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Analysis of the Housing Gaps for the Reentry Community in Milwaukee County, 2021

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MSP 781: Innovation, Evaluation, and Adaptive Management

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Executive Summary

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Masters of Sustainable Peacebuilding, Class of 2022

Background

This project was tasked as a class assignment for MSP 781: Innovation, Evaluation, and Adaptive Management, a core course of the Master of Sustainable Peacebuilding program within the College of Nursing at University of Wisconsin- Milwaukee. The identification and analysis of housing gaps was requested by Data You Can Use on behalf of Project RETURN. Data You Can Use is a nonprofit in Milwaukee, WI that helps people access data and make it useful in improving community conditions. Project RETURN (Returning Ex-incarcerated People To Urban Realities and Neighborhoods) is a nonprofit that helps individuals make a positive, permanent return to community, family and friends through employment, housing, mental health, counseling, support groups and advocacy services. The purpose of this project is to identify the existing housing resources available for individuals returning from incarceration and to note gaps in process and resources in Milwaukee County, Wisconsin. Our primary goal is to provide in-depth analysis of the environment in order to aid Project RETURN in compiling compelling data for it's future grant proposals and advocacy efforts. We completed this evaluation through numerous hours of desk research using internet and university resources as well as speaking with and listening to individuals with lived experiences with incarceration and housing services. Time and accessibility constraints associated with the length of the class and the COVID-19 pandemic hindered any stakeholder engagement through interviews or surveys. Our project will be just one part of a larger evaluation done by Data You Can Use.

Key Findings

For this evaluation project, we completed a literature review and focused on three areas inhibiting sustainable housing for formerly incarcerated individuals: landlord bias, housing vouchers, and policies and prejudice regarding registrants. Our overall key findings focus on the various gaps present in the housing community including a lack of resources, community prejudices, and governmental and policy inadequacies. These gaps increase the challenges formerly incarcerated individuals face in acquiring housing and ultimately lead to homelessness, which increases the likelihood of reincarceration and recidivism.

Recommendations

The many gaps present in the current housing system for formerly incarcerated individuals present opportunities for growth and impactful change. These areas of improvement range from policy change and governmental restructuring within the DOC to accommodations within the affordable housing market and social justice reform. However, there are many additional factors to consider that our project did not cover such as: mental health, transportation, employment/job readiness, health insurance and adequate identification. All of these factors contribute to the challenges formerly incarcerated individuals face to maintain housing and move past society-imposed negative stereotypes.

Glossary

Agent -- The person supervising someone released from jail or prison

“Ban the Box” -- A campaign to remove questions regarding criminal record from any applications

Community Supervision -- A set of programs that provide for the supervision of individuals convicted of crimes in their local community versus placing them in a secure correctional facility

DOC -- Department of Corrections (for Wisconsin)

Homeless -- The condition of not having a stable residence, which includes sheltered (in shelters for the homeless) and unsheltered (on the street) homelessness

Incarceration -- The state of being confined in jail or prison

Jail -- A county run place of confinement for individuals awaiting trial or with sentences < 1 year

Parole -- Release prior to finishing the confinement portion of a prison sentence

Prison -- A federally or state run place of confinement for individuals with sentences longer than a year

Probation -- Under supervision without being in jail or prison, such as on house arrest

Public Housing -- State-funded housing for low-income families

Recidivism -- Committing a new offense within a specified follow-up period that results in a new sentence to either prison or probation (following a release from prison).

Registrants -- Persons convicted of sexual crimes

Reincarceration -- An admission to prison within a specified follow-up period for either a revocation, a revocation with a new sentence, or a new sentence (following a release from prison)

Returns -- People released from jail or prison; formerly incarcerated individuals

Revocation -- When a released person on parole or supervised release is charged with violating parole conditions and is sentenced to spend the some or all of the remainder of their sentence in confinement following a revocation hearing

Introduction

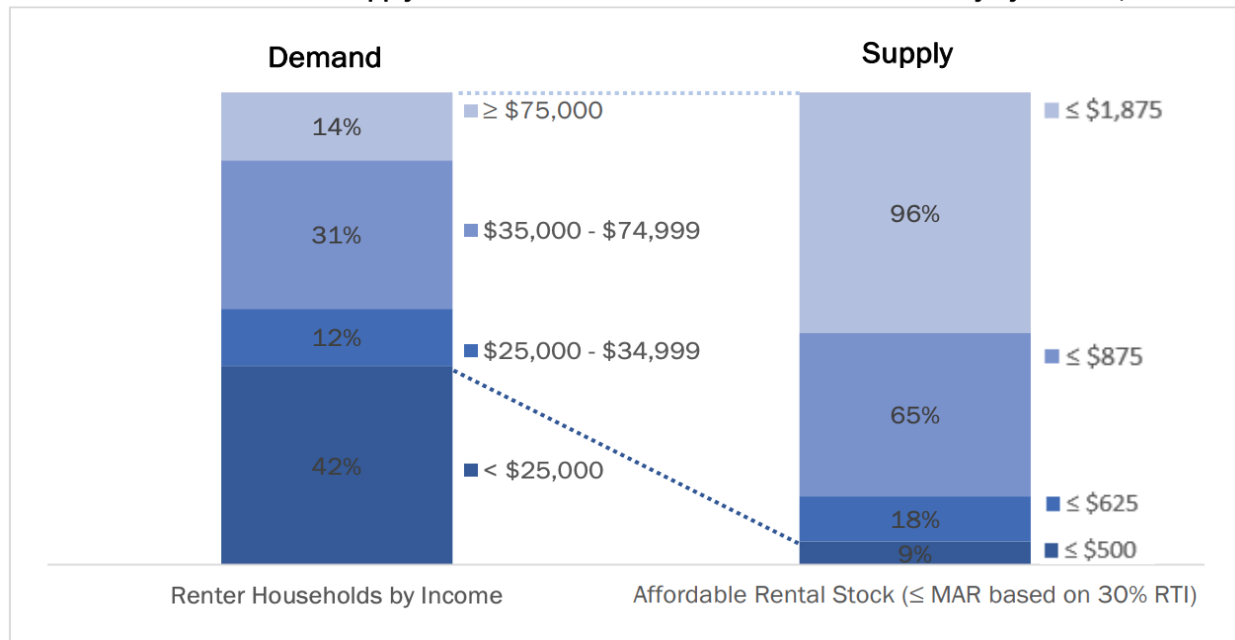
“Exclusionary housing policies constitute one of the most significant barriers to reentry. People leaving prison and jail are typically among Americans with the most dire housing needs. For them, publicly supported housing is the only realistic option for safe and stable places to live. Excluded from public housing, they often end up swelling the ranks of the homeless, become inhabitants of grimy and unsafe transient hotels and motels, or crowd into the homes of relatives and friends. None of these options is conducive to the development of stable, productive lives for former prisoners or their children.” (HRW, 2004)

