Vocational & Life Skills Evaluation Annual Report

Grant Cycle Four: Year One

June 1, 2020 to July 30, 2021

NEBRASKA CENTER FOR JUSTICE RESEARCH

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Her research interests include reentry, perceptions of police, victimization, and interventions that aim to reduce social inequities within the criminal justice system more broadly.

Dr. Towne is a first-generation college graduate with a B.A. in sociology and psychology from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, and a M.A. and Ph.D. in sociology from the University of Missouri-Columbia.

She spends her free time running, baking, and traveling with friends and family.

Dr. Michael Campagna is a Research Associate at the Nebraska Center of Justice Research (NCJR) at the University of Nebraska at Omaha where he conducts research and evaluation activities for criminal and juvenile justice agencies.

Dr. Campagna has published in numerous peer-reviewed criminal justice journals, focusing on enhancing the reentry process by improving the use of risk and needs assessment.

Originally from Pennsylvania, Mike lives in Omaha with his nerdy Californian wife Andrea, caring for their many house plants, vegetable garden, two aquariums, and two rescue cats – Arson and Espionage. Mike enjoys camping/hiking, skiing, sports, sci-fi, and his 2005 Rav4.

Mike's life work is actually in the kitchen, where he and Andrea regularly create to-die-for meals. Mike's restaurant career is on pause, but he hopes to run a classy but traditional pizza shop with a witty bartender someday.

Dr. Ryan Spohn is the Director of the Nebraska Center of Justice Research (NCJR) at the University of Nebraska at Omaha where he performs statewide and local research and evaluation activities targeted at improving the performance of Nebraska's juvenile justice, criminal justice, and corrections activities.

Dr. Spohn has published in numerous sociology and criminal justice journals, including Criminal Justice and Behavior, Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice, and Violence Against Women.

Dr. Spohn has served as both a research partner and a consultant for the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA). He is a Fellow of the BJA Innovations Suite Research-Practitioner Academy and a Fellow of Georgetown University's Center for Juvenile Justice Reform.

Outside of the office, he enjoys watching college sports, reading, walking and biking, grilling, anything science fiction, and spending time with his family and their geriatric miniature schnauzer.

Taylor Claxton is a Research Assistant at the Nebraska Center for Justice Research. She is a doctoral student in the School of Criminology & Criminal Justice at the University of Nebraska-Omaha. Her research interests include reform, public opinion, activism, addressing inequities in the criminal legal system, and the implementation of trauma-informed services. When Taylor is not working, she enjoys catching up on sleep, going to the movies, and watching her favorite comedies.

Tara Grell is the graphic designer for the Center for Public Affairs Research at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. Her work focuses on designing infographics, reports, and visuals to best represent the CPAR team's work. She is also the graphic and web designer for the Nebraska Public Transit grant, working to promote rural transit across Nebraska. She occasionally assists other units within the UNO College of Public Affairs and Community Service on graphic design projects including reports, infographics, email blasts, and grant applications. Tara has a B.S. in journalism from the University of Central Missouri. She spends her free time running her own wedding and event stationery business; traveling with her husband to go hiking and attend Dodgers baseball games; and spoiling their two dogs, Drew and Sadie.

Executive Summary

The report presents data evaluation updates for the Vocational and Life Skills Program (VLS) for the first year of Grant Cycle Four. VLS was created by the Nebraska Legislative Bill 907 in 2014 to improve the transition for individuals returning to the community after incarceration, increase public safety, and reduce recidivism. VLS includes a balance of providers that address different types of participant needs that develop and manifest in different ways. This report contains 1) an updated VLS logic model for grant cycle four, 2) descriptions of the nine funded programs and a matrix of services provided, 3) a snapshot of participation across the programs, 4) STRONG-R need domain descriptions program offerings target, and 5) overall initiative and individualized evaluation results into the first year of the current grant cycle.

The Nebraska Center for Justice Research (NCJR), housed at the University of Nebraska Omaha, evaluates the VLS initiative. NCJR reports to the Nebraska Department of Correctional Services (NDCS) regarding the implementation process and data updates on a monthly and quarterly basis. NCJR has collaborated with VLS service providers to create individualized evaluation plans with manageable goals contributing to the overall initiative goals. The intermediate goals of VLS have developed over time and are currently focused on providing increased responsivity to individuals facing a variety of barriers and challenges to successful reentry. The evaluation team has also been working with NDCS to systematically match needs to intervention across grantees and increase the utilization of quality evidence-based interventions. The diversity of programming available is a challenge to evaluate, but it does make it possible to address whole person needs.

During the first year of Grant Cycle Four, VLS grantees generally met their individualized performance and outcome measures (pp. 11-19), despite the continuing challenges presented by COVID-19. Another challenge that may has reduced the quantity of program offerings available to participants involve the staffing shortages within NDCS facilities. This has sometimes resulted in staff being unavailable to escort program facilitators to designated programming spaces. Lastly, some community program providers have reported a decrease in the number of participants who receive parole, resulting in a decrease of participants served among residential community providers. Although the evaluation is limited in being able to assist NDCS and Parole on addressing these challenges to programming, the evaluation team continues to work with NDCS to improve the VLS evaluation by implementing standardized evaluation procedures outlined in LB 605 across VLS programs.

