

FORMAL RESEARCH PORTFOLIO

Literature Review and Field Research

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FORMAL RESEARCH PORTFOLIO: Literature Review and Field Observations

The Valley Court Diversion Program acknowledges the multitude of factors that play into the housing insecurity issue, and the goal of this paper is to help provide resources to start the journey of fixing these issues. This research hopes to provide answers to answer the question: What are the factors of ex-offenders that make it difficult for them to reintegrate and find housing? Not only will this paper propose interventions that should help smooth the re-entry process for ex-offenders to improve their access to stable housing, but it will also discuss the field research performed at the Haven which sheds light on the problem and helps re-examine the theories proposed to see how feasible they are.

Homelessness and housing insecurity is a systemic issue that permeates society. The lack of social safety nets, like government-provided low-income housing in America contribute to this issue, especially when mentally ill people end up in transient living situations or homeless. There is much stigma associated with mental illness and homelessness, which may make it hard for those who are ill to seek help. This stigma is “an attribute that is deeply discrediting, accompanied by stereotyping, rejection, status loss, discrimination, and low power” (Thoits 2011: 6). A stereotype is an idea or opinion of an identity that is applied to every individual that carries that identity (i.e. all convicts are dangerous and untrustworthy). Internalizing a negative stereotype can lead to individuals carrying negative concepts about themselves, even if those concepts are not true. Stigma can lead to status loss, causing people with mental illness or a criminal record to be regarded as “less than” in society. This leads to individuals having very little influence over decisions made by the community, hence the lack of social capital. All of these subsequent issues stem from stigma and how it affects the individuals on a personal, community, and systemic level.

Exposure to negative influences at a young age gives youth a predisposition towards mental illness and may also lead to self-medication in the form of substance abuse (Giordano 2002). This lack of proper treatment creates a pipeline from untreated treated mental illness to involvement in the criminal justice system. Restorative justice programs, like the Valley Court Diversion Program (VCDP), practice the theory of justice that emphasizes repairing the harm caused by criminal behavior by helping to break the cycle of violence occurring due to mental illness, substance abuse, and repeated criminalization. VCDP breaks the cycle of incarceration by providing individuals an alternative to jail. Participants are referred to the VCDP's program by the state's attorney. Instead of receiving a jail sentence for the offense, the individual then goes through certain programs, as determined by the VCDP, and once completed they avoid any marks on their record.

The institutional and societal systems in place for those who have gone to jail do not provide them with any sense of control over their own lives. Ex-offenders often return to what is familiar to them after their release from prison given the significant challenges they face in re-entry in obtaining jobs, transportation, stable housing, and positive relationships with the community. When sparsely populated communities have stereotypes against those who have been in jail, people are less likely to help provide social safety nets or a sense of community. The lack of transportation will often keep people stuck in the same place, even if the situation is less than desirable. Jobs are already hard enough to obtain without a criminal record but the restrictions on the people who have one, filter down into society's stigmas against ex-offenders. This paper seeks to address the difficulties that ex-offenders have in reintegrating into society and propose possible solutions that the VCDP could engage.

POPULATION

Populations at Risk

Identifying the VCDP's clientele population and common factors of the people who go through the program will help to distinguish which populations are most at risk for future incarceration and homelessness. By identifying this at risk population, potential solutions can be more easily offered to promote behavior and habits to reduce destructive behavior. Children with parents who are violent, in the criminal system, and financially unstable, have an increased likelihood of engaging in crime and experiencing housing insecurity later in life (Heimer 1997). These children are socialized from a young age to accept these behaviors as normal. Crime and delinquency often occur when a household is violent and of low socioeconomic status, which many of the time, are products of social structure in the surrounding community and in immediate person to person interactions (Heimer 1997). In various studies, it was found that adolescents who were involved in crime were much more likely to be arrested as adults (Giordano 2002). The concept of criminal continuity emphasizes the fact that many illegal, violent, and unhealthy behaviors practiced at a young age are continued into adulthood and create insecure, unstable lifestyles, in which these criminals find themselves homeless. Women involved in criminal behavior as adolescents demonstrated mental health problems into adulthood, which makes dealing with financial and housing insecurity even more difficult. Adolescent socialization to criminal behavior can occur in various forms, such as interaction with peers, parents, and neighborhoods. Parenting practices and socio-economic resources have large influences on adolescent law breaking (Heimer 1997). Criminal continuity is exhibited by children who are socialized in this way and they represent a population that is very susceptible to exhibiting the same behavior their parents did, making them more vulnerable to financial

insecurity and homelessness. The different relationships parents have with their children have various effects on the child's behavior throughout the course of their life. The absence of a biological father, due to incarceration, leaves daughters at high risk of abuse and neglect by a non-biological father. This abuse and neglect experienced in a woman's adolescence increases her susceptibility to homelessness into adulthood, since she is likely to leave the house and live without a home in order to escape the abuse (Hagan 2007). The research shows commonalities amongst the people who appear to be financially unstable and homeless. It is important to monitor these populations and eventually attempt to propose solutions to reduce crime rates and promote job stability in order to proactively prevent homelessness.

