

Building Awareness of Employment Opportunities for Ex-Offenders in Kosciusko County



Connecting local employers with individuals reentering the workforce who are seeking a rewarding career

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1.)Introduction: The Mission/The Vision

Since the Covid 19 pandemic began in the spring of 2020 Kosciusko County along with the rest of the world has been hit with many challenges. There has been a roller coaster of ups and downs throughout the last two years to say the least. Our community has been hit with job loss, business closings, drug addiction, depression, financial struggles, death, and just overall fear of what would be coming next. As we began to move on from the pandemic and businesses started to reopen, restrictions lightened, the struggle for employers to find employees become more apparent than ever.

Kosciusko County's unemployment rate is approximately 1.6% while the county's chemical addiction challenge rages on. That is what brought us to our idea. We wanted to raise awareness to employers in Kosciusko County that there are programs within our community to support individuals trying to rebuild their livelihood. Organizations such as JCAP, Work Release, and Live Well Kosciusko all work towards or have programs to support ex-offenders in seeking employment opportunities within our community as well as assist employers with education concerning substance misuse and those recovering from it.

As two individuals who oversee the hiring and directing of employees, one of our largest obstacles to overcome is finding candidates to fill positions within our companies. In some instances, the need is an individual who has the drive and desire to work and grow within our respective organizations. Once we are able to make that connection, it becomes our job to ensure they receive the proper training and guidance to make them not only successful at their job, but feel as if they are contributing to the team.

With the ongoing community challenge of finding employees that are needed to continue growth as well as provide a listing of possible job opportunities to those who have struggled in obtaining employment due to past behaviors, we chose to

BUILD AWARENESS OF EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR EX-OFFENDERS IN KOSCIUSKO COUNTY.

2.)Kosciusko County Jail Chemical Addiction Program (JCAP):

The Jail Chemical Addiction Program (JCAP) is a 4-month substance abuse treatment program within the Kosciusko County Jail. Inmates who apply to the program are screened through a selection committee comprised of representation from the Probation Department, Prosecutor's Office, Work Release Center, Community Corrections, Jail staff,

the Jail Commander, and the Sheriff. JCAP participants are housed in a separate area of the jail which helps to create a therapeutic environment. Participants in the program attend six to eight hours of classes daily and are expected to maintain high standards of living while in the program. Multiple community organizations contribute to teaching a variety of classes.

The JCAP schedule consists of recovery-based classes such as:

- MRT (Moral Reconation Therapy)
- Matrix
- Anger Management
- Seeking Safety
- SMART Recovery
- Celebrate Recovery
- Boundaries
- Codependence
- Domestic Violence classes.

Life Skills are an also an important part of recovery. These classes include:

- Financial Literacy
- Parenting,
- Logistics
- CORE Mechanical's Introduction to Construction
- ServSafe-Food Handler Safety
- Be Heart Smart
- INWork Job Readiness
- Art
- Fitness

Providing a well-rounded curriculum to JCAP participants helps them achieve their long-term recovery goals. In addition to the classes provided to participants, a family support group was organized in which loved ones can learn about topics such as the science of substance use disorder, boundaries and communication, why relapse happens, and signs of relapse.

At the time of this writing, JCAP has had 70 graduates of which 68 have been released from the jail system. 24 of these individuals have relapsed and 44 are doing well. As of April 14, 2022 JCAP will have had 77 graduates from 11 groups complete the program.

JCAP has 18 organizations or individuals that come in weekly for class instruction and an additional 15-20 businesses, organizations and individuals that come in during the 4-

month program to talk with the participants about resources, help with mock-interviews or give motivational speeches

3.)Kosciusko County Work Release Program

- The Kosciusko County work release is a division of Kosciusko County Community Corrections. It is one step from the Jail and designed to help participants find work, build resumes, responsibility, interact with the community, before being moved down to community corrections.
- Participants in work release are permitted to travel to and from work. Any additional travel outside of the center is only granted with prior approval.
- Work release gives participants the opportunity to learn, build, and develop skills/relationships without being in a conventional jail setting.
- On average, the Kosciusko County Work Release Center house approximately 74 participants. That number is split pretty evenly between males and females.
- Residents at work release are subjected to random drug testing and report to work every day.

