

## Got Faith? - An in-depth analysis and review of five faith-based prisoner reentry programs in Florida

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### ABSTRACT

*In the United States, prisoner reentry programs are a necessity to re-integrate back into society and are of two types: Faith and Non-Faith. With increased emphasis placed on reforming the criminal justice system policies due to Black Lives Matter and other non-profits actively working to change the system from the outside, reentry programs are having a resurgence of interest for effective public policy. There are significant barriers for major policies at the state, local, and federal to be alleviated, nevertheless, our research wanted to consider the effectiveness of five faith-based, male-only reentry programs in central Florida. Small focus groups were utilized to better understand the concerns and issues returning inmates faced in the program as well as when returning to society. Reentry participants were found to have high confidence in the success of their participation in their faith-based program's efforts on their personal and family growth.*

**Keywords:** Faith-based, Prisoner, Reentry, Florida, men

### Introduction

Since the mid-1990's, state and federal policy-makers in the criminal justice system have worked to create prisoner reentry systems to ease the transition from prison back to society. Prisoner reentry programs have been posited to increase the success rate of reentry transition to society (Seim and Harding, 2020). It has also been hypothesized that socially positive behaviors could hold the key to preventing future recidivism and decrease jail and prison population, thus lowering state and federal expenditures (Denney et al., 2014; Travis, 2005). Research conducted among former inmates shows that returning inmates who score on measures of religiosity and spirituality appear to exhibit socially positive behaviors, potentially preventing them from reentering jail or prison (Travis, 2005).

Throughout Western history, both incarcerated and returning inmates from jails and prisons have used religious organizations to adapt and transition back to society (Smith and Simon, 2020). Religious institutions provide a firm structure and allow an inmate to gradually adjust with support through services catered for an easier transition back to society. A majority of faith-based foundations have increasingly provided diverse services such as job placement assistance, shelter, basic food and necessities, mentoring, advice support, and treatment for alcohol and drug abuse as well as concerns for public safety and community (Yocum and Nath, 2011). These services are a major necessity for any prisoner that is about to exit prison or jail and return to society.

After exiting jail or prison, former inmates often face severe and exacerbating difficulties when adjusting back to society (Denney et al., 2014; Nayer 2010). Effective safeguards are used by the criminal justice system such as intense supervision upon release and strict monitoring policies to allow for returning inmates to adjust successfully back to society (Listwan et al., 2006). Well-managed and efficient prisoner reentry programs such as work furloughs, allow returning prisoners to hone job skills paving the way for a smoother transition to the outside world.

However, if prison inmates were deemed a threat to public safety, parole boards would deny their release.

Simon (1993) wrote that the tried-and-true methods of rehabilitation conducted while in jail or prison were not effective enough to prevent recidivism. This frequently led to situations where many hopeful applicants for reentry that we're unable to find employment were then refused parole and remained in prison until deemed less of a threat (Listwan et al., 2006). As the 1990s rolled on, instead of meaningful efforts to attempt for the reintegration of returning inmates to society, the mission of the criminal justice system drifted largely towards supervisory status only (Simon, 1993).

African-American and Latino neighborhoods were particularly hard-hit for employment prospects due to low levels of educational attainment and career skills, especially upon leaving jail or prison (Seim and Harding, 2020). Once their sentences had been served, the likelihood of a good income from

steady employment is inversely proportional to time spent in incarceration (Denney et al., 2014; Travis, 2005; Simon, 1993).

Reentry programs in prison and jail range from anger management therapy and drug counseling to General Education Development (GED) graduation and work furlough programs. Beginning in the 1970s these types of programs were either minimized or outright terminated due to a public outcry over a few highly controversial and publicized incidents (Travis, 2005). Realistically, the public could not believe that deviant and violent individuals locked up in a highly restrictive and punitive environment would quickly re-adjust when placed back in society and become normal, working citizens.

Beginning with the Clinton administration, officially recognized Prisoner Reentry Program policies were re-created to allow returning inmates reentry pathways into society, enabling them to be socially well-adjusted to lower recidivism (Travis, 2005). Borrowing from previous prison rehabilitation programs, the new reentry programs made adjustments and became adaptable to the specific needs of the current reentry population. The ultimate goal of any effective prisoner reentry program is investing in the inmate well enough to allow them to make the effort to prevent re-offending.

