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The Process of Reintegration: A Qualitative Exploration of the  
RealVictory Program and Criminogenic Factors

Celeste M. Davis

A thesis submitted to the faculty of  
Brigham Young University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Science

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## ABSTRACT

### The Process of Reintegration: A Qualitative Exploration of the RealVictory Program and Criminogenic Factors

Celeste M. Davis

Department of Sociology

Master of Science

With prison populations on the rise, it is imperative to find re-entry programs that effectively decrease recidivism. Understanding the experiences of participants and the criminogenic factors that provoke and prohibit their successful reintegration is a vital aspect of evaluating re-entry programs. With sixteen in-depth interviews, this study evaluates the pilot re-entry program, RealVictory, by exploring the opinions and experiences of its participants including the key criminogenic factors affecting their successes and failures during the reintegration process. The two most pervasive criminogenic factors affecting recidivism for participants of this study were support systems and desire to change. While both the control and treatment groups had three members rearrested since they were last out of jail or prison, we find that re-arrest isn't necessarily the best measure of program success despite the common use of this measure in quantitative studies (Seiter, 2003). All participants who went through the RealVictory program reported that the program was effective in helping them to stay out of crime.

Keywords: reintegration, re-entry, crime desistance

Brigham Young University

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## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Table of Contents.....	iv
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Problems of Re-entry.....	2
Re-Entry Programs.....	3
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	5
Cognitive-Behavioral Approaches.....	5
Theoretical Perspectives.....	5
Strain Theory.....	6
Social Control Theory.....	7
Deterrence Theory.....	9
Social Disorganization Theory.....	10
Social Learning Theory.....	12
Criminogenic Factors.....	14
The RealVictory Project.....	16
Chapter 3: Methods.....	20
Sample.....	24
Chapter 4: Results.....	27
Start into Crime.....	27
Re-entry Programs.....	29
Helpful Aspects of Programs.....	30
Program Aspects that are not Helpful.....	32
Can a Re-entry Program Help Those Who Do Not Want It?.....	34
RealVictory.....	36
How RealVictory Compares to Other Programs.....	37
How to Change the Program?.....	38
Classes.....	39
Cell phones.....	41
Commitment and Confidence.....	43
Who does RealVictory Work Best For?.....	44
Summary of Evaluation: Participant Satisfaction.....	46
Key Criminogenic Factors.....	47
Substance Abuse.....	47

Employment.....	49
Family .....	51
Friends .....	53
Age.....	54
Desire.....	55
Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusions.....	56
Support Systems .....	57
Desire to Change .....	58
What Does This Mean for the RealVictory Program? .....	59
Limitations .....	61
Suggestions for Further Research .....	62
Conclusions .....	62
Sources .....	64
Appendix A .....	71

## List of Tables

Table 1. Key Criminogenic Factors from the Literature.....	14
Table 2. Sample Demographics and Characteristics.....	25

## Chapter 1: Introduction

After almost fifty years of constancy, incarceration rates increased dramatically from 1973 to 2000 in the U.S. The average incarceration rate remained stable at 106 inmates for every 100,000 people from 1930 to 1975. By 2000, there were 478 inmates per 100,000 people (MacKenzie, 2006; Visher & Travis, 2003). In 2002, more than 1.4 million people were held in prison (Petersilia, 2003).

Along with this increase of persons entering prisons has come an increase in the number of persons coming out. Over 600,000 prisoners were released from state and federal prisons in 2002, four times as many as twenty-five years ago (Visher & Travis, 2003). Unfortunately most of the attention has been directed toward the number of people held in prison, rather than the large numbers of prisoners being released (Seiter, 2003). Petersilia (2003) notes that one of the most profound challenges facing American society today is the reintegration of the roughly 1,600 prisoners who leave state and federal prisons each day. Bearing in mind the increasing prison population, Kelly (1991) predicted that due to the high volume of release, parolees and probationers may become increasingly high risk in terms of repeating crimes and returning to prison. Parole officers may find it increasingly difficult to monitor releasees, resulting in either an increase in violations or a decrease in detection of violations.

According to current recidivism rates, Kelly's prediction has to a large degree proven accurate. Within three years of being released, seven in ten releasees are rearrested and half will return to prison (Visher & Travis, 2003). A return to the community often provides merely a brief stop on the road back to prison.

These unprecedented incarceration and recidivism rates should be cause for concern, as they directly affect crime and safety in America. The prison system seems to do little to deter

inmates from committing further crime upon release. Lynch and Sabol (2000) found that the increases in crime and social disruption from parolees and probationers have a negative effect on other institutions such as families, communities and schools. Additionally, as parole boards release inmates more readily, the deterrent effect of punishment declines with the corresponding erosion in perception of the severity and certainty of imprisonment (Kelly, 1991).

With so many parolees and probationers getting rearrested and returning to jail or prison, there is a clear need for effective re-entry programs to assist prisoners on the path to successful reintegration into their communities without returning to crime. Numerous re-entry programs have been implemented and tested with differing and often conflicting success rates.

How then is the transition from prison back to society eased? What programs have been instituted and which of them work? This study attempts to evaluate the re-entry program RealVictory using data on participants' own experiences. Specifically, RealVictory will be assessed for strengths and weaknesses, and the criminogenic factors causing participants to reoffend or "stay clean" will be evaluated.

### **Problems of Re-entry**

The future for many prisoners appears bleak as they make their return to society. Many of them are uneducated, unskilled, without solid family supports and most have serious social and medical problems (Petersilia, 2003). Additionally, upon release they experience the added stress of a criminal prison record and the stigmas of distrust and trepidation that come with it. Prisoners find that the world to which they return is drastically different from the one they have been living in. In prison, inmates learn the necessary skills to survive in that harsh atmosphere. Ironically, the skills learned in prison (e.g., violence, harsh language, take what you can get

attitude) often oppose those skills and values which are helpful and requisite for life outside of prison (e.g., work ethic, courtesy, employment skills) (Kurleychek, 2006).

Not only is the prison world different from the world outside, but this outside world is often quite different from the one they left before prison. Parolees and probationers often find that people are less willing to assist them after they have returned from jail or prison.

