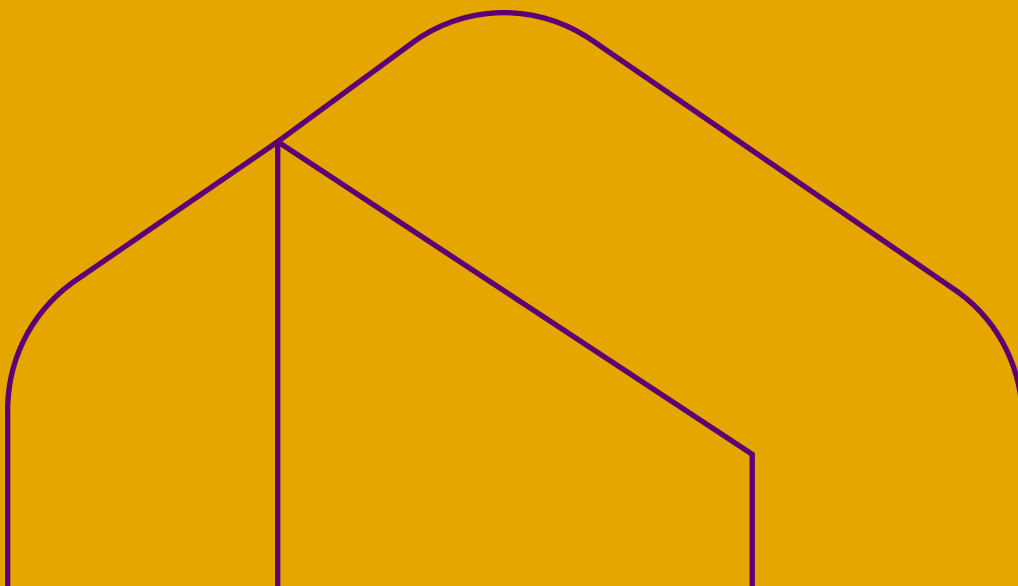




RESEARCH  
BRIEF



# Supporting Fathers' Resilience During Reentry: Evidence from Osborne's Prepare Program



# SUPPORTING FATHERS' RESILIENCE DURING REENTRY: EVIDENCE FROM OSBORNE'S PREPARE PROGRAM

Michelle Portlock, M.P.A.,  
Vice President, Impact & Evaluation, Osborne Association

Fathers returning from incarceration confront a [complex set of challenges](#) to rebuilding stable lives, particularly in [securing employment](#) and [reestablishing family relationships](#). Limited work histories, rapid shifts in workplace technology, and legal or informal hiring restrictions often restrict their access to jobs. At the same time, many fathers encounter obstacles reconnecting with their children and navigating family dynamics altered during their absence. These intertwined challenges underscore the need for comprehensive reentry supports.

The Osborne Association's Pathways to Reentry, Employment, and Parenting (Prepare) program launched in 2016 to meet this need. Serving more than 180 fathers across New York City each year, Prepare supports participants in building economic stability, strengthening parenting and coparenting skills, and reducing behaviors that can result in reincarceration. Unlike traditional workforce programs that focus solely on job readiness and placement, Prepare integrates three evidence-based curricula focused on employment, parenting, and healthy relationships. In recent years, programming has been complemented by training in physical and emotional self-regulation. Prepare is delivered by a team that includes staff with lived experience of incarceration, offering participants relatable role models and informed guidance throughout their period of reentry.

Earlier research demonstrated the strength of this holistic approach. A 2015–2020 evaluation by John Jay Research and Evaluation Center (John JayREC) found that Prepare “was successful in helping individuals reconnect with their children and families and obtain employment,”<sup>1</sup> and that 80 percent of participants who secured a job through the program remained arrest-free five years after completing it.

