

Voices of 5-Key Model Participants

EARLY FINDINGS FROM A MULTI-STATE TRIAL

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RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

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PRIORITIZING RAPID DISSEMINATION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS TO ADVOCATES, PROFESSIONALS, AND POLICYMAKERS.



| OVERVIEW OF THIS REPORT

This report contains interviews from four study participants involved in the 5-Key Model. The purpose of this report is to highlight the stories of participants in the 5-Key Model to provide a personal window into the experiences of those recently released from prisons. The interview explored participants' lives and families, successes and challenges, and solicited advice for effectively helping individuals leaving incarceration.

Following each participant interview, we interviewed study practitioners and explored their perceptions about the hard work and dedication of the participant and the reentry reform work we do at IJRD.

This is the fourth quarterly report which describes the inner workings and early discoveries of participants and researchers in a national groundbreaking longitudinal study officially titled A Multisite Randomized Controlled Trial of the 5-Key Model for Reentry. Phase 1 of the study is underway in 12 urban and rural counties across four states – Florida, Kentucky, Pennsylvania, and Texas. Phase 2 of the study began in August 2019 in South Carolina, Ohio, and Indiana.

| ABOUT THE AUTHORS

The report was prepared by Dr. Carrie Pettus-Davis, Associate Professor and Founding Executive Director of IJRD, and Principal Researcher of the 5-Key Model trial; and Dr. Stephanie Kennedy, the Director of Research Dissemination at IJRD.

Institute for Justice Research and Development (IJRD) is a research center housed within the College of Social Work at the Florida State University. Our mission is to advance science, practice, and policy to improve the well-being of individuals, families, and communities impacted by criminal justice system involvement. 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](#) reside in communities across the nation and are currently implementing the 5-Key Model for Reentry research, as well as research on other pressing issues relevant to criminal justice and smart decarceration strategies.

You can learn more 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.

KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THIS REPORT

We made several observations about the interviews.

- Being asked about opinions and perspectives on reentry and personal life experiences seemed to be a rare experience for study participants, leading to them sometimes struggling to answer the interview questions.
- Feeling the stigma of incarceration despite participants having served their time and making tremendous progress, was a very real, and disheartening experience for some participants. Participants wanted to feel valued, loved, and needed which sometimes was described as unachievable in the face of stigma.
- Two of the participants discussed things they were able to achieve during incarceration and how planning for reentry was critical to their post-release success.
- Participants felt what was most beneficial from the 5-Key Model was the practical support and emotional guidance provided by the study practitioners. They also appreciated the goal setting, patience, and commitment of the practitioners. Participants appreciated the consistency of meetings with practitioners and their assistance with providing participants' a new outlook on life.



- When asked what community members could do to help those who have experienced incarceration to do well after release, participants said to provide a listening ear, offer a path, help to surround people with positive support, and to recognize that many people who have been to prison want to give back.



‘LARRY’ IN TEXAS

Norris – a Reentry Program Specialist who delivers the 5-Key Model to people as they leave incarceration and come home - interviewed Larry, served a 27-year sentence for a violent crime. Larry contacted the 5-Key Model team the morning he was released from prison and has been actively engaged with the project ever since. He celebrates one year of freedom this month.

Norris: Tell us a little bit about yourself, Larry.

Larry: Well, I was incarcerated when I was 17 years old in 1991. I did 27 years, and when I got out I was 44 years old.

During my incarceration - I got my GED. Then, I took the electrical trades and I became the teacher's aide. Then I went from being an electrician to becoming a boiler-room operator which I did for 10 years. After that I learned a little bit about plumbing, then refrigeration. I tried to take the license, but the state has a policy where you can't take the test if you're not chosen and my name wasn't ever put into the hat to take it.

People were kinda mad about it, actually! Wanting to know why? Saying 'he's the main one, you need to let him take it.'

So it took five years but I got into HVAC – I passed with straight A's and the teacher asked if I wanted to be his teacher's aide.

But then when it came time for me to leave, that was probably one of the most emotional points that I had in

there. Because it was like I couldn't believe that I was leaving and I was nervous and scared and I didn't know what to expect... I had family that I really didn't know anything about. I'd been inside for so long.

My mom came to pick me up - her and my three nieces. The whole trip going down to [City]... all I did was just look around. And when I got home, I started doing all the stuff I had been practicing - you know, the goals and everything. I started to put that plan into action.

At first I started off working for my friend and then I ended up getting a job where I'm at now, doing HVAC work. I've been being successful ever since.

Norris: You're dedicated and hard-working for sure. Is there anything you'd like people to know about you though?

Larry: In the beginning you know it seemed hard but as the days been going by, it's getting easier. I have these set goals in place and when I do accomplish something on that list for me that's a big thing, a major achievement. A lot of people, when they get out, they really don't know what they want to do with their life. I think the difference for me is that I took it upon myself and started working on my resume while I was incarcerated. I started working on my skills as far as when I talk to a customer, when I was incarcerated. The things that I did when I was incarcerated, I brought them out and started applying them.

My supervisors at work they tell me that I've got good customer relation skills and sometimes customers call the office and say 'I like him' or 'I want him to come out and do the job – no one else.' It's happened several times and you know, that's a big thing for me.

Norris: What brings you the most joy in life?

Larry: Waking up everyday -- not being in that cell. 'Cause now, man -- you just don't know -- I get up in the morning and I am happy to go to work. There was one day when I first started and we were in the shop cleaning, and well - I

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was so used to working and one of the guys told me it was lunchtime and he said, 'man go ahead and sit down and relax' and that's when it hit me – Oh it's okay for me to sit down. [Laughs] That was weird for me.

