

Returning Home, Inc.: An Innovative Community Alternative to Reduce Recidivism and Overcrowding



by Byron R. Johnson,
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Reduce Recidivism and Overcrowding*

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**A TEMPLATE FOR STRATEGIC PARTNERS
IN THE COMMUNITY TO PARTNER, PARTICIPATE AND
SUPPORT THEIR EVIDENCE-BASED LIFE SKILLS PROGRAMMING**

"Here where we are in Northwest Arkansas, the population is expected to double from 500,000 to a million people by 2050. We are already experiencing severe overcrowding in our county jails, so maintaining the status quo is not sustainable. Returning Home is a valued partner because it is using a new strategy with the goal of returning agency and responsibility to offenders so they can become tax-paying, law-abiding citizens."

JUDGE DEAKINS, Washington County, AR.

INTRODUCTION

In the state of Arkansas, jail and prison overcrowding has been a constant talking point for a number of years. Not surprisingly, the strain from overcrowding is reducing staff safety as well as correctional effectiveness. With Arkansas' projected population growth, local jurisdictions as well as Counties and the State are having to increase their criminal justice budgets and find unique ways to create more beds in these facilities that are already at capacity or beyond. The rising financial costs for facility expansion to accommodate more beds must be approved by local and State leadership. Finding a solution that can be agreed upon is very difficult when it comes to this complex topic. Lifestyle crimes which are rooted in drug addiction, criminal behaviors, and recidivistic patterns are often the focus of decision-makers, but these concerns are just the outcomes of a much larger problem. Distorted perceptions about oneself and others among inmates, as well as false beliefs are often central to these other more commonly recognized issues. These beliefs are deep-seated in trauma, Adverse Childhood Experience's (ACE), poverty, low level of education, and fractured homes, among other things. These experiences lead to a false belief in one's self and the world around them. Taken together, these issues compound the problem facing offenders returning to communities after experiencing incarceration.

The Problem of Prisoner Reentry and Aftercare

Creating new offender treatment and support programs within prisons and connecting those efforts to community-based programs outside of prison have been difficult. Moreover, in an era of finite resources and ever-tightening budgets, efforts to expand existing educational, vocational, and counseling programs within prisons have not yielded a significant change in recidivistic behaviors.

Returning Home: A Catalyst for Rethinking Reentry and Aftercare

The Community Alternative Program (CAP) offered by Returning Home, Inc. (RH) is a male transitional living program for individuals facing incarceration due to new charges and supervision infractions. The program provides safe and sober housing, food security, hygiene kits, clothing, case management, mental health counseling, employment preparedness, financial education, medication management, addiction support, and recovery connection. This holistic program is designed to reduce recidivism and help clients become self-sufficient and stable members of the community. In addition to reducing future deviant behavior, CAP is designed to encourage prosocial behavior (i.e., virtuous behavior that benefits others and society).

The RH Community Alternative Program, has yielded significantly positive results in lowering recidivistic patterns. As an alternative to sending a low-level offender to an overcrowded prison, with limited resources, offenders are instead sentenced to a program with services that reduce the likelihood of future incarceration.

Further, RH has created a template for strategic collaborations in the community to partner, participate and support their evidence-based life skills programming, through volunteerism, which has effectively reduced criminal behaviors, resulting in lightening the overload in the judicial system, but most important, rehabilitating offenders and protecting society.

Overcrowding in County Jails

Over a quarter of the estimated 1.9 million individuals (550,000) incarcerated in the United States are housed within one of the 3,116 local jails.¹ Over 80% of those residing in jails have not been convicted, as many are awaiting trials or other court proceedings. Relatedly, there is a significant amount of turnover in jails, as evidenced by the fact that, while 469,000 people entered jail in 2022, people served time in jail more than once, as more than 7 million people went through US jails in that same year. While many make bail within hours or days, many others lack the resources for bail and remain in jail until their trial. Less than 20% (102,700) have been convicted, with most serving time for misdemeanors with sentences under a year. An estimated 25% will be re-arrested within a year.

As with prisons, county and other local jails across the country are faced with overcrowding, with many simply waiting for a trial date, which can often take up to a year as a result of multiple continuances (i.e., when a court date is delayed until a later date). Unlike prisons, there are generally few if any programs available for people in county and other local jails while they await trial.

In Arkansas, efforts to reduce prison overcrowding have led to early release from state prisons, with many of these people being re-arrested and placed back into county jails, often for outstanding fines, detainers, or restitutions from other county jurisdictions.

The purpose of this case study is to describe and evaluate RH’s Community Alternative Program as an innovative model both for reducing county jail overcrowding as well as reducing recidivism rates for individuals released from jail. The first section of this report provides a brief background on both the problem of county jail overcrowding in Washington County and on Returning Home, Inc., and then provides an overview of the innovative partnership between the two. The second section provides a qualitative look (i.e., drawing on interviews of residents) and preliminary quantitative outcomes associated with the CAP operated by Returning Home in Huntsville in comparison to their Center in Springdale. The third and final section of the report provides ROI (Return On Investment) modeling, in terms of reduced county costs for people transferred to the CAP, the employment of the CAP residents, county government revenues from payment of fines/ restitutions/child support, and projected future savings from reduced recidivism. This section also utilizes this projected ROI to demonstrate how establishing additional CAPS could aid in combatting county jail overcrowding and reducing law enforcement costs for counties across the state of Arkansas.

I. BACKGROUND

Washington County Court

Judge Patrick Deakins, a CPA vocationally, has been in office as Washington County Judge for 2 years. His primary focus is to identify more cost efficient and programmatically effective approaches to interrupt recidivistic behaviors and provide a pathway for county jail inmates to make a successful transition back to their home and community. As Deakins, himself a father of two children, explains:

The primary driver of overcrowding in our jails is that we have a broken criminal justice system. While we work on trying to fix some of those problems, we need programs like Returning Home that operate outside of the bureaucracy, that can focus on building up offenders by giving them agency and an opportunity to become whole persons and break the generational recidivism that many of these men are mired in.

