



## **Illinois Reentry Housing Demonstration Program**

Operated by the Illinois Justice Project, Safer Foundation and TASC (Treatment Alternatives for Safer Communities)

### *Process Evaluation & Recommendations*

*Evaluation Prepared by*

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## ***About the authors***

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Barbara Otto is a policy analyst with extensive expertise in Medicaid, Medicare, and Social Security as well as other public benefits programs for older adults, children, and adults with disabilities. She is often called upon to provide expertise and insights on health and populations with complex social needs with Congress, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, the Social Security Administration, and media outlets. She has been a technical author on important reports to Congress, including *Medicaid and CHIP Payment and Access Commission (MACPAC)*. President Barack Obama appointed her to the Advisory Group on Prevention, Health Promotion, and Integrative Public Health Council (2011-2017). She is an author of several publications including the *No Nonsense Guide Series* on Medicaid and the *Safety and Justice Challenge: The Frequently Impacted Strategy* (2023).

## Executive Summary

In response to an immediate crisis brought on by COVID-19, the Illinois Justice Project (ILJP), the Safer Foundation, and Treatment Alternatives for Safe Communities (TASC) received support from the Chicagoland philanthropic community to implement a Reentry Housing Demonstration Pilot (RHDP) from June 2020 through November 2022. The original goal was to provide housing and other support to 30 to 45 people over a 24-month period during COVID-19. The original goal was met and exceeded, with 122 individuals served through the RHDP during a 29-month period.

### *Barriers to Housing for Returning Residents*

Despite available funding to cover housing costs, program staff experienced obstacles to obtaining housing, including lack of affordable housing options in Chicago, resistance from landlords and property managers to rent to individuals with criminal records, time needed to cultivate relationships and trust between RHDP staff/participants and landlords, and concerns of landlords over the ability of individuals to maintain rent payments long-term.

### *Characteristics of population*

The characteristics of the population served through the RHDP were substantially different from those of “typical” individuals released from prison. The population served by RHDP were older, more likely to be Black, more likely to be female, more likely to have been in prison for a violent crime and spent considerably longer in prison than non-RHDP individuals released from prison during the same period.

### *Services delivered under the Reentry Housing Demonstration Pilot*

Program participants not only received assistance in paying rent and obtaining more stable housing but were also provided with an array of other supportive services, ranging from the provision of basic necessities (e.g., personal care items, cell phone, and transportation vouchers) to referrals and services to address employment needs as well as physical and mental health needs.

### *Impact of the Reentry Housing Demonstration Pilot*

Although program participants self-selected into this voluntary program and—as noted above—were demographically those for whom reentry is frequently more difficult and thus may not be directly comparable to others released from prison, it is encouraging that analyses of return-to-prison rates (i.e., recidivism) indicate RHPD participants had lower rates of recidivism than other individuals released during the project period, **roughly a third lower** than a comparison group that was released at a similar point in time. (21% vs. 32%, respectively.)

The experiences gained by ILJP, the Safer Foundation, and TASC in carrying out this pilot project and its outcomes can help inform IDOC’s increased interest in reentry planning and support. Further, the RHDP lessons learned could help IDOC determine the placement of Correctional Assessment Specialists (CASs) in parole offices to address the needs of individuals on Mandatory Supervised Release (MSR).

### ***Proposed Action Items to Leverage Lessons Learned by the RHDP***

While it was a small-scale pilot, the lessons learned by the RHDP could be easily translated into concrete action items for policy change.

### ***Opportunities for Systems Alignment & Strategic Investments***

The Reentry Housing Demonstration Project helped us identify opportunities to optimize federal, state, and local dollars to facilitate access to reentry services.

#### *Systems Alignment & Change*

- *Partner with HUD’s Continuum of Care (CoC) and Public Housing Authorities (PHA) to address barriers for returning residents to improve affordability of housing.*
  - Local PHA rules around people with records returning to family in public housing.
  - CoC’s and HUD’s definition of homelessness and how it serves as a barrier to rental assistance and permanent housing vouchers.
- *Partner with IL Department of Corrections (IDOC) to improve the connection between community level providers and Field Services activities around housing & supportive services prior to release from custody.*
  - Implement a housing needs assessment tool with IL Department of Corrections. This housing needs assessment tool was created in partnership with IDOC and the Corporation for Supportive Housing, but there are few dollars for implementation. Understanding housing needs will help IDOC work with IL Reentry Council to create direct pathways to targeted supportive services for returning residents plus housing.
  - Increase collaboration between the Correctional Assessment Specialists (CASs) and community level providers to pro-actively problem solve around housing instability of returning residents.
- *Eliminate barriers like “crime free housing” and “nuisance” ordinances and residency restrictions for returning residents.*
  - Local “crime-free housing” and “nuisance” ordinances:
    1. Require and encourage landlords to evict tenants based on alleged criminal or nuisance behavior.
    2. Classify any law enforcement or emergency contact as nuisance behavior, including service calls from people seeking police assistance.
    3. Require or encourage landlords to use criminal background checks, which can cause discrimination based on arrest [that don’t lead to convictions] and conviction records.
    4. Require or encourage landlords to evict entire households when one family member has an interaction with law enforcement or is convicted of a crime, which can result in families being torn apart and children being homeless.
  - Residency restrictions that limit where people required to register on the Sex Offender Registry can live in the community also served as a huge barrier to securing affordable housing.

### *Strategic Investments*

- *Increase and expand community-level reentry services and supports.*
  - Replicate and expand strategic investments by the IL Department of Healthcare & Family Services such as the Supportive Reentry Network Collaborative and the pending Justice Reentry Services under the Section 1115 Demonstration Waiver.
- *Invest in a housing continuum for returning residents.* Returning residents face multiple challenges accessing traditional housing services and supports. Illinois must promote a housing continuum that includes transitional housing in addition to permanent housing and home ownership.
  - Partner with the Illinois Housing Development Authority (IHDA) and state policymakers to create more affordable housing options and a housing continuum to meet the needs of returning residents across the state.
    - Facilitate investments for community-level providers to purchase and operate low-barrier housing for returning residents.
    - Facilitate strategic investments in permanent housing programs and home ownership initiatives.

