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New Path

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UC Berkeley
Graduate School of Journalism (2019)

New Path:

How former inmates find their way back into the workforce

Abstract:

When Anthony Bustos stepped out of prison, everything seemed weird. He had never used Twitter or Amazon, he didn't have a bank account, and his neighborhood had changed, in a good way. Bustos had been lost in alcohol and violence for 11 years and spent 22 years behind bars for murder. Now he was trying to figure out a new path for his life, and getting a job would be one major step.

About 35,000 inmates are released in California every year. Many struggle to survive in the Golden State without a job or savings. Lacking skills and experience, they jump from one temporary job to another. Their criminal history is another barrier. Legislative changes are not helping former inmates as much as expected, mainly because many employers are not aware of them.

Six months into parole, the 43-year-old was able to join Pit Stop, a one-year program that provides training and transitional jobs that help many former inmates build an employment history and reconnect with society. Operated by San Francisco Public Works, Pit Stop now maintains 25 public toilets in the city, with 150 employees, most former prisoners.

This multimedia journalism project consists of a text story, video, photos, and data visualization. The news package shows how former inmates start over, and the challenges they face. I reported the story, filmed and produced videos, and visualized data.

Source List:

Interviews:

Anthony Bustos, attendant of Pit Stop
Lovett Milton, attendant of Pit Stop
Yvonne Michael, attendant of Pit Stop
Derrick Engelman, supervisor of Pit Stop
Harvey Turner, supervisor of Pit Stop
Lorenzo Grant, supervisor of Pit Stop
Nadon King, supervisor of Pit Stop
Hanif Hakeem, supervisor of Pit Stop
Mohammed Nuru, director of San Francisco Public Works
Rachel Gordon, director of policy & communications of San Francisco Public Works
Lena Miller, founder and co-executive director of Hunters Point Family
Ron Wilson, chief operating officer of Hunters Point Family
Christian Martin, executive director of Lower Polk Community Benefit District
Lonnie Tuck, Regional Director of Oakland's Center for Employment Opportunities office
Jasper Burroughs, outreach specialist of Oakland's Center for Employment Opportunities office
Katherine Katcher, founder and executive director of Root & Rebound
Deric Washington, senior legal fellow of Root & Rebound
K.C. Taylor, associate director of California Legal Services
Lawrence Robinson, mentor volunteer coordinator of Rubicon program
Michelle Walker, participant of Rubicon Program
Tommy Tinsley, participant of Rubicon Program
Vinuta Naik, staff attorney of East Bay Community Law Center
Jael Myrick, program coordinator of East Bay Community Law Center
David Harding, professor of sociology at UC Berkeley

Online Sources:

- [California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation website](https://www.cdcr.ca.gov/victim_services/sentencing.html#WHAT_IS_PAROLE)
https://www.cdcr.ca.gov/victim_services/sentencing.html#WHAT_IS_PAROLE
- California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, "[Offender Data Points \(2017\)](https://sites.cdcr.ca.gov/research/wp-content/uploads/sites/9/2018/07/Offender-Data-Points-as-of-December-31-2017-1.pdf)"
<https://sites.cdcr.ca.gov/research/wp-content/uploads/sites/9/2018/07/Offender-Data-Points-as-of-December-31-2017-1.pdf>
- [California Department of Fair Employment and Housing website](#)

<https://www.dfeh.ca.gov/resources/frequently-asked-questions/criminalhistoryinfoinemploymentfaqs/>

- [California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, “2018 Recidivism Report \(2019\)”](#)

<https://sites.cdcr.ca.gov/research/wp-content/uploads/sites/9/2019/01/2018-Recidivism-Report.pdf>

- [California Legislative Information website](#)

https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=201720180AB2138

- Center for Employment Opportunities, “[Improving Long-Term Employment Outcomes: Promising Findings from New York State \(2019\)](#)”

https://ceoworks.org/assets/images/CEO-Improving-Long-Term-Employment_030719.pdf

- National Conference of State Legislatures, “[License Overload? \(State Legislatures Magazine, April 2018\)](#)”

<http://www.ncsl.org/bookstore/state-legislatures-magazine/occupational-licensing-can-balance-safety-and-employment-opportunities.aspx>

