

Final Implementation Evaluation Report for the Illinois Going Home Program

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Executive Summary

The Illinois Going Home Program (GH) was conceived with several challenging, policy-level goals that reflect an attempt to refocus the corrections system on rehabilitation. Illinois was asked by federal authorities to design and implement GH without incurring substantial or on-going new expenses. Going Home officials attempted to meet these objectives by establishing three major changes in the way the state of Illinois prepares a prisoner for release into the community from the corrections system. The program seeks to:

- (i) Help prisoners integrate into the outside community by placing them into a “rehabilitation trajectory” that begins as they enter the corrections system, and extends beyond their release.
- (ii) Create this trajectory by tightly integrating existing community programs and resources with the services already available within the state correctional system.
- (iii) Introduce an intensive case management model for prisoner re-entry and rehabilitation. Central to this model are the Clinical Reentry Manager, a case manager for each participant, and the Transition Team, a group of individuals from each partner program, that together coordinate the array of services offered by disparate community agencies and Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) subunits.

The evaluation of the Illinois Going Home program was divided into two major pieces – an implementation evaluation and an impact evaluation. The former documents the extent to which the program itself functioned as planned, while the latter measures the impact of the program on participants. This report is the implementation evaluation only. It contains information on the following:

- (i) Program participation by the Going Home participants,
- (ii) An analysis of the views of program staff on how the program operated,
- (iii) Participants’ views about their lives, what they expect from a reentry program, and how the Going Home program worked for them,
- (iv) Benchmark measures of recidivism and employment outcomes based on previous cohorts of young men from the Going Home target population.

Some of the key findings in this report are as follows:

- (i) By the summer of 2006, 158 men enrolled in the Going Home program. Since September 2004, the enrollment rate averaged approximately 75 men per year.
- (ii) Men incarcerated at the West Side Adult Transition Center (ATC) who agreed to enroll in the program prior to parole received more services prior to their release than their counterparts who were incarcerated at downstate facilities.
- (iii) Program staff indicated that participants received more Going Home services while incarcerated than after their parole. There was a broad consensus among the program’s officials and staff that in order for reentry services to be effective they had to start while participants were still on the “inside.” Many expressed skepticism that

- reentry programs targeted to young offenders could be successful if they started only after these men paroled from prison.
- (iv) Staff interviews demonstrated strong support for the program's core elements, but several features of the program that are closely associated with its design frustrated them. As a result, many adjustments were made to the original program design and some components were not implemented at all.
 - (v) GH staff were surprised that the education levels and academic skills of participants were lower than anticipated. On average participants' reading scores were below the 7th grade, with some testing below the 4th grade level. GH services, which were designed for more job-ready participants, needed to be modified to compensate for these deficiencies in basic skills.
 - (vi) Effective case management proved to be an even more important element of the program than originally envisioned. Staff-offered explanations for uneven skill levels in the frontline staff include speculation that the salaries offered for Clinical Reentry Manager (CRM) positions were too low to attract case managers with the range of skills and experience necessary to serve this population of participants, observations that case managers as well as other frontline staff required more training than they received, and exercised poor judgment in hiring decisions.
 - (vii) Implementing a complex program model that requires a multi-layered state agency to work in conjunction with multiple community-based non-profit organizations proved difficult. Many staff said that while they have benefited from the experience of working with people from the other organizations, they experienced difficulty implementing this feature of the program. Two of the key problems identified with this feature of the program have been (a) uncertain lines of authority, and (b) lack of incentives, rewards, and consequences for failure to perform. Both of these points were discussed in more detail in the interim report.
 - (viii) Many staff contended that a large complex agency such as the Illinois Department of Corrections was not designed to work together with many smaller private organizations to serve the reentrant population. Staff emphasized that IDOC needed to become more flexible when working with community-based organizations. The Program Coordinator of the Going Home program needed more autonomy to contract and pay for outside services in a timely way. Although some billing issues that initially limited the program's capacity to provide services were resolved, staff still strongly recommended that the Program Coordinator and CRMs be given petty cash funds to pay for program related expenses.
 - (ix) Previous cohorts of young reentrants provide a benchmark for assessing the performance of GH participants as well as participants in other reentry programs. In the past, one-year recidivism rates back to IDOC facilities among men from the GH target population averaged 25 to 30 percent, with three-year recidivism rates exceeding 60 percent. In recent years, one-year recidivism rates approached 40 percent for this group. This population has had among the highest recidivism rates of any group of reentrants back to Cook County.
 - (x) Previous cohorts of young reentrants had very poor employment histories. Most never worked the equivalent of a full-time job at the minimum wage for more than one calendar quarter. However, prison was not associated with lower employment rates. Past cohorts of young reentrants were more likely to be employed during the

first full quarter after parole than any other quarter either before or after prison. Although their employment rates were relatively low during this period—averaging approximately 27 percent—this percentage was higher than during any quarter prior to their entering prison. Therefore, even in the absence of formal reentry programs, social workers who serve young offenders should not expect their employment rates to decline following prison.

- (xi) We find that in the past, the three-year recidivism rates of young 18 to 24 year old Cook County reentrants, whose earnings during the first full quarter after the quarter of their paroles exceeded the equivalent of working half-time at the minimum wage, were substantially below those of their peers. Further, these young men’s rates of recidivism back to IDOC facilities were approximately the same as those of reentrants who were 25 years or older when they paroled from prison. In other words, the recidivism patterns of this particular subset of young reentrants have been similar to those of their older counterparts. We conclude that in order for reentry services that emphasize job placement to be successful in the long run, they must ensure that reentrants attain some modest threshold level of earnings while employed.
- (xii) Young men in the Going Home target population have had especially poor employment histories prior to entering prison for the first time. A lesson from this finding is that while reentry programs often emphasize reentry of former prisoners back into their communities, most young reentrants are not reentering the labor market upon their parole, because they have yet to establish any meaningful employment history to start with. This finding suggests that reentry programs need to incorporate strategies that help former prisoners to *enter* the work force for the first time.
- (xiii) During the first six months after leaving prison, the employment rates of the 25 to 29 year old North Lawndale/Garfield Park reentrants have been about seven percentage points greater than those of observationally similar 18 to 24 year old reentrants to the same community. When these older reentrants work, they also earn more than younger reentrants to the same community area. This evidence indicates that employment outcomes for older reentrants, even those from the same community areas, are not likely to serve as a reliable benchmark for the probable employment outcomes for GH participants. A better benchmark is the employment outcomes of similar young men from nearby communities.
- (xiv) Post-prison employment rates of previous cohorts of Cook County reentrants should help Illinois policy makers and program operators establish program performance standards that are not unduly ambitious or unrealistic. For example, setting a post-prison benchmark employment rate of 50 percent or more for Cook County reentrants would constitute a very ambitious standard for a prisoner reentry program. Instead, planners of reentry services should anticipate that quarterly employment rates of reentrants are likely to be in the 30 to 35 percent range during the first few quarters after parole. Further, we expect these rates to decline modestly with time since parole.
- (xv) An important reason for low employment rates among the reentrant population is that they are likely to leave jobs once they find them. Their “transition rates” from employment to non-employment among Cook County reentrants historically has been highest among the GH target population. About 43 percent of such reentrants who

were employed during the first full quarter after paroling from prison were not employed at any time during the second full quarter after their release. Further, this high transition rate out of employment is too large to be explained even by the high rates of recidivism among these men. These high transition rates out of employment indicate that one component of a successful reentry program likely should be services to help reentrants retain their jobs and to move them from job to job quickly when they become unemployed.

I. Introduction to the Going Home Program Implementation Evaluation

This final implementation report of the of the Illinois Going Home Program evaluation was prepared by Dr. Martha Van Haitsma of the University of Chicago Survey Lab the principal investigator, Dr. Robert LaLonde of the University of Chicago Harris School of Public Policy Studies, and Dr. Susan George, a researcher at the Chapin Hall Center for Children. The University of Chicago team, under the direction of Dr. LaLonde, was selected to evaluate the Illinois Going Home program during its initial two years. The University of Chicago Survey Lab carried out the implementation portion of the evaluation by interviewing program staff and attending a sampling of program meetings to assess whether or not the program functioned as intended. Dr. George supervised the portion of the evaluation that interviewed a sample of Going Home participants and monitored their participation. Dr. LaLonde supervised the portion of the evaluation that provided baseline information on the Going Home target population.

II. A Summary of the Aims of the Going Home Program

Each year approximately 650,000 people across the country are released from incarceration and sent back into communities. About one-half these ex-offenders return to prison within three years. Many commit new and serious offenses while under parole supervision. In response to this problem of recidivism, the Office of Justice Programs (OJP – part of the Department of Justice) established the Serious and Violent Offender Reentry Initiative. Altogether, 68 grants totaling \$100 million were awarded across forty-nine states, the District of Columbia, and the Virgin Islands.

In the original proposal, the Going Home Program sought to serve 200 men between September 2003 and September 2005. In keeping with this target, the original Going Home letter was approved on June 30, 2002. But the budget for the program was not approved until June 3, 2003. As a result of the delay in funding, the program did not start until September of 2003 and was slated to run through June of 2006. Since then, the program has been extended for an additional year into 2007.

As originally funded, the GH Program had four stated goals:

1. Prevent re-offending
 - a. Begin the reentry planning process within the correctional setting and initiate contact with key service providers, law enforcement, and community corrections agencies prior to the offender's parole
 - b. Ensure full offender engagement in the planning process and ensure offender clearly understands expectations and consequences
 - c. Identify needs and provide support and services to promote successful reentry
 - d. Exercise active supervision of the offender, ensure accountability, and administer appropriate, graduated sanctions for non-compliance
2. Enhance public safety

3. Assist the offender to avoid crime, engage in pro-social community activities, and meet family responsibilities
4. Ensure program sustainability

III. The Illinois Going Home Program

The Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) is the lead agency overseeing the Illinois Going Home Program (GH). At the heart of the GH program goals is an attempt to refocus the corrections system on rehabilitation. The Illinois Going Home Program attempts to meet those goals without incurring substantial or on-going new expenses. This federally-funded demonstration program aims to provide a comprehensive set of social and employment-related services to 18 to 24-year-old males planning to return to specified Chicago neighborhoods after their release from state prison. The goal of the program is to facilitate the re-integration of ex-felons into the communities and families to which they return after prison. However, emphasizing the re-entry of ex-felons into the community necessitates a major shift in the organizational culture of the corrections system.

To achieve this end, Illinois' Going Home program attempts to establish three major changes in the way IDOC prepares a prisoner for release into the community from the corrections system. First, the program seeks to help prisoners integrate into the outside community by placing them into a "rehabilitation trajectory" that begins upon their entry into and extends beyond their exit from the corrections system.. Second, the program seeks to create this trajectory by tightly integrating existing community programs and resources with the services already available within the state correctional system. Finally, the program seeks to introduce an intensive case management model for prisoner re-entry and rehabilitation. Central to this model are the Clinical Reentry Manager and the Transition Team that coordinate the array of services offered by disparate community agencies and IDOC subunits.

The program aims to bridge the inmate's time inside and outside prison by linking men with existing community services. The program design includes an initial assessment of program participants, referral into various programs including drug treatment, life skills and job readiness training, job placement, transitional housing, remedial education, and vocational training. Program case managers, called Clinical Reentry Managers or CRMs, and other program staff actively involved with the GH participants determine referrals and program participation based on the participants' individual needs. Program staff assesses participants' progress on an ongoing basis.

By design, GH procures the services participants need *not* by starting new programs, but by linking existing programs into a coherent trajectory through which CRMs shepherd young reentrants. Although funding for the CRMs comes directly from the GH program, the goal is to forge cooperative links between existing service organizations that will outlive the GH grant.

is ambitious design challenged the institutional cultures and practices of participating community organizations as well as of IDOC itself. It is not surprising that a relatively small program with such aims ran into many logistical obstacles, large and small, and encountered some personal and

institutional resistance along the way. During its first 24 months of operation, the Illinois Going Home Program experienced significant difficulty marshalling its component players to function according to plan. Nevertheless, it served its primary purpose as a pilot program: the effort to pull many levels of IDOC together with community providers to provide a clearer picture of the many steps required in order to refocus corrections on prisoner reintegration.

IV. Enrollment and Participation

To recruit eligible young prisoners for the Going Home program, the Program Coordinator used the IDOC's Offender Tracking System (OTS). The OTS enabled her to identify eligible young men who were still serving time in downstate facilities. The preferred path, as discussed previously in the interim report, was to route GH participants through existing programs in the IDOC system in a graduated series of steps. Eligible men were supposed to be identified on entry to IDOC facilities. Those with substance abuse issues were to be sent first to Robinson Correctional Center for five weeks of orientation and then to the Southwestern Illinois Correctional Center (SWICC) for treatment. When GH participants approached their date of parole, GH Program staff would transmit information to appropriate IDOC staff in order to arrange the transfer of these men to the West Side Adult Transitional Center (ATC). The ATC is a work-release prison from which men could be sent out to community programs or jobs prior to parole. The ATC set aside fifteen beds in expectation that about 15 GH men would reside in the ATC for 90 days pre-release at any time. Alternate paths were needed for those without substance abuse issues. Ideally, all GH men were meant to be transferred to the ATC at least 90 days before release.

The first Going Home participant enrolled in February of 2004 – six months into the program – and 14 men in total enrolled over the course of the first year. Low enrollment made it difficult to assess the operation of Going Home during the first year. The interim implementation report summarized the first year of the program, focusing on causes of and solutions to low enrollment. The first year of the program culminated in a revised plan for subsequent years of the program.

This revised plan continued to evolve with the program. One important component of this revision was to increase the geographic area served by the program. Initially, officials intended the GH program to serve young reentrants to the North Lawndale community area on the West Side of Chicago. In subsequent years the target area for the program expanded to include young men from East and West Garfield Park community areas, which border North Lawndale to the north.

A second program revision developed a parallel track for enrolling young men that did not require their transfer from a downstate facility to the ATC. All but five men who joined GH and paroled from the ATC were already at that facility before they enrolled in the program. Due to the scarcity of men able to meet the qualifications for transfer to the ATC the program developed other tracks for enrolling young men that did not require their transfer from a downstate facility to the Westside ATC. The most important of these other tracks enrolled young men from SWICC.

Although the SWICC men could not participate in the same programs or receive the same services as the ATC men, they did receive quarterly visits from at least three Transition Team members and computer classes in addition to the programs (anger management, drug treatment, educational) offered at SWICC. They also benefited from more intensive post-release services that included higher placement in transitional housing and referrals to community providers prior to their release. .

IV.A. Enrollment During the Second Program Year

During the next twelve months, between September 2004 and September 2005, an additional 80 men enrolled in the program for a total program enrollment of 94. Although enrollment was very low during the first nine months of the program, since September 2004, enrollment accelerated to an annual rate of approximately 75 men per year. Figure 1 illustrates this rise in enrollment. The number of new GH participants ranged from a low of five per quarter during the early phase of the program, to a high of 26 during the summer quarter of 2005.

This rate of approximately 75 enrollments per year appeared to hold steady during the program's third year: during the 4th quarter of 2005 an additional 20 men enrolled in the GH program, and from January through July of 2006, 44 men agreed to enroll in the program. Thus, the enrollment rates for the third year averaged about 19 persons per quarter; on an annual basis this enrollment rate projects to about 77 men per year. Therefore as of the summer of 2006, 158 men have enrolled in GH since its inception.

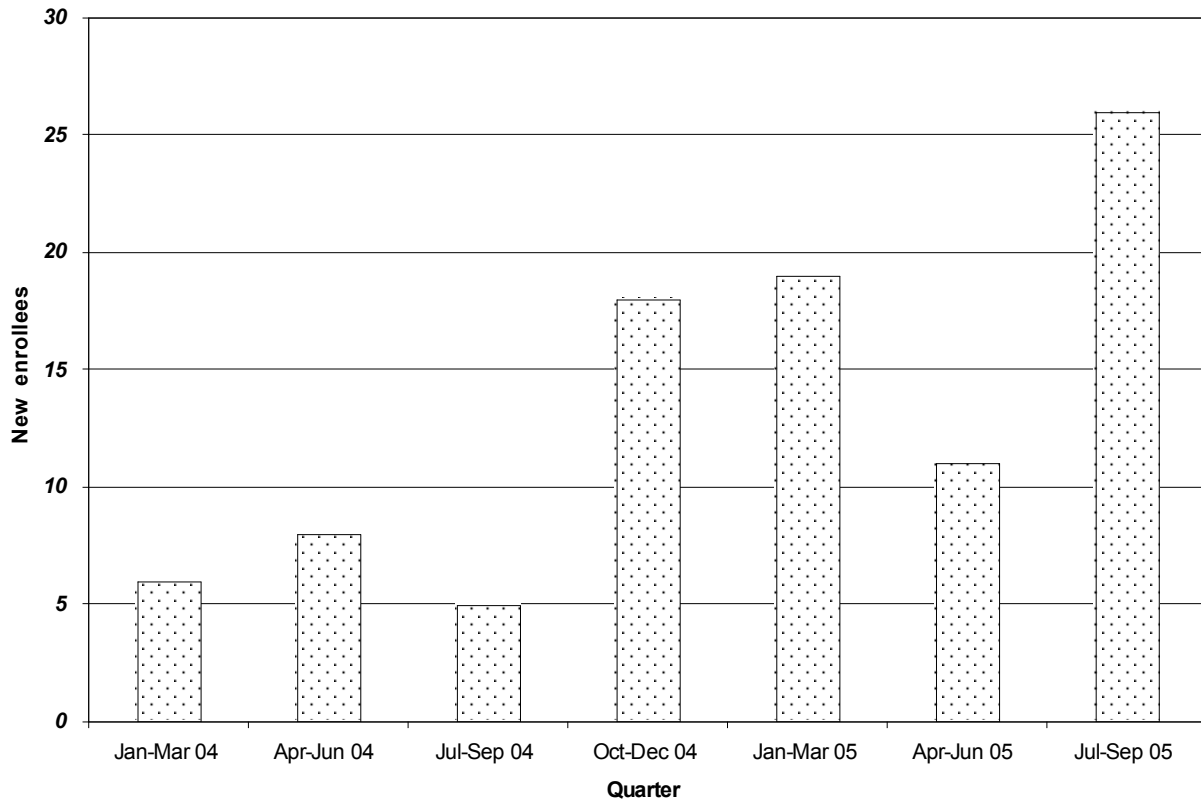


Figure 1: New enrollees by quarter of program operation

GH staff intended to “keep the door open” to allow men the option of accessing program services even if they had not actively participated for some time. This policy means that the number of GH participants is expected to accumulate over time. As shown in Figure 2, by the end of the 8th quarter of operation, a total of 85 men received services or were eligible to receive services through Going Home. (Note that there are only seven quarters represented in Figure 2 because no one received services during the program’s first quarter of operation.)

