FACILITATING PATHWAYS TO POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION FOR JUSTICE INVOLVED INDIVIDUALS

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ABSTRACT

This phenomenological study examined ways in which a coordinated and proactive network of professionals could support justice involved individuals in their postsecondary educational pursuits. A critical qualitative methodology was applied to explore context and opportunities for services to be used across organizations, governmental agencies and two- and four-year colleges within the United States who are working with a growing justice involved population. Nine cross-sector professionals were interviewed, using a cross-sectional design to answer two research questions. Findings were consistent with research to show that a network of professionals could help justice involved individuals to better access and attain postsecondary education through intentional and transparent support services. The following thematic priorities emerged as ways this network could be impactful: 1.) creating a pathway of communication and connection, 2.) addressing sustainable basic needs 3.) coordinated community partnerships. 4.) holistic supports that facilitate access to real and tangible resources; and remembering that 5.) background and family dynamics matter. Participants voiced that while services are available for justice involved individuals, there is a lack of uniformity and transparency making access to these resources difficult. Findings also showed a lack of holistic services which considered the totality of the justice involved individuals' experiences inclusive of their familial, systemic, traumatic experiences which governs their motivation, trust, confidence and prioritization.

Keywords: justice-involved, coordinated partnerships, cross-sector professionals. Coordinated and proactive network, postsecondary education

DEDICATION

The pursuit of this higher degree and commitment of time to this dissertation, was not only a means of self-elevation but to give voice to the marginalized and justice impacted individuals. I hope through this work, professionals will use their power to help others inclusive of their families and the advocates who seek to empower and uplift those who have been wronged limited or underdeveloped due to issues within our educational and criminal justice systems.

Words cannot express my deepest gratitude to my family, who sacrificed so much to support me in this doctoral and associated experiential pursuits. May this accomplishment be testament to my parents' everlasting love and inspiration and serve as a motivating force for my children Irving, Falyn and Sydney.

God, thank you for using me as a vehicle for change and impact.

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James Baldwin once said “Not everything that is faced can be changed but nothing can be changed until it is faced.” It is with that in mind that my dissertation committee (Dr. Robert Seal. Dr. Danielle Wallace, Dr. Anthony Driggers and Dr. Charley Flint) and I worked tirelessly on this dissertation. This work seeks to encourage cross-sector professionals and networks to create pathways for *everyone, including justice involved individuals,* to gain access to and succeed in their postsecondary educational pursuits.

I am grateful to all the mentors, supporters, classmates, work colleagues and cheerleading friends who uplifted me, kept me focused, held countless study breaks and just completely made this degree and written work possible. A million thanks can’t even express how much I appreciate you all. I must also acknowledge the American Association for Community Colleges and American Association for Colleges and Universities for providing me with a platform to present and engage in dialogue with incredible colleagues across the country.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Education has been known to be a lever that has the power to move and influence people within societies. It has been noted as one of the most powerful tools in creating positive changes in the world and fortifying individuals, by helping them rise above barriers and meet any tests (*"Education Means Emancipation" | Whitehouse.Gov,* 2010). Knowledge gained through education, can empower people through skills and opportunities that improve their lives and others within their communities (*"Education Means Emancipation" | Whitehouse.Gov*, 2010). Education has also proven essential in promoting economic growth, reduction of poverty, promotion of human rights and fostering social cohesion (OECD, 2012). It follows that prioritization of education is essential to creating equal access to high-quality education, regardless of an individuals' backgrounds and circumstances; benefiting both the individuals and society as a whole (OECD, 2012).

Research has also shown that schools and the failure to educate can be a prime factor that contributes to high rates of incarceration. Children from minority families particularly those from low-income neighborhoods are overrepresented in special education and detention centers and because of the lack of supports, those children make their way through the school-to prison pipeline with status offenses such as truancy and running away (Tulman & Weck, 2010). The failures of the educational systems clearly contribute to the increased numbers of youth being incarcerated (Tulman & Weck, 2010). 80% of adolescents who are imprisoned are eventually rearrested within 3 years of being discharged (Seigle et al., 2014). Some argue that the education system and criminal justice system act in concert, within the United States, often contributing to the chaos that surrounds the African American population in our society (Smith, 2009).

Nearly 30 percent of the almost 2 million incarcerated adults were arrested as juveniles, and 84 percent reported involvement with substances (*Reclaiming Futures Initiative: Improving Substance Abuse Interventions for Justice-Involved Youth | Office of Justice Programs*, 2006). The grim reality is that in this day and age, the United States holds over 2.2 million people in state and federal prisons, approximately 700,000 of which will seek to re-enter society each year (Halkovic & Greene, 2015). The typical average age of judicially involved individuals overlaps with the average age of traditional college undergraduate students, 15-25, (College Enrollment Statistics: Total + by Demographic, 2019). To make matters worse, the impact of this level of incarceration and judicial involvement is largely concentrated within particular communities, lower socio-economic statuses, and racial groups (Kaeble, 2018).

Despite these trials and tribulations throughout their life and educational journey, a 2014 survey, by the National Center for Education Statistics, set forth that 70 percent of respondents in a sample of people incarcerated in state, federal, and private prisons expressed a desire to pursue an academic program (Rampey et al. 2016). Unfortunately, only 9 percent of those respondents were, able to earn postsecondary certificates or degrees (Rampey et al. 2016). Another study tracked 1,291 young men, released on parole from the Michigan Department of Corrections in 2003 (Harding & Harris 2020). 28 percent of those men enrolled in postsecondary education by 2014 and only approximately 4 percent of those who enrolled, eventually earned a degree (Harding & Harris 2020). These studies illustrate just how much justice-involved individuals understand the value of higher education, however, so few are able to realize their goals of obtaining these postsecondary credentials (Harding & Harris 2020). The end result is that justice involved individuals are left without access to post-secondary education and find themselves ill-equipped to engage in a competitive, skilled labor market and change the

trajectory of their lives (Harding & Harris 2020). Educated individuals have opportunities to enter into the job market; however, a large segment of the population, those who are justice involved, are excluded from postsecondary education attainment, which may ultimately have a negative impact on workforce, industry and societal needs (Kaeble, 2018).

Research has also demonstrated that justice involved individuals who seek to pursue postsecondary education options, experience a number of barriers to higher education which seem systemic in nature and range in issues such as limited funding sources, lack of support services, biases within the application process, minimal housing options, lack of transitional services and stigma (Halkovic & Greene, 2015). Alternatively, the benefits of facilitating educational opportunities for formerly incarcerated individuals are great and can lead to greater civic engagement, social networks of support, economic opportunity and increased social mobility for justice involved individuals (Halkovic & Greene, 2015). Despite the ability for postsecondary education to transform lives, the systems as they currently exist, may lessen the opportunities for students with former criminal or justice involvement to overcome cultural and structural barriers (Evans et al., 2019). The inability to overcome these obstacles, often precludes or discourages these students from transformational opportunities that which post-secondary education may afford (Halkovic & Greene, 2015).

Problem Statement

While the United States accounts for less than 5 percent of the world's population, its incarceration rates are among the highest in the world, accounting for almost 20% of the world's incarcerated people (National Research Council, 2014). Additionally, people of color experience the brunt of the corrosive practices of the educational (Quereshi & Okonofua, 2018) and criminal justice system and have endured historic and systemic economic injustice (Eisen et al.,

2016). Their communities are over policed, over prosecuted, over incarcerated and underemployed (Eisen et al., 2016). Justice involved individuals have aspirations in life, yet they are in cells of prison or poverty (Eisen et al., 2016). Breaking the cycle of incarceration involves a multifaceted approach, including addressing the root causes of criminal behavior, providing support and resources to those who have been involved in the criminal justice system, and promoting alternatives to incarceration (Cristobal & Raza, 2023). Research has begun focusing on the promotion of successful reentry and reducing recidivism, but it examines it from the perspective of the barriers rather than the insight administrators may provide who work with judicially involved individuals to facilitate their educational pursuits (Browning & Miller, 2018).

In recent years, articles have highlighted a civic engagement model of reentry practice that lends support to this study and can inform the community of professionals that seek to facilitate postsecondary education for the justice involved (Bazemore & Stinchcomb, 2004). The civic engagement model of reentry is grounded in identity transformation, life course and social disorganization/social capital perspectives which focuses on communities, its entities and its membership in the reintegration process (Bazemore & Stinchcomb, 2004). Bazemore and Stinchcomb (2004) illustrated that justice involved individuals can strengthen communities and contribute to the common good through restorative practices (Bazemore & Stinchcomb, 2004). The research however highlights informal social support rather than system-based influences of reentry (Bazemore & Stinchcomb, 2004).

Post-secondary educational systems may play a critical role in facilitating and supporting justice involved individuals academically and personally, by tying them to resources that help them overcome barriers to success and gain access to higher education opportunities (Delaney et al., 2019). Academic and social resources may include tutoring, mentoring, counseling and

mental health services while seeking to create an accessible and inclusive campus environment (Delaney et al., 2019). Financial Services may also include allocation of aid to help cover costs of tuition, textbooks and housing expenses (Delaney et al., 2019). Post-secondary options may also include reentry services that focus on job training and placement. Advocacy and legal resources may also prove helpful in supporting students' rights and navigation of legal challenges that may arise while enrolled at the college (Delaney et al., 2019).

Research Questions

The following research questions will help guide this study:

RQ1. How may systems (organizations, colleges and agencies) align formally, to facilitate postsecondary education for justice involved individuals?

RQ2. What formal supports are needed by justice involved students, once enrolled in postsecondary programs, to facilitate momentum towards degree or certificate attainment?

Significance of the Study

This study is significant to inform educators, policymakers, social agencies and the public about factors that contribute to the systemic barriers and injustices experienced by judicially involved individuals, especially people of color. Judicially involved individuals are significantly and disproportionately affected by stigma, policies, complicated processes, and access to resources, which can be minimized by collaborative efforts from cross-sector professionals. Facilitating postsecondary education attainment for judicially involved individuals can serve as a powerful tool for community reintegration, rehabilitation, the reduction of recidivism, the promotion of economic stability, and will help to address educational inequities. By investing in

the educational attainment for judicially involved individuals, society is in essence investing in their future and contributing to a more just and inclusive society.

Definition of Terms

The United States Department of Education, in the *Beyond the Box* report (U.S. DOE, 2016) defines *judicially or justice involved individuals* as anyone involved in the criminal justice system (U.S. DOE, 2016). The term is designed to encompass a range of experiences for people that have a history of arrests, juvenile crimes, misdemeanors, or felony convictions (U.S. DOE, 2016). The term justice involved also includes people who have been charged, convicted or whom are currently or formerly incarcerated (U.S. DOE, 2016). However, all individuals who have been convicted of a felony or other crimes have not necessarily been incarcerated and therefore there is a distinction between the term justice-involved and formerly incarcerated individuals (Custer, 2016).

Judicial involvement is a subset of the justice involved term and focuses mainly on individuals who are engaged in legal proceedings and are involved in judicial processes such as: summons to appear in court, involved in lawsuits, defendants or plaintiffs in criminal cases or individuals involved in administrative or regulatory proceedings (*Judicial Involvement Definition | Law Insider*, n.d.). Both terms; justice and judicially involved acknowledges that individuals who have experienced the criminal justice system are more than just their past actions or convictions and instead shifts the perspective towards these individuals by showing their potential to become productive members of society, if given adequate support and opportunities (Kaeble, 2018). This terminology also recognizes the need for rehabilitation and reintegration into society, post justice involvement (Kaeble, 2018).

Typically, judicial involvement starts as juvenile delinquency which is defined as a violation of a law, committed by a person prior to their eighteenth birthday *("Juvenile" Defined | JM | Department of Justice*, 2015). Juvenile delinquency is introduced in this study due to the prevalence of the age-crime curve which peaks during the teenage years between the ages of 15 and 19.

Formerly incarcerated typically refers to individuals who were imprisoned in a jail, prison, or detention center for a predetermined amount of time and have since been released. Formerly incarcerated individuals may include individuals on supervised or conditional release, such as parolees (Cox, 2020).

System-impacted is a broad term that refers to incarcerated and formerly individuals and extends to others who are economically, familial or legally impacted in a negative way by incarceration of self or a close relative. System-impacted may also include individuals who have been arrested and/or convicted of a crime without incarceration (Abeyta et al., 2021).

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

In 2014, the American government opined that Americans must inspire, empower and try to reach and support individuals, regardless of their backgrounds, to make sure that the United States remains a place where hard work results in a chance to get ahead and change their social mobility (White House Report, 2014). To date, some argue that this proclamation is a promise that is unfulfillable (Mijs, 2016). Educators have attempted to understand history, traditions and experiences of individuals who have been marginalized and excluded from accessing and succeeding within postsecondary educational systems (Landreman, 2013). However, educators noticed limitations in the framing of early multicultural efforts around displacing stereotypes (Landreman, 2013). The lack of examination into the larger structural issues gave educators the illusion that they were doing something constructive when in fact the reverse held true, little transformative education was taking place (Landreman, 2013).

A study by Runell (2017) highlighted how educational pathways and the impact of higher education may serve as a hook for change, and serve as a transformative experience that aids formerly incarcerated individuals with the process of desistance, or the cessation of criminal activity. In fact, the United States Justice Department, highlighted the connection between recidivism and the growing body of research on criminal desistance (Solomon & Scherer, 2021). Desistance is known as the process by which a person arrives at a state of nonoffending (*Desistance from Crime: Implications for Research, Policy, and Practice | National Institute of Justice*, 2021). According to Runell (2017), higher education can play an important role in the desistance process of justice involved individuals, especially when offering access to dense support networks that help to facilitate change through engagement in prosocial routine activities.

Theoretical Frameworks

There are several theoretical frameworks that may help shape our understanding of the supports needed for post-secondary educational pursuits of justice-involved individuals. One such framework is the Social Learning Theory which suggests that individuals learn behaviors and attitudes from the social environment around them (Astray-Caneda et al., 2013). This theory can be applied to the pursuit of post-secondary education among justice-involved individuals by examining the role of social support, positive role models, and exposure to educational opportunities in promoting educational attainment and reducing recidivism (Astray-Caneda et al., 2013).

The Human Capital Theory also informs this work by positing that education is a form of investment that can lead to greater economic and social opportunities, job creation, wages and increased productivity (Mokline, 2018). This theory can be applied to justice-involved individuals by exploring the relationship between educational attainment, employment, and reduced involvement in the criminal justice system (Mokline, 2018).

The Social Capital Theory, is another framework which focuses on the value of social networks, social cohesion and relationships in promoting individual well-being and success (Almedom, 2005). This theory helps us examine the role of community-based organizations, peer networks, and other social supports in promoting educational attainment and reducing recidivism (Almedom, 2005). The Social Capital theory illustrates the importance of more than one person helping justice involved individuals to utilize resources that they would not know about accessing if acting independently (Chambers & Guthrie, 2015).

The researcher finds that the Critical Race Theory (CRT), is most applicable to this study, since it examines the role of race and racism in shaping social power structures and inequalities

so to guide critical analysis of issues that may inform action strategies (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). CRT also keeps our focus on the lack of acknowledgement as it relates to the experiences of people of color (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). CRT sets forth that race is socially constructed; racial differences are created and supported by society and racism is "complex, subtle, and flexible" in that it reveals itself depending on the context and changing stereotypes of people who are minorities (Gillborn, 2015, p. 278). According to the CRT framework, structural racism must be understood within a broader social, economic, and historical context (Matsuda et al., 1993).

One of the tenets of CRT is intersectionality which involves the examination of overlapping and intersecting social identities as they are associated with structural and systemic oppression and discrimination (Crenshaw, 1991). Critical reflection using intersectionality emphasizes the role that social structures such as gender, class, race, marginalization and oppression has on some groups in society (Mattsson, 2013). The "matrix of domination," is a term that describes the broader social organization within which intersecting oppression exists particularly as it relates to privilege, oppression and race which helps society to better understand how systems of domination operate (Gilborn, 2015). According to Gillborn (2015), a core advocacy component may help to generate coalitions between differing groups which if they work together, may help to resist and change the status quo.

