THE STORY OF PATHFINDERS [FAMILY PATHFINDERS]: INVESTIGATING THE IMPACT,
EXPERIENCES, AND CONTEXT OF RE-ENTRY MENTORING

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The United States has the largest population of imprisoned persons in the world. The vast majority of these individuals eventually leave prison and re-enter society, facing a number of challenges in the process. Those who are unable to successfully re-enter society run the risk of recidivating back into the prison system. Mentoring has the potential to promote successful re-entry and help offenders to get their lives back on track. Pathfinders of Tarrant County is a unique organization. Its historical position as one of the foremost “welfare to work” programs gives it unique insight into the economic struggles of at-risk individuals and families, and its existing relationships with mentors and other community organizations gives it a rich pool of resources to draw from. By helping to connect participants with community resources, Pathfinders removes quite a bit of the complexity from seeking help at a time when vulnerable people need it most. This thesis presents an overview of how Pathfinders conducts mentoring and its unique brand of social service advocacy, including the unique and not-so unique challenges that a re-entry population may have to offer.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Second Chance Act of 2008 reflects a comprehensive response to the increasing number of people who are released from incarceration and returning to communities. Section 211 of the Act authorizes grant funding to nonprofit organizations and federally recognized Indian tribes that may be used for mentoring projects to promote the safe and successful reintegration into the community of adults who have been incarcerated.

“Mentoring,” as defined by in the Second Chance Act, refers to a type of developmental relationship where a less experienced person is helped by a more experienced person in developing an enhanced sense of self-worth and a set of specific knowledge and skills relevant to increasing their chances of successfully re-entering society (DOJ 2013). The goal of this relationship is to promote more effective and successful re-entry for offenders through the establishment and maintenance of mentoring relationships both before and after the offender’s release from prison.

The objective of the Second Chance Act is to establish or improve the administration of offender mentoring programs. This includes the expansion of mentoring strategies and programs; enhancing and improving the organizational capacity, system efficiency, and cost effectiveness of mentoring programs; and improving outcomes for offenders in mentoring programs by establishing and strengthening collaborative community approaches (DOJ 2013). Pathfinders of Tarrant County uses its Second Chance Act mentoring grant to collaborate with area agencies and organizations and to coordinate their expertise in providing mentoring and other services to women who are at high risk for recidivism.
CHAPTER 2
DESCRIPTION OF APPLIED THESIS PROJECT

Client Background

Pathfinders of Tarrant County is a 501(c)(3) non-profit, dedicated to strengthening the Fort Worth community “by empowering individuals and families to attain self-sufficiency” (Pathfinders 2016). It offers mentoring, classes, and assistance with social services to program participants living within Fort Worth. As a grant-funded organization, Pathfinders must regularly report on certain performance and outcome metrics relative to their grants. These metrics can be as simple as a tally of the number of program participants, or as complicated as calculating the class attendance of participants who have successful completed the program. Traditionally, Pathfinders kept this information in the form of spreadsheets and performed manual calculation as needed. As the organization expanded and the number of clients served grew, this form of reporting became more and more of a burden and Pathfinders began looking for a solution to retain its focus on its core mission.

To solve the reporting problem, Pathfinders of Tarrant County contracted with an outside evaluation team at the University of North Texas Health Science Center (UNTHSC) in Fort Worth. The evaluation team conducted a series of research projects for Pathfinders, including outcome evaluations for several of the non-profit’s re-entry grant populations. I first came across Pathfinders during my work as a member of the UNTHSC evaluation team, where I was given the task of creating a database for the organization.
What Pathfinders Does

Founded in 1997 under the name Family Pathfinders of Tarrant County, Pathfinders originally offered mentoring services to help families struggling with poverty to achieve financial stability. This program expanded to include at-risk youth, and in 2010 Pathfinders began offering mentoring to people reentering society from the prison system. Since this time, re-entry mentoring has evolved to become the primary form of mentoring at Pathfinders.

Mentoring at Pathfinders is conducted by both Pathfinders employees and by volunteer mentors. Mentoring coordinators, the employees responsible for mentoring, provide advice and guidance to volunteer mentors and mentoring clients and coordinate the services that clients receive. These services may come through Pathfinders and formal partnering organizations, or may be delivered informally through referrals and personal communications.

Grant-covered services – such as case management, substance abuse treatment, job readiness training, housing assistance, and family reunification and victim workshops – are offered in partnership with other local organizations. Formal partnerships are laid out for each grant via various Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs), while informal relationships leverage the personal connections and historical relationships between Pathfinders and local organizations.

Formal partnerships exist between Pathfinders and local organizations such as:

- Tarrant County Re-Entry Coalition
- Workforce Solutions for Tarrant County
Informal partnerships include local organizations such as foodbanks and homeless shelters, as well as county-level government organizations such as the Tarrant County Housing Authority.

Pathfinders coordinators act as a single point of contact for clients to gain information and referrals to various services in the community. This is similar to the concept of health advocacy, where a “health advocate” will assist individuals in navigating complex healthcare and insurance-related issues. Throughout the thesis, I will refer to this practice as “social service advocacy.”

Description of Project

Due to rapid expansion in recent years, Pathfinders sought to upgrade its organizational and data infrastructure through the creation of a database. This would help mentoring coordinators in their day-to-day jobs, and assist evaluators in determining the effectiveness of the mentoring programs.

In October of 2014, as part of an existing evaluation project between Pathfinders and the UNTHSC evaluation team, I was brought onboard to design and implement a database that could be used to assist re-entry mentoring coordinators for the Second Chance 2013 grant cohort in their day-to-day tasks and to gather high-quality data for grant reporting and evaluations. Between October and November of 2014, I conducted interviews and focus
groups with key stakeholders, gathered relevant documentation, and presented different iterations of the database to the alpha test group. During alpha testing of the database I sat alongside mentoring coordinators as we went through the process of entering clients and pulling up contact and historical data. The database entered beta testing in December 2014, and the evaluation team began inputting historical client data from earlier grants. In early January, the database moved from beta testing and into production where it was used by re-entry mentoring coordinators for day-to-day tasks.

In July 2015, after the successful implementation of the database, Pathfinders became interested in expanding it to cover all its Second Chance mentoring programs. By expanding the database, it would become possible to evaluate the common themes of mentoring throughout all the programs instead of focusing only on individual grant populations. This expansion, as well as the exploration of mentoring themes, became the basis of my applied thesis project.
CHAPTER 3

PROJECT DESIGN

Project Overview

The Pathfinders project was composed of two separate components: the expansion of the database and the exploration of the themes of mentoring. These components required two different approaches. The database expansion was largely informed by the same design process that I used during its original development, with the benefit of the additional experience in programming and database design that I had gained because of that project. The exploration of the themes of mentoring required additional qualitative research, both to identify what the themes were and to explore them in the populations of interest.

There were three deliverables for the project: (1) an expanded mentoring database, (2) a preliminary list of the common themes of mentoring, to be used in the creation of research questions, and (3) an executive report overviewing the themes of mentoring and its impact on mentees, mentors, and mentoring coordinators. Each of these deliverables were developed via an iterative design process; defined as a cyclical process of prototyping, testing, analyzing, and refining a design to improve its quality and usefulness. Several of the phases overlapped in parts out of necessity.

Phase 1: Database Expansion

The database expansion involved multiple meetings and discussions with Pathfinders coordinators and other potential database users to determine their daily needs and workflow as well as their quarterly and annual reporting needs, and an extended period of participant
observation to identify areas where usability could be enhanced. Meetings were held with the primary coordinators for each of the three populations that Pathfinders serves, and repeated as necessary during the iterative design process. These meetings were held in the coordinators’ offices during regular working hours. Meetings were informal and unscripted, and were not recorded beyond paper notes. Topics for the meetings included additional data that would need to be collected, how the coordinators planned to use the database, and their concerns and fears about the new technology. Database users tended to be non-technical, and simple user experience and reporting capabilities were identified as database priorities. Six meetings were held overall, sometimes with several participants.

After the initial design phase, a group discussion was held with the coordinators and a pilot version of the new database was introduced. During the discussion, I walked coordinators through the process of putting in a new client and looking up contact information and notes. Feedback was sought on the utility of this design, and several bugs were identified. The re-entry coordinators volunteered to beta test the new database, a process that lasted for over a month.

During the beta test period, I visited the Pathfinders’ program site a number of times in order to sit next to coordinators and get a sense of their work and implement changes or fixes to the database as needed. A series of informal conversations took place on the nature of the Pathfinders program, the work coordinators do, and some of the daily tasks and challenges re-entry mentees face. Approximately twenty hours were spent conducting participant observation in this fashion. After beta testing was complete, the database entered production and was released to all coordinators.
Phase 2: Identification of the Themes of Mentoring

In order to identify the themes of mentoring, which my client defined as the common threads between the Pathfinders’ mentoring programs, I reviewed prior work from the UNTHSC evaluation team and several grant applications Pathfinders had written for their reentry and welfare-to-work mentoring programs. Prior work from the UNTHSC evaluation team had highlighted the relationship between coordinators, mentors, and mentees as a major underlying theme and the importance of mentoring by volunteers and the promotion of financial stability and resilience as topics of interest. This recognition was echoed in past Pathfinders’ grant proposals and other print and electronic communications from the organization.

In an initial meeting with my thesis client and a senior stakeholder, the importance of these three themes was verified, and one additional theme of interest was identified: Pathfinders’ relationship with other local organizations is a unique feature of the non-profit, as is the role of coordinators as social service advocates in helping clients find resources.

These four themes formed the core of the topics explored by the focused group discussions in the third phase of the project, as well as provided the basis for much of the qualitative coding in the fourth phase. Several additional themes were identified after coding the discussions – these themes are highlighted in section Phase 4: Research Deliverable.

Phase 3: Qualitative Research

Three focused group discussions were conducted between December 2015 and May 2016. Each discussion was held with one of the key mentoring populations: one discussion was held for employee mentoring coordinators, one for volunteer mentors, and one for client
mentees. These discussions ranged from 25 to 40 minutes in length, and were composed of one group of two people, one group of three people, and one group of four people. The sessions were audio recorded and later transcribed word-for-word prior to coding.

