



Marcus Kondkar, Professor and Chair
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY
Loyola University New Orleans
kondkar@loyno.edu

September 9, 2026

Evaluation Report for the Louisiana Parole Project (LPP) Employment Enhancement Program (EEP) 2023-2026

This report is a summary of the external evaluation for a grant funded initiative awarded to the Louisiana Parole Project (LPP) to improve employment outcomes for citizens returning home from Louisiana prisons. It is submitted pursuant to the Contractual Agreement between the Louisiana Parole Project and Loyola University New Orleans, executed in March 2023. The program grant period covers September 2023 to August 2026.

Overview of the Louisiana Parole Project (LPP)

The Louisiana Parole Project's reintegration model provides clients with wraparound services to help them successfully transition into their communities. LPP staff includes formerly incarcerated men and women trained in various complex aspects of reentry in addition to the expertise honed from their own lived experiences. LPP staff promote a culture of treating formerly incarcerated people with dignity, humanity, and respect, and, through their clients, challenge widely held misconceptions about formerly incarcerated people. Since its inception in 2016, LPP has expanded its range of services, and has helped over 700 people successfully reintegrate into the community, many of whom are returning after spending decades in Louisiana prisons.

LPP services include assistance with:

- Pre-release preparation
- Representation at pardon and parole hearings
- Transitional housing
- Transportation
- Employment
- Documentation needs including those related to healthcare and other benefits
- Access to mental health care and social work services
- Peer mentorship
- Programming related to technology, social norms, communication, and financial literacy

Overview of the Employment Enhancement Program (EEP)

Steady employment is consistently identified in reentry research as an essential component of successful reintegration that extends beyond, but includes recidivism metrics. Financial security is related to most other variables correlated with reentry success, including stable housing, transportation, physical and emotional well-being, and civic engagement. People returning home with felony convictions face significant obstacles to employment, both through formal restrictions embedded in licensing requirements across many work settings, but more often through informal gatekeeping based on stigma and perceptions about formerly incarcerated people. Most people with felony convictions experience the frustration of submitting multiple job applications and showing up for job interviews only to be rejected following a background check. Recognizing this major problem, LPP secured resources to fund the EEP. The grant award allowed LPP staff to focus on identifying industry demand trends in Louisiana and dedicate a staff position to engage with area employers to forge relationships between them and potential employees.

Evaluation

This evaluation of the program begins with the metric of recidivism, but includes:

- Recorded interviews with a sample of EEP employers
- Recorded interviews with a sample of EEP client employees
- Site visits to a sample of EEP workplaces
- Tracking monthly metrics on a shared AirTable database for all EEP clients
- Meetings with LPP's Business and Industry Liaison and LPP peer mentors

While there is rarely one simplistic explanation for reentry success or failure, there is consensus in reentry research over the main determinative factors. These are generally related to employment, transportation and housing stability, family and community support, access to holistic reentry services, past or ongoing experiences with substance use disorders, and access to mental health treatment. Additional factors include age at incarceration, length of incarceration, and the conditions of parole. The most widely used indicator of reentry success is the rate of recidivism, measured variously by new arrests, convictions, or return to state or federal custody in a sample population over time. The task of most reentry evaluation research is to identify quantitative correlations between recidivism and a checklist of factors such as those listed above, a task complicated by the difficulty of isolating one factor while controlling for others.

It is important to note that not all of the people assisted by the EEP initiative connecting them with area employers availed themselves of the same or all the additional wraparound services LPP has to offer. Formerly incarcerated people come to LPP with different histories, skillsets and resources and are assessed to determine individualized plans of support. For example, some may already have secured housing and transportation, and may not have needed any additional programming, but were

struggling to find an employer willing to look beyond a felony conviction. Others may have come to LPP needing a job and help with just about everything else as well.

Over the course of the grant period, from September 2023 to the end of August 2026, LPP staff leading the EEP initiative reached out to 375 potential employers in the Greater Baton Rouge Area to explain the EEP, the employee screening process, and the potential among people returning home from Louisiana prisons. This outreach effort created a network of 132 potential employers open to considering employing formerly incarcerated people. LPP screened 586 potential employees, many of whom were nearing their release dates, for EEP eligibility. The screening process resulted in a pool of 357 eligible employees for the program. Of those 357 eligible employees, LPP was able to secure employment of 270 formerly incarcerated men and women across the 132 unique employers, the majority of whom remain at their original work placements.

