THE HATFIELD PRIZE 2023

Nourishing Communities: *Promoting Equitable WIC Participation for Immigrant Women and Children in Oregon's Rockwood Community*

By Kailani West and Greg Burch, Ph.D.

Multnomah University

Pathways to Restoration: *A Holistic Approach to Preventing Human Trafficking and Supporting Survivors in East Texas*

By Adriana Cisneros Emerson and Isabella Cavalcanti Junqueira, Ph.D.

LeTourneau University

From Incarceration to Integration: *A Critical Analysis of Reentry Care in Prison Education Programs in West Michigan*

By Emily Steen and Mark Mulder, Ph.D.

Calvin University

CENTER FOR PUBLIC JUSTICE

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ABOUT THE HATFIELD PRIZE

The Hatfield Prize is awarded annually to three Christian student-faculty pairs at a four-year college or university. Recipients conduct research on social policies that impact vulnerable children, families and communities, and explore the impact of these policies in their local communities. This semester-long research project culminates in three policy reports that make recommendations for both government and civil society institutions in contributing to policies that promote flourishing communities. The Hatfield Prize is named in honor of the late Senator Mark O. Hatfield, who served as a United States senator from Oregon for three decades, and was known for his principled Christian faith and for his commitment to working across differences to find common ground.

ABOUT SHARED JUSTICE

Shared Justice, CPJ's program for Christian college students and young adults, inspires and equips the next generation of leaders with the framework and tools needed for a sustained commitment to civic engagement and advocacy in their communities. By extension, Shared Justice is devoted to providing resources, tools and support to academics, pastors and other individuals engaged in forming young adults as citizens. Shared Justice's core programming includes the annual Hatfield Prize research award, the Civitas Fellowship for Congressional Staff, virtual and in-person events with college students and CPJ's internship program.

ABOUT THE CENTER FOR PUBLIC JUSTICE

The Center for Public Justice (CPJ) is an independent, nonpartisan organization devoted to policy research and civic education. Working outside the familiar categories of right and left, conservative and liberal, we seek to help citizens and public officeholders respond to God's call to do justice. Our mission is serving God by equipping citizens, developing leaders, and shaping policy to advance justice for the transformation of public life. Visit www.cpjustice.org to learn more.

Foreword

Dear Reader,

I am pleased to share the 2023 Hatfield Prize reports with you. I want to thank Kailani, Adriana and Emily for all of the hard work and the many hours they spent researching, writing and editing their reports. I am also grateful to Greg, Isabella and Mark for the guidance they provided their students throughout the process of writing The Hatfield Prize, from helping them to navigate the Institutional Review Board (IRB) process to providing edits.

I would be remiss if I did not thank Madeline Pannell, Caroline Tichenor, Ezra Craker, Ela Alvarado and Rafa Oliveira for their assistance in selecting the Hatfield Prize recipients, editing the reports and providing program support for The Hatfield Prize. I'd also like to thank Adriana Cisneros Emerson and Debora Haede, my colleagues at CPJ, for their design support and guidance. Thank you to all of you for the many hours you've devoted to making these reports shine.

This year's policy reports examine social policies that impact the well-being of mothers, children, youth and adults across the country. Specifically, the reports focus on seeking the flourishing of immigrant families, survivors and youth at risk of human trafficking and formerly incarcerated people who are enrolled in a prison education program. Each of the reports examine the scope of the issue on both a national and local level and highlight racial, ethnic and socioeconomic disparities, framing solutions in the context of both government policies, as well as the vital contributions of faith-based organizations, churches and other civil society institutions.

DISCOVER introduces readers to a specific social policy in the United States and examines the current response of the federal government in addressing the issue and its impact on individuals and families.

FRAME articulates the normative Christian principles which support the social safety net, considers the unique responsibilities and contributions of government and civil society institutions and makes concrete recommendations.

ENGAGE brings Discover and Frame to life, telling the stories of impacted individuals and the communities in which they live. This section features original reporting by the student-faculty pairs in Oregon's Rockwood community, East Texas, and West Michigan.

Each of these reports represent a scholarly picture of how Christian principles, when applied to social policies that impact our communities, can encourage the flourishing of all. The Hatfield Prize reports can also be accessed online at www.cpjustice.org.

Sincerely,

Emily Fromke Crouch
Program Director, Shared Justice
Center for Public Justice

Nourishing Communities: Promoting Equitable WIC Participation for Immigrant Women and Children in Oregon's Rockwood Community

By Kailani West & Greg Burch, Ph.D.

DISCOVER

For the first ten years of my life, my mother raised my twin sister and me by herself. In our home, she was the provider, the housekeeper, the cook, the entertainer and the one we called when we were scared, curious or hungry. She was and is mom. My mom was alone, but fortunately for her, she had help. We were one of the families who received a food box (or two) during the holidays from our local church. My sister and I were two of the kids who received free or reduced lunches in elementary school. And like 6.2 million others in the United States, my mom, my sister and I were WIC beneficiaries.[1] The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) is a federally funded government program that helps millions of women and children in need. This help ranges from financial assistance for healthy food options to lactation support and referrals to local health care resources and facilities.

As I research WIC and uncover many stories, I am coming to realize that there are several possible scenarios. The first is like my story. Some might know about WIC from firsthand experience. Or maybe you benefited from WIC without even knowing it. Perhaps your mother received services or assistance from WIC or your eldest sister prepared breakfast for you with produce purchased with her WIC card. Finally, the third scenario includes those — maybe you — who might still be wondering, what is WIC?

Some of the people who have never heard of WIC are actually the ones who need it the most, including women and children in immigrant communities. Picture this scenario: a young mother has recently moved to a new country where she does not fully speak the language yet and is not familiar with the government assistance programs available. She has a young child and is pregnant with another. She is desperate for some help, so she walks into a local health clinic and picks up a pamphlet at the entrance table where she waits in line for a walk-in appointment. On the front page is a picture of a young mom holding her baby. She smiles because it reminds her of the first time she held her firstborn. This piques her interest, and she opens it up. Listed under the text in the language she is still learning, it reads in her heart language: “Proper infant nutrition is fundamental to a child’s continued health, from birth through adulthood.” She already knows this, but she keeps reading anyway. “Correct feeding in the first three years of life is particularly important due to its role in lowering morbidity and mortality, reducing the risk of chronic disease throughout their life span and promoting regular mental and physical development.”[2] She turns the page to find details about a WIC clinic that provides benefits for both the mother and the child, including nutritious food, nutrition education, breastfeeding support and referrals to health care and social services. On the following page, it says that the programs at the clinic support more nutritious diets, participating children are more likely to receive preventative medical care and participating women give birth to healthier babies.[3] She lets out a sigh of relief, thinking, “Finally, something that can help me and my children!”

Now imagine that this pamphlet did not

include translations in the woman's heart language, or that she heard of WIC too late (after the child age cut-off of five years old) and missed out on the benefits, or that she didn't have a ride to the local WIC agency and it was too far to walk to, or that she was scared that applying for WIC would ruin her family's opportunity to become United States citizens. Immigrant and refugee women face many obstacles when it comes to receiving supplemental assistance for themselves and their children, such as lack of transportation and fear of becoming a public charge. A public charge is a term used to describe a non-citizen who may be likely to depend on government for their main source of income upon receiving citizenship. Public charges can be grounds for inadmissibility or for denial of a Permanent Resident or Green Card.[4] This research report evaluates the real needs of immigrant women and children and offers suggestions on how to make WIC more accessible.

WIC: A Lifeline for Families in Need

Piloted by legislation in 1972, WIC was designed as a short-term (then, just a two-year pilot) program to influence lifetime nutrition and health behaviors in high-risk populations.[5] By 1974, WIC was operating in 45 states.[6] Today, the program is under the jurisdiction of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), which is funded by Congress. To be eligible, applicants must meet the income requirements, earning an income at or below 185% of the United States federal poverty guidelines. For example: a one-person household making around $26,973 (or below) annually could qualify, financially, for WIC.[7] Applicants can also show proof of enrollment in the following services to be automatically approved: Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) or Medicaid.[8] What makes WIC different from SNAP and Medicaid is that WIC is specifically for women and their children. While women enrolled in Medicaid and SNAP automatically qualify for WIC, these programs also differ based on who they are meant to serve, how beneficiaries qualify, and how long the program roll-out lasts. Applicants of WIC must also live in the state where they apply and must be pregnant, breastfeeding and/or have a child under five years old. Finally, applicants must be seen by a health care professional either at a WIC clinic or with their primary health care provider to confirm the nutritional risk and need.[9]

WIC state agencies, of which there are 89, serve all 50 states, 33 Tribal Organizations, the District of Columbia, Northern Mariana, American Samoa, Guam, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. There are 1,900 local agencies and 10,000 clinic sites.[10] State agencies administer the program and guide local agencies. State agencies also provide services at various clinic locations that include (but are not limited to) county health departments, hospitals, schools and Indian Health Service facilities.[11] To apply for WIC, individuals can call the state or local agency to set up an appointment.[12] In most places, the words *clinics*, *offices*, *sites*, *locations and local agencies* are interchangeable. The largest difference is between the state and local agencies.

WIC brings together a unique group of people to support enrolled families. This community is composed of parents, pediatricians and physicians, peer counselors and grocers. As noted in the story above, WIC provides a range of services from nutrition education, breastfeeding promotion and support, referrals for health care and social services and benefits for food.[13] Some of the WIC-approved foods include fruits and vegetables (fresh, frozen, canned and dried) and milk (including soy and tofu), whole grain cereals, whole wheat bread, light tuna, canned and

dry beans, peanut butter, cheese, juice, eggs and iron-fortified infant formula.[14]

WIC offers a range of services and is critical for the health of millions of women and their children. Researchers Steven Carlson and Zoë Neuberger write, "Children living in poverty are… more likely to be food insecure, and food insecurity in households with children is associated with inadequate intake of several important nutrients, deficits in cognitive development, behavioral problems and poor health."[15] They add that infant mortality and other risk factors are higher for families of color, and they claim that, "Black and Latino families have long experienced higher levels of food hardship" that reflect long standing inequities.[16] In a 2018 study, 65% of Black women, 63% of Latina women and 31% of white women were eligible for WIC.[17]

In 2021, WIC served around 6.3 million participants each month, accounting for 43% of all infants in the United States.[18] Still, the program does not currently serve everyone who needs it. Lauren Hall, food assistance program researcher at the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, along with Neuberger, writes that before the COVID-19 pandemic, "A substantial share of Medicaid and SNAP participants who were income-eligible for WIC were not enrolled."[19] In 2018 and 2019, there were pilot projects conducted in four different states that found, "Between 44% and 63% of WIC-eligible people enrolled in Medicaid and SNAP were not enrolled in WIC."[20] The authors argue that trends show that the gap could be even larger today. But why is there such a large gap?

Barriers Faced by Immigrant Families

Immigrant families can face many hardships, which inequities and disparities exacerbate. However, WIC can and does help many families in need, helping to reduce disparities and inequities, alleviating some hardships.[21]

Despite the need for WIC, immigrant women sometimes fear that enrolling in the government program could impact their legal status. Fortunately, this is not the case. According to a resource published in 2018 by the Public Health Foundation Enterprises, receiving WIC does not hurt the chances of receiving a Permanent Resident Card (commonly known as a Green Card).[22] Furthermore, Green Cards cannot be revoked because a mother or child is a beneficiary of WIC or has applied for WIC. Thankfully, this critical program does not affect immigration status of the individuals or family either. United States citizenship will not be denied as a result of receiving WIC benefits, and a person will not become a public charge because they are receiving WIC.[23]

Despite the need for WIC, immigrant women sometimes fear that enrolling in the government program could impact their legal status.

From this information alone, we know that undocumented women can receive WIC care. An online resource published by National Immigration Forum states that WIC and emergency services covered by Medicaid might actually be the only government assistance programs that those without documentation can receive.[24] They say that undocumented immigrants may be eligible for benefits that are "deemed necessary to protect life or guarantee safety in dire situations … or access to health care and nutrition programs'' under emergency services covered by Medicaid and WIC benefits.[25] The National Immigration Law Center (NILC) published an article explaining that, "Many immigrant families hesitate to enroll in critical health care, job-training, nutrition and cash assistance programs due to fear and confusion caused by the laws'

complexity and other intimidating factors."[26]

To clear some confusion, the NILC explains that there are two categories of immigrants when it comes to most federal assistance programs: "qualified" and "not qualified." "Not qualified" individuals include undocumented individuals as well as "many people who are lawfully present" in the United States. "Qualified" immigrants include: individuals with Green Cards, refugees and individuals granted asylum, individuals granted parole by the United States Department of Homeland Security for at least one year, Cuban and Haitian entrants, certain survivors of abuse or trafficking and individuals residing in the United States "pursuant to a Compact of Free Association" and for Medicaid purposes only. The article also confirms that almost every state provides access to WIC regardless of immigration status.[27]

Factors Impacting WIC Awareness and Participation

There are many reasons why there might be such a large gap between the number of women eligible for WIC and the number who are actually enrolled in the program — especially when it comes to immigrant women and women and children of color. This report will be limited to exploring three potential reasons for this gap in enrollment, but the reasons are certainly not limited or fully encompassed by these examples. First, many women do not know that they qualify or what WIC holistically includes. Second, language or cultural barriers prevent women from accessing WIC's services. And finally, women face challenges in accessing WIC benefits due to a lack of resources such as transportation and access to grocery stores and health care clinics or health care professionals.

How can more women receive needed assistance through programs like WIC? First, more women need to hear about the program and all of its benefits and know that they qualify. However, when women hear about WIC, they often hear concerns and even misinformation from others. And when women are comfortable and confident in applying, they may run into roadblocks and the process can become too overwhelming. How can we address concerns and misinformation regarding WIC? How can applying be made more accessible? Who is going to help mitigate these barriers so women can receive the assistance they desperately need? There are many barriers that come with these contributing factors that women face — not only in accessing WIC but with accessing general and necessary nutrition and health care for themselves and their children. However, government, local nonprofits, schools and churches have the ability to mitigate these barriers.

FRAME

God cares for the entirety of his people and creation, and specifically for the marginalized — including immigrant and refugee women. In the list of commands that God gave to Moses for the Israelites, God said, "Do not mistreat or oppress a foreigner, for you were foreigners in Egypt … if you do and they cry out to me, I will certainly hear their cry."[28] God pays special attention to the people that society rejects and neglects. In Zechariah 7:10, God says, "Do not oppress the widow, the fatherless, the sojourner or the poor, and let none of you devise evil against another in your heart."[29] There are endless commands issued to the Israelites in the Old Testament centered on their just treatment of each other and outsiders. Hannah says in 1 Samuel 2:8 that "God raises the poor from the dust, lifts up the needy … God sits them with officials, gives them the seat of honor!"[30] Instead of

leaving people in their need, God lifts them up. God saw the suffering of his people, sent his son, and in Jesus, specially cares for each one. In fact, while countercultural to the societal structure that prevailed during his time on earth, Jesus sought out women and children and cared for them. He says in Mark 9:37, "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but he who sent me."[31]

From the creation of the world and up until now, God's character, including his care for the poor and the marginalized, has been consistent. This care is revealed in Deuteronomy,

"If among you, one of your brothers should become poor, in any of your towns within your land that the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against your poor brother, but you shall open your hand to him and lend him sufficient for his need, whatever it may be … For there will never cease to be poor in the land."[32]

In our land, in my city, and in your city, there will always be people in need. And there will always be resources to be given and ways to be involved. Involvement can start regionally in local governments, health care facilities, nonprofits, schools and churches. There are endless ways to care and there are tangible ways to help break barriers to WIC access, which this report explores.

The same indifference and oppression that immigrants and refugees, women and children faced in biblical times persists today, thus the exhortation to care for them remains deeply relevant. The Center for Public Justice's Guideline on Welfare states that, "The call to be a 'neighbor' — to help those who are in need — is addressed to all people and all institutions. Receiving assistance should enable those in need to reach or return to self-sufficiency and be in a position to help others."[33] This Guideline calls Christians to care about their neighbors and especially to consider the women and children in their communities in need facing the consequences of health disparities.

The persisting health disparities that immigrant and refugee families face is both a reflection and result of their marginalized status in society. Health disparities are "preventable differences in the burden of disease, injury, violence or opportunities to achieve optimal health that are experienced by populations that have been disadvantaged by their social or economic status, geographic location and environment."[34] A few drivers of health disparities include poverty and lack of resources, and these health disparities act as a compounding factor, placing individuals at further marginalization. One health insurance company has found that on a micro-level, "Health disparities rob individuals of good health and their sense of well-being and personal security." On the macro level, health disparities deprive communities of both human resources and money, drive up health care costs and diminish the quality of life for everyone.[35]

The Power of Partnerships in Community Care

One significant way we can prevent health disparities in our communities is through working together to improve WIC access. The Lord's care for the marginalized can be reflected and exemplified in communities when groups of people come together in partnership. It is when "communities and faith-based organizations, employers, health care systems and providers, public health agencies and policymakers work together to develop policies, programs and systems based on a health equity framework and community needs" that prevention of health disparities can begin.[36]

Government's Role in Promoting Welfare

Each sector of society can play a major part in mitigating the barriers to WIC access for immigrant and refugee women. WIC assists mothers and children in need during a time of growth and change. However, there are various means by which women can receive support: through government assistance programs like WIC as well as from health facilities and nonprofits, schools and churches. According to the Center for Public Justice, the institution of government "bears responsibility to legislate, enforce and adjudicate public laws for the safety, welfare and public order of everyone within its jurisdiction," guided by the principle of public justice.[37] Public justice is the "act of promoting the well-being of an entire society in right relationship with the larger world that God made."[38]

One way government engages in this effort is through distributive justice, and an example of this is the way government allocates benefits. As a result, there may be advances in human freedom, economic prosperity and environmental safeguards.[39] Government can assist health facilities and nonprofits in their role of helping women by further providing resources specific to the needs of families. Schools and churches can support women and children in their daily lives and provide information and resources that help families thrive. When the various levels of society come together, the care and commands of the Lord can be reflected in communities, and families' needs can be met.

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Government has the ability to partner with communities to provide funding and additional resources to communities as they seek to ensure that immigrant women and children are fed. One way that government can partner with communities to prevent health disparities is by implementing new technologies that make WIC easier to access.[40] In 2021, a grant of $53 million dollars, funded by the American Rescue Plan Act, was given solely for modernization and innovation efforts for WIC. The USDA's website says that these investments will help WIC "reach more eligible mothers and young children and improve the service they receive throughout their entire experience with the program … and [help] to reduce long standing disparities in maternal and child health."[41]

One nonprofit, the Food and Research and Action Center (FRAC) — based in Washington, D.C. and federally funded by the Community Services Administration (an agency under the umbrella of the Department of Health and Human Services) — offers the Community Innovation and Outreach Cooperative Agreement, which is a grant that helps participating and potential WIC participants expand partnership with community-based organizations and connects underserved populations with FRAC. Although FRAC is also supported by faith-based organizations, this agreement does not explain how the grant specifically includes faith-based organizations. Incorporating faith-based organizations could be useful, as they are some of the most embedded community organizations at the local level.

Another grant program awarded by USDA's Food and Nutrition Service funded 66 WIC state agencies to improve technology and service delivery of WIC services. Modernizing WIC could mean setting up online ordering through the WIC application or uploading benefits to a participant's account remotely without traveling to a WIC clinic, two

proposed changes by the Food Nutrition Service and USDA.[42]

Finally, the American Rescue Plan funded the WIC Shopping Experience Improvement grant program, which serves as a positive example of government cooperation with communities. Through this program, the USDA gave out 19 grants to WIC state agencies in order to improve the shopping experience for mothers by modernizing in-store shopping and working toward online shopping. WIC funding for the fiscal year of 2023 nationally is over 6.1 million dollars and serves more than 6 million women, infants and children.[43] While it is about $100,000 less than 2022, this year's funding is higher than the few years before the start of COVID-19.[44] Changes made through these grants will serve current participants and could serve anticipated participants through educational efforts.

Civil Society Engagement

As government partners with communities to expand WIC access, other organizations can also help people connect to the program. Because WIC is a nutrition assistance program and offers services to improve health, health care facilities could play a major role in assessing and resolving the problems in WIC access. Health care facilities, including faith-based health care providers, can offer in-person support in which care providers guide women through WIC benefits and the application process. Health facilities and care providers can also offer various remote appointments with language interpreters ready and available. Along with health facilities, nonprofits can provide accurate information for the community along with resources such as transportation, interpretation/translation and offering support to a person in the application process. Health facilities and nonprofits both have feet on the ground in the communities that they are based in. They know the needs of communities, and better yet, know the solutions to problems such as barriers to WIC access.

