

Post-Prison Housing for Yamhill County, Oregon:

Reducing Rates of Homelessness and Recidivism for Those Entering Society After Incarceration

Taaryl A. Taylor

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Northwest University

### Table of Contents

Introduction	4
Project Proposal	4
Intervention	6
Required Resources	8
Implementation	9
Timeline	10
Summary	12
Works Cited	13

### Contextualization Table of Contents

Introduction	15
Developing Within Context	15
Put Into Practice	19
Implementing and Advocating	20
Summary	21
Works Cited	23

### Qualitative Inquiry Table of Contents

Introduction	24
Qualitative Inquiry and Community Development	24
Practicing Qualitative Methods	25
Research Questions	26
Research Context	27

Post-Prison Housing	27
Outcome Markers	29
Summary	31
Works Cited	32

ICD Values Table of Contents

Introduction	34
Personal Transformation	34
My Understanding of Social Justice	37
Copowerment and Future Work	38
Philosophy of Service	39
Summary	41
Works Cited	42

## Post-Prison Housing for Yamhill County: ICD Thesis Project Proposal

### **Introduction**

When a person leaves prison, he or she faces many challenges to successfully reintegrate into society. Sometimes, the challenges are too great to overcome, resulting in a failure to integrate, further arrests, and a return to incarceration. In order to reduce rates of homelessness and recidivism, those reentering society after incarceration must have access to stable, safe, and affordable housing. This must be done to both meet the needs of these individuals and address the concerns of the community. My proposal is to fund housing in Yamhill County for individuals being released from prison.

To achieve this goal, I have comprised this thesis into two main sections. The first section is the practical project proposal. My practical project proposal will consist of research outcomes, practices and principles of community development, innovative thinking and creative problem-solving skills, and project management principles. The second section incorporates three detailed essays that answer several questions based on International Community Development program themes and content. The first essay will explain my understanding of contextualization and its importance to community development. The second essay discusses the strengths of qualitative research methods for understanding contexts of need. The final essay demonstrates the way in which my values have been impacted by my experience of the ICD program.

### **Project Proposal**

My practical project proposal is for dedicated housing for those returning to Yamhill County after being incarcerated. This will be accomplished by securing a minimum number of beds in an apartment facility located within the county that will meet the criteria of safe and stable housing. Housing upon release brings security and the potential for complete recovery to

the lives of those being released from prison. The Department of Corrections does not secure housing, and recently released individuals cannot choose to live in the community with family members. The law dictates that individuals must be discharged into the county in which they were convicted, regardless of available housing. Ray Kennedy told me after his release from a local prison, “My main worry is figuring out where I am going to sleep. I didn’t have any places to go”. The needs are complex, and the community has many impactful programs to help with mental health, drug addiction, and employment. However, a shortage of available housing in Yamhill County often leaves these citizens homeless, in despair, and tempted to return to familiar lifestyles and patterns that led to their incarceration.

Over the last 40 years, the U.S. has seen a phenomenon known as mass incarceration. The jail and prison population went from approximately 500,000 in 1980 to 2.1 million in 2004 (Cho, et al). Studies show that while mass incarceration continues to rise, so does the nations’ homeless population. As one study points out, “Little is known, however, about the relationship between these two concurrent phenomena. Although service providers have long pointed to anecdotal evidence about the overlap between these two populations” (Cho, et al). Homeless housing providers and shelter hosts have been reporting for many years that they deal with high rates of people who have recently been incarcerated. Some providers of homeless shelters have anecdotally reported rates as high as 70 percent. The goal to providing apartments to the recently released is to reduce recidivism and promote public safety while building community inclusion. Housing is a key component in accomplishing other tasks that society will ask of the recently released individual, such as committing to a program to promote sobriety and accessing employment.

By comparison, rates of shelter use have been found to be higher among people exiting prison than among people exiting state psychiatric hospitals (Metraux & Culhane). In our nation, there is a connection between mass incarceration and homelessness. If a community addresses either mass incarceration or homelessness, then there will be a positive effect on the other issue. Homelessness was 7.5 to 11.3 times more common among jail inmates than in the general population, when data was collected. Homelessness and incarceration appear to increase the risk of each other, and these factors seem to be mediated by mental illness and substance abuse, as well as by disadvantageous sociodemographic characteristics (Greenberg & Rosenheck). Inmates who had been homeless (that is, those who reported an episode of homelessness anytime in the year before incarceration) made up 15.3% of the U.S. jail population, or 7.5 to 11.3 times the standardized estimate of 1.36% to 2.03% in the general U.S. adult population. In comparison with other inmates, those who had been homeless were more likely to be incarcerated for a property crime. They were also more likely to have past criminal justice system involvement for both nonviolent and violent offenses, to have mental health and substance abuse problems, to be less educated, and to be unemployed (Greenberg & Rosenheck). Many of the markers that make up individuals, who are more susceptible to incarceration, are also the same markers for homelessness. The most common issues of mental health, substance abuse, and undereducated make up large sections of both the homeless and prison population.

### **Intervention**

The proposed intervention will be dedicated apartments for individuals returning to the community after being incarcerated. Upon release, qualifying individuals will reside in a provided apartment and begin working on the many other requirements.

Remnant Initiatives is a nonprofit located in Yamhill County, Oregon that provides reentry services to those being released from incarceration. The goal is to build capacity within the community to better receive and support the previously incarcerated. The national prison system does not track or record statistics for those individuals who leave prison without a home address. In Yamhill County, Remnant Initiatives is tracking this data locally showing between 20-30% of individuals return to the county without a viable housing option. When individuals return from prison, authorities determine the places that they cannot live without providing solutions for where they can live. Parole officers in Yamhill County often tell individuals who are being released where the nearest homeless shelter is located while charities hand out sleeping bags. Public housing is unavailable for individuals with a criminal history, and parole boards maintain significant restrictions on where and with whom an individual can reside. For example, a recently released individual cannot live with their spouse if the spouse was a co-defendant or victim of a related crime. Released individuals also are not allowed to live with a relative if they reside outside of the county. Viable housing options are limited because of criminal-justice related policies and practices with stringent restrictions. Remnant Initiatives strives to create relationships that copower the person in reentry and the community members seeking to serve them. Understanding that over 95% of those who spend time in prison will be released and return to neighborhoods, Remnant Initiatives believes that communities need to help prepare citizens by becoming involved in the justice system and help those rejoining a community to achieve sustainable self-sufficiency.

