

The author(s) shown below used Federal funding provided by the U.S. Department of Justice to prepare the following resource:

Document Title: Prisons as Schools for Change:
Evidence from Illinois

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Document Number: 310638

Date Received: June 2025

Award Number: 15PNIJ-21-GG-00139-NIJB

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Office of Justice Programs (OJP)
NIJ award # 15PNIJ-21-GG-00139-NIJB
Prisons as Schools for Change: Evidence from Illinois
Final Research Report

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Unique Entity Identifier (UEI): ZUE9HKT2CLC9
01/01/22 - 12/31/2024
Award Amount: \$585,726

Disclaimer: This project was supported by Award No. 15PNIJ-21-GG-00139-NIJB, awarded by the National Institute of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this publication/program/exhibition are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of Justice.

I. Summary of the Project

Abstract: This research evaluates the Kewanee Life Skills re-entry Center (LSRC) using a randomized controlled trial. Over 24 months beginning in mid 2017, 551 individuals under the supervision of the Illinois Department of Corrections who were eligible to transfer to Kewanee were randomly offered the opportunity to transfer (the “treatment group”) or not (“the control group”). We leverage this randomization to identify the causal effect of assignment to the Kewanee LSRC on our primary outcome of interest, recidivism, as well as several secondary outcomes, including measures of re-arrest, occupational licensing, and post-release neighborhood of residence. Broadly, we find no evidence of significant impacts of assignment to the Kewanee LSRC on these outcomes. Qualitative data collected through interviews is explored to shed light on barriers that may have limited the impact of Kewanee LSRC exposure.

(i) Major Goals and Objectives

The three goals of this project, as stated in our original grant proposal, were to (1) use quantitative methods to evaluate the Kewanee Life Skills re-entry Center (LSRC), a rehabilitation-focused prison in Illinois, (2) use qualitative methods to evaluate the Kewanee LSRC, and (3) disseminate our findings along the way to ensure stakeholders are kept up to date on the latest results. The objectives for each goal – quantitative analysis, qualitative analysis, and dissemination – are described in more detail below.

Goal 1: Quantitative Analysis – We have used Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) administrative data to evaluate the impact of the intervention on prison re-entry rates.

Specifically, we stated in our original proposal that we would measure 1-, 2-, and 3-year re-entry rates once 100 or more study participants had been released for at least 1, 2, and 3 years, respectively. In this final report, we present re-entry results based on 1-, 2-, and 3-year post-release periods (covering 550, 531 and 459 of the 551 study participants, respectively).

Although not the primary focus of the intervention, we also proposed to examine impacts on post-release re-arrest rates and employment rates, conditional on signing data sharing agreements with the data owners that permitted archiving study data in line with NIJ's requirements. Based on data availability and closeout agreement, we have not pursued data on post-release re-arrest or employment.

Goal 2: Qualitative Analysis - While the quantitative analyses assess whether inmates' access to the Kewanee LSRC had a statistically meaningful impact on prison re-entry rates, it is also important to understand potential mechanisms, as well as any barriers that may limit the impact of exposure to the Kewanee LSRC. We planned to conduct out-of-prison in-depth interviews with individuals who were previously incarcerated at the Kewanee LSRC and had been released on parole. We also proposed to conduct focus groups with Kewanee LSRC staff and parole officers. This qualitative data collection was proposed to capture perceptions of the Kewanee LSRC facility, to help us understand which programmatic elements residents perceived to be most helpful in preparing for re-entry, and to understand experiences during the re-entry process. Based on IDOC preferences and closeout agreement, we paused qualitative work after conducting 21 interviews with individuals who were previously incarcerated at the Kewanee LSRC; we did not conduct any focus groups, we did conduct initial thematic analysis.

Throughout the data collection process, our team met weekly to debrief on the interviews, during which time we discussed early themes and monitored the continuous emergence of new insights to assess saturation, as is standard in qualitative research. We found that after 15 interviews, the same topics were coming up in relation to our key qualitative research questions about understanding the mechanisms driving the quantitative results and hearing from participants themselves about which re-entry supports were most helpful as they were exiting the Kewanee facility. We continued with 6 more interviews, specifically sampling those more recently released from Kewanee to ensure we captured diverse perspectives

related to our research questions, and once again found the same topics were coming up related to our research questions in each new interview. While we initially hypothesized for this project that we might need at least 40 interviews, in qualitative research, it is common to reach saturation at around 20 interviews.

Goal 3: Dissemination - We planned to disseminate our findings within scientific and policy communities. This dissemination would occur through participation in academic presentations, media pieces, and policymaker outreach. We have continued to do this throughout the duration of the project by presenting up-to-date findings at academic conferences and sharing them with the Illinois Department of Corrections at regular intervals. In the future, we intend to publish our findings in a leading peer-reviewed scientific outlet.

(ii) Research Questions

The United States' incarceration system has proven to be one of the most far-reaching and punitive public institutions of our time. Currently, we have the highest incarceration rate of any country in the world, imprisoning over 650 out of every 100,000 citizens (World Prison Population List 2018). Despite being more likely than any other country to incarcerate our citizens, our current incarceration system is ineffective in reducing subsequent criminal involvement: fully four out of five formerly incarcerated persons are re-arrested after release in some release cohorts (Alper et al, 2018).

This continuous cycle of crime and incarceration has direct, negative implications for both public safety and for government budgets: besides the heavy costs of imprisoning thousands of individuals, criminal records act as significant barriers to gainful employment and housing (Prescott and Starr, 2019; Epstein et al, 2018; Leasure and Martin, 2017) and increase dependence on government assistance (Mueller-Smith, 2015). It is thus vital for policymakers in

general—and correctional facilities in particular—to understand whether re-entry outcomes can be improved, and which re-entry initiatives hold the most promise.

Given their direct contact with incarcerated individuals, correctional facilities may offer the most promising opportunities to intervene in a way that reduces further justice system involvement—but these facilities are not currently filling this role. Many studies in the United States show that incarceration actually *causes* an increase in post-release recidivism and unemployment (Aizer and Doyle, 2015; Mueller-Smith, 2015). But this is not the case everywhere: rehabilitation-focused prisons in Norway, for instance, have been shown to not only reduce recidivism (by 29%), but also improve post-release employment outcomes for ex-offenders (Bhuller et al., 2019). These effects were primarily driven by individuals who were not working prior to incarceration; among other programs, increased participation in employment programs was able to raise employment and earnings while discouraging further criminal behavior among this group.

Building on this prior work, the current evaluation seeks to answer the following research question:

- Is the rehabilitation-focused prison model replicable in the United States and can it reduce post-release recidivism?

To advance the knowledge frontier on promising re-entry models, we conducted a randomized controlled trial of admission to an innovative rehabilitation-focused prison facility in Kewanee, Illinois. The Kewanee Life Skills re-entry Center (LSRC) has been in operation since February 2017 and focuses exclusively on moderate and high re-entry risk male offenders, based on the Service Planning Instrument assessment, (Jones and Robinson, 2018) who are between one and four years away from their release date. The Kewanee LSRC sets itself apart from other re-

entry facilities by incorporating the overall atmosphere of the facility itself into the de-institutionalization process. The facility and its processes create situations that mirror the autonomy that individuals are expected to have outside of prison, including the right to move freely throughout the facility without being physically escorted from one location to another. Further, the facility offers a suite of educational, job readiness and cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) courses. These supports provide individuals with an opportunity to build skills that may be valuable on the job market and ease the transition back into society. Moreover, these supports are designed to engender behavioral changes aimed at improving socioemotional well-being, potentially reducing the risk of reoffending. The primary quantitative aim of this study is to evaluate whether the support provided by the Kewanee LSRC can reduce this risk of reoffending, as measured using data on arrests, convictions, and re-incarceration. To the extent possible, the quantitative analysis also aims to uncover the channels through which any changes in reoffending may occur (for instance, changes in the characteristics of neighborhoods in which persons released reside).

