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Nebraska Serious and Violent Offender Re-entry Program:  
An Evaluation of Participants' Perception of Program Effectiveness

A Thesis

Presented to the

School of Criminology and Criminal Justice

and the

Faculty of the Graduate College

University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

University of Nebraska at Omaha

by

Crystal Fuller

July, 2007

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Thesis Acceptance

Acceptance for the faculty of the Graduate College,  
University of Nebraska, in partial fulfillment of the  
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Date 7/17/07

## **Abstract**

Nebraska Serious and Violent Offender Re-entry Program:  
An Evaluation of Participants' Perception of Program Effectiveness

Crystal H. Fuller, MA

University of Nebraska, 2007

Advisor: Dr. Lisa Sample

In response to the three-fold increase in the number of returning inmates to America's communities over the last three decades, the Department of Justice's Serious and Violent Offender Re-entry Initiative provides funding for development of programming to reduce recidivism rates and improve community safety. However, evaluations of these re-entry programs have not addressed the attitudes and opinions of the program participants themselves. This study examined the perceptions of the re-entry participants to help assess the effectiveness of the programming they are receiving from the Nebraska Serious and Violent Offender Re-entry Pilot Program. Data was gathered from personalized re-entry plans for offenders and through qualitative interviews of the program transition managers and program participants. The results of this research addressed the effectiveness and possible improvements of the Nebraska re-entry program, which will ultimately affect the inmates' likelihood of living crime-free upon their return to the community and hence increase public safety.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to begin by extending my sincerest thanks to my committee chairperson, Dr. Lisa Sample, who graciously, without hesitation, gave me her time, effort, guidance, and encouragement to make me a better student, researcher, and scholar. Without her passion for criminal justice and education, this project could not have been possible. I would also like to thank my committee members Dr. Bill Wakefield and Dr. Scott Harrington whose feedback, guidance, and support is greatly appreciated. Another thank you is extended to Bill McCarty whose assistance with contact information with the research participants was integral to the completion of this project.

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On a personal note, I want to thank my parents for always believing in me and instilling a passion for learning which has brought me to this moment. You both have inspired me to push myself to find my personal successes and have been my biggest supporters along the way. Thank you to Ryan and April who have been the best role models a little sister could ask for, following in your footsteps has been a privilege. Also, thank you to Alex whose positive influence and encouragement has kept me focused on the finish line.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Over the last three decades the American corrections system has seen a four-fold increase in the number of prison admissions, rising from 200,000 in 1973 to 1.4 million in 2003. (Travis 2005) This rising number of prison admissions can be attributed to a combination of the changing correctional philosophy from rehabilitation to retribution, the return to determinate sentencing, requiring offenders to serve at least 80 percent of their sentences, the elimination of parole in many states and the federal government, and the “get tough on crime” campaign on drug offenses. (Travis 2005) Despite communities’ and the criminal justice system’s desire to keep the streets of America safe and crime-free; many incarcerated offenders have and will be returning to the streets unprepared for what lies before them; finding employment, housing, support systems, and treatment programs. The current research addresses the issues of prisoner re-entry by examining Nebraska’s Serious and Violent prisoner re-entry program, which is intended to reduce re-offending and promote public safety through intensive programming for offenders.

The first step to reducing recidivism rates and improving public safety is to understand the large number of America’s prisoners being released every year. Roughly 95% of prison inmates return to the community after serving their sentence, whether through parole supervision or mandatory release. (BJS 2002) Over the last thirty years, the average caseload of a parole officer has been increasing to levels that do not allow for intense monitoring. This being so, the number of inmates who violate aspects of their parole has been steadily increasing over the last three decades as well. (Travis 2005)



Along the same lines, the abolishment of parole in many states has resulted in a greater number of inmates being released to society through mandatory release, having no parole supervision upon their return to the community. Couple these issues with the decreasing number of prison programs offered across US prisons, offenders that are returning to our communities are re-offending at high levels and are returning to our prisons, thereby increasing prison populations.

With these newly released offenders back on the streets, another major issue that plagues the criminal justice system is the concept of the revolving door. Recidivism is the commission of another crime after a criminal sentence is completed. The official rate of recidivism is quite low compared to the actual number of crimes committed by these released offenders because many crimes are not being reported and those that are do not always result in arrest or conviction. This hidden quantity of crimes committed by returning offenders is an important issue that must be addressed in order to increase public safety and allow for more successful re-entries into our communities. The Bureau of Justice Statistics (2001) states that of the 300,000 inmates that were released in 1994 from fifteen states, 67.5 percent were re-arrested for a new crime within three years after their release, while 51.8 percent of these released inmates were re-incarcerated, convicted of a new crime or for a technical violation of their parole agreements. (BJS 2002) This rate, however, only includes those that are returned to state or federal prisons, overlooking the offenses committed that are punished by probation, commitment to county jail, or even those offenses that are unknown to the police.

In order to counteract the effects of declining prison programming, the high caseload and low supervision of parolees, and the increasing number of mandatory

released offenders, new and more intense programming is needed. The more individualized the treatment programming and services that these inmates receive while in the correctional system, the better chance they have of returning to their communities and living crime-free.

President Bush has called for the creation of prisoner re-entry services, focusing on job training and placement services, transitional housing, and mentoring (Weedon 2004). In collaboration with this call for more extensive services, the US Department of Justice offered \$100 million dollars divided into 68 grants for the development of Serious and Violent Offender Re-entry programs. These grants are an effort to increase public safety and reduce victimization by helping returning offenders become productive members of the community through close supervision and programming during their release. (Office of Justice Programs 2006) All 50 states have developed their own form of re-entry program, with forty-nine states, the District of Columbia and the Virgin Islands utilizing the funding assistance from these government grants. (OJP)

This thesis examines the Serious and Violent Offender Re-entry Program in Nebraska. The current research is small part of a larger evaluation of the three phases of the reentry program conducted by the University of Nebraska at Omaha. The overall evaluation will determine if the program components of all 3 phases have been designed and implemented as intended. Within this context, my research is determining if participants received the services they were promised, which is simply just one, albeit important, part of the evaluation that is underway. In terms of the overall reentry initiative, taken together, my research in conjunction with the other evaluation activities

will determine if the program can, or has, achieved its goals of reducing re-offending and enhancing public safety

This research explores the program participants' perceptions of their programming. My main research question is: What programs and services do the program participants think that they need to live a crime free life after they return to the community? It is important to examine this aspect of the process in order to assess program implementation and effectiveness.

With recognition that programs are likely to be more effective when those operating programs are fully aware and cognitive of the attitudes and experiences of program participants, it is important to include the perspective and perceptions of the program participants themselves. (Turner and colleagues, 1999 and Farole and Cissner, 2005) Staff and participants will, of course, have areas of agreement and disagreement, but it is crucial for staff to be aware of how their perceptions and attitudes might differ from participants' so that they may most effectively manages those differences, and identify areas for continuous improvement. (Turner and colleagues, 1999 and Farole and Cissner, 2005) To this end, it is important to determine whether the inmates in Nebraska's reentry program are receiving the services that program implementers and the corrections department have deemed necessary for effective re-entry and whether the inmates are receiving the services that *they* think will give them a better chance of success. It is also important to note that the differences between what the inmates want to receive and the actual programming that they may be receiving in order to more fully understand program effectiveness and re-offending.

Program effectiveness relies on the implementation of the promised programming; if original programming is not being administered, the inmates' progress toward completion of the program, and a smooth and safe transition back to their communities, may suffer. Moreover, ultimately the goal of the prisoner re-entry program initiative is to provide for safer communities. In order to reach this goal, the programs offered to inmates should be the services inmates believe may be beneficial to their successful reintegration. These offenders will have a better chance of learning and accepting the information and training from the re-entry programming if they believe that it is something that they think that they need and want, as opposed to being forced into participating simply to make parole.

In the remainder of this section I will discuss the history and description of the Serious and Violent Offender Re-entry Initiative as it is being implemented across the United States. I will also offer a more in depth look at the Nebraska re-entry program.

### **History and Description of the Prisoner Re-entry Initiative**

In order to deal with the almost 600,000 inmates that are released into the community yearly in the US (BJS 2002) and the threats they pose to the public, programs and treatment services need to mediate the risks for recidivism before these inmates ever reach the streets. Prisoner re-entry programs are designed to do this very thing. These programs are used to promote effective reintegration of offenders back into the community after their release from a correctional facility; remain crime-free after release, maintain steady employment, abstain from drugs, and comply with the plan of their programming and release. More specifically, these programs focus on assisting the

offenders with the life skills needed before release and after reentry to successfully become a law-abiding citizen in the community. (Office of Justice Programs 2006)

Although much of the re-entry program is parallel to parole, there are several distinctions regarding the re-entry program that make it different from parole. According to the Nebraska Department of Correctional Services website, only 40% of inmates in Nebraska make parole, therefore, this program provides additional surveillance to those who would not ordinarily receive any upon release. Another difference is that reentry programming services start early in inmates' sentence of incarceration, in some cases as soon as the inmate is inducted into the institution, whereas traditional parole services begin as offenders are released into the community. Last, parole services typically end once offenders have been successfully released from parole, leaving offenders to find ways to on their own to continue their programming. In contrast, the reentry initiative is meant to cultivate a continuity of care, thus providing services to offenders while incarcerated, during parole, and even after parole has been successfully completed. This continuity of care can be seen in the various phases of the reentry initiative.

Prisoner Re-entry programming includes three phases. Phase I is the institutional phase in which programs work to prepare offenders for release and reentry into the community. Such programs include education, mental health services, substance abuse treatment, job training, parenting and family programs, mentoring, and diagnostic and risk assessments. (Office of Justice Programs 2006) After successful completion of Phase I, the offenders are transitioned to Phase II, which utilizes community-based programs, including public and private mental health service, drug treatment and support groups, and day reporting centers that allow for consistent programming to be delivered

to the offenders. As with the Phase I programs, Phase II also provides educational, employment, mental health, and substance abuse treatment programs, as needed. The final phase of the re-entry program is community-based long-term support programs, Phase III. Those that reach Phase III are no longer under the supervision of the criminal justice system, and are living in their community with a network of social service agencies and other community organizations to provide further services. (Office of Justice Programs 2006)

The theoretical framework on which re-entry program are based is deterrence. According to Spohn (2002), Beccaria and Bentham explained that crime results from a rational calculation of the costs versus the benefits of criminal activity. Criminals commit crime because the benefit of crime outweighs the cost of possibly getting caught. To this end, two types of deterrence could be accomplished with proper education and training; the general public could be deterred from committing crimes once people see other experience consequences to offending (general deterrence), and specific individuals could be prevented from committing future criminal acts once they experience consequences for their transgressions (specific deterrence). The prisoner re-entry program is meant to promote specific deterrence, and prevent individuals' future offending, by increasing skills for rational thought. Program components are meant to teach and assist offenders in the identification of the costs of crime, which outweigh any benefit. Also, the supervision associated with reentry is meant to increase surveillance of offenders and thus increase their certainty of apprehension, also promoting specific deterrence.