The Reentry Housing Demonstration Pilot's (RHDP) evolution over the pilot period provides key insights to the critical role of braiding services between the housing and the social services sector, especially for returning residents with complex needs. The Illinois Reentry Council, convened and facilitated by the IL Justice Project, is using the findings from the RHDP to inform housing strategy for the group. Further, the IL Justice Project is also looking to the lessons learned in the pilot to help shape future recommendations on core components of community-based reentry services.

# Reentry Housing Demonstration Pilot

## ***Impetus and Introduction***

In the spring of 2020, as COVID was threatening people in congregate settings like prisons, the Illinois Justice Project, Safer Foundation (Safer), and Treatment Alternatives for Safe Communities (TASC) were concerned about the lack of housing and support services for those being released from the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) during this public health emergency. The impetus for the Reentry Housing Demonstration Program was two-fold: to address the immediate housing needs of individuals released from prison due to COVID-19; and document findings to have evidence to change policy and practices. The Reentry Housing Demonstration Program (RHDP) builds off the Illinois Justice Project (ILJP) and Metropolitan Planning Council's analyses of the significant challenges for returning residents to successfully navigate reentry from prisons to communities throughout Illinois. Those analyses found discrimination, combined with the shortage of deeply affordable housing, perpetuate the exclusion of formerly incarcerated people from the housing market. The resulting white paper, *Reentry Housing Issues in Illinois: The Current Situation, Challenges, and Possible Solutions* identified that the needs of returning residents are both varied and complex, and in addition to housing, an individual involved in the criminal-legal system also may need health care, substance abuse counseling, and job training. They may also struggle to navigate a complicated, patchwork system that would overwhelm anyone. At the same time, resources available at the state and local levels are fragmented and services lack coordination.

While the RHDP was born out of the crisis of COVID-19, it created an opportunity for the partners to access the critical resources needed to demonstrate that housing assistance combined with supportive services can improve reentry outcomes for people leaving IDOC. Loyola University's Center for Criminal Justice and Smart Policy Works LLC conducted a process evaluation of the implementation and service provision of the RHDP and examined short-term outcomes in terms of return to prison. This report provides an overview of the program implementation, the characteristics of those individuals served through the pilot program, and highlights what elements of the pilot worked well to stabilize returning residents and put them on a path of success. The evaluation also documented systemic and societal barriers posing challenges to reentry that can be addressed by policy and practice changes in the reentry system.

## ***Reentry and Housing: Challenges in Illinois***

Housing supply in Illinois is limited for all populations. Returning residents face unique challenges in securing housing. They face significant bias from private landlords and housing providers because they have a criminal record. In addition, there are four categories within the HUD definition of homelessness but returning residents do not fit "neatly" into any of these four categories.<sup>1</sup> Further, HUD's Homeless Categories 1 & 2 require documentation and certification that could potentially impact a returning resident's status with parole

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<sup>1</sup> HUD uses four categories to determine eligibility – Category 1: Literally Homeless; Category 2: At risk of homelessness; Category 3: Homeless Under other Federal Statutes; and Category 4: Fleeing/Attempting to Flee Domestic Violence. <https://www.hudexchange.info/homelessness-assistance/coc-esg-virtual-binders/coc-esg-homeless-eligibility/four-categories/>

requirements. HUD Secretary Marcia Fudge did release guidance to local Continuums of Care on how to interpret HUD's Category 2 (At Risk of Homelessness) to accommodate returning residents. The Illinois Justice Project and partners in the Illinois Reentry Council have been engaged with the Chicago Continuum of Care to explore this opportunity. <sup>2</sup>

In addition to the challenges with HUD rules and regulations, the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) has faced a challenge in finding appropriate housing arrangements for individuals who are required to register on the Sex Offender Registry, resulting in a large number of these individuals being held in IDOC as technical violators of Mandatory Supervised Release (MSR) for not having an approved host site. Not only are housing options for this population limited due to legal restrictions on where people with sex offense convictions can reside (e.g., within a certain number of feet from a school), but often landlords and family members are reluctant to have those who have to register on the Sex Offender Registry live in their property due to stigma.

COVID-19 also brought pressure on IDOC to reduce the prison population in order to mitigate the spread of the virus in crowded prisons across the state. Just before the on-set of COVID-19 (December 31, 2019), IDOC's population stood at 38,259, but the prison system was only designed to hold 27,778<sup>3</sup> individuals. Given the threat COVID-19 posed for those in congregate settings, IDOC exercised their authority to reduce the population using the limited options available, including medical furloughs, placement on electronic detention in the community,<sup>4</sup> and the utilization of a rarely used sentence credit called Earned Discretionary Sentence Credit (EDSC). Out of all of these options, the one used most extensively during the on-set of COVID-19 was EDSC. From March 2020 (the on-set of COVID-19) to December 2020, IDOC released 19 individuals on medical furlough, placed 155 people on electronic detention, but granted 2,259 individuals EDSC, thereby accelerating their release onto MSR.

EDSC provides the Director of IDOC with the authority to award individuals up to 180 days of EDSC if they qualify under Section 3-6-3(a)3 of the Illinois Code of Corrections. Individuals qualify for EDSC if they do not have convictions for specific types of violent crimes, do not have serious disciplinary incidents while in prison, and participate in rehabilitative programs while in prison. In the months leading up to the COVID-19 pandemic, less than 5% of those released from prison had been awarded EDSCs. However, starting in March 2020, the proportion of individuals released from IDOC receiving EDSC increased, reaching a peak of 35% in April 2020. As a result, the number of individuals released from prison onto MSR jumped 10%, from a monthly average of 1,642 between February 2019 and February 2020, to an average of 1,807 in March and April of 2020. The largest increase in exits from prison onto MSR during that period of time occurred among individuals sentenced to IDOC from outside of Cook County, with average monthly exits onto MSR jumping 26% between the February 2019-February 2020 period and the March-April 2020 period.