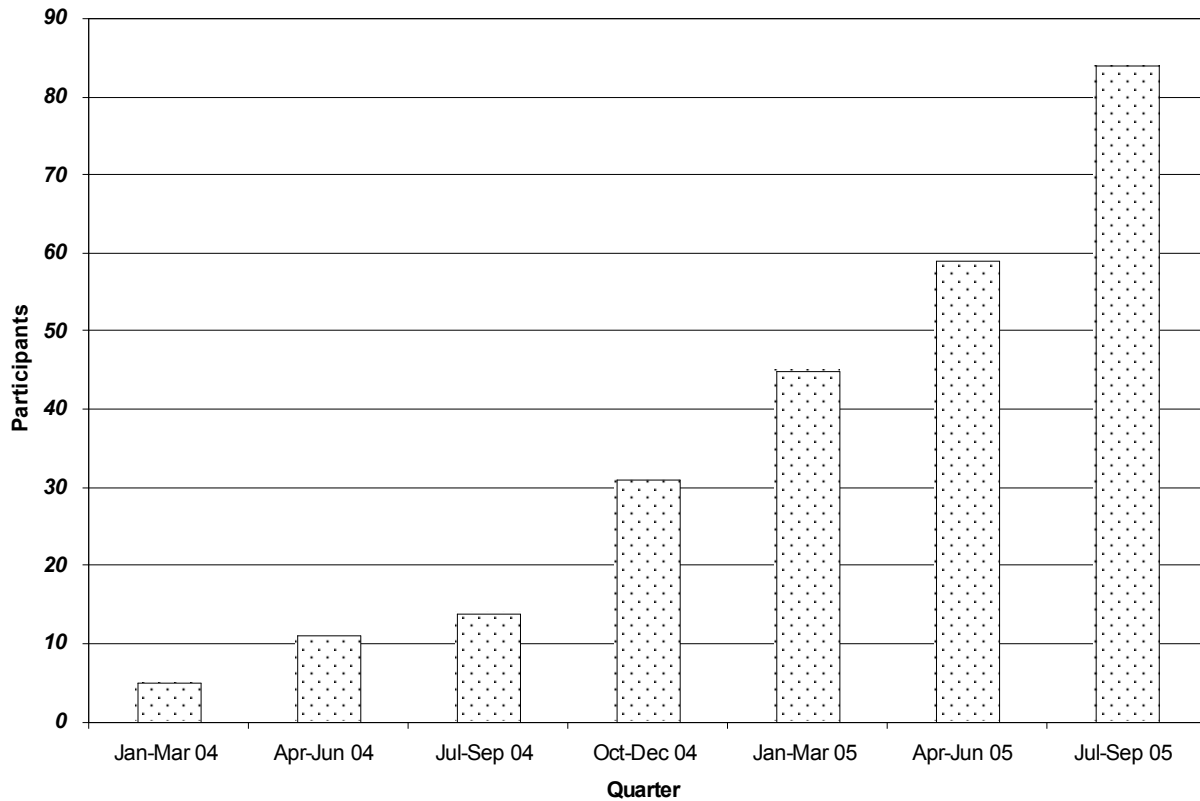


Figure 2: Number of participants during each quarter of operation

As a result of this open door policy, only nine GH participants were discharged from the program: six were discharged at their request, and three were discharged because GH staff lost contact with them.

IV.B. Sources of GH Participants

As shown by Figure 3, through the end of September 2005:

- The largest group of participants, 123 men, were recruited from inmates already housed at the ATC.
- The next largest group of participants-25-were recruited from SWICC
- Only five GH participants transferred to the ATC from downstate facilities as a result of requests by GH officials.
- A small percentage of participants were identified in other downstate institutions. They enrolled in GH shortly before paroling back to the North Lawndale area.
- Finally, two participants came to GH after being referred to the program while on parole. Because neither of those participants stayed engaged in GH's services, the decision was made not to accept new post-release participants in the future.

As of September 30, 2005, 11 of the 94 GH participants had not been transferred to the ATC. For 10 of these men, program officials do not anticipate their transfer prior to being paroled. Instead, these men will receive services and parole from IDOC's SWICC facility. These men are among a group of participants who officials determined were eligible for the program, but were ineligible for transfer to the ATC. Of all GH participants through September 2005, 53 had spent time in the ATC.

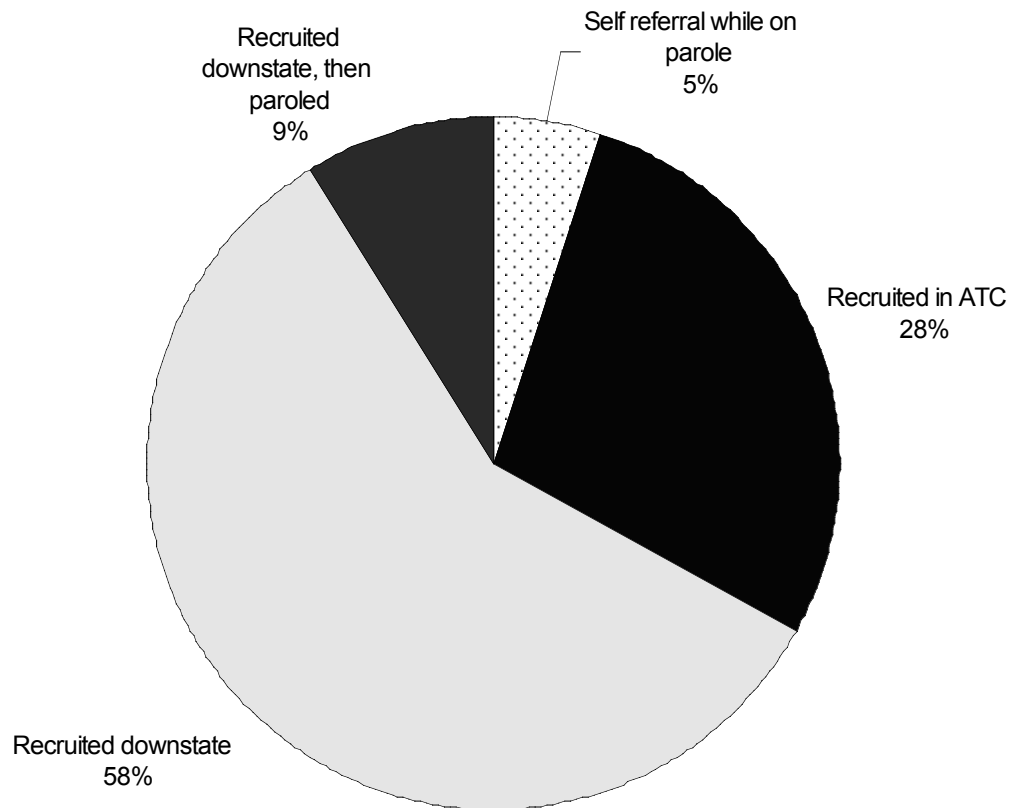


Figure 3: Source of new participants

IV.C. GH Participants Who Have Paroled From IDOC Facilities

By the end of the program's second year, 52 percent of the program's then 94 enrolled participants were paroled from prison. This percentage includes seven GH participants who paroled, but had been terminated from the program earlier. As of September 30, 2005, 49 men paroled either from the ATC or from a downstate facility. Seven participants paroled during the first year and 42 participants paroled during the second year.

During the program's third year of operation, the total number of participants who paroled nearly reached 100. As of December 2005, six additional GH participants paroled for a total of 55. During the period from January through July 2006, an additional 42 men paroled. One implication of these figures for an impact evaluation is that the sample sizes for an analysis of

the “impact” of GH services on one-year recidivism rates back to an IDOC facility will not approach 100 until after the close of the 2007 Fiscal Year.

At the end of the second program year, officials expected that 34 of the “not yet paroled” participants would parole during the third program year. The actual number of parolees during the third program year ran well ahead of this expectation. As of September 30, 2005, there were nine additional program participants scheduled for parole after September 2006. This result appears to be due to the program’s success in enrolling men who arrive at the ATC (without a request for transfer from GH staff) who are scheduled to serve short periods of time prior to their release.

IV.D. Participants Who Were Returned Downstate Prior to Parole From ATC

By the end of the program’s second year, a few GH participants’ access to program services was limited because they were returned to downstate institutions as a result of violations while residing at the ATC. These violations included fighting at the ATC and “unauthorized movements” when outside the ATC, either when the participants was supposed to be going to work or attending a GH service. These men are considered GH participants, because they still receive some services and because they remain eligible for GH services when they finally parole from their downstate facility.

As shown by Figure 4, nine men—one in every six GH participants who spent time at the ATC prior to September 2005—was returned from the ATC to a downstate facility prior to parole. By the end of the second year of the program, all but two of these men subsequently paroled from a downstate IDOC facility. The remaining two men were scheduled for parole during the third program year.

The significance of this percentage of ATC returnees for the future administration and assessment of the program is limited for two reasons. First, over time the program relied less on attempting to transfer GH participants from downstate to the ATC facilities. Instead, it either enrolled participants in downstate facilities and worked with them in those facilities or enrolled participants already at the ATC. The evaluation team expects that ATC return rates are likely to be higher among men transferred to the ATC at the request of GH officials (otherwise these men would have already been at the ATC based on IDOC’s assessment of their risks) and to be lower for men already assigned to the ATC prior to enrolling in the program. Second, the percentage of ATC returnees will understate the actual ATC return rate that officials should expect because not all GH men at the ATC have completed their time at that facility and therefore remain at risk to be returned downstate.

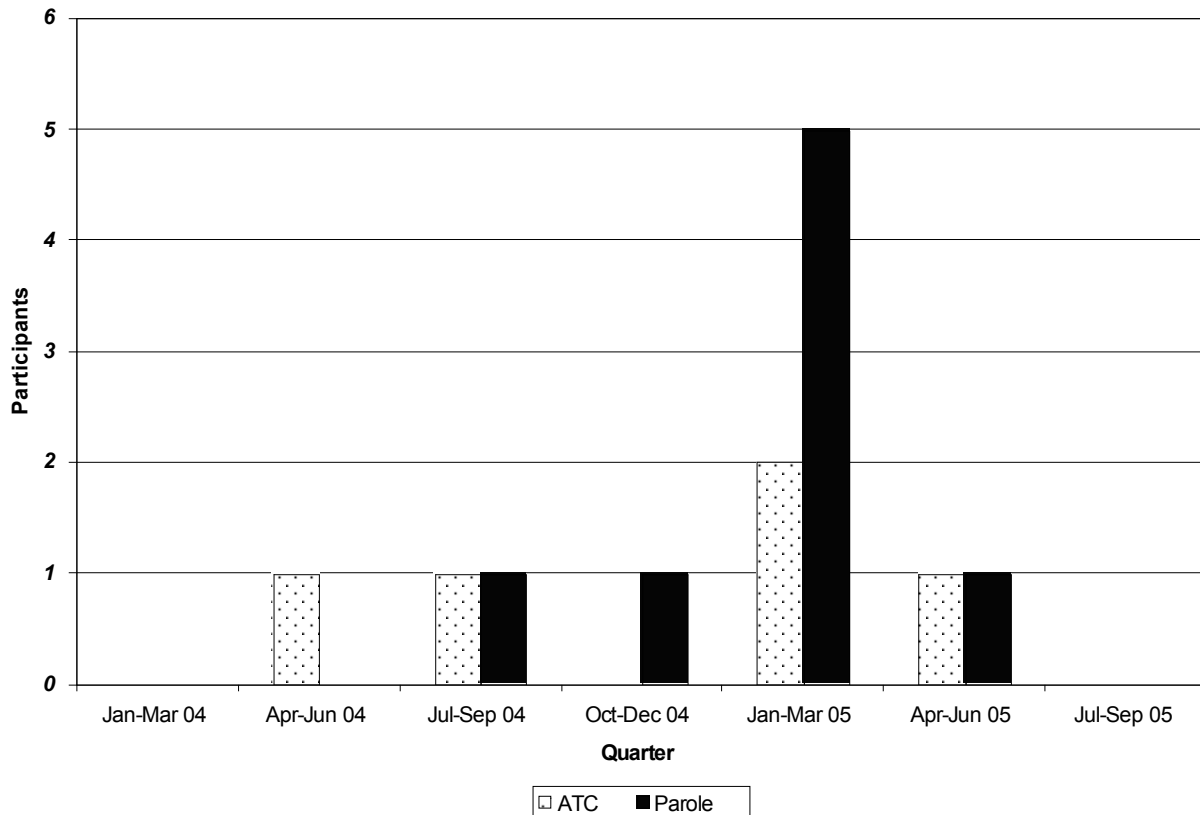


Figure 4: Number of participants returned to downstate institutions from ATC and from parole by quarter of program operation

IV.E. GH Participants Who Returned to a Downstate IDOC Facility

Figure 4 also provides a count of the number of GH men who returned to a downstate institution by September 2005 following their paroles. Nearly all of the 15 men who violated parole (prior to September 30, 2005) were arrested for a new offense. Most of these offenses were drug law violations.

The counts of GH men who returned downstate from the ATC or after a parole violation is of limited value for computing early recidivism rates for program participants without knowing how many GH men were paroled. Given the statistics on the number of parolees in section IV.A, the evaluation team computed approximate measures of the rate of recidivism back to prison as of the end of September 2005. The nine GH participants who returned downstate from the ATC should be included in recidivism measures only after they parole. Prior to their paroles they have not yet left IDOC custody.

By the end of the program’s second year, on September 30, 2005, approximately 33 percent of the paroled GH participants -16 out of 49 parolees to date - returned to an IDOC facility. As shown in section IX, this percentage is in line with historically observed one-year recidivism rates for the GH target population.

During the program's third year, recidivism rates appeared to hold steady. As of December 31, 2005, a total of 17 of the GH parolees returned to prison. This figure constitutes about 31 percent (i.e., 17 out of 55) of GH parolees. From January through July 2006, an additional 19 GH parolees returned to prison for a total of 36 men since the program began. The ratio of parolees who returned to prison to the total number of parolees remained between 30 and 40 percent (i.e. 36 out of 97 parolees). This rate is again consistent with past recidivism rates for similar young men from these communities.

It is important to recognize that these recidivism rates are likely to increase as the time since these men's parole dates increases. These crude rates are based on small sample sizes, with the possibility of only very short-term follow-up with parolees. These percentages likely understate the 12-month recidivism rates to be reported in a final impact evaluation. For example, at the end of the second program year, only eight of these reentrants paroled more than one year prior to September 30, 2005. Therefore, the 31 percent estimate of the one-year recidivism rate is likely to rise as the remaining parolees are followed by the evaluation for up to one year (or more) after their paroles.

IV.F. Services Received by Going Home Participants

In this section, we report on the numbers of GH participants who received services from February 17, 2004, the date the first two men enrolled in the program, and September 30, 2005, the end of the second program year. Participants include (i) men who signed up for the program but were still awaiting transfer from a downstate facility to the ATC, (ii) men who once were at the ATC, but were sent back downstate because of rules violations, (iii) men who were still at the ATC, and (iv) men who paroled from either the ATC or a downstate facility.

Once enrolled, GH participants were assigned to Clinical Reentry Manager (CRM) who provided case management services through Treatment Alternatives for Safe Communities (TASC). These staff members were responsible for managing participants' cases both prior to and after parole. Many enrolled in the life skills and job readiness U-Turn Permitted program operated by the North Lawndale Employment Network (NLEN). Later, as more men enrolled in the program, some began to receive mental health counseling. Other services received by GH participants include NLEN job placement services, referrals to drug treatment, and assessments provided by Gateway and Haymarket. Some participants also received housing assistance from organizations such as Safe Haven, and Jack Clark. To date nearly 20 participants received this transitional assistance.

IV.F.1. Life Skills and Job Readiness Services

The NLEN's four-week job readiness program, U-Turn Permitted, was the first service most participants received, beyond some orientation and assessment services provided by the CRM while at the ATC. To participate in this program, GH participants either spent time at the ATC or were paroled. Participants at the ATC were allowed to leave the facility to attend the program. Program participants at downstate facilities did not have access to these services while incarcerated. Even GH men at the ATC sometimes had to wait until U-Turn Permitted had an

opening, and some of these men were paroled prior to a U-Turn slot becoming available. Once GH participants completed U-Turn, they were eligible to receive \$100 clothing vouchers.

As of September 30, 2005, 35 GH participants completed the U-Turn Permitted program; by July 2006, 79 GH participants completed the U-Turn program. Nearly all of these men were still at the ATC when they completed the program. Significantly, there were only a few GH men who started the U-Turn program but never completed it. Of the 89 who started the program only 10 did not complete U-turn. This is a very high completion rate for a program targeted toward this population. However, it is significant that nearly all these men completed U-Turn Permitted while incarcerated at the ATC, as opposed to after their parole.

Figure 5 shows the number of new enrollees alongside the number of GH enrolled men who completed U-Turn by quarter, as of September 30, 2005. During the first two program years, the number of GH men completing U-Turn ranged from 2 to 10 participants per quarter. During the third program year, the numbers of men served averaged nearly 15 completers per quarter.

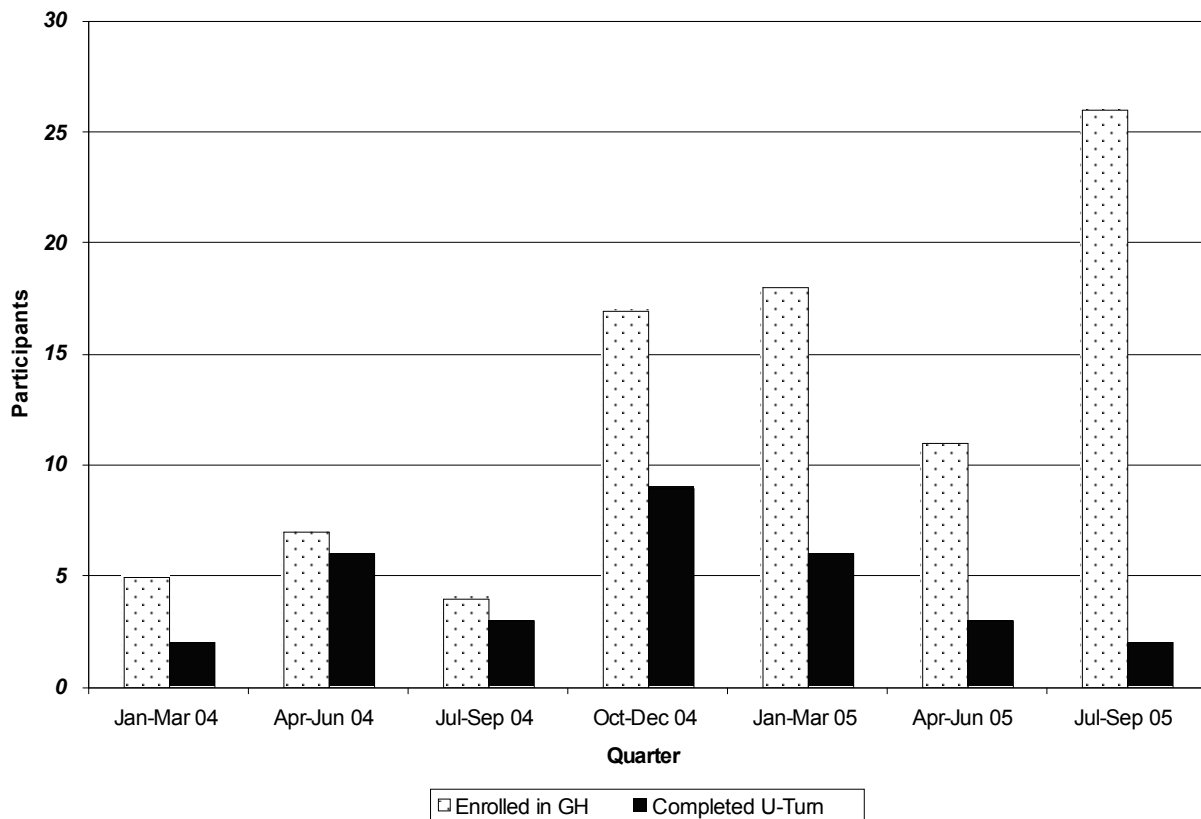


Figure 5: Number of new enrollees and completers of U-Turn Permitted by quarter of enrollment or completion.

