

Empowered From Within:

Peer Research on Job Readiness



Unapologetically HERS, through the Participatory Action Research Leadership Program (PARLP), draws on a robust Participatory Action Research (PAR) project, where community researchers, incarcerated in the Central CA Women's Facility, conducted in-depth stakeholder interviews with their peers to collect firsthand experiences and insights. By synthesizing this qualitative data, they developed actionable recommendations aimed at enhancing job readiness and facilitating successful reentry.

Key Findings

Economic Injustice & Compensation



Current compensation is inadequate, averaging approximately \$120 a month, fostering financial insecurity and dependence on family or community support post-release.



Pay disparities between inside (incarcerated) and outside (community) shape perspectives on employment, significantly impacting motivation and long-term employment goals.

Systemic Barriers to Job Readiness

- ✓ CCWF programs are severely outdated, lacking essential training in modern technology (e.g., Zoom, Microsoft Office, Google Workspace, Android/iOS devices).
- ✓ Extensive waitlists delay access to vocational and technology programs, further impeding timely skill development for reentry.
- ✓ Critical gaps exist in financial literacy, budgeting skills, and cost-of-living education, intensifying economic hardship upon reentry into high-cost areas such as San Francisco and Los Angeles.
- ✓ The lack of sufficient educational providers and instructors within CCWF contributes to prolonged waitlists and limited program availability.
- ✓ Many incarcerated individuals have never held jobs outside of prison. Prison employment does not require traditional applications, resumes, or interview processes, leaving individuals without these critical experiences and skills, adversely affecting their confidence and limiting employment opportunities post-release.
- ✓ Current vocational and educational programs often lack direct relevance to realistic job opportunities and do not align with actual skillsets required by employers post-release.
- ✓ Individuals serving life or life-without-parole (LWOP) sentences often face exclusion from critical job-readiness programs and certification opportunities, significantly limiting their access to beneficial training.
- ✓ Programs fail to support realistic adaptation, neglecting essential job readiness practices such as applying for jobs online, navigating career pathways, and understanding real-world workplace expectations.



Persistent Housing and Cost-of-Living Challenges



California's housing costs far outpace income growth, forcing many formerly incarcerated people into multiple low-paying jobs just to survive.



Affordable housing shortages compound economic and social instability post-release.

Technology and Skill Training Deficits



Current CCWF vocational training programs fail to prepare individuals for digital work environments.



There is an urgent need for training in digital literacy, coding, office productivity tools, and entrepreneurial skills to close confidence and skill gaps.

Recommendations



Invest in Livable Wage Fellowships and Programs

Support community-based programs (e.g., Unapologetically HERS, CCWP, Ella Baker Center) providing livable wages, transferable skills, meaningful employment experiences, and networks crucial for successful reentry.

Develop and Fund Relevant Financial and Job Readiness Training

Support community-based programs (e.g., Unapologetically HERS, CCWP, Ella Baker Center) providing livable wages, transferable skills, meaningful employment experiences, and networks crucial for successful reentry.



Prioritize Comprehensive Tech and Vocational Training

Modernize vocational and technology training programs through short-term boot camps and digital skills training in essential tools and entrepreneurial skills.

Strengthen and Expand Peer Support & Networks

Support community-based programs (e.g., Unapologetically HERS, CCWP, Ella Baker Center) providing livable wages, transferable skills, meaningful employment experiences, and networks crucial for successful reentry.



Policy Considerations



Modernize and expand vocational and technology training programs to ensure they provide relevant, transferable skills aligned with current job market demands.



Allocate necessary resources to significantly reduce waitlists, hire adequate instructors, and expand timely access to vocational, technological, and educational programs for all incarcerated individuals.



End exclusionary practices restricting individuals serving life and LWOP sentences from participating in critical job-readiness and certification programs.



Ensure vocational and educational training programs closely align with realistic employment markets and the specific career goals of incarcerated individuals, enhancing the applicability and usefulness of training received inside.

Listen and Learn More



Explore the powerful narratives and in-depth insights of community researchers in our 10-episode podcast series: *Empowered From Within: Peer Research on Job Readiness*, available in May of 2025 on our website, Spotify and YouTube. Episodes will cover *Technology and Skills Sharing, Compensation and Livable Wages, Barriers to Employment, Networking and Mentorship, Motivation, Self-Empowerment and Reintegration, Accessibility and Relevance of Training Programs, Job Readiness & Realistic Adaptation, Interviewing and Hiring Process Preparedness, Program Duration and Structure in Leadership and Professional Development, and PARLP & Project Overview.*

Unapologetically HERS
www.uahers.org



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"If I didn't have peer support in my building, I wouldn't know how to get any information."

"Positive feedback boosted my self-esteem. Giving people a chance, not being judgmental, and just showing others it's possible, helps us stay focused and believe in ourselves."

"What keeps me going when feeling overwhelmed is working the vision that I see for myself and when I see people that I done time with come back into the prison showing us that there is life out there and how endless the opportunities are if we just work for it, they give me hope."



"Information is power. Understanding the cost of living would help us be more successful upon release."

"There is a 'homeless' quality to people in here, and paying a fair wage would change that."