Recent data shows that communities are safer and experience less crime when residents are engaged and able to work together toward shared goals (Kubrin and Wo). The need for dependable and safe housing upon release is one of the crucial factors in bringing stability and

recovery to the lives of those reentering society. An analysis of community-based prisoner reentry programs found that providing housing assistance had the greatest positive effect on returning individuals (Wright, et al).

The objective of meeting housing needs of those reentering society is to reduce recidivism and promote public safety. A recent study showed, “National-level policymakers are paying attention to this issue and have begun to support the idea that helping ex-offenders find housing could be a way to help reduce recidivism and thus ease the strain on corrections agencies and keep communities safe” (Rodriquez and Brown 2). Housing those reentering communities will continue to gain momentum with law makers.

Yamhill County has a housing crisis that many times leaves these citizens homeless, despairing, and tempted to return the familiar lifestyle that got them arrested in the first place (Davis). Affordable housing is on the decline as the area becomes more of a tourist destination. Remnant Initiatives is often the only ally a recent inmate has to seek out and secure housing on their behalf. Housing means a safe and consistent place to sleep, prepare food and store belongings. A night shelter does not provide the same security for those who have discharged from prison since it is “first come, first serve” with no privacy or stability. Tom and David Kelley, authors of *Creative Confidence* assert, “We’ve found that figuring out what other people actually need is what leads to the most significant innovations” (85). Providing housing for those returning to our community as a way to reduce homelessness and recidivism is a new and innovative concept for Yamhill County.



## **Required Resources**

Remnant Initiatives will work towards securing housing for recently released inmates in the form of an apartment for up to 1 year in a central location authorized by the parole officer. Rent will be paid for the first 3 months of occupancy. A sliding scale model will be used after the free period and will be capped at 1 year according to low-income rental standards through the county. The ideal apartment complex will have between 10 and 20 apartments and be located near public transit. A lease agreement of no less than 3 years with a maximum of 7 years will be required for grant purposes.

Yamhill County receives funds annually from the safety and savings act. These funds are to be used to reduce recidivism and the local safety committee and county commissioners choose where to place the funds. A grant from the safety and savings act will fund this proposal. I spoke with Remnant Initiatives Director, Jodi Hansen, who stated, “The county has resources available for housing and it is our job to help them use those resources in the most beneficial way.”

Yamhill County has a deep understanding of community partnerships. Love Inc., Provoking Hope, Lutheran Community Services, YCAP, Helping Hands, Hope on the Hill and 2nd Street Community are just a few organizations seeking to collaborate together with RI to provide housing. Remnant Initiatives is currently on a panel with several local nonprofits that have been asked to create an affordable housing proposal. This is a space where Remnant Initiatives advocates for clients who need sustainable housing right out of incarceration.

## **Implementation**

Remnant Initiatives was created in early 2017 as a reentry service for Yamhill County. Co-developers, Jodi Hansen and I, knew that Yamhill County had been given re-investment

funds by the state of Oregon to help reduce the rate of recidivism, but Yamhill County did not have a specific organization that worked one-on-one with individuals reentering society. Without a reentry service available, data has not been accurately collected or shared regarding public safety and recidivism and the funds are going to other projects. While working with individuals to create a sustainable reentry plan and following them through the first year of release, Remnant Initiatives hopes to share new data collected with the county's public safety committees and law makers.

Mentors working with Remnant Initiatives benefit individuals who are reentering into society by implementing a detailed plan that includes getting into sustainable housing, drug treatment, mental health treatment, and job assistance. Author Neal Whitten states, "A mentor can help you discover your possibilities" (17). That is exactly what Remnant Initiatives is hoping to inspire with mentorships. Through this program, individuals are empowered to meet goals in collaboration with mentors, nonprofit leaders, and various support staff. Kelley and Kelley describe empathy as, "it's the ability to see an experience through another person's eyes, to recognize why people do what they do" (85). By empathizing with someone goes through when trying to rejoin the community, mentors have a better understanding of how to support them.

### **Timeline**

A mentor will start the detailed release plan up to 6 months before the expected release date, and the plan will continue up to a year after release. This detailed plan includes all the goals that the reentering individual hopes to accomplish, including many action steps that the mentor knows will need to be performed such as getting a bank account, paying all outstanding DMV fines, renewing health insurance and meeting requirements set forth by parole officers. With this program, the individual has access to a surplus of mentors for various help, including but not

limited to career advice, housing application assistance, sobriety sponsorship, and faith-based community support.

In order for an individual to have a successful reentry, the planning must start months before the release date. People in incarceration do not have access to computers, the internet, unlimited phone minutes or basic housing information of the area where they will be released. If the inmate is not being released to an area with known relatives or acquaintances, they will need help getting housing set up. To add pressure to the situation, inmates often release with very little money.

The national prison system does have jobs inside the facilities, but they do not pay living wages (Sawyer). Prison wages take into account what they consider to be living expenses and it is common for a full-time worker to be paid less than \$40 for a month's worth of wages. Basic supplies still need to be purchased including shampoo, snacks, haircuts, tampons, and phone minutes to call family. This leaves very little money for saving and has to be kept on an account in the prison. With all of the challenges surrounding earning and saving money, it is not uncommon for a newly discharged inmate to walk out of the gate the morning of release with less than \$200 after several years of incarceration.

For the inmates who qualify for disability and social security, all benefits are suspended while incarcerated. This means that qualifying inmates are unable to collect benefits and save for the release. The benefits must be re-issued upon release. Application for reinstatement can only occur after release, often resulting in a wait in excess of several months before benefits resume.