While these numbers speak for themselves, they fail to capture an additional, less tangible impact of the EEP initiative: changing employer perceptions, policies and practices regarding hiring formerly incarcerated people. LPP's business and industry liaison, JP Funes, estimates that approximately 80 of the 132 EEP employers amended their internal HR policies to eliminate employment restrictions based on conviction histories based on LPP's outreach efforts and their positive experiences with their formerly incarcerated employees.

This evaluation has captured an additional quantitative measure of reentry success by comparing the **recidivism rate of clients assisted through the EEP initiative (3%) with the overall state recidivism rate (33%) over three years**. The conclusion is that participation in the EEP program is correlated with significantly lower recidivism compared to recidivism among non-EEP participants, as measured by the overall state recidivism rate. It is important to note the limitations of this conclusion with respect to identifying causal relationships between recidivism and any single additional variable associated with successful reentry.

The success of the program, with respect to recidivism, stems from the combination of strong partnerships between LPP and the Greater Baton Rouge Economic Partnership and GNO Inc.¹, the LPP screening process for potential employee clients, a dedicated business and industry liaison on staff, and responsive program leaders.

¹ GNO Inc., a regional economic development organization, serves the 10-parish region of Southeast Louisiana that includes Jefferson, Orleans, Plaquemines, St. Bernard, St. Charles, St. James, St. John the Baptist, St. Tammany, Tangipahoa, and Washington parishes.

A qualitative approach to reentry research, one that delves deeper into the lived experience of returning home after years of incarceration reveals the complexity of identifying and controlling for specific factors associated with successful reintegration. These factors usually co-occur and are often interrelated, making it difficult to isolate the effect of any one of them. Additionally, a recidivism rate so low (3%) in the experimental group of 270 limited the possibility of learning from clients who reoffend despite their involvement in the employment program. However, interviews with a sample of employers and employees revealed an overwhelmingly positive experience for employers and employees alike. They also provide insight into some of the challenges of reintegration generally.

Employer Experiences with the EEP

Consider the reflections of one of the early EEP employers, **Kyla Romanach**, chief public defender for East Baton Rouge Parish, who employed three EEP clients, **Stephanie King**, **Demetricy Moore**, and **Ricardo Carmouche** through the program.

Ms. Romanach appreciated the degree of personal investment her formerly incarcerated employees bring to the work:

“I think it’s more meaningful. I also think just having a job means more to them. I think they have a greater awareness of the importance of having a job and the importance of being seen as good employees. Whereas when we’re hiring people off the streets, especially younger people, often they don’t treat the job nearly as seriously. And they don’t understand the impact on the clients. My Parole Project secretaries understand that if a file doesn’t get to court the day that it’s supposed to get to court, there is an impact in the courtroom because they were in that position, whereas my other secretaries don’t have that same sense of importance. They also want to be seen as responsible tax paying citizens, and so they take their work more seriously.”



“They’re doing amazingly well. I have had absolutely no problems with any of them. They are much more responsible than my average employee. They have a stronger work ethic... they are much more willing and eager to actually try to respond to the needs of the people on the other end of the phone because they understand what it is to be on the other end of the phone. And then I think that kind of sets a good example for others.”

Kyla Romanach, EBR chief public defender

Richard Crawford, an arborist and manager for the tree cutting company, Demco, took a very pragmatic approach regarding hiring formerly incarcerated people. In his words it comes down to, "Can he do the job? Is he going to be reliable? Is he going to come to work every day? What he did before, it's important, but it's not the only thing that's important."

Mr. Crawford hired two EEP clients who had been incarcerated for several decades, **Tommy Floyd** and **Garry Childers**. He had no experience with formerly incarcerated people but was willing to give them a chance.



"Yeah. I think that I wouldn't trade Tommy or Garry for anybody else on my crew. I'd have missed out on not just two good humans to me, but two good workers if I would've allowed what they've done 30, 40 years ago to determine what I do now."

