

2024

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

**Phase 2:
Reentrant Perspective**

DCRC

DELAWARE CORRECTIONAL REENTRY COMMISSION

Prepared by Social Contract



Social Contract

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- Community members who shared their experience through the survey and listening sessions
- Delaware Correctional Reentry Commission (DCRC)
- DCRC Landscape Analysis Work Group ([Appendix A](#))
- Community Champions:
 - **Coley Harris** - Lead Champion
 - **Tahali Mubeen** - Lead Champion
 - **Michael Bartley** - Outreach Champion
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 - **Jasmin Carter** - Outreach Champion
 - **Metetwa Shakur** - Outreach Champion
 - **Khalil Abdar-Rashid** - Outreach Champion
 - **Anonymous** - Outreach Champion



We thank you for your continued support in our efforts to understand and improve the reentry system in Delaware.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Throughout 2023, Social Contract, on behalf of the Delaware Correctional Reentry Commission (DCRC), undertook an analysis of the reentry system in Delaware from the perspective of people with lived experience. This assessment was the final part of a two-part analysis of the reentry system, of which the first phase focused on the perspective of service providers in the reentry ecosystem.

The overarching goal of this research is to identify the assets, gaps, and opportunities within the reentry system in Delaware.

Through this work, over 180 people who have been incarcerated in Delaware were engaged to share their experiences, generate potential solutions, and support the implementation and analysis of this research. Eight of those individuals participated heavily in the research, shaping the methodology, design, and analysis as well as conducting the survey and facilitating the listening sessions.

The research, which included a statewide survey and in-person listening sessions, uncovered a wealth of information about the experience of people navigating the reentry process in Delaware. This report analyzes key findings from the data collected and shares solutions generated by individuals with lived experience. All findings and solutions presented in this report come directly from the data collected from individuals with lived experience and do not reflect Social Contract or DCRC's opinions.



180+

People with
Lived Reentry
Experience
Engaged

At a high level, the data showed:

01

Release planning is happening, but it is often not meeting the needs of reentrants.

02

Access to a strong support system is essential to successful reentry.

03

Employment, housing, and transportation were the most needed services, but people had difficulty accessing all three.

04

There are many services providing mental health support both pre- and post-release, but they are not fully meeting needs.

An overarching theme that permeates all of the findings in this report is the importance of involving people with lived experience in both the design and implementation of reentry processes and programs.

Listening session discussions often centered around the importance of engaging people with lived experience, with 16% of solutions-based conversations mentioning the need to involve more formerly incarcerated individuals in reentry. Many individuals stood ready and willing to provide their expertise and support to improve reentry for future returning citizens and their suggested solutions, which can be found within this report, provide concrete ways for the system to include them.

INTRODUCTION

The Delaware Correctional Reentry Commission (DCRC) was established in 2019 under Executive Order 27 and was formally sunset in 2020 once the original 19 objectives were accomplished. Given the great success of the Commission, the group identified additional system improvements, policy issues, and projects that would improve the state of prisoner reentry in Delaware and continued its work through the creation of the 2021-2024 [Delaware Recidivism Reduction Blueprint](#).

**Landscape Analysis
Phase 1**

**24 Reentry Service
Providers Engaged**

**Landscape Analysis
Phase 2**

**180+ Previously Incarcerated
Individuals Engaged**

In 2022, DCRC, alongside Social Contract, undertook a qualitative analysis to better understand the landscape of service providers offering support to reentrants in Delaware. As part of this analysis, 24 providers were engaged through semi-structured interviews and a survey to better understand what services were available for reentrants post-release as well as what needs exist among the providers who offer those services. Top needs identified by providers included flexible and equitable funding to increase services and capacity, improved communication and partnership among stakeholders, and improved processes for data collection, access, and accountability.

This report encompasses findings from the second phase of the landscape analysis, undertaken in 2023, which focuses on amplifying the perspectives and experiences of people who have been incarcerated in Delaware. Through phase two of the landscape analysis, **DCRC sought to answer the following questions, which guided every aspect of the landscape analysis from what data is collected to how it is analyzed:**

01

What are the greatest needs, as perceived by reentrants, and are these needs being adequately met?

02

How does the reentrant experience accessing and navigating services post-release?

03

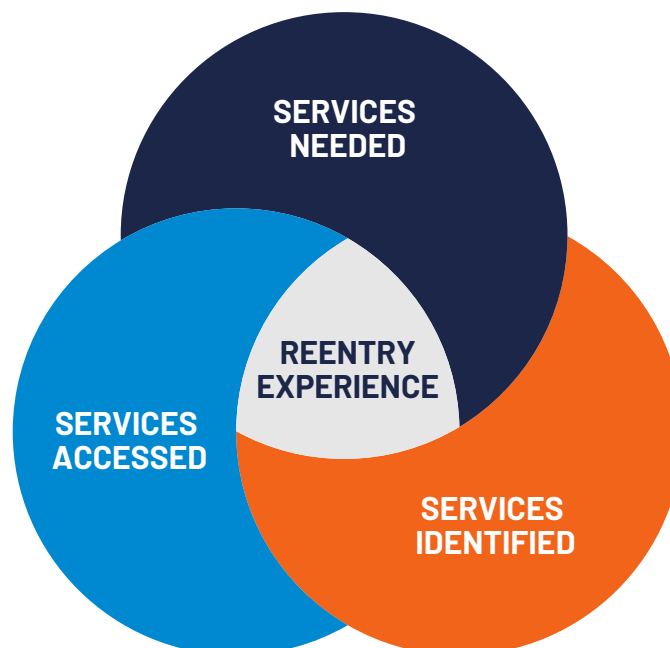
Is there a disparity between the needs reentrants identify and the services they can access?

04

Where do reentrants feel they have been most successful and supported, and what factors contributed to these positive experiences?

05

How do needs differ based on various reentrant characteristics, such as age, length of incarceration, and years since release?



METHODOLOGY

Approach to Community Engagement

Social Contract's approach to community engagement aims to elevate the decision-making power of impacted people, unlock transformative change, and bridge the divide between voices of impacted people and systems action. This approach is guided by three main principles - inclusivity, accessibility, and equitability.

Recognizing the diverse interpretations of community engagement across contexts, the following are Social Contract's definitions of key terms related to this report:

Community Engagement



Working with an impacted group to create an intentional shared space that elevates their voices and lived experiences to activate their power in decision-making and solution building.

Impacted Group



Individuals that were released from incarceration in a level IV or V facility in Delaware within the past 5 years.

Outreach, Engagement, and Data Analysis

To ensure that the information collected for and presented in this report is reflective of the needs of the impacted group, the team engaged the community through the Participatory Action Research Method (PAR). The core concept of PAR is to generate knowledge based on the principle that those most impacted by the research should take the lead in shaping the methodology, design, and modes of analysis of the research project.¹ By using this approach, the team sought to bridge the gap between researchers and the community, ensuring that the research findings are not only data-driven but also deeply rooted in the lived experiences of the participants.

To this end, Social Contract partnered with eight individuals from the impacted group, two Lead Champions and six Outreach Champions (collectively referred to as “Community Champions”), to consult on and support the outreach, engagement, and analysis for this work.

OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT

In an effort to comprehensively and inclusively collect data, the team deployed two engagement methods: surveys and listening sessions. The data presented in this report was gathered from these engagements.

Surveys

With the support of DCRC and the two Lead Champions, Social Contract developed a survey in both English and Spanish to gather insights from the impacted group about their experience with the reentry system in Delaware. The survey aimed to reach a large and diverse audience to hear their perspective on assets, gaps, and potential solutions to improve the reentry system. The survey was deployed by Outreach Champions from October to December 2023 in their communities. The survey questions (English) can be found in [Appendix B](#).

¹“About PAR.” Participatory Action Research, Carleton College, participatoryactionresearch.sites.carleton.edu/about-par/. Accessed 14 Jan. 2024.

Listening Sessions

Lead Champions facilitated three listening sessions across the state, with one held in each county, in December of 2023. These 60-90 minute in-person sessions aimed to create an intentional shared space that would elevate the voices and lived experiences of the impacted group, enabling them to actively participate in solution-building. The sessions also allowed the Lead Champions to share initial data from the surveys and provide information about how the data collected would be used. To enhance accessibility, the sessions were held in the evening at community locations accessible by public transit, with free parking available.

Outreach for both the surveys and listening sessions was conducted by the Community Champions in their own communities. The outreach strategy was determined by the Community Champions given their extensive knowledge of the impacted group. At the suggestion of the Community Champions, survey participants were compensated with a \$10 gift card upon completion of the survey to acknowledge the value their experience added to this work. Champions used tablets and wifi hotspots to administer surveys, allowing them to meet people in the community where they feel most comfortable.

The result of this inclusive outreach strategy, led by the Community Champions, was the collection of 167 eligible survey responses (from a total of 182 responses) from a diverse subset of the impacted group. Additionally, 33 people attended the listening sessions, with 58% of participants having direct lived experience. Owing to the absence of participants with direct lived experience in the Kent County session, it was excluded from data analysis. Excluding that session, this report includes data from New Castle and Sussex County listening sessions, which totaled 25 people, 19 of which have direct lived experience.