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<sup>2</sup> Secretary Fudge Outlines HUD Actions to Address Reentry Housing Needs and Increase Public Safety, <https://archives.hud.gov/news/2021/pr21-105.cfm>

<sup>3</sup> The design capacity was reported to the U.S. Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Statistics by IDOC for December 31, 2016, but has not reported a design capacity since that date.

<sup>4</sup> Electronic detention (ED) is different from electronic monitoring (EM). Those on ED are still considered to be inmates within IDOC, while those on EM have completed their prison sentence and are on Mandatory Supervised Release in the community.

Given the crowded conditions within IDOC and the need to safely reduce the prison population to mitigate the spread of COVID-19, primarily through the use of EDSC, the Reentry Housing Demonstration Pilot (RHDP) was developed to address these issues. The intent of the pilot was to test strategies to secure safe, stable housing and demonstrate how services and supports can align to promote successful reentry. With the support from a number of Chicago-area philanthropic foundations, the RHDP was developed in the spring of 2020.

The pilot program was designed to provide people leaving IDOC with up to 12 months of support through both rental assistance and supportive services, including:

- Housing
- Clothing/Food
- Telephones and technology (if needed)
- Access to state identification cards
- Connections to Medicaid, SNAP or social services, and
- Support to secure employment

The voluntary program was formally launched in June 2020. The initial design for the program relied on staff within IDOC's Correctional Centers to provide people being released from prisons across the state with contact information for TASC and the Safer Foundation and a description of the services available through the RHDP. As described below, for a variety of reasons, the recruitment of participants into the program shifted towards working directly with the community-level parole offices across the state to identify individuals in need of the support and services available through the RHDP. The Safer Foundation and TASC hired case managers to work with the people on MSR who contacted them. The original plan was for TASC to provide 10 to 15 slots for participants across Illinois outside of the Chicago area and Safer to provide 20 to 30 slots across Chicago over a six-month period. Thus, the RHDP was originally envisioned as a six-month project that would serve a total of 30 to 45 people, depending on the duration of their housing needs. While the ILJP originally envisioned this as a short-term intervention, the positive response from funders enabled the partners to turn it into a 29 month "pilot" to explore impact of targeted housing plus services.

Smart Policy Works conducted qualitative interviews with six individuals who volunteered to share their experience with the RHDP. Individuals who engaged in interviews received gift cards of \$50.00 for their time. Participants were asked a series of questions related to their living situation prior to their incarceration, along with questions related to their health, behavioral health, and other supportive services such as education, employment, and skill training needs. The interviews were designed to illustrate the reentry challenges experienced by returning residents. Loyola's Center for Criminal Justice obtained and analyzed detailed case-level data for program participants and combined that with other data available from IDOC. These data and analyses allowed for a description of the RHDP participant characteristics and needs, and how those were similar to, or different from, the larger cohort of individuals released from prison during the same time period who did not participate in the RHDP.



# RHDP Program Participant Characteristics and Outcomes

## ***Recruitment & Enrollment in RHDP***

From its inception in June 2020 through November 2022, roughly 150 individuals had been *referred* to the RHDP, and of these, 122 unique individuals were *enrolled* in the program and provided with housing support and/or other forms of assistance to aid their reentry. As mentioned previously, the original goal of the project was to provide housing support and assistance to 30 to 45 individuals within six months. Due to the positive response from philanthropy, the original vision was expanded exceeding the original goal of people the RHDP was intended to serve, and thus the project ultimately exceeded this goal in the number of individuals it intended to serve.

## ***Pilot Recruitment and Operations***

An early challenge for the program was recruitment – individuals were provided a flyer on the program and related services prior to release, but project staff were unable to conduct “in-reach” with prospective participants within the facilities due to COVID-19 restrictions. At the end of 2020, the first six months of the RHDP, there were a total of 12 participants enrolled in the program, but by the end of June 2021 (the first 12 months of the project), the cumulative number of participants enrolled and provided housing support/assistance had reached a total of 31 (Figure 2). By the end of 2021 (after the first 18 months of the project), the cumulative number of individuals enrolled in the RHDP totaled 43. In early 2022, enrollment in the RHDP dramatically increased – the result of both the evolution of recruitment strategies as well as the Safer Foundation securing a property where they were able to directly provide housing units.

By the end of the project period (November 2022, or 29 months after the RHDP was initiated), the cumulative total number of participants enrolled reached 122, with 97 individuals served by the Safer Foundation and 24 individuals served by TASC (1 individual was served by both TASC and Safer due to the client moving). Thus, out of the 122 individuals served during the project period, roughly two-thirds (79 of the 122, or 65%) were enrolled during the final 11 months of the project.

It was also recognized early on by project staff and IDOC that in addition to housing being a challenge for *soon-to-be-released* individuals, often individuals who had *already been released* onto MSR found themselves in situations where their initial housing arrangements became untenable—either due to family members no longer able to support the person to reside with them, or the individual themselves recognizing the environment not being conducive to their successful reentry. With this desire to meet the needs of those already on MSR whose housing situation had deteriorated, the RHDP staff shifted to making parole agents aware of the services available through the program so that they could let individuals on their caseload know of this housing option. To facilitate this communication, the project brought on board a part-time staff member who had previously worked in IDOC’s Parole Division to facilitate communication between the RHDP staff and parole agents. However, given that the loss of one’s housing can be sufficient grounds for violation one’s MSR conditions, it is possible that individuals on MSR might be reluctant to reach out to their parole agent to communicate housing issues out of fear that it might result in a violation of MSR.

