UNCOMMON EVALUATION

FROM RE-ENTRY TO RETURN:

The Social and Economic Value of Jobs of Hope

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Executive Summary

Jobs of Hope is a faith-based, relationship-driven re-entry program serving men in Weld County, Colorado who are returning from incarceration or deep justice involvement. Participants often enter the program facing multiple, overlapping barriers, including criminal records, unstable housing, substance use histories, limited work experience, interrupted education, and strained family relationships. Jobs of Hope responds to these challenges through an integrated model that combines practical support, case management, peer and faith-based encouragement, employment readiness, recovery support, basic needs assistance, and long-term relational accountability.

This Social Return on Investment (SROI) evaluation was conducted to better understand and communicate the social and economic value created by Jobs of Hope. The analysis used three years of program data from 2023, 2024, and 2025 to reflect the program in its current, more mature form. Internal intake, case management, and service tracking data were supplemented with external research and public cost data related to justice involvement, emergency services, housing instability, employment, food security, peer support, and life-skills development. The SROI process also served as Jobs of Hope's first structured external evaluation by clarifying the program's theory of change, identifying key outcomes, selecting measurable indicators, and applying conservative financial proxies to estimate value.

The evaluation found that Jobs of Hope generates substantial value for participants, families, public systems, funders, and the broader Weld County community. **Based on the three-year analysis, the program produced an estimated SROI ratio of 1:4.91. This means that for every $1 invested in Jobs of Hope, approximately $4.91 in social value is created.** This value is generated through reduced justice system costs, fewer crisis and emergency service interactions, increased employment and earnings, improved housing and recovery stability, and access to stabilizing supports such as food, clothing, hygiene items, peer support, and life-skills training.

The largest areas of monetized value are linked to the program's ability to support reduced recidivism, improved stability, and increased employment. These findings suggest that Jobs of Hope's integrated approach is especially well aligned with the needs of high-risk men returning to the community. By addressing basic needs, recovery, employment readiness, housing instability, and relational support together, the program helps participants move from crisis and survival mode toward stability, contribution, and long-term community connection.

The reported SROI ratio should be understood as a conservative estimate rather than a full accounting of Jobs of Hope's total value. Several meaningful outcomes, including hope, identity change, spiritual growth, family healing, and renewed purpose, were described qualitatively but not monetized in the financial model. These outcomes are central to the program's mission and may be deeply important to participants and families, but they were excluded from the ratio because suitable data or defensible financial proxies were not available. As a result, the SROI ratio likely understates the full social value created by the program.

Sensitivity testing showed that the overall finding remains stable under more conservative assumptions. When deadweight assumptions were increased, meaning a larger share of change was assumed to have happened without Jobs of Hope, the ratio decreased but remained above 1:3.5. When key financial proxies were lowered and the valuation period was shortened, the ratio still remained above 1:3. These tests indicate that the conclusion is not dependent on overly optimistic assumptions: Jobs of Hope continues to generate more value than it costs across a reasonable range of more cautious scenarios.

The evaluation also identified opportunities to strengthen future impact measurement. Some outcomes, particularly long-term recidivism, employment retention, housing stability, and substance-use outcomes, are currently based on partial follow-up, self-report, or inconsistent tracking across years. Strengthening outcome tracking and, where feasible and ethical, developing data-sharing relationships with justice, health, housing, and employment partners would allow Jobs of Hope to validate participant outcomes more consistently and refine future SROI estimates. Periodic updates to the SROI, perhaps every three to five years, would also help the organization and its funders understand how changes in scale, design, partnerships, and funding affect long-term value.

Overall, this SROI evaluation provides evidence that Jobs of Hope is a sound and meaningful investment in re-entry, recovery, family stability, and community well-being. The program turns relatively lean philanthropic investment into measurable social and economic value, while also supporting deeper personal and relational changes that are harder to quantify but central to lasting transformation. For funders and community partners, the findings make a clear case for continued and expanded support for Jobs of Hope as a cost-effective, community-rooted response to justice involvement, instability, and re-entry barriers in Weld County.

Program Background

Jobs of Hope is a faith-based, relationship-driven re-entry program based in Weld County, Colorado, serving men who are returning from incarceration or deep justice involvement. These participants often leave prison or jail facing multiple, overlapping barriers: criminal records that limit hiring, unstable or unsafe housing, long histories of substance use, interrupted education, and strained family relationships. Without targeted support, many are at high risk of unemployment, relapse, homelessness, and returning to custody, which carries significant human and financial costs for families, systems, and the wider community.