Theory of Change & Logic Model

NDCS seeks to increase the overall quality of life and meaningful employment among VLS participants, which can indirectly reduce recidivism.[1] 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.[2] 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.[3,4] 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 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 compliment 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 five of this report illustrates this theory of change that is possible with the support of multiple agencies, employers, and service providers.
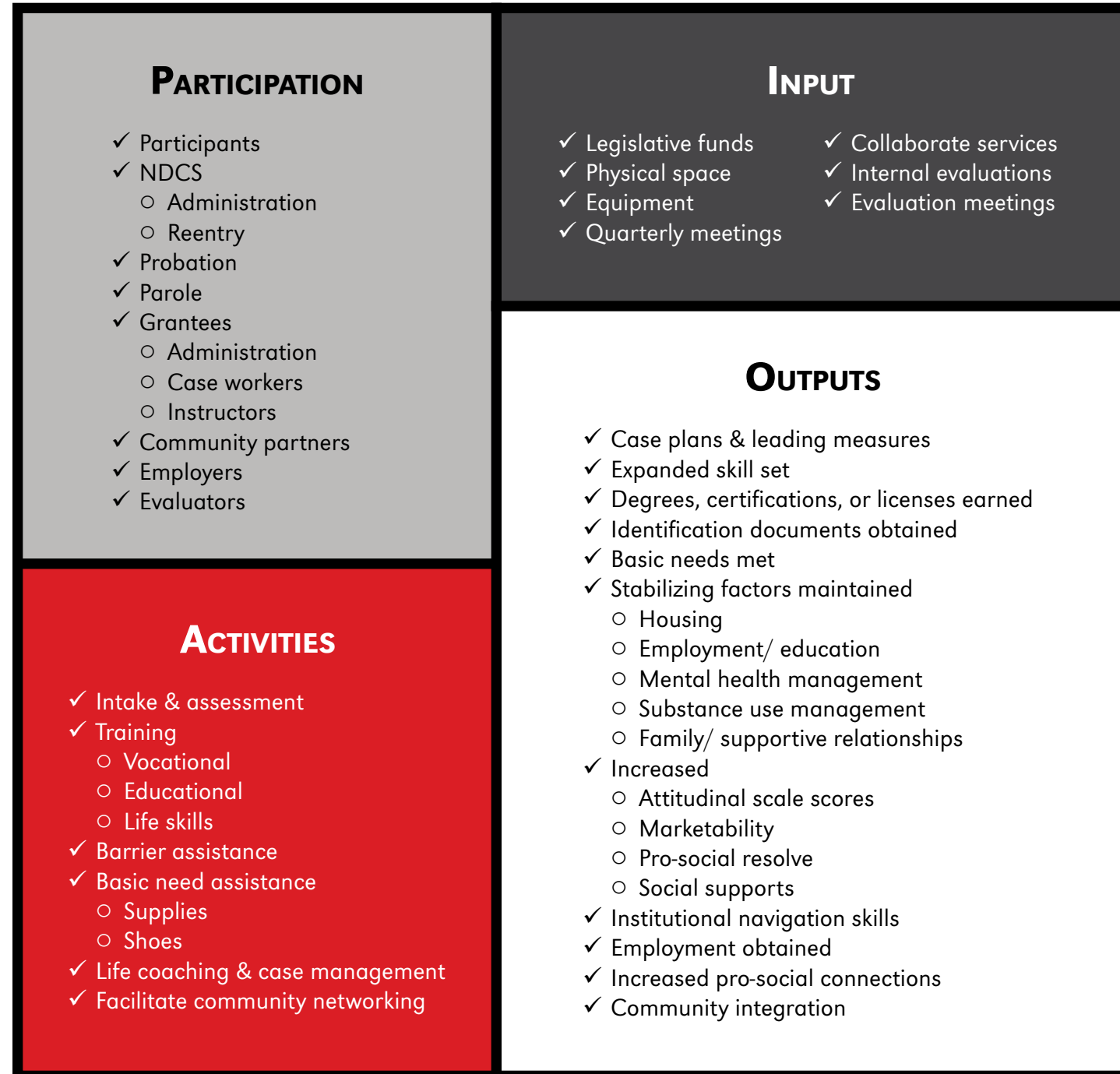
Program Purpose

Justice-involved individuals often report little to no previous employment. These individuals have and continue to face inherent barriers to employment upon release.[11] Employers are more likely to consider post-incarcerated individuals who have engaged in or completed their education, possess skills relevant to potential position, and have mastered the soft skills required to demonstrate their general readiness for employment.

Key Principle

One's time spent in prison can be a window of opportunity to advance personal skillsets critical to achieving economic stability.

Participation

- ✓ Participants
- ✓ NDCS
  - ○ Administration
  - ○ Reentry
- ✓ Probation
- ✓ Parole
- ✓ Grantees
  - ○ Administration
  - ○ Case workers
  - ○ Instructors
- ✓ Community partners
- ✓ Employers
- ✓ Evaluators

Input

- ✓ Legislative funds
- ✓ Physical space
- ✓ Equipment
- ✓ Quarterly meetings
- ✓ Collaborate services
- ✓ Internal evaluations
- ✓ Evaluation meetings

Activities

- ✓ Intake & assessment
- ✓ Training
  - ○ Vocational
  - ○ Educational
  - ○ Life skills
- ✓ Barrier assistance
- ✓ Basic need assistance
  - ○ Supplies
  - ○ Shoes
- ✓ Life coaching & case management
- ✓ Facilitate community networking

Outputs

- ✓ Case plans & leading measures
- ✓ Expanded skill set
- ✓ Degrees, certifications, or licenses earned
- ✓ Identification documents obtained
- ✓ Basic needs met
- ✓ Stabilizing factors maintained
  - ○ Housing
  - ○ Employment/ education
  - ○ Mental health management
  - ○ Substance use management
  - ○ Family/ supportive relationships
- ✓ Increased
  - ○ Attitudinal scale scores
  - ○ Marketability
  - ○ Pro-social resolve
  - ○ Social supports
- ✓ Institutional navigation skills
- ✓ Employment obtained
- ✓ Increased pro-social connections
- ✓ Community integration

Long-term Goals

1. Increase meaningful employment among participants.
2. Increase overall quality of life among participants.
3. Decrease recidivism rates among participants.

Hypotheses

1. Individuals at highest risk to recidivate will benefit the greatest from correctional programming.[12]
2. If individual barriers and needs are met, one's risk to recidivate will decrease.[13,14]
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.[15,16,17,18]
5. Increased meaningful employment will decrease recidivism.[19]
6. Increased education will decrease recidivism.[20,21]
7. Increased health will decrease criminogenic behaviors.[22]

External Factors

1. Positive and negative individual peer networks.
2. The recent global pandemic that limits safe employment opportunities and increases job competition.
3. 58% of employers ask about criminal records when hiring.[23]

Program Provider Descriptions

Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC)

ABC is part of a national company that provides trade-specific apprenticeship training and work-based learning opportunities for careers in the construction industry. ABC offers classes in correctional facilities and ABC facilities in Lincoln and Omaha.

Bristol Station

Bristol Station allows formerly incarcerated individuals to transition into the community in a residential setting. They provide opportunities of self-discovery and encourage participants to develop sustainable pro-social routines.

Mental Health Association (MHA)

MHA provides peer-run behavioral and "wrap-around" support services in Lincoln. This holistic approach provides participants with access to services on an as-needed basis. Services include evidence-based programming and peer-group activities that are provided in residential and facility settings.

