

# THE RELEASE PLAN

*Facing the challenges—the expected and the unexpected*

**Written by former female inmate Karen Campbell**

author of the book

*Falling: A Prison Memoir*

*Hard Lessons and the Redemption of the Woman Next Door*

*My name is Karen Campbell. I served six years in Oregon's women's prison, Coffee Creek Correctional Facility, for Manslaughter II/DUII. It was a fatal drinking and driving car accident. I was paroled on April Fools' Day, 2011, and have successfully reintegrated into society. I strive to restore justice by writing and advocacy. I've written this guide to help you as you prepare to re-enter the world outside.*



## RELEASE PLANNING ARE YOU PREPARED FOR RELEASE?

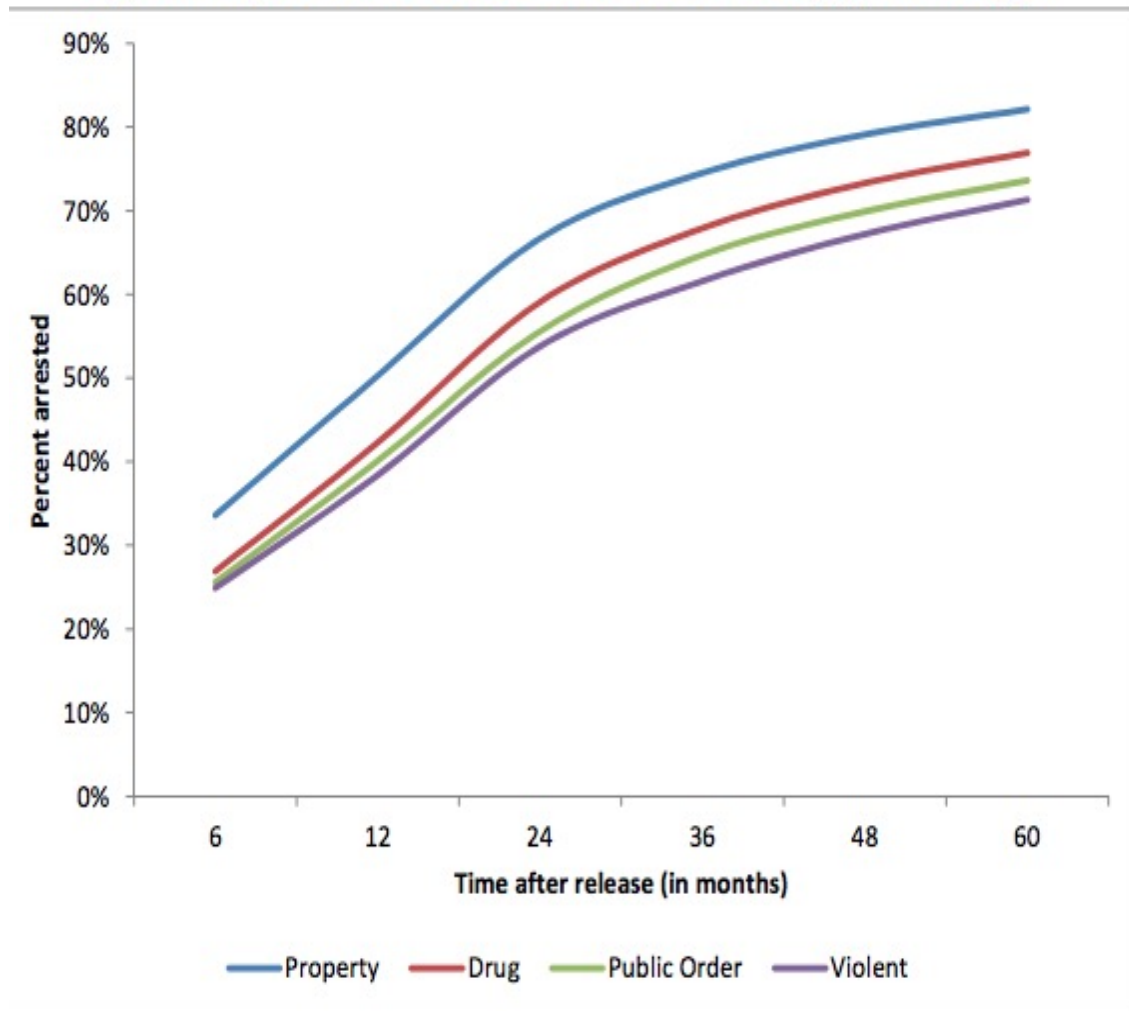
The Department of Corrections will inform you of the basics. But when it was my turn to walk out the gate, I wanted more. So I wrote this plan to help you get out and stay out.

Planning ahead is the key to successful re-entry. Plan early. Your plan must be ambitious, but not so ambitious that you can't stick to it.

If you follow *The Release Plan* you can avoid a pinball lifestyle, reacting successfully to unexpected challenges as life comes at you.

**You will have to fight for your freedom. Start now.**

**Figure 4. Proportion of Released Prisoners Rearrested, by Offense Type**



**Source:** U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Recidivism of Prisoners Released in 30 States in 2005: Patterns from 2005 to 2010*.