### **Prisoner Reentry Programs: Policy Issues**

The return of an inmate to society after an extensive time in incarceration, even temporarily in jail, presents a plethora of policy issues. There are three pertinent criminal justice policy issues up for discussion in this research: 1) Spouses/Significant Others & Children, 2) Post-release Employment and 3) Housing after release. These are the three policy issues most salient when examining the effectiveness and usefulness of prisoner reentry programs. Considering the tremendous monetary expense our nation expands in the criminal justice correctional system, an analysis, and examination of faith-based reentry programs is a critical necessity to consider the substantial impact it may have on the three policy objectives.

#### **Policy Issue #1: Spouses/Significant Others and Children**

Complications immediately arise before release because, in many states, returning inmates are severely warned not to associate or contact anyone whom they know has a criminal record (Rhine, Smith, and Jackson, 1991). Unfortunately, this warning often encompasses families and friends, both limiting their assistance for the ex-con to make a smooth transition and coercing the returning inmate to make tough decisions (without family or friends support) on methods to successfully adjust back to society (Seim and Harding, 2020).

Family members who provide for housing either temporarily or permanently for a returning prisoner can generate anxiety and fear both inside and outside the home (Yocum and Nath, 2011; Ripley, 2002). Usually, returning inmates will look for alternatives such as homeless shelters, halfway houses, and other community/quasi-government housing (Metraux and Culhane, 2004). Finally, if unable to find adequate housing to meet their needs, they sleep on the streets, exacerbating a chronic homeless problem affecting numerous cities (Denney et al., 2014; Mumola, 2002).

Reconnecting with their families and especially with their children is a stress-fraught initiative for most returning inmates (Yocum and Nath, 2011; Johnston 1991, 1993). Issues of trust and family identity as well as the consternation of new roles and their effect upon young, impressionable minds are the primary stressors on reentering society (Johnston, 1991). As with children, parents in prison experience anxiety, anger, and fear due to the uncertainty of the child's welfare during their incarceration.

Incarcerated parents may not see their children for years and if the incarcerated parent is single, their children could be placed in foster care or with unreliable relatives, creating an uncertain and potentially dangerous future for the children (Hairston and Rollin, 2003).

Finally, husbands and wives of incarcerated individuals suffer from their forced estrangement from each other (Braman, 2002). Financial, emotional, marital, and other types of family-based struggles become rampant between spouses, leading to further anger, frustration, and stress-causing rifts with the relationship. Infidelity or divorce while in prison can cause increased complications between married adults (Yocum and Nath, 2011; Denney et al., 2014; Braman, 2002).

Prior research has posited that the institution of marriage is an encouraging predictor for the prevention of recidivism. It is hypothesized that the stronger the emotional bonds are between married couples, the lower the likelihood of future criminal activity (Horney, Osgood, and Marshall, 1995).

It is further theorized that a tightly bound, cohesive family unit could exert enough positive stress on an ex-inmate and prevent him or her from engaging in antisocial behavior (Yocum and Nath, 2011; Denney et al., 2014; Loeber and Farrington, 1998, 2001).

#### **Policy Issue #2: Housing after reentry**

Viable housing options for returning inmates have posed a significant policy challenge to criminal justice administrators for years (Denney et al., 2014; Travis, 2005). Generally, returning inmates can bunk or share rooms with friends, family members, or other types of close relatives to whom they can make such a request. In New York City, the Vera Institute kept track of 49 returning inmates released from New York state prisons and found that 40 of the former inmates lived with a family or friend within the 30 days upon leaving prison (Nelson, et. al, 1999).

For the majority of returning inmates, absolutely no prearranged housing is secured before release (Denney et al., 2014; Raphael, 2011).

The Urban Institute discovered that 49% of respondents among 153 individuals reported sleeping at a family member's house the first night of their release (Travis and Visher, 2003). The study found that 20% of returning inmates were living with a spouse or other type of partner and about 33% were living with their mother or stepmother (Travis and Visher, 2003). Seven percent of the study's respondents admitted that they slept at a friend's house on the first night of their release (Travis and Visher, 2003).