Metropolitan Community College (MCC)

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. They provide college courses, workshops, employment consultations, and a basic needs pantry. 180 RAP participants can earn a GED, career certificate, national certifications or associate's degree.

Project Reset

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

ReConnect, Inc.

ReConnect, Inc. offers short courses that balance life skills and cognitive restructuring techniques with employment training to help clients reach their full potential. Located in Omaha, ReConnect hosts job fairs to connect clients, employers and provides pre-release services in correctional facilities.

RISE

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

TRADE

TRADE 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. Services include courses or trainings, but focus on relational, cognitive, and technical skillsets.

York College (YC)

YC is a private education institution that provides participants with education courses and prepares them for gainful employment using a spiritual approach to improve cognitive thinking skills and relationship skills. Participants can earn an Associate's degree for passing all the classes included in the program.

Program Self-Assessment Matrix for Reentry Programs

Grantee leads are asked to complete the Self-Assessment for Employment-Focused Reentry Programs each grant cycle, created by the National Reentry Resource Center (NRRC)[24]. The self-assessment is designed to help employment-focused reentry programs gauge their current capacity to provide integrated reentry and employment interventions to improve employment outcomes and reduce recidivism. The evaluation team uses this tool to assess the gaps in promising practices across VLS programs from the workforce development field to improve work outcomes for hard-to-employ populations, including people returning to communities from incarceration or who are on parole and probation supervision. It also assesses the program's use of the service-delivery principles that have been shown to reduce recidivism and can be used to build the employability skills of this population.

Matrix Navigation Key

- ● Offering NRRC's recommended programming in this area
- ◐ Offering a portion of NRRC's recommended programming in this area
- ○ Not offering NRRC's recommended programming at this time

		ABC	Bristol Station	MCC	MHA	Project Reset	ReConnect	RISE	TRADE	YC
Job Readiness	Education	●		●	◐		●		●	●
	Training	●		●	◐	●	●		◐	
	Soft-skill interventions	◐	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	Transitional-job placements	●	●	●	●		●	●	●	
	Non-skill related interventions (supportive services)		●	●	●	●	●	●		
Job Placement & Retention	Non-transitional subsidized employment opportunities	●								
	Job coaching	◐	●	●	●	●	●	●		◐
	Job development	◐	●	●	●	●	●	●		
	Employment opportunities	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
	Retention and advancement services (participant-facing)		●	●	●	●	●	●		
	Retention and advancement services (employer-facing)		●	●	●	●	●	●		
	Financial work incentives						●	●	◐	
Engagement	Staff dedicated to case management duties			●	●	●	●	●		
	Trainings for staff dedicated to case management duties			●	●	●	●	●		
	Communication	◐	●	●	●	●	●	●		
	Cognitive-behavioral interventions		●	◐	●		●	◐	●	
	Peer supports		●	●	●	●	●	●		
Timing	Pre-release services	●		●	●	●	●	●	●	
	Services in the community begin after release	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
Incentives	Non-financial incentives		●	●	●	●	●	●		
	Financial incentives						●	●		
Coordination	Coordination with community supervision or corrections		●	●	●	●	●	●		
	Communication with family or community supports	◐	●	●	●	●	●	●		
	Case conferencing		●	●	●	●	●			
Structured Time	Structured programming		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	◐
	Transitional job or unsubsidized employment programs		◐	●		●				

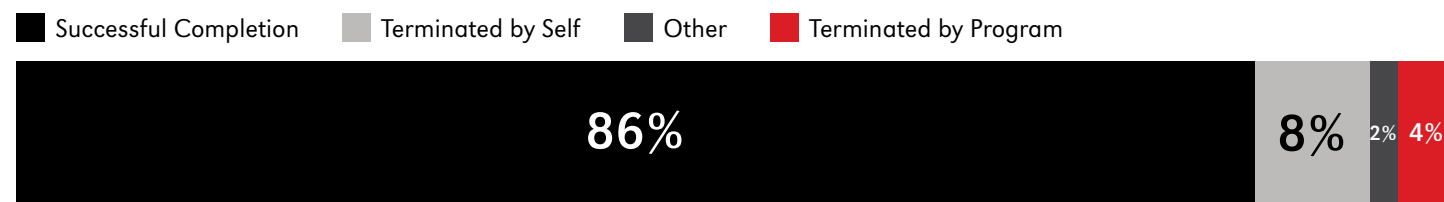# VLS Participation Year One of Grant Cycle Four

There have been 2,301 successful completions out of the 3,235 VLS participations that ended in the first 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 (71%), others have stopped for a variety of reasons: decided to leave on their own accord (terminated by self), asked to leave by the program (terminated by program), or other reasons (moved, referred to other agency, pandemic limitations, among other reasons). VLS participants completed 4,028 program offerings during their participations with service providers. The average VLS participant completed programming within 141 days.

Program	New Program Participants[a]	Total Participations[b]	Successful Completions[c]	Average Days till Successful Completion
ABC	296	322	261	88
Bristol Station	65	75	35	150
MHA	443	534	244	175
MCC	959	1,138	953	139
Project Reset	72	57	4	78
ReConnect	629	752	667	128
RISE	110	221	62	436
TRADE	136	125	75	100
YC	NA	11	0	NA
Total	2,710	3,235	2,301	141