CRT is instrumental when examining the disproportionate impact the criminal justice system has had on people of color and helps to understand the ways in which education is a tool for challenging systemic inequalities and promoting social justice (Bazemore & Stinchcomb, 2004). CRT is in line with the goals of social justice, academics, and activists in seeking to dismantle the inequalities in education and working through "color blindness" that exists within

those systems (Yang, et al., 2018). Some may argue that there are efforts to preserve the status quo of systematic racism (Castro et al., 2019) and some may point to the racist practices that have been incorporated into public education, policing and incarceration in the United States (Alexander, 2010). Alexander (2010) for example, set forth that the criminal justice system is no longer primarily concerned with the prevention and punishment of crime, but instead on the management and control of the dispossessed. Instead of relying on race, society uses the criminal justice system to label people of color 'criminals' and then engages in all the practices we supposedly left behind (Alexander, 2010). The author goes on to note that the fate of millions of people, particularly within the Black community, depends on the willingness of those who care about racial justice to re-examine their basic assumptions about the role of the criminal justice system in our society (Alexander, 2010).

These various theoretical frameworks help to understand the historical plight of systemic issues that change the trajectory of youth and shape the basis for judicial involvement. They help to illustrate the need for proactive, coordinated supports for judicially-involved individuals and provide a basis for advocacy to influence policy and practice in this area (Bazemore & Stinchcomb, 2004).

Adaptive and Collaborative Leadership Frameworks

Meaningful and sustainable systemic change can only occur through concerted, collaborative efforts on the part of all system professionals (Kania et al., 2011). Creating an environment of shared leadership and collective visioning facilitates a more open exchange of information, better relationships among system participants, and a stronger commitment to a common vision (Kania et al., 2011). When shared leadership occurs, people approach problems in collaborative ways, engage each other in defining the work to be done, and are able to

facilitate interaction and sustain action so that goals can be realized (Kania et al., 2011). Sharing leadership means being mutually responsible for the process of change (Scharmer, 2007). Sharing power means being mutually responsible for the effect of the change and establishes a framework for creating systemic change through improved awareness, insight and co-creation (Scharmer, 2007).

Leading change requires collaborative initiatives and organization to navigate through complex adaptive environments (Senge et al., 2015). Senge et al., (2015) discuss the application of system leadership as stepping across a threshold and the dissolution of whatever might limit those steps forward. One may argue that the leadership capability within the public and private sectors, who deal with judicially involved individuals, must also step across this threshold (Senge et al., 2015). Gaining a deeper understanding, defining, and developing design approaches towards effective collaboration may prove helpful in creating sustainable changes within the ecosystems within which the judicially involved and the professionals who seek to support them; live and operate (Senge et al., 2015).

Professionals who work with judicially involved individuals can engage in collaborative leadership as a way to build partnerships and foster collaboration between professionals across agencies, colleges and societal stakeholders (Innes & Booher, 2010). Leaders within this network may share their collective knowledge, resources, and best practices, that creates a collective approach to supporting post-secondary education for judicially involved individuals (Innes & Booher, 2010). By promoting open communication, trust, and teamwork, collaborative leaders can enhance and formalize the effectiveness of the network of professionals and the work they do with judicially involved individuals (Innes & Booher, 2010). These system leaders could

work together, as people working through the same problem with a similar population: by coming together, thinking more deeply about what's happening to judicially involved individuals and creating higher leverage changes through progressive cycles of action, reflections and learning over time (Senge et al., 2015).

As system leaders, cross-sector leaders would be able to focus on creating the conditions that can produce change and that can eventually cause the change to be self-sustaining (Senge et al., 2015). Innes and Booher (2010) articulated ways that collaborative decision-making could take place inclusive of scholars, practitioners, and professionals in diverse fields whom could all benefit from these synergies and promote public policy and administration benefits. Archer and Cameron (2013) also shows advocacy for the craft of collaborative leadership setting forth that it builds on many of the foundations that leaders have gleaned from their experiences. These approaches are also in-line with adaptive leadership frameworks which speaks to the creation of a network of professionals, whom work from a premise of growth mindset and seek to promote the belief that change is possible, with a greater sense of capacity to adapt and learn. This builds upon past approaches, requires new knowledge and skills, and seeks to disrupt inconsistencies with existing paradigms (Marzano et al., 2009).

Adaptive leadership requires numerous processes and practices that induce individuals or groups to do the adaptive work as well as sustain that work in order to make progress on addressing adaptive challenges (Northhouse, 2019). Northouse (2019) set forth the various processes and practices embedded in Heifetz's adaptive leadership ideas (Heifetz, 1994; Heifetz et al., 2009; Heifetz & Linsky, 2017) into six different approaches which include: getting on the balcony, identifying the adaptive challenges, regulating distress, maintaining disciplined attention, giving the work back to the people, and protecting the leadership voices from below.

The metaphor of a dance floor and balcony (Heifetz, 1994; Heifetz et al., 2009; Heifetz & Linsky, 2017). The dance floor is where action and interaction takes place, where individuals can only see what is going on in their immediate surroundings (Heifetz & Linsky, 2017). However, one can amass a broader perspective of the entire dance floor by moving to a balcony (Heifetz & Linsky, 2017). That vantage point affords the individuals a broader pattern of interaction, engagement, and behaviors. This approach can help the group to better understand the system dynamics and explore more appropriate solutions to the challenge (Heifetz et al., 2009).

Northouse (2019) indicated that once the dynamics and situation have been observed, the leaders must then analyze and diagnose the challenges through an iterative cycle of observations of systemic happenings, interpretations, identification of adaptive challenges, and designing interventions to address those adaptive challenges (Heifetz, 1994; Heifetz et al., 2009; Heifetz & Linsky, 2017). Within this process, leaders are encouraged to understand adaptive elements, making benign interpretations about what is going on within the system, then making conflictual interpretations, and then focusing on individual actions that identify underlying system dynamics (Heifetz & Linsky, 2017). Adaptive challenges require learning in order to accurately define and effectively address the issues, therefore this iterative process of observing, interpreting, and intervening serves to both support the learning process and enable stakeholders to experiment with a range of possible interventions that will promote positive change (Heifetz & Linsky, 2017).

Adaptive leaders would need to identify and regulate a productive level of disequilibrium by regulating distress and conflict to enable the group to do adaptive work (Heifetz, 1994; Heifetz et al., 2009; Heifetz & Linsky, 2017). The practitioners would need to name the factions

that are present that may disrupt their work, understand the values and loyalties each faction holds, and then help the group find ways to work productively across factions (Green & Fabris McBride, 2015; Heifetz et al., 2009). Professionals working with judicially involved individuals will require a multidimensional approach that encompasses an understanding of juvenile involvement stemming from youth and subsequent supports needed: inclusive of educational, reentry, transitional and social-emotional.

Juvenile Delinquency

An abundance of research demonstrates that victimized youth of abuse and/or neglect have an increased risk of adverse outcomes and delinquency compared to non-maltreated youth (Herz & Dierkhising, 2018; Herz et al., 2019; Stouthamer-Loeber et al., 2001). These experiences negatively impact life domains such as, family relationships, academic failure, issues with employment, crime victimization, and receipt of public assistance (Courtney et al., 2009). A terminology encapsulating the plight of these individuals is known as “crossover youth” which refers broadly to youth who have been victims of abuse and/or neglect, who engage in delinquency (Herz et al., 2010). Research suggests that crossover youth are more susceptible to deeper penetration and entrenchment into the juvenile justice system (Halemba et al., 2004).

African American youth are more likely to be crossover youth and are overrepresented in juvenile justice systems as well as child welfare systems (Hill, 2006; Snyder & Sickmund, 2006 Goodkind et al., 2013; Herz, 2012; Huang et al., 2012; Ryan & Testa, 2005). For example, a study in Los Angeles, noted that African American youth were 10% of the general population yet accounted for 37% of child protective services referrals, 28% of probation referrals, and 63% of crossover youth cases (Herz & Ryan, 2008). African American youth penetrate deeper into

systems often receiving probation, while their white counterparts have their cases dismissed for similar crimes (Ards et al., 2003; DeLone & DeLone, 2017; Needell et al., 2003; Ryan et al., 2007). Evidence also supports that there is an overrepresentation within the child welfare system where Black youth typically experience placements outside of their home as illustrated in a deep-end child welfare youth sample, which showed that African Americans comprised approximately two-thirds of those in out-of-home placements that were a year or more in length (Kolivoski et al., 2017).

Crossover youth later find themselves within the approximately 47,000 youth who are incarcerated in juvenile detention and correctional facilities (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2017) within the United States. 18,000 juveniles are introduced to the judicial system through detention centers each year, more than 5,000 of those juveniles are imprisoned for nonviolent or low-level offenses (Sistachs, 2018). These low-level offenses may include things like violating a curfew, running away or other status type violations (Sistachs, 2018). Minor offenses have historically kept some young people behind bars in emotionally harmful and stressful environments, for minimal offenses that have little to no risk of danger to society (Sistachs, 2018). Meanwhile, these offenses have devastating and lasting effects on the youth who are sometimes abruptly separated from their families, schools, and communities to await a trial or serve prison time even before they are adjudicated (Sistachs, 2018).

Youth of color have been more likely than white youths to be arrested and subsequently go deeper into the juvenile justice system (Puzzanchera & Hockenberry, 2013). Researchers have acknowledged that there are numerous factors at play with this complex social problem that extends beyond differential offending or differential treatment alone (National Research Council, 2013). National data shows that Black youths and other youths of color are more likely

than white youths to be arrested, referred to court, petitioned after referral (i.e., handled formally), and placed in an out-of-home facility after being adjudicated (Hockenberry & Puzzanchera, 2020). In 2019, compared to white youths, Black youths were 2.4 times more likely and American Indian youths were 1.5 times more likely to be arrested. Additionally, cases involving Black juveniles and Hispanic juveniles were more likely to result in out-of-home placements (32 percent each) than cases involving youth of all other races/ethnicities (27% of cases involving American Indian juveniles, 23% cases involving white juveniles and 20% of cases involving Asian juveniles) (Hockenberry & Puzzanchera, 2020). In 2019, the *Census of Juveniles in Residential Placement* showed a rate of 315 Black youths in custody per 100,000 in the population, compared with 72 white youths per 100,000—a ratio of approximately 4.4 to 1.0 (Sickmund et al., 2021).

Delinquency has historically been associated with failing schools, income disparities, familial poverty, socioeconomic status and racial disparities in economic opportunity (Puzzanchera et al., 2022). Children who grow up in impoverished circumstances have a higher risk of engagement with the juvenile justice system (Council, 2022). Additionally, children caught within the juvenile justice system face extra challenges in completing high school and obtaining employment, which can severely affect their economic prospects (Council, 2022). A representative from the Institute for Advancement of the American Legal System and Arizona Chief Justice Kathleen Quigley, indicated that the key measure of any legal system, is the way the justice system treats vulnerable youth (Council, 2022). The way we treat our vulnerable youth will directly affect the health of our communities, our states, and our nation (Council, 2022).

Studies have shown that many involved in the criminal or juvenile justice systems have themselves been victims, and interaction with the juvenile justice system may contribute to further trauma (Council, 2022). Adverse childhood experiences were also associated with a 35 percent increased risk of juveniles being involved in a serious or violent crime or chronically offending (Grant et al., 2020). Unmet mental health treatment further fuels the prison pipeline for juveniles (Cohall,2016). Justice-involved youth have substance use disorders twice as high as the general population (Cohall, 2016). The number of youth needing treatment which is estimated to be over 800,000, far exceeds available treatment slots (*Reclaiming Futures Initiative: Improving Substance Abuse Interventions for Justice-Involved Youth | Office of Justice Programs*, 2006).

School discipline is another way that children are funneled through the juvenile justice system (Grant et al., 2020). Students who have been suspended or expelled are approximately three times as likely to interact with the juvenile justice system within the next year (Grant et al., 2020). Research shows that higher suspension rates were closely correlated with higher dropout and delinquency rates, resulting in a tremendous economic cost for the suspended students (Marchbanks, 2015), as well as for society as a whole (Losen et.al., 2015). As a result, the large racial/ethnic disparities in suspensions will likely have an adverse and disparate impact on the academic achievement and life outcomes of millions of historically disadvantaged children (Losen et.al., 2015). Minority students seem to be targeted and are losing out on their education and students of color and disabilities are more likely to be funneled into the criminal justice system for behaviors that may warrant supportive interventions and/or a simple trip to the principal's office, instead of a criminal record (Love, 2009).

When given access to resources, education, positive opportunities a juvenile offenders trajectory may be influenced (Cavanagh, 2022). Youth involved in the juvenile justice system are often engaged in cross system services (Juvenile Justice Committee, 2020). It has been recommended that agencies adopt an integrated care model to execute interagency collaboration and partnerships with other youth and family serving organizations (Juvenile Justice Committee, 2020). This model would include various stakeholders like schools, child welfare agencies, mental health, medical and substance abuse services, and employment and training programs to help mitigate risk factors, prevent further delinquency and facilitate restoration efforts (Juvenile Justice Committee, 2020). If juvenile delinquent behaviors are not remediated and interventions are not in place to support justice involved youth they may engage in criminal behavior as adults (Cavanagh, 2022).

Historical Plight of Judicially Involved-Adults

Federal, state and city criminal justice facilities detained approximately 2.2 million adults by the end of 2015 which equated to 1 in every 200 U.S. residents that are justice involved (Carson & Anderson, 2016). As research highlights, there have been longstanding racist practices that are pervasive and negatively impact communities of color, particularly black men (Carson & Anderson, 2016). Black men are disproportionately affected by stricter penalties, more likely than Whites to be stopped by police, get arrested and convicted of crimes, from which they are typically later exonerated (Gross, 2016). In fact, Black Americans are incarcerated in state prisons 5 times the rate of white Americans (The Pew Charitable Trusts, 2023). On a national level, one in 81 Black adults in the Unites States is serving time in state prisons (The Pew Charitable Trusts, 2023). More than half of the prison population, in 12 states, are Black which includes New Jersey, Delaware and Maryland (The Pew Charitable Trusts,

2023). New Jersey is also one of seven states which maintain a Black/White disparity that is larger than 9:1 (Nellis, 2021).

Additionally, people of color were funneled into low wage vocations and employers were forbidden to offer black workers higher wages (Jeffers, 2019). Minoritized groups, particularly African American behavior was criminalized historically for regular, noncriminal activities which reopened them to modern day slavery, known as incarceration (Jeffers, 2019). This historical perspective is important framing to understand the need to reverse the inequities that exist within the judicial system, as a means of informing the work to support judicially involved individuals.

Many judicially involved individuals also face challenges and trauma from the systems and their experiences with the judicial processes (Steadman et. al., 2009). Research shows that judicially involved experience serious mental health disorders that are 3-6 times higher than the general population (Steadman et. al., 2009). Approximately 31% women and 15% men are affected by mental health issues (Steadman et. al., 2009). In addition to mental health issues, the Bureau of Justice Statistics conducted a study which found that half of individuals in state and federal prisons have a substance use disorder (Mumola & Karberg, 2004). Over 70 percent of those with mental illness had a co-occurring drug use disorder as well (James & Glaze, 2006).

Homelessness has also been a characteristic of judicially involved individuals, supported by a national study which found that 15% of those who were incarcerated had been homeless the year before their detention which is over 11 times more than the general U.S. adult population (Greenberg & Rosenheck, 2008). Of all those in prisons and jails, individuals with mental illness were twice as likely to have been homeless (James & Glaze, 2006). Moreover, 2 out of 5 people in prisons and jails lack a high school diploma or GED (Holzer et.al., 2003). As a result,

employment rates, earning potential and social mobility are low due to limited education, physical and mental health issues, the stigma of their justice involvement and having been removed from gaining marketable experiences in the workforce: all leading to greater challenges when they reintegrate into society (Holzer et.al., 2003). Justice involvement and criminal records are attached to a person permanently which may lead to legalized discrimination and collateral consequences that affect people long after they have served their sentences or been involved in the judicial system (Jacobs, 2015).

