

Tips for Persons with Criminal Records Retuning to the Community

Written by:

Thomas Dujmic

For:

St. Leonard's Society of Canada

Toronto, ON, Canada

April 2021

Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Section 1: Goal Setting and Motivation	4
Thinking About Goals	4
How to Identify Your Goals	5
Section 2: Social Services/Financial Assistance	8
Contact Information by Province	8
What to Do Once You've Applied	10
Section 3: Employment	11
Goals for Employment/Things to Consider When Looking for a Job	11
Tips for Employment/Applying for Jobs	12
Skilled Trades and Labour Positions	12
Section 4: Educational Opportunities	14
List of Canada's Universities, Colleges, and Technical Schools	14
Section 5: Food Services	17
Section 6: Mental Health Support	19
Fitness & Mental Health	20
Section 7: Record Suspensions (Pardons)	22
Final Thoughts	23

Introduction

My name is Thomas Dujmic and I am a volunteer in school with a criminal record. I originally came up with this project as a placement student with St Leonard's Society of Canada to help persons with criminal records seeking employment, and for those who are transitioning into a new stage in their lives to better their future. I realized people may need help with more than just employment, so I created this document to share advice that might help people who are looking to increase their chances of success now that they are living in the community with a criminal record, especially those that have recently been release from jail or prison.

My hope is that by sharing using this information and advice that I learned in getting to where I am now, that it will help with your well being and mindset in this lifestyle. This document does not claim to have all the answers and not all the sections may be relevant to everyone. The information presented below is intended to be a starting point, but readers are encouraged to do their own research to make sure they are developing a plan that is right for them.

Trust your thoughts, and it is never too late.

"You miss 100% of the shots you don't take"

- *Michael Jordan*

Section 1: Goal Setting and Motivation

There are many ways to achieve your goals and become successful. It all starts with the right mindset towards turning a new leaf. With getting your life back on track, setting goals and having a motivational thought helps with focusing and staying productive. Healthy thinking and having something positive to work towards can benefit you with being successful in getting yourself to where you want to be.

Thinking About Goals

When setting goals, don't start challenging yourself too much when you are just getting on your feet. Simple goals that keep you away from negative influences can be a good start. As someone with experience transitioning back to community living with a criminal record, the goals I set for myself had to do with my lifestyle and habits. Smaller goals like learning to cook or trying fancier recipes on your own can be therapeutic and enjoyable. Being someone that was incarcerated and released on my own, my motivation was thinking about going back to school. From my experience, setting goals that will increase your ability to communicate with service providers, employers, co-workers, and other acquaintances will benefit you in this process.

To set yourself up for success, make sure your goals are **SMART**:¹

- **Specific** – *something you aren't doing/need to do but want to achieve*
 - (e.g., *wake up on time every day*)
- **Measurable** – *something that I can keep track of to note progress*
 - (e.g., *keep track of the exact time I wake up each day*)
- **Achievable** – *something that is within my capacity to achieve*
 - (e.g., *using the tools I have (alarm clock) to reach my goal*)
- **Realistic** – *something than can be obtained through commitment*
 - (e.g., *setting a reasonable time to wake up*)
- **Timely** – *something that can be achieved to help reach a future goal*
 - (e.g., *need to wake up at a consistent time to be on time for a job*)

¹ Kate Eby. (2019). *The Essential Guide to Writing SMART Goals*. Smart Sheet.
<https://www.smartsheet.com/blog/essential-guide-writing-smart-goals>

Essentially, the idea is to break down large goals into smaller bite-size pieces that follow your process (e.g., what are all the smaller goals that need to be achieved before you have what you need to reach the main goal?) As you organize the steps and schedule out your intentions for each milestone, you'll be amazed to see how much easier they are to reach.

Having the right mindset when setting and working towards your goals is important for increasing your chances of actually reaching your goals. Little thoughts like this will change your view about your life and can lead to better habits which will increase your ability to adapt at work, school, or in the community. Motivational thoughts and goals will help you strengthen skills you have already developed and help improve your weaknesses. This will keep you focused, especially when you see results.

