



The Inside Out Network:

A PLATFORM FOR FACILITATING SUCCESS
FOR RETURNING CITIZENS

by Byron R. Johnson and William Wubbenhorst



Purpose & Mission

Launched in August 2004, The Baylor Institute for Studies of Religion (ISR) exists to initiate, support, and conduct research on religion, involving scholars and projects spanning the intellectual spectrum: history, psychology, sociology, economics, anthropology, political science, philosophy, epidemiology, theology, and religious studies. Our mandate extends to all religions, everywhere, and throughout history. It also embraces the study of religious effects on such things as prosocial behavior, family life, population health, economic development, and social conflict. While always striving for appropriate scientific objectivity, our scholars treat religion with the respect that sacred matters require and deserve.



The Inside Out Network:

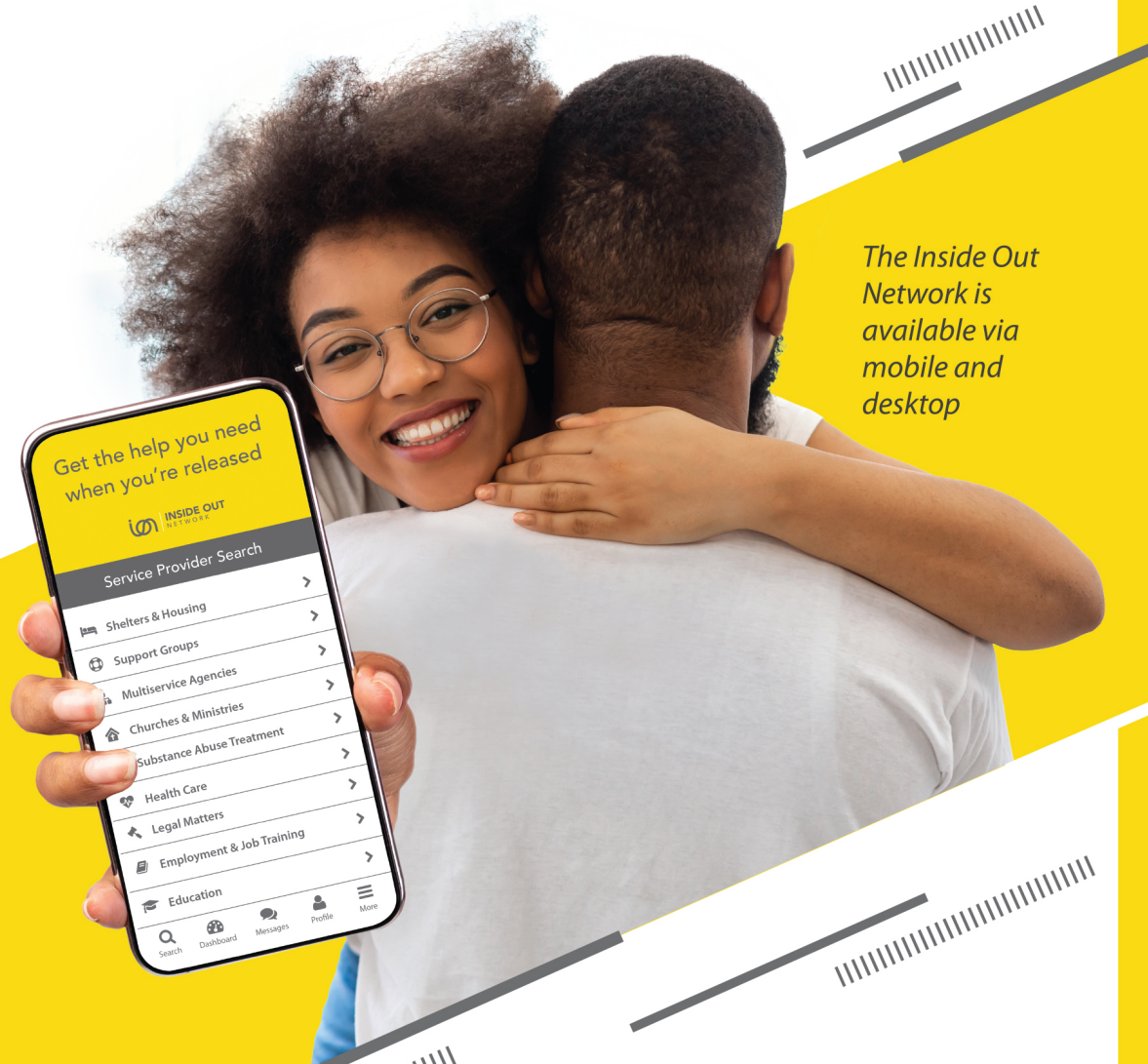
*A Platform for Facilitating Success
for Returning Citizens*

by Byron R. Johnson and William Wubbenhorst

THE INSIDE OUT NETWORK:
A Platform for Facilitating Success for Returning Citizens

INTRODUCTION	5
I. BACKGROUND:	6
CONNECTING IN-PRISON PROGRAMS TO PRISONER REENTRY AND AFTERCARE	
The Needs of Returning Citizens	
II. THE INSIDE OUT NETWORK - HOW IT WORKS	9
ION Begins	
ION in Arizona	
What ION Does	
How ION Works	
III. A PRELIMINARY EVALUATION	14
Looking at the Numbers	
Looking Beyond the Numbers	
ION - Next Steps in Arizona	
ION Beyond Arizona	
IV. CONCLUSION	20

Get your loved one the help they need before they're released



The Inside Out Network is available via mobile and desktop



SIGN UP TODAY!

Here's a **FREE** and powerful new way to overcome the isolation and invisibility of reentry. You can enroll your incarcerated loved one on the Inside Out Network to find helpful resources and supportive people through a revolutionary website that provides a path to personal transformation & the practical help needed.