While much of the existing research on re-entry has focused on objective outcomes like recidivism and employment, qualitative studies have shown that the process of re-entry is shaped by individual experiences, social contexts, and access to supports (Western 2018; Harding, Morenoff and Wyse, 2019). Returning individuals must navigate complex personal, social, and structural challenges that may determine how they draw on skills and knowledge from pre-release programming (Petersilia, 2003). By conducting in-depth interviews with those recently released from the Kewanee LSRC, the qualitative work in this study aims to capture how participants experienced the facility's programming, which programmatic elements they found useful in preparing for release, and any challenges to success they faced post-release. This qualitative work will help contextualize the quantitative findings and provide deeper insight

into how individuals apply the skills and knowledge gained from pre-release programming to their re-entry experiences.

(iii) Research design and analysis techniques

Quantitative Analysis: We evaluated the Kewanee LSRC using a randomized controlled trial. This was made possible by the fact that there was excess demand for placement at the Kewanee LRSC; by mid-2019, for instance, the facility only had space to house 237 individuals, but had received nearly 3,000 transfer applications. Thus, IDOC staff were able to conduct randomization waves to determine who was admitted to Kewanee and who remained in their original IDOC facilities.

Randomization ran from mid 2017 to mid 2019 and followed a multi-step screening process which ensured that applicants met four requirements:

1. Individuals must not have already been randomized into the treatment or control groups, and they could not have been subject to outstanding medical holds, transfer stops, or immigration warrants.
2. Individuals must have been nearing the end of their sentence and anticipating re-entry within one to four years.
3. Individuals must have completed the Service Planning Instrument (Jones and Robinson, 2018) re-entry risk assessment and received a moderate- or high-risk score. SPIn is a tool that is used by IDOC to assess recidivism risk. This requirement ensured that the Kewanee LSRC was not admitting individuals with risk assessment scores that were too low.
4. Individuals must not have had a history of significant disciplinary infractions in the six months preceding the application date. The last requirement was put in place to ensure

the physical security of the Kewanee LSRC facility, while also maintaining the free movement policy. Those who did not meet this criterion remained eligible for future randomization waves.

Applications from individuals who met these criteria were reviewed through a hand-review process. The Kewanee LSRC staff developed a scoring rubric to determine whether applicants were ineligible due to any of the following disqualifying factors:

1. Evidence of clear and intentional misrepresentations in the application.
2. Blaming others for their prior actions.
3. Criminogenic needs that were not treatable at the Kewanee LSRC (e.g. those currently enrolled in specialized treatments).

Over 24 months, IDOC officials conducted 18 randomization waves (referred to as batches) amongst 551 individuals, assigning 277 individuals to the treatment group and 274 individuals to the control group. Randomization waves took place on an ad hoc basis as beds became available at Kewanee LSRC. For each randomization wave, the number of individuals assigned to treatment was determined by the number of available beds. Compliance was high: 93% of those assigned to the treatment group were eventually transferred to the Kewanee LSRC, while only 7% of the control group were transferred.

Table 1: Treatment and Control Baseline Characteristics

Variable	Treatment	Control	Difference in Means	P-value
Age	36.318 (8.781)	37.485 (9.925)	-1.027 (0.805)	0.202
Black	0.61 (0.489)	0.533 (0.5)	0.078 (0.043)	0.067
Hispanic	0.137 (0.345)	0.124 (0.33)	0.014 (0.029)	0.633
Veteran	0.022 (0.146)	0.022 (0.147)	-0.001 (0.013)	0.923
Sentence Length	13.3 (11.229)	11.971 (10.487)	1.223 (0.932)	0.19
Prison Time Remaining (Years)	2.462 (0.867)	2.33 (0.84)	0.13 (0.073)	0.075
Truth-in-sentencing %	0.596 (0.159)	0.58 (0.148)	0.016 (0.013)	0.232
Direct from Court	0.199 (0.4)	0.212 (0.409)	-0.022 (0.034)	0.519
Discharged & Recommitted	0.643 (0.48)	0.617 (0.487)	0.039 (0.041)	0.348
Parole Violations	0.148 (0.356)	0.157 (0.364)	-0.013 (0.031)	0.662
Cook	0.495 (0.501)	0.391 (0.489)	0.099 (0.043)	0.02
Winnebago	0.043 (0.204)	0.055 (0.228)	-0.013 (0.018)	0.487
Peoria	0.047 (0.212)	0.044 (0.205)	0.003 (0.018)	0.847
F-test of Joint Significance				0.221

Note: There are 277 treatment and 274 control individuals. The treatment and control columns represent mean values of respective variables. Parenthetical values below means represent standard deviation of variable. P-value refers to the p-value associated with the coefficient on treatment status in a regression of the given outcome on an indicator for treatment and batch controls.

We tested for balance between the treatment and control groups in regard to participant demographics, prison sentence, type of entry, and sentencing county, which represent all of the (pre-determined) variables available in IDOC records.¹ Table 1 above shows that the randomization process was successful at balancing observable characteristics across the treatment and control groups. Given that the table tests for balance across thirteen covariates, some degree of imbalance for individual covariates is to be expected even if the randomization was successfully undertaken. In the final row of the table, we present the p-value associated

¹ See Table 1A for detailed variable definitions.

with a test of the joint null hypothesis that all treatment-control differences are jointly equal to 0. The p-value of 0.22 indicates that we cannot reject the hypothesis that the treatment and control groups are indeed sampled from the same population.

At the time of randomization, study participants were typically in their mid-thirties, primarily Black or Hispanic, and serving 12-13 year sentences. Consistent with the requirement that individuals be 1-4 years away from release at the time of randomization, study participants had an average of 2.4 years remaining on their sentence. Nearly two-fifths had been in prison before, either for the same conviction or sentence (parole violations) or a different one (discharged and recommitted). A large share (44%) were sentenced in Cook County, home to the city of Chicago.

Qualitative Data Collection: Qualitative data collection consisted of 21 in-depth interviews with men on parole who were formerly incarcerated at the Kewanee LSRC.

Interview Recruitment and Sampling

To recruit interview participants, the research team partnered with the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) to identify individuals who met the eligibility criteria – specifically, men formerly incarcerated at the Kewanee LSRC who were on parole or otherwise released from custody. The initial goal was to conduct up to 100 in-depth interviews, with recruitment continuing until thematic saturation was reached. The team worked with Parole Officers (POs) to distribute recruitment flyers to eligible individuals. As a secondary recruitment method, snowball sampling was used, with interviewees asked to refer to others they knew from their time at the Kewanee LSRC who might be interested in participating.

The first wave of interview participant recruitment began in February 2023. The research team provided POs with flyers detailing the study, emphasizing the voluntary nature of participation, and noting that a \$50 gift card would be provided as an incentive for participation. The flyers also included research team contact information for those interested in participating. From these efforts, 24 individuals reached out with interest in participating. Due to administrative matters, qualitative research activities were paused between April and December 2023. In January of 2024, the research team began reaching out to those who had formerly indicated interest in participating in interviews. Because the interview scheduling outreach happened almost 10 months after individuals had originally expressed interest in participating, many phone numbers had changed, and we were not able to reach everyone on the original list. This first round of recruitment resulted in 12 interviews.

Given the known challenges in reconnecting with participants after the research pause, the research team implemented snowball sampling as a secondary recruitment strategy to expand the sample. Additionally, initial recruitment efforts relied on PO referrals, which may have excluded those who were less engaged with supervision or who were more hesitant to engage with research that they were hearing about from their POs. Prior to scheduling interviews with those identified through snowball sampling, the research team first confirmed that they had been formerly incarcerated at Kewanee LSRC and met the study's eligibility criteria. This method resulted in 4 additional interviews.

During repeated thematic saturation checks, the research team found that many interviewees had been released from Kewanee at least two years prior to the interview and had not recidivated, likely reflecting the mechanical oversampling of those with more successful re-entry experiences. Additionally, several of the interviewees had been incarcerated at Kewanee during the COVID-19 pandemic, which they noted had altered the availability of services and

programming. To address these concerns and ensure we had a sample conducive to answering our qualitative research questions, the research team conducted a final round of recruitment in April 2024. Since recently released individuals may have had different experiences both at Kewanee and during re-entry, this final round aimed to capture more immediate perspectives on how individuals navigated the transition process post-release. This effort resulted in 5 additional interviews.