Re-Entry Services

Approximately two thirds of the 700,000 people released from prison each year are re-arrested, re-convicted, or re-incarcerated within 3 years from release. This high recidivism rate is affected by what is widely recognized as barriers to reentry such as employment limitations, lack of access to educational opportunities, financial legal obligations, criminological thinking patterns, gaps in mental and physical health care, social bonds, and spoiled identity (Petersilia, 2003, Travis, 2002, Visher & Travis, 2003, Mallik-Kane & Visher, 2008, Kilmer, 2016). Some researchers like Listwan et al., (2006) argue that a departure from reintegration practices like the "industrial parole" model combined with mass incarceration have resulted in a "reentry crisis" which now requires reform and an implementation of evidence-based practices and development of efficacious reentry programs.

In 2004, President Bush highlighted justice involved reentry as a major issue during his State of the Union Address, and subsequently allocated hundreds of millions of Second Chance dollars to be spent on the development of reentry programs in the United States (Petersilia, 2004). Many states have made efforts to lessen the negative impact on the justice involved through things like the Second Chance Act of New Jersey. The Second Chance Act for example

is a progressive bill established in the state of New Jersey and provides a process by which justice involved individuals may petition for a clean slate expungement, so they may fully participate within our society (NJ Legislature, 2019*)*. The bill was passed by Congress in 2008 and is an investment into strategies that seek to reduce recidivism, increase public safety and reduce costs of corrections (NJ Legislature, 2019). The bill authorizes up to $165 million in federal grants to local, state and tribal agencies and nonprofit organizations to fund programs and initiatives to pathway creation for the over 95 percent of justice involved individuals that were incarcerated in state prisons that will be released into their communities. Without these pathways and as research shows in over 40 states: more than 4 out of 10 of formerly incarcerated will be reincarcerated within 3 years (Pew Center on the States, 2011).

Reentry programs and community supervision have mixed success in their ability to significantly reduce recidivism or increase reintegration (Georgiou 2014; Hyatt & Barnes 2014). Reentry success is generally defined according to recidivism, however, other measures of success such as acquiring a GED and maintaining gainful employment are also indicators of successful reentry outcomes (Listwan et al. 2006). Judicially involved individuals need emotional support from service providers who seek to promote and build human capital (i.e., individual capacities) and reconstruction of self-identities and narratives, which contributes to desistance (Burnett & McNeill 2005). These findings underscore the importance of creating supportive environments within educational institutions and society at large to facilitate successful reintegration for this population.

Facilitation of Postsecondary Education Access and Attainment

To end mass incarceration and successful reintegration and support for judicially involved individuals, a mindset shift is needed that increases the focus on prevention and restoration and moves away from punishment (Nellis & Mauer, 2017). That's where post-secondary educational systems may be instrumental in shifting the current pipeline, away from prisons and into colleges and workforce readiness programs (Nellis & Mauer, 2017).

Post-Secondary Options

There is increased focus on providing pathways for justice involved youth, as evidenced by the Second Chance Pell and the FAFSA Simplification Act, which paves the way for incarcerated students to have access to Pell grants (Education, 2021). The type of post-secondary education that justice-involved individuals can pursue, will depend on their individual goals and circumstances, as well as the resources and support available to them (Hall, 2017). Some common types of post-secondary education that justice involved individuals pursue include:

1. Vocational or technical training: Vocational or technical training programs provide education and training in specific skills or trades, such as welding, automotive repair, or healthcare. These programs are often shorter and more focused than traditional academic programs and may be more accessible to justice-involved individuals who have limited time or resources (Hall, 2017).
2. Community college: Community colleges offer two-year associate degree programs, as well as certificate and vocational training programs. These programs may be more affordable and accessible to justice-involved individuals who are seeking to improve their skills and job prospects (Hall, 2017). Some research points to the role community

colleges play in the lives of JII (Ross, 2018). One study illustrates that community college education provides a second chance for formerly incarcerated individuals to pursue their educational goals and move towards successful reentry (Ross, 2018). While this study also highlights the importance of supportive relationships of faculty, staff and fellow students, it places emphasis on the need for more resources and programs to support JII such as academic and career counseling, peer support groups and mentorship programs (Ross, 2018). The study suggests that with greater proactive planning, community colleges can play a significant role in facilitating successful reentry and promote educational and career opportunities for JIIs (Ross, 2018).

3. Four-year colleges and universities: Justice-involved individuals may also pursue traditional four-year college and university programs, which offer bachelor's degrees in a variety of fields (Hall, 2017). These programs may be more competitive and require a higher level of academic achievement but can also provide more career opportunities and higher earning potential (Hall, 2017).
4. Online education: Online education has become an increasingly popular option for justice-involved individuals, as it can be more flexible and accessible than traditional in-person programs (Hall, 2017). Many colleges and universities offer online courses and degree programs, as well as free online educational resources such as Massive Open Online Courses (Hall, 2017).

Barriers Experienced by Judicially Involved

Collateral consequences affect justice involved individuals and those with criminal records who seek to pursue postsecondary education whom arguably are not part of the college completion agenda (Custer, 2016). In fact, it seems that higher education policymakers at the

federal, state, and institutional levels intentionally built barriers to hinder justice involved individuals' abilities to gain access and complete their education (Custer, 2016). These barriers whether ignored or hidden may be the key to scaffolding services to address the multi-faceted challenges faced by this potentially growing population of postsecondary education prospects (Custer, 2016).

While state and federal policy makers have tried to foster student enrollment and retention through federal and state policies relating to financial aid, developmental education, transfer and credit portability, outcomes-based funding and accountability systems; justice involved college students are not recognized in these efforts (Kelly & Schneider, 2012). Higher education policymakers at the federal, state, and institutional levels have not addressed barriers that hinder justice-involved students' abilities to pursue and complete postsecondary education (Custer, 2016). Some laws and systemic policies that target college students who have previous justice involvement seem incompatible with higher education's goals for improving access and completion (Custer, 2016). However, in spite of these opportunities for higher education to be transformative, students with justice-involved backgrounds may still experience sizeable obstacles due to systemic and structural barriers (Evans et al., 2019). College students who are justice involved, have a reduced chance of succeeding in education starting from high school and through to higher education.

Operational Barriers

Researchers have identified a number of challenges formerly incarcerated students face in higher education which typically start with discriminatory admission processes and background checks (Couloute, 2018). Many colleges ask questions about criminal history on admissions applications and seemingly consider criminal history when making admissions

decisions (Custer, 2016). Questions may seek information regarding felony convictions, misdemeanors, juvenile crimes, arrests, and pending cases (U.S. Department of Education, 2016a). Colleges are also requiring student workers to undergo criminal background checks, eliminating some justice involved students from the qualifying pool (Owen, 2014). A survey was conducted of 132 institutions which noted that 26% required criminal background checks for student employees, 87% for staff, and 40% for faculty (Hughes et al., 2013). Interestingly colleges do not require background checks for collegiate athlete eligibility (Custer, 2016). The National Collegiate Athletic Association has no eligibility requirements related to justice involvement either (Custer, 2016) which raises an interesting argument of risk vs benefit to the colleges. Also interesting, is that research finds no evidence to show that these admissions policies improve campus safety, yet colleges still ask these questions deterring many justice involved applicants from completing applications for fear that stigma may attach if they disclose their criminal history (Rosenthal et al., 2015). A study found that two-thirds of people with felony records, discontinued their college applications after being asked about their criminal history (Rosenthal et al., 2015).

In another study highlighted by Pierce et al., (2014) there was a survey of 124 admission officers across U.S. colleges which found that more than half of the institutions asked questions about applicants' criminal history. The majority of the admissions counselors interviewed admitted, that they would deny qualified applicants based on assault convictions or convictions of a drug-related offenses. Similarly, McTier et al., (2019) conducted interviews of college administrators which found that students convicted of sexually related offenses were perceived negatively. Therefore, in spite of colleges seeking to create inclusive college campus environments, there still remained the negative perceptions and beliefs that ex-offenders could

be rehabilitated and therefore should be denied admission since they may cause a threat to the college campuses (McTier et al., 2019). Therefore, these administrators excluded justice involved students from their colleges (McTier et al., 2019).

Many advocacy groups and the Department of Education, under the Obama Administration, attempted to discontinue the practice of collecting criminal history in the college admissions process for fear of discrimination that may be rooted in the decisions and the disproportionate number of marginalized groups in the criminal justice system (Rosenthal et al., 2015). The U.S. Department of Education (2016) announced a campaign to improve postsecondary education outcomes for justice-involved students entitled *Beyond the Box* to discourage colleges from inquiring about judicial involvement and criminal history (Johnson & Abreu, 2020) particularly since longstanding data shows that Black men are disproportionately affected by stricter penalties and are more likely than Whites to be stopped by police, get arrested and convicted of crimes, from which they are typically later exonerated (Gross, 2016). However, criminal background checks are still used in higher education and used for admission, campus housing and student employment decisions on college campuses (Custer, 2016).

Another long-standing barrier for justice involved individuals is financial aid, deeming people with drug or criminal records ineligible for federal or state aid (Crawford, 2005). In 1988, under the Anti-Drug Abuse Act anyone convicted of drug possession or trafficking was documented in a federally kept file, against which all financial aid applicants were cross-checked and denied aid (Custer, 2016). In 1998 there was a Drug-free Student Loan provision which made students ineligible for federal student financial aid if they were convicted of specified drug crimes (Crawford, 2005). During the period of 2001 and 2004 it has been

estimated that approximately 17,000-41,000 students lost their eligibility for financial aid due to drug convictions alone (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2005). The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) also requires a special worksheet for applicants to complete to determine whether their conviction affects their eligibility for federal student aid (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). State financial aid also comes with its own sets of barriers including merit-based ineligibility if students are justice-involved (Custer, 2016).

Justice involved college students have also noted barriers with being able to participate in student organizations or activities, studying abroad, participating in service-learning projects, and other activities that involve community engagement (Custer, 2016). A multitude of other obstacles are also experienced, including socioeconomics and responsibilities associated with early parenthood (Sandefur et al., 2005). Many lack reliable information about navigating college and work (Lareau & Cox, 2020). These issues increase their likelihood for higher debt and predatory practices by unethical, for-profit postsecondary education providers (DeLuca et al., 2016). Some justice involved individuals also need to work or are required to pay child support payments and may have criminal legal restitution to pay (Zatz, 2020) which can limit their ability to pursue a postsecondary education after release. Failure to comply with the requirements of their release, may even result in reincarceration (Harding & Harris, 2020), which ultimately ends up as the total disrupter to the re-integration processes and post-secondary pursuits.

Justice involved individuals are affected by their incarceration experiences which interrupts their transitions to typical rites of passages that their non-justice involved peers are afforded (Harding & Harris, 2020). These experiences destabilize their development as

productive citizens and disrupts their trajectories typically funneling them into low-wage, exploitative employment, recommission of crime, substance abuse and mental health disorders (Harding & Harris, 2020). Since so many who are justice involved spend so much time in a poor, stressful condition of prisons, juvenile delinquency centers and other justice facilities their development of key social and support networks are not properly formed (Sugie & Turney, 2017).

Affective Barriers

Copenhaver et al., (2007) interviewed four formerly incarcerated students focused on real and perceived stigmas and found that these students often struggled with disclosure of their criminal history due to fears of judgment and exclusion from other students and professors. The stigma could potentially limit a student's academic and social engagement while thwarting their sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2012). Justice impacted are at times described as wearing an invisible stripe (LeBel, 2012; Maruna, 2011). This term illustrates the lifelong label of being considered a criminal (Halkovic & Greene, 2015). Justice-impacted students typically weigh disclosing their criminal record, the negotiation of which can serve as a social barrier (Strayhorn et al., 2013).

Students also expressed concerns with meeting new people and starting new experiences. Similarly, Mayweather (2018) in interviews with 16 formerly incarcerated students found that these students struggled with self-disclosure, trusting, and interacting with classmates. These students reported difficulty with socialization and felt the need to use caution when interacting with others. These concerns were valid as evidenced by a study conducted by McTier et al., (2017) which found that justice involved individuals were often barred from scholarships, on-campus job opportunities, and on-campus housing. Justice involved students may not be

afforded the opportunity to live in campus housing due to their justice involvement, past or present. There are some state statutes and state system policies that prohibit certain students from living in campus housing, including sex offenders or those with criminal records (Custer, 2016). While colleges need to balance the safety of all residents against the need for housing for justice-involved students, higher education professionals may need to determine how best to be equitable and not exclusionary in their decision-making.

These factors discouraged justice involved and formerly incarcerated students from fully participating in postsecondary education systems. As referenced in Miller et al. (2014), formerly incarcerated students often experienced culture shock, feelings of being an outsider, and technological incompetence. These feelings were heightened since many JIIs return to school many years after their peers and may feel out of place due to age differences and maturity level. Also, those released from long sentences felt incompetent, because they lacked the skills and were ill prepared to understand contemporary technology. Justice involved individuals also struggle with lack of awareness of the demands and stipulations of their parole or conditions for probation, which may further limit their pursuit of higher education. These individuals have to go through frequent and mandatory check-ins, drug testing, and electronic monitoring (Cadigan & Kirk, 2020) which can greatly interfere with postsecondary attendance and engagement.

Rationale for Service Creation

As highlighted in Wagner and Rabuy (2017) prisons, parole, and probation costs the United States approximately $81 billion each year. Lochner and Moretti (2004) found that education significantly reduces criminal activity, thus saving billions of dollars every year. Education also provides direct benefits to the formerly incarcerated (Lochner & Moretti, 2004).

Runell (2017) in interviews with 34 formerly incarcerated current and former students at a university found that their educational experiences helped promote efforts to desist from criminal behavior. Many participants reported that their educational institutions helped them find positive social bonds with peers and develop noncriminal habits (Runell, 2017). In addition, participants reported that their programs helped them develop critical thinking skills, which allowed them to evaluate their situation and consider the possible consequences of violating the law (Runell, 2017). Participants also discussed how their educational experiences helped broaden their access to employment opportunities (Runell, 2017). Similarly, Mayweather (2018) in interviews with 16 formerly incarcerated students found that postsecondary education helped them achieve self-actualization, prevent relapses into old bad habits, and increase employment opportunities. These achievements gave the formerly incarcerated encouragement and a sense of purpose (Mayweather, 2018).

Research has also suggested that participation in postsecondary education can promote civic engagement and prosocial attitudes among even incarcerated students (Mastrorilli, 2016). Thus, higher education may help to mitigate (anti)social orientations internalized by individuals growing up in under-resourced communities. Despite these access issues, studies demonstrate the benefits of formerly incarcerated students pursuing an education, including achieved self-actualization, increased job opportunities, improved self-esteem and confidence, increased social supports and networks and reduced recidivism.

If schools were to provide comprehensive support services that address the unique needs of justice involved students, post-secondary institutions can help to facilitate momentum towards degree or certificate attainment and increase the likelihood of successful reentry into

society (Sutherland et al., 2019). A study highlighted in Dowdell (2019) focuses on the role that supportive relationships may provide when formerly incarcerated students reenter into society and seek to pursue post-secondary education (Dowdell, 2019). The study emphasized the need for greater institutional and community support after studying formerly incarcerated students who enrolled in a community college in New Jersey (Dowdell, 2019). The research showed that supportive relationships both inside and outside the classroom were critical for the success of the formerly incarcerated individuals (Dowdell, 2019). Some areas that students indicated as helpful were the peer support groups and mentorship programs that facilitated reentry and helped to promote academic success (Dowdell, 2019). The focus of many of their initiatives was transitional services to help JII reintegrate into society and succeed in their post-secondary educational pursuits (Dowdell, 2019). The study did not set forth specific details on the composition of the peer support groups which would be important for educators to understand as they seek concrete ways to support this population (Dowdell, 2019). Peer groups, to be effective, would need to consist of individuals with common experiences such as formerly incarcerated, justice involved or system impacted people with addiction, mental health, housing and other issues to better identify with and understand this group (Dowdell, 2019).

