

New River/Mount Rogers Workforce Development Region

2022 Q2 QUARTERLY
WORKFORCE REPORT

Introduction

Welcome to the 2022 Quarter Two Workforce Report.

In 2020, a special session of the General Assembly passed legislation that increased earned sentence credits for Virginia Department of Correction (VADOC) inmates starting July 1st, 2020. As a result, VADOC announced in March 2022 that approximately 4,500 inmates would be released statewide between July 1st and August 30th, 2022. It is still unknown what proportion of the 4,500 inmates will settle in Region 2. This increase requires creative collaborations and preparation to successfully absorb returned citizens into the workforce.

This quarter's report focuses on "returning citizens," or individuals who have recently been released from incarceration. Often, those with mental and substance abuse disorders overlap with those who have been incarcerated, resulting in the same organizations serving both target populations. CECE conducted interviews with organizations that work with this target population in Region 2 to begin to provide documented data on the challenges and resources these individuals require to have the best chance of success post-incarceration. By better understanding this population, workforce and other social assistance organizations can provide the tools needed to better support returned citizens in their endeavors to reintegrate into society and find meaningful employment.



Interviews with Local Organizations



New River Community Action and VA Cares

A reentry program that assists individuals who are within six months of being released or have been out of incarceration for one year or less. The primary focus is to help people successfully reenter society, with programs centered around homelessness and housing, HeadStart, family, and VA Cares, which focuses on reentry.



Virginia Rural Health Association

A nonprofit organization that provides funding and consulting to other organizations across Southwest Virginia who serve those in rural communities.



Appalachian Center for Hope

A relatively new program focusing on residential treatment, recovery planning, and reentry services. Serving between 16-80 individuals for residential treatment on an annual basis.



New River Valley Community Services

Over 800 individuals are employed at NRV Community Services and each year about 1,100-1,200 people are served. NRVCS staffs drug courts in Montgomery, Pulaski, Giles, and Radford City. Drug courts offer programming focused on alternative sentencing and reentry in lieu of incarceration. Other services through NRVCS include mental health programs, programs for those with intellectual disabilities, and school-based services.



Mount Rogers Community Services

Twin, Wythe, and Smyth drug courts offer treatment services. Overall, treatment programs serve 9,000 individuals, with a third of those specifically substance use patients. The main prevention program is the Strengthening Families program, which targets parents who are either at risk of losing their children or who have already lost them and are trying to get their rights back. This 14-week program enrolls about 120 individuals a year. MRCS also coordinates community coalitions to provide reentry citizens with resources to meet their needs, like clothes for an interview or food services.



District 17 Probation & Parole/Highlands Community Collaboration Council

District 17 and the Reentry Council covers Smyth and Washington Counties, City of Bristol, and other counties outside of Region 2. There are currently over 2,000 cases under supervision across the district, either in probation, parole, or post-release supervision. Services include mental health, substance abuse, housing, daycare, and more.



Mount Rogers Industrial & Development Center

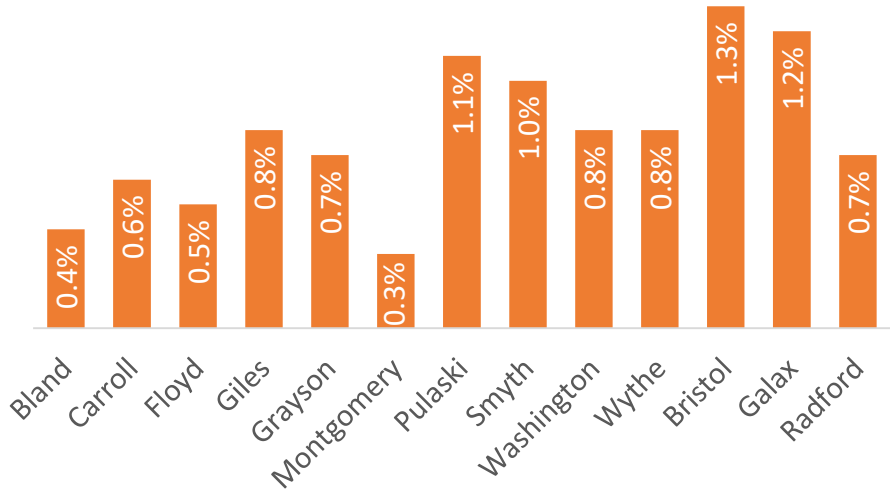
An employment center that employs those with disabilities, serious mental illness, and substance abuse issues. They hire internally, doing hands-on assembly type work, such as sewing. The center offers a supported employment program that assists with finding employment within the community and job development. They do not hire anyone under the age of 25.

