



NEBRASKA CENTER FOR JUSTICE RESEARCH



VOCATIONAL & LIFE SKILLS EVALUATION ANNUAL REPORT

GRANT CYCLE FOUR: YEAR THREE
JULY 1, 2022 TO JUNE 30, 2023



SCHOOL OF CRIMINOLOGY
AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents evaluation updates for the Vocational and Life Skills Program (VLS) for the third year of Grant Cycle Four (July 1, 2022, to June 30, 2023). This report contains:

1. the VLS logic model for grant cycle four,
2. a geographical spread of where providers offer services and/or programs,
3. a snapshot of participation across the programs,
4. highlights from a study with VLS employers, and
5. program offerings provided in the final year of grant cycle four.

This report is collaborative in its presentation given that it is shared with NDCS administrators and funded program providers in the final drafts to ensure it is comprehensive in measurement, analyses, and result interpretations.

Feedback and questions on this report can be directed to the Principal Investigator, Dr. Ryan Spohn, whose contact information is on the back of this report.

The Nebraska Center for Justice Research (NCJR), housed at the University of Nebraska Omaha, has evaluated the VLS initiative since 2014. NCJR provides reports to the Nebraska Department of Correctional Services (NDCS) regarding the implementation process and data updates on a monthly and quarterly basis.

At the beginning of the grant cycle, NCJR collaborated with VLS service providers to create individualized evaluation plans with manageable goals contributing to VLS's overall goals. Those plans are being phased out as the VLS transition to adhere to evaluation requirements of LB 896.

PROGRAM PROVIDER DESCRIPTIONS



Associated Builders & Contractors (ABC) is part of a national company that provides trade-specific apprenticeship training and work-based learning opportunities for careers in the construction industry.



Black Men United is a non-profit corporation that was founded in 2003 and focuses on human services, training, and community development organization. The primary goal of BMU is to help Black men and boys grow and support the development of their communities.



Bristol Station with the Western Alternative Corrections, Inc. allows formerly incarcerated individuals to transition into the community in a residential setting while providing opportunities of self-discovery and pro-social routine development.



Community Alliance is a non-profit agency serving individuals who are experiencing challenges with substance abuse and their mental health. They provide a diverse range of services such as psychiatric and health care, supportive housing, family education, vocational and community rehabilitation.



The Community Justice Center (CJC) provides restorative justice programming and restorative re-entry services. The mission of CJC is to transform harm to healing and hope by advancing community safety, respect, responsibility, reintegration, relationships, and healing through restorative justice evidence-based programming.



Mental Health Association (MHA) promotes a culture of hope and healing through Intentional Peer Support services that includes evidence-based programming in both residential and correctional settings.



Metropolitan Community College (MCC) is a public education institution that supports the 180 Re-entry Assistance Program (180 RAP) to provide education and work readiness training both within correctional facilities and on the Omaha campus.



Midland University created the Reentry Code Academy (RCA) which would assist inmates with the process of returning to society. The RCA could be implemented at any of the nine correctional facilities in Nebraska based on the need.



Opening Doors is a program administered by the Center for People in Need. It provides comprehensive services and opportunities to support low-income, high needs individuals in correctional facilities and at the CFPIN facility in Lincoln.



Persevere is a non-profit organization with the goals of increasing public safety and reducing recidivism. Their programming includes technology-based job training, career readiness instruction and support, case management, job placement, and long-term reentry support.



Project Reset is a nonprofit organization focused on increasing the qualified workforce in NE that support formerly incarcerated persons in gaining and maintaining trade employment as they work towards a designated trade apprentice status.



ReConnect, Inc. offers short courses that balance life skills and cognitive restructuring techniques with employment training to help clients reach their full potential.

