

Homelessness and Parole

A SURVEY OF DENVER'S SHELTERS

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COLORADO
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Additional copies of this report are available at ccjrc.org.

About this Report

In the spring of 2007, The Piton Foundation released a report indicating a quarter of the people on parole in the Denver metro area resided either in homeless shelters or other temporary housing. The Piton report was based on an analysis of data obtained from the Department of Corrections as well as additional research conducted by The Piton Foundation.¹ In addition, a number of shelter providers in Denver recently indicated a perceived increase in the number of homeless parolees in Denver's emergency shelters.

The Department of Corrections has not historically tracked the specific number of parolees who have been released homeless, so it is not possible to determine whether there has been an increase in homelessness among parolees over time. However, we have been advised the Department's Division of Adult Parole, Community Corrections, and YOS recently began keeping statistics on the number of homeless parolees each parole office supervises.²

Because of the gap in information about homeless parolees, CCJRC decided to conduct this survey in order to better understand the drivers of homelessness among parolees and the experiences of both homeless parolees and shelter providers. While it is possible for some people to leave prison homeless who are not on parole, this survey focuses only on homeless parolees.³

Methodology

It was not possible to include every location where homeless parolees are temporarily placed, such as private boarding houses and motels, in this survey. Thus, CCJRC confined the scope of this report to the eight major emergency overnight

shelters in Denver. From December 2008 through February 2009, CCJRC interviewed 48 homeless parolees in seven of these eight shelters. Interviews were conducted in the shelters at night after dinner, and participation was voluntary. The 60-question interview took from one half to one hour per person to conduct.⁴ In most shelters, staff publicized the survey using a flyer supplied by CCJRC. Participants received a copy of *Getting On After Getting Out: A Re-entry Guide for Colorado*,⁵ as well as a \$10 gift card to King Soopers.

In collaboration with shelter staff, CCJRC also conducted a point-in-time count the evening of February 25, 2009, at the eight shelters included in this survey. The count included both the total number of people in the shelters and the number of people known to be on parole. The shelters included in this count are the eight major emergency shelters in Denver. Three accept only women and the rest accept men, although women may be accepted in programs/housing other than the shelters' emergency housing. The eight participating shelters are Brandon Center, Crossroads, Delores Project, Denver Rescue Mission, newgenesis, Samaritan House, Step 13, and Theodora House.

The third part of CCJRC's homeless parolee survey involved personal interviews with program directors, coordinators, and project managers who worked in the shelters. These interviews were conducted personally or by email, and in some cases more than one staff member from a shelter was interviewed.

The interviews with parolees and shelter employees, as well as the point-in-time count, were conducted by Carol Peeples, re-entry coordinator for CCJRC.

1 CCJRC staff assisted with The Piton Foundation's study. The full report is in the spring 2007 issue of The Piton Perspective and available online at http://www.piton.org/Documents/ThePITONperspective_Spring07_5-24.pdf.

2 This data is not released on an official basis by the Department's Office of Planning and Analysis, but it is available upon request from the Department's Division of Adult Parole.

3 People who leave prison without parole supervision may have been incarcerated for a crime committed before July 1, 1993, and are therefore eligible to discharge from prison without mandatory parole, or they may have been revoked while on parole and returned to prison where they finished their mandatory parole sentence while incarcerated. People who discharge from prison are not eligible for services from parole offices or transition specialists.

4 The survey instrument is available upon request from CCJRC.

5 *Getting On After Getting Out* is a re-entry guide written and distributed by CCJRC. From late 2007 through 2009, CCJRC provided almost 25,000 copies for free to people in prison and on parole. Due to generous support from the Daniels Fund, CCJRC was also able to provide an additional 1,000 copies to homeless shelters for distribution to their clients on parole.

Acknowledgements

CCJRC would first like to thank the people on parole who shared their circumstances with us. We are grateful for their time and willingness to talk about their personal situation.

We would also like to thank the staff of Denver's homeless shelters for their interest and participation with this survey. We thank them for sharing

their experiences and for opening their shelters' doors to us.

CCJRC would like to acknowledge the many organizations and state agencies, including the Department of Corrections, that are working to address the problems around homelessness and re-entry into society. We hope this report is of service.

Executive Summary

The interviews conducted for this survey offer insight into 48 individuals who were homeless and on parole in Denver, Colorado, during the winter of 2008-2009. Their stories and situations exemplify the complexity of the issue, but this is not to say that common threads did not surface. Indeed, it is these commonalities that form the basis for each of the eleven recommendations presented in this report.

The average annual cost of incarcerating an inmate is over \$30,000 per inmate,⁶ so changes in policies and practices that reduce recidivism can provide the state with an immediate opportunity for significant cost savings. In fiscal year 2008, 41% of the *total* admissions to Colorado's prisons were people who had been revoked from parole and returned to prison. Of this group, 27% returned to prison for committing a new crime while on parole, but 73% (3,353 people) were returned to prison for a technical violation of their parole.⁷

It is not known whether people who leave prison homeless have a higher failure rate on parole, but it is known that people face enormous challenges, including finding housing, when they are released.⁸ Based on our own research and interviews with parolees, CCJRC believes that paroling or discharging from prison homeless is a barrier to successful re-entry and should be avoided to the greatest extent possible.

Demographic information about parolees interviewed

Of the 48 people interviewed, 42 were men and 6 were women. Their average age was 42 and 84% were single. The majority of people were white (42%) or African American (38%). Over one-third (37%) were last incarcerated for one year or less and 79% were last incarcerated three years or less. Half were convicted in Denver County, and the other half were convicted in five nearby counties. Over two-thirds (72%) were not released from prison until they reached their mandatory release date.

Findings from interviews with parolees

- 61% could not or did not take a re-entry or life skills class prior to leaving prison, with the most prevalent reason being that a class was not offered.
- Of those who took a re-entry or life skills class prior to release from prison, 77% found the class "helpful" or "very helpful."
- 8% reported their Interstate Compact transfer application was not submitted by their Department of Corrections case manager on a timely basis.
- 59% reported their Department of Corrections case manager was "not very helpful" or "not helpful" with their development of a parole plan.
- 31% were released homeless because they had no one to parole to in- or out-of-state, but there were eight other reasons why people paroled homeless, underscoring the complexity of the issue.

6 Colorado Department of Corrections. Statistical Report: Fiscal Year 2008. Released June 2009. Page 9. Available online at https://exdoc.state.co.us/secure/combo2.o.o/userfiles/folder_18/StatRpt08final.pdf.

7 *Ibid.* Page 12.

8 Colorado Commission on Criminal and Juvenile Justice 2008 Annual Report. December 2008. Page 44. Available online at <http://cdpsweb.state.co.us/ccjj/2008recommendations.html>.

- 58% had been homeless at least one time before, and 42% were homeless for the first time.
- 90% had been out of prison for six months or less, with about half of this group out a month or less.
- 38% had been homeless for one month or less, and 30% had been homeless from two to three months.
- 72% viewed their parole officer as “somewhat helpful” or “very helpful.”
- 71% were currently unemployed, and 58% had not been employed at all since their release.

Besides finding a job and housing and meeting financial needs and parole requirements, homeless parolees described other needs, including psychological needs:

- accessing mental health treatment
- struggling with a history of substance abuse
- feeling set up to fail or fear of failure
- feeling depressed, humiliated, stressed, and/or overwhelmed

Findings from point-in-time count

On February 25, 2009, there were 211 people on parole in the eight major emergency shelters in Denver, which was 14% of the total number of people in those eight shelters that night.

- 83% of the parolees were in one shelter the night of the point-in-time count. This shelter is the Salvation Army’s Crossroads Overnight Shelter for Men, commonly referred to as Crossroads, located at 1901 29th Street.

- The concentration of homeless parolees in one shelter appears to be a policy decision by the Department of Corrections as well as a consequence of Denver city ordinance 565, adopted by the Denver City Council in 2001.

Findings from interviews with shelter providers

All of the shelters contacted for this report welcomed the opportunity to participate in the interviews.

- Half of the shelters anticipate making no change in the number of parolees they will accept.
- Half of the shelters are interested in housing additional parolees.
- None of the shelters plan on decreasing the number of parolees they accept, but almost all said they would limit the number of parolees to a certain proportion of people in their shelter.
- Several shelters feel under-utilized by the Department of Corrections.
- Not every shelter offers the same range of services for parolees’ needs. Some shelters offer an employment resource center, experienced case management, medical services, life skills and education programs, etc., while others offer fewer or no services.⁹
- Almost half of the shelters report a good relationship with Department of Corrections personnel, but a number of shelters would like to improve the relationship. Good communication was identified as key to the relationship.