Through partnering with Data You Can Use and Project RETURN, we have worked to discover the systematic gaps in housing resources for formerly incarcerated persons within the county of Milwaukee, WI, including a focus on various national policies and alternative state applications. The purpose for this evaluation is to provide Project RETURN with valuable data, which can be used to connect with new beneficiaries and sources of funding. In turn, this will allow for project continuation and expansion. The ultimate scope for this project is to map the needs and resources available in the community and identify the gaps for the 2700 people returning to society within Milwaukee each year. To further narrow down our research, we have focused on three inhibitors to available, sustainable housing: landlord bias, the housing voucher system, and registrant prejudice. Through desk research, interviews, attending public forums, and lived experiences, we were able to see widespread gaps throughout the reentry housing system. Our findings have been shared in the form of a literature review and an extensive list of possible recommendations to ease the current housing crisis for the formerly incarcerated community.

Background

While housing availability is an issue for most if not all cities, Milwaukee has a particular mismatch between the availability of affordable apartments and the amount of people who need them. Based on a 2018 report, “42% of renter households in Milwaukee County earned less than \$25,000 per year in 2016, [while] only 9% of rental units charged monthly rents those households could afford (Cancel Martinez, 2018).” Additionally, this impacts and burdens Black households at twice the rate of white households (Cancel Martinez, 2018).

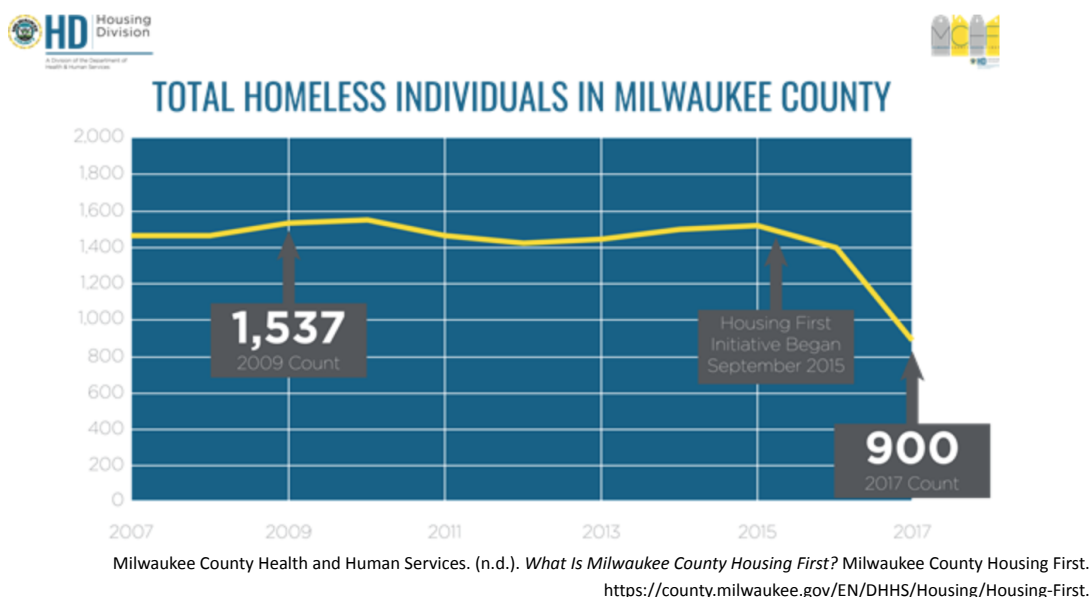
Chart 14. Demand for and supply of affordable rental units in Milwaukee County by income, 2016



Source: Wisconsin Policy Forum analysis of U.S. Census Bureau ACS 1-year estimates

In 2019 in the United States, there were approximately 17 unhoused people per 100,000. In Wisconsin, the rate is lower at 10 unhoused people per 100,000. This equates to 4,538 people without stable housing (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2021). According to Housing First, an initiative of Milwaukee County’s Health and Human Services Department, in 2017 there were 900 homeless individuals in Milwaukee, down from 1,537 in 2009. While this is an encouraging sign for Milwaukee

