

The Green Sheet

Pennsylvania Board of Probation and Parole

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Offender-friendly job fairs held statewide

Preparing offenders for successful transition back to their families and reentry to the community is the focus of the board's community reentry division. Successful reentry can increase public safety, improve the health of the community, sustain families, improve the welfare of children and lower costly criminal justice expenses.

That's why reentry into the community is so important. The board has made considerable investments in its state reentry system by training agents to work more effectively with offenders, the development of community relationships with organizations that can help offenders to succeed, and the improvement of its reentry processes.

One of the many key parts of the board's reentry program has been the establishment of offender job fairs across the commonwealth. This spring, together with the Citizens Advisory Committees and various community partners, the board has held four job fairs in Pittsburgh, York, Philadelphia and Harrisburg.



Above, employers wait for the doors to open at the Pittsburgh Help Fair. Below, the room is full of offenders talking with potential employers and service providers.



Offenders line up and wait outside for the start of the Pittsburgh Get Back To Work Help Fair.

Get Back to Work Help Fair - Pittsburgh

Trinity Lutheran Church of Pittsburgh was the host site of the 10th Annual "Get Back to Work Help Fair" on March 20-21.

The Help Fair is a two-day program that targets unemployed offenders currently on parole in addition to any offender who wants to better their placement because they are not satisfied with what they have and want to achieve more. When this year's two-day event came to a close, 135 state offenders on parole participated in the program.

Job Fairs (continued)

Day One is a “speaker day” that features discussions on interview skills, resume writing, dressing for success, financial counseling, lifestyle and behavior change.

Day Two is “provider day” that features local employers from Allegheny County to meet with the offenders to discuss possible employment opportunities, along with other service providers who are there to discuss educational advantages, health screening, addiction recovery and housing services.

The Help Fair was sponsored by the Citizens Advisory Committee, or CAC, of the Board. Located in each of the Board's 10 districts, CACs focus on the Board's reentry process and assist with employment opportunities and various needed services for offenders within the community. In addition to the CAC, other key sponsors were The Resource Center, Consult US', West Penn Hospital and Trinity Lutheran Church.

Key board staff who helped coordinate the Help Fair were Deputy District Director Bruce Fronk and District Director Larry Ludwig.

York County Career Fair - York
Individuals who are unemployed or who have a criminal history that make it difficult to find and retain employment attended the York County Career Fair from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Tuesday, May, 14. The event was held on the York Campus of the Harrisburg Area Community College.

"The goal of the Board's Reentry Program is to provide individually tailored and continued service for each parolee, maximizing their ability to succeed in the community. U.S. Corrections statistics support the concept that recidivism rates are nearly cut in half for offenders with full-time jobs compared to those who are unemployed."

~ Chairman Michael C. Potteiger

Clockwise: Event attendees fill the room in York. At bottom right, York Deputy District Director Commins and Agent Duncan stop for a moment during the career fair. At bottom left, community partners who helped organize the career fair.



The event was sponsored by the CAC of the Board and HACC in conjunction with the Manufacturers Association of South Central PA, York County Cooperative Extension Job Fair Committee, Bellamanna Ministries, Crispus Attucks and other local organizations. The career fair featured employers ready to hire for jobs in a variety of industries.

At the end of the York Career Fair, 16 employers and community agencies participated in the event. Based on records accumulated during the fair, 135 of the 314 registered participants had criminal backgrounds. Out of this total, four of the 135 participants with criminal backgrounds were hired full

time by the various employers at the job fair.

Philadelphia City-wide Ex-Offender Career Fair - Philadelphia

Eager to secure a job, more than 3,500 job seekers filled the plaza in front of the Municipal Services Building in Center City Philadelphia in the early morning hours of Friday, May 17. The job fair was intended for ex-offenders.

Several of the board's agents had worked prior to the event with hundreds of offenders currently on parole to prepare: they developed resumes, discussed how to dress for an interview and focused on personal interviewing skills.

