

**Desistance Strategies:**  
*A study of criminal behavior from the  
offenders' point of view*

A Report by  
Tushar Kansal, Dania Reid, Craig Thomas, and Henry White  
In Conjunction with The Connection, Inc.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	3
INTRODUCTION	5
LITERATURE REVIEW	10
METHODOLOGY	14
FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS	19
I. Past Criminality	19
II. Interpersonal Relationships	25
III. Community Involvement	31
IV. Desistance: Turning Point vs. Process	34
V. Future Outlook	36
VI. Program Feedback	39
VII. Employment	43
CONCLUSION	44
RECOMMENDATIONS	47
FUTURE RESEARCH POSSIBILITIES	48
WORKS CITED	49
APPENDICES	
Appendix A: Interview Schedule	50
Appendix B: Coding System	55
Appendix C: Coding Sample	63
Appendix D: Consent Form	64
Appendix E: Demographic Survey	65

## **Executive Summary**

This study highlights factors that aid and hinder criminal offenders as they attempt to change their behavior and desist from crime. We stress the perspectives of the offenders themselves. We conducted 22 interviews with graduates of Connection House and current members of the Middlesex and Meriden Alternative to Incarceration Centers (AICs). In this report, we include both statistics and quotations. We seek to emphasize the voices of our interviewees: individuals who struggle on a daily basis with the issues of criminality and desistance.

In order to isolate the factors that promote desistance from crime and those that promote persistence, we divided up our interviewees into groups of eight “persisters” and fourteen “desisters.” That is, those individuals who have engaged in criminal activity during the past six months are designated as “persisters,” and those who have not committed any crimes during that past six months are “desisters.” We do not know whether the persisters or desisters will engage in crimes again. However, past studies have found that offenders who do not commit another crime within six months of being released from state custody have a significantly greater chance of “going straight” in the long run. We use this six-month period to separate behaviors and attitudes that are likely to lead to desistance and those that are not. We also present the most difficult challenges in the lives of both persisters and desisters.

### **Key Findings:**

- Drug abuse, economic deprivation, and anger are all related to criminal activity. Many participants stressed that recovery from addiction is a life-long process of constant struggle.
- Supportive relationships with romantic partners, family, and friends can be powerful factors in encouraging desistance and successful reintegration into the community.
- Both persisters and desisters reported that socializing with criminals often leads to criminal behavior, but the desister population was more likely to break away from old friends.

- Desisters were more actively engaged in the community than persisters were. Desisters participated in communities of faith and volunteered in shelters and halfway houses.
- While some interviewees stated that one factor was a “turning point” in their lives that lead them to desist from crime, most described desistance as a *process* that takes an extended period of time, including episodes of relapse.
- Desisters tend to have more concrete goals than do persisters, and desisters also tend to be more optimistic about the future.
- All of the participants had complex strategies for avoiding future crime.
- Connection House graduates tended to have positive feedback about that program, while AIC participants had both positive and negative feedback. Both persisters and desisters recognized that programs are not the only solution, though, and that people have to be accountable for their own actions.
- Many participants found vocational and life-skills programs to be useful in helping them avoid crime. Employment was a factor that helped some participants desist from crime.
- Our interview pool—which had more whites and females than the percentages of those two groups in Connecticut’s prison population—suggests that those two groups are overrepresented in diversionary programs such as Connection House and the AICs.

# INTRODUCTION

This study examines the factors that aid and hinder ex-offenders in avoiding crime. According to Maruna, most people who leave prison intend to lead law-abiding lives. However, as is generally accepted in criminological literature, approximately one-third of prisoners return to prison within six months of release, while another third of prisoners return to prison within three years. In this report, we outline the greatest challenges facing ex-offenders and highlight the factors which seem most helpful for offenders as they attempt to desist from crime.

This project was originally conceived by Charles Barber of The Connection, Inc., and was executed by the Wesleyan University research team, consisting of four students. The team interviewed participants in The Connection, Inc. programs who had run afoul of the law. We share their stories about what has helped them avoid crime, what future plans they have, and the biggest problems they face. In addition, by comparing the experiences of those who have recently committed crimes with those who have desisted from crime for at least six months, we hope to discover which factors help people succeed in the long term. The factors we studied included past criminality, living situations, romantic partners, family involvement, friends, influential people, community activities, turning points, processes of desistance, goals, and program participation (in programs like Connection House and Narcotics Anonymous (NA)).

## The Offender's Point of View

In most studies about criminality and desistance, the thoughts and opinions of offenders are largely ignored. In our study, we take a different approach. Our goal is to represent the offender's point of view to the best of our abilities. To fully understand criminal behavior, it is important to look at the most influential factors in the lives of offenders.

This study supplements the quantitative work which emphasizes the importance of structural forces in crime and punishment, such as class and race.<sup>1</sup> We provide an array of individual experiences in order to create a broader understanding about criminality and desistance in society.

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<sup>1</sup>See Petersilia (2003) for an example.

### The Connection, Inc.

The Connection, Inc. is a “nonprofit organization dedicated to inspiring people to reach their fullest potential as productive and valued citizens.”<sup>2</sup> In order to reach this goal, the agency works with many individuals who have been involved with the criminal justice system. It has over forty individual programs spread throughout Connecticut. For our project, we interviewed clients who participated in one of three programs: Connection House, the Middlesex Alternative to Incarceration Center (AIC), and the Meriden AIC.

*Connection House* is a fully residential facility in Middletown, CT, with fourteen beds. It treats clients with substance abuse problems. Some clients check themselves in and others are mandated to be there by the Connecticut Department of Corrections (DOC) as part of their early release agreement from prison. Most clients stay for about six months, and participate in individual and group programs. For our interviews, we spoke with people who had successfully graduated from Connection House, which means that they completed Connection House program and are now living in mainstream society.

*The Middlesex Alternative to Incarceration Center (AIC)* is located in Middletown as well, and has both residential and daytime clients. This AIC addresses the needs of a wide range of clients, who are referred by the Judicial Branch of the State of Connecticut. It serves up to 70 clients at a time.

*The Meriden AIC* offers out-client services only. (Out-clients live elsewhere, but participate in programming offered by the facility.) Similarly to the Middlesex Center, clients may be mandated here for a large number of reasons; most are on parole or probation. For both of the AICs, we spoke to current participants. We could not receive the necessary Connecticut DOC approval to speak with parolees, so we only spoke to people under the supervision of Court Support Services Division, such as probation violators.

### Persisters and Desisters

In order to isolate the major factors that have encouraged offenders to desist from criminal behavior, we interviewed two different populations: those who currently are in the midst of criminal behavior and legal troubles (persisters), and those who are no longer engaged in criminal activity (desisters). We hoped to find significant differences between these two populations, in order to determine what factors allow some people to turn away from crime while others repeatedly run afoul of the law.

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<sup>2</sup>For a detailed description of The Connection, Inc. and its programs, please visit their website at [www.theconnectioninc.org](http://www.theconnectioninc.org)

There are many ways to divide offenders into “persisters” and “desisters.” In an extreme example, it would be possible to say that everyone who is not actively committing a crime is a desister. Another possibility would be to classify people based on intent—those who intend to commit crimes in the future are persisters, and those who intend to stay straight are desisters. While we do not intend to deny the ability of our participants to shape their futures, many people who decide to abide by the law later commit crimes again. For the purposes of our study, we decided that it would be most useful to define “persisters” and “desisters” based on how long it has been since the individual last committed a crime. Past studies have found that a third of people who are released from prison re-offend within six months, and another third re-offends within three years. Therefore, we chose to define desistance as “having spent the past six months without committing a crime.” The “persisters” in our study, therefore, had all committed a crime within six months of the date we interviewed them<sup>3</sup>.

In order to target a “desister” population, we interviewed graduates of Connection House. We hypothesized that this population would have desisted from crime for at least one year, which was largely the case. Out of the thirteen Connection House graduates interviewed, only one had violated the law within the past six months.

In order to target a “persister” population, we interviewed current participants of two AIC programs. We hypothesized that we would find people who had committed crimes recently, and would therefore fit our “persister” profile because most people are mandated to be there for violating a condition of their probation or parole. Out of the AIC population, seven out of nine people had offended within the past six months.

	<b>Desister (No Crimes Committed During Last 6 Months)</b>	<b>Persister (Crime Committed During Last 6 Months)</b>
<b>Connection House Graduates</b>	12 (92%)	1 (8%)
<b>AIC Participants</b>	2 (22%)	7 (78%)

In our analysis, we differentiate between persisters and desisters. These groups are largely synonymous with the AIC members and Connection House graduates, respectively, but

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<sup>3</sup> At the time of interviewing, one of the interviewees had been out of prison for only two weeks; we chose to discard this interview because the interviewee did not have a sufficient chance to prove desistance or persistence. At least two of the participants live in some form of supervised living (like a halfway house); we include their data, despite the reservation that they have been supervised, and not completely free.

not completely. By analyzing the differences between the persisters and desisters, we show which factors are most associated with desistance. If there is a factor that is present in more of the desisters' lives than the persisters' lives, we may be able to suggest that this factor can contribute to avoiding criminal behavior.

We are not drawing a firm line between the two populations, however. While the persister group is statistically more likely to re-offend, we cannot predict the future. Even if a person we classify as a persister never re-offends, our division is still significant because he is in the early stages of desistance. We hope this division will provide us insight into the different stages of the transition from committing crimes to becoming a law-abiding citizen.

### The Sample Population

We collected demographic information about our participants in order to see if there were any over-represented groups in our study compared to the imprisoned population as a whole. We compare the participants of Connection House and the AICs by age, gender, race, marital status, employment status, and place of residence.

Overall, the ages of participants ranged from the 20s into the 50s. The AIC group was significantly younger, with 78% (7 of 9) age 30 or younger. This largely reflects the age of the clientele of the AICs. In the Connection House graduate group, however, 69% (9 of 13) were over age 40. This is partially because we contacted graduates of Connection House, while we contacted current member of the AICs. The age of the clientele of Connection House may be comparable with the AICs, but some of Connection House graduates we spoke to have been out for a decade or more. Age is often a significant factor in criminal activity; there is a much lower incidence of crime in older age groups (Petersilia 2001).

We interviewed approximately equal numbers of men and women in the AIC (four and five, respectively), and we interviewed nine men and four women at Connection House. The percentage of males in our total population was 59% (13 of 22). This number is low for the offender population as whole; males make up over 90% of people incarcerated in state prisons.<sup>4</sup> While the offender population of Connecticut may vary some from this national figure, our sample nevertheless is overly representative of women.

In terms of race, we over represent whites and under represent blacks compared to the total offender population. Approximately one-third of offenders are white, while our sample population is 59% white (13 of 22). Our population is 18% Latino/a and 18% black, with four of each ethnicity, respectively. In the offender population as a whole, the Latino/a percentage is

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.prisonpolicy.org/prisonindex/prisoners.shtml>

approximately the same, but blacks make up almost half of those incarcerated in state prison.<sup>5</sup> In our report, therefore, it is likely that we over represent the experiences of white offenders, which may differ significantly from offenders of other ethnicities.

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.prisonpolicy.org/prisonindex/prisoners.shtml>

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Criminal justice literature, whether pertaining to the American judicial system, penal system, prison industrial complex or other sub-cultural phenomenon, is robust and contains a certain temporal longevity. Since the construction of the first prison in America, Walnut Street Jail, established in Philadelphia in 1790, sociological literature has accompanied and traced the rise of this bureaucratic and economic machine.