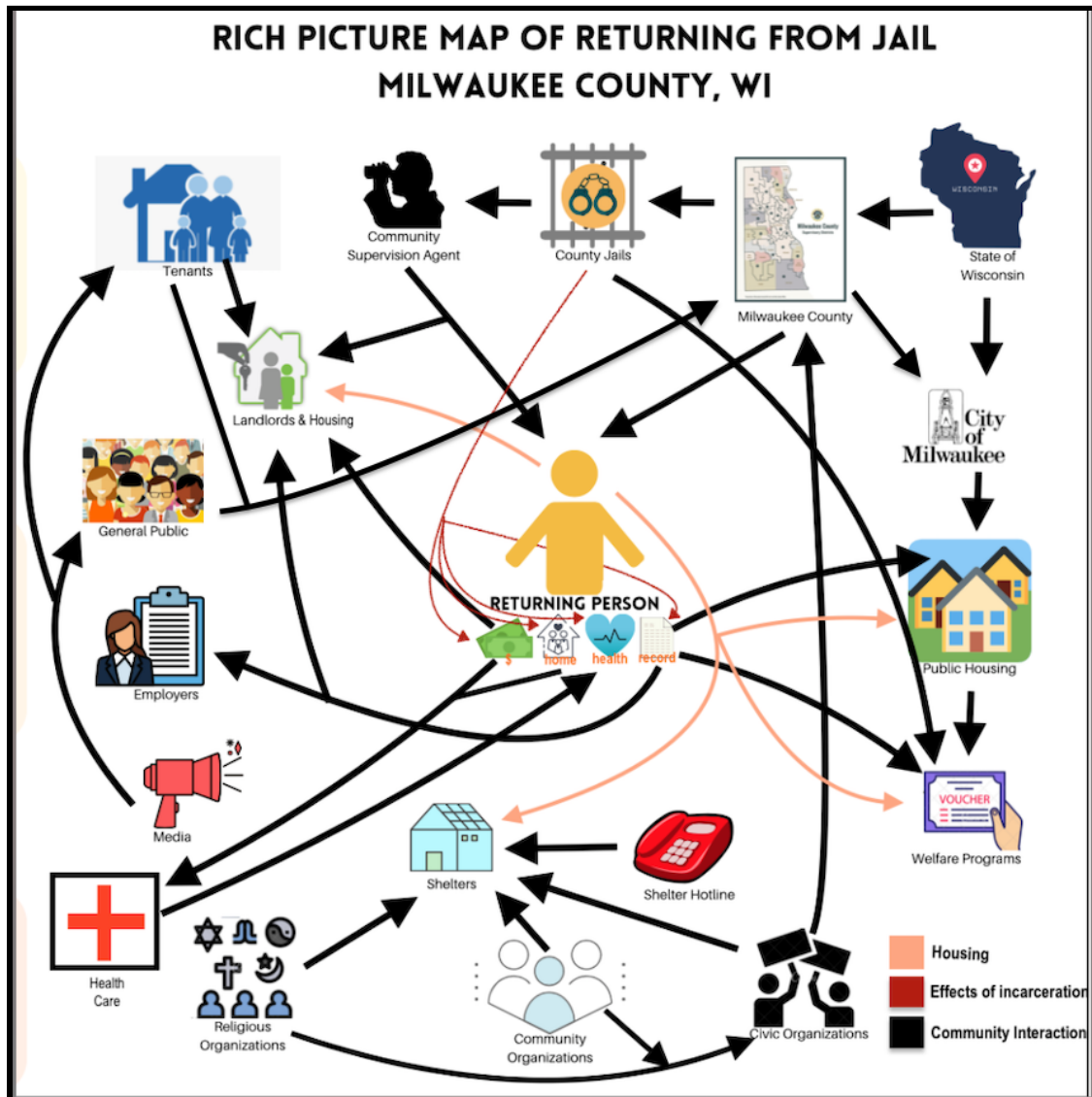
county, homelessness rates have increased across the nation since 2016 and may have worsened due to the COVID-19 pandemic (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2021).



Homelessness is an issue that affects the general public; however, studies have shown that people who have been incarcerated are more likely to be homeless. People who have been incarcerated once are 7 times more likely to be homeless while those who were incarcerated more than once are 13 times more likely to be homeless (prison policy). Not only is homelessness an effect of incarceration, but it is a likely cause of incarceration, as 15% of those who are incarcerated were homeless the year before their imprisonment (Couloute, 2018). Thus, sustainable housing is a way to prevent incarceration and break the cycle of reincarceration and revocation (Crowell, 2017).

According to Wisconsin's Department of Corrections, approximately 2,708 incarcerated individuals were released to Milwaukee County in 2019 and 2,591 people in 2020 (Office of the Secretary- Research and Policy Unit, 2021). For the several community organizations that provide returning services for these folks, housing is a primary concern (along with health and employment). Below is a rich picture map that illustrates the various ways incarceration impacts life after release. This map illustrates the effects of incarceration on the financial wellbeing, stable housing, mental and

physical health, and record of those returning to Milwaukee County. Depending on the person's conviction, a formerly incarcerated individual is able to access housing through family, private landlord, shelters or public housing.



Stakeholders:

As one can see from the map above, there are several stakeholders surrounding the successful reentry of formerly incarcerated individuals into society. The purpose of this map is to succinctly visualize

and represent all the stakeholders involved in housing and the ability of formerly incarcerated individuals to acquire housing. Thus, not only are housing stakeholders represented but so are the media, the public, employers, religious, community and civic organizations, and the community agent.

Under the Returning Person, or formerly incarcerated individual, there are four icons that represent significant impacts (red lines) incarceration has on an individual: financial wellbeing, relationships and stable housing, mental and physical health, and criminal record.

The orange lines show the potential avenues of obtaining housing if not through family. These options are public housing (the payment for which can be aided with housing vouchers), shelters, or private housing and landlords. Below is a snapshot of stakeholders in Milwaukee County, Wisconsin. It is **not** an exhaustive list.

- Housing
 - Private landlords
 - Public Housing
- Employment
 - Project RETURN
 - W RTP/BIG STEP
- Documents
 - Wisconsin Community Services
 - Community Corrections Employment Program
- Food
 - Food share
 - Church pantries
- Clothing
 - Partners in Hope
 - Goodwill Industries
- Health Care
 - Transitions clinic
 - Muslim Community Health Center
 - Gerald Ignace Indian Health Center
- Family
 - Fatherhood Initiative
 - Running Rebels
- Education
 - Prisons 2 Professionals

- Innovative Educational Solutions Institute

Literature Review

Landlord Bias:

Formerly incarcerated people are not a protected class under the Fair Housing Act of 1968 which outlawed “discrimination concerning the sale, rental and financing of housing based on race, religion, national origin or sex.” The amendment in 1988 added protection for folks with disabilities and certain family statuses such as the presence of children (History.com, 2010). However, because the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) recognizes that racial and ethnic minorities are unfairly affected by U.S. policing and the U.S. justice system, they also agree that criminal background checks disproportionately affect fair housing for Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) (Kanovsky, 2016).