INSIDEOUTNETWORK.NET
SUPPORT@INSIDEOUTNETWORK.NET

INTRODUCTION

The Inside Out Network (ION) is a unique, web-based platform for connecting Returning Citizens (RCs) with a variety of community-based programs and services available to assist them in their transition back into the community upon release. The purpose of this case study is three-fold:

1. To provide a brief background on the level of resources and types of initiatives that correctional institutions have historically provided to meet the educational, vocational, and rehabilitation needs of prisoners.
2. To give a brief historical sketch of the Inside Out Network: its origins, philosophy, and approach as a facilitator for Returning Citizens in their efforts to re-integrate into society upon release from prison. This section will also include an in-depth examination of the ION program in Arizona in partnership with the Department of Corrections, based on interviews with correctional staff, parole officers, and a variety of nonprofit, community-based organizations, including faith-based organizations, that utilize the ION platform to connect with and assist Returning Citizens.
3. To conduct some preliminary analysis of the data behind ION, using metrics that show where and how ION helps improve Returning Citizens' ability to identify the resources and programs they need to successfully re-integrate with society.
4. To identify next steps for ION, in terms of both their ability to serve more RCs in Arizona and their current efforts to expand their partnerships with correctional institutions in other states.

I. **BACKGROUND:**
Connecting In-Prison Programs to Prisoner Reentry and Aftercare

There is widespread consensus that correctional institutions offer too few programs designed to meet the educational, vocational, and rehabilitation needs of prisoners. There are a number of reasons for this situation, but one of the most obvious is that policymakers have been reluctant to support correctional policies that appear to favor offender treatment programs. Job training, counseling, or support services for inmates can easily be interpreted as endorsing a philosophical approach that is “soft on crime.” However, evaluation studies indicate that these same kind of correctional programs (e.g., holistic, restorative, and positive approaches to offender treatment) have been linked to recidivism reduction and thus help to achieve the goal of increasing public safety.¹ In fact, empirical evidence supports the notion that more punitive approaches have been linked to higher recidivism rates.² Nevertheless, law-and-order approaches have consistently been prioritized over offender treatment models.³ Stated differently, empirical evidence confirms that offender treatment can be effective and reduce post-release recidivism. Regrettably, however, decision-makers have been reluctant to support and scale these efforts.

While practitioners, scholars, and politicians continue to debate how to effectively manage correctional populations, the process of successfully reintegrating offenders back to communities has frustrated correctional leaders and politicians for many decades. This problem has been exacerbated by the sheer number of prisoners returning to American communities each year. Between 1980 and 2006, the U.S. prison population increased by 467 percent (from 319,598 to 1,492,973), and the parole population increased by 362 percent (from 220,438 to 798,202).⁴ The prison population decreased by about 7 percent (from 1,615,500 to 1,505,400) between 2009 and 2016, and the parole population continued an upward trend, showing an almost 10 percent increase between 2006 and 2016 (from 798,202 to 874,800).⁵

Though the prison population has been in slow decline since 2009,⁶ a prior three-decade buildup has made it inevitable that there would be an increase in the number of prisoners returning to communities across the country.

In 2015, more than 641,000 people who had been sentenced to state and federal prison were released to communities across the country.⁷ Consider that another 9 million people are released from local jails each year.⁸ Even though it has often been argued that a prisoner reentry plan that includes effective aftercare programs for ex-prisoners (and their families) has the potential to reduce recidivism significantly and thus improve public safety, policymakers have been reluctant to publicly defend such programs.⁹ This has led to a national debate about how to best handle what has become known as the prisoner reentry crisis.¹⁰

Several correctional programs have been implemented over the years to help address the difficult adjustment period when prisoners transition back into society. Halfway houses, community corrections, intensive supervision, and community reintegration programs represent a few of the various post-release efforts designed to make prisoner reentry into society less difficult for ex-prisoners while ensuring public safety.¹¹ But despite corrections expenditures that are now in excess of \$60 billion annually, the likelihood that a former prisoner will succeed in the community has not improved. In a 2018 study that followed more than 400,000 people released from state prisons in 30 states in 2005, 68 percent were arrested within 3 years of release, and 79 percent within 5 years of release.¹²

Growing caseloads have made effective case management of former prisoners in the community increasingly difficult. A by-product of heavy caseloads is increasing occupational stress on parole officers.¹³ In addition, when parole officers are spread too thin to effectively manage clients in the community, ex-offenders inevitably do not receive the supervision and assistance they clearly need.¹⁴ Even though the problems faced by ex-prisoners returning to society are readily identifiable, governmental efforts to address these reentry and aftercare problems remain limited.¹⁵ On the other hand, private efforts to confront these correctional problems have produced some results that are positive.¹⁶

1 Harlow, C.W. (2003). Education and Correctional Populations (Washington: U.S. Department of Justice), 4, <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/ecp.pdf>; Maryfield, B. (2020). Research on Restorative Justice Practices, Justice Research and Statistics Association. Supported by Grant No. 2018-86-CX-K038 awarded by the Bureau of Justice Statistics. <https://www.jrsa.org/pubs/factsheets/jrsa-research-brief-restorative-justice.pdf>; Pagano, M.E., Wang, A.R., Rowles, B.M., Lee, M.T., & Johnson, B.R. (2015). "Social Anxiety and Peer Helping in Adolescent Addiction Treatment," *Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research* 39(5):887-895; Hallett, M., Hays, J., Johnson, B. R., Jang, S. J., & Duwe, G. (2015). "First Stop Dying:" Angola's Christian Seminary as Positive Criminology," *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology* 61(4):445-463.

2 James J. Stephan, (2008). Census of State and Federal Correctional Facilities, 2005 (Washington: U.S. Department of Justice), 6, <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/csfef05.pdf>

3 Cullen, F. 2002. Rehabilitation and Treatment Programs. In *Crime: Public Policies for Crime Control*, edited by James Q. Wilson and Joan Petersilia, 253–289. Oakland, CA: ICS Press.

4 U.S. Department of Justice. 2006. Adults on Probation, in Jail or Prison, and Parole. Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Online. Table 6.1. Retrieved from <http://www.albany.edu/sourcebook/pdf/t612006.pdf>

5 Kaeble D. and M. Cowhig. 2018. Correctional Populations in the United States, 2016. NCJ251211. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics

6 U.S. Correctional Populations in the United States, 2016 (NCJ 251211) was written by BJS statisticians Danielle Kaeble and Mary Cowhig. Probation and Parole in the United States, 2016, was written by Danielle Kaeble. Data are from BJS's National Prisoner Statistics program, Annual Probation and Annual Parole surveys and Annual Survey of Jails. The reports, related documents and additional information about BJS's statistical publications and programs can be found on the BJS website at www.bjs.gov.

