Community Assistantship Program

Community Offender Reentry Program Evaluation Project
December 2009

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Executive Summary

The Community Offender Reentry Program (CORP) has been in existence for three years as a program that provides referral services and intensive case management for offenders being released into the Duluth, Minnesota, area. CORP is approaching the end of its pilot program period; therefore the timing is right for an evaluation to be conducted. The project with CORP had three main goals. These were: 1. To evaluate the inputs and outcomes of the CORP program, specifically from April 2008 through March 2009; 2. To develop on-going evaluation tools; and 3. To assist in meeting the evaluation requirements of various grants.

In order to meet the first goal, the researcher created an interview schedule/questionnaire, conducted interviews with 24 active or recently closed clients and analyzed the data. The results of the program evaluation study showed that overall, clients perceived the program to be beneficial. Services which were rated the highest included the relationship with the case manager and receiving bus passes. Participants in the study offered some helpful feedback regarding the mentor aspect of the program, identifying it as a beneficial component which could use further development. While causation cannot be established in this type of study, the finding of a high employment rate (66.7%) among participants is encouraging.

For the second goal area, the researcher explored other existing reentry models, programs, and evaluation tools; and, with the assistance of CORP staff, created new database screens from which useful reports could easily be pulled for on-going evaluation purposes. New database screens were developed to track client progress on goals. Existing screens for referrals, demographics and final outcomes were updated to include specific sections for CORP clients. These changes allow for more effective and efficient reporting for grant purposes as well as on-going program evaluation.

In order to meet the third goal, the researcher analyzed existing data from case notes and database entries. An annual report for the Office of Justice Programs (OJP) grant was due during the project period and the researcher used this secondary data analysis to contribute to the report. The OJP report contains information regarding employment, mental health, chemical dependency and recidivism. The secondary data analysis showed several positive results, including a low recidivism rate of 8.5% among all clients involved in CORP from April 2008 through March 2009.

This report is divided into three main sections (Program Evaluation, On-going Evaluation Tools, and Grant Evaluation) with each section containing a discussion of the project associated with the relevant goal. The introduction/literature review and significance sections are related to the project as a whole.

Introduction/Literature Review

According to Janene Falley, a detective in Topeka, Kansas, “Everyone can change … Some simply don’t have that ability without serious intervention” (quoted in Breyne, 2006, p.21). Reentry programs have sprung up around the country to provide the support, assistance, and intervention necessary to help facilitate that change. While there have been few such programs for several decades, the majority of them began through a series of reentry initiatives started by the Office of Justice Programs in the late 1990s (Taxman, Young, Byrne, Holsinger, & Anspach, 2002). One of the reasons for the increasing need for reentry programs is the changes which have occurred in the parole system. According to Petersilia (1999) the role of the parole officer has gradually shifted from that of service and assistance, i.e. helping parolees transition through finding housing, gaining employment and getting into treatment programs, to that of
detection and surveillance. This shift is partially due to the increase in the conditions of parole (Petersilia, 1999).

Reentry programs aim to provide these transitional services and assistance. They generally include a variety of services revolving around employment, housing, chemical dependency, mental health, and involvement in community activities and/or social networks. Some programs also incorporate a mentoring component. Others focus on only one aspect such as employment, housing or faith based counseling. Some of these programs are referral agencies while others also provide intensive case management. Other programs actually have on-site businesses and transitional housing opportunities into which their clients are funneled. The Community Corrections and Reentry Programs run by Pioneer Human Services in Washington State are an example of the latter. The subject of this study, Community Offender Reentry Program (CORP) operated through SOAR Career Solutions in Duluth, Minnesota, provides both referral services and intensive case management.

Goldsmith and Eimicke (2008) list several environmental and community factors that can impact prisoner reentry:

- shortage of public housing
- child-support payments
- gang activity (in and out of prison)
- social characteristics of neighborhoods
- restrictions on where ex-offenders can work and limited job prospects
- no savings and no immediate entitlement to unemployment benefits (p.2).

It is clear then, that reentry programs should target these areas in order to successfully reduce recidivism and aid in the reintegration process. Goldsmith and Eimicke go on to outline several effective interventions for reentry programs. These include “enhanced supervision,” “adding employment to support and supervision,” “starting programs before release,” and “faith and community support” (2008, p.3-7).

It is just as clear that no one agency can address all of these factors. Petersilia (1999) identifies collaboration as a key component to successful reentry initiatives. She states that no one agency whether it be law enforcement, department of corrections, non-profit, mental health, or parole, can work in isolation to provide effective transition services and reduce crime in the community. CORP collaborates with several organizations including its parent organization, SOAR Career Solutions for employment services, the local community college for education opportunities, a local mental health center for mental health services and Men as Peacemakers for mentorship services. CORP staff are in direct communication with probation/parole officers and county workers, and participate in a transition coalition in order to network with other agencies who provide services to similar populations.