Regional Overview

Population

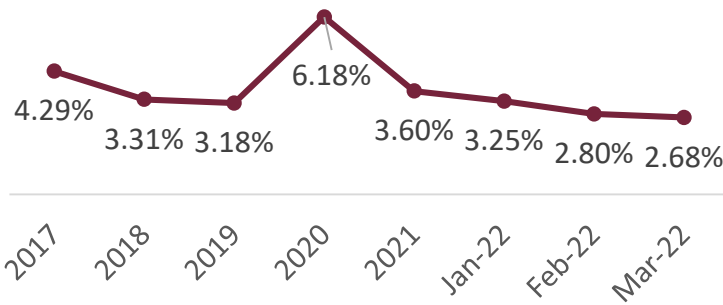
In 2020, there were 2,552 individuals in state prison or local jail in Region 2. Pulaski County had the highest incarcerated population with 367 individuals, but the City of Bristol had the highest percentage of their population incarcerated at 1.3%. Bland County had the lowest number incarcerated at 22 individuals, and Montgomery County had the lowest percentage at 0.3% due to the county population being the highest. Overall, 0.7% of the population in Region 2 was in state prison or local jail in 2020.

Percentage of 2020 Population Incarcerated

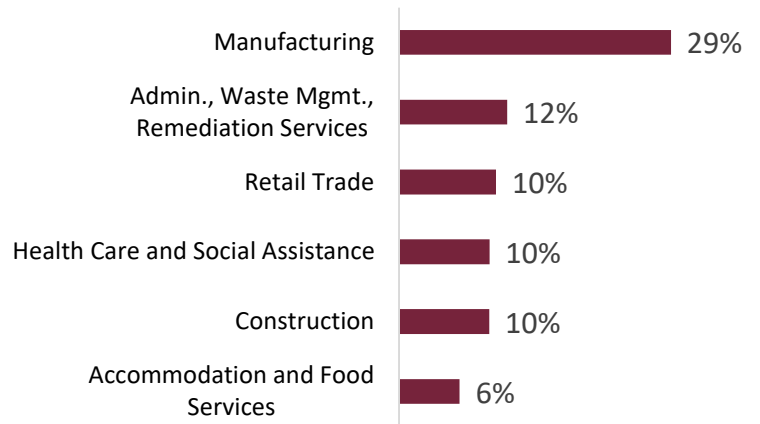


Unemployment

Unemployment Rate

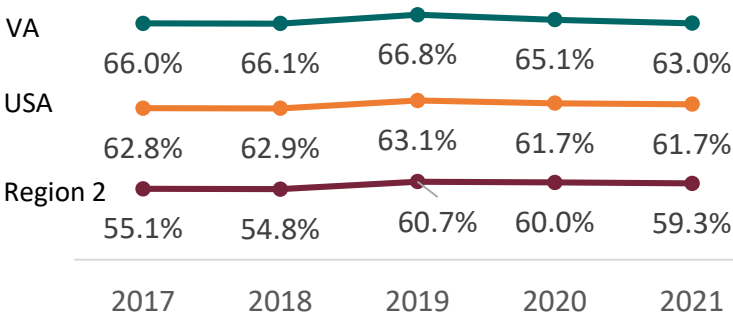


Unemployment by Industry



Since 2020, the unemployment rate in Region 2 has decreased by 3.5%, reaching a lower rate than before the COVID-19 Pandemic. The manufacturing industry has the highest unemployment in the region at 29%; this industry, along with waste management, construction, and food services are common industries for reentry citizens to find employment in.

Labor Force Participation



The labor force participation rate in Region 2 is lower in comparison to the state and nation. This rate represents the number of individuals of working age, who are NOT working or are actively looking for work. This rate could rise as more incarcerated individuals are released and begin to enter the workforce. To facilitate this transition, it is necessary to assist reentry citizens with finding work and connecting them to employers who have hired previously incarcerated or recovery citizens.