The main research questions that these focused group discussions were brought together to answer included:

1. Is the relationship between mentors, mentees, and coordinators functioning in an effective and beneficial manner? That is, do mentors and mentees feel that they are getting the support they need, both emotionally and in terms of the services Pathfinders provides?

2. Do mentors feel that they are adequately prepared for their role and/or are properly addressing mentees' needs?

3. Has Pathfinders and the mentoring program had a beneficial impact on participants' lives, in terms of resilience and/or financial stability? That is, has there been a positive change in participants' living conditions, employment, or state of being that can be attributed to their participation in the mentoring program?

4. What service and/or communication gaps exist in the mentoring programs, and how can these be best addressed?

The first focused group discussion was held with two mentoring coordinators on December 24th, 2015. Recruitment for this discussion was informal, and consisted of personal conversations held at the Pathfinders office. The first discussion was intended to investigate the coordinator’s view of their relationship with mentors and mentees, their experiences...
working with volunteer mentors, and their opinions on the difficulties and successes on helping mentees increase resilience and financial stability.

The second focused group discussion was held with four volunteer mentors on January 14th, 2016. Recruitment was conducted at a mentor training event, with participants invited to stay behind and discuss their experiences if they would like. Refreshments were provided during the event. This discussion investigated mentors’ perception of their onboarding experiences, what they have seen or felt to be effective or ineffective in promoting financial stability and resilience among mentees, and some of their experiences as volunteers.

The third focused group discussion was held with three client mentees on May 10th, 2016. Recruitment was conducted at a group mentoring event by Pathfinders coordinators, and contained only mentees undergoing group mentoring. Interested mentees stayed after the group mentoring event and were given $5 gift cards for their time. This discussion investigated mentees’ experiences working with Pathfinders and the mentoring program, the role of mentoring and coordinators in helping with financial stability and resilience, what services or experiences client mentees have found particularly useful, and what services they would like to have.

As well as the focused group discussions, I participated in two mentor training events and had several informal conversations with mentors during these events. The first event was conducted by a visiting lecturer in the field of criminal justice and discussed criminal thinking, criminal thinking tactics, and the role of mentoring in encouraging positive behavior and new ways of thinking. The second event was a workshop on healthy mentoring relationships, adapted from core material from World Class Communication – a product of Healthy
Relationships International. This workshop overviewed the principles of good communication and active listening, discussing how relationships are formed and maintain and how to avoid “communications killers.” Participating in these training events helped me gain a picture of how mentors were socialized into their role as mentors by Pathfinders, and what messages this socialization qualitatively entailed. This form of participant observation took approximately four hours in total.

Phase 4: Analysis

To avoid repeating previous research from the evaluation team, a focused approach to data analysis was used. The focused group discussion transcripts were analyzed and coded according to the themes identified during phase two of the project, and relevant data points were extracted to flesh out each theme. After this initial sweep, the transcripts were re-analyzed to identify additional themes. This form of coding is a blend of inductive and deductive methods, and as per Bernard (2011) it is the form of coding that Willms et al. (1990) and Miles and Huberman (1994) recommend.

Newly identified themes included:

- The question of what mentees are looking for in the program
- The role of the coordinator as mentor

The first theme, the question of what mentees are looking for in the program, was answerable using both data from the mentee focus group, as well as intake data collected in the database. In order to assess the intake data, 274 re-entry applications ranging from 2010 to 2015 were analyzed, and the top two reasons for reasons for participating were qualitatively coded. The second theme, the role of the coordinator as mentor, was categorized
as a sub-theme of the triangular relationship between mentees, mentors, and coordinators and explored alongside this topic.

**Phase 5: Research Deliverable**

The research deliverable consisted of a twelve-page high-level document overviewing the research findings. This deliverable was written to a non-technical audience, with the assumption that they may or may not be familiar with Pathfinders or its model, or with re-entry mentoring as a whole. The deliverable included the qualitative results of the focus groups, as well as the additional data pulled from the database. The research deliverable addressed:

- How coordinators, mentors, and mentees work together
- Partnerships with other organizations
- Pathfinders’ history of mentors as volunteers
- Mentor onboarding and the process of meeting a mentee
- What mentees are looking for when they join the program
- The services mentees find most useful
- Challenges in mentees’ establishment of financial stability and resilience
- Challenges in communication between mentors and mentees

Much like the database expansion phase of the project, the research deliverable followed an iterative design where I provided a draft to my client for feedback and revised sections as needed.
Timelines

The original and final timelines for this project varied dramatically due to life events. Before database expansion was completed, I received an offer for a full-time position in another city located over an hour away from my client. As a result of this, while the database portion of the project was completed on-time, the focused group discussions and research deliverable were delayed by months due to scheduling issues.
CHAPTER 4

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review attempts to place Pathfinders and its model within its broader scholarly and social context. It begins by providing a historical overview of Pathfinders and its place among the “welfare to work” programs brought about during the welfare reform era of the 1990s, discusses the historical and anthropological context of the United States’ current imprisonment challenges, and then presents an overview of state of research on re-entry mentoring and the Second Chance program.

Welfare Reform and “Welfare to Work”

The welfare state officially began in the U.S. in the year 1935, when President Roosevelt signed the Social Security Act into law as part of the New Deal. This act resulted in the creation of three welfare entitlement programs: Social Security, Unemployment Insurance, and Aid to Dependent Children (ADC). The ADC, later renamed the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), was originally conceived of as a fund to support white widows with children, who were expected to stay home and care for their children (Blank and Blum 1997). In the 1960s, during the time of the Civil Rights Movement, the program struck down requirements used to exclude black women and those who had never married (Blank and Blum 1997).

In the years afterwards, a growing body of rhetoric constructed AFDC recipient status as the cause of poverty, unwed births, and crime – especially fraud (Blank and Blum 1997; Kohler-Hausmann 2015). During the time of the Regan administration, campaign rhetoric firmly established the image of the “welfare queen” – stereotyped as a sexually promiscuous
single black mother who perpetually has more children to stay on welfare – in the collective imagination (Demby 2013; Kohler-Hausmann 2015). Ironically, it was Regan’s later passage of the 1981 Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act that removed many of the prior work incentives for AFDC recipients as well as made most wage-earners ineligible (Kohler-Hausmann 2015).

Reagan’s Act was neither the last nor the largest change to the welfare system. In August of 1996, in the most widespread change yet, a bipartisan effort led to the passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA). PRWORA, more commonly known as the “Welfare Reform Act,” ended welfare as it was known and replaced the Aid to Families with Dependent Children program with Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF.) The transition from the federally-controlled cash welfare entitlement program AFDC to the largely state-controlled block-grant program TANF had a “pathbreaking” impact that fundamentally altered the way assistance was provided to low-income families in the United States. Work became a requirement, and a lifetime limit on financial aid was implemented (Kohler-Hausmann 2015).

One of the major changes brought about by TANF was a great expansion of state welfare-to-work programs. These programs aimed to “lift people out of the cycle of poverty” by promoting a “work-first” approach, or, by promoting rapid entry to the unskilled or low-skilled labor market (Keast 1999). Many of these efforts made use of a “Multi-Party Model,” where multiple parties collaborate to fulfil different components of the welfare-to-work process. This typically takes the shape of a partnership between businesses looking to hire welfare recipients, and service providers such as a non-profits or for-profit organizations who locate and train welfare recipients (Keast 1999).
More complicated partnerships may feature multiple parties taking on specific roles during the welfare-to-work process. This may include recruitment, mentoring, job readiness training, and work-specific training. Soft skills training, such as training in professional dress and demeanor, and proper ways of dealing with family issues and emergencies, are commonly addressed by the service provider.

In September of 1996, in response to Welfare Reform, the Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts created the Family Pathfinders Welfare-to-Work Program. This statewide program was led by the Texas Department of Human Services and operated as a partnership between state government, community organizations, and local businesses. It matched families on welfare with teams of four to eight trained volunteer mentors from religious congregations, businesses, and/or civic groups. Between 1996 and 1999, Family Pathfinders trained over 2,600 volunteer mentors who were matched to over 500 families on welfare in roughly 80 Texas communities (Keast 1999). In 1998, Vice President Al Gore deemed the Texas Family Pathfinders program as a model program and recommended it be replicated across the United States (Keast 1999; Vice President 1998).

However, the Family Pathfinders program was an unfunded initiative operated by volunteers. It was housed by existing non-profits, who were expected to take over all management duties. Although the program had been hailed as highly successful even by the Vice President, this arrangement soon proved unsustainable and various program sites began to shut down.

The Tarrant County Family Pathfinders, one of the program’s key sites, was an exception. In 2002, the organization located a funding stream to hire its first salaried
mentoring coordinator. In 2003, it left the state partnership to incorporate as Family Pathfinders of Tarrant County, a freestanding 401(c)(3) non-profit organization. As of 2016, Pathfinders is a fully-funded non-profit and the last surviving remnant of the original Family Pathfinders organization.

The Study of Prisons

Anthropology has had comparatively little to do with prisons over the past four decades. In the twenty years between the advent of the age of mass incarceration in the 1980s and the turning of the millennium, there was a general lack of literature on the subject, and much of what existed were theoretical rehashings of previous works. In her essay Toward an Anthropology of Prisons, Lorna Rhodes (2001) outlines the historical, sociological, and anthropological perspective on prisons and punishments circa the year 2000. She cites the dearth of works concerning prisons in anthropology, instead looking to the historical involvement of the disciplines of psychiatry and psychology, sociology, and criminology with the construction of the historical and modern-day penal institution. These fields first emerged as disciplines in their own right in relation to the nineteenth-century penitentiaries and asylums, and remain deeply entangled in the creation of the structures they have sought to describe (Rhodes 2001).

