

# Southeastern Wisconsin Workforce Development Project Evaluation Report

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## I. Context of Corrections and Post-Prison Reentry

Releases by County and Release Year		
Release Year	County	
	Kenosha	Racine
2000	306	347
2001	288	281
2002	271	303
2003	317	267
2004	281	292
2005	257	355
2006	268	343
2007	224	339
2008	233	366
2009	210	280
2010	285	442
2011	331	532
2012	348	534
2013	422	525
2014	364	462
2015	391	477
2016	331	527
2017	382	499
2018	375	519
Total	5,884	7,690

Figure 1: WI DOC Division of Adult Institutions

Racine and Kenosha Counties have two of the highest prison incarceration rates in the State of Wisconsin. Likewise, post-prison releases by year, between 2000-2016, total over 15,000 individuals (see Figure 1). The numbers of released post-prison “reentrants” are expected to grow in the coming years as the WI Department of Corrections (WIDOC) looks to refer many more mid or high-risk reentrants to transitional services within a community context. And naturally, every individual reentrant has family, friends and/or extended networks that are impacted by their reentry to society. The numbers of justice-involved Wisconsin residents are staggering but largely hidden from view of the mainstream. People returning to their communities from prison or jail face complex challenges. Many entered prison already struggling with mental illness, substance abuse and effects of chronic poverty. They leave still struggling with those issues and face additional obstacles such as finding housing, accessing education and employment, and reintegrating into family and community life. These myriad challenges contribute to the strong likelihood that they may commit new crimes and be incarcerated again. Given these struggles, national data indicate two out of three ex-offenders are rearrested within three years of their release (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2016). High rates of recidivism greatly impact public safety, the victims affected by those new crimes, as well as the lives of offenders who are unable to break out of the cycle of crime.

## II. Kenosha and Racine Counties’ Response: Kenosha Unity Coalition

The Kenosha Unity Coalition (KUC) was launched in 2016 by the Kenosha County District Attorney to engage partners regionally through strong leadership and communitywide action all while promoting successful reentry from incarceration. Key community partnerships include the Kenosha Police Department, Department of Corrections, Divisions of Health and Workforce Development, and many local non-profit organizations and advocacy groups—including UW-Madison Division of Extension in Kenosha County as of 2018.

Dating from its inception, many notable accomplishments have been achieved in a variety of areas relating to successful reentry, many of which were achieved prior to Extension involvement. Below is a

short summary of those outcomes to provide important context to the work that was to be spearheaded directly by Extension in more recent years.

*KUC Outcome #1:* Serving to construct pro-social pathways to alternative, positive reentry outcomes (to reduce the risk of re-incarceration). Alternative, positive outcomes have been realized through a network of supportive services by diverse providers. Expanded resources for substance abuse have been provided for many reentrants because of KUC.

*KUC Outcome #2:* Expanded access to case management upon release from incarceration is another “win” for KUC that is adding value to the local community and reentrants alike as highest risk offenders are targeted for services.

*KUC Outcome #3:* A final “win” of the KUC includes the shared understanding and aligned purposes that have been achieved amongst parties that are often at odds. Because the Justice System, Public Safety, Corrections, Probation and Parole are inherently integrated, for the success of reentrants, professionals from these spaces need to be engaged in trust-based relationships with one another and working, truly, for the benefit of the individual reentrant. This requires collaborating across the broader criminal justice system and the KUC has prompted a lot of ongoing progress in this respect. The “Project: Safe Neighborhoods” was developed by KUC leadership after stakeholders identified a substantial increase in firearm-related incidents and remains a very positive fixture bringing together a variety of related parties for the betterment of systems.