Demographic Patterns of Incarceration

Unemployment, stigma, and lack of social capital disproportionately impacts black, male offenders and offenders with low education. Incarceration rates are more concentrated in communities with high populations of black men with low education. This population has also experienced some of the largest increases in incarceration over time and continue to make up most of the prison population in the country (Raphael 2011; Turney 2014). Part of this increase can be explained by the fact that black men are often profiled and receive differential treatment from the judicial system. Studies have found that they are incarcerated at higher rates in areas with larger white populations (Pettit and Western 2004). Beyond being incarcerated at higher rates, black men also have more trouble reintegrating into society. Upon release from prison, they do not have enough social connections and the ones that they do have are often unhelpful in acquiring jobs (Ray et al. 2016). Often times, they are forced back into the underground economy of drug dealing. Along with having less social networks, black ex-offenders are subject to racism and stigma which often leads to poorer job outcomes and higher rates of recidivism.

However, it is not only the population of black men who have experienced an increase in incarceration rates. In fact, the annual growth in female incarceration has surpassed that of the men in the past two decades (Messina et al. 2006). Although there has been an increase in female incarceration, studies have found that women are still less likely than men to have a prior record upon arrest and, if they do have a record, their record is much more likely to be less severe (Bernadette et al. 2003). This increase in both the female and black male populations are largely due to drug-related arrests however; the way men and women engage in drug abuse is very different. Women are often socialized into drug use by a male partner compared to men who are often exposed through peer groups (Bernadette et al. 2003).

Incarceration rates are not just tied to being male and black, although that population is being incarcerated at higher rates. Women and those of low socio-economic status are also experiencing an increase in incarceration rates. However, the problems that face these offenders upon release are all the same, although to vary degrees.

Identifying

As introduced in the *Demographic Patterns of Incarceration* section of the paper, minorities of race and socioeconomic status, are over-represented in the criminal justice system, and have very little access to sources of social capital or control. The reduction of these resources makes it difficult for minorities to acquire the necessary tools to create mobility and create a stable lifestyle with components, such as employment and housing (Giordano 2002). The lack of social capital held by minority groups and those with highly stigmatized identities demonstrates a form of inequality present in society. Without this social capital, these groups are often systematically oppressed, which makes their reintegration after incarceration even more

difficult. This cycle enforces current systems, like the school to prison pipeline and legitimizes and justifies gaps in place, which perpetuates systemic inequalities throughout society. Since there is a decreased sense of agency amongst groups who have less power, resources, or control, cognitive transformations, or agentic moves are not likely to be enough in order to change behavior to break bad habits and cycles (Giordano 2002). This means disadvantaged minority groups will need stronger motivations and more available resources in order to facilitate behavior to promote a healthy lifestyle. Similar to minority groups, the mentally ill also struggle with making life changes due to systemic oppression. Those who are mentally ill and have committed crimes are, often, highly involved in extremely encapsulating drug cultures, which requires a higher level of individual motivation or “up-front commitment” to make a long-lasting change (Giordano 2002). Being vulnerable to psychological distress is an important factor to consider when a person seems unable to make positive lifestyle changes. It is evident that marginalized populations, such as minorities and mentally ill are more susceptible to housing insecurity because they have access to fewer resources, power, and forms of capital in society.

NATURE OF THE PROBLEM

The United States has one of the highest incarceration rates in the world in that “3 percent of adults in the United States currently endure some form of correctional supervision, including the 2.3 million individuals incarcerated and the additional 4.9 million individuals on probation or parole” (Turney 2014). Studies have shown that, upon release from prison, ex-offenders often experience a decreased quality of life. They are unable to find housing or a job and have lost many of their social connections. The effects of incarceration often go beyond the incarcerated individuals. Ex-offender’s families also experience negative consequences from the offender’s incarceration. As a society, we have not yet decided how ex-offenders should be viewed once

they are released from prison. Once released, ex-offenders are forced to continually pay for their offense, through social isolation and a decreased quality of life. When an ex-offender reenters society, he or she does not get to enter with a clean slate; the title of “convict” sticks to him/her. Addressing all the individual factors that impact an ex-offender’s reintegration is beyond the scope of this paper. This paper will narrow in on a few factors (i.e. employment, social support, and relationships) to investigate in more depth.