In addition to achieving statewide representation, one Community Champion was bilingual in Spanish and English, facilitating outreach to the Spanish-speaking community. This diversity enriches the quality and depth of the data collected, ensuring a well-rounded and holistic representation of the impacted group's experiences.

DATA ANALYSIS

Once information was collected through the outreach and engagement methods outlined above, the data was organized and analyzed to inform the findings within this report. All findings and solutions presented in this report come directly from the data collected from individuals with lived experience and do not reflect Social Contract or DCRC’s opinions.

Survey data was organized and analyzed using Excel and Survey Monkey. All survey data has been deidentified and cleaned to remove incomplete and ineligible responses. Of the 182 total survey responses, 167 remained for analysis (92%). Survey data analysis was conducted by Social Contract with support from the Lead Champions.

Listening session data was collected via notetaking, de-identified, and coded based on key themes that arose during the engagements. Data from the Kent County session was not included in this analysis since no attendees had direct lived experience being incarcerated in Delaware. Given this exclusion, the data is based on two listening sessions (New Castle County and Sussex County) with a total of 25 attendees, 19 (76%) of which were individuals with lived experience. Key themes were reviewed by the Lead Champions and coding was completed by both Social Contract and the Lead Champions. Sessions were not recorded to ensure privacy and encourage openness.

182

Total
Survey
Responses

167

Surveys
Eligible for
Analysis

25

Total Listening
Session
Attendees

19

Attendees
with Lived
Experience

Data Limitations

As with all data collection and analysis, there are potential biases that are important to note before presenting the findings. The following are potential biases that may have occurred during data collection and analysis and should be considered when reading this report.

Selection bias in listening session attendees: Since the listening sessions were optional and attended by a small number of people by design, it is possible that the group of individuals that chose to participate share some similar characteristics and therefore do not fully represent the impacted group. For example, those who participated were able to attend, implying availability of free time and transportation. Moreover, some attendees may have been part of similar social circles, indicating membership in a more proactive group of reentrants. This selection bias may impact the generalizability of the results, as the needs shared during the sessions might be specific to individuals who are more proactive and successful in their reentry journey.

Minimal engagement of Spanish speakers: Despite efforts to engage the Spanish-speaking community through a bilingual Community Champion and a Spanish version of the survey, limited engagement and representation of non-English speakers in the analysis was observed. Given that the bilingual Community Champion supported Spanish-speakers in taking the English version of the survey, there remains uncertainty about the actual reach within the Spanish-speaking population. No listening session attendees were primary Spanish-speakers.

Reliance on note taking for listening sessions: The decision not to record listening sessions, which prioritized privacy and openness, may limit the ability to verify or revisit specific details. Detailed notes were taken at each session in lieu of recording.

POPULATION ENGAGED

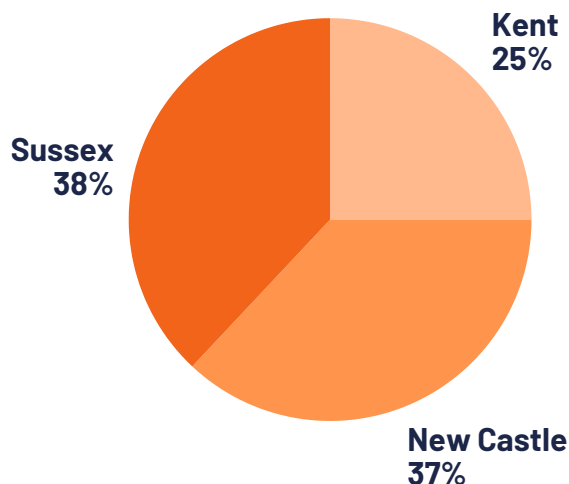
Using the PAR method, the team was able to engage a diverse and representative subset of the impacted group from across the state that encompassed individuals from different races/ethnicities, counties, gender identities, ages, and incarceration experiences (e.g., length of stay). The following section will highlight the demographic data of individuals engaged through both the survey and listening sessions to allow for a better understanding of the data used to inform this report.

Survey Participants

For the survey, eligible individuals were those who had served a minimum of one year (males) or six months (females) in Delaware prisons and were released within the last 5 years. The goal was to get a diverse subset of participants while ensuring that the data was relevant to the current reentry system. The survey received 167 eligible responses. The following demographics describe this group of respondents.



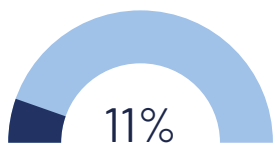
COUNTY OF RESIDENCE



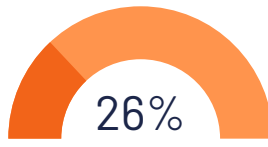
Demographics Analyzed:

- County
- Age
- Gender
- Race & Ethnicity
- Prison Term
- Release Time

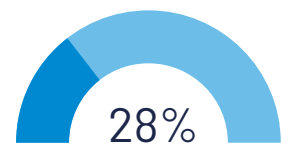
AGE



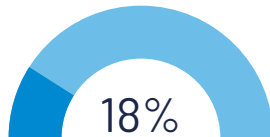
18-24
Years Old



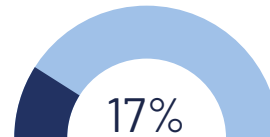
25-34
Years Old



35-44
Years Old



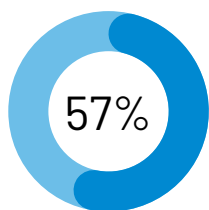
45-54
Years Old



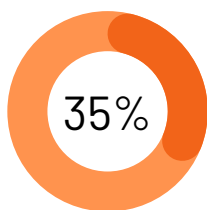
55+
Years Old

RACE AND ETHNICITY*

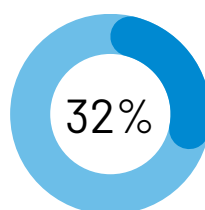
Survey respondents closely mirrored the distribution of race and ethnicity among Delaware’s prison population as a whole, which includes 57% Black and 38% White individuals.²



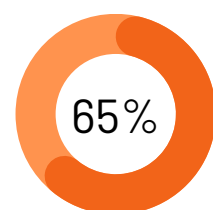
Black



White



Women



Men

Other represented groups include:
 3% American Indian or Alaskan Native
 2% Asian
 1% Native Hawaiian/other Pacific Islander

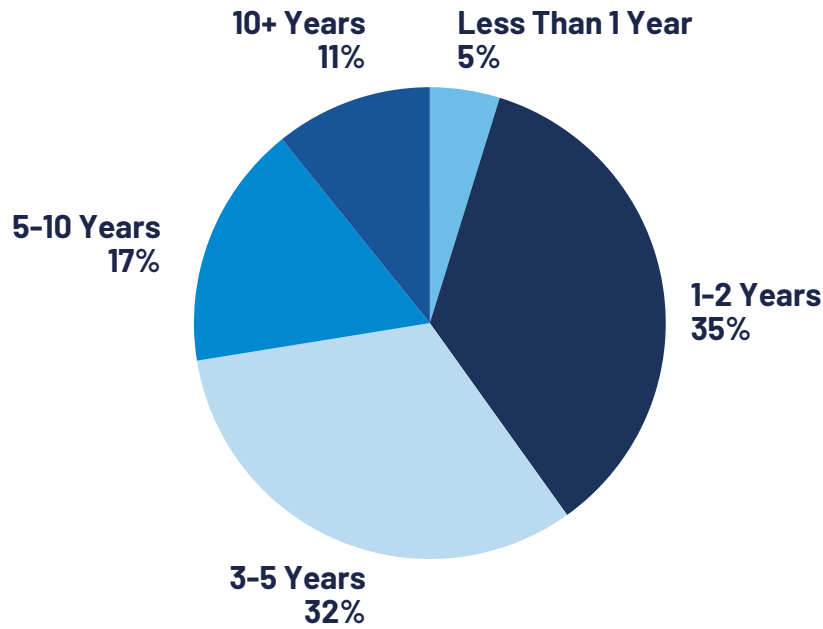
GENDER IDENTITY*

In addition to the demographics below, 0.6% of survey respondents identified as transgender men, and 1.2% identified as transgender women.

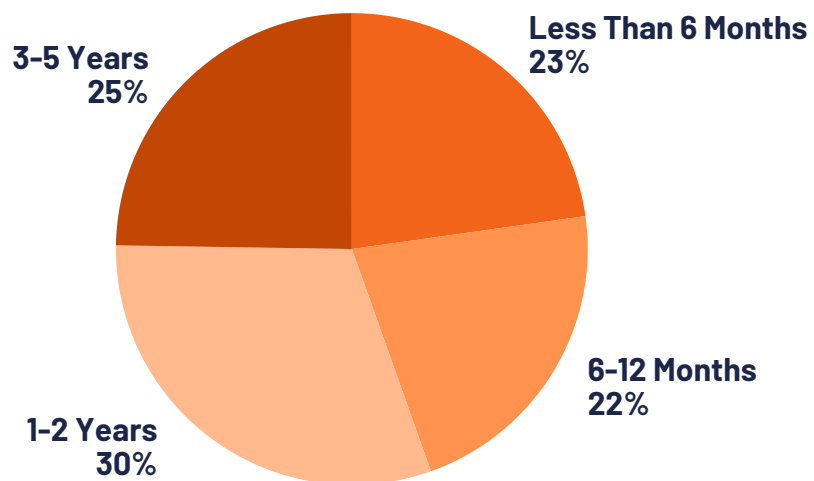
*Not all participants disclosed all demographic information and as a result, these responses do not equal 100%

² (2023) Delaware Department of Correction annual report 2022. Available at: https://doc.delaware.gov/assets/documents/annual_report/DOC_2022AnnualReport.pdf (Accessed: 29 January 2024).

