Coming Home to Bull City: A Program Evaluation of Durham’s Local Reentry Council

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Introduction

Since the 1970s, the United States has seen a 500% increase in its total incarcerated population. Not only are people formally incarcerated, but as of 2016, there were about 6.6 million individuals under any kind of criminal supervision, including parole and probation (The Sentencing Project 2016). Although sentencing policies have changed, such that people are facing longer sentences, more than 95% of them will eventually be released. Nationwide, almost 70% of recently released individuals are rearrested within three years (Alper 2018). In addition to the risk of reincarceration, recently released individuals face many barriers and comprehensive reentry programs can help to ease their obstacles.

Reentry programs are designed to help returning citizens acclimate to society after their period of incarceration. Their goal is to decrease recidivism, maintain public safety and also save money. A decrease in criminal activity among the justice-involved community translates to reduced spending on arrests, court processing, parole and probation (Economy League of Greater Philadelphia). Many reentry institutions provide employment readiness training to expand ex-offenders’ work opportunities. In addition to employment-specific training, reintegration programs may also offer access to post-secondary education.

North Carolina began its efforts to aid formerly incarcerated individuals in 2009. That year, Governor Perdue signed Executive Order No. 12, which directed the Governor’s StreetSafe Task Force to Stop Repeat Offenders to formulate policy goals to guide authorities and community members to “coordinate reentry planning and preparation initiatives” (NC Reentry Action Plan). Over the past ten years, the Task Force’s report, along with the legislative report from the Joint Select Committee on Ex-Offender Reintegration into Society, has guided North Carolina’s strategy for reintegrating recently released persons. Today, the state’s programming
for reintegration is led by local reentry councils (LRCs). According to the North Carolina Department of Public Safety’s Division of Adult Correction and Juvenile Justice, local reentry councils are meant to “coordinate resources in the community for formerly incarcerated people and their families that will facilitate a successful transition from the criminal justice system back into society” (NC Reentry Action Plan).

**Main Question**

As of 2017, there are 14 reentry councils in North Carolina serving 20 counties. Ultimately, the State Reentry Council Collaborative (SRCC) hopes to expand its programming to serve the formerly incarcerated in all 100 counties. Currently, the SRCC provides recommendations to the state of North Carolina on ways in which to improve reintegration efforts for the thousands of justice-involved persons returning home. These recommendations largely look outwards to other divisions of North Carolina’s government, but it is also imperative to look inward at each existing County’s reentry council’s relative success. I will be looking specifically at Durham’s LRC which primarily serves recently released individuals with Durham residency. Durham County is in a unique position because it has a progressive District Attorney, Sheriff and Mayor who are poised to ease the post-incarceration transition. Satana Deberry’s campaign for District Attorney was rooted in building a fairer and safer Durham with a clear emphasis on reevaluating our current incarceration system and strategy (Deberry for District Attorney). Clarence Birkhead’s platform for Sheriff included an explicit interest in improving reentry efforts, stating he wants the Sheriff’s office to “connect individuals to the support they need to help break the cycle of recidivism” (Birkhead for Durham). Furthermore, Mayor Steve Schewel proposed
legislation to eliminate a collateral consequence of incarceration by allowing ex-felons to obtain a Commercial Driver’s License (Steve Schewel for Durham).

Central Question: What concrete steps is Durham’s local reentry council taking to accomplish their goal of helping justice-involved individuals reintegrate into society and in what ways can their practice be improved?

**Conceptual Framework and Literature Review**

I. **Introduction**

The United States has seen a 500% increase in the number of persons currently incarcerated in prison and jails, with the most recent population total of 2.2 million people. In 1973, around 200,000 people were behind bars (Prisoners 1925-81 1982). Sentencing and law enforcement policies can be credited with this exponential rise, rather than an increase in crimes committed overall (The Sentencing Project 2016). Approximately 77 million Americans have a criminal record and in North Carolina, 1 in 5 adults are living with criminal records (State Reentry Council Collaborative 2018 Recommendations). This rising prison population translates to an ever-growing group of citizens trying to reintegrate into society upon release.

A priority for justice-involved individuals, their families and communities is avoiding reincarceration. In an effort to reduce the likelihood of rearrest and reimprisonment, reentry programs have been implemented across the nation. Comprehensive reentry programs can provide formerly incarcerated persons with access to housing, employment, educational and health services. Employment programs, halfway houses and drug rehabilitation have been shown to be effective in reducing recidivism (Jonson and Cullen 2015).
II. Defining a Program Evaluation to Study the Effectiveness of Public Policy

The policy process includes the following five steps: problem identification, policy analysis, policy development, policy enactment and policy implementation. Policy implementation is assessed through program evaluation. For policy regarding the formerly incarcerated, the local reentry councils are the implementation step and will be analyzed as such. A program evaluation can be defined as “the systematic assessment of the operation and/or outcomes of a program or policy, compared to a set of explicit or implicit standards as a means of contributing to the improvement of the program or policy” (Weiss 1998).

There are multitudinous ways in which an evaluation can be carried out but “the systematic assessment” of the program or policy mandates that a concrete plan must be in place. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has defined theirs to include the following steps: engaging stakeholders, describing the program, focusing the evaluation design, gathering credible evidence, justifying conclusions and ensuring use and sharing lessons learned (Framework for Program Evaluation in Public Health 4). Though the steps for this evaluation practice were developed within a public health lens, they are applicable to other public programs. The above stages will be used in my analysis of the reentry council in Durham County, North Carolina.

The stages of evaluation start with engaging stakeholders which includes “people or organizations having an investment in what will be learned from an evaluation and what will be done with the knowledge.” Secondly, the context, resources, and anticipated outcomes of the program are outlined. The specific methodology of the evaluation and indicators of success or failure within a program’s operation are also detailed. Conclusions will be justified by analyzing and synthesizing the data and giving recommendations. Finally, there must be a follow-up with
the program and distribution of the knowledge gained via the completed evaluation. Moreover, the CDC has adapted standards for assessing the effectiveness of an evaluation to include utility, feasibility, propriety and accuracy (Framework 6).

