Barriers to Reentry in Durham, NC
FROM COMING HOME TO FINDING A JOB AND EVERYTHING IN BETWEEN

DURHAM INNOVATION TEAM
RESEARCH SYNTHESIS REPORT
Up To Date as of June 6, 2018
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"We are committed to making Durham a place where all residents share in our city’s prosperity. Shared prosperity in Durham will only be possible when all of our neighbors have access to those most basic of needs: jobs that pay a decent wage and housing that is affordable and safe. This is a big challenge we face as a community, and for many the challenge is magnified by the collateral consequences that come with having a criminal record."

Mayor Schewel

Durham’s economic prosperity has not been shared by all residents. The Durham i-team’s first priority area is focused on our justice-involved residents whose secondary consequences of having a criminal record extend well beyond the time they spent detained, on probation, or in prison, and can persist for decades.

Upon reentry people with criminal records, even those with dismissed or misdemeanor charges, face additional barriers to finding employment, securing affordable housing, getting a college education, and obtaining a driver’s license. These barriers make it difficult for some in Durham to successfully reintegrate and share in the community’s prosperity, increasing the likelihood of recidivism.

The Innovation Team exists to add capacity to our ability to work with residents to address these barriers. Those most affected by a problem need to be involved from the outset in developing solutions; thus we have prioritized these voices, stories, and lived experiences.
The collateral consequences of arrest and incarceration hinder economic opportunity for our residents in complex and confusing ways. Our work seeks to better understand and identify ways in which we can best curb recidivism locally while increasing economic opportunity and upward mobility for Justice-Involved Residents (JIRs) in Durham.

**Preliminary measurements for success:** lowering the recidivism rate, increasing the employment rate of justice involved residents
OUR VALUES

Rigor | Resident-Centered
Impact- & Data-Driven | Risk Taking *

**Rigor:** We don’t have the answers; our residents who live the challenges every day are the most knowledgeable. Creative and effective solutions are the result of the right problem diagnosis. Innovation teams mine large volumes of quantitative and qualitative data, look inside and outside Durham to learn from others that have wrestled with similar challenges, and consider problems from multiple angles to understand the root causes.

**Resident-Centered:** Government solves problems faster and more creatively when it seeks to deeply understand the needs of the people it serves. Innovation teams share challenges and invite residents in their city to help define problems, then develop and test solutions.

**Impact-driven:** Innovation teams relentlessly focus on results. They set targets and use data and performance management to measure progress and impact. They have a bias toward action because they know that, in the end, the work matters only if it delivers meaningful impact that residents can see.

**Risk Taking:** Innovation teams challenge ‘business as usual’ in their organizations. We test ideas with residents early on, before they are formalized, funded or vetted, in order to quickly gain feedback and improve their ideas so they can ultimately invest in the best solution.

*inspired by Bloomberg Philanthropies*
During the first six months, the i-team has focused on understanding the challenges faced by justice involved residents when looking for sustainable employment (see activities and approach). This in-depth research led to the insights shared in this synthesis document.

From here, we will establish a list of design principles that capture what solutions must include in order to be successful.

Next, with residents’ help, the Innovation Team will begin developing solutions and prototypes to test. They will be rapidly spun out on a small scale to measure and track progress against goals. Ideas that show positive results will be scaled and implemented through new public-private partnerships and City matching funds.
KEY TERMS

Focus Area

**Justice-involved:** The full continuum of ways in which individuals interact with the criminal justice system, including arrest, pretrial and trial, probation, incarceration, parole, and living with criminal records

**Collateral Consequences:** The rights, privileges, and opportunities denied to individuals as a result of their criminal records (records need not imply conviction). These barriers to accessing employment, housing, education, and a variety of other resources include both legal mandates and personal and social biases. These consequences prevent those involved with the criminal justice system from accessing the very resources they need for successful reentry

**Economic Opportunity:** Access to sustainable employment that provides an engine for upward mobility and to housing, transportation, health care, child care, social and career services, and education and training that provide a good quality of life and the building blocks for individuals and families to flourish

**Upward Mobility:** Being on an economic track that allows for the kinds of career and financial growth needed to achieve personal and/or family goals

**Employ (instead of hire):** Providing work opportunities that are steady, sustainable, and move people towards a career rather than simply offering a paycheck

**Second chance employer:** A wide spectrum of employment philosophies ranging from criminal records not being grounds for disqualification from employment to employers who actively prioritize hiring those with criminal records
KEY TERMS

Research & Design

**Qualitative Data:** Information about qualities; information that can’t actually be measured. We use research methods such as interviews, focus groups, and participant observation to understand individuals’ lived experiences and environments.

**Quantitative Data:** Information about quantities; information that can be measured and written down with numbers.

**Synthesis:** The process of making sense of our qualitative and quantitative data - connecting disparate pieces of data to form a fresh perspective, and relying on intuition and judgement to uncover new meaning.

**Themes:** A brief statement summarizing the unique relationship between multiple data points.

**Insights:** A provocative statement of truth that reflects an understanding of the problem, why the problem exists, and frames why it matters.
FOCUS & OBJECTIVES

In general, we hoped to gain a clearer understanding of:
  • the scale of the problem here in Durham and who it primarily affects
  • what types of outcomes are being measured and what do we, as a community consider as “success”

When talking to justice involved residents, we wanted to better understand:
  • their perception of the overall experience of collateral consequences
  • their process of seeking employment and housing
  • the support programs and systems residents are aware of and use
  • their ideal version(s) of community re-entry support

When talking to local employers, service providers, criminal justice employees and advocates, we wanted to better understand:
  • the existing perceptions around placing and employing justice involved residents
  • the landscape, structure and scope of supportive services offered to justice involved residents in Durham
  • the roles and discretionary powers of various entities within the criminal justice system
Stories are just data with a soul.

From prisons and jails to diners and grocery stores to courtrooms and City Hall — we’ve gone to a lot of places and heard a lot of stories in this work.

Stories about people getting out of prison, not having a place to call home or a way to make a living. Stories about families who helped people through as well as the support systems people sorely lacked. Stories about people trying to make a difference in a criminal justice system that is hard to bend and people tired from decades of effort.

These stories, and many more, are the foundation of our qualitative research.
Data is only as good as the sources it comes from.

Much of our qualitative research focused on listening to our justice involved residents as well as the wide spectrum of people involved in and touched by the criminal justice system. This included probation and corrections officers, judges and lawyers, service providers, employers and activists. In a system as complicated and often contradictory as our criminal justice is, a diversity of voices is essential to begin to understand the root causes of problems facing our justice involved population.