Norris: What are your favorite activities or hobbies?

Larry: On that, I really can't say... by me being on a monitor [electronic ankle monitor] I ain't just had the opportunity to explore what I really like and stuff. 'Cause right now that only thing that I like to do is just sit in the house and watch YouTube.

Norris: Tell us a little bit about your family.

Larry: My family - they are real supportive. Especially my mom, my brother, and my nieces and stuff. Like with my mom, no matter what she always has something positive to say. She wants to see me succeed. My brother - if there's something I need, he would help me out and everything. And my nieces - it's crazy - I've got a 6-year-old niece and she's my heart. She'll call and all she'll wanna do is just talk. [Laughs] My other two nieces... They are the same way. It's always 'Uncle, can you come take me here or take me there' and it's hard for me to say no 'cause I'm gonna do it anyway.

Norris: Tell us how you came to participate in the 5-Key Model?

Larry: When they came and interviewed me on the unit and they started to explain what the program was about and everything, I thought 'y'all gon' let me just participate in this program?' I was like 'why?' - you're giving me all this information and all these tools to be successful and stuff. Because the help y'all provide - it keeps me moving to that next step even on the times when I get down or something. I always know there's somebody that I can call.

Norris: What has your experience been like with the 5-Key team?

Larry: Oh, it's been great. When I came out I was working with Amberly. We talked and there was always something positive. Even when I first got out, I used to call - I think

almost every other day about something. And she always had the right words to push me to that next step.



Working with you has been great too. I remember one of the questions that you asked me a while back was 'what will life be without 5 keys?' and I still ain't come to the realization of when this is over with, what it's gonna be like.

Norris: Would you be willing to share your story of how you went to prison?

Larry: How I ended up in prison was greed. I wanted something that I didn't have. I got a murder case. And when it took place, I didn't think about it. All I wanted was what he had that I didn't have. And a lot of people I think that get locked up, there's something that another person has that they don't have. The vast majority of the people that I was with that's why they were behind - something that somebody else had that they couldn't have.

Norris: If someone asked you, what's the best thing that I can do to help someone after prison, what would you tell them?

Larry: What helped me was having those goals in place. And that's what I would set them down and explain to them - show them how to set up goals a way that works for them. You know, a lot of people when you talk goals to them - all they are thinking is far down the road. But it can be something simple. It can be 'get up at a certain time in the morning' or simply 'get up and read a couple pages out of a book.' You know a vast majority of people that I have seen - they get stuck on their phone. And that's a goal for a person that maybe could be hard for them to do – to stay off the phone for a certain amount of hours or even a whole day. Connect to what's around them. That would be what I would want to talk them about.

Norris: Thanks for being a part of our study and doing the great things that you do.

| READ OUR INTERVIEW WITH NORRIS

IJRD: Tell us a little bit about yourself.

Norris: I've lived in Texas my whole life. I've worked for most of my career in clinical mental health settings. Before joining the 5-Key Model, I helped implement a dual diagnosis program for individuals managing substance use and mood disorders at a residential treatment center. Many of the clients I worked with in clinical mental health and substance use disorder treatment had some experience with the criminal justice system and I really see the importance of helping people like them.

IJRD: What are you most proud of about Larry?

Norris: I am most proud of Larry's honesty. He is just amazingly honest. He was a kid when he went to prison and he is honest about what brought him there. He's worked so hard to learn everything he can so that he doesn't wind up in that mindset again. He learned everything he could in prison and has come out and accepted every opportunity and worked his hardest to be his best. He has overcome so much in his life but has not used any of it as an excuse or a crutch at all – his experiences only motivate him to keep going, to keep working, to try harder.

IJRD: What do you see as the most exciting things happening in reentry reform?

Norris: I think the 5-Key Model itself is exciting and such a useful tool – not just for incarcerated or formerly incarcerated individuals, but for all of us. The content is flexible and addresses so many aspects and phases of life, helping people to grow and build supports around them.

Many of the people I grew up with have been in and out of the prison system and in my home community, there hasn't been a lot of mutual trust or respect between law enforcement and many community members. I think because of that background, I never learned about how policies and laws are developed or changed. To me, the First Step Act is also really exciting because it creates a path for individuals charged with non-violent or less serious crimes to be released from prison so that they can go home, be with their families, and be productive citizens in our communities.



Nechama – a Reentry Program Specialist who delivers the 5-Key Model to people as they leave incarceration and come home - interviewed Loyalty, who recently completed a 5-year prison sentence. Loyalty been actively engaged with the 5-Key Model project since he released from prison 10 months ago. Nechama and Loyalty spoke while sitting together in a public park in their local community.

Nechama: Tell us a little bit about yourself.

Loyalty: I'm from Pennsylvania. I'm 32 years old and I'm an Aquarius. I'm laid back and I'm a comedian. I'm very dedicated, I work hard. I have a good job – I'm very dedicated to my job. I work at a restaurant as the Prep Manager, so I take care of the whole back of the kitchen.

I'm very passionate, very emotional. Anything I do I try to put my all into it - I go as hard as possible. I try and I push, I try to be consistent. I'm very passionate in all aspects of life. Anything I do, anything I try and put my thumb on, my fingerprint on, and somebody look at it like, 'I know Loyalty did that.'

Nechama: What brings you joy?