4.)Live Well Kosciusko-Educating employers about Substance Misuse and Recovery in Kosciusko County

Live Well Kosciusko is a non-profit organization that promotes the health and well-being of all residents in Kosciusko County. This committee is supported by the Kosciusko Chamber of Commerce and K21 Health Foundation which includes representatives from Fellowship Missions, WorkOne, IMD (Instrumental Machine & Development), The Bowen Center, Silveus Insurance Group, Wildman, and KHRA.

Live Well Kosciusko is working to transform the community into a thriving place to live, learn, work, play, and visit. Currently, there are four main initiatives in place to work towards this goal.

- ❖ Tobacco Free Coalition
- ❖ Cancer Coalition
- ❖ Employer Wellness Coalition
- ❖ Well-Being Initiative

Getting K-County businesses on board with 2nd chance programs.

An additional program offered by Live Well Kosciusko, aimed at employers hiring, is their Workforce recovery program.

Program Overview:

- This program gives employers resources necessary to help their workers navigate recovery from substance misuse
- Epidemics like opioids are severely affecting employees across the state
- Opioids have a "\$1.5 billion direct impact on the state's annual economy" (IU Kelly School of Business)

Benefits:

- Providing tools to businesses to assist in supporting their employees along their path to recovery

Upcoming and future events including guided assistance for program implementation

The committee is planning to hold a one-day training in May for HR Directors.

Purpose of Event: To provide education and stigma reduction on substance misuse and how employers are able to support their staff.

Agenda of Event:

8:00 a.m. Registration and refreshments

8:30 a.m. Opening speakers

9:00 a.m. Prevent, assist, retain

- Director of Indiana Workforce Recovery, Wellness Council of Indiana

10:00 a.m. Legal guidance on developing a drug free workplace

- Partner, Krieg DeVault LLP

11:15 a.m. Lunch break

12:00 p.m. Medication Assisted Treatment

- Tony Toomer, OTP Manager, Indiana Family and Social Services Administration

1:00 p.m. Naloxone training

We also plan to have tables available for local organizations who provide resources to people in recovery to display them and meet with various HR folks.

After this one-day training, the committee would like to assist 10 local employers to implement 2nd chance programs in their businesses.

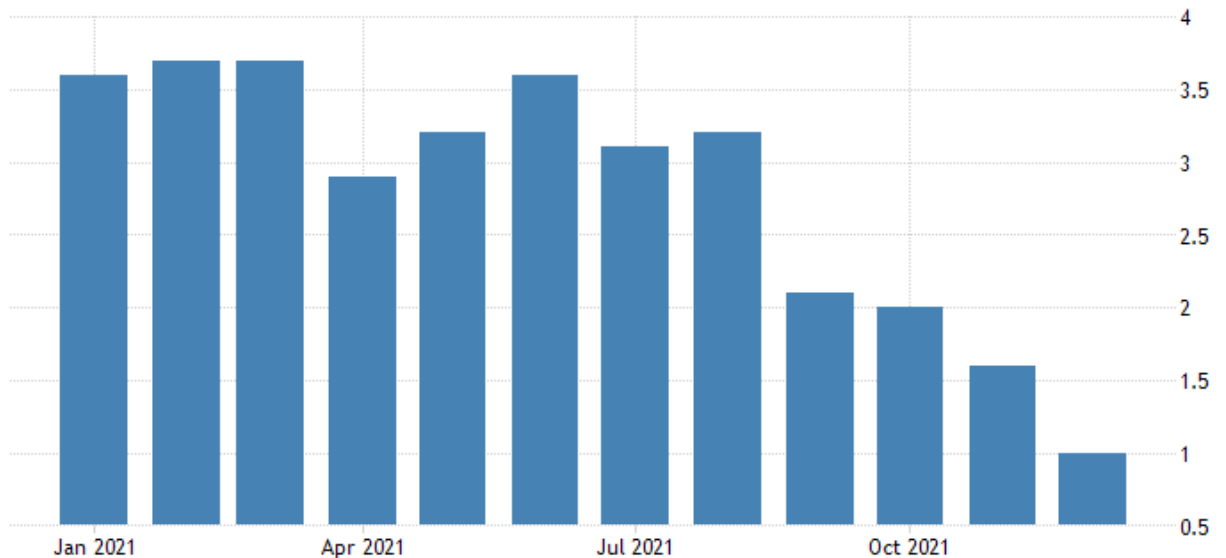
In the spring of 2021, a Community Needs Assessment for Kosciusko County was completed. This data was collected by Bowen Center for the Rural Communities Opioid Response Program (RCORP). A group from the RCORP Consortium submitted a grant that includes funding for a Substance Misuse Workforce Recovery Education Program for employers. If the grant is accepted, the funds and implementation of the project should begin in October of 2022. The initiative would be funded for a 3-year period.¹

¹ Community Needs Assessment provided by LiveWell Kosciusko

If accepted, future involvement of companies in this program could help to educate those looking to hire on how to assist individuals coming from a background of substance abuse on ways to assist them in becoming a contributing member of their work team.