### **Nebraska Serious and Violent Offender Program**

Nebraska is one of the states to have the opportunity to develop a pilot prisoner re-entry program with the funding from a Department of Justice Serious and Violent Offender grant. To assess if Nebraska's prisoner re-entry program has implemented its programming according to its goals and objectives, since it began in 2004, an overview of the Nebraska's correctional environment and its general work plan for the re-entry program will be reviewed. This review will be used as a foundation for the evaluation of processes and programming as viewed by the program participants themselves.

The Nebraska Serious and Violent Offender Re-entry Program's work plan (Nebraska Department of Correctional Services 2003) states that in 2002 Nebraska housed over 4,000 inmates in their prisons and released 2,007 inmates through mandatory discharge and parole that same year. Having spent an average sentence of 24 months behind bars (Nebraska Department of Correctional Services 2005), these released offenders are unprepared for life out in the community; resulting in trouble with re-establishing employment, housing, and bonds with family and friends. They are left with little to no aid for substance abuse and health problems. For the nation as a whole, the average number of released offenders that return to the correctional system is roughly two-thirds. However in Nebraska, the rate is quite a bit lower. The rate of recidivism for all crime categories; including murder, sexual assault, robbery, burglary and drug possession, in 2002 for Nebraska was significantly lower, at 21.0%, compared to the national average of roughly 52% for the same year. (Nebraska PRP work plan) However, this lower rate still results in hundreds of new victims and an increased concern for the safety of the public. As we can see, even with this lower recidivism rate, it is still

a problem that must be addressed. Nebraska looked to the Serious and Violent Offender Initiative to assist in finding a solution.

Nebraska's serious and violent offender pilot program began in 2004. This program offers services to participating offenders for substance abuse and mental health problems, employment, and housing, help reuniting with family, help completing an education, and help preventing criminal behavior. The offenders that are part of this pilot program are in the program on a voluntary basis. However, there are several requirements for selection into the pilot program. The target population contains serious and violent offenders, age 18 to 35, being housed in the Omaha Correctional Center, the Community Corrections Center-Omaha, or under Adult Parole supervision, and have been assessed as high risk for future recidivism if services are not provided. (Nebraska PRP work plan) The risk assessment consists of several evaluation areas that are administered through a standardized instrument. The areas include prior criminal history, age, drug use, age of first drug use, evidence of violence, and institutional behavior.

The typical program participants exhibit several similar characteristics; they have prior criminal histories, have used drugs and also started using drugs at a young age, have exhibited violence or have been involved in weapons use, and have shown negative institutional behavior. Moreover, eligible inmates must be returning to five different area codes in the city of Omaha after their release in order for evaluations to assess the impact of their return on public safety. As the title of the initiative states, the offenders in this program must be in the serious and violent category. The Nebraska Board of Parole offers twenty six crimes that are to be considered both serious and violent. These crimes include 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> degree murder, manslaughter, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> degree sexual assault,



robbery, motor vehicle theft, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> degree assault, arson, child abuse, vulnerable adult abuse, and assault of a police officer. However, due to political reasons, Nebraska's Governor has excluded offenders convicted of sexual offenses from participating in the state's prisoner re-entry program. (Nebraska Correctional Services Work plan 2003)

The Nebraska prisoner re-entry program has five goals for which it hopes to achieve. It must be noted that the goals of program from the NDCS grant work plan are simply goals and have not yet been assessed. These are simply the Nebraska Department of Correctional Services' (NDCS) vision for the program, and an evaluation is underway to determine if these goals have been met. However, an overview of the of the goals is needed to better understand the Nebraska re-entry program

The first goal is to prevent re-offending. Objectively, this goal will be implemented through the selection of the target population, fully engaging the offender in the planning process of their own re-entry programming and services plan, individualizing the case plans for each offender through all three program phases, exercising active supervision and offender accountability, and finally coordinating state, community and faith-based services to ensure support is in place. (Nebraska Department of Correctional Services Work Plan 2003) This goal is of utmost importance to the corrections system and also to communities. If there is prevention of crime, there are implications for the criminal justice system; with less offending, police have fewer crimes to investigate, the courts have fewer cases to try, and the corrections system has fewer inmates. For communities, crime prevention will result in fewer victimizations and possible losses of lives.

The second goal is to enhance public safety by working with local law enforcement to coordinate communication, accountability and supervision, provide ongoing management, utilize technology for offender location, exercise zero tolerance for new criminal activity, and implement individual reintegration plans. (Nebraska Department of Correctional Services Work plan 2003) The safety of the community fosters a sense of security within community members and promotes trust and respect for law enforcement and the criminal justice system as a whole. Law enforcement plays an important role in the accomplishment of this goal. With cooperation between the prisoner re-entry staff, the returning offender and law enforcement, the development and maintenance of re-entry plans along with crime-free living assists in the improvement of public safety.

The third goal is to redeploy and leverage existing community resources for offenders by fostering linkages and accessing currently provided service. This goal will be carried out by the use of federal funds to design, build, test and improve systems that are already established, use the funding to enhance existing state and local resources, increase communities' leverage and allocation of resources, enhance partnerships among government agencies and community organizations, and enhance availability and quality of re-entry services. (Nebraska Department of Correctional Services Work plan 2003) Simply put, the reentry program is intended to help the Nebraska Department of Correctional Services (NDCS) foster relationships with new service providers in the community and better allocate inmates to existing services currently being used by the department. Currently, NDCS has scant resources in their institutions and in the community to serve offenders and parolees and typically assigns all offenders, regardless

of need, to these programs. The reentry initiative is intended to promote more outreach to community services providers, inviting them to offer services to offenders both within and outside of institutions. More importantly, with the help of needs assessment tools, the reentry program is intended to better match offenders to existing services, so that those most in need of specific treatment receive programming, and those not in need do not take up valuable space in limited programs. The use of pre-existing community programming allows for NDCS's limited funds to be used in a positive fashion to improve the program, or adjust the programming to assist in the reintegration of the returning offender. The coordination and expansion of existing community programs allows for the sustainability of the program and promotes a seamless transition for offenders.

The fourth goal is to assist the offender to avoid crime, engage in pro-social community activities, and meet family responsibilities, within a restorative justice climate. Although this term is used to describe one of the goals, there is no definition provided by NDCS. However, it seems that the inclusion of transition teams for offenders is a way in which the reentry program is meant to foster reunification with family and with the community. Transition teams for offenders consist of members of the offenders' families, their children, members of the clergy, the offenders' employer, a local law enforcement officer, and other members of the offenders' support network. The re-entry program will promote transition team meetings that encourage productive engagement between the offender, victim, and community organizations, provide for and expect the offender to be a contributing productive citizen, and increase involvement

between members of offenders' support networks and returning offenders. (Nebraska Department of Correctional Services Work plan 2003)

The fifth goal of Nebraska's re-entry program is to ensure program sustainability. The program looks to ensure current community and government resources are utilized and will remain accessible once federal funds are unavailable, ensure government and community support exists and that these relationships are enhanced and built, and finally to ensure that this initiative is viewed as integral to community and public safety. All of the preceding goals are of utmost importance, however, without program sustainability, the prisoner re-entry program cannot successfully assist returning offenders in developing a crime-free life within their community. The nurturance of the programming can be accomplished through the allocation of funding to all programs throughout the re-entry process. With fully functional programs, the re-entry process can continue to benefit returning offenders.

Given that all fifty states received federal grant money to establish prisoner re-entry programs, it is likely that the aforementioned goals are not unique to Nebraska's program. It is now time to review the degree to which other states' programs have successfully achieved their goals. More importantly, a review of other states' program evaluations provides insight into the ways in which goal achievement can be measured.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Over the past three decades there have been numerous studies that have addressed the issues of prisoner re-entry in the United States (Travis 2005, Petersilia 2004, Solomon 2005). More specifically there have been program evaluations that have examined the effectiveness of re-entry programs on reducing re-offending (La Vinge and Lawrence 2001). The processes by which programs are implemented, however, often have a direct effect on participation outcomes (Rossi and Freeman 1998). These effects can be seen when programs are not fully implemented as intended or only part of the curriculum is made available to the program participants. When the program is not fully implemented, the outcome results, including the reduction of recidivism rates, are jeopardized and the actual program effects can not be measured.

The purpose of this review is to highlight the methodologies used in process evaluations and demonstrate the way in which these evaluations provide further understanding of program participants' outcomes. This information will provide further justification for the need for inmates' perceptions of re-entry programming. I begin by examining prisoner re-entry outcome evaluations and then move to a review of process evaluations conducted in several fields. I conclude with an examination of a process evaluation on a prisoner re-entry program and a discussion of the way in which this literature will guide and/or justify my research.

In regard to reentry programs' affect on recidivism, Visher and colleagues (2004) reported on their four state, longitudinal pilot project research. The authors provided 324 prison inmates with self-administered surveys before and after their release

to the community. Visher and colleagues (2004) reported that the inmates who found jobs after release were more likely to have participated in work release while incarcerated. Also, younger inmates that returned to families with parents or relatives with substance abuse problem were more likely to use drugs after release. The authors also found that one-third of respondents were re-arrested within six months of release for either parole violations or for new crimes (Visher et al 2004). The respondents reported that an extra focus in prisoner re-entry programs needs to be on parenting skills, education, more intensive policing, and greater involvement of the corrections department in public agencies. Therefore, the programs that are being implemented in the Prisoner Re-entry Programs studied are in need of intensification and adjustment (Visher et al 2004).

Release to the community has differing effects on inmates based on the type of crime they committed. Solomon and colleagues (2005) state that certain prisoners benefit more from intensive supervision after release than others. Supervision did not seem to effect re-offending for violent offenders whereas lower-level offenders, identified by the authors as likely to be black men with few prior arrests and who were serving time for parole or probation revocations, are most likely to have lower re-arrest levels with supervision. Solomon and colleagues (2005) found that prior arrest record had a significant impact on re-arrest; the fewer prior arrests, the lower the risk of or re-arrest when released with supervision to the community.

In addition to outcome evaluations, scholars also often conduct process evaluations. (Babbie 2001) Process evaluations look to the implementation of the goals and objectives of the program to identify if the programs have been applied and

implemented as intended. Because there is little to no process evaluation research already in existence in the prisoner re-entry field, with many evaluations still under way, my current research is needed to develop an understanding of the implementation of the components of prisoner re-entry programs. Although there are few process evaluations on prisoner re-entry, there have been process evaluations that have been conducted on other programs.

Egbert and her colleagues (2006) conducted a process evaluation of a Drug Court program utilizing progress reports at both the client and at the program level. The authors also identified program statistical reports at the agency level used to routinely monitor client retention, services that were delivered, and the therapeutic interactions (Egbert et al 2006). Through the utilizations of these progress and statistical reports, the authors found that, like other research on the implementation of drug courts, multiple levels of care, ongoing monitoring, and drug offender restoration, offer successful objectives and goals to allow for early stage success, including remaining drug free and crime free, for clients and also for system development (Egbert et al 2006).