HUD issued guidance on how to apply Fair Housing Act standards in 2016. They state, “... a discriminatory effect resulting from a policy or practice that denies housing to anyone with a prior arrest or any kind of criminal conviction cannot be justified, and therefore such a practice would violate the Fair Housing Act. Policies that exclude persons based on criminal history must be tailored to serve the housing provider’s substantial, legitimate, nondiscriminatory interest and take into consideration such factors as the type of the crime and the length of the time since conviction” (Kanovsky, 2016). Thus, a blanket ban on those with past convictions is illegal. Any rejection must be on a case-by-case basis and have strong, directly related justification.

Based on a study done in Akron, Ohio in 2007, 66% of landlords would be inclined to reject anyone with a conviction (Clark, 2007). This was before the 2016 HUD guidance that suggested doing so was discriminatory. The top three offenses that would prompt likely rejections were violent offenses, sex offenses, and murder. The same study stated how many landlords were primarily concerned with the

“protection and safety of community” and feared legal responsibility if a tenant with a known criminal history harmed another tenant. Another concern was the possibility of having to pay for nuisance calls if a certain property had police called on it too often, which is a policy that exists in several cities including Milwaukee (City of Milwaukee, n.d.).

These fears are largely unfounded. Though recent criminal activity may be positively correlated to chances of future criminal activity, it should not and cannot be the only factor used to assess potential tenants, according to HUD. Furthermore, studies show that seven years post release, individuals with felony convictions are no more likely to commit a crime than a person with no convictions (Kurlychek et al, 2007). Court cases have proven that landlords generally do have the legal responsibility to ensure the basic safety of tenants in non-common areas; however, there must be convincing proof that the cause of harm to a tenant from another tenant was “foreseeable” and caused by a “proximate” action of the landlord (Rhaney v. Univ. of Md. Eastern Shore No. 118, 2005). In many cases, landlords have won the cases brought about by tenants harmed by other tenants due to a lack of evidence of foreseeable and proximate causes. In regards to nuisance call policies, organizations like ACLU are challenging these policies on the grounds that landlords often punish tenants via eviction or fees for these nuisance charges even if the tenant was the victim of the crime (American Civil Liberties Union, 2017).

Another study done in Seattle, Washington found that landlords were strongly against “ban the box” measures and used the argument of not being able to manage risk, which as private property owners, they believe they have the right to manage (Brydolf-Horwitz, 2020). A survey found that 80 percent of Seattle landlords believed that the ordinance would place “an unreasonable burden” on them. Many commented that if “ban the box” ordinances were passed, increased rents and more requirements such as 5 year’s worth of employment and address history would be initiated to root out formerly incarcerated individuals. Others commented on how governments should financially compensate or underwrite landlords who rent to those with recent criminal records.

A study done on the impacts of “ban the box” policies in employment found after a “ban the box” policy was passed, affected companies called black applicants 45% less than they did white applicants. Prior to the policy, the difference had been 7% (Starr, 2018). These two studies demonstrate that passing a single policy does not guarantee an end to discriminatory practices and can, in fact, increase the amount of discrimination faced by certain individuals. Simply omitting the criminal history check box will not undo generations of racial prejudice and patterns of discrimination that landlords, employers and other gatekeepers unconsciously and intentionally practice.

Another factor is the ease at which landlords, and the rest of the public, can access criminal records. In Wisconsin, for example, one can search any first name and be shown all currently or formerly incarcerated individuals with that first name (State of Wisconsin, n.d.).

Landlord Insights

Landlord bias follows closely with the inherent biases in U.S. society that has resulted in higher rates of discrimination towards, policing of, and incarceration for Black, Indigenous and other peoples of color. Many landlords use the notion of risk to justify asking for criminal background checks, even knowing the reality of the justice system’s disproportionate impact on non-white communities. However, even if landlords were more open to renting to those with a criminal record, many other barriers exist that prevent formerly incarcerated individuals from finding affordable, stable housing. Existing outreach and potential education programs can be solutions.

Housing Vouchers:

Upon release, more than 50% of formerly incarcerated individuals return to family homes, which can be a strong source of social, emotional, and material support. However, it is not uniformly available as a permanent solution, as many in the incarcerated community may have family living in a different

state, family members with felonies, or familial discord, all of which could hinder successful reentry.

(Pleggenkuhle, Huebner, and Kras, 2016)

With returning to family homes not always a permanent or widespread option for the formerly incarcerated community, housing vouchers may be one of the best solutions for reentering persons to find sustainable housing, however, it is by no means easy. There are many obstacles that arise, as vouchers are federally funded and the formerly incarcerated community often has high rates of getting declined. Nationally, there are currently two pathways for reentering individuals to receive vouchers, the first being Section 8 housing vouchers, and the second are vouchers the DOC provides explicitly for formerly incarcerated individuals. However, as Wisconsin currently does not provide DOC housing vouchers, TLP (transitional living placement) options are used instead. (hirefelons.org, n.d.)

- Transitional Living Placements:

Within the state of Wisconsin, housing vouchers are not provided by the DOC. Instead, there are two options to gain TLP (transitional living placement) through a POS (purchase of service), a house placement through the Matt Talbot agency or an apartment rental through a contracted landlord. Both housing options are completed only through an agent referral. (Malone, 2021)

The first option, housing placement through the Matt Talbot agency, provides a maximum of 60 day placement within one of thirty houses throughout Milwaukee.

There is no charge for the formerly incarcerated individual and all necessities, such as toilet paper, are provided. Though there is no cost, there are heavy rules that apply to the residents, such as a 10 pm curfew. After the 60 days is over, the individual will be forced to move out and find a new place to stay. Stay extensions are only approved due to extreme circumstances (such as being out of work after a diagnosis of COVID), and are for a period of roughly one month. (Malone, 2021)

The second option is an apartment rental through DOC contracted landlords within the county of Milwaukee. The number of contracted landlords is ever changing, but as of March 2020, the maximum allotment paid by the DOC was \$400 a month for the 1st and 2nd month's rent. An extension for an additional month can be made in case of extreme circumstances. The DOC pays all funds directly to the landlord, and any remaining payment that is due is to be provided by the formerly incarcerated individual. While this may seem to be a valid option, the apartments are really just slums within the inner city. Due to the poor quality of the available housing for rent, landlords, more accurately known as slumlords, are able to receive a larger payment through their contract with the DOC than if they were renting to the general population. Therefore, the higher income is motivating select landlords to take advantage of the formerly incarcerated community. (Malone, 2021).