Employment

Upon release from prison, most ex-offenders have trouble finding a job. Often times, this difficulty is due to the stigma that is associated with incarceration. Most ex-offenders are viewed through the stereotype of being untrustworthy or dangerous and, therefore, have trouble finding conventional jobs. However, this section will address some of the other factors, beyond social support and relationships, that lead to decreased job opportunities for ex-offenders.

Attaining legitimate employment is often viewed as a requirement for an offender’s successful reintegration into society (Visher et al. 2003). Legitimate employment is viewed as employment that is not involved in an underground economy, which is an economy that revolves around an untaxed market and often involves drugs selling and prostitution. Without adequate employment, ex-offenders are unable to procure housing. One reason that employment is so difficult for ex-offenders to acquire is that, while in prison, they do not have the opportunity to gain life skills that are necessary to make them a competitive job candidate. Prisons have not been able to increase their education/vocation classes at the same rate that their populations have been increasing (Visher et al. 2003). Due to this, offenders are not provided the opportunity to keep their job skills up to date. The salience of the internet means that not only is information

spread faster but the ways jobs are conducted is constantly changing—new jobs, using new technology, are always being created. Someone who is incarcerated is often unable to access this new technology and is, therefore, ill-equipped for the changing job market upon release. However, the problem of employment is much more complex than ex-offenders lacking skills. There are many jobs that ex-offenders are barred from having, due to state and federal laws (Ray et al. 2016). This makes the job market for an ex-offender even smaller than that of someone who has never been incarcerated. There are some jobs that ex-offenders do not have the skills for, due to the lack of skill acquisition during incarceration, and other jobs that they, legally, cannot apply for. Therefore, the job market that an ex-offender is eligible for is extremely narrow. Beyond that, they must also compete within this limited market against individuals who do not carry the stigma of being incarcerated.

Many, ex-offenders must have employment in order to be in accordance with their parole standards (Ray et al. 2016). Without proper employment, ex-offenders often end up being sent back to prison, on the basis of a parole violation. However, as the examples above outlined, this employment is often hard to attain. In this way, lack of employment becomes a way in which ex-offenders find themselves trapped in a cycle of repeated incarceration. Stable employment is also necessary in order for individuals, ex-offender or otherwise, to be able to afford housing. Stable housing is another parole requirement for ex-offenders (Ray et al. 2016). Offenders are barred from public housing and, therefore, must find other means of housing. However, without suitable employment, ex-offenders are unable to pay for housing and, once again, find themselves in violation of parole and incarcerated.

Employment provides ex-offenders with a way to form a new community and present themselves as a positive role model. Stable employment also decreases the chances that ex-

offenders will re-engage in criminal behaviors (Ray et al. 2016). Jobs not only provide ex-offenders with financial security and housing possibilities but; it can also provide them with a completely new group of social connections thereby facilitating their successful reintegration.

Social Support

Upon release from prison, ex-offenders must learn how to navigate their new identity of “convict.” However, there are many difficulties within navigating this identity. The label of convict is an extremely stigmatized label, with individuals often assuming that convicts are dangerous and untrustworthy (Ray et al. 2016). It is this stigma that not only makes it hard for ex-offenders to find employment but to also reintegrate successfully. Those of high status and power often attempt to formulate norms which isolates groups with stigmatized identities and pushes them to the fringes of society (Link and Phelan 2013). One way in which marginalized groups are continuously kept down is through stereotype threat. Stereotype threat occurs when an individual is aware of the negative views associated with their identity and perform worse on a task because of these societal expectations (Link and Phelan 2013). One area where ex-offenders may experience stereotype threat is during job interviews. Even if the ex-offender does not believe that the stereotype is applicable to who they are, just being aware of the stereotype’s existence, and the fact that their interviewer may believe it, can cause the ex-offender to perform poorly during the interview, thereby verifying the stereotype in the interviewer’s mind (Major et al. 1998).

Negative stereotypes may also cause individuals to disengage or disidentify from the area in which they feel the stereotype is being applied (Major et al. 1998). An ex-offender who disengages from searching for employment due to negative stereotypes may start to view

legitimate employment as not important or necessary to them. In comparison, an ex-offender who dis-identifies with employment will not view their inability to procure legitimate employment as representative of how they are as a person. Although, disengagement and disidentification may help ex-offenders maintain their self-esteem by discounting areas in which stereotypes are prevalent, these actions also hinder them from being able to procure employment. This forces ex-offenders into a vicious cycle in which they must ignore fields that are important for their reintegration in order to maintain their self-esteem.