Another area that has been extensively researched is that of sexual offenders, Megan's Law and the registries to which sex offenders are required to report. Scholars have used several different evaluation types, but process evaluations were used to examine the implementation of community notification and also the correctness of the addresses on web-based registry databases (Welchans, 2005; Tewksbury, 2002). Results showed that there were less than 75% of registry entries that were possible correct addresses. Through this evaluation Tewksbury (2002) suggests that without the correct addresses and location of these offenders, the registry's utility is defeated.

Matson and Lieb (1996) looked at the different forms of public notification that accompanied the return of sexual offenders to the community, including media releases, door-to-door flyers and mailed flyers, to determine if the community notification law had been effectively implemented. Matson and Lieb (1996) also examined the effects of these forms of community notifications. The authors stated that Megan's Law notification create potential forms of harassment and vigilantly attacks toward the registered sex offenders, however the authors found that only 3.5 percent of the notifications resulted in any type of backlash toward the registered offenders.

The Intensive Aftercare Program utilized in juvenile detention facilities most closely resembles prisoner re-entry programs that are being implemented in adult facilities across the United States. Flynn and her colleagues (2003) evaluated these aftercare programs, which provide job training and placement, substance abuse treatment, educational programming, family interventions, and other community-based services that will be continued after release from the institution. For this process evaluation, Flynn and colleagues (2003) conducted both qualitative and quantitative assessments of the program staff and participants. Focus groups were conducted with the program staff to obtain an understanding of the program objectives and goals, and to express their roles and relationships in the aftercare program (Flynn et al 2003). Interviews were administered to five program administrators to assess the treatment philosophies of the aftercare program. Another qualitative assessment addressed the issue of community embeddedness and the extent to which the program and treatment services are implemented in the community after youthful offenders return to their neighborhoods (Flynn et al 2003). Quantitative analysis was also conducted on the treatment programs



that the youth in the aftercare program were receiving over their time in the program and the institution. Flynn and colleagues (2003) found that staff turnover and the implementation of the programming in the community were barriers to the successful execution of the aftercare program.

After addressing process evaluations implemented in fields across several disciplines, one process evaluation was located that directly assessed a prisoner re-entry program in Pennsylvania. La Vigne and Lawrence (2002) evaluated the Pennsylvania Community Orientation and Reintegration (COR) Program. In this process evaluation, the authors utilized several interviewing and data collection techniques, including focus groups, COR participant surveys, and curriculum evaluations. Focus groups were used to obtain discussion and qualitative data from Phase I instructors, Phase I managers, Phase II instructors and Phase II participants. Surveys were administered to the COR participants at both the Phase I and Phase II levels. The surveys addressed the participants' perception of ease of transition to the community on a variety of challenges that the participants might face after release (La Vigne and Lawrence 2002).

The evaluation addressed the lessons that the programming was intended to administer by examining the helpfulness of the lessons for return to the community. These lessons include job skills training, which addressed job search, resume development and interviewing skills, with training on how to explain a prison record. Other lessons include life skills training, money management, alcohol and drug treatment, anger management, and family reunification and parenting classes. Results suggest that the Pennsylvania COR program has assisted the participants in their preparation and readiness for release, as compared to the general prison programming.

Specifically, the evaluation found that the implementation of Phase I programming had the highest level of consistency and received the highest ratings from both the staff and the program participants. Several other strengths include the community contacts that were made through the COR program, including applying for personal identification, getting mental health referrals, obtaining housing resources, and making employment contacts. The anger management and life skills lessons of the COR program, include coping strategies for dealing with anger and specific skills necessary to maintain healthy relationships with peers, family, and others in the community, are also strengths identified by the inmates, staff and the evaluators.

The evaluation addressed several areas for improvement in the COR program. More staff training and more communication from the Department of Corrections administrators was suggested to enhance coordination and standardization of program delivery. Another area for improvement was the need for conducting a more thorough needs assessment of each inmate prior to release to determine who would benefit most from the COR program. One of the key improvements that were recommended for COR was to address the impact that the program has with regard to its ability to enhance reintegration and reduce of the recidivism rates of the returning inmates.

My examination of the process evaluations that have been conducted on programs across the mental health and criminal justice field has shown that interviews with staff and participants, focus groups, assessments of correct information, and quantitative assessments of program implementation are common components of program evaluations. Through the examination of these different tactics of process evaluation, I will look to utilize the interview aspect of these previous studies; however, I will improve

upon these methods by qualitatively interviewing the prisoner re-entry program participants. More importantly, my review of these process evaluations demonstrates the way in which the process can affect the outcomes of program participants and the need to investigate the programming process of the Nebraska prisoner re-entry program.

### **CHAPTER III**

#### **METHODOLOGY**

Qualitative interviewing of the inmate participants in the Nebraska Serious and Violent Offender Re-entry Program was the primary method of data collection for the current research. Qualitative interviewing methods, as opposed to quantitative data analysis, were used due to the rich and in-depth information that result from open-ended questions and open discussion (Strauss and Corbin 1998). Qualitative interviewing was also used due to the small number of re-entry program participants; small sample sizes are not conducive to data analysis and statistical testing. To address the posed research questions; What programs and services do program participants believe they need to live a crime free life after their return to the community and how do program participants perceive the programming and services they are receiving, interviewing methods were the appropriate technique for this research design.

Although qualitative interviewing allowed for in-depth responses to research questions, the data received from the respondents were only relevant to research conversations that occurred at a particular time and place (Wengraf 2001). The responses were limited in their ability to generalize to the larger prison population. However, the responses this research looked to receive were used to address the needs of Nebraska re-entry program participants only, improve their program experience, and increase the likelihood of a crime-free life for the Nebraska participants upon return to their communities.

The sample of participants in this research was drawn by the Department of Correctional Services as participants enrolled in the re-entry program. The research

participants, included the members of Phase I and Phase II<sup>1</sup>, also offenders ages 18 through 35, who have been sentenced for a serious or violent offense, who have been assessed as having a high risk of re-offending, who were planning to return to the Omaha area in three different zip codes; 68104, 68110, and 68111, and who had release dates of less than three years from June 2004. The males were located in the Omaha Correctional Center and also in the community via the Omaha Community Corrections Center, but both males and females were included in the sample. These women were housed in the Women's Correctional Center in York Nebraska and the Community Corrections Center.

Although participation in the re-entry program was voluntary, participation in the evaluation was not voluntary. Therefore, my sample includes all of the inmates that voluntarily agreed to participate in the program, not all of those eligible for reentry programming. Approximately only 40% of those eligible for the reentry program agree to participate, so ultimately the degree to which the research results that follow are representative of the inmate population at large is unknown. It is likely that the perceptions and the outcomes of those participating in the program vary from those eligible for the program but choose not to participate. This should be kept in mind when interpreting my results.

The final sample of my respondents included six males from the Omaha Correctional Center, nine males from Phase II at the Omaha Community Corrections Center, one female from the Women's Correctional Center in York and three females in Phase II. As this is a program that was adding participants concurrent to my data collection, the final sample number was determined on the day of the first interview with the transition managers, however, during my interview time frame, four participants in

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<sup>1</sup> At the time of this research there were no inmates enrolled in Phase III.

the parole stage of phase II left the program and two phase I participants were terminated from the program. The paroled participants have often been in the program the longest and have seen the fruits of the programming and services, or have seen how it may have affected their transition, but having four of the nine quit during my research time, left the in-depth information from this group of participants shorter than expected. A description of the sample can be found in Table 1.

The current research primarily addressed the participants and the programming in Phase I of the Nebraska re-entry program. As the Nebraska program had only transitioned a small number of its Phase I participants to the second, community-based, phase, the conclusions of this research addressed the institutional based programming and inmate perceptions. However, the participants in Phase II were included in the final sample and themes and conclusions were identified for the Phase II participants as well.

The research occurred in two phases. First, I identified the programs and services that the Department of Correctional Services reported the program participants were receiving, which were located in their individual re-entry plans. In the second phase, I interviewed participants, with open-ended questions to address the research questions.

TABLE 1.\*                      **SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS**

	Phase I	Phase II	Phase III
<b><u>Sex</u></b>			
Males	6 (86%)	9 (75%)	
Females	1 (14%)	3 (25%)	
<b>Total</b>	7	12	
<b><u>Race/Ethnicity</u></b>			
White	3 (43%)	4 (33.3%)	
Black	3 (43%)	7 (58.3%)	
Hispanic			
Other	1 (14%)	1 (8.3%)	
<b>Total</b>	7	12	
<b><u>Mean Age</u></b>			
Males	23.5	26.3	
Females	23	25.3	
<b><u>Crime Type</u></b>			
Robbery w/ weapon	2 (28.5%)	3 (25%)	
Assault 1 <sup>st</sup> degree		1 (8.3%)	
2 <sup>nd</sup> Degree	2 (28.5%)	1 (8.3%)	
Burglary	2 (28.5%)	1 (8.3%)	
Possession of Narcotics w/ intent to sell	1 (14.5%)	4 (33.5%)	
Murder		1 (8.3%)	
Manslaughter		1 (8.3%)	
<b>Total</b>	7	12	

\*As of July 2007

**Acquiring Re-entry Plans**

The first part of the analysis was to retrieve the personalized re-entry plans and programming schedules for each of the program participants. To augment this information, I interviewed the two transition managers to ensure the information found in the re-entry plans was both current and accurate. These managers were also asked to

discuss program components and details so I could discern the details of services offered. This information was recorded on a simple notepad, and I created a table of services available, description of curriculum, purpose of the program, and number of contact hours expected for each participant. Through the utilization of the program plans for these inmates, these reports provided a basis for the second part of the methodology, the inmate interview; to assess the perceptions of the inmates' needs compared to the programming the Nebraska Department of Correctional Services reports they received.

### **Inmate Interviews**

Just as important as the programming that the Department of Correctional Services said that the re-entry program participants received, was the insight of the actual program participants themselves. The second part of the analysis was conducted through the use of interviews, which were administered to each of the inmates in the program, and responses were recorded on a standardized instrument (see appendix). Within the interview, two major areas were addressed. The first area was asking the program participants to express their perceptions about the programming that they believed that they needed to be successful in their return to their community. The second area was to examine the perceptions of the inmates about the programming that these participants think that they received.

To tackle the question regarding the similarities or discrepancies between what the state reported participants were receiving and the programs in which inmates reported they were enrolled the prisoners' re-entry plans were matched to the section of the interview regarding the services and programming the inmates reported having received. To identify if the re-entry participants are receiving the programming and services they



were promised on their entry to the program, several questions were asked. “Have you received the programming and services that you were promised when you enrolled in the program?” Another question was, “What programs have you participated in to date in the re-entry program?” These responses regarding the programs were compared to the personalized re-entry plans received from the transition managers.

In order to determine whether the participants in the re-entry program were receiving the programming that they believed they need to remain crime free upon and after their return to their communities, several questions were utilized. The interview instrument itself is located in the Appendix. I specifically asked, “What do you think you need to live a crime free life outside of prison?” followed by probes to develop and expand the response, was asked to assess the perceptions of the program participants of their needs. “Have these needs been addressed in your time in the re-entry program? Which ones? and how so?” and “What needs have not been addressed in the program? Why?” addressed the actual programming and services that have been or have not been provided to these participants, programming they thought they need.