The interview sample included 21 men who had been formerly incarcerated at Kewanee LSRC. Our average interviewee for this qualitative study was 46 years old. At the time of the interview, participants ranged in age from 31 to 62 years old and were living in various parts of Illinois, including Chicago, Peru, Champaign, and Peoria. Time since release varied across participants: 8 had been released approximately two years prior, 4 had been out for three years, 8 for four years, and 1 for five years, meaning the average interviewee had been released for just over three years at the time of the interview.

A key limitation of the interview sampling was the 10-month gap between initial recruitment and data collection, which created logistical challenges and may have affected participant recall, particularly for those released from IDOC several years prior. Throughout the data collection period, the team conducted regular debriefs to assess thematic saturation and ensure that interviews reflected a broad range of perspectives relevant to the qualitative research questions in the study.

Interview Data Collection

Between January and May 2024, the research team conducted one-hour, semi-structured interviews over Zoom with the 21 respondents. All interviews were audio-recorded, and during each interview, a second member of the interview team joined the Zoom call and took field

notes, writing down observations and takeaways as well as any observations about body language and interactions during the interview. Participants were provided with a consent form in advance of the interview outlining confidentiality measures, the voluntary nature of the interviews, the use of audio recording, and their right to withdraw at any time. The interviewer then administered verbal consent at the start of each interview. Interview data was stored on a secure server and pseudonyms and interview IDs were used to name all files to ensure participant confidentiality.

Prior to conducting interviews, we created an interview guide (included in our Appendix) with open-ended questions designed to explore participant experiences at Kewanee and during re-entry. The interviews were semi-structured, allowing interviewers to follow up on key themes and probe for deeper insights. The section on Kewanee experiences captured participants' perspectives on daily life at the facility, relationships with peers and staff, the programming and services they accessed, and how Kewanee compared to other IDOC facilities. This section also explored participants' sense of community while at Kewanee, skill development for re-entry, and challenges navigated after release. The post-release section, modeled after Western's (Western, 2018) re-entry study, examined key areas identified as relevant during re-entry, including daily routines, support networks, housing stability, employment opportunities, and financial responsibilities. Additionally, we sought to understand whether and how participants used skills or resources from Kewanee to support their re-entry and any gaps they encountered.

The interviewer team comprised of four women from diverse backgrounds, including those originally from the United States, Haiti, China, and India, and ranging in age from 25 to 35. This composition helped to bring multiple perspectives to the research process. Because the study involved interviewing formerly incarcerated men about potentially sensitive topics, the team received extensive training in ethical, trauma-informed interviewing, and researcher

positionality. The trainings also covered techniques for conducting semi-structured interviews, maintaining participant confidentiality, and practicing reflexivity in qualitative research. Throughout the interview period, the team held weekly debriefs to refine interview techniques, ensure that a broad range of perspectives was captured, and to discuss emerging themes. From our notes during data collection, we present an overview of initial thematic analysis that the team identified based on the interviews.

(iv) Expected applicability of the research

Much U.S.-based research on post-release outcomes of those previously incarcerated has focused on evaluating wraparound services for ex-prisoners—including transitional jobs, cognitive behavioral therapy, substance abuse therapy and housing assistance—once they have been released from prison. These programs usually last a few months and aim to remedy the fact that ex-prisoners face compounding barriers to the development of a stable life, including limited education and work experience, and high rates of mental illness, trauma, and substance abuse (Doleac, 2016; Doleac, 2018). Unfortunately, several randomized controlled trials (RCTs) show that these wraparound services generally yield disappointing results (Grommon, Davidson, and Bynum, 2013; Cook, Kang, Braga, Ludwig, and O'Brien, 2015; Wiegand and Sussell, 2016; D'Amico and Kim, 2018).

The historical U.S. focus on wraparound services, often provided post-release, may miss key components of effective rehabilitative programming in other countries: first, rehabilitation focused services in countries like Norway are provided prior to an individual's release from prison, in order to prepare them well in advance for re-entry into society; second, individuals may benefit from these services being available and readily accessible for a few years, as opposed to a fixed duration of a few months; and third, compliance with programming may be

much higher while incarcerated than in a post-release environment because it removes various obstacles to participation, such as lack of transportation (Buck Willison, 2019; Lindquist et al, 2018). The Kewanee LSRC evaluation was designed to help clarify whether these differences hold the key to improving offender re-entry outcomes in the United States.

Prior to the present study, Cook et al. (2015) presented the best evidence of potential benefits associated with the provision of programming prior to release. Although the Kewanee LSRC model built on this intervention across several dimensions – emphasizing personal freedom and choice in take-up of services, offering individuals the opportunity to participate in services over an extended period of 12- 48 months, and emphasizing physical autonomy and freedom of movement within the facility – it ultimately showed that these changes were unable to significantly reduce the re-incarceration rate among the study population. To be even more specific, access to the Kewanee LSRC was unable to significantly reduce the re-incarceration rate amongst a group of men at elevated risk of re-entering prison (based on the SPIn re-entry risk assessment) that may have been positively selected within that group via the eligibility criteria (e.g., no recent significant disciplinary infractions, not blaming others for their prior actions based on their application essay, etc.). At the same time, there were no significant increases in re-offending associated with access to the Kewanee LSRC. As such, the 3-year prison re-entry rate was broadly similar for the treatment group (28%) and control group (25%). While quantitative results from our study indicate that there was not a reduction in the likelihood of re-entry, there was also not an increase in that likelihood for participants. Qualitative insights from our interviews pointed towards how incarcerated persons viewed their time at Kewanee as a stark contrast to other IDOC facilities. They appreciated increased autonomy, respectful treatment and access to educational programming. They also highlighted practical tools learnt at Kewanee which they applied in their lives post release.

Although our findings are necessarily specific to the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) population that participated in the study, IDOC is broadly representative of the U.S. prison population along various dimensions, including with respect to the high re-entry rates for those previously incarcerated. As such, any lessons learned from our study are likely to be useful for prison reform efforts across the U.S., but should be leveraged and interpreted in conjunction with evidence generated by other evaluations of rehabilitation-focused prison facilities.

Examples of such evaluations include research on Pennsylvania's *Little Scandinavia* unit, which is designed to draw lessons from practices employed in Scandinavian prison facilities (known for their focus on rehabilitation) and may soon be expanded to several other units within the Pennsylvania DOC (Hoopes 2024), as well as an evaluation of the Restoring Promise program (Clark-Moorman, 2024), which operates in prisons in several U.S. states and focuses on improving prison culture and climate.

II. Participants and other collaborating organizations

1. Principal Investigators/Project Directors

a) Name: Dr. Ashna Arora

Role: Co-Investigator

Nearest person month worked: 36

Contribution to Project: Dr. Ashna Arora oversaw research design and implementation of this project, contributing her expertise in causal methods and data analysis.

Funding Support: NIJ and Arnold Ventures

Collaborated with individual in foreign country: No

Country(ies) of foreign collaborator: NA

Travelled to foreign country: No

If traveled to foreign country(ies), duration of stay: NA

b) Name: Dr. Benjamin Feigenberg

Role: Co-Investigator

Nearest person month worked: 36 months

Contribution to Project: Dr. Benjamin Feigenberg contributed to the project by providing academic direction and overseeing the design and implementation of the RCT, including statistical power calculations, randomization, and data analysis. His involvement was supported through a subcontract, with funding from NIJ to ensure methodological rigor and policy-relevant insights.

Funding Support: NIJ

Collaborated with individual in foreign country: No

Country(ies) of foreign collaborator: NA

Travelled to foreign country: No

c) Name: Dr. Hays Golden

Role: Principal Investigator

Nearest person month worked: 11 months

Contribution to Project: Dr. Hays Golden, serving as the Administrative Principal Investigator (PI) after Dr. Ashna Arora's departure from the Crime Lab, played a key role in overseeing project operations and ensuring continuity.

Funding Support: NIJ and Arnold Ventures

Collaborated with individual in foreign country: No

Country(ies) of foreign collaborator: NA

Travelled to foreign country: No

2. Each person who has worked at least one person month per year on the project during the reporting period

a) Name: Diamond Thompson

Role: Research Manager

Nearest person month worked: 4 months

Contribution to Project: Diamond Thompson coordinated research activities, managed partnerships, and ensured effective implementation of the study.