III. Demographics of Released Individuals

The Bureau of Justice Statistics estimates that approximately 600,000 individuals are released from state and federal prisons annually, and this number is only expected to rise (Beck 2000). More than 95% of state prisoners will eventually be released to their communities at some point (Bureau of Justice Statistics 2020). The large majority of those being released are male, and represent 88% and 78%, of those under parole and probation, respectively (Bureau of Justice Statistics 2016). The median age of persons being released is 34 with a median education level of 11th grade (Travis, Solomon, Waul 2001). More than half of recently released individuals are Black/African American, representing 40% and 31% of those under parole and probation, respectively (Kaeble 2018).

In the early 1980s, just over 30% of individuals released from state and federal prisons were convicted of violent offenses, while just over 10% of individuals were drug offenders. Over the past 30 years, there has been an increase in drug offenders being released and a gradual decrease in violent offenders. Recent studies have shown that the proportion of released offenders who were convicted of drug crimes rose from 11% to 32%, while the number of violent offenders fell from 32% to 25% (Lynch and Sabol 2001). In North Carolina, property and non-trafficking drug crimes constitute between 65% and 69% of all felony convictions over the past ten years (Quick Facts: Felony Convictions).

IV. Sentence and Parole Reform Policy
Sentencing reform over the last 20 years, including mandatory minimums, has caused the average amount of time individuals spend behind bars to increase. Since their creation in the 1950s, mandatory minimums mandate that judges “sentence offenders to a specified minimum prison term for a specific crime” (Mandatory Minimums and Sentencing Reform). Before North Carolina’s Fair Sentencing Act was passed in 1981, there was indeterminate sentencing, in that “judges had wide discretion to set sentences” (Freeman 2011). In the late 1980s, the Parole Commission was releasing prisoners at a rapid rate, such that many defendants were only serving a fraction of their court sentence. As a result, judges imposed longer sentences. Inconsistent sentencing led to a sharp increase in North Carolina’s prison population: in 1975, the average daily population was less than 13,000, which later increased to 17,500 in 1985, and finally to a staggering 19,000 in 1990 (Freeman 2011).

Nationwide, in 1990, the average time spent behind bars was 22 months, while 1998 saw a 27% increase to 28 months (Prisoners in 1999, Beck 2000). In addition to the mean sentence length increasing, there has been a sharp decrease, from 33% to 16%, in the number of exiting prisoners who were incarcerated for one year or less (Lynch and Sabol 2001).

Changing parole practices have also altered the conditions of release for many. Previously, prisoners were released after the parole board’s approval, which served as an incentive for good behavior during their sentence. However, truth-in-sentencing legislation passed in the late 20th century requires convicts to serve the period for which they have been sentenced, thereby reducing the parole board’s role in making release decisions. 40 states require violent offenders to serve at least 50% of their sentences, while 27 of these states, including North Carolina and the District of Columbia, mandate that these offenders serve at least 85% of their sentences (Ditton and Wilson 1999).
V. Preparation for Release and Reintegration

As previously mentioned, nearly all incarcerated individuals will be released and are spending, on average, more time behind bars. Therefore, this time could be used to improve their skills, treat addictions, and generally prepare them for their anticipated freedom. However, access to and participation in in-prison programs is disproportionately low, with respect to their expected effectiveness.

Intensive, prison-based drug treatment programs have been proven to reduce recidivism, especially when they are combined with post-release community aftercare (Gaes et. al 1999). The quality and quantity of these programs varies widely across the nation, but their impact has yet to reach its maximum potential. A 2012 report by the Government Accountability Office cited prison overcrowding within the federal system as the reason for the tens of thousands of individuals on the waitlist for drug treatment programs (Johnson 2012). Of those who are about to be released, only 18% of those with a substance abuse problem reported having received treatment during their sentence (Beck 2000). Approximately 63% of the 40,000 inmates in the North Carolina Department of Corrections need substance abuse treatment, however the current programming can only accommodate about 10,000 individuals, annually (Joyner 2010).

In addition to substance abuse prevention programs, a very low proportion of inmates have said they participated in vocational or educational programs while incarcerated. There have been strides to expand correctional education programs across the nation, most notably, in California (The Hechinger Report 2019). But there still exists a large number of prisoners being released who have not participated in vocational and/or educational programs. The North Carolina General Assembly currently prohibits utilizing state funds for community college training in
local jails, greatly diminishing inmates’ access to post-secondary education (State Reentry Council Collaborative 2018 Recommendations).

VI. Post-Release Supervision and Parole Violations

Fewer release decisions are made by the parole board, but a large majority of the recently incarcerated are subject to some form of post-prison supervision in the community, most often parole (Mai and Subramaniam 2017). The increasing incarceration and release rates correspond to a rapidly growing parolee population: in 2000, 725,500 offenders were on parole, which went up to 853,200 in 2013 (Heberman 2014).

Requirements of parole vary by jurisdiction, but they typically include drug abstinence, curfews, maintaining employment and not associating with persons with a criminal record (Prison Fellowship 2020). This era of constant technological innovation has enabled parole supervision to be more efficient, yet substantially more intense. Electronic monitoring allows parole officers and other law enforcement officials to observe ex-offenders for 24 hours a day, 365 days of the year (Connecticut General Assembly). However, these heightened supervision strategies have not been proven to reduce reoffending, though they have been correlated with detecting more technical parole violations (Petersilia 1999).

