

**Career Intervention Proposal - Assisting Ex-Offenders with Career Development**

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### **Description and Rationale**

Returning home after being in prison is a very challenging transition for most newly-released prisoners, as well as their families and communities. Recidivism studies show that without intervention, two-thirds of those released will return to prison within three years. Sadly, prisoners often go back to prison not because they committed a crime, but because they don't have the proper support and resources needed to become a productive member of society (Prison Fellowship.org, 2022). Research indicates that prisoners reentering the community are often undereducated, have little or no prior work history, lack vocational skills, have histories of substance abuse, and are more likely to suffer from mental illness (Troshynski et al., 2019). Furthermore, the experience of being an "ex-con" with a criminal record presents a myriad of barriers unique to individuals post-release. These include difficulties in finding and securing employment as well as suitable housing (Pager, 2003).

Although employment has been a traditional measure of success after exiting prison, it is only one aspect of successful transformational change. Reestablishing social relationships, providing child support, finding stable housing, and accessing other programs (e.g., educational programming, substance abuse, counseling, etc.) are also important components of successful reentry (Troshynski et al., 2019). Prior research has found that employment in vocational programs can lower the risk of reoffending (Rossman & Roman, 2003) and that, particularly for offenders aged 25 and older, stable employment is effective at reducing re-offense rates overall (Uggen, 2000). Therefore, individuals returning home to communities without a range of services or employment opportunities are at an even greater risk of re-offending. Due to these statistics, it is important to create a program that newly released offenders can have access to in order to help them properly transition back into society.

### **Literature Review**

According to Vorghese (2012), “for offenders, the long-term effectiveness of vocational interventions is measured not simply in terms of career outcomes, such as employment, but also in terms of how the interventions translate to a decreased return to criminal behavior, also termed recidivism (p. 2). Given the known relationship between employment and recidivism, “there is an emphasis on the federal level on providing career planning and job placement services to offenders” (Niles & Harris-Bowlsby, 2022, p. 437). With this in mind, it is important to create a program that addresses the values and skills of clients, but also focuses on prevention from returning to jail or prison. Unfortunately, “the pendulum swings from time to time with regard to public opinion about the services that offenders and ex-offenders should receive” (Niles & Harris-Bowlsby, 2022, p. 437). The current interventions in place to help ex-offenders is limited, therefore, applying specific interventions from both Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) and Self-Determination Theory as well as social skills and relapse prevention training are going to be the most integrated way to help an ex-offender from recidivating and living as a productive member of society.

SCCT is mindful of the barriers that individuals who are newly released may face and how that may impact career opportunity and development. This is seen in SCCT’s focus on interactions between the individual and their environment, and the theory’s understanding of career interests, goals, and achievements influenced by external forces. It is important that when working with ex-offenders, professionals maintain an understanding of external factors and extrinsic obstacles, as ex-offenders face many environmental obstacles that reduce opportunity and choice (Johnson, 2013). In fact, “the SCCT conceptualization of self-efficacy, outcome expectations, goals and

actions can be applied to understand career behaviors of offenders and ex-offenders (Vorghese, 2012, p. 14).

Johnson (2013) proposed an integration of SCCT and Self-Determination Theory (SDT) when working with individuals with ex-offender status due to the benefits of each model. SDT emphasizes autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Johnson, 2013), all positively correlated with motivation and behavior change. The application of both SCCT and SDT, or Self-Determination Cognitive Career Theory (SDCCT), would allow clients to explore barriers they face, their journey with job exploration, self-esteem issues, career readiness, and more (Johnson, 2013). This approach emphasizes the client's autonomy in their decision-making processes, the therapeutic relationship between client and counselor, and feedback provided by the counselor in order to increase feelings of competence in the client (Johnson, 2013). In addition to applying the SDCCT model to career interventions, it is important to include social skills training into sessions in order to increase interpersonal skills, emotional self-regulation and prosocial attitudes (Brown et al., 2013, p. 1057). Building self-efficacy is done through identifying values and skills that the individual possesses, as well as setting goals towards skills that may need to be learned in order to be successful. Chen & Shields (2020) propose a five-stage model to building self-efficacy and increasing ex-offenders desired future outcomes through the use of addressing personal performance accomplishments, being encouraged and taught by the counselor, addressing physiological states, goal setting and creating a plan of action (p. 39) which could also include a plan to prevent relapse.