Deakins supports Returning Home because it is working with an “outside the box” strategy that has a goal of returning agency and responsibility to offenders so they can become tax paying and law-abiding citizens. Deakins also notes

1 Sawyer, Wendy; Wagner, Peter; Mass Incarceration: The Whole Pie 2024; Press Release, 3/14/24.

SACRED AND SECULAR PARTNERSHIPS CAN PLAY A CATALYTIC ROLE IN A TRULY COMPREHENSIVE AND SCALABLE APPROACH TO PRISONER REENTRY



these problems are rooted in the justice system, where continuances and associated challenges in getting both the public defender and prosecutor on the same page are arduous, often resulting in long-term stays in county jails, from 8 months to a year before a case is heard. Deakins was also concerned with the efficacy of some judges in terms of working through back-logged cases and the resulting extended jail terms due to those delays.

CEO of Returning Home, Nick Robbins, successfully competed for a one-time grant from leftover COVID funds which was distributed by then Judge Wood, Deakins predecessor. Since the funds were a one-time grant, they are not likely to be available in the future. Judge Deakins and the County staff quantified the cost of housing an inmate in the County jail at \$94 per day. In Robbin's proposal he offered to house an inmate for \$60 a day and include aftercare and programming to prevent reincarceration of the individual. Through the competitive bidding process, Robbins received a one-time grant of \$2M dollars to accept inmates into the Returning Home program over a three-year period.

Returning Home

Returning Home was established in 2014 as a non-profit, 501©3 with the mission of: Repairing lives and restoring families of Northwest Arkansas citizens who are either imprisoned or who have been recently released. Returning Home began as a center in Springdale (Washington County, AR), providing food, housing, clothing jobs and daily classes for men who were released from prison on condition that they enroll in Returning Home's post-release program for 90 days before they are free to move home or establish residence in another place. Returning Home partners with Phoenix Recovery, who manages the residential component of the center to serve the 75 male residents who have been paroled from prison.

In 2019 and 2020, Robbins, presented to the Washington County leadership a pilot alternative program for men in County Jail. In 2021 Washington County funded this pilot program that was established at the Returning Home Center in Springdale Arkansas. Setting aside beds out of the current residential program for the new Community Alternative Program. Returning Home staff made periodic visits to the county jail, as well as providing information to the Public Defenders and Prosecutors Office about CAP for inmates to consider and choose to participate in the program. With the prosecutors and public defenders' approval, an individual signs a plea agreement with the judge and is sentenced to Returning Home to complete CAP instead of serving time in jail or prison for their current criminal charges.

The CAP moved from Springdale to Huntsville, located in nearby Madison County, in 2023, and is the focus for the current case study. This innovative program provides Washington County judges with the alternative of referring, or sentencing, people in the county jail to this transitional living program in lieu of jail or prison time. The program was founded by Robbins, an ex-offender himself, having served 7.5 years for armed robbery. Prior to establishing RH,

**BREAKING GENERATIONAL RECIDIVISTIC BEHAVIORS
AND ADOPTING NEW ACTIONS WILL RESULT IN HEALTHIER
HOUSEHOLDS AND COMMUNITIES.**



Nick served as the re-entry specialist for a faith-based prison program, Pathways to Freedom, located within the Arkansas state prison in Wrightsville, AR.²

CEO Nick Robbins described some of the limitations of traditional prison programs he has observed in his previous capacity as a prisoner re-entry specialist for Pathways to Freedom preparing inmates for release, as well as the challenges the Springdale center has faced over the eight years of operating the center:

Programs in prison are typically information dumps. Inmates are expected to read material, answer questions, expecting that to result in a changed life. Returning Home believes a more thorough plan is needed, one which has standards of support, accountability and follow through, which are in “real time”, outside of a prison. If a participant fails to fulfill his commitments, he is kicked out of the program.

Prison in-house re-entry training is inadequate. It is often too quick, with little or no follow up once the individual released, other than a probation officer. Without good follow up, absconding is common. The FTA [Failure to Appear] is not only when an offender fails to appear for their court date, but also when an inmate is released from prison and if they fail to report at their appointed re-entry place of residence in Springdale, they will have a warrant placed for absconding which is failure to meet release requirements.

One of the challenges we have faced at the Springdale center is the fact that we are in the middle of a growing city in Northwest Arkansas where the temptations lead a lot of our guys to abscond³ or to get discharged for failing a drug test.

However, one distinct advantage that Returning Home has in working with county jails is the fact that most of those returning citizens are being released back into the immediate vicinity, whereas the logistics of state prison re-entry planning is complicated by the fact that ex-offenders are returning to communities across the state.

These barriers to successful re-entry led Robbins to seek out an alternative location for a residential program to improve outcomes. Overall, Returning Home’s \$800,000 budget is funded through the one-time grant by Washington County (40%), fees from enrollees to cover room and board (20%), individual donors (12%), and grants from foundations and businesses (28%).

² Pathway To Freedom, Inc. (PTF), a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, is a holistic service program that provides educational, values-based, pre-release services to prisoners on a voluntary and non-compulsory basis, while preparing them to reintegrate into society and become productive citizens through the use of new and improved pro-social and life skills that will enhance family and social relationships, moral and spiritual development, and employment opportunities.

³ Abscond means leaving a jurisdiction secretly or suddenly, e.g. to avoid service of process, arrest, or prosecution; or leaving with another person's money or property. Absconding is generally a criminal offense which may lead to imprisonment in jail. abscond | Wex | US Law | LII / Legal Information Institute (cornell.edu)

The Returning Home Community Alternative Program (CAP)

With the funding received from Washington County, Returning Home was able to acquire and renovate a large property located in nearby Huntsville, AR and, with an additional 10-bed modular unit built on the property grounds with a total capacity to house 26 residents. As with the center in Springdale, referrals for participants in the Huntsville CAP were obtained through presentations to individuals in the county jail. Robbins described the advantages of the Huntsville location in comparison with the Springdale site:

We benefit from the support from Judge Deakins, who is working closely with the County Sheriff to expedite the process of getting men into the Returning Home program. The Huntsville site is in a rural setting, with fewer distractions or opportunities for candidates to abscond. Sitting on 14 acres, with the closest town being 3 miles away, provides a quiet atmosphere for candidates to connect with other men, who are setting goals and plans for re-entry into their family and community.