To address if the participants are actually benefiting from the re-entry programming they are receiving, several questions were addressed; “Have you found these programs to be helpful? Why or why not?”, “Do you have any suggestions for programs to add or eliminate?”, and “What ways can the existing programming you have participated in be improved?”. By asking these questions, the responses were used to draw conclusions for the Department of Correctional Services in improving the re-entry programming.

The participants of the research were assured full anonymity from the responses of the interviews. However, for the purposes of the findings of the current research the responses were labeled with numbers one through nineteen, only for the citation of responses, with no connection to the individuals' personal information. The responses of the transition managers were labeled in a similar fashion. The responses from the two transition managers were labeled as manager A or manager B, with no connection to their personal information.

In order to derive the conclusions from the open-ended questions of the inmate interviews, conceptual ordering was used. Conceptual ordering is the organization of data into categories based on the properties and description of the information (Strauss & Corbin 1998) which ultimately was used to develop key themes. These themes became the final conclusions as to the extent that the programming the Department of Correctional Services meets the expectations and needs of the program participants themselves.

### **Limitations**

Despite my best efforts, there are limitations to this research design. First, sample bias is inherent in this design, as only those agreeing to participate in the program are included in the research. By their very nature, the opinions and perceptions of those agreeing to participate in the reentry program should differ from those who refused programming. If nothing else, offenders who volunteered for the program should be more amenable to its effects than those who refused this service. Also, because the sample was derived from only re-entry participants from the Nebraska program, my findings are not representative of the entire population and therefore can not be

generalized to other inmates. Moreover, given that this research was conducted in a single state, it is unlikely that my findings can be generalized to re-entry programs across the United States. Nevertheless, this research can be used to effectively draw conclusions and infer improvements for Nebraska's reentry program as a whole.

My research plan was to identify the perceptions of the participants in the re-entry program as to the programming they are receiving to therefore assist the Department of Correctional Services in improving the programming to ultimately reduce the recidivism rates of the participants. The research will be able to help identify the areas in which the prisoner re-entry program need improvement and ideas on how to improve these areas to ultimately improve the safety of the community through the effective programming and services for the program participants.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **FINDINGS**

As mentioned, the responses from this research were collected from the transition managers and the program participants from Phase I and Phase II of the re-entry program. The following section is divided into two sections. The first describes the interviews with the transition managers regarding the programming and services available to the program participants; and the second examines the interviews with the program participants themselves.

#### **TRANSITION MANAGERS' INTERVIEWS**

In order to establish a background on the programming that the Re-entry program offers participants, both transition managers for the program were interviewed. They were asked to explain the programming offered to participants through their personalized plans, and other classes and programming for which they are eligible. Table 2 provides an organized look at the programming available, the components of the programs, the purpose of the programs, and the extent of the contact the participants have with each particular program.

Mental Health was the first of the services the transition managers described when asked about the programming available to the re-entry participants. Transition manager A stated: "As for mental health, there is the GOLF program. I'm not really sure what the letters stand for, but it includes behavioral recognition in the first stage, cognitive work in the second, they work on change in the third stage and work on maintaining the change, and the maintenance of the change and goal setting are worked on in the fourth stage."

Transition manager B stated “most of the participants complete the first two stages of GOLF, if not all of them. But if they haven’t completed them, they are at least on the list when they enter into the program.”

Table 2. **PROGRAM AVAILABILITY**

<b><u>Program Title</u></b>	<b><u>Program Components</u></b>	<b><u>Purpose</u></b>	<b><u>Contact Hours</u></b>
Mental Health GOLF Program	Behavior recognition, Cognitive Change, Change Maintenance, and Goal Setting Maintenance. Self Monitoring Skills and intervention strategies.	Behavioral and Cognitive Change	Levels I-III, 12 – 2 hour Sessions Level III- Individualized Sessions
SAU	Residential Treatment, Monitoring and Education	Drug Treatment and Drug Change	10 Months
NRTS	Non-Residential, Prevention and Awareness	Education	2 Times a Week, for 9 Weeks
Men and Women in Progress	Motivational Speakers, Former Inmate Speakers, and Open Discussions	Motivation and Role Model Development	Twice Monthly
Narcotics Anonymous/Alcoholics Anonymous	Weekly meetings	Relapse Prevention and Support Development	Weekly
Education	GED’s and College Courses	Academic Development	1 to 3 Days, for 1 to 1 ½ hours Weekly
Victims Awareness		Empathy Development	9 Weeks
Wrap Sessions	Discussion of Progress in Programming		Once at the end of the month

Substance Abuse Treatment programs are a second required area for the re-entry participants on their personalized plans. According to the transition managers there are two different substance abuse treatment programs to which the re-entry participants are assigned. The first is the Substance Abuse Unit (SAU), a residential treatment program, with no contact with the general prison population, which participants complete in an average of 10 months. The residential program monitors the participants and educates them on alcohol and drug use, and stresses relapse prevention. The second program is the non-residential treatment service (NRTS) that works with every other participant to work on prevention and awareness of the issues of drugs and alcohol. This program is a weekly, nine session course.

A third program that the managers were quite enthused about was Men In Progress. Men in Progress is a group-session-oriented program in which the participants meet twice a month. All the male participants in the three phases come together to discuss issues that affect their chances of getting out and staying crime free. The program brings in motivational speakers to talk about maintaining change, along with ex-felons who discuss their situations, including what has been helpful and harmful to their own process, so the participants can learn from them.

Transition manager A stated:

They seem to really like it when we have these meetings and bring in the ex-felons to talk with them. We try to keep it fresh with different people coming in. We work on having some religious classes, but we have to be open to some of them not wanting to participate. We also supply mentors for these guys. These mentors come in at least once a month to help establish connections with the outside and gain support.

Along with the programming that is part of the personalized plan, the transition managers stated that the participants at the Community Corrections Center were offered

the opportunity to participate in an after-care program, anger management courses, job placement and job services, Narcotics Anonymous and Alcoholics Anonymous, and GED course work.

After addressing three of the core programs the re-entry program contains, we can see that the mental health program contains four levels, encompassing behavioral recognition, cognition, change management, and goal-setting. Drug treatment programming was a second requirement of the participants, the two program include the residential program, SAU, and the non-residential program, NRTS. These programs work on education and awareness. The third program that the transition managers seemed most excited about was Men In Progress. These meetings include motivational speakers and mentors', but, most of all, bring in ex-felons who have "made it on the outside" to come in and share with the men. After examining the perceptions of the programming by the transition managers, we can now examine to their perceptions of their involvement with the program.

### **Managers' Assessments of Involvement**

To address the involvement of the program participants in the programs, three areas were addressed; the contact with participants, the performance evaluations conducted, and the support given to the participants. Transition manager B stated "We have contact with each of the participants at an end of the month meeting, where we talk to them about what has been going on in the last month, their progress in the programming and we give them a chance to bring up new ideas for the program."

Transition manager A further expanded with these statements:

We have an open office policy and the guys know that they can come to us about anything, we make sure that they can reach us at anytime and we'll do what we can. We are also there for them at custody changes and any hearings that they may have to go to. We also get to drive them to job interviews and other visitations that they need to go to.

When asked about the contact with the program participants, there was a clear distinction between the different facilities and different stages, and the contact with the transition managers.

When addressing the participants who were in Phase I of the program, housed at the Omaha Correctional Center, transition manager B continued to explain, “ we want to keep our office open to the participants so they can come to us to address the issues that may be bothering them, or if they are having trouble on the yard. We definitely are there to be supportive.” The contact with the participants in Phase II, however, is slightly different compared to the contact with Phase I participants.

Manager A described their interaction with the work release participants as “for those on work release, we have contact with their case workers to address any issues that may have risen. We also have our once a month meetings, or sometimes on an as needed basis, but we try to meet at least once a month. We also are there if they have supervised visits and we conduct reports from the records of their case managers.”

They also added:

We also see them twice a month at Men In Progress, so we are able to get a hold of them then for the monthly visits. We also help them by driving them to job hunt, to obtain certificates including driver's license and birth certificates. But we normally see them at Men in progress.”

When the participants reach the community stage of Phase II and are put on parole, the contact with the transition managers again changes.



The participants have most of their contact with their parole officers. If there is an issue, then we most likely hear from the parole officer. We are available for after hours if they need someone to talk to, I always have my cell phone on in case someone needs some help at any time of night. We've also helped them get settled in the contract housing, and in job searches. By this time, they are pretty self sufficient, but we are there to help out if they need it. (Transition Manager A)

To explore the means in which the progress of the participants are measured, the managers were asked to elaborate on their participant evaluations. "Performance evaluations are done at the end of each month. We look for the number of programs completed for each participant. However, completion of programming is not tracked until they have been in for 6 months. This gives them time to get acclimated to the people, programs, and getting into the swing of things."(Transition Manager B) The managers also stated that support was the key piece to the re-entry puzzle. The managers continued to express, "The re-entry program provides the supportive tool for these people to complete the programs and we are there to help them get on the right track through our open communication, opening new windows of opportunity to kick habits and reshape thoughts, by providing mentors, and bringing in people that have been in their position and have made it. We are definitely their supportive back bone in this process." (Transition Manager A)

The final area of interest was the managers perceptions of the participants' involvement in the programming. One manager stated: "There's a pretty high compliance rate. Most of the members participate because they know they are in a good program. There are very few who don't participate, but we will work with them to straighten things out before they are kicked out of the program. We will make sure that we are doing our job and help them get back in the game." (Transition Manager A)

We can see that transition managers seem to have different levels of contact with the program participants. There seems to be direct contact on a regular basis with the Phase I members, a lighter regiment for the participants on work release at CCCO, and an independent focus on the contact with the members of Phase II who are on parole in the community. The managers also explain that they are evaluating the participants on a regular basis and report high compliance rate with the participation of the members. Having examined the perceptions of the staff that manage the re-entry participants, we now turn to the responses of the program participants themselves.

### **PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS' PERCEPTIONS**

The following results pertain to respondents' views about the processes, participation and overall opinions of the re-entry program. The data are grouped into perceptions of need, perceptions of programming, attitudes towards change, and overall opinions. The responses below are derived from interviews with both male and female program participants regardless of phase, except for gender-specific programs such as Men in Progress and Women in Progress. This is done because the programming required for and available to both men and women are identical for their personalized plans. Also, there was little variability in the responses to my questions by men and women.

#### **Perceptions of Need**

When asked to address the programming, services, skills, or material items that the program participants believed that they need to live a crime-free life when they emerge from prison, a variety of responses were provided. However, there were several

key components that were identified. Every response included at least one of the following; education, a job, time management skills, maintaining cognitive change, or positive influences and support groups.