- National Conference of State Legislatures, “[Barriers to Work: Improving Employment in Licensed Occupations for Individuals with Criminal Records \(2018\)](#)”

http://www.ncsl.org/Portals/1/Documents/Labor/Licensing/criminalRecords_v06_web.pdf

- [New York State’s Department of Labor website](#)

https://www.labor.ny.gov/careerservices/work-for-success/overview.shtm#_blank

- [Project Return website](#)

<https://www.projectreturninc.org>

- Safe Return Project, “[Community Reintegration and Employment in Contra Costa County \(2013\)](#)”

<https://pacinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/reintegration-employment-final.pdf>

- [Safer Foundation website](#)

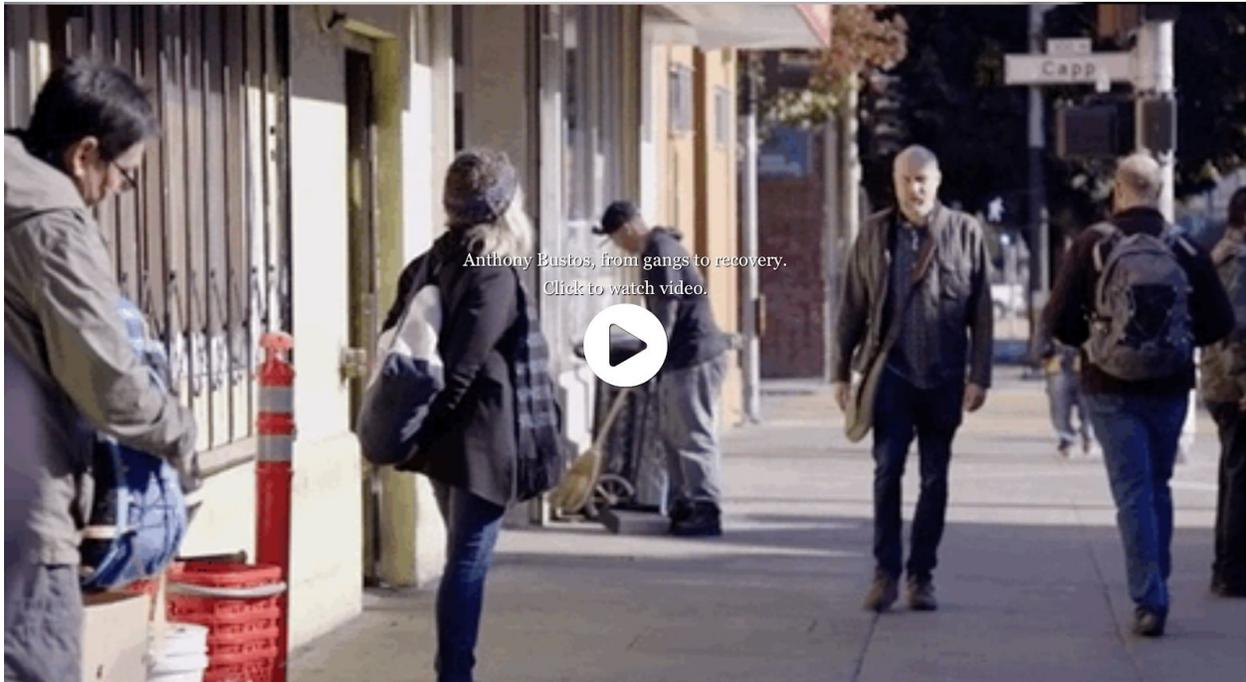
<https://saferfoundation.org/How-We-Help/Workforce-Development/Transitional-Employment>

A close-up photograph of a person's hand with several tattoos on the fingers and palm. The hand is positioned on the right side of the frame, with the fingers slightly spread. The background is blurred, showing what appears to be a public restroom sign.