Loyalty: Anything that's stress-free - it could be anything. I mean, if work's good, and it's not too much stress, that brings me joy. If people are satisfied with their meals, and there's no hiccups, that brings me joy. My family bring me joy. My kids, every day, brings me joy - even if they are bad! [Laughs] But they do bring me joy regardless. Anything that's just smooth, simple, and consistent brings me joy. It could be anything.

Nechama: Tell us about your family.

Loyalty: I have 3 siblings - an older brother, a little sister and little brother. My older brother is a great leader, but don't want to lead. Would love to lead, but don't do it. He's very musically inclined - he plays the piano, drums. He performs with his reggae band - he can sing - and he produces music. He performed the Apollo Theater in New York, which was cool. I love him to death. He loves me. He's very overprotective over me, always make sure that I try to stay in the right path. He's always on top of me if I mess up or slip a little bit, pulls me right back in line.

My sister - I can't stand her, but I love her. [Laughs] That's my baby. She's my heart, my rock - I'd do anything for her. She works at [College] – a very good job, a good college. I'm very proud of her. She picked up and moved on her own, without no support from nobody else while raising a daughter. Her daughter - my little niece. Love my little Ladybug.

My little baby brother - he's crazy. [Laughs] He's just like me, but younger. He's 9 years old. I love him – my boy. I wish I could spend more time with him, but he lives a nice little distance and his mom is always working - we have different moms.

Then my dad is just like me, but older. We did time together. He works as hard, if not harder, than me. He's always spitting wisdom to me, dropping jewels on me. The same thing I do with him, and we always sharpen each other's blade. Iron sharpens iron.

My mom died 9 years ago – I miss her, I love her. I know she's watching over me and the family. She's just chillin', sipping on some beer, smoking a cigarette. It's another reason why I go as hard as I do in this world, because she showed me that nobody gon' give you nothing in this world, so you've gotta go get it yourself.

I mean, you might get blessings here or there, but everything else is just, it's all on you. Life is what you actually make it.

If you just sit around, nothing is going to get accomplished, but if you go out there and put in the work and the hours, then things will come your way and end up on your plate, you'll have a good meal to eat.

Nechama: What's your favorite thing about your kids?

Loyalty: They're both just hilarious. And they don't bite their tongues. They're comedians, and it reminds me of me. They'll crack jokes and just rip on you, all day. We'll just start ripping, and some of their rips don't make sense but it's funny to them so it's funny to me. They'll tell you exactly what's on their mind, and don't care how you feel, but they will respect you if you give them the respect. They're both 9 – born 4 months apart. One lives in [another state] and the other one lives here. I love them, love my babies.

Nechama: What are some of your favorite activities or hobbies?

Loyalty: I like to chill with my little circle that I have - a group of guys, just a real small circle. Also I like to chill with family and my babies. I love to play video games sometimes – I like Madden Football the best - just to get my mind off of life, or whatever it is that I'm going through.

I like to go out here and there, go to little events, little functions. Stuff like that, little gatherings. I don't like to do crowds, but I will sacrifice if I'm with people.

Nechama: Tell us a little bit about your experience with the 5-Key Model project.

Loyalty: I remember them calling me to talk with a researcher and she introduced the program to me – a new program for inmates that are about to be released. And it was very interesting to me because it was, like, dang, this is definitely something I could do for me but also to help others who are incarcerated - who are coming home.

I knew I needed something to help me - I know that I have PTSD, and I know that I'm doing the best I can to stay sane and stay out of trouble and not go back. And I know that the more help I can get, the better chance of me staying home, and why not have more help? I feel as though 5-Key

continues to point me in the right direction. Because my mind was already transforming to be a better person - to be a better human being, a better father, a better brother, and on and on.



I've only been home 10 months, and I'm blessed to be in this program. And I really don't know where I would be at – I wouldn't say I would have went back to jail – but I don't know if I would have been this happy, this peaceful, this strategic in my planning and life of how to move in this world. I mean I already had patience in prison – you learn patience in waiting for that release date - but I have way more patience now. It's like 5-Key boosted and enhanced all of my abilities, and I'm thankful for that.

It's helpful to meet up every week, talk about everything – the good, the bad, the ugly. And just to have somebody there to actually genuinely care, to hear what's going on, that means a lot to us people that was in jail, that was incarcerated, that was confined behind barbed wires and not able to go nowhere. I feel like somebody really cares about me - somebody really gives a damn. To have that, to have somebody in your corner, that really means a lot because a lot of people don't have people in their corner, especially coming home from prison.

Nechama: Would you be willing to share what happened in your life that you ended up in prison?

Loyalty: I mean, my first case - that was an accident. I was 16 and I did 5 years for it. I was young and dumb and without guidance. I won't dig too deep into that one, but it was an accident. Nobody will never understand how I feel because I'm the one that looks in the mirror every day when I wake up. And nobody don't understand what I see and what I'm thinking and how I'm feeling - I just always walk around with a smile on my face, and make it look good. 'Fake it till you make it' - and all that.

My second time going to jail I definitely just didn't care. I was making a decent amount of money a month and was

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just drinking. Just going out weekends – then going to work Monday morning with a crazy hangover. I just didn't care. I had a car, was about to get my own apartment. I thought I was the man - I thought I was indestructible, invincible. 26 years old, thought I was the s***. I did my time for my problems, for my situations.

And, you know, I don't regret nothing. The way it happens is the way it's supposed to happen. Even if you had a chance to change it, because God gives you choices. But He already knows what you're going to do - so, I believe it's destined. Whatever happens was meant to happen. And I do thank God for setting me down, shaping me into the man that I am today. I try to live every day like it's my last. I try to put a smile on everybody's face.