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Another institution that can play a role in breaking the barriers of WIC access is the schooling system, which includes private, faith-based and public schools. WIC assistance and schools both support early childhood development, creating a natural ground for partnership. Drexel University published research showing that "WIC helps children to be ready to learn when they enter school" and that "WIC decreases the risk of developmental delays in young children."[45] Children's Health Watch says that children who are eligible but do not receive WIC are more likely to be underweight, in poor health and at risk for developmental delays. Children are considered at risk for developmental delays when there are concerns in their ability to speak, their use of fine and gross motor skills, their expression of social and emotional behavior and their ability to learn in school. Proper nutrition can aid development in young children, increasing their success in the classroom and beyond.[46]

Because schools already serve many children who are eligible for WIC through the National School Lunch Program, they can be at the forefront of improving access to WIC and other nutrition programs. Through the National School Lunch Program, schools offer nutritional foods to all students and provide low-cost or no-cost meals to students who

are eligible.[47] All schools are a source of food and could be a credible link in educating families about the resources available to them. Schools should consider welcoming a WIC table at a family resource event, offering pamphlets at the school nurse's office or posting flyers near the student pick-up and drop-off zone. Schools are a great resource for providing solutions to WIC access for immigrant women and their children.

Churches, like schools, can act as a pillar in families' lives, offering resources critical to their flourishing. This is especially the case for immigrant families needing trustworthy assistance, as they can be at risk due to their documentation status. Churches reach families and meet their needs, acting as the connecting link between them and church and community resources. Leaders in churches may also be able to connect congregants to free or affordable resources outside of the church. Further, churches that are naturally attuned to outreach may consider WIC outreach and promotion. Outreach can "broaden the reach and effectiveness of WIC, helping overcome barriers to WIC participation, including widespread misconceptions about eligibility, limited access to information about WIC benefits and how to apply and outdated notions of program promotion."[48] Church promotion of WIC could look similar to school promotion of the program, and churches could post flyers near Sunday school classrooms, on the church's bulletin board or in high-traffic areas such as restrooms. Churches could also promote WIC on their website as a resource and consider holding or promoting a local resource fair. In this way, churches live into their ministries to care for women and children by mitigating barriers to WIC access and utilizing their integral location and community relationships.

The collective efforts of these different institutions can alleviate barriers to WIC access from different angles, improving access to health care for under-resourced women and children. Through government funding, resources given through nonprofits and health clinics in conjunction with promotion of WIC resources at schools and church outreach, women can receive the information they need to work toward WIC access. These different institutions can provide resources along the way, ensuring that families receive nutritious food, educational information and necessary referrals to health care professionals.

ENGAGE

The Community of Rockwood

The community of Rockwood, Oregon, is a vibrant, diverse, alive and welcoming place. In Rockwood, there are more than 88 languages represented (after English, the majority speak Spanish, Vietnamese and Russian), and it has one of the youngest populations in the area (1 in 4 residents in Rockwood are below the age of 17). Although it is a community of vibrancy and hope, it has also been referred to as "rejected" and "neglected."[49] This area, its history and the general view of Rockwood is a result of years of underinvestment, which has arguably contributed to Rockwood's reputation as "Oregon's largest under-resourced and challenged community."[50] Rockwood was once a part of unincorporated east Multnomah County but was annexed from Gresham in 1987.[51] At this time, Portland, along with refugee and immigration services, was strategically moving Black residents and thousands of refugees and immigrants into what was then affordable housing. Co-founder of Rockwood Community Development Corporation (Rockwood CDC), Brad Ketch, gives more insight to Rockwood's history in his book, The

Flourishing Community, A Story of Hope For America's Distressed Places. Ketch writes,

"A place like Rockwood is a liminal place. You find liminal places when you go past the boundary of one place and before you arrive at another place. 162nd Avenue is the eastern border of Portland, and Rockwood begins on 163rd — past the boundary. Gresham proper is down the road five miles, and historically had nothing to do with Rockwood. But in 1987, the Oregon Supreme court forced the annexation of Rockwood into Gresham, against the sentiments of the people who lived in either place. So there sits Rockwood, excluded from Portland and never embraced by Gresham."[52]

Rockwood Community Development Corporation (Rockwood CDC) is a nonprofit that partners with local leaders to help the community flourish and engages the Rockwood community through its various programs. These programs focus on health outcomes, housing solutions and economic development.[53] During my research, I partnered with the Rockwood CDC and their East County Community Health branch to learn more about the community and its needs.

According to the Rockwood CDC, the median household income in Rockwood is less than half of Portland's and 30% less than the median household income in the entire state. For perspective, Rockwood is about 15 minutes from Portland and 10 minutes from Gresham proper. Also, a large proportion of households in Rockwood are led by single mothers, more than other surrounding areas. The Rockwood Identity Atlas, a quantitative study supported by the Rockwood CDC, reports that in 2019, roughly 26% of the population held some immigrant status, which was three times the rate found in all of Oregon.[54] This resource also states that the median household in the community spends a little over 42% of their income just on rent alone.[55] Along with having some of the lowest incomes in the state, Rockwood also has some of the worst health outcomes and educational attainment in comparison to other large communities in the state. Similarly, life expectancy in this community is 10 to 15 years lower than it is in Portland.[56] This information and more is listed on the Rockwood CDC's website and in the Rockwood Identity Atlas.[57]

Albina-Rockwood Promise Neighborhood (ARPNI) is a partnership with various community based organizations, schools, local and federal government agencies and individuals. Their partnerships with these institutions and individuals, along with surveys and reports provided, demonstrate their commitment to the community. ARPNI published a 2019-2020 Neighborhood Survey, which graphed service and program priorities for residents of the community. Under the category "Assistance (for utilities, housing payments, food assistance, clothing, school supplies)" 55% of respondents said "I would like to use in the future," 27% said "I already use," and 18% said "I would not use these." This data reveals both the need and desire of Rockwood residents to access public assistance for themselves and their families. As previously discussed, WIC is a program designed to help families in need. How many of these survey participants answered with a program like WIC in mind?

Over the course of the semester, I interviewed various community workers,[58] a city council member of Gresham, an executive director of a nonprofit, a parent, family and community engagement coach, and four mothers: Maxi, Lucia, Chying and Ninning.[59] Their voices are critical in painting a full and clear picture of Rockwood and its needs. Through our conversations, the rest of the report brings to light possible solutions to the WIC access problem. These interviews and the majority

of the research took place from January 2023 through May 2023, and the information and suggestions from the conversations will reflect this timeline.

The State of Nutrition and Health Care in Rockwood

In my conversation with Maxi, one of the mothers that I interviewed, we discussed how WIC can help. She said it is a great help and that because of WIC, beneficiaries do not have to worry as much about buying and having food. We also discussed that some women are missing out on tremendous help because they are nervous about giving out their personal identifying information. The initial request for "tanto papeles e informacion"[60] hinders women from applying for WIC. They fear that the information given might lead to them or their children becoming public charges (as a reminder, this means: grounds of inadmissibility, or reason that someone could be denied a Permanent Resident or Green Card because of dependence on certain government benefits).[61] In my conversation with Maxi, she told me how she wishes more women knew the truth — that they could receive WIC without becoming a public charge.

Another challenge specific to the residents of Rockwood is that there are few grocery store choices. Maxi told me the options in the stores are limited. This was especially true during COVID-19. She said, "las tiendas no tenían formula … las tiendas estaban vacías."[62] (The formula shortage was specifically due to supply chain issues,[63] a problem which could have been exacerbated by Rockwood's disconnection from the two closest cities). Of the few grocery stores, there are: an Albertsons, a WinCo, and a Grocery Outlet. The Albertsons' produce prices can often be higher than others, the nearest Winco is too far to access from Rockwood without a car or bus pass, and the Grocery Outlet does not accept WIC. While the percentage of residents receiving SNAP in Rockwood is almost double that of the entire state, residents still have trouble accessing food. The issue of transportation is discussed later (such as not having transportation to a store), but not having WIC (because SNAP alone is not enough to improve food security) further exacerbates problems such as food insecurity. In a conversation with one community worker who had previously worked at a grocery store, she mentioned for some families it can be especially difficult to get what they need depending on what is available to buy with WIC benefits and what WIC can cover. A resounding need for diapers and wipes (items not covered by WIC, but offered during WIC office visits pre-COVID-19) is a common theme in the conversations held with community workers and mothers alike.

Government Assistance in Technology, Educating, and Location

During the time I was researching and interviewing individuals in Rockwood, their clinics had yet to open up again post-COVID-19. Although WIC offices are still in the process of opening, government funding and program innovation can help to bolster its outreach to women in need. For example, furthering technology advances is one potential way to increase accessibility. Researchers Hall and Neuberger offer an example that speaks to both the COVID-19 years and transportation issues. In some states, there was not the option to remotely load WIC benefits onto electronic benefit cards, so the participants were forced to travel to the WIC clinic to drop off their physical cards. "Every state that couldn't remotely load benefits experienced a decline in total WIC participation and participation by infants and children between February 2020 and February 2021."[64]

WIC offices at the time of my research had been operating remotely as a result of COVID-19 and during that time waived the requirement to provide eWIC cards only in person.[65] Since then, WIC offices have started to phase into re-opening, including the WIC offices in Rockwood. From most of the women I talked with, the WIC smartphone application was something that they found beneficial, and it appears to be the driving force behind successfully continuing their benefits. Although it proved helpful for some, Maxi pointed out that her paper coupons were more practical for her and in fact, when she first changed to using the card, it was complicated. Her story reveals two important realities: technology may help some WIC beneficiaries, although there are people who cannot read or who do not have access to the Internet or a smartphone who may prefer paper coupons. Perhaps offering access to smartphones and assistance and training in navigating the WIC app could help long-term beneficiaries of WIC and make the transition from paper coupons to electronic benefits more successful.

WIC is more than just food, and that the program offers a range of classes on topics such as lactation, nutrition, safe cooking practices and how to make baby food.

Similarly, the women I interviewed informed me that WIC is more than just food, and that the program offers a range of classes on topics such as lactation, nutrition, safe cooking practices and how to make baby food. Before COVID-19, these classes were offered in person and interpreters were available. Post COVID-19, these classes are remote and some are available as videos linked on the website available to be viewed at any time. In-person classes helped the women to ask any questions they had in their language. Bolstering the advertisement of WIC's educational classes could help the women currently enrolled in the program and perhaps reach more potential applicants.

Most of the women I met with were able to describe their experiences with these classes. Chying said the "WIC program is not only food," and along with classes, there are recipes available. Institutions, such as the ones discussed in this report, working to reveal resources available could help reach more women who do not know about WIC or realize they are eligible for it. In my conversation with Ninning, she offered the idea of placing flyers with information on educational resources in the places where women might frequently be, such as supermarkets and other shopping centers. These flyers can contain information on what resources are available and how to apply for WIC.

Going one step further, the Food and Nutrition Service at USDA should consider opening up another WIC clinic or moving one closer to the heart of Rockwood. Specifically in this community, and based on my conversations, the WIC clinics are too far apart. Among the two barriers to accessing WIC that Chying listed were income (she mentioned that this service is "not only for low income" families and there are women who need it, but do not qualify because they make just right over the cutoff) and location; fifteen minutes might not seem far, but when a mother is traveling by foot or by bus and has one or more children with her, fifteen minutes can easily become an hour. And in Oregon, that hour happens in the rain during most times of the year. Further, having a disability might compound these hardships drastically. This intersection is relevant to the community of Rockwood, as the Rockwood Identity Atlas states that there is a higher prevalence of individuals

experiencing disability compared to the rest of Oregon statewide.[66] Food in Rockwood is already limited, but experiencing disability could make trips to the grocery store longer and more difficult.67

In my conversation with Maxi, she told me that the continued closure of WIC offices discourages women from applying for WIC benefits, since they assume they will not be able to apply.[68] Opening or moving WIC offices closer and supporting current offices with additional translation and staffing could improve access to programming for current and potential WIC beneficiaries. In my conversation with Lucia, she mentioned that while WIC has been helpful for her family, there continue to be long wait times on the phone. This wait can be even longer when there is only one person available who speaks her first language.

As this report has explained, there are different institutions which work together to help families in need. In a conversation I had with Gresham Council Member Vince Jones-Dixon, we discussed the state of WIC needs in Rockwood along with ways to mitigate barriers to accessing WIC.[69] Councilor Jones-Dixon told me of current support given to nonprofits and organizations such as Play Grow Learn and the Rockwood Market Hall, where women can use SNAP and WIC benefits, participate in the community garden and receive food from food pantries. Councilor Jones-Dixon echoed the benefits that could come from mitigating WIC barriers, and how providing access to nutritional food could mean there is one less thing a family has to worry about.

We also discussed the importance of education because “people don’t know what they don’t know.” To begin these educational efforts, citizens can simply ask grocery stores why they do not receive WIC or ask nonprofits why they do not focus on WIC access. Educational efforts can also include educating grocery stores and nonprofits on streamlining processes and offering education on destigmatizing negative connotations about WIC beneficiaries by “humanizing the people and the collective situation.” There are individuals who do not know what resources are available to them, and conversations like this one, with people in local government, are an example of a first step toward spreading necessary information and facilitating change for those in need.

Nonprofits and the Heart of Community Workers

Lynn Ketch, executive director of the Rockwood CDC, sat down with me to discuss the community and its needs.[70] Lynn has a public health certificate herself and formed the Rockwood CDC with her husband Brad Ketch in 2013, focusing on asset-based community development. Their nonprofit aims to listen to the community so that it can be attentive and responsive to the needs of their neighbors. Lynn says she “had never imagined" this amount of growth. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Rockwood CDC became a great asset to the community because their staff were working in Rockwood and were therefore able to meet specific needs of its citizens. Rockwood experienced more significant impacts due to and during the initial COVID-19 years, and to quote Lynn, “what happens in Rockwood impacts everyone” — meaning that what happens in Rockwood impacts its surrounding neighborhoods. Further, Lynn explained that larger nonprofits that cannot get a foothold in Rockwood are forced to move back into Portland, perhaps leaving needs unaddressed. The smaller nonprofits, such as the Rockwood CDC, have an advantage, allowing them to serve in the remaining gaps.

Lynn also described some hopeful focuses for her team as they move forward, which include

clinical linkages, social connectedness and food and nutrition. East County Community Health, a branch of Rockwood CDC, holds free vaccine and resource fairs for the community. At these fairs, various other nonprofits, schools and health clinics are represented and ready to meet the community's needs. I learned that at these specific resource fairs, a WIC representative is not always able to be present. In the absence of having a WIC representative, Rockwood CDC and other nonprofits should still consider posting WIC information on flyers or on an additional resource table. Additionally, the various programs associated with Rockwood CDC's Rockwood Food Systems Collaborative (an initiative which uses food, business and agricultural development and nutritional education to reach the goal of better health for Rockwood), could consider promoting information on WIC access in their online resources or at various food banks.[71]

To meet the needs of the people of Rockwood, nonprofits and their community workers can make lasting impacts. It is because of their placement in the heart of the community that their suggestions are both relevant and important. I had the privilege of discussing Rockwood and its needs with another woman of many titles.[72] Besides being a mom, she is a community worker, a farmer and more. In our conversation, she expressed the difficulty of receiving WIC in Rockwood because the community does not have the infrastructure or staffing that organizations have in neighboring communities. While there are fewer options in Rockwood compared to larger cities like Portland, there are still a few organizations that offer support to individuals in need: East Portland Community Center, Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization Center, Human Solutions Partnership and Play Grow Learn. These organizations offer resources such as housing stability or legal assistance, language or nutrition education, opportunities and activities for individuals of all ages to get involved in the community and more. In our conversation, this mom and community member highlighted the importance of educating fellow farmers on the economic impact on WIC vouchers, another form of cash. Not only do WIC Farm Direct Dollars, vouchers, and virtual Quick Response (QR) codes help mothers to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables, but farmers can also benefit from them as another form of profit. WIC Farm Direct Dollars are available seasonally through local WIC clinics and through the WIC app and may be used only with participating farmers markets or stands.[73]

From our conversation, I gathered that increasing knowledge and rollout of WIC's Farmers Market Nutrition Program farmers and community members could increase WIC applications, especially because these coupons are issued in addition to traditional WIC benefits, and this idea was only echoed in other conversations I held. The Farmers Market Nutrition Program was established in 1992 with the goal to provide more fresh foods to WIC participants. Advertising for this program should be prioritized so that more programs like it could benefit current and future WIC beneficiaries.[74] Even with the existence of this program, almost all of the women I talked to shared that they wish WIC would offer more fruit, vegetables and meat. The specific farmers market funding seems to be a great resource for women (although when I asked if their friends and families knew about this benefit, they stated that they were unaware of it), and one that WIC should continue extending throughout the year. Chying shared that WIC is helpful as it helps mothers to buy groceries and nutritional food, but can it do more with the help of other institutions such as faith-based organizations?

Churches and Houses of Worship

Churches and houses of worship have the ability to support the community in unique ways. Their mission and capability to address both physical and spiritual needs makes them a natural partner in improving food security and access to health care. Further, churches and houses of worship already find missional alignment and feel compelled to serve the community because of various commands in the Bible or other holy books. There are many churches in and near Rockwood that are already inclined toward outreach, specifically for refugees.[75] The Imago Dei Community is self-considered a "family of churches" in Portland and has a specific ministry for refugees. The central city campus of Imago Dei partners with Refugee Care Collective, a resettlement assistance program in Portland.[76] To further serve refugees, churches such as Imago Dei could consider offering WIC educational resources to congregants and the surrounding community, as well as reaching out to Rockwood.

Many churches in and near Rockwood also engage in various food outreaches. Rockwood Adventist Church has a monthly Harvest Share, a joint effort with the Oregon Food Bank, where they provide produce to the Rockwood community. Rockwood Adventist Church, along with others, could consider bolstering their commitment to serve those in need by offering WIC resources such as by handing out pamphlets during these food banks.[77]

Highline Christian Church, which I attend in Burien, Washington, is another example of a community of faith that offers transportation to families in need to various appointments. This ministry formed when the congregation saw the need for transportation assistance in their community and wanted to respond practically. Research by FRAC shows that "engaging trusted community messengers, such as the rural faith-based community (churches, temples, synagogues, and mosques) is also a strategy to achieve success with rural outreach efforts."[78] Although this recommendation is for rural areas, the recommendation could be helpful for communities like Rockwood. People who attend churches and other houses of worship have already developed trusted relationships within a community that understands their own context and with people who could give them trustworthy advice regarding governmental programs such as WIC.

Churches should also consider partnering with other community-based organizations in Rockwood. Recently, the Rockwood CDC held a seminar for local churches to learn how they can minister to people in and near their congregation as a community-based organization and how to meet the needs specifically of Rockwood residents by partnering with other organizations that already exist in the communities. Partnering with other organizations, offering tangible solutions, and engaging with and educating members in houses of worship can help broaden WIC knowledge and offer the whole community opportunities to learn, inquire and enroll.

Schools and WIC Promotion

Schools, including private, public and faith-based institutions, can play an important partnership role with families when it comes to improving child nutrition, facilitating WIC enrollment and educating families on public assistance options available to them. To get a sense of how schools already support child and family nutrition and child development, I interviewed a local parent, family and community engagement coach named Tina Nelson from Head Start. Head Start programs provide free learning for preschool-aged children from lower-income families and their engagement in broadening WIC access is notable. Along with offering no-cost education to children, Head Start

is centered around health and family well-being. They seek to engage the whole family and also provide nutritious breakfast, lunch and snacks at school.[79]

Nelson explained her current role and her previous one as a family worker, and in our conversation, we discussed how Head Start also facilitates the relationship between schools and WIC offices. At enrollment, family workers ask Head Start families if they are enrolled in WIC, and if not, these workers refer families to their local WIC office. Before COVID-19, Head Start held enrollment fairs where WIC representatives would be available for individuals to ask questions and seek guidance. That connection now happens remotely, solely through phone calls. Although Nelson mentioned that "finding food used to be not so easy" compared to how it is now, there are still many unmet nutritional needs in lower-income and multicultural families. And, for these families, food is a source of community and development as well as sustenance.