IV.F.2. Counseling Services

After some delay initiating a contract, the GH program's counseling services began during May 2005, approximately 15 months after the first GH participant enrolled in the program. These services, provided through the Institute of Clinical Social Work, intended to assist program participants and their family members during all phases of the program.

In an effort to maintain the confidentiality of the men who participated in this part of the program, the evaluation team did not seek to obtain the individual identities of participants who received counseling services. But, from interviews with GH staff, three points are clear. First, since these services got underway, 10 to 15 men per month received counseling. The counselors saw many of these participants twice per month. Second, the counselors reported that the men they saw would benefit from sustained mental health services. Third, GH officials commented that it is difficult to get participants to seek these services after they parole from the ATC. This last point underscores one of the lessons learned from U-Turn Permitted: these young men's participation rates in services are higher while they are incarcerated than after they parole. As we discuss below there was considerable consensus about this point among the GH staff interviewed for this evaluation.

IV.F.3. Drug Treatment Services

In addition to providing counseling services, Going Home placed five men into residential drug treatment in the community. Centers in the area that provided services are Gateway, Haymarket, and Safe Haven. Program officials also expect that some of the 25 participants from IDOC's downstate SWICC facility will have received some drug treatment services prior to their parole.

IV.F.4. Employment and Job Placement

In addition to providing the U-Turn Permitted component of the program, the NLEN also provided GH participants with job search and job placement services. Many GH participants who paroled out of the ATC made use of NLEN's Recourse Center. Some used this center while still incarcerated at the ATC and after they were paroled. As of September 30, 2005, NLEN documented that 22 GH participants were employed at least once following parole. GH helped 18 of these men to find these jobs. Employers included Solo Cup, Honey Co-Op, McDonald's, Wendy's, Shamrock Auto Sales, Jakacki, and Labor Power, a temporary employment agency.

During the third program year an additional 36 GH participants were placed into jobs for a total of 58 to date. This figure implies that GH formally placed about 55 percent of parolees. This percentage does not include employment among GH men who found jobs on their own. The number of placements has increased sharply because the total number of participants who had been at the ATC or who had paroled from a downstate facility has increased over time.

So far, NLEN statistics indicate that GH participants placed into jobs have had a difficult time retaining them. Although through July 2006, 58 GH participants were placed into jobs, NLEN reported 61 placements. Three men received more than one placement. Of these 61 placements, only 10 GH participants retained their jobs for at least 90 days. This experience underscored the importance of developing a job retention component for the program.

V. The Evaluation Plan for Illinois Going Home Program

The evaluation of the Illinois Going Home program was divided into two major pieces – an implementation evaluation and an impact evaluation. The former was intended to document the extent to which the program itself functioned as planned, while the latter would measure the impact of the program on participants. This report is the implementation evaluation only. The impact evaluation must wait until sufficient numbers of men who received services are paroled from IDOC facilities to afford a statistically reliable comparison between program participants and non-participants.

V.A. Staff Interviews

The original plan for the implementation evaluation included a series of four in-person interviews with up to eight core staff people and up to thirty-six half-hour phone surveys. The interviews were to contain a fixed set of questions and response categories for outside agencies to which Going Home men had been referred. This plan changed.

The information obtained from the staff interviews was meant to provide a sampling of the types of services that the men had received. During the first year of the GH program, no outside agencies provided any services. All services in this period were delivered by the core partner agencies, NLEN and TASC. Further, because the program took off slowly and evolved along the way, it became clear that questions with fixed response categories would not generate useful information. During the second half of the second year of the program's operation, men were referred into several transitional-living centers, and the evaluation conducted phone interviews with staff at some of these agencies.

The evaluation team conducted open-ended interviews with 40 different GH staff or service providers associated with or providing services to GH participants. In eight cases, the evaluation conducted two interviews at two points in time. Twenty of the interviews were conducted in person and the remainder by phone. In addition, distinct from the original plan (which had no provision for observation of staff meetings), Survey Lab staff attended 15 different meetings (some Transitional Team meetings, some other meetings of program administrators) and two special events to observe interaction among program staff and learn about program functioning. Notes from these interviews and meetings as well as meeting notes generated by the GH program staff as part of their on-going operations provided the basis for this section of the report.

The evaluation conducted most of the interviews using two interviewers. This resulted in two sets of notes for more complete and accurate reporting. Interviews were *not* tape-recorded. Thus, although we endeavored to record the exact words of respondents as much as possible in our notes, all excerpts from notes (presented in quotation marks throughout the report to distinguish these from our own analytic comments and summaries) are paraphrases that reflect our written notes and are not transcriptions of interview sessions.

The individuals that the evaluation team interviewed include staff from the following agencies:

- Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC)
- The West Side Adult Transition Center (part of IDOC)
- Parole Division (part of IDOC)
- Treatment Alternatives for Safe Communities (TASC),
- The North Lawndale Employment Network (NLEN)
- The Institute for Clinical Social Work (ICSW)
- Other agencies contracted to provide services for Going Home men

Survey Lab staff loaded notes from the interviews and meetings into Atlas.ti, a textbase program that facilitates systematic coding and analysis of textual data.

V.B. Participant Interviews

In addition to the staff interviews, the evaluation also conducted in-depth interviews of 12 GH participants and nine participants' family members about the following topics:

- Personal and family background
- Involvement with and perceptions of the criminal justice system
- Personal support systems
- Opinions regarding the Going Home program and needed services for ex-offenders
- Aspirations for the future

From these participant interviews, the evaluation team intended to develop a more informed understanding of the backgrounds, opinions, and needs of GH population as well as their assessments of the GH program. The extended interviews shed more light on these issues than could be acquired from shorter interviews of each participant or from administrative data maintained and used by GH staff.

Although the evaluation design never called for interviewing a large number of GH participants, our sample of GH interviews constituted one in five of all GH parolees at the time that the last interview was conducted in June 2005. This was due to the slow rate of enrollment during the early phases of the program and the restriction that, in order to protect their anonymity, the evaluation team could only interview participants after they had been paroled. As a result, the evaluation team views the information from these interviews as an especially good sample for better understanding the early enrollees and parolees from the GH program.

Recruiting GH participants and their family members for one-on-one interviews was a three-step process:

1. Just before their parole from the ATC, participants were given an information sheet about the one-on-one interviews. The sheet provided details about the goals of the interviews and explained that in addition to interviewing the participant himself, the evaluation would also ask him to refer a family member for a separate interview. The information sheet explained that participation was voluntary and gave a phone number to contact a member of the evaluation team for additional information and to schedule an interview.

2. Participant interviews were scheduled over the phone and took place in a private room. Men were interviewed and given an information sheet to pass along to a family member of their choosing. The information sheet for family members explained the purpose of the interviews and asked them to call the evaluation team.
3. Family member interviews were scheduled over the phone and took place in the same location as the participant interviews.

The interviews consisted of a combination of questions developed by the evaluation team and input from the interviewees about, “what people running programs like GH should know.” The interviews lasted about 90 minutes. Unlike the GH staff interviews, all of the participant and family member interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. The transcripts were then coded for content and themes.

In the next sections of the report discusses the findings from the staff and participant interviews. Sections VI and VII of this report presents the evaluation’s analysis of the findings from the staff interviews and discuss what they may mean for the GH program and the design of future reentry initiatives. In Section VIII of the report we summarize the findings from the participant interviews.

VI. The Promise of Going Home as a Model for Ex-Prisoner Re-Integration

Many of the staff associated with Going Home expressed a good deal of enthusiasm about this effort at the beginning of the project. As time passed, with delays and very slow progress, this general enthusiasm waned. Morale dropped to a reported low in the period after the one-year mark. All program staff showed signs of frustration by this point. Things continued to move slowly, but the program began to pick up momentum as staff gained familiarity with the program’s goals and operations, and with each other. Also, as was shown in Section IV a larger number of men entered GH.

At the end of its second year, GH still had farther to go to fulfill the implementation goals in the initial design of the program. However, throughout the program, frontline staff across agencies continued to strongly support the fundamental philosophy of the Going Home approach. Further, during the second year of the program, several new program components that either figured prominently or did not figure at all in the initial GH design were successfully implemented.

VI.A. Core Elements Identified As Important

The core elements of the program that staff identified as important, effective and worth continuing and emulating include:

1. Starting inside
2. Intensive case management
3. Gradual transition

The evaluation outlines the main features of these three elements and follows these descriptions with a report on the progress Going Home made with respect to each element during the first two years of the program's operation.

VI.A.1. Starting Inside

A basic concept of the original initiative, preparing men for reentry while still in prison, continues to resonate with many different program staff as fundamental to reducing recidivism. The fact that Going Home begins inside prison is a major strength of its approach. GH program staff contends that in order for the program to work most effectively, its participants must participate for a sufficient length of time prior to being paroled from IDOC facilities.

Comments from the interview notes reveal the importance that both frontline and supervisory staff members at different agencies assign to the need to begin the program inside IDOC facilities.

If you get to them [prisoners] on the inside, they are compliant and malleable. This is not the case once they have gone home and gone back into the old neighborhood with their old friends.

What you need is to start working with them in prison so that when they get to the ATC they are ready to go out and get a job.

Getting them a job *before* they get out makes a big difference. At the ATC they have the structure that gets them up and gets them used to going to work on time and coming back until they can internalize this discipline. The half-way houses help with this also by providing another step between the discipline enforced by the corrections system and the internalized discipline needed to go to work and stay with a job.

Clients need more and earlier counseling on the inside. Most clients are angry and self-destructive because of a poor childhood. If they get counseling on the inside, they are much more likely to continue counseling on the outside.

Across interviews the evaluation discovered three primary points that GH staff made concerning the value of a program that begins prior to release from prison:

- **Starting inside keeps attendance high.** Getting young men to consistently attend a program after release is extremely difficult. The program should be run when attendance can be required – before the men leave prison. Virtually all staff interviewed saw this aspect of the program as key to any positive impact it may have. One respondent contrasted the difficulty of getting recently released young men to attend programs with the ease of doing so prior to release by noting, “At the ATCs, you are expected to participate in all assigned programming, or you are sent back to prison.”
- **Starting inside allows staff to help men develop an alternative game plan while service providers have their attention.** These young (18-24 year-old) men often do not

yet know what is best for them, and unlike the older men that community-based re-integration programs often serve, most young offenders have not yet come to the realization that their criminal careers are a dead end. Once outside, men are barraged by competing temptations and the advice of old gang friends. Inside, they hear a consistent message. Young men might not see the value of programs at this point in their lives, but if they go through the programs and hear the information, they learn about the options available to them and where they can go for help when they eventually do come to a point of being ready to turn their lives around. Further, as a practical point, if the men establish personal contact with community service providers while still inside, the men can more easily re-establish contact later on the outside.

- **Starting inside sets the stage for more productive choices on the outside.** The best-case scenario would be to find employment for prisoners *before* release. While in a work-release prison, men are much more likely to maintain good attendance and get into good work habits. Also, if a person has a paycheck on release, he has an option other than returning to sell drugs or other illegal hustles. Seeing a counselor *before* release makes it far more likely he will see one after release.

VI.A.2. Intensive Case Management

Going Home participants are young. GH staff recognize that these men come from a background with little positive social control or socialization. These men need intensive case management. As one GH staff respondent put it,

This younger population is also the most difficult to work with in terms of getting the participants to be involved and buy into the program. This is an age group that still thinks they are invincible and has not had the ‘Aha!’ moment of not wanting to go back to prison; after the first couple of times they are incarcerated, they think they know how not to get caught.

According to most of the staff that was interviewed, one of the most positive aspects of the program comes out of the weekly Transition Team meetings. To the extent that every agency has some frontline staff represented at the meeting (attendance was better during some periods than others), they provide an avenue for the exchange of key case-by-case information for each man in the program. At this weekly meeting, all attending staff can provide input about what best to do given *each participant’s* situation and behavior. The institution of a case-by-case summary for staff of the different partnering agencies to review at each Transition Team meeting was a key factor cited in moving the program along toward providing the kinds of services envisioned for participants in the original plan. The first list by participant was included in a Transition Team meeting in July of 2004, initiated by the new Program Coordinator stepping into that position at that time.

VI.A.3. Gradual Transition

Building on both the idea that a pre-release program bridges the transition to community living and on the idea of intensive case management, many GH staff point to ways the program does or can allow for a more gradual transition.

- **Post-release placement in transitional residential treatment programs helps men adjust.** Several staff commented that the men who are placed in transitional housing programs after they were paroled from the ATC seemed to do better than those who go directly back into private housing. The pace of these transitional placements clearly picked up during the second half of the second year of the program.
- **Men need sufficient time inside the ATC before work or program release as well as before parole.** Some staff stressed the need for smoother transitions between stages of life *on the inside*, namely, the move from a higher security prison to the ATC. These staff suggested that a period of inside-the-ATC programming might help temper the shock of a sudden upturn in freedom that accompanies this transition. These staff would not recommend movement to outside programs until completion of these internal programs. The following excerpt from interview notes is illustrative of this point of view.

The respondent feels that GH men do not and are not given the opportunity to make a shift from the medium and maximum security environments from which they are coming into the minimum security environment of the ATC. If they had time to make this shift and get used to the idea of the increased freedom and responsibility that they are being given, they would be less likely to commit movement violations. The respondent gave the example of men running into someone they know on the street who might offer them drugs, or the temptation of visiting home or friends rather than going straight to the programming site and back.

A different staff person made a comment with a similar point:

Programming needs to start with participants at least six months prior to release. Any later and they are too occupied thinking about their approaching freedom to think very hard about anything else. U-Turn Permitted and other programming cannot compete with the prospect of their imminent freedom for the attention of participants.

- **Cooperation between IDOC and local community organizations – a central aspect of the Going Home program – is quite important for smoothing the transition.** Going Home was intended to forge new links among existing community organizations and between these groups and IDOC. While this process has been perhaps the most difficult of the original project goals, many of the individuals who were interviewed still regarded it as an important and achievable goal for the future. By the end of the second program year, GH had not increased the capacity of any of the coordinated programs, a fact that disappointed staff at many of the participating groups. However, many of the GH staff

report that they have learned a great deal from working with those in other participating organizations. GH staff has made personal connections with others across programs that can help them as they serve men transitioning from incarceration to community life. GH staff contends that it is particularly important for men in the program to be connected with programs in the community prior to release.

VI.B. Progress in Key Elements of the Going Home Program

For a variety of interconnected reasons detailed later in this report, the Going Home program developed more slowly than expected. However, despite the many unanticipated difficulties of meshing programs run by small, non-profit community groups with those run by a large and multi-layered state agency, the evaluation documented progress in each of the three core areas identified by staff as crucial to the program's success.

- **Starting inside.** Early in the program, staff commonly complained that men were being transferred to the ATC with too little time to take advantage of the programs being offered. More recently, staff reports that GH men have entered the program with more time prior to their scheduled paroles. Data support this perception. Excluding GH men who were sent back from the ATC to the parent institution due to behavior problems, about half the men transferred to the ATC in 2004 stayed in for fewer than 16 weeks. The proportion of short stays dropped to about a third among those transferred in between January and July of 2005. All those transferring to the ATC later than July 2005 have remained at the ATC as of September, 2005. Since the spring of 2005, GH men who cannot be transferred to the ATC prior to parole have been getting some programming pre-release (one GH staffer puts the start time at March while another at May) when they are located at the South West Illinois Correctional Center (SWICC). In addition, Chicago GH staff has made several trips to SWICC to meet with GH men who are incarcerated at that facility. The goal is to identify men at intake, move them first to Robinson and then to SWICC. As of September 2005, there was no additional programming in place for GH men incarcerated at IDOC's Robinson facility.
- **Intensive case management.** ATC staff report that imprisoned men often have counseling needs and that regular ATC programming does not meet these needs. The GH program provides this extra and much-needed service. As one staffer put it,

Normally, the ATC is only equipped to handle men on non-psychotropic medication, but not men with therapeutic counseling needs. The continuum of care is there for Going Home participants. The Going Home people are followed more closely so that they do not fall through the cracks.

With more men in the program, an additional CRM was hired in May, 2005. New programs were in the process of being added. A financial counseling program was in the works, as was a mentoring program (which was briefly begun, then halted due to problems with clearance for entry into the ATC). Beginning in the spring of 2005 GH men residing in the ATC became eligible for regular ATC programming in addition to the GH programming that they had been receiving since the start of the program. During the

Summer of 2005, and for the first time in the program, two GH men met with the Transition Team to go over their discharge summaries. It was only then that this is part of the original GH design began to get under way.

- **Gradual transition.** In the original GH design, the ATC was deemed best suited to bridge the transition back into the community since men at this location can be released during the day for work and programming. Unfortunately, a mismatch in eligibility criteria made it difficult to move many early potentially eligible GH participants to the ATC facility. GH staff worked out a procedure for maximizing the number of men in the program who are able to be transferred to the ATC. Originally, program staff approached men who met eligibility criteria and petitioned for a transfer after the prisoner was enrolled. This resulted in many enrollees' denied transfer and inability to access pre-release GH services at the ATC. Since approximately August of 2004, the list of eligible men is *first* screened for probable transfer approval. GH staff only recruits participants from among those men who qualify for the move to the ATC anyway. This greatly reduced the number of cases in which transfer is denied. One GH official contended that 145 of the first 150 transfers requested by the program were denied.

Transitional Living Arrangements: Services to smooth the transition post-release have also increased. The first placement of a GH participant into a transitional living arrangement post-prison occurred in September of 2004, the second in January of 2005. In the subsequent nine months, at least one placement has occurred each month for a total of 14 men placed through the beginning of September, 2005. From January through July 2006, an additional five GH men were placed in transitional living arrangements.

VII. Challenges That Arose When Implementing Going Home in Illinois

Despite the promise of Going Home and the staff's continued belief in the core structure of the program (starting inside, intensive case management, and gradual transition including a coordination of existing community services), program implementation progressed very slowly. As is true with any new program, staff had to work out regular procedures and adjust to unexpected situations.

VII.A. Learning and Adjustments to Program Environment

Any program involves a period of learning by program staff and Going Home was no exception. Adjustments were made to accommodate issues including: participants with lower-than-anticipated education; participants' mobility after parole; case management practices; and required levels of staff expertise.

VII.A.1. Participants with Lower-than-Anticipated Education

As part of the basic design of leveraging existing community resources, Going Home tapped an established program called U-Turn Permitted to provide important employment-related services to GH participants. Prior to GH, the U-Turn Permitted program served persons who came to them voluntarily and were older and more educated than the GH men.

The U-Turn Permitted programs were designed for men with a reasonable level of literacy. Even counting the one participant with an associate's degree and the four with GEDs, the average TABE score for men in Going Home was under 7th grade. Twelve percent of the men tested with less than a 4th grade education level and thirty-five percent with a 4th to 6th grade level. An additional thirty percent scored between six and 7.9 grades. In other words, over three-quarters of the GH men were functioning at less than an 8th grade educational level and almost half were functioning at a 5th grade level or lower. Program staff at NLEN had to adjust to serving men with very low levels of education. At least one GH participant who began U-Turn Permitted was unable to finish because of low literacy, and at least one GH man was turned away from the U-Turn program because he could not read.