Many prisons do not have release counselors or a reentry specialist on staff. Oregon Department of Corrections has limited staff assigned to this position according to the website. However, Remnant Initiatives is not seeing newly released inmates with the skills needed to be

prepared for life immediately upon release. We do not see that corrections have a plan in place. As Whitten points out, “A problem that is incompletely or vaguely defined wastes valuable time, energy, and funds” (14). An Urban Institute study tracked released prisoners in Illinois. They found that of clients who responded that they “did not have a place to live lined up” upon release, and only 21 percent participated in pre-release programs. Of those who did participate in pre-release programs 45 percent reported that finding a place to live was not covered in the program. In addition, for those who discussed finding housing in their program, only 39 percent received housing referral information (LaVigne et al.). These numbers were similar to the findings of reentry studies in Ohio and Texas (Visher & Courtney).

Another obstacle to effective discharge planning in prison is that prisons tend to be located in rural areas. However, most recently released inmates will return to urban areas hundreds of miles from the prison where they were incarcerated. The geographic distance renders it difficult to connect returning prisoners to the available housing market or for discharge staff and social workers to even attempt to provide housing assistance, as they are unlikely to have sufficient knowledge of the housing landscape to aid returning prisoners (Cho).

## **Summary**

Remnant Initiatives is the only organization in Yamhill County currently investing in and tracking individuals recently released from incarceration. Although providing housing for those who have committed crimes against society is a difficult concept for some, author Palmer reminds us to keep striving and writes, “Our first need is not to release the tension, but to live the contradictions” (10). By giving support, assistance, and equipping citizens who have intersected with the law, Remnant Initiatives is actively working to make the community safer. One of the core beliefs in housing for those most in need is what author Sider declares when he says,

“Christians must insist on redistribution” (230). By redistributing our resources to meet the needs of the formerly incarcerated we believe safety will go up and recidivism will go down. When crime goes down, cost to support jails and prisons also goes down. The community can invest in things to bring families together, educate children, and provide a better environment for those living in Yamhill County. By providing an opportunity for a released inmate to have safe and stable housing upon release, Remnant Initiatives will provide the platform for the individual to be able to accomplish the goals that will be necessary for a life free of crime.

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## **Contextualization Essay**

### **Introduction**

Being able to effectively understand contextualization in reentry services will lead community development work into a sphere of healing the social dynamics of those who have experienced incarceration. In this essay, I will be discussing what developing within the context looks like and what that looks like to put into practice. This essay also proves to show what implementing and advocating looks like when contextualization is applied to societal issues. Community developers are armed with innovative and creative ideas that need to be supported by the contextualization of the people, places, and history of where they serve; to avoid further rupturing the fragile framework of the community.

### **Developing Within The Context**

As I sit in Representative Post's office for the 2<sup>nd</sup> year in a row, I wonder if he remembers me from last year. Bill Post is my district representative in the state legislature, and I have met with him to talk about voting for the Safety and Justice Act. The Safety and Justice Act puts money back in local communities to prevent recidivism and reduce the need for building additional prisons. Essentially, I want this radio talk show host to vote for less money to go towards incarcerating people and more money to be invested in local counties reentry programs. It's a long shot as Representative Post has voted against this bill the last 2 times. I am sitting in this really uncomfortable leather club chair that seems like it will swallow me whole, while looking at a picture above Mr. Post's desk with an American flag, a soaring eagle, and a cross all imposed together with a bible verse at the bottom.

When I talk about reentry, he started to engage. This well dressed, man in his early 50's with a bald head and confident demeanor tells me of the wonderful thing his church is doing.



They are building a dormitory for teenage boys that come out of incarceration and have no place to live. Representative Post discusses that a gymnasium will be part of this project for the athletic pursuits that young men often desire. I am glad to find some common ground, but I asked in what ways is the church equipped to deal with teenage boys who have already been in the justice system. Will you have counseling for them or is it just mandatory bible study? What kind of drug treatment will be supported? Many of them will carry a sex offender status. How does the church plan on dealing with that?

Representative Post had simple and to the point answers, that to me, lacked the depth and contextualization needed by those who hope to engage with those coming out of incarceration. Young men, many of whom are minorities, lacking education, attachment to family and with serious diagnoses that lead to violent behavior are not to be taken on lightly. If Mr. Post has his way, the first cuss word will get a kid kicked out of the dormitory and back on the street. The church group that he is affiliated with has no room for understanding where these kids have come from and what they are dealing with. The hard lines that are drawn for what is expected of these young men, and as a community development practitioner, I see as lacking in context, empathy, science-based evidence and God's grace.

My time working with Representative Post is an example of what the world of reentry looks like in my context. I fear that once the ideological framework is broken for those who seek to help, the offender becomes discarded once again. Author Richard Beck relates it like this, "monsters are subhuman and malevolent, a source of social threat and danger" (93). Most of the groups involved have a Christian belief system, and it is overwhelmingly a western, evangelical mindset. When I look back at my time meeting in Representative Post's office is what Parker Palmer depicted *In the Belly of a Paradox*: "our first need is not to release the tension, but to live

the contradictions” (10). Coffee Creek Women’s Facility, Oregon’s only women’s prison, has more than a hundred church groups providing bible studies in nearly every denomination imaginable, but not one college class is offered to nearly two-thousand inmates. In the world of community development, this is heavily weighted by salvation theory, that the main goal is to get an inmate “saved” and somehow all the other things in life will turn out. When I interviewed Chaplin Brault about this, her comment was “evangelicals show up, other groups don’t.” This means that contextualization in this framework of those who are seeking to be successful during reentry is limited to the bible studies one attended while incarcerated. Author Bryant Myers writes “I too believe that evangelicals have had a powerful place in social change “the church in the nineteenth century Britain had evangelicals who shared a vision for the redeeming world. They shared the good news while improving agriculture, education and health”(93). Further exasperating the disconnect is the rule that those same volunteers are not allowed to have continued contact with recently released inmates. This essentially leaves the released individual with no connections to the outside world.