#### **Policy Issue # 3: Post-Reentry Employment**

Since the 1990's, on average 590,400 prison inmates have been released annually from state and federal correctional

facilities (James, 2015; Carson and Sabol, 2012; Garland, Wodahl and Mayfield, 2011; Martin, 2011). Former inmates returning to their neighborhoods lacked the critical thinking, problem-solving and communicative skills necessary for steady employment and prevent a return to prison (Marbley and Ferguson, 2005; Carson and Sabol, 2012; Garland, Wodahl and Mayfield, 2011; Martin, 2011). Recidivism is unfortunately highly likely due to a paucity of career-related skills (Marbley and Ferguson, 2005).

Morani et. al (2011) tracked 122 ex-offenders who participated in Project Re-Connect, a six-month voluntary prisoner reentry program for inmates returning to society. Social outcomes and their after-effects, such as employment, family and child assistance, and housing assistance to former inmates were analyzed.

A large number of returning inmates request social outcome assistance when reentering society (Morani et. al, 2011).

During the period of incarceration, inmates work for either the state or through a contract with a private corporation (Travis, 2005). Abundant examples exist for this type of work: cooking food, prison ground maintenance, laundry, and mail sorting.

Prison and jail work serves a dual purpose of keeping inmates occupied while inside the walls but the intention should be to develop transferable job skills once they return (Denney et al., 2014; Mumola, 1999). For example, in numerous states inmates manufacture and produce modular furniture, license plates, and bedding linens for state agencies and residents (Mumola, 1999).

In 2008, President Bush signed the Second Chance Act, a major prisoner reentry law for faith and non-faith-based prisoner reentry organizations (Arungwa and Osho, 2012). Beginning in 2009, Congress and President Obama began allocating monies for municipal and state prisoner reentry efforts (Arungwa and Osho, 2012). Post-release employment training is a serious consideration for reentry programs to undertake and monitor their effectiveness.

Research among returning inmates has theorized that steady employment can have a strict deterrent effect on future criminal activity. For example, immature youth with poor decision-making skills working alongside mature, older positive mentors in the community could be a viable solution to prevent criminal temptation. Among returning inmates, mentoring and supportive associations upon release could potentially decrease the likelihood of recidivism (Yocum & Nath, 2011; Travis, 2005).

### **The State of Florida**

Florida has the nation's third-largest state prison system after Texas and California (FLDOC, 2020). The Florida Department of Corrections (FLDOC) is responsible for public safety in Florida. With a system of 60 major prisons, which include seven private prisons, the FLDOC provides incarceration for 94,000 inmates (FLDOC, 2020). In addition, FLDOC has over 24,000 employees operating in the state of Florida (FLDOC, 2020). In the 2018-2019 fiscal year, FLDOC's yearly operating budget was \$2.4 billion (FLDOC, 2020).

### **Faith-based prisoner reentry organizations in Florida**

### ***Dunklin Memorial Camp, Okeechobee***

Dunklin Memorial Camp (Dunklin) was founded and managed by Pastor Mickey and Laura Maye Evans in 1962 (Dunklin Memorial Camp, 2020). With the assistance of the teachings of Christ, Dunklin's primary purpose for its existence is to provide drug and alcohol abusers assistance with their struggles.

The idea that Reverend Dunklin worked on initially was to create a "city" that would provide a "refuge" for the "...spiritual, emotional and physical regeneration" of alcohol and drug abusers (Dunklin Memorial Camp, 2020).

Pastor Evans believes in a vision from God which gave him the idea to create a city of refuge for alcohol and drug abusers (Dunklin Memorial Camp, 2020). Dunklin's primary hypothesis is predicated on the belief that the Christian approach is the best method by which to eliminate an individual's unhealthy relationship with alcohol or drugs.

### **Lamb of God, Okeechobee**

Lamb of God is a similar faith-based reentry program with the only difference being that the men at Lamb of God work off-campus while both Faith Farm and Dunklin's men work on their respective campuses for extended periods (Lamb of God, 2020). At the end of the workday, the participants return to Lamb of God's campus to hold Bible classes and attend Alcoholic Anonymous or Narcotic Anonymous meetings. A few of the men chose to enroll in G.E.D. or community college classes nearby. Lamb of God allows the men living on its campus a large degree of autonomy, freedom of movement, and self-discipline that is rarely found among faith-based programs (Lamb of God, 2020). Executive Director Michael Lewandowski has been, Lamb of God's director of programs since its inception in 1990.

