



Neighborhood conditions, including the physical state of housing stock, quality of schools, policing, and other amenities such as recreational options, influence public safety.

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Housing, Inclusion, and Public Safety

People want to live in safe neighborhoods where they are free from fear — where they can thrive and reach their full potential. For too many people in too many places, crime, even violent crime, is a daily reality, and the threat of crime is ever looming. Low-income households may struggle more than others to find affordable housing in safe neighborhoods. The personal costs of living in a dangerous neighborhood are high. Being victim of crime, witnessing crime, or fearing crime, in

addition to the direct impact of a crime that could result in serious injury or death, can lead to stress and isolation, impair physical and mental health, and diminish school and work performance.¹ The housing and community development context weighs heavily in achieving a higher level of public safety. Numerous housing and neighborhood conditions influence public safety, including the physical quality of the housing stock, policing strategies in particular areas, and, significantly,

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Message from the Assistant Secretary

This issue of *Evidence Matters* discusses issues related to public safety, crime, and inclusion. It considers the broader context of housing and community development for public safety as well as for those groups communities have historically struggled to include and support. This issue also examines what research tells us about factors that contribute to violent crime at the neighborhood level as well as violent crime's impact on communities and their residents. These issues are important to understand as HUD works to ensure that all people can live in safe, supportive, and inclusive communities.

The Office of Policy Development and Research (PD&R) has been closely involved with research that helps us better understand the effects of crime on neighborhoods.

Launched in the 1990s, the Moving to Opportunity (MTO) demonstration considered how the chance to move to lower-poverty, safer neighborhoods has benefited low-income residents. In addition to recent research showing benefits for children's adult earnings and educational attainment, MTO documented significant improvements in movers' physical and mental health. These health benefits were attributed to reductions in stress as families moved to safer neighborhoods; decreased parental stress may be an important mechanism generating the observed improved outcomes for their children.

HUD has taken a number of steps to facilitate inclusive communities. One way is through guidance. In 2011, former HUD Secretary Shaun Donovan encouraged public housing agencies (PHAs) to provide second chances to formerly incarcerated individuals. In 2015, HUD informed PHAs and other owners of federally assisted housing that they may not evict residents, terminate assistance, or deny applications because of an arrest record: arrests themselves are not evidence of criminal activity. The 2015 guidance also clarified that HUD does not require "one-strike" policies that deny admission to anyone with a criminal record or require automatic eviction if a household member engages in criminal activity in violation of their lease. Instead, in most cases, PHAs and owners can use discretion. And in 2016, HUD clarified that housing providers' use of criminal history may constitute a fair housing violation if it has a discriminatory impact or a discriminatory intent — and a blanket prohibition on any person with a conviction record constitutes a fair housing violation.

Several HUD programs and resources have supported inclusion and successful reentry. In April 2016, HUD and the U.S. Department of Justice awarded \$1.75 million in grants for the Juvenile Re-entry Assistance Program, which helps justice-involved youth secure jobs and housing. HUD has also partnered with the White House for the Summer Opportunity Project, an interagency initiative that connects youth nationwide with job and education opportunities. In June 2016, HUD released "It Starts with Housing: Public Housing Agencies Are Making Second Chances Real," a publication highlighting PHA models that successfully reintegrate formerly incarcerated people into their communities.

Housing and community development are closely linked with crime, public safety, and inclusion. These are just a few examples of ways in which PD&R and HUD are striving to build stronger, safer communities.

— Katherine M. O'Regan, *Assistant Secretary for Policy Development and Research*

Editor's Note

Crime, public safety, and inclusion, the focus of this edition of *Evidence Matters*, are issues that are essential to efforts to expand opportunity through housing and community development. Even as crime rates have significantly declined in the United States over the past 20 years, some communities remain disproportionately affected by crime, and some groups of residents are unduly disconnected. Throughout this issue, you will see how strategies, both social and physical, can foster stronger communities, reduce crime, and improve quality of life for all residents.

The lead article, "Housing, Inclusion, and Public Safety," considers the housing and community development context for public safety and inclusion as well as strategies to improve outcomes for opportunity youth — those youth who are ages 16 to 24 and neither working nor in school — and support reentry for incarcerated persons. The Research Spotlight article, "Neighborhoods and Violent Crime," discusses evidence on characteristics linked to violent crime in neighborhoods as well as the effects of violent crime. Finally, the In Practice article, "Reducing Offender Recidivism and Reconnecting Opportunity Youth," describes three initiatives to find stable housing for former offenders and to provide housing and wraparound services for former foster youth.

We hope this issue of *Evidence Matters* provides a helpful overview of this important topic. Our next issue will focus on housing, community development, and the digital divide. Please provide feedback on any of our issues at www.huduser.gov/forums.

— Rachele Levitt, *Director of Research Utilization Division*

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Highlights

- Crime is related in part to the built environment. The planning subfield of crime prevention through environmental design has developed a substantial amount of research on ways in which design elements such as lighting and opportunities for surveillance can reduce crime.
- Public safety is enhanced when people are incorporated into the social and economic life of the community, including groups that have traditionally been difficult to incorporate such as opportunity youth and former prisoners.
- HUD has encouraged public housing agencies to use their discretion to give second chances to deserving former inmates who show a reasonable probability of favorable future conduct.

inclusion, or the extent to which all residents are included in the life of the community. Inclusion is particularly challenging and critical for groups of residents that communities historically have struggled to include. One such group is the roughly 5.5 million youth in America between the ages of 16 and 24 who are neither employed nor in school.² These "disconnected youth" are also known as "opportunity youth," reflecting the individual and

societal gains that could be realized if these youth were reconnected. Another group that communities have traditionally struggled to include is formerly incarcerated individuals. When these groups are successfully included in their communities, they are better able to flourish personally and are less likely to engage in criminal activity that endangers public safety. A number of evidence-based policy responses at the federal, state, and local levels seek to

enhance public safety by addressing the housing and community development context and by better incorporating at-risk youth and formerly incarcerated individuals.

The Housing and Community Development Context

Although crime and public safety are concerns for all communities, crime is concentrated in disadvantaged neighborhoods.³ Research shows that living in a disadvantaged neighborhood can increase the risk of a youth or adult engaging in criminal activity, even after controlling for individual sociodemographic characteristics.⁴ In other words, the prevalence of crime in these areas is explained in some measure by neighborhood disadvantage itself. This finding results in part from disparities in the physical environment. Older, deteriorating housing stock, for example, increases exposure to lead-based paint, which has been linked to aggressive and antisocial behavior that sometimes results in criminal acts.⁵ Physical blight, as evident in dilapidated housing, is also associated with increased criminal



Exposure to crime can lead to stress that impairs physical and mental health, including school performance, whereas living in a safe neighborhood positions children to flourish.

activity. Signs of physical disorder are a signal to criminals that residents are not invested in a neighborhood and are therefore less likely to report crimes.⁶ Similarly, research shows that vacant properties, which often deteriorate in physical quality and leave fewer “eyes on the street,” contribute to increased crime, including assault and arson.⁷ Other mechanisms that potentially influence criminal behavior in a neighborhood context include peer groups; social interactions; the quality of schools, police, and other social goods; and the design of the built environment.⁸

The concentration of crime in disadvantaged neighborhoods may also reflect disparate policing practices.⁹ In the absence of effective enforcement, residents may turn to other means of protection. Research by Sobel and Osoba suggests that youth gangs form in such areas as a way to protect youth from violent crime.¹⁰ In the same places, law enforcement may focus on low-level, nonviolent offenses, resulting in high rates of arrest and incarceration but diminishing returns in terms of public safety.¹¹ In neighborhoods where a

substantial portion of the population cycles in and out of prisons, social networks and institutions are weakened, eroding social capital and collective efficacy, which in turn increases the likelihood of criminal activity in the neighborhood.¹² This dynamic makes the successful reintegration of returning former prisoners — a break in the cycle of reentry and recidivism — a critical step for improving public safety.

Communities can also enhance public safety by addressing the environmental factors that contribute to crime. Combating blight and remediating lead contamination address the connection between crime and poor housing quality. Communities may likewise engage a range of strategies, including code enforcement, tax foreclosure, land banking, demolition, neighborhood marketing, and commercial revitalization, among others, to return vacant properties to productive use with a positive impact on crime.¹³ Demolition strategies, which may be necessary in distressed neighborhoods with weak real estate markets, should include plans for reuse such as urban farming,

wetlands, or recreational space. A randomized controlled trial of a vacant lot greening intervention in Philadelphia, for example, found that greening was associated with reductions in certain gun crimes and an increased perception of safety among residents.¹⁴

The relationship between environmental design and crime suggests that the environment can be designed or altered in ways that reduce crime. One planning subfield, crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED), has developed a substantial amount of research on the relationship between environmental design and public safety. Increasing the level of surveillance over an area, controlling access, and establishing clear territorial boundaries with fences or landscaping can help reduce crime.¹⁵ For instance, by incorporating lighting and surveillance, limiting possible escape routes, and promoting high visibility in public and semipublic spaces, potential criminals have fewer opportunities to conceal activities or evade law enforcement.¹⁶ Increasingly, CPTED also considers the relationship between the built environment and social factors that influence crime, such as how a space can be designed to host festivals and cultural events that foster a strong sense of place and community.¹⁷ CPTED is complex and difficult to evaluate, raising research quality questions and precluding definitive conclusions regarding its effectiveness, but several studies find reduced crime and other positive outcomes in places that have implemented CPTED interventions. Some questions remain about whether these interventions reduce crime or simply displace it to other places or times.¹⁸ More research is needed to better understand the relative importance of individual and environmental factors as well as how the interaction of these factors causes criminal activity.¹⁹

In practice, Derek J. Paulsen, commissioner of planning, preservation, and development for the city of Lexington, Kentucky, and professor of justice studies

in the College of Justice and Safety at Eastern Kentucky University, says that most planners, architects, and developers would agree that crime prevention is related to design and is important, although not necessarily near the top of their list of considerations. Much more could be done, he says, to incorporate crime prevention into the design of new housing developments and in municipal planning. To this end, the Lexington-Fayette Urban County government now integrates crime prevention into its comprehensive plan. Police sign off on development plans just as a fire marshal does in most jurisdictions, allowing police to have input on the design of areas for which they will later be held responsible for preventing and responding to crime. Paulsen points out that designing for crime prevention could also be required in applications for federal funding, such as low-income housing tax credits.²⁰

Policing can prevent crime and promote public safety, ideally without excessive arrests and incarcerations. The final report of the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing

highlighted the need for a relationship of trust between communities and law enforcement based on a culture of transparency and accountability. The report emphasizes crime reduction through community policing that builds on community engagement and avoids tactics that stigmatize certain groups and can result in disparate outcomes for those groups.²¹ Defined as a philosophy promoting strategies based on the proactive use of partnerships and problem-solving techniques to address the immediate preconditions of crime and social disorder, community policing improves on "the traditional policing model that emphasized preventive patrol, rapid response, arrests, and investigations." Scheider recommends community policing specifically for public housing agencies as well as for municipalities. Public housing agencies could identify criminal justice-related problems specific to their context, such as drug and alcohol violations or the reentry of former prisoners, and collaborate with relevant stakeholders to develop solutions.²²

Throughout the country, police departments have successfully collaborated with community stakeholders in pursuit of specific strategies to reduce crime and revitalize neighborhoods. In California's East Bay Area, for instance, the community development organization Pogo Park, the Richmond Police Department, and the city housing director partnered to facilitate a community-informed cleanup of a park and renovation of surrounding vacant properties along with the reoccupation of a home that had been a center of drug activity in a crime hotspot. The park area has enjoyed a dramatic reduction in crime and now serves as a community meeting place and the distribution center for the school district's free summer lunch program.²³ Although evaluating the effectiveness of community policing generally is difficult because strategies and implementation vary across sites, meta-analysis by Gill et al. finds that community policing improves the perception of safety, citizen satisfaction, and trust of police, although it does not find significant reductions in crime or the fear of crime overall.²⁴



Lighting is among the design elements addressed by the planning approach known as crime prevention through environmental design, or CPTED.



Strategies such as vacant lot greening and community gardens can enhance public safety.

