Reentry and the Community: Assessing Community-Based Responses to the Challenge of Prisoner Reentry

BY

ANDREW BUCHANAN
B.A., Franklin and Marshall College, 1988

THESIS

Submitted as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Urban Planning and Policy in the Graduate College of the University of Illinois at Chicago, 2016

Chicago, Illinois

Defense Committee:

Philip Ashton, Chair and Advisor, Urban Planning and Policy
Janet Smith, Urban Planning and Policy
Curt Winkle, Urban Planning and Policy
This thesis is dedicated to my wife, Mary McMahon, without whom it would never have been accomplished, as well as my father, John M. Buchanan.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my thesis committee – Philip Ashton, Janet Smith and Curt Winkle – for their support and guidance through this process. I would also like to thank all of the people who helped me by providing important and relevant information on reentry, and who were open to sharing their opinions and life and work experiences: scholars who have studied this issue; administrators at organizations involved in reentry; and ex-inmates who are living this experience.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Synopsis</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Methodology</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Terminology</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Limitations</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. MASS INCARCERATION IN THE UNITED STATES</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Incarceration on the rise</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Ensnared in the system</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Free but still confined</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. The end of mass incarceration?</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. THE RESPONSE TO REENTRY</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Reentry solutions</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Theory of informal social control</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Community-based response to reentry</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Evaluating reentry initiatives</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Analysis</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Recommendations</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Community cases</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. CONCLUSION</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI. APPENDICES</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Typology</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Map of Chicago Community Areas</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. IRB Claim of Exemption approval letter</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII. CITED LITERATURE</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIII. VITA</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FIGURE</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Rate of imprisonment in the U.S. in 2014 by race and gender</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Photo of South Side street</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Photo of Teamwork Englewood main office</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Photo of building in Englewood</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Photo of Safer Crossroads ATC</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Graphic display of Community Transition Panel</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SUMMARY

This paper examines the issue of prisoner reentry and the relationship between released inmates and the communities to which they return. Hundreds of thousands of inmates are released every year in the United States, and most return to disadvantaged communities that are unprepared to absorb them and offer few positive opportunities. It is a dynamic that can and has led to high rates of recidivism and further erosion of already challenged communities, and has an outsized impact on inner city neighborhoods and the minority community.

What this paper explores is whether and how that dynamic can be reversed, with the social capital in even the most troubled communities organized to assist ex-inmates and ease their transition back into society. While there are many different reentry strategies and programs, this paper focuses on ones that have a strong community component. After a thorough examination of the history of mass incarceration in the U.S. and the more recent move away from such strictly punitive measures, there is an assessment (via a typology) of community-based reentry initiatives. The typology provides the framework for a deeper analysis of the issue, which is followed by specific recommendations related to community and reentry.

This evaluation is done within the context of the current political environment in Chicago, Illinois and the United States. While the easy answer to the challenge of reentry would be to argue that every released inmate should have wrap-around services that could include housing, job placement and access to services including behavioral therapy and drug and alcohol rehabilitation, that is not realistic. At the local, state and federal level, there are tremendous budget pressures and seemingly little will to shift scarce resources to this population. At the same time, there is another interesting trend: a move to allow the early release from prison drug
and other non-violent offenders, and more emphasis going forward on community corrections rather than incarceration.

To many in the field of reentry it is an exciting time, but this trend also highlights difficult questions: How can these ex-offenders be successfully integrated back into society when resources are limited and opportunities so few in the communities they return to? And what are the best ways to engage these communities in the process of reentry so they are better prepared to manage this challenge? This paper addresses these questions and offers recommendations on how best to move forward on this important issue.
I. Introduction

A. Synopsis

In a 2015 story in the *Chicago Tribune*, a reporter described the experience of inmates who had been released from Illinois prisons and were taking a Greyhound bus from St. Louis home to Chicago. Upon their release, the men had been given prison-issue sweatpants, about $10 in cash and a one-way bus ticket. Many had only vague plans of where they were going to stay upon arrival in Chicago and what they were going to do. They expressed hope that they would avoid a return trip to prison, but didn’t sound optimistic. As one man said: “The hard part is staying out. I always say I’m not going to go back and then I do.” Another was even more pessimistic: “What are most of us going to do? I’ll tell you what, we’re going to go back to doing what we were doing.” (Mills, 2015)

As the prison population in the United States soared over the past four decades with the prevalence of ‘tough on crime’ policies, it only accentuated a difficult reality: the vast majority of inmates (close to 95%) were and are going to get out. Currently, more than 600,000 inmates are released annually in the United States, a population about the size of the city of Milwaukee returning to communities around the country. (National Research Council, 2008) The majority of these ex-inmates have few of the skills needed to find stable employment and navigate life on the outside, and studies show they often settle in neighborhoods with high rates of crime and poverty, and few opportunities. (Sampson and Loeffler, 2010)

The result, many social scientists argue, is that this population gets sucked into a cycle of ‘release, re-arrest, re-imprisonment,’ the impact of which is hard to exaggerate. This cycle, they argue, denies millions of Americans, mostly poor minorities, the chance at stable, productive lives, and has a devastating effect on inner city neighborhoods.
It is certainly an issue that has for some time bedeviled policy makers, social scientists, community activists and other concerned parties, and there have been innumerable studies on how to better help ex-inmates reintegrate back into society. It is an issue that has taken on renewed importance in the United States, as well, with criminal justice officials and lawmakers looking at alternatives to long prison terms for many crimes, and the country appearing ready to turn its back on the era of ‘mass incarceration.’

This paper endeavors to add to this scholarship by examining the relationship between released prison inmates and the (in most cases) challenged communities they return to, and how resources and assets in those communities can be organized and utilized to assist in reentry. Specifically, it will assess different community-based strategies and programs designed to help ex-inmates in their transition back into society, and analyze whether they can have a positive impact on released offenders and ultimately help reduce rates of recidivism among this population. This study will look at nationwide trends in reentry but give special focus to Chicago neighborhoods that data show receive a significant number of released inmates annually.

This study tackles many questions around reentry, the most important of which are:

- What are important community-based reentry strategies, how are they organized and how is community engagement promoted in each?
- What is the impact or potential impact of such strategies? Which ones have shown or appear to have the most promise and can they be replicated?
- Beyond that, what more can be done to engage communities in this process of easing the transition of ex-inmates back into society?
This assessment will be conducted within the broader context of the current rethinking around mass incarceration in the U.S and the search for effective alternatives to incarceration. Also important is the reality that most federal, state and local agencies are facing great financial challenges and are not in a position to fund comprehensive reentry programs on a massive scale.

For these and other reasons that will be explored, it would be hard to overstate the importance of this issue on the individual and community level. The United States is at a critical juncture in its history as it relates to criminal justice and imprisonment, and may be on the cusp of significant changes leading to less punitive policies against offenders. But what will this trend mean to the hundreds of thousands of inmates released from prison every year, and to the often troubled communities they return to? Even the most impoverished neighborhoods have resources and assets, but can they be organized and engaged in assisting former inmates re-integrate? And ultimately, is there a formula or strategy around community engagement and social networks that can improve outcomes for ex-offenders, keeping them out of prison?

There are any number of programs that have been created to assist ex-inmates in their transition back into society, and many tout impressive results in finding employment for clients, keeping them off of drugs and out of prison. Yet this study is more concerned with so-called ‘informal social controls’ – the relationships and community ties that seem to discourage anti-social and criminal behavior. A National Institute of Justice report on reentry and the community found that “studies have consistently shown that informal social control agents are more powerful than formal agents of control in achieving and maintaining behavior change.” (Young et al., 2002)

It is important to note, too, that this relationship between ex-inmate and community can lead to a cycle of decline, dragging both down in a reciprocal relationship of dysfunction. Yet, at this
important time, it is worth studying whether that relationship, driven by efficient and cost-effective programs and strategies, can instead become a cycle of improvement that benefits both.

**B. Methodology**

This paper follows three main methods and taps various sources for data and information. Data-gathering included interviews with ex-prison inmates in Chicago as well as staff at organizations doing work in reentry and others involved in this issue. Methods:

1. **Literature review:** Provides context on the impact of mass incarceration on individuals and communities, and the meaning of the recent shift in criminal justice and sentencing policies. It also involves an exploration of the strategic and programmatic response to reentry, and in doing so informs the categories for the following method.

2. **Typology:** Examines and compares various community-based approaches to assisting ex-inmates in reentry, focusing on strategies and programs that emphasize community engagement and social ties.

3. **Examination of policy and practice:** A closer examination and analysis of community-based reentry strategies, assessing which appear most promising and should be reproduced.

As mentioned above, my research included subject interviews: seven ex-prison inmates who had spent time in Illinois penitentiaries and were either free or were serving out the remainder of their terms at a Chicago transitional center; 10 individuals who were deeply involved in the subject of reentry, either in their work in the community or as scholars.

This paper will conclude with an analysis of my findings and specific recommendations on how best to move forward in what is a dynamic policy environment.
C. **Terminology**

At this point it is important to define some terms that will pop up throughout this paper, and provide a perspective on the approach I took and why I did so. Let’s start with the concept of ‘community’ itself, which can be defined in any number of ways. Is it the neighborhood where you live? Or even smaller, just the block you live on? Or maybe there’s no spatial aspect to it; today, certainly there are many on-line communities that span the country and even the globe. Someone may belong to several communities at the same time.

In Chicago, the city and many researchers and other observers recognize 77 clearly defined community areas, although certainly local residents have their own descriptions for where they live. For example, someone might live in the community area of Lakeview, according to that definition, but would tell someone they are a resident of the smaller neighborhood of Wrigleyville. On the West Side there is an area that has become known as K-Town, for the local streets that begin with a ‘K,’ a name that isn’t recognized among the 77 community areas. And it’s doubtful many residents know (or care) exactly when they’ve passed from Englewood into West Englewood.

I will make mention of these formal community areas in this paper but am more concerned with what the social scientist Robert Sampson describes as “variability in the spatial social organization of everyday life.” (Sampson, 2012) Rather than a strict geographic definition, in the context of this paper I see ‘community’ as the residents and institutions most impacted by reentry, and also with the most potential to engage and influence ex-offenders.

In addition, how do I (and other researchers) define ‘social networks,’ ‘community ties’ and ‘community engagement?’ Again, there is no strict definition for any of these. Just as local residents would quibble over the exact boundaries of Englewood, different academics and
researchers would have different definitions of the above terms. I will not attempt to settle this and provide formal definitions of each. I will, instead, tackle this in the context of my thesis, describing why, for example, I believe a certain reentry initiative represents an example of community engagement or an effort to boost social networks. There are obvious dividing lines: a stand-alone drug rehabilitation program located outside the city that draws participants from throughout the region would not be considered a ‘community’ initiative. A program that puts ex-inmates to work renovating houses in a Chicago community that data show receives a significant number of released prisoners, would be. There are obviously many different types of reentry programs and strategies, and when assessing specific ones I will describe why I think they are examples of ‘community’ initiatives.