How the CAP Works

RH staff, all of whom are ex-offenders themselves, use several qualitative questions to determine whether an individual would be a good fit for their program, such as:

- What are their charges?
- What is their personal background?
- Are candidates non-violent, non-sexual offenders? (RH will accept people that had previous violent offenses, but not current violent charges)
- Is the candidate willing to work at a Butterball meat processing plant (RH has an employment agreement with Butterball, located 5 minutes from their residential program) or Brunner and Lay (manufacturer of mining equipment) located 40 minutes from the Huntsville residence?
- What is the nature of their relational skills?
- Are there any emotional problems?
- What is their medical history?
- How much does the candidate owe in fines and/or restitutions?

These questions are intended to determine the “fit” of an individual in the culture of the residential program, not to simply select those with the least number of challenges to overcome.

The Huntsville CAP, as with the Springdale center, provides safe and sober housing, food security, hygiene kits, clothing, case management, mental health counseling, employment preparedness, financial education, medication management, addiction support, and recovery connection. RH has also identified inputs and outcomes for tracking residents’ personal, physical, spiritual and family growth (see Exhibit 1).

Personal sleeping arrangements are two-, four- and six-man bedrooms. The property’s acreage gives CAP members an opportunity for family members to visit on family day and enjoy the surroundings. The property is located on the side of a large hill and surrounded by trees on all sides which makes it hidden from the entrance to the facility. Securing employment of participants usually takes two to four weeks to arrange upon their arrival, due to limited employment vacancies and the need to obtain identification for the client first. Butterball turkey processor is the primary employer, and the company creates a family type environment for workers.

Beyond CAP’s on-site training and work requirements, outside activities are permitted, like church attendance, but not mandated. CAP staff provide support through daily meetings and devotionals. Before entering the CAP program candidates must affirm their commitment to join a program which requires participants to get a job, have a financial plan, be monitored by staff, keep their personal spaces clean, and fulfill general household duties, in a positive faith-based environment. Everyone must take a random drug test regularly and no drugs are allowed, except authorized by a doctor or physician assistant. They must also get counseling from the resident therapist. See Exhibit 2 for the ‘5 Simple Ethics’ that govern the CAP’s operations and expectations.

What Works for the Returning Home CAP?

As shown in the preliminary results in the evaluation section below, there are two key elements contributing to the initial success: i) nurturing and protecting the culture within the residence to be focused on healing and personal transformation; and ii) case management supports to identify and pay off and otherwise resolve residents’ fines, restitutions, and/or child support requirements.

Life in the Huntsville CAP - “Culture is King”

The initial challenge concerning residents coming into the Huntsville CAP is to undo some of the behaviors, attitudes and actions they developed in jail. As Brenda Stringfellow, who serves as Program Director, at the Huntsville CAP, explains:

In prison, the prevailing culture is one of submission. Everyone, including inmates and staff, must adhere to strict prison standards. There is constant turnover among prison staff, and new inmates arrive daily. This environment often fosters gangs and unhealthy relationships.

In contrast, Returning Home (RH) emphasizes nurturing responsibility and agency under careful oversight. Upon entry into the program, each new participant is paired with an established member to instill the program's culture and expectations. This mentorship helps lay a positive foundation and vision for all participants.

In addition to the assigned mentors, there is a dedicated group of peer leaders who have been trained in various techniques to foster positive change. These leaders are instrumental in creating and maintaining a culture that encourages personal growth and development. They actively engage with the men in the house, providing guidance, support, and motivation to help each individual reach their full potential. Through their efforts, the peer leaders ensure a supportive and nurturing environment conducive to transformation and progress."

One of the major goals for nurturing a positive and supportive culture within the CAP is to teach the men to be willing to serve and speak about each other in positive ways. The recognition that humility was essential in the program, work activities, and classes is foundational to the culture they are trying to establish. First and foremost, the Huntsville CAP staff recognize participants must jettison the idea that they are victims. To break this poverty mindset, they must establish a healthy identity, which flips the script of “every day is the worst day in my life” to everyday is an opportunity to improve my situation and make life better.

The Huntsville CAP employs small groups of 6-8 residents for their Fatherhood program, with the rest of the programming involving all of the residents, on a variety of subjects. The size of the fatherhood group allows opportunity for everyone to share. A common experience of almost everyone in the small groups is they never had a father who knew how to express his emotions in a positive manner.

The Huntsville CAP is very clear and very strict about the rules for living in the Huntsville CAP, as reflected in the high percentage of discharges shown in the preliminary evaluation shown below. As Robbins explains, CAP staff have collectively found that maintaining a strict policy as it relates to protecting and nurturing the culture within CAP is essential:

Given the background for many of the men coming through Huntsville, there is little margin for error for them once they graduate from the CAP. Our strict policies are also a message to the other guys in the house of how we value the culture within the house in nurturing positive relationships and supporting those that are serious about making improvements in their lives and staying out of jail or prison.

Case Management – Giving them a clean slate

As noted in the Introduction, the majority of people in county jails have not been convicted, with many of them in jail due to an outstanding fine, unpaid restitution, or community supervision infractions. On average, each Huntsville CAP graduate had been previously incarcerated 9.76 times in Washington County jail before entering the program, and served an average of 303.9 days in jail.

It takes Returning Home about 3 weeks to gather all the background information on a Huntsville CAP candidate through AOC Public Court Connect, a website that provides case information for Arkansas court cases. Once admitted, Returning Home staff work with the CAP resident, who is generally employed at the Butterball meat processing plant or elsewhere, to identify and pay off their fines, as well as resuming any child support payments if they have them. Based on a weekly snapshot of the 20 residents currently employed, these residents, on average, had approximately \$3,000 in court fines and were paying an average of \$742 per month to pay down those fines. Three of these twenty residents were also paying \$89/week in child support payments.

