

## EMPLOYMENT BARRIERS FOR FORMER PRISONERS



In the state of Oklahoma, well over 8 percent of the population has some sort of criminal background. The best way to eliminate the pattern of crime is to help these individuals find a job as this is the general way to eliminate poverty and keep these individuals off the streets, away from trouble and tempting situations. However, having a felony conviction, which is something many Oklahomans have, could mean having to deal with some serious obstacles when it comes to actually finding employment. There are still a number of felons who are filling up the prisons of Oklahoma, as these prisons are close to their capacity. However, at one point or another, the vast majority of these individuals will be released from jail and will then need to find a job; otherwise the chances of going back to prison will be quite high. For one former prisoner, being released from prison was an entirely different experience. Michael Howell-El was serving a 23-year sentence that related to drug. After serving his time and being released, he entered into an atmosphere that was entirely different than it was when he was locked up. Howell-El says that he was excited and shocked to see the new kinds of cars, along with cell phones and all other aspects of technology, all of which have advanced over the past two decades. He says that when he entered prison, mobile phones were still really large but now they are equipped with texting and are super small and handheld, which was something that came to a surprise to him. After getting out of prison, Howell-El was told that he owed two years-worth of child support, which he owed for a daughter that he produced back in 1987. Unfortunately, he daughter passed away in 1989 but he still owed the money. He no longer had the money that he saved during his prison years, especially with all of the fees. He is an ex-con and realized, how could he possibly pay the price of living, along with all of the other fees he owes, after just being released into an entirely different world, one that is so different from what it was back in the 80's. He is not the only one feeling the crunch. Many other former prisoners in Oklahoma are having a hard time finding the employment that they need in order to live, without having to resort back to a life of crime. The Center for Employment Opportunities works with these former felons, helping them to find employment, but there is still a lot of work to be done and a lot of progress to be made, as there are many former prisoners who are having a hard time adjusting to life after being released.