Halting the Revolving Door of Recidivism:
Examining the Challenges and Successes of Ex-Offenders
in Maintaining Employment

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Abstract

Re-entry as a field was developed in response to the criminal justice system's efforts to counter high recidivism rates where repeat offenders cycle in and out of prison. Consequently, government and non-profit stakeholders have developed social services programming to respond to the needs of those released from prison in ensuring they have the support needed to break free of a lifestyle of continuous crime. Scholars in the field have identified employment as a key factor that discerns whether ex-offenders desist from offending or not. That being said, the field has focused more on how ex-offenders acquire employment and less on how they keep their jobs.

The objective of this paper is to explore the latter and in the process, reveal the structures that bar returning citizens from maintaining their positions in the workforce and from re-integrating with society at large. In undertaking this study, I partnered with the Chicago South Side non-profit organization, Teamwork Englewood, to conduct quantitative and qualitative analyses of how their clients have fared since undergoing the process to become hired and work for the industrial plant Dakkota Integrated Systems.

I have identified the deindustrialized landscape of Chicago as a primary obstruction to ex-offender clients' retaining their positions at Dakkota, presenting geographic barriers for clients unable to finance their commutes to such faraway worksites and socioeconomic barriers that relegate ex-offenders to a form of employment with low pay and erratic hours that processes them more so as bodies than as people. In highlighting these barriers, I posit both short-term solutions that would better equip ex-offenders for navigating Chicago's current landscape and long-term solutions that call for the economic reinforcement of the South Side to ensure both ex-offenders and their communities can heal from historically damaging developments and grow together.

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Introduction: Enter Re-Entry

"*650,000* people are released from prison each year," announces Mark Mitchell, director of the reentry department for the non-profit organization Teamwork Englewood (TWE), when I ask him about the importance of his work in providing social services to returning citizens. "That's 650,000 people going back home, looking for jobs and housing in communities that have nothing for them. The city's just not equipped to take in that many bodies. So we have to step up to catch people coming out of the joint before they fall through the cracks again."

Mark's statistic of 650,000, derived from the Illinois Sentencing Project, reflects the stark reality of our current criminal justice system that absorbs and releases record numbers of Americans, particularly African-Americans, as a result of punitive laws conceived in the "tough on crime" era in the 80s and 90s (Kubrin and Squires 10). In tracking the phenomenon of recidivism, researchers Kubrin and Squires note the rise in the rate of incarceration of black Americans as having tripled between 1980 and 1995 and that 33% of black men ages 20-29 have been processed in the criminal justice system in the present day, alarming developments that the scholars attribute to policies like mandatory minimums imposing prison sentences as standard punishment and the War on Drugs that targeted marginalized communities of color (10-11).

What the "tough on crime" platform fails to account for are the consequences of mass incarceration once individuals released from prison come back home and return to their communities without systems of support in place to facilitate their reentry. Recognizing the returning citizen's need for employment and housing as well as rehabilitative services for substance abuse and mental health disorders, Kubrin and Squires discuss how returning home for ex-offenders entails re-entering environments characterized by oppressive conditions such as

poverty, residential instability, and family disruption that have the potential to inhibit their reintegration into society (15).

Identifying employment as a means of sustenance that could shape the trajectory of the returning citizen and as a key factor with the potential to guide the re-entry process, researchers such as Visher and Courtney conducted studies on the job search experience for ex-offenders, finding that though individuals who did have jobs were less likely to recidivate, only 37% of their sample had secured full-time jobs one year after their release with 81% reporting that their criminal history had been a barrier to seeking employment (3-4).

In light of these results, I wanted to further investigate the role of employment in reducing recidivism by covering the experience of ex-offenders in maintaining their employment status to add to the currently existing body of research that focuses primarily on the job search and acquisition process. In particular, I was interested in the prospect of assessing the impact of short-term employment on ex-offenders in contrast to long-term employment; the question arose whether ex-offenders who were employed for a temporary period would be empowered to seek out more permanent job opportunities in the future or whether the termination of their first job would push them towards the path of recidivating.

My original intention in conducting this project was to discern whether a relationship between length of employment and likelihood of recidivating existed to shed light on how ex-offenders might resort to non-legal means of securing and improving their socioeconomic stability if they were not supported in the process of obtaining and maintaining employment. However, in administering interviews and analyzing data, I have begun to yield findings that elaborate less on the outcome of recidivism and more on the desire of ex-offenders to re-integrate in any way they can and how the system of re-entry has fallen short of reinforcing such a desire. In pursuing this

new narrative, I seek to uncover the nature of the challenges and successes ex-offenders face in their experience of maintaining employment.

Undertaking this study requires a mixed qualitative-qualitative approach. In collaboration with the non-profit organization Teamwork Englewood, I procured data from partner agencies who employ Teamwork Englewood's clients to analyze the proportions of ex-offenders who had been hired on either a temporary or full-time basis from the candidate pool and the average period of employment for this population. I additionally interviewed the clients themselves to inquire firsthand about their experiences in relation to employment and the reentry process in general. The acquisition of the employment data and interviews enables me to understand the complications ex-offenders encounter in undergoing re-entry process and consequently provide policy recommendations on how to further improve reentry services to guide the reintegration of returning citizens.

Background: "Get a Career, Become a Real Man"

As the re-entry movement gained momentum at the start of the twenty-first century in response to the emergence of studies connecting the reduction of recidivism to the re-integration of ex-offenders' into society, stakeholders on the local, state, and federal level have sought to invest time and resources into programming aimed towards supporting the needs of returning citizens. However, while existing research has highlighted the importance of stable housing, structured support systems, and accessible job opportunities in the re-entry process, both public and private institutions have yet to reach a concrete conclusion regarding what model of re-entry programming would best empower ex-offenders to navigate the aggregate of re-entry barriers built on a foundation of institutional and interpersonal stigmatization of their criminal backgrounds upon their release from prison.

As a member of the Re-Entry team of Teamwork Englewood who had joined the roster of staff in 2018, I was fortunate to have the opportunity to encounter and examine the organization's model of re-entry for this study. I had first arrived at Teamwork Englewood in the summer of 2018 as an intern from the Summer Links program, a social justice initiative hosted by the University Community Service Center to partner university students with community organizations in Chicago. It is worth noting my placement at Teamwork Englewood provided a valuable insight into the stigmatization of crime in the city that would eventually drive me to conduct this research.

Teamwork Englewood, founded in 2003 as a result of the New Communities Program, has established itself in Englewood as the multi-faceted social services organization that seeks to comprehensively address the needs of all who walk through their doors, guided by the Quality of Life Plan (QLP) developed by community members, staff, and trustees (Teamwork Englewood, "Quality of Life Plan") . The QLP identified and established five key arenas of life for Teamwork

Englewood to address: "Education & Youth," "Health & Wellness," "Housing & Public Spaces," "Jobs & Economic Development," and "Public Safety."(Teamwork Englewood, "Quality of Life Task Forces") The Re-Entry department specifically falls under the jurisdiction of "Jobs & Economic Development".

When I first applied to be partnered with the Re-Entry Department of Teamwork Englewood, Mark Mitchell asked if I was afraid of coming to a neighborhood like Englewood, explaining that some of his previous interns had been apprehensive of either the reputation of the South Side or the prospect of working with "convicts". I replied in turn that it was important to me to connect with the Englewood community because I wanted to understand the South Side outside mainstream perspectives that cast the region in a negative light. Recalling how my family had initially opposed my participation in Summer Links because of how I wanted to work in the very same neighborhoods they had only recognized as sites of uninhibited violence, I recounted to Mark how I had to tell them I would be working in a government office located downtown to secure their approval of my summer plans. This conversation indicated to me the importance of shattering stigma by choosing to make, rather than avoid, contact with marginalized populations. In the following months with Teamwork Englewood, I found that the popular perceptions of the residents of the South Side as "dangerous" and "volatile" were rooted in racism and classism - incidentally, two of the forces that led to the phenomena of the criminalization of African American and Hispanic communities and mass incarceration.

Mark himself sought to confront stigma by bringing together the worlds of incarcerated life and civic conduct through his lived experiences. Having acquired over ten felony convictions and later four degrees and six certifications, he has occupied a unique position in the re-entry field as a formerly incarcerated citizen who has personally navigated the challenges of the re-entry

process in order to rise to his current position as a prestigious professional. In reflecting on the process of receiving an education with a criminal record, Mark once remarked to me, "Back in the joint, I had to take tests - and at first, I scored at a fourth-grade level in everything but reading comprehension, which I scored a twelfth-grade level in. You know why? I got so good at reading up on my convictions and teaching myself the law that I aced all the reading sections on the test." His experiences represented how the ex-offender, barred from formal education, has no choice but to acquire knowledge in the form of "street education" such as learning Latin to understand charges on a rap sheet. Similarly, Mark understood there to be a gap in current re-entry programming due to a field that lacks understanding of returning citizens' needs. Lamenting that, "People like SAFER Foundation think the answer is job training ...They'll have job training programs to teach people how to write resumes and use computers that last for *months* and they'll only pay the guys $50 a week. No one can live off that. It's just not sustainable", Mark has sought to implement his own model of re-entry that focuses on job acquisition as opposed to job training, citing how ex-offenders would rather secure hands-on employment opportunities to obtain the financial security they need to "get back up on their feet" than learn how to draft resumes to job applications. As such, Mark's workforce development model focused on connecting Teamwork Englewood clients to partner employment agencies who have agreed to take on all clients that the re-entry team refer to them. Over the years, Mark has refined the process to consist of monthly job orientation events that would send clients to interview or test at their designated employment agency to begin the hiring procedure.

One of Teamwork Englewood's partners is Dakkota Integrated Systems, a Midwestern automobile assembly chain and one of the subcontractors for Ford Motor Company. Mark had established a contact with the Dakkota industrial plant located in the south suburbs of Chicago,

based on the federal policy that incentivizes businesses to support the cause of re-entry by giving additional federal funding to employers who hire ex-offenders. In procuring this type of partnership with employment agencies, Teamwork Englewood's model of re-entry has overcome one of the most significant re-entry barriers: the background check, utilized by employers and landlords to bar individuals with criminal records from employment and housing opportunities (Harding et al. 88-89). That being said, one should note that Dakkota, while amenable to the contract and sympathetic to the cause of re-entry would set a single condition for the hiring process, has required Teamwork Englewood to only refer ex-offenders with non-violent backgrounds, which indicates how barriers to employment still exist for certain portions of the ex-offender population. Of the ex-offenders who are hired by Dakkota, Mark has acknowledged that clients do continue to face a series of difficulties, such as how, "a lot of our people

have trouble getting to and from work because they don't own cars. We used to have funding to buy everyone bus cards but since the government doesn't give us funding anymore for that, we can't help them out anymore. So, some of our guys end up not being able to hold down jobs because they don't have access to regular transportation." The statistic that only 26% of clients remain employed while 74% have been terminated in Teamwork Englewood's operations was a dire sign that re-entry programming should focus not only on providing ex-offenders employment but ensuring they stay employed.

Indirectly, Mark has acknowledged the importance of maintaining employment by drawing a distinction between a "job" and a "career" in his interactions with clients. In particular, while observing a Teamwork Englewood job event in January of 2020, I noted how Mark explained the difference between "jobs" and "careers" to one client who was new to the field of re-entry as a teenager who had only recently developed a criminal record. At 19 years old, James was unusually

young for the typical ex-offender, aged anywhere from 25 to 65 years old, who came to the Teamwork Englewood office in search of employment. Having entered our office with his mother close by his side, James had looked nervous approaching Mark. While I first thought his anxiety might have stemmed from his experience of having to adjust to the challenging realities that come with the designation of "ex-offender," James's mother would complicate my initial assessment by sharing that James had recently been caught in a shooting where he had gotten shot and his friend had been killed and that he had consequently developed a fear of going outside, a fear she believed could be ameliorated by sending him to work. Mark, listening attentively, spoke up to affirm to the two of them that he would do everything in his power to set James up with a job. "Not just a job," Mark immediately added, correcting himself. "A career, that's what you're looking for." He addressed James. "You know what the difference between a job and a career is? Jobs are temporary but once you get a career, you're set for life. Making more than minimum wage *consistently*, I mean, and deciding what hours you want to work. That's what a man really needs. So let's get you to work." Swiveling on his office chair, Mark turned to the computer to search for notifications from partner agencies who regularly updated us on the programming they offered.