7 Carson, E. A. Prisoners in 2015; Langan, P. A., and D. J. Levin. 2002. Recidivism of Prisoners Released in 1994. NCJ 193427. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics.

8 Allen J. Beck, "The Importance of Successful Reentry to Jail Population Growth" (paper presented at the Urban Institute's Jail Reentry Roundtable, June 27, 2006), available at urban.org/sites/default/files/beck.ppt.

9 Cullen, F. 2002. Rehabilitation and Treatment Programs. In *Crime: Public Policies for Crime Control*, edited by James Q. Wilson and Joan Petersilia, 253–289. Oakland, CA: ICS Press.

10 See for example, Travis, J. 2005. But They All Come Back: Facing the Challenges of Prisoner Reentry. Washington, DC: Urban Institute Press; Travis, J., and C. Visser, eds. 2005. Prisoner Reentry and Crime in America. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press; Western, Bruce (2018). Homeward: Life in the Year After Prison. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation; Harding, David J., Morenoff, Jeffrey D., and Wyse, Jessica J.J. (2019). On the Outside: Prisoner Reentry and Reintegration. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

11 Petersilia, J. 2003. When Prisoners Come Home: Parole and Prisoner Reentry. New York: Oxford University Press; Osborne, J., and A. Solomon. 2006. Jail and Reentry Roundtable Initiative. Washington, DC: Urban Institute.

12 Mariel Alper, Matthew R. Durose, and Joshua Markman (2018). 2018 Update On Prisoner Recidivism: A 9-Year Follow-Up Period (2005-2014), (Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2014), available at [bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/rprts05p0510.pdf](https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/rprts05p0510.pdf)

13 Finn, P., and S. Kuck. 2003. Addressing Probation and Parole Officer Stress. Final Report to the National Institute of Justice. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, National Criminal Justice Reference Service. Retrieved from <http://www.ncjrs.org/pdffiles1/nij/grants/207012.pdf>.

14 Michelle S. Phelps (2013). "The Paradox of Probation: Community Supervision in the Age of Mass Incarceration," *Law Policy* 35: 51-80.

15 Travis, J., and C. Visser, eds. 2005. Prisoner Reentry and Crime in America. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

16 Johnson, B. R., D. B. Larson, and T. Pitts. 1997. "Religious Programming, Institutional Adjustment and Recidivism Among Former Inmates in Prison Fellowship Programs." *Justice Quarterly* 14: 145–166; Johnson, B.R. 2003. The InnerChange Freedom Initiative: A Preliminary Evaluation of a Faith-Based Prison Program. ISR Report. Waco, TX: Baylor University, Institute for Studies of Religion; Johnson, B. 2004. "Religious Program and Recidivism Among Former Inmates in Prison Fellowship Programs: A Long-Term Follow-Up Study." *Justice Quarterly* 21: 329– 354; Johnson, B.R., W. Wubbenhorst, & C. Schroeder (2013). Recidivism Reduction and Return on Investment: An Empirical Assessment of the Prison Entrepreneurship Program. Institute for Studies of Religion, Special Report. Baylor University (2013), <http://www.BAYLORISR.org/publications/reports/>; Grant Duwe, Michael Hallett, Joshua Hays, Sung Joon Jang, and Byron Johnson, "Bible College Participation and Prison Misconduct: A Preliminary Analysis," *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation* 54, no. 5 (2015): 371–90; Sung Joon Jang, Byron R. Johnson, Joshua Hays, Michael Hallett, and Grant Duwe (2018). "Existential and Virtuous Effects of Religiosity on Mental Health and Aggressiveness among Offenders," *Religions* 9, 182: 1-19.

The Needs of Returning Citizens

Every year, more than 600,000 people are released from state prisons across the country.¹⁷ Many of these individuals struggle with unhealthy shame and stigmatization and have low levels of social capital. Some additional salient characteristics of these returning citizens (using Arizona Dept. of Corrections figures as an example): Average age is 35 years, 85% are male, 60% are people of color, average length of incarceration is 2.2 years, and 85% have a moderate to intense need for substance abuse treatment. Eight out of 10 men and 9 out of 10 women reported having at least one physical health, mental health, or substance abuse problem. This is a population whose health is generally compromised and who are challenged by many, if not most, of the social determinants of health.

Most of these returnees don't have a warm and effective support network to come home to. And most RCs aren't adept at navigating the confusing and disconnected patchwork of services, agencies, and churches that are actively trying to help them. Most of the men and women who are released into the community are eager and hopeful to do well, settle down, stay sober, do productive work, and enjoy healthy relationships. However, because of poor communication, constantly changing service providers, and out-of-date or incomplete information, most returning citizens simply cannot see the path to the help that is out there for them.

At the same time, many programs serving RCs go undersubscribed, with job-training classes operating at half-capacity, halfway houses with unfilled beds, and ministries shut down because service providers lack an effective way to connect to and communicate with RCs in real time. The current "system" serves very few stakeholders well and has led to widespread dissatisfaction and discouragement for both RCs and the service providers who are looking to work with them. These and other factors contribute to poor health outcomes, high rates of recidivism, and a generational cycle of despair among RCs.

II. THE INSIDE OUR NETWORK - HOW IT WORKS

ION Begins

The Inside Out Network began in 2006 as a church-based prison ministry called "Under the Door." In 2015, ION created a paper-based reentry guide for Chicago under the name RED (Re-Entry Directory) Chicago, partnering with over 25 churches to arrange for free printing. The success of this printed guide led to a new partnership (and opportunity) with the Illinois Dept. of Corrections, working to address another unmet need, an online reentry platform for the entire state. In response, ION developed an early prototype in 2017 and worked to create the Inside

¹⁷ This figure does not include those released from federal prisons or local county jails or all those who are serving probation for a felony conviction.

Out Network platform. In 2020, ION transitioned its legal status from a church-based ministry and reorganized as a separate 501(c)(3). In 2021, ION launched formally statewide with the Illinois Dept. of Corrections.