⁹ CCJRC was told that Denver city ordinance 565, discussed at length in recommendation #5 at the end of this report, is a cause for this disparity.

Recommendations

The issue of homelessness among parolees is complex, for there is no simple or singular reason why people leave prison homeless. While this report ultimately found no “silver bullet” to address this complex issue, the findings suggest areas where changes in policies and practices may help reduce this number and/or shorten the length of time parolees are homeless.

CCJRC offers eleven recommendations below; each of these is further discussed in the Recommendations section at the end of this report. CCJRC is aware the state presently faces a significant budget shortfall. With that in mind, many of our recommendations focus on strategies that are cost neutral and involve a change in existing practice and/or policy.

1. CCJRC recommends the Department of Corrections identify people at risk of being released homeless prior to their release, preferably as early as possible. This recommendation includes five separate suggestions for actions the Department might take to prevent homelessness once someone is identified as being likely to release homeless.
2. CCJRC recommends the Department of Corrections ensure that community corrections boards are aware when an applicant is homeless, and that community corrections boards give special consideration when it is known the applicant will be homeless upon release.
3. CCJRC recommends the Department of Corrections officially track and report the number of people released homeless, their parole revocation rate, and the filing of escape charges on this population.
4. CCJRC recommends the Department of Corrections discontinue the current practice of concentrating homeless parolees in one shelter and explore partnerships with other shelters in Denver.
5. CCJRC recommends the Denver City Council explore the consequences of ordinance 565, series of 2001, and consider revising the ordinance.
6. CCJRC recommends the Department of Corrections articulate in a written policy the criteria considered by parole officers and supervisors for denial or acceptance of a parole plan and any reconsideration that may be appropriate if the denial of a parole plan results in the homeless release of a parolee.
7. CCJRC recommends area county jails explore the feasibility of developing an alternative step-down transitional program for homeless parolees, such as the Denver Homeless Transition Program, a collaborative pilot project between the Denver County Jail, the Department of Corrections, and the Division of Criminal Justice.
8. CCJRC recommends that metro area counties identify and address the gaps in community-based services and housing for homeless people leaving prison or jail and returning to their counties.
9. CCJRC recommends Denver’s Road Home conduct a survey of the admission policies of housing providers that receive state, federal, or local government funding in Denver, including public housing authorities, nonprofit long-term housing providers, and private landlords involved with Section 8 housing. CCJRC recommends this report be made available to the public.
10. CCJRC recommends the City and County of Denver conduct a review of municipal ordinances and departmental hiring policies and practices, both formal and informal, regarding the employment of people with a criminal conviction.
11. CCJRC recommends the state earmark additional funds to provide vouchers or other forms of financial assistance to indigent parolees for re-entry related expenses, including classes and treatment ordered as a condition of parole. This type of assistance is particularly important during the first few months following release.

Interviews with Homeless Parolees

CCJRC interviewed 48 people on parole from December of 2008 through February of 2009 in seven of the eight Denver shelters listed below.

shelter	# of parolees interviewed
Brandon Center.....	1
Crossroads*	26
Delores Project	3
Denver Rescue Mission.....	3
newgenesis	4
Samaritan House.....	8
Step 13	3
Theodora House**.....	0
total count	48

*The number of parolees interviewed at the Crossroads shelter is disproportionate to the number of people interviewed at the other shelters because of the concentration of parolees at this shelter.

**Theodora House, a shelter for women, was included in this report but it was not possible to interview a parolee the night interviews were scheduled.

Demographic information

Of the 48 people interviewed, 42 were men and 6 were women. The youngest person interviewed was 22 years and the oldest was 61, with an average age of 42 years.

- 42% were in their forties
- 27% were in their thirties
- 21% were in their fifties
- 8% were in their twenties
- 2% were in their sixties

Interviewees self-reported their ethnicity/race as:

- White – 42%
- Black/African American – 38%
- Native American/Alaskan Native – 10%
- Hispanic – 4%
- Biracial – 4%
- Asian/Pacific Islander – 2%

The great majority (84%) were single (includes divorced, separated, and widowed), 8% were married, and 8% were unmarried but in a relationship.

Length of incarceration and time since release

Almost 80% reported their most recent period of incarceration was three years or less. In total,

- 37% were incarcerated for one year or less.
- 23% were incarcerated from one to two years.
- 19% were incarcerated from two to three years.
- 13% were incarcerated from three to five years.
- 8% were incarcerated over five years.

The great majority of parolees (90%) had been out of prison for less than six months. The breakdown for the amount of time since release from incarceration is as follows:

- one month or less – 44%
- two to six months – 46%
- seven to twelve months – 8%
- more than one year – 2%

Length of time homeless

While 90% of the parolees said they had been out of prison for less than six months, 81% said they had been homeless for six months or less. The discrepancy between these two numbers may be because some people were released to a sponsor and then later became homeless.

The breakdown for the time reported homeless is as follows:

- one month or less – 38%
- two to three months – 30%
- four to six months – 13%
- seven to twelve months – 4%
- more than one year – 15% ¹⁰

Parole office, status of release, and county of conviction

Released from 19 different public and private prisons, the 48 parolees report to four parole offices:

- Central Metro Lincoln – 63%
- Sherman – 19%
- Westminster – 14%
- South Metro Englewood – 4%

The majority were not released on discretionary parole by the Colorado Board of Parole.

- 72% of the parolees were released when they reached their mandatory release date.
- 19% were re-released after being incarcerated for a parole violation.
- 9% were released by the parole board on discretionary parole.

Half of the people were convicted in Denver County. The other 50% were convicted in five other area counties. The breakdown by county of conviction is as follows:

- Denver – 50% ¹¹
- Jefferson – 16% ¹²
- Adams – 15%
- Arapahoe – 13%
- Douglas – 4%
- El Paso – 2%

¹⁰ This figure may differ from the 2% who reported they had been out of prison for over a year because several people who cycled in and out of prison and homelessness included prior periods of homelessness in their response to the question about how long they had been homeless.

¹¹ Three of the people in this group were convicted in Denver County and another county (Arapahoe, Douglas, Routt). They were counted as convicted in Denver County.

¹² Two of the people in this group were convicted in Jefferson County and another county (Arapahoe, Adams). They were counted as convicted in Jefferson County.

Preparation for re-entry

A majority (61%) of the homeless parolees did not take a re-entry or life skills class while in prison for the following reasons:

- class was not offered at the prison – 81%
- not interested – 10%
- put on a wait list – 9%

Of those who took a re-entry or life skills class prior to release from prison, 44% said the class was “very helpful” and 33% said the class was “helpful.”

As per Department of Corrections regulation, case managers are tasked with assisting inmates with pre-parole and parole planning.¹³ Some parolees reported case managers who tried to make calls on their behalf, “answered questions,” got IDs, told people about resources, helped with “old warrant paperwork,” etc.

However, a majority (59%) said their case manager was “not very helpful” (10%) or “not helpful” (49%) with the development of their parole plan. Some parolees said their case manager lacked the information or connections necessary to help with this planning, while others said their case manager did not see release planning as part of their job.

Paroling homeless

In the following section, we report on questions that attempted to ascertain the reasons

for people to parole homeless. Was it by choice? Was there no one to parole to? Was the possible parole sponsor rejected by the Department of Corrections? Was an Interstate Compact transfer a possibility?¹⁴ If so, why is this person living in one of Denver’s shelters?

Although a majority of parolees (58%) had been homeless at least one time previously, a significant percent (42%) reported never having been homeless before the current time. The most prominent reason was not having a parole sponsor, but there were a number of other reasons why people were released and living in shelters.

Their reasons break down as follows:

- 31% had no one who could be their parole sponsor, either in- or out-of-state.
- 17% said their first parole plan did not work out and they subsequently became homeless.¹⁵
- 10% cited reasons suggesting communication with case management broke down and the release plan defaulted to a homeless plan.¹⁶
- 10% had their parole plan denied by the Department of Corrections.¹⁷
- 10% wanted to parole to another state via the Interstate Compact.¹⁸
- 6% did not want to burden their family/take a handout from family.

¹³ Colorado Department of Corrections. Administrative Regulation 550-08. Effective date October 15, 2008. Available online at <https://exdoc.state.co.us/secure/comboweb/weblets/index.php/regulations/home>.

¹⁴ The Interstate Compact for Adult Offender Supervision is an agreement signed by almost all of the states. It allows the transfer of people under criminal justice supervision to another state if both states agree to the transfer.

