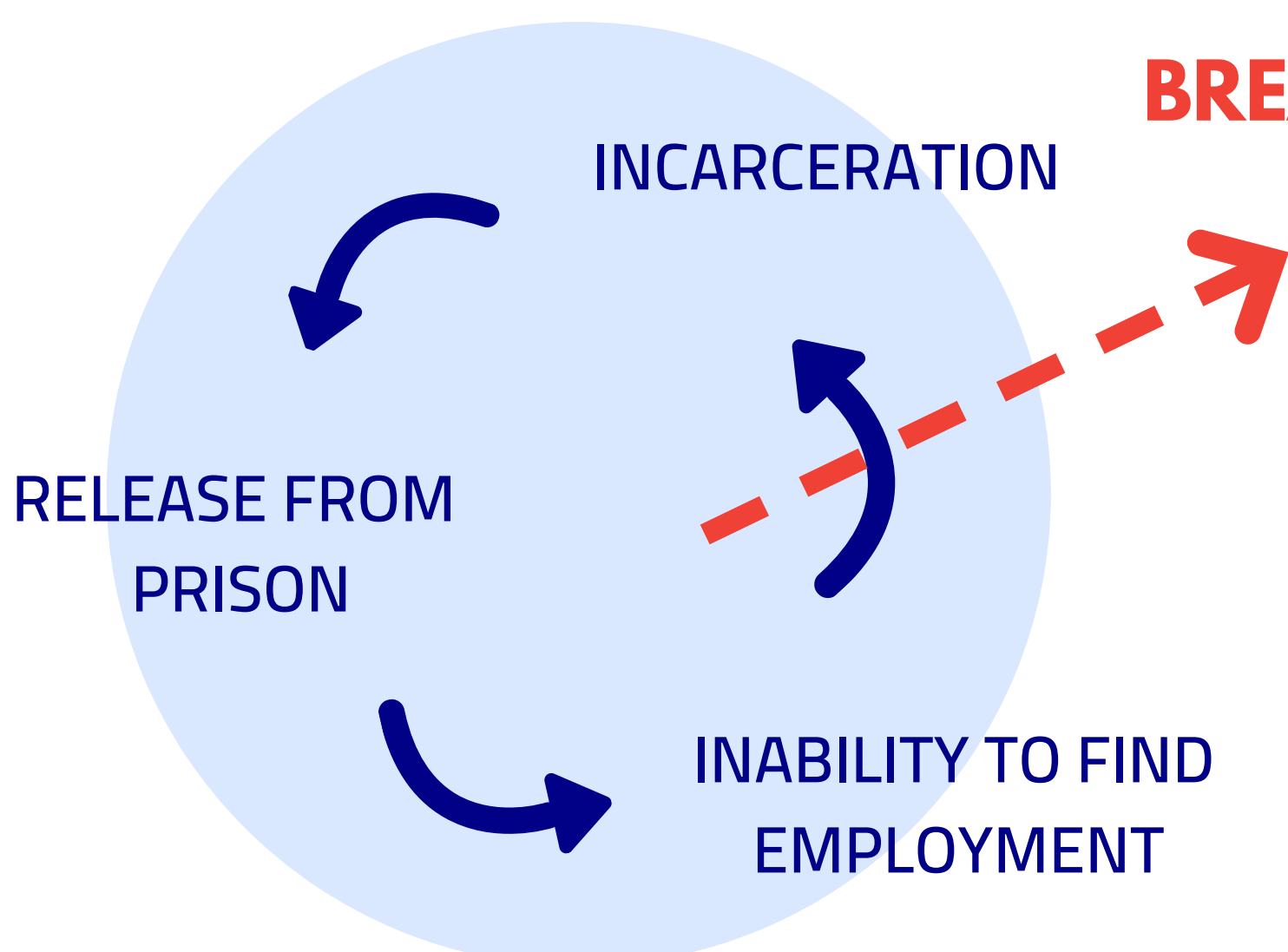


# THE JUST SOLAR RETURNING CITIZENS INITIATIVE

The Just Solar Returning Citizens Initiative is a program that is supported by [Minnesota Interfaith Power and Light](#) and [Solar Bear](#) in collaboration with the [Minnesota Department of Corrections](#). The program functions to train formerly incarcerated citizens in solar installation and site evaluation, while also awarding them a solar PVC certificate from the Minnesota DOC. Returning citizens are then equipped with the skills and know-how to enter the solar industry after their time served. The Just Solar Returning Citizens Initiative is revolutionary as it [challenges our country's longstanding prison-industrial complex and provides solutions for an environmentally friendly renewable future that improves the lived experience of returning citizens as well as the general public.](#)

## 1 CHALLENGING THE PRISON-INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX

The United States has a prison population rate of 724 people for every 100,000 people: the highest of any nation in the world. Rates of incarceration are even higher amongst previously marginalized communities, largely due to unjust institutions that systemically target people of color and low income individuals. A major obstacle for citizens returning to their communities after being in prison is finding work; many employers dismiss these members of society all too quickly, in spite of their potential to be dedicated, hard-working employees. An inability to find work only serves to increase rates of recidivism, which in turn, serves to perpetuate our current system of mass incarceration. The Just Solar Returning Citizens Initiative works to change this facet of our current system by preparing individuals with the skills and knowledge to succeed in the solar industry. In doing so, we hope to help break the cycle of one aspect of mass incarceration starting with helping formerly incarcerated individuals gain meaningful employment in the solar industry.



### BREAK THE UNFAIR CYCLE OF RECIDIVISM

A study by the Bureau of Justice reports that three out of four released prisoners were re-arrested within five-years after the start of the study. 89% of those re-arrested were unemployed.



Employment helps break the cycle of recidivism that the prison-industrial complex relies on.