5.) Employment Levels Throughout the County: Growing number of jobs=increased needs of employees.

Unemployment Rates in Kosciusko County, IN were around 1.00% in December of 2021, according to the United States Federal Reserve. Historically, Unemployment Rates in Kosciusko County, IN reached a record high of 17.90 in April of 2020 and a record low of 1.00 in December of 2021²

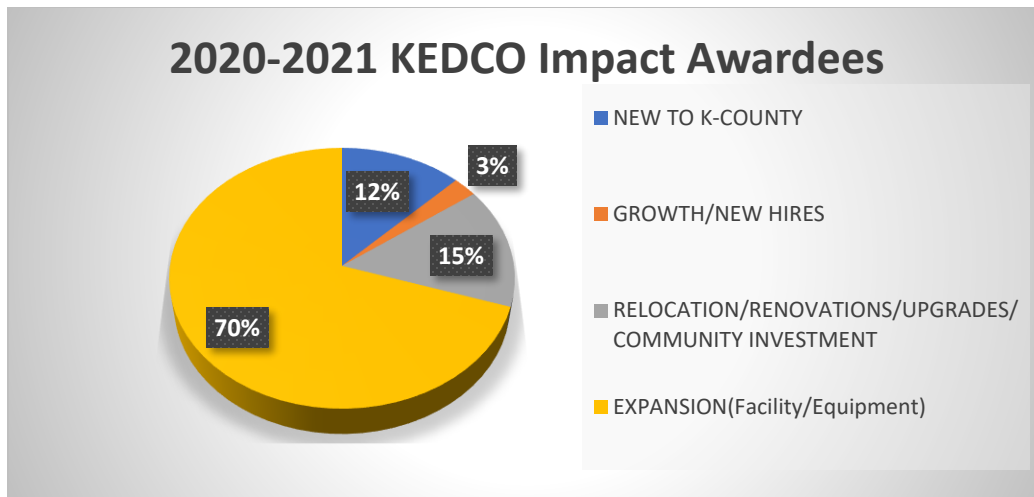


SOURCE: [Unemployment Rate in Kosciusko County, IN - 2022 Data 2023 Forecast 1990-2021 Historical \(tradingeconomics.com\)](https://tradingeconomics.com/unemployment-rate-in-kosciusko-county-in-2022-data-2023-forecast-1990-2021-historical)

Even through the Covid-19 Pandemic, Kosciusko County continued to experience growth among its current businesses as well as introduced new business to the area. Between 2020 and 2021, roughly 40 local business' received accolades thanks to reported growth in the form of expansion, new hires, expansion of facility/equipment or relocation/renovations/upgrades and community investment.³

²[Unemployment Rate in Kosciusko County, IN - 2022 Data 2023 Forecast 1990 Historical \(tradingeconomics.com\)](https://tradingeconomics.com/unemployment-rate-in-kosciusko-county-in-2022-data-2023-forecast-1990-2021-historical)

³Kedco 2020-2021 Business Impact Award Winners



In the first quarter of 2022, local news outlets have reported numerous occurrences of businesses coming to the Kosciusko County region⁴, company acquisitions and growth⁵ not to mention the number of current business operations still seeking individuals to fill available positions. ⁶ Most of us see the needs of companies every day on our drive to work by the marquees or signs lining the street “NOW HIRING APPLY WITHIN”.

6.) Survey Questions & Results

In order to gain some insight on local employers; including their hiring habits of individuals with prior convictions, their knowledge of Kosciusko County programs available to help those looking to reenter the workforce and gauging interest in learning more about utilizing not only the services currently in place, but also the groups providing a pool of possible employees; we put together a survey to be issued locally. With the help of *KHRA* (Kosciusko Human Resource Association), *Work One* and *Live Well Kosciusko* a survey was sent out electronically to nearly 400 Kosciusko County businesses and organizations.