The American penal system is currently the world's largest for any industrialized nation and continues to grow. The system today holds over 2 million prisoners, 95 percent of whom will eventually be released, according to a US Department of Justice estimate.<sup>6</sup> With current mandatory minimum sentences, three strikes rules, and other judicial practices promoting incarceration, more people are going to prison than ever in history. Most of these offenders eventually return to their communities, albeit usually for a short period of time. Two-thirds of all ex-convicts are rearrested within three years of their release, strongly suggesting severe problems with the current reentry infrastructure.<sup>7</sup>

In the 1980s new, tougher drug laws largely fueled the beginning of the hyper-incarceration period which we see continuing today. Accompanying these new laws and expanding prisons was the feeling among many reentry systems personnel that “nothing works”; no matter what new programs and complicated new approaches were tried, most criminals were career criminals, later deemed “super predators,” unable to reform their deviant behaviors.

A moderate body of literature emerged to question this view. Casper and Brereton, for example, questioned the quantification of “effectiveness” in light of amorphous and often contradictory definitions of goals.<sup>8</sup> They denounced the intrinsic complications of running programs with both manifest and latent character goals, considered necessary for completion before “successful” reintegration was possible.<sup>9</sup> Finally they maintained any evaluation must be given an appropriate time window to view these programs.<sup>10</sup>

The 1970's and 1980's also saw, for the first time, the idea of self-reporting and self-reported crime statistics in scholarly journals and entering into professional criminological discourse. Self-reporting opened a window into the lives, thoughts, feelings and general human

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<sup>6</sup> Joan Petersilia, *When Prisoners Come Home: Parole and Prisoner Reentry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), v.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

<sup>8</sup> Jonathan D. Casper and David Brereton, “Evaluating Criminal Justice Reforms,” *Law & Society Review* v.18 n.1 (1984): 121.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.

condition of ex-offenders and current inmates through their words and stories of past and current criminal activity. In 1973 David Farrington published the seminal work, "Self-Reports of Deviant Behavior: Predictable and Stable?" in which he stated the now common-knowledge assertion:

The key dependent variable in criminology is deviant behavior. In the past this has often been defined according to the criminal law measured using the official statistics of crime. However, it is generally believed that official records do not provide an accurate measure of deviant behavior.<sup>11</sup>

An independent, three-part analysis in 1983 confirmed for the first time the validity of self-reporting. Based on studies of youth smoking in grades 7-12 in an unnamed Midwest community, responses of teens to a confidential questionnaire were substantiated through a "randomized response" instrument and through the "biochemical measure of smoking"-- mouths of a random sample of the surveyed teens were literally swabbed to confirm the accuracy of the survey responses.<sup>12</sup>

In the mid-1980's the concept of self reporting simply as a means of calculating the frequency of deviant or criminal activity came under question as academics began to realize that this information could be used to probe more complex sociological issues about criminal behavior and intent. Blumstein, Farrington and Moitra analyzed four longitudinal delinquency studies from Philadelphia, London, Racine, Wisconsin, and Marion County, Oregon.<sup>13</sup> All four studies confirmed the existence of offenders they deemed persisters, i.e., those who have a very high recidivism rate. They reasoned that if one could find patterns of behavior or general markers to predict persistence behavior in the personal responses of the persisters, those exhibiting such characteristics could be defined early in their criminal careers and separated from the innocents and desisters who have low recidivism probabilities. This might potentially have a "significant crime reduction impact."<sup>14</sup> But in 1987, Farrington published an article warning of criminal justice policy decisions based on these predictions of high-rate offending without many further longitudinal studies to confirm and bolster the variables used to make the predictions.<sup>15</sup> Another study from 1985 argued that criminal opportunity could be reduced if criminal's self reports were

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<sup>11</sup> David P Farrington, "Self-Reports of Deviant Behavior: Predictive and Stable?" *The Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* v.64 n.1 (March 1973): 99.

<sup>12</sup> Ronald L. Akers et al, "Are Self-Reports of Adolescent Deviance Valid? Biochemical Measures, Randomized Response, and the Bogus Pipeline in Smoking Behavior," *Social Forces* v.62 n.1 (September 1983).

<sup>13</sup> Alfred Blumstein, David P. Farrington and Soumyo Moitra, "Delinquency Careers: Innocents, Desisters, and Persisters," *Crime and Justice* v.6 (1985)

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 187.

<sup>15</sup> David P Farrington, "Predicting Individual Crime Rates," *Crime and Justice* v.9 (1987).

analyzed for the rational choices and their decision-making, but only as they pertained to specific crimes.<sup>16</sup>

More recent criminal self-reporting work has diverged into two categories: large-scale assessment of current and prior responses for global trends and personal narrative pieces of individual criminal lives and possible attempts to go straight. One of the most notable recent examples of large-scale analysis of self-reporting is *Making Good: How Ex-Convicts Reform and Rebuild Their Lives*, Shadd Maruna's 2001 analysis of the Liverpool Desistance Survey (LDS). Based upon the LDS, a large-scale British project to produce narrative data on the thoughts of ex-offenders about their own desistance and variables which influenced their going straight, Maruna questions the stark division that has been drawn in criminological discourse between persisters and desisters.<sup>17</sup>

Several important books have been published in the focused narrative field in the last few years. *All God's Children: The Bosket Family and the American Tradition of Violence* came out in 1995 as Fox Butterfield's attempt to trace the social-psychological roots of the American epidemic of violence and the prison industrial complex as a means of trying and failing to stem this tide. In 2004, Jennifer Gonnerman published *Life on the Outside: The Prison Odyssey of Elaine Bartlett*. Rather than a redemption or condemnation piece, the book tells the story of the incarceration period and subsequent struggle of Elaine Bartlett to go straight.<sup>18</sup>

Of tangential relation but immeasurable importance in any discussion of criminal justice and the prison industrial complex is Latessa, Gendreau and Cullen's 2002 article, "Beyond Correctional Quackery: Professionalism and the Possibility of Effective Treatment." A sharp denunciation of modern corrections, it focuses its ire on those approaches that operate without considering existing knowledge of causes of crime or what programs have been shown to change offender behavior. They articulate four main sources of this "quackery": the lack of research implementation in program designs; lack of assessment and classification for these programs; failure to utilize proven treatment methods; and near-total lack of evaluation of the entire process.<sup>19</sup> They argue that such "quackery" has been phased out of the medical sciences through

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<sup>16</sup> Ronald V. Clarke and Derek B. Cornish, "Modeling Offenders' Decisions: A Framework for Research and Policy," *Crime and Justice* v.6 (1985).

<sup>17</sup> Shadd Maruna, *Making Good: How Ex-Convicts Reform and Rebuild Their Live* (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 2001).

<sup>18</sup> Jennifer Gonnerman, *Life on the Outside: The Prison Odyssey of Elaine Bartlett* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2004).

<sup>19</sup> Edward J. Latessa, Francis T. Cullen and Paul Gendreau, "Beyond Correctional Quackery: Professionalism and the Possibility of Effective Treatment," *Federal Probation* v.66 n.2 (September 2002): 44-46.

careful governmental licensing and self-reflective analysis of effectiveness while governmental policy and monetary support for corrections uphold destructive practices.<sup>20</sup>

Our study falls into the somewhat less robust literary ground between the large analysis pieces aiming to find global trends in responses of ex-offenders and personal narrative pieces. We use analysis tools including a social science computing program to analyze global trends for our 22 cases and qualitative quotations to provide emphasis to the differences in responses between persisters and desisters and insight into why those differences might exist. We also hope to add to the general knowledge of what works and does not work for ex-offenders attempting to re-enter society, the chronically under-assessed correctional field, according to the “correctional quackery” article.

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 44-46.

# METHODOLOGY

## Sampling

We used two sample populations. The first group consisted of ex-clients of Connection House who had “successfully” integrated into society. For this group, we defined “success” as desisting from crime or substance abuse for the six months prior to the interview date, and only interviewed ex-clients who met this criterion. We identified this group as “desisting” offenders.<sup>21</sup>

The second sample group consists mainly of members from the two Alternative Incarceration Centers (AICs): The Middlesex AIC and the Meriden AIC. We interviewed members who had re-offended or relapsed at least once within a six-month period; we identified this group as “persisting” offenders.

Originally the research group sought persisters who were arrested and convicted for criminal activity and/or drug use within a six-month window; however, after not obtaining a sufficient number of clients for our persisting pool, the group decided to expand the criteria to include offenders who participated in illegal activities within a six month period. Because we could not obtain Department of Correction (DOC) approval to speak with parolees within a suitable timeframe, we had to expand our criteria to include probation violators, voluntary participants in the AIC programs, and pre-trial offenders who offended within a six-month timeframe.

Additionally, it is important to note that our study mainly deals with people arrested for drug violation because Connection House and AICs are primarily for offenders with histories of substance abuse problems. That said, the criminal behavior and issues of interview participants may vary significantly from person to person.

For the first group, interviews took place at a reunion scheduled by Connection House. Each attendee was informed in advance of the research project and our intentions to interview them. At the reunion, we conducted ten interviews. In the weeks following the reunion, an additional two interviews were conducted over the phone.

For the persisted pool, we visited the AICs at the time of a normal group meeting (such as Narcotics Anonymous) and asked for volunteers to skip part of the meeting to speak with us. We completed ten interviews at the AICs, bringing our total number to 22 interviews.

All of the interviews were tape-recorded and conducted in semi-private areas, such as an office with an open door or a common area without anyone in the immediate vicinity.

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<sup>21</sup> Maruna classifies the participants of his study as “persisters” and “desisters.” Persisters regularly commit crimes; desisters were once persisters but have refrained from crime for a significant period of time.

## Procedure

The interviews lasted anywhere from 30 minutes to an hour. Before each interview, the participant was given an information sheet describing the nature and purpose of our research, and was then asked to fill out a consent form. Additionally, participants were verbally assured of confidentiality with the stipulation that the information they provided contained no threat of physical harm to themselves or others.<sup>22</sup> The last document presented to participants was a background survey which solicited demographic information.<sup>23</sup>

## Schedule

The interviewing schedule was designed to gather information on factors that may have influenced the criminality of the participants.<sup>24</sup> The schedule was divided into five sections: *Support Systems*, *Goals*, *Problems*, *Desistance*, and *Programs*. Categories were strongly influenced by Maruna's *Making Good*, and included both open-ended and closed-ended questions.

The *Support System* section addressed the participants' relationships with family members, romantic partners, friends, and peers in community groups. In addition to determining what types of social relations the participants had, we also tried to assess the quality of these relationships. We hoped to discover the influence of peer groups and social interactions on the participant's post-release decisions.

In the *Goals* category, we asked about future goals and the feasibility of the participant's plans to reach these goals. We hoped to elicit the participant's outlook on life.

In the *Problems* section of the schedule, we investigated the details of the participant's crimes. Specifically, we asked for the motivation for criminal behavior, whether drugs played a role, and whether the participant planned on repeating past illegal behavior. We tried to determine both the specifics of the participant's criminal behavior and the attitudes and feelings of the participant.

In the *Desistance* section, we investigated factors potentially influential in the participant's discontinuance from illegal behavior. We tried to locate the turning point for the participant (when they began to desist) to determine if any particular individuals were influential

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<sup>22</sup> This was mutually agreed upon by all members of the research team and our agency contacts; this standard was determined sufficient for safety and moral reasons without unduly limiting the willingness of the participants to speak freely.

<sup>23</sup> See Appendices D and E, respectively, for the Consent Form and the Demographic Survey.

<sup>24</sup> See Appendix A.

in this change, as well as to elicit reflection from the participant about the cause of their criminal behavior.