### **III. Enter Extension.**

Upon the expansion of Extension staffing in a workforce development capacity in Kenosha-Racine Counties, Extension educators became engaged with the KUC toward the end of 2018. Despite the successes of KUC over the previous years, there remained—remains—many questions about maintaining the capacity for programs (Vivitrol, Reentry Case Management, and Project: Safe Neighborhoods). KUC members had concerns about sustaining—and scaling—the positive community impacts. There were, likewise, concerns about losing momentum if KUC did not find ways to engage more prominent actors in the county, region and state that could elevate the issues and ultimately assist in funding initiatives that were showing promise.

Extension, with the intention of creating workforce development programming aimed at reaching under/unemployed audiences, would look to target reentrants because reentrants tend to represent under/unemployed audiences. The issue of reentry workforce development needed to be “ripened” and its profile raised in the eyes of power brokers across the region—including employers. To accomplish that, Extension set out to implement a diversity of programming.

## 2018-2020 Extension Workforce Development Educational Outputs:

### A. Extension created employer-agency networks to enhance employment outcomes (Amy Greil).

1. Coordinated the first and second annual Re-entry Employer Expo in both Kenosha and Racine Counties in partnership with Kenosha and Racine District Attorneys and the U.S. Attorney's Office. 40+ regional employers networked with 25+ re-entry employment agency representatives over the course of two half-day events to build rapport and foster understanding between employer and reentry agency representatives.
2. Organized six on-site employer visits with company executives and reentry agency representatives (including production floor tours) orienting agency representatives to current day industry. These relationship-building experiences between employers-agencies helped identify common pitfalls and opportunities for successfully hiring/retaining re-entrants.
3. Created an educational video, "[Bridging Divides: Expanding Re-entry Employment Success](#)," featuring employers and agencies that shared best practices in hiring individuals with barriers to employment.
4. Built connections by phone and e-mail with 48 employer contacts and 23 agency representatives. Conducted phone interviews to explore how employers could take steps to hire re-entrants such as HR policy revisions and the fostering of relationships to agency representative.
5. Networked with 25 HR professionals and delivered a pilot training through a Racine/Kenosha human resource association about inclusive workplace culture and hiring individuals with barriers to employment.
6. Organized a Kenosha-Racine Counties workforce development bus tour for statewide Extension colleagues that met with and learned from local expertise and partners.

*Programming lessons learned and evaluation gathered through surveys and interviews with employers and agencies representatives.*

- i. Reentry agency representatives desire to be better equipped as employment navigators in their interactions with reentrants as many are unaware of present-day industry demands and the increasingly sophisticated skill sets required. There is great interest among agency representatives to engage more directly and more deeply with employers. Five of five partners surveyed stated they would welcome more opportunities to connect—and seek to acquire skills to foster relationships with employers. Expos and onsite company tours described above in educational output #1 and #2 were organized by Extension to enable agency representative to “go deeper” with employers and bridge divides, with limited success.
- ii. There is a lack of meaningful contact with executives/employers “on employers’ turf/terms.” Agencies do not regularly encounter employers as, naturally, both parties operate within separate spaces. Agencies are programming within a community context locally/regionally whereas employers are concerned wholly with regional/national/international markets and often safeguard their interactions by restricting solicitations/personal requests from local community representatives. Employer-sponsored events like the Employment Expos described in output #1 above, presented some openings to bring the parties together but employer turnout was admittedly limited, and resultant relationship-building potential was superficial. There is also an undeniable, perceptible power imbalance between employers and non-

profit/public sector agency representatives who feel unwelcome in spaces reserved for employers and unequipped to initiate contact. These findings were gathered through evaluative interviews with agency representatives over years.

- iii. There are, likewise, complications in creating relationships between agency representatives and corporate human resource professionals (HR). HR professionals, while charged with realizing creative hiring solutions, admit they cannot “take risks” on hires with criminal backgrounds because of legal issues and concerns raised by current employees within a heightened, “litigious culture” that promotes aversion of business risk and any hiring innovation. This perspective by HR professionals was made explicit during a group conversation facilitated during the HR training/educational output #6 above.
- iv. Lack of Qualified Candidates in the Agency “Pipeline.” At the end of it all, agency representatives, in an online survey and in the focus groups explored below, consistently lament their inability to meet/match the employer demands based on the limited working experience of their reentry clients. Industry needs are far outstripping the ability of professionally unskilled reentrants to meet workplace requirements.