New Participant Intake Status

■ Incarcerated ■ Work Release ■ Parole ■ Probation ■ Discharged

48%	23%	9%	17%	3%

Program Completion Status

■ Successful Completion ■ Terminated by Self ■ Other ■ Terminated by Program

86%	8%	2%	4%

[a] **New program participants:** the subset of the total served who were new to the programs in the specified time period. New participants with each program are counted once for the first new participation.
[b] **Total participations:** a count of participants that were actively participating in each program during the year.
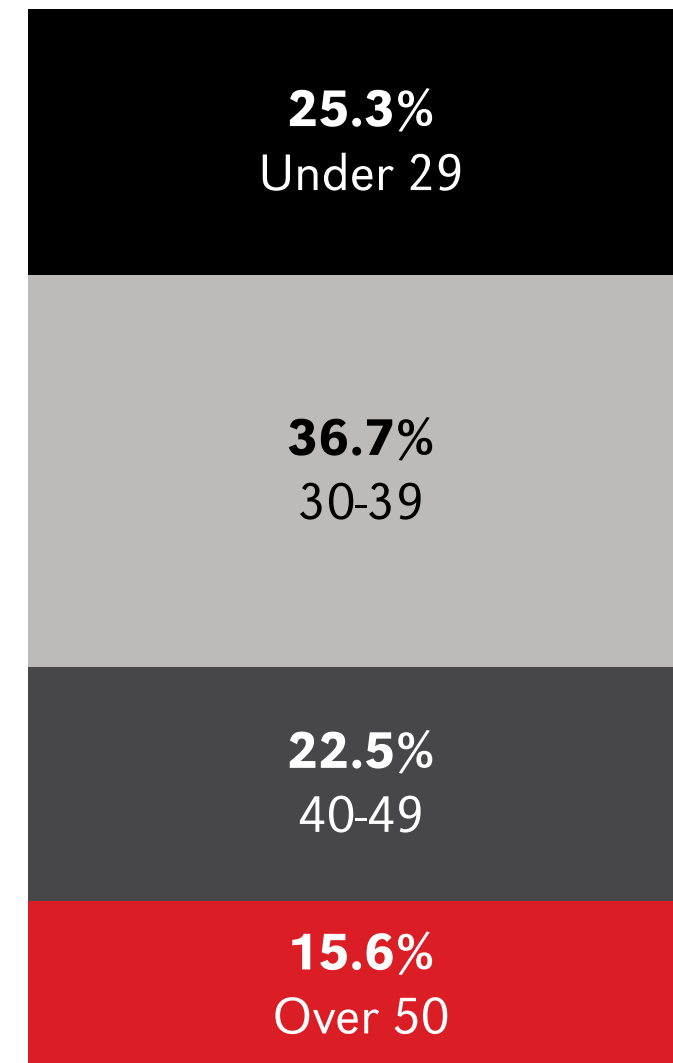[c] **Successful completion:** participants are considered successfully completed when they finish all program requirements developed by service providers and marked as completed upon program exit.
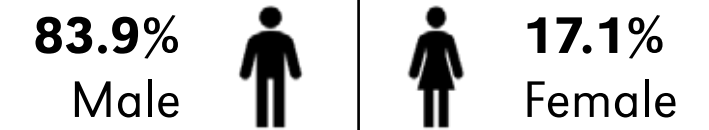
Participant Demographics

Program staff collect and verify a variety of self-reported demographic information from participants in their programs. In this report, we present the collective demographic information on age, race, and sex among VLS participants. Most participants are under 40 years of age and male. These demographics are comparable to that of the VLS population, but females are slightly more likely to participate in programming in both the facilities and the community[25].
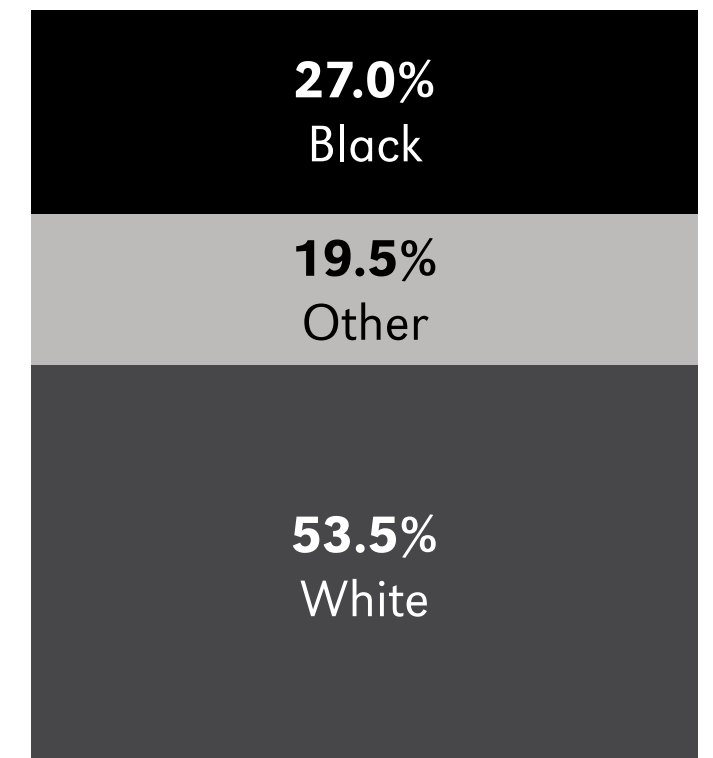

Age

25.3% Under 29
36.7% 30-39
22.5% 40-49
15.6% Over 50

Gender

83.9% Male | **17.1%** Female

Race

27.0% Black
19.5% Other
53.5% White

Matching Service Providers to Participant Needs

STRONG-R Domain Needs	ABC	Bristol Station	MCC	MHA	Project Reset	ReConnect	RISE	TRADE	YC
The evaluation team recommends participant needs be addressed by systematically matching participant needs at the program offering level. The evaluation team has developed a catalog matrix of services to assist with the implementation of this practice. Drawing upon the catalog matrix, the STRONG-R domain needs and VLS programs that address those needs are listed below. VLS programs self-identified which needs their program targets both directly as noted with "D" and indirectly as noted with an "I". Needs targeted at the offering level are noted in abbreviated forms in the following program offering sections.									
Aggression (Ag.): The aggression need is assessed to assist programs appropriately treat it. Specifically, where the aggressive behaviors occurred, if the aggressive behaviors are ongoing regardless of setting, and whether any violent or threatening behaviors have been present in the last six months to five years. Programs addressing this need would seek to identify underlying triggers and alternative solutions.		D		D	D		I	I	
Attitudes and Behaviors (AB): Assesses whether the individual accepts responsibility for their behavior, (2) their behavior towards authority figures, (3) respect for others' property, (4) their readiness for change, (5) their belief in success, (6) their impulse control, (7) their ability to deal with others, and finally (8) problem solving skills. Programs addressing this need develop prosocial attitudes and behaviors.	I	D	D	D	D	D	I	D	I
Education (Ed.): This need accounts for the individuals' highest level of education, current educational status, and academic motivation. Programs that address this need offer formal classes that lead to an accredited degree or certification.	D	D	D		I			D	D
Employment (Em.): Assesses current employment and income, longest period of employment, income sources, employment barriers (e.g., education, problem-solving skills, social skills, poor work habits, mental health issues, criminal convictions, and drug use), finance, and expenses. Programs that assist participants to secure employment address this need.	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	I
Family (Fam.): This portion assesses the individual's relationship with the individual's partner, family, and/or children. Programs addressing this need seek to improve these potential support systems for participants.	I	D	I	D	I	D	D	D	
Friends/Peers (FP): Assess an individual's social support, specifically: if they have friends; whether those friends are unstable, anti-social, or pro-social; if the friends are willing to help; and how the individual responds to anti-social friends. Programs addressing this need help individuals develop healthy friendships.	I	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	
Mental Health (MH): Assesses whether suicide is an ongoing concern; whether the individual is receiving mental health treatment; is prescribed medication, and relative medication compliance. Programs addressing this need assist individuals develop mental health strategies.		D	D	D	I			I	
Residential (Res.): The residential need asks about the individuals type of residence (e.g., living as the primary occupant, group/transitional housing, living with friends, transient, homeless), other occupants (e.g., partner, children, friends), and neighborhood support. These programs assist individuals secure safe and affordable housing.		D	D	D	I	I	D	D	
Substance Use/Abuse (SUA): This portion of the assessment inquires on the type of substance, how the individual supports addiction, and the impact of that substance use on education, employment, family, friends, current conviction, mental and physical health, and IV drug use. Programs addressing this need assist individuals identify underlying triggers and propose alternative solutions.		D	D	D	I	I		I	

