

# Housing Stability After Incarceration

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## About the Authors

The report was prepared by:

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IJRD is a research center housed within the College of Social Work at FSU. Our mission is to use science to improve lives, communities, and institutions by developing and researching innovations that reduce unnecessary reliance on the criminal justice system and by offering solutions that produce equity and prosperity across race, socioeconomic class, and behavioral health status. IJRD specializes in conducting rigorous real-world research using randomized controlled trials and prioritizes rapid dissemination of research findings to advocates, professionals, and policymakers.

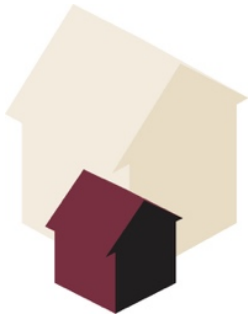
IJRD [team members](#) live and work in communities across the nation, implementing a range of research projects relevant to criminal justice reform.

You can learn more about broader work of IJRD at [ijrd.csw.fsu.edu](http://ijrd.csw.fsu.edu).

This report is one of a series exploring the lives of individuals after they leave incarceration and return home. All of the individuals from whom data are drawn in this report series are enrolled in a multi-site, multi-state randomized controlled trial of a well-being-based behavioral health intervention called the 5-Key Model for Reentry.

You can learn more about the overall 5-Key Model study methodology [here](#), how the 5-Key Model was developed [here](#), and the broader work of IJRD at [ijrd.csw.fsu.edu](http://ijrd.csw.fsu.edu).

You can access the 12 previous reports in this series – including one-page summaries of each report – [here](#).



## Background

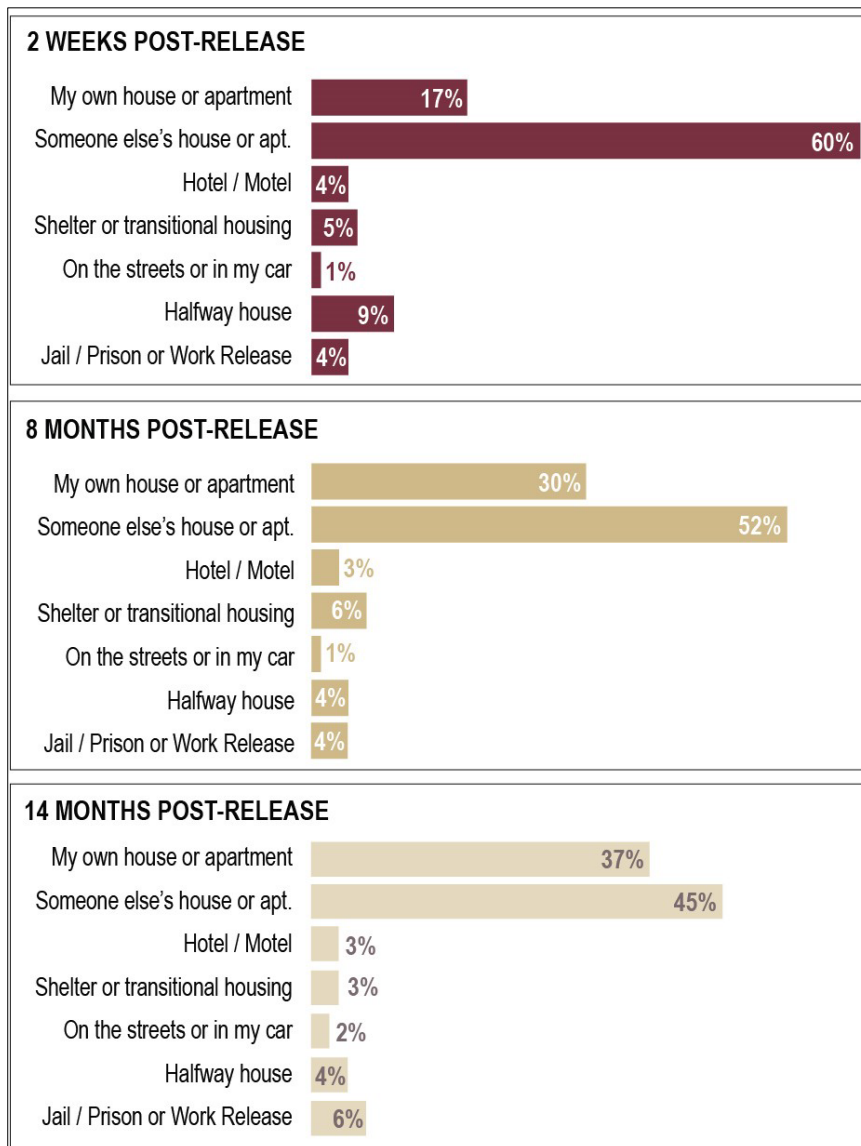
Attaining stable housing is often framed as a key component of success for individuals leaving incarceration and returning home. Research indicates one third of individuals who return home from prison experience housing instability and 10% experience homelessness within their first-year post-release.<sup>1-5</sup> Although individuals can and do secure employment after release regardless of their housing situation, having stable housing reduces a range of barriers and challenges for individuals as they make the transition from incarceration back home.<sup>6</sup> During the reentry period – typically defined as the six months prior to release and extending throughout the first year post-release in the community – many individuals are required to secure an address and employment, meet the terms of any post-release probation or parole supervision, and/or engage with formal services like mental health or substance use disorder treatment. Without stable housing, these tasks become exponentially more difficult.<sup>6-7</sup> If and when individuals become homeless, they are at increased risk for coming into contact with law enforcement and being arrested for sleeping in public spaces, trespassing, and other misdemeanors often associated with homelessness.<sup>1,3,8-9</sup>

