

# AN EVALUATION PROPOSAL FOR A REENTRY RESOURCE MANAGEMENT CENTER

by

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To Sam, with all of my love. Thank you for keeping me humble.

AN EVALUATION PROPOSAL FOR A REENTRY RESOURCE MANAGEMENT CENTER

by

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# AN EVALUATION PROPOSAL FOR A REENTRY RESOURCE MANAGEMENT CENTER

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This study provided a county-funded reentry resource management center located in Texas with evaluative strategies to ensure the implementation of evidence-based practices and effective use of funds. This research explored recidivism within a local jail setting. The researcher performed a critical analysis of the reentry center's existing logic model in order to operationalize elements intended to accomplish the overall mission to reduce recidivism within the county. Staff interviews provided insight into perceptions of legitimacy toward the center's mission, respective job-related duties, and the logic model. Finally, several quantitative analyses describe the demographic- and offense-related data of the client base, as well as recidivism rates compared to the general population in the local jail. The analyses performed found that outreach efforts target parolee populations rather than individuals serving time in the local jail. While causation cannot be concluded due to the referral-based services provided by the center's staff, individuals who become clients were rearrested less often than non-clients. The study concludes with several recommendations for expanding outreach and recidivism data access as well as incorporating client feedback to better serve unique release populations.

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The era of mass incarceration in the U.S. was characterized by a 700 percent increase in the rate of imprisonment from the mid 1970s until 2009 (Ghandnoosh, 2019). The fear of victimization, stoked by sensationalist media and political maneuvering, was formalized by the passing of legislation that increased the punitiveness of sanctions, such as extending the length of criminal sentences (Blasko et al., 2016). Efforts to punish convicted offenders left little attention for reentry programs, despite the expected release of nearly all incarcerated individuals (Alper & Durose, 2018). Deleterious consequences resulting from a paucity of reentry services are reflected in current recidivism rates that remain high nearly a decade after peak rates of incarceration. Rearrest rates for individuals released from prison are nearly 45 percent within the first year, almost 70 percent within three years, and more than 80 percent over nine years (Alper & Durose, 2018).

Although approximately 2.3 million people are in prisons and jails in 2020, even more individuals are on probation or parole (Sawyer & Wagner, 2020). In 2015, there were nearly 4.7 million adults on state or federal community supervision (Kaeble & Bonczar, 2017). Despite a consistent decrease in the overall supervised population since 2008 due to a reduction in probation placement, parole placements have outpaced parole releases for five consecutive years, contributing to a parolee population of more than 870,000 (Kaeble & Bonczar, 2017).

Due to high caseloads, probation and parole officers are not equipped to meet the individual needs of every client. Individuals discharged from prison without supervision often lack access to formal resources intended to ease the transition from incarceration to life outside.

The primary response to mass release has been the creation of reentry programs and services, which may be governmental, funded by a government agency, or privately operated. Federal legislation has supported privatized correctional services since the Prisoner Rehabilitation Act of 1965, which has expanded to support both nonprofit and for-profit transition and reentry organizations (Latessa & Lovins, 2019). Private providers are considered to be more cost effective and more adaptable, as well as better positioned to serve local populations than large governmental bureaucracies (Powers et al., 2017). The ultimate goal of a reentry program, regardless of target population or funding source, is to decrease recidivism. However, the mere existence of reentry resources does not translate to effective assistance for returning individuals. In addition, without evaluations, government agencies cannot be assured of the value of their financial investments into providers.

The Second Chance Act (SCA) has provided federal funds to local and state agencies targeting the reduction of recidivism and improving public safety since its enactment in 2008, providing more than 80 million dollars in fiscal year 2018 (Council of State Governments, 2018). More than 800 grants have supported various programs focused on particular elements such as employment and housing assistance, counseling, family services, and substance abuse treatment (Council of State Governments, 2018). For example, evaluations have been created for programs that target individuals in county jails with pre-release services in Pennsylvania, a juvenile justice department's family based services for former gang members in Texas, a Connecticut housing program born of a collaboration between a private counseling provider and the court system, and general administrative improvements in Iowa to increase implementation success (Council of State Governments, 2018). These programs exist across the nation and serve significantly

different populations but are still eligible to receive SCA funding contingent upon successful evaluation results.

Programs that receive government funding may be more inclined to perform evaluations to show effectiveness when competing for contracts. While not always mandated, positive results from an evaluation can increase local awareness and support for the organization, encourage community corrections officers to refer clients, and create professional networks that increase the knowledge density of support services in a community. On a broader scale, evaluations contribute to evidence-based policy and programming that most effectively address factors that contribute to recidivism (Barak & Stebbins, 2017). In addition to outcomes, evaluations can be used to measure implementation as well as impact. A program that does not reduce recidivism or fails to reach a substantial population of people with a need supposedly addressed by the program is an ineffective use of limited resources (Muhlhausen, 2012; Makarios et al., 2016).

It is more important to assess an individual's risks and needs and then create a treatment plan rather than assign every individual to the same reentry programming. The capacity to specialize is one of the appeals of private reentry organizations. While risk assessment tools should be validated to ensure accurate treatment planning, these tools require practitioners to be well-versed in their use (Latessa, 2012). Researchers and academics can design and perform evaluations to justify continued investment in a reentry program as well as recommendations for future success. Not only does this benefit practitioners by increasing the empirical rigor of programming, but researchers get the opportunity to test theoretical principles in a real-world setting otherwise inaccessible. Finally, it is necessary for research to be performed with respect to the geographical context of the organization or program being studied. Norms and practices in

one region may vary drastically from the values and priorities of others, especially on the state level as described in the SCA examples above.

## **Texas**

Nationwide, the rate of incarceration is nearly 700 people per 100,000 (or 1 in 144) but in Texas, this rate increases to more than 890 per 100,000 individuals (or 1 in 113) (Wagner & Sawyer, 2018). This comparatively high rate of incarceration places greater strain placed upon reentry resources since such a high density of people in Texas are affected by the collateral effects of a criminal background. Based on recidivism data collected from cohorts placed or released during fiscal years 2013 through 2015, roughly 46 percent of individuals released from prison, 63 percent of people released from state jail, and 44 percent of individuals on parole were rearrested within three years (Texas Legislative Budget Board, 2019).

Despite a decrease in releases from 2013 to 2014, rearrest rates for individuals released from prison remained near 22 percent each year. This has been a general decrease since peak one-year recidivism rate of 28 percent in 2003 (Texas Department of Criminal Justice [TDCJ] Executive Services, 2019). Among individuals released from state jail, correctional facilities in Texas where individuals serve up to two years, one-year rearrest rates remained within one percentage point of 39 percent each year. Parolee rearrest rates were nearly 21 percent in 2013 and just below 20 percent in 2015. There was a revocation rate of 7.8 percent within the total population of nearly 84,200 parolees in fiscal year 2018, more than two percentage points higher than 2013; approximately one out of five revocations were for a technical violation. More than 145,000 individuals are incarcerated in Texas, and more than 84,000 are on parole (TDCJ Executive Services, 2019). Recidivism costs the state significantly. In fiscal year 2018, it cost

roughly \$62 a day to house someone in prison, approximately \$52 a day in state jail, and \$4.40 a day on parole (Texas Legislative Budget Board, 2019).

Texas has historically prioritized budgeting effectiveness in corrections since the creation of the Criminal Justice Policy Council (CJPC) in 1983, which was tasked with determining the costs and benefits incurred by government services such as supervision (CSG Justice Center, 2016). Paralleling the movement toward evidence-based correctional practices, efforts to share data between agencies led to the first computerized tracking system for correctional involvement in 1989. This information has been used by the Legislative Board's Criminal Justice Data Analysis Team to generate correctional population projections and correctional operation costs since 2004 (CSG Justice Center, 2016). In 2001, state police began auditing arrest and report data from local jurisdictions to ensure accurate and timely reporting to state agencies, and the inclusion of State Identification Numbers (SIDs) for felons in this exported data has been mandated since 2005 (CSG Justice Center, 2016). This dedication to data collection has allowed Texas to track intake data for local facilities through County Identification Numbers (CIDs), which are difficult to tabulate due to high rates of rapid turnover. In 2007, Texas enacted Justice Reinvestment legislation that made funds available both for progressive sanctions and for agencies and programs targeting the reduction of recidivism. Also in 2007, members of parole boards were required to publicly post annual approval rates compared to recommended approval rates. In 2013, the Office of Court Administration reviewed common court fees to evaluate the necessity and impact on technical violations an individual's ability to pay may have; this occurred the same year that new probationers were required to undergo a risk/needs assessment

at placement (CSG Justice Center, 2016). The assessment for individuals who were potential parole candidates was performed while still incarcerated (CSG Justice Center, 2016).

To address the needs of correctional populations and reduce risk of recidivism, Texas has created a Reentry Task Force made up of government agency representatives such as judges, sheriffs, and family service providers intended to increase the density of reentry services available to individuals reentering as well as encourage interagency communication. Organizations are assigned to collaborate on projects that increase housing, employment, or wraparound substance abuse treatment as legislators and correctional agency leaders have concluded that these factors to be the most influential on recidivism (TDCJ Reentry and Integration Division, 2018). Inclusion of community corrections officers is especially necessary since agents in Texas report a heavy emphasis on supervisory rather than rehabilitative duties and frequent outsourcing of treatment referrals. Collaboration on projects that result in additional service providers in these communities can improve the likelihood that community corrections officers are better able to meet the needs of their clients by referring them to local services (Hoover, 2018). The most recent legislative session resulted in the funding of additional reentry specialists and case managers and efforts to decrease name-based rejections of applications for identification through a collaboration between the Texas Department of Public Safety and the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ Reentry and Integration Division, 2018). In addition, the Reentry and Integration Division has mandated routine training and certification for the statewide risk assessment tool for offenders in order to provide effective and individualized treatment recommendations (TDCJ Reentry and Integration Division, 2018). Relationships between TDCJ and the Windham School (the district that provides educational curriculums to

individuals in TDCJ custody) have resulted in various employment-based services such as job fairs and vocational skills training that have led to the identification and subsequent targeting of released but unemployed individuals (TDCJ Reentry and Integration Division, 2018).

Despite the localized nature of many reentry programs, most reentry and recidivism research focus disproportionately on prisons. While more than half a million people go to prison each year, more than eleven million intakes occur at roughly 3,000 jails across the nation during the same time (Sawyer & Wagner, 2020). In Texas alone, over one million individuals go to jail annually (TDCJ Reentry and Integration Division, 2018). The majority of people in jail have not been convicted, and those serving terms are either being held temporarily before transfer or are serving terms considered too short for effective treatment programming. This is significant because reentry studies often rely on rearrest as a measure of recidivism, rather than rates of reconviction or reincarceration.

Jails are the gatekeeping facilities of the criminal justice system. A person can be released and never charged, but if they were arrested and held at a local jail, they will have a record. For this reason, Texas counties upload local arrest data to the DPS as well as TDCJ, meaning an individual can be tracked through various criminal justice systems by listed identifiers, such as name and identification numbers. This population is especially important to study because local jail populations are the most likely population to recidivate compared to state or federal facilities as well as significantly more likely to remain in the communities near the jail (Jenkins et al., 2017). Many of these communities have little to no resources available, despite research that finds jail inmates frequently have compounding issues before detention such as addiction, inconsistent employment, and nowhere to stay (Jenkins et al., 2017). Thus, their

rearrest contributes to destabilization of local communities and the cycle of incarceration drains the few, mostly untested resource providers in operation. Evidence-based reentry programming that targets local jail populations can benefit the surrounding county by interrupting this cycle of incarceration.

### **Research County**

Research County, an alias for a county located in Texas, is one of the most populous counties in the state with approximately 2,000,000 residents (Pinney, 2017). Just over half are female, nearly three-fourths identify as white (46 percent as white non-Hispanic), 18 percent black, and 30 percent as Hispanic/Latino (U.S. Census, 2019). There are nearly 699,000 households, and more than 80 percent of people lived in the same home as the previous year. Nearly 85 percent of homes have internet access, and more than 90 percent have a computer. Approximately 85 percent of residents ages 25 and over have at least a high school diploma (U.S. Census, 2019). In 2016, the unemployment rate was 4.0 percent (Annual Report, 2016). Research County has been the subject of previous recidivism research. A study that provided recidivism data for the five largest counties in Texas reported one-year, two-year, and three-year recidivism rates for released populations including state prison, state jail, and those on community supervision from 2011 through 2013. For state populations released to Research County, individuals released on deferred adjudication and probation were the least likely to reoffend; those released on parole, from state prison with no supervision, and state jail were the most likely to be rearrested. In Research County, parole costs roughly \$4 a day per individual, or \$10,300 for the entire parolee population daily (Pinney, 2017). Persons released to parole recidivated at a rate of 22 percent in the first year, and 43 percent by the end of year three



(Fabelo et al., 2016). Of the nearly 5,260 individuals released from state prison to Research County, 49 percent or 2,551 individuals were sentenced to parole compared to nearly 2,360 who were discharged with no supervision (Pinney, 2017). One-third of people released from state prison were rearrested in their first year out, and 50 percent were rearrested by year three (Fabelo et al., 2016). Individuals released from state jail were the most likely to be rearrested, with a one-year recidivism rate of nearly 40 percent and a rate of 60 percent by the end of the third year.

As part of the five-county study, Research County provided researchers with access to local incarceration data. Between 26,000 and 28,000 individuals were released from county jail each year of the study, and release types included pretrial release, commercial bonds, and discharges after serving a sentence; the latter consistently remained the largest contributor to recidivism (Fabelo et al., 2016). Overall, one in two people who served sentences in a county jail would be rearrested within three years.

The total approved county budget for fiscal year 2020 is \$680 million; more than 75 percent of this budget is generated from taxes (County Budget and Risk Management Department, 2019). Within the larger \$606 million allotted to the General Fund is nearly \$195 million budgeted for Public Safety, making up nearly one-third of the General Fund's budget (County Budget and Risk Management Department, 2019). Three-fourths of this nearly \$195 million is designated to fund the Sheriff's Department, and more than \$92 million of that is assigned to fund confinement in facilities such as local jails (County Budget and Risk Management Department, 2019).

The average cost of housing an individual in a Texas county jail is \$59 a day. Slightly more than two thousand individuals, or 40 percent of the county jail population, are awaiting trial

in Research County; in most Texas county jails, more than half of people in jail have not yet been convicted (Pinney, 2017). For those awaiting trials on felony charges, the average cost of confinement is more than \$103,000, compared to nearly \$20,000 for a pretrial defendant charged with a misdemeanor. In Research County alone, taxpayers are paying more than \$123,000 per day to house the entire population of pretrial defendants (Pinney, 2017). Counties are responsible for more than 80 percent of the cost of indigent counsel; this cost Research County more than \$16.4 million in fiscal year 2015 (Pinney, 2017). It costs taxpayers approximately \$11,200 a day to house the total population of convicted individuals serving time in Research County Jail (Pinney, 2017).

Less than \$10 million of the General Fund is allotted for community services; this includes approximately \$822,000 in public assistance and \$4.5 million in human services (County Budget and Risk Management Department, 2019). This means a significant proportion of the fiscal budget is being used to house a significant and ever-rotating population of individuals in jail but leaves comparatively little funding to lower their high risk of recidivism.

Individuals returning from state or federal incarceration facilities apply for assistance from the same local providers that individuals released from local jails do, adding additional straining resources already stretched thin. In 2018, statewide survey data was collected from community corrections officers who identified excessive caseloads and documentation requirements as contributing factors to an overall preference to refer clients toward outside treatment providers (Hoover, 2018). In addition, these officers acknowledged that their job requirements forced them to focus more on supervisory rather than rehabilitative activities in the limited time with clients, and that this often means these officers are not up to date on local

resources available to clients, or the quality of those resources (Hoover, 2018). Outside of community corrections officers, Research County stakeholders such as criminal justice and behavioral health officials reported that the quality of reentry programs as well as availability had a direct effect on the likelihood of recidivism with half unsure what local reentry or treatment-based providers existed (Hollis et al., 2016). In addition, nearly half stated that resource coordination was poor.

Research on individuals released from incarceration report that they rarely visit more than one resource agency and prefer to have the next stages of reintegration laid out clearly (Nhan et al., 2017). This may include applying for welfare or forms of identification, as well as seeking employment assistance or affordable housing. Considering the sheer financial burden on taxpayers, Research County should be investing in local reentry service providers that can offset the cost to taxpayers by decreasing the recidivism of released individuals.

In 2015, a local assistance network opened a reentry resource management center to serve county residents returning from incarceration. To decrease recidivism, the center staff provide individualized referrals to local services and resources according to a client's risks and needs. The most prevalent types of referrals are for housing and employment opportunities, and clients also receive assistance with transportation.

This study will provide center staff with evaluative strategies by operationalizing elements of the center's existing logic model. Interviews with staff will provide insight into the legitimacy with which staff members regard the logic model as well as their respective roles in achieving the center's mission to reduce recidivism. Quantitative analyses of client data and

recidivism rates comparing clients to the general jail population will provide center staff with specific, empirically based service and outreach strategies rooted in current literature.

In the next chapter, a literature review will describe various evaluative strategies as well as analyze current research regarding the impact of instrumental resources, specifically housing and employment, on recidivism and reintegration.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

A consequence of the mass incarceration era is the inevitable release of nearly all imprisoned individuals (Morenoff & Harding, 2014). Once released, individuals face limits on access to social services and resources that enable successful reentry into their communities. Reentry programs attempt to address unique gaps created by the prohibitive nature of a criminal record within the very communities to which individuals return. By responding to local needs, such as overcoming record stigma with vocational training, programs may help reduce the likelihood of reoffending.

Public or private, many reentry organizations and programs receive government funds such as grants to operate, which means that taxpayers are (perhaps unknowing) stakeholders in reentry initiatives (Muhlhausen, 2012; Farabee et al., 2014). Since the continuation of criminal behavior presents a direct threat to public safety, financial backing should be reserved for programs that lower the recidivism of their clients. While federal programs are routinely evaluated, state- and local- level reentry programs should enact evaluative strategies to ensure the effective use of public resources.