D. Limitations

While there is a growing body of research into reentry, studies and sources of data remain relatively limited, with the subject not gaining significant scholarly attention until the last few decades. There are reentry programs and strategies that simply haven’t undergone rigorous assessment.

Although data help reveal trends in reentry and community dynamics, it is often difficult to pinpoint why exactly individuals make the life choices they do and why some communities thrive while others decline.

From a policy standpoint, there is a growing movement away from incarceration and toward ‘community corrections,’ with alternatives such as supervised probation gaining in popularity. This paper does not directly assess this trend, although there are clear implications for it in my research – many strategies and solutions that are examined in the context of released inmates could also apply to those on probation.
There are special issues around incarcerated women, mostly involving family and children, but that is not addressed in this paper. However, reentry initiatives that are assessed here are not specific to men and could impact either gender.

Finally, while I interviewed ex-inmates and others involved in and impacted by the reentry experience, and those responses helped shape this paper and its findings, the number of subjects was small and I make no claim that their responses are conclusive evidence of trends in the field. My assessments, conclusions and suggestions are all my own, drawn from an extensive literature review, study of current and past theories, field study, interviews and observations.
II. Mass incarceration in the United States

A. Incarceration on the rise

Prior to assessing specific reentry programs and strategies it is important to understand the forces that helped create current conditions, and also appreciate the great challenges faced by released inmates. The term ‘mass incarceration’ has become almost cliché, but what does it really mean? This section provides a history and overview of mass incarceration in the U.S., and explores the debates around its effectiveness and impact both on those in the system and the communities to which they return. It will then examine the issue of recidivism in the U.S. and describe the many hurdles faced by those released from prison. Finally, it will look at the recent move away from the punitive approach of mass incarceration and the possible implications of this trend.

Beginning in the early 1970s, following a half century of relative stability, the incarceration rate in the United States spiked dramatically. In 1972, 161 people were incarcerated per 100,000 citizens. By 2007, the rate of incarceration had more than quintupled to 767 per 100,000 people (this includes state and federal prisons as well as local jails). The rate has declined slightly since 2010 but is still by far the highest in the world. (Travis et al., 2014)

The increase can be attributed to changes in sentencing policies that represented a more punitive approach – as opposed to rehabilitative – and resulted in higher rates of prison admissions and longer sentences. Increased incarcerations for drug offenses, particularly in the 1980s, explain much of this increase, some experts say. Others argue that there is a simpler explanation: prosecutors nationwide got more aggressive, filing felony charges much more frequently (often for crimes that previously would have been misdemeanors), resulting in prison terms for a far greater number of offenders. (Brooks, 2015)
There was a significant racial component to the mass incarceration trend as the conviction rate for blacks rose much faster than that for whites and Hispanics. During the 1980s and 90s, blacks were more than six times as likely as whites to be incarcerated. That disparity has narrowed but blacks are still more than four times as likely as whites to be incarcerated. Young black males, particularly low income and uneducated ones, felt the brunt of this trend, and many of the statistics are startling. (Travis et al., 2014) One in four black children who grew up in this era has seen a parent imprisoned. Today, black men in their 20s and early 30s without a high school diploma are more likely to be incarcerated than have a job. (Tierney, 2013) Almost a third of black males born in 2001 will go to prison at some point in their lives. (Clear and Frost, 2003)
So what prompted the policy changes and helped fuel mass incarceration over the preceding decades? The ‘war on crime’ came on the heels of a significant increase in crime in the 1960s – the homicide rate nationally almost doubled between 1964-74 – and social upheaval that saw high-profile anti-war and civil rights’ demonstrations. And it was perpetuated by worsening conditions in American inner cities, which at the time were experiencing a significant loss of manufacturing jobs and out-migration of middle class families. What was left behind were “pockets of severe and spatially concentrated poverty” that were home to rising crime rates and a wide variety of other social ills. From these challenges emerged the more punitive approach to crime and justice. (Travis et al., 2014)

Rising incarceration rates coincided with a significant decrease in crime rates in the United States over the next couple of decades, which to some observers was proof that the policy changes worked and helped to make troubled communities safer. But many social scientists questioned this theory, noting that studies have pinned the declining crime rate as much on demographic trends (a shrinking percentage of young people relative to total population) as anything else. In fact, they argue, mass incarceration has destabilized some neighborhoods with the consistent removal of a sizable population of men and has helped create the conditions for
crime, particularly violent crime, as well as other social problems. A 2014 report from the National Research Council, *The Growth of Incarceration in the United States: Exploring Causes and Consequences*, concluded that mass incarceration has reduced crime rates, “but the magnitude of the crime reduction remains highly uncertain and the evidence suggests it was unlikely to have been large.” (Travis et al., 2014)

This debate is ongoing. While mass incarceration may indeed have contributed to a decline in the crime rate, I believe that the cyclical nature of it has been detrimental to poor, mostly minority communities and to the men who live there. While poverty and segregation are entwined in the history of the United States, “what is altogether new is the extent to which these communities are devastated by the working of our nation’s criminal justice system … and by mass incarceration in particular.” (Thompson, 2014)

While an incredibly complex issue, *New York Times* columnist David Brooks was insightful in writing that “today’s incarceration levels do little to deter crime while they do much to rip up families, increase racial disparities and destroy lives.” (Brooks, 2015) In addition, the National Research Council report found that the criminal justice system has become “a key contributor to the political, social, and economic marginalization of African Americans and members of other groups that have historically been disadvantaged.” It added that there is a risk the system “will advance social control at the expense of social justice.” (Travis et al., 2014)

Many social scientists argue that is exactly what has happened over the last 40 years. Michelle Alexander, in her book *The New Jim Crow*, says mass incarceration is a “human rights nightmare” that has created an undercaste of black men who are impacted by a system more damaging than the discriminatory Jim Crow rules of the last century. (Alexander, 2012)
Alexander argues the shift to more punitive measures was just the latest phase of control and punishment of blacks following slavery and Jim Crow, and that it was fueled by a growing prison-industrial and criminal justice-complex that found profit in the arrest and confinement of millions of black men. The ‘War on Drugs,’ formally launched by President Ronald Reagan in the early 1980s, accelerated the trend, Alexander says, by almost exclusively targeting low-income minority neighborhoods with increased police presence, massive arrests and longer prison terms for low-level offenses. (Alexander, 2012)

B. Ensnared in the system

Once swept up in the system, offenders find it hard to ever break free. They often plead guilty to avoid the threat of even longer prison terms, and serve time in a system that values control over rehabilitation. They then enter the next phase of control upon release, Alexander and others argue. The systems of parole and probation in the past few decades also began to take a more punitive approach, focusing less on assisting former inmates and those sentenced to probation than on catching them when they violated terms of their release or sentence. In 1980, just 1 percent of prison admissions were parole violators; by 2000 more than one-third were. (Alexander, 2012)

The result is a system where more than 2 million people are physically confined in jails and prisons, and about 5 million are on probation and parole. All of them, Alexander argues, have been “branded” as criminals or felons, a mark that allows them to be discriminated against (in employment, housing and other ways) and makes it almost impossible for them to re-integrate as productive members of society. (Alexander, 2012) The result is too often a cycle of recidivism where “one’s debt to society is never paid.” (Alexander, 2012)
The nationwide recidivism rate is difficult to precisely quantify but a major study by the Bureau of Justice Statistics in 2005 that looked at the rate in 30 states found that more than two-thirds of released inmates were re-arrested within three years, and more than three-quarters within five years. (Cooper et al., 2014) A 2011 study from the Pew Center on the States, conducted in collaboration with the Association of State Correctional Administrators, looked at re-incarceration rather than re-arrest and found better, although still troubling, numbers: 45 percent of released inmates in 1999 were re-incarcerated within three years, and 43 percent who were released in 2004. The rate was even higher in Illinois: nearly 52 percent for both cohorts. (The Pew Center, 2011) Also, studies show that while the crime rate declined in the 1990s, the share of arrests attributable to released prisoners grew. “Regardless of how it is measured, the ‘failure’ rate is very high among released prisoners.” (National Research Council, 2008)

The impact of mass incarceration in the U.S. has and will continue to be examined, and will continue to generate differing opinions, but it is not a goal of this paper to come to any conclusions on that debate. It is, however, an issue worth exploring (at least briefly) to provide proper context. Studies show the majority of prison inmates come from and return to communities most impacted by mass incarceration, areas having experienced the arrest and removal from the community of significant numbers of men. In a sense, the theory I am exploring involves the connections left behind after mass incarceration and the fallout from that policy. This paper will now look at some of the more specific challenges faced by inmates upon release from prison, leading into an exploration of the strategic and programmatic response to this challenge.
C. **Free but still confined**

As noted, released inmates most often return to the same challenged neighborhoods from where they came, or ones that share the attributes of high joblessness and crime, and little opportunity. The challenges they must surmount are daunting: finding places to live and securing gainful employment (felony convictions often preclude people from living in public housing, receiving some forms of government assistance and applying for many jobs); navigating often unsafe communities and resisting the lure of gangs and drugs; overcoming the challenges of mental illness (studies show rates of mental illness are much higher among inmates than the general population). “The successful reintegration of former prisoners is one of the most formidable challenges facing society today.” (National Research Council, 2008)

The hurdles these ex-inmates must overcome encompass almost every significant aspect of daily life:

*Housing* – Finding affordable housing is a major concern for low-income Americans around the country, even more so for ex-inmates. Public housing has long been an option for low-income and unemployed individuals, but public housing agencies throughout the U.S. have adopted measures barring applicants with felony or even more minor convictions. Studies show that while many ex-inmates may find a place to live, at least temporarily, with family or friends, others seek beds at shelters or end up homeless. (National Research Council, 2008)

*Employment* - Studies consistently show a negative impact on employment and earnings for ex-inmates, although that may be related both to their prison experience and the fact many lack a high school diploma, positive work experience and other skills needed to obtain work. There are also many jobs where a felony conviction is an automatic disqualifier. Federal, state and local agencies have adopted policies barring ex-felons from many positions, and employment
applications in the private sector often ask applicants to check a box if they have been convicted of a felony. Many municipalities have recently passed so-called ‘Ban the Box’ amendments prohibiting employers from inquiring about a criminal record until later in the application process, although they mostly apply only to city jobs and sometimes companies that contract with public agencies. In addition, other studies have shown many employers simply express a reluctance to hire people with a criminal record. (Travis et al., 2014)

An ex-inmate in his late 40s who had spent 30 years in prison for murder told me that although he has changed, he feels like he’s still serving his sentence. “There has been no welcome (from the community), period,” he said, adding that he’d been out for three months and had yet to find work. “It’s rough. Everywhere I go I see doors getting shut in my face. … If they’re not going to give me an opportunity, do they want me to go back to do what I was doing?”