ION in Arizona

In 2021, ION also launched the network across the state of Arizona, enrolling service providers and working collaboratively with the Arizona Dept. of Corrections, Rehabilitation & Reentry (ADCRR) to produce explainer videos, train staff, and register inmates. In the fall of 2022, in conjunction with ADCRR, ION conducted a survey and assessment of networking connections in reentry across the state of Arizona—the first ever in any state, as far as they were able to discover. ION surveyed hundreds of reentry organizations and thousands of networking connections in order to better understand and map (a) who is actively engaged in reentry, (b) how and to what extent reentry organizations interact with each other, and (c) how they engage in various coalitions and networks. The premise for this effort was that first getting a clear picture of what’s happening will allow for better informed efforts to improve reentry overall going forward.

What ION Does

ION addresses the problem of invisibility in reentry head-on by providing an online platform that allows RCs and service providers to see and be seen and to communicate directly with each other. As Fred Nelson, Executive Director for ION, explains:

ION’s platform is the missing connecting piece in reentry. Better yet, think of us as ‘eHarmony for reentry.’ We make it easy for returning citizens and service providers to search, find relevant matches, connect with, and even reach out proactively and message each other on our platform. We’ve built a tool that empowers and enables returning citizens to engage in their own reentry more actively, often starting prior to release. ION also allows and incentivizes service providers to be proactive and respond promptly, while giving new service providers an easy way into the reentry marketplace.

How ION works

Enrollment

The first, and most challenging step in the ION process is the enrollment of pre-release prisoners into the ION network. The enrollment process—which is supposed to begin between seven and 13 months before release, depending on an inmate’s community risk score¹⁸ — involves getting RCs online to register for the program and begin

18 A community risk score is assessed as people enter into the DOC, and then proceed through it to reentry. It uses actuarial models to assess the likelihood of someone recidivating, from 1 on the very low likelihood end, to 5 on the high likelihood end.

identifying and connecting with a variety of resources to assist them in their transition back into the community. The key players necessary for RC enrollment into ION are the Correctional Officer III (COIII), who works as an RC’s case manager while in prison, and the Reentry Preparation Specialist (RPS), a trained and paid inmate position serving as a peer coach to RCs in preparing for release.

At enrollment, the inmate creates a personal profile that outlines the kinds of help they’re looking for upon release, their anticipated address and release date, and personal information they choose to share with potential service providers. Service providers, meanwhile, enroll directly online to create an organizational profile that outlines all the kinds of services they provide, their location, contact information, hours of operation, and any fees or restrictions that may apply.

There are both cultural and technological challenges to the enrollment process. The cultural challenge revolves around gaining the commitment from the COIIIs to get RCs enrolled and active on the platform. ION staff have invested significant effort in presenting and training the COIIIs and RPSs on the ION platform and enrollment process to that end. As explained by Jason Jardine, a COIII trainer working systemwide at every correctional facility, getting the COIIIs on board is key:

The buy-in from the RPSs is strong, as they can immediately grasp the value of ION based on their own lived experience and just needed the training to help RCs to use it. The real challenge is getting the COIIIs on board. I know at first that I treated the enrollment as a kind of ‘check the box’ exercise, where I got a lot of the RCs registered for ION, but didn’t work too hard getting them to actually use it.

Once I began to understand how powerful the ION platform was, I began to really understand the potential of ION, I began to work hard to get the RCs to use it as well. However, in some of the complexes¹⁹, the culture and attitude of some, but certainly not all, COIIIs towards the RCs’ ability to make a successful transition can limit their efforts to get the RCs connected. However, it’s also important to note that there is also a significant number of Returning Citizens that refuse to utilize ION, no matter how hard their COIIIs express the benefits of this resource.

The technological challenge is how to get RCs access to a computer with Internet. In many cases, this requires the COIIIs to provide access through their own computers for the RCs during their meeting times. Another strategy is to migrate the ION platform to inmate tablets, and discussions are underway with tablet providers, including Securus Technologies, a major supplier. In the meantime, some RCs have developed a workaround by registering

19 Prisons.

for ION and sharing their login information with friends and family to assist them in connecting with resources and programs while they are still incarcerated. ION and ADCRR are implementing a pilot project to utilize mothballed desktop computers and whitelist the ION platform for RCs to use at designated times. If this pilot proves successful, the plan is to implement it across the state in every prison unit.

Recruitment of Service Providers

Even before any inmates were enrolled, ION needed to spend time and effort on the supply side, which involved the recruitment of service providers. ION has categorized ION service providers into nine categories, with many providers serving more than one category:

- 1. Shelters and Housing
- 2. Substance Abuse Treatment & Recovery
- 3. Employment and Job Training
- 4. Health Care
- 5. Churches and Ministries
- 6. Education
- 7. Support Groups
- 8. Multiservice Agencies
- 9. Legal Matters

ION has participated in many county and statewide reentry coalition meetings across Arizona to gain more exposure and participation. One particular challenge in this effort is recruiting service providers in rural areas, which have fewer resources and programs to serve ex-offenders. Finally, ION has used social network analysis²⁰ to better understand the workings and interactions or reentry programs in different communities. As of Aug. 1, 2023, ION has registered 182 service providers throughout the state.

