

## Changing Offenders' Behavior: Evaluating Moral Reconciliation Therapy (MRT) in the Better People Program



Portland Mayor Vera Katz was among those who attended Better People's Fall 2000 Graduation Ceremonies.

*"We have been impressed with the Better People approach because their MRT program thoroughly prepares people to be reliable employees. Their one-year follow up after placement is almost unprecedented in my many years of experience in Human Resources and is important to employment retention."*

– Scott Eave,  
Vice President Human Resources,  
Gunderson Inc.

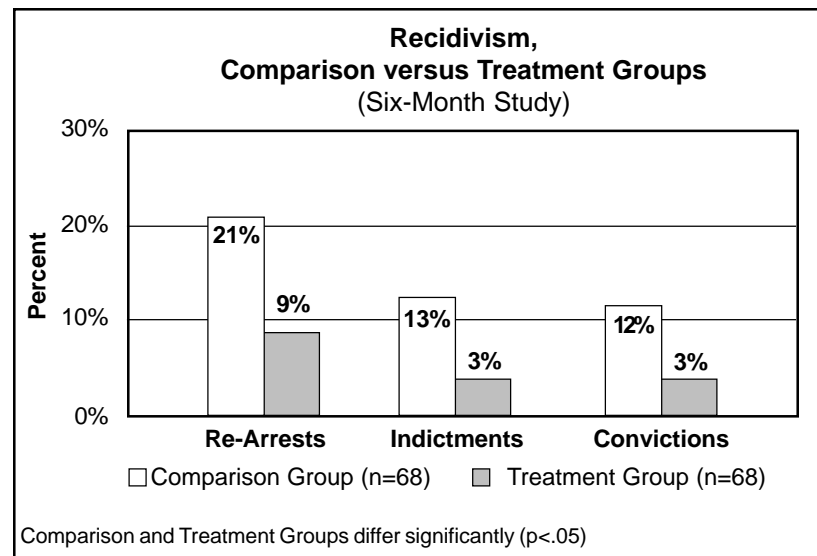
One of the highlights of our year was the release of an evaluation which showed that former offenders who take part in Better People's cognitive behavioral therapy program (Moral Reconciliation Therapy) are significantly less likely to reoffend than those who attended an orientation but chose not to participate.

According to the findings, compiled by Clariner M. Boston, MS, MPA, with technical assistance from Annette Jolin, Ph.D., 21 percent of those who attended a Better People orientation but did not take part in Better People's Moral Reconciliation Therapy were re-arrested over a six-month period compared to just nine percent of those former offenders who attended at least one Better People MRT group session.

The study further showed that 12 percent of the comparison group were re-convicted compared to three percent of those who availed themselves of the MRT approach through Better People. (See graphic below)

It is clear that we as a society must do more to lower recidivism rates, and this evaluation is a first step in demonstrating Better People's effectiveness in meeting that important goal.

The full report can be viewed on-line at [www.betterpeople.org](http://www.betterpeople.org).



This chart shows evidence of Better People's success in meeting our number one goal – reducing recidivism rates in Multnomah County. Treatment Group refers to clients who attended at least one Better People MRT group session.

## The Better People Mission Statement: To Dramatically Reduce Recidivism (offenders returning to crime) In Multnomah County and Other Areas

### What We Do and How We Do It:

Since its inception in 1998, Better People's goal has been to reduce the number of people from Multnomah County and other areas who return to crime.

This goal is being accomplished with a three-pronged approach that includes cognitive-behavioral counseling using Moral Reconciliation Therapy, living-wage employment and hands-on follow-up for one year to help Better People clients retain their jobs.

Clients must be at least 18 years old, they must be clean and sober for at least 30 days prior to acceptance, and display a commitment to attending group sessions that utilize Moral Reconciliation Therapy.