ABC Performance Measures & Program Offerings

ABC provides participants with opportunities to succeed using the merit shop philosophy. They deliver 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. ABC's services will ease reentry transition most for individuals reentering the community with employment needs. Service delivery is in facilities and communities across the state.

To assess program fidelity and the results of programming, measures were updated during a virtual meeting on September 8, 2020, and included NCJR researchers, ABC administration and staff, and NDCS VLS administrators. ABC identified what they expected to accomplish in the upcoming grant cycle and what they expect their long-term impact to be on clients and community. Performance measures and program offerings for the first year of Grant Cycle Four are presented below.

GOALS	RESULTS
• On average, 75 participants per quarter will complete OSHA trainings.	○ **66** participants completed OSHA trainings.
• At least 25% of participants will take more ABC programming after completing Core.	✔ **27%** of participants took more programming with ABC after completing Core.
• Upon completion, 80% of participants will "agree" or "strongly agree" that "I would recommend this program to others."	✔ **93.3%** of participants served would recommend to others. (164 survey responses)
• After OSHA 10-hour General Industry, 80% will earn 80 or above.	✔ **99%** of OSHA 10-hour General Industry participants passed! (113 participants)

ABC Program Offerings (Need Targeted)[d]	Completed	In Progress	Incomplete	Total
Applied Construction Math (Ed.,Em.)	69	0	0	69
Construction Technology 2 (Ed., Em.)	2	0	0	2
Core (Ed., Em.)	51	0	1	52
Electrical 1 (Ed., Em.)	3	2	0	5
Electrical 2 (Ed., Em.)	2	0	0	2
OSHA 10 Hour Construction (Ed., Em.)	122	0	0	122
OSHA 10 Hour General Industry (Ed., Em.)	113	0	1	114
OSHA 30 Hour Construction (Ed., Em.)	28	0	1	29
Plumbing 3 (Ed., Em.)	1	0	0	1
Virtual Electrical (Ed., Em.)	11	0	0	11
Total	**402**	**2**	**3**	**407**

[d] Needs targeted by program offering key: (Ed.) = Education, (Em.) = Employment.

Bristol Station Performance Measures & Program Offerings

Bristol Station provides participants an environment, interventions, and case management aimed to accelerate psychological and social development related to behavior and thinking. They adhere to the Risk Need Responsivity model of correctional services and utilize a validated and prominent actuarial assessment to direct case management. By utilizing cognitive behavioral techniques and supervision, participants are pushed to reconfigure their perceptions, interpretations, and responses to stimuli.

To assess program fidelity and the results of programming, measures were updated during a virtual meeting on September 14, 2020, and included NCJR researchers, Bristol Station staff, and NDCS VLS administrators. Bristol Station identified what they expected to accomplish in the upcoming grant cycle and what they expect their long-term impact to be on clients and community. Performance measures and program offerings for the first year of Grant Cycle Four are presented below.

GOALS

RESULTS

Goals	Results
• 85% of completers will reduce ORAS[e] score.	○ **82%** reduced their overall ORAS risk score.
• 80% of completers will increase QOLI[f] score.	○ **70%** increased their QOLI score.
• 80% of participants will "agree" or "strongly agree" that "I would recommend this program to others."	○ **79%** of participants served would recommend to others. (38 survey responses)
• 85% of participants who successfully complete the program will be employed at completion.	✔ **91%** of participants were employed upon successfully completing the program.

Bristol Station Program Offerings (Needs Targeted)[g]	Completed	In Progress	Incomplete	Total
Anger Management (Ag., AB, MH)	3	0	0	**3**
Conflict Resolution (Ag. Em.)	38	9	16	**63**
Dress for Success (Em.)	38	9	16	**63**
Employment Readiness (Em.)	40	0	0	**40**
Family Reunification (Ag. AB, Fam.)	22	0	2	**24**
Interviewing Skills (Em.)	38	10	16	**64**
Job Coaching (Em.)	38	9	16	**63**
Money Management (Em.)	1	0	3	**4**
MRT (AB, Fam., FP)	2	3	4	**9**
Relapse Prevention Group (AB, SUA)	8	0	4	**12**
Residential Reentry (AB, AB, Em., MH, Res.)	63	10	1	**74**
Transitional Skills (Ag., AB, Em., Fam., FP)	30	0	12	**42**
Transportation Independence (Em.)	21	0	0	**21**
Total	342	50	90	**482**

[e] ORAS refers to the Ohio Risk Assessment System. Decreased scores indicate improvement.
[f] QOLI refers to the Quality-of-Life Inventory. Increased scores indicate improvement.
[g] Needs targeted by program offering key: (Ag.) = Aggression, (AB) = Attitudes/Behaviors, (Em.) = Employment, (Fa.) = Family, (FP) = Friends/peers, (MH) = Mental Health, (Res.) = Residential, (SUA) = Substance Use/Abuse.