MOST RECENT PRISON TERM



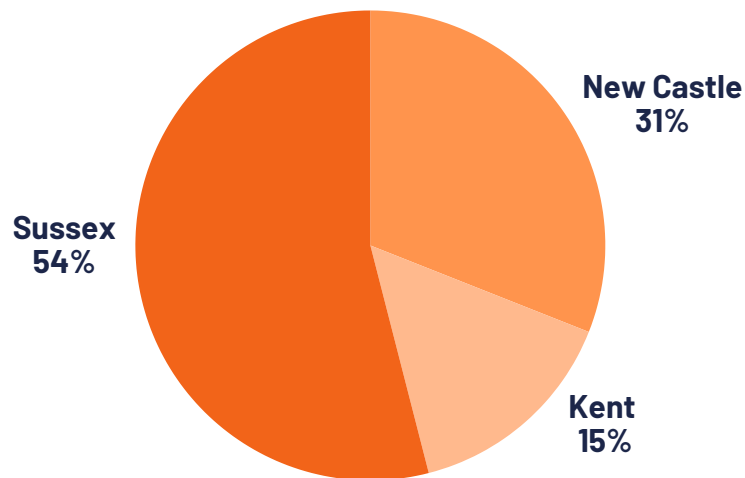
TIME SINCE MOST RECENT RELEASE



Listening Session Attendees

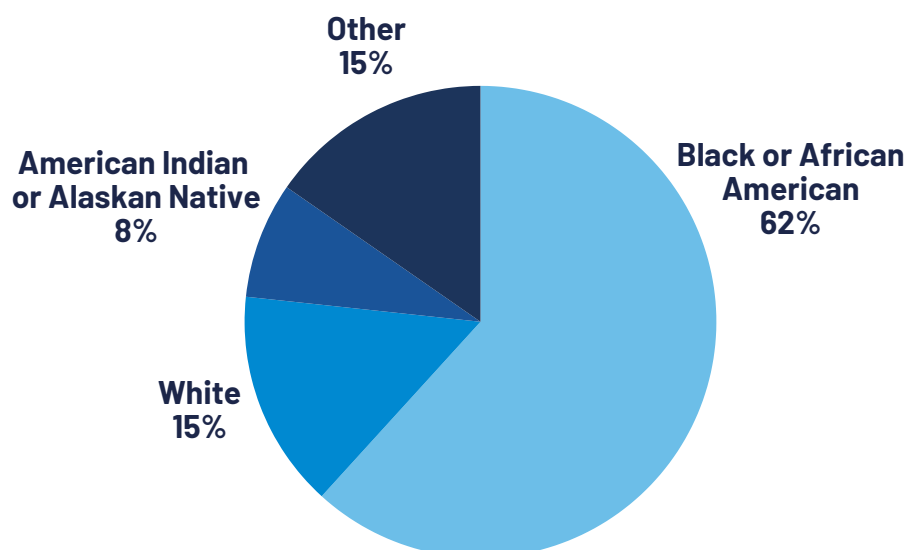
Across the two listening sessions that are included in this analysis, 19 people with lived experience attended and actively participated. The following data describes 13 of the 19 attendees with lived experience that consented to sharing demographic information:

COUNTY OF RESIDENCE

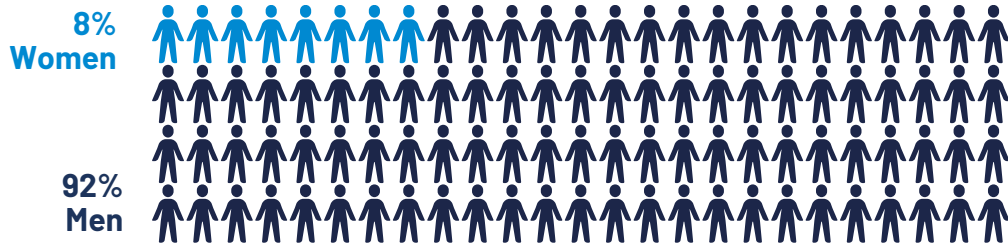


RACE AND ETHNICITY

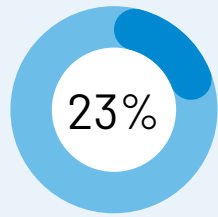
Individuals who chose "Other" indicated Middle Eastern and Hispanic identities.



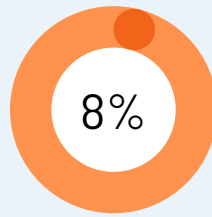
GENDER IDENTITY



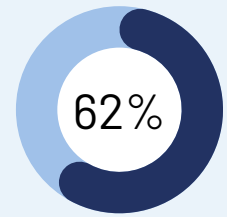
MOST RECENT PRISON TERM*



3 Years or Less

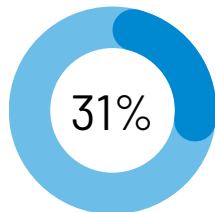


3-5 Years

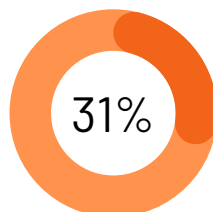


10+ Years

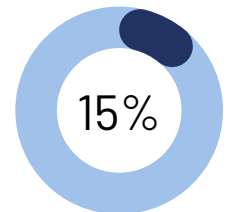
TIME SINCE MOST RECENT RELEASE*



2 Years



3-5 Years



6+ Years

*Not all participants disclosed all demographic information and as a result, these responses do not equal 100.

KEY FINDINGS

The goal of this research was to better understand Delaware’s reentry system from the perspective of people who have experienced it themselves, including what is working well, what gaps exist, and what ideas the impacted group has for improvement. This section will highlight the key findings of this assessment from the perspective of the impacted group as well as solutions generated by those individuals. Each finding and its accompanying solutions were compiled directly from the data collected through the 167 survey responses and 19 listening session attendees with lived experience.

An overarching theme that permeates all of the findings in this report is the importance of involving people with lived experience in both the design and implementation of reentry processes and programs. Listening session discussions were frequently centered around the importance of engaging this group, with 16% of solutions-based conversations mentioning the need to involve more formerly incarcerated individuals in reentry. Throughout the solutions presented, all of which were generated by people with lived experience, it is apparent that the involvement of the impacted groups is of utmost importance.

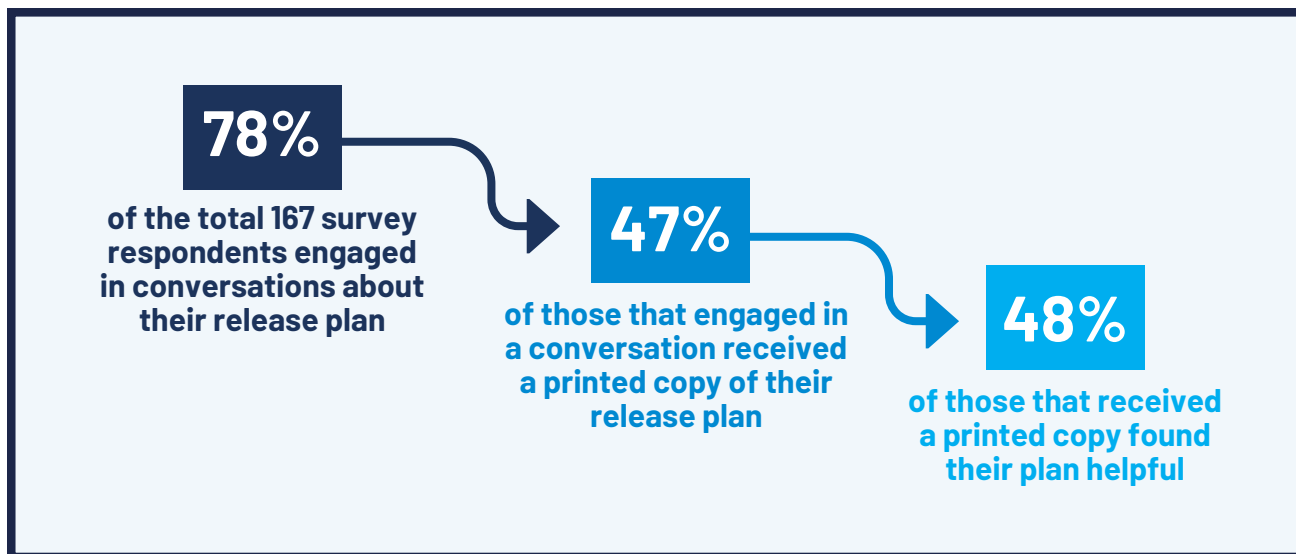
Finding: Release planning is happening, but it is often not meeting the needs of reentrants

ANALYSIS

In November 2019, the Delaware Department of Correction (DOC) implemented the Transition Accountability Plan (TAP) process, which requires staff to provide all qualified individuals with a release plan that “tracks services and supports from prison entry through post-release supervision discharge.”³ The data collected through this landscape analysis suggests that people are engaged in conversations about their release planning, but that this planning process is not always providing the support necessary for a successful transition to the community.

