

RISE

2021 ANNUAL REPORT

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Greetings RISE Friends and Supporters:

I'm pleased to share with you our 2021 annual report. The need for RISE programming and services continues to increase as people returning home from incarceration encounter the challenges we're all facing as a community. RISE added new staff and programs this year in response to the growing needs for support, all focused on our mission to break generational cycles of incarceration.

In January we launched the RISE Business Academy, a 12-week program for system impacted people pursuing their dream of small business ownership. Twelve academy graduates started businesses in 2021. We anticipate larger classes in 2022 as we open the program up to justice-involved people across the state including their family members.

Our newest offering is the RISE Youth and Family Program. This interactive program holds a safe space for deep work and conversations for Nebraska children and families impacted by incarceration with a goal of healing and restoration.

Whether volunteering virtually or in person, 184 of you participated in 14 RISE in-prison coaching days and community-based events. I'm humbled by how you all keep showing up for our Builders.

In 2022 we will launch a "unit-based" version of our in-prison program at the Nebraska State Penitentiary. 40 incarcerated people will live together as program participants and we will be able to offer them programming five days a week for six months. RISE programming will also continue at the six other facilities we currently serve.

A new partnership with the Nebraska Department of Labor will allow RISE to provide workforce development programming and training for more system impacted people in 2022. We know many employers are struggling to meet staffing needs and would love to connect RISE Graduates with more employment opportunities.

We can't do any of this without you. Thank you for supporting RISE and the people we serve during these challenging times. You are truly making a difference in people's lives every day through your time and resources.

Best Regards,

Jeremy Bouman, CEO



ORGANIZATIONAL PROFILE

OUR MISSION

That all people will find freedom from generational cycles of incarceration.

OUR VALUES

Tough Love
Witness
Entrepreneurial Mindset
Grit
Rebuilding

At RISE, transformation starts pre-release and continues post-release. Our inside/out model bridges incarceration to the community and considers all the critical steps in that journey.

We prepare and train people for each phase through intensive character development, employment readiness, job creation through entrepreneurship and case management. We transform people in the community by building awareness and empathy that leads to support and opportunity.

These connections heal families, create employment pathways and lower recidivism.

RISE Board of Directors

Ken Stinson
Shonna Dorsey
Bill Ochsner
David Bills
Jeff Slobotski
Ava Thomas
Naomi Hattaway
Leah Smejkal
Dr. Mark Foxall
Todd Johnson
Jeremy Bouman
Bill Hobbs
Carla Walker



STATEMENT OF FINANCIALS

Statement of Financial Position Assets

Cash	1,953,121
Pledges Receivable	744,596
Total Assets	2,697,717

Liabilities

Current liabilities	53,971
Total Liabilities	53,971

Net Assets

With Donor Restrictions	347,093
Without Donor Restrictions	2,350,624
Total Net Assets	2,697,717

Statement of Activities

Contributions

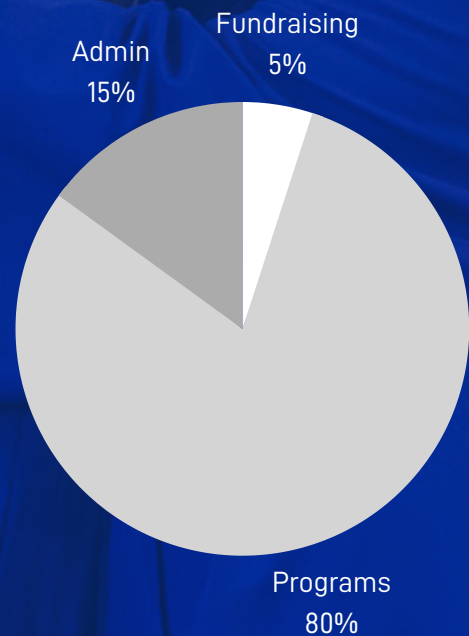
Foundations	727,509
Organizations/Government funding	752,286
Individual Donors	54,851

Other Income	1,531
Total Contributions	2,697,717

Expenses

General Operating Expenses	279,917
Program Expenses	1,492,892
Fundraising Expenses	93,306
Total Expenses	1,866,115
Revenue over Expenses	(329,938)**

**Multi year pledges recorded in year of award.
Pledges as of 12/31/20 received in 2021 = 823,500



35

RISE Anchor Group Members
(Monthly Donors)

296

Overall Individual Donors



Thank you to our individual donors, our RISE Anchor Group monthly donors, and the following companies, foundations and organizations for your support of RISE in 2021:

Alley Poyner Macchietto Architecture
Bank of the West
Blue Cross Blue Shield of Nebraska
Cox Communications
Department of Health and Human Services (NE)
Dundee Bank
Farm Credit Services of America
Firespring Foundation
First Lutheran Church Avoca
FNBO
The Hawks Foundation
Healthy Blue Nebraska
J.C. & Jessie Seacrest Family Foundation
Junior League of Omaha
Ken and Ann Stinson Fund
The Kim Foundation
King of Kings Church Omaha
LinkedIn
The Lozier Foundation
Lutheran Family Services
Mammel Family Foundation
Mercy City Church
Moglia Family Foundation
Morgan Stanley Foundation
Mutual of Omaha Foundation
Nebraska Civic Engagement Table
Northern Natural Gas
Omaha Community Foundation
Pape Family Foundation
Peter Kiewit Foundation
Rejoice Lutheran Church
Robert B Daugherty Foundation
SHARE Omaha
The Sherwood Foundation
Skillwork LLC
Southern Heights Presbyterian Church
Starbucks Foundation
Suzanne & Walter Scott Foundation
The Retirement Research Foundation
Todd and Mary Heistand Family Foundation
United Way of the Midlands
Verizon Foundation
VLS
Walmart
William & Ruth Scott Family Foundation

IN-PRISON PROGRAM

By Maria Moreno, Director of Programs

The RISE In-Prison Program continued to have programming delays in 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic as facilities would go into lockdowns for weeks - even months on end. However, our program participants and peer facilitators stayed focused and determined, often meeting with their fellow classmates in housing units, which allowed the program to stay on course.