Watching Mark assuredly pull up emails on his desktop while James and his mother shifted by the doorway, uncertain of what was happening but having no choice but to place all their trust in Mark, I thought about what it meant for an ex-offender to acquire a career instead of a job, where securing regular hours was framed as a luxury and earning more than minimum wage was framed as a peak accomplishment. The dichotomy between "careers" and "jobs" was indicative of the reality ex-offenders experience in obtaining and maintaining employment, of being relegated to a secondary market of labor with low pay and erratic hours, of being marginalized in the workforce.

I also thought about the other marginalizing experiences James had undergone. James, about to turn twenty in two weeks, was afraid to ride CTA because he felt he had a target painted on his back, a gun trained on him that would kill him the same way it had killed his friend. What would it take for him to recover from the events of that night? Would he encounter a paralyzing anxiety every time he commuted to work? What was it like for him to pass the nights before without sleep because he kept reliving the bullets striking his body and shattering his friend's skull in his dreams? Would his employer understand and empathize with why James might come into work late and exhausted, giving him the chance to explain he still had nightmares of the shooting and panic attacks on the train rides to and from work? Or would they label his tardiness and flagging energy as "laziness" and "incompetence", deciding to fire an employee they perceived to be of no use to them?

These questions reveal both the marginalization ex-offenders experience in living in volatile spaces shaped by historically oppressive socioeconomic forces and the marginalization of becoming beholden to employers who can fire them at any moment without recognizing their resilience and strength in the lives that they lead — forms of marginalization I will expand upon throughout this paper in writing and analyzing the labyrinthine process ex-offenders undertake to secure and sustain their employment.

Literature Review: Setting the Stage of Life After Prison

Rehabilitation vs. Retribution: Diverging Approaches to the Revolving Door of Recidivism

The development of the field of re-entry in response to recidivism can be traced back to the division between the rehabilitative and retributive approaches in the criminal justice system. While America has gained an infamous reputation as the nation with the highest rate of incarceration in the world in contemporary times (Robertson, "Crime is Down"), one should note the American phenomenon of mass incarceration only gained traction in the past few decades with the rise of the "tough on crime" era from the 1970s to the 1990s, hypothesized by scholars to have manifested in response to "economic turbulence and labor-market dislocations" in the latter half of the twentieth century (Bushway et al. ix). Researchers Kubrin, Squires, and Stewart track how mass incarceration has disproportionately affected black men, citing the statistics that "almost 1 in 3 African-American ages 20-29 is either in prison, jail, probation or parole on any given day" (10) in the context of "the prison population increasing fourfold from 330,000 in 1980 to nearly 1.4 million in 1999" (10).

In light of the mass absorption of people into the American criminal justice system with a national rate now of 3,437 incarcerated individuals per population of 100,000, there exists an opposite force of equal magnitude — the release of 650,000 inmates nationwide into the general population on an annual basis (Kubrin et al. 10-11). Given the sheer numbers of formerly incarcerated individuals returning to their communities, government officials, non-profit organizations, and members of the public alike have begun realizing the need to re-integrate such a population out of concern these ex-offenders were at high risk of recidivating (Travis et al. i)

A recognition of the impact of recidivism has guided conversations on how to address individuals involved in the criminal justice system, whether it be to initiate preventative measures

by cracking down on crime or intervene later in facilitating the re-integration of ex-offenders. The question of where crime starts and ends and when to take action can be explained by the model of the revolving door of recidivism.

Criminal justice scholars Bushway, Stoll, and Weiman explain the "revolving door of prison release, crime, and reincarceration" (1) as a ceaseless cycle where inmates released from prison are unequipped in their efforts to reintegrate into society and resort to offending only to be returned to a carceral state once more. Those who advocate for a retributive approach towards crime might assert the necessity of harsher punitive policies under the belief that imposing stronger forms of incarceration will lower rates of crime by separating and reshaping potential repeat offenders in a contained environment (Bushway et al. ix). These policies include the extension of sentences, mandatory minimums, and Three Strikes laws (Kubrin et al. 10). The extension of sentences and mandatory minimums set imprisonment as the standard punishment for a spectrum of crimes, including drug offenses, while Three Strikes Laws target repeat offenders by imposing a life sentence on individuals with two prior serious convictions for the third crime they commit. Alternatively, those who maintain a rehabilitative approach posit that incarceration has exacted such a damaging toll that ex-offenders are hindered from reintegrating into society by their experience of imprisonment. Researchers Solomon, Travis, and Waul, for instance, discuss how an inmate's time in prison results in gaps in work history and exposure to prison culture that may lower their employability (31).

In light of the latter's advocacy, waves of reform in the form of public outcry, non-profit organizing, and governmental action began rolling out to soften the harsh impact of the "tough on crime" platform. One such reform arose from the school of thought that viewed formerly incarcerated people as victims to structural inequities rather than perpetrators of criminal actions

and called for an increase in public and private services to respond to the low economic status as well as physical and mental health issues experienced by ex-offenders. Under such a framework, scholars such as Sampson and Wilson have studied how socially disorganized environments characterized by factors such as poverty, family disruption, and residential instability both contribute to rates of crime and recidivism (37-56).

In developing a sympathetic understanding of the circumstances of ex-offenders, many of whom experience racial and economic marginalization, advocates of rehabilitation have begun to advance the claim of the necessity of a field like re-entry, meant to secure the socioeconomic stability of vulnerable ex-offenders and redirect the trajectory of their lives away from crime and towards reintegration.

The Rise of Re-Entry: Addressing Employment, Housing, and Support Systems

At the start of the twenty-first century, criminal justice reformers had already developed a vision for the budding field of re-entry. In 2000, author Travis explored the potential to further expand re-entry models, starting with programs such as drug and mental health courts coupled with therapeutic services. Acknowledging the importance of the concept of relapse, Travis elaborated on the importance of providing consistent support to ex-offenders to ensure their thorough recovery, whether it be through deconstructing the stigma of criminal records by re-organizing the categorization of sex offenses or framing substance abuse in the lens of healthcare by offering addiction treatment (4-6).

In examining the trajectory of the re-entry movement, Solomon, Travis, and Waul list various stakeholders in the field ranging from "the US Congress, which has allocated nearly $100 million [in 2001] to reentry strategies and is considering bipartisan legislation to address prisoner

reintegration, to the community groups that are building networks of support and supervision for those coming out" (2). They discuss the necessity of stakeholders' involvement in dismantling barriers to "the search for housing, employment, treatment, healthcare …" (2).

In their book *On the Outside,* authors Harding, Morenoff, and Wyse write additionally on the urgency of securing support for re-integration processes by discussing how ex-offenders are an especially vulnerable population, experiencing a rate of death that is thirteen times higher than the general population mortality rate because they are particularly susceptible to dying by suicide, homicide, and overdosing (61). In detailing the re-entry experiences of a sample of former inmates, they narrate the typical ex-offender's stresses of acquiring housing, grappling with mental health & substance abuse issues, and finding & maintaining employment.

In the study "One Year Out", scholars Visher and Courtney note that the challenges ex-offenders face often overlap and feed into each other. For instance, in examining the job search experience for study subjects, they found that individuals with fractured or absent support systems and unstable housing were less likely to secure employment and more likely to recidivate (2). While "One Year Out" encompassed the comprehensive network of relationships between the factors of housing, employment, support systems, re-entry programming, and health issues, a number of re-entry scholars have focused on employment as a singular object of study in recognition of the structural economic inequalities that contribute to high rates of crime and recidivism in marginalized communities. The aforementioned analysis of "economic turbulence and labor-market dislocations" (ix) and the "tough on crime" era as conducted by Bushway, Stoll, and Weiman can be mirrored in the research of Wilson and Sampson who found that de-industrialization in Chicago and mounting unemployment in African American and Hispanic neighborhoods led to an increase in crime in the city (48-49). In alignment with the theory of the

revolving door of recidivism, "One Year Out" has shown how 54% of ex-offenders were employed

prior to their incarceration, indicating that 46% were unemployed at a significantly higher rate than

the national unemployment rate of 5% at the time, and how only 37% of this sample would obtain

employment in the year after their release from prison (3-5). Other studies confirm that "released

prisoners confront diminished prospects for stable employment and decent wages throughout their

lifetimes" (Solomon et al. 31) and "the greater use of incarceration may confine less-educated

individuals to the 'secondary' labor market, characterized by erratic employment and low

earnings" (Bushway et al. 1).

Re-Entry and Policy: Using Evidence-Based Practices to Develop Programming

In light of the emergence of academic investigation into the re-entry dimension of criminal

justice, the question arises as to which policies have the most potential to substantively address the

needs of returning citizens and which stakeholders have developed the platforms to implement

these policies.

One theory that has driven policy production and implementation in the realm of re-entry

has been the development of "evidence-based practices", defined as a means of evaluating the

validity of programming through scientific research (Miller and Miller 343). Having arisen in the

field of medicine in the 1990s, evidence-based practices migrated to the disciplines of psychology,

social work, and criminal justice in the early 2000s.

In the eyes of the Department of Justice, evidence-based practices include cognitive

behavioral therapy, substance abuse treatment, and programming for education, employment, and

social support — all services addressing needs highlighted in the re-entry literature above.

Citing research that links re-entry programming to reducing recidivism, the Department of Justice under the Obama Administration released five principles reflecting their re-entry objectives, ranging from providing inmates individualized re-entry plans to providing inmates programming to target their criminogenic needs to enabling inmates to build their support networks to establishing halfway houses to facilitate the transition back to civilian life to distributing information on re-entry resources to every individual released from prison (Department of Justice, "Roadmap to Re-Entry"). One should note that the term "criminogenic needs" as utilized in Principle II of the Roadmap to Re-Entry is derived from a body of criminological and sociological research that has identified factors predicting an individual's likelihood to commit another crime such as substance abuse and lack of access to employment opportunities ("Roadmap to Re-Entry). Asserting a recognition of how the phenomena of crime is linked to other structural socioeconomic inequites, the Obama Administration has played a role in advocating for and implementing policies such as the Second Chance Act of 2008 that authorizes the allocations of funds towards state and federal re-entry programs dedicated to education, job placement, and rehabilitation (Justice Center, "The Second Chance Act Fact Sheet") and the Smart on Crime Initiative of 2013 that revises federal prosecution to impose less mandatory minimums and focus on more serious drug offenders ("Roadmap to Re-Entry"). Other federal initiatives include the Fair Chance Business Pledge, inviting companies to express support for returning citizens by undertaking practices such as eliminating background checks (The White House Office of the Press Secretary), and the Work Opportunity Tax Credit, which enables employers to claim tax credits on the wages of ex-offender employees if they work a sufficient number of hours (Office of Workforce Investment, "WOTC Fact Sheet").

One should note that given the newness of re-entry as a movement and the fact that a significant number of re-entry programs were implemented in the past five to ten years, there exist gaps in the data collected on the efficacy of re-entry policies that indicate there is still more work to be done and more research to be conducted in the field. For instance, one group of researchers found the Second Chance Act to have no effect on repeat offending in the states of Kentucky, Oklahoma, and South Dakota while another group asserted the Second Chance Act had a role in reducing recidivism rates in Alabama, Georgia, and Mississippi, demonstrating the variability of the overall impact of the policy and raising the question as to why certain states experienced more success than others at administering re-entry programming (Amico, Geckeler, and Hui; Amasa-Annang and Scutelnicu). While certain data such as reports on the decline of the federal prison population in the 2010s ("Roadmap to Re-Entry") hint at the promise of the Obama Administration's federal re-entry policies to engage in a positive trend of reducing mass incarceration, the shift to the Trump Administration and a memo released by the then Attorney General Jeff Sessions giving prosecutors more freedom to impose mandatory minimums signifies the challenges of sustaining re-entry policy in the constantly changing realm of national politics. That being said, the development of the rise of re-entry in establishing rehabilitation rather than retribution as the federal approach to criminal justice has had a substantial impact of mitigating the public's biases against ex-offenders; research shows that 60-80% of employers are now willing to hire ex-offenders in the wake of the implementation of the Work Opportunity Tax Credit policy (Hunt et al. 2).