Matching

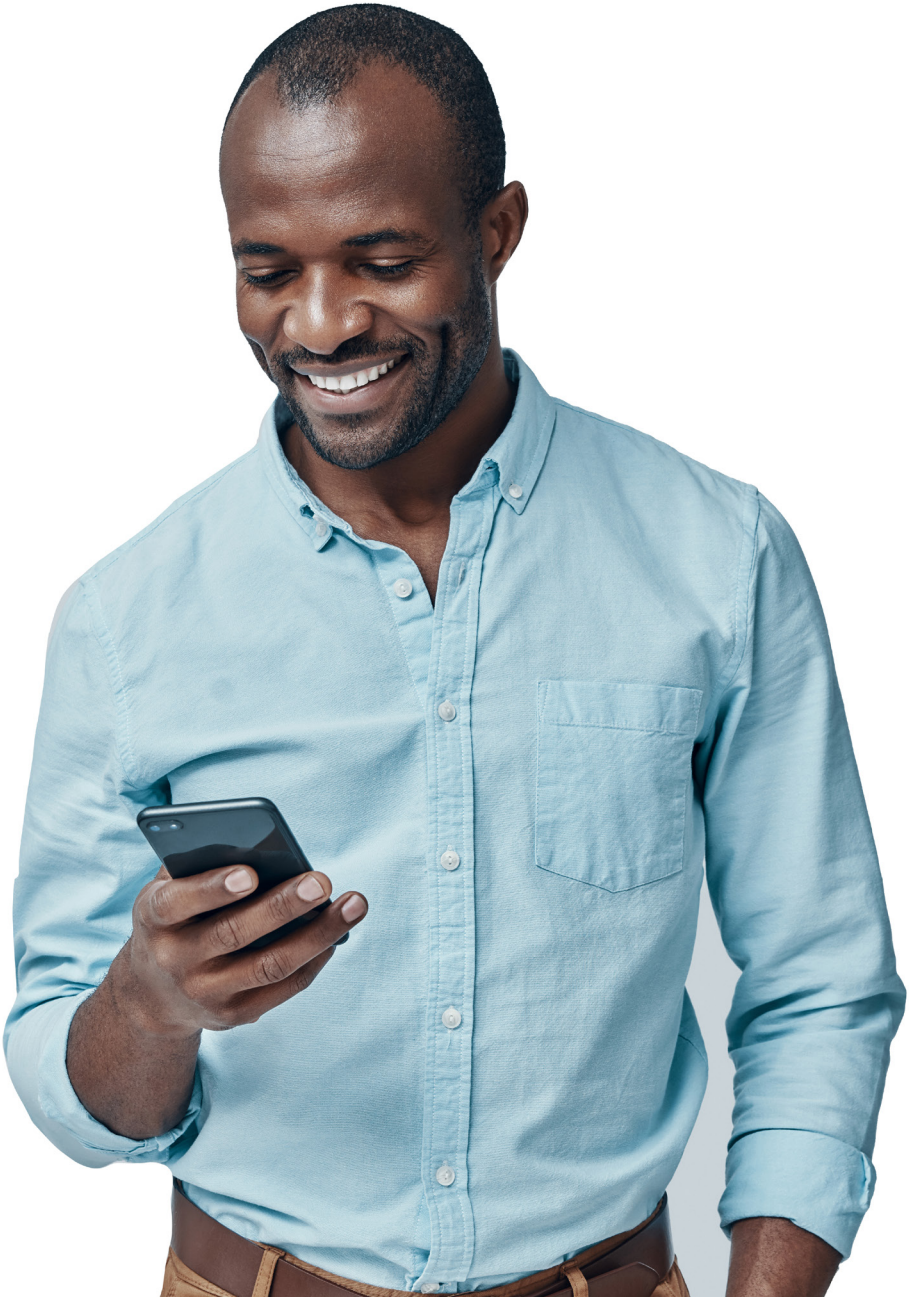
Returning citizens’ personal profiles go live in the system up to 11 months before their scheduled release. Their profiles are matched for relevance with service providers both by service category and by geographical proximity. Service providers are able to view the profiles of all new relevant matches prior to inmates’ release dates. This allows service providers to see, for the first time, all of the relevant individual returning citizens who are being released into their service area, in real time, and to reach out proactively to message them.

²⁰ Social Network Analysis is a method used to determine and understand the nature of social interactions between individuals as well as groups. This method uses algorithms to determine the strength and nature of a range of relational aspects like communication, trust, influence, resource sharing, and exchange of knowledge.. Maps and other visualizations of these social networks can be created to enhance insight and understanding.

Engagement

There are two significant ways returning citizens and service providers engage on the ION website: searching and messaging. The website’s search function both lists and maps service providers by category and allows returning citizens to save “favorite” service providers on their dashboards. The website’s message function (similar to an instant message app on social media) allows simple, direct messaging between citizens and providers and keeps a record of the exchange. Once they’re released, returning citizens don’t need an email or phone number to communicate directly. They simply log in and message relevant, selected providers. This constitutes the primary outcome and purpose for ION, to empower RCs and service providers to connect and directly engage with each other.

An engagement represents a communication established between an RC and a service provider. It does not capture whether or not the RC receives services from that particular provider. Once an engagement is made, many service providers and RCs go “offline” from ION to continue their communications. That means that even a single communication through ION may result in a RC receiving services and support from that service provider.

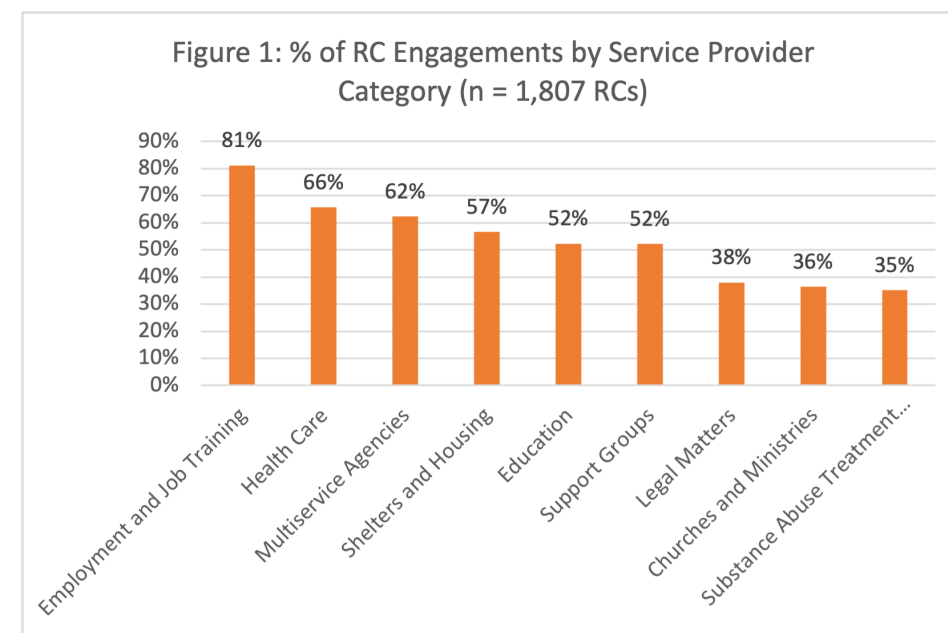


III. A PRELIMINARY EVALUATION

This evaluation consists of both qualitative and quantitative components. The qualitative piece is based on interviews with service providers and ADCRR staff, working both inside and outside of the prison. The quantitative component is based on the data and statistics captured through ION itself.

