THE REENTRY OF YOUNG OFFENDERS: A LOOK AT REINTEGRATION

THE REENTRY OF YOUNG OFFENDERS: A LOOK AT SUCCESSFUL REINTEGRATION

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Abstract

This qualitative study looks at the experiences of youth reentering their communities after serving a custodial sentence. Interviews were conducted from the perspectives of five key informants, including youth counselors and probation officers. Based on these conversations, the nuances of youth reentry were explored in-depth. These pages contain personal stories regarding the successes and challenges that come with reentry and reentry programming. Based on the findings and relevant literature, recommendations and suggestions on how to improve reentry are made. Further, in contrast to dominant recidivism-based understandings of success, this study promotes a more holistic understanding of successful reentry outcomes.

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Chapter One: Introduction

I was inspired to conduct this research project after reflecting on a number of personal experiences I had while working with at-risk and offending youth. As a Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) student, I specifically chose to do both of my student placements with hard to reach youth populations. My first placement was at a youth drop-in centre called The Dam located in Meadowvale where I worked with a variety of youth in an informal gathering setting. While at my second placement Justice for Children and Youth (JFCY), a non-profit legal clinic in Toronto serving children and youth in the Greater Toronto area, I was directly involved in the initial intake process for offending youth. Through my experiences as a placement student, I became interested in the complex lives of youth especially those who had found themselves in conflict with the law. In getting to know these clients, I realized that they each came from different circumstances and they truly had their own unique story. Yet despite these apparent differences, each of these youth had found themselves engaging in offending behaviours.

Shortly after graduating, I was hired by the Region of Peel, where I continue to work today. As an Assessment Worker, I conduct intake applications for Ontario Works, Peel Access to Housing (PATH) and Child Care Subsidy. While I speak to a number of clients on a daily basis, I find it is the young clients that always capture my attention. I often speak with young people who are planning to leave custody or who have recently left custody

and would like to apply for interim financial assistance. Usually at this point, they are not set up with secure housing and they confirm they are living in temporary accommodations or living from couch to couch. I have noticed that these youth are often not attending school because they are having difficulty getting re-registered so they can return to complete their credits. To complicate this challenge, many say that they have limited social support, as they have challenging (sometimes non-existent) relationships with parents and extended family.

I observed that youth were frustrated in trying to coordinate with multiple service providers, including the Region of Peel, as required in their conditions of probation. Youth told me about their struggles trying to reconnect after being incarcerated and trying to find a new sense of normalcy in their daily lives. This was especially true once probation is finished, they have 'completed' the reentry process and they are no longer affiliated with reentry programming or probation. It was ultimately these conversations and experiences that sparked my interest for this research project as I began to notice missing pieces to the puzzle.

Specifically, I aimed for this study to capture what it is like for young people to reenter their communities after completing a custodial sentence. In this way, I referred primarily to the youth who are ordered to complete a designated sentence where they are incarcerated for a period of time (either short or long) in a youth detention centre. After being released from the

detention centre, these youth are then placed on probation so a designated probation officer can monitor their reentry. Generally, these youth are between the ages of 16 and 19, although the *Youth Criminal Justice Act (YCJA*) captures youth as young as 12. Given that there are alternative consequences for youth in conflict with the law, such as receiving a warning or being referred to a community program, this study really refers to a specific group of young people who have been incarcerated.

Overall, this study aims to shed light on the traumatic experiences of youth in custody through a review of the literature as well as their challenges and successes upon reentry. It specifically calls on the insider experiences of key informants, namely those who work first hand with youth reentering the community, to speak about what reentry is really like. While the findings primarily speak to the experiences of youth who are still in connection with probation services, the discussion also touches on what implications there are once reentry services are exhausted. Ultimately, this study captures the nuances of reentry and challenges the current understanding of program success based on recidivism alone.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

In order to set the context for this research project, it is important to look at what is already known about youth reentering their communities after incarceration. The reentry of youth into their communities is a complex phenomenon that has been studied by numerous scholars. This chapter will review relevant pieces of literature as they speak to the current climate and understanding of youth crime. Specifically, this chapter will look at perspectives on youth crime, the experiences of youth in custody, approaches to reentry including challenges and success and lastly how this all relates to this research project.

1. Perspectives on Youth Crime

In attempting to understand the reentry process for young offenders it is important to first appreciate that there are multiple ways of understanding youth crime, which directly correspond with responses to young offenders. Generally in the literature, there are five primary perspectives on juvenile justice based on differing conceptions of youth crime and justice. These perspectives include welfare, justice, crime control, corporatist and modified justice (Corrado, Gronsdahl, MacAllister, & Cohen, 2010). These models or perspectives essentially work on a continuum with priorizing the needs of the youth on one side, which corresponds with the welfare model, and priorizing the safety and protection of society at the other, which

corresponds to the crime control model (Corrado, Gronsdahl, MacAllister, & Cohen, 2010).

In a most basic sense, the welfare model focuses on identifying youth needs and then responding to them, namely through focusing on the rehabilitation and reintegration of youth. The welfare model sees youth as vulnerable and in need of protection. As a result, welfare model proponents believe that youth needs should come first and foremost and youth crime should be responded to by helping youth address their needs instead of punishing their actions. On the other hand, the justice model focuses on youth procedural rights and proportional sentencing, which speaks to procedural fairness, and due process in the actual processing of decision-making (Corrado, Gronsdahl, MacAllister, & Cohen, 2010). Crime control is certainly the strictest model in terms of responding to youth crime. This model values public safety and protection over the needs of youth, a completely different emphasis from the welfare model. The fourth model, the corporatist model emphasizes the use of administrative decision-making and discretion for professionals like social workers and probation officers when responding to youth crime (Corrado, Gronsdahl, MacAllister, & Cohen, 2010). Lastly, the modified justice model is a fusion model that synthesizes the justice, welfare, crime control and corporatist models. Procedural fairness is at the forefront of decision-making; however, making decisions that protect society, holding young people accountable in ways proportional

to their maturity and the severity of the crime and providing rehabilitative services are also significant (Corrado, Gronsdahl, MacAllister, & Cohen, 2010).

Of these five approaches, this research project will primarily focus on the reentry of young offenders from a welfare perspective on juvenile justice. Again, a welfare perspective works to highlight the current shortfalls of placing youth in custody and recognizes the responsibility of governments to place the needs of young offenders at the forefront and create programming that is considerate of their needs (Corrado, Gronsdahl, MacAllister, & Cohen, 2010). A welfare perspective generally encourages imposing fewer judicial sanctions on offending youth and encourages the courts to arrange for developmentally appropriate and primarily extrajudicial consequences for offending youth. At the same time, in circumstances where custody is seen as necessary for the welfare of the youth, these consequences will focus on rehabilitation and addressing the well being of that youth as reintegration and rehabilitation are the primary values of the welfare perspective. Overall it is from the welfare perspective that the needs of youth are at the forefront, although this is not to say that public safety is overlooked. In looking at the *Youth Criminal Justice Act*, it is clear that the current responses to youth crime take aspects of each of the models in some way or another.

In viewing the current responses to youth reentry from a welfare perspective, critics are quick to note how current reentry programs generally

fail to meet the problems and needs of young offenders appropriately (Corrado, Gronsdahl, MacAllister, & Cohen, 2010). When program success is primarily defined in terms of recidivism alone, as it is often times, multiple other relevant aspects of social life can be completely overlooked.

The Media and Public Views on Youth Crime

Young offenders and the problem of youth crime is an issue that often receives mixed attention in the media. Through media outlets, like online forums, newspapers or news broadcasts, Canadians access snippets of information that shape not only their opinions of young offenders but also what responses to youth crime should look like. Often times these stories are designed to be short attention-grabbing sound bites or headlines based on only partial or misleading information. In this way, the media is able to evoke strong and direct responses to crime by portraying young offenders as either victims or victimizers, but more often than not the latter (Adorjan, 2011). Over time, these headlines and stories inform and shape our opinion in both positive and negative ways whether or not we are readily aware of it happening.

In one recent study, it is suggested that as many Canadians believe that crime is increasing, greatly overestimating current crime trends despite the fact that youth crime and youth crime severity is generally on the decline in Canada (Public Safety Canada, 2012; Tanasichuk, & Wormith, 2012). Further, many Canadians assert that the Criminal Justice System is too

lenient and would appeal to a crime control model to youth justice, while at the same time they are not fully aware of average sentence length or basic sentencing procedures for individuals convicted of offences (Tanasichuk, & Wormith, 2012). Despite the role of misinformation there are growing tensions as less than half of Canadians feel confident in the Criminal Justice System itself (Mann, Senn, Girard, & Ackbar, 2007; Tanasichuk, & Wormith, 2012). Capitalizing on this anxiety is the Conservative government and their publicized "get tough on crime agenda" which continues to call for harsh punishments and consequences (Bala, Carrington, & Roberts, 2009, p. 159).

The Youth Criminal Justice Act and Criminal Justice System

In Canada, the consequences and sentencing of young offenders falls under the jurisdiction of the *Youth Criminal Justice Act (YCJA)*, the third wave of juvenile justice in Canada. In many ways, there are still increasing demands from Canadians to be tough on young offenders in spite of opposing bodies of research confirming that crime is on the decline. As a result, the *YCJA* is seen as a political compromise, serving to address the anxiety of the general public stemming from highly publicized cases of youth crime, while also responding to the cries of professionals, advocates and critics for appropriate and sensitive services for youth (Bala, Carrington, & Roberts, 2009). In fact, in looking at the *YCJA*, notable elements of the welfare model are emphasized in the focus on the rehabilitation and reintegration of young offenders. Alternatively, the justice model is promoted through the *YCJA's*

emphasis on procedural fairness, rights and procedures when it comes to processing young offenders (Corrado, Gronsdahl, MacAllister, & Cohen, 2010). Lastly, the potential for lengthy adult sentences for serious young offenders in the *YCJA* reflects aspects of the crime control model.

Among other aspects of the *YCJA*, one of the primary goals from its inception in 2003 was to reduce the number of young offenders in custody (Bala, Carrington, & Roberts, 2009). Consider in 2010 alone, nearly 153,00 Canadian youth were accused of committing a crime, 42% were charged by the police, while the remaining 58% were dealt with by other means (Public Safety Canada, 2012). While in 2002, charge ratios were at a staggering 70% in Ontario (Bala, Carrington, & Roberts, 2009). As it is clear from these two statistics presented that extra judicial measures or non-court sanctions for less serious offences and first-time offenders, have certainly been utilized to reduce the number of youth charges and numbers of youth in custody.

Research has long indicated that sending youth into custody does little to increase public safety and only further increases costs of providing youth justice services (Bala, Carrington, & Roberts, 2009). Despite this, young people continue to be sent into federal and provincial correctional facilities for a number of different offences. Currently placing an offender in custody or incarcerating any offender is largely recognized as the most serious and punitive response to crime that the Canadian Criminal Justice System can impose today (Cesaroni, & Peterson-Badali, 2010). Since capital punishment

is no longer used, incarceration is now the strongest measure of state power, and as a result legislation recognizes that it should be using sparingly and only for very specific purposes (Cesaroni, & Peterson-Badali, 2010).

2. Youth in Custody

Adolescence is a pivotal time in life marked by significant development, growth, transition and planning for the future (Clinkinbeard, & Zohra, 2012). In order to make this transition successful, it is widely recognized that youth, when capable, need to be given the opportunity to make their own decisions, develop important social relationships, and ultimately learn how to become responsible adults (Finlay, 2009; Steinberg, Chung, & Little, 2004). While incarcerated, there are clearly significant challenges to these parts of a youth's development. For one, due to the structure of incarceration there is quite clearly a significant loss of freedom and choice, which hinders a youth's ability to make decisions and navigate choices in the real world (Cesaroni, & Peterson-Badali, 2010). Similarly, youth are given limited opportunities for positive social development, both with external and internal influences, which not only limits their personal development but also hinders any chance of social support (Finlay, 2009; Woodall, 2007).

In one study, youth described their isolation from friends and family as one of the most difficult aspects of being incarcerated (Woodall, 2007). In fact, the time immediately after connecting with loved ones was viewed as

one of the lowest and most depressing times while incarcerated, as it brought into sharp contrast their current day-to-day realities (Woodall, 2007). It is therefore of no surprise that some suggest that incarceration may actually exacerbate support deficiencies that were existing previously, which may cause inmates to feel further isolation and adjust even more poorly as it becomes blatantly obvious that they are missing support from external sources, like friends or family (Biggam, & Power, 1997). However, youth are not just restricted and limited from their access to external supports, but they also face critical challenges from internal sources.

On the Inside: Bullying and Victimization

There are generally two models for understanding an offenders' adaptation to the institutional environment, they are known as they deprivation model and importation model (Finlay 2009). The deprivation model asserts that offenders adjust to the "pains of imprisonment" through the use of violence as a way to regain control and influence (Finlay, 2009, p. 2). In this way, violence is a reaction to being imprisoned and stems from the institutional environment. On the other hand, the importation model suggests that offenders have imported their preexisting beliefs, values and experiences which were with them prior to being incarcerated, and as such the prison experience, including violent interactions, are an extension of their lived experience where violence is normalized. As a result, this model argues that young offenders bring their normalization of violent experiences along

with them while they are incarcerated, whether as victims or perpetrators, and this violence is further perpetuated institutionally (Hartinger-Saunders, Rittner, Wieczorek, Nochajski, Rine, & Welte, 2011).

