



NAVIGATING A NEW HORIZON:  
**Promising Pathways to  
Prisoner Reintegration**

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## Overview

Today, prisoner reentry poses formidable challenges for corrections planners and policymakers.<sup>1</sup> Among these challenges are record numbers of prisoners returning home, having spent long terms behind bars with inadequate assistance for their reintegration.<sup>2,3</sup> There are also public safety concerns due to rising rates of recidivism among the majority of released prisoners.<sup>4</sup> Still other challenges involve a lack of self-sufficiency. Most returning prisoners have difficulties reconnecting with families, affordable housing, and livable wage jobs.<sup>5,6</sup> In addition, many released prisoners are faced with the challenge of reentering poor, urban communities plagued by the deadly nexus of drugs, gangs, and guns.<sup>7,8</sup>

America's burgeoning correctional population includes more than 2 million prisoners and 4.7 million adults on probation or parole.<sup>9</sup> At year end 2002, the total Federal, State, and local adult correctional population, including those incarcerated and those being supervised in the community, reached a new high of 6.7 million.<sup>10</sup> The driving force behind the nation's incarceration surge is more than two decades of "get-tough" sentencing reforms including mandatory minimums, truth-in-sentencing, and the reduced use of parole.<sup>11</sup> While credited with reversing the tide of unprecedented crime rates, these reforms have resulted in over 600,000 ex-prisoners returning to communities each year.<sup>12</sup>

Recognizing the need to meet the multiple challenges of prisoner reentry, the President's Faith-Based Initiative identifies individuals transitioning from prison to home as a special needs population. The Compassion Capital Fund (CCF), as part of the Faith-Based Initiative, was established to increase the scale and effectiveness of faith- and com-

munity-based organizations (referred to as FBOs and CBOs) through research and other supportive means. Caliber Associates is currently conducting CCF-sponsored research to evaluate the pre- and post-release effects of the Kairos Horizon program. The goals of the faith-based residential rehabilitation program are to increase personal and family responsibility and employability among prisoners and ex-prisoners. While the Kairos Horizon program evaluation is ongoing, the following summarizes findings of a comprehensive goals assessment. The purpose of the assessment was to determine what priorities relevant Federal, State, and local agencies/institutions have for returning prisoners. Specifically, the goals assessment sought to establish how Kairos Horizon program stakeholders define successful reintegration, and whether sufficient services are available to ensure that success.

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This brief contends that the Kairos Horizon program is an invaluable partner in navigating an uncharted prisoner reentry landscape. The goals assessment points out that while perspectives on the role of religion may differ, corrections professionals, faith practitioners, and other stakeholders, including the Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF), share common objectives of promoting public safety and achieving self-sufficiency among returning prisoners. Results of the goals assessment also suggest that finding ways to successfully reintegrate returning prisoners involves engaging the faith community in collaborative community-corrections partnerships. In addition, goals assessment findings show that past contributions of the faith community inform reentry strategies for the future.

## Rival Perspectives

Understanding the historical role of religion in prisons is important to comprehending the sources

of support and opposition to FBO-sponsored programs in modern corrections. For more than a century, proponents have argued that religious programs are capable of achieving a number of important spiritual and secular goals. Among these goals are promoting prisoner rehabilitation and prison reform in a manner that prevents many of the problems associated with traditional methods of incarceration (e.g. high violence levels and custody/treatment conflicts). Advocates believe that religious programs transform the lives of prisoners while achieving the goals of punishment. Some suggest that religious programs do no harm and potentially reduce prison crowding and confinement costs by decreasing length of stay and decelerating demand for bed space.

In contrast, adversaries argue that religious programs are anathema to progressive penal practice. Opponents charge that religious programs in prisons are neither clinically relevant nor psychologically informed, and consider such programs at odds with correctional treatment and therapeutic principles. This perspective views religious program activities as futile attempts to change people based on religious beliefs rather than rehabilitative standards. Other challengers suggest that certain religious program activities lack constitutional foundation (e.g. prayer and proselytizing) and have become graphic representations of the need to separate church and state, particularly in cases involving government funding. Others voice concern about the professional qualifications of religious program volunteers, suggesting a lack of specialized experience working with serious, violent, or youthful offenders.