Ex-offenders are often aware of the negative stereotypes and stigma that surround their identities. They are also aware of how their joblessness is perceived by others and, therefore, hesitate to reach out to the few connections that they do have in order to secure a job, due to shame and embarrassment (Ray et al. 2016). Instead, they try to succeed at finding a job on their own, without the help of friends and family, another example of how ex-offenders are pushed to the fringes of society. Ex-offenders also receive very little support from society. They are continuously punished for crimes that they have already served time for. Once released, they are subjected to negative stereotypes and stigma which makes it difficult, if not impossible, to secure legitimate jobs and succeeds in pushing them into a cycle of joblessness, homelessness, and criminal activity.

Relationships

Jobs in the United States are often obtained through social capital, which is the way in which individuals gain necessary cultural and economic influence/information through the relationship networks that they are a part of. It is not a question of *what* a person knows but rather *who* a person knows. While in prison, offenders lose connection to most of their family

and friends and, upon release, find that many of their relationships have dissolved. Without these relationship networks, job searches become difficult, to nearly impossible, for ex-offenders. Not only do they have to manage the stigma of being labeled an ex-offender, but they also do not have former employers or family/friends who are willing to vouch for them to possible employers. However, offenders often enter into prison with less social connections than most individuals (Ray et al. 2016). This is largely due to factors that were addressed in the Populations section. Ex-offenders are often minorities, come from poor neighborhoods, and have low levels of education. These factors make it particularly difficult for them to create relationships that are helpful towards attaining legitimate employment. Often times, the networks that ex-offenders do have before prison are deeply tied in the underground economy and it is these same networks which helped facilitate their incarceration in the first place. Therefore, these networks provide them with little help upon release.

Even if ex-offenders do have possibly helpful networks in which to engage, they often chose not to due to the stigma surrounding their incarceration—a tendency referred to as defensive individualism. Defensive individualism is when an individual chooses not to engage in the relationship networks that they do have in order to protect those in the network or to maintain their own self-esteem (Ray et al. 2016). ex-offenders often view the stigma attached with being a convict as damaging to family and friends and, for this reason, often chose not to use whatever few social connections that they do have.

POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

In communicating with the members of the Valley Court Diversion Program (VCDP), it is apparent that housing insecurity is a serious problem among ex-convicts and continues to

occur despite current programs and initiatives. The potential solutions suggested to the VCDP will be categorized as short term and long term and fall into three tiers of interaction: the individual level, the community, and the systemic level. Short term solutions will provide reactionary responses to instances of homelessness and housing insecurity while long term solutions will attempt to proactively reduce housing crises before they occur. These solutions are influenced by findings in the literature and also the concept of restorative justice. The VCDP emphasizes components of restorative justice, such as mending physical, social, and emotional relationships; obligations to repair harm; and following through to put things right. In both the short and long term proposed solutions, it is important to recognize restoring property loss, restoring sense of security, restoring a sense of empowerment, and restoring social support when attempting to alleviate housing insecurity and restoring justice (Braithwaite 1999).

Short Term

The short-term solutions proposed to the VCDP will occur at the individual, community, and systemic levels. Before attempting to enforce preventative measures to decrease homelessness, reactionary solutions are necessary in order to address the various situations currently at hand. At the individual level, deterring the desirability of deviant/criminal behavior itself is an important first step. Making this fundamental change requires a shift in identity, supported by an energizing, positive event, such as having a job or a strong support system in friendships or spouses (Giordano 2002). Responsibility and a concrete commitment in any form is extremely helpful in promoting these identity shifts. At the community level, actors should partner together to form a network of resources, such as food pantries, and local programs to provide to those who find themselves homeless due to the criminal system. Publicizing resources in the surrounding area that are offered to offenders, will increase agency by providing apparent

options for potential life improvements. At the systemic level, communities, along with the prison industrial could look into creating temporary housing for ex-offenders. As mentioned in the Nature of the Problem section, ex-offenders struggle to procure housing due to problems that are created while they are in prison (i.e. lack of job skill growth, loss of connections, increased stigma). Ensuring funded housing for a set period of time would remove the burden of finding housing from ex-offenders. Creating structure and a regulatory period can be one of the most reliable and effective solutions for restorative justice. Future field research, may also shed light on further potential short term, systemic solutions to decrease homelessness and number of re-offenders.