Unavailability of jobs, lack of family support and withdrawal of community resources all reflect this change in sentiment (Seiter, 2003). Finding a job can be a difficult task but an important one for successful reintegration. Release is often a very stressful time for inmates, which makes it all the more difficult to avoid returning to drug or alcohol abuse—a problem from which three fourths of prisoners suffer (Petersilia, 2003). For many reasons, it is daunting for an ex-inmate to avoid a return to crime. It is crucial, therefore, that strong programs are in place, aimed at facilitating the process of reintegration (Seiter, 2003).

### **Re-Entry Programs**

Excluding those who are either executed or die from natural causes, all prisoners experience re-entry; in fact, 93 percent of all inmates are eventually released back into society (Visher & Travis, 2003; Petersilia, 2003). With so many prisoners being released, it is imperative to identify re-entry programs that work.

A few decades ago, a prominent analysis of re-entry programs (Martison, 1979) concluded that essentially nothing worked—that little could be done to prevent prisoners from returning to crime after release. While viewpoints have changed since then, many researchers still share Martison's sentiment. A debate is currently waging as to whether or not re-entry programs are at all effective. After an extensive review of the literature, Petersilia (2004) concluded that there is no consensus in answer to the question, "Do prisoner re-entry programs

work?” Many researchers have evaluated various programs and have found them to be successful in reducing recidivism (Aos et al., 2006; Kurleychek, 2006; Seiter, 2003; Lipsey et al, 2001; Wilson et al, 2000). On the other hand, many disagree and claim that if reductions in recidivism are found, the effects are minimal (Wilson & Davis, 2006; Farabee, 2005).

While various researchers have come to different conclusions regarding the effectiveness of re-entry programs, it is difficult to refute that certain aspects of re-entry programs have shown to be more effective than others. Preferably, criminogenic factors or factors correlating with or causing criminal activity would be the target of treatment. Pro-criminal attitudes and associates, antisocial temperament, weak self-control skills, and deficits in education, vocation and employment skills are just a few examples of criminogenic factors (MacKenzie, 2006).

Studies on why prisoners get into crime are also useful for re-entry programs since the same factors which get criminals into crime are often those which explain why they repeat it. A qualitative study such as this one, which allows prisoners to tell their own stories, would therefore prove beneficial. Identifying criminogenic factors in the participant’s experiences would allow policy makers and program creators to utilize this data toward improving re-entry programming (Travis & Visher, 2005).

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### **Cognitive-Behavioral Approaches**

While researchers disagree on the effectiveness of re-entry programs, a consistent theme in many studies on rehabilitation is the positive effects of cognitive-behavioral approaches (Wilson et al, 2005). Cognitive-behaviorism assumes that changes in cognition lead to changes in behavior (Dobson & Block, 1988). Therefore, programs based on the cognitive-behavior approach seek to help ex-inmates become aware of thoughts which lead to criminal behavioral responses and to alter those thoughts in an effective and positive way (Wilson et al, 2005).

The basis for cognitive-behavioral approaches is the idea that once negative thought processes are altered, negative behavior will decline as well; no harsh punishment is required. In a recent meta-analysis, cognitive-behavioral programs were found to reduce recidivism by 20-30 percent compared to control groups (Lipsey et al, 2001). Similarly, Pearson et al (2002) found that cognitive-behavioral programs had a mean recidivism reduction of about 30 percent and that these programs were more effective in reducing recidivism than behavioral ones. Wilson et al (2005) went so far as to claim that all higher quality studies reported positive effects favoring the cognitive-behavioral treatment programs. The RealVictory program follows a cognitive-behavioral model.

### **Theoretical Perspectives**

In analyzing why people engage in crime, it is useful to review several crime theories. The research presented draws on the social structure school of thought, viewing crime as a result of what is occurring in the social structure around the crime. Five social structure crime theories will be reviewed in this paper: strain theory, social control theory, deterrence theory, social disorganization theory and social learning theory.

## *Strain Theory*

Based on Durkheim's (1897) idea of anomie, strain theorists in criminology argue that crime is a result of the frustration and anger of the lower class caused by a strain between the expectations and culture of living in a middle-class world and the reality that those expectations cannot be met (Merton, 1968). Strain appears when there is too much emphasis placed on the goal and too little emphasis placed on legitimate means for achieving the said goal. This strain may be either structural or individual. Structural strains refer to societal level movements or processes which affect how individuals classify their needs. Individual strains suggest tension individuals feel as they seek to satisfy their needs.

The idea originated with Durkheim's (1897) idea of anomie in his study of suicide, which postulates that a lack of personal social ethic and norms can lead to a lack of moral and sanctioned aspirations. Robert Merton (1938) furthered this idea of anomie and took it to mean the dissonance between cultural goals and realistic means for reaching those goals. He saw the "American dream" as promoting monetary success without correspondingly promoting legitimate means to attain this success. Thus, people engage in deviant behaviors out of frustration or anger because of the discontinuity between expectations and reality. Robert Dubin (1959) added to Merton's ideas and focused a functionalist light on strain theory, viewing deviance as a function of society. Dubin additionally distinguished between cultural goals, institutional means and norms, holding that each person interprets and acts upon norms differently.

More recently, the work of Robert Agnew (1992) has been very influential in strain theory criminology. He proposed a general strain theory that is not tied to social class, but rather focuses on self-generated norms. Agnew's strain theory does not rely solely on structural or

individual strains, but emotional strains. He asserts that strain can materialize from negative relationships with others.

Living in an area largely dominated by educated, middle-class society could put a strain on the participants of this study as they seek to gain middle or upper class status with limited means for achieving this. Selling drugs, which most of the participants of this study have engaged in, is a lucrative alternative to the jobs that participants can legitimately obtain. Strain theory can help understand why participants in this study initiate and maintain criminal lifestyles.

### *Social Control Theory*

Travis Hirshi (1969) is largely known for elaborating social control theory. Hirshi thought that the processes of socialization, social learning and interaction help to reduce inclinations toward antisocial behavior, largely because these social processes help to augment self-control, which is a key trait in avoiding deviant behavior. Simply put, "Social control theory attempts to identify the ties that bind individuals to society and thus control their behavior. The major proposition of this perspective is that delinquent acts result when an individual's bond to society is weak or broken." (Hirshi, 2004: 538).

