

Barriers Facing System-Impacted People Seeking Employment in Wisconsin

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What is EXPO?

- EXPO emerged in 2014 when formerly incarcerated people from around Wisconsin came together to discuss what it would look like to create a statewide organization that was both for us and by us.
- We work to:
 1. Restore formerly incarcerated people to full participation in the life of our communities
 2. Eliminate all forms of structural discrimination against formerly incarcerated people
 3. Promote accountability, restorative justice and healing

How We Function



EXPO functions as an *extended family, a community* where every member helps others. Everyone is both a giver and a receiver in an "*each-one-teach-one*" process. We are *value-based* in a solid traditional faith/family value system that stresses the work ethic, personal and social accountability, responsibility, decency, integrity, and caring for others in a *mutually beneficial* approach.



EXPOs Fundamental Assumption



We believe in the **HUMAN DIGNITY** of formerly and currently incarcerated people, and recognize they come from, and are **PART OF OUR COMMUNITIES.**



The First Barrier

- When we talk about people who are currently or formerly incarcerated, the language we use matters.
- Using terms like “offender” and “inmate” reduces people to their worst mistake and fails to recognize their complexity and humanity.
- The Department of Corrections and many county jails have made the shift to terms like “persons in our care” or “residents.”



The Language We Use Matters

Terms that we use at EXPO are

“system-impacted people”

“currently or formerly incarcerated people”

“justice-impacted people”