Head Start programs have the ability to address misinformation about WIC's program itself, especially considering that the program specifically serves children in the age requirement and families in the income requirement of WIC. As discussed in my conversation with Nelson, some multicultural families who receive food services might not be familiar with the food given, so Head Start can provide clarity on the food and services that WIC's can cover. Families that do not use formula or eat dairy or families that prefer fresh items might decide to opt out of WIC or solely use SNAP benefits if they are not aware of the other benefits of the program. When WIC is presented holistically, highlighting the educational aspect of the program and the wide variety of food choices families have, individuals might find the program more desirable and useful for their family. The private, public and faith-based schools in Rockwood should consider mirroring efforts done by Head Start to connect under-resourced families with their local WIC offices. Schools should consider hosting resource fairs, engaging with family members to ensure they or their children are already enrolled into a nutrition program or educating families on the holistic offerings of WIC.

WIC: Building Bridges for Impact and Access

WIC clinics, now that they are fully opened, can facilitate partnerships with other organizations to meet current and potential WIC beneficiaries. Besides partnering, clinics should increase their staffing and offer bilingual interpretation and translation services. Also, WIC clinics should consider offering transportation services or partnering with community-based organizations, like churches, that offer these. Additionally, they should consider strengthening technology and invest in training long-term WIC beneficiaries. In fact the National WIC Association (NWA) partnered with Nava, a public benefit corporation, to offer possible remedies to inequitable access to technology and state agencies' barriers to updating programs like WIC. Some of their recommendations include providing and funding technical and user experience from the federal level and creating resources that support WIC agencies in implementing and maintaining technology, both on the federal and state level.[80] Their "WIC Technology Landscape Report" published in April 2023 containing interviews with WIC agencies revealed that some states face higher barriers in implementing "innovative participant-facing tools than others."[81] The NWA also states there will be pilot projects to improve data sharing by hiring medical liaisons to help transmit data from health care providers to WIC agencies. They suggest that the USDA provide more assistance to support these pilot programs, because while WIC agencies

have offered flexible services and have future ideas to continue to improve WIC, "strategic federal investment could multiply and catalyze their efforts."[82] The NWA is a notable resource that offers current research and suggestions for furthering WIC access, which was especially helpful. During the months of research for this report (January-May 2023), I personally did not get a response from the WIC offices in Rockwood.

Thank you, Rockwood

As I worked on this report, it was evident that the women and community workers I interviewed care about their community. Maxi shared with me, "Tú das, tú recibes," which means, "If you give, you'll receive."[83] From her endless giving in the community, the Lord has blessed her and her family, sometimes more than she could have imagined. One might ask, what is the reason Maxi gives? She was once like many WIC beneficiaries in need. Justice requires those working for and in Rockwood to include WIC access in the ongoing community conversation, increasing knowledge of and access to the program. The different institutions explored in this report each have unique angles of access to the community and different ways to be involved in mitigating barriers to WIC access. The women and children in Rockwood speak to the strength of the community. Although Rockwood is a vibrant and diverse community, it is still under-resourced and disconnected from organizational and governmental structures. I have hope that there are tangible and realistic solutions that can be actualized to further help their community thrive.

I thank the various individuals, community workers and mothers who took the time to introduce me to their part of the world, welcome me into their community and express their vulnerability. Thank you, Rockwood.

Pathways to Restoration: A Holistic Approach to Preventing Human Trafficking and Supporting Survivors in East Texas

By Adriana Cisneros Emerson & Isabella Cavalcanti Junqueira, Ph.D.

Note to readers: This report contains stories of human trafficking, sexual assault and abuse.

DISCOVER

Mary was 16 years old when she met her trafficker on an instant messaging platform. Battling low self-esteem and bullying at school, Mary found herself unable to rely on her parents while her family was experiencing economic hardship and grieving the loss of a son and a nephew. Though she tried to find shelter in teachers, relatives and friends, Mary's complex situation was not given the attention it deserved. The feeling of neglect from these significant figures in her life prompted Mary to explore alternative sources of attention — as suggested by a school friend — to find the care and attention she needed.

After months of performing on video in exchange for praise, gifts and financial compensation, Mary met an older man with whom she quickly built rapport. The man, showing no sexual or physical interest in her, acted as a father figure — listening to her sorrow and counterbalancing every self-deprecating thought with a compliment and kind gesture. After receiving expensive phone bills from Mary's calls to the man she met online, her parents discovered what she had been doing and grounded her for a

month. During this time, Mary had no contact with her trafficker and started experiencing suicidal ideation as a result. Once her parents returned her phone, Mary discovered her trafficker was in the area and asked to meet with him. She would frequently skip school to spend time with the man because she felt cherished by him. After a fight with her mother and fear of emotional and physical retaliation from her father, Mary chose to contact her trafficker and run away with him and a friend from school.

After days on the road from Sachse, Texas to Alexandria, Louisiana, Mary's friend returned home to appease her worried mother, and Mary woke up with a clouded mind, drugged and tied to a bed. Initially sweet and understanding, the man she had learned to trust suddenly became a monster, threatening to harm her and end her life. He also threatened her family to ensure she followed his orders. For five days, Mary was sexually assaulted by different men while drugged and restrained.

When Alexandria's law enforcement entered the hotel room and found her hidden in a closet, Mary thought she would finally be safe and her life would return to normal. But when the officers identified her as the runaway girl from Texas, Mary felt like she was being punished for her decision to leave home. Law enforcement sent Mary to a juvenile detention center and instructed her to shower — erasing all physical evidence of the assaults. On her way home, Mary's parents scolded her for her actions, emphasizing the great shame they felt toward her, while she repeatedly asked to be taken to a hospital.

Once at the hospital, Mary and her mother were informed that Mary could have critical health issues as a result of her multiple sexual assaults. As a minor, Mary received counseling from health care providers and family members. However, some well-intentioned advisers often judged Mary's experiences as disappointing or irrational, unfurling a sense of shame and stigma. Consequently, Mary felt isolated and disheartened, resulting in further physical, emotional and spiritual distress — and preventing her from attaining comprehensive healing.

After suffering this injustice, Mary committed herself to surviving day by day. She tried to regain a sense of normalcy in her life. However, experiencing judgment and rejection from various actors — including her community, family, church and inner circle — intensified her shame and furthered stigmatization. Likewise, since Mary could not access the mental and physical care she needed, she was hindered from finding comfort and a suitable support system. As a result, Mary dropped out of school, became alienated from society and found herself trapped in subsequent abusive relationships. To this day, Mary, now a 34-year-old woman, still battles the mental and physical repercussions arising from the initial injustice she suffered. Mary's experience has been aggravated by the absence of a collaborative response from different spheres of her community with the end goal of her successful reintegration into society.

Mary's story illustrates the experiences of the thousands of human trafficking victims nationwide.[1] Her story conveys the challenges these victims face before being trafficked — for which they are purposely targeted — and the aftermath of this injustice, which often results in their re-trafficking. This report will explore and evaluate avenues to aid in the prevention of trafficking based on said challenges, as well as in the reintegration of victims of human trafficking into society. There are three prominent issues at hand, which will be the main focus of this research: first, the injustice of human trafficking and its prevention; second, the prevention of victim re-trafficking; and third,

the successful reintegration of victims into their communities based on a cohesive and compassionate response. These factors should be integrated into a comprehensive approach to care and intervention to prevent re-trafficking while enhancing restoration and healing.

Defining Human Trafficking: the Scope of the Problem

The United Nations defines human trafficking as

"the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation."[2]

Available data indicate that human trafficking has become a global concern, encompassing an estimated 24.9 million victims worldwide in 2022, reflecting both sex trafficking and forced labor exploitation.[3] In the United States, isolated data does not accurately reflect the magnitude of the problem. Nonetheless, in 2021, the National Human Trafficking Hotline Data Report highlighted 10,360 cases of human trafficking in the nation.[4] Additionally, the 2021 Federal Human Trafficking Report by the Human Trafficking Institute reported that the cases investigated involved different schemes, including small-scale operations run by individuals to more extensive and complex crime rings.[5] From the reported cases in 2021, data suggest victims of this injustice were coerced into the human trafficking system via the Internet (53%), previous relationships (4%), street/track (2%), bar/club/cantina (1%) and using uncategorized methods (1%) and at massage parlors (1%).[6] In 38% of the cases, however, information was insufficient and thus determining the method of solicitation was not possible. The University of Texas at Austin reports an estimated 79,000 youth and minor victims of sexual-related human trafficking state-wide.[7]

Due to the limited availability of appropriate and comprehensive data-gathering arrangements, researching and sizing the magnitude of human trafficking nationwide remains a challenge. In this regard, government agencies' approach to understanding the human trafficking problem is underdeveloped since collaborations between key stakeholder organizations are needed to develop an effective multifaceted data-gathering system that can extract significant insights into the scale of the problem.

At the state level, different states have varying methodologies for divulging their statistics. California has established laws requiring specific businesses and other establishments to post a human trafficking model notice created by the Attorney General's Office. The Assembly Bill 2034 (2018) allows local agencies and school districts to seek "reimbursement for certain costs mandated by the model notice posting requirement."[8] Likewise, the state of Florida established different mechanisms to assist victims of human trafficking in the state through Senate Bill 7064 (2023). Among its provisions, the bill allows human trafficking victims to pursue civil action against traffickers and the property seized from traffickers to be sold and proceeds to be paid as restitution to victims.[9]

In Texas, state law does not require law enforcement to compile and report statistics specific to human trafficking cases. A complicating factor is that traffickers in this state may be charged with other violations (that may be easier to collect evidence

for) in lieu of human trafficking — such as kidnapping or sexual assault.[10] There are available data, for example, on the number of sexual assault cases in the state; in 2017, statistics indicated there were 18,750 victims of sexual assault.[11] However, Texas lacks essential data on the number of kidnapping or missing person cases.

Access to such information is critical to understanding the scope of the problem in the state and the nation because a portion of sexual assault, kidnapping, and missing person numbers represent cases of human trafficking. In this respect, the various methodologies individual states utilize to collect data might hinder the implementation of a comprehensive response to this injustice. Human trafficking cases can create a level of complexity that requires different approaches across the nation. States might strengthen their interventions by designing multidisciplinary and collaborative data collection methodologies to support the nation's fight against sex trafficking.

The discussions thus far are preliminary efforts to portray the scope of the human trafficking problem. This report will attempt to address critical issues such as re-trafficking prevention and successful reintegration into society. Addressing these topics is instrumental to sculpting the direction of positive conversations, collaborations and practices across various organizations and institutions. We seek to understand current best practices that stimulate the reinstatement of human trafficking victims to their communities while minimizing risk factors that obstruct their human flourishing. Likewise, factors contributing to the likelihood of becoming a target will be identified and addressed. By preying on victims exhibiting psychological and financial vulnerabilities, traffickers intentionally use their prevailing persuasion to exert control over their victims, thus diminishing survivors' ability to rejoice in their value as God's image-bearers.

Psychological Vulnerabilities that Heighten the Risk of Human Trafficking

Victims of human trafficking are initially targeted based on characteristics identified by traffickers, such as psychological and financial vulnerabilities. Typically, victims of human trafficking face emotional and psychological challenges. Psychological risk factors include the experience of trauma, negative perception of self and others, sexual denigration of self and dysfunctional attachment styles.[12] These challenges prompt potential victims to seek approval and affection from others while experiencing a feeling of isolation or disconnection from immediate family members and their social circles. Such factors — combined with the absence of a support system and the development and accumulation of specific behavioral manifestations — such as low self-esteem — and coupled with the use of maladaptive coping and problem-solving mechanisms can fuel the need victims feel to escape from their households and sustain relationships with individuals who may take advantage of their vulnerability.[13] It is important for the potential victim's parents, teachers, counselors and friends to recognize such manifestations of psychological stress in order to curtail the traffickers' intentions to identify and exploit the individual's mental state and helplessness.

Financial Factors: The Intersection of Poverty and Exploitation

Financial factors are fundamental to understand the forces that increase potential victims' likelihood of being trafficked. People in impoverished communities can struggle to meet basic needs like health care, food, shelter and education. Traffickers worldwide search for potential victims in this category

by seeking out and making false promises to underprivileged individuals and communities. For instance, in Delta Niger, Africa, traffickers promise vulnerable parents living in poverty or debt a better life for their children with wealthy families along with the chance of a good education.[14] Often, traffickers research and exploit these parents' poverty for their perverse gain.

The idea of giving up one's children so that they can live a better life is nothing novel. For example, during the Holocaust, parents were desperate to provide their children with a chance to live away from Nazi tyranny and continual bombings. Because of this, many parents sent their children to live with host families in the United Kingdom through a program known as the Kindertransport of 1938–40.[15] While the Kindertransport was a successful operation in this regard due to the benevolent nature of the families who welcomed the children fleeing Nazi persecution, these accounts emphasize the methods traffickers might resort to, including bogus contracts and false promises, to prey on desperate victims who lack basic financial security, yet still have a desire to offer their children a better life.[16]

Physical Factors: Health Implications of Trafficking

Human trafficking poses a significant public health concern. Victims of this injustice have physical needs that, if not met, prevent them from successfully reintegrating into their communities. As they have been physically and often sexually abused, sexually transmitted infections are critical concerns for victims of sex trafficking.[17] Additionally, due to poor conditions they have been subjected to during their ordeal, victims of human trafficking often struggle with poor nutrition, hygiene, physical disabilities, changes in their menstrual cycles, urinary tract infections, acute and chronic injuries, fatigue and exhaustion.[18]

Stigma and Isolation: Psychological Factors Hindering Recovery

Human trafficking victims face psychological repercussions as well due to the physical, sexual, and mental abuse and exploitation experienced in captivity. Some of the most common psychological symptoms and illnesses victims experience include post-traumatic stress disorder, major depressive disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, panic disorder, suicidal ideation and Stockholm syndrome — the development of positive feelings toward the abuser as a coping mechanism — and various substance abuse disorders.[19]

The concept of stigma, described as a factor that profoundly discredits an individual, contributes to the fragile psychological state of victims.[20] Stigma is a social construction whereby a distinguishing mark of social disgrace is attached to others to identify and devalue them.[21] Stigma is a complex problem because it is considered multifaceted; that is, it comprises a variety of essential elements influencing mental health. Alarmingly, stigma might also lead to re-trafficking because it impacts the victim's access to care.

Due to the stigmatization experienced by human trafficking victims, they typically experience social barriers — including shaming, shunning and a profound lack of understanding — that result in divorce from their communities.[22] Additionally, the strong sense of shame resulting from trauma paired with a loss of self-worth places an unrealistic expectation on victims of human trafficking to take the initiative in seeking help. Hence, understanding stigma as a factor that hinders victims' recovery process is crucial to reframing the approach taken by different spheres of society to provide appropriate victim care and rehabilitation.

Financial Factors that Prevent Victims from Flourishing

Socioeconomic status, which can be tied to the lives of victims before trafficking, poses a challenge to successful reintegration based on poor economic conditions.[23] Financial vulnerabilities in victims can increase risk factors that may contribute to re-trafficking as they feel forced to adopt a range of strategies to survive, including seeking and staying in abusive relationships and engaging in illicit activities for financial compensation.[24] Poverty, manifested in illiteracy, unemployment and poor living conditions, must then be interpreted as a factor that not only increases the risk of victim targeting, but also as an agent that prevents victims of human trafficking from receiving transitional justice.[25] In human trafficking, transitional justice advocates for survivors of this injustice by focusing on institutional, policy and educational reforms. The aim of this report is to create awareness among policymakers through campaigns regarding human-trafficking–related legislation, as well as to encourage civil society institutions as they continue coordinating their efforts to fight sex trafficking.[26]

Addressing Knowledge Gaps in Identifying Human Trafficking Victims

A lack of understanding of human trafficking among law enforcement and service providers prevents victims from receiving the care and attention they need. There is a general misconception among law enforcement and service providers regarding the profile of human trafficking victims. Under this limited perspective, victims of this injustice are understood to be primarily foreign-born, young females forced into prostitution.[27] Likewise, there is little acknowledgement that human trafficking can occur domestically and is not exclusive to a particular gender or age group. Paired with this knowledge gap, there is a lack of recognition that prostitution of minors also constitutes human trafficking and, similarly, that it is plausible that sex work is not performed voluntarily.[28] Exploring this concept further, it is essential to highlight the explanation of the subject offered by Chapter 20A of the Texas Penal Code. The chapter states that the crime of trafficking persons is defined as "the use of force, fraud or coercion against an individual to receive or benefit from labor or commercial sex acts."[29]

A lack of understanding of human trafficking among law enforcement and service providers prevents victims from receiving the care and attention they need.

Government Efforts in Supporting Trafficking Victims

Human trafficking is associated with exploitation, inequality, oppression and the indescribable harm and injustice its victims endure. Among the primary efforts to address human trafficking and victim reintegration into society are the endeavors created by government institutions and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Support efforts can be classified across the following categories: preventive educational campaigns, law enforcement, victim support, rehabilitation and education, reintegration into society and interorganizational collaborations and analysis.

The struggle with human trafficking requires collaborative intervention from governments and law enforcement agencies. These agencies can synchronize their resources and capabilities to rescue victims and prosecute traffickers and criminal networks. Their efforts can also aid in preventing human trafficking by investigating and prosecuting

those who engage in labor exploitation, forced prostitution and other forms of enslavement. For instance, the state government agency, Texas Human Trafficking Resource Center, "connects Health and Human Services staff, health care providers, stakeholders and those who have experienced human trafficking to resources needed to locate services, help prevent trafficking, and recognize and respond to potential trafficking situations."[30]

Similarly, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) victim specialists provide essential guidance and intervention through local, state and federal resources to dispense immediate assistance — including shelter, food and clothing — and long-term support, such as counseling, education assistance and job training. The effort also includes investigations, arrests and prosecution of rescued victims' traffickers.[31] The FBI regularly collaborates and shares intelligence with Homeland Security Investigations, the Department of Health Services (DHS) and many other agencies.[32] As more collaborations develop, the role of government and law enforcement seems to become more active in fighting human trafficking. Nevertheless, it is essential to recognize that interventions should go beyond physical rescue on the basis that the initial intervention is only a starting point for victims' support and recovery.

Victim support also encompasses prevention campaigns. Support and prevention are ongoing processes that underpin public and private programs designed to assist victims by offering medical care, mental health counseling and legal assistance to address reintegration needs. Programs such as the Homeland Security Blue Campaign combat the injustice of human trafficking by educating the public, law enforcement and other business partners to recognize the indicators of human trafficking and learn how to respond to possible cases appropriately.[33] The Blue Campaign works closely with the DHS Center for Countering Human Trafficking. These collaborations extend to strategic partnerships with private and public sectors to enhance national public awareness and galvanize anti-human trafficking efforts. The Blue Campaign aims to promote prevention steps to deter human trafficking while improving the protection of exploited persons.[34]

Legal Frameworks: Government Efforts to Combat Trafficking

In 1865, the 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution banned the practice of slavery.[35] Rooted in this critical event in U.S. history, new laws in the past decades have become more comprehensive to advance the fight against human trafficking. According to the Department of Justice (DOJ), several laws in the United States are designed to protect victims of human trafficking.[36] The Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) is a federal law passed in 2000. This act's strength rests in its definition of human trafficking as a federal crime and its provision of resources for law enforcement agencies to investigate and prosecute traffickers. TVPA also provides for the protection and assistance of trafficking victims. In 2000, an amendment was added to the TVPA to establish programs that assist trafficking victims, including the T Visa program that allows victims to remain in the U.S. temporarily while they apply for permanent residency. Furthermore, the Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act was enacted in 2015. This law provides resources for law enforcement agencies to investigate and prosecute human trafficking cases. It also establishes a fund to provide restitution to trafficking victims to help with the rehabilitation process.

Similarly, the Frederick Douglass Trafficking Victims Prevention and Protection Reauthorization Act of 2018 enhanced the federal government's focus on critical issues

such as forced labor, including preventing and prohibiting labor trafficking in diplomatic households.[37] Previously, foreign diplomats and their households enjoyed diplomatic immunity, as well as legal protections and exemptions regarding labor in diplomatic households, including those employed by them. Therefore, the act addresses labor and human trafficking to ensure that bondage and slavery conditions are absent from diplomatic households. Violations in such cases are considered an assault on a person's human rights.[38] This law also increased the opportunity for reporting and the prohibition of goods produced through forced labor.

