



The STAR Project’s **Mission** is to provide the guidance and support that will successfully re-integrate ex-offenders into the community as contributing members of society.

Our **Vision** is to increase community safety and reduce recidivism by assisting persons to successfully transition from incarceration to the community.

Ban the Box

For many former inmates who go back to jail/prison a permanent inability to find a job plays a large role in their eventual recidivism. Their high rate of unemployment is due in part to common hiring policies that screen out all people with criminal records at the beginning of the hiring process regardless of the applicant’s qualifications, type of offense, or how long ago the offense happened. These practices hurt all parties involved. They harm the communities these people are trying to reenter, keep employers from accessing qualified candidates and opens them to potential civil rights lawsuits, and stifles the individual’s attempt to build a successful contributing life out of prison.



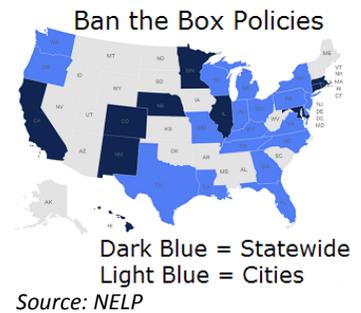
Have you ever been convicted?

Recognizing the broad societal benefits as well as the moral imperative to challenge these hiring practices a movement called “Ban the Box” has taken off across the nation. In its most basic form it requires employers to remove the check-box on job applications asking about criminal convictions. This is not to say that a prospective employer is banned from ever asking or from conducting background checks. It simply means that they must wait until later in the hiring process, once an applicant has been allowed the opportunity to interview.

Ban the Box is a movement that brings together employment justice advocates, law enforcement, politicians and business leaders. According to the NELP (National Employment Law Project) at least 66 cities and counties, 12 states and 2 large corporations have adopted some version of a Ban the Box policy.

There is a lot of variation in policies. Some locations have moved the question/background check to after the interview process or only once a conditional offer has been made. Others have provisions that only certain types of job should be back-

ground checked. Several have adopted EEOC guidelines that only specific crimes pertaining directly to the job and having a material effect on business prospects be screened out of the hiring process. A few locations adopted practices requiring that employers make background check results known and give the applicant the opportunity to respond to inaccuracies in the record. Often, a first step applies the ban to government hiring or employers contracted with governments only later including private employers.



In Washington State, on June 10th, 2013 Seattle passed an ordinance banning the box that includes private employers. Spokane is also considering banning the box. This past legislative cycle the Washington Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers (WACDL) tried to get legislation passed at a state level banning the use of non-conviction (arrest) records from consideration in hiring. The bill never made it to a floor vote.

However, the WACDL in association with a leadership class of Ag-Forestry professionals spread across the state are putting together a new policy package for this coming legislative cycle. They plan to coordinate their efforts with the Governor’s new Justice Reinvestment Task Force. The process is in the early stages and they are still determining how ambitious they want the package to be. This time around they will emphasize the wide support for this issue across multiple groups. Specifically, they plan to build support from within the business community. Be on the lookout for this bill in the coming year.

For more information check out: <http://www.nelp.org/page/content/banthebox/>. See page 2 to learn more about the impact of discriminatory hiring practices on STAR clients.

Employment and the Label “Felon”

Finding a job with a felony conviction is daunting. There are numerous barriers to employment including a lack of transportation, mandates to stay strictly in the city of Walla Walla, or a lack of qualifications (such as education or trade skills). On top of these possible restrictions, one of the most difficult aspects of the job search process is getting a foot in the door for an interview. Two STAR clients, David and Scott, were willing to share their experiences about working to obtain employment after incarceration.

David begins, “I have put in, from when I stopped counting, twenty six applications in the past one hundred and twenty six days.” From these applications, he only got three interviews and remains unemployed. Scott, who has been out of prison for three and a half years, cites the same difficulty saying, “I’ve only had, what, on all the applications that I put out, I’ve only had four interviews.” An interview means opportunity to distinguish yourself whereas an application can easily be disregarded (especially when a person with a felony usually must check “the box” on an application). David remarks, “I think the interview process is the time in which you need to judge someone by their character.” But he further points out, “Most of the time I can’t even get an interview.” This is not uncommon—more often than not, a person with a felony is not given the opportunity to interview. This is not always due to lack of qualification either—both David and Scott have had some higher education and affirmed that they had essentially only applied to positions that they were qualified for.