Social control theory proposes four primary dimensions of social bonds: attachment, commitment, involvement and belief. Attachment refers to a social bond to people and institutions—between the individual and his/her parents, peers, teachers, school, church or other objects. The idea behind attachment is that the deeper the attachment between an individual and such people or institutions, the less likely he/she will engage in criminal or deviant acts (Hirshi, 2004). Commitment refers to investment in lines of action. The stronger the commitment to something pro-social, the less likely deviant behavior will occur. Involvement in conventional activities is the third type of social bond and refers to the idea that criminality demands time and

effort and if an individual is involved in some other activity or pursuit, he/she would not have as much time and energy to devote to criminal acts. The last social bond, belief, refers to belief in a common pro-social value that could prevent an individual from engaging in antisocial behavior against said belief.

Social control theory holds that an individual's relationships, commitments, values, norms and beliefs encourage him/her to be a law-abiding citizen. The stronger these attachments, commitments, involvements and beliefs, the more likely individuals will be to abstain from criminal activity. This theory has been used in applied criminology to find ways to reduce the likelihood of criminality in individuals by increasing their social controls or social bonds.

When social control theory came on the scene in the late 1960s, it contrasted with strain theory. Hirshi (1969) challenged differential association theory with the idea that deviant peers would not have a direct impact on delinquency when social bonds were taken into account. In the early 1990s, social control theory shifted to self-control theory based on Hirshi and Gottfredson's (1990) work. Informal social control theory, coined by Sampson and Laub (1993) emphasizes that individuals may change from delinquent to law-abiding and vice versa through the social support they receive by belonging to different societies or groups over the life course.

Social control theory explains why employment or family support would have an impact on desistance from crime. Employment provides the involvement and commitment to pro-social endeavors. The responsibilities posed by an occupation often deter criminal activity. Family support provides a social bond or attachment to other people that is helpful in discouraging criminal behavior.

## *Deterrence Theory*

There are four basic assumptions underlying deterrence theory. First, human actors are characterized by free choice to choose how to act. Second, humans act in a way to seek pleasure and avoid pain. Humans act as rational calculators as they weigh costs and benefits of each action and its consequence. Third, punishment is able to deter crime because the criminal's costs of being punished through the system will outweigh the benefits of the crime. Fourth, the quicker and more certain the punishment, the more effectively it will deter crime (Beccaria 1764).

At the base of deterrence theory is rational choice theory. Rational choice theory holds that all action is rationally motivated regardless of how irrational it may seem. It assumes that people make choices by calculating probable costs and benefits before making decisions. When faced with choices, people will choose the option that will maximize their benefits and minimize their risks or losses (Scott 2000). This theory has been criticized by many social theorists who hold that decisions are based on more than just calculated risks and benefits—that human action includes both rational and non-rational elements. The argument that deterrence, rather than retribution, is the main justification for punishment is a hallmark of the rational choice theory and can be traced to Cesar Beccaria (1764).

The U.S. criminal justice system was created around the idea that people will act according to the dictates of rational choice theory. Since going to jail, being fined, being put on parole or probation, going to court, or getting arrested would minimize benefits of freedom, money, time and ability to obtain employment without the added difficulty of a criminal record, the assumption is that people would want to act in a way to avoid these consequences. The theory holds that it is in their self-interest to adhere to the laws of the nation which will keep

them from these negative outcomes. Rational choice theory views law abiding citizens as maximizing their rewards and criminals as minimizing them.

The rational choice model and deterrence theory in criminology has been under scrutiny for centuries now (Beccaria 1764). One line of scrutiny highlights how human beings are not as rational as deterrence theory might assume. Such critics emphasize how often those who are about to commit a crime do not pause to weigh out all costs and benefits in the heat of the moment, particularly when drugs and alcohol are involved. Approximately three-fourths of prisoners suffer from drug and alcohol abuse; consequently many criminals' ability to rationally think through their criminal acts before they commit them is inhibited (Petersilia 2003). The rational choice model, however, views all criminal acts as calculated individual conduct (Garland 2001).

Deterrence theory can explain why the subjects of this study initially engage in criminal activity and why they continue to live the lifestyles they do. The pros of crime and substance abuse outweigh the cons of the criminal lifestyle for them. Deterrence theory is also used in the RealVictory curriculum to show participants the benefits of staying clean and the costs of their lives of crime.

### *Social Disorganization Theory*

Within the social structure realm of thought, there are many theories devoted to analyzing the relationship between poverty and crime. Numerous theories are tested and created each year to further understand the complex correlation between the two. Cultural deviance theory states that lower classes are more likely to be deviant because they are rejected by mainstream middle class culture and must create a subculture. This subculture does not have the resources necessary for the lifestyle of mainstream culture and, thus, often requires that its members resort to crime

and deviance as alternate methods to gaining success (Miller, 1958). Yet another theory, the social ecological theory, holds that community deterioration will lead community members to act in deviant ways. Social disorganization theory is similar to the social ecological theory and shows that specifically economic deprivation leads to population outflow and erosion of a functional informal social structure, and thus it is difficult to maintain social order in such a disorganized society (McKay and Shaw, 1929).

The theory of social disorganization dates back to the early 1900s when sociologists at the University of Chicago explained crime, delinquency and other social problems with disorganized community institutions (Jensen, 2003). As a city of rapid growth and social change, Chicago was an ideal locale to evaluate the idea that “disorganizing forces” such as an increasing population of diverse immigrants contribute to a lack of teaching and learning important social values and rules which prohibited crime in societies (Thomas and Znanieki, 1918). Shaw and McKay (1929) furthered the theory in their research on patterns of delinquency in the Chicago area. They found that high delinquency rates persisted over time despite changes in community racial and ethnic composition, suggesting that other neighborhood conditions did more to explain crime rates than did characteristics of individual residents (Shaw and McKay, 1942).

Various measures have been utilized through the years to assess social disorganization. Among them, low socio-economic status (Shaw and McKay, 1942; Barnett et al., 2002; Reisig and Cancino, 2004), residential stability or mobility (Bursik 1999), racial and ethnic heterogeneity (Land et al., 1990; Barnett et al., 2002), family structure (Sampson and Groves, 1989), and perceived incivilities (e.g., “signs of physical decay and social disorder”) (Reisig and

Cancino, 2004). The two most common measures among these studies are low socioeconomic status (SES) and residential mobility.