Additionally, over the past several years, the housing stability of many individuals – including those returning home from incarceration – has been complicated by both the recent national spike in the rental market and the dwindling supply of affordable housing in many communities.<sup>10</sup> The lack of subsidized housing and other affordable options are a particular challenge for individuals often already struggling to navigate housing in the context of their criminal record.<sup>10</sup>

Finally, the majority of what we already know about housing stability for individuals during reentry focuses explicitly on the intersection between incarceration and homelessness.<sup>11-12</sup> While literature explores the impact of enrolling formerly incarcerated individuals in a range of supportive housing programs,<sup>13</sup> less is known about how housing situations change for individuals throughout the reentry period as a means to target services to those most in need and provide targeted support.

The data used for this report were drawn from individuals enrolled in a randomized controlled trial of the [5-Key Model for Reentry](#). The trial is currently underway in Indiana, Ohio, and South Carolina. Team members interviewed 420 individuals two weeks after their release from prison, 293 individuals 8-months post-release, and 215 individuals 14-months post-release. This brief report examines changes in where and with whom individuals live, whether they consider themselves to be homeless, and whether they are paying rent or mortgage where they stay between leaving prison to 14-months post-release. These findings are situated within the broader context of reentry support, exploring the impact of both incarceration and reentry on families and the need to focus resources on those most in need.

## Where do you live 2 weeks, 8 months, & 14 months post-release?



Two weeks after release from prison, a majority (60%) of individuals were living in someone else's home and almost 1 in 5 were living in their own home. Ten percent of individuals were in highly unstable living situations – living in a hotel/motel, a shelter or transitional housing program, or on the streets or in their car. Thirteen percent of individuals were living in a halfway house, work release center, or correctional setting.

By 14 months post-release, however, 40% were in their own home and fewer than half were living in someone else's home. Eight percent of individuals were in highly unstable living conditions and 10% were living in a halfway house, work release center, or correctional setting.

Taken together, 77% of individuals appeared to be in relatively stable housing conditions two weeks after release. This figure increased over time – 84% of individuals were in stable housing conditions by 14-months post-release. However, at all three post-release time points, 18-24% of individuals were living in relatively unstable housing conditions.

We found no statistically significant differences in where individuals were living when we broke down the sample by gender, racial identity, and age at time of release.

## With whom do you live?

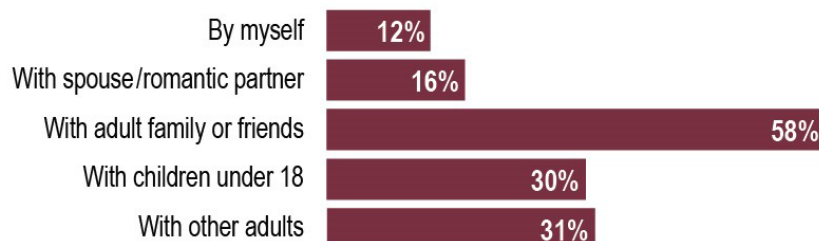
Two weeks after their release from prison, nearly 60% of individuals were living with adult family or friends. Just under 30% were living alone or with a spouse or romantic partner. Just under a third of individuals were also living with children under 18.