"For the most part, they're perfect because they don't miss work. And if they do miss work, they let you know, which is important. I got guys that call me up, 'Oh man, I'm sorry. I forgot to tell you last week I had an appointment this morning at 9:00.' They don't do that kind of stuff. Heck, I wish all my guys had more of their traits, like come to work every day, work all day, don't complain."

Richard Crawford, arborist at Demco

Mr. Crawford shared this advice for other potential EEP employers:

"I would just say try not to let your biases or that stigma get in the way because I hate to think that I would have done that because I've really benefitted and if I would have let that affect me on the front end, I wouldn't have them. I know the I, you can't judge a book by its cover and that's really true because if I had let the built-in biases or the stereotype and all, I probably wouldn't have Tommy and Garry. So, I would say I believe like y'all's thing now, second chances. People change."

Sean Balfantz, Human Resources Manager at Deltak Manufacturing, a metal fabrication company, employed six EEP clients and said he had a very positive experience with all of them, “honestly, all of them have been really great assets for us.” Three moved on to other jobs and three remain employed. Mr. Balfantz had an open mind to hiring formerly incarcerated folks despite a less than favorable experience with a previous work release program that has since been terminated. He describes his role as a builder of things and people.

“At the end of the day for manufacturing, it's about building things and that's including building people, even employees, every employee we hire basically has to meet the same expectation for safety, quality, attendance and performance. The Second Chance hiring isn't about giving someone a free pass. It's been about giving a quality individual the opportunity to earn success at our company. When someone rises to that challenge, it is a win for the employee plus the company and their family and the community.”

Mr. Balfantz was particularly enthusiastic about a couple of EEP clients who he thinks will stay on for the long-term:

“He [David Lightsey] is amazing. I mean, he's just solid as a rock. He's been helping people learn the painting training. When we put other people back there, he helps them learn as well. I mean, just wonderful. And then Romalis Hartwell. Oh, my goodness. Phenomenal guy. We just offered him another position. He loves life. He's always got a smile, positive as can be. He's worked with our manufacturing side and then we just offered him an opportunity to possibly do shipping, receiving, and material handling in the yard, which is a big deal for us because we have a whole lot of material here. So, again, all of these guys, they really have done a lot for us.”

EEP clients have also found successful jobs in the restaurant industry. **Will Monceaux**, general manager at Tsunami Sushi hired two sushi chefs, a grill chef, and a line chef through the program. Some had certificates in culinary arts, but he explained that most of the training happens on the job. For Mr. Monceaux, the work ethic is the most important thing he looks for in his employees:

“Dependability is a big factor in what we do because one missing piece of the puzzle can make your whole night almost a disaster. They show up to work on time, prepared, early, they are accepting to coaching, that is a massive thing. With the team members that we've received so far, I don't worry if they're going to show up to work, it's not a question. I don't worry if they're going to work the whole time, their work ethic is fantastic. If I'm like, ‘Hey, I want this, this and this done on this timeline,’ I don't have to constantly go back and forth. These are not your guys who are on and off the streets back and forth the whole time, these are people who have gone in, they have experienced hardships and survived those hardships and now all they want to do is be better.”



“So, for me personally, I've always been a second chance person, but I think for my team members, I would say that most of them don't even realize, not because we hide anything, but because of how well the program works and how naturally they integrate themselves into what we do.”

Will Monceaux

--

Will Monceaux, general manager, Tsunami Sushi

Mr. Monceaux almost seemed apologetic for hiring a highly educated formerly incarcerated man, **Eric Denet**, as a grill chef, thinking he was overqualified even though he had no culinary training.

“I work with a gentleman right now who he's actually a paralegal that cannot get into his field because of his conviction... But when I tell you, he is overqualified for what he's doing right now, I think he has three degrees at this point, he spent all of his time while he was there [incarcerated] bettering himself, learning, acquiring different skills, different trades and stuff like that and, genuinely, all he

needs is someone to give him the opportunity. I think they [employees] broke those walls down because we see them more as people and less as crimes. And so, I think sitting with them and actually just getting to interact and laugh and cut up with them and joke and see that they're normal people and stuff really changes your perception on who they are and they're less of a label and more of a solid person standing next to you."

Rouses Market has employed more EEP clients than any other employer, with 20 employees working at different locations. **Andrew Kehrees**, a Rouses manager supervising a number of EEP employees, said that his perspective on second chance hiring is informed by a decade of prior experience in law enforcement.