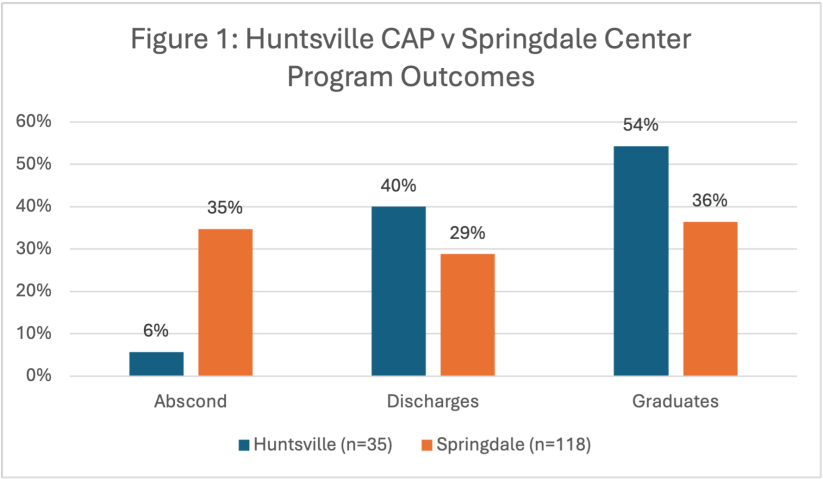
Paying down these fines not only results in additional income for the counties, but also prevents them from being re-arrested for nonpayment of court fines.

Finally, Family Day is a special opportunity to invite families to join their loved ones for a day of fun and food on property. The family get a chance to meet staff and have a better understanding of the progress their loved ones are making. It also helps the CAP staff learn about their specific family dynamics that helps them in counseling the men.

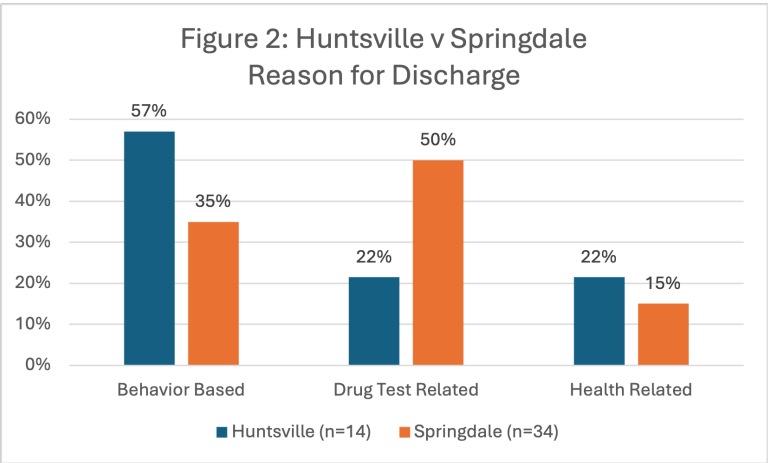
II. Preliminary Evaluation

Preliminary Quantitative Results

Based on the outcomes for the first 12 months for Huntsville, there is already clear evidence that the remote Huntsville location is yielding better results in comparison to the Springdale Center. Figure 1 shows the outcomes for the Huntsville CAP over the past 12 months in comparison to the Springdale Center over the past 2 years.



Only 6% of Huntsville residents have absconded, compared to more than a third (35%) from the Springdale center, located in the middle of town. Furthermore, graduation rates at Huntsville are 50% higher than those at the Springdale Center. Although discharges are higher at Huntsville versus Springdale (40% v 29%), the strong emphasis on maintaining a healthy culture at the Huntsville CAP requires clear consequences for residents that violate the house rules or refuse to engage in program requirements geared towards improving their life situation.



Likewise, the more remote Huntsville location allowed for fewer drug-related discharges from the program, as shown in Figure 2 above. Only 22% of Huntsville residents were discharged for a failed drug test, compared to 50% for the Springdale location.

Qualitative Results: To provide a more descriptive understanding of the Huntsville CAP, we also conducted interviews with a couple of current residents.

Jason

Jason has 5 children between his wife and himself. Jason brought 1 child into the family, she brought 3 children, and together they have one child. Jason is 44 years old and grew up with an abusive alcoholic father who was incarcerated for a period of time because he abused Jason and his brother. Jason initially adopted the same patterns as his father and became an alcoholic and has been to jail/prison six times. He’s now sober and his wife, an alcoholic too, is also sober. Jason’s father beat him regularly growing up and it wasn’t till Jason was in his late 20’s that he forgave his father for those beatings. Jason is now reconciled with his father, who himself has been sober for the past fifteen years.

Jason has reconnected with his local Church, White River Baptist, which is close by, and he is also involved with a recovery type of program called HOPE (Helping Other People Entanglements). Jason described his experience living in the Huntsville CAP so far:

Getting accepted to the CAP felt like winning the lottery. I knew that there were things I needed to fix in my life before I went back home, such as setting personal boundaries and improving my communication skills with my wife. I am getting along well with the other guys here and really appreciate the positivity and goal-oriented aspects of the culture here. I have already reconnected with my church family, so I have the social supports I need when I leave here.

Cody

Cody is 38 years old, never married, but has a 15-year-old daughter. He was raised in a Pentecostal home with an alcoholic dad who beat his mother. Cody also has memories of his grandfather beating his grandmother, setting a precedent of generational abuse. Cody was incarcerated for 5 years as part of a 20-year sentence, and his preparation for release was just a short class and he was given \$80 and they said “see you later.”

Cody was re-arrested for not paying child support and spent 300 days in county jail, before his acceptance to Returning Home. Cody’s early family life was traumatic. He was the youngest of two brothers and his older brother committed suicide at 18 years of age, when Cody was 9 years old. Cody started using meth at 13 years old to cope with life’s pain, which subsequently landed him in prison.

Cody has been at the Huntsville CAP for a year now and serves as one of three senior leaders in the house. The senior leaders play an important role in curating the culture within the house and helping newcomers to acclimate. He described what he called the ‘criminal mindset’ he held before coming to Returning Home, and how is learning a different way to approach his life:

Living day to day, adrenaline-based, no self-focus, no empathy, not paying bills, and hurting loved ones. Now I am learning how to better process my feelings, learning humility, and the value of helping others and being more approachable, especially in my role as a senior leader here.