#### **Evaluation Designs**

Common data sources for many reentry programs are arrest records, often from local jurisdictions or state agencies. Recidivism rates recorded as rearrests are the most frequently used metric of program success: fewer arrests mean lower recidivism rates, which indicates successful treatment (Hartwell et al., 2012; Muhlhausen, 2012; Wright & Cesar, 2013; Cook et al., 2014; Farabee et al., 2014; Taxman & Caudy, 2015; Clark, 2016; Miller & Miller, 2016; Kirk

et al., 2018; McNeeley, 2018). In addition, rearrest values can be compared across programs and jurisdictions. Rearrest is preferable to reconviction or reincarceration since those may result in a plea deal or other outcome not reflective of the actual offense (Clark, 2016; Powers et al., 2017). However, the definition of recidivism is not uniform; it may include new offenses, technical violations, or both depending on the organization or program (Wright & Cesar, 2013; Clark, 2016). In addition, recidivism can be affected by risk factors not always captured in formal arrest data.

Interagency collaboration is pivotal to the success of reentry programs since these professional connections inform government agencies about available resources. Collaboration is mutually beneficial because community corrections officers report spending the majority of their time performing supervisory duties and a willingness to refer clients to non-governmental organizations, while reentry organizations benefit from the increased client population (Hoover, 2018). Further, collaborations that unite various agencies allow individuals to be tracked through various systems and create more comprehensive databases for needs and risks; this is especially useful for individuals with serious mental illness since they require wraparound health services (Hartwell et al., 2012).

Interagency partnerships also allow for the inclusion of data other than rearrests. Besides recidivism, evaluations may seek to measure client engagement through attendance (Heilbrun et al., 2017) or program completion (Blasko et al., 2016), desistance according to number of supervision revocations (Blasko et al., 2016) or days in the community without arrest (Bunting et al., 2019). Evaluations may control for demographic data such as gender, age, race or ethnicity, and employment status (Barak & Stebbins, 2017; Costopoulos et al., 2017;

Chamberlain, 2018; Bunting et al., 2019). Static risk factors include offense data such as number of previous convictions, most recent offense type (Barak & Stebbins, 2017), release type (Bunting et al., 2019), time since last arrest (Bunting et al., 2019), and supervision violations (Farabee et al., 2014; Denver et al., 2017; McNeeley, 2018). Programs that focus on treating clients dealing with comorbidity may also describe the history of addiction (Bunting et al., 2019), previous treatment, and mental illnesses of individuals (Hartwell et al., 2012; Bunting et al., 2019). This allows programs to develop a more comprehensive treatment plan based on individual level nuances.

The most popular types of evaluations that programs undergo are outcome, process, implementation, and impact studies. Outcome evaluations determine if a program achieved its stated goals. Analyzing data from a follow up period after program completion is a common strategy for these evaluations. Reentry programs frequently track recidivism over a one-year period (Farabee et al., 2014; Clark, 2016; McNeeley, 2018; Bunting et al., 2019). Outcome evaluations that control for individual-level factors can show which clients benefit the most or least—for example, specific elements of programs may affect women or older adults differently than other groups (Miller, 2014; Costopoulos et al., 2017).

A program may undergo a process evaluation to understand why or to what extent outcomes occur. Researchers may include observational data to describe programming dosage and participant participation. Process evaluations are especially useful for identifying disconnect between theoretical design and actual practice, which allows programs to assess effectiveness. Over the course of two years, Miller and Miller (2016) studied two substance abuse treatment programs run out of a county jail in Ohio and found that while both decreased recidivism, the

rates were considerably lower and therefore more effective when jail administrators were perceived as more supportive of programming. If the researchers relied solely on recidivism rates, the outcomes of the programs appear to be successful. In reality, the variance within recidivism rates indicated that a more appropriate evaluation would include a metric for administrative support and how that support affects the implementation of a reentry program in a correctional setting. In this case, a process evaluation rather than an outcome evaluation is preferable; when administrators are neutral or actively hostile toward reentry programming, the program's outreach and impact are lessened compared to recidivism rates in periods where reentry program is actively supported by administration.

Implementation evaluations measure how well programs align with the intended practices. Many focus on the effect that staff have on implementation, since providers must have a thorough understanding of the program's purpose as well as appropriate training to ensure clients are receiving effective treatment. Evidence-based programming should account for the impact of staff through methods such as interviews and surveys targeting personality traits, training, and level of supervision from administration (Makarios et al, 2016; Hoover, 2018). In studies where program staff report a lack of necessary resources to complete objectives or felt that their training was inadequate, the programs were also less likely to reduce recidivism (Barak & Stebbins, 2017; Hoover, 2018).

Impact studies measure the effectiveness of goals established by a program. This is especially useful for programs that target specific risks or needs to lower recidivism, such as job placement or cognitive-behavioral therapy. While these are both considered generally successful intervention strategies, the interdependence of multiple factors means that there may be



circumstances in which treatment achieves the end goal of employment or prosocial skills but does not affect recidivism. In an impact evaluation comparing recidivism rates between private and public correctional facilities, researchers determined that rates were not significantly different but that individuals released from private facilities were significantly more likely to commit new offenses despite pre-release programming (2017). This renders a reentry program ineffective because lowering recidivism is the fundamental purpose—findings regarding other benefits are essentially collateral.

Many evaluations contain both quantitative and qualitative elements for a more holistic understanding of the program's design and effectiveness. Quantitative designs are intended to provide programs with rigorously tested, evidence-based measures of success. Due to the very nature of social sciences, laboratory conditions and program replication outside of a program's original social context are not normally feasible features of the majority of these experimental designs. Instead, many studies rely on a quasi-experimental research design. Although programs may not be able to randomly assign individuals to a client or control group, but propensity matching based on similarities between clients and non-clients is a common technique for providing comparison value (Powers et al., 2017; Visser et al, 2017). Program exposure can also be studied with a quasi-experimental design. For example, Costopoulos and fellow researchers offered to assist county jail inmates with applications for welfare and other social services; the control group became those who chose not to receive assistance (Costopoulos et al., 2017).

Designs considered truly experimental due to random assignment have been possible in certain circumstances. In one study, researchers were able to randomly assign individuals from jail or prison to a treatment program via a lottery system because the program was at capacity.

However, both the control and experimental groups had been recently released from pre-determined correctional facilities that are not necessarily representative of other regions or offender populations. For example, research on the effect of employment on recidivism using an intent-to-treat analysis was featured in a top criminology journal but because it targeted high-risk individuals such as gang members and drug offenders, it is not considered generalizable (Visher et al., 2017). This caution against generalizability is important because organizations and programs may serve exclusive client populations according to specific needs or offense histories (Latessa & Lovins, 2019).

Qualitative reentry research contextualizes the social setting of a program beyond providing a recidivism rate. Qualitative evaluation strategies can describe intangible factors and influences on recidivism that in turn make assessments more comprehensive. For instance, Miller interviewed several staff members and participants of a six-month cognitive behavioral program and found that both parties felt that participants were obligated to fake internal change (2014). A client can complete a program and continue to commit offenses he is never arrested for, or at the very least retain antisocial values and never be captured in a recidivism measure based solely on rearrest. Staff interviews are common in implementation studies (Fox, 2012; Hoover, 2018; Lucken, 2020) and are often accompanied by observational data or site visits performed by researchers (Makarios et al., 2016; Miller & Miller, 2016).

Ethnographic approaches are especially useful for populations who may rely on informal support or control outside of formal resources. By following individuals through reentry experiences not always known to the formal criminal justice system, such as homelessness or under-the-table income, researchers can collect data about individual experiences not available

from official sources. This type of research provides insight into how the decision-making processes and pressures felt by individuals recently released from incarceration to support themselves or their families. The Boston Reentry Study was a seminal work that tracked men returning to the larger Boston area and provided insight into reliance on social networks and difficulties in forging prosocial paths in neighborhoods without strongly developed social services (Simes, 2019). In another study based on ethnographic data collected from men released from prison, Durnescu (2019) identified reintegration trajectories for individuals based on their initial reception from prison: those with involved families were able to enjoy simply being out for longer periods of time before looking for work compared to those without any friends or family. Participant interviews are a frequent strategy to collect inputs about program impact, since their accounts permit researchers to gauge participant buy-in (Farabee et al., 2014; Makarios et al., 2015; Heilbrun et al., 2017; Maier, 2020). Fontaine and Beiss (2012) recommend interviewing current inmates to hear in their own words their most urgent needs, self-described risk factors, and pre-incarceration influences. Programs should take this knowledge into account while creating programs to appeal to target populations (Barak & Stebbins, 2017). Finally, surveys of people currently incarcerated can also measure their awareness of resources as well as recommend improvements to outreach methods (Meek et al., 2013). Informal social network members, primarily family members such as mothers or grandmothers, are also included in qualitative research in order to identify criminogenic or prosocial influences an individual may interact with while he attempts to reintegrate after serving time (Steiner et al., 2015; Bellair et al., 2019; Schaefer et al., 2019; Simes, 2019).

Reentry programming should inventory an individual's existing support mechanisms. This allows the program providers to prioritize treatments for the most urgent needs and risks an individual does not otherwise have the means to address. When administrators are disconnected from client needs, especially commonly reported needs like a job or a place to stay, the effectiveness of a program can be overestimated. In an analysis of clients and administrators from twelve Serious and Violent Offender Initiative (SVORI) programs enacted in different local sites for comparison of implementation, researchers found that program administrators overwhelmingly identified needs for general reentry planning at rates similar to client responses. While administrators indicated that such services were provided, only 60 percent of clients reported receiving any (Lattimore et al., 2011). Administrators hypothesized that employment referrals were necessary in nearly half of cases, but less than one-third of clients received even one (Lattimore et al., 2011). Overall, the study found that administrators regularly overestimated the services provided within their organizations compared to client feedback. This indicated that implementation measures comparing the identification of needs at initial intake to the management of those needs over the course of programming should be enacted as soon as possible.

The perception of program viability from the perspective of stakeholders (such as law enforcement agents and community employers) beyond program providers is also necessary since stakeholder represent the interests of local residents—particularly public safety. Often, reentry programming originates from local leadership collaborating in pursuit of a solution to recidivism within their communities (Fontaine & Beiss, 2012; Hollis et al., 2016). Before

programming can be enacted, current providers and agencies that serve reentering populations may be consulted to identify existing gaps in resources.

Community corrections officers are tasked with ensuring clients meet all conditions of supervision, and this can mean outsourcing treatment to local providers. Community corrections officers report overwhelming caseloads, a heavy focus on formal documentation, and pressure to prioritize monitoring duties over rehabilitation; these contribute to an increased likelihood of referring clients to outside reentry agencies (Hoover, 2018; Lucken, 2020). Referrals depend on those officers being made aware of resources in the community, so outreach to possible collaborators should remain a top priority for reentry program administrators.

Successful evaluations can provide criminal justice agencies with the confidence to refer clients to non-governmental reentry organizations. For this reason, it is to the benefit of program administrators to align definitions of recidivism and success to metrics that potential government agency referral sources follow (Hartwell et al, 2012). Local agencies can collect knowledge from across a community about background-friendly employers and navigate agencies that provide social welfare. This assistance is vital in decreasing the risk of recidivism for reentering individuals.

**Barriers to evaluation.** The capacity of a program to address unique needs is preceded by the identification of needs and risks that individuals face at reentry. Current literature finds that reentry programming should be individualized to decrease recidivism (Wright & Cesar, 2013; Taxman & Caudy, 2015; Clark, 2016; Miller & Miller, 2016). Assessment tools should be empirically validated to ensure accurate identification of static and dynamic risks as well as

needs, which may not always be criminogenic but can contribute to destabilization (Latessa, 2012; Blasko et al., 2016).

Vulnerability stemming from unaddressed needs and uncontrolled risks are compounded by the stigma associated with a criminal record and can contribute to recidivism (Hartwell et al., 2012; Costopoulos et al., 2017). Taxman and Caudy (2015) caution that the accuracy of assessments can decrease as the accumulation of needs and risks surpasses the threshold that qualifies *high risk*. Assessment tools that are unable to determine varying impacts of each risk or need, or interdependence between several can lead to ineffective treatment recommendations. Failure to reintegrate after receiving treatment may be blamed on the individual or on the program, when really the shortcomings fall partially with the initial intake assessment. Further, if program staff does not explain the relationship between a participant's risks and needs and the proposed treatment plan to the individual, they may fail to pursue programming intended to increase protective factors and support against recidivism (Heilbrun, 2017). Finally, researchers have found evidence that assessments may align culturally-based behaviors and thought patterns, especially those familiar to minority populations, as inherently criminogenic—this leads to treatment that some participants find hostile and illegitimate (Barak & Stebbins, 2017).

While individualized treatment is empirically supported, it is necessary for programs to identify trends in client needs and risks—perhaps a particular community lacks affordable housing options for people with criminal records, or the majority of clients are seeking substance addiction treatment. Successful programming is designed with the community context in mind, and results are often not generalizable. A program or curriculum successful in one community may have little effect elsewhere, which can be difficult to reconcile with the foundational

principle of experimental replication. Reentry program can be voluntary, and therefore subject to selection bias (Fox, 2012; Muhlhausen, 2012). This is complicated by the reliance on formal arrest data as a measure of recidivism; while this value can be understood by individuals outside of criminal justice fields, there is a risk of misinterpreting the data due to lack of context. For example, arrest data only reflects violations or new offenses committed by an offender who is caught, rather than all crimes that occur.

Ultimately, the facility that a population is released from affects the rates of recidivism. Local jails often lack any pre-release reentry program due to short sentences despite affecting significantly more people than prison. In addition, there is evidence that people in local jails have unique needs independent from those serving time in prison (Farabee et al., 2014; Costopoulos et al., 2017; Jenkins et al, 2017). Prison programming is more likely to receive funding than local organizations serving jail populations, and there is less research focused on individuals returning from jail (Fontaine & Beiss, 2012). Funding is not always dependent on positive evaluative results, so organizations (particularly private may not be motivated to undergo assessment (Latessa & Lovins, 2019). Regardless, evaluations are necessary to identify shortcomings of each stage of a program and provide recommendations for improvement and sustainability.

Programs that focus on instrumental needs such as housing and employment may implement a number of evaluation designs in order to gauge effectiveness and qualify for continued funding. In Texas, the department of Criminal Justice Reentry and Reintegration considers the housing and employment of released individuals to be urgent priorities in achieving the larger mission of recidivism reduction. Programs targeting housing and employment are therefore more likely to receive government (local, state, or federal) funding, and should be

subject to regular evaluation. In the next section, the impact of these instrumental resources and the effectiveness of programming that targets housing or employment will be discussed.

### **Housing and Recidivism**

Research demonstrates that residential instability at release contributes to recidivism (Simes, 2019). Compared to an average of one move per year, individuals with records average more than two moves in the year after release (Steiner et al., 2015; Chamberlain, 2018). This is according to formal measures such as parole data, which only reflect the address listed by an individual and not where they may actually spend their time (Simes, 2019). Each move increases the risk of recidivism substantially, and the actual experience of individuals without a consistent place to stay contributes to disadvantages many studies fail to capture (Steiner et al., 2015; Chamberlain, 2018). Reentry organizations often provide housing assistance in addition to reintegration programming because clients often lack knowledge about local resources or have little experience navigating the bureaucracies of social services (Hartwell, 2012; Costopoulos et al., 2017). It is necessary to first differentiate between individuals who return to their pre-prison neighborhoods and those who do not since current research identifies significant differences and indicate unique needs of those two groups.

**Types of housing.** The type of housing a person is released to affects their likelihood of recidivating (Clark, 2016). Housing can be correctional or treatment based, as well as public or private. Individuals who live in residential treatment centers are the least likely to recidivate with a new offense but are at an increased risk for accruing technical violations (Fontaine & Beiss, 2012; Steiner et al., 2015). This serves to remove participants from criminogenic influences exerted by personal networks. People who move into the private residences of loved ones are less



likely to recidivate than those who cycle through emergency shelters and homelessness, especially if that loved one is a relative rather than a significant other (Steiner et al., 2015). While often assumed, it is difficult to measure the intensity of supervision exerted by guardian figures compared to romantic partners. However, increasing levels of disadvantage in communities where private housing is located is correlated with increasing risk of recidivism (McNeeley, 2018). Further, individuals who live with members of their social network in private housing are not protected by the physical separation from criminal opportunity afforded by residential treatment centers. Finally, living with family or other loved ones does not normally provide the degree of structure to daily routines that residential treatment centers do (McNeeley, 2018). Homelessness is significantly related to recidivism (Steiner et al., 2015). These individuals were also less likely to develop attachment to prosocial norms such as civic engagement or providing for a family (Simes, 2019).

#### **The Effects of informal social networks on residential stability and recidivism.**

Individuals who return to pre-prison neighborhoods tend to be younger and racial or ethnic minorities (Simes, 2019). In particular, black parolees have less capital to move elsewhere than white parolees (Keene et al., 2018; Chamberlain, 2018). The Boston Reentry Study found that two-fifths of participants returned to only 15 percent of neighborhoods (Simes, 2019). Nearly half of the men in the study moved in with members of their social network members (primarily women relatives) and remained in that area for longer on average. Similar to Chamberlain's research, Simes found that where an individual lived before incarceration heavily impacted the likelihood he would live in the same or at least a similar neighborhood (Chamberlain, 2018; Simes, 2019). Living with social network members increased a person's exposure to structural

disadvantages but increased attachment, meaning that people remained in communities without resources that promote prosocial lifestyle changes such as employment. However, attachment to a community increases the longer an individual goes between periods of incarceration, which then decreases the risk of recidivism. Interviews of recently released individuals and their informal social networks found that network members provide emotional support and instrumental resources such as a place to stay, money and food, contributing to a decreased risk of recidivism (Durnescu, 2018; Schaefer et al., 2019; Simes, 2019). These members also exert social control on their formerly incarcerated loved ones by limiting access to transportation and exposing them to non-criminogenic individuals, replacing previous criminal networks (Schaefer et al., 2019).