"To me, it's the same as hiring anybody else at this point. And then again, double back I guess on what I said earlier, I mean the stigma of them being formerly incarcerated, it's bad, it's a stigma that people have. I don't think it's one that you can judge people on. Me, personally, I was actually in law enforcement for the last 10 years, so I'm well-versed in that realm. I mean you can't judge a book by its cover. So, I think that's the most important thing, is just give people a fair shake and let them prove themselves either wrong or right."



"Well, I find a lot of them are very dedicated to... They're grateful for the employment. So, they're willing to go the extra mile, they're willing to stay late, come in on their days off. They have a sense of, I don't know, I guess hunger would be the way to put it, to where they're wanting to contribute. So that's one of the biggest things that I see that's different. They have that extra feeling of, 'I need to do more,' than just somebody that we hire off the street that isn't in that situation. They seem to take a little bit more pride in what they're doing."

Andrew Kehrees, current manager at Rouses, formerly with the Ascension Sheriff's Office

James Johnson, prep manager and purchasing manager for Mike Anderson Seafood, said he didn't know very much about the details of the EEP initiative when he decided to hire **Arthur Brown**:

"And AB, Mr. Brown, he walked in one day and he asked me, did we need any help? Are we hiring anybody? And I said, 'Yeah.' And at that time he told me that he had just got out on parole and he told me he had served 40 or so years. And we sat down, and we talked, and I asked him, I said, 'Man, you want a job and you want to make your life better or you just trying to get a job because if you don't, you go back?' He said, 'No, man, I'm trying to do better.' I said, 'Okay, well that's good. So, this is what I'll do. I'll hire you.' And I said, 'I need a cook, assistant cook.' And we cook in steam kettles and we cook 60, 80 gallons of soup at a time. So, I said, 'It's not hard work, but it's not easy work. And the hardest thing for you to do is learn these recipes, but I'm going to give you the recipes. I'm also going to cook with you one or two a week until you learn those soups. And when you learn the soup, then we'll move on to the next soup and those you'll be cooking every week.' So, he picked up everything really well."



"Man, you ought to try some of the parole guys." I said, 'I have a guy that's on parole that's out and he's the guy that cooks these soups that we bring to you every day. And you know how the soups are.' They were like, 'We thought you were cooking.' 'No.' I said, 'I trained him to do it and he does it. I mean, he does it just as good as me. You didn't even know that it wasn't me doing it.' And I said, 'He's a great employee. He comes to work on time. I don't have to look for him.'"

James Johnson, Manager at Mike Anderson Seafood

Employee Experiences with the EEP

Many of the EEP employees I interviewed also availed themselves of other assistance and programming from LPP and credited the LPP classes and employment prep workshops for their job readiness. **Stephanie King**, who spent 27 years at LCIW, much of that time as a jailhouse lawyer, and the first graduate from Tulane's prison education program, was the first person Kyla Romanach hired at the East Baton Rouge public defender's office.

"The LPP classes that they give you are great. And I struggled a lot with technology. I worked with technology a lot, but obviously the technology we had was ancient and outdated, unbeknownst to me. Because a lot of the things I do now, I still struggle with some of the stuff, but it's amazing how much that they did help with those things. I enter a lot of data into the computer. I help my attorneys. I actually do motions sometimes that a lot of the other secretaries don't do. But I guess because of my experience, my attorneys have seen that I'm capable of doing that because all of them are not motions that are straight off the computer-generated templates that they have. So, I have to alter them and adapt them to the situation, whatever it is. But I run back and forth to the courtroom. I pull files, I update files, I put files back. I make the files; I enter the stuff in the computer and I deal with clients on the phone... It took me a while to realize that I actually had relevant experience. I mean, I didn't have this type of experience, but I definitely was able to draw on a whole bunch of my computer experience, my legal experience, every experience I had in prison to do this job effectively."

Like other EEP employees, Ms. King had a sense of responsibility as an "ambassador" for the program, that if she did a good job, her employer would be more likely to hire other formerly incarcerated people.



"When I came over here, LPP was like, 'Stephanie, you're the first person to ever have this opportunity and we want more people to be able to get a job. And if you can't do it, I need you to come say, I can't do this, or I need you to say it's too much for me or whatever, because we can't afford to screw it up because we want other people to have an open door.' And not only did I get a raise five months after I came here, two other people got hired. So obviously I didn't screw it up."