Types of Services Post-Secondary Institutions Might Offer

To achieve equity in education, research shows that schools have a duty to justice involved individuals and should provide proper supports for students to re-enter school and graduate (Equity and Quality in Education Supporting Disadvantaged Students and Schools, 2012). This could be achieved by developing policies that facilitate educational access, mental health support, transparent assessment of credits and make-up options (Equity and Quality in

Education Supporting Disadvantaged Students and Schools, 2012.). Post-secondary institutions may seek to model their strategic planning and design of support systems for justice-involved individuals, around the holistic approach that was set forth by Project Rebound (Heiner et al., 2021) which increased services like financial aid support, tutoring, admissions assistance, legal services, counseling, and career services. This comprehensive suite of services, allowed Project Rebound to retain students and decrease the recidivism rate to 0% between 2016 and 2020, compared to non-program participants within California in 2018 which was 50% (Heiner et al., 2021).

Many colleges within the United States offer degree programs and courses in prison but some argue that higher education is complicit in the denial of opportunities for justice involved students by the lack of funding, lack of advocacy in reducing prison sentences for enrolled students and not providing resources to mitigate the high costs of legal representation and counsel (Baxter, n.d.). Narrowing the gaps for collegiate access, participation and support across all races and income levels will prove important to the sustainability of some colleges, and the country (Baum et al., 2013). It is for colleges to create varying and promising pathways for students from all backgrounds (Baum et al., 2013). The inequality in the access to and distribution of resources must be at the forefront of post-secondary institutional efforts to help students overcome hurdles, particularly justice involved and other marginalized groups (Baum et al., 2013).

Intersectionality of Justice Involved Individuals

Understanding the intersectionality of justice involved college students is critical to better support this group of students (Johnson & Abreu, 2020). The intersectionality framework may help guide the development of policies and practices needed to better engage justice involved college students in a holistic way (Johnson & Abreu, 2020). An intersectional framework keeps attention on the ways the experiences of justice involved students are classified by race, gender and the nature of their criminal justice history with little consideration of nuances that exist between each student (Johnson & Abreu, 2020). Additionally, critical reflexivity may prove useful when designing ways to better engage justice involved students where college administrators can interrogate their own positionality, assumptions, actions, decisions, and interactions with justice involved students and the policies that bind them (Johnson & Abreu, 2020).

Narrowing the gaps for collegiate access, participation and support across all races and income levels may also help to create varying and promising pathways for students from all backgrounds (Baum et al., 2013). The inequality in the access to and distribution of resources must be at the forefront of our efforts to help students overcome hurdles, particularly justice-involved, minoritized groups (Baum et al., 2013). Some research points to the need to revamp the Justice Reinvestment programs that seek to address specific needs of JIIs, a multi-sector coordinated effort to make reductions in correctional populations by targeting high incarceration communities (Greene et al., 2013). These efforts would have a distinct measurable advantage, as a target for the work that colleges seek to do with state and local policy prescriptions (Greene et

al., 2013). Colleges could also adopt this cross-sector model to advocate for continued enrollment in college, in lieu of stricter, longer sentencing (Greene et al., 2013).

Transitional, Social and Emotional Supports

A process of deconstruction and reconstruction may be needed by a network of professionals and postsecondary educators to help justice involved students (*Department of Education*, 2019). This could lead efforts of change in personal, systemic and structural values, beliefs and behaviors that dismantle regressive practices which limit the ability for justice involved individuals to access education (Johnson & Abreu, 2020). A coordinated community effort could help to address hidden or ignored behaviors that inhibit the capacity of postsecondary institutions to fully support and engage justice involved students (Johnson & Abreu, 2020). This could also address the challenging experiences that justice-involved individuals cite as barriers to their pursuit of post-secondary educational pursuits (Johnson & Abreu, 2020).

Networked improvement communities are one strategic way to address societal and educational issues. Networked improvement communities often assemble a group of professionals, practitioners, and other interested partners to address a common problem of practice through a focused, iterative approach (LeMahieu et.al., 2017). Networks can focus on a particular aim, while working to develop a guided and deeper understanding of the problem, rooted in improvement science (LeMahieu et.al., 2017). This accelerates, develops and refines interventions that they are able to integrate into practice (LeMahieu et.al., 2017). Applying this approach to increase access to post-secondary education for justice involved individuals, may help address the aim of increasing equity, educational attainment and social mobility (Batiuk & Szymanski, 2021). Additionally, a network can build connective partnerships between

correctional facilities, community colleges, and universities to create clear pathways for justice involved individuals to access post-secondary education (Batiuk & Szymanski, 2021).

A coordinated effort among policymakers, educators, and community organizations may also be helpful in addressing the challenges that justice involved individuals face when they ultimately get close to their postsecondary educational pursuits (LaVigne et al., 2019). This multifaceted approach may help to address the complex barriers that justice involved individuals face when trying to access things like financial aid, Pell Grants and scholarships (LaVigne et al., 2019). Advocacy for equitable policies, and seeking to secure funding sources for this population, may also help with tuition and textbook costs and other educational expenses (Batiuk & Szymanski, 2021).

Concretely, the facilitation of education for justice involved individuals would require collaboration and coordination among multiple systems, including the criminal justice system, educational institutions, and community-based organizations (Justice, 2019). If these systems worked together, education could be more seemingly and successfully facilitated for justice involved individuals (Justice, 2019). The establishment of partnerships and collaborations would help in sharing resources, expertise, and best practice creation and execution of training programs, coordinated service delivery, and the creation of referral networks (Justice, 2019).

The opportunity to offer integrated services may increase the chances for these individuals to succeed in their post-secondary education pursuits (Justice, 2019). These services could include housing assistance, job training and placement services and mental health and substance abuse treatment (Justice, 2019). Lastly, the development of educational pathways is key to linking individuals to GED programs, job and vocational training, tailored to their unique needs (Justice, 2019). The removal of as many systemic barriers would be helpful to helping

justice involved individuals overcome access issues, navigate financial aid hurdles and continued advocacy for policy changes that make it easier for justice involved individuals to access education (Justice, 2019).

An expansive network, which includes postsecondary administrators, may also provide tailored academic support to justice-involved individuals, such as tutoring, academic advising, and mentoring (LaVigne et al., 2019). The creation of programs that address the unique needs of justice-involved students, such as academic remediation and support for transitioning back into society (LaVigne et al., 2019).

Summary

Chapter 2 illustrated the barriers and challenges faced by justice involved individuals and the frameworks that assist professionals in better understanding their plight. Chapter three will explore the research design that will guide the exploration into creating educational pathways for justice involved so that the impact of higher education may serve as a hook for change and a network of professionals could serve as a transformative experience that aids formerly incarcerated individuals.

Chapter 3: Research Design Overview

Chapter 3 will set forth the process by which the researcher gathered the data for this study. The methodology, research design, participant selection criteria and recruitment along with data collection and analysis techniques will be explored. Ethical considerations and trustworthiness that were also part of this phenomenological inquiry will also be discussed.

Methodology

Most jobs in the United States require some form of education beyond the high school level. Unfortunately, justice-involved individuals encounter significant hurdles in obtaining a postsecondary education. The term justice involved is defined as anyone who has been convicted or incarcerated (*Justice Involved Definition | Law Insider*, n.d.). There is limited research on ways to build support systems, within postsecondary education networks, for justice involved people to gain access, momentum and completion of their postsecondary educational pursuits, whether long- or short-term programs. This lack of research, makes this type of study critical for pathway creation for justice involved individuals to pursue, persist and attain their degrees or certificates.

Research on colleges and organizations that offer services for justice involved students, focus mainly on their sense of belonging and stigmas that exist from their judicial involvement; instead of the narrower focus taken for this study. This study will examine systemic barriers and explore services, from a network of professionals, which may increase access and attainment of postsecondary education for the justice involved population.

The contents of this chapter include an introduction to the conceptual framework used to investigate how a formal alignment of organizations, colleges and agencies may work together

to facilitate postsecondary education access and attainment for judicially involved individuals (JIIs). The purpose of this study was to fill gaps in the literature by investigating supports needed by justice involved students to attain and persist in postsecondary programs with the aim of providing a roadmap for college administrators, agencies and organizations through their insight about ways to create formal, systemic collaboration and pathways for judicially involved individuals.

The researcher examined the perspective of the professionals, who have lived experiences in working with judicially involved individuals in their pursuit of postsecondary education. The following section contains a definition of the conceptual frameworks utilized to ground the study. Adaptive and Collaborative leadership theories served as the grounding frameworks that drove this research. Next, the researcher outlines the study's methodology, including the criteria for participation, recruitment and exclusionary criteria, and the interview procedure. For this research, the participants were asked to take part in one interview to examine their experience working with judicially involved individuals. Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis was then utilized by the researcher to interpret the meaning of this experience for professionals who work with judicially involved individuals.

Conceptual Framework

This study was grounded in the Critical Race, Collaborative and Adaptive Theoretical Frameworks as a means of understanding the role race and racism played in shaping social structures and inequalities within education and judicial systems and inform the work that professionals need to examine to dismantle the structures that form barriers for judicially involved individuals. The identification of existing systemic issues and barriers will help collaborative and adaptive leaders to work proactively to develop coordinated supports for judicially involved

individuals and provide a basis for advocacy to influence policy and practice, with the aim of greater facilitation of access and attainment of postsecondary education for that population.

Phenomenology

Phenomenology was the guiding methodology used for this qualitative inquiry. Phenomenology is the study of the lived experiences of an individual who has experienced a phenomenon (Flynn & Korcuska, 2018; Mapp, 2008). Phenomenology, as a philosophy and method of inquiry, is an intellectual engagement in interpretations and meaning making, used to consciously understand the lived world of humans (Qutoshi, 2018). Known as the godfather of phenomenology, Edmund Husserl, sought to discover meanings and essences in knowledge (Moustakas, 1994). Husserl argued that one side of knowledge is "real," while the other side of knowledge is in essence non-real (Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenology seeks to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to describe the universal essence (van Manen, 1990). Participants who engage in this qualitative method provides a first-person account which describes their experience with the phenomenon. Phenomenology is used to educate our own vision, to define our position, and to broaden how we perceive the world (Qutoshi, 2018). Intentionality should be at the heart of every phenomenological investigation. Intentionality is the interconnectedness between people, things, and the world within which they live (Valentine et al., 2018). In phenomenology, the researcher is a part of the research and must suspend judgement and preconceptions about the phenomenon (Henriques, 2014). To suspend judgment, phenomenologists utilize the process of bracketing (Flynn & Korcuska, 2018). To bracket is to suspend one’s own beliefs and experiences to authentically examine the experience (Flynn & Korcuska, 2018). Bracketing allows for the development of a more in-depth description and interpretation of lived experiences while helping to ensure the validity of the data collection and analysis process (Qutoshi, 2018). Only those individuals who have experienced the phenomenon

are capable of communicating the experience to the outside world (Mapp, 2008). Purposeful sampling is also used so that the researcher may speak only to individuals that have experienced the phenomenon (Mapp, 2008). While difficult to predict the right sample size in this type of research, the sampling should continue until saturation is achieved (Mapp, 2008). In phenomenology, data collection and meaning making are processes that take place simultaneously (Qutoshi, 2018).

Three structural forms appear in the analysis of phenomenology (Solowski, 2000). First, is the structure of parts and wholes. Wholes can be analyzed into two different elements: pieces and moments, while pieces are parts that can subsist and be presented apart from the whole. Moments are dependent parts that cannot survive or be shown apart from the whole to which they belong. Such parts are non-independent and cannot exist or be presented by themselves (Solowski, 2000). According to Solowski (2000), when human beings think about something, they articulate the parts and wholes within it. The second structure of phenomenology is the identity of manifolds. When people want to express something, we can always differentiate between the expression and what is being revealed (Solowski, 2000). In most cases, multiple expressions can be made to express one meaning. The third structure of phenomenology is presence and absence. Solowski (2000) found presence and absence to be the objective correlates to filled and empty intentions. An empty intention is defined as an intention that focuses on something that is absent, or not present to the one it intends (Solowski, 2000). A filled intention is an intention that focuses on something that is there, in the presence of the one it intends (Solowski, 2000).

Transcendental Phenomenology

In transcendental phenomenology, the meaning can be found in one's consciousness of a phenomenon (Valentine et al., 2018). According to Husserl, the development of a person can be influenced by others through their thoughts, feelings, and demands (Valentine et al., 2018). This occurs independently of the person's ability to understand the degree of that influence (Henriques, 2014). Transcendental phenomenology is concerned with seeking the reality of an experience, not pursuing truth (Qutoshi, 2018). Every person's experience is unique to them. In the natural setting, a phenomenon is not limited to a specific population, but rather anyone who is experiencing it (Englander, 2019). This is co-experienced in a world of others with their own experiences (Englander, 2019). Transcendental phenomenology also focuses on formulating a detailed description of lived experiences through bracketing (Englander, 2019). The suspension of judgment is essential for the researcher to properly gain insight into the lived experience (Qutoshi, 2018). The focus of the methods is to describe the essence of a phenomenon seen through the never-changing aspects of textual and structural descriptions of the participants' experience (Valentine et al., 2018).

Hermeneutical Phenomenology

Hermeneutical phenomenology, also called interpretive phenomenology requires the researcher to bring their own experience and understanding of the phenomenon into the research process (Aspers, 2010; Mapp, 2008). The researcher has preconceived notions about the phenomenon before the data collection begins. Hermeneutics allows the researcher to find the underlying meaning by analyzing people's reflections on their experience. The goal is to find the deeper meaning of a phenomenon within the contexts of the entire human experience.

The researcher is required to acknowledge their personal experience and knowledge of the phenomenon throughout the research, including during the data collection and analysis (Bynum & Varpio, 2018).. In hermeneutic phenomenology, there are many possible interpretations of a phenomenon. The focus of the methods in descriptive phenomenology is subject-centered, while for interpretive phenomenology, it is intersubjective, with an emphasis on interpreting the experiences of the participants in their natural environment (Valentine et al., 2018).

Rationale for Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis was best suited for this study since the researcher sought to understand the coordinated services needed for judicially involved individuals to access and attain postsecondary education and how the professionals who work with that population could construct coordinated supports (Smith et al., 2009). IPA is concerned with providing a detailed examination of the lived experience of the participants (Smith et al., 2009). IPA is informed by philosophical concepts in three key areas: phenomenology, hermeneutics, and ideography (Smith et al., 2009). There are three considerations with IPA. The first consideration, phenomenology, is concerned with the examination of the lived experience for an individual. The second consideration, hermeneutics, is the theory of interpretation (Smith et al., 2009). The third major consideration in IPA is ideography, which is a focus on the details and grasping the meaning for a given analysis (Smith et al., 2009). This methodology was best suited for this study since the researcher wanted to be open to all possible interpretations of participants' lived experience. According to Bynum and Varpio (2018), in hermeneutical studies, it is common for the researcher to have previous knowledge or experience with the central phenomenon. Judicial involvement and creation of educational pathways is something is familiar to the researcher;

since the researcher is an educator and has a legal background (Varpio, 2018). The researcher bracketed their personal experience from the interpretation of the data, however, their personal experience provided additional clarity as the participants described their experiences (Varpio, 2018). An IPA inquiry also allowed the researcher to identify the manifestations of a phenomenon in the world and to understand how the parts relate to each other (Valentine et al., 2018). The inquiry was intersubjective, with stress on interpreting the experiences of the participants as they are lived in the world (Valentine et al., 2018). An interpretive approach allows the participant questions and data collection to focus on what it means for judicially involved individuals to gain access and attain postsecondary education and how the experience of professionals across sectors influences that (Valentine et al., 2018).

