



## NEWS RELEASE

### Workforce Development Board

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## Prison 2 Employment: “We need someone in our corner”

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Tom Amberson had college degrees and plenty of work experience, but a felony conviction and nearly six years in prison made him unsuitable for hiring in the eyes of many would-be employers.

“I applied for lots of jobs, but kept getting ‘nos’ along the way. It’s so discouraging,” says Amberson, a former counselor who found life after incarceration every bit as challenging – and in some ways, even more so – than his time spent behind bars.

That is, until Goodwill Southern California took him under his wing and, with the support the state’s Prison to Employment Initiative (P2E), provided him the pathway to rebuild his life at age 65.

This past year, the San Bernardino County Workforce Development Board (WDB) partnered with its counterpart in Riverside County to support re-entry services under P2E and help ensure that individuals such as Amberson get the opportunity to work and live independent lives.

In Amberson’s case, Goodwill is the P2E provider, and he currently works 30-35 hours per week at one of the nonprofit organization’s Upland retail locations.

“I can’t stress enough that felons coming out of prison need someone in their corner, to help you walk through things and get you on your feet. Employment and housing – when you get those two in place, then we have a chance,” Amberson says.

California releases approximately 36,000 individuals from state prison each year, and while re-entry services have been available for years, there hasn’t been a formal coordinated effort to link education, job training and other support services. Under P2E, \$37 million was committed statewide to operationalize integration of workforce and re-entry services across the state over a three-year period.

Jonathan Weldy, who chairs WDB’s Special Populations Committee, believes the investment will pay off in multiple ways.

“You see the impact it is having on so many individuals who now have the opportunity to re-establish their lives, live independently and contribute to society in a greater way. At the end of the day, too, it strengthens our labor pool and contributes to a healthier local and regional economy,” Weldy says.

Lowell King, Regional Operations Officer for Goodwill Southern California, says P2E aligns directly with the organization’s mission of transforming lives through the power of



work.

“Having a job is about so much more than a paycheck. It’s a source of self-respect, pride and identity. We’re proud to be a P2E provider and to help individuals who have been incarcerated take that next step in their lives,” King says.

Amberson’s goal is to someday own his own business. While in prison, he used his education and experience to tutor fellow inmates who were pursuing their GEDs. He became president of the prison toastmasters and earned a business degree.

After his release, he was in a halfway house for 10 months – looking for work but consistently being rejected.

“No one would look at me because I had a felony. Eventually I ended up at Goodwill in Victorville, and got hired on the spot,” he says. “If you’ve been in prison, getting a job makes all the difference in the world to your self-esteem. It’s enabled me to get on my feet as I wait for the next step.”

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### **About the San Bernardino County Workforce Development Board**

The San Bernardino County Workforce Development Board (WDB) is comprised of private business representatives and public partners appointed by the San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors. The WDB strives to strengthen the skills of the County’s workforce through partnerships with business, education and community-based organizations. The San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors is committed to providing county resources, which generate jobs and investment in line with the [Countywide Vision](#).

The Workforce Development Board, through the San Bernardino County Economic Development Agency and Workforce Development Department, offers a variety of programs designed to help youth and adults identify career pathways and get the appropriate training and skills. Programs funded through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) provide eligible youth, ages 16 to 24, access to a variety of career and educational services designed to help enhance job skills, develop leadership qualities, explore career options, participate in adult and peer mentoring opportunities, and take advantage of work experiences. In addition, the WDB operates San Bernardino County’s three America’s Job Centers of California (AJCC). The AJCCs provide individuals with job training, placement and the tools to strengthen their skills to achieve a higher quality of life. The AJCCs also support and provide services to the County’s businesses, including employee recruitment and business retention programs.

Employers and job seekers who are interested in the Workforce Development Board programs may call: (800) 451-JOBS or visit [www.sbcounty.gov/workforce](http://www.sbcounty.gov/workforce). Also follow us on: Facebook [www.facebook.com/SBCountyWDB](https://www.facebook.com/SBCountyWDB); Twitter [@InlandEmpireJob](https://twitter.com/InlandEmpireJob); LinkedIn <https://www.linkedin.com/company/sanbernardinocountywdb>; and YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/SBCountyWIB>.