According to Rhodes, this “looping” of influence creates difficulties when it comes to separating the academic discourse of these disciplines on prisons from the phenomenon of prisons in their own right (2001.) As a result, much of the work of sociology and criminology with regards to prisons seeks to normalize findings in the vein of this historical discourse. There is a smaller vein of work that seeks to go outside the box, as it were, writing against
contemporary prisons, revising commonplace historical understandings, directly engaging with the lives of prisoners and the interior of the prison, addressing the growing phenomenon of women-as-prisoners, and investigating the context of the “school to prison pipeline” among poor minorities – a perspective that is underrepresented in the literature (Re Cruz 2016; Rhodes 2001; Schlosser 2013).

Writing Against the Contemporary Prison

Voices speaking against the contemporary prison point to the lack of sense it makes in context. Since the mid-1970s, the United States has seen over a fivefold rise in the incarcerated population. In 1975, the average daily incarcerated population was roughly 400,000 (Western 2007). In 2014, the most recent year for which we have data, roughly 2.2 million people were incarcerated (Kaeble et al. 2015). Most of these prisoners are eventually released, usually re-entering into society through community supervision programs such as parole. These released prisoners are typically disadvantaged socially, economically, and oftentimes educationally, leading to poor employment prospects and high recidivism rates (Morenoff & Harding 2014).

While the prison population has ballooned upwards, crime rates have held steady or even declined over the past four decades (Gottschalk 2007; Rhodes 2001; Wacquant 2002). The increase in the incarcerated population since the early 1970s has been commonly attributed to the “War on Drugs,” which began in 1972 under President Ronald Reagan. Policies tied to this effort resulted in rigid drug offense sentencing guidelines requiring longer prison terms, mandatory minimum turns, the transition of some offenses from misdemeanor to felony, as well as the “three-strikes” or “habitual offender” laws – state-enacted statutes
that mandate courts to impose harsher sentences on those previously convicted of two prior serious offenses (Smith & Hattery 2006).

Notably, the impact of this expansion has been greatest on the poor and on African American communities (Smith & Hattery 2010; Wacquant 2010). Former prisoner, philosopher, and social rights activist Angela Davis (1998) identified the “War on Drugs” as the starting point of what she deemed the “prison industrial complex” – which she defined as a type of “magic trick” in which impoverished peoples, particularly those deemed socially problematic, are “disappeared” from society and utilized by private prisons for profit-generating activities. The root of this trick, Davis held, is racism, and racialized views linking poverty to criminality – such as the image of the black “welfare queen” scamming the system to produce criminal children (Demby 2013, Davis 1998).

However, Davis’ vision of the root of the prison industrial complex is not shared by everyone. In his article Crafting the Neoliberal State: Workfare, Prisonfare, and Social Insecurity, Loic Wacquant (2010) points to the collapse of the welfare state and the beginning of the age of mass incarceration as political response to social insecurity brought about by the fragmentation of wage labor and the shakeup of previously existing racial hierarchies. Like Davis’s vision of the prison industrial complex, Wacquant (2010) points to the role of prisons in “invisibilizing” problem populations, but he differs in suggesting that the focus on privatization and profit-making is a “chimera” hiding the true issues (Wacquant 2009). Rather than prisons being a for-profit enterprise operating at the expense of the vulnerable, they are instead population-management tools aimed at controlling the consequences of economic deregulation and the transitioning of social assistance from welfare to a much more restricted
workfare (Wacquant 2010). In Wacquant’s view, prisonfare and workfare are thus two sides of the same coin and any future efforts to reform the prison system are impossible without also addressing the issue of welfare.

The School to Prison Pipeline

Imprisonment and education status are deeply intertwined, particularly among poor minorities. A study by Harlow (2003) found that only 35% of the incarcerated population had a high school diploma or higher, with approximately 41% lacking a high school degree and 23% having attained a GED – most which were attained while serving time in a correctional facility. Previous research has found that who do not graduate from high school are eight times more likely to be imprisoned than those with at least a high school diploma (Bridgeland et al. 2006).

In the United States, approximately one in five high school students do not graduate with their class – this number rises to one out of two in the poorest minority communities (Brint 2006).

This difference in educational outcomes is not due to any great differences in the merit of these students, but is rather a function of the school environment. In many poor and minority communities there exists a systemized lack of school funding, a neglectful academic environment that fails to provide students the tools they need to succeed and then blames students when they fail, and outright hostility towards students in the form of invasive school policies and police on campus (Fine & Ruglis 2009; Schept et al. 2015). Much of this problem is caused by adverse legislation such as the Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act of 1989, the Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994, and the No Child Left Behind of 2001 which led to zero-tolerance policies that directly removed many students from schools, kicked off the close cooperation between schools and police that led to increased student arrests for minor
offenses and non-criminal behavior, and tied school funding to standardized performance via testing – creating an incentive for schools to push out “problem students” (Schept et al. 2015).

This miseducation has resulted in high school dropout rates and exacerbated what has been politely deemed the “achievement gap,” where students of color and those of low socioeconomic status consistently measure lower on educational standards (Brint 2006; Fine & Ruglis 2009; Schept et al. 2015). Of course, miseducation is nothing new. It was the central theme of Carter Woodson’s 1933 thesis The Mis-Education of the Negro, where he found that black students were not being taught in schools, but rather being culturally indoctrinated to accept a subordinate place in society. According to Woodson:

"When you control a man’s thinking, you do not have to worry about his actions. You do not have to tell him to stand here or go yonder. He will find his “proper place” and will stay in it. You do not need to send him to the back door. He will go without being told. In fact, if there is no back door, he will cut one for his special benefit. His education makes it necessary." (1933, pp. xxx)

Although some theorists point to the need for reform of the existing system, others suggest that the only way to resolve this problem is to dismantle the pipeline altogether – by removing cops from classrooms and striking down the adverse laws that created the pipeline in the first place (Schept et al. 2015).

Revisiting Theory

Historically, the prison has been understood as a mechanism for individual reform (Melde 2008; Rhodes 2001). Since the nineteen-hundreds this reform has transitioned from attempts to produce conscience through repetitive and meaningless work, such as punishments where prisoners were subjected to harsh factory-style labor during the daytime hours and isolation at nighttime, to rehabilitative efforts including educational, vocational, and
therapeutic programs (Rhodes 2001; Wacquant 2002). In the 1970s, the United States was a world leader in penological innovation – the prison population was steadily decreasing, facilities were being closed, and at one point in time it was said that the United States would be a “nation without prisons” (Wacquant 2002).

It was during this decade that two seminal works on the nature of culture and power were published. Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* and Bourdieu’s *Outline of a Theory of Practice* were two highly influential works that would later go on to guide the framing and discourse of issues of power and control, particularly as these issues relate to institutions embedded in larger socio-historical processes (Schlosser 2013). One comparison of note between the two authors is that of Bourdieu’s concept of “doxa” and Foucault’s definition of the “panopticon.”

*Doxa*, as conceived of Bourdieu, is a “self-evident” logical classification that exists outside of an individual’s personal experience (Schlosser 2013). In other words, doxa is culturally-produced way of seeing the world that is so embedded in the fabric of a society that it has itself become invisible. As Schlosser (2013) describes, “the social world... really is... the product of individuals’ decision-making, classification, and social action... in effect, individuals regulate and control themselves.”

This is striking similarity to Foucault’s interpretation of Bentham’s panopticon. The panopticon, as described, is the mechanism of ultimate surveillance – like J.R.R. Tolkien’s fictional Eye of Sauron, or modern-day NSA surveillance, it is all-seeing and ever-watching. In her work, *A Conceptual Integration Toward an Empirical Sociology of Prisons*, Schlosser (2013) quotes Foucault’s description of the panopticon’s effect:
“Hence the major effect of the Panopticon: to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power. So to arrange things that the surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action; that the perfection of power should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary; that this architectural apparatus should be a machine for creating and sustaining a power relation independent of the person who exercises it; in short, that the inmates should be caught up in a power situation of which they are themselves the bearers.” (pp 38)

It is of note here that the panopticon’s surveillance – and the dysfunction of power inherent in that surveillance – has the effect of internalizing an “objective” force in order to create a system of self-regulation in the prisoners.

Both doxa and panopticism represent the social reality of the individual, derived from the internalization of messages delivered unnoticed and unremarked upon in a thousand invisible and unheard ways. As Bourdieu states, “because the subjective necessity and self-evidence of the commonsense world are validated by the objective consensus on the sense of the world, what is essential goes without saying because it comes without saying,” (Schlosser 2013, pp 39).

Prison Ethnography

Of course, in the decades following the 1970s, the conversation around prisons turned from how best to reform prisoners to the ineffectiveness of reformation and the purpose of prisons began to steadily shift from the rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders to warehousing and punishment (Melde 2008; Rhodes 2001; Wacquant 2010). During the time of this shift there was a dearth of direct observational and empirical studies and so much of the theoretical and philosophical debate at that time was informed by little more than
quantitative analyses of recidivism, prison violence, and, of course, the traditional “armchair philosophy.”

Exceptions to this rule do exist, however, and they are critical in understanding what is going on in the prison system today. In Penal Reform and the Stability of Prison Adaptive Modes, Chris Melde (2008) investigates how the day-to-day lives of inmates has changed since the mid-20th century, drawing on past work from ethnographers such as Irwin and Sykes. Melde conducted his research through a series of in-depth interviews with male inmates at a medium security facility in Missouri, which at the time had the 8th largest incarceration rate in the United States (2008).

Melde’s works examines what the changes that prison adaptive roles – the roles that inmates play in order to adapt to their environment – have undergone. Drawing on John Irwin’s book The Felon, released in 1970, Melde examines the three common adaptations prisoners make. Those who maintained focus on the outside world either “did their time” or “gleaned,” while those who focused on gaining social status within the prisons were described as “jailing.” Inmates “doing their time” kept to themselves and did not make trouble, taking efforts to keep their stay in prison as short and as comfortable as possible (Melde 2008). “Gleaners,” meanwhile, “did their time” but made an effort to change their lives so as to not return to prison – they attempted to use the resources available to them to change their life course and become law-abiding citizens after their release (Melde 2008). Those who “jailed” were at the opposite end of the spectrum of those who “gleaned” – those labeled as “jailing” acted so as to become as successful as possible in prison, joining likeminded groups and seeking power and prestige among other inmates, often through the underground economy
and through physical coercion (Melde 2008). From the 1970s to today, Melde found that there have been few changes in these modes (2008).