¹⁵ Three people were released to a sponsor but returned to the shelter after conflicts with the sponsor or the sponsor became worried about the parolee. Two people were directly released to transitional housing with a private landlord, but both struggled with substance abuse and ultimately needed a more structured environment. One person was paroled to his parents who lived in elderly housing with a 30-day limit on guests. One person was removed from the FOREST program. One person said his parole officer said he had not had time to check out the house he owned.

¹⁶ One person said his case manager called his potential sponsor two times, and since the case manager could not reach his family he decided to parole homeless. One person said he could not get his parole sponsor “lined up in time.” One person said nothing was done to get him back into Mental Health Center of Denver housing. One person did not know how to do a release plan. One person said his case manager would not submit his friend as a potential sponsor due to a 20-year-old prior drug conviction.

¹⁷ One person whose plan was denied had an employer from his previous job who vouched for his job and agreed to arrange an apartment for him, as well as a parole officer in his county who would oversee him on his caseload. One person said his parole officer told him his mother’s house was not an option. One person said no reason for the denial was given and his mother said the parole office never contacted her. Two people had their plan denied due to the potential sponsor’s criminal record.

¹⁸ Four people said their Interstate Compact application had not been submitted by their Department of Corrections case manager on a timely basis. Of these four, two were then told by their parole officer to remain homeless for a period of time before the parole officer would submit the paperwork. One person was declined by the receiving state.

- 6% could not parole to a potential sponsor because of a sex offense conviction.
- 6% wanted to parole homeless to Denver because the city has resources.
- 2% thought family would be a negative influence.

Of the 58% who had been homeless at least one other time, their reasons for being homeless the previous time include, by order of occurrence:

- drugs/substance abuse
- no sponsor/family problems/family rejection
- released from incarceration
- choice (fun, freedom, starting over, being alone)
- could not find a place to live (lack of money, nature of offense)

Transitional housing opportunities

When asked whether they tried to get into a community-based transitional housing facility such as Charity's House Ministries, Champa House, Matthews Center for Excellence, etc., instead of paroling homeless, 75% said they did not. The reasons why they did not include:

- 55% did not know about the facilities.
- 17% did not want to live in one of these facilities.
- 14% did not have the money.
- 14% cited miscellaneous reasons.¹⁹

Of the 25% who knew about transitional housing opportunities, accessing the programs was problematic for reasons that included lacking the funds to pay or not being admitted due to the nature of their charge (conviction for a violent or sex offense).

Assistance

Over 78% received some type of help (other than housing) since their release, usually from the re-entry specialists with the John C. Inmann Work and Family Center.²⁰ The Work and Family Center is a Department of Corrections re-entry effort to connect people on parole with employment and community resources and services. The types of assistance parolees said they received included a backpack with hygiene items, winter coat, clothing voucher, and/or bus tokens.²¹

Over half (56%) reported that the John C. Inmann Work and Family Center or their parole officer provided their shelter with a monetary voucher. Interviewees reported they received vouchers for two, three, or four weeks, and several people reported receiving vouchers for a longer period of time.

Helpfulness of parole officers

The great majority of the parolees (72%) said their parole officer was either "somewhat helpful" (30%) or "very helpful" (42%). When asked to explain how their parole officer was helpful, their comments fell into several categories:

- referred parolee to the John C. Inmann Work and Family Center
- seemed fair
- seen as understanding the parolee's struggle with substance abuse
- helped with resources
- gave parolee the benefit of the doubt
- explained everything
- offered job referrals and bus tokens

Parolees who ranked their parole officer as "not very helpful" or "not helpful" said the parole officer:

- had not helped with resources or information about resources
- was not understanding
- was threatening

¹⁹ For example, one person in this group said his parole officer would not let him transfer to Charity's House or Samaritan House and would not let him move out of his current shelter until he had a job. Another person in this category said his case manager in prison erroneously told him the Matthews Center would not accept people with a felony conviction.

²⁰ The main office for re-entry specialists is at 877 N. Federal Boulevard in Denver. Additional office locations are in Pueblo, Colorado Springs, Grand Junction, Westminster, and Greeley.

²¹ Not everyone received all of these resources, but several reported receiving a combination. The resource that most people said they needed more was bus tokens. Several larger men also described having difficulty finding clothing that would fit.

Employment

The majority of homeless parolees (71%) were currently unemployed. Over half (58%) had not been employed at all since their release from prison.

Most of the 29% who were employed said they found their jobs through temporary employment agencies or day labor. Most of their wages were under \$8 an hour.²² None of the people employed by a temporary agency or day labor had benefits. Several other parolees were employed “off the books” doing odd jobs for friends, and two worked for a former employer for hourly wages of \$14 and \$20, respectively, plus benefits. Only three people in this group had found full-time employment.

Of those who received wages, their earnings averaged \$440 a month.²³ Three people received public assistance.²⁴

Parole-related expenses

The parole office pays for required urinalysis/breath analyses (UA/BA) for people on ISP-parole (intensive supervised program).²⁵ About two-thirds of the people interviewed indicated they were on ISP-parole. Of the parolees who did not indicate they were on ISP, half said they had to pay for a urinalysis or breath analysis one to four times a month for a reported fee ranging from \$12 to \$18 each.²⁶

Every person on parole is required to pay a monthly \$10 fee to support the Department’s integrated parole database and communication system known as C-WISE (Colorado Web-based Integrated Support Environment). Parole officers apparently have some discretion with the C-WISE fee since 12% of the parolees said their fee had

been waived until a future date. Another 12% said they were behind in their C-WISE payments, one person by as much as \$100.

Parolees are often required to take classes and/or be in treatment as a condition of parole. These required classes may also be an expense. In limited circumstances, this expense may be covered by a parole office or by a TASC office.²⁷ For example, if a parolee is a TASC client and has been ordered to attend drug and alcohol classes, TASC usually pays for these required classes if the individual is homeless and/or unemployed, at least for some period of time. Funding permitted, parole offices may pay for some mental health classes. However, not all required classes are subsidized. For example, one person said his parole officer is providing a voucher for three out of every four or five therapy classes. One person said he had to pay \$45 four times a month for required mental health classes. A third person said his parole officer would pay for his first five required sex offense denial classes

Paying restitution is another parole-related expense for most people convicted of a crime.

Of the parolees interviewed:

- 52% were not yet paying toward their restitution debt (usually because their parole officer was flexible with the start date of making restitution payments and working with their employment situation).
- 29% had restitution payments that ranged from under \$20 to \$388 a month.²⁸
- 19% said they did not owe restitution.

22 One woman said her employer paid her \$2.34 for each room she cleaned in a motel, so she had to clean three rooms in an hour to earn a minimum wage salary.

23 While this amount seems very low, it is actually skewed high by two people who earned \$1400 and \$1200 a month. Excluding these two people, the average income was less than \$300 a month.

24 Two people received a monthly income of \$207 and \$230 from Aid to Needy and Disabled (AND), which is short-term financial assistance for people waiting for approval of their Supplemental Security Income (SSI) application. One received \$730 monthly income from SSI.

25 ISP-parole is an additional condition of parole set by a parole board member. It is ordered for people deemed to be at a higher risk and in need of closer supervision. Part of this supervision usually includes electronic monitoring (e.g., ankle monitor).

26 Since several of the people in this group also report making no income during the previous month, their source of income to pay for this cost is unclear. It is also possible the interview did not uncover their ISP status since the questionnaire did not ask this particular question. ISP status was volunteered by interviewees when asked about parole-related expenses.

27 Treatment Accountability for Safer Communities (TASC) has a contract with the DOC to help people on parole with a history of substance abuse with services and case management.

28 The payment details of this group are uncertain. For example, one person reported making \$100 during the previous month and owing \$330 a month in restitution (which he had not paid). Another reported receiving \$730 a month on disability but being told he need to pay \$388 a month in restitution. Two people said their parole officer determined the amount of their restitution payment (\$240 and \$299 respectively) by dividing the amount of restitution they owed by the amount of time left on parole.

Homeless and on parole: in their own words

People were asked about the general experience of being homeless and on parole. These comments fell into a number of general categories.

A significant number of people commented about their frustration trying to meet all of the conditions of parole.

- It's hard on parole. I can't move around. I got classes, UAs [urinalysis] reporting, call in every morning. I can't go out all day to look for a job. I have to call in.
- [It's] frustrating. For someone who had a place to live, bank account, car...and then to have nothing. And then you can't get a job after you're out. And you have to schedule everything around parole.
- It's hard because you still have to struggle with the system or your PO [parole officer] will say you're a failure and put you back in prison.... It takes one and a half hours one way to drop a BA or UA [breath analysis, urinalysis], two times a week. [Many people on parole rely on public transportation.]
- You have a lot of demands to meet which is okay, but I think the parole could give more assistance the way they deal with people. They don't treat you in a fair way.
- The first day they slammed me. There's too many things to do – the programs, the rules... It's overwhelming.
- I want to violate my parole and go back to prison to finish my sentence, day for day...Maturely, I understand it's been barely a month.
- On parole, some of the stuff they want you to do is ridiculous—report every week, meetings every week. How do they expect you to get a job and do everything, especially when they have you on a curfew? It's like doing your sentence all over again. And trying to get health care? ID card?

