

SPRING 2007



Our mission is to provide opportunities for children and their families to move from poverty and dependence to self-reliance.

# The Piton Perspective

Connecting the Denver Community to Neighborhood Facts and Piton Foundation Programs

## Study Portrays Struggles People Face After Prison

Colorado's prison population has skyrocketed. In 1980, there were fewer than 3,000 people in state prisons. By 2007, as a result of tougher sentencing policies, there were over 22,000 people in prison – an increase of 600%. In addition to the strain this has put on the state's budget, the substantial impact on families and communities cannot be underestimated. People are being incarcerated and released at historic volumes. Last year alone, 9,000 people were released from prison in Colorado.

“Prisoner reentry” – as the process of leaving prison and returning to society is known – presents challenges both for the person leaving prison as well as for the families and communities to which they return. The situation has captured the interest of The Piton Foundation – which focuses on improving the lives of low-income children – because most of the men and women going to prison have children, and a disproportionate number of people released are returning to a handful of lower-income Denver neighborhoods.



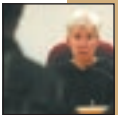
Piton's recent analysis of data from the Colorado Department of Corrections and additional research with people on parole in the Denver area contribute to our understanding about the problems that formerly incarcerated individuals face as they try to reintegrate into society.

- A quarter of people on parole in the metro area, more than one-third in Denver, end up in homeless shelters or other temporary housing.
- At least three-quarters had a history of drug problems before prison; 55% of those whose parole was revoked report continued substance abuse problems after release.
- People coming out of prison feel unprepared and without the support they need from their parole officers, families, or community organizations.
- Finding and keeping a job is the number one problem identified by people getting out of prison. Parolees cite lack of identification papers and driver's licenses, employers' reluctance to hire people with criminal records, and expenses associated with their parole as major work-related barriers.

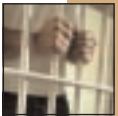
### INSIDE THIS ISSUE



**2**  
Piton's Perspective



**3**  
Prisoner Reentry Study



**7**  
Piton Supports Emerging Community Issues



**8**  
Foundation News

THE PITON FOUNDATION



THE COMMUNITY INVESTMENT DIVISION OF  
GARY-WILLIAMS ENERGY CORPORATION

## Staff

**Terri Bailey**  
*Senior Research Officer*

**Matthew Barry**  
*Research Officer*

**Pamela Buckley, Ph.D.**  
*Research and Evaluation Officer*

**Carol Bush**  
*Chief Financial Officer*

**Mary Gittings Cronin**  
*President and Executive Director*

**Diane DiGiacomo**  
*Communications Officer*

**Anne Flear**  
*Program Assistant*

**Alan Gottlieb**  
*Program Officer*

**Bernita Hadley**  
*Communications Associate*

**Hi Howard**  
*Program Officer*

**Christine Márquez**  
*Program Development Manager –  
Strengthening Communities*

**Jody Miranda**  
*Receptionist*

**Lisa Montagu**  
*Research Associate*

**Jeanette Montoya**  
*Program Assistant*

**Lisa Roy**  
*Program Officer*

**Van Schoales**  
*Program Officer*

All e-mail addresses are:  
first initial and last name  
@piton.org

370 17th Street, Suite 5300  
Denver, CO 80202  
303-825-6246

*Editor:* Diane M. DiGiacomo  
*Researchers:* Terri Bailey,  
Matthew Barry, and  
Pamela Buckley, Ph.D.

THE PITON FOUNDATION



THE COMMUNITY INVESTMENT DIVISION OF  
GARY-WILLIAMS ENERGY CORPORATION



# Piton's

## P E R S P E C T I V E

As a foundation focused on poverty in Denver for 30 years, crime and safety are issues that continually surface in working with residents of low-income neighborhoods. Crime rates are typically high in the same neighborhoods where poverty rates are high. Safety is quite often the number-one concern of people living in lower-income neighborhoods. And over the years, Piton has supported numerous community- and faith-based groups that have been involved in gang prevention efforts, neighborhood watch, and even prison visitation programs, but we've had little to do with the actual prisoner population.