Understanding the dynamics and synergies between distinct organizations that aim to prevent and reintegrate victims into society is pivotal to the corrective and transitional justice process.

Considering the different injustices victims of human trafficking are subjected to before and after being trafficked, the role of government agencies, nonprofit organizations, businesses and faith-based institutions in combating human trafficking through support and prevention merits further investigation. Understanding the dynamics and synergies between distinct organizations that aim to prevent and reintegrate victims into society is pivotal to the corrective and transitional justice process.

Nonprofits and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs): Strengthening the Fight Against Trafficking

Preventive educational campaigns are usually formed through multiagency collaborations. Typically, government agencies, NGOs and faith-based organizations launch prevention campaigns to raise awareness about human trafficking and educate at-risk communities about the warning signs of trafficking in their region. These campaigns use various dissemination tools — including public service announcements, community and school workshops, and social media outreach through various channels. For example, the organization Elijah Rising in Houston, Texas, hosts van tours to educate the public regarding the realities and impact of sex trafficking in Houston.[39] Additionally, their campaign is committed to helping adult women survivors receive the necessary support services that foster hope and practices that allow them to reintegrate into their communities, such as job training. Operation Underground Railroad, headquartered in Anaheim, California, focuses on children and their reintegration into the community through collaborative efforts with other organizations and government agencies.[40] The Phoenix Dream Center in Phoenix, Arizona, is another example of an organization that helps young victims overcome their physical and mental trials through aftercare efforts.[41]

The following essential category is centered on the issue of providing victims of human trafficking the opportunity for rehabilitation, education and reintegration into society. After the initial intervention in which victims are separated from their traffickers, additional assistance is required to ensure such interventions deliver healthy and sustainable outcomes for victims. This approach can include job training, language classes and other educational programs. For example, the international nonprofit organization UNITAS provides educational opportunities, including prevention and training for survivors to thrive.[42]

In the U.S., interorganizational collaborations provide substantial leverage in fighting human trafficking across state lines. Institutions can achieve this goal by sharing knowledge,

data and analyses while providing mutual assistance to expedite processes, rescues and integration systems. Research has indicated that a multifaceted approach is the best way to prosecute traffickers while advancing victim support and defense.[43] Therefore, our research intends to unveil new insights into human trafficking and re-trafficking concerns by exploring prevention and reintegration practices that foster the human flourishing of victims while considering the implications of collaborations at the intersection of politics, faith and public justice.

FRAME

Mary's trafficking nightmare did not end when law enforcement apprehended her trafficker. What she hoped would be the end of this chapter of her life has instead proven to be a lifetime journey filled with challenges. Immediately after law enforcement intervened and rescued Mary from a life of trafficking, an optimal approach from law enforcement and health care providers should have followed trauma-informed care practices.[44] A trauma-sensitive approach from law enforcement delivers victim care based on official protocol while safeguarding evidence for legal proceedings.[45] Research indicates that following proper procedures rooted in trauma-informed care may increase the ability of law enforcement to access an accurate account of events — ultimately building the case against perpetrators and delivering justice.[46]

Of comparable importance is that to achieve sustainable restoration, victims of human trafficking require a sense of guidance and continuity to be provided by competent organizations working in synergy. A joint task force between law enforcement and health care providers is paramount in granting victims the medical attention they need — and in formally assisting with identifying victims and prosecuting traffickers.[47] Additionally, with the support of victim advocates, survivors can be invited to actively advocate for their justice by consenting to the performance of a Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) exam — thus collecting physical evidence of the injustice.[48] While nurses typically lead the implementation of the SANE exam, the effort now also includes teams of primary and secondary responders called Sexual Assault Response Teams (SARTs). The SARTs program is represented by law enforcement, detectives, victim advocates and health care professionals. The SANEs/SARTs stakeholders focus on building a comprehensive intervention and care. Although research outcomes indicate some encouraging results for the SANEs/SARTs programs' performance, there is still insufficient data regarding its impact across legal and political systems.[49]

Bridging Gaps through Collaboration

Research indicates a pressing need for multidisciplinary collaborations between law enforcement, health care providers, nonprofit organizations and faith-based institutions to provide adequate victim aftercare and deliver justice.[50] Conversely, the absence of a collaborative effort between these institutions ultimately results in the alienation of victims from their communities — depriving them of enjoying fellowship as God intended for his creation.

Mary's case serves as a testament to the fundamental need for collaboration between government agencies, nonprofit organizations and faith-based institutions. Her lack of a continuous support system rapidly deteriorated her mental health and overall financial situation. It is essential to understand human trafficking as a phenomenon that seeks to belittle image-bearers of God based on vulnerabilities,

preventing them from living in dignity. Consequently, Mary — deprived of guidance to provide her with a sense of direction and continuity after her traumatic experience — endured further abuse from her partners and was trapped in a cycle of stagnation.

To provide an adequate response that leads to the reintegration of victims into society, the collaboration between government agencies, law enforcement, health care facilities, nonprofit organizations and faith-based institutions must be centered around helping survivors develop the necessary tools to reach physical, psychological and financial flourishing while encouraging self-sufficiency. Each of these organizations must consider survivors' challenges and complex profiles to contribute to their growth and allow them to blossom in their communities. Because God — in his infinite grace — has conceived the institution of government and civil society organizations to respond to the needs of the people, it is the role of these organizations to develop mechanisms to prevent and respond to the injustice of sex trafficking.

As Mary's case shows, coordination between various agencies and organizations is critical in ensuring that victims receive the help they need while making traffickers accountable for their crimes. Effective coordination must also pursue a robust and sustainable reintegration of human trafficking survivors into society. This ideal aligns with the Christian faith because it involves the healing and transformation of victims as different spheres of our communities work in synergy through a public justice approach to advance the restoration of dignity. It is of utmost importance, then, to understand that the degree to which victims of human trafficking successfully reintegrate into society is contingent upon the degree to which these organizations collaborate with one another.

Understanding Human Trafficking as a Biblical Injustice

Human trafficking is a deviation from God's good design for creation. Forced labor and forced sex distort God's intended harmony for his kingdom as sin pervades the hearts of our communities through injustice. Moreover, because every human being is created in the image of God — *imago Dei* — we all have inherent dignity and worth. In this respect, human trafficking victims can lose vision of their worth and God-given value as human beings made in his image. On the other hand, traffickers filled with cruelty separate themselves from God's righteousness and mercy, thus acting according to what is profitable in their own eyes.[51]

The concept of *imago Dei* can be found throughout Scripture. Genesis 1:26-27 reads: "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the heavens, the livestock, the earth and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.' So God created man in his image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them."[52] In direct conflict with God's vision for creation and the role individuals have been assigned in furthering his kingdom, sin manifests in the form of human trafficking in our communities. It is, therefore, our role as Christians — as stewards of God's creation and agents of the kingdom of God — to correct this injustice through a collaborative approach between different sectors of society. In doing so, as image-bearers of God, Christians are called to honor individuals' God-given dignity and allow them to flourish in God's design.

Our responsibility lies in embracing God's calling in our lives while fostering advocacy for human trafficking victims

by developing systems and networks to advance their flourishing and reintegration into society.

Jeremiah 29:7 is another verse that highlights the Christian duty to bring justice to victims of human trafficking. In it, God tells the prophet Jeremiah to let the people of Israel know that God wants them to, "Seek the shalom of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive and pray to the Lord for it; for in the shalom of it shall you have shalom."[53] This verse should inspire Christians to actively participate in the coming of God's kingdom on earth through the pursuit of shalom — which must be achieved through the relentless pursuit and consequent delivery of justice. A public justice approach where communities seek the well-being of victims of this form of slavery honors God's design for His creation.

This Judeo-Christian perspective has significant implications regarding the just treatment of human beings. For instance, James 3:9, which states, "With the tongue, we praise our Lord and Father, and with it, we curse human beings who have been made in God's likeness," emphasizes the grace that should be extended to human beings as they are created in the image of God.[54] Moreover, the idea of shalom, more than just encouraging the pursuit of justice and peace, points to building a relationship with God and offering charitable actions and respect towards our neighbors based on God's love to advance human flourishing. Thus, our responsibility lies in embracing God's calling in our lives while fostering advocacy for human trafficking victims by developing systems and networks to advance their flourishing and reintegration into society.

Government's Role and Responsibility in Addressing Human Trafficking

The role of government in addressing human trafficking is rooted in its responsibility to legislate laws that promote the shalom of our communities and the well-being of individuals. According to the Center for Public Justice's (CPJ's) Guideline on Government, "The government of a political community bears the responsibility to legislate, enforce, and adjudicate public laws for the safety, welfare, and public order of everyone within its jurisdiction."[55] In carrying out these activities for the welfare of communities and the public order of everyone, government intervention must be strategic, multidisciplinary and multifaceted. As it creates, establishes and enforces laws, government is called to prevent injustice and hold criminals accountable for their actions while protecting the right of individuals to live in dignity and harmony. Accordingly, the federal government is entrusted with indiscriminately delivering justice to everyone — even marginalized individuals — by coordinating efforts with local and state governments.

Moreover, in the fight against human trafficking, the government must provide law enforcement agencies with the necessary resources and practical personnel training to effectively investigate and prosecute trafficking cases. Part of this training and resource support should require multiagency data collection and the compilation of relevant knowledge of prosecuting human trafficking perpetrators and protecting human trafficking victims through longitudinal studies. These studies would provide law enforcement and other social service organizations with benchmark information as a foundation for their work in restoring and returning human trafficking survivors to their communities. Without this data, learning the best ways to support survivors is difficult.

Equally significant, local, state and federal government data must be transparent and

accessible to all government agencies and social service organizations. Historically, the concept of promoting data transparency across institutions, businesses and governments working toward the same initiatives is not new. The subject has been intensely pursued and applied to various contexts with implications for democracy.[56] However, the limitation of this practice lies in the ambiguous role of government in the processes and scope of the problem. Hence, our research specifies the need for a clear understanding of the role of government in achieving justice.

CPJ's Guideline on Government, as stated previously, also emphasizes the role the institution plays in achieving justice through legislating and enforcing public laws based on accurate data that impacts our communities' safety, welfare and public order. The process of collecting and disseminating data is therefore essential to develop successful strategies that deliver fitting results, uproot human trafficking out of our communities and promote the flourishing of trafficking survivors.

Conceptually, data transparency is linked to democratic governance and justice because it helps government institutions address breaches and lack of coordination in anti-human trafficking partnerships.[57] In this respect, government can provide communication channels and incentives for organizations when addressing human trafficking challenges. The government's endeavors often include the development of partnerships and alliances with key stakeholders, including nonprofit organizations, for-profit organizations, faith-based institutions and committed individuals.

The DOJ has set a standard protocol for an effective response to investigating and prosecuting human trafficking crimes. By contributing to constructing a network of service providers that help trafficking victims via their grant programs, the DOJ facilitates the complaint process for persons wanting to report a case of trafficking.[58] Additionally, the DOJ has developed a framework for an adequate response to addressing reports of human trafficking while also sharing critical resources for victim care. DOJ's efforts showcase synergy with the previously described role of government in establishing practices that promote public justice.[59] Hence, government institutions' pursuit of public justice can explain their role in properly exercising governmental authority in the political arenas and community.

Although human trafficking for forced labor is not the main focus of this report, it is vital to highlight that government representatives should investigate and create just laws to stop institutional traffickers (e.g., labor trafficking) as well. Labor trafficking has become a significant part of human trafficking in the U.S. In Texas, there are approximately 234,000 individuals who have fallen victim to labor trafficking.[60] In developing an adequate response to this injustice, it is important to recognize the significance of limited job opportunities, inadequate pay and poverty as factors which exacerbate the obstacles of potential and present labor trafficking victims to integrate into their communities and live in dignity. Likewise, the scarcity of consistent employment opportunities must be understood as a barrier to trafficking survivors' growth and reintegration. As a result, both victims and individuals susceptible to labor trafficking must be equally included in intervention programs which seek to advance the flourishing of community members. However, as it is particularly difficult to track labor trafficking data, our research emphasizes the need for data collection and dissemination channels to create strategic plans that curtail the movement and operations of both sex and

labor trafficking injustices through awareness campaigns and accurate prosecution of perpetrators.

While federal-level efforts to prevent and combat human trafficking are increasing, consistency in what states define as human trafficking and associated legal procedures should be synonymous with the framework developed on a federal level. As discussed in the previous section of this report, there are cases in Texas where human trafficking has been prosecuted under charges of sexual assault or kidnapping instead. The absence of accurate data because of the diversity of definitions and prosecution strategies of human trafficking crimes across states consequently inhibits the advancement of federal efforts to adjudicate these crimes. In this sense, congruence between federal and state levels is pivotal to effectively responding to this injustice. As CPJ's Guideline on Government states, "As government concentrates on upholding public justice, there may, as a consequence, be advances of human freedom, economic prosperity, environmental safeguards, and international peace."[61]

Civil Society's Role and Responsibility in Addressing Human Trafficking

Corporations, nonprofit organizations, faith-based institutions and citizens are each responsible for contributing to the prevention of the injustice of trafficking, as well as for aiding victims in the process of reintegration into their communities.

The role of nonprofit organizations in preventing and combating human trafficking is crucial, as they are called to serve as a place of refuge and security for individuals before and after being rescued from injustice. According to the Center for Public Justice, "The call to be a 'neighbor' — to help those in need — is addressed to all people and all institutions," and this call extends to nonprofit organizations.[62] Nonprofit organizations are often perceived by their communities as beneficial partners to government.[63] Dedicated nonprofits have dynamic networks they can use to raise awareness and funding to serve and restore human-trafficking victims and vulnerable populations. Nonprofits and advocacy organizations can work with government institutions to protect vulnerable individuals from trafficking in terms of law and policy. Although advocacy has its place, it is equally vital for citizens to raise awareness through education and community outreach.

Nonprofit organizations can also develop a structure that aids human trafficking victims in the fulfillment of their needs — ranging from physical to psychological and financial through active intervention and instruction. Furthermore, as victims seek to heal and become integrated into their communities, nonprofit organizations are responsible for encouraging self-sufficiency and human flourishing by consistently and systematically providing education and job training. CPJ's Guideline on Welfare states, "Receiving assistance should enable those in need to reach or return to self-sufficiency and be in a position to help others."[64] Nonprofit organizations are responsible for providing transitional justice for marginalized individuals through mentorship programs, facilitating access to medical and psychological assistance and advocating for anti-trafficking laws and responses.

Finally, as nonprofit organizations collect pertinent data while assisting victims, they must advance the current understanding of the scope and nature of the injustice. Nonprofit organizations can then share relevant information through suitable channels to fulfill an educational role that spreads awareness about the everyday challenges of potential or present human

trafficking victims. By sharing their knowledge, nonprofit organizations can contribute to reforming a system that allows for survivor flourishing. Considering this, nonprofit organizations have become essential to promoting and delivering justice and long-lasting solutions in the fight against human trafficking.

Despite nonprofit organizations' efforts to address issues surrounding sexual assault, poverty, homelessness, minority rights, education and women's rights to prevent and correct injustice, human trafficking remains a threat to our communities. As nonprofit organizations play a role in responding to this injustice through advocacy work, education campaigns and community outreach, their work merits further support from local, state and federal government, as well as from for-profit organizations with corporate social responsibility programs.

Corporate Responsibility in Combating Trafficking

To drive tangible change in the lives of human trafficking survivors and in the systemic response to this injustice, corporations must be included as part of the public justice solution. Businesses have a responsibility to ensure their supply chains do not support labor trafficking, that their personnel are capable of identifying and accordingly reporting trafficking in persons and that their employees are compensated fairly and justly.

Of particular concern is the hospitality industry, which has been identified as a sector alarmingly vulnerable to both labor and sex trafficking.[65] Statistics reflect that 10.5% of sexual exploitation of cases reported in the year of 2016 involved hotels, which makes this sector only less popular than commercial brothels for trafficking purposes.[66] For-profit organizations, especially in the hospitality industry, must therefore equally engage in efforts to prevent and respond to human trafficking by practicing corporate social responsibility and joining in anti-trafficking initiatives. Correspondingly, such initiatives should seek to augment the efforts of various sectors of society and contribute to the comprehensive response to support survivors of and those vulnerable to sex trafficking. As government agencies, nonprofit organizations and faith-based institutions are leading the fight against human trafficking, it is crucial that businesses actively seek to utilize their resources, expertise and influence to enhance the impact of these efforts.

Businesses are also called to increase employee awareness regarding the ever-evolving practices of human trafficking while simultaneously encouraging individual involvement in the fight against trafficking. In this respect, businesses can take various proactive steps to respond to this issue. The implementation of training programs to educate personnel about the signs and different avenues to report human trafficking is of critical importance to identify and address potential trafficking situations. Likewise, it is vital that businesses allocate resources and devise mechanisms to prevent and provide adequate responses to instances of trafficking in their supply chains. This process involves conducting thorough due diligence on subsidiaries' business practices to guarantee their adherence to ethical standards and a code of conduct, which honors and promotes the freedom and dignity of those they employ.

Accordingly, for-profit organizations are prompted to allocate their resources to financially and strategically support other organizations' efforts to assist present and potential trafficking victims while contributing to the delivery of restorative justice. Leveraging their financial, operational and technological influence to combat

human trafficking is imperative to provide an adequate response to this problem that effectively maximizes the work and impact of these other organizations.

Faith-Based Approach to Healing and Restoration

Faith-based organizations are called to take an active role in society by helping promote its development while encouraging vulnerable individuals to know and walk with God. In doing so, faith-based institutions are responsible for identifying, welcoming and aiding members of communities who have been alienated because of injustice. In responding to human trafficking, faith-based institutions are called to love their neighbors by contributing to the delivery of justice to victims while encouraging them to seek comprehensive care and find shelter in God. Because individuals who have experienced trauma — such as being trafficked — often struggle to recognize their inherent value due to the abuse and dehumanization endured, faith-based institutions should remind individuals of their God-given worth and dignity through guidance and ongoing support. However, according to CPJ's Guideline on Welfare, these interventions should not rest solely with nonprofits and faith-based institutions. Human trafficking victims merit multidisciplinary care even when such care is not readily provided by the aforementioned organizations due to geographic limitations or economic restraints.[67] As a result, government institutions will sometimes have to act in ways that go beyond preventive measures and the support of NGOs and faith-based organizations. In this respect, the normative role of government demands intervention in critical conditions that can endanger the welfare of society as a whole.[68]

Additionally, faith-based institutions play a vital role in delivering shalom to communities as they are responsible for providing transitional care to victims of injustice by serving as mentors and caregivers. Faith-based institutions are fundamental in reconciling God's ideal for creation and the introduction of sin into the world through victim assistance and empowerment.

The Faith Alliance Against Slavery and Trafficking (FAAST), a faith-based institution with a global presence, has raised awareness of human trafficking while aiding survivors through a Christ-centered approach. At the national level, the FAAST team collaborates monthly to conduct ongoing projects, research, training events and resource development.[69] In doing so, FAAST has expanded to almost every continent, with a strong presence in Cambodia, Kenya, Bangladesh, Mexico, Ukraine and Canada, amongst other countries. FAAST's faith-based approach to human trafficking encourages victim healing in God through communion — providing transformational care and emergency relief.[70]

Faith-based institutions play a crucial role in welcoming ostracized members of society to know God, especially victims of injustice who are seeking care that aligns with their faith. In doing so, faith-based institutions are paramount to preventing human trafficking as they provide excluded members of society with a sense of community and an avenue for spiritual, financial and emotional growth and healing. Faith-based institutions can host local conversations with other community sectors to foster better community support and engagement, promote fellowship and lead to a widespread impact that closes the gap between entities with congruent visions. Through a collaborative and knowledge-based approach between pertinent organizations, faith-based institutions will be able to better identify and respond to the needs of their community members in a timely manner.

Finally, faith-based institutions are also responsible for becoming aware of and addressing their own potential biases, which prevent them from viewing and treating victims of human trafficking as people of value and worth, created in the image of God. In doing so, those within society are encouraged to recognize the humanity in individuals from different backgrounds or contexts who have fallen victim to the injustice of human trafficking. Approaching survivors of human trafficking with compassion and empathy can decrease the stigma and biases surrounding human trafficking, enhancing human flourishing and connection for survivors in their communities.