Research on the efficacy of reentry programs is very limited. Kremer (2005) examined 30 reentry programs in order to put together a summary of best practices. He concluded that most of them, “did not have any outcome measurements, no specific infrastructure, and very little systematic approach” (2005, p. 2). In her review of the literature, Petersilia (2004) found only 19 studies that had a comparison study and only two of them were randomized experiments. She concludes that rigorous scientific methods cannot be applied to reentry program evaluations with weak methodology; therefore it cannot be clearly determined which programs work and which do not. Petersilia (2004) goes on to talk about how almost all of these reentry program evaluations measure recidivism as the only outcome criteria.
Significance

A review of the literature shows the importance of conducting evaluations of reentry programs as well as developing useful on-going evaluation tools.

The results of this program evaluation will be useful for CORP to continue developing their programming, apply for additional grants, satisfy grant evaluation requirements and ultimately better serve their clients. Although the results of the study have limited generalizability beyond the geographical region of Duluth, MN, the study has far reaching significance due to the shortage of evaluations of reentry programs. It is hoped that this study can provide ideas and tools for other reentry programs seeking to do evaluations. This study will add to the existing body of literature and provide a basis of comparison for future studies.

While CORP is fortunate to have access to SOAR Career Solutions’ database, the existing screens were not sufficient in gathering the data necessary for grant or program evaluations. The new screens created provide a useful means of gathering and reporting necessary information. It is hoped that these screens can provide helpful examples of ways to collect information for other reentry programs.
Program Evaluation

Research Questions
This program evaluation attempts to answer the following questions:

1. How effective are CORP services?
2. What improvements can be made in order to make the program more effective for clients?
3. What is most important for clients in achieving successful reentry?

Methods
Interviews were conducted by the researcher with 24 CORP participants, using an interview schedule/questionnaire (see Appendix A). The interviews ranged in length from 20 minutes to over an hour, with the average being 45 minutes. Each participant received a $10 gift card as a thank you after completing the interview. There were no issues with inter-rater reliability as the researcher conducted the interviewers, analyzed, coded and entered the data. While the researcher was responsible for these tasks, they were performed in consultation with CORP staff in order to determine the information which was most important.

The closed ended questions were coded and entered into a codebook (see Appendix B). Data analysis was conducted using the statistical software, SPSS. Frequencies were the main statistics calculated.

The data analysis for the qualitative data consisted of identifying the main themes in the responses and determining how to report them. Some of these themes were able to be coded as closed ended questions and entered in the codebook as well. For all of the questions, answers were only reported when more than one participant gave any particular response. For some of the questions, many participants’ answers fit into more than one category, therefore percentages do not total 100% for these questions. For example, a participant response to what they liked most about CORP could include the resources provided and having a supportive case manager. The method of reporting these results generally is frequencies along with a few crosstabulations.

Population and Sample
The population of the study is ex-offenders who are returning to the Duluth, Minnesota, area. This includes those coming from the St. Louis County Jail; Northeast Regional Corrections Center (NERCC), a local men’s workhouse; the local female offender program; Minnesota Department of Corrections and Federal offenders.

The sample for the interviews was drawn from all clients who have participated in CORP or who are currently active. As of May 1, 2009, CORP has served a total of 105 clients since its inception in August 2006. Fifteen clients were closed prior to September 2007. These clients were not contacted for the study as the program has gone through significant changes. Of the 60 remaining closed cases, CORP no longer had current contact information for 25 of them. The remaining 35 closed clients were eligible for the study. Of the 31 active clients, two were not eligible for the study as they entered a treatment program immediately following release and had not used CORP services.

The receptionist from SOAR Career Solutions, the parent organization of CORP, called all the clients regarding the study and asked if they wanted to participate. She used a script, therefore giving the same information to each client. She contacted each client a maximum of three times; leaving messages if not able to get a hold of them. She attempted to contact 35
closed clients and 29 active ones. Of the 35 closed clients, she was only able to get a hold of, or leave messages with 16; six of which scheduled appointments, five of whom showed for their appointment. Of the 29 active clients, 22 scheduled interviews, and 19 showed for their appointment. Out of the 64 total clients contacted, 28 agreed to participate and scheduled appointments for the interview. Of these 28 there were four no call, no shows; therefore 24 interviews were completed. There were originally two additional no shows, however they ended up rescheduling and did complete the interview.

Results

Demographics of the sample

The sample (n=24) was 87.5% male, with only 3 female participants. This is similar to the gender breakdown of the overall population CORP serves which is 82.7% male. It also corresponds to the overall incarcerated population in the United States which is 91% male (West & Sabol, 2009). The ethnic/racial breakdown of the sample was 83.3% European American, 8.3% African American, and 8.3% bi/multiracial. This is slightly different then the ethnic/racial background of all CORP clients which is 70.9% European American, 13.6% African American, 9.1% American Indian, and 2.7% bi/multiracial.

The sample closely resembled the CORP population in terms of age. The sample range is from 20-55, with the mean age being 37.29; the population range is from 20-56 with a mean age of 34.5. It also corresponds to the overall incarcerated population in Minnesota whose average age is 35.7. The number of incarcerations among the sample ranged from 1 to 12 with the average being 4 and the median 2.5. The total length of time incarcerated among the participants ranged from 2 months to 25 years, with the median being 26.5 months. 37.5% of the participants reported juvenile placements ranging in length from 1.3 months to 10 years. Eight participants reported being on probation or parole, and four were still incarcerated at the local work release program.