If parolees do not meet the conditions of their supervision or have been convicted of a new crime, their parole can be revoked, and they can be incarcerated again. In 2016, at least 168,000 formerly incarcerated individuals were imprisoned for technical violations of their parole (Kaeble 2016). Nationwide, parole violations account for over 30% of prison re-admissions. Some speculate that with the growing parolee population, but a disproportionate amount of resources, these technical violations may serve as a mechanism to manage parole officers’ large caseloads (Travis et. al 2001). Moreover, some parole officers reported that the law enforcement
component of their work is a greater priority than the rehabilitation component, and the absence of rehabilitation may be contributing to the high rate of parolees returning to prison (Travis et. al 2001).

The changing parole processes transformed criminal supervision to a punitive, rather than a rehabilitative program. Although their goal is to reduce recidivism, the mechanism by which this is done has resulted in an increase in prison readmissions. Parole officers are a component of local reentry councils so it is important to evaluate the extent to which they are still successful in fulfilling their original mandate as technology advances and their caseloads grow.

VII. Existing Challenges to Reentry

a. Substance Abuse

Nationwide, 58.5% of state prisoners report having a drug dependence or abuse problem and 39.3% report using drugs prior to their criminal justice involvement (Bronson 2017). As previously mentioned, of the individuals with drug dependency problems upon their incarceration, only about 18% of them received treatment (Beck 2000). Several studies found that drug treatment is a cost-efficient strategy in reducing both substance abuse and criminal activity (Travis et. al 2001).

In addition to high levels of drug use and abuse, the incarcerated have a significantly higher proportion of alcohol problems relative to the general American population. 71% and 65% of state and federal inmates, respectively, reported that they ever drank regularly. Moreover, 28% and 21% of state and federal inmates, respectively, reported that they drank daily or almost daily in the past year (Hartley and Marks Publishers 2002). Of those who were alcohol-dependent upon their incarceration, just over 20% of them received in-prison treatment (Beck 2000).
For individuals who undergo in-prison treatment followed up by community aftercare, there was a 28% decrease in recidivism and a 62% decrease in drug use (Gaes et. al 1999, Beck 2000). Increasing access to high quality treatment programs behind bars and pairing them with community-based programs after release have the highest likelihood of reducing criminal activity and substance dependency.

b. Mental and Physical Health

The rates of chronic, communicable illnesses within prisons are significantly higher than the general American population. An estimated 40% of inmates report having a chronic condition and 21% reported ever having tuberculosis, hepatitis B or C, or other STDs, excluding HIV or AIDS (Medical Problems, Maruschak 2015). 1.5% of the total prison population has HIV, which is about three times higher than the national statistics (HIV in Prisons, Maruschak 2015).

The high rates of chronic ailments demand in-prison healthcare services to be more robust and for post-release healthcare services to be established. Continuity of high-quality care during incarceration and afterwards must be standardized. Although many systems provide planning and treatment regimens for inmates living with HIV, these services are highly variable across the nation (Travis et. al 2001).

The proportion of prisoners with mental illnesses is also disproportionately high. 14% of inmates met the threshold for serious psychological distress (SPD) in the previous 30 days before the study, while 37% of them reported being told that they had a mental disorder by a mental health professional. For perspective, 5% of the general standardized population reported meeting the SPD threshold in the past 30 days. 63% of prisoners who had ever been told they had a mental disorder had received treatment since their admission: 49% receiving counseling or
therapy and 39% receiving a combination of counseling or therapy and prescription medication (Bronson and Berzofsky 2017).

Successful reintegration of the formerly incarcerated with mental illness is dependent upon a sustainable mental healthcare program upon their release. Many mentally ill inmates also suffer from drug dependency, thus, the community-based program in place must account for this intersectionality (Travis et. al 2001). The in-prison system is insufficient and must be expanded. Additionally, the momentum must be carried into their release in an effort to increase the likelihood of a successful reentry.

c. Employment Opportunities
Stable employment upon release is a crucial component to an individual’s successful reintegration. However, the collateral consequences of a criminal conviction prevent justice-involved persons from obtaining jobs. Studies have shown that a conviction signaled to employers that the applicant was untrustworthy, and employers were “less likely to respond positively” to the applicants that revealed their criminal background (Western, Kling and Weiman 2001).

Prior to employers reviewing applications, many justice-involved individuals are unable to apply for some positions. Many states impose restrictions upon hiring ex-offenders in fields such as education, healthcare and other forms of public employment (Travis et. al 2001). North Carolina ranks twelfth out of 50 states with 695 collateral consequences related to “employment” and “occupational and professional license and certification” (National Inventory of Collateral Consequences of Conviction). Moreover, North Carolina ranks thirteenth with respect to total collateral consequences (Study of Employment Collateral Consequences in North Carolina 6).
Relative to those who are continuously employed, an individual’s incarceration may undermine attaining employable skills, especially as access to vocational and educational training, drug treatment and healthcare services decreases with an increase in the incarcerated population (Western et. al 2001). Many employers seeking to hire previously imprisoned applicants require more job experience which is almost virtually impossible as sentence lengths increase (Study of Employment Collateral Consequences in North Carolina 17). Moreover, Granovetter (1995) found that a “large proportion of jobs are found through personal connections that match workers to employers” (Western et. al 2001). As their time spent behind bars increases, it is possible that their social connections to employment on the outside are dwindling, so too their “likelihood of participating in the legal economy” (Travis et. al 2001).