Funding Support: NIJ and Arnold Ventures

b) Name: Leah Luben

Role: Research Analyst

Nearest person month worked: 13 months

Contribution to Project: Leah Luben contributed to the project by developing qualitative research instruments, assisting with participant recruitment and consent protocols, and supporting the training of Research Assistants for data collection.

Funding Support: NIJ and Arnold Ventures

c) Name: Javier Lopez

Role: Analytics Manager

Nearest person month worked: 14 months

Contribution to Project: Javier Lopez contributed to the project by processing, coding, and matching data across sources, as well as implementing statistical analyses under the guidance of Dr. Feigenberg and Dr. Arora.

Funding Support: NIJ and Arnold Ventures

d) Name: Daniel Lopez

Role: Senior Research Manager

Nearest person month worked: 19 months

Contribution to Project: Danny Lopez co-managed relationships with external partners, internal implementation activities, and communication of findings.

Funding Support: NIJ and Arnold Ventures

e) Name: Miguel Hernandez-Pacheco

Role: Research Manager

Nearest person month worked: 20 months

Contribution to Project: Miguel Hernandez-Pacheco co-managed relationships with external data and program partners, internal implementation activities and communication of findings.

Funding Support: NIJ and Arnold Ventures

f) Name: Kairvy Grewal

Role: Qualitative Research Manager

Nearest person month worked: 15 months

Contribution to Project: Kairvy Grewal worked on developing qualitative instruments and conducted participant interviews, recruitment and consent protocols. She co-managed relationships with external data and program partners, internal implementation activities and communication of findings.

Funding Support: NIJ and Arnold Ventures

g) Name: Germalysa Ferrer

Role: Qualitative Project Associate

Nearest person month: 15 months

Contribution to Project: Germalysa coordinated conducting interviews with Kewanee participants and assisted in qualitative data collection.

h) Name: Tom Ballard

Role: Data Associate

Nearest person month: 16 months

Contribution to Project: Tom Ballard contributed to the project by processing, coding, and matching data across sources, as well as implementing statistical analyses under the guidance of Dr. Feigenberg and Dr. Arora.

Funding Support: NIJ and Arnold Ventures

i) Name: Melissa McNeill

Role: Data Science Manager

Nearest person month: 7 months

Contribution to Project: Melissa McNeill contributed to the project by processing, coding, and matching data across sources, as well as implementing statistical analyses under the guidance of Dr. Feigenberg and Dr. Arora.

Funding Support: NIJ and Arnold Ventures

j) Name: Jacob Miller

Role: Embedded Analyst

Nearest person month: 11 months

Contribution to Project: Jacob Miller contributed to the project by processing, coding, and matching data across sources, as well as implementing statistical analyses under the guidance of Dr. Feigenberg and Dr. Arora.

What other organizations have been involved as partners?

Organization Name: Arnold Ventures

Location of Organization: 1225 I St NW #7, Washington, DC 20005, United States

Partner's contribution to the project: Funding

Organization Name: Illinois Department of Corrections

Location of Organization: 2700 S California Ave, Chicago, IL 60608

Partner's contribution to the project: Collaborative Research

III. Changes in approach from original design and reason for change

The research team shifted its qualitative approach based on guidance from IDOC. Specifically, to minimize logistical challenges, IDOC requested that data collection be conducted by Crime Lab's in-house team rather than through a partnership with the John Howard Association. In May 2023, we submitted a memo to NIJ outlining these changes to our qualitative research approach.

We also experienced delays in project activities. In April 2024, NIJ conducted a remote monitoring review of our project, which required us to pause all activities until the review was completed. During this time, we worked closely with NIJ representatives to provide necessary documentation and address any concerns related to project expenditures and progress. The pause, while important for ensuring compliance with grant requirements, impacted our ability to continue with the planned data collection, particularly the qualitative interviews.

IV. Outcomes

(i) Activities/accomplishments

Quantitative Analysis: Consistent with the analyses outlined in our initial proposal, we produced estimates of 1-, 2-, and 3-year prison re-entry rates for individuals in the treatment and control groups who had been released for at least 1, 2, and 3 years respectively.

Of the 551 study subjects, we can observe 1-year outcomes for 550 individuals who participated in the randomized control trial (276 treatment, 274 control). Additionally, we can observe 2-year outcomes for 531 individuals (266 treatment, 265 control), and 3-year outcomes for 459 individuals (232 treatment, 227 control). We note that findings for 3-year re-entry rates, in

particular, are subject to change as additional participants accrue sufficient time after their release to be included in the analysis sample (only 20 study participants are not included in the 2-year re-entry sample and only 1 study participant is not included in the 1-year re-entry sample).

Qualitative Analysis: Based on the closeout agreement, initial thematic analysis was conducted. During data collection, we monitored for thematic saturation, we documented early qualitative insights which we outline in a subsequent section. These insights, drawn from field notes and team debrief notes, highlight early themes related to Kewanee LSRC experiences, skill application, and support systems post-release.

Dissemination: In addition to regularly sharing updated analysis findings with IDOC stakeholders, we have sought out opportunities to disseminate our findings whenever possible. Dissemination activities have included presentations by the co-PIs at national conferences including the annual conferences of the Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management and the Southern Economic Association. Co-PI Arora also presented preliminary findings and information on the Kewanee LSRC facility at NIJ's National Research Conference in the Fall of 2024. We have also sought out more informal opportunities to disseminate findings to stakeholders, including by engaging with representatives from the Governor's Office in the State of Illinois and by meeting with peer researchers engaged in contemporaneous evaluations of rehabilitation-oriented facilities in other settings (for instance, the evaluation of Michigan's IGNITE Program conducted by Alsan, Barnett, Hull, and Yang).

(ii) Results and Findings

Figures 1-3 plot cumulative re-entry rates every three months (i.e., the likelihood of returning to prison within 3, 6, 9 months, etc.), separately by treatment status. We restrict attention to study

participants who have been released for at least 12 months in Figure 1, 24 months in Figure 2, and 36 months in Figure 3.² We construct time since release using August 2024 as our end point (this is the most recent date for which prison re-entry data were analyzed within the grant reporting period). Overall, we do not document statistically significant reductions in the prison re-entry rate for the treatment group relative to the control group.

In Figure 1, the control group (displayed in black) is observed reentering at a slightly higher rate than the treatment group (displayed in blue) in every quarter following their release from prison. However, as Table 2 shows, this difference is not statistically significant at conventional significance levels. At the end of 12 months, 11.3% of the control group had re-entered prison. After controlling for randomization batch fixed effects and individual-level covariates,³ the treatment group is 0.3 percentage points less likely to return to prison (equivalent to 2.7% of the control group mean), but this difference is not statistically distinguishable from zero.

² Table 1B provides re-entry rates by time since release and treatment status for an unbalanced panel that includes all individuals with available re-entry data for 12 months post-release when measuring 12 month re-entry, all individuals with available re-entry data for 24 months post-release when measuring 24 month re-entry, and all individuals with available re-entry data for 36 months post-release when measuring 36 month re-entry.

³ Specifically, we control for race/ethnicity, age, veteran status, sentence type, sentence length, truth-in-sentencing status, and sentencing county.