Not all scholars agree that social disorganization is an adequate explanation for why people commit crime, however. Critics would argue that crime isn't entirely concentrated in lower-income areas and that these structural theories cannot explain middle-class and upper-class crime, which is extensive and often not reported. The main counter-arguments against structural theories are individual theories—those that hold that the main cause of crime is not the neighborhoods, but rather the individuals. Samenow (1998) points out that there are too many people in poor neighborhoods who are pro-social citizens and too many middle class and upper class citizens who are criminals to ever prove structural theories; rather it is individual inclinations toward anti-social behavior that causes crime. Personality theories argue that personality characteristics determine whether or not one engages in crime. Aggressive personalities, manipulative traits and lack of self-control have all been found to tend to lead to deviance (Verona and Carbonell, 2000). Learning aggression and violence theories suggest that criminal behavior is a learned behavior when it is reinforced or rewarded (Bandura 1973).

While the participants of this study do not live in the slums of a major city, they do live in the less stable and less affluent parts of town. The population mobility and lower SES of the neighborhoods and environments they live in play a part in the disorganization of their society. Patterns of criminal behavior by others in their neighborhoods lessen the social stigma of crime, making it easier to commit.

### *Social Learning Theory*

Social learning theory states that people learn new behavior through the reinforcement or punishment of past behavior. New behavior can also be learned through observation of the

positive or negative outcomes of others' behavior. Initial theory of social learning held that social learning is instigated in four stages: close contact, imitation of superiors, understanding of concepts and role model behavior (Bandura, 1977).

In criminology, social learning theory has been used to describe deviancy. Deviant behavior can be learned and encouraged, for example, by observing the behavior of delinquent peers. Delinquency could be discouraged by parental punishment of delinquent behavior (Burgess and Akers, 1966). This theory is also called differential association. By association with deviant peers, one learns reinforcements and punishments of criminal behavior and can then act to reap benefits and avoid punishments. One can also model pro-social behavior where this behavior is reinforced. Criminal behavior depends on the frequency and probability of its reinforcement (Burgess and Akers, 1966).

Social learning theory has played a substantial role in criminal policy in the latter half of the twentieth century since it advocates the punishments of criminals. In fact, some say social learning theory helps to account for the increase in prison populations and sentences that began in the 1970s (Livingston, 1996). Not everyone agrees with the ideas associated with social learning theory, however, since what may be reinforcement for one criminal may not be for another. Punishments are also subjective and vary from person to person.

Since social learning theory focuses on association with others and their influence, it helps describe why friends and family have such an impact on recidivism. If an ex-inmate associates with peers who do not use drugs and are pro-social citizens, it is easier for that person to avoid criminal activity than if he associates with former friends who surround themselves with drugs and deviant behavior. Likewise, if one grows up in a home where criminal activity is

prevalent, it is more likely that an individual will learn and repeat deviant behavior than someone who grew up in a home where criminal activity was absent.

### **Criminogenic Factors**

Crime theories can help clarify the factors that help offenders to desist from crime or hinder their progress. Because criminals commit crime for varying reasons, there are numerous criminogenic factors to consider. For this study, a few of the criminogenic factors that will be focused on include employment, age, substance abuse and family support. These factors have been selected due to their theoretical significance and prevalence in the literature involving recidivistic factors (Wright et al, 2004; Mednick et al, 1990). Table one summarizes key criminogenic factors from the literature.

**Table 1: Key Criminogenic Factors from the Literature**

<i>Criminogenic Factor</i>	How it affects recidivism
<i>Employment</i>	Increases social involvement, attachment and social capital Provides responsibilities and productive way to spend time
<i>Age</i>	As age increases, the likelihood of offending decreases With age can come increased maturity
<i>Substance Abuse</i>	Addiction and substance abuse increase the likelihood of offending. Alcohol and drugs dull the senses.
<i>Family</i>	Family provides social attachments and support Offenders need support systems to desist from criminal life

Numerous studies have shown employment to be a key factor in reducing recidivism among offenders (Sampson & Laub, 1993; Uggen, 2000; Wright, 2004). Individuals with a history of unemployment or employment instability lack the social integration and social capital

gained from steady employment and are, thus, at higher risk for recidivism (Kazemian, 2007). Numerous longitudinal studies on crime and employment have found employment to be one of the two main predictors of decline in criminal activity, along with marriage (Morizot, 2007). Social control theory helps to explain why employment has such an effect on recidivism. When an offender is engaged in work, he has a pro-social involvement which acts as a deterrent from deviant or dangerous activity.

The effect of criminogenic factors on recidivism changes according to the age of the offender. For instance, employment seems to be an important factor in reducing crime for older but not younger offenders. Uggen (2000) found that for adults ages 26 and older, employment reduces recidivism, but for criminals younger than 26, it does not. In fact, many of the discrepancies in the findings of employment and crime are due to age. Offenders reach the peak of their respective criminal careers at different ages and, therefore, re-entry programs have varying effects on participants depending on their age. Social learning theory explains that beginning at a young age one can learn behavior by reinforcements and punishments. While this theory applies to older generations as well, youth are generally more impressionable and susceptible to learning criminal behavior. Additionally, perceptions of rewards and punishments change with age. This could explain why age is often referred to as a reason for crime desistance.

Substance abuse is another criminogenic factor that can alter the effectiveness of other strategies and factors in reducing crime. For example, employment and marriage have been found to assist in the decline in criminal activity, but only among those who do not use drugs (Ouimet & Le Blanc, 1996). Physical addiction can have such pervasive effects on the brain and the body that it supersedes the effects that employment, marriage, family, goals and other factors

would have on recidivism. With the war on drugs in full force, substance abuse plays a huge role in incarceration and recidivism among addicts.

Family background, situation and support have been found to play a major role in the likelihood of getting into crime. The divorce of parents as well as a changing family structure can increase a child's or adolescent's risk for engaging in criminal activity (Mednick, 1990). A study of prisoners in London found that 58 percent of them came from broken and disturbed homes (Griffiths, 1976). Parents obviously have a major impact on their children's lives, and parental supervision and attachment are strong predictors of self control, a lack of which can lead to crime (Hope et al, 2003). Also, as stated above, marriage is one of the two leading predictors of a decline in criminal activity (Morizot, 2007). A support network, be it from family or friends is critical for successful reintegration (Abrams, 2006).