VII.A.2. Participant Mobility Post-release

The Going Home program was specifically designed to serve men returning to the North Lawndale community in Chicago. Parole agents are assigned cases according to the areas in which the men reside. Normally, when a parolee moves to a different parole area, he is transferred to a parole agent serving in that new location. The Parole Division assigned a small number of parole agents to handle all GH cases (in addition to other cases). Keeping GH men distributed among a few agents is important to intensive case management because these agents attend Transition Team meetings and are aware of the options available to their GH clients. To preserve this aspect of the program, parole agents working with Going Home were more flexible about seeing some of the men outside their normal service areas.

VII.A.3. Case Management

Originally, TASC intended to provide case management for drug rehabilitation related services only. However, particularly during the extended start-up period of very low enrollment, it became clear that the Clinical Re-entry Manager hired by TASC needed to provide case management services for *all* Going Home men not just those requiring drug rehabilitation services. In addition, the CRM was needed as a general case manager, coordinating all services and not just those related to drug abuse. There was no other case manager to coordinate services.

VII.A.4. Required Levels of Expertise

The CRM position is a lynchpin for the GH program. As the position evolved with the program, it became apparent that this critical role required a level of training beyond the initial purpose and salary level of the job. To remedy this problem, the program added an additional on-site CRM to assist and supervise the work of the first CRM. However, it remains unclear whether this approach will adequately address what appears to be a need either for more training of staff hired into CRM positions or for the GH program to hire more skilled and experienced personnel in the these positions from the start. During the staff interviews, some GH staff identified their peers' judgments in making hiring decisions as a reason for the sometimes uneven skill levels of frontline staff.

VII.B. Organizational Design and Relationships Affect Implementation

Going Home also suffered from difficulties beyond normal program adjustment. Even though potential solutions for problems that arose were identified by line staff or leaders of participating private agencies (NLEN, ICSW, TASC) and divisions of IDOC (ATC, Parole, GH staff, staff at feeder prisons, etc.), these proposed solutions were often only partially implemented months later, or not at all. Several organizational components of the Going Home design resulted in a continued pattern of delay in implementing the original program as well as implementing suggested program modifications in response to problems.

VII.B.1 Elements of Program Design That Contributed to Incomplete Implementation

Key elements of the program design that underlie the slow and incomplete implementation of Going Home as envisioned are:

- 1) Lack of clear lines of authority within IDOC with respect to GH program needs;
- 2) Lack of performance incentives administered by IDOC for the non-profit partnering agencies;
- 3) Inadequate provision for the skill and training levels required by key GH staff.

Designers of programs that succeed Going Home should take into account the management structures and organizational cultures of the public and private groups that they plan to coordinate. IDOC is a large agency with many semi-autonomous subunits including specific prisons, parole, intake, etc. It is likely that other state corrections systems are similarly complex. For a program such as Going Home that has both sporadic and on-going needs for cooperation from individual IDOC staff at high and low levels across many different subunits, smooth operation requires that clear lines of authority with respect to program requirements be in place from the start.

Incentives and quantitative standards are needed both within and across organizations to motivate and monitor performance. Absent such incentives and standards, it takes a very long time to accomplish any task, and the quality of what is done is uneven. The GH program design rests on strong and on-going cooperation between many people from different organizations. All need to be able to depend on the others and believe that each organization is doing their share of the work. Incentives and explicit standards are needed to foster the necessary levels of cooperation and accountability. As a result of these issues, some staff acknowledged that the Program Coordinator needed more authority to enforce performance standards on the participating community organizations.

A program of the complexity of Going Home requires staff with sufficient levels of training and experience to occupy key roles. The salary levels assigned to certain roles in the Illinois Going Home program were not sufficient to attract staff with the qualifications required by the job or to maintain acceptable levels of employee turnover.

The cross-group coordination demanded by the GH design, in addition to the wide-ranging pull of the program on resources across subunits and levels within IDOC, means that those in charge

need to be familiar not only with the formal rules and policies, but also with organizational subcultures and with the political realities of the day.

Below are examples of delays and lack of follow-through that can be traced to the program design flaws noted above.

- The original proposal talked about coordinating with Chicago police. There was some representation of Chicago police at very early meetings about Going Home. However, as of April, 2005, there was still no actual coordination with police. When a GH participant was picked up by the police, nobody called the parole officers or anybody else associated with Going Home. GH staff was still discussing the need for coordinating with police in April, 2005. In July of 2005, GH staff reported a “first” coordination with Chicago police. The originally envisioned relationship between police and parole for GH men had not yet been established. By the end of the second program year, no police officer had attended any of the Transitional Team meetings.
- An action item requesting that the Mandatory Sentenced Release (MSR) data sheet be provided to ATC staff when a GH offender transferred into the facility was first on the agenda at the start of April 2004, and still pending at the end of September 2004, six months later.
- The original GH plan called for having GH program requirements included in parole board orders. At an August 10, 2004 meeting, the fact that this had not yet occurred was underlined by a decision to request that Going Home requirements be added to Parole Board orders. The draft request was not completed until the end of September. Early in 2005 SWICC and the ATC agreed to add the wording “will follow any and all recommendations of the Illinois Going Home Program” under the “other” category at the bottom of the Parole Instruction sheet. However, as of September 2005 – a year after the initial request, this wording still had not been added to board orders, and copies of the instruction sheets are still not being made available to parole officers.
- The original design of Illinois Going Home program calls for graduated sanctions for non-compliance by program participants. The need for effective sanctions and incentives dominated discussion during the first six months of the Transition Team meetings. The Program Coordinator developed a list of “viable incentives and sanctions” based on Transition Team discussions and circulated this document for input in August and September of 2004. A year later, that list was still pending approval because no way to access the funds to pay for the suggested incentives has been identified.
- Standard Operating Procedures, developed by top GH staff at the time of the one year mark, remained in a pending state. There have been problems getting these officially adopted or put into practice.
- Project Match and the Save-Up program, both intended to help GH men save money, were not, as of September, 2005, successfully implemented by any GH program participants for various reasons including slow responses to requests for information

about the programs, program restructuring, and the lack of follow-through on the part of the GH participants themselves. The Project Match program was described to the Transition Team as part of the GH program in April, 2004. A request for more specific information, first made in May of 2004 and repeated periodically, was not completed until August of 2005. The Save-Up program was part of the original proposal for Going Home in Illinois. One GH participant went through the required six hours of financial training for the Save-Up program, but the program subsequently re-organized under new management. The new program operators required the GH man to repeat the training if he wanted to participate. He did not do so and was never able to access the program. Since then, only three participants opted to take advantage of this program. They filled out the paper work, but never followed through with their scheduled appointments to meet with the Financial Advisor.

- The absence of the originally proposed video-conferencing in combination with the slow start to the GH program meant that a number of early “participants” in prisons outside the ATC, and some who moved directly from prison to parole, received fewer services prior to parole than their ATC-housed counterparts.

VII.B.2. The Consequences of Program Design and Incomplete Implementation

The underlying design of Going Home generated a variety of operational difficulties that overlap and interconnect. These are detailed below in the following categories:

1. Insufficient initial flow of men through the program
2. Insufficient or non-existent training and cross-training for frontline staff
3. Complications of coordinating multiple agencies and IDOC subunits
4. Intra-agency disjuncture
5. Lack of familiarity and follow-through by IDOC bureaucracy
6. Lack of incentives and consequences; unclear or missing supervision and lines of authority

VII.B.2.a. Insufficient Initial Flow of Men through the Program

The Going Home program served fewer men than it intended to serve during its operation to date. Low enrollment emerged as the major issue in the interim evaluation report. Eligibility problems regarding entry to the ATC still exist, but to the extent men can move there, identification and movement into the ATC now takes place in a more timely manner. Problems in trying to identify eligible participants on their entry into the prison system remain, but GH staff has continued to work to resolve this issue.

Originally designed to serve 200 men in two years, only 14 were recruited by the end of the first year and only 94 men enrolled by the end of the second year. Of the total program budget of \$2,365,461, 75% remained unspent as of August 2005.

A program cannot function well without a sufficient volume of clients to keep staff engaged at anticipated levels. It is likely inefficient to operate a program substantially below capacity.

Some GH staff observed that if only a few men from Going Home come to the attention of any given service provider, then the needs of the program as a whole will not receive any priority.

Three primary reasons account for this problem of flow, which, absent new program or ATC eligibility criteria, has been resolved to the extent possible.

Mismatch of ATC and GH Eligibility Criteria. While the original plan called for the program to serve men while still in prison downstate, the distance between the prison and the services in Chicago caused logistical difficulties that made remote services cost-prohibitive. Video conferencing, originally proposed to solve this problem, never materialized. An alternate plan seemed to provide the solution: bring GH men to the West Side Adult Transition Center, a minimum-security work-release prison near the return neighborhoods of GH men. However, the criteria governing eligibility for the GH program and those governing eligibility for the ATC center have not matched. This mismatch continues to make it difficult to maintain a sufficient flow of men into the program even though there are more than enough GH-eligible men in the system statewide.

Differences Between ATC and Downstate GH Parolees. Those who move directly from a downstate prison, such as SWICC, into GH on parole do not have the same advantage of services pre-release, a key element of the program. Although this continues to pose problems, it might be solved under the current model that uses an ATC if an inmate's eligibility criteria lines up. In practice this means that young, violent offenders are not likely to receive program services, because they likely are in facilities in which no services are available. The ATC eligibility criteria insure that GH participants will be among the least violent offenders among 18-24 year old parolees. As the program has evolved, it has made greater use of, the SWICC in order to provide services inside for men who do not qualify for the ATC. However, this institution's distance from the programs makes it difficult and expensive for Chicago-based staff to deliver services to men there while they are still inside.

Difficulty of Identifying Eligible GH Men in a Timely Manner through the IDOC Information System. Record keeping across the state in IDOC takes place using several different software systems that are not fully integrated with each other. Further, a backlog of paper files often awaits entry into the online system. Consequently, men who are eligible for Going Home may be identified only after they have too little time left to serve to take advantage of programs while still inside the ATC. This problem was much reduced during the second program year with a goal of identifying men *as they go into prison*. One respondent noted that at the end of the summer of 2004 it was still common for GH men at the ATC to have only 30 days or even a week of time left before parole by the time they arrived. This does not allow enough time to provide any programming on the inside. A year later, in August of 2005, this respondent reports that most of the GH men coming in have 3-6 months of time left. Program staff reported that this as a major improvement in the functioning of the program. However, identification of GH-eligible men at intake -- especially those who will be eligible for transfer to the ATC -- remained problematic for reasons that are not clear.

VII.B.2.b. Insufficient Training and Cross-training for Frontline Staff.

Staff identified a second short-coming of program implementation in the interim report: the lack of training for frontline Going Home staff. Those staff interacting directly with GH men often knew the least about the program design and goals. Training that did take place did so primarily at the supervisory level of the program. Further, no initial training of staff took place *across* organizations. That is, community organizations were not systematically apprised of IDOC procedures affecting GH, nor did IDOC staff get training with respect to the programs and operating procedures of the community groups. For example, IDOC decided to provide its pre-service orientation training only to GH staff from TASC, but not staff from NLEN and ICSW who believed that they also would have benefited from this training.

The former issue of basic training has been addressed with respect to new staff hired later in the program. The GH program is now sufficiently institutionalized that each organization can orient any new staff about the program in a coherent way and they appear to be doing so. Certain agencies have conducted a single cross-training on their own initiative, but Going Home as a program has not taken on this issue: the program has no on-going cross-training of frontline staff. Therefore, new hires who missed an agency-initiated one-time cross-training may never receive such training. Agency staff continues to raise the need for systematic cross-training as part of the program.

VII.B.2.c. Complications of Coordinating Multiple Agencies and IDOC Subunits.

Going Home has been implemented primarily through the cooperation of three private social service organizations, two distinct IDOC subunits, and various administrative IDOC staff. Some IDOC staff are associated directly with Going Home. Other IDOC staff has indirect and sporadic relationships to Going Home because their jobs impinge on the recruitment and transfer of men into Going Home, or other permissions, contracts and related needs of the program. Not surprisingly, the number of groups involved increases the time needed for smoothing out interactions between them and for implementing changes along the way.

- **Multiple organizations, multiple organizational cultures and styles.** The number of organizations involved multiplies the length of the learning curve because each group must learn and adjust to the standard practices and needs of the others. This is compounded by the fact that some of the organizations (e.g., the ATC, SWICC) are IDOC institutions with very formal security rules and others are community service organizations (NLEN, ICSW, TASC) without similar security regulations. The organizations also vary in size (e.g., IDOC vs NLEN). In addition to variation in organizational structure and style, one respondent noted that, "...IDOC has traditionally been very resistant to pre-release services by outside organizations." This culture of resistance to outside programming inside the prison is antithetical to the key elements of the GH program: starting programming pre-release, intensive case management, and linking with the services provided by existing community partners. A number of respondents contended that the larger culture of IDOC statewide is that of getting offenders off the street and keeping them off the street. Refocusing on rehabilitation and community re-entry is slow going in the face of this systemic culture.

- **Staff turnover.** Staff turnover at any given organization potentially moves the program back along the learning curve on inter-organizational cooperation. Each of the key partner organizations (IDOC, ATC, NLEN and TASC) had some staff turnover during the first two years of the GH program. One of the partnering organizations noted that their agency, "...has a high turnover rate. They lose a lot of people to other jobs that pay more money." Other staff left due to wider financial difficulties of their organizations or due to re-assignment to other duties. Each staff addition and loss requires a new adjustment period between program staff. The more organizations involved, the higher the probability of staff turnover due to factors outside the program that affect each separate group.
- **Multiple service populations for each organization.** Each organization also has a regular service clientele, some of them other (ex)prisoners, some of them other community members. None of the groups involved in GH dedicates itself solely to GH participants, or even to 18 to 24 year old reentrants. Going Home men are a minority of the people any one group serves, yet groups involved with GH must allocate staff resources to coordinate with many other organizations in order to serve this small segment of their clientele. Groups have had difficulty attaining and maintaining this level of coordination, especially as it pertains to sending valuable staff persons to attend regular and lengthy meetings.

Further, when agencies serve different types of clients, the most difficult clients may get short shrift – and GH men may be the most difficult clients of those that they serve. The GH Evaluation Team’s Technical Report on baseline measures of recidivism and employment indicates that the GH target population has historically had among the highest recidivism rates and the lowest employment of any group of reentrants from IDOC facilities to Cook County.

Consequently, the evaluation team expects it to be especially difficult to develop jobs for young ex-felons. They have low levels of schooling, literacy, and prior employment experience. Employers may legally discriminate against this group and have many reasons to do so. Job developers that serve both Going Home men and other men from the community have an incentive to send their best candidates to employers in order to maintain good relationships with the few employers willing to hire ex-offenders. Respondents report that Going Home men are young and so have more “attitude” and less experience than other, older men a job developer might serve.

VII.B.2.d. Intra-agency Disjuncture.

Although Going Home is a program of the Illinois Department of Corrections, many IDOC staff may have never heard of it. Well into the second year of the program, the staff who said they hoped *that the interviewers* (the evaluators meeting with them to collect their views of how the program was functioning) would provide *them* with information about how Going Home is meant to work and what the current procedures are. Going Home serves a relatively small number of men. However, recruiting participants for Going Home required the cooperation of IDOC staff at many levels and in many locations around the state. Gaining this cooperation was hampered by the following:

- **Uneven cooperation and training inside the ATC.** The West Side Adult Transition Center has its own set of programs and procedures, but these did not receive adequate consideration in the planning stages. The Going Home design implied that ATC staff and officials could simply take up their new role for Going Home. During the first year of the program, some respondents contended that the ATC's line staff was not briefed about the program nor did they get any special GH training. Lack of clear rules and baseline training resulted in inconsistent and sometimes counterproductive procedures with respect to Going Home men inside the ATC. While ATC staff has final approval on all inmate movement outside the ATC, some GH staff contended that communication about the men's programming was not always clear, occasionally with serious consequence for ATC staff: one GH man was able to exploit the confusion to gain unauthorized movement outside the facility – a serious problem for ATC staff whose responsibility is security.

Some staff reported that they resented the disruption caused by a new program for which they had little information or training. Initially GH men were not participating in regular ATC programming. Now, the ATC programs are available to GH men. However, one ATC program (Gateway) moved from a 3-month to a 6-month schedule that prevents many GH men from taking advantage of it, since they are in the ATC for shorter periods.

While much of the initial confusion over GH has dissipated, lingering hostilities toward the GH program appear to remain among some ATC staff. Last minute decisions to revoke movement of GH men for planned GH activities and lockdowns with insufficient regard for employment and program schedules of GH men seems to reflect an unwillingness by particular ATC staff to accommodate GH program needs. The on-going lack of cooperation from some ATC staff puts cooperating ATC staff and GH program staff in a difficult position.

VII.B.2.e. Lack of Familiarity and Follow-through with IDOC Bureaucracy.

In order to function, Going Home requires authorization from IDOC for many basic logistical steps. Staff found they could not depend on verbal assurances about program arrangements because of overdue, incorrect, or disregarded paperwork (submitted both by IDOC and by outside groups and processed by IDOC and outside groups). This resulted in delays and frustrations of many kinds:

- **Uncertain lines of authority.** The organization of IDOC prevents the GH Program Coordinator from being able to make agency resources available to Going Home in a timely manner. This resulted in a number of assurances made in good faith that turned out to be outside the real control of those making the promises or entailed much more involved maneuvering than anticipated. Consequently, GH staff could not always depend on verbal promises of high level IDOC staff associated with the program to get things reviewed or approved in a timely manner. Verbal approvals at the highest level have not been consistently followed up with the steps required to make them official.

- **Background checks.** Going Home program staff who needs to work inside the ATC must have appropriate background checks. The ATC is, after all, a prison. Problems with both service providers and IDOC bureaucracy delayed these necessary checks. To illustrate, the need for a background check for a particular provider was raised in a meeting at the beginning of April, 2004. It took three weeks before the appropriate forms were provided and another month before the service provider completed the forms. Six months later, the background check was still not completed. This issue continues to plague GH in the second year of the program. For example, to sidestep the problems associated with giving prisoners movement, the program discussed moving NLEN's U-Turn Permitted program inside the ATC. Ostensibly, this plan made progress over a period of several months, but ultimately the program never moved inside the ATC. Contradictory reports about these plans include staff failing to submit materials for approval, two denials of approval, failure to submit appeals on request, and failure to apply as volunteers rather than staff. If community re-entry programs are used inside IDOC detention facilities, the fact that most programs make heavy use of recovered ex-felons must be taken into account and clearance issues addressed up front.
- **Accessing funds for incidental expenses.** In order to access funding for any purpose, IDOC requires that a vendor either have a contract with IDOC or that the vendor be willing to accept a voucher. Neither petty cash fund nor any mechanism for reimbursing personal payments by GH staff currently exists. If a GH staff person wanted to bring donuts for volunteer mentors in the ATC, for example, they would have to do this out of their own pocket because there is no effective way to access the money earmarked for just this sort of thing. As a consequence, some effective program participation incentives – gifts for the men's children at Christmas, pumpkins at Halloween – occurred sporadically and depended upon GH staff being willing to pay for these privately. Note the following excerpt from meeting notes:

Before everyone else arrived, [name] was listening to another staff person about a GH guy who had lost his ID and so was not going out on arranged job interviews. [Name] pulled money out of her purse for the new ID if the staffer could take him to apply. She looked at me observing her handing out cash and noted there is no petty cash fund to cover problems such as this and no way to get reimbursed for it. She has to pay out of her own pocket if she wants to get anything done.