⁴ [Big Lots, Planet Fitness New Tenants Lined Up For Revamped Shopping Center – InkFreeNews.com](#)
[Second Culver’s restaurant coming to Warsaw \(wndu.com\)](#)
[Rural King Opening Date: March 26 – InkFreeNews.com](#)

⁵ [Orthopediatrics Acquires MD Orthopaedics – InkFreeNews.com](#)

⁶ [Career Bridge - KEDCO \(kosciuskoedc.com\)](#)

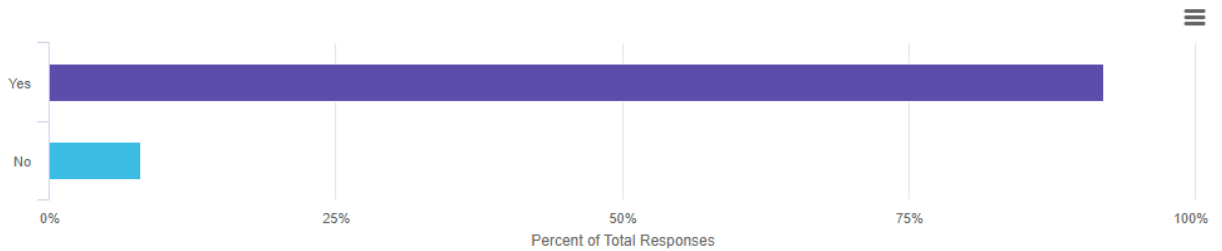
Questions on this survey included:

- Business Name/Best person to contact?
- Is your business or organization open to hiring individuals with a criminal record?
- What criminal offense could eliminate the possibility of hire?
- Would you be willing to learn more about the potential to hire individuals with prior convictions?
- Are you familiar with Kosciusko County’s JCAP program?
- Would you consider hiring opportunities from an individual graduating from the JCAP program, or a similar program of development?⁷

The goal of the survey, was to begin forming a collection of Kosciusko County employers who currently hire, would entertain the possibility of hiring or would be open to learning more about utilizing individuals from this talent pool.

The survey also asked those responding, if they would elaborate as to what types of charges would keep them from employing an individual.

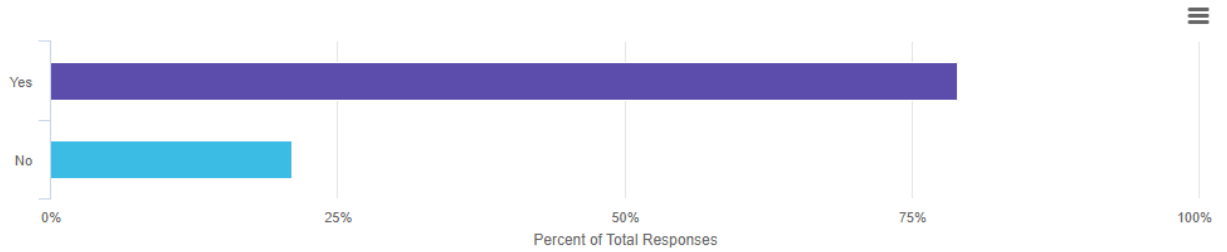
Is your business or organization open to hiring individuals with a criminal record?



**92% Replied YES-8% Replied NO
1-UNANSWERED**

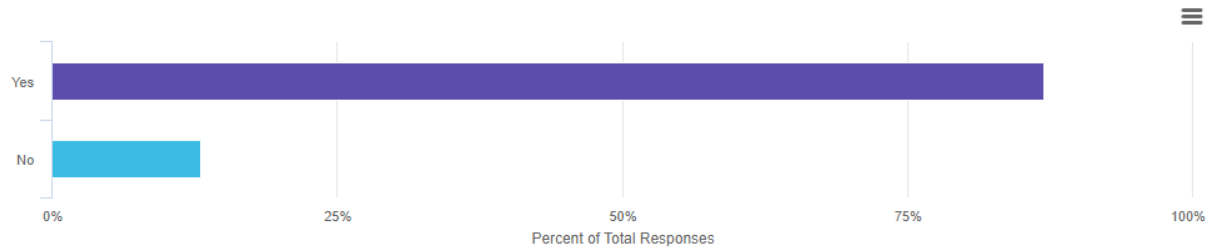
⁷ KLA White Paper Project Survey: Building awareness of employment opportunities for ex-offenders in Kosciusko County. <https://www.surveymonkey.com/w/0ls912t>

For those business who do not currently hire: Would you be willing to learn more about the potential to hire individuals with prior convictions?



