTES: Results in this figure are weighted by week of random assignment and adjusted for pre-random assignment characteristics.

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

The sample size is 973. Four sample members are missing Social Security numbers and therefore could not be matched to employment data.

**Impacts for the Subgroups Defined by Time Since Release from Prison**

- **There is some evidence that CEO increased unsubsidized employment for sample members who came to the program shortly after release; this pattern was not evident for sample members who came to the program later.**



**The Enhanced Services for the Hard-to-Employ Demonstration**

**Table ES.1**

**Three-Year Impacts on Recidivism  
Center for Employment Opportunities**

Outcome	Program Group	Control Group	Difference (Impact)	P-Value
Ever arrested <sup>a</sup> (%)	48.1	52.8	-4.7	0.147
Ever convicted of a crime <sup>b</sup> (%)	43.1	48.8	-5.6 *	0.078
Convicted of a felony	10.0	11.7	-1.6	0.419
Convicted of a misdemeanor	34.0	39.3	-5.4 *	0.083
Ever incarcerated <sup>c</sup> (%)	58.1	65.0	-6.9 **	0.027
Prison	33.7	35.2	-1.5	0.626
Jail	56.6	63.0	-6.4 **	0.041
Ever incarcerated for a new crime (%)	23.7	28.0	-4.3	0.128
Prison	7.8	9.9	-2.1	0.249
Jail	16.9	19.9	-3.0	0.229
Ever incarcerated for a technical parole violation (%)	37.5	35.1	2.4	0.435
Prison	21.9	19.6	2.2	0.394
Jail	35.4	31.6	3.8	0.216
Total days incarcerated	173	187	-14	0.392
Prison	92	104	-13	0.273
Jail	81	82	-1	0.917
Ever arrested, convicted, or incarcerated <sup>d</sup> (%)	64.9	70.6	-5.7 *	0.060
Incarcerated at end of Year 3 <sup>e</sup> (%)	25.4	30.0	-4.6	0.114
Sample size (total = 977)	568	409		

SOURCES: MDRC calculations using data from the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS) and the New York City Department of Correction (DOC).

NOTES: Results in this table are weighted by week of random assignment and adjusted for pre-random assignment characteristics.

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

<sup>a</sup>Each arrest date is counted only as a single event. If there are multiple crimes or charges on the same date, only the most serious charge is recorded in the analysis.

<sup>b</sup>A total of 23 convictions were found to be associated with an arrest that occurred prior to random assignment. These convictions are counted in the analysis as occurring after random assignment.

<sup>c</sup>Includes all reasons for incarceration, such as sentences for new crimes, technical violations of parole, detainee (jail), and other admission reasons. A sample member may have multiple admissions; therefore, incarcerations for new crimes and parole violations do not sum to the percentage incarcerated.

<sup>d</sup>This composite measure was created by combining three measures that are not mutually exclusive: arrest, conviction, and incarceration. Participants who were arrested and/or convicted, for example, were also incarcerated. The composite measure represents people who experienced one or more of these recidivism measures.

<sup>e</sup>Incarceration status based on Quarter 12 after random assignment; includes both prison and jail.

Table ES.2 shows impacts on measures of employment and earnings for subgroups defined at baseline and before random assignment occurred, analyzed by the elapsed time between release from prison and random assignment, with a focus on postprogram unsubsidized employment.<sup>10</sup> Similar to what was found for the full sample, recently released program group members had much higher rates of overall employment than recently released control group members, and the difference was driven by CEO's transitional jobs. However, in a pattern that differs from the full sample's, CEO had positive impacts on some measures of postprogram employment for the recently released subgroup.

On average, recently released program group members had more quarters with unsubsidized employment during the postprogram period than their control group counterparts. There were no significant impacts on postprogram earnings.<sup>11</sup> Without impacts on earnings, it is difficult to say with certainty that CEO had an impact on employment stability; one would expect that if the program group was employed in more quarters, there would have been a corresponding impact on earnings during the same time period. Among those who were further from release when they were randomly assigned, there were no impacts on postprogram unsubsidized employment outcomes (shown on the right-hand side of Table ES.2). The daggers in the rightmost column of the table identify impacts that are statistically different for the two subgroups. Again, these impact results should be interpreted with caution because the sample sizes of subgroups are smaller.