Whether violent interactions are brought on or normalized by incarceration the fact remains the same that bullying and victimization amongst young offenders has become a serious issue that can set a negative undertone for the institution's peer culture as a whole (Helmund, Overbeek, & Brugman, 2012). Where youth outside of custody would normally turn to their social network or peers for social support and understanding, within an institutional context there is a broad culture that promotes masculine showmanship and bravado prohibiting male offenders from confiding in their peers (Woodall, 2007). This phenomenon is mainly understood that for a male offender displaying any sort of perceived external weakness can be damaging to their reputation and ultimately a concern for their safety, as outward appearance and reputation are of the utmost importance when it comes to power and control (Woodall, 2007). Further, shorter sentences amongst young offenders also work to create a high turnover rate within the institution's population. This constant shuffling of the inmate population means that violence is at its highest, as there is a constant struggle for power or a pecking order (Cesaroni, & Peterson-Badali, 2010). In addition to the normative violence, there is a constant sense of instability from the shuffling of inmates, which limits prosocial and positive relationship building as

fostering a sense of unity and trust takes time (Biggam, & Power, 1997; Cesaroni, & Peterson-Badali, 2010).

Among young offenders, bullying and victimization while in custody is staggeringly commonplace (Connell, & Farrington, 1997; Finlay, 2009). In one study, 70% of residents were involved in bullying, 45% as bullies and 25% as victims (Connell, & Farrington, 1997). In the same study, 90% of victims said bullying and victimization occurred every day (Connell, & Farrington, 1997). Engaging in peer violence is theorized as being pivotal in helping to maintain a natural balance of power and control within the inmate subgroup (Finlay, 2009). While female inmates often resort to psychological or indirect bullying, their male counterparts often exert physical and direct bullying tactics (Connell, & Farrington, 1997). Unlike high school bullying, where the victim can go home to recover in private, young offenders cannot escape their tormenters as they are all confined within the same quarters and must regularly participate in shared programming.

In many ways, bullying and victimization amongst young offenders is really at extreme levels, but it is accepted as a normative event that receives little attention (Cesaroni, & Peterson-Badali, 2010). Many inmates report that bullying goes unreported and unnoticed (Connell, & Farrington, 1996). This perpetuation of violence is in large part due to an unwritten inmate code, where the highest rule for inmates to abide by is to keep quiet and avoid becoming a 'rat' or 'snitch' (Cesaroni, & Peterson-Badali, 2010; Connell, &

Farrington, 1996; Finlay, 2009). Turning to staff could put youth at serious risk of physical retaliation, so the common solution is to be tough or fight back, which has obvious consequences (Finlay, 2009).

Isolation and 'Arrested' Development

Unlike adult inmates, youth are generally still quite immature in their relationships and require a higher level of cognitive and physical stimulation on a daily basis (Finlay, 2009). For young offenders, this means that the highly secluded areas and strictly structured and monotonous schedules characteristic of most detention centres can be highly damaging to their personal growth (Finlay, 2009). Additionally, space functionality, organization and even cleanliness can have an impact on their stimulation and ability to foster any sort of positive experience (Finlay, 2009; Office of the Ombudsman & Child and Youth Advocate, 2008). Youth need to be in developmentally appropriate environments. Studies support that cottage or communal style institutional organization which fosters a sense of togetherness is best as prolonged isolation can have a broad range of psychological consequences (Finlay, 2009; Office of the Ombudsman & Child and Youth Advocate, 2008). They also need a balanced schedule of programming that meets their physical, emotional, educational and spiritual needs, but this is often not the case due to limited funding or resources (Finlay, 2009).

Youth incarceration is further complicated when young adults are transferred to adult facilities (Kupchik, 2007). This is sometimes done due to the seriousness of the sentence or other times simply due to logistical issues; however, being placed in developmentally inappropriate services designed for adults can be extremely damaging to a young offender (Kupchik, 2007). In light of all these challenges, it is not surprising that it has been suggested that the development of youth is also arrested once they become incarcerated (Cesaroni, Peterson-Badali, 2010).

Obedience and Rehabilitation: The Example of Segregation

Although Canada is generally known to have adopted a rehabilitative stance to incarceration, it becomes clear once examining the structure of correctional facilities and the actions of correctional staff that there are two directly competing values which are generally at the forefront – obedience and rehabilitation (Finlay, 2009; Steinberg, Chung, & Little, 2004). While incarcerated, young offenders are required to obey the rules and expected to operate within highly structured environments. As a result, there are punishments for disobedience; social control and respect of this process is of the utmost importance. As a prime example of an approach that supports obedience is the use of therapeutic quiet or segregation, which is often used as a punishment for misbehaviour for young offenders (Office of the Ombudsman & Child and Youth Advocate, 2008). Segregation generally involves 23 hours of confinement in a cell that is smaller than a regular cell,

has no windows with access to the barest of necessities – a mattress, toilet and meal slot (Office of the Ombudsman & Child and Youth Advocate, 2008).

At the same time, there is an expectation under the *YCJA* is that young offenders are going to be given a second chance to rehabilitate and improve themselves and hopefully reintegrate back into society. In this way, incarceration is designed to be a therapeutic, personal experience to guide youth into understanding how to make informed decisions, and improve themselves so they are able to reintegrate back into society. However, as Steinberg, Chung, and Little (2004) assert:

> The justice system does little to treat the problems offenders bring with them when they enter the system, little to promote the successful development of offenders while they are in the system, and little to protect offenders from the potential iatrogenic effects of system involvement. (p. 32)

Many critics would agree, that as it stands the current corrections system creates offenders who leave with more problems than they came with (Steinberg, Chung, & Little, 2004). The constant battle between social control and social welfare creates serious logistical problems for young offenders, which sends mixed messaging at the very least.

3. Current Approaches to Youth Reentry

Since most young offenders return to their communities once they have served their sentence, it only makes sense in terms of public safety and offender reintegration to understand the risks and protective factors that are involved in this process (Altschuler, & Brash, 2004). Identifying risk and

protective factors is ultimately the first step in developing a plan for reentry, as they should serve as the building blocks for the entire reentry plan moving forward. In this way, risk factors will be worked and improved upon, while protective factors will be enhanced and broadened. Further, ensuring that offender needs are identified and assessed and then services are coordinated is also of the utmost importance if reentry is meant to be meaningful and successful (Bouffard, & Bergseth, 2008).

There are currently four responses to reintegration or reentry of young offenders in Canada. Again, these approaches are (1) prison-based programming, (2) surveillance-based transition programs, (3) assistance-based transition programs and (4) integrated throughcare programs (Griffiths, Dandurand, & Murdoch, 2007). Currently reentry approaches in Canada aim to involve a mix of surveillance as well as the provision of some sort of support or social service to improve general well being; however, in actuality this aim is not always brought to fruition (Bouffard, & Bergseth, 2008). There are many significant and noteworthy challenges to implementing reentry programs.

Initial Challenges

Before going through the specifics of any of these responses, it is important to remember that there are multiple barriers that make the implementation and ultimate success of reentry quite challenging. While in theory many of these programs seek to assist with rehabilitation, in reality

there are multiple factors that make reintegration and rehabilitation fall short in practice (Altschuler, & Brash, 2004). From the beginning, it is argued that in order for integration to be most successful, planning needs to begin at the very earliest stages of admission (Altschuler, & Brash, 2004). It is argued that by planning early, this provides ample time for everyone (i.e. the youth, family members, community supports, social services) to consider how to reenter society in a meaningful way, often by making connections to outside resources, social supports, and family members as a united front. However, due to a real absence of appropriate resources for young offenders and a lack of coordination between institutions and communities, many young offenders reenter society without any connections to support (Griffiths, Dandurand, & Murdoch, 2007). This either leads them to seek out resources on their own or to simply cope as best as they are able to without formalized support.

For youth who are able to overcome the initial challenges of entering into reentry programming, another real setback is being matched to inappropriate services (Cornell, 2001). It is not uncommon that young offenders are admitted into programming that involves mixed-patient populations or provides services designed for adults that are not well-suited to their developmental stage or personal needs (Wynterdyk, 2000). By failing to match young offenders with appropriate services, the reentry plan becomes completely compromised. This is especially true when considering

that many young offenders are known to be developmentally lagging when compared to their non-offending peers, therefore matching them to adult services would provide further barriers to receiving the support they need (Altschuler, & Brash, 2004). Ultimately in understanding that young offenders experience reentry in a way that is unique to them alone, services tailored specifically to their needs are not only beneficial, but required (Altschuler, & Brash, 2004).

Prison-Based Programming

Prison-based or institutional programming is the first line of reintegration programming available to young offenders in Canada. Prison-based programming provides services to incarcerated individuals in order to improve access to education, mental health care, substance abuse treatment, vocational or skills-based training, therapy or counseling as well as mentorship (Griffiths, Dandurand, & Murdoch, 2007). In order for this type of programming to be the most successful, it is important to have an accurate assessment or understanding of the needs of young offenders (Griffiths, Dandurand, & Murdoch, 2007). However, due to logistical and resource issues at the time of admission, receiving an accurate and comprehensive assessment of the offender and their needs is not always feasible.

At the same time, another major set back of prison-based programming is the fact that participation is completely voluntary (Griffiths, Dandurand, & Murdoch, 2007). In this way, should offenders choose not to participate, they

are subsequently released back into society without any real preparation for the reintegration experience (Griffiths, Dardurant, & Murdoch, 2007). Despite the fact that Canadian correctional facilities are aimed at rehabilitating youth while in custody, many do not provide the actual means for achieving change. In this way, programming is in short supply, is of poor quality or is at times inappropriate based on the unique needs of youth offenders who do choose to become involved (Altschuler, & Brash, 2004). While there is evidence that some faith-based programs and drug programs employed in Canadian prisons, like The High Intensity Substance Abuse Program (HISAP) and Institutional Methadone Maintenance Treatment (MMT) programs, have had some success in reducing recidivism, there is mixed support for employment and life skills training programs (Griffiths, Dandurand, & Murdoch, 2007). It has been suggested that it may be difficult to capture program success in evaluative frameworks due to the different dynamics of such programs (Griffiths, Dandurand, & Murdoch, 2007).

Surveillance-Based Transition Programs

It is largely understood that the first few months of reentry are the most critical time for young offenders (Abrams, 2006). In understanding this, surveillance-based transition programs provide the second line of reintegration programming in Canada. Surveillance-based transition programs interact with youth right upon their release. In the most basis sense, surveillance-based transition programs involve young offenders

coming into regular contact with a designated probation officer (Corrado, Gronsdalh, MacAllister, & Cohen 2010). Probation officers are assigned to a caseload of youth and become responsible for ensuring that they are meeting the requirements of their probation as per the terms of the court order. Some regular tasks for offenders involved may include participating in electronic monitoring (EM) or ensuring that drug or urine analysis is free from any prohibited substances, as well as ensuring participation and attendance in mandated programming if stipulated.

Youth probation in Canada has been influenced by various political, social, cultural and philosophical principles and has changed over time (Corrado, Gronsdahl, MacAllister, & Cohen, 2010). Currently probation officers attempt to balance the best interests of the offender with the enforcement of court orders and public safety (Corrado, Gronsdahl, MacAllister, & Cohen, 2010). Despite the significance of this role in corrections, much of the available research confirms that intensive supervision programs are typically not successful in reducing recidivism rates (Griffiths, Dandurand, & Murdoch, 2007). This is especially true when surveillance-based approaches are used alone or in the absence of treatment or any sort of skills development. Success and efficacy findings typically report some initial improvements in recidivism; however, these positive results generally decline over time (Griffiths, Dandurand, & Murdoch, 2007).

Assistance-Based Transition Programs

Assistance-based transition programs are aimed specifically at giving support to identified risk areas once an offender has been released from custody. Assistance-based programs focus primarily on the known needs of offenders, as they have typically been referred to community-based programs through coordination or case management directly upon release (Griffiths, Dandurand, & Murdoch, 2007). In this way, programs that offer support and assistance to offenders with mental health issues, employment or job market reentry, housing and financial assistance, family support, as well as specific programming for sexual offenders can all be included under the assistance-based program umbrella (Griffiths, Dandurand, & Murdoch, 2007). These programs are delivered out in the community and participants may not have necessarily participated in any programming while still in custody. As a result, it may take more time to engage youth meaningfully as they may not have been truly prepared for reintegration prior to their release.

Integrated Throughcare Programs

Lastly, integrated or throughcare programs are perhaps the most promising area for young offenders' reentry. Throughcare programs are the fourth type of reentry or reintegration programming in Canada. Throughcare involves continuously coordinating programming for an offender throughout their time in custody and for a period of time after release. In this way,

programming can be adapted to meet needs that can be foreseen or are readily identified, but it can also be expanded to incorporate areas that require development that may only present after release. As a result, integrated, throughcare programming requires extensive coordination or case management (Griffiths, Dandurand, & Murdoch, 2007). It is primarily focused on ensuring there is a seamless transition in terms of continued services and supports while in custody and after release.

Throughcare is really a three-phase program design incorporating (1) prerelease planning and services, (2) reentry preparation or short-term post-release (the initial transition) and (3) community-based programming after release (Bouffard, & Bergseth, 2008). Research indicates that young offenders who are able to generate expectations for themselves in the future are able to have greater ability to be prepared for what lies ahead in terms of transitioning back into their communities (Clinkinbead, & Zohra, 2012). Through the use of throughcare programming, young offenders are encouraged to develop plans for handling barriers that may present, as well as connect with resources that can assist or help negotiate new or unanticipated barriers moving forward (Clinkinbeard, & Zohra, 2012). It is this planning aspect that really sets apart throughcare programming from the other types of reintegration programs offered. Further, the case management or continued support further strengthens and improves young offenders' reentry chances.

Once released from care, throughcare programming requires extensive engagement and involvement from communities to ensure that continued support will be available. It also requires that services have been set up in advance so offenders' reentry will have a smooth transition. Throughcare aims to incorporate an ecological approach to support, when done effectively. In this way, youth are engaged in multiple environments and multiple factors that influence their lives are not only considered, but also meaningfully incorporated. Mentors or role models may also be matched with youth to help improve their social bonding and ultimately enhance the transition experience (Bouffard, & Bergseth, 2008). Overall, there have been mixed findings on whether or not throughcare programming is effective in reducing recidivism (Griffiths, Dandurand, & Murdoch, 2007). While some programs like, Intensive Surveillance and Supervision Program (ISSP): The Initial Report have been found mildly successful, others like Project Greenlight, have found no reduction in recidivism (Griffiths, Dandurand, & Murdoch, 2007).