Network members reported feeling discouraged when they felt that their attempts to manage a released individual result in strain. There is no linear relationship between closeness and willingness to intervene on behalf of a loved one, especially if that intervention seems like snitching to an individual's parole or probation officer (Schaefer et al., 2019). In addition, many individuals who lived with network members at release felt like "deadbeats" for not being able to support themselves. They also faced external pressure to contribute to the household, which can increase the likelihood that they return to criminal activity to make money quickly (Keene et al., 2018). Returning to a neighborhood that an individual had lived in before prison often indicates a return to the criminogenic networks and increased exposure to criminal opportunities that reentry programming may not address. This is because many conditions of supervised released require a place to live and income, and some individuals must rely on their former networks to provide those type of support to meet these requirements (Bellair et al., 2019). However, many social

networks are made up of family members who are less likely to be themselves involved in criminal activity (except for drug use), even if they possess criminal records (Bellair et al., 2019). A former record does not exempt an individual from wanting to help their loved one reintegrate.

Overall, most released individuals do not return to their pre-prison communities but move to neighborhoods with similar levels of poverty and lack of opportunity (Harding et al., 2013; Chamberlain, 2018). This may even mean proximally near; more than 40 percent of parolees moved to a neighborhood within a half-mile of their pre-prison community (Harding et al., 2013). This is normally measured through databases at community supervision agencies that track first addresses since they have to be approved. However, this measure is incomplete. Harding and colleagues found that over one-third of more than 3,000 sampled parolees had unknown addresses over the course of the two-year study; at any time, roughly nine percent of participants were unaccounted for (2013). People may not return to pre-prison neighborhoods due to record-based stigma, a lack of affordability, or to get away from criminogenic environments. These individuals have less informal social support or control in place to adapt to similarly few formal resources, and incarceration results in weakened social bonds, disqualification of eligibility for social services, and prohibitive background checks despite a desire to move to a “better” neighborhood (Fontaine & Beiss, 2012; Kirk et al., 2018). Individuals who lack social network support report feeling accelerated pressures to find work and a place to live at release since there is not a safety net in place (Durnescu, 2018). Evidence shows that families who provide support at release can provide informal support and monitoring that complements formal expectations for rehabilitation and reentry. Community corrections

officers and reentry programmers alike should seek to vet out prosocial network members and apprise them of treatment goals in place to ensure support and supervision when agents cannot be present (Schafer et al, 2015).

Studies that measure the influence of social networks on recidivism find that individuals who are visited in prison by network members are less likely to recidivate and more likely to develop an attachment to a neighborhood at release (McNeeley, 2018). Individuals who never developed an attachment with a neighborhood were more likely to experience residential instability and recidivate. This population is especially prone to frequent moving. Nearly two-thirds of participants without a stable address were rearrested within a year (Simes, 2019). Literature finds that housing assistance in the form of vouchers can increase stability and decrease recidivism. In a randomized control trial, researchers found that formerly incarcerated men who received housing vouchers for six months of paid housing located outside of previous neighborhoods did not recidivate less than individuals who received the vouchers to stay in pre-prison communities (Kirk et al., 2018). However, individuals who received housing vouchers to remain in pre-prison neighborhoods were less likely to move within the six-month period or recidivate than those who received no assistance (Kirk et al., 2018). The findings suggest that programs focused on providing financial support contribute to residential stability while also decreasing the pressure to engage in criminal activity that can provide a quick payday.

**Effects of reentry on individuals and communities.** Analysis of local communities and populations that reentry programs intend to serve are necessary to ensure effectiveness. Current research find that released individuals disproportionately enter communities characterized by structural disadvantages such as widespread rates of poverty, high rates of crime, few

employment opportunities, and intense police supervision (Morenoff & Harding, 2014; Jenkins et al., 2017; LeBel, 2017; Sugie & Lens, 2017; Chamberlain, 2018; McNeeley, 2018). These neighborhoods experience significant disorganization due to high turnover, low rates of homeownership, economic instability, and higher densities of individuals with criminal records (Morenoff & Harding, 2014; LeBel, 2017). A criminal record can decrease the employment opportunities a person has as well as dictate where a former offender can live, depending on their offense. Due to affordability and stigma in the housing market, people with records tend to congregate in communities that do not discriminate against record-holders. Communities such as these are the least likely to have social support resources or impactful informal social control mechanisms in place (Jenkins et al., 2017; LeBel, 2017). A study based on nearly a decade's worth of parole data in Cleveland found that approximately one-fifth of parolees settled in just five percent of neighborhoods, where parolees made up more than two-fifths of residents (Chamberlain, 2018). For every one percent increase in parolee residents, violent crime increased the following year by over one percent and 0.5 percent for property crime; the increase in violent crime was correlated with increased vacancies, and property crime with decreased property sales, indicating a reciprocal relationship between parolees and criminal activity (Chamberlain, 2018). This supports similar research that finds the disproportionate influx of persons with criminal records into very few neighborhoods contributes to instability and lessened effects of informal social control (Kirk, 2015).

The populations of these neighborhoods are primarily racial and ethnic minorities (Kirk, 2015; McNeeley, 2018; Simes, 2019). Chamberlain (2018) found that more than 65 percent of black parolees moved to neighborhoods with levels of poverty similar to their pre-prison

neighborhoods, and more than 60 percent of these neighborhoods had high poverty rates.

Comparatively, almost 60 percent of white parolees were significantly more likely to have lived in low poverty areas and return to similar communities at release (Chamberlain, 2018).

The criminal justice system contributes to disorganization by generating high concentrations of incarceration from these disadvantaged communities. When individuals return, it is with less social or financial capital and increased vulnerability due to coerced removal and a criminal record (Sugie & Lens, 2017). In addition, due to the uncontrollable real world setting of social science experiments, it is difficult to establish a causal relationship between recidivism and crime as well as isolate the effect of the community on criminal behavior from other risk factors at play (Wright & Cesar, 2013). A natural experiment made possible by Hurricane Katrina found that less than five percent of zip codes in Louisiana have more than three parolees, and that their dispersal across previously unentered zip codes after the disaster significantly decreased recidivism (Kirk, 2015). Kirk (2015) conceded that although displacement occurred (albeit very little), the net benefits from dispersal indicated that high concentrations of parolees can increase criminal opportunity and criminal influence. This is likely because these communities experience existing disadvantages such as residential instability, poverty, and lack of economic opportunities (Kirk, 2015).

Ironically, incarceration is intended to increase public safety by removing threats to social control, but its disproportionate frequency in minority and disadvantaged communities foster residents' fear of crime and distrust of law enforcement rather than providing relief. In turn, this leads to individuals with financial capital to move away and those without that capital remain in an increasingly normless community. Increased police presence is often correlated to

increased recidivism rates and technical violations, which contributes to community corrections officers' complaints that their workload is almost entirely dedicated to supervision rather than reintegration (Wright & Cesar, 2013).

Research that focuses on spatial and community elements of reentry are often based on populations that can be tracked to some degree, such as parolees, and incorporates Census data to identify and operationalize poverty and resident demographics (Harding et al., 2013; Chamberlain, 2018; McNeeley, 2018; Simes, 2019). The spatial mismatch between released individuals and resources that catalyze prosocial reintegration destabilizes the reentry process (Morenoff & Harding, 2014). A lack of housing can inhibit reintegration, but housing alone does not protect an individual from risk. A high concentration of parolees is not correlated significantly with the increased use of public assistance of any kind, often because individuals with criminal records are prohibited from receiving certain benefits (Chamberlain, 2018). The risk of recidivism is not immune from environmental influences, and risk reduction requires mobility to avoid or operate outside of settings with few opportunities (Maier, 2020).

A study that tracked the daytime locations of parolees found that participants who spent time in areas with job clusters, or places where multiple jobs were available, were significantly more likely to be hired and hired faster than those who spent their days closer to their residences (Sugie & Lens, 2017). The researchers concluded that economic and other opportunities are simply not available in communities where parolees live, so these individuals should prioritize access to transportation to close the distance between themselves and risk-reducing opportunities (Sugie & Lens, 2017). Maier (2020) came to a similar conclusion, finding that individuals who prioritize access to transportation in pursuit of opportunities unavailable in their communities are

more likely to desist from criminal activity. Successful reentry programming must be accessible to populations most in need. Similar to arrest rates, reentry resources are not uniformly spread across communities. Caseworkers should promote reentry into communities with a less severe concentration of other record-holders since high populations of individuals in need deplete local resources (Kirk, 2015).

**Limitations of housing programs.** Despite evidence that residential treatment facilities are effective in reducing recidivism, many private organizations exclude participation of individuals with particular offense histories such as violence or sexual crimes (Kirk et al., 2018). Sometimes, this is to compromise with community residents rallying against the influx of any record-holding persons, a phenomenon referred to as “not in my backyard” (Fontaine & Beiss, 2012).

Neglecting this population can further inhibit access to already limited resources, and formalized stigma that implies these offenders are beyond rehabilitation assumes continued offending regardless of the desistance effects described in life-course trajectories research (Sampson & Laub, 2003; Grossi, 2017). Correctional facilities are set up far from the normative societies that offenders are expected to re-enter, limiting the spatial overlap between residence and other resources, such as access to employment opportunities (Fontaine & Biess, 2012; Maier, 2020).

Besides the noted shortcomings of reliance on official data for addresses, community corrections officers do not necessarily have the resources to vet an address and determine if the location is suitable for an individual attempting to integrate prosocially. Traditional data collection is limited to individuals who are either required to check in on an ongoing basis so addresses can be updated (LeBel, 2017). Even the attainment of a residence is not unconditionally protective, and not all addresses decrease the risk of recidivism.



## **Employment and Recidivism**

Current research finds employment to be protective against recidivism (Cook et al., 2014; Steiner et al., 2015). Income represents steps toward financial independence and autonomy, by individuals forced to rely on family or friends for various types of support at release. The ability to provide for loved ones can catalyze a shift in identity from criminal to tax-paying citizen, overcoming stigma (Keene et al., 2018). Employment also requires routines that structure previously idle time and allows the individual to replace antisocial networks with prosocial people and mentors aligned with normative values (Bunting et al., 2019). Over time, these relationships become increasingly influential and protective, contributing to desistance from crime (Sampson & Laub, 2003).

Income alone is not protective against recidivism (Latessa, 2012; Costopoulos et al., 2017; Jenkins et al., 2017). This is partially because the types of jobs that people with criminal backgrounds can get do not generally pay a living wage and therefore work “off the books” commonly supplements meager paychecks. If an individual is not invested in maintaining the job, the income, or the collateral benefits, the impacts become negligible and the risk of recidivism increases (Cook et al., 2014). Employed individuals are less likely to be re-arrested, signaling more successful reintegration; individuals not arrested in the first six months after release were significantly more likely to be employed in the latter half of the year (Cook et al., 2014).

**Effects on recidivism by type of employment.** Current research has stratified employment status, including fulltime, part-time, disability, and unemployed, and its effect on recidivism. Bunting and other researchers (2019) found that people who were disabled and

receiving monthly welfare were the least likely to be re-arrested and accrued more days in the community than any of the other categories. Half of the unemployed population was re-arrested, while 80 percent of full-time and 80 percent of part-time employees were still living in their communities one-year post-release (Bunting et al., 2019). An outcome evaluation of a prison-based reentry program found that it may take former offenders upwards of a month to find employment, and each time they leave or change jobs—which occurs an above average number of times for this population—the risk of recidivating increases (Bunting et al., 2019). However, there is evidence that the job search does not begin until nearly a month after release if someone is able to rely on monetary and other support from family and friends (Durnescu, 2018). This may indicate less pressure to find licit employment, either due to ongoing support or engagement in criminal enterprises.

**Limitations of employment-based reentry programs.** Possessing a criminal record not only limits employment opportunities, but also affects how seriously an individual perceives their chances of finding work. Jenkins, Dammer, and Raciti (2017) found that more than half of county jail inmates interviewed considered the lack of a job to be their greatest barrier to reintegration, and the majority stated that an unhelpful community corrections officer, lack of available services, and lack of education would make getting hired more difficult..

The effort an individual puts into an employment program is not necessarily reflected by the employment opportunities available, and participants can become frustrated that they cannot outwork the stigma of a record. Cook and colleagues found that offenders considered high-risk such as gang members were less likely to recidivate while employed at a program-assigned job at release, but that they struggled to find work after the period was up, during which time

recidivism rates increased again (Cook et al., 2014). The inability to find a licit job does not reduce the need to provide for loved ones and contribute to a larger household, so many individuals trying to reintegrate feel they have no choice but to turn to hustles and under-the-table work to meet responsibilities (Durnescu, 2018). Employment programs and community corrections officials do not have tools to measure the impact of this income, or how invested an individual is in retaining a licit job that does not meet his basic needs (Cook et al., 2014).

In particular, women are harmed by ex-offender stigma when looking for work. Entry-level child and healthcare work, both fields dominated by women, do not require high educational attainment or experience but generally require a background check. One study found that in comparison to women, men were more likely to land a job in one of these fields and make more than women even if both have a background, despite the reality that women tend to recidivate less than men (Denver et al., 2017).

Many employers are disinclined to hire persons with criminal backgrounds due to the effects on other employees, customers, and the overall stigma that ex-offenders are dangerous or will not work hard. While criminal background checks in jobs not related to vulnerable populations such as children or elderly are based in assumptions that a criminal background is irredeemable, social movements favoring “Ban-the-Box” initiatives may only exacerbate discriminatory hiring practices; there is evidence that ban the box actually leads to employers to rely on other biases. Research has found that when prohibited from asking about a record early in the hiring process, employers assume black applicants likely have a record even when they do not (LeBel, 2017).

To counter the effects of a criminal record, organizations both pre- and post-release often try to incorporate professional and vocational skills curriculums resulting in certifications that former inmates can attach to resumes or highlight in interviews. These are generally limited to populations released to community corrections or to those serving a short sentence in prison, as jail sentences are generally considered too brief for most programming, employment or otherwise (Jenkins et al., 2017). Unfortunately, despite standard requirements mandating employment, community corrections officers are often not prepared to provide services or referrals that result in job offers (Hoover, 2018).

Job placements do not always last beyond the duration of the program despite the increase in related experience. In addition, participation in these programs cannot increase employment opportunities in fields that bar former offenders, the effects of which are the most extreme for violent or sex offenders who face the most offense-based discrimination and the least access to reentry programming (Grossi, 2017). Employer-based stigma often occurs alongside discrimination of the housing process and can lead individuals with backgrounds to view the criminal justice system as well as other governmental agencies with cynicism, further removing individuals from the of pursuit traditional values (Kirk et al., 2015). The inability to overcome the stigma of a criminal record contributes to forced helplessness long after release, increasing the likelihood of recidivism and delegitimizing attachment to prosocial goals.

## **Summary**

The number of individuals imprisoned and released from 1976 to 2009 has overwhelmed existing resource providers, leading to legislation beginning in the mid-2000s intended to fund reentry services at the federal, state, and local levels. This was intended to permit various

government agencies to create resource providers capable of responding to community-specific gaps in services and address the risks and needs of recently released people. In addition, returning individuals are in need of unique assistance since their records bar them from receiving many standard resources available to others in similar economic situations. In response to legislation, a number of organizations have risen to address the needs of people released from correctional facilities.

Following is the Methods section, which will provide an explanation of the data sources used and the analyses performed.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODS**

This study created the framework for the evaluation of a reentry resource center (hereafter referred to as the center) in a large county in North Texas. The center was created to enable client access to reentry resource providers throughout the county. Clients, adult county residents returning from incarceration or other correctional settings such as community supervision, are referred to resource providers located within the county. There are not prohibitions based on offense or release type.

The researcher approached center staff in the summer of 2019 to design and implement an evaluation strategy. Because the center is primarily funded by the county on a contractual basis, the director of the center as well as the CEO of the overhead organization are invested in incorporating evaluative measures to provide an empirical basis for existing practices or for the creation of new evidence-based protocols, depending on the outcome of the study. The strategies implemented in this study and those recommended for future evaluations were selected to encourage routine, ongoing evaluations. In order to build a positive professional relationship with staff, the researcher underwent the volunteer process for the center's overhead organization. This included confidentiality agreements and a criminal background check. By October 2019, when arrest data became available due to a new relationship with the County's Information Technology Data Analyst team, the staff at the reentry center invited the researcher to attend meetings with county staff and analysts. The researcher underwent additional county-level background checks to gain access to arrest and recidivism data. No data was accessed before approval by the University's Institutional Review Board.

In the initial stages of this study, the researcher located a publicly available logic model designed soon after the inception of the center in 2015. It describes the staff, clients, and resource providers, as well as the activities offered by the center, the intended results and outcomes of participation, and finally the intended impact of the program. The director confirmed the continued reliance on this logic model for guidance in standard operations, and no revisions or modifications have been made.

The researcher performed a critical analysis of the logic model to verify its applicability in evaluating the objectives, goals, and overall mission of the center. Both full-time employees (the director and reentry coordinator) were interviewed to provide insight into the implementation of practices as specified in the logic model. Each respondent was asked independently of the other to avoid any added pressure to participate due to small staff size. These face-to-face semi-structured interviews took approximately an hour each and were recorded at the center. Each staff member was assigned an alias. They were subsequently transcribed by the researcher, who coded responses to identify the objectives and goals of each position and consistency with the center's overall mission. The data were analyzed to determine if staff responses reflected comprehension of the model's intended practices and describe participants' perceptions of the legitimacy of the model.

Following the qualitative analysis of the interview data, several quantitative analyses were conducted to demonstrate the evaluation process and provide the center with preliminary data on program success. From the start of fiscal year 2018 through the end of fiscal year 2019 (October 1st, 2017 through September 30th, 2019), the center recorded intake data for 1,554 clients. All client data were de-identified of personal information including names, county or

state identification numbers, license numbers, or social security numbers. Next, the researcher tabulated demographic variables including gender, race/ethnicity, age, and most recent incarceration place. This was completed in Microsoft Excel. The descriptive statistics of clients provide center staff with information on the most common types of clients they serve.

Deidentified data detailing different offenses and rates of rearrest are provided both for clients and for the general jail population, provided to the researcher by the center director. Client status is the independent variable. Recidivism and offense data are based on arrest records from the county jail and provided to the center through a data-sharing collaboration with a data analyst employed with Research County.



## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

#### Part I: Logic Model

*“Logic Model – Pilot Phase”* (Rev. 03)

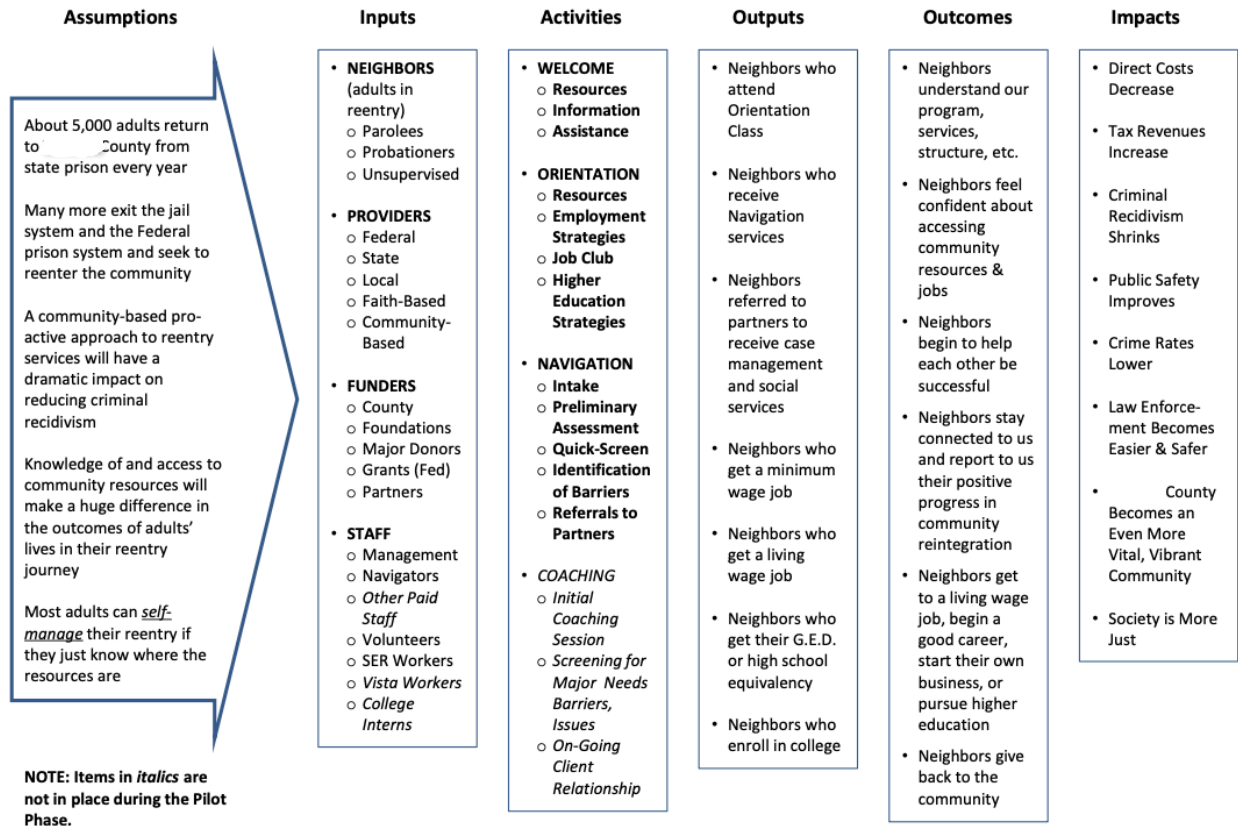


Figure 1. Research County Reentry Center logic model.

This study was designed to evaluate the program according to the outputs established by the logic model (see Figure 1) and compare client recidivism to general recidivism within Research County. Since the center competes for contracts with the county on an annual basis, the logic model should establish and operationalize the essential functions of the center, possible collateral effects, and intended implementation. Currently, the center is funded primarily by the

county and operates as an offshoot of a larger, non-criminal justice-related local assistance organization. The researcher confirmed that the original logic model publicly available remains in use in an interview with the center's director. Titled "Pilot Phase", the outcomes and impacts are not all operationalized, and no evaluative measures have been enacted to determine the appropriateness of this model. This means that it is unclear how many of these outcomes or impacts are actually being completed, so it is unclear when or if administrators would re-evaluate the logic model; thus, the circular issue of "evaluate the center according to the logic model" and "ensure the model reflects the ideal practices of the center" had arisen. In the next section, a critical analysis of the logic model is presented, and the areas for improvements that increase specificity that would more effectively measure outputs in later evaluations are highlighted.

**Assumptions.** The logic model is based on a series of assumptions, located in the leftmost column. These ideas form the foundation for understanding the need for reentry services in Research County. There are no citations, despite the data-based nature of several points. These statements should be separated for clarification. The logic model should be primarily empirical, and the Assumptions category should be split to include a Reentry Statistics category. For example, the population of adults released from state prison could be verified by several reports. One such resource was the five-county study by Fabelo and colleagues in 2016, reflecting county-specific release data by previous incarceration type between 2011 and 2013. For the logic model to remain applicable, the most recent release data should be made available and a citation included. The subsequent statement regarding jail and federal prison releasees is only accurate if those populations are grouped together when compared to state prison releases. Local jails see far more inmates each year than other incarceration facilities while the number of people held in

federal prison remains consistently smaller than state prison populations, meaning that releases will also total far less. The other assumptions about “self-managing” and “huge difference” imply that the difference between recidivism and reintegration are dependent on access to reentry resources and decreased community stigma. If these statements are to be significant in developing an evidence-based logic model, they must first be grounded in theoretical basis. Since the center primarily provides for urgent material needs such as employment or housing and subsequently collects some data on available social networks, the most appropriate frameworks may be a strain or life-course theory. This would require significant reformation of the logic model to incorporate variables of particular interest according to either respective theory, and is beyond the scope of this study.

**Inputs.** Inputs follow Assumptions. First are *neighbors*, returning individuals specifically identified according to the county’s highest recidivating state release statuses according to Fabelo and colleagues (2016): *parolees*, *probationers*, or *unsupervised*. However, the center accepts clients from local and federal facilities, and should be listed in this section. Due to the difficulty in tracking naturally transient populations, the only description of the jail population is that “many more” are released than individuals who were previously incarcerated in state facilities; individuals released from local jails are included in the broader “unsupervised” category within the inputs. This is vague since it may also refer to state jail releases as well as unsupervised prison discharges, and these recidivism rates for each respective population would not be combined in this way. To more effectively convey the necessity of resources for this population in particular, a quantitative value of total jail intakes or releases should be added to the Assumptions section. This is available (with a few years lag time) on county data sheets on

the Texas Criminal Justice Coalition website. *Providers* are also listed under Inputs, and refer to potential referral sources such as *federal, state, local, faith-based, and community-based*. Examples of programs county residents may encounter should be listed for the sake of clarification, and the additional references to existing programs or providers may also help stakeholders not directly involved with reentry efforts to better understand the nature of interagency collaborations in place. *Funders* include *County, Foundations, Major Donors, Grants, and Partners*. In his interview, the center director stated that the majority of funding is directly from the county on a yearly, contractual basis, and that the remaining funds are from private donations. The proportions of funds received by each category should be shared for the sake of transparency. As for *staff*, the positions are *management, navigators, volunteers, and SER workers*. The latter refers to the Senior Community Service Employment Program funded by the Department of Labor. These individuals work as receptionists performing various clerical duties at the center on a rotating basis. Future models may include variables for other paid staff, vista workers, and college interns, but current employees do not fall within these categories and there are no concrete plans in the near future to expand the staff.

**Activities.** Activities undertaken by staff, specifically the navigator title, are categorized as *Welcome, Orientation, Navigation, and Coaching*. The reentry coordinator manages these tasks at the time of this study. *Welcome* activities include *resources, information, and assistance*. These are purposely broad since individuals bring unique needs and risks to sessions. *Orientation* refer to the overview of resources, employment strategies, and higher education strategies discussed with potential clients in events such as Project Safe Neighborhoods. Since parolees are the only released populations required to attend orientation sessions or meetings for Project Safe

Neighborhoods, outreach targeting other released populations should be incorporated in this section. *Navigation* is a series of steps each client undergoes to determine individual risks and needs. This includes *intake*, *identification of barriers*, and *referrals to partners*. Forms labeled Preliminary Assessment and Quick-Screen that used before fiscal year 2018 have since been streamlined into a single comprehensive intake form used since October 2017. This needs to be updated on the logic model, as the two previous forms are still listed. Finally, the coaching model is currently employed by the reentry coordinator, who is responsible for the intake and referral process for clients at this center. Once an individual's information is entered into the client database and a case record is generated, they are considered actively enrolled as a client for the following year. Updates to that case record are made each time a client returns to track what services were offered. The coaching method is more of a description of the approach to the provider-client relationship rather than a task accomplished and should be listed under navigation. The effect of this approach is further discussed in the interview portion of the results section.

**Outputs.** Outputs include the number of clients who participate in various activities, including *neighbors who attend orientation class*, *neighbors who receive navigation services* (becoming clients), and *neighbors referred to partners to receive case management and social services*. The participation values are intended to reflect a rudimentary measure of outreach and identifying individuals who do not become clients after attending orientation can make up a control group to compare against client recidivism in future evaluations. Individuals who attend the mandatory orientation sessions either at the main parole office or attend at least one mandatory Project Safe Neighborhood session can create a measure of outreach since every

parolee released to the county must attend both of these events, where the center staff provides information about their services, but attendees are not required to become clients. Sign-in sheets (which already include a space for identification numbers such as SID) for these should be digitized immediately after the sessions and forwarded from the parole office or the agencies responsible for hosting PSN to the center director. From there, two running logs should be kept that document how many attendees became clients within a week of the event. This is currently the only available measure of outreach due to small staff size.

Of particular interest should be where clients are being referred to regularly. This can be documented in the intake data with a space in each client's profile to list referral sites the reentry coordinator recommends during each session with a client. Follow-up can include the reentry coordinator reaching out to these other providers to confirm the center client visited and also received services or not. Feedback from providers can strengthen existing professional relationships by opening consistent avenues of communication with center staff. Since neighbors who receive navigation services and neighbors referred to partners to receive case management and social services are both listed as outputs, navigation services should be defined so as to differentiate between the two; the inclusion of both implies a client could receive one and not the other, and client status is achieved when an individual undergoes an intake process and is provided referrals.

The remaining four outputs require client follow-up, including the *number of neighbors who receive a minimum wage job, a living wage job, GED or equivalency, or enroll in college*. There is no indication that housing placement data would be collected, despite making up a significant portion of referrals according to the reentry coordinator. The implication of these

outputs is that these events occur after becoming a client. However, individuals who come into the center may already have a minimum wage job and seek a job with a living wage. First, the living wage for research county must be calculated for that client's living situation. Data collection processes since the beginning of fiscal year 2020 include space where a client can indicate existing sources of income. Then, their profile can be categorized as "seeking minimum wage job" or "living wage job". From there, the reentry coordinator can follow up with employers he referred clients to and input information about whether the client met with the employer and was hired. Reasons for being hired or not should be documented in the client profile, as patterns may emerge, such as lacking a certain critical document or two little related experience. This improves the quality of referrals made by the coordinator as well as ensures that employers are still actively seeking employees. Clients should be encouraged to provide feedback about income and hours according to what they are comfortable sharing. This can also serve to measure length of employment and frequency of job changes after incarceration.

The goals centering around educational attainment are unique since a diploma or degree does not expire. This should be measured by documenting what proportion of individual who become clients already have a baseline of education, such as a high school diploma or equivalency. Then, the clients who received educational resources such as a GED class at the center should be monitored on a regular basis, perhaps annually, for completion. Rolling enrollment may be more appropriate; someone who receives information about a GED class one month is unlikely to have completed all four exams by the following month. The success of this measure depends on client feedback; the reentry coordinator may provide resources about a GED class or paying for college courses, but the client must enroll and additionally inform the

coordinator that they intend to pursue an educational goal. For each of the above employment and education outputs, current staffing levels may limit ability to perform follow-up tasks.

**Outcomes.** At the time of this writing, expected outcomes are not measurable. They center around ensuring that clients are made aware of local programs and resources, can confidently access those programs and resources, reach out to other returning individuals to offer support, provide feedback to the center and maintain contact over time. Pre-post assessments may be issued to clients to measure how many and which resources clients are familiar with before and after becoming a client, as well as surveys intended to measure perceptions of usefulness.

Finally, successful clients are expected to set long-term life goals such as achieving a dream job or higher education and find ways to give back to their communities by volunteering time or money. These outcomes are followed by immeasurable impacts, except for three—recidivism rates should decrease, the cost that clients incur on the county should in turn decrease, and crime rates decrease. The latter should be clarified in that either it refers only to crime related to recidivism and makes no assumptions about previous offending, or specifically that overall rates in the county should decrease. The majority of crime that affects the local jail population is committed by re-offenders, as shown in the quantitative analysis section of this study. Therefore, lowering the rate of recidivism in the county by providing services to individuals previously incarcerated in the local jail is a more appropriate output.

Client recidivism should be lower than general recidivism if access to information about local resources and referrals are sufficiently protective against continued criminal involvement, but this does not account for various individual-level factors that a client may experience, such as



the sustainability of the referrals. If a client gets a job he only learned of as a direct result from a referral by the coordinator but immediately loses that job after less than a month, the effectiveness of the referral must be in question unless thorough client data is collected that provides additional reasons for the loss of that position. The remaining impacts include statements such as *tax revenue increase*, which should be clarified according to potential savings, in that a person held in the local jail does not cost county dollars, generated primarily by taxes, set aside for operating the jail. This does not address the cost of these individuals seeking resources such as welfare. *Improved public safety*, the jobs of law enforcement made “easier and safer”, and a *more just society* are statements that are not empirically testable, and a survey of general residents intended to measure perceptions centered around concepts such as public safety and law enforcement may be the only empirical strategy available to justify the use of those terms in the model. Finally, research County would become “vital” and “vibrant”. Even with qualitative instruments such as client, staff, and community resident feedback, qualifying these statements is not possible due to the likely varied response and understanding of the criminal justice system, making responses incomparable and thus unable to average into a meaningful measure of either—for this reason, they should be removed entirely.

Following the model analysis, interviews with staff provided insight into the overall mission of the center, the strategies employed by each position in pursuit of that mission, and the position-specific objectives that individual staff members engage in to accomplish those goals.

## **Part II: Staff Interviews**

The center currently employs two full-time staff members: the reentry coordinator, Mr. Michelsen and the center director, Mr. Adams. No sampling strategy was employed due to small

staff size. While the Memorandum of Understanding signed by the overhead organization's CEO was still in place, the researcher confirmed a willingness to be interviewed by each staff member. Both interviews were completed face-to-face and recorded on the same day in March 2020 and took approximately an hour each, and the researcher transcribed the audio recordings. The purpose of these interviews was primarily explanatory. The questions were designed to illicit information about each employee's understanding of the center's purpose, the roles their respective positions play in achieving short- and- long term goals, and the formation and maintenance of interagency relationships considered pivotal to the success of the center. While Mr. Michelsen was familiar with the logic model and assisted in defining many of the components, Mr. Adams received the majority of questions regarding the model as he was a co-author and uniquely positioned to reflect on any discrepancies between the intentions of the model and the reality of its implementation. No formal evaluation has been undertaken since the center's opening. Mr. Adams confirmed that no significant modifications have been made to the logic model and therefore it should remain an appropriate framework by which to evaluate the center's success, which is defined by the outputs and outcomes sections of the model. There has been no turnover in the core staff since the inception of the logic model, written shortly after Mr. Adams' arrival in October of 2017; Mr. Michelsen was already employed at the center and accepted a full-time position in 2018.

**Understanding the mission.** The mission of the center is to help formerly incarcerated individuals reintegrate by providing access to local resources. Connecting these individuals to reentry resources should reduce recidivism. Each employee provided an interpretation of that

mission according to their respective positions. The reentry coordinator stated the following about the mission:

[It] would be to continue to reduce recidivism here in [the county] and by extension across the state...we would like to create more or less a seamless process. Someone comes out of jail or prison and they are here almost immediately... we can make that transition from incarceration to being back in the community.

The most important strategy according to employees in achieving this mission of reintegration and the reduction of recidivism is to be aware of as many local resources that could benefit returning individuals. Mr. Michelsen further explained the vitality of knowledge in the reentry resources network:

“To...understand and be knowledgeable about every possible reentry related resource in [the county]—not only the different agencies and organizations, but also the services they provide and hopefully to know somebody that works within that agency so that we have a point of contact.”

**Staff responsibilities.** The second pivotal strategy is to connect individuals to local resources that address their specific needs and risks; this is primarily the responsibility of the reentry coordinator. To understand how the roles of these employees accomplish these two strategies, significant portions of each interview focused on job duties and tasks. For the reentry coordinator, these objectives include client intake, referrals, various administrative duties, and interagency relationship management on a personal level. Mr. Michelsen described the intake process as follows:

...Somebody comes to the office; we inquire if it's their first time here. If it is...then they're given an intake form that gathers most all the demographic data that we need and asks them about certain kinds of needs that they may have, what sort of services that they're seeking...all that baseline information. Once they have completed the intake form, then they come back here to my office and we sit down and I begin the interview process with them, learn about what's going on. I let them tell me their stories most of the time because that will generate the questions that I need to ask. Somebody may come in; they may already have a job. But they may be living in one of the halfway houses... 'Where can I go live now that I don't have to be living at the halfway house anymore?' So again, that leads me down the road to asking about their income and what kind of offense they have, because different housing providers are going to have different kinds of barrier offenses. Basically, it just becomes a give-and-take between the client and I.

Mr. Michelsen described the time immediately after release through the first ninety days as "fluid", making any planning or scheduling ahead of time very difficult for these individuals. In addition, there are few reliable communication mechanisms available, since a person recently released may not have a cell phone or internet access to create an email address. For this reason, clients do not make appointments; meetings are solely on a walk-in basis. One of the most important goals of the client interview process is to understand the context of the individual's situations. Mr. Michelsen stated:

As the reentry coordinator [I] sit down with them to...gather as much information from the client as we can regarding their particular circumstances, regarding their particular

needs, and then make the appropriate referrals to those agencies based on the client's individual set of circumstances...no two clients are gonna be exactly alike, they may have the same criminal offense, there may be a lot of things that are very similar but there's a lot of variables that come into play so we want to make sure that we get them to the right places for them, the best resources that can help meet their needs. So that's my job... to be able to listen, to ask the right questions, to pull out the information that's necessary and then also to know the resources available, and get those clients connected to those resources.