Some GH staff reported they spent non-reimbursable personal funds for GH needs even as the bulk of the GH funds remained unused.

- **Contracts with service providers.** The ICSW worked without compensation for two months because a contract that had been promised many months earlier still had not been put in place by the time earlier money ran out. This group's counseling work ceased altogether for almost two months while the contract was finally put in place. This was a problem for the program – men were asking for the counselor and were upset when he was not available. It is difficult to engage these young men with counselors in the first place. A service gap potentially loses hard-won progress.

A related challenge associated with the counseling component of the program is illustrative of a very important implementation question when a large state agency subcontracts services from many different small social service providers. Some GH staff suggested that the state paid for participants' counseling services approximately 90 days after they are billed. They indicated that this policy may have had the unintended effect of limiting the program's capacity to provide counseling services to GH participants. This policy may deter otherwise qualified counselors from participating in the program, because they require a timely income that the program apparently cannot provide. Counselors who already have a regular income from another full-time job are likely less deterred by the state's payment schedule, but the hours that they provide to program are additional hours on top of a full-time job. For this reason, such providers are likely to limit the time that they are willing to work in the program. However other GH staff disagreed contending either that this issue was unimportant or that their colleagues' perceptions were incorrect. Instead, they contended that the problem lie with the vendors whose payments were delayed because of they did not submit timely invoices. This problem appears to be resolved after GH officials showed these agencies how important it was to submit an invoice each month in order to get paid each month.

Staff members from other organizations also pointed out that contract funds were not flexible. As staff began to identify new needs for the program, they had no feasible way to pay for these under the existing project contract. An excerpt from one set of interview notes illustrates this point:

This respondent has issues with the way the money has been allocated in the program. There was no money set aside for training. New expenses incurred by the program are not reimbursed. Cell phone use by the case manager had not even been factored in.

This perception about inflexibility in the use of contract funds appears to remain an important obstacle for GH operators. But it is not clear from other staff that the funding lines were that inflexible. For example, TASC had money in its budget for training of its staff that worked on the GH program. It was the only agency involved with GH to request such funding, either during the initial contract development or during subsequent renewal and amendment periods. Further in the case of TASC, it had a budget for a cell phone for all of the CRMs from the time of its original contract.

The design of the program envisioned that program staff would be able to draw on a wide variety of services available in the community depending on the needs of individual participants. Despite being a young population from three West Side community areas in Chicago, the GH population has proven to have heterogeneous needs and require customized services.

VII.B.2.f. Lack of Incentives and Consequences; Unclear/missing Supervision and Lines of Authority

Lack of incentives for high-quality staff work, lack of consequences for poor work, and unclear or absent supervision and lines of authority have continuously plagued the overall performance of the Going Home Program. Part of this stems from the nature of the program as one that links a set of organizations together.

- **Reward Structures are Linked to Wider Organizational Purposes, not Going Home.** Frontline staff answers to supervisors at their respective organizations and not to a central Going Home manager. Staff career trajectories depend largely on what their local supervisors think of their work, *not* how well staff are performing with respect to Going Home. Sometimes the needs of Going Home mesh with the general needs of one of the partner organizations and sometimes they do not. In particular, IDOC is a very large organization, and running GH depends on cooperation from a wide array of personnel from within that large structure. However, responding to GH requests is unlikely to have any career payoff for many of those involved.
- **Lack of Authority.** Staff specifically hired for Going Home at one agency lacked the authority to direct those hired for Going Home at another agency to carry out particular tasks or to follow or change procedures. This meant that often the only way to push for cooperation was by polite request, and requests could be ignored indefinitely. This feature of the current GH program is inherent in its design. While its importance was raised in the interim report, little progress appears to have been made addressing this challenging issue.

Not unexpectedly, this issue has slowed down the implementation of program procedures or changes that had been agreed to verbally by the leaders of participating agencies. The Program Coordinator produced notes, updates and action items from each weekly Transition Team meeting and distributed these to other TT members prior to each meeting. However, it became apparent at meetings attended by Survey Lab staff that only a few others attending ever actively prepared for the meeting, brought notes of their own, took notes during the meeting, or volunteered to take on any tasks associated with action items. For example:

- From August through October of 2004 there were between two and five action requests over twelve weeks old at every transitional team meeting.
- From April to June of 2005, there were still one or two such outstanding requests at each meeting.
- Looking only at completed requests, a summary from minutes of 28 different weekly meetings shows 29 requested actions completed by the Program Coordinator and 30 requested actions completed by all other staff combined.
- Standard Operating Procedures (SOP- See Appendix D) specify that those working with Going Home submit certain reports. Reporting requirements are also part of the contracts between IDOC and the community groups. Throughout the entire first two years of the program, only one staff person from a non-IDOC agency submitted a partial report.
- SOP also call for men to be evaluated within seven days of entry into the ATC. Weekly Transition Team meeting notes show that this did not always occur. For example, one GH participant who enrolled in the program and arrived at the ATC by mid-November of 2004 was not assessed until mid-February of 2005. Another who was in GH and at the ATC by the end of December 2004 still had not been screened by the time he was paroled at the end of March 2005. Three other GH participants who arrived at the ATC in January and February of 2005 were still not screened by

April of 2005. Although the weekly meeting notes repeatedly call for the screening of these participants, the Program Coordinator has no authority to compel this work. The Program Coordinator does not hire the CRM responsible for screening nor can the Program Coordinator fire the CRM.

- Toward the end of 2004, the CRM hired an assistant who was subsequently found to be completely unsuitable for the job. The assistant was let go within six weeks of hire. The assistant was hired without the oversight of more senior GH staff because of the missing lines of authority and lack of supervision for that position. Senior staff contend that this individual would never have been hired had they been included in the hiring process.

VIII. Participants' Perspectives on Reentry and Reentry Services

The evaluation budget did not include sufficient funds to interview every GH participant, but it was nonetheless important to interview some participants to provide greater insight into their backgrounds, their views of the criminal justice system, and their own assessments of reentry. This information is potentially important for the design of reentry programs targeting young reentrants, and none of it appears otherwise available from administrative sources. The participant interviews focused on: the participants' descriptions of their family backgrounds; their description of the early stages of their criminal backgrounds; their perceptions of the criminal justice system; their views about reentry and reentry programs; and their aspirations for the future.

VIII.A. Family Backgrounds

Consistent with the literature on the backgrounds of young criminal offenders, GH participants reported overwhelming histories of family disintegration. Of the twelve participants, ten had never lived with their father or did not know their father. Of the two participants who did live with their fathers, one reported being abandoned by his father at the age of nine and then subsequently moving in with him again at age thirteen after the death of his mother. The other participant lived with his father, a known drug dealer, until the age of sixteen, at which time his father passed away. Furthermore, half of the participants interviewed lived at least part of their childhood in the care of someone other than their parents, including aunts, grandmothers and foster care. Reasons given for living outside of the care of parents included parental drug addiction, death of the parent, and the presence of physical abuse.

Participants' also reported that their family lives were plagued by addiction and drugs. Six of the GH men reported the use of drugs by their mother. Of the other six GH men, all but one reported a close family member's involvement in drugs. One reported living with a drug and alcohol addicted step-father who physically abused both him and his mother. Another reported that his father was a drug dealer. A third lived with his drug addicted father for a period of time while another reported living with his drug dealing brothers. A fifth participant became more heavily involved in drug dealing when he began dealing for his uncle, upon the uncle's release from prison. As a juvenile, if the participant was caught, the punishment would be far lighter than if his uncle was caught again.

In addition to the general lack of family cohesion expressed by interviewees and their family members, many of the GH men reported a particularly devastating family loss or disintegration preceded their deeper involvement in crime. For one participant whose mother had died shortly after his birth and who had been living subsequently with his siblings and grandmother, serious involvement in crime began after the death of his grandmother. Of the period following his grandmother's death he said, "After she passed... it seemed like everything fell apart, it was every man for himself."

Another GH participant said of the death of his father when he was sixteen, "It hit me hard and I really took a turn for the worse then...I didn't know how to deal with it, so I just acted out - reacted in ways to get attention basically. That's when I just started breaking the law and not really caring about the consequences." Still another interviewee was arrested for the first time the day that his brother's funeral was being held. Having already experienced the murders of his other two brothers due to drug and gang involvement, the death of his third brother, described by the participant and his mother as "the working man," to asthma was particularly devastating for the family. The GH participant reported having been very close with this brother. He recalled that the brother often took him to basketball games and movies. He said, "I was little then, but then after they passed, I just started selling drugs." Of his mother's reaction to the death of his brother, he said, "Stuff just changed after my brother got killed, I guess she was hurt. She got depressed."

These observations were consistent with the views of staff who worked with the GH men. Counselors involved with the program also observe that GH participants often report that were adversely affected by a "life event," such as a death of a parent or close relative during the tween and teen years. Many also report that they began their association with gangs and criminal activity between the ages of nine and 11. When some participants discuss this phase of their lives, they suggest that their community contained few options for attaching to other non-gang peer groups.

Most participants appear to come from homes in which one or both parents have been involved with the criminal justice system. It was not unusual for participants to report their mothers had previously been incarcerated. However, some GH staff report that some participants appear to have grown up in two parent homes, in which neither parent was involved with the criminal justice system, and both parents regularly worked full-time. These participants' mental health needs often appear to be greater than those of other participants. (It should be noted that not all GH officials agreed with this observation.)

Finally, many of the participants acknowledge that they needed structure and less free time in their lives after they were paroled from prison. GH staff also reports that some participants said that reconnecting with their peers in their communities after parole made it more difficult for them to stay out of prison. Counselors commented that many of these young men had only limited knowledge of the life that the program seeks to have these young men enter into after they are released from custody.

VIII.B. Early Criminal Histories

Due to the design of the Going Home program, most of the GH participants interviewed were in prison for drug law violations, including possession and sale of drugs. They all reported either a history of drug use or dealing. All of those interviewed also had a history of arrests prior to their most recent arrest – many having previously spent time either in prison, in a juvenile detention center or in Cook County jail. For most of those interviewed, their prior arrests were also drug or gun related, though there were participants who also had been arrested for car theft and assault.

After the interviews were conducted with the GH men, it became clear that a theme emerged from these men's stories. Although there were no questions asked to illicit such information, four of the interviewed participants specifically discussed feeling that their original involvement with dealing drugs emerged from the necessity to make money for themselves and their families. Combined with the lack of legitimate forms of employment due to their young ages (many of the participants report beginning to sell drugs between the ages of 11 and 13), and what they reported to be an easily accessible drug market, many interviewees saw selling drugs as a rational choice to make in order to help support themselves and their families.

One participant who was living with his aunt due to his mothers' drug problem explained his decision in the following way:

My mother had seven kids and there were already two by the family that we were staying with...so as I was growing up I didn't always get the things I wanted...sometimes I didn't even get the things I needed. So I figured if I can't get it from them, I am going to have to resort to the streets. Pretty much at the age of thirteen...I started selling drugs to get what I wanted, to get what I needed, to make sure my little sisters were alright, 'cause I had four little sisters.

This sense of needing to take responsibility for oneself and one's younger siblings was echoed in the interviews of other GH participants as well. One interviewee reported that he had been an honor roll student involved in sports prior to becoming criminally involved. He spoke of his sense of responsibility for his family after the death of his stepfather when he was thirteen saying:

It was devastating,...he gave me that father love, and now he was no longer around...where was the leader now? And with me being the oldest now, I would think, what would he do, in certain situations...my mom got laid off you know, the food not coming in the house like how it supposed to be, and bills need to be paid...I was trying to think, think like a man, what would a man do. It affected everybody in their own different way...but as far as like my mom, she turned to drugs...I was too young to work a job, so, let me do this, everything else can wait, this is my top priority right now.

Another interviewee was raised by an aunt who physically abused both him and his brother and used the foster care checks that she received for their care on her own children instead, often refusing even to provide her nephews with bus fair and forcing them to walk over an hour to and from school. Of his decision to begin selling drugs he said,

It's not like I didn't have nowhere to sleep and like that, but the things I wanted I never got from no one. I had to go and get it on my own. I was going to school and my friends – my so-called friends – who I thought were friends at the time, I'm seeing them come to school and they got everything that you want. I'm like, man. I'm like, how you all doing that? I started messing with them and just went the wrong way. I really regret that a lot... I was trying to sell drugs to buy something or selling drugs to have money.

This GH participant's brother who also was interviewed echoed this feeling of having no where else to turn to for income than the drug market saying,

My brother, he raised everybody that was in the house. There was like six of us and it was just him. And he was only about eight. It was hard. I'm trying to be positive with my life. And that's what my brother's trying to do but it's just hard. You can't wish on something from the restaurant to eat, you got to pay for it. So in order to pay for it you got to do what you got to do to get the money. That's what the people don't really be understanding about situations. They just be, oh, we gonna lock you up, and all this. You don't know what's going on in their family household. They don't know what going on, how these people surviving out here on these streets.

This brother went on to say that,

(t)he reason why he (his brother?) was locked up, the reason why he had to sit in there and suffer and do all the things that goes on in jail is because no money. You got no money, you not even really a person in this world... You don't have no money, you can't eat... you can't get the things you need... That's the only thing he can do is try to sell drugs and the only thing that's gonna lead to is getting locked up. And as soon as you get locked up you're thinking, then what else can I do? What can I do? I can't get hired nowhere. I mean, I ain't gonna be asking nobody for no money, I'm grown. Ain't nobody gonna give me nothing. Ain't nobody doing that since I been on this earth. So, selling drugs? I guess. Jail? Okay. If I got to sell drugs and go to jail, then jail is where I got to be because I can't make no money doing nothing else.

VIII.C. Perceptions of the Criminal Justice System

All interviewed participants and family members were asked about their views and thoughts on the criminal justice system. Though opinions varied greatly amongst those interviewed, many expressed a sense of ambivalence about an individual's responsibility for himself and the corruption that they feel pervades the police force, the courts, and the prisons. When asked about his opinions of the criminal justice system, a brother of one GH participant said,

I feel that no one should be caged like animals, but again, I feel that some people do need to be caged because they just went crazy in society. But you never know what makes people become a murderer, a rapist...it's all about backgrounds. You not born just to be a murderer...It's just things that you be around. And some people are, today, more followers than leaders. They want to do what they see the crowd do. They want to get

money because they see the other people getting money. And some people just out there selling drugs because they have no choice. And when they get locked up I feel sorry for people like that. You know they get locked up when they had to sell drugs just from meal to meal...but I know a lot of people that sell drugs just to be selling them. And them being the ones that always gets away with it...When people like that get locked up, I don't even really feel sorry for them because they make their own choices.

GH participants also echoed these complex feelings about the criminal justice system and society. One participant said,

The police system is corrupt...I done been through so much with them and I know how crooked they is...You could never even did nothing wrong as far as sold drugs or nothing in your life but you can't stand out...front. You can't even walk in your neighborhood...So it's really like prison outside of prison if you really look at it.

The participant then went on, however, to say that the police, "got a job to do. I feel like if they catch you wrong, they catch you wrong. You knew the consequences before you was out there, or you should have known."

Another GH participant with a different view observed,

I'd say it's biased to a certain extent, but you can't judge that because you did the shit you done to get in jail...So I feel there's no wrong-doing on the police or the criminal justice department and their line of work, it ain't on them. You went out there doing the same thing, getting the same results...That's how I see it. If you don't want what you getting, stop doing the things you doing. And then you'll be good and you won't have them problems. But even though there is some officers in Chicago that will put some drugs on you, what will beat you up, that will put a gun on you. But all of them not like that. You can't, just like they can't stereotype all black people, you can't stereotype the police, and you can't stereotype all the judges. Because all of them ain't crooked...

Many participants and family members also expressed frustration with the way the criminal justice system handles drug law violations and the services that they provide for inmates during their incarceration. When asked of her opinion of the criminal justice system one participant's aunt replied,

I am glad you asked this... I think the criminal justice system spends more time on sentencing for drug cases...They end up with sentences like seven years, eight years, nine years...guns are killing people and you can get a six year sentence for just having a gun but for drugs you get five or six years in jail. If they are drug abusers then they should be in drug treatment programs, not in prison...I think when they start to put the juveniles into prison rather than putting them in programs that will help them, that it will not help them more... Put them into programs that will allow them to do something better for themselves, rather than continue to let them go home and do the same things that they're doing, and involve the families in it as well. When you involve the families in it and they make it that it has to be that way, it will make it better for those younger men growing up.

VIII.D. Perceptions About the Role of Reentry Programs

When asked about his views of the criminal justice system another participant contended that, "...it ain't nothing but a crime school, cause while you are there, all you hear is what people did and what crimes they committed and how to do it better." When asked specifically about the services available to inmates he replied, "They have a few programs that are alright, but the majority of them are screwed up... they there just to say they are there." This interviewee then went on to suggest that attending a re-entry support program should be a requirement for release for everyone on parole, saying,

For ones that are really trying to struggle and do right, but they don't have anyone to support them and do right, they come through this program, it would be possible... I figure if you put him (someone being released from prison) around positive people, nine times out of ten he is going to start doing positive things.

Other participants and family members spoke of a greater need for services upon re-entry as well. One mother of a GH participant said,

If they have these programs in place for ex-offenders, they need to have interaction with the individuals before they're released from prison... You need to have a case worker assigned to the individuals that will actually go out and do the foot work, make the communication. Establish communication with employers, with the educational field, with whatever housing they assist them with for those who don't have family support, for those who are on their own. Some of them may have mental problems or some of them may have drug addictions... They need to have actual components set up in each program where they really have hands on interaction with the inmates and not just shuffle paper or tell me to go to this person... Most of them are grown so it's not like you got to take them by the hand, but when you been locked up for five, ten, fifteen years you are clueless to what's going on out here. Everything changes. So the programs need to come up to the date and place to be able to assist the inmates when they come back out. They may need counseling...they're coming out trying to learn how to live again... And the longer they stay away... that person becomes mentally dead. They have the prison mentality. So everything they do is about them. They're trying to survive, trying to protect themselves, they're hostile, they're angry. They lock them up but they don't prepare them for nothing else... They can't work, can't provide for themselves, can't have their own living quarters. What do they expect them to do? I don't think they ever created any of these programs for any of these individuals to succeed. I think they're in place for them, this may sound ignorant, but I think they put them there to make it seem like the government cares and wants to assist them, but they're not in place to do it because when they go to these... programs and don't get any help or assistance, that's even more discouraging. ...And I think that's what it's designed to do, to keep them in that cycle. Repeat offenders, repeat offenders.

Similarly, another GH participant recommended,

Ninety days prior to your release from prison there should be a guidance counselor provided for every inmate that's about to get out. And just talk with them about what they need and like, what they're trying to do. And just provide them with the resources before they get out. See what really the problem is and ask them why they do the things they do. Get them some counseling, if necessary. Provide them with a job, or point them in a direction where they can get a job.