The length of time participants had been involved with CORP ranged from three weeks to 18 months, with a mean of 4.6 months. The number of times participants met with their case manager was divided into four categories: 1-5, 6-10, 11-15, and 16 or more. The mode response was 6-10.

Quantitative data

The interview schedule (see Appendix A) included several questions which yielded quantitative data. The first set sought to measure how beneficial the services are which CORP provides its clients. Participants ranked services they had used from “not beneficial” to “extremely beneficial.” Table 1 lists these services in order of which were used by the most participants. The most beneficial services used by almost all participants were the relationship with their case managers and bus passes. 23 participants (n=24) utilized case management services with 100% reporting that they were beneficial; 22 participants received bus passes and 100% of them also stated that they were beneficial. Another service which ranked high in both participant use (17) and being beneficial (88.2%) was employment. This variable includes employment classes, assistance with resume writing, interviewing skills, and computer job searches.

The least beneficial services identified by participants were the mentor relationship and child support assistance. Half of the participants (12) reported on the mentor relationship, with 75% of them stating that it was beneficial. Only four participants reported using child support
assistance, 50% stated it was beneficial. Based on comments regarding how to improve the program, it seems that participants like the mentor component of the program; however it needs some adjustments to make it more effective and beneficial to them.

Table One
Participants ranking of CORP services and referrals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service/referral</th>
<th>participants responding (n = 24)</th>
<th>% who answered moderately to extremely beneficial</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relationship with case manager</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bus passes</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment (classes, assistance, etc)</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>88.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing assistance</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>86.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other incentives (gift cards, etc)</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentor relationship</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>75.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal hygiene</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>87.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental health assistance</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>85.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chemical dependency assistance</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>85.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child support assistance</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reentry circle</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The second set of quantitative data questions asked participants whether they agreed or disagreed with a given statement regarding the CORP program and its impact on their transition process. Table Two reports the results of these questions. All but two participants answered each of the questions. 100% of participants responding stated that they feel supported by CORP staff, will come back to CORP in the future if they have problems, their outlook on life has improved since participating in CORP, and they have no second thoughts about sending a friend to CORP.

Table Two
Statements regarding the CORP program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>participants responding (n = 24)</th>
<th>% who agreed with statement</th>
<th>% who disagreed with statement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I feel supported by CORP staff in my transition process.</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In general, CORP services are helping me to be more independent.</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>90.9%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If I have problems in the future I will come back to CORP for help.</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall I feel CORP has been helpful in assisting my transition process.</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>95.9%</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel nervous when I go to CORP.</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
<td>91.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall, things have gotten worse for me since I have been involved with CORP.</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>95.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My outlook about my life has improved since participating in CORP.</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I have second thoughts about sending a friend to CORP for help.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>24</th>
<th>0.0%</th>
<th>100.0%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Men as Peacemakers**

Men as Peacemakers (MAP) is a small non-profit organization focused on mentorship, restorative justice, and domestic violence issues. MAP is a collaborative partner with CORP and has offices in the same building. The mentorship component of CORP is facilitated by MAP and staffed by a mentor coordinator. The mentor coordinator for MAP/CORB also facilitates group meetings for CORP clients once a month. The purpose of these meetings is to facilitate networking and discussions surrounding reentry issues. The remaining service MAP provides for CORP clients is reentry circles. These circles provide an opportunity for CORP clients to sit with various community members and have a dialogue regarding the challenges and rewards of living in mainstream society. This is a fairly new service and only three CORP clients have participated so far. Table one above shows that the two study participants who have been involved in a reentry circle stated that it was beneficial. Table Three shows the numbers and percentages of participants involved in MAP services.

### Table Three

**Participant involvement with Men as Peacemakers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th># of participants involved</th>
<th>% of participants involved</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mentor program (matched)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>45.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(in process of being matched)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men as Peacemakers groups</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reentry circles</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When asked about the potential impact MAP groups have had on their transition, nine participants reported having attended at least one group. Of these, six stated that the group was helpful, and three reported that it was not helpful. Seven participants stated that the meeting times for MAP groups conflicted with their work schedules, and three shared that they did not know about the MAP groups.

Another question asked those participants with mentors to describe their relationship with their mentor. Of the 11 participants with mentors, two had just been matched and therefore had not yet established a relationship with them. Two others reported that they had no contact with their mentors because of their (the participants’) lack of follow through. Two reported that they did not connect or have a positive relationship and five reported a good, positive relationship involving regular contact with their mentor.

**Qualitative data**

**Goal Areas**

The interview included an open ended question regarding what changes had been made in each of the 16 different goal areas (employment, housing, transportation, parenting, family reunification/relationships, education, financial, legal, sobriety, support groups, identification documentation, physical health, mental health, spirituality, food/clothing/basic needs, and other) since the participants’ release. Each of the goal areas is not necessarily applicable to every participant. Although severn participants stated they had goals in the “other” category, none of
the responses were not similar and therefore this goal area is not included in the report. Table four displays the most common response for each of the goal areas that were quantifiable.