He discussed utilizing skills developed over nearly two decades working in the field of physical therapy. Supportive of the medical approach to reentry, he stated:

I have training in being able to conduct interviews and listen to people and hear some of the pertinent symptoms they're presenting with, make the correct diagnosis, and then provide them with best treatment modalities...the coaching model works so well here...it's very client directed. It's not my job to guide them down any particular path; it really is to listen and hear what they're saying and then based on that, asking the questions that I need to ask to generate more info that I may need from those answers, then provide the referrals or solutions that they need and get them connected with those agencies and people.

The researcher was interested in understanding this apparent unification of a diagnostic approach and a coaching model, especially because clients do not have mandated follow-up sessions after their first meeting with the coordinator. A medical model implies confirmation of treatment—in this case, successful reintegration through the utilization of local resources that

decrease the likelihood and frequency of recidivism. In fact, due to the ever-changing nature of post-release needs, the coordinator described frequent return visits or phone calls from clients who struggle to retain long-term employment and housing—the two main referral types made—and that he encouraged clients to follow up with him about their experiences. However, the irregular access to transportation and means of communication often means that the coordinator primarily interacted with clients in need of additional referrals, and not from clients who are benefitting from referrals, nor does he often hear from clients who moved out of the county. Despite requesting contact information at intake, making contact with clients for the purpose of receiving feedback (especially success stories) was unachievable partially due to reasons previously discussed. Further, since his position was reentry coordinator and not case manager, routine sessions and meetings are not considered wholly necessary. Mr. Michelsen's responsibilities were involved knowing as close to every local resource in the area as possible and informing clients of the existence and criteria to receive those resources, not monitoring clients. The success of the client was considered dependent on their initiative once they are provided the knowledge. He found that a coaching approach made conversations with clients more effective in identifying needs, risks, and the individual's inclination to overcome barriers they will face. It appears that this approach used motivational rhetoric to encourage personal accountability, as yet unmeasurable in the logic model but described as follows:

I tend to believe very highly in the coaching model. So I personally use that as a part of the way I conduct client interviews and work with my clients here. Try not to just be a dispenser of information but I really try to help them understand that the resources that they need—the mental spiritual, emotional—resources that they need to be successful

they possess those... learn to be resilient and move forward and not spend all your time looking back you know, look at what you have in your hands right now, and how can you use that? What kind of tools do you possess right now? how can you move forward with the tools that you have? What's the next right thing that you need to do?

It does not appear that there was formal training in place to work at the center; rather, both full-time staff members are employees of the overhead organization, a religion-based non-profit intended to serve county residents living in poverty. When asked to elucidate upon his qualifications for the position, Mr. Michelsen said that his own decade-long incarceration in the Texas Department of Criminal Justice provides him unique insight into the reentry process.

Having gone through that process myself kind of gives me a unique perspective because I kind of understand what it's like inside, or on the other side of those bars, and I know what it's gonna be like when they walk out the door. I know what it's gonna be like the first thirty, sixty, ninety, one-hundred eighty days. I never tell clients I know how they feel because I don't. I'm not living in their skin. But I do know what they're gonna face because I faced the same barriers and obstacles myself. So a lot of the knowledge, a lot of the resources that I help clients with now I have had to use myself, and the strategies to employ those resources and what you have to do to keep moving forward. So it's not just the knowledge based on theory but based on practical application in my own life and also in working with other people who are formally incarcerated and learning from them too.

Soon after his release, he originally came to work at a reentry center through a Department of Labor program that employed people 55 years and older. The former director

gradually adapted Mr. Michelsen's duties from primarily administrative to more community engagement:

After a few months working as a SAR participant—mainly as a receptionist and things that were more clerical and office related—[the former director] began to utilize me more in the role of going out and learning about other agencies finding out about resources, doing research, finding out what was available out there, contacting housing providers to see if they were still operating and making sure that all the resources we had were current and up to date.

Reflective of the common experiences of formerly incarcerated persons seeking work, the shift from becoming a part-time employee of one program to the part-time employee of a different agency to a full-time employee of the center's overhead organization was organic and nonlinear; employment was not guaranteed. Rather than a standard resume and interview approach, his continued employment was dependent on the reputation Mr. Michelsen acquired over time.

When I began with the program, I was limited to about 17 hours a week of training time, but I was here often a lot longer than that. But I was working for free beyond 17 hours...even then the stipend that they paid me... was only minimum wage, \$7.25 an hour, so that's what I lived on.... I had to figure out how I could pay my bills, pay my rent. I had to sell plasma to make ends meet so I could keep afloat, so I am able to look a client in the eye and say 'look, I understand that this may be a very small step that you're taking here, this opportunity may be a very small opportunity but it...just depends on what you make of it'. It's given me a lot of credibility with my clients.



When the former director left the center, the CEO of the overhead organization asked him to remain due to his experience and knowledge of local resources. This experience shaped Mr. Michelsen's belief in the necessity of networking to achieve success in reintegration, and why "who you know" matters.

**Client base.** The center is located in a collection of offices and buildings that include a sheriff's department, veteran services, and various other resource providers. It is not somewhere individuals simply stumble into, meaning that they usually learn about the center while either at a nearby agency or through outreach efforts by center staff. The researcher asked Mr. Michelsen to explain how individuals came to the center:

The majority of people that return to [the county] are on some kind of supervision, generally its parole. Every month, there is a program here called Project Safe Neighborhood that is...a parole mandated program for all people returning to [the county]. And there are also a number of probationers there that its mandated for, so each month that program hosts about 300-350 participants. And that's every month. So the center has a small segment of time in that program to present to those folks about our agency, about what we do and how we serve people. So every parolee that comes home to [the county] with almost no exceptions hears about the center... telling them were open and what they need to do to access us. Now, not everybody that is there will come, but a lot of the people that are there will, and we get plenty of people that are referred to us from their individual parole officer or probation officer. We do get people that hear about us while they're in TDCJ. TDCJ now has a pretty robust reentry division within

that agency and so they have reentry case managers that are assigned to the various units, and I've been on the phone with a lot of those case managers.

Project Safe Neighborhood is a Department of Justice initiative where local, state, and national law enforcement agencies come together to target particular crime problems in a region. In Texas, various PSN divisions are named after the city their jurisdiction lies within. The city where the center resides has utilized their PSN program not only to target concentrated regions of criminal activity, but has also invited local reentry resource providers, churches, and family services agencies to attend these meetings in an effort to bring the reduction of recidivism to the forefront of the agenda of each participating organization. Parolees are required to attend this monthly session, and various reentry resource agencies can send representatives to inform the parolees of their services. This is why so many of the clients at the center are parolees; they are made aware of the center by staff in a meeting hosted in the same building. Probationers are not normally required to attend this monthly session, but their probation officer may recommend that they attend. No agency requires released individuals to become a client of the center, meaning that the client base is subject to the influence of some selection bias. Mr. Michelsen is additionally certified as a TDCJ volunteer, and he provides support to mentors working with inmates monthly. Infrequently if an individual serving time is in need of a mentor, he will meet with them but primarily this is time he spent interacting with the mentors and reentry managers, informing them about the center and its services.

The researcher was additionally interested in the coordinator-client relationship beyond the first meeting. Mr. Michelsen described how individuals who become clients utilize the center over time:

Many clients make many trips back here and it's not always just a one-off thing where they come in, they get resources, they go out. A lot of times they run into speed bumps along the way and I always tell them all you have to do is just come by or call me. And let me know what's going on because if I can I'm gonna help you get unstuck. You know many of them take me up on that so that's a good thing. I really do always ask clients how things are going, if they're successful or if they're running into problems I want to know. And a lot of them do that. I get letters from men and women all over the state of Texas that are currently incarcerated. I'm a certified TDCJ volunteer. I can go into the prisons and present information about the center. So we get quite a bit of mail and I respond to everybody and try to get them the answers that they need, and what they can expect"... "My going into the prison has generated a lot of referrals...I'd say probably the majority of the referrals come through the parole system, whether through project safe neighborhood or through the parole officers.

There is no outreach designed to target the local jail population, which is problematic since the county funds the center in order to prevent recidivism, which tends to cost the county since people are sent to the local jail regardless of the previous incarceration facility, they served in.

The center's mission to reduce recidivism by connecting clients to local resources meant Mr. Michelsen primarily provided referrals to employment and housing opportunities, as well as transportation resources. Employment and housing are considered by local government agencies to have the most effect on reintegration, and that attainment of both allows an individual to become a self-reliant, contributing member of society rather than defined by a criminal

background and dependent on assistance services long-term. The intake form in place at the center did not produce a risk profile for each client. However, Mr. Michelsen did describe elements of risks and needs identification in order to refer clients to resources that will have the most direct impact on their reintegration. This way, instead of clients becoming frustrated despite continued effort to attain housing or employment and making little headway, Mr. Michelsen could provide them with referrals most closely aligned to their needs such as addiction services as well as risks, such as barriers due to type of offense. Another aspect of his role was to personally reach out to resource providers and social service agents he has personally cultivated relationships with to the benefit of a client:

Sometimes I may contact an agency provider or person in that agency to help smooth the way for that client to get there—help them understand the process or the steps they might need to take to get what they need ultimately because many times it’s a multi-step process. Somebody comes in, and they don’t have a valid Texas ID or driver’s license, they don’t have a social security card, they don’t have a birth certificate. All of those are critical documents that they need to be able to move forward. They want to go to work but they can’t till they get the documents so there’s an order that things have to be done in...Any given day a client walks in and you never know what kinda presentation they’re gonna make as far as the needs they have. No two of them are alike.

Employment and housing are two heavily researched factors considered protective against crime in varying degrees. However, getting a job or an apartment is not simply a matter of sending a person to a facility with an opening. Rather, Mr. Michelsen took into account the types of offense-based barriers an individual may have, their previous work history, and what

type of housing assistance they may qualify for. Local resource reentry services do not only mean programs that increase job skills, but information about how to navigate social services bureaucracies, such as signing up for welfare and attaining personal critical documents. Since critical documents are necessary for the employment and housing referrals that he provides to clients, Mr. Michelsen familiarized himself with the most efficient order in which clients should set about collecting copies of those documents. Sometimes these agencies may take a while to process information and frustrate clients who consider a hold-up for a critical document the only barrier between themselves and a job or qualifying for housing. Mr. Michelsen mentioned that it is not uncommon for individuals released from incarceration to feel cynical towards other governmental institutions as well, but it is often necessary for these very individuals to interact with agents from various departments in order to access factors that may contribute significantly toward reintegration, such as employment and housing. Reentry is not normally a linear process, and individuals may feel overwhelmed at how urgent every activity appears to be. A person must find a place to stay, a steady income, and documents that establish their eligibility for both. Perhaps that same individual also spends time applying for welfare assistance and maintaining good standing with a community corrections officer. Each of these tasks is vital to their success on the outside, even if simply because failure to achieve any one of them is a violation of their release. Having gone through a reentry process himself and almost immediately begin working on the other side of the desk, Mr. Michelsen is uniquely positioned to provide guidance and empower clients with the realities of the reentry process to lessen their feelings of helplessness and confusion. Remarking on the interconnectedness of urgent needs, he stated:

The three big barriers that people coming home from jail or prison face are employment, housing, and transportation...Now obviously there are a lot of other things that go along with that; healthcare...critical documents that they might need, different kinds of social service agencies that provide other kinds of needs but those are generally secondary to the three big ones. So probably the biggest of those are gonna be employment. People need to be able to generate an income as soon as possible after release because if they're not living in a halfway house that's state funded, then they are having to depend on family or friends or couch surfing or other things just to have a roof over their heads...Part of...my job here is to present them with the options that are currently available given their set of circumstances and help them understand this isn't the ideal. I understand that living in a homeless shelter is not the ideal situation for you but its far better than living on the street, because you face much increased risk if your homeless and it's unfortunate, but it's the reality. So we try to take people where they are and help get them plugged into the resources they need, but also understand that this isn't permanent; this is a transition. Part of it is just helping to ground them in reality.

The center also provides transportation resources. In addition to irregular access to means of communication, a lack of transportation contributes to difficulties clients have in reaching resource providers. Currently, the county issues a set quantity of day bus passes to be distributed to clients on an annual basis. At this time, center policy allows clients to receive five day bus passes at their initial meeting and additional passes after thirty days. If they provide the coordinator with verification of employment or enrollment in a vocational program, they can then receive additional passes. Besides bus passes, the center has an ongoing relationship with a

transportation navigator who provides clients with information about accessing means of getting around for individuals with disabilities or special needs beyond simply the bus system. In addition, a formerly incarcerated person and current owner of a local mechanic shop provides clients with deals and payment plans for cars he purchased at auctions and fixes for resale.

Mr. Michelsen said that he felt encouraged by the director to provide feedback and bring up alternative solutions to problems he encountered in the course of performing his job duties. Since there are only two full-time staff, the relationship between the two has elements characterizing a partnership rather than strictly an employer-employee, and Mr. Michelsen is frequently consulted and participates in decision-making aspects of center operations. He describes the relationship in the following way:

Sometimes I'm very 'down in the weeds' so to speak with the client situation, and it's hard to have a perspective—a good perspective—but [Mr. Adams], because he's a little bit removed from that, he has sometimes a clearer picture of what needs to happen. So he's a great resource to have here.

Because he is an employee of the overhead organization that operates the center, the researcher asked about his perception of the organization and how the management style affected the ease with which he could accomplish his work.

They're very supportive...I resonate with the mission statement to help other people and to help other organizations help other people.....Our CEO has said that his management style is to hire really good people and then stay out of their way. And he does that, it's not just something he says. Whatever we need to do here, as long as we're getting the results that we're getting, they give us a lot of freedom to implement and make changes

and adapt because it's a very fluid kind of world that we live in, with the client base that we work with. So not being so rigid and bureaucratic is really a wonderful thing. And [the overhead organization] is that kind of agency, and even though they didn't necessarily provide me the formal training so much as it was kind of life lessons.

Similarly in his own interview, the director of the center stated, "I really like working with him [the CEO]. He's like, 'Okay, just leave them alone'." The employees each appreciate the benefits of the hands-off leadership style; the CEO appeared to hire competent individuals with experience in working with reentering populations, a specific subgroup of vulnerable individuals the overhead organization intends to serve. The staff are free to represent the center in pursuit of activities and networks that benefit the client base with minimal bureaucratic intervention. However, as Mr. Michelsen stated, this freedom is dependent on "results", which until a recently formed relationship with a county analyst, the center was unable to quantify outside of increasing numbers of clients. That is a recent development intended to determine if the success that staff perceives the center to have achieved is statistically supported. It is unclear how or if the CEO's management style would change should center clients recidivate as frequently or more than the general population of returning individuals. The interpretation of recidivism rates would benefit by context offered by client feedback, which is not currently nor consistently available.

In sum, the interview data suggest that Mr. Michelsen perceived his job to be instrumental in the achievement of a mission set forth by an organization he found to be legitimate. Overall, his descriptions of relationships with the center director and the CEO were



positive. The researcher then focused on expanding outward, on relationship formation and maintenance with local resource providers.

**Relationship foundation and maintenance.** The purpose of establishing relationships with other agencies is ultimately to benefit clients by increasing the selection of resources that someone may be referred to that the client may otherwise have never known about. The center itself is the result of collaboration between the county government and local reentry and assistance organizations. The importance of interagency collaborations and professional networks are vital to the reentry coordinator's role. Hypothetically, the more resource referrals that Mr. Michelsen can provide clients with, the more seamless the reentry process becomes for clients who come to the center soon after release, provided with means for transportation and tasks organized in the most efficient order to achieve employment and housing. When asked about how the functions of his job centered around increasing knowledge density and strengthening relationships with local organizations, a few elements key to his outreach success became clear. One was simply the proximity of other agencies, since the center is purposefully located within a compound of service providers.

We have such a tremendous network of resources. Besides myself and [Mr. Adams], we also have people from workforce solutions in our office that are part of the BEST program, people that are ... Pathfinders are next door, so those are two additional agencies that I have very close connections with that provide services to clients.

For other local agencies, he described the resource databases he accesses. At the time of the interview, there was a full rolodex of business cards on his desk.

I do have quite a few connections with people inside the agencies. We have a very large database of contact names and phone numbers. it's very easy to get ahold of people if I have a question...it's very easy for me to pick up a phone and call one of our housing providers and tell them about a client that I have, and ask them 'do you have a vacancy?' and get them connected with housing you know, just that quickly and easily. All that has come about though because we have such a good working relationship with the providers of resources and that's a very valuable thing. For me it is. And I really do honor that kind of relationship, so I really do try to take the info that they provide me seriously when I make a referral to them...I ask what kind of background offenses, what age of client would [they] prefer to have living there, and when I'm screening clients I have that info running in the background in my mind. That way when I make contact with that housing provider, I can tell them I've spoken to this person and [know] that they meet their minimum requirements, so they're gonna get good solid referrals from us and it's not gonna waste their time, not gonna waste the client's time and create more stress.

One of the most important origin points for many of these relationships is the county's Reentry Coalition. Coalition members are representatives from various reentry agencies across the county. A meeting involving as many providers as possible is beneficial since a single individual likely visits multiple agencies for assistance. Mr. Michelsen or Mr. Adams or both attend these monthly meetings. The coalition runs a website that provides information about member agencies organized according to need: there is a page for veteran services, juvenile resources, reentry services, and mental health services among others. Mr. Michelsen and Mr. Adams sit on the committee for reentry services and evaluate agencies that request membership

according to various criteria such as non-profit status. For instance, people recently released from incarceration do not usually have the funds to pay for services, so an agency that would charge clients may not be a good fit. This puts Mr. Michelsen and Mr. Adams in positions where they are aware of new and incoming reentry services nearly as soon as they arrive and can engage in professional relationships early on.