Our quantitative data also came from a diverse range of sources that offered unique insights both from the information provided and the difficulties presented. Complicated, opaque, disorganized, and often impenetrable, the data sets we had to work with shed light on the difficulties of trying to understanding how the criminal justice system operates. From court system data that is functionally illegible due to the size and disorganization of files to DMV records that required weeks—and public records requests—to obtain, it’s been a long road to even start the task of analyzing data. This process illustrates a key issue facing everyone working in the criminal justice system: it’s hard to identify sustainable solutions to problems with scopes that are difficult to define.
Who we talked to

**Justice Involved Residents**

The gender and racial breakdown of these interviews closely matches the overall demographic breakdown of justice-involved residents in Durham but we recognize a need to speak to additional members of the Latinx community and those under 30 to ensure this alignment continues.

**Service Providers and Employers**

Includes employees of the Criminal Justice Resource Center, transitional housing providers, the Durham Housing Authority, and employment placement and readiness providers. Employers include the City of Durham and business owners across the many sectors, including construction, restaurants and education.

**Law Enforcement Officials and Criminal Justice Advocates**

Includes police officers, deputies, probation officers, prison and case managers, judges, lawyers and advocates working in this space such as NC Justice Center, the ACLU, Southern Coalition for Social Justice, Forward Justice, and the Carolina Justice Policy Center.
Interviews & Focus Groups
We prioritized the individual voices of those most affected and impacted by having one-on-one and small group conversations with residents and key stakeholders – both within our innovation lab and within the community.

Participant Observation
We conducted participant observation at Orange County and Butner Correctional Institutes, Durham County Jail, Southerners on New Ground Black August Bail Out Project, Durham County Drug Treatment Court, Durham County Misdemeanor Diversion Program, Legal Aid Expunction Clinic, the Religious Coalition for Non-Violent Durham Reentry Program and Restorative Justice Program, the Criminal Justice Resource Center, the Local Reentry Council, Step Up, NC Works, Eckerd Training to Work Program, Project Build Gang Diversion Program, Love and Respect Recovery House, and Homeboy Industries in Los Angeles.

Worksessions
We held facilitated worksessions within the innovation lab at City Hall to learn and ideate with key stakeholders around new ways forward.

Progress Reviews
We invited key stakeholder groups into the innovation lab on an ongoing basis to review our efforts as work progresses. This is a key reason for making our work visible around our space.
Stakeholder Map Development
In an effort to better understand the existing network of those providing services to and advocating on behalf of our justice involved residents, our team needed to visualize the broader landscape, their high-level offering and current connections.

While we created a first draft based on our own internal knowledge, we’ve begun pulling in additional stakeholders to help fill in the gaps.

We’re using a mapping software called Kumu. Kumu is a powerful data visualization platform that helps us organize complex information into interactive relationship maps.

Employer Survey
We partnered with a graduate student at Duke University to conduct a survey of local Durham employers to better understand their experiences and concerns related to hiring justice involved residents. Key findings from this survey are incorporated throughout our insights below. 77 employers responded to the survey. The top five industries who responded to the survey were food & beverage (21%), retail (18%), scientific and technical services (14%), legal services (9%), educational and social services (9%).

Finally, our findings have also been informed by secondary literature, with particular focus in the areas of employment, criminal justice system related debt, and barriers to obtaining a driver’s license.
Our current quantitative data sources include:

**Durham County Jail** Data on those detained from 2011 – 2017

**Durham Police Department Data and Durham Police Crime Reports** Data on those arrested from 2007-2016

**North Carolina Department of Public Safety data (NCDPS)** Automated System Query Data on those incarcerated, on probation, or on post-release supervision.

**North Carolina Court System Data**

**United States Census Bureau**

**Durham County Office of the Sheriff Annual Report FY2016-2017**

**State Administrative Office of the Courts** Data on the number of individuals with dismissed or not guilty charges in the past five years, and on all individuals with a suspended or revoked driver’s license due to failure to appear or failure to comply.

**North Carolina Department of Motor Vehicles/Department of Transportation (NCDMV/DOT)** Submitted a request for information from the North Carolina Department of Motor Vehicles. Data on the number of people with revoked or suspended drivers’ licenses and the amount of fines and fees they must pay to reinstate their licenses.
Change happens at the speed of trust.

Our outreach coordinator—a lifelong resident of Durham who has also been justice involved—is crucial to our success. We are aware that for many justice involved residents, government is often seen as a source of punishment rather than partnership. We’re trying to change that perception, and we know this is a slow process.

Local government has to earn credibility with those in vulnerable communities who often feel ignored. Our outreach coordinator has helped enormously in getting residents who otherwise would not be likely to visit City Hall to open up and talk about their experiences.

Our research approach reflects our ethos: those most affected by problems are best positioned to propose workable solutions. The research that follows will serve as the foundation for generating ideas, projects and policies designed with people, not simply for them.
JUSTICE INVOLVED
RESIDENT POPULATION
JUSTICE INVOLVED RESIDENT POPULATION

Overview

Each year, over 700 residents return home to Durham from state prison, and thousands more are detained in the Durham County jail.

Currently, over 2,900 residents are on some form of community supervision. These numbers do not capture many residents who also suffer the collateral consequences of a criminal record, including those who have served their time, who are no longer under supervision, who were arrested but had their charges dismissed, or who received a not guilty verdict.
In 2016, Durham had roughly:

- Released from prison: 746
- Detained in jail: 7072
- On community supervision: 2964

"Reentry is a whole big complex thing... the numbers are important. If we don’t know the numbers, we just never know how we are doing."

Durham Resident

THAT'S OVER 10,000 RESIDENTS.
In North Carolina though, 1 in 5 residents on average has a criminal record. This means that the justice-involved resident population in Durham could be as big as...

Based on 2016 Census Data showing a Durham population of 294,618.
POPULATION DEMOGRAPHICS

Overview

Durham County

Key Term descriptions

Durham County – Census demographics for 2016
Prison – Residents returning to Durham County from state prison in 2016
Community Supervision – Residents on probation or parole in 2016
Jail – Residents detained in Durham County Detention Center in 2016
Arrests – Residents arrested by Durham Police in 2016

Racial groups shown have currently been limited to “White” and “Black” due to inconsistencies in data reported from our sources. We are unable to feel confident at this time in providing additional clarity on the racial/ethnic composition. For example, we know the Hispanic/Latinx community has unique challenges when it comes to Justice Involvement but we were unable to consistently segment race/ethnicity from the sources we had access to. We will continue to work on gaining more clarity.
POPULATION DEMOGRAPHICS

Justice Involved Resident Breakdown

Durham County

- Arrests
- Jail
- Community Supervision
- Prison

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POPULATION DEMOGRAPHICS

Factors That Make Reentry More Difficult - Length of Confinement

INCARCERATION LENTH IN PRISON: Longer periods of incarceration can make the reentry transition more difficult.

Over half of those returning from prison have spent 1-5 years incarcerated.

DETENTION LENGTH IN JAIL: The average jail stay is 9 days. On average, Durham spends $125/day per resident that is detained - meaning the average total cost soars to over $1100/stay.