Regardless of one's support or opposition to the use of religious programs in corrections, FBOs have historically helped bring hope to prisoners, ex-prisoners, and families affected by incarceration. Traditionally, FBO-sponsored services have included providing food, shelter, and clothing. Over the years,

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these services have expanded to include education, employment, and housing assistance. More recently, FBO services have evolved to embrace crime prevention counseling, substance abuse treatment, and victim assistance. Today, the wide range of spiritual and secular services provided by FBOs and affiliated CBOs continue to support the successful reintegration of returning prisoners. Moreover there is solid empirical evidence that these services increase public safety, enhance self-sufficiency, and shape successful reentry experiences.<sup>13 14</sup>

### The Kairos Horizon Program

Established in 1976, Kairos Prison Ministry is an ecumenical ministry active in over 250 prisons in 30 states and four foreign countries, utilizing more than 20,000 volunteers annually. The Kairos Horizon Communities Corporation, a non-profit organization founded to establish faith-based residential programs in prisons, is an outgrowth of Kairos Prison Ministry. In 1999, the Kairos Horizon program began operating faith-based communities in Florida, Ohio, and Arizona prisons. The first program was established at Tomoka Correctional Institution in Daytona Beach in collaboration with the Florida Department of Corrections and the Florida Commission on Responsible Fatherhood. The Kairos Horizon program strengthens relationships among participants, their families, and the faith and correctional communities, to increase personal and family responsibility and employability of prisoners and ex-prisoners. A three-day session launches the 12-month program that adds a new group of 50 men every six months. Kairos Horizon program participants maintain regular work or education assignments and faith-based programming takes place during the evening. Trained local church volunteers facilitate program activities and serve as informal mentors. Kairos Horizon encourages wives, mothers, other relatives, and friends of the incarcerated to attend a spiritual retreat

called Kairos Outside hosted by its collaborating partner, Kairos Prison Ministry. This community-building program is available at no cost and is presented by trained volunteers in 30 locations around the country, two of which are in Florida. The continuing support of families and communities is viewed as the underlying strength of the program. Table 1 on the following page describes Kairos Horizon program components.

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## The Evaluation

The Kairos Horizon program evaluation examines effects of the faith-based program on prisoners, ex-prisoners, their families, the community, correctional institutions, and state government agencies. The evaluation is designed to determine whether the program assists participants (including graduates and non-graduates) in establishing important social bonds (e.g., family relationships, job stability, and a stake in organizations within their community). To the extent that Kairos Horizon program participation strengthens these bonds, the prison system is expected to benefit with reduced infractions, a safer correctional environment, fewer parole violations, and decreased reliance on the Department of Corrections. The community is also expected to benefit from strengthened family relationships, stronger bonds to community organizations, lower rates of unemployment, and reduced reliance on the Department of Human Services. In addition, correctional systems and communities are expected to benefit from reduced recidivism and increased public safety. Exhibit 1 (on page 5) illustrates the hypothesized effects of the Kairos Horizon program evaluation logic model.

The Kairos Horizon program evaluation examines effects of the faith-based program on prisoners, ex-prisoners, their families, the community, correctional institutions, and state government agencies.

Specifically, the Kairos Horizon program evaluation has two main objectives: (1) to determine the role of the faith-based program in supporting individual prisoners, their families, and communities; and (2) to evaluate whether the program represents a best practice

for providing services to prisoners and their families. The evaluation measures individual outcomes by following Kairos Horizon program participants over time. Participants are assessed during the remainder of their prison sentence and after their release into the community. The evaluation team collects data from discipline reports and solicits feedback from correctional officers. After a participant's release, the team collects data on employment patterns, family relationships, and other indicators of a pro-social lifestyle. To assess the impact of the Kairos Horizon program during a one- to three-year follow-up period, participants are compared to a similar group of prisoners who did not participate in the program.