Women as Prisoners

Women commit fewer crimes than men. In 2014, just 1.25 million persons out of the 7 million under some form of correctional supervision were female, and women accounted for only 25% of the probation population (Kaeble, Glaze, Tsoutis & Minton 2015; Kaeble, Maruschak & Bonczar 2015). When looking at the prison population, the numbers are even more skewed – women accounted for just 7.2% of the population of state or federal prisons in 2014, and 14% of the population of local jails in 2013 (Carson 2015; Minton et al. 2015).

Women are arrested for different reasons than men. Women commit far fewer acts of violence than men across their criminal careers, and a far higher percentage of women prisoners have substance abuse issues than men do (Reisig et al. 2006).

The dynamics of this distribution remain largely unremarked-upon and unexplored, as the vast majority of prison and/or criminal studies focus almost exclusively on men – or, worse, focus exclusively on men while claiming to be gender-neutral (Reisig et al. 2006; Rhodes 2001; Wattanaporn & Holtfreter, 2014). This has the effect of viewing prisoner status through a male-only lens, while covertly ignoring both the experiences of women as prisoners and the role of masculinity in shaping the experiences of male inmates. The end result of this dynamic is that the experiences of a large and growing population of female prisoners are underreported and unexplored, and a series of unconscious and potentially untrue gender assumptions are made by policy-makers, administrators, and others (Reisig et al. 2006; Rhodes 2001).
However, the history of women as prisoners is not an entirely unknown thing. Joanne Belknap, in her article “Offending Women”: A Double Entendre, presents an examination of a series of historical criminological articles written by women authors about women prisoners between 1910 and 1939. In the beginning of the 19th century, the incarceration rate for women was much higher than present day: according to historical reports from Louise Stevens Bryant – the early 20th century head of the Department of Research and Statistics at the Municipal Court in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania – from 1911 to 1914, women made up roughly 26% of Philadelphia’s prisoner population (Belknap 2010).

The explanation for this is simple - like the “war on drugs,” prior to 1932 a “war on women” was being waged. The battlefront was women’s morality and as many as half of the women jailed were imprisoned for what were seen as “sex offenses” involving consensual adult behavior – such as adultery – while another 10% were jailed for the crime of “laziness” or “being a worthless person” (Belknap 2010). Women who were convicted of these “morality offenses” were often sentenced to reformatories, which aimed to reform these women into “good wives and maids” before releasing them to parole (Belknap 2010). One author claimed that this required “a tremendous amount of character development [by women prisoners]” (Belknap 2010, pp 1072).

More modern literature points to what has been deemed “pathways” research in explaining the differences between male and female offenders. Kathleen Daly, a leading voice in feminist criminology, identified five common pathways women take when entering into crime: (a) street women, who were forced out or chose to leave their homes, became involved in petty crime and addicted to drugs, and then became prostitutes; (b) harmed and harming
women, who were abused or neglected as children, and later became violent to others while turning to substance abuse as a coping mechanism, (c) battered women, who suffered from intimate partner violence, and turned to violence and were later convicted of violent offences themselves, (d) drug-connected women, who became addicted to drugs or were otherwise exposed to the drug trade, and began selling drugs through their intimate partners or through family members, and (e) other women, who, out of either necessity or greed, commit financial crimes (Reisig et al. 2006; Wattanaporn & Holtfreter 2014). Later work by feminist scholars relabeled other as economically motivated, seeing as these women lack abuse or substance abuse histories and are not violent, and determined that this pathway was ungendered (Wattanaporn & Holtfreter 2014).

Contemporary Response to the Age of Imprisonment

Chimera or otherwise, Angela Davis’s critiques of the prison industrial complex have since garnered support from academics and journalists alike, who have linked the privatization of prisons to increased violence and recidivism rates (Schlosser 1998; Spivak & Sharp 2008). As early as the 2000’s, conservatives were also beginning to see the problem with the huge number of prisoners and the “revolving door” of recidivism (Contant 2011; Nuzzi 2014). The problem, primarily, was just how expensive it was to house them all (Gottschalk 2007). In Texas, prison reform was brought about by a bipartisan effort led by Democrat state senator John Whitmire and Republican representative Jerry Madden. Their mission was to tackle crime without building any new prisons, as prisons cost too much (Nuzzi 2014).

In 2007, to address the influx of new people into the State of Texas and the projected increase in the number of criminals, the Texas government created a plan to construct three
additional prisons for an estimated price tag of $2 billion. Believing that this was both unnecessary and ineffective, Whitmire and Madden suggested that the Legislative Budget Board instead allocate $241 million for drug treatment programs and the creation of specialty courts specific to certain problems such as drugs and prostitution (Nuzzi 2014). Republican Governor Rick Perry signed onto this plan, and the allocation went through. A year afterwards crime in Texas began to drop, with the overall crime rate decreasing 2.9% compared to 2007 and rates for some specific crimes, such as rape, decreasing even further (Beckworth 2008).

Re-entry Mentoring and the Second Chance Program

In 2008, with fierce bipartisan support, President George Bush signed the Second Chance Act into law. This act outlined a set of seven re-entry programs dedicated to reducing recidivism rates, and provided grant funding to non-profits offering these programs. The Second Chance programs cover domains such as adult mentoring, technology career training, family-based substance abuse treatment, co-occurring mental health and substance abuse treatment, and other areas. Non-profits implementing a Second Chance program are required to include a number of mandatory components specific to each program, but are otherwise given leeway in creating their own programs. Of course, programs that include activities that have been demonstrated to be effective in facilitating successful re-entry have a higher priority consideration than programs that do not.

In order to be considered for a Second Chance Mentoring program grant, non-profits must fulfill seven mandatory requirements. These requirements include documentation of established partnerships with correctional agencies and third parties, pre- and post-prison release services that include connecting mentors and mentees, offering transitional services to
assist in offender re-integration, creating a plan for recruiting mentors, creating a mentor training curriculum, providing a plan for tracking participant outcomes for at least 12 months following mentees’ release from prison, and providing a baseline recidivism rate for the proposed target population in order to measure effectiveness (DOJ 2013).

Beyond the Department of Justice’s requirements, Second Chance Mentoring programs are expected to adhere to the principles of quality mentoring. Numerous authors have sought to identify and lay out the workings of mentoring into a set of common principles anyone can apply across a wide variety of contexts (Brown and Ross 2010). These principles involve a process that must be done correctly in order to get satisfactory results. The mentoring process involves proper recruitment of mentees, selecting and matching mentees and mentors, setting agreed-upon mentoring goals, building proper rapport between mentors and mentees, honoring the evolution of the mentoring relationship over time, applying appropriate techniques for dealing with mentee setbacks, and effectively concluding the mentoring relationship (Brown and Ross 2010). The strength of mentoring is in this process, and the impacts of mentoring, as per the literature, come from getting the process right.

Mentoring programs, such as the Second Chance Mentoring program, use the principles of the mentoring process in order to offer a positive social support system for mentees. Prior research has suggested that a majority of incarcerated individuals lack these support systems, as well as the constructive feedback to help with successful re-entry (Koschmann & Peterson 2013). Mentoring relationships that begin during incarceration allow mentors to assess mentees’ re-entry needs and create a tailored plan for their release – this plan may include how the mentee can gain access to needed services, such as housing or job
training programs (Goldstein et al. 2009). In addition, mentorship creates a safe space for participants to discuss personal issues, seek reassurance, participate in normalizing behaviors, and create new social bonds (Koschmann & Peterson 2013).

Many mentoring programs focus on targeting individuals who are of moderate to high risk for recidivism. The level of risk is determined through standardized risk assessment tools such as the Ohio Risk Assessment System (ORAS) that measure a range of factors linked to recidivism within a year of release (Latessa et al. 2010). These factors comprise seven domains, including: criminal history, substance abuse status, level of family and social support, employment status, finances, level of education, neighborhood problems, and antisocial attitudes and behavioral problems (Latessa et al. 2010). In addition to evaluating the risk of recidivism, the ORAS has also been used to assess the service needs of individuals upon their release from incarceration.

A series of best practices have been proposed from evaluations of re-entry mentoring programs such as the Welcome Home Ministries in California and the FOCUS Reentry mentorship program in Colorado. These programs used “in-reach” to provide counseling and support while participants were still incarcerated, tackled the dual prong of drug addiction and mental health issues through treatment programs and psychiatric counseling, and provided referrals for additional services such as healthcare and dental, housing, food and clothing, life skills, employment readiness training, family reunification, and more (Goldstein et al. 2009; Koschmann & Peterson 2013).

Pathfinders, with its history of welfare mentoring and community partnerships, was well-positioned to move into its new role a re-entry mentoring service provider. The
organization and its partners applied for Second Chance Mentoring (SCM) grantee status shortly after the act was passed, and accepted its first re-entry cohort in 2010. The Pathfinders’ Second Chance Mentoring program utilizes many of the best practices outlined above, including the use of standardized risk assessment tools in order to assess participant needs. It is built on the principles of effective mentoring, uses “in-reach” to provide services to still-incarcerated individuals, and offers referrals to provide additional services to post-release participants, among other services.

Studies done by the UNTHSC evaluation team have highlighted Pathfinders’ success in reducing recidivism rates among its participants. The first re-entry cohort saw a considerable reduction in re-arrests over a three-year period – with only 39% of participants rearrested within three years of participation, as compared to 59% in the reference population (Spence-Almaguer 2015). The second re-entry cohort witnessed further improvements – the rate of re-arrests was cut almost in half compared to the reference population after one year post-release, and in more than half for the following two years (Rohr et al. 2015).
CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS

Database Expansion

The database expansion followed an iterative design. The initial meeting with the head of the Pathfinders organization laid out a series of expectations for the new database. These expectations were that it would (a) support current and future programs and workflows, (b) allow for easy retrieval of relevant data points as well as comparison of multiple programs, and (c) be user-friendly for program coordinators and staff. Subsequent interviews with Pathfinders coordinators revealed that a series of changes needed to be made to the existing database in order to fulfill these expectations.