Cody recently reached out to his 15-year-old daughter, and although he didn’t know what to say to her, his counselor at RH (Britt) encouraged him to reconnect with her. Cody has been in many programs through his incarceration and he doesn’t like the 12-step introduction where participants say, “Hi, I’m Cody and I’m a drug user”. Cody said it’s important to remind men at RH that we should focus on the future, not the past. We need to report on the here and now, not the back then. Cody also enjoys the practice of “push-ups”, ‘where you are vigilant in looking for opportunities to encourage and ‘Push Up” other residents for their positive contributions to community life and healthy interactions with other RH men.

III. Looking Ahead: Replicating the Returning Home Model to Reduce County Jail Overcrowding

State Prisons and County Jails in Arkansas

The challenge of overcrowding in county jails is impacted by state prison overcrowding. Arkansas, with its rapid population growth, has not built a new prison since 2005, so when state prisons get overcrowded, it is common to release prisoners early. In fact, in Arkansas, prisoners only tend to serve about one-sixth of their prison term. Many of these prisoners then end up in county jail, leading to overcrowding.

Giving the local Judicial System another resource outside of more traditional alternatives like Drug Court or Mental Health Court increases services to address this population. Having people sentenced to a community-run program is new to the area but this method is used in many other States. Keeping it local compared to incarceration provides a platform to assist the individual in making the lasting changes necessary and do so in the real world. Programs in incarcerated settings are imported and vital to success but lack more than simply a hypothetical approach to change. For example, it is challenging to teach financial management with individuals having a job, income, and bills. It is also difficult to teach someone to set boundaries with their families and friends if they are incarcerated. The CAP provides an opportunity to walk alongside these individuals in a structured setting that offers high-level accountability in the area they are from.

Returning Home is about redirecting individuals in jail to a structured setting that provides for their foundational needs and gives these individuals the chance to learn what a self-sustaining life looks like. As the CAP teaches them how to be a productive member of society, they slowly take on more and more agency and responsibility so that they have the confidence to maintain once they complete their program. Learning to sustain this experience at home is a large part of the success of CAP. Family dynamics are tough for everyone. Being able to learn about parenting in the Fatherhood Class, among other classes, increases communication skills, understanding of their role in the life of the children, and how to set appropriate boundaries with family members that are still living an unhealthy lifestyle.

Projecting the ROI of the CAP

This section utilizes the preliminary outcomes demonstrated by the Returning Home CAP in Huntsville. This replication model is based on the projected Return On Investment (ROI) for six such alternative residences, each serving housing 25 men for an average program of 6 months for a total of 60 men served per year (times 6 CAP residences for a total of 360 men served).

The returns of the ROI for this proposed CAP expansion is four-fold:

- i. **Reduced county law enforcement, prosecution, and jail costs ⁴ due to reduced re-arrests:** With an estimated CAP re-arrest rate of 22% (see reference I), as compared to the overall county rate of 64% (reference F), the proposed CAP expansion would result in 81 fewer re-arrests among CAP enrollees [124 re-arrests – reference J – less 43 re-arrests – reference J]. This would generate an estimated annual \$980,000 in reduced law enforcement and jail costs.
- ii. **Additional state and federal tax revenues associated with higher numbers of employment among CAP graduates:** There is an annual savings of \$123,000 in additional federal and state taxes paid due to a higher employment rate among CAP graduates of 73% (see reference P) as compared to an estimated 32.5% among non-CAP participants released from jail (see reference Q).
- iii. **Additional County revenues from payment of court fines and restitutions:** There are is first-year savings of \$144,000 from payment of various fines and restitutions owed paid by CAP graduates.
- iv. **Child Support Payments:** Assuming that 15% of CAP participants, there are \$133,000 in estimated first year savings from child support payments.

As shown in Table 1 (next page), there are the estimated first-year savings alone for the establishment of these six new CAP programs would be over \$840,000. The future benefits from reducing re-arrests are significantly higher. Returning Home, utilizing arrest data provided through Washington County Courts, determined that the individuals that fail the CAP program are re-arrested 2.77 times. With the improved CAP graduation rates in Huntsville, this could translate into an additional \$2 million in savings for the County.

4 Note: The calculation from fewer arrests uses only the incremental costs to jails (i.e., healthcare, food and hygiene) in this calculation (see reference A).

Table 1: Project ROI for CAP Model Implementation

Economic Savings from Reduced Re-arrests	Ref.		
Estimated per person annual Cost for food, hygiene and health care costs in county Jails.	A	\$8,577	Estimated as 25% of the total per person cost of \$34,310 (Washington County Courts), or \$8,577 per person.
Average total court costs per arrested individual	B	\$17,650	The Economic Costs of the U.S. Criminal Justice System - AAF (americanactionforum.org)
Percentage of ex-offenders that are re-arrested for new crimes committed	C	20%	Over 80% of those in jail under local authority have not been convicted. [Sawyer, Wendy; Wagner, Peter; Mass Incarceration: The Whole Pie 2024; Press Release, 3/14/24.]
Average total annual cost per re-arrested offender	D	\$12,108	Formula: A + (B*C). Annual costs of incarceration plus total court expenses per crime committed for the 20% of re-arrested individuals (versus the 80% that return to jail for parole or other violations and thus not incurring additional court costs).
Estimated number of CAP graduates per year	E	194	54% graduation rate times the 360 men served per year (60 men/CAP times 6 CAPS)
Estimated re-arrest rate for people in county jail (i.e., not participating in CAP)	F	64%	Returning Home
Expected number of CAP non-participants to return to jail	G	124	Formula: E * F. Projected number of non-CAP recidivists.
Total estimated costs of re-arrested CAP non-participants.	H	\$1,501,330	Formula: D * G. Projected number of CAP non-participants times total court and incarceration costs.
CAP graduates projected re-arrest rate	I	22%	The original re-arrest rate of 33% for the RH program in Springdale was based on a 36% graduation rate. The graduation rate for the Huntsville program is 54% or 50% higher. We correspondingly reduced the 33% re-arrest rate by 50% for an estimated 22% re-arrest rate.
Expected number of CAP graduates who will return to jail.	J	43	Formula: E * I. Projected number of participants re-arrested from among CAP graduates.
Estimated costs of re-arrested CAP graduates	K	\$520,623	Formula: D * J. Project number of re-arrested CAP graduates times total court and incarceration costs.
TOTAL ESTIMATED SAVINGS FROM REDUCED RE-ARRESTS OF CAP GRADUATES	L	\$980,708	Formula: H - K

