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The Role of Community Based Programs in Reducing Recidivism in Ex-Offenders

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Abstract

This study aims focus and attention toward the growing social problem of recidivism among ex-offenders in the United States. The United States incarcerates more people than any other country and the numbers continue to grow. In addition, the United States has the highest rates of recidivism (Pew Center on the States, 2011). Recidivism is defined as a persons continued criminal behavior after receiving some sanctions or undergoing intervention for a pervious crime (National Institute of Justice, 2010). The goal of this research is to highlight important literature that has impacted our views on recidivism, crime, and ex-offenders as well as why our current policies and laws are not helping the situation, but rather hindering. This study is qualitative in nature. Information was obtained through semi-structured interviews with employees currently working with ex-offenders in the community. The data was analyzed using thematic clustering and open coding. The following five themes emerged through data analysis: social stigma as a barrier, lack basic needs, effects of poverty, community ties, and unrealistic preparedness. All interview participants highlighted the general idea that offenders are not prepared for successful release due to societal and personal barriers. This study will highlight previous literature regarding recidivism and barriers to success as well as provide discussion around key findings.

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Introduction and Research Question

The United States has one of the highest incarceration rates in the entire world (Glaze, 2011). The US incarceration rates are astonishingly high in comparison to similar countries and an understanding that we are not equipped to hold over two million people is coming to realization (Glaze, 2011). It is understood that 95% of individuals who become incarcerated will eventually be released back into our communities (National Reentry Resource Center, 2012). Individuals are released from prison with varying degrees of preparation. Best practice and research has initiated a stronger push for rehabilitation programs and reentry planning to assist offenders in successful reentry. Reentry planning refers to processes of preparing offenders for release and reentry into the community by connecting them with resources and health and human service agencies that will assist offenders in pro social reintegration (Mellow & Christian, 2008). Although we have witnessed a shift in the understanding of planning for discharge as potentially necessary, statistics prove that offenders are still recidivating at extreme rates.

The term ex-offender should be addressed for this paper as well. Ex-offender has a negative connotation and much stigma is associated with this label. For the purpose of this research ex-offender will be the primary term used because the literature as a whole identifies this population as ex-offenders. Social workers in particular should be aware of how labeling people affects their own self esteem as well as the way society views them. Ex-offender assumes a person is a criminal and does not take into consideration wrongful conviction or other concerns a person has that has caused them to fall into criminal activity.

Recidivism is defined by the Pew Center on the States (2011) as an individuals' relapse into previous behavior, typically after receiving some type of sanctions or

interventions required for a previous crime (Pew Center on the States, 2011). Research

suggests that in between 2004 and 2007 43% of individuals who were released from state

prisons returned (Pew Center on the States, 2011). Understanding the systems and

barriers in our society that affect successful reentry is the start to finding a solution that

will reduce our high rates of recidivism. This research is seeking to understand the role

of community-based programs in reducing recidivism for ex-offenders.

Despite the great need of services and programming our correctional facilities are

still lacking resources and knowledge on how to tackle the social problem of recidivism.

The literature review points out an important piece of this puzzle with recognition that the

majority of people ending up in prison have been through the system in one way or

another. Many engage in the justice system as young teens and although services may be

provided, they have failed, and society has failed in assisting in positive relationships and

community involvement. The racial and ethnic minorities of the United States are

overrepresented within the correctional system and disproportionally come from and

return to low socioeconomic neighborhoods and communities (Pew Center on the States,

2011). Understanding that individuals who have been incarcerated have not been

introduced or engaged in positive life skills gives even greater support to the need of

community involvement after release through programs and services that are made

available.

Community based agencies and professionals, such as social workers, employed

within the agencies are working at targeting recidivism and providing best practice

treatment modalities to increase successful community reentry for ex-offenders.

Understanding how systems theory and the person in environment perspective impacts

ex-offenders and the world around them is a key component in understanding and

reducing recidivism. Social workers have a unique perspective in that we see the impact

and interaction the individual has in congruence with the systems and world around them.

Recidivism is not a personal failure on the individual but rather a combined societal

failure due to barriers and limited resources. Community based agencies provide a

continuum of care that may have already begun in prison. This transition of community

reentry is more successful when offender needs are identified in association with

necessary services and programs available. Social workers inside and outside the prison

work in collaboration to create smooth reentry by addressing barriers and work on the

construction of appropriate services prior to release. Community based programs that are

targeted to reduce recidivism and increase ex-offender success can only assist and

support if offenders are involved in their services. The literature review will provide

understanding of recidivism, reentry, barriers to success, policy that addresses the issue

of incarceration and recidivism, community based programs, and the role of social

workers and community based programs in reducing recidivism. The research will gain

understanding from the community based program employees whose work consists of

helping ex-offenders' successful reentry in their community. The perspective of direct

service providers will provide insight into what their role is in regards to reducing

recidivism.

Literature Review

Society and Crime

Our society has always had crime, offenders and justice. Although many professionals and citizens are starting to advocate and see a need for change in the way society handles such issues it is apparent that the need is great and our current standards aren't helping to reduce the phenomena of crime. Our prisons are overpopulated to the point that something has to change. The National Council on Crime and Delinquency discusses the United States' incarceration rates in comparison to the rest of the world and their findings are shocking. The United States contributes less than 5% of the world's population but accounts for 23% of the world's incarcerated people," (Walmsley, 2006). Walmsley also suggests that US facilities are overcrowded and contribute to prisoner health problems and are ultimately a safety risk for both staff and prisoners (Walmsley, 2006). According to the U.S. Department of Justice 1 in every 104 adults are incarcerated in state or federal prisons as well as county jails (Glaze, 2011). A 1 in 104 ratio of adult translates into 2,266,800 individuals who were incarcerated in 2010 (Glaze, 2011). Furthermore when looking at the big picture of corrections and supervision, the United States had 7,076,200 individuals in some sort of supervision, probation, parole, or incarceration in 2010 (Glaze, 2011).   Other research also includes that in 2005 alone, 600,000 of incarcerated individuals were released (Pogorelski, Wolff, Pan, & Bltiz, 2005).

Research has highlighted that prison is not transforming the majority of criminals into functioning members of our society. The United States has one of the highest rates of recidivism in the world (Pew Center on States, 2011). According to a study conducted by the Pew Center on the States, between 2004-2007 43% of individuals released from state prisons returned (Pew Center on States, 2011). Slowly society and experts in the field are recognizing our failed attempts of rehabilitating offenders back into the

community and there has been a push to increase success for offenders and the criminal

justice system as well as in the community.

This literature review will discuss polices enacted to increase success within

offender reentry into the community and will help develop ideas and thoughts around

reducing recidivism. More specifically it will focus on effective discharge planning for

offenders, roles of professionals, specifically social workers, in discharge

planning/reentry planning, issues surrounding recidivism, community based programs

and evaluation of the work surrounding effective reentry into the community by ex-

offenders. A deep examination of the literature surrounding this topic will enable one to

understand the role of community based programming in reducing recidivism among ex-

offenders. The literature review will integrate the discussion on resources and services

provided inside the prison to those provided outside the prison via community based

organizations and agencies. The emphasis of this paper is to seek out a continuum of

support for ex-offenders starting from the prison and transitioning into the community.

The aim is to explore how expert support and resources from within the ex–offender's

community are key to reducing recidivism and ensuring his or her own success in

community reentry. This research will add to the knowledge base by gaining important

information directly from community based program employees regarding their work in

reducing recidivism with ex-offenders.

Recidivism

American prisons were first created with a focus on rehabilitation (Pew Center on

the States, 2011). With limited funding and discrepancies on what services and

programs should be available for offenders, rehabilitation has not always remained a

priority through the 20th century (Pew Center on the States, 2011). The primary goal of

prison is still public safety but with increasing prison populations, community reentry

and high recidivism rates we have seen a demand for rehabilitation (Pew Center on the

Sates, 2011). Reducing recidivism has become a goal and priority for society and the

criminal justice system. For the purpose of this research recidivism will be defined as

"A person's relapse into criminal behavior, often after receiving sanctions or undergoing

intervention for a previous crime," (National Institute of Justice, 2010 pp. 1).   Research

has shown that the United States releases 95% of state prisoners at some point (National

Reentry Resource Center, 2012). The term reentry is used to describe services and

programs that are designed to help ex-offenders successfully reintegrate their

communities upon release from prison or other correctional facilities (Wheeler &

Patterson, 2008). Understanding recidivism and offender needs is an important aspect of

community reentry because of the high percentage of individuals who will eventually be

released from prison.

    One special report conducted by Langan and Levin (2002) provides data through

the Bureau of Justice regarding recidivism rates in the United States (Langan & Levin,

2002). Langan and Levin (2002) discuss four measures for recidivism regarding their

research. The four measures include rearrests, reconviction, resentence to prison, and

return to prison with or without a new sentence (Langan & Levin, 2002). The four

measures were used to track 272,111 former inmates for three years after their release in

1994 (Langan & Levin, 2002). The researchers found that within the three years from

their release in 1994, 67.5% of prisoners were arrested for a new offense, 46.9% were

convicted of a new crime, 25.4% were sentenced to prison due to a new crime, and

51.8% were in prison either serving time for a new sentence or because of a technical

violation due to supervised release (Langan & Levin, 2002). An interesting finding to point out in this research is also the correlation between length of time after release and percent of ex-offender recidivism. This study found that the highest number of rearrests and reconvictions as well as returns to prison happened in the third year of release (Langan & Levin, 2002). Similarly, the National Reentry Resource Center provides validity to Langan and Levin's study by a similar study conducted by the Justice Center that also saw the three year period as being highest in recidivism rates (The National Reentry Resource Center, 2012). This study also gives support to the idea that recidivism is rising. Langan and Levin (2002) compared recidivism rates in 1983 to the 1994 study and found that the recidivism rate had increased from 62.5% in 1983 to 67.5% in 1994 (Langan & Levin, 2002). The National Reentry Resource Center also discusses the percentage of parole violators that account for recidivism rates. It was found that in 2009, 33.1% of all prisons admissions, 35.2% of state admissions, and 8.2% of federal admissions were due to some type of parole violation (The National Reentry Resource Center, 2012). This percent is extremely high, considering 4.9 million individuals were on probation or parole in 2010 (The National Reentry Resource Center, 2012).