Believe in yourself. Nothing is impossible if you have the right mentality.

How to Identify Your Goals

This list of questions will help you decide what you want to work on according to priorities. These questions helped me decide what I want to do for my future. Using base questions will help you get an idea of what you need to do for a solution to change.

1. What does goal setting mean to you?
2. Where do you see yourself in the next year? 5 years? 10 years?
3. What do you want to improve on?
4. What are some of your strengths? How do they help you when you're faced with an obstacle?
5. What keeps you productive?
6. What motivates you to succeed?
7. What habits do you have that are beneficial to your recovery?
8. Why is goal setting important to you?

9. Where is your comfort zone?
10. How can you develop the skills you need to become successful?
11. Where do you want to live next year? 5 years? 10 years?
12. What is your dream job?
13. Are you someone that perseveres when faced with an obstacle?
14. Do you believe that perseverance could help you to achieve your goals?
15. Can you think of an example of perseverance in your life?
16. Can you think of an example in your life of a time when you lacked perseverance?
17. Who are positive influences in your life?
18. Do you need to fix relationships that were damaged?
19. What could you do to improve or maintain your relationships with the people that you listed as a positive influence? Do you think that you have enough of those types of relationships?
20. How could you start new contacts with those people you would like to associate with? Is there someone who could help you to facilitate contact?
21. Are there people you need to stay away from to stay on the right track?
22. Do you want to maintain your relationships with the negative influences you listed? If so, then what would the consequences be? What would be the benefits of cutting off all ties with those people? Do you feel ready to do so? For these people, is there a way you could get rid of those unhealthy aspects in the relationship and still keep it?

Everyone has their own way of planning ahead. Below are some simple goals that helped me develop the skills I needed while I figured things out.

Resume building – with your best accomplishments add what you are capable of doing, a clean resume will help with landing a job.

Job experience- gaining experience anywhere will help your finances and goals towards finding a better job. Learn as much as you can.

Staying healthy- maintaining a healthy lifestyle and staying away from negativity will attract the right people in your life.

Enhancing communication skills- practicing your everyday language will benefit you towards learning how to be a professional.

Educational opportunities- looking for ways to build your educational background will guide you to your profession.

Career development- looking into a career and seeing what you need for you to get into the field, building skills, and gaining experience towards the career you want will help you get the job you want.

Graduating high school- (important for many entry level positions)

Weekly goals to keep you busy- little achievements motivate you to keep up the hard work, you will notice a change in your mood once you start setting your own records.

Section 2: Social Services/Financial Assistance

Here is the social services contact information for all of Canada. Social service caseworkers can help you get ID (e.g. health card, birth certificate), find shelter, gain employment, and can get you the help you need for your mental health and/or addictions. Take advantage of the help you get from these caseworkers, use your communication skills, and ask questions. Its in your best interest to apply for social assistance if you are someone like me with little to no support. Social Services will help you with getting your identification if you have just been released. (Health cards & Birth Certificate)

Each province has its own application process. Use the contact information in the table below to find out more for the province you live in.

Contact Information by Province

Province	Link	Contact Info
Alberta Social Assistance Support Program	https://informalberta.ca/public/service/serviceProfileStyled.do?serviceQueryId=1050511#:~:text=Access%20supports%20and%20services%20online,to%20meet%20their%20basic%20needs	1-877-644-9992
British Columbia Social Services	https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/family-social-supports/income-assistance	Call 1-866-866-0800 or use My Self Serve
Manitoba Social Assistance (EIA)	https://www.gov.mb.ca/fs/eia/	204-945-0183 1-866-559-6778 1-800-855-0511 (Manitoba Relay Service)
New Brunswick Social Services	https://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/services/services_renderer.10295.Social_Assistance_Program.html	(1-833-733-7835)