### Table Four
Common responses for Goal Areas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal Area</th>
<th>Majority response</th>
<th>Sample (participants with this goal)</th>
<th># of participants giving majority response</th>
<th>% of sample giving majority response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Working full time</td>
<td>N=21</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>61.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parenting</td>
<td>Has regular contact with or custody of children</td>
<td>N=11</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>72.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal</td>
<td>Remained law abiding</td>
<td>N=22</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>81.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal</td>
<td>Currently paying fines/child support/restitution; or all paid</td>
<td>N=12</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>58.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirituality</td>
<td>Involved in church</td>
<td>N=20</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>65.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identification documentation</td>
<td>Obtained one or more post release</td>
<td>N=11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>63.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sobriety</td>
<td>Attends AA/NA/GA</td>
<td>N=22</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>81.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>Living in a halfway house, treatment facility, or group home</td>
<td>N=24</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>45.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Employment**
Twenty-one of the participants (n=24) reported employment as a goal. Of these, 66.7% were working. Four of the respondents were unable to work due to their housing situation, enrollment in a treatment program and/or due to physical injury. Table five shows the current employment situation for the participants with employment as a goal.

### Table Five
Employment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Current Employment Situation</th>
<th># of participants giving response</th>
<th>% of participants giving response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Working full time</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>61.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannot work</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>19.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In process/actively searching</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working part time</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Parenting
Eleven participants identified parenting as a goal. Of these, eight reported having frequent contact with or custody of their children. Three reported establishing contact with their child(ren) for the first time in many years while participating in the program.

Legal
Four participants reported violating the conditions of their release including offenses of driving after suspension and consuming alcohol. Of the twelve participants reporting they owed child support, fines, or restitution, seven stated they are currently paying on them or have paid them off.

Spirituality
Many respondents shared that spirituality was an important aspect in their lives. Thirteen reported actively attending church or church related activities. Two reported being Christians, but not involved in church. Five stated that their spirituality consisted of AA/belief in a higher power, or another form of spirituality.

Identification Documentation
Many CORP clients exit prison without identification (state identification card, birth certificate, or social security card). Eleven participants in the study identified obtaining one or more of these documents as a goal; seven have obtained them since their release.

Education
The answers for this goal were grouped into three categories. Of the 17 participants with education as a goal, two have attended or are currently registered for classes of some type; three have plans to attend classes in the near future (i.e. “I’m going to attend the welding program this fall”); and 12 report that they would like to go back to school in the future, but have no immediate plans to do so.

Sobriety
Twenty-two (n=24) participants reported sobriety as a goal. Many identified this as the key to their successful reentry. Eighteen of these report attending AA/NA/GA meetings. The length of time participants have been sober ranges from 0 to 142 months with a mean of 20.6 months. Five respondents reported having relapsed post-release, and seven are currently in a treatment program (five are in inpatient programs and two are in outpatient programs).

Housing
Participants report housing to be one of their main focus areas upon release. One respondent summed it up well by saying, “It’s hard to plan anything else when you don’t even know where you are going to hang your hat.” Participants’ current living situation was grouped into four categories. These are displayed in table six.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Current Housing Situation</th>
<th># of participants giving response</th>
<th>% of participants giving response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table Six</th>
<th>Housing (n=24)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

12
Mental Health

Sixteen, or 66.7%, of participants reported having a mental health diagnosis. Eleven of these participants were receiving treatment and ten reported taking medication.

Physical Health

The majority of respondents reported they were in good physical health. Some reported various health problems such as back pain, arthritis, carpel tunnel, and being overweight.

Food/Basic Needs

The majority of participants reported no problems in the area of food/basic needs. Many of them have these needs taken care of by their housing, i.e. board and lodge, treatment facility, group home, or custody (work release housing). A few report using local resources such as the food shelf, food stamps, and gift cards from CORP.

Family Reunification/Relationships

Sixty-two percent of respondents reported having one or more supportive family members with whom they are in regular contact. Six participants shared that they have no contact with one or more family members and nine stated that they are in process of reconnecting with a family member, building trust, or have recently made contact for the first time in many years.

Transportation

The majority of participants report taking the bus as their primary means of transportation. Others report getting rides from friends, walking, and riding the bus. Only four participants reported having both a drivable vehicle and a license. Eleven participants or 45.8% reported barriers to getting their drivers license.

Support Groups

When asked to identify their support networks/systems/groups, three of the participants stated they had none. AA/NA/GA meetings (and associated people) and church related groups/activities were identified as the top two support networks by the remaining 21 participants. Table seven lists the various support networks identified by clients.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th># of participants giving response</th>
<th>% of participants giving response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AA/NA/GA meetings/sponsors/people</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>58.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church related groups/activities</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>41.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAP groups/mentor</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Financial

Most respondents report being “broke” or wishing they had more money. Those with jobs are struggling to pay bills, fines, restitution, and child support; and those without jobs are in need of finding a job in order to get on their feet. Two respondents reported having good paying jobs and doing well in this area.