Looking at the Numbers

What kinds of services do RCs seek? Figure 1 below shows the number of RC engagements by service category.



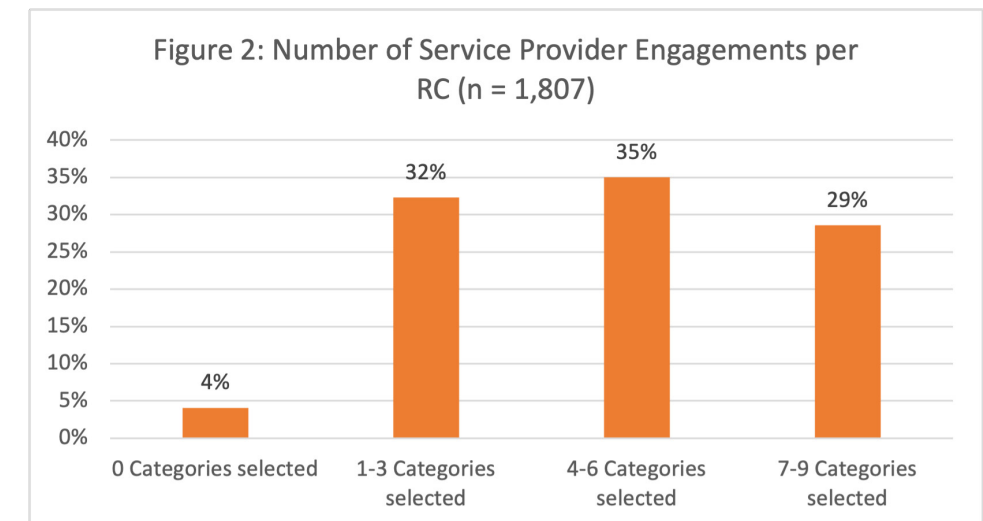
Not surprisingly, employment/training, healthcare, and shelters/housing top the list, along with multiservice agencies that, in all likelihood, are providing some or all of these services. One notable feature of ION is their inclusion of churches and ministries as a service category.

Gaining access and opportunity for these faith-based programs to minister to RCs through departments of correction has historically often been a challenge. In addition, many of the other categories also include faith-based organizations.

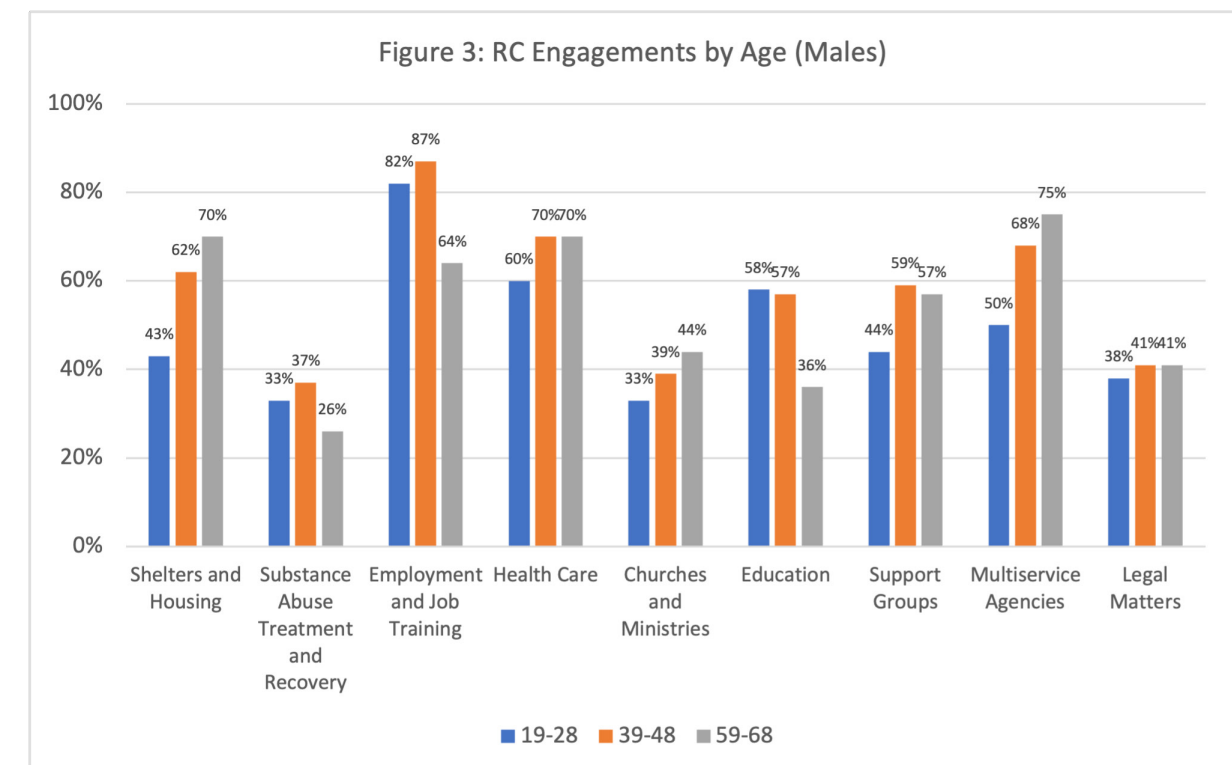
Figure 2 below, which shows the number of service category engagements, reflects the multiple needs of RCs upon return to the community. Almost two-thirds of RCs (64%) engaged with 4 or more service providers.

RC Engagements by Age

There are also interesting trends in the type of RC engagements with service providers based on age. As figure 3 below shows, only 43% of RCs males aged 19-28 engage service providers for Shelters and Housing. This percentage increases to 62% for males aged 39-48 and 70% for ages 59-68.