Newfoundland and Labrador Social Assistance	https://www.gov.nl.ca/cssd/income-support/application/	Avalon Toll-free: 1-877-729-7888 TTY: 1-877-292-4205 Central Toll-free: 1-888-632-4555 TTY: 1-877-292-4205 Western Toll-free: 1-866-417-4753 TTY: 1-877-292-4205 Labrador Toll-free: 1-866-449-3144 TTY: 1-877-292-4205
Northwest Territories Social Assistance	https://www.ece.gov.nt.ca/en/services/income-security-programs/income-assistance	Telephone: (867) 767-9355 Toll-free: (866) 973-7252 Toll-free: 1-800-491-8885
Nova Scotia Social Assistance IA	https://novascotia.ca/coms/employment/income_assistance/index.html	1-877-424-1177
Nunavut Social Assistance IA (Disability)	https://www.gov.nu.ca/family-services/programs-services/income-assistance-ia	Qikiqtani: 867-473-2615 or Toll-free: 1-800-567-1514 Kivalliq: 867-645-5040 or Toll-free: 1-800-953-8516 Kitikmeot: 867-983-4032 or Toll-free: 1-800-661-0845
Ontario Social Assistance	https://www.ontario.ca/page/social-assistance	Toll-free: 1-888-789-4199 Tel: 416 325 5666
Prince Edward Island Social Assistance	https://www.princeedwardisland.ca/en/information/family-and-human-services/social-assistance-program	Toll-free: 1-877-569-0546
Quebec Social Assistance	https://www.quebec.ca/en/family-and-support-for-individuals/social-assistance-social-solidarity	514 644-4545 418 644-4545 450 644-4545 Toll-free: 1 877 644-4545

		For the hearing impaired (TTY) Toll-free: 1 800 361-9596
Saskatchewan Social Assistance SAP	https://www.saskatchewan.ca/residents/family-and-social-support/financial-help/financial-help-for-unemployed-or-lower-income-people-and-families	Toll-free: 1-866-221-5200 or TTY 1-866-995-0099
Yukon Social Assistance	https://yukon.ca/en/legal-and-social-supports/supports-adults-and-seniors/apply-social-assistance	Phone: 867-667-5811 or 867-667-5812 or Toll-free: 1-800-661-0408

What to Do Once You've Applied

- 1) **Cooperate and maintain a healthy relationship with your caseworker** - cooperate with what they ask of you while you are being processed in the system and creating a plan. This will also enhance your communication skills through interviews with your caseworker. They are the ones who will help you and make decisions about your application and support.
- 2) **Be prepared** – continue to bring what you need for social assistance support during your first stage of reintegration. If you don't know what to bring – ask!
- 3) **Be responsible** – when given your shelter money make sure it goes to your room/apartment rental, this is your living support. Don't use this money for recreational purposes. Your own space is what you need to focus and get to where you need to be now that you are on parole/probation.
- 4) **Ask the questions** you have about employment, and educational opportunities. Make sure to bring up the plan you came up with for your parole release/probation order and the goals you have set for yourself so your caseworker can refer you to agencies and tell you what you need to do to get there.
- 5) **Don't be afraid** to follow through with your goals and plans now that you are released. Ask about addiction, parenting, educational, mental health, or other programs that can help you with your coping skills now that you are in the community on your own. There are people and services available to you that are willing to help you if you let them.

Section 3: Employment

It is very important to explore what you want to do. Good things take time, so do not stress that you didn't get hired for the first job you applied for. Resumes and cover letters are what you can build for your first step towards seeking a job. Define what you can do from past experiences and put it on paper. Show that you are willing to commit your time to your future employer.

Be patient with gathering information for the job you want. Take your time developing the skills you need or earning the credits mandatory for a starting position.

**With having a record, please be patient with finding the right job. Not all employers approve of a record. This process takes time for a person with a record.*

If you are on social assistance: With having support from your caseworker for guidance, take advantage of the computers and internet they offer and research your career in mind, or use your own equipment if you have it. It's in your best interest, especially if you want a good job. Your caseworker can't do all the work, so make sure your resume can do some of the talking for your work towards an interview.

Goals for Employment/Things to Consider When Looking for a Job

The questions below are things you can consider to help you figure out what is important to you when looking for a job that will be a good fit for you.

- What hours are you willing to work?
- What is the minimum wage/salary you are willing to accept?
- Do your values align with the company/organization?
- What benefits does the job offer?
- Is it a lot of team or independent work?
- What is the commute like?