Figure 1. Likelihood of Returning to Prison within 12 Months

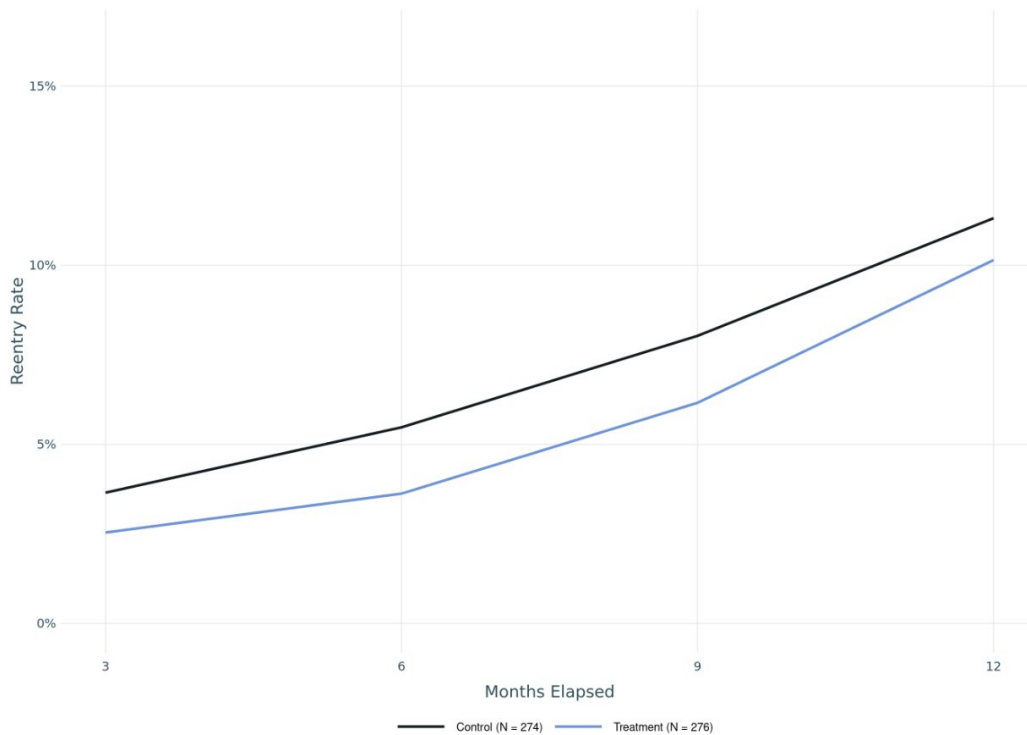


Figure 2 focuses on those released for at least 24 months prior to August 2024. We find that the re-entry rate for treatment group members surpasses the control group re-entry rate at 18 months after exit – the control and treatment group re-entry rates remain similar in magnitude thereafter. At the end of 24 months, 18.9% of the control group had re-entered prison. After controlling for randomization batch fixed effects and individual-level covariates, the treatment group is 1.1 percentage points more likely to return to prison (equivalent to 5.8% of the control group mean), but this difference is not statistically distinguishable from zero.

Finally, in Figure 3, we observe that the treatment group re-entry rate surpasses the control group re-entry rate after 24 months and remains higher through the remainder of the three year post-release period. At the end of 36 months, 25.1% of the control group had re-entered prison. After controlling for randomization batch fixed effects and individual-level covariates, the

treatment group is 4 percentage points more likely to return to prison (equivalent to 15.9% of the control group mean), but this difference is not statistically distinguishable from zero.

Figure 2. Likelihood of Returning to Prison within 24 Months

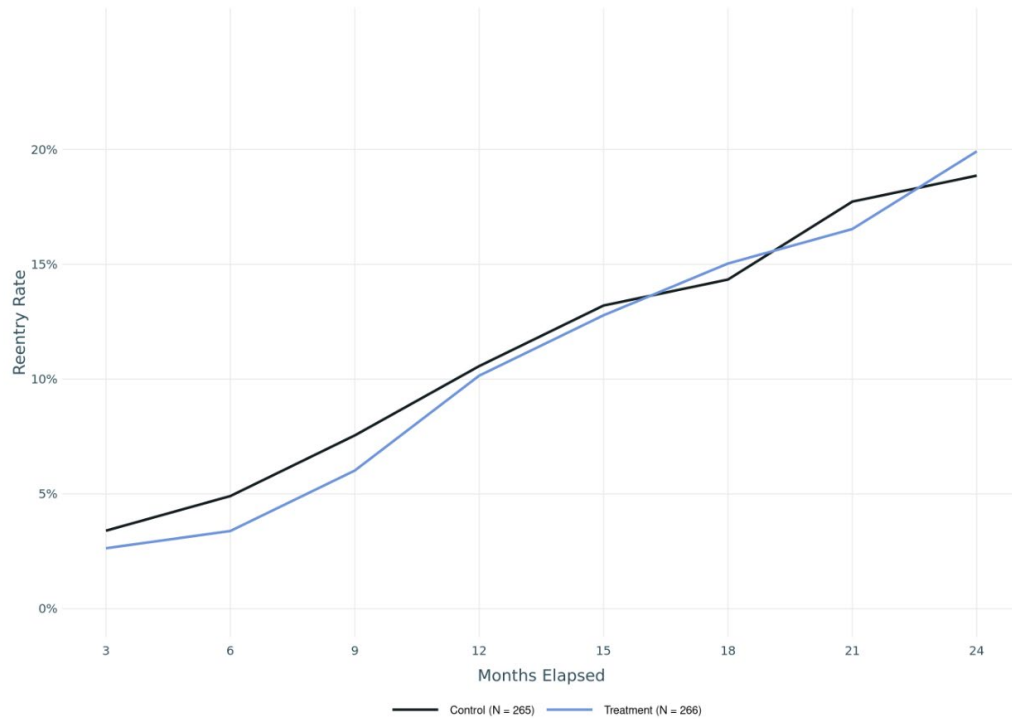


Figure 3. Likelihood of Returning to Prison within 36 Months

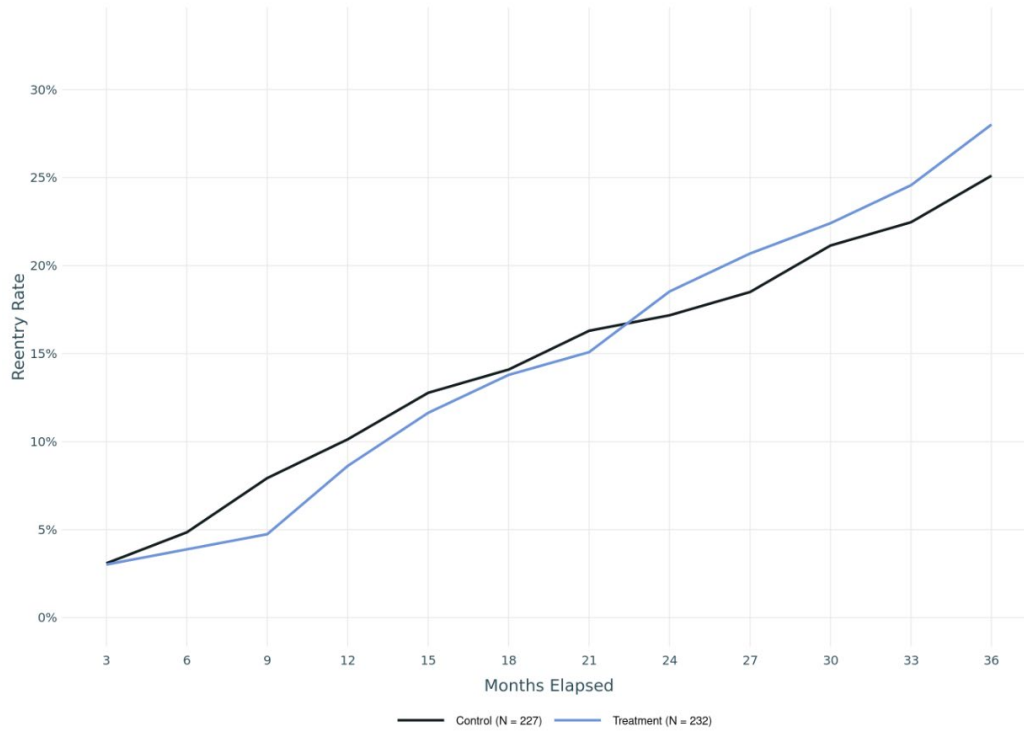


Table 2: Treatment Effect by Release Follow-up Period

	12-Months	24-Months	36-Months
Treatment Effect Estimate (Std. Error)			
No Controls	-0.012 (0.026)	0.011 (0.034)	0.029 (0.041)
	P-Value: 0.659	P-Value: 0.759	P-Value: 0.482
Batch Controls Only	-0.008 (0.026)	0.013 (0.035)	0.033 (0.042)
	P-Value: 0.762	P-Value: 0.702	P-Value: 0.426
With Covariate and Batch Controls	-0.003 (0.027)	0.011 (0.035)	0.040 (0.042)
	P-Value: 0.910	P-Value: 0.740	P-Value: 0.335
Control Mean	0.113	0.189	0.251
Total Observations	550	531	459
Control Observations	274	265	227
Treatment Observations	276	266	232

Note: Regressions with controls include randomization batch fixed effects as well as controls for race/ethnicity, age, veteran status, sentence type, sentence length, truth-in-sentencing status, and sentencing county. Robust standard errors are presented in parentheses.