15% of residents are detained in jail for more than a year.

An additional 24% are held for longer than 200 days but less than a year.
Factors That Make Reentry More Difficult - Education Level

Low educational attainment can make finding work more challenging.

Data Collected from: http://webapps6.doc.state.nc.us/apps/asqExt/ASQ
Factors That Make Reentry More Difficult - Severity of Offense
Having a felony can making finding work more challenging.

Data Collected from: http://webapps6.doc.state.nc.us/apps/asqExt/ASQ (“missing” or “unknown” have been ommitted)
COMMON FACTORS, INDIVIDUAL JOURNEYS
Common Challenges Facing Justice Involved Residents

In an effort to think more systemically, we’ve identified four challenge areas that affect our justice involved residents’ ability to share in Durham’s prosperity and avoid recidivism. Each resident’s experience is unique but there are undoubtedly common threads. The four areas, defined below, are:

**Instability:** the struggle to find reliable housing, transportation, and/or childcare along with day-to-day stressors of poverty and debt

**Underdeveloped capacity:** a lack of physical and mental health, relevant skills, education, and/or knowledge of how to navigate the world of work and life outside of the criminal justice system

**Limited support:** lack of access to or awareness of support services, mentors and/or supportive family members

**Limited opportunity:** limited opportunities for employment due to the stigma of a criminal record and/or access to basic documentation necessary for employment
WHAT COULD BE...
“I do not have to worry about where my next meal will come from or whether I have a roof over my head tomorrow, so I can focus my energy and time on building a better future for myself.” (Stability)

“I have the skills I need, and where I need additional assistance or direction, I know where I can find and access that support.” (Capacity)
WHAT COULD BE...

“I am confident that by accessing these supports and investing in my future through education and self-care (e.g. mental health) that I will find a job that will provide me with a sufficient wage to support myself and my family.”

(Support & Opportunity)

If we are looking towards the future to what an ideal outcome for our residents upon release could be, these statements would be true. To flourish, our residents need opportunities to earn a decent wage, the capacity to gain and keep this work and navigate life, awareness of programs and support services that can aid them in this navigation and build their capacities where needed, and a basic level of stability from which to operate on a day-to-day basis.

We’ve organized the insights that follow according to which challenge area it contributes to most as well as a few broader changes in our perspective that we feel need to be considered.
GAINING STABILITY
The heavy reliance on fines, fees, and bail pushes the poor even deeper into the our criminal justice system.

The severity of consequences experienced by those interacting with the criminal justice system is often tied directly to one’s checking account balance (or lack thereof). Our court system currently does not have a standard process or set of expectations on how and when to assess ability to pay. This leaves it to the discretion of judges who often apply radically different standards. Someone’s inability to pay is often only considered after they have struggled to pay off fines/fees. As a result, those who live in or near poverty routinely face harsher consequences than those with greater financial resources who’ve committed similar crimes.
INSIGHT 1

Observations & Data

“People get sentences that they cannot possibly complete.”

Former Durham County Judge

“So you’ve got that parole office you got to report to...so that’s money also that you’ve got to pay, and you don’t have enough. It’s kind of hard to pay for probation or parole when you don’t have a job and you’ve just got home.”

Durham Justice Involved Resident

Over 22,000 City of Durham residents have a suspended driver’s license for failure to appear in court or failure to pay. 82% of those charged with failure to pay are people of color.

NC Administrative Office of the Courts, data analyzed by I-Team.
We do not design all of our support services to meet people where they are or for those who need them most.

A poor financial situation can make it difficult to search for work and to participate in support programs. Basic necessities such as bus passes are treated as rewards designed to encourage good behavior rather than the prerequisite for participation for a population often struggling to make ends meet. This leads some services to be designed primarily for a very narrow subset of our justice-involved population - those in the least need of help with the greatest chance for success.
“(We) don’t give out free bus passes. They have to earn it.”

Durham Service Provider

“A lot of families have come in – a child stealing diapers and formula for little sister – it was something they had to have. Sometimes it is just a matter of making sure our families are having their basic needs met.”

Durham Service Provider

“And I think people around here think that people are homeless and people are in poverty and don’t have jobs and different things because they just don’t want to work. That’s not the case.”

Durham justice involved resident
INSIGHT 2

Observations & Data

“Sometimes my case managers don’t like me providing a resource right away...paying for a $25 restoration fee at DMV. But this builds trust. I get pushback, ‘oh no we shouldn’t do that yet because they haven’t done anything yet.”

Durham Employer

“When they are coming to us, they need to decide do I need training or work. That’s a big decision.”

Durham Service Provider

Few opportunities exist for residents to gain both income and skills simultaneously.

During a resident workshop, we also heard from a man who was required to attend two different programs immediately upon release (each lasting several weeks) as part of his supervision requirements or risk being violated and detained again.

The time commitment required a large part of his available job hunting/work hours each day. He not only had difficulty quickly securing a job but also struggled to pay his probation fees.
Returning citizens first need safe, stable housing in order to find and sustain employment yet the reentry system does not have the capacity to meet this complicated and expensive need.

Our system puts heavy focus on finding employment first but our justice involved residents really need stable, safe housing in which to build confidence and free up mental space to pursue/sustain employment opportunities upon release. Planning for housing arrangements pre-release is often seen as nothing more than a “box to check” to meet release requirements by both case managers and justice involved residents. Collaboration with service providers is often minimal with a disconnect in preferred timing for placement.
"It’s a lot of little barriers, man, and it start with housing though ‘cause your foundation is everything. And if your housing ain’t all the way together it’s gon’ be hard to be effective other ways."

Justice Involved resident

“Our people are not eligible for the vouchers [at the Durham Housing Authority].”

Durham Criminal Justice Advocate

“I watched families evicted from Section 8/public housing because their child was in for a drug charge.”

Durham Criminal Justice Advocate

Most do not qualify as “homeless” under the federal definition. Public housing access is dependant on their charge, local discretion, and is often at capacity already. A criminal record can affect their families’ ability to maintain it upon returning as well.
One individual we met with recounted how his caseworker said his mom had approved his home plan and said he could go back to her place after he got out of prison. He didn’t believe that. “She probably just talking.” He told us he was probably going to go back to staying with friends in the gang.

The responsibility of finding a place to live after leaving prison falls heaviest on the JIR but they are rarely (if at all) given the time, tools and information needed to create a sustainable plan.

Many fall back on previous arrangements or temporary ones that put them at a disadvantage for having the mental space needed to pursue/sustain employment and a positive trajectory forward.

25-50% Percentage of clients in need of housing
Justice-involved residents need long-term, consistent guidance and accountability. When they fail to get this from the reentry system, they go without or turn to informal networks, which are often insufficient.