Community Awareness and Advocacy

Members of communities are called to raise awareness about acts of injustice and human rights violations. Groups of citizens ought to advocate for victims' rights and the restoration of justice while holding the government accountable for the diligent development of legislation and administration of just laws. In the fight against human trafficking, citizens are responsible for creating a collective voice and encouraging active participation from community members and peers in preventing, identifying and addressing human trafficking.

Considering the different, yet interdependent roles of government, nonprofit organizations, businesses, faith-based institutions and citizens in responding to human trafficking, this research aims to bridge the gap that prevents victims of injustice from reintegrating into their communities. In considering the barriers which prevent victims of human trafficking from flourishing in their communities, our research intends to shine a light on the challenges of the system in preventing and responding to human trafficking through a public justice approach.

ENGAGE

Despite government and civil society's efforts to fight human trafficking, it has found a home in Texas. In terms of numbers of trafficking cases, Texas ranks second in the nation — only preceded by California. Available data reflect an estimate of 313,000 victims of human trafficking in the state in 2016.[71] To effectively respond to this injustice and promote the flourishing of victims in the region after being rescued, collaboration between government agencies, nonprofit organizations, businesses and faith-based institutions must be encouraged. Hence, to gain a deeper understanding of how government and civil society can partner to foster the comprehensive healing and reintegration of trafficking victims while also advancing preventive measures, we conducted interviews with community leaders in Texas. These interviews shine light on their first-hand experiences in assisting human trafficking victims.

Tiffany Smith, a therapy clinician at Van Zandt county's Children's Advocacy Center, described her experience advocating for youth human trafficking victims. As part of her job, she received a female minor who, after being rescued from a life of trafficking by law enforcement, was reluctant to disclose her story. Working with minors, Smith understands the implementation of trauma-informed care as an essential step for first responders to practice when responding to human trafficking. Because law enforcement's approach to the minor was not mindful of the complex physical and psychological trauma to which victims of trafficking are subjected to, the response they obtained from this minor was hostile. Consequently, as Smith later made a mindful, informed attempt to obtain valuable information from the victim, she was unable to learn enough in order to support her needs. As a result, the victim's

disposition to accept help, to receive justice and to have an opportunity at healing was hindered.

To effectively respond to this injustice and promote the flourishing of victims in the region after being rescued, collaboration between government agencies, nonprofit organizations, businesses, and faith-based institutions must be encouraged.

This story[72] exemplifies the importance for government agencies, nonprofit organizations, businesses and faith-based institutions to work collaboratively and to be in concurrence with one another to deliver justice and victim healing from different spheres of our communities. The absence of mandatory training and informational seminars, which grant these institutions an opportunity to educate themselves and work cohesively to effectively respond to human trafficking, must be understood as a disservice to victims. In this respect, the injustice of trafficking in persons in East Texas merits a collaborative approach from different sectors of society, including government and civil society — shaped by corporations, nonprofit organizations, faith-based institutions and devoted groups of citizens. In both preventing the propagation of and responding to sex trafficking, the dynamics and synergies between such organizations must be examined and incentivized.

Local and State Government Efforts

Texas houses federal and state organizations dedicated to controlling and responding to the presence of human trafficking in the state. As they seek to ensure the fair treatment of victims of this illicit activity while also holding criminals accountable for their actions, their work is crucial to the delivery of justice to victims and perpetrators of this illicit activity alike. A field office of the DHS — located in Grand Prairie, Texas — is responsible for conducting criminal investigations, providing victim assistance, identifying trends in human trafficking and reporting human trafficking at the federal level to facilitate widespread action. On the state level, the Texas Human Trafficking Prevention Coordinating Council is a prime example of the efforts being made by the state government to prevent and prosecute human trafficking.[73] The Council's work is comprehensive and centered on the prevention of human trafficking, victim identification, investigation, prosecution and rehabilitation. In doing so, the Council identifies the pillars of prevention, protection, prosecution, providing support and partnering as the means to end human trafficking in Texas.

Likewise, the Texas Child Sex Trafficking Team in the Office of the Governor has the mission to "build sustainable capability, enhance expertise, promote policies and create new and leverage existing collaborations."[74] The team aims to protect children from sexual exploitation, help the public recognize its signs, help victims recover, support healing and deliver corrective justice to those who exploit children. Tomi Grover, who served as the North Texas regional administrator for the Office of the Governor's Child Sex Trafficking Team, identifies several challenges the region of East Texas has in combating human trafficking. These include a lack of institutional capacity from law enforcement to operate to their fullest potential, the pressing need for cohesive partnerships between law enforcement and other sectors of society and the large geographical distances between cities in the region.[75]

As this report advances, it is imperative to acknowledge the role of government in preventing and responding to the injustice of trafficking in persons. As evidenced by the aforementioned institutions, government crucially provides justice as it holds a duty to guarantee the human rights of individuals and prosecute this criminal activity. This includes the responsibility to fund and develop campaigns to raise awareness about human trafficking and educate the public. Therefore, by actively engaging in preventative efforts while also enforcing the law, government institutions must be considered essential to the comprehensive delivery of justice and flourishing of our communities.

Civil Society Efforts

Likewise, civil society in Texas — made up of houses of worship, nonprofits, faith-based organizations, businesses and many other important components — takes part in the fight against human trafficking. As they act to prevent and respond to human trafficking by connecting with and aiding survivors, faith-based institutions' and nonprofit organizations' efforts merit to be highlighted.

In this respect, it is important to understand the role of these organizations in delivering justice as they work closely with victims to provide them with physical, psychological and financial care — ultimately bringing them closer to their successful reintegration into society. For example, Hannah House, a maternity home located in Gilmer, Texas, seeks to reach women who have found themselves in a crisis pregnancy situation such as those recently freed from human trafficking. Hannah House offers counseling, transportation and quality medical care to women who have experienced crisis pregnancy situations — including victims of human trafficking.[76] Hannah House seeks to meet women's basic needs while instilling hope and a path to healing through counseling and connection with resources.

Similarly, Rahab's Retreat and Ranch — located in Kilgore, Texas — is a voluntary, faith-based program that serves victims of sex trafficking and women in the sex industry free of charge. The institution's mission is to offer a haven to women who have experienced physical, emotional and sexual abuse and those coming from jail, regardless of socioeconomic background. Women combating self-harm, drug and alcohol addictions, depression, unplanned pregnancies and homelessness are also encouraged to join the program.[77]

In contrast, For The Silent, a nonprofit organization based in Tyler, Texas, works to end sex trafficking and exploitation by empowering the voices of vulnerable and exploited youth through prevention, survivor care and community reintegration programs.[78] FTS developed a crisis-intervention program for victims and a prevention education program for high-risk youth after realizing the size of the problem of trafficking in East Texas. In doing so, "FTS works hand in hand with juvenile justice departments, law enforcement and middle schools in East Texas to educate, empower and mentor girls who are at high risk for or have already experienced exploitation, giving them the tools they need to leave exploitative situations."[79]

Additionally, FTS offers prompts for crisis responses to children and youth from the moment law enforcement becomes involved in a sex trafficking case.[80] This, paired with their survivor care program, equips survivors with essential tools to regain control over their lives. FTS offers a range of services aimed at supporting individuals in developing essential life skills, finishing their education, securing housing, pursuing employment opportunities and crafting resumes.[81] Likewise, the Children's Advocacy Center at Van Zandt County, located in Northeast

Texas, focuses its efforts on "serving as the first stop for children entering the justice system because of suspected sexual abuse, severe physical abuse and those who have witnessed a violent crime."[82]

Located two hours away from Longview, Texas, Kimiya International's mission is centered on acknowledging the deeply rooted psychological impact that trauma has on victims of abuse, including human trafficking. By working closely with survivors to elevate humanity through documentaries and programs focused on post-trauma healing, Kimiya International prioritizes the reestablishment of the connection between mind and body. Through its Fight Club program, Kimiya International strives to "address access, affordability and negative stigma surrounding post-trauma mental health and self-care."[83] Their holistic program combines boxing, yoga and counseling for women who have endured trauma. Kimiya's chief executive officer, Dr. Sana Syed, defines trauma as "an event or series of events that take place and continue to affect individuals throughout their lives."[84] In this respect, Syed argues that trauma — often a trigger of PTSD — ultimately takes victims back in time and prevents them from living in the present, from healing and finding restoration. Kimiya International's unique approach to addressing trauma therefore seeks to combine physical movement and talk therapy to advance healing. The physical component of the program includes yoga and boxing. Yoga is aimed at encouraging survivors to stay in the present by regulating their breathing and being mindful of it — ultimately calming the nervous system. Similarly, boxing offers survivors an opportunity to have an outlet for a physical release of emotion while also empowering them through self-defense tactics. By offering talk therapy sessions, in contrast, survivors of abuse are given the space to work through pieces of their lives, deprogramming the trauma to which they have became accustomed to.[85]

Moreover, Love146 in Houston, Texas provides an example of a nonprofit organization geared towards responding to human trafficking through active advocacy work. Through community engagement, the organization seeks to prevent trafficking in the U.S. by "reaching thousands of youth groups with an education that equips them to recognize vulnerabilities and protect themselves from exploitation" while aiding trafficked children by offering constant support and advocating for them.[86] Love146 has reached 68,177 children through prevention and community education by empowering youth groups to understand vulnerability, spot traffickers and seek help. Simultaneously, Love146 has reached 17,535 adults through strategic collaboration by connecting parents, professionals and community members to protect children.[87]

Hope Education Partnership Transformation Aftercare (HEPTA) Coalition in Longview, Texas, aims to bring in various sectors of the East Texas community — including nonprofit organizations, government agencies and faith-based institutions — to deliver an effective and comprehensive response to human trafficking. In doing so, HEPTA strives to meet the different needs of trafficking victims while increasing local and state awareness about the ever-evolving tactics of traffickers. HEPTA Coalition's vision, therefore, is to aid victims of human trafficking in their physical, psychological and financial processes to find healing and flourishing in community.[88]

The proactive participation of businesses is equally indispensable to constructively prevent and respond to human trafficking. In Texas, the Texas Businesses Against Trafficking (TBAT), in partnership with the Texas Secretary of State, seeks the active participation of all Texas businesses in the

fight against trafficking.[89] TBAT's mission is centered on raising awareness about labor and sex trafficking with the collaboration of businesses in the state. To become members at either the partner or associate level, businesses must complete an application that acknowledges they have or intend to adopt a policy aimed at combating human trafficking, make training available to employees about recognizing its signs and participate in educational and awareness campaigns.[90]

The positive impact that civil society in East Texas has had amongst vulnerable populations and victims of trafficking in persons highlights the importance of interconnection between government and civil society. To further expand their currently existing efforts while optimizing their influence to aid in the prevention of and response to human trafficking, it is paramount for both sectors to work in synergy. In doing so, their resources and expertise can be integrated — thus adequately serving victims and enhancing their flourishing and the delivery of justice.

Identified Problems and Challenges

Despite these strong efforts to counteract human trafficking from various angles, this form of injustice is nonetheless rapidly evolving in our communities. The presence of human trafficking continues to prevent our society from achieving shalom and living in harmony. A proactive approach which considers the shortcomings of our system, therefore, is necessary to guarantee the reduction and eventual eradication of this heinous crime. Thus, we feel compelled to highlight the various problems identified throughout our research in order to advance the mission of government and civil society in honoring the dignity and inherent value of individuals.

Challenges in Coordinating Support Ecosystems

The U.S. and individual states have resources available to help agencies and individuals who want to address the complex issues of human trafficking. For instance, in Texas, the Texas Human Trafficking Resource Center connects health care providers with nonprofits, faith-based organizations and those who have experienced human trafficking. The purpose is to bestow resources needed to locate services, information and training materials that can inform and prevent trafficking through recognition of critical issues and appropriate responses to potential trafficking situations.[91] However, many organizations and victims do not know these services are available, as research suggests that these altruistic efforts have historically been siloed and disorganized.[92] Further research, investigation and coordination are needed to address complex challenges in the current coordination of human trafficking support ecosystems and actionable responses.

1. Addressing Individualism and Misconceptions in East Texas

The individualistic culture of East Texas seems to have a prominent place in the public discourse. Often, it reflects the contextual values that represent a foundation of economic, political, social and moral thinking.[93] In contemporary society, individualist freedom and perceived rights to make choices can also align with hedonism and psychological disposition.[94] Hence, such dispositions can make stakeholders, agencies and individuals overlook the potential adverse effects of individualism in the case of human trafficking. This paves the way for misconceptions which seek to extend the notion that victims of human trafficking chose this path for their lives. In doing so, the reality that trafficking victims are lured in by a web of deception of seismic proportions becomes blurred.

2. The Impact of Geographic Factors: Distance

and Coordination

Researchers have documented evidence that in regions with vast open spaces and distances between cities, human traffickers have developed intricate networks to conduct their tactics.[95] Hence, traffickers often scout urban and rural locations with easy access to major highways and airports. Studies have indicated a preference for the utilization of economy motels and hotels. Trafficking leaders, however, might also choose higher-end hotels depending on the demands of their clientele.[96]

Human trafficking perpetrators are professional strategic planners and implementers of criminal intent.[97] They devise budgets and strategies to investigate the affluence of neighborhoods and the region's economic vitality, as this could increase their profit margins.[98] In this respect, traffickers might obtain cities or regional maps to orchestrate their prostitution locations and accessibility. Matter-of-factly, human traffickers are skilled experts when developing their unjust strategic schemes, clandestine marketing, fraudulent technology and criminal course of action.

The disconnection between organizations responsible for providing services in the fight against human trafficking in the area clouds potential solutions and avenues to serve and meet the needs of victims.

In Texas, there have been attempts to coordinate multidisciplinary task forces to encourage and support a collaborative effort across the region. For example, the Heart of Texas Human Trafficking Coalition is a multidisciplinary task force that seeks to coordinate efforts among local and federal law enforcement, prosecutors and victim service providers to end human trafficking in our community. Additionally, Smith of the Children's Advocacy Center explained how law enforcement can have some collaboration with counselors and faith-based organizations in the form of training on identifying traffickers and victims while providing a proactive intervention that will benefit the rescue and victims' reintegration into the community. One of her key assertions was that the different agencies must orchestrate their efforts in a way that brings optimal outcomes.[99]

One of the critical challenges for task forces and initiatives is that they may fail to fulfill the demands of their charge. Hence, there are gaps in the process, as Smith described. Going further, according to Grover of the Office of the Governor's Child Sex Trafficking Team, there are several challenges facing efforts to combat human trafficking in East Texas — including a lack of capacity within law enforcement, the need for greater collaboration between law enforcement and other sectors of society and the significant geographical distances between major cities like Longview and Tyler. These distances, Grover argues, make it difficult to establish a single coalition that can effectively respond to trafficking across many counties and towns.[100]

Unsatisfactory outcomes and distractions from common purpose between key facilitation stakeholders might surface when designing multidisciplinary and interorganizational collaborations. There are various reasons for this disconnect, including the inability of organizations and key stakeholders to actively organize because of the great distances between cities in East Texas. Additionally, the lack of training in coordination — coupled with the temporal nature of these task forces — as well as shifting priorities can hinder the funding

of these partnership efforts.[101] Therefore, more research on the perceived benefits of collaborations and the implementation and sustainability of efforts is necessary to explore the reasons and circumstances for such endeavors' failure, disconnect and successes.

Disparities in data collection pose additional challenges for a holistic response to trafficking

Collecting official data on the challenges and prevention of human trafficking is still evolving. For human trafficking laws to be strengthened, there needs to be an official and clear direction on data collection, analysis, evaluation and endeavors that hold traffickers criminally responsible for their actions while addressing the journey to healing and reintegration of human trafficking victims.[102] One of the critical factors that researchers propose is the need for investing in more research and analysis to stay up to date and review the performance of various government interventions, interorganizational collaborations and desirable outcomes. For example, technology is constantly evolving. As a result, more resources should be invested so that law enforcement in critical regions can stay current on new methods.[103]

Rebecca Cunio, executive director of For The Silent, highlights the absence of current research on the prevalence, frequency and response to commercial sexual exploitation as a key factor that thwarts efforts in place to provide an effective response to this crime.[104] She pointed to a study conducted by the University of Texas School of Social Work as the only one frequently cited when examining child sex trafficking statistics in the state. As this study dates back to 2017, Cunio urged institutions to heed modern factors which increase the number of trafficking victims in Texas— including the border crisis and immigration.[105]

Adding to the problem is the fact that there are different statutes to which human trafficking can be charged. In this respect, Cunio brought attention to the disparity in coding practices between government agencies, such as law enforcement, and nonprofit organizations pertaining to human trafficking.[106] Such differences pose an additional challenge to properly compiling and interpreting available data. It is imperative, then, that we recognize the absence of up-to-date, accessible data as a critical barrier to understanding the full scope of this injustice and to developing an appropriate response to it.

While data collection is crucial for advancing knowledge about human trafficking, other efforts are equally important in improving the effectiveness of programs, interventions and legal repercussions. As Cunio contended, consistent training in labeling, prosecuting and documenting human trafficking as such, for example, is indispensable to guarantee a successful representation of the magnitude of trafficking-related crimes which are currently being misidentified. As there remain narrative issues under other designations like abduction or prostitution, the legal process often lacks the clarity necessary to prosecute human trafficking cases effectively. Equally concerning, the fact that law enforcement officers' reports can be mislabeled out of ignorance or malice can derive in mistakes in the legal process, hindering the victims' and perpetrators' likelihood of obtaining justice.[107]

There is a need for greater awareness and education on human trafficking among legal professionals, law enforcement officers, and other key stakeholders to address these challenges. By improving the knowledge and skills of these individuals, we can better combat human trafficking and ensure that perpetrators are brought to justice.

Health Insurance Portability and

Accountability Act (HIPAA) law prevents clinicians from disclosing reported or suspected trafficking to law enforcement

Health care professionals are trained regarding the core approach to patient-centered trauma interventions. For instance, a private setting must be used for the patient not to feel threatened while health care professionals can maintain the appropriate level of confidentiality.[108] The process also includes recognizing that a multidisciplinary approach is required, including medical and mental health and shelter allocation after discharge.[109]

Nevertheless, health care professionals are often concerned about the possibility of violating the rules of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA) when it comes to disclosing certain types of information. However, it is essential to note that the HIPAA Privacy Rule allows reporting injury or abuse in certain circumstances. For instance, health care providers can report the gender, age and type of trafficking but not the service date.[110]

Despite these provisions, many health care providers fear disclosing too much information.[111] This approach can hinder efforts to combat human trafficking. Therefore, governments, health care providers and other key stakeholders must engage in discussions to establish a greater awareness of the law and its exemptions. This collaboration can help provide meaningful and essential intervention for human trafficking victims while ensuring that health care professionals do not violate HIPAA regulations. Lastly, it is of paramount importance to recognize that the implementation of this collaboration on the policy and practical level can effectively address the issue of human trafficking and protect its victims.

Recommendations for Action

At the core of our recommendations is the premise that multidisciplinary and interorganizational collaborations are needed to effectively address the challenges victims of human trafficking face and the notion that receiving justice is also part of the healing process. We call for the enhancement of an integrative approach which involves the efforts of government agencies, law enforcement, nonprofit organizations and faith-based institutions. Therefore, our research suggests in-depth considerations regarding policy and practice.

First, we suggest the creation and implementation of laws which mandate ongoing required training and education courses for law enforcement and health care professionals on the topic of human trafficking. In this respect, Smith deems it essential for first responders to be subjected to mandatory trainings in order to maintain synergies and cohesion between different efforts.[112] Additionally, we believe this goes hand in hand with fostering a culture of collaboration between government and civil society. As stated by Deanna Gatlin, a law enforcement coordinator for the HEPTA Coalition, an effective task force must necessarily include the participation of all sectors of society to coordinate efforts and optimize access to knowledge and resources.[113]

Additionally, we contend the efforts of Texas Businesses Against Trafficking merit to be replicated in all states. Each respective Secretary of State must seek the active collaboration of businesses to combat human trafficking. In this respect, the participation of the hospitality industry — that is, hotels, motels and others — is crucial to effectively identify and halt trafficking efforts through educational campaigns and the application of strict reporting protocols in conjunction

with law enforcement. Correspondingly, we encourage the swift enactment of legislative actions which strengthen similar initiatives by mandating businesses to engage in consistent employee training and participation in educational campaigns, enhanced reporting obligations and regular audits and compliance checks.