The issue of recidivism has come to the attention of our nation and there is more of an understanding that without necessary services and programs we will not reduce this rate. The realization that we can no longer afford to keep people in prison is also important in finding ways to reduce recidivism. One aspect researchers, professionals and the general public tend to agree on is that it is too expensive to keep people in prison. Bar, Harris, Fisher, and Armstrong (2010) found that on average it costs the United States $30,000 a year to house one person (Bar, Harris, Fisher, & Armstrong,

2010). In addition to that, the researchers point out that the corrections budget has increased by 600% since 1982 (Bar, Harris, Fisher, & Armstrong, 2010). It should also be noted that the amount of offenders being released each year is nearly four times more than twenty-five years ago (Bar et al., 2010). Bar et al., also point out that there was a 13% rise of parole violators who reentered the prison system since 1980 (Bar et al., 2010). The researchers also suggest that a major part of the issue of recidivism is the lack of information and knowledge regarding the process offenders go through in reentry. In order to reduce recidivism a person in environment approach should be incorporated to meet all needs of a person, regardless of existing barriers. The person in environment perspective involves looking at the big picture of a person's life and understanding how outside factors affect the individual (Clark, 2009). Dealing with an enormous issue such as recidivism requires recognition of all things that play into the social problem.

Another important aspect to remember while discussing crime, recidivism, and reentry is the issue of mental health and mental illness associated with offenders. Sieleni presented statistics through the Department of Justice, which found that 16% of individuals in the US correctional systems were mentally ill (Sieleni, 2011). Other research has indicated that at least half of all incarcerated individuals in 2006 have symptoms of mental illness (James & Glaze, 2006). Chaimowitz contributes to higher number of persons with mental illness in the correctional system to deinstitutionalization, more stringent qualifying criteria, lack of community resources, and sociopolitical and socioeconomic forces (Chaimowitz, 2011). Deinstitutionalized left many without a place to live or accessibility to services in order to get their needs met. In addition, services and assistance are difficult to obtain partly due to the lack of community resources

(Chaimowitz, 2011). Although mental illness in regards to recidivism is not the focus point of this study it is imperative to keep in mind the impacts it can have on crime, incarceration, discharge planning, community reentry and community based programming. There has been a somewhat new push to keep mentally ill offenders out of prison and instead an increase of placement into more appropriate agencies or the use of differing sanctions is widely discussed by professionals.   One report from Kansas made over three dozen recommendations on how to divert persons with mental illness away from prison, some of which include: mental health training for police and other public safety employees, more sentencing alternatives, more treatment and greater efforts to include family (Kansas City Star, 2011). Davis, Fallon Vogel, and Teachout suggest that public recognition and incentives to provide more alternative sanctions for individuals with mental illness are helping to create better program implementation and inevitably will help to decrease the number of persons with mental illness in prison (Davis, Fallon, Vogel, & Teachout 2008).

Preparing for Reentry

Although society has created and established many programs and initiatives designed to help offenders successfully reenter the community, some would argue that inside the correctional facility we still have much ground to cover when it comes to preparing offenders reentry (Mellow & Christian, 2008). Reentry is "The process of prisoners reentering society after a period of incarceration in prison, jail, or detention facility," (Wilkinson, 2001 pp. 46). Wolff, Bjerklie, and Maschi (2005) also define reentry as "a social investment, protecting the outcomes produced by correctional health care during incarceration and protects the public from future crime" (Wolff, Bjerklie, &

Maschi, 2005 pp. 21). Aside from programing, services, and treatments available in

some prisons discharge planning and reentry guides are in the forefront on preparing

offenders for community reentry. Discharge planning and centralized guides hold the

tools for successful reentry. Without proper planning and extensive support in the reentry

process ex-offenders will be set up for failure. Effective discharge planning within the

prison system not only prepares offenders for success but assists community based

programs in the delivery of services by giving a strong understanding of offender needs.

Mellow and Christian (2008) define discharge planning as "preparing prisoners

for release into the community and connecting them with health and human service

agencies to facilitate their pro social reintegration" (Mellow & Christian, 2008 p. 339).

Mellow and Christian (2008) consider discharge planning as a "necessary tool to combat

high recidivism rates" (Mellow & Christian, 2008 p. 339). Prisoners often have a variety

of needs and barriers when released from prison. Scharf (2008) suggests that discharge

planning should begin as soon as a person is incarcerated (Scharf, 2008). He further

states that the sooner we begin planning for reentry the sooner we identify barriers to

success and in turn have more time to overcome such issues (Scharf, 2008). Many times

recidivism is the product of individuals with multiple co-occurring problems that they are

unable to receive help for or receive any type of assistance (Mellow & Christian, 2008).

The idea of discharge planning is to establish services prior to release so that a continuum

of care is accessible. Discharge planning is slowly becoming the norm in prisoner

community reentry but there is still little research that suggests a best method for delivery

and implementation of planning. Mellow and Christian (2008) suggest that even without

empirical support surrounding the written discharge planning within the prison, success

in discharge planning for medical patients gives evidence to the successful effectiveness

of discharge plans (Mellow & Christian, 2008). Effectiveness of discharge planning also needs to be evaluated. Some of the areas Mellow and Christian (2008) discuss are whether or not the offender's needs are assessed and whether discharge plans are written clearly.

Fallon, Lurigio, and Rollins (2004) discuss more specific needs for mentally ill offenders. It is noted though that although the article is specifically geared towards those with mental illness the base of discharge planning incorporates needs for all offenders. These basic needs also include specific information on an offender's needs for community-based treatment, employment, housing, and financial and social support Fallon, Lurigio & Rollins, 2004). In another article by Lurigio (2011), the idea that serious mental illness should be treated like any other medical issue and that the correctional setting is compelled to provide sufficient services (Lurigio, 2011). Fallon et al., (2004) further suggests that to produce the most success offender reentry post-release services should be intensive and ongoing within the community (Fallon et al., 2004).

Sabbatine (2007) further suggests that along with a collaborative discharge plan, the idea of offenders being active participants in creating a discharge plan during incarceration is key to success (Sabbatine, 2007). Mellow and Christian are unique in the way that they present offender needs identified by offenders whereas much research is devoted to professionals discussing their ideas of what offenders and ex-offenders need. Mellow and Christian discuss a study developed in 1981 by Duffee and Duffee where half way house populations were surveyed to find the most frequent problems prisoners face (Mellow & Christian, 2008). The findings of this study addressed five problems listed by order of importance as reported. The problems included, finding a job, needing money, transportation problems, needing training or education to get a job or a better job

and problems getting a wardrobe (Mellow & Christian, 2008).   It is imperative to use

discharge planning as a collaborate process including both outside services as well as

maintaining offender needs in order to prepare offenders for success within the

community (Mellow & Christian 2008).

A somewhat new idea in discharge planning is the need for added planning for

individuals diagnosed with mental illness. One discharge plan, which has gained national

attention, is the National Gains Center Reentry Checklist. Kirkman, Schatzel, and Osher

review the pilot tests on this checklist as well as the process and areas of reentry that are

addressed. Four areas focused on in the creation of the National Gains Center Reentry

Checklist include, assessing, planning, identifying and coordinating (Kirkman, Schatzel

& Osher, 2005). The purpose of the checklist that was developed was to give offenders

and professionals a "centralized record" of potential needs and that documents the steps

taken by staff to ensure those needs are met (Kirkman et al., 2005). The checklist not

only benefits the offenders but also gives accountability to staff in the role of discharge

planning. The study included pilot tests in two jails that previously had involvement with

the National Gains Center. The checklist was welcomed by transition specialists and

other jail staff as they found it to be an excellent plan to follow as it provided clear

documentation and efforts made by staff as well as encompassing all needs of offenders

(Kirkman et al, 2005). Although this checklist is geared towards individuals with mental

health diagnoses it could be argued that it may be effective for all offenders with mild

modification based on specific needs. The idea of implementing a centralized record

regarding personal needs and special accommodations offenders may need within the

prison can create a much smoother and effective transition to the community. Mellow

and Christian go on to describe discharge planning as a linking guide for prisoners with

appropriate community based services and organizations (Mellow & Christian, 2008).

By connecting offenders to services and programs prior to release it enables them to

receive help and assistance before they violate their parole conditions or are arrested for a

new crime (Mellow & Christian, 2008). To increase success within the community

reentry, discharge planning should focus on linking offenders to services that will help

address their specific needs and barriers in order to become productive members of

society.

Osher, Steadman, and Barr (2003) discuss a different method for discharge

planning, or "transition planning" which this study refers to as it implies a continuum of

care and collaboration of professionals (Osher, Steadman & Barr, 2003). Osher et al.,

(2003) primarily focus on transition planning within jails rather than prison. Differences

between the two include length of time incarcerated and reasons behind the incarceration.