The reentry process is long and complex, yet many of the formal support services are short term or only address one facet of reentry. People frequently seek long term guidance from those in informal support systems, with whom it is often easier to build trusting and familiar relationships with than service providers. Without stable, steady guidance, people are vulnerable to many of the factors that caused them to offend in the first place.
“My daddy in the streets, I need some positive people to show me. It don’t take me too much to learn. All you gotta do is guide me, show me the right way. I ain’t got no guidance.

Justice involved resident

“I know what works, when it comes to a man and a woman coming out of these institutions. I’ve failed in a lot of different kinds of institutions, treatment programs...None of that stuff works...what works is someone coming inside the door, mentoring you all the way out the door. Holding your hand and when you get out the door, actually helping you be placed...”

Durham justice involved resident
“We lack the ability to provide the kind of long-term intensive case management that many individuals want and would benefit from.”

Durham Reentry Service Provider

“And I always wanted to correct some of my wrongs... It took somebody else to show me they cared and that love and it kind of rubbed off on me and I thought, you know what, I could do that same thing they’re doing for me, for someone else because there’s a lot of us who need it. And that’s what pushes me to continue doing community stuff.”

“I don’t need someone who tells me what I want to hear, who acts like they down. I need someone to tell me what I don’t want to hear but what I need to hear.”

Durham Justice Involved Residents
IMPROVING SUPPORT
Reentry efforts, where they exist, often start too late to be effective.

The burden of responsibility for planning prior to release is placed most heavily upon the resident - often after spending weeks, months or years having most decisions made for them and without access to necessary resources. Most re-entry efforts start with the case manager and probation officer near the end of a resident’s sentence. For service providers looking to help in this space - accessing prison and jail earlier often poses logistical problems due to lack of clarity around needs, sheer scale of the population involved and geographical disparities.
"We’ve got to start the reentry process the day they get here."

*Prison Case Manager*

"The exit process is very poor. The Local Reentry Council is trying to improve that process—up until now it’s been pretty much non-existent."

*Member of the Local Reentry Council*

"But as far as time frame, it takes 3-5 years to get back into a society level that’s livable."

*Durham Justice Involved Resident*

"The reality is that there is very little real planning for exit. It’s very hard for a community to reach out to 56 prisons."

*Resident and Criminal Justice Advocate*
“It can be really hard to get in to prison on a consistent basis. ”

Durham Service Provider

“I’ve been talking to guys that are close to coming out, asking them, what are they doing to prepare themselves. Do they have a case manager? And it seems very haphazard, the process. I assumed, when you got closer to your release date that between your probation officer and case manager, that the gate didn’t just hit you in the ass... I mean this is a damn recipe for disaster. A couple of the guys there said, yeah, they talked to a case manager, a couple of them didn’t even know who there’s was. It seems to be bits and pieces here and there.

Justice Involved Resident

Monthly case load per manager in prison: 120

Number of times a case manager meets with most inmates in one month: 1
Despite a large and often returning population, few resources are spent in our jail to support reentry and prevent recidivism.

With no strategic plan in place within the Durham County jail to help individuals “course correct” earlier, a fee/fine structure that further criminalizes the poor and an overwhelmed system of providers that is often under-equipped to assess true needs - our jail becomes a “revolving door.”
“The system is not equipped to deal with people...it is built to punish and not to treat. We try to point them to resources upon release, but we have struggled some here.”

Durham Sheriffs Office

“We currently do nothing in depth to assess the person’s needs on the front end. I wish we could do more to sit around the table on the front end and discuss what does this person need.”

Durham’s DA Office

“Nobody’s doing anything in here [the jail]. We could do something here...a job class in jail would be a good thing.”

“I have no idea [why there aren’t programs for people in jail]. I think it’s because they feel like they are coming back.”

Durham Justice Involved Residents
INSIGHT 6

Observations & Data

If we were able to eliminate recidivism in our jail in 2011 – so that no one entered jail more than once...

The jail population in 2017 would be 60% smaller.

1000+
Durham residents detained 10x or more since 2011.

Roughly 26% of residents detained in the Durham County jail between 2011 and 2016 were detained 3x or more.
While some point to the short amount of time individuals are detained in jail as a reason for focusing less on the jail as a space for support services, the reality is that some residents spend considerable time in our detention center.

The average jail stay is 9 days. On average, Durham spends $125/day per resident that is detained - meaning the average total cost soars to over $1100/stay.

15% of residents are detained in jail for more than a year.

An additional 24% are held for longer than 200 days but less than a year.
Probation officers are the only consistent touchpoint during reentry, but some do not see reentry support as a top priority of their job and our system doesn’t provide the resources for them to work in this way.

Probation officers have large caseloads, high turnover, and are rarely able to regularly connect with the broader service provider network. Little room is left for the individualized attention or relationship building necessary for probation to serve as a means of support and mentorship.
We spend on average $31,000 to incarcerate someone per year – and only $1,900 to supervise them upon release.

Jail: $125.59/day to detain VS. $5.31/day on supervision

“For folks that you just dump out of jail/prison...and especially if you dump them out on probation/parole you know where they’re going? Back to jail/prison. But imagine that same person...coming to a program whose mentored them all the way out the door; he’s never going back.”

Durham Justice Involved Resident

“I didn’t know about the City’s second chance employment program...I usually just try to keep my eye out for places hiring.”

Durham Probation Officer
INSIGHT 7
Observations & Data

“As long as they are linked to the probation officer, there should be an employment link...That’s a lot of time to deal and work with people, understand their skills and interests...while they are on probation.”

Durham Service Provider

“...top reasons people violate the terms of their probation: pending charges, they do not have money to complete treatment; transportation is a big problem.”

Durham Law Enforcement

“Misdemeanor probation violation” was the most cited charge in data from the Durham County Jail.

79% of those with these charges are black.
After restricting their freedom for months or years, we set returning citizens up for failure by burdening them with too many choices during reentry.

Residents often face “information overload” (decision paralysis or fatigue) with current resources provided to them upon exiting prison and jail – rendering much of it useless. Too many decisions remain for a resident to make so soon after leaving a place where most things were decided for them.
“Everyone gets discharge plans. The facilities offer a list of resources - I’m not sure if every facility offers this - that says where NC Works is, DSS, community college, etc. But there’s nothing that’s intentionally done that offers any kind of intentional employment connection.”

*Durham Service Provider*

“There’s lights out, wake up call, chow call, clothes exchange, count down, there’s a call for everything… if you don’t have somebody behind you pushing you, an institutionalized person will think that somebody’s supposed to feed them. They expect people—they can do it for themselves – but they expect for people to still do for them like the people in the institutions were…”

*Durham Justice Involved Resident*
INSIGHT 8

Observations & Data

“There is a need for clear, concise, current, accurate and mythbusting information in multiple accessible formats for people…”

North Carolina Criminal Justice advocate

“If you don’t know where the jobs are at, how do you get them? If you don’t have a laptop, how do you go online?”

Durham Justice Involved Resident
Re-entry information is hard to find; when it can be found, much of it is bad information, which is often worse than no information for a justice involved resident.