A ‘civic death’ - Social scientists say ex-offenders experience a sort of ‘civic death’ where in many places they can’t vote, serve on juries and earn licenses to work in many professions. In 2010, approximately 6 million people with a felony record were disenfranchised, representing about 1 in 40 eligible voters nationwide, and 1 in 13 black eligible voters. More than 1 in 5 blacks can’t vote in the three states with the highest rates of black disenfranchisement, Florida, Kentucky and Virginia. Many states and municipalities have recently passed ordinances reversing this trend and allowing ex-offenders to vote, but the numbers remain stark. (Travis et al., 2014)

This plays out in other ways, as well. Welfare reform legislation signed by President Bill Clinton in 1996 permanently barred people with felony drug convictions from receiving federal
benefits such as food stamps. States were allowed to opt-out of this provision but most have not. (Alexander, 2012)

*Mental health and substance abuse* - On top of the countless challenges many inmates have faced before entering prison – failure in school, unemployment, unstable home lives, exposure to stressful and possibly violent social situations – a significant percentage are also dealing with mental health issues. There are no firm statistics on the rates of mental illness among American inmates but the National Alliance on Mental Illness estimates that more than 400,000 prisoners nationwide suffer from some mental health issue. Cook County Sheriff Tom Dart, who oversees the massive Cook County Jail in Chicago, says he considers the jail the largest mental health facility in the country. He estimates about one-third of those at Cook County on any given day suffer some mental health issue. He is credited with initiating some innovative programs to address the problem, but in Chicago and around the country the demand for such services both inside prisons and in the community is considered overwhelming. (Ford, 2015)

The result is many people arrested for mostly non-violent, minor offenses, simply because they had no access to mental health care or couldn’t afford their medications. There are even cases of individuals who say they commit crimes with the goal of being arrested, hoping they can get medication on the inside. But experts say the prison experience can exacerbate preexisting psychiatric conditions or cause new issues to surface. The issues run the gamut and include posttraumatic stress disorder; some studies have shown rates of PTSD among inmates much higher than in the general public. (Travis et al., 2014)

Then there is what has been called the ‘prisonization’ affect: the process many inmates go through to adapt to prison life and cope with the daily stresses they face. Experts say the traits prisoners develop – fear of others and a constant defensiveness, aggressive outward appearance,
poor social skills – will likely make re-integration into society that much more difficult. The strict prison regimen (constantly being told when to sleep, when and what they can eat, and having every aspect of daily life dictated to them) can also leave some with the inability to handle the unpredictability of the outside or lacking the necessary self-sufficiency to survive. (Travis et al., 2014) Inmates, particularly ones who have served long terms, become “crippled by incarceration … They don’t know how to survive in the community anymore.” (Tierney, 2013)

One ex-inmate, a man in his mid-50s who had been to prison three separate times, said he “always feels weird” when he gets out. “It’s really hard to shake off (the prison experience). It’s always with you. And when you’re out you feel like people are watching you all the time,” he said.

Many released inmates have also battled alcohol addiction and substance abuse problems. A survey conducted by the Bureau of Justice Statistics in 2002 found that 68 percent of jail inmates described symptoms they had experienced in the preceding year that were indicative of substance abuse or dependence. (Karberg and James, 2005) A 2010 report from the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA) at Columbia University had similar findings: 65 percent of U.S. inmates met the medical criteria for substance addiction or abuse. (The National Center on Addiction, 2010)

*The environment* - Studies have shown that most released inmates return to the often troubled communities from where they came or ones sharing the same traits. The term ‘mass incarceration’ to some experts then is misleading, because the trend is actually “experienced at a highly local level.” Most inmates attempt to re-start life in these communities of “concentrated
disadvantage” where there are few jobs but many aspects of social dysfunction. (Sampson and Loeffler, 2010)

A 2005 research report from the Urban Institute that followed 400 men released from prison who returned to Chicago found that more than half (54 percent) settled in just seven communities: Austin, North Lawndale, East Garfield Park, West Englewood, Humboldt Park, Roseland, and Auburn Gresham. All are communities that have poverty rates higher than the city average and perform poorly on other demographic measures. (Visher and Farrell, 2005) A more comprehensive Urban Institute report conducted in 2001 revealed that more than one third (34 percent) of ex-inmates returned to just six of the city’s 77 designated community areas (or 8 percent): Austin, Humboldt Park, North Lawndale, Englewood, West Englewood, and East Garfield Park. “These high-concentration areas are among the Chicago communities that are the most socially and economically disadvantaged,” the report found. (La Vigne et al., 2003)

*Social exclusion* – While studies have pointed to the importance of social networks and community connections in the successful re-integration of ex-inmates, instead this population is often unlikely to have access to such networks and know how to negotiate social aspects of the communities where they land. Community members and local employers also may have little interest in engaging released inmates and may hold preconceived (and negative) notions about

For a map of designated Chicago community areas see Appendix B, p. 58
ex-inmates. Imprisonment “can lead to gross exclusion from conventional social networks in one’s community.” (Berg and Huebner, 2011) Ex-inmates often experience a sense of “neighborhood social isolation” that only works to exacerbate the challenges described above. And they frequently return to communities where residential instability – possibly caused in part by mass incarceration – means informal social controls aren’t evident. (Morenoff and Harding, 2014)

Ex-inmates I spoke to said this social isolation is sometimes self-imposed, because they want to avoid the old hangouts and former friends and associates that may lead to trouble. “I try not to socialize with anyone,” said one. “I have two friends and one’s my sister and the other I met while living at Safer (a transitional housing center in Chicago). … I’m gonna find me some new people to hang out with.”

In addition to all of these challenges, many ex-inmates face other hurdles, as well. They may be barred from driving (to areas where there are jobs), have a curfew or be on home confinement (further limiting their mobility and socialization), or have mounting debts from child support or court fees (difficult to pay off when you can’t find work). Michelle Alexander writes that it is “difficult to imagine a system better designed to create – rather than prevent – crime.” She finds it remarkable not that so many return to prison, “but how many somehow manage to survive and stay out of prison against all odds.” (Alexander, 2012)

An ex-inmate I spoke to who had been in and out of prison several times echoed those comments. “It’s like you’re set up to fail,” he said.

D. The end of mass incarceration?

There is a strong argument that the criminal justice system, as traditionally and currently designed, helps create the conditions that make recidivism almost a logical conclusion for many.
But there has been a shift in thought and policy in the last few years. In states throughout the country and among leaders of both major political parties there has been a realization that mass incarceration has been incredibly costly and created a cycle of recidivism for too many mostly poor Americans. The response has been a re-thinking around such severe measures as mandatory minimum sentences, policy changes that have given thousands of non-violent offenders the chance to win reduced sentences, and a turn toward alternatives to incarceration for non-violent offenses. (Markon and Weiner, 2014) While the rate of incarceration in the U.S. more than quintupled in almost 40 years (starting in the early 1970s), that increase began to slow around 2000 and has actually declined slightly since 2010. (Travis et al., 2014)

In July, 2014, then-Attorney General Eric H. Holder Jr. announced a policy change that made some 50,000 federal prisoners being held for drug offenses eligible to seek early release. Holder called it “a milestone in the effort to make more efficient use of our law enforcement resources and to ease the burden on our overcrowded prison system.” (Apuzzo, 2014)

President Barack Obama became the first sitting president to visit a federal prison when he did so in 2015 in an effort to highlight the need to change what he called “a broken system.” And he cheered the “good news … that good people of all political persuasions are starting to think we need to do something about this.” (Baker, 2015)

In Illinois, Gov. Bruce Rauner, a Republican, has charged the Commission on Criminal Justice and Sentencing Reform with coming up with recommendations to reduce the state’s prison population by 25 percent in 10 years. The prison population in Illinois has soared by about 700 percent in the last four decades and the system is badly overcrowded, designed for about 33,000 inmates but currently confining close to 50,000. (McDougall, 2015)
Critics of mass incarceration have cheered these policy shifts, but what do they mean for the 600,000 some inmates who are freed each year in the United States? In a time of widespread government deficits, Michelle Alexander and others perceive little will to pour hundreds of millions of dollars into rehabilitation programs for poor black offenders or strategies to revitalize impoverished communities around the country. Alexander also argues that as long as policing tactics remain the same, little will change, because “mass incarceration is based on the prison label, not prison time.” (Alexander, 2012)

In addition, if large numbers of inmates are suddenly released back into challenged neighborhoods around the country and robust support systems aren’t in place, “the effects could be broadly harmful and could discredit decisions to reduce the use of incarceration.” (Travis et al., 2014)

The issue of prisoner reentry, then, seems as important as ever. This paper will now examine the response to reentry including programs and strategies designed to assist ex-inmates upon their release and help them overcome the challenges they face. It will give special focus to initiatives that promote community connections and social networks, and will explore the origin of this theory – that social networks and community ties can be positive and vital components of reentry for ex-inmates.
III. The Response to Reentry

A. Reentry solutions

One of the great difficulties of reentry is that it is a national issue affecting millions, but calls for individual solutions. There isn’t a one-size-fits-all program or strategy for prison inmates, who each have their own needs and challenges and histories, or the communities they are returning to. One inmate has a supportive family he can live with but there’s a waiting list for the program he wants to enroll in to help him overcome his drug problem. Another has mental health issues and receives weekly therapy, but his problems have left him alienated from his family and he has no resources to afford an apartment that will keep him off the streets between therapy appointments. Still another is enrolled in a job training program but he has found there are few jobs in his community, and he has no car to drive to where they are.

Countless programs have been designed and implemented over the past several decades to help inmates make the transition back into society, some of which start before the offender leaves prison. These include drug and alcohol rehabilitation; job training and placement; cognitive/behavioral therapy; educational support; transitional housing; and peer mentorship. Many such programs have no doubt been creatively designed and can point to impressive results. A comprehensive 2007 National Research Council report, Parole, Desistance from Crime, and Community Integration, found “scientific evidence that several programs and approaches reduce violations of community supervision requirements, arrests for new crimes, and drug use.” The report pointed specifically to cognitive/behavioral therapy and frequent drug testing coupled with treatment as being successful. (National Research Council, 2008)

In Chicago, the Safer Foundation is a well-respected organization that has a long-standing commitment to job training and placement, and also offers educational and other support
services, and operates two transitional housing centers on the city’s West Side. Safer says that
the recidivism rate among clients it places in jobs is less than half that of the average in Illinois
(around 50 percent of inmates returning to prison within three years). (Safer Foundation, 2008)
Whether such results stand up to scrutiny – positions in some reentry programs are limited to
non-violent offenders who have some job/social skills, so higher success rates may not be
surprising – or are cost effective measured against other programs or imprisonment is unclear.
But there is no doubt Safer and many other organizations can point to positive, quantifiable
results in helping ex-inmates stay out of prison.