Long Term

Long term solutions are proactive in their attempt to reduce the overall occurrence of housing insecurity for ex-offenders. Long term solutions appear to be systemically based due to the stigma that society places on the individual. Therefore, it is up to communities to change policies and create an environment that encourages the successful reintegration of ex-offenders. At the community level it is essential that the members of the community acknowledge the problem of criminal behavior and its link to homelessness. Community members need to see the value of restorative justice programs, which often occurs when structure and regulatory periods are enforced through catalysts known as “hooks” (Giordano 2002). A “hook for change” is a motivator that encourages an individual to engage in positive, long lasting behavioral and lifestyle changes (Giordano 2002). Hooks direct an actor’s attention toward present and future concerns and provide them with a detailed plan of action (Giordano 2002). Hooks can be beneficial tools for lasting behavior changes and also help create a replacement-self, aligned with the new values that have been formed from their behavioral and life changes. Ideally,

communities will recognize the success of restorative justice practices and take responsibility for their young offenders and care more about the deeper, institutional sources of the problem (Braithwaite 1999). Acknowledgement at the community level of the productivity of restorative justice practices will affect the systemic level and influence policy changes. Once the importance and benefits of restorative justice are recognized by the community, actors will be more likely to support policy changes that promote restorative justice principles, which will consequently decrease criminal behavior and crime rates. Systemic, policy solutions offered in the literature were limited; however, field research will apply more directly to current policy issues in New Hampshire and Vermont. For example, New Hampshire currently does not take full advantage of federal funding to alleviate housing insecurity. The communication at the state level between New Hampshire and Vermont is minimal and needs to be greatly improved in order to improve the quality of life in ex-offenders residing in either state, due to the limited resources in such a rural area. Both New Hampshire and Vermont can improve the policies they have in place to establish a more concrete, efficient system that works together on a systemic, community, and individual level.

LITERATURE REVIEW CONCLUSION

The problem of homelessness and housing insecurity as it relates to ex-offenders is more complicated than the scope of this literature was able to outline. Each of the sections mentioned—Employment, Social Support, Relationships—could be an entire report on its own. The goal of this paper was to briefly dive into some of the components of reintegration that the VCDP may be able to address through their programs. The literature has shown that lack of employment, stigma and loss of social support, and lack of positive relationships are just some

issues that increase recidivism rates. The solutions proposed in this review are merely a stepping stone to thinking about how ex-offenders can be helped throughout their reintegration process.

The literature review shows the problem of homeless through an academic lens. The goal of the rest of the portfolio (i.e. the field research) is to show how the issue of homelessness and housing insecurity is being addressed on the ground level by community organizations. It is the researchers hope that the combination of the literature review and field report will help to shed light on this nuanced problem and provide the VCDP with a concrete solution and ways to combat the problem proactively.

FIELD RESEARCH: Field Observations and Interview at the Haven

Field research for the portfolio was conducted at the Upper Valley Haven in White River Junction, Vermont. The Haven is a non-profit organization that provides housing, food, and counseling resources to individuals in the Vermont and New Hampshire area that are experiencing financial and/or housing insecurity. The Haven provides programs for children, adults, and families. They also have eight service coordinators who are trained to meet with individuals in crises and help them formulate possible options and discover resources. The goal of the field research was to determine what resources the Haven could provide to Valley Court Diversion Program (VCDP) pertaining to housing. The reason the researchers chose to conduct research at the Haven is because of its salience in the Upper Valley community. Through word of mouth and interview research, it was concluded that the Haven is considered to be the leading organization in the Vermont and New Hampshire area that provides housing and additional resources to individuals suffering from housing insecurity. The researchers hoped to receive a more personal view of the Haven through on-site observations and interviews and determine its use to the VCDP.

VCDP is often in position of emergency planning in which they must find individuals housing within a matter of hours. However, as mentioned in the literature review, the problem of housing for former felons runs much deeper than just a lack of physical space. Mental illness, joblessness, a lack of social connections, and stigma related to crime are all closely linked to housing insecurity. The reason the Haven is so highly regarded in the area is because it attempts to address the factors that are causing housing insecurities along with supplying housing for individuals. The Haven engages with federal, state, and local resources, while creating their own personal relationships with programs and shelters in the area. They serve as an example of how

to react to the immediate problem of housing insecurity while also looking towards long term, preventative measures to decrease the occurrence of homelessness.

METHODS

The field research at the Haven was conducted in two parts, the first of which was an on-site interview and tour with the executive director Sara Kobylenski. Before the interview, members of the team drafted questions to ask Ms. Kobylenski pertaining to her role at the Haven and the Haven's role within the Upper Valley. The purpose of these questions was to piece together how the Haven could help VCDP find housing for their participants along with possible resources the Haven could share with VCDP. The researchers hoped that the interview with the executive director of the Haven would provide more information on the programs that the Haven has to offer to the community. It was also, the hope that the interview would illuminate the structural day to day workings while the observations would send light on the interpersonal interactions that take place at the Haven. Two days before the visit, an email was sent to Ms. Kobylenski outlining the research questions and the information the interviewers hoped to gain from the visit. Two members of the team visited the Haven on a Tuesday morning at 8:00, which was right before the Haven had opened for the day and met with the executive director. The entire interview and visit lasted approximately 90 minutes. Since Ms. Kobylenski had been briefed on the purpose of the research before the meeting, she had designed a presentation and points of interest to discuss with the interviewers. For these reasons, the interview was more structured than expected and lasted approximately 60 minutes, with the presentation comprising 50 minutes. The last ten minutes were used to ask clarifying questions that had not been answered by the presentation. The interview took place in Ms. Kobylenski's office, which was situated across from the entrance and welcome desk at the Haven. From her office, it was