When studying and reflecting on what re-entry might look like in other countries, criminal justice scholars have rightfully pointed out that as America has the most incarcerated people relative to the national population in the world, the objectives of the American movement of re-

entry may be markedly different to how other nations have structured their criminal justice systems and re-integration processes. For instance, the American non-profit organization Vera Institute of Justice noted that because Germany and the Netherlands have built their criminal justice systems on the foundation of rehabilitation and resocialization, the nations have shown a preference to utilize diversion as a strategy in the form of fines, suspended sentences, and community service and use incarceration as a last resort, to the extent only 6% of convicted offenders in Germany and 10% in the Netherlands are imprisoned in contrast to 70% in the United States (Subramanian and Shames 9). For those placed in German and Dutch prisons, Subramanian and Shames discussed how the incarcerated are given opportunities to connect with their families and exert control over their day-to-day routines (given they followed the requirements of undergoing employment and education programming) to the extent inmates can vote and spend time outside prison (12-13). In discussing how drastically the German and Dutch criminal justice systems diverge from the American system, Subramanian and Shames indicate that re-entry, a process established as following release from prison in America, actually takes place while prisoners serve their sentences in Germany and the Netherlands in the sense that both corrections systems frame prisons as supportive sites of transition in contrast to the United States that positions prisons as a punitive space of captivity (19).

The international non-governmental organization Penal Reform International has asserted how international documents on justice such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), a treaty adopted by the United Nations General Assembly, set standards that establish reformation and rehabilitation as the end goal for all penitentiary systems. Citing in particular the Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, author Roy highlights how the colloquially named "Nelson Mandela Rules" emphasize the necessity of initiating the re-entry

process during the prison sentence and in providing after-care to ex-prisoners to ensure they are welcomed, rather than ostracized, in their reintegration (3-4). Roy lists model re-entry policies from certain nations that address such challenges such as Turkey's Labor Law that mandates companies with over 50 staff members to hire a fixed percentage of ex-offenders as employees, Finland's open prison policy that allows prisoners to go to work among civilians while serving time, and Singapore's Yellow Ribbon Project that encourages the public to be more accepting of ex-offenders (13-14, 20). Roy does caution in the case of Singaporean re-entry policy that while the Yellow Ribbon Project has been successful to the extent that 94% of the population has been exposed to the project and 60% has expressed support for having an ex-offender as a friend or colleague, one should be mindful of the significantly punitive nature of Singapore's criminal justice system that utilizes the death penalty (21-23).

As such, Roy asserts the significance of developing re-entry as a criminal justice approach in the hopes that rehabilitation as an objective can permeate entire criminal justice systems from start to end (26) in order to address common re-entry challenges of procuring employment, stigmatization of criminal records, and sustaining support systems.

The Pivotal Factor of Employment: Acquiring a Job Versus Keeping a Job

Regarding discussion on the effectiveness of re-entry employment policy, one should note the nuanced difference between programming that focuses on securing a job versus maintaining a job.

While literature on the job search process has led to the identification of traditional challenges of re-entry such as the stigma of criminal records that motivates employers to turn away job applicants with backgrounds and the lack of familial and financial support isolated ex-

offenders face (Visher and Courtney 10), research focusing on retaining employment only gained momentum in the twenty-first century. Written in 2007, "Barriers to Re-Entry" discusses the concept of "dead-end" jobs that "afford limited opportunities for steady long-term employment, human-capital accumulation, and career advancement and benefits" (Bushway et al. 4). These dead-end jobs are confirmed by the observation that ex-offenders' employment rates skyrocketed by 30% in the immediate post-release period but flatlined after 1.5 years and became negative after 3 years (Bushway et al. 12).

The authors identify that "black men experience steeper declines in employment with time out of prison [which] may reflect that they are strongly motivated to be employed in the legitimate labor market in the short term after release but cannot maintain employment in the labor market" (Petit and Lyons 216). The paper "Employment after Prison", published one year later in 2008, confirms that 65% of the sample of former inmates had been employed at some point but only 45% were currently employed 8 months after their release from prison (Visher et al. 6).

What is also striking in these studies is the length of employment researchers use to assess whether ex-offenders are able to maintain employment or not. In "Employment and Prisoner Re-Entry," Kachnowski uses the metric of a week's worth of working to discuss how 20% of her sample claimed to have worked at least one week 1-3 months after their release from prison and how the percentage would grow to 44% working for at least one week 4-8 months after (3). Conversely, Solomon, Travis, and Waul evaluate monthly employment retention by citing statistics like how re-entry organizations like the Safer Foundation in Chicago had a 60% retention rate of ex-offenders who were still employed after 30 days (32-33). The analysis of employment on a weekly and monthly basis indicates how ex-offenders encounter the significant challenge of maintaining employment in contrast to the general population.

In affirming the disconnect between attaining and sustaining employment, various researchers have undertaken projects to examine the root causes that disrupt an ex-offender's ability to continue work. While age has been suggested as a factor influencing employment retention in a study remarking that "older offenders are more amenable to employment interventions than younger offenders" (Uggen 542), other scholars have attributed the nature of the jobs available to ex-offenders as deterring the formerly incarcerated individual from regular work. Bushway, Stoll, and Weiman suggest that "The jobs ex-inmates get offer low wages and may discourage continuous employment" (222) and Visher, Debus-Sherrill, and Yahner discuss how a significant number of ex-offenders work construction and factory jobs and thus have to seek out other sources of financial support besides paid work, which may be discouraging to sustaining employment in the long-term (3-4).

Studies that have followed the progress of ex-offenders have provided additional concrete identification of factors that may inhibit formerly incarcerated people from maintaining employment. In "Employment and Prisoner Reentry", Kachnowski infers from her observations of subjects over the course of months that ex-offenders who worked before their incarceration and perceived their post-release neighborhood to be a reliable environment to conduct a job search were more likely to work continuously in contrast to non-white respondents who experienced negative peer influences, had no support systems, and experienced mental health issues (4). Apart from pinpointing the specific marginalization experienced by ex-offenders who experience racism and ableism, the study acknowledges the importance of conditions of the environment like the proximity of employment opportunities and the ability to develop work history (4-5). In tracking the employment experiences of ex-offenders according to bimonthly intervals, the authors of "Employment after Prison" write that 2 months after one's release from prison, subjects who had

direct access to work upon their release from prison, abstained from drug use, and were able to acquire an ID worked more consistently (6-8). Interestingly enough, the survey of the sample 8 months after release yielded the additional results that subjects who had trade and job training in prison and who were earning higher wages at their jobs were more likely to have maintained their employment status (Visher et al. 7).

In light of the aforementioned literature, my research project aims to build on these studies by honing in on the re-entry experience of sustaining employment through interviewing select individuals who offer particular insights that speak to systemic struggles experienced by the formerly incarcerated population at large while attesting to the specific set of racial, economic, and gendered conditions of residing in the South Side of Chicago. I hope to further expand upon the above discussions with quantitative data that bolsters the theory that environmental factors shape the ability of the former to continue work as well as qualitative data that delves into the reintegration process as rarely seen before through inviting unique marginalized voices to tell their stories and reclaim their narratives.

Methods and Data Collection: Examining the Lay of the Land

Methodology:

I was interested in carrying out my study on Teamwork Englewood because the organization had developed a model of direct job referrals, rather than job training programming. This means that TWE's approach dismantles the barrier of the job search for clients by opening job slots for specifically ex-offenders. That being said, TWE still encounters challenges in the retention rate of clients. Wanting to understand the nature of these challenges that encompass the difficulties of maintaining employment for ex-offenders has become the driving force for this study. This research project thus seeks to elaborate on the nature of ex-offenders' experiences in maintaining their jobs once hired and add to the current body of research that has focused more so on how they have been reintegrated into the workforce to begin with.

I utilized the database of all the Teamwork Englewood clients who had been hired by the employer Dakkota Integrated Systems in the year 2017-2018 to determine the key numerical figures of the retention rate of clients employed, the average duration of a client's period of employment, and the most significant causes that contributed to the termination of clients' employment. I chose to analyze the 2017-2018 dataset specifically because this specific year marked Year 1 of Teamwork Englewood's implementation of the job referral model and presented me the opportunity to not only evaluate the successes and challenges faced by the cohort of this pilot program but also to revisit these clients in 2019-2020 and their experience of reintegration into the workforce and society at large two years after they were initially hired at Dakkota.

Seeking out the voices of TWE's clients would be critical to providing a more in-depth qualitative background to the 2017-2018 numbers. While the statistics of the average length of employment and the proportion of full-time clients to terminated clients were concrete and

objective, I found that the database's labeling of why clients had been terminated left room for interpretation and that interviewing these individuals would clarify these ambiguities and shed more light on their re-entry experiences than could ever be gleaned from a spreadsheet.

I assert as well the significance of conducting interviews with returning citizens in an informed manner that recognizes and honors their circumstances. In my time with Teamwork Englewood, we had partnered with an organization called Solve that wanted to electronically refer social services to clients by having them sign up online. But many ex-offenders coming out of halfway houses didn't have regular access to computers or the Internet and were unable to fully mobilize Solve. As such, for this research project, I sought to hold interviews through phone calls as the most accessible medium for returning citizens and acknowledge that while the alternative of inviting individuals into the office to interview exists, it would be less feasible given this method would disrupt clients' schedules while they are either at work or searching for work.

The strengths and limitations of this methodology lies in the unique nature of Teamwork Englewood's job referral model. The organization exists as a great starting place for studying the retention of employment and the effects of recidivism for ex-offenders but I wanted to be cognizant not to extrapolate to the field of re-entry at large, due to the organization's distinct model. Additionally, while interviews are likely to yield valuable insights, I recognize as well that clients may withhold information due to the personal nature of the questions asked about their re-entry experience.

To supplement the initial qualitative dataset I had collected via phone interviews, my second reader Professor Chad Broughton advised me to follow up with a few clients who I had built a rapport with to gather more in-depth insights into their lives since their employment with Dakkota. As such, I have developed recollections of a number of clients I came to know from their

onboarding at Dakkota to their departure from the company to their efforts to undergo the job search once more to where they currently are in their lives. These recollections are drawn from in-person conversations.

Data Collection:

On the quantitative side, I acquired access to the dataset provided by Teamwork Englewood regarding the rates of retention of each client at the employer Dakkota Integrated Systems. The dataset in the form of an Excel spreadsheet produced by the Human Resources manager of the Dakkota industrial plant included the length of employment of each client along with a listed reason for their termination, if need be. Ultimately, the dataset tracked the 302 Teamwork Englewood clients that were employed at Dakkota between May of 2017 and July of 2018. Out of the 302, 58 had achieved the status of full-time employee, 38 were working in good probation, and 210 were terminated from employment. Cited causes for termination included the categories of: 1) aggression/violence, 2) resigned, 3) health issues, 4) failed drug screening, 5) never returned, 6) performance, 7) attendance, 8) no call no show, 9) transportation, 10) job abandonment.

Image 1: A sample of Teamwork Englewood's dataset encompassing the employment data of all clients hired and employed at Dakkota Integrated Systems. The "Operator" section has been censored to ensure the privacy of clients' personal information. "G" refers to the employment status of "Good Standing", indicating the clients' potential to maintain their position during the specified week, while "T" refers to "Terminated", indicating the clients' termination from their position.