However, about four years ago we began to hear more about the struggles many individuals coming out of prisons face as they return to the communities in which they live. We heard over and over again about the huge impact this was having on neighborhoods, on the families living there, and those coming out of prison. And Denver is not alone. Cities across America are facing the same challenge. A number of them are members of the National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership. NNIP routinely works to analyze emerging trends and neighborhood issues across cities. Through NNIP, an opportunity presented itself for Piton to work with other cities to analyze the extent and impact on previously incarcerated persons returning to Denver neighborhoods.

We believe that "prisoner reentry" is a timely topic that needs more public discussion and that's why it is the theme of this issue of "The Piton Perspective." Here's what we learned through our work:

1) Colorado is locking up and releasing prisoners at historic rates. By 2009, the state is expected to have an inmate population of 25,000, up from under 3,000 in 1980. When prisoners are released – at a rate of about 9,000 per year – more than half return to live in Denver and the other metro counties, and they are increasingly concentrated in lower-income neighborhoods.

The reality is that most people released from prison face significant barriers that prevent them from being able to find steady work, affordable housing, or get other help they may need. Many of them are not very well prepared to return to society. Two out of three will not succeed and will be reincarcerated. Unless we address this high failure rate, the prison population will continue to grow, families will be destabilized, and public safety jeopardized.

2) State spending on prisons has increased from \$57 million in 1985 to a projected \$703 million in 2007. Our spending on prisons has grown from less than 2% of the state's budget to almost 9%. The spiraling costs of prisons, as Gov. Bill Ritter pointed out in his first State of the State speech, is hurting the state's ability to fund education and health care.

3) People released from prison also make up a growing proportion of the homeless in Denver because the city has shelters to house them. Of the 1,377 people on parole in Denver, as many as 37% are homeless and living in temporary shelters and motels.

4) More than three-quarters of people in prison in Colorado have children. Research tells us that children of prisoners are six times more likely than other children to be incarcerated at some point in their lives. Without effective intervention strategies, as many as 70% of these children will become involved with the criminal justice system.

From Piton's perspective, it is clear that Colorado must do more to make sure the growing population of people coming out of prison is better prepared to succeed outside by getting the education, substance abuse treatment and mental health services they need.

We hope that by educating ourselves and the public about the issue of prisoner reentry, a greater public dialogue will develop.

Mary Gittings Cronin  
*President*

# Study Explains High Prisoner Reentry Failure Rate

People whose parole has been revoked account for a large percentage of the burgeoning prison admissions each year. In 2006, of the 10,168 people admitted to Colorado prisons, 3,826 were for parole revocations. Of those, 72% were for technical violations, such as failing to notify the parole officer about a move or failing to show up for an appointment; 27% for new crimes.

Most caught in this revolving door of people entering, paroled, and reentering prison are people from the Denver metro area. Among the Department of Corrections data that The Piton Foundation analyzed was an address file of the 6,614 parolees under active DOC supervision as of May 2007; 3,379 of them in the metro area. More people are on parole in Denver (1,377) than any other Colorado county.

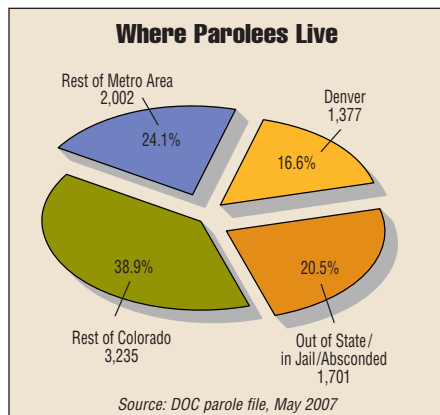
The Piton Foundation also surveyed people whose parole was revoked and who were returned to Colorado prisons. This was followed by a second survey and focus groups with people who were still out on parole to see if their experiences were different than those who had already failed on parole.

Across both surveys, most were male (82%), white (37%) or African American (31%), and single (52%). Almost three quarters had children under the age of 18 (73%).

When analyzing the challenges and barriers to success, however, there were few differences between those who had already failed and those who were struggling to succeed. Where those differences exist, they are noted in the analysis that follows.