Scott volunteering at Diversity Day 2014

Even when offered an interview the experience is still varied. Scott recalls his first experience interviewing after incarceration: “My first interview, which was with Home Depot, was a disaster. When we filled out the application it said on there that if your conviction is over ten years old then you do not have to disclose it. But when I went to my interview, the questions that were being asked, I had to disclose the fact that I had been in prison. And the lady said [...] that anybody that was convicted of a felony, her experience was that they didn’t get hired. But she gave me the option of continuing the interview or stopping right there.” Though this was a disheartening experience, there are also positive experiences in the search for employment.

David discusses an experience with a potential employer: “This woman by the name of Mary, she works for the Sears Corporation. Ever since I applied to Sears, every week or so she sends me emails of companies that are hiring. I always check into the jobs that she recommends for me. So she has always maintained contact with me. This wasn’t something I signed up for, this was just because I filled out applications to Sears.”

While there are hurdles to finding employment, there are also resources in Walla Walla that help in this process. David says, “My CCO told me about WorkSource. That is a very valuable tool. I went to WorkSource numerous times and the guy behind the desk told me about Indeed.com and Craigslist. That is just a plethora of knowledge.” Both men emphasized the importance of word of mouth when finding a job and having a network. That is how Scott secured his first job at Oil Can Henry’s. “I found out that they were hiring from two guys that worked there. I would have to say word of mouth is the best.”

Despite these resources why is it so hard to overcome a felony record and find a job? David has a theory: “It is the general perspective that once you’re a felon you’re untrustworthy, you’re unreliable. We are immediately labeled.” It is hard for employers to see past this label and yet, with no job, it is very difficult for a person to live a crime free life. David explains, “Now don’t get me wrong, I do believe that a certain kind of caution is necessary, however to take it to the extreme and bar everyone, or shall I say most felons, from even giving them the opportunity to work is not very just.” This is the conundrum for an employer—making sure to hire safe, trustworthy employees while also knowing that if no one hires a person with a felony then that permanently limits their opportunity.



David

It should come down to the actual individual: Scott explains, “As far as support from the community and potential employers and stuff like that, I think they need to take a look at who the person is that’s applying. Granted, I was incarcerated for almost nineteen years but like I like to tell people, my past made me who I am but it does not define who I am. There is a whole different person now than what I was back then.”

In the end, people want to be seen not as their labels, but as human beings. When it comes to securing a job, this label is detrimental. It is up to us as community members, employers, and conscious individuals to, at the least, acknowledge these difficulties and contribute where we can to breaking down the barriers to finding employment.

Meet Our New Staff



**Kathy Farrell Guizar -
*Transition Specialist***

Kathy is working with inmates at the Washington State Penitentiary on pre-release planning and paperwork. This includes all of the work that leads up to being able to sign-up for school, seek financial aid, and receive other community services for people releasing all around the state.

“After relocating to attend Whitman College from Metro Detroit I made a conscious choice to call Walla Walla home. This decision has served me and my family well. I am excited about my new role with the STAR Project because I can personally enjoy the small town lifestyle while realizing a statewide impact at the Penitentiary.”



**James Crosbie -
*Case Manger***

It is a pleasure and a privilege to be working with the STAR Project.

I am new to Walla Walla, having just arrived from Bellingham. Already I feel at home in this community, having been graciously welcomed by the people I’ve encountered here.

Prior to moving to Walla Walla I taught middle school Language Arts and Social studies for almost ten years. As a teacher, I often struggled to meet the personal needs of students whose lives had been torn apart by conflict and inconsistency relating to the cycle of drug abuse, crime, and incarceration in their families. Often unable to intervene as effectively as I would have liked to, I grew frustrated watching some of these students slip into the lifestyle and habits of those around them.

Here I have a unique ability to help individuals caught in this cycle to break free and realize their full potential. I am excited to be a part of this work and to help affect real change. I always looked forward to celebrating the personal growth students would realize over the course of a school year and I fully anticipate celebrating the growth of our clients here.

Please Join us Online!

STAR Project is joining the 21st century and would love to take you with us. Please check out our Facebook and Twitter accounts at:

www.facebook.com/TheSTARProjectWW
and on Twitter:

[@theSTARProjWW](https://twitter.com/theSTARProjWW)

We also have an electronic newsletter/mailling list you can sign up for. By signing up for the email list everyone wins - WE save paper and YOU get to see the newsletter in all of it’s full color glory and with more in depth articles and resources. You can sign up by clicking the Join Our Mailing List button at the bottom of our webpage: www.thestarproject.us

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