### **Faith Farm- Okeechobee & Boynton Beach**

Faith Farm Ministries was founded in 1951 by Reverend Garland Eastham (Faith Farm, 2020). The original mandate of Faith Farm ministries was to provide shelter, comfort, food, and Biblical training to the homeless men in the nearby communities surrounding Faith Farm. However, after realizing that there was a critical need for alcohol rehabilitation and treatment, Faith Farm designed a program to help men recover from alcohol abuse.

Currently, there are three locations in Florida for the rehabilitation and treatment programs-Okeechobee, Fort Lauderdale, and Boynton Beach. All programs offer complete program treatment and rehabilitation to both men and women.

### **The Love Center, Fort Pierce**

In 1995, after struggling with his substance abuse addictions, Pastor Jerome Rhyant founded The Love Center to assist other struggling addicts. The Love Center works with the Sheriff's Department of Prisoner Re-Entry Programs to provide a halfway/transitional house for recently released inmates. Referrals to The Love Center are by chaplains and priests who minister in prison. Operating costs for The Love Center are primarily supported by donations; prisoners are also sponsored for the cost of their reentry (The Love Center, 2020).

Pastor Rhyant relies on spiritual faith and teachings of the Bible to successfully acclimate recently released prisoners back to the real world. Pastor Rhyant has created several businesses

such as a car wash and detailing and lawn maintenance service. The men work during the day and return to the Love Center for Bible and substance abuse classes. Lessons on renting an apartment, balancing checkbooks, and other functional needs for adapting to the post-release environment also factor into Pastor Rhyant's philosophy (The Love Center, 2020).

#### **Methodology: Focus Groups**

Focus groups of men in groups of five to nine men were used to gather data at the faith-based reentry programs. Program managers were contacted and the purpose of the research was explained to them in person or via phone call. Subsequently, at the end of the workday, the program managers would randomly select male candidates for each focus group. Focus group research has been utilized effectively for small groups of individuals (Berg, 2004). Focus groups hold potential for the researcher to find out and conduct effective interviews allowing for extensive data collection (Basch, 1987; Lengua et al., 1992; Berg, 2004). Finally, the usage of focus groups allows all participants unrestricted and open access to fully answer any questions (Berg, 2004).

#### **Purpose of focus groups**

Due to the nature of faith-based prisoner reentry programs focus group data collection is ideal. Groups of individuals who work together over long periods tend to form strong social bonds with each other. Social bonds could hold the key to preventing recidivism because of the collective group identity individuals have in common with each other as well as future networks of positive support and encouragement after leaving the program.

#### **Data Collection**

At each of the faith-based reentry programs, after lunch and dinner, announcements for research and data collection for the present study were made to all members in the program. Participants were asked to stay behind and requested to voluntarily participate in a research study. Volunteer participants in the research study were then spoken to in focus groups, the largest group being eleven men and the smallest group of six men. A basic quantitative survey asking for descriptive data was also passed out to the men to complete and turn in. Table 2 provides the results.

#### **Data and Content Analysis**

After the final interviews were transcribed, they were analyzed using content analysis and frequency and usage of keywords by the men interviewed. Key themes and concepts were then analyzed using a grounded theory approach defined by Charmaz (1983, 2006). The transcripts were evaluated and specific themes were considered and utilized based on keywords. These themes were then finally evaluated in our conclusion for recommendations and considerations for potential future public policy changes. Quantitative methodology analysis was conducted using SPSS.

#### **Dunklin Memorial Camp, Okeechobee, Florida**

After dinner, six men stayed behind to participate in the focus group interviews. The ethnic backgrounds of the program participants were White men with one exception. The one exception was an African-American male. The men's ages ranged from mid-20 to late '40s. The men had been in the program over varying periods. The shortest period spent in the program was

three months and the longest was fourteen months. Two of the men interviewed were brothers and both had spent time in jail before arriving in the program. One brother was training to be a minister. The focus group lasted approximately 45 minutes.

For the men, the family was the most important variable in their lives. Family as variable importance was followed by housing, then employment when asked to rank the three or four most important issues once they left the program. When asked if they were able to make social contacts for jobs and housing once they left the program, all the men who'd been in the program for more than six months stated affirmatively that the Reverend Mickey Evans and others in the administrative department would have something lined up for them when they left the program. A few of the men spoke about the networking contacts they had made while in the camp. Dunklin utilizes the Big Brother-Little Brother approach whereby an older member of the camp will introduce the new members of the camp to everyone and "show him the ropes." The Big Brother-Little Brother system is unique to Dunklin; other faith-based programs researched did not have this type of system. The men at Dunklin expressed the idea that the program did not make them feel like a client; but rather as part of a family.