Communities can also address low-level crime through community courts that involve residents in identifying public safety concerns, administer justice through service assignments, and offer social services to address the causes of crime.²⁵ Some community courts have been initiated by court systems, others by mayors or city prosecutors, and still others by community activists, but a common feature of these efforts is community engagement and responsiveness.²⁶ A few evaluations of community courts have found reduced levels of certain crimes in the community, reduced recidivism, speedier resolution of cases, increased use of alternatives to incarceration, and improved public perceptions of safety and criminal justice, but more rigorous studies are needed to confirm that these benefits can be attributed in full or in part to the courts.²⁷ Critics caution that the presence of community courts might encourage law enforcement to charge low-level offenders that they otherwise would not, and further, that the community courts might perpetuate the racial biases of the broader court system if not implemented well.²⁸

Beyond the formal structure of a community court, research shows that communities with strong social ties and a willingness to intervene on each other's behalf can reduce violence, even in severely disadvantaged areas.²⁹

Finally, research shows that providing affordable housing — particularly supportive housing that offers onsite services for substance abuse, employment, or other needs — for populations at risk of criminal justice involvement, such as chronically homeless and formerly incarcerated individuals, reduces the likelihood of future incarceration and associated public costs. The Justice Policy Institute finds that states that spend more on housing generally have lower incarceration rates and suggests that investing in affordable and supportive housing gives people a stable foundation for education, employment, and services, including those in groups at higher risk for criminal activity.³⁰ Coordinated place-based investments such as Choice Neighborhoods and Promise Zones also seek to improve public safety by addressing the various housing and

community development factors that influence crime. These programs take a holistic approach to community revitalization, crossing policy sectors such as housing and education in ways that are relevant for addressing risk factors for crime, such as youth disconnection.³¹ For example, in San Antonio, Texas, a Choice Neighborhoods implementation grant and a Promise Neighborhoods implementation grant combined investment in housing, education, and job training in the EastPoint neighborhood, better enabling the neighborhood to incorporate all residents into community life and, as a result, reducing the risk factors associated with criminal activity.³²

Opportunity Youth

Neighborhoods can become safer as they more fully incorporate all of their residents into the social and economic life of the community, including opportunity youth — those between the ages of 16 and 24 who are neither employed nor in school. For opportunity youth, reconnecting with school or employment holds the promise of increasing

their income, having a better quality of life, and avoiding involvement with the criminal justice system. Because opportunity youth are four times more likely than other youth to commit crimes, with an estimated 63 percent of youth crime attributable to opportunity youth, reconnecting these youth with school or employment may also result in substantial gains in public safety and associated reductions in public spending.³³ At the societal level, researchers estimate that, in 2011 dollars, each opportunity youth generates a direct taxpayer burden of \$170,740 and a social burden of \$529,030 between the ages of 25 and 65. These calculations account for added public costs for social services as well as unrealized tax revenues, earnings, and economic growth.³⁴ The extent of the burden reflects the extent of the opportunity. Everyone stands to gain from the full engagement of the nation's opportunity youth.

Youth may become disconnected for many reasons, and several factors may be both a cause and consequence of disconnection.³⁵ Causes of disconnection from school include a history of academic difficulties or failure; a history of discipline or behavior issues; chronic absenteeism, which may be associated with homelessness or health issues; a lack of parental support; the premature assumption of adult responsibilities; peer influences; poor school quality; and disaffection with school faculty, structure, or curriculum, among other factors.³⁶ Differences among opportunity youth compared with connected youth provide additional insight into the reasons why youth become disconnected. Those differences include a higher likelihood of living in poverty, having left high school without graduating or having high school as their highest academic credential, and having a disability. Disconnected females are more than three times as likely to have a child.³⁷ Teen parents, foster youth, and youth involved with the criminal justice system are at higher risk of disconnection than are other youth.³⁸

Racial minorities are disproportionately disconnected. Rates of disconnection are 27.8 percent for Native American youth; 21.6 percent for African-American youth; 16.3 percent for Latino youth; 7.9 percent for Asian-American youth; and 11.3 percent for white youth, who make up the largest number of opportunity youth at about 2.5 million. Although young men are more likely to be disconnected overall (14.2% of young men and 13.5% of young women are disconnected), among Latinos and Asian Americans, young women are more likely to be disconnected than young men.³⁹

Significant variation in the rates of disconnection exists across metropolitan areas. Many characteristics of disadvantaged neighborhoods that are associated with the geographic concentration of crime are also associated

with disconnection. Places that score low on the American Human Development Index, a composite measure of health, education, and income indicators, tend to have high rates of disconnection. Areas with high rates of adult unemployment and low levels of adult educational achievement also tend to have high rates of youth disconnection, suggesting that disconnected parents have difficulty supporting their children in employment and educational achievement. Finally, disconnection for some racial groups is strongly associated with residential segregation, a legacy of discriminatory practices and policies that include redlining and restrictive covenants. Lewis and Burd-Sharps find that the higher the degree of segregation between African American and white populations in an area, the higher the likelihood of African-American disconnection.⁴⁰



Surveillance, lighting, limited escape routes, and high visibility of public and semipublic spaces can help restrict opportunities for potential criminals to conceal activities or evade law enforcement.

Housing instability is both a cause and a consequence of disconnection. It can lead to youth disconnection by contributing to increased rates of school absenteeism and interaction with the criminal justice system, among other pathways. Some opportunity youth may already have experienced homelessness, and opportunity youth are at heightened risk of experiencing homelessness in the future.⁴¹ A study of incarcerated youth of color in New York City found that “housing instability was by far the strongest correlate of social exclusion.”⁴² Although difficult to definitively quantify, a report by the Congressional Research Service suggests that a “significant share” of youth who are ages 16 to 24 and experiencing homelessness would meet the definition of being disconnected.⁴³ Of 39 directors of local programs serving opportunity youth surveyed by the U.S. Government Accountability Office, 24 reported insufficient housing options for youth.⁴⁴ Generally, policies that reduce family and youth homelessness would provide more youth with a platform for engagement with school and employment, and some policies target groups at higher-than-average risk of disconnection, such as former foster youth.⁴⁵

Because of the high rate of criminal activity among opportunity youth compared with other youth, policies that support youth engagement also affect public safety.⁴⁶ Ideally, these policies would prevent youth from becoming disconnected in the first place. Initiatives aimed at certain risk factors such as housing instability or criminal justice involvement create conditions that make it more likely that youth remain connected.⁴⁷ Policymakers at the state and local levels have implemented alternative education models for at-risk youth such as online learning or offsite classrooms to stem school dropout rates.⁴⁸ Based on their study of youth in Baltimore who spent their early years living in distressed public housing, DeLuca, Clampet-Lundquist, and Edin highlight several possibilities for reducing youth disconnection, the first category of which centers on housing.

- *Improve access to high-opportunity neighborhoods.* Youth stand to benefit from mobility programs that provide housing support, such as vouchers that enable households to move to high-opportunity neighborhoods, the siting of affordable housing in high-opportunity neighborhoods, and place-based strategies that increase opportunities in historically disadvantaged neighborhoods.⁴⁹
- *Support the creation of “Identity Projects.”* DeLuca et al. find that identity projects, described by the authors as a “consuming, defining passion” that can range from an academic interest or passion for football to a meaningful job or role such as parenting, can help youth become and remain engaged and connected. They suggest restoring funding for institutions such as public schools and other local government entities to support arts programs, extracurricular activities, and other types of programming that foster identity projects. They also point out that nonprofits have an important role to play in supporting venues in which identity projects are likely to take root.⁵⁰
- *Support youth in their pursuit of postsecondary opportunities.* DeLuca et al. suggest that youth at risk of disconnection benefit from supports that allow them to slow the transition to adulthood, make better decisions regarding their future, and prepare them for postsecondary opportunities. Supports include school and career counseling for a full range of options, from 4-year college to employment. Youth should receive support to help them choose programs that they can complete, are of good value, and do not leave them burdened with unmanageable debt.⁵¹

Although prevention is preferable, other policies target youth who have already become disconnected, seeking to reengage youth with education and training opportunities that prepare them for employment or that employ youth directly. A range of policies and

programs, both public and private (and often in partnership), seek to engage youth with education and employment opportunities. In a recent effort to facilitate collaboration in service of opportunity youth, the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2014 provided for up to 10 Performance Partnership Pilots. The pilots are designed to help youth ages 14 to 24 who are homeless, in the juvenile justice system, or disconnected achieve their educational and employment goals. The program allows grantees to pool funds across federal funding streams, affording them the flexibility to reduce administrative burdens and overlap in programs to more efficiently and effectively invest in needed services for opportunity youth.⁵²

The Family Unification Program (FUP), which provides housing vouchers for up to 18 months for youth who have aged out of foster care, and the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program, which can provide housing support for 18- to 21-year-olds who have aged out of care, promote housing stability for a subpopulation of youth at high risk of disconnection. HUD and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services have also launched a FUP and Family Self Sufficiency (FSS) Demonstration that extends the 18-month time limit for FUP vouchers and pairs them with FSS program and public child welfare agency services to give former foster youth more time to develop the skills needed to become self-sufficient.⁵³ The Chafee program builds on the housing platform, providing up to \$5,000 per year for youth to pursue postsecondary education and training through the Educational and Training Vouchers Program for Youths Aging Out of Foster Care.⁵⁴

Federal programs that offer employment opportunities coupled with education and training include the U.S. Department of Labor’s Job Corps and YouthBuild programs, the U.S. Department of Defense’s National Guard Youth Challenge program, and the various service programs of the



Los Angeles Economic & Workforce Development Department

Summer employment programs help keep youth connected. In 2015, Health Care Integrated Services hired several youth as part of the HIRE LA's Youth program in Los Angeles.

Corporation for National Community Service such as AmeriCorps. Job Corps is a residential education and training program for low-income youth that has increased rates of General Educational Development (GED) and vocational certification attainment and reduced rates of arrest and incarceration. In YouthBuild, high school dropouts split their time between education toward a GED and working to renovate affordable housing for low-income individuals and persons experiencing homelessness. Studies of the program over several years show mixed results but generally find positive outcomes for those who completed the program.⁵⁵ An offshoot of this program, the YouthBuild USA Offender Project, targets young adults who have served time in jail or prison or who have been referred to the program by the criminal justice system as an alternative to incarceration. Comparing program participants with similar groups of

youth, an evaluation finds that participants are more likely to graduate from high school or complete a GED and have lower recidivism rates.⁵⁶ Finally, a random assignment design evaluation finds that the National Guard Youth Challenge program's education and employment supports have been successful in increasing GED completion, college attendance, and employment, helping youth to reconnect.⁵⁷

One example of a public-private partnership to reduce disconnection, the Housing Opportunity and Services Together Demonstration, offers supports such as wraparound and case management services to low-income parents and children in federally assisted housing to help them overcome barriers to self-sufficiency. One of the initiative's goals is to reduce neighborhood crime by engaging youth. The demonstration relies on philanthropic and government funding and has been implemented in four sites.⁵⁸

In Washington, DC, the demonstration included a Promoting Adolescent Sexual Health and Safety program aimed at decreasing teen pregnancy, a risk factor associated with youth disconnection. Early evaluations of the program found that residents reported that they felt better able to achieve their goals; in addition, employment rates improved, keeping more youth connected and thus at lower risk for criminal activity.⁵⁹

Some private-sector entities have recognized the potential of reconnecting opportunity youth. The 100,000 Opportunities Initiative is an employer-led push to create at least 100,000 opportunities in the form of jobs, apprenticeships, and internships to opportunity youth by 2018. The initiative is managed by FSG and the Aspen Institute's Forum for Community Solutions, with support from several private foundations and a partnership of nearly 40 employers.⁶⁰ Such employer-led engagement not

only creates opportunities for youth but also fills employers' need for non-managerial employees and, through additional training such as internships and apprenticeships, middle-skill labor.⁶¹

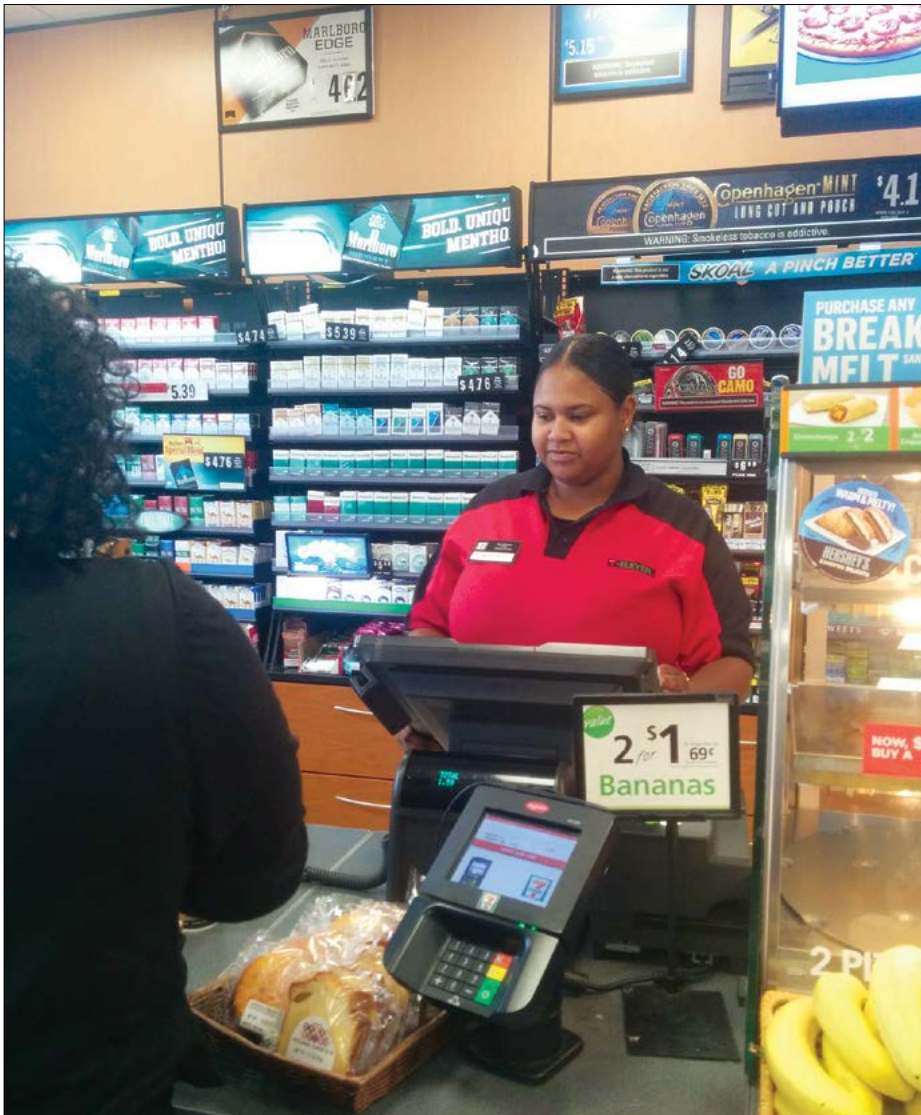
As discussed above, male and minority youth are disproportionately represented among opportunity youth. In response, the Obama administration's My Brother's Keeper initiative targets boys and young men of color with supports to overcome opportunity barriers through mentoring, education, and partnerships with police and communities to reduce crime and violence. The My Brother's Keeper Task Force recommended investment in summer youth employment as a way to keep youth engaged during summer breaks as well as presenting

them with opportunities to earn money and develop skills. In February 2016, the White House announced the Summer Opportunity Project, which supports local communities in providing evidence-based opportunity programs and employment for youth, with the expected additional benefit of reduced criminal involvement. Program components include facilitating partnerships between state and local youth-serving organizations with employers, dissemination of best practices for youth summer programming, and support for mentoring, among others. The HIRE LA's Youth initiative, for example, has a goal of hiring 15,000 youth for 6-week summer jobs, targeting youth from families receiving public assistance, foster youth, and youth experiencing homelessness.⁶²