# 2 FIGHTING CLIMATE CHANGE WITH SOLAR

The most common forms of energy used in the U.S. today have high carbon footprints which cause a stronger greenhouse effect and propels global climate change forward, meaning stronger storms, the hottest years on record, and rising waters. The mission of the Just Solar Returning Citizens Initiative is to find a way to tackle issues that accompany mass incarceration along with the dire issues of climate change that plague our earth.

Solar is a more sustainable option than oil or natural gas; panels last for 25 years and provide us with free energy from the sun. With more and more solar power being introduced to the grid, the need for coal and natural gas is diminishing. Taking conscious steps towards a future where we rely on renewable energy, such as solar power, is a positive step towards curbing climate change impacts and moving towards a more sustainable relationship with the planet. It's possible to work against climate change and the prison-industrial complex simultaneously.

If all the sunlight energy striking the Earth's surface in Texas alone could be converted to electricity, it would be up to 300 times the total power output of all the power plants in the world!



## \$41,000

per prisoner per year  
could instead go towards...

### EDUCATION

teacher salaries, classroom resources, special needs support, professional development, scholarship funds



### COMMUNITY BUILDING

social justice work, youth programming & mentorship, community gardens for affordable local produce



### INFRASTRUCTURE

rebuild neglected neighborhoods, improve public safety, increase transportation justice by improving public transit



# 3 SOCIETAL BENEFITS

What would our communities look like if we put millions of dollars into schools, infrastructure, and community programming rather than towards our prisons? Minnesotan taxpayers spend \$41,000 per inmate every year to keep them locked away. The Just Solar Returning Citizens Initiative attempts to break the cycle of recidivism that the prison industrial complex relies on by training returning citizens to work successfully in solar technology. Investment in public goods could grow as a result of the excess funds from no longer paying large prison fees and from saving money on electricity by switching to solar. Additionally, correctional programming like ours has been shown to increase post-release employment, improve public safety, lead to greater community cohesion and improved family functioning. These positive impacts can come simply from not locking away citizens who simply need a fair shot at a second chance.

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