possible to observe occupants entering for breakfast when the Haven opened its doors for the day. After the interview, Ms. Kobylenski toured the researchers around the Haven's facilities, while continuing to elaborate on the resources available to individuals seeking help. Although the tour did not go into any of the shelter's bedrooms, pictures of the bedrooms and private rooms were shown to the researchers at the end of the tour.

Field observations were conducted at the Haven by the researcher on the team who was not present for the interview. The goal of the field observations was to procure an accurate sense of the people who sought help from the Haven, and their reasons for coming. The researchers hoped that the field observations would provide a more intimate and personal view of the Haven and its occupants. The observations were meant to compliment the structural perspective that had been provided during the interview. In this way, the Haven could be understood through a structural and interpersonal lens. Before beginning observations, the team considered what observations would be most useful, the authenticity of the observations, and any biases the researchers might impose on the observations. The field observations were conducted on the same Tuesday at 4:50 pm and lasted for about an hour and 40 minutes. The researcher sat in the Haven dining room and observed people before, during, and after a provided meal. In conducting these observations, it was important not to affect or influence the usual behavior of the members at the Haven; as the purpose of the observations was to get an accurate depiction of the daily activities and interactions. In order to do this, the researcher was quiet and sat at a dining room table with a notebook and pen to take notes. She engaged in conversation when asked a question, however, did not initiate conversation with individuals. By doing this, she realizes that her presence may have seemed abnormal to individuals at the Haven and could have made other people uncomfortable, possibly affecting the naturalness of the interactions she was observing.

RESOURCES

Local Programs

The field research concluded that the resources provided by the Haven would be the most efficient way to alleviate the VCDP's housing problem. It is designed as a welcoming space for the community and its employees are taught how to best utilize local, state, and federal resources to the benefit of the individuals who are seeking help. The Haven strives to address more than just the problem of housing insecurity. When a person enters the front doors of the Haven, immediately to the right is a coat rack of lightly used winter coats for people to take. There is no sign out sheet or attendant, just the simple note "Take a coat if you need one." Next to the coats are three boxes of free books. The dining area, when not being used as a seasonal shelter at night, is always filled with food. The researchers were informed that there are always free loaves of bread from King Arthur Flour Cafe and the kitchen makes sure that there are always snacks. People are welcomed to gather in the dining area during the day, regardless of whether or not they are staying in one of the Haven's shelters. A full dinner, continental breakfast, and snacks are provided each day. The Haven's food pantry is open to the community, Monday through Friday, and is designed to look like an actual supermarket. Fresh fruits and vegetables are donated by local farms and organizations and volunteers stock the food pantry every morning before it opens.

The Haven has three shelters on its property: the Hixon House Adult Shelter, the Byrne House Family shelter, and the seasonal shelter. The seasonal shelter is set up in the dining area after dinner time. The purpose of the seasonal shelter is to provide additional beds during the cold weather months when the other shelters are full, and it is dangerous to sleep outside. The

seasonal shelter can fit about eighteen people and the space is divided into male and female beds. It remains open until it reaches capacity. Although the Haven's main building, which houses the seasonal shelter, closes from 7:30-8:30 every day, occupants of the shelter are not required to take their belongings with them and may leave them in the dining area during that hour. Ms. Kobylenski told the researchers that, "When people come into our regular program shelters, they have space. They come in they put their stuff there. They come and go, but they don't have to take their stuff. They're not turtles at that point." The Hixon House Adult Shelter has ten bedrooms, seven individual bathrooms, and can usually house about twenty-one people. As Ms. Kobylenski informed the researchers, fourteen of the twenty-one current occupants are men, which is a gender imbalance that the Haven usually tries to avoid. The Hixon House has its own computer room which occupants may use at their leisure. It is also has its own dining room and kitchen which, similar to the one in the main building, is always stocked with food and snacks. Occupants of the Hixon House are required to complete weekly chores in the house as part of their stay. Each occupant is assigned a day of the week and a chore to complete. The mean stay for occupants in the Hixon House is 101 days.

