

**Justice Involved Solutions - Short-Term Training**

Our Justice Involved Solutions Unit has championed the re-entry efforts of over 10,200 students transitioning from the justice involved system to continued education, short-term training certifications, college options, and second-chance employment, since 1997. Students that complete our transition courses in GED, Life Skills to Work (LSW) and Stop-the-Turnstile-Life Style (STS), who move on to our unique education, training, and 2nd chance employment opportunities, have been found to recidivate at approximately 28%.

Our Unit was able to take advantage of the first national U.S. Department of Justice reentry initiative called the ***Going Home Project, in 2000***. This funding facilitated our focus on pre and post-release planning for seriously violent offenders in three counties in Washington State, with the Washington State Department of Corrections (DOC).

Over the past 17 years, South Seattle College established ***learning centers*** to provide Life Skills to Work, GED, college options, training and second-chance employment transitional solutions. These learning centers have grown and currently include our main New Holly Learning Center, and Learning Centers at five Washington State DOC locations, the prison at the Washington State Monroe Correctional Complex, King County Center for Alternative Programs (CCAP) and the King County Regional Justice Center.

After the successful completion of the Going Home Project in 2006, South Seattle College and the Going Home Project Steering Committee created a sustainability plan that created what is known now as the ***King County Community Partnership for Transition Solutions (CPTS)***. CPTS has recently celebrated its tenth year anniversary and has been replicated to seven regional counties in Washington State. KCCPTS currently includes over 43 federal, tribal, state, county, city, faith, non-profit, and formerly incarcerated individuals, agencies and organizations.

“***Ready to Get Ready***”

South Seattle College’s commitment to serve this population lead to the development of ***Skills to Pay the Bills in 1997***. Skills to Pay the Bills is a two-week, cognitive and behaviorally-driven, job preparedness transitional course to assist men and women to obtain employment, training, and post-secondary education, while under DOC and/or other forms of community supervision. “Offenders” enrolled into Skills to Pay the Bills were also enrolled as students at South Seattle College. The integration of this course into the local justice involved system was intentional to change the “ready to get ready” narrative of community supervision and our students to “***go to work***.”

Our objective was to increase job placement and retention by introducing a single transitional and progressive process to prepare, educate, coach and/or guide our students to actual employment through our ***Second Chance Employer network*** and/or ***post-secondary education*** at the college. Post-secondary educational options include, but are not limited to, warehouse logistics, landscaping, (8) (Pre) apprenticeships, welding, automotive technology, web technology, business information technology, pre-engineering, and hazardous material certification.

We provided this framework for thousands of our students from 1997 to 2013. Employment and education solutions were facilitated by our ***PREP/GO2WORK*** employment specialist team which worked in tandem with the Skills to Pay the Bills curriculum. Our ***PREP/GO2WORK*** employment specialists actively engaged local employers to solicit partnerships. Such was done (and still is done) through group meetings and focus groups. Recruitment also involves our more seasoned employer partners to present to other employer prospects with their positive experiences.

Completers of the Skills to Pay the Bills continued with ***PREP/GO2WORK*** to develop their work portfolios, which include their master application, resume samples, cover letters, identification documents, and other materials necessary to apply for employment. Our workforce specialists would then pursue job opportunities and direct referrals for immediate placement. We were also able to focus the efforts of our non-custodial students by working with the King County Sheriff’s Department and Division of Child Support to re-adjust their obligations while they were actively enrolled at South Seattle College.

In 2014, we enhanced our Life Skills to Work: Skills to Pay the Bills curriculum into a six-credit course entitled ***Life Skills to Work: Steps to Freedom***. Heavily influenced by the CDC-Kaiser Permanente ***Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) study of 1998***, Steps to Freedom is a six-section, 117-page workbook that adds the focus of building resiliency skills and healthy behavioral habits. Steps to Freedom is instructed at all our Learning Centers and serves as an integral transitional force into GO2WORK, employment, and post-secondary educational opportunities.

In 2016, we met the demand of our King County partners to develop a simplified three-week cognitive-behavioral course entitled ***Stop-The-Turnstile (STS)*** to prepare students for either our Steps to Freedom curriculum or our GED program. STS focuses on reaching out to a younger and volatile population King County Corrections has been encountering. Focusing more on decision-making, choices and consequences, STS aligns our students to the more advanced work Steps to Freedom has to offer.

In summary, our development of Skills to Pay the Bills, PREP/GO2WORK, Steps-to-Freedom, Stop-the-Turnstile has been the result of effective strategic planning with numerous federal, state, and local agencies, organizations, and employers to minimize the gaps in the system, increase job placement, retention, and wage progression. Our mission is to provide impeccable educational and employment solutions to all our students, regardless of legal standing. The result has been ***a lower recidivism rate (28%)*** versus the local state (32%) and the national rate (67%) within three years of release.

