

# CORRECTIONAL SERVICE CANADA

CHANGING LIVES. PROTECTING CANADIANS.

## Employer Hiring and Retention of Offenders: Insights from Canadian Employers

*Employers find that with the right work ethic and training, hiring offenders can benefit companies and communities.*

### Why we did this study

This study was conducted by researchers at Washington State University in collaboration with the Research Branch. The objective was to learn more about employer experience in the hiring and retention of offenders released from incarceration. The researcher worked directly with Community Employment Centres in the Pacific (Vancouver) and Prairie (Calgary, Edmonton) regions to identify potential employers to interview for the project.

### What we did

Twenty-six employers who had previously hired offenders within the past 3-5 years were interviewed for the project. The employers were located in Calgary, Edmonton, Kelowna, Prince George, Vancouver, and on Vancouver Island. Three primary questions guided the interviews: (1) what are the primary motivations for employers to hire offenders? (2) What factors seem to be associated with the successful hiring and retention of offenders? (3) What challenges do employers face, and how are employers addressing these challenges? Interviews followed a semi-structured format. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and then analyzed using qualitative methods that identified emergent themes related to these questions.

### What we found

When asked what motivates them to hire offenders, employer responses fell into two broad themes. The first, which was especially prevalent amongst organizations involved in construction, is that they needed individuals willing to take on tough jobs in low-skill areas. The second broad motivation was a belief in second chances and a desire to give back to the community in some way. Even for employers who emphasized the need to hire for hard to fill job positions as a primary motivation, many also noted that everybody makes mistakes in their lives and deserve a second chance.

Employers described a number of characteristics of offenders that they believed allow these individuals to succeed in the workplace. First, the most common characteristic is having a positive work ethic – being willing to work hard, take initiative and show a genuine interest in

contributing, and showing up to work consistently and on time. A second characteristic is that these individuals must be able to work well with others. Many of the employers interviewed have small crews or teams working closely together, so a cooperative work ethic is critical. A third characteristic relates to offenders feeling that they are supported by supervisors, co-workers, and the company.

Interviews with employers highlighted a number of challenges such as hiring individuals with important soft skills (e.g., work attitudes) and managing risks of ex-offenders returning to prior behaviors and addictions. Many employers emphasized the value of working with Community Employment Centre (CEC) staff to address these challenges, for example by screening individuals for job openings and tracking and following-up with offenders.

### What it means

Employers were quite positive in their assessment of the support provided by the CECs. They suggested CECs could do more outreach to employers to let them know about their services. Employers also saw value in CECs taking a lead role in creating regional networks that would bring employers and other stakeholders together to share experiences and ideas to advance the hiring and retention of offenders.

### For more information

Please e-mail the [Research Branch](#) or contact us by phone at (613) 995-3975.

You can also visit the [Research Publications](#) section for a full list of reports and one-page summaries.

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