### **The RealVictory Project**

RealVictory is a cognitive-behavioral treatment-based pilot program currently being tested in Utah and Oregon. Many similar programs have been implemented and tested in the past. RealVictory is unique, however, in its design of everyday contact with new cell phone technology to follow up with self-reported goals and provide support. Additionally, a six week training course is included in which participants examine and alter criminal beliefs and behaviors. Each session is one and a half hours long and includes 8-20 participants. The classes are different from most other re-entry courses in that they are more centered on changing the participants' cognitive habits and methods of decision making rather than being centered primarily on substance abuse. Substance abuse is mentioned in discussion and activities in each class period, but the course content targets how the participants think, act and behave in general.

With the use of a tool called the “belief window,” the classes make participants evaluate how they prioritize their needs and wants and then determine how their desires affect their behavior.

At the end of the course, they set up their own goals and plan for personal change. The participant’s goals and schedule are entered into a computer system, which calls them at a set time every day to follow up on reported goals by asking if the participant has followed the goal since the last phone call, how much effort has been put into achievement of the goal and what the result was. The participant answers each question using the keypad on their phone and the answers are recorded into the system. According to their responses, positive and encouraging pre-recorded messages are then played. Participants can choose who records the encouraging messages (friends, family, parole or probation officer, etc) and can update them at any time. The daily phone coaching process lasts for one year. The length of the program is another factor which sets RealVictory apart from many other programs since most re-entry programs typically only last a couple of weeks. Daily follow up with goals and encouragement from loved ones over a long stretch of time is crucial to helping offenders keep out of crime and get their lives back on track (Listwan et al, 2006).

The RealVictory project began in 2005. To date, over 350 (approximately 300 adults and 50 juveniles) parolees and probationers from Utah and Oregon (Utah County, Salt Lake County, and Tillamook County) have participated. Participants are selected by the chief probation and parole officers and supervisors and then tracked and interviewed for one year during their participation in the program to assess changes in behavior and attitudes. Once RealVictory has received the background information for the experimental group, they select a control group of the same number with the fourth district courts records. Characteristics such as previous offense, criminal record, age and sex are matched. The control groups do not receive the cell phone or

classes but they are contacted every month to fill out a monthly report card so that their experiences can be compared with those from the experimental group.

The RealVictory program's curriculum incorporates many ideas from social control theory, deterrence theory and social learning theory. The pre-recorded messages providing support from family members and friends sustains the notion from social control theory that pro-social attachments are key in deterring deviant behavior. Additionally, the extent of the program with daily contact for a year necessitates commitment and extensive involvement on the part of the participant. Deterrence theory is used in RealVictory classes, as the benefits of abstaining from delinquency and the costs of criminal life are highlighted. The goal is to change the way they perceive the necessities and desires of their lives. Similarly, social learning theory is utilized by reinforcing the positive outcomes of life without crime. Videos, stories and life examples are shared in order to demonstrate these positive outcomes.

In reviewing the literature, some gaps have been identified in the examinations of re-entry programs. Most re-entry programs are evaluated quantitatively. Many studies use closed-question surveys to assess effectiveness. This approach does not allow the parolees and probationers the freedom to voice for themselves what is effective and what is not, and which specific factors affect their experiences. Visser and Travis (2003) suggest that transitions from prison to society are best understood by taking into account an individual's circumstances before incarceration, experiences during incarceration and the period after release.

This study attempts to gather information in this manner with in-depth interviews of parolees and probationers who have completed or are currently participating in the RealVictory program. It also seeks to understand the situations of these RealVictory participants to further explore key criminogenic factors affecting their recidivism. Assessing these factors qualitatively

will be advantageous in examining whether or not participants successfully reintegrated and how the RealVictory program assisted in this endeavor.

### Chapter 3: Methods

There are many different methods and approaches to evaluation research. This study is embedded in the responsive and illuminative evaluation approach (Patton, 2002). First coined by Robert Stakes (1975), the responsive approach to evaluation assesses a program by personalizing the evaluation process. Guba and Lincoln (1989) said that the responsive approach is the fourth generation of evaluation. The first generation is measurement-based, the second description-based, the third judgment-based and the fourth is based on perspectives. Since measurement-based quantitative research has already been conducted for the RealVictory program, a method of evaluation based on individual perspectives and responses to the program would provide a more complete evaluation. Qualitative research, including face-to-face contact with participants in a program, is required in responsive evaluation. Responsive evaluation includes the following steps:

1. Identification of issues and concerns based on direct, face-to-face contact with people in and around the program;
2. Use of program documents to further identify important issues;
3. Direct, personal observations of program activities before formally designing the evaluation to increase the evaluator's understanding of what is important in the program, and what can/should be evaluated... (Patton, 2002: 171)

Before conducting any interviews, I first attended the six RealVictory classes in order to determine the goals, structure and content of the program. I also familiarized myself with the cell phone portion of the program.

Gathering data for this study consisted of one hour interviews with sixteen parolees and probationers. A sample of twenty RealVictory participants (10 from control groups, 10 from treatment groups) were initially selected to participate in this study. However, after contacting all twenty, only one responded from this initial sample (most of the numbers were out of order and we had no other means of contacting them). Multiple attempts to contact RealVictory participants from old records were not fruitful. Consequently, all of the eight treatment group interviewees were participants in the most recent adult RealVictory class. Their classes were held in July of 2008, and interviews were conducted January – August 2009.

Eight interviews took place at the University Parkway Center (in a room designed for qualitative social science research), one was held at the Beaver County Jail, one in the Utah County Jail, one over the phone and five at the Daily Reporting Center in Provo.

We had particular difficulty contacting members of the adult control groups selected by RealVictory. After many months of calling, over twenty-five were contacted and we only succeeded in interviewing three (two at the University Parkway Center and one at the Utah County Jail). Since it was so common for control participants to not show up for scheduled interviews, months into the study, we could not find eight control group interviews from the RealVictory selected adult control groups. Consequently, we decided to conduct five control interviews with volunteers from the Daily Reporting Center, since that is where the RealVictory control groups were initially recruited. These five interviews were individual interviews held at the Daily Reporting Center (DRC) in a separate room on the premises. The participants were selected from the “advanced” class (almost graduated, recovering ex-addicts) so as to better match the RealVictory control group (some of whom still attend these same DRC classes). The only difference between these control group participants and the ones from RealVictory is that

the interviewees at the DRC never received the monthly report card calls from the RealVictory team. None of these interviewees said that these phone calls made any difference in their behavior, so this difference is not thought to be significant.