#### **B. Build Capacity in Individuals Returning from Incarceration by Increasing Knowledge of Community Resources (Christine Wasielewski)**

1. Coordinated 7 prison reentry resource fairs at Kenosha Correctional Center for individuals between 90-120 days of custodial release.
2. Connected 63 men leaving incarceration with 36 agency contacts who provide employment training and supportive services to reduce barriers to the economic productivity of returning citizens.
3. Presented to 31 agency representatives at the Kenosha County Emergency Services Network Meeting and conducted targeted outreach in the community and at Racine Youthful Offender Correctional Facility resource event to expand fair agency participation and increase organization involvement.

*Programming lessons learned and evaluation gathered through Resource Fair exit surveys with currently incarcerated individuals.*

- i. Three quarters of those surveyed left the fair with an understanding of services and opportunities available in the community. Reentrants gained new knowledge of community resources, received guidance on navigating limitations in personal work histories within that agency context, and in some cases, met with a contact they could directly follow up with upon return to the community. More than half of respondents said they were planning to make changes as a result of something learned at the Resource Fair, including comments on using employment resource lists, looking into certification training programs, making an appointment with a participating provider, and a commitment to returning to college.
- ii. KCC administration identified financial literacy as an unmet need for this reentry population, where education could be delivered to all new admits to KCC. Addressed during orientation, the learning would reach all incarcerated individuals at the facility, over time, regardless of the community or WIDOC facility they go to next in the state. To address this deficiency, Mary Metten, Extension’s Health and Well-Being Educator in Kenosha County conducted one financial literacy workshop prior to the COVID-19 pandemic that interrupted all in-reach to the facility.

- iii. A persistent limitation of the fairs is making resources localized and applicable to all attendees. Aside from the technical college resources, many of the employment certification and training programs made available to reentrants through the fairs, for example, have limits on who may enroll based given geography/county. Individuals leaving Kenosha Correctional Center (KCC) return to communities in Kenosha, Racine and Milwaukee Counties in approximately equal numbers although with vastly different needs so matching resources to needs is difficult. This is further complicated because individual needs could not be identified in advance.
- iv. High quality employment resources are hard to identify and recruit because most employers are not interested in in-facility events. This leaves temporary employment agency as the last resort. Because these lists of temp agencies include larger companies with “branches” throughout southeastern Wisconsin, they may meet an immediate need of the job seeker to find employment, however, do not provide long-term employment stability, high wages, opportunities for advancement or any semblance of the predictability/structure of which incarcerated individuals are accustomed.
- v. Securing basic needs is, admittedly, the primary concern of this population, employment being secondary. In exit surveys, fair attendees listed the need to obtain housing more frequently than securing employment as a primary concern. Other concerns include staying sober, transportation, and how the community receives the reentrant. These concerns are, naturally, very complex and make it difficult to identify the appropriate resource to meet need.
- vi. Securing commitment by a wide range of agencies and community organizations is challenging. Meeting WIDOC policy requirements to enter the facility and become a volunteer/exhibitor is an arduous process which deters interest from many high-quality resource providers. For example, the criminal background check requirement deterred or prohibited valuable, knowledgeable resources that had attended fairs prior to strict policy adherence. It was striking to see how resource fair exhibitors that self-identified as previously incarcerated tended to be the most valued resource at fairs as their personal experience provided momentary mentor support.

### **C. Launch Post-Prison Peer-Mentoring Pilot (Amy Greil and Christine Wasielewski)**

- 1. Researched 3 national models for post-prison reentry and AODA recovery mentoring. Contributed to/reviewed content, created partnerships for the submission of a Department of Justice grant application to fund post-prison peer mentors, expand re-entry case management and coordinate a community coalition for criminal justice. Submitted a Wisconsin Idea grant proposal and budget requesting a 3-year grant to hire a Mentor Coordinator, compensate 10 paid peer mentors, conduct program evaluation, and support mentor/mentee pairs. \*While both grant applications were unfunded, these applications serve as useful templates for future grant requests, helped to build relationships with new partners, and required significant time investments.