Given that CEO's impacts on unsubsidized employment for the recently released subgroup appeared relatively late in the follow-up period — long after most participants had left the program — it seems unlikely that they are a *direct* result of the program's services.<sup>12</sup> One hypothesis is that the same behavioral changes that led to CEO's effects on recidivism (discussed further below) may also have led to better employment retention for some people. It is also possible that the employment impacts are a secondary effect of the program's impacts on recidivism. Specifically, recently released program group members were more available for work than their control group counterparts because they were less likely to be incarcerated or otherwise involved with the criminal justice system, making it more likely that they would be employed later in the follow-up period.

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<sup>10</sup>The overwhelming majority of program group members had no participation in CEO in Years 2 and 3 after random assignment, so this period of time is considered postprogram.

<sup>11</sup>The difference of about \$1,100 is not statistically significant. Notably, the weighted average of the impacts for the subgroups is not equal to that for the full sample. This pattern occurs as a result of regression adjusting and has no effect on the basic impact finding for the earnings outcome. Even when impacts are run unadjusted, the differences do not rise to the level of statistical significance, and the main finding of no impact is unchanged.

<sup>12</sup>For the program to have had a direct effect, one would have expected to find effects on continuous employment as individuals transitioned from subsidized to unsubsidized employment.

The Enhanced Services for the Hard-to-Employ Demonstration

Table ES.2

Impacts on Employment and Earnings, by Time Between Prison Release and Random Assignment

Center for Employment Opportunities

Outcome	Length of Time Between Prison Release and Random Assignment				Difference Between Subgroup Impacts <sup>b</sup>			
	3 Months or Less		More Than 3 Months					
	Program Group	Control Group	Program Group	Control Group				
	Impact	Impact	Impact	Impact	P-Value <sup>a</sup>			
<b>Employment (Years 1-3) (%)</b>								
Ever any employment <sup>f</sup>	87.3	72.3	15.1 ***	0.000	82.0	69.1	12.9 ***	0.000
Ever worked in a CEO transitional job <sup>d</sup>	73.5	-0.9	74.4 ***	0.000	68.3	5.2	63.1 ***	0.000
Ever worked in an unsubsidized job	68.9	71.4	-2.5	0.612	59.5	67.9	-8.4 **	0.037
<b>Postprogram unsubsidized employment outcomes (Years 2-3) (%)</b>								
Ever worked in an unsubsidized job	58.3	54.6	3.7	0.472	47.9	51.7	-3.8	0.374
Average quarterly unsubsidized employment	33.8	27.5	6.2 *	0.074	24.9	27.1	-2.2	0.444
Number of quarters with unsubsidized employment								
None	41.7	45.4	-3.7	0.472	52.1	48.3	3.8	0.374
1 to 3	23.9	25.0	-1.1	0.818	21.6	23.1	-1.5	0.679
4 to 6	15.5	18.2	-2.7	0.489	14.0	16.1	-2.1	0.502
7 to 8	18.9	11.3	7.5 **	0.038	12.3	12.5	-0.2	0.954
Worked 6 or more consecutive quarters	17.9	12.0	5.9 *	0.086	14.3	10.6	3.7	0.199
<b>Earnings (Years 2-3)<sup>e</sup> (\$)</b>								
Total UI-covered earnings <sup>c</sup>	12,385	11,185	1,200	0.582	9,820	8,252	1,568	0.356
CEO transitional job earnings	61	-6	67	0.121	159	18	141 ***	0.000
Unsubsidized earnings	12,323	11,192	1,132	0.603	9,662	8,235	1,427	0.401
Sample size (total = 926) <sup>f</sup>	223	160	310	233				

(continued)

### Table ES.2 (continued)

SOURCES: MDRC earnings calculations from the National Directory of New Hires (NDNH) database and employment calculations from the unemployment insurance (UI) wage records from New York State.

NOTES: Results in this table are weighted by week of random assignment and adjusted for pre-random assignment characteristics.

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

A small number of control group members accessed CEO's transitional jobs. Due to weighting and regression adjustments, CEO employment and earnings outcomes for the recently released control group are less than zero.

<sup>a</sup>Standard errors are presented in this report for all impacts with a p-value of 0.000. Following are the standard errors for all impacts with a p-value of 0.000 (presented in the order in which they appear in the table and beginning with the "3 Months or Less" subgroup): Employment: 4.131, 3.691, 3.571, and 3.301. Earnings: 37.772.