This information regarding housing vouchers or TLPs specifically allotted by the Wisconsin DOC has been difficult to find. Upon discussing the process with a representative from the DOC, it has been apparent that the information regarding these vouchers needs to be retrieved from the individual renter's agent. Thus, it is not readily available to the public. Fortunately, an agent in the Milwaukee area was available for an interview, and they shared the previously stated information. In comparison, however, DOC voucher availability from Washington state allows for up to \$500 a month for a maximum of three months. (Washington State DOC, n.d.)

- Section 8 Housing Vouchers:

"Section 8 is a federally funded rental assistance program that exists in every state. It allows eligible individuals and families to rent an apartment from a participating landlord at a heavily discounted rate of about 60-70%." (hirefelons.org, n.d.) Due to the fact that

this program is federally funded, the eligibility guidelines are often very strict, and may pertain not only to the formerly incarcerated individual, but also members of their family. With the strict guidelines, it is common for returners to get declined from the program. While each state has its own eligibility criteria, there are two felonies that Federal Regulations states will automatically remove you from eligibility. These are: lifetime registration on the sex offender registry or a conviction of manufacture or production of meth in federally assisted housing.

Milwaukee County states the following as additional official section 8 disqualifiers:

- Engaged in the following criminal activities within the past five years: (Seriousness of offense, time since conviction/recent history, and rehabilitation considered)
 - Drug-related criminal activity, defined by HUD as the illegal manufacture, sale, distribution or use of a drug, or the possession of a drug with intent to manufacture, sell, distribute or use the drug
 - Violent criminal activity, defined by HUD as any criminal activity that has as one of its elements the use, attempted use, or threatened use of physical force substantial enough to cause, or be reasonably likely to cause, serious bodily injury or property damage
- Evicted from federally assisted housing in the last five years
- Terminated by Milwaukee County's rent assistance program
- Families over income (all household income is considered)
- Incomplete documentation or fraudulent information
- Owing debt to Milwaukee County Rent Assistance Program or any other Housing Authority.

*Retrieved from: <https://county.milwaukee.gov/EN/D HHS/Housing>

Though a voucher is ultimately the best chance to receive sustainable housing, there are still many obstacles in the way that hinder the process. A few of the more common inhibitors are as follows:

- Portability:

One of the difficult dynamics with housing vouchers, pertains to the portability of said vouchers. As each state (and county) has different eligibility requirements, if a person

who previously had been approved, moved (for employment, etc.), their vouchers do not automatically transfer. (NHLHP, 2018)

- Housing Supply:

“In 2001, private residences represented 97% of the market for all apartments and houses in the USA.” (Nayer, G., Perez-Feliciano, L., and Adams, M., 2020) If this trend remains true, that leaves 3% of the housing market generally available for rent and an even lower percentage that is affordable for the re-entering community. In light of the 2008 Great Recession and the current pandemic, the numbers are likely to be lower. The overall low number of available housing, where vouchers are able to be used as currency, leaves a high percentage of the formerly incarcerated community to rely on other housing options, with many ending up sleeping on the streets.

- Waiting Periods

The amount of time it takes to get approved to receive housing vouchers ultimately depends on the city size and current level of need in the area. The wait time can vary between 6 months or a multi-year long process, as prospective renters wait for their turn; applications must also be admitted during the open period to be added to the waitlist. Once a voucher is received, renters are allowed to begin looking for apartments, but that could take another extended period of time before finding an accepting landlord. The only way to really move up on the list to get vouchers sooner, is if an applicant is found to be eligible for priority status. A couple of the ways to gain priority status are if the person is currently living in a condemned apartment or experiencing domestic violence. (hirefelons.org, n.d.)

Housing Voucher Insights

While housing vouchers may be the best option for affordable, sustainable housing for the formerly incarcerated community, the roadblocks can be insurmountable and ultimately heavy deterrents. The potential waiting period and disqualifiers alone may steer formerly incarcerated individuals into other directions, even though those options may lead to living on the streets. In terms of TLPs supplied by the DOC, they have been found difficult to navigate and are not meant for long-term living arrangements.

The fact that there is no information directly supplied by the DOC (the very department intended to provide the necessary information) seems like an added, unnecessary stress that can be mitigated by simply providing resources. An individual's agent is the only way to access any of this information, which is not useful if the agent is missing key information or discord is present. Overall, the housing voucher and TLP processes need to become more streamlined and accessible to formerly incarcerated individuals, and until that happens, alternatives to the current housing climate are, in my opinion, key to easing the current housing hardship. A list of potential alternatives are described in the "recommendation" section.

Registrant Prejudice:

Of all individuals with criminal records, registrants have the most difficult time finding housing (White, 2008). In addition to having more rules placed upon them by the Department of Community Corrections, as much as 68 compared to the general 18 for non-registrants, they have residency restrictions limiting where they can live based on the location of schools, churches, daycares, malls, parks, and other types of areas frequented by children, even if they don't have a crimes involving children (Kim Malone, retired DCC agent). According to the 2008 paper by Loving, there is no evidence that residence restrictions are related to preventing or deterring sex crimes against children. To the

contrary, the evidence in the 2008 report strongly suggests that residence restrictions are likely to have the unintended effect of increasing the likelihood of sexual re-offense. Such increase in risk level is due to the destabilizing effect residence restrictions have on registrants and the way they are likely to exacerbate rather than reduce their psychological states, which are known to be associated with re-offending. By pushing registrants further away from neighborhoods and society and more into the fringes, DCC policies, municipal laws, and state statutes alienate registrants, which makes them more likely to commit a new crime or voluntarily go back to prison out of hopelessness and anger (Loving, 2008). The reports also found that restrictions negatively impacted the employment and stability opportunities for registrants (Bynum, T., Grommon, E., Huebner B., et al. 2013).