Finding a job and housing are two of the major barriers for people coming out of prison.

- It's hard. Before I went to prison it wasn't like this. Now it's hard to get an apartment, get a job once they find out you're on parole.

- It's a lot of stress — not having a place to live. You're worried about finding a job, being on the streets when you have to leave here [the shelter].
- It's hard. You have the worry of keeping everybody happy with parole but you have to find a job and housing. Finding housing the PO [parole officer] will approve. I can find housing but my PO won't approve....Parole requirements are difficult. It took two weeks to get permission to answer the pager with my cell phone from a construction sight. The TASC person says you have to take these classes. You have to. It's not that easy to find an employer to work with you. When you work with a crew of people, the other people have to pick up your slack. I don't have approval to drive. I have to get approval for everything.

Several people spoke of their fear of failing and returning to prison, while others felt as if they had been set up by the criminal justice system to fail.

- I want to succeed, but I've lost hope in the last few weeks. There are just so many insurmountable barriers that you just get hopeless. Overwhelmed. I asked to go to newgenesis but I was told no. I got out with nothing. My family is sick and can't send money. I have to get clothes, bus passes, ID, all this and now a job while having to be in the shelter at a certain time. It's too much expected in a short period of time.
- [It] sucks. [I'm] broke. Nobody wants to help. Every door you go to gets shut. You feel like you're getting set up for failure. Crossroads is a set-up for failure.
- [It's] frustrating. I'm finding out I'm stronger than I thought I was. It feels like parole doesn't care. I'm set up to fail. They don't train us. We're not set up to be reintegrated. The women don't get the reintegration [services offered men]. Nor are families and sponsors told what to expect. Part of me says it would have been a heck of a lot easier to kill my number.
- It's humbling. It's set up to fail. The shelter has become a halfway house....You got a 7:00 curfew and taking the bus everywhere. Job choices are limited.

Some people talked about feeling humiliated by their circumstances, and a couple of interviewees openly discussed having difficulty managing their mental health.

- It's very depressing to say the least. I'm bipolar too and heavily depressed. That makes the burden intensified. I have thoughts. Why am I doing this when I'm not getting anywhere?
- [It's] humiliating. The way people look at you. It's ruined me. Breaks your spirit, your heart. Most mornings I don't want to wake up anymore. I've had two heart attacks. I wish one of them had killed me.
- It hasn't been nice. I'm so used to providing for myself that being homeless I have to ask people to take care of me and I don't like that.

Several people who struggle with substance abuse felt as if their problem was exacerbated by their environment, although in one case the situation was the opposite.

- You're not supposed to associate with felons or be around drug activity but you're forced into that exact activity. The PO [parole officer] demands it by putting my sobriety in jeopardy daily [by telling him he had to stay at this particular shelter].
- Drug and alcohol use was a big contributor to my cycling four times in and out of incarceration and my homelessness. Each time you come out you're at more of a disadvantage. You have a lot of hoops to jump through to appease parole and the shelter. Those two entities don't always work together.
- If I hadn't landed here in Step 13 I would be back in prison. I was sinking. The relapse switch was on and I couldn't get it turned off. I was making good money and already in that mode.
- The first time it was real hard in Crossroads because of the drinking and drugging and you had to leave early in the morning. You sit all day in a day shelter with a bunch of drug people. Here in Samaritan House you can stay here during the day.
- My PO [parole officer] knows I have prior drug problems and told me to stay away from the back fence. This feels like a test or set-up.

Meeting the challenges of re-entering society after incarceration may be very stressful for some people.

- If I wasn't poor I would leave. It's stressful. The environment. Parole has done anything they can do to me.
 - It's stressful, especially when you're on parole. Your PO [parole officer] tells you to do stuff but you forget. I need to get back on my meds. I'm going to go to Stout Street.
 - [It's] crazy. It's been hard and stressful. I've never been through this before.
 - I don't like it. It's hard mentally. I just want to go home.
 - It's the first time for both. It's been kind of a struggle but I've learned what I need to do. I don't like it here [the shelter] but you got to deal with it.
 - [It's] very stressful. Just a new experience.
 - It's pretty rough. It's hard. I don't think I'm equipped like some people are when it comes to life skills. Having to do all this by myself—trying to get a place to live. I'm getting the runaround. Every place I go to they tell me to go to another place.
- A final group of comments demonstrate the perspective some people have gained while living in a shelter.*
- It's a humbling experience....I don't have it that bad. I have to call in the morning and go to my classes. My employer is flexible with my classes.
 - [It's] not bad. I see other people a lot worse than I am. Doing drugs and stuff. I'm doing okay. I just made an effort to be a team leader.
 - Being homeless taught me my parents were right. Being on parole taught me I couldn't always take things in my own hands.
 - It's challenging sometimes. I'm not on ISP [intensive supervision program] so everything is pretty easy for me.
 - [It's] lovely. I have a place to put my head. I have no curfew but I set one for myself. My PO [parole officer] knows where I am. I have a 24-hour contact with him. I can leave messages. He can leave messages. If I do good, he's going to shorten my length of parole.
 - I have gained a lot of respect for the homeless. This is a rut I don't want to stay in. Some of the homeless are in this rut and falling into this is one of my biggest fears.

Biggest challenge being homeless and on parole

The survey's final qualitative question asked parolees to identify the biggest challenge they had experienced while homeless and on parole. Their responses once again fell (albeit not always neatly) into several categories.

For a significant number of people, finding a job and/or meeting their financial responsibilities posed their biggest challenge.

- I think about my financial responsibilities one hundred times a day. I need an ID. I want to get on it.
- Not being able to provide because of work and a curfew. I don't blame the system. I blame myself. I've had opportunities before.
- Trying to get a job and get on my feet.
- Making rent.
- Finances. Getting a job.
- Finding and maintaining steady employment.
- Employment. Housing. Couple of times I've been told they wouldn't hire felons straight up. Other times it's felt like the interview ended when I told them I had a felony.
- Maintaining a level of hygiene that's suitable to my level of employment. That's why I'm not working at Brown Palace or the Hyatt. (He's a chef.)
- Trying to get a job with my felony conviction. And trying to keep my health in one piece.
- Looking for a job and having to do everything parole tells you to do. Worried that you're going to fail parole. I don't want to go back again.
- My PO [parole officer] is telling me to get a job and work and pay off my C-WISE and fines. But if I get a job I won't get Social Security. It's a catch-22. If I don't pay off DOC they're going to violate me, but I'm waiting to hear about SSDI [Social Security Disability Insurance]. The doctors in Fremont [a correctional facility] told me to apply for SSDI.

Some people identified living in their shelter, or the condition of being homeless while meeting other responsibilities, as their biggest challenge.

- In weather like this [snowy/cold] it's hard to get up in the morning and get out. I have gunshot wounds in both legs.

- Being homeless here—the disrespect here in Crossroads. They [the other men] steal from you. It gets to be frustrating. A lot of the guys here don't stay clean. They don't show respect.
- Trying to get my life back together. Trying to get a place to stay.
- I'm scared. I hate to come back here [the shelter]. My biggest fear is getting tired one day and not coming back here.
- To keep from putting my hands on somebody and going back. This environment is pretty disrespectful.
- Coming to Crossroads every night.
- Surviving and dealing with ruffraff rude people, trying to get in touch with family, having doors slammed in your face because of you being you.
- Things are just a little harder. Getting housing is harder. Being homeless is not comfortable anyway. I'm thankful for this place [the shelter].
- Being here at Crossroads. But a lot of that is due to the drug infestation and trying to stay sober.
- I'm having trouble finding places to go. You're out at 5:30 am and most places don't open until eight. You're walking around in the cold.

Other people felt their biggest challenge was feeling overwhelmed by the combination of factors they were dealing with.

- The first week you get out you're scared and confused. You know when you take a cat out and dump it off? That's what you feel like. You're scared.
- Not having any solutions to anything. No doors open to people. The way people treat you. I shave. I shower every day. Still, people look at you like you're a bucket of slime. I used to be a strong person. That's all gone.
- I'm not stable. I self-destruct. I like to wake up on my own, eat my breakfast, step out the door when I'm ready. I'm not a street runner. Here I've got to go outside.
- Underneath everything is incredible grief and sorrow with imprisonment and subsequent loss. I've had a lifetime of defeat and failure. Suffered a lot of abuse as a child.
- By putting all these things on you, it makes you want to say screw you.
- [My biggest challenge is] not killing myself.