Qualitative Insights Emerging During Data Collection

These insights are not drawn from qualitative coding, rather they represent insights from preliminary thematic analysis based on ongoing reflections from the research team during data collection. The insights are drawn from field notes, team debrief meetings, and interviews compiled throughout the interview process, rather than from systematic post-data collection analysis, and should be interpreted as preliminary reflections. The three key themes presented in this section were identified through a systematic review of interview data, with particular attention to recurring patterns and participant narratives. The following themes were selected because they were the most frequently discussed by participants and emerged as the most prominent patterns across interviews. The first theme shed light on how formerly incarcerated men experienced Kewanee, and reflects the common perception that they felt ‘humanized’ while they were at Kewanee (in comparison to other IDOC facilities). The second theme highlighted that classes on financial management and computer skills were the most popular at Kewanee. These were not just useful at Kewanee but equipped individuals with skills they could use post release. The third theme highlighted that, beyond resources offered at Kewanee, familial support emerged as a key factor for those navigating life post release.

The experience of Kewanee

Our interview guide was designed to capture experiences at the Kewanee LSRC. One particular topic that came up repeatedly during team debriefs was how interviewees talked about daily life at Kewanee differing from other IDOC facilities. Several interviewees spoke about how Kewanee felt more “welcoming” in comparison to other IDOC facilities that they had been in. For instance, one interviewee told us:

“So, upon arrival, there, first, you’re not fully used, coming from IDOC – you’re not used to people actually being so kind to you, as far as talking to you like a civilized person and human being and not dehumanizing you. So, it was nice. The introduction was nice. They welcomed us there with open arms, and you just felt so good. You felt like you were so down and dirty, and then when you get to a place like Kewanee it’s like, damn, I’m in heaven.”

The ‘humanizing’ experience at Kewanee stood out to this interviewee since he was not able to encounter that at other IDOC facilities.

While one interviewee pointed out how welcoming Kewanee was, another highlighted that the facility granted inmates “more freedom” to move around.

“It was a lot more freedom. You signed out, you didn’t have to worry about being escorted. You could come and go as you please, just basically signing out...Whereas other places, it was mass movement. These were only the times that the movement was moving, so sometimes you got to your location, like healthcare, you were sitting there two or three hours just waiting because the mass movement didn’t coincide with healthcare.”

The interviewee is speaking to the freedom of movement while at Kewanee, something that they didn’t experience at other IDOC facilities. In notes the research team took during data collection, we found that several interviewees echoed this sentiment, with another saying, “it made you feel human again. It made you feel in control of your life.” This is noteworthy given research findings that a particular salient struggle during re-entry is navigating newfound autonomy and decision-making (Western, 2018).

Apart from the freedom of movement, interviewees also credited Kewanee for fostering a culture of learning while at the facility. One of them shared this in an interview:

“Kewanee helped me with goals I didn’t even know I...listen, Kewanee was a blessing to so many because again, we went from being isolated to having a community that was fostering creativity, research, critical thinking, you know what I’m saying? Man.”

The interviewee went on to talk about the “profound” impact of Kewanee, saying:

“Kewanee was profoundly impactful in the way that everybody thought. So, you got a plan, I had a plan going in, I’m going to run a barbershop, you understand what I’m saying, but once you start getting exposed to all this information, you know what I’m saying, now your ideas become broader... just like when you go to college.”

In the interviews, we noticed that participants frequently described Kewanee as offering a chance for residents to develop new skills and sometimes, to expand their thinking about future opportunities.

Application of useful skills learned at Kewanee

One of the key research questions that our qualitative research aimed to answer was what specific programming and services were perceived as helpful in preparing for re-entry. Among the classes offered at Kewanee, which residents were able to choose from, the interviewees talked the most about the financial literacy program, commercial driver’s license (CDL) classes, classes on cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), computer literacy, English grammar and anger management classes. In our fieldnotes and weekly interview team meetings, we noted that the financial management and computer literacy classes were mentioned particularly frequently

during interviews. In addition, through our interviews, we learned that several interviewees appreciated classes that helped them 'think out of the box'.

Classes on finances helped me 'manage money better'

Several interviewees mentioned that a general challenge they had faced even prior to their incarceration was the lack of a credit score, which inhibited their ability to find loans and housing. Given these challenges, our interviewees explained that they benefited from classes that taught financial management while at Kewanee. For instance, one interviewee pointed out that he found the finance class 'amazing' and the instructor helpful:

"[The instructor] had that stuff broke down. The man knows his stuff when it comes to the money, and budgeting and trying to get your credit right, and see, that was one of my biggest challenges also coming from there was, I had never actually built credit."

The interviewee went on to add how he continues to use these skills post-incarceration, "...And so going through that class, I actually learned how to do it, how to use it, how to invest, how to save and I'm utilizing that today. You would never think that I was ever in prison."

A separate interviewee, when asked about skills he learned at Kewanee that helped him stated:

"You say what did I learn from there that helped me when I... yes, I ain't going to lie to you, I left Kewanee, I was locked up over 15 years and already had over 600 credit score, you understand what I'm saying? So coming out of Kewanee, I had established credit history having been in prison 15 years, seven months."

This is a striking example that illustrates the application of financial literacy skills developed at Kewanee during re-entry.

Another interviewee was asked about how he applied these financial skills during his re-entry into society and responded that these skills helped him manage his money better and that he saw himself spending his money on the “right things now”. He said, “...Like the money management one, it helped me manage my money better...Because to me money is like once I get it, it’s gone. I’m not a saving type of person...So with the money management that they helped me learn in there, it helped me save for the right things. I used to spend money on just anything. But now applying what they helped me learn, it helped me put my money toward the right things now instead of just spending it on whatever.”

Computer classes at Kewanee ‘put you up to date’

In addition to using skills learned during financial management classes, interviewees pointed out how computer literacy classes aided their ability to use computers while navigating re-entry.

One credited computer classes as ‘putting them up to date’ to ease re-entry:

“...All the guys that’s been gone for a lot of years, they teach you computer classes because a lot of guys that’s been gone a long time they may be out of date. So, Kewanee tried to put you up to date and set you up so that you’ll be all right when you get out.”

During another interview, a participant shared that he had been incarcerated at the age of 16 and transitioned to Kewanee when he was 42 years old. At that time, he had “no idea” how to use a computer.

“...I had no idea how to work a computer. I didn’t know how to work a cell phone. There were a number of things I had no clue about...They taught me the basic workings of

software, like Word, Excel and things of that nature, things I had never had any experience with. So, that was really important for my development.”

The interviewee appreciated being brought up to speed regarding how to operate technology. It also aided the interviewee to not feel ‘clueless’ around a laptop. Later, in the interview, he mentioned that he bought a laptop for himself the day he was released and was able to use it since he had some prior “working knowledge” of how to operate it.

Other notable classes

During our interviews, interviewees also highlighted other classes and resources that they found useful. For instance, CBT classes that helped them reframe their negative thoughts were appreciated by some. A participant recalled a class:

“...Thinking for a Change, I think was one of them where we would just confront different situations, and we would talk through, okay, what’s our thoughts in regards to if this particular situation happened. And if there was a negative thought, then they would try their best to introduce us with a more appropriate thought or a more appropriate response to whatever the situation was that wouldn’t end up in us putting ourselves in a situation where we could potentially have any type of adverse consequence.”

The participant credited this class not only with teaching him how to reframe a negative thought but helping him think about the future and about how a situation could have adverse consequences if dealt with negatively.

In a similar vein, another interviewee pointed out that he appreciated classes at Kewanee that made him think “outside the box”. The interviewee was asked a question about what supports they had to plan for the future and mentioned:

“...There was a program that Kewanee offered, and I can’t remember the name of it, but the instructor... he brought a lot of books and talked about a lot of things that inspired change, and looking inside oneself and developing the mind and making it better. Just look outside the box pretty much. And, I owe a lot of credit to him especially.”

This example illustrates how skills obtained at Kewanee are not just applied during re-entry but can also be used as supports to plan for the future.

