



Central Iowa Works

Returning Citizen Reentry Simulation

The Reentry Simulation was developed by the United States Attorney's office and designed to allow participants to gain an understanding of the obstacles offenders face upon release from a term of incarceration.

The purpose of the Reentry Simulation is to help participants more clearly understand the barriers ex-offenders face on their paths to re-establishing themselves as law-abiding, taxpaying citizens. By "living the life" of someone released from prison, participants experience first-hand the barriers and challenges encountered by returning citizens on a daily basis. This experience highlights many of the unnecessary barriers to successful reentry.

During the simulation participants are assigned the identity of a fictional offender and navigate through a series of events in an effort to successfully reintegrate into the community. They have to meet the strict life requirements that people released from prison have to meet or risk being returned to prison.

The obstacles that simulation participants face include obtaining identification cards, homelessness, lack of transportation, limited money, paying required court costs, visiting parole officers, seeking employment, and applying for assistance when all resources have been exhausted.

The simulation begins with each participant being given a "Life Card" which details his/her identity, circumstances of incarceration, level of education, and financial and employment status. They are then asked to navigate a month-in-the-life of that person. Each "week" lasts 15 minutes with "transportation tickets" required to move from station to station.

It takes approximately 20 to 25 individuals to operate the simulation. These individuals "staff" the various agencies where the participants are required to visit as they return to the community. These stations include an employment office, clinics, rehabilitation center, transportation office, treatment program, parole office, court system, bank, driver's license, shelter, and even a jail. The simulation last about 90 minutes and is designed to serve approximately 20 to 35 participants.

The simulation is intended to educate all members of the community regarding the challenges returning citizens face when leaving prison. Almost any person would find it a useful exercise, but policy makers, elected officials, faith-based communities, employers, community organizations, and law enforcement personnel may find it particularly helpful.