Economic Gains: Increased Tax Revenues			
Estimated number of CAP graduates per year	G	194	54% graduation rate times the 360 men served per year (60 men/CAP times 6 CAPS)
Estimated re-arrest rate for people in county jail (i.e., not participating in CAP)	H	64%	Returning Home [Source?]
Expected number of CAP non-participants to return to jail	I	124	Formula: E * F. Projected number of non-CAP recidivists.
Estimated number of employable (i.e., non-re-arrested) people among CAP non-participants	M	70	Formula: E - G. CAP non-participants less projected number of recidivists.
CAP Graduates estimated re-arrest rate	K	22%	
Expected number of CAP graduates who will return to jail.	N	43	Formula: E * I. Projected number of recidivists from among CAP graduates.
Expected number of employable CAP graduates	O	151	Formula: E - J. CAP graduates less projected number of recidivists.
Percentage on CAP graduates not re-arrested that are employed and retain employment for at least one year.	P	73%	Returning Home
Economic Gains: Increased Tax Revenues			
Percentage of CAP non-participants not re-arrested that are employed and retain employment for at least one year.	Q	32.5%	Only 25%-40% of FIPs land a job after a year of being released. While these numbers do depend heavily on the specific location, FIPs find it exceptionally difficult to get a job within the first year of release.18 Out Of Prison Employment Statistics [2023]: Economic Opportunity For Formerly Incarcerated - Zippia
Additional number of ex-offenders employed as a result of CAP	R	86	Formula: (O * P) - (N * Q)
Average annual federal and state taxes paid per employed person	T	\$2,093	Source: Returning Home
TOTAL INCREMENTAL TAX REVENUES PAID DUE TO CAP PROGRAM	U	\$179,998	Formula: R * T
Economic Gains: Payment of County Fines Restitutions			
Estimated number of CAP graduates per year	G	194	54% graduation rate times the 360 men served per year (60 men/CAP times 6 CAPS)
Average annual payments for county fines	V	\$2,968	Source: Retuning Home. Paying \$742.75 per month in court fines over 4 months.
TOTAL ESTIMATED REVENUES TO COUNTIES FOR UNPAID FINES AND RESTITUTIONS	W	\$575,792	Formula: G * V

RETURNING CAP GRADUATES TO THEIR COMMUNITY AS REFORMED CITIZENS IS A BETTER SOLUTION.



Economic Gains: Child Support Payments			
Percentage of CAP Graduates with Child Support Payments	X	15%	Source: Returning Home
Estimated number of CAP graduates	Y	29	Formula: X * G
Average annual child support payments per person	Z	\$4,608	Source: Returning Home
TOTAL ESTIMATED CHILD SUPPORT PAYMENT BY CAP GRADUATES	AA	\$133,644	Formula: Z * Y
Total CAP Impact/Expenses			
Estimated number of CAP graduates per year	G	194	54% graduation rate times the 360 men served per year (60 men/CAP times 6 CAPS)
Estimated first year savings and economic gains (e.g., increased tax revenues) from CAP.	AA	\$1,870,142	Formula: [Total prison and court costs from reduce re-arrests (L)] plus [Incremental tax revenues from higher employment (U)] plus [Additional revenues to counties for fines and restitutions paid (W)] plus [Additional payments for court fines (AA)]
Net annual County Costs for 6 CAP Programs	BB	\$1,025,210	\$2.57 million (80% of estimated annual cost of \$3.21 million ⁵) less \$1,543,860 (\$8,577 in incremental county jail costs for 180 CAP participants [360 participants with 6 month stay])
NET ANNUAL FIRST YEAR SAVINGS		\$844,932	Formula: AA - BB
Future Savings			
% reduction in re-arrest rates due to the CAP program	CC	18%	The increase in CAP graduation rates as compared to CAP graduation at Springdale (54% versus 36%)
Estimated reduction of re-arrested individuals	DD	65	360 projected CAP participants times 18%
Average number of arrests per individual after release from jail.	EE	2.77	Source: Returning Home
Average total annual cost per re-arrested offender	FF	\$12,108	Formula: A + (B*C). Annual costs of incarceration plus total court expenses per crime committed for the 20% of re-arrested individuals (versus the 80% that return to jail for parole or other violations and thus not incurring additional court costs).
TOTAL ADDITIONAL SAVINGS FROM REDUCED FUTURE RE-ARRESTS		\$2,180,045	Formula: DD * EE * FF

5 Assumes the additional 20% of costs will be paid rents paid by CAP participants.

A Model for Expanding CAP Across Arkansas

A proposed expansion for five additional CAPS would be able to reach over 50% of the jail population across the state, providing over 150 additional beds and serving over 300 men annually that are currently in county jails across the state (see Exhibit 3 for the full proposed expansion).

IV. Conclusion

The quantifiable outcomes which Returning Home has produced over the past three years, and especially since the launch of the CAP in Huntsville, is noteworthy. However, even greater benefits have been observed in the emotional, psychological, relational, and spiritual growth which CAP students have expressed. Those immeasurable benefits require further research and understanding to validate how the CAP culture of pathways, accountability, and opportunity break unhealthy behavioral patterns and establish a plan for success.

CAP’s innovative strategy and programming effectively reduces inmate costs and fulfills a mandate to reform offenders and return them as productive citizens in their respective communities. Breaking generational recidivistic behaviors and adopting new actions will result in healthier households and communities.