For example they explain a difference between someone who was arrested and detained

in jail for their own safety due to mental health concerns vs. a drug dealer (Osher et al.,

2003). The researchers discuss the APIC model, which includes four areas of focus:

assess, plan, identify, and coordinate (Osher et al., 2003). This article also sheds light on

the importance of case managers within the criminal justice system. It is suggested that

with the use of case managers as coordinators of care produce a more positive outcome

(Osher et al., 2003). Case managers' goals should include communication of offender

needs as well as coordinate timing and delivery of services (Osher et al., 2003). The

implementation of an ACT team is also encouraged to help offenders reenter the

community and stay in the community. ACT teams consist of multidisciplinary

members, typically have low caseloads, and are available 24/7 in the community (Osher

et al., 2003). Offenders benefit from the intensive care coordination provided and are

able to get their needs met before they reenter the correctional setting (Osher et al., 2003).

It is necessary to recognize that many of the people who enter the criminal justice system

are arrested for crimes related to substance abuse, mental health, and homelessness.

These arrests may have been avoided if these people were able to access community

based programs. If these issues are recognized upon first arrest and proper discharge

planning is used to connect individuals with services the potential for a decrease in

recidivism is great (Osher et al., 2003).   Diagnosis of mental illness within the prison

systems should be of focus so that offenders can have more specific discharge plans that

work to meet their needs (Baillargeon, Hoge, & Penn, 2010). Offenders who are able to

participate in discharge planning often leave with a plan for housing and other basic

needs. Many times if additional services are identified as necessary, discharge plans are

given to the varying agencies that will be working with the ex-offender (Osher et al.,

2003). Although some states have moved towards more active discharge planning, not

all ex-offenders receive some type of continuum of care. Ex-offenders who are released

with a plan as well as services ready and available and are aware of specific needs have

an advantage as they are provided with concrete information as a starting place (Osher et

al., 2003). Creating and implementing discharge plans that include community based

programs should reduce the recidivism by making such services available upon release.

Preparation for community reentry prior to an offenders release date helps reduce

recidivism because offenders are able to get their needs met immediately after release

(Osher et al., 2003). Olson, Rozhon and Powers (2009) suggest that in order for

offenders to reach their full potential release planning is a necessary tool to bridge

treatments received while incarcerated to community based programs that will help

offenders continue with treatments and services (Olson, Rozhon & Powers, 2009). Being

able to link offenders to appropriate programs and services to meet their needs plays a major factor in regards to reducing recidivism rates (Olson et al., 2009). A study completed by Olson, Rozhon, and Powers gave validity to the effectiveness of discharge planning, which includes community based programming. Researchers studied two groups of offenders from the Illinois Sheridan Correctional Center; the first group received discharge planning the second control group did not. The two groups were followed over a two-year period to record whether the required treatments were completed and if they were incarcerated after the previous release (Olson et al., 2009). The study found that on average the group who received discharge planning was 20% less likely than the control group to return to prison. This study along with previous research discussed gives evidence in the effectiveness in discharge planning in reducing recidivism rates. Social workers and other professional included in the discharge planning play a crucial role in the connecting of necessary and appropriate services in order to help offenders succeed in community reentry. The goal of community based programs is to implement services and programs that assist ex-offenders in their success within the community. This process can be made easier by clear discharge plans from correctional facilities that provide information regarding needs and barriers offenders may be facing.

Challenges to Reentry

There are numerous challenges for offenders when released from prison. Prison is like no other type of institution. Offenders lose all of their rights and many times their dignity. Not only do they lose rights but they lose the ability to take care of themselves. They are no longer required to put in any effort to meet their own basic needs; therefore

they lose the ability to do so (Wheeler & Patterson, 2008). They are dehumanized and forced into more crime and gang related activity than on the streets just so they can survive. Prison is cold and can truly change a person, sometimes for the better and sometimes for the worse. Beside the challenges being faced simply because of the environmental state of a prison being so different than the outside world, as social workers we must look at the big picture and truly take into account the Person in Environment perspective in order to help offenders face these challenges head on. Wheeler and Patterson (2008) remind us that most times it is the multiple problems we are trying to combat when offenders are reentering the community. Offenders are dealing with substance abuse, mental illness, medical problems, lack of education, unemployment, legal barriers that inhibit them from receiving public services such as transitional housing or public assistance, as well as difficulty obtaining state issued identification (Wheeler and Patterson, 2008). Aside from individual barriers Wheeler and Patterson identify barriers within the system such as "overburdened parole system and lack of alternative sentencing options and sanctions" (Wheeler & Patterson, 2008 pp. 2). Ex-offenders have so much working against them that it is impetrative for social workers and the criminal justice system to implement effective discharge plans that prepare offenders for success rather than recidivism.

Lattimore (2007) echoes Wheeler and Patterson (2008) when identifying the many barriers offenders face when reentering the community. Lattimore adds to these barriers by including returning to neighborhoods with few economic opportunities and few if any positive role models in disproportionately rates (Lattimore, 2007). Lattimore (2007) also reminds us that in order to reduce recidivism, barriers that are inhibiting successful reentry within systems, such as criminal justice, mental health, education, and financial

must be addressed. In addition, there is a need to address current systems and supports

within the community that may be weak, missing, inaccessible, or unattainable.

Baillargeon et al., (2010) reiterate many of these barriers to successful reentry but also

highlight how mental illness affects reentry. Persons with mental illness are more likely

to become homeless and even less likely to find employment (Baillargeon, Hoge, &

Penn, 2010). It is important to remember that offenders have been through the system

such as social and public institutions that are designed to develop good citizens and have

failed (Lattimore, 2007).   In other words, our preventative actions are not effective for

all persons. Barriers to successful community reentry have become a long list that

researchers and policy makers are starting to recognize. However unless there is

acknowledgement of how extensive and difficult these barriers are it seems there are

unrealistic expectations of "finding the magic bullet that will cure recidivism,"

(Lattimore, 2007).

     Lattimore outlines current methods created to reduce recidivism that are not

working. Lattimore suggests that the majority of correctional budget is allocated to

security and safety of staff, offenders, and the public (Lattimore, 2007). Most budgets

are maxed out before sufficient programming can be implemented (Lattimore, 2007).

Furthermore, Lattimore discusses the constant change of funding which causes programs

to be reinvented or changed to do more with less (Lattimore, 2007). It is noted that with

the many changes in budgets and re-structuring of programming, it is difficult to

evaluate services and programs for effectiveness (Lattimore, 2007).

     It appears that barriers to successful community reentry are many and sometimes

impossible for some offenders to overcome.   There are many aspects that contribute to

high rates of recidivism but as research suggest, the lack of a strong discharge plan and

weak connection to community based programs play a major role (Olson et al, 2009).

There is potential that even with professionals assisting in the discharge plan, there is

still a lack of community resources needed to create environments for successful

community reentry (Olson et al, 2009). The creation and implementation of community

programs is a key component to successful community reentry as they continue the

treatment that may have began within the prison walls and incorporate it to the

offenders' new life in the community (Olson et al, 2009). Evans (2006) points out the

importance of community based programs as providing community safety (Evans,

2006).   Ex-offenders have so much working against them, therefore it is important for

social workers inside and outside of the prison to incorporate the person in environment

perspective and apply it to reducing recidivism by helping ex-offenders find ways to

meet their needs through available resources and support systems.

Policies Enacted to Assist Offenders in Reentry

Understanding recidivism and reasons why it is happening at such high rates is a

first step in defining new ways to increase offender success in community reentry. In

2003 funding was provided by the US Federal Government to develop and implement

programs that would help to facilitate reentry for offenders convicted of serious and

violent crimes (Lattimore, 2007). Funding is the key to service and programming. It

defines what agencies are able to do and whom they serve. Without proper funding those

who would benefit from services and programs go without. With such funding the

Serious and Violent Offender Reentry Initiative (SVORI) was created, which is the first

program of its kind in the sense that it was geared towards the most serious and violent

inmates and required more than $100 million dollars of investment (Lattimore, 2007).

SVORI is able to incorporate the entire process of reentry by utilizing a three phase continuum that is able to address services beginning in prison which focuses on preparation for release just prior to release and first few months out of prisons but also continues for one year after release (Brumbaugh, Lindquist, & Visher 2007). Brumbaugh, Lindquist, and Visher (2007) studied outcomes and effectiveness of SVORI by obtaining information from directors in correctional settings who carried out SVORI programs. The researchers were able to identify barriers to implementing this program effectively. Barriers identified included: existing agency regulations or polices that made the programming difficult to implement, high director and staff turnover which lead to inadequate training and not enough funding (Brumbaugh et al, 2007). In addition to the barriers of service implementation offenders have numerous barriers they face to even identify or engage in services or successful reenter the community. Brumbaugh et al., also discussed the issues behind disconnects and troubles agencies faced in trying to collaborate for such services included in SVORI (Brumbaugh et al, 2007). The research provided a hopeful attitude for future programming and a philosophical change in the way society and professionals think about reentry and provided proof that implementation of such programs may lead to a substantial reduction of recidivism (Brumbaugh et al, 2007).

Although SVORI seemed to provide an all encompassing approach by providing programing that met the majority of an offenders needs as well as appropriate services and programing it was not cost effective and was not reauthorized by congress (Lattimore, 2007). SVORI was however a pivotal initiative that paved the way for other programs such as the Prisoner Reentry Initiative, the Marriage and Incarceration Act, and the Second Chance Act.

Congress enacted the Prisoner Reentry Initiative (PRI) in 2004, which was a $300 million dollar initiative supported by President Bush (Bauer, Hart, Hopewell & Tein 2007). This program was managed by the Department of Labor, but lacked in one area as it did not provide services for violent offenders (Lattimore, 2007). The PRI is an employment-based program for inmates, which enables ex-offenders to find employment after release from prison (Lattimore, 2007). The U.S. Department of Labor followed 30 agencies that were granted funding by the PRI and found that recidivism rates were at 20% compared to 44% which is the national rate of recidivism (Wheeler and Patterson, 2008).