By 14-months post-release, however, the percentage of individuals who were living alone or with an intimate partner had steadily increased to 48%. Forty-two percent of individuals were living with adult family or friends. The percentage of individuals living with children under 18 dropped

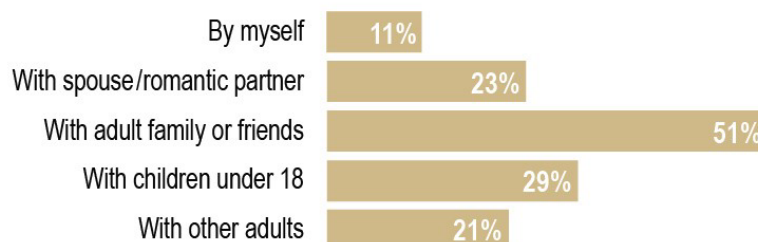
slightly from two weeks to 14-months post-release, due either to changes in family composition or children turning 18 across the three post-release time periods.

*Note: Individuals were able to select more than one category, therefore values do not add to 100%.*

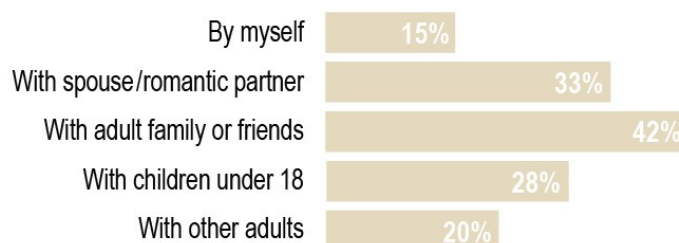
### 2 WEEKS POST-RELEASE



### 8 MONTHS POST-RELEASE



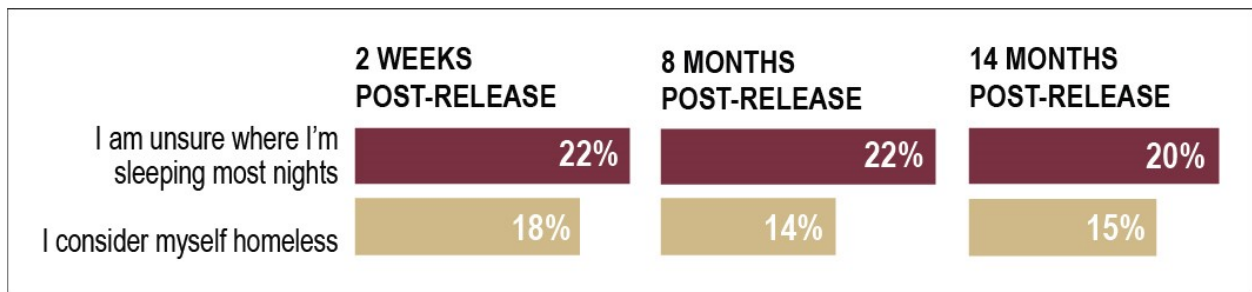
### 14 MONTHS POST-RELEASE



## Are you unsure where you're sleeping most nights?

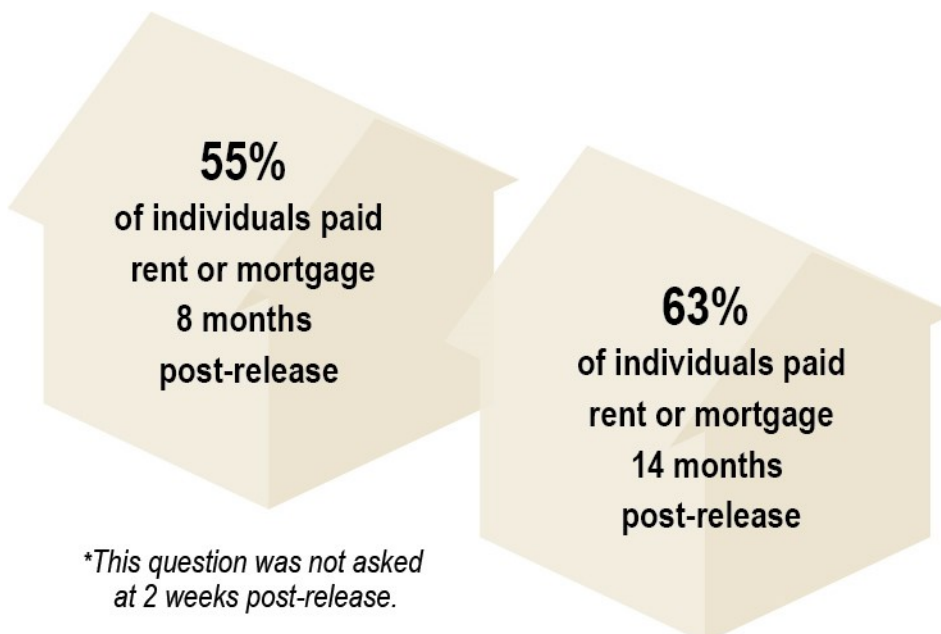
After asking individuals where and with whom they lived, we also inquired whether they were unsure where they were sleeping most nights or if they considered themselves to be homeless over the 14-month post-release reentry period.