Finally, we believe establishing a framework for data collection about human trafficking in states for governments and civil society to access is crucial. In doing so, local, state and federal governments must work with businesses and other stakeholders to develop mechanisms to quantify the magnitude of the problem of human trafficking in their communities and delegate resources accordingly to provide an appropriate response.[114] We also believe individuals at risk of human trafficking — including adolescents, and those in homeless shelters and low-income neighborhoods — should have easy access to pertinent information on this matter. In this respect, education and awareness in our communities — assisted by educational institutions, nonprofit, faith-based organizations and businesses — play a fundamental role in preventing the propagation of this injustice.[115]

Upholding Justice, Dignity, and Shalom in Our Communities

While this report predominantly focused on the injustice of sex trafficking, labor trafficking urgently warrants equal attention. Human trafficking — regardless of the form it takes — is a perversion of human rights, a grave violation of victims' dignity and a deviation from God's vision for creation. Government and civil society must strongly condemn the exploitation and dehumanization of individuals through human trafficking and actively seek the reintegration of all victims of this injustice into society. In the same manner, the righteous application of corrective justice to traffickers merits the attention of government and civil society alike. Labor trafficking is equally concerning in the United States. The scope of this project is on sex trafficking because Tyler, Texas — 37.6 miles away from Longview — is known today as a national hot spot for sex trafficking.[116] We encourage continued efforts to raise awareness about human trafficking, advocate for victims' rights and collaborate with various stakeholders to create a society that upholds justice, human dignity and shalom in our communities.

From Incarceration to Integration: A Critical Analysis of Reentry Care in Prison Education Programs in West Michigan

By Emily Steen & Mark Mulder, Ph.D.

DISCOVER

Gregory Powell was 17 years old when he was sentenced to life in prison without parole. He and his friends took another man's life; now in return, he had to spend the rest of his life in the carceral system. As a juvenile lifer, Powell "grew up" in prison — the concrete walls and prison schedule raised him for 20 years. Powell lost hope of finding meaning and purpose after he was transferred to a lower-security facility, where he first witnessed elderly prisoners. Standing face-to-face with 80-year-old lifers, Powell saw his own mirrored future.

In 2005, however, the landmark U.S. Supreme Court case *Miller v. Alabama* ruled that juvenile life sentences without the possibility of parole constituted cruel and

unusual punishment.[1] For the first time since he was 17, Powell had hope. In 2018, Powell was accepted into the Calvin Prison Initiative and began working towards his bachelor's degree while in prison. After just two years into the five-year program, Powell was eligible for resentencing due to a series of Michigan Supreme Court sentencing reforms. In the summer of 2022, *People v. Stoval* in the Michigan state courts banned juvenile life sentences for second-degree murder cases, directly impacting Powell and his co-defendants.[2]

After his resentencing, Powell was released from prison only to discover a whole new set of challenges. After 28 years of being isolated from society, the only worlds Powell knew were those of his distant childhood and prison. Once released, Powell experienced overwhelming difficulty in re-learning the world around him, adapting to new responsibilities, taking classes on a college campus, finding housing, reconnecting with old friends and using a cell phone. In addition to struggling logistically, Powell struggled mentally as he processed his return after 28 years. "You spend all your time dreaming of the day you get released, then you're released, and you wonder: now what?"

Powell is just one of the 15 students and graduates who have participated in the Calvin Prison Initiative while in prison and returned home. Some have completed their degree while inside prison; others, like Powell, were released halfway through the program and are continuing their degree outside prison. Though each has a unique story, all of them face similar challenges when returning home from prison.

What are Prisons for?

The prison has long been a staple of American institutional life, largely hidden from American public discourse through physical and social isolation. However, both scholars and the public have questioned the role of the carceral system[3] in the rehabilitation of its participants, especially since the exponential increase in our nation's prison population.[4] Between 1970 and 2000, the prison population experienced a 400% increase in scale.[5] Recent scholarship agrees that prisons in our nation no longer serve as the rehabilitative institutions they once did under early American Quaker ideals, from which early visions regarding the purpose of prisons developed.[6] From its founding in 1829, Eastern State Penitentiary sought reform and rehabilitation for prisoners rather than punishment. The Quaker-inspired system emphasized solitary contemplation and meaningful labor that was designed to inspire repentance, both the basis of the word penitentiary and its guiding ideological framework.[7]

The prison has long been a staple of American institutional life, largely hidden from American public discourse through physical and social isolation.

Our current justice system no longer pretends to rehabilitate or restore offenders to their community. The current carceral strategy is largely uniform in its approach to punishment and lacks imagination in developing alternate strategies for rehabilitation. Conditions in prison, second-class citizenship for returning citizens, harsh sentencing laws and the prison industrial complex provide evidence that incarceration is for punishment, not rehabilitation.

Reentry: The Afterlife of Incarceration

Recently there has been a growing consensus that the "structural violence" of prisons follow

the imprisoned long after their release.[8] Scholar Reuben Miller has therefore rightly named the "afterlife" of mass incarceration as the systemic social exclusion that accompanies the mark of a criminal record.[9] Many states temporarily or permanently ban those with felony convictions from receiving benefits such as food vouchers, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Supplemental Security Income and public housing.[10] Finding employment offers an additional challenge to reentry due to employment practices that discriminate against those with criminal records. By stripping formerly incarcerated people's access to public housing, social services and employment, the lingering impacts of mass incarceration destroy all necessary elements for a safe and just society such as community trust, social networks and reliance on public institutions.[11]

The shadow of mass incarceration looms over every American citizen, but it is important to note that its impact is felt most by communities of color.

These "collateral consequences" of mass incarceration impact everyone. Institutionalized trauma and violence seep out past the barbed wire and fences of prisons into the everyday lives of formerly incarcerated people (FIPs), correctional officers and community members.[12] The shadow of mass incarceration looms over every American citizen, but it is important to note that its impact is felt most by communities of color. Despite claims of "justice and equality for all," the law is not colorblind. The likelihood of white men having a criminal record at some point in their lives is 1 in 13; for Black men, it is 1 in 3.[13] Not only do prisons distort the public understanding of justice by advocating for punishment without rehabilitation, but the carceral system targets communities of color in doing so. Prisons do not rehabilitate those inside. Nowhere is this fact more evident than in reentry trends.

National Reentry Trends

Reentry is a relevant topic of national concern due to the influx of community members that will return to their communities due to sentencing reform. Both bipartisan legislation as well as the staggering number of Americans in prisons across the nation have led to greater attention on reentry and rehabilitation. According to a 2019 poll conducted by the Justice Action Network, 75% of Americans believe the country's criminal justice system "needs significant improvements."[14] The 2018 First Step Act, passed under the Trump administration, exemplifies bipartisan efforts towards descaling prison populations through lowering mandatory minimum sentencing for certain drug offenses and creating pathways towards earlier releases at the federal level.[15] As its name implies, the act reflects a bipartisan consensus in taking initial action towards descaling the world's leading prison nation.[16]

As our nation comes to terms with the scale and impacts of mass incarceration, more returning citizens will reenter their communities under state supervision. Over 6.9 million total people are on probation, in jail, in prison or on parole in the United States, but only 1.9 million people are currently confined on any given day.[17] Evidently, those within prison walls only make up a portion of those impacted by incarceration. Due to the size and extent of mass incarceration, over 600,000 people exit local, state and federal prisons annually.[18] This means that the number of people released from prison has increased over 50% in the last 20 years.[19] Though this is an encouraging statistic given

the historic mass imprisonment of poor and minority populations, the dramatic exodus of people who have been permanently impacted by the system poses new policy questions for the integration of these family members, employees and church members who have long been absent. Current barriers prevent at least 600,000 people each year from fully reentering and fruitfully contributing to their communities.

Reentry, as we currently know it, fails to rehabilitate formerly incarcerated people as shown through recidivism, unemployment, housing insecurity and mental illness rates.

Reentry, as we currently know it, fails to rehabilitate formerly incarcerated people as shown through recidivism, unemployment, housing insecurity and mental illness rates. Using these standards to measure reentry success, prisons clearly do not deter future crime or rehabilitate those who have committed past wrongs.[20] Measuring the tendency of those released to reoffend provides initial insight into the complexities of reentry.

Reentry Goals: More than just Lowering Recidivism

In the United States, recidivism, the tendency of a returning citizen to re-offend, is exceedingly high: more than two-thirds of prisoners recidivate and are rearrested within three years after their initial release.[21] This rate increases to 79% within five years post-release and 83% within nine years.[22] Parole, a conditional freedom administered by state parole boards and officers, has become a significant contributor to these staggering rates. In fact, current research reveals that just as many people are reincarcerated for parole violations as for new offenses.[23] Parole requires strict adherence to high standards which vary by state and can include getting a job, attending regular parole appointments and going to therapy or substance abuse treatment.[24] However, with little support from parole agencies and minimal parole violation hearings, the parole system can "create a procedural vortex from which people on parole cannot escape and are at continual risk of being rearrested and reentered into the prison system" according to Stephanie Gasca, lead plaintiff in an ongoing suit against the Missouri parole board.[25]

Though recidivism is one insight into the dysfunctionality of the criminal legal system, recidivism rates cannot accurately capture the entire scope of reentry "successes." Recidivism is a binary measure; one reoffends, or one does not.[26] As such, lowering recidivism rates should not be the only goal of reentry care. Instead, striving for low rates of housing insecurity, unemployment or mental illness in the formerly incarcerated population can lower recidivism as a by-product of increased social integration and services.[27]

In 2020, Michigan's recidivism rate dropped to an all-time low at 23.6%, following the establishment of the Michigan Department of Corrections' (MDOC) Offender Success program, which practices reentry care through providing social services.[28] Offender Success works to ensure that "every offender released from prison will have the tools needed to succeed in the community."[29] Starting in prison with a risk and needs evaluation, the program secures resources for formerly incarcerated people (FIPs) throughout their transition into the community until their parole is complete. Offender Success has been a national leader in modeling holistic reentry services, and with it, lowering recidivism rates. The scope of

successful reentry is admittedly broader and more complex than meaningful employment, housing security and mental health support, but the MDOC, along with other reentry experts, understand that without these crucial needs, further social and community flourishing cannot be attained.

The Significance of Employment in Reentry

Employment is a key piece to reentry support because, regardless of parole conditions and financial need, employment gives stability, ownership and responsibility to those adjusting to life back in the community.[30] Formerly incarcerated people are unemployed at a rate of over 27% — higher than the total U.S. unemployment rate during any historical period, including the Great Depression.[31] The Bureau of Justice's study that followed 500,000 people after their release in 2010 reported that 33% of the respondents could not find employment for four years post-release. Additionally, at any one time, no more than 40% of respondents were employed, suggesting that employment that was found did not offer stability or upward mobility.[32]

The "Ban the Box" policy initiative, which prohibits discriminatory hiring practices by removing the question "have you ever been convicted of a crime" off job applications, has been adopted by 37 states in the public sector and 13 in the private sector. Even with this policy, having a criminal record still reduces employer callback rates by 50%.[33] For some, low social capital, transportation needs and lack of education and experience can limit job prospects considerably, even after securing an interview.[34] Even for those with a job, FIP employees only make 53% of the median U.S. worker's wage during the first year after their release; after four years in the workforce, these employees earned 84 cents for every dollar made by median wage workers, according to the Bureau of Justice.[35] In a 2008 longitudinal study of reentry employment, the Urban Institute found that formerly incarcerated people who utilized connections with friends and family were the most successful in finding a job.[36] Research indicates that the social capital obtained through relational ties is of "paramount importance in connecting people with jobs."[37] For those without family and friend connections, discriminatory hiring practices as well as their lack of social capital, references and networks can leave them without employment prospects and reliable income.[38]

The Need for Immediate Housing Assistance

Adequate and stable housing is another necessity for returning citizens. Similarly to employment, dependable and affordable housing provides a foundation of dependability and safety for FIPs.[39] Affordability and legal deniability, however, pose the greatest barriers to FIPs who are seeking housing. Right now, more than seven million affordable housing units are needed to fill the gap between the need for housing and the housing units currently available in the U.S. In the current housing market, renters working full-time, minimum wage jobs cannot afford a two-bedroom apartment in any U.S. county; in 93% of U.S. counties, workers cannot afford even a one-bedroom apartment on minimum wage.[40] Clearly, lack of affordable housing is an issue that impacts groups other than returning citizens, but this issue impacts most FIPs both before and after their release.[41]

Of every 10,000 formerly incarcerated people, 570 face housing insecurity each year. Housing insecurity encompasses the sheltered and unsheltered homeless as well as those who reside in marginal housing (motels, rooming houses, etc.).[42] People who have been incarcerated once are seven times as likely to be homeless than the general

population, and that figure almost doubles if they recidivate and are released.

FIPs display a high rate of shelter-use, housing insecurity and an elevated likelihood of recidivism if they do not have access to affordable, adequate and secure housing.[43] For those who reside in marginal or transitory housing, one longitudinal study conducted in Michigan reported that parolees experienced an average of 2.6 moves per year after their initial move out of prison.[44] Fifty percent of the moves occurred within the first eight weeks of their release, indicating that immediate housing assistance is essential. However, chances of being housing insecure even four years after one's release is still four times the general population's risk.[45]

Short- and long-term housing solutions are thus necessary for supporting returning citizens. The likelihood of experiencing housing insecurity declines significantly for returning citizens with relational support they can temporarily reside with. However, not all returning citizens have family members who can easily accommodate them post-release.[46]

Due to exclusionary housing policies, families that rely on government assistance or live in public housing units may be at risk for eviction with the presence of a FIP in their rental unit. Though 2015 reform efforts to the Fair Housing Act established that outright denial of public housing for FIPs was discriminatory, public housing units still have substantial discretion in choosing applicants for their limited capacity.[47] Individual public housing units also can add screening processes on top of federal eligibility requirements, guaranteeing that an applicant with a criminal record will almost never be selected over other eligible candidates.[48] "One Strike" laws in public housing mean that any renter, especially those with a criminal record who are already placed on watch for misdemeanors, will be evicted after one infraction.[49] Families on the brink of homelessness, therefore, may have to choose between evicting their released family member or being at risk of eviction themselves. Even Section 8 housing vouchers, known to increase access to diverse housing options, leave many FIPs and their low-income families at the discretion of the private market which typically utilizes more stringent and discriminatory background checks.[50]

Mental Health Challenges Among Returning Citizens

In addition to housing and employment needs, many FIPs battle the mental health and/or substance abuse problems that initially brought them to prison. The American Psychological Association estimates that 54% of state prisoners struggle with mental illness, and 10 to 15% of them deal with severe mental illnesses, such as schizophrenia.[51] Returning citizens who have undergone solitary confinement experience PTSD levels comparable to those faced by veterans due to traumatic events, stressors, fear and psychological harm while in prison.[52] Research has shown the need for meaningful work trajectories, effective coping strategies, positive social engagement, positive relationships and healthy thinking patterns as the five benchmark standards for mental health support in reentry care.[53]

Substance abuse and lack of treatment while in prison is another issue that many FIPs undergo. Only one in 13 people who have drug dependency before their incarceration receive treatment for drugs while in prison.[54] Without proper treatment while in prison, drug offenders are extremely vulnerable to relapse post incarceration. Recidivism rates among untreated drug offenders are higher than the average recidivism rate.[55] Probationers who did not complete drug treatment had a recidivism rate of 33% one year after discharge and 67% after the fourth

year. Comparatively, the non-drug-using control group had recidivism rates of 20% in the first year and 44% after four years.[56] Additionally, in the first two weeks after their release from prison, returning citizens are almost 13 times more likely to die than the general population, and the leading cause of death among recently released individuals is overdose.[57] Comprehensive treatment and health care must be provided both in and out of prison to ensure that relapses do not occur when released. Relapses account for a large percentage of parole violations but can be avoided through holistic care and prevention strategies.[58]

Due to legal barriers and a lack of social capital, many formerly incarcerated people struggle with unemployment, housing insecurity and mental illness. Those who are privileged to be welcomed back by family and friends show the greatest reentry success rate, measured by the lowest recidivism, unemployment and housing insecurity rates.[59] Family, friends and former employers are proven supports that can help FIPs secure employment and stable housing. Those without such connections must rely on restricted welfare services or the support of non-governmental organizations in their communities. With more people returning from prison than ever before, civil society must fulfill its God-given roles and responsibilities to care for returning citizens, especially in light of the declining government spending on reentry care. One reentry strategy that has proven successful begins with investment into prisoners long before they are scheduled for release: prison education programs.

A History of Prison Education Programs

Since 1973, the federal government has supported low-income students by paying for their postsecondary education through Pell Grants. Though prisoners were initially included under the umbrella of eligible Pell Grant recipients, "tough on crime" legislation, which reflected the prominent fear of violent crime amongst the American public in the 1980s and 90s, led to sweeping crime control measures.[60] The 1994 Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act revoked Pell Grant funding "to any individual who is incarcerated in any federal or state penal institution."[61] Without federal funding, secondary education and vocational programs in prisons immediately dropped by half. In 2014, less than 2% of state or federal prisoners had received a degree while in college, and just 7.3% had taken a class. However, 40% of prisoners wanted to enroll in a degree program and an additional 29% wished to pursue an educational certification of some kind.[62] Pathways from Prison to Postsecondary Education offered by the U.S. Department of Justice began in 2013 as a pilot program for the expansion of educational programming in prisons.[63] Michigan has been a national leader in prison education programming since it was chosen as one of three states to participate in the five-year program. Successes of the study were evident after a few years of its implementation: Individuals who enrolled in a postsecondary education program were 48% less likely to be reincarcerated than those who did not.[64]

Educational programs incorporate theories of positive criminology, which call for positive experiences through institutional integration to reduce crime instead of confinement or punishment.

The growth of prison education programs has been on the rise since the bipartisan Restoring Education and Learning Act of 2019 restored Pell Grant eligibility to incarcerated individuals in federal and state

correctional institutions.[65] The new Pell Grants for Prisoners initiative lifts a ban on incarcerated students receiving federal grants that has been in place for the last 26 years. Many universities and colleges across the nation are now preparing to add second campuses in prison facilities and invite prisoners to join their student rosters.[66] This exciting policy development is supported by an accompanying body of literature confirming the benefits of educational programs for prisoners in prison culture and reentry success.

Educational programs incorporate theories of positive criminology, which call for positive experiences through institutional integration to reduce crime instead of confinement or punishment.[67] Positive criminology, therefore, increases self-efficacy, the belief in one's own capacity to change their behavior in positive ways. Criminologist Michael Hallett of Baylor University has repeatedly found that educational programs display and increase "the importance of respectful treatment of prisoners by correctional administrators, the value of building trusting relationships for prosocial modeling and improved self-perception and the importance of repairing harm through intervention."[68] Higher education rates also corresponded with lower violent outbursts, increased personal income, lower unemployment, greater political engagement and volunteerism and improved health outcomes.[69]

America's notorious "bloodiest prison," Louisiana State Penitentiary (also called Angola), has served as a model of reform for prisons across the nation in recent years. In 1990, there were 280 assaults by inmates against staff members and 1,107 inmate-on-inmate assaults reported in the prison. By 2012, those numbers had dropped to 55 assaults on staff and 316 between inmates.[70] One of the key factors in such a drastic culture transformation was the unlikely partnership between the prison and a seminary.[71] With the expansion of prison education programs and their potential to transform reentry, how can universities with prison education programs, local churches, NGOs and local governments support returning citizens, students and graduates? Within this framework, how and why should Christians seek the flourishing of returning citizens?

FRAME

Care for the vulnerable is a central tenet of biblical justice, which is rooted in love rather than fear or resentment, heals and restores rather than wounds and is big enough to be offered to all, oppressed and oppressors alike. Theologian Nicholas Wolterstorff names this tenet of justice God's "preferential option of the vulnerable."[72] The vulnerable among us are victims of unjust systems that humans have created. FIPs stuck in spiraling cycles of recidivism, poverty and relapse because of unjust barriers to successful reentry are among the vulnerable in our nation. Current discriminatory policies and practices re-victimize the same vulnerable populations as they cycle in and out of prison and back onto the streets, only to reoffend.