Lessons Learned: Engagement with the post-prison reentrant population has demonstrated that, naturally, the skills/capacity of the individual will almost entirely determine their ability to transition to successful employment. Reentrants require very tailored transitional services—including employment services. Correctional institutions support reentrants’ transition to the workplace through short term case-management but do not have capacity or resources to provide longer-term mentoring. Meanwhile, funding for a reentry peer mentoring pilot effort has been hard to secure though Extension collaborated with partners to submit two grant applications.

#### IV. Evaluation Framework: Viewing Extension through Community Capitals

By May of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic was severely impacting reentry programming across the region. At that time, Extension educators stepped back to take stock of past work and various roles with the KUC through structured focus groups' conversations. Ten key organizational partners participated in three focus groups. Testimonials from those focus groups are integrated into the framework described below.

UW-Madison Division of Extension's Community Development Institute Evaluator, Josset Gauley, facilitated the focus group sessions without the participation of Amy and Christine to enable more frank discussion and a more objective evaluative vantage point. Likewise, an Extension Qualitative Data Service Specialist, Joel Drevlow, assisted in the analysis and helped to develop the evaluation framework described below.

The well-established Community Capitals Framework (CCF) is explored through the work of Mary Emery and Cornelia Flora in their 2006 journal article "Spiraling-Up: Mapping Community Transformation with Community Capitals Framework." It serves as a framework for further evaluation of the SE WI Workforce Development Project.

The CCF advances a notion that the lifeblood of any community can be linked to the presence and strength of seven community capitals. These capitals are often thought of as *byproducts* that can be nurtured in a community by educational outputs often contributed by Extension (ie. Extension conducts a series of trainings that serves to build knowledge and skills among participants, thus building the community's human capital).



However, what if it was conceivable that these same capitals be *inputs* from Extension (rather than simply byproducts)? Inputs would be resources transferred into a community from Extension through strategic "investments" (i.e. educational programming activities) for the purpose of promoting ... This latter notion is a twist on a well-established, taken-for-granted approach to community development in that it proposes that Extension (as a community in its own right) does possess forms of capital and can transfer these forms of capital to that of a community, building collective capacity.

We are suggesting that the workforce project deals in certain capitals, acknowledging that only a few of the capitals apply; Cultural, Human, Social and Political.

Figure 2 Community Capitals Framework

#### Novel Application of the CCF: Transferring Capitals

This very idea of transferring capital has been demonstrated in academic literature whereby an entity (corporation in this case, and their outreach agents as public relations practitioners) has internal capital that can be transferred to the local community more broadly. Jin and Lee (2013) write that "corporate public relations practitioners can formally or informally offer to the corporation's relevant publics venues in which social interaction, meaning, and action can emerge. To this end, public relations can serve as an agent constructing a bridge between a corporation and its publics, thus creating social capital outside the corporation."

We acknowledge that Extension educators serve various functions that are quite distinct from corporate public relations practitioners. The point, however, is how a member of a bounded organization (a corporation or even in the case Extension) can foster bridging capital in other, say, grassroots publics (in our case, community coalitions such as the Kenosha Unity Coalition). Taken together, we suggest that Extension can transfer capital(s) from one group (Extension) to another set of actors (reentry service providers as members of KUC). Indeed, this transfer is not only possible—this transfer builds collective capacity.

## **V. Four Community Capitals Explored through Evaluation Testimonials**

### **Cultural Capital:**

The concept of culture provides a frame of reference for understanding the fabric of community life. This fabric is often connected by a common language, symbols, gestures, beliefs, values, and resources.