One option that was also explored during the pilot project and remains a potentially valuable avenue for these types of supportive services being made available to individuals on MSR, was to use the newly created positions of Correctional Assessment Specialists (CASs) within parole offices as a conduit. CASs are staff with graduate-level credentials in social work, psychology and other clinically oriented fields, who are in place to assess the needs of those on MSR and to make appropriate referrals for services and support. These staff are not parole agents and are not involved in the supervision of those on MSR. As a result, these staff are potentially much better positioned to identify individuals who have housing issues that could interfere with their successful reentry, particularly at an earlier stage than when the individual loses their housing completely.

### ***Housing Challenges***

Despite the RHDP having funding available to cover the costs of housing, program staff still reported significant challenges in locating housing and landlords willing to lease units to people with criminal-legal system involvement. Staff reported a range of obstacles that returning residents face, including systemic challenges like local “crime-free housing” and “nuisance” ordinances, and banishment laws that limit where people subject to the Sex Offender Registry can live. According to the project staff, more than one landlord was eager to accept the tenant while they were in the demonstration program but threatened eviction near the end of the 12-month subsidy because they assumed the individual wouldn’t be able to sustain the rent. Safer and TASC staff also identified other forms of housing discrimination impacting returning residents that also plague other low-income Illinoisans, including:

- Some properties that were offered to returning residents were unhealthy and unsafe, including a rental unit with a bat infestation;
- Landlords who appeared eager to rent until learning the potential tenant has a record, or in one case, the potential tenant was a woman<sup>5</sup>, and then backtracked claiming they have no available units; and
- Affordability and accessibility of housing is especially challenging for returning residents who are essentially starting over – even though most were able to secure jobs paying between \$12-\$15/hour, they were still “rent poor”, having to spend more than half of their annual income on rent.

The program team also identified that many of the individuals enrolled in the demonstration program experienced housing instability *prior to* their incarceration. Of the participants enrolled in the program, many reported during program intake that they were homeless prior to their most recent incarceration<sup>6</sup>, and of those that did have housing, in most instances the individual’s name was not on the lease. In addition, during qualitative interviews with individuals returning to Chicago or Cook County, many reported living situations where they lived “doubled up” or were “couch surfing” with relatives or with friends.

Smart Policy Works conducted qualitative interviews with six individuals who volunteered to share their experience with the Reentry Housing Demonstration Program. Of the six individuals

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<sup>5</sup> Program staff reported the landlord was open to renting to men with a criminal record but withdrew their interest when they realized the prospective tenant was a woman with a record.

<sup>6</sup> The RHDP requested that both Safer and TASC include language related to the individual’s living arrangements prior to incarceration as a part of their initial screen for eligibility for the intervention.

interviewed, three of the six had living arrangements prior to their incarceration where they either lived in their own home with their name on the lease or the mortgage; two were living “doubled up” in a shared living arrangement where they didn’t pay rent; and one was homeless due to their severe mental illness. Four of the six interviewed were released from IDOC to live with family; one returned to the home they owned with family, and another was released to a homeless shelter after serving a 30-year sentence. Thus, while they had access to some type of housing prior to incarceration, it was not stable or sustainable long-term.

### ***Description of the Intervention***

The Reentry Housing Demonstration Program (RHDP) was a voluntary program that combined both rental subsidies and supportive services. At the outset, the objective was to test what kind of supports returning residents needed to access and *sustain* housing. The design anticipated providing both rental subsidies and assistance navigating supportive services in the community. Over the course of the project, ILJP, Safer and TASC realized it would be difficult to secure housing without at least 12 months of rental support, so the program extended rental supports from six to twelve months. Further, both Safer and TASC identified participants that needed more intensive support services in addition to housing. The support services included assistance applying for public benefits (e.g., Medicaid), accessing behavioral health care, developing financial literacy, and life-skills supports since many experienced significant challenges adjusting to life after incarceration. These services were particularly critical given the relatively long periods of time program participants had spent in prison prior to their release (see later description of this issue).

The RHDP was designed so that Safer Foundation would serve program participants returning to Cook County, while TASC would serve individuals returning to the rest of Illinois outside of Cook County. A core objective of the RHDP was for Safer and TASC to prepare enrolled participants to take over rent at the end of the program. Both providers employed dedicated caseworkers to provide support and assistance to participants. As mentioned previously, over the full period of the RHDP (June 2020 to November 2022) 122 individuals were served.

Each partner organization approached the RHDP participant’s needs with person-centered services: TASC dedicated caseworkers operating as “reentry case managers” who helped manage the participant’s transition by connecting them with housing and support services; Safer employed a dedicated “housing navigator” to manage the client’s housing transition needs and leveraged an existing cadre of “reentry navigators” to support the client in accessing support services. The role of these “coordinated reentry support roles” either through “*reentry navigators*” or “*reentry case managers*” is emerging as a crucial element of successful reentry. Further, as a result of the stigma toward returning residents, both Safer and TASC identified the need for dedicated personnel to facilitate relationship building with landlords and to develop a pipeline of housing options for returning residents.

### ***Housing and Challenges Identified by the Demonstration Project***

Safer and TASC experienced different challenges securing housing due to the geographic areas they were covering. TASC, working outside Cook County, was able to connect with landlords offering affordable rooms or units for lease. However, given that TASC was trying to serve participants across the state, often their arrangements with individual landlords were to serve

one individual participant. For example, the 24 participants served by TASC were from more than a dozen different counties across the state.

Safer, working within Cook County, had significant challenges finding *deeply affordable*<sup>7</sup> housing options for participants. Ultimately, Safer was able to leverage master lease arrangements<sup>8</sup> with existing housing providers in Chicago to guarantee access to housing units and to address housing provider's concerns about having the staffing and expertise to meet the needs of returning residents.