Education was expressed by the respondents as being integral to their success of remaining crime free on their return to their community. One respondent stated that “I think that getting an education is really important. Without getting some schooling, there is less chance of me being successful in the change that I’m trying to do.”(Participant 4) Another respondent addressed the issue by saying, “education is really important, even if it is just giving you skills for a certain trade or making you more book smart. With it there are a lot more possibilities.”(Participant 6)

Having stated that getting a better education will lead to better skills, several respondents noted that obtaining more education will lead to obtaining a better job. One respondent stated: “There aint no way that I’m gunna get a good job without gettin more education skills. All I’m gunna be endin up doin is flippin damn burgers at McDonalds or Burger King without it. So my GED is good and all, but I need to get on top of some college courses to get the kind of job I can get by on.”(Participant 7) Several other respondents mirrored this sentiment;

Without a good education, I’ll be right back where I was, with no real job that is going to take me anywhere. If I get some more training on how to be educated and act educated then I can convince myself that I actually can get a real good job. Then maybe I won’t even be tempted to commit a new crime. (Participant 12)

I want to continue my education, maybe get set up with Metro Tech and get an associates degree. I know that being an ex-con isn’t going to help me get a great job, but if I have some more school courses under my belt, then I can maybe get a good one. (Participant 1)

The acquisition and maintenance of full time employment was a second emphasis area for the needs of the respondents. The majority (65%) of the respondents stated that

maintaining a full time job was a key need to remaining crime free. As one respondent summarizes, “Without a full time job I won’t have the monetary assets to pay my bills and get back on my feet when I get out. If I get one and keep one, then I’ll be much more likely to keep clean and keep my nose in good things.”(Participant 10)

Along with maintaining a full time position to retain earnings, some respondents also saw employment as a time management tool. “If I have a full time job that I go to every day, Monday through Friday, maybe even a little on the weekends, then I am keeping busy and keeping myself out of trouble. I know that the more free time that I have on my hands, the more likely that I could do something stupid. But if I keep busy, then that is less likely to happen. That’s why I need a full time job,” stated participant 8. Two other participants felt similarly about maintaining employment as a time management tool:

I definitely need a schedule to keep my self busy and on the right track. If I have a good job that I enjoy going to everyday, then can use that to take up the free time that I used to have; the time that got me in trouble. (Participant 7)

I used to sit around bored all day when I was out, so to get some entertainment I’d take a little adventure. If I have something to take up my time, like a real job, then it will keep me off the streets and I won’t have to go on adventures anymore, at least not criminal ones.(Participant 11)

Along similar lines, and as mentioned in the previous responses, change must occur for successful transition into the community. Cognitive change was highly regarded as a need for living crime free. Correcting and re-aligning criminal thought processes is a main concern of the mental health courses. Participant 16 stated, “I have to keep working on the cognitive changes that I have made here. I realize now that I can change, but it’s going to take a little bit more than what I was giving before, and I am needing and wanting more when I get out.” One other respondent expressed:

I think that mental preparation is over 90% of the battle to stay straight on the outside. We have been working here to change our thoughts, and if I keep my mind in the right place, I'm gunna be alright. (Participant 5)

Part of maintaining mental preparation and changes in cognitive processes is allowing oneself to be surrounded with positive people, positive environments, and supportive groups. "I need to be around positive people and positive things to rub off on me and to teach me how to be a good and positive person and member of the community." (Participant 4) Statements like this show the perception that by simply surrounding themselves with positive people, they too will do positive things. When respondents talked about this need, there seemed to be a real desire to fulfill it.

If I want to be a better person and a better father, then I have to be a better person. I really want to be a better person and do good things with my life. I know that if I keep my connections with people that are doing positive things for themselves and others around them, then I can know that I can do that too. (Participant 9)

My support group has given me a lot of positive feedback and is keeping me on the right track now. Without them I don't think that I'd have made it as far as I have. I definitely need to maintain their support in the future. (Participant 18)

Other needs were also expressed by individual participants, including obtaining a driver's license, obtaining transportation, and assistance with paying past due child support. After addressing the primary needs that were addressed by the respondents, they were also asked to explain how their needs were being addressed in the re-entry program. Most of the respondents (85%) reported that their needs had been addressed in the program. As one participant stated, "They have addressed everything in every meeting, as to the what, the how, and the why we need to or should do something. They motivate you to be successful in living crime and drug free, and helping you to take the steps to be where you want to be." (Participant 2)

Respondents were also asked to explain if any of their needs had not been addressed in their time in the program. An overwhelming majority (80%) of the participants responded that there was nothing that was not being addressed and were quite confident that they were getting what they needed from the program; however, a few respondents did not feel the same.

I haven't had much visitation with my children; I wish that would be addressed. I have also noticed that the program is only focused on the individual, but I think that they should try and focus more on the others that in the lives of the participants. We aren't alone in our struggles, we are trying to get better for them, so I think that should be included. That's something that I need when I get out and it's not being addressed.(Participant 13)

My medical issues have not been addressed. I need to think about what I am going to do when I leave here and there hasn't been anything done to help me find a counselor or even how to find a good doctor where we're going to live. I wish that they'd help more with these kind of issues. (Participant 15)

After examining the program participants' perceptions of their needs for living a crime free life upon return to their community, we can see that there appears to be needs for more education, maintaining full time employment, time management tools, maintaining cognitive change, and positive surroundings and support groups. It was also addressed that these needs seem to have been met; however, there were other, less main-stream needs that were not addressed for a few of the respondents. Through this look at the perceptions of need and the fulfillment of these needs by the program, we can now look more extensively at the programming in which the participants are eligible to participate.

### **Perceptions of Programming**

Program participation is, in large part, the core of the re-entry program. To identify if the participants perceived that they were receiving the programming and services in which they were promised at the time they entered into the program, the exact question was asked. Every respondent stated that “yes” they perceived that they had or would be receiving the services that they were promised. One respondent asked, “I think so, unless I have been lied to. Do you know if I’ve been lied to? Just kidding, I know that I have completed everything off my personalized plan, and I’m still receiving more programs on top of that. So I know that is a yes to your question.” (Participant 17)

The participants’ personalized plans were obtained through consent from the individual participant. The personalized plans were then compared to the interview responses for the question of the programming and services in which they had participated. This was done to reaffirm participants’ perceptions of their contracted programming and assess the full implementation of reentry services. The direct comparisons uncovered that an overwhelming majority (95%) of participants’ responses matched the obtained personalized plans.

More importantly, it is necessary to assess if the program participants perceive the programs to be helpful in their transition to the community. In the process of discussing this question, several programs were identified as being most helpful; mental health programs, the drug treatment programs, Narcotics Anonymous, and Work Attitudes and Behaviors.

One of the main purposes of the mental health courses is to work on changing the thought processes of the individuals from criminal to lawful. Several participants

perceived this program as being quite helpful. One participant stated, “Yep, mental health helped me work on my trust issues, thought patterns, and to change my process of thinking. I am able to ask question to get the in-depth answers that I need to get them answered. This will all help me be able to use what I learn to keep straight back on the streets.” (Participant 14)

The mental health program, GOLF, includes behavior consequences lessons to identify the need to step back and think before acting. This was also perceived by participants as an important and helpful part of the mental health programming. One participant stated, “GOLF led me to think about my thought process and work on taking it from negative to positive. It’s changed because I think before I act now. I don’t have to get mad right away, I let myself think about what I should be instead of just getting mad and hittin’ someone.” (Participant 9) Other respondents mirrored this statement;

GOLF helped me most. It taught me to think before you act. It showed things in everyday life and how I can change to live a better day to day life. It also create a foundation of work patterns that help for future long term change. It also taught me to improve my communication skills with others and being respectful to them and myself. It taught me that everyone is not an enemy. I can now approach a situation having thought through the consequences before I act. That’s what really helped. (Participant 3)

The mental health and cognitive thought process training helped me a lot. I can think about the consequences of my actions now, when before I didn’t, I just did what I knew best which meant violence. I am not the same person because of the program and I am really appreciative for all the help that it gave me. (Participant 14)

Along with the helpfulness of the mental health services, drug treatment services were also viewed as helpful in creating positive change in the participants. Regarding the residential treatment program, SAU, several participants felt the program had changed their life forever. One participant stated: “SAU was the best thing that’s ever happened



to me. It has helped me change the way that I think about things. It includes cognitive exercises, how to maintain this thought process once we get out, and we talk a lot about relapse prevention. I am pretty scared that once I get out I might relapse, but I know that if I work on what SAU has taught me then I'll be ok." (Participant 13) Other participants used similar notions in describing SAU's helpfulness:

SAU forced me to look at my life at other's views. I could see what to change to not go back to where I was when I came into the corrections system. (Participant 19)

SAU gave me a new way of thinking about my drug problem. You are there in the residential program for so long that there isn't any chance that I couldn't have changed. We were forced to see that we do have a problem and that it is affecting more than just our state of mind for a high. It breaks you down and builds you back up in a different way of thinking. I know that it has really helped me, for the long haul. (Participant 5)

The non-residential drug treatment program was also seen as beneficial to one participant, "NRTS changed my ways of using drugs and alcohol. I am more aware of the dangers and the aftermath of taking drugs. It's a real helpful program, and it gives you lots of information to help you make good choices." (Participant 11) Although some found this program helpful, there were two participants who did not agree and stated, "NRTS in the first level gives you educational information on drug types and the effects and reasons to not take drugs and how it can lead to no good, but I already knew all of that. I didn't find those classes to be helpful at all"; and, "NRTS was no helpfulness and I didn't see any use for the course, if I have to be positive it was alright, but really it wasn't. It's only helpful if you want to change or want it to be helpful. I don't take drugs but I had to be in it, I didn't have any need for it, it was pretty much boring." (Participant 18)

After the drug treatment courses are completed, the participants are required to attend weekly Narcotics Anonymous meetings. A vast majority (70%) of the participants felt the program was helpful, and two participants had much to say about the program. One expressed, "NA was helpful because it includes my circle of friends so we can keep each other accountable to remain drug free while we are in and also when we get out. It helps me build stronger relationships with my friends and the other inmates that are going through the same things as me." (Participant 12) Another participant states, "Narcotics Anonymous allows me to share and relate to the other people who are coming to the meetings. It also lets me feel a strong fellowship with other people that are going through what I have been going through. I was asked to lead the meetings which made me step up, take on responsibility, and help in coping with my addiction. It's maybe the most worthwhile thing that I have done while I've been in the program." (Participant 15)

With some of the participants perceiving that fellowships and friendships are helpful in their transitional process, there is one program that brings all of the participants together to communicate and relate to each other and other ex-inmates that come in to talk to the participants. Men In Progress was highly regarded by many of the respondents (83%), resulting in responses such as, "Men In Progress allows me to relate to those that are coming in to talk to us. I can speak my mind and others can do the same. We talk about a lot of different topics that will affect us while we are still in and when we get out. It is good that we can talk to others that have been through it, they can guide us on what not to do and give us pointers on things that are hard to avoid when we get out, so that we can prepare before we get there. They give us a better chance of making it" (Participant 3) and "The guys that come in to talk to us are real helpful in answering our questions

about what it's like getting out and stayin' straight. The motivational speakers are pretty good too, they help us keep a positive mindset and keep us believing that it's mind over matter and that we can succeed. I really like the time that I spend in Men In Progress.” (Participant 8)