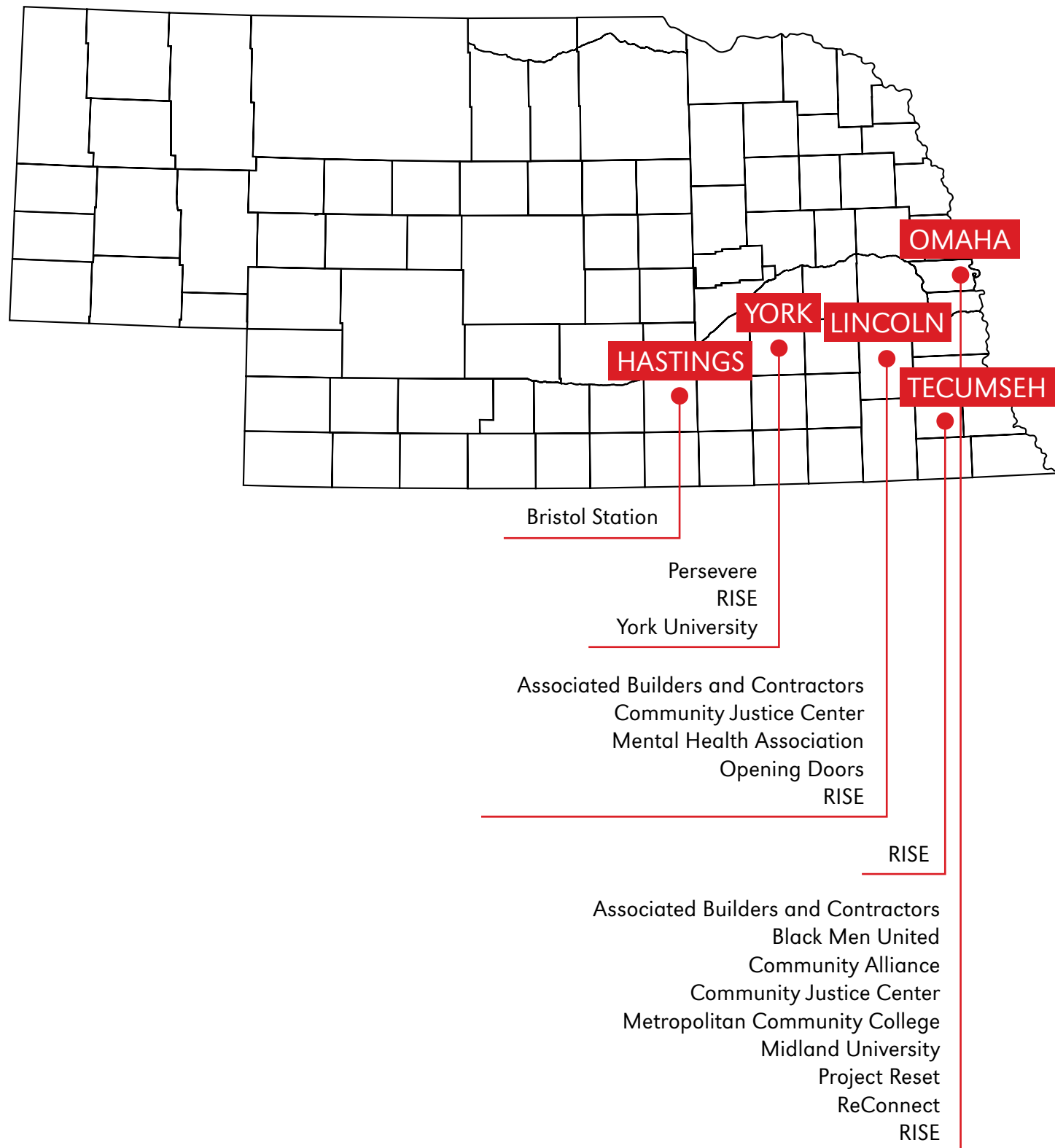


RISE seeks to end cycles of incarceration by equipping currently and formerly incarcerated people with job readiness, reentry planning, housing and employment pathways that help participants thrive.



York University is a private education institution that provides participants the opportunity to earn an Associate of Arts degree and prepares them for gainful employment using a spiritual approach to improve cognitive thinking skills and relationship skills.

VLS SERVICE GEOGRAPHIC REACH



THEORY OF CHANGE

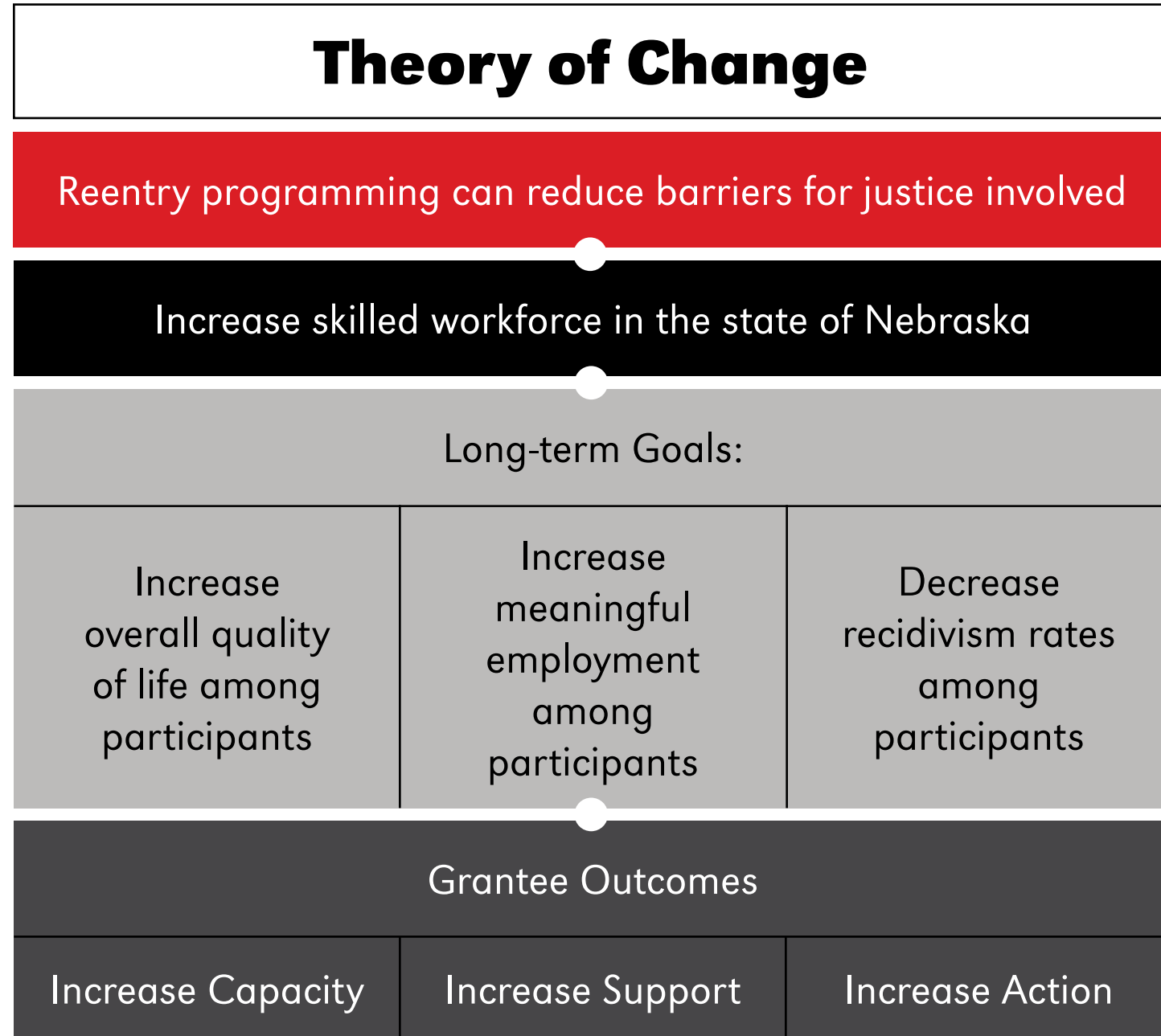
A *theory of change* refers to the central mechanism by which change comes about for individuals targeted by interventions.¹ NDCS seeks to increase the overall quality of life and meaningful employment among VLS participants, which can indirectly reduce recidivism.² Reentry programming reduces the barriers individuals face as they reintegrate back into the community, but the environments to which they return are often conducive to criminal behavior. Thus, programming alone is not a complete solution to recidivism, but it can equip individuals with valuable skills that can alleviate strain in the reentry process. The VLS initiative allows NDCS to fund nine service providers that support individuals during the reentry process. Some VLS providers focus on job training that has been demonstrated to increase earning potential and reduce economic strain. Others offer education that seeks to broaden individual perspectives, increase readiness for more advanced vocations, and increase self-efficacy. Finally, mental health is addressed by some VLS service providers to increase functionality and self-esteem. *Collectively, VLS service providers deliver interventions intended to increase pro-social behaviors, confidence, competence, job skills, and social awareness.*