Both Safer and TASC experienced resistance from landlords and property managers around renting to returning residents. TASC observed particular resistance to tenants with felony convictions. Both providers experienced low awareness among landlords and property managers of the Just Housing Amendment (the Cook County ordinance prohibiting housing discrimination based on criminal backgrounds) and the Illinois Human Rights Act (protecting against discrimination in real estate transactions due to a criminal record). When the program was initially designed to pay six months of rent, landlords were concerned about the economic stability of the clients after the end of the program. The extension of the subsidy from 6 to 12 months was crucial to increasing landlord and property manager confidence in the program and its clients.

Dedicated supportive services offered by both Safer and TASC improved landlord confidence in their tenants' reliability. Both said they encountered landlords in the program who stated they were interested in continuing to rent to returning residents after their experiences interacting and collaborating with the RHDP and the participants. TASC had two landlords' express interest in housing returning residents, regardless of subsidy, after positive experiences with program participants. Although the majority of program clients did not receive complaints from landlords or property managers, TASC had one landlord invoke a Crime-Free ordinance<sup>9</sup> to evict a client.

In addition, during the RHDP period, Safer was able to raise capital to purchase their own building to house returning residents, including the RHDP participants. In an effort to increase the sustainable impact of this pilot, TASC is currently building a network of landlords open to housing returning residents. TASC is also focused on educating landlords on rental practices that create barriers that violate client rights, and clearing up misinterpretations of protective ordinances, policies, or laws.

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<sup>7</sup> Deeply affordable is defined as 30% of the Average Median Income or below. In 2023, that is an annual income of less than \$23,109 for an individual.

<sup>8</sup> A master lease is an agreement between a lessor and lessee who leases the property, sublets to tenants, and covers operating expenses

<sup>9</sup> Crime-free ordinances punish landlords when police are called too often to an address. They encourage landlords to evict "problematic" tenants to keep the neighborhood "crime free", or else levy fines upon the landlord. The cause for the police visit is irrelevant to crime-free ordinances.

### ***RHDP Rental Support by Housing Type***

While both Safer and TASC provided rental subsidies for up to 12 months, the average rental support period was 8.5 months in Chicago-Cook and 9 months outside of Cook County. In Chicago-Cook County, Safer was able to place participants in Single Room Occupancy (SRO) units in addition to studio apartments and one-two bedroom units. TASC placed the majority of participants in one-bedroom units, and in a couple of cases was able to assist clients who were able to return to their previously existing (prior to incarceration) housing arrangements with mortgage or rental assistance. TASC also worked to transition their participants into self-sufficiency by decreasing the subsidy over time to help participants assume responsibility for the full rent at the end of the program period.

	<b>Single Room Occupancy – Studio Apartments</b>	<b>Units with 1-3 bedrooms*</b>	<b>Mortgage Assistance</b>
<b>Chicago-Cook County</b>	18	18	0
<b>Outside of Cook County</b>		11	3

\*Safer had access to two 3-bedroom units that were used by women in the pilot.

Safer’s average monthly participant rental subsidy cost was \$750; TASC’s average rental subsidy cost was \$670. Broken down by type, Safer pays a monthly average of \$900 for one-bedroom units and \$650 for SROs and studio apartments. TASC had one outlier of \$1400 rent, but they assume that is due to the client’s sex offense conviction.

At the end of the pilot, Safer recorded four participants that were able to move on to other housing without a rental subsidy; 19 were still living in the unit they accessed under the pilot and are paying the full rent due to employment; and eight are still living in the unit and are receiving a subsidy/rental assistance through other means.

### ***RHDP Supportive Services***

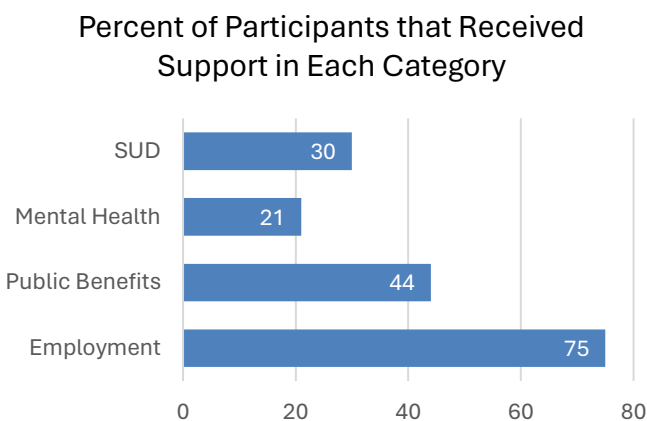
Safer and TASC were given discretion as to what services they provided to program participants, but both organizations built their services approach for the RHDP based on their existing programs and services.

Safer leveraged RHDP dollars to add a Housing Navigator to their team, provided each program participant with a cell phone if needed (thanks to a donation from AT&T), and financial support for utility bills and other housing-related costs (application fees, appliance maintenance, etc.). Safer also utilized the RHDP dollars to assist with rental application costs and supported participants with employment, accessing health and behavioral health services, and financial literacy courses focused on budgeting. The Safer Reentry Navigators conducted biopsychosocial assessments to create custom services plans that connected participants to community supports such as community food pantries, furniture banks, and support groups. Safer monitored participant’s preparedness to transition out of the program through these individualized service plans, which includes both financial and housing stability components.

While in the program, Reentry Navigators met monthly with participants to review progress towards individual goals. Safer Reentry Navigators remain in contact with clients for a minimum of 3 months after the end of a client’s rental subsidies.