However, the NRC and many other studies report more mixed results. Steady employment is
seen as vital to helping ex-inmates support and re-establish themselves, and the Chicago-based
Joyce Foundation directed a comprehensive program to support ex-inmates in finding and
keeping jobs in Chicago, Detroit, Milwaukee and St. Paul, Minn. The resulting 2010 report,
*Transitional Jobs Reentry Demonstration*, found that while transitional jobs provided important
sources of income and stability for some released prisoners, “we did not find a clear link between
transitional jobs and increased long-term employment or reduced recidivism for former
prisoners.” The project found that “work alone may not make enough of a difference for
reentering former prisoners when they are faced with so many other profound challenges.” It
recommended further study of this difficult and complex issue. “There simply isn’t much known
about what works best to help them make this transition.” (The Joyce Foundation, 2010)

This has been echoed by others, with one expert estimating that less than 1 percent of all
prisoner reentry programs implemented in the U.S. in the last decade have been subject to a
formal evaluation. (National Research Council, 2008)
Many in the reentry field tout so-called ‘wrap-around’ services, where ex-offenders are offered, depending on the circumstances, transitional housing, drug and alcohol rehabilitation, job training and placement, assistance with mental health needs, or some combination of the above. The Urban Institute, with support from the MacArthur Foundation and in partnership with the Safer Foundation, conducted a comprehensive program and study that provided just such services. Participants were also supported by case managers, mentors and “local informal social networks and residents committed to making their neighborhood safer.” (Johnson, 2015)

The project, titled Safer Return, “was designed to engage and coordinate a broad swath of community members to help returning prisoners shape better futures for themselves.” The results were positive, with limitations. Safer Return participants had more success getting and keeping jobs, and earned more in wages than ex-inmates not in the program. The recidivism rate was lower, as well. These positive results were seen more so in Garfield Park than West Englewood – the two demonstration neighborhoods – though even there it was not as much as organizers had hoped for. (Johnson, 2015) In addition, the program was not deemed cost effective, as the positive results “were outweighed by the high cost of implementing the program.” (Fontaine et al., 2015)

The NRC report, while citing many examples of innovative programs and individual successes, found that “it can identify with high confidence only a very few best practices for reducing recidivism and enhancing desistance among people leaving prison to return to local communities.” (National Research Council, 2008)

**B. Theory of informal social control**

Interestingly, when studying these various responses to the challenge of reentry one notices a thread running throughout: the importance of social networks and community connections. An
ex-inmate living in a community with a strong social network can borrow a car or find a ride from a concerned neighbor to his drug rehab sessions. One who has strong ties with his family has a place to live and maybe some financial and emotional support. Another hanging out on the street gets pointed to an engaged local church that provides a free meal and some life skills counseling.

Both the Urban Institute and NRC reports noted the importance of family ties, social relationships and community conditions and engagement in easing the transition of ex-inmates. Although Safer Return was designed to engage the local community in prisoner reentry, “it fell short of the program model.” The Urban Institute concluded that “there is untapped potential among family members and the community at large.” (Fontaine et al., 2015)

The NRC report described how troubled neighborhoods can be mine fields for ex-inmates, but also found that engagement of offenders’ families and communities can produce positive outcomes and may be as important, or more important, than any individual strategy or program. “Successful reentry is not something a former inmate achieves alone, but in the context of and with the support of personal and community institutions, such as families, churches, and employers.” (National Research Council, 2008)

So, how did this theory about the role of community in reentry come about? Celebrated urban planner and activist Jane Jacobs may not have connected her famous “eyes on the street” theory to reentry, but there are links: an engaged community will reduce opportunities for crime because everyone knows that someone is always watching. (Jacobs, 1961) This is also related to the concept of the role of informal social controls: that a community with an active civic life will reduce opportunities for crime and other forms of social dysfunction.
But how? Scholars Todd Clear (criminal justice) and David Karp (sociology) say responsibility must devolve from the criminal justice system (formal control) to community (informal social control) and local institutions such as churches, schools and civic associations. In so doing, the theory “works by cultivating the community’s social obligation to prevent crime.” Civic participation is important, including the promotion of social ties and supportive relationships, and there are roles for regular citizens as well as victims and the offenders themselves. “Concern for the collective good becomes the motivating force in obeying the law.” (Clear and Karp, 1999)

When active civic participation is achieved, community members become informal agents of control. This can be more effective than formal controls because “the community is literally closer-more proximate-to the offender on a round-the-clock basis, and thus can observe and react more quickly to both positive and negative behavior.” Besides this more intimate relationship with the ex-inmate, community members also have more of a vested interest in the outcome than formal agents of control such as police, parole and probation officers. In addition, community members can provide avenues to opportunity (rather than just punitive responses), and positive reinforcement, so that “released offenders come to understand that they have a place in the community, that they are accepted. … Involvement of the community goes a long way in breaking down the stigma and alienation experienced by returning offenders.” (Young et al., 2002)

A 2005 report on reentry from the Annie E. Casey Foundation found that most community residents, offenders and their family members aren’t properly prepared for the return of ex-inmates. It argued for an emphasis on promoting social ties and building community, including establishing expectations that ex-offenders can contribute to their communities and have
opportunities to do so. Community social networks have an important role in reentry, the report found, “including friends, neighbors, relatives, mentors, community organizations, and faith-based institutions that provide neighbor-to-neighbor support.” Such neighborhood support “is crucial to the successful reentry of people who have been in prison,” the report concluded. (Annie E. Casey, 2005)

This support can take the form of connecting ex-inmates to helpful programs and services or referring them to job opportunities, but can also involve inducing normative behavior – motivating behavior that conforms to local norms. In an engaged community, ex-inmates may be dissuaded from selling drugs or joining a street gang by the fear of being branded a criminal by other, respected members of the community. It is sometimes referred to as ‘shaming,’ wherein individuals avoid criminal or other anti-social acts for fear of bringing shame upon themselves or their families. There are a couple of potential issues with this theory, however: if the shaming is too severe and individuals feel stigmatized, they may believe they have no other options socially but to join with others so stigmatized (such as gangs); also, if levels of community engagement are low and social networks aren’t strong, positive normative behavior may not be present in the first place. It can only work if the community consistently endorses a culture that frowns upon criminal and anti-social behavior. (Clear and Karp, 1999) Later in this section I will explore further this concept of informal social control within the context of reentry, looking at whether it can be promoted in communities to bring about positive change.

Reuben Jonathan Miller at the University of Michigan School of Social Work conducted a comprehensive study of reentry in communities on the West Side of Chicago as well as larger trends in the field. He noted how the number of reentry organizations nationwide exploded between 2000-2010, with most being community-based programs. He argued that it represents a
trend in criminal justice where the process of rehabilitation and reentry “has been outsourced and privatized, moving from within prison walls and into the therapeutic spaces, church basements, and community centers of the inner city.” (Miller, 2014)

This paper will now examine specific, community-based reentry programs and strategies that will populate a typology of such initiatives.

C. Community-based response to reentry

Just as there is no simple, single definition of ‘community,’ it also isn’t easy to settle on clearly defined examples of what represents ‘community engagement’ or ‘social networks.’ Certainly it is variable and can include many of the individual strategies mentioned above (drug/alcohol rehab, job placement, cognitive therapy). But in the context of this paper’s hypothesis, there must be a thread of community and/or social engagement. One researcher I spoke to said he saw housing as the lynchpin for successful reentry, and argued that it often comes about as the result of strong social networks. If it involves ex-inmates living with family, finding housing through community connections or living at a community-based adult transitional center, then yes, I agree. For the purposes of this paper, though, housing by itself will not be assessed, but instead how ex-inmates might be better able to obtain that housing.

As explored earlier, one of the great challenges in reentry is the fact that most ex-inmates return to troubled neighborhoods – a 2012 report on released inmates in Illinois found that some of the neighborhoods on Chicago’s West and South sides that inmates return to had black male unemployment rates of over 40 percent. (Vogel, 2012) The principle theory this paper explores is how, even in these neighborhoods facing tremendous difficulties, social networks can be tapped and community engagement stimulated in order to improve outcomes for ex-inmates.
This paper will now examine several such ways this can play out, focusing on strategies and programmatic responses that will populate the typology (Appendix A).

**Community activation** – This approach inhabits all of the strategies mentioned before and the ones that will come after, and can come in many different forms. But it can also be complicated because many studies show that troubled neighborhoods often have a negative impact on the prospects of released inmates, and vice versa. Ex-offenders perform poorly in communities with high rates of joblessness, crime and other factors of social dysfunction, and conversely these neighborhoods appear to be negatively impacted when they are host to large numbers of returnees. It can create “linked dynamic processes” that “together create a pernicious cycle of decline.” (Morenoff and Harding, 2014)

Residents of these neighborhoods could be forgiven for being wary about ex-inmates, but how can cynicism be turned into positive engagement? When and how do community members become agents of informal social control, the community, work and family bonds (including marriage) that can induce desistance from crime? If such informal social controls are more effective than formal social controls, how to promote them?

One way is to promote the social capital in a community by tapping into the assets that are in even the most challenged neighborhoods: community leaders, local businesses and civic institutions (including the police), churches, health clinics and block clubs. “Even the worst-off communities command human assets and organizational potential that have not been fully harnessed,” writes social scientist Robert Sampson. (Sampson, 2012) What if a community created a network of resources so that all of these assets were connected (overseen by a local board or panel that included members of the community)? That way a local pastor could know where to refer an ex-inmate for drug counseling or a mentorship program; a transitional center
for released prisoners would know where there were trouble spots in the neighborhood and when job opportunities and chances for civic engagement came up. And in Chicago, what if this network was connected to the Illinois Department of Corrections and Cook County Department of Corrections so that everyone knew when inmates from the community were released?

The Urban Institute’s *Safer Return* project placed a great emphasis on local assets, including community-based parole officers who were resources for ex-offenders, and proposed the creation of community advisory councils. But an after-report concluded that the project could have done more to engage families, community members and existing social service providers. “Purposeful inclusion of families and community residents in the reentry and reintegration of former prisoners has tremendous potential to lead to better outcomes,” the report said. (Fontaine et al., 2015)

Teamwork Englewood on Chicago’s South Side is an organization that has built a network of community institutions in one of the city’s toughest neighborhoods. Johnny Outlaw directs reentry services there and said the network includes the local police district, area churches, US Bank, St. Bernard Hospital and Kennedy-King College, where he helps ex-inmates enroll in classes. The goal, he said, is to get as many community partners as possible invested in the fate of ex-inmates.

Still, he said it will be difficult to...
stimulate a wider sense of community in Englewood and get local residents to welcome and assist ex-inmates. He didn’t blame residents for being wary, considering all of the other ongoing challenges in the community. The morning I met him at Teamwork Englewood four young men, including two 15-year-old boys, had been shot the previous evening just two blocks away, and Outlaw had heard there was a retaliatory shooting overnight.

“It’s a daily occurrence around here, the shootings and the crime,” said Outlaw. “You gonna greet him (an ex-inmate) with open arms? This person might burglarize your house, rob your grocery store.”