Image 2: A second sample of Teamwork Englewood's dataset encompassing the employment data of all clients hired and employed at Dakkota Integrated Systems. "Comments" refers to causes of termination of clients from their employed positions.

In totaling how many clients fell into each category of termination, I discovered the following:

REASONS FOR TERMINATION		
Cause		**Total of Clients**
Job Abandonment		25
Transportation		2
No Call No Show		27
Attendance		65
Performance		47
Never Returned		8
Failed Drug Screen/Hair Follicle		6
Voluntary Quit		3
Health Issues		6
Damage to Company Property		2
Resigned		10
Moved Out of State		1
Aggression/Violence		4
Violate Company Policy		2
Extenuating Circumstances		3

Image 3: A table I developed to represent the total number of clients associated with each cause of termination from employment at Dakkota Integrated Systems.

In addition to examining causes of termination, I also sought to calculate the average length of employment for clients listed in this database who had been hired by Dakkota during the 2017-2018 year. Utilizing the database's unit of "G" that marked each week a client had remained employed and in "Good Standing" (as shown above in Image 1), I found that the 302 Teamwork Englewood clients had collectively worked for a total of 2366 weeks, indicating that each client on average was employed for 7.8 weeks.

On the qualitative side, interviewing former and present Dakkota employees was meant to provide clients who were terminated the opportunity to clarify their experiences and share new information regarding their re-entry process that would not have been captured in the spreadsheet, as seen in the brevity of the "Comments" section of the dataset above.

Clients were interviewed on their employment status and their re-entry experience.

1) If the client was let go from their position at work, they will be asked about how they've spent their time since the termination of their employment and how smoothly they believe their re-entry process to be going. They may be asked to share whether they were able to secure a stable means of living, housing, and support system. They may additionally be asked to describe their perception of their self and their vision of the future.

2) If the client remains at their position at work, they will be asked to reflect on how their employment has shaped the trajectory of their life path and how smoothly they believe their re-entry process to be going. They may be asked to share whether they were able to secure a stable means of living, housing, and support system. They may additionally be asked to describe their perception of their self and their vision of the future.

As mentioned previously in the "Methodology" section, I sought to elaborate upon the original set of interviews by conducting check-ins on a number of clients who had remained in contact with me, both via chatting in person for clients who came in to visit the office and through follow-up phone calls for clients who were otherwise inaccessible.

Discussion of Findings: What It Means to Navigate the Post-Prison Lifestyle

Quantitative Findings: Grasping the Volatile Employment Experiences of Ex-Offenders

As stated previously, in reviewing Teamwork Englewood's employment data, I was able to confirm that out of the 302 clients hired in the 2017-2018 year, 58 became full-time employees (constituting 19% of clients), 210 were terminated at some point in time (constituting 70% of clients) and 34 were listed as still in their probationary period of employment (constituting 11% of clients).

For this project, I sought in particular to run a quantitative analysis of the nature of terminations of ex-offender clients and the average length of time each client had been employed for. In tallying the number of clients classified in each category and calculating the magnitude of each cause of termination in relation to the total terminations, I produced the below graphic:
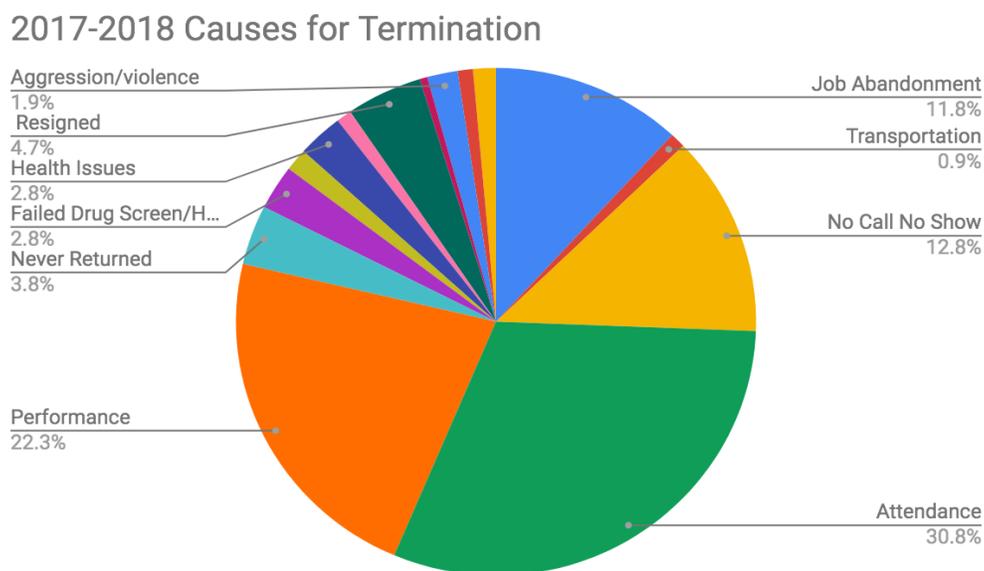

2017-2018 Causes for Termination

Aggression/violence
1.9%
Resigned
4.7%
Health Issues
2.8%
Failed Drug Screen/H...
2.8%
Never Returned
3.8%

Performance
22.3%

Job Abandonment
11.8%
Transportation
0.9%
No Call No Show
12.8%

Attendance
30.8%

Image 4: A graphic charting the percentage of clients cited for every cause of termination in the Teamwork Englewood employment dataset.

This graphic indicates that "Attendance", "Performance", "No Call No Show", and "Job Abandonment" are the greatest causes of termination of Teamwork Englewood re-entry clients. Before interviewing these clients, I asked Mark Mitchell to share his insights on the significance of these particular reasons for termination. In Mark's opinion, "Attendance" ,"No Call No Show", and "Job Abandonment" all represent clients' difficulties in acquiring and maintaining the transportation needed to commute to and from work and the distance between the neighborhoods they live in and their workplaces; an ex-offender without a car and cell-phone who relies on public transportation to travel from Englewood to Calumet City might not be able to make it to work if he misses the bus that comes every two hours and doesn't have the means to report to his supervisor, resulting in Dakkota marking him as a "No Call No Show" in alignment with company policy to let employees go for a single infraction. Mark remarked as well that "Performance" indicates instances in which clients are unable to keep up with the rigor of the work, characterized as twelve-hours shifts in either daytime or nighttime where employees must be on their feet at all times assembling automobile parts and operating machinery for three to four consecutive days in a week. He added that female and elderly ex-offender clients are disproportionately terminated for performance reasons.

I verified Mark's insights, especially in regard to "Performance", by calculating the percentage of women terminated for performance (35.7% or 5 out of 14 clients) in contrast to the percentage of men (21.8% or 43 out of 197 clients). One should note in general the disproportionately of female clients employed in relation to male clients, given only 14 out of the 302 clients hired from 2017 to 2018 were female. Such a statistic reflects the stark reality of how women experience marginalization in re-entry, particularly in the context of how ex-offenders are

only able to access the secondary labor market that consists of mostly manual labor jobs in the sectors of construction, factory work, landscaping, and food service (Visher and Courtney).

The above discussion of Dakkota as a geographically distant site of employment with long labor-intensive shifts should shed sufficient light as to why so many clients are unable - and in some cases, unwilling - to remain full-time employees. I add as well that Dakkota's rate of compensation is set at $13/ hour of work and raised to $15-17/hour for employees who stay employed at the plant for over 3 months. The statistic of 2 months as the average period of employment for Teamwork Englewood clients hired at Dakkota speaks to the reality that even clients who are committed towards the goal of long-term employment and heightened pay often struggle to maintain their employment status to the point of receiving increased compensation and benefits.

That being said, the fact that 58 ex-offender clients had been hired as full-time employees in 2017-2018 is significant as a measure of Teamwork Englewood's lasting impact on these individuals who found the experience of working at Dakkota to be fulfilling and provide a consistent source of pay to the extent that they would commit to long-term employment at the plant. In remaining employed with Dakkota, these clients have undertaken the process of re-integration, securing an income, a livelihood and a way of life that will enable them to forge their own paths out of the revolving doors of recidivism. Reflecting on what a remarkable feat it was for these 58 clients in the first year of this program to have found full-time employment, I asked Mark for his thoughts on what would have enabled their success.

In his response, he confirmed that the clients that were most likely to retain their positions at Dakkota either had consistent transportation or lived nearby the plant and were physically fit enough to uphold the intensive labor requirements of the position, but most importantly, committed

to "making [the job] work for them." When asked to elaborate, Mark replied, "It *is* hard work - especially when you consider other easier options like going back out on the streets to hustle. But it's also available and honest work - and our people who want that, who really want that, are going to do whatever it takes to stay with the job - like asking their neighbor for a ride when they miss the bus to make sure they get to work that day or signing up to work overtime shifts to show their commitment. They persevere through it all. And it's rewarding. It pays off. I've got guys who started out making $13 an hour [in 2017] and now [in 2019] they're the top dogs of the plant and in charge of their own teams of people as supervisors for Dakkota." He also clarified that the retention rate of 19% doesn't account for all the clients who work at the plant to make ends meet until they are "ready to move onto bigger and better things"; for instance, he indicated that many of the clients who fell under the "Resigned" category had left Dakkota after ascertaining they had sufficient financial security and employment experience to undergo the job search once more in pursuit of more lucrative opportunities and should be considered "success stories."

Lastly, Mark asserted the significance of age as a predicting factor, citing the thesis of a criminal justice paper: "A middle-aged ex-offender employed within 90 days of his release from prison is shown to be just as hard-working, if not more, than non-offenders in his age group." Indeed, I found that the average age of the full-time ex-offender employee at Dakkota was 36, which aligns with the study Mark cited - "Work as a Turning Point in the Life Course of Criminals: A Duration" by Christopher Uggen, whose results "suggest older offenders are more amenable to employment interventions than younger offenders" (542). When I asked Mark why older clients have a higher likelihood of maintaining their employment at Dakkota than younger clients, he reiterated his stance that perseverance and patience are critical to informing the potential for a prospective employee to continue working at the plant and that these two qualities were more

likely to be found in individuals who wanted to renounce their history of involvement in the criminal justice system who were, on average, older.

In recognizing Mark's interpretations of the above data, based on his singular perspective as a formerly incarcerated individual, were both valuable but limited in scope, I sought out the subjects of Dakkota's database to offer them the time and space to interpret their own experiences and represent themselves in the narrative of re-entry. Thus begins my discussion of my qualitative research.

Qualitative Findings: The Need for Continuous Support in the Re-Integration Process
Part I: Insights from Initial Interviews

I interviewed 43 Teamwork Englewood clients, hired by Dakkota from 2017-2018, for five to ten minutes at a time regarding their experience with employment upon their release from prison. Out of the 43 clients I spoke with over the phone about their experience with employment, 16 had remained employed at Dakkota and wanted to continue to work there, 4 were employed but wanted to find a different job, 20 were terminated from Dakkota and had resumed the job search process since then, and 3 had been terminated but did not want to find employment. Only 7 of the 43 were women.

As mentioned in the Methodology section, I crafted interview questions that invited the individual to share out their perspective on their re-entry experience, the complications they've faced in regards to employment, housing, and support systems, as well as how they perceive themselves and their visions for the future. During the interview process, given most interviewees answered their phones while on their breaks and had only a few minutes to spare, I focused more on questions relating to navigating employment and housing in order to collect data that would be

most key to the project of analyzing the ex-offender's experience of acquiring and maintaining employment; additionally, in recognition of the fact that clients might find responding to more personal questions such as whether they had developed support systems or how they felt about themselves over the phone to be a challenging experience, I asked them to generally describe their own re-entry experience and left the question open for them to provide as much or little detail as they wanted.

While I sought to connect to each client I interviewed given the present time constraints, I found that those who were most receptive to the interviews were those who wanted to be heard either for how their struggles as ex-offenders reflected structural inequities barring them from succeeding or for how their personal victories reflected their ability to break free of the criminal justice system and rebuild their lives.