³ Delaware Department of Correction. “Delaware’s Comprehensive Reentry Plan and Progress Report”. 31 Dec 2020. https://doc.delaware.gov/dcrc/assets/docs/DCRC_Final_Report.pdf

Of the 167 survey respondents, 78% were engaged in conversations about their release plan, but only 47% received a printed copy of the plan and just under half (48%) of those people who received a printed copy found the plan helpful. Additionally, release planning was the second most mentioned gap during the listening sessions, with 19% of conversations around gaps focusing there.

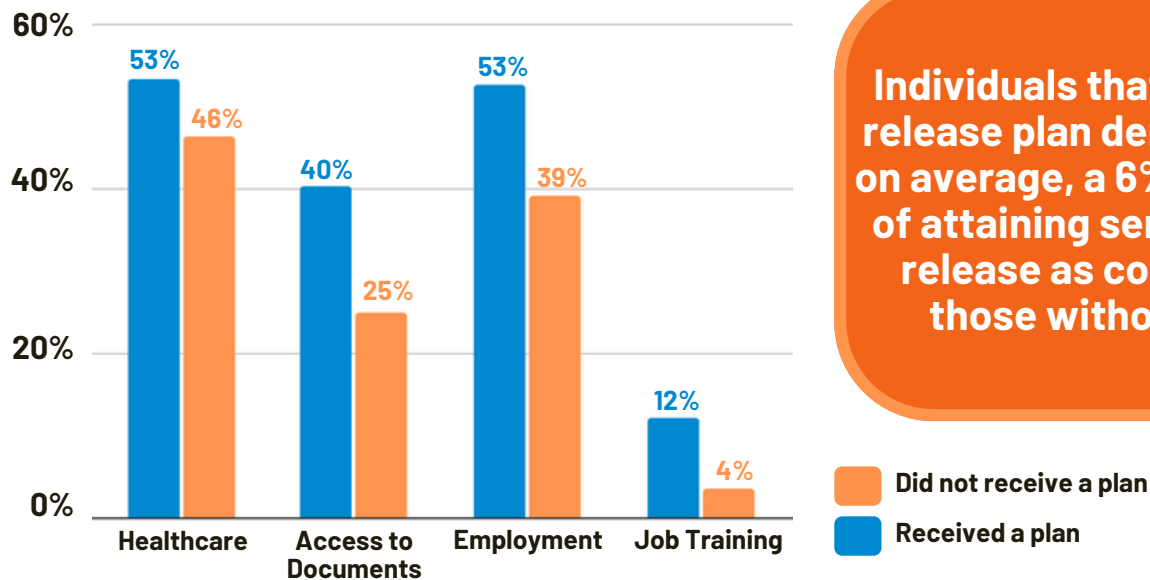


The qualitative feedback gathered from the impacted group highlighted a general feeling of frustration and disappointment with their transition from incarceration to the community. Multiple participants shared experiences being released without anywhere to go or a number to call for support. Others expressed that they were given a plan at release, but it was either something they had never seen before or provided very minimal information, such as a print out of a google map. One participant shared, "somebody did my reentry plan for me. I got the plan [for the first time] when the lady dropped me off at the Oxford House."

Related to transition planning, a recurring theme in the data was the absence of comprehensive needs assessments during incarceration. A participant from the listening session stated, "I served almost 15 years, and nobody ever did a needs assessment for me." For context, DOC does assess incarcerated individuals with tools such as the Risk Needs Assessment, but the sentiment from the impacted group was that this was not enough and that a more general needs assessment was needed for all people entering prison regardless of sentence length.

In addition to the impacted group’s desire for improved release planning, the data suggests that getting a release plan supports increased access to services post-release.

Post-release service access based on whether individuals engaged in release planning



Individuals that received a release plan demonstrated, on average, a 6% higher rate of attaining services post-release as compared to those without plans.

SOLUTIONS GENERATED BY PEOPLE WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE

Solutions to the challenge of release planning generated by individuals with lived experience emphasize a personalized and proactive approach, with a focus on a process that begins at the time of incarceration and provides a collaborative, tailored reentry plan that meets an individual's unique needs. It is important to note that the solutions below are all currently part of the DOC reentry process. DOC is currently undertaking fidelity monitoring and implementing a feedback mechanism to ensure that the processes are executed consistently, which may address some of the gaps raised through this work by people with lived experience.

Reentry planning begins upon entry and culminates upon release

Listening session participants emphasized the importance of commencing reentry planning from the very first day of incarceration. The early emphasis should be on evaluating individual needs and goals, guiding them in accessing in-prison services to equip them for successful reentry. As release (or potential release) nears, the focus can then shift to post-release planning, which should include warm handoffs to service providers and support obtaining necessary documentation.

Additionally, reentrants recommended placing a special focus on the last six months of a sentence for intensive reentry planning, particularly in the areas of employment, education, housing, and health resources. This targeted approach aims to facilitate a smoother transition into post-release life. It is important to note that DOC has implemented both assessments and transition planning in prisons, but there seems to be an opportunity to both improve those processes as well as better communicate about them with incarcerated individuals.

Move away from the one-size-fits all approach in favor of a collaborative, tailored approach

A common sentiment among listening session participants was that every person's reentry journey is different and should be treated as such. Participants mentioned the need for a more collaborative transition planning process and expressed a desire to be actively involved to ensure their plan is tailored to fit their needs and goals. Important to this process, according to the impacted group, is having culturally competent counselors in reentry planning. One suggestion raised was to prioritize the inclusion of counselors who understand and address the diverse backgrounds and needs of reentrants, with an emphasis on people who have lived experience with reentry.

Stop applying a one-size-fits-all approach to reentry, you're missing a majority of people's needs.

Provide all individuals with one or more printed copies of their release plan

Given that less than half of individuals that engaged in discussions about their post-release plan reported being given physical copies of that plan, individuals expressed a desire to have the plan both before and after release. To ensure people are prepared, multiple copies can be provided so they could share with relevant service providers as needed.

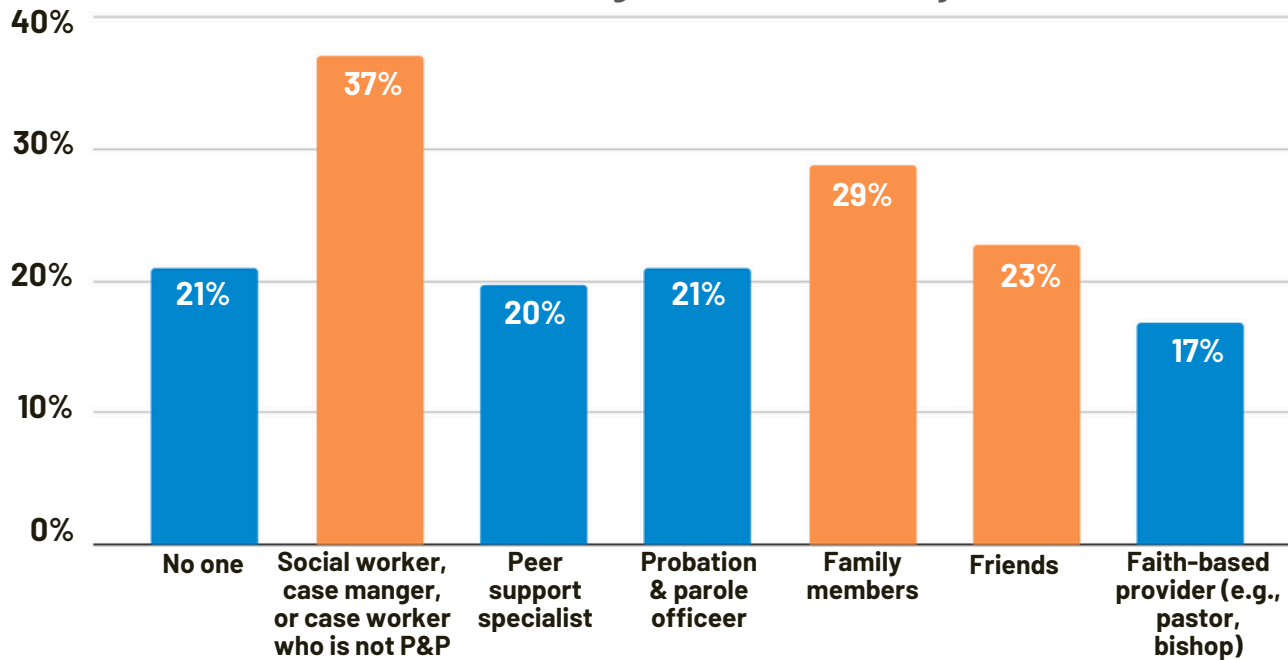
Finding: Access to a strong support system is essential to successful reentry

ANALYSIS

Many participants leaned heavily on support systems, such as family and friends, for assistance upon release. 70% of survey respondents looked within their community to meet post-release needs such as accessing food and shelter. When asked who, if anyone, helped them access these services in the community, the top three answers were community-based social workers and case managers (37%), family (29%), and friends (23%).