Tips for Employment/Applying for Jobs

Honesty is very important when it comes to seeking employment. Do not lie on your resume. Employers know if you're qualified or not after one shift if you said you have experience. Avoid putting yourself in risky situations. There are level entry positions in skilled trades and for labour positions. Everyone must start somewhere.

Build up your resume – work on your profile so you can be reviewed through your application

Be creative – you have plenty of options, like starting your own business (Covid increased online opportunities for sales and other business platforms)

Be patient – because you have a criminal record, this process may take awhile, but keep trying

Skilled Trades and Labour Positions

As someone who has lived experience in seeking a job with a record, I have found that getting familiar with skilled trades and labour positions can help you start a career, or help you make/save money for living expenses while you are in school or working towards a different job. In these industries, criminal records are common with workers who are employed.

In many provinces' trades are in demand in many areas. Below is a list of what many skilled trade/labour employers want to see, but make sure to do your own research to find out what you need to get the specific job you're interested in:

Work experience in any field- employers like seeing that you've worked previous jobs and can manage handling tasks.

Communication skills- employers want to ensure that you can comprehend what they are asking of you or what they are telling you.

Physically capable to lift repetitively- employers want to see strength and athleticism because these are physically demanding jobs

Positive attitude- no one likes someone that's negative. Positivity opens doors.

Team player- labour jobs require teamwork, cooperation with employees is mandatory

Leadership skills- whether its critical thinking, or motivating others to continue to work hard will give you options in this field as labourers need a leader to navigate through their day with tasks.

Problem solving skills- employers want to see that you can work independently around obstacles in the workplace. Your supervisor can't explain everything

Eagerness to learn- wanting to improve your skills and work harder, to produce more will help with becoming an apprentice.

Organization skills- showing that you can be neat around your work and place things where they belong after a shift properly will show your employer you are careful with company tools/equipment. Having your work area organized will show gratitude towards being hired.

Listening skills- doing what you are told and understanding what is said will improve your relationship at work or before you are hired.

GED or High school diploma (higher education is better)- some jobs want to see that you can read, write, and do basic math on the job when needed. It is always required for many levels entry positions.

Grade 10 Math- for many trades, grade 10 math is mandatory for the work you will be doing. Measurements, installations, and renovations require basic math knowledge in any trade.

Section 4: Educational Opportunities

Being on probation or parole does not mean you cannot study. Take advantage of the opportunities your employment services office has to offer or enrol in college courses. Both choices are up to you, this is what will make finding employment easier. With having an education and being in school, many doors can open with opportunities for you to get experience and build your professional resume.

GED programs and adult learning centres are affordable with social services allowance, or if you can afford things on your own.

If you have not been enrolled in school for a long time, my recommendation would be to start with community college. Credits can carry on to your university degree if you choose to continue studying.

Undergraduate degrees in Canada can take either three or four years to complete, depending on the university. Postgraduate degrees last between one and three years to complete, depending on the type of degree. Different types of higher education providers in Canada include universities (which carry out research and provide both undergraduate and postgraduate degrees), community colleges and technical, applied arts or applied science schools (which grant certificates, diplomas, associate degrees and bachelor's degrees).

School can be stressful with homework and studying, however, your education can be the foundation of your future. What you know will increase your chances of long-term success and having this knowledge can build self confidence.

List of Canada's Universities, Colleges, and Technical Schools

For those of you who have secondary school education or equivalent, here are some options for Canadian colleges, universities, and trades schools. Make sure to read carefully for what you need to enroll in your program of choice.

This list is for anyone that is looking to apply to university and/or college to start their education path. Every province has different prerequisites towards getting into school.