A family whose problems are collective and not singular.

*"You see," earnestly spoke up, "We believed that we have our 'little problem' (alcohol or drug abuse) but now that we are here at Dunklin, it's not just our little problem anymore; it's a big problem which we all share." It's sort of like a Big Brother-Little Brother thing."*

The Big Brother-Little Brother part of the Dunklin program is another method by which the men police themselves and ensure the newcomers don't feel alone or without a friend to talk to during their initial few weeks in the program. The results appear to indicate that the men were highly satisfied and positive in their outlook of the program and their future possibilities on completion of the program.

*"It's like...you place your trust in them and they can come through for you, they've come through for other guys. I believe in Reverend (Mickey Evans) and the work he does...Housing is always an issue, but with the program's assistance, I know I can find good housing after I leave."*

*This is why I am glad I am in the program. ...Without good housing, I will be back in jail."*

Questions were also asked about the men's thoughts about returning to their communities and families. For the men who had families and children, they felt they could easily reintegrate into their community. Dunklin Memorial also creates avenues for family meetings that allow recently released inmates to gradually make contact with their loved ones. Another observation made by a Dunklin participant:

"My kids are my everything.

I had made the mistake to not make the right choices during my lifetime and that harmed my relationship with my kids and ex-wife. We got married (very early) in high school and then we just didn't make good decisions together. This program is very

helpful to be able to make strong contact and relationships with my kids.”

#### **Faith Farm- Okeechobee**

At the Faith Farm’s Okeechobee campus, a total of ten men volunteered and were involved in the focus group. During the focus group interviews, the men at Faith Farm-Okeechobee expressed high levels of positive outlook with their treatment program and said they were not worried about their future. Out of several concerns the men had about leaving jail and/or leaving the program, most expressed the primary desire to reconnect with their families. Jobs were the second most important issue and housing was the third most important issue.

Several of the returning men had someone to stay with or were already married/co-habiting and had a home or an apartment. All expressed a positive desire for the faith-based program to reconnect stronger with their wives and children.

“Hardest (thing) to find is a steady job and a decent paycheck.

If you have a record, no one wants to hire you. This (program) will help me out a lot I think but it all depends on the Lord (Jesus Christ) to help me. I love the program and am glad they have set aside contacts for us. The issue is that even if I get a job, they will not pay me (very) much and I just think that’s wrong to do. People should be paid fairly. I served my time in jail and need to get a good job. The problem is if you have a record, they don’t want to hire you.

The program’s content was deemed very good or good, with some men expressing the desire that Faith Farm should create a mentor’s program. Some of the men had heard of Dunklin’s mentoring program and mentioned this during the focus group interviews. Most men felt that their program would be more effective if the men had someone to speak to and mentor when they first entered the program. For the first month, the men said that they were not even allowed to speak to the new men in the program unless the new men made an effort to get to know them.

*“For the first month, we don’t speak to the new men; everyone has an adjustment period back to life in the real world. We give the new guys their (personal) space and allow them to re-adjust on their own time.”*

When questioned about the content of the program, the men felt that the program had overall been designed well and appeared to assist them in the reentry process.

*“The program is very good about being able to create stronger relationships through Bible study and integrated housing for families...I couldn’t have asked for a better program for my children and myself.”*

Several of the men expressed the desire to enter the Omega House, which is specifically set aside for men who have been in the program for over six months and wish to gradually reintegrate themselves back into the community. Overall the men appeared satisfied with their program.

#### **Faith Farm- Boynton Beach**

After being introduced to Faith Farm’s assistant director through Dunklin, a focus group of eleven male volunteers was conducted. The men at Faith Farm expressed a high positive

outlook with their treatment program and stressed that they were not worried about their future. Out of several concerns the men had about leaving jail and/or leaving the program, most expressed the desire to reconnect with their families with jobs and housing being the second and third most important issues on their minds. Housing was in third place because as the men explained to me, they had someone to stay with or were already married and were going back to live with their spouses.