Sharing the burden of the vulnerable is specifically modeled in Old Testament law, which emphasizes communal care and commitment to the downtrodden. Provisions for the oppressed include a year of Jubilee every 50 years in which all debts are forgiven and slaves are set free.[73] Old Testament law, as far removed as it seems from modern society, displays God's express desire for the restoration of the vulnerable. The commands to freely give interest-free loans, extra grain and livable wages, all align with God's mandate in Proverbs: "Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due when it is in

your power to act."[74]

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The New Testament further reveals God's commitment to the vulnerable, as the Hebrew God *of* the oppressed becomes God *as* the oppressed. God entered the world not as a rightful ruler, but as a helpless baby, born to refugee parents of a low socioeconomic status. The Son of God himself was falsely accused, crucified by a corrupt criminal justice system, experienced abuse and torture and was degraded by those in power. The power of the resurrection, therefore, reveals "the stubbornness of hope" throughout the narrative arc of humanity.[75] Jesus' death and resurrection acknowledges injustice as a real, lived instrument of sin and death, but testifies that justice, and with it, hope, will rise again.

Throughout the Old and New Testament, the hope of God is specifically for those in prison. The message of God, as delivered by Jesus at the start of his ministry, is to "bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners" (Isaiah 61:1). Hebrews 13:3 calls Christians to "remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them." Wolterstorff notes that this faithful presence among the broken reflects Jesus' physical incarnation with his people.[76] Neglecting to care for those in prison, on parole, or reentering society with a criminal record is neglecting Jesus himself.

People who have been imprisoned are specifically mentioned in the Bible not only as a vulnerable population in need of protection, but as active agents of God's mission. The Old and New Testament tell stories of God's divine purpose for people in prison, not in spite of their captivity, but precisely because of it. Joseph, Samson, Jeremiah, Daniel, John the Baptist, Peter, Paul, and as mentioned earlier, Christ himself are but some of the biblical figures who were imprisoned. In fact, God chose a people group in captivity to bring about the lineage of his son and redemptive plan for the world. The special purpose, care and witness of people in prison continues after they are released. In fact, the light of the gospel shines especially bright in the most broken, dark and neglected parts of society. Stories of redemption while incarcerated serve as a powerful witness to the stubborn hope of God. However, despite God's designated care and purpose for those who have been incarcerated, society often refuses God's vision of restoration for FIPs. God's care and command for the vulnerable does not only embrace those in prison cells but continues to follow FIPs as they reenter society.

Retributive and Restorative Approaches to Justice

"Justice served" commonly follows criminal indictments in headlines, tweets and posts. Though the word justice is used commonly, common notions of justice center around what happens in the legal system. Although the government has a responsibility to practice public justice through enforcing laws meant to maintain public safety and wellbeing, much of our criminal legal system relies on hollow conceptions of what the Bible envisions for a just society. As religion scholars Joshua Dubler and Vincent W. Lloyd argue, reshaping our justice system to bring about shalom is a uniquely Christian task because of the animating spirit of biblical

justice that illuminates an alternative path forward. A more complete conception of divine justice condemns injustices of the world, provides stubborn hope for redemption and empowers the church and its people to actualize justice in our present reality. Christians must be at the forefront of challenging harsh "law and order" justice to reimagine the world as it should be. Government must be able to punish offenses and seek restitution for crimes committed, but it should also practice reconciliation through administering restorative justice. The pursuit of shalom requires the restoration of current and formerly incarcerated people to society and to their communities. Preventing any human being, an image bearer of God's very likeness, from full restoration after their debt is paid is unjust. Following the heart of the gospel, no human being is beyond transformation and redemption, regardless of their worst mistake or criminal record.

Retributive Justice in the American Legal System

Even if they are not familiar with the name, most Americans are deeply familiar with retributive justice. Retributive justice serves as the primary Western model of justice and in practice requires an offender to make a payment through punishment proportional to the harm enacted. Retributive justice is the core of the American legal system; however, the demands of retribution continue to grow under the monstrous scale of mass incarceration. Since the late 1990s, sentence lengths have increased, while crime rates have steadily declined.[77] In addition to harsh sentencing, the shadow of mass incarceration continues to define FIPs' lives post-release, hindering their ability to re-integrate into meaningful work, stable housing and social networks. Retributive justice alone cannot model biblical justice as the demands of the carceral system grow disproportionately to the offenses committed and offenders are further isolated from their communities.

Restorative Justice as a Path to Reconciliation

Both retributive and restorative justice models seek to "vindicate through reciprocity" through a balancing of scales.[78] But whereas retributive justice attempts to equalize imbalance by punishing offenders, restorative justice evens the scale by acknowledging a victim's needs, encouraging the offender to take responsibility, make right their wrongs and address the causes of their behavior. Restorative justice is a transformative model of justice that invites victims, offenders and communities into a cooperative dialogue of radical hospitality in order to cultivate relational and societal reconciliation.[79] Fostering the relational and societal reconciliation of restorative justice is at the core of embracing returning citizens and promoting successful reentry policies.

Guiding Principles of Restorative Reentry

Restorative reentry follows the guiding principles of restorative justice in implementing a reformed reentry system that involves government, civil society and local churches. To promote public justice for all, victim needs, community obligations and offender reintegration are central to restorative reentry. In this way, a restorative community closely resembles a functional and healthy ecosystem: all members are mutually dependent on one another for life. In alignment with biblical justice, every member of the community is tied to one another's flourishing. A restorative community protects the most vulnerable in their population and commits to restore what has been broken. These central tenets of restorative justice provide pressing implications for reentry care for the government, local communities, and individuals. Following theologian Abraham Kuyper's notion of "sphere sovereignty," different spheres of public and private life

have unique and important roles to play in God's restoration of humanity, and with it, the restoration of our formerly incarcerated brothers and sisters in Christ.[80] Government has a role to play in creating environments where FIPs have access to housing and jobs. Businesses, community organizations, churches and individuals all have distinct institutional and social responsibilities for restorative reentry.

Government's Role in Restorative Justice

As an administrator of public justice and protector of the common good, the government must implement restorative legislation that removes systemic barriers to reintegration and promotes a restorative legal system for FIPs.[81] The importance of repealing post-conviction consequences that hamper successful reentry cannot be overstated. Legislating equal access to voting, employment, jury participation and social services is necessary to ensure that FIPs are treated as equal citizens with fundamental rights despite their criminal history. To promote the welfare of returning citizens, the government bears the responsibility of removing barriers to federal housing subsidies and prohibiting the use of criminal background checks on housing applications. This project could be partially accomplished through the expansion of state "clean slate" laws, which clear a range of convictions from the public record after a certain period.[82] These laws represent a promising shift, removing barriers to employment and housing, and have been successfully adopted in 10 states since 2018. The Clean Slate Initiative partners with local agencies, activists and faith communities to support legislation that has opened the door for second chances to more than 12 million people so far.[83]

According to the Center for Public Justice, government also bears "responsibility to uphold a just legal framework for recognizing, protecting and encouraging the full range of human responsibilities."[84] This includes the protection and encouragement of the talents and skills of returning citizens. One way to accomplish this is through overturning licensing law bans. Though many states and individual businesses have stopped requiring people to report their criminal history on job applications, the thousands of licensing laws — the National Inventory of Collateral Consequences of Conviction lists more than 16,000 — that bar people with conviction records from pursuing work in certain fields must be changed.[85]

Additionally, even with community support systems, without governmental aid and legal protection, FIPs are left with no safety net. To protect FIPs, they must be recognized as a vulnerable population before God, but also before the state. The city of Atlanta recently provided an additional safety net for returning citizens by classifying FIPs as a protected class in January 2023. This means that employers, landlords, banks, schools and other city institutions can no longer legally deny people goods and services based on their criminal background. The city ordinance protects returning citizens under the 14th Amendment, shielding them from discrimination alongside other protected statuses such as race, gender, disability, marital status or sexual orientation.[86] Classifying returning citizens as a protected class in public and private sectors as Atlanta has done will considerably elevate FIPs' ability to secure life-giving employment and stable housing.

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While reentry policies are important, reforming the system from the time of arrest to post-incarceration life will provide the foundation for successful reentry. Some of these proposed reform policies seek to improve the system at the front end of the legal process such as law diversion programs and fair sentencing laws.[87] Others focus on improving prison conditions through enhanced prison programming and higher health and safety standards for prisoners.[88] Reentry programming and rehabilitation efforts must begin in prison and even before arrest for long-term transformation within the legal system.

Positive Transformations through Civil Society

Businesses, community organizations and other institutions of civil society also have an important role to play in providing necessary services for returning citizens as well as connecting FIPs to their community. Businesses can commit to hiring FIPs as a certain percentage of their employed workers.[89] Cascade industries in Grand Rapids has been a national leader in establishing inclusive employment strategies for returning citizens. This Grand Rapids-based manufacturer has been creating pathways to employment for FIPs for decades, offering employment to over 75 workers out of their 600-person staff and establishing their 30-2-2 initiative in 2012. 30-2-2 encouraged 30 local businesses in Grand Rapids to hire two returning citizens for two years and track their performance.[90] Cascade is working to change business culture surrounding a criminal record by tracking wages, attendance and performance reviews for returning citizens to prove to businesses that hiring FIPs works. Offering work to returning citizens allows them to develop skills and gain work experience that is needed to build soft skills and a competitive resume.[91] Inclusive employment is also a mutually beneficial business strategy. The Center for Economic and Policy Research estimates that the national economy loses $57 to $65 billion each year because of the underemployment and reduced output of people with felonies and prison records.[92] Giving FIPs a chance when hiring is not just charity work; it is smart business.

Nonprofits and community organizations also have a distinct role in providing direct services and resources to FIPs. Organizations that offer counseling, transitional housing, substance abuse support groups and work training programs provide some of the most important services directly after release. Nonprofit organizations serve as direct connection points for FIPs, introducing returning citizens back into their broader communities. Fresh Coast Alliance (substance abuse counseling), Degage (homeless shelters and programs), Allegan Food Pantry (food assistance), Have Mercy (temporary housing shelters), Red Project (substance abuse and hygiene clinic), United Way (community grant fund), Salvation Army (wraparound services), Our Brother's Keeper (emergency housing) and Pure Heart Foundation (youth services for incarcerated parents) are all nonprofits in Western Michigan that serve FIPs upon their return day after day.

Community dialogue is another vital part of creating trust between neighbors, especially when FIPs are reintroduced into society. The Dispute Resolution Center in Ann Arbor, Michigan, is a nonprofit that engages in community dialogue, offering services in mediation trainings for community members and facilitating dialogue in restorative justice circles.[93] Though these circles are often used prior to sentencing, post-release victim-offender mediation can help both offenders

and victims to process their release. In Grand Rapids, community dialogue has also resulted from a partnership between the Michigan Department of Corrections and the Grand Rapids Police Department.[94] The CLEAR program, led by Offender Success, invites FIPs and police officers to engage in meaningful dialogue about topics such as forgiveness and community trust. CLEAR stands for coalition, leadership, education, advice and rehabilitation. The initiative accomplishes these core values through sharing stories, offering support and partaking in mediated discussions.[95] Some CPI graduates shared that CLEAR led to "positive transformations" for both officers and FIPs. Since the program's start in 2013, similar groups have formed across West Michigan and are now being offered to women returning home from prison. As of May 2023, the CLEAR model boasts a 0% recidivism rate due to increased social accountability and community connection.[96]

Community connection is vital for reintegration, and established friendships within broader social networks counteract loneliness, physical and social isolation and emotional distance between offenders and their communities.[97] Businesses, nonprofits and community organizations all have vital roles to fulfill in providing these intangible connections.

Churches as Community Supporters and Mentors

Churches have an equally important role to play in partnering with returning citizens, inviting them to services and social gatherings and offering community support. Many recently released FIPs rely on church services as their main social activity every week.[98] Churches provide FIPs with established community, routine social interaction and a sense of belonging, leading to a higher rate of social empowerment.[99] Churches can play a large part in making returning citizens feel welcomed into a community of supporters as well as offering financial support and mentorship opportunities.

Kingdom Life Church in West Michigan models restorative reentry. Co-founded by returning citizen Nate Johnson, Fresh Coast Alliance grew out of the faith-driven mission of Kingdom Life church where "forgiveness is our standard and redemption is our expectation."[100] Fresh Coast Alliance provides wraparound care and services for returning citizens and those struggling with substance abuse. The program currently operates eight reentry homes, and provides employment, housing, counseling, one-on-one peer led reentry coaching, group therapy and more for those that need it. Johnson challenges other churches to ask themselves how they can best impact the cities and neighborhoods they are in. "Evangelizing can be accomplished through service and addressing a problem," he says. Contextualizing the gospel through physical, lived redemption stories has the power to bring struggling people to Christ and to a better life. Kingdom Life is evidence of this fact: when Fresh Coast Alliance began in 2015, there were 404 people on parole in Muskegon, Michigan; now, there are 297.[101]

A Shared Responsibility Towards Returning Citizens

Highlighting the commitment to restorative reentry from many different institutions begs the question: do we have a shared responsibility towards returning citizens? In looking to God as our authority and judge, the answer throughout the Old and New Testament is a resounding *yes!* All spheres of life have different responsibilities to protect and defend FIPs in giving them a chance at full restoration and social integration. Legal discrimination and social stigma that prevent FIPs from life-giving employment, mental health support and stable housing must serve

as a call to action. We must ask ourselves: what is my responsibility towards returning citizens? As church members, business owners, landlords, volunteers, legislators and friends, individuals can work towards biblical shalom through the safekeeping of our brothers and sisters who have been incarcerated. Offering our resources, time and friendship establishes a faithful presence among FIPs, creating stability, trust and mutual dependency. Due to the evident complexity of reentry struggles faced by millions who have returned home from prison and will continue to be released, reentry care must be a community effort through institutional collaboration to fully defend, tend and keep the vulnerable reentering society.

ENGAGE

Gary Tucker spent years of his life sentence applying for college classes. After incarcerated students were stripped of their eligibility for federal Pell Grants in 1994, he watched as prison education programs shut down inside his facility. Though there were limited classes available, "I was a lifer, so they didn't take me," Tucker reported. Through countless letters and phone calls, "I applied every year, and every year different educational programs rejected me." Then, Tucker heard about the Calvin Prison Initiative (CPI) — an accredited undergraduate program offered by Calvin University in Michigan, available for lifers. After transferring facilities and beginning classes, Tucker was proud to tell me that he was able to maintain a 3.96 GPA throughout his three semesters with the program.

Just as unexpectedly as his acceptance to the CPI, Tucker's parole review was initiated in September 2019. He was released just months after. What he assumed was a routine parole review scheduled for every five years turned into something more. "No one expected that, not me, not my family, and not CPI," he said. Though his reentry journey has not been an easy one, he is "thankful that Calvin is letting me take classes and finish my degree," something he's always wanted to be able to do. Gary Tucker and six other released CPI students have completed undergraduate degrees after their release or are currently taking classes on Calvin's main campus. For released CPI students, reentry poses an entirely new set of struggles and policy questions.[102]

The Calvin Prison Initiative

The concept of the Calvin Prison Initiative was conceived after a group of Calvin students visited Angola Prison in 2005. The director of the CPI, Dr. Todd Cioffi, says the group "went down there, and what they saw was not the bloodiest prison in America. In fact, they saw prisoners engaging in meaningful work and school."[103] The success of the education programs at Angola Prison inspired faculty at the Calvin Theological Seminary to initiate a relationship with the Michigan Department of Corrections. Soon after, the CPI was created in partnership between Calvin University and the Calvin Theological Seminary and continues to operate as a joint effort between the two institutions. The CPI offered its first course in the Richard A. Handlon Correctional Facility in Ionia, Michigan in 2011 and became an accredited academic program in 2015 with their first cohort of 20 male students joining CPI at the Handlon facility. Due to their commitment to providing education to those who have limited access to educational programming, the CPI accepts 20 students each year who have at least seven years of their sentence remaining.[104]

Despite their focus on education for lifers or those with long prison terms, CPI has had to address the issue of reentry much earlier

than anticipated. The first CPI student was released in 2018, just three years after the first cohort began in 2015. Sentenced to life in prison, Robert Hopkins said he was "blind-sided" by his initial summon for the parole hearing that led to his eventual release. "After the first guy was released, we managed his various needs using what we had," Cioffi said, "but then we realized we were going to get a steady group coming out." A program designed for lifers had not considered the need for reentry until, "Suddenly, we were involved in reentry," as Cioffi shared.[105] Since then, 14 other CPI students have been released from prison. The CPI serves as a unique model for other prison education programs and universities considering prison education following the re-establishment of Pell Grants for Prisoners in July 2023. The reentry of 15 released CPI students and graduates highlights an important fact of prison programming: reentry care is inseparable from educational engagement with prisoners.

Educational Engagement and Reentry Care

Released CPI students, graduates and CPI leaders all agreed that Calvin University has a moral and faith-driven responsibility to released CPI participants. But why does an academic institution have a responsibility to released students and graduates when the program has traditionally served prisoners during their sentences? The answer, according to CPI leaders and released students, is the faith-driven heart of the CPI. Cioffi echoed the thoughts of many in attesting that, "We are a higher academic institution, but if we're going to engage with a vulnerable, high-need population, we have to care for them as whole people, not just students." One student reasons that the university and surrounding community engaging in reentry care is the same kind of community support as that of the four friends who carried their paralyzed friend in to meet Jesus in Mark 2. "What we don't see in the Bible is the care that those friends had to give the healed man after he was healed. Jesus was the one to transform the man, but his friends and community had to teach him how to walk again."[106]

The university, local churches, nonprofit organizations and businesses share in the responsibility to protect released students and graduates; in the minds of CPI students and leaders, there is no alternative. In fact, from the perspective of those released from prison, reentry care is so intertwined with the mission of the gospel that the two cannot be separated in a Christian institution.

After experiencing 23 years in prison and a four-year parole, Gabriel Santos says reentry requires "the same kind of love shown by Jesus to his people while they were still sinners."[107] The university and surrounding community have the task of acting as an institutional buffer from discriminatory policy, unemployment, housing insecurity, social isolation and other common barriers faced by returning citizens.

In addition to the Christian mandate to "love your neighbor as yourself," higher academic institutions such as Calvin University are uniquely positioned to embrace released students and graduates. Higher academic institutions are also tasked to fulfill an educational, as well as social function in their communities. Universities are "enablers of change," leading through education, research and resource networks. Both faith-based and secular educational institutions share a responsibility to develop students into successful members of society as thinkers, creators, citizens and people in community. Universities also draw together communities through the myriad resources they offer. Community networks are essential safety nets for returning citizens, and for many CPI students, the university serves as one of their primary communities upon their

release. Prison education programs must consider their pivotal role in the reentry of their students and graduates as a natural continuation of their educational commitment to students. Engaging with incarcerated learners is important but must be accompanied with an explicit commitment to students' full development both inside and outside of prison.

Addressing Institutional Gaps in Reentry Care

There is broad acknowledgement among staff and students that in many ways, CPI is not designed to serve reentry needs. The seminary and university did not craft CPI with reentry support in mind. Cioffi commented that he and other visionaries of the program "were naive enough to think we were going to educate prisoners, that's it."[108] With four students finishing their degree on the Grand Rapids campus, seven CPI graduates and four men who have not completed their degree since the program's start in 2015, reentry has been adopted into the program through circumstantial necessity. As 20 new students join the program every year, the CPI anticipates more paroled students and graduates to enter the Calvin community on the Grand Rapids campus.

However, due to the current informalized reentry structure, students shared that some of their needs seemed to "slip through the cracks."[109] This is not willful neglect on the part of CPI or the university but has caused feelings in some returning citizens of being "abandoned," "cut loose" by the program or "reliant on unstable support." Still, many acknowledged that "CPI has their plate full of other things" and were grateful that "they help when they can." CPI staff members shared many of these concerns, noting that their current reentry model was "putting out fires as they popped up" and "providing for immediate needs one at a time." Staff reported not having the "luxury to gain a broad overview of reentry care because we were thrown into it very suddenly."[110] Any reentry support given by CPI is largely offered on an individual basis, sometimes off-the-clock and often alongside other pressing needs for the operation of the prison education program. A problem that stems from the CPI's lack of personnel, institutional support and reentry expertise is perceived among some students as a flawed understanding of returning citizens' needs and their diverse definitions of what successful reentry looks like. Identifying reentry needs among the CPI student and graduate population can therefore further guide what reentry care should look like, how these services are administered and who must be involved.

In order to identify needs among the returning CPI population, 15 released CPI participants shared their stories with me through a series of semi-structured interviews. For privacy purposes, their names have been changed throughout this report. Through these discussions, I was able to learn from their reentry experiences, collaborate with them to brainstorm reentry program improvements for the CPI, and in doing so, model the necessity of reentry supports for other prison education programs around the country.