Some participants also mentioned how anger management classes were helpful in navigating their internal state. An interviewee felt that this class at Kewanee was “life changing”. He explained his takeaways:

“First and foremost, anger is a normal emotion experienced by everybody, you know what I’m saying, and how you manage that anger is very important. And so you need to add tools to your toolbox to help you, you know what I’m saying, manage yourself in those situations, cope, you know what I’m saying, in those situations. Because some people like me come up like I did, have traumas we don’t know, triggers we’re not aware and so you have to have those tools in order to, you see what I’m saying, manage yourself in the spaces so that you don’t create fucked up circumstances for yourself.”

The interviewee saw these skills as “tools in their toolbelt” that they could use to navigate re-entry. In addition, these classes also helped him recognize, acknowledge and understand his triggers so he could ‘manage themselves’ in spaces that triggered him.

Strong family support key in successful re-entry

We heard from interviewees that Kewanee generally provided a more humanizing experience that allowed for greater autonomy, while also offering the chance to learn skills and tools that could be applied during re-entry. However, when we asked about what shaped interviewees' re-entry experiences, the most common responses were not necessarily about resources related to Kewanee. Instead, participants often focused on the importance of strong family support. Housing is typically a major concern during re-entry, and some interviewees described how critical it was to have living arrangements with sisters, aunts, brothers, or friends, allowing them to avoid the instability and challenges of halfway homes. These accounts point to the importance of social supports in shaping the broader conditions under which re-entry unfolds, regardless of whether Kewanee was helpful.

An interviewee told us about his transition from being released from Kewanee to being sent to a halfway house and his challenges with the same. He said, "Well, when I first got out, they sent me to a halfway house...Which I left there because I wasn't feeling no halfway house because it made me feel like I was more locked down more than I was when I just left Kewanee." For this interviewee, halfway houses created restriction of movement that was more severe than in Kewanee. He went on to add that he was able to navigate this situation by relying on familial support, "...So I left there (halfway home) and I went and stayed with my sister, so I stayed with my sister for a little while. Then, I got reacquainted with an ex, then that didn't work out so that's when I went to stay with my cousin."

Another interviewee mentioned how his mom had been a pillar of support for him:

"Well I have my mom. She's a big support for me, and she has been since I've been released...Yeah, I think one of the biggest areas that she helped in was that when I was

released, she had a vehicle waiting on me. So, I think that there was a huge help because just to navigate and to move around and put in applications and do little tasks are necessary upon release, it's almost like a necessity to have a vehicle or a car. So, she provided me with the car, and that made it... it was much easier for me to transition back into navigating things."

Being able to rely on the support of his mother for resources (such as having a car) that he wouldn't have had access to otherwise was key in navigating re-entry.

In the same vein, another interviewee noted that while he is blessed to have familial support, he knows of friends that don't have that support. He pointed out that this negatively impacts their transition process back home:

"Oh man, it's a lot harder, and I know that I'm blessed to have that in my life because I know people that don't got their mom or don't got their dad or don't have a place to go. So they're forced to basically go back to what they know. And that usually ends up bad because they end up basically getting caught back in a position where it's like, how are you going to be positive when you're around negativity? And it just goes bad. So that's my understanding of some of the friends that I knew."

Beyond a lack of family support, this interviewee highlights a larger point -- that going back into the same neighborhoods they spent time in prior to incarceration can put them back into similar cycles of conflict.

The early qualitative insights gathered from our interviews with formerly incarcerated individuals at Kewanee offer initial perspectives on how participants made sense of their time at the facility and its relevance for re-entry. Interviewees often described Kewanee as a stark contrast to

other IDOC facilities – highlighting increased autonomy, respectful treatment, and access to educational programming. Participants spoke about learning practical tools that some later applied after release. At the same time, many noted that their re-entry experience was most shaped by supports beyond the facility itself. Family connections often played the most central role in securing housing as well as emotional support, underscoring the interplay between institutional re-entry support and post-release conditions.

While these early qualitative insights are based on interview notes and team debriefs during data collection, they are valuable in documenting the experience of residing in Kewanee and initial patterns and reflections about the re-entry process. By capturing interviewees' perspectives on which aspects of the facility were most beneficial, we can paint a clearer picture of what made Kewanee distinct from other IDOC facilities. These insights will be further developed through formal qualitative analysis to systematically identify key themes and speak to our research questions. Namely, we will focus on how interviewees navigated commonly known post-release challenges – such as securing housing and finding employment – and what tools or supports they drew on in the process.

(iii) Limitations

Randomized controlled trials represent the “gold standard” in program evaluation. By ensuring that treatment and control group member attributes are balanced in expectation, we can confidently identify the causal effect of treatment (i.e., an offer of admission to the Kewanee LSRC) within the study sample. It is important to recognize, however, that our findings are specific to the study population and study setting. In particular, the Kewanee LSRC facility only houses male inmates, and is intended for inmates with specific attributes (no history of significant disciplinary infractions in the six months prior to application, sufficiently high risk

assessment scores, etc.). As such, our results cannot be generalized to broader populations that do not meet these criteria. One other important limitation to note is that the study period overlapped with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. To the extent that estimated impacts on re-entry may vary based on the post-release environment, the uniqueness of the COVID-19 pandemic period should be considered when evaluating the external validity of findings. For instance, lower overall re-entry rates during the COVID-19 pandemic may have muted the benefits of Kewanee LSRC access to the extent those in the control group were already at a lower risk of re-incarceration.

V. Artifacts

(i) List of products

The University of Chicago Crime Lab has produced a website that provides an overview of the project and will be updated to include results as they are finalized:

<https://crimelab.uchicago.edu/projects/kewanee-lsrc/>. In addition, we have prepared biannual reports for IDOC which include updated results as well as summaries of new data sources being pursued and exploratory analyses.

(ii) Data sets generated

As part of NIJ's data archiving requirements, the study produced an anonymized individual-level dataset (which will be available on NACJD) that will allow independent researchers to replicate the results presented in Figures 1-3 and Table 2 (excluding results based on specifications that incorporate additional controls).

(iii) Dissemination activities

Dissemination activities have included presentations by the co-PIs at national conferences including the annual conferences of the Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management and the Southern Economic Association. Co-PI Arora presented preliminary findings and information on the Kewanee LSRC facility at NIJ's Annual Research Conference in the Fall of 2024. We have sought out informal opportunities to disseminate findings to stakeholders, including by engaging with representatives from the Governor's Office in the State of Illinois and by meeting with peer researchers engaged in contemporaneous evaluations of rehabilitation-oriented facilities in other settings.

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VII. Appendix

Kewanee Post-Release Interview Guide

INTRODUCTION

Hello! How are you doing? How are you feeling today?

Insert some small talk about weather/your mood/their mood/anything that lightens the interaction.

Thanks for being here. My name is [NAME] and I am an interviewer at the University of Chicago Crime Lab. My colleague, [NAME] will join us to take notes and ask a few questions in case I miss anything important.

On this project, we are speaking with people who have exited Kewanee LSRC to learn about experiences after release and what supports are most helpful during that transition.

If the respondent's video is off, see if they would be comfortable switching their video on.

ADMINISTER CONSENT

We emailed you a consent form, and I'll read out loud some key points about the study before we start.

First, your participation in this interview is completely voluntary and will not affect your parole status or any services that you receive through IDOC.

You will be asked questions about your experience at Kewanee and post-release.

It should take around one hour to finish.

As a thank you for your time, you will receive a \$50 gift card.

You can skip any questions or end early and you will still receive the gift card.

The information you share will be kept strictly confidential, and we will not tell anyone you participated or use your real name. The only exception is that if you tell us that you are in immediate danger of harming yourself or others, we may have to report this to authorities without your consent. We will not ask you questions about these topics.

Are there any questions I can answer before we move on?

Do you agree to participate in an interview?

If not, ask if there are any more questions you can answer or if we can reschedule the interview for another time. If they are still not interested, you can thank them for listening and end the call.

If yes:

With your approval, I'd like to record the interview for a precise record of your responses.

Do you agree to be audio-recorded?

If not, ask if there are any more questions you can answer about the recording. If they are still unsure, you can continue with note taking only.

START RECORDING IF CONSENTED TO BE RECORDED

As I mentioned, we will not connect anything you say to your real name. Instead, we will use a pseudonym, or a fake name. What is a pretend name you'd like us to use for you?