Resource lists and websites providing program or benefit information, key contacts, eligibility requirements, and other information are often inaccurate, irrelevant, unorganized, and out-of-date. This misinformation can be defeating for those seeking help at a very vulnerable time.
INSIGHT 9

Observations & Data

7/15

Number of employment services listed on one reentry resource guide we reviewed that were no longer in existence.

“The County Resource Guide will be updated as current information is received.”

North Carolina Department of Public Safety website for County Resource Guide Queries (as of 3/11/2018)
“It is hard to know the landscape of service providers, and it takes a lot of staff time, time we don’t really have, to keep information on providers up-to-date.”

Durham Service Provider

“You’ve gotta have some resources for these guys cause I came home with a folder full of stuff talking about these programs, you can get this and you can get that...I had a whole folder full of that crap. But actually make something they can use...”

“...there was just no information out there. There was no knowledge of what was available, of what programs were out there. I’m sure I just touched the tip of the iceberg about what programs are available out there right now for us.”

Durham Justice Involved Residents
Successful reentry efforts require a level of trust in government institutions that simply does not exist among justice-involved residents.

Many residents feel programs could lead to further justice involvement or that providers will not understand their life experiences, causing some to not use available resources or fully commit to the process. Well-intentioned programs have to contend with a generational legacy of government mistrust as many rightly perceive government (or anything that even “looks” like government) as punitive and entrapping institutions rather than helpful ones.
“Is this a trap?”

text message from an applicant to the Durham Driver Amnesty Program

“You know we already do this [dismiss old charges], right?...a case manager in a prison recently had an inmate who would be returning to Durham soon...he had some old pending traffic charges that occurred before he went to prison...I told her to tell him to come down to the courthouse when he got out and we would see what we could do.”

Assistant District Attorney

A previous effort to provide amnesty for certain driving charges that required people to show up in person at the courthouse resulted in about two dozen participants. When we removed the requirement to show up in person and instead sent a trusted messenger out into the community to let residents know they could apply by text message, over 2,200 people applied - a 100 fold increase!
The NC General Assembly is pressuring judges to limit their use of waivers to provide financial relief to individuals who cannot afford to pay court fines and fees, often leading to re-incarceration.

The most notable example of this is the NC General Assembly’s effort to “chill” the use of waivers by judges by publishing a list of how many charges each judge waives. In the absence of any counter narrative, this effort appears successful in achieving its intended aim. While Durham voters elect these judges, and would likely support judges in their use of waivers, few voters are aware of this issue. In the absence of support from their constituents, judges are vulnerable to political pressure from outside Durham, resulting in the decreased use of waivers.
“I don’t think many people have this on their radar, even though I believe people in Durham would care about this issue.”

Durham Criminal Justice Advocate

Recent statewide actions to pressure judges:
The NC State Legislature created another barrier for judges on December 1st, 2017, requiring judges to give 15 days notice to all affected agencies before issuing a waiver to a fine or fee – adding an administrative burden with only one clear aim.
Re-entry services don’t work well in silos.

Due to limited funding, time, interest in or ability to collaborate, many re-entry programs operate in silos, lessening the capacity to serve the justice involved population. The small number of local employers willing to hire justice involved residents cause those in employment related services to heavily guard connections. Tight competition for limited resources incentivizes competition rather than collaboration.
INSIGHT 12
Observations & Data

Service Provider A: “I get emails like crazy... 40 - 50 jobs per day! I don’t know where the email comes from.”

Service Provider B: “Why don’t you forward that to me?!“

Service Provider A: “.... [silence]”

“The problem is that everyone’s in their own silo, no one’s willing to step out and enhance what they do. They might not know how to do so. People do what they’re accustomed to. What can make a change for folks to stop what they’re doing and see what’s not working?”

Durham Service Provider

“Too many different people touch the file. Those involved in the system touch a person’s case at different points through the system, but do not see it all the way through.”

District Attorney’s office
“What would be ideal is if all the resources former offenders needed could be located in one place where they knew to go when they got out... all the experts under one roof and people would talk to each other...our Durham version of Homeboy Industries.”

*Durham Service Provider*

“*The flow of referrals seems to go one way.*” Only 8 of 44 organizations were listed as both sending and receiving referrals.

*RTI Study*

**Promising Development**

Durham’s Local Reentry Council was recently established with the stated goal of connecting our returning residents with the local services and support necessary for successful reentry.
Both policy makers and service providers are working without a clear understanding of the true size of the population in need. That need is far greater than the capacity we are currently operating at.

Service providers and policymakers are often trying to do what they can with the resources they have available to them instead of thinking first about the size of the challenge they face and the resources or system design they need to address it. Service providers may track how many people they serve in a given year, but there is no sense of how many are left unserved, what it will take to reach them, or how long it will take at the current rate to reach everyone.
Before this project started, few, if any, in Durham could tell you:

How many people have a criminal record in our county?

How many people have a revoked or suspended license?

How many people are eligible to have records expunged?

How many justice involved residents are we serving?

A reminder of scale:

10,000+
people interact with the Durham Criminal Justice each year.

Between three of the larger employment placement service providers in Durham, 358 people were served in 2016.

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CJRC = Criminal Justice Resources Center
INSIGHT 13
Observations & Data

383
The number of expunction requests made in Durham in 2016-2017.

87,000+
The number of dismissed/not guilty charges in the past five years, many of which may now be eligible for expunction under recent changes in state law.
Peers are uniquely positioned to help justice-involved residents navigate the complex network of support, but our system doesn’t leverage them as much as we might.

Most local reentry programs do not fully harness their experience of justice involvement through program design or implementation. Their knowledge of navigating the complex network of support is more likely to be trusted and reflect the realities other justice involved residents face – leading to greater feelings of satisfaction, confidence and sense of control. These same peers however, often experience social and spatial isolation from networks that control resources. In the absence of intentional efforts to help them connect with larger networks, our community is not able to fully harness the transformative potential of peer support mentorship.
“...have people who went through the same situations but had [grown] up from it, [bettered] themselves...when you have somebody that never went through that, they can’t really relate...”

Justice Involved Resident

“People like us that are here talking, that live it, experience it...we have been there we can get to them a lot better because we been there and lived that situation, lived in the street, did this crime...and at the same token we’re rehabilitating ourselves as we go along and do this.”

Durham Justice Involved Resident

“People closest to the problem are closest to the solution.”

Durham Attorney
“Researchers have found a spatial mismatch between poverty and joblessness and concluded that residents ‘socially isolated’ from jobs could not rely solely on their social networks.”

RTI study (Morenoff & Harding, 2014)

“Have classes taught by peers, experienced members of the streets. The city needs an intermediary between the city and the streets, between jobs and the streets.”