## A sense of hopelessness

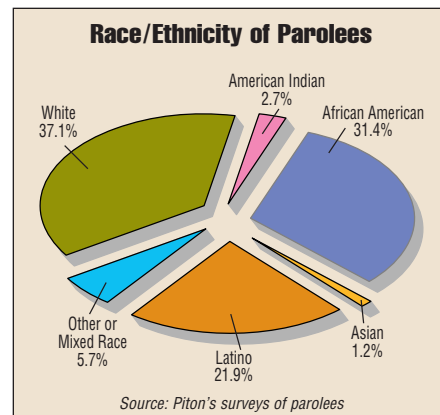
People on parole, not surprisingly, had a more positive outlook and sense of confidence in their ability to succeed than



those whose parole was revoked. But the longer people remain on parole, the harder it becomes to maintain that sense of optimism. What starts as confidence quickly erodes to anger and hopelessness. Rather than getting easier, parolees report that life gets more difficult the longer one is on parole.



*"I was confident I would make it and never come back to this, that's for sure. But once you start falling back, and you get so deep in the hole and you don't know how to dig your way out, you're afraid and scared as hell."*



*"At first, I believed I would make it. Then as weeks went by, it got harder, then months. I became nervous and afraid. I began to turn to the easy way out – drugs and alcohol."*



– Inmates with parole revoked

For those whose parole was revoked, only one-third felt prepared for their last release (32%), and only one in four said they got the help they needed from their caseworker to develop a good parole plan prior to their release (26%).

There is no time to orient or deal with the culture shock people

## The Prisoner Reentry Study Methodology

The Piton Foundation's prisoner reentry study had two parts: an analysis of data from the Colorado Department of Corrections (DOC) and surveys and focus groups conducted with people in prison or on parole, and with service providers.

A community advisory committee worked closely with Piton on the project. The group included representatives of the Colorado Criminal Justice Reform Coalition, Denver and Regis universities, community residents from lower-income Denver neighborhoods, and representatives of community-based organizations involved in providing reentry services to people released from prison.

In addition to the address file of the 6,614 parolees under active DOC supervision, The Piton Foundation also analyzed DOC data from the Level of Supervision Inventory (LSI) conducted on an unduplicated sample of 5,902 people released from prison to the six-county metro area between January 1, 2003 and July 15, 2005. The LSI is a standardized risk/needs assessment tool designed to pinpoint areas of need to prevent recidivism.

The DOC data pointed to a number of barriers to successful reentry into community life – notably homelessness, limited employability, substance abuse, and mental illness. The advisory committee decided to delve deeper into the reasons people fail and to provide some insight into the scope and impact of this failure on persons returning to Denver and the surrounding communities. The second part of the study entailed two surveys and focus groups with people on parole and service providers serving this population. The first survey was conducted with 157 people who were not successful on parole. The second survey was conducted with 256 people on parole. The surveys were conducted by students and faculty from Regis University and staff from the Colorado Criminal Justice Reform Coalition. The focus groups were conducted by faculty from Denver University.

experience when they are released from prison. They are required as a condition of parole to be functional from day one.



*"I was afraid. I was nervous and somewhat shy. I felt like I was from another planet after doing seven and a half on a nine. I was lost; trying to remember phone numbers and addresses was a nightmare. The only number I couldn't forget was my DOC number."*

*"Going to a halfway house before release would have made it easier to succeed instead of just being thrown out the door with \$100 and no skills, no place to go, and no support system."*

– Inmates with parole revoked

The study reveals a number of factors that help explain this growing hopelessness and for many, their ultimate failure on the outside.

## The struggle to find and keep a job

DOC data reveal a patchy work history and poor educational achievement for those coming out of prisons into the Denver metro area. Close to one third had never been employed for a full year (32%); and more than half were employed less than 6 months in the year prior to their incarceration (55%). Lack of education was also a problem. According to the data, more than half had not completed regular high school (58%). This was particularly a problem for Latinos, 72% had less than a 12th grade regular education.

In surveys and focus groups, both people on parole and those revoked identified employment as the biggest reentry challenge they faced. Roughly half of those surveyed said that it was difficult for them to find or keep a job because of their felony conviction. Other barriers included lack of identification documents, not being permitted to drive, and required meetings during work hours.

Nearly three-quarters of both survey samples were employed (or had been employed the last time they were on parole), though not all full time. Yet more than half found it difficult to earn enough money to support themselves. On average, the median wage of survey respondents who worked full time was \$10 an hour, or about \$21,000 a year.