Individuals chose to commit crime for a variety of reasons, such as having limited legal income or embracing anti-social attitudes developed as a juvenile.³ Nevertheless, the decision to change one's lifestyle within the context of effective and available social support systems must happen for positive change to occur.⁴ Sometimes interacting with others who have been successful in reentry can provide the motivation to change patterns of criminal behavior. Many VLS staff have lived-experience with incarceration and substance use, and those experiences often inform staff on ways to motivate participants and increase trust in the process of behavioral and lifestyle change. Once striving towards conformity, the likelihood of someone re-offending can and often does decrease.⁵

When the VLS program was initiated in 2014, lawmakers were discussing the importance of community supervision of persons released from prison. These discussions were informed by a Council of State Governments (CSG) study, which indicated that incarcerated persons with short prison sentences were often released from prison without community supervision. CSG's report also indicated that Nebraska lacked parole guidelines to ensure those convicted of serious felonies received community supervision.⁶ Advocates of public safety suggest that a period of community supervision is a prudent component of the efforts to assist individuals making a safe transition, and is supported by empirical evidence.⁷ However, the logic that community supervision increases returns to prison through these supervision efforts (e.g., drug tests, portable breath tests for alcohol, and home visits to check for weapons or criminal associations) is sound, and supported by considerable evidence.^{8,9}

As a complement to necessary community supervision, VLS programming generally uses a strength-based strategy to address client needs. VLS focuses on promoting meaningful employment through a variety of case management and supervision strategies. Some examples of supervision provided through VLS program offerings include highly structured residential placements; mental health-focused transitional housing; cognitive-based programs that address criminal thinking and promote pro-social thinking; vocational training programs that prepare individuals for careers in industry; and educational courses that promote individuals' educational and career goals. Although focus and dosage (or intensity) vary by program and individual, VLS grantees place individuals in supportive, pro-social environments that hold participants accountable for attendance and completion, while promoting cognitive and behavioral change targeted at meaningful employment and long-term community success.

Finally, in addition to improving the quality of life among participants and their families, increased employment rates among participants also benefits the state of Nebraska by reducing strain on general social services, by increasing tax contributions, and by contributing to safer communities.¹⁰ The logic model on page four of this report illustrates this theory of change that is possible with the support of multiple agencies, employers, and service providers.



VLS PROGRAM LOGIC MODEL GRANT CYCLE 4 (2020-2023)

Input						
Legislative Funds	Physical Space	Equipment	Quarterly Meetings	Collaborate Services	Internal Evaluations	Evaluation Meetings
Participation			Outputs			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Participants ✓ NDCS ✓ Probation ✓ Parole ✓ Grantees <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administration • Case workers • Instructors ✓ Community partners ✓ Employers ✓ Evaluators 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Case plans and leading measures ✓ Expanded skill set ✓ Degrees, certifications, or licenses earned ✓ Identification documents obtained ✓ Basic needs met ✓ Stabilizing factors maintained <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing • Employment/education • Mental health management • Substance use management • Family/supportive relationships ✓ Increased <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attitudinal scale scores • Marketability • Pro-social resolve • Social supports ✓ Institutional navigation skills ✓ Employment obtained ✓ Increased pro-social connections ✓ Community integration 			
Activities						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Intake & assessment ✓ Training <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vocational • Educational • Life skills ✓ Barrier assistance ✓ Basic need assistance ✓ Life coaching and case management ✓ Facilitate community networking 						
Hypotheses						
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Individuals at highest risk to recidivate will benefit the most from correctional programming.¹¹ 2. If individual barriers and needs are met, one's risk to recidivate will decrease.^{12,13} 3. If population barriers and needs are adequately addressed, the percentage returning to prison within three years will decrease. 4. Increased education will increase likelihood of meaningful employment.^{14,15,16,17} 5. Increased meaningful employment will decrease recidivism.¹⁸ 6. Increased education will decrease recidivism.^{19,20} 7. Increased health will decrease criminogenic behaviors.²¹ 						
External Factors						
+/- Peer Networks		Global Pandemic		Hiring Bias of Justice Involved		

