



The Workforce  
Investment Board  
of Herkimer/  
Madison/Oneida  
Counties (NY):

A Case Study in  
WIB/FBCO  
Collaborations

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Background<sup>1</sup>: The Place

Jobs and hope are far removed from Utica’s urban core. Neighborhoods built to house immigrant waves of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries have faded into a cluster of despair-laden streets where high poverty and crime and low education and income stand in stark contrast to the higher-wealth suburbs and small rural communities that dominate the rest of the Herkimer-Madison-Oneida County region. The city’s plight comes after a long, slow decline that turned the Upstate New York State community from a manufacturing/ defense industry hub that could look

back on decades of growth, into a community struggling to survive. Between 1993 and 2003, the Utica region lost more than 12,000 jobs in the manufacturing and defense areas. Although job growth in the service sectors made up some of those losses, the region’s economy has sputtered. Nowhere is this truer than in the City of Utica, which from 1990 to 2000 suffered a 12 percent population loss and – without the arrival of more than 10,000 refugees – would have declined further.

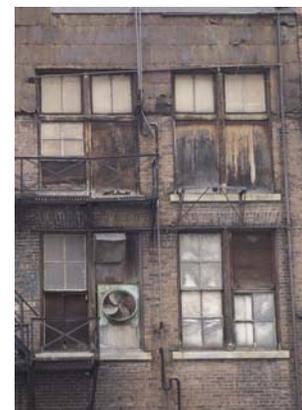
A population transformation accompanied the decline, resulting in a city with a central core of Census Tracts facing multiple issues that include high crime, housing blight, family disintegration and all of the other issues common to larger metro areas. By 2004, the 13501 Zip Code in Utica – which covers the census tracts cited at left -- comprised 10% of the county’s population but 40% of jail admissions.

**Project Target Areas**

Census Tracts	% Poverty (NYS avg:14% Oneida County avg: 13.0%)	%Unemployed (NYS avg: 7.1% Oneida County avg: 5.9%)
<b>201 (Utica)</b>	<b>44.4</b>	<b>10.1</b>
<b>203 (Utica)</b>	<b>45.7</b>	<b>22.0</b>
<b>207.01 (Utica)</b>	<b>45.7</b>	<b>13.8</b>
207.02 (Utica)	19.4	5.7
<b>208.02 (Utica)</b>	<b>27.2</b>	<b>9.3</b>
<b>208.03 (Utica)</b>	<b>36.8</b>	<b>11.9</b>
<b>209 (Utica)</b>	<b>33.4</b>	<b>9.4</b>
<b>210 (Utica)</b>	<b>39.7</b>	<b>8.1</b>
<b>211.01 (Utica)</b>	<b>41.5</b>	<b>11.4</b>
211.02 (Utica)	32.2	5.5
211.03 (Utica)	28.3	5.0
<b>212.01 (Utica)</b>	<b>39.6</b>	<b>13.2</b>
212.02 (Utica)	18.6	4.7
<b>213.01 (Utica)</b>	<b>34.0</b>	<b>9.0</b>
<b>213.02 (Utica)</b>	<b>23.5</b>	<b>8.5</b>
213.03 (Utica)	7.8	19.8
<b>214.01 (Utica)</b>	<b>21.3</b>	<b>13.2</b>
215 (Utica)	45.2	5.2

Source: U.S. Census. Tracts above the NY State average in both unemployment & poverty are in bold.

The crisis runs deeper than numbers. The Utica City School District’s Safe Schools Report notes that almost 20 percent of the 533 students at Watson-Williams, and 10 percent of the 704 children at Kernan Elementary School have a relative who is incarcerated. According to Utica Police Department records, as noted in Utica’s Safe School Project, in one week, the following crimes took places within a five-block radius of two elementary schools, home to more than 750 elementary pupils: One homicide, 300 reports of gunshots, 15 drug raids, 125 robberies by force and 150 larcenies.



<sup>1</sup> This case study was prepared by William Wubbenhorst of Macro International Inc.

Utica's above-average crime rate is getting worse.

According to FBI Uniform Crime Rate data:

- In 2003, Utica's violent crime rate was 1.14 times the U.S. average.
- In 2004, Utica had a higher rate of violent crime than 86% of cities in New York State and 72% of cities nationwide.
- In 2005, Utica had a Crime Index of 4,918.9 crimes per 100,000 people, 6.3% above the national average.

