

## **BASICS–**

### **Returning individuals to the “World of Work”**

Today, anyone who leaves the correctional system in Georgia has nearly a 50/50 chance of returning within three years. This is a statistic that needs to change. Here are a few more statistics that will appall you:

More than 53,000 inmates housed in the Georgia Department of Corrections

Fifty-two percent (52%) of current inmates have been incarcerated before

It costs between \$15,000 and \$22,000 to house an inmate for one year

More than 20,000 inmates are about to leave the system and return to society. Many need help in making that transition. They lack the fundamental skills necessary to find and keep a job, manage their money and stay out of trouble. There are several programs out there that address this issue. There is only one, though, that has been around since 1977.

BASICS (Bar Association Support to Improve Correctional Services) was founded by the State Bar of Georgia in 1977 in response to a challenge from then U.S. Supreme Court Chief Justice Warren Burger. In the 33 years since 1977, BASICS has been providing an effective re-entry training program for participants in State Prison Transitional Centers all over the state of Georgia. This training means that the graduate will become a productive member of his or her community, and will no longer pose a danger to public safety.

In short, BASICS helps society in three fundamental ways:

it saves the lives of its graduates by giving them the skills, tools and confidence to become productive citizens and stay out of jail,

it benefits society by reducing crime and making the community safer

it saves a tremendous amount of money with each graduate.

Each participant attends 10 classes. These classes cover everything an inmate needs to prepare themselves for the work force, from goal setting and self assessment to effective workplace communication to a post release plan of action. Following the last class is a graduation ceremony attended by the students, their families, correctional officers, and various invited guests. It is one of the most moving graduation ceremonies you can ever attend. The students chose a president, and there is a valedictorian. Every student walks across the stage and gets a handshake or hug from each official as they receive their hard earned certificate. As they return to their seat with their family and friends with shining eyes and a straight spine, everyone in the room can see that every single graduate is incredibly, and justifiably, proud of their achievement. For some, this is the first time they have donned a graduation gown and graduated from a program—any program! The BASICS graduation may very well be the best thing they have done for themselves. Earning that certificate, and earning the right to walk across that stage, sets them on the right path for success.

While the BASICS program works to change the lives of its participants, it is society that is the ultimate beneficiary of the program. Society benefits from a reduced crime rate. Society benefits from the savings to taxpayer dollars when fewer people are incarcerated. Society benefits when more people are gainfully employed and paying their share of taxes. Society benefits when more people leave prison ready and eager to become part of the solution, rather than more of the problem.

It costs \$15,000 to \$20,000 per year to keep one person incarcerated for one year in Georgia; the training cost for a BASICS graduate is only about \$500. Thus, for every successful BASICS graduate who finds a job and stays out of prison, the savings are immense. According to the Reentry Policy Council, a nonpartisan organization founded in 2001 to address the ever increasing number of released prisoners, the recidivism rate for participants in job training

programs is reduced by at least 20 percent, and some studies indicate 60 percent. BASICS only costs around \$500 per person, or around \$250,000 for 500 graduates. The financial contribution of the graduates is incalculable. Yet, without help, BASICS will disappear.

Here is one BASICS graduate's story: K never finished high school, although he repeated the 9th grade FOUR times. He was incarcerated at a very young age, but BASICS turned his life around. In his own words: *"The BASICS program gave me the tools to harness and channel my thoughts of how to be successful, to maintain confidence and empowerment. It helped me design my plan of action and to utilize the information and resources that were available. After serving approximately 16 years, I walked from a prison cell into Georgia State University where I earned my bachelor's degree in psychology. After earning my MBA, I am now a Doctorate candidate at Argosy University. I am currently poised to start an Adjunct Professor position with Voorhees College this fall. One of the many highlights of my BASICS experience was becoming a BASICS instructor after finishing my undergraduate degree. So for me, I have experienced both sides of the BASICS program, each being a rewarding experience."*

That is just one success story—there are around 500 similar stories every year—more than 10,000 so far. Without help, though, there won't be any more success stories. Without help, there won't be: 20 year olds who learned how to be a good employee, 30 & 40 year olds who kick their addiction and, thanks to BASICS, have the skills necessary to find a job and be a contributing member of society, or young mothers who gets to return home to their children because BASICS has taught them how to support herself and them.

BASICS receives no money from the Department of Corrections. For many years, BASICS received a substantial grant every year from the Georgia Bar Foundation, the IOLTA (Interest on Lawyers Trust Accounts) foundation. However, the current economic downturn

means that the Georgia Bar Foundation has not been able to renew that grant. BASICS must find an alternative source of money. If we can't find the money, the program will die.

The Lawyers Foundation of Georgia is the philanthropic arm of the State Bar of Georgia. All donations through the Foundation are tax deductible when made, as the Foundation is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation. For more information about BASICS or the Lawyers Foundation of Georgia, please contact us at [lfg\\_lauren@bellsouth.net](mailto:lfg_lauren@bellsouth.net), or 404-659-6867, or 104 Marietta St. NW, Suite 630, Atlanta, GA 30303.