We may have faced a few graduation delays and rescheduling, but once graduations rolled around, everyone was ready to celebrate all of the hard work they had dedicated to the program.

It was incredible to once again have families join our graduation events this year - to see our Graduates be parents to their children, to celebrate the journey of rebuilding their lives, and to recognize the love and support they receive from their loved ones at home.

Separation from family members during the pandemic has been incredibly challenging, with visits being limited and in-person visits not resuming until May of 2021.

Over the past year, we have also had the opportunity to start new activities inside facilities. At the Nebraska Correctional Center for Women, RISE Graduates initiated a new RISE Ambassadors Club where they bring learning opportunities to their fellow peers.

The Graduates organized a large Reentry Expo with over 60 people in attendance. At the Expo, RISE staff, RISE Graduates, and other reentry organizations led workshops about shifting mindsets, preparing for reentry, effective interviewing skills, and budgeting. We also had the opportunity to offer parenting and healthy relationship classes, led by our new Youth and Family Associate, Alana Alexander, as well as mindfulness classes led by volunteer, Caitlin Finn.

"To be honest, RISE changed my life completely and gave me the tools I needed to have healthy relationships with my family and girlfriend. I feel like I greatly achieved my goals and then some. As a person, I have found my true self and finally found peace of mind in a crazy life. I know my strengths and how I use them in everyday life. I plan to use every bit of what I've learned for the rest of my life and see if I can help others." - RISE Graduate



6

In-Prison Program cohorts graduated from facilities

67

In-Prison Program Graduates

63%

Graduation rate* for all six cohorts

*107 individuals in 2021 began IPP programming. 40 did not complete and 67 graduated. $67/107=62.6$. Applicant only individuals were not included as they did not participate.



“Coming into this class I really only thought I was going to learn about business and how to start and run my own business.

I definitely was not expecting all the self-evaluation this class would lead to and then how I would grow from that evaluation.

I learned so much about myself and how my past affected so many of my decisions and continues to affect me to this day. But most importantly, I also learned tools so I can stop the cycle of letting that past lead me down the wrong path.

I didn't come in expecting to learn about my personal strengths and ways to see when my moments of weakness were coming.”