There was also a danger in utilizing this philosophy. During the data collection process, it was essential for the researcher to bracket their own experience and beliefs to prevent contamination of the data (Smith et al., 2009). Without bracketing, the researcher risks influencing the responses of the participants. It is also essential to mention that this type of phenomenological inquiry should not be interpreted as a whole truth (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004). The focus should be on the truthfulness of the participants' lived experiences.

Purpose of Research

The purpose of this study is to examine the potential for coordinated and proactive practices to support justice involved individuals who wish to pursue postsecondary education. A critical qualitative methodology will be applied to explore context and opportunities for services to be used across organizations, governmental and social service agencies and two- and four-year colleges within the United States who are working with a growing justice involved population. A cross-sectional design may prove helpful in addressing these questions, through the use of

qualitative research designs that employ interviews with colleges and agencies working with justice involved individuals, to improve supports and pipeline creation. The following research questions will help guide this study:

RQ1. How may systems (organizations, colleges and agencies) align to facilitate postsecondary education for justice involved individuals?

RQ2. What supports are needed by justice involved students, once enrolled in postsecondary programs, to facilitate momentum towards degree or certificate attainment?

Use of Research Outcomes

With findings from this study, the plan is to prepare a manuscript for submission to peer reviewed journal (s) with the aim of informing practice across postsecondary education and organizations that work with justice involved individuals. There is additional intent to present this research, through regional and national conferences, to organizational and local college leaders (presidents, cabinet members, non-academic deans and support service leadership) to generate momentum around this work so network formation will be considered. The aim of this study is to facilitate adoption of research findings, to offer wrap-around support services and dismantle barriers for justice involved individuals in their pursuit of postsecondary education.

Background and Need

It is projected that by year 2027, 70 percent of all jobs will require education beyond the high school level (Blumenstyk 2020). Unsurprisingly, few justice-involved individuals are currently able to obtain education at the postsecondary level. Research dating back to a 2014 survey, by the National Center for Education Statistics, indicate that 70 percent of respondents in

a sample of people incarcerated in state, federal, and private prisons expressed a desire to pursue an academic program (Rampey et al. 2016). Unfortunately, only 9 percent of those respondents were in fact, able to earn postsecondary certificates or degrees. Another study tracked 1,291 young men, released on parole from the Michigan Department of Corrections in 2003 (Harding & Harris 2020). 28 percent of those men enrolled in postsecondary education by 2014 and only approximately 4 percent of those who enrolled, eventually earned a degree (Harding & Harris 2020). These studies show just how much justice-involved individuals understand the value of higher education, however, so few are able to realize their goals of obtaining these postsecondary credentials. The end result is that justice involved individuals are left ill-equipped to engage in a competitive, skilled labor market and change the trajectory of their lives.

Access, equity and improvement, necessitates micro patterns of leadership to bring about change (Santamaria & Santamaria, 2015). This study intends to address the need and opportunities to facilitate this change and examine how leadership across agencies, organizations and colleges may create a network of support, advocacy and pipelines for justice involved individuals who seek post-secondary education.

Duration and Timeline

The study took approximately ten months; from receipt of IRB approval, through February, 2024. The proposed timeline for this research, would be as follows:

- IRB approval – April, 2023: participant recruitment
- May - July, 2023: Collection of data to address study’s research questions
- August-September, 2023: Data Analysis
- October, 2023: Prepared dissertation for submission to chair

- November 2023-February 2024: Finalized dissertation for submission to chair

Research Design

This research employed a descriptive phenomenology design to conduct the study. Participants were employees from organizations, agencies and two-and four- year college administrators within the tri-state, New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania region, who work with justice involved individuals who wish to pursue postsecondary education. Gaining an understanding of how the phenomenon, as constructed through their experiences, provided an opportunity for reflection on how systems may be built to facilitate and support justice involved individuals in their pursuit of postsecondary education. Participation was solicited via email using a letter included in Appendix A. The minimum sample size for this research was seven (7) professionals across the agencies, organizations and colleges, with an ideal sample of 9-15 participants.

As the researcher of this study, informed consent was obtained from all study participants prior to commencing with data collection. Appendix B depicts the informed consent form that was emailed to each of the study participants. The study's participants were asked to review, sign and date the informed consent form and email the completed form to the researcher's school email address which was held securely and confidentially. Professionals who volunteered for this study participated in interviews with the request to reserve the right to follow-up with a phone call or second interview to clarify points raised in previous sessions.

Appendix C outlines the interview questions.

Location

The researcher conducted the study with participants from agencies, organizations and two-and four-year colleges within the tri-state area, inclusive of New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania, via Zoom or in-person at a location convenient and mutually agreed upon by the participants, which afforded the necessary privacy. The geographic location did not need to be expanded outside the tri-state region, since the pool was large enough and consisted of qualified and volunteer samples from the New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania region.

Email, phone calls and listservs, using the researcher's network, were the technologies used to recruit participants.

Storage and Disposition of Data and Recordings

The researcher stored any and all data collected on a personal, password protected external storage device. The researcher was the sole individual with access to the protected information, which will be deleted after a year, post-culmination of the research, to preserve its confidentiality. Any needed hard copies of the data collected, were stored at my personal home. The documents were locked in a drawer at that location.

Subject Recruitment and Selection

The researcher used a snowball sampling and identified participants within and external to their network to get at least 7 and as many as 15 administrators who work with justice involved individuals within agencies, organizations and two- or four- year colleges. Participants had to be at least 18 years or older. Individuals who are under 18 will not be able to participate in this study. There was no exclusion criterion aside from age and lack of experience in working

with justice involved individuals. Participants could possess any range of degrees, and a member of any race or gender and socioeconomic status.

The geographic location could have been expanded outside the tri-state region, only if a large enough qualified or volunteer sample cannot be achieved in the New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania region. Interviews were tape recorded, with the requisite permissions granted.

Protection of Subjects and Ethical Considerations

Subject anonymity was upheld using a password protected external storage drive. The type of study also tangentially protected the anonymity of the justice involved individuals, which formed the core subject matter for this study. The primary source of the data was drawn from participant answers during the interviews. Codes were used to mask identifiable private information and aggregate information was not published that could potentially identify participants.

Consent Procedures

Informed consent was obtained from all study participants prior to commencing with data collection. As evidenced in Appendix B, an informed consent form was emailed to each of the study's participants and they were asked to review, sign and date the informed consent form and email the completed form to the researcher's secure email address. Once received, the researcher signed and dated the forms and returned the duly executed informed consent final copy, via email to the participants.

Potential Risks

Potential risks to subjects associated with participating in this research were minimal and were no greater than they would experience in their everyday work environment. There were no

foreseeable other potential risks associated with the subjects with which they work or to the administrators who voluntarily participate in this research.

Potential Benefits

The potential benefit of this study will be the formation of a coordinated network of professionals whom will develop the tools and collaboration that provides scaffolded support and improves the system for justice involved individuals that facilitates their access, momentum and completion of postsecondary education.

Risk/Benefit Analysis

The potential benefits of this study, such as the facilitation of postsecondary education access, momentum and completion for justice involved individuals outweighed the minimal risks associated with participation in this study. Enhancing and creating a systemic approach to postsecondary educational pursuits for justice involved individuals will also contribute to generating more skilled workers that are so desperately needed in the workforce today.

Trustworthiness

To establish trustworthiness, the researcher conducted a practice interview on a nonparticipant to examine the effectiveness of the questions. This afforded the researcher the ability to refine the questions, and also test equipment and software prior to going live. Trustworthiness was also established through the member checking process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The member checking process ensured the credibility of the findings, and the researcher's interpretations of each individual's experience. Participants were asked to reaffirm their responses to the questions, giving them an opportunity to further expand responses about their experiences, if desired. Responses to all questions were reaffirmed prior to the conclusion of the interview. Additionally to minimize bias and ensure trustworthiness, the researcher suspended

their own beliefs through bracketing (Flynn & Korcuska, 2018; Qutoshi, 2018). As a self-identified African American woman with a legal and higher education background, it was important for the researcher to remove her own experience with the phenomenon from the data collection process. Though the researcher's experience in working with judicially involved individuals is not as extensive as that of the participants, her lived experiences still provided context for the study. Bracketing also ensured that the researcher's past experience, as an attorney and higher education professional did not interfere with the data collection process.

Summary

The methodology for this study utilizes critical race, adaptive and collaborative leadership theories as the conceptual framework. Phenomenology was selected as the interpretive lens. Phenomenology was selected because it allows the researcher to examine the depth of participants' lived experiences with judicially involved individuals. To examine the phenomenon, the interview protocol was designed to explore the ways professionals within organizations, agencies and colleges may work together to facilitate access and attainment of postsecondary education. This may prove to be an empowering experience for the professionals and the judicially involved individuals with which the professionals work. The researcher plans to conduct 10-15 virtual interviews to examine the phenomenon. The following chapter contains an exploration of the findings for this research.

Chapter 4: Results

Chapter 4 will review the findings of this phenomenological study. The chapter will discuss the participant demographics and summarize the participant feedback as it relates to the research questions that guided this study. Emergent themes from participant data will also be discussed.

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to better understand the ways professionals, across sectors, could formally work together to dismantle barriers with the aim of facilitating postsecondary education, access and attainment for justice involved individuals. As noted in earlier chapters, the United States holds over 2.2 million individuals in state and federal prisons, approximately 700,000 of which will seek to re-enter society each year (Halkovic & Greene, 2015). The typical average age of judicially involved individuals overlaps with the average age of traditional college undergraduate students, 15-25, (College Enrollment Statistics: Total + by Demographic, 2019). Despite the many barriers experienced by justice involved individuals, a large percentage of those incarcerated in state, federal, and private prisons expressed a desire to pursue an academic program (Rampey et al. 2016). Unfortunately, only a small percentage are able to earn postsecondary certificates or degrees (Rampey et al. 2016).

The research questions that guided this phenomenological study were: 1.) How may systems (organizations, colleges and agencies) align to facilitate postsecondary education for justice involved individuals? 2.) What supports are needed by justice involved students, once enrolled in postsecondary programs, to facilitate momentum towards degree or certificate attainment?

Participants

Participants included nine (9) professionals that work with justice involved individuals within social service agencies, advocacy organizations and two- or four- year colleges. There were four adult men (*n*=4) and five adult women (*n*=5) and all participants were above the requisite 18 years of age, the average age was 40 years old. All participants reported having worked with justice involved individuals for at least 8 years or longer within a tri-state region in the mid-Atlantic United States. Participants possessed a range of degrees, professions and racial backgrounds. Lastly, all participants read and completed the form of consent to participate in the study.

All participants were interviewed once, using a semi-structured interview protocol which was conducted via *Zoom*. A brief introductory meeting and/or confidential written communication was exchanged with participants to provide context, clarification or additional information. Upon completion of the interviews, the transcripts and audio recordings were analyzed to identify and organize themes from the participant responses. Trustworthiness was upheld using a piloted interview with a non-participant to ensure that the equipment was functioning properly and to test the effectiveness of the questions prior to the recruiting process. The member-checking process also ensured trustworthiness as clarifying questions were posed to the participants. An inductive coding technique was utilized by the researcher as a way to interpret the meaning of the participants' transcribed experiences. This technique is known as a ground-up approach by which the codes are derived by the data (Delve, 2020).

The researcher examined all transcripts with a suspension of the researcher's previous knowledge and experience of the phenomenon, as a way of focusing on the individualistic essence of the participants' lived experiences. The analysis required the researcher to review the

transcripts and recordings. The transcripts were analyzed using a manual qualitative analysis to identify the initial codes within the transcripts. The codes were then manually grouped according to the participants responses to interview questions, which formed the basis for the key findings for this study.

Table 1 below, shows the demographics for each participant, including their years of experience in working with justice involved individuals through advocacy, direct services and/or personal lived experiences of justice involvement. A profile summary is also provided for each participant. Subsequently are emergent themes produced from the research and the lived experiences of the participants as it relates to the thematic areas.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participants	Gender	Race	Industry	Years Working With Justice Involved
Participant 1	Male	African American	Higher Education	12
Participant 2	Female	African American	Government	10
Participant 3	Female	African American	Government	30
Participant 4	Female	Latina	Higher Education	8
Participant 5	Female	African American	Higher Education	15
Participant 6	Male	African American	Higher Education	7
Participant 7	Female	Latina	Faculty	2
Participant 8	Male	Caucasian	Formerly Incarcerated/Advocacy	4
Participant 9	Male	Latino	Formerly incarcerated/Higher Education	3

Participant 1

P1 is an Executive Director for Student Transition Success Programs and has served in that role for the last three years. P1 works at a Community College in a large urban city and has been a higher education professional for over 10 years. P1 leads a Center for Male Engagement

and within that role, engages in activities to increase educational outcomes for justice involved individuals, through programming and academic support services. P1 helps justice involved students navigate life on- and off- campus while delivering mentoring, tutoring, career development, financial literacy and budgeting to the students they serve. P1 facilitates expungement clinics and also leads the College's Prison Education program. Their primary focus is on restorative justice practices and reentry support programs that facilitate enrollment, retention and success in college.

Participant 2

P2 is a member of the Legislative Branch and serves as a member of a state House of Representatives. They work to address matters related to justice involved individuals, primarily as it relates to women and their reentry into society. P2 is a public servant who has focused their work on forging cross-sector collaborations and partnerships to solve some of the community's biggest challenges. Throughout their career, P2 determined that public safety, job security, access to quality education and healthcare were the key components to ensuring that a community could thrive. In the General Assembly, P2's priorities include expanding access to healthcare to improve health outcomes, increasing educational opportunities and facilitating career pipelines for youth and young adults. They also work to create jobs through business incentives, and ensuring women and girls are at the forefront of their legislative priorities.

As a leader within a major urban youth network, P2 has worked to increase the education and workforce opportunities available to the most vulnerable youth. They helped to secure over $3 million in support for the Work Ready summer youth jobs program; nearly $1 million to support the design and implementation of educational and career pathways for youth; and

worked alongside national organizations to shape the development of federal legislation dedicated to workforce development training programs for youth.

Participant 3

P3 is a member of the State general assembly and represents two of the largest Legislative Districts in a large metropolitan state. P3 works with Community Development and Affairs and serves as a member of the Labor, Commerce and Economic Development committees while chairing the Legislative Black Caucus. P3 advocates for job growth, women's health, voting rights, civil rights, and criminal justice reform and has championed voting rights legislation, signed by the Governor of their state, into law. That legislation restored voting rights for more than 80,000 individuals who are currently on probation or parole.

Participant 4

P4 has been a success coach for the past 2 years for a cohort-based, scholarship program at a large community college in an urban city. Prior to higher education, P4 worked for social service agencies for 8 years primarily within a residential treatment facility for boys between the ages of 12 and 18, who had charges of sexual assault. P4 also managed caseloads that involved family therapy to address sexual deviance with the aim of developing individualized goal plans to comply with court requirements. Subsequently, P4 worked at an elementary school with ninth graders who were involved with the criminal justice system. P4 also worked at a diversion program designed for individuals who had felony drug charges. Currently, in addition to working in higher education, P4 volunteers at a District Attorney’s office within a large urban city.

Participant 5

P5 has been a higher education professional for over 20 years and has worked for both 2- and 4-year institutions. In their latest role, they serve as the Dean of Academic Advisement at a

large, multi-campus community college. P5 is an academic and Student Affairs Specialist who is a Licensed Professional Counselor and approved Clinical Supervisor. They began working with justice-involved individuals as a “passion project” seeking to provide customized accommodations to help them navigate college, available resources and social obstacles, successfully.