*"I was nervous at first and then I got scared 'cause I didn't have a sturdy foundation out there. I had no job and I was lost without hope. I know I can succeed, but with the constant debt that I was in with restitution, I had to pay for classes and all, broke as a joke, so I ran to the drugs to drown it all."*

– Inmate with parole revoked

But under the state's mandatory parole requirements, parolees must keep a job. Violating parole could mean going back to prison.

## A stable place to live

DOC data revealed a large number of people, particularly in Denver, are homeless, living in homeless shelters or motel. Much of the concentration of homeless in Denver is because Denver is where more of the facilities for the homeless are located. More than one-third of those on parole in Denver are living in shelters or other temporary housing<sup>1</sup>.



*"I still don't have answers, but possibly first and most of all being able to have a roof over my head at night to start would be a relief. That is half the battle."*

Employment Issues	Survey of Persons Whose Parole was Revoked	Survey of Persons on Parole
<i>Found it difficult to find or keep a job because:</i>		
Felony conviction . . . . .	56%	46%
Too many parole-related meetings or classes during work hours . . . . .	57%	27%
Not permitted to drive . . . . .	46%	26%
<i>Biggest problems:</i>		
Having enough money to support self . . . . .	59%	49%
Finding a job . . . . .	41%	39%
Keeping a job . . . . .	31%	22%
Getting CO ID . . . . .	34%	32%

*"There is NO HOUSING. People are being released, discharged or paroled, broke and homeless, and in the middle of winter, without even adequate clothing to even keep them alive if they had to sleep outside."*



– Inmates with parole revoked

County	Number of Parolees	Percent of Parolees in Temporary or Less than Permanent Housing
Adams . . . . .	.621	18.5%
Arapahoe . . . . .	.634	16.4%
Boulder . . . . .	.37	23.6%
Broomfield . . . . .	3	20.0%
Douglas . . . . .	.44	4.5%
Jefferson . . . . .	.531	11.5%
Denver . . . . .	1,377	36.7%
Metro Total . . .	3,379	24.5%

The surveys substantiated that lack of stable housing is a major problem. Almost half (48%) of those who failed on parole said that finding a place to live was one of their biggest problems. Among both survey groups, those revoked and those still out on parole, roughly one-quarter reported spending their first night after release on the street, in a shelter, or in a motel.

<sup>1</sup> This represents the percent of Denver parolees under active supervision who live with one or more other parolees in shelters, other temporary housing, or less than preferred housing that may or may not be temporary. Other parolees who have absconded or whose whereabouts are unknown may or may not be homeless as well.

Research by the Colorado Criminal Justice Reform Coalition points to two main reasons for parolees in Denver being homeless: 1) DOC regulations prohibit people on parole from associating with family members who have criminal convictions, and 2) the parolee has no family or friends in the area. Survey and focus group participants also said discrimination against felons hindered their efforts to find housing.



*"I don't know how many applications I filled out and paid a \$25-\$30 application fee, probably 20 or 30, until I finally found an apartment that would take a felon. The places were more than happy to take my application fee though."*

– Parolee

Finding housing is only half the battle. Keeping stable housing may be even harder to achieve. More than three quarters of those on parole for six months or more reported having lived in three different places since their release (78%).