Supporting Reentry for Formerly Incarcerated Individuals

Formerly incarcerated individuals represent a second group whose successful inclusion promises to enhance public safety as well as improve their life opportunities and outcomes. In the case of some violent criminals, public safety requires their removal from society. When sentences are completed or prisoners are otherwise released, however, they need a place to live. In an era of mass incarceration, with as many as 2.3 million individuals incarcerated in correctional facilities, more than 600,000 individuals are released from state and federal prisons each year.⁶³ Millions more — nearly 12 million — exit local jails each year.⁶⁴ Many of these individuals were incarcerated for non-violent offenses, usually drug-related, and viable alternatives to incarceration may be effective for them.⁶⁵ Whatever their offense, formerly incarcerated people often struggle to successfully reintegrate into society. Although recidivism rates vary depending on whether they are measured by rearrest, conviction, or reincarceration, they are high. Approximately 45 percent of individuals released from state and federal prisons are reincarcerated within 3 years of release, either for new crimes or for parole or probation violations.⁶⁶

Addressing reentry problems begins with addressing the underlying causes of mass incarceration. Although the number of incarcerated individuals has increased fivefold since 1970, the crime rate has declined. Yet researchers attribute only a portion of the decrease in crime to enforcement and incarceration, suggesting diminishing returns from incarceration on crime reduction.⁶⁷ In response, the Obama administration has pursued new strategies, such as enforcing mandatory minimum sentences for nonviolent drug offenses less frequently. For the first time in four decades, crime rates and incarceration rates are declining at the same time.⁶⁸ New and ongoing reforms are also needed to address racial disparities in criminal justice, particularly for African



Los Angeles Economic & Workforce Development Department

Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti has set a goal of connecting 15,000 youth with summer jobs. Miyetta Angol was hired by 7-11 in 2016 and will have access to its corporate training program.



Access to stable housing can improve health, employment, and recidivism outcomes for reentering prisoners.

Americans, that “result from disparate treatment...at every stage of the criminal justice system, including stops and searches, arrests, prosecutions and plea negotiations, trials, and sentencing.”⁶⁹ Together, African Americans and Latinos make up approximately 30 percent of the general population but 60 percent of the prison population.⁷⁰

Access to Housing Improves Inclusion and Reduces Recidivism. Housing is an immediate need for individuals newly released from prison. Research shows that former prisoners are at elevated risk of homelessness.⁷¹ Barriers to housing include the general shortage of affordable housing across much of the country as well as challenges specific to ex-offenders, such as criminal background checks. Stable housing can be a platform for inclusion and for better outcomes for reentering prisoners, including health, employment, and the reduced likelihood of recidivism. It can also reduce recidivism and its associated social costs and improve public safety for the receiving community.⁷² Safe, stable, and affordable housing can be a refuge and base while seeking employment or focusing on treatment, and it provides

consistency while avoiding the dangers and difficulties of homelessness.⁷³ Job seekers need a permanent address and a means of contacting and receiving contact from prospective employers.⁷⁴ A quasi-experimental, longitudinal, multisite evaluation of the Washington State Reentry Housing Pilot Program, which provides up to 12 months of housing and wraparound services to high-risk offenders leaving prison, finds that housing with wraparound services increases the likelihood of successful reintegration.⁷⁵ Programs tailored for subgroups of former prisoners have also shown success. A quasi-experimental design evaluation of the Returning Home—Ohio program, which provides supportive housing for reentering individuals from 13 state prisons who have behavioral health disabilities and risk for or history of housing instability, found reductions in rearrests and reincarcerations within 1 year of release (see “Reducing Offender Recidivism and Reconnecting Opportunity Youth,” p. 25).⁷⁶

Recently, the Obama administration has launched several initiatives to help former prisoners reintegrate successfully, such as the U.S. Department of

Education’s Adult Reentry Education Grants and the U.S. Department of Labor’s Linking to Employment Activities Pre-Release pilot grants, as well as initiatives related to housing.⁷⁷ The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services sponsored the Enhanced Services for the Hard-to-Employ Demonstration and Evaluation Project. The demonstration tested the effectiveness of an intervention that included temporary jobs and other services to support job prospects compared with basic job search assistance and community services. A random assignment evaluation of one of the demonstration sites, the Center for Employment Opportunities in New York City, found significant reductions in recidivism, especially among those who enrolled in the program shortly after release from prison, and reduced criminal justice system expenditures.⁷⁸

Opportunities in Federally Assisted Housing. HUD has taken steps to reduce barriers to former prisoners in both public housing and the private market. In public housing and in the Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program, public housing agencies (PHAs)

enforce restrictions related to alcohol abuse, drug use, and past criminal activity to make public housing safer for residents. Federal policies require PHAs to enforce a lifetime ban on admission to public housing and the HCV program for individuals who, for example, have been found to have manufactured methamphetamine in federally assisted housing or are sex offenders subject to a lifetime registration requirement. PHAs also prohibit admission to households if at least one household member has been evicted from public housing in the past three years for drug use, if a household member is engaged in criminal activity, or if the PHA has reason to believe that a household member's criminal activity will threaten the health and safety of other residents. Within these guidelines, PHAs exercise broad discretion in applying criminal history restrictions to respond to local crime conditions and individual cases, and their restrictions are often more severe than those required by federal policies.⁷⁹

In 2011, HUD's then-Secretary, Shaun Donovan, and Assistant Secretary for Public and Indian Housing Sandra Henriquez encouraged PHAs to give second chances to deserving ex-offenders by, among other things, considering

goals to support ex-offenders and their families." For example, the exclusion of households from public housing based on the criminal history of minors or guests may harm families' chances of getting or retaining housing.⁸¹

Marie Claire Tran-Leung of the Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law argues that inquiring into criminal records older than five years, using arrests as evidence of criminal activity, using overly broad categories of criminal activity, and failing to consider mitigating circumstances are ways in which PHAs unreasonably restrict access to housing assistance. Blunt implementation of policies precludes second chances for individuals who have a criminal record and individuals whose past gives little indication that they pose a threat to residents. Tran-Leung writes, "By relegating potentially deserving applicants to homelessness, these housing providers miss an opportunity to decrease crime and risk aggravating the very problems that plague the safety and well-being of their communities."⁸²

HUD has sought to ease the impact of PHA policies on former prisoners and especially on their families, seeking to

or evictions triggered "any time a household member engages in criminal activity in violation of their lease" in all circumstances. Significantly, the guidance also explicitly prohibits eviction or denial of an application based on an arrest record, which the guidance notes is not in itself evidence of criminal activity.⁸⁴

Reunification with one's family can be an important step in successful reentry for formerly incarcerated individuals, including avoiding homelessness, but moving back in with a family in public housing may put that family at risk of losing assistance.⁸⁵ Margaret diZerega of the Vera Institute for Justice says that adjusting the rules so that reentering individuals can return to their families "above board" benefits the individual, the family, and the community at large. The individual is able to take advantage of the resources and emotional supports that can be provided by the family without putting the receiving family at risk of eviction. In addition, because families who take in reentering individuals off lease may be less likely to call the police to report crime or call the PHA for maintenance for fear that they will be evicted, allowing families to add reentering individuals to their lease promises community benefits as well.⁸⁶

Although diZerega notes that many PHAs have not implemented the HUD guidance, the Vera Institute for Justice reports that some PHAs are beginning to adopt more inclusive policies through updated screening policies that evaluate applicants' criminal records holistically and consider evidence of rehabilitation, among other factors.⁸⁷ The King County and Seattle Housing Authorities, for example, have revised their voucher screening policies to incorporate a uniform 12-month waiting period after incarceration for Class A felonies, replacing the previous system of waiting periods ranging up to 20 years depending on the crime committed.⁸⁸ Some PHAs are experimenting with pilot programs aimed at family reunification. For example, the

Reunification with one's family can be an important step in successful reentry for formerly incarcerated individuals, including avoiding homelessness.

factors that indicate "reasonable probability of favorable future conduct," such as participation in counseling programs when screening applicants for tenancy.⁸⁰ Curtis et al. write that despite this urging from HUD, PHAs have tended to use their discretion to exclude. They argue that "the decision to define those with alcohol, drug, or criminal histories as categorically undeserving [of housing assistance] undermines other important public policy

strike "a balance between allowing ex-offenders to reunite with families that live in HUD subsidized housing, and ensuring the safety of all residents of its programs," as Donovan and Henriquez put it.⁸³ To this end, in fall 2015, HUD issued guidance for PHAs and owners of federally assisted housing regarding use of arrest records in tenancy decisions. The guidance reminds PHAs that HUD does not require a "one-strike" policy under which admission is denied



HUD has encouraged public housing agencies to give second chances to deserving ex-offenders who need housing assistance.

Oakland Housing Authority’s Maximizing Opportunities for Mothers to Succeed program sets aside 11 housing units for mothers leaving jail who have participated in a counseling, education, and employment assistance program. After a year of case management, the residents can apply for permanent housing without having their conviction held against them. The housing agency plans an extension of the program that will also include fathers leaving jail.⁸⁹ For more examples, see “Reducing Offender Recidivism and Reconnecting Opportunity,” p. 25.

Halfway Houses. These policies aim to open up housing opportunities for formerly incarcerated prisoners, most of whom live with family members after release, although often only temporarily. In addition to HUD-assisted and private-market housing, options for reentering individuals include various types of transitional, administered, supportive, and community-based correctional housing, including halfway houses, but these options are all severely limited, putting reentering persons at high risk of homelessness.⁹⁰ More than 80 percent of individuals exiting

federal prisons live in halfway houses known as Residential Reentry Centers. In some cases, high-risk offenders are required to reside in halfway houses.⁹¹ Halfway houses are low-security, correctional, transitional residential facilities that typically offer employment, education, and treatment with supervision.⁹² Research shows mixed results for halfway houses in reducing recidivism, with studies finding increased recidivism in some cases.⁹³ These outcomes may be related to differences in “staff competency and turnover, clientele, [and] program offerings,” among other variables across halfway houses, which are often operated by private contractors.⁹⁴

To improve the likelihood of successful outcomes for residents of federal halfway houses, the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) initiated new requirements in 2014 for greater assistance in pursuing job opportunities, such as access to cell phones and transportation as well as specialized treatment for residents with mental health and substance abuse issues.⁹⁵ DOJ urges individualized continuity of care for reentering citizens as they seek housing, employment, and health care in the

community and face reentry challenges.⁹⁶ A number of reentering individuals find housing in three-quarters houses, typically homes or apartment buildings that rent beds to single adults. These facilities are largely unregulated, although they receive public dollars through various residents’ benefits for housing or other services. Because of their unregulated status, the John Jay College of Criminal Justice Prisoner Reentry Institute finds that most fail to deliver on purported programming and services to aid the transition of reentering individuals.⁹⁷

Supportive Housing. Recognizing that “a significant number of persons in the reentry population also face persistent substance abuse and other chronic health challenges,” HUD and DOJ are partnering in a Pay for Success program targeting people experiencing homelessness who are frequent users of corrections facilities as well as homeless and healthcare services. Building on evidence that permanent supportive housing with a Housing First approach reduces homelessness, arrests, hospitalization, and emergency room visits for people with severe medical and

New York City Housing Authority

behavioral problems, the \$8.7 million program will test the cost-effectiveness of the intervention for reentering individuals and the possibilities of bringing in nontraditional funding sources.⁹⁸

Housing and Community Development as Lever and Platform for Public Safety

Public safety is an essential component of opportunity — people cannot reach their full potential while living with the constant threat of death and injury and the accompanying stress. Likewise, the ways in which communities seek to improve public safety affect residents' opportunities to succeed. Old approaches such as mass incarceration have proven both unjust — with gross racial and ethnic disparities — and ineffective, showing diminishing returns on crime reduction. Housing and community development alone are not the answer for improving public safety, but they are key components of more effective and equitable approaches and are significant levers for improving outcomes. Strong communities that are inclusive and that provide opportunities such as jobs and quality schools can help improve public safety. Specifically, remediating lead, combating blight, and incorporating crime prevention in housing design have the potential to reduce crime, and stable, affordable housing provides a platform for at-risk residents, including opportunity youth and formerly incarcerated individuals, to successfully engage in education, training, and employment. For opportunity youth, housing stability can reduce stress and allow youth to more fully engage in identity projects, school, or employment. For formerly incarcerated individuals, housing is critical for getting the formal and informal supports that break the cycles of recidivism and, in many cases, addiction. The potential gains are substantial, both for the reconnected opportunity youth or reentering prisoners and for the broader community. Housing providers, including PHAs, landlords accepting HCVs, and market-rate landlords, sometimes in partnership with providers

of social and supportive services, will play a crucial role in providing housing opportunities to achieve these potential gains. [EM](#)

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Neighborhoods and Violent Crime

Violent crime wreaks a terrible impact not only on individual victims, their families, and friends but also on nearby residents and the fabric of their neighborhoods.¹ Exposure to violent crime can damage people's health and development,² and violence can push communities into vicious circles of decay. Rates of violent crime in the United States have declined significantly over the past 20 years. Disadvantaged neighborhoods have experienced larger drops in crime, although significant disparities persist.