Because I sit on that governance committee along with [Mr. Adams] for the prisoner reentry module, I get those requests for inclusion by other agencies, and I have to make sure that they meet the eligibility requirements for the website portal. And if they do, I have to go a little but further and get to know the agency a little bit and find out a little bit about them, so a lot of times, that involves making phone calls or sending emails, looking at their website and learning what I can about that agency before I give them the thumbs up or the thumbs down on the inclusion on the network of care website...And if I have questions about an organization, especially if it's listed in the 211 system, then I know [211] is just a phone call away. Same with the [county] Homeless Coalition...Clients are from some of the homeless shelters here in [the county] that are ready for a more permanent housing so they send us referrals all the time...There are no fees to join the coalition or dues, it's just a matter of filling out the applications and participating and contributing to the coalition's mission and the reentry community as whole...it's not a difficult process so people find that on the website. Invitations are sent out via email to a lot of organizations...not everybody that is a member of the coalition comes to every meeting, so the meetings tend to—we have about thirty, forty, fifty people most every meeting, and there's always great topics that are brought up and a lot of good

networking...word has gotten out not only about the center but about the reentry coalition in [the county] so we get a lot of interested folks that are there and want to find out more about it and want to become more involved in it.

While organizations can approach the coalition for membership, the coalition members also advertise the monthly meetings to any potentially interested agency as well as the general public. The researcher was unable to attend because of cancellations due to concerns about the spread of Covid-19. While initial awareness of organizations may come about initially because of his role on the coalition's committee, Mr. Michelsen follows up with agencies considered a good fit in his role as reentry coordinator at the center. This way, professional networks are not wholly reliant on membership in the coalition but are strengthened by unification under a broad mission. In order to establish a positive relationship with an organization, he takes into account their service specialties and the eligibility needed to become a participant.

We have employers that will contact us, and housing providers now who will contact us, and let us know that they would like to serve formerly incarcerated people. So my job then is to meet them to understand how their agency or process works so that way I can make the best referrals. So a lot—some may be the result of stumbling across a particular agency or organization, or a client may come in and say, 'hey did you know about these guys?' And I'll say, 'no didn't, educate me'. So I'll learn some of the clients that come in may have stumbled upon a job and they want us to know that who they're working for will hire, so my job is to reach out to that employer and let them know that I'd be happy to send them qualified people, just tell me what qualifies somebody...so I get to know the most that I can know about that agency or organization and who they serve, how they

serve them, and how best to get them connected to that agency so that way the referrals that I make are the right kind of referrals.

Mr. Michelsen discussed why he attends the graduation ceremonies of reentry programs he is frequently invited to, such as Bridges for Life. This is an excellent example of the relationship maintenance he engages in with agents from other reentry resource providers and programs, fostering positive and open communication and support of each other's similar missions. Regarding the benefits of this trust and sense of investment in the success of other agencies, Mr. Michelsen described the advocacy he is able to provide clients:

It's easy to pick up the phone. In the employment and the housing realm... [Mr. Adams] and I are...putting together consortium of housing providers and employers, bringing them together to help understand that they each have the solution for the other. People have a hard time finding good stable employment if they aren't adequately housed, but they can get adequately housed unless they have good steady employment, good income. So how do we knock down those barriers? If somebody's background is the only thing standing in the way of getting good housing what do we need to do? How can we help mitigate that? It may mean vetting those clients, finding out from the housing provider, 'what are your stipulations?' And then making sure that when somebody comes in that we are finding that out from the client, and we make sure that if we send them to that housing provider, we know they've met that housing provider's minimal requirements.

It is crucial to Mr. Michelsen that he provide referrals based on the best possible fit.

Firstly, Mr. Michelsen provides a client with a much-needed link on the path toward reintegration, and the referral source receives a new client. In addition, a successful referral

experience can increase the likelihood that an agent from another organization will respond positively if Mr. Michelson personally vouches for a client. Beyond that, Mr. Michelsen operates according to a tenet to humanize his clients. To him, they are people who committed a crime, but still deserve help in overcoming criminal identities that shape so much of their return to regular life. As Mr. Michelsen expands the center's resource network, agencies and organizations that interact with him can begin or continue to view clients as individuals in need of assistance and desirous of authentic change, rather than unalterable offenders. This humanization is evident in the coaching method, which stresses personal responsibility and resilience.

Since decreasing recidivism is the mission of the center, placing clients in jobs and homes is the foremost strategy implemented by center staff. Mr. Michelsen's position should implement this strategy by referring individuals to individual openings and by ensuring the eligibility of clients for these opportunities. At this time, the center does not track placement information and does not have a way to follow up with organizations referred to or clients referred out, so the success of these referrals is purely anecdotal at this stage. Other position objectives include outreach to local organizations, the maintenance of professional relationships, client interviews, and client advocacy. In order to set clients up for successful reintegration, he familiarized himself with local resource providers—primarily landlords, treatment facility operators, employers, and social service agents—formed personal relationships maintained with regular contact to ensure he was aware of barrier factors or required criteria. Through an interview process intended to identify the unique needs and risks of a client, he was then able to consult his directories and generate an individualized list of various referrals to local resources that clients can then utilize. Theoretically, this means returning individuals spend less time in

limbo scrambling to find an income or a place to live and can more rapidly shift their identities into those of taxpaying, law-abiding citizens rather than offenders. Being invested in societal norms, such as providing for yourself or your family through licit employment and having a home are considered to be ties to prosocial values and behaviors. While the center is not organized according to any theoretical framework, the intended benefits of client status represent the impact of social control on normative attachments and prosocial socialization. The center is intended to reduce recidivism and increase reintegration by streamlining the reentry experience. When asked what improvements in process or practice the center should enact, Mr. Michelsen immediately identified additional staff:

I see the clients primarily but I also have to do data entry, inter-case records, handle minor emergencies that come up, be the office administrator...So some days I feel pulled in many directions... it would be nice to have some more full time or at least part time staff to be able to eliminate some of that so I can focus more on simply helping the client also getting out and discovering new agencies and resources that are there.

Currently, there is not a clear timeframe for receiving the funds necessary to hire additional staff. Mr. Michelsen trained the rotating part-time employees who perform clerical duties through the same employment program he completed. He lamented the lack of client follow-up, stating that previous attempt to implement surveys—including previous attempts through research projects at nearby universities—resulted in very little participant feedback. Contact information changes quickly and is rarely updated once invalid. In Mr. Michelsen's experience, clients rarely return to the center unless they are in need of additional assistance.

Part of the reason that individual client feedback is so important is because there is not a better way to determine how effective clients perceive the center to be or gauge the quality of referrals. Even recidivism data is limited to rearrests within the county since the center staff and county analyst only have permissions to access the county database and sometimes parole violations of clients when provided by the unit supervisor, who was unable to provide parolee data for this study. To collect client feedback, Mr. Michelsen would not require permission from an additional agency. He found that the lack of additional hands makes it impossible to track client feedback with his current workload. As for the future of the organization, he is positive that the center will continue to positively impact clients and improve data collection methods:

It would be great if there was some type of shared platform here in [the county] where if I make a referral... that that client could be tracked by all the agencies serving that client...I know the tech is there, but I don't know how achievable that goal is. But to me that would be a great way to follow a client through this maze of resources and so if I send them to an agency that I know they've gone there I know what the outcome of that referral was.

**Supervisor responsibilities.** The second interview was completed with center director Mr. Adams. The researcher wanted to understand the significance of the center's location, specifically why the county the center operates in had been selected. Mr. Adams said that support for reentry initiatives from high ranking officials had long been the norm.

[The commissioner] has always been a champion...for the reentry population for as long as I can remember, working back with Workforce. He's always involved himself with the reentry community, helping individuals get back on their feet, helping individuals register



to vote...the commissioners court are the ones who really birthed having something here...I'm sure there's a need in every county but most definitely because of those individuals already here.

When asked to define the mission of the center, he stated the following:

To uncover every related resource in [the county], what's available for returning individuals and families, social workers...we are a community resource management center. We manage the resources in the community, making sure resources are made available to individuals whether they're coming back from prison or jail. individuals who are released, instead of going all over town to different agencies, searching for different resources and agencies, they can just come to the center...and we should have those resources either on hand, email, phone numbers, something to put in their hand...something that will assist them with their transition.

Mr. Adams focused primarily on efficiency. To him, released individuals should be able to come to the center and from there receive information on every resource available to them based on their circumstances in order to turn around and utilize them, and successful placement reflects on the efficiency of the staff in identifying and addressing needs. He described his job primarily in the collection and presentation of data and numbers from the center in order for the center to continue to function.

Since 2017 we've had this many people, this is the recidivism rate, this is how many people have gotten employed, people that have found housing, count of individuals that have retained their jobs in two years or six months. So having the info ready to present to my CEO, to... present to [the] commissioner, or whoever may request it, that's my

role...my role as the director is to make sure we create relevance, that we are relevant in the community. Develop relationships to meet with employers, to meet with city leaders, to meet with our local officials and share with them what's going on...build relationships...and provide awareness ,which we have done... of the biggest parts of my position is creating opportunity and developing relationships...so that the county sees the value of keep funding this. This thing is valuable, a valuable need in the community.

Regarding his qualifications for the position, he had come to the center after working for Workforce Services as a special projects manager for approximately nine years. He primarily managed board-initiated issues concerning vulnerable populations. In fact, the CEO of the center's overhead organization knew of Mr. Adams in that previous role through a project to alleviate homelessness. Mr. Adams characterized his leadership styles as oriented around producing synergy and promoting service to others above all. In this he found common ground with the CEO of the overhead organization. In his role as director, he continued to lead diversity and inclusion trainings across the state with several organizations—not all related to local government or even reentry. He considers his professional skills in presentation and staff development to have been transferred quite readily to his current position.

When I came on board in 2017, I met with every reentry organization in the county to share with them what we could do if we partnered. How we could leverage relationships, leverage funding...instead of looking at what I had and saying we aren't going to be able to do this, I looked at other avenues of how we could get it done. So I met with the [Texas Offenders Reentry Initiative] and the Redemption Bridge and the Unlocking Doors and

other organizations and sat down with them and said, 'hey this is what we could do...if we partnered and worked together.'

**Strategies for collaboration.** He was also responsible for networking, but his approach appeared to be more business-like, task-oriented compared to Mr. Michelsen's approach. For Mr. Adams, leveraging relationships meant unifying specialized resources from various providers to accomplish a larger goal. He elaborated on the concept of competition among local agencies, and why the center thrives in a setting with more providers and more resources rather than less:

Sometimes you'll run into competition. I don't see that a lot with us because we don't need numbers in order to function. Were pretty much TC's hub. Although the numbers are benefitting...but were not in competition...that's what helps us extend our reach a little further because when we reach out to work with other organizations were gonna refer to you anyway. So we don't case manage. We don't have individuals that come we, we don't meet with them time and time and time again like a case manager would. Were gonna refer to all those agencies anyway so it's a benefit for that agency to connect with us one because....were one of the only organizations able to go into project safe neighborhood and present to all those agencies so we'll get a chance to let all those individuals that are there know of the service providers that were working with at the same time were working with the county and now were working with the city. So it would just benefit the other agencies to partner and work with us because we are providing more exposure... in markets they weren't in before.

Mr. Michelsen's role is based on one-on-one sessions, while Mr. Adams focuses on larger events where more people can attend and participate. To unify as many individuals with

employment opportunities as possible, Mr. Adams coordinates with local employers, resource providers, and government agencies within the county and the city to host job fairs every year.

He described the creative process as follows:

It's really based on a radio show I used to have before I went back to school ...called Continuing the Climb where I just interviewed different individuals from different walks: politicians, clergy, entertainment about their climb and how they got to where they were and what I would do with that is I would pull the principles out of the story, the commitment, the consistency, the endurance, showing the audience that regardless of who you are, what your race is, your gender your background, no one gets to the next level without exercising these principles. Everyone's gonna have to be disciplined or consistent or maybe have a belief so that was the idea...we wanted to tag this job fair with that same principle in mind that regardless of what has happened to you you're not gonna get to the next level unless you're committed your discipline unless you have resources...and relationships.

The events job fairs are advertised, and flyers handed out with color-coordinating codes according to certain prohibited offenses per employer. For example, some employers will not hire individuals with records of theft or sex offenses, and some employers will accept applications from people with violent felonies if the records are older than a certain number of years; each employer may have specific criteria for any offenses, and the guide makes it clear for participants which employers are most likely to accept an application or resume. Not only have more than 300 individuals been hired, but the benefits from the partnerships he laid the groundwork for in those initial meetings are made evident:

We're excited that we've been able to...create inclusivity.... that's the benefit of partnerships and relationships. That's the benefit of really going out and developing those relationships to leverage and provide resources...one of the things we look at is we talk about the service heart...it means that the heart keeps pumping out ideas...continues to prepare something to offer, to be of assistance and promote the interest of. Regardless of what resources you don't have, someone else may have them. And if you just develop that relationship with that organization or company, then whatever it is you're going after, eventually it will manifest.

To address housing needs, Mr. Adams with assistance from Mr. Michelsen are developing a housing consortium. In his own words, Mr. Adams describes this project as follows:

That's going to consist of landlord who own apartments or houses...housing, duplexes that will work with us in giving these individuals an opportunity. So what we're doing is saying okay, the only barrier to releasing or renting or buying with you is having a felony, how can we move past that? So what we've done is we've created a vetting system and these landlords, these providers accept this vetting system and once they accept it then once individuals come through our doors, if they haven't committed an offense in the last five years or are no longer on parole...or probation and since they've been off parole they haven't committed any new offenses they've been working at a job for the last 6 months or a year, so we'll create that once we vet them and the landlord can say 'okay, you've gone through this process, you've gone through the orientation, and they only thing you have now is a felony? Well we're still gonna lease to you'. So that's

what we're developing now, were working with one organization that has over 400 properties so that's gonna be a great benefit to what we're doing here in the county.

Evident here is the humanizing language also considered important to Mr. Michelson.

Mr. Adams sees the center as a structure of support and personal empowerment for released individuals seeking to align themselves with normative goals and values. To Mr. Adams, it is not enough to define an individual by their record but rather, by their willingness to work toward prosocial goals, in as many steps as that may take. The center does not ban clients from returning after a certain number of offenses. Rather, staff encourages clients to reach out and seek assistance when needed—it's a matter of offering another chance, not a just a second chance. Mr. Adams believes that when clients utilize resources provided to them and participate in prosocial activities such as working a licit job, these individuals can reshape previously held stigmas in employers and residents who have never been incarcerated. The stigma of a criminal record is harmful for individuals seeking to turn their lives around, and since clients come to the center of their own volition, he considered this to be evidence of a desire of authentic change. As an example, he mentioned to the researcher that city government positions where the center is located have enacted a "Ban-the-Box" policy. In this he sees the opportunity for government agencies to transform common rhetoric and frustration with continued recidivism into constructive action, further breaking down stereotypes within the community. As director, he considered it apart of his job to challenge stereotypes and stigma of criminal record, stating:

The employers...and city leaders that I work with...have a healthy perspective, they're able to see individuals in the reentry population and be able to identify...am I working with criminals? Or am I working with an individual who just committed a crime?

Because as we know as we talk so much here that not everybody who has committed a crime is a criminal, although law enforcement looks at them that way...they have to see everyone who has committed a crime as criminal, they have to categorize that way which is understandable. But the same time they understand that everyone who's committed a crime is not a criminal... we can leverage that idea if they start buying into that... if they haven't committed an offense in a number of years, if the offense isn't a violent offense—where I totally get you want to keep the community aware—but if it's not a violent offense, when and how long will they have to keep that on the record? If we're gonna give them a second chance when can they get a second chance?

In response to questions posed about his relationship with staff, Mr. Adams mentioned that he and Mr. Michelsen worked together more than strictly a superior-subordinate relationship, and that their personal backgrounds and experiences allowed for various perspectives to be brought to the table at any time.

Sometimes they can't see past [their] relationship or connection with the reentry community—I've been there, I'm such an advocate for you, I can't see past that connection. So maybe that's where I come in, not having a background, never having been incarcerated. With my team I'm able to share with them a different perspective with the reentry community because they can share with me how they're actually feeling, this is what they're engaged in, and I can share with them maybe the perspective from our leadership and the laws and maybe what's coming down the pipe.

**Perceptions of success.** director also perceived the center to be effective in reducing recidivism among clients, stating:

I think we're on pace, we've really exceeded a lot of goals on the logic model. Were excited we're exceeding them with just the minimal resources that we have...because we're able to show the county that for individuals coming through our doors were making this impact.

However, since the logic model does not establish timeframes or projected client populations and job or housing placements, it is unclear which goals have been exceeded. He confirmed that there was no timeline by which the model could be replaced with something other than a "pilot" format. This may be due to the fact that not every output or outcome on the model has been operationalized, therefore making formal confirmation of achievement impossible at the time of this study. Like Mr. Michelsen, Mr. Adams laments a lack of manpower. In particular, he would like to see the processes for critical documents provided in-house rather than general guidance as is available now. In addition, he would like to implement employer education sessions that address concerns about hiring individuals with records. As for more tangible and immediate goals, he discussed the interrelated nature of employment, transportation, and housing, with particular emphasis on the relationship between homelessness and increased likelihood of recidivism:

We're on course to expand in the areas that we target which are the big three: transportation, housing, and employment.... creating a housing consortium...increasing our employer consortium. Hiring an individual who will be a community liaison coordinator. That person will be responsible for knowing all of the resources in the community and keeping us connected with it as well as with transportation, being aware of all the diff avenues for transportation. But right now our big focus is on the housing



consortium, that's a big part of our initial goal that we're currently working on, we want to make sure that we have...landlords and organizations that will work with us on the second chance initiative because the housing piece of reentry is a direct result of recidivism in [the county]..and universally.

Within the center, he looks forward to viewing data collected after the expansion in October of 2019, so that placement data can be measured going forward:

We don't look at how many employers we have or how many landlords we have in our consortium we are measuring by placement. Based on the info we gave [the analyst] they came back and were able to show that [the center] has a 29% recidivism rate compared to [the county jail's] 61-63% recidivism rate. We like to contribute a lot of that to that housing and employment, so that's how we like to measure by individuals gaining employment with the employers we're working with and those individuals retaining that employment because if they are retaining that employment they aren't recidivating.