Additionally, the percentage of male RCs engaging with Churches and Ministries goes from 33% for ages 19-28 to 44% for ages 59-68. Conversely, RC engagements for education and substance abuse treatment and recovery decrease with age.



Looking Beyond the Numbers

We interviewed three service providers in order to gain their perspective on the impact and value of ION.

Pastor Will Nieves (Churches and Ministries):

Pastor Will is Founder and Executive Director of GATE Outreach Ministries in Tucson Arizona, which provides transitional housing, spiritual mentoring and guidance for Returning Citizens. Pastor Will, who has lived experience as an ex-offender himself, also serves on the Pima County Reentry Coalition, where he met Fred Nelson of ION in 2020. Will saw ION as a revolutionary change in comparison to the resources he had available to him in transitioning from prison back into the community. As Nieves explained, ION is especially helpful for smaller faith-based organizations like his:

ION is the best thing to happen to the correctional system, in my opinion, especially for smaller organizations. Some of the larger and more established organizations and faith-based programs already have established referral networks and larger budgets through funding. ION serves as a platform for organizations like mine, that don't have these resources and arrangements, to be able to connect to returning citizens that had a life-changing experience in prison and want help to live that out back in the community.

Another Level of Community Service – ALOCS – (Multiservice Agency)

Albert Whitmore, who serves as Intake and Marketing Specialist for ALOCS, first learned about ION about 18 months ago. ALOCS offers a wide variety of services to RCs, ranging from financial literacy and medical services (reimbursed by Medicaid) to career training to (voluntary) worship services and morning inspirational meetings. Prior to registering with ION, ALOCS relied on word-of-mouth and struggled with getting information on their re-entry services to pre-release inmates. Since joining ION, Whitmore has seen the numbers of connections they have made with pre-release RCs—what they term as in-reach—increase from 10 to 50 inmates per week. As Whitmore explains:

ION gives us the ability to look up the backgrounds of RCs based on their profiles to see if there is a good match between our services and their needs. Generally, it only takes the first connection through ION for us to find good matches for RCs returning to the communities we serve. Once the connection is made, we have a chance to serve.

Bridging the Gap – Terros Health (Healthcare)

Lori Jones is the Bridging the Gap (BTG) Reentry Manager for Terros Health. Terros Health serves locations across Maricopa County through their Comprehensive Health Centers and Counseling Centers. Terros Healthcare's mission is Inspire Change for Life. Terros Health services are designed to meet the RC's acute, behavioral, and health-related social needs (HRSN) and address identified health inequities among their patient population.

Bridging the Gap Reentry team offers connections to resources including sober living homes across the Valley. Jones supervises a team of 15 people who provide services for justice-involved individuals prior to and post-release ranging from primary care for physical health to outpatient treatment for mental health and an extensive range of resources. These resources include housing assistance, employment programs, NARCAN distribution and education, and obtaining identification and clothing (including shoelaces).

Jones became aware of ION through an online demonstration by Fred Nelson and signed up right away. To date, their partnership with ION has given them a means to proactively message nearly 1,500 RCs with information about their services. These pre-release connections enable inmates to get signed up for Medicaid before leaving the prison. Even for those with whom they don't connect in prison, Jones has noticed an increase in walk-ins, which she attributes to the greater exposure they have in the prison through ION.

ION – Next Steps in Arizona

Fred Nelson and the ION staff continue to invest their time and effort both in increasing the visibility of ION within the prisons (demand), continuing to recruit more service providers across the state, and partnering with the ADCRR on a game-changing pilot project to install ION standalone terminals inside prison units, where inmates can directly access the online platform without the mediation of prison staff to work on their own reentry. If this pilot project (slated for the last quarter of 2023), is successful, the goal is to expand it to every unit across the state.

In this dynamic, ongoing partnership, ION is benefitting from a change in culture occurring among state correctional departments and parole across the country. As explained by John Coughlin, Parole Officer for ADCRR:

There are a number of cultural shifts taking place in the corrections world, particularly in parole services. The new parole is trying to change the image that they're 'out to get you' by finding parole violations that will send you back to prison. The new model for parole is based on the concept of encouraging returning citizens with more agency to come up with their own plans for successfully returning to the community. ION is a perfect fit for the new approach.

There is also a cultural shift, albeit a little slower to come about, within the prisons in the role of Correctional Officer IIIs (COIIIs) and Reentry Preparation Specialists (RPS). The level of this challenge can also vary, based on the culture within different prisons across the state. Similar to the shift in the approach to parole, COIIIs are being encouraged to engage more collaboratively with RCs in their planning efforts, with enthusiastic support from the RPSs who are generally already very supportive of the use of ION pre-release.

Robert Duffney, Program Specialist within ADCRR responsible for the roll-out of ION across the state’s prison system, captured the challenge of getting COIIIs on board with ION:

In many ways, the challenge with getting COIIIs committed to using ION boils down to whether or not they are hopeful that returning citizens can truly make a change in their lives. If they’re not hopeful, they will tend to dismiss the value of ION and not engage fully.

ION Beyond Arizona

Besides its work in Arizona, ION is also active in both Illinois and Oregon, has reached agreement to launch in Mississippi and has a vision and key milestones for ongoing expansion nationwide.

Illinois

ION maintains a presence in Illinois, where the ION platform was initially prototyped, and then eventually implemented statewide in partnership with the Illinois Dept. of Corrections (IDOC). After a two-year pilot project with the department, pre-release registrations are currently suspended until further notice while the IDOC retools its IT infrastructure. Despite that significant interruption, ION still maintains an active presence in the state, with approximately 2,400 returning citizens and 210 service providers registered on the platform. ION continues to partner with Cook County Jail, federal probation staff from Northern Illinois, and some IDOC prison facilities.

Oregon

After months of exploratory conversations and planning with Oregon Dept. of Corrections leadership, a MoU was signed in May, 2023. Largely patterned on the “expansion playbook” used in expanding to Arizona, there is a defined numerical target to reach before the online platform goes live and is publicly launched. The idea is to have enough service providers already onboard that when Adults in Custody (AICs) begin to go online to search for help, they’re able to find a reasonable number of choices and variety of services. ODOC will start offering when ION has registered 70 service providers statewide, with 50 providers in the heavily populated I-5 corridor, with another 20 providers coming from more rural areas of the state.