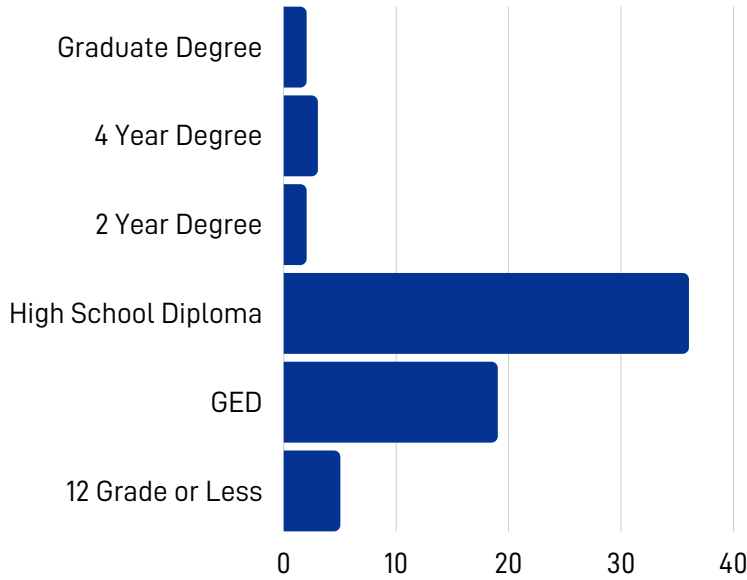
- RISE Graduate



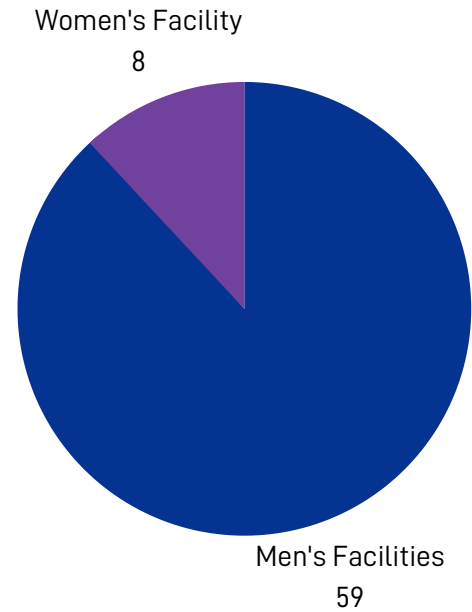
IN-PRISON PROGRAM

2021 RISE Graduate Demographics

Education Level of 2021 In-Prison Program Graduates

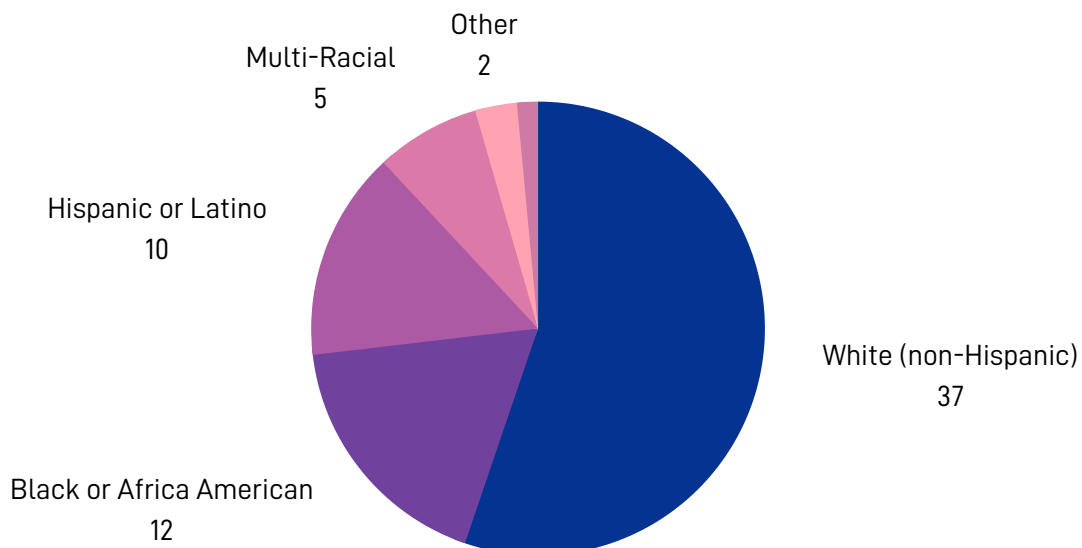


Gender of 2021 In-Prison Program Graduates



"RISE has helped me grow as a man and want to move more successfully in life... It made me enhance my mentality to become a stronger thinker. The goals I set for myself at the beginning showed me that I can complete whatever I put my mind to. I spend my time doing more productive things now and worrying about becoming a better man and father. RISE has helped me accomplish this." - RISE Graduate

Race/Ethnicity of 2021 In-Prison Program Graduates



IN-PRISON PROGRAM OUTCOMES

By Erin Cooper, MS, Director of Research & Evaluation

Upon entry to the in-prison program and upon completion, participants complete an 85 question survey that measures over a dozen areas of construct that are covered in RISE curriculum.

Through data analysis, RISE is able to determine statistically significant growth for the 2021 Graduates and what areas growth was found.

The results of this data analysis indicate that RISE in-prison programming is significantly impacting the lives of its participants in the following areas:

- Behavior change
- Hope and empowerment
- Grit
- Employment readiness
- Positive support systems

Despite statistically significant results being limited to the aforementioned areas, it is important to recognize that growth did occur in many other areas when examining raw data pre-programming and post-programming.

For example, growth was witnessed in healthy coping strategies, self-efficacy, prosocial behavior, developing relationships, improved decision making, and reentry preparedness.

Regardless of statistical significance, growth in any area related to character development and employment readiness is likely to positively impact outcomes during the remaining time of incarceration and post-release.





POLICY AND ADVOCACY

By Jasmine L. Harris, MPH, CHES, Director of Public Policy and Advocacy

The past year presented great opportunities and challenges for policy and advocacy efforts. Although we were still dealing with the pandemic and changes in the rules at the legislature, we were able to focus on growing RISE's presence in the policy and advocacy space. Here's highlights from our work in 2021:

Legislative Work

During the legislative session, we provided testimony, written position letters and online comments for twenty-three legislative bills. These bills ranged from removing the prohibition on SNAP benefits from people with multiple felony and felony drug convictions to restoring individuals' rights to vote upon release from incarceration.

During the interim session we testified on two legislative resolutions that focused on removing barriers for professional licenses and certifications for people with felony convictions and the intersectionality of poverty and incarceration.

We also worked closely with Sen. J. Cavanaugh's office on LB636 for the elimination of cash bail. Many of these bills did not make it out of committee

and will have a chance to be advanced to general file in the 2022 legislative session.

Day of Empathy

This was our 2nd year partnering with DreamCorp Justice (formerly known as #Cut50) to organize an event for Day of Empathy. This virtual event was a lobby day for participants to learn more about policy efforts that organizations in Nebraska have been working on towards alternatives to incarceration.

There were over 110 individuals and 14 senators logged on for the event. The attendance grew from the previous year and overall feedback was positive.

Incorporating break out rooms for individuals to speak directly with senators created an opportunity that many appreciated. It allowed for direct interaction with legislators on matters of concern that ranged from concerns of building a new prison to cash bail.

**"Thank you for this event, and I look forward to attending more!
I am just starting on my journey to learn more and become more involved and so appreciate this event." - Event attendee**



POLICY AND ADVOCACY

...continued

Lunch & Learn

As RISE continues to grow and offer programs and services to people impacted by the criminal justice system, we want to ensure that we raise awareness with our elected officials about who we are and what we do.

In 2021, we hosted a virtual lunch and learn session for interested senators to hear more about our efforts and the impact that our organization has in the state. There were eight senators in attendance hearing updates on our programs, data collection, reentry services and advocacy efforts. The senators were appreciative of this session and look forward to hearing more in the upcoming year.

Nebraska Criminal Justice Reinvestment Roundtables

Another opportunity in 2021 that allowed RISE to focus on policy issues regarding the criminal justice system was the data and evaluation review with the Criminal Justice Institute (CJI) for the Nebraska Criminal Justice Reinvestment Initiative. This process was a deep dive into the processes and data of the Nebraska criminal justice system to provide recommendations to address the overcrowding issues in the state's correctional facilities.

These roundtables allowed for system impacted individuals and service providers to be a part of the discussion and present their perspective to the Working Group of this initiative. In-person and virtual roundtables were conducted, where over 25 individuals participated to answer questions about what they see missing from the reentry process and barriers to completing conditions of parole/probation supervision.

This information was compiled in a summary of priorities and submitted to the Working Group - which included the governor, chief of justice, senators and directors of corrections, parole and probation - and considered when creating policy recommendations for the state legislature.

RISE REENTRY

By Erica Raetz, MSW, Director of Reentry Services



During my weekly "letter time" where I close my office door to dive into mail received from our incarcerated people, a neatly written envelope with a pink letter folded inside caught my attention.