In regard to the former, a number of clients expressed either resignation or frustration for attempting to hold onto jobs that would slip out of their grasp for reasons out of their control.

One significant reason was transportation, as mentioned previously, for interviewees who lived in the South Side but had to go the extra mile, literally and metaphorically, to configure their routes traveling to and from work every day in spite of the reality that these commutes could be unreliable or inconsistent.

Ricardo shared with me that he had been let go after his car broke down in the winter due to the freezing conditions. "And you know, it wasn't just me, it was me *and* my nephew in the car going to work at Dakkota because Mark had gotten us jobs there," he informed me ruefully. "And we'd been going steady up until my car broke down in the middle of the road. We missed work that day and they marked us down as not coming in and called us up later to tell us we were fired." While car troubles may have been common for any working person, the terrain of sustaining

employment would be especially treacherous for Ricardo and his nephew in light of how Dakkota's policy has a lower rate of tolerance for tardy employees and how Ricardo hadn't known at the time he should have followed up with his supervisor to inform them of his extenuating circumstances, resulting in the immediate consequence of termination.

Larry's story as well is a reflection of the stringent attendance policies at Dakkota: "I had to take the Pace Bus every day to get to work. But if you miss the bus, you have to wait another 30 minutes to an hour before the next one comes. And then, when you come into work, you're late and they make sure to write it down. If you're late a couple times, they let you go." Larry's termination can be further illuminated by the context of how Teamwork Englewood clients hired by Dakkota not only have to work twelve-hour shifts for three to four days a week but also spend an additional two to four hours in transit to and from the company depending on where they live, these individuals must grapple with grueling hours of labor-intensive work and long transit that affect their ability to uphold Dakkota's exacting expectations of punctuality and efficiency. Additionally, Dakkota's response may reflect the nature of the secondary market of labor, which is more willing to accept ex-offenders as members of their workforce but shows less patience and understanding to individuals who fall out of line for a variety of reasons. One should note that employers in the secondary labor market, based mostly in retail, service, and manufacturing sectors as stated in the study "Employment after Prison" (Visher et al. 6) , prioritize mass efficiency to the extent that they seek bodies who can sustain maximum standards of productivity as opposed to investing in irreplaceable individuals, inevitably resulting in high turnover rates in these lines of work.

In addition to transportation, other clients spoke to the complications of balancing their work life and family obligations in their interviews. While Amous took pride in his daughter's

acceptance to Ohio State University, he also shared his concerns about funding her college experience, as a returning citizen who had to depart from Dakkota to seek out a position with more hours and better pay to supplement his wife's income and financially support their daughter during this time. In another interview, after I asked John if he'd be willing to share any thoughts regarding his employment experience, he quietly informed me that he had been marked a "No Call No Show" and let go from Dakkota the day after his brother had been shot and killed. I told him I was sorry - for his loss, for the fact that he would be punished for choosing to mourn the death of a loved one over going to work. Again appears the familiar tension of workplace etiquette and the expectation of calling an employer in the case of extenuating circumstances - but I assert that regardless of whether or not one knows to call, nobody should be penalized for not prioritizing work in the face of such a tragedy. My concern for how John had lost his job mirrors my worries for James in the "Background" section in regards to how trauma in the personal sphere can be exacerbated by repercussions in workplaces unequipped for processing the struggles their employees face outside of working hours. Given the context of how Dakkota is located in the south suburbs while Teamwork Englewood clients mostly live in the South Side, one can also recognize how the physical distance dictates how Dakkota supervisors might be more detached from experiences such as becoming the victim of or losing loved ones to gun violence. Additionally, there is no denying that even if a job at Dakkota might improve the economic status of its employees, ex-offenders who have returned to their original neighborhoods still grapple with the detrimental socioeconomic conditions that result in the rise of crime as a means of living and gangs as a form of community.

In the process of conducting these interviews, I heard a multitude of clients express the struggles that they had undergone without sufficient support from either the government or non-

profit stakeholders that had promised them assistance; in turn, I sought to affirm their experiences as a researcher looking to present a comprehensive and candid image of re-entry's strengths and flaws as well as respond to their concerns by referring them to (hopefully) more reliable resources as a responsible employee of Teamwork Englewood. I do note here the complications of striking a balance as a neutral observer conducting a study of subjects' experiences and as a case manager wanting to respond to her clients' stories and I acknowledge my own bias in gravitating towards the latter role. I also acknowledge that in a number of cases, I was unable to take any substantial action to address the issues cited by clients in their interviews, whether it be because of my own limitations in deferring to the discretion of the Re-Entry department as a junior employee or because of the constraints of the organization or field itself.

In one notable instance, after I called Kim's number and asked if she was present to take the call, the social worker on the other line was silent for a moment before offering the clipped response that no, Kim was not here, she had passed away from a drug overdose months ago. I numbly gave the social worker my condolences before hanging up. No longer in a state of mind to continue interviewing clients, I sat in the office and thought, *What if Teamwork Englewood had followed up with her sooner to make sure she was stable? Could we have prevented this?* This line of thinking would have implicated the social worker and her organization's mental health and substance abuse recovery programming as well. The news of Kim's death was a stark reminder of the importance of providing regular support to ex-offenders during their re-entry process before it was too late.

Even clients who had experienced relative success compared to their peers as either individuals who were employed full-time or had managed to secure employment even after their termination from Dakkota voiced the need for comprehensive and consistent support:

Veronica and Britney, two of the few female clients who remained employed, shared how they had been searching for stable housing in spite of working consistent hours. Addressing housing is key to ensuring a client's ability to continue participating in the workforce and to re-integrate with society at large; when ex-offenders acquire long-term housing, they are empowered to undertake the process of rebuilding their lives upon the foundation of spaces they claim for themselves, secure in the knowledge they have obtained shelter and safety and can focus their time and energy on managing their other affairs such as employment. That being said, Teamwork Englewood's re-entry team has been limited in our scope to provide housing to clients in need "due to the fact the grant funding us only gives us enough money to refer people out to other job agencies," according to Mark. "And even then, because we're committed to the cause, we still go above and beyond to help them." And surely enough, after noting that Veronica and Britney were women, Mark directed me to refer them to another department of Teamwork Englewood: the Englewood's Women's Initiative, a project developed to support the comprehensive needs of women as a vulnerable population in the South Side by connecting them to a network of non-profit partners such as Metropolitan Family Services and Family Rescue. Fortunately, Mark was able to develop a solution to address Veronica and Britney's housing needs; as mentioned previously, re-entry literature such as the study "One Year Out" have otherwise confirmed that without securing both housing and support systems, ex-offenders are far less likely to obtain and maintain their employment (2).

Vincent, Marcus, Anthony, and Terrence, clients who had moved on from Dakkota to undergo the job search process once more, all told me they had been successful in procuring employment only to be let go anywhere from weeks to months later when their employers ran background checks on them and found violence in their backgrounds. While their time at Dakkota

had served them well in providing valuable work experience without barring them from employment on the basis of backgrounds, they would encounter the new challenge of applying for jobs under employers that saw them as criminals first and people second. While the question might arise as to whether these businesses would have allowed the men to keep their jobs if they only had non-violent offenses in their background, I am concerned by how drawing a line between offenses might uplift one group of ex-offenders at the expense of another group. Ideally, the field of re-entry should seek to dismantle barriers to employment for all to ensure the revolving doors of recidivism come to a standstill.

Part II: Following Up on Clients' Re-Entry Trajectories

In undertaking the project to check-in with clients I had stayed connected with from their initial entry into Teamwork Englewood and onwards, I wanted to highlight the stories of two clients, Walter and Tom, who traveled down completely separate paths to juxtapose the experiences of clients swept up in the revolving doors of recidivism with clients who manage to pass through the doors and make it to the other side.

While usually 50-100 ex-offenders enter the Teamwork office for our monthly job events, I came to know Walter, an earnest and meticulous middle-aged man, on a one-on-one basis after he approached Mark and me to ask for directions to Dakkota to test for the position, explaining he didn't have a cellphone to look up the location or a car to travel to the factory. "What's your address?" I asked as I opened Google Maps on the office computer. We scanned the computer screen together as I listed off the three buses he needed to take to travel from his home to Dakkota in the span of an hour and a half and he asked me to zoom in to show him the exact stops he needed

to board and exit the bus, murmuring the names of the street corners to himself as if to memorize the intricate sequence of steps he needed to take for his commute.

"I can print out the directions for you, if you'd like," I offered to him.

"Oh, could you do that? That'd be great!" he replied, his eyes brightening. When I gave him the print-out of the directions, he asked for a pencil to circle the exact stops he had asked to see on the computer screen, explaining he wanted to be sure he was going in the right direction.

"But as long as I know where I'm going, I'll be all good. I'll be sure to get there early, pass all the tests, everything," he affirmed to me as he neatly folded the directions into his pocket before leaving the office for the day.

And true to his word, he did everything he had promised he would do; on the date of his test for Dakkota, he arrived two hours early and successfully passed both the rim test, a test to assess the physical strength and skill of Dakkota candidates in screwing tires onto car frames, and the drug test. He, along with seven other peers, were waiting in the hallway to the Human Resources office when Mark and I arrived to assist with the onboarding process of having clients file their hiring paperwork, as requested by Dakkota staff.

I walked over to stand by him in the hallway. "Hey, Walter, congrats on passing the rim test!"

He smiled at me with delighted surprise. "You remembered me?"

"Of course I did," I replied, managing to conceal my own surprise at his happiness at being recognized. In hindsight, Walter's happiness would make sense in the context re-entry organizations often treat their clients like bodies and numbers, rather than individuals, due to the sheer numbers of people requiring their services. "Do you remember *me*?"

"Angela. You're the one who helped me with the directions."

"That's me. And I can help you with the paperwork for this job too if you want," I said as the Dakkota HR manager beckoned us inside the office and we all took our seats in front of thick packets of paper we would fill out in the next half hour.

Walter chatted with me the whole time we filed his paperwork together. "Junior," he said, printing out the JR by his name. "Walter Smith was my dad, Walter Smith Junior is me." He would explain to me too how he had family down South, how he had been arrested on charges of robbery while here in Chicago, how he was trying to get his life back on track since his time out of prison. "Never meant to hurt nobody," he said.

"I believe you," I replied. I knew in the back of my mind a number of people who wouldn't have, but then again, they weren't here with me and Walter trying to decode the legal intricacies of IRS forms and cracking jokes over how overly complicated the process was. They didn't know who Walter was or any of the clients who had come into Teamwork Englewood. They didn't know the kind of resolve and perseverance it took to face barrier after barrier in the job search but to keep going nonetheless in the hope an opportunity would present itself in the future, how difficult it was to maintain that optimism and dedication in the face of closed doors and total rejection.

When Mark called me over to leave Dakkota in time for his next meeting, Walter stopped me on my way out. "Hey, if [Dakkota] doesn't work out, I can call you to help me out again, right?"

"Yeah, of course. Just call Teamwork's number and ask for Angela and we can talk more then."

Months passed. At the office, occupied with meeting new clients at every monthly event, I didn't have the opportunity to check in on Walter until the Dakkota HR office sent Teamwork Englewood a copy of their employee records. As I scrolled through, I eventually located Walter's

name, along with the "T" marking his termination. My heart sank. In coming to know Walter, I knew he had done everything he could to stay employed with Dakkota. As it turned out, he had been terminated for "Performance" reasons. Rationally, it made sense; Dakkota's shifts were difficult to manage even for the most athletically fit employee. But my disheartened expression must've been evident enough that Mark leaned over to see what had caused me to react in such a way.

"Oh, him? Yeah, that's the guy that's been calling for you."

"What?" I asked numbly. Having resumed classes at the University of Chicago, I was working part-time for the office now. The thought I could've missed Walter's calls and left him hanging while I was in class learning about modernist poetry was upsetting. "Why didn't you tell me?"