In his position as center director, Mr. Adams perceives the overarching mission of the center to reduce recidivism in the county and engage in active partnerships with local organizations and resources that serve vulnerable populations. As someone who has to view the proverbial larger picture, Mr. Adams recognizes that a person vulnerable because of a record may also be vulnerable to poverty due to housing instability or joblessness, which can affect individuals who have never been incarcerated. Any organization or provider that serves a vulnerable population can be approached for a collaborative relationship, and Mr. Adams' strategy to achieve the center's mission is to broker these individual relationships to create large-scale events and

interactions that seek to provide reentering individuals with the tools by which to become self-sufficient, and decrease the stigma of criminal backgrounds.

In the following section, the researcher performed a series of quantitative analyses of client data, offense data, and recidivism data for clients and the general county jail population.

### Results Part III: Quantitative Data Analyses

The analyses describe the demographic factors of center clients, their offense histories, and recidivism data. Data demographic features of the center's clients are based on client intakes during fiscal years 2018 and 2019, since the center organizes data by fiscal year for contractual purposes. The secondary analyses compare recidivism and offense data between clients and the general county jail population. These dates vary slightly from the standard two fiscal year period according to data availability.

From October 1, 2017 through September 30, 2019, center staff logged 1,554 client intakes. No intake data was available in December 2017, January 2018, February 2018, or April 2018. These client records are missing due to transfer failures from the old client database to the system that replaced it.

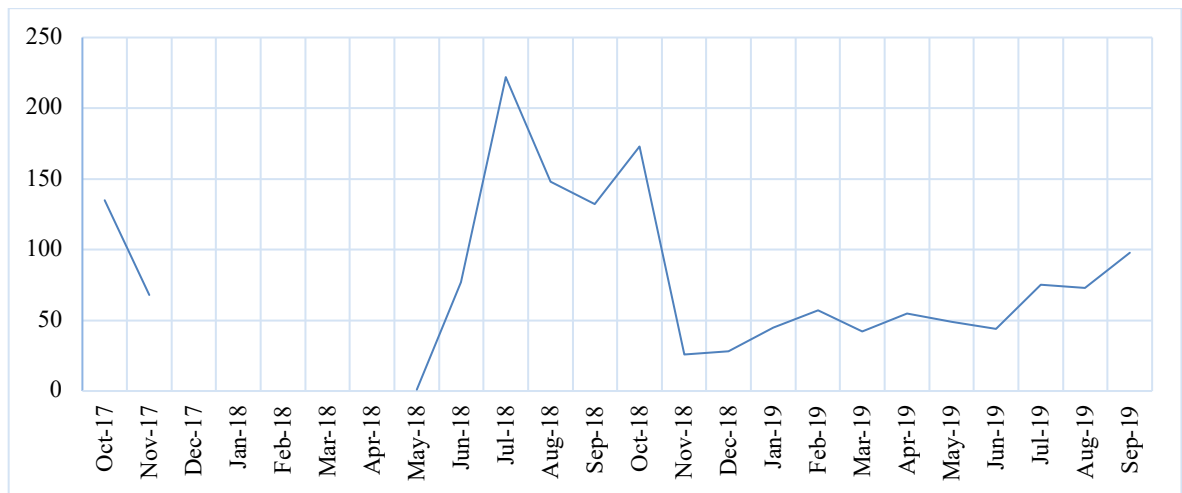


Figure 2. Client intakes by month, FY2018-2019.

Figure 2 displays intake data by month, showing peak rates in July of 2018 at approximately 225 client intakes, followed by a second peak in October of 2018 at nearly 175 intakes. After a steep dip to nearly 30 intakes in November of 2018, monthly intakes have continued to increase slightly. This coincides with TDCJ release data from that period displayed

in Figure 3; statewide, an average of 3,100 individuals were released to parole between May and August of 2018 (TDCJ Executive Services, 2019). Fewer individuals were discharged from state prisons than were released on parole, averaging approximately 537 prison discharges between May and August of 2018, and an average of 16 individuals were sentenced to probation each month between May and August (TDCJ Executive Services, 2019). Overall, this indicates that parolees made up the largest share of individuals released from TDCJ facilities and this may affect the number of incoming clients who indicated that their last place of incarceration was a state prison.

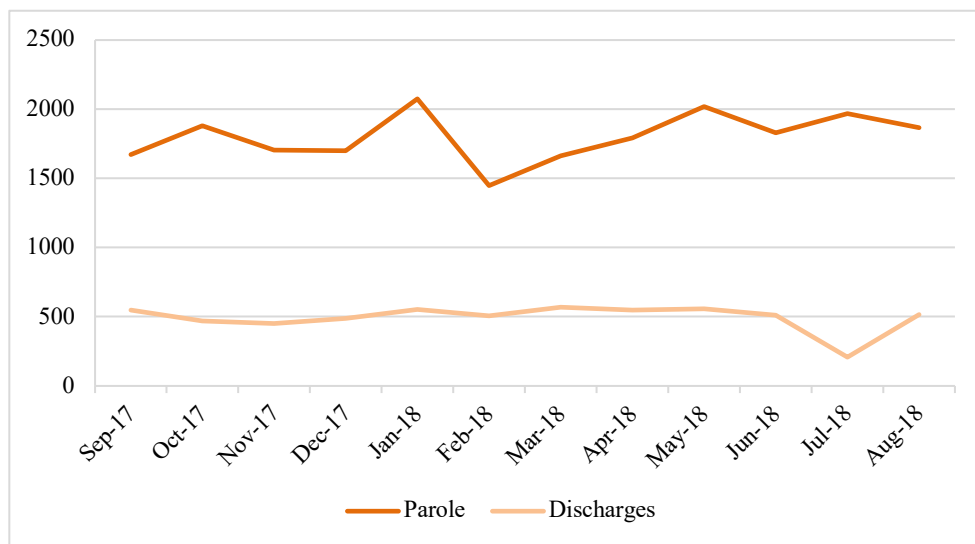


Figure 3. TDCJ releases in FY2018.

Without a data-sharing relationship in place with agents from TDCJ, it is unclear how many of these individuals returned to the Research County at release. According to a report from the Texas Department of Criminal Justice, a total of 41,400 persons were released from state prison during fiscal year 2018 (TDCJ Executive Services, 2019). Nearly 12,000 (nearly 29%) were Black, and almost 14,500 (nearly 35%) were White. Even across the entire releasee

population of approximately 65,110 (including state prison, state jail, and substance abuse felony programs), these proportions did not vary greatly; nearly 38% were White and 28% were Black. Neither the center nor TDCJ collected specific data about white non-Hispanics, so comparisons between data categories may be more appropriate between the center and TDCJ data rather than the center and the Census. Hispanics made up approximately 36% of the TDCJ total released population compared to only 18% of clients at the center. Almost half of the center's clients are white. Compared to less than 20% of the overall county population, almost one-third of center clients are black; this proportion is more similar to the state prison population than to the county where the center resides.

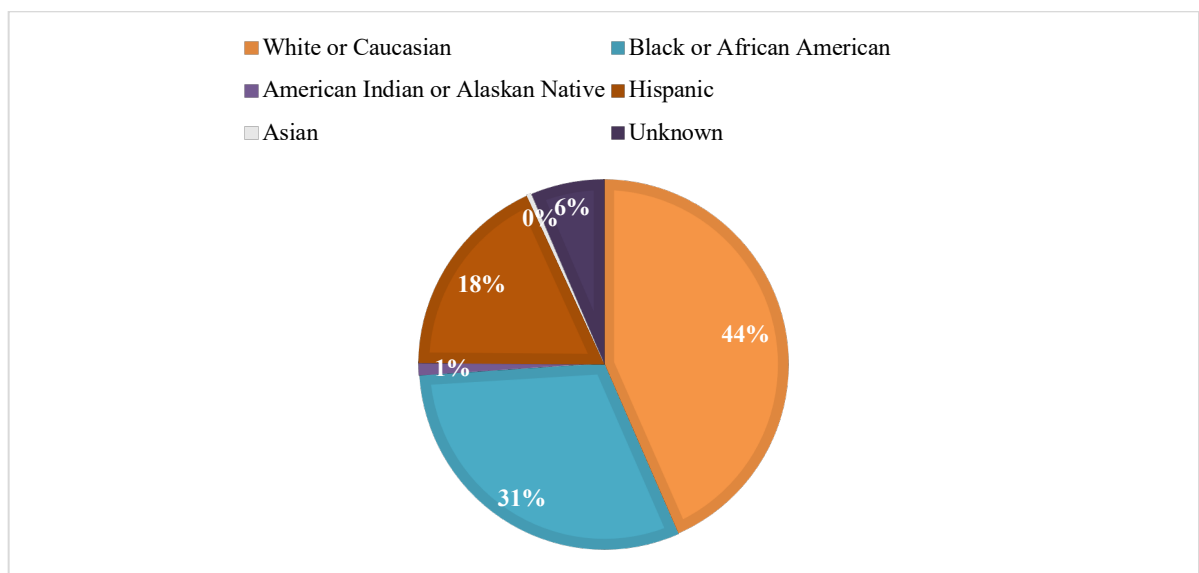


Figure 4. Race/ethnicity of clients FY2018-2019.

White clients were overrepresented in the first year of the study period, representing 67% of client intakes from October 2017 through December 2017. From January 2019 through October 2019, nearly 30% of individuals who became clients identified as Hispanic as seen in

Figure 4. This may be due to increased referrals from partner agencies, as outreach efforts have not expanded past parolee-centered events.

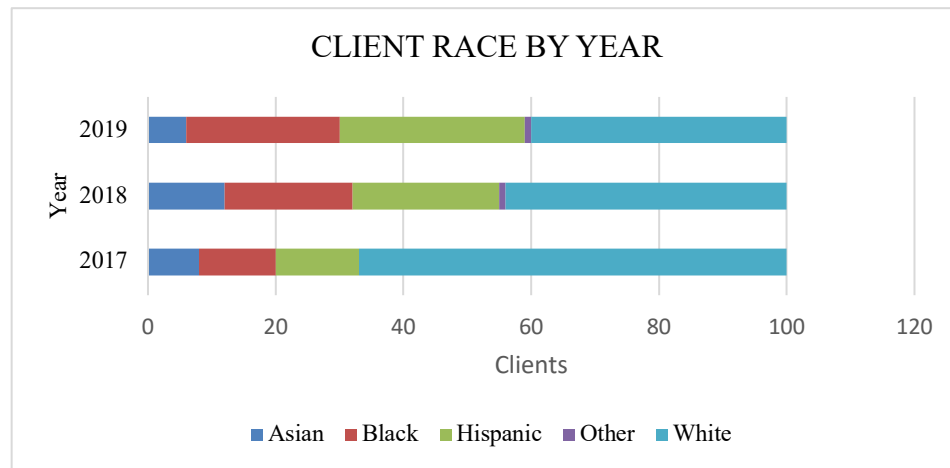


Figure 5. Client race/ethnicity by year.

The next demographic factor of interest was gender. Just over half of county residents are female, but only 15% of clients at the center are female. Incoming parolees are required to attend a reentry orientation session at the main parole office in the county—held twice weekly for men, only one session per month is provided for women. However, intake data did not consistently reflect significantly more male clients coming to the center than women. Four months in 2018 (July, August, September, and October) saw large increases in size of the men’s client base, as shown in Figure 7. This may be due to particularly high release rates, or community events that provided more exposure than usual. Historically, literature has found that men consistently offender and reoffend more often than women, but it is unclear if the proportions would change should outreach targeting particular release populations occur.

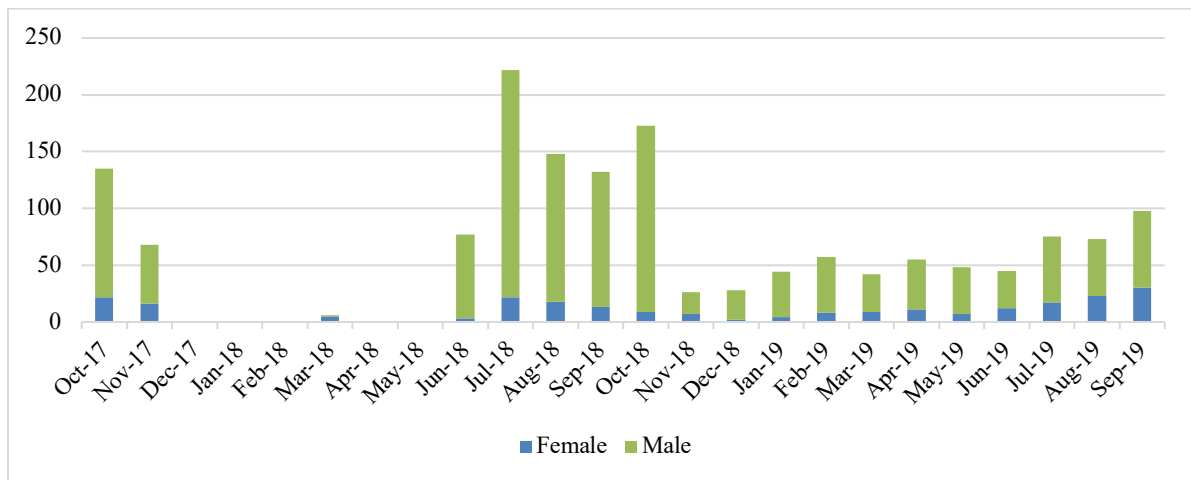


Figure 6. Client intake by gender FY2018-2019.

Next, client age at the intake date is examined (shown in Figure 7). The age brackets were created to match those used in TDCJ publications documenting the number of intakes, releases, and on-hand populations in state correctional facilities. This format will be useful for center staff should a relationship form with a representative from TDCJ who can provide access to arrest and incarceration data in state facilities for future evaluations. For the two-year study period, clients who were between the ages of 31 and 40 at intake make up nearly 28% of all clients. This is reasonable given the majority of clients were released from prison either fully discharged or on parole; according to the most recent TDCJ statistical report, 40% of more than 40,000 individuals released from prison in fiscal year 2018 served between three- and five-year sentences, and nearly 22% served six to ten years (TDCJ Executive Services, 2019). According to the age-crime curve, an empirical staple of criminological theories, individuals who commit crimes peak in late adolescence but continue through their mid-twenties. It is therefore reasonable to assume that at least some of the center's clients followed this trajectory. The average sentence length at conviction for an individual released from TDCJ was seven years, but the average time actually served was four years (TDCJ Executive Services, 2019). When both

brackets for ages ranging from 21 to 30 are combined, those 368 clients make up almost one-fourth of all client intakes. Approximately 24% of the individuals released from prison served two-year sentences. There was a total of 69 client records that did not have a birthdate and were excluded from this analysis.

There were 23 clients aged between 18 and 20 years at intake, but only five had most recently been incarcerated in the Texas Juvenile Justice Department (see Figure 7). These clients may have come to the center after release in order to access resources that would decrease the risk of continued criminal involvement, since it is likely that the next facility would be an adult correctional site. It is unknown how these comparatively young individuals came to know of the center, and if perhaps family members sought out the center's services on their behalf.

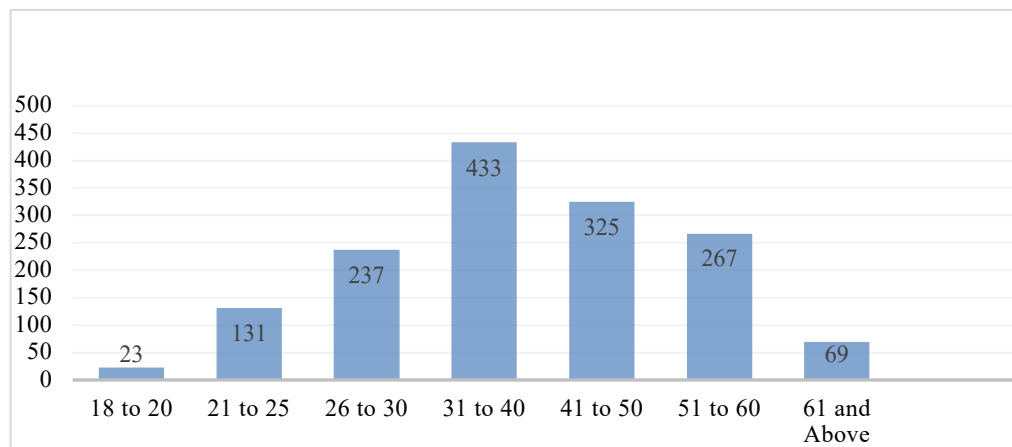


Figure 7. Client ages FY2018-2019.

A useful indication of the mobility of center clients is the fact that only 4 clients were last incarcerated in county jails outside of Research County as shown in Figure 8. Proportionately few clients had been released from a state jail, which is not surprising since the closest state jail is more than thirty miles away from the city that the center resides within, and they would be responsible for making their way to the center. People are discharged from state jail without



continued supervision so knowledge of the center would essentially have to be due to word of mouth from other inmates or family and friends upon release. This is unlikely if the individual is not familiar with the region they are released into upon the completion of their sentence.