Participant 6

P6 is an Assistant Dean of Community Relations for a transformative education prison program at a 4-year comprehensive, multi-campus university. The program is consortium-based and brings different entities together to provide higher education access to incarcerated men and women. The consortium consists of 2- and 4-year colleges along with the Department of Corrections, with the aim of providing educational access. P6 oversees the development and maintenance of community partnerships. Their background in education spans upwards of 9 years, where they have had various roles in middle and secondary schools as well as higher education. P6 has first-hand experience with many of the flawed systems that negatively impact underserved groups. As a certified teacher, P6 has spent countless hours designing lessons that broadened students’ thinking while serving as a supportive resource.

Participant 7

P7 served as a Deputy Sheriff Officer after a long career in law enforcement. They worked as a corrections officer and served as a public and community servant, priding themselves on empowering those around them. P7 is the founder of a non-profit organization dedicated to enhancing and empowering the lives of young women in urban communities. As an advocate for change and a member of various committees for youth engagement they serve as a voice for the voiceless, expressing the concerns and perspectives of a large urban city’s most

vulnerable populations. P7 is an ordained minister and currently works at a 2-year, large community college as a full-time Criminal Justice faculty member who also works with the college's prison education program.

Participant 8

P8 was sentenced to life without parole for second degree murder, when they were 17 years old. When the U.S. Supreme Court outlawed life without parole sentences for juveniles, P8 was granted parole after serving 31 years in maximum security prison. Shortly after their release they joined a Leadership Council responsible for Human Rights Watch. The Council progressively worked towards the abolishment of Life Without Opportunity for Parole through second look advocacy and agendas. P8 has spoken to members of Congress, testified to legislators, and helped to develop a Bureau to use their voice and experiences to change the narrative of extreme sentences. P8 works for a national organization that seeks to create a more fair and effective justice system. They also serve as an Alternatives to Violence facilitator and peer counselor. They also successfully authored a grant to fund a prison art class and helped to develop a victim/offender mediation program. P8 obtained three vocational degrees while incarcerated and pursues college credits on a part-time basis.

Participant 9

At the age of 12, while getting a haircut from his grandfather, P9's grandfather was shot and killed. P9 recounted getting punished by their parents when arriving home crying, from the traumatic experience. At age 17, P9 was sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole, for first degree homicide. They described themselves as a confused, angry and illiterate

teen upon entry to prison. With an IQ of 56, they were classified as being mentally ill and were told they could never learn how to read and write.

During the interview P9 recalled receiving their mother's letters while incarcerated but they couldn't read the letters. Other prisoners would read the letters to them until one day an inmate refused to read any additional letters, telling P9 that they had to start reading for themselves. The inmate then started showing P9 how to read and after much hard work P9 passed and received their GED, albeit after seven tries. Their enthusiasm was evident when recounting that day, sharing "dang I finally made it because I was the first one in my family to go that far in education."

While incarcerated in a maximum-security facility, P9 not only learned how to read, write and earn their GED but they went on to earn an associate's and bachelor's degree in Education and Business through a program at a 4-year comprehensive university. P9 was released from jail following a Supreme Court decision that ruled automatic life sentences without parole for juveniles as unconstitutional. P9 later went on to win a Pulitzer Prize for an eponymous podcast. P9 currently works for a large 2-year community college as a coach for a reentry engagement program. This program is designed to support students, once entangled in the criminal justice system, to get an education and find a new path.

System Alignment That Facilitates Postsecondary Education for Justice Involved Individuals

Participants shared their lived experiences as it relates to ways systems (organizations, colleges and agencies) could align to facilitate postsecondary education for justice involved individuals. Through their responses to research question number one, the following themes emerged.

Table 2

Emergent Themes and Supporting Evidence

Emerging Themes	Supporting Evidence
Hierarchy of Basic and Substantive Needs	• "If someone's home and safety is their first need and if they don't have housing or if the lights are off- it's like school is not on that priority list at all." • "All around" approach to supporting students to address their hierarchal needs and to keep them "focused on education." • Community and grassroots organizations are typically good partners in helping to support justice impacted families, since they tend to have direct "ground level" contacts which can prove helpful.
Create a pathway of communication and then connection	• "It's not really a matter of holding ourselves out as a resource, so much as it's a matter of coordinating with the other resources and service providers." • Colleges should allow more cross credits so that if a person obtains credits at a prison-

		based college that colleges should "pick it up there" by being a little bit more flexible in accepting those transfer credits. • "It's about being able to have conversations about how we are engaging. How are the laws being enforced? Are there barriers there? What are the disparities in sentencing. It's then about being able to put people at the table who are not offended by having the conversations because it's not about being on the defense but instead about what you represent. It's about, let's look at how we've been failing and acknowledge that and then how do we improve?" • "everyone is worthy of an education and just knowing some of the discriminatory practices that have occurred with both education and the judicial system, really how do we address that to facilitate pathways for those who are justice involved?"

College and Community Partners	• "I think building more specific pathways that involve partnerships with community members and involve every aspect of the college community." • "Nobody should be judged on the worst day or worse decisions that they've made, or worse decisions that they've made, you know, or the rest of their life. So how do we set people up for success just start looking at this from a different way and, you know, thinking that deeper dive into these results." • Local education entities and school districts should be at the table because before they get to us (postsecondary institutions) it starts at the elementary level both figuratively and literally.
Holistic Supports Which Include Real and Tangible Resources	• "My job is to teach, show and expose you (justice involved) and then help you to make an informed

	decision about what you want the rest of your life to look like. So we give them the tools and then let them use them." • Help them essentially "land on their feet." That means, a monthly stipend, secure housing, and workforce development. • Mental and physical health issues don't "go away once you are no longer incarcerated, so individuals need to be able to have those same level of supports as they transition out. • "Historically, if people were of a certain color, there were systems in place that looked to break up the family unit where you could not have any type of government subsidies if you were a family unit, of a certain color." Historical barriers were "baked into systems."
Their Experiences and Backgrounds Matter	• "You can't talk about them without having them be a part of the solution"

	• A network of professionals would need a "boots on the ground" perspective. • "All these people (justice involved) have great knowledge and experience on how the system can be improved and done better and they can get better results."

Theme 1: Hierarchy of Basic and Substantive Needs

According to participants of this study, justice involved individuals prioritize housing, food and other basic necessities before considering the pursuit of education. Participants shared that in their experience, these tenets of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs were primary considerations for JII's since they tend to prioritize their physiological, safety, social, esteem and self-actualization needs. Participant 4 noted that home and safety are also priorities for JIIs since the lack of housing or having the lights turned off, makes college not on the priority list at all. Additionally,

> "if their electric and water is off and they cannot get employment because of their background, they are going to go into the streets and possibly sell drugs again so they can pay their light bill and that is the cycle."

Participants opined that networks constructed to help JIIs should consider their hierarchal mindsets and look to identify key community partners that may help facilitate, organize and provide basic need resources such as housing, food, mental health services and fair chance employment. In P4's experience for example," the most effective people (college administrators)

have been those who take those (basic) needs into account and provide food for all college students without charge and provide programming to keep individuals informed about available resources." P9 also spoke of a comprehensive, "all around" approach to supporting students to address their hierarchal needs and to keep them "focused on education." As a special program college advisor, P9 noted that their students can come to their center for food, diapers, milk, toiletries, feminine products and whatever else they may need, noting the impact it made on the students' retention and persistence. Participants also noted that community and grassroots organizations are typically good partners in helping to support justice impacted families, since they tend to have direct "ground level" contacts which can prove helpful. Working with grassroots organizations has provided Participant 7 with a direct pipeline which has afforded JIIs with resources to pay their bills, get access to food, and to help them address varying aspects of their lives.

Theme 2: Create a pathway of communication and then connection

Supporting justice involved individuals requires an elimination of loops and "holes" (P7) in the system; with the aim of creating a clear line of communication with essential community partners. Of those interviewed for this study, the seasoned government officials and the former sheriff officer, believed that colleges should model after state programs designed for formerly incarcerated females who were domestic violence victims. These potentially model programs were meant to provide support for 12-16 months to help women successfully reengage in society while becoming self-sustaining and able to care for their families independently. According to the legislators interviewed, the program was designed to help individuals land on their feet by offering supports like a monthly stipends, secure housing, and workforce development skill and job placement pathways.

There was a shared sentiment, amongst participants, that people within and across systems need to work together to facilitate a pathway to education, while also creating relationships with identified partner names and warm handoffs. Participants opined that clear lines of communication should serve as a first step to establishing real connections and that synergy is needed to improve systems. P7 likened this synergy to "spokes on the wheel." The analogy was made as a way to illustrate that when all wheels turn they move at the same time to create momentum. However, as P7 noted, "if a spoke is out of place, the wheel could not be as effective." Interviewees also noted the importance and value of seeing the whole person and the totality of their experiences, when working with JIIs. All the participants agreed that systems can be developed and improved, noting that the criminal justice and education systems have yet to focus on the overall improvement or betterment of the experiences and barrier deconstruction that judicially involved individuals face. Participants opined that if advocates, judges, courts and others kept, at the forefront, the totality of the JIIs experiences, as a factor in all decision-making then there may be greater construction of programs and services that sought to reduce systemic loopholes, barriers and punishment.

Theme 3: College and Community Partners

Participants noted that building more specific pathways should involve partnerships and relationships with churches, shelters and YWCA's within the community. In P5's experience, local YWCAs and YMCAs are "a lot of times your housing connections." Other partnerships identified were local social service agencies, school district professionals, rehabilitation centers, networks for sobriety and reentry organizations. Participant 6 had a slightly different view about the role of colleges and indicated that their focus should be on education and that college administrators should not cross into the work of re-entry professionals and other service

providers. P6 noted that college professionals should work in tandem with reentry organizations and mental health providers and that “it's not really a matter of holding ourselves out as a resource, so much as it is a matter of coordinating with other resources and service providers.” Participant 6 also shared that college administrators should understand the scope of work provided by reentry services and how colleges can refer students. P6 went on to mention that reentry professionals should know what colleges provide and make it synergetic to the work of the agency. P6 noted that this exchange has helped her to address tech barriers, build resumes, and help to support justice involved individuals. She also likened this work to a barbecue, noting that when going to a barbecue, you communicate to determine what others are bringing so that the attendees do not duplicate the offerings.

College administrators may wish to better understand the lived experiences of justice involved individuals by engaging politicians, lobbyists and advocates who wish to support their successful reengagement to society. As participants 1 and 3 stated, this high-powered network of professionals could potentially help to counter the “political winds” which change literally, like the wind when politicians change. P8 also believes that colleges should work with the government sector but that it could become a “political football” that gets kicked back and forth, whichever way the “wind is blowing that day.” Several participants noted that judges within the city, state and the federal courts may be most helpful and should understand the kind of work that colleges seek to engage in support of justice involved individuals. P7 worked with judges from both the state and municipal courts to gain a better understanding of how laws were being enforced P7 also wanted to better understand the disparities in sentencing as a way to create alternatives and pathways for justice involved individuals to be sentenced to college instead of prison.

Participant 3 thought that the involvement of politicians and judges should focus on skill-building in lieu of harsh penalties that ultimately limit employment options for JIIs. Participant 3 opined that while governmental agencies should be a partner, “you need to compel leaders to act because this is not the popular issue.” Parole boards could also be helpful because they determine a person’s readiness to return to society. In fact, according to Participant 9, parole and probation officers may be “safe havens” since some parole officers are “more than happy to have their parolees go to school” instead of jail.

Participant 2 opined that colleges may wish to work with non-profit organizations whose mission it is to invest in solutions and services that grow the state or local economy. These organizations can help to connect employers to workforce talent, inclusive of justice involved. Labor unions might also be helpful in hiring JIIs. Community and 4-year colleges and local mayors may also be good partners in creating scholarships and allocation of dollars to aide in the transition of formerly incarcerated or justice involved individuals. According to Participant 7, the mayor's office may also be helpful in financing a one-stop shop within the town or city. P3 in fact spoke about a one-stop shop in her large city, where there is a portal for justice involved individuals to access all of the local, state and federal programs for which they are eligible. According to P7, the public welfare system could also be helpful as a way of making supports more accessible. P1 noted that parents and guardians “are struggling and trying to find ways to support their loved ones but too often, decisions are made without them at the table.” P7 noted that professionals need to come together, to look at how the system has been failing, acknowledge that and decide how to improve the systems. In order to do so, we must consider the totality of the justice involved individuals’ experiences.

According to one of the formerly incarcerated participants, the issue of delinquency starts at an early age and therefore local educational entities, should be part of the network. The school district could potentially be important since breakdowns in the system begin in the elementary school. This could potentially also build systems of supports, warm handoffs and lessen the disenfranchisement justice involved face with the educational system according to participants 3, 4 and 7. As Participant 2 indicated “nobody should be judged on the worst day or worst decision that they have made, for the rest of their life. Colleges may be well positioned to set people up for success by looking at all systems and their interconnectedness.

Supports Needed by Justice Involved Students to Facilitate Momentum Towards Degree or Certificate Attainment

Interviewees responded to research question number two which sought to answer the types of supports needed by justice involved students, once enrolled in postsecondary programs, to facilitate momentum towards degree or certificate attainment. According to all the participants, students that ultimately gain access to higher education need considerable supports from 2- and 4-year colleges to be retained and to ultimately graduate from degree or certificate programs. Participant feedback addressed the following areas that would prove helpful in achieving that aim.

Theme 4: Holistic Supports Which Include Real and Tangible Resources

Participants believe that an expanded definition and application of supports is required for justice involved individuals. In their experience, a network of professionals internal and external to colleges, should use a holistic approach to educational access, enrollment, persistence and support services. All the participants indicated that immediate and sustainable supports were

necessary particularly as it relates to basic needs. Justice involved may face challenges with accessing valuable and necessary resources for a myriad of reasons, including but not limited to: stigma, systemic barriers and college policies. Several of the participants opined that this particular area is of critical importance for advocacy and systemic change. When considering that systemic change, P3 opined that change agents need to keep top-of-mind that "nothing has necessarily been designed for justice involved individuals except for incarceration." P3 cited the fair housing act that moved from "excluding minorities on race to exclusion based on charges and socioeconomic status." P3 went on to note that systems:

> "moved to break up family units, where you could not have any type of government subsidies if you were a family unit, of a certain color. We're still living post that era, but trying to undo a lot of those barriers that were baked into the system."

In addition to the systemic barriers, there are others like transportation, reliable technology, lack of understanding of collegiate norms and practices that are also particularly challenging for justice involved who wish to pursue their education. Participant 9 recommended that college administrators expose systems and be transparent about processes and practices that may be barriers for justice involved individuals so that the JIIs are able to identify and have the tools to deal and overcome them. In an effort to engage and support JII's, colleges may wish to follow the example of a regional comprehensive four-year university, like P6's, which created a specialized position and focused offices to work specifically with justice involved and a network of service providers. P6 noted that supports of any kind, have gone a long way for justice involved individuals at their university. Their college created an environment where JIIs have a community of partners that provide both formal and informal supports. The college and its administrators provide safe spaces for JII's to talk to their colleagues and peers in a designated space where the students feel comfortable. P1 and P6 work for offices that offer a cohort model,

where college administrators help students to navigate processes together, inclusive of expungement of their records.

Another helpful resource may be lawyers as they have assisted community colleges in supporting justice involved with their legal issues. P1 shared that lawyers have been instrumental in providing free legal advice, handling expungements and/or pardons and in identifying grants that may help to pay for legal processes and forms. Three of the nine participants noted that it is important to understand JIIs' circumstances and take into consideration their stressors, their current familial and personal climate and then have people available to give them legitimate unrestricted access to assistance.