Another participant commented,

I mean, a lot of people, a lot of people need help... I have been involved for 15 years, so I mean the adjustment to a new way of life is difficult at that time...you have to know what you want, you know what I'm saying, and sometimes people have to go to counseling session...to really dig within themselves and see what is going on. And you have to provide people with that... but don't get me wrong, you can't save everybody, cause everybody doesn't want to change... like with people that want to change, you have to weed them out, that crowd, and try to help. A lot of people are locked up because of a bad decision they made at that particular time, see what I'm saying, this really isn't that person's life, just something that happened... A lot of people get a thrill from committing crimes. You know, you got to leave them where they want to be, but here is a guy right there, ... been workin' all his life, then something happens and to deal with that situation, he do what he did. Ok, we got to help him, to prevent that from happening again. Put him in the cage with some wolves is not the answer...

VIII.E. Summary of Participant Interviews

The impression gathered from the interviews with the GH participants was of young men who were disappointed in themselves and the circumstances of their lives. The unanswered question for them was how to change. They were open to help from "the system" but they did not have much experience with getting help anywhere. They had grown up in families that were poor and stretched thin on many dimensions. Many reported changing family relationships including spells of foster care. As children and teenagers when their families were torn apart by traumatic losses and deaths, some coped alone. Others reported taking on added responsibility of caring for younger siblings. They had grown up on the edges of the educational system, and in the mainstream of the drug culture. Using and selling drugs offered a place to belong and also a way to provide for themselves and family members, including providing such basic needs as food..

These men did not know how to connect with systems that would help them, they needed outreach services that gave them structure, direction, and a chance to catch up on what they had missed out on in life. Some contended that an attractive feature of any reentry program was that it be structured and address the problem as they viewed it that reentrants have too much free time. In addition, programs should consider the economic rationale for their drug dealing. Many men expressed a desire to do the right thing, and recognized the logic of being incarcerated for their criminal activity. But they wanted to opportunity to change. They also acknowledged that this desire was not shared by all of their peers.

IX. Baseline Recidivism and Employment Outcomes for the GH Target Population

Given the implementation of the Going Home Program and the circumstances of the GH participants, what type of outcomes should program officials expect for them? One way to address this question is to examine recidivism and employment outcomes for similar young men in the past. This information provides a valuable benchmark that GH staff as well as the staff of other reentry programs can use to assess the performance of their programs. Here the evaluation presents historical recidivism, employment, and earnings outcomes for previous cohorts of 18 to 24 year old men who paroled to the North Lawndale and Garfield Park community areas. None of these young men received GH services. Their experiences are instructive because they provide a basis for predicting what would have happened to the GH participants had there been no program. The evaluation also compares these outcomes to those for other reentrants to Cook County.

Our primary source of information about GH participants is administrative data maintained by the state of Illinois. For male reentrants two important source of information are admission and exits records maintained by IDOC and quarterly wage records maintained by the Illinois Department of Employment Security (IDES). The former records available to the Evaluation Team at the time of this implementation report provide information on all admissions and exits from IDOC facilities for men committed to state prison from Cook County, starting on July 1, 1989. The second set of records available to the evaluation team includes reports from Illinois employers to IDES of former prisoners' quarterly earnings. This information is available for this report starting from the first quarter of 1995 and extends through the second quarter of 2005.

Although the evaluation team did not have data from the most recent fiscal years to provide a description of the IDOC and employment histories of many GH men, the data are a rich source of information of men who can be thought of as the Going Home Target Population. These are 18 to 24 year old men who paroled from IDOC facilities to the North Lawndale and East and West Garfield Park community areas in Chicago. It is possible to follow the post-parole earnings and recidivism rates starting in the first quarter of 1995. It also is possible to follow (i) older reentrants who paroled to the same communities or (ii) reentrants who are the same age but who paroled to other community areas in Chicago or townships in Cook County during the same time period.

Further, while few of the men we define as the "GH target population" became actual GH participants, the employment and recidivism outcomes of such young men can constitute baseline outcomes for men who have participated in the program. Using this information, it is possible to describe the historical pre- and post-prison employment and earnings patterns and the recidivism rates back to prison for men who are very similar to men in the GH program. The evaluation also compares these men to other reentrants to understand the extent to which the GH target population is representative of other Cook County reentrants or other 18 to 24 year-old Cook County reentrants. This information should help GH staff, as well as staff of the Sheridan program and other reentry initiatives, such as those operated by the Safer Foundation, to set realistic benchmarks for the performance of their programs. A separate technical appendix is being prepared that provides much more detail on the findings described below.

To establish baseline patterns of recidivism and employment for the GH target population and for other male reentrants to Cook County, the evaluation analyzed the population of parolees from Illinois state prisons during the 10½ year period beginning in the first quarter of 1996 and extending through the second quarter of 2005. This part of the evaluation focuses on men (i) who paroled from IDOC facilities to Cook County during this period, and (ii) whose IDOC records included a valid Social Security number - although we could not verify whether this Social Security number was their own.

IX.A. Matching State Administrative Records

In this part of the evaluation, the Social Security numbers on IDOC records were matched for approximately 27,400 of these 37,000 men to quarterly wage records as maintained by the IDES covering the period from 1995:I through 2005:II. For the purposes of this analysis, reentrants whose Social Security numbers did not match to records maintained by the IDES were assumed to have had no earnings in jobs covered by the state's unemployment insurance (UI) system. Some of our analysis focuses on a subsample of men who paroled between 1996 through the second quarter of 2002. This cohort is of interest to our analysis because we can observe the men's recidivism and earnings patterns for at least three years following their releases from prison.

IX.B. Recidivism Rates for the GH Target Population and Cook County Reentrants

This information from administrative records provides officials and policy makers with the likely recidivism and employment patterns that the GH communities should expect in the absence of an effective reentry program. The evaluation expected the men served by the GH program to be among the most challenging group of reentrants that could be served by a reentry program. Indeed, this expectation was confirmed by IDOC's administrative data. As shown in Figure 6, men from the GH target population, defined as 18 to 24 year old African-American reentrants from the North Lawndale/Garfield Park communities in Chicago, had among the highest recidivism rates of any group of IDOC reentrants to Cook County.¹ Among first time parolees, about 60 percent had returned to prison within three years of release. Over the shorter term, about 14 percent of previous cohorts of young North Lawndale/Garfield Park reentrants returned to IDOC facilities within six months, and 29 percent had returned within 12 months. Among those reentrants whose 1st parole occurred after January 1, 1996, the recidivism rates of 2nd time parolees were similar to the recidivism rates for first time parolees.

¹ In this evaluation, recidivism is defined as the percentage of reentrants who return to state prison. Arrest data or information on Cook County jail spells was unavailable.

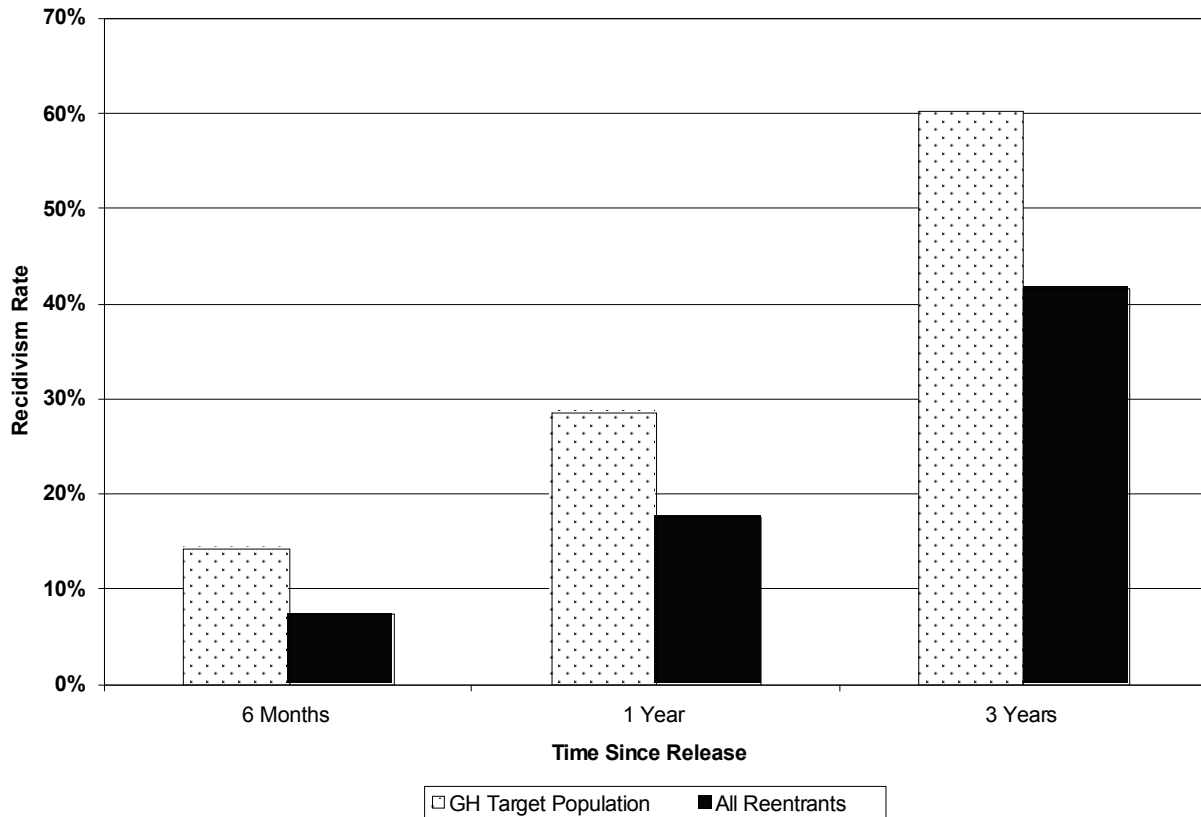


Figure 6: Recidivism back to IDOC facilities for Going Home target population and for all male reentrants to Cook County, 1996 to 2002

In comparison to the reentrants in the GH target population, recidivism rates for all 1st time IDOC parolees to Cook County have been substantially lower. They have averaged 7 percent during the first six months following parole, 18 percent during the first year following release, and 42 percent during the first three years following release. By contrast to the GH target population, the short-term recidivism rates for all 2nd time IDOC male paroles were substantially greater the second time around. After the first six months, 12 percent of 2nd time reentrants had returned to prison; after one year 25 percent of them had returned to prison.²

² Because our sample period ends in 2005:II, the evaluation team could not follow many of the 2nd time parolees for as long as three years. As a result, the evaluation does not report three year recidivism rates for this group of reentrants.

Recidivism rates of previous IDOC reentrants from Cook County have varied significantly by age, race, prior schooling, offending category, time served, year of parole and community area. Among reentrants who served time for similar offenses, those who were (i) 18 to 24 years old (Figure 7), (ii) African-American (Figure 8), (iii) high school dropouts (Figure 9), (iv) who were incarcerated for property law violations (Figure 10), (v) who paroled later during the time period studied (Figures 11 and 12), and (vi) who were from Chicago's West Side community areas tended to have higher recidivism rates than other Cook County reentrants.