Violent crime also has a uniquely powerful role in defining neighborhoods. A study of neighborhoods in 22 cities indicates that levels of violent crime in a neighborhood, particularly robbery and aggravated assault, strongly predict residents' perceptions of crime, whereas property crime has little effect.³ An array of studies also suggest that violent crime reduces neighborhood property values more than property crime does.⁴ Perceptions also differ among groups. Residents with children and longer-term residents, for instance, consistently perceive greater levels of crime and disorder than do their neighbors.⁵ Decisions on where to move often reflect concerns about safety. People with housing choice vouchers, for example, consistently rate a safer neighborhood as their top priority.⁶

Variations in levels of violent crime are linked to complex characteristics of neighborhoods, including disadvantage, segregation, land use, social control, social capital, and social trust, as well as the characteristics of nearby neighborhoods. Identifying the root causes of violent crime can also point to promising strategies to reduce its incidence and impact.

- Rates of violent crime in the United States have declined significantly over the past two decades, but disparities persist.
- Exposure to violent crime damages the health and development of victims, family members, and entire communities. Low-income people and racial and ethnic minorities are disproportionately affected.
- Violent crime is geographically concentrated in particular neighborhoods and in more localized areas known as hot spots; evidence suggests that problem-oriented policing of hot spots can be effective.
- Strong social organization, youth job opportunities, immigration, and residential stability are among several neighborhood characteristics associated with lower crime rates.

The Extent of Violent Crime

There are three major national sources of crime data in the United States: the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Uniform Crime Reports, which reports data on crime counts, crime rates, and arrests; the National Crime Victimization Survey, which tracks self-reported victimizations of crime; and the National Vital Statistics System, which has data on deaths, including homicides.⁷ At the national level, these sources indicate a massive decline in violent crime — generally defined to include murder, rape, robbery, and aggravated assault — over the past 20 years.⁸ According to the Uniform Crime Reports, the violent crime rate dropped by nearly half between 1995 and 2014, from 684.5 violent crimes per 100,000 inhabitants to 365.5 (fig. 1).⁹ The homicide rate also dropped by nearly half over the same period, from 8.2 per 100,000 inhabitants to 4.5.¹⁰ And according to the National Crime Victimization Survey, by 2014, the violent victimization rate — that is, the rate at which people are victims of violent crime — dropped to 20.1 per 1,000 persons, only about a quarter of 1993's rate of 79.8.¹¹ Compared to other wealthy nations, modern rates of violent crime in the United States are not exceptional, though homicide rates remain “probably the highest in the Western world.”¹² In particular, gun violence is far more common in the U.S. than in other Western nations.¹³

No consensus exists on a single cause for the massive American decline in crime. In 2015, the Brennan Center for Justice reviewed evidence on theories to explain the decline, finding that such factors as an aging population, consumer confidence, decreased alcohol consumption, income growth, increased rates of incarceration, and increased policing all likely contributed.¹⁴ With regard to increased incarceration, the National Academy of Sciences' 2012 report concluded that although higher incarceration rates may have caused a decline in crime, “the magnitude of the reduction is highly uncertain and the results of most studies suggest it was unlikely to be have been large,” and, moreover, that high incarceration rates had significant social costs, particularly for minority communities.¹⁵

At the same time, African Americans and Hispanics are more likely to be victims of violent crimes — especially serious violent crimes — than are whites, although the gap has narrowed over the past 10 years (fig. 2).¹⁶ African Americans are disproportionately victims of homicide compared with whites or Hispanics (fig. 3).¹⁷ Similarly, low-income people are much more likely than others to experience crime, including violent crime.¹⁸

Although evidence indicates that neighborhood characteristics contribute to these disparities, none of the

major national sources of crime data provide comprehensive information at the neighborhood level. Researchers usually define neighborhoods according to census tracts, which include from 1,200 to 8,000 people and are drawn to reflect visible community boundaries.¹⁹ The absence of annual, national neighborhood-level data frustrates efforts to compare violent crime trends across and within communities.

One particularly expansive national source for neighborhood-level crime data is the National Neighborhood Crime Study (NNCS), which collects street crime data reported to police for the year 2000 from 9,593 nationally representative neighborhoods in 91 large cities.²⁰ Considering NNCS data, Peterson and Krivo found striking racial inequality across neighborhoods in the average rates of violent crime: predominantly African-American neighborhoods (those that consist of more than 70% African-American

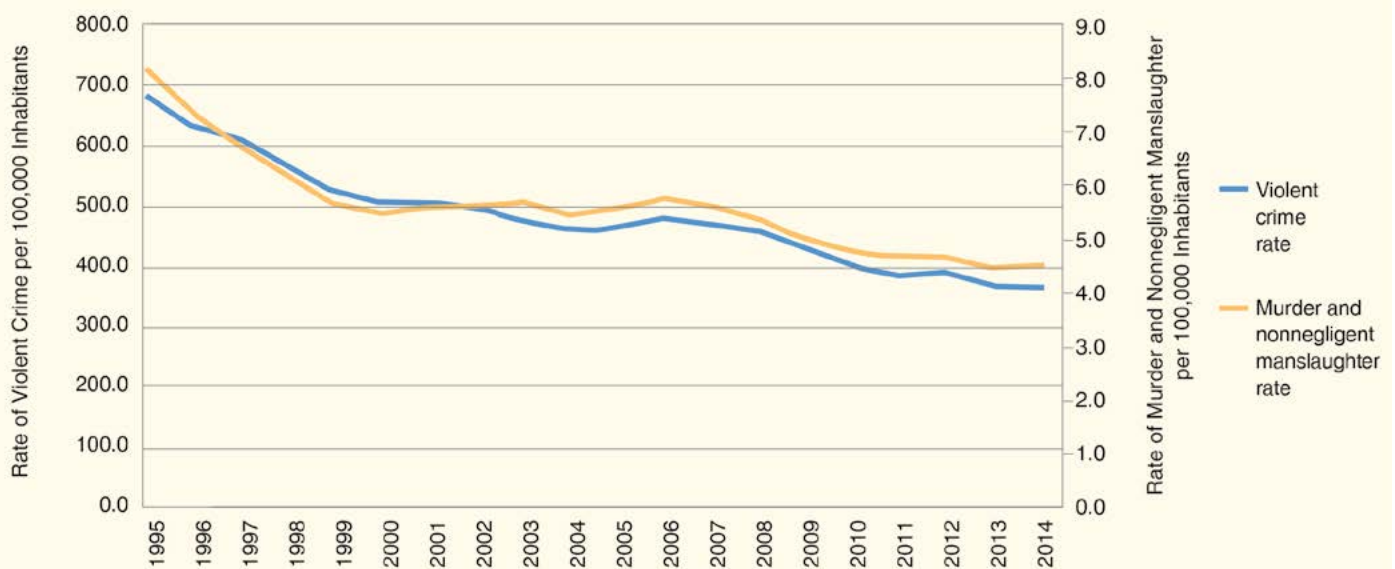
residents) averaged five times as many violent crimes as predominantly white communities; predominantly Latino neighborhoods averaged about two and a half times as many violent crimes as predominantly white neighborhoods. These differences in crime rates are linked to structural disparities: segregated neighborhoods also tend to be disadvantaged and lack access to community resources, institutions, and means of social control such as effective policing as well as social trust.²¹ A followup study is underway to add data from 2010 and analyze trends.²²

Disadvantaged, segregated communities have experienced a large portion of the national decline in violent crime but remain disproportionately affected by high violent crime rates. In 2015, Friedson and Sharkey considered neighborhood-level violent crime in six cities — Chicago; Cleveland; Denver; Philadelphia; Seattle; and St. Petersburg, Florida — over the past decade

or longer.²³ In each of these cities, the absolute rate of violent crime in the most violent neighborhoods dropped dramatically: in Cleveland, for instance, the absolute difference in violent crime between the most violent fifth of neighborhoods and all the rest declined by 65 percent. Similarly, poor neighborhoods, majority African-American, and majority Hispanic neighborhoods narrowed the gap between them and other neighborhoods. But although overall violent crime rates have declined substantially, the distribution of violent crime remains about the same: the communities that were initially the most violent generally remained the most violent. In all six cities, the most violent fifth of neighborhoods still experienced more violent crime than the second most violent fifth of neighborhoods experienced before the decline.

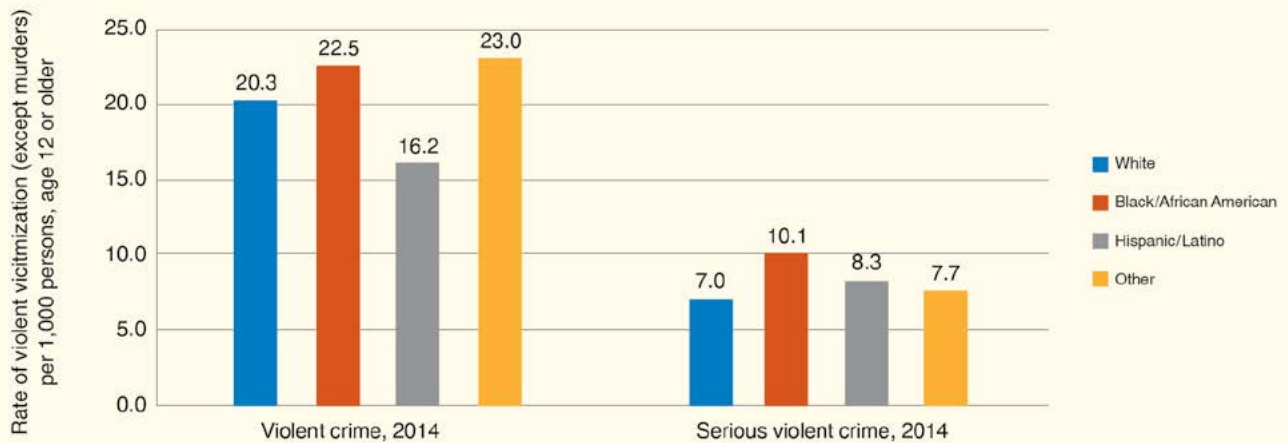
Similarly, Lens et al. found that in seven large American cities, housing choice voucher holders' exposure to

Figure 1. Violent Crime and Murder and Nonnegligent Manslaughter Rates in the United States, 1995–2014



Source: Federal Bureau of Investigation. "Crime in the United States by Volume and Rate per 100,000 Inhabitants, 1995–2014" (ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2014/crime-in-the-u.s.-2014/tables/table-1). Accessed 7 August 2016.