As a community developer, I see the lack of healthy community upon release as a problem that will continue to prevent success for those stuck in this system. As a person of faith, I see this as an opportunity to acknowledge the short-comings of our broken world and look to bring restoration to hurting communities. Part of that work of restoring is understanding the background and context of the people you walk alongside. The language used is often a divider for Christian groups working with inmates. Many of the volunteers were not raised in the environments where crass language is the norm, and therefore simple cuss words become a point of contention in the relationship. Derogatory comments towards other genders and races are commonplace for the incarcerated individual, and this often started for them in childhood.

Violence and unspeakable acts have been committed against the incarcerated individual and they have committed them against others bringing further judgment. I choose to believe author Meyers when he states “God’s salvific and redemptive work extends to this messy, sinful world” (11). The inability for the “often sheltered” volunteer to accept these truths about human nature hinders the relationship.

To be an effective community developer one must be able to sit with the broken parts of the world and realize you do not have all the answers. The effective community developer will have a strong sense of what is happening behind the scenes of society, whether it be political, cultural, financial, or emotional. They will be able to take all of these things into account and recognize biases along the way, while bringing about innovative tools to help build something new and restorative while honoring what is the past. The effective community developer also recognizes Geert Hofstede’s assertions about how we came to exist in our culture “parents, teachers, managers, and rulers are all children of their cultures; in a way, they are the followers of their followers” (79). Developers have to be willing to accept the context in which a person was brought up in and work to help them repair any damages.

I recently went to a charity banquet for a ministry that aims to educate and alleviate poverty for the poorest children in Rwanda. While listening to the founder speak, I was caught off by how much this Rwandan Pastor spoke to the room in a western context. I couldn’t help but wonder what this event would look like in Rwanda, with the people we are gathered to serve? He was educated at a local bible college and therefore really understood what donors wanted to hear and see. As pictures of Rwandan children drinking fresh water, praying, and studying flashed across the power-point screens that encircled the room, the founder, Dr. Mugisha made a startling comment. He said that he started the nonprofit as a way to help his country after the

genocide and with all of our efforts, we would erase the genocide. As the crowd roared in applause, I couldn't grasp how one would erase a genocide. It is part of the history of the Rwandan people. Just as much as an inmate being abandoned by his parents, as a young child, or someone being abused by her father is part of their own history. I will not seek to erase or overlook the history that has taken place in the lives of those I desire to work with, but I do hope to help re-build and add to, with layers of forgiveness, healing, and successful relationships.

### **Put It Into Practice**

In order to practice contextualization, the community developer needs to be willing to acknowledge and accept where the culture that they are working with resides. This is not just in definition of physical space, although that is very important, but also in relation to mental abilities and socio-economic spaces. An example of this would be a bible study that I participated in for a few months led by a group of Christian women who had a heart to work with the women incarcerated at Coffee Creek Correctional. The study became focused on a lot of teachings that veered towards Nationalism with a Pro-Israel theme. Voting came to be a topic that was brought up, and this led to some conspiracy theories promoted by well-known television evangelists. The problem with this class is that it did not take into account who these women were and the reality of their situation. None of the women could vote and several of them would never see the outside of prison again, so politics seemed to be out of context for them. The idea that groups of Christians would travel to the holy land for biblical tours was also a concept I found offensive as most of these women would never have a passport and travel is not a reality. I found that this bible study was not a good contextualization for the inmates to thrive, but it was rather a space for the particular group of people teaching it, to further share their views.

Out of that experience came a small group that I co-created. It was based on relationship, and we would read books that were easily available. Prayer was something that was asked for and given. Some of the books chosen were Christian in nature and dealt with themes of forgiveness, while other books were popular and made into movies. This was a time to encourage the incarcerated, engage in conversation that was specific in nature, work through life events such as a death of a family member or a reconciliation with a loved one. Celebrations happened and mourning occurred, but it had to be focused and related to the inmate and not the world happening outside of the gates, because that world might as well be a million miles away. Author Daniel Groody asserts “because we are built for love, the greatest gift of community is the experience of connection, especially as this takes shape in genuine friendship” (6408). This is what practicing contextualization can look like. Breaking down all the barriers to someone else’s world and forgoing our own agenda while seeking to bring community to those in desperate need of it.

### **Implementing and Advocating**

As I continue advocating for better prison programming and post-prison housing for those recently released from incarceration, I will continue to implement my knowledge of contextualization into every plan. While developing housing strategies with local leaders and sub-committees, I continually find that it is necessary to balance the communities needs for safety with the formerly incarcerated needs for community. Striking an equitable balance is of the utmost importance, as seeking approval from the community remains high. While the community members have several organizations in place helping to represent them, such as the local police department, county sheriff’s office, parole and probation, and local public safety committee, I find that Remnant Initiatives is the only organization locally looking to represent

those in reentry. A handful of community members have been trained as volunteers to work with individuals who have been released. In the article *Boosting One's Social Identity*, Authors state “there is wide agreement that individuals perceive group membership as an important facet of the self” (Tajfel & Turner). People coming out of incarceration are on the fringes of society and are depicted as those who need to be kept from others. I am advocating for safe and meaningful relationships and living arrangements that will encourage healthy connections, appropriate love of self, neighbor, and God's creation. This has to be created, implemented, modeled, and refined over time.

The details of this plan take shape after funds are secured for dedicated housing specifically for people being to be discharged to Yamhill County, Oregon from prison. Housing needs to be an affordable option that can be accessed for a minimal amount of money and will scale up as the formerly incarcerated individuals gain employment. Housing needs to be in the city limits and near public transportation, shopping, banking, and other community resources since most of individuals will not be able to obtain a vehicle, license, or insurance for a long period of time. Restrictions on where offenders can live in an area must be accommodated, such as, not within a certain distance to schools and daycares. Having housing that meets the criteria of a safe release for both the community and the former inmate will continue to be the top priority.