The Byrne House Family Shelter houses eight families. Unlike other family shelters in the areas which often will not allow fathers to stay, entire families (including fathers) are allowed to come and stay in Byrne House. Currently, the shelter is housing 6 two parent families and 2 single parent families. Families are given two adjoining bedrooms, one which is fitted with bunk beds and the other which has a single full bed. There are four full kitchens, which are shared by two families. Upon arrival, each family is given a color which corresponds to the color coding on their bedroom doors, the hallway carpets leading to their living spaces, and their kitchen. In this

way, families keep track of which rooms are theirs. The mean stay for occupants in Byrne House is 98 days.

All three of the Haven's shelters are low barrier shelters. This means that although occupants can enter the shelters while under the influence, they cannot continue to use while in the shelters. Occupants who do use while in one of the shelters are given multiple chances before they are asked to leave. The Haven offers substance abuse counseling through other organizations in the Vermont and New Hampshire area and will often try to get their occupants help through these means before asking them to leave.

The Haven is equipped with eight full time Service Coordinators. The Service Coordinators are available to meet with an individual as soon as they arrive seeking help. The role of the Service Coordinators is to talk with individuals and figure out what options and resources are available for that individual. Service Coordinators meet one on one with individuals for as long as they need to until a solution has been found. Three to four coordinators work full time with the Haven's adult and family shelters. The other coordinators are there for the general community. Individuals are almost always guaranteed a same day meeting with one of the coordinators. When helping individuals, the Service Coordinators exhaust the Haven's resources along with other local, state, and federal resources.

There are some limitations to the housing that the Haven offers. They do not offer individual housing for teens and the Haven is almost never empty, making it hard for people to get housing there. However, the Haven partners with other shelters and organization in the area to fill these gaps. When a teenager arrives at the Haven looking for housing, a Service Coordinator will often call over to The Junction at LISTEN and see if they have space available.

LISTEN is another local organization that provides forms of housing, food, clothing, and other resources. Field research was not conducted at LISTEN and, therefore, there is not much detailed information about that organization in this report. The Haven has a very close relationship with many of the shelters in the New Hampshire and Vermont area. When all the shelters at the Haven are full, the service coordinators will often call other local shelters in Vermont and New Hampshire to check for space. Often times, acquiring housing at these shelters may take negotiation on the part of the Haven staff, however, the Haven has formed an informal partnership with most of the shelters in the area. If there are no beds available in any of these spaces, the Haven will next check what state resources might be available for the individual or will offer to pay for a night in a hotel. As Ms. Kobylenski stated, “So, are we full? Yes. But will we always talk with people and do problem solving? Yes. We have three people who do nothing but that all day long. Every day.”

The Haven also has a series of adult learning classes that individuals can take part in, even if they are not being housed at the Haven. These classes are designed to help adults build the skills they need in order to secure a stable job and permanent housing. Adults can take financial literacy classes that will help them learn how to budget money successfully and classes that help them understand tenant laws and topics related to renting/leasing a living space. The programs also help connect individuals with beneficial, mental health programs. The goals of the adult learning classes are to provide individuals with skills that will enable them to combat homelessness. Although the Haven’s main role within the community is to provide emergency housing, they also seek to eliminate this need through their adult literacy programs.

State Programs

The Haven has a relationship with many of the Welfare Officers in Vermont and New Hampshire. The officers in Vermont are state based while those in New Hampshire are town based. Welfare Officers are often able to provide money for temporary hotel housing for individuals who are experiencing housing emergencies. Officers will also often know if there is additional emergency housing available in the state that the Haven missed in their search. The Haven often tries to connect individuals with their Welfare Officers, even if housing has already been found, because the officers are often better equipped to navigate the federal resources.

The Haven will often contact the Economic Services Division (ESD) of Vermont, if the individual is a Vermont resident. This state department provides help for individuals going through housing emergency, fuel/energy emergencies during winter, and other crises. The department provides individuals with benefits, so that they can afford the essentials. They also offer an individual up to 84 nights of housing in a hotel over a 12 month period. ESD supplies adverse weather exceptions for housing. This means that if ESD determines that the weather is bad enough, Vermont citizens without housing are automatically eligible for a paid night in a hotel.

Federal Programs

The field research conducted at the Haven did not largely illuminate the federal options that are available for individuals suffering from housing insecurity. Ms. Kobylenski largely focuses on utilizing the available local and state resources. However, the Haven's website offers links to some of their community partners and also provides links to governmental websites that can be used to receive federal aid. One such website is *Benefits.org*, which calculates the amount of federal and state aid money that is available for an individual. The website has individuals

answer questions in a series of categories: general, household, education, health, income & assistance, and work experience. It then calculates which federal aid programs a person is eligible to use. The program offers the *Projects for Assistance in Transition from Homelessness* and the *Continuum of Care Homeless Assistance Program*. Both of these programs aim to provide housing to individuals who are homeless.