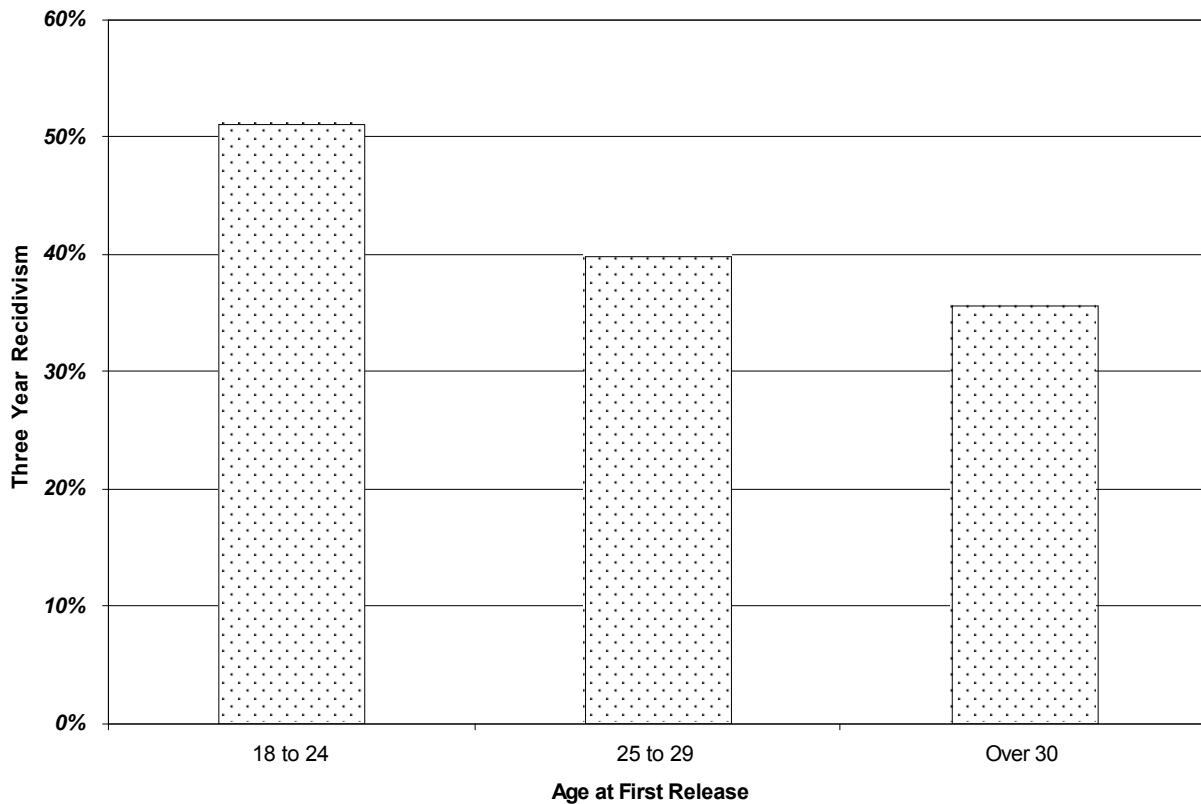


Figure 7. Three year recidivism by age at first release

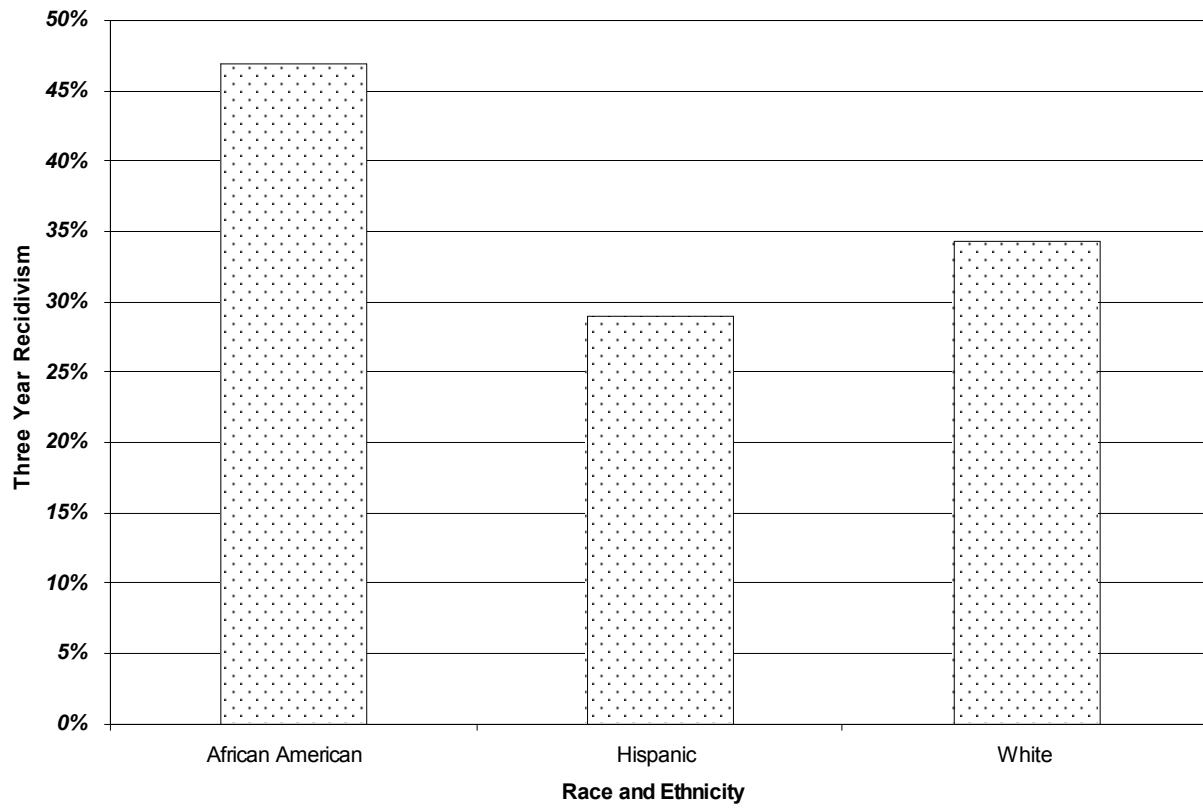


Figure 8: Three year recidivism by race and ethnicity

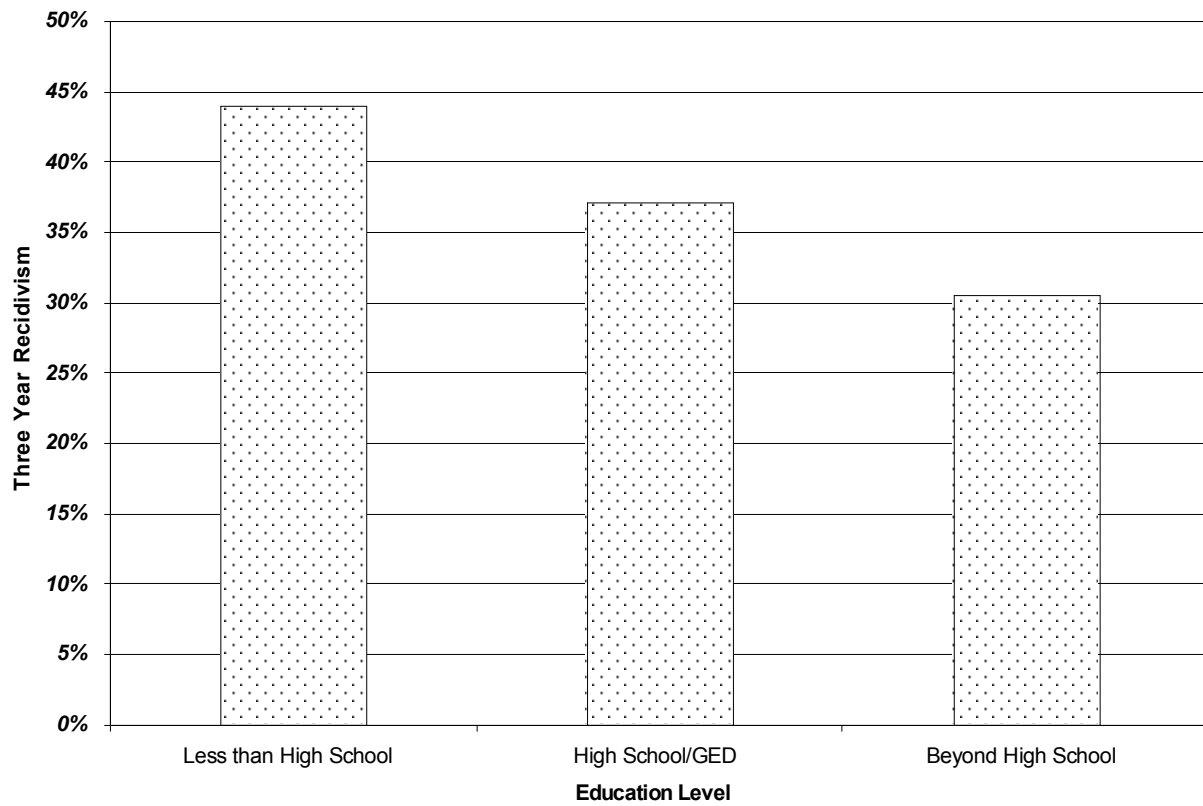


Figure 9: Three year recidivism by education level

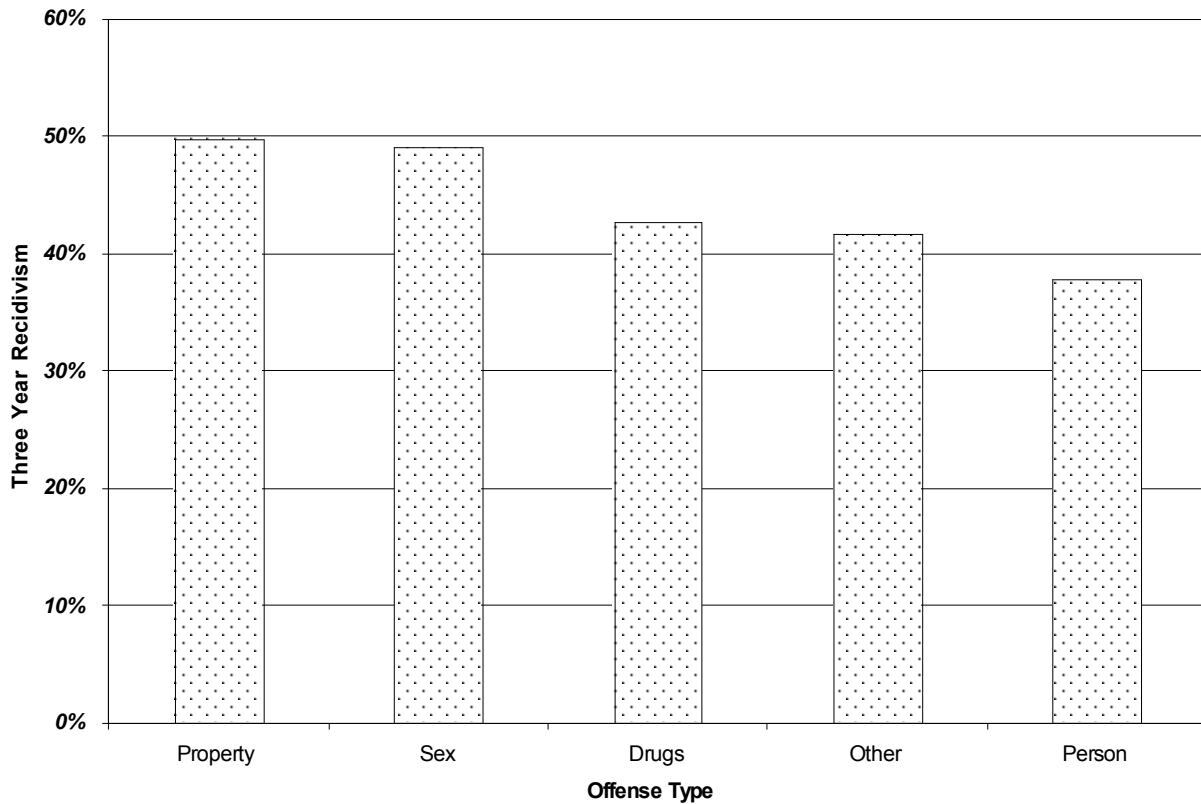


Figure 10: Three year recidivism by offense type

In particular, we find that men from the GH target population have had very similar recidivism rates to observationally similar men from the Austin/Humboldt Park communities in Chicago. But their recidivism rates during the three years following their parole have been significantly greater than observationally similar men from the Englewood/Auburn Gresham community areas. After three years, the percentage of young North Lawndale reentrants who have returned to prison is nearly 10 percentage points greater than otherwise similar young men from the Englewood/Auburn Gresham Community Areas. This finding suggests that comparing GH participants to their counterparts from the Austin/Humboldt Park community areas is likely to provide a better gauge of program performance than comparing them to their counterparts on the city’s south side.

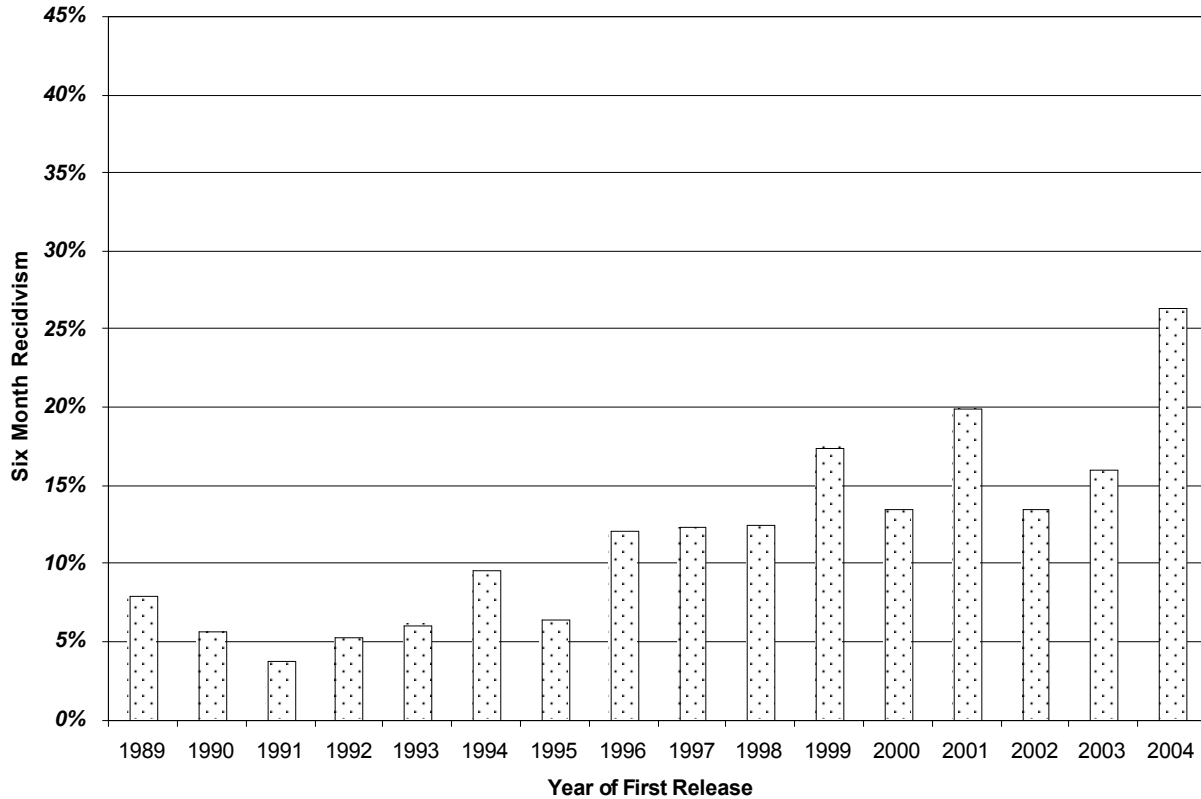


Figure 11: Six month recidivism of North Lawndale and Garfield Park 18 to 24 year-old African American reentrants

By contrast, using recidivism outcomes for *previous* cohorts of men from the GH target population is likely to provide less reliable indicators of program performance than using similar men paroling at about the *same time* into adjoining communities. As shown in Figure 11, we find that short-term recidivism rates-measured as the percentage of reentrants that returned to prison within six months of their parole has been highly variable. These rates were relatively low for men paroled during the early 1990s. During the mid-1990s short-term recidivism rates rose substantially for men paroled during the late 1990s. The rates peaked in 2001 and again in 2004. We found that this temporal variation in 6 month recidivism rates cannot be explained by changes in these reentrants’ personal attributes, offense categories, felony classes, or time served.

As shown by Figure 12, one-year recidivism rates for the GH target population also show a similar rise during the 1990s. During the first half of this decade about one-fourth of reentrants in this group returned to prison within one year of being paroled. During the second half of the decade, this rate rose so that by 2001 through 2004, more than one-third of the reentrants in these cohorts had returned to prison within one year. As discussed above in this report, this fraction is consistent with initial findings on one-year recidivism rates of paroled GH participants.

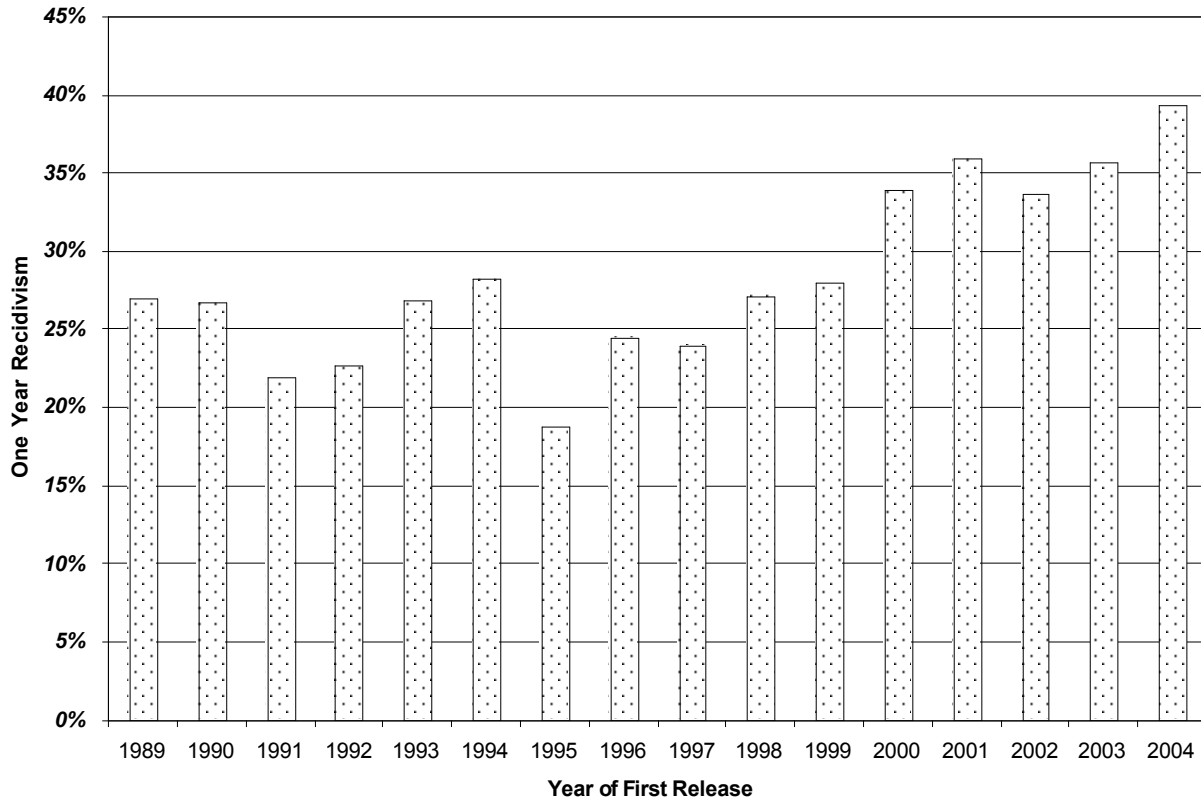


Figure 12: One year recidivism of North Lawndale and Garfield Park 18 to 24 year-old African American reentrants

IX.C. Employment, Earnings and Recidivism

Reentrants who had been employed during the year prior to entering prison had *lower* recidivism rates after their paroles. (See Figure 13.) But this relationship is diminished somewhat after we account for other personal characteristics, including a reentrant’s prior schooling, offending category, and time served (information that IDOC currently collects). These findings hold, especially, for younger reentrants such as men from the GH target population. Therefore, for men in this population, knowledge about recent pre-prison employment experience *does not* seem to be especially valuable to reentry program providers.

By contrast, among older reentrants, evidence of pre-prison employment is a better predictor of lower recidivism after parole. As a result, for male reentrants 25 and older knowledge of their recent pre-prison employment may be valuable information to providers of reentry services.

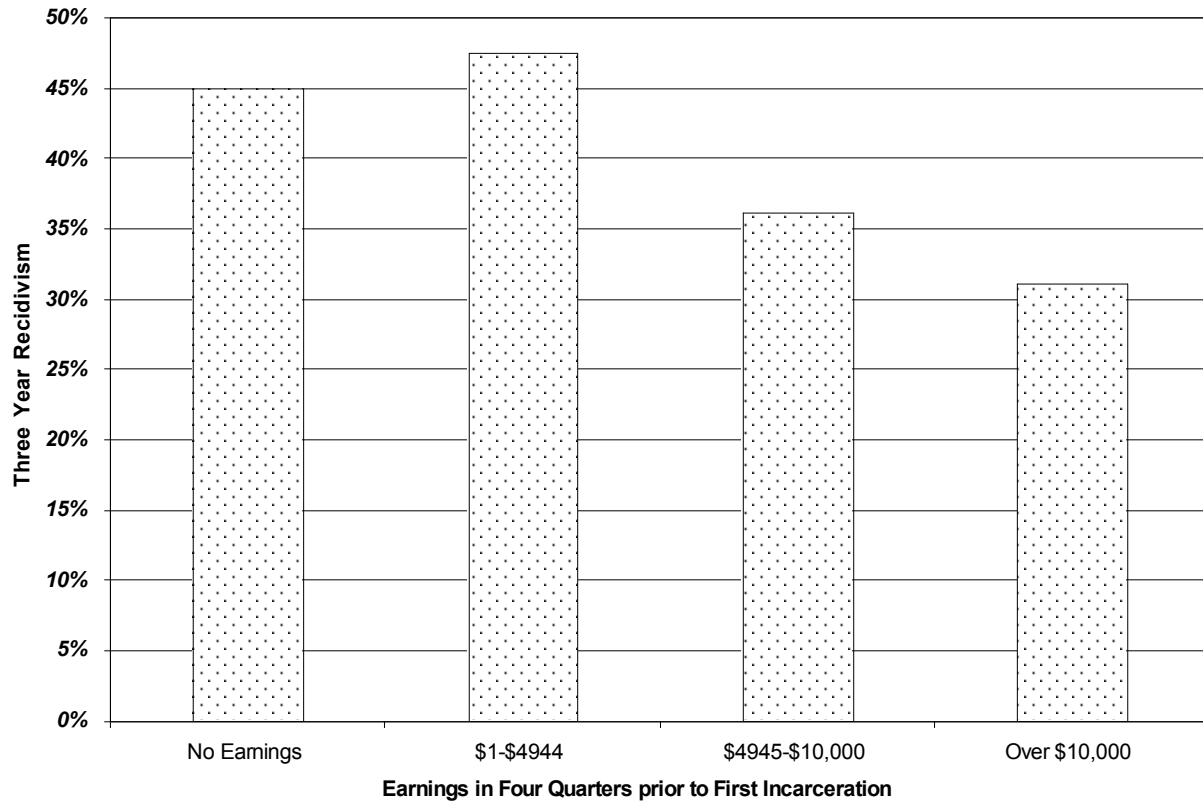


Figure 13: Three year recidivism by earnings in the four quarters prior to admission to prison

Our analysis of previous cohorts of IDOC reentrants to Cook County indicates that employment during the first full quarter *after* their paroles is associated with lower recidivism rates throughout the first three years following his parole. This relationship is strongest for reentrants *who were under 25* when they were paroled. This finding should help reentry program providers identify reentrants soon after parole who are the least likely to return to prison.

We also find that the relationship between post-parole employment and long-term recidivism is stronger for reentrants who earned more in their post-prison jobs. As with jobs held during the pre-prison period, post-prison jobs in which reentrants earn less than a person working part-time at the minimum wage were not associated with lower recidivism over the long run.

By contrast, when post-prison earnings have been above this threshold, including for the youngest reentrants, long-term recidivism rates are significantly lower. Among the youngest reentrants, including reentrants in the GH target population, earning more than half-time minimum wage pay is associated with substantial reductions in long-term recidivism. We find

that the three year recidivism of young reentrants whose earnings meet or exceed this threshold were approximately the same as those of the typical reentrant who was 25 years or older when he paroled from prison. In other words, the recidivism patterns of this particular subset of young reentrants looked a lot like those of their older counterparts. We conclude that in order for reentry services that emphasize job placement to be successful in the long run, they must ensure that reentrants attain some threshold level of earnings while employed.

IX.D. Post-Parole Employment and Earnings

IX.D.1. History of Low Earnings and the Meaning of Reentry

Turning from measures of recidivism to employment outcomes, we find that parolees from the GH target population historically have had low rates of employment and low earnings when they worked. We estimate that during the 34 quarters that we follow them in our data, only about 30 percent of these reentrants ever earned over the course of one calendar quarter--13 weeks--what we expect a worker to have earned had he worked the equivalent of full-time at the minimum wage. By contrast, for all Cook County reentrants this fraction is nearly one-half (46 percent). A lesson from this finding is that while reentry programs often emphasize reentry of former prisoners back into their communities, most young reentrants are not reentering the labor market upon their parole, because they have yet to establish any meaningful employment history to start with. This finding suggests that reentry programs need to incorporate strategies that help former prisoners to essentially *enter* the work force for the first time. This requirement holds especially for men in the Going Home target population.

IX.D.2 Employment Rates During the First Full Quarter After Parole

Although reentrants' employment rates after prison are low, on average they are greater than were these men's employment rates prior to prison. As shown by Figure 14, we find that during the first full quarter following their release from prison, about 25 percent of reentrants in the GH target population worked in jobs covered by the Illinois Unemployment Insurance system. By contrast, during the 4th quarter prior to the quarter that they were admitted to prison this group's employment rate was only 17 percent, or 8 percentage points *lower* than their post-parole employment rates. This percentage is smaller than the employment rates that we observe for all Cook County reentrants. During the first full quarter after their paroles, 31 percent were employed. This percentage is about five percentage points above their employment rates prior to prison.