Stephanie King

Demetricy Moore and **Ricardo Carmouche** were also hired to work at the East Baton Rouge public defender's office, and both recognized the value of their own experiences for the job. Ms. Moore explained how difficult it was for her to navigate employment opportunities with a felony conviction when she came home after serving 25 years at LCIW:

"I had several degrees, but I also know that I was a convicted felon. I also know that on paper, people say we're pro-second chance, but soon as you fill out an application, it's always denied because of your criminal background check. And that's reality. That was the reality I was faced with. I filled out numerous applications. Matter of fact, I even did a DoorDash application that got denied because of my background check. You would think DoorDash, really. But DoorDash does a background check. So, I'm like, 'I can't even dash?'"

Almost all able-bodied incarcerated people in Louisiana work every day, having been sentenced to "hard labor," yet they have difficulty equating that experience with conventional work histories. Ms. Moore took a different view on this issue. Before taking the job at the public defender's office she did brief stints as a housekeeper and as an administrative assistant at an engineering firm.

"I did the interview, told them where I came from. I was incarcerated, but I also changed the narrative of my incarceration. I used it because when they asked the question, 'How would you do to deescalate a conflict in the workplace?' And me being in prison with people from different walks of life gave me that

experience to be able to deescalate a situation and do conflict management and resolution because in prison I was also a peer minister. So, instead of using it as a negative, I used my incarceration as a positive... My logic was the jobs I had in prison was jobs I can hold in a free world. I worked in a library. There's libraries out here. I worked in a kitchen. Piccadilly is a kitchen. I worked as a sound tech. I did housekeeping in there. So, the jobs that I had in prison was jobs that didn't give me pay but gave me experience."

After the opportunity opened up with the public defender's office, Ms. Moore realized that her experiences with the criminal legal system were also assets rather than something she should hide:

"What's meaningful is the fact that I get to help people that I was once in their shoes. And the one thing when I met [my supervisor] she was like, 'I don't care where you've been. I just care about getting the work done.' And I was like, 'Can I say something?' And she was like, 'Yeah.' I said, 'Well, I do care where I've been. And this is why. I care where I've been because this is no longer just cases to me because I know how I felt to get my setbacks when my public defender didn't have their files in order. So, I'm going to make sure if something goes wrong, it's because of the DA, not because of you.'"



Demetricy Moore

"If I got to run to the courthouse back and forth, I'm going to make sure because that's a life to me. That's just not a case. No matter what they did, they still deserve a fair trial. And if I can help my public defender do that, if I have to stay late because she's preparing for trial to make copies, I'm going to make sure within my power that she has everything she needs to do her job. And that's why this is so powerful for me because I wish somebody would've did it for me."

Ms. Moore acknowledged that reentry organizations can only do so much when it comes to biases and obstacles that formerly incarcerated people encounter. She

believes that formerly incarcerated people are the only ones who can change negative perceptions by their own example, and a little help.

“Ignorance is still out there. Most people don't look at people. They see the crime, but they don't see the people. I've just been blessed to surround myself with individuals that see me and not the crime or the mistake that I made. And I have a responsibility to change those perceptions. I don't think that reentry can address all those issues. Trust the process of whatever that look like and let people help you. We so wanting to do everything ourself because we don't want to be a burden, but let people help you. And then don't let them down.”

Ricardo Carmouche was the third person employed by the public defender's office and at the time of his interview was preparing to transition to a job there as an investigator. Like his coworkers, Demetricy Moore and Stephanie King, Mr. Carmouche sees his own experiences as an asset to his clients. He also recognizes how important the EEP program has been to his success.

“And if it wasn't for the EEP, if it wasn't for that program, I wouldn't even have this opportunity. I wouldn't be aware of it. I had a job set up prior to release working with a contractor that had a contract with EBR Parish Schools and I was going to be cleaning schools and I was ready. But I had no idea. The program has been beautiful. It's been beautiful ever since. I'm staying in one of their transition houses right now. They set me up with my current employer. They donated a vehicle to me, gave me transportation and stuff to help me. Even prior to that, they'll come and bring me to and from work and stuff like that. Man, without their support. I don't want to think of how it would be if I didn't have the Parole Project support. They understand our need for employment and everybody that comes to the Parole Project has a different skillset. And what they do is, and I love this about them, they assess us to determine what our skillsets are, and then they place us from there with all the available job opportunities and they do everything for us.”