When considering the cultural capital of Extension, it is helpful to consider the inherent frame of reference as it is situated within a prestigious, nationally renowned research institution that was founded upon the Wisconsin Idea. The culture of valuing relationships and the long-lasting commitment to local communities are cultural artifacts of Extension that have been shown to be uniquely valued by KUC partners. These forms of cultural capitals, that Extension educators can share broadly with community partners, bolster the success of projects and cement impactful community development processes.

*“UW has this big umbrella, a reputation for public health, research... Employers, because they know we’re working with UW, may take a shot [at engaging directly], realiz[ing] we have some legitimate collaborations that can create change.” “J.S., Reentry Service Providing Non-profit Executive Director”*

This focus group statement demonstrates that cultural capital transfer occurred. The reputation and credibility of Extension was essentially shared with workforce development partners, creating a bridge that advanced relationship-building between reentry agency and employers.

### **Human Capital:**

In its simplest form, human capital reflects the investments that people make in their education, on-the-job training, or health. Such activities translate into improved knowledge, skills, and health status for individuals – factors that increase their human capital stock. Human capital also refers to efforts by individuals to enhance their interpersonal and leadership skills in hopes of strengthening their ability to become active contributing members to the civic health of their communities.

Human capital from Extension takes the form of the range of process facilitation expertise, organizational skills to coordinate action, sense-making abilities, and research skills possessed by educators that are called into action during community development processes.

*“Before the synergy of this coalition... we didn’t even know what each other were doing on any given day. So not only do we not understand the collective capacity that we have to change lives as a group—but we’re not even aware of what people are doing! People could be going in opposite directions... We are in a better place as a community after my 30 years as a prosecutor... as far as people being on the same page, committed to making sure reentry really*

*works. I don't think it's a coincidence that this happened about the time we found [in Extension] fulltime committed people that are working together with us as talented facilitators moving us in the same direction." "M.G., District Attorney's Office"*

*"[Extension] is a go-getter. If there's a task or something out there, educators are researching, digging, bringing things back and trying to build this puzzle. Painting this picture. We have benefited in that way." "S.B., Child Support Program Administrator"*

Various human capitals are attributed to Extension educators in the two quotes above. In the first testimonial, "talented facilitators" transfer this capital to aid group processes and in the second quote, "researching and resource convening" are called out as value-added capitals to the workforce development project.

### **Social Capital:**

Social capital represents the "glue" that holds a community together, spurring growth and development among people or actors that ultimately brings benefits to the entire community. Social capital consists of "bonding" and "bridging" activities that occur within the local community setting, as well as "linking" activities that tie community members to organizations and resources located outside the community (what is sometimes referred to as vertical connections).

Social capital, when extended from Extension educators to community partners, can be shown to be a particularly potent force for community transformation. And, social capital, is perhaps the most valued form of the seven capitals by partners, because of the relational value and quality that Extension connections can manifest.

*"A whole conversation unfolded to benefit the people that we're serving... I think every time we connect with Extension—and then connect with others—it's just been beneficial to know what's out there as well as what can be brought back to help those here at [correctional centers]." "M.B., Correctional Institution Administrator"*

*"Extension brought a lot of people together, and that is important because it's best for the reentrant when we get out of our silos. When we're in silos, we're only giving them one facet—one approach [and that can limit the reentrant's success]. "N.T., Kenosha County Division Leader"*

As noted in the focus groups' testimonials, then, bonding, bridging and linking forms of social capitals are unknowingly referenced, evidence that these are carried by Extension and transferred to partners through collaborative projects.