The final section of the schedule, *Programs*, comprises questions directly pertaining to Connection House, the AICs, and any similar programs the participants had used.<sup>25</sup> We also tried to gauge each program's effect on the participant's behavioral changes.

The research group decided to use the interview schedule as a loose guideline, not as a rigid template. Emphasis was placed on the types of information we sought to elicit, rather than the order of the questions. We tried to go with the flow of the conversation, while guiding the content when necessary.

### Pseudonyms

To ensure the confidentiality of participants, each person was provided with a pseudonym to protect the identity of their real name. Participants were given the option of creating their own alias; however, only one person provided a name for himself. The research team created names for the other participants in the study.

### Coding and SPSS

Following the administration of the schedule, all information pertaining to the interviews was coded and entered into the SPSS data spreadsheet for further analysis.<sup>26</sup>

While the use of the social science database "SPSS" is a complicated process littered with computing jargon and program specific commands, a basic review of our analysis will make the study reproducible. All values obtained through the interview coding process for each interview were used to create a spreadsheet in Microsoft Excel. Not every interview elicited all the information for which we coded, thus creating unknowns in the data set; these were coded as nine because every entry into the SPSS database must be numerical or the configuration is automatically changed. This means that running simple analysis would not work with data containing any non-numerical entry. Those questions not applicable were coded as 8. For example, the question pertaining to the quality of a romantic relationship does not concern an ex-offender who is not in a relationship.

Once the Microsoft Excel spreadsheet was pasted into the SPSS database through a simple copy-paste function, a filter had to be applied. One case that did not fit into our definitions of persister and desister necessitated the filter so it would not be counted in the results. All

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<sup>25</sup> Other programs include: halfway houses, Narcotics Anonymous, Alcoholics Anonymous, etc.

<sup>26</sup> The coding system is available in Appendix B.

variables and their possible values were entered into the database directly from the coding sheet to create labels for the cross tabs. By variable here we mean the answers to each question, as each question became a micro case unto itself through the analysis. The cross tab function in the SPSS database is the only manipulation of data we used. Cross tabbing created small tables in which an independent variable, our desister/persister split, could be seen in relation to any dependent variable. We ran the desister/persister split against all other variables to look for differences in the answers of desisters and persisters. We decided to create the tables with raw number counts to see how many of each group answered each question and percentages within each group, e.g., what percent of the desister group said they had any family contact.

### Problems

Throughout the interviewing and data analysis process the research team encountered problems with specific areas in our approach to the study. Below we have highlighted some of the more major issues that have affected the way we implemented our methodology.

- Ideally, we would have been able to interview parolees at the AICs, since this group would be most similar to Connection House clients who had been sent there directly from incarceration. However, we had to forgo interviews with parole clients because of DOC restrictions. The exclusion of parolees from our respective pools dramatically reduced our sample size.<sup>27</sup>
- In creating the criteria for the desister/persister categories we had conflicting and varying ideas for the split between the two study pools. Ultimately we chose the six month period of desistance for differentiating the two pools because past studies suggest persistence is highest within the first six months of one's release from prison or substance abuse treatment facilities.
- Our criteria for the persister/desister categories would have been better defined if we had more information on the various time periods in which people committed crimes and the history of each participant's living situation (i.e. who lives in his/her own housing; who lives under supervision).
- Dividing our groups into persisters and desisters was a difficult process, and may not accurately represent our participants. Some of the persisters, especially, may succeed at desistance.

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<sup>27</sup> Initially, we planned to conduct an additional reunion at Cochehan House, another substance abuse treatment facility, to increase our numbers for the desister pool. However, due to difficulties in locating former members of the Cochehan we cancelled our visit there.

- We interviewed at least two people who lived in supervised situations. These individuals have not necessarily had a reasonable opportunity to prove desistance or persistence.
- Four individuals conducted the interviews, each with a slightly different style. Two group members generally had longer interviews and two group members had shorter interviews. If one person had done all of the interviews, the information obtained would presumably be more uniform.
- Due to time constraints, we developed the interview schedule and coding system without any input from the participant population. A more collaborative approach to our research may have given us more direction in study of current and past offenders.
- Finally, for every interview conducted we assumed honesty from each participant, while this may not be the case. There is inevitably some chance that some of the personal testimonies inserted in the text were either exaggerated or falsified.

# FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

## I. Past Criminality

### Offender Attitudes About Crime

Maruna suggests that a major difference between persisters and desisters is that persisters express much less personal agency describing in their activities, while desisters accept more responsibility for their actions. Our data support this conclusion. We found that half (4 of 8) of the persisters described their past criminality in a passive way. This usually meant describing their crime in terms of “what happened to me” rather than “what I did.” For example, Sandra (a persister) described her criminal past like this: “It went from level to level, until the point that it was out of control.”

In contrast, 85% (11 out of 13) of the desisters described themselves as having agency in their past criminality. Country claimed responsibility for his drug habit simply: “I started using drugs.” Generally, the passive offenders used more complicated sentences, which shifted the blame. Wayne, a persister, when asked about the cause of his legal troubles, responded in this way: “I don’t know, really. To be honest. It could have been, I guess, I had an uncle I was real close to, and he moved away, out of state.... Right after that, it started. I didn’t care about nothing.”

	<b>Passive Descriptions of Past Crimes</b>	<b>Active Descriptions of Past Crimes</b>
<b>Desisters</b>	2 (15%)	11 (85%)
<b>Persisters</b>	4 (50%)	4 (50%)

These data suggest that a major step in becoming a desister is claiming responsibility for past actions. This could help offenders claim agency in their current struggles, and inspire them to believe in their own power to change their lives.

### Drugs & Substance Abuse

Drugs were closely linked to the crimes committed by the participants. In total, 86% (19 of 22) of the participants indicated that drugs were in some way involved with their crime.<sup>28</sup>

These individuals either committed crimes while under the influence of drugs or committed

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<sup>28</sup> In this report, we consider alcohol to be a drug.

crimes to finance their drug habit. The degree and method in which drugs were involved with crime did not vary much between the persisters and desisters groups. For this section, instead of offering solutions for why some people continue to commit crimes while others go clean, we instead offer analysis of how drugs and crime interact for our total population. This is an extremely important issue; figuring out how to assist offenders in solving their drug problems is an essential part of helping them turn away from crime.

<b>Drugs Related to Crime</b>	<b>Under the Influence of Drugs During Crime</b>	<b>Drugs Clouded Judgment</b>	<b>Committed Crime for Drug Money</b>
19	13	11	8

What is the reason for this high correlation between drugs and crime? Bob, a desister, described the relation between the two:

Hand in hand. Hand in a glove, however you want to phrase it. Because I notice when my drug use . . . the more that progresses, if that's the proper term to use, the more trouble I got into. . . . Eventually the drugs got out of hand, and so did the crimes I started committing.

As in this example, drug addiction can lead to a general loss of control and feelings of chaos that make it easier to engage in criminal activity. Howard noted that even steady employment could not distract him from his addiction: "The addiction was so strong it didn't matter that I worked, when I was using, I was in the grips. The craving was stronger than my will." Thirteen out of seventeen offenders<sup>29</sup> committed their crimes while under the influence of drugs. Eleven individuals indicated that drugs clouded their judgment or decision-making skills. Chad emphasized that his problem was "not so much drugs as substance abuse." He claimed that drug use was a problem only when it became an addiction. This could be the point where the individual loses self-control.

It was also common for offenders to commit crimes in order to fund their drug addiction; eight individuals indicated that money for drugs was an important motivation for crime. As Avery put it, "there were no limitations on what I would do to get money to get drugs."

The offenders were well aware of the connection between drugs and crime. All but one participant (21 of 22) planned to avoid drugs as a way to stay clear from crime. Our sample

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<sup>29</sup> While we had 22 total participants, we only had data for 17 offenders for this question.

population over represents offenders with drug problems compared to all offenders, but drugs are still an important element in many crimes.

Margaret offers one example of how drug addiction leads to incarceration: “I started my internment [at a] very old age. I had a . . . cocaine addiction which led me to selling drugs. Being from a small town . . . it was confined to the bar I worked at. Everybody did it. It was always around. It was what you called ‘normal.’ As my own addiction progressed and I did more . . . I eventually got in trouble with the law for selling.” In this case, drug dependency created a great economic need, which was filled by dealing.

We asked our participants why some people commit crimes and others stay straight.<sup>30</sup> Samantha offered this explanation:

It’s the way they grow up. I grew up in a house where everybody did drugs. I grew up in a house where everyone was angry, fighting all the time, so naturally when I get older, I’m going to grow up and be angry. But if you grow up with some college professor and some nice clean kids, not even rich ‘cause [that doesn’t mean] you’re good parents . . . but parents that teach you right, . . . most of the time you be a good person. But even if you grow up with drug addicts it doesn’t necessarily mean you’re going to be a drug addict because I know my sister doesn’t do it and my brother and I both do drugs so . . .

She tied together many of the factors we discuss throughout our report: drugs, family structures, and anger. These all were major influences on her criminal activity.

It would be erroneous to assume that any drug use leads to addiction or legal troubles. Avery told this story: “I started smoking weed and drinking at 17. I picked up heroin for the first time at 27. From the point I picked that up, I was in and out of jail, you know?” Marijuana and alcohol did not cause him legal troubles; heroin, however, caused him many problems. For Catherine, crack was the drug that led to legal troubles: “I never got rid of that crack. That crack always hung around. That’s what ended up bringing me down.” Each of the individuals had a unique story to share, although it often contained common elements.

In a unique case, Shawn desired to stay clear of the law, yet smoke marijuana: “I’m going to try to do it legally. I’m just going to try to stay out of the trouble and go out to California and do it the legal way.” He also argued for a positive benefit for drug use: “Normal people get tired and fall asleep [when they smoke pot]; it stimulates my brain in the right way so I can concentrate and do what I have to do. That’s the main reason I smoked pot.”

The struggle in overcoming addiction is a long one. Sandra commented on the temptation to relapse: “That’s my disease; that’s how bad I’ve gotten in my life . . . There’s

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<sup>30</sup> This may be an unfair question, for how can these ex-offenders make assumptions about the offender population as a whole?

definitely temptations . . . But I know better. I know that if I do, I'm not going to be in any place better than I was two and a half years ago." Although we did not specifically ask, many participants indicated that they made several attempts to go clean before they were successful. As Country put it, "relapse is a part of recovery. Very few get it on their first shot." Chad admitted that drug addiction is a life-long struggle: "Even in recovery, you still have the urge to use. It's always an option."

Our participants offered suggestions for how to aid addicts in the process of recovery. Country stressed the importance of providing recovering addicts with educational opportunities: "A lot of addicts suffer from low self-esteem. They feel inferior. . . . Education helps a lot." Rob emphasized the importance of going to meetings: "The number one thing I see when people relapse... it's because they stop going to meetings." The problem with missing meetings is that "you can forget what it's like." Chad said that a daily inventory was important for staying clean, specifically, "reflecting on how my day went."

The programs offered for drug problems are not universally appropriate, according to some of the participants. This is Daisy's perspective on the N.A. meetings that she was required to attend: "I don't know, it's like all those people talking about their heroin addiction and they did coke and I'm just sitting there . . . I used to smoke a little bit of pot." She did not claim to have a drug addiction, but did smoke marijuana. She was convicted of conspiracy to commit burglary, unrelated to drugs. While drug addiction led to criminal activity for many of the participants, this was not her story.