Alberta Education

- <http://study.alberta.ca/plan-your-studies/universities-colleges-technical-institutes/>

British Columbia Education

- <https://apply.educationplannerbc.ca/>

Manitoba Education

- <https://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/ie/study/post-sec.html>

New Brunswick Education

- https://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/departments/post-secondary_education_training_and_labour/Skills/content/Institutions/UniversitiesAndColleges.html

Newfoundland and Labrador Education

- <https://www.findnewfoundlandlabrador.com/learn/apply/>

Northwest Territories Education

- <https://www.ece.gov.nt.ca/en/services/adult-and-post-secondary-education>

Nova Scotia Education

- <https://studynovascotia.ca/how-to-apply/>

Nunavut Education

- <https://free-apply.com/en/university/1012400180>

Ontario Education

- **University:** <https://www.ouac.on.ca/>
- **College:** <https://www.ontariocolleges.ca/en/apply>

Prince Edward Island Education

- <http://www.degrees.ca/pe/>
- <https://www.masterstudies.ca/universities/Canada/Prince-Edward-Island/>

Quebec Education

- <http://www.degrees.ca/qc/english/>
- <http://www.degrees.ca/qc/french/>
- <http://www.canadian-universities.net/Campus/Applications-Quebec.html>

Saskatchewan Education

- <https://www.saskatchewan.ca/residents/education-and-learning/universities-colleges-and-schools>
- <https://www.saskatchewan.ca/residents/education-and-learning/universities-colleges-and-schools/post-secondary-institutions#universities>

Yukon Education

- <https://www.collegesinstitutes.ca/members/yukon-university/>

As someone that has gone back to school and is close to finishing my probation sentence, I have earned a level entry position working for a college. Skills and job experience goes a long way when applying somewhere. Don't give up when you are in school applying to jobs and they're not hiring you. If you get knocked down, continue to get back up and send those applications in. Your placement with school will help your resume stand out for the career you are working towards. Its all a process, and it is very worth the wait. Continue to maintain a healthy average and put in that study effort! Education is everything, don't let your record stop you from your goals.

Section 5: Food Services

Keeping up with food can be difficult for those who haven't been on their own before. When I was first getting off my charges and sentenced to probation, I didn't have much money to spend. So, I was going to my local food bank for what I needed, which was often enough to last a few weeks. I wouldn't rely on just food bank products for a whole month though, I got my dry food and canned goods there and then bought what I could afford. They're there to help you, don't be intimidated. Some people need support, appreciate the good in the volunteers that help you.

Below is a list of food bank services for every province in Canada for you to locate your nearest agency providing food. Here you will find what you need if you are someone trying to save money. Some people like me needed a food bank because I was not earning enough to buy food on my own.

Be patient with these employees as they volunteer their time for us.

Canada Wide Food Banks

- <https://www.foodbankscanada.ca/>

Alberta Food Banks

- <http://www.albertafoodbanks.org/>

British Columbia Food Banks

- <https://www.foodbanksbc.com/>

Manitoba Food Banks

- <https://mb.211.ca/term/food-banks/>

New Brunswick Food Banks

- <https://fooddepot.ca/need-help/>

Newfoundland Food Banks

- <https://www.foodfirstnl.ca/>

Northwest Territories

- https://www.yellowknife.ca/en/living-here/Food-Support-Services.asp?_mid=32430

Nova Scotia Food Banks

- <https://www.feednovascotia.ca/>

Nunavut Food Banks

- <https://www.qajuqturvik.ca/>
- <https://www.itk.ca/nuluq-mapping-project/initiative/niginik-nuatsivik-nunavut-food-bank/>

Ontario Food Banks

- https://feedontario.ca/about-us/find-a-food-bank/?gclid=Cj0KCQiAkZKNBhDiARIsAPsk0WgJJWc30BRK-st5jh2h1kkRaoq-TnIS2IGKSU-pej29-J0CWPI6urkaAp9AEALw_wcB

Prince Edward Island

- <https://www.foodbankscanada.ca/About-Us/Annual-Reports/2021-Statement-Sheets/Prince-Edward-Island.aspx>

Quebec Food Banks

- <https://banquesalimentaires.org/en/>

Saskatchewan Food Banks

- <https://skfoodbanks.ca/>

Yukon Foodbanks

- https://yukon.ca/sites/yukon.ca/files/food_security_programs_yukon.pdf

Section 6: Mental Health Support

Canada-wide support for mental health can be found on this page. If you are ever experiencing an emergency or have thoughts of suicide and feel like you have nowhere to go, go to your nearest emergency room. Tell them how you feel and what your thoughts are. Talking about your mental health shows bravery and these professionals are there to help you.