Identifying Reentry Needs Among CPI Students

- ***Social Integration***

One of the greatest needs identified by CPI participants was social integration. Social integration is the incorporation of members into a united group; in the case of released students, social integration occurs on both a structural and individual level as full inclusion of released students is intentionally pursued. CPI is at the heart of many relationships that returning students and graduates formed while isolated from their family and friends.

In some cases, returning citizens reported being incarcerated far from their homes or families, making it difficult to maintain some of their most important relationships and to move back to be near friends and family once they are released. Additionally, only three out of the 15 returning citizens I interviewed were able to live with family or friends after their release. For those without family, friends, or community to return to, reentry remains an isolating process. Former CPI student Gabriel shared that, "There were times I wanted to reoffend, just so I could return to what I knew with people I knew. Reentry just can't be done alone."[111] Those who did have social connections reported more sustainable housing options and employment possibilities. Four CPI graduates who secured jobs upon release found these jobs due to connections with work training programs or through Calvin University's network of alumni.

For some CPI participants, CPI leaders and fellow students became their second family — especially during their reentry. Daryll shared that the CPI has been his primary community since his release because the "CPI have made themselves available. They have been in my life this whole time and have been like my family."[112] Robert shared that he sees "Calvin [as] family more than my immediate family" and that "social networks at Calvin were the most instrumental in my release."[113] For men such as Robert and Daryll, professors having them over for dinner or students inviting them to lunch have a large impact: "They see me as a safe person. I'm not just a criminal or guy on parole to them and so I become more than that even to myself."[114] Creating an environment for the social integration of released students is something that CPI and the Calvin community at large has been receptive to. Continuing this work through more structured social supports can only improve social integration efforts on campus and in the local community.

- ***Employment***

Fulfilling employment with livable wages and accommodating hours for class schedules was another need identified by CPI students and graduates. Those who were employed described meaningful employment and steady income as "empowering," "something I always wanted," and "a chance to support myself."[115] But although 82% of those I interviewed were either employed full-time or part-time, only 36% of those who had jobs found their work to be meaningful. In most cases, FIPs were working long hours to counteract their low hourly rate. Most of these men were employed at manufacturing plants, working on assembly lines or delivering parts. One man said, "I know I wasn't created to be a truck driver, but it's what I have to do to pay the bills right now."

Current Calvin student Julian works the third shift managing an assembly line from 10 p.m. to 7 a.m. almost every day of the week. His daily schedule consists of "working all night and sleeping all day until 10 at night." As a part-time student, Julian says he "tries to get school somewhere in there." Julian knows "it's not healthy, but it's what I gotta do."[116]

Over half of the men interviewed reported difficulty in securing employment. Many could not make it past an initial interview after they disclosed their criminal history to future employers. Julian watched as his interviewers "made a verbal job offer and then suddenly went back on what they said after I told them."[117] Though employers were impressed with the graduate's credentials and their willingness to learn, their degree was often no match against their competing criminal record. These experiences align with the research: those who go through prison education programs are only eight percent more likely to find employment after their release.[118] While this gives returning graduates a slight advantage over other

returning citizens, their degrees do not guarantee them work due to discriminatory hiring practices and stigma against FIPs in the workplace. Even when applying for jobs for which they felt qualified, Julian and other returning citizens felt "nervous," "worried," or "full of anxiety" when interviewing. On the off chance they were offered the job after disclosing their criminal history, men described this opportunity as employers "taking a chance on me" or "being willing to take a risk" even when they were qualified for the positions.[119]

These experiences reveal the need for more reentry-friendly employers and stigma-free workplaces. Though Michigan employers are legally prohibited from including "have you ever been convicted of a felony" on job applications since the 2018 Ban the Box Legislation, stories from CPI men conveyed the high level of discrimination still present in the workforce.

Ultimately, addressing this need is a shared responsibility on the part of the government and individual employers. Providing further incentives for hiring returning citizens can prompt more workplaces to consider becoming reentry friendly. The Work Opportunity Tax Credit is a federal tax credit available to employers that hire marginalized groups, such as FIPs, who face significant barriers to employment.[120] Additionally, the Federal Bonding Program established by the U.S. Department of Labor provides fidelity bonds that protect employers from fraud or damage from "at-risk" employees in their first six months of employment. This ensures that businesses can afford to hire FIPs knowing that any damages ensued are backed by the government at no cost to the employer.[121]

Even with government-issued incentives, employers still report hesitancy to hire FIPs because of their perceived "untrustworthiness."[122] Recommendations from trusted local organizations and institutions can therefore be a significant factor in hiring FIPs. Universities with prison education programs can play an important role in connecting graduates to workplaces, vouching for their character and growth while in prison and providing respected recommendations. Gabriel now works in the nonprofit sector because of previous connections he made with the organization he now works with. Connecting released employees to reentry-friendly employers is a suggested area of growth for prison education programs because of their local connections, alumni networks and reputation in their communities.

- ***Housing***

Housing was another stated need for CPI students and graduates. In alignment with the research on housing amongst the broader population of returning citizens, CPI students and graduates explained the difficulty of finding affordable, stigma-free and stable housing. For those who did not have housing options in the area such as Daryll, housing became his "biggest stressor when [he] was released."[123] Those who relied on personal connections for housing experienced "times when [they] didn't know where [they] would live or when [they] would have to move."[124] In CPI participants' experiences, relying on friends and family for housing did not always provide long term stability. These experiences shed light on the need for an established safety net to ensure that part-time students and workers can live without fear of housing insecurity.

Housing has been one of the CPI's biggest struggles in providing reentry care. Cioffi admitted that finding "housing is a lot more difficult than we thought it would be." A group housing partnership with community organization Living Waters Ministry Network did not provide close enough proximity

to campus or independent living for CPI students. This partnership has highlighted the need for independent accommodations for CPI students to better accommodate their individual studying and school schedules.

CPI attempted to open their own reentry house right next to Calvin's campus for CPI students that shut down in May 2023 after one year in operation. The housing insecurity of CPI students and graduates relying on CPI housing has not proved to be conducive to succeeding in school or work post-incarceration. Though CPI was not able to manage a reentry house alone, the program must still consider committing to offer subsidized housing for students.

CPI's housing efforts reveal the need for a community partner and offers several insights into reentry housing for FIP students. First, providing housing for students and some graduates upon their release from prison freed them to search for employment and focus on their education. Offering subsidized housing for all CPI students and graduates through a community partnership is vital to the success of returning CPI members. However, as I learned through CPI's past community partnership, group reentry homes cannot always accommodate individual student schedules. CPI students and graduates expressed the need for independent living with increasing financial responsibilities. Providing diverse housing options with a variety of community partners could offer CPI members more choices in their living situation, proximity to campus and housing expenses. Identifying housing partnerships even before students' release ensures that they have a place to live upon their release from prison, freeing them from one of the biggest stressors for many returning citizens.

- ***Mental Health Support***

Comprehensive, affordable and accessible mental health support for returning citizens was another need identified by many. "Even with the tools I had to succeed, it was a struggle for me to catch up. I lived in a dream state for months before I really couldn't process it because I felt I couldn't share it with anyone," one student shared.[125] Gabriel agreed that this was a common experience for many returning citizens because many are "hit with huge waves of anxiety and depression that they have to face when they come home. They could hold a lot at bay while in prison that they can't suppress anymore."[126]

Processing years of trauma and coping with their release requires intensive counseling with trained mental health professionals. In a few cases, released students and graduates reported severe mental health issues that led to mental outbursts, suicidal thoughts and tendencies or relapse. Substance abuse counseling and treatment is an additional need, especially for those who entered prison with addiction problems and did not receive proper help. These cases call for referrals to specialized treatment centers or psychiatric care that can save the lives of returning citizens who are especially vulnerable to mental health crises, isolation and relapse. Mental health support is an area of growth for the CPI to lean on the expertise of other organizations and experts in the psychiatric field.

Holistic and Accountable Reentry Care

After listening and learning from formerly incarcerated people, the following guiding reentry principles were developed using their voices, stories and struggles. These principles do not provide an exhaustive set of guiding ideals by any means; rather, these principles are meant to serve as a roadmap to any reentry programming in centering the voices of those who have been incarcerated, specifically for those who have participated

in prison education programs. In many ways, the returning students and graduates I interviewed have many of the same needs as returning citizens that have not gone through educational programming; social integration, employment, housing and mental health support are but a few of their diverse needs. In other ways, their struggles are unique, especially for those who attempt to balance classes with other reentry struggles. Released students have diverse needs that implicate their universities in their reentry journey, though universities cannot handle reentry alone.

Restorative reentry is centered on what CPI students and graduates see as the key to reentry success: empowering returning citizens. Defining a "successful reentry" must be defined in accordance with each individual's hopes, goals and differing ideas of "success." CPI participants felt that the best reentry strategies would accommodate their different goals, timelines and lifestyles as they redevelop their independence and self-identity. Practicing holistic and accountable reentry care involves centering FIP voices in their own reentry journey and collaborating to set goals and gradually increase steps towards independent flourishing. This principle is backed by established social theory: employing the self-determination theory in developing reentry strategies can increase goal accomplishment and individual FIP buy-in. Self-determination theory explains the correlation between making autonomous decisions and personal motivation to accomplish their stated goals.[127] However returning citizens choose to map out their reentry journeys, their individual voices must be central in the process.

Institutional Collaboration

To adequately meet the diverse set of needs that returning citizens face, institutions must collaborate to provide comprehensive and specialty care. One CPI staff member compared reentry to the medical field: it takes a team of medical professionals, referrals, specialists and primary care doctors to provide individualized care. Institutional collaboration is needed both within the university and between the university and community partners such as reentry-friendly employers, landlords, nonprofits and churches.

What might institutional collaboration in reentry look like across Grand Rapids? As the primary social integration structure for their students, Calvin University could adopt a "primary physician" role, providing individualized referrals to reentry care specialists in Grand Rapids. Substance abuse recovery and treatment, intensive counseling and trade skill certification programs should be incorporated into reentry care for CPI students and graduates. Offender Success through the Michigan Department of Corrections (MDOC) models this framework successfully, partnering with other reentry services to provide wraparound care for formerly incarcerated people. Offender Success models institutional collaboration and referral well, partnering frequently with local organizations. Those who are referred to Offender Success through their parole board are connected to MDOC networks for hygiene kits, clothing vouchers, bus passes, vital documents or other needs. Utilizing Offender Success' collaborative model could be useful in establishing a cross-institutional reentry plan at Calvin.

As a hub of resources, connections and FIPs' primary social structures, Calvin and other universities should take an active role in connecting FIPs with local alumni and organizations to provide discrimination-free employment that can accommodate parole appointments, classes and therapy schedules. Gathering a network of reentry friendly alumni employers and landlords

to connect with interested students would be beneficial for both alumni and returning citizens. One current CPI student is currently working for a Calvin University alum. Though he applied for many other jobs, no other employer would take a chance on him after he shared his criminal history. The employer he currently works for has different priorities: "Our staff is 50% formerly incarcerated men." When he told his prospective employer he was a student with the CPI, the alum hired him because of his faith in the university's mission and reputation. Additionally, the part-time student, part-time employee says his boss is "accommodating of my class schedule" and is "encouraging me to keep up my education even while working."[128]

Structured Support Systems

Developing structured support systems to foster the social integration of released CPI students and graduates should focus on both social and resource connections. Though informal social and institutional connections are also important for social integration, structured reentry support systems can best care for released students' needs.

Structured Social Support Systems

Creating structured social support systems on campus is a task for the university. As more CPI members are released, pairing CPI graduate students with men recently released from the program could provide an opportunity for newly released men to "learn how to do life again" from those who know the experience the best. One student said it was hard "trying to learn how to drive, how to take care of yourself, how to cook, how to pay bills. You're a baby out here, and not many people really get it."[129] Offering CPI group sessions and one-on-one CPI student coaching in tandem with case management could provide community and professional help. Current CPI students also suggested partnering students with peer tutors in classrooms so that they can have better resources for group study and tutoring sessions. The Calvin Peacemakers, a student restorative justice club on campus, is additionally an important network for FIPs and current Calvin students to create community together. Creating community on campus is perhaps the biggest strength of the current CPI reentry strategy and should continue to be developed to fully embrace students and graduates to create belonging.

Creating structured social support systems is additionally a task for local churches. Celebration Fellowship is a multi-site prison church that has locations both inside and outside prison that are popularly attended by CPI students and graduates. Daryll says that his involvement in Celebration Fellowship has "played a large role in my reentry and understanding community." Louis says this church has become "his family" because of their support and community.[130] As the co-founder of Kingdom Life church in Muskegon, Michigan, Nate Johnson says that churches should engage in the ministry of reconciliation because it is part of the gospel. "Reentry is no more than the parable of the prodigal son reentering his father's house. Recovery is God's mission of salvation," Johnson said.[131] The Church, therefore, must become a place of welcome for returning citizens, giving them the consistent and non-judgmental love as the people of God. Also a returning citizen and reentry supervisor, Nate Johnson summarizes this notion, saying "feeling belonging is half of reentry. Creating that feeling of belonging will take care of intangible needs that aren't being met."

Structured Resource Support Systems

Though social bonds were helpful in connecting some FIPs to employment and housing, organizations that provided reliable and organized support were foundational in

many released students' success stories. For reentry at Calvin University to be successful in helping or referring students, this care must first be restructured to include a formalized reentry process. A separate office managing reentry would allow the CPI to focus on what they do best: administering higher education to the incarcerated and maintaining a partnership with MDOC. A formalized reentry office or program at Calvin could more easily partner with the abundant reentry resources in Grand Rapids while removing pressure from CPI staff to operate both an educational and reentry program.

Students and graduates interviewed only had marginal support from external organizations other than Calvin or other informal social networks. This was largely due to a lack of awareness of services or limited transportation. Although many students and graduates said "I know programs exist," they struggled with "connecting the dots between services and making appointments."[132]

The Returning Citizens Service mapping application (RCS), created and administered by the Calvin University Geography Department, identifies existing organizations all around the state of Michigan, aiming to pair returning individuals to necessary reentry services. In Kent County, where Grand Rapids is located, the RCS map has reported and linked contact information for 366 reentry services. These services are classified by type of service, location of service, and level of accessibility without reliable transportation.[133] However, individuals attempting to use these services shared that technological barriers stand in their way of accessing this tool. Additionally, this tool provides contact information for services but requires individuals to contact the agencies themselves. For Daryll Hayes, scheduling appointments over the phone results in high levels of anxiety, and he doesn't yet feel comfortable emailing. An additional confounding factor is limited transportation. RCS classifies two-thirds of reentry services in Kent County as low transportation coverage. One participant I interviewed wanted to participate in an interview but did not know how to schedule a Zoom call and did not have transportation to get to campus, where most interviews were held. This isolated example conveys a larger pattern expressed by returning citizens: individuals cannot be left alone to identify services or organizations to meet their needs, even if those organizations have the capacity to help.

Reentry Point-People

Difficulties in finding reentry services can be reduced through the presence of a reentry point-person, or case manager. CPI staff reported that they currently act as case managers, even if informally. One staff member said, "I do my best to refer them to services I know or lend them a listening ear, but it's hard."[134] Additionally, due to the CPI's primary focus on education, some students expressed that they felt pressure to return to their education. One student said he wished "someone would have told me all my options besides going back to class and given me some time. You just don't know what you want when life in prison is all you know."[135]

Besides their parole agents, many returning citizens do not have formal case managers or reentry coaches beyond what the CPI staff can offer them. Designated case managers in a university reentry office could provide more consistent and individual care plans for returning students and graduates. Currently, the TRIO student support system at Calvin University pairs students with individual advisors to oversee their academic needs. A reentry case manager could model many similarities to this program in addition to referring CPI students and graduates to services outside the university. If the creation of a reentry office is not feasible, at least one

person in a prison education staff needs to be appointed to reentry care to begin. For the CPI, as more students are released and the CPI graduate network expands, these responsibilities will only continue to grow. For the long-term success of the program and wellbeing of released students, the development of a reentry office at Calvin University or any prison education program is essential.

Prison Education Programs as Agents of Second Chances

In reflecting Christ's love for us, we must give everyone the same unending grace and mercy granted to us through Jesus' death and resurrection. In fact, Jesus calls us to forgive "not seven times, but 77 times."[136] Prison education programs like the CPI provide second chances for many who never were given the opportunity to receive a degree. Prison education programs create community out of isolation, inspire students to see themselves as worthy of time and investment, and live out Jesus' call to offer 77 chances.

Gabriel said, "CPI showed me who I was and what I was capable of when I believed I wasn't worthy of forgiveness." Gabriel said he believed he "didn't think I could contribute anything of significance to the world." Now, Gabriel changes the lives of others who have gone through prison or struggle with addiction. For Gabriel, his work is "repaying a debt I never can repay," as he learned that his victim was homeless and was being brought to rehab when Gabriel took his life.

Some CPI students began prison without finishing high school. They believed they were "not worthy of education because I could never change." Now, Robert, CPI graduate, is entering grad school in fall of 2023. CPI students are the embodiment of Calvin's mission to "equip students to think deeply, act justly and live whole-heartedly as Christ's agents of renewal in the world."[137] CPI and other prison education programs serve as an example for other spheres of life as they use their strengths and resources to care for the vulnerable through education and growth. Though prison education programs invest in the least of these while they are in prison, this same commitment must be maintained throughout students' reentry.

For many formerly incarcerated people, Jesus' model of unending forgiveness is not their reality once they reenter their communities. Because of their criminal record, they are systematically denied housing, employment, access to many life-giving social services and full social integration. With the odds stacked against formerly incarcerated people, their governments, local employers, universities, community organizations, houses of worship and social networks must jointly prevent FIPs from "slipping through institutional cracks."[138] Stories from released graduates of the CPI reveal that without institutional support and social networks, returning graduates of prison education programs face similar barriers as the general population of returning citizens. Clearly, a college degree alone cannot shield returning citizens from systematic exclusionary policies and the stigma surrounding a criminal record.

The reentry struggles of the CPI highlight an important fact of prison programming for other institutions to follow: reentry care is inseparable from educational engagement with prisoners. Highlighted by the CPI's reentry triumphs and trials, reentry care must be a collaborative effort between many different institutions, each of which has a unique and pressing role to play in restorative reentry.

The Calvin community has a unique opportunity to lead other prison education programs in extending God's grace and

support to its released CPI students and graduates. Although the university cannot do it alone, their students and graduates have tangible recommendations that should be considered at Calvin and other institutions with prison education programs. Sharing the burden of the vulnerable in our communities necessitates community action in the face of reentry injustices. As a Christian institution, Calvin's reentry network can be the face of hope and redemption following the CPI's transformative work being accomplished inside the walls of the Richard A. Handlon Correctional Facility. Outside prison walls, the university, surrounding community, local institutions and body of Christ have their shared work cut out for them in bringing about God's kingdom come, on earth as it is in heaven.

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Nourishing Communities: Promoting Equitable WIC Participation for Immigrant Women and Children in Oregon's Rockwood Community

Kailani West received her bachelor's degree in global studies with a concentration in culture and diversity from Multnomah University. She currently is studying to receive her master's in global development and justice from Multnomah University. She also interned for Multnomah's Voices of Scholars program her senior year there and dedicated time teaching English at a local immigrant and refugee resource center. Kailani is currently interning with Globalscope in Tübingen, Germany.

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Pathways to Restoration: A Holistic Approach to Preventing Human Trafficking and Supporting Survivors in East Texas

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From Incarceration to Integration: A Critical Analysis of Reentry Care in Prison Education Programs in West Michigan

Emily Steen is a recent graduate of Calvin University, where she majored in sociology with concentrations in urban studies and criminology. While at Calvin University, Emily founded and led the Calvin Peacemakers, a restorative justice club focused on bridging the Calvin Prison Initiative and Calvin's traditional campus. As a theater artist and activist, Emily is also passionate about arts education for underserved communities, especially those impacted by the carceral system. She is currently working towards a masters degree in theater education while working at theater companies across New Jersey, her home state.

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Pathways to Restoration: A Holistic Approach to Preventing Human Trafficking and Supporting Survivors in East Texas

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From Incarceration to Integration: A Critical Analysis of Reentry Care in Prison Education Programs in West Michigan

By Emily Steen & Mark Mulder

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