The only thing that helped me succeed was family & friend reunification... having the right people in place.

Who, if anyone, helped you to get services in the community, get enrolled in benefits, and get other community assistance?



The data suggests that Probation & Parole and Peer Support Specialists could play a larger role in this support system, as respondents did mention them as providing support, but at a slightly lower rate (21% and 20%, respectively). Additionally, 52% of survey respondents felt their probation and/or parole officer did not assist them in meeting their needs in comparison to the 34% that felt they did (the remaining 14% preferred not to respond).

Listening session participants consistently cited community based support systems as an essential asset to their reentry experience. In fact, 60% of contributions to conversations on assets of successful reentry mentioned the importance of strong support systems. One participant shared, “the only thing that helped me succeed was family and friend reunification... having the right people in place... nothing from the system.” Listening session participants emphasized the efficacy of support systems in facilitating a successful reentry, especially when pre-release and transition services fall short. One participant elaborated:

“My desire not to return to prison was huge, but without those contacts, I would’ve returned. There was only one person who helped me on the inside. I went to transitional housing next. Our internal resources [in prison] were not the right ones. The substance abuse programs [post-release] can be very selective, but the nonprofits and the organizations around here were great.”

The strong belief of the impacted group that support systems are essential to successful reentry was supported by survey data, in which individuals who received help from their community post-release were more likely to report access to basic reentry services such as food, transportation, healthcare, documentation assistance, and employment than their counterparts that did not receive community support. For instance, 12% of individuals supported by their community accessed food services, while only 3% of those without community support received food services. Similar disparities were observed in transportation, housing, healthcare, access to documents, and employment, where there was, on average, an 8% gap in accessing services between those who received community support and those who did not.

Individuals who received help from their community post-release were more likely to report access to basic reentry services such as food, transportation, healthcare, documentation assistance, and employment than their counterparts that did not receive community support.

These findings suggest that individuals who remain in contact with their support systems, both while incarcerated and after release, are more likely to receive additional assistance in overcoming formidable obstacles during the reentry process. This correlation in the data was supported by listening session discussions, which reiterated the importance of these support systems. Data also suggests that Probation & Parole and Peer Support Specialists could play a larger role in this support system, especially given that many people are released to supervision. As one participant shared, "It's a long, tough road, but that contact from the outside means that the inmate feels recognized, cared about, and supported."

SOLUTIONS GENERATED BY PEOPLE WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE

A prominent discussion point around support systems during the listening sessions was their potential to generate impactful solutions to reentry issues. Listening session attendees underscored the importance of having these support systems in place both pre- and post-release to help ensure successful reentry. Solutions ideated during the listening sessions that utilize support systems are outlined below.

Facilitate relationship building with family and/or friends pre-release

Participants recommended greater support pre-release to facilitate successful family reunification upon reentry. Some ideas discussed include offering parenting resources and outlining a plan for family/friend reunification during transition discussions. Attendees also explained that oftentimes, people who are recently released are unaware of the current needs of their families and how they might help to meet these needs.

Planning for family reunification can help to establish expectations for both reentering citizens and their families. The survey data supports this desire for more intentional family reunification planning - when asked an open-ended question about what would have helped individuals get ready for release, the third highest response was family reunification.

“ A blindspot is often family too. There’ll often be no preparation or organization for reunification. People don’t know how to parent or acquire needs for a family unit. ”

Connect reentering citizens with people with lived experience

To help foster an environment that is conducive to reentrants connecting with people with lived experience upon release, it was recommended that the State funds a “Buddy System”, where people who are about to be released are paired with a community member with lived experience to help guide them through the reentry process. It was recommended by listening session attendees that this pairing occurs 6-12 months prior to release to facilitate relationship and trust building. Attendees emphasized the importance of having people who deeply understand their experience with being justice-involved within the context of their unique communities to help guide them through reentry. This type of system would do just that while also providing them the guidance and resources made available by learning from people who successfully reentered their communities after incarceration.

“ Fund a buddy-buddy system with guys who are in their community and connect them with people who are leaving prison... pair people up who are doing the work. ”

Support the building of support systems that are culturally appropriate

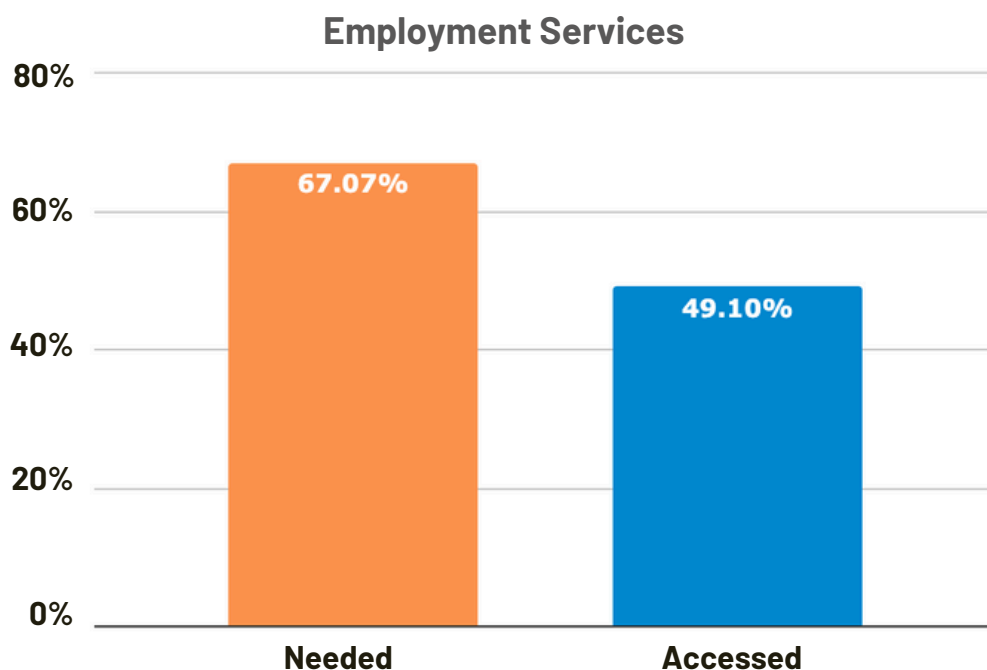
Related to the “Buddy System” idea, discussions revealed the need to connect individuals to culturally competent support systems that take into account a person’s background, identity, and religion. One participant advised “you need to be paired culturally - for example if you’re Muslim, then you need someone who is Muslim to take you through the reentry process.” Another participant suggested that the State of Delaware builds connections with faith families and places of worship by encouraging their involvement in reentry networking, solution building, and programming. Each person released from incarceration might have a unique set of hurdles to overcome, and these hurdles may be further complicated by a cultural gap between the reentering person and the resources that they are offered. To help bridge this gap, listening session participants recommended emphasizing cultural and religious identity when building support systems to help guide recently released people through reentry.

Finding: Employment, housing, and transportation were the most needed services, but people had difficulty accessing all three**ANALYSIS**

The impacted group made it clear that leaving incarceration and rejoining the community is very difficult for most people and a great deal of support is needed to make the transition a success. When asked their greatest needs upon release, survey participants responded with access to employment services, housing assistance, and transportation services, which were chosen as top three needs by 67%, 67%, and 43% of respondents, respectively. However, reported access to these services was much lower, with 49%, 26%, and 23% getting those services, respectively.

Employment Services

Upon release, 67% of individuals actively sought employment services, yet only 49% successfully accessed them, revealing a notable disparity between the demand for and actual access to such services. 60% found securing a job to be one of the most challenging aspects post-release, indicative of the underlying urgency to bridge the gap between seeking and obtaining employment services.



During listening sessions, 12% of the commentary focused on gaps in employment and related services. Some individuals expressed frustration with the job search process, citing concerns about potential judgment from employers based on their criminal records, "I've put out my own and helped others put out dozens of resumes and gotten no calls back. People just see your record."

12% of listening session commentary focused on gaps in employment and related services.

Highlighting the positive impact of employment support, 65% of survey respondents who reported being currently employed also accessed employment services after release. Additionally, 39% of those reporting as currently employed accessed in-prison employment and education services (e.g., pre-Apprenticeship, GED) while only 11% of those reporting as currently unemployed accessed the same resources. Moreover, currently employed individuals reported accessing a broader range of services overall compared to their currently unemployed counterparts.

39% of those reporting as currently employed accessed in-prison employment and education services (e.g., pre-Apprenticeship, GED) while only 11% of those reporting as currently unemployed accessed the same resources.