Reentry Populations

Incarcerated Population

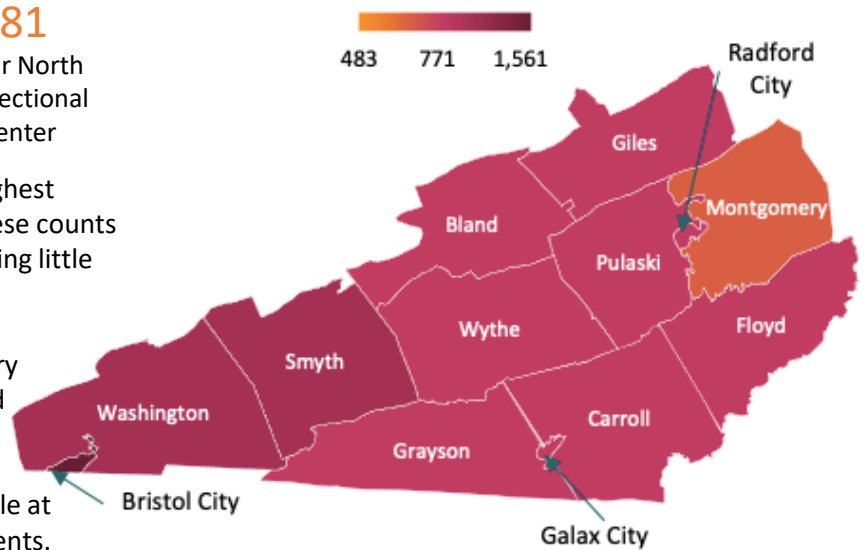
Regional Jail Populations, May 2022

605	272	881
Bland Correctional Center	Marion Correctional Treatment Center	River North Correctional Center

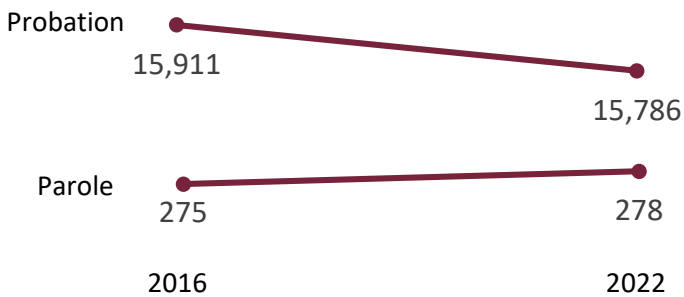
In 2022, River North Correctional Center had the highest population out of Region 2's three regional jails. These counts have stayed constant over the past five years, showing little change.

When calculating for incarceration rate, Montgomery County had the lowest at 483 residents incarcerated per 100,000 residents. Bristol City had the highest rate at 1,561 residents incarcerated per 100,000 residents. Most counties in Region 2 fell in the middle at about 771 residents incarcerated per 100,000 residents.

Incarceration Rate per 100,000 Residents, 2020



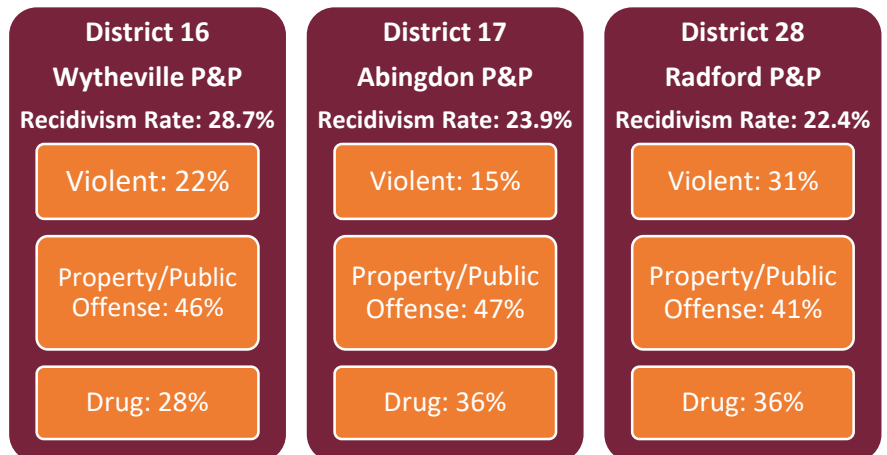
Probation and Parole Population



Local organizations explained their challenges in tracking the returned citizen population, due to their transient and unresponsive nature. Additionally, numbers are difficult to quantify when returning citizens are not actively engaged in follow-along services or programs. In the Western region, parole numbers have been consistent since 2016, experiencing little change. However, the probation counts have decreased by 125 individuals over the past five years.

Recidivism Rates

According to VADOC's annual report, in 2021 Virginia's recidivism rate was 23.9%, the second lowest rate in the country. However, these numbers are flawed according to primary research with New River Community Action, as this only tracks state facilities, not local jails, and also does not include all types of offenses, such as those sentenced for child support or a probation violation if sentenced for less than a year. Recidivism rates for 2017 show that the majority of re-offenses are property/public offense charges, followed by drug charges.



