



RISE Today

by Charles Lieske, RISE Program Specialist,
Administrative Office, Lincoln

The RISE program has continued to see success while serving probationers in Nebraska communities.

Since its inception in 2007, the RISE program has served over 3,500 adult and juvenile probationers with skill-building services targeted at improving their educational and employment opportunities.

During this time, 573 probationers have graduated from the program, and, of those, 423 were considered “successful,” meaning they have not returned to the probation system a year after completion.

In other words, Probation enjoys a success rate of 74% for those who have graduated from the RISE program, but only 14% of those served by the program actually graduate.

In this issue of *On the Horizon*, we have recruited RISE Specialists to provide an insider’s view of the work they do and to discuss recommended strategies for teamwork and referrals that we hope will help our graduation numbers rise.



Building Lifelong Skills

by Jessica Coburn, RISE Program Specialist, District #8, O’Neill

The RISE program is not only for finding employment or getting an education, but also for providing life-long skills that enhance employability and help maintain education. The RISE program works to enhance skills probationers already excel at, while improving other skills they need.

RISE Specialists connect with businesses in the community to see what specific skills employers are looking for when hiring. Specialists incorporate these skills into probationer groups and one-on-one sessions, utilizing the RISE participant workbook probationers complete.

Specialists also work with schools to create a partnership with probation. The Juvenile School Support Program teaches juveniles how to identify habits and attitudes they can change in order to improve their academics and attendance.

Our goal with providing life-long skills is to promote positive behavior and address poor decision-making by teaching individuals to effectively deal with the challenges and demands of everyday life. RISE Specialists guide probationers to be able to succeed in the future and are dedicated to teaching these life-long skills to adults and juveniles.



Filling Probationers’ Tool Boxes

by Jamie Fisher, RISE Program Specialist, District #11, North Platte

Sometimes our choices lead us on a dark path that is hard to back down; a path with discouragement and lack of hope. These are themes I hear from probationers on a daily basis. Some fear failure or rejection due to their criminal convictions and/or lack of skills.

The RISE program helps fill the probationers’ “tool boxes” by re-introducing skills they may have forgotten over the years or introducing new ones to help them reach success in employment and education. We also build confidence and encourage positive thinking about the future.

RISE Specialists are here to mentor, encourage, and help probationers gain the confidence they need to switch to a brighter path. We cannot make others change; they have to be ready.

Some of the skills RISE focuses on for adults are recognizing barriers/setting goals, job readiness, application challenges, creating a proper résumé and an explanation of conviction letter, how to conduct an effective job search, interviewing tips and meeting employers’ expectations. We also help those who need to get their GED or higher education but don’t know what steps are needed to get there.

There is also the RISE Juvenile School Support Program, which offers structure, support, and opportunities to build self-esteem. Common problems I have seen with juvenile probationers include low grades, issues with school attendance and behavioral problems.

The juveniles who participate in RISE often find it comforting to have someone who will listen

without judgment and offer help when needed.

RISE is here to support juveniles as they continue down their path of discovery, guiding them to learn from their mistakes and think about the future more positively.

Juvenile RISE works on several target areas including goal setting, motivation, organization, study skills, and test-taking. For some, we also work on budgeting skills, employment, and post high school education. All these are skills they will need to fill their “tool boxes” for years to come.

Knowledge is power, and adult and juvenile probationers can have power, if they choose to actively participate in RISE.

Our mission is to change “discouraged” into “encouraged” and “no hope” into

“hope.” When probationers have completed the RISE program, they are equipped with the tools (skills) needed to fill their “tool box.” Taking a step, even a baby one, towards success and coming out with even just one new skill, is a mission accomplished.

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How RISE Screenings Work

by Nichole Swanson, RISE Program Specialist, District #6, Fremont/Blair

Why is the RISE intake/screening appointment important? In a phrase: “buy-in.”

The intake is the Specialist’s opportunity to begin building a working relationship with a probationer after an officer referral is made. It also allows for organization of the probationer file and time to make updates.

Officers can help their probationers feel more comfortable with the RISE process by personally introducing them for the scheduling of a screening appointment.