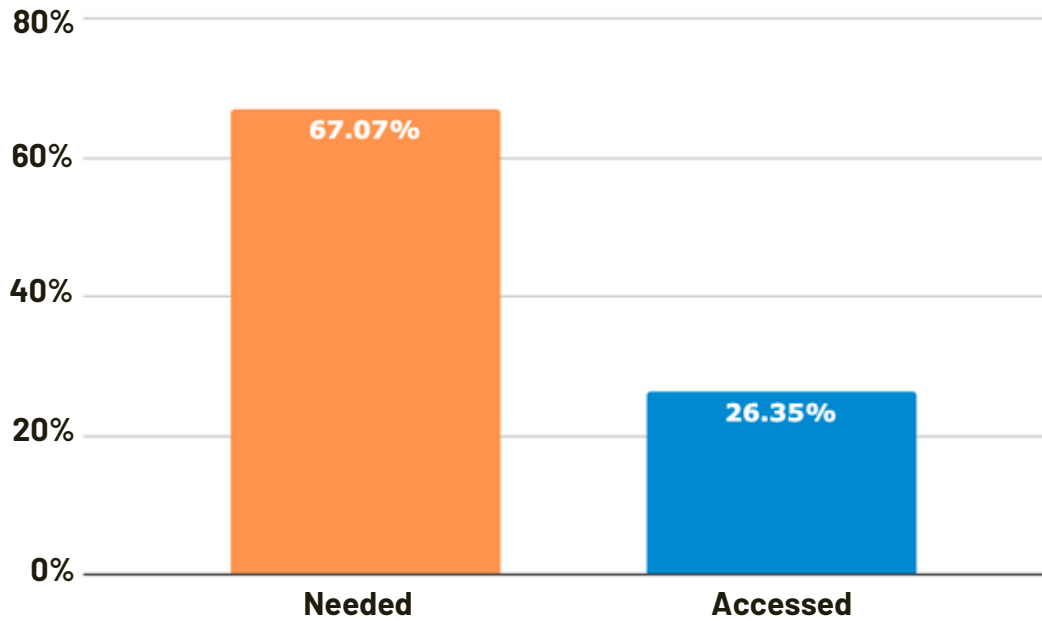
This data underscores the critical need for connection to and enrollment in employment services to ensure that individuals navigating reentry are able to secure stable jobs upon release that support their successful reentry.

Housing Support

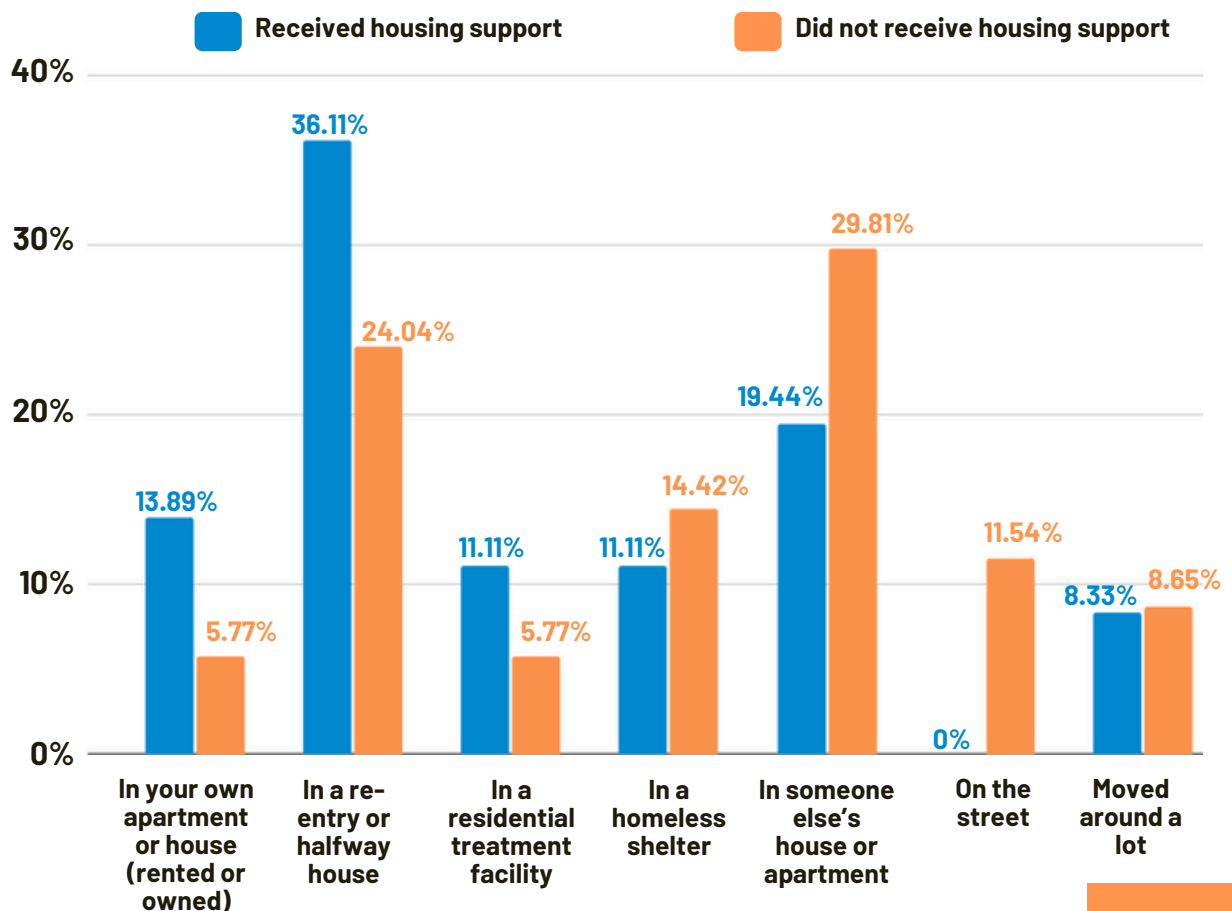
Delaware, as with most states in the country, is experiencing an affordable housing shortage. This lack of housing options exacerbates challenges reentering society, as many individuals are not able to find a stable place to live. 59% of survey respondents found securing a place to live to be one of the most challenging aspects post-release and 62% of respondents did not get any help finding a place to live before they were released. Additionally, when asked the open-ended question, "What else would have helped you get ready for your release from prison?," the most common response was housing support (24% of responses).

Importantly, the positive impact of housing support becomes evident as those who received such assistance while in prison tended to have more stable living situations after release. This correlation emphasizes the potential efficacy of housing support in fostering successful reentry.

Housing Support

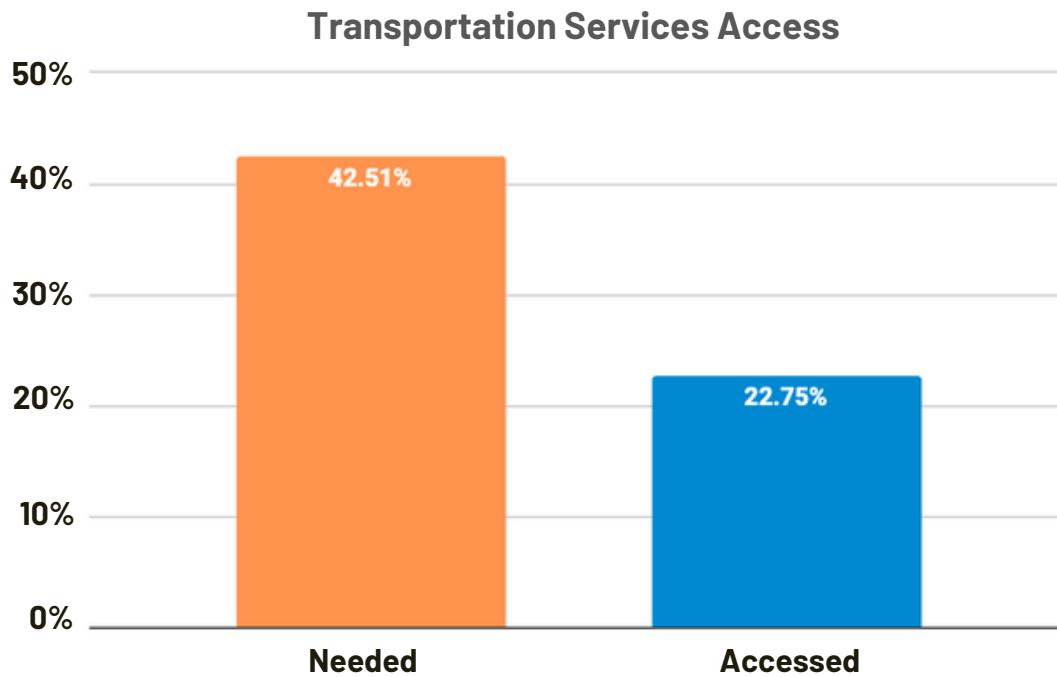


Housing Support Access by Current Residence Type



Transportation Services

Whether it is getting to work, a doctor’s appointment, a probation meeting, or a support group, participants shared that there are many commitments associated with a successful reentry, most of which require transportation. Supporting this need, 43% of survey respondents expressed a need for transportation support, but only 23% were able to successfully access it. As shown in the data collected, the repercussions of inadequate access to transportation extend to various facets of reentry. Notably, 20% of reentrants identified transportation access as a substantial barrier to employment.