<sup>b</sup>When comparing impacts between two subgroups, an H-statistic is generated. The H-statistic is used to assess whether the difference in impacts between the subgroups is statistically significant. It is interpretable in much the same way as the t-statistic and the F-statistic from analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests are interpreted. Statistically significant differences across subgroups are indicated as: ††† = 1 percent; †† = 5 percent; † = 10 percent.

<sup>c</sup>These outcomes reflect only UI-covered employment and earnings.

<sup>d</sup>CEO transitional employment is estimated using data from NDNH and CEO's management information system (MIS).

<sup>e</sup>Due to missing earnings data for Year 1, this report includes impacts for only Years 2 and 3. The earnings difference of around \$1,100 is not statistically significant. Notably, the weighted average of the impacts for the subgroups is not equal to that of the full sample. This pattern occurs as a result of regression adjusting and has no effect on the basic impact finding for the earnings outcome. Even when impacts are run unadjusted, the differences do not rise to the level of statistical significance and the main finding of no impact is unchanged.

<sup>f</sup>A total of 48 sample members are missing the latest prison release date prior to random assignment and are therefore missing from estimates in this table. An additional three sample members are missing Social Security numbers and therefore could not be matched to employment data.

- **CEO’s impacts on recidivism were strongest among those who were recently released from prison. For that subgroup, CEO reduced arrests, convictions, and incarceration during the three-year follow-up period.**

Table ES.3 presents CEO’s impacts on recidivism for subgroups defined by time between prison release and random assignment. The impacts on recidivism were largest for those who came to the program shortly after release. Among that subgroup, program group members were significantly less likely than control group members to be arrested (49 percent, compared with 59 percent); convicted of a crime (44 percent, compared with 57 percent); or incarcerated (60 percent, compared with 71 percent). These impacts represent a reduction in recidivism of 16 percent to 22 percent across the three outcomes.<sup>13</sup> There were no statistically significant impacts on recidivism among those who entered the study more than three months after release from prison.

Figure ES.2 is helpful in understanding how CEO’s impacts on recidivism unfolded over the three-year follow-up period. The figure shows CEO’s impacts on the first occurrence of an arrest, conviction, or admission to prison or jail after an individual’s date of random assignment.<sup>14</sup> The upper panel of the figure shows that CEO’s impacts on returns to crime were concentrated in Year 1 of the follow-up period, when program group members were active in the program or shortly thereafter. (For the recently released subgroup, this time period corresponds closely to the first year after release from prison.)<sup>15</sup> Rates of recidivism in the first year were 12 percentage points lower for the program group than for the control group (35 percent, compared with 47 percent); this impact represents a 26 percent reduction in recidivism. In Years 2 and 3, by contrast, there was no significant difference between the program and control groups in *initial* recidivism.

Once CEO initially prevented someone from returning to crime, some of those same people continued to have lower recidivism rates in future years. Prior reports from this evaluation and tables in Appendix D of this report show that CEO had impacts on some measures of recidivism in the second and third years of the follow-up period. In combination with the

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<sup>13</sup>The percentage change in recidivism is estimated by dividing CEO’s impact on recidivism by the mean of the control group for each outcome. For convictions, the calculation would be  $-12.7$  divided by  $56.7$ .

<sup>14</sup>There is an important distinction between the *first* recidivism event and the recidivism events presented above in Tables ES.1 and ES.3. The *first* recidivism event for an individual can occur only once during the study follow-up, while the overall recidivism outcomes, shown in the preceding tables, include recidivism that occurred in each of the years, without regard for whether it was the first, second, or third event for an individual. Measures of impacts on the *first* recidivism event are identical to *any* recidivism event for Year 1 of the follow-up. These two measures differ in Years 2 and 3.

<sup>15</sup>For the recently released subgroup, it is likely that the first event *after random assignment* is the same as the first event *after release* because of the short amount of time that had passed between release from prison and being randomly assigned.