Stable employment upon release is a significant indicator of reduced recidivism, especially those with high wages. However, the income penalty for incarceration is estimated to be between 10% and 30% (Western et. al 2001). Prison-based vocational and educational programs have positive ramifications in terms of reduced recidivism, but the most effective initiatives are those targeted at released prisoners in their mid-twenties (Travis et. al 2001). In an effort to combat ex-convicts’ perceived untrustworthiness, the presence of a third-party intermediary or case manager to avoid problems in the workplace, increases employers’ willingness to hire the formerly incarcerated (Travis et. al 2001).

d. Housing

Potentially the most difficult challenge facing released prisoners is finding stable housing. The North Carolina Sentencing and Policy Advisory Commission reported unstable housing in the top 10 most selected barriers for offenders: applying for work and an identification card is substantially more difficult for those without a permanent address (Study of Employment
Collateral Consequences in North Carolina 23). Many do not leave prison with sufficient funding to afford an apartment, on top of landlords requiring future tenants to list their financial and criminal history, which makes securing housing difficult. Moreover, federal housing policies enable federally assisted housing programs to deny housing to persons who have engaged in “certain criminal activities” (Legal Action Center 2005). The guidelines are fairly lenient, citing that individuals who have, at any point, engaged in “drug-related criminal activity, violent criminal activity, or other criminal activity that would adversely affect the health, safety, or right to peaceful enjoyment of the premises” can be refused public housing (Legal Action Center 2005).

Individuals who have been evicted from public housing units for drug-related criminal activity or alcohol abuse cannot reapply for another three years. However, housing providers may shorten the three-year window if there is evidence that the evictee is participating in a drug treatment program (Travis et. al 2001). Thus, expanding substance abuse treatment programs and increasing access to affordable housing can aid in reintegrating the formerly incarcerated.

VIII. The Price of Prisons and the Role of Reentry Programs

The boom in incarceration rates has also translated to a large increase in spending within the justice system. In 2015, the average annual cost of an inmate in North Carolina was $30,180 (Mai and Subramaniam 2017). The price of prison includes the costs of security, food, recreation and healthcare. To decrease these costs and the burden on American constituents, there must be a greater push to support sustainable, expansive reentry programs and diminish the rate of re-imprisonment.

Relative to community-based initiatives, local reintegration programs have the potential to impact the most amount of recently released individuals. Community-based initiatives
mandate that an individual voluntarily seek support from them, which could limit their reach. On the other hand, a government-sponsored program paired with law enforcement agencies could be an effective tool to reduce recidivism and ensure they become stable members of the community. Community solutions in Texas and California have seen success but are not standardized: Oasis Center in Texas provides mentorship, financial literacy, among other services, while Root and Rebound in California provides legal assistance (Charles Koch Institute).

A comprehensive, standardized program has the potential to be highly effective, in that individuals are not susceptible to variable initiatives dependent upon their location. Nationwide, hundreds of community organizations have been successful in securing stable employment and housing for recently released individuals, but current programming is not standardized across the board, as it could be with a local model.

IX. Reentry Programs in the United States

Since the early 2000s, the United States has transitioned from a parole management system to resource mobilization in an effort to alleviate “the reentry problem” (Jonson and Cullen 2015). President Franklin D. Roosevelt vocalized the “very important matter of getting people from prison back into society,” but only recently have we seen reentry programming embraced by federal, state and local governments (Roosevelt 1941). The reentry movement in the United States was largely spearheaded by two events: funding the Serious and Violent Offender Reentry Initiative and passing the 2008 Second Chance Act.

In 2003, the federal government established the Serious and Violent Offender Reentry Initiative (SVORI) which provided funding to “improve the criminal justice, employment, education, health and housing outcomes for people returning to the community after prison” (Garcia and Ritter 2012). Across all 50 states, 69 agencies received between $500,000 and $2
million over a three-year period to support programs to reduce reimprisonment and improve post-release outcomes. In North Carolina, the Departments of Corrections and Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention were among the SVORI grantees (Lattimore and Staffey 2010).

President George W. Bush solidified his support for combatting the reentry problem by signing the Second Chance Act into law in 2008. The Second Chance Act established the Prison Reentry Initiative which helped recently released individuals gain employment and partnered with the Departments of Justice and Labor to tackle recidivism in high-risk regions. The Act also enabled state and local governments to collaborate with non-profit organizations to create prisoner reentry demonstration projects which include vocational training and mental and physical health care (Office of the Press Secretary 2008). Through the Second Chance Act grant program, over five North Carolinian organizations received funding for their reentry efforts (Second Chance Act Grant Program).

These programs have enabled the development of hundreds of reentry programs nationwide that have decreased recidivism in their communities. However, determining effectiveness of these programs is especially difficult as many are not evaluated (Mears and Cochran 2015). As such, it is a challenge to concretely determine what “works” for reentry programs. Recent survey findings show that the general population supports prisoner reentry programs, therefore we have a responsibility to build off of this momentum and support comprehensive, success programming.

**Methodology**

I will be conducting my analysis of Durham’s local reentry council’s effectiveness across five central categories: constituencies, services, funding, partnerships and organizational structure. In the discussion of their LRC’s vision, mission and goal, language related to these
categories is present throughout. These categories are the most pertinent to the analysis and as such, will be used to evaluate the LRC’s effectiveness.

This analysis is a case study of Durham because it has a progressive local government with an interest in prisoner reentry. Relative to other North Carolina counties, Durham is in a unique position, in that reentry programming has strong backing from their mayor, Sheriff and District Attorney. Therefore, it has the greatest possibility of having successful LRC.

I. Constituencies

Local reentry councils most broadly target persons recently released from criminal supervision, but the demographics of this audience is widely varied. I will be using existing publicly available data from the North Carolina Department of Public Safety’s statistical publications and research archive regarding trends in justice-involved individuals in North Carolina, inmate infraction trends, homelessness in ex-offenders, educational attainment in inmates, chronic illness, supervision entries and exits, prison entries and exits to get necessary background to understand who is being served.

