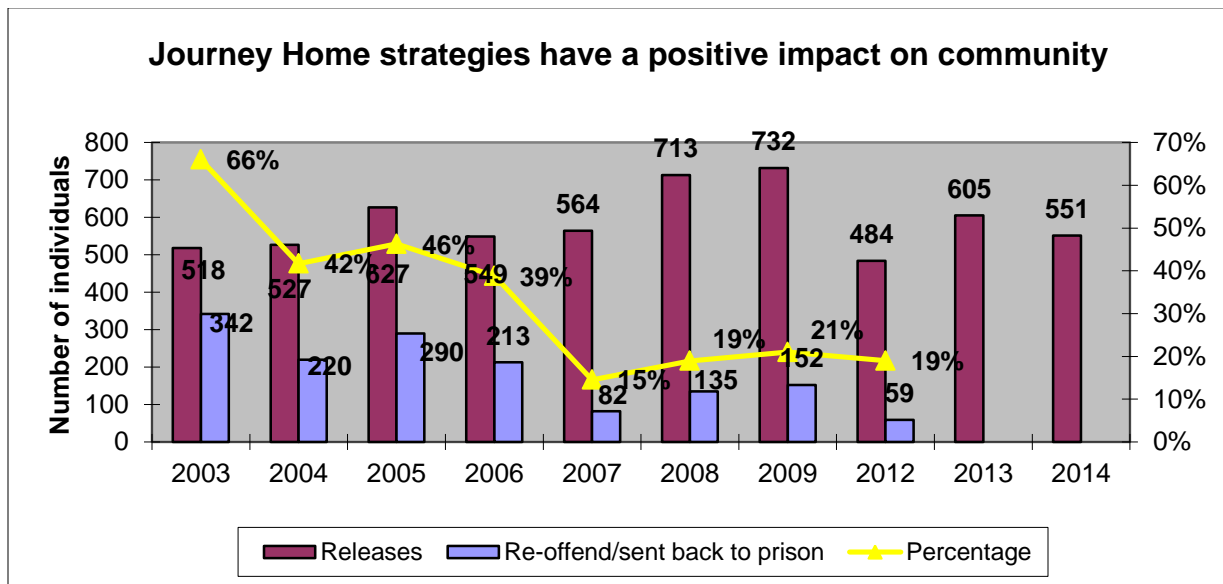


# The Journey Home

## *Changing a life one person at a time*

Each year between 300 to 700 people return to Dane County from prison looking for a fresh start and a reboot of their life. Upon their return, many of these individuals face immediate challenges and obstacles that may result in them returning to prison for a new crime or for some kind of violation. Officially recognized reasons for recidivism include revocation, violation of rules and committing a new crime. For most of us, this is not a path that we would choose for our life or the life of our loved ones. On the other hand, one bad decision can change ones' life forever whether it was planned or not. Even when bad decisions have been made, it does not mean that all hope is lost! Changing lives is exactly what United Way of Dane County is all about. We want to help change lives, even when it is not the most popular thing to do or with a population that most in the community would turn their backs. Giving hope along with proven strategies for ten years, Journey Home is changing former offenders' lives one person at a time!



**Reducing the recidivism rate in Dane County emerged as an important strategy within the Agenda for Change goal of moving more people on pathways out of poverty.**

In 2003, Dane County had a recidivism rate of 66% for individuals returning to prison within two years of release. This includes individuals committing new crimes and those being returned to prison for violations.

In 2005, after many months of research, meetings and study of reintegration programs in other communities, UWDC created a model using promising practices we believed would work in our county. Four areas that research shows are most important are: Residency, Employment, Support and Treatment (REST). Evidence confirms that former offenders who access three of these four strategies are successful in creating safe and productive lives in the county.

Today, Journey Home is implemented in partnership with the Madison-area Urban Ministry (MUM), to effectively connect former offenders with community resources to reduce the re-incarceration rate for our community. The program has two main components: 1) Resource Specialists who provide intensive one-on-one assistance and 2) one-stop monthly "Service Fairs" offering former offenders and their family member(s) access to needed services, all in one location.