CONCLUSION

After reviewing the current literature and conducting field observations, it is clear that housing insecurity is a prevalent issue in the Upper Valley and the nation as a whole. The current situation at hand is complex and must be approached from more than just a reactionary standpoint if the stress and danger associated with housing insecurity is to be alleviated. With these following proposed solutions, the VCDP will be able to take a preventative, proactive approach to solving housing insecurity. The Possible Solutions section of the Literature Review highlighted the different tiers of the problem. We identify these three tiers to be, the individual level, the community level, and the systemic level. Similarly, the proposed solutions below are categorized within their tiers and within the timeframe of short term or long term. These categorizations are created so that the VCDP can best implement appropriate solutions across a variety of situations.

Short Term Solutions

The field research has shown that the Haven has the potential to be an immensely useful resource in providing housing, expanding the VCDP's network, and accomplishing the organization's restorative justice principles. At the individual level, the Haven provides immediate housing solutions while also offering counseling through Service Coordinators who

provide guidance in areas such as job searches, money management, and mental health issues. At the community level, the Haven has the potential to be a useful partner for the VCDP. Through the Haven, the VCDP can become more integrated with the different services available in the region and can create a sense of community with other organizations. Building relationships with other organizations through the Haven will increase efficiency and the quality of care they provide to their clients. At the systemic level, it could be worthwhile for the VCDP to communicate with the courts to determine some of the biggest issues recurring offenders have within the judicial systems. Identifying these common issues would help to highlight areas that could be strengthened in the judicial system and help to enforce policy changes. Identifying these issues would also allow the VCDP to shape their restorative justice program so that it could become more proactive and reach out to at risk populations before they end up in the judicial system.

Long Term Solutions

At the individual level, the VDCP could look into expanding the programs that they offer to their clients. Offering individuals educational classes on topics such as job acquisition, money management, and lifestyle and behavioral changes will hopefully reduce criminal behavior/recidivism and secure stable housing. At the community level, an official partnership with the Haven would serve both parties' interests in the overall goal of eliminating the cycle of criminal behavior to homelessness. At the systemic level, instilling state policies that acknowledge the way incarceration and mental illness contribute to housing insecurity would help to eliminate this problem over time. The VCDP could look into acquiring volunteers so that the directors could shift their priorities to policy creation and campaigning that address the root causes of housing inequalities. As mentioned in the literature review, having employment and

housing are parole requirements for former felons (Ray et al. 2016). However, many felons have trouble getting employment due to the stigma associated with being incarcerated and, therefore cannot afford housing, leaving them homeless and thereby creating even more difficulties in finding a job. Former felons, who do not have family members that are willing to support them, enter into a constant cycle of incarceration due to parole violations. Policy addressing parole requirements, such as the ones listed above, would be beneficial in combating housing insecurities at a systemic level.

The VCDP strives to reduce the occurrence of homelessness due to criminal acts, along with engaging participants in restorative justice in an effort to break the cycle of criminalization. Through a review of the existing literature and field research, the researchers have attempted to establish an appropriate categorization of the ways in which homelessness manifests at different levels. The field research has made it apparent that the Haven is an invaluable resource in Vermont and New Hampshire in terms of dealing with housing instability. An official partnership between the VDCP and the Haven would be beneficial for both organizations. The VCDP would be able to more adequately provide appropriate housing and resources for their clients through the Haven's services. In return, the VCDP would be able to provide the Haven with a restorative justice program, something that the Haven does not currently have. In this way, the VCDP could help decrease the amount of recurring ex-offenders that cycle in and out of the Haven's programs and services.

The literature review and field research has shown that homelessness and housing insecurity, especially as it relates to ex-offenders, is a nuanced problem. There are many factors that make reintegration difficult for ex-offenders. Some of the factors that the researchers touched on are the stigma and stereotypes associated with being labeled as a convict, ex-

offenders' lack of social connections and relationships, and the difficulties in attaining suitable employment. However, these issues only begin to touch the surface of a much larger problem. The prison industrial system within the United States is designed to bring in billions of dollars for for-profit corporations, it has its own market with its own shares. It is not a system that is designed to help offenders build their lives and rehabilitate but rather, it is meant to continuously funnel individuals through a system that makes money off of their presence. The VCDP strives to break this cycle of incarceration by offering individuals an alternative to jail and preventing entrance into this damaging industry. It is the researchers' hope that the provided analysis of homelessness and incarceration has helped to shed light on the existing inequalities in the Upper Valley Area and has provided useful and productive solutions for future VCDP initiatives.

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