The trends in justice-involved individuals in North Carolina provides information regarding the changes in population statistics between 1995 and 2000. This report delineates the trends in supervision entries and exist, the age and sex distribution, racial composition, crime types, and the average length of stay for both the probation and prison populations. Though this data is moderately outdated, it provides the context for which many of these reentry programs were established and the populations they help. This report will be used alongside the supervision entries and exits dataset as well as the prison entries and exits dataset, which provides more current information.
In an effort to better understand their time whilst incarcerated, I will be utilizing the inmate infraction trends dataset for descriptive statistics. An infraction is defined as any violation of a rule by an inmate. Infraction counts serve as indicators for behavior on the outside, and what services they might be needing upon release.

As previously noted, nationwide, ex-offenders are allowed to be legally discriminated against for their criminal background by both private and public landlords. Thus, the report regarding homelessness in ex-offenders gives a glimpse into how this practice directly impacts the resident offender population of North Carolina.

Moreover, it is imperative to note what level of education inmates have received prior to their period of incarceration, such as to better understand the context for the extent at which LRCs provide educational programming.

Finally, healthcare for low-income persons is already a difficult feat, as they are not exempt from contracting illnesses but are more burdened with the price of their sickness. Thus, the statistics memo regarding inmates with HIV/AIDS provides the conditions for which some LRCs enable access to quality medical care.

II. Services

Every reentry program across the nation varies in what services they provide to their target population and North Carolina-based programs are no exception to this rule. In an effort to analyze the effectiveness of the LRC, I will be looking into what specific services each provides, what their specialty is and how they are providing them. Their specific programming is available on their public website, but in the event that the details of their implementation is not provided, I will be reaching out to Durham’s LRC to gain a concrete understanding of how they distribute their services.
III. Funding

Similar to their specialization of services, the funding for an LRC varies within North Carolina. Each program’s annual report and their budget can provide information regarding their allocation of resources to determine their program’s efficacy. Moreover, I will investigate whether or not they are functioning solely on their donations from the state. If not, where is their additional support coming from? The job of the Intermediary Agency is to manage funding for establishing each LRC, thus an investigation into the financial reports will indicate the level at which the council is able to provide resources to its target population.

IV. Partnerships

Local reentry councils are public entities, and thus must rely heavily on public support. All of their goals cannot be single handedly achieved, therefore, looking into which other institutions they work with to help their population is imperative to this analysis. From looking at their websites and communicating with the Advisory Committee to determine which public entities are providing their services.

V. Organizational Structure

The structure of a local reentry council is tantamount to the services it is providing. Unequal distribution of labor could potentially pose major roadblocks to seamless service dissemination. North Carolina’s LRCs have an established structure, but their execution must be analyzed. Therefore I will be asking the following questions when investigating organizational structure:

How many people are on the staff? How often do they work? How is work distributed amongst the staff? Do you have plans to change your current structure to include more/less employees?

Empirical Discoveries and Analysis
Durham’s Local Reentry Council is a network that provides services and support for justice involved individuals. As delineated on their website, the goal of the local reentry council is to provide persons with the necessary services and support to aid their transition and reduce recidivism at a local level. In an effort to analyze Durham’s Local Reentry Council’s success I will be looking into the constituencies, services, funding, partnerships, and their organizational structure.

1. **Constituencies**

Durham’s Local Reentry Council’s target population includes incarcerated individuals within 6 months with a Durham home plan, people being released from detention facilities, those currently on probation, parole or post-release supervision or any justice-involved individual. The first demographic I will be looking into is people in prison with a Durham home plan.

The data that is publicly available on the North Carolina Department of Public Service website only has information on entries, exits and total population within the justice system. So, I looked into exists to capture the Council’s primary target population. To determine which individuals have a Durham home plan, I filtered the data to focus on persons who self-reported their County as Durham. After this filtering, I determined that 623 were released from state prison facilities between December 1, 2019 and November 30, 2020. 445 of those individuals, about 75%, are Black and a majority are over the age of 50.

I then expanded my search to include those that were released from all types of community corrections. This includes those in active, intermediate and community sentences. Active punishment involves incarceration in either a local jail or state prison. In North Carolina, misdemeanants are incarcerated in local jails, while felons are in state prisons. Intermediate punishments mandate that the offender be placed on supervised probation which could also
include special conditions such as electronic house arrest, drug treatment court or a residential center. Finally, community punishments involve a simpler probation which could include community service or educational skills development (Schlosser and Pritchett). In the last year, 1,150 people with Durham County residence were released from all forms of community corrections.

It is also important to understand the felony-misdemeanor status of recently released individuals, as the reintegration processes are different. In the last year, of the 623 individuals that were released, about 96% of them are convicted felons. A small 24 are classified as misdemeanants.

One of Durham’s Local Reentry Council target populations includes those that are currently on probation, parole or post-release supervision. To better understand this demographic, I filtered prison entries by punishment type and looking specifically into active sentencing, intermediate sentencing and post-release, I saw that 371 people could be classified as being on probation, parole or post-release supervision. In North Carolina, post-release supervision operates similar to a parole program and may require that participants meet with their supervising official regularly, not use illegal substances and obtain employment.

From this data, we can see that the Durham Local Reentry Council could potentially have a total target demographic of 1,773 individuals in the past year. This is potentially an underestimation because I limited my data to those with Durham residences and those under various forms post-release supervision. However, their largest target population is any justice-involved individual which has the capacity to more than double this number because it could include persons incarcerated and released in the past years.
The context for how many individuals the Council provides services for is necessary, but even more important is understanding who these people are. When an individual is referred to the Council, the LRC does a needs assessment and creates a personalized plan for their reintegration, so it is important to take a closer look into their target populations so we can understand what kinds of individuals they are interfacing with. The characteristics to be considered include educational attainment, health, inmate infraction and recidivism rates.

II. Services

Durham’s Local Reentry Council provides services via its Intermediary Agency, the Criminal Justice Resource Center (CJRC). The CJRC has three community-based corrections programs for Durham County residents over 18 who are currently on probation, parole or post-release supervision. The three programs are Adult Drug Treatment Court, Recidivism Reduction Services and The Reentry Program.