The evaluation also examines the role that Kairos Horizon plays within the Department of Corrections, other state agencies, and the community. This component of the evaluation provides valuable information concerning perceived effects of the program, and informs policymakers interested in implementing a faith-based residential community. Results of the comprehensive process and impact evaluation are expected to contribute to a growing body of empirical evidence supporting the claim that the Kairos Horizon program ranks among best practices in meeting the needs of prisoners, ex-prisoners, and their families.

## Goals Assessment Method

Among the goals of the Kairos Horizon program are increased contact with families of prisoners, completion of rehabilitative program components, safer correctional environments, and a more productive prison experience. As part of the ongoing program evaluation, the goals assessment sought to identify other relevant outcomes. The primary purpose of the assessment was to determine what priorities key stakeholders have for prisoners, ex-prisoners, and their families.

**Table 1. Kairos Horizon Program Components**

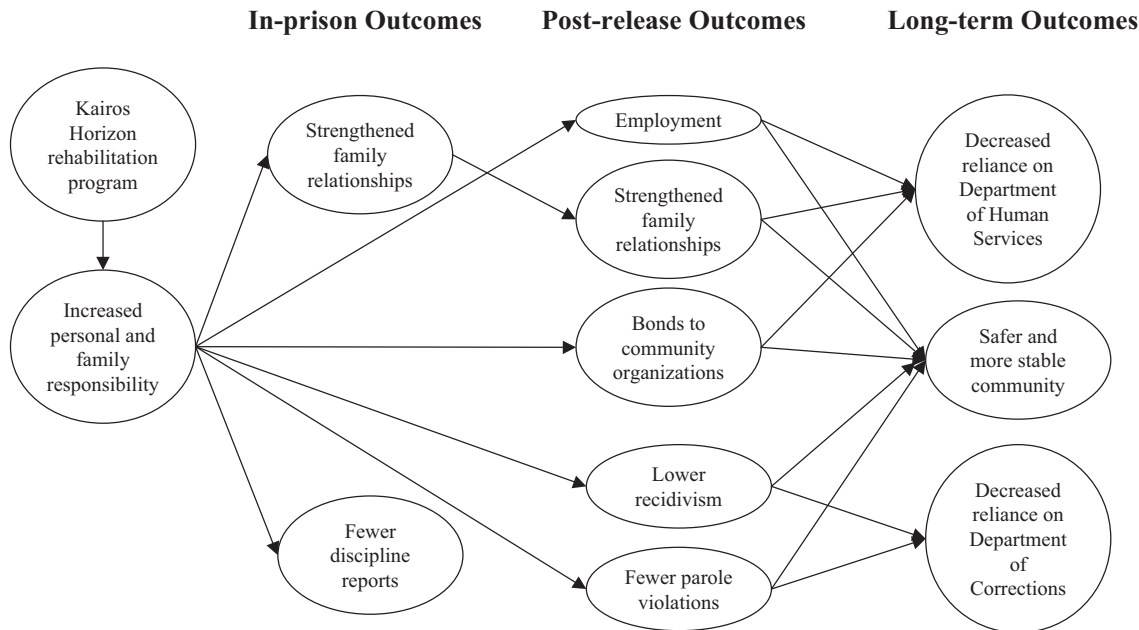
Component	Duration and Description
Godparents - Outside Brothers and Sisters	This 6-month module involves a form of unstructured or informal mentoring where the best in each volunteer becomes a visible model for those who might never have had good role models. All meet at the same time, and each Godparent visits with one inmate as a friend in a ministry of presence and listening with an open heart. There is no commitment beyond the gate, just a response to Matthew 25:36 to "visit those in prison."
Journey	This 4-month module includes small-group, faith-specific study based on scripture. Emphasis is placed on finding personal meaning and individual feeling in response to scripture. Volunteer facilitators pose questions to assist the process of discovery within, whether that involves confusion, threat, fear, boredom, joy, or peace.
Quest	This 7-month module focuses on improving anger management, conflict resolution and relationship skills. Maintaining healthy relationships is ongoing for everyone, but particularly difficult for those who may have no experience with them. Volunteers also facilitate sessions to develop communication and parenting skills.
Family Relations	This 12-month activity involves weekly letter writing to children and families, designed to restore family relations strained by crime and incarceration. A Family Day is also held for each class, which sometimes has been the setting for the reunification of long-separated family members. Letter writing supplies and postage are provided.
Worship, Prayer Time, and Group Meetings	This 12-month activity involves time for faith-specific worship, and personal and communal prayer. Program participants live in family pods of 6 or 8 men committed to serving one another. Daily devotionals are also conducted, with the leadership rotating among the family members. In addition, weekly meetings are used to iron out individual differences, address community issues, and affirm individual and group progress.
Crown Financial Ministries	This 13-week module focuses on the program participant's relationship to money. This scripture-based course is very popular among local congregations and Kairos Horizon was the first ministry to offer it in prison. Learning to develop greater financial responsibility is essential to the successful reintegration of prisoners.
Workshops	This 12-month activity includes bi-weekly sessions drawn from Richard Foster's book, Celebration of Discipline. These experiential workshops focus on topics such as prayer, meditation, study, forgiveness, confession, and service. Other workshops presented by clergy or specialists in the field include victim offender issues and parenting.
Substance Abuse Programs	These 6-12 month modules focus on substance abuse prevention and treatment. The workbook series is from Bridge Builder's The Way Home and addresses addictive behavior. This program provides a spiritual approach to aid recovery from addiction and is facilitated by volunteers.
Family Reading Ties	This 8-week module addresses fatherhood issues and is required for participants who have children ages 13 and under. At the end of each session, participants select an award-winning children's book. The incarcerated parent then records the book or excerpts onto tape. Adequate funding allows both the book and tape to be mailed to their children.
Experiencing God	This 12-week course is designed to assist participants in discerning God's presence and action in their lives. A workbook accompanies the program as does a facilitator's guide. Local church volunteers lead this comprehensive series.
Making Peace with Your Past	This 12-week course focuses on recognizing compulsive behavior, forgiveness, and finding release from shame. Other areas of emphasis include healing painful memories, releasing the fear of experiencing joy, and enhancing the ability to receive blessings. Volunteers lead this workbook series.