Scrolled at the top in cursive letters I read, "Please don't give up on me." Tears immediately welled up in my eyes as I realized this was a fear so many of our people experienced throughout 2021, and the responsibility RISE holds to never give up on anyone.

Over the course of the last year, our reentry team experienced the victories of recruiting over 200 employers to hire people with criminal records, welcoming home 45 individuals from prison, adding three more Reentry Specialists to our team, and providing over \$23,000 in rental and utility assistance and quality of life items (shoes, winter coats, and other necessities).

We also saw the depth of heartbreak - children being reunited with their parents, only for their parents to be sucked into the dark cycle of addiction; incarcerated people who had prepared diligently for their release, only to be denied parole and required to wait another year to come home; happy, thriving people in the community experiencing loss of a loved one and their mental health becoming too much for them to manage. Our team walks with Builders through it all. We typically like to tell the success stories, but those successes are only one chapter.

"I have been incarcerated for 6 years. I have learned this: that I don't ever want to be where I am today, but honestly I don't ever want to leave because I am scared of failure - what everyone will think of me. What if I come back? What if I can't make it out there? My mom is coming to get me, but what if I'm not what she remembers? What if my kids don't know me anymore? My fear is that in the end, I won't be all that my family needs." - RISE Graduate



30

Graduates released from prison in 2021

167

Overall Graduates released to-date from prison*

201

Individuals received reentry services in 2021

*35 of those are reincarcerated in county or state facilities at this time.

RISE REENTRY & RECIDIVISM

By Erin Cooper, MS, Director of Research & Evaluation

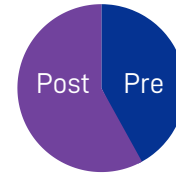
RISE has always understood that to experience reentry is to experience crisis. Incarcerated individuals are often released to area communities with little to no financial support, emotional support, mental health support, or support for substance use addictions. This often leaves formerly incarcerated individuals operating in crisis mode and at a higher likelihood of reoffending.

RISE believes that reentry support is crucial to the success of its released graduates. Support must be tailored to individual needs, support must be swift, and support must be available around the clock. Most importantly, reentry support must begin prior to release.

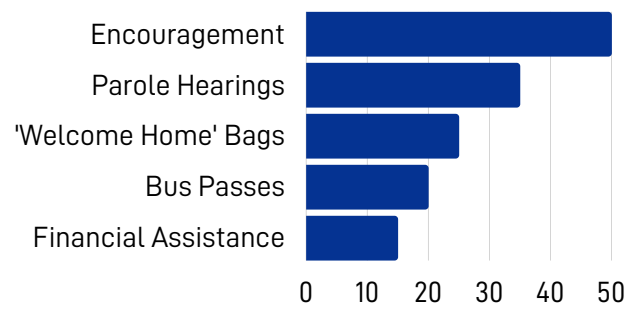
During 2021, the RISE reentry team was able to serve 201 Graduates either pre-release or post release. RISE was able to provide over 1300 reentry services during 2021.

Over 1300 Reentry Services Provided in 2021

577 Pre-Release Services Provided
798 Post-Release Services Provided



Most Common Reentry Services Provided in 2021



RISE is providing released Graduates with high quality reentry services resulting in the majority of released Graduates experiencing a sense of overall well-being and recidivism well below that of the general population.

In 2021, RISE adjusted its organizational definition of recidivism to match that of the Nebraska Department of Correctional Services (NDCS). Recidivism is defined as a return to NDCS for a new sentence or for a parole violation (law or technical). NDCS provides RISE with official recidivism data bi-annually and this data is then used to update RISE's internal database and to calculate recidivism data.

It is important to remember that RISE recidivism rates cannot be compared to NDCS recidivism rates as there are variations in populations and no controls for variables in place.

RISE recidivism data indicates more than 94% of recidivism is related to technical and/or law parole violations, while less than 6% of recidivism is

related to new felony convictions and incarcerations. RISE was able to examine the causal behavior of parole violations and with the limited data available to RISE, 100% of recidivism has been related to substance use. Substances may not be the direct reason why a person was reincarcerated, but substance use involved in the individual's life causing distorted and illogical thinking leading to poor choices thus resulting in parole violations.

This data could be examined even further and developed into a possible theory that recently released individuals are turning (or returning) to substance use to cope with the stressors related to reentry and thus engaged in anti-social behavior resulting in recidivism.

EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM

By Eduardo Gardea, Employment Specialist

2021's RISE Employment Program built a database of over 200 background friendly employers. The Employment Program also achieved an 89% employment rate amongst of released RISE graduates. By increasing employer relationships in Omaha, Lincoln and across the state, the Employment Program established itself as one of the leaders in the Metro area for successfully navigating employment for the formerly incarcerated.

As the Employment Program became successful it also became clear that while more businesses are opening their doors to the formerly incarcerated population, there are many employers whose company culture is not prepared to properly welcome and retain employees with criminal backgrounds.