Jobs of Hope's mission is to walk alongside these men as they rebuild their lives, helping them move from crisis and survival mode into stability, purpose, and contribution. The program does this by combining practical assistance with consistent, trusted relationships and a strong emphasis on personal responsibility and hope. Staff and volunteers, including people with lived experience of incarceration, offer a blend of accountability, coaching, and encouragement that many participants have never experienced in a structured way. Core components of the program include:

- **Employment and skills:** Job-readiness training (soft skills, work habits, interview practice), support with resumes and applications, help navigating background-check barriers, and connections to local employers. Participants are also supported to pursue education and credentials such as the GED and short-term training relevant to local industries.

- **Recovery, mental health, and case management:** Linkages to recovery housing, outpatient treatment, and therapists; ongoing case management to coordinate services, address legal and administrative tasks (IDs, benefits, transportation), and monitor progress.

- **Basic needs and stability:** A food pantry for participants and their families, access to clothing, hygiene items, and showers, and connections to housing resources to reduce the risk of homelessness or unsafe living situations.

- **Family, community, and faith support:** Support to repair and strengthen family relationships, encouragement to reconnect with positive community and faith communities, and peer support from mentors who model a stable, pro-social life after incarceration.

At a high level, the program's theory of change is that when high-risk men receive this integrated package of support—practical help plus strong relational support—they are more likely to stabilize in the community, maintain sobriety, secure and retain employment, fulfill family responsibilities, and avoid future justice involvement. These individual changes, in turn, generate broader social value through reduced system costs and stronger, safer families and neighborhoods.

SROI Objectives and Rationale

Jobs of Hope operates on a lean budget while working with men who face some of the highest barriers in Weld County: recent incarceration, unstable housing, substance use histories, and limited work experience. As the program has grown, the board and leadership have wanted stronger, more systematic evidence of impact to both honor the investment of funders such as the Weld Trust and to make a clear case for expanding private and philanthropic support. Until now, Jobs of Hope had not undergone a formal external evaluation; understanding of impact was based largely on participant stories, staff experience, and basic activity counts.

The Social Return on Investment (SROI) approach was chosen as a way to provide that evidence in a form that is especially meaningful to foundations and private donors. SROI translates outcomes such as fewer days in jail, fewer emergency room visits, more months employed, and more stable housing into dollar values using conservative cost estimates. This allows funders to see how each dollar invested in Jobs of Hope compares to the costs that would likely be incurred by the justice, health, and housing systems if participants did not receive support.

Equally important, the SROI process itself functions as Jobs of Hope's first structured evaluation. To complete the analysis, the program had to articulate its theory of change, identify the most important outcomes for participants and systems, align those outcomes with measurable indicators, and critically assess how much of the observed change can reasonably be attributed to Jobs of Hope rather than to other services or background trends.

For Jobs of Hope and its funders, the SROI study was designed with three main purposes:

- **Demonstrate value for money to private funders:** Provide a clear estimate of how much social value is created for every dollar invested, giving the Weld Trust and other donors a concrete basis for continued and increased support.
- **Establish a baseline evaluation:** Offer a first, structured assessment of outcomes and data quality that can be updated and refined in future years.
- **Guide strategic and funding decisions:** Highlight where Jobs of Hope's impact appears strongest, where assumptions are most sensitive, and where additional investment or improved data could further increase the program's effectiveness and the confidence of funders.

In the sections that follow, the report summarizes how the SROI was carried out, presents the main findings, and outlines what they suggest about Jobs of Hope's impact and future development in Weld County.

Methodology

The SROI analysis for Jobs of Hope was designed to reflect the program in its current, more mature form. To do this, the study used three years of data from the 2023, 2024 and 2025 calendar years rather than focusing on a single year or on earlier start-up periods. This allowed the analysis to smooth out year-to-year variation and better represent the typical operations and outcomes of the program.

Data Sources

The analysis drew on two main internal data sources:

- **Intake data:** demographic characteristics, justice involvement history, baseline housing and employment status, educational attainment (including GED status), and initial needs identified at program entry.

- **Case management and service tracking data:** records of services provided (e.g., employment support, housing assistance, peer support, food pantry use), referrals and linkages, case notes, and documented changes in participants' status over time (employment, housing, sobriety, justice involvement where known).

