

About the Centre for Justice and Reconciliation

The Centre is the justice reform arm of Prison Fellowship International, an association of Christian NGOs active in over 100 countries. The Centre assists governments, its affiliates, and other NGOs in addressing problems in the criminal justice system.

The Centre promotes restorative justice policies and practices as a promising approach with benefits for victims, communities and offenders.

While operating in the Christian tradition, the Centre seeks common ground, dialogue and collaboration with people from all backgrounds and traditions.

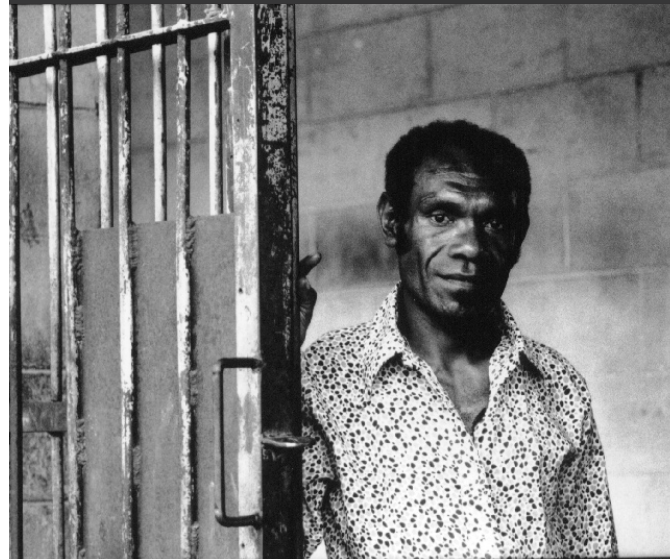
About the 10 Keys

Criminal justice practitioners around the world seek practical measures to address the serious crises that exist in many justice systems. The purpose of the 10 Keys Project is to offer ideas to assist them in doing that.

CENTRE FOR JUSTICE AND RECONCILIATION

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10 KEYS TO PREPARING PRISONERS FOR RE-ENTRY



PREPARING PRISONERS FOR RE-ENTRY

Nearly all prisoners are eventually released back into society. Whether they re-enter society successfully—as a contributing member—or unsuccessfully is a matter of public safety. Unfortunately, most ex-prisoners are unable to make a successful transition and they eventually return to prison.

Offenders face many obstacles when they leave prison. Some of these they may have confronted before prison, such as unemployment, substance abuse, low self-esteem, anti-social relationships, and so forth.

But others obstacles result from the prison experience itself. Prisoners have little control over daily life, which means that they can be overwhelmed by the choices facing them after prison and unprepared to make good decisions. Further, prison removes them from the support networks they

once had, support that might help them to make a successful transition into society.

Usually prisons do little to prepare prisoners to address the immediate and practical needs they will face on release. For example, where will the prisoners stay that night, and how will they get there? Often prisoners themselves don't think about these kinds of matters, and only have general, long-term ideas about their future after release.

However, there are practical steps that could better prepare prisoners for re-entry. While these do not guarantee that they will succeed after release, this preparation will increase their chances.

10 KEYS TO PREPARING PRISONERS FOR RE-ENTRY

Building Constructive Relationships

Constructive relationships are important to prisoners during re-entry. However, many prisoners have broken relationships caused by the imprisonment or by the harm they may have done to their families and loved ones. This increases the chances that they will return to destructive and anti-social relationships.

Key 1: Find Mentors

Identify volunteers or family members to serve as mentors during their re-entry. Mentors can be trained to offer support, advice, friendship and sometimes practical assistance as well.

Key 2: Reunite Families

Rebuild and repair relationships between prisoners and their families (or friends if family is not an option). Begin by opening lines of communication through letters, telephone calls, and visits.

Key 3: Develop Communities

Communities of support can sustain ex-prisoners during their transition. Faith communities can serve this role well. Encourage mentors and family members to help ex-offenders gain the trust of their faith community.

Addressing Needs

Ex-prisoners face survival questions from the moment they leave prison, such as how to find food, where to go for lodging, and so forth. A clear plan gives ex-prisoners time to settle into life outside prison.

Key 4: Plan Ahead

Help prisoners make realistic plans for the first twenty-four hours of release. This includes accommodations for the first night, transportation to that location, locating food and clothing, meeting the costs for these needs, spending free time and so forth. Then help them make realistic plans for the first month outside prison.

Key 5: Locate Resources

Identify resources available to ex-prisoners from NGOs, churches, government agencies and so forth. Make sure prisoners know the application procedures, hours of operation, location of offices, and qualifications for each.

Key 6: Avoid Trouble

Prisoners will confront familiar problems when they return to society. Help them identify friends, family members, locations, and circumstances likely to draw them into trouble, and develop strategies to avoid them.

Key 7: Find Help

Some problems require the help of people with special training. Help prisoners who need it find treatment for mental illnesses, addictions, medical conditions and so forth.

Contributing to Society

Becoming contributing members of society takes intentionality, time and effort. Prisoners will need to deal appropriately with the past and build a constructive future.

Key 8: Make Amends

Successful reintegration is difficult while the harms caused by ex-offenders in the past remain unaddressed. Enlist skilled facilitators to guide restorative meetings with victims for discussing how to make amends and rebuild damaged relationships.

Key 9: Serve Others

Volunteering with civic or charitable organisations helps ex-prisoners build positive relationships, develop daily routines, and learn marketable skills.

Assessing Strengths and Weaknesses

Effective preparation for re-entry requires honest evaluation of prisoners' personal strengths and weaknesses. In fact, such an assessment creates the framework in which the ten keys can be most effective.

Key 10: Conduct Inventory

Identify prisoners' personal strengths, such as education, employment history, and skills. Consider their assets, such as family relationships, social networks, spiritual maturity, and undeveloped talents. Review their needs, such as for treatment of addictions, health problems, and so forth. Use this inventory (and add to it) in helping prisoners prepare realistic plans for returning to society.

Other Important Resources

Successful reintegration of prisoners into society does require commitment and work on their part. But they need significant help from society as well. Resources that should be made available are:

- In-prison education and vocational training to help prisoners gain skills needed to function in society.
- Substance abuse treatment (residential and out-patient) in prisons and in communities.
- Transitional housing to give ex-prisoners structured living environments as they re-enter society.
- Financial assistance to help offenders to arrange for basic necessities such as accommodation, clothing and food immediately upon release.