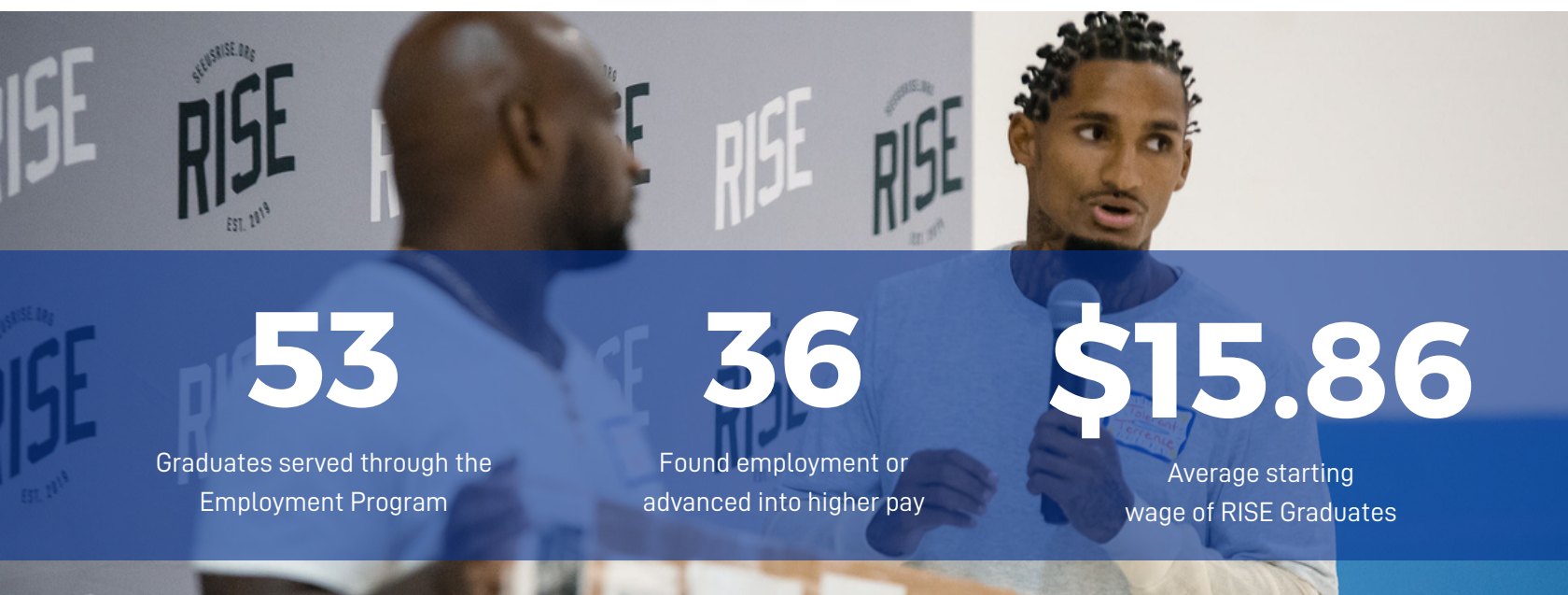
Most white-collar businesses are more reluctant to hiring formerly incarcerated people. The narrative on hiring people with felony backgrounds is making a positive shift amongst employers and within the community.

Previously, the responsibility of self-betterment has been placed on the applicant. However, employers are beginning to ask themselves, "what can we do to help, what is our role as employers to support all applicants and the community overall?"

Nonetheless, action is still needed. In a program where RISE highlights individuals' expertise and talents, people with criminal backgrounds, are still struggling to identify purpose and an understanding of their personal unique strengths. For the formerly incarcerated, the path of self-discovery and employment go hand in hand, and it remains a challenging one.

"I've achieved my goal by putting my all as much as I can and using my strengths. Even though I'm going through a lot, I still got things done.

I've grown to open up when it was hard for me to do. I've also grown close to everyone involved in RISE. "
- RISE Graduate



53

Graduates served through the Employment Program

36

Found employment or advanced into higher pay

\$15.86

Average starting wage of RISE Graduates

EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM

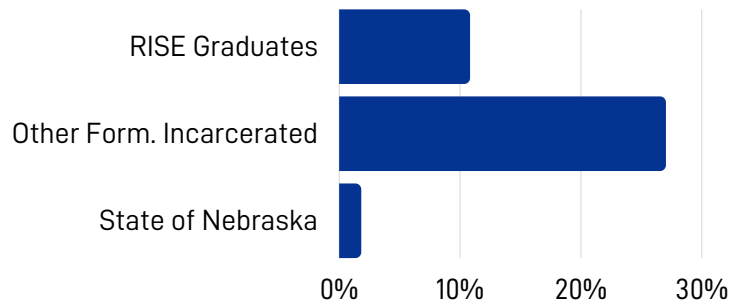
Data and Points of Interest

During 2021 Nebraska began to see an increase in employment opportunities as the economic effects of COVID-19 began to lessen.

At the end of 2021, Nebraska saw an unemployment rate of 1.8% which was the lowest unemployment rate in the nation. Despite the low unemployment rate for the state, released RISE graduates saw a much higher unemployment rate of 10.8% which is much lower than the national average of 27% unemployment for formerly incarcerated individuals.

Despite many RISE graduates improving their financial status through better employment opportunities, the median wage remains unchanged from 2020 at \$15 per hour for 2021. It is theorized that this is due to many graduates entering industries that remain wage stagnant (e.g., manufacturing, warehouse).