Job Fairs (continued)

However, word of this year's job fair went viral through various social media sites and the response was overwhelming.

Too overwhelming.

The 2013 job fair was the third time the City of Philadelphia sponsored the event. The first job fair drew 1,000 applicants. Last year only 100 people showed up.

For this year, organizers anticipated a big crowd and doubled staff to handle the response, but the crowd was still too large to handle and forced the event to be cancelled.

Those job seekers fortunate enough to be at the front of the long waiting line were permitted inside to talk with those employers who were there but for those remaining, they were asked to place their resumes, promising that each person will be contacted about a rescheduled date and location.

This program was started by Mayor Michael Nutter and the District Attorney's Office to help integrate ex-offenders back into society and the workplace, with the goal of cutting recidivism - ex-cons going back to a life of crime, and thus back into the court and prison system.

Board staff was in attendance to talk with any offenders who were able to access the job fair before it closed as well as giving encouragement to stay focused on employment pursuits, despite not gaining access to the job fair inside the building.

Harrisburg Job Fair

The line started forming around 9:40 a.m. for the 10 a.m. start of the Harrisburg Job Fair.

Within the next 30 minutes, the line swelled to several hundred people waiting for the opportunity to meet with a potential employer.

As the job fair got underway, ex-offenders – eager to become employed – could be seen completing job applications by hovering over a coat rack, sitting on end tables and even writing against the walls to complete a job application.

The fourth of four ex-offender job fairs for the spring of 2013 proved one thing: ex-offenders are eager to get back to work.

Held at HACC's Midtown campus on Wednesday, May 22, the job fair was sponsored by the Harrisburg District Citizens Advisory Committee, HACC, Dauphin County Adult Probation and Parole, and the Bureau of Community Corrections.

At day's end, the results from this job fair were impressive as well:

- 15 employers and 8 employment resources participated in the job fair
- 841 people attended, per the sign-in sheet



Counter clockwise: Board staff in attendance in Philadelphia was Deputy Executive Director Dan McIntyre, Parole Agents Cintron and Smith, Chairman Potteiger and Deputy District Director Bonnie Ferguson. Event attendees at the beginning of the long line talk with potential employers. Bottom middle: Mr. McIntyre and Chairman Potteiger talk with Chester Parole Agent McGowan. At bottom right, part of the 3,000+ crowd that gathered for the career fair at the Municipal Services Building.



Job Fairs (continued)

During an on-site media interview at the Harrisburg event, Chairman Potteiger summarized the board's initiative with these programs.

"The new push to connect ex-offenders and employers is in line with Gov. Tom Corbett's 'jobs first' initiative, taking away one of the barriers ex-offenders face in becoming productive members of their community.

"In addition to the federal bonding and tax credit programs, hiring a person who is under parole supervision adds another blanket of security because the person is more likely to show up for work and less likely to have substance abuse issues.

Any issues at work can often be sorted out with one call to a probation or parole officer. That's more incentive for employers to give these individuals a second chance.

"The new job fairs are about education - not only educating ex-offenders about job opportunities and strategies for landing them, but also educating employers about the opportunities and - frankly - advantages of hiring ex-offenders."



Clockwise: Event attendees talk with a recruiter from a local business. Above, Agent Sheaffer talks with Chairman Potteiger before the event opens. At left, Parole Agent Smith talks with an offender.



Clockwise: An applicant fills out a job app on top of a coat rack. Above right, a snack food company recruiter discusses employment opportunities. Bottom right, an employment service representative discusses dressing for success with an attendee.



At left, a recruiter for an inventory company offers assistance to a job applicant.

Her mission: Helping ex-offenders secure employment

For Dena Clare, it's personal.

She is an active member of the Board's Harrisburg District Citizens Advisory Committee and the corporate recruiter for Harrisburg-based employer PC Parts, Inc.

Her mission: helping ex-offenders secure employment. Her reason to do so is what drives her.