"'Cause that's not what we do," Mark replied emphatically. When I turned around to look at him, his expression was understanding but firm. "We're not a temp agency. We're not here to keep giving people jobs. We're just here to refer them to their first gig and how they do from there on out is up to them. That's what the grant says we're supposed to do; and we do more than that by walking [clients] through the hiring process but we can't do everything."

"But he asked if I could help him and I said yes," I said. "He wanted to keep working. If I can connect him to another job, I'm sure this one would work out." Implicit in my statement was the assertion it was not just Walter in this kind of situation; there were many more clients like him who had been hired by Dakkota and invested in maintaining their jobs only to have been let go and left to fend for themselves once more.

"If we focus on getting everybody who was let go second, third, fourth jobs, we wouldn't be able to help the people coming in through the doors looking for a *first* job," Mark retorted. "It's not fair to them if we do that."

The whole situation was unfair, I wanted to reply, but as a junior Teamwork Englewood employee, I deferred to Mark's judgment. It didn't change the fact Walter would continue to remain in my thoughts as I wondered how he was doing and where he was now.

In researching and writing this paper, I was hopeful I could use this opportunity to follow up with him. However, I might have made an error of judgment by first consulting Mark to ask if I could call Walter for the purposes of this study, if not to check in with him to refer him to another job opportunity. Mark sternly replied, "I know what you're doing, and the answer is 'no'. Remember the conversation we had the last time? Good. He can't rely on you."

I note here that Mark specifically instructed me not to call Walter but otherwise generally accepted and supported my initiative to follow up with other terminated clients, even allowing me to access the database of names needed to call individuals for interviews. I sense that the primary reason Mark drew this distinction was to make the point that I couldn't become too invested in specific clients when the work to be done at Teamwork Englewood required having the capacity to provide support to as many clients as we could "to get as many of these guys to work so they can start paying the bills and piecing their lives back together again". I also think he might have given me the list of 150 clients to call, knowing I would to a certain degree have to prioritize data collection over assessing and responding to clients' needs, given my time and energy constraints. (To some degree, he was right, as much as I did try to check in on each client during their interview).

As I mentioned earlier, one main complication to this study was collecting data on the issues clients had undergone and experiencing limitations on how to respond. My hope then is to be able to stay true to what clients have shared with me and include their voices in this paper in the hopes of bringing awareness of the kind of treacherous territory Walter and his peers have to navigate in staying connected to a source of income without becoming discouraged to the extent that they might turn back to recidivating as a familiar way to make their living and fall back into the criminal justice system.

Conversely, in a counter-narrative to Walter's, I was able to meet another client, Tom, and learn of how he had forged his own path to break away from the cycle of recidivism.

Interestingly enough, I had encountered Tom accidentally in the context of tabling for Teamwork Englewood for a job fair hosted by Sarah Gad, a third-year University of Chicago Law School student running to become the next U.S representative for Illinois' 1st Congressional District. I had met Sarah in her visit to Teamwork Englewood and her emphasis on the importance of including criminal justice reform in her political platform, given her previous experiences with addiction and incarceration. Mark and I, both impressed by her commitment to advocating for change to the system, had agreed to support her cause by attending her next job fair as an organization invested in connecting ex-offenders with the right resources.

While stacking a new pile of Teamwork Englewood brochures for visitors of the job fair to pick up, I heard a voice call, "Hey, Teamwork Englewood!" and looked up to see a beaming man dressed in a dapper suit walk up to the table.

"Hey," I responded, smiling in response to his enthusiasm. "Thanks for coming out in the snow, how are you doing today, sir?"

"I'm doing just fine," he replied. "I wanted to come over to say 'hi' since you guys helped me out the last time."

"Oh, that's great to hear! Do you know Mark then?"

"I sure do. He helped me get a job with Dakkota. It was pretty good work while it lasted. My name's Tom Jones by the way."

I shook the hand he extended. "I'm Angela. And I'm glad to hear that Teamwork was able to help you," I said. While I hadn't had the opportunity to talk one-on-one with Tom, I had remembered his name from the Dakkota database of employee data. He had been one of the clients who had been promoted to full-time status the last time I checked. My happiness for him and his positive experience with Teamwork Englewood, though, was tempered by the fact that his presence at this job event must have meant he must have unfortunately been let go from Dakkota at some point. "And are you looking to find a different job now?"

Tom laughed sheepishly. "Well, to tell you the whole story, I'd moved on from Dakkota to another job with hours that worked better for me. That one didn't pay so good in the end but hey, I'm here now, ready for another opportunity. Actually —" He leaned in closer to confide in me. "I'm thinking of applying to help out with Sarah Gad's campaign. Seeing the work that she's done, I'm inspired to get involved too. Especially having been through the system and to have made it to where I am now, I want to be able to help other people do the same."

I looked at him, how radiant he was in his confidence and his conviction. "Sarah Gad's campaign would be lucky to have you; I'm definitely rooting for you," I told him. "And I'll be sure to tell Mark you said 'hi', he'll be glad to hear that you're doing well."

"Thanks so much," he replied. "I'll never forget what Teamwork did for me. I appreciate you all."

As he waved goodbye and moved on to mingle with the crowd of people at the job fair, I pulled out my phone to text Mark, "Hey Mark, just bumped into Tommy J. He's doing well, says he remembers and appreciates what you did for him." I reflected too on Tom's positivity. While it was true many of the ex-offenders I had met in my work at Teamwork Englewood had displayed strong hope and faith that they would be able to "turn their lives around" (in their words), it was rarer to see a client exude the shining confidence that Tom did.

In all honesty, when Tom had approached the Teamwork Englewood table, I hadn't thought he had a background in the first place. When I had begun working in the Re-Entry department, I had been teased by Mark for the fact that I had mistaken a number of re-entry professionals, who had Master's degrees and had never been to jail before in their lives, for Teamwork Englewood clients. "I can't believe you can't tell who's who," he said, shaking his head with a chuckle. "Listen, our business partners always come in nicely dressed, talking politely, acting professional. Verbal language, body language - it's all different from our people. You gotta learn how to read people better." And indeed, Tom had walked up to the table having upheld the criteria of dressing and behaving in a "professional" manner. The fact he had narrated his journey out of the criminal justice system as one where he had "made it to where he is now" and "wants to help other people do the same" was a testament to the fact he had embraced himself as a fully integrated returning citizen with a knowledge of the criminal justice system but a belief in his power to make a difference in spite of it. While he had admitted to his second job being "not as good," he had recognized the experience as a part of his reality as a returning citizen but moved on to seek what he perceived to be bigger and better things.

The revolving doors of recidivism hadn't caught him; he had strode out with plans to make the doors more accessible.

Policy Recommendations

Increasing Accessibility to Work for Ex-Offenders on a Geographic and Cultural Level

In light of this paper's discussion of how ex-offenders became relegated to a secondary labor market shaped by de-industrialization of Chicago in the 70s, one can note the intrinsic tension that arises from setting up factories in the south suburbs of the city that ex-offenders must travel a far distance from their neighborhoods usually situated in the South Side.

Acknowledging that the impoverishing and alienating effects of de-industrialization are pervasive and require significant time, effort, and funding to address, one short-term solution would be for government and non-profit stakeholders to recognize transportation as a salient issue in re-entry and provide more assistance in funding the transit of ex-offenders aiming to secure and maintain their employment. Earlier, in the "Background" section, I had featured Mark's comment regarding Teamwork Englewood's ability to finance transportation options for clients, where "We used to have funding to buy everyone bus cards but since the government doesn't give us funding anymore for that, we can't help them out anymore." Noting the significance of local, state, and federal funding non-profit organizations rely upon to carry out their operations, framing transportation as a means of ensuring ex-offenders' access to employment is key to encouraging a re-allocation of government funds to enable returning citizens to travel to and from work until they've accrued a sufficient income to pay for their own commutes.

However, in the long-term, I would advocate for a solution that aims to improve not only the socioeconomic wellbeing of ex-offenders but also their neighborhoods in terms of recognizing the value that this population brings to their communities and how both can benefit one another. In particular, I see the potential for an additional re-allocation of re-entry funding towards supporting local businesses in the South Side in hiring and employing ex-offenders, especially in

the case of businesses in the area run by community members who may or may not be returning citizens themselves that would be far more likely to take an interest in hiring fellow community members with backgrounds.

One should note here that such a step would be addressing and ameliorating the historically oppressive developments that had systematically deprived black and brown communities in the South Side of financial and cultural capital; as mentioned previously, sociologists Wilson and Sampson in their paper "Toward a Theory of Race, Crime, and Urban Inequality" allude to how forces of structural social disorganization contribute to "racial poverty" (53) in the city by listing how the movements of deindustrialization and urban renewal in Chicago led to a loss of employment and housing resources and instability of spaces for minority populations that consequently resulted in the dissolution of community and the rise of crime. Mark, as someone who had been involved in the criminal justice system but also earned multiple degrees participating in academia, understood such a history far too well in terms of his personal experiences and sociological theory. "You know the War on Drugs was really a war on black people, right?" he asked me on one car drive to visit a halfway house to inform its residents of the next Teamwork Englewood job event. The drive, which lasted an hour, was spent with Mark recounting how the criminal justice system had terrorized the South Side in the 80s, tracking down and imprisoning drug users at astronomically high rates. "The craziest thing was, the feds putting us behind bars were the ones responsible for all this," he told me as we turned into the parking lot of the House of James. "And if you don't believe me, read *The New Jim Crow*. It'll blow your mind." I did in fact believe Mark, given his experiences, but I read *The New Jim Crow* by Michelle Alexander anyways, which would confirm the narrative he had woven of the CIA's involvement in transporting cocaine from Nicaragua into American cities, of the sinister sensationalization of "the

crack epidemic" by media outlets and government officials that criminalized "inner-city neighborhoods" and by extension people of color, and the rise of mass incarceration with the creation of policies like the 100 to 1 crack sentencing where possession of 5 grams of the affordable crack cocaine equated to the same sentence as possession of 500 grams of the more expensive powdered cocaine, resulting in the disproportionate imprisonment of low-income drug users who were often African-American or Latinx (4-12, 49-56). One can then recognize and understand the devastation of embroiling the South Side in the War on Drugs and placing thousands of black and brown Chicagoans behind bars, plunging communities into a state of violence and loss and divesting neighborhoods and families of valued members. In describing how the 100-1 sentencing law disproportionately targeted city neighborhoods in relation to suburbs to me, Mark pointed out how "it was always black people who got busted for buying and using crack while white people out in the suburbs got away with [powdered cocaine]" and explained how suburbs became spaces of white wealth when "white people began moving away from the city because they didn't want to have to live with black people anymore. You know about white flight?" I did. I knew as well that Mark's reflection on the suffering of black and brown communities in the city versus the white suburbs that were doing far better, socioeconomically speaking, raised the question of what it would be like to repair the damage sustained by the South Side to be on par with that of the southern suburbs.

To me, the reparation process would manifest in the form of the re-entry movement redirect funding back to these divested populations in addition to advocating for the reform of the criminal justice system to bolster the socioeconomic wellbeing of these areas on a whole. Specifically, if the field of re-entry were to focus on financing local entrepreneurs from both primary and secondary markets of labor committed to hiring and employing ex-offenders in providing products

and services to their neighborhoods, returning citizens would have the opportunity to participate in the economic activities of their communities and contribute to the overall wealth - that is, cultural and financial capital - of the South Side.