Specifically, the goals assessment sought to define what determines successful reentry, and what options there are for ensuring success.

The goals assessment protocol identified stakeholder priorities and expectations, explored both short- and long-term outcomes, and incorporated these goals into the evaluation. First, the goals assessment team identified a number

of Federal, State, and local agencies and institutions that were expected to have a stake in the successful reentry of prisoners. These community stakeholders routinely work with individuals affected by incarceration. Second, interviewees were identified based on their knowledge of stakeholder goals, and in-person or telephone interviews were scheduled. Third, interviews were conducted with representatives from agencies responsible for managing convicted offend-

## Exhibit 1. Hypothesized Results



ers, enforcing child support, providing public assistance, or implementing faith- and community-based programs. Stakeholders were asked about their organization's response to prisoner reentry challenges and the potential consequences for public agencies and the larger community. Fourth, the goals assessment incorporated findings into the ongoing evaluation (e.g., the program is expected to reduce recidivism by increasing the likelihood that participants sustain stable family relationships and maintain employability).

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## Goals Assessment Results

Results of the goals assessment reveal that various stakeholders, including DCF, have a vested interest in prisoner reentry. The reasons for stakeholder involvement in the lives of returning prisoners are as varied as their definitions of successful reintegration. Other results indicate that corrections professionals and faith practitioners share common objectives of promoting public safety and

achieving self-sufficiency among prisoners, ex-prisoners and their families. Specifically, these and other key stakeholders identified two primary outcomes as indicators of successful prisoner reentry: (1) reduced recidivism; and (2) increased independence.

First, goals assessment interview data show that building social relationships that promote public safety was viewed as essential to increasing the probability of returning prisoners avoiding further criminal behavior.