The term “registrant” refers to the fact people who commit sex offenses have to add their names to a public registry upon release. Whatever effectiveness these registries could have had has been eroded by the widespread public access to the information, which allows the general public’s fears, which are largely based on sensational media coverage of and commentary toward registrants and people with criminal records, to operate without objectivity and context (White, 2008). Registries are also eroded by residency restrictions that are often so onerous that registrants fail to report their whereabouts so as to avoid being restricted out of most housing opportunities. A reported 80 to 90 percent of sex crimes against children are committed by a relative or acquaintance and are not against strangers in the types of places on which residency restrictions are placed. Residency restrictions will not stop a perpetrator from victimizing a family member or acquaintance in their home or in their neighborhood and will not keep a perpetrator from getting access to a stranger (Merriam 2008).

Surveys seem to find a link between residence restrictions and registrant homelessness that is likely to lead to other negative consequences, including unemployment and violations of their rules of supervision that they were assigned upon release. Further, they agree that residence restrictions are not a viable means of stopping registrants from re-offending (Loving, 2008). The conclusion drawn from this

information is that residency restrictions are an unfounded and ineffective effort to appease the public's concern over sexual offenses. A current quasi-solution is shared living arrangements with other registrants, which have been shown to deter recidivism in registrants, even those assessed to be at the highest risk of sexually re-offending. This, again, seems to say that experience and research contradict common public perception of what is and is not effective for curbing instances of sexual reoffense (Datz, 2007).

Registrant Prejudice Insights

While residency restrictions may give parents the sense that their children are safe, the reality is that the restrictions place severe impediments on registrants. Some argue that people who are registrants have given up some of their liberty by committing such heinous crimes against society (Levinson, 2007). However, most people fail to realize just how broad and all-encompassing the residency restrictions are for those upon release. They can become subject to these restrictions for having consensual sex as teens or so-called Romeo and Juliet cases where one party is underage but there is only a few years difference in age (Wis. Stat. §§ 939.51, 948.09, 2018). The state is indiscriminately applying these statutes to everyone who falls within an extremely broad category and are failing to take into account the specific risks posed by any given person upon release and enforcing these statutes without regard to their effectiveness or side effects (White, 2008). If society truly desires such types of restrictions on registrants, there must be a more individualized method of determining who should be subject to them and who does not need to be subject to them.

Additional Factors Impacting Sustainable Housing

1. Identification Cards (IDs)

State-issued identification allows a formerly incarcerated individual to get health services, apply for housing in some cases, obtain employment, and interact with certain

businesses that require identification. The Division of Adult Institutions has a policy stating that designated staff must assist incarcerated folks in obtaining all necessary paperwork and applying for a state ID. However, our project has not been able to ascertain what percentage of released individuals in Milwaukee County or Wisconsin actually leave with state-issued IDs. Individuals with lived experiences say that the policy is not uniformly followed. Nationally, only a third of all Departments of Corrections ensure that all individuals leave with a state-issued ID as the federal government cannot enforce any in-prison ID law (La Vigne et al, 2008; Lantigua-Williams, 2016).

2. Health Clinics:

A person's health is directly connected to their employability and ability to maintain a job (Antonisse, 2018), and without employment, a person is much less likely to have sustainable housing. Health clinics that focus specifically on helping those recently released from prison only just began last year via the federally qualified Transitions Health Clinic partnership between Advocate Aurora and Progressive. In addition, the other federally qualified Health Centers are Milwaukee Health Services, Inc., Outreach Community Health Centers, Sixteenth Street Community Health Center, and Gerald Ignace Indian Health Center. They all have medical and behavioral health care and some have dental. If the individual is uninsured, they will either help them enroll into Medicaid or the marketplace, or if the individual doesn't qualify for insurance, they all put people on a sliding fee scale based on income and household size. All except the Gerald Ignace Indian Health Center have multiple locations. There is also the Aurora Family Care Center, and Ascension has two residency clinics that will see people returning from prison. And there is the Muslim community health center, for Muslims, and the Walker's Point clinic. (Jenni Sevenich, CEO of Progressive)

3. Health Insurance:

A significant policy was passed in October 2020 that will suspend and then re-evaluate incarcerated Medicaid members' health care benefits before they are released from jail or prison (Goodsitt, 2020). This policy not only will directly benefit many lower-income individuals reentering society by decreasing reliance on emergency care and helping break the cycle of homelessness and reincarceration/recidivism but will also allow community organizations and service providers to pass on the costs of assisting formerly incarcerated individuals to the federal government.

4. Mental health:

Mental health is a rising concern within the Wisconsin prison system. A 2012 study states that an estimated two-thirds of the female population and one-third of the male population within the prison system are living with various mental health disorders. While treatment may occur during incarceration, the inmate population is often left to fend for themselves shortly after their release. Upon release from jail, formerly incarcerated individuals may only receive a 3-day supply of medications, and those released from prison receive a 4-week prescription and two weeks worth of pills on hand. While this supply may help initially, formerly incarcerated individuals will often run out of their medications before they are able to see a doctor or receive health insurance. As the cost of medications is on the rise, it may come down to having to choose between paying for food or shelter or spending their precious funds on medications. While not an easy choice, medications tend to be put on the backburner, which drives recidivism and re-incarceration rates higher due to untreated mental health (Hertel, 2013).

5. Job readiness/employment:

The state invests over \$100 million in job readiness programs for formerly incarcerated individuals each year through in-prison and post-release programs (John Anderson, WRTP/BIG STEP). People with criminal records are 4-6 times more likely to be unemployed (Augustine, 2020), which brings into question the effectiveness of the programs to which this money goes. There are 366 employment related restrictions placed upon individuals with a criminal record in Wisconsin (National Inventory of Collateral Consequences of Conviction). Vocational training options in prison are very coercive and underwhelming: incarcerated individuals are forced to take what limited options are at their facility, and the training is commonly viewed as insufficient by employers (Rob Hutton, employer of formerly incarcerated people; and Shannon Ross, recently released individual). There are also many unfounded societal fears of hiring people with criminal records (Augustine, 2020). These factors make job readiness and acquisition for formerly incarcerated individuals considerably more difficult.