**Since 2006, over 1,000 service providers have attended the monthly Service Fairs.**

## (R)esidency

Everyone needs a safe place to live. However, most former offenders struggle to locate affordable housing. They find themselves in a Catch-22 situation: they need employment to pay for a place to live but they can't find employment without an address to put on the job application, or a safe place to sleep and live. Housing is not only difficult to find in Dane County, landlords can be especially selective choosing tenants. Families that live in Section 8 housing can not have a former offender living with them, this makes it very difficult to keep family together.

**Since 2006 we have been successful at finding housing for 303 individuals.**

MUM links apartment associations and landlords with former offenders to place them in housing. They ensure both former offenders and landlords know and work within their rights and responsibilities for housing. Since Journey Home began, we have been able to find housing for 37% (303 of 830) of those who needed housing.

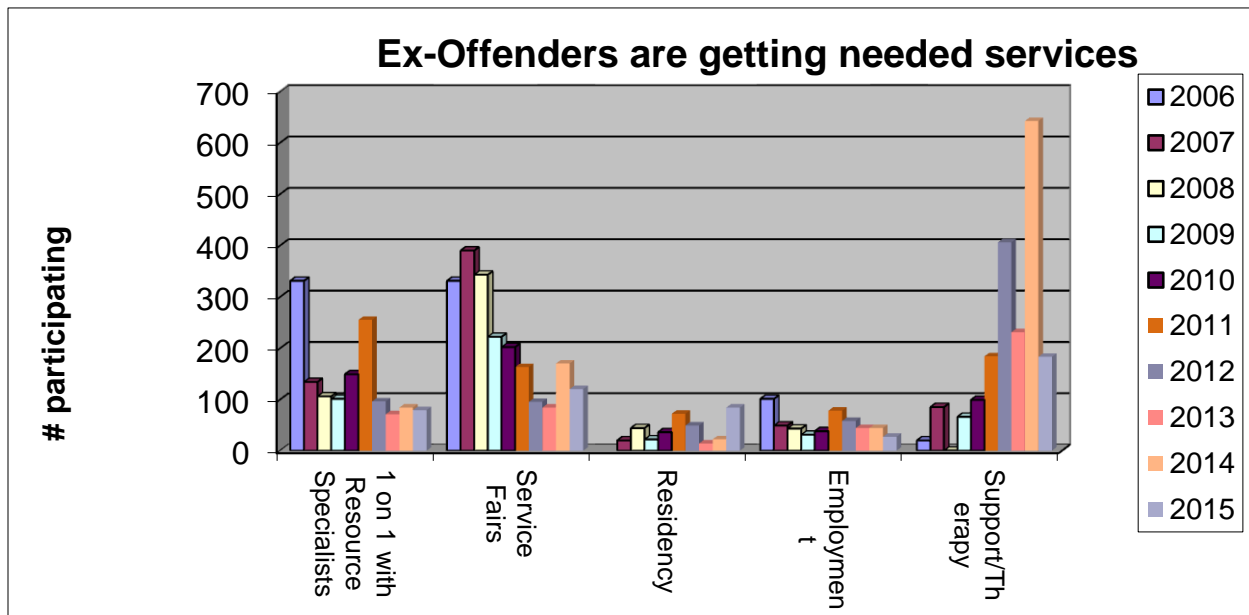
## (E)mployment

Finding employment can be challenging for many given our current economic changes that have occurred since the Great Recession. Those who are hiring are very selective in their choices of employees, making it even more difficult for a former offender. Many employers still sift out former

offenders with a check box on their applications for employment. However, a “ban the box” movement is helping employers understand that offenders are not all the same. Most former offenders have low skills and often no work history, which makes positioning them for jobs difficult.

However, with a greater emphasis on providing employment training, former offenders with skills will have a greater chance to find employment. They represent an untapped market for employment. Since 2006, Madison-area Urban Ministry has found employment for 622 people or 75% of the 830 who were looking for employment.

MUM has a program called Just Bakery, which provides 16 weeks of commercial baking vocational training in culinary skills. Since 2014, 52 Just Bakery participants were able to find employment. This program is a great addition to the services already being provided by Madison-area Urban Ministry.



## (S)upport

Some former offenders are able to pick up where they left off and rejoin their families that provide them with a network of support. However, for others this is not the case.

