

Bleak job outlook confronts ex-cons

Despite incentives, many businesses won't hire ex-offenders

By Chelsey Levingston, Staff Writer

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He has a strong work history and Tyrone Cox Jr. still can't find a job. Even knowing a trade isn't much help right now.

This may be the norm nowadays, but the economy is only one barrier for Cox. The other is his theft conviction in 2004.

"Because it's a theft-related offense, they don't want to hire us," said Cox.

At least not permanently. After his orientation at Talbert House halfway house, Cox said he has moved from job to job in the past three weeks after a layoff and temporary agency placement. Even when he goes to work as a temp, he's sometimes sent back if there's no work.

He can't be an electrician helper anymore under the terms of his state supervised parole. But Cox starts another temp job Monday, Aug. 17, at AK Steel Corp.'s Middletown Works.

"My record, it's rough with a charge like I have," he said.

Another ex-offender with more celebrity power brought this subject to light in Sunday's "60 Minutes" interview.

Atlanta Falcons quarterback Michael Vick was suspended from the NFL after a prison sentence for illegal dogfighting, damaging his career. Vick in July was reinstated to the NFL. Last week he was picked up by the Philadelphia Eagles.

Not all ex-offenders have prospects in the job market like Cox and Vick.

"Now with the economy, we're not having a lot of luck with our residents finding jobs, bottom line," said Randy Allman, manager at Talbert House on Ohio 63 outside Lebanon, which serves 11 counties in Southwest Ohio.

Many of the 72 residents at Talbert House come straight from an institution, said Allman. As a result, even before the economy becomes a barrier, Allman said residents may find the world changed and their skills outdated.

Talbert House focuses on helping its clients achieve success in the workplace. But the sluggish economy is a new challenge, Allman said.

"We want them to have all the pieces in place to be successful. One of these pieces is employment," said Teri Nau, Talbert House community relations director.

But in today's economy, many ex-offenders find getting a job nearly impossible, even with tax incentives for employers and support for the Talbert House workers they employ.

The Talbert House vocation department works to educate employers about tax credits for hiring

ex-offenders and provides residents support and transportation.

“If you think about it, that’s a pretty big package to offer to an employer and we still get mostly rejections. I can only attribute that to their record,” Allman said.

Allman also said ex-offenders see increased competition for low-paying work and temporary jobs.

Chris Connolly, assistant vice president of Community Behavioral Health, which is a social service organization primarily serving Butler County, said many people with records work hard and have skills, but a small-business environment with closer management often works better for them. Ex-offenders tend to find success working with smaller organizations such as roofing, construction and landscaping, which are more hands-on with their employees, he said.

“The main thing I see is there’s a job opening and 20 people apply. You’re an ex-offender and you’re almost immediately screened out. For an ex-offender that’s very frustrating,” Connolly said.

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