### Peer Pressure

One possible explanation for how people become involved in both drugs and criminal activity is social involvement. For the participants who provided data about this, 100% (20 of 20) indicated that their friend group consisted largely of offenders in the past. Furthermore, eight indicated that peer pressure was a significant factor in their motivation to commit crime. The participants clearly believed in the necessity of separating themselves from these previous social groups in order to avoid legal trouble; eighteen indicated that avoiding old friends was part of their plan for staying clean. Michael described the problem of having active offenders for friends: "I wouldn't say that they're not friends no more, but I just can't be around them, otherwise I'll get in trouble." In fact, the only two people who maintained friends who violated the law were persisters.

While many participants recognized the influence of their social groups, many also stressed the importance of personal agency. In the words of Shawn: "As much as they say peer

pressure gets people to do drugs, it's not. It's your own choice in the long run." Another participant, Xavier, had similar sentiments:

I just take everyday at a time. No matter what, you don't have to use drugs. You're dealing with life on life's terms. Bottom line is the people who get clean and then go back out and use, it's not because of this or because of that, it's because they chose to, how they chose to get away from reality. It's a choice.

While friends can be powerfully influential, our participants consistently noted the importance of claiming personal responsibility. Along with our finding that desisters are more likely to express agency in describing past crimes, these data suggest that claiming responsibility is an important step in the process of desistance.

Avery stressed the importance of expressing personal agency in order to begin the process of recovery: "You have to say 'I'm tired of this lifestyle—I have to change, I have to change.' If you say that every day, you'll change, and your outlook on everything will be different." While external factors may have great influence, most of the participants emphasized personal choice.

### Economic Motivation

Economic motivation is also important to our participants; seven individuals said that a need for money (for reasons other than drugs) was a major cause of their criminal activity. Wayne described his motivation for stealing simply: "the money was good . . . Fast cash." As Nancy explained, it becomes even more difficult to become financially stable if you have a criminal history: "it's hard, if you've got a felony, to get a job . . . There's a lot of people who cannot get jobs. . . and that's what makes those guys go right back to doing a life of crime. You know what they do best is sell drugs . . . 'Cause they have to get some money some how." Shawn said of his situation, "I started selling 'cause I had no money, no income, I couldn't pay my rent or anything and I refused to ask my parents. I started selling to pay the bills." He went on to add that that was the basis for almost all his dealing.

Howard took the relation of money with drugs in a new direction. He spoke of waking up as a middle-aged addict when no one will hire you and having to swallow the fact that you'll have to work a minimum wage job at that point in your life to get anywhere. He stressed, "You have to be humble; and there's people that do it." Economic instability, therefore, is another major barrier to successful desistance.

## Anger

Nine out of nineteen participants listed anger or passion as a major motivation for their crime. Samantha was one of the participants to openly admit her anger problem: "I have a bad anger problem so I am really quick to like to fight, kick, scream and let my anger out at the wrong people in the wrong way. Probably if I don't learn how to control my anger it will happen again." She talked somewhat favorably about the anger management program, but said she only attended one session.

Anger problems were also linked to drug use. Sandra said, "Alcohol fuels my anger." She was one of several participants who indicated that drug abuse caused emotional outbursts, possibly related to a loss of self-control. Country had the opposite experience; he used drugs to cope with emotional turmoil: "I started using drugs because I was angry, and it mellowed me out." While drug dependency relates to these anger problems in different ways, the two issues are closely linked.

For Country, learning to deal with his anger was a vital aspect of his recovery from addiction: "I had a right to feel the way I felt, which had never been told to me by my parents or by any teachers." He now knows that he is allowed to experience a wide range of emotions, including anger; the problems only arise when he acts out. He has learned how to deal with his anger, which helped him immensely.

Anger is not useful as an explanatory variable, since it was a problem for persisters and desisters in relatively equal numbers. It may be useful in the future to study methods of dealing with anger and stress, however, since these issues seem of utmost importance among offenders.

## II. Interpersonal Relationships

The people one associates with, especially family and friends, are invariably important in a person's life, and this is as true for current and former offenders as any other members of society. We sought to determine how, for our participants, their family and friends may have influenced whether or not they became involved with criminal activity, and what influence they may have on decisions regarding future criminality and recidivism.

### Romantic Relationships and Significant Others

Past studies have found that former offenders who are involved in harmonious romantic relationships are more successful in reintegrating into society.<sup>31</sup> Although we did not find that either persisters or desisters, as a group, were significantly more likely to be involved in romantic relationships, we did find that these relationships played an important role in many people's lives at the individual level. For example, Samantha has found her boyfriend to be very supportive: "He really loves me because not every man would be there when you are locked up." Howard has found his marriage to be helpful as he reintegrates into mainstream society: "It's very supportive because we're both in the recovery process.... Today we're partners in marriage." In contrast, Nancy recounts that, although she lives with her two children, she kicked her husband out of her house because: "[I]t seemed like he would never change, and I always tell him: 'If something happens, I'm going to be involved too, because it's my house.' ... He was a drug user." Although the quantitative findings regarding the prevalence of romantic relationships among persisters and desisters are inconclusive, there is no doubt that romantic relationships play important roles in encouraging persistence or desistance in the lives of many current and former offenders.

The vast majority of both persisters and desisters who reported being involved in a romantic relationship reported that the relationship was a positive force in their lives. An interesting note, however, is that a persister, Sandra, was the only person to state that her current relationship is a negative force in her life. Although it is difficult to generalize from an isolated case, Sandra's experience suggests that at least some persisters may remain in unhealthy and unsupportive relationships rather than making a "clean break" with their pasts. This "clean break" would imply that the person is committed to taking actions that would aid in her own process of desistance.

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<sup>31</sup> Christy A Visher and Jeremy Travis, "Transitions from Prison to Community: Understanding Individual Pathways," *Annual Review of Sociology* v.29: 89-113 (2003).

## Family

Past research has found that family acceptance, encouragement, and perceived emotional support greatly facilitate reintegration into mainstream society for former criminal offenders.<sup>32</sup> Anecdotally, many of the interviewees reported that their own families have been playing a crucial role in their own struggles for desistance. For example, since her release from prison, Sandra has been working in her parents' restaurant, and she has succeeded to the point of becoming a manager there. Furthermore, many interviewees emphasized that emotional attachment to one's family is a significant motivation to stay out of trouble. For example, Ricky explained: "Before I didn't see [my family] much. I had no time for them... I had no time for myself. I had no idea who I was. It's great now. The one thing that I enjoy the most is to know that I [have] a family. I enjoy the time that I have now." Thus, many interviewees reported that their own families have had a positive impact on their lives as they struggle to desist from crime.

Despite the positive sentiments of many of the interviewees regarding their families, a few of the interviewees reported having negative family experiences. For example, Catherine said that she drank alcohol and smoked marijuana for the first time with her father. Our statistical findings also paint a mixed picture of the importance of supportive families in encouraging desistance behavior, contrary to what past studies have found. For example, although a majority of both desisters and persisters report both frequent and positive contact with their families, desisters (43%) are far more likely than persisters (13%) to report having only "some" contact with their families.

	<b>No Contact with Family</b>	<b>Some Contact with Family</b>	<b>Frequent Contact with Family</b>
<b>Desister</b>	0 (0%)	6 (43%)	8 (57%)
<b>Persister</b>	1 (12%)	1 (13%)	6 (75%)

Similarly, the only two people in our entire population to report that they had predominantly "negative" interactions with their families were *desisters*. Thus, while the vast majority of both persisters and desisters reported having frequent and positive interactions with their families, it

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<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

must be noted that the findings of our study do not fully corroborate the findings of past studies regarding the importance of one's family to successful desistance.<sup>33</sup>

### Children

A somewhat higher percentage of desisters reported having children than did persisters.

	<b>Does Not Have Children</b>	<b>Has Children</b>
<b>Desister</b>	5 (36%)	9 (64%)
<b>Persister</b>	4 (50%)	4 (50%)

These figures weakly suggest that having children promotes desistance. While this may be true, almost all interviewees, meaning both persisters and desisters, who have children reported that they are in contact with their children and that they have a positive attitude towards their children. Therefore, while it may intuitively seem that having children promotes desistance, this does not explain why a substantial portion of the persister population also has children. Although both persisters and desisters overwhelmingly attest to the importance of their children in their lives and their desire to actively participate in their lives, member of the persister group nevertheless have a hard time staying out of legal trouble. For example, Bob, a desister, explains:

See I know what's going to happen if I go back getting high, I lose contact with my oldest daughter, which means I lose contact with my granddaughter... I let my whole family down, so they'll pretty much be done with me.... I think I fully know the value of how much family really means... and I learned this value while I was sober.

In contrast, Diana, a persister, loves her daughter, but nevertheless cannot be with her: "It's difficult. I love feeding her, taking care of her. I could be there more often. Instead of being here [the Alternative Incarceration Center] I should be home with her.... I just have to keep myself out of trouble." While both Bob, a desister, and Diana, a persister, want to participate in the lives of their children, Diana demonstrates a lesser ability to stay out of legal trouble in order to "be there" for her daughter. The significant difference, then, comes from the ability of the desisters to follow through on their plans and desires.

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<sup>33</sup> Although a clear explanation as to why some desisters had weak relationships with their families did not emerge, it is possible that these desisters decided to move away from their families because the families did not prove to be a supportive force in the formers' lives. If it is the case that the family atmosphere that one grew up in contributed to one's criminal behavior, a distancing from one's family may be beneficial if one seeks to end that behavior.

### Living Situation

The people with whom someone lives are potentially a crucial support for those trying to reintegrate into mainstream society. Past studies have found that living in a supportive environment, especially with a spouse and children, is more conducive to desistance than living alone or with one's parents.<sup>34</sup> The results of our study contradict this finding, however, as a larger percentage of desisters live alone than do persisters:

	<b>Lives Alone</b>	<b>Lives with Family or Friends</b>
<b>Desister</b>	4 (31%)	9 (69%)
<b>Persister</b>	1 (14%)	6 (86%)

It should be noted, however, that our study did not distinguish exactly *whom* the interviewee is living with. While the majority of interviewees reported that they “live with family or friends,” this could mean that a person is living with a spouse and children, or that she is living with her parents, or that she is living with two of her friends. It is possible, therefore, that the persisters who report living with “family or friends” are not actually living in an environment that is conducive to desistance, such as with one's children, but rather are living in an environment that is conducive to persistence, such as with a group of friends who are involved in criminal activity. While, in a limited sense, our study contradicts earlier findings about the impact of one's living situation on desistance, in order to come to a concrete conclusion, more study is needed to determine which specific people persisters and desisters live with, and whether these people encourage persistence or desistance.

### Friends

Of the twenty interviewees for whom we have information, every one reported that, during the period that he was criminally active, he had friends who were also involved in criminal activity. Samantha reflected: “My mother always said the best way to go to jail is to hang out with people just coming and going out of jail. I think it definitely depends on whom you hang out with. I was going to college and everything.... It all depends on who you hang out with really.” Many other interviewees expressed similar opinions regarding the connection between one's friends and criminality.

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<sup>34</sup> Visher and Travis, 2003.

Although both desisters and persisters reported having friends who engaged in criminal behavior in the past, desisters were much more likely to sever these connections in an attempt to desist. Desisters were much more likely than persisters to report that they either had “no social life” or only a “slight social life,” whereas persisters were more likely than desisters to report that they had a “substantial social life.”