Some people who struggle with substance abuse identify this struggle as their primary challenge of re-entry.

- The hardest is staying away from drugs and alcohol because there are times I want to have a drink and do a hit but I don't want to go back to DOC.
- Staying free and not going back to prison. Working. I like working. Leaving the drugs.
- Not to violate my parole and keep my sobriety out here.
- The unknown. I don't know what the hell is going to happen. I might relapse...get frustrated and give up. Other than a place to sleep, some clothes, food, I got nothing.
- Not smoking weed.

- Staying clean, but I've been doing it. I go to drug groups through the parole office, and...it takes a village.

And finally, some people who struggle with mental illness identified this as their biggest challenge.

- I'm bipolar. I get guinea pig meds from Stout Street. [I'm] staying off depression while dealing with the daily stress of parole and starting over.
- Managing medical needs while homeless. I can't find the mental health services I need. I'm getting the meds but I'm not getting counseling and therapy.
- Functioning straight and not having my meds. Bipolar swings are hard. Sometimes I'm motivated to do stuff and sometimes I'm not.

Point-in-Time Count

On Wednesday, February 25, 2009, a CCJRC staff member conducted a count of people in eight shelters that night, including a count of the number of people known to be on parole.²⁹

The shelters housed a total of 1,499 people,

either in the shelters' program beds or on overflow mats. Of this number, 211 (201 men and 10 women) were known to be on parole. This indicates that at least 14% of the people in eight major shelters in Denver that particular night were on parole. A list of the count by individual shelter follows.

shelter	count	parolee count	% on parole in shelter
Brandon Center (women)	54	0	0%
Crossroads (men)	327	175	54%
Delores Project (women)	45	5	11%
Denver Rescue Mission (men & women)	580	4	1%
newgenesis (men)	120	10	8%
Samaritan House (men & women)	269	14	5%
Step 13 (men)	75	2	3%
Theodora House (women)	29	1	3%

Number of people in the shelters, including the number of people on parole, from a point-in-time count of eight shelters conducted on February 25, 2009.

total count	total parolee count	
1,499	211	14%

²⁹ The count was provided by the staff of the shelters except for the overflow beds at Denver Rescue Mission and Samaritan House. At both Samaritan House and Denver Rescue Mission, CCJRC staff asked people in the overflow line or overflow beds to self-identify whether they were on parole. The program managers at both shelters questioned the lack of positive response, so the count of people on parole for these two shelters may be low. Because it was difficult to count the number of people on parole allowed upstairs in Denver Rescue Mission the night of the 25th, CCJRC staff returned two nights later for another count. The count did not change, although a staff member said he estimated that around 5% of the 314 people at Denver Rescue Mission's overflow and New Life Program (est. 16 people) were on parole.

Interviews with Shelter Staff

The third part of CCJRC's homeless parolee survey involved personal interviews with program directors, coordinators, and project managers in eight of Denver's major emergency shelters.

During the interviews, CCJRC tried to reach a better understanding about the following:

- whether the shelter anticipated any change with accepting people on parole
- whether the shelter had seen a change in the number of people on parole who needed its services
- the needs of people on parole and whether/how this impacted the shelter
- whether the staff felt the shelter was able to meet the needs of people on parole
- the shelter's relationship with Department of Corrections parole officers/re-entry specialists

Change in accepting parolees

None of the shelters planned on decreasing the number of parolees accepted by the shelter, and half did not anticipate making any change in their acceptance or management of people on parole.³⁰ Half of the shelters want to accept more people on parole and collaborate to a greater extent with the Department of Corrections with this population. One staff member said his shelter is "looking for a way to be more involved with re-entry for the first 60 days and stabilizing their lives as they come out of prison." Another said his shelter "hopes to house more people coming out of prison." A third reported having both the capacity and interest in housing more parolees.

Most have experienced increase in parolees

Five of the eight shelter providers reported a steady increase in parolees using their shelters.

One shelter reported seeing "more people [on parole] than ever before." Another shelter experienced a 20% increase in parolees from September 2007 to September 2008. Two shelters reported no change in the use of their shelter by parolees. One shelter reported a dramatic decrease in the number of parolees at the shelter.

Needs of parolees/impact upon shelters

Shelter staff identified many of the same needs listed by the parolees during their interviews, and then some. Besides the basic needs of food, shelter, clothing, showers, hygiene items, etc., staff members identified:

- access to training and education, including General Education Development (GED)
- message and job boards
- information/help accessing information
- medical needs/health resources
- state driver's license or identification card, Social Security card, birth certificate
- phones
- meeting the requirements of Social Services if parolees have children
- case management/strong orientation
- curfews that do not conflict with their jobs

When asked to identify the most pressing need presented by homeless parolees, shelter staff responded with needs that fell into two categories. The first category was more concrete:

- employment/aggressive job referrals and support with the job search
- transportation
- affordable transitional or permanent housing
- meeting the time requirements of parole/being counted so they don't get in trouble with parole
- structure/stability

³⁰ At the time of the interviews in early 2009, none of the shelters planned on decreasing the number of parolees it would accept. On July 29, 2009, Denver Salvation Army announced it would close Crossroads and focus resources on expanding its transitional housing program. <http://www.thedenverchannel.com/news/20217855/detail.html>.

The second category of pressing need indicated the fragility of this population:

- “an opportunity to get themselves together”
- being treated with care by the community
- being able to discuss their problems

Staff members from seven of the eight shelters said that having people on parole in their shelter had no impact or had a positive impact upon the shelter. One shelter’s staff member explained, “There’s no negative aspect at all. There’s no difference between parolees and the other people in the shelter. Actually, they’re a lot more disciplined and cordial because they’re under supervision.” Another staff person said: “Typically parolees are much more motivated to work our program as a condition of their parole. At the same time, many have difficulty adjusting to the freedoms our program offers.”

Almost every shelter would limit the number of parolees to a certain proportion of people in the shelter. Several staff explained this limit was “due to the possibility of a change in culture.” One woman’s shelter had noticed a “fear factor with the other women in the shelter and staff” and a “prison mentality” with larger numbers, but “with a smaller number, they integrate better into the milieu.”

Ability of shelters to meet parolees’ needs

Some shelters provided a variety of services for parolees’ needs. For example, one shelter provided “group counseling, orientation, substance abuse class, an employment program, and transitional housing,” while another had “on-site medical, psychiatric and psychology services, along with a residential outpatient treatment program for co-occurring disorders.” Yet another shelter provided “case management to every resident, as well as referrals to local resources such as Workforce Development, medical resources, and housing resources.”

Shelter staff also spoke of the gaps in their

services. One staff member said, “We could use case managers. I feel we could do so much more if we had funding for someone to help people understand the system.” Another staff member acknowledged that “staff could use more education on how to interface in a supportive way and have a greater understanding of what they’re dealing with.” Yet a third said, “We can help with day labor but we don’t have the resources to help with job placement.” One person mentioned a gap in community resources and described being able to connect people with community resources but also struggling with “limited” community resources. Another program manager described a different sort of resource gap: “somewhere to connect with people around something positive.”

The shelter where the majority of parolees lived does not offer as many resources as some of the other major shelters in Denver. Crossroads provides beds/mats, meals, showers, job and message boards, and religious speakers. The shelter can not offer supportive services and programs, according to a Crossroads spokesperson, because of a Denver city ordinance.³⁷ In order to remain outside of the ordinance’s requirements for shelters that house people convicted of certain crimes, Crossroads can not offer services and programs. “We stepped up when 565 affected all the other shelters,” a spokesperson said. It is important that the city’s policymakers understand this dilemma. If Crossroads had not “stepped up,” the city and county of Denver would have had no emergency shelter to house homeless parolees convicted of certain offenses, including specific sex offenses and violent offenses. The Salvation Army has recently announced the closing of Crossroads as an emergency shelter.

Relationship between shelters and parole officers/re-entry personnel

Three shelters reported a good relationship between parole officers/re-entry staff and shelter personnel, with communication seen

³¹ Ordinance 565 is further explained in recommendation #5.

as the key to improving and/or maintaining that relationship. For example, one shelter characterized the relationship as “friendly, and the two [parole officers] I have interacted with communicate frequently and seem on top of supervising their parolees.” Another program manager reported the shelter’s case manager had a “very good relationship” with parole officers. Another shelter reported a “very good” relationship and a “weekly team meeting with a representative from Work and Family Center.”