The PRI attempts to take a more encompassing approach by providing transitional housing, job training and even job placement (Bauer et al, 2007). A unique aspect of this initiative is the use of peer mentors within the community as well as attempts to integrate faith based and community groups to assist offenders in the transition from prison to community (Bauer et al, 2007). Through this initiative other services were able to be implemented to meet offender needs such as faith based programs, housing programs, substance abuse treatments and mental health services (Bauer et al, 2007). This initiative was funded and accepted by congress because of the understanding professionals and society is gaining on reasons behind incarceration and recidivism (Bauer et al, 2007). It is understood that the external factors in a person's life are just as impactful as the nature of prison in how successful of unsuccessful a person is in community reentry (Bauer et al, 2007). It is encouraging to see policies enacted that are truly devoted to meeting needs of individuals and creating programming that research has shown to be effective such as these community based agencies. The role of community based programs is to meet

needs and help ex-offenders succeed, but they are only possible with funding and appropriate programming.

Lattimore (2007) introduces the Marriage and Incarceration Initiative. The Marriage and Incarceration Initiative requires $30 million, and provides focus on strengthening marriages and families for men in correctional facilities (Lattimore, 2007). It is also understood that there are very few if any types of institutional support that can help to assist family in maintaining positive relationships (Bauer et al, 2007). With the majority of individuals being incarcerated having children or marriages, such programs are necessary in strengthening these relationships to assist in successful community reentry and reduction of recidivism (Bauer et al, 2007). Bringing families together while individuals are incarcerated helps build the bridge to success and can also be incorporated in community based services individuals are involved with after release.

In 2005 the federal government initiated the Second Chance Act (Pogorzelski, Wolff, Pan & Blitz 2005). This act established funding to help expand reentry services for individuals who are leaving prison (Progorzelski et al, 2005). President George W. Bush presented the United States as a land of "second chance, and when the gates of the prison open, the path ahead should lead to a better life," (Progorzelski et al, 2005). The basis of this act is to create more community support for ex-offenders. Services included in this act are access to public assistance, housing, medical and mental health services, education and job training (Pogorzelski et al, 2005). One important aspect of the Second Chance Act is that it acknowledges issues behind reentry as a significant social problem (Pogorzelski et al, 2005). Evaluation is necessary and used to address needs and effectiveness. The National Institute of Justice and the Bureau of Justice Statistics are assigned to conduct research on the Second Chance Act (Schultz, 2006). The task force

was created to identify programs and activities that may be overlapping or duplicating services, identifying methods in which collaboration and coordination are used within programs and activities, develop programs that would improve outcomes of reentering individuals and children of offenders, identifying areas and funding that could be coordinated across multiple agencies, and lastly, identify barriers that limit successful reentry and provide recommendations to overcome such barriers (Schultz, 2006). Although much consideration and debate was produced surrounding the passing of the Second Chance Act, the 109th Congress did not pass the act (Lattimore, 2007). Without the funding and implementation of policies the responsibility of helping ex-offenders become productive citizens is funneled down to the underfunded agencies that have a primary goal of public safety, rather than offender rehabilitation (Lattimore, 2007). In April of 2008 the Second Chance Act was finally approved by Congress and signed into law (Justice Center, 2012). This bill authorized $165 million in grants to provide services that increase successful transition from prison or jail to the community (Justice Center, 2012). Although the bill was originally not accepted by congress little changes were made in the substance of programming goals. Primary areas of focus under this act include: mental health, substance abuse, housing, homelessness, education, employment, and families (Justice Center, 2012).

Policy is what enables us to create and implement specific programs that target the key issues in the community and reentry. Policy enforces a cumulative and collaborate approach that in theory paves the way for success. In order for agencies to receive funding for services they must focus on employee assistance, substance abuse treatment, housing, family programing, mentoring, victims support, and other services that reduce recidivism (Justice Center, 2012). Pogorzelski, Wolff and Blitz point out that

although these types of services have been shown to be effective in reducing recidivism

and reentry success one area of focus for professionals and community based programs

should be the "invisible punishments" created out of policy such taking away the right to

vote, right to assistance, and access to employment (Pogorselzki et al, 2005). It is further

suggested that invisible punishments have created a class of people "perpetually labeled

as unqualified for public support" (Pogorselski et al, 2005). This idea and punitive belief

associated with ex-offenders is what is holding rehabilitation within the prison system

back. A second chance should be exactly that and community programs can help break

down barriers and assist in reentry success.

Community Based Programs for Ex-Offenders

As discussed earlier, policy implementation provides funding and guidelines that

help to provide success through program integration. Second Chance Coalition (SCC) is

an example of collaborative work and organization that has impacted recidivism and

successful reentry in Minnesota. Founded in 2007, SCC defines itself as a partnership

(which includes over 50 different organizations) that advocates for fair and responsible

laws, polices, and practices, that allows ex-offenders to succeed outside of incarceration

and to "contribute to their communities to their full potential" (Second Chance Coalition,

2012 pp. 1). Following the many initiatives initiated by the Second Chance Act, the

SCC's focus is children and families, education, employment/job training, housing, law

enforcement, mental health, substance abuse, task force/coalitions, and advocacy (Justice

Center, 2012). The SCC works to provide services to all persons affected by crime or

incarceration. Populations served include: individuals returning from detention facilities,

local jails, prisons, individuals both under and not under community corrections

supervision, the elderly, adults, juveniles, men, women, people convicted of violent and non violent offenses, victims, gang members, tribal populations, sex offenders, and families and children of incarcerated individuals (Justice Center, 2012).

The SCC is an active member in the fight to reduce stigma and increase awareness of second chance issues on local and national levels through advocacy and policy change (Second Chance Coalition, 2012). One major impact the SCC has had on Minnesota and inevitably the United Sates was the "Ban the Box" bill (SCC, 2012). Minnesota was the first state to approve this bill, which required all public employers to wait until an individual has been selected for a job interview before searching through criminal records (SCC, 2012). The SCC has created one of the largest events that brings awareness and education to Second Chances through their "Second Chance Day on the Hill" which is an event that occurs at the capital and allows for advocacy by individuals and also provides bridging for agencies and programs (SCC, 2012). The SCC can be seen as a useful tool that connects individuals to specific programming and services that meets their needs through the various partners under the coalition (SCC, 2012).

Grant Duwe evaluated Minnesota Comprehensive Offender Reentry Plan (MCORP), which was created to reduce recidivism. MCORP was implemented in 2008 and was designed to increase access to community services and programming for offenders by implementing case management collaboration between caseworkers in prison and community based agents (Duwe, 2012). Specific areas of focus for this program include access to employment, housing, and programing in the community (Duwe, 2012). Data collection and analysis evidenced that offenders who participated in MCORP were more likely to obtain employment within the first six months of release, participate in community support programing, and access education programing

compared to the control group (Duwe, 2012). Obtaining employment creates a positive environment for successful reentry by increasing self-esteem and giving individuals a sense of purpose, which increases pro-social actions in their lives (Wynn and Jacques, 2011). Another interesting finding Duwe discovered was that individuals who participated in MCORP reported having broader social support systems (Duwe, 2012). Although MCORP had an impact on significantly reducing reoffending, it did not have an impact on supervision revocations for technical violations (Duwe, 2012). These findings provide validity to previous research that suggests a positive correlation of community based programs and reducing recidivism, further studies would be of value to add reliability and validity to this idea (Duwe, 2012).

Evans (2006) introduces a more specific program directly providing services designed to help offenders reintegrate successfully into the community. Transitional Intervention for Parole Supervision (TIPS) created teams of community supervision officers whose primary goal is to evaluate and assist returning offenders (Evans, 2006). TIPS is a national program. Although not implemented in every state most states have programming with similar qualities (Evans, 2006). TIPS helps offenders identify their individual needs and assist in meeting them. Evans (2006) notes housing as a crucial aspect to reducing recidivism. TIPS acknowledges housing as a formable link between employment and strives to help ex-offenders to establish stable living conditions (Evans, 2006).

Phases of Reentry

According to the US Department of Justice, Almanac of Policy Issues, almost 650,000 people are reentering the community upon release from the prison system

(Almanac of Policy Issues, 2004). The almanac describes three phases of reentry as outlined based on the development of model reentry programs. The first phase "Protect and Prepare" discusses programs within the prison that are designed to prepare offenders for reentry (Almanac of Policy Issues, 2004). Some programs include education, mental health treatment, substance abuse treatment, job training, mentoring, and full diagnostic and risk assessment (Almanac of Policy Issues, 2004). The second phase "Control and Restore" looks at the community based transition programs. These programs will have a unique perspective, as they are able to work with offenders prior to release and then after release. Services are similar to phase one but are implemented into the community such as education, monitoring, mentoring, life skills training, assessment, job skills development, and mental health and substance abuse treatment (Almanac of Policy Issues, 2004). Phase three "Sustain and Support" may be the most crucial in the fact that it is looking at long-term community based support programs. It is imperative when looking at recidivism and considering that most offenders are reoffending in the third year of release (Langan & Levin, 2002). This program assists offenders who are now "off paper" offenders who met their supervision requirements and are no longer monitored by the criminal justice system. This program is designed to "provide ongoing services and mentoring relationships" (Almanac of Policy Issues, 2004). In developing programming that assists offenders in the reentry process and strives for success it is key to be mindful of these three phases and to have an understanding of what an offender is needing depending on where they are at in the release process. The different phases of reentry establish great need for a continuum of care beginning inside the prison and continuing long term after their release with community based organizations aimed at meeting ex-offender needs.