MCC Performance Measures & Program Offerings

MCC 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. In close collaboration with Nebraska Parole and Probation, 180 RAP helps these populations reduce personal barriers and successfully transition into a viable career pathway and the workforce.

To assess program fidelity and the results of programming, measures were updated during a virtual meeting on September 15, 2020, and included NCJR researchers, MCC administration and staff, and NDCS VLS administrators. MCC first described their services, population served, and agency goals. MCC then identified what they expected to accomplish in the upcoming grant cycle and what they expect their long-term impact to be on clients and community. Performance measures and program offerings for the first year of Grant Cycle Four are presented below.

GOALS

RESULTS

Goals	Results
• On average, 300 participants will be served by MCC each quarter.	○ On average, **284** participants were served by MCC each quarter.
• Quarterly, participants will maintain a 3.2 GPA.	✔ VLS students maintained a **3.5** cumulative GPA.
• On average, 300 participants will be served by the Job Center each quarter.	✔ On average, **455** participants were served by the job center each quarter.
• 80% of participants involved in peer support will feel supported by their peers (MCC evaluations).	○ Temporarily unavailable because of Covid-19.

MCC Program Offerings (Needs Targeted)[h]	Completed	In Progress	Incomplete	Total
Career Certification (Em.)	1	0	2	**3**
CDL (Em.)	2	0	0	**2**
Employment Readiness (Em.)	77	0	0	**77**
Forklift Certification (Em.)	52	0	0	**52**
Four-Week Workshop (AB, Em.)	17	0	0	**17**
GED (Ed.)	2	0	1	**3**
Initial Communication (Ed., Em.)	70	0	0	**70**
Job Readiness (Em.)	148	0	0	**148**
MCC Credit Course (Ed.)	258	6	2	**266**
National Career Readiness Certificate (Em.)	18	0	0	**18**
National Certification (Em.)	5	0	0	**5**
Orientation (Ed.)	738	0	0	**738**
OSHA (Em.)	1	0	0	**1**
Other Services (Res.)	87	0	0	**87**
Total	1,515	8	6	**1,529**

[h] Needs targeted by program offering key: (AB) = Attitudes/Behaviors, (Ed.) = Education, (Em.) = Employment, (Res.) = Residential.

MHA PERFORMANCE MEASURES & PROGRAM OFFERINGS

MHA provides participants reentry case management focused on wellness and recovery. By providing intentional peer support, offering informed choice, promoting wellness, and encouraging hope, participants can increase their employment prospects and capacities to integrate into pro-social networks including family and various community organizations. These program offerings are particularly helpful for individuals with mental health needs as they transition back into the community.

To assess program fidelity and the results of programming, measures were updated during a virtual meeting on September 8, 2020, and included NCJR researchers, MHA administration and staff, and NDCS VLS administrators. MHA identified expected accomplishments in the upcoming grant cycle and their expected long-term impact on clients and the community. Performance measures and program offerings for the first year of Grant Cycle Four are presented below.

GOALS	RESULTS
• On average, 75 participants will be served by MHA each quarter.	✔ On average, MHA served **134** individuals each quarter.
• 80% of those served "agree" or "strongly agree" that they "would recommend the program to others."	✔ **81.3**% of participants served would recommend others. (48 survey responses)
• 80% of MHA participants will show increases in overall Quality of Life (QoL) scores.	✔ **81% increased**; 15% same; 4% decreased (69 entrance/interim & exit scores provided).
• 85% of MHA participants will show increases in QoL "self-worth/purpose", pre to post.	○ **23% increased**; 68% same; 9% decreased (69 entrance/interim & exit scores provided).

MHA Program Offerings (Need Targeted)[i]	Completed	In Progress	Incomplete	Total
Benefits (Em.)	3	2	0	5
HONU (AB, Em., Fam., FP, MH, Res., SUA)	71	3	5	79
Hope (Em.)	83	99	4	186
Other Services	5	0	0	5
Peer Prevention Group	345	0	0	345
Real (Ag., AB, MH, Res.)	39	3	3	45
Total	**546**	**107**	**12**	**665**

[i] Needs targeted by program offering key: (Ag.) = Aggression, (AB) = Attitudes/Behaviors, (Em.) = Employment, (Fa.) = Family, (FP) = Friends/Peers, (MH) = Mental Health, (Res.) = Residential, (SUA) = Substance Use/Abuse.

PROJECT RESET PERFORMANCE MEASURES & PROGRAM OFFERINGS

Project Reset was welcomed into the VLS initiative in January of 2021 and has hit the ground running! 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 specifically mentors justice involved individuals into life changing careers in the skilled trades and labor industry in an effort to bridge the gap of a qualified workforce and recidivism in our community. Participants in the program work towards a designated trade apprentice status.

To assess program fidelity and the results of programming, measures were developed during a site visit on March 30, 2021, at Project Reset and included NCJR researchers, Project Reset administration and staff, and NDCS VLS administrators. Project Reset identified expected accomplishments in the upcoming grant cycle and their expected long-term impact on clients and the community. Performance measures and program offerings for the first year of Grant Cycle Four are presented below.

GOALS	RESULTS
• At least 50% of transitional employment participants will participate in the Trade Preparation Workshop.	✔ **57.1%** of Transitional Employment participants continued to the Trade Preparation Workshop.
• At least 80% of program completers will "agree" or "strongly agree" that they would recommend the program/training to others.	✔ **100%** of participants would recommend the program to others. (3 survey responses)
• At least 80% of participants will "agree" or "strongly agree" that they feel confident in their abilities upon program completion.	✔ **100%** of participants reported feeling confident after program completion. (3 survey responses)

Project Reset Program Offerings (Needs Targeted)[j]	Completed	In Progress	Incomplete	Total
Apprenticeship Employment (Em.)	2	1	0	3
Core Foundations Workshop (Ed., Em.)	25	17	1	43
Financial Wellness Workshop (Em.)	8	4	0	12
Job Coaching and Development (Em.)	19	26	0	45
Orientation Workshop (Em.)	68	0	0	68
Pre-Apprenticeship Employment (Em.)	3	0	0	3
Resume and Interview Workshop (Em.)	12	19	0	31
Trade Based Employment (Em.)	3	4	0	7
Trade Preparation Workshop (Ed., Em.)	12	11	0	23
Transitional Employment (Em.)	14	11	0	25
Total	**166**	**93**	**1**	**260**

[j] Needs targeted by program offering key: (Ed.) = Education, (Em.) = Employment.