The interview team consisted of myself and five sociology undergraduates who were already working for the RealVictory project. They each received training in qualitative research before being allowed to interview. There were two interviewers for each interview—one primary and one secondary. We tried to make the interviews more of a guided conversation than a question/answer session, bringing up relevant topics while still allowing each participant to speak their thoughts freely and comfortably. Interviews lasted between 30 – 90 minutes and were all audio recorded with the exception of the interview at Beaver County Jail where audio recorders were not allowed. For this interview, extensive notes were taken by both interviewers.

Each participant received \$20 compensation for their time. After each interview, the interview was transcribed and then analyzed, coded, and searched for recurring themes. The interview guide changed slightly throughout the interviewing process according to the significance of these recurring themes, factors, or patterns. Each interview was coded in the program NVIVO and analyzed from there. General topics for coding include: background information, re-entry programs, RealVictory program, criminogenic factors of age, family, friends, employment, drugs and alcohol, etc.

The interview guide includes the following questions and themes (a copy of the final interview guide can be found in *Appendix A*): the full story of how interviewees got into crime, prison life, life after prison, major turning points, the nature of their crimes, temptations of recommitting crimes, things that are helpful in staying out of crime, catalysts of returning to crime, experiences in prison and their effects on life afterward, family life, childhood, problem

areas/success stories of reintegration, other programs in and out of prison they have been a part of and their assessment of them, what they find to be effective in a re-entry program, how RealVictory compares to other programs, how helpful the cell phones and classes were, what changes could be made in the program, how long they've been out of prison, strength of commitment to stay out of prison, confidence level in ability to keep goals, level of desire to stay out, experiences with drugs and alcohol, how addictions affect these processes, experiences with employment, and their ideas on solutions to various problems in the criminal justice system, re-entry programs and their own lives.

My role as interviewer is as an outsider. This position poses a few potential drawbacks to the study, namely the participants may not be as comfortable sharing their experiences with drugs and crime with me since I have not had those same experiences. Since I am a graduate student from Brigham Young University, they may think I am judging them and be hesitant to share information with me merely because of my education level and the associated assumption of religious affiliation that comes from attending BYU. Additionally, I may not always understand the vocabulary associated with the life the participants lead. The position of an outside observer has its potential benefits, however, in that I will not get too personally involved and may be able to view situations participants present with a relative objective lens.

As a program evaluation, this study seeks to answer the questions: Does the RealVictory program help desist from crime? What aspects of the program are effective for participants and which are not? How satisfied are participants with the program? What are their suggestions for program improvement?

## Sample

The sixteen persons we have selected for interviews are from the adult groups of the RealVictory study. The juvenile RealVictory participants were not included in this study since typically they are harder to contact.

Due to the convenience sampling method utilized to select participants, this study cannot be said to represent the experiences of all RealVictory participants. However, it offers an inside look into some of the experiences and opinions of those involved in the adult classes of the program. The demographics of those I interviewed do parallel fairly well the composition of the adult RealVictory participants, who are primarily white, male and in their 30s. Table 2 shows some of the demographic and other characteristics of the sample. The following is a summary:

- Interviewees include eight from the experimental groups, eight from control groups.
- Ages range from 25 to 48 years old.
- Interviewees include 14 males and 2 females.
- All interviewees are white.
- Interviewees have varying criminal histories ranging from assault, theft, domestic abuse, driving under the influence, drug sale and drug possession (while arrests are for various reasons, all participants have reported some type of drug or alcohol abuse in their past or present).

**Table 2: Sample Demographics and Characteristics**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Control/Treatment</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Severity of Crime</b>	<b>Education level</b>	<b>Kids</b>
Crystal	Treatment	F	46	3	GED	2
Elliot	Treatment	M	30	2	BS	4
Bob	Treatment	M	48	3	HS	1
Jason	Treatment	M	25	1	HS	1
Richard	Treatment	M	47	3	HS	1
Jon	Treatment	M	35	1	HS	2
Paul	Treatment	M	27	3	GED	8
Tyson	Treatment	M	25	2	GED	0
Colby	Control	M	37	3	GED	3
Patrick	Control	M	32	2	HS	2
Sean	Control	M	31	1	11	1
TJ	Control	M	48	3	10	8
Marcus	Control	M	35	3	AS	2
Janice	Control	F	40	2	10	2
Morgan	Control	M	38	1	GED	1
Jay	Control	M	25	2	10	0

The names shown are pseudonymns. The severity of crime level is ranked one through three. A one indicates that the participant has been to jail three times or fewer and has never been to prison. A two means the participant has been to jail more than three times and has never been to prison, and a three ranking indicates the participant has been to prison at least once. Education levels include GED, indicating they did not graduate from high school but have since received their GED; HS, meaning they graduated from high school with no further schooling;

AS, signifying an associate's degree; BS, indicating a bachelor's degree and numbers indicate the last year of schooling completed and no high school degree.

The treatment and control groups are fairly well matched. Both include one female and seven males; both are all the same race (Caucasian); and the average age for both groups is 35. The treatment group is slightly more educated and has a slightly higher average of severity of crimes. The average number of children for both groups is 2.4. Only one member of the treatment group is married, and two in the control group are married. All participants but three have been married at least once.

There are a few differences between the control group and treatment group in terms of employment. In the treatment group, seven of the eight participants report having a job in construction, including work in sheet metal, iron welding, sprinklers, concrete and pipes. There is one mechanic in that group. In the control group, six reported construction jobs including work in cement, asbestos, concrete and maintenance. One from the control group is unemployed and one is a stay at home mom.

## Chapter 4: Results

### **Start into Crime**

In order to understand the people I was interviewing, I thought it very important to get to know as much about them and their past as possible. I wanted to hear their life stories—about their upbringing, schooling and the story of how they got started into crime.