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Table ES.3

Three-Year Impacts on Recidivism, by Time Between Prison Release and Random Assignment  
Center for Employment Opportunities

Outcome	Length of Time Between Prison Release and Random Assignment						Difference Between Subgroup Impacts <sup>a</sup>
	3 Months or Less			More Than 3 Months			
	Program Group	Control Group	P-Value	Program Group	Control Group	P-Value	
Ever arrested <sup>b</sup> (%)	49.1	59.1	-10.0 *	47.0	50.5	-3.5	0.420
Ever convicted of a crime <sup>c</sup> (%)	44.0	56.7	-12.7 **	42.7	45.7	-3.0	0.493
Convicted of a felony	15.6	14.6	1.0	6.8	10.2	-3.4	0.156
Convicted of a misdemeanor	31.9	46.1	-14.3 ***	35.5	36.8	-1.3	0.764
Ever incarcerated <sup>d</sup> (%)	60.2	71.3	-11.2 **	57.1	63.2	-6.1	0.147
Prison	38.9	43.4	-4.5	33.1	31.6	1.4	0.722
Jail	56.7	71.4	-14.7 ***	56.7	60.0	-3.4	0.428
Ever incarcerated for a new crime (%)	26.5	35.4	-8.9 *	22.7	24.7	-2.0	0.593
Prison	11.2	12.5	-1.4	5.9	8.8	-2.8	0.209
Jail	16.4	25.6	-9.1 **	17.9	17.1	0.7	0.822
Ever incarcerated for a technical parole violation (%)	38.5	39.8	-1.3	36.8	34.2	2.6	0.528
Prison	23.8	25.5	-1.7	22.3	16.8	5.5	0.110
Jail	34.2	35.1	-0.9	36.1	31.2	4.9	0.228
Total days incarcerated	213	247	-34	154	151	3	0.872
Prison	118	138	-20	82	85	-3	0.852
Jail	95	109	-14	72	66	6	0.560
Ever arrested, convicted, or incarcerated <sup>e</sup> (%)	66.8	75.8	-9.0 *	64.3	70.2	-5.9	0.148
Incarcerated at the end of Year 3 <sup>f</sup> (%)	30.1	36.1	-6.0	22.5	27.4	-4.9	0.195
Sample size (total = 929) <sup>g</sup>	225	160		311	233		

(continued)

### Table ES.3 (continued)

SOURCES: MDRC calculations using data from the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS) and the New York City Department of Correction (DOC).

NOTES: Results in this table are weighted by week of random assignment and adjusted for pre-random assignment characteristics.

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

<sup>a</sup>When comparing impacts between two subgroups, an H-statistic is generated. The H-statistic is used to assess whether the difference in impacts between the subgroups is statistically significant. It is interpretable in much the same way as the t-statistic and the F-statistic from analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests are interpreted. Statistically significant differences across subgroups are indicated as: †† = 1 percent; ††† = 5 percent; † = 10 percent.

<sup>b</sup>Each arrest date is counted only as a single event. If there are multiple crimes or charges on the same date, only one the most serious charge is recorded in the analysis.

<sup>c</sup>A total of 23 convictions were found to be associated with an arrest that occurred prior to random assignment. These convictions are counted in the analysis as occurring after random assignment.

<sup>d</sup>Includes all reasons for incarceration, such as sentences for new crimes, technical violations of parole, detainee (jail), and other admission reasons. A sample member may have multiple admissions; therefore, incarcerations for new crimes and parole violations do not sum to the percentage incarcerated.

<sup>e</sup>This composite measure was created by combining three measures that are not mutually exclusive: arrest, conviction, and incarceration. Participants who were arrested and/or convicted, for example, were also incarcerated. The composite measure represents people who experienced one or more of these recidivism measures.

<sup>f</sup>Incarceration status based on Quarter 12 after random assignment. Incarceration includes both prison and jail.

<sup>g</sup>A total of 48 sample members are missing the last prison release date and are therefore missing from all outcomes in this table.

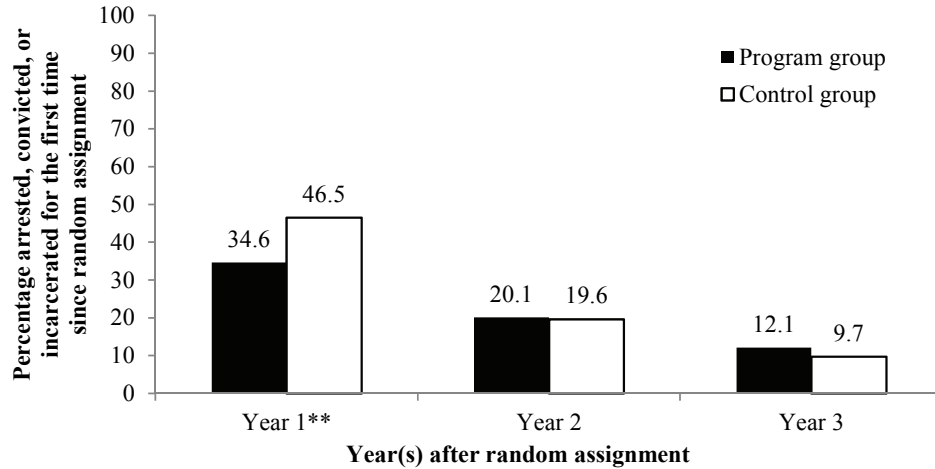
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Figure ES.2