Figure 2. Rate of Violent Victimization (Except Murders) by Victim Demographic in the United States, 2014



Source: Jennifer L. Truman and Lynn Langton. 2015. "Criminal Victimization, 2014," Bureau of Justice Statistics.

neighborhood crime declined substantially from 1998 to 2008. This decline happened not because voucher holders moved to areas with lower crime rates but because their neighborhoods' crime rates improved more than those of other neighborhoods (although these neighborhoods still lagged behind on absolute levels of crime).²⁴

Within neighborhoods, research has indicated that violent crime occurs in a small number of "hot spots."²⁵ These hot spots are "micro places" — either street intersections or segments (two block faces on both sides of a street between two intersections).²⁶ One study reviewed Boston police records from 1980 through 2008 and found that fewer than 3 percent of micro places accounted for more than half of all gun violence incidents.²⁷ When gun violence increases, these hot spots account for most of the increase, and the same occurs when gun violence declines. Hot spots' presence is linked to both opportunity — for instance, the presence of more bus stops, a busy street, or the lack of street lighting — and social controls on crime.²⁸ Both informal

social controls, such as collective efficacy, and formal social controls, such as the presence of law enforcement, could prevent hot spots.²⁹ Evidence suggests that policing aimed at hot spots — particularly problem-oriented policing that focuses on specific problems such as gun seizures and engages the community as a partner — can be more effective and does not just displace crime.³⁰

Much violent crime may also occur within narrow social networks.³¹ In general, a disproportionate number of murder victims and offenders are young,³² and about four-fifths of victims³³ and three-fifths of offenders³⁴ are male. Also, many studies have observed "victim-offender overlap," meaning that the victims and offenders of violent crime are often members of the same social network, and neighborhood context such as street culture might influence this phenomenon.³⁵ One study found that in Boston, about 85 percent of gunshot injuries occur within a single network of people representing less than 6 percent of the city's total population.³⁶ Drawing on an array of research on networks, Papachristos argues that

"gun violence is transmitted through particular types of risky behaviors (such as engaging in criminal activities) and is related to the ways in which particularly pathogens (e.g. guns) move through networks."³⁷ As Sampson notes, networks can enable prosocial activities as well as gangs and crime.³⁸

Neighborhood Characteristics and Violent Crime

Neighborhoods' incidence of violent crime is related to an array of intertwined characteristics, including poverty, segregation, and inequality; collective efficacy, disorder, trust, and institutions; job access; immigration; residential instability, foreclosures, vacancy rates, and evictions; land use and the built environment; neighborhood change; and location of housing assistance. These characteristics can be both the cause and result of violent crime.³⁹ Neighborhoods change dynamically: violence can influence people to leave, which leads to an increase in segregation and violence.⁴⁰ Moreover, neighborhoods are affected not only by their own internal characteristics but also by those of nearby neighborhoods. After

controlling for neighborhoods' own internal characteristics, rates of violence in Chicago neighborhoods are significantly and positively linked to those of surrounding neighborhoods.⁴¹

Poverty, Segregation, and Inequality. Neighborhoods with more concentrated disadvantage tend to experience higher levels of violent crime. Numerous studies, for instance, show that neighborhoods with higher poverty rates tend to have higher rates of violent crime.⁴² Greater overall income inequality within a neighborhood is associated with higher rates of crime, especially violent crime.⁴³ Sampson notes that even though the city of Stockholm has far less violence, segregation, and inequality than the city of Chicago, in both cities a disproportionate number of homicides occur in a very small number of very disadvantaged neighborhoods.⁴⁴

Racially and ethnically segregated neighborhoods also tend to have higher rates of violent crime. Peterson and Krivo's analysis of nationwide neighborhood crime data for the year

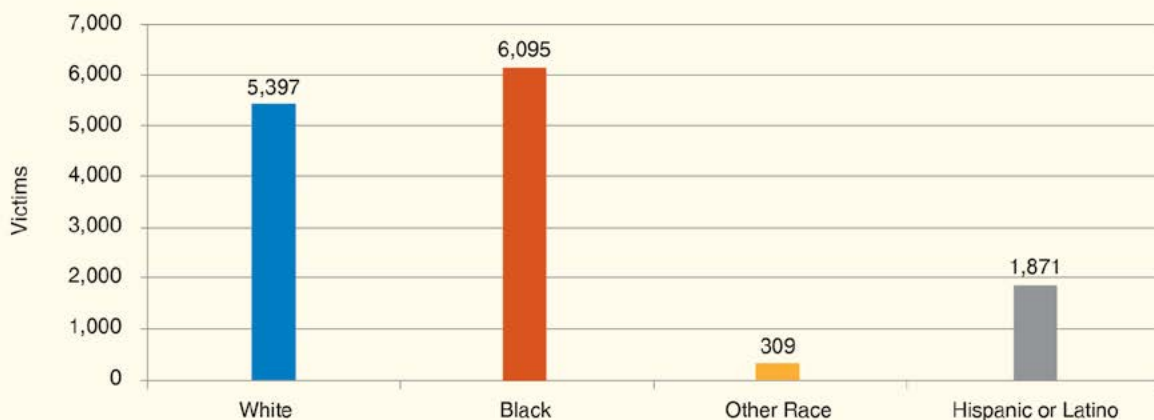
2000 demonstrates, however, that violent crime rates in predominantly African-American and Latino neighborhoods differ little from predominantly white neighborhoods after controlling for segregation and disadvantage. In particular, spatial disadvantage — that is, adverse characteristics such as poverty or crime among nearby neighborhoods — appears to drive disparities in local crime rates between these neighborhoods.⁴⁵ As Pattillo-McCoy writes, crime from disadvantaged areas in Chicago often spills over into middle-class, predominantly African-American neighborhoods.⁴⁶ Moreover, the effects of citywide segregation extend beyond majority-minority neighborhoods: neighborhoods nationwide, regardless of their racial composition, tend to experience higher rates of violent crime when they are located in cities with higher levels of segregation.⁴⁷

Poverty, segregation, and inequality are related to neighborhoods' access to resources and ability to solve problems, including problems that foster crime.⁴⁸ These resources include access to institutions, particularly effective community

policing and the swift prosecution of violent crime. In 2015's *Ghettoside*, Leovy explores how underpolicing of violent crime spurred high homicide rates in segregated South Central Los Angeles neighborhoods as an alternate “ghettoside” law emerged.⁴⁹ This alternate law involves witnesses scared to testify, the formation of gangs for protection, and cascades of disputes and violent crime among interwoven communities.⁵⁰ As Massey writes, “In a niche of violence, respect can only be built and maintained through the strategic use of force.”⁵¹ Evidence suggests that a greater propensity for arguments to escalate to lethal violence, combined with easier access to firearms, contributes to higher rates of homicide in the United States.⁵² As Leovy points out, the absence of law has fostered violent crime in communities throughout history.⁵³

In many communities of color, troubled relationships with law enforcement — linked to aggressive tactics and the disproportionate prosecution of drug crimes — hinder efforts to address violent crime.⁵⁴ Concentrated disadvantage, crime, and imprisonment appear to interact in a

Figure 3. Reported Murder Victims by Race in the United States, 2014



Source: Federal Bureau of Investigation. “Murder Victims by Race, Ethnicity, and Sex, 2014” (ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2014/crime-in-the-u.s.-2014/tables/expanded-homicide-data/expanded_homicide_data_table_1_murder_victims_by_race_ethnicity_and_sex_2014.xls). Accessed 7 August 2016.

continually destabilizing feedback loop.⁵⁵ In disadvantaged, segregated neighborhoods, residents may also be more likely to be detached from social institutions and disregard the law,⁵⁶ hampering crime enforcement and prevention.⁵⁷ Evidence suggests that community policing can improve communities' relationships with law enforcement and contribute to strategies such as hot-spot policing that seem to reduce violent crime.⁵⁸

Collective Efficacy, Disorder, Trust, and Institutions. Collective efficacy, defined as social cohesion among neighbors and their willingness to intervene on behalf of the common good, appears to be an important determinant of violent crime in neighborhoods.⁵⁹ Social cohesion measures ask, for instance, whether residents believe people in their neighborhood can be trusted.⁶⁰ Across neighborhoods in Chicago and cities worldwide, Sampson and others have found that collective efficacy and violent crime are interrelated: violence can reduce collective efficacy, and collective efficacy can prevent future violent crime.⁶¹

public life and treat the presence of violence with resignation, adolescents may feel that attempts to avoid violence are futile, and that they are on their own in their attempts to do so.”⁶²

Collective efficacy is linked to disorder, such as garbage in the streets or broken windows.⁶³ Sampson notes that people's perceptions of disorder in their neighborhood are likely related to collective senses of social meaning and inequality.⁶⁴ “Broken windows” policing, aimed at reducing perceived disorder to prevent crime, is one of the most influential philosophies in policing. Rigorous research suggests that disorder, however, might ultimately be a product of root causes such as the concentration of disadvantage and low collective efficacy, which also lead to crime.⁶⁵ Disorder can trigger reactions that further increase disadvantage and crime — for example, by encouraging people to move and stigmatizing a neighborhood.⁶⁶ In fact, strong evidence indicates that shared *perceptions* of past disorder (that is, what people thought about a neighborhood years ago) are a better predictor of

residents.⁶⁹ Strong social organization, however, can reduce violent crime. Sampson found that Chicago neighborhoods with more connected leadership, as demonstrated by social ties between leaders, tend to have much lower homicide rates even controlling for factors such as concentrated disadvantage.⁷⁰

Job Access. Job access can help explain variations in crime types across urban neighborhoods. One study of Atlanta in the early 1990s examined job opportunity for youth in neighborhoods, including whether jobs were geographically accessible, whether youth would be qualified to hold them, and the level of competition for those jobs. This study found that poor job opportunity was closely linked with neighborhood-level crime, although more closely to property crime than violent crime.⁷¹

Immigration. Numerous studies show that immigration is strongly associated with lower rates of violent crime.⁷² One rigorous study of neighborhoods in Los Angeles in the mid-2000s, for instance, found that greater concentrations of immigrants in a neighborhood are related to significant drops in crime.⁷³ Similarly, Sampson, in analyzing data on Chicago neighborhoods, found that, after controlling for other factors, concentrated immigration is directly associated with lower rates of violence.⁷⁴ One reason for this finding might be that people who immigrate have characteristics that make them less likely to commit crimes — for example, motivation to work and ambition.⁷⁵ Leovy, considering Los Angeles, notes, “Despite their relative poverty, recent immigrants tend to have lower homicide rates than resident Hispanics and their descendants born in the United States. This is because homicide flares among people who are trapped and economically interdependent, not among people who are highly mobile.”⁷⁶

Residential Instability, Foreclosures, Vacancy Rates, and Evictions. Residential instability — that is, more frequent moves among a neighborhood's residents —

Residential instability — that is, more frequent moves among a neighborhood's residents — appears in some circumstances to be related to increases in violent crime.

Collective efficacy can affect youths' “street efficacy,” their perceived ability to avoid violent confrontations and find ways to be safe in their own neighborhood, in turn influencing their likelihood to turn to violence. After controlling for individual and family factors, Sharkey found that Chicago youth who live in neighborhoods with concentrated disadvantage and low collective efficacy have lower street efficacy, and those with higher street efficacy are less likely to resort to violence or associate with delinquent peers. As Sharkey writes, in communities with lower collective efficacy where “residents retreat from

homicides in neighborhoods than are present levels of physical disorder.”⁶⁷

One study of violent crime in Chicago neighborhoods during the 1990s found that legal cynicism — when people view the law as “illegitimate, unresponsive, and ill equipped to ensure public safety” — explained why homicide persisted in some communities despite citywide declines in poverty and violence.⁶⁸ Kirk and Papachristos suggest that legal cynicism is linked to two related influences: neighborhood structural conditions and police practices and interaction with neighborhood



In some circumstances, vacant and foreclosed properties are associated with increased neighborhood crime rates.

appears in some circumstances to be related to increases in violent crime.⁷⁷ Research shows that residential instability might affect violence at least in part by, for instance, reducing community efficacy.⁷⁸ Violent crime and residential instability appear to be interrelated: one study considering Los Angeles neighborhoods in the mid-1990s estimated that the effect of violent crime on instability was twice as strong as that of instability on crime.⁷⁹

Multiple studies have found that foreclosures increase violent crime on nearby blocks.⁸⁰ One study notes that because foreclosures appear to pull crimes indoors, where offenders are less likely to be caught, crimes resulting from foreclosures and subsequent vacant units could be underreported.⁸¹ On the other hand, foreclosures might just reshuffle crime at the local level.⁸²

Vacancies and evictions can also lead to violent crime by destabilizing communities and creating venues for crime. A study of Pittsburgh found that violent crime increased by 19 percent within 250 feet of a newly vacant foreclosed home and that the crime rate increased the longer the

property remained vacant.⁸³ In 2016's *Evicted*, Desmond notes that Milwaukee neighborhoods in the mid-2000s with high eviction rates had higher violent crime rates the following year after controlling for factors including past crime rates.⁸⁴ Desmond suggests that eviction affects crime by frustrating the relationship among neighbors and preventing the development of community efficacy that could prevent violence.⁸⁵

Land Use and the Built Environment. In *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Jane Jacobs proposes several elements that could make neighborhoods safe, such as a clear demarcation between public and private space; “eyes on the street,” such as nearby shops; and fairly continuous use.⁸⁶ Some empirical research, however, suggests that mixed-use areas, which combine commercial and residential properties, have lower rates of crime than do commercial-only areas, perhaps by reducing crimes of opportunity.⁸⁷ Other land use strategies might also reduce violent crime. A study of a natural experiment in Youngstown, Ohio, which cleaned up vacant lots and funded efforts to improve them, found that community

improvement of lots reduced violent crime nearby (see “Housing, Inclusion, and Public Safety,” p. 1).⁸⁸

Neighborhood Change. Changes in neighborhood demographics, such as gentrification, can affect violent crime rates. Kirk and Laub suggest that gentrification can cause an initial increase in crime because neighborhood change causes destabilization, although in the long run gentrification leads to a decline in crime as neighborhood cohesion increases.⁸⁹ Neighborhoods’ spatial location can also affect crime rates. Boggess and Hipp found that in Los Angeles in the 1990s, neighborhoods at the “frontier” of gentrification had many more aggravated assaults than did those located near other neighborhoods also experiencing gentrification.⁹⁰ Evidence also indicates that the general decline in crime may have contributed to gentrification, as higher-income families feel more comfortable moving into the city.⁹¹

Location of Housing Assistance. Rigorous research to date demonstrates that violent crime generally does not increase in neighborhoods when households with housing vouchers move in. In 2008, an article in *The Atlantic* suggested that in Nashville, Tennessee, significant neighborhood-level increases in violent crime were linked to voucher holders’ moves.⁹² Ellen et al. analyzed neighborhood-level crime in 10 large American cities from 1995 to 2008, however, and found little evidence that households with housing choice vouchers caused crime to increase where they moved. Instead, they found strong evidence indicating that voucher holders tend to move into neighborhoods where crime is already increasing, perhaps seeking more affordable rents.⁹³ Some other studies suggest that associations between increases of voucher holders and increases in crime could be limited to disadvantaged neighborhoods or neighborhoods where households receiving housing assistance are concentrated.⁹⁴ Mast