	<b>No Social Life</b>	<b>Some Social Life</b>	<b>Substantial Social Life</b>
<b>Desister</b>	4 (31%)	6 (46%)	3 (23%)
<b>Persister</b>	1 (14%)	3 (43%)	3 (43%)

Steve, a desister, reported that, “since I stopped using drugs, I haven’t had many close friends.” Furthermore, while 57% of desisters report that their current friendships have all developed since they ceased their period of criminal activity, only 25% of persisters report the same. Karen, another desister, said: “When I first went back to New Haven, I saw the same people doing the same things that I was doing before I went to jail. Can’t get involved with that... I’ve changed.” Persisters are much more likely to maintain at least some of their friendships with people from the time when they were criminally active, with 63% reporting that some of their friends are leftover from their criminal past, while only 29% of desisters report maintaining some of their “old” friendships. Diana, a persister, illustrates the difficulty that persisters face in breaking away from their old friendships: “No matter what, through thick and thin, we learn to stay in contact, not to treat each other differently, because why?... It’s like you think that you’re better than somebody if you’re going to change the relationship with each other.... We’re all equal.” Lastly, 25% of persisters reported that their “new” friends engage in criminal activity, whereas no desisters reported that any of their “new” friends engage in criminal activity. Thus, while both persisters and desisters almost universally report that they were friends with criminals when they themselves engaged in criminal activity, desisters are much more likely to break off those old friendships in an effort to go straight than are persisters.

### Influential People

Eighteen out of twenty-two (82%) interviewees reported that a particular person, or a group of persons, such as one’s family, really helped them turn their lives around. While interviewees cited a variety of different types of people, the two most common answers were either a family member or “family” generally, and an employee of a program, such as Connection

House. For example, Sandra said of her father: “He really was the one to help me.... He’s the one who pushed me. He’s the one I cried to. He’s the one who really helped me.... I really needed him.” A few people singled out a friend, while others placed an emphasis on God. A contrast that emerged between persisters and desisters is that 50% of persisters attributed their turn-around to a family member, whereas only 21% of desisters did the same.

### III. Community Involvement

Much of contemporary criminological thought holds that pro-social actions, especially involvement in community activities, can greatly aid the reintegration of former offenders back into mainstream society.<sup>35</sup> While these community activities can take myriad forms, such as involvement in a political campaign or coaching a Little League team, we found that the community activities that the interviewees most frequently mentioned were participation in a support group, such as Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) or Narcotics Anonymous (NA), and involvement with a community of faith, such as a local church or mosque. Our findings with regard to community activities correlate with existing criminological theory in that desisters are much more likely to be involved in various aspects of their communities than persisters.

Most generally, we found that *desisters are almost twice as likely to engage in community activities as persisters are*, with 83% of desisters reporting participation, and only 37% of persisters reporting participation:

	<b>Does Not Participate in Community Activities</b>	<b>Participates in Community Activities</b>
<b>Desister</b>	2 (17%)	10 (83%)
<b>Persister</b>	5 (63%)	3 (37%)

Our findings regarding support groups, such as Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and Narcotics Anonymous (NA), will be provided below, but it is important to note that, when asked about their participation in “community activities,” many of the interviewees responded that they attended AA or NA meetings. That is, many interviewees reported viewing their support groups as “communities,” and in fact, for some respondents, their support group seemed to be their most important community. For example, Sandra said of her experience in Narcotics Anonymous:

I got very close to the people in my groups.... Everybody got together afterwards, weekends, got together as friends. It wasn't just about NA and talking about drugs. We got involved with hanging out, going and playing basketball, and taking our kids together to the park.... You meet true people in NA. Those are real friends.

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<sup>35</sup> Visher and Travis, 2003.

Like Sandra, many of the interviewees who participated in support groups reported that the sense of community that they found there was one of the aspects that they found most helpful about the programs.

Interviewees' responses regarding participation in a faith group, such as a church, synagogue, or temple, show a stark difference regarding levels of involvement in religious communities between persisters and desisters. Most significantly, *no persisters reported being involved with a faith group*:

	<b>Does Not Participate in Faith Group</b>	<b>Participates in Faith Group</b>
<b>Desister</b>	8 (62%)	5 (38%)
<b>Persister</b>	7 (100%)	0 (0%)

Many studies and anecdotal evidence over the years have shown that individuals often become devout believers as part of their process of desistance. Ricky, a desister, goes to church four times a week and explains the circumstances under which he found religion: “When I started praying, something that I never did before, I started calling the name of the Lord Jesus. Couple of days later I got arrested. It happened for a reason. And I changed.... God’s worked for me and everything, [it’s because of him] I’m alive.” Our findings suggest that regularly practiced faith, and perhaps the sense of community that accompanies regular attendance at a place of worship, contribute to the process of desistance.

Finally, some of the interviewees reported participating in various other community activities besides support groups and faith groups. The evidence, again, suggests that desistance is linked to active involvement in the community. Although only a minority of both desisters and persisters report being involved in other community activities, participation among desisters was more than twenty percentage points higher than participation among persisters (36% of desisters compared to only 13% of persisters). For example, Bob, a desister, describes himself as: “one of them guys that... I go around and I speak, NA meetings, halfway houses. Not because my parole officer wants it, actually my parole officer doesn’t even know I’m doing it.... It’s something I always wanted to do, and now I’m in a position to do it, so I’m doing it.” In contrast, Sandra, a persister, explained the circumstances under which she did volunteer work: “When I first got out of rehab, I did a lot of volunteer work at Rockingham [a rehabilitation center].... It was very self-gratifying. I was able to give back something that I got....” Despite the value of her work, however, Sandra no longer volunteers at Rockingham: “I did the volunteer work because I was

asked, and I felt if I was asked, it was for a reason, but I really want to spend time on me, and my kids.” Sandra, a persister, explains that the only reason that she used to volunteer is because she was asked to do so, whereas Bob, a desister, volunteers because he genuinely wants to help his community.

Our findings suggest that desisters are more likely to be involved in the community than persisters. Desisters are more likely to actively participate in a community of faith, such as a church, and are also more likely to participate in other community activities. Furthermore, as the preceding quotations from Bob and Sandra demonstrate, desisters seem to be more interested in contributing to the wellbeing of their communities than do persisters.

## IV. Desistance: Turning Point vs. Process

We were interested in understanding the agency of participants in their recovery from substance abuse and in general, criminal behavior. One way we explain this task was by asking former and current offenders to describe moments and/or processes in their lives where they felt compelled to change patterns in their behavior, and to identify factor(s) that contributed to their moments and /or processes of desistance.

Of the 22 interview conducted, more than half of the group (persisters and desisters) attributed their desistance to a specific moment in their life – the remaining 35 percent described their “transformation” as being gradual and stretched over time.<sup>36</sup> Sixty-five percent of desisters recovered after going through some process of change.

Interviews with both desisters and persisters – whether they cite a long term process or a single life-altering moment – strongly suggest that recovery from substance abuse, typically occurs after several periods of relapse until cumulative experiences and/or particularly momentous tips the scale. For Sandra, the combination of religious feelings and an arrest played a major role in changing his attitude and perspective on crime:

It was January 9, 2003.... I had enough. It really hit me that day. Pleading with God.... Please do something drastic to help me change my life.... I finally admitted that I was completely powerless. There was nothing I could do to help myself. I needed help from someone or something else.

For others, like Roseanne, the turning point came after witnessing the effect their lifestyle had on friends and loved ones:

When I was growing up I never thought I was good enough for anything and I never thought people cared for me. I had money, a car when I was 16 and thought people hung out with me because of what I had... right until a few years ago...and you know when I went to prison one of them wrote and said “I am hurt...you were my best friend and you just removed yourself from my life.” So when I got out that’s what kept me clean... I finally realized “wow I matter.”

Finally, several people credited their changed behavior to stern prison terms. Bob spoke of tough prison sentences as being the life altering moment that led him to desistance:

In order to want to get of the bottom, you got to hit the bottom first... The judge sentenced me to 25 years in prison ...that was my bottom... It was time for me to do something. There was one guy in there doing life, without the possibility. It’s like: “You’re going to die in here... I’m not trying to die in here.” So everything plays its role.

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<sup>36</sup> Despite the manner in which we classified desisters and persisters, every interviewee asserted his or her intention to desist from criminal activity. Therefore we include the perspectives of both persisters and desisters, as we have defined them, in this section on desistance.

In most cases, people from the desisting and persisting pools described their struggles to desist from addiction and other illegal habits as being a day-by-day process. As Shawn put it:

I did get up one morning and say, 'I have nothing left to lose'. But I did that a lot while I was still using too. It took awhile for me to actually stop...

Almost every participant interviewed either alluded too or directly attributed their changed lifestyles to a maturing process they experienced while either being in prison, jail, a program and/or living independently. Similarly, participants spoke of repeated encounters with relapse and recidivism—each revealed a setback, mistakes and in some cases, re-incarceration. Xavier said that he “went through Connection House twice,” and added, “there’s some people who have to learn the hard way and some people come in here once and never touch drugs again.” Catherine summarized her experience more pointedly, “[I was looking at] at 15 years. Just tired.”

## V. Future Outlook

### Goals

Re-entry organizations commonly base their programs on the perhaps obvious idea that those with clear goals and a forward-thinking mentality are more likely to become desisters. Our findings support this assertion: ten of fourteen desisters interviewed claimed to have clear goals, and no desisters lacked goals of some kind. In contrast, the persister group had only two of eight participants with clear goals, three had general goals and three reported having no goals whatsoever. However, the question is one of causality: does having strong goals lead to desistance or does a commitment to desistance lead to making stronger goals?

Country sees a lack of goals tied directly to persistence, suggesting that desistance brings long-term goals as an afterthought: “Initially, I was so depressed coming out of prison, [my goal] was just to get out of bed and shower.” Xavier’s agrees, saying his current lack of goals stems from his persistence, i.e., that his troubles with the law are preventing him from having the time and clarity of mind to formulate clear goals for himself: “I had goals before I got jammed up again but uh, I’m responsible for my arrest now. Stuff kind of gets put on hold and it’s just... all still there.”

Respondents also shared significant differences in terms of their attitudes about their goals for the future. Twelve of fourteen desisters were optimistic about their goals, while half of the eight persisters were neutral and two were pessimistic. Samantha, a desister, said of her life and goals: “My boyfriend already got the apartment so my life is going to be straight as long as I don’t do drugs and all that.” As long as she follows her goals, she imagines her life turning out wonderfully. Sandra, a persister, said of the struggle to stay happy about her outlook: “What can I do to move forward? Keep things positive. For my children.” She struggles with not losing the positive outlook on her future.

The perceived agency—the active role played in life through personal change rather than passive response—of the ex-offenders in their goals was inferred through the language used to describe the goals and plans. More than half of both persisters and desisters expressed a sense of personal agency in reaching their goals; however, three of the eight persisters felt no agency while all desisters felt some sort of personal agency. Diana, a persister, described her goals as: “Well, I’m going to go with God for this one. If God permits, I’ll have a steady job.” Catherine echoed her lack of agency, saying: “When you don’t work, you don’t provide at all. It’s demeaning. I would like to be able to get back to work but I don’t know if I can do it.” Possibly due to the shorter time period since reentry, persisters characterized their responses by more

uncertainty and a sense that things are up in the air: “I just take them a day at a time. I don’t have no set goals, really, yet,” commented Michael.

### Plans

Plans on how to avoid crime in the future are central for desistance. While all twenty-two ex-offenders responded that they want to avoid crime, we asked about their actual plans to avoid crime in the future as it pertained to avoiding old friends, avoiding drugs, participating in a program, staying busy and/or any other specific plans. In contrast to the responses about goals, *all* respondents reported having specific plans to avoid crime in the future. Not only that, *all* respondents reported multiple plans forming a larger strategy for desistance.