Providing Ex-Offenders' Access to Cultural and Educational Capital

As long as ex-offenders continue to be directed into the workforce of the secondary market of labor, there exists a need for these future employees to learn how to navigate the professional workplace — especially for individuals who have not had the opportunity to continue their education past high school and who have known primarily how to earn an income through illegal channels. In the context of Teamwork Englewood, the re-entry staff could implement more programming to inform clients of the workplace expectations of employers like Dakkota such as the importance of communicating instances of tardiness or missed days to their supervisors. That being said, continuing the trend of noting the ways in which employers and ex-offender employees operate in different worlds, it's important to recognize, as mentioned above in the "Methodology" section, how some ex-offenders, particularly those coming out of halfway houses with little to no funds, don't own personal cell phones or household computers needed to call or email their supervisors but rather, rely on landlines in the homes of whoever has allowed them to stay there at the moment, which results in miscommunications where both employers and employees have difficult contacting one another because they rely on different media. This instance of miscommunication reflects a far greater dynamic of misunderstandings between employers who have neither lived on the South Side nor been involved in the criminal justice system and ex-offender employees, as seen in the interviews of multiple clients who were let go because their extenuating circumstances were either not communicated or understood. In light of these

misconceptions, the field of re-entry would do well to foster dialogue between both parties to ensure that employers are able to meet the needs of their ex-offender employees and vice versa. This can mean for instance, educating employers in especially sectors interested in hiring ex-offenders on the challenges of leaving prison and returning home such as how many individuals have difficulties acquiring consistent transportation because they have little to no liquid assets or have experienced trauma in their involvement in the criminal justice system that informs how they act.

As a more long-term solution, the re-entry movement should continue to host their current programming that teaches ex-offenders how to access more primary markets of labor that offer more consistent hours and better pay such as hosting resume workshops. However, one should note that many of these programs, while maintaining a long-term vision of success, have failed to address the immediate needs of their clients, given most don't offer a sufficient stipend or any form of pay as Mark cited in the "Background" section. In contrast to non-profit organizations like SAFER Foundation that may be removed from the experience of ex-offenders, Mark as a returning citizen himself understands more than most the needs of ex-offenders who
are looking to fill their bellies, find a roof over their head, and begin paying the bills of the family members, partners, and friends who are hosting them on a day-today basis. In the words of Mark, "before anything else, these guys just need to get back up on their feet."

Having discussed both short-term and long-term solutions to build the cultural and educational capital of ex-offenders, I hope to finalize this section by reflecting on how the Re-Entry department has synthesized components from both types of solutions to take action to support clients in navigating professional environments in 2019-2020. In October of 2019, while conducting this research, I had asked Mark if there was more Teamwork Englewood could do to

heighten the retention rates of our clients, to which he had replied that he'd been considering how to incorporate discussions on conflict resolution in the monthly job orientations he hosted, claiming he'd " been telling the guys not to get into fights, to be respectful to the higher-ups, that acting nice and polite is going to get them farther in life. But maybe I should do more presentations on that, since I've been hearing back [from Dakkota] that some of the guys have had real attitude problems." At the time, while I understood that starting fights in the workplace would never be ideal, I wondered whether Dakkota's supervisors would respond more sympathetically to their ex-offender employees if they knew engaging in conflict could be classified as a trauma-informed behavior, especially if the individual in question had experienced violence in the past and felt the need to defend themself against perceived threats (Erwin et al. 196-215).

A month later, I unexpectedly received the opportunity to advise Teamwork Englewood on bringing together partner employers such as Dakkota and re-entry clients in productive conversation. In November, I walked into the Teamwork Englewood office only to find the Re-Entry team assembled in the conference room, gathered together for a staff meeting to brainstorm applying for grant funding - specifically to reduce recidivism.

"Mark," I said. "You know who wrote a whole paper on stable and consistent employment as a strategy to reduce recidivism?"

I then spent the next few months incorporating the results of this research into the grant application, developed around a model of increasing the retention rate of ex-offenders in the workforce providing strengthened transportation assistance and hosting events for partner employers and returning citizens to convene and learn from one another. Such a model was built to address the geographic, socioeconomic, and cultural barriers discussed throughout this paper that inhibit the re-entry of returning citizens.

In January of 2020, we were notified that we had been awarded the grant. After celebrating the news, we scrambled to allocate the funds accordingly into purchasing bus cards and gas cards and contact re-entry stakeholders interested in leading workshops on "Workplace Ethics", "Conflict Resolution in the Workplace", "Financial Literacy", "Time Management", and "Skill Building/Career Planning" that employers and prospective clients alike were both asked to attend. At the time of submitting this thesis paper, Teamwork Englewood has only had the chance to implement this programming for a few months; as such, not enough time has passed and not enough data has been collected to confirm the effectiveness of these recommendations. My hope is that even if this research project has come to an end, a recognition of the successes and challenges faced by ex-offenders in retaining their jobs can continue to inform Teamwork Englewood's operations and reach the field of re-entry at large.

Conclusion: Halting the Revolving Doors of Recidivism

To come full circle in concluding this paper, I hope to return to the story of James as referenced previously in the Background section, the 19 year old young man recovering from a shooting who had been promised a "career" in coming to the doors of Teamwork Englewood. The "career" that Mark would secure for James would come in the form of a partnership between Teamwork Englewood's Re-Entry department and Greater West Town Community Development Project (GWTP), an organization that offers vocational training programming to set up community residents with stable jobs. Fortunately, Mark asserted to James and his mother, GWTP provided a stipend in their twelve-week woodworking training program that James could live off of while receiving training on the necessary skills to enter the field of woodworking. James's mother, who understandably looked skeptical about the prospect of woodworking as an employable trade, asked Mark if there were any programs that focused on forklifting, an occupation perceived to be far more mainstream in Chicago's industrial plants. Mark only shook his head; while GWTP had forklifting training, there was no stipend available, no source of immediate money that could sustain James in paying the never-ending stream of bills. What was set as a priority in this moment was not James's preferences in choosing a career but rather what channel could provide James instantaneously with a livable income and later with a long-term position in the workforce. Having made clear that woodworking was the only option he could offer, Mark handed James a business card, directing him to give the card to the supervisor of the woodworking program to confirm he was a referral from Teamwork Englewood. "Your appointment's going to be at 8:45 AM but you're gonna have to get there by 8 AM. You show up early, you show your potential to be a good worker," Mark instructed. James's mother nodded; she would have to take another day off work to accompany her son to GWTP, but it was a necessary sacrifice as far as she was concerned. "I've

got a long record and I don't want any child of mine to go through that," she declared. "He's going to be alright," Mark replied. "I'll make sure of it."

While James is an exception to Teamwork Englewood's usual client population both in terms of his age and his referral to GWTP rather than Dakkota, James's story speaks in general to the brewing uncertainty and desperate hope that accompany ex-offenders in navigating their re-entry experience of securing and maintaining employment. The idiomatic expression "beggars can't be choosers" seems to especially apply to ex-offenders, who, deprived of their choices to decide their futures on the basis of the socioeconomic conditions of their communities and ostracized on the basis of their criminal record, are not given the opportunity to choose what kind of work they want and instead, become relegated to the secondary market of labor in the case of Teamwork Englewood clients who are referred to Dakkota and must accept conditions of minimum wage pay for long hours of undertaking strenuous labor at inaccessible locations. As such, ex-offenders and their support systems are put in a position of continuously making sacrifices, such as having to go to extreme lengths to prove themselves as dedicated and deserving workers on top of the many challenges they endure as returning citizens who must re-integrate with civilian society.

Consequently, my greatest challenge was finishing each interview, knowing my clients would be returning to their day-to-day lives of standing their ground against the myriad of systemic and environmental factors all working against them. Especially at the start of my time working for Teamwork Englewood, I passed multiple sleepless nights consumed by my concerns for the clients I had made contact with - had Lewis received access to his schizophrenia medications? Had Christopher found a job that was less taxing on his body? These were indeed high stakes situations indicative of the turmoil ex-offenders face in managing the ever-present threat of being swept off

their feet by the revolving doors of recidivism. Yet, these matters were also not as dire as I had anticipated them to be in the sense that most if not all the clients that come into Teamwork Englewood's office had long grown accustomed to their lived reality of marginalization in employment, housing, and the multitude of other sectors and knew how to find ways to "make ends meet", as one client, Barry, put it. As another client, Charles, said, "You gotta do what you gotta do." Ex-offenders' adaptation to their lives following their release from prison is reflected both in the interviews I've conducted for this study and in the work I do at Teamwork Englewood. I've seen the resilience of clients in walking into the Re-Entry office and asserting that they wanted to rebuild the lives they lost. I've seen their optimism, like when Kevin proudly informed me for the first time in his life that he was worked full-time in his position at Dakkota, and their frustration, like Denise told me Teamwork Englewood hadn't done enough to help her and hung up before I could further ask any more questions. The one theme that consistently ran in the narratives of the clients who I interviewed and who I work with was their drive and determination to survive and succeed, to make lives for themselves in spite of the losses and injustices they had experienced.

What can the field of re-entry do in the face of the drive and determination of returning citizens looking to reintegrate? On an individual level, re-entry stakeholders should take the time to recognize and appreciate the challenges ex-offenders face in their day-to-day lives. On a community level, re-entry figures and organizations should take action to ensure employment is accessible to the populations who have been marginalized in their paths in and out of the criminal justice system. Lastly, on a structural level, both government and non-profit organizations dedicated to the cause of re-entry should recognize the forces of racism and classism in cementing the phenomena of mass incarceration and recidivism and consequently, work to counter these forces in addressing issues like deindustrialization and divestment.

To conclude this paper, I quote Mark on one of the many mottoes he's developed in his work in re-entry: "Save the adults! Everyone always talks about 'saving the kids' this, 'saving the kids' that, but what about the adults who have been forgotten, cast aside, left in the dust? They matter too."

Ex-offenders matter. Their right to acquire employment matters, as does their right to stay employed, rise through the ranks, and secure better lives for themselves. Now it's just a matter of the field of re-entry meeting returning citizens where they're at and accompanying on their journeys to move forward, rather than slipping back into the cycle of recidivism.