Women In Progress is a similar set of bi-monthly meetings that are set up for the female re-entry participants. The female version also includes ex-inmates and other motivational speakers, but it brings in speakers to explore issues that expressly address female health and safety. One respondent stated: “Women In Progress has allowed me to hear women come in from Planned Parenthood and talk about awareness of my health, giving us good information of STD's, and talk about men's and women's issues through them using surveys and slides. The domestic violence classes were hard to follow, but none-the-less helpful. I think that the time that they take to come out here is worthwhile for us and for them.” Other female participants stated;

Women In Progress has been helpful because these women that come talk have been in my shoes and they understand where I've come from. They are supportive in the change that I want to make for my future. By just knowing I can talk to these women about anything, knowing where I've been, and definitely not acting like a counselor but more like a comfort and encouragement for having to do things that I don't want to do. I am very comfortable talking to these women and it is fun to go to these meetings, cause I learn a lot because they make it so comfortable.(Participant 11)

Women In Progress has shown me that there is hope for me. I know that I have been working to change my life while I have been in the re-entry program, but I think that in knowing that these women have made it, are happy and are doing good things with their life, I know that it is possible for me too. (Participant 14)

One of the needs that the participants expressed as crucial to their successful transition to crime free life was maintaining full time employment. The program that is

designed to assist in this process is Work Attitudes and behaviors. Participants perceived the services that this program offers to be helpful. Participants stated;

Work attitudes is a good tool for finding a job before we leave prison. It gives you all the necessary help with the steps to get a good job, so we can try to stay out of trouble when we get out. (Participant 7)

Work attitudes and behaviors helps with the start of pre-release, it also teaches you about resumes, how to write a cover letter, helps us with interviewing skills by bringing in a lady to do mock interviews with us and to help us to improve on making a good impression on the people we want to work for, helping us know what is appropriate dress for the interview, helping us keep our communicating skills good. It also showed me that I need to continue with my college credits. (Participant 11)

Along with helping in the processes of writing resumes and cover letters and interviewing skills, the program also brings in the opportunity for the participants to study and prepare for taking the CDL test in order to be a delivery driver.

There's a man that comes in and he helps us get ready to take our CDL test so we can work for his company and be delivery drivers. He gives us the training packets and he helps us study so we can pass the test. It really helps me to know that I actually can get a job outside.(Participant 1)

When I need to get a job, the work program has helped through listing places to work and bringing in the CDL training class and giving us study stuff and prep for the test when we are released. (Participant 4)

After examining the participants' perceptions of what programming is helpful, the respondents also expressed areas of programming that could be improved to make the program more relevant. The primary area of interest in this section of the interview was the size of the group of participants. The participants stated that the program was very small and that the program could be improved by increasing the number of participants in the program, "We need to get more people into the program. I look forward to going to Men In Progress, but there are just not that many people in the program and it would only help us to have more guys to support each other. The more people you have rooting for

you and keeping you accountable would only benefit the success of the program and us participants.” (Participant 11) Other participants concurred with the need for more participants and offered suggestions;

I think that there should be a wider age range of people in the program. I know that there is an age limit, but I think that there are older people that ask me about the program and want to know how they can get in and better themselves like I have gotten to. I don't see how it could hurt they aren't any different than me, except they were born years before me. (Participant 6)

The program should be offered to a wider range of inmates. I think that it should not only just include first time offenders, but it should look to include those that are older or those that have several hits. I think that there is a better chance for change if these guys were allowed in, they are older, wiser and have more capacity to truly want to change after being in for so long. I think that would better the program. (Participant 17)

Along with more participants improvements were suggested for more interaction between the current participants and participant compliance. One participant stated, “They need to keep everyone in the program involved in the activities of the program. I don't think that there are enough people willing to do everything that the program offers, and that brings down the morale of the group, cause they don't want to participant when we ask them. It's really frustrating when I want to take every opportunity to better myself through the program and their just sitting back doing the minimum to get by. Frustrating.” (Participant 16) Another respondent stated;

We need to include more get-to-know-you activities at our meetings. It's hard when there is someone new in the program and they just sit in the back and get lost in the crowd for a while until finally they make the effort to jump in. If we are supposed to be the brotherhood that we talk about, then we need to get the interaction with the new guys as soon as they enter the program to make them feel welcome and start their process on a good note. (Participant 5)

I don't know why we can't have more time and more conversations with the participants that are in SAU. They have to be separated on the yard, and we can't even get to know them while they are in treatment, even though they are in the re-

entry program. I think that we should get more interaction with all the participants, regardless of that treatment program they are in. (Participant 2)

With more participants in the program, there is also a perceived need for more programs to accommodate this increased number. “There just needs to be more classes, programs, meetings available to us. I have completed all of my personalized plan, and I’m still going to be in the program for a while longer, there just needs to be more to do,” stated participant 6. Another expressed that the programming was too past focused, “Put the focus on the future. I know that I have done some bad things in my past, but I have come to terms with them and I think that the program keeps bringing them back up and it’s not helping me with working towards changing my future. If they keep rehashing our bad pasts, we aren’t going to be able to get past them and move on to change for the better. That definitely needs to be improved.” (Participants 18)

Men in Progress was one program for which a few respondents had suggestions. “Cut down on the time that we sit in Men In Progress or else just make it worth while for us to be there. I have to take time off my work assignment for these meetings and all we do is sit around and talk about bull shit. None of these guys can know my situation, yeah they can try, but all they talk about it bull shit nothing. I haven’t gone the last few times because I’m sick of it, nothing about it is worth while for me.” (Participant 16) Three other participants felt that one particular guest speaker should be eliminated;

They know that none of us like the police, they are the reason that we were caught. I just don’t see why we have to sit in a room with them and have to talk with them. (Participant 7)

I just don’t get why the police have to come talk to us. I don’t like them and they don’t like me. They come in telling us that we are going to be supportive of you when you get out, but I know that they don’t mean it. They have been against me

from the time I was little, and them coming in here isn't going to change my attitude. I just think that that should be left out. (Participant 13)

I think that the interrogation by the police needs to be eliminated. I don't see why they should have contact with us to the extent that they do. They are our support on the outside, right, but they have the chance to interrogate us and are trying to find out too much about us and try to get into our lives. They are trying to know where we hang out, where we like to eat, and what we are doing during our days. They don't need to know all that. I think that should be taken out. (Participant 17)

Other participants felt that residing at the community correction center limited them on the programming that they received;

Just get more interaction and meetings for us over here at CCCO. We go to Men In Progress two times a month and then that's all we do. We just waste our time sitting around the rest of the month. We just aren't getting anything out of the program over here. (Participant 12)

I don't get why there is so much available for them over in custody, and we get dropped over here with nothing. At least have the transition managers come over here once in a while and meet with us, I don't think that I see them but the two times we go over to custody a month. I think that they forget about us. It's pretty boring to be in the program, if it weren't for the year of housing rent free, I wouldn't be in the program anymore. (Participant 14)

Housing was another area for which a couple inmates felt that there needed to be improvements. "There needs to be a meeting of the guys that are going to be living in the house. Sure we were in the program together, but we didn't have to actually live that close together. I think we need to get together and discuss arrangements, so there aren't issues later" expressed by one respondent. Another state, "They need to change the neighborhood that the halfway house is located in. It is a really bad neighborhood; the guys down there just got robbed last week. They say that they want to help us change, but they are sending us back to the same fucking shitty neighborhood. How's that

supposed to better our living situation? I lived in a better place before I got here, I'm down grading." (Participant 11)

As much as programming is essential to the re-entry program, there are aspects of the programming that make the program different from the opportunities for the general inmate population, such as faster enrollment in programming, motivational meetings, and support groups. The participants were asked to identify these differences and one key theme rose from all of the responses, the supportive nature of the programs and the staff. One participant said, "We are getting a double dose with the supports that we are receiving from the managers and the mentors and the speakers. They also give more opportunities for us to change." (Participant 9) Other participants echoed these sentiments;

They have lost more classes in a lot more areas in the re-entry program. They have job training, CDL training, other meetings and activities to keep us to stay out of trouble and most of all they are behind us 100% and they got our back on any problem that we may have and they help us in the parole process. (Participant 8)

The classes and programs are smaller and there is more supportive one on one time with the transition managers. Because of the help that we have the program will definitely work if you use the resources that are available to us. (Participant 1)

There are lots of way that you can get the support that you need to make a change in your life. There are lots of programs, support groups, and interaction with people that are going through it too. (Participant 19)

We are getting to know other guys that are going through the same changes that we are and that helps in knowing that we can count on each other and since we know what the other is doing we can help out to make all of our changes stick. (Participant 15)

After examining the participants' perceptions about the programming in which they are enrolled, we can see that they seem to be receiving the programming and



services that they were promised when they entered the program, that the mental health, substance and drug abuse courses, narcotics anonymous, and work attitudes and behaviors were all perceived as helpful. The participants also believed that there need to be improvements on increasing the number of participants, improving the interaction of participants, getting more programming over at CCCO, and improving the housing situation. The participants also perceived that the re-entry program offers more support in their programming than the programming that is offered to the general prison population. Along with the supportive nature of the re-entry program, the attitudes of the participants must also be willing to change. The following section examines the responses of the participants on the nature of their attitudes toward change.

### **Attitudes Toward Change**

In order to understand the thought processes and the mind set of the participants at the beginning of their time in the program, each was asked why they chose to join the re-entry program. An overwhelming number of respondents provided a couple variations of the same underlying concept, a chance to change. The responses came in several forms including, “For support in the change that I wanted to make in my life, through kicking my drug habit and cracking my criminal thoughts, this program was my chance to complete that change.” (Participant 6) Other respondents used different terms,

I wanted to have a change in my life and my actions, which were taking me nowhere good. I was tired of getting into trouble and being in prison, and I wanted to make a change to help me stay out, so I thought that I’d try it. (Participant 4)

It was a good opportunity to start over, to give myself a second chance, it was a good avenue for change and it opened new windows for opportunity to change my life. (Participant 19)

It was an opportunity to change and be a better person. Before I entered the program I had lots of problems and lots of write ups. But since I got into the program I have had to hold myself accountable and I have gotten better. (Participant 10)

Other respondents stated that the incentive of living rent free for a year played a large part,

I thought it would change my life through a residential program, we also have a half-way house that we can live in rent-free for a year, and that is was a transitional program. (Participant 14)

I joined to put myself on the right track to succeeding in being crime free, with a lot of support behind me, even allowing us to have a place to live once we are released, rent free for a year. That will be a big help in saving some money before we have to make it completely on our own. (Participant 16)

The attitudes towards change can also be addressed through the responses to the question, how have you seen yourself change since you entered the program? One participant explained that there have been several changes that have taken place in his time in the program, particularly in his criminal thought processes,

Before I entered the program there would have been some things that I would have done, but since I have gone through the thought process change training I don't do them now. Before I would have had an idea to get money, I would have thought to sell some weed, but now I don't, I think about working harder at a job. (Participant 8)

Several of the respondents felt that their behaviors toward others was an area that they had changed, including anger management and trust,

I have worked on my temper through mental health, and now I think that I don't have to get upset first and act, not I think first and if I need to get mad it will be for a reason. (Participant 10)