The essence of CAP’s success parallels the current scientific research surrounding “hope”. Hope which is active and measurable, requires agency and a pathway to fulfill the primary goals of the CAP program, which include: 1) securing employment, 2) responsibly paying fines and child support, 3) rejecting addictions, 4) living and participating in a new culture of encouragement and accountability, and 5) preparing graduates to re-enter their home and community as productive, pro-social leaders.

The Community Alternative Program is less costly and more effective than County Jail. The current status of keeping individuals incarcerated without focused programming which facilitates change and produces hope is unsustainable as Northwest Arkansas continues grows. Returning CAP graduates to their community as reformed citizens is a better solution. With jails and prisons overcrowded plans to replicate CAP ideals, programs and settings will reduce criminal behaviors which contribute to recidivism.

As one CAP graduate expressed, “Completing the CAP program has been the best thing that ever happened to me. My insecurities and problems at home as a young man left me hopeless, and it got me in a lot of trouble. Now I see the light and a better way to live.”

Because prisoner reentry is a problem facing communities all across the United States, the goal of any plan should be to establish a model that not only is effective in a particular area, but also can be effective on a larger scale in multiple communities. There is a need for innovative approaches that prioritize collaboration, where the goals of the reentry model are realistically achievable, and the specific elements of the plan are replicable in any community – rural or urban. Finally, the plan is affordable and does not add new costs to already overburdened correctional budgets.

This case study provides preliminary evidence that Returning Home is capable of developing a scalable plan for effective prisoner reentry. To replicate these experiences, local governments need to continue to welcome and accommodate religious and community-based volunteers and groups, like Returning Home. Additionally, faith- and community-based groups will have to bring much needed expertise in coordinating and training volunteers in the areas of employment, housing, education, and counseling. In this way, sacred and secular partnerships can play a catalytic role in a truly comprehensive and scalable approach to reducing prisoner recidivism.

We have often heard the statement, “All Politics are Local.” Likewise, one can argue all solutions are local. Returning Home is an exemplar that is making this case quite strongly. Even though reentry is recognized as a national problem, it is not an issue than needs to be solved from by looking to Washington, DC. It may sound overly simplistic, but the most innovative solutions tend to be found among ordinary people who are inspired to do great things. Moreover, these innovations often seem to be led by faith-motivated individuals and groups. This case study provides preliminary evidence of a possible solution to a problem that most communities are struggling to confront.

EXHIBIT 1:
Outcomes Demonstrated Through Specific Program Inputs and Client Activities in the Areas of Personal Growth, Physical Growth, Spiritual Growth, and Family Growth

Personal Growth

Financial Education

- Developing skills in savings, banking, budgeting, debt reduction, and credit building.

Cognitive Behavior Education

- Enhancing ability to identify thinking errors, increase emotional intelligence, recognize and question unhealthy foundational beliefs, and establish healthy beliefs and values.

Goal Setting

- Increasing focus, motivating new behaviors, sustaining momentum, and promoting self-mastery.

Legal Freedom

- Managing open cases, fines, fees, restitution, addressing active warrants, and satisfying court stipulations.

Time Management

- Improving punctuality for program obligations, increasing productivity, decreasing stress, enhancing self-discipline, and raising the quality of outcomes.

Accountability

- Developing the ability to hold others accountable in a healthy manner, accepting accountability constructively, and increasing self-awareness.

Sustainability

- Maintaining employment, obtaining a driver's license, and securing safe and healthy housing.

Physical Growth

Mental Wellness

- Participating in weekly group and individual counseling, managing medication, and improving focus and mindset.

Addiction Recovery

- Undergoing drug testing, establishing healthy relationships and boundaries, preventing relapse and crises, and forming a support network.

Physical Health and Wellness

- Establishing a primary care physician (PCP), securing insurance, managing medication, and addressing health issues and work-related injuries effectively.

Spiritual Growth

Pursuit of Personal Relationship with God

- Attending church, fostering hope in Christ, and engaging in Bible study and devotionals.

Family Growth

Fatherhood

- Increasing parent/child engagement, understanding healthy discipline, and recognizing the roles and responsibilities of a father.

Family Dynamics

- Establishing healthy boundaries, enhancing communication, and recognizing individual roles within the family.

Program Culture

- Increasing social awareness, valuing each community member as family, and fostering a community with family values.

EXHIBIT 2:
5 Simple Ehtics (Returning Home CAP)

1. **Confidentiality and Respect:** All staff members will maintain strict confidentiality regarding brothers' personal information, including their past struggles with addiction. Residents should be treated with respect, dignity, and empathy, fostering an environment of trust and support.
2. **Zero Tolerance for Substance Abuse:** The primary goal of CAP is to provide a substance-free environment. Therefore, a strict zero-tolerance policy for alcohol and drug use is enforced, with clear consequences for violations. Regular drug testing is implemented to ensure accountability.
3. **Supportive Community:** Encourage a sense of community among brothers by promoting positive interactions, peer support, and accountability. Foster an environment that values teamwork, encourages healthy relationships, and discourages negative influences or behaviors that could jeopardize recovery.
4. **Individualized Recovery Plans:** Recognizing that each brother has unique needs and circumstances. Develop individualized recovery plans that focus on their specific goals, strengths, and challenges. Provide access to resources such as counseling, 12-step programs, training, and education to support their personal growth and long-term recovery.
5. **Growth Focus:** Fostering an environment that inhibits growth and provides different channels to navigate spirituality, faith, recovery, relationships, health, and community. Utilizing these avenues to restore our lives, repair our families and become self-sustaining.

EXHIBIT 3:
CAP Expansion Proposal

The following proposal provides information on the target population, partnerships, selection for expansion criteria, costs, and projected outcomes/impact for expansion of the CAP program across Arkansas.

Target Population

Target population is non-violent and drug related charges. This population has the highest risk of recidivism in the State of Arkansas around a 60% rate published in the Recidivism in Arkansas A Roadmap to Reform, 2022. This specific population is committing lifestyle crimes which are frequent and lead to regular arrests and stays in the County Jails.