P9 also noted that the creation of good relationships within the college and different departments are essential for helping "walk students through processes and to assist with things like financial aid forms and scholarships." Similarly P4 noted that "in order for a student to be comfortable pursuing their education and be able to focus, they have to have income and resources available where they are not every day trying to figure out how to pay their light bill." P1's suggestion is that administrators proactively understand what justice involved individuals will need and create safe passages. The legislative participant noted that it is often the lack of knowledge about available resources that contributes to the social determinants. Colleges may seek to model after community colleges that provide structured programs of support through the offering of vouchers for clothes, free food, diapers, milk for single mothers, toiletry and other essential items so that their students can focus on their academics instead of wondering how to care for their basic needs. P9's program also offers tutoring, mentorship and wrap around support systems

According to half of the participants, justice involved students may need a source of "direct funding for basic needs, books and emergencies" that potentially arises during their enrollment. They also need help in navigating the FAFSA application. P3 for example expanded the application of tuition assistance grants to cover summer and winter enrollment for adult justice involved individuals. P3 stated that there was an expressed need for "creative reforms" to make sure that there is financial support and access to educational credentials.

Employment

Employment was mentioned by every participant and it centered upon the role that administrators can play in connecting and creating opportunities for justice involved individuals to make a livable wage. Participants referenced the building of a toolkit which would begin with helping JII's to develop their resume. According to P4, internship and work study options would also be helpful in building a toolkit that targets underdeveloped skills, ultimately providing justice involved individuals an opportunity to be more marketable. Participant 5 noted that the "job and career option pipeline must first be improved" since "ideally more companies need to see the benefits of creating jobs for people who have justice involved backgrounds and seek to create opportunities for people to have a second chance. Participant 5 opined that many justice involved individuals have the motivation to pursue an education however, they do not have the opportunity nor quality employment options.

One significant barrier seems to center around the type of job justice involved individuals are able to get based on their record or justice involvement. P5 shared that often times students want careers like nursing, yet they have had a conviction for a controlled substance so they would have a problem with getting a license. Two higher education professionals noted that educators must help students make a career match that is realistic

through honesty about the job options available for someone with a record. College administrators have the hard task of connecting those two things (interest and reality of employment), according to P4 and P5. The other major barrier is that individuals are returning from incarceration with college degrees but companies will not recognize a "prison degree." Participants 6 and 8 believe that college administrators are well positioned to have conversations with employment partners to facilitate an employment pathway for their justice involved students' even if it means working through their college's alumni base.

From a legislator's (P2) standpoint justice involved individuals need help with gaining access to and navigation of economic opportunities. One such example was P9's community college which entered into multiple partnerships with organizations that welcomed and strategically targeted justice involved employees and worked with colleges to develop a pipeline of skilled workers. An example P9 used was a partnership with a local medium-sized casino where JIIs participated in a paid training while pursuing a full-time job with the organization. The College also entered into a partnership with a local Mural Arts organization which employed and paid students above minimum wage and another partnership with catering companies and CDL/truck drivers. All of this helps the student connect with community partners that could fulfill their employment and social mobility needs while addressing society's workforce needs.

These successful employment partnerships shed light on ways colleges may help students through advocacy and the identification of employers who are "much more open-minded," as P3 would say. Open-mindedness extends beyond entry level positions but instead is predicated on the belief that justice involved individuals can do so much more than laborious

work. One of the previously incarcerated participants (P8) recounted their first job, post incarceration, remembering that it was very labor intensive, at a tree farm. It required long working hours and at 51, they were not interested in what P8 called “a young man's job.” P8 further noted that employment issues vary greatly by geographic locations. They used California as an example of a location that created pipelines for formerly incarcerated and justice involved individuals. According to P8, “some states have a lot more opportunities and some places have none.”

Housing

Colleges may wish to consider working with their local housing authority to provide a housing pathway for individuals. P2 believes that programs, similar to the program for reentering women, should be offered by colleges to help JIIs “land on their feet.” These services would include a monthly stipend, secure housing, and workforce skill development. Three of the nine participants noted their work closely with halfway houses, probation officers and social service agencies to combat the issue of homelessness. P4 emphasized that people who have been involved in the justice system, may face residual strained relationships within their communities because of their criminal activities. According to P4, sometimes, there are repercussions for some of the choices they made while involved in criminal behavior, which makes it complex when placing them in safe homes and environments. Some judicially involved students, according to three participants, may have limited options because their families are still involved in criminal activity and it may not be an ideal place for them to return. Others are couch surfing, in the experience of two participants. and their surroundings may not be adequate of controllable regarding the time and place to study or complete their homework. P3 also noted that

legislatures have “not done enough work around the housing piece.” They opined that having secure housing is important because often times, justice involved individuals don't want to go back into the same neighborhood or stay with the family that may have caused them harm.

The honors living learning community at P6’s 4-year college, may serve as a model program since it offers justice involved students with housing options that focus on recovery as well, for substance abusers. Almost all the participants noted that issues with housing may lead to recidivism since inadequate access to housing or unsafe environments can lead to justice involved pursuing quick money to fix their homelessness problem. Another common issue identified was when individuals return home from prison to find out that their only source of shelter has relocated and is no longer a housing option. Additionally, according to P5, formerly incarcerated often times are released to halfway houses which they typically have to leave, before completing their educational pursuits. P5 noted that when their term ends at the halfway house, they may have to relocate and therefore lose credits if they have to transfer to another institution closer to where they find housing. In their experience, one of the biggest barriers to credential completion is the need to leave a residential community or halfway house.

Participants noted that stigma can be another barrier to resources. P3 worked on a housing related “ban the box” legislation, so that individuals do not have to disclose criminal conviction on housing applications. P3 noted that if people checked the box, they would not be afforded “quality housing or even substandard housing because of discriminatory practices.”

Technology and Transportation

More the half of the participants mentioned that technology and transportation present major hurdles for justice involved individuals to persist in postsecondary education programs.

Participant 6 for example noted that: when working with someone, post incarceration, some may have never turned on a computer or spoken on a cell phone which can make it difficult for them to pursue their education." They further noted, justice involved are "being asked for deliverables by professors where they have to integrate technology into those deliverables, which "really raises the stakes for them." To address this issue, P6 and P9 developed partnerships to address the tech barriers for his students by providing laptops, wi-fi and specialized foundational training for students.

Participants also noted that transportation is a barrier to retention since students must be able to get from home to their worksite, grocery store and school. "College administrators will need to factor in those costs and offer some type of assistance, especially in the more remote areas."

Mental Health Services/Overcoming Stigma

Justice involvement and the circumstances leading up to incarceration or criminal behavior often times is traumatizing. Educators should seek not to retraumatize, through bureaucracies and barriers but instead look to connect JIIs to resources. The college participants in this study indicated that their campuses provide access to mental health counselors and support groups as a way to help students navigate their traumatic experiences and clinical diagnosis. P9 suggested training for all college staff members and faculty as a way to ensure that individuals and their experiences are "not all lumped together", but instead individualized making it possible to tailor services. In P9's experiences, justice impacted individuals do not want to disclose their past for fear that it might "devalue their existence in the class." "Colleges

should seek to create a non-judgmental space where individuals can disclose and be their vulnerable selves" noted P4.

Policies

The nine participants of this study referenced policies as a substantial barrier to persistence and credential attainment. Non-attendance policies for example have presented some challenges since justice involved individuals must frequently attend probation or parole check-in meetings. Policies around payment and registration were also reported barriers to persistence and completion as reported by P5 and P9.

Another policy consideration, centered around colleges that offer education in and outside of prison. The two formerly incarcerated participants indicated that justice involved individuals may take credits while incarcerated and subsequently be unable to finish their degree at the physical college campus because of college policies that ban convicted felon from campus. P7 shared another issue with credits obtained while incarcerated, noting that colleges should allow more cross credits so that if a person obtains credits at a prison-based college that post release, colleges should "pick it up there" by being a more flexible in accepting transfer credits from prison-based programs. P3 agreed, stating that the "bad part about them (justice involved) not finishing is they have credits out there and sometimes loans that they will be responsible for, so it just compounds the need for economic security when they can't complete their studies." Transferability of coursework taken in prison, should be a seamless transition from incarceration to connecting individuals to industry and resources according to P2.

Theme 5: Their Experiences and Backgrounds Matter

The formerly incarcerated and legislative participants stressed the importance of including justice involved students in designing supports offered by the college. According to

Participant 1, college administrators "cannot design something for someone without having their input and then be surprised that it does not work." Participants noted that people in power oftentimes do not talk to those most effected by the criminal justice system, as a way to leverage their experiences to transform and improve support systems for justice involved individuals. More than half of the participants noted that the justice involved "narrative matters." Participant 8, who was formerly incarcerated, used his story to illustrate how productive JIIs can be to make systemic changes and to advocate for policy reform. P8 noted that according to a human rights study, 40% out of nearly 200 former release lifers in California worked at nonprofit and were giving back, using their experiences and knowledge to affect policy changes. P9 also opined that "all these people (justice involved) have great knowledge and experience on how the system can be improved and done better and they can get better results."

Summary

The participant interviews consistently noted that a network of professionals could better facilitate pathways to post-secondary education for justice involved individuals. It also identified services needed to support justice involved, while enrolled in post-secondary education for purposes of persistence and program completion. Chapter 5 will summarize the research findings and provide implications for our community of practice.

CHAPTER 5: Discussion

This chapter will coalesce the findings, literature and interpretations made by the researcher. Limitations of the study, recommendations for future practice and research will be discussed with the aim of addressing the research questions and developing ways to facilitate pathways to postsecondary education for justice impacted individuals.

This phenomenological study was conducted to better understand the ways professionals, across sectors, could formally work together to help justice involved individuals overcome barriers that limit their access and attainment of postsecondary education credentials. The research design helped to examine the lived experiences of the participants which included: nine (9) professionals who have worked with justice involved individuals within social service agencies, government, advocacy organizations, two- or four- year colleges and formerly incarcerated individuals. The research questions that guided this study were: 1.) How may systems (organizations, colleges and agencies) align to facilitate postsecondary education for justice involved individuals and 2.) What supports are needed by justice involved students, once enrolled in postsecondary programs, to facilitate momentum towards degree or certificate attainment?

Theoretical frameworks guided this study and the findings were contextualized using existing research. Findings were consistent with research to show that a network of professionals could help justice involved individuals to better access and attain postsecondary education through intentional and transparent support services. The following thematic priorities emerged as ways this network could be impactful: 1.) creating a pathway of communication and connection, 2.) addressing sustainable basic needs 3.) coordinated community partnerships. 4.)

holistic supports that facilitate access to real and tangible resources; and remembering that 5.) background and family dynamics matter. Participants voiced that while services are available for justice involved individuals, there is a lack of uniformity and transparency making access to these resources difficult. Findings also showed a lack of holistic services which considered the totality of the justice involved individuals' experiences inclusive of their familial, systemic, traumatic experiences which governs their motivation, trust, confidence and prioritization.

The following chapter will discuss key findings as it relates to relevant literature and theories while identifying implications for future research, policy and practice. It will also summarize the study's limitation and provide a conclusive summary statement of findings.

System alignment

Research and participant feedback suggest that meaningful and sustainable systemic change can only occur through concerted, collaborative efforts on the part of all system professionals (Kania et. al, 2011). Creating an environment of shared leadership and collective visioning facilitates a more open exchange of information, better relationships among system participants, and a stronger commitment to a common vision (Kania et. al, 2011). When shared leadership occurs, people approach problems in collaborative ways, engage each other in defining the work to be done, and are able to facilitate interaction and sustained action to realize the shared goals (Kania et. al, 2011). A participant likened this process to "spokes on the wheel. You turn the wheel and all the folks move at the same time. If one spoke is out of place, the wheel cannot be as effective."

This study used various frameworks to determine how society, networks of professionals and colleges could increase access and postsecondary credential attainment for justice involved individuals. The *civic engagement model of reentry* for example, illustrates how communities

and its entities may help justice involved individuals work through identity transformation, life course and social disorganization. (Bazemore & Stinchcomb, 2004). *Social Capital Theory* was also used to highlight the value on social networks, social cohesion and relationships in promoting an individual's well-being and success (Almedom, 2005). The research and the participant feedback support the premise that coordinated social networks help change systems through relationships, warm hand offs, increased communication and pathway creation which are key to helping justice involved individuals to gain access and progress toward academic credentialing.

The role of community-based organizations, peer networks, and other social supports may not only promote educational attainment it has been shown to also reduce recidivism (Almedom, 2005). Findings suggests that a network of people within and across systems have reduced reincarceration and/or judicial involvement. Participants noted clear lines of communication, connections to identified people within social service and probation offices as some of the steps taken to advocate and connect justice involved individuals to needed resources. Participants spoke of synergetic relationships between colleges, social service agencies, and governmental offices as a way to create systemic and supportive pathways for justice involved individuals to successfully reengage and be contributory members to society. The Social Capital Theory and participant feedback also illustrated the importance of having more than one person helping justice involved individuals, to create linkages and pathways to resources that justice involved would not be able to access independently (Chambers & Guthrie, 2015).

When discussing systems, many of the study's participants noted that marginalization, stigma and disenfranchisement with education began at the elementary level, where harsh

punishments were unevenly applied, particularly with black and Hispanic students. Participants discussed a school to prison pipeline, opining that it was due in part to under-resourced schools and discriminatory practices within the elementary and middle schools across the United States. The justice involved individuals who participated in this study acknowledged issues within their foundational schooling as a major factor which lead to illiteracy, behavioral issues, unaddressed learning disabilities and trauma. These experiences were consistent with research that shows that adverse childhood experiences were also associated with a 35 percent increased risk of juveniles being involved in a serious or violent crime or chronically offending (Grant et al., 2020). Unmet mental health treatment further fuels the prison pipeline for juveniles (Cohall, 2016).

According to Love (2009), minority students seem to be targeted and are losing out on their education; students of color and those with disabilities are more likely to be funneled into the criminal justice system for behaviors that may warrant supportive interventions and/or a simple trip to the principal's office, instead of a criminal record (Love, 2009). Study participants recalled students they worked with, facing charges of assault and other crimes as young as 12 years old. They shared that those students would have benefited from classrooms that were designated for students struggling with behavioral issues, disabilities or mental health issues instead of being heavily charged by the criminal justice system. Severe penalties for minor offenses can have devastating and lasting effects on the youth who are sometimes abruptly separated from their families, schools, and communities (Sistachs, 2018). However, when given access to resources, education, positive opportunities a juvenile offenders trajectory may be influenced (Cavanagh, 2022).

Research and findings showed that there are several models that align with the theoretical frameworks referenced above and that collaboration and intentional services may

yield greater personal and systemic results. For example, youth involved in the juvenile justice system are often engaged in cross system services (Juvenile Justice Committee, 2020). This integrated care model can execute an interagency collaboration and partnership with other youth and family serving organizations (Juvenile Justice Committee, 2020) inclusive of stakeholders from schools, child welfare agencies, mental health, medical and substance abuse services, and employment and training programs. This integrated model helps mitigate risk factors, prevents further delinquency and facilitates restorative efforts (Juvenile Justice Committee, 2020). Governmental participants also noted a similar cross collaboration model which helps transition formerly incarcerated women into society through the use of coordinated supports and resources including: housing, stipends, skill development, basic needs resources and mental health supports. These models, if scaled, may help to facilitate postsecondary education pathways and coordinated supports for all justice involved individuals.

Breaking the cycle of incarceration involves a multifaceted approach, including addressing the root causes of criminal behavior, providing support and resources to those who have been involved in the criminal justice system, and promoting alternatives to incarceration (Domestic Policy Council, 2023). Justice involved individuals can strengthen communities and contribute to the common good through restorative practices (Bazemore & Stinchcomb, 2004). However, participant feedback and research show that both social and system-based influences are essential for successful reentry (Bazemore & Stinchcomb, 2004).

Supports for Justice Involved Students

Lochner and Moretti (2004) found that education significantly reduces criminal activity, while providing direct benefits to justice involved individuals (Lochner & Moretti, 2004). If schools were to provide comprehensive support services that address the unique needs of justice

involved students, post-secondary institutions can help to facilitate momentum towards degree or certificate attainment and increase the likelihood of successful reentry into society (Sutherland et al., 2019).