I see that I have changed in the way that I react to people. I don't jump down their throats at the smallest comments anymore. I also carry myself differently and I can open up and trust people more than I ever have done in the past, before if my trust was violated there would be no way that it could be gotten back, but now I can work on restoring the trust. (Participant 14)

Job placement was another area that respondents felt that they have made strides to change:

The job placement has helped me so much. I have to work for my family and my son, so he doesn't follow in my footsteps. By being the oldest member in the program, I have seen all the younger guys making the same mistakes that I have, and I don't want to be there again. (Participant 18)

In July I will have a full year of work history, I haven't been able to hold a job for as long as I can remember, which shows that I have the motivation and determination to succeed. I have improved my actions and my anger. I'm a changed man. (Participant 19)

To address the extent to which the change that these participants claim they have undergone is a long term commitment, the respondents were asked how they were going to maintain this change once they reenter society. Several responses can be read below:

I'm going to stick with positive people and watch how they live their lives and how they are good people. I am going to maintain a full time job, something that I have not done for longer than a couple of months, and with the money I make I am going to start a savings account so I don't have to revert to crime for a little cash. I am going to stick with NA and attend weekly, and I am going to thank God everyday for the opportunity that he gave me through this program to change my life. For that I am forever grateful. (Participant 2)

I've got a great support group and my family is ready to help me succeed and will keep me accountable for my actions. I am no longer that worthless man that entered prison, I am a changed man. I am going to continue to take part in whatever the re-entry program will allow me to be part of, they can't keep me away. (Participant 6)

I'm going to start talking to troubled kids in schools. I think that there is a lot to learn from my story, cause I don't want no more kids doing what I did. I'm going to try to change a few kids, then I'll feel better about the process that I have gone through, making it worth something to someone other than me. (Participant 4)

One of the most impressive responses to this area of interest did not come from a scheduled interview, but from a voicemail greeting. The greeting stated:

You know who you got. I am committed to changing my life, and that means getting away from people that are leading a life of no good, if you are one of those people that I am trying to get rid of, hang up right now and don't call back. But if you are someone who believes that everyone deserves a second chance and that anything is possible, please remain on the line. (Participant 17)

These comments regarding attitudes toward change, suggest that many of the participants joined the program for an opportunity to change. They appear to have also felt that they have changed in thought processes, anger management and trust issues, and attitudes towards employment. Several participants also felt that this change was a change that would last for a very long time by suggesting that they have plans to continue with aspects of what they have learned in the re-entry program. After delving into the attitudes toward change, we now take a look into the overall opinions of the participants about the program as a whole.

### **Participants' Overall Opinions**

When asked to share their overall opinions of the program, several areas were identified, including participants' opinions of transition managers, program peers, and overall programming. Respondents' opinions of the transition managers suggest an overwhelming agreement that the managers were quite helpful. "The managers provide us with so much support. They are behind us all the way in all of our decisions, as long as we've thought about them and think the decision is best for us. I am really grateful for them," expressed participant 6, while participant 4 said, "I couldn't have picked better myself, they are good people and are incredibly supportive. They want to see us change for the better, and will do what it takes to help us get there."

When it came to conflict resolution, the managers were again highly applauded. One respondent stated “We call them our re-entry moms. They help you when you need them to do something for you. They help us if we have problems on our units, they will call meetings to talk to guards or other inmates that are causing us problems, to talk and get the conflict resolved. And one of the nicest things is that they treat us like we matter. That’s made the biggest difference for me.” (Participant 2)

Other respondents have echoed the same sentiments regarding resolution of problems;

The managers are good hearted people and they genuinely care about how we end up. I like that they have an open door office policy so I can go in and chat them up or go in for some guidance. They always help with what you need and will do what they can. (Participant 1)

They keep us on our toes, that’s for sure. They keep us on the right track whether in the classroom, in our programs or even on the yard. When there is an issue that comes up, they don’t judge, they bring us in and get our side of the story and they will go out of their way to resolve it, even getting other staff involve to take care of it. (Participant 5)

Among the tasks of the transition managers, the act of transporting participants to and from places was also addressed by the respondents. “They are cool people, they help out if there is anything that you need all of the time. They give a ride to look for jobs or to go to a job interview. They are really nice about it” stated participant 15). Other respondents mirrored the last statement;

They help out a lot with a lot of different things. I think the biggest one for me is that they help get visitation leave so that I can go visit my grandma, and they get the transportation aligned so they can drive me there and then pick me back up with my visitation time is over. I’ll also be needing them to start taking me to some job interviews here in a couple months when I get put on work release, but I hear they’re real good about that too. (Participant 9)

They have been real good about getting me to the places that I need to be. I have been trying to get my birth certificate and identification card, and they have been

real good about taking me to different places to get the right stuff to get those things. I appreciate them a lot for what they've done for me. (Participant 14)

Jessie provides me with good information of setting up transportation to get me to and from work. If my ride isn't able to come get me, then all I have to do is call them up and they'll try their best to personally get me there. They're real nice. (Participant 11)

After expressing their perceptions of the transition managers, the participants were asked to describe their perceptions of their peers in the program. Among the positive responses about the program participants as perceived by the participants themselves, accountability and a fellowship were among the two top responses. Several respondents stated;

We hold each other accountable for keeping on the straight and narrow. It's a fellowship of brother. General population isn't holding anyone accountable for their actions, but we watch out for each other. If we don't watch out for the others in the program, then it is likely that the actions will get thrown back on us for not helping out. So we try to keep an eye on other members on the yard. (Participant 3)

They are good people, and we are actually like a little family, where we have to hold each other accountable for our actions. I hope that my family back on the outside holds me as accountable for my actions when I get back as my re-entry family does in here. (Participant 6)

They are cool. We are all trying to work on the same things so we can help each other cause we know what we are going through. Because of that we keep each other going and even though I'm not trying to make friends, I still respect them and what their trying to do. (Participant 17)

There were also less positive perceptions, however, regarding the motivation and reasons for wanting to be in the program. One participant stated, "They are alright, they probably aren't in it for the right reasons, just trying to milk anything they can get out of the system including the free housing. I guess what I don't understand is how they say they want to change or have changed, but they still keep coming up with fucking dirty

UA's. And what really gets me is that there is nothing done about it, doesn't seem right to me. Bull shit is what it is." (Participant 10) Other respondents stated;

They just fake it to make it. They just tell the managers that they are changing, but behind their back bag on the program and how it isn't helping them. Doesn't seem like a change to me. (Participant 7)

Some of them want to be involved in the program, but flat out say that they don't want to change. Or they say they want to change, but don't get involved in all the programming. We try to get them there, but it's useless if they don't want to be there. It's pretty sad. (Participant 12)

To gain an overall perception of the program, the respondents were first asked if the program was what they had originally expected it to be. Almost all of the respondents stated that the program was what they had expected. One participant stated, "I signed up expecting to prepare me for leaving the prison system, job hunting, providing housing after release, and allowing us to have someone to call when we want to get into trouble or if we are having issues, and that is exactly what I got. So yes, I got exactly what I expected." (Participant 8)

As for the opinions of the re-entry program overall, all of the respondents expressed they held the program in high regard, all using the term "good", "great", or "awesome". Several respondents said, "The program is great. It is very helpful; they give you the right tools to make it as a productive member of society. The people there are there truly care about us and our goals", "It's a golden opportunity for change. All the right doors are opened for you and it is up to you to take them", and "It's a great program. It gets me to do the things that I need to do, even though I may not always want to do them, and it's very motivating." Another respondent stated "It is a good program, it is a good set up with lot of support around you. It's life changing, it's what I call serious business."

## Summary

From the responses on the overall opinions of the transition managers, the participants seem to think that they are very supportive, give good advice, are there to take care of conflicts, and are good at providing transportation to visitations and job interviews. The respondents had mixed feelings about their peers in the program. Some felt like there was a fellowship between the men and that they help each other accountable, however, there were other respondents that felt like their counterparts were faking it to make it. All of the respondents expressed positive thoughts about the programming addressing the supportive nature and providing the opportunity to change.

Having reviewed the responses to my questions, I should note that the responses to the interview questions seemed to be truthful and quite sincere, by both the transition managers and the program participants. The respondents' openness and compliance to answer my questions created a comfortable atmosphere in which to uncover perceptions of reentry programming. I, therefore, have faith that the findings of this research are reliable and accurately reflect people's opinions.

In sum, the transition managers identified the programming made available to the program participants and the components of each. They also addressed their interaction with the participants at each phase and established that the amount of face time decreases as the participants' transition through the program, but their support remains high. The program participants expressed several needs that they believed would help them live crime free, including, but not limited to, education, employment, and support systems. They also reported that the re-entry program appeared to have provided the services to



meet these needs. Through the helpfulness of the programming, the participants felt that they had made changes in their lives, often reported as permanent changes for life.

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The Serious and Violent Offender Re-entry Initiative was created to develop programming in America's prison system to assist in the transition, from institution to community, for the offenders most likely to recidivate. The Nebraska re-entry program was established in 2004 and has served an average of 20 participants at any one time. The program is facilitated by two transition managers and utilizes the three phase model to administer programming, services, and meetings to the participants in the Omaha Correctional Center, the Community Corrections Center and those participants that have transitioned to the community on parole.

The current research project examined the responses of the re-entry program transition managers and the program participants themselves to address two research questions: what programs and services do program participants believe they need to live a crime free life upon return to the community, and, how do program participants perceive the programming that they are receiving. One-on-one qualitative interviews were administered to the respondents to derive responses that were conceptually ordered into several key interest areas.

My findings suggest that the program participants appear to be receiving the programming and services that they need to live crime free on return to the community. The program seems to be providing the services, skill, and trainings to meet the needs of these participants, with only a few needs having not been addressed. Also, the participants perceived that they had, and were receiving, the programming and services they were promised. With these general conclusions drawn, there are several areas that

deserve to be addressed in the discussion of this research project and the interpretation of my findings. These areas include such factors as the personalized plans of offenders, the influence of demographic variables on responses, the availability of programming for participants, and generally, the ways in which my findings comport to overall reentry goals. Following the discussion of these areas, thoughts on areas for improvement for the program will be addressed.

### **Interpretation of Findings**

Because the participants in the program can be 18 to 35 year olds, of different races, and being of both male and female genders, these variables can shed some light into the perceptions of the participants. For instance, the gender of program participants is one area that deserves further exploration in regard to the perceptions of the reentry program. Although responses were generally consistent across the sexes, some subtle differences could be discerned. The programming available for the two genders were identical when it came to the personalized plans, however, there were differing services when it came to the Men in Progress and Women in Progress programs. In regard to the fact that both men and women were part of the re-entry program, the women appeared to be far more likely to express enthusiasm and gratefulness for being in the program than men. For example, when discussing Men/Women in Progress meetings, there were differing opinions in regard to the helpfulness of this program. The men's program brought in motivational speakers and had ex-felons come in to talk with the male participants. The women's program also brought in motivational speakers and ex-felons, but the women were also given presentations by Planned Parenthood, a domestic violence educator, and community outreach workers from Compassion In Action. The fact that

the women are receiving services regarding women's general health and sexual health, while the men are not, or did not care to disclose the sessions, addresses the fact that the programs are similar, but the programming appears to be more specialized to the needs of women. This brings up whether the needs of women are more clearly defined than those of men, or if these women are receiving these additional services for another reason? Is the programming better suited to provide the services and classes that women find beneficial, or is it that women's needs are more clearly defined within society? It could also be that women are simply more expressive and are more willing to talk about how they really feel about the programming that they are receiving than men. Answers to these questions could improve the quality of programming for both men and women.