### Second Chance – Getting Started

The Oneida project, named Second Chance, began as an informal alliance of staff from county agencies that soon came to realize they were all serving ex-offenders, but without any type of central coordination. A 2004 pilot project was designed to address that, and grant funding was sought to work in collaboration with FBCO sub-grantees to recruit and place ex-offenders. The grant was rejected. As Russ Davis, grant writer for the Oneida WIB, explained:



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*Second Chance was an apt name for the project, because it was through a second effort at making this project work that it developed into an effort that went far beyond the original aims. When we didn't have grant money, it meant we had to really decide if we were serious enough about this to work within the resources we had. The response from county agencies, faith-based agencies and the WIB was that this was too critical an issue not to act upon, so we rebuilt our project.*

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The WIB and its core partners spent several months assessing what could be done within existing revenue streams, so that at a minimum, agencies serving ex-offenders could increase collaboration and cooperation. This process was one of the major keys to the Second Chance project's ultimate success because it helped partners learn one another's ways of doing business and helped agencies that are not normally workforce partners, such as probation, parole and other law enforcement agencies, develop a relationship with the project.

WIB staff who worked with former welfare customers, people with disabilities, and the homeless and at-risk youth was all a part of the internal conversation to increase the WIB's understanding of the related issues and challenges in working with ex-offenders, as well as a better understanding of the community partners they would need.

The next step in that process was to extend and expand that conversation among core partners with the community. Utica's local Congressman, Sherwood Boehlert, was a very strong and early supporter of building a stronger local partnership. He agreed to work with the WIB to reach out to the community and invite a broad spectrum of FBCOs and other agencies dealing gauge

the interest among attendees serving various high-need populations. More than 75 people attended, representing 40 agencies, and after subsequent media coverage, the mailing list of interested parties increased to over 200 names representing FBCOs, government agencies, service providers, prisoner advocates and elected officials. Davis described the WIB's objective for this event:

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*The goal was not to start services, but to start conversations and build off of existing services so that we were closing gaps and supporting effective service providers, not re-inventing the wheel. We found agencies and FBCOs who did one piece, or worked with one small group, but it was clear that there was no regional system for serving ex-offenders to get them employed and help them retain work. We had to build this ourselves, educate partners about what the workforce system does, what ex-offenders need, and how government-funded programs are results-driven.*

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The DOL/CFBCI also provided an additional catalyst by providing one of their staff members to speak on two occasions about the office's Ready4Work initiative for ex-offenders, helping the WIB reach another 150 people. However, not everyone wanted to stay involved. As more meetings followed, and organizations better understood the nature and requirements of grant funding, the broader group that topped 100 organizations at its largest was reduced to a nucleus of those for whom services to aid ex-offenders was of sufficient interest.

By the time the WIB TLC grant opportunity came out in 2005, the Oneida WIB essentially knew who its FBCO partners were likely to be, and they set about working to create cross-agency communication (e.g., between the WIB and the parole office), as well as communication with FBCOs who were not currently serving ex-offenders, but were interested in working with the WIB.

### **Implementing Second Chance**

When the Second Chance project was awarded \$499,973 in July of 2005, the WIB was poised to move quickly based on their pre-proposal efforts. In fact, the Second Chance project holds the distinction of being the only WIB TLC project out of the 2004/2005 grantees to report actual placement outcomes within the first quarter of the project. Because the WIB's coordination efforts had progressed after the application, the first attempts to coordinate FBCO services were taking place before the grant funding arrived.

The first challenge for the Second Chance project was to issue an RFA to formally engage its FBCO partners through a competitively-bid process. Davis described the challenges with designing and RFA that would work for this project:

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*The folks we that we anticipated would step up as partners in this effort had a wide range of capabilities and assets, so we needed to avoid a cookie-cutter approach to the RFA. We also wanted to keep the process simple, so we wouldn't scare people off with an overly burdensome application process.*

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Second Chance released the RFA under the title “A Menu of Possibilities”, which laid out a brief background of the project, and directing applicants to consider whether their role would revolve around making referrals (i.e., outreach/recruitment) and/or accepting referrals (i.e., training/job placement). The RFA solicitation also included a service menu checklist containing examples of 13 needed services (based on examples from the first round of TLC grantees) in connection with serving ex-offenders, as well as a simple, six-step process to help the FBCOs develop their plan (See Exhibit 1 for the RFA instructions).

### **FBCO partners**

The WIB received a total of 10 proposals, of which it selected eight (see Table 1). The WIB expected more, but in follow-up interviews with potential applicants found a wide range of reasons not to apply, chiefly concern over red tape they might encounter from federal funding.