4. Fixing the Offender

As all of the types of reentry programs have now been explored, it is quite evident that they all see the individual as the source of the problem in some way or another. The attitude of 'fixing' the offender (i.e. if they are sufficiently trained so they can go back to work, provided with basic housing or income, or given treatment for substance use or health issues, then they

should be ready to reenter society) is really evident here. Most of the treatment initiatives are brief and focused on completing a program rather than making a meaningful transition. Further, 'tough on crime' approaches like surveillance-based programming are promoted and still utilized although there is no real support that intensive surveillance alone is even effective in reducing recidivism (Bala, Carrington, & Roberts, 2009; Griffiths, Dandurand, & Murdoch, 2007). This is really indicative of the Conservative government's "get tough on crime agenda" while also falling in line with the views of many Canadians who feel that tougher approaches are needed (Bala, Carrington, & Roberts, 2009, p. 159; Tanasichuk, & Wormith, 2012). It is only the last approach, integrated throughcare programming, which takes a more holistic or ecological approach to understanding reentry.

The Importance of Reentry Programming

No matter which approach to reentry is employed, it is important to recognize that reentry programming serves as a vital response to address the highly traumatic experience of being in custody, all the while setting the tone for reintegration. In one study of young people, being remanded into custody for any period of time ranks amongst one the highest lifetime stressors, right behind the death of a parent (Cesaroni, & Peterson-Badali, 2010). As was explored, youth experiences in custody are marked by increased infractions, higher risk of suicide, increased assaults on inmates and higher experience of anxiety, and less ability to cope, in comparison to adult offenders (Cesaroni,

& Peterson-Badali, 2010). Further, there is a high prevalence of psychiatric disorders as well as learning disabilities, among youth in custody (Cesaroni, & Peterson-Badali, 2010). In fact, one study suggests that as many as 90% of young offenders have a diagnosable mental health problem (Woodall, 2007). Outside of incarceration, factors like poverty, lack of education, racism, and poor parenting can be relevant in understanding young offenders (Clinkinbeard, & Zohra, 2012). In addition to this, youth are uniquely transitioning developmentally from childhood to adulthood, a period marked by physical, cognitive, social and emotional change which can be difficult at the best of times (Altschuler, & Brash, 2004). These multiple factors make youth reentry a complex and challenging phenomena, which is why programming is essential to make this process as smooth as possible.

Challenges in the Reentry Process

For youth who are not matched with appropriate resources, there are many real and perceived challenges to being successful in leading a crime-free life and reintegrating back into society. In one study, youth expressed that an inability to attain employment led them to feel inadequate, going back to "their old ways" was comforting and reliable, something they knew they would be good at (Arditti, & Parkman, 2011, p. 207). Similarly, falling behind where peers are developmentally, especially when support systems like family members or friends may be reinforcing them to move forward, causes

doubt and feelings on the part of youth that they are responsible for people being let down (Altschuler, & Brash, 2004; Arditti, & Parkman, 2011).

Further, some male youth expressed that depending on family members and others for support meant to them that they are not fully-developed as a man, and still need to grow up, causing them to pull back to show their independence, even when they need support (Arditi, & Parkman, 2011). There are many other barriers to successful reentry, like lack of stable and affordable housing, no income or access to employment, limited or no connections to social supports (i.e. family, peers, mentors), physical, psychological or behavioural health concerns (Altschuler, & Brash, 2004; Hartwell, McMackin, Tansi, & Bartlett, 2010). All of the risk and protective factors that relate to the youth need to be given careful consideration if reentry is going to be meaningful and lasting.

Recidivism and 'Successful' Reentry

It should be noted that it was not until the 1990s that aftercare programming, or various programming designed to assist offenders successfully reenter society once released from custody existed (Bouffard, & Bergseth, 2008). From its inception reentry programming was developed as a way to increase public safety and to combat high rates of recidivism, rather than necessarily working to improve the reentry experiences of the offenders themselves. Although there has been significant progress in creating reentry programming that better meets the needs of offenders, in many ways the

continued focus on reducing recidivism as the gold standard still exists. In many ways, this long-standing gold standard is still reflective of the crime control model, which lobbies for the safety of society over the needs of offenders.

This is largely because research has readily recognized that there are significant numbers of repeat offenders, causing chronic impact on the Criminal Justice System and concerns for public safety (Abrams, & Snyder, 2010; Griffith, Dandurand, & Murdoch, 2007). As one source asserts, "a majority of convicted offenders have at least one prior conviction, either in youth or adult court… and nearly 75 percent have multiple prior convictions" (Griffiths, Dandurand, & Murdoch, 2007, p. 2). In light of the serious consequences of chronic offenders, in terms of victim costs, criminal justice costs and productivity loss, there has been increased attention to ensure that young offenders' reentry into society is focused on ensuring they do not reoffend and become career criminals (Bouffard, & Bergseth, 2008; Hartwell, McMackin, Tansi, & Bartlett, 2010).

It has been identified that relying on recidivism alone is quite limiting and while it may require more creative approaches for measuring efficacy, success should be expanded to include whether or not youth are able to succeed in a number of different areas in their lives, like school, work, and development of positive relationships (Beale Spencer, & Jones-Walker, 2004). Expanding definitions of success would also allow youth a space to determine

what they want for themselves and how they envision success. While recidivism is certainly important, it should not be the only factor considered for successful reentry. Youth will eventually need to become contributing members of society and will require the skills it takes to become successfully reintegrated. In this way, an expanded definition of success would fit more closely with youth needs and a welfare approach.

5. Connecting to Current Research Project: The Role of Staff in Reentry

One common theme of many studies is acknowledging the crucial role that staff can play in a young offender's rehabilitation experience (Biggam, & Power, 1997; Finlay, 2009; Woodall, 2007). Due to their ongoing interactions with the youth, the correctional staff have many opportunities to exert both negative and positive influence on inmates. In terms of negative influence, one study reports that it is common for corrections staff to have a lot of discretion, which can lead to situations of uneven application of rules and situations of over-control (Finlay, 2009). This can create fear amongst inmates as discretion may be applied in some circumstances and not in others, while over-controlling interventions can lead to physical injuries (Cesaroni, & Peterson-Badali, 2010). At times these situations of over-control have become exposed and publicly investigated like the well-known case of Ashley Smith. Ashley Smith was a young offender who suffered from undiagnosed mental health issues, but was reportedly transferred to a more punitive adult facility where she was tasered and pepper-sprayed by staff on

multiple occasions. That was until she ultimately failed to receive adequate support services and consequently committed suicide in her cell (Office of the Ombudsman & Child and Youth Advocate, 2008).

While on the other hand, another study reports the especially encouraging and positive influence that female staff can have on largely male inmate populations (Woodall, 2007). In this way, female staff members have the ability to develop a more sensitive and nurturing relationship with inmates in ways that their male colleagues were unable to, which can be especially helpful in environments where male bravado is at a peak (Woodall, 2007). Further, other studies acknowledge that both male and female staff can be a key figure for young offenders, in many ways acting as a mentor for positive behaviour and role modeling (Biggam, & Power, 1997). This is especially important as positive relationships, including those with staff, can help buffer stress and can be instrumental in mediating a young offenders' adjustment both throughout their incarceration and leading up to their reentry (Biggam, & Power, 1997). Trusted staff can also be resources for offenders who may require extra support or assistance.

Therefore it is in the context of this study that reentry will be looked at through the perspective of key informants, namely probation officers and youth workers. These individuals have valuable insight as frontline staff working with youth during reentry. From their perspective, I hope to capture the essence of reentry and gather what successes and challenges they

experience in their attempt to work with youth reentering their communities.

Chapter Three: Theoretical Framework

As a researcher, it is important to understand my beliefs and where I position myself before I can appreciate how much I in turn shape and influence my research journey. Since I believe it is impossible for anyone to fully extricate themselves from their research, it is important that I acknowledge my theoretical framework and embrace it as an integral piece of the research puzzle. In many ways, a theoretical framework determines even the most fundamental aspects of a research project, including what is considered evidence, how the question is posed and even the expectations of what I hope to get out of the study. As a researcher approaching this particular research project, I believe my theoretical framework is a fusion of both the critical and interpretive social science approaches. This chapter will be used to explore how the critical and interpretive social science approaches are integrated to form my theoretical framework and how I will acknowledge and respond to what challenges this fusion may present.

1. Critical Social Science Approach

Critical social science research serves the purpose of both critiquing and transforming social relations (Kreuger, & Neuman, 2006). In this way, critical social science researchers understand that social reality exists and structural forces shape individual experience in distinct ways (Kreuger, & Neuman, 2006; Mason, 2002). In an effort to critique and change social

relations, critical social science researchers work to unveil an inherent power hierarchy where powerful groups in society continuously attempt to increase their influence and promote their agenda at the expense of less powerful or vulnerable groups (Jackson, 1999). Therefore by engaging in critical social science research and critiquing the current social order, research becomes a catalyst for social change and improvement.

As a critical researcher involved in this research project, I am interested in who gets to define successful reentry and by doing so I am simultaneously critiquing the current definition of success that exists. I question why success is defined the way it is, and who dictates this definition. As a researcher, I encourage a deeper look at how success is defined because reentry is a complex and layered experience that has to do with more than just recidivism. In challenging the dominant notion of success as related to recidivism alone, which is what the 'powerful' groups in society believe, I present an opportunity for others, namely key informants, to present their own ideas.

As a critical researcher, I also openly acknowledge that I am passionate about working with and learning about at-risk youth and offending youth populations. Unlike positivist researchers, as a critical social science researcher I acknowledge that I cannot be a disinterested or neutral party and I am readily engaged in the research process and topic (Krueger, & Neuman, 2006). Part of this engagement is about acknowledging that I come

into this research project with some pre-existing questions about this phenomenon, but at the same time I am committed to learning about reentry through the insider perspectives of key informants and empowering those involved to share their knowledge.

Ultimately as a critical social science researcher, I feel that I have an obligation to advocate for changing the current state of things (Jackson, 1999). In this way, I hope to provide an opportunity for key informants to share their experiences and understandings of a successful reentry, which I believe will be in contrast to dominant societal views and can hopefully spurn further discussion. Overall, I want this to be a learning experience for everyone involved, a key tenet of critical social science research.

2. Interpretive Social Science Approach

Interpretive social science researchers seek to understand social life and unravel the various meanings that people attach to experiences and phenomena (Kreuger, & Neuman, 2006). For researchers, it is not only about trying to understand what is important to the people being researched, but also trying to view things from their perspective (Kreuger, & Neuman, 2006). Gathering the motivations, purposes and intents behind actions are of the utmost importance to interpretive researchers. It is these meanings that are at the heart of interpretive social science research. Ultimately, it is understood that people define social reality, but at the same time it is acknowledged that this experience may or may not be the same for everyone.

Experiences are sometimes shared amongst people, but may also be unique. In this way, interpretive social science research is a collaborative effort with participants rather than a study on or about them.

In this way the interpretive side of my research framework really speaks to my commitment to engaging key informants as experts and doing my best to understand what reentry is like from their perspectives. In order to do this, key informants were interviewed firsthand so I could begin to understand how they interpret the concept of success and successful reentry. Eventually, transcripts assisted in analyzing their interpretations so they could then be compared to dominant societal definitions of success. It was their opinions and lived experience that were of the utmost importance and as a researcher I aimed to work with them collaboratively to develop an understanding of the meanings they give to successful reentry.

3. Situating Myself

Looking back on my past experiences working with at-risk youth and young offenders, I realize that I have always been highly critical of the current stereotypes cast on youth in conflict with the law. Instead of buying into the current ruling Conservatives' prevailing "get tough on crime agenda," I have become acutely aware of the multiple factors that intersect to impact this population, including socioeconomic status, education, race, neighbourhood, peer group, and family relations (Bala, Carrington, & Roberts, 2009, p. 159; Beale Spencer, & Jones-Walker, 2004). In

understanding that there are so many factors that can contribute to a youth engaging in offending behaviour, I have concluded that these same factors should be addressed when planning for reentry back into the community. I will make the case that reentry programming and planning needs to be a holistic experience that meets the needs of youth involved, rather than simply aiming to meet narrow program goals of success and primarily reducing reoffending.

As mentioned in Chapter Two, today's models for measuring the successful reentry of a youth are extremely narrow. In this way, success is largely based on promoting increased surveillance with the ultimate goal of lowering recidivism, or keeping a low rate of youth reoffending (Bouffard, & Bergseth, 2008). When program success is defined specifically this way, as long as youth are not reoffending, then service provision is considered to be effective. Therefore a successful reentry experience could see a youth unsupported by their family and the community, with chronically precarious housing, a lack of basic education and life skills, or unaddressed addiction and mental health issues (Clinkinbeard, & Zohra, 2012). As a result, I feel that recidivism is really only a partial picture of reentry success and there are multiple other aspects of this story that should be taken into account as well.

I strongly believe, as many academics argue, that youth need holistic programming that appreciates the multiple aspects of their lives pertinent to them reintegrating, including but not limited to recidivism (Beale Spencer, &

Jones-Walker, 2004). Since reentry is such a complex, multi-faceted experience, it only makes sense, from a critical perspective, to engage those directly involved, namely youth and staff, for their input on what this redevelopment process should look like. As insiders, both youth and staff have firsthand knowledge of what is required for a successful transition experience back into the communities.