The original design of the database allowed mentoring coordinators to enter in information about client intake form answers, client demographics, child demographics, participant’s contact information, mentor information, a monthly mentoring report, services completed, recidivism, and criminological and self-sufficiency assessments. This design suited re-entry mentors, but contained a great deal of extraneous information and inappropriate sections for youth mentees and welfare-to-work participants. However, as one of the expectations was that data should be comparable across programs, completely separating these sections out was not an appropriate design. Instead, a series of changes were made to the front end of the database in order to present the database forms in different “views.” One “view” was appropriate for youth and welfare-to-work mentoring, and one for re-entry mentoring. These “views” both led to the same tables on the backend of the database, allowing for the data to more easily be queried and analyzed.
The separation of the programs into various “views” led to a series of user interface changes. A series of conversations and participant observation with the lead re-entry mentoring coordinator revealed that the default query mechanisms in Microsoft Access were not sufficient to perform the queries needed for grant reporting, so a series of new queries were written out in standard query language (SQL) and built into a separate “reporting view.” This “reporting view” allowed users to run advanced queries by selecting various parameters through dropdown menus and hitting a “run” button.

An additional issue that was reported as coming up time and time again were data entry errors. Mentoring coordinators would commonly start to enter information in for one client, get interrupted and have to move away, and then lose their place. Additional improvements to the user experience included programic mechanisms that checked records for errors before allowing the records to be saved – for instance, a new participant’s contact information could not be entered into the database without that participant already being entered into the client demographics section. Pop up messages were created explaining what these various errors were, and what users could do to correct them.

Identifying the Themes of Mentoring

As discussed in Chapter 3 above, the themes of mentoring we were interested in exploring were determined through a series of meetings with the client as well as a review of existing literature on the Pathfinders program. The initial meeting with the client involved a focused discussion on what the objectives of the Pathfinders program are, and was informed both by my prior work with the UNTHSC evaluation team and my experiences in creating the database and conducting participant observation at Pathfinders.
In our conversation, we discussed what the primary goal of the mentoring program was, as well as identified components that all the mentoring programs had in common. Each mentoring program sought to help participants attain self-sufficiency, through financial stability and through employment – especially retained employment. Each program had mentoring done by volunteers as opposed to employees. This was done for historical reasons as part of the original Family Pathfinders model to avoid power issues and keep mentors and mentees on the same level, but was unusual in contemporary re-entry mentoring. However, it worked and so Pathfinders didn’t change it. Each mentoring program drew on relationships Pathfinders had built with other community organizations. Many of these partnerships were formally defined in various funding agreements, but others consisted of informal connections between individuals in a similar line of work who knew each other and were willing to help.

Prior work from the UNTHSC evaluation team highlighted the importance of the relationship between mentors, mentees, and mentoring coordinators. In a mixed-methods evaluation of the Second Chance mentoring program, this triangular relationship was found to have a beneficial effect in terms of addressing the needs of re-entry mentees and providing a strong social scaffolding effect (Andrews et al. 2016). The mentoring relationship was also found to contribute to lower rates of recidivism (Cantu et al. 2015). Further investigation of how this relationship operated between the programs was deemed a priority.

Two additional themes were discovered during the qualitative coding of the focus group transcripts: the role of mentors as coordinators, and the question of what mentees are looking for. The first additional theme was consolidated as a sub-theme under the relationship
between coordinators, mentors, and mentees; while the second theme was explored in depth in its own section.

Answering the Research Questions

Is the relationship between mentors, mentees, and coordinators functioning in an effective and beneficial manner?

The relationship between mentors, mentees, and coordinators was found to be beneficial, but faced challenges related to the reality of re-entry. Relationships between mentors and mentees were found to suffer if the mentee was placed under too much stress, or if the mentor was unable to accommodate a flexible schedule. In cases where mentees lacked a volunteer mentor, the coordinator would take on that role. Participants in the mentee focus group reported a high level of satisfaction with coordinators acting as mentors during group mentoring.

In the mentor focus group, participants discussed their experiences in being matched with mentees. Participants expressed satisfaction with the matching process and reported that they felt that they were prepared for mentoring. Participants were particularly satisfied with the in-person introduction to their mentees, citing that talking about what to expect and what to do beforehand helped soothe uncertainties. Role-modeling of proper mentor behavior by the coordinator was also cited as helpful.
Do mentors feel that they are adequately prepared for their role and/or are properly addressing mentees’ needs?

Mentors in the focus group reported that they felt adequately prepared for mentoring. Mentors matched to pre-release mentees reported a higher satisfaction than did post-release mentors, however. Participants in this focus group claimed that pre-release mentees were more receptive, open, and welcomed their visits, whereas post-release mentees seemed to consider them a burden. According to one mentor who transitioned from post-release to pre-release, “I’ve enjoyed the pre-release mentoring, because you can find them... and you’re not tracking them down.”

Has Pathfinders and the mentoring program had a beneficial impact on participants’ lives, in terms of resilience and/or financial stability?

Participants in the mentee focus group claimed a very high level of satisfaction with Pathfinders in terms of establishing financial stability and resilience. Pathfinders’ social service advocacy was highlighted as highly beneficial, and for one participant, potentially life-saving. However, it should be cautioned that participants’ definitions of stability and resilience may not match that of outside organizations. Re-entry mentees often exit the prison system without any financial resources, and may be deeply impoverished or even homeless. A roof over one’s head, a steady paycheck, and a little bit of money in the bank may not necessarily match most peoples’ ambitions, but may be a dream come true for mentees.
What service and/or communication gaps exist in the mentoring programs, and how can these be best addressed?

The mentee focus group aimed to identify the services that participants felt were the most useful. The most valuable service provided by Pathfinders was social service advocacy: coordinators provided help to mentees in finding housing and housing programs, working with other non-profits to help them find clothing post-release, retrieving legal documents, and applying for social programs. The only other service mentioned that did not consist of some form of advocacy was that of providing mentees with gas and bus vouchers to help them pay for transportation. This advocacy was made possible by Pathfinders’ strong history of service in Tarrant County, and its relationships with other service organizations.

Participants in each of the groups highlighted a number of challenges in the mentoring relationship. The daily challenges mentees face can also have the effect of making it difficult for them to find time to connect with mentors. Participants in both the mentee and mentor focus groups highlighted time as the biggest obstacle in the mentoring relationship. As one mentor put it, “I don’t want to be one more box you have to check, and I don’t want to be a burden to you. I want to help you. And yet, if I’m becoming a stress in your life then that’s not what it was meant to be.” For mentees experiencing scheduling difficulties, group mentoring appeared to be an effective way of retaining the benefits of mentoring even without the one-on-one relationship.

Exploring the Themes of Mentoring

The themes of mentoring were largely explored in the deliverable product, which is available in Appendix B. In lieu of copying the deliverable word-for-word, I will instead provide
an overview of the major findings related to the individual themes identified by both Pathfinders and through the qualitative coding. This overview integrates the viewpoints of each of the three populations of interest and provides a dive into some of the context underlying each theme.

The Triangular Relationship Between Coordinators, Mentors, and Mentees

Mentoring coordinators are salaried Pathfinders employees who work with clients and stakeholders to perform mentoring activities and provide needed services. Coordinators provide training and support for volunteer mentors, are active in the lives of client mentees, and coordinate with third-party service providers such as government agencies and non-profits. Coordinators may act as a second mentor to client mentees when needed.

Mentoring coordinators will match mentors and mentees together based on what the mentees and mentors are looking for in the mentoring relationship, and how far they travel. After matching mentor and mentee, the coordinator will introduce the two in person and go over the expectations of the mentoring relationship. Coordinators act as a mediator, facilitating communication between the two parties and providing advice as needed.

A recurring topic in the mentee focus group was how the coordinators were always there for the mentees when they needed help, or just someone for them to talk to. As one mentee said, “they reach out every time I’m having a bad day. I don’t actually call anybody, but all of a sudden I’ll get a text [from the coordinator] like, ‘hey, how’re you doing?’ Like, she knows, she’s on radar!”

This relationship was seen as deeply authentic by participants in the mentee focus group, with participants discussing how even former coordinators maintain contact and
provide support and social service advocacy during a mentee crisis. According to one mentee, “it’s one thing I can say - even though they might have moved on, like the situation I had, like, I lost my job and she [the coordinator] wasn’t even with them [Pathfinders] – she took it out of her time to email my PO [parole officer] to let them know what’s going on.”

Mentors in the focus group reported feeling a high level of support from coordinators. Mentors may come to coordinators with questions or requests for support, and coordinators will offer advice or walk them through situations. If a mentor or mentee does not feel that the match is a good one, they can ask the mentoring coordinator for a rematch.

Mentors and mentees maintain regular communication. For those undergoing one-on-one mentoring, this consists of a phone conversation at least once a week and an in-person meeting once per month. Those undergoing group mentoring meet in a group once per week with other mentees and mentors. These group mentoring sessions may be held at local restaurants or even bowling alleys. Like with individual mentoring, group mentors and mentees are encouraged to maintain contact over the phone. Mentors who provide mentoring to individuals who are still incarcerated say that they appreciate having a regular schedule with their mentees. Mentors and mentees meeting one-on-one after incarceration reported difficulties in arranging face-to-face meetings due to scheduling conflicts.

Mentors as Volunteers

Pathfinders works with volunteer mentors to provide support and guidance to mentees. Mentors provide social and emotional support and give their mentees information that they might not have had access to before – on topics such as personal finance, professional development, and education – helping mentees to build needed life skills.
Volunteer mentors come from all walks of life, bringing a variety of viewpoints and perspectives. This contrasts with the standard re-entry mentoring model, where mentoring is done by paid employees – typically a social worker. Part of the reason for this is historical: when Family Pathfinders transitioned from getting most of its grant-funding from welfare-to-work programs to getting most of its funding from re-entry, it kept using its original mentoring model. This model had served the organization well before, and Pathfinders saw no reason to change it.