Interestingly, three-fourths of the persisters described participation in a program as a part of their desistance strategy, while only half of the desisters plan on participation in a program. Perhaps those ex-offenders more recently released, a mainly persister group, seek a comfortable area where they can receive guidance for their issues; desisters have been in the communities longer and may not need as much attention or value rigid guidelines for everyday activities. Sandra speaks for the majority of persisters when she says: “As long as I have some sort of program, I’m okay.” Bob, a desister, describes how he sets his own terms for desistance, without the help or watchful eye of a program: “The things that I keep in my head now are the things that [are] helping me stay out. Helping me to stay focused. Think about where I’m going. Think about who’s going to be there.”

All but one ex-offender predictably, given our sample population, said they planned on avoiding drugs as a part of their desistance. Michael, a persister, said of drugs: “The only thing that ever got in my way [for desistance] was drugs...” Bob, a desister, described his plan to avoid drugs as the central point in his desistance strategy: “It’s just totally different now, and the way it’s different now: there’s nothing in the bag, whether the bag is \$10, \$20, I don’t give a damn. There’s nothing on the package store shelf, that’s worth jeopardizing [his new family life].” The majority of both persisters and desisters planned to stay busy, as well as had some other kind of plan as a part of their desistance strategy.

### Crime in the Future

When asked if they planned to avoid crimes in the future, all but one of the interviewees said yes (the ex-offender who said no, Shawn, said he plans to get his job transferred to California where he can get a cannabis club card and smoke marijuana “legally”). Furthermore, all but one of the ex-offenders felt personal agency in their desistance in the future; interestingly, the one

who didn't feel her own agency is a desister, Samantha. She said of her anger problem:  
"Probably if I don't learn how to control my anger [crimes] will happen again."

## VI. Program Feedback

Due largely to court-authorized sentences and drug recovery processes, our interviewees were mandated (or in a few cases, advised) to participate in treatment and rehabilitation centers run by the Connection. When asked about their experiences in the program(s), participants offered interesting, insightful and meaningful thoughts about the programs they are either currently attending or have attended in the past. The following section will share the comments and feedback of clients from the three sites we generated our pools from, including thoughts on other facilities similar to that of the Connection.

### Feedback about Connection House

Connection House is a service program offered by the Connection, Inc. The “House” offers treatment for people suffering with substance addiction. “The Mission of Connection House is to provide quality, visionary, leadership in the field of substance abuse treatment.”<sup>37</sup>

Former clients of Connection House interviewees spoke approvingly of the program. Although responses varied from person to person, similarities were found in their thoughts about the efficacy of daily programming. For example, almost all of the former House members found the life skills offered by the program fundamental to their gradual re-integration into the greater society. Karen said this of Connection House:

They [Connection House] do so many things here. They give you living skills, if you heed their advice they give you everything to set you out on your own.

Roseanne commented on the practicality of the skills that are taught there:

You learn to live on a budget of 45 dollars a week ...I smoke so I had to learn to budget myself on 45 dollars a week...and so when I left here I was use to living on 45 dollars a week for personal stuff. The food and stuff was here, but for personal stuff all I could spend was that so when I left here... they made me put my money in a bank so when I left here I could get an apartment. And I did and I also brought that with me and so for six months I learned to live off 45 dollars a week and probably followed that for the next year until I got a girl friend.

The program’s provision of guidelines for budgetary and financial management was particularly valuable for clients preparing to enter other communities upon their release from Connection House. Clients not only received general instruction in their spending but in their use of time and resources as well. In fact, some of the ex-members of Connection House attributed their entire recovery to the vocational and education tools provided by the program.

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<sup>37</sup> For further information, please see their website at [www.theconnectioninc.org](http://www.theconnectioninc.org).

The professional services notwithstanding, former members of Connection House also spoke fondly of Connection House staff. Ex-members found the counselors supportive and compassionate. Rob said that he liked “the way the staff treats you. They don’t look at your past and judge you a lot. They treat you like you’re brand new. You get a second shot. It’s about the whole recovery process.” Margaret called one of the Connection House employees, “the closest thing to a saint.”

The only consistent criticism of Connection House that came through in interviews pertained to the program’s policy—or the lack thereof—on drug use while in the programs. A few interviewees believed that the program needed to implement a zero tolerance policy for non-compliant program attendants. They spoke of having to deal with peers who insisted on drug use at the time of their tenure in the center and found the illegal habits of other program attendants threatening to their own recovery. Said Rob:

If you were doing something and it affected me, I would point my finger...  
I would tell on people. People hated me. That's because I wanted to live  
This program . . . Is good. It works, but you have to want it to work for you...

But while interviewees believed the program should be sterner in their no-drug use policy, the former Connection House clients personally understood the importance of “second chances.”

#### Feedback about the Middlesex and Meriden Alternative Incarceration Centers

The alternative incarceration centers (AICs) specializes in the monitoring and rehabilitation of “at-risk incarceration” offenders, albeit almost a third of the participants interviewed entered the respective centers voluntarily.<sup>38</sup>

Members of the Middlesex and AICs expressed mixed sentiments about services provided by the respective centers. While clients generally acknowledged the importance of the AIC programs, some saw areas for improvement in the centers’ facilitation of day-to-day protocol and rehabilitation practices. In interviews with clients, a few talked about the need for more food and better food, vocational assistance, more highly-qualified staff, and individualized attention for clients. Samantha expressed concerns about the staff’s qualifications:

I would put a staff that needs more than a high school [degree] to work here  
'cause all they need is a high school diploma and a clean record ... and be 18  
years old ... I would suggest [the staff have] some skills to prove to me that they  
are not like us. I want some proof that they could help me.

Michael spoke to the need for better client-to-staff pairing:

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<sup>38</sup> The Middlesex AIC provide both residential and non-residential services for court-mandated referrals, while the Meriden AIC just offers non-residential services for their clients.

I'd do one-on-ones, like, a lot more with the clients, to really get to them and reach out, because really, sometimes, I think one-on-ones help a lot more than doing a group. Some people don't open up that much in group.

Sandra, another client of the same center recommended that clients be grouped by age so as to the address the experiential divide between younger and older AIC attendants:

I would keep the younger kids, with the younger kids. Because... for a lot of us that are older, that finally admitted that our life has been totally screwed up by drugs and alcohol, get agitated by the kids that don't really want to be here. They don't want to listen. They don't care. They're not here cause the want to be.

That said, most of the AIC clients expressed overall satisfaction with their placement in the centers. They recognized the inevitable limitations of programs like the AIC and even expressed the importance of client accountability. Steve shifted the responsibility of recovery and desistance from the program to clients: "I don't think there are any problems with the programs, just the individuals...Like for the longest time I didn't want to stop doing drugs."

#### Feedback about Other Programs:

In addition to asking clients about their experiences in Connection House and the AICs, the research team also inquired about other programs they have participated in.

We received mixed responses from the clients. Some participants spoke highly of programs they attended before being placed in a Connection center. They remember the tools they gained from the programs—skills they found helpful in their recovery. Roseanne spoke in depth of one activity conducted at The Bellevue Center:

If I was going to design a program I would probably very closely follow the treatments...what they have at [The Bellevue Center]... they teach DBT [Dialectical Behavior Therapy] ...They teach you some skill that you can take on with you in your life... When you are faced with a decision most people they have this thing they call your emotional mind and your logical mind. Your emotional mind comes with your emotional response and you logical mind comes with no emotional response... and you have to take a step back and think it through.

At The Bellevue Center people were given a practical behavioral guide to help them in their everyday decision-making. Former clients of the program found the Dialectical Behavioral Therapy particularly effective in shaping clients' outlook on life situations.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>Dr. Marsha M. Linehan reported the following in *Cognitive-Behavioral Treatment of Borderline Personality Disorder (1993)*: "Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) is the application of a broad array of cognitive and behavior therapy strategies to the problems of Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD), including suicidal behaviors.

DBT also has a number of distinctive defining characteristics. As its name suggests, its overriding characteristic is an emphasis on 'dialectics' - that is, the reconciliation of opposites in a continual process

When asked about non-profit support groups like Narcotics Anonymous (NA) and Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), participants spoke highly of the groups' mission and treatment approach. In addition to providing clients with spiritual guidance, NA and AA pair their attendants with sponsors to help them with the recovery process. In several cases, clients of the support groups maintained relationships with their sponsors, long after being released from the program(s). Avery spoke of his relationship with an NA sponsor:

I was hesitant at first. There are people there to help me. It's five years later and I've got the same sponsor and I know some good people... If I stop going to meetings, then I stop being responsible, I stop being a productive member of society, and I'll be getting high, I'll be getting arrested again and going back to jail again...[He prays with his sponsor; they are there for each other]...Every meeting in the world of N.A., they say the serenity prayer for the suffering addict. When they say that prayer, they help me.

Conversely, others offered less than positive feedback on programs they attended outside of Connection House and/or AIC. Diana, a former client of the Rusford Center, said this of the program: "I wanted a program that was going to treat me more like an adult... I would've probably acted more like an adult. I got screwed.... I got a lot of buttons pushed...I swear they pushed me to relapse."<sup>40</sup>

Some clients criticized programs like the Eddy Treatment Shelter—a Connection program located in Middletown for not being sterner in its maintenance of supposed drug-free environments. Said Daisy:

I don't know. There were more drugs in that place than are out on the streets and that's a place where you are supposed to be getting better?!...The Eddy Center, I would check people's pockets when they come in, do what you have to do to keep the drugs out of there.

The enforcement of zero tolerance policies notwithstanding, programs identified as most successful in their treatment strategies were those which provided individualized counseling for clients, practical life skills and financial or vocational assistance. Programs that *only* monitored the criminal activities and substance abuse habits of clients were not considered as helpful.

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of synthesis. The most fundamental dialectic is the necessity of accepting patients just as they are within a context of trying to teach them to change. This emphasis on acceptance as a balance to change flows directly from the integration of a perspective drawn from Eastern (Zen) practice with Western psychological practice." Source: <http://www.toddlertime.com/borderline/dbt.htm>

<sup>40</sup> The Rusford Center was founded in 1975 for individual suffering with substance abuse problems. Rusford has treatment facilities in three central Connecticut locations: [Middletown](#), [Meriden](#) and [Glastonbury](#).

## VII. EMPLOYMENT

Finding employment can be a valuable aid for an individual in the process of desistance. In addition to providing financial stability, it can provide structure and meaning. Not surprisingly, therefore, our desister group was much more likely to be employed than our persister group.

	<b>Unemployed</b>	<b>Employed part-time</b>	<b>Employed full-time</b>
<b>Desisters</b>	2 (14%)	1 (7%)	11 (79%)
<b>Persisters</b>	4 (50%)	1 (12%)	3 (38%)

Desisters are more likely to be employed full-time and less likely to be unemployed than persisters. We do not know whether finding work helped the desisters succeed in avoiding crime, or whether once they avoided crime it was easier to find a job. Country suggested the former, saying, “work is a big part of my recovery.” Some of the persisters may have counted themselves as unemployed because they may have engaged in illegal economic ventures, such as stealing or selling illicit substances. In any case, having employment is correlated with desistance—helping ex-offenders develop job skills and find work may be an important method of supporting their attempt at desistance.

# CONCLUSION

## Past Criminality

Drug abuse was an important factor in the legal troubles of the participants. Many of them committed crimes to fund addiction, while others said that drug use impaired their judgment. In general, they stressed that recovery from addiction is a lifelong process of constant struggle. Providing support to recovering addicts is a vital part of helping them steer clear of the law.