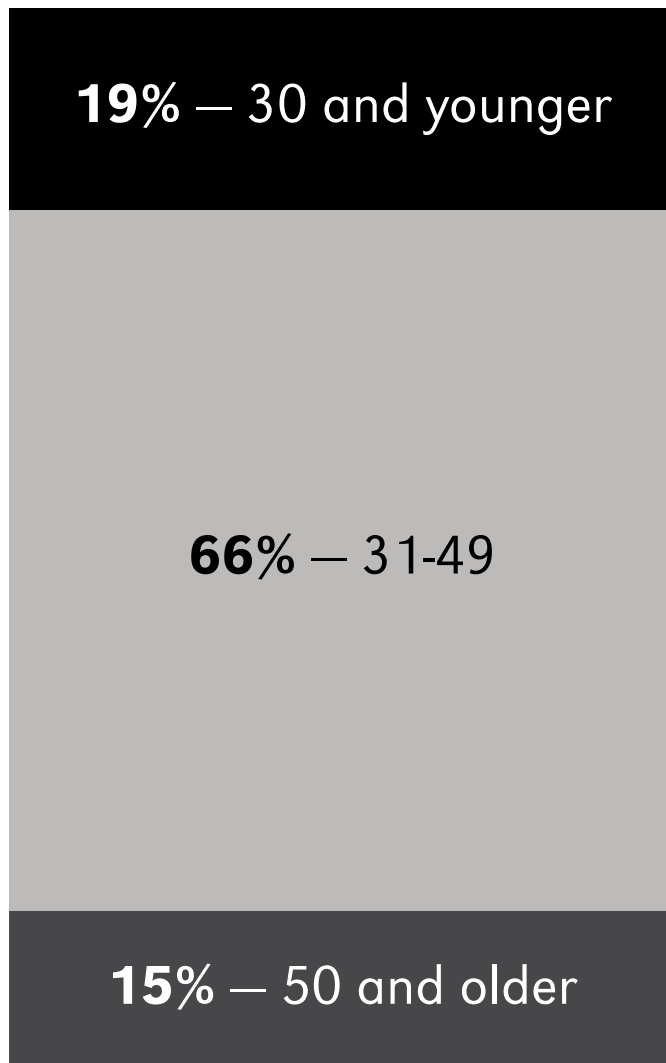
PARTICIPANT CHARACTERISTICS

Program staff collect and verify a variety of self-reported information from participants in their programs. In this report, we present select characteristics on VLS participants.

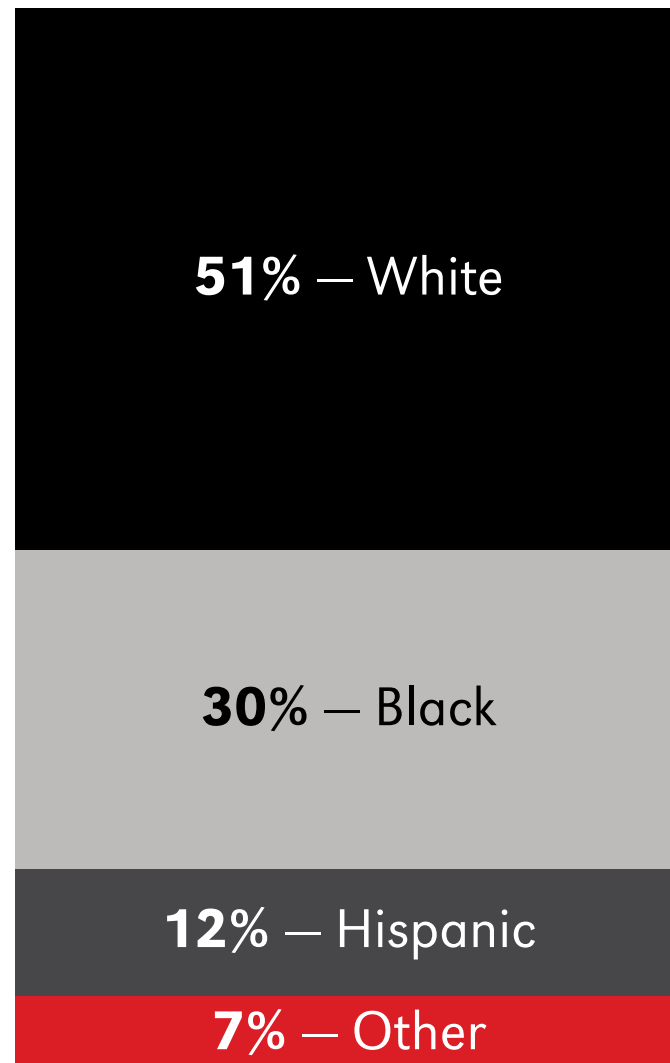
Gender



Age



Race & Ethnicity



VLS PARTICIPATION FOR YEAR THREE OF GRANT CYCLE FOUR

There have been **3,178** successful completions out of the **3,277** VLS participations that ended in the third year of grant cycle four. Participants are considered successfully completed when they meet all requirements set by program staff. Although most participants successfully completed programming (**97%**), others stopped for a variety of reasons: decided to leave on their own accord (withdrawn from program) or were asked to leave by the program (terminated from program). The average VLS participant completed programming within **38** days.

Table 1: Participation in Year Three Across VLS Programs

Program Provider	Total Participant Completions ^a	Successful Completions ^b	Average Days to Successful Completion
ABC	355	323	14
Black Men United	21	21	2
Bristol Station	122	109	Not applicable ^c
Community Alliance	13	11	84
CJC	777	775	7
MHA	865	847	53
MCC	1,276	1,265	26
Midland University	53	22	1
Opening Doors	272	253	18
Persevere	0	0	Not applicable
Project Reset	171	169	71
ReConnect	417	375	17
RISE	334	282	90
York University	0	0	Not applicable
Total Individuals Across VLS Programs	3,277	3,178	38

^a **Total participations:** A summation of individuals who participated in VLS funded programming in the year and ended a program offering by the end of the year.

^b **Successful completions:** A summation of individuals who completed all required components of a VLS program offering during the year.

^c Days until completion across the different program offerings within the larger residential program are not an appropriate estimation of the average time commitment for Bristol Station participants. Rather, it takes 131 days on average to complete all the recommended program offerings at Bristol Station.

PARTICIPATION SURVEY RESULTS

The Vocational and Life Skills Participant Survey collects feedback from individuals involved in various programs to assess their experiences and challenges. It includes questions on participants' reasons for joining, their perceptions of program support and staff respect, and their self-assessed problem-solving and goal-setting abilities. The survey also evaluates social interactions and self-efficacy, to measure confidence in achieving goals and handling tasks. Additionally, participants identify barriers they face in the reentry process, such as lack of skills, substance use history, and access to resources. A total of 1,268 surveys were collected by the grantee providers from July 5, 2022 through June 30, 2023.