The interview should take about an hour. Do you have a hard stop at a specific time?

Take note of their stop time, and make sure to wrap up the interview at that time.

SECTION 1: POST-RELEASE EXPERIENCES

[Note to interviewer: The purpose of this section is to assess how respondents are doing post-release, exploring the resources and skills they found most helpful during the transition from prison back into their communities, and whether they relied on supports from Kewanee specifically. We also want to understand the challenges they have encountered, and any gaps in services or support.]

I'd love to start by hearing how you've been and what life has been like since your release from IDOC.

Could you share with me what a typical day looks like for you?

Can you tell me about the best part of your life post-release?

Can you tell me about your current support system? (IMPORTANT)

Can you provide an example of a time you have drawn on that support system post-release?

Thinking back to when you were close to being released from IDOC, what support did you have in planning for the future? (IMPORTANT)

What are some obstacles or difficulties you've faced during the transition out of IDOC? (IMPORTANT)

We understand that experiences can differ and that not everyone has the same support.

Thinking about others who you knew from your time in Kewanee, can you share any challenges or barriers they have encountered during their transition? [Note to interviewer: dig for examples here.]

From your perspective, what are some of the factors that could influence a person's return to prison after release?

Thinking back to your transition out of IDOC, can you walk me through your steps to find housing? (IMPORTANT)

[Probes: What supports did you have? What challenges did you face? What is your current housing situation?]

Tell me a little about the neighborhood where you currently live.

Have you ever felt unsafe there after your release?

Is this the same neighborhood you lived in before entering IDOC?

We have heard that finding employment after IDOC can be difficult. Can you walk me through your experience searching for a job post-release? (IMPORTANT)

[Probes: What supports did you have? What challenges did you face?]

Have you been able to find a stable job?

Since your release, have you received money from any other sources? This could include public assistance, family and friends, or activities you have taken on to supplement your income.

What financial responsibilities did you have right after your release? For example, did you have any fines, court costs, child support, or housing costs? (IMPORTANT)

SECTION 3: KEWANEE LSRC SERVICES

[Note to interviewer: The purpose of this section is to explore the specific programming and services respondents accessed while they were at Kewanee and what they found helpful and what was missing. We want to get a general understanding of programming, but do not need to go as in-depth for each question in this section.]

I would now like to get a better understanding of your experience at Kewanee.

To start, how did you find out about Kewanee? (IMPORTANT)

[Probes: Who told you about it? How was Kewanee described? What were your expectations?]

When you first got to Kewanee, did you have any specific goals?

How would you describe your relationship with others who were at Kewanee?

Can you tell me about activities or situations that helped you feel included in the community at Kewanee?

How would you describe your relationship with Kewanee staff?

How was your day-to-day experience at Kewanee different from the IDOC facility you were at right before Kewanee?

What classes did you take at Kewanee that stand out to you?

What did you find most useful about those classes?

What's something you learnt in [X class]?

Can you walk me through a time you used that after you were released from IDOC?

(Probe if they speak about financial literacy classes or anger management: We have heard a lot about Financial Literacy classes, can you recall other classes that stood out to you?)

Were there any classes at Kewanee that you wanted to take but they weren't available?

During your time at Kewanee, what type of health services did you access?

Can you tell me about any mental health services you accessed? (IMPORTANT)

[Probes: Were there any tools or strategies you learnt that you have been able to apply since your release?]

Did you participate in a job or any other activities while at Kewanee?

Thinking back to the time you were being released, did Kewanee provide you with any resources or referrals to help with the release? (Probe: We heard about a Kewanee brochure/folder/pamphlet, was that helpful to you?)

Overall, do you feel Kewanee prepared you for the transition out of IDOC? (IMPORTANT)
[Probes: How so? What was most important?]

What other resources could Kewanee have provided to better prepare you for life after release?
(IMPORTANT)

SECTION 4: PAROLE EXPERIENCES

[Note to interviewer: The purpose of this section is to get a brief understanding of parole experiences, particularly focusing on any challenges they've encountered in meeting specific parole conditions.]

Finally, I would like to ask you a few questions about your experience with the parole system.
Keep in mind that anything you share will remain confidential.

Are you currently on parole?

Tell me a little bit about your relationship with your [current/most recent] parole officer?

Has your parole officer connected you to any work opportunities?

Have any of the conditions of your parole been difficult to meet? (IMPORTANT)

[Probes: Can you tell me about that?]

CONCLUSION

[Note to interviewer: The purpose of this section is to wrap up the interview by offering respondents a chance to reflect and add any final thoughts, while also allowing the interviewer to thank the participant for their contribution, provide information on next steps, and talk about snowball sampling.]

Okay, before we wrap up:

Can you tell me about where you see yourself in 5 years?

Finally, is there anything I missed that you think is important for us to know about ways that Kewanee or the transition out of IDOC could be improved? (IMPORTANT)

Thank you for taking part in this interview and providing your thoughts on the Kewanee. If you have any questions or concerns about the study, you can use the contact information provided in the consent form that we emailed to you.

My colleague will now stop recording.

STOP AUDIO RECORDING

Thank you again. This was such a great conversation. I learned so much! How was your experience doing this interview?

We are interested in speaking with more people about experiences at Kewanee. Do you know anyone else who was at Kewanee who you think might like to be interviewed by us?

If yes:

Okay great. My colleagues who scheduled this interview with you will follow up to see if you could put us in touch with them.

Thank you again so much for your time. You will receive a \$50 gift card by email in the next 7 days as a thank you for your participation. If you have any questions, you can reach out to the contacts provided on the consent form we emailed to you.

Table 1A: Balance Table Data Dictionary

Variable	Description
age at sentencing	Years between date of birth and sentencing date, where sentencing date is defined as 'Sentence Date for the current offense.'
black	Indicator for self-identified as Black
hispanic	Indicator for self-identified as Hispanic
veteran	Indicator for self-identified as veteran at the time of admission
sentence length	Sentence length is measured in years
prison time remaining	Difference (in years) between date of study randomization and projected mandatory supervised release date
truth-in-sentencing %	Under the Unified Code of Corrections (730 ILCS 5/3-6-3(a)(2)), a sentencing provision for crimes committed on or after June 19, 1998, in which inmates must serve their entire sentence of imprisonment for first degree murder and terrorism; 85% of their sentence of imprisonment when convicted of selected violent offenses; 75% of their sentence of imprisonment when convicted of gunrunning; and 60% of their sentence of imprisonment when convicted of selected weapons, money laundering and high level drug offenses. This measure takes on values between 0 and 1.
direct from court	Direct from Court is an indicator for the individual's first admission to the Illinois Department of Corrections after being convicted and sentenced to imprisonment for a felony offense.
discharged and recommitted	Discharged & recommitted is an indicator for an individual who has been discharged off his/her sentence (finished parole term) and then returned to IDOC on a new order.
parole violations	A indicator for 'Technical MSR (mandatory supervised release) Violators' or 'MSR Violators, New Sentence'. These are typically individuals that have violated a condition of their parole. Not all individuals with a admission type of 'Technical MSR Violators' or 'MSR Violators, New Sentence' are considered to be violators. Individuals that have been returned to prison with these admission types may be awaiting a hearing with the Prisoner Review Board (PRB) for a decision regarding their alleged parole/MSR violation. PRB hearings can take up to 90 days, during which time an individual will stay in prison. If the individual is found to be a violator and the PRB revokes their parole/MSR term, they remain in prison as a violator. Individuals who were found to be violators, but whose parole is also being resumed by the PRB are released to resume their parole/MSR term. Individuals found not to have violated are released to resume their parole/MSR term and are not assumed to be violators. The 'Technical MSR Violator' admission type may include individuals with pending criminal charges as well technical parole violations. Admission types are not updated beyond the initial designation.
cook	Sentenced in Cook county
winnebago	Sentenced in Winnebago county
peoria	Sentenced in Peoria county

Table 1B: Reentries by Months From Exit

Time Duration	Group	Total Exits	Reentries	Reentry Rate
12 Months	Control	274	31	11.3%
	Treatment	276	28	10.1%
24 Months	Control	265	50	18.9%
	Treatment	266	53	19.9%
36 Months	Control	227	57	25.1%
	Treatment	232	65	28%