6. Transportation:

Transportation is an integral need for successful reentry, as it allows formerly incarcerated individuals to retain employment, maintain their release criteria, find housing and food, go to doctor's appointments, and the list goes on. Relying on the public transportation system is not ideal, as the bus stops and hours of operation are pre-set, knowledge of public transportation is essential, and public transportation accessibility may become an issue. A second option of transportation includes driving a personal or borrowed vehicle, but this also causes strife, as receiving or reinstating a driver's license may be unattainable, and the costs of gas, maintenance, and insurance may quickly become overbearing. Overall, transportation can quickly become an

inhibitor to resuming a successful, sustainable livelihood upon release. (Vigne, Davies, Palmer, and Halberstadt, 2008)

Solutions Currently in Place

The current research has shown missing pieces within the solution landscape. While there is some work being done within the city of Milwaukee in regards to landlord training, the overall “solutions” seem to lean towards organizations and churches working with the formerly incarcerated community. While these organizations are leading the way for impactful change, they are not permanent solutions to the current housing crisis.

One current organization addressing landlord bias is Project RETURN, which has a list of private landlords who have been approached and have agreed to a special partnership with Project RETURN. Partner landlords agree to be listed on Project RETURN’s website and accept individuals who are returning with no or few restrictions (Project RETURN, n.d.).

The City of Milwaukee has a Landlord Training Program, but it’s classes center around “keep[ing] illegal activity out of their property” (City of Milwaukee, n.d). Community Advocates also has a variety of tenant-landlord programs, many of which include security deposit or rental assistance, wrap-around services for homeless individuals, and short landlord training on renter's rights and responsibilities for tenants and property owners (Community Advocates, n.d). These two programs could be repurposed to provide education on challenges and rights of incarcerated individuals and be incubators of partnerships.

Three of the organizations currently working with the formerly incarcerated population within Milwaukee are: Reentry Housing Council, Partners in Hope, and Project RETURN.

Recommendations

1. Hire housing advocate with lived experience

Increase the number of advocates with experience in the reentry housing arena. This is highly beneficial if the advocates have lived experiences with finding housing upon release.

2. Promote realtor partnerships

Create a cohort of realtors in the area, who can advocate for formerly incarcerated individuals, as they are often the “face” of renters. According to a formerly incarcerated gentleman, this cohort would be able to assist in the rental process, create accessibility, and lead to sustainable landlord/renter partnerships. (Conway Jr., L, 2020)

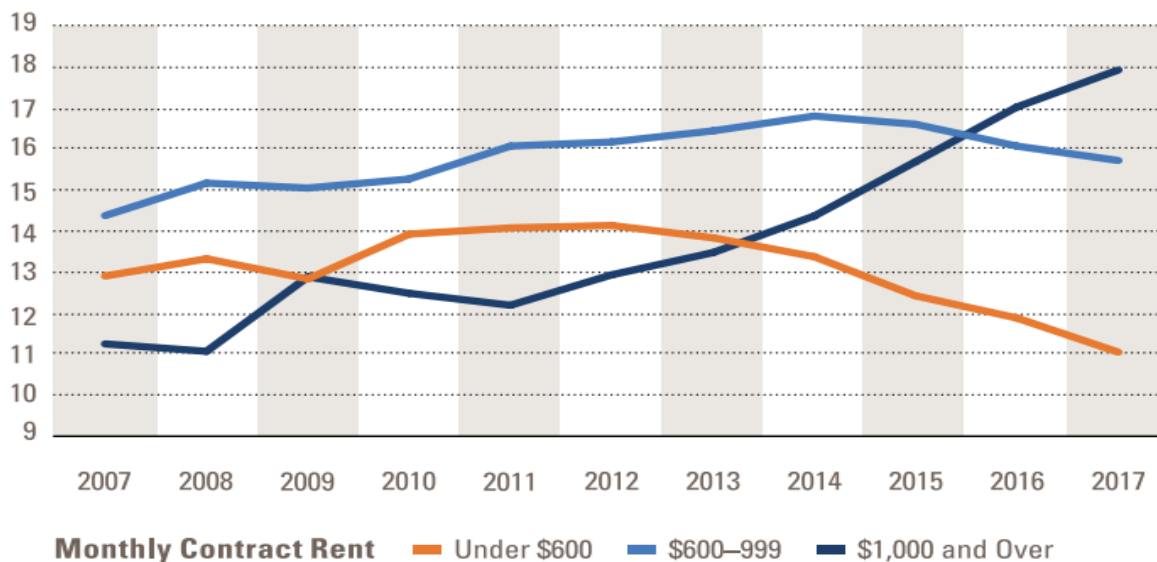
3. Advocate for more affordable housing

Limited housing supply is a national concern, as there is simply not enough affordable housing to meet society’s needs. Supply of low-cost units is declining while high-cost rentals are increasing in tandem (Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University, 2021).

Direct interventions in the form of robust advocacy for attractive, sustainable and affordable public housing can address several housing issues namely homelessness and broad need for financial assistance.

Strong Growth in High-Cost Rentals Has Coincided with Dramatic Declines in Low-Cost Units

Rental Units (Millions)



Notes: Rental units may be occupied, vacant for rent, or rented but unoccupied; excludes units occupied without cash rent. Dollar values are adjusted for inflation using the CPI-U for All Items Less Shelter. Contract rent excludes all utilities paid separately.

Source: JCHS tabulations of US Census Bureau, American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates via IPUMS USA.

4. Prioritize ensuring that state identification is issued prior to release

Starting in 2009, designated staff in the WI Corrections System has been directed to help incarcerated people gather the necessary documents and sign up for a State ID card (Division of Adult Institutions, 2020). A requirement that prison and jail staff in Wisconsin must assist all eligible individuals who want a state ID would prevent many individuals returning to society without the necessary identification to start rebuilding their lives. Since housing is an issue for some folks after release, getting a state ID while incarcerated is key.