### **Objectives**

The main goal when assisting ex-offenders is to help them gain meaningful employment after incarceration, as “research shows a high correlation between getting and keeping a job and

reduced recidivism” (Niles & Harris-Bowlsby, 2022, p. 437). However, this can only be achieved through application of the SDCCT model and additional skills training in order to help the client have the best possible chance of being successful after incarceration. The main objectives that will be addressed in sessions with ex-offenders will be based on the five-step process (Johnson, 2013) proposes, which will include the individual being able to manage their environmental barriers such as substance abuse and social supports, learning to build support systems, strengthening their self-efficacy, developing realistic outcome expectations and clarifying job goals and the subsequent skills that need to be attained. Utilizing specific activities and interventions such as identifying values and skills, administering the O-Net interest profiler, teaching social skills and creating a relapse prevention plan are just some of the ways to accomplish these objectives.

### **Structure**

The structure of our sessions will be meeting twice during the first week, and once every week thereafter for a total of four weeks. During the first session, an initial assessment will be completed, and the career counseling program used will be discussed in detail, including administering a pre-assessment questionnaire on client expectations of the career counseling experience and program being used. The total number of sessions will be five, with one activity scheduled in each session, which include discovering values and skills, administering the O-net interest profiler and interpretation of results, psychoeducation on social and emotional skills, and creating a relapse prevention plan. Meeting times will be up to client discretion, but preferably the same day and time every week so that client has ample time to process what they have learned and begin to integrate the program’s concepts into their daily life. The physical setting will be a meeting room that has computer and internet access, preferably at a career center or private

practice. Selection of members will be based on criteria such as previous incarceration, lack of career direction and increased risk of recidivism due to nature and severity of criminal activity.

### **Activities and Techniques**

The activities and techniques utilized for this program are going to be specialized specifically for the needs of ex-offenders. It will be important to orient the client to what interventions will be used and why they are important. First and foremost, it is important for the counselor to make the ex-offender feel safe in order to explore self-esteem, potential barriers, job-readiness, values and skills (Johnson, 2013) as these are essential topics to address when working with this population. The first activity to be implemented is to explore the individual's values and beliefs about work, including current skills and future skills to be obtained. This would be done through a semi-structured interview and psychoeducation regarding career expectations and building confidence in applying skills in the workplace. Utilizing the O-Net Interest Profiler (see appendices), which is based on Holland's theory of careers and vocation choice (Chen & Shields, 2020, p. 39) is going to be essential in helping the client discover the type of work activities and occupations they may enjoy and find exciting. This intervention can be especially important to ex-offenders because oftentimes when a person is released from jail or prison they don't have a clear idea of what they would like to do for work, and many of them have earned their money through illegal activity (Tanguay & Carducci, 2022). In the third session, another psychoeducational technique will be introduced where the individual will be exposed to different types of social and emotional learning, which is essential for the individual to be successful in their career after coming from an environment that promotes antisocial behavior. The counselor will use the social skills training wheel (see appendices) in order to facilitate this lesson. Lastly, it is important to create a relapse prevention plan (see appendices) with the client in their last session, which is a

working document that they can take with them and utilize when needed. As Tanguay & Carducci (2022) state, “the development of a relapse prevention plan is pertinent when working with ex-offenders that is unique to this population in order to avoid external factors that have negative consequences and to combat the internal voices that may tell them to give up.” This plan will include details such as external and internal triggers and relapse warning signs, positive coping strategies, names of allies in the community when coping strategies are failing, daily and weekly lists of goals and actions and reasons to stay on the path and achieve the goals set, external and internal factors that might hinder achieving these goals and ways to overcome these hindrances (Tanguay & Carducci, 2022). Implementing these interventions and activities over a five-week period gives the ex-offender the best opportunity to be successful post-incarceration.