TASC Reentry Case Managers provided system navigation support for Medicaid, SNAP, and behavioral health access. In addition to securing housing, TASC Reentry Case Managers worked with participants on “housing stabilization,” which included developing housing budgets to sustain rent with long-term housing and employment goals. TASC also organized support and educational groups for participants to discuss the challenges associated with reentry and recovery, as well as housing. They directed program participants to technology assistance, with a focus on ensuring access to telehealth services. Their work to connect participants with community support included developing a statewide resource directory for services like job training, substance abuse disorder treatment, food pantries, furniture banks, and clothing sources. Similar to Safer, the TASC Reentry Case Managers developed transition plans and budgetary goals with participants before they exited the program. During the final month, when TASC and the participant split rent responsibility, the Reentry Case Manager reevaluated which additional wraparound services may benefit the client and ensured their ongoing access to those services.

**RHDP Participant Health, Behavioral Health & Services**



Of 122 individuals served:

- 75% received help with Employment
- 44% received help accessing Public Benefits
- 21% received help with Mental Health
- 30% received help with substance use disorder (SUD)

Of the 122 participants served between June of 2020 and November of 2022, 75% secured employment. Safer Foundation served 97 participants during the RHDP period: 17 had a mental health need (17/97=18%); 12 of these 17 (71%) were referred and received services; 25 were indicated to have SUD need (25/97=26%); 12 of these 25 were referred to and received services; 30 were assisted with enrollment in Medicaid and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Of those served by Safer, six had physical medical needs; and one had a cognitive disability and need for services.

TASC served 24 participants during the RHDP period: 23 participants enrolled in Medicaid, and 21 enrolled in SNAP – 2 did not meet qualifications and 1 refused to reapply after claiming he did not meet qualifications. 12 of the TASC’s 24 participants (50%) received behavioral health services; and 9 participants (38%) received mental health services. TASC also worked with one

individual on helping reinstate Supplemental Security Income (SSI) disability benefits for a participant with severe mental illness.

### **Characteristics of Reentry Housing Demonstration Project Participants**

RHDP participants were analyzed through demographic (age, race, sex), conviction offense (i.e., what offense were individuals originally sentenced to prison for), time incarcerated prior to enrollment in the RHDP, and where in Illinois the individuals were under MSR supervision. The RHDP participants were compared to the larger cohort of individuals released from prison during the period of the demonstration program.

**Table 1: Comparison of RHDP Participant Characteristics to Larger Cohort of Individuals Released from Prison, 2020 through 2022**

	Cook County		Rest of Illinois	
	RHDP/Safer Participants	Overall IDOC Exits from Cook County	RHDP/TASC Participants	Overall IDOC Exits from Illinois Outside Cook County
<b>Race</b>				
White	10.2%	9.0%	28.6%	54.2%
Black	85.2%	74.7%	61.9%	36.9%
Hispanic	4.5%	15.0%	9.5%	7.9%
Other	0.0%	1.3%	0.0%	1.0%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
<b>Sex</b>				
Male	90.9%	95.8%	85.7%	89.8%
Female	9.1%	4.1%	14.3%	10.2%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
<b>Age</b>				
Under 30	18.2%	36.0%	14.3%	28.5%
30 and older	81.8%	64.0%	85.7%	71.5%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
<b>Average Age</b>	43.6 yrs old	36.8 yrs old	41.9 yrs old	37.8 yrs old

When comparing the race, sex, and age of those being served by the RHDP to the larger pool of individuals leaving prison during the implementation period (2020 through 2022), several notable differences were evident (Table 1). In both Safer and TASC’s programs, a larger proportion of the pilot program participants were Black than the overall exits from prison to those parts of the state. Among the individuals returning to Cook County served by the Safer Foundation, 85% were Black, compared to Black people accounting for 75% of non-RHDP participants exiting prison back to Cook County. Similarly, among those returning to Illinois outside of Cook County and served by TASC, 62% were Black, compared to Black people accounting for 37% of the overall exits from prison back to the rest of Illinois (Table 1).

A similar pattern was evident when comparing the sex of participants to the broader cohorts of those released from prison: 9% of people served in Cook County by Safer were female

compared to 4% of all returning residents to Cook County over that period; and 14% of pilot participants served by TASC were female compared to 10% of those released from prison to the rest of Illinois (Table 1).

Finally, participants in the pilot program also tended to be older than those released from prison during the program period. Among the participants served by Safer in Cook County, the average age was 44 years old, compared to an average age of 37 among all of those released from prison back to Cook County. Similarly, the participants served by TASC in the rest of Illinois had an average age of 42, compared to an average age of 38 among all people released from prison to the rest of Illinois. Looked at another way, more than 80% of the participants served by Safer and TASC were 30 or older, compared to roughly 70% of individuals released from prison during the period when the program was being implemented (Table 1).

**Table 2: Comparison of RHDP Participant Characteristics to Larger Cohort of Individuals Released from Prison, 2020 through 2022**

<b>Original Crime Type</b>	<b>Cook County</b>		<b>Rest of Illinois</b>	
	<b>RHDP/Safer Participants</b>	<b>Overall IDOC Exits from Cook County</b>	<b>RHDP/TASC Participants</b>	<b>Overall IDOC Exits from Illinois Outside Cook County</b>
Violent	48.9%	35.4%	52.4%	32.9%
Illegal Possession of a Firearm	13.6%	32.1%	14.2%	12.8%
Other	37.5%	32.5%	33.3%	54.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
<b>Crime Class</b>				
<b>Original Prison Sentence</b>				
Murder, Class X or 1	48.9%	29.7%	47.6%	27.1%
Class 2, 3, or 4	51.1%	70.3%	52.4%	72.9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
<b>Average Years Incarcerated *</b>	9.43 years	4.03 years	5.83 years	3.0 years

*\*Includes time spent in jail pretrial.*

The nature of the conviction offense resulting in an individual’s sentence to prison, and the length of time incarcerated, were also compared between RHDP participants and all people released from prison during the program period. Among the participants served by Safer in Cook County, a much larger share had been originally in prison for a violent crime than was evident among the overall cohort released from prison during program implementation: 49% of the pilot program participants in Cook County had been in prison for a violent crime, while 30% of all people released from prison back to Cook County had originally been sentenced to prison for a violent crime. Similarly, among the people served by TASC in the rest of Illinois, roughly



52% had been in prison for a violent crime, compared to 33% of the broader group of individuals released from prison back to the rest of Illinois (Table 2).