"I had a brother who passed away at age 40," Dena explained. "He was an ex-offender. It was always hard for him to find a legitimate job that came with insurance coverage. He found odd jobs that paid under the table, but none on the table with insurance. He couldn't get his teeth fixed or his eyes taken care of."

It is for this very personal reason that when Dena sees opportunities to help ex-offenders, she doesn't hesitate. That's why she was at the Harrisburg Offender Job Fair on Wednesday, May 22nd at the HACC Mid-Town Campus representing PC Parts.

"This was my first offender job fair and it was the busiest job fair I have ever worked at," Dena explained. "We did not know what to expect and the turnout was unbelievable. I ran out of the 400 business cards that I had there. I made 200 more copies of the materials I was handing out, and ran out of those. I received a combination of 800 applications and resumes plus the

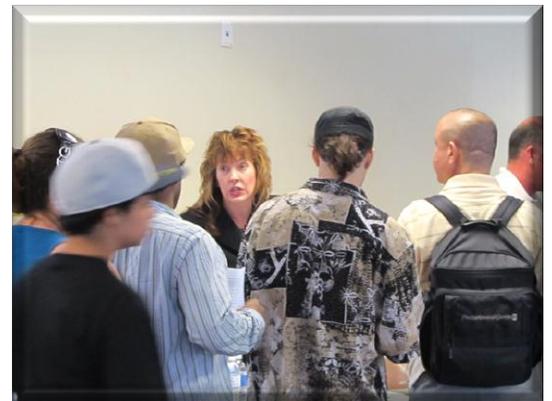


Dena Clare of PC Parts talks with a few of the 841 people that passed by her recruitment booth at the job fair.

names on the sign-in sheets that we had. In the first 40 minutes of the job fair, I had collected 200 applications. We were so busy the entire time. Some (of the individuals she talked with during the day) really made an impression on me."

After the job fair, Dena had just started to comb through the daunting amount of paperwork of job hopefuls. And it is a task she wasn't taking lightly.

"I am a one person, HR recruiter shop," Dena said. "I take pride in the fact that everyone who walks in to our office, I will at least say hello to them or give them an interview. I know what it's like to be treated with respect so just to take time out of my schedule to say 'hello' ...you will be remembered. A



couple of minutes of my time goes a long way."

PC Parts, Inc. is a totally green company. Working out of three buildings in the Harrisburg area, they sell computer parts, printer parts and rebuilt printers to companies who fix other computers and printers.

"Our buildings are full of parts," Dena said. "We have shipping, receiving, inventory, dismantling, cleaning, inspecting and printer rebuilds. We take stuff apart with either a hand drill or hand tools. Our starting wage is not really high but the offenders don't mind the wage. They are excited to have a full-time job and are willing to accept and work for the incentives that the company offers."

Dena explained that the current workforce for PC Parts Inc. consists of 40% ex-offenders. "Of those working for us who are

Her mission (continued)

at the halfway houses that we work with, none of these offenders went back to prison. That's huge."

Dena credits mentoring by herself and others as one of the keys to this success. "They come to me with a lot of questions; questions about getting forms they need, or things they are permitted to do like vote – and many of them ask life-based, personal questions because a lot of them have never really had anyone who cared about them ever before."

Dena also said that expectations are stressed.

"The company held a picnic at a [Harrisburg] Senator's baseball game," Dena stated. "We told them what we expected of them while there and that included no alcohol. They joined in on activities. We ate together. We sat in our seats together. They took in the sights at City Island and a lot of them brought their young children with them and they were able to play. There were no issues."

Dena also said that after the weekend, each of the offenders was tested. Every one passed.

"Companies don't realize advantages (of hiring offenders)," Dena said. "You are helping the offender become a tax paying citizen again. They show up for work because they want to work. They give more than 100%. They are happy to get out of the

halfway houses and be productive. Another positive we don't mind is that the individual facilities call us to check and see that they are there.