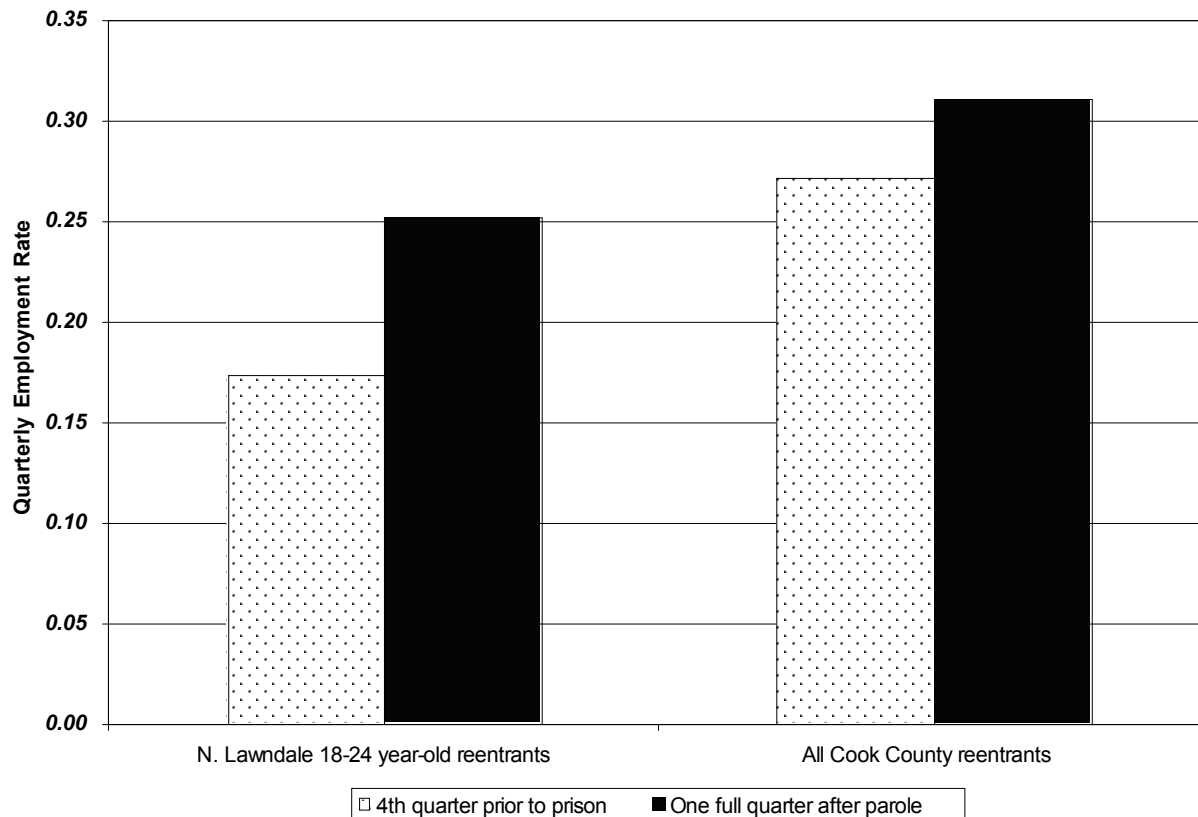


Figure 14: Employment rates of Cook County reentrants

We find that many of these employed reentrants worked very little when they were employed. About 25 percent of them earned less than \$300 during the entire quarter. If these reentrants worked at the federal minimum wage this amount implies that they worked less than 58 hours during the quarter. If they were paid more than the federal minimum when they worked, this implies that they worked even fewer hours per quarter.

We also find that employment rates and earnings following parole from prison among young reentrants from the Austin/Humboldt Park and Englewood/Auburn Gresham community areas have been comparable to those of young men from the GH target population. Indeed, during the first quarter after prison, the employment rate for North Lawndale reentrants has been slightly higher. This evidence suggests that these young reentrants may serve as a reliable comparison group when evaluating the employment experiences of GH participants in the impact evaluation.

By contrast, the employment rates of older male reentrants, including 25 to 29 year old reentrants, to the North Lawndale/Garfield Park community areas (who would have just missed the age eligibility cut off for the GH program), are significantly greater than those of their younger counterparts. During the first six months after leaving prison, the employment rates of the 25 to 29 year old North Lawndale/Garfield Park reentrants were about seven percentage points greater than those for observationally similar 18 to 24 year old reentrants from the same community. When these older reentrants work they also earn more than younger reentrants to

the same community area. This evidence indicates that employment outcomes for older reentrants, even those from the same community areas, are not likely to serve as a reliable benchmark for the probable employment outcomes for GH participants.

IX.D.3. Prison Does Not Appear to Depress Subsequent Earnings and Employment Rates

Operators of reentry programs should not expect that the employment prospects of participants in their programs to be depressed because of their time in prison. In a separate technical paper prepared as part of the evaluation documents that reentrants who served more time on average earn more than their counterparts who had served less time when they were paroled. In other words, although they should expect that the GH participants and similar reentrants to have very low employment rates and earnings, these poor employment outcomes do not appear to be the result of having been in prison. Their poor employment outcomes after parole are consistent with their history of poor employment outcomes during the years leading up to their incarcerations. Evidence of low employment rates following reentrants' participation in a reentry program does not indicate whether the program is effective or ineffective.

We find that for all groups of reentrants, including men in the GH target population, employment rates were at their highest during the first six to nine months *after* leaving prison. Moreover, we observe that during this post-prison period employment rates were about five percentage points greater than they were at their peak during the pre-prison period. As indicated by Figure 15, this finding implies that pre-prison employment rates—even rates even from several years prior to incarceration are likely to understate reentrants' employment rates following their paroles. We find this result has held especially for men in the GH target population. Therefore, pre-prison employment rates are not likely to serve as reliable benchmarks of reentrants post-prison employment experiences—at least in the short-term.

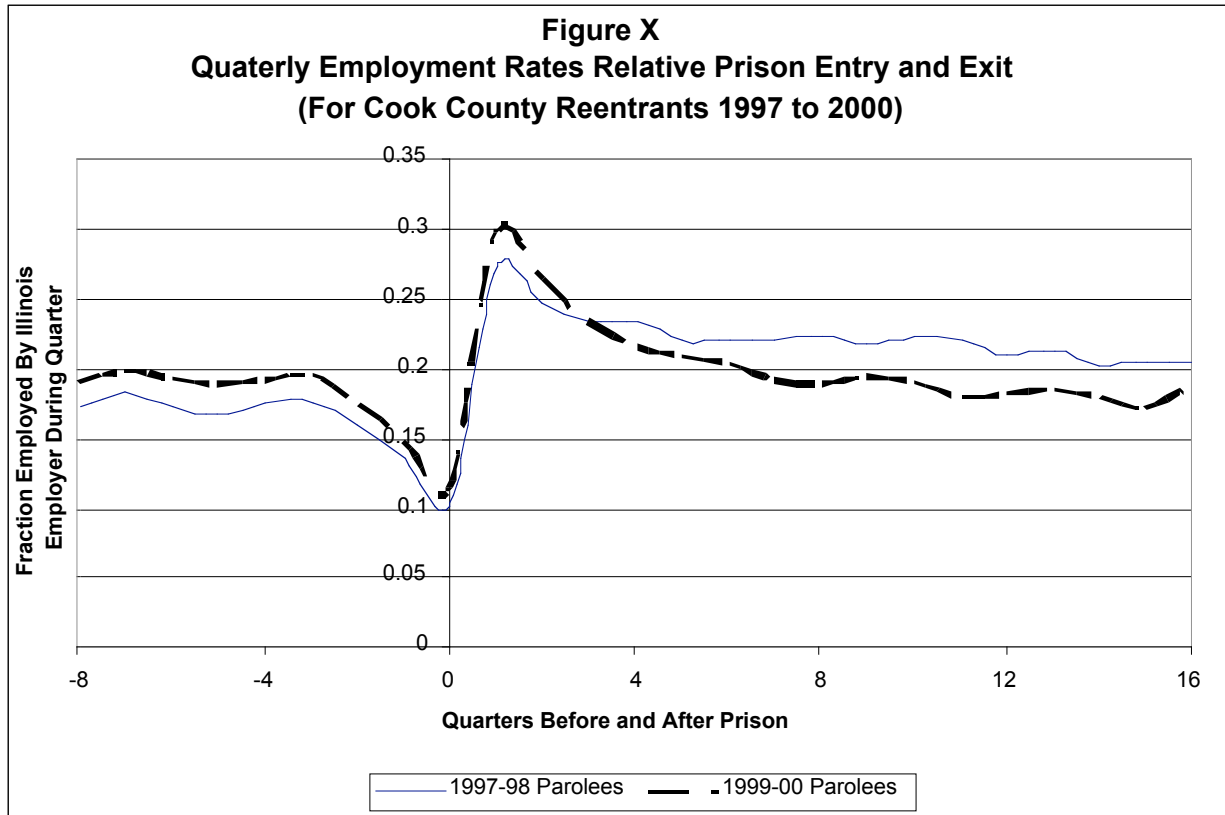


Figure 15: Quarterly employment rates relative to prison entry and exit

What we have learned about post-prison employment rates of previous cohorts of Cook County reentrants should help Illinois policy makers and program operators establish program performance standards that are not unduly ambitious or unrealistic. For example, we find that setting a post-prison benchmark employment rate of 50 percent or more for Cook County reentrants would constitute a very ambitious standard for a prisoner reentry program. Instead, planners of reentry services should anticipate that quarterly employment rates of reentrants are likely to be in the 30 to 35 percent range during the first few quarters after parole. Further we expect these rates to subsequently decline modestly with time.

IX.D.4. Transition Rates Out of Employment

We observe that an important reason for low employment rates among the reentrant population is that reentrants' are likely to leave jobs once they find them. Another way to say this is that their transition rates from employment to non-employment are very high. As shown by Figure 16, we found that such transition rates historically have been highest among the GH target population. When they are employed, 27 percent of men from the GH target population leave employment for non-employment during any given quarter compared to 22 percent of all Cook County reentrants. But during the first full quarter after their paroles, about 43 percent of these employed reentrants were not employed at any time during the second full quarter after their release. This high transition rate out of employment is much too large to be explained even by the high rates of recidivism experienced by these men.

These high transition rates out of employment indicate that one component of a successful reentry program likely should be services to help reentrants retain their jobs and to move them from job to job quickly when they become unemployed. But we emphasize that we found no evidence in the IDOC/IDES data that these transition rates out of employment were greater because these men had been prison.

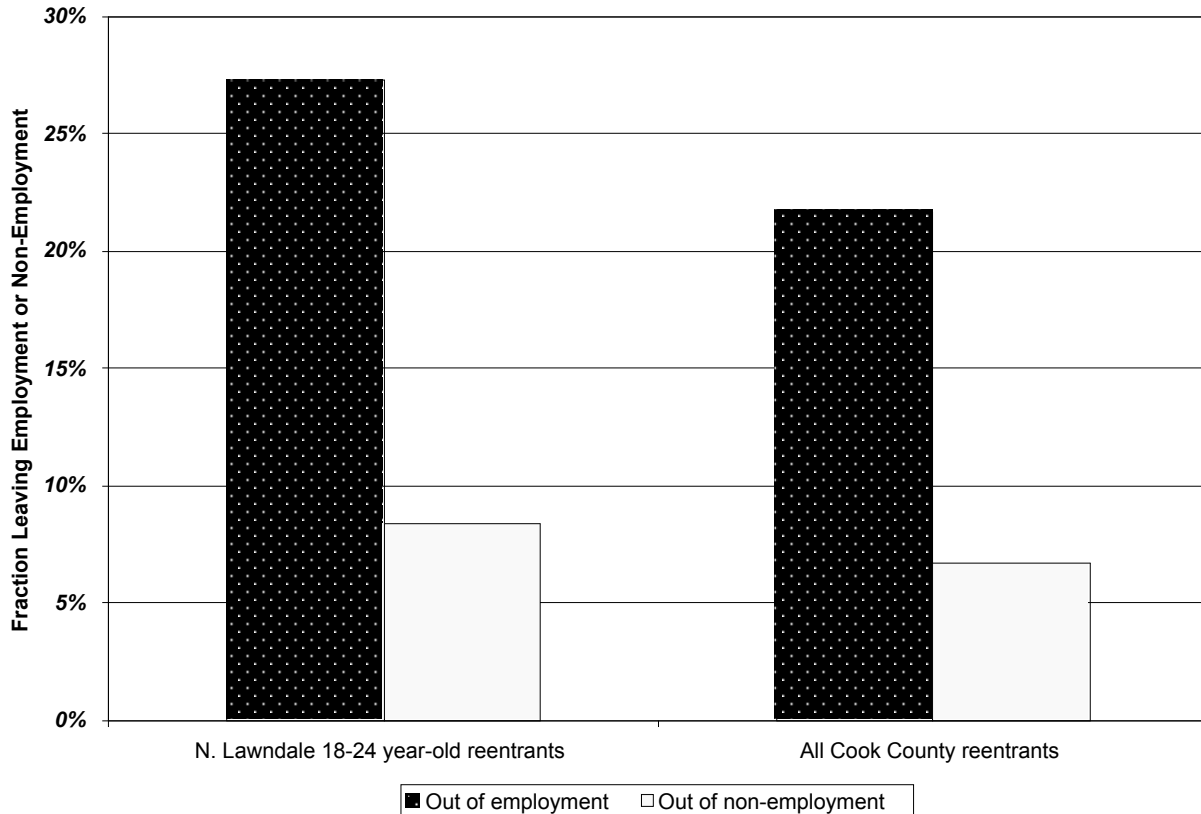


Figure 16: Quarterly transition rates out of employment and non-employment

X. Conclusions and Lessons Learned

The Going Home program is an ambitious attempt to accomplish several major policy steps simultaneously. First, the program is an effort to create a “rehabilitation trajectory” for participants that begins at the time of incarceration and continues through parole and even beyond. Ideally, inmates are assessed on entry and routed through education, drug rehabilitation, and skills programs that improve their chances of becoming productive citizens upon exit from the system, rather than continuing to be repeat offenders. Second, the program organizes that trajectory by integrating private, community programs able to serve ex-offenders with services offered within the state correctional system. The idea was that existing programs and services could be “leveraged” to create a self-sustaining new program that would not require new funds on an on-going basis. Third, the program aims to tailor services to the needs of individual

offenders through the pivotal coordinating work of a Case Manager and Transitional Team that pulls members from all participating organizations and IDOC subunits. It is not surprising that a program with such a large agenda has faced so many challenges. Accordingly, this program should be understood as the pilot it was meant to be.

A true test of the principles organizing Going Home awaits a revamped plan for implementation that takes into account the practical lessons learned in this round. Specifically,

1. When a program is structured to rely on cooperation between different organizations, it is critical that the necessary lines of authority are in place from the beginning.

- Program supervisors must have the authority to require promised work for associated funding. This includes being able to withhold payment when required reporting and/or service deadlines are not met. Similarly, supervisors should have some mechanism for recognizing exemplary contributions by program staff. Program managers should consider developing quantitative performance measures or standards for assessing performance of participating organizations.
- Top program officials must have the authority necessary within their own agencies to get required paperwork and procedures approved in a timely manner.

2. Communication is another crucial aspect of a program that involves multiple organizations.

- The weekly Transition Team meetings were critical to the organization and delivery of services that GH men received. The meetings would have been more productive still if some minimum level of attendance and active preparation were required of each key organization. Measures of attendance at such meetings could be one important performance indicator for participating organizations.
- Baseline training is very important. All players need to work from the same basic set of rules about how the program functions. Administrators of community organizations that partner with IDOC must adopt the practice of providing standardized training to their own employees and volunteers. These materials have been available for some time, but administrators have not consistently used them when training their staff to work with GH participants.
- Cross-training is also important. Different organizations need to be aware of each others' normal modes of operation. In particular, when partnering with IDOC, it is critical that community organizations learn about the security rules to which they must adapt their programs.

3. "Leveraging" existing programs requires more than just drawing community organizations together. In addition to baseline and cross-training, participating agencies need incentives, too.

- Service organizations cannot operate for free. In practice there does not appear to be much excess capacity in these organizations available for a program like GH to leverage. To sustain community involvement, the initial program funding must include some method for expanding agency capacity. This could involve sharing of resources such as

grant writers or bearing the costs of training programs to increase the efficiency of partnering groups.

- Social service organizations typically operate within tight budgets and with minimal reserves and margins for error and unexpected costs. These organizations need contracts in place and payments on time in order to maintain their role in the partnership.
- Reporting requirements are needed in order to monitor organizations' performances, and mechanisms must be put in place that rewards satisfactory or exceptional performance.

4. State corrections systems, at least those as large and complex as IDOC, must be treated more like a constellation of smaller organizations than like a single entity in order to make a program like Going Home run smoothly.

Each prison runs in a semi-autonomous fashion. Parole Division is its own entity with its own culture, protocols, and concerns. Administrative staff within IDOC who must process clearance packages or approve program protocols have their own set of backlogs, time schedules, and priorities. One cannot assume that because the larger, statewide institution signs on to a program such as Going Home that the logistical support required from these many internal subunits will be automatically forthcoming. Rather, these different units and levels of the state correctional program need to be approached in the same manner as the various participating community organizations, with attention to how each unit's independent operating needs can be fit in with the Going Home program's needs and vice versa.

- Before starting program operations, top level staff, at each of the affected subunits of the state correctional system, needs to be consulted and brought on board. Wardens of each prison that will house GH men at any point in the program, parole boards, intake staff, and administrative staff who oversee such things as outside contracts, background checks and transfer approvals all need to understand the program and evince some level of commitment to making it operate as designed.

5. Employees of small non-profit organizations in the community can advance their careers by moving between groups. State correctional staff is more likely to spend their careers within the state correctional system. If cooperation with a program such as Going Home does nothing to help advance state correctional workers within their own system, then staff assigned to the Going Home program will have little incentive to pay attention to the program or to cooperate with outside groups.

6. The state administrative data available to GH officials allows them to set realistic benchmarks and goals for recidivism and employment outcomes. Such targets should help them administer and monitor their program's progress and help policy makers understand why recidivism rates will be relatively high and employment rates will be relatively low even if the program is successful and cost-effective. Historical information about the GH target population indicates the following:

- The Going Home target population has historically had among the highest recidivism rates back to IDOC facilities of any group of reentrants to Cook County. Although their recidivism rates have been similar to reentrants to other West Side communities, their

recidivism rate have been consistently higher than comparable young men paroling to communities on Chicago's South Side.

- In recent years, the one-year recidivism rates for men in the GH target population have exceeded one-third. These rates are higher than in the past. They suggest that even if the GH program or others like it are effective, we expect that their participants' one year recidivism rates after parole still could be in the 25 to 30 percent range. Three year recidivism rates back to state prison for the GH target population historically have been approximately 60 percent.
- Post-prison employment rates for the GH target group have been low. However, like other Cook County reentrants they have been consistently higher during the first few quarters after prison than during the quarters leading up to their incarcerations. This finding implies that GH staff cannot compare pre- and post-prison employment rates to gauge the success of their programs. In the past, employment rates for male reentrants to Cook County have been highest during the year after parole from prison.
- During the first full quarter after prison, employers in Illinois report that 27 percent of reentrants from the GH target population are employed. The employment rates for older reentrants during that first full quarter after prison have averaged 34 percent. After two years employment rates of reentrants fall back toward their pre-prison levels. Some of this decline results because these men have returned to prison. GH staff can expect that even if their job placement initiatives are successful, employment rates are likely to remain low. For example post-prison employment rates in the 35 to 40 percent range would likely indicate that the reentry program had done well fostering participants' employment.
- An important reason for low employment rates among the reentrant population is that they are likely to leave jobs once they find them. Their "transition rates" from employment to non-employment historically have been highest among the GH target population. These high transition rates out of employment indicate that one component of a successful reentry program likely should be services to help reentrants retain their jobs and to move them from job to job quickly when they become unemployed

Overall, the implementation of Going Home has encountered many challenges. On-going problems of missing incentives, lines of authority, and cooperation between the entities involved have slowed the program's implementation and hampered its functioning. At the same time, it is clear that the program has moved forward in spite of the difficulties and offered lessons about future implementation of similar reentry efforts. Program staff remains dedicated to the promise of the principles of the Going Home program – starting inside, intensive case management, and gradual transition (including partnerships with community-based organizations as a key component). Lessons learned from this pilot program provide practical guidelines for bringing reentry programs' operations in line with their objective of successfully improving the outcomes of young parolees when they reenter their communities.