Replacing distressed public housing with new mixed-income housing through the HOPE VI program decreased violent crime rates in certain neighborhoods.

and Wilson considered this question in Charlotte-Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, from 2000 to 2009, finding that increases in voucher holders were associated with crime increases only in neighborhoods that exceed relatively high thresholds for poverty or concentration of voucher holders.⁹⁵

Public housing demolition also appears to have affected neighborhood violent crime rates. From the end of the 1990s through the mid-2000s, public housing developments across the nation were demolished through the HOPE VI program, forcing thousands of families to relocate with housing vouchers.⁹⁶ Looking at crime rates in Atlanta and Chicago, Popkin et al. found that in Atlanta and Chicago, crime rates plummeted in the neighborhoods where public housing had been demolished alongside net decreases citywide; in Chicago, they estimated that the decrease in violent crime in those areas was more

than 60 percent greater than it would have been without HOPE VI. Many of these public housing developments were severely distressed with high rates of violent crime, and HOPE VI's combination of demolition and new mixed-income housing appears to have reduced crime in these neighborhoods.⁹⁷ Moreover, most neighborhoods also absorbed households with relocation vouchers without any effect on crime rates. The neighborhoods that saw significant increases in crime with the addition of voucher holders were those that already had high rates of poverty and crime.⁹⁸

The Costs of Violent Crime in Neighborhoods

Violent crime has numerous, lasting effects on neighborhood residents that extend beyond its direct impact on victims and their families and friends. One of the most significant findings from the Moving to Opportunity experiment, which enabled low-income families to move to low-poverty neighborhoods,

was the effect on movers' health. Movers ended up in much safer neighborhoods, and parents and adolescent girls experienced significant improvements in health, including lower rates of obesity, linked to reductions in stress.⁹⁹ In dangerous areas, people may avoid going outside, and a strong relationship exists between perceived neighborhood safety and obesity rates.¹⁰⁰

In general, exposure to violence puts youth at significant risk for psychological, social, academic, and physical challenges and also makes them more likely to commit violence themselves.¹⁰¹ Exposure to gun violence can desensitize children, increasing the likelihood that they act violently in the future.¹⁰² One study found that children exposed to an incident of violent crime scored much lower on exams a week later.¹⁰³ Another study focusing on Chicago in the 2000s considered children's exposure to neighborhood violence over time, finding that, after controlling for differences between students, children

living in more violent neighborhoods fall farther behind their peers in school as they grow older and that this effect is similar in size to that of socioeconomic disadvantage.¹⁰⁴ At a larger level, Chetty and Hendren find that children who live in neighborhoods with higher crime rates for 20 years experience significant reductions in income as adults.¹⁰⁵

Neighborhoods of concentrated poverty and disadvantage can also create coercive sexual environments in which sexual harassment, molestation, exploitation, and violence against women and girls become accepted. These environments, which disproportionately affect adolescents of color, negatively affect children's sexual development and can lead to long-term psychological stress and substance abuse.¹⁰⁶

Strategies From the Evidence

The evidence on neighborhoods and violent crime suggests several strategies for improving safety and neighborhood health. Investing in communities caught in cycles of crime, decay, and disinvestment can help reduce crime rates.¹⁰⁷ Research on social ties and institutions suggests that strong community organizations and leadership can make a difference. Investments that increase inclusion and support education, skills, and access to jobs may be necessary to address the concentrated disadvantage at the root of violent crime in neighborhoods. Housing programs may avoid reconcentrating poverty in disadvantaged areas and crossing thresholds linked to increases in violent crime. In general, policies that reduce economic, racial, and ethnic segregation can increase communities' access to key resources to prevent violent crime and promote healthy development. In addition, more comprehensive national data on crime at the neighborhood level can help us better understand trends.

Promising programs could also prevent violent crime by helping youth and others avoid violence. The Becoming a Man program in Chicago, for example,

adopts cognitive behavioral therapy to help young men slow down their thinking and consider whether their automatic thoughts fit the situation. New rigorous experimental evidence suggests that the program can reduce violent crime arrests by 45 to 50 percent and improve graduation rates by 12 to 19 percent.¹⁰⁸

To a large extent, changes in violent crime are linked to broader social progress and economic gains. Today, as Friedson and Sharkey point out, the recent decline of violent crime offers opportunities for "a virtuous cycle of declining crime and disorder, reinvestment, and greater integration of disadvantaged neighborhoods into the urban social fabric."¹⁰⁹ Taking advantage of these possibilities could reduce disparities and save more people, families, and neighborhoods from the impact of violent crime. **EM**

— Chase Sackett, *Former HUD Staff*

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Reducing Offender Recidivism and Reconnecting Opportunity Youth

Access to stable housing, supportive services, and opportunities for education and employment can help promote social inclusion for people who have committed crimes or are at risk of engaging in criminal behavior. Programs that connect former offenders with housing and supportive services to facilitate their successful reentry into society have been shown to reduce recidivism among target populations.¹ These programs can reduce the high rates of homelessness among former inmates and provide the stability that they need to gain employment and avoid returning to prison (see “Housing, Inclusion, and Public Safety,” p. 1). For the nation’s “opportunity youth” — the estimated 5.5 million 16- to 24-year-olds who are neither employed nor in school and are thus more susceptible to criminal behavior — access to housing, education, and employment offers the possibility to reconnect to their communities’ social and economic fabrics.² In recent years, a number of programs have emerged that unite multiple sectors for collective impact, including departments of corrections, public housing agencies, philanthropies, nonprofits, social service providers, and workforce programs. The most effective of these initiatives not only reintegrate these groups into society but also save money that would otherwise be spent on incarceration, homeless shelters, emergency services, and other social supports.

Returning Home–Ohio (RHO), administered by the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (ODRC) and the Corporation for Supportive Housing, and the Burlington Housing Authority’s Offender Re-Entry Housing Program are two such programs working

Highlights

- Returning Home–Ohio — a program offering permanent housing with supportive services to returning prisoners with certain medical needs and who are at risk of homelessness — has shown success in reducing rearrests and returns to prison.
- In Vermont, the Burlington Housing Authority partners with the state’s Department of Corrections to help former prisoners find housing through the Offender Re-Entry Housing Program. More than 600 former prisoners have participated in the program.
- The Aspen Forum for Community Solutions’ Opportunity Youth Incentive Fund supports initiatives throughout the country aimed at improving outcomes for opportunity youth. In Denver, the fund has provided resources for collaborative efforts to house former foster youth.

to find stable housing for former offenders. A third program, the Aspen Forum for Community Solutions’ Opportunity Youth Incentive Fund, is a nationwide initiative that supports and invests in organizations to create educational and employment pathways for opportunity youth, such as efforts in Denver, Colorado, to provide housing and wraparound services for former foster youth.

Returning Home–Ohio: Permanent Housing With Supportive Services

Ohio’s prison population currently stands at nearly 51,000 and is expected to rise through 2023, in part because of

the number of years prisoners remain incarcerated.³ This population rise is straining the state’s budget: in 2014, Ohio taxpayers spent \$1.7 billion to run the state’s prison system. The prison system, which has a maximum capacity of 38,600 inmates, is also burdened by the rising population.⁴ To combat recidivism and homelessness among the recently incarcerated, ODRC and the Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH) launched RHO in 2007 as a pilot program in 13 prisons across the state. The program targets prisoners slated to be released (or who have been out of a facility for fewer than 120 days) who were



Denver’s Chamber of Commerce, the backbone organization leading efforts to reconnect opportunity youth in Denver, helps prepare young people for employment and educational attainment.

homeless before incarceration or are at risk of homelessness after their release. To be eligible for RHO, offenders must also be HIV positive or have a severe and permanent mental illness. Participants receive permanent housing as well as supportive services such as mental health treatment, medication, and substance abuse counseling. Nine providers in five cities participated in the pilot, which cost about \$5 million in rental subsidies, program evaluation, and administration.

A 2012 evaluation by the Urban Institute compared the RHO participants with a comparison group of individuals exiting prison at the same time and who were eligible for RHO services but did not receive them. The evaluation showed that RHO participants were 40 percent less likely to be rearrested and 61 percent less likely to return to prison within a year of release than were members of the comparison group. This result is especially notable considering that RHO participants were more likely than those in the comparison group to reoffend — they were more likely to have an alcohol or drug abuse disability, and their security level in prison was higher.⁵

Current Program

In 2013, the state of Ohio expanded RHO by 40 percent, and today the program serves 206 people in 8 counties; it has served 520 people since 2007.⁶ CSH contracts with nonprofit agencies that provide housing as well as supportive services. Although most of these organizations provide both housing (through private landlords) and services, two providers partner with organizations that deliver supportive services and case management. Each organization decides whom to accept within RHO's general eligibility criteria, with some open to accepting people convicted of a sex offense and those convicted of arson.⁷ Katie Kitchin, director of CSH in Ohio, explains that the organizations, selected through a competitive request for proposals, are chosen in part based on the additional resources



Corporation for Supportive Housing

An evaluation by the Urban Institute showed that Returning Home—Ohio, which has served more than 500 people since its inception in 2007, reduced recidivism by 40 percent.

that they can bring to RHO. “Reentry, just like homelessness, is a multifactor challenge,” she says. “Helping returning citizens think about their place in the community is more than providing a place to live. It’s making sure [that] there’s community integration, employment, substance abuse services,” and support for former inmates’ mental health needs.⁸

Most referrals to RHO come from prison staff, who identify offenders who both lack housing following their release and fit RHO’s mental health and disability criteria. Not all prisoners referred to RHO decide to accept; about 15 percent are not admitted because they do not complete the application process or do not want to join the program after learning about it. Some offenders who need higher levels of medical services than RHO can provide go to other facilities, such as nursing homes. About 15 percent of applicants are rejected because they are ineligible — for example, they do not have a severe and persistent mental illness. Providers also can reject referrals if, after interviewing them and reviewing their scores on

the Ohio Risk Assessment System (a statewide tool that assesses a former offender’s risk to others), they believe that person is not a good fit for their program.⁹

Once accepted, participants are set up in an apartment with their own lease, and assisted with furniture and household items. An individualized service plan, completed with the participants, outlines their goals, objectives, and the supportive services that they can receive, such as mental health counseling, addiction treatment, and basic life-skills training. Although participants are not required to use these services, RHO staff strongly encourage them to do so. Providers also coordinate with community-based treatment centers and other community resources to wrap services around the individual. The housing and services providers conduct assessments 9 to 12 months after participants have joined the program to see whether participants are ready to move to more independent housing or need to stay in RHO. The assessments take place every three months thereafter. These assessments are meant to open the door to talking about a life beyond

Returning Home, for the case manager and the tenant, to say “this isn’t the end, maybe there’s more I can do,” says Terri Power, CSH senior program manager.

Some people depart because they wish to live independently, and move in with family or a significant other or because they have secured employment that makes it possible to afford their own apartment. Those who have an extensive criminal history and will not be able to get on any other subsidy or who need long-term supportive services are encouraged to apply for the Home for Good rental subsidy, earmarked for people at risk of homelessness because of prior convictions. The program, administered by the Ohio Housing Finance Agency, provides a subsidy to ensure that recipients pay no more than 30 percent of their income toward housing. Others leave RHO because their outcomes have been less successful; they may need a greater level of medical care in a nursing facility, have reoffended, or have violated the terms of their lease.¹⁰

CSH, which manages the program, works consistently to improve it, collecting data to determine how people are referred to the program and the reason why they leave. According to Kitchin, the organization trains RHO’s housing and service providers in harm reduction; Housing First practices; and Critical Time Intervention, an evidence-based model that aims to prevent homelessness among the severely mentally ill who exit institutions, including prisons. CSH has also contracted with the University of Cincinnati to train housing and service providers in criminogenic qualities and how best to use case management and cognitive behavioral interventions to reduce recidivism.¹¹

Housing Provider Challenges

In addition to the challenges that participants face, housing providers have had to overcome their own

challenges to implement the program. Case managers for New Housing Ohio, a housing and services provider that serves RHO participants in Ohio’s mostly rural Butler County, must drive long distances to reach clients, which consumes considerable time and resources. The rural environment also presents transportation challenges for participants seeking employment and access to social services. Tosha Crone, a supportive services manager at New Housing Ohio, says that the area’s lack of recreation centers or other meeting points to provide programming makes offering alternatives to engaging in criminal behavior difficult. As a result, says Crone, it is important for providers to introduce readily accessible and

cost-effective activities, such as playing basketball and walking to get an ice cream cone.¹²

Other housing providers point to the best practices that they have identified that resulted from early mistakes in rolling out the program. Lavada Smith, tenant services specialist at Miami Valley Housing Opportunities (MVHO), a nonprofit housing organization in Dayton, highlights the importance of employing a scattered-site approach for housing RHO participants. Smith says that when MVHO began providing beds for RHO in 2011, the organization thought that housing participants in a single building would make it easier to conduct check-ins and assess their



The Northern Lights program, a collaboration among the Burlington Housing Authority, the Howard Center, and other local agencies, provides transitional housing and supportive services to women who were recently incarcerated.

progress. However, MVHO learned that doing so essentially kept them “institutionalized,” replicating the same community as they had in prison. Housing the 25 RHO participants that MVHO supports today in different buildings and neighborhoods across Dayton gives participants a better chance to “start fresh and start anew,” says Smith.¹³

The scattered-site approach is one reason Kitchin cites for community support for the RHO reentry model — single buildings filled with ex-offenders, she says, might be perceived as a greater risk to a community. Moreover, because RHO’s supportive reentry model provides mentally ill participants at risk of homelessness with housing and mental health services, they are not living on the streets, which makes communities healthier and safer. In fact, thanks in part to the program’s success, Kitchin says, the state’s Department of Youth Services is considering a similar project targeted to offenders exiting

juvenile facilities, which in Ohio includes anyone under age 21.¹⁴

The housing providers echo Kitchin’s observation that, overall, communities do not object to former offenders being housed among them, although Smith recalls a handful of cases in which people complained about MVHO settling sex offenders in their midst. In those instances, she said, she reminds people that being released from prison means that these former offenders have been given a second chance, and it is the community’s responsibility to give them a second chance, too. MVHO’s strong reputation in the community — the organization has a 25-year history of providing housing for people who are disabled, mentally ill, or HIV positive and who would otherwise be homeless — helps to further allay neighbors’ concerns.¹⁵

The housing and services providers also emphasize the importance of the supportive services built into the RHO model. Crone points out that because

many participants have been without the services they need for a long time, they may not realize how badly they need medication until they are provided access to it. In addition, the fact that RHO provides supportive services can help landlords feel more confident in leasing apartments to the former offenders, says Crone.