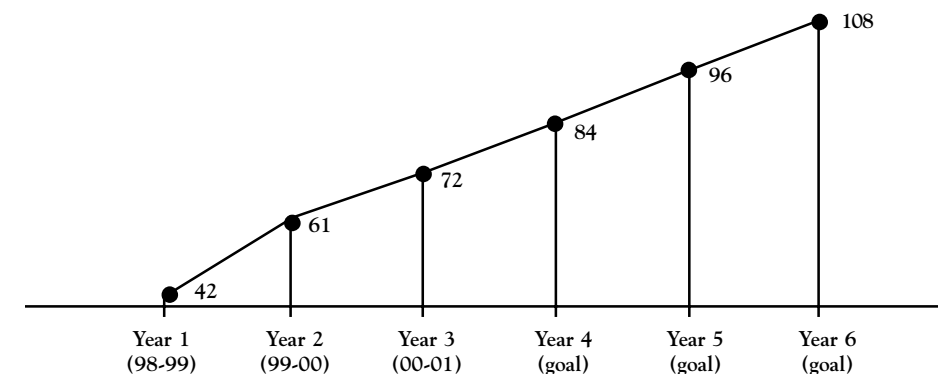
Under the direction of Better People facilitators, clients move through steps aimed at helping them identify and change the patterns of thought and behavior that have led to criminality in the past.

Once clients have demonstrated their commitment by passing through at least three steps in the MRT program, they are eligible for employment through Better People's referral program.

Better People works only with employers who pay at least \$8 per hour and offer health benefits. Clients receive ongoing support through Better People's retention program, which monitors a client's work performance in cooperation with employers.



Better People Executive Director Chip Shields has become an advocate for "what works" in reducing recidivism. Shields played an important role in restoring \$9 million in cuts to prison programs as part of the Oregon Criminal Justice Reform Coalition, organized by the Western Prison Project.



The chart at left tracks the job-placement growth of Better People's program since 1998 and highlights goals for the future.

## Better People Exceeding Job Retention Standards



Board members David Tarlow, Sam Jackson, Jr. and staff Alison Meier watch as staff Clariner Boston hugs graduate Ron Miller. Mr. Miller, who started at \$13.85/hour, celebrated one year on the job August 30, 2000.

Finding jobs for former offenders isn't as hard as it might at first appear. The tough part is keeping them at living-wage jobs, and that is where Better People's approach is truly succeeding.

Other nationally recognized former offender employment programs typically achieve a 180-day (six-month) job-retention rate of between 50 to 55 percent.<sup>3</sup> Better People's 180-day job retention rate is 76 percent.

Our goal for 2001-02 is to have 70 percent job retention at one year, and we think that goal is within reach. For job placements where Better People directly arranged the interview (what we call direct placements) our job retention rate since 1998 is 70 percent at one year. We know of no other offender-specific program that tracks job retention to 365 days.

What this strong job-retention rate means to businesses is that they can hire better people through Better People. This satisfaction means they will continue hiring from us and may begin to see all former offenders generally as a potential source of reliable talent.

In addition to higher-than-average retention rates, wages for Better People clients are higher, as well. Since 1998, Better People's average wage for job placements is \$8.70/hr. The wage rate was \$9.05/hr. for direct placements. Other former offender programs around the country have reported average wages of \$6.30 per hour in New York to \$7.25 per hour in St. Louis.<sup>4</sup>

### Placement and Retention Outcomes in 2000-2001

Enrolled <sup>1</sup>	Completed <sup>2</sup> MRT Step 3 (Job Ready)	Employed On Entry	Employment Placements	30-Day Retention	90-Day Retention	180-Day Retention	365-Day Retention	Active Clients	Waiting List
347	187	23	72	97%	94%	77%	58%	63	40

### Placement and Retention Outcomes Since June 1998

Enrolled	Completed MRT Step 3 (Job Ready)	Employment Placements	30-Day Retention	90-Day Retention	180-Day Retention	365-Day Retention
712	403	175	97%	88%	76%	60%

<sup>1</sup> Enrolled means client paid the one-time \$25 enrollment fee and attended at least one MRT session. Referral agencies often pay part of the enrollment fee, but all Better People clients must pay something, even if it is only \$1.