But I see how going to prison made me a better person. Because it sat me down - it really got my mind together. I mean, prison is bad, but there's a lot of good in it too – and if you take those good things that can really help you to be a better individual, a better person.

And since I been home, I've touched a lot of hearts and a lot of souls. A lot of people have seen the change in me – and that really makes me happy. My purpose in life is to make sure that everybody that I encounter grows and be able to prosper in life, is to make them better because I know it can happen. Because it has happened to me, so I'm just paying it forward.

Nechama: If someone asked you, what's the best thing that I can do to help someone after prison, what would you tell them?



Loyalty: The best thing to do is have a good support system – a positive support system. You can't be around negativity or bad people. That's the biggest thing that a person needs when they come home. Even if nobody can help you financially - you've got to have somebody that's there to continue pushing you, motivating you.

When I came home, I got it done a little fast because I'm very goal oriented. I had a written list of things I needed to do - and I was just on it. I knew I needed this – needed that. I knew I needed to go get it, because I don't like asking nobody for nothing. I'm very, very independent. I like to have my own everything.

For me, it happened real quick – but for others, it might take some time. Like, my friend just came home last week, and I helped him get a job with me. And, I'm that person for him - I encourage him every day. He's so fresh home, he's not acclimated yet - he still doesn't believe he's home. He says it's like a dream and he just don't want to wake up. And I know that feeling. Martin Luther King Jr. said 'You don't have to see the whole staircase, just take the first step.' So, all we can do is take the first step.

Nechama: Thanks for sharing your information and sharing your life.

READ OUR INTERVIEW WITH NECHAMA

IJRD: Tell us a little bit about yourself.

Nechama: My name is Nechama, I'm a Licensed Clinical Social Worker, and I'm passionate about helping individuals who have experienced severe traumas. I've worked extensively in both the US and abroad providing trauma-related behavioral health services to survivors of human trafficking, domestic and sexual violence, and child abuse. I am also an active member of the Elsinore-Bennu Think Tank for Restorative Justice in Pittsburgh, where I (along with several colleagues) helped to organize and edit a book of writings by six 'lifers' – individuals currently serving out life sentences in Pennsylvania. The book, *Life Sentences: Writings from Inside an American Prison*, will release in September.

IJRD: What are you most proud of about this participant?

Nechama: Honestly, it's hard to pick just one thing that makes me the most proud. Loyalty has come so far in the time I have known him - he is so determined to continue to grow and change for the better. He is incredibly resilient and I am inspired by his dedication to both his own personal growth and to helping others regardless of what else is going on around him. He is compassionate, responsible, self-reflective, and highly motivated. Joining him on this journey and watching as he becomes more comfortable, happier, and successful has truly been a gift. He shows up ready to be challenged and challenging

me right back. Loyalty has grown tremendously without sacrificing the things that make him him – a deep sense of empathy, unending positivity, and a genuine spirit to create positive change in everything around him.

IJRD: What do you see as the most exciting things happening in reentry reform?

Nechama: I am excited to be on the front lines and watch as reentry reform takes place through my work with the 5-Key Model. Helping people heal from their traumas is very important to me and I have enjoyed watching individuals change as they leave prison and begin again.

Through my work with the *Life Sentences* book, I have gotten a glimpse into the minds and lives of individuals sentenced to spend the rest of their natural lives behind bars. However, recently, Pennsylvania has started to commute the sentences of 'juvenile lifers' - those who sentenced to life in prison before their 18th birthday. Faruq (Robert Wideman) was one of the first to come home. Faruq helped to create the Elsinore Bennu Think Tank to help others and give back to the world and his community. I am in awe of how many incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals share this altruistic spirit – even when they have no possibility of seeing the changes they create. I am excited to watch as their voices, expertise, and passion amplifies reform efforts and creates enormous and powerful waves across the country.



Taylor – a Reentry Program Specialist who delivers the 5-Key Model to people as they leave incarceration and come home - interviewed Adam, who recently completed a six-and-a-half-month prison sentence. Adam and Taylor have been working together since he released from incarceration 10 months ago. Taylor and Adam spoke in the public library.

TAYLOR: Okay, we're recording. Why don't you tell us a little bit about yourself, Adam?

Adam: Ugh. I hate this question. You know, I'd love to have something really profound to say but there's really not. I'm just like everybody else - I'm living life and doing the best I can. The best way to describe it is - I'm in a settling period right now, just kind of settling in.

I guess I try to stay positive. You hear the phrase - there are always two sides to the coin? It doesn't matter if there's a negative - there's a positive to it. You just have to be willing to look for it. I have... you know I don't want to say I have a unique outlook... I just have an outlook that not many people are willing to allow themselves to have. They fall into the traps of society and social media and the people they are around and with and you know - I do, but I don't. It's very hard for me to have a distinct profound opinion on something because I can see a multitude of sides. We could be having a discussion and you could make a good point and you know what, yeah that's a good point. But I can always find something to caveat. Some people like to win arguments and come out on top, but you know there

is no coming out on top - it's just different perspectives, different information.

People say that I don't have emotion because I think most of the things that people get emotional about aren't worth the energy of getting emotional or upset about. So I guess I do stay pretty constant - I stay pretty level. When I do have an emotional attachment to something - it shows because it's something I care about. Other than that, half the things in this world that people make a big deal about aren't worth it. It is what it is. Why stress about it? It's not worth it.