### **Materials and Resources**

In order to deliver the program effectively, the following resources will be needed: a budget of five thousand dollars in order to create the program, which includes all interventions and activities that can be implemented at career centers across the country. During each session, there needs to be a meeting room or office that is equipped with a computer and web access in order to administer the O-Net interest profiler and create a relapse prevention plan collaboratively with the clinician. It will also be important to have the ability to print copies of the results of the assessment and for the individual to have a copy of this plan to take with them. There also needs to be an allotted budget of one hundred dollars per session for the career counselors involved in meeting with the individual, which could be at the discretion of the career center where services are being provided.

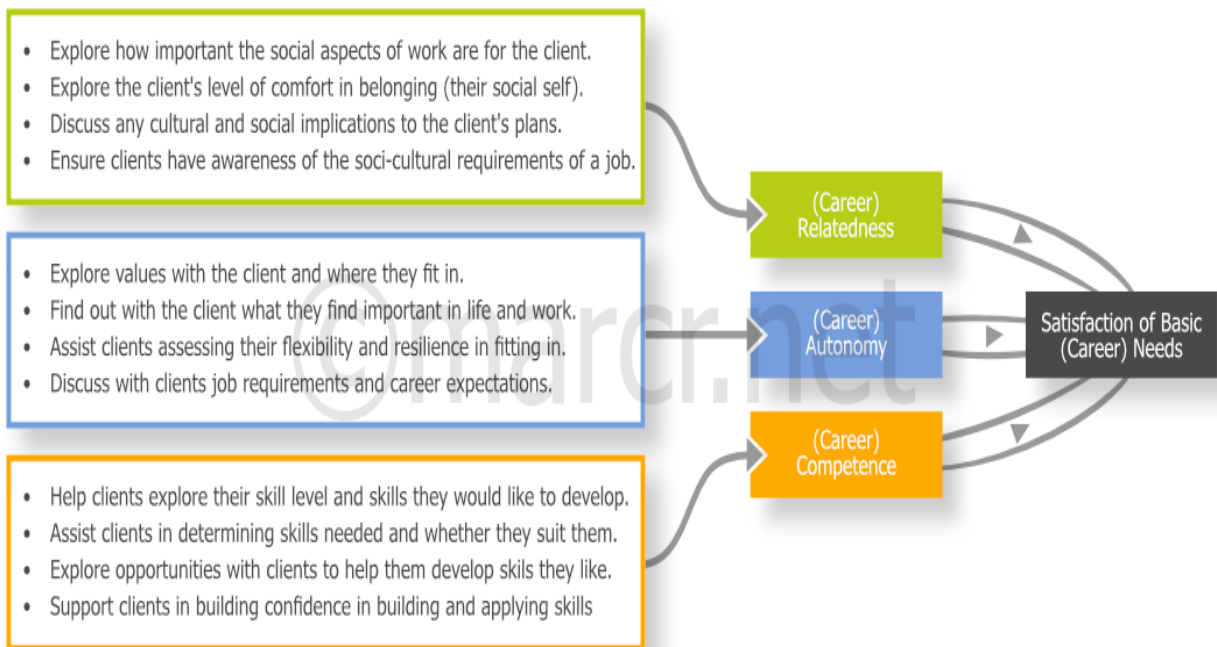
### Overall Effectiveness

There will be a pre-assessment and a post-assessment done with the client in order to measure the effectiveness of the implemented program. In the beginning, the client will complete a pre-assessment questionnaire which will highlight the expectations that they expect from the career counselor and the program being implemented. At the end of the 4-week program, clients will then be prompted to complete a post-assessment after the sequence of activities has occurred in order to measure the effectiveness of the program and to see if they are following the relapse prevention plan that was developed as well as how they are utilizing the skills that were learned during the program.