### **Summary**

In summary, the most effective and loving way to work with individuals who are experiencing incarceration is to contextualize the many factors that have contribute to their circumstances. Pogorzelski referencing the *Second Chance Act* note “the complex and significant association between poverty, crime, health, neighborhood quality, residence stability, and

economic, and economic opportunities is well established: where one lives matters” (1791). To understand the events that often happen for someone who intersects with the justice system and be able to offer adequate assistance is offering a way forward. Daniel Groody argues “many today are poor not because of laziness but because of a system of structures, policies, and institutions that greatly diminish their options and keep them in poverty” (2727). When looking at a social change, the community developer must look at the structure, policies, and institutions in place, that keep individuals in a bondage. Although it is not wise to think one person can tackle all of the structures, policies, and institutions to rid society of the harm perpetuated, it is worthwhile to take action on a well thought out idea or innovation. Over time ideas and solutions change in order to successfully benefit society.

By properly contextualizing, community developers will be able to offer a more effective and restorative approach to social change. This only can happen after dedicating time to knowing the history, beliefs, cultural preferences, values, and social norms of a specific population. By asking questions, being opened to finding alternative answers and letting go of ideologies, those in the community development field will bring skills and ideas to those who are desperately looking for hope and searching for a way forward.

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## **Qualitative Research Essay**

### **Introduction**

Qualitative inquiry is a methodology of research that seeks to find detailed answers to social phenomena. In this essay, I will be discussing how to integrate qualitative inquiry and community development. Through my fieldwork I was able to practice qualitative methods and use research questions to further explore the context. This essay also proves to show the benefits of post-prison housing with detailed outcome markers. By using qualitative inquiry methods in a given context and discovering information previously unknown or undocumented, the researcher can further ideas, inquiries, or phenomena that has been unexplained.

### **Qualitative Inquiry and Community Development**

Northwest University's International Community Development program has a core belief that you must know a culture deeply and surrender yourself to the wisdom of those whom you serve for maximum impact (Master of Arts in International Community Development).

Qualitative inquiry allows the researcher to immerse herself in the culture and surrender previous assumptions in order to uncover knowledge previously unknown. Once the knowledge has been uncovered, this can be looked at and further researched to find a way for maximum impact.

The international community development program focuses on students becoming social change agents in society. In my experience, words and stories are often a key to change. Qualitative research is described as "interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they contribute or attribute to their experiences" (Merriam and Tisdell 6). In international community development, we are asked to uncover experiences in a way that surveys and basic data collection does not allow us to look into. We are asked to collect stories, observe and interpret, thus gaining intimate understanding of our research results.

The qualitative approach is distinctive since it uncovers knowledge within a specific context. Context itself is a central factor since the researcher is conducting qualitative inquiry in the field. “Whether it be the physical environment or mode by which an in-depth interview (IDI), group discussion, or observation is conducted the outcomes in qualitative research hinge greatly on the contexts from which we obtain this data” (RDR). Another distinction of the qualitative approach is the fact that the researcher plays a critical role in collecting the data, and therefore will have the potential of being less objective than in other methods. Although a researcher may want to remain unbiased, the fact that personal interviews, relational dialog, and interpretation are involved means that bias is inevitable at a certain level.

As authors Sunstein and Strater point out “your purpose is to collect and consider multiple sources of information, not facts alone” (14). It is meant to be undertaken in the natural environment using various forms of data collection for further evaluation. While attempting to remain largely distant from bias, the researcher will conduct experiments and observations to find hidden information, knowledge or patterns. The goal is to build a picture of a situation or context in a generalized manner. J.W. Creswell defines qualitative research as “an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The research builds a complex, holistic pictures, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in natural setting” (Creswell 15).

### **Practicing Qualitative Methods**

In my fieldwork, I used qualitative methods to learn about Oregon’s Department of Corrections facilities, including those for men, women and juveniles. When speaking with officials throughout the Department of Corrections, I have noticed a lack of consistency in the programs and opportunities offered. For instance, the Coffee Creek Correctional Facility website

lists an education department. This department is in charge of offering GED courses and other higher educational degree completion courses. My investigation revealed, however, that this department has reassigned its only proctor to a different department, leaving no possibility of taking a test or completing a degree. Coffee Creek is Oregon's only women's facility, housing more than 1,800 inmates without an education department able to facilitate any education; yet the website still says that they offer advanced educational opportunities.

My goal was to use qualitative research methods to look at Oregon's various institutions and gain as much information as possible through a survey that was meant to find out how the state's prisons engage with a restorative model of justice. After the surveys were complete, I was able to compile the information for Remnant Initiatives, a Yamhill County reentry service, to use and distribute for training and educational purposes. My hope is to have further conversations within the community that will lead to greater support for quality restorative programs within Oregon's institutions. As I review my research of the various components of our criminal justice system and all of the lives affected by incarceration, I will be contemplating a criminal justice system that values prevention, treatment, and healing ("Our Work").

### **Research Questions**

The questions below were asked in a survey to guarantee that everyone was being asked the same questions and was given the opportunity to expand on their answers when they felt it was necessary. During the process, many interviewees expounded upon topics that they felt needed more time while skipping over questions that they deemed unnecessary. When a question was asked that the interviewee didn't feel comfortable answering, they were encouraged to skip it. The idea was to ask questions about the main issues that have been shown to lead to

incarceration. Then to document what facilities have programs that are working to help correct the deficiencies in those areas.

- What programming/interventions provided to adults while they are incarcerated have the most impact on success after release?
- Does this institution offer those programs/interventions?
- Please name the programs and interventions.

The questions centered on five main areas: education, job skills, substance abuse, mental health, and a general category that allowed for additional information on each particular facility and the readiness of its inmates upon release.

### **Research Context**

The setting for my research was the Oregon State Department of Corrections. I interviewed prison chaplains, reentry specialists, and a prison superintendent. In addition to those working at the prison, I interviewed individuals recently released from an Oregon institution. Because of the rules that the prisons have in place, I was unable to interview those currently incarcerated. All in-person interviews took place within 60 miles of each other in the greater Willamette Valley, Oregon. I had access to Santiam Correctional Facility in Salem, Coffee Creek Correctional Facility in Wilsonville and the State Penitentiary in Salem. Many of the interviews took place over the phone from my office.