The participants also recognized the role of their friends in crime; many had broken off old friendships. Economic deprivation and anger were major motivations for crime, as well. All of these issues are extremely important factors in the lives of our participants, and should be addressed as completely as possible to maximize the chances of successful reintegration.

## Interpersonal Relationships

Supportive interpersonal relationships with romantic partners, family, and friends can be a powerful factor in encouraging desistance and successful reintegration into the community. Many interviewees attested to the positive impact that their romantic partner has on their lives, although a few regarded their partner's impact as primarily harmful to the types of lives that they wanted to lead. Similarly, while most interviewees reported maintaining strong, supportive relationships with their families, some desisters said that they were not that close to their families or did not have a positive relationship with them. Although a somewhat larger percentage of desisters than persisters have children, members of both groups claim a strong attachment to their children and a desire to raise them well. The difference between the desisters and the persisters stems from the seemingly greater ability of the desister group to successfully avoid criminal behavior for the sake of their children. Similarly, while both groups almost universally reported that socializing with criminals often leads to criminal behavior, the desister population is much more assiduous about severing ties with old friends and forming social networks that no longer promote criminality and recidivism. Finally, a large majority of interviewees reported that there was either a particular person, or perhaps a group of people, who helped them turn their lives around, although the categories of the "people" mentioned varied widely.

## Community Involvement

Desisters are more actively engaged in the community than persisters are, engaging in activities such as participating in a community of faith and volunteering in shelters and halfway

houses. A particularly striking point is that, even though only a minority of desisters is involved in a community of faith such as a church or a temple, no desisters reported being involved in any communities of faith. The findings of this study are in line with previous studies that have shown that desisters are more likely to be involved in pro-social activities and that pro-social activities, in turn, encourage desistance and successful reintegration into mainstream society.

#### Desistance: Turning Point vs. Process

Over half of the interviewees—whether persisters or desisters—attributed a long-term process to their desistance from crime and drug use; only 35 percent of the 22 clients link lifestyle transformation to a particular moment in their lives. In some cases specific events were cited as life-altering moments, implying that recovery from substance abuse typically occurs after several periods of relapse until a combination of experiences and/or significant occurrence tips the scale. Some explicitly said that recovery from drugs and desistance from crime was not an overnight process. Some had to go through programs like those offered by the Connection, Inc. several times. A few completely attributed their recovery to a single factor: romantic relationships, children, a stern jail sentence or religious conversion.

#### Future Outlook

All of the members of the desister population had goals; ten of fourteen had very clear notions of their immediate futures. Persisters, in contrast, gave mixed responses—three of them had no goals whatsoever. The desisters also demonstrated more optimism about the likelihood they could achieve these goals for the future than did the persisters. Twelve of fourteen desisters were positive when discussing their futures, while over half of persisters had neutral or negative attitudes. More persisters than desisters voiced the need for programs as important for their desistance, 75% to 50%.

The majority of voices in both groups expressed their personal action and motivation, their agency, as important for their future. Only a handful of persisters expressed a total lack of agency, the sense that others are in control of their future desistance. More interesting than simply having and viewing goals differently, all of the participants had multiple goals for desistance, or more complete strategies to avoid crime.

#### Program Feedback

Former members of Connection House spoke favorably of the center. Many credited their recovery to the vocational and life skills instruction they received from the House. Clients were

pleased with the money management courses they received and one respondent said that, at the age of 42, Connection House helped him set up his first ever savings account. Moreover, the provision of practical financial knowledge and job opportunities post-Connection House helped clients stay on the course of recovery.

Conversely, clients of the AICs expressed mixed feeling about their experience in the programs. Some offered recommendations for the centers' improvement. They wanted improvement to dietary provisions; proof that the AIC workers were qualified to treat them; enforcement of a zero tolerance policy on drugs, and specifically in the case of the Middletown AIC, the separation of the Middlesex AIC from the Eddy center.

That said, both persisters and desisters at the AICs recognized the importance of accountability. One AIC client put it this way: "I don't think there any problems with the programs just the individuals...like for the longest time I didn't want to stop doing drugs." They did not deflect all culpability from themselves.

Many of our participants participated in NA or AA. Everyone spoke highly of the support groups. Specifically, they highlighted the mentorship they received from sponsors.

### Employment

Employment is highly correlated with desistance. The group of desisters were much more likely to be employed fulltime and were less likely to be unemployed than the persisters. This suggests that helping offenders build job skills and find employment is an extremely important part of supporting the desistance process.

### Demographic Survey

Other findings that raised questions involved the demographic survey. Less than 60 percent of the people we interviewed and Connection House and the AICs were males. This statistic was significantly less than the actual makeup of the prison system, where males overwhelmingly outnumber females. We also interviewed more white-identified individuals than people of color, though more Black and Latino males are in the jail/prison system than whites.

Although the small size of our pools may have skewed our findings, the survey still suggests that race and gender may play a role in who is sent to diversion programs versus those sent to jail/prison.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE CONNECTION, INC.

- Have program participants set short-term, achievable goals. Setting and reaching goals is a process.
- Having a desistance *strategy* is not enough; help create a framework for success and realization of goals.
- Programs may create a false sense of security. Tailor the last parts of programs as movements towards more of an apartment/tenant atmosphere.
- Make an effort to stay in touch with program graduates. Ex-offenders need many types of support.
- Explore the possibility of incorporating the families of program participants into existing programs or creating separate programs that emphasize family involvement in drug treatment for clients.
- Encourage pro-social activities, such as volunteering and engagement in the political process, especially at halfway houses.
- Continue to emphasize support programs such as AA and NA, since many people view these programs as very important “communities” in their lives.
- Continue to encourage a community-like atmosphere within the programs, especially in stable residential programs such as halfway houses.
- Research the accessibility of the programs for men and people of color. These groups were underrepresented in our study, and may be systematically denied admission to beneficial programs.
- Pay particular attention to the following problems that plague many offenders: anger, financial instability, and a lack of peer support for desistance.

## FUTURE RESEARCH POSSIBILITIES:

- Conduct a study with a population that has all been released from prison at least six months previously.
- Conduct a study with a population that has all been released from prison at least three years previously.
- Explore the desistance strategies of both people in supervised living situations and those who live unsupervised in general society.
- Improve consistency in style of interviewing and in style of coding.
- Conduct research in a more participatory fashion.<sup>41</sup>
- Verify the veracity of the interviewees by consulting their records.
- Utilize a representative sample of the population, with regard to such factors as the demographics of the local community, the demographics of the local prison population, the demographics of the state prison population, and the demographics of the national prison population.
- Utilize a larger sample population.
- Conduct longitudinal studies which follow particular individuals in their transitions from incarceration to freedom.

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<sup>41</sup> E.g., see Park, 1993.

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# APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

## Warm up Questions:

1. How'd you end up in Connecticut?
  - A. How long have you lived in Connecticut?

## Support System

### **Family**

2. How's your living situation (before coming to the AIC)?
  - A. Live with family
  - B. Live alone
  - C. Live with friends
3. Are you in a (romantic) relationship?
  - A. Is the relationship a good thing?
  - B. How long have you two been together?
    - i. After offending
    - ii. Before offending
  - C. Has it gotten better/worse since your last offense?
  - D. Does your relationship help you with your problems?
4. Do you have contact with your (extended) **family**?
  - A. What members?
  - B. How often do you see them?
  - C. What do you do with them?
  - D. How is your relationship with them?
    - i. feel pressure
    - ii. provide support.
5. Do you have any **kids**?
  - A. do you live with them?
  - B. do you see them or talk to them?

### **Friends**

6. How are your relationships with friends?
  - A. Have your relationships changed because of legal trouble?
    - i. Yes, i am not friends with the same people
    - ii. No, I have the same friends.
  - B. Do you mostly have the same attitudes about life as your friends or do you really find differences?
  - C. Have any of your friends had trouble with the law?
  - D. Have your views changed since your offense?
    - i. How?
  - E. Have theirs?
    - i. How?
7. What **community activities** are you currently involved in?
  - A. **Faith Group**?

1. What kind
  2. How long?
  3. With who?
- B. Community Organization?**
1. What kind?
  2. How long?
  3. With who?
- C. Sports?**
1. What kind?
  2. How long
  3. With who?
- D. Other

**Goals:**

8. Where do you see yourself in six months to a year?
  - a. Doing the same thing
  - b. In a new place
  - c. New job
9. How do you hope/intend to get there?
  - a. How concrete are the plans?
  - b. Do you feel optimistic?
  - c. Do you feel like you are in control of your life?

**Problems:**

10. What types of legal trouble have you had before?
  - (A. What resulted in you coming to the AIC?)
11. How did that situation come about?
  - A. Did **drugs** play a role?
    - a. Drug violations
    - b. Drug habit led to property crimes
    - c. Drug dealing was economic necessity

(Use parts of this question if this information doesn't come up in Q. 10)

12. Since your (last/previous) offense, (what kind of problems have you faced/have you faced any problems) staying out of trouble?
  - A. When?
  - B. What happened?
    - i. Involved:
      - a. Drugs?
      - b. Theft?
      - c. Petty stuff (harassment by the cops)?
    - ii. Who was it with?
      - a. Friends
      - b. Alone
    - iii. Where?
      - a. Old neighborhood?
    - iv. How?
      - a. Sudden opportunity
      - b. Careful planning

- v. Did you consider your options?
- C. What was your motivation?
  - i. Financial troubles
  - ii. Pressure or Advice from other people
    - 1. Old friends/acquaintances
    - 2. Family members
    - 3. Substance addiction
- D. While the situation was happening, how did you feel?
  - i. Misgivings
  - ii. Confident
  - iii. Solidarity with friends
- E. What did you do afterwards?
  - i. Lay low.
  - ii. Kept offending
- F. What were the effects/results of your behavior?
  - i. legal troubles
  - ii. things went well.

**G. If it has been more than one instance, how were succeeding instances different than the first time?**

- (i. Same as above. Compare to previous example.)
- ii. Did you think about this situation differently?
  - a. Consider your first experience?
  - b. Misgivings?
  - c. Confidence?
- iii. What were the effects/results of your behavior?
  - a. Legal troubles
  - b. Things went well
- H. Looking at your past offenses, are those types of actions something that you would engage in again?
  - a. Why or why not?
  - b. Pros and cons of criminal activity?

Desistance:

- 13. Why do you think that you've had **legal problems in the past?**
  - A. What do you blame for these problems?
    - i. Committing illegal behavior?
    - ii. Placing blame on exogenous circumstances?
    - iii. Placing blame on someone else?
- 14. What factors have helped you to stay out of legal trouble **in the past?**
  - a. Not getting caught
  - b. Family/friends/relations
  - c. Religion
  - d. Community involvement/pro-social engagement and behavior
  - e. Moment of realization
  - f. Programs (such as Connection House)
  - g. A particular person
- 15. How do you hope to stay out of legal trouble **in the future?**

- a. Not getting caught
  - b. Family/friends/relations
  - c. Religion
  - d. Community involvement/pro-social engagement and behavior
  - e. Moment of realization
  - f. Programs (such as Connection House)
  - g. A particular person
16. Has there been a **major turning point** in your life, regarding your relationship to the law?
- A. If so, could you describe it?
  - B. If change is a process that needs on-going maintenance, what support is there?
    - 1. Family
    - 2. Friends
    - 3. Personal strength
    - 4. Spirituality
  - C. Is it some of both? How?
17. Was there a **particular person** who has helped you get on your feet after your offense?
- A. Who was that person?
    - 1. Family Member
    - 2. Friend
    - 3. Program employee

The Connection/Programs:

18. What programs have you participated in since offending?
- A. Connection House
  - B. AICs
  - C. AA, NA, drug treatment
  - D. Counseling

**(for each program)**

- i. How did you get involved in that program?
  - a. mandatory
  - b. choice
- ii. Did you have personal goals while in that program? (if so, what goals?)
  - a. no goals
  - b. to go straight
  - c. other
- iii. What did you find helpful in staying out of legal trouble?
  - a. individuals (if so, who?)
  - b. particular programs
  - c. personal change
- iv. Did you have any problems that the program failed to address?
  - a. employment
  - b. drugs
  - c. other
- v. What would you have changed about that program to make it better?