Improvements/Needs Assessment

Participants identified four main services they felt they could benefit from which they had not yet accessed. Five participants stated they were interested in reentry circles, four would like to receive additional incentives/gift cards, three would like mentors, and three wanted more assistance with housing.

Feedback regarding how to make services more beneficial revolved around two main areas. The first is the mentor component. Participants stated that “mentors need training,” there should be a “shorter process for getting a mentor,” and they should “have more people signed up as mentors to be referred to.” There were also three comments regarding employment. One stated that CORP’s services were redundant to what was provided in prison. Another shared that it would be helpful to have actual job leads with “felon friendly” employers. The final employment comment had to do with the policy maintained by the county that if a resident of a board and lodge is employed, they have to turn over a majority of their net wages to the board and lodge.

Only eight participants shared any information regarding what they least liked about the program. Five of these responses had to do with the mentor program or MAP groups. The feedback given included that the process of getting a mentor was too long, “I had to keep calling back – they couldn’t figure out a mentor for me;” that there should be more groups than just one per month; there should be more mentors and mentees involved; and mentors should be more involved in mentees life, “it would help to have them call you.” Specific ideas for group topics were given as well such as information regarding how to obtain housing, paying child support, and mental health issues; and having someone from the college come to the group to speak about furthering their education.

Similarly, the majority of participants did not identify any ways in which CORP could meet their needs more effectively. Of the nine who did, three had to do with the MAP/mentor program, three involved funding, and two had to with macro level policies regarding housing and employment for people with a felony on their records. Suggestions for the MAP/mentor program include having groups in the mornings, better organization, better matching of mentors with mentees of like interests, and more social activities with mentors/mentees. Funding suggestions included funding for a small loans program, for car insurance or down payment/deposit on housing; and more grants for schooling in order for the local community college to offer more classes for CORP participants.

Effectiveness of CORP

The question “How has your involvement with CORP affected the above [goal] areas?” yielded a variety of answers, most of which were not concrete or tangible. Some could be
categorized as simply stating that the services were helpful, while others had to do with having a supportive person as a case manager. Still others were more abstract, stating that it “helped me stay positive,” “added to my reasons for change” or “gave me hope, motivation to stay sober.” Table eight attempts to categorize the various responses to this question.

### Table Eight

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How has your involvement with CORP affected your goal areas?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Response</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services/referrals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case manager/supportive person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intangibles: hope, motivation, focus, confidence, self-esteem, stability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAP/Mentor component</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Participants’ responses could fit into several categories therefore the totals do not equal 24 or 100%.

The responses to the question regarding what participants liked the most about the CORP program were similar to those regarding how involvement in CORP has affected their goal areas. This information is displayed in table nine. The comments of many participants regarding what they like the most about CORP cannot be quantified in a table. Some of them are included below:

“IT’s a non-judgmental place that understands what we are going through and is helpful with it.”
“[Case manager] has been very supportive and compassionate.”
“Someone to be able to talk to about problems. Someone to give you insight about ways to help or better yourself.”
“They aren’t judging me. I love the fact that CORP is here and wants to help us.”
“The empathy of the staff … consideration, understanding of my situation and circumstance.”
“They really try to help – staff aren’t just trying to get a pay check.”
“The people – they make you feel welcome, like you have someone on your side willing to help you.”
“They get your spirits up and show you that things are possible.”

### Table Nine

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What do you like most about the CORP program?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Response</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case manager/staff/people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources/referrals/services</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Participants’ responses could fit into several categories therefore the totals do not equal 24 or 100%.

### Successful Reentry

There were three questions which addressed the concept of a successful reentry from the ex-offenders’ perspective. These questions were, “What does a successful reentry look like to you?” “What have been your three biggest challenges/barriers in achieving successful reentry thus far?” and “What do you feel you need in order to continue transitioning successfully?”
responses given by the study participants are similar for these questions and are displayed in tables 10-12.

**Table Ten**

**What does a successful reentry look like?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th># of participants giving response</th>
<th>% of participants giving response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Obtain and/or maintain employment</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community involvement</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>41.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obtain housing</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintain sobriety</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remain law abiding</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>29.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Become self-sufficient/independent</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Set goals/work on goals</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Participants’ responses could fit into several categories therefore the totals do not equal 24 or 100%.

**Table Eleven**

**Major challenges or barriers in achieving successful reentry**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th># of participants giving response</th>
<th>% of participants giving response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Obtaining housing</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>45.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obtaining/maintaining employment</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>45.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining sobriety</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>29.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of transportation/driver’s license</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>29.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental health issues</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Participants’ responses could fit into several categories therefore the totals do not equal 24 or 100%.