Participant feedback and research concur that post-secondary educational professionals may play a critical role in facilitating and supporting justice involved individuals academically and personally, by providing advocacy, intentional supports and linking them to resources which will help them to overcome barriers to educational pursuits (Delaney et al., 2019). Academic and social resources may include tutoring, mentoring, counseling and mental health services while seeking to create an accessible and inclusive campus environment (Delaney et al., 2019). Financial Services may also include allocation of aid to help cover costs of tuition, textbooks and housing expenses (Delaney et al., 2019). Postsecondary options may also include reentry services that focus on job training and placement. Advocacy and legal resources may also prove helpful in supporting students' rights and navigation of legal challenges that may arise while enrolled at the college (Delaney et al., 2019).

Participants agreed that higher education professionals and community members are essential to addressing basic and sustainable needs, providing holistic supports and helping justice involved individuals with the reconstruction of their confidence to promote self-advocacy, motivation, professional language and skill building. The findings were also in line with the *Human Capital Theory* which posits that education is an investment that can lead to greater economic and social opportunities, job creation, wages and increased productivity (Mokline, 2018). Participant experiences paralleled this research stressing that community partnerships outside of the college are important particularly since the "institution does not work

in a vacuum." Specific pathways should involve partnerships and relationships with churches, shelters and YWCA's within the community.

Professionals who work with justice involved individuals can engage in collaborative leadership as a way to build partnerships and foster collaboration between professionals across agencies, colleges and societal stakeholders (Innes & Booher, 2010). Both research and participants of this study agreed that leaders within each network or service agency can share their collective knowledge, best practices and support which may ultimately lead to greater communication and teamwork to support justice involved individuals (Innes & Booher, 2010).

As system leaders, cross-sector leaders would be able to focus on creating conditions that can produce self-sustaining change (Senge et al., 2015). These approaches are also in-line with *adaptive leadership frameworks* which speaks to the creation of a network of professionals, whom work from a premise of growth mindset and promote that change is possible, with a greater sense of capacity to adapt and learn (Marzano et al, 2009). Findings noted that this can prove particularly helpful when working with justice involved individuals whose actions are motivated, by hierarchal factors which include physiological, safety, social, esteem and self-actualization needs; all of which are needed along with growth mindset, before pursuit of postsecondary education can become their reality. Findings illustrated how a network of professionals could advocate for justice involved as it relates to transfer of credits (from prison-based programs to colleges), soft-skill development and rehabilitation services that help to enhance self-esteem while promoting and encouraging positive changes in behavior. They would also be able to support justice involved with reintegration into society while emphasizing their

role as responsible citizens inclusive of employment opportunities, housing assistance, and ongoing support.

Social Justice Implications

Gaps in research and consistency in participant responses noted an additional layer of challenges for justice involved black males and minoritized groups who wish to pursue post-secondary credentials. While the focus of this study was on facilitating pathways for justice involved individuals broadly, the racial disparity and overincarceration of Black men should not be ignored (Pettit & Gutierrez, 2018; Sawyer & Wagner, 2019).

Tenets of the Critical Race Theory (CRT) were present throughout many of the interviews particularly as it related to the role that race and racism play in shaping social structures which have a disproportionate impact on people of color. Results supported research findings that highlight that education is a tool for challenging systemic inequalities and promoting social justice (Bazemore & Stinchcomb, 2004). Some participants spoke about the preservation of the status quo of systematic racism (Castro et al., 2019) and noted the racist practices that have been incorporated into public education, policing and incarceration rates within the United States (Alexander, 2010). For transformation to take place, a study may wish to review several systems inclusive of child welfare, juvenile justice, elementary and middle schools since oppression is complex and can be in a latent form (Kolivoski, 2017).

An analysis of crossover youth would be helpful and require an analysis into the macro and structural perspectives as it relates to the impact of race and racism that have been "baked into the system," as noted by one of this study's participants. African American crossover youth

for example, have historically had an overrepresentation in many systems, compared to their white counterparts (Kolivoski et al., 2017) and research shows that these alleged child-serving systems, particularly the juvenile justice system, have had two main objectives inclusive of social care and social control, further penetrating individuals into the system and increasing the likelihood of negative outcomes (Sherman & Balck, 2015). Dominant narratives exist, that when youth of color exhibit delinquency it is more likely interpreted as a negative *individual*-level trait accompanied by a perception of dangerousness, carrying harsher punishment (Bridges & Steen, 1998; Graham & Lowery, 2004). Juvenile courts seem to further reinforce racial stereotypes of Black youth and delinquency (Butler, 2013) which often strip away their humanity, divert attention away from structural inequalities, and maintain a dominant ideology of unworthiness for an already minoritized group (Collins, 2000). Counter-deficit-story-telling, through the application of CRT, therefore becomes critically important (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) helping us to analyze issues using a race-based lens when examining history and present-day realities for minoritized groups.

A micro and macro pattern of professionals may seek to address these systemic issues by conducting equity audits, which can be used to identify practices, policies and procedures that create systemic barriers for minoritized populations within our institutions (Duplain et al., 2022). Equity audits may help to create and maintain a shared equity vision; collect data to identify gaps in opportunities and to rigorously mine the data with critical self-reflection (Duplain et al., 2022). Lastly, equity audits help professionals to chart a course of action with the aim of addressing root causes for opportunity gaps while designing pathways and practices that yield equitable outcomes (Duplain et al., 2022).

The findings of this research support the premise that colleges are well poised to take the lead on research, advocacy, awareness-building and training to bring about requisite systemic change. Colleges may also offer courses, teacher and guidance counselor workshops, and work with community outreach programs with the aim of increasing community awareness and engagement around the social, economic, and psychological factors that lead to youth crime and societal changes that can be made to combat those trends. Additionally, colleges can offer mentorship programs where college staff, students and professionals work with community leaders, to provide positive and supportive role models and resource rich networks. College professionals may also use their platform to redefine naming realities through a non-White dominant cultural perspective (Albrecht & Keen, 2009). For example, they may help to redefine that black men are not mostly criminals but shed light on the true problem of institutional racism that exists within the education, legal and economic systems that have affected black men disproportionately (Albrecht & Keen, 2009).

As noted in Chapter 2, colleges can collaborate across sectors to develop strategies for crime prevention and intervention which may lead to greater coordination of services with the aim of facilitating the sharing of resources, expertise, and best practices which cut across the elementary, middle, high school and postsecondary education levels. Cross-sector professionals can also advocate for policy changes with the goal of addressing systemic issues like poverty, inequitable practices, lack of access to education and employment opportunities, and inadequate mental health services. By advocating for policies that address these issues, environments can be cultivated to better support youth development, help to reduce the likelihood of criminal behavior and increase educator training. Colleges, using a restorative justice approach, may also seek to provide alternatives to traditional punitive approaches by designing tailored programs

and pathways for justice involved individuals which subsequently prevents further involvement in the criminal justice system.

Colleges have a major presence in the communities in which their schools reside. College leadership, if they seek to execute their mission, should take ownership of leading and transforming those communities through a solution-focused, sustainable and culturally relevant pathway to address known and historic issues. To do anything contrary, would mean that colleges are complicit in the historic marginalization and discriminatory practices that work to the detriment of those we commit to serve.

Implications for Future Research

As noted above, there are gaps in research regarding the additional barriers that may exist for black males who were justice involved. This may affect their successful reentry into society and their ability to gain access and/or persist towards post-secondary credentials. A race-based approach to this study may prove important to understanding the under-enrollment and lack of persistence that trend data shows about black males in college and their marginalization and high levels of incarceration within American society.

Eight of the nine participants discussed that family and the justice impacted individuals' background matters. Family dynamic and the socio-economic status of the family matters and influences the ability for justice involved to be contributory to society and successful in their pursuit of education. Participants of this study noted that families are often "silenced and overlooked" within the court system, indicating that this is often a systemic issue worth examining. Future research may wish to examine the impact of family and the totality of justice involved individuals background which may lead to further marginalization of this demographic

and their families. This may prove important because as a participant explained-the result of incarceration or justice involvement impacts and shapes all later experiences for justice involved individuals. If systems and their representatives like judges, police officers, probation officers, colleges do not take all factors into consideration when making decisions about justice involved individuals, then the system may not be improved, nor may justice involved individuals ever truly be successful in this society.

Another area for future exploration may include the examination into ways judges may leverage their authority and judicial power to effectuate systemic changes that positively impact justice involved.

Limitations

This phenomenological study was designed to better understand the lived experiences of professionals who work with justice involved individuals to facilitate pathways to postsecondary education. Due to a lack of qualitative research involving justice involved individuals and a network of professionals who can support and build pathways, however as with many qualitative studies, the sample size was small. The sample size included nine (9) participants which may prevent generalization and future qualitative research may wish to examine a larger sample to further examine the lived experiences of similar participants.

This study was also limited to virtual communication. Conducting in-person interviews may have afforded the researcher a better examination of participants' body language which could have provided additional insight into the meaning of the phenomenon for participants. The researcher also relied on self-reports from the participants to uncover the depth of their experiences which were presumed to be true and accurate. The limitations of this study present

opportunities for future research that seek to expand upon these findings as it relates to facilitating pathways to postsecondary education for justice involved individuals.

Summative Conclusion

This phenomenological study was an examination of how professionals may work intentionally and formally to facilitate pathways to postsecondary education for justice involved individuals. The researcher found that systems (organizations, colleges and agencies), when aligned formally, may facilitate postsecondary education for justice involved individuals. Additionally, with formal supports higher education professionals may help to facilitate momentum towards degree or certificate attainment. This study supports previous research which stressed the importance of understanding the intersectionality of justice involved college students as critical to better supporting this at-risk group of students (Johnson & Abreu, 2020). The intersectionality framework may help guide the development of policies and practices needed to better engage justice involved college students in a holistic way (Johnson & Abreu, 2020).

Research is well documented regarding the benefit of education on recidivism. This study gave voice to those who have often been excluded from previous research regarding the benefits of cross sector professionals on the success of justice involved individuals. There is still additional research needed that examines how black males, who are justice involved, are particularly marginalized and limited in their access, pursuit and persistent of postsecondary education. Also for additional research is the power and authority that judges and other higher-level criminal justice personnel may use their authority to address the systemic issues that create barriers for justice involved to successfully pursue education and more broadly and importantly to engage as self-sustaining, gainfully employed and contributory members of society.

This research provides colleges and cross sector professionals with guidelines to consider when seeking to develop systemic pathways, holistic supportive and resource rich partnerships and coordinated, transparent relationships for the benefit of justice involved. The findings in this study should not be considered mutually exclusive. The researcher hopes that by highlighting the positive impact of coordinated networks, that more colleges and cross-sector professionals would be encouraged to pursue them. When more justice involved individuals can benefit from a coordinated pathway to postsecondary education it increases their chance of increasing their socio-economic standing, mental and familial well-being, and benefit collegiate enrollments and workforce demands for skilled labor.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Letter

Dear Administrator,

Greetings. I am a doctoral student within the Organizational Leadership program at William Paterson University, which is located in Wayne, New Jersey. The reason for this email is to request your participation in my research.

The purpose of this research is to examine the potential for coordinated and proactive practices to support justice involved individuals who wish to pursue postsecondary education. The design of this study requires me to ask administrators within organizations, governmental agencies and colleges that work with justice involved individuals, to participate in an interview (s) to discuss their experiences with justice involved individuals as they seek to pursue postsecondary education. You will also be asked to provide insight about the identification of and ways systemic barriers may be addressed to better facilitate the postsecondary degree attainment of justice involved individuals.

The interviews will be 1:1 and will take place via zoom or in-person at a site convenient to the participant, with no other participants present. The interviews will take approximately 60 minutes and there will only be a follow-up meeting (s) and/or phone call to clarify points raised in the initial interview. Interviews will be recorded using the zoom record function or handheld device if the interview is in-person, if permission is granted to do so.

Administrator participation is completely voluntary and all data collected will remain anonymous. Risks associated with participation in the interviews will be minimal, any risks involved are no greater than those encountered in everyday life. A benefit of participation is an enhancement of knowledge in the area of this research study and informing agencies, schools and organizations that work to facilitate the postsecondary educational pursuits of justice involved individuals.

If you would like to volunteer to participate in this study, please review and sign the attached informed consent form and return it via email. Please feel free to share this email with colleagues who work with justice involved individuals in their pursuits of postsecondary education, who may be interested in also participating in this study.

Please contact me if you have any questions regarding this research. Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Danielle Liautaud-Watkins
William Paterson University
1600 Valley Road Wayne, New
Jersey 07470
liautaudd@wpunj.edu

Appendix B: Active Informed Consent for Interviews and Other Minimal Risk Studies

William Paterson University
Project Title: Facilitation of Postsecondary Educational Pursuits for Justice Involved Individuals
Principal Investigator: Danielle Liautaud-Watkins
Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Robert Seal, Chair of Dissertation Committee
Faculty Sponsor Phone Number: 973-720-2410
Department: Educational Leadership
Course Name and Number: Research Design and Methods II: LEAD 7320-070 Protocol
Approval Date: December 5. 2022

I have been asked to participate in a research study on the facilitation of postsecondary educational pursuits for justice involved individuals. The purpose of this study is to determine ways to facilitate postsecondary educational pursuits of justice involved individuals. I understand that I will be asked to be interviewed and discuss my work with justice involved individuals within my organization, agency or college to provide insight into my experiences regarding barriers they face, systemic ways to facilitate their access, momentum and credential attainment of postsecondary credentials. I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary and I may end my participation in this research at any time.

Risks associated with completing this interview (s) are minimal, which means the risks involved are no greater than risks encountered in everyday life and I accept them. Benefits of my participation in this study are highlighting ways to facilitate postsecondary educational pursuits for justice involved individuals through scaffolded support systems.

I understand that any data and recordings collected as part of this study will be stored in a safe and secure location, and that this data will be destroyed, when this research is completed. I

understand that I will be audio-recorded and/or video-recorded and that these recordings will be destroyed when the interview is completed.

I understand that my identity will be protected at all times and that my name will not be used without my separate written permission. I understand that the results of this study will not be reported in a way that would identify individual participants.

I understand that by providing consent for this study I am also providing consent for my anonymized responses to be included in datasets that may be used in the future by the investigator of this study or other investigators for research related to the purpose of this research study.

If I have questions about this study, I may call the investigators, Danielle Liautaud-Watkins or the other individuals listed in the heading of this document. If I have any questions or concerns about this research, my participation, the conduct of the investigators, or my rights as a research subject, I may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at 973-720-2852 or by email to IRBAdministrator@wpunj.edu.

By signing this consent form, I am agreeing to participate in this research study.

Name of Participant _____ Signature of Participant _____

Date:_____

Name of Investigator _____ Signature of Investigator_____

Date:_____

Name of Witness _____ Signature of Witness_____

Date:_____

Appendix C: Interview Questions

1. Please describe the programs you have facilitated or been involved with for justice involved individuals?

2. What type of steps do you take to facilitate enrollment for justice involved students, into postsecondary certificate or degree programs?

    a. What is the success rate for students whom you've helped to enroll in postsecondary education programs?
        i. How many enrolled and completed a certificate?
        ii. How many enrolled and completed a degree?

3. What are barriers you've witnessed that justice involved individuals, who wish to pursue postsecondary education, experience? In college and systemically?

    a. What have you done to address those barriers?
    b. Please describe what other resources, collegiate or systemic changes may be needed to address those barriers?
    c. What supports/services do you feel are lacking/still needed?
    d. Please describe any challenges, justice involved individuals may have who live on campus or off-campus housing.

4. Please describe what an ideal system of support could look like to facilitate postsecondary education for justice involved individuals.

    a. Who (organizations, governmental agencies, colleges) should be in a postsecondary network to facilitate justice involved individuals in their educational pursuits?
        i. Please provide your thoughts about social service agencies working with postsecondary networks and/or colleges to provide wrap-around services to justice involved individuals.
    b. How should these systems align to facilitate enrollment and momentum once enrolled in the postsecondary programs?