MUM provides a unique approach with a continuum of services to former offenders without supportive families. In addition to working one-on-one with the Resource Specialists and the agencies that participate in the monthly Service Fairs, former offenders can also join the Madison-area Urban Ministry Circle of Support program or the Phoenix Initiative. Eleven Journey Home clients are in Circles of

Support with four people on a waiting list. Ten Journey Home participants are in the Phoenix Initiative this year.

The Circle of Support program links a team of five to seven volunteers with one former offender to provide assistance in areas they identify, upon release. These volunteers come from a variety of church congregations throughout Dane County. The Phoenix Initiative is a support program with a curriculum designed to help men & women reconnect with their children and make good choices while providing for their family.

**The Resource Specialists aid ex-offenders as they work on necessary life and job skills to ensure they met their personal goals.**

## (T)reatment

We know that about 80% of ex-offenders who are released have mental health issues – including (alcohol and other drug abuse) AODA. While in prison, they receive the treatment and support that they need. However, upon release, not all are able to continue with their treatment for a variety of reasons. Mental health and AODA resources are in short supply – most have waiting lists – particularly for those who don't qualify for health insurance.

**Since we began this initiative, we have linked 2,069 ex-offenders to support and/or treatment services.**

The Resource Specialists work closely with the community agencies to provide mental health services. They have a listing of agencies with the earliest available openings. Our goal is to refer ex-offenders to programs that have the shortest waiting lists without cost.

## Success Story – Giving back to the community

Mr. B was released at the beginning of 2016 after serving 12 years in the Department of Corrections.

A MUM Resource Specialist, John Givens met and worked with him 6 months prior to his release and upon release he came to MUM to participate in the Journey Home and to request a Circle of Support given the length of time he had served in prison.

Mr. B came out of prison highly motivated and focused on being successful at reintegrating and has been taking advantage of every program and service MUM has to offer as stepping stones for him to continue his reintegration into the community.

He is involved in the Journey Home, a Circles of Support, the Phoenix group, MUM's speaker bureau and is active in the community in helping others re-enter successfully by being one of MUM's biggest advocates in recruiting and referring to MUM for services.

Mr. B's participation in MUM's speaker bureau has included speaking to students at UW-Madison's School of Psychiatry and Psychology, Edgewood College's Restorative Justice Program and MUM's Prisoner Re-entry simulations.

He continues to be an active client and open to MUM's outreach needs and outreaching on MUM's behalf.

## A Ten-Year Retrospective

### Successful Service, Great Need and Complicated Tracking

Based on emerging promising practices, we designed the Journey Home program to provide services within two years to those returning to Dane County from prison. We track results on multiple levels: services received by individual participants, program impact on participants and overall re-incarceration within our community.

**Since the Journey Home initiative began, participants have a remarkably low return to prison rate for participants in the Journey Home program: 5.4% in 2006, 9.7% in 2007, 8.5% in 2008, 10% in 2009, 8% in 2010, and 5.1% in 2015, compared to an average of 66% prior to 2005.**

**With these outstanding results for program participants, the community-level return to prison rate was reduced from 66% in 2003 to 39% in 2006, 15% in 2007, 19% in 2008, 21% in 2009 and 19% in 2012. We are awaiting updated community-level re-incarceration rate. We feel confident that implementation of the Journey Home program combined with new programming at the Department of Corrections is resulting in this significant impact on not only the program participants but the overall county-level recidivism rate.**

Simply counting persons receiving services and calculating overall recidivism is straightforward. Effectively evaluating the program's impact on participants is more complex. We compare the names of our individual participants with those of the Department of Corrections (DOC) to see if participants are back in prison. What we discovered through our five year analysis has been eye opening. Tracking ex-offenders through the DOC is extremely complicated by 1) not all participants know their ID numbers, may have been released prior to the year of service (we only count those who are released and served in the year they receive service), may not have originally been a part of the Wisconsin Department of Corrections and may have been in jail not prison for a period of time). See lesson learned section for more details . By tracking individuals through the DOC, we have identified hundreds of former prisoners as well as those convicted but not incarcerated who are in need of Journey Home services.