Social Worker Role in Ex-Offender Reentry

One of the most crucial roles social workers play in offender reentry is keeping in mind our values and ethics. Social workers have a deep belief in the dignity and worth of each person and a true value that each person deserves assistance and the right to live their lives. Social workers believe in social justice for all, not just those who can afford justice. Social workers within the prison system are simply guests of the correctional department and aren't always in a position of authority when it comes to logistics of prison life, depending on the prison and the relationship between departments. According to the US Department of Labor, in 2004 there were 93,000 correctional counselor positions held (Jones & Bartlett Publishers). It was also estimated that the job positions for correctional counselors would grow 9-17% through 2014 (Jones & Bartlett Publishers). It should be noted that throughout the article previously discussed, correctional counselor refers to not only social workers but also other providers such as psychologists, chemical dependency and mental health workers as well as parole officers. With higher demand and program funding available social services workers, particularly social workers will be in high demand (Jones & Bartlett Publishers). Social work in the criminal justice system and correctional setting have a unique set of skills and perspectives that help to serve individuals dealing with incarceration and reentry (socialworkers.org).

The literature has described a great need for programming and services delivered by competent social workers and other professionals. Specific roles of social workers within the correctional setting can vary from state to state and differing departments. Bond, Mann & Powitzky (2011) gives an example of the social work role at Joseph Harp

Correctional Center and the Oklahoma State Penitentiary. Roles include collecting information and helping the offender with social security disability application, or other applications that may be necessary for the offender as well as planning for services after discharge such as supervised release, providing information regarding transitional housing, basic needs, bus passes and housewares items (Bond, Mann & Powitzky, 2011). Many offenders leave prison with high debt due to bills, fines, fees and restitution or court costs, therefore part of the social work role may be developing plans in order to help offenders pay off debt (Bond et al, 2011). Social workers assist offenders in accessing community based programs to meet needs of mental health or substance abuse. A part of community based programming and release planning includes understanding and assessment for risk factors associated with an offender (Jones and Bartlett Publishers). Through this assessment of risk management, social workers help in reducing recidivism by ensuring proper supervision and care is accessible by offenders (Jones and Bartlett Publishers).

Social workers within community based programs have similar roles as those within the prison but are molded to directly fit the needs of ex-offenders. Depending on the ex-offenders discharge plan or lack of, community based programs and professionals work to create support for the offender including finding housing, obtaining different types of state assistance, mostly medical and food, and any other assistance they may need (Bond et al, 2011). The overarching goal of social workers and other professionals in community based organizations is assisting ex-offenders in services that create environments that are conducive to independent living (Bond et al, 2011). Community based programs are working to meet the client where they are at. This may mean picking up where the prison discharge planners left off or starting fresh. It is important to note

that returning to the community can be a huge shock, especially depending on the amount

of time a person has been incarcerated. Social workers and other professionals within the

community based programs should be aware of the psychological and emotional

challenges one may have by completely changing the world a person is accustomed to

(Mellow and Christian, 2008). The way of life that the average citizen is accustomed to

can be difficult for someone who has been incarcerated for a long period of time. Tasks

such as using cell phones or computers can be novel and adjusting to this new life can be

scary. Community based programs evaluate all areas of a persons life by incorporating

the person in environment perspective and tailor services and programs that will provide

effective support that inhibits successful community reentry and in the reduction of

recidivism (Bond et al, 2011).

The social work role throughout the correctional system is different throughout

states, facilities, departments and in and outside prison walls. Roles can be broad as well

as very specific depending on the agency. What remains constant are the social work

ethics and values that tie us together. An article published by socialworkers.org reminds

us of the importance of dignity and worth of a human being, social justice, competency,

best practice, research, and advocacy (socialworkers.org). Social workers inside and

outside the prison can share similar goals, as we are the advocates and treatment

providers for this vulnerable population (socialworkers.org). Social workers are unlike

many professionals in that we incorporate all aspects of a person's life and can ultimately

be a part of that coordination and collaboration to meet the needs of clients. Social

workers play an important role as resource connectors and identifiers. To provide

effective services and treatments social workers use the person in environment

perspective to evaluate and help implement necessary supports and programs that will

assist ex-offenders in successful community reentry and provide an overall reduction of recidivism rates. By incorporating the person in environment perspective, system and societal barriers and conflicts become more clear therefore it becomes easier to identify these issues and problem solve around what needs to be done to provide assistance for ex-offenders through the use of community based programs.

Conceptual Framework

The theoretical framework that guided this research is the application of systems theory and the person in environment perspective (PIE). This framework was developed to understand what role community based programs play in reducing recidivism among ex-offenders. According to Friedman and Neuman (2010) systems theory is an "organizational model" building upon the person in environment perspective in order to "deconstruct situations and then reconstruct them" looking at the relationship between different systems and the larger social environment (Friedman & Neuman, 2010). The terms, micro, mezzo, and macro are used to identify the levels of systems in an attempt to understand the complexity with how differing systems interact with one another and the affects they have (Green & McDermott, 2010). Ludwig von Bertalanffy is greatly known as the father of general systems theory (Friedman & Allen, 2010). The framework for systems theory was guided by ideas presented by both Durkheim and Webber (Freidman & Allen, 2010) and was developed through frameworks related to many fields such as physics, psychology, biology, and anthropology (Patton & McMahon, 2006). The systems theory and PIE perspective are the most commonly used approaches in the social work professional practice (Kondrat, 2002). Utilizing these frameworks in regards to this

research will encompass all areas of focus when looking at the role community based programs have in reducing recidivism for ex-offenders.

It is understood that systems theory is composed of varying "systems" that interact with one another and have driving force in that relationship (Green & McDermott, 2010). These levels are identified as micro, mezzo, and macro. For this research the micro level will consist of the ex-offender and those closest to him/her such as family and friends. The mezzo level is identified as the community they belong to as well as the programs and supervision they are involved in after incarceration. The macro level is identified as the government and its polices, which dictates rules, regulations, and services that impact the lives of ex-offenders during as well as after their term in prison. Understanding crime and recidivism is a part of systems theory. Breaking down these levels allows us to clearly see how each level is interconnected and affected by the other. An individual who has been released from prison is controlled by the mezzo system in regards to what they can and cannot do, where they are allowed to be, who they can see and affiliate themselves with as well as what programs and services they are required to be a part of. The mezzo level bases their rules and regulations on the macro levels standards. The government provides funding and decides what programs, services, and responsibilities the community based programs have in meeting ex-offenders' needs. The macro level is also influenced by micro and mezzo levels through advocates, individuals, legislators, and the general public. If all systems involved in this issue incorporate thoughts and information about what can be done to reduce recidivism through community based programs a more integrative, encompassing solution may be possible.

Systems theory allows us to view the differing systems in a person's life in order to best meet their needs and understand their environment and the barriers and opportunities within their lives (Higgins & Severson, 2009). When we are able to understand how much impact each system has on one another and how directly they are connected we begin to understand why change in systems and regulations can be slow moving. In order to find success within individuals, the systems surrounding us need to be in congruence with individual needs that can be properly implemented through mezzo systems.

Higgins and Severson suggest that a best practice when working to reintegrate adult offenders into the community is to follow the person-in-environment (PIE) perspective (Higgins & Severson, 2009). The person in environment theory involves looking at the big picture of a person's life and understanding how outside factors affect the individual (Clark, 2009). PIE framework remains focused on the "goodness of fit" when discharge planning and community reentry (Higgins & Severson, 2009 p 790). Higgins and Severson also suggest that if the goodness of fit and PIE perspective are not used as frameworks, offenders are set up essentially to fail. They further state that when an offender's needs and stressors are greater than available resources most will experience difficulty in coping, poor health, and social isolation (Higgins & Severson, 2009).

The literature review demonstrated a great deal of individual and societal barriers that affect successful community reentry and the reduction of recidivism. It is clear that in order to target this social problem of high recidivism a systems theory perspective is necessary to combat the many factors that attribute to this problem. By utilizing the knowledge of both systems and PIE theory we are able to target offender needs and

ideally help individuals access appropriate services within their mezzo systems such as community based programs. When we see a lack of services or an inability for offenders to access services or even get basic needs met we should focus on the big picture. Focusing on the big picture will require advocacy and policy implementation that will create a more positive outcome for individuals and society by providing necessary support and services that help offenders successfully reenter the community. This research takes a deeper look into the mezzo level and understanding what types of services are available within the community that are working to reduce recidivism by helping individuals become a valuable part of this mezzo environment.

For this research social workers and other professionals currently working in community based programs targeted at successful reentry and reduction of recidivism for ex-offenders were interviewed. Specifically, the individuals interviewed are employed by programs that are in association with the Minnesota Second Chance Coalition and are located in Minnesota. The interviewees in depth knowledge of policy, programs, and services available and those that are needed will add valuable information in understanding the role of community based programs in reducing recidivism. The findings in this research will strengthen the idea that a PIE perspective and systems theory are imperative for tackling the issue of high recidivism by meeting ex-offenders where they are at and providing services that are directly implemented based on individual offender needs.

Methodology

Research Design

The research conducted is qualitative in nature. The research includes interviews with employees from two agencies in the Twin Cities that are identified partners of Second Chance Coalition in Minnesota.   Interviews took place at a setting that is convenient for each participant.

The research strived to gain an understanding of community based programs' role in reducing recidivism and helping ex-offenders succeed within the community. The purpose of this study is to obtain professional perspectives on the role of community based programs in reducing recidivism through the professionals that directly serve this population.

Sample

In order to obtain a sample of participants the researcher contacted the Second Chance Coalition of Minnesota and was directed to a list of agencies who are identified partners. Once the agencies were reviewed, the researcher determined which agencies provided direct client contact and selected agencies to pursue. Email addresses were provided through agency websites and individuals within agencies were sent emails, which identified the research topic and basic information regarding the interview process. The researcher corresponded with individuals within the agencies to further identify the research sample.