ReConnect Performance Measures & Program Offerings

ReConnect, Inc. provides participants tools needed to transform their lives and the communities in which they live. ReConnect delivers services that help clients maximize their potential and overcome barriers that interfere with their ability to reach their full potential. Programs focus on re-entry support and services, job readiness and life skills, educational tutoring, and family mediation.

To assess program fidelity and the results of programming, measures were updated during a virtual meeting on September 8, 2020, and included NCJR researchers, ReConnect administration and staff, and NDCS VLS administrators. ReConnect identified what they expected to accomplish in the upcoming grant cycle and what they expect their long-term impact to be on clients and community. Performance measures and program offerings for the first year of Grant Cycle Four are presented below.

GOALS

RESULTS

GOALS	RESULTS
• On average, at least 45 participants will be served per month in the facilities.	✔ On average, **46** individuals were served each month in the facilities (557 individuals).
• On average, at least 20 participants will be served in the community each month.	○ On average, **16** individuals were served each month in the community (195 individuals).
• On average, 300 participants will be served by the Job Center each quarter.	✔ **92.6%** of participants would recommend the program to others. (148 survey responses)
• 80% of those served "agree" or "strongly agree" that they "would recommend the program to others."	✔ **One** toolbox credential program was offered.
• 80% of participants completing an initial and follow-up Self Sufficiency Matrix Assessment will show improvement in at least three categories.	✔ **92%** of participants improved in at least three categories.

ReConnect Program Offerings (Needs Targeted)[k]	Completed	In Progress	Incomplete	Total
Career Prep (Em.)	21	0	0	21
Construction Toolbox Credentials (Em.)	7	0	0	7
Final Number (AB)	20	0	0	20
GPS (self-paced) (AB)	92	0	0	92
KEYS 1 (AB)	220	1	76	297
KEYS 2 (AB)	72	2	1	75
Post-Release Reentry Support (Em., Res.)	49	2	1	52
Pre-Release Reentry Support	180	2	2	184
Ready for Work (Em.)	50	0	3	53
Right Start (Em.)	49	0	3	52
Right Start 2.0 (Em.)	27	1	0	28
Success Prep (AB, Ed., Em., Res.)	20	0	5	25
Total	807	8	91	906

k Needs targeted by program offering key: (AB) = Attitudes/Behaviors, (Ed.) = Education, (Em.) = Employment, (Res.) = Residential.

RISE Performance Measures & Program Offerings

RISE seeks to end cycles of incarceration by equipping current and formerly incarcerated persons with the tools and hope to thrive in NE communities. They assist individuals within the Nebraska Department of Correctional Services 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 then in-prison programming.

To assess program fidelity and the results of programming, measures were developed during a virtual meeting on September 3, 2020, and included NCJR researchers, RISE administration and staff, and NDCS VLS administrators. RISE identified expected accomplishments in the upcoming grant cycle and their expected long-term impact on clients and the community. Performance measures and program offerings for the first year of Grant Cycle Four are presented below.

GOALS

RESULTS

GOALS	RESULTS
• At least 50% of builders actively participate in re-entry or case management services after release.	✔ **59.5%** of builders who had pre-release support, also participated in post-release support.
• At least 95% of builders will respond "agree" or "strongly agree" that they are satisfied with programming upon completion.	○ **90%** of builders reported satisfaction with the RISE program upon completion. (10 survey responses)
• At least 80% of builders will report being socially supported half the time upon program completion.	○ **60%** of builders reported feeling supported upon program completion. (10 survey responses)
• RISE will gain five new community partners each year of the grant cycle (40 noted on CIC implementation report).	✔ RISE currently has **141** community partners.

RISE Program Offerings (Need Targeted)[l]	Completed	In Progress	Incomplete	Total
Post-Release Reentry Support (Em., Ed., Fam, FP, MH, Res.)	62	32	0	94
Pre-Release Reentry Support (Em., Ed., Fam, FP, MH, Res.)	39	52	0	91
Total	101	84	0	185

l Needs targeted by program offering key: (Em.) = Employment, (Fa.) = Family, (FP) = Friends/Peers, (MH) = Mental Health, (Res.) = Residential.

TRADE PERFORMANCE MEASURES & PROGRAM OFFERINGS

TRADE is a program operated by the Center for People in Need (CFPIN) in Lincoln. Its mission is to provide 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. TRADE case managers assess need and assign programming in line with needs and participant preference to improve reentry transitions back into the community.

To assess program fidelity and the results of programming, measures were updated during a virtual meeting on September 14, 2020, and included NCJR researchers, TRADE administration and staff, and NDCS VLS administrators. TRADE identified what they expected to accomplish in the upcoming grant cycle and what they expect their long-term impact to be on clients and community. Performance measures and program offerings for the first year of Grant Cycle Four are presented below.

GOALS

RESULTS

GOALS	RESULTS
• On average, 16 core participants will be served in the community onsite each quarter.	✔ On average, **20** core participants were served each quarter in the community.
• 85% of participants will "agree" or "strongly agree" that "I would recommend this program to others."	✔ **97.3%** of participants would recommend this program to others in GC3. (37 survey responses)
• On average, there will be eight CAD completions each quarter.	○ There were **five** CAD completions for the year.
• 75% of participants will report confidence in their abilities upon program completion.	○ **70.3%** of participants reported feeling confident upon program completion. (37 survey responses)

TRADE Program Offerings (Need Targeted)[m]	Completed	In Progress	Incomplete	Total
Computer Aided Drafting (Ed., Em.)	5	0	0	**5**
Core Classes (AB, Ed., Em., Res.)	75	0	6	**81**
Core Classes - In Facility (AB, Ed., Em., Res.)	8	0	0	**8**
Family Support (Fam.)	1	0	0	**1**
Forklift & Warehouse Operations Module (Em.)	19	0	3	**22**
Other Services	27	0	0	**27**
People Obtaining Prosperity (POP) (Ed.)	0	7	0	**7**
Welding Module (Em.)	14	0	4	**18**
Total	**149**	**7**	**13**	**169**

[m] Needs targeted by program offering key: (AB) = Attitudes/Behaviors, (Em.) = Employment, (Fa.) = Family, (Res.) = Residential.