Unemployment Rate of RISE Graduates vs. Other Formerly Incarcerated

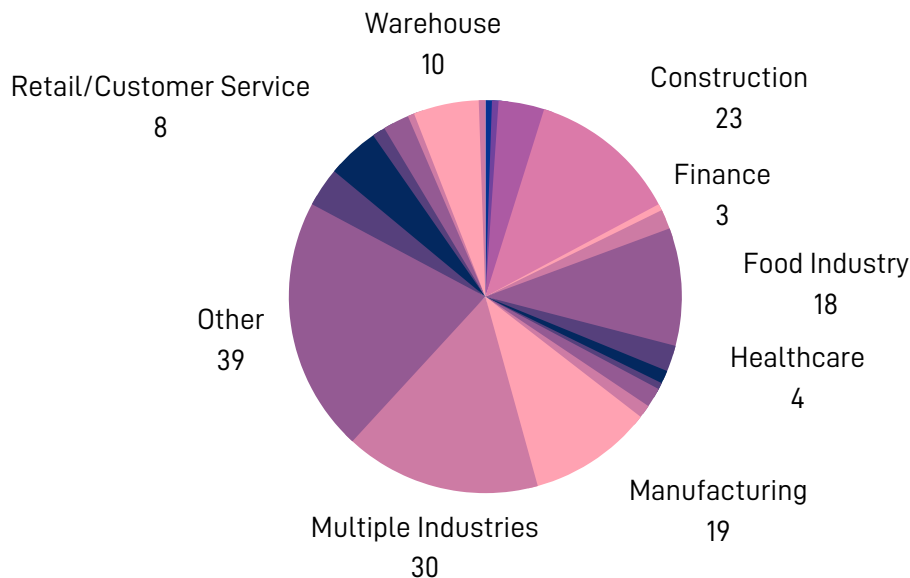


To combat this stagnation, RISE is exploring several avenues to improve career trajectories and income opportunities for RISE graduates. Avenues being explored include online certification partnerships and partnerships with the Nebraska Department of Labor programs.

71% of RISE Graduates have employment prior to release or within 90 days of release*.

“Foundations helped me realize why I was doing this and that it wasn’t just to look good for the parole board, but to actually improve myself and give myself a better chance at success when I get out and that this was a way I could make sure to not let my family down again as I have so many times.” - RISE Graduate

Employer Industries of RISE Graduates**



*35 data points available; 25 out of 35 released graduates had employment prior to release or within 90 days of release

** Not all employers currently have a RISE Graduate employed.



"Prison has a good way of wrapping all your mistakes in barbed wire. But RISE fully unwrapped them and painted them beautifully on me, like the most incredible painting you've ever seen."
- RISE Graduate



RISE ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

By Alejandra Jimenez, Program Associate

The RISE Alumni Association is a community built for RISE Graduates that have transferred to community corrections and/or have reentered the community.

The RISE Alumni Association, (RAA) is a platform established for our RISE Graduates to provide peer support and to be in fellowship with other Graduates and the RISE family. It is a way to learn more about the services that are available to them and more importantly, it is an opportunity to build community and help support reentry.

The goal for RAA is to increase community engagement and productivity by creating opportunities to connect with families and their communities. We understand that community is essential to reintegration and RISE is committed to playing a pivotal role in the community reintegration process. We do this by having get-togethers to provide a safe and positive space for RISE Graduates and their families to have fun, learn from one another, and share lived-experiences without judgement.

RAA is more like a family. The support, love and encouragement amongst our Builders and our RISE team is completely genuine.

In addition to the offered get-togethers, seminars and workshops, the RISE Alumni Association meets every Tuesday for Supper Club - a casual time to reconnect, check in with us and each other. The support that comes out of these weekly touch points is unmatched.

To promote and provide healthy, pro-social activities, the RAA met for a movie night, family picnics in both Omaha and Lincoln, attended Jazz on the Green, and went bowling. We look forward to creating more pro-social activities and really broaden this essential group!





RISE BUSINESS ACADEMY

By Alejandra Jimenez, Program Associate

The RISE Business Academy successfully launched on February 15th, 2021. There were a total of 12 participants who graduated in the span of three cohorts.

Our hope for this program is to create and promote self-sufficiency, independence, economic growth in our community as well as prevent recidivism. By the end of the 12-week program, participants will be able to identify their entrepreneurial skills that enable them to make the most of opportunities, overcome and learn from setbacks, and succeed in a variety of situations.

Participants complete a business plan that will be used as a roadmap on how to structure, run and grow their business. Their business plans can potentially help them get funding or bring on new business partners. They will also know how to use the tools and community resources to register their business from start to finish.

During the course of the program, we pair our participants with a community volunteer who

serves as a business coach. They meet once a week until graduation day to support them in creating their business plan, business pitch, and mentor them based on their similar background and the type of business they want to start.

Having a business coach encourages and enables our participants' entrepreneurial development. Coaches can help focus their efforts by setting goals and giving intimate knowledge and feedback on how a business works based on their experiences as a business owner or expert themselves. This allows for our participants to gain different perspectives as well as expand their network.



Congratulations!

12

Graduates among three cohorts

4

LLC's established within 2-3 months of completion

90%

Program completion and graduation rate



RISE BUSINESS ACADEMY

By Alejandra Jimenez, Program Associate

Some of the challenges our participants faced were technology based. A few participants had a difficult time navigating through the different online platforms needed for the class. We had to work on navigating through these platforms (ex: Google Docs, Slides, etc.) outside of the classroom to help them complete their assignments and business plans.

In the future, we plan to team up with our RISE Alumni Association to work on having technology crash courses where they can learn to navigate all the online resources to help them in the implementation of their business plans and prepare for their business pitches.

Secondly, a huge factor in either not completing the program or not completing an assignment is self doubt and self sabotage. This is very common in our participants. Sometimes, doubt can make them feel as though they cannot complete the program or move forward with their business ideas. Building their confidence in every class and believing in themselves has been key in keeping them engaged and excited to move forward with their business idea without allowing self doubt to be a factor.

Starting costs for new business owners can also be an issue for some of our participants. Some businesses require more upfront startup money to register the company, pay for things such as insurance, equipment, marketing and advertising, office space, etc.


During the Business Academy, participants work through a business plan and define the costs involved for their business specifically in the Financial Projections section. This allows them to decipher exactly how much they need to start their business.

We are excited to continue this successful program in 2022 and develop ways to not only empower the Graduates and their business ventures, but to encourage our community members to utilize them!

"When I was praying and seeking for my next career move, I wanted to be in a place where I could fulfill a purpose bigger than I could ever imagine, to be challenged, to embrace the things that add meaning into my life. This program is just that and more!"

- RISE Business Academy Graduate



A woman with dark hair pulled back, wearing glasses and a teal-colored top with small white dots. She is smiling and looking slightly to the right. The background is blurred, showing what appears to be an indoor setting with some lights.