Taylor: What brings you the most joy in your life?

Adam: Well, that's subject to change because we're having a baby in five days. Or less. In general though, I guess it's whatever comes up. There is no 'most' for me - one thing doesn't bring me more joy than something else, it's just the joy and happiness looks different than something else. I love riding my ATV. I love hiking. I love hanging out with friends. I love practicing yoga... they all bring me happiness in different ways. No more or no less than anything else. They all kinda play their part.

Taylor: What are your favorite activities or hobbies?

Adam: I practice my yoga. That's the biggest thing but you know, it just depends. I like just being outside, and whatever just comes or whatever strikes me at the moment is kinda what I do. I read on occasions. I'm going to a concert next week.

I feel like I'm in a transitional period right now. I love to learn but what's the point of learning if you don't apply it and you don't learn how to adjust and how to change it. So I read and listen to podcasts, talk to people and do things. But everything that I've learned up until this point, I needed to learn. Now I'm working on transitioning to applying the information that I have and learning through experience which is very different than just attaining knowledge.

Taylor: Tell us a little bit about your family.

Adam: So as I said, my immediate family is going to increase by one this week. Right now at home, it's me and

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[my spouse] and her sister. I've also got my parents, my sister, my other son... but he's 18 and living his own life now. I try to do what I can to repair that relationship but he's his own person now, I can't force anything. I don't mean that as an excuse, but it's complicated.

I mean I guess I feel differently about family than a lot of people. Everybody's family. I mean, people I've never met, people who I meet at a store or a function. It's odd but you know I see everybody as being family in a way. A lot of what I hear is you know – 'family first' and 'take care of your family' and 'blood is thicker than water' and all this stuff. Obviously, I'm going to take care of my family - it's easy to take care of my family.

What's not easy is to take care of people who you don't think deserve it, or who don't have the opportunities or whatever. And I care for those people just as much as I care for my family. A lot of people don't agree with it, but I think it's the way things really should be.

Taylor: Tell us about your experience of the 5-Key Model.

Adam: Participating in it allows me to obtain information that may or may not help somebody else. So, so there's no point in not participating – otherwise, I'm not doing anything.. If you want to have an impact, then open yourself up to things.

Overall, I've had a good experience. Everybody I've talked to is real nice and real friendly. You're all very easy to talk to. It's really easy to do and it's just kinda you learn. Like for me, there was new information that I learned but mostly what it did was keep the information that I already knew in the forefront of my mind so that I could more readily apply it to life. And then when I did have blocks, you all were very willing to give me other options that I could apply in different ways.

Taylor: People often want to know why people wind up in prison. Would you be willing to share your story?

Adam: That question bothers me. It's not about sharing, but when I see that question come from somebody who hasn't

experienced it or wants to know 'how you put yourself there...' Like, how could you get emotional about something or just lose yourself. But it's easy to make a bad decision.



Think about it like this... Say you're at a bar with a couple of your friends, males and females. And some guy is being disrespectful to a female that you're with and you hit him in the mouth, he falls down, breaks his neck on a chair. You're going to prison - no choice about it. Maybe you reacted to that situation from a caring place - you didn't like to see your friend being disrespected or talked to or touched in a way that you knew bothered her. And while your reaction, 9 times out of 10 wouldn't have that consequence, it just so happens that one time, s*** fell the wrong way.

So, you know - for somebody to put themselves on a pedestal and say 'well I don't see how you could do that because I would never do that...' And maybe you wouldn't do that, but there is probably something else that you would get emotional about or react to in a manner that may have a consequence that you didn't foresee. It can happen to anybody.

I mean if you want to know my story... I got high and walked into the wrong house. I made a stupid mistake. I suffered the consequences for it. Did I think that walking into the wrong house and leaving as soon I realized I was in the wrong house was okay? No, but I thought maybe trespassing? But they hit me with a burglary charge... I mean it happens. It doesn't bother me what I did... I know what I did was wrong.

What bothers me is the stigma that's attached to it. It's very difficult for people to see any work that I put forth or anything that I do differently when I have a label that doesn't apply to me anymore.

Once you label me, you negate me. All the judgments and opinions and everything that go along with that label precedes who you are.

VOICES OF 5-KEY MODEL PARTICIPANTS

Taylor: If someone asked you what's the best thing I can do to help someone after prison, what would you tell them?

Adam: Here's the thing... I don't really know anything that anybody I've met doesn't already know. I think most Americans and most people in jail or prison have this mentality that the easy way is the right way. They usually know it's wrong but whatever it is - it's easy and quick and it gets them what they want and that's not necessarily the right way to do things.

Everybody is always looking for a shortcut or a hack to life. Quit trying to hack s***. Just quit trying. You gotta put forth the work, you gotta put forth the effort.

It's very difficult nowadays for people to spend the time, attention, and focus on something to get the desired results. We wanna find a shortcut to, you know, just get it done and just move on to the next thing. When you leave prison it may

take you a year or two to actually start making a halfway decent money – half of what you're worth... but it feels better. It feels better than going out there and getting that quick easy money - because that quick easy money don't mean anything to you.



I work for my money and when I wanna spend it on something - I spend it on what I want, things that I want to do. Things that are important. Unfortunately, the long way is the only way to do it. If you do it the short way you're cutting yourself short.

Taylor: That's good advice for so many different areas of life, just so you know.

Adam: I appreciate it.

| READ OUR INTERVIEW WITH TAYLOR

IJRD: Tell us a little bit about yourself.