20% of reentrants identified transportation access as a substantial barrier to employment.

Furthermore, regional disparities were evident in the survey data, emphasizing the critical need for targeted interventions. In Sussex County, 71% of respondents reported successfully accessing transportation services, highlighting a considerable reliance on such support in this specific Delaware area. In contrast, Kent County exhibited a noticeable gap, with 37% expressing a need for transportation services, but only 18% reporting successful access. This emphasizes the disparity between demand and availability in Kent County. New Castle County reported the lowest transportation needs at 23%, yet even here, a disparity persists, as only 11% reported successful access. These findings underscore the importance of implementing targeted strategies to bridge the gap between transportation needs and accessibility, ensuring a more equitable distribution of resources across different regions.

Participant County	Expressed the Need for Transportation Services	Successfully Accessed Transportation Services
Sussex	41%	71%
New Castle	23%	11%
Kent	37%	18%

The insights gathered from the listening sessions align with the survey findings, underscoring the widespread challenges associated with obtaining dependable transportation post-release. This amplifies the urgency for comprehensive solutions to bridge the transportation gap, ensuring that reentrants not only have the means to move but also gain access to vital services that contribute to their successful and sustainable reentry into society.

SOLUTIONS GENERATED BY PEOPLE WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE

Given that the data suggests that both individuals who were engaged in pre-release transition planning and who had strong support systems had greater success in obtaining services, strengthening both may improve access to these much needed resources. Additionally, people with lived experience generated potential solutions to the challenges faced in accessing services more generally.

Increase access to relevant prison education and employment programs

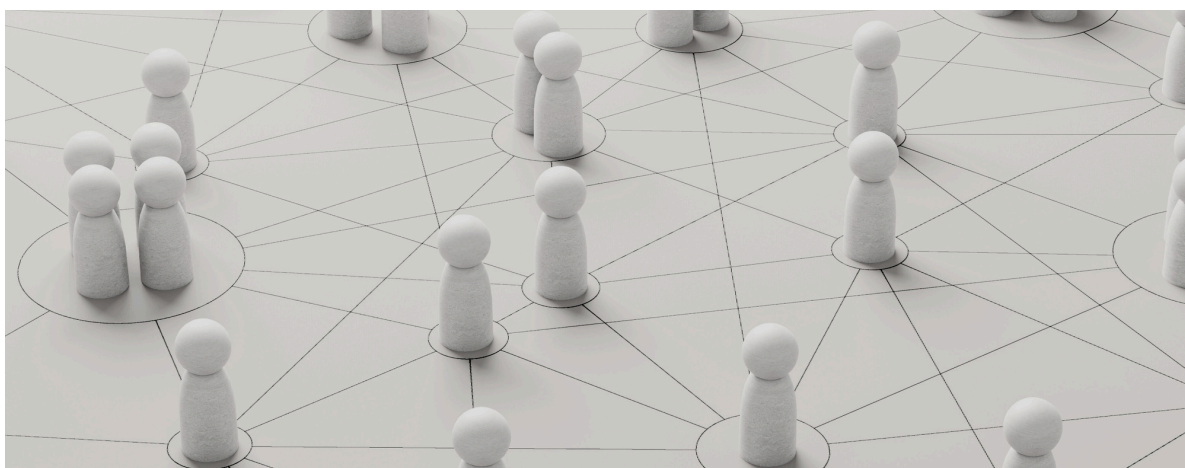
Participants highlighted the importance of accessing relevant education and employment services while incarcerated to increase job prospects upon release, a feeling that was supported by the data, which showed that a greater proportion of employed individuals (39%) had accessed in-prison education and employment services than those who were unemployed (11%). A few tangible solutions included streamlining access to classes, removing bureaucratic hurdles for enrollment, and adding more in-demand trade options. It is important to note that prison education and employment programs are limited in scale due to space and instructor constraints. DOC is in the process of opening a new Vocational Center at a Level V facility, which may increase access to and variety of these programs.

Employ more people with lived experience to work in prisons post-release

There was wide agreement at both listening sessions that the prison system in Delaware should employ more people with lived experience, especially in case management and peer support-type roles. One person shared, "I'd help our formerly incarcerated individuals get involved with case management, because they understand it." Not only did people feel this would provide much needed jobs, they felt it would improve the reentry process for people who are incarcerated since they would have access to someone who understood them and their journey. There was an acknowledgement that current policies make this difficult; participants suggested amending the policy to reduce the stringent requirements for incarcerated individuals to work within and revisit correctional facilities. This type of policy amendment would allow for previously incarcerated individuals with lived experience to take on more hands-on roles such as case management and transition planning.

Centrally located hub to obtain information on all needed services for reentrants

Given the difficulty expressed by participants in accessing the complicated web of services needed for a successful reentry, solutions arose around a centrally located hub that would provide all relevant information in one place. There was no discussion about whether this would be a virtual or physical hub, but there was consensus that it must be easily accessible and comprehensive. State Service Centers are available in each county to meet this need, but general sentiment was that a more reentry-focused resource is needed.



Increase the role of Probation & Parole in supporting people through post-release service navigation

As many people leaving incarceration are on mandated supervision, participants felt that Probation & Parole (P&P) Officers are uniquely situated to provide support navigating services post-release. One suggestion that arose during the listening sessions is to invest in comprehensive training for P&P Officers to increase their proficiency in navigating the multifaceted challenges associated with reentry. Discussions also centered on ensuring that all P&P Officers are adequately trained in trauma-informed approaches. This strategy emphasizes a holistic and strategic approach to support those undergoing reentry while enhancing the capabilities of the officers facilitating this process.

Finding: There are many services providing mental health support both pre- and post-release, but they are not fully meeting needs

ANALYSIS

The need for quality, relevant mental health services rose to the top of the listening session conversations among people with lived experience, with one person sharing, “we need support in a myriad of ways, but it’s the mental support in particular that matters”. With 22% of gaps and 17% of solutions discussed during those sessions focused on mental health, this was the most covered topic in the reentrant-led conversations. Though access to mental health resources was identified as a gap at the listening sessions, participants acknowledged that services do exist, they are just not meeting all of their needs.

44%

of survey respondents indicated mental health as the top resource used while incarcerated.

40%

of Black respondents accessed mental health services while incarcerated.

58%

of White respondents accessed mental health services while incarcerated.

This was reflected in the survey data, where participants were asked to identify, from a list, what programs they used while incarcerated; mental health was the top response, with 44% of participants using those services. This differed by race, with 40% of Black respondents and 58% of White respondents accessing mental health services while incarcerated. After release, 23% of survey participants noted trying to access mental health services in the community and 22% were successful in their efforts.

“If we don’t deal with physical and mental health, none of the rest matters.”

Taken together, the qualitative and quantitative data points to an issue not with access to mental health services, but with finding services that fully meet a person's needs. A common sentiment expressed during the listening sessions was that the mental health services offered while incarcerated are a 'pseudo process' that merely checks boxes and often provides medication, but fails to offer the needed psychological support.

“

We've been traumatized - we still carry the hideous experiences of what we went through. The primary focus should be on psychological/mental support. What about the long-term effects when someone is making their transition? The psychological process needs to be revamped, restructured.

”

SOLUTIONS GENERATED BY PEOPLE WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE

The overarching sentiments among people with lived experience as it relates to meeting mental health needs for the justice-involved population are to start early, make it personalized, increase the involvement of people with lived experience, and ensure continuity.

Ensure every individual receives a mental health evaluation upon entry into prison

Regardless of sentence length, people with lived experience stressed the need to start mental health planning early with an evaluation/needs assessment at or around intake. Additionally, it is important to people that these results are both shared with the individual and used to collaboratively create a personalized plan. Multiple listening session participants shared that their behavioral health plan was not shared with them and did not feel right for them, which reduced the effectiveness of the person's willingness to participate in the services. One potential evaluation that was mentioned for use is the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) assessment, but the overall feedback was that the assessment did not matter as long as the process was comprehensive, consistent, and collaborative.

It is important to note that DOC's process is to screen everyone at intake, regardless of sentence length, for mental health needs. If there is an indication of need, a Comprehensive Mental Health Evaluation is completed.

“ Reentry doesn't start out here, it starts in [prison]. It should take place as soon as a needs assessment is in place. I'd use ACEs; it's been updated and improved. For every person that walks through the door, I don't care if they have 30 life sentences; I'm gonna start working on it right now. ”

More people with lived experience providing mental health support in prison

In addition to sharing that the mental health treatment plans did not always reflect their needs, listening session participants emphasized that the individuals providing the services were not always relatable. In speaking about this, one participant stated, “if you don't understand me, how... are you going to judge me?”. There was overwhelming agreement at both the Sussex and New Castle County listening sessions that greater access to peer support while incarcerated would greatly improve mental health services. As noted above, participants acknowledged the difficulty of people with a record returning to prison to provide services, but believed this DOC policy should be revisited and revamped to reduce barriers.