### **Post-Prison Housing**

Jeffrey Bouffard and Lindsey Bergeron's article, "Reentry Works: The Implementation and Effectiveness of a Serious and Violent Offender Reentry Initiative" details out a small case study undertaken in the northern Midwest. According to this case study, offenders considered to be serious and violent were given more community service-based referrals than other offenders

upon release. The article details out how those receiving more help upon release have lower rates of drug use and post-parole arrest. This is a very encouraging study for those researching reentry practices, although the fact that the research has not been expanded for greater impact is frustrating. James Luther et al.'s study "An Exploration of Community Reentry Needs and Services for Prisoners" focuses on offender behavior patterns and considers how to retrain behaviors upon release. Participants in this case study reported that a lack of discharge planning led to poor community reentry with basic needs such as stable housing and employment unmet (Luther). This research along with my fieldwork findings led to my focusing on post-prison housing for the thesis project.

A 2005 article about the "The Second Chance Act" offered a way to help communities who are burdened by offenders coming back in to a community and by all of the services that they will need (Pogorzelski). The Second Chance Act calls for communities to strengthen reentry services to provide more opportunities for people leaving prison. I think it would also be interesting to detail what the burden would be in the community that doesn't offer reentry services. I realize that not having a reentry service is the case in most areas, but I think we need to be able to count the high costs of reentry not being successful to compare with the high cost of social services.

Merriam and Tisdell describe a key component of qualitative research as "collecting data through interviews, observations, and documents" (Merriam and Tisdell, 105). My study made use of primarily qualitative methods. Most of the research was done conducting interviews, surveys, and looking at data already collected but not yet presented as a whole. The differences between this research and other research similar in topic was the personal experiences of those interviewed and statistics and programs specific to the context or location being studied. My

desire was to take national and local statistics and weave personal stories throughout to reveal what could be achieved when the focus is on prevention, treatment, and healing, with the hope of discovering better post-prison housing options. I employed quantitative methods to collect statistics as part of the overall picture. Finally, I used action research to create part a practical tool that Remnant Initiatives can use for educational purposes. As Stringer describes, “the primary purpose of action research is to provide the means for people to engage in systematic inquiry and investigation and to design an appropriate way of accomplishing a desired goal and to evaluate its effectiveness” (6). Action research is about providing systematic procedures that are cyclical, solutions oriented, and participatory in nature. The goal being to devise sustainable improvements that enhance the lives and well-being of those participating (Stringer 5). For the post-prison housing project to become a successful reality, action research is needed to set up systems and keep track of outcomes to ensure all objectives are met.

### **Outcome Markers**

Remnant Initiatives is a local nonprofit that specializes in reentry services for people coming out of incarceration. The organization aims to inspire and coach community-minded individuals and groups into action that improves the capacity to serve our Yamhill Valley neighbors transitioning from incarceration and enable them to help others in turn. It relies upon be a partnership between the recently released “neighbor in transition” and the various services that are provided in our area. The hope is to mentor and coach individuals into a successful way of life after incarceration and turn into those that help others in the process. Obtaining post-prison housing is the goal for this project.

A first step by Remnant Initiatives was to build a team of trained mentors certified by the Department of Corrections. The mentor becomes one person the “neighbor in transition” knows

who is not currently battling addiction or incarceration. Each mentor has a detailed plan for each “neighbor” up to six months before leaving prison and up to a year after release, when a graduation takes place. Adding post-prison housing to these efforts would help meet the predominant need of shelter.

This program hopes to teach and model the type of life skills that are not taught in our current prison system. Many of the “neighbors” are coming from backgrounds of addiction and from unsafe families of origin. The chance to live in an environment of successful individuals assisting and advising them along the way will hopefully lead to better life choices and lower rates of recidivism.

The first desired outcome for this program is to have “neighbors” living and working in a sustainable manner in the community. The first steps out of incarceration are all about trying to build towards this outcome. All indicators show that reaching this step greatly reduces a person’s chance of going back to prison, and preparation for living in the community has to start before release. Maintaining sobriety, repairing broken relationships, and building on education all require a safe place to lay your head down at night and the money needed to sustain it.

The second outcome involves that repair work that comes after a person has done time in prison. Many of these “neighbors” have children who have been in foster care or residing with relatives. Often additional DHS requirements must be met to start the process of parenting again, and these will require active mentorship, engagement and funds for necessary classes and court hearings.

The third outcome can happen when a “neighbor” has successfully gone through all the steps in their plan, and they have become part of the community that supports those desiring to come back into society in a sober, safe environment. Remnant Initiatives currently has a handful

of people who were informally mentored before the start of this program and are now in positions to give back and become resources. The greatest example of this is a woman who was mentored five years ago and now rents rooms in her home to newly released individuals whom Remnant is working with. She has become a trusted part of this community and an asset as a landlord.

The last outcome has to do with reporting for potential grants in the future. Since the nonprofit is new, they have not applied for grants or had previous years to show success. Remnant Initiatives is diligently tracking all “neighbors” that they work with and will continue doing so for the future. The hope is that the individuals who receive mentorship with this reentry service have a far greater success rate. Qualitative methods will be used to gather tracking data for grant purposes.

I see great value in evaluation, especially while doing development work. We have many wonderful ideas that are put into action on a regular basis, but do they reach the intended outcome? Why are we doing these things, and should we keep doing them? I like the definition of evaluation used by Mark et al.: “Evaluation exists to improve the way that programs and policies function” (49). Without evaluation, we will never know if what we do makes a difference and most of us need to know that in order to continue.

Project management teaches you that you always need to evaluate. All of the resources of time, money, and talent have been used to implement a program. To not evaluate it means you will never seek to improve on it, re-create it or share the success of it. It will always remain incomplete. The assessment of merit and worth is what draws me in the most. I want to know if something has a value and worth as a community developer. Something a friend of mine asks



when she speaks to nonprofits is, “Who will miss you, if you are gone”? If a nonprofit closes and the community doesn’t notice or feel a loss, then what did they actually do for the community?