So how does the screening work? The juvenile screening instrument is designed to differentiate between three unique placement tracks.

1) Individual Student Consultations assist a probationer in one or two “skill building” areas where they are struggling.

2) Juvenile School Support is the “original” RISE program for juveniles where probationers complete assignments that help them improve the skills Jamie mentioned in her piece.

3) The Navigator Program provides for participation in School Support assignments, while the RISE Program Specialist is tracking grades, attendance, behavior, community service and employment. Specialists may also attend meetings at school.

The RISE Specialist works closely with officers, juveniles, schools, and informs parents/guardians of the program requirements to bridge skills into the home environment.

The screening instrument for adults is scored in two distinct sections of *employment* and *education*. The questions are straightforward and can be posed using Motivational Interviewing in a conversational manner to build rapport with probationers. The scoring of questions helps the RISE specialist to determine the appropriate level of intervention such as individual advisement, employment only, education only, or the entire program, which includes both domains. Barriers may be noted that prevent group involvement and scheduling

individual sessions may be appropriate.

The Specialist explains the RISE program requirements, completes paperwork, shares handouts and schedules a start date. This will help the probationer succeed within the structure provided. The Specialist also allows time for questions and concerns of the probationer.

Referring officers and judges should take the opportunity to showcase what RISE can do for the probationer! RISE is a skill-building program, most often completed in a group setting. The RISE program curriculum is designed to be facilitated by the RISE Specialist utilizing line-by-line reading, activities, visual aids, guest speakers to share expert views that relate to the lesson, homework for thoughtful consideration on each of the probationer’s parts, as well as rehearsal and role play to practice and refine skills such as interviewing. It takes effort and commitment, so “buy-in” is important for probationers to keep motivated to complete the program!



Making the Best Referral

By Sarah Larsen Astrones, RISE Program Specialist, District #9, Grand Island

How do you decide whether or not a probationer is a good referral for RISE? This aspect of the newsletter is to help judges, PSI writers and supervising officers identify who should be referred.

When it comes to adults who are the best fit for RISE, we have to consider the key elements of employment and education. If a probationer seems to always have employment, but their employer changes every time you meet, refer them! The objective of RISE is not only to help probationers attain employment, but to teach them the skills to maintain employment as well. Just because a person is employed does not automatically exclude them from being considered a good candidate for the program.

The same is true for education. Just because a probationer has a GED, high school diploma, or higher education does not mean s/he won’t benefit from the program. RISE Specialists are specifically trained with the probationer in mind.

Juveniles who score as a high-risk case should automatically be referred to RISE. Likewise, juveniles who are at risk of dropping out of school or are having behavioral or truancy issues would also qualify.

We are here to see that probationers are setting themselves up for success. Giving us the best referrals will help us more fully engage probationers in our process because they will be in need of what we have to offer.



Opening Employers’ Doors

by Kathy Wagoner-Wiese, RISE Program Specialist, District #10, Hastings/Minden/Holdrege

In my opinion as a RISE Specialist, one of the most effective tools the RISE program teaches is the “Letter of Explanation.”

Probationers usually have several barriers when looking for employment. One of the toughest barriers can be their criminal history. Honesty is most important, and felony convictions must be disclosed on applications.

In the past it was usually suggested to use the phrase “will explain in interview” to address the conviction question on an application. However, today it is suggested that applicants provide a letter of explanation along with their applications and resumes. This letter should be concise and basic, with information such as what the conviction was; what was learned from the experience; how they have taken responsibility for their actions; and what they have to offer the employer.

Responding to the conviction question with the words, “Will explain in interview” leaves a lot of room for negative imagination. The probationer may never get a chance to explain if they don’t get the interview.

A “Letter of Explanation” can be a positive tool in job searching because it will be an explanation of the facts, putting the employers’ fears to rest. Furthermore, this *opens the door of opportunity* to get that interview.



“Celebration of Service” Symposium Approaches

On Thursday, May 31, from 9:30 to 3:30, Nebraska AmeriCorps members and supervisors will showcase their service stories through creative projects at the Seward Civic Center. This is an opportunity to network and practice summarizing AmeriCorps experiences to use while pursuing future opportunities.