Seven respondents mentioned they got their start in crime because of their parents or siblings. Often in these cases, alcohol and drugs were part of their family at an early age. Tyson noted, “I first started drinking when I was .... well as far back as I can remember, even 8 years old. We'd go camping with my dad and he'd say 'you can have a beer.' Being a little kid, that was cool... when I got older, I just stole it from him. Alcohol has always been in the family.” Paul also got started with drugs young since his mother was a crack dealer and was in and out of prison his whole life. He can remember smoking pot with her as early as age eight or nine.

It is unsurprising that those who grew up surrounded by drugs and alcohol engaged in it at an early age themselves and then later had a hard time getting away from it. Social learning theory explains how children can learn behavior from their surroundings. Like father, like son is the story for many of those I interviewed. However, for some participants whose family members have never had problems with substance abuse or engaged in criminal activity, the blame was placed on strict upbringing. Three participants claimed that their stringent parents drove them to rebellion and eventually to disobey the law. Jon blamed his parents' absence on his start into crime. He claims they were never home, so he was bored and had too much freedom.

For others who mentioned family as the reason for criminal activity, blame was not placed on any person, but rather on tragic circumstances that drove them to alcohol or drugs.

Richard realized this during the interview, “You know I’m sitting here and it just now dawned on me. I never sat down and thought about it, but it was after when my marriage fell apart. Really. You know I never really blamed it on that, but that’s when I really got involved in harder drugs and stuff.” Richard had his daughter taken away from him by his ex-wife and has never seen her again. Crystal had a similar experience with divorce, loss of a child and consequent substance abuse:

My oldest boy [Ricky], his dad was my high school sweetheart. We were together forever. When [Ricky] was about three, he had been seeing this girl and got her pregnant and called me up at work and told me. I said something really stupid, I didn’t mean it, I was just hurt and my bubble had been busted. I mean he was my first love. I said just run off with your illegitimate kid because you’re not going to see your legitimate kid anymore, blah blah blah. He came to get him a couple days later and took off with him, stole him. Back then they didn’t have Amber Laws. It cost a lot of money for a private investigator, so I looked for him for about three years traveling around in my car. I got a bunch of good leads, but it seemed like he was always one step ahead of me. After about three years it seemed like he just dropped off the face of the planet, and that is when I started drinking.

Of all the respondents, only two admitted that it was their own will to start into crime. They craved the excitement and wanted to rebel. Morgan followed Cooley's looking-glass self theory (Cooley, 1902) and started smoking because others already thought he did. “I just always had the reputation that I got high even though I never had... So when the time came somebody handed me a pipe, it was like ok, everybody already thinks I do. I might as well do it.”

There were very few differences in the stories of the control group versus the treatment group. There was an interesting difference, however, between the male and female respondents. Both females were the only of the study to report starting into crime at a later age—both started getting into drugs around age 30. When asked to describe the factors influencing their start into crime, both females cited divorce and subsequent depression as the primary reason. This was an interesting difference from most of the male respondents who started breaking the law much earlier mostly because of friends or family members' influence. The gender gap in criminology—the idea that criminal careers of females are most often shorter and less serious than that of males—is universally accepted by criminologists (Steffensmeier and Allan, 1996). For every type of crime except prostitution, females just don't commit as many crimes as males. Steffensmeier (1996) found that women do not have the same motivation as men in committing crime due to gender norms, social control and moral and relational concerns. Gender differences have also been found in risk-taking tendencies (Hagan, 1989). Men tend to take greater risks to sustain status or competitive advantage while women take risks in order to sustain valued relationships. This study supports previous findings regarding gender differences.

### **Re-entry Programs**

In order to evaluate the RealVictory program, it is necessary to discover what respondents think about the other re-entry programs they've been through. Understanding what is helpful and not helpful to participants in a program will assist in creating and improving re-entry programs, including RealVictory. Each participant has been a part of the Daily Reporting Center (DRC) program. Included in the DRC are required Alcoholic Anonymous meetings, so each participant has been through AA as well. Other common programs included: Narcotics Anonymous, the OUT program (at Utah County Jail) and the Gathering Place.

### *Helpful Aspects of Programs*

Participants were each asked, “What aspects of [re-entry] programs do you find most helpful?” A few common responses include: close knit groups like a family, good counselors, interacting with one another, providing hope, new things to learn, and providing facts about drugs and addictions.

Eight of the sixteen participants said that having friends in the program or just a good group makes all the difference in a program. A common response to the question of what the most helpful aspects of a program were is typified by what TJ said, “...hanging out with people that don't use, new friends, knowing that there's other people out there that are just like you that deal with the same [stuff] the same way I do on a daily basis that are staying clean.” Elliot admitted he voluntarily goes to AA every week, even though he is not required to anymore, because the group has become like family to him. When he went out of town for a weekend, there were five messages on his phone from members of his group wondering if he was okay.

Several participants (5 of 16) mentioned good counselors as a reason why a program helps them or not. Jon said,

When you find a counselor who cares about what he's talking about then you do want to listen to him. [Certain] counselors are just there to get a pay check and trying to say that you're doing everything wrong and this is how you should be living, you don't want to listen to those people. But [Will], his heart is in his program, he feels like his program can work. There's a difference.

Many also mentioned that counselors should be trained and competent so you can trust what they are saying. Another important quality in counselors was their belief in their students. Commenting on his favorite program, Richard noted,

They either believe in you or help you believe in yourself a little bit more...

After you've been doing drugs for so long it's so easy to get depressed or down on yourself... you reach a point where you don't think you can get yourself back, so if they help you believe in yourself and give you the tools to feel positive, that's the most helpful.

Many participants mentioned that they tune out if they feel the information is repetitive or that they've heard it before. They want to learn new things. Also, factual information about the drugs and addictions can be helpful.

Knowing about your addiction, your triggers and stuff is totally helpful...They actually teach you what marijuana does to your body instead of just knowing it's bad. They teach you like one marijuana joint is equal to 120 cigarettes, just like the tar factor. It's got like over 400 chemicals in it. I mean those kind of things, you kinda need to know in order to want to stay away from it.

Regarding the structure of the programs, everyone seems to like different things. The majority of participants said that group discussions help them the most, where they can learn from their peers, but three participants said that one-on-ones with counselors were more helpful to them.