Besides the recently renovated and expanded Kennedy-King College one block away along 63rd Street, Whole Foods is building a new store across the street as part of a development that is expected to draw some retail outlets as well. These are promising developments for Englewood, but still the signs of decay and distress are everywhere in the community: trash-strewn empty lots, vacant and boarded up homes, burned out and crumbling commercial buildings. Outlaw acknowledged it is a challenging environment for the steady stream of ex-inmates the community receives.

In Brattleboro, Vermont, local authorities have created the Brattleboro Restorative Reentry Program in an effort to engage the community in the process of reentry. The program includes Community Advisory Panels and support groups called Circles of Support and Accountability.
where community volunteers work with ex-inmates who are moving back to the community. (Brattleboro Community, 2015)

Although Brattleboro and Englewood share little in common, the effort is an interesting community-based response to reentry. It is that community component of reentry that “may encourage people to commit to a prosocial life-style and to develop new networks that include law-abiding citizens.” That can happen through family relations, employment and also “other types of community engagement, such as participating in the work of neighborhood associations or volunteer work.” (National Research Council, 2008)

**Civic engagement** – This sounds similar to the previous category but instead is concerned with promoting community engagement among ex-inmates. The idea is that if an ex-inmate is invested in the health and well-being of a community, they are much less likely to commit crime there and instead pursue more positive paths. As noted above, this can include encouraging (or possibly requiring) ex-inmates to work with civic associations or local charitable groups.

Another idea is to have a “civic justice corps” that would mobilize ex-inmates to work on improvement projects around the neighborhood, such as rehabbing dilapidated housing, sprucing up local parks or rebuilding schools and playgrounds. The potential pay-off would be two-fold: The ex-inmate is combating idleness by working and in the process becomes invested in his community. (Clear and Frost, 2003)

Certainly most of the communities they are returning to have plenty of needs, so there is a third pay-off, as well: community improvement. On a large scale these efforts could be paid for by diverting funds that would have gone to incarceration for specific offenders. This approach has promise because instead of seeing ex-inmates only as potential threats, it recognizes them as members of the community able to contribute to its improvement. In that way “the calculus of
community safety and quality of life is recomputed to include them as potential positive forces.” (Clear and Karp, 1999)

An example of this in Chicago is the Green ReEntry project run by the Inner-City Muslim Action Network, which puts ex-inmates to work rehabbing homes in the Chicago Lawn neighborhood. Ex-inmates will live in the homes, which are rehabbed to include various environmental features. The program sounds promising but is limited: four homes are being renovated with grants from the city and the Islamic Society of North America. (Brachear, 2010)

Mentorship – Mentoring programs – sometimes also called peer support – are a popular reentry initiative designed to create important social ties for the ex-inmate. They are designed to provide support and guidance upon reentry and connect ex-inmates with resources in the community. Many if not most reentry programs include some form of mentoring – the Safer Foundation, St. Leonard’s Ministries and other reentry providers in Chicago include mentoring among their offerings – and often it involves ex-inmates who have successfully navigated life on the outside as mentors. Mentoring can involve one-on-one relationships or group sessions, and require thorough screening and training of mentors. (Annie E. Casey, 2005)

An evaluation of a comprehensive mentoring program done for the U.S. Department of Labor found that it can have real benefits, helping ex-inmates get and retain jobs, and reducing rates of recidivism among participants. However, it also concluded that mentoring by itself is not enough. Released inmates have many immediate needs, including housing, employment and health care. “While dependable and supportive mentoring relationships can be a crucial component of a reentry initiative, those relationships are a complement to—not a substitute for—these necessary reentry services.” (Fletcher, 2007)
Community corrections centers – This strategy has offenders serving out the final phase of their prison terms in community-based residential facilities where they can receive a wide variety of services as they negotiate reentry. While residents are afforded more freedoms than they would have in prison, including earning the right to leave for work, these places generally have guards on site. Pennsylvania has dozens of such facilities, and an effort is made to place inmates near the communities where they lived, with the recognition that family and community can provide a support system. (Schweigert, 2010)

Ohio is another state that has embraced this strategy, and an analysis found that community correctional centers were much cheaper (per inmate) than regular imprisonment, that inmates on average stayed at the center for shorter terms compared to those in jails and prisons, and that rates of recidivism were lower. The report acknowledged the state needs to do a better job in analyzing recidivism rates, however, because of the difficulties in comparing rates for inmates held on different types of charges. Inmates must be approved for placement in community corrections centers, so violent and sex offenders and others held on more serious charges are often prohibited. (Marion, 2002)

The Chicago-based Safer Foundation has a contract with the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) to run two facilities on Chicago’s West Side that it calls Adult Transition Centers (ATCs). The IDOC determines who can live at the facilities and there are close to 600 men between the two locations. Residents can receive services including job training, basic skills and GED classes, and therapy sessions. Both ATCs are located in the North Lawndale community, which as noted earlier is one of the Chicago community areas that receives a significant number of ex-inmates annually, and is one plagued by high rates of poverty and joblessness. Safer notes that one element of successful reentry is “active community
involvement and partnerships,” (Safer Foundation, 2015) and administrators said the community has been very supportive of the ATCs.

Andre Martin, the program director at the Safer Crossroads ATC, said facility administrators have worked hard to engage the community. “At the beginning it was difficult to convince the community as to what we were doing,” he said. “But we helped them understand. The community is struggling and we’re dealing with this issue (of reentry).” Martin has been at Safer for almost 20 years and said at certain points in the past they were in jeopardy of having to close Crossroads because of a loss of state funding, and that the community rallied around them with “an overwhelming amount of support.”

How to quantify such support and the impact on the community of ATCs and other community corrections centers should be subjects of future research into this strategy.

**Restorative Justice** – Restorative Justice attempts to repair the harm caused by crime to both victims and the community by bringing them together in mediated sessions. In an ideal scenario, a restorative justice strategy would bring together the offender, the victim and other stakeholders such as community members impacted by crime in order to work out a resolution (which could involve an acknowledgement from the offender of the impact of the crime and possibly some form of restitution). (Centre for Justice, 2015)
In Chicago, the Community Renewal Society has led a coalition promoting restorative justice, called the Reclaim Campaign. It foresees a system of Restorative Justice Peace Hubs around the city where offenders, instead of being jailed, would meet with victims and also be referred to appropriate reentry services. While the campaign has claimed some policy victories as Cook County authorities rethink how to handle non-violent offenders, there is no evidence this system of peace hubs has taken root or is on the horizon. (Community Renewal Society, 2015)

For all the idealistic visions behind it, restorative justice is “barely mentioned in today’s criminal justice reform debate and has never accomplished much more than to chip small chinks out of the granite edifice of the American prison and jail system.” (Obbie, 2015)

Reentry Partnership Initiatives - Reentry Partnership Initiatives (RPIs) were originally an initiative of the U.S. Department of Justice’s (DOJ) Office of Justice Programs and were designed to bring together agencies of the criminal justice system (formal control) with social service providers and community members and organizations including local churches and businesses (informal control). They were launched at eight sites around the country in the early 2000s and took a variety of forms: One RPI in Washington state used community “guardians” who work with the ex-inmate as part of his/her case management team; another in Maryland focused on involving community-based service providers; a third, this one in Missouri, used reparation panels offenders met with. (Young et al., 2002)

RPIs have been described as an important development because they represent significant change in the system, “moving out from prisons into communities and, ultimately, neighborhoods.” Criminologist Joan Petersilia wrote that “this model represents an ideal,” yet then acknowledged that there’s no evidence yet that they can be successfully implemented and impact rates of recidivism. (Petersilia, 2003)
The Boston Reentry Initiative (BRI), which was not one of the DOJ sites, is a collaboration between law enforcement agencies and social service and faith-based organizations in the community that targets inmates judged to be at high risk to recidivate. The program begins when inmates are still incarcerated and includes a transition plan that follows them after they’re released. The plan directs ex-inmates to services available to them such as drug rehabilitation and job training programs, and provides community-based mentors that work with the released inmate for 12 to 18 months after release. The Council of State Governments’ What Works in Reentry Clearinghouse did an assessment of the program and gave it positive marks for reducing rates of recidivism among program participants. (Braga et al., 2009)

A thorough assessment of the DOJ initiatives by the Bureau of Governmental Research found that they were an innovative response to a difficult issue, but were experimental in nature and at best represented a foundation for further development of similar reentry programs. The report also expressed concern over the fact that while the demonstration sites engaged community volunteers, most also had paid positions, which would make them vulnerable to funding concerns including government cutbacks. The promise of RPIs “lays ahead, in engaging the full powers of natural, informal social controls that are the community and fully integrating offenders … as members of that community.” (Young et al., 2002)

It has been 14 years since that report was issued and there is little evidence that RPIs, the Boston one notwithstanding, have taken off as the strategy of choice among governmental agencies, municipalities or communities. But that said, there is also no doubt that these same bodies are increasingly looking to community-based solutions to reentry, and that the innovative ideas that originated with RPIs are likely informing that evolution.
**Family reunification** – The original and sometimes most important social tie for ex-inmates is family. In reentry, families are often on the front line, providing ex-offenders places to live and financial support, and becoming resources as they look for work. The Vera Institute of Justice, which focuses on reentry, reports that new research shows that encouraging stronger ties between ex-inmates and their families leads to better outcomes for the released inmates. A survey of returning prisoners in Chicago found that those that said they experienced positive family support had lower reconviction rates than those that reported negative family relationships. A formula for offender success can be found in “identifying and building upon offenders’ pro-social supports from families and other social networks.” (diZerega, 2010)

But how to promote these relationships? You can’t force families to be supportive and loving that weren’t in the first place, can you? It can indeed be a difficult proposition. Families also report that the return of a relative from prison can be stressful, causing a financial burden for many already struggling families and leading to strained relationships. Also, research shows that family and community ties can suffer greatly while an offender is imprisoned, so more emphasis needs to be placed on starting the reentry and reunification process before inmates get out. That’s exactly what the Vera Institute is encouraging with a Justice Department-sponsored coaching packet it created that is designed to help local jurisdictions better cultivate these relationships both before and after inmates are released.

In New York City, La Bodega de Familia is a family-focused reentry program for former prisoners that uses comprehensive family case management, and the results so far look promising: a decrease in illegal drug use among ex-inmate participants, fewer arrests and better general physical and mental health. (diZerega, 2010)
**Marriage promotion** – Marriage is also an important social tie. Studies have found that married ex-inmates have lower rates of recidivism, for seemingly various (although as yet unproven) reasons: an incentive to avoid prison because of a strong social bond; a more consistent, structured daily routine that often doesn’t involve interaction with potentially risky peer groups. “Marriage, especially strong marital attachment, has thus been identified as a significant factor in desistance for men.” And women, too, although to a lesser extent. (National Research Council, 2008)

Similar to family reunification, this strategy leads to difficult questions about how to promote positive relationships that might not have been there to begin with. Marriage can’t really be forced, and the government and local non-profits aren’t likely to get into the match-making business with ex-inmates, and probably shouldn’t. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) did attempt something similar with the comprehensive Community Healthy Marriage Initiative, launched in the early 2000s. However, it did not specifically target ex-inmates and the results were mixed. (Bir et al., 2012) More appropriate, I would argue, is a program such as La Bodega Familia: provide supportive services to already married couples and families, and start these services prior to release.