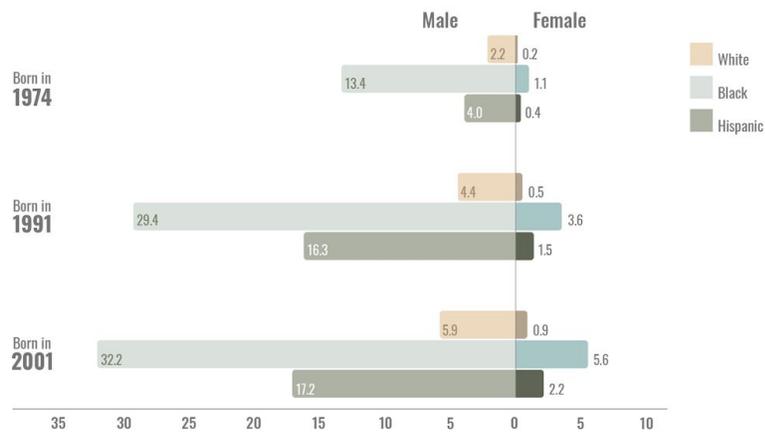
New Path

San Francisco residents and tourists may not know that the men and women helping them at public toilets along city streets could have been behind bars just weeks or months before. How one program helps former inmates find their way back into the workforce.

*Text by Saemmoool Lee
Videos by Yingshan Deng*



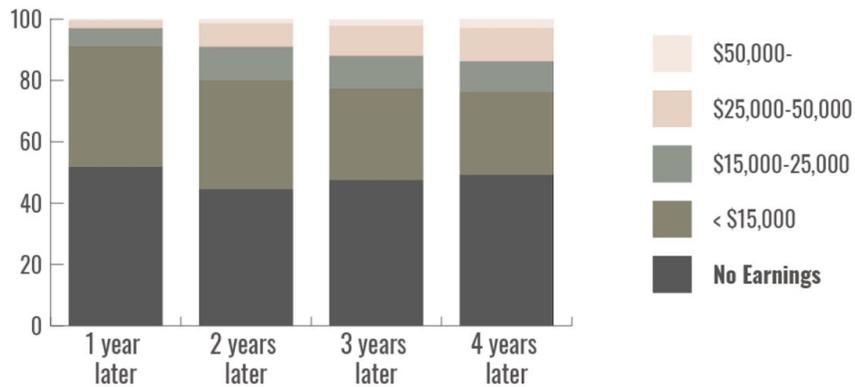
Likelihood of being imprisoned in the U.S., depending on when a person was born (%)



Source: Bureau of Justice



Average Annual Earning for Former Inmates After Release (%)



Individuals age 18-64 in prison for at least one year as reported by states and Federal Bureau of Prisons to IRS 2009-2013 and linked to earnings and filing records 1999-2014.

Source: The Brookings Institution



Anthony Bustos started to work for Pit Stop last year, about six months after his release from a California state prison. When the 43-year-old gained freedom after 22 years of incarceration, he wanted to open up and talk to people. He says getting the job gave him the opportunity to do that.

Bustos is among the 95% of state prisoners who won't have to spend their lives behind bars, according to the Bureau of Justice. However, the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) doesn't track the employment of former prisoners. Only a few small-scale studies show their struggles: In a survey of 101 residents of West Contra Costa County who had been released within the previous 3-18 months in 2011, 78% of respondents were unemployed. Nearly all the respondents with a job were working part-time in construction, auto repair or other forms of manual labor.

Convicts are released either into state supervised parole, as was Bustos, or county-level supervision (also known as post-release community supervision), according to CDCR. The most serious and violent offenders are released to state parole, and the non-serious, non-violent, and non-sex offenders are released to county-level supervision. Parolees are assigned a parole agent and obligated to follow their agent's instructions. Former inmates who are under county-level supervision are supervised by a local law enforcement agency. Parolees account for half (49.3%) of those released from state prisons in 2017, the most recent year available, according to CDCR. Their average length of stay in prison (4.7 years) is almost four times greater than that for those under county-level supervision (1.3 years). After their release, parolees are required to attend a "Parole and Community Team (PACT)" meeting to learn about community resources, including employment opportunities.

The location of Pit Stop toilets in San Francisco.



The Pit Stop program began in 2014 as a six-month pilot project at three locations in the Tenderloin after a community budget hearing. Students from the De Marillac Academy said that they were tired of having to navigate around human waste on their way to and from school in the Tenderloin. Nuru convened a meeting with his staff, and they came up with the idea for Pit Stop. It aimed not only to solve the community problem but also to create a pipeline for people trying to re-enter the workforce.