### **FBCO Outreach Intermediary**

Second Chance utilized an intermediary for the specific purpose of reaching out to FBOs, namely churches, and connecting them to the project. The intermediary had a long history of serving the homeless and partnering with churches, but generally the flow of customers was from churches to the Mission, not the other way around. Unfortunately, this outreach effort was not fully successful, due to the real and perceived challenges churches face in working with the ex-offender population, as explained by Paul Grossman, project lead for the Rescue Mission of Utica:

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*No doubt, for the average church member, the thought of having ex-offenders right in among our children and wives, etc., is a true reality check for just about anyone. I can be easier for a parole officer to carry out his daily tasks, then leave to go to his home miles away; an employer can deal with an ex-offender perhaps the same as with any somewhat challenging employee, then go home and worry about it tomorrow. But when an ex-offender comes into a church family, right in the midst of them, it's a whole new ball game. It can all work; it can be done, with proper and reasonable boundaries and checks. Most likely, the churches and their leadership are going to have to seek God's wisdom, guidance and protection more than ever in finding workable solutions to this real, present need, but it can be done.*

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## Linking the FBCO partners

A key role that the Oneida WIB played for its FBCO partners was in linking them to the One-Stop Career Center and to one another. Although the closest One-Stop and the core cluster of neighborhoods were less than a mile apart, the One-Stop, located in a state office building that required ID for entrance, was perceived as being in an unwelcoming building. So, the One-Stop had to go to the neighborhood. Doshine Jenkins, Second Chance Project Director, described one of her central goals in creating a strong network for the benefit of the ex-offenders they were serving:

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*I have found that a good partnership amongst the FBCOs consists of their willingness to be open, flexible, respectful of each other, and non-possessive of the clients... Partnerships and collaborations are a challenging transition for any agency since they lose a part of their identity, and they are not always comfortable with that.*

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Teresa Schram, project lead for the Women's Employment and Resource Center, described how the WIB's networking efforts helped strengthen and expand their networks and sustainability:

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*We would get referrals directly through Second Chance staff, as well as from some of the other FBCOs. We have gained a greater awareness of these other community programs and resources in the process, and it has allowed our agency to expand to serve the needs of female ex-offenders. There are relationships and networks that will continue even after the grant funding is over.*

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**Table 1: FBCO Awardees**

Name	Type of org.	Funding	Primary Role	Description
Rescue Mission of Utica	FBO	\$12,600	Intermediary to non-funded FBOs.	Outreach to churches and connect them to the Second Chance Project.
Cosmopolitan Center	CBO	\$5,400	Program space	Provided office space to serve the target population.
Jesus Christ Tabernacle of David (JCTOD)	FBO	\$150,232	Receiving Referrals	Job club classes, resume preparation, interviewing skills, life management skills, job readiness, job placement, transportation services, grooming and dress code and mentoring.
Hope House	FBO	\$9,100	Making Referrals	Referrals to partner agencies, job placement, food pantry.
Women's Employment and Resource Center	CBO	\$30,000	Receiving Referrals	Computer training, job placement, job readiness, resume and interview preparation, practical communication skills, personal management/ responsibility.
Muslim Community Association of Mohawk Valley <sup>2</sup>	FBO	\$38,900	Receiving Referrals	Mentoring, job readiness, job placement and life skills support, interview preparation.
Youth Empowerment Project	FBO	\$68,138	Receiving Referrals	Informational groups, dressing to succeed, anger management life skills, resume writing assistance, interview preparation, job search, support group, job placement, travel/ transportation support, mentoring.
HealthFriends	FBO	\$20,000	Making Referrals	Referrals to partner agencies, prescription medications for ex-offenders, referrals to Mental Health Connection, follow-up to assure application for proper health insurance is filled out and obtained.

The WIB realized from the inception of this project that sub-grantees interfacing with the One-Stop would be a challenge because few had an administrative infrastructure. To address this challenge the WIB assigned a coordinator to the One Stop to serve as a resource and referral person as well as help the FBCO sub-grantees understand the comprehensive One Stop system; thus developing a plan to build a strong linkage between the FBCOS and the One Stop system. As Jenkins explained:

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*This worked out well, because the FBCO sub-grantees were able to refer their clients to the One Stop to access services such as the on site interviewing with a featured business. Also the One Stop was able to refer clients to different FBCO sub-grantees for specialized service such as: job club, and mentoring component.*

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This cross-referral between the FBCOs and the One Stop System is further supported by the outcomes data reported from the project, in which 128 program participants were referred to the One Stop by the FBCOs and 638 participants from the FBCOs to the One Stop.

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<sup>2</sup> This grantee was subsequently terminated, due to problems understanding church/state separation requirements and performance issues.

## Business Partnerships

The FBCOs were the primary drivers of business partnerships for Second Chance, with the WIB offering support. FBCOs took the lead because of their role in helping retention, which is critical for ex-offenders. A procedure manual was developed for the FBCOs for this purpose, including guidance on how to engage businesses. There was also coordination between the One Stop and the FBCOs, and the often went out together to visit businesses as well. As Jenkins described:

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*All of our FBCO sub-grantees interacting and relationship building with employers a big challenge. They did not know how to go about building a solid relationship with employers. Bi-weekly meetings provided the opportunity to discuss tips for approaching business partnerships. From the helpful tips, FBCO sub-grantees were able to build their own relationships with businesses. To avoid multiple business contact, we developed a system that would allow for job referrals to pass through the FBCO sub-grantee who had developed relationship with a particular employer. In addition, the FBCO sub-grantees utilized the On the Job specialist to gain access to her pool of employers to find employments for participants. On the job training dollars were used to penetrate the infrastructure of the hard to reach employers.*