Returning Citizen Characteristics

Top Challenges Upon Reentering the Community

When interviewees were asked to describe the main barriers for returning citizens reentering society, every participant noted housing, stating that there is a lack of affordable options in the region. Other top challenges listed were having accessible resources and support from the community and facing the stigma that may exist from employers and community members.

These individuals often feel a lack of employer support, have limited transportation options, and cannot make a livable wage. One interviewee stated, "I work with rural populations. Even if you have a regular doctor's appointment, that involves finding transportation, finding childcare, and taking off from a job where they already have a bullseye on you." These barriers make the transition back into the community extremely difficult.



Top Needs Upon Reentering the Workforce

-  Increase in Available Information and Resources
-  Policy Changes to Improve the Justice System
-  Elimination of Medical and Court Debt
-  Increase Public Education to Reduce Stigma
-  Building Community Capacity and Collaboration
-  More Employers Willing to Hire Reentry Citizens
-  Increase in Prevention Services
-  Broadband Availability in Rural Communities

The top need reentering citizens require is more information and assistance with transitioning into society. Examples include assisting with basic tasks such as how to get a car, assistance at the DMV, and more assistance from employers with tasks such as financial literacy. Decreasing the uncertainty and stress these individuals face through support and accessible information will improve their success in life and in the workplace.

Policy changes, elimination of debt that develops while incarcerated, and increasing education to employers and community members, especially landlords, are also suggested needs to decrease systemic barriers that exist. Addressing these needs will assist in eliminating barriers to employment and create a supportive ecosystem that these individuals can return to.

Top Industries and Skills for Reentry Citizens

Top Industries

Interviews revealed that the most common industries that reentry citizens are employed in are restaurant and fast-food, construction, customer service, factory settings, and manufacturing-related industries. Many of the top industries in Region 2 align with those industries. Although jobs are projected to decline in the next five years, the number of hires is high, many times due to turnover, suggesting that jobs will be available post-release. Earnings are higher for manufacturing-related industries; with training, occupations in these industries could be well-paying roles for reentry citizens.

Industry	2021 Jobs	2026 Jobs	% Change	2021 Hires	Avg. Earnings
Limited-Service Restaurants	4,928	4,686	-5%	7,223	\$19,984
Full-Service Restaurants	4,459	4,423	-1%	6,403	\$23,662
Supermarkets and Other Grocery Stores	3,557	3,537	-1%	3,616	\$23,978
Heavy Duty Truck Manufacturing	2,910	2,825	-3%	861	\$78,897
Warehouse Clubs and Supercenters	2,558	2,654	4%	2,416	\$34,765
Gasoline Stations with Convenience Stores	1,752	1,581	-10%	1,805	\$26,263
Truck Trailer Manufacturing	1,691	1,611	-5%	468	\$57,290
Motor and Generator Manufacturing	1,404	1,370	-2%	384	\$75,758
Landscaping Services	1,096	1,142	4%	790	\$32,246
General Warehousing and Storage	864	826	-4%	544	\$46,768

Top Skills

Top Skills in Job Postings in Region 2, June 2020 – June 2022



The top in-demand skills seen in the region align with the top industries, such as merchandising, cash register, and restaurant operation skills, but also include skills that would require more training like marketing, auditing, and accounting.

Skills seen in reentry citizens according to the interviews included general and hard labor skills. However, the interviews stated that many times, the challenge is finding an employer who will teach the individual the skills they need to succeed at the job. It takes time to develop that relationship, which is why mentors are needed to assist reentry citizens with that transition and overcome barriers.