**D. Evaluating reentry initiatives**

As we have seen, community-based responses to reentry can take many different forms. In addition, a variety of factors influence how and why these strategies are created, as well as how one can best assess them. Important elements include theory and objective, target of intervention and impact on the community. Funding is always an important issue and concern when assessing state-sponsored activities or the work of non-profits, and that is no different here. It should be noted, though, that I am examining broad strategies and programmatic responses rather
than doing program evaluation. Therefore, funding issues will be noted when relevant, but it will not be a category by itself.

The following are the axes of evaluation for Appendix A. As I conducted my research – an extensive literature review that included examining different reentry strategies as well as trends in criminal justice, community development and reentry; and interviews with individuals involved in community-based reentry initiatives and ex-inmates – these factors stood out as being important in the development and assessment of programs designed to assist ex-inmates at the community level:

**Foundational theory** – What is the philosophy underpinning each strategy or the foundational theory that led to its creation? Is it based on traditional programs designed to assist ex-inmates or grounded in broader sociological theory? Or is it mostly original in design? This category will look at the basis for each programmatic response and strategy.

**Target of intervention** – Who or what is the target of the designed intervention? Is it the inmate, the community and potential support system, or the criminal justice system? Or maybe a combination of the above?

**Objective** – What is the objective of the strategy or the hoped-for outcome? These can vary from the specific and measurable (reduce the rate of recidivism a certain percentage) to the more inexact (boost community engagement and social networks).

**Community impact** – Each of these initiatives has a prominent community component so it is important to look at what impact they actually have on the community. This category isn’t easily measured or assessed, so for some programs the assessment is more about what the intended impact is.
Weaknesses – What are the main weaknesses or challenges to the strategy being implemented and fulfilling its objectives? These can range from funding concerns to logistical challenges to lack of community or political will. Maybe a strategy looks good on paper but is simply not financially feasible or politically viable in the current climate.

Strengths – What are some of the advantages or strengths certain strategies have that make implementation and positive execution more likely? A strategy may, for example, be cost-efficient and politically popular at the moment.

Key to success – What are the one or two factors that must be present for a strategy to find success? Or alternatively, factors that in their absence success is not probable?

Program example – A specific programmatic example of the initiative.

Replication – Is the program or strategy easily replicated on a wide scale? Some programs may be feasible on a small scale but show little promise for development beyond that. This is in some ways the ultimate test for the programmatic response to reentry and a measure that has likely frustrated many social scientists and public officials.

Replication is also the lens through which my analysis of these reentry programs will be further developed in the next section. A major focus of this paper has been Chicago but as I make recommendations for moving forward it will be in the context of this category: Which programs or strategies appear most promising and most likely to be replicated on a wider scale?
IV. Analysis and recommendations

A. Analysis

As noted previously, there are many great challenges in reentry and no silver bullet in addressing the issue. In addition, every individual and every community is different, with their own unique issues, needs and circumstances.

That being said, there have been many creative responses to reentry that recognize the important role of the community – that no ex-inmate will tackle this challenge by themselves. In addition, it is an exciting time to explore this issue as there is a serious re-assessment underway of mass incarceration and sentencing policies in the United States. We may be at a point of a significant shift in criminal justice policy where many more convicted offenders are released from prison early, receive shorter prison terms to begin with and serve out a significant portion of their sentences out in the community rather than behind bars. There is a great challenge and opportunity to try to make this transition a positive experience for both ex-inmates and the communities to which they return.

The typology (Appendix A) is a medium to analyze several community-based reentry strategies and evaluate them in the context of various factors. It also provides insight into which initiatives could be replicated and therefore potentially have a broad impact. **Community activation**, if accomplished successfully, could have a great impact and be a relatively cost effective response since it relies on community assets that are mostly already in place. But execution of this tactic would almost certainly face many significant hurdles, including community members and institutions that could be apathetic or even hostile to the concept of engaging with and assisting ex-inmates. To be effective it would have to be highly organized, as well, and that could be difficult in communities where social networks are weak. These
challenges notwithstanding, this is an approach worth pursuing as the objective transcends all others: to have an active, engaged community that is welcoming to ex-inmates and willing to help them, and where a strong sense of informal social control is present.

**Reentry Partnership Initiatives** share elements with the preceding tactic, and an evaluation of RPIs results in a similar conclusion: While the approach may be logistically challenging it is one worth exploring because the potential impact is great. RPIs, which have been attempted in several locales, represent a comprehensive approach to reentry that is badly needed. Yet, as noted earlier, they haven’t popped up in communities around the country, likely due to not insignificant challenges: Who will be the organizing body? Who will fund the initiative? And even if well funded, will communities respond and participate? Both RPIs and community activation contain positive elements that will be more fully developed in the next section as they inform this paper’s main recommendations.

Three of the reentry strategies, **civic engagement**, **mentorship** and **restorative justice**, are grouped here because the evaluation leads to a similar conclusion for each: They can be effective and should be a part of any larger reentry strategy, but as stand-alone responses the chance for a broad, significant impact is doubtful. On paper, civic engagement sounds wonderful – employ ex-inmates in neighborhood beautification or other civic improvement projects, which provides a benefit to the community while also giving former offenders a positive outlet and getting them invested in the communities where they live. But in communities with few assets and many needs, who is going to organize and fund these projects? And those are questions that take on even greater significance if the goal is to replicate the strategy on wide scale.

Similarly, restorative justice appears promising on an individual basis but the impact is limited. This has been and is being attempted in many locations, and the tactic to have ex-
offenders meet with victims and understand the impact of their actions could be an effective deterrent to further crime. But there are many challenges. In reality, many victims may not want to participate in restorative justice sessions, and ex-inmates may do so only because they are required to. And who is going to organize, mediate and fund such sessions? It is difficult to see this approach having a great and wide impact.

Mentorship is a tactic already in widespread use, and it appears to be one that can be effective. Who better to help guide ex-inmates in their transition back into society than people who have been through the same experience? But there are significant logistical challenges that would limit its impact on reentry as a whole, first and foremost being the scale of intervention needed. It is hard to imagine the implementation of a program that would find mentors or programs for a significant portion of the 600,000 some inmates released from American prisons every year. However, that is not to say it should not be available to ex-inmates and a part of any larger community-based response to reentry.

Studies have shown that community corrections centers can be a cost-effective tool, and while they require a significant commitment from the government (to fund as an alternative to regular imprisonment), the trends in criminal justice are toward more community-based forms of punishment and/or confinement. It will be interesting to see, though, how far that trend goes. Will governments be willing and able (over possible resistance from state employees, victims’ rights groups and others) to make such a shift and fund this method on a large scale? How do you overcome opposition from communities who might not want to host such sites? Will the tactic be able to withstand PR challenges if a client commits a high-profile crime while living at one of these centers? These are all important questions, but they should not stand in the way of
further development of this strategy for the simple reason that it seems to work. One of this paper’s recommendations in the next section involves community corrections centers.

**Family reunification and marriage promotion** are strategies that involve what is often the strongest social tie for offenders, but only one has the potential for wide impact. While only some prison inmates are married, almost all have family. And while certainly those family ties can be strained by imprisonment or even non-existent, it is a strategy worth promoting. Studies show that inmates with positive family ties have more success once released, and that many rely upon family for places to live and the networks needed to find work. Family reunification is also a part of the recommendations in the next section.

**B. Recommendations**

My study of this issue leads me to recommendations that I believe can be impactful, and that are made within the political, governmental and societal context of America in 2016: the shifting trends in criminal justice; the budget crises at the local, state and national level; and the enormous needs of released inmates and the communities to which they return. I first offer a set of recommendations that are broad in nature and related to policy measures, some of which were touched on in this paper but not explored fully. That is followed by my main recommendations that get to the heart of this paper, and are more programmatic and specific to community-based approaches to reentry. The policy recommendations:

- Reform parole to make it less punitive and more reflective of its original purpose, to assist released inmates in the transition back into society.

- Continue to pass ordinances opening up civic and employment opportunities to ex-offenders, including ones allowing convicted felons to vote and prohibiting
potential employers from asking about a criminal record in the initial part of the vetting process (Ban the Box).

- Create a special unit of government at the state level to specifically address reentry. This could be a branch of the department of corrections headed by a special Reentry Czar reporting to the governor. Whatever the name or format, the challenges around reentry are so great that the issue is deserving of such special attention, particularly with recent reforms representing a move away from incarceration. If Gov. Rauner’s commission can come up with ways to reduce the prison population in Illinois by 25 percent in 10 years, wouldn’t it make sense to think and plan seriously for what this will mean to these offenders and the communities where they live?

- In Chicago and elsewhere, bring back formal planning. In their book Planning Chicago, D. Bradford Hunt and Jon B. DeVries bemoan the fact Chicago has turned its back on comprehensive planning, instead focusing on one individual project after another in a seemingly random manner “not derived from a careful plan based on a set of criteria, priorities, or targeted needs. … But we cannot evaluate progress toward a larger goal or plan, because one rarely exists.” (Hunt and DeVries, 2013)

In the area of community-based interventions, I recommend the prioritization of two strategies detailed in this paper, both of which have shown great promise in improving outcomes for ex-inmates and in the potential for replication, and the development of a programmatic model I believe can be deeply impactful in addressing the challenge of reentry.
Recommendation 1 – Promote family reunification

Family is often the first place released inmates turn for housing and emotional and financial support, and studies have shown that positive family ties can improve outcomes for ex-inmates. And there is this simple fact: everyone has a family, and except for rare cases where inmates are alienated from all living relatives, there is likely someone on the outside interested in their welfare. Promotion of these positive ties – when appropriate, of course – can make a difference.

The inmates I spoke to cited family as being supportive and also said it was a big factor in motivating them to stay out of prison. Speaking of his mother, one inmate said he always felt guilty because “she’s doing time with me.” Others mentioned wanting to remain free for their children or an elderly parent who might pass away while they were locked up.

Recommendation 2 – Commit to the community corrections center model

States and the federal government are looking at alternatives to traditional incarceration for non-violent offenders and this could be the answer. The Safer Foundation says its adult transition centers are cheaper and more effective (in keeping ex-inmates out of prison) than imprisonment. It would require a significant commitment from the government, but the money spent incarcerating an individual could instead go to these centers, where offenders can live, receive needed services and leave to work and visit friends and relatives in the community. Relationship-building with local communities would need to be part of the process because some people may object to hosting such a facility in their neighborhoods.