The Problem in Numbers

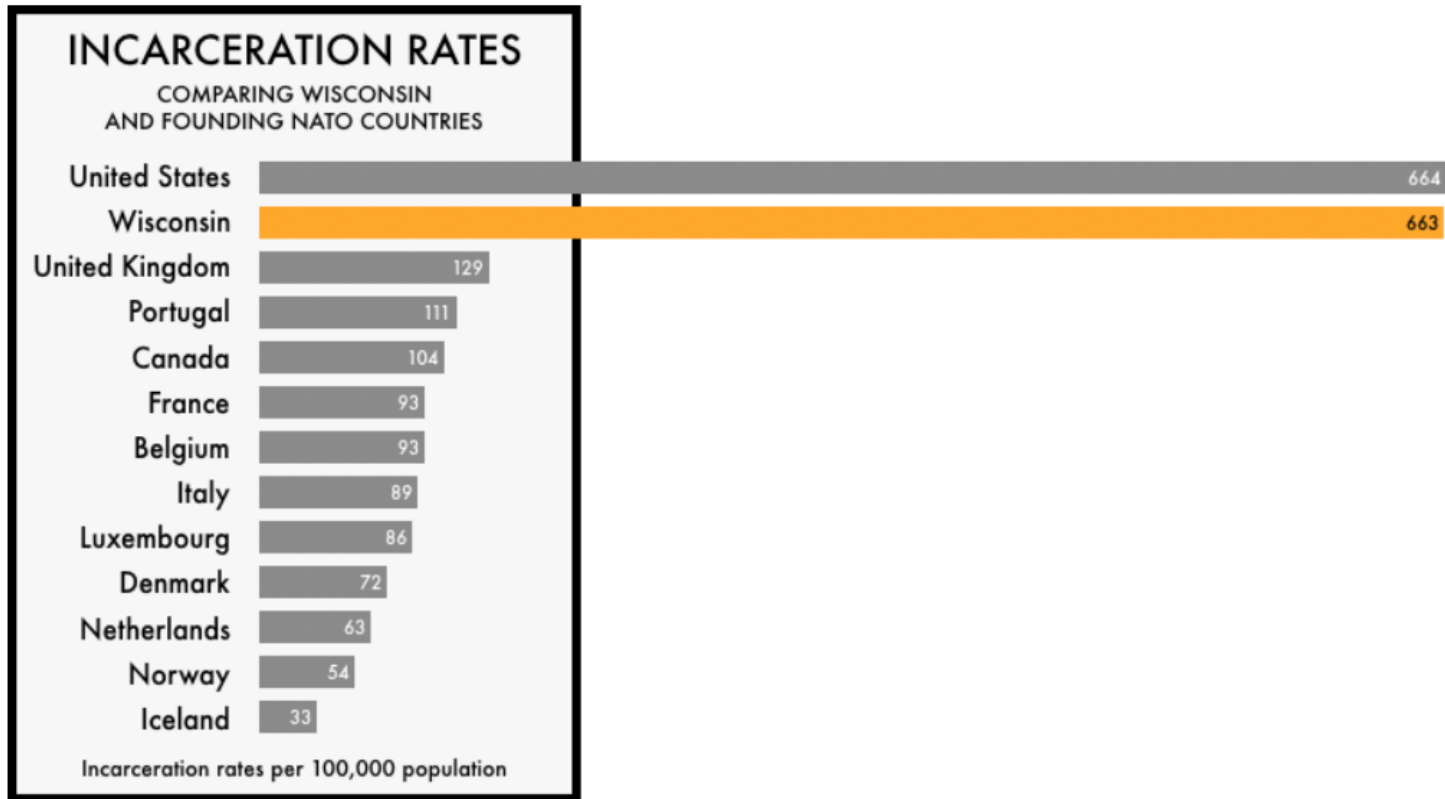


In 2018, one-fourth of the 5 million formerly incarcerated people in the United States were unemployed — five times more than the general population, according to the Prison Policy Initiative, a nonprofit that studies and offers solutions to America’s mass incarceration problem.



The Problem in More Numbers

Today, Wisconsin's incarceration rates stand out internationally



Source: <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/global/2021.html>

The Second Barrier



Each year in Wisconsin 129,000 people are booked into jails across the State.

Most will lose employment as a result and **earn their place on CCAP** creating the first barrier.

105,000 people in Wisconsin live with a conviction.

The screenshot displays the 'Wisconsin Circuit Court Access' website. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links for 'Search', 'Calendar', 'Pay fees', 'Reports', and 'Help'. A 'View payments (0 items)' link is also present. The main content area is titled 'Case search' and includes a link to learn about recent changes. Below this, there are several search criteria sections: 'Party name' with fields for 'Last name', 'First name', and 'Middle name'; 'Birth date' with a date picker (MM-DD-YYYY) and a checkbox to include parties without a middle name; 'Business name' with a text input field and a checkbox to include parties without a birth date; and 'County' with a dropdown menu (currently set to 'Statewide') and 'Case number' with a text input field. At the bottom, there are 'Search' and 'Reset' buttons.



The Problem's Impact on People

- Daniel came out of prison after 29 years
- Executive director was there at the gate and has supported him in establishing safe housing in a positive and supportive area
- Has worked with EXPO to improve his technology skills
- Has now enrolled at Marquette University
- He is now employed with a reentry organization
- He can never vote and will serve lifetime supervision

What's going on here?



Peer Mentor



Technology Training



How could this committee help?

- Invest in community-wide peer mentoring programs run with and by formerly incarcerated people.
- Start the peer mentoring process earlier by expanding programs allowing formerly-incarcerated peer mentors to go inside and work with people before they are released.
- Mandate the creation of technology-focused trainings as a form of vocational education inside DOC facilities.



The Problem's Impact on People

- Prior to her conviction, Mia was a business owner with 20+ years of customer service experience.
- When she was released, she was told she needed to go out and get a job.
- She applied to customer service jobs all over her town; Target, Kohls, Kay Jewelers etc. She thought her customer service expertise would be an asset to these companies.
- In interview after interview, she was turned away from jobs making \$12/hour because of her conviction.
- Fortunately, she had a friend who was a business owner and knew her personally. He hired her into stable employment. Most others are not as lucky.

What's going on here?



- In our communities, there are strong stigmas against people who have been incarcerated. It is assumed that we are untrustworthy at best and potentially harmful at worst.
- As a result, even those people with the relevant expertise and experience – gained either in prison or outside– are not hired for positions they are more than qualified for.



How could this committee help?

- We are the most dedicated and loyal employees because we are so grateful for the chance to start again. Community and employer education
- Work with formerly incarcerated people and employers who currently hire us to design employer education on the value added of hiring system-impacted individuals.
- Provide tax credits and other incentives to encourage employers to see beyond the stigma.



The Problem's Impact on People

- Bianca came out of prison and is now on the registry.
- Despite having a college degree, she was unable to get a job even at a phone bank.
- She was told she could not be hired because she would have access to people's addresses.

What's going on here?



**Immediate Disclosure
of Conviction**



Poorly-Defined Statute



How could this committee help?

- Support “ban the box” legislation.
- Develop clearer language specifying employers’ responsibility for non-discriminatory hiring practices.

The Role of System-Impacted People in this Work



- Use our expertise.
- We have been in this place and know what is needed.
- Trust us and our experiences.