Several shelters expressed a desire for improved communication with parole staff. One staff member reported the relationship is “getting better because of the meetings we’ve had.” He added, “But really it’s nonexistent. There’s really no communication. We don’t understand what they’re trying to achieve. No one knows what anyone else is doing.” Another shelter reported “very limited contact with parole officers and the DOC [Department of Corrections],” while another “would like to improve it.” One manager, who expressed a desire to have additional people on parole in his program, said he wanted

“more communication between the DOC and the community. If we could come together as a group, we could save our community a lot of money.” He observed of the revolving door of recidivism: “Every time we have a parolee go through the cycle, you lose a little more help.”

Staff from several shelters described how a parole officer’s actions may present a conflict to shelter personnel and their responsibility for everyone in their shelter. For example, one person said some parole officers want to come into the dining room “to look for their parolee,” but the shelter staff saw this action as “a breach of privacy for the other women” in the shelter. One case manager said his relationship was “getting better,” but he “had clashes in the past with POs [parole officers] coming in thinking they have the run of the place.” He described parole officers coming into the shelter “saying they’re going to personally check the dorm.” He continued, “We don’t let them do that. The last thing we want is for someone with a gun walking through the dorm looking for someone.”

Recommendations

The issue of people exiting Colorado's prisons homeless is complex, and this report ultimately found no one explanation. However, the findings from the report's interviews, point-in-time count, and interviews with the emergency shelter staff suggest areas where changes in policies and practices may help reduce this number and/or shorten the length of time parolees are homeless.

1. **CCJRC recommends the Department of Corrections identify people at risk of being released homeless prior to their release, preferably as early as possible.**

Early identification allows for greater time to plan and explore options for those at risk of being released homeless. Actions on the part of the Department that may prevent or reduce homelessness include:

- *Encourage applications to community corrections for people at risk of being released homeless while on parole and ensure that case managers re-refer people with homeless release plans 12 to 14 months from their mandatory release date. Halfway houses may be a viable alternative for some people who would otherwise be released homeless. In 2008, the Colorado Commission on Criminal and Juvenile Justice recommended the Department: "Encourage the use of discretionary parole to community corrections in lieu of homeless parole plans to provide a stable living situation prior to the offender's mandatory parole plan (MRD). Six to eight months prior to the MRD, a case manager should submit an application to community corrections for individuals who are likely to parole homeless."³²*

The Department recently revised the administrative regulation that governs community corrections referral and placement to include: "At the discretion of the case manager, an offender may be re-referred to community corrections if: 1) the offender is 14 months prior to their estimated MRD [mandatory release date]; 2) the offender continues to be eligible by displaying acceptable institutional behavior."³³ In order to ensure that people who are most likely to parole homeless have another chance to be accepted into a community corrections facility, CCJRC recommends this administrative regulation be revised to *require* case managers to re-refer people to community corrections if they have a homeless release plan 12 to 14 months prior to their mandatory release date.

- *Encourage people in prison who will be homeless after release to apply for community-based transitional housing opportunities prior to their release. This step involves educating prisoners and Department of Corrections staff about the alternatives to releasing homeless, such as community-based transition programs (Charity's House Ministries, Matthews Center for Excellence, Denver Rescue Mission's Champa House and New Life Program, etc.). The survey results indicate that 55% of homeless parolees did not know about these programs.*
- *Encourage the timely submission of Interstate Compact transfer applications by Department of Corrections case managers prior to release. Timely submission of Interstate Compact applications by case managers is currently in a Department of Corrections administrative regulation.³⁴ However, this report's findings suggest that several*

³² Colorado Commission on Criminal and Juvenile Justice 2008 Annual Report. December 2008. Page 36. Available online at <http://cdpsweb.state.co.us/ccj/2008recommendations.html>. In its "Response to the Colorado Commission on Criminal and Juvenile Justice 2008 Re-Entry Recommendations," released in May 2009, the Department responded that it "does not identify Offenders in the information system as homeless and there is concern by the various homeless commissions regarding stereotyping people as homeless." CCJRC disagrees that identifying people at risk of homelessness is stereotyping and believes that early identification of homelessness is comparable to other identifiable release-specific needs, such as medical needs, and encourages the Department to implement this Commission recommendation.

³³ Department of Corrections. Administrative Regulation 250-03 (IV) (B) (8). Effective date May 15, 2009. Available online at <https://exdoc.state.co.us/secure/comboweb/weblets/index.php/regulations/home>.

³⁴ "For discretionary release offenders, the [transfer application] packet will be submitted when the offender has been placed on tabled status by the Parole Board. For mandatory release cases, the packet will be submitted within 120 days prior to the offender's scheduled Parole Board review." Colorado Department of Corrections. Administrative Regulation 1300-01(IV) (B) (1). Effective Date January 15, 2009.

parolees living in Denver's shelters did not have their applications submitted in a timely manner. Parole officers should also be encouraged to submit Interstate Compact transfer applications on a timely basis. This report's findings included several people who had been instructed by their parole officer to live in the shelter for a period of time before the parole officer would submit the Interstate Compact transfer application.³⁵ This personal practice by some parole officers is not required by the governing administrative regulation.

- *Prioritize eligibility into the Department's Pre-Release Program for people who are at risk of being homeless upon release.* The Department of Corrections has made a significant effort to improve its re-entry preparation efforts with its recently introduced Pre-Release Program, a re-entry curriculum currently offered in 19 facilities. The Pre-Release Program provides a continuum of services from the facility to the community through the development of a transitional action plan that includes identification, housing, employment, transportation, etc. However, since the capacity of this program is roughly 2,000 people a year³⁶ and the Department of Corrections currently releases over 10,500 people a year,³⁷ the majority of people released will not receive these services. People at risk of releasing homeless could be prioritized to receive the more intensive planning and assistance available through the Pre-Release Program.

- *Encourage people at risk of releasing homeless to fully explore every potential parole sponsor.* People at risk of releasing homeless may need to be coached through release planning to fully explore every parole sponsor option they may have. In some cases, relationships with families and friends are strained and/or damaged. People in prison have the responsibility of maintaining these relationships and may benefit from assistance with this complex area, either through coaching or prison programs. Prisoners may also need to be educated about the difficulties of being on parole in a homeless shelter.

2. ***CCJRC recommends the Department of Corrections ensure that community corrections boards are aware when an applicant is homeless, and that community corrections boards give special consideration when it is known the applicant will be homeless upon release.***

The DOC referral packet usually, but not always, includes information that a particular applicant is likely to be released homeless. It is not clear whether the community corrections boards or providers place any particular weight upon that factor. CCJRC is not making a blanket recommendation regarding the boards' acceptance policies. Acceptance into a community corrections facility by both the board and the provider is a complicated decision-making process. *However, CCJRC recommends the Department ensure that community corrections boards are aware that an applicant is homeless, and that the boards give special consideration when it is known an applicant will be homeless upon release.*

³⁵ "The CPO [community parole officer], upon determining the parolee's eligibility to transfer under the Interstate Compact Agreement shall submit the 'Transfer Investigation Request' to their immediate supervisor listed in ICOTS [Interstate Compact Offender Tracking System]. The supervisor shall look over the request and either send back to the CPO for modification or submit to the Colorado Interstate Compact Office for approval." Colorado Department of Corrections. Administrative Regulation 1300-01(IV)(D)(1). Effective Date January 15, 2009.

³⁶ Office of State Planning and Budgeting. Governor Ritter's FY 2009-10 Crime Prevention and Recidivism Reduction Package Fact Sheet. November 2008. Page 3.

³⁷ Colorado Department of Corrections. Statistical Report: Fiscal Year 2008. Released June 2009. Page 22. Available online at https://exdoc.state.co.us/secure/combo2.0.0/userfiles/folder_18/StatRpt08final.pdf.

3. In order to allow for a more comprehensive analysis, CCJRC recommends the Department of Corrections officially track and report the number of people released homeless, their parole revocation rate, and the filing of escape charges on this population.

As previously explained, the Department of Corrections does not appear to formally track the specific number of people released homeless, either on parole or if they discharge without further supervision. In order to allow for more comprehensive analysis and planning by the Department, policymakers, and service providers, CCJRC recommends the Department of Corrections specifically track the number of parolees released homeless and the names of the emergency shelters/ shelter programs and temporary housing facilities/ boarding houses to which they are released.

In addition to tracking information about parolees released homeless, CCJRC also recommends the Department track the rate of revocation (both for new crimes and technical violations) for this population in order to better determine whether homeless parolees have a higher rate of revocation. If there is a substantial difference, this information could prove beneficial to parole offices and service providers in the community. Parole revocations for technical violations constitute a substantial percent of admissions to the Department of Corrections. In fiscal year 2008, 30% of the 11,038 total admissions were returned to prison on a parole revocation for a technical violation.³⁸ With better outcomes for the parolee population, including homeless parolees, the savings for the state could be significant.