These were supplemented, where necessary, by external data to estimate baseline conditions and financial proxies, including:

- Published justice, health, housing, and employment statistics (e.g., recidivism and employment rates for formerly incarcerated people, average costs of jail/prison days, emergency room visits, shelter nights, food pantry use)

- Research literature on GED earnings impacts, peer support costs, and life-skills training

- Public cost data from Colorado and national sources (e.g., state corrections budgets, hospital pricing information, studies on the value of food pantries)

SROI Steps

The SROI followed the standard sequence of:

1. **Stakeholder and outcome mapping**
    - Identified key stakeholder groups (participants, their families, the justice system, health and housing systems, funders, and the wider community).

- Developed a theory of change for each group, linking Jobs of Hope activities to short- and medium-term outcomes (such as reduced jail days, increased employment, improved housing stability, and reduced use of crisis services).

2. Indicators and financial proxies
    - Selected measurable indicators for the most material outcomes (e.g., change in employment status, episodes of homelessness, use of food and clothing supports, known justice contacts).
    - Assigned conservative financial proxies to these indicators (e.g., cost per incarceration day, cost per ER visit, value per food pantry visit or year of access, average annual earnings for an entry-level job, estimated cost of peer support and life-skills training).
3. Time frame and valuation
    - Chose a valuation period that reflects the likely persistence of outcomes beyond the initial year (e.g., up to three years for employment and reduced recidivism).
    - Calculated the gross present value of benefits for each outcome across the chosen time frame.
4. Adjustments: deadweight, attribution, and drop-off
    - **Deadweight:** Estimated what proportion of each outcome would likely have occurred without Jobs of Hope, using available benchmarks (e.g., typical recidivism and employment rates for formerly incarcerated people).
    - **Attribution:** Adjusted for the contribution of other services and supports (such as probation, other community programs, or family support), so Jobs of Hope did not claim full credit for changes.
    - **Drop-off:** Applied annual reductions to reflect that some benefits diminish over time (for example, sobriety, employment stability, and reduced crisis use are more fragile than a permanent credential like a GED).
5. Aggregation and ratio calculation
    - Summed the adjusted present value of all monetized outcomes across stakeholders.
    - Compared this total social value to the total cost of running Jobs of Hope over the same period to produce the **SROI ratio of 1:4.91.**

Key Assumptions

To keep the model transparent and conservative, several simplifying assumptions were made:

- The three-year internal dataset (2023–2025) reasonably represents the typical performance of Jobs of Hope in its current form.

- When exact local cost data were unavailable, state or national averages were used and, where possible, rounded down to avoid overstating value.

- Only outcomes with a clear link to Jobs of Hope's activities and at least some supporting data were monetized; important but harder-to-measure outcomes (such as hope, identity, and spiritual growth) were described qualitatively but excluded from the financial calculation.

These choices mean that the reported SROI should be viewed as a cautious estimate of Jobs of Hope's social value, rather than an upper bound.

Outcomes and Evidence of Change

For Jobs of Hope, outcomes can be understood at three interconnected levels: basic stability, economic progress, and deeper social and psychological change. Together, these changes underpin the SROI results.

Basic Stability and Recovery

Participants typically enter Jobs of Hope with long histories of substance use, unstable housing, and frequent crises. Within the program:

- **Sobriety and recovery stability** increase as men spend more days abstinent, experience fewer relapses, and more consistently engage with recovery homes, groups, sponsors, and peer support.

- **Mental health and emotional regulation** improve through access to therapy, case management, and structured routines; participants report fewer crises, less anxiety and depression, and better coping skills and self-management.

- **Housing stability** improves as men move from homelessness or unstable arrangements into recovery housing, transitional living, or more permanent housing, and remain housed for longer periods.

These basic stability gains reduce immediate risk and create the foundation for sustained change in other areas.

Employment, Income and Life Skills

Economic progress is central to Jobs of Hope's mission. Over the three-year period:

- **Job readiness** increases as participants complete life-skills, soft-skills, and job-search training, build stronger resumes, practice interviews, and develop more reliable work habits.

- **Employment rates** rise, with more participants working, working more hours, and transitioning into more stable or higher-quality jobs over time.

- **Earnings and financial stability** improve as participants gain income, reduce reliance on public benefits, and learn to budget, manage debt, and meet basic needs more consistently.

- **Education and skills** advance through completion of GEDs, short-term trainings, certifications, and other milestones that enhance long-term employability.

These economic changes are reflected in the SROI through increased earnings and reduced costs associated with unemployment and instability.

Justice Involvement and Public Systems

Because Jobs of Hope works primarily with justice-involved men, changes in system involvement are particularly important:

- **Recidivism decreases**, with fewer arrests, technical violations, new charges, and returns to jail or prison among men engaged in the program compared with their prior patterns and with typical state-level baselines.
- **Use of crisis and public systems decreases** as improved stability and support lead to fewer emergency room visits, detox stays, and short-term crisis placements; issues are addressed earlier through case management and community resources.