Durham Service Provider

285

Number of certified Peer Support Specialists in Durham County

According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, peer support leads to increased self-esteem, confidence, sense of control, raised empowerment scores, sense that treatment is inclusive of needs and engagement in self care and wellness.
INCREASING CAPACITY
Justice involved residents often lack easy access to their record and clarity around their charges or convictions, hindering their ability to be their own advocate.

In the same way that making important decisions about your physical or financial health is difficult without access to your comprehensive medical records or credit report – for an individual with a record, that lack of clarity or access can have big consequences and hinder their ability to be their own advocate.
“People don’t know their charges.”

*Durham Service Provider*

“I didn’t realize I had an outstanding warrant in another state.”

“They (lawyers) will get a felony off your record but I’m not sure if it really gets off your record. It seems like that stuff is still there.”

*Durham Justice Involved Residents*

“I wish people could get free access to their state certified record. If an applicant brought me this it would save me the time of running it and show me they were honest and trying to turn things around.”

*Durham Employers*

“They [applicants] are shocked to find out what is in their record. It happens all the time.”
At key moments in residents’ lives where knowledge of the collateral consequences of justice involvement could influence their decisions – such as prior to committing a crime or accepting a plea – there is often no opportunity to learn about them.

This is often due to lack of knowledge of the way the criminal justice system functions, varying levels of discretion within the process, overworked legal council, deeply rooted myths and generational incarceration.
“I did not understand when I took the plea bargain that the felony on my record would follow me the rest of my life.”

Justice Involved Resident

“I thought it was gonna be the same. I never thought about the record actually affecting my life...I thought I was gonna go home, I could get any job. It makes me feel kind of angry and kind of sad at the same time cause when I was young I didn’t think having a record was going to affect you in life but once you get older and you’re trying to get a better job, not only for you but for your family, just for having a record, they would be quick to shut down the door.”

Durham Justice Involved Resident

“Education about collateral consequences - for high school students, police, SROs, probation and parole officers – is important and often lacking. There is a need to scale up educational programs.”

Durham Service Provider
INSIGHT 16
Observations & Data

1,019
total number of collateral consequences in North Carolina

679
number of employment specific consequences in North Carolina

(niccc.csgjusticecenter.org)

“I wasn’t prepared for that to be the same situation with housing, that people don’t want to rent to people with a record. And I was like, what?”

Durham Service Provider

He didn’t think his record would affect his ability to find work: “I’ll just convince people I can do the job.”

Durham Youth
Despite a growing demand for labor in key industries, it’s difficult for justice-involved residents to take advantage of the opportunities if they lack basic resources and soft-skills.

Incarceration takes people away from schools and legal jobs that build the skills needed to succeed in a well-paying job. We then expect people to find work quickly upon release but individuals often lack basic forms of identification needed, including a social security card, valid state ID or driver’s license. There are some industries – such as restaurants and construction – where a high labor demand makes the record itself less relevant and the main barrier to employment is not having a criminal record, but lacking certain soft/hard skills.
INSIGHT 17

Observations & Data

“Soft skills like knowing when to call into an employer, basic employment etiquette is one of the biggest problems with retaining jobs.”

Durham Service Provider

“Life skills – that consistency everyday, showing up at 7am, is the toughest thing. We have a pretty low bar to entry. If you can show up on time, and pass the drug test, we will hire you. We have found that those who go through a prep program have better outcomes…”

Durham Employer

“This guy on our staff has a good connection to the DMV, so he is able help guys coming back from prison to get an ID. But not everyone is lucky enough to know someone with that kind of connection. A lot of people come back without an ID and need assistance getting one.”

Durham Service Provider
“Job classes in jail would be a good thing. They could do role plays of how to deal with real life work situations, like if your boss was rude to you or a customer came in and was really disrespectful. Nobody’s doing anything in here, we could do something here.”

Justice Involved Resident

“I tried at McDonalds but I didn’t know how to do the application. I don’t have time for all that. So I just went back to what I know...I don’t know what a resume is and I don’t know my social security number.”

Durham Justice Involved Resident

“We care more about a person’s attitude and willingness to learn than their hard skills.”

Durham Employer (Survey Respondant)

Soft skills were cited more often than hard skills in an employer survey we conducted. Respondents mentioned soft skills 154 times, while hard skills came up just 82 times.

58% of employers we surveyed said over half of their positions require at least a high school diploma or equivalent. Unfortunately, over half of residents on community supervision and over 75% of those returning from prison lack a highschool diploma.
The level of computer literacy required by the modern job search process has become a barrier of its own.

For even minimum wage jobs today, comfort with things such as internet access and an email account is necessary. Due to years of incarceration or lack of experience with formal job applications, many residents do not have these basic capabilities. Digital application styles and resume expectations that vary from employer to employer can be difficult to navigate. Low literacy levels and lack of knowledge of important information, such as social security numbers, can make this process nearly impossible for some.
The “hard-skill” most valued by local employers we surveyed (45% of respondents) was computer skills – defined as “basic understanding of Microsoft Office, e-mail, ability to troubleshoot as needed.”

A resident came in looking for our outreach coordinator. He was looking for help finding a job. The outreach coordinator wasn’t there so we offered to give him the contact information. He struggled to figure out how to use his phone.

“I just got out of prison,” he explained. “I have no idea how to use this thing.”

Another has visited our office on multiple occasions asking for help in setting up an email account and accessing the city job site so he could apply for jobs. He was almost done with probation, and still didn’t have an email account.
Durham lacks a consistent, strategic approach to connecting justice involved residents to services, resources and jobs based on residents’ needs, readiness to work, criminal background, motivation, and risk factors for recidivism.

Justice involved residents are often lumped into broad categories when it comes to utilizing services and programs – categories that do not always acknowledge their specific capacity, individual needs or risk level. This tendency towards generalization impacts the type and quality of services they receive and therefore, in many ways, their success or lack thereof in successful reentry.
“Durham lacks a classification system to understand the likelihood of recidivism (or relapse), the individual’s needs or their motivation to change. Assessment is a cornerstone of effective correctional practices (Andrews and Bonta, 2010) to match individuals to the correct services.”

RTI Study

“Going down there to sign up for TASC and the CBI program and I ain’t even did nothing wrong. That’s just fresh out of prison they make you do that, saying I’m a high risk cause, I guess, I’m black and I ain’t working or I ain’t complete school or whatnot. That don’t mean I’m out here breaking the law. I don’t see why I’m high risk. That don’t make sense.”

Durham Justice Involved Resident

During a recent employment-focused service provider workshop we asked individuals if they ever use formal methods of assessment to help assess what their clients needs are. While a few mentioned assessment tools that they were familiar with, the majority said that they tend to assess needs based on their individual experiences working with Justice Involved Residents.
CREATING OPPORTUNITY
Current reentry efforts around employment tend to focus on getting someone hired instead of sustaining employment/careers and we rarely acknowledge that minimum wage is unappealing compared to the “easy money” of one’s past.