This graph shows recidivism rates by crime from 2005-2010. **Within five years, between 68-80% of released prisoners were rearrested.**

## STATISTICS

Compared with the average American, ex-offenders are

- Less educated.
- Less likely to be gainfully employed.
- More likely to have a history of mental illness.
- More likely to deal with substance abuse.

***All have been shown to be risk factors for recidivism—returning to prison.***

# FINANCIAL ADVICE

The average citizen strives to make ends meet. After your release, if there is no money left at the end of the month, no one will be standing on the corner with a bag of groceries, pointing you in the right direction. **It will take a lot of money to keep you from danger.**

## Anticipating Your Expenses

What will your expenses be when you parole?

- How much does each and every item cost?
- Do the math, add it up.
- Find the source of those answers.

The advertisement section in the local paper is a start.

The sticker-shock reality will make you grateful for your savings plan.

## Fundamental Expenses

Bus pass	U.A. test	Parole	Housing
Shoes	Clothing	Underwear	All-weather jacket
Hat	Gloves	Backpack	Hygiene items
Food	Toiletries	Cell phone	Phone card
Gas money for taxis or rides from friends and family			Credit card for Uber/Lyft

## Early Housing Research

- What is the cost of housing?
- In your parole location, where are the areas that have both employment and transportation opportunities?
- Where are the areas that you should avoid?

## Employment

- Research companies that hire felons in your area.
- Apply for jobs that will reflect the skills you've gained while serving.
- Research jobs that will still be thriving when you parole, such as
  - Skilled trade (cosmetology, automotive)
  - Food service
  - Housekeeping
  - General construction/roadwork/landscaping

## Mail Out Copies of *The Release Plan*

Send this plan to loved ones and support people and agencies.

- Keep them in the loop.
- Send updates.
- They are looking for consistent follow-through and wise decision making.

# ONE YEAR-SIX MONTHS TO PAROLE

## Housing Options

- Friends and family
  - Agree on responsibilities and expectations.
- Mission or shelter
  - Make sure it is secure, crime-free lodging.
  - Inquire about arrival, arrangements for keys, and rules of stay.
- Placement in rehab
- Release center in your town/area

## Medical

- Kite medical unit for records.
- Follow up with medications for discharge.
- Research government health care plan.
- Inquire about free or low-cost walk-in clinics.

## Education

Apply if possible and/or research

- GED before parole
- Vocational training programs
- Degree, tech, and certificate programs
- Women in transition programs
- FAFSA (college financial aid)

## Attend Resume Class

- Prepare a resume and cover letter.
- Practice the interview, including “the speech” about your past.
  - Make it honest and to the point, no whining.
  - You will give that speech for the rest of your life.

## Research

- Your local Dress for Success or professional charity closets.
- The Goodwill in your area.

## Begin to Mail Out Belongings

- Books
- Educational materials: certificates/verification of class participation
- Photos and other personal items such as craft projects

## **Ramp Up Your Health**

- Exercise daily.
- Increase walking distances to reflect errands, rain or shine.
- Take an interest in your appearance, get a haircut, moisturize.
- Eat every fruit and vegetable on your meal tray, even if it is canned.
- Sleep eight hours.

Work on developing good patterns to fall asleep.

Mentally prepare for new noises and sunlight!

## **Develop/Deepen Your Spiritual Practice**

- Ask religious service volunteers if they have a church/yoga studio/temple you could attend or one they recommend.
- Continue to go to services in the chapel.
- Continue to read self-help books.
- Meditate.
- Study patience.
- Study compassion for yourself and others.
- Study gratitude.

## **Contact Family and Friends**

If you are fortunate to have supporters, let them know your plans.

- Mail them your release plans to display your good intentions.
- Ask them for permission to use their contact information.
- They may want to wait to see if you are successful.



# FINAL DAYS BEFORE YOU WALK OUT THE GATE

## Your Possessions

- Mail out your final belongings.
- Keep your toiletries, purchased clothing, radio, etc.

Although most women want to walk away from the entire experience, you will not have the extra cash to refurbish yourself.

Most of your money will be going to housing and transportation.

## Clothing

- Ask family/volunteer to send you your parole clothing or
- Leave wearing state-issued sweats which are perfect for continuing your exercise commitment.

## Transportation

Arrange transportation from the facility to meet with your Parole Officer

- Using your state-issued bus pass or
- Traveling with friends, family, or church volunteers.

## Lodging

Secure lodging and then confirm

- Details of your arrival.
- Arrangements for keys.
- Rules of your stay.
- A safe place for your belongings.

## RELEASE DAY!

- Put on clothes of the free world.
- Take a breath, stand up straight.
- Say hello, out loud, using your first name (not your last name/prison name).  
"Hi, my name is Karen."
- Walk out the gate to a new life.