**Table Twelve**

**What do you feel you need to continue transitioning successfully?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th># of participants giving response</th>
<th>% of participants giving response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maintain sobriety</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>41.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support (church, CORP, MAP, family)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Participants’ responses could fit into several categories therefore the totals do not equal 24 or 100%.
Discussion

As presented above, the sample of this study is fairly representative of the population, therefore the results can be assumed to be generalizable. Because of the small sample size of females and clients of color, there is limited generalizability for these sub-populations. Specifically, the sample included no American Indian participants although the population from which the sample was drawn is 9.1% American Indian.

As noted in the literature review, whether or not a reentry program is considered successful is typically measured only by recidivism rates. While the experts agree that recidivism is important, there are many elements that need to fall into place if an ex-offender is to successfully reintegrate into society and not reoffend. This explorative and evaluative study sought to examine which services were most beneficial to clients and how CORP could be most effective in assisting clients in their reentry process. Based on the participants’ responses, it appears that employment, housing, and sobriety are the top three indicators of success and that in order to achieve that, support and community involvement are necessary. This is consistent with some of the factors impacting transition identified by Goldsmith and Eimicke (2008) as well as their proposition of community support and employment options as effective interventions. The fact that so many participants rely on the support of a faith community is also consistent with research showing the effectiveness of involvement in a faith community for ex-offenders (Goldsmith and Eimicke, 2008).

Regarding the section on goals, the researcher hesitated to include the 12 participants with some unidentifiable future goal of education in the report. However, it seemed that even though wanting to go to school in the future is intangible and immeasurable, it is important to include them. The reasoning for doing so can be summed up by one such participant’s statement, “I never would have thought about education if I didn’t come here…. This is the first time I’ve had goals for my life.”

A number of crosstabulations were conducted between several different variables which yielded no relationship. The only two crosstabulations done which appear to show a relationship are between employment status and housing, and employment status and relapse. All participants reporting living in their own apartment/housing also reported being employed full time. Also, none of the participants reporting full time employment reported a relapse. Tables 13 and 14 display these results. While there appears to be a relationship between these variables, no causation can be determined.

### Table Thirteen

**Relationship between Employment status and reported Relapse**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Relapsed</th>
<th>Did not relapse</th>
<th>Missing data</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Working full time</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working part time</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In process/actively searching</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannot work</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No employment goal</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>5</strong></td>
<td><strong>8</strong></td>
<td><strong>11</strong></td>
<td><strong>24</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table Fourteen

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship between Employment status and current housing situation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Own apartment/housing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working full time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working part time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In process/actively searching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannot work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No employment goal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Limitations

There are several limitations to this study. One is the small number of participants for several variable classes. For example, within the sample there were only three females, two African Americans and five participants with closed cases. Therefore it was not possible to conduct any comparison analysis using the sample demographics.

Only having five clients whose cases were closed participate in the study presented another limitation. Because CORP no longer has current contact information for so many closed clients the study lacks their perspective. It is possible that contact was lost due to the clients’ dissatisfaction with the program or unsuccessful reentry. If this is the case, the results of the study would be skewed in a positive direction. The possibility of skewed results in a favorable direction also exits because those clients with a positive view of the program may be more likely to agree to come in and complete the interview.

Another limitation is the relatively short (4.6 months) length of time participants had been involved with CORP. This also affected the mode number of times the participants met with their case manager (6-10). Because of the short time involved in CORP, some of the participants had not utilized many of the services offered or had the opportunity to do much work on their goals. This lessened the ability of the study to capture progress on goals.

Other limitations have to do with the questions themselves. While the first series of questions (see appendix A, question #1) was meant to measure progress on goals, they did not achieve this end. Rather, the questions measured where the individual was currently situated in this area, instead of what progress they had made. The results are still useful, but not in measuring outcomes. Additional statistical analysis could have been conducted on question 3 if the categories had been ordinal: not beneficial, slightly beneficial, moderately beneficial, beneficial, and extremely beneficial. Although it can be assumed that participants took them to be ordinal based on the 1-5 rating scale, the mislabeling could have been confusing. A similar mistake was made for questions 6-13. Labeling these responses strongly disagree, disagree, agree, and strongly agree, would have made them interval in nature, thus allowing for further statistical analysis.

Researcher/interviewer bias is another limitation. While the multitude of open-ended questions allowed for the researcher to obtain a wealth of information, it was impossible to ask
exactly the same follow up questions to every participant. Therefore, some participants may have
given more information that would have fit into the categories used in analysis had they been
asked different or additional follow up questions.

Additional limitations are that this study is based on the self reports of clients. These self
reports could be inaccurate for various reasons including poor memory, human tendency to
minimize or exaggerate problems, and motivation to not disclose sensitive information, i.e.
whether they have violated conditions of their release and not been caught. Inherent in open-
ended questions is the problem of ambiguous answers such as having a “supportive” family
member, which creates yet another limitation.

**Recommendations**

Participants identified seven (employment, housing, transportation, mental health,
support, legal and sobriety) of the 16 main goal areas as obstacles and necessary elements for
achieving successful reentry. This would suggest that CORP staff are on target in focusing on
these goal areas and they should continue to do so for each client whenever applicable.