Protection of Human Subjects

Research participants were recruited through email correspondence. The researcher contacted various agencies that partner with Second Chance Coalition in Minnesota. After establishing a contact person though the agency, the researcher emailed

employees regarding their voluntary and confidential participation in the research. The researcher received confirmation from two agencies willing to participate in the interview. The researcher inquired about necessary approval from individual agencies but found that due to the nature of this research and interview no additional approval was required per each agency. Although approval was not necessary for each agency of employment for interview participants, approval letters were obtained from agency directions that simply stated that they have approved the researcher to conduct research with its staff members.

Informed consent was be given to each participant prior to his or her participation in this research. The researcher clarified any concerns and ensured understanding of consent prior to agreement. The consent form assured participants that all information gathered through the interview would remain anonymous and confidential. All consent forms were signed at the beginning of the interview. (See Appendix B for informed consent form.)

Data collected from each interview was placed in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's home. All audio recordings were password protected on the researcher's computer and were deleted after they were transcribed. Any type of identifying information was removed from the data collected to ensure confidentially and anonymity. The researcher and research chair will be the only people with access to raw data and once data is transcribed all audio recording will be deleted. Raw data and transcriptions will be destroyed June 1, 2013 after the writer has presented and defended her research. The researcher will ensure that participants do not reveal names and other identifying information of their colleagues and their clients (ex-offenders). Participants were not

asked identifying information of clients in order to maintain confidentially of their clients during the interview.

Data collection instrument and process

The data for this research was provided through semi-structured interviews conducted with the confidentially of the participant in mind. The interview consisted of ten qualitative questions based on prior research.   The questions were geared towards type of services the agencies provide as well as understanding barriers to services. Interviews were conducted at an area of convenience that provided privacy of the participant to ensure confidentiality. (See Appendix C for interview questions.)

Data analysis plan

Content analysis of the data collected was used to identify themes within the research participant's interviews. Interview recordings were transcribed and prominent ideas were identified. Once ideas were identified throughout the interviews they were coded and grouped into themes. The researcher analyzed data by using interpretation of interviews and the use of coding and grouping into themes.

Findings

This study includes interviews from 8 individuals who identified themselves as employees at one of the two non-profit agencies that are working in association with Second Chance Coalition of Minnesota. Both agencies are currently working with ex-offenders in the twin cities area. The agencies will be identified by Agency A and Agency B throughout the findings section. Agency A is an organization that is housing

focused and provides immediate shelter for those required by the State to live in DOC

funded housing until they meet supervision requirements. Agency B is focused on

connection to basic needs, job readiness, and community ties. These individuals

participated in a face-to-face interview that was audio recorded. Six of the participants

were male and two were female. As noted earlier in data analysis, transcripts were

analyzed through thematic clustering open coding. The following five themes emerged

through data analysis: social stigma as a barrier, lack basic needs, effects of poverty,

community ties, and unrealistic preparedness.

Social Stigma as a Barrier

One of the most common themes throughout the data analysis was the issue

behind social stigma in preventing ex offenders to succeed within their community. Most

respondents agreed that society in itself has built walls around ex-offenders that limit

their ability to abide by conditions of release. Social stigma can be looked at as the

umbrella that holds all other issues that are impacting success within the community for

ex-offenders. One informant put it as simple as "people feeling others are not worthy of

life". There was an overwhelming voice in informants who felt that because of societal

views on people with criminal pasts are so negative that in essence we set people up to

fail once they are released. Kim from Agency B stated that

> people aren't prepared for the barriers society has put up to keep them from being
> successful…they are prepared in their head, but they end up reoffending because
> they don't have a choice…what would you do if you didn't have money to buy
> food or obtain shelter, would you not do whatever it is you had to do to get your
> basic needs met?

Six out of the eight respondents included comments such as "setting people up for failure" or discussed issues with policy formed by society's views on people who have committed crimes. Sam who is also employed with Agency B included that "people don't treat them (ex-offenders) as normal human beings, and we have to understand that it is going to be difficult and we have to give them a chance to rebuild themselves…". Three other informants from Agency A also discussed the importance of allowing individuals to prove themselves. The reality is that ex-offenders have many obstacles to face in reentering the community and unless society decides they are worthy of a "second chance" or opportunities to do well, success is unrealistic.

Social stigma is also a major factor in policies enforced and created by citizens. It is an example of "not in my backyard" thinking. All eight informants discussed the problems with society not allowing ex offenders to rebuild their lives and become productive members of society. Joshua from Agency A put it as

> people may say ex-offenders should be able to get a job and a place to live once they are released so they can be a part of society, but when it comes down to it, communities fight DOC funded group homes in their neighborhoods, and refuse to hire ex-offenders in their own businesses.

It appears that there is a disconnect in what's best for society as a whole and what we as individuals are willing to do to change these issues. Some informants would suggest that it's how we keep prisons in business. Two informants from Agency B discussed the amount of money Mincoor makes from incarcerated employees. Julie from Agency B stated that

> Mincoor is a multi million-dollar corporation…they aren't talking about the costs of keeping people in the prisons because they are making more money on their Mincoor employment than it costs to house someone.

These two informants suggest that the reason why society has set up such strict and harsh

laws regarding supervised release may be for more sinister reasons than the other

informants would suggest. They discussed the state setting up rules they know people

will not be able to obey in order to keep their Mincoor workforce in full force. These two

informants from agency B suggest that the prison is really just a business and people are

its revenue.

Lack of Basic Needs

When talking with informants about key barriers and issues that ex-offenders'

experience in their lives that inhibit their success, the lack of basic human needs was

discussed. Clothing, housing, and food were major areas of concern for all informants.

The lack of these needs also help feed into one another and add to the cyclical nature of

recidivism. Kim from agency B, pointed it out in this manner,

> they can't find an apartment because people don't want to rent to them, they can't
> find a job because people don't want to hire them……what would you do if you
> couldn't feed your children or find a place to live?....Would you not go into a
> grocery store and eat something if you were starving? And that is illegal.

It was pointed out by 6 informants that regardless of a person's internal motivation, the

reality of a felony/criminal history severely impacts their ability to obtain any basic needs

or to truly survive and succeed in their communities. Ex-offenders have been put into a

category of undeserving of basic needs or assistance. All eight informants discussed the

importance of treating ex-offenders as human beings regardless of their past.

Through conversation it became apparent that all informants feel that to some

extent ex-offenders are put into a position where they are not treated like people who

deserve life.   Julie from Agency B described ex-offenders as the "forgotten people". All

four informants from Agency B discussed the loss of connections to others and without

that support accessing basic needs can be nearly impossible. As Cory from Agency B put

it, "everything is a barrier, the basic necessities of life." When a person is released from

prison they are technically still incarcerated by the Department of Corrections, or the

DOC. Most people are on some type of supervised release or intensive supervised

release, which means they are bound by several rules and regulations on what they can

and cannot do and what is required. Depending on the individuals release type

determines their rules. Most ex-offenders have to find housing and employment within

sixty days. Informants suggest that the problem with that comes when individuals do not

have their basic needs met. When people don't have shelter or food, it becomes

impossible to job search or find a place to rent. Kim from Agency B shared her opinion

in saying that

> if people do not have their basic needs met, such as food, shelter and clothing, it is
> almost impossible to concentrate on more long term goals and needs such as
> finding employment and housing…you can't focus on anything else because basic
> needs have to come first.

Their attention and focus is how to make it through the day, how to survive. Two other

informants from Agency B stressed this belief as well, and one included her strong belief

that people who are released under some kind of conditions/supervision should have all

basic needs met by the DOC because of their parole status. All informants from Agency

A indicated that most ex-offenders are not required to pay any kind of fee for their room

and board, an exception to that is work release offenders, and federal offenders waiting

trial. The majority of ex-offenders are on some kind of supervised release, which

requires no financial payment on their part. John from Agency A stated

> Most don't pay anything, they don't have money to spend anyways…that's why we don't do any kind of self pay clients, they won't be successful if they are paying rent to us because they need to save money to be able to obtain housing and meet their conditions of release.

Agency A informants all discussed the importance of having basic needs in order to be successful. Overall, there was overwhelming support throughout interviews to advocate for ex-offenders needed assistance with getting basic needs met through resource connections and assistance with general assistance applications and food stamps.

Effects of Poverty

Six of the informants discussed the importance of recognizes the socioeconomic status of most ex-offenders and what that means for successful community reentry. One issue touched on by two informants from Agency B and one from Agency A was the issue behind an offenders "county of commit". County of commit refers to the county where the criminal act happened. The law requires ex-offenders who require some type of supervision after their incarceration to receive that supervision from their "county of commit". This requires the ex-offender to live in that county and in essence live in the areas with the potentially negative environments that helped to get them into prison. Kim from Agency A stated

> I cannot wrap my head around making people go back to the area where they were involved in criminal activity, they've paid their debt to society, but we are keeping them in that hostile environment and not truly letting them move on.

This becomes the cycle of recidivism. People are being released back to the hopeless poor neighborhoods they came from where they are unable to see a way out. This not only affects their ability to obtain meaningful employment but in terms of getting back on their feet, so many of these poor neighborhoods they came from will not accept them

back for policy reasons. John from Agency A touched on the fact that most of their

family is also in poverty and are receiving some kind of assistance which makes

supporting their loved one who is released from prison difficult. John stated, "because of

section 8 housing requirements and restrictions, felons can't live in the same house as a

loved one". Not only can ex-offenders not afford their own housing but many times

cannot stay with friends or families because of their need for assistance as well. Kim

shared her opinion that "until there is focus on the crisis of poverty, targeting recidivism

will be nearly impossible." These thoughts and information from interviews continued to

bring about the larger picture of recidivism and the various societal problems we face that

continues to leave us with our current situation.