<sup>2</sup> Step 3 is the MRT step where clients become eligible to be placed in permanent, full-time jobs that pay a minimum of \$8/hr. plus health benefits. The Step 3 benchmark is analogous to what other agencies consider "job ready." It takes about three weeks for clients to pass Step 3. Better People refers clients to our partner temporary employment agencies so that they can earn some income while they work toward Step 3.

<sup>3</sup> In their Urban Institute report *From Prison to Home: The Dimensions of and Consequences of Prisoner Reentry*, Travis et al. (2001, p. 33) note that The Center for Employment Opportunities in New York has a 50% job retention rate at six months. A former offender employment agency that Better People Executive Director Chip Shields worked for previously has consistently had a job retention rate of around 55% although that rate has increased to 80% for welfare-recipient clients funded to receive intensive job-retention assistance.

<sup>4</sup> See Buck (2000) *Getting Back to Work: Employment Programs for Ex-Offenders*, p. 28.— a Public/Private Ventures report.

## Thank You Better People Referral Sources

- Adult & Family Services
- Alpha House
- ASAP Treatment
- Boeing Company
- Brooks Employment Services
- Center For Community Mental Health
- Central City Concern
- Clackamas Co. Voc. Rehabilitation
- Clackamas County Community Corrections
- Clark County Washington Department of Corrections
- CODA
- Columbia River Correctional Institution (CRCI)
- Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde
- CRCI - Turning Point
- CRCI - Women in Community Service
- DePaul Treatment Centers, Inc.
- Dr. Wollert & Associates
- East Portland Disability Services
- Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution
- Friendly House
- Full Spectrum Consulting
- Goodwill Industries
- Gunderson Inc.
- Hope Springs
- IJIP
- Inact
- Interchange
- Kon-A-Way Til-Li-Kum PC
- Jean's Place
- JOIN
- LDS Employment Services
- LOTUS (formerly CPA)
- Millcreek Correctional Institution
- Multnomah County Close Street Supervision
- Multnomah County Children & Family Services
- Multnomah County Community Court
- Multnomah County Inverness Jail
- Multnomah County Department of Community Justice (DCJ)
- Multnomah County DCJ Day Reporting Center
- Multnomah County DCJ African American Program
- Multnomah County Restitution Center
- Multnomah County Sheriff's Office
- Multnomah County Courts



Alumnus Bart Smith (front) and Better People Corporate Representative David Applin listen to another alumnus speak at the July 2001 alumni retreat. Mr. Smith celebrated his one-year employment anniversary in September 2001.

**Better People Alumni Club Mission:**  
*People recovering their lives, reaching out to help others.*

*"Varicast, a foundry in North Portland, has enjoyed a positive relationship with Better People for over two years. Three of the four people we've hired from Better People have been with us for over one year. I believe this is due in no small part to Better People's MRT program on the front end, coupled with long-term job retention assistance on the back end."*

– Veva Goehler, Varicast

- Multnomah County Aging & Disability Services
- Multnomah County Forest Project
- NARA
- National Council On Aging
- Northeast Workforce Center
- Northwest Pilot Project
- NE One Stop Career Center
- Oregon Health Sciences University Options
- Oregon Council For Hispanic Advancement
- Oregon Employment Department
- Oregon State Penitentiary
- Oregon Youth Authority
- Portland Community College - Skill Center
- Portland Community College - Steps To Success
- Portland Community College - Dislocated Workers Program
- Salvation Army
- Seventh Step
- Shutter Creek Summit Camp
- Sisters of the Road Café
- Southeast Works
- St. Andrews Catholic Church
- St. Joseph The Worker
- St. Vincent de Paul
- Stewart & Steele
- STOP Drug Court
- Touchtone
- Transition Projects, Inc.
- U.S. Child Support Program
- U.S. Public Defender
- U.S. Pretrial Services
- U.S. Probation & Parole
- Uhuru Sa Sa
- Union Gospel Mission
- Veterans Administration – CARS
- Volunteers of America Men's Residential Center
- Volunteers of America Women's Residential Center
- Vocational Rehabilitation
- Washington County Corrections
- West Women's Shelter
- Western Business College
- William Temple House
- Youth Opportunity Center
- YWCA