Employment and housing appear to be major issues and therefore should have primary
focus. It would be beneficial for an agency such as CORP to have a community liaison whose
job would be to build relationships with community employers and landlords in order to facilitate
greater employment and housing opportunities for those with a felony on their record.

Participants in the study gave specific recommendations for the MAP component of the
program. In order to further develop this program and maximize its effectiveness the study
shows that mentor training, better organization, and more group meetings focused on reentry
topics would be beneficial for clients.

The fact that 100% of participants responding to the question regarding case managers
stated that this relationship was beneficial is of utmost importance. Taken along with the
comments regarding what participants like the most about the CORP program, one could
conclude that competent, capable and compassionate case managers are a necessary element in a
successful reentry program.

Although beyond the scope of this study, it is interesting to note that of the eleven
participants who had been incarcerated for 33 months or longer, eight of them had juvenile
placements. Not one participant who reported a juvenile placement had been incarcerated for less
than 33 months. This suggests the need for more research as well as programs geared towards the
successful reentry of juvenile offenders.

There are many limitations to the results and generalizability of this study. Petersilia
(2004) sums up these limitations when she writes, "Engineers measure it with a micrometer,
mark it with a piece of chalk, and cut it with an axe. Criminologists measure it with a series of
ambiguous questions, mark it with a bunch of inconsistent coders, and cut it to within three
decimal places" (p.8). It is therefore necessary that additional program evaluations be conducted
on a variety of reentry programs. It is also essential for CORP to continue evaluating their
program on an on-going basis.
On-Going Evaluation Tools

The second goal of this CURA project for CORP was to “develop on-going evaluation tools.” Although the primary intention of the interview schedule utilized in the program evaluation was for conducting the interviews for that study, this tool had an additional purpose. With some adjustments based on what was learned through the interview process, the interview schedule can be transformed into an exit survey and filled out by all clients when exiting from the program.

The main tool created for the purpose of on-going evaluation however, is the new database screens. Prior to this project, CORP staff entered data into the existing database screens of SOAR Career Solutions (the parent organization). In some areas this worked well as the data collected was important to both SOAR and CORP, but in other areas it seemed either unnecessary to enter the data or there was no place to enter the data which was necessary. After much researching of other reentry programs to see what they used for on-going evaluation tools, it was determined that CORP would need to create their own.

The process of creating these new screens was long and arduous. It began with many questions regarding what data was important for CORP to gather, what specific grants required CORP to report on, and how to define success and outcomes and then how to measure them. The researcher met with the program staff and brainstormed these questions. The next step was to figure out how to collect the necessary data in a user friendly manner without making more work for the case managers. The process continued with making draft copies and asking the question, “why do we want to know that information” in order to ensure that we were not collecting extraneous data just because we had the capability. Finally, the team met with the Associate Director and shared the designs for the new database screens. He in turn passed them on to the database developer to implement. The process continues as the case managers suggest slight revisions here and there to make the new screens more user friendly.

According to Petersilia (2004) most evaluations of reentry programs use recidivism as the only outcome criteria. In contemplating these new database screens and what to measure, CORP staff and the researcher agreed with Petersilia (2004) that “the ultimate goal of reentry programs is reintegration, which clearly includes more than remaining arrest-free for a specified time period.” Therefore, in order to truly measure reintegration, it is necessary “to build into our evaluations measures of attachment to a variety of social institutions” (p.7). Thus, the new database screens which were created include ways to measure progress and outcomes in each of 16 goal areas: employment, housing, transportation, parenting, family reunification/relationships, education, financial, legal, sobriety, support groups, identification, medical/dental, spirituality, mentor, food/clothing/basic needs, and other.

The referral, demographics, and final outcome screens were also updated with sections specific to CORP clients. Places to track relapses and recidivism were also added to the sobriety and legal goal screens respectively. Please see Appendix C for copies of the actual new database screens. The final outcome screen is not included in Appendix C as it is still undergoing more revisions.
Grant Evaluation

The third goal of this CURA project for CORP was to “assist in meeting the evaluation requirements of various grants.” One specific grant evaluation which was due during the time period of the CURA internship was an Office of Justice Programs (OJP) Annual Report. In order to assist with this report, the researcher conducted secondary data analysis by using the files, case notes, and information entered into the existing database. The sample for the secondary data analysis included all participants in CORP from April 1, 2008 through March 31, 2009. The secondary data analysis involved 71 clients, 42 of whose cases were closed during that time period and 29 of whom were active as of March 31, 2009.

There were several specific areas which the OJP wanted data on for this annual report. These included chemical dependency, mental health, job training and acquisition, and recidivism. For the purposes of this report the following operational definitions were used:

- **Recidivism**: new offense or probation violation, whether or not it resulted in incarceration, while involved in the CORP program.
- **Survival period**: the amount of time between intake date and recidivating.
- **Chemical dependency/mental health referral**: all clients who had chemical dependency and/or mental health issues and identified these as goal areas were counted as referrals.
- **Chemical dependency follow through**: clients who actively attended AA/NA meetings or similar groups, or were involved in treatment were considered as following through.
- **Mental health follow through**: clients who were compliant with medications (where indicated), and/or made and kept mental health appointments were considered as following through.