Below you will find your country wide services supporting mental health.

Alberta Services

- <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/amh/amh.aspx>

British Columbia Services

- <https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/>

Manitoba Services

- <https://www.gov.mb.ca/health/mh/>

New Brunswick Services

- <https://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/departments/health/AddictionsandMentalHealth.html>

Newfoundland Services

- <https://www.gov.nl.ca/hcs/mentalhealth-committee/mentalhealth/>

Northwest Territories Services

- <https://www.hss.gov.nt.ca/en/services/mental-wellness-and-addictions-recovery#:~:text=The%20NWT%20Help%20Line%20is,%2D800%2D661%2D0844.>

Nova Scotia Services

- <https://www.mentalhealthns.ca/find-support>

Nunavut Services

- [https://www.gov.nu.ca/health/information/mental-health#:~:text=If%20you%20think%20that%20you,%2D800\)%20265%2D3333.](https://www.gov.nu.ca/health/information/mental-health#:~:text=If%20you%20think%20that%20you,%2D800)%20265%2D3333.)

Ontario Services

- <https://www.ontario.ca/page/mental-health-services>

Prince Edward Island Services

- <https://www.princeedwardisland.ca/en/topic/mental-health-services>

Quebec Services

- <https://www.quebec.ca/en/health/advice-and-prevention/mental-health>

Saskatchewan Services

- <https://www.saskatchewan.ca/residents/health/accessing-health-care-services/mental-health-and-addictions-support-services/mental-health-support/seeking-professional-help>

Yukon Services

- <https://yukon.ca/en/health-and-wellness/mental-wellness/access-adult-counselling-services>

Fitness & Mental Health

This section is short, but relevant for your mental health. With wanting to feel good about yourself and your physical appearance, getting fit can be helpful. It can also keep you away from negative situations. Exploring the gym as a new hobby can be intimidating, especially when you see someone fitter than you. Take your time and find yourself improving as you progress with this lifestyle. Learning about fitness will improve your well being in the community.

Being physically active stimulates the brain, which is why I workout in the morning, I am more alert this way. A lot of people feel a lot better after a sweat and a nice workout. It can help with your mental health and physical health.

I know trainers can be costly, and so can the gym, so take advantage of the YMCA or local community centres which may be more affordable. You may also have some luck at contacting a local halfway house who may be aware of services available in your area. There are many gyms that are affordable, using Google, you can navigate your city's gym facilities and pick the membership that suits your budget.

<https://www.ymca.ca/> - To find your local YMCA use this link

For a free option, I used YouTube when I first started training, that's where I learned my workouts.

www.youtube.com – To access free workouts use this link and search the area of focus for your exercises in the gym or at home. Try Searching “chest workout” or “upper/lower body workouts”, YouTube is a great website for free workouts!

Section 7: Record Suspensions (Pardons)

This is a section for those who have completed their sentence and are looking into getting a pardon (now called a “suspension”) for their record. I am not eligible for another few years, so I don’t have experience with this process yet. However, the links below can help you educate yourself on the record suspension process, so you can take the steps you need ahead of time to get there. Take note that you can only get a record suspension after a certain number of years after finishing your sentence without conflicts with the law.

I have attached a link this link is for you to look into what you need. You will find everything for a record suspension on this website. The is currently a \$50 fee for the application, but please note there can be some additional costs for some of the documents you need to make the application.

<https://www.canada.ca/en/parole-board/services/record-suspensions.html>

Final Thoughts

I hope you have learned a few things that helped me get my life together. These were the basic steps I took to get ahead. I have been able to accomplish a lot of my goals and have made a lot of progress toward other ideas I had planned for myself. I am happy with where I am because I built a routine and I stick to that program.

Good luck to those of you who read this and reach out to me anytime if you are someone in recovery looking positive relationships.

Trust the process.

- Thomas Dujmic

“One day you will tell your story of how you’ve overcome what you are going through now, and it will become part of someone else’s survival guide.”

- *Unknown*