Related to the nature of the charges, in both programs, the clients served tended to have been originally sentenced to prison on more serious felony charges than the larger group of individuals released from prison during the project period. For example, among Safer clients, 49% had been sentenced to IDOC on a Murder, Class X or Class 1 felony (Table 2). By comparison, of all the exits from prison back to Cook County (where the Safer program was operating), only 30% of all exits from prison during the same time period had been sentenced to prison for these higher-level offenses. A similar pattern was seen among the clients served by TASC in Illinois outside of Cook County. Among the TASC clients, 48% had been originally sentenced to IDOC on a Murder, Class X or Class 1 felony, compared to 27% for all exits during the same period to the rest of Illinois (Table 2).

As a result of being originally sentenced to prison for more serious felony charges that often included a violent offense, the length of time individuals served by the RHDP had spent in prison was considerably longer than the typical person released from prison in Illinois (Table 2). For example, among the participants served by the Safer Foundation program in Cook County, the average time incarcerated before their release was 9.4 years, compared to an overall average of 4 years among the typical individual released from prison back to Cook County. Although the length of time served in prison by the clients enrolled by TASC outside of Cook County were not as long, on average, they were still longer than the typical person released from prison. Specifically, the average time served among those in the TASC program was 5.8 years, compared to 3 years among all people released from prison back to communities in Illinois outside of Cook County.

Thus, it appears the RHDP served individuals who were more likely in need of housing support: they skewed considerably older, and served much longer in prison, than the typical person released from prison during the same time period and back to the same communities. Given the length of time incarcerated, it is likely that these individuals have weaker connections and ties to their communities, families, and a support network than individuals whose length of incarceration was of a shorter duration. Further, the offenses for which the RHDP were originally sentenced to prison were more likely to be for violent crimes and sex offenses, again, a characteristic seen as causing challenges in securing housing post-release.

In addition, the information collected by Safer & TASC helps fully describe the circumstances and needs of the participants served. For example, program intake included questions about needs beyond housing, including those related to employment, physical and mental health, and substance use treatment. A higher proportion of clients served by Safer had employment needs than those served by TASC (60% versus 25%). This is understandable, as one of the primary services provided by the Safer Foundation is assisting returning citizens with obtaining employment. On the other hand, a larger portion of those individuals served by TASC were identified as in need of services related to substance use and mental health, aligning with their overall mission and work. Roughly 50% of those served by TASC were identified as in need of assistance related to substance use, compared to 26% of the clients served by Safer. Similarly, roughly 55% of the TASC clients were identified as having mental health needs, compared to less than 20% of those served by Safer. Roughly one-quarter of the clients served by both TASC and Safer were identified as having physical health needs.

## ***Examining Recidivism of Program Participants***

One of the most frequently used measures of outcomes for programs that serve justice-involved populations is recidivism, measured as either arrests subsequent to release from prison or being readmitted to prison. As a point of reference, during the period from 2013 to 2018, roughly 39% to 44% of all people released from prison in Illinois returned to prison within 3 years, the standard follow-up period that has been used by IDOC to measure recidivism. As described earlier, a significant portion of people returning to prison was due to MSR violations, including losing or failing to secure housing. However, because the RHDP did not involve random assignment, served a relatively small number of self-selecting participants, and most have not been out of prison very long, there are significant limitations to performing recidivism analyses and comparing the outcomes to other groups of individuals. Part of this stems from the fact that the program served individuals who sought out the assistance of the RHDP, and thus, is a unique self-selected group of participants. Further, the average length of time between when individuals enrolled in the program were released from prison and December 31, 2022, when recidivism was checked, was only 19 months. Still, examining the degree to which program participants returned to prison is an important consideration<sup>10</sup>. Overall, of the RHDP participants tracked for recidivism during the average of 19 months post-release, 21.8% were returned to prison by December 31, 2022. For comparison's sake, of *all* those released from IDOC between 2013 and 2018, between 35% and 38% were returned to prison *within 2 years*<sup>11</sup>. Analyses by Loyola's Center for Criminal Justice of those released from IDOC during 2020 through 2022 found that roughly 32% of individuals were returned to prison by December 31, 2022, and on average these individuals were at risk of recidivism for 20.6 months<sup>12</sup>. Again, because program participants volunteered for participation in the program, and thus represents a unique, self-selected small group of people released from prison, it cannot be concluded that the program in and of itself produced the lower rate of recidivism. Still, the finding of a lower recidivism rate among program participants is encouraging.

## **Next Steps & Recommendations**

While the Reentry Housing Demonstration Program (RHDP) was designed to assist returning residents during the COVID-19 pandemic, there is broad consensus that the experiences and lessons learned provide insight into how the reentry process can be improved. The RHDP highlights the need to provide transitional and permanent housing assistance to returning residents that extend well beyond the immediate time period following release. Most of the

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<sup>10</sup> To examine recidivism, Loyola was able to match 110 of the 122 individuals participating in the RHDP to IDOC's data. For these 110 individuals, it was determined if they were readmitted to prison in Illinois after they had been enrolled in the RHDP.

<sup>11</sup> See <https://idoc.illinois.gov/content/dam/soi/en/web/idoc/reportsandstatistics/documents/fy21-online-recidivism-table.pdf> for IDOC's official measures of recidivism during the 2013 to 2018 time period.