Low-wage jobs with no upward mobility are not appealing to many residents with criminal records, who often already have access to illegal employment that is immediate, well-paid and provides an opportunity for career mobility. Individuals are more likely to re-offend if they do not have access to livable wages, legal work with an opportunity for upward mobility or see how a low-paying job is part of clearly discernible career pathway that will lead to higher wages while lowering their risk for recidivism.
full time on minimum wage

$1,160/month
(before taxes)

Average cost for housing in Durham for one adult

$710/month

PLUS: Monthly fines for community supervision can range from $40 to hundreds of dollars court administration, jail fees, probation, electronic monitoring, drug testing, even community service – and more.

“Let’s say you’ve got locked up for selling drugs, you used to making $5,000-$10,000 a week. Then you come out and they offer you a job making minimum wage...So, when you think of pride, guys that are used to making a certain amount and then they’re like, eight bucks? Naw. I’m not doing that. They they might be ashamed of where they’re working at. A lot of guys won’t work at McDonalds.”

Durham Justice Involved Resident

“Delayed gratification is a problem with this population...the need for quick money.”

Durham Employer
Local employers worry most about liability and the level of hand-holding justice involved residents will need but those worries may not be rooted in reality.

Some employers worry about the safety of their goods, staff, and customers when hiring JIRs, particularly those with violent or theft charges. There is a lack of knowledge about ways to limit this perceived financial and legal risk as well as incentives such as federal wage subsidies and on-the-job training support that might make the rewards of hiring justice involved individuals greater for some employers. Research suggests much of this worry is misplaced and that justice involved residents are no more likely to quit or exhibit workplace misconduct than the average employee.
46% of employers we surveyed said “greater protection from legal liability” would increase the likelihood of their organization hiring an individual with a criminal record.

“If I hire someone with a serious criminal history because I can place them with one employer as a temp, when that temporary position ends, if I cannot place him in another job, he can file for unemployment insurance, which has financial implications for me as the employer. As a staffing company, we have to aggressively watch out for this. Hiring people with a felony who are harder to consistently place in jobs because of his limited hiring potential, places us at higher risk of financial loss.”

Durham Employer

“There are a whole lot of people in this community helping those who have records with resumes and skills – but if you don’t have employers willing to hire, it won’t matter.”

Durham Employer
“Our insurance carriers prohibit us from employing anyone with a felony conviction regardless of timeline. If I could wave a magic wand, I would disconnect insurance from a employee’s criminal record.”

Durham Employer

“I’m not willing to put my employees and customers in a situation with someone that has a violent & harassing past. It directly effects my employees’ emotional well being, financial well being, and can cause all of us to lose everything.”

“I hold liability insurance and if I had to file a claim and the insurance company found out I knowingly hired someone with a criminal record, they could deny the claim and my rates would go way up. It ticks me off, but I can’t do much to change it currently.”

Durham Employers
We have a tendency to create well-meaning incentives without communicating them and often make them so laborious that they aren’t worth accessing.

Current employment-related incentives at the state and federal level have not been communicated well and lack a clear path to action. From both the resident and employer perspective - existing incentives intended to encourage more employers to hire Durham residents with criminal records (such as certificates of relief, federal bonding, tax incentives, and wage subsidies) are often a mystery. For those who are aware of incentives, they often state the process is too cumbersome, confusing or costly to make it worth their while. As a result, we may be allocating resources to programs that few will take advantage of.
“I have had my safe emptied twice - once by a justice involved individual and once by someone who wasn’t. I am concerned about larceny but I have never heard of the federal bonding program.”

_Durham Employer_

“We have heard there are incentives, but every time we have looked, it was just too much of a headache for whatever the incentive is...We haven’t used any of them.”

_Durham Employer_
90% of local employers surveyed were not at all familiar with certificates of relief.

57% said they were not at all familiar with available tax incentives.

9% stated they were “very familiar” with these programs.

Small businesses in Durham seem to demonstrate a willingness to hire JIRs more often than larger ones.

Larger local employers often have a wider net of stakeholders and more structured hiring processes, all of which lead to a greater scrutinizing and standardization of hiring practices.

Small businesses often do not have the resources to run background checks, may have a more personalized and individualized hiring process, and assume a greater risk in hiring a JIR.

“Managers hate using it. You have to click 87 buttons. It is the least user friendly system.”

Durham Small Business Owner/Second Chance Employer on NC Works hiring system
On a criminal record, everything that is shown is perceived as a risk by employers – whether it’s relevant or not.

An unnecessary level of visibility exists. Background checks are designed in such a way that they show employers every single thing on a person’s record, even though they may only care about certain offense types or whether a crime was recent when making a hiring decision. By showing everything, background checks also validate everything as a “risk”, limiting opportunities for some applicants who employers may have otherwise been willing to take a chance on. Some also buy bulk data that can become outdated quickly, others are not updated in a timely matter with the final verdict or sentence, some data is simply incorrect, and the language used is often confusing for someone without a legal background. These factors make it difficult for the average person to assess true risk within the hiring process and often contribute to residents missing out on opportunities unnecessarily.
“It depends on the nature of the crime”

The most common response to a survey sent to local employers about what most concerned them about hiring someone with a criminal record.

“Criminal record doesn’t imply conviction.”

Durham Criminal Justice Advocate

“I have a charge that I was never even convicted of that once they go in the computer, it’s gonna say, “murder.” It’s gonna say dismissed. But once a person sees “murder” they don’t care about dismissed.”

Durham Justice Involved Resident

“In smaller organizations where individuals are not overly familiar with how background checks present information, they are likely considering things like dismissed charges even though they shouldn’t. Some vendors screen out dismissed charges, but others don’t.”

Durham Employer
Employers need support too but opportunities to learn from one another when it comes to Second Chance Employment are rare.

Some employers cite feeling alone when it comes to being or becoming a second chance employer. They are not aware of other employers making similar decisions and have no peers who can serve as mentors they can bond with over shared experiences or concerns. They do not hear about the positive experiences other employers may have had hiring someone with a criminal record. In addition, there are few if any programs aimed at supporting employers in second chance employment, whether it comes to accessing incentives or providing ongoing peer support to their employees who may be struggling on the job.
“Can employer engagement happen sooner in the process? What about supportive services for the employer?”

“I like this notion of employer engagement on the front end. Share success stories with businesses so they know what this looks like and how it works effectively.”

*Durham Employers*

**FOUR:** Minimum number of pages on the NC Works website an employer has to navigate before getting to information about federal funding for on-the-job training.
Employers also cited desire for more structured pre-employment programs to address these issues.

“We have found that those [justice involved residents] who go through a prep program have better outcomes...When TROSA calls, we are gonna hire anyone they’ve got.”

“Our margins are so thin, we can’t afford to train people on the job, especially in soft skills.”

__Durham Employers__
It is difficult for justice-involved residents to explain their record to employers in a way that adequately represents their experiences.