Community Ties

There was a consensus among all informants that the key to the success of their

agencies is having positive community ties and connections. The two types of

community connections that were referred to in each interview were personal community

connections such as family, friends and other supports, as well as resource connections

such as employment assistance, housing, and access to basic needs. Julie from Agency B

touched on the idea of personal connections and talked about the importance of having

support while incarcerated in order to increase success after release. She stated

> most people who are in prison are forgotten, family doesn't visit, friends loose
> touch, they are alone…especially the mothers and the women who are
> incarcerated, men are typically remembered by their wives, or mothers…the
> difference a solid support system makes is incredible.

This support people receive not only helps with their mental and emotional being while

incarcerated, but having someone to pick you up from the prion and help with resource

connection is extremely beneficial. Sam from Agency A was able to add support behind

his belief that people who have community connections while incarcerated and after

release are more successful than those who do not. He stated

> A Minnesota DOC (department of corrections) study found that people who have regular visits while incarcerated are 25% less likely to recidivate, and further if those visits were from close relatives or friends that 25% increased dramatically.

These two informants stressed how important these community connections are to ex-

offenders and their success in community reentry. This idea and information is a key

component in the work they do within their agency in helping ex-offenders live

meaningful and successful lives inside and outside the prison.

The four informants from Agency B talked specifically about a program through

their agency that works with community volunteers and offenders. They match people

based on their personalities and commit to visiting the offender one time a month for a

minimum of one year.   Through this program they have witnessed a dramatic difference

in their client's attitudes and preparedness for release. Three informants specially

referenced a friendship that developed through this program, which connects community

volunteers and offenders. Julie stated that "the key to the program is that trust is

developed between the volunteer and offender, and often true connections are made that

turn into lifelong friendships." The three informants talked about this relationship that

have developed and lasted fourteen years. The offender was incarcerated for 29 years,

and 14 of those years where spent with his volunteer friend. The friendship grew to be so

strong and real that his friend sent him pictures of his family and shared personal stories,

and when the offender was released after 29 years his friend gave him help with housing,

clothing, and finding a job. The friendship ended because the friend had passed away.

They meant so much to each other that the ex-offender/friend was mentioned in his obituary. Community connections are about real people having positive relationships that are built upon trust and care for another human being.

In regards to resource connections, all eight informants discussed how difficult and sometimes nearly impossible it is for ex-offenders to find housing and jobs. Informants all shared that because their agencies have been working with landlords and employers for many years they have been able to compile a list of people who are "felon friendly" and secured good working relationships. These felon friendly landlords and employers are difficult to find, and as one informant suggests even easier to burn. Tom from Agency A stated

> We as an agency focus a lot and work hard towards gaining those positive community relationships with employers and landlords but the unfortunate fact is that it only takes one bad encounter with one of our clients and that relationship is over.

As an agency, having positive community ties are crucial in not only helping ex-offenders get on their feet but also necessary for recruiting clients. When people have bad experiences with a company or an agency, they talk about it, they suggest that their friends and family do not work where they had negative experiences. Both agencies where employees were interviewed had positive ties with community members. These positive ties are reflected in the number of clients they serve and how busy they are. According all informants, most clients hear about their agencies from other people. It's a word of mouth process. Not only do these agencies pride themselves on having positive community ties, but they also express their positive ties with the Minnesota Department of Corrections and the law enforcement in the counties they serve. Successful community reintegration is a difficult process that requires ex-offenders to break through

the many barriers they face. Cory pointed out that, "All things individually if working well is good, but the key is combining as many as we can around one person then the likelihood they succeed is much greater..". In order to ease the process and help, rather hinder ex-offenders all informants suggest the necessity of communication and connections of all areas of an offender's life as well as all systems involved.

Unrealistic Preparedness

The last major theme that emerged through the interviews was the offenders' unrealistic preparedness as well as professionals' unrealistic ideas on how to prepare. All informants discussed the disconnect between how we think the real world is like and how it actually is. This is especially true within the prison system. Each informant talked about the transition classes offered in prison that help offenders get ID's and social security cards, create resumes and engage in mock interviews, but the consensus was that offenders aren't prepared for the cruel reality of limited jobs, making minimum wage and sometimes even less. Troy from Agency A described these transition classes as somewhat available, but was unsure how accessible they were to all offenders, he further stated

> some help is inside, but not enough…it has to do with funding, so most guys I see were not able to get into the so called classes and come out with no ID, no social security card, and no idea how to even create a resume.

An interesting finding was the difference in opinion two informants from Agency A had on this issue of transition classes and levels of preparedness within the prison system. Joshua agreed that more help and more funding will increase overall preparedness for larger populations he stated

> It depends on the guy, some guys are super motivated and come out with everything they need to get a job, and others come with nothing…these guys who come out with nothing seem to just go through the motions of prison and do nothing to better their lives.

The conflict in opinions brings out the differing levels of preparedness in relation to motivation levels. In all, each informant discussed the importance of more programming and more services in hopes to better address the varying needs and types of assistance required for each individual. Many offenders have big ideas on what they will do once they are released, such as starting their own businesses, and along the way they have not been given those reality checks of how difficult that will be. Cory shared that,

> 7/10 guys say they want to work independently and be their own boss, but they don't have a firm grasp on how difficult that is, just getting a job is difficult, they aren't prepared with a realistic idea of what's about to happen to them and how difficult its going to be.

There is a disconnect between expectations and the reality of our society. Through interviews it appears that ex-offenders are prepared with an overly optimistic attitude and therefore are given a disfavor for realistically preparing for their future.

Education was another major focus of not being prepared for community reentry. Many people are being released from prison without a high school diploma or GED and that in itself is very limiting on what they will be able to do and whether or not they can get a job. A huge barrier informants discussed is ex-offenders not being able to read or write. It is impossible to apply for a job if you are illiterate. Another aspect to think about is ex offenders being computer savvy. Most things are done on the internet and ex-offenders haven't always had much experience with computers and especially the internet. Sam from Agency B stated that

> computer literacy is almost always an issue…think of people who have served long sentences, 15-20 years, and what technology was like prior to their

incarceration, in a lot of cases we are teaching people how to use a mouse and they don't really understand what the internet even is.

This speaks on the point that many offenders are being released to a completely different world. So many of them either were incarcerated before people even used personal computers, or grew up in areas and schools that didn't have access to that type of technology. Computers, cell phones, and internet are all potential nuances to these people and without proper assistance and guidance it is nearly impossible to predict success.

Throughout the interview process and data analysis the themes were clear and conscience. Understanding why the United States has such a high recidivism rate and identifying areas of disconnect between systems and individuals is necessary in targeting recidivism and a social problem. Informants stressed on the issues of social stigma as a barrier, the issue with a general lack of basic needs, the importance of community connections in regards to personal and resources, and the idea of a general unrealistic preparedness in ex-offenders.

Discussion

Previous literature has described the United States' high recidivism rates in ex-offenders as a true social problem. Society has slowly started to revisit their stance on criminals and how we as a society treat them and what we expect of them. There is a slow realization that not only are we financially equip to house and maintain the amount of incarcerated individuals we have, but that their might be a different way to deal and manage crime and crime committing individuals in a way that will benefit society economically, socially, and politically. This research is important to not only social work

professionals but those involved in the criminal justice system, employers and community members. This research has highlighted the historical barriers identified by previous research as well as barriers identified by research informants who currently serve this population with ex-offenders. Understanding what prevents ex-offenders to be successful in their community reentry is the first step in developing a new plan and new way that will increase their success. Informants shared their personal and professional take on ex-offenders and through their interviews emerged themes that encompasses the issue of recidivism and begins to understand and answer why we have this issue as well as where we need to improve.

The following five themes emerged from the data analysis: social stigma as a barrier, lack of basic needs, effects of poverty, community ties, and unrealistic preparedness. All informants added valuable information to each theme and for the most part statements and opinions were in congruence with each other. Informants put much emphasis on the issue or social stigma and poverty as the top issue that trickles down to other issues and barriers ex-offenders face upon community reentry. Societies view on who ex-offenders are and what they deserve goes against social work's deepest values, beliefs, and ethics. This population is to be considered vulnerable and appropriate assistance and services should be working for, not against.

The only areas where differences occurred in the interview process were opinions on the individual's motivation and true accessibility to employment and housing. The majority of informants believed the issues were more on the actual lack of available housing and employment for people with felonies and more focused on the outside barriers. Some informants do feel there is also evidence towards individual's lack of motivation as the major problem preventing people from success. Although these views

differed there was much agreement on lack of services and help for ex-offenders to get started at creating new lives.

Implications for Social Work Practice and Policy

Ex-offenders encounter numerous barriers and are many times not given a true "second chance". We as a society feel that ex-offenders must prove themselves to be good honest people in order to stay in society, but the truth is that society has put up barriers that prevent success and an actual "second chance". Ex-offenders can be vulnerable and because we see recidivism as a social problem social workers must be the advocates who work for change. As social workers many of these ex-offenders may be our clients and it is our job to help them reach success on the individual level as well as the macro level. Without policy change ex-offenders have little control over their environments and their success. It's important to remember that many of these ex-offenders are young, people of the future. It is clear that our current standards and policies have not impacted crime and we are reaching our capacity of prisons. Change is needed, and social workers are agents of change that can assist in stopping this social problem.

Strengths and Limitations

A strength of this research is the valuable insight that research participants will provide in regards to their current employment. Research participants add validity to gaining knowledge into the role community based programs have in reducing recidivism among ex-offenders as they have direct client contact in providing such services. An additional strength of this research is the differing focus areas of agencies participants are

employed through. This adds strength to the research because it will encompass the differing services available and may shed light onto the continuum of services or a potential disconnect in resources and availability. Although each agency where participants were gathered from has the overarching goals of providing services for ex-offenders in order to reduce recidivism, each agency has different tasks and goals per their program. This will provide valuable information to understand the entire role played out by the number of community based programs and services that are providing direct care for ex-offenders.