Public Impacts and Economic Costs

As the Urban Institute’s evaluation demonstrated, the pilot program realized its goal by effectively reducing recidivism rates for participants. Although the program has not been formally evaluated since the pilot ended, from July 1, 2012, through March 31, 2016, recidivism to state prison among RHO participants was just 8 percent. During the same period, approximately 79 percent of participants maintained their housing.

However, the Urban Institute’s evaluation of the pilot shows that RHO has not saved the state money. RHO



Oxford House is a transitional housing facility for women in Burlington, Vermont.

Burlington Housing Authority

participants, no matter what services they received, cost more than people who were not part of the program. This evaluation, however, only examined participants who had been out of the program for a year, which means that it did not capture the long-term costs incurred by people who may have returned to prison for longer sentences later on. As the Urban Institute observed, “program investments are by definition more costly than business as usual, particularly in the short term.” Moreover, the evaluation did not include the social costs of recidivism: the pain inflicted on crime victims and the overall burden such events place on public safety.¹⁶

Kitchin says that a financial incentive is not the only reason a state might be motivated to run such a program. As the pilot demonstrated, RHO allows people leaving prison to reintegrate into the community with the support that they need to avoid reoffending, successfully reach their goals, and rejoin society.¹⁷

The Burlington Housing Authority Houses Former Offenders

In 2007, Vermont was running out of space to house prisoners and had a choice: the state could either spend \$82 million to lease space in out-of-state prisons or spend an estimated \$200 million to build a new state prison. Instead, state lawmakers, guided by research from the Council of State Governments Justice Center on how to reduce recidivism, adopted a different strategy, allocating \$6.3 million to reduce the number of inmates through prison-based treatment for substance abuse, transitional housing, and electronic monitoring.¹⁸ The strategy was successful: Vermont’s prison population has fallen by 7 percent to 2,050, saving the state a projected \$54 million that it otherwise would have spent on incarcerating these offenders from 2009 to 2019.¹⁹

In 2004, the Burlington Housing Authority (BHA) began working with the state’s Department of Corrections to

RHO allows people leaving prison to reintegrate into the community with the support that they need to avoid reoffending, successfully reach their goals, and rejoin society.

develop reentry programs for former prisoners. Federal law prohibits two groups from living in public housing: those on the lifetime sex offender list, and those convicted of making methamphetamines on public housing property. Other than these restrictions, each housing agency is permitted to make its own decisions about whom to permit in public housing, and BHA is one of a number of public housing agencies that allow former felons to receive housing choice vouchers. During its first year, the program placed 49 formerly incarcerated people in housing, more than half of whom received a housing subsidy.²⁰

The Offender Re-Entry Housing Program is run by BHA, which coordinates with the state’s Department of Corrections, social services organizations, and private landlords. Most referrals come from the Department of Corrections and from probation and parole officers, but some come from service providers in the prison, service providers in the community, or even from the applicants themselves.²¹ The program currently employs two reentry specialists who work separately with men and women.²²

Those referred to the program meet with the reentry specialists before their release to share their long-term goals; their needs, such as counseling for substance abuse; and any barriers to housing such as evictions or debts owed to previous landlords.²³ The program accepts between 60 to 80 percent of referrals.²⁴ Those who are rejected are frequently told “no for now” and given instructions on what to do to apply successfully in the future, such as clearing previous debts to landlords or cleaning up a messy credit history, says Rachel Schneider, the reentry specialist

who works with female prisoners. Once they have completed these tasks, most of these would-be applicants do reapply. She says that the program “flat-out rejects” applicants who have too many barriers to housing or whose needs are too great for the program to serve, such as those with severe mental health difficulties; these individuals are referred to a more appropriate agency.

Finding Housing for Former Offenders

Securing housing often begins while the participant is still incarcerated, up to a year before release. While in prison, participants may take a “ready to rent” course run by BHA, although it is not required. Schneider and Mike Cartier, the other reentry specialist, also work with participants to clear up former debts or evictions, secure recommendation letters from the supervisors of their jobs in prison, and work on repairing their credit. These steps can ultimately “open up more housing options” when the person is released, says Schneider.

The housing specialists then work to find a suitable apartment. Some participants are eligible to live in one of the more than 600 rental apartment properties BHA manages or receive a rent subsidy. Others, however, particularly men who are on the lifetime sex offender registry, must rent a privately owned, market-rate apartment.²⁵ Finding housing for sex offenders can be especially challenging because of the restrictions on where they can live as well as community concerns. Research suggests, however, that such restrictions can be counterproductive. Studies show that housing restrictions are unlikely to prevent recidivism and can isolate sex offenders, making it more difficult to

New York City Housing Authority's Family Reentry Pilot Program

The New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA)'s "lookback period," which requires former offenders to wait a number of years before they can live in public housing, makes it difficult for formerly incarcerated individuals to live in public housing or rejoin their families on NYCHA leases. A new pilot program, however, is testing a change to that policy.

NYCHA's Family Reentry Pilot Program, launched in 2014, serves former offenders aged 16 and older who have been out of jail for less than 3 years and who wish to join their families in public housing. Participants receive case management tailored to their needs for a minimum of six months and up to two years, which can include substance abuse treatment, mental health support, provisions to clean up a credit history, and support for navigating the court system. At the end of two years, if the participants have successfully reentered and if their families agree, they are added to the family's public housing lease.

The program was developed by the nonprofits Vera Institute of Justice and the Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH), the Department of Corrections for New York City and New York State, the New York City Department of Probation, and a number of reentry service providers. The city's Department of Homeless Services is funding the case management component, and NYCHA has devoted staff to the program. To decide whether to admit an applicant, NYCHA examines a person's track record during incarceration and release and the person's motivations for returning home, such as wanting to be a good parent.

The pilot has an acceptance rate of about 53 percent, says Margaret diZerega, the project director of sentencing and corrections at the Vera Institute. Twenty-two percent of applications were closed or withdrawn before they were accepted because applicants changed their mind or were ineligible. Some 14 percent of applicants have been denied because the victim of the crime may live in the housing development where they wish to reside, because the family's tenancy is problematic (that is, the household is arrears in rent or engaged with legal proceedings, although these conditions do not automatically disqualify an applicant), or because there is no clear indication that the applicant is headed on a different trajectory, diZerega says. In other instances, NYCHA has deferred applicants for six months, asking that they spend a bit more time out in the community before reapplying.¹

Of the 73 people who have enrolled in the program so far, there have been no new convictions. Because the program is still new, only five people have "graduated" since its inception. Three joined their families' NYCHA lease, and two decided that they no longer wanted to live in NYCHA housing. diZerega considers the latter outcome a success as well, explaining that the participants "were able to get reestablished and are doing well in the community."²

Because the formerly incarcerated are at an elevated risk of homelessness —19 percent of people who left prisons in New York State during 2015 lived in a homeless shelter — the program stands to decrease homelessness among

access treatment services or even meet the conditions of their parole, which in turn reduces their chances of successful reentry and rehabilitation.²⁶

Because the program is more than a decade old, say Cartier and Schneider, it has a stable of landlords familiar with the program and its clients, which makes placing the former offenders easier. Moreover, the former offenders sign releases that allow the reentry specialists to discuss their convictions with potential landlords, which can ultimately put the landlords at ease. Schneider adds that landlords' concerns are also allayed by transitional housing money

supplied by the Department of Corrections and managed by BHA that can be used by the tenants as a deposit and as the first month's rent. The program also offers a landlord guarantee that acts as a second security deposit. At the lease's end, a landlord can claim up to \$2,000 from this fund for repairs or other tenant-generated costs.²⁷

The program provides retention services for up to a year, although Schneider often works for longer periods with the women on her caseload. Overall, more than 600 former offenders have participated in the Offender Re-Entry Housing Program. Of the 40 people

housed during 2014 and 2015, 8 lost their housing and returned to jail — a recidivism rate of 20 percent — and a number of participants have maintained their housing for more than 3 years. But providing participants with a home does more than reduce recidivism. Having a home allows participants to secure employment and often helps them cope with sobriety and mental health issues, says Schneider. In fact, many of the participants have never before had a lease in their own name. "Having a place that they can call their own ... really helps them in following through on everything else," says Cartier.

participants and save public money otherwise spent on incarceration and homeless shelters.³ It has other benefits, however, thanks to the reciprocity of relationships among family members. For example, says diZerega, in many cases, the person moving home is joining an elderly parent with health needs; living together allows the formerly incarcerated person to help the parent with medication compliance, grocery shopping, and other wellness needs.

The Vera Institute is conducting an evaluation of the pilot, which it expects to release during fall 2016. Among its goals is to determine how many people might benefit from this program and assess its benefits to participants, such as how living in a safe, stable environment enables participants to work on employment and educational goals.⁴

Because NYCHA is the nation's largest housing agency, the pilot has the potential to benefit many thousands of people within NYCHA, should the agency decide to expand the program.⁵ To bring the program to scale, the housing agency would need to build capacity to administer the program. Moreover, the pilot stands to function as a successful model of how to lift local bans for other public housing agencies around the country. The program has already begun to change other aspects of NYCHA policy. Formerly, if a person living in NYCHA housing were arrested on agency property, and the arresting officer gave testimony about the arrest to NYCHA, that person could be permanently excluded from NYCHA, meaning that they could never return to public housing. The policy was meant to preserve a family's tenancy — to ensure that the entire family would not be evicted. The permanent exclusion policy is one reason why so many people had initially been rejected from the pilot; CSH found, on examination, that about half of applicants were permanently excluded. Now, participants can take part in the pilot even if they have been permanently excluded; if the participant successfully completes the two-year program, they can permanently join the family lease and their exclusion disappears. Presently, NYCHA is examining the number of people the permanent exclusion affects with the possibility of revisiting the way that this policy is written. CSH's Erin Burns-Maine says that this "is an unanticipated outcome of the pilot that has the potential to benefit many."⁶

Earning applicants' trust has been another challenge. "It took a significant public education effort by NYCHA and partners to increase our application numbers, as people with justice histories initially feared coming out of the shadows," says Burns-Maine. NYCHA, CSH, and others have conducted considerable outreach to persuade potential participants that they will not be penalized even if they are presently living off-lease (which violates NYCHA rules) and that the pilot is a safe way to return to their families' leases.

¹ Interview with Margaret diZerega, 25 April 2016.

² Ibid.

³ Corporation for Supportive Housing. 2015. "Promoting Access to Safe, Stable Housing for All New Yorkers."

⁴ Interview with Margaret diZerega.

⁵ Interview with Erin Burns-Maine, 26 April 2016.

⁶ Ibid.

The Need for Supportive Services

Unlike *Returning Home—Ohio*, BHA's program does not include supportive services. Cartier points to the "gray area" that many of the men he works with fall into. Although many have problems with alcohol or need mental health services, he says, they fail to qualify for additional supportive services. Yet, these problems are large enough to interfere with participants' capacity to sustain their housing. With additional services, Cartier explains, program participants would be better positioned to do so.²⁸

Schneider and Cartier both note that transitional housing programs may yield better long-term results for some participants than setting up a former offender with independent housing directly from prison.²⁹ "It's a lot to go from prison to the community, to doing everyday life on your own, when you've been around a lot of people telling you what you need to do every single hour of the day," says Schneider. This is particularly true, she says, of women with children exiting residential programs, who have benefited from extra parenting support and guidance. Among the successful transitional housing programs in the state, they point to facilities run by nonprofits and ones

owned and managed by BHA, such as the Northern Lights program, which collaborates with service providers to offer up to a year of housing and wraparound services to women leaving jail who are eligible for housing choice vouchers.