These changes generate substantial value for taxpayers and public systems and are a major driver of the SROI ratio.

Family, Community, and Personal Development

Jobs of Hope also supports deeper relational and personal change:

- **Family relationships strengthen** as participants increase contact with children and partners, rebuild trust, and contribute more consistently to child support and co-parenting.
- **Positive community involvement grows** through participation in church and community groups, volunteering, and building pro-social networks that replace past associations tied to crime or substance use.
- **Hope, purpose, and identity shift**, as men begin to see themselves less as "addicts" or "offenders" and more as workers, fathers, and community members with a future.
- For those who choose it, **spiritual life deepens**, with many reporting renewed or strengthened faith as a key source of motivation and resilience.

Not all of these outcomes are monetized in the SROI model, but together they describe the broader change Jobs of Hope seeks to create: men who are sober, stably housed, working, present for their families, and contributing positively to their communities.

SROI Results

Headline Ratio

Based on the three-year analysis (2023–2025), the Social Return on Investment for Jobs of Hope is estimated at: **1:4.91**

This means that for every 1 dollar invested in Jobs of Hope, the program is estimated to generate approximately 4.91 dollars in social value for participants, their families, public systems, and the wider Weld County community.

The total social value figure includes only outcomes where there was reasonable data and a conservative financial proxy. Important but hard-to-monetize changes such as growth in hope, identity, and spiritual life are described qualitatively but not counted in the ratio, making the estimate cautious rather than optimistic.

Where the Value Comes From

The benefits quantified in the SROI model can be grouped into several main categories:

- Reduced justice system costs
    - Fewer jail and prison days and fewer new court cases for participants engaged with Jobs of Hope, valued using conservative per-day and per-case cost estimates.
    - This category contributes a substantial share of the total social value, reflecting both the high cost of incarceration and the program's focus on justice-involved men.

- Reduced use of crisis and emergency services
    - Fewer emergency room visits, detox stays, and shelter nights, inferred from improvements in sobriety, housing stability, and basic-needs support.
    - These avoided costs accrue primarily to health and housing systems and to local governments.

- Increased employment and earnings
    - Participants moving into and sustaining employment, leading to higher earnings compared with likely outcomes without program support.
    - This generates value for participants and their families directly and, indirectly, for the local economy and tax base.

- Improved stability and supports
    - The value of food pantry access, clothing and hygiene supports, peer support, life-skills training, and other services that help participants maintain stability and avoid more expensive crises.

After aggregating these monetized benefits and adjusting for what would have happened anyway, contributions from other services, and the decline of some benefits over time, the net present value of social benefits was 4.91 times larger than the cost of operating Jobs of Hope over the same period.

Interpretation and Comparison

An SROI of 1:4.91 places Jobs of Hope within the middle range of ratios commonly reported for re-entry programs, where other studies found returns in the 3:1 to 8:1 range. This indicates that Jobs of Hope is delivering strong value for money while working with a high-need population.

It is important to note that SROI results are not intended for direct “league-table” comparisons between programs. Each study reflects its own context, data, and assumptions. In this case, the Jobs of Hope SROI should be viewed as:

- A conservative estimate of the social value created by the program as it currently operates
- A tool for learning, highlighting which outcome areas contribute most to value and where better data could refine future estimates
- A signal to funders and partners that resources invested in Jobs of Hope are associated with meaningful and measurable benefits for participants, systems, and the community

Sensitivity Analysis and Limitations

Sensitivity Tests

Because SROI results depend on assumptions and estimates, several simple "what if" tests were run to understand how robust the Jobs of Hope ratio is to more conservative choices.

Test 1 – Higher deadweight (more change happening anyway)
The base model assumes that some portion of each outcome would have occurred without Jobs of Hope (for example, using a baseline recidivism rate of about 30% and an employment deadweight of 40%). In the sensitivity test, deadweight rates were increased across key outcomes (employment, reduced recidivism, and reduced crisis-service use) by 10 percentage points. Under these more conservative assumptions, the SROI ratio decreased but remained above 1:3.5, indicating that even if a larger share of the change is attributed to "business as usual," Jobs of Hope still generates significantly more value than it costs.

Test 2 – Lower financial proxies and shorter time horizon

In a second test, several major financial proxies were reduced (for example, lowering the assumed cost per jail/prison day and per emergency room visit) and the valuation period for employment and reduced recidivism was shortened, so benefits were counted over fewer years. This scenario also lowered the overall ratio but still produced an SROI greater than 1:3, suggesting that the conclusion that Jobs of Hope delivers strong value for money does not depend on optimistic proxy values or long time frames.