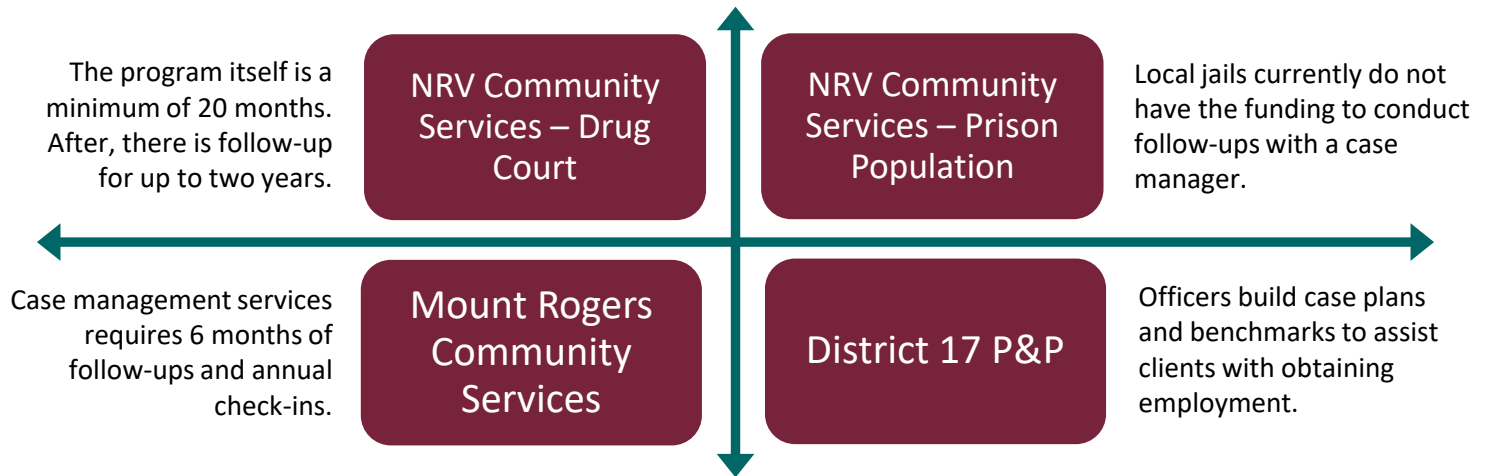
Mount Rogers Industrial & Development Center

In an interview with Mount Rogers IDC, the importance of on-the-job support was emphasized when working with reentry citizens. Providing the opportunity to explore options, learn what skills they already possess and what skills they may be interested in obtaining, and most importantly receiving support throughout this process will prioritize success. There are numerous barriers outside of the workplace these individuals face; having employers that provide resources similar to those that Mount Rogers IDC suggests will assist in sustained and successful employment.



Outcomes and Recommendations

Typical Outcomes of Reentry Citizens



The outcomes of reentry citizens can be difficult to track; each organization has their own method of monitoring and measuring success. Additionally, long-term employment can be difficult to maintain, depending on many factors such as mental health issues or returning to an environment or workplace with high prevalence of substance use.

Recommended Strategies

Increase the quantity and quality of affordable housing

- Utilizing resources such as Oxford Houses for those recovering from substance abuse can provide affordable, clean, supportive housing to returning citizens during their transition.

Create a collaborative network of resources

- Forming a coalition of regional organizations and compiling a comprehensive list of available wraparound services can relieve stress on not knowing where to go and improve local partnerships.

Design a referral network between community organizations and employers to improve the transition

- Many organizations interviewed stated that their clients find employment on their own. Having a better referral network between community organizations and local employers can bring awareness to well-paying jobs in the region and can also help employers refer employees to services they may need.

Build a supportive work environment by improving employer-employee relationships

- Educating employers on working with reentering citizens can help reduce stigma, create structure within the workplace, and increase the support the individual will have to create a comfortable environment where the individual can ask questions and improve as an employee.

Improve funding for prevention services

- Casinos are expected to bring in revenue for substance use programs and prevention services; this has been lacking. With the newest casino in Bristol, more revenue should be allocated towards these services to address this need.

List of Other Local Resources



Reentry Councils

- New River Valley Reentry Council
- Galax Reentry & Community Collaboration Council



Substance Use, Healthcare, Mental Health Services

- Mount Rogers Health District
- Highlands Community Services
- Life Center of Galax
- People Inc.
- Bristol Lifestyle Recovery
- Appalachian Substance Abuse Coalition
- 401 Peer Center in Radford
- Crossroads Medical Mission



Alcoholics Anonymous Meetings

- Sinking Springs Presbyterian Church – Abingdon
- Blacksburg Community Center – Blacksburg
- Blacksburg United Methodist Church – Blacksburg
- Christ Episcopal Church - Blacksburg
- Solitude House – Blacksburg
- State Street United Methodist Church - Bristol
- Store Front – Christiansburg
- Soul’s Harbor Church - Damascus
- Falling Branch Methodist Church - Floyd
- Floyd Baptist Church - Floyd
- Floyd Nazarene Church - Floyd
- Galax Presbyterian Church – Galax
- Mount Olivet United Methodist Church - Galax
- Hillsville Christian Church – Hillsville
- Royal Oak Presbyterian Church - Marion
- Pulaski Presbyterian Church in America – Pulaski
- Grace Episcopal Church – Radford
- Unity Christian Church – Radford
- Epworth House – Rural Retreat
- The Cove on Main - Wytheville
- Holy Trinity Lutheran Church - Wytheville
- Mount Pleasant Methodist Church - Wytheville
- St. John’s Episcopal Church – Wytheville
- Wytheville First Church of God - Wytheville



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