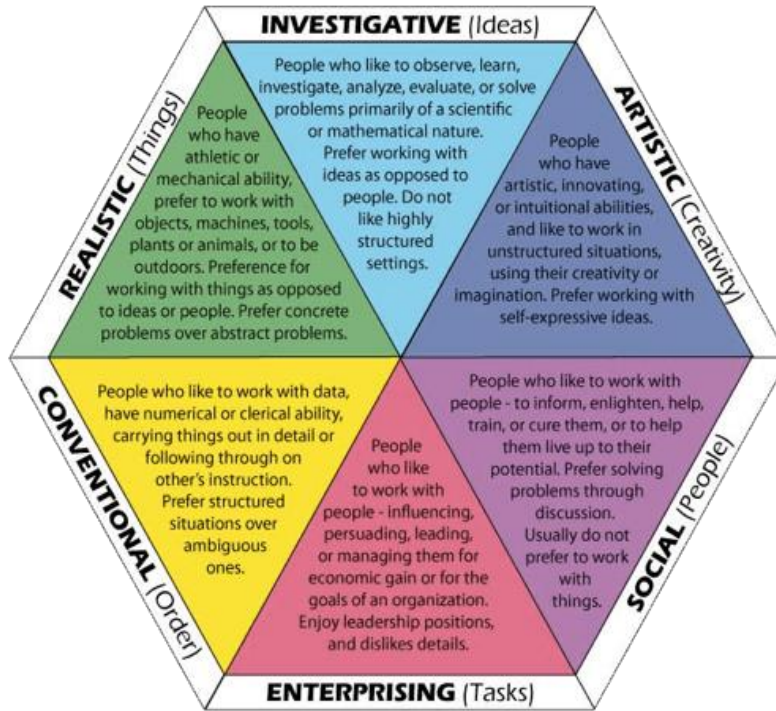
### Appendices

#### Activities and Techniques

#### Exploration of Values and Skills



**O-Net Interest Profiler**



**Social Skills Training Wheel**



### Relapse Prevention Plan

"BY FAILING TO PREPARE, YOU ARE PREPARING TO FAIL."  
— BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

## Relapse Prevention Plan

<b>My triggers are</b>	
<b>EXTERNAL TRIGGERS</b>	<b>INTERNAL TRIGGERS</b>
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

**My relapse warning signs are**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_

**Daily disciplines**      **THINGS I NEED TO DO ON A DAILY BASIS**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_

**Coping strategies on my own**      **THINGS I CAN DO ON MY OWN IN CRISIS**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_

**People and social situations to distract**      **WITHOUT ME SHARING MY STRUGGLES**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Primary support network</b>	
<b>NAMES</b>	<b>PHONE NUMBERS</b>
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

**REASONS I WANT TO STAY SOBER**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

**If I do relapse, what can I do to keep me safe and get back on track?**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

WWW.MINDSPACECOUNSELING.COM

Activities were adopted from (Tanguay & Carducci, 2022) PowerPoint presentation on Assisting Ex-Offenders with Career Development

**Post-Assessment Questionnaire****Post-Assessment Survey for Program**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Counselor: \_\_\_\_\_

Instructions: Please indicate your level of agreement the statements listed below:

- Strongly Agree
- Strongly Disagree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree

1. The objectives of the program were clearly defined.

- Strongly Agree
- Strongly Disagree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree

2. Participation and action were encouraged. Topics covered were relevant.

- Strongly Agree
- Strongly Disagree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree

3. The topics covered were relevant.  
to me.

- Strongly Agree
- Strongly Disagree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree

4. The content was organized and easy to follow.

- Strongly Agree
- Strongly Disagree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree

5. The materials distributed were helpful.

- Strongly Agree
- Strongly Disagree

- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree

6. This training experience will be useful in my work.

- Strongly Agree
- Strongly Disagree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree

7. The counselor was knowledgeable about the topics covered.

- Strongly Agree
- Strongly Disagree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree

8. The counselor was well prepared.

- Strongly Agree
- Strongly Disagree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree

9. The program objectives were met.

- Strongly Agree
- Strongly Disagree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree

10. The time allotted for utilizing the aspects involved was sufficient.

- Strongly Agree
- Strongly Disagree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree

11. The meeting room and facilities were adequate and comfortable.

- Strongly Agree
- Strongly Disagree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree

## References

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