### **Political Capital:**

Political capital relates to individuals who are in positions of power and influence in the community. As Emery and Flora (2006) note, it is the ability to affect the distribution of both public and private resources within the community. A second dimension of political capital has to do with the ability to gain access to individuals and organizations—the so-called power brokers, movers and shakers that have the resources to influence important decisions. Extension is shown to carry these dimensions of political capital:



*“The notion of local employers hiring felons required prior relationships and a degree of trust to get our feet in the door. If Extension hadn’t been involved, we simply wouldn’t have had the opportunity to do that.” “M.G., District Attorney’s Office”*

*“And these are employers that I may never have gotten into the door with—it’s hard to get into the door, particularly when you have a product (participant) that you are already screening out when they come into your door. UW has given me more access to employers, and I’ve felt tremendously more supported as a small organization.” “J.S., Reentry Service Providing Nonprofit Executive Director”*

Here are just two examples, but several diverse partners have emphasized this same notion of a crucial Extension political capital linkage that offered privileged “access.” This transferring of capital to reentry agencies enabled them to successfully “get in the door” or engage with relevant power brokers like employers and influential political officials.

## **V. Concluding Remarks**

Extension’s Southeastern Wisconsin Workforce Development Project reflects a very ambitious programmatic effort by a team of Extension educators who together piloted educational efforts within the relatively unknown field (to Extension) of workforce development, engaging closely with unknown partners, all while navigating the complex environment of criminal justice and corrections.

To see all the fragments of the work over two years in this one document is at the same time humbling because we did so many things and worked with so many people—and terribly inadequate. There was more learning done over the past two years than can be described justly but some of the primary seeds of reflection to draw upon from an institutional perspective may be these:

1. We in Extension—particularly speaking from the work in SE WI—naturally have only begun to uncover the very “tip of the iceberg” with respect to the complex issues involved with reentry. And as many experts in the field will concede, employment isn’t really *the* issue—people can generally find work. It’s staying employed and finding some personal measure of success through paid work that is terribly challenging. It’s expanded, quality employment opportunities set within a whole host of environmental supports that are self-reinforcing that reduce likelihood of criminality and enable a successful reentry experience over years. A workforce development project established in isolation from the complex environmental factors at play is insufficient. Furthermore, now as the pandemic’s impacts entrench across the region, employment prospects have become even more restricted and difficult to navigate for all involved.
2. The post-incarceration experience and reentry (particularly post-prison) remain rich fields for future work for Extension in a tragically underserved programming “space.” As our UW System (interim) President Tommy Thompson is a former Wisconsin governor and very invested in linking statewide resources between education and corrections: There is a prime opportunity to act now by engaging in reentry programming. Whether it be audiences of justice-involved families (children and family members), individuals leaving incarceration, reentry service agencies (whether public, private, non-profit), and employers—there are numerous access points to this important work that are largely lost on our institution. And when there is academic programming underway in a given

- corrections/reentry environment, it is siloed and fragmented across schools, institutes, etc. Take for example, UW-Madison's prestigious law school with scholars that are thought leaders in restorative justice and strong advocates for implementing promising reentry strategies (like peer-mentoring). It was tremendously challenging to make connections from Extension to on-campus expertise, complicated all the more by the short time horizon. Nonetheless, future opportunities exist. [Dr. Cecelia Klingele](#), for one example of a legal scholar committed to reforming the state's correctional systems, is readily interested in being a resource to Extension.
3. Perhaps new staffing priorities amidst this broader conversation of widespread national, global protests about racial inequity can align more of UW's work among the underserved communities of color—so many of which affected by the criminal justice system.
  4. Through the Community Development Institute's (CDI) Thriving Communities Shared Outcome Measures, Extension educators, program managers and (soon-to-arrive) CDI Institute Director are currently developing comprehensive tools, language and next generation evaluation frameworks that can illuminate programming stories of successes and "failures," that better portray nuanced impacts like those described above. Particularly for CDI educators that largely program at a system level, new ways of talking about our work are needed beyond the default (relatively unhelpful) summaries of outputs and participant numbers. These transactional constructs, while required by certain funders, do not reflect the depth of relationships that were required nor the lasting impact of the work. CDI educators must be empowered and capable of expanding and transferring what limited—or vast—capital reserves we possess as situated between an array of federal, state and local partners. Leveraging these assets means Extension can add immeasurable value to community projects.

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