Recommendation 3 – Establish Community Transition Panels

Every community that data show is significantly impacted by reentry should have one of these panels that I see as a hybrid of two strategies assessed here, community activation and
Reentry Partnership Initiatives. The Community Transition Panel (CTP) would be a source of support as well as enforcement for released inmates, and would be similar in concept to an RPI but with an even more significant community component. Panel members would include residents of the community, representatives from local businesses and other community institutions such as churches, schools and civic associations, and local police and public officials (or representatives from their offices). Ex-inmates would be required to meet with the panel to create a reentry plan and the panel could direct them to support services, affordable housing and employment opportunities. There would need to be a direct connection to an ex-inmate’s parole officer, as well, so that failure to abide by the plan could be addressed (once well established, maybe the CTP in essence becomes the de facto parole officer, in partnership with correctional authorities). The panel would be the embodiment of informal social control, with a measure of formal control, as well. The message to inmates: The community is here to help, and is watching.

CTPs would have the added benefit of engaging the community in the reentry process. The challenge of reentry is national in scope but plays out at the community level. In the Chicago region, ex-inmates by and large are not returning to the affluent, north shore suburbs, they are returning to distressed communities on Chicago’s South and West sides. That is where the CTPs should be, working out of local offices. For example, Teamwork Englewood has its headquarters, including offices and public meeting spaces, on the second floor of an old bank building on 63rd Street that could be a potential host site for a local CTP.

Besides referring ex-inmates to counseling services or directing them to drug and alcohol rehabilitation programs, the panel could be the organizing point for other programs:
• Get ex-inmates involved in the life of the community, either through work projects, volunteer activities or membership in a local group.

• Set them up with a community mentor.

• Help promote healthy family and marital relations.

• When appropriate, host restorative justice sessions involving offenders and victims.

Three more suggestions for CTPs:

**Demand accountability:** Demand that everyone involved, from community members and partners to the police and the ex-inmates be held accountability for their actions and made aware the impact they have on the broader community. Almost all of the ex-inmates I met spoke about the importance of being completely committed to doing the right thing, and how hard it can be. Some of them had been in and out of prison five and six times, but rather than blame society or the criminal justice system, interestingly they spoke of the need for personal responsibility. “I
got nobody to blame but myself,” said one. “They put the drugs on the table but I didn’t have to do it.” Said another: “You got to want to change.”

Seek partnerships: CTPs should also look to the outside for help with their work and with coordinating services. Partnerships with the private sector could create employment opportunities for ex-inmates and mean technical assistance for the panel. For example, a new Whole Foods is being built directly across the street from the Teamwork Englewood headquarters, and Johnny Outlaw said he has met with company officials several times and they have promised to hire community residents to work there. The Safer Foundation has many such agreements with employers throughout the Chicago region, and also has a relationship with Loyola University to conduct research and create reports on its work.

Collect and analyze data: Such research is important to the effective operation of reentry programs and also to fulfilling grant obligations and earning new funding. CTPs should be diligent in tracking and reporting outcomes data, and should also rely on data assessment to make their work more efficient. Data show the half dozen or so communities that many ex-inmates in Illinois are returning to, but what if you dig deeper? Can the data indicate which ex-inmates are most likely to recidivate? Which age group or class of offender is the most worrisome? We are in the era of so-called Big Data, where data analysis is being used in business, healthcare and many different fields, and it could also be greatly beneficial in reentry.

The creation of CTPs would not be without challenges, maybe the most significant being potential community apathy or hostility. Community members may not want to acknowledge that the issue of reentry is important in their neighborhood, or they may even be hostile to the work of the CTP. Some people could be wary of welcoming ex-inmates and object to assistance specifically designed for this population, believing it would only attract more released prisoners.
That is why it is so important that CTPs not have just token community involvement but be primarily made up of local residents and community institutions. It would also be vital that CTPs establish subcommittees to broaden their work and reach into the community; and include ex-inmates on these so they are engaged. The CTP should be seen as a vibrant local institution, just like a prominent neighborhood church or community group.

But it is one thing to set up a structure for community engagement, and quite another to actually get people interested in the issue, and get them to commit to serve on the panel and consistently come out to meetings and make the process work. Simply appealing to the common good is not likely to be enough, especially in communities facing various social and economic obstacles, and ones that may have witnessed many failed improvement efforts over the years.

So, how do you motivate residents and local institutions to join the CTP? How do you create an atmosphere of sustained community engagement? Some more apparent answers are to make meetings easily accessible and hold them at times when working people can attend. Information is also key. Work to educate residents about the importance of the issue of reentry in their community and help them understand that the ultimate goal of the CTP is to create a safer, more prosperous neighborhood for everyone.

Another answer might be in the structure of the CTP itself – make it as broad-based as possible, with regular citizens and also local leaders, members of churches and block clubs, and representatives from the police, the city and the business community. Engage as many areas of the community as possible and distribute the responsibility, as well, and that way the project isn’t overly dependent on one individual or organization. As has been noted, assets and social capital can be found in even the most challenged communities – surveys have shown that many low-income neighborhoods boast plenty of churches, civic associations and other groups – and it
would be the job of the CTP to coordinate these resources and create needed connections. In that way, organizational capacity is enhanced and the community is better able to respond to the special needs of this population.

This is certainly not an easy question to answer, and is one community organizers have been grappling with forever. It is one that should be the subject of more research going forward, too. How do you stimulate the development of stronger social networks? What are the conditions under which residents become engaged community members? Where has this been accomplished successfully, and how did they do it?

Funding will be another concern for CTPs, as with any new venture. The panels, however, should be fairly cost effective, largely relying upon community members and institutions already in place. While it may be necessary to have a paid government employee on the panel as an organizer and moderator – maybe a case worker with the newly formed Illinois Department of Reentry Services who could work with a network of CTPs – other panel members could be volunteers, and would direct ex-inmates to already existing programs and services. And as mentioned above, it would be important to establish private sector partnerships that could be supportive, providing funding, technical assistance or other services.

A final issue to consider is how CTPs would define and measure success. One measure would be outcomes for the ex-inmates that the CTP monitors. Or it would actually be a series of measures: Have they avoided arrest and re-imprisonment? Are they employed? Are they engaged in other ways in the community (through their church, a community group or a volunteer activity)? In the long term, it will be important to assess the impact on the community as a whole. Although it would likely be impossible to indisputably link such measures to the work of the CTP, they are still questions worth pursuing: Is the crime rate down? Has the
unemployment rate moved? Has business activity in the community been affected? Is home ownership on the rise and has there been an impact on important health measures?

C. Community cases

There are similar examples around the country to look to when creating a CTP. As mentioned previously, the reentry initiative in Brattleboro, Vermont, includes Community Advisory Panels. (Brattleboro Community, 2015) Austin, Texas, has a Community Justice Council (CJC) that includes a Neighborhood Protection Action Committee, which is a citizens’ board that consults on public safety issues including offender reintegration. (Clear and Karp, 1999)

In Illinois, a 2007 report from Gov. Rod Blagojevich’s Community Safety and Reentry Commission had many community-centric recommendations for what it described as ten high-impact areas around the state that receive a high number of released prison inmates. One recommendation was to establish community resource centers in each of those ten high impact areas as places where ex-inmates could receive services and regularly meet with their parole officers and other members of their reentry team. That may be a good idea but the report had a rather broad definition of its high impact areas. Cook County/Chicago was listed as one, even though as the report acknowledges, that one area receives almost 60 percent of the state’s parolees annually. (Community Safety, 2007)

That would have to be a pretty large community resource center to serve that population. In fact, almost a decade after the report was released, Blagojevich is in federal prison and there is little evidence the reentry recommendations have been instituted. Many of them do look good on paper, and the report also provides further support of the role of community in reentry. It included an assessment of the Operation Spotlight Parole Reform Initiative, which was designed
to reduce caseloads on parole officers in Illinois and in general make the parole process more efficient. But the report found it had “become increasingly clear that parole agents cannot successfully transition parolees back to their communities without increased capacity and partnership with the faith, family, and community members there.” (Community Safety, 2007)
V. Conclusion

In their book *The Punishment Imperative*, criminologists Todd Clear and Natasha Frost argue that it appears mass incarceration in the United States – “a grand social experiment in punishment” – is coming to an end, and that the country may be entering “one of those rare, momentous times in history.” (Clear and Frost, 2003) If the country does indeed continue down this path, less dependent on imprisonment as a response to crime, it raises some obvious questions: Will there be job opportunities and treatment services for this increasing number of released inmates and those serving out their terms in the community? How will already struggling communities absorb this population? Will there be the funding and the political will to provide supportive services that are so badly needed? And if not, do we risk a repeat of the deinstitutionalization of the mentally ill and developmentally delayed from a half century ago, when a lack of community resources too often led to homelessness and imprisonment for this population?

The challenges for ex-inmates and the communities to which they return, as described in this paper, are great. Sociologist Loïc Wacquant, who has written extensively about issues of race, poverty and imprisonment, argues that the concept of reentry itself is flawed because most offenders instead experience circulation between “the bloated prison and the barren hyperghetto,” where there are no opportunities and never were. “How could former prisoners be ‘re-integrated’ when they were never integrated in the first place and when there exists no viable social structure to accommodate them outside?” (Wacquant, 2010)

Johnny Outlaw, reentry administrator at Teamwork Englewood, works hard to get former inmates job interviews, helps them register for classes, and directs them to mentorship programs and other services in the community. But he acknowledges it is a huge mountain to climb for
many ex-inmates. He recently had 12 former offenders enrolled in a neighborhood beautification program but only two made it through the entire one-year program. Other times, the will is there for ex-inmates but the necessary resources and social skills are not.

“I had one guy who was going downtown to a restaurant who had agreed to interview him, and we got his resume ready,” Outlaw said. “He ran out of here so happy and excited. But he came back five minutes later and said: ‘Mr. Outlaw, where’s downtown?’ He’d never been out of Englewood.”

Jerry Butler is the Vice President of Community Corrections at the Safer Foundation, where he has been for almost 15 years after serving in administrative capacities with the Illinois Department of Corrections for three decades. “There are so many people out there claiming to have a magical wand. … The substance abuse people say that’s the key, the mental health people say the same thing, the community people say the key is you need to beef up community resources,” he said. “But there’s not one single answer.”

Butler argues that what is more important are policy changes to remove the barriers to employment and other opportunities for ex-inmates, and improving communities impacted by reentry so that they can better integrate released prisoners. “Make those unhealthy communities healthier and you will help the problem,” he said.

One way to make those unhealthy communities healthier, I believe, is to get them engaged in the process of reentry and assist them so they are better prepared to welcome this population and help them re-integrate. More specifically, I argue here that what needs to be done is to promote community-based strategies that data indicate are successful in keeping ex-inmates out of prison, and that are realistic from a cost and feasibility standpoint. Those include promotion of positive family ties and further development of the community corrections center model that has inmates
serving out their terms at community-based facilities where they can receive services and other help transitioning back into society. Also, I argue for the creation of Community Transition Panels in every community significantly impacted by reentry. These panels, which would resemble the experiment with Reentry Partnership Initiatives, would be made up of community members and institutions, would work with released inmates on re-integration and would include sub-committees designed to address various community issues with the ex-inmates. The idea would be to create a positive feedback loop of community engagement and improvement.

