



*... corrections certainly has a role to play in the return of offenders to society and their successful re-entry into their communities.*

## Re-Entry and Reintegration — What Is Corrections' Role?

By James A. Gondles, Jr., CAE  
Executive Director  
American Correctional Association

States across the nation are experiencing extraordinary fiscal crises that are prompting governors and legislatures to recommend dramatic cuts to all areas of state government. Correctional departments have not been immune to these cuts and, in fact, have been among the hardest hit.

Correctional administrators trying to find ways to save basically have three options. First, they can reduce spending on institutional security; however, cuts in this area could compromise the safety of inmates and staff. Second, administrators could reduce programming expenses; however, prison and jail-based services across the nation are already threadbare and offer little or no potential for savings. Thus, the third option, managing prison populations more effectively, is the only realistic option.

There are two major ways to control prison populations: Limit the number and length of stay for those entering the system or remove individuals from the system.

Corrections can play an important role in the first area by doing a better job of educating lawmakers concerning the implications of changes to sentencing guidelines. But, in the end, decisions impacting who and how long an individual is placed in our care are largely made by our state legislatures and the courts. It is in the second area of re-entry and reintegration of offenders — on

which this issue of *Corrections Today* focuses — that we can have a great impact.

**Corrections must  
make inroads into the  
community to ensure  
that those leaving our  
care have access to  
programs and  
services in the  
community.**

According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, more than 8 million individuals were released from our nation's prisons and jails and returned to the community in 2000. In fact, more than 95 percent of the 2 million people currently incarcerated will one day be released from our prisons and jails. A 1994 BJS recidivism study estimates that within three years, 51.8 percent of inmates released during the year were back in prison either because of a new crime for which they received another prison sentence or because of a technical violation of their parole. If society can do a better job in this one area, it will have a dramatic impact

on correctional populations, as well as on the safety of our communities.

Correctional populations are not static, and corrections certainly has a role to play in the return of offenders to society and their successful re-entry into their communities. Corrections cannot be content with providing educational job training and health care within our institutions. Corrections must make inroads into the community to ensure that those leaving our care have access to programs and services in the community. We must ensure that they have access to adequate health care, treatment for medical, mental and substance abuse problems, and that they have the opportunity to earn a living wage. The solution to issues surrounding the re-entry and reintegration of offenders into society does not belong solely to corrections; it belongs to the community. And, as part of the community, we must play our role by ensuring that treatment and educational programs are available and used, and developing partnerships with community-based groups. ♦