Table 2: Participant Surveys Collected Across Grantees

Program Provider	Total Surveys Collected
ABC	102
Bristol Station	28
MHA	320
MCC	567
Opening Doors	116
Project Reset	53
ReConnect, Inc	38
RISE	33
York College	9
Total	1,266

Motivation to Participate in VLS Programming	Barriers Remaining After Participation
Financial assistance: 23% Make new friends: 16% Learn new job skills: 59% Learn new life skills: 62% Improve mental health: 26% Was recommended to me: 20% Improve substance abuse recovery: 14% Look better in front of the parole board: 11% Other: 16%	Living with a disability: 12% History of substance abuse: 41% Lacking job or life skills: 10% Lacking social support: 21% Lacking computer and/or tech skills: 16% Lacking mental health care access: 13% Lacking safe and affordable housing: 33% Lacking affordable childcare: 5% Lacking accessible addiction support: 8% Lacking reliable transportation: 37% No barriers reported: 18%

SURVEY RESULTS ACROSS GRANTEEES

Participants were asked a series of questions reflecting their program satisfaction, perceived support, and pro-social attitudes. Responses were indicated using a Likert scale in which 5 = strongly agree, 4 = agree, 3 = neither agree or disagree, 2 = disagree, 1 = strongly disagree. Average ratings are presented in Table 3 below. Taken together, the results indicate that they believe they will find a job they enjoy, believe the staff treated them with respect, felt supported by their peers in the program, are satisfied with their program, and want to help improve social justice in their communities.

Table 3: Satisfaction, Support, and Attitudes Across Grantees

How much do you agree?	ABC	Bristol Station	MHA	MCC	Opening doors	Project Reset	ReConnect, Inc	RISE	York College	Overall
I believe I can obtain a job I enjoy	4	5	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
Program staff treated me with respect	5	4	5	5	5	5	4	5	5	5
I feel supported by my peers in the program	4	4	4	4	4	4	3	4	3	4
I am satisfied with the services I received at this program	4	4	4	4	5	5	4	5	5	4
I want to help improve social justice in my community	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4

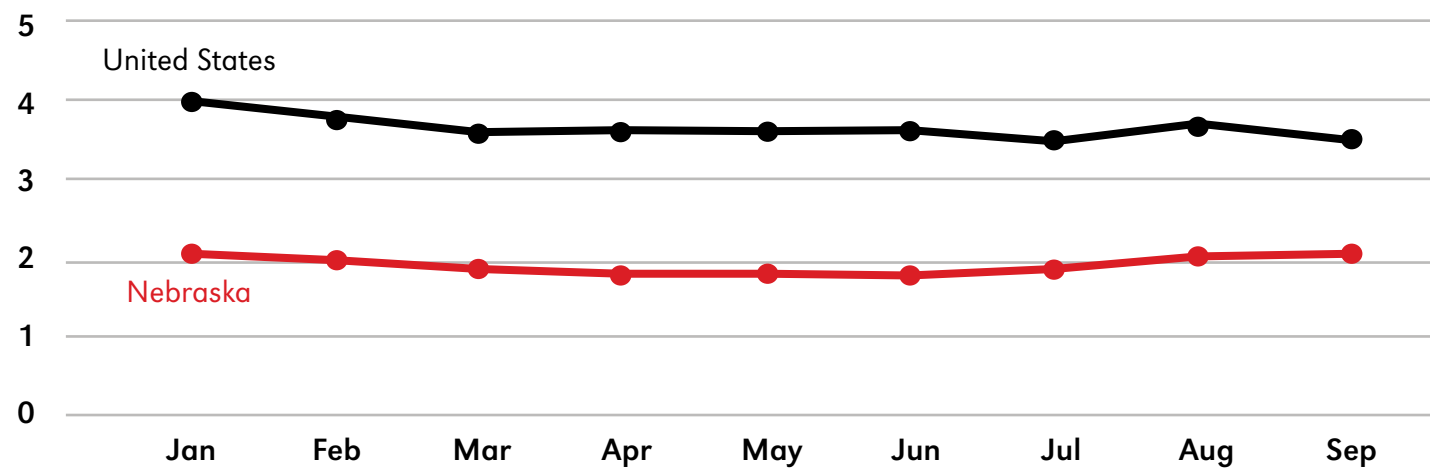
One of the goals of the VLS initiative is to equip individuals with vocational and life skills needed to successfully reintegrate back into society after justice-involvement interventions. To measure an individual's belief in being able to do just that, the evaluators included a self-efficacy scale on the survey to measure one's perceived success in work related goals. Using eight item questions, participants were asked to rate how much they agree with various statements that capture work related confidence and belief in future success in which 5 = strongly agree, 4 = agree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 2 = disagree, 1 = strongly disagree. On average, all grantee participants indicated that they agree to their belief in work related success.

EMPLOYER STUDY HIGHLIGHTS

The Nebraska Center for Justice Research (NCJR) conducted an employer study as part of the Vocational and Life Skills (VLS) evaluation to understand employers' perspectives on the process of reentry and onboarding individuals with criminal history. Since the inception of VLS over eight years ago, nearly 10,000 participants have received hands-on vocational training, educational credits, soft skills, and mental health support through VLS grants. Talking to the employers who hire these individuals after incarceration provided valuable insight into the strengths and limitations of these life-skill trainings for their employees.

Nebraska's low unemployment rate provides a unique case study to examine this phenomenon where justice-involved employees have less competition for employment. Over the past decade, Nebraska has held one of the lowest unemployment rates in the nation.²² In 2022, there remains a considerable difference in unemployment between the United States as a whole and Nebraska (See Figure 1). Further, as of June 2022, the Nebraska Department of Labor (DOL) announced an unemployment rate of 1.9%, setting a record for the lowest unemployment rate in the nation's history.^{23,24}

Nebraska vs. United States 2022 Unemployment Rates



Research Questions

What are the strengths of the justice-involved individuals in the state of Nebraska for employers?

What are the challenges faced when employing justice-involved individuals in the state of Nebraska?

The evaluation team interviewed 18 employers (21 individuals) from various industries. The project examined the data for patterns that the research team combined into themes. The themes most pertinent to Nebraska lawmakers and public policy are presented in this report. Themes were subsequently divided into sub-themes to improve specificity of the issue and improve the precision of recommendations.