The proportion of individuals who were unsure where they were sleeping most nights and who considered themselves to be homeless remained relatively stable from two weeks after their release from prison to 14-month post-release.



## Do you pay rent or mortgage?

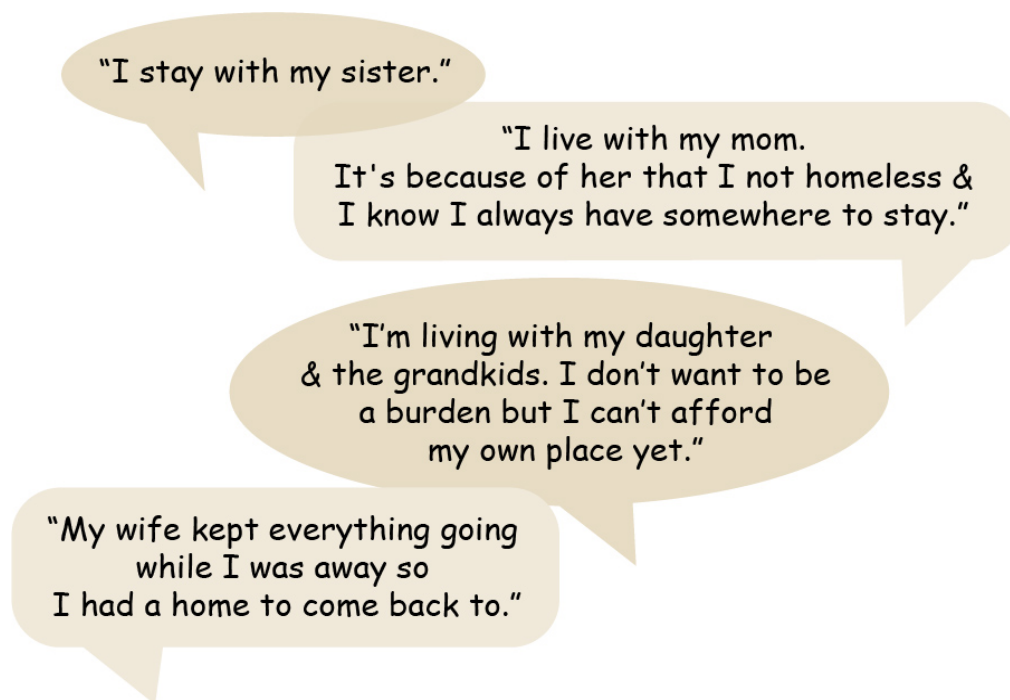
Although we did not ask whether individuals were paying rent or mortgage where they were living two weeks after their release from prison, by 8-months post-release more than half were paying rent or mortgage. By 14-months post-release, this figure increased to nearly two-thirds.



## Key Takeaways

The data presented in this brief report suggest that individuals who release from incarceration into highly unstable housing situations are likely to struggle with housing throughout the reentry period. While housing may not have been critical for all, there is a clear need to focus resources on the 14-22% of individuals who are high-need to prevent instability and homelessness and to extend housing supports beyond the initial release from incarceration.

Many individuals returned home from prison to live with loved ones, family, friends, or intimate partners, however, cohabitating may not equate to stability for all individuals.



Although many individuals are deeply dependent on their family members, research suggests that [family support during reentry tends to deteriorate over time](#). An individual's family is rarely integrated into formal reentry planning or reentry support services; while [data-driven programs to support family members during reentry](#) exist, few reentry service centers offer them. Therefore, the emotional and financial strain placed on families during reentry often go unspoken and unaddressed.

The financial strain that reentry places on many families is underscored by the relatively low percentage of study participants who were paying rent or mortgage where they lived. Just over half of individuals were paying rent or mortgage at 8-months post-release; this figure increased to 63% by 14-months post-release. An individual's ability to earn enough income to contribute to their family's housing and other financial needs can be constrained



by contact with the criminal justice system and incarceration. Formerly incarcerated individuals – especially those with felony charges – are 4-7 times more likely to be unemployed when compared to members of the general public; rates of joblessness at one-year post-release are estimated at 60% among the formerly incarcerated.<sup>14</sup>

Although substantial attention has been given to individuals who become homeless after incarceration, it is clear that the resource burden of incarceration extends well beyond the individual – even when individuals achieve relatively stable housing living with loved ones. This resource burden often keeps or pushes the families of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals into poverty.<sup>9,15</sup> The data presented in this report highlight the critical need for reentry services to both prevent homelessness and to direct emotional and financial support services to both individuals and their loved ones to ensure that the hundreds of thousands of individuals who leave incarceration every single year can thrive in the community after release.

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