The researcher gathered the data for the report which was written along with the CORP supervisor. Please see Appendix D for the full report.

The results of this study are very promising, particularly the low recidivism rate. Only 6 of 71 clients, or 8.5%, recidivated while in the program. Caution must be taken when using this definition of recidivism, and the resulting low number, due to the absence of long term follow up. Recidivism is very difficult to measure and therefore very difficult to compare statistics; however, a study done involving all prisoners released from 15 states in 1994 showed that there was a 67.5% re-arrest rate within three years of release (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2002).

Another encouraging finding from this study was that 46.7% of clients were employed at the time of the analysis and that 11 clients, or 35.5% of those employed, had been at their current job for over six months. Finally, of note is the number of clients with chemical dependency (64.8%) and mental health issues (40.8%). Because this data was never entered into the database in a systematic manner, these numbers seem to be underreported. This is one of the areas that the new database screens hope to correct and provide more accurate reporting. The good news is that according to the data gathered, 87% of clients with chemical dependency issues were following through and that there was an 86.2% follow through rate for clients with mental health issues.
References


Appendix A

CORP Program Evaluation
Consent form

The Community Offender Reentry Program (CORP) is conducting a program evaluation. The purpose of this survey is to evaluate the effectiveness of CORP services and to improve them. You have been selected for the study because of your status as a client within the CORP program. Participation is voluntary. Your choice to participate or not will not affect the services you receive at CORP. All participants will receive a $10 gift card for their time.

This study is confidential and there will be no identifying information presented in the final report. If you would like CORP staff to know the results of your survey in order to better serve you, please sign below:

Name _____________________________________________ Date ______________________

Whether or not you choose to share your results with CORP staff will not affect the services you receive at CORP.

Thank you.
1. What changes have been made in the following areas since your release? If not applicable, please state so.
   - Employment
   - Parenting
   - Legal
   - Spirituality
   - Identification documentation (ID, Birth certificate, social security card, etc)
2. How has your involvement with CORP affected the above areas?
3. Please rank the following CORP services and referrals according to how beneficial they have been to you, 5 being extremely beneficial and 1 being not beneficial at all. If you have not used them, circle not applicable (N/A).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Not Beneficial</th>
<th>Slightly Beneficial</th>
<th>Beneficial</th>
<th>Moderately Beneficial</th>
<th>Extremely Beneficial</th>
<th>Not Applicable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bus pass</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Incentives (gift cards, etc)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Hygiene</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing Assistance</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment (STEPS, workforce center, Fast Track, computer classes, etc)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Health Assistance</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Support/Assistance</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chemical Dependency Assistance</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentor Relationship</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reentry Circle</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship with Case Manager</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other ______________________________</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Do you feel you could benefit from any of the programs in question #3 which you have not yet participated in? If so, which ones? Have you been referred to them?

5. For the programs which were not beneficial for you in question #3, how could we improve them?
For questions 6-13, please circle the response that best describes your agreement or disagreement with each statement.

6. I feel supported by CORP staff in my transition process.
   - Strongly disagree  
   - Slightly disagree  
   - Agree  
   - Strongly agree

7. I feel nervous when I go to CORP.
   - Strongly disagree  
   - Slightly disagree  
   - Agree  
   - Strongly agree

8. In general, CORP services are helping me to be more independent.
   - Strongly disagree  
   - Slightly disagree  
   - Agree  
   - Strongly agree

9. Overall, things have gotten worse for me since I have been involved with CORP.
   - Strongly disagree  
   - Slightly disagree  
   - Agree  
   - Strongly agree

10. If I have problems in the future I will come back to CORP for help.
    - Strongly disagree  
    - Slightly disagree  
    - Agree  
    - Strongly agree

11. My outlook about my life has improved since participating in CORP.
    - Strongly disagree  
    - Slightly disagree  
    - Agree  
    - Strongly agree

12. Overall I feel CORP has been helpful in assisting my transition process.
    - Strongly disagree  
    - Slightly disagree  
    - Agree  
    - Strongly agree

13. I have second thoughts about sending a friend to CORP for help.
    - Strongly disagree  
    - Slightly disagree  
    - Agree  
    - Strongly agree

14. Do you have a mentor?  
    If so: how would you describe your relationship with your mentor?  
    - How many times have you interacted with your mentor?  
    - Has this relationship impacted your transition?  
      How?

15. Do you attend Men As Peacemakers groups?  
    If so: has it impacted your transition?  
    How?  
    If not: how come?
16. Have you participated in a reentry circle? 
   If so: has it impacted your transition? 
   How?

17. What do you most like about the CORP program?

18. What do you least like about the CORP program?

19. How could we meet your needs more effectively?

20. What have you heard from your friends who do NOT participate in CORP regarding what they think about the program?

21. What does a successful reentry look like to you?

22. What have been your three biggest challenges/barriers in achieving successful reentry thus far?

23. What do you feel you need in order to continue transitioning successfully?

Any other comments you would like to share?