Like Dunklin, all the men expressed a positive desire that the faith-based program had allowed them to reconnect stronger with their wives and children. When asked their opinions regarding the content of the program nine out of eleven men said that the content of the program was good. When asked about the process of the program, all of the men stated that the process was good and that there were no changes they would want to be instituted. When asked about the administrators’ assistance with the program, some of the men hesitated and only five out of eleven men said that the program administrators had been helpful. Reactions were mixed and one man explained:

*“It’s like they don’t trust us; they’re a little bossy occasionally. We (just) feel that we already paid our debt to society and we are trying to start over. The administrators are very helpful, however, and we know they want us to succeed.”*

Other men voiced their support and agreed that the program administrators and the program content were useful especially with rebuilding relationships with family.

*“The program allows for a period of growth to be able to make contact and improve one’s relationship with their ex-girlfriend and children. When I was sent off to jail for a year, I was not able to maintain any contact with my children because their mother would not allow them to meet me in jail. They grew up without me around and I need to see if I can try and make amends.”*

#### **The Love Center, Fort Pierce**

At the Love Center in Fort Pierce, six men were interviewed in the focus group session. All the men had served time in jail or prison recently and lived in the apartment complex on the campus. All agreed that the Love Center program had made them feel closer to their children and especially their families. Some of the men expressed the thought that the treatment provided to them at the Love Center made them feel like family but also like a client, something that they agreed with their colleagues at the Faith Farm campuses but interestingly enough, not with Dunklin Memorial. One of the few negative comments made by a man in the program when asked about the process and content of the program was that professionalism should be exhibited when admitting new people. Another critique from the men was that Pastor Rhyant should spend more time mentoring and advising them for the next phase of their life. Pastor Rhyant does not run the day-to-day management but he does run Bible sessions on a bi-weekly basis. Overall, the impression was that the men enjoyed the process of the program and were satisfied that the program produced desired results to keep them out of prison or jail in the future.

All the men expressed the hope that the program would assist them in their abusive behaviors towards alcohol and drugs.



A couple of the men interviewed did express the thought that there might be problems living in the crime-infested neighborhood, but all the men did agree that their unique living situation provided a rare opportunity for them to overcome their problems.

*“The Love Center can assure me that I won’t be sleeping outside (but) will do their best to find housing after I leave the program, possibly a shelter (or something similar).”*

One issue the men were candid about was the temptation of living in a neighborhood where drugs and crime were rampant. Questions were asked about the neighborhood about the temptation and danger associated with returning to society. Several men responded:

“One thing I have learned is that we should not try and judge others for their decisions and leave it to God,” one man told us while others nodded their heads in agreement. “If they act stupid and be stupid, I don’t want no part of that,” another man finished.

**Lamb of God, Okeechobee**

Lamb of God is run by Mike Lewandowski and is also one of the few programs that the Florida Department of Corrections (FLDOC) endorses and provides monetary support in the state of Florida. The FLDOC provides a per diem rate of \$25 a day for each man that Mike Lewandowski uses towards the rent and maintenance as well as basic supplies for each man who enters the program.

Mike Lewandowski runs his program with more leniency than other faith-based reentry programs. For instance, he has a generous policy of allowing men who cannot pay rent immediately to stay on indefinitely as long as they are making a conscious and good faith effort to find work. Some of the men had resided on the premises without paying rent for several months.

One man interviewed informed the group that he was unable to pay rent to Mr. Mike Lewandowski for almost two months before he was able to find a job. He was grateful that Mr. Lewandowski agreed to not evict him as long as he was looking

for work every day. He was finally able to find a job at a local trucking company and drove trucks while enrolled in classes in the evenings after work. In total nine men were interviewed during the qualitative process. All of the men had either been in jail or prison previously, with most of them caught up in drunk driving or bar fights. Some of the men interviewed (five out of nine) had children and agreed that the program was assisting them in becoming closer to their families. The men did voice their opinion that while the program was not stringent and structured, it did allow them a great deal of personal growth and responsibility. The process, content, and administration support were rated highly by the men present.

The men did not feel like a client; rather they felt like a family with Mr. Lewandowski as a father figure.

*“You see, we are here because we made some mistakes...if it wasn’t for Mike, we’d all be out on the street or worse...maybe jail or prison. He treats us with respect and tough love.”*

Research has shown that for a substance abuse program to work, it must work through cooperation and team effort, a good example being that of Alcoholics Anonymous. Almost all the men at the faith-based camps agreed that working as a team, without the distraction of women around them, assisted them in starting new habits and breaking past ones. A number of the men spoke of the camaraderie they enjoyed in the faith-based program and expressed the difficulty of finding that elsewhere. The struggle to overcome addiction collectively resulted in close friendships and relationships during their stay within the complex.