### **Summary**

As an agent of social change, qualitative approaches to inquiry will make me more impactful as I continue to seek detailed answers to social phenomena. This is a crucial role as both a community developer and one who seeks to be an effective social change agent in my community. The methods of qualitative inquiry that will be the most helpful for future projects will be qualitative: uncovering experiences, collecting stories, observing, and interpreting the data. Remaining in the natural environment to know and understand a culture in which I will be able to gain wisdom from while serving will remain paramount.

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## **Transformation Essay**

### **Introduction**

When I look back at what the International Community Development program has taught me, I find surprising results about myself, the world I live in, and the people who inhabit it with me. In this essay, I describe my personal transformation and how my understanding of social justice has been expanded. I explain how I understand copowerment and my future vocational work, as well as my philosophy of service. Being able to summarize what the last two years of study has meant and how the ICD values have changed me has been a rewarding process that will continue guiding me as a social change agent.

### **Personal Transformation**

When I started this program, I didn't want anything in my life to change. I wanted to work at the same job, develop a nonprofit, and keep living in my existing community. What I wanted out of the program was to read some good books and discuss justice related issues with other like-minded people. Learning how people from other cultures deal with common social challenges and how that could relate to my existing place was what I had in mind. The things that I was involved with at the beginning of this program fit who I thought I was or at least who I thought I wanted to become as a person.

Halfway through the program I was given an official diagnosis of Complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. This is a mental health disorder that is caused from a past trauma, and in my case relates to previous concussions suffered and is noted as a brain injury. I believe I finally reached this diagnosis because I pressed myself too far and my brain became fatigued. Dealing with much more pronounced symptoms such as memory loss, emotional instability, and

an overall disconnection from others became a full-time job. Seeking out the best possible treatments and travelling large distances for cutting edge therapy became an obsession.

During this process, I couldn't help but relate my experience to those who have intersected with the justice system. Predominantly, I thought of those who are incarcerated and possibly suffering from similar mental health issues. I wondered what the treatments options were. While I have access to highly sought-after medical professionals, the individuals that I often work with do not have that same access. In the journal *The Prevalence of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in Prisoners*, research shows a range from 0.1% to 27% for male, and from 12% to 38% for female prisoner populations (Baranyi, Gergő et al). Looking back at many of the people I have worked with in the justice system, I can see many of the symptoms. This is also a diagnosis, that if left untreated, continues to erode one's life and often leads to substance abuse, isolation, and major depression. Recognizing that females are incarcerated at a high number for substance abuse, allows this data to show where the links are being made and what our current system could be focusing on for treatment. In one study, 90% of the imprisoned people with PTSD were reported to have unmet needs for psychiatric care, including pharmacotherapy and psychological treatment, which is the highest rate among all mental disorders (Jakobowitz S, Bebbington P, McKenzie N, et al). During my fieldwork, I found that mental health was an area often left untreated while a person is incarcerated. Many prison employees did not see a need to emphasize treatment over things such as job skills or addiction recovery.

As a person who is dealing with a mental health diagnoses similar to those who have succumbed to substance abuse and criminal behavior, I believe even more in the need for scientifically based mental health treatment inside institutions. As Baranyi points out "PTSD treatments during imprisonment may have the potential to reduce barriers to complete

correctional interventions, improve adherence to medical treatments, and improve the longer-term institutional and community rehabilitation”. As I worked at creating a reentry program for my community, dealing with the lack of mental health care inside the prisons has become a key issue.

This journey has changed everything for me. I was able to take a leave from my job at the public defender’s office in order to seek treatment and find something that fit with who I know I am now. The reentry program that I was so excited about is going strong and making a difference, but without me as director. It was not healthy for me to be in that role as someone who needs to seek less group connection and more one-on-one support. Going back into a mentor role is where I seem to thrive and communicate best. The environment that I work in has become a major focus as I look at my future vocation. What types of sounds will I be subjected to at work? What will the emotional regulation of the clients be? How many people will I be talking to on a daily basis?

Although these feel like insurmountable challenges at times, I am being reminded of my “super powers” by those who understand how the brain works. I have been working with an individual who is in the midst of alcohol addiction. My goal has been to set up an intervention and seek out those willing to help him stabilize and move forward. I have done this before but never realized that I am able to remain somewhat emotionally detached from horrible circumstances while still having an appropriate amount of empathy. As I bring food and water to a motel room, not sure if I will find a deceased person or not, I realize that this is one of my super powers. I am able to exist within the chaos of trauma and violence. As I notice the families essentially cutting off the addicted member, I am still looking for the next practical step.

My personal transformation while in this program is profound and still developing. It has happened in the midst of difficult circumstances and with a fair amount of despair for my future. I have learned that you have to grieve who you thought you would become and accept who you really are. I am slowly rising to meet this challenge.

### **My Understanding of Social Justice**

Social justice means that the world has created an imbalance through brokenness and justice is not achievable for all. However, people still work towards the improvement of all those living as an act of love towards our creation. Author Moe-Lobeda argues “this is our lifework, to receive God’s love, and to live justice-making mysterious and marvelous love into our world” (57). As a person who wants to bring love into our world, I also want to dismantle unjust systems and help recreate new systems. Moe-Lobeda describes this as “social systems or structures are created by people over time. What is constructed by human decisions and actions is subject to human agency” (12). As humans, we create structures and over time those need to be evaluated and adjusted to meet changing needs. Social justice is not a stagnant target but an ever-moving and changing goal that community developers and change agents need to keep up with. As poverty alleviation becomes successful in one area of the world a fall-out may bring a crisis in a new area. This shows the interconnectedness and globalization of the world to the full degree and being an ICD member has prepared me for this challenge.

I hope to continue writing and advocating for important justice issues. Recently I have been writing about mental health stigma, the unfairness of the cash bail system, and non-violent communication. My goal is to secure a position working with currently incarcerated youth as a plan coordinator or at one of our parole and probation offices as a peer support specialist.