Adult Drug Treatment Court (ADTC) targets persons with substance abuse problems that are convicted of particular non-violent, felony or misdemeanor offenses. ADTC serves an alternative to incarceration to treat chemical dependency and “break the cycle” of substance abuse and related crime. ADTC is made up of a judge, prosecutor, defense attorney, law enforcement liaison, probation officer, drug court coordinator and treatment providers all seeking to help the participant succeed. The 1-year program requires that the voluntary participants be willing to engage in treatment and educational programming. The treatment services may include a needs assessment, intensive outpatient treatment, case management and group therapy. Additionally, individuals must pay any outstanding fees, complete community service, meet with their case manager and attend bi-weekly court sessions with the judge and treatment team.
Participants may also be eligible for education and employment assistance. In the past year, ADTC served 38 individuals.

Recidivism Reduction Services (RSS) provides cognitive behavioral programming, substance abuse services and connections to community resources for high risk adult offenders in Durham County. The North Carolina Department of Public Safety aims to reduce recidivism and rates of probation and post release supervision revocations.

In FY2019, the Criminal Justice Resource Center had 14 people enrolled in their Reentry Program, 13 of which completed it. Working alongside the Durham Police Department, Community Corrections, the Parole Commission and the Religious Coalition for a Non-Violent Durham, the program provides various support services to ease the return of offenders into the community after incarceration.

III. Funding
The Criminal Justice Resource Center receives a majority of its funding at the County level. Local and state governments contribute just under $1M to their revenue. Of the about $4M total revenue, their expenditures on the reentry program in FY2019, was just over half a million dollars.

IV. Partnerships
The key to Durham’s Local Reentry Council succeeding is their community partnerships. The LRC itself connects people with employment assistance and job readiness training, substance use disorder treatment, transportation assistance, mental health referrals, transitional/short-term housing assistance and child-care assistance. The aforementioned substantial barriers to reentry—substance abuse, mental and physical health, employment and housing—are all directly addressed through the LRC’s local partnerships.
Acting as the Intermediary Agency for the Reentry Council, the CJRC has dozens of connections to local community-based organizations for services including food assistance, clothing assistance and homelessness prevention assistance. Some of the organizations they partner with include the Durham Rescue Mission, TROSA, Housing for New Hope and StepUp Durham.

V. Organizational Structure

All North Carolina local reentry councils directly fund two employment positions, a reentry coordinator and a case manager. The coordinator oversees case management in addition to forming and maintaining partnerships with local service providers. The case manager is directly in charge of formulating reentry plans and connecting individuals to local resources. LRCs in North Carolina are made up of the following four entities: the North Carolina Department of Public Safety (NC DPS), an Intermediary Agency, the Advisory Committee and Service Providers. The NC DPS supports the LRC and is informed of existing resources within communities to assist in the transition from correctional supervision. An Intermediary Agency is a nongovernmental organization that acts as a liaison between the state’s Office of Research and Planning and is responsible for managing funding for the creation of LRCs. The Advisory Committee is composed of non-profit leaders, formerly incarcerated individuals and government leaders to identify missing resources and respond to those that are lacking, where possible. Finally, Service Providers consist of local and faith-based community organizations that directly provide services to recently released individuals (Reentry Initiatives).

Conclusion

At the outset of my research, I sought to evaluate the efficacy of Durham’s local reentry council using a program evaluation framework. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention’s
program evaluation steps were clear in its components: engaging stakeholders, describing the
program, focusing the evaluation design, gathering credible evidence, justifying conclusions and
ensuring use and sharing lessons learned. The step of importance is focusing the evaluation
design as this part requires identifying the indicators of success or failure within a program’s
operation. It is impossible to determine a program’s efficacy if one cannot even determine what
success or failure looks like.

Durham’s LRC publishes their achievements via participant numbers in their annual
report. However, these numbers require context to be understood. In their reports, there is no
number for their total target population. Durham’s Local Reentry Council’s target population
includes incarcerated individuals within 6 months with a Durham home plan, people being
released from detention facilities, those currently on probation, parole or post-release supervision
or any justice-involved individual. At face value, this population seems relatively large,
particularly “any justice-involved individual.” A justice-involved individual includes any person
who has had any “contact or interaction with courts, jails or prisons including drug-courts, child
protection cases, probation, jail, prison or workhouse” (Justice-Involved Populations). In North
Carolina, approximately 160,000 persons are formally incarcerated or under criminal justice
supervision (North Carolina profile). This number, however, does not even remotely cover the
number of people classified as justice-involved individuals.

Using public data from the North Carolina Department of Public Service, I estimated that
the Durham LRC’s in the last year’s total target population was approximately 1,773 people.
Their annual report indicates that they served 290 individuals, therefore, they reached a mere
16.4% of their target population. 16.4% seems to be a small number, therefore, to better
understand their success rate, I decided to compare their results to two other neighboring counties’ LRC.

I. County Comparison

I chose to compare Durham County with Orange and Wake Counties. Similar to Durham’s LRC, Orange and Wake’s LRCs do not explicitly state their total target population size. Therefore, I will use the similar strategy as in Durham to determine their target demographics.

a. Orange County

Orange County’s target population includes individuals released from a federal or state prison or local jail returning to Orange County or any Orange County resident facing barriers to reentry due to a justice-involved past. The primary demographic of interest is the individuals with an Orange County home plan. To determine which individuals have an Orange County home plan, I filtered the data to focus on persons who self-reported their county as Orange. After this filtering, I determined that 114 were released from state prison facilities between December 1, 2019 and November 30, 2020. 70 of those individuals, about 60%, are Black and a majority are male.

I then expanded my search to include those that were released from all types of community corrections. In the last year, 312 people with Orange County residency were released from all forms of community corrections.