Tracking data about escape convictions may also be beneficial to the state. About two-thirds of the parolees interviewed indicated they were supervised under the intensive supervision program (ISP). If the whereabouts of a parolee on ISP can not be determined by his/her parole officer or if a

parolee on ISP changes residence without permission from his/her parole officer, that parolee may face an escape charge, a felony with a mandatory sentence that must be served consecutively. (Parolees who are not on ISP status face an “absconding” violation if their whereabouts are unknown, which is a parole violation versus a new charge.)

CCJRC also recommends the Department track the number of homeless parolees who are subsequently convicted of escape. The Department releases information about prison admissions by offense, and escape is the fifth highest nonviolent category (384 people during fiscal year 2008).³⁹ A significant number of homeless parolees may be on ISP status, and a “walkaway” from a shelter may lead to the more serious charge of escape rather than absconding. This information could help determine whether there is a higher rate of escape by homeless parolees on ISP as compared with other parolees on ISP. And again, any reduction in escape convictions would result in significant savings to the state.

Finally, CCJRC recommends the Department publicly report the number of people released homeless, their revocation rate for technical violations, and the filing of escape charges on this population. Educating a wider audience could promote increased understanding about this population and collaboration between agencies.

4. CCJRC recommends the Department of Corrections discontinue the current practice of concentrating homeless parolees in one shelter and explore partnerships with other shelters in Denver.

The point-in-time count established that 83% of the parolees staying in the eight major emergency shelters in Denver were concentrated in one of these shelters the night of February 25, 2009. Of the eight shelters, that particular shelter also had the highest proportion of parolees to its general population: 54% compared to the next highest

³⁸ Colorado Department of Corrections. Statistical Report: Fiscal Year 2008. Released June 2009. Page 12. Available online at https://exdoc.state.co.us/secure/combo2.0.0/userfiles/folder_18/StatRpt08final.pdf.

³⁹ Ibid. Page 15.

concentration of 11%. CCJRC finds the concentration of parolees troubling in and of itself, but this is compounded by the fact that this shelter lacks many of the services and programs (which if offered would violate city ordinance 565) available from other shelters. CCJRC also finds it of concern that a significant number of parolees spoke negatively about this shelter and voiced concerns about their risk of relapse due to the availability of drugs and alcohol at or near the shelter.

The concentration of parolees appears, in part, to be a policy decision by the Department of Corrections.⁴⁰ Thus, CCJRC recommends the Department of Corrections explore partnering with other shelters to house parolees.⁴¹ Half of the shelters involved in this survey indicated their interest in such a partnership, especially if they would receive a monetary voucher. These shelters offer a number of services to people accepted by their programs. However, these shelters also indicated they would limit the number of parolees to a certain proportion of their shelter's homeless population since they believed that a high density of parolees sometimes recreated the prison culture.

5. CCJRC recommends the Denver City Council explore the consequences of ordinance 565, series of 2001, and consider revising the ordinance.

Ordinance 565, adopted by the Denver City Council in 2001 to amend chapter 26 in Denver's

Revised Municipal Code, may partially explain the concentration of parolees in one shelter. The ordinance requires a nongovernmental residential facility⁴² in Denver that provides "lodging along with supervision or treatment for one or more offenders" convicted of certain crimes⁴³ and currently under supervision (e.g., parole) for that crime to also meet a number of requirements, including specific staffing. Because these requirements were onerous or cost prohibitive for a number of shelters, boarding houses, residential treatment facilities, and transitional housing providers, the result was the denial of this housing opportunity for certain offenders or for the facility to only offer lodging.⁴⁴

A number of service providers and advocates (Colorado Coalition for the Homeless, National Alliance for the Mentally Ill, Mental Health Center of Denver, Salvation Army, etc.), probation officers, parole officers, and concerned citizens have encouraged the Denver City Council to explore the consequences of ordinance 565, but these efforts have stalled. *Because our findings suggest the results of this ordinance may not be in the best interest of public safety or successful re-entry, CCJRC recommends the Denver City Council evaluate the unintended consequences of the ordinance and revise it accordingly.*

⁴⁰ A number of people interviewed at Crossroads shelter reported asking for permission to transfer to another shelter. Almost all of them were told they must stay at Crossroads and would not be given a voucher for another shelter.

⁴¹ Recent events indicate the importance of this recommendation. On July 30, 2009, Denver Salvation Army announced it was closing Crossroads shelter in order to focus resources on its transitional housing program. It is not known whether the city's other homeless shelters will be able to accommodate the homeless parolees that stayed at Crossroads. The Salvation Army's transitional housing will have acceptance criteria consistent with ordinance 565.

⁴² A nongovernmental residential facility is defined by ordinance 565 as a location/place not owned by the state or city that provides lodging along with "supervision or treatment of offenders." Council of the City and County of Denver. Ordinance 565, Series of 2001. Available online at <http://www.denvergov.org/tabid/37889/Default.aspx?link=http://www.denvergov.org/apps/docudex/ordinances.asp@title=City%20Ordinance%20Search>. Page 2.

⁴³ *Ibid*, Pages 1-2. These offenses include crimes against persons, arson, robbery, burglary and related offenses, incest, wrongs to children, domestic violence, harassment--stalking, assault, and offenses related to firearms. See the noted pages for a specific list of the statutes describing these crimes.

⁴⁴ The concentration of 83% of the homeless parolees in one out of eight major shelters in Denver the night of CCJRC's point-in-time count is not wholly explained by ordinance 565. The interviews with parolees suggest that not every parolee in Crossroads was under supervision for a violent or sex offense.

6. CCJRC recommends the Department of Corrections articulate in a written policy the criteria considered by parole officers and supervisors for denial or acceptance of a parole plan and any reconsideration that may be appropriate if the denial of a parole plan results in the homeless release of a parolee.

In administrative regulation 250-21, the Department of Corrections outlines the process by which a parole plan is investigated, including a parolee's potential residence. A parole officer is required to conduct a pre-parole investigation and submit his/her findings to a supervisor. The supervisor is then responsible for approving or denying the parole officer's pre-parole investigation. The administrative regulation does not identify criteria by which a parole officer is to base his/her decision to deny (or approve) a parole residence, nor does it identify the criteria by which a parole supervisor approves or denies the parole officer's decision. This unguided discretion may lead to inconsistencies in decision-making.

CCJRC recommends the Department of Corrections revise administrative regulation 250-21 to include criteria to guide the parole officer's decision to deny a parole residence and the parole supervisor's decision-making. We also recommend the criteria include special considerations that may be appropriate if the denial of a residence would result in the parolee being homeless.⁴⁵

7. CCJRC recommends area county jails explore the feasibility of developing an alternative step-down transitional program for homeless parolees, such as the Denver Homeless Transition Program, a collaborative pilot project between the Denver County Jail, the Department of Corrections, and the Division of Criminal Justice.

Half of the people interviewed for this report said they were convicted in a county outside of

Denver. Because there is not enough transitional housing for people who are released homeless, CCJRC recommends area county jails explore the feasibility of developing an alternative step-down transitional program for homeless parolees. One example of this is the Denver Homeless Transition Program (DHTP), a transitional program recently implemented by the Denver County Jail in collaboration with the Department of Corrections and the Division of Criminal Justice. The pilot project has eligibility criteria and an acceptance process managed by the Denver County Community Corrections Board and a team of parole officers. Its target population includes prisoners within nine months of their mandatory release date from the Department of Corrections who are going to be released homeless in Denver.

DHTP offers people accepted into the program an opportunity to stabilize their life (get an ID, find employment, start a savings fund, etc.) and offers programs and supervision, much like a community corrections facility. However, unlike community corrections facilities, inmates accepted into DHTP are not charged for their housing. The program currently houses up to 15 people at the Denver County Jail for an expected stay of six months and is looking to expand to include additional men and women.

8. CCJRC recommends that metro area counties identify and address the gaps in community-based services and housing for homeless people leaving prison or jail and returning to their counties.

If a parolee does not have a parole sponsor and will be homeless upon release, it is Department policy to release the parolee to the county in which s/he was convicted.⁴⁶ However, several metro area counties do not have an emergency shelter or transitional housing. When this is the case, the Department places a homeless parolee

⁴⁵ CCJRC has been informed the Department is currently in the process of revising this administrative regulation in order to add specific language about pre-parole investigation decision-making.