"Being in the RISE Business Academy made me be a part of a group where we got to be each others cheerleaders and we got to see each other succeed." – Kelli

I'M STILL ME. JUST DIFFERENT.

By McKenzie Ring, Director of Marketing

We often mention reentry is crisis. It's survival mode. Simply trying your best to make the next right step, grasping for help and longing for someone to offer you some hope along the way.

Wishing someone could see beyond your crime and see your skills and talents as worthy of a fruitful career.

Continued...

Kelli is a second-cohort graduate of the RISE Business Academy. "I actually heard about RISE from a staff member at the Nebraska Department of Labor. I didn't even know the Business Academy was a thing yet."

Kelli never had the opportunity to work with a reentry program through her lived experience in the criminal justice system. While on the inside, she lacked the disease of substance use, had previous employment and a Bachelor's degree which all disqualified her from programming and services she desired to take. On the outside, other resources she sought out simply didn't know how to navigate a person with a criminal background. She was left to maneuver this new world of reentry alone.

"All I could do was what I knew how to do...and that was just to apply for jobs. At one point, I don't keep track anymore, but in the first 18 months of my reentry, I applied for close to 200 jobs. I had about 40 interviews, had been a finalist for 12, had eight offers, and all eight rescinded due to my background. I was crushed.

I would get my hopes up for a job, every time, having that happen repeatedly. I'm not valued, I'm not appreciated, I'm not paid for my skills and experience. I have to live with fear in the back of my mind that I'm going to have to go through that process again. People see me until they see that piece of paper."

Even with a great education, an extensive background in human resources and office management, Kelli humbly took an assistant manager position at a local convenience store, all to be reminded by the company of the retribution she would face if something was taken from the register. The blame would naturally fall on her based on her background. This loomed on her.

Kelli always had business ideas and aspirations. After months and months of let-downs and affliction, learning about the RISE Business Academy gave her hope. She was finally able to create an opportunity for herself without the stress and anxiety of seeking employment from a company that wasn't background friendly.

"It took me about a month to get the courage to see if I would qualify for the Business Academy because I hadn't taken the RISE In-Prison Program."

12 weeks later, Kelli not only completed the RISE Business Academy, she placed fourth in her cohort's Business Pitch Competition and won \$500 in funding to launch Hope Virtual Service, LLC.

"The Business Academy opened a door, gave me a path and that helped me overcome my obstacles along the way. Either someone helped pave the way or gave me the courage to step through it."



Kelli pitching her virtual assistant business August 6, 2021.

"When you're starting a business or even just thinking about it, it's really lonely. Your family and friends might be cheerleaders, but they're also really worried.

They're worried about what happens if you take that step and what if you fail. They're looking at all the negatives of starting a new business - even if they love you and support you, they're still worried.

They've already seen you fail magnificently.

Being in the Business Academy made me be a part of a group where we got to be each other's cheerleaders and we got to see each other succeed. Not just the other participants, but the staff at RISE. They've increased my bubble. I know I have a place I can go to ask questions and get an honest answer. They're not going to give me misinformation and they're going to encourage me on my toughest days. They're helping me realize the relationships I'm building might not be for right now." Continued...



"They might be for next month...six months from now...maybe even next year. But I know this is where my growth is going to come."

Kelli is now at a point where she's hoping the part time jobs she applies for can get her enough income to really start building her business.

"The Business Academy created the opportunity for me to do this. Before the Business Academy, I didn't have a path. I didn't have funding. I didn't have a sense of community that could help me take one cohesive idea and put it to paper.

By having direction and lessons each week to focus on, it gave me a chance to look at each part of my business in a smaller picture. Where as when you just go off and start a business, you often don't have the time to sit and think about all the different puzzle pieces you have to put together.

The speakers provided each week were so helpful. It was the first time I didn't feel judged. They all knew why we were there, but they were still encouraging us. And you felt like, from a colleague perspective, you could see them in public and they'd still be respectful to you. They have a genuine interest in your success."

Her biggest take away? Having a sense of community. Feeling accepted. Having hope.

"You know...I was ostracized from my old circles... and when they see me now, they feel uncomfortable, like I'm somehow damaged, but I'm not.

I'm still me. I'm just different."

Hope Virtual Service, LLC aims to give hope to small businesses through administrative assistance, unbiased Human Resource consulting, technical support, and more.

For information and to support Kelli and her small business, you can visit her website at hopevirtualservices.com

YOUTH AND FAMILY PROGRAM

By Alana Alexander, Youth & Family Program Associate

Levels of wellness can be placed alongside a social gradient within communities, and health outcomes are accurately predicted by placement within that gradient. The lower you place, the higher you're at risk of negative health outcomes — physical health, of course, but mental, spiritual, and social health as well.

Research shows access to health care, risky behaviors and genetics matter, but they only account for a fraction of health disparities. Instead, societies with the greatest degree of social inequality and largest discrepancies between wealth distribution and social hierarchies predictably have the worst health gradients. There are few, if any, societies below the incarcerated within the social gradient. Historically, this society's well-being has been cast out, set aside, and condemned — as their persons have been.

The Youth and Family Program offers support to increase wellness by creating a community where families can safely express affect, but also discuss how to plan for what family looks like during incarceration, talk about the future, and manage expectations for reunification after release.

What this looks like right now:

- A weekly gathering of families meeting for dinner every Friday night to discuss themed topics to promote family wellness. Main goals: provide a community of support, destigmatize incarceration, and improve wellness by increasing agency.
- Community outreach across the state of Nebraska to discuss wellness and needs of system-impacted families.
- Individualized support for Builders and their families with one-on-one family mediation and conflict resolution sessions.
- Continuing education workshops inside facilities that include education and support for healthy family dynamics and creating pathways to forgiveness for both how the men may have been parented and how they may have parented their own children in the past as well as what successful parenting looks like for them in the future. The women are offering specific advice, love, and support by writing and illustrating a children's book aimed to address various psychological stages children go through during a significant life change.