Beyond the historical reasons, Pathfinders has found a number of benefits to volunteer mentoring. Mentoring by volunteers helps to avoid power imbalances between mentors and mentees, aids in honest communication, and allows Pathfinders to draw on individuals with a wider range of experiences than would otherwise be the case. When more complicated situations arise that volunteers do not feel they are able to address, coordinators may also take the role of mentor as needed.

Financial Stability and Resilience

A number of challenges were found to exist in establishing financial stability and resilience among re-entry mentees. The primary challenge related to immediate needs taking priority over long-term goals. Mentees are in a precarious situation post-release, and may not be positioned for financial security for some time. Re-entry mentees face considerable challenges after their release from the prison system. Many individuals without family or friends nearby are homeless after their release from prison and some may find themselves without employment, finances, or clothing. One mentee in the focused group discussion faced just that situation:
Well, when I came out of the jail, I was homeless. I couldn’t go back to where I was living because my ex did drugs. And so, my daughter and I, we lived on the streets for the first week after I got out. I mean, that was so hard for me. I’d say – I’d tell myself – that if I was going to relapse, I’d have done it right then... But they [Pathfinders] have helped me in a lot of ways – gave me some clothes, because I had all my stuff in storage, I couldn’t get to all my stuff. And they’ve helped me with gas vouchers, and – they didn’t help me with housing, but they pointed me in the right direction.

Beyond arranging basic living needs, re-entry mentees must also complete their parole requirements. This may include finding full-time work, completing multiple drug tests per week, regularly meeting with parole officers, attending court sessions, and paying court fees. Some of these requirements make it difficult to fulfill other requirements: for example, it may be exceptionally challenging for an individual coming out of the prison system to find a full-time job that allows them to take time off to go to court and still pay well enough to cover their fees.

Once mentees have adjusted to the immediate post-release phase, additional crisis situations are likely to occur. Because of demanding parole requirements, any event that has an impact on either time or money can cause considerable setbacks among participants. What would ordinarily be considered a minor setback to a low-income worker - such as a reduction in hours in a part-time job, a schedule change, or a medical bill - may have unavoidable negative consequences for someone on parole.

By helping mentees get assistance from area non-profits and social services, Pathfinders tightens the safety net both in the immediate post-release phase and during crisis situations. This form of social service advocacy was found to be highly helpful in improving re-entry outcomes among mentees. Pathfinders also conducts financial education and training to
help mentees create emergency savings funds, avoid payday lenders, and maintain good credit.

Partnerships with Other Organizations

Pathfinders has a rich history of partnerships with local organizations. Organizations will formally partner with Pathfinders on one or more grant-funded programs, or may have an informal relationship consisting of referrals or favors. These relationships within the community have been consistently highlighted as one of the program’s greatest strengths, both by focus group participants and the external evaluation team from the UNT Health Science Center (Spence-Almaguer et al. 2015).

Mentors recognize that strong partnerships prevent the duplication of services in a community, allowing organizations to specialize in what they do well. By working together organizations can “piggyback” off of each other’s services, offering more than they would be capable of offering alone, while still maintaining focus on their core mission. As one participant in the mentor focus group said, “I think that Family Pathfinders has gotten even better coordinating with other similar agencies in the community, so that they’re not all trying to do the same thing... they may not be having a clothing drive here, but they know who is having one.”

Client mentees do not always recognize which organization is responsible for what service. However, they do recognize when valuable services are made available to them, as well as coordinators’ roles in getting them those services. Services specifically mentioned by mentees included:

- Help with finding clothing
• Bus and gas vouchers for transportation
• Help with finding housing and housing programs
• Help with getting legal documents such as birth certificates and driver’s licenses
• Help with writing resumes and conducting job interviews
• Help with preparing taxes and tax documents

What Mentees Are Looking For

In both the coordinator and mentor focus groups, participants made statements about the importance of meeting the mentees “where they are” and not prescribing solutions for them. Addressing what clients want out of the mentoring relationship was seen as important. In the mentee focus group, participants were asked what brought them to the mentoring program and what kept them involved. Mentees who received group mentoring cited the sense of community they felt attending the group sessions, the fun they had in attending the events, and the safety they felt in sharing personal thoughts and experiences. It was also added that it certainly didn’t hurt that group mentoring sessions included a free meal.

Because the mentee focus group contained only re-entry mentees undergoing group mentoring, there was a chance that it would not be representative of mentees undergoing one-on-one mentoring. So to supplement the focus group data, additional information was drawn from the database. When mentees enter the program, they fill out intake applications explaining why they would like to participate. 274 of these mentee intake applications ranging from 2010 to 2015 were analyzed, and the top two reasons for mentee participation were qualitatively coded.
According to the intake form data, the number one reason mentees participate in the program is that they feel they need help. The second is that they would like more support, and the third is that they would like someone to talk to. “Help” for mentees was not often expanded upon in the intake form, however, “support” was usually clarified to refer to social and/or emotional support.

![Figure 1: Top Two Mentee Reasons for Joining](image)

Participants in the mentee focus group found a number of services to be useful. Some of the services highlighted in the mentee focus group include:

- Help with finding housing and housing programs
- Help finding clothing post-release
- Gas and bus vouchers
- Help retrieving legal documents
- Help applying for social programs
Other services mentees mentioned included classes on tax preparation, and how to write resumes. One participant claimed that as a result of a resume writing workshop, her resume was so professional that she was hired based on it alone.
CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION

The question of what mentees are looking for was an interesting one, and illustrates a potential communication gap in the program. While the goal of the re-entry program is to increase financial stability and resilience in mentees, according to the intake data from the database the top three reasons that mentees sought to join the program were all related to social support; such as feeling they need help, support, and someone to talk to. “Resources” only ranked fifth on this list, and “achieving goals” was seventh. This may indicate a mismatch in terms of what mentees are looking to get out of the program and what mentors and coordinators are offering. However, as one mentor said, “they’re really clear, too, about not imposing our goals and dreams on them. That helping them realize theirs... it’s only going to happen if they choose to make it happen.”

Another interesting point is the difference between individual and group mentoring. Mentees undergoing group mentoring receive a greater amount of social support than those undergoing a one-on-one mentoring relationship. Mentees in a group setting meet with many other mentees, two to three coordinators acting as mentors, and do fun activities once per week. Mentees undergoing group mentoring have the same telephonic connection with coordinators as those undergoing individual mentoring, but also benefit from relationships with peers who are going through the same issues. This might affect program outcomes, and further research in this area may be useful.
CHAPTER 7

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

My work with Pathfinders, first through my position with the UNTHSC Evaluation Team, and later with the applied thesis project, was an incredible experience. By the time I finished my thesis, I’d been working with the organization in one form or another for almost two years. My client, Toby Jones, has been my main point of contact and a great source of wisdom all along. Toby has a deep experience as a mentoring coordinator with Pathfinders, and has been an active advocate for teenage drug offenders.

The Project

Overall, I am pleased with the way the project turned out. My client is satisfied with both the database redesign and the research deliverable. When I originally started working with Pathfinders as a member of the evaluation team, I had minimal experience with database development and none with programming. Since that time, my skills have grown exponentially, and the database redesign allowed me to implement what I had learned.

The focus groups were small, but we could delve deeper into certain areas than would otherwise be the case. This information was supplemented by the knowledge I had gained through conversations I had had with the mentoring coordinators, and from participating in several mentor training sessions. My only regret is that we were unable to hold a focus group with mentees receiving individual mentoring. Their experiences may have different from that of the group mentees, and would have been a good addition to the project.
Defeated by Success

My original timeline (pp. 49) called for me to complete the database expansion by August 2015, identify the themes of mentoring by October 2015, and finish the deliverable and thesis by March 2016. While the database was completed on time, the identification of themes was completed in May of 2016, the deliverable in September, and thesis in November, an overall delay of more than six months. This is due to a significant challenge that arose during the course of the project: I accepted a full-time position in a city roughly an hour and a half away. As a result, I encountered a number of scheduling difficulties, particularly difficulty in scheduling the focus groups, and was unable to dedicate the same amount time and effort I would have had available otherwise.

Additionally, for the first six months after starting my new career I was commuting approximately three hours a day or fifteen hours a week. This left me unable to dedicate much time or effort to anything that was not essential during this time. My new position was a wonderful opportunity, one that I do not regret, but the timing was terrible. I would caution anyone looking to complete their thesis project to be careful about starting their career early.

The End of the Era of Imprisonment?

The past few years have seen a number of improvements to the prison system. The Second Chance Act, reauthorized in 2015, is one facet of a cultural shift in how policymakers conceive of the prison system and its role. The bipartisan support for prison reform through efforts such as the Smart on Crime initiative, combined with recent state-led efforts to legalize marijuana and end the War on Drugs, has led to a slow but sure decline in the prison population.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Deliverables</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Database Expansion (Expected Completion Date: August, 2015)</strong></td>
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</table>
| **Tasks** | 1.) Interview Pathfinders coordinators and other potential database users in order to determine their daily needs and workflow and their quarterly and annual reporting needs  
2.) Beta-test database expansion with a small, interested group to identify bugs and opportunities for improvement before implementing across organization |
| **Deliverables** | 1.) Summary of user needs and workflow, to be utilized in redesigning the database  
2.) Finalize back end of database, user-friendly forms and appropriate queries for use by Family Pathfinders' various mentoring programs. |
| **2. Identification of the Themes of Mentoring (Expected Completion Date: October, 2015)** |
| **Tasks** | 1.) To identify the themes of mentoring  
2.) To generate additional research questions |
| **Deliverables** | 1.) Summarization of initial findings, to be discussed with interested stakeholders  
2.) List of research questions to be used in creation of focus group protocol |
| **3. Creation of Executive Report and Thesis (Expected Completion Date: March, 2016)** |
| **Tasks** | 1.) Conduct focus groups and/or interviews to investigate identified research questions. Analyze transcripts, identify themes and compare findings with quantitative data and existing literature. |
| **Deliverables** | 1.) An executive report for Pathfinders  
2.) An academic thesis will be published on these findings, with additional publications possible |

*Figure 2: Original Project Timeline*
In 2016, the Federal Bureau of Prisons was instructed to move away from the private prisons so loathed by social rights activists such as Angela Davis. On August 18, 2016, U.S. Deputy Attorney General Sally Yates (para. 3) issued a memorandum to the acting director of the Federal Bureau of Prisons:

Private prisons served an important role during a difficult period, but time has shown that they compare poorly to our own Bureau facilities. They simply do not provide the same level of correctional services, programs, and resources; they do not save substantially on costs; and as noted in a recent report by the Department’s Office of Inspector General, they do not maintain the same level of safety and security. The rehabilitative services that the Bureau provides, such as educational programs and job training, have proved difficult to replicate and outsource – and these services are essential to reducing recidivism and improving public safety.

