

URL: <https://stvp.stanford.edu/clips/a-financial-case-for-social-change>

Beverly Parenti, co-founder of The Last Mile, lays out a compelling financial case for why the program aims to bring entrepreneurial and technology training to inmates in the prison system. Parenti also shares her personal experience of being inspired to take on this challenge with her husband and fellow co-founder Chris Redlitz.



Transcript

So when Chris came home that night, he was so energized.. He had that look in his eyes that he gets when he has extreme focus and intention.. And he started telling me about his experience and how surprised he was at the level of interest and understanding of business that the men portrayed who were in the audience for his speech.. So then he starts pitching me on the idea.. His new startup is going to be the Last Mile, it became the Last Mile and we were going to have a startup program inside San Quentin.. Well, I am not an easy sell.. And my first reaction was why would I want to spend my free time because I have so little of it anyway, why would I want to spend my free time working with prisoners? But he had that passion and he actually asked me not to make any judgments about something I knew very little about.. So reluctantly, I committed to do research about incarceration and also to go and visit the men to experience first-hand what he was so passionate about.. So first was my research.. Well, I wanted to find out more about the issues facing the prison system in California today..

And what I learned from my research made me realize that even a small scale effort could make a difference.. So here are some of the learnings.. In California, we spend more for prisons than higher education.. The average cost per prisoner to tax payers \$45,000.. The rate of recidivism exceeds 60%.. So by the time many men are released from San Quentin, as taxpayers we've already invested nearly \$1 million for their incarceration.. But without rehabilitation, many of them will return.. That's a bad investment.. If we could reduce recidivism by just 5%, billions of dollars could be saved in the next 10 years alone.. But without rehabilitation, these problems will persist..

So if that wasn't convincing enough for me to get involved, I went to San Quentin, so I could meet the men, many of whom later became the founding members of the Last Mile.. And it was then that I realized why Chris was so passionate about this program.. These men were not bad people.. They are people who made bad decisions and many of them decades ago.. I saw hope in their eyes.. They are determined to succeed and to right their wrong and to give back to their communities and make their families proud.. So I agreed.. I was on board.. I joined Chris as co-founder of the Last Mile and we created this program as our social cause.. From that point on, our goal is to help these men turn their dreams into reality and begin to pave the road to success...