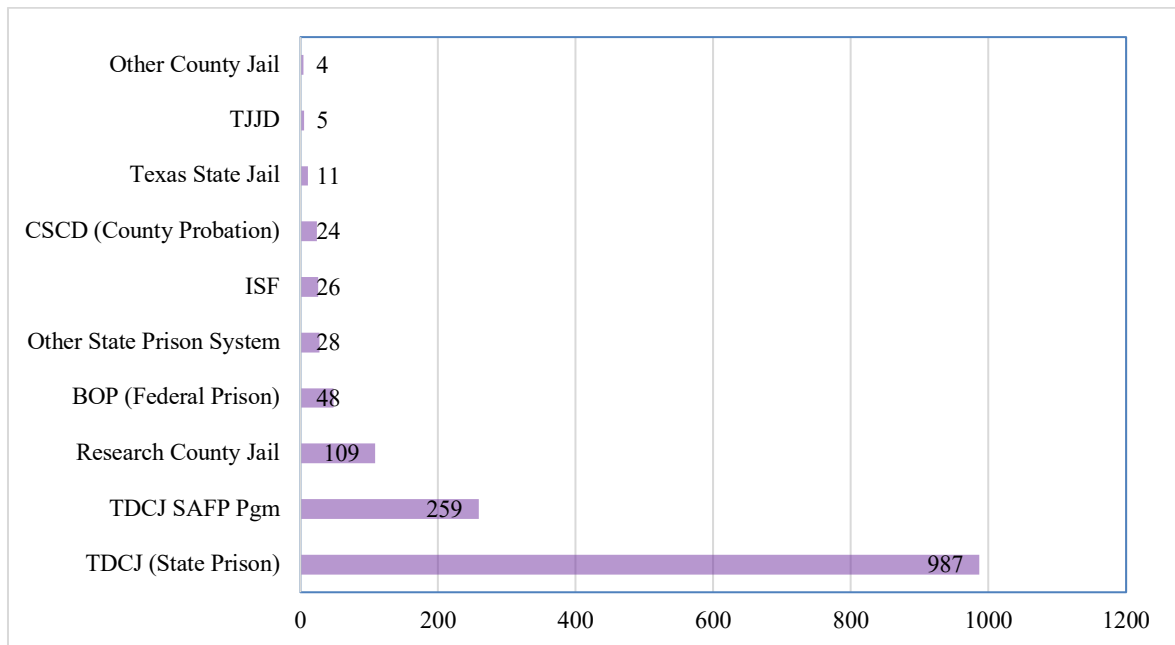


Figure 8. Last incarceration facility of clients FY2018-2019.

Relatively few clients are serving time on probation, and outreach is difficult since probationers are not mandated to attend PSN sessions in the same way as parolees. While the re-entry coordinator stated that several probation officers were aware of the center and recommended that their clients come in, becoming a client is not required. This is unfortunate given that probationers are likely to serve sentences in the communities in which they reside, and typically have several conditions of probation including such things as maintaining stable housing and remaining employed.

Intermediate sanction facilities house individuals serving time for violating their conditions of community supervision, including both parole and probation. There are not any

facilities such as these within 300 miles of the study site. Less than thirty clients were most recently incarcerated out-of-state and may have moved to the area to escape criminogenic influences from their previous residences. This means that they may be unfamiliar with the area and therefore unaware of local resources. Those who move to the city or county where the center is located may have done so to live near supportive, prosocial family or friends after serving time, and may become aware of the center through those informal social network members.

As found in previous studies of this population, it does not appear that many individuals released from the Research County jail sought assistance at the center. These individuals tend to cycle through local jails, serving short stints before returning to criminogenic environments. This population is unlikely to move away and often continues to offend without intervention since very few reentry efforts exist for people released from a local jail. Recent state legislation will result in the addition of several pre-release and post-release reentry case managers within state facilities, but no similar initiatives have been enacted for local jails. Outreach by the center staff targeting this population and their families through may result in a significant influx of client intakes.

It is notable that the second largest group of clients, nearly 260 individuals, had been released from a Substance Abuse Felony Punishment (SAFP) sentence, which is a modification of an existing sentence of parole that includes six to nine months of additional treatment. This population often has additional risk factors, such as relapse, addiction, and comorbid effects of mental health concerns, and may require additional resources outside of employment and housing referrals. The center did not begin consistently collecting data about release status, such as discharge or parole, until September 2019, the last month within the timeframe of this study.

More than 60% of clients were released from state prison. It is unknown how many were serving time on parole at time of their intakes, but due to the center's focus on parolee populations, parolees likely make up the majority of the client base. While this proportion increases when combined with the SAFP population, it is unwise to do so since it must be assumed that at least some clients were discharged from prison with no further community supervision. The parolee population already receives the majority of reentry resources as well as academic attention, often due to more complete records, extensive data collected over time, and the more serious offense histories. Data on parolees were not available at the center due to shortcomings in data collection methods. The researcher was not able to measure outreach by comparing the total number of parole orientation or PSN session attendees to the number of client intakes resulting from these meetings. It appears at this time participant sign-in data is not regularly shared with the center, which would permit a comparison of recidivism between clients and non-clients. A total of 53 client records did not include the last incarceration facility.

The timeframe available for recidivism data based on client information provided by the center was October 1, 2017 through November 15, 2019. In that period of time, nearly 30% of clients who were last incarcerated at a county jail in Research County were rearrested compared to 61% of the general population rearrested. Among clients released from any local, state, or federal facility between October 01, 2017 through December 2019, the rate of rearrest resulting in a book-in at the county jail was nearly 18%. The turnover in the local jail population is made evident in Figure 9, which displays the number of individuals booked-in compared to those released per year. Because the timeframes of interest by according to fiscal year, 2017 appears to have far fewer book-ins and book-outs.

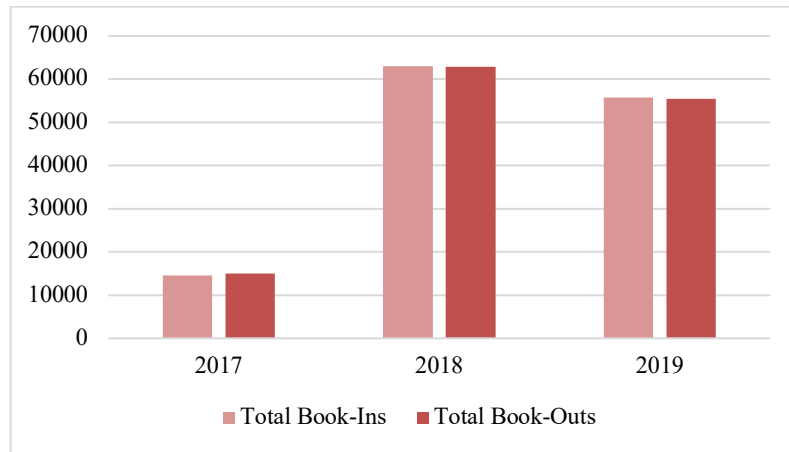


Figure 9. Research County Jail booking counts 10/01/2017 through 11/15/2019.

Of the 133,255 total book-ins that occurred within the study period, 81,548 (approximately 61%) of the book-ins were for individuals who had previously served time in the jail. This means that the majority of individuals being booked into the county jail already have criminal records, but the majority of these individuals are not receiving reentry services at the center. Those that do become clients are rearrested less frequently.

General jail populations were arrested for misdemeanor offenses such as assaults, driving under the influence, evading/resisting arrest, larceny, and drugs or narcotic-related offenses. The most frequent misdemeanor offenses committed by clients were categorized as various C misdemeanor offenses, as shown in Table 1. Other common offenses included drugs or narcotics-related offenses, evading or resisting arrest, or trespass of real property. Of particular note is the prevalence of offenses related to charges from other cities or counties, accounting for nearly 18% of charges leading to client misdemeanor arrests.

Table 1. Misdemeanor offenses committed by clients.

<b>Misdemeanor Offenses Committed by Clients</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Percent Total</b>
Assault Offenses		2	6	8	3.7%
Burglary/Breaking & Entering		1	13	14	6.7%
Destruction/Damage/Vandalism of Property			2	2	0.9%
Driving Accident Offenses			1	1	0.4%
Driving Offenses			1	1	0.4%
Driving Under the Influence		1	14	15	7.1%
Drug/Narcotic Offenses		11	18	29	13.7%
Evading/Resisting Arrest		10	16	26	12.3%
Family Offenses, Nonviolent		1	1	2	0.9%
Having Pending Charges in Other Cities or Counties		5	21	26	12.3%
Larceny/Theft		4	6	10	4.7%
Possession of Drug Paraphernalia			1	1	0.4%
Terroristic Threat			1	1	0.4%
Trespass of Real Property	4	3	14	21	10.0%
Various Other Minor (Misdemeanor C) offenses		11	42	53	25%
Weapons Laws Violations			2	2	0.9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>159</b>	<b>212</b>	<b>100%</b>

Individuals in the general jail population were most frequently arrested for felonies involving drugs or narcotics, assaults, and larceny or theft offenses. Less common felonies included burglary or breaking and entering, driving under the influence, evading or resisting arrest, and fraud-related crimes. Regarding felony offenses, the client population was most frequently arrested for drug or narcotics-related charges, as shown in Table 2. Violent offenses such as assaults, burglary or breaking and entering, and robbery were also prevalent, as were larceny or theft offenses. These are fairly similar to the general population's offenses and represent the total number of client rearrests within the timeframe of interest.

Table 2. Felony offenses committed by clients.

<b>Felony Offenses Committed by Clients</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Percent Totals</b>
Arson		1	<b>1</b>	<b>0.3%</b>
Assault Offenses	10	34	<b>44</b>	<b>13.5%</b>
Burglary/Breaking & Entering	6	21	<b>27</b>	<b>8.3%</b>
Counterfeiting/Forgery	2	1	<b>3</b>	<b>0.9%</b>
Court-Related Offenses	1	1	<b>2</b>	<b>0.6%</b>
Driving Accident Offenses	2	2	<b>4</b>	<b>1.2%</b>
Driving Under the Influence	4	7	<b>11</b>	<b>3.3%</b>
Drug/Narcotic Offenses	27	76	<b>103</b>	<b>32%</b>
Escape	2	2	<b>4</b>	<b>1.2%</b>
Evading/Resisting Arrest	2	13	<b>15</b>	<b>4.6%</b>
Family Offenses, Nonviolent		2	<b>2</b>	<b>0.6%</b>
Family Offenses	2	14	<b>16</b>	<b>4.9%</b>
Indecency & Sex Offender Offenses	1	6	<b>7</b>	<b>2.2%</b>
Indecency-Fondling (Child)		1	<b>1</b>	<b>0.3%</b>
Larceny/Theft	8	20	<b>28</b>	<b>8.6%</b>
Motor Vehicle Theft	3	6	<b>9</b>	<b>2.8%</b>
Robbery	7	18	<b>25</b>	<b>7.7%</b>
Sex Offenses	1	1	<b>2</b>	<b>0.6%</b>
Unlawful Restraining or Harassment	1	2	<b>3</b>	<b>0.6%</b>
Various Other Serious Offenses	1	8	<b>9</b>	<b>2.8%</b>
Weapon Law Violations	1	8	<b>9</b>	<b>2.8%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>244</b>	<b>325</b>	<b>99.8%</b>

Since parolees and other individuals may be held in the county jail for violating their conditions of supervision, specific data featuring parole violations was made available to the researcher, shown in Figure 13. Data was not available for parole violations of clients before October 2017, although the center opened in June of 2015. This data represents violations that resulted in arrest and the individual being held at the county jail, and data reflecting parole violations that did not result in arrest are not reflected in this figure.

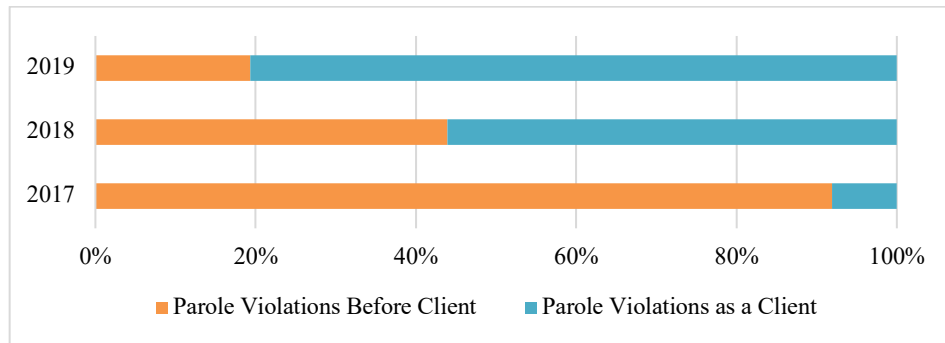


Figure 10. Parole violations before and after becoming a client FY2018-2019.

The steep increase in parole violations of clients may be at least partially due to incomplete records, but the totals remain higher for individuals on parole once they become clients compared to the number of parole violations individuals made before they became clients. Recommendations for improving data collection and increased access to recidivism data beyond the county can be found in the discussion section.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **DISCUSSION**

Based on rearrest data from records at the Research County Jail, it appears that there is a correlation between becoming a client at the center and a decrease in recidivism. Individuals who become clients after being released from the county jail are more likely to be rearrested than individuals who were released from a combination of local, state, and federal facilities. While causation cannot be established since the center operates by referring clients outward to local service providers, these comparatively low recidivism rates correspond with the perceptions of success and impact emphasized in the staff interviews.

At this time, outputs do not fully establish the role of the center in reducing recidivism. While the recidivism data reflects that becoming a client is protective against recidivism, the logic model is not operationalized to measure placements that occurred due to referrals made by staff. Until this is rectified, the center staff will be unable to claim that referrals not only result in housing or employment opportunities for clients, but that these placements are protective against recidivism. Since the logic model will likely serve as the basis for future evaluation, it is crucial that the model reflect the association between referrals, placements, and decreased recidivism.

This study included several limitations. No individual is mandated to become a client, which means there is a possibility of selection bias. In addition, data collection methods were inconsistent and generally rudimentary. Information recorded about clients varied frequently according to priorities at the time. Inconsistencies were not fully apparent until the change to a new database, a process that began as the project was coming together. This meant several months' worth of client data are permanently missing and are unlikely to be recovered. Analyses



were limited to the most extensive data categories available, which were primarily demographic. Until data collection can stabilize for several years at a time, it will be difficult to create meaningful multi-year comparisons beyond basic demographic data. Additional demographic data concerning income, housing status, and education level were added to the client intake process in October 2019, but information collected before that date will not be updated unless a client comes in for a session with the reentry coordinator. Future evaluations will likely be postponed until at least October 2020 in order to have one full year of client data.

Offense-related data included last incarceration place, but not release type. The type of facility an individual is released from likely affects not only awareness of the center, but also the effectiveness of referrals. Further, individuals released from different facilities may view the reentry process differently and have various levels of personal investment in avoiding rearrest or reincarceration.

This study measured recidivism through rearrests that resulted in bookings at the count jail. While it is notable how many clients were arrested for charges in an outside county or city, it is unclear how many clients committed wholly separate offenses outside of the county, or how many clients committed offenses that did not result in arrest such as certain technical violations. In particular, parole violations may not reflect every parolee client since release type was not specified for the client intakes that occurred in the study period. This may explain the discrepancy between client parole violation data and general client recidivism rates shown in Figure 10. In addition, since risk-level data was not collected, the researcher cannot determine if parolees who were more likely to violate conditions of community supervision were referred to

the center by a parole officer or other agent to seek additional assistance. Increased parole violations may also reflect an ever-growing client population.

The study period coincided with the hiring of the center director and no core staff turnover occurred throughout the two-year period, indicating staff stability and further supporting statements by each reflecting passion for the center's mission. This research was completed at an especially appropriate time to prepare the center for future evaluations, and the researcher has developed key strategies to improve data collection and expand outreach.

Several layers of data collection were added at the beginning of fiscal year 2020, including source of income, income range, marital status, education level, and release type. These variables as well as employment history, family background, age at first offense, and release type are factors that the Texas Risk Assessment System users enter in order to generate risk levels for clients. While the center does not provide case management, the referral process is based off of individual-level factors, and if staff members become certified TRAS users, this risk information may be collected from previous assessments a client may have undergone as part of review for parole or even at their original sentencing. This will be of significant use for future research, as additional stratification of clients could permit the regression of individual-level factors that affect the likelihood of recidivism or reintegration, and further inform a theoretical grounding.

Once a client has received referrals, it is necessary for that individual to follow up with staff about the effectiveness of those referrals. Otherwise, housing, employment, and educational placement data cannot be recorded in a client's profile, and outputs established by the logic mode cannot be completed. Since the center outsources treatment and services, clients tend to return

only when they are in need of further assistance. The center staff has attempted to cold call clients with little success, so perhaps an incentivization approach would be more effective. If it is not possible to mandate follow-up visits, then center staff may offer additional bus passes to clients who return in the following weeks or months with feedback about their referrals. In addition, the reentry coordinator should record referral sites in a client's profile. This way, he can follow up with the providers rather than solely relying on the clients. This will corroborate or expose discrepancies between outcomes that clients report and feedback from referral agencies. Ultimately, this will allow the center staff to track how many clients are receiving referral services and how many are following through, which are two outputs laid out according to the logic model. To operationalize elements of the logic model's outcome section, center staff may issue a pre-post assessment or survey to clients that measures the perceptions of the center's effectiveness.

At the time of this study, both the center's director and the reentry coordinator lamented a lack of additional staff. While the researcher did not ask any specific questions about burnout, future interviews and assessments should include questions that elicit feedback about job-related stress. Staff expansion likely hinges on additional funding. In the meantime, staff members should create job descriptions for positions that would target client outreach and describe qualifications according to remaining gaps on the logic model unmet by current employees. At this time, no outreach targets discharged populations. This includes individuals released from the local jail, who are more generally more likely than other clients to reoffend. Besides mandated parolee orientations and PSN sessions, staff should begin meeting with pre-release populations at the local jail. In addition, establishing a relationship with agents within TDCJ's Reentry Division

would not only increase access to arrest data beyond the county level, it would also provide center staff with information about how many individuals from nearby (relatively) state facilities are likely returning to the area.

The reentry resource management center is the result of collaborative efforts spanning government agencies and private sector and non-profit providers. Since it is funded primarily by the county, it is in the best interests of county representatives as well as the center staff to participate in regular evaluations in order to ensure that resources are being maximized and clients are being provided effective referrals. The staff was eager to aid the researcher throughout this project, reflective of the strong belief in the work they are doing. While there are several recommendations in place, the center has been open for less than five years. The implementation of evidence-based practices recommended by this study provide a framework in which the center can more effectively target client needs according to the unique individual circumstances of each individual in need of services. In addition, this study explains the necessity of structuring client data so that future evaluations can eventually measure each element of the logic model, of which recidivism is the most important but by no means the only measure of success.

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## **BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH**

Meagan Robbins was born in Galveston, Texas. After graduating from Timber Creek High School in Fort Worth, Meagan entered San Antonio Community College in 2014. She received a Bachelor of Arts with a major in criminology from the University of Texas at Dallas in December 2018. In the following year, she began working at a rape crisis center in the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex and entered the criminology graduate program at the University of Texas at Dallas. In the fall of 2020, she will begin the doctoral program in criminal justice at Texas State University.

## **CURRICULUM VITAE**

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