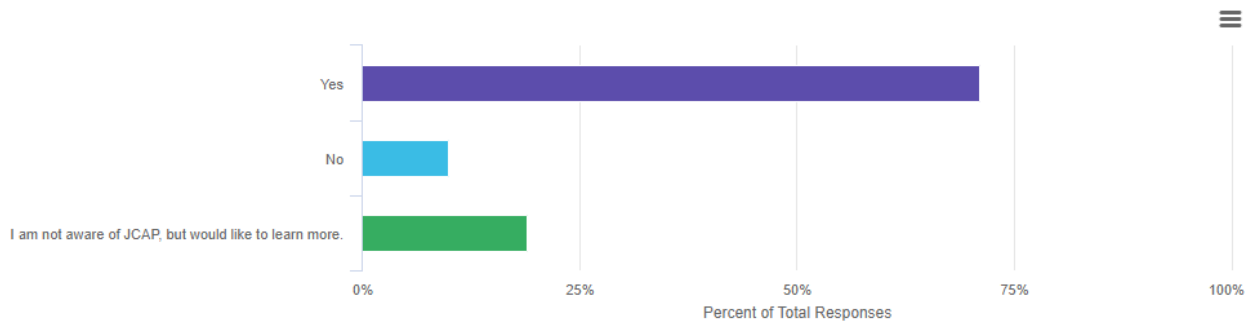
79% Replied YES-21% Replied NO

Are you familiar with Kosciusko County's JCAP program?



87% Replied YES-13% Replied NO

Would you consider hiring opportunities from an individual graduating from the JCAP program, or a similar program of development?



71% Replied YES-10% Replied NO

19% Would like to learn more

Violent offenses, crimes involving money or finances and offenses sexual in nature, were the most common responses as to why an individual would not be a candidate for employment.

Unfortunately, our survey did not garner the overall number of responses that we had hoped for, which led to cold calls or e-mails to local business HR reps to inform them of the project. In all we compiled a list of 38 local business who are open to hiring ex-offenders. Maybe the question of: Business Name/Contact Person, detoured people from continuing any further?

7.)Next Steps-Sustainability & Conclusion: What can the Jean Northernor Project Proud Award be used for?

With the majority of our focus geared towards helping individuals currently in the process of completing JCAP or residents at Work Release, it occurred to us that this information could assist current residents of Kosciusko County who are seeking employment; as well as individuals looking to relocate into the area that are concerned or have struggled to find employment due to past behaviors that resulted in criminal charges.

If our project were chosen for the Jean Northernor Project Proud Award, it would be used to assist with continued funding for Kosciusko County's JCAP program to continue its service to our community. This funding could be used to continually promote awareness with employers in our county, bring in further programs to help with the growth and education within the program as well as continue providing a second chance for those who may be needing just that, a chance. As for the future of this project, we strongly believe this can grow and be maintained, adding current companies and updating as new business comes to the county. Expanding to the point of sharing with individuals what companies offer as far as benefit packages and furthering education.

Today might mean we are nearing the end of our KLA tenure; however, this project could develop into the start of an exciting and rewarding career for someone who previously thought something of that caliber was out of their reach.

As the Covid 19 pandemic slowly rides off into the sunset, the need for employees is not a problem that will end. As long as our community is growing, we will have employers seeking more employees. As long as the Earth is spinning there will be a need for second chance opportunities! Everyone makes mistakes, it's how we rebuild that's important. Our goal is to have others share the same passion of taking care of the people in our community and it's evident from the research in this project there's many that do!

8.) Works Cited

- 1.) Community Needs Assessment provided by LiveWell Kosciusko
- 2.) [Unemployment Rate in Kosciusko County, IN - 2022 Data 2023 Forecast 1990 Historical \(tradingeconomics.com\)](#)
- 3.) Kedco 2020-2021 Business Impact Award Winners
- 4.) [Big Lots, Planet Fitness New Tenants Lined Up For Revamped Shopping Center – InkFreeNews.com](#)
- 5.) [Orthopediatrics Acquires MD Orthopaedics – InkFreeNews.com](#)
- 6.) [Career Bridge - KEDCO \(kosciuskoedc.com\)](#)
- 7.) KLA White Paper Project Survey: Building awareness of employment opportunities for ex-offenders in Kosciusko County.
<https://www.surveyking.com/w/0ls912t>