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One such business partnership, which was actually forged directly by the WIB, was with Delft Blue, a subsidiary of a Canadian-owned veal processing plant that was experiencing rapid growth and a project hiring need of about 50 people on an annual basis. John Gorea, plant manager for Delft Blue, described how they became a business partner for the Second Chance project:



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*We had essentially depleted the traditional venues for recruiting and hiring, and still weren't meeting our staffing needs. When Project Coordinator Nancy Gaston came knocking on our door, we were open to listening. Although we had some concerns about hiring ex-offenders, the OJT dollars<sup>3</sup> they were offering for hiring Second Chance participants helped us take a chance. We have been pleased with the results, and have found that the retention rates for the Second Chance hires was twice as high as it was for people we were hiring off the street. Nancy calls us weekly about job openings, and we appreciate her follow-up on the folks she's placed with us to make sure the placements are successful.*

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One of those hires described the path they took to their job placement at the plant, and the impact that Second Chance has had on how they now see the future:

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*I was referred to Nancy [who is the Second Chance liaison at the One Stop] from my parole officer, who was located in the same building. Before I even had a chance to look at jobs, Nancy worked with me on how to dress, how to present myself in an interview, the importance of showing up on time, and so on. I learned after that this process was also a way of her testing to see if I were really ready to hold down a job. When I interviewed for the job here, I was also shown how I could grow in the job. This whole experience let me see more possibilities for my life, and has made me think about returning to school to complete my college education.*

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### **The Outcomes for the Second Chance Project**

Despite the fact that the Second Chance Project was dealing with ex-offenders, one of the most challenging populations to find jobs for, the outcomes achieved by the project confirm their status as a best practices site. The outcomes for this project, as compared with the other nine 2005 WIB TLC projects, are as follows:

- Almost double the average for all the WIB grants of 87 and exceeding their own goal of 160 ;
- Highest number of participants served (638), more than double the 2005 WIB grantee average of 307 and exceeding their own goal of 500;
- Second highest in the number of volunteer hours committed to the program (5,243), and over 50% higher than their goal of 3,000; and
- Highest percentage of ex-offenders served (100%) as compared to the average of 58% for the grantees as a whole;

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<sup>3</sup> Refers to On the Job Training subsidies to help defray an employers training costs.

## **Sustainability of the Project**

Second Chance is not just the story of one grant. Through the outreach efforts, justice system officials had become partners in the WIB's work. Through them, the WIB was alerted to an opportunity to secure funding to develop a Re-entry Task Force. Although the task force's mission was broader than employment, there was agreement that because the WIB had formed a coalition built around employment; this was a logical next step. Securing that funding has greatly enhanced communication efforts and partnerships. The Re-entry Task Force, which would not have come about without the Second Chance project, was a critical part of the WIB's submission for a Life Skills for Prisoners grant from the US Department of Education. The work of Second Chance also caught the interest of the County Sheriff, who wanted an in-jail program to link with everything going on in the community.

Because that project worked, one of the original FBCO grantees has recently partnered with the WIB to extend the in-jail project to a jail-to-community project that targets young adult offenders. Thus, as 2008 begins, a community that in 2005 had no organized system for getting ex-offenders to work now has a Re-Entry task force that addressed needs of state parolees returning from state prison, and a jail-to-community project for younger adults who are sent to the local county jail.

Additionally, the referral network development that took place during the grant-funded time is in place and being sustained through a more solid partnership effort that requires no additional funding, but does increase the WIB's ability to serve customers. Collaborations developed through Second Chance have helped the WIB increase efforts to work with community partners. Thus, there are now two projects addressing the needs of the homeless, one specifically for veterans, as well as enhanced partnerships that increase the WIB's ability to help local agencies connect their customers with employment.

As the FBCO funding for Second Chance ends, referral networks are in place to go forward, services are being delivered better than before the grant through new partnerships and programs, and there is a strong community commitment to work as a team to keep the Second Chance partnership active so the WIB can build on the collaborations and because the relationships developed in the process have helped all the project partners to better accomplish their missions.

## **Conclusion**

Alice Savino, Executive Director for the Oneida WIB, reflected on the journey of the Second Chance project, and the experience and opportunities that came along the way:

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*Overall, the solicitation was a good match for what we are about. In addition to our success in executing the project, it allowed us to expand our network of partnerships and strengthen relationships that were already in place. Our WIB has high visibility in the community, to the point that we help other public agencies by brokering relationships for them to collaborate with FBCOs. All in all, Second Chance has given us all something to feel good about, and that's important for a town like this that needs hope.*

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