Key informants, namely probation officers and youth workers, have insight about the experiences of youth and the meanings they attach to reentry that are unique to them alone as insiders (Mason, 2002). The experiences of key informants in assisting youth during reentry, like any of those in the entire social world, "[are] largely what people perceive [them] to be… Social life exists as people experience it and give it meaning" (Kreuger, & Neuman, 2006, p. 69). In this way, key informants can give insight into what it is like for youth to experience reentry because they have been deeply involved with youth throughout the experience.

4. Theoretical Tensions and Challenges

By adopting a critical-interpretive framework, it was important to acknowledge that there are ways that these two approaches blend nicely, but at the same time there were also some critiques and challenges that each approach posed to the other. Firstly, both critical and interpretive social science approaches are interested in the voices and experiences of participants. In relation to my study, key informants and their opinions are of

the utmost importance. Privileging the voices of key informants fit well with both of these approaches because unlike positivist research, both critical and interpretive social science approaches acknowledge the social aspect of research (Kreuger, & Neuman, 2006).

Where these approaches differ; however, is that the critical researcher critiques the interpretive researcher for being too subjective and privileging opinions and ideas over actual context (Kreuger, & Neuman, 2006). While the interpretive approach looks more at the micro-level, the critical approach takes it further to a larger, macro-level historical context (Kreuger, & Neuman, 2006). Further, critical researchers see the interpretive approach as too passive, without taking a stance or making a firm position to be an active party in change. Interpretive researchers assert that value judgments impose ways of understanding the world on others and instead multiple and even competing interpretations are acceptable (Kreuger, & Neuman, 2006). This was where my project leans more on the critical side. I wanted this research project to be a tool towards creating change. I hoped to go beyond the surface and really dig deep into what a successful reentry experience really means to those intimately involved in the process so I could bring forth a number of recommendations for improvement going forward.

Despite any challenges in blending these approaches together, the critical-interpretive framework served well in this research project. It both opened the door for engaging and co-creating knowledge with key

informants so as to better understand reentry, while it also provided an avenue for critiquing the current state of things. I ultimately hoped for this research project to both appreciate the insider perspectives of front-line staff in this experience, while simultaneously adding to a growing body of literature promoting a more holistic understanding of success when it came to youth reentry.

Chapter Four: Methodology and Methods

Since I have already explored the blended critical-interpretive social science approach that informed my research project, this chapter will then take a closer look at my particular research methodology and methods. Given that I aimed to understand the lived experience of reentry for young offenders, I selected phenomenology, a qualitative method that is committed to understanding lived experience and gives voice to individuals, as my research methodology. In a most basic sense, phenomenology creates knowledge by having researchers delve directly into the lived experiences of people by immersing themselves into their worlds (Finlay, 1999). This chapter will explore the specifics of this research project's methodology, namely phenomenology, as well as the particulars around recruitment, participants, data collection, data analysis, ethical considerations and consent/confidentiality.

1. Phenomenology

Phenomenology, deriving from the complex and controversial phenomenological philosophy, was primarily developed by philosopher Edmund Husserl in the late 19th century in an attempt to understand the essence of the life world as it is lived (Finlay, 1999; Pascal, Johnson, Dore, & Trainor, 2010). Husserl asserted that people could uncover knowledge about a phenomenon by entering into the lived experience of someone else that has

experienced it (McCormick, 2010). In order to understand human experience (*Verstehen*), one must gain access to the mind or spirit (*Geist*) of the other person (Finlay, 1999). Given the subjectivity and philosophical nature of phenomenology, there is great debate amongst researchers and scholars as to how it is best applied in more practical contexts. In fact, in consulting various sources it is clear that there are sometimes contradictory and even opposing understandings of how to conduct phenomenological research, which is primarily seen around the technique of bracketing, which will be addressed later on (Finlay, 1999; Pascal, Johnson, Dore, & Trainor, 2010).

For this research project, my ultimate goal was to understand the reentry process from the perspectives of key informants. I hoped to get into their perspectives and mindset by trying to see and understand things from their point of view. When asking questions, I allowed participants to describe their experiences without interference. At times, I requested clarification or had additional questions; however, I tried to do so without prompting them to answer a certain way. Instead, I made brief notes on the interview guide throughout most of the interviews where I could make note of particularly poignant statements or ideas that I would like to return to. In my mind, this was how I envisioned phenomenology operating as my methodology.

By doing so, I hoped to uncover participant's experiences regarding reentry and particularly the meanings attached to the notion of 'success' as primary foci of analysis. By using a qualitative method to allow for key

informants to convey their opinions, they were given an opportunity to express perspectives that may not be in line with dominant societal constructions of success (Jackson, 1999). In many ways qualitative research was flexible and provided an opportunity to get an in-depth understanding or insight of the reentry experience in ways that quantitative methods could not (Jackson, 1999; Krueger, & Neuman, 2006). Due to this in-depth understanding, I felt that phenomenology was a well-suited choice of methodology to reflect the complexity of lived experience.

Bracketing and Reflexivity

Generally, it is widely accepted in phenomenological studies that researchers must completely immerse themselves into the other person's life world in order to fully grasp the other person's lived experience. Given that the relationship with the researcher and participant lays the foundation for understanding someone's experience, developing a relationship that is open, willing to discover, unencumbered by the constraints of knowing is of the utmost importance (Finlay, 1999). Naturally, an 'open, unencumbered relationship' sounds complicated to achieve since everyone has an existing bias that is constantly brought into situations based on existing opinions, experiences and beliefs. Therefore, in order to avoid this personal bias tainting the meaning of someone else's experience; Husserl asserts that researchers should bracket or set aside their own subjectivity to focus on the other person (Pascal, 2010; Singer, 2005).

Bracketing involves compartmentalizing or holding back personal assumptions, theories, perspectives regarding a phenomena in a way that then allows the researcher to truly get into someone else's experience from their perspective (Tufford, & Newman, 2010; Finlay, 1999). Some researchers suggest this can be achieved using journals, sticky notes, or memos, to record personal bias. During the research process, bracketing can also be achieved in other ways, including acknowledging the power differential between researcher and participant or even to help maintain a focus on the research question. For example this can be done by having a researcher write down their feelings when something particularly poignant was said during an interview, which can help them engage deeper in the data during data analysis. Since these feelings are simply recorded/bracketed and not included in the actual interview itself, it allows the participant's answers to go untainted by the researcher's personal bias (Tufford, & Newman, 2010).

Bracketing is another concept that is highly controversial and not quite understood the same way by all phenomenological researchers (Tufford, & Newman, 2010). In fact, there is ongoing debate as to how it is achieved, when it should be used (beginning, throughout, after, etc), who should use it (researchers, participants, both, etc) and whether it is even possible (Pascal, 2010; Tufford, & Newman, 2010). One of Husserl's most notable students, Martin Heidegger took up this latter argument and asserted that instead of removing one's biases during bracketing, researchers must

become self-reflexive and acknowledge it (Pascal, 2010). Since I certainly came into this research journey with bias that would never be completely removed, it was this Heideggerian reflexive approach that I strived for personally as a researcher. People are always subjective in their experience, so as a phenomenological researcher, I openly acknowledged that it was impossible to be objective and instead was reflexive (Singer, 2005).

Challenges and Drawbacks of Phenomenology

Like any research methodology, there are clearly positives and negatives in selecting phenomenology for this particular research project. Phenomenology is complex and requires a close rapport between the researcher and participant. While it is suggested that a rapport develops between the researcher and participant through continued meetings over time, due to time constraints this was not possible for my research project. In this way, participants were only provided one opportunity to meet with me and complete their interview. While it certainly is possible that a rapport developed between myself and the participants for that brief period of time, it still may not be considered sufficient enough for engaging in a true phenomenological inquiry. For this reason, I adopted an informal semi-structured interview approach, which I felt gave opportunity for a relationship of trust and respect as much as possible.

2. Recruitment

I recruited participants for this study by contacting several agencies and organizations that are known to provide assistance to at-risk and offending youth within Peel. These agencies varied significantly in the scope and type of services offered, and included places such as a general a youth drop-in, agency offering specialized youth services (i.e. counseling and life skills), the local probation office, a transitional housing provider and an emergency youth shelter. I initially made contact with these agencies by connecting with various Program Managers and Team Leads. At that time, my intention was to inform them briefly of my study, confirm if they were at all interested in participating and then to obtain permission to move forward.

Initially, I created a recruitment poster, which was intended to solicit youth participants in this study [refer Appendix A for Recruitment Poster]. Agency staff were given copies of the poster, copies of my student business card as well as the Letter of Information for youth participants [refer to Appendix B for Letter of Information 1]. All youth were advised to connect with me directly if they had any further inquiries regarding the study or if they were interested in participating. Once they connected with me via phone or email, I intended to arrange to meet up at a mutually agreeable time for the interview to take place. I had hoped that the recruitment posters would be sufficient to solicit enough youth to participate in the study, but with little response over a few weeks I began to drop by some of the agencies to see if I

could recruit youth in person. Unfortunately this process also went on to no avail for several weeks so I needed to once again regroup and change my recruitment strategy.

While I had a few responses (three to be exact) from youth to the participation poster, I began to realize that following through with completing an interview was also a challenge. I had multiple participants schedule and reschedule interview slots until I was no longer able to connect with them further. Eventually, in the interest of moving forward in a timely manner, I elected to include key informants, namely front-line staff, like probation officers and youth workers into my participant pool. Front-line staff would also be very familiar with the reentry process and would have valuable insight. I immediately started a new recruitment process of sorts by reconnecting with each of the agencies I had called initially to now see if any staff would be interested in participating in the study. The turnaround on the second call of interest was almost immediate. Within two weeks I completed the majority of my interviews and within a month I was completely finished with data collection.

3. Participants

I conducted a total of five one-on-one interviews for this research project. All of the interviews were completed within the month of August 2013. Interviews were conducted at the preferred location of each participant, primarily personal office space or a private meeting room on site.

This was also done as a matter of courtesy and convenience as each of the participants I spoke to had quite busy schedules and it would be difficult to get away to speak with me.

Of the five participants, there were three female participants and two male participants. Each of the participants had different experiences and tenure when it came to working with youth. In terms of experience, the participants had over 32 years worth of experience working with youth collectively. Specifically, participants relayed that they had one, four six, eight, and thirteen years respectively. The participants were recruited from Associated Youth Services of Peel, the Mississauga Youth Probation Office, Our Place Peel, Peel Youth Village and The Dam (Meadowvale/Cooksville). Although each of the participants work in different settings and capacities, all of the participants work first-hand with youth who are reentering the community.

4. Data Collection

Since the primary focus of phenomenology is to understand the essences of lived experiences during a phenomenon, it is of no surprise that nearly all phenomenological inquiries are done through a series of interviews or conversations with a participant (McCormick, 2010). This is done so the researcher and participant can develop a rapport and understanding of one another. Generally, these conversations or interviews are then transcribed

word for word so they can be analyzed at a later time for deeper meanings regarding the lived experience of the individual being studied.

With regard to this research project, all interviews were semi-structured in nature and completed in a one-on-one setting. Due to time constraints of the thesis, there was only one interview completed per participant. During the interview, I at times referred to an interview guide to assist with the flow of questions, but left the interview at a conversational level so I was able to stray to areas of interest if something came up that I wanted to explore further [refer to Appendix C for Interview Guide]. All of the interviews were audio recorded using a laptop and then later transcribed word-for-word to ensure accuracy.

Phenomenology is very much about collaboration when it comes to creating knowledge and changing systems (Singer, 2005). Phenomenological research studies would then see the "the client is actually the single most potent contributor," in this particular case these are the key informants, given their expert knowledge on reentry (Singer, 2005, p. 270). As a result, concepts or phenomena, like success and reentry, should only be operationalized using their self-definitions, so research is then co-created as a mutual partnership (Pascal, 2010).

While the intention is for terms and concepts to be operationalized only by participants, it is important to acknowledge that this may be challenging for some who are still making sense of their experiences.

However, phenomenology values and welcomes the opinions of participants, so even partial understanding and confusion may be relevant. Phenomenology embraces the value of researching individual experiences, personal knowledge and the representation of meaning in data analysis and transcription (Pascal, Johnson, Dore, & Trainor, 2010).

5. Data Analysis

Given the complexity of lived experience, phenomenology asserts that data analysis is a gradual, ongoing process that requires careful attention to detail and ample time (Pascal, 2010). Data is read and reread by researchers for meanings; often done by breaking down the transcripts into sections, and then reading rereading the transcripts continuously in a circular fashion to find meanings and themes that emerge. For this study, I began this process by listening to each of the interviews and transcribing the dialogue to create a basis to begin the data analysis process.

Transcribing the interviews themselves was actually a fairly lengthy process, as I painstakingly paused and restarted the audio so as to not miss any of the nuances of language. I really took my time listening to the dialogue and pausing the audio recording throughout to ensure accuracy and also to make room for pauses. Once this process was complete, the transcriptions then were printed so the hardcopies could be highlighted with multiple colours, underlined and circled, to signify different and emerging themes. It

was truly a circular process of reading and rereading to capture the essence of things.

6. Ethical Considerations

Prior to commencing this research project, I submitted an Application to Involve Human Participants in Research form to the McMaster Research Ethics Board (MREB) to obtain approval. The Application clearly outlined my intentions for this research project and laid out any potential ethical considerations I should be aware of. The MREB carefully reviewed my Application, and with a few minor amendments I was provided with a Certificate of Ethics Clearance to Involve Human Participants in Research so I could move forward in my study [refer to Appendix D for Ethics Approval Certificate]. This Ethics Approval Certificate was provided to all of the Program Managers and Team Leads at each organization as evidence that I had received approval to complete the study by the MREB.