Taylor: My name is Taylor and I've been working in mental health for over six years. Most recently, I worked with children as a school-based therapist in Kentucky. Before that though, I worked with incarcerated individuals in a jail in West Virginia. I really enjoyed working with people in jail and felt like I was able to give them a voice. It was in this role that I discovered how underserved the population of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals truly are.

IJRD: What are you most proud of about Adam?

Taylor: I am very proud of everything Adam has accomplished. He is consistent and so hard-working and he always stays positive. He has set several large goals for himself and I have watched him diligently work towards achieving them - even when he faces obstacles or challenges. Also, Adam is supportive of his family and has put in a lot of time to strengthen his relationships, working on himself in the process. He has grown so much in the

time I've known him and it's been a pleasure to watch him succeed.

IJRD: What do you see as the most exciting things happening in reentry reform?

Taylor: Honestly, I'm excited that we use the Research-to-Practice Feedback Loop to identify what's working and what's not so that we can help individuals leaving prison more effectively. It's just so important to take participant and practitioner input into consideration – especially as we move into the (next) three new states.

Also, I really like knowing that our work doesn't end with our participants – our policy team uses our data to improve state-level laws and regulations, helping to remove formal barriers for all justice-involved individuals. I also think it's exciting that reentry reform work – on our team and nationally - is starting to give people with a lived experience of incarceration a voice, because everyone deserves to be heard.

VOICES OF 5-KEY MODEL PARTICIPANTS



Michelle – a Reentry Program Specialist who delivers the 5-Key Model to people as they leave incarceration and come home - interviewed Tracey, who recently completed a 10 year prison sentence. Tracey has been actively engaged with the 5-Key Model project since he released from prison 7 months ago. Michelle and Tracey spoke in a coffee shop in their local community.

Michelle: Tell us a little bit about yourself, Tracey.

Tracey: I'm 28 years old. I'm from Florida. Currently, I stay with my mother and I work at [car detailing business] which is somewhat full-time, depending on the weather. And... as of right now, I'm just living life.

Michelle: What brings you the most joy in life?

Tracey: Having another opportunity in society. After being in 'college' - hint hint. [whispering into the recorder] College is code for prison. After 10 years inside, I'm excited at just actually having an opportunity at life again. Or society. Well, I'm not going to say life – my joy is having an opportunity at society again.

Michelle: What do you want people to know about you?

Tracey: Don't judge the cover of the book and try to get to know me first. I may look a little rough sometimes but... Don't judge the cover of the book, try to get to know me first, that's all I wanna say.

Michelle: What are your favorite activities and hobbies?

Tracey: Oh man. Driving. Working out. I love music. I'm part of a car club and we have a lot of functions and we do a lot of things together but one of the most relaxing, most favorite things that I like doing is working out.

Michelle: Tell us a little bit about your family.

Tracey: Actually, I find that I'm helpful for my mother because sometimes I tend to overthink and she needs that. Not always or all the time - but me and my mother have a well put together relationship. I wanna say it's good for me being there at home after doing so much time. She actually feels like 'okay, I can get part of my mind back' now that one of her children are not in college [prison] any more. My brother is currently doing 10 years as well, but he's almost done. He'll be home in 2021 or 2022...

My folks haven't been together for a long time and my died while I was still inside. Two years ago now. Beginning of 2017.

I also have a small group of guys that I was in college [prison] with and a lot of them have been successful re-entries back into society. They're my other family. People love me.

Michelle: I know they do - I see it. Tell us about your experience with the 5-Key Model?

Tracey: Well, in my last 90 days, I had got a call-out for the 5-Key program. Went to the sit down with this researcher and I talked to her for an hour and she asked me would I be interested in actually doing this on the outside? I said, 'Yeah, of course.' I'll do it if it has anything to do with helping individuals to become better or more successful re-entries into society. Because I have family members that are going to be coming home right after me and what a better program that I can give them too, an up-and-up to help them.

I like that you're direct, Michelle. Big shout out to you for that. What a better way to have somebody who is direct with you... because if you are - I'm not saying I'm indecisive, but I have this thing where I think so much that

VOICES OF 5-KEY MODEL PARTICIPANTS

I come up with so many choices to make when it's really all so simple. But you're so direct and it's the fine line and you go by it. Point blank, plain and simple, there it is, right there in your face. That's what I like about you.

In general, though, my experience with the 5-Key program has been 'granduous.' Like just 'granduous.' [Laughs] It's allowed me to reflect on where I have come from and where I'm going – sitting down and thinking things over, strategically. I'm learning not to be pessimistic but optimistic about what's going on in the last 7 months. The 5 Keys has been not only a bridge for me to society but it also has given me a new outlook on towards life.

Michelle: People often want to know why people wind up in college [prison]. Can you or would you be willing to share some of that story with us?

Tracey: My older cousin and I both took a path that would one day lead to destruction. For us both it was prison. But we could've been dead. Some guys in my neighborhood would show us what they were doing and we would watch. I learned what to do and what not to do - how to get caught and how not to get caught. The mistakes they made - I knew not to make those same mistakes.

But, one day... Well, I was a fresh 18-year old and we decided to get together and, you know - chaos happened. And when chaos happens or you deliberately do something, you got to pay the consequences. You know, everything has a consequence or repercussion. But you know what, I wouldn't take it back, not one bit... 'Cause if it wasn't for that situation or the outcome of that situation - actually doing time, and being subjected to the things that I had

to condone in or be part of or be submissive to the system – well, I wouldn't have ever learned the things that I know now. I have studied some things that you would have to go to college to learn - and I mean real college this time. But there's some things that I have learned while I was in the Florida penile system and it helped me out a lot in today's society. Like psychology and building people skills. It's helped.