### Substance abuse – the revolving door

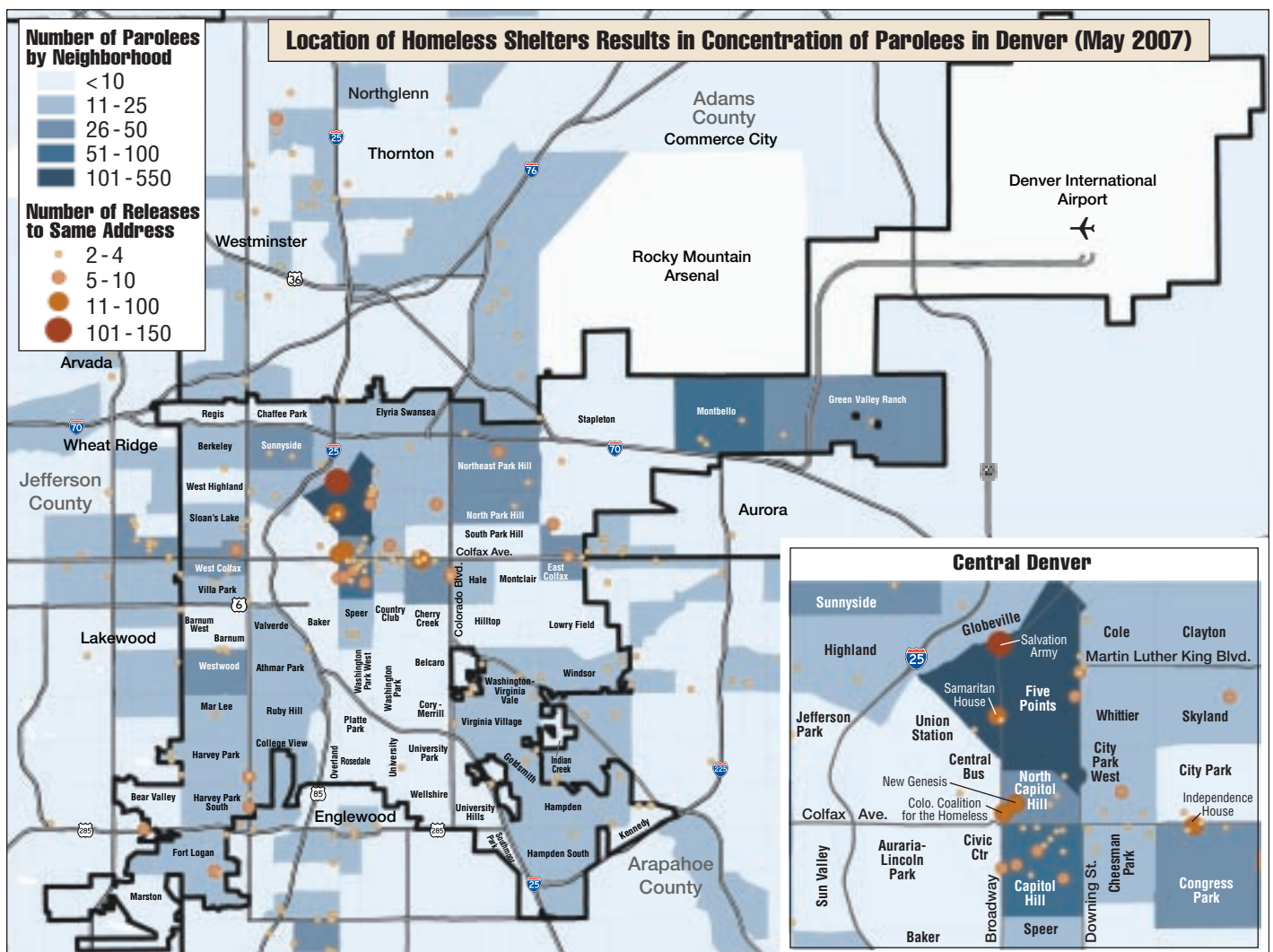
Almost three-quarters of people in prison had a drug or alcohol problem at some time in their lives, and almost half reported a problem with drugs as recently as the year prior to going to prison according to DOC data. Both surveys and the focus group results substantiate this as a major obstacle to a person's success on parole. Consistent across all three samples was the tendency for many to turn to drugs and alcohol as a way of coping with the stress of life on parole.

For those whose parole was revoked, 62% reported that they participated in drug and alcohol classes while in prison, but still over half (55%) attributed their parole revocation to drinking and/or drug use. If parolees are caught drinking or fail a drug test, they can go back to prison.

Significant substance abuse treatment needs emerged from focus group data analysis. Many had been convicted of drug-related crimes and have substance abuse problems that pose major challenges while on parole. Prohibitive substance abuse treatment costs were also noted as barriers to success.



*"I was very confident and had high hopes of succeeding on parole, but being in that Colfax area is what triggers my drug*



*use... I tried to get help for my problem, but could not catch the scheduled provider at his office.”*  
 – Inmate with parole revoked

## Inadequate support to succeed

Significant numbers of people whose parole was revoked reported that among their biggest problems was not being able to renew relationships with the most significant people in their lives. People also struggled to get the help they needed from family or friends. Those still out on parole lag only slightly behind in naming these as significant problems.



*“I was lonely and lost, didn’t have anyone, didn’t know anyone. I wanted to have a regular life, but I felt completely out of place and I felt as sad as I used to feel in prison.”*

– Inmate with parole revoked

Family/Social Support Issues	Survey of Persons Whose Parole was Revoked	Survey of Persons on Parole
<i>Biggest problems:</i>		
Renewing relationships with most significant people in my life . . . . .	40%	27%
Getting help I need from family and/or friends . . . . .	36%	21%
Being socially accepted . . . . .	30%	26%

This isolation is in part due to the prohibition against associating with family members who have criminal convictions. For others, their family is out of state.



