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# Parenting model aids crime fight

**Tony Hudson**

Someone once told me that if the only tool in your tool belt is a hammer, everything starts to look like a nail. A situation that requires a new tool also requires a new understanding, training and resources. Crime prevention should include a number of tools. One that should be in every community's tool belt is how we deal with returning prisoners.

After a 700-percent increase in jails and prisons since 1970, you'd think the nation would finally have run out of criminals to put behind bars. If you happened to read Jeff Wiehe's article Sept. 20, "Repeat offenders rack up hefty bills for time in lockup," it exhibited histories of arresting and releasing offenders, some up to 163 times, and the exhaustive cost to do so.

The stagnating criminal justice industry requires a new school of thought, and from one that has been around for centuries; they could model good parenting skills.

What would a good parent do when little Timmy continues to put his hand in the cookie jar 163 times? Who is to blame? The reflex might be to blame the child and if the only tool is punishment, the result would be to punish harder. Child experts would say that there are a number of creative options to keep Timmy from the cookie jar.

Not too many people like crime or the criminal behind it, but we've run out of beds in state prisons and most counties have expanded their jails. We've hit a critical point to think alternatively to this problem. A lot of the responsibility falls in the lap of the returning inmate to change, but any community willing to forgive is a wise one. To say that little Timmy is a cookie thief and always will be gives a license to Timmy that he may not want. It is possible that he may never change, but meaningful parenting would elevate expectations of Timmy and provide opportunities.

Allen County Re-entry Court is a perfect start for reducing re-incarceration rates, but it does not have the capacity to provide services to all 1,200 returning inmates to Allen County per year. Education, employment, housing, substance abuse recovery and family reintegration are the major determinants for a reduction of re-incarceration rates. The general community can take a role by doing small things such as donating interview apparel, donating time to mentor or tutor, or starting a ministry at church for their children.

In many cases jobs are the linchpin for success and independence. But it is not the employer's responsibility to hire someone they do not trust; after all, there is a bottom line here. The nonprofit that I've had the honor to lead the last four years, Blue Jacket Inc., provides well-trained, screened candidates to area employers spending an average of 35 contact hours per person. Blue Jacket helps employers receive a \$2,400 tax credit and can bond graduates of the program. Blue Jacket is a creative tool to address crime.

I would bet that police are tired of arresting repeat offenders. It is their job to respond to crime but it is our job, as a community, to prevent it in the first place. If we overlook intelligent and creative tools to be used to prevent crime, we only hurt ourselves. After all, almost everyone comes home from prison eventually, and no one is immune from being a victim of crime.



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Participants take part in a 2003 session of re-entry court, one of a number of alternatives to punishment in the battle on crime.

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