During the study, participants were asked to reflect on their experiences working with youth reentering the community. At times they recalled moments where their work is challenging, but they also reflected on moments of success and triumph. Since front-line staff may not want to reflect on any difficult experiences or challenges they had when working with youth reentering the community, I acknowledged that this may be a distressing process. To assist, I leaned on the support of a senior colleague who was able to provide me with direction and a list of resources that may be

relevant should anything arise. Further, I confirmed that all of the participants involved in the study are also supported through their own Employee Assistance Program (EAP) whom they were able to consult if they require additional support post-interview.

7. Consent/Confidentiality

All of the details of the study were reviewed with participants prior to commencing the interview process. Each participant was given enough time to review the Letter of Information as well as given an opportunity to ask any lingering questions they may have prior to moving forward [refer to Appendix E for Letter of Information 2]. As part of this process, each of the participants was also asked to sign the consent page to verify their consent in participating in the study. Participants were advised of their right to withdraw from the study and also to skip any difficult or uncomfortable questions as they saw fit. The intention was provide an environment of ease that participants were able to feel safe sharing their opinions and experiences.

All participants were advised that their real names and identities would not be included in the write up of the study and instead a pseudonym would be assigned to the data they provided. As a researcher, I ensured that information and quotations were carefully selected so as to safeguard the identity and precise workplace of those involved. Further, I explained the data protection process to those who had further inquiries.

Chapter Five: Findings

The participants in this study provided a depth of experience and knowledge that captured the essence of reentry as well as spoke to some of the successes and challenges they experienced first hand while working with young people. Upon reviewing each of the interviews during data analysis, it was clear that there were some common themes and findings that were expressed across the interviews. Specifically, this chapter will explore themes related to participants' experiences regarding the struggle to build a rapport, observations regarding contributing factors or circumstances that lead youth towards offending, issues around service delivery and coordination, challenges and successes during reentry, misinformation in the community as well as the challenge of ending reentry programming. Combined, these themes speak to the nuances of reentry as well as areas where improvements can be made.

As discussed in Chapter Four: Methods and Methodology, participants were assigned a pseudonym to safeguard their identities and ensure anonymity while participating in this study. The participants' pseudonyms are as follows, Daniel, Erin, Jennifer, Lauren and Michael. These names will be used throughout the findings section to correspond with various statements made by each of the participants. Further, direct quotations were carefully

selected so as to protect the identity of the participant as well as their place of work.

1. Setting a Context

Prior to discussing the specific findings of this study, it is important to first speak generally to the current state of things in social services. Since the introduction of neoliberal policies in the late 1980s, there have been a range of measures that have changed the provision of social services, including reentry services, in troubling ways. Specifically, the introduction of neoliberalism has meant that there are significantly fewer resources allotted for social services although there are ever-increasing demands. Inevitably, the roles of workers, like the participants in this study, have been transformed in significant ways. In various studies, workers confirm that they find it difficult to address the unique or especially complicated needs of clients, as there is often not enough time or additional support that can be provided outside of standard appointments (Baines, 2006). There is also increased pressure on workers to speed up work by standardizing practices, ultimately diminishing worker discretion and simultaneously deskilling the workforce (Baines, 2006).

In many social service environments, efficiency is of the utmost importance and workers must be accountable for their actions at all times. While the number of administrative tasks increase, workers confirm they must adhere to them strictly or there are reprimands (Baines, 2006). Many

front line workers relay they experience significant work-related stress and an extreme sense of dissatisfaction with their work, as they feel they have less time to interact in meaningful ways with clients (Baines, 2006). In many ways, the social aspect of social services is starting to diminish along with the "loss of our vision of what social work is supposed to be and who it is supposed to serve" (Baines, 2006, p. 206). It is then in this environment that the participants in this study are working with youth reentering the community. They encounter managerialism and neoliberal ideologies in various forms, all the while trying to provide quality service to youth.

2. The Struggle to Build a Rapport

Nearly all of the participants specifically identified relationship building as being absolutely essential in the beginning stages of reentry. In order to make any sort of meaningful changes, these participants felt that they must first develop a relationship with the young person based on trust and honesty, which would lay the foundation for moving forward. Relationship building was especially important when working with offending youth, as youth at times have difficulty accepting others into their private lives. This ties in strongly with the literature that supports that positive relationships, especially those with staff, can help buffer stress and can be instrumental in mediating a young offenders' adjustment (Biggam, & Power, 1997). Trusted staff can act as mentors, providing resources for youth who may require support and assistance throughout reentry.

Participants relayed that learning about a client and what was important to them fostered trust and growth. Further, once they had a solid foundation built, participants were able to personalize sessions and help that youth address the specific needs that they presented and skills they identified they wanted to work on as opposed to being limited to delivering a standard program. At the same time, when clients were unwilling to open up, participants indicated that there was great difficulty in understanding a youth's needs. As a result, participants asserted that it then becomes a challenge for them to build that initial relationship so they are able to get something meaningful out of their time with their clients. In these cases, multiple participants said it was important to work with youth "where they're at" and let them set the pace so the relationship is both realistic and meaningful to all parties. One participant specifically spoke about this experience saying,

> If it's your expectation to come into a relationship with a youth and think, "I'm going to change your whole life around," then you're doing a disservice to yourself and the client, because that may not be what they want or where they're at. So you definitely have to have a passion to be in this field or at least I think you do in my opinion. *Erin*

In her experience, Erin acknowledged that it was just as important to identify her expectations as a worker as it was to identify a youth's expectations while relationship building. Erin believed that doing this was imperative so workers were not only aware of the potential harm and disappointment that could result from them imposing their personal expectations on young

people, but also because this hindered a youth's ability to evolve and progress on their own naturally.

I believe the statement reflects that Erin believed "[working with a youth] where they're at" means first appreciating a youth's state of mind and willingness to embrace change and then progressing forward from that point in a natural way. Erin's statement alluded to the fact that this may not always be an easy practice to adopt. In consulting the relevant literature, research is consistent with Erin's experiences, confirming that training and competency of staff to work more effectively with youth where they are at, including specialty training and support for understanding how to work with youth who experience mental illness, is essential for workers (Woodall, 2007). Further, the literature also indicates that "working with youth where they're at" serves youth well, not only for adjustment purposes, but also in terms of what services they will require both in the short and long-term (Bender, 2010).

Daniel also spoke candidly about his experiences with relationship building and the process of getting to know his clients. He said,

> I find that a lot of the young people I work with are in an interesting place. They either want to maintain decisions… or they want to change decisions that they made in the past and make better decisions. In many cases these youth are at a crossroads. There are usually really distinct reasons why some people have made decisions that have landed them in places like this. So discussing those reasons and kind of getting an understanding of that I think is helpful in trying to foster some sort of change. *Daniel*

Like Daniel, many of the participants emphasized that trying to figure out where the client was at in terms of their thought processes and willingness to contemplate change was absolutely essential in making the first steps towards relationship building. However, Daniel uniquely used the word "crossroads" to signify that this experience can be used as a turning point. In very real ways, youth need to decide during reentry what direction to move in and ultimately it becomes their choice to change or to remain on the same path and potentially reoffend in the future. In order for workers to assist, Daniel believed it was integral for workers to understand the logic and reasoning behind past decisions in order to assist youth to make better decisions in the future. In essence, Daniel asserts that workers must get to the root or heart of decision making in order to create change.

Participants argued that once they understood the mindset of their client, especially what motivations or intents were behind the decisions to led them to offending, then they could begin to collaborate with the client to develop a plan for moving forward. In order to do this, Lauren connected her feelings on how worker-client rapport and understanding the needs of clients were tied closely to goal setting. When a young person shared their expectations during the goal setting process, Lauren felt that she learned a lot about what the young person was actually going through personally and where they wanted to be. She said,

> Every month we work on goal setting and it's through goal setting that we really come to understand, you know, everything else that's going on in the young person's life. Whether they want to return to school or try something new, like getting their driver's license. Goal setting highlights where they want to be and we can work through what they need to do to get there. *Lauren*

As relayed in the quotation, Lauren believed that goal setting was crucial in learning about her clients and their unique circumstances. At the same time, goal setting also worked to highlight areas that need to be worked on to promote a successful reentry process. Both Lauren and Erin spoke about how measureable and realistic goal setting also defined how youth and workers come together to gauge a client's success over time. Goals are then collaboratively reassessed on a monthly basis to determine whether or not progress has been made. If the worker and client noticed a trend where there was little or no progress being made on goals, participants asserted that they would work with the youth to create strategies to address this stagnancy so they could begin to make progress again.

3. Contributing Factors and Circumstances Leading Towards Offending

During each interview, participants were asked to speak about some of the factors or circumstances they have observed relating to young people being involved in offending behaviour. Each of the participants spoke about a number of contributing factors that they felt were relevant or significant to their clients offending; however, it is important to firstly note that they all agreed that every young person was unique. In this way, every participant

reiterated that there were no prescribed or fixed contributing factors that applied to every single young person becoming involved in offending behaviour. This is consistent with the literature that speaks to a number of risk factors that can be linked to a youth's offending behaviour (Altschuler, & Brash, 2004; Clinkinbeard, & Zohra, 2012).

Participants spoke about how every case was different, in that a number of things or even just one thing, like the impulsivity of youth, could be particularly influential depending on the youth. At times, instead of multiple contributing factors, sometimes one small thing was amiss in a young person's life and a poor decision highlighted it. One participant spoke about this specifically,

> You always find something that was just… there was a little something that went wrong. And you know, I think that's just depicting youth in general. They're still very impulsive and they don't really always think about their behaviours and what [consequence] it's going to result in. *Jennifer*

Jennifer highlights how sometimes everything seemed to be in place, but one small thing "went wrong" and led them down the road to offending. At the same time, Jennifer also importantly touched on another theme by identifying the mindset of youth and their development as another relevant factor.

Multiple participants acknowledged that poor decision-making was related to a youth's stage of development cognitively. Michael relayed, "some kids are just impulsive and make bad choices. You know, youth are still

growing up and maturing and might not really think through what they're doing before they do it." As these two quotations indicate, both Michael and Jennifer felt that it was at times relevant to take into consideration a young person's immaturity when it comes to decision-making and their ability to have foresight. Naturally, addressing this by helping these youth make more positive decisions becomes crucial to the reentry process.

Participants like Michael and Jennifer were quick to note that as young people go through reentry, they are simultaneously developing physically and cognitively as they come into adulthood. Eventually as adults, these same young people, like all young people, will be expected to make more positive, calculated and deliberate decisions. Therefore identifying ways that future choices could be improved, either by reflecting on past decision making or working on general skills development, was a key area for these participants to address with their clients in programming. This dual transition that Michael and Jennifer note is synonymous with findings on the reentry of youth (Alschuler, & Brash, 2004; Arditi, & Parkman, 2011; Hartwell, McMackin, Tansi, & Bartlett, 2010). Particularly, research supports that offending youth are typically lagging developmentally behind their non-delinquent counterparts, therefore efforts to address this discrepancy are vital to reentry efforts (Alschuler, & Brash, 2004).

Although all participants agreed that specific contributing factors related to offending were not fixed, nearly all of the participants referred to a

youth's relationship with their family as a factor that merited consideration. Specifically, Daniel noted if a youth had low levels of parental supervision, there could potentially be increased opportunities to offend. Similarly, many participants acknowledged that this of lack support from parents or extended family could be exacerbated during reentry when youth require additional support from their family to complete programming. In this way, participants reiterated that for most young people, their parents or extended family served as their primary source of support growing up, so without ongoing support and guidance from these figures, youth were missing a crucial pillar in their development.

Lastly, peer association or being involved in a particularly negative peer group was identified as another potential factor relevant to some youth's involvement in offending behaviours. In the interviews, participants noted that negative peer association created an environment where offending behaviours were acceptable and normal. For example, Michael highlighted one circumstance where he can recall peer association being a factor,

> I have a kid who was into street racing, right? And the group of people he hangs out with are all car enthusiasts. So when he gets into trouble, his peers tend to be one of the main factors. I find that it's rare that somebody acts alone, it's always been in a group of guys or girls. *Michael*

Michael specifically notes that he rarely sees youth acting out on individually and instead group involvement or interaction with peers becomes an avenue

for becoming involved. At the same time, other participants not only felt that negative peer association was related to offending, but was a relevant factor during the reentry process as well. Specifically, Daniel and Jennifer spoke about their clients becoming entrenched in gangs and gang culture as a prime example.. In fact, Jennifer specifically recalled a time where she was able to assist a youth by taking positive steps to remove the youth from gang culture, which significantly added to that client's ability to successfully reintegrate. However, this example will also be explored more in-depth in the section on Challenges and Successes During Reentry.

4. Issues around Service Delivery and Coordination

In speaking with the participants about their experiences working with young people reentering the community, it was clear that reentry service delivery for young offenders was in actuality a complex, coordinated system. They described that multiple workers, whether they worked in the community or were affiliated with corrections, were designated to work with a specific youth during their reintegration. For reference, the reentry process begins for youth while they are still incarcerated. At that time, youth are connected with a probation officer to assist with their reentry planning while they are still in custody. Essentially a youth's probation officer oversees their reentry from custody until their order is completed. Upon release, the probation officer ensures that youth are keeping up with the requirements of their order and attending necessary programming as mandated by the

sentencing judge. Depending on the conditions of their order, a youth may further be required to meet with a counselor to complete life skills courses (i.e. anger management), an employment worker for job skills development (i.e. resume workshops, interview skills), a caseworker for financial assistance, and a psychiatrist for counseling and so on. Given this, several participants acknowledged that this means a youth may be mandated to attend frequent appointments with various program providers, who may not be in relative proximity to one another.

Since many youth attend programming using public transit commuting often poses challenges in and of itself. Erin noted, "depending on the nature of their conditions, whether it's to come [to counseling], for school, probation, if there's a social worker, you know… I think it can probably be pretty overwhelming." Another participant, Lauren, identified that while her workplace was taking positive steps to improve youth attendance by providing bus tickets and refreshments to youth while programming is underway, other significant challenges persist.