The high-stakes nature of looking for employment and the unbalanced power dynamics between an employer and potential employee makes the task more difficult. Talking about a record can also bring up powerful and complicated emotions like shame and regret, making the story all the more difficult to recount to a powerful stranger.
“People tell you, when I was inside—staff, volunteers, say, don’t tell people you’ve been in prison. Well, that comes back to bite you when you do get the job because even if it’s not on the application, when it comes up, I know friends who’ve been let go because of it.”

*Durham Justice Involved Resident*

“If I have to make assumptions about what you did, they usually won’t be good. Don’t make employers find this on their own.”

“It’s like dating – don’t lead with a bad past. Don’t make that your first impression.”

*Durham Service Providers*

“There’s no fairytale ending – they see the man that I am today through the consistency in my story moving forward.”

“They tell you in prison, you gonna get these applications, to be honest with them. So when you do be honest with them, that kind of already eliminates you from the chance.”

*Durham Justice Involved Residents*
Storytelling in a peer-to-peer context provides a powerful, authentic and tangible model for justice involved residents of how change is possible.

Storytelling coupled with peer support can be therapeutic to those who do not have hope in their current situation. Most programs and other reentry resources – beyond substance abuse/recovery efforts – do not utilize or fully harness its power to sustain perspective/behavior/lifestyle changes despite a robust body of data pointing to its potential.
“My name isn’t important but what is important is my story.”

“In telling my story, it has constantly put me in a position to tell it again. And the therapeutic value of telling my story has been so necessary for me...when I’m sharing my story, I release those things so it’s not something I carry...that type of honesty, for whatever the reason, people say, “I can relate to that from this perspective of my life.”

Justice Involved Residents

When it comes to searching for a job, employers often get the “bullet point” version of someone’s story - void of opportunity for connection and trust-building. In a peer setting, the complete narrative can more easily be shared.

Personal contact, as in a face to face interview, reduces the effect of a criminal record in the hiring process by roughly 15%. (Sequencing Disadvantage - Pager, Western, and Sugre)
It is difficult for government agencies and service providers to access and share the data needed to develop better policy.

A deep understanding of the population being served is critical in developing better policy and a just course of action forward. Both government agencies and service providers seem hesitant to share data - often due to privacy concerns, worry of accuracy and accountability. Competition for funding contributes to protection of siloed data sources and data that is accessible is often not captured fully to begin with or is difficult to digest for many individuals working within this space. This further reduces our collective ability to make clear decisions around the best, most efficient path forward for creating increased economic opportunity.
“Individuals returning to Durham with a Security Risk Group (SRG) designation have a dismal recidivism rate in Durham County, but we do not know who is made aware of the names and release dates of the individuals. What if each individual in this group was met personally upon their arrival back to Durham and given necessary services? Of course, this can’t happen if we don’t know who they are or when they are being released.”

Durham City/County Gang Reduction Strategy Steering Committee, request to i-team

The i-team learned that NC DPS “does not share this information unless it is part of a structured law enforcement program,” and that currently only the Durham Police have access to this information. The i-team has also been working for 6 months to acquire data from the DMV on Durham County residents who have a revoked or suspended driver’s license. This data is crucial to understanding the challenges preventing residents from restoring their license.
The chart above represents the time it would take us to process a five-year statistical raw data extract of data from the statewide Automated Criminal/Infractions System (ACIS) from North Carolina Administrative Office of the Courts.

“People tend to think it is very easy to know about and identify this population. To “us” who work in the system, it is a lot more complicated than that. Who are we really talking about; how big?”

Durham Criminal Justice Advocate
Loss of their driver’s licence is a major barrier to employment for justice-involved residents yet there’s little focus on restoration efforts.

Many jobs require a driver’s license as a minimum requirement for consideration, and yet 20% of Durham’s adult population has a suspended or revoked license. Employers who have “banned the box” fail to recognize that requiring applicants to have a driver’s license creates a barrier in many ways similar to asking about criminal history on job applications. Many residents have had their licenses suspended due, not to DUIs or other public safety concerns, but rather due to failure to appear for court hearings or failure to pay court fines.
INSIGHT 28
Observations & Data

74% of employers surveyed did not ask about criminal backgrounds in the hiring process.

Only 43% didn’t require a driver’s license for employment.

“10-15% of our clients have a driver’s license. When they lose it, it is such a killer. That guy with a license is gold when it comes to finding work.”

Durham Employer

“We are not focused on reducing failure to appear in traffic court, because they don’t result in a warrant for your arrest.”

CJRC

Failure to appear in court results in the automatic and indefinite suspension of a person’s driver’s license.

The City of Durham was one of the first local employers to “ban the box” on its job applications. However, the city requires a driver’s license for 65% of its job classifications.

Legal service organizations allocate relatively few resources to driver’s license restoration.

46,658
Durham County residents have a revoked or suspended license.

Black (38%) and Hispanic (40%) males (81%) are disproportionately affected. (Source: NCDMV/DOT)
NECESSARY PERSPECTIVE SHIFTS
"You can only help those who want it" isn’t helping enough people.

This is something you hear all across the system and speaks to a trait both justice involved residents and providers typically equate with “getting tired”. It’s an extremely subjective way of measuring potential and “getting tired” often requires either a very long period or multiple periods of incarceration. This perspective contributes to services being designed primarily for a very narrow subset of our JIR population - those in the least need of help with the greatest chance for success. We need more truly supportive and holistic services for those at the highest risk of reoffense who are typically most in need of wrap-around support.
While care is available for substance abuse or mental illness, there is little access to culturally appropriate mental health care to handle issues of hopelessness, anxiety, anger, depression and despair that often stem from poverty, violence, trauma and incarceration.

These issues are important factors to why people offend as well as why they have difficulties re-integrating into families and legal work life after incarceration.

“Jobs ain’t shit if your mind ain’t right.” Justice Involved Resident
We can do a better job of humanizing justice involvement and local stories of success.

In the absence of these narratives that build compassion, understanding and transparency around existing efforts, our employers and residents are left with abstract characterizations of justice involved residents that are often inaccurate and “scary,” further reinforcing the stigma of having a record. Many residents and employers are unaware of how many Durham residents are actually justice-involved and the large toll this takes on our community and the lives of so many families.

“Let’s demystify what it meant to be justice involved so we are not scared; help us understand and build compassion.”  Durham Employer
Restorative justice is powerful because it creates space for more stories to be told.

It empowers everyone affected to speak, to listen, to learn and to heal. While some efforts are being made locally to integrate its principles into their work, our criminal justice system tends to tell one story: whether someone committed a crime or not. It is often insensitive to the reasons behind why a crime was committed as it is to the effects of that crime on the larger community. Restorative justice is also powerful because it keeps people out of the retributive justice system and provides an opportunity for both the victim and the perpetrator to heal.
the end.