“***The Felon Friendly List***”

In 2006, our Justice Involved Solutions Unit began to address the issue of the “felon friendly” lists that was widely circulated throughout our community and impeded our transitional assistance efforts. The list’s origin was unknown, but it gave job searchers a false sense of security because most of the employers on the list were not even aware of its existence. It also perpetuated a false belief from local criminal justice agencies and job referral organizations that obtaining employment was easy and only required minimal effort with this list. However, use of this list resulted in reduced job placement, reduced job retention, and a negative relationship with local businesses.

In response, we audited the list and contacted all the employers and asked questions. We used this opportunity to create relationships. By doing so, we generated the interest of 38 local employers to provide second chance opportunities. By including employers in our client’s transitional process, we created a new narrative and strategy to engage employers in hiring people with criminal records.

By 2007, South Seattle College and our partners within the newly formed CPTS (including strong backing by the Washington State Department of Corrections and The U.S. Probation and Pretrial Services Office of Western Washington) sat down and agreed to develop the ***Second Chance Employer Database website*** as a secure tool for case managers, corrections officers, probation officers, job specialists, and employers within the CPTS framework. In contrast with the “Felon Friendly List,” the database is password protected and not available to our clients or anyone not certified by CPTS.

Access to the database requires CPTS members to attend a 4.5 hour certification course developed by the CPTS steering committee, and pay a one-time access/maintenance fee. The certification course includes a familiarization of Washington State’s Federal, State, and local criminal justice systems, purpose and intent of the database, navigating the database, and developing resiliency against manipulation. Completers of the training are also expected to sign and agree to a Memorandum of Understanding between CPTS and their responsibilities to uphold the integrity of the 2nd Chance Employer Database.

To date, CPTS’s Second Chance Employer Database has over 437 employers and over 40 user subscribers. The database is audited quarterly by members of our GO2WORK team to not only keep it up to date, but to create, maintain and grow professional relationships with human resource representatives. Job seekers who benefit from the database must first meet certain milestones in Life Skills to Work to demonstrate the level of preparedness (proficiencies in our ***Learn-2-Learn Process***, planning, work ethic, personal and inter-personal relationships, family focused and values that are founded on a ***resiliency-based, cognitive behavioral model)*** in order for our job specialists in our GO2WORK unit to make connections and referrals. We estimate that 54% of our GED LSW completers have returned back to work part-time or full time since 2007.

Since Seattle has enacted the “***ban the box” ordinance*** in 2013, employers now have to look at applicants qualifications prior to a criminal records check. This was a significant victory to our work and provides a more level field and gives our students a more competitive edge as they enhance their credentials through participating in our curriculum.

“***It Takes a Village***”

King County’s Community Partnership for Transition Solutions Mission Statement supports the successful transition of justice involved adults who have earned their return to the community and their families through a supportive and caring volunteer network. South Seattle College, being a charter member of CPTS, has lead the charge by supplying a forum for CPTS to meet at our New Holly Learning Center every third Friday of every month since 2006.

For example, bi-yearly 2nd chance employer database certification training takes place at our New Holly Learning Center to provide community partners the 4.5 hour certification, an opportunity to network and have on-hand e-platform time with the database. At the completion of the training, partners then are provided their certification, a copy of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and 2 week period of time to decide if their sponsoring agency will sign a customized MOU and pay the 1-time subscribers fee to be issued a secured password to the 2nd chance employer database.

The common goal of all members of CPTS is to provide the individual the solutions they need in order to be self-sufficient, re-employed, and have the ability to pay their financial obligations as well as reconnect with their children and families.

“***The Way Forward***”

We are extremely grateful for the opportunities the **U.S. Department of Justice, WA State Department of Corrections, King County Community Corrections Division, WA State Division of Child Support and U.S HHS/Administration for Children & Families** and our **CPTS** partners have afforded **South Seattle College** through the ***Criminal Justice Project (CJP), Going Home Project (CHP)***, **Children of the Incarcerated Mentoring Project, *King County Criminal Justice Initiatives (KCJI)***, ***Project Get Connected (PGC),Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN)*** and more recently, ***2nd Chance Adult Reentry Demonstration Project (RPI)***. We are also proud of our growth, sustainability, and positive outcomes that have resulted from our relationships with our community partners to serve this population.

Our 20 year history of successful growth and strategic development of effective cognitive and behaviorally based transitional courses, training and community partnership development, as well as our professional relationship with over 400 local second-chance employers. Again, thank you for the opportunity to partner with you for those we serve. We hope to impress that our journey is ongoing and that the process to effectively promote, enhance, and develop our communities constantly evolves. We know there is much more work to be done.

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