Partnerships

Who maintains these partnerships? The ideal relationship of partnerships stays local. This helps build relationships and understanding of the issues in their area. Each County will work to provide support and accountability to the programs.

Selection for Expansion Criteria

Selection criteria for CAP expansion: Present at the Association of Arkansas Counties (Ideally present at Annual Conference in August. Must be serving one or more of the following counties.

- Pulaski (max 40 funded beds)
- Benton (max 31 funded beds)
- Washington (max 26 funded beds)
- Faulkner (max 13 funded beds)
- Saline (max 13 funded beds)
- Sebastian (max 13 funded beds)
- Craighead (max 13 funded beds)
- Garland (max 10 funded beds)

Desired total of 157 beds across these locations.

These locations have been chosen for the first round of expansion due to their high population. The larger the population the greater the chance of keeping the alternative beds full. One bed per every 10,000 in population is the formula.

More Counties served the higher probability of being chosen.

Cost

The cost of the Community Alternative Program is \$60 a day per bed. Current Washington County Jail costs per day per bed is \$94.68 a day. With 50% being funded from your County and 50% coming from the State of Arkansas. With the costs shared it incentivizes each stakeholder to invest in the endeavor but not take on the full burden of the cost. Funds will be provided yearly four months prior to the previous funds running out. The program cannot accept clients being sentenced to them for four months without four months of funding in place.

Implementation costs of \$250,000 will be awarded to the chosen organization with a timeline of no more than twelve months to implement the program and be able to accept clients. If a program is up and running prior to the end of the twelve-month implementation period, they will be eligible to receive their first year of running costs at that time. The \$250,000 will be shared cost of \$125,000 from the County and \$125,000 from the State.

Outcome of Washington County CAP

Let’s take an in-depth look at those clients accepted into the program.

They were arrested in Washington County alone 9.76 times prior to program entry.

They served on average 303.9 days in jail total from those arrests prior to program entry.

78% were homeless prior to program entry.

89 % were without full time employment prior to program entry.

59% have one or more children prior to program entry.

The current charges prior to program entry were for nonviolent, non-sexual charges.

The impact of CAP

The big question is whether there is a measurable impact of the program on the lives of those who graduate. The best comparison of the Community Alternative Program is of those who were accepted. Comparing those who completed the program compared to those who did not complete.

33.3% of the graduates were rearrested. Compared to 64% of clients arrested, that did not complete the program.

Of those failing to graduate they average 2.7 arrests.

Graduating CAP reduced the rate of arrest by 31%.

Of those 33% that graduated and were rearrested 4% went to prison.

Graduates of the program retained employment at a 73% rate compared to those who didn’t complete the program retained employment at a 35% rate.

Graduating from the program increased the likelihood of the individual maintaining employment by 48%. This leads to more taxes being paid, increasing the ability to pay financial obligations and giving the clients the ability to be self-sustainable.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Byron R . Johnson is Distinguished Professor of the Social Sciences at Baylor University. He is the founding director of the Baylor Institute for Studies of Religion (ISR) as well as director of the Program on Prosocial Behavior. Johnson is a senior fellow at the Sagamore Institute (Indianapolis). He is a leading authority on the scientific study of religion, the efficacy of faith-based organizations, and criminal justice. Recent publications have examined the impact of faith-based programs on recidivism reduction and prisoner reentry. Before joining the faculty at Baylor University, Johnson directed research centers at Vanderbilt University and the University of Pennsylvania. He has been the principal investigator on grants from private foundations as well as the Department of Justice, Department of Labor, Department of Defense, National Institutes of Health, and the United States Institute for Peace. He is the author of more than 200 articles and a number of books including *More God, Less Crime: Why Faith Matters and How it Could Matter More* (2011), *The Angola Prison Seminary: Effects of Faith-Based Ministry on Identity Transformation, Desistance, and Rehabilitation* (2016), and *The Quest for Purpose: The Collegiate Search for a Meaningful Life* (2017).

Ken Canfield is a nationally known leader and scholar who has committed his life to strengthening fathers and families. He founded the National Center for Fathering at www.fathers.com, and Grandkids Matter at www.grandkidsmatter.org. He has testified to the National Commission of Children, served as a founding member of the Vice Presidential “Father to Father” Initiative and the National Fathers Leadership Group. He has been recognized for his leadership and awarded the Father of the Year by the National Congress for Men and Children, and received the Polish Presidential Medal of Honor. He is the author of numerous articles and books, both popular and scientific. His work has appeared in *Psychological Reports* and *Educational and Psychological Measurements*, and he has authored: *The 7 Secrets of Effective Father*, *The Heart of a Father*, *The Adventures of Fatherhood Series*, *They Call Me Dad*, and *The Heart of Grandparenting*, as well as several book chapters in collaborative books.

William Wubbenhorst is a non-resident fellow for the Institute for Studies of Religion at Baylor University (ISR) and co-founder of Harvest Home Institute, LLC. Over the past few years, he co-authored case study evaluations, published through Baylor University’s Institute for Studies of Religion, entitled *Purposeful Design: Rebuilding Lives and Providing the Gift of Work Through Social Enterprise*, *The Inside Out Network: A Platform for Facilitating Success for Returning Citizens*, and *Church and Community Leadership Institute: A Unique Capacity-Building Program for Community-Focused Faith Leaders*. He is also co-author of a textbook entitled *The Faith Factor and Social Problems: Rethinking Evidence, Practice and Policy*, scheduled for publication in spring of 2025 (Baylor University Press). Prior to that, Wubbenhorst served as Associate Commissioner for the Family and Youth Services Bureau within the Administration for Children and Families from 2017 to 2021. Previously, Mr. Wubbenhorst worked as a consultant to government and non-profits for over 30 years, most recently as a Return On Investment (ROI) Specialist, developing economic measures for community-based social and health programs. Mr. Wubbenhorst has collaborated with professors from several prestigious academic institutions, including Baylor University, Boston University and Harvard University. Mr. Wubbenhorst received an MBA with a concentration in Public and Non-Profit Management (Beta Gamma Sigma honors society) from Boston University.



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