In fact, one of the initial challenges of reentry programming identified by several participants was helping youth become engaged in mandated counseling and programming. One participant spoke specifically to this saying,

> I think hands down the most challenging thing is engaging them, having them kind of attempt to buy into what we're kind of talking about or what we're doing or what the intent is and having them come

> is like the first initial challenge. Once you kind of get over that piece, then, um it's becomes much easier, but it's kind of that initial engagement that can be pretty tough depending on the kid. *Erin*

I believe Erin's statement highlights a very important aspect of reentry that merits further consideration. For example, a youth may be court-mandated or mandated by their probation officer to attend a specific program, but they may not be ready to embrace it in terms of their willingness to think about changing their thought processes or behaviours. As a result, participants like Erin acknowledged that engagement was not just about youth attending the required classes, but really listening to the messages and trying to understand how this could fit into their lives. Participants confirmed that true engagement of youth may at times require extreme flexibility and creativity from workers since youth often do not want to be there.

When youth are forced to attend mandated programs, but are not ready to engage with programming, this places workers in a difficult spot where they acknowledge that at times they may not be acting in ways that are consistent with meeting a youth's current needs. This particular dilemma was addressed by one of the participants,

> You're often fighting with yourself between what the probation order says and where your kid's at, right? So while you're trying to walk them towards counseling and sometimes they don't get there and if they don't get there, eventually you have to say, "You have to go because that's what the order says…" Um, but are they really getting anything from it? I don't think so. If you're in counseling and you don't want to be there, you're not going to get much from it. *Jennifer*

In this quotation, Jennifer specifically highlights how service delivery goals and expectations as they were mandated by probation or a court order, were at times contradictory to what her client needed at that time. Further, participants expressed that they struggled to engage and maintain commitment due to the typically shorter length of time that they were allotted to work with a client on reentry programming. In this situation, a worker's obligation to meet service mandates were chosen over client needs since the ramifications for a youth's non-compliance were serious (i.e. legal repercussions for youth) and workers did not have much time to complete mandated requirements. I believe this acknowledgement of choosing of service mandates over youth needs was a particularly noteworthy moment in the interview process as it draws attention to how mandated services at times fail to meet youth needs and while also how various terms of a youth's order may not necessarily be a well fit at the time.

Although engagement and participation in mandated programming were highlighted as service delivery challenges, participants noted that they were sometimes further challenged by trying to gather necessary information and fill in the missing pieces to make progress. Participants indicated that since service delivery was often provided by multiple agencies, it was important to gather and then share information amongst one another. For example, Michael and Erin said information sharing was helpful in obtaining transcripts to register a youth for high school, while Lauren spoke

about how information sharing could assist in securing additional services or supports that may require additional funding (i.e. seeking referrals for specialized mental health or addiction services, especially for clients with undiagnosed or unmet needs). While this process of information sharing was vital for filling in gaps and meeting needs, but it also helped workers to avoid any repetition in messaging.

Since service delivery required careful coordination and takes multiple people to make sense of, participants need to ensure that the messaging they provided was consistent but at the same time not overly repetitive. One worker spoke about this phenomenon saying,

> It's about keeping everyone in the loop. It's very collaborative having everyone be on the same page makes it so much easier to avoid any type of duplication, right? Like if a kid is hearing the exact same things from three or four different people that can get kind of tiresome, so we try to eliminate that… I think a lot of the time with these kids what I find is that they just either want someone to hear them or they want someone to understand as opposed to being told what to do. *Erin*

With multiple people working with the same youth, at times participants felt that they were merely spinning their wheels without making any real progress. By sharing information, participants asserted that they made more significant steps and accomplished more with youth by dividing and sharing tasks. This also worked well to keep youth interested in engaged since the information delivered was new and varied.

5. Successes and Challenges During Reentry

Throughout the interviews, each of the participants spoke extensively about the challenges and at times the successes they experienced while working with youth during the reentry process. While all participants were asked to share their thoughts on the challenges and successes, their answers varied significantly. Some participants took this opportunity to refer to specific examples of success or challenges with youth they work with currently or previously. Others, like Erin and Lauren, gave more general understandings related to the notion of success and challenge, which will be explored later.

Firstly, it should be noted that it appeared to be difficult for nearly all of the workers to recall specific moments of success. As a researcher, it appeared as though a common understanding of success was not shared amongst all of the participants, which further complicated their answer to this question. In fact, many participants found it hard to define or explain a successful reentry experience even in a general way as indicated by their lengthy pause in speech prior to answering.

Nevertheless, since challenging current understandings and redefining a successful reentry experiences were a major component of this thesis, it was quite fitting that one particular worker, Lauren, adopted an understanding of success that fits closely with the welfare approach I adopted for understanding youth crime. Specifically she said,

> Success is all based on what our young person thinks is important to them, so I can't really grade it. Because you know, we might teach them the skills but they may not apply it right away and that's okay because it takes time and experience in order for some of our skills to start being utilized. *Lauren*

Drawing on the conversation that took place during the interview and this particular quotation, Lauren clearly relayed that she defined a youth's reentry success primarily in ways that were relevant to the particular youth she worked with. Accordingly, working towards meeting the needs and goals that were identified as being of importance by a youth were the benchmarks for success rather than necessarily aiming to meet program mandates and showing that program skills are now employed. Lauren acknowledged that as a worker she cannot specifically identify or measure success herself since youth primarily define what success means to them. In this way, Lauren's definition of success is as unique as each youth she works with.

Similarly, Erin's understanding of success was closely tied to goal setting. She described how during goal setting, she encouraged youth to primarily define what was important for them to achieve and to avoid telling her things they assumed she wanted to hear. She identified that with her experience, she could usually tell when this was happening, and so she could easily redirect them to dig deep. By doing this, Erin redirected youth to construct goals that ultimately allowed them to become successful in a meaningful way.

On the other hand, most of the other participants adopted a difference stance and spoke mostly of tactile examples of success. Many participants indicated that they felt at times it was difficult to see monumental "changes" or "successes" take place since they only really worked with youth during a short period of time. Specifically, if a youth did not reoffend while they were working towards reentry, participants, like Michael and Jennifer, considered this to be a mini-success of sorts. This type of understanding of success, based primarily on recidivism, is certainly consistent with dominant understandings of success encouraged by many reentry programs. In fact, this is consistent with findings in the literature that indicate that recidivism is primarily the gold standard of efficacy or success for many reentry programs in circulation today (Beale Spencer, & Jones-Walker, 2004; Bouffard, & Bergseth, 2008; Hartwell, McMackin, Tansi, & Bartlett, 2010).

When it came to discussing reentry challenges, participants appeared to have much more material to draw on. Participants were able to easily and quickly list challenges since there seemed to be more challenges than successes in their experience. In fact, one participant, Erin, even acknowledged "I think it's great that you ask a lot of about successes and challenges because I think it can definitely be challenging at times and huge moments of success are few and far between." When asked, many participants came up with multiple barriers and examples they could think of in the moment, including the role of parents and peer groups, insufficient

preparation in advance, lack of time, lack of motivation or difficulty with ongoing engagement to name a few. Since for the most part these challenges were already explored at length earlier in the findings, I will only go back to the role of parents, which multiple participants highlighted as a critical challenge to reentry.

While parents were previously identified as a potentially relevant factor in the initial process of offending, the were also identified by participants as being potentially obstructive to youth in the progress and success of reentry. Participants saw parents or guardians as a significant barrier to youth returning to their home environment, which is at the very heart of reentry itself. Participants indicated that while parents had the capability to be positive influences on their children's lives, their absence and or lack of support also had a significant detrimental effect. Several caseworkers spoke about the role of parents as it relates to reentry challenges saying,

> [Youth] go home to the same situation that you can't change and a lot of the home environments aren't good for these youth. In effect it becomes harder for the youth to change because they're back in that environment… So it's like the parents end up being my biggest barrier. You see that and feel bad for this kid who really even if they do succeed at this point might not even receive any recognition from their parents. *Jennifer*

Jennifer's quotation demonstrates that in her experience, parents were detrimental to a youth's progress, by providing very little positive reinforcement or encouragement for youth. Additionally, youth are returning

to an environment at home, including at school or with peers that may not be healthy or supportive.

The literature supports that ongoing assistance and support from parents can be effective in improving reentry outcomes, which validates Jennifer's experience (Beale Spencer, & Jones-Walker, 2004). When youth are trying to make changes to their lives and their home or community environments are impeding or failing to support their success, it is quite understandable that reentry would become an uphill challenge. For the most part, youth spend all of their time at home or in community environments and consequently when these spaces are negative they may be placing themselves as risk of reoffending by returning to old habits.

While participants indicated that parents are influential in reentry, many of the interviews highlighted that few parents were actively and positively involved. Daniel spoke about his experiences saying,

> There's one client on my caseload where he's had a parent with him along the way ever since the first meeting… But overall, I think that's the minority. The majority seems to be parents, who feel that the kid has the problem, fix the kid and let me know how it goes. *Daniel*

The literature supports what Daniel is saying, confirming that parents and guardians are often identified as both risk and protective factors for their children. However, in many cases, parents appear to be detrimental to the reentry process (Altschuler, & Brash, 2004). Further when Daniel spoke specifically about parents believing that workers should be "fix[ing] the kid,"

this also resounded with the simplicity of "get tough approaches" wherein "something must be "wrong" with offenders, and so they need to be "fixed" (Beale Spencer, & Jones-Walker, 2004, p. 89). While a few participants felt that this viewpoint may occur because parents see the workers as the experts and expected them to be more capable of assisting, others participants believed that parents reach a point where they become exhausted and withdraw because they no longer know what to do.

Despite all the varied discussion about challenges and successes, there was one particularly poignant example of a reentry success moment told by a participant. This was the story of Jennifer and one of her clients,

> One of my kids had gang tattoos and he wanted out of the gang. [Reintegration funding through the Ministry was secured] to remove the tattoos… Um 'cause he wanted out of the gang and that was identifying him to the gang so that was a huge piece that was stopping him from getting employment. All the employers saw these tattoos on his hand that were very cryptic and about a gang… I mean, you may not have known it was gang related but it wasn't a nice tattoo, right? So it was something he felt was a barrier to getting employment and he felt uncomfortable with doing interviews and stuff because of this tattoo. Um, also anybody who saw it that were gang related individuals would come up to him right away like, "hey bro, you're one of us…" Like you know, he didn't want to be that anymore. He was still in a community that had gangs, so you know, I think that worked out really well and, and, and I think he started getting confidence after they started getting removed. Because then he did get a job and he was happy and he's recently [been discharged] and hasn't been in trouble in a very long time. Before that he was always in trouble. *Jennifer*

In Jennifer's story, she talks about how a youth she worked with was able to disassociate from a negative peer association by removing gang tattoos. By

removing the tattoos, which were very visible, her client began to feel more confident and capable when it came to completing interviews. While he lived in the community, the removal of the tattoos also worked to remove the connection he had with this particular group. Ultimately, this story speaks to an outside of the box, creative application and use of Ministry funding that had a significant impact for the client. After the tattoos were removed, the youth was able to secure employment and has since remained on the right track. The removal of his tattoos truly went a long way towards his reentry both on a short-term and long-term basis.

It was clear from all the discussion regarding success and challenges during reentry that there does not seem to be a consensus among the participants on how reentry success should be defined. While some of the workers, namely Lauren and Erin touched on some promising emerging understandings of success that were youth driven, others still found it difficult to define in general ways. Given the discussion, it appeared that challenge was more salient than success during reentry for the participants.

6. Misinformation in the Community

Since physically and socially youth transition back into their community it follows logically that the community then plays an important role in the reentry process. Specifically, several participants spoke to how they believed community members need to step up to support young people as they attempt to transition back into normalcy. As already reviewed in

Chapter Two, at times the community has understandings of young offenders' success that may not actually be consistent with the facts, which can then pose a challenge for young people during their reentry experience (Tanasichuk, Wormith, 2012). Of all the participants, Jennifer and Daniel specifically took a few moments during their interviews to address some issues relating to the role of the community that I felt were important for me to address in my findings.

By primarily drawing on the negative perceptions of youth offenders, which are fueled by the media, these participants spoke about the role of community perceptions in the reentry process. One particular worker said,

> I think the biggest thing for anybody to know is that like, people look at them like "Oh those kids are bad kids." You always hear people say, "Oh they're bad kids" but it's like, that's just looking at what they did and not who they are. You know, I think it's important to look at who they are as people as opposed to what they did. What they did they need to be held accountable for and that's why they've been punished or they've been given this consequence of jail or probation… But we need to look at what they did and how we as a society has sometimes failed these youth. Jennifer

In her quote, Jennifer identified that young people, as persons need to be separated from their actions. Namely, a young person may have committed an offence but they will not be an offender forever. She confirmed that once their sentence was completed and they have been held accountable for their actions, they deserve a chance to move on. Changing the mindset of the community then plays a significant role in the acceptance and reintegration of young people.

Similarly, Daniel said, "I don't think [youth] are very well prepared to [reenter the community]. I think they need the supports from the outside, in the community, in order for them to be more prepared." Daniel's quotation reminded me of how community members can "other" offenders by disregarding their own role in this phenomenon. For community members it becomes important to take a step back and look at their own role in this experience as well. The community must recognize that they have sometimes failed these youth, which led them to where they are today. Similarly, the community may not assume responsibility for supporting young people to get back to where they want to be.