*“Mike (Lewandowski) allows us to stay on the premises as long as we need to even if we are currently unemployed. He cares about us.”*

Descriptive statistics (quantitative data) was also utilized to know more about the men. In Table 1, descriptive statistics are provided:

**Table 1-Descriptive Statistics**

Descriptive Statistics on Faith-based Reentry Program Participants	Faith (N= 42)
Average Age	(26-32) 28 %
Married	13.2%
Education- High School	67%
Ethnic Background	(White) 73.6%
Entered Program	(3-6 months) 34%
Heard of Program	(Word of mouth) 58.5%
Currently on probation	24%
Currently on parole	2.9%

Have had Probation in past	75.5%
Have been Parole in past	1.9%
Planning on staying for entire treatment	75.0%
Do have children	48.1%
Program improved relationship with children	(Yes) 90.0%
Most common occupation prior to program	(Service) 24.8%
Length of time to gain employment after program	(1-3 months) 86%
Program assists in gaining employment	(Yes) 69%
Returning to prior profession	26.9%
Starting new profession	28.8%
Education assistance- G.E.D.- Yes	19.1%
Education assistance- college credits- Yes	23.4%
1st time in program- Yes	73.5%
Participated more than once in program- Yes	26.5%
If choice, wish to stay in program- respondents answering "Yes"	84.6%
Resource increase-more assistance with job hunting	29.3%
Resource increase-more funding provided to administration	22.8%
Resource increase-more assistance with housing	10.9%
Decrease amount of time spent in program	24.6%
Treated as clients during course of program	81.1%
Satisfaction with Program Administrators' assistance	93.1%
Satisfaction with Process of Program	91.1%
Satisfaction with Content of Program	94.1%

As our data shows, the vast majority of the participants (over 90%) were satisfied by the program administrator's assistance, process, and content of the program overall. Positive outcomes were also determined about the future direction and new chapters of their lives. 67% of participants had a high school/GED degree and 73% were White.

Only 13.1% of men were married which is not surprising considering the previous research has determined that family support (marriage and children) is one of the strongest indicators for desistance from crime. Unfortunately, most incarcerated men do lose their significant other while incarcerated and struggle with having a supportive partner upon release (Travis, 2005 and Nayer et al., 2015).

## Discussion

In total, five Christian faith-based programs and 42 men were interviewed for a period lasting 45-60 minutes at a time. Quantitative data was also collected as shown in Table 1.

None of the men interviewed were pressured for any questions that they did not wish to answer. During their interviews, they had been asked what one issue stood out in their minds when they left prison or jail. While a majority of men chose Family, Employment, and Housing as their primary concerns upon their return to society, several men also spoke about the need to stay away from old neighborhoods and past friends who had tempted them and lead them astray.

Research has confirmed this widely held opinion among the men interviewed: a complete lifestyle change is necessary for an ex-inmate to prevent re-incarceration (Travis, 2005; Denney et al., 2014).

Currently, the major research among prisoner reentry programs has identified the barriers to successful reentry as well as other types of obstacles facing reentry participants once they leave society.

Research has also spent an enormous amount of effort and time discussing the extraneous variables such as socioeconomic status and neighborhood problems that can affect the likelihood of recidivism as well as becoming re-arrested. Issues such as housing, employment, family and friends support, education and a significant desire to successfully reintegrate back into society are all problems that pose significant problems to returning inmates.

The research has been clear on several aspects: Returning inmates require tremendous social and emotional support when transitioning back to society and that this structural need is sorely lacking for a significant group of returning inmates.

However, our study is unique in that we have attempted to examine and link program administrator's support, advice, and mentoring in potentially being another factor in reducing recidivism and re-arrest. The client-service satisfaction index of participants was another decision our study tried to make an effort to understand what the program satisfaction would be as derived from theories of client-oriented satisfaction.

## Findings

**#1) Importance of post-release employment-** In our study, the first major finding was the importance that reentry participants attributed to steady and gainful employment once released and sent back to society. As the research demonstrates, the men interviewed were extremely keen on employment training and how their training could be marketable and useful after having graduated from the program. Additionally, many of the study participants stressed the need for a living wage that would allow them to create enough income to satisfy family-bearing costs and/or other living expenses incurred while in jail.