Employers reported several benefits in working with justice-involved individuals that include being able to retain staff during the "labor shortage". Thus, the participants we interviewed recommended Nebraska employers be open to hiring justice-involved individuals if they are not already. These employees have earned a reputation for being dedicated and possessing in-demand skills the criminal justice agencies and VLS program providers help them develop. In coordinating employment with this population, employers interviewed report both positive and negative experiences working with justice-involved individuals, agencies, and programs. One of the most notable findings from the interviews would be that barriers faced by formerly incarcerated persons extend to their employers. Additionally, working with this population reduces the stigma of the justice-involved held by employers.

Table 4: Themes that Emerged from Employer Interviews

Main Themes	Sub-themes	Frequency (n=18)	Percentage
The benefits of employing justice-involved	Benefits	13	72.2%
	Labor Shortage	13	72.2%
	Advice to other employers	18	100%
Justice-involved skill sets	Skills developed through agencies	12	66.7%
	Skill gaps	15	83.3%
Pros and cons on justice-involved employment collaboration	Positive experiences with agencies	12	66.7%
	Negative experiences with agencies	11	61.1%
	Positive experiences with grantees	7	38.9%
Rippling barriers to successful reentry	Institutional barriers	14	77.8%
	Societal barriers	16	88.9%
Stigma among clients and coworkers	Stigma	8	44.4%
	A changed perspective	12	66.7%
Improvement recommendations	Recommendations for CJ system	15	83.3%
	Ban the box	16	88.9%

In conclusion, our findings indicate that facilitating the full integration of justice-involved individuals into Nebraska communities can enhance productivity for employers and their customers by addressing vacant positions. However, achieving this integration requires critical examination of the barriers and stigma that impede progress. Failure to address how attitudes, barriers, policies, and laws continue to penalize individuals after they have served their time hampers their success and affects the communities to which they return. This report serves as a case study in such reflection, with the ultimate aim of advancing reentry success, ensuring stable employment, and enhancing public safety in Nebraska communities.

ABC PROGRAM OFFERINGS PROVIDED

Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC) delivers pre-employment training, trade specific apprenticeship training, and work-based education courses with learning objectives tailored to participants with career goals in the construction industry. Service delivery is in Omaha, Lincoln, and NDCS facilities. Program offerings^d participations for the third year of Grant Cycle Four are presented below.



ABC Program Offerings	<i>Completed</i>	<i>Incomplete</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Applied Construction Math</i>	23	9	32
<i>Core</i>	21	8	29
<i>Electrical 1</i>	17	14	31
<i>Electrical 2</i>	5	1	6
<i>Electrical 3</i>	6	0	6
<i>Electrical 4</i>	1	1	2
<i>OSHA 10 Hour Construction</i>	167	17	184
<i>OSHA 10 Hour General Industry</i>	251	16	267
<i>OSHA 30 Hour Construction</i>	5	0	5
<i>Plumbing 1</i>	4	0	4
Total	500	66	566

^d A complete list of program offering descriptions can be retrieved from VLS quarterly reports on NCJR's website www.unomaha.edu/college-of-public-affairs-and-community-service/nebraska-center-for-justice-research/documents/vlsreports/vls-quarterly-report-gc4-q12.pdf.

BLACK MEN UNITED PROGRAM OFFERINGS PROVIDED

Black Men United supports justice-involved individuals by providing them a safe space to conduct job searches, take classes and work one on one with reentry navigators at the Kumani Restorative Justice Center. Specifically, the reentry work helps these individuals navigate the challenges of reintegrating back into their communities. They aim to help participants find employment, housing, transportation and other supportive providers. In addition, all Black Men United clients have access to a private food pantry, which provides food and basic care needs. Program offerings participations for the third year of Grant Cycle Four are presented below.



Black Men United Program Offerings	<i>Completed</i>	<i>Incomplete</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Reentry Navigation</i>	24	0	24
Total	24	0	24

BRISTOL STATION PROGRAM OFFERINGS PROVIDED

Bristol Station with Western Alternative Corrections provides program intervention and case management aimed to accelerate psychological and social development related to behavior and thinking. Service delivery is provided in a residential community located in Hastings, Nebraska. Program offerings participations for the third year of Grant Cycle Four are presented below.



Bristol Station Program Offerings	<i>Completed</i>	<i>Incomplete</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Anger Management</i>	1	1	2
<i>Conflict Resolution</i>	39	26	65
<i>Dress for Success</i>	38	26	64
<i>Employment Readiness</i>	37	1	38
<i>Interviewing Skills</i>	38	26	64
<i>Job Coaching</i>	38	26	64
<i>Moral Recognition Therapy (MRT)</i>	1	0	1
<i>Other Services</i>	64	1	65
<i>Personal Growth/Family Reunification</i>	16	3	19
<i>Relapse Prevention Group</i>	11	6	17
<i>Residential Reentry</i>	39	26	65
<i>Transitional Skills</i>	28	6	34
<i>Transportation Independence</i>	3	0	3
Total	353	148	501

COMMUNITY ALLIANCE PROGRAM OFFERINGS PROVIDED

Community Alliance agency serves individuals and their families across the Omaha area and surrounding counties. They provide a diverse range of services such as psychiatric and health care, supportive housing, family education, vocational and community rehabilitation. Additionally, they provide aid to the homeless, transition-age youth, families, and overall care coordination. Community alliance provides supervised and independent apartment living with the goal of promoting independence and safety. They use licensed physicians, nurse practitioners, and professional counselors for their services and outreach programs. Program offerings participations for the third year of Grant Cycle Four are presented below.