YORK COLLEGE PERFORMANCE MEASURES & PROGRAM OFFERINGS

The mission of YC is to transform lives through Christ-centered education and to equip students for lifelong service to God, family, and society. The overarching goal of YC 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.

To assess program fidelity and the results of programming, measures were updated during a virtual meeting on September 8, 2020, and included NCJR researchers, York College administration and staff, and NDCS VLS administrators. York identified what they expected to accomplish in the upcoming grant cycle and what they expect their long-term impact to be on clients and community. Performance measures and program offerings for the first year of Grant Cycle Four are presented below.

GOALS

RESULTS

GOALS	RESULTS
• For each trimester, YC students in NCCW will exhibit an average GPA similar or greater than comparable York College students on main campus.	○ VLS NCCW participants average GPA=**3.7** (Main campus average=3.3)
• For each trimester, YC students in NCCW will have student evaluation mean scores for "recommending course to others" that is similar or greater than York College Students on the main campus. (0="strongly disagree", 4="strongly agree")	✔ VLS NCCW participants average response: **3.7** "agree"/ "strongly agree" (Main campus average=3.42)
• 80% of participants will "agree" or "strongly agree" that "I would recommend this program to others."	✔ **100%** of participants would recommend this program to others in GC4. (10 survey responses)
• At least 50% of participants will report that they feel supported by their peers.	✔ **90%** of participants felt supported by peers in GC4. (10 survey responses)

York College Program Offerings (Need Targeted)[n]	Completed	In Progress	Incomplete	Total
Associate of Arts Degree Program (Ed.)	0	11	0	**11**
Total	**0**	**11**	**5**	**11**

[n] (Ed.) = Education need targeted by program offering.

Concluding Remarks

This report highlights findings from an ongoing evaluation of the VLS program initiative provided by NCJR-UNO with the following stakeholders in mind: NE Legislature, NDCS, and VLS Program Providers. The NCJR-UNO evaluation team has provided formative, process, and outcome evaluation services as part of the overall VLS evaluation. For the first year of grant cycle four, the primary goal of the evaluation is to provide annual data monitoring and performance measure results that demonstrate progress towards the desired outcomes of interest. Recent VLS reports using additional data and measures are available on the NCJR website.[26]

The following data were utilized in the present report: sociodemographic characteristics, numbers served, and program performance measures for the first year of grant cycle four. Sociodemographic data reveal female participants are slightly overrepresented relative to the general population incarcerated in Nebraska's prisons. This may be because female participants anticipate more challenges when entering the labor market relative to their male counterparts. Numbers served data reveals a decrease in VLS participation from last year: new participants decreased by 3.2%, total served decreased by 17.1%, and successful completions decreased by 9.8%. This is likely a combined result of increased illness from the COVID-19 Pandemic, NDCS staffing shortages leading to periods when services cannot be provided in facilities, and a reduction of one-and-done program frameworks increasing the overall time spent with participants on average. The average days till completion has also increased from 105 days in 2019 till 141 days in this report. Lastly, individualized performance measures demonstrated that VLS program providers continue to challenge themselves with higher goal benchmarks and improve the quality-of-service delivery in the process. Although program providers did not meet as many performance measures goals as in previous years, the results reveal participants are satisfied with the services received and developing skills that will be helpful during release.

The evaluation team is working with NDCS to evaluate each VLS program in a systematic fashion according to the guidelines set forth in LB605. Moving forward, the evaluators will place more emphasis on whether program participation reduces recidivism that will be informed by the following formative evaluation data: site visits, key staff interviews, interviews with offenders, group observations, and a review of materials for applicable programs. The extent to which the data show adherence to concepts linked with program effectiveness will be reported, along with feedback to the department including the strengths, weaknesses, and recommendations to better adhere to evidence-based programming for each program.

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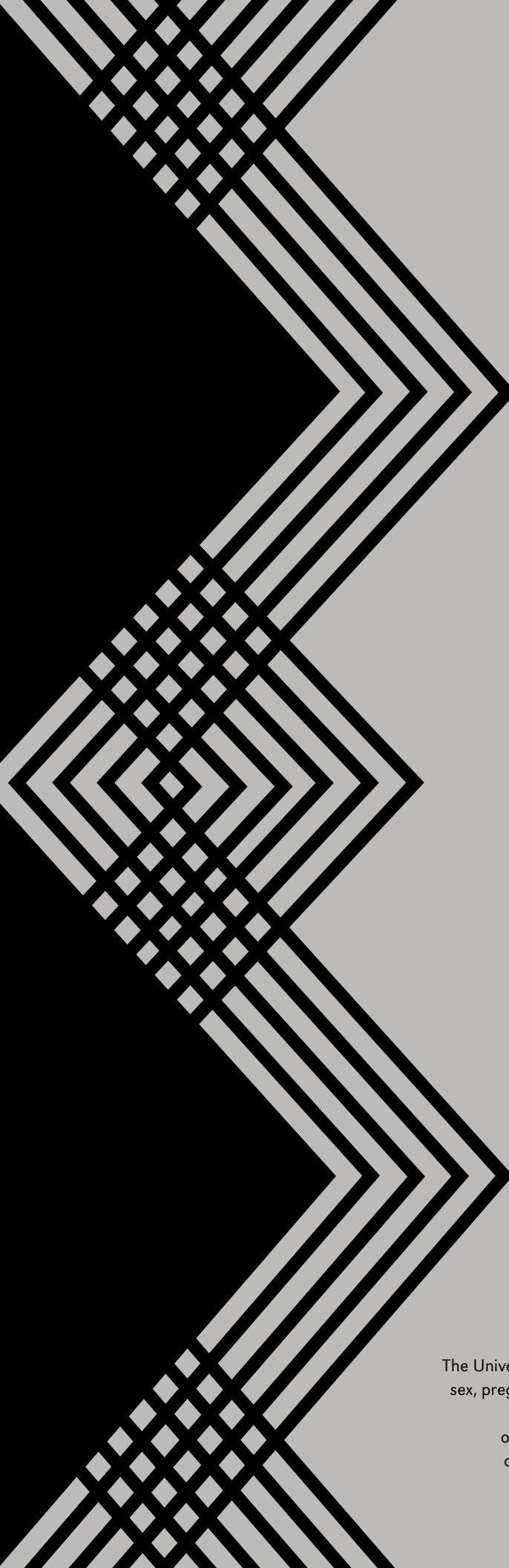
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