*“I wanted to parole where my family is out of state and where I have support. If I had been able to visit my brothers sometime would have helped. Other than them I have no family here.”*

– Inmate with parole revoked

The surveys also asked about the support people received from their parole officers. In 1993, Colorado passed legislation requiring mandatory parole for all crimes committed on or after

July 1, 1993. The minimum mandatory parole was one year for class 6 offenses and up to five years for class 2 offenses.

People on parole when surveyed reported much more positive relationships with their parole officers than those whose parole had been revoked. 79% of those on parole said they got what they needed from their parole officer compared to just 36% of those whose parole was revoked.

Consistent across both survey groups was the punitive culture of parole. People on parole generally reported that parole seemed like an additional punishment rather than help to succeed. Long waits, never knowing what to expect, the constant walking on eggshells all add up.

Unfortunately, the longer a person is out on parole, the greater their likelihood of having multiple parole officers; 81% of those on parole for 6 months or more had 3 different parole officers.

*“Have to be somebody you’re not, lie to them, walking on ice at all times. Not a friendly atmosphere.”* – Parolee

*“I wanted to succeed, make it, support myself, family, children, etc. I love to try to prove everyone wrong, but they make it hard at the same time in every way. All they have to do is help us and they would be amazed on how many people would stay out and be successful in life.”*



*“Violated and trapped, overwhelmed. I expected help, not someone trying to make me fail. I was released with a confident head up, determination, and I quickly was knocked down.”*

– Inmates with parole revoked



## Adding up the challenges

Many people coming out of Colorado prisons face not just one of the challenges discussed but most of them. Overwhelmed with requirements and financial burdens, they struggle to find a job and stable housing, and feeling ill prepared and unsupported all add up and take their toll. What starts out as confidence quickly deteriorates.

In the survey of persons whose parole was revoked, 69% reported being depressed. The DOC data confirm this finding. More than half of the people coming out of prison and into the metro area have moderate mental health problems such as anxiety and depression (53%), and significant numbers have more severe mental health problems (11%). This is even more the case for women, 70% of whom are assessed with moderate mental health problems, 17% with severe problems. By 2008, the DOC projects that one out of every five people in prison will suffer from a serious mental illness.<sup>2</sup>

This issue of “The Piton Perspective,” however, is not intended to present the men and women coming out of Colorado prisons as helpless victims. All of them have been convicted of crimes and many of the challenges they face are the result of their own poor choices. But when so many fail in their attempt to reenter society, we must ask ourselves whether we can afford the high cost of failure, a cost that is being borne by the victims of future crimes, the taxpayers who pay the enormous costs of building more prisons to house an ever increasing number of prisoners, the communities that bear the disproportionate burden of their return, and the families and children they leave behind. We hope you will agree with us that it is a question worth asking.

<sup>2</sup> Colorado Department of Corrections, Budget Request, 2004-05, 625.

# Piton Program

## SUPPORTS EMERGING COMMUNITY ISSUES

“Strengthening Communities” is one of The Piton Foundation’s three program areas in which it concentrates its efforts to provide opportunities for children and their families to move from poverty to self-reliance. Improving pre K-12 education and increasing economic opportunity are the other two.



### The Prisoner Reentry Project

The Piton Foundation has a long history of working with the Denver community to use data to influence public policy and program practice. Focusing on Denver’s lower-income neighborhoods, Piton’s strengthening communities program provides technical assistance and support to community-based efforts, including training residents in strategies for using information for social action. Through this ongoing work, the issue of prisoner reentry, and its impact on former prisoners, their families, and their neighborhoods, emerged as a key topic of interest.

This local interest led to Piton’s involvement in the national Reentry Mapping Network. This network, lead by the Urban Institute and involving organizations from 14 cities, partners with community members and local stakeholders to access and analyze data related to incarceration and reentry to develop strategies to improve reentry outcomes.