“Investing in community-based initiatives can pay for itself several times over through savings from reduced recidivism and fewer prison admissions,” the 2007 report from the governor’s Community Safety and Reentry Commission found. In order to accomplish this, the report argued that “nontraditional partners, including family members and community and faith-based service providers, must be part of the reentry equation.” (Community Safety, 2007)

I would take that a step further and say that family and churches and community should not be considered “nontraditional partners” but part and parcel of the reentry experience for ex-inmates and communities. Only then can we expect to see significant progress in the successful re-integration of ex-inmates in communities in Chicago and throughout the United States.
### Community activation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>An engaged community can assist ex-inmates in reintegration and be &quot;eyes on the street&quot; to minimize potential trouble.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The community: local leaders, businesses, and other civic organizations; area law enforcement resources and lawmakers; regular citizens.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stigmatize, a sense of community' where ex-inmates are welcomed and helped, and informal social control is present.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potential for great, positive impact if well organized and widely committed residents and institutions.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logistically difficult as many communities/ex-inmates return to suffer from civic disengagement among other problems.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relies on residents and community institutions that are already in place, so should not require great financial commitment.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A strong network of committed community residents and institutions.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Civic engagement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ex-inmates who are engaged in the community, through a neighborhood improvement project, membership in a civic association, or volunteer activity, will be invested in the community's overall well being and less inclined to participate in criminal or anti-social activities.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ex-inmates and also community residents and institutions. The latter will need incentives to participate and encouraged to be accepting of ex-inmates and actively welcome them to participate in projects.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make ex-inmates feel as if they are accepted by the community.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potential for positive impact as ex-inmates are less inclined to engage in criminal behavior and instead are participating in activities that create community improvement.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Requires a significant commitment from community residents and institutions, many of whom may have deep misgivings about ex-inmates in their neighborhoods. Even with willing partners will be challenging to coordinate, and will likely require significant funding.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compelling case can be made for it as it potentially fulfills multiple needs: ex-inmates need, and studies show, want work and positive outlets; communities have various improvement needs and benefit from keeping ex-inmates occupied.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community partners willing to employ ex-inmates on projects and welcome them into local establishments.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Mentorship

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ex-inmates who face so many challenges can benefit from peer support and guidance, particularly when it comes from individuals who have been through the same experience.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ex-inmates and potential mentors in the community.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ease the transition of ex-inmates back into the community by providing them emotional as well as logistical support (directing them to community resources).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On its own should not be expected to make a significant community impact.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruiting needed mentors - more than 400,000 inmates are released in the US annually - training them and coordinating services. Ensuring program follow-through from both mentor and mentee.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well accepted therapeutic tool in widespread use, so minimal design challenges. Potential pool of volunteers on hand: mentors can graduate to mentors.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well trained, committed and effective volunteer mentors.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### County corrections centers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community-based transitional centers that provide housing and various support services can ease reintegration and serving out their terms as well as ex-inmates in the community.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inmates serving out their prison terms and ex-inmates who use services at the centers.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide a variety of services (housing, job training, counseling) in a community-based setting so that inmates and ex-inmates are better prepared to rejoin society.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potential for moderate impact if center seeks local partners and fosters community engagement. Lacking that, it could be an unengaged, stand-alone building.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Requires significant commitment from the government and that might not come easily, even with recent trends away from traditional incarceration. Could face cases of NMIBy (Not My Backyard). Limited to non-violent offenders.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data show it can be more cost effective than incarceration and lead to better outcomes for ex-inmates.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A commitment from the government to this strategy, and to provide funding for these centers.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Restorative justice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>For criminal offenders to be fully accepted back into a community there must be a restoration of trust between offenders, victims and other stakeholders.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offenders, victims and community stakeholders.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bring together offenders, victims and other stakeholders in mediated sessions so trust can be restored and positive relationships developed, for the benefit of all involved, including the community.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possible for positive impact as ex-inmates understand and appreciate the impact they have on the community.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Required coordination and management of mediated sessions could be difficult. Crime victims and offenders may be hesitant to participate.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not a costly intervention.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willingness of offenders and victims to participate.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Reentry Partnership Initiatives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Partnerships between agencies of formal (law enforcement and criminal justice) and informal (community institutions) control can surround ex-inmates in support as they navigate reentry.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ex-inmates</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create positive outcomes for ex-inmates by getting different stakeholders invested in the reentry process.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potential for great impact as RPIs manage reentry in their communities and ex-inmates experience comprehensive support.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significant project to create RPIs with various partners and manage it on an ongoing basis, and who is going to fund it?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engages stakeholders that are mostly already in place: police and the courts, community institutions, family. Measure of accountability not found in other interventions.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lead organization to recruit partners and that is committed to overseeing RPI going forward.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boston Reentry Initiative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficult because of the commitment required from various partners and funding questions. Although components could be attempted on a piece-meal scale.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Family reunification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family is the original social tie and those ties should be promoted (when appropriate), as it is often the first place released inmates turn for housing and emotional and financial support.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ex-inmates and their families.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promote positive family ties that can be of benefit to ex-inmates in the many challenges they face: financial, social, housing, networks to employment.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive when ex-inmates have networks to tap and are kept off the streets. But it's a specifically targeted intervention so impact likely is limited.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Many families find the return of an inmate disruptive and may not have had positive ties to begin with, which was exacerbated by the prison experience.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyone has this tie, whether positive or negative, and studies show when it’s positive that outcomes for ex-inmates improve. Not an expensive intervention.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Families willing to be supportive of ex-inmates or at minimum learn how they can be supportive.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Marriage promotion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The most immediate social tie, marriage can translate into support and positive motivation for ex-inmates.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ex-inmates and their spouses/partners.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promote positive marital ties can translate into support for ex-inmates on many levels and provide them motivation to succeed.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive but limited. Not nearly all inmates are married and some who may be in negative relationships.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married inmates may not be in prison but by participating, spouses/partners show their willingness to help. Studies show that positive marital ties do make a difference.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married couples willing to participate and open to the intervention.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Funding needs and challenges

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community partners willing to employ ex-inmates on projects and welcome them into local establishments.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inner-City Muslim Action Network’s Green ReEntry, Chicago, Civic Justice Corps, U.S. Dept. of Labor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding needs and challenges of coordination among community residents, institutions and ex-inmates make replication difficult. Also, no two communities have the same needs or assets to tap into.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C

Exemption Granted

January 29, 2016

Andrew Buchanan, MUPP
Urban Planning and Policy
4924 N. Oakley Ave.
Chicago, IL 60625
Phone: (312) 363-0257 / Fax: (773) 275-0145

RE: Research Protocol # 2016-0028
“Reentry and the community: Assessing the impact of social networks and community ties on prisoner reentry”
Sponsors: None

Dear Andrew Buchanan:

Your Claim of Exemption was reviewed on January 29, 2016 and it was determined that your research meets the criteria for exemption. You may now begin your research.

Exemption Period: January 29, 2016 – January 29, 2019
Performance Site: UIC
Subject Population: Adult (18+ years) subjects only
Number of Subjects: 30

The specific exemption category under 45 CFR 46.101(b) is:
(2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless: (i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects’ responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

Please note the Review History of this submission:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Receipt Date</th>
<th>Submission Type</th>
<th>Review Process</th>
<th>Review Date</th>
<th>Review Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>01/08/2016</td>
<td>Initial Review</td>
<td>Exempt</td>
<td>01/08/2016</td>
<td>Modifications Required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01/15/2016</td>
<td>Response to Modifications</td>
<td>Exempt</td>
<td>01/20/2016</td>
<td>Modifications Required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01/22/2016</td>
<td>Response to Modifications</td>
<td>Exempt</td>
<td>01/29/2016</td>
<td>Approved</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

You are reminded that investigators whose research involving human subjects is determined to be exempt from the federal regulations for the protection of human subjects still have responsibilities for the ethical
conduct of the research under state law and UIC policy. Please be aware of the following UIC policies and responsibilities for investigators:

1. **Amendments** You are responsible for reporting any amendments to your research protocol that may affect the determination of the exemption and may result in your research no longer being eligible for the exemption that has been granted.

2. **Record Keeping** You are responsible for maintaining a copy all research related records in a secure location in the event future verification is necessary, at a minimum these documents include: the research protocol, the claim of exemption application, all questionnaires, survey instruments, interview questions and/or data collection instruments associated with this research protocol, recruiting or advertising materials, any consent forms or information sheets given to subjects, or any other pertinent documents.

3. **Final Report** When you have completed work on your research protocol, you should submit a final report to the Office for Protection of Research Subjects (OPRS).

4. **Information for Human Subjects** UIC Policy requires investigators to provide information about the research protocol to subjects and to obtain their permission prior to their participating in the research. The information about the research protocol should be presented to subjects in writing or orally from a written script. **When appropriate**, the following information must be provided to all research subjects participating in exempt studies:
   a. The researchers affiliation; UIC, JBVMAC or other institutions,
   b. The purpose of the research,
   c. The extent of the subject’s involvement and an explanation of the procedures to be followed,
   d. Whether the information being collected will be used for any purposes other than the proposed research,
   e. A description of the procedures to protect the privacy of subjects and the confidentiality of the research information and data,
   f. Description of any reasonable foreseeable risks,
   g. Description of anticipated benefit,
   h. A statement that participation is voluntary and subjects can refuse to participate or can stop at any time,
   i. A statement that the researcher is available to answer any questions that the subject may have and which includes the name and phone number of the investigator(s),
   j. A statement that the UIC IRB/OPRS is available if there are questions about subject’s rights, which includes the appropriate phone numbers.

Please be sure to:

> Use your research protocol number (2016-0028) on any documents or correspondence with the IRB concerning your research protocol.

We wish you the best as you conduct your research. If you have any questions or need further help, please contact the OPRS office at (312) 996-1711 or me at (312) 355-2908. Please send any correspondence about this protocol to OPRS at 203 AOB, M/C 672.

Sincerely,

Charles W. Hoehne  
Assistant Director, IRB #7  
Office for the Protection of Research Subjects

cc: Charles J. Hoch, Urban Planning and Policy, M/C 348  
Philip Ashton, Urban Planning and Policy, M/C 348
CITED LITERATURE


Ford, M.: America’s Largest Mental Hospital is a Jail. The Atlantic, June 8, 2015.


Obbie, M.: They Knew it was the Right Thing to Do. *Slate*, Dec. 29, 2015.


Safer Foundation web site: Adult Transition Centers, 2015  


**Figures**


Figure 2 – Carson, E.A.: Prisoners in 2014. Bureau of Justice Statistics, U.S. Department of Justice, September 2015, NCJ-248955.

Figures 3, 4, 5 and 6 – Photographs taken by Andrew Buchanan.

Figure 7 – Graphic created by Andrew Buchanan.
VITA

NAME: Andrew K. Buchanan