Working with individuals who have been labeled and cast aside is a fulfilling vocation, and I excel in situations with layers of injustice. I am always looking for the root cause of the behavior that led to the crime or addiction. While many believe that the root is not of value, I believe that it is the answer to preventing more of the same actions. If someone can find out the root of why they drink or physically harm others, then we can work on changing that behavior and living a life of restoration. In the *Social Justice Handbook*, Cannon states “one of the ways that Christians are called to respond when people violate principles of justice and hurt those around them is by practicing redemptive justice. Redemptive justice, like restorative justice, tries to find balance between forgiveness and consequence (38). As a social justice advocate, I have to be able to strike a balance between calling out injustice and wanting consequences for the injustice.

With many of the ideas that social justice advocates introduce they will undoubtedly be going against what the world has already agreed upon. Kuenkel describes this as “new ideas often meet massive resistance before they are finally taken on as natural” (96). Everything in restorative justice takes a long time since new ideas are scary and the results unknown. Society is taught that right and wrong is a black and white set of guidelines and everyone knows what those guidelines are. Author Miroslav Volf describes what society needs to understand by asserting “within social contexts, truth and justice are unavailable outside of the will to embrace the other. I immediately continue to argue, however, that the embrace itself – full reconciliation – cannot take place until the truth has been said and justice done” (29). This is a challenge for all of us as we have all been victim and perpetrator in various situations.

### **Copowerment and the Future**

I understand copowerment to be a mutual exchange through which both sides of a social equation are made stronger and more effective by the other (ICD Northwest). This term is new to



me, and I was first introduced to it during the first week of the ICD program at Oxford. The mental image I get when I think of copowerment is one of a rope being intertwined with three pieces. Two pieces represent the community members and the third represents the community itself, or the place of context. It takes all three pieces to become bound and strong in order to be the tool needed for heavy lifting, holding objects together, or creating a suspension bridge for crossing.

Copowerment reminds us that as community developers we are not on a solo journey but rather a journey of embracing and strengthening an existing community. While we are in the midst of bringing our skills and knowledge to the community, we must be willing to embrace the skills and knowledge that the same community will teach us. Both parties will be transformed and strengthened through the process.

### **Philosophy of Service**

One of my inspirations has been Gregory Boyle and his work with inner city youth. He has a belief that we are all children of God no matter what our actions have been. This is the kind of belief I will need to continue working in the social justice field. As Boyle describes in his book *Tattoos on the Heart* “and so the voices at the margins get heard and the circle of compassion widens. Souls feeling their worth, refusing to forget that we belong to each other. No bullet can pierce this” (212). When people feel their worth, they start to act like they belong.

What makes my brain light up and start to gather pieces of a puzzle to put into place? It happens when I embrace those who struggle for sobriety, responsible behavior, and reasonable success. I want to continue being the treasure hunter who looks for the goodness in every person no matter how small or hidden and I want to be the person to say it out loud to them. The world tries to make you feel naive for believing that good things can come from broken circumstances,

but I refuse to let this become my perspective. God is in the brokenness, and I will continue looking for God in the stories, faces, and places of my community.

I have never been able to shake the understanding that we were all made in the image of God. What happens after we arrive here in this broken world and perpetuate our beliefs, traumas, fears, addictions, and good intentions on others is what makes the rest of our story complicated. If we are being honest with ourselves, we have been impacted by some of the worst and some of the best that our world has to offer through our mere existence with other humans. People are complicated with layers of life that just keep piling up until our death. I have very few answers for what eternity will hold but I see the complexity that we face in our daily existence as a way to work out who God is and isn't. This is my way to bring the kingdom of heaven to our place on earth and to show a small portion of the love, forgiveness, humbleness, equality, justice, and mercy that God has shown us. With this understanding, I have chosen to work with an often-unlovable lot known as inmates.

My work will continue to be advocating for a better prison system. A system that treats the whole person instead of just punishing them for the crime. I will continue to lobby against more prisons being built with funds that take away from all of the services that a healthy society needs to prevent criminality. Services such as, a fully funded education system, health care with an emphasis on mental health and trauma care, addiction recovery services for everyone regardless of income, affordable housing and equality between men and women of all colors. While working with people who have been convicted of some truly heinous crimes, I have been able to pin-point many of the causes that lead to a life intersecting with the criminal justice system. Volf details "you need to make space in yourself for the perspective of the other, and in order to make space, you need to want to embrace the other" (220). Although I do not like many

of the behaviors and attitudes of the people that I work with, I can see many of the disadvantages they have had in a life of inequality, and why we must fight this at the root cause.

As Volf further argues “theologians should concentrate less on social arrangements and more on fostering the kind of social agents capable of envisioning and creating just, truthful, and peaceful societies, and on shaping a cultural climate in which social agents will thrive” (21). This idea of fostering the kinds of change agent that will bring equality in one area and ripple through the other aspects of society is something I will continue to devote my time to.

A national conversation is happening around how our country deals with criminal justice. Important programs are gaining traction, including a restorative justice model. With restorative justice, the prison is to provide rehabilitative services to the inmates. In order to release them back into the community better equipped to pursue a life outside of the criminal justice system. My goal is to continue looking at Oregon’s various institutions and gain as much information about how our prisons are doing with a restorative model. The hope is to have further conversations within my community that will lead to greater support for quality programs within our institutions. As I research the various components of our criminal justice system and all of the lives affected by incarceration, I will be contemplating a criminal justice system that values prevention, treatment and healing (PSJ).

### **Summary**

Understanding that my ability to do good works is a moving target, I will forever have to commit to letting God speak into what justice really is. Author Marjorie Thompson describes “a willingness to listen to God’s Word and to give ourselves wholly to God’s designs in the world” (53). Part of my understanding of the world is to look for God in it, even the darkest of places. Thompson also argues, “We want to know God is related to our pain. Suffering makes us aware

of our need for a larger framework of meaning and purpose in life” (5). We all suffer, but to be able to see, hear and feel our Creator in the midst of suffering changes everything. If I am to make a way for peacemaking and reconciliation among those living in incarceration, I must be willing to acknowledge the pain and request God’s presence in it. This means to never shake the understanding that we were all made in the image of God.

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