Michelle: So if someone asked you what the best thing I can do to help someone after college [prison] what would you tell them?

Tracey: Just listen and give them an avenue to go down. Give them a path and a direction 'cause here it is we have been subjected to rules and regulations and how to walk, how fast to go, how to talk, can't talk this loud, can't be this loud, you gotta be in this part of the building, you can't be over there. You don't follow the rules and regulations - you'll be subject to penalty.

Even with this 5-Key program, there's things that I can do and things I can't do. I can't come up here smoking and drinking, being rude. These are unspoken rules but they are rules.

Michelle: Thank you, we are so very proud of you.

| READ OUR INTERVIEW WITH MICHELLE

IJRD: Tell us a little bit about yourself.

Michelle: My name is Michelle and I have been a Licensed Clinical Social Worker for over nine years. For most of this time, I have worked with individuals diagnosed with mental health and substance use disorders as they leave prisons and jails. I have always seen social work as an avenue to challenge and end the oppression that exists in society. I sincerely believe that every human being has inherent worth and dignity. Too often, we allow labels or zip codes to impact how we see individuals. I feel that our communities need to be more responsive to the complex needs of each individual and develop compassionate and effective responses to mental health, addiction, trauma, and poverty to understand how these issues intersect with race and gender.

IJRD: What are you most proud of about Tracey?

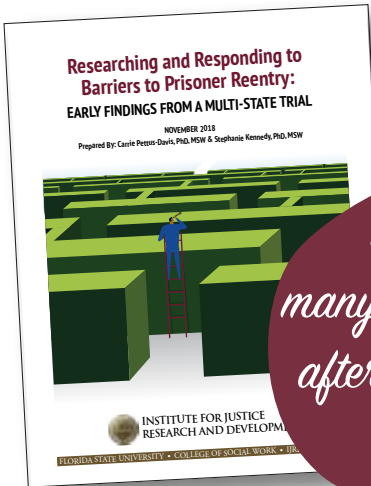
Michelle: I am proud of Tracey for so many reasons. I am proud of the consistency and self-discipline that he demonstrates week after week. He goes to work, helps at home, participates in hobbies and clubs, and has started dating. He consistently takes every opportunity or piece of feedback offered and uses them to actively create a path to the future he wants. Tracey takes his goals seriously, aligns his time with his goals, and is always looking for ways to grow and improve. Watching him build his life over the past year has truly been an honor.

IJRD: What do you see as the most exciting things happening in reentry reform?

Michelle: I am so excited that the 5-Key Model was designed by listening to formerly incarcerated individuals and represents a compassionate and empathetic response. I am proud to be on a dedicated and passionate team who listen to incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals with empathy, helping them succeed after release from incarceration and stay at home with their families where they belong.

I think what is really exciting is that we are beginning to use the voices of those with a lived experience of criminal justice system involvement. Like all complex social issues, there is no magic bullet or simple solution. But at IJRD, we have begun to truly create a cohesive community by hiring those who survived incarceration and using their expertise to shape our services and policies. Oftentimes, people with educational credentials or professional experience identify solutions without ever consulting the individuals who those solutions will directly impact. It is exciting to see the reentry reform movement seek out opportunities to include those who know and understand incarceration and reentry through their own experiences with it.

KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM OUR FIRST THREE REPORTS



Participants face many barriers to success after they release from incarceration.

RESEARCHING AND RESPONDING TO BARRIERS TO PRISONER REENTRY

Our [first report](#) was released only a few months after the study started. In this report, we detailed the internal and external barriers to reentry that study participants faced as they transitioned from prison to our communities. Participants' experiences clustered into internal barriers such as: experiences with employment, experiences of trauma, the impact of mental health and substance use disorders, and having limited opportunities for social connection. These internal barriers affected how our participants moved through their world and interacted with the 5-Key Model.

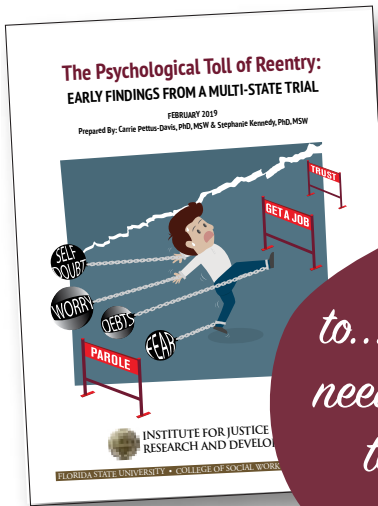
Key takeaways include:

- Employment is a primary focus for many individuals leaving incarceration - shortly after release, many participants were working multiple jobs and long hours.
 - Participants were often employed in low-wage physical labor jobs which limited their opportunities for financial self-sufficiency.
 - The desire for work and the necessity of employment created multiple obstacles when participants also needed to meet post-release supervision obligations or access therapeutic supports.