⁴⁶ "If the parolee does not have a viable residence, the offender shall be referred to the community re-entry specialist and regional office, which supervises the county from which the offender was convicted." Department of Corrections. Administrative Regulation 250-21(4) (A) (3). Effective date June 15, 2009. Available online at <https://exdoc.state.co.us/secure/corweb/weblets/index.php/regulations/home>.

in a county with shelters and/or transitional housing, which is often Denver.⁴⁷

Half of the people interviewed for this report said they were convicted in a county outside of Denver. The practice of “Denver dumping,” as it is colloquially referred to, is driven by the lack of services for county residents who are homeless upon leaving jail or prison. *Thus, CCJRC recommends that metro area counties identify and address their gaps in services and housing for homeless people leaving prison or jail and returning to their county.*

9. CCJRC recommends Denver’s Road Home conduct a survey of the admission policies of housing providers that receive state, federal, or local government funding in Denver, including public housing authorities, nonprofit long-term housing providers, and private landlords involved with Section 8 housing. CCJRC recommends this report be made available to the public.

Many of the policies that public housing authorities (PHA) adopt in regard to admitting people with a criminal conviction are more restrictive than required by federal law and reject all people with criminal records rather than admitting them on a case-by-case basis. This may be due to a misunderstanding of the Code of Federal Regulations which mandates that PHAs must deny admission to people only with *certain* criminal convictions.⁴⁸

Unilaterally denying access to public housing removes a possible housing option for a parolee, particularly if his or her potential parole sponsor

lives in public housing. Therefore, no matter what their crime, some parolees who could be in stable housing with a parole sponsor are forced to parole homeless and reside in emergency overnight shelters.⁴⁹ In addition, unilaterally denying access to public housing solely on the fact that someone has a criminal record may create chronic and/or long-term housing instability for people who are struggling financially and not able to make the leap from a shelter to the private sector housing market.

Thus, CCJRC recommends that Denver’s Road Home conduct a survey of the admission policies of housing opportunities that receive state, federal, or local government funding in Denver, including public housing authorities, nonprofit long-term housing providers, and private landlords involved with Section 8 housing. The findings of this survey should be made available to the public.

This survey should determine the formal admission policies of these housing providers for people with a criminal conviction. In addition, the survey should also determine the actual practices and outcomes. For example, if a housing provider indicates that it accepts people with a criminal conviction on a case-by-case basis, the survey should also ask the housing provider to provide the number of people with a criminal conviction it has accepted and rejected over the past year.

Noting that it is “often difficult for offenders to work with landlords and the housing authority,” the Commission on Criminal and Juvenile Justice recently recommended that policymakers “educate and encourage housing authorities to

⁴⁷ CCJRC does not support a blanket policy requiring homeless parolees to serve their period of parole in their county of conviction and prefers a policy that allows for case-by-case discretion.

⁴⁸ The Code of Federal Regulations mandates that public housing authorities (PHA) prohibit admission if any household member has ever been convicted of manufacturing methamphetamine on the “premises of federally assisted housing” or if any household member is subject to a state’s lifetime sex offender registration program. Code of Federal Regulations, Chapter 24, Part 982.553. Page 624. Accessed online at <http://frwebgate3.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/PDFgate.cgi?WAISdocID=36569229791+1+2+0@WAIAction=retrieve>.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* The Code of Federal Regulations directs PHAs to prohibit admission for certain current criminal activities. For example, a PHA must deny admission to an applicant if a household member is within three years from the date of eviction from federally assisted housing for drug-related criminal activity unless the evicted household member has successfully completed an approved drug rehabilitation program. The PHA must also have standards that prohibit admission if the PHA determines a household member is using illegal drugs, or if a household member’s use of illegal drugs threatens the “health, safety, or right to peaceful enjoyment...by other residents.” Additionally, the PHA may also prohibit admission if the PHA determines any household member “is currently engaged in, or has engaged in during a reasonable time before the admission” of certain criminal activities. *Ibid.*

be no more restrictive than the HUD guidelines in refusing public housing to people with criminal records.”⁵⁰ CCJRC hopes that Denver’s Road Home will support this Commission recommendation and support efforts to encourage housing authorities to develop criteria such as the nature of the conviction, relevance of the conviction to the housing, length of time since the conviction, and evidence of rehabilitation in order to assess admission on a case-by-case basis.⁵¹

10. CCJRC recommends the City and County of Denver conduct a review of municipal ordinances and departmental hiring policies and practices, both formal and informal, regarding the employment of people with a criminal conviction.

One of the most glaring findings in this survey was the high rate of unemployment and underemployment of homeless parolees. Without access to gainful and living wage employment, the likelihood that someone will be able to succeed on parole or find permanent safe housing is slim.

Research is conclusive that “stable and meaningful employment is critical to recidivism reduction”⁵² and that “one of the most important conditions that leads to less offending is a strong tie to meaningful employment.”⁵³

Consequently, the Commission recommended a review of state “statutes, rules, regulations, and policies that create a barrier to employment or professional licensing for people with a criminal

conviction.”⁵⁴ This review will help policymakers assess whether there are unnecessary employment barriers for people with a criminal conviction due to state laws, regulations, or departmental hiring policies and practices.

This type of review is equally necessary at the local level. *CCJRC recommends the City and County of Denver conduct a review of municipal ordinances and departmental hiring policies and practices, both formal and informal, regarding the employment of people with a criminal conviction.*

11. CCJRC recommends the state earmark additional funds to provide vouchers or other forms of financial assistance to indigent parolees for re-entry related expenses, including classes and treatment ordered as a condition of parole. This type of assistance is particularly important during the first few months following release.

In 2008, the Commission on Criminal and Juvenile Justice made a number of recommendations around the need to subsidize some of the mandated parole expenses. One recommendation suggested a voucher plan to “assist the offender in accessing immediate services, including housing, medication (for example, insulin), mental health services, addiction treatment, and related programs” based on a pre-release needs assessment.⁵⁵ The Commission also noted that the \$100 in release funds had not increased since 1972 and recommended an increase in gate money for “first-time parolees upon release.”⁵⁶

50 Colorado Commission on Criminal and Juvenile Justice 2008 Annual Report. December 2008. Page 35. Available online at <http://cdpsweb.state.co.us/cccj/2008recommendations.html>.

51 The example of criteria is from *The Constitution Project*. Accessed online at http://www.2009transition.org/criminaljustice/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=37&Itemid=122.

52 Colorado Commission on Criminal and Juvenile Justice 2008 Annual Report. December 2008. Page 49. Available online at <http://cdpsweb.state.co.us/cccj/2008recommendations.html>.

53 Przybylski, Roger. *What Works: Effective Recidivism Reduction and Risk-Focused Prevention Programs*. Prepared for the Colorado Division of Criminal Justice. February 2008. Page 38. Available online at http://cdpsweb.state.co.us/cccj/PDF/WWo8_0228o8.pdf.

54 *Commission on Criminal and Juvenile Justice*. May 14-15, 2009, *Retreat*.

55 Colorado Commission on Criminal and Juvenile Justice 2008 Annual Report. December 2008. Page 43. Available online at <http://cdpsweb.state.co.us/cccj/2008recommendations.html>.

56 *Ibid*. Page 28.

Neither recommendation has been implemented, mainly due to the state's budget crisis. CCJRC is aware the current fiscal shortfall prevents any action on the part of the state that is not cost-neutral, but we believe the inability of some

parolees to pay for parole and re-entry expenses is contributing to the exorbitant cost of revocation and re-incarceration. We also believe this type of assistance is especially important during the first few months of release.⁵⁷

In conclusion

CCJRC believes the findings generated from interviews conducted with parolees' provide insight into the complexity of this population. The 48 individuals ran the gamut, from first-day-out optimism to months-later deflation. Some were ready to move on – if given the opportunity of employment and other housing, while others appeared to need long-term program and/or financial support. For many, despair was a common denominator. They described doors that opened reluctantly or not at all. They also described frustration, depression, humiliation, and loss.

Living in a shelter may be a daunting experience and can create yet another barrier to successful re-entry from prison. CCJRC hopes that readers of this report agree that paroling or discharging from prison homeless should be avoided to the greatest extent possible.

The range of recommendations generated by this report indicate the number of different approaches it may take to reduce the number of people paroling homeless. Several recommendations are short-term and could be implemented immediately, while other recommendations are obviously long-term.

No matter the time frame or the agency involved, reducing the number of people paroling homeless will take a concerted effort by all.

⁵⁷ Almost 46% of the people returned to prison during fiscal year 2007 for a technical violation were re-incarcerated within six months of their release. Colorado Department of Corrections. Statistical Report, Fiscal Year 2007. Released June 2008. Page 51. Available online at https://exdoc.state.co.us/secure/combo2.o.o/userfiles/folder_18/StatRpt2007.pdf.