Ensure continuous mental health services through transition planning

While conversations on mental health largely centered around access to relevant services while incarcerated, multiple solutions generated aimed to ensure the continuity of services upon release. Similar to suggestions around release planning, people felt that this transition planning for mental health should be personalized and begin early, with one person suggesting it begin at least 6-months pre-release. This planning process would ensure that people are connected to the right services and either enrolled or on waiting lists. As opposed to giving someone a name to call when they are released, participants felt a more warm connection was needed to community-based service providers. This could be done by peer support specialists, in-reach coordinators, counselors, or probation & parole officers. Similar to release plans, participants were clear that they would like to see these behavioral health plans pre-release and have a copy with them when they leave.

If you wait until you get out to put your name on a list, you're already a year behind.



CONCLUSION

The data collected through this two-part analysis of the reentry system in Delaware has highlighted the dedication State agencies, community-based providers, and people with lived experience have to improving the experience of reentry for future Delawareans. In the first phase, 24 service providers volunteered to share their experience of supporting people through the reentry process and in the second phase, over 180 people with lived experience provided invaluable input. Throughout the full process, the DCRC agencies have shown strong support for this work.

An overarching takeaway from the two analyses is that many services and programs exist to support people as they transition out of prison, but these are either not always accessible or not meeting all of the identified needs of people with lived experience. Many solutions provided by the impacted group revolve around improving and expanding services and processes that are already in place, such as release planning, behavioral health support, employment support, and transportation access. Additionally, providers felt there is a need for greater communication and cooperation to ensure the people who need services are able to access them effectively.

There was also a strong emphasis on more actively including people with lived experience in the reentry process, from problem-identification to solution-building to implementation. For each gap in the system identified by the impacted group, there was at least one solution mentioned that involved the inclusion of people who had been incarcerated, often playing a direct role in supporting the reentry process for future Delawareans. These individuals have unique expertise in navigating reentry and stand ready to support this process through paid employment.

This two-part analysis provides a view of the reentry system from both the perspective of people who have been incarcerated and those who support them upon release. Taken together, findings from the two analyses can provide an actionable roadmap for DCRC to improve the reentry system in Delaware.

APPENDIX A

WORK GROUP MEMBERS	AGENCY
Jessica Cline	Department of Correction
Alonna Berry	Office of the Governor
Joanna Champney	Division of Substance Abuse and Mental Health
Corie Priest	Department of Labor
Karryl Hubbard	Department of Labor
Gina Aurora	Department of Labor
Valarie Tickle	Criminal Justice Council
Maureen Whelan	Department of Education
Lisa Minutola	Office of Defense Services

APPENDIX B

Survey Questions

1. **Were you sentenced to prison in Delaware for at least one year (male) or at least 6 months (female)?**
2. **How long were you in prison? (if you have been in prison more than once, please share the most recent)**
3. **How long ago were you released from prison? (if you have been in prison more than once, please share the most recent).**
4. **How old are you?**
5. **Which of the following best describes you?**
 - a. Man
 - b. Woman
 - c. Transgender man
 - d. Transgender woman
 - e. Nonbinary/nonconforming
 - f. Prefer not to answer
 - g. Other (please specify)
6. **Which of the following best describes you? (select all that apply)**
 - a. American Indian or Alaskan Native
 - b. Asian
 - c. Black or African American
 - d. Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
 - e. White
 - f. I don't know
 - g. Prefer not to answer
7. **Which of the following best describes you?**
 - a. Hispanic or Latino or Spanish Origin
 - b. Not Hispanic or Latino or Hispanic Origin
 - c. I don't know
 - d. Prefer not to answer

8. What is the highest grade or level of school you have finished?

- a. None
- b. 8th grade or less
- c. Some high school
- d. GED
- e. High school diploma
- f. Vocational/technical/business certificate or diploma
- g. Some college
- h. Associate's degree
- i. Bachelor's degree
- j. Graduate/professional degree
- k. I don't know
- l. Prefer not to answer

9. What county do you live in?**10. While in prison, which of the following programs did you use?**

- a. Peer Support
- b. Substance Abuse Treatment
- c. Medication Assisted Treatment/Medication Assisted Withdrawal (MAT/MAW)
- d. Cognitive Behavioral Treatment
- e. Mental Health
- f. Educational - Associate's Degree
- g. Educational - Adult Basic Education/GED
- h. Educational - Life Skills
- i. Educational - Vocational Training (Computer Skills, Culinary Arts, Auto Tech, Flagger, Young Apprentice Program, Customer Service, NCCER Skilled Training, special education services)
- j. Pre-Apprenticeship (Construction, welding, and auto-mechanical)
- k. Work opportunities (textiles, carpentry, and auto)
- l. Commercial Drivers License Certification program
- m. None of these apply
- n. Prefer not to answer
- o. Other (please specify)

11. What else would have helped you get ready for your release from prison?

12. **While in prison, did you talk to anyone about a plan for after your release?**
This would have included someone meeting with you to help you plan for your release from prison, figure out what services or programs you needed, and trying to get you into needed programs or services.
13. **Were you given a printed copy of your plan for after your release?**
14. **Has this plan for after your release been helpful to you?**
15. **What were your highest needs right after being released from prison?**
 - a. Food
 - b. Transportation
 - c. Housing
 - d. Healthcare
 - e. Access to documents (e.g., ID, birth certificate)
 - f. Employment
 - g. Job Training
 - h. Education
 - i. Mental Health Treatment
 - j. Addiction Treatment
 - k. Family reunification
16. **Did you look for help in your community to meet these needs?**
17. **If you used services in the community after release, did someone give you a needs assessment? A needs assessment is where someone asks you questions to figure out what services or programs could help you, like substance use treatment, mental health supports, health care, vocational training, or education.**
18. **Has anyone followed up with you to make sure you got the services that they referred you to?**
19. **Which of the following services did you TRY TO GET after your release from prison? (Select all that apply)**
 - a. Food
 - b. Transportation
 - c. Housing
 - d. Healthcare
 - e. Access to documents (e.g., ID, birth certificate)
 - f. Employment
 - g. Job Training

- h. Education- Adult Basic Education / GED
- i. Education - High School Diploma
- j. Education - College / Vocational Training
- k. Mental Health Treatment
- l. Addiction Treatment
- m. Family reunification
- n. None of the above
- o. Prefer not to answer

20. **Which of the following services did you GET after your release from prison?**

(Select all that apply)

- a. Food
- b. Transportation
- c. Housing
- d. Healthcare
- e. Access to documents (e.g., ID, birth certificate)
- f. Employment
- g. Job Training
- h. Education- Adult Basic Education / GED
- i. Education - High School Diploma
- j. Education - College / Vocational Training
- k. Mental Health Treatment
- l. Addiction Treatment
- m. Family reunification
- n. None of the above
- o. Prefer not to answer

21. **Who, if anyone, helped you to get services in the community, get enrolled in benefits, and get other community assistance? (Select all that apply).**

- a. No one
- b. Social worker, case manager, or case worker who is not a parole or probation officer
- c. Peer support specialist
- d. Probation & parole officer
- e. Family members
- f. Friends
- g. Faith-based provider (pastor, bishop, priest, other person from a church)
- h. Other (please specify)

22. **If you had to meet with a probation and/or parole officer after your release, did you feel that your probation and/or parole officer helped you meet your needs?**
23. **Please share how easy or hard it was for you to do the following:**
- a. Get a job after release?
 - b. Keep a job once you had one?
 - c. Stay clean & sober after release?
 - d. Deal with pressure & stress after release?
 - e. Access sufficient food after release?
 - f. Access healthcare after release?
 - g. Get rides to work, appointments, meetings after release?
 - h. Find a place to live after release?
 - i. Enroll in school after release?
 - j. Access job training after release?
 - k. Get documents you needed (State ID, birth certificate) after release?
24. **How happy were you with the services listed from community organizations after your release from prison?**
- a. Food
 - b. Transportation
 - c. Housing
 - d. Healthcare
 - e. Access to documents (e.g., ID, birth certificate)
 - f. Employment
 - g. Job Training
 - h. Education- Adult Basic Education / GED
 - i. Education - High School Diploma
 - j. Education - College / Vocational Training
 - k. Mental Health Treatment
 - l. Addiction Treatment
 - m. Family reunification
25. **While in prison, did you get any help finding a place to live after your release?**

26. **Right after release from prison, where did you live?**
- a. In your own apartment or house (rented or owned)
 - b. In a re-entry or halfway house
 - c. In a residential treatment facility
 - d. In a homeless shelter
 - e. In someone else's house or apartment
 - f. On the street
 - g. Moved around a lot
 - h. Prefer not to answer
27. **Where do you live now?**
- a. In your own apartment or house (rented or owned)
 - b. In a re-entry or halfway house
 - c. In a residential treatment facility
 - d. In a homeless shelter
 - e. In someone else's house or apartment
 - f. On the street
 - g. Moved around a lot
 - h. Prefer not to answer
28. **Which of the following best describes you?**
- a. Unemployed and looking for a job
 - b. Unemployed and not looking for a job
 - c. Employed full time
 - d. Employed part time
 - e. Volunteering
 - f. Prefer not to answer
29. **What is / was the hardest part about finding a job?**