Community Alliance Program Offerings	<i>Completed</i>	<i>Incomplete</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Care Coordination</i>	2	0	2
<i>Charting a New Course</i>	1	2	3
<i>Employment Assistance</i>	3	0	3
<i>Housing Assistance</i>	2	0	2
<i>Integrated Health</i>	2	0	2
<i>Peer Support/Mentoring</i>	3	0	3
<i>Seeking Safety</i>	2	0	2
<i>Substance Use Support Group</i>	5	1	6
<i>Transportation Assistance</i>	3	0	3
Total	23	3	26

CJC PROGRAM OFFERINGS PROVIDED

The Community Justice Center (CJC) provides restorative justice programming and restorative re-entry services. This organization helps individuals in both the Omaha and Lincoln areas. CJC follows the 5 key model for reentry which is family reunification, peer support services, promote connections, enhance civic engagement, and reduce the risk of recidivism. CJC represents a holistic approach to the reentry process by focusing on multiple sides of the problem. They support communication, transportation, technology, housing, employment, family reunification, and prevention through services. CJC partners with other communities and reentry organizations to achieve their holistic approach. The mission of CJC is to transform harm to healing and hope by advancing community safety, respect, responsibility, reintegration, relationships, and healing through restorative justice evidence-based programming. Program offerings participations for the third year of Grant Cycle Four are presented below.



Community Justice Center Program Offerings	Completed	Incomplete	Total
<i>CJC Victim Impact/Empathy</i>	557	3	560
<i>Circles of Support</i>	259	0	259
<i>Community/Family Support</i>	13	0	13
<i>RJI/Key Reentry Support</i>	42	0	42
<i>Victim Empathy</i>	208	0	208
Total	1,079	3	1,082

MCC PROGRAM OFFERINGS PROVIDED

Metropolitan Community College's 180 Re-entry Assistance Program (180 RAP) delivers student-centered education and cognitive-based interventions through case management to participants. Participants are provided work readiness and life skills training, direct services, and transitional support. Program offerings participations for the third year of Grant Cycle Four are presented below.



MCC Program Offerings	Completed	Incomplete	Total
<i>CDL Preparation</i>	27	7	34
<i>Employment Readiness</i>	206	0	206
<i>Fiber Optics Certification</i>	1	0	1
<i>Forklift Certification</i>	46	0	46
<i>Four-Week Workshops</i>	94	3	97
<i>Job Readiness</i>	1	0	1
<i>Long-Term Relief Group</i>	17	1	18
<i>MCC Credit Course</i>	563	36	599
<i>MCC Certificate of Completion</i>	32	0	32
<i>National Certification</i>	3	0	3
<i>Non-Credit ESL</i>	1	0	1
<i>Non-Credit Workshop</i>	404	1	405
<i>Orientation</i>	789	0	789
<i>OSHA</i>	2	0	2
<i>Other Services</i>	60	0	60
<i>Trauma Informed Peer Support</i>	53	1	54
Total	2,299	49	2,348

MHA PROGRAM OFFERINGS PROVIDED

The Mental Health Association (MHA) provides wrap around reentry services through the Intentional Peer Support Model, focusing on wellness and connections to the community. MHA strives to create safe and inclusive transitional living, peer supported employment and other services specific to the individual needs and hopes for success. Together they explore community resources, natural community support, access to mental and physical health care, basic needs, and support in self-advocacy. Program offerings participations for the third year of Grant Cycle Four are presented below.



MHA Program Offerings	Completed	Incomplete	Total
<i>Benefits</i>	1	0	1
<i>CARES</i>	10	3	13
<i>HONU</i>	73	3	76
<i>HOPE</i>	352	12	364
<i>Peer Prevention Group</i>	604	0	604
<i>REAL</i>	1	0	1
Total	1,041	18	1,059

MIDLAND UNIVERSITY PROGRAM OFFERINGS PROVIDED

Midland University created the Reentry Code Academy (RCA) which would assist inmates with the process of returning to society. Their programs focus on education that would help them achieve their educational and career goals. Program offerings participations for the third year of Grant Cycle Four are presented below.



Midland University Program Offerings	Completed	Incomplete	Total
<i>Code 101</i>	19	32	51
<i>Info Session</i>	14	0	14
<i>Reentry Code Academy</i>	0	7	7
Total	33	39	72

OPENING DOORS PROGRAM OFFERINGS PROVIDED

Opening Doors provides comprehensive services and opportunities to support low-income, high needs families and individuals as they strive to lift themselves out of poverty and achieve economic self-sufficiency. Opening Doors case managers assign programming in line with participant needs and preferences to improve reentry transitions back into the community. Program offerings participations for the third year of Grant Cycle Four are presented below.



Opening Doors Program Offerings	Completed	Incomplete	Total
Basic Computers	10	0	10
Computer Essentials	12	5	17
Computer Essentials Module	21	4	25
Core Classes	111	19	130
Core Classes - In Facility	38	2	40
Family Support	30	0	30
Forklift & Warehouse Operations Module	50	8	58
Job Seek	153	8	161
Office Professional Module	8	0	8
Other Services	22	0	22
People Obtaining Prosperity (POP)	1	2	3
Seeking Safety (Opening Doors)	9	5	14
Tooling-USNE	6	3	9
Welding	44	14	58
Total	515	70	585

PERSEVERE PROGRAM OFFERINGS PROVIDED

Persevere is a non-profit organization with the goals of increasing public safety and reducing recidivism. They offer a holistic and comprehensive approach to achieve their goals of helping the justice-involved population. Their programming includes technology-based job training, career readiness instruction and support, case management, job placement, and long-term reentry support. This program provides a certification and secure employment upon reentry to society from NDCS. Technology training occurs during the year before their release into society which assists with post-release job placement. Program offerings participations for the third year of Grant Cycle Four are presented below.

Persevere's Program Manager was hired on January 24, 2023. Persevere leadership met with NDCS at NCCW on February 7, 2023, to confirm next steps regarding programming and planning buildout of a classroom at NCCW. Persevere's IT team worked with NDCS IT and engineering teams regarding the logistics of the implementation tasks required for installing a technology class at a location not initially designed for IT programming. Due to the restrictions associated with having a technology class inside a correctional facility, requirements for security of the network, and the specific location of the classroom, which was not being used in this manner previously, a significant amount of time was required to install the infrastructure to ensure the safety and security of the technology hardware and software.