Reconnecting Opportunity Youth: The Aspen Forum for Community Solutions

The Aspen Institute, an educational and policy studies organization based in Washington, DC, created the Aspen Forum for Community Solutions and Opportunity Youth Incentive Fund in 2012 to support collaborative efforts and collective impact strategies that

address community challenges and improve outcomes for opportunity youth.³⁰ Monique Miles, director of the Opportunity Youth Incentive Fund and deputy director of the Aspen Forum for Community Solutions at the Aspen Institute, says that this work has been ongoing for decades at the grassroots level. In recent years, however, the Obama administration's focus on this population, along with new research that quantifies opportunity youth's cost burden and their potential contribution to society, has provided the "wind in the sails" needed to create the cross-sector, evidence-based strategies that reconnect opportunity youth with employment and educational opportunities, says Miles.³¹ Among the initiatives that the fund supports are workforce programs that provide training for local jobs in growing industries and General Educational Development programs designed to assist youth who have dropped out of school.

To support this work with opportunity youth, the fund provided \$13 million in 21 grants to collaborative groups nationwide, including K–12 educators, community colleges, and nonprofits.³² Miles says that the ways they go about setting priorities, identifying problems, and designing solutions differ from community to community based on available resources, existing infrastructure, and local needs. Despite these differences, all of the collaboratives focus on opportunity youth and emphasize collective impact approaches.³³

Housing Former Foster Youth in Denver

In 2012, Rose Community Foundation, a philanthropy based in Denver, received planning funding from the Aspen Institute's Opportunity Youth Incentive Fund to launch a collaborative, collective-impact approach to improve outcomes for opportunity youth in the city. According to Rose Community

Foundation, Denver's population of opportunity youth is approximately 9,850, or 13.4 percent of the city's 16 to 24-year-olds. Demographically, they resemble opportunity youth across the country: they are disproportionately black and Latino, nearly half (45.5%) have been homeless at some point, nearly a third (31.8%) have a criminal record, and almost a quarter (22.7%) are presently in foster care.³⁴ Together, Denver's opportunity youth cost taxpayers approximately \$500 million each year in social services, welfare, spending on health care and crime, and lost wages and diminished taxes.³⁵ Being disconnected from employment and education makes it difficult for these youth to sustain themselves and engage in meaningful careers.

The Denver collaborative is in its third year of receiving funds from the Aspen Institute, and the Denver Metro Chamber of Commerce has taken over from



Mile High United Way

Bridging the Gap participants tour the Auraria Campus, which is home to the Community College of Denver, Metropolitan State University of Denver, and University of Colorado Denver, to gain an understanding of what college life would be like and learn how to navigate the campus.

the Rose Community Foundation as the backbone organization for the city's efforts.³⁶ Although this collaborative focuses specifically on workforce preparation and educational attainment, housing instability can affect these efforts as well. Lorena Zimmer, who works with opportunity youth as the talent pipeline director at the Denver Metro Chamber of Commerce, recalls a young woman who did not show up to an interview because her housing had changed abruptly, and she did not have access to the professional clothes she needed. Few of us are equipped to handle such stresses, says Zimmer, who notes that such instability can make simply reporting to work difficult.³⁷

Among the collaborative's housing-specific efforts is the Mile High United Way's Bridging the Gap program, which serves people older than 18 and under 22 who were in the child welfare system after their 16th birthday and who are either homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness.³⁸ Bridging the Gap provides these young people a Family Unification Program voucher that funds 18 months of housing assistance (see "Housing, Inclusion, and Public Safety," p. 1).

Minna Castillo Cohen, senior director of community impact and investments for Mile High United Way, explains that the organization began administering the vouchers in 2005 but soon realized that participants needed more than financial support to maintain their housing. Bridging the Gap responded by implementing mentorship as a cornerstone of its program. Today, independent living coaches work with participants — the program administers some 142 vouchers — to create individual plans for wellness, social connections, educational and employment goals, and crisis management and help them develop their own goals. For these youth in particular, who have been part of systems and institutions that have dictated their actions for most of their lives, Castillo Cohen says that "[i]t's really important [that they] take the



Mile High United Way

A participant in the Bridging the Gap program makes a deposit into her Individual Development Account, a matched savings account that participants can draw on to pay for housing or educational costs.

wheel" to independently identify the goals that they wish to pursue.³⁹ Among the most effective services that the program partners with is the Nurse-Family Partnership, an evidence-based model in which nurses make home visits to women pregnant with their first child to improve wellness of the mother and her baby. According to Castillo Cohen, the Nurse-Family Partnership has been so successful that the program is considering developing a mental health services program following a similar model, in which therapists visit young people at home, at the program office, or in the community.⁴⁰

Participants come to Bridging the Gap through referrals from parole officers,

caseworkers, homeless shelters, and self-referrals. They are assessed by staff and matched with a coach who works with them to develop a plan and design a "stepping-up tool" that outlines a path toward self-sufficiency. This matrix guides both participants and their coaches through the program. Bridging the Gap staffers check in with participants monthly and conduct surveys at 6, 12, and 18 months to assess how prepared they are to leave the program and whether they perceive themselves as being ready to leave. Such formal data collection complements anecdotal feedback that the staff gather from events such as holiday parties and other community get-togethers.⁴¹

Castillo Cohen stresses the importance of allowing young people to assume responsibility for some of the work involved in applying to Bridging the Gap and finding an apartment. When a parole officer or caseworker handles all of the research, applications, and paperwork, participants are sometimes less successful “because they haven’t had an opportunity to make decisions about where they would like to live or understand how to apply for an apartment — decisions that require practice and assist them in the skills they need to be independent,” she says. And the program demands independence: the vouchers do not permit recipients to live with roommates, although significant others are allowed. This requirement can be problematic because these young people often are not used to living by themselves, and they sometimes feel scared or lonely on their own, she says. This natural desire for connection sometimes leads to trouble with landlords when young people invite friends to stay over in ways that violate their lease agreement. Castillo Cohen also points to the value of social connections — whether through a program, a service, or some other kind of civic engagement — and the role that they play in achieving successful outcomes for participants. She notes that those with the “highest levels of engagement with their independent living coach do better.”

Conclusion

Returning Home—Ohio, Burlington’s Offender Re-Entry Housing Program, and Denver’s Bridging the Gap program all follow Housing First principles. The programs provide stable housing as a foundation for promoting social inclusion and improving economic outcomes for former offenders and opportunity youth. “We see a dramatic change to young people once they’re housed,” says Denver’s Castillo Cohen. In addition, those who work with former offenders and opportunity youth consistently point out the importance of combining housing with supportive services, which often empower participants to maintain their housing,

As studies such as the Urban Institute’s evaluation of RHO demonstrate, these programs model the utility and effectiveness of collective impact. However, additional longitudinal research is needed to further assess the programs’ efficacy and cost effectiveness over the long term — for example the degree to which RHO mitigates long prison sentences, which are very costly. Moreover, current research has not captured the intangible benefits these programs offer, such as enhanced quality of life for participants and their communities.

What is clear, however, is that providing housing along with supportive services and case management allows organizations from different sectors and with complementary expertise to focus their efforts and resources on improving outcomes for a single group. However, that does not make such work easy, says Miles. Programs that cross multiple sectors and that (by necessity) involve many people require extensive training and education. The New York City Housing Authority’s new family reunification program, for example, entails training many hundreds of property managers. (See “New York City Housing Authority’s Family Reentry Pilot Program,” p. 30.) Yet this type of collective work is vital, Miles says, particularly for communities that have experienced the most success in “moving the needle” toward better outcomes for opportunity youth. [EM](#)

by HUD”; Interview with Katie Kitchin, 29 April 2016.

- ⁷ Interview with Tasha Crone, 10 May 2016.
- ⁸ Interview with Katie Kitchin.
- ⁹ Interview with Lavada Smith, 10 May 2016.
- ¹⁰ Ibid.
- ¹¹ Interview with Katie Kitchin.
- ¹² Email correspondence with Tasha Crone, 29 June 2016.
- ¹³ Interview with Lavada Smith.
- ¹⁴ Interview with Katie Kitchin.
- ¹⁵ Interview with Lavada Smith.
- ¹⁶ Fontaine et al., 34–6.
- ¹⁷ Interview with Katie Kitchin.
- ¹⁸ Council of State Governments Justice Center. “Vermont” (csgjusticecenter.org/jr/vt/). Accessed 3 August 2016.
- ¹⁹ Council of State Governments Justice Center. “Justice Reinvestment State Brief: Vermont”; Council of State Governments Justice Center. “Vermont.”
- ²⁰ Burlington Housing Authority. 2014. “Burlington Housing Authority Offender Re-entry Housing Program Policy and Procedure Manual”; Interview with Rachel Schneider, 26 April 2016.
- ²¹ Ibid.
- ²² Interview with Rachel Schneider; Interview with Mike Cartier, 28 April 2016.
- ²³ Interview with Rachel Schneider.
- ²⁴ Interview with Rachel Schneider; Interview with Mike Cartier.
- ²⁵ Interview with Mike Cartier.
- ²⁶ Center for Sex Offender Management. 2007. “Managing the Challenges of Sex Offender Reentry,” 10; Council of State Governments Justice Center. 2016. “Reentry Housing Options for Sex Offenders;” Kelly M. Socia. 2011. “The policy implications of residence restrictions on sex offender housing in Upstate NY,” *Criminology & Public Policy* 10:2, 351–89; J.C. Barnes. 2011. “Place a moratorium on the passage of sex-offender residence restriction laws,” *Criminology & Public Policy* 10:2, 401–9.
- ²⁷ Interview with Rachel Schneider; Interview with Mike Cartier.
- ²⁸ Interview with Mike Cartier.
- ²⁹ Interview with Rachel Schneider; Interview with Mike Cartier.
- ³⁰ Denver Opportunity Youth Investment DOYII. 2015. “Year 1 Evaluation Report,” 3.
- ³¹ Interview with Monique Miles, 3 May 2016.
- ³² Melody Barnes. 2014. “Blog: Pathways to Aspen — Melody Barnes and the AFCS Perspective,” October 22 Blog, Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions; Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions. “Partners” (www.aspencommunitysolutions.org/the-fund/partners/). Accessed 3 August 2016.
- ³³ Interview with Monique Miles.
- ³⁴ Rose Community Foundation. 2014. “On-Ramps to Opportunity: Connecting Youth to Education, Work and Success,” 2.
- ³⁵ Denver Opportunity Youth Investment DOYII.
- ³⁶ Interview with Lorena Zimmer, 28 April 2016.
- ³⁷ Ibid.
- ³⁸ Interview with Minna Castillo Cohen, 6 May 2016.
- ³⁹ Ibid.
- ⁴⁰ Interview with Minna Castillo Cohen.
- ⁴¹ Ibid.

Additional Resources

- “Employment and disconnection among teens and young adults: The role of place, race, and education” (2016), by Martha Ross and Nicole Prchal Svajlenka, offers data and analysis examining youth employment and unemployment rates, with a focus on youth who are disconnected from employment and education. www.brookings.edu/research/reports2/2016/05/24-teen-young-adult-employment-recession-ross-svajlenka#V0G0.
- “Vulnerable Youth: Employment and Job Training Programs” (2015), by Adrienne L. Fernandes-Alcantara, reviews federal youth employment initiatives, including some aimed specifically at youth offenders. www.fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R40929.pdf.
- “Engaging Communities as Partners: Strategies for Problem Solving” (2014), of the Beyond Confrontation: Community-Centered Policing Tools series by PolicyLink, outlines steps for successful community-police collaboration as a basis for effective community-centered policing approaches. www.policylink.org/sites/default/files/pl_police_commun%20engage_121714_c.pdf.
- “Building Our Way Out of Crime: The Providence, Rhode Island, Case Study” (2009), by Bill Geller and Lisa Belsky, explores community developer-police collaboration in the Olneyville neighborhood of Providence, Rhode Island. The study describes several positive public safety outcomes resulting from a sustained and concerted collaborative effort to use community development to ameliorate crime hot spots. www.olneyville.org/Geller-Belsky-case-study.pdf.
- “It Takes a Village: Diversion Resources for Police and Families” (2016), by Karen Tamis and Cymone Fuller, examines alternatives to arrest and incarceration responses to low-level problem behaviors such as skipping school or violating curfew and highlights several local examples. www.vera.org/sites/default/files/resources/downloads/it-takes-a-village-report.pdf.
- *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (2010), by Michelle Alexander, investigates the racial disparities in incarceration and criminal justice and their consequences. newjimcrow.com/.
- “Halve the Gap by 2030: Youth Disconnection in America’s Cities” (2013), by Kristen Lewis and Sarah Burd-Sharps, provides data on youth disconnection and advances recommendations for reconnecting youth, preventing disconnection, and setting measurable targets for reducing disconnection. s3.amazonaws.com/moa/MOA-Halve-the-Gap-ALL-10.25.13.pdf.
- “Exploring the Ways Arts and Culture Intersect with Public Safety” (2016), by Caroline Ross, highlights multiple pathways through which the arts influence public safety, including the incorporation of arts in public place-making and arts programs for at-risk youth. www.artplaceamerica.org/sites/default/files/public/pictures/artplace_field_scan_safety_ross_apr_2016.pdf.
- “The High Budgetary Cost of Incarceration” (2010), by John Schmitt, Kris Warner, and Sarika Gupta, highlights the rising rates of incarceration in the United States and examines the causes and costs of incarceration. www.cepr.net/documents/publications/incarceration-2010-06.pdf.

For additional resources archive, go to www.huduser.gov/portal/periodicals/em/additional_resources_2016.html.

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Rachelle Levitt: Editor

Chase Sackett: Managing Editor

Authors: Chase Sackett (Former HUD staff) and Sage Computing staff

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