16

Families utilized RISE Family Support and/or Mediation

10

Family workshops held inside facilities with 40 attendees

18

Participants in the RISE Family Wellness Collective



YOUTH AND FAMILY

...continued

Dr. Thomas, M. Reimers, psychologist at Boys Town Behavioral Health Clinic, has been a tremendous help in conceptualizing the Family Wellness Collective. With his guidance, a sustainable program has been developed and curriculum approved for adolescents and above.

Dr. Gregory S. Snyder, psychologist at Boys Town Center for Behavioral Health, has volunteered to be present during the practical application week for each themed Family Wellness Collective topic to ensure additional trauma is not added to the experiences of families while we role-play healthy ways to manage family conflict.

Matt Gutschick and Isaiah Ruiz from the Rose Theater have offered their creative services and venue space for the Family Wellness Collective and for the Children's Creative Summer Program.

Our first Family Wellness Collective "Art Show" at Marcey Yates' Culxr House was held in November and was a fun introduction to the program.

Rosalia Alexis Rosalia Alexis is the leading artist of the Blackstone Mural Project, alongside her brother, Lorenzo Fuller. Connor Lund has advocated for us with the Blackstone Business Improvement District and Public Art Group who have now granted RISE permission to create a family mural in Spring, 2022.

Though the program is in its infancy, families express emotional exhaustion from the carceral experience and can be slow to join. Oftentimes, there is significant distrust for any entity that pries into family life or wellness. Both are strong barriers to accepting assistance of any kind.

DHHS is most often in play when a family member is arrested. Families, understandably, feel the need to protect their homelife from further disruptions or intrusions. People are tired and traumatized by a system that does not often work in their favor.

We will remain diligent in our mission that people will find freedom from the generational cycles of incarceration through this program.

RISE VOLUNTEERS

By Chantal Wentz, Volunteer Relations Manager, and Erin Cooper, Director of Research and Evaluation

As 2021 comes to an end, RISE continues to be blown away by the tremendous support of our volunteers. During times of isolation and uncertainty for everyone, RISE volunteers consistently exemplify RISE values in each service opportunity that presents itself.

RISE received record donations from volunteers and had an AMAZING Giving Tuesday outcome. Additionally, Volunteers provided holiday gifts for 20 program Graduates and their families, with just a few days notice, ensuring the end of 2021 was a bit brighter and less stressful for our reentering friends.

Prior to COVID-19, in-person volunteer events were standard practice in RISE programming. This practice was in place to humanize the incarceration experience while building empathy and connections for participants prior to reentering the community. Due to COVID-19 and NDCS procedural changes, in-person volunteer events were suspended and/or permanently changed at all facilities. This change led RISE to develop an online volunteer portal to continue providing volunteer experiences and building community empathy.

Despite restrictions based on health concerns, NDCS staffing shortages, and facility overcrowding, RISE saw 117 new volunteers, many of whom utilized the new online volunteer portal. This portal also allowed RISE to provide volunteer opportunities to individuals from other states and countries around the world.

While RISE saw more new volunteers, RISE did see over 60 volunteers return. RISE theorizes that the low return rate was due to volunteers no longer having access to NDCS facilities.

We look forward to the year ahead and creating new volunteer options, not only through the in-prison program, but via the RISE Business Academy and the RISE Youth and Family Program.



184

Volunteers shared their time and talents with RISE in 2021

14

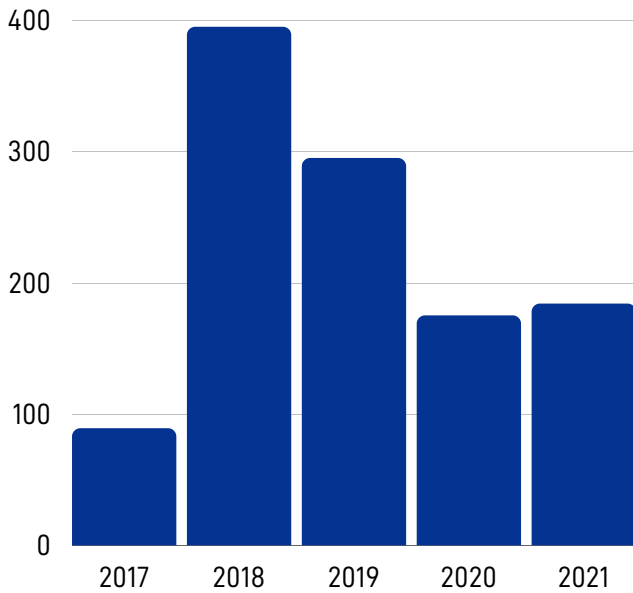
In-prison and modified online coaching events

872

Unique number of overall volunteers to date

RISE VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers



RISE is a gift-lifter. In small baby steps, it encourages people, builders, staff and volunteers alike, to lift up their innate gifts and share them with the world. I'm so grateful to be part of the giftng. - Suzanne King, RISE Volunteer



31 175⁺

RISE Business
Academy volunteers

Online
coaching volunteers

"Having the opportunity to volunteer with RISE has been, hands down, the most fulfilling thing I've ever had the privilege of doing! Being someone that has been incarcerated and had those worries and struggles that goes with that it, RISE addresses all of those and some! RISE stands out for many reasons but the purpose full work they do with caring hearts is hands down the greatest thing about this organization! Volunteering for RISE has had a huge impact on my life and my fellow coworkers' lives at Starbucks, while also creating awareness of our ever growing incarceration problems in our state and country." - James Stull, RISE Volunteer