Due to the time and financial constraints, a limitation this research is the lack of sample size as well as the diversity of the sample. Each participant was apart of an agency that partnered with Second Chance Coalition, so although there is differences in what tasks and goals each agency carries out, they are under the same umbrella. It would be beneficial to seek interviews from agencies outside Second Chance Coalition and in other areas of the state and the United States. Another limitation to this research is the lack of involvement and input from the identified population of this research. Understanding how ex-offenders view the role of community based programs in reducing recidivism would be beneficial in addressing the scope of the problem and identifying barriers to services. Due to the time limits and lack of financial resources the general sample size is limited and cannot be defined as true for the general population or other community based programs working to reduce recidivism. Regardless of limitations this research will provide information regarding the barriers ex-offenders have to successful community reentry as well as the community based programs that are available and their current work in reducing recidivism.

Conclusion

The focus of this research was to gain a deeper understanding from community based program employees who work directly with ex-offenders with the goal of successful community reentry. By interviewing direct service providers, important insight in regards to the role that community based programs have in reducing recidivism among ex-offenders was gained. This research strived to gain better understanding of the prison to community transition, understand barriers to success, and identify services and programs that are working directly to solve this social problem and help ex-offenders succeed in their communities.

This research is rich in first hand information, encounters, and work with ex-offenders. The informants provided great answers, stories, and facts about the work they do and the experiences they have had. There were five major themes that emerged through data analysis. These themes were identified as social stigma as a barrier, lack of basic needs, effects of poverty, community ties, and unrealistic preparedness. Informants gave the perspective that because of the social stigma and effects of poverty this population endures, the other issues arise. There was a sense of despair and true hopelessness in many cases. An understanding of the importance and need for strong advocacy of a real "second chance" for ex-offenders was presented. Until we as a society decide that we will allow ex-offenders to rebuild their lives within our communities we are battling an unending cycle of recidivism.

Ex-offenders are many times vulnerable people who are deserving of advocacy and assistance. Social workers have a societal obligation to help those in need, and advocate for the betterment of their lives as well as the necessity of help. If society

continues to face crime in this way our prison will overflow. We do not have the

financial ability to house a growing population of offenders. The more accessible

community resources are, and the more transitional work completed the higher rates of

success we will see. Social workers have the unique perspective of the person in

environment, which is pivotal in addressing the social problem of recidivism.

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Appendix A

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to acknowledge our agency's support of Paige Paulson's clinical research project: The Role of Community Based Programs in Reducing Recidivism in Ex-Offenders. I give Paige permission to conduct research with our staff members by inviting them to participate in face-to-face interviews at (agency name). I understand that Paige will inform our staff of the opportunity to participate in her study through email and phone calls.   I understand that participation in this study is voluntary. She will use the interviews to gain insight into the role of community based programs in reducing recidivism in ex-offenders.

I understand that Paige will take the following measures to ensure confidentiality of data collection and anonymity of clients. Informed consent forms will be discussed with each participant to ensure understanding.   Also, no identifying questions or information will be asked that could be linked to clients.   In addition I understand that Paige will keep all signed consent forms, audio recordings, transcripts of interviews, and coding materials in a locked file cabinet in her home until June 1, 2013.   On that date all data will be destroyed and information.

I understand that this study will not proceed until the University of St. Catherine's Institutional Review Board and Paige's research committee has approved it. I am aware that this research is part of her clinical research paper, which will be published and presented to the public in May 2013. All reports of this research will be done in a manner that protects the confidentiality of the participants and our agency.

I understand that there are no anticipated risks to our organization and that risk to study participants is minimal, which may include negative feelings or memories the questions may produce. I understand that participants will be made aware through informed consent that they may stop the interview at any time or skip questions. I understand that the expected benefits include an increase in knowledge of the role community based programs have in reducing recidivism in ex-offenders.

Sincerely,

(ADD NAME & TITLE)
(DATE)

Appendix B

What is the Role of Community Based Programs in Reducing Recidivism in Ex-Offenders?
INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

Introduction:
You are invited to participate in a research study investigating what the role of community based program is in reducing recidivism in ex-offenders. This study is being conducted by Paige Paulson, a graduate student at St. Catherine University and the University of St. Thomas under the supervision of Richa Dhanju, a faculty member in the Department of Social Work. You were selected as a possible participant in this research because you are employed by an agency that is partnered with Second Chance Coalition and have direct contact with the identified population. Please read this form and ask questions before you agree to be in the study.

Background Information:
The purpose of this study is to understand the role community based programs have in reducing recidivism in ex-offenders. It will provide valuable knowledge about what current programs provide and individual opinion on what could increase success within ex-offenders and community reentry. Approximately 8-10 people are expected to participate in this research.

Procedures:
If you agree to participate in this research, a ten-question interview will be conducted. The information gathered through the interview will remain confidential. Time and date of interview will be scheduled to accommodate your schedule and a meeting place near Minneapolis or St. Paul, which is of convenience to you will be agreed upon. This study will take approximately fifty minutes to complete the interview. The nature of the interview questions will not be intrusive regarding client confidentiality and will focus on how services are obtained, barriers clients face, and policies that affect their work and clients.

Risks and Benefits of being in the study:
The study proposes minimal risks. First, as participant you may feel discomfort regarding information shared, although it is not anticipated. A second risk may include participants feeling embarrassed or ineffective in assisting client success. Although this is a possibility, it is not anticipated due to the nature of the questions addressed during the interview

There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this research, although you will contribute to the research base regarding community-based programs' role in reducing recidivism with ex-offenders.

Confidentiality:
Any information obtained in connection with this research study that can be identified with you will be disclosed only with your permission; your results will be kept confidential. In any written reports or publications, no one will be identified or identifiable. Furthermore, pseudonyms will used to ensure confidentiality.

I will keep the research results in a locked file cabinet in my home and only I and my advisor will have access to the records while I work on this project. I will finish analyzing

the data by May 17, 2013. I will then destroy all original reports and identifying information that can be linked back to you on June 1, 2013. Voice recordings will be stored on my computer and will be password protected. The recordings will also be deleted on June 1, 2013.

Voluntary nature of the study:
Participation in this research study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your future relations with St. Catherine University or University of St. Thomas in any way. If you decide to participate, you are free to stop at any time without affecting these relationships. You are also free to skip questions and answer only those you wish to.

Contacts and questions:
If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me, Paige Paulson, at (715)-222-4758. You may ask questions now, or if you have any additional questions later, the faculty advisor, Richa Dhanju (651)-690-6755, will be happy to answer them. If you have other questions or concerns regarding the study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you may also contact Dr. John Schmitt, Chair of the St. Catherine University Institutional Review Board, at (651) 690-7739.

You may keep a copy of this form for your records.

Statement of Consent:
You are making a decision whether or not to participate. Your signature indicates that you have read this information and your questions have been answered. Even after signing this form, please know that you may withdraw from the study at any time.

_____

I consent to participate in the study and audio taping of the interview.

_____

Signature of Participant   Date

_____

Signature of Researcher   Date

Appendix C

Interview Questions

1. What services and or programs does your agency offer and what are your roles within the agency?
2. Who are the majority of people obtaining services and how do they typically get connected with your agency?
3. In what ways do you feel ex-offenders are prepared or not prepared for community reentry?
4. In your experience have you worked with transition planning/discharge planning teams within correctional settings, and if so what have you found to be helpful in that process?
5. What criteria do individuals have to meet to access agency services?
6. Is there a fee for services? If yes, what is that fee?
7. What barriers are your clients facing and how do you help them overcome such barriers?
8. What is the length of time clients receive services and do you feel it is sufficient?
9. Can you identify any policies/laws/regulations that hinder or increase successful reentry?
10. What do you feel is the most important thing professionals can do to increase successful reentry within the community?

Appendix D

Recruitment Script

Dear Supervisor and or Manager,

My name is Paige Paulson and I am a MSW student at the University of St. Thomas and St. Catherine's University. I am in my final year of the masters program and currently working on my research proposal. I am writing you today to inquire about the possibility of utilizing staff members within Second Chance Coalition and Amicus, Inc. in my interview process in order to collect data for my research.

My research topic is looking at the role that community based programs take in reducing recidivism among ex-offenders. I'm looking specifically at what professionals see as barriers to successful reentry and what the programming and services offer in the effort to reduce recidivism. Much of my work has included researching types of programs available as well as polices that have been created to provide funding and programming to assist offenders is successful reentry. Through my research I learned of Second Chance Coalition and thought it would be insightful and helpful to utilize the thoughts and opinions of professionals directly in service with this population, especially in our area.

I am specifically seeking permission to conduct interviewee recruitment through your agency. The interviews I wish to conduct will be brief, semi-structured, and confidential. I do not expect interviews to last more than 50 minutes and steps will be taken to ensure confidentially within participants.

I am interested in discussing this further with you regarding interviews and my research. I greatly appreciate your time and thoughts regarding my email.

Thank you,
Paige Paulson

Participant Recruitment Script
(Appendix E)

Dear Staff Members,

The purpose of this email is to inform you of the opportunity to participate in research regarding reducing recidivism among ex-offenders and specifically the role that community based programs have in reducing recidivism. The researcher, Paige Paulson is a MSW student at the University of St. Thomas and St. Catherine's University. She is seeking participants who will provide information through brief, semi-structured, interviews. Interviews are expected to last no longer than 50 minutes. Steps will be taken to ensure confidentially within participants. If you are interested in participating in this research or would like more information contact Paige Paulson via email or phone. Contact information listed below.

Phone – 715-222-4758
Email – paul4530@stthomas.edu

Sincerely,
Supervisor