Building on those promising results, in 2020 Osborne partnered with Child Trends, a national research institute, to conduct a more rigorous study of Prepare's impact. The [study by Child Trends](#) used a randomized controlled trial design to assess program effectiveness and to examine the added value of incorporating the [Social Resilience Model \(SRM\)](#)—a neuroscience-based, skills-building approach designed to help individuals regulate their physiological responses to stress. New participants were randomly assigned to cohorts receiving either the standard Prepare curriculum or an enhanced version that included SRM instruction.

The evaluation found that participation in Prepare led to **statistically significant improvements in Parent Involvement**, and that fathers in SRM-enhanced cohorts reported **significantly higher Parenting Self-Efficacy** than those who did not receive SRM training. Participants also described meaningful changes in their day-to-day lives, including improved relationships with children and coparents, greater emotional regulation, increased confidence, and renewed motivation to be present

---

1. <https://johnjayrec.nyc/osbornereform/>

and responsible caregivers. Many participants attributed these shifts directly to their Prepare experience.<sup>2</sup>

A central benefit of Osborne's research partnership with Child Trends was the opportunity to strengthen the program in real time. Over the five-year study period, the program and evaluation teams met regularly to review observations and participant feedback. Midway through the evaluation, Child Trends recommended improvements to ensure more consistent delivery of SRM content. In response, Osborne engaged Laurie Leitch, Ph.D., Founder and Director of Threshold GlobalWorks, who developed SRM based on the work of Peter A. Levine, PhD. Dr. Leitch provided additional training to Osborne staff and produced SRM educational videos for use in the curriculum. The evaluation concluded that these enhancements led to **deeper integration of SRM practices** and more frequent and confident use of SRM techniques by participants in both classroom and personal settings.

Among more than 50 federally funded fatherhood programs, Osborne was distinctive in its use of a skills-based approach to help participants build resilience and regulate physiological responses to stress, distress, and trauma. Prepare was recently re-funded by the U.S. Administration for Children and Families through 2030, underscoring its demonstrated effectiveness and promise as a model for holistic, evidence-based reentry support. Below, Child Trends summarizes the study's research questions and major findings.

### Participant Feedback

A survey of nearly 650 Prepare participants over the past five years reinforces the evaluation findings:

**92%**

reported that the program was helpful or extremely helpful overall

**85%**

found the program helpful or extremely helpful for their parenting

**78%**

reported that Prepare was helpful or extremely helpful in supporting their coparenting



2. Child Trends, *Resilience in Reentry: An Implementation and Impact Evaluation of the Social Resilience Model in the PREPARE Program in New York City*, 2025.

# INTEGRATING THE SOCIAL RESILIENCE MODEL INTO PREPARE PROGRAMMING

Fadumo Abdi, Victor St John, Ph.D.; Child Trends

## What is Prepare?

The Osborne Association runs a program for formerly incarcerated fathers and father-figures. In a three-week period, participants receive a curriculum blending parenting education, healthy relationship skills, job placement support, and workforce readiness. The program also connects families to other community services; child-support and financial-literacy workshops; and industry-recognized hard-skills training (e.g., OSHA and site-safety credentialing) to bolster family well-being and financial security. Rooted in culturally responsive, father-centered practice, Prepare fosters healthier family dynamics and safer communities as fathers transition home. Following the three-week group curriculum, Prepare provides individualized support with job placement and job retention.

## What is SRM?

To bolster Prepare, Osborne introduced the Social Resilience Model (SRM) into the program in 2020. SRM is an evidence-based practice, developed by Threshold GlobalWorks, that teaches attention management strategies. For individuals who are going through periods of high stress or have had traumatic experiences, SRM can help them manage their attention, redirect from stressors and triggers, and build resilience. Some of the practices of SRM are below.



### Tracking (sensory tracking)

By paying attention to internal bodily sensations (e.g., breath, heart rate, muscle tension), participants notice signs of stress or calm. This builds their awareness of how reactivity arises and lays the foundation for all other SRM skills



### Grounding

By focusing attention on the sensation of contact with solid surfaces (e.g., feet against the floor, back against a chair), grounding creates stability in the nervous system, promotes calming practices, and interrupts reactivity.