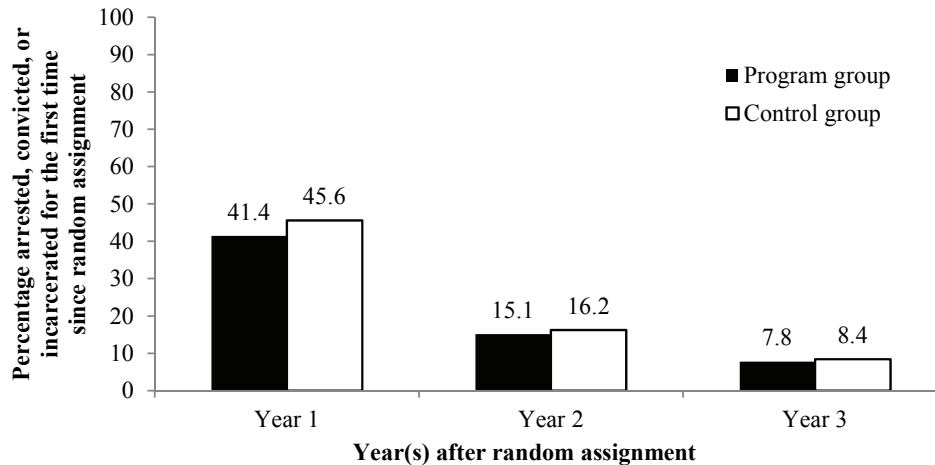
Impacts on First Incident of Recidivism After Random Assignment,  
by Time Between Prison Release and Random Assignment

Center for Employment Opportunities

Recently released subgroup



Not recently released subgroup



SOURCES: MDRC calculations using data from the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS) and the New York City Department of Correction (DOC).

NOTES: Results in this figure are weighted by week of random assignment and adjusted for pre-random assignment characteristics.

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

Sample members may have multiple arrests, convictions, or incarcerations in the follow-up period, but only the first incident of recidivism was used in the calculations for this table.

The sample size is 929. A total of 48 sample members are missing the last prison release date and are therefore missing from all outcomes in this figure.



findings shown in Figure ES.2, there is evidence that CEO's impacts on recidivism in Years 2 and 3 of the study's follow-up period may have been driven by its initial impacts on crime, which occurred during Year 1. This pattern is consistent with other studies, which have shown that the risk of returning to crime is highest in the first year after release and declines steadily with time.<sup>16</sup>

### **Impacts for Other Subgroups**

- **CEO's impacts were stronger for those who were more disadvantaged and those at highest risk of recidivism.**

Impact results were also examined for other subgroups that were formed based on sample members' characteristics before random assignment. The pattern of findings across several subgroups suggests that CEO's impacts were strongest for those who were more disadvantaged and at higher risk of recidivism. The subgroups with the largest impacts on employment and recidivism include those with four or more prior convictions, those without a high school diploma or GED, and those with a high risk of recidivism (based on a risk index determined by age, number of prior convictions, and other static factors) at the time of random assignment.<sup>17</sup> For example, among the subgroup with four or more prior convictions at the time of study entry, CEO reduced convictions for new crimes by 12.8 percentage points. Among the subgroup with fewer prior convictions at study entry, no statistically significant difference in new convictions was found between program and control group members. Notably, there is some overlap among these subgroups. For instance, many of those with four or more prior convictions are also categorized as having a high risk of recidivism.

### **Benefits and Costs of CEO**

The results described above show that CEO generated positive impacts on employment and reductions in recidivism and that these impacts were strongest for the recently released subgroup. If the cost to operate the CEO program is less than the savings associated with those impacts, taxpayers and other stakeholders may realize monetary benefits. The CEO evaluation includes a benefit-cost analysis to assess the benefits and costs associated with the CEO program and to answer questions about whether CEO is cost-effective from the perspective of

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<sup>16</sup>Blumstein and Nakamura (2010). The highest risk of recidivism occurs in the first year after release. Research has shown that recidivism declines steadily with time. After 3.8 to 7.7 years (depending on the type of crime), the likelihood of a former prisoner's committing a new crime is equal to that of people of the same age in the general population.