5. Create shared housing partnerships

Community members can volunteer to share their houses with formerly incarcerated individuals (as a roommate), for a discounted rate (a community in California is authorizing \$25/day). This could lead to a mutually beneficial relationship, as the homeowner could help

integrate the formerly incarcerated individual back into society, and they in turn could provide companionship or assistance within the household. (Wiltz, 2019)

6. Create or improve a landlord rental commission

Landlords could earn a commission or tax incentive for renting to people who were formerly incarcerated. The commission rate could potentially increase as renter numbers increase.

7. Educate Landlords

As was mentioned in the landlords literature review, landlords are under or misinformed about the legal liabilities of renting to people with criminal convictions and the likelihood of formerly incarcerated people posing a threat. Additionally, many may be unaware of the implications of the Fair Housing Act. More workshops on these topics may move landlords to be more understanding and open to renting to formerly incarcerated individuals. Already Project RETURN has been reaching out to private landlords to educate and persuade them to rent to formerly incarcerated folks. Their effort can be expanded through existing educational programs with the City of Milwaukee's Department of Neighborhood Services and Community Advocates' housing services (City of Milwaukee, n.d.; Community Advocates, n.d).

8. Update screening processes

This coincides with the current "Ban the Box" movement. Ultimately, removing opportunities for housing discrimination could lead to an easier pathway of finding sustainable housing; however, the consequences of this policy as stated in the landlord bias section must be considered.

9. Create a family member reconnection counseling program

As returning to family homes is not always an option for the formerly incarcerated community, family counseling could assist in settling any familial discord that could prevent

their successful reunification. This would need to be a process throughout the incarceration timeframe.

10. Implement Operational reentry facilities

Inmates due to be released within 18 months, will be moved to a reentry facility. This facility will assist with job training, housing support, therapy, employment, etc. A section of the building will be reserved for those who have been released, but have not been able to find suitable housing in time. (ex. Reentry housing project in Georgia) (Wiltz, 2019)

11. Create In-prison tenant preparation and certification

One's history while in prison living with forced roommates translates directly to their ability to be a good tenant. This can be turned into a certification process that would make landlords more comfortable renting to those who possessed them.

12. Create clear housing resources

Throughout this process, the discrepancies between resource lists on the internet have been brought to light. The WI DOC has a list of only four resources, while other websites list up to 38 resources. This can lead to difficulty and confusion when finding housing assistance or availability. Many organizations have duplicated their efforts in compiling resources. Consistent and well-maintained sources are needed.

13. Create an agent Appeal Board

A board outside the control and structure of the Department of Corrections who would oversee appeals and disputes regarding housing denials by the Department of Community Corrections.

14. Train DOC staff

Through phone calls to the DOC, it has become apparent that there is not a standardized training process, as questions get passed from one person to another. Having generalized

training in terms of resources for formerly incarcerated individuals and their families could ease potential stress and provide an easier pathway to using available resources.

Changing the narrative of DOC employees to use acceptable terms and “labels” can assist in creating an inclusive, accepting society, such as the term “registrants” instead of “sex offenders”.

15. Reevaluate Milwaukee’s Nuisance Process

Local nuisance processes were created as anti-drug and anti-crime efforts, but they have been found to be highly discriminatory by HUD officials and others. Many who are affected by nuisance processes are women and victims of domestic violence (Paulsen, 2016). The nuisance process further discourages landlords from renting to those with criminal records as landlords would want to avoid nuisance fees and would assume they would be more likely to engage in “disorderly conduct.” Milwaukee has a Nuisance Process with the vague phrase “disorderly conduct” being an eligible nuisance activity (City of Milwaukee, n.d.).

16. Provide more resources for Milwaukee County within the Reentry Resource provided by the Wisconsin Department of Corrections

The lead housing resource listed on the DOC Reentry Resource handout is the WIBOSCO (Wisconsin Balance of State Continuum of Care), which does not list the county of Milwaukee as a region. It is essential to provide multiple resources to cover all areas of Wisconsin within the Reentry Resource Handout. (State of Wisconsin, Department of Corrections, 2018)

Recommendation Feasibility

Key	Begin within 2 Years	Begin within 5 Years	Extended Goals
- Wisconsin Department of	1. Landlord education	1. Agent appeal board (SG,	1. Volunteered shared

Corrections (<i>DOC</i>) - Community Organizations (<i>CO</i>) - City Government (<i>City</i>) - County Government (<i>CG</i>) - State Government (<i>SG</i>) - National Government (<i>NG</i>)	(<i>CO, City</i>) 2. Realtor partnerships (<i>CO, City</i>) 3. Clear housing resources (<i>DOC, SG</i>) 4. Housing advocate with lived experiences (<i>CO</i>) 5. Advocate for affordable housing (<i>NG, CG, City</i>)	(<i>City</i>) 2. DOC staff training (<i>DOC</i>) 3. In-prison tenant preparation and certification (<i>DOC</i>)	housing partnerships (<i>CO, SG, City</i>) 2. Operational reentry facilities (<i>SG</i>) 3. Family member reconnection counseling (<i>DOC</i>) 4. Reevaluate Milwaukee's nuisance process (<i>City, CG</i>) 5. Landlord rental commission (<i>City, CG, SG</i>)
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Conclusion

The housing landscape for formerly incarcerated individuals in Milwaukee mirrors the situation in most cities across the country. Biases by landlords and municipalities to deny housing to formerly incarcerated individuals, lack of county and city housing assistance, additional restrictions on registrants and those with meth convictions among others pose significant barriers to formerly incarcerated individuals. But a number of jurisdictions around the country have demonstrated creative and more humane approaches to creating stable housing for the reentry population. Milwaukee, in particular, has a high potential for substantial reform regarding formerly incarcerated individuals and housing: principally, interest from the city to invest in the problem and interest from many organizations to work together more to address it. Given the overwhelming evidence of the problem and local support to implement a better approach, Milwaukee is positioned to begin addressing homelessness and housing insecurity in the coming years.

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