<sup>12</sup> To create a more contemporary comparison for recidivism, analyses were also performed to determine what percent of individuals released during the same time period as the program participants (i.e., 2020 to 2022) were returned to prison by December 31, 2022. Specifically, all individuals released from IDOC during the program period that were not included in the project were tracked to determine the rate at which they were returned to prison. A process was used to only select unique individuals, using their most first release date if they had multiple release dates between 2020 and 2022. For this cohort, the average time between their exit from IDOC and when the recidivism was checked (December 31, 2022) was 20.6 months. During this period, there were 44,959 unique individuals released from prison, and 32% of them were returned to prison following their release by December 31, 2022.

RHDP participants obtained housing immediately following release from prison, but it was after this initial period of reentry that housing “instability” issues arose. The recognition of the need to identify housing issues *throughout* the course of an individual’s reentry process is critical, and it is possible with the establishment of non-parole agent positions within each of the parole offices in Illinois (i.e., the Correctional Assessment Specialists, or CASs) that these problems with unstable or unsafe housing could be more quickly identified and addressed. Still, even with better identification of individuals who have returned from prison and are experiencing housing problems, the need for more affordable, accessible, and readily available housing remains. Further, the RHDP also highlighted how housing is not the only support and service that individuals returning from prison need, particularly people who spent long periods of time away from family and pro-social support systems. Thus, in addition to housing, there is an opportunity and need to expand services and supports to returning residents. Many individuals released from prison struggle with obtaining basic necessities (e.g., food, personal care products, a cell phone, transportation), but also face challenges navigating the myriad of requirements related to their MSR supervision and mandates, need help with obtaining employment, and/or need assistance in accessing physical and behavioral health services.

### ***Proposed Action Items to Leverage Lessons Learned by the RHDP***

While it was a small-scale pilot, the lessons learned by the RHDP could be easily translated into concrete action items for policy change.

### **Opportunities for Systems Alignment & Strategic Investments**

The Reentry Housing Demonstration Project helped us identify opportunities to optimize federal, state, and local dollars to facilitate access to reentry services.

#### *Systems Alignment & Change*

- *Partner with HUD’s Continuum of Care (CoC) and Public Housing Authorities (PHA) to address barriers for returning residents to improve affordability of housing.*
  - Local PHA rules around people with records returning to family in public housing.
  - CoC’s and HUD definition of homelessness and how it serves as a barrier to rental assistance and permanent housing vouchers.
- *Partner with IL Department of Corrections (IDOC) to improve the connection between community level providers and Field Services activities around housing & supportive services prior to release from custody.*
  - Implement a housing needs assessment tool with IL Department of Corrections. This housing needs assessment tool was created in partnership with IDOC and the Corporation for Supportive Housing, but there are few dollars for implementation. Understanding housing needs will help IDOC work with IL Reentry Council to create direct pathways to targeted supportive services for returning residents plus housing.
  - Increase collaboration between the Correctional Assessment Specialists (CAS) and community level providers to pro-actively problem solve around housing instability of returning residents.
- *Eliminate barriers like “crime free housing” and “nuisance” ordinances and residency restrictions for returning residents.*

- Local “crime-free housing” and “nuisance” ordinances:
  1. Require and encourage landlords to evict tenants based on alleged criminal or nuisance behavior.
  2. Classify any law enforcement or emergency contact as nuisance behavior, including service calls from people seeking police assistance.
  3. Require or encourage landlords to use criminal background checks, which can cause discrimination based on arrest [that don’t lead to convictions] and conviction records.
  4. Require or encourage landlords to evict entire households when one family member has an interaction with law enforcement or is convicted of a crime, which can result in families being torn apart and children being homeless.
- Residency restrictions that limit where people subject to the Sex Offender Registry can live in the community also served as a huge barrier to securing affordable housing.

### *Strategic Investments*

- *Increase and expand community-level reentry services and supports.*
  - Replicate and expand strategic investments by the IL Department of Healthcare & Family Services such as the Supportive Reentry Network Collaborative and the pending Justice Reentry Services under the Section 1115 Demonstration Waiver.
- *Invest in a housing continuum for returning residents.* Returning residents face multiple challenges accessing traditional housing services and supports. We promote a housing continuum that includes transitional housing in addition to permanent housing and home ownership.
  - Partner with Illinois Housing Development Authority (IHDA) and state policymakers to create more affordable housing options and a housing continuum to meet the needs of returning residents across the state.
    - Facilitate investments for community-level providers to purchase and operate low-barrier housing for returning residents.
    - Facilitate strategic investments in permanent housing programs and home ownership initiatives.

### **Next Steps**

What started as an initiative to address the immediate housing crisis for returning residents during COVID-19, the Reentry Housing Demonstration Pilot’s (RHDP) evolution over the pilot period provides key insights to the critical role of braiding services between the housing and the social services sector, especially for those returning residents with complex needs returning from carceral settings. The Illinois Reentry Council, convened and facilitated by the IL Justice Project, is using the findings from the RHDP to inform housing strategy for the group. Further, the IL Justice Project is also looking to the lessons learned in the pilot to help shape future recommendations on core components of community-based reentry services.

## **About the Illinois Justice Project**

ILJP engages in criminal legal system reform efforts that promote policies that will make our communities safer and reduce recidivism among youths and adults. ILJP works at the local, regional, and state levels in partnership with stakeholders from underserved communities, with an emphasis on addressing racial inequities and poverty. This work is carried out through the development, advocacy, implementation, and monitoring of policies, programs, and practices.

## **About Safer Foundation**

At the very core of Safer Foundation is the belief in an unobstructed road to reentry. From their start in 1972, its mission has been to support, through a full spectrum of services, policy & advocacy, the efforts of people with arrest & conviction records to become employed, law-abiding members of the community, and, as a result, reduce recidivism.

## **About TASC**

TASC is committed to building a healthier, safer, and more just society. TASC offers specialized case management for people with substance use and mental health issues so they can get and stay healthy. TASC connects people who work within systems – healthcare, human services, law enforcement, justice – to practice effective strategies that improve health outcomes.