Piton formed a community advisory committee to advise the research, review the reentry data from the

Colorado Department of Corrections, and to develop and implement a strategy for disseminating the findings and engaging the community on the issue of prisoner reentry. The committee consists of residents from lower-income Denver neighborhoods and representatives of community-based organization that serve formerly incarcerated populations, as well as the Colorado Criminal Justice Reform Coalition.

Meeting over an 18-month period, the community advisory committee determined the need to collect more information to gain a fuller picture of the barriers to successful reentry than could be obtained from the DOC data alone. They decided to collect primary data about five priority areas identified through the analysis of the initial data: employment, housing and homelessness, substance abuse, mental health, and family and social support. Piton supported and provided staff oversight to the research, which is described in this newsletter. This research ultimately informed the strategic plan developed by the Colorado Criminal Justice Reform Coalition.

### Colorado Criminal Justice Reform Coalition's Parole/Reentry Strategic Plan, 2007-2008

The Colorado Criminal Justice Reform Coalition (CCJRC) is a diverse, statewide coalition of individuals, organizations, and faith communities united to reverse the excessive use of incarceration and halt the privatization of prisons in Colorado

Its goals are to end the discriminatory nature of the criminal justice system and to redirect funding and policy priorities to substance abuse and mental health treatment, alternatives to incarceration, effective prisoner re-entry, and other strategies that will most effectively strengthen communities.

Its 2007-2008 strategic plan related to prisoner reentry includes:

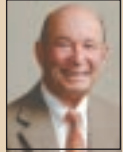
- 1) releasing a comprehensive research report of the data highlighted in this issue of “The Piton Perspective”;
- 2) educating policy makers and the public on the scope of the problem and the need for reform at the state and local level;
- 3) improving pre-release planning by providing comprehensive information on release planning and community resources to people incarcerated, people released from jail/prison, families of people in jail/prison, community service providers, and criminal justice professionals;
- 4) reforming parole laws;
- 5) reducing homelessness among people released from prison;
- 6) increasing funding for more community-based re-entry services and connecting people with those services;
- 7) advocating for the development of effective intervention steps for people at risk of revocation on parole in order to reduce the revocation rate.

For more information go to [www.ccjrc.org](http://www.ccjrc.org)

# Foundation

## NEWS

### Sam Gary, Ron Williams Honored for Investments in Education



Sam Gary



Ron Williams

Sam Gary and Ron Williams were recognized for their long-time support of education by the Public Education and Business Coalition. PEBC presented Gary, Piton's founder and chairman, and Williams, president of Gary-Williams Energy and Piton's vice chairman, with the Cal Frazier Investing in Education Award at its annual luncheon in early May.

### Piton Partners with News on School Choice Series



The Piton Foundation partnered with the Rocky Mountain News on a week-long series examining the impact of school choice on Denver Public Schools. The series, "Leaving to Learn: DPS' Enrollment Gap," which ran April 16-22, featured Piton's estimates of the school-age population in Denver to inform the analysis of where children in Denver are going to school. The research

shows that about one-quarter of school-age children in Denver are attending either private schools or suburban school districts. To read the series, go to [www.piton.org](http://www.piton.org).

### Alan Gottlieb Takes New Post at PEBC



Alan Gottlieb, Piton Foundation education program officer for the past nine years, is leaving July 1 to take the position of vice president for policy and business engagement at the Public Education and Business Coalition. There he will continue to edit HeadFirst magazine, the HeadFirst electronic newsletter, and a blog focused on statewide education policy. In addition, he will lead PEBC policy initiatives and hopes to write some books on education issues as well. Piton looks forward to continuing to work with Alan, and the PEBC, on education reform issues.

### Piton Welcomes Two New Staff

Piton is pleased to welcome Lisa Montagu as a research associate and Christine Márquez as a program development manager. Lisa holds a master's degree in urban and regional planning from the University of Illinois and is working toward a master's degree in library and information science at the University of Denver. Christine holds a bachelor's degree in political science, international relations from the University of California at Los Angeles and a master's in nonprofit management from Regis University. Christine was most recently with JVA Consulting where she was the director of consulting and capacity building.

#### THE PITON FOUNDATION



THE COMMUNITY INVESTMENT DIVISION OF  
GARY-WILLIAMS ENERGY CORPORATION

370 17th Street, Suite 5300  
Denver, CO 80202-5653

Non-Profit Org.  
U.S. Postage  
**PAID**  
Denver, CO  
Permit No. 2747