

They keep Coming back!!

Improving Rehabilitation and Parole Practices in our Criminal Justice System

Over the years, the ideology that “nothing works”, as it relates to prisoners, has led researchers and scholars to critically examine interventions and programs that are necessary to reform offenders during their incarceration. The ultimate focus should be to effect appropriate behavioural change in inmates during this time by implementing programs that would inevitably restore the inmate to reasonable functioning upon reentry into the society. This form of restorative justice is necessary, if the criminal justice system is seeking to successfully rehabilitate offenders.

The goal of all penal institutions is to develop appropriate rehabilitative programs. The approaches used serve three purposes, reforming the inmate, reducing recidivism and in the process, improving inmate’s chances with the paroling authority.

Research has shown that when inmates return to society, they do not feel part of the community. According to (Johnson, 2002), inmates felt alienated and they would rather accept another prison sentence than to be part of a society in which there is loss of autonomy and cohesiveness. Society’s viewpoint of the offender stems from their past behavior, rather than current or future behavioural changes. Regardless of how we view this, inmates eventually return to society and are expected to be productive citizens. In order for reintegration to be successful, we must be proactive at reforming the criminal justice system to meet the needs of inmates and the community.

Invariably, crime is a social phenomenon, and it is a violation against victims, the community and government. Over the past ten years, we have witnessed an increase in the number of prisoners housed in our prison system. This has resulted in chronic overcrowding.

Higher levels of incarceration have resulted in:

- Loss of earnings - those incarcerated do not assist with the economic development of Barbados.
- The cost of incarceration to government /taxpayers is alarming and recidivism is on the increase.
- The disruption of familial relationships and breakdown in family cohesion. Children suffer because parents are not available to rear them and to help with their developmental process.
- Citizens are not available to vote; therefore, they do not contribute to the democracy.

While incarcerated, society grows, things change, and families reform. Incarceration at an early age prevents inmates from acquiring the necessary basic skills that are needed for life.

It is extremely critical that as policy makers, we focus on the domains that are crucial to reentry into the community. These domains include civic identity, public health, housing, public safety, family, work, personal and emotional stability, attitudes and the community. Inevitably, prisoner reentry involves working with all these domains to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of outcomes.

Some Rehabilitation Programs that can be considered:

- **Reintegration Training**
- **Job Preparedness**
- **Community-based court programs**
- **Family Involvement in reentry**
- **Criminogenic Needs Through Offender Programming**
- **Community Service Learning Circula**
- **Discharge Planning**
- **Self-Esteem Building**
- **Negotiation Skills**
- **Psychological Intervention**
- **Counselling**
- **Behaviour Modification**

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