From this data, we can see that the Orange’s Local Reentry Council could potentially have a total target demographic of 426 individuals in the past year. This is potentially an underestimation because I limited my data to those with Orange County residences and those under various forms post-release supervision. However, their largest target population is any justice-involved individual facing barriers to reentry which has the capacity to more than double this number because it could include persons incarcerated and released in past years.
In FY2019, the Orange County LRC had 54 individuals on their caseload, approximately 12.6% of their estimated target population (Orange County LRC). Orange County’s LRC’s Intermediary Agency is the Criminal Justice Resource Department (CJRD) and provides case management for LRC clients.

In just its second year of operation, Orange County’s LRC provided housing, education, employment and transportation services. 24 clients were facing housing instability and the LRC was able to obtain housing assistance via transitional and/or emergency housing for 18 clients. Five were able to obtain permanent housing assistance via rent or security deposit payments.

With respect to education, the LRC partnered with Durham Technical Community College and enrolled eight of their clients in job skills training. The LRC also has a partnership with Recovery Milestones and Durham’s LRC which aids their educational resource expansion. Of those on their caseload, the LRC received employment referrals for 17 of their clients. The Orange County LRC partners with NC Works Career Center, Orange Works Career Center, Vocational Rehabilitation Center and Senior Community Service where clients can receive resume assistance and attend hiring events. Finally, the LRC worked to reduce transportation barriers by providing bus passes for employment-related issues and Uber rides for emergencies.

The Orange County Local Reentry Council already has distinct plans in place to grow their operation and at the outset it is clear they are on the right track. However, a gap still remains in determining what success will look like for them. There is hope for new partnerships in the local communities, but there is not a clear point at which this goal will be reached.

Relative to Durham’s LRC, Orange County serves less of their target population with less support from community organizers. It has only been 2 years since its inception, which could be the cause of this limited community outreach. It is also important to understand the varying
demographics between Orange County and Durham County. Orange County’s population is approximately 142,938 people with a median household income of $68,211, while Durham’s is approximately 316,789 people with a median household income of $58,073. Moreover, Orange County’s poverty rate is 13.4%, while Durham’s is a staggering 16% (Orange County, NC | Data USA). As previously mentioned, there is a clear correlation between income level and criminal activity, which could be the cause of Orange’s small target population and even smaller serviced population (Neighborhoods and Violent Crime).

Relative to Orange County, Durham’s LRC is more robust: serving a larger clientele with more resources.

b. Wake County

Wake County’s target population includes individuals over 18 released within 9 months with Wake County residency, those with an North Carolina Department of Public Safety (NC DPS) assessment score of “High” and those currently on probation, parole or post-release supervision. The primary demographic of interest is Wake County residents over the age of 18. To determine which individuals have Wake County residency, I filtered the data to focus on persons who self-reported their county as Wake. After this filtering, I determined that 1,339 were released from state prison facilities between December 1, 2019 and November 30, 2020. 898 of those individuals, about 67%, are Black and a majority are male.

I then expanded my search to include those that were released from all types of community corrections. In the last year, 3,317 people with Wake County residences were released from all forms of community corrections.

From this data, we can see that the Wake’s Local Reentry Council could potentially have a total target demographic of 4,656 individuals in the past year. This is potentially an
overestimation because I filtered my data to those with Wake County residences and those under various forms post-release supervision. However, their secondary stipulation mandates that individuals in their programming have a NC DPS assessment score of “High.” This assessment prioritizes Wake’s caseload and measures those with the highest risk of recidivism. The score intakes the person’s age at their first offense, their current age and their total number of arrests. Individuals that were young at their first offense and are still young, approximately 21, with over six arrests qualify as “High.” The Wake LRC prioritizes individuals with a “High” score but does not turn away those who do not.

Between January 1, 2020 and September 30, 2020, the Wake LRC served 135 individuals, approximately 3% of their estimated target population (Wake QTR 3 Report). Wake County’s LRC’s Intermediary Agency is the Capital Area Workforce Development.

In conjunction with their local partners, Wake County’s LRC provided housing, basic needs, employment, life skills, documentation and transportation assistance. The vast majority of their clientele received assistance with basic needs. Clothing, food, phone service and personal protective equipment all qualify as basic needs service. Some of Wake’s partners include Community Success Initiatives, Fathers Forever, Pardoned by Christ and Redirection NC. Among other services including employment training and mentorship, all these community organizations provide housing assistance as this is the largest barrier facing recently released individuals in Wake County. In an interview with the LRC Coordinator, LaNarda Roberts Williamson, she stated that “what we’re really struggling with is housing…it’s a huge concern.” Pardoned by Christ provides housing for male sex offenders but only has 4 beds to serve the entirety of Wake County.
Similar to North Carolina’s other local reentry councils, Wake County receives a majority of its funding from the NC DPS. All LRCs in North Carolina receive the same amount of money from the DPS, regardless of size. Wake County is the largest LRC but has disproportionate financial support from the government. However, they have applied for additional funding to expand their existing capacity, specifically related to COVID-19 response.

Relative to Durham and Orange’s LRCs, Wake County serves a substantially smaller fraction of their target population with less financial support. In confronting this disparity, it is also important to understand the varying demographics between Wake County and Durham County. Wake County’s population is approximately 1.09M people, almost three times larger than Durham’s, with a median household income of $79,970. Moreover, Wake County’s poverty rate is 9.75%, substantially less than Durham’s 16% (Orange County, NC & Wake County, NC | Data USA). Wake County’s large population could account for its substantial estimated target population size; however, they are clearly not meeting the demand of persons needing reintegration assistance.

Looking at Durham’s data in isolation paints a very different picture than what we can now see when comparing its LRC with Orange and Wake’s. Durham is able to reach a greater proportion of their target population with greater support from their community partners. However, it is not simply enough to speak relatively and in comparison. Durham’s LRC has an obligation to expand their case management capacity to help those on the margins of society.