### Resourcing and resource strengthening

Participants are taught to think of a person, place, memory, or object that evokes a sense of comfort, safety, or joy. They deepen these “resources” by focusing on sensory details, which helps shift attention away from distress and toward calm.



### Shift and stay

This skill involves intentionally shifting one's attention away from distressing stimuli toward a calming sensation then maintaining focus in that place of calm. This technique is useful in managing pain, overwhelming emotions, and disruptive thoughts.

Text and graphic excerpt from [\*Implementation and Impact Evaluation of Social Resilience Model in the PREPARE Program in New York City\*](#), Child Trends

## Research design and questions

In a study funded by the Administration for Children and Families, Child Trends collaborated with Osborne to evaluate the addition of SRM to the Prepare group curriculum, using a random assignment approach. The purpose of the study was to evaluate the impact SRM has on the program participants by comparing the outcomes of those in the standard Prepare track and those in Prepare Plus, which included SRM education. The study used surveys, interviews, and focus groups to collect data and answer the questions:

What effect do Prepare and Prepare Plus have on the lives of formerly incarcerated fathers and father-figures (i.e., within-group differences) across the four key outcome domains (i.e., parenting, healthy relationships, employment readiness and financial education, and reduced recidivism)?

What differential impact does Prepare Plus (when compared to Prepare) have on the lives of formerly incarcerated fathers and father-figures (i.e., between-group differences) across the four key outcome domains (i.e., parenting, healthy relationships, employment readiness and financial education, and reduced recidivism)?

How does implementation of Prepare and Prepare Plus influence the observed key outcome domains (i.e., attention management, parenting, healthy relationships, employment readiness, and reduced recidivism)?

## Findings

The study compared participant perceptions and outcomes before and after participating in the group programming. In this comparison, the study showed that being in either track of Prepare programming led to statistically significant improvements in Parent Involvement, Difficulty Affording the Cost of Living, and Housing Insecurity.

The study also compared those who were in Prepare and those who were in Prepare Plus and received SRM. Those who were in the Prepare Plus cohort showed significantly higher Parenting Self-Efficacy scores. Notably, the improvement in parenting-related measures aligns with the emphasis on self-regulation and grounding in the SRM add-on of Prepare Plus.

From the interviews and focus groups, the study showed that participants who received SRM reported practicing SRM during stressful situations like interviews, when coparenting, and during any general stressful situations. Some of the participants who received SRM shared feedback about using grounding skills at work when they felt the situation was stressful. Participants in Prepare Plus noted that they were more mindful of the impact of trauma and adverse childhood experiences when they are parenting their children now. One participant shared,

*“Basically, [SRM gave me] skills that I can use to nurture and build my son up, to use for myself to avoid situations, and the grounding techniques so I can calm myself down whenever I need to.”*

In addition, participants reported the importance of being in a group and building relationships with peers who have experiences in common. Participants also said they would recommend this program to others and indicated that they have shared the skills they learned with their friends.

## Key Takeaway

When implemented with fidelity, SRM can be effectively integrated into reentry programming to strengthen participants’ emotional regulation and parenting skills. The findings from the evaluation show that SRM is aligned with and enhances Prepare’s theory of change. After a targeted effort to strengthen the delivery of SRM training components, Prepare Plus participants more consistently identified, practiced, and internalized SRM techniques across both classroom instruction and their day-to-day lives.

## Prepare Plus participants described using SRM skills to calm themselves in stressful or triggering situations:

*“That stuff about grounding, it helps me cool down. I do it at work when someone pushes my buttons.”*

*“Whenever a situation is stressful or tense, I could just find a chair or a wall or something to lean on, close my eyes, take deep breaths, and just focus on my hands, my feet, different parts to distract me from whatever the situation may be.”*

*“I told my bunkie to try that thing we did—think of something that makes you feel good when you start getting hot.”*

*“You go somewhere like a quiet room and think about something that made you happy—that’s what I do now.”*