

*Friday May 15, 2020 St. Francis House + Suffolk University CORI Project*

*JoAnna Peters of the St. Francis House Workforce Development department gives us a look into the impact of a criminal record while trying to secure meaningful employment.*

Here at the Workforce Development (WFD) department of St. Francis House, our guests experiencing homelessness face a variety of employment barriers; perhaps one of the most significant is having a criminal record. Most employers run a Criminal Offender Record Information report, or a 'CORI', before hiring candidates and fear, stereotypes, societal stigma, and worry of maintaining a good reputation often cause employers to hesitate in hiring someone with a criminal history.

The WFD department services are provided with the goal of helping our guests obtain meaningful employment. However, considering some guests have criminal histories, we want to ensure that we are guiding those guests to apply for "CORI-friendly" job opportunities.

To support this effort, the WFD staff have partnered with a Suffolk University Public Administration undergraduate course to conduct employer interviews in a variety of different fields to get more information to support our guests with criminal records who are seeking employment. Suffolk students were assigned industries and interviewed employees and Human Resources professionals. Through these findings, we've been able to learn which industries are more accepting of criminal records, and this will help facilitate the process of guiding our guests towards obtaining successful employment in the future.

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### **Construction**

Construction companies were found to be very CORI-friendly. In fact, this industry often partners with local jails to hire individuals upon release.

### **Independent Boutique**

An independently-owned boutique said they do not check CORI reports when onboarding new employees because most are family or friends she already has a personal relationship with.

The owner believes in giving people second chances and stated she would fairly assess and consider applicants with non-violent criminal backgrounds. Her advice for applicants with criminal records – *consistent with that of many other employers interviewed for this project* – is to be honest and transparent about criminal history.

### **Information Technology**

Interview results from a start-up tech company suggested that the information technology (IT) field may not be CORI-friendly, particularly when it comes to violent offenses. For example, the IT company interviewed runs CORI reports for all new hires, and it was very rare that an employee had a criminal background.

### **Healthcare**

An organization primarily offering healthcare services to the LGBT population checks CORI reports upon hiring candidates. However, the organization is committed to influencing social change and providing employment opportunities regardless of a criminal record. A criminal record will not disqualify someone from obtaining employment, but decisions for candidates with records are made on a case-by-case basis, with consideration of the type of charge(s), age of the charge(s), and type of employment the candidate is pursuing.

### **Non-profit**

A non-profit agency that provides a variety of substance abuse recovery services was identified as a CORI-friendly employer. In fact, this agency looks to hire those who are “struggling in the community,” including people coping with substance abuse or mental health issues, those experiencing homelessness, and people who have criminal backgrounds. Candidates with a lived experience of addiction are often viewed as an asset to the substance abuse recovery industry, though many of them also have criminal records.

### **Supermarkets**

A supermarket interviewed was another “CORI-friendly” employer, performing background checks only for those pursuing a position as a driver. This is essential for that particular job because drivers deliver groceries directly inside people’s homes, and many are elderly customers.

Nonetheless, the supermarket interviewed said they were dedicated to hiring applicants that face employment barriers and are trying to change their life in a positive way. Similar to other CORI-friendly businesses, they stressed the value of honesty for applicants in regard to discussing their criminal histories.

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Having a better understanding of how industries view criminal history is very valuable for our team in aiding our guests. As part of our mission at St. Francis House, we never turn anyone away, and a major aspect of the WFD department is to provide knowledge and resources to our guests in relation to employment. It is essential for our team to be able to support guests that face employment barriers due to their criminal history.

The WFD team would like to thank and applaud the six students at Suffolk University who conducted this project, your hard work has meaningfully contributed to St. Francis House and will make a positive impact on the men and women we serve.