- 96% of study participants reported having experienced at least one traumatic event.
 - 60% of study participants had a close friend or family murdered and more than 70% witnessed someone being seriously injured or killed.
 - Nearly 45% have been attacked by someone using a gun, knife, or other weapon.
 - More than half of the participants have been robbed by someone using force or the threat of force.
 - Participants also described the incarceration experience as a form of trauma.
- Participants with mental health issues and substance use disorders were in particular need of support.
 - Participants are often highly motivated to maintain sobriety and connect with 5-Key practitioners for validation and support.
 - 5-Key practitioners are available to all participants throughout the day and are willing and able to immediately intervene with any individual on the verge of mental health or substance use crises.
- Participants often have limited opportunity for social connection during incarceration.
 - After release they must rebuild trust and re-learn how to connect.
 - Despite seemingly insurmountable obstacles, participants sought out ways to connect with 5-Key Model practitioners, their family, friends, employers, community, and faith.

External barriers to success included:

- Housing instability
- Lack of consistent access to transportation
- Lack of consistent access to a home phone or cell phone
- Lack of consistent access to a computer or the internet



The inability to...get basic human needs met...can lead to desperation to survive.

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL TOLL OF REENTRY

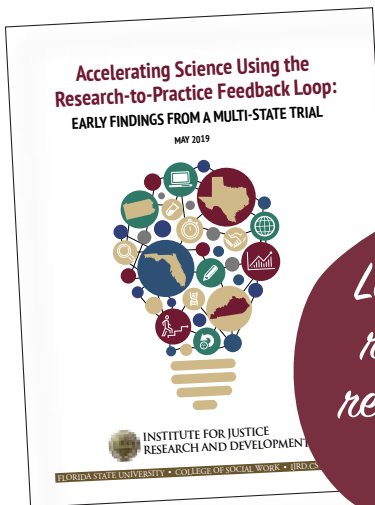
In the [second quarterly report](#), we explored the post-release experiences of our study participants in the comparison group – those who are not receiving the 5-Key Model. Using study participants' own reflections, we described the psychological toll that reentry takes on many individuals, underscoring their struggles to adapt to life after incarceration, to adjust to the slow pace of post-release stabilization, and to manage their worries and anxieties about their lives during the reentry period. We also examined how leaving incarceration affects not just study participants, but their families as well, who rarely receive any formal support as they welcome their loved one back home. Finally, we described the reentry service landscape that exists in the absence of the 5-Key Model and how men, in particular, struggle with the reality that they need help while wanting desperately to remain independent.

Key takeaways include:

Individuals leaving incarceration must psychologically transition from the prison setting back home. However, this transition is also experienced by their families and communities.

- Men and women are forever changed by the lasting effects of the incarceration experience.

- Prison life often alters how a person responds to other people, stressors, or life events.
 - Leaving prison requires individuals to make decisions and trust their choices, which may be overwhelmingly uncomfortable and difficult for them.
- The inability to rebuild a life and get basic human needs of food and shelter met by limiting employment and housing can lead to desperation to survive.
- Participants who receive tangible and/or emotional support from family experience reentry differently than participants whose families were not able to help or who were not active in their lives.
 - Those without strong family connections tended to be highly isolated and were frequently homeless.
- For some formerly incarcerated men, accessing services and needing help was experienced as a marker of failure as an independent and strong man. Other men who were desperate enough to seek out services needed for survival came up empty-handed and felt deceived.
- In the examination of the reentry experience in our 4 study states, four realities emerged:
 1. Recidivism has historically been blamed on the failure of individuals, yet recidivism is the result of a combination of systemic barriers and failures and the decisions of system actors as well as individual behavior on behalf of those who have gone to prison.
 2. Communities are not adequately holding themselves accountable for helping individuals succeed after prison.
 3. Unpredictable release dates often compounds the already existing challenges of reentry.
 4. Family support in reentry is largely invisible although reentry is typically a family experience - more attention is needed in this area.



The Feedback Loop enables us to rapidly translate research into policy and practice.

ACCELERATING SCIENCE USING THE RESEARCH-TO-PRACTICE FEEDBACK LOOP

In the [third quarterly report](#), we focused on the process of conducting a randomized controlled trial of a complex, multifaceted reentry intervention across 12 counties in four states and how we use a rapid translation Feedback Loop process to inform the research, policy, and practice. We described the Feedback Loop and detailed how the Feedback Loop has been used to collect data from practitioners, participants, and our research team to improve the implementation and impact of the 5-Key Model.

- At IJRD, we use a Research-to-Practice Feedback Loop to adapt our processes, release results, and implement policy and practice changes in real-time – shrinking the implementation gap.
- The Research-to-Practice Feedback Loop begins with an evidence-driven intervention like the 5-Key Model.

- Data are systematically collected and analyzed in an ongoing fashion to identify trends, patterns, and potential areas that require adaptation.
- Data are drawn from the experiences of practitioners and participants as well as from statistical analyses.
- The goal of the Feedback Loop is to refine services or programs, improve service effectiveness, and speed the rapid translation of research findings into policy and practice.
- Current issues to which the Feedback Loop has been applied include:
 - Adapting 5-Key Model content to be individualized and adaptive from day one.
 - Increasing the use of technology to build trust and rapport between practitioners and participants and overcome logistical barriers.
 - Moving away from reliance on brick-and-mortar office space and delivering the 5-Key Model in communities, homes, and jobsites.
 - Increasing the use of group-based sessions with participants.
 - Changing the staffing model to harness the passion of new Master's level social workers through a full-time, paid Post-Master's Fellowship. An inaugural class of 16 Post-Master's Fellows began with IJRD in June 2019. Fellows will help with Phase 2 of the 5-Key Model project.

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We extend our deepest gratitude to our research team and collaborators who work diligently every day to improve the lives of individuals and families impacted by criminal justice system involvement in order to promote the safety and well-being of our communities across our nation.

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