



## **Exploring the Research Gaps in Residential Reentry Centers: A Compendium Guide of Resources for Reentry Professionals and Policymakers**

### **Introduction**

This document compiles the most qualitatively and quantitatively significant and comprehensive studies on residential reentry centers (RRCs).

The purpose of this guide is twofold:

1. To give reentry professionals a readily accessible document that catalogs peer-reviewed research on RRCs
2. To highlight the broader need to conduct empirical studies of RRCs in order to more accurately determine their overall effectiveness as a medium for successful reentry

The resources are presented in chronological order. All studies in this document are from academic journals that have been peer reviewed for their legitimacy and validity. For a resource to merit inclusion, it had to specifically address the subject of RRCs, either directly (i.e., with a primary focus on RRCs) or indirectly (i.e., through a variable that directly impacts RRCs). Studies were omitted from this resource guide if they did not fit these criteria, or if their subject matter was too broad in scope.

### **Statement of Problem**

Without access to stable affordable housing, research suggests that a person recently released from jail or prison has a significantly higher chance of returning to incarceration.<sup>1</sup> According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), approximately two thirds of incarcerated

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<sup>1</sup> National Housing Law Project, "The Importance of Stable Housing for Formerly Incarcerated Individuals," *Housing Law Bulletin* 40, no. 2 (2010): 60–62, <http://nhlp.org/node/1374>.

individuals reentering the community will return to prison within three years of release.<sup>2</sup> RRCs, known colloquially as “halfway houses,” are used in corrections on the federal, state, and local levels to provide those transitioning from prison with a step-down option designed to ease the transition back into the community, promote safe and stable reentry, and reduce recidivism. Fewer than one percent of people recently released from prison in the U.S. have access to these reentry facilities, however, because there are not many of them.<sup>3</sup>

Existing research about RRCs—a mixture of private, public, and nonprofit entities—also provides few concrete answers to key operational questions, such as: how many RRCs are in operation nationally? Who operates them? How many people do they serve annually? Which rehabilitative services do they regularly provide? Additionally, there is little concrete evidence to show how effective RRCs are at reducing recidivism and achieving other prosocial reentry outcomes, such as employment and family reunification.

The Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) creates guidelines for each RRC contract, which are set out in contractual Statements of Work (SOWs).<sup>4</sup> However, a preliminary review of BOP audits suggests that many RRCs are underperforming on SOW performance criteria, which may contribute to a low overall success rate for RRCs.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> “Reentry Trends in the U.S.: Recidivism,” Bureau of Justice Statistics, last modified March 4, 2016, <http://www.bjs.gov/content/reentry/recidivism.cfm>.

<sup>3</sup> Faye S. Taxman, Jessica Rexroat, Mary Shilton, Amy Mericle, and Jennifer Lerch, *Executive Overview: What Works in Residential Reentry Centers?* (Fairfax, VA: George Mason University Center for Advancing Correctional Excellence, 2010). [https://www.gmuace.org/documents/publications/2010/Overview\\_Document.pdf](https://www.gmuace.org/documents/publications/2010/Overview_Document.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> “BOP: Residential Reentry Management Centers,” Federal Bureau of Prisons, accessed March 1, 2016, [https://www.bop.gov/about/facilities/residential\\_reentry\\_management\\_centers.jsp](https://www.bop.gov/about/facilities/residential_reentry_management_centers.jsp).

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Department of Justice, Office of the Inspector General. *Audit of the Federal Bureau of Prisons’ Contracting for and Management of Residential Reentry Centers* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of the Inspector General, Audit Division, 2012), <https://oig.justice.gov/reports/2012/a1220.pdf>.

## Resources (In Chronological Order)

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## Conclusion

Although RRCs are a commonly used tool in community corrections, and will continue to provide essential services to returning citizens, existing research has not yet conclusively determined or even fully explored the overall impact of RRCs on reentry. In addition to filling the significant research gaps, further studies are needed to professionalize and standardize the use of RRCs in corrections. In order to quantify the impact of RRCs, the scope of future research should expand to include longitudinal examination of resident cohorts. Future research should also highlight model programs and practices in RRCs that are empirically proven to have a positive impact on reentry.

Research available currently suggests an overall consensus that RRC success depends on effective and consistent delivery of client services administered by the appropriate staff. Licensed professionals in the fields of substance use, family reunification, employment, education, and mental health should be providing these key services. The studies listed in this resource guide also suggest that consistency is a key factor in client success rates. The more regularly clients receive these prosocial services, the greater their chance for success after release. Directing more—and more intensive—services to clients with the highest risk of recidivating may lead to better outcomes.

The resources compiled here also generally agree that RRCs are most effective for clients with specific criminogenic needs. Moderate- to high-risk participants seem to benefit much more from the heavily structured RRC environment than lower-risk cohorts. The resources also suggest that these higher-risk individuals benefit from consistent engagement with behavioral health services following release from an RRC facility.

With future qualitative and quantitative data on RRCs, researchers can provide the industry with a better understanding of what works in RRCs.