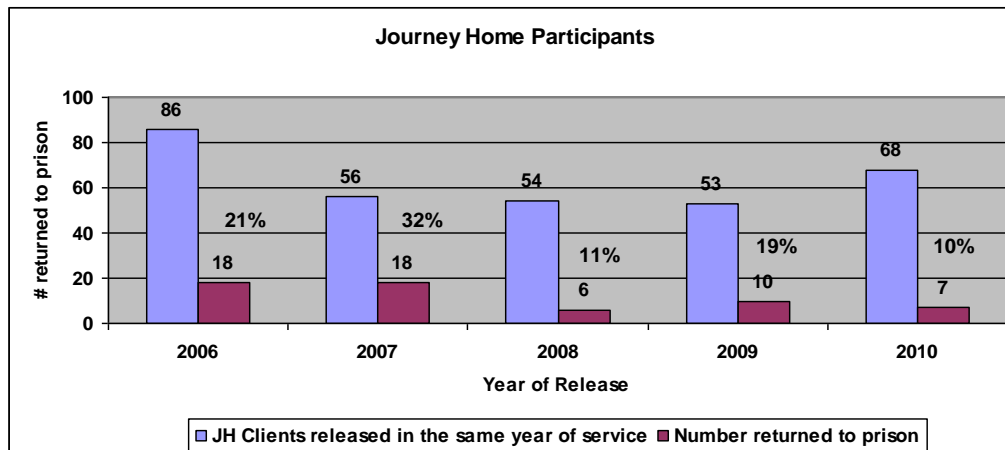
**Of the 3,066 individuals receiving services since 2006, only 10% (317) of these clients were released in the year they sought assistance from Journey Home.**

The remaining 2,749 individuals were released in a prior year or had been convicted but not incarcerated in the Wisconsin prison system with their conviction record they face many of the same challenges as those who have been incarcerated.. As a result, we have faced a growing waiting list for services, which challenges our desire to supply services promptly after the ex-offender is released.

## Program analysis

1. Program outcomes improve for ex-offenders who work intensively with Resource Specialists. As shown in the chart below, recidivism dropped to 10% for those individuals – our overall goal.

### Program outcomes improve for participants who work intensively with Resource Specialists



2. The Journey Home program has been highly cost effective when compared with the cost of incarceration.
  - a. A ten-year total investment of \$1,030,194 averages \$716 for each of the 1,439 participants who have worked one-on-one with the Resource Specialists. The average drops to \$156 or 6,589 participants if we count all of the services provided through Journey Home.
  - b. A typical year of incarceration costs taxpayers about \$30,000 per inmate. This is a minimal return on investment of one of United Way's most effective initiatives.

## Lessons Learned

1. A growing number of DOC clients are seeking help.
  - a. There is a pent-up demand from those released in earlier years and need from those who were convicted but not incarcerated.
2. The service model with a tiered approach is appropriate for the levels of need we see.
  - a. We are providing intensive Case Management through our Resource Specialists for those in very challenging situations.
  - b. Service Fairs are most effective for those who need less intensive help to reintegrate.
  - c. Service Fairs are also helpful to the organizations that participate. They use this monthly opportunity to get to know each other to understand their capabilities.
3. Our open-door policy creates challenges to implementing best practices due to the high need. We see individuals who have been out for a while but still need assistance coming through the doors for services.
4. The difficulty in counting former offenders complicates monitoring because.
  - a. DOC numbers are assigned to individuals who have spent time in jail only and are released on probation.
  - b. Interstate Compact transfers (former offenders who were incarcerated in other states) qualify for DOC numbers.
5. Journey Home's small staff is stretched in meeting demand for services.
  - a. We have 2.75 FTE Resource Specialists providing services, one bi-lingual Spanish/English. We have a .5 FTE Resource Assistant who helps with FSET screening and Service Fairs organization.
  - b. MUM's Executive Director works with clients and provides the direct supervision of the reentry staff.
  - c. Circles of Support have 1.0 FTE Program Coordinator who provides the services and volunteer training and links congregation teams to participants as well as 1:1 support of Resource Specialist.

With limited resources, we are most effective focusing on clients who have been recently released. We need to evaluate the relative effectiveness of these strategies for people who have been out of prison for a longer period of time. However, giving more ex-offenders a fresh start reducing the incidence of crime and leaving more resources to serve other former offenders who need help reintegrating.



## Your Help Is Needed

To learn how you can help with The Journey Home Initiative, call 2-1-1 or visit our website at [www.unitedwaydanecounty.org](http://www.unitedwaydanecounty.org) or [www.VolunteerYourTime.org](http://www.VolunteerYourTime.org).