"That's another thing I like about this job. Clients call and man, they stressed out and they worried and stuff like that. And I'm like, 'Man, I know how you feel, bro.' One dude said, 'Man, you don't know how I feel.' I said, 'Man, look.' And I don't mind telling certain people, 'Man, I just come home from spending 26 years in Angola.' I said, 'I've been what you going through years ago and so much more.'"

Ricardo Carmouche

Sometimes, the EEP job placements serve as steppingstones to other employment.

Stephen Tweedle spent 23 years in prison, much of that time working as a baker for the State Police Barracks and the food industry seemed like a logical starting place. LPP staff had established a good working relationship with the East Baton Rouge Council on Aging, and they had an opening for a baker in their Meals on Wheels program.

"I got my first real interview with people who were intent on hiring me, which was the Council on Aging. I went there, explained who I was, and they said, 'We don't care nothing about your crime. We not scared of you.' So that was their attitude. So, I fit right in with them, and I became a baker and using my skills ... I knew about restaurant operations, food service. So, I fit right in."

Mr. Tweedle explained that he has greater ambitions but is taking his time, and grateful for the assistance from LPP.

"My living situation right now is with the Louisiana Parole Project who's helping us. We work, pay rent and stay in facilities provided by them, helping us to transition into our own independence. That's very beautiful what they do. I'm actually grateful and everybody is grateful for that because if it wasn't for them, we would have nothing."



"I really appreciate the fact that LPP staff has been in prison, and they know exactly how it feels and what you need to survive and they actually apply that in our day to day program. One of the things that I get from EEP is that these guys are eager for our success because it makes all of us look good. And when I say 'us,' I'm talking about formerly incarcerated people."

Stephen Tweedle

When I interviewed Mr. Tweedle, he had just been offered a job as a car salesman at a Nissan dealership to start right away. He was excited for the change, but felt the need to give the Council on Aging fair notice,

"They've offered to hire me immediately. They wanted me to come work today. But of course, we're professional, so we have to give that two week notice so they can replace me with somebody because it is a hard job. And I know how that is."

Eric Denet, a man who spent his time as a paralegal and pursuing education while incarcerated, faced one obstacle after another with employment when he came home.

"So, trying to get into the field of being a paralegal, it was literally terrible because of my charge, basically. I've been to countless interviews. I done been through the final two. I'd been the last one, and it was just like, 'Hey, we're just going to do a background check and that'd be the last thing.' I mean, it was already the conversation of what I'll be doing and all of this stuff, and once they run the background check, it was wiped off right there. It was just like, 'Hey, we decided to go a different route.' Even after I explained to them the level of cases I did, the amount of cases I actually worked on."

When Will Monceaux, the general manager at Tsunami Sushi offered Mr. Denet a job as a grill chef, he was skeptical but decided to give it a try considering the barriers he was facing in the legal field.

“The opportunity came to go work at Tsunami, which is a high-end sushi restaurant, but I didn't want to take it because I actually didn't know how to cook, literally, and they was talking about a grill chef and I was like, ‘I can't do that. I don't know how to cook.’ So, it was funny because one of the guys told me, ‘Hey, just go watch YouTube.’ I said, ‘I don't think that's going to work like that.’ But I actually did watch some videos, even as crazy as that sounds, and I decided to take the job. They're a great set of people over there. The general manager, he comes and he explains and works with you, and he has a set of managers that are just phenomenal. So, he had the grill manager train me, and he had the patience for the job. He showed me a lot of things and walked me through it. And now I'm at the point, at this point, that I'm just on my own doing it now.”



“I mean, I've been through so much with the legal field, and when the opportunity came, I said, yeah, I do want to learn how to cook. And I stepped into it and now I actually enjoy it. So, I could see anywhere from three to five years at this job, probably advancing, not just learning how to cook, but to actually move further. I'm a grill chef now, but I'll move into a sushi chef and just keep moving through it to gain all the knowledge of everything.”

Eric Denet