The age factor of the target population may account for some observations and conclusions about the program participants and the effect that the program has had on them. The program allows for a seventeen year difference in the ages of its participants, and there are differences in their perceptions and outlooks on the program. The most significant distinction between the older participants from the younger is the commitment to change. In general, younger participants, ages twenty to thirty, see their time in the program as helpful, but do not have the enthusiasm and fire behind their confessions of change.

The older participants, ages of over thirty, seemed to be much more adamant that their lives have been changed, through their cognitive skills, behavior recognition and willingness to "keep it straight". The older participants also commented on the fact that the younger participants have not walked in their shoes and have not seen what they have seen, and that they are trying to help the younger men get to the place of change in which

they were currently. It can be seen that the inclusion of a seventeen year age range has helped the older participants in realizing their change process, working on bettering themselves through helping the younger participants continue in their change, and helping the younger participants realize the work that needs to be put in to achieve change.

Another demographic interest area is that of the race of the participants. In analyzing the responses of the participant, knowing that the program consisted of whites, blacks, and those categorizing themselves as other, the respondents for the most part responded exactly the same way across the board. This appears to reflect that regardless of race, the programming and services that the re-entry program is making available to these participants is being uniformly administered and the participants are addressing change with similar attitudes. This finding should be noted particularly in light of the findings that often suggest racial bias or discrimination in the criminal processing of offenders.

The aforementioned question and observations deserve further attention, but more importantly, the way in which my findings support, or refute, reentry program goals has direct implication for further program development.

### **Comparisons of Findings to Program Goals**

The Nebraska re-entry program, as you recall, set out in their work plan to implement programming to achieve five goals to prevent re-offending: objectively selecting the target population, fully engaging the participants in their programming planning process, creating individualized personalized re-entry plans for offenders, assist the offender to engage in pro-social community activities, and meet family

responsibilities, and to exercise active supervision and offender accountability. As the findings of this research suggest, some of this goal has been addressed in some capacity, while seems to fall short in others.

One objective of the program addresses the full engagement of the participants in the programming planning process and provide individualized re-entry plans for participants. A list of the programs available in the re-entry program and the programs in which the respondents had participated was derived from the interview with the respondents. This list was then compared to the personalized plans that were created for offenders at their entrance into the re-entry program. Because there are three required areas of the re-entry programming for all participants; mental health, substance abuse treatment and education, there appears to be little that seems to be personalized. Participants may be involved in parenting classes or anger management courses, but these are not on the personalized plan. The fact that the personalized plans that are developed for the participants when they enter into the program include the areas that all members of the re-entry program are required to take part, this does not seem to leave much room for the plans to be personalized.

When assessing the goal of exercising active supervision and offender accountability, an examination of the purpose of the transition managers is in order. The transition managers' positions were established to facilitate the programs and services to the participants and enforce the program accountability. It seems, however, that the managers have taken on another key role within their supervision of the program and its participants. Based on the responses of the participants, the managers appear to have done more for offenders as a support system and a sounding block than as simply a

supervisor to ensure program compliance. In some cases, it seems the transition managers offer more to offenders than much of the courses and trainings they receive. Therefore, it appears that the transition managers have created a solid support system for the program participants, which is a strong addition to the duties in which their position originally described.

Another goal of the program looked to enhance public safety through coordinating with local law enforcement to hold zero tolerance for new crimes and full implementation of the individualized re-entry plans. The program brought in law enforcement officers to speak to the participants and establish a rapport and build trust between the two parties. This part of the goal was seen as expendable by a few respondents who did not see a purpose for these meetings, and also felt that this was an invasion of their privacy because the law enforcement officers were interrogating them. Because this has been seen by offenders as antagonistic in nature, this part of the goal seems to have not been effectively implemented, or at the very least, more communication is necessary between officers and offenders to better explain the role of law enforcement in the program.

A further goal was to assist the offender to avoid crime, engage in pro-social community activities, and meet family responsibilities. In order to assist the offender in avoiding crime and engaging in pro-social activities, continued programming to maintain cognitive and behavior changes was to be maintained throughout the participants' time in the program, regardless of phase. To maintain this process, the programming must be made available to the participants. The goal looked to administer programming that tied victim awareness, the use of community organizations, and support groups together, all

of which have been made available to the program participants through different aspects of re-entry programming.

When the issue of programming availability was brought up to the phase II participants that were on work detail at CCCO, they addressed that there was no programming available to them over there and they were wasting all of their time in the program, besides the two Men In Progress meetings a month. This has discrepancies with the response from a transition manager about the programming that is available to the participants at the community corrections center. The transition manager stated that the following programs and services were available for community corrections phase II participants; after-care sessions of continued substance abuse prevention, Narcotics and Alcoholics Anonymous, Anger management, UNO GOCA, GED courses, Job placement, and work release. The question is: what do these men, who are concerned, do after they have completed the once a week, six session courses on after care and anger management, and have also completed their GED, and are on work detail? It is the perception that they are left to complete their work detail duties, go to the two meetings a month for Men in Progress, and if they have to, attend NA or AA. This leaves much down time, and with very minimal contact with the transition managers, these men, if not completely committed to change and are not getting the support that they need to succeed, may fall through the cracks and relapse into a life of crime.

Another issue brought up within the group of men at the Community Correction Center was that the only reason that they joined the program, and the only reason that they have continued to stay in the program is the contract housing provided to them rent-free for one year after release. It needs to be asked if these men are joining the program



to change their behaviors and want to live crime free, or if they are looking for a “free ride” for one year when they get out. If nothing else, this findings seems to suggests that the progress evaluations for participants should pay greater attention to purpose behind participants’ joining the program. The program appears to be focused on providing the opportunity and resources for change, but if the participants are not willing from the start to accept the fact that they need to change or have the opportunity to change, but rather see a meal ticket in the housing for a year, then the program is not being utilized effectively for the right group of people.

There were other program goals beyond the scope of this research that were not addressed. These included redeploying and leveraging existing community resources and also to ensure program sustainability. Nevertheless, from the information gained in this study, it seems some program goals are being addressed; whereas, others are being attained less so and in need of improvement.

### **Implications of Research and Improvements of Programming**

Overall, there are suggestions for improving the program as a whole, based on the responses of the program participants themselves. These suggestions include working on increasing the number of participants who are allowed in the program, increasing face time with the participants at CCCO, addressing the need for increased programming at the Community Corrections Center, and assisting in forming better relationships between the program participants. The largest number of complaints, however, came from the phase II participants on work release and work detail.

Community corrections participants’ responses suggest that they think “the transition managers are good people, but they don’t have much contact with them” or

they don't bring up needs they would like addressed because they just don't talk to them enough. It is felt that further development of the transition managers' roles is needed within Phase II at the community corrections center.

To address the concern of face-time with the managers, an option could include placing one of the transition managers' offices in the community corrections building. This would also develop the walk-in open-door office environment between the participants and the manager. A second option could include having one or more of the transition managers having "office hours" at CCCO at least twice a week. This would allow the managers to keep one-on-one contact with the participants to track their attitudes and progress and this would also give the participants more time to discuss issues with the managers.

In order to address the participants' concerns about wasting their time with no programs to attend, additional programs need to be developed and initiated. Because there is a limited number of activities and services available at CCCO, some participants are only looking toward living in the contract housing rent-free for a year as the only benefit from the program. It appears that by providing further trainings and services, the participants expressed that the program would mean more to them. Unfortunately not all of the participants could offer suggestions for additional programming, but a couple expressed wanting to have the opportunity to partake in more workforce related trainings like the CDL training in which the institutional phase I participants participate. If nothing else, this suggestions highlights the need to explore expanding Phase I programming to Phase II participants. Another participant wanted to get more volunteer projects to do to fulfill a personal need for change. A third participant stated that just

having a get together a couple times a week with the other phase II members to have fun and maybe learn something, would be a good addition to the opportunities they have now.

A second area that should be addressed for improvement is the relationship and interaction between the participants within a particular phase and between phases. The interaction between the participants during their time in the program, seems to have been a positive asset to some, but has also left others wanting more. To address the participants' need for more peer interaction, two areas come to light through interview responses. The first is the restricted communication between program participants in the SAU program and the other re-entry members. The second is the slow-paced process of getting acquainted that happens when new inmates are brought into the program. Several participants felt that there was not enough effort put into getting all of the 'old' guys involved in the 'new' guys acclimation to the program. It is felt that doing more 'get to know you' ice breakers would get the new participants involved, get everyone interacting, and also improving the relationships between those who have been in the program for awhile. These interactions should be with all of the program participants, from both OCC and CCCO.

### **Future Research**

As much as this research addressed the posed research questions and appears to show that the Nebraska re-entry program has addressed the needs for change of their participants and has seems to have followed through on their promise of programming initially offered to the participants, there are areas in which this research could be enhanced. To address the area of programming, future research should look more in-

depth at the differences in programming offered to the female participants compared to those offered to the male participants. In terms of the programming that is made available for phase II participants at the Community Corrections Center, additional examination of the actual programming schedules should be addressed. To eradicate the limitation of this research in regard to external validity, future research should increase the sample to re-entry programs at facilities in different regions of the United States. This would allow the findings, implications, and conclusions to assist more re-entry programs in delivering effective programming to the offenders who need it the most.

Despite the need for more research, however, this study has shed light on the degree to which some components of the reentry program in Nebraska have been implemented as intended and the program has the potential for achieving its intended goals. To date, this program appears promising, but only through further evaluation will we know if this program reduces re-offending, and ultimately promotes the public safety, as intended.

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## APPENDIX

### Participant Interview Instrument

How long have you been a participant in the re-entry program?

What do you think you need to live a crime-free life outside of prison in terms of types of skills, programs, etc? Why?

Have these needs been addressed in the time you have been in the program? Which ones? How so?

Which of those needs have not been addressed? Why?

In what programs have you been a participant in your time in the re-entry program?

Have you found these programs helpful? Which ones, why or why not?

Have you received the programming and services that you were promised when you entered the program?

If not, what were you promised that you have not received?

Why did you join the re-entry program?

Was the program what you expected it to be when you entered?

Do you have any suggestions for programs to add or eliminate from the program?

Do you have any suggestions for improving the existing programs?

What is your overall opinion of the re-entry program?

What is your overall opinion of the transition managers?

What is your overall opinion of your peers in the program?

What are the difference, if any, that you see between the programming available to you in the re-entry program compared to the programs available to the general prison population?

How have you seen yourself change in your time in the re-entry program? Is it because of the program?