Together, these tests show that while the exact ratio changes with different assumptions, the overall finding of positive and meaningful social return is stable across a range of reasonable, more conservative scenarios.

Limitations

Like any evaluation, this SROI analysis has limitations. Key ones to note are:

- **Data gaps and quality**
    - Some outcomes, such as long-term recidivism, housing stability, and employment retention, are based on partial follow-up or participant self-report rather than complete administrative records.
    - Not all participants have the same length of observation, and some information is missing or inconsistent across years.

- Attribution challenges
    - Jobs of Hope participants often receive services from multiple providers (probation or parole, treatment programs, recovery homes, other community agencies).
    - Although the model applies attribution adjustments, it is not always possible to precisely separate the impact of Jobs of Hope from the contributions of other supports.
- Financial proxies and assumptions
    - Many proxies (e.g., cost per jail day, ER visit, shelter night, value of peer support or life-skills training) are drawn from state or national studies and public reports rather than directly from Weld County budgets.
    - Where multiple figures were available, conservative mid-range values were chosen, but they still represent approximations rather than exact local costs.
- Time frame and outcome persistence
    - The analysis uses three years of program data and applies assumptions about how long benefits last (drop-off) beyond the initial year.
    - For some outcomes, especially sobriety and employment, the true long-term trajectory—whether gains are fully maintained, partially maintained, or lost—is not yet known.
- Non-monetized outcomes
    - Important changes such as hope, identity, spiritual growth, and deeper family healing are not monetized in the SROI ratio due to lack of suitable proxies or data.
    - As a result, the reported 1:4.91 ratio likely understates the full value created by the program.

These limitations do not negate the findings, but they do mean that the SROI should be interpreted as a careful estimate and a learning tool, rather than a precise measure of every aspect of Jobs of Hope's impact.

Conclusions and Implications

What the SROI Tells us

- **Jobs of Hope generates strong value for money.** The SROI ratio of 1:4.91 indicates that every dollar invested is associated with nearly five dollars of social value in reduced justice and crisis-service costs, increased earnings, and improved stability for participants and their families.
- **The program's impact is broad as well as deep.** Measurable financial benefits are driven by reduced incarceration and emergency use and increased employment, but these sit on top of important non-monetized changes in hope, identity, relationships, and spiritual life.
- **The findings are robust under more conservative assumptions.** Sensitivity tests show that even when key assumptions are tightened, such as higher deadweight, lower proxies, and shorter time horizons, the SROI remains comfortably above 1:3, reinforcing confidence that Jobs of Hope is a sound investment.

As a first formal evaluation, the SROI establishes a clear, evidence-informed baseline from which Jobs of Hope and its funders can track progress and refine strategy over time.

Implications for Program Strategy

- **Build on strengths:** The largest contributions to value come from reduced justice involvement, improved stability, and increased employment, suggesting that Jobs of Hope's integrated approach of addressing recovery, basic needs, job readiness, and relational support is working well for high-risk men.
- **Deepen follow-up and continuity:** Outcomes like sobriety, housing stability, and employment are fragile. Investing in longer-term follow-up and alumni support could help sustain gains and increase long-term impact.
- **Target gaps:** Where data hint at weaker or more variable outcomes (for example, education or long-term housing), the program can explore targeted enhancements or partnerships.

Implications for Funders and Partners

- For foundations such as the Weld Trust and other private donors, the SROI provides quantitative evidence that Jobs of Hope turns philanthropic dollars into substantial social value for Weld County.
- The analysis supports the case for maintaining and expanding funding, particularly for components that drive both human and financial outcomes: recovery and mental-health supports, employment and education services, housing stability work, and peer support.

- Public and community partners (justice, health, housing, employers, faith communities) can view Jobs of Hope as a cost-effective ally in reducing recidivism, easing strain on crisis systems, and strengthening families.

Implications for Data and Evaluation

- The SROI highlights the importance of more systematic tracking of key outcomes over time, especially justice involvement, employment retention, housing stability, and substance-use outcomes, to improve future estimates and guide continuous improvement.
- Strengthening data-sharing relationships (where feasible and ethical) with justice, health, and housing systems would allow Jobs of Hope to validate self-reported outcomes and more precisely quantify system-level benefits.
- Periodic updates of the SROI, perhaps every 3–5 years, would help the program and its funders see how changes in design, scale, or funding mix affect impact and value for money.

For additional information on this SROI, please contact:

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