7. The Challenge of Ending Reentry Programming: Unresolved Issues

Lastly, I felt it was important to end by highlighting some final remarks by Erin that identified the challenge of ending a relationship with a youth. Like ending any therapeutic relationship, Erin asserts that ending a relationship with a youth after reentry programming can be difficult. At various points in each interview, the participants explained the limitations in their relationship with youth, primarily tied only to the length of a youth's order or term on probation. When youth were no longer on probation or had completed their required programming, they were no longer mandated to attend sessions and participants no longer had contact with them. Further, once they completed their order or probation, youth were no longer covered by the funding mandate, so they were forced to stop attending programs

whether they still required assistance or not. Erin spoke about the difficulty of this transition saying,

> I really wish there was more we could do. Just because probation is up doesn't mean that everything is done and their problems are solved. So at that point, it's about making sure that we can connect them to resources prior to them leaving, so they're prepared and stuff. *Erin*

In this statement, Erin highlighted the difficulty of ending the relationship when there were still unresolved issues. Youth may still require assistance and may only be at the beginning stages of change when their order ends.

Specifically, there was one significant phrase: "just because probation is up, doesn't mean that everything is done and their problems are solved." Workers that assist youth either through reentry programs or probation are then faced with the challenge of trying to assist youth as much as possible for the limited time that they are in contact. At the same time, youth are complex and multifaceted beings and it takes time to uncover multiple issues and to decide which issues there is time to address. While probation attempts to address the needs of youth while they are under an active youth order, there needs to be further supports for youth who are in still requiring assistance in transitioning. This challenge specifically highlighted the need for resources and funding to be allocated for youth who have completed their probation, but still require intensive programming to achieve reentry success.

Overall, by exploring the experiences of workers assisting youth to reenter the community I have revealed the complexity and intricacy of

reentry. In reviewing and discussing the interviews it is clear that there are still many commonalities and yet differences among participants. Together, the participants' insights illustrated that there are still areas for reentry to be opened up for dialogue, critiqued and improved upon, which I will discuss in the next chapter.

Chapter Six: Discussion and Conclusion

This study aimed to understand the experiences of youth reentering the community through the voices of five key informants working with youth during reentry. In reviewing the findings, there are a number of challenges that I feel should be addressed as well as recommendations that can be brought forward into the dialogue on youth reentry. As this study comes to an end it is also important to touch on some of its limitations, as no study is without limitations. In this chapter, I will delve into a number of recommendations that complement the findings and add to the dialogue on youth reentry, as well as look at some of the limitations of this study. This chapter will also include concluding remarks.

1. Recommendations

Involving Youth and their Families in Meaningful Ways

Given the highly complex nature of responding to young offenders, research supports that it is essential to include young people in their own treatment and decisions about best practices. In fact, in one study, young offenders were able to very accurately assess challenges that they anticipated upon reentry (Abrams, 2006). Yet for a number of reasons, which I can now attest to firsthand, there are few studies that provide the context of reentry experiences from the youth's perspective. In order to fully understand youth needs for reentering society and create policies and programs reflective of

this, efforts need to be made to ensure that youth are consulted and included as experts. This would certainly require a different venue than a Master's thesis, which could provide sufficient time to recruit youth participants.

As noted in the Findings Chapter, Erin and Lauren indicated that youth involvement is currently being increased at their agency through measures like collaborative goal setting and by allowing youth to take a more hands on role. This type of involvement also lends well to rapport building, which can be a challenge as identified in the Findings Chapter. It further helps youth take responsibility for their actions and decision-making, which lends well to promoting maturity, an area where offending youth are often lagging behind. While these developments are certainly quite promising, more still needs to be done to engage and include youth across the board.

Involving youth in meaningful ways is challenging due to the precarious nature of working with this population and also the slow movement of change in agency and government policies, which will be discussed later on in the section on the role of the government. This is where I believe social workers and other frontline youth workers need to advocate and ensure that young people's voices are heard. For example, agencies could be assisted to deliver an anonymous service user survey regarding practices or develop a youth panel internally so youth could speak on their own behalf. These actions would take beginning steps towards acknowledging the unique needs of youth as dictated by youth.

Some research has been conducted regarding service user perspectives on reentry, such as the study conducted by Hattery and Smith (2010) who conducted in-depth interviews with adult offenders who have reentered society. Hattery and Smith (2010) explore offenders' reentry stories and understand how each unique pathway to prison and experience of reentry is different. While the findings from studies like this may not be generalizable to the large population, they would provide a model of future exploration with youth, which should be relevant to policy-makers and service providers. As reported in the Findings Chapter, youth are very much unique and therefore studies that capture their uniqueness are essential for improving the reentry process. By appreciating the range of youth experiences during reentry, reentry programming can be designed in ways that are more flexible and able to meet different needs. For example, one-on-one programming rather than group programming could be beneficial in catering to a youth's specific needs.

While youth are important stakeholders in reentry, so are their families. As discussed previously, families and especially parents can provide youth with the support they need to successfully transition back into their communities, while in contrast parental absenteeism can have negative effects on reentry (Beale Spencer, & Jones-Walker, 2004). Since the role of families was discussed by all of the participants in the Findings Chapter, I believe there needs to be steps taken to further involve families in the

reentry process. Parental involvement can work towards creating an extended and collaborative support network for youth, while it also helps to ensure everyone is on the same page. Further, if involved parents can identify when youth are achieving their goals and will be able to share in their success. This may work towards developing an improved bond between parent and child.

It may also be helpful to engage parents in programming on a one-on-one basis as well as in collaboration with youth. If parents are involved in reentry programming, this may provide the worker with a designated opportunity to address the youth's home environment. By speaking with parents about the home environment, workers may be able to gather a more complete understanding of home and social life and then be able to identify any issues that may present challenges for youth while also identifying positive sources that can be emphasized for support. At the same time, one-on-one programming for parents may assist them in working on areas, like communication or anger management, that they can personally improve to promote a better relationship with their child.

For youth whose parents may not be involved in their lives, either by choice or otherwise, I believe it is extremely important to have other positive role models involved in the reentry process. This may include foster parents, extended family, friends, and in the absence of these adults, perhaps initiating a special mentoring program, similar to Big Brothers or Big Sisters,

could be helpful. I believe it is important for someone, other than probation officers and workers, to provide emotional support and encouragement to a youth while they are transitioning. This person can also be important in validating successful outcomes.

Reconsider Understandings of Program Success

In reviewing the literature, it was clear that a lot of research has been conducted around the rehabilitative aspect of reentry, but not nearly as much has been done to assess program effectiveness (Beale Spencer, & Jones-Walker, 2004). Currently, much of the research on reintegration programs is plagued by null findings in relation to program effects, small sample sizes, little consistency and problems with methodology and evaluation (Bouffard, & Bergseth, 2008). These limitations make it difficult for researchers to demonstrate whether or not some programs are in fact effective, which subsequently determines whether or not new programs are worth exploring further and existing programs will continue to be funded. It then becomes challenging to introduce innovative programming that is youth-driven and uses self-reporting to determine efficacy, as this self-reports are not always acceptable as sufficient evidence. There is ultimately a need to expand ways of measuring effectiveness to ensure that the best interests of everyone, but especially youth, are being addressed moving forward.

Part of this expansion should also include broadening current definitions of success, and moving away from seeing recidivism alone as the

gold standard. Scholars have identified that relying on recidivism alone is quite limiting, and while it may require more creative approaches for measuring efficacy, understandings of success should incorporate a number of different areas in a youth's life, like school, work, development of positive relationships (Beale Spencer, & Jones-Walker, 2004). Expanding definitions of success would also allow youth a space to determine what they want for themselves and how they interpret success. While recidivism is certainly an important piece of reentry success, it should not be the only factor considered.

As previously discussed in the Findings Chapter, Lauren touched on a promising, youth-driven understanding of success that is beginning to emerge: "success is all based on what our young person thinks is important to them." This was a pivotal moment in the interviews. If youth are able to define what they believe a successful experience entails at her agency, this opens the door for more holistic definitions of success to emerge in other agencies as well. Overall, there needs to be less emphasis on recidivism alone and more focus on meeting a youth's specific needs so that when their probation is complete they will have a better chance at successfully reintegrating. Self-reporting and surveys completed by youth who have finished their probation may be a good starting point for this. These tools may present an opportunity for youth to highlight their success in a number

of different areas, including social relationships like those with peers or family, which may be difficult to others to define.

Increase the Role of the Community and Address Misconceptions

In order to further improve reentry experiences, multiple scholars have suggested that there needs to be increased assistance from the community (Griffiths, Dandurand, & Murdoch, 2007). In addition to allocating increased funding to extend the reach and quality of services provided by the community through integrated and assistance-based transition programs, there are also practical things that the community at large can do to assist. For example, by building incentives for employers to hire and train young people, and developing creative initiatives to assist youth in giving back to their neighborhoods and communities, like youth-action committees or social clubs, there may be benefits for everyone involved (Arditi, & Parkman, 2011). These types of initiatives provide youth with hands-on opportunities to become involved in their communities and build positive partnerships. Similarly, mentoring may be another community initiative worth consideration. If youth reentering society are given the opportunity to mentor or assist other youth with similar stories, they will not only gain personal experience as a mentor and feel positive about their impact, but it will also add to benefitting the community at large (Hartwell, McMackin, Tansi, Bartlett, 2010).

Again as touched on in Findings Chapter, Daniel and Jennifer both spoke to the role of the community in reentry. Daniel said, "I think [youth] need the supports from the outside, in the community, in order for them to be more prepared." While Jennifer acknowledged, "I think it's important [for communities] to look at who [youth] are as people as opposed to what they did." In this way, both participants acknowledge that the community is integral, while Jennifer sees that supporting youth can begin by being more open-minded and accepting of young people.

While longstanding beliefs of community members may be hard to change, youth desperately need the support of the community and it will be important to address these misconceptions by countering them. Although this type of change will not occur over night, I believe it is crucial to develop opportunities for youth to present themselves in a more positive light over time. With the help of families, friends, workers and other youth advocates, perhaps initiatives like youth-driven community events, like a barbecue or basketball tournament, may provide an opportunity for the community to liaise with youth who are getting back on the right track. These types of events would be even more effective in countering misconceptions if the event received positive media coverage, as there are often highly sensationalized, negative stories about young offenders.

It is further noted by scholars that communities play a pivotal role in reentry in terms of lobbying for change and prioritizing the mobilization and

sustenance of resources, like those to assist offenders reentering society. Specifically, if communities are behind initiatives for young people, there will be an increased chance that funding will be focused on research and service provision for young people (Wynterdyk, 2000). However, this leads to the question of whether reentry success places too much emphasis on the community and off loads responsibility from the government.

Increase the Role of the Government and Length of Reentry Programming

With communities expected to take on a larger and more integral role in reentry, it simultaneously relieves the federal and provincial governments of their responsibilities. I recommend then that the government take more responsibility for the reentry of young offenders in substantial ways. In the short-term, this could mean further development for custody-based programs (i.e. education programs, addiction services) that already exist, but in the longer-term this could include improved partnerships with the community and more sharing of responsibility and funding in offender reentry and rehabilitation.

Specifically, this speaks to an improved relationship between agents of the government, namely probation officers, and youth workers providing reentry services within the community. As identified in the Findings Chapter, information sharing and coordination of services is a major challenge during reentry. If there is a more collaborative approach taken, all parties, but especially youth, will benefit. This could be promoted by introducing policies

that formally require increased ties between community agencies and the probation office. For example, mandating that regular updates every certain number of weeks take place between probation officers and other workers assigned to work with a particular youth may be helpful. Since the government is responsible for contracting out the care of young people to community agencies, I feel it is appropriate that they are also responsible for ensuring that a collaborative approach is taken throughout the reentry process.

Another important area for governmental improvement relates to practitioners and policy-makers recognizing the harm they have imposed on young offenders in this entire process (i.e. the trauma of being charged, incarcerated). In light of the high stress experience of incarceration for youth and the significant impact this has on their lives as discussed in the Literature Review Chapter, practitioners and policy-makers need to accept the possibility that youth may be reentering society with more problems than before they entered care (Cessaroni, & Peterson-Badali, 2010). A large part of this responsibility I believe relates to ensuring that reentry services adequately address a youth's needs before programs are terminated.

As touched on the Findings Chapter by Erin, "just because probation is up doesn't mean that everything is done and their problems are solved." In this way, there needs to be a more effective 'bridge of care' so to speak for youth who still require further care even though their order or probation

have been completed. Although youth can be referred to outside agencies for further assistance once programming is completed, youth will essentially be starting from the beginning again in terms of having to build a new worker-client rapport. Given that rapport building was identified in the Findings Chapter as presenting a significant challenge, it would be beneficial if workers in the community could extend their assistance. One way this could be done is through the government allotting more funding to agencies that already provide transition support to youth, so they could continue their assistance to youth if needed. In this way, reentry service is not necessarily tied to a youth's order.

Another way I propose that governments assume responsibility is by allotting enough time for sentencing judges to create youth orders that fully and appropriately consider the unique needs of each youth and the length of time required to address needs. Specifically, this requires the sentencing judge to cater the terms of the order very specifically to the unique needs of the youth or to allow the flexibility for workers and others involved in care to provide significant input in advance or to be able to amend requirements to become better suited to youth needs. This feedback lends well to ensuring that there is sufficient time to work with youth to build a rapport and also to correctly identify and address their needs. Further, this also would address the dilemma in the Findings Chapter whereby workers are forced to act in

ways that are at times inconsistent with youth needs in order to meet the requirements of an order.

Overall, there are a number of ways that reentry services can be improved. Given the findings of this study, I feel the recommendations provided address some of the major challenges as identified by participants. While these recommendations may on the surface appear to be challenging to bring to fruition at times, they work to generate ideas and begin a crucial discussion on how reentry can be improved for youth.

2. Limitations of the Study

Lack of Youth Voices and Small Sample Size

While this section has already identified a number of recommendations for improving reentry, it is important to also consider the limitations of the study itself. To begin, the absence of youth voices was undoubtedly a limitation, not to mention a personal disappointment, of this study. As discussed in Chapter Four, in the planning and recruitment phases, I made continued efforts to ensure that youth voices would be present at the forefront of this study. In fact, even with a lack of response initially, I continued to make attempts to include youth by changing my recruitment methods and strategy. However, eventually due to the time constraints of the thesis and in the spirit of completing this study, I decided to incorporate the voices of frontline staff instead.