Their Input:

19. Do you see a need for a program like (the AIC/Connection House/treatment/half-way houses/etc)? If so, how would you design one?
20. Is there any **factor I overlooked** which has helped you or others turn away from crime?
21. After getting in legal trouble for the first time, why do some people go straight and some people get in trouble again?
22. Is there anything else we should know?
23. Is there anything we should ask in future interviews?

That was the last question. Thank you for helping us with our study.

## APPENDIX B: CODING SYSTEM

### 1. Connection House

- 0—AIC member
- 1—Connection House member

### 2. Living Situation:

- 0—live alone
- 1—live with family or friends
- 2—live in supervised location (halfway house, etc)
- 3—other (specify in notes)

### 3. Partner

- 0—no partner
- 1—partner

### 4. Start of Romance:

- 0—before legal troubles
- 1—after legal troubles

### 5. Quality of Romance:

- 0—negative (e.g. partner contributed to relapse/criminal activity/etc)
- 1—neutral or mixed response
- 2—positive about partner (e.g. partner is very supportive)

### 6. Family Contact

- 0—no contact
- 1—some contact with any member
- 2—frequent contact with any member

### 7. Quality of Family Contact

- 0—Family contact is overwhelmingly a negative experience
- 1—contact is neutral, or positive and infrequent
- 2—contact is relatively often and not negative

### 8. Agency in Family Contact

- 0— Other members decide to cut or continue contact with participant
- 1— Participant decided to cut or continue family contact

### 9. Kids

- 0—no kids
- 1—kid(s)

### 10. Contact with Kids

- 0—no
- 1—yes

### 11. Attitude about Kids

- 0—negative attitude toward kids (unwanted responsibility, etc)

- 1—neutral or mixed attitude
- 2—positive attitude toward kids

**12. Friends**

- 0—no social life
- 1—slight social life
- 2—substantial social life

13. Time of Friendship

- 0—all friends from “persisting” time period
- 1—some friends from “persisting” time period
- 2—no friends from “persisting” time period

14. Criminality of Friends “Then”

- 0—friends committed crimes as well
- 1—friends were mostly straight

15. Criminality of Friends “Now”

- 0—friends commit crimes
- 1—friends are mostly straight

16. Agency with Friends

- 0—others chose to be friends or end friendships
- 1—participant chose to make friends, keep friends, or end friendships

**17. Community Activities**

- 0—does not participate
- 1—participates

18A. Support Group (NA, AA, etc)

- 0—no
- 1—yes

18B. Faith Group

- 0—no
- 1—yes

18C. Other Community Activity

- 0—no
- 1—yes

19A. Attitude Support Group

- 0—Does not find valuable
- 1—Finds valuable or wants to participate (even if s/he does not)

19B. Attitude for Faith Group

- 0—Does not find valuable
- 1—Finds valuable or wants to participate (even if s/he does not)

19C. Attitude for Other Community Activity

- 0—Does not find valuable

1—Finds valuable or wants to participate (even if s/he does not)

**20. Goals**

0—no goals

1—has vague goals

2—has clear goals (w/a plan)

21. Agency in Goals

0—No goals, is passive

1—Goals, is passive

2—Goals, is active

22. Attitude about Goals

0—pessimistic

1—mix of pessimism and optimism or neutral

2—optimistic

(feel free to include notes about this question—apathetic? desperation?)

**23. Crimes**

Agency of Crimes in Past

0—passive description of crimes (something happened to me)

1—active expression (I did this and that)

24. Drugs related to Crimes (in any way, such as needed \$ for drugs)

0—Drugs not related to crimes

1—Drugs related to crimes

25. Drugs involved with specific Crime

0—participant was not using at the time of the crime

1—participant was under the influence at the time of the crime

(alcohol counts as a drug)

26. Time since Last Crime

0—under 1 month

1—under 1 year

2—between 1 and 3 years

3—over 3 years

27. Attitude about crime

0—does not try to avoid crimes

1—tries to avoid crime

28A. Motivation was money for drugs

0—no

1—yes

28B. Motivation: drugs clouded judgment

0—no

1—yes

28C. Motivation: Money for other reasons

0—no

1—yes

28D. Motivation: Peer pressure

0—no

1—yes

28E. Motivation: Passion/Anger/etc

0—no

1—yes

28F. Motivation: Other

0—no

1—yes

29A. Plans to avoid Crime: Avoid old friends

0—no

1—yes

29B. Plans to avoid Crime: stay off drugs

0—no

1—yes

29C. Plans to avoid Crime: Participate in program (AA, halfway house, etc)

0—no

1—yes

29D. Plans to avoid Crime: Stay busy

0—no

1—yes

29E. Plans to avoid Crime: Other

0—no

1—yes

30. Crimes in Future

0—Will not try to avoid crime in future

1—uncertain

2—Will try to avoid crime

31. Agency for the Future

0—participant does not convey sense of personal agency (feels like they might not be able to avoid crime, even if they want to, e.g. “i will try to avoid crime, but my friends might force me into it”)

1—participant does convey sense of personal agency

## **32. Desistance**

Turning Point

- 0—does not desist
- 1—Desists, but has no moment
- 2—Desists, because of moment

33. Process

- 0—does not desist
- 1—Desists, but not because of ongoing process
- 2—Desists, because of ongoing process

34. Agency of Desistance

- 0—someone else made me change
- 1—I chose to change

**35. Particular person**

- 0—no
- 1—yes

36. Type of person

- 0—family member
- 1—friend NOT from program
- 2—friend from program
- 3—program employee
- 4—other (specify in notes)

**37A. Programs: Connection House**

- 0—no
- 1—yes

37B. Programs: an AIC

- 0—no
- 1—yes

37C. Programs: Support group (AA, NA, etc)

- 0—no
- 1—yes

37D. Programs: Other

- 0—no
- 1—yes

**(Leave blank the following categories that do not apply)**

38. Helpfulness of Connection House

- 0—harmful
- 1—neutral
- 2—helpful

39. Agency in Connection House

- 0—had no goals, plans

1—worked toward a goal

40. Voluntary Admission for Connection House

0—mandated into program

1—chose to do program

41. Helpfulness of the AIC

0—harmful

1—neutral

2—helpful

42. Agency in the AIC

0—had no goals, plans

1—worked toward a goal

43. Voluntary Admission AIC

0—mandated into program

1—chose to do program

44. Helpfulness of support group

0—harmful

1—neutral

2—helpful

45. Agency in support group

0—had no goals, plans

1—worked toward a goal

46. Voluntary Admission for support group

0—mandated into program

1—chose to do program

47. Helpfulness of Other Program

0—harmful

1—neutral

2—helpful

48. Agency in Other Program

0—had no goals, plans

1—worked toward a goal

49. Voluntary Admission for Other Program

0—mandated into program

1—chose to do program

**Background Information Survey:**

50. Age

0—18-24

1—25-30

- 2—31-40
- 3—41-50
- 4—51+

51. Gender

- 0—male
- 1—female

52. City of Residence

- 0—Middletown
- 1—New Haven
- 2—Hartford
- 3—Meriden
- 4—other (specify in notes)

53. Race/Ethnicity

- 0—Black or African American
- 1—Hispanic or Latino/a
- 2—White or Caucasian
- 3—other (specify in notes)

54. Marital Status

- 0—single
- 1—married
- 2—divorced
- 3—widowed

55. Employment Status

- 0—unemployed
- 1—employed part-time
- 2—employed full-time

56. Hours per week

- 0—0-20
- 1—21-30
- 2—31-40
- 3—41-50
- 4—51+

**Comments or quotations for particular questions (include question code):**

Living Situation:

Partner:

Family:

Friends:

Community Activities:

Goals:

Crimes:

Turning Point:

Particular Person:

Programs:

Background Information Survey:

**Other Quotations and comments:**

Physical Observations of Participant:

Any bias or problems with interview:

Advice for how to improve/design programs:

Any responses from “Their Input” section:

Any other important comments, observations, quotations, etc:

## APPENDIX C: CODING SAMPLE

As an example of the process of coding interviews—that is, assigning a series of numbers to statements made in words—excerpts from Bob’s interview are transcribed below. The text in **bold** provides an indication of how a given statement or series of statements yielded a numerical code, as corresponds to the Coding Schedule (See: Appendix B).

“It’s pretty much like a combination of me, being ready to make that turn, and just happening to plug in with the right people at the right time, who help me to complete the turn, you know... [**Coding Question #33—“Process”: Option #2—“Desists, because of ongoing process”**] Cause I done programs in prison, and even the atmosphere plays a role, you know. You look around here [Connection House], and it’s like, you look around a program in a prison, and it’s like: “Ok, you’re still in prison... to be able to walk out of the front door and come in the back door, you know, and it’s like, okay. I would say... a lot of the footwork was done in prison, but then, you know, it’s like the timing was perfect: Once the prison didn’t have any more [to] offer, to get here was like, the reward, of, not only what’s not in prison, but if you don’t get high no more, even though this is a halfway house, sometime you gotta break things up, umm, This is a home, it’s not a prison. You can walk out the front door and go down the street... You can’t do that in prison. And my thing was, like, you know, you can live a normal life, if you want to. This October will be nine years since I last picked up, you know, and I said to myself: “you already proved that you can go without getting high.” “So, let’s just put that off to the side for a minute. Cause you not getting high, so you ain’t gotta worry about, you ain’t even gonna deal with that right now. Right now, how about just giving it a try, you know, cause when I got here, I had close to \$3000 in the bank.” [left over from before?] “No. Before I went to prison, I never... had a savings account. This place kind of introduced me, to like, you know working a real job, and...” [**Coding Question #38—“Helpfulness of Connection House”: Option #2—“Helpful” (due to both the statements about Connection House being different from a prison and also how it introduced him to a job and a savings account)**] “I’ll be 43 this year... I was 42, and it was the first time I had a savings account.” “I didn’t grow up like that, I didn’t grow up with no savings account. Work! Nah, I ain’t working.”



# APPENDIX E: DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

## Background Information Survey

Please answer the following questions:

**Age:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Gender:** \_\_\_\_\_

**City or Town of residence:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Race/Ethnicity:** \_\_\_\_\_

**What is the primary reason for your participation in The Connection program?**

\_\_\_\_\_

(possible answers include: parole violation, probation violation, condition of release, etc.)

\*\*\*\*\*

For this section, please place an "X" next to your answer.

**Marital Status:**

Single: \_\_\_\_\_

Married: \_\_\_\_\_

Divorced: \_\_\_\_\_

Widowed: \_\_\_\_\_

**Employment Status:**

Unemployed: \_\_\_\_\_

Employed Part-time: \_\_\_\_\_

Employed Full-time: \_\_\_\_\_

**If employed, how many hours per week do you work?** \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for your cooperation!