For all these reasons, I am eager to enlist your help in beginning the process of reducing – and ultimately ending – our use of privately operated prisons. As you know, all of the Bureau’s existing contracts with private prison companies are term-limited and subject to renewal or termination. I am directing that, as each contract reaches the end of its term, the Bureau should either decline to renew that contract or substantially reduce its scope in a manner consistent with the law and the overall decline of the Bureau’s inmate population.

Yates (2016) goes on to applaud the Bureau’s current efforts to reduce their reliance on private prisons, and applaud their efforts at their own facilities. It is highly likely that the state prison systems will look to the example set by the Bureau and phase out their reliance on private prisons over the next few years as well.

Have we seen the end of the American era of imprisonment? Perhaps. The shuttering of private federal prisons is a good sign. However, the school to prison pipeline is still in effect and shows no sign of being dismantled anytime soon. And, as, as Wacquant (2009) claims, private prisons may well be a chimera hiding the true problem of poverty. But, perhaps, the end is in sight.
APPENDIX A

FOCUS GROUP TOPICS
Initial Remarks/Questions
1. Thank everyone for coming, establish consent/permission to record, etc
2. Explain what focus groups are/how they work – guided questions, but also conversation between participants, timelimit, etc.

Coordinator Questions
1. Topic: Investigate three-way relationship between mentors, mentees and coordinators
   - Can you describe for me how the partnership between mentors, mentees and you guys works, exactly?
   - What are some of the challenges you face or benefits you've noticed, working under this model?
   - I've heard a bit about your work with partnership organizations. How does that work, exactly?
2. Topic: Mentors as volunteers
   - So, why did you guys decide to focus on volunteer mentors, as opposed to other types?
   - Have you guys noticed any benefits or drawbacks to working with mentors as volunteers?
3. Topic: Financial stability in participants
   - So, one of Family Pathfinders’ main goals is to increase resilience and financial stability among its participants. Can you guys tell me a bit more about this?
   - What are some of the difficulties you’ve encountered in trying to promote this?
   - What do you think would improve your ability to help with this?

Mentor Topics
1. Topic: Feeling prepared for mentoring
   - So, can you guys tell me how this mentoring thing works, exactly?
   - How were you guys brought onboard and trained?
   - Do you think most people are prepared for their first mentoring experience?
   - What do you think would help them be more prepared?
     - Lead-in to asking if they want more on-going support: training, closer contact with coordinator, etc.
2. Topic: Role of Family Pathfinders in increasing financial stability among mentees
   - Two of Family Pathfinders goals are to increase resilience and financial stability in mentees. Do you feel that Family Pathfinders and you guys overall are successful in that?
   - What works, or contrarily, what else needs to be done?
3. Topic: Experience as volunteers
   - Can you tell me some more about your impressions of the mentees? Like, who they are, and what they need?
   - What are some of the topics that you think come up a lot, between mentors and mentees?
   - Do you feel that the mentoring program is addressing mentee’s needs?
Do you guys think mentoring has a positive impact on the mentors, also? Does it help people feel fulfilled?

Mentee Topics
1. Topic: Experiences working with Family Pathfinders and the mentoring program
   ○ So, what do you think brings people to Family Pathfinders and the mentoring program?
   ○ Can you tell about the process – like, how someone gets set up here and meets their mentor(s)?
   ○ What do you think the rough spots, or problems are, in getting set up with a mentor/Family Pathfinders? What do you think would help with those?

2. Topic: Financial stability and resilience
   ○ So, one of Family Pathfinders' goals in the mentoring program is to help people figure out how to get on your feet financially. Do you guys think the mentors, or the program, help out at all in that way? Can you describe how?
   ○ Another of Family Pathfinders' goals is to help people tackle some of the big issues that come up in life, maybe help them find ways to deal with these things moving forward. Resilience, and all that. Do you think the mentors, or the program, help out at all in that way? Can you describe how?

3. Topic: Other
   ○ Is there anything else you guys would like to share, maybe about how you think the mentoring program affects people, or about what you think they could do to improve it?
APPENDIX B

CLIENT DELIVERABLE
The Story of Pathfinders

Investigating the impact, experiences, and context of mentoring

K. Hanich  
9/26/16  
University of North Texas
The Pathfinders’ Mission

The mission of Pathfinders is “to strengthen the community by empowering individuals and families to attain self-sufficiency.”

Pathfinders does this by taking a “helping families help themselves” approach, providing the support system needed for at-risk individuals to sustain financial and personal stability. The Pathfinders Mentoring Program provides this support system through a long-term mentoring relationship with its clients. Clients, or mentees, join the program for one year to receive support services from Pathfinders’ mentoring coordinators and volunteer mentors and are able to continue the relationship after completing the program.

The different forms of support and services that Pathfinders offers includes:

- Emotional and social support; through conversations about participants’ life history, goals, and events
- Building life skills; related to budgeting, job-seeking, and employment retention
- Connecting participants with community resources; including food banks, clothing donation centers, rent assistance programs, and childcare aid
- Financial literacy; teaching the basics of banking, budgeting, and credit

Pathfinders provides mentoring services for families, youth, and individuals seeking to re-enter society from the prison system. These services are funded by donations, and by grants from organizations such as the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Justice.

The Pathfinders Mentoring Program has been recognized as a Best Practice by the Urban Partnership Initiatives of the Department of Health and Human Services, and was named a Top-Rated Nonprofit by GreatNonprofits from 2012 to 2016.
About the Study

In 1997, Pathfinders began as “Family Pathfinders” a mentoring organization dedicated to increasing financial stability in families struggling with poverty. This program expanded to include at-risk youth, and in 2010 Pathfinders began offering mentoring to people re-entering society after incarceration. Since that time, the number of re-entry mentoring clients has dramatically increased. In an effort to learn more about mentoring best practices, Pathfinders has partnered with Kristen Hanich of the University of North Texas Health Science Center to conduct a study investigating the impact, experiences, and context of mentoring. This work forms the basis of Kristen’s thesis.

Methodology

Between 2014 and 2016, while working with the University of North Texas Health Science Center (UNTHSC)’s Evaluation Team, Kristen built and maintained a database for Pathfinders. The material captured in this database, including intake forms, progress notes, self-sufficiency evaluations, and reported services, forms the basis of the quantitative analyses throughout this report.

Between late 2015 and early 2016, Kristen conducted a series of focus groups aimed at investigating several themes:

- The relationship between coordinators, mentors, and mentees
- The experiences of mentors as volunteers
- Financial stability among participants

The results of these focus groups, as well as Kristen’s past participation in mentoring training and conversations with the coordinators, form the basis of the qualitative work throughout this report.
Mentoring Coordinators
How Coordinators, Mentors, and Mentees Work Together
Mentoring coordinators are Pathfinders staff who screen prospective clients for enrollment into the mentoring program. Once admitted, the coordinators match the participants individually and to mentoring groups with volunteer mentors from the community who have completed mentor training. The triangular relationship between participant, mentor and mentor coordinator is what makes the mentorship successful.

Coordinators may act as a second mentor to clients. Mentees talk about how the coordinators are always there for them when they need help, or just someone to talk to. This relationship extends beyond the typical 9 to 5 workday. Former coordinators still keep in touch with their clients.

Mentoring coordinators facilitate monthly going mentor training in the form of mentor mixers where mentors can meet to discuss best practices and attend workshops on various topics related to the field of mentoring. In addition, Mentoring coordinators advocate with third-party service providers such as government agencies and local non-profits to help clients obtain needed services.

Coordinators will come together to share their experience when a mentee or mentor has a situation that’s out of their reach:

“If one of my mentors has a situation or an issue I haven’t faced before, then I can check with [one of the others] to see if it’s come up before so we can find a group decision on an answer. It allows us to bring a whole lot more knowledge to the relationship.”
- Focus Group Coordinator

Different mentoring programs have different requirements, based on the funder requirements. Some programs will require more or less regular contact with mentors and mentees. Typically, coordinators will get in touch once a week with mentees and once every other week with mentors.

Partnerships with Other Organizations
Since its inception in 1997, Pathfinders of Tarrant County has had a strong history of partnerships with local organizations. These organizations will partner with Pathfinders on one or more grant-funded programs. Each grant-funded program may have a number of memorandums of understanding (or MOU’s) between partnering agencies. If an MOU exists for a program, then there is a formal relationship between Pathfinders and an organization. Clients for a program receive services from both, and partners may receive a share of the funding.

In addition to formal partners, Pathfinders also works informally with organizations such as local shelters, food banks, training providers, sources for clothing, furniture and household goods, as well as employment services. This allows coordinators to help mentees get access to needed community resources even when no MOU exists.

“When I’m really, down, down, down, I can call her and she’ll pray. You know, that’s a powerful thing to me.”
- Focus Group Mentee
Pathfinders’ partners include:

- The Tarrant County Re-Entry Coalition
- Workforce Solutions for Tarrant County
- Community Supervision and Corrections Department
- UNT Health Science Center
- The Women’s Center of Tarrant County
- One Safe Place of Tarrant County
- Cornerstone Assistance Network
- Parents and Partners of Prisoners
- First Street Mission
- Center for Transforming Lives
- Red Oak Books Foundation

A Key Differentiator

In the focus groups, both mentees and mentors mentioned how Pathfinders’ strong community partnerships set the organization apart.