While these participants were highly knowledgeable and provided great insight when it came to reentry, their experiences are undoubtedly different from those of youth. Although there was ultimately no way that participants could understand reentry as intimately as youth they were not experiencing reentry firsthand, they still provided a crucial quasi-insider viewpoint, which I believe was extremely important to consider. Workers are intimately aware of the challenges and successes experienced by youth reentering the community and can also speak to their own experiences working within this context.

Another limitation of this study relates to the small sample group of participants. Although the sample size was well within the sample size for a typical Master's thesis, there was only a finite amount of information that could be shared by the five participants. Participants' opinions as reflected throughout the interviews may not necessarily be reflective of all frontline workers and at times were even different from one another. In this way, this study may not be generalizable for the experiences of all workers, but nevertheless, these experiences are important to note as they begin a dialogue on reentry. I can also appreciate that it would have been difficult to incorporate many more than five participants in the study given the time constraints of the thesis itself. In spite of this, I believe participants provided a depth of insight that was crucial to my understanding of this phenomenon.

3. Concluding Remarks

As indicated in the Introduction, this research was initially sparked by a reflection on a number of personal experiences I had while working with at-risk and offending youth. In seeing youth become frustrated and challenged while trying to reenter the community, I was inspired to understand this experience further and discuss how reentry could be improved. In reviewing the literature and particularly noticing the lack of youth voices in reentry research, I was further fuelled to dig deep into reentry a with youth firsthand to gather what their experiences and opinions are in relation to this phenomenon. Additionally, I aimed to contrast dominant recidivism-based understandings of success with emerging, more holistic understandings of success that incorporate different areas of a youth's life with recidivism as only one piece of the puzzle.

Although the study did not entirely go as planned, I believe I was successful in opening a dialogue regarding the experiences of youth during reentry, which I hope will be a stepping-stone for others interested in exploring reentry further. I also hope that this study will be relevant to those interesting in seeking change that better appreciates youth needs and will assist in moving towards a more holistic understanding of success in the future. Given the recommendations I discussed earlier, it is clear that there is progress to be made. However, some of the findings also highlight there are promising developments emerging.

As I end this research journey, I would like to reiterate how grateful I am for those who participated in this study. For without their insight, this study would not have been possible. I would like to thank them for the amazing work that they continue to do with young people, despite the daily challenges they face. I am hopeful that reentry experiences and outcomes will continue to improve and progress in their capable hands.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Recruitment Poster

PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR STUDY ON EXPERIENCES OF YOUTH REENTERING COMMUNITY AFTER SERVING SENTENCE

I am looking for volunteers to take part in a study that aims to understand the experiences of youth coming home/reentering their community after recently serving an institutional sentence.

Your participation would involve completing one-on-one interview, less than 30 minutes in length.

In appreciation for your time, you will receive
free refreshments as well as a small gift certificate.

For more information about this study, or to volunteer for this study, please contact:

Samantha Bellmore
Social Work Graduate Student, McMaster University
647-206-8317
Email: bellmosm@mcmaster.ca

PLEASE FEEL FREE TO TAKE A BUSINESS CARD
This study has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance by the McMaster Research Ethics Board.

Appendix B – Letter of Information 1

Letter of Information

The Reentry of Young Offenders: A Youth Perspective on Successful Integration

Investigator:

Student Investigator: Samantha Bellmore
Department of Social Work
McMaster University, Ontario, Canada
Cell# 647-206-8317
Email: bellmosm@mcmaster.ca

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Stephanie Baker Collins
Department of Social Work
McMaster University
Hamilton, Ontario, Canada
905-525-9140 ext# 23779
Email: sbcollins@mcmaster.ca

Purpose of the study
The purpose of this study is to better understand the experiences of youth offenders who are reentering their communities after serving their sentence. The particular focus is on youth aged 16-19 who live in Mississauga and who have reentered their community within the last six to twelve months. I hope to understand from a youth perspective what a successful reentry experience would entail and compare it to the policy's definition of success.

What will happen?
If you choose to participate, you will be interviewed in a one-on-one setting with only me. The interview will not be longer than 30 minutes in length. During the interview, you will be asked a few specific questions about your experiences reentering the community, but also some general questions about yourself. For example, I will ask you to tell me about yourself and your goals, the circumstances that led to you being incarcerated, the length of your sentence, etc. Additionally, I am interested in knowing what the reentry experience was like overall. For example, were you prepared? Are there any positives or negatives? What things do you think could have gone better?

With your permission, I will take point form notes during the interview, so I can go back to things you might say. In order to make sure I am accurate in recording what you say, our interview will be audio recorded and transcribed.

What are the risks?
I will do my best to make sure that there are only minimal risks for you during this study, but it may be uncomfortable for you to reflect on some of your experiences. I

will do my best to give you the time you need to say what you need to say and I can provide you with some resources that can support you after the interview. Depending on your level of comfort, you may also worry about others knowing that you were a participant in this study – Especially if they are not aware that you were incarcerated. I will do my best to keep your personal information confidential and if you choose, we can meet in an area that is away from anyone you may wish to keep this information private from.

Are there any benefits?
It is not likely that there will be any direct benefits to you, but by better understanding your experience I hope that researchers and others may be able to create services that better meet your needs and the needs of youth like you.

Payment
As a token of appreciation for your participation, you will be presented with a $10.00 Gift Certificate to Square One Shopping Centre.

Who will know what I said or did in the study?
You are participating in this study confidentially. I will not use your name or any information that would allow you to be identified. You will be assigned a pseudonym (alternative name) that will represent your information or any direct quotes you say in the report. No one but me and my faculty supervisor, Stephanie Baker Collins, will know whether you participated unless you choose to tell them. This includes any agency staff that may have referred you. While the agency will be provided a summary of the findings, these findings will not identify who participated.

The information will be kept in electronic form on a computer that will be protected by a password. The laptop will always be in my possession or will stay in my locked office. Once the study has been completed, the data will be destroyed within three years, which is standard.

I will protect your privacy as outlined above. If legal authorities request the information you have provided, I will defend its confidentiality.

What if I change my mind about being in the study?
Your participation in this study is voluntary, so it is your choice to be part of the study or not. If you decide to be part of the study, you can stop (withdraw), from the interview for whatever reason, even after giving verbal consent or part-way through the study or up until approximately June 10, 2013. If you decide to withdraw, there will be no consequences to you. In cases of withdrawal, any data you have provided will be destroyed unless you indicate otherwise. If you do not want to answer some of the questions you do not have to, but you can still be in the study.

How do I find out what was learned in this study?
I expect to have this study completed by approximately September 2013. If you would like a brief summary of the results, please let me know how you would like it sent to you.

Questions about the Study

If you have questions or need more information about the study itself, please contact me via email at bellmosm@mcmaster.ca, or by phone at #647-206-8317

This study has been reviewed by the McMaster University Research Ethics Board and received ethics clearance.
If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a participant or about the way the study is conducted, please contact:

McMaster Research Ethics Secretariat
Telephone: (905) 525-9140 ext. 23142
c/o Research Office for Administrative Development and Support
E-mail: ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca

Appendix C – Interview Guide

Interview Guide

The Reentry of Young Offenders: A Youth Perspective on Successful Integration

Samantha Bellmore, Masters of Social Work Student
Department of Social Work, McMaster University

1. Tell me a bit about your experience working with young offenders. What do you enjoy most about your work? What do you find most challenging?

2. Tell me about the circumstances that often lead your clients into custody. Are there mostly unique circumstances? Or is there a trend that you see?

3. How do you understand the reentry process for young offenders?
a) What programming is available for youth reentering the community? Is this programming available? Waitlists?

4. What challenges and successes have you seen in working with youth reentering the community?

5. In your opinion, how prepared are youth reentering their community?

6. Is there something important we forgot? Is there anything else you think that I need to know about your experience as a worker?

The End. Thank you!

Appendix D – Ethics Approval Certificate

McMaster University

McMaster University Research Ethics Board (MREB)

c/o Research Office for Administrative Development and Support, MREB Secretariat, GH-305, e-mail: ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca

CERTIFICATE OF ETHICS CLEARANCE TO INVOLVE HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH

Application Status: New ☐ **Addendum** ☑ **Project Number:** 2013 053

TITLE OF RESEARCH PROJECT:

The Reentry of Young Offenders: A Look at Successful Integration

Faculty Investigator(s)/ Supervisor(s)	Dept./Address	Phone	E-Mail
S. Baker-Collins	Social Work	23779	sbcollins@mcmaster.ca
Student Investigator(s)	**Dept./Address**	**Phone**	**E-Mail**
S. Bellmore	Social Work	647-206-831	bellmosm@mcmaster.ca

The application in support of the above research project has been reviewed by the MREB to ensure compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement and the McMaster University Policies and Guidelines for Research Involving Human Participants. The following ethics certification is provided by the MREB:

☑ The application protocol is cleared as presented without questions or requests for modification.

☐ The application protocol is cleared as revised without questions or requests for modification.

☐ The application protocol is cleared subject to clarification and/or modification as appended or identified below:

COMMENTS AND CONDITIONS: Ongoing clearance is contingent on completing the annual completed/status report. A "Change Request" or amendment must be made and cleared before any alterations are made to the research.

Reporting Frequency: **Annual:** May-05-2014 **Other:**

Date: May-05-2013 **Acting Chair, Dr. D. Pawluch**

Appendix E – Letter of Information 2

Letter of Information

The Reentry of Young Offenders: A Youth Perspective on Successful Integration

Investigator:

Student Investigator: Samantha Bellmore
Department of Social Work
McMaster University, Ontario, Canada
Cell# 647-206-8317
Email: bellmosm@mcmaster.ca

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Stephanie Baker Collins
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Hamilton, Ontario, Canada
905-525-9140 ext# 23779
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Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to better understand the experiences of youth offenders who are reentering their communities after serving their sentence. The particular focus is on youth aged 16-19 who live in Peel and who have reentered their community recently. I hope to understand from a youth perspective what a successful reentry experience would entail. Further, from a worker's perspective, I would like to understand what it is like to work with youth reentering the community.

What will happen?

If you choose to participate, you will be interviewed in a one-on-one setting with only me. The interview will not be longer than 30 minutes in length. During the interview, you will be asked a few specific questions about your experiences working with youth reentering the community. For example, I will ask you to tell me about the population you work with, challenges and successes you have experienced.

With your permission, I will take point form notes and also audio- record and transcribe the interview in order to make sure I am accurate in recording what you say.

What are the risks?

I will do my best to make sure that there are only minimal risks for you during this study, but it may be challenging for you to reflect on some of your experiences. I will do my best to give you the time you need to say what you need to say and I can provide you with some resources that can support you after the interview.

Depending on your level of comfort, you may also worry about others knowing that you were a participant in this study. In this way, I will do my best to keep your personal information confidential and if you choose, we can meet in an area that is away from anyone you may wish to keep this information private from.

Are there any benefits?
It is not likely that there will be any direct benefits to you, but by better understanding your experience as a worker I hope that researchers and others may be able to create services that better meet the needs of youth and workers dedicated to reentry.

Payment
As a token of appreciation for your participation, you will be presented with a $10.00 Gift Certificate to Square One Shopping Centre.

Who will know what I said or did in the study?
You are participating in this study confidentially. I will not use your name or any information that would allow you to be identified. You will be assigned a pseudonym (alternative name) that will represent your information or any direct quotes you say in the report. No one but me and my faculty supervisor, Stephanie Baker Collins, will know whether you participated unless you choose to tell them. This includes any coworkers who may have also been approached to participate. While your agency will be provided a summary of the findings, these findings will not identify who participated.

The information will be kept in electronic form on a computer that will be protected by a password. The laptop will always be in my possession or will stay in my locked office. Once the study has been completed, the data will be destroyed within three years, which is standard.

I will protect your privacy as outlined above. If legal authorities request the information you have provided, I will defend its confidentiality.

What if I change my mind about being in the study?
Your participation in this study is voluntary, so it is your choice to be part of the study or not. If you decide to be part of the study, you can stop (withdraw), from the interview for whatever reason, even after giving verbal consent or part-way through the study or up until approximately September 11, 2013. If you decide to withdraw, there will be no consequences to you. In cases of withdrawal, any data you have provided will be destroyed unless you indicate otherwise. If you do not want to answer some of the questions you do not have to, but you can still participate.

How do I find out what was learned in this study?
I expect to have this study completed by approximately October 2013. If you would like a brief summary of the results, please let me know how you would like it sent to you.

Questions about the Study

If you have questions or need more information about the study itself, please contact me via email at bellmosm@mcmaster.ca, or by phone at #647-206-8317.
This study has been reviewed by the McMaster University Research Ethics Board and received ethics clearance.
If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a participant or about the way the study is conducted, please contact:

McMaster Research Ethics Secretariat
Telephone: (905) 525-9140 ext. 23142
c/o Research Office for Administrative Development and Support
E-mail: ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca

CONSENT

- I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by Samantha Bellmore of McMaster University.
- I have had the opportunity to ask questions about my involvement in this study and to receive additional details I requested.
- I understand that if I agree to participate in this study, I may withdraw from the study at any time or up until approximately ***September 11, 2013***
- I have been given a copy of this form.
- I agree to participate in the study.

Signature: _____

Name of Participant (Printed) _____

Please complete below:
1. I agree that the interview can be audio recorded.
(a) Yes
(b) No

2. (a) Yes, I would like to personally receive a summary of the study's results.
Please send them to this email address _____

Or to this mailing address: _____
_____
_____

(b) No, I do not want to receive a summary of the study's results.