

Returning Home: A Descriptive Evaluation of Prepare in New York City¹

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The Osborne Association's Prepare program aimed to improve relationships between formerly incarcerated fathers and their children using a four week (later shortened to three week) family-centered approach. The workshops focused on parenting and workforce skills, and were supplemented with one year of follow-up support. Prepare was refunded for an additional five years (2020-2025) past the first evaluation.

The Research and Evaluation Center at John Jay College of Criminal Justice (JohnJayREC) partnered with Osborne to evaluate the first five years of the program and answer four research questions –

1. Is the program successful in helping individuals re-engage with their children and families, relative to their level of engagement at the baseline? If so, how?
2. Is the program successful in helping individuals obtain and maintain employment? If so, how?
3. Is there a relationship between obtaining and maintaining employment and improved relationships between children and co-parents? If so, what?
4. Do interactions between staff and clients, as well as between clients, influence client outcomes? If so, how?

The JohnJayREC team examined data from 578 participants from cohorts one through 47. The final analytic sample included 263 individuals who completed three rounds of surveys. The research team supplemented the analysis with data collected from 27 individual participant interviews, 45 staff interviews, and five focus groups.

The research team's findings suggest Prepare was successful in helping individuals reconnect with their children and families. Seventy-seven percent of the analytic sample were successfully placed in a job. Almost all interview and focus group participants reported that the Prepare workshop curriculum, additional certification opportunities, and experienced job specialists made them feel equipped to search for employment.

1. Due to complications quantifying family reconnection constructs, as well as unfulfilled recidivism and employment data requests from New York State, the JohnJayREC team was unable to statistically support all of the findings from the interviews and focus groups. The questions raised during the analyses suggest avenues for future studies, including alternative ways to quantify improvements in family relationships and connectedness, and a closer, quantifiable examination of how bonds between participants in a program can impact participant success.

Program participants reported that obtaining and maintaining employment improved their ability to have a relationship with their children and families and the research found support for this in the survey analysis. Strong bonds between staff and participants motivated and encouraged participants to succeed in the program, inspired participants to continue working for a positive change after completing the program, and were associated with a higher likelihood of job placement.

Participants had almost universally positive things to say about Prepare. Feedback included high levels of satisfaction with the services, information, and support they received from the program. Most participants said they would recommend the Prepare program to others coming home from incarceration, and in many instances, they already had. Recommendation for program improvements were also gathered during interviews and focus groups with participants and staff. The information was shared with Osborne throughout the project.

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We talked about how to connect with your kids mentally – how to uplift and connect with your kid. We learned about how the tone of your voice could be discouraging and how not to holler at your kids. Know that you can talk to your kids . . . make your kids feel like they are something. You are their superhero. So if you be polite and respectful to them, they will catch on to being a better productive member of society. Yea, I learned a few tricks. I learned a lot of things.
-Program Participant

It gave me confidence. I was scared. Never had a legit job – I'd worked with my father and uncles before, but I had never went out on my own and looked for a job so they gave me confidence that I could do it. And with what they [staff] went through – they been through what I been through –look at where they are now. They were a perfect example.
-Program Participant

They make us feel wanted after being gone for so long because people do forget about us when you're [incarcerated], but that's what I like about Osborne, they always check on you. They keep looking for you even when you graduate.
-Program Participant