Mentors recognize that strong partnerships prevent the duplication of services in a community, allowing organizations to specialize in what they do well. By working together organizations can “piggyback” off of each other’s services, offering more than they would be capable of offering alone, while still maintaining their focus on their core mission.

Although mentees may not be familiar with the role of each individual partnering agency, they recognize when valuable services are made available to them, and coordinators’ role in getting them those services.

Specific services that were mentioned include:

- Help with finding clothing
- Bus and gas vouchers for transportation
- Help with finding housing and housing programs
- Help with getting legal documents
- Help with writing resumes and conducting job interviews
- Help with preparing taxes and tax documents

Mentors

Mentors as Volunteers

Pathfinders works with volunteer mentors to provide support and guidance to mentees. The volunteer mentors come from all walks of life, providing a variety of valuable experiences and insights. Mentors give their mentees information that they may not have had access to before – on topics such as personal finance, professional development, and education – helping mentees to build needed life...
skills. Beyond this, mentors serve as someone a mentee can talk to in what may be a very difficult and challenging time.

Having volunteer mentors helps to keep a level playing field between mentees and mentors, as well as bring a greater range of experience to the table.

Volunteer mentoring...

- Avoids power differences
- Enables honest connections between mentors and mentees
- Mentor is friend, confidant, advisor – not just another spot on the to-do list

“IT’s Our Legacy”
Pathfinders has worked with community volunteers since its inception in 1997. This was the original model the Family Pathfinders mentoring program was built on, and the organization has continuously refined the mentoring process since then.

While the organization’s original focus was on a “welfare to work” method of addressing poverty - as opposed to the needs of the re-entry population - many of the best practices remain the same from the 1990’s to today:

- Proper matching of mentors with families is crucial to a successful relationship
- Regular communication between staff coordinators, mentors and participants
- Work with as much of the community as possible – civic groups, religious congregations, businesses can all be resources and advocates
- The gap between those who succeed and those who do not depends on the support of people who care and advocate

How Mentors Come to Pathfinders
Mentors come across Pathfinders in a number of ways:

1. Coordinators may know people in the community that they feel would be a good fit for the program and recruit them directly
2. Mentors might come across seminars in church groups and other community organizations
3. Volunteer sites such as Volunteer Match or GreatNonProfits list Pathfinders as a volunteering opportunity and provide information and volunteer reviews

Volunteer mentors may sign up to provide mentoring one-on-one, to participate in group mentoring, or through the Pathfinders’ Pathfinder Partner program.

Meeting a Mentee
Coordinators match mentors and mentees. This is based on what the mentees and mentors are looking for in the mentoring relationship, and how far they’re willing to travel.

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Those providing re-entry mentoring may meet their mentees inside of the jail for pre-release mentoring or outside after they have been released from incarceration for post-release mentoring.

- Mentors who provide pre-release mentoring say they appreciate having a regular schedule with their mentees.
- Those providing individual post-release mentoring may face challenges in arranging a face-to-face meeting due to the scheduling demands of people on probation.

The coordinator will introduce mentor and mentee in person, and talk about what the mentoring relationship means. With the ground rules laid out, mentors and mentees can communicate with each other freely.

For one-on-one mentoring, this translates to communicating by phone at least once per week, engaging by text and social media, and meeting face to face a minimum of once per month. Mentors and mentees may meet for coffee, in restaurants, or local libraries or parks.

For group mentoring, mentors and mentees will meet in a group once per week. These group mentoring sessions may be held at local restaurants or pro-social venues such as bowling alleys. Pathfinders will ask businesses for permission to host these group meetings, and then pay the cost of meals and activities. Some venues support the program by not only supplying a meeting place, but by donating food or discounting services. Like with individual mentoring, group mentoring allows space for mentors and mentees to connect for discussion which oftentimes leads to regular communication outside of the group.

**Mentees**

**What Mentees Are Looking For**

Mentees may join the Pathfinders Mentoring program from a number of different avenues:

- Different programs serve different populations and have different requirements to join
- Some programs serve families or individuals while another serves youth
- A larger and larger percentage of mentees come from re-entry programs, like Tarrant County’s Intensive Day Treatment (IDT), which is a jail-based substance abuse program.

Each population may come in with a different set of needs, depending on their clients’ common goals. Aside from the program goals that Pathfinders and partnering agencies address – such as reducing recidivism rates, and helping families get off of public assistance – mentees come into the program with a set of personal goals that they want to address. Helping the clients meet these goals is part of the Mentoring program’s primary objective of meeting the clients where they are.

Re-entry mentees coming into the program complete an intake application explaining why they would like to participate. Most mentees coming into the program say they need help, more support, and someone to talk to.
In order for a prospective mentee to join the Pathfinders’ Mentoring program, they must first meet grant requirements. These requirements are different for each grant but include the targeting of at-risk populations, such as the economically disadvantaged.

For the re-entry program, Pathfinders coordinators enter the jail and provide a presentation on what the mentoring program is and the benefits are. If a prospective mentee is interested, they can apply to join. A coordinator will interview the prospective mentee to see if they’re a good fit for the program. If so, mentoring will begin in the jail.

Pre-release mentors will meet with mentees to discuss their goals and work out a post-release plan. Before mentees are released, the mentoring coordinator will try to match them with a post-release mentor. This can be an individual mentor or a group mentor, based on the mentee’s needs. Some mentees may remain unmatched, and receive their mentoring directly from a coordinator.

The specifics of the mentoring relationship will vary depending on whether the mentorship involves an individual or a group mentor.

**Individual mentoring**
- One mentor, one mentee and one coordinator
- Phone call once per week or more
- Meet in person once per month, or more in a mutually agreed-upon venue

274 re-entry applications ranging from 2010 to 2015 were analyzed, and the top two reasons for participating were qualitatively coded.
Group mentoring
- Several mentors, coordinators, peer group of other mentees
- Phone call from assigned mentor/coordinator once per week or more
- Meet in person several times per month for lunch, dinner, or pro-social activity

What Mentees Find Useful
In the focus group, mentees discussed a number of the services that Pathfinders offers. Some of these services were described as being very helpful to mentees.

Services described as particularly helpful include:
- Help with finding housing and housing programs
- Help setting goals
- Support and encouragement from coordinators and mentors
- Help finding clothing post-release
- Gas and bus vouchers
- Help retrieving legal documents
- Help applying for social programs

Other services mentees mentioned included classes on tax preparation, and how to write resumes. One mentee claimed that her resume was so professional that it was the reason she was hired.

Re-entry mentees experienced different levels of difficulty upon their release. One mentee was made homeless due to her probation requirements and was unable to access her finances, legal documents, or possessions. She and her daughter were without shelter for a week. During this time Pathfinders coordinated with area non-profits to provide clothing and help her find housing services. These services were critical during this time period.

Putting It All Together
Tackling the Needs of Re-entry Mentees
Mentees in the re-entry program face a number of daily challenges related to their release from incarceration. Some may find themselves without employment, finances, or clothing. Even those with families living nearby may not be able to stay with their relatives due to parole or probation requirements, making them homeless.

Re-entry mentees face considerable challenges after their release. Beyond basic living needs, they must also complete community supervision requirements. This may include finding full-time work, completing multiple drug tests per week, regularly meeting with supervision officers, attending court sessions, and paying court fees. Some of these requirements make it difficult to fulfill other requirements — for example, it may be challenging for someone coming from incarceration to find a
full-time job that allows them to take time off to go to court and still pay well enough to cover their fees.

Mentors and coordinators act as an emotional support during this difficult time. They are there when the daily challenges become unbearable, and when the inevitable crisis occurs. Mentees cite the need for an authentic connection, praising mentors and coordinators who keep in contact even after the formal relationship is complete.

However, there are also challenges in regards to mentoring. Time is especially an issue. In the focus groups, both mentors and mentees talked about how busy schedules can lead to difficulty in finding a good time for mentors and mentees to meet.

- Pre-release mentors claimed their favorite thing about being pre-release was that they wouldn’t have to track their mentees down
- Mentees undergoing group mentoring doubted that they would have time in their lives for meeting an extra person

**Building Resilience and Financial Stability**

Before mentees can attain long-term resilience and stability, they must first master these things in the short-term. This can be difficult given the demands and realities of their given situation, particularly for re-entry mentees. Additional demands; such as taking care of a household, children, or elderly relatives, may put further strain on mentees finances.

Pathfinders services can help mentees tackle some of these immediate challenges by directing them to community resources, helping them build resumes, and coaching them on how to answer interview questions asking about their backgrounds. Other services are focused on helping mentees attain long-term financial stability. These include educational and job-training programs, budget and financial literacy workshops, and goal-setting sessions.

The task of mentoring is in meeting the clients where they are and helping them create goals for the future. However, there is a natural tension in encouraging mentees to set goals for the future when so much of the short-term is still in chaos. Is teaching about budgeting appropriate when mentees don’t have jobs? Should mentors teach about the long-term plan when a mentee’s long-term plan might be noon?

Mentees in the focus group talked about the role of goals and visions in maintaining their focus. The importance of both long- and short-term goals were touched upon, as was the role of social support in helping people achieve those goals. Individual differences may play a strong role in determining what sorts of goals are appropriate for mentees.
In Conclusion

Being a mentor involves providing emotional support to mentees and sharing valuable life skills. What mentees need most is from mentors is someone to listen to them without judging them. This support helps mentees maintain focus on their goals and deal with crises as they occur. A properly resolved crisis may bring with it the opportunity for mentors and mentees to deepen the mentoring relationship.

Mentees consider many of the services that Pathfinders offers to be essential to getting back on their feet. These services may not be unique in the community, but would likely otherwise be inaccessible to the re-entry population without coordinators serving as the gateway.

"With our client base, you also find that sometimes the weekly conversations can be kind of short with the clients until there’s a crisis. Once there’s a crisis... All of a sudden they’re a whole lot more communicative. Sometimes it takes the crisis to really develop that deeper trust.”

- Focus Group Coordinator
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