<sup>17</sup>A working paper from this evaluation describes the method used to assess a sample member's level of risk and shows that CEO's impacts on recidivism were larger for those at "high" risk of recidivism when they entered the study (Zweig, Yahner, and Redcross, 2010).

taxpayers, victims, participants, and society as a whole. The societal perspective sums the taxpayer, victim, and participant perspectives and represents the combined net benefit from all three perspectives.

The analysis of CEO's financial benefits expands on the impact analysis and considers the value of earnings (and associated taxes and credits), transitional jobs labor, and recidivism outcomes. The CEO benefit-cost analysis places a dollar value on each *incident* of recidivism (that is, the number of arrests, convictions, and admissions to prison), unlike the main impact analysis, which focuses primarily on the *prevalence* of recidivism in the research sample (that is, the proportions of the sample who experienced each outcome).

- **For the full sample, the estimated benefits generated by CEO outweighed the program's costs. For the recently released subgroup, benefits outweighed costs by a larger margin than for the full sample.**

CEO's impacts on recidivism and employment translated into economic benefits that outweighed program costs. The benefit-cost analysis estimated that the total net benefit of CEO was about \$4,100 per program group member from a taxpayer perspective; the total net benefit to society was estimated to be about \$4,900 per program group member. As discussed above, CEO's impacts on recidivism were larger for the subgroup that was recently released from prison; therefore, the total net benefit of CEO was also larger for this subgroup than for the full sample. The estimated net benefit of CEO is about \$8,300 per *recently released* program group member, from a taxpayer perspective. The majority of benefits to taxpayers came in the form of reduced criminal justice system expenditures and the value of services that CEO participants provided to government agencies in the transitional job work sites.<sup>18</sup>

As with any benefit-cost analysis of this type, the CEO analysis is based on estimated impacts, which have varying levels of certainty. In order to estimate the financial value of CEO's effects, the actual differences observed in outcomes were used, whether or not they reach a level of statistical significance because they are nonetheless the best estimate of the actual impact of the program. If the true impact of the program is larger or smaller than the differences in outcomes observed in this study, the net value of the CEO program will correspondingly increase or decrease.

The estimates of the benefits and costs of CEO also depend greatly on assumptions about the number of people that the program is likely to serve (its operating scale) and about the

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<sup>18</sup>Victim costs contribute minimally to the net benefit-cost results in this study because the conviction charges are primarily for drug crimes, which are generally considered "victimless" in the research literature.

number of prison beds that might be eliminated due to reduced recidivism.<sup>19</sup> Changes in the current operating scale of the CEO program and adjustments to other underlying assumptions would correspondingly increase or reduce the estimated net benefits generated by the program. In order to illustrate how different assumptions change the results, a number of sensitivity adjustments are presented in the benefit-cost chapter of this report. Even when the most conservative assumptions are applied simultaneously, CEO appears to be a cost-effective option. Under a wide range of assumptions, the program generates between \$1.26 and \$3.85 in benefits per \$1.00 of cost.<sup>20</sup>

## Conclusion and Policy Implications

CEO generated large impacts on initial employment because of the transitional jobs, but the effect faded quickly as program group members attempted to transition to unsubsidized jobs. CEO also generated significant reductions in key measures of recidivism. The program's impacts on recidivism were especially promising for the recently released subgroup (the group that the program was designed to serve). CEO's impacts on initial returns to crime were concentrated in the first year of the follow-up period, when program group members were active in the program or shortly after they left it. The evaluation produced strong evidence that CEO prevented the first recidivism event after release for some program group members. By using employment as an immediate engagement strategy after release, CEO intervened early on and placed those people on a different trajectory, deterring future criminal activity.<sup>21</sup> Reductions in recidivism are difficult to achieve and have rarely been seen in rigorous evaluations such as this one. One of the primary goals of the program was to produce sustained and consistent impacts on unsubsidized employment. The results in that area are less encouraging, though the program may have improved employment stability later in the follow-up for some participants.