II. **Recommendation: Hire a Data Analyst**

At present, Durham’s LRC only funds two full-time positions: case manager and reentry coordinator. Their main priorities are resource allocation and partnership maintenance which are already substantial undertakings. There is a clear deficit in the data available regarding LRC
participant demographics and outcomes which mandates the need for an additional position of data analyst. Based on my research, it is my opinion that this is the first step to improving our LRC and meeting the growing demand. My proposed job description for the position can be found in Appendix 1.

The primary obstacle to developing this position is funding. I proposed a starting rate of $17/hour which is comparable to other part-time data analyst positions. Assuming an 8-hour workday, 5 days a week for approximately 47 weeks, this totals to $31,960 annually to fund this position.

In order to support this position, the Durham LRC must primarily request additional resources from the NC DPS. Additionally, it is imperative they apply to nationwide criminal justice support grants, namely through the Second Chance Act. The Second Chance Act grant program supports non-profit organizations that provide reentry programming to those released from a correctional facility. Durham’s LRC falls into the Category 1 grantees: larger organizations that serve at least 150 participants. With respect to the data analyst position specifically, this qualifies for the “developing or enhancing data systems” and “providing sustained case planning and management in the community” components of the allowable uses for the grants (Second Chance Act Programs). In FY2020, the Department of Justice awarded 21 grants of at least $450,000, with a majority at $750,000 (FY 2020 Second Chance Act). Even at the minimum, this is sufficient funding to support this part-time position for over 14 years.

The proposed job description included the possibility for full-time employment contingent on excellent employee performance. Data analysts in North Carolina are salaried at more than $50,000 and a grant of this size could definitely support this growth for at least eight years, following an 18-month part-time tenure. Second Chance Act grants are intended to
support the organization for three years; therefore, this grant could not only cover this new position but expand the LRC’s existing programming.

The deficits in Durham’s LRC effectively fulfilling its mandate come from an ineffective streamlining of services. Therefore, the first step to improving resource dissemination comes from efficiently collecting and organizing client data. Upon referral to the LRC, individuals undergo a needs assessment in which the case manager determines what services the person needs. This assessment process also allows the staff to correctly prioritize and allocate resources properly. This process must continue but with a clear outline of needs hierarchy.

III. Implications and Further Research

The five main barriers to a successful reentry into society are substance abuse, mental and physical health, housing, employment. At present, Durham’s local reentry council technically supports their client base in all of these areas, but the way in which it is accomplished must be improved. This is a highly difficult and expensive process, but we must not shy away from this undertaking simply because it is not easy.

We have a responsibility to help those we have pushed to the margins of society due to their criminal conviction. Justice-involved persons should not be suffering lifelong, debilitating repercussions after they are released from criminal supervision. As such, the first step must be streamlining their access to resources via their local reentry councils. It is imperative that Durham County alongside the state government expand their funding and support for this effort. With this additional position and their productivity output, the Durham LRC could substantially grow their client population, available resources and community partnerships.

Ultimately, this is a great starting point, but the work cannot stop here. Additional research on and inquiry into the LRC’s programming must be completed as long as it is serving
the Durham community. In my own research, I elected to compare Durham with Orange and Wake Counties, but further research must juxtapose Durham with the 12 remaining LRCs. Moreover, Durham must be compared to similar organizations across the nation. Durham is relatively successful within a regional North Carolina landscape, but recidivism is not a uniquely North Carolinian problem. As such, other researchers must compare Durham’s efforts with other municipalities across the United States.

Although comparison is useful to paint a broader picture, Durham must also be critiqued in a vacuum. Durham’s history and demographics are unique, and with it their justice-involved population. Therefore, the resources used to assist them must be tailored to the Durham community. It is a long, arduous road to perfecting the reintegration process for our justice-involved community members, but we must stay the course and help those who have been marginalized by their criminal involvement and conviction.
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Appendix

I. Appendix I

The Durham County Local Reentry Council (LRC) is a network of service providers offering assistance to our justice-involved community members. Our goal is to efficiently and successfully reintegrate our clients into the Durham community after a period of criminal supervision.

We are seeking a data analyst to work alongside our reentry coordinator and case manager and support our reintegration efforts.

As a data analyst, you will be a full member of the Durham LRC team, responsible for developing and executing strategies for human-centered data collection and analysis. You will regularly interact with various stakeholders to understand needs, build concise reports, conduct data analysis and make actionable recommendations. You love solving open-ended queries by taking complex data sets and transforming them into meaningful analyses aimed towards identifying imaginative, yet practical solutions for our clientele.

Responsibilities

• You will attend implicit bias training through the Racial Equity Institute.
• You will stay current on sentencing policies and conviction collateral consequences pertaining to the state of North Carolina.
• You will design, build and maintain reports using Excel, R, Python, Tableau and other analysis and visualization tools.
• You will present findings to stakeholders including the North Carolina Departments of Public Safety and Correction.
• You will wrangle, clean and manipulate data to track participant-level enrollment and outcomes.

Requirements

• 2+ years of data analytics experience, with a strong preference for experience within the non-profit/criminal justice space.
• A strong quantitative, problem-solving oriented background and mindset.
• Strong communication skills.
• Ability to thrive in a collaborative working environment.

Preferred Qualifications

• Bachelor’s degree in statistics, computer science, mathematics or a related technical field.
• Expertise in Microsoft Office, particularly Excel.
• Expertise in R and Python data analysis packages.
• Expertise in Tableau or similar data visualization tools.
• Experience with SQL.

This is a part-time position, with a starting rate of $17/hour and the potential for full-time
status dependent upon employee performance. All qualified applicants will receive consideration for employment regardless to race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, criminal conviction, disability, veteran or any other federal, state or local protected status.