Persevere Program Offerings	Completed	In Progress	Incomplete	Total
Software Coding Class	0	0	0	0
Reentry/Reintegration Services & Support	0	0	0	0
Total	0	0	0	0

PROJECT RESET PROGRAM OFFERINGS PROVIDED

Project Reset out of the Nebraska Center for Workforce Development and Education (NCWDE) is a nonprofit organization focused on increasing the qualified workforce in Nebraska. Project Reset mentors justice involved individuals into life changing careers in the skilled trades and labor industry to bridge the gap of a qualified workforce and recidivism in our community. Program offerings participations for the third year of Grant Cycle Four are presented below.



Project Reset Program Offerings	Completed	Incomplete	Total
<i>Apprenticeship Employment</i>	4	2	6
<i>Core Foundations Workshop</i>	93	5	98
<i>Financial Wellness Workshop</i>	46	0	46
<i>Job Coaching and Development</i>	113	0	113
<i>Orientation Workshop</i>	138	0	138
<i>Pre-Apprenticeship Employment</i>	2	3	5
<i>Resume and Interview Workshop</i>	101	1	102
<i>Trade Based Employment</i>	27	0	27
<i>Trade Preparation Workshop</i>	59	6	65
<i>Transitional Employment</i>	58	8	66
Total	641	25	666

RECONNECT PROGRAM OFFERINGS PROVIDED

ReConnect, Inc., provides participants with tools needed to transform their lives and the communities in which they live. Programs focus on re-entry support and services like job readiness, life skills, educational tutoring, and family mediation. Program offerings participations for the third year of Grant Cycle Four are presented below.



ReConnect Program Offerings	Completed	Incomplete	Total
<i>Career Prep</i>	2	0	2
<i>Final Number- Stages of Change</i>	14	0	14
<i>Final Number 2.0- Independent Learning</i>	85	17	102
<i>GPS (self-paced)</i>	37	0	37
<i>KEYS 1</i>	119	20	139
<i>KEYS 2</i>	59	4	63
<i>Post-Release Reentry Support</i>	55	0	55
<i>Pre-Release Reentry Support</i>	32	1	33
<i>Right Start 2.0</i>	84	0	84
<i>Success Prep</i>	30	7	37
Total	517	49	566

RISE PROGRAM OFFERINGS PROVIDED

RISE assists individuals within NDCS in wellness and recovery by providing job readiness, reentry planning, and connections to housing and employment pathways. RISE uses peer facilitators (previous RISE graduates) to facilitate in-prison programming. Program offerings participations for the third year of Grant Cycle Four are presented below.



RISE Program Offerings	Completed	Incomplete	Total
<i>Crisis Intervention</i>	6	0	6
<i>Emotional Support</i>	172	0	172
<i>Employment Assistance</i>	15	0	15
<i>Family Program</i>	22	0	22
<i>Financial Assistance</i>	5	0	5
<i>Housing Assistance</i>	12	0	12
<i>Parole/Probation/Supervised Release Support</i>	14	0	14
<i>RISE: Post-Release Reentry Support</i>	51	10	61
<i>RISE: Pre-Release Reentry Support</i>	98	33	131
<i>RISE</i>	63	21	84
<i>Reentry Planning</i>	31	0	31
<i>Substance Use Assistance</i>	2	0	2
<i>Transportation Assistance</i>	3	0	3
Total	494	64	558

YORK UNIVERSITY PROGRAM OFFERINGS PROVIDED

The mission of York University is to transform lives through Christ-centered education and to equip students for lifelong service to God, family, and society. The overarching goal of York University is to educate program participants to prepare them for gainful employment to which they are well-suited upon their release from NCCW, thus increasing their chances for successful reintegration into their communities. Program offerings participations for the third year of Grant Cycle Four are presented below.



York University Program Offerings	Completed	Incomplete	Total
<i>Associate Degree</i>	11	0	11
<i>Communication Skills</i>	39	0	39
<i>Critical Thinking</i>	30	0	30
<i>Ethical Inquiry</i>	27	0	27
<i>Social Responsibility</i>	49	0	49
<i>Spiritual Formation</i>	41	0	41
Total	197	0	197

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This evaluation report provides an in-depth look at the VLS for the third year of Grant Cycle Four (July 1, 2022, to June 30, 2023). The report showcases the VLS logic model, the geographical spread of service providers, program participation data, highlights from employer studies, and detailed descriptions of program offerings in the final year.

Our findings underscore the critical role of VLS in supporting justice-involved individuals' reentry into the community. The collaborative efforts between NDCS administrators, funded program providers, and NCJR have been pivotal in ensuring comprehensive and effective evaluation and implementation of the program.

This report highlights several findings from an ongoing evaluation of the VLS initiative but does not cover all program successes. The NCJR-UNO evaluation team has provided technical assistance along with formative, process, and summative evaluation services as part of the overall evaluation. While monthly and quarterly reports focus on data monitoring updates, this annual report emphasizes outcomes from process evaluation efforts. Additional VLS evaluation reports using further data not presented here can be obtained from our website.

Key highlights from the report include the impressive completion rates of VLS programs, the geographical diversity of services, and positive feedback from employers who have hired VLS participants. These elements collectively indicate that VLS is making significant strides in improving the quality of life and employment prospects for justice-involved individuals, thereby contributing to public safety and community stability.

The VLS Participant Survey reveals that participants are motivated primarily by the desire to gain new job and life skills, with substantial progress noted in



areas such as self-efficacy and program satisfaction. Despite these successes, challenges remain, including barriers related to substance abuse history, social support, and transportation. Addressing these barriers will be crucial to further enhancing program outcomes and supporting participants in overcoming obstacles to their full reintegration and success.

Moving forward, the transition to the evaluation requirements of LB 896 marks a new phase for VLS. The commitment to continuous improvement and responsiveness to feedback will be essential in maintaining the program's success and addressing the evolving needs of participants and stakeholders.

For further inquiries or detailed discussions on this report, please contact Dr. Ryan Spohn, whose contact information is provided at the end of this document.

Thank you for your continued support and engagement in this vital initiative. Together, we are making meaningful progress toward reducing recidivism and enhancing the well-being of our communities.

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