"Another positive is that the resident employees who have prior substance abuse issues are tested regularly and we as employers know they are clean and can work safely," Dena said.

"And lastly, the importance of the WOTC credit and the federal bonding program are huge. Employers are not aware of these two things the way that they should be – or else we would have had more potential employers attend the Harrisburg offender job fair."

Dena offers advice to potential employers who are thinking about expanding their workforce to include ex-offenders. "You need to have one key person to be the main contact for offenders. You will be asked a lot of questions and a lot of mentoring will take place and...it is very personal with each offender.

And what about future offender job fairs. Dena has a lot of ideas and suggestions.

"Not only do we need to have more offender job fairs, we also need to focus on educating employers," Dena said. "We need to let them know about the positives of these types of programs.

"For the offenders, we might want

to consider having more classes if possible to help prepare the offenders before they go to the job fair," Dena said. "With the different halfway houses that I am working with, I am running into issues that not all of the residents are technically ready for a job. They don't have ID, the I9 form or any other forms of identification. They don't know how to get a birth certificate or a Social Security card. Some do not have their GED.

"Having a completed resume is most helpful. They need to realize that they can put their prison jobs on their resume to show what they have accomplished while incarcerated as well as the jobs they had before they were incarcerated," Dena said.

"Other focus areas could be dressing for success, interview skills and basic life skills like managing finances, child care issues or how to register to vote.

"The parole officers are doing their best to help everyone on their caseload succeed," Dena said. "And the offenders we see really are trying. Now we need to start connecting more offenders with more long term employment opportunities within our communities."

Her inspiration is her brother. Her motivation is from interactions like this.

"I was interviewing an ex-offender. Near the end, I asked him if he had any questions of me. He asked, 'I'd like to know why you hire ex-offenders and why you care?'"

Her response: "Because I do."



Employer Benefits of Hiring Individuals on Community Supervision

The Parole Agent:

- Is a direct point of contact and resource for the employer and can assist with employee retention.
- Monitors the conditions of supervision to include the individual maintaining employment and submitting to random drug testing.
- Works with the parolee to seek jobs in areas where their job skills meet the work requirements.
- Is responsible for monitoring the parolee's place of residence and employment, evaluating the need for treatment or programming, and to assist the parolee with problems that occur.
- Will maintain contact with you as long as you employ the parolee. Routine visits may occur on site to monitor the parolee's progress, but these visits will not disturb the workplace environment.

By reducing risks of re-offending:

The community benefits through safer neighborhoods.

The parolee is able to support himself, his family, pay any restitution owed and pay taxes.

The costs of other public services that are impacted by criminal behavior are reduced.

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Employer Tax Credits for New Hires

A program is available to employers who hire individuals who have been deemed to have barriers to employment under the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) – federal tax credit.

Federal Bonding Program

The Federal Bonding Program was created as an incentive to employers to hire qualified individuals who may need to be bonded as a result of barriers to employment.

The program provides individual fidelity bonds at no cost to the employer or its applicant for job applicants that may be denied coverage by commercial carriers because of barriers to employment.

How does a Potential Employer Determine if an Individual on Community Supervision is Suitable for Employment?

State parole agents are responsible for ensuring that the work place is an appropriate environment for the parolee based on the parolee's conviction and criminal history. For example, an offender convicted of embezzlement would not be allowed to work in a bank.

As a potential employer, here are the questions you should ask the parole agent regarding the parolee:

- How long has s/he been on parole and how is he doing?
- What offense was s/he convicted of?
- Does s/he have the job skills, experience or education for the job?

- Where does s/he live and how long has he lived there?
- Does s/he have transportation?
- Does s/he have valid photo identification?
- When can s/he start working? (The parolee may be enrolled in a community-based program that he or she is required to complete.)

The Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry provides all needed information discussed in this document online. The web address for the Department of Labor & Industry is:

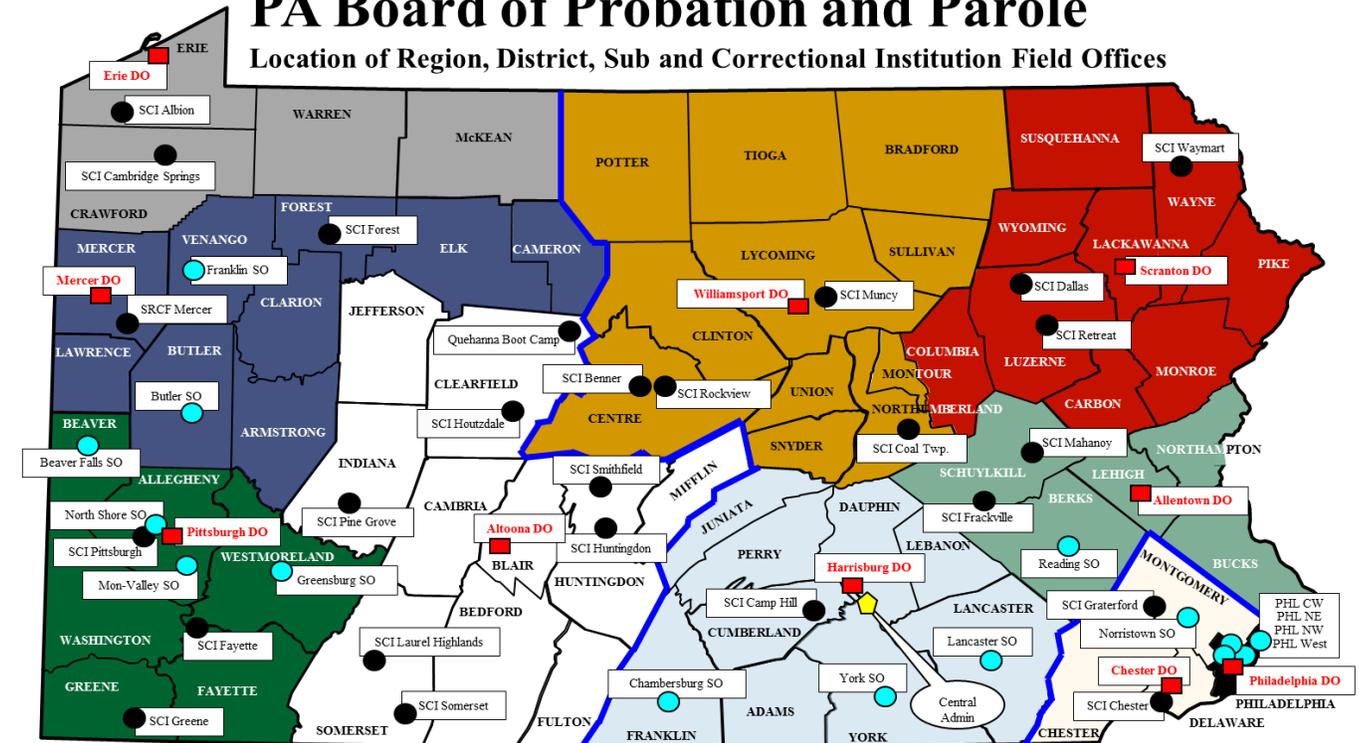
www.dli.state.pa.us

1 On the left navigation bar, select **EMPLOYERS**. Scroll down this page until you reach the **Financial Incentives / Resources** section. Under **Tax Credits** select **Work Opportunity Tax Credit**

2 On the left navigation bar, select **PUBLICATIONS**. Select the document called: **Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC-1)**

PA Board of Probation and Parole

Location of Region, District, Sub and Correctional Institution Field Offices



Western Region

Erie District	Altoona District
Mercer District	Pittsburgh District

Central Region

Williamsport District	Harrisburg District
Scranton District	Allentown District

Eastern Region

Chester District
Philadelphia District

■ PBPP District Office (10)

● PBPP Sub-Office (15)

● State Correctional Institution (26)