## Leave the Facility with Your

- Food stamp voucher/gift card
- Bus pass
- Savings from your DOC account
- Condoms (required)

*Leave with dignity: Do not brag about your release.*

*Do right by those who supported you by offering to share your release plans.*

## First Steps

- Parole Office: **FOLLOW ALL COURT-ORDERED CONDITIONS OF PROBATION AND PAROLE.**
- Begin alcohol/drug rehab if required.
- Go to your housing. Secure documents and belongings in a safe container.
- Contact your friends and family.

## Then...

- Eat something wonderful.
- Do something completely spontaneous without regard to time and place.  
Simply stand still and look at nature for as long as you wish.  
Slice a piece of real cheese with a real knife outside mealtime.  
Do not call it “chow” ever again.
- If you are lucky, hug someone safe.
- Cry and don't worry about getting beat up for it.
- If you live your first free day mindfully and responsibly, there will be more.

## ONGOING: KEEP WORKING ON THE RELEASE PLAN

- Keep a personal schedule.
- WRITE THINGS DOWN.
- You will be on sensory overload and your mind will feel like scrambled eggs.  
Ease in.
- Nap.
- Hug a tree, smell a rose for your pals inside.
- Sleep.
- Walk, pray, bolster whatever mental and/or spiritual health plan you have been practicing.
- No one can put you back inside but yourself.

# FIRST TWO WEEKS

## Make Appointments

- Double-check: Secure documents in a safe container/location.
- Follow through with PO/rehab requirements.
- Color hair, get a haircut. (You have saved the money!)
- Visit Dress for Success or a charity clothes closet.
- Open a bank account.
- Gather any personal effects that may have been in storage.
- Go to the DMV.
  - Obtain an ID.
  - Take steps to obtain a driver's license.

## Purchase Supplies

- Money belt/safe way to carry your ID and other precious documents
- Planner
- Vitamins
- Clothing, walking shoes, weather-related items, mittens, hat, etc.
- Cell phone and/or phone card

# FIRST MONTH

## Make Appointments

- Visit your local state employment office. Plan on at least half a day to register into the system and wait for assistance.
- Locate and visit a local community health clinic. Follow through on requirements to become a patient, including medical care and medications.
- Set up mail service with the post office.
- Keep government/utility letters for proof of address.
- Locate pantry/food charity meal service.
- Get a library card.
- Begin to apply for work. Return to the local employment office. Allow time for instruction/learning.
- Find online application sites, such as
  - The library
  - Release centers
  - Felon friendly businesses
  - Former contacts
- Keep a close eye on your budget.
- Reassess living conditions. Investigate alternatives if you sense a danger to your freedom.



## TWO TO THREE MONTHS

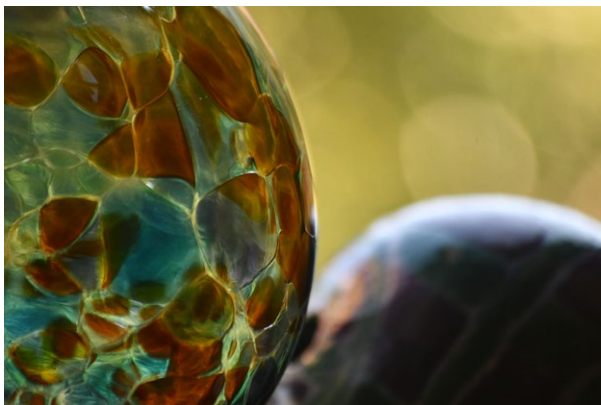
### Make Plans!

- Treat yourself to
    - A free day at the museum.
    - A favorite hike.
    - Sex. Yes, sex. Use the condoms.
  - Volunteer at a
    - Shelter for people or critters.
    - Pick-up litter event.
- You just might meet credible guys/gals who have a connection to a steady job.
- Keep up your exercise and sleep and eat as well as your budget will allow.
  - Go to temple/church.
  - Practice yoga.
  - Take a class at the library.
  - Take a bus ride to somewhere in your town you have never seen before.
  - Meet the people. Look them in the eye. They do not know who you are or where you have been.
  - Stay busy, and rest.

## GOING FORWARD ON YOUR OWN

### Make Commitments

- Remain vigilant.
- Be grateful for every messy new day, no whining.
- Stay away from old haunts and triggers.
- Set a realistic pace. It is easy to become impulsive and lazy when you're tired.
- Ask for help from the right person.
- Set a personal audacious goal.



## **FINALLY...**

The heavy weight of incarceration is over. You are free. It means human touch, toes in wet sand, avocados and mangoes. A real mattress. Carpet. Freedom is staring out at a night sky and knowing that you could do it the next night and the night after that.

If you are looking for guarantees of successful re-entry, there aren't any. You might feel like you have a stamp on your forehead that says "Ex-Con," but frankly, people are too busy saving their money, eating right, and trying to be good citizens to pay attention to you.

*The Release Plan* begins inside, building trust and self-confidence. *The Release Plan* continues to work on the day you parole and in your tenth year of freedom. Imagine *The Release Plan* as a night walk on a lighted path. Sometimes you veer off to the side or stumble into the shadows, but you dust yourself off, recommit to the plan, and find yourself back on the lighted path.

**Go on, stand up straight, call yourself by your first name.**



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