As of August, 2023, ION staff has managed to register 35 service providers across 50 locations. The goal is to launch in late Fall of 2023.

Mississippi

In August, 2023, ION reached an agreement with Burl Cain, Commissioner of the Mississippi Dept. of Corrections, to expand across the state. The plan is to fast-track a MoU, partner with key leaders in the MDOC (including the Director of Workforce Development), reach out to service providers, and accelerate the rollout in the spring of 2024.

Ongoing Conversations

As ION staff engage in exploratory conversations with additional states, the expansion plan is expected to follow four key phases and to take roughly three years to launch, nurture, and solidify each new state network.

- 1. Secure buy-in from Dept. of Correction (MoU and Letter of Support) – 4 months
- 2. Recruit service providers to register and reach public launch metric – 9 months
- 3. Train DOC staff; implement registration process, launch statewide – 1 month
- 4. Ongoing registration of providers, training of staff, and secure additional funding – 2 years

Vision and Key Milestones

ION’s vision “is that, all across the country, in every county jail, state prison, and federal facility, inmates will directly access the Inside Out Network on their tablet computer beginning a year prior to their release. This direct access will allow them to connect with relevant reentry service providers, empower them to be actively engaged in their own reentry process, and lead to significantly better outcomes for themselves, their families, service providers, and other stakeholders. This transformation will allow departments of correction to reframe their role and better focus their pre-release efforts on the 15% of inmates who need intensive reentry case management.”

ION’s board and staff envision six major milestones on the way to reach their vision. The first three milestones have been reached and they are now transitioning to Milestone #4.

1. **DESIGN:** Prototype and Test

This phase ran from 2017-2020, when the ION platform was built, tested extensively with returning citizens and service providers, and refined. “Early adopter” service providers were registered.

2. **MOMENTUM:** Successful Launch in Multiple States

In 2020-21, the ION platform was successfully launched in Illinois and Arizona. Approximately 3,000 returning citizens and 340 service providers were registered.

3. **MOVEMENT:** Expand to Additional States and Double in Size

In 2022-24, the ION platform will expand to Oregon and 1-2 additional new states, even as the network is expanded and nurtured in Illinois and Arizona.

4. **TIPPING POINT:** Platform Migrates to Tablet Computers

When ION clearly demonstrates its viability and growing acceptance by multiple states, inmate tablet providers will partner with ION and DOC staff and add ION to their inmate experience.

5. **MAJOR WAVE:** Significant Numbers of States Adopt ION

When ION is available on inmate tablets, the incentive to use ION for reentry becomes broadly compelling for departments of corrections and jails across the country, along with a host of service providers.

6. **FINAL WAVE:** Bureau of Prisons Adopts ION Platform

The federal Bureau of Prisons adopts ION for its approximately 160,000 inmates, after seeing it in action in many other jurisdictions.

III. CONCLUSION

One of the most persistent problems within the criminal justice system continues to be high recidivism rates among formerly incarcerated persons. Despite the attention given to the prisoner reentry crisis, it remains one of the most difficult problems for practitioners and policy-makers to effectively address. However, the Inside Out Network provides a unique, web-based platform that makes it possible to effectively connect returning citizens to a variety of community-based programs and services that are able to assist in the difficult transition back into the community upon release from prison. Because of ION’s philosophy and approach as an intermediary or facilitator between returning citizens and a host of community-based organizations as well as faith-based groups, it is able to more holistically meet the educational, vocational, and rehabilitative needs of ex-prisoners. By using technology, ION is able to provide an invaluable platform for returning citizens in real-time. Because ION utilizes a web-based platform, it is easy to see how this exemplary model might be replicated in virtually any jurisdiction in any state. Moreover, the web-based platform is adaptable in urban as well as rural communities, making scalability another important and much needed feature in addressing the prisoner reentry crisis.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Byron R . Johnson is Distinguished Professor of the Social Sciences at Baylor University. He is the founding director of the Baylor Institute for Studies of Religion (ISR) as well as director of the Program on Prosocial Behavior.

Johnson is a senior fellow at the Sagamore Institute (Indianapolis). He is a leading authority on the scientific study of religion, the efficacy of faith-based organizations, and criminal justice. Recent publications have examined the impact of faith-based programs on recidivism reduction and prisoner reentry. Before joining the faculty at Baylor University, Johnson directed research centers at Vanderbilt University and the University of Pennsylvania. He has been the principal investigator on grants from private foundations as well as the Department of Justice, Department of Labor, Department of Defense, National Institutes of Health, and the United States Institute for Peace. He is the author of more than 200 articles and a number of books including More God, Less Crime: Why Faith Matters and How it Could Matter More (2011), The Angola Prison Seminary: Effects of Faith-Based Ministry on Identity Transformation, Desistance, and Rehabilitation (2016), and The Quest for Purpose: The Collegiate Search for a Meaningful Life (2017).

William Wubbenhorst is a non-resident fellow for the Institute for Studies of Religion at Baylor University (ISR). He recently completed a 21-month term as Associate Commissioner for the Family and Youth Services Bureau within the Administration for Children and Families. Previously, Mr. Wubbenhorst worked as a consultant to government and non-profits for over 30 years, most recently as a Return On Investment (ROI) Specialist, developing economic measures for community-based social and health programs. Mr. Wubbenhorst has collaborated with professors from several prestigious academic institutions, including Baylor University, Boston University and Harvard University. He has published a variety of peer-reviewed journal publications and case studies. Recently, Mr. Wubbenhorst co-authored a case studies entitled Harvest of Hope: A Faith-Based Child Welfare Intermediary and The Crosswinds – Open Table Collaboration: An Aftercare Model for Runaway and Homeless Youth. Mr. Wubbenhorst received an MBA with a concentration in Public and Non-Profit Management (Beta Gamma Sigma honors society) from Boston University.



INSTITUTE FOR STUDIES OF RELIGION

BAYLOR UNIVERSITY

ONE BEAR PLACE #97236

WACO, TX 76798

254/710-7555

WWW.BAYLORISR.ORG