One factor that complicates the interpretation of the CEO findings is the fact that another rigorous random assignment study of transitional jobs programs for former prisoners — the Transitional Jobs Reentry Demonstration (TJRD), which was conducted in four programs in the Midwest — did not find similar impacts on recidivism in the first year. The TJRD programs operated transitional jobs models that differed from CEO in a number of ways; notably, none of them operated a work crew model. Yet all of the programs were successful in placing program

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<sup>19</sup>Underlying assumptions most directly affect the marginal cost of incarceration in prison and jail, where costs vary greatly depending on the scale of the program and the number of beds eliminated.

<sup>20</sup>The low-end value of \$1.26 was estimated for the full sample using all of the most conservative underlying assumptions. The high-end value of \$3.85 represents the high-end assumptions for the recently released subgroup. See the discussion in Chapter 4 for details about the benefit-cost methodology and sensitivity analyses.

<sup>21</sup>See Appendix Table D.3 and Redcross et al. (2009).

group members into transitional jobs and, as a result, increased employment initially. Taken together, these evaluations show that although it is possible for a transitional jobs program to reduce recidivism, such results are not typical. The results also underscore the complexity of the relationship between employment and recidivism.

One hypothesis for why the CEO model produced stronger impacts on recidivism than the TJRD models is that the CEO model — particularly its small work crews — encouraged a mentoring type of relationship to develop between participants and CEO staff, particularly worksite supervisors. Indeed, survey results show that program group members were more likely than control group members to feel connected with staff.<sup>22</sup> The work crew model also gives participants the opportunity to interact with peers in a positive environment, which may have affected their attitudes and behaviors.

One thing is clear and consistent across the findings from the CEO and TJRD evaluations: rates of employment are very low among those returning from prison. Less than 30 percent of the control group in each study were employed in any given quarter. In both studies, results show that transitional jobs were successful in generating higher rates of employment than would otherwise be found for returning prisoners, demonstrating that when former prisoners are offered an immediate paid job, they are willing to work.

With the current fiscal crisis in most states, policymakers are looking for ways to reduce criminal justice expenditures while maintaining public safety. From a policy perspective, the CEO program as operated appears to be a cost-effective reentry option. Under a wide range of assumptions, the monetary benefits generated by the CEO program exceed its costs to taxpayers. It is important to confirm these findings in additional studies.

In designing future transitional jobs evaluations, it will be important for policymakers and program operators to consider enhancements to existing models. Recommendations for enhancements depend largely on the reasons that one believes the programs studied thus far have not produced consistent employment impacts. One hypothesis is that the transitional jobs programs generally did not train participants for specific occupations. Another hypothesis is that the transitional jobs were too short and should be extended to allow more time to build a participant's employability before a transition to the regular labor market is considered. All of the programs experienced difficulties in identifying job opportunities in the private sector and in helping participants make the transition to regular employment. Therefore, programs may consider boosting job development and placement services, perhaps by offering incentives to employers or by putting more emphasis on identifying employment opportunities, cultivating partnerships with private employers, and helping participants stay employed once they obtain

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<sup>22</sup>Redcross et al. (2009).

unsubsidized jobs. Financial incentives for keeping an unsubsidized job have shown promising effects in TJRD and other studies and could be part of a comprehensive employment strategy.<sup>23</sup>

Future evaluations of programs serving former prisoners should also consider looking closely at program components that address criminal thinking and behaviors. Some criminologists believe that cognitive-behavioral approaches may be key to reducing recidivism. Indeed, the findings from the CEO evaluation suggest that the program's promising impacts on recidivism may have been driven by the positive peer and staff influences that extended beyond the basic provision of employment, though paid employment may be needed to engage participants in activities designed to influence behaviors.

The U.S. Department of Labor and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services are both mounting multisite random assignment studies of enhanced transitional jobs models for various populations, including former prisoners, noncustodial parents, and welfare recipients. Both evaluations are building on the body of evidence produced by this and other studies of transitional jobs programs.

Partly in response to evidence from this evaluation, CEO has refined and enhanced the model that was implemented in this study. Thus, the results of this evaluation might be different if the study took place today. CEO is currently operating replication programs in several locations in the United States; a random assignment evaluation of those programs is planned in the coming years.

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<sup>23</sup>Michalopoulos (2005); Bloom (2010); Holzer and Martinson (2005); Loprest and Martinson (2008); Berlin (2000); Martinson and Hendra (2006); and Redcross et al. (2010).

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