Employment as a concern for these reentry participants is a significant worry and fortunately, the programs examined did provide bridges and opportunities for them to connect with after graduation from their programs. Social networks and contacts through the faith-based community are a worthwhile endeavor to prevent recidivism.

**#2) Advising and mentoring opportunities-** Our second finding was that reentry participants also spoke strongly of all the advising and mentoring opportunities they were granted while in the program both inter-participant and intra-participant. Especially in Dunklin Memorial, all programs allowed for some type of support group after leaving jail. As previous research has demonstrated (Travis, 2005), positive social support is a critical ally for preventing recidivism and decreasing the temptation for criminal activity. Structural support is crucial for the prevention of a return to crime and faith-based ministry organizations are uniquely poised to provide this type of mentoring and support that reentry participants desperately crave.

**#3) Lengthy effects of incarceration and its lasting effects-** A third finding that was mentioned in earnest by the reentry participants in several of the interviews conducted was the lengthy effects of being incarcerated and how this type of institutionalization affected the men even after leaving jail. Men spoke about being uncertain and even insecure about the most basic activities soon after leaving jail such as merely wanting to take a break while at work and use the bathroom or requesting additional helpings of food at the cafeteria.

A sense of mutual respect, camaraderie, and a spirit of firm support throughout their transition to society while in the program, allowed the men to beneficially adjust to pre-release to society.

This sense of mutual respect may be an extremely important marker for preventing recidivism.

**#4) Program Administrators and the Value of their Support-** A fourth finding was about the role of program administrators and how valuable their support was during this period of transition from exiting jail to almost being ready to be released back to society. Program participants in all programs surveyed had almost nothing negative to report on their administrators' support and mentoring.

The vast majority believed that the administrators were doing everything they could to allow for the participants to be fully prepared and successful once they returned to society.

**#5) (Loose) support networks among reentry participants and administrators-** a fifth finding was of the necessity and importance given to loose support networks both during the transition period and after leaving the program. Most of the participants made special mention of this necessity during the process of our research. Men often were able to find employment and housing opportunities through both support networks of administrators as well as fellow participants who shared this knowledge freely. These types of social networks operated on a platform of openness and inclusivity allowing for the potential for genuine growth among returning inmates.

Faith-based reentry organizations have several major advantages which government reentry programs, i.e. non-faith programs do not possess. Faith-based ministries have large social networks, operating under passionate goals to prevent someone from reentering prison or jail.

Faith-based ministries' social networks can provide for housing, social support, and employment-based on these networks as well as other charitable donations such as clothing

when an inmate returns to society. Finally, faith-based ministries can offer salvation and refuge for the soul such that a non-faith program cannot provide.

### Future Research

Future recommendations for research would be inaccurate and incomplete without suggesting that the family and children should be studied more not just as separate variables but also as models for the prevention of recidivism. Several of the men interviewed at the faith-based programs were eager to talk about the marriage and family counseling services available and how these services had positively affected the relationship with their families. A further research study should incorporate these variables and analyze the effectiveness of reuniting families and children with returning inmates as well as the success of reintegrating them back into society. In the future, the research questions would need to be expanded upon in both their intent and clarity of objectives. Changing cities/counties and even comparing the results with a different state, perhaps in the Northeast or Midwest might be a clever idea also. As prior research continues to demonstrate, prisoner reentry programs as a

viable method of reducing re-arrest and recidivism rates appear to be the most promising and also the most researched.

If our nation's recidivism and re-incarceration rate are to accurately decrease, reentry programs appear to be the best solution for a complex and multi-faceted problem.

As the American economy involves more and more knowledge-based workers, it is critical for our nation's commitment to truly involve returning offenders to society by creating better avenues to earn a good living, have proper housing, and connect with their families. Otherwise, we will not commit fully to our nation's purpose of a robust democracy by not integrating everyone into our country. Steps such as creating and managing reentry programs that allow participants to have truly meaningful employment and family opportunities to reintegrate back to society should be embraced, expanded upon, and improved. Our nation's returning prisoners, having served paid their debt to society must be more effectively supported. National reentry public policies must be carefully crafted and robustly managed to prevent further recidivism.

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