Appendix 1: Map of Chicago, the South Side, and Dakkota Integrated Systems

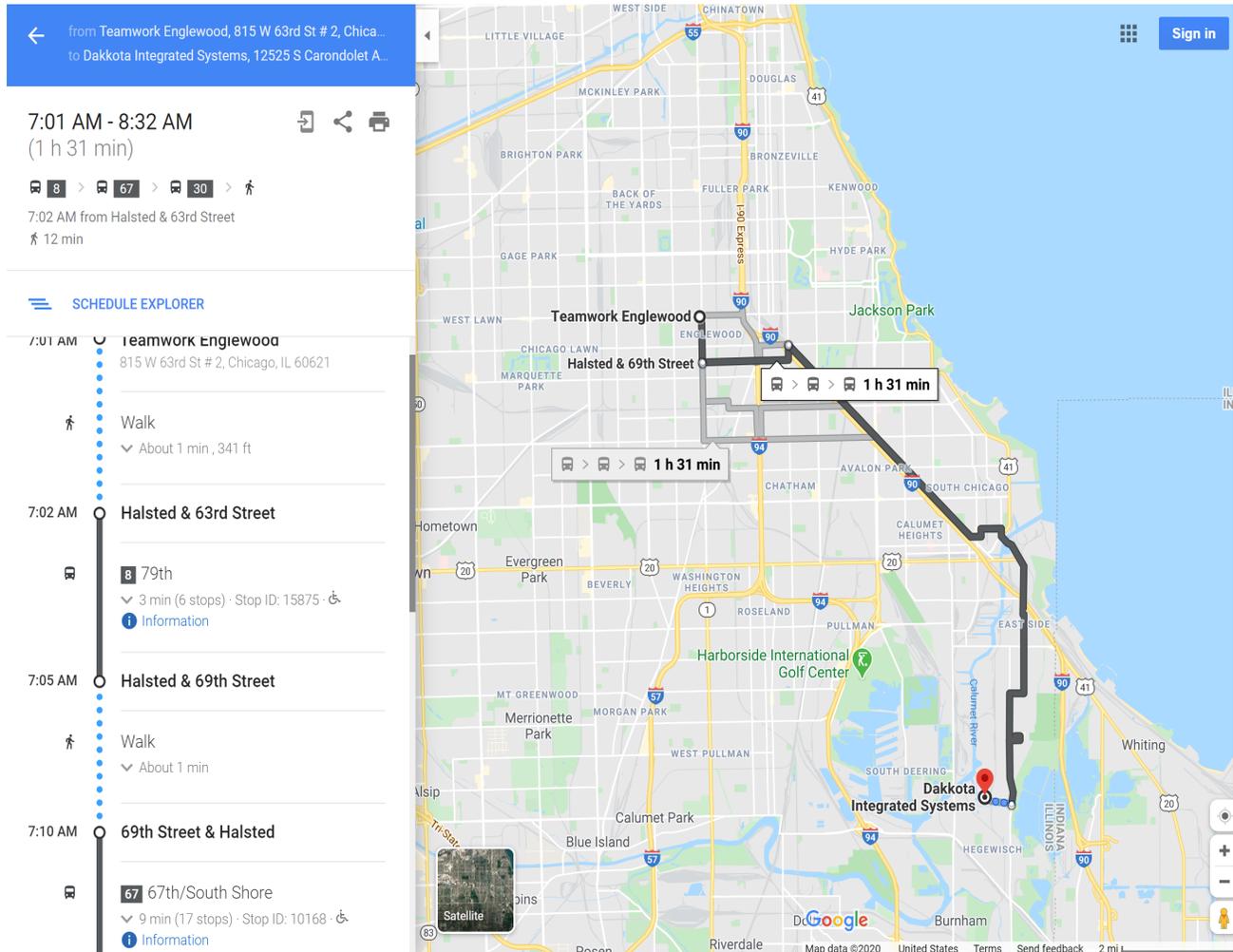*Image A: A map of the route from Teamwork Englewood on 815 W. 63rd Street to Dakkota Integrated Systems on 12525 S. Carondolet Avenue as produced by Google Images. Note that Teamwork Englewood is located in Englewood while Dakkota is located in South Deering. Also note the logistics of transportation needed to travel from Teamwork Englewood to Dakkota; a one-way commute requires 3 buses and takes 1.5 hours to complete.*
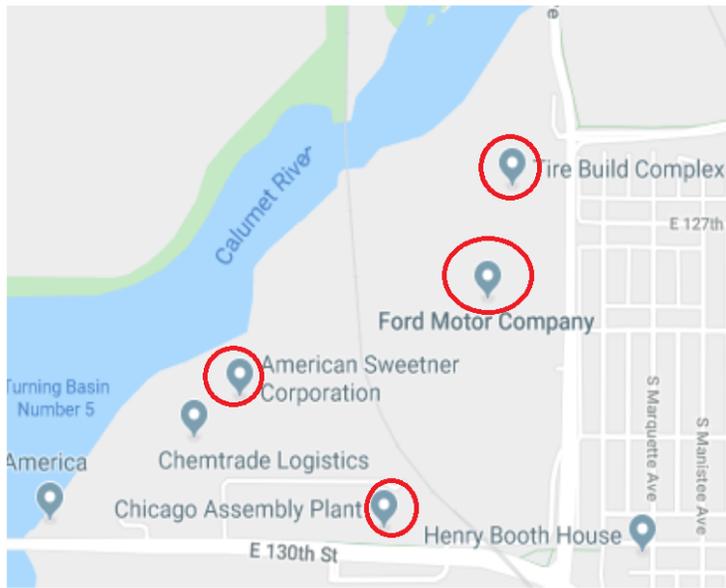
Image B: Other maps produced by Google Images zoomed in on the location of Dakkota Integrated Systems and its surroundings. Note that in this area, a number of factories have been built, including PECO Pallets, ZF Chassis Systems, and Ford Motor Company. This arrangement of maps is meant to indicate the deindustrialized status of Chicago, given the industrial plants have all been moved to the south suburbs, as well as the distance between residents of the South Side and the available secondary market of labor.

Appendix 2: Sample Intake Form

TEAMWORK ENGLEWOOD COMMUNITY REENTRY SUPPORT CENTER

Phone Intake   Walk-in

DATE _____   IDOC#_____

NAME_____

PHONE_____ & _____

ADDRESS_____

REFERRED BY_____

EMAIL _____

SERVICES:

__Education   __Employment/Job Training   __Transportation

__Housing   __Counseling/Mentorship   __Healthcare

__Clothing   __Computer Classes   __Legal Services

__ID   __Mental Health   __Substance Abuse

Other_____

Referred To: _____Date_____

7 Day Follow-Up:

_____

_____

Retention:

30 Days _____   60 Days_____   90Days_____

Image C: A scanned copy of the intake form used by Teamwork Englewood's Re-Entry staff to screen clients and identify their needs. Note the usage of IDOC# as a measure to determine the criminal background of a prospective client; a Re-Entry case manager looks up a client's number on the Illinois Department of Corrections database to discern what offenses they have committed and whether any partner employers would be willing to hire them. Additionally, note the construction of the "Services" section intended to capture the scope of clients' needs. Lastly note the "Retention" section is categorized into 7/30/60/90 days. TWE Re-Entry's current policy classifies a client who has retained their job for 90 days or more as "full-time."

Release of Information

I hereby authorize Teamwork Englewood to disclose in good faith any information they may have regarding my qualification and fitness for employment and/or employment training.

I will hold Teamwork Englewood, and any other person/s working on their behalf forwarding references, free of liability for the exchange of this information and any other reasonable and necessary information incident to the employment process.

Print_____

Signed_____   Date_____

Image D: A scanned copy of the back side of the intake form used by Teamwork Englewood's Re-Entry staff to screen clients and identify their needs. All clients who utilize Teamwork Englewood's services are asked to sign this agreement to give their consent to TWE case managers to process and handle their personal information such as their addresses and criminal background information. TWE's Re-Entry staff utilizes this information to inform their reports on client intake and referrals to the City of Chicago, who provides the organization with the funding needed to continue their operations. The consent of Teamwork Englewood's clients was necessary for me, as a staff member for the organization and researcher, to have permission to access and analyze their employment data.

Appendix 3: TWE Re-Entry Models

Client Intake

We host monthly job events for ex-offenders seeking work to inform prospective clients of the available job opportunities and screen whether they would be eligible for our services and what types of employment would be most suitable for them.

Client Employment

For clients who follow through with the job application process and are hired for the positions, we perform regular check-ins and monitor their progress to ensure the success of their re-entry experience.

Client Referral

After determining which clients are eligible for our services, we refer them to our partner agencies, most of whom are industrial plants based in the south suburbs. We prepare clients for the job application process, whether it be undergoing a rim test or attending an interview.
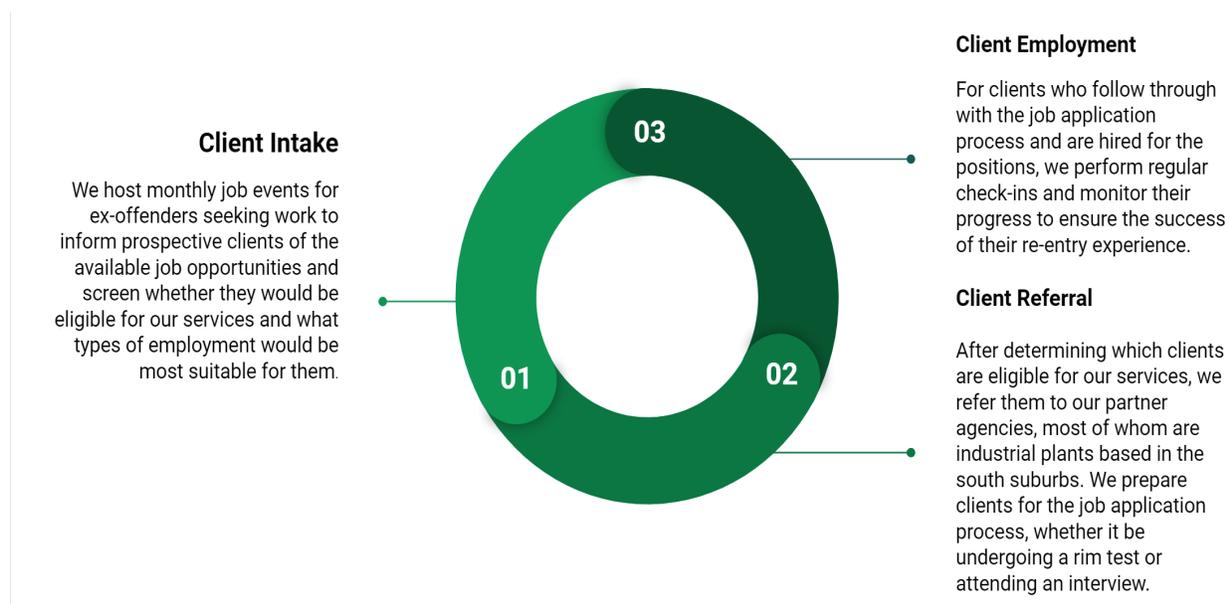
Image E: A graphic I produced to represent TWE Re-Entry's workforce development model, implemented under Mark Mitchell's direction as of 2017. Note the three stages of intake, referral, and employment. Intake takes place through receiving and screening clients to discern whether Teamwork Englewood's services can meet their needs. Referral takes place through Re-Entry case managers connecting clients to suitable job positions and guiding them through the process of applying. Employment takes place when clients are officially hired and onboarded to begin working.

Workforce Pipeline *How the Grant Can Help*

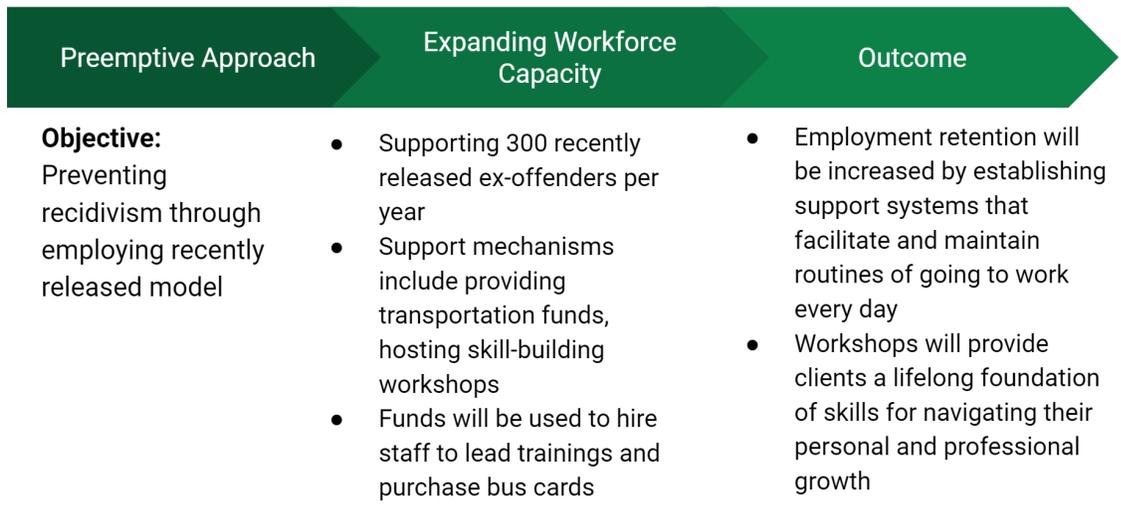| Preemptive Approach	Expanding Workforce Capacity	Outcome
Objective: Preventing recidivism through employing recently released model	- Supporting 300 recently released ex-offenders per year - Support mechanisms include providing transportation funds, hosting skill-building workshops - Funds will be used to hire staff to lead trainings and purchase bus cards	- Employment retention will be increased by establishing support systems that facilitate and maintain routines of going to work every day - Workshops will provide clients a lifelong foundation of skills for navigating their personal and professional growth

Image F: A graphic I produced to represent TWE Re-Entry's revised recidivism reduction model, implemented under Mark Mitchell's direction as of 2020. Note the objective of recidivism reduction is accomplished through the mobilization of employment strategies intended to provide further support to clients in maintaining their positions in the workplace through assistance with transportation and professional skill-building.

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