Stakeholders defined recidivism as rearrest for a new crime and/or re-incarceration for a parole violation. Second, these data show that increasing independence involves constructing a continuum of care to support released prisoners and that enhanced community support is critical to achieving self-sufficiency. Stakeholders defined independence as attaining and maintaining employment. In addition, goals assessment interview data show that positive family relationships (e.g., emotionally and financially supporting children), pro-social peer group participation (e.g. support groups sponsored by

FBOs), and regular involvement in public assistance and/or the completion of treatment programs (e.g., education, employment, health care, housing, and substance abuse prevention) were viewed as key to overcoming barriers to successful prisoner reintegration. Moreover, goals assessment data affirm that Kairos Horizon program objectives are consistent with community expectations and standards.

### Common Objectives

Kairos Horizon program goals assessment findings are consistent with research that reveals the need to close a growing public safety gap.<sup>15 16 17</sup> Langan and Levin (2002) found that among the 272,111 prisoners released in 15 states, 67.5% were rearrested for a felony or serious misdemeanor within three years. Furthermore, the rising recidivism rates translate into thousands of new victimizations each year—46.9% of released prisoners were convicted of a new crime and 25.4% were resentenced to prison for a new crime. In addition, 51.8% of released prisoners were back in prison, serving time for a new prison sentence or for a technical violation of their release (e.g., failing a drug test, missing an appointment with the parole officer, or being arrested for a new crime).<sup>18</sup> Goals assessment results suggest that corrections professionals and faith practitioners should rethink prisoner reentry strategies to increase public safety. To the extent that Kairos Horizon participants demonstrate reduced recidivism rates, this finding would contribute to empirical evidence that faith-based interventions reduce crime.

Goals assessment findings are also consistent with research that sheds light on the need to overcome multiple barriers to self-sufficiency among returning prisoners.<sup>19 20</sup> Sampson et al (1997) found that social capital (the resource stemming from the structure

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of social relationships which in turn facilitates the achievement of mutually beneficial goals) and collective efficacy (the ability of neighbors to care for one another) are negatively related to rates of crime in poor neighborhoods.<sup>21 22</sup> Goals assessment results also suggest that finding pathways to the successful reintegration of returning prisoners involves engaging the faith community in collaborative problem-solving partnerships. To the extent that the Kairos Horizon program builds social capital and constructs collective efficacy, the program may help increase self-sufficiency among prisoners, ex-prisoners, and their families.

In addition, Kairos Horizon program goals assessment findings are consistent with research results indicating that the past contributions of the faith community inform reentry strategies for the future. The faith community has woven a substantial thread through the fabric of American corrections for centuries. Since early prisons such as the Walnut Street Jail, reformers with strong religious beliefs have helped direct the path of modern corrections. Contemporary juvenile courts and detention facilities, penitentiaries and prisons, and probation and parole agencies are the legacy of faith-inspired reformers.<sup>23</sup> Philanthropists committed to religious charity also created numerous inner-city missions and social service programs to serve the impoverished. In many instances, these early religious charities became FBOs and CBOs and continue to provide social services to prisoners, ex-prisoners, and their families.<sup>24</sup>

### Conclusion and Next Steps

This brief concludes that the Kairos Horizon program is an invaluable partner in achieving successful prisoner reentry.



The goals assessment highlights that corrections professionals, faith practitioners, and other stakeholders, including the DCF, share common objectives of promoting public safety and achieving self-sufficiency among returning prisoners. The goals assessment also reveals that successfully reintegrating returning prisoners involves engaging the faith community in collaborative community corrections partnerships to build social capital and construct collective efficacy. In addition, goals assessment findings indicate that past contributions of the faith community inform reentry strategies for the future.

The next issue brief will determine whether, and under what circumstances, the Kairos Horizon program increases public safety and enhances self-sufficiency among returning prisoners. Specifically, the program evaluation tests the hypothesis that the program builds social capital by fostering relationships among prisoners, ex-prisoners, and their families. The evaluation also tests the proposition that the program constructs collective efficacy by creating caring communities through local church volunteers. In addition, the forthcoming program evaluation tests the claim that program completion facilitates the successful reintegration of returning prisoners.

## Endnotes

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