Only a few participants mentioned anything about the content of programs as being helpful or not (the majority of comments dealt with people—peers and counselors—not with content), but of the two who mentioned it, both said that programs that make you analyze what you've done and realize the implications of your actions were the most helpful. Colby mentioned,

...When you have to really sit down and really evaluate what you've done in life and got to do... if you really put yourself into, it'll tear anybody up. I mean to write how it impacted your family, your mom, your dad and individually tell and you have to read it ... I mean I was in tears up there. I just realized I'm 37 years old, heck I wish I would have gone to prison a long time ago.

Of all the respondents only Morgan in the control group couldn't think of anything helpful in the programs he's been through and said he just goes because he's forced to.

#### *Program Aspects that are not Helpful*

A few common responses to the question, "What aspects of programs did you find unhelpful?" include: fellow participants who are either still using, insincere or forced to be there, different levels of addicts/criminals being placed together, religion and unstructured classes or environment.

The most common complaint about most programs seemed to involve the other participants in attendance. Thirteen of the sixteen participants mentioned the sincerity of their fellow participants as playing a major role in their experience in a program. According to participants, the main problem is that most people attend these programs because they are forced to either by their probation or parole officers or the court or another program. Consequently many people in the programs are not sincere in wanting to change their lifestyle, which makes it difficult for those who are. Paul said that AA is just "a spot for ex-addicts to find a new, different drug than what they're quitting." Also commenting on AA meetings, Tyson said,

... You have this guy that's maybe three days clean. He's in there and he's trying as hard as he can and then some drunk dude walks in or some drunk chick walks in and just slurs and slobbers and says all this stuff and this guy

goes, 'well what am I doing here, I can be here and still get drunk, then why not? You can be in a program or try, but you have to actually want to be there.

Additionally, participants found it unhelpful when they were placed with people who were on a different level of addiction or criminality than they were. Jason, who has only been to jail once for four months, said he felt way out of his league and like he didn't fit in with the guys coming out of prison that were in certain programs with him.

Three of the participants mentioned that preaching or a call to a theistic source was not helpful to them. Elliot mentioned, "When people start saying you've got to do this and you've got to get one with God and stuff, all I can do is I just look at them and say, 'don't tell me what to do. I don't have to do that.' I can find some way not to drink and not to have to go to church."

Just as structure, counselors and organized classes were aspects of programs that people found helpful, a dirty environment and unstructured programs negatively affected participants' experiences. Richard stated that if you have to walk through a cloud of smoke to get into the meeting, it gives it a bad feeling right from the start. For Paul, it's important that counselors be privy to the drug world.

I hated [a certain program] because they've got counselors there that have never looked at a drug in their life ... I hate that counselors or substance abuse counselors who are sitting there trying to tell you about your life who have never even looked at a drug. It drives me nuts. It makes me not even want to listen to them 'cause they're like, 'You're doing this and you're doing that. There's no reason why you should still be addicted or this, that.' I just I can't stand it 'cause that person knows nothing about what we're going through or what the addiction thing is.

All in all, peers seem to make a world of difference one way or another in these programs. When some participants don't want to be there, they use the program to gain drug connections, or use class time to brag about past offenses, then no one finds these programs very helpful. But when a program has a good group of people who want to be there, participate in group discussions and are sincere in their desires to change, then this program can be extremely helpful to ex-offenders at any point in the recovery process. The finding that peer networks and support are helpful in a program aligns with most other research analyzing re-entry programs (Abrams, 2006).

#### *Can a Re-entry Program Help Those Who Do Not Want It?*

This study has found the desire to change to be one of the most essential criminogenic factors in desisting from crime. Over and over it was brought up or mentioned that nothing—not family, friends, employment or jail—could help someone who did not want to be helped. In other words, those who really wanted to still use would continue to use no matter what. This interesting interview finding suggested the question “Is there anything a program can do for someone who does not want to quit?” Of the thirteen to whom I addressed this question, nine said no and four said yes.

Of those who answered no, some left no room for any influence, like Patrick, who said he’s been in that situation plenty of times, and nothing will help. Or Paul, who in response to the question, “So do you think there’s anything a class or program can do for people...that don’t want to stop?” said, “No. No. You’re not going to. All they’re doing is sitting there to pacify their P.O. or pacify whoever put them into that class... nothing will change them until they want to.”

Others, like Jason said that programs can't really persuade a person to stop if they don't want to, but they can help.

Jason: ... no matter what you go through, you're going to stop when you stop.

No matter what you're not going to stop until then...

Interviewer: So do you think there's anything a program can do for someone who doesn't want to stop?

Jason: No.

Interviewer: Nothing?

Jason: Maybe hold him back for a little while, but once they got free reign, they're going to go back to what they want. But like I say, no matter what, if they're there, they're going to learn something. They have to. Why wouldn't you? So I mean if you gotta force them into it, go for it. It's part of treatment. I've been forced into programs and I still learn, but I wasn't very willing to.

Interviewer: So would you say that they programs...

Jason: No matter what they help.

Interviewer: Were they more helpful to you when you had made up your own mind to stop?

Jason: Oh yeah. Then you start fighting for it. It's a lot different.

Four respondents thought that programs could help someone want to quit. Morgan said, "If you make them look at their selves and realize what they are or that their life isn't good, and it's never going to be good, they'll decide they want to have a different life." Jay thought that if a program can physically prohibit one from getting high, that this would do the most good for people otherwise unwilling to change. He notes, "If the state started paying for pellets, that

would help more people than anything.” Pellets are opiate blockers that constrain users from getting high.

Before analyzing the RealVictory program, it is important to understand what respondents think about re-entry programs in general and if they can help at all. This information can then be applied to the RealVictory program to see if it aligns with program facets participants find most helpful (such as tight-knit groups and helpful counselors) and avoids those that are not helpful (such as dirty environments and insincere participants).

### **RealVictory**

The effectiveness of re-entry programs is largely determined by whether or not participants get rearrested after the classes (Seiter, 2003). Of the eight I interviewed, three of the RealVictory participants have been rearrested since their classes. One was for a court issue from 2005, one was for a dirty urine analysis detected in a drug treatment program he is a part of, and the other was for a parole violation. Just by looking at the numbers, it appears that the program was only about 60% effective for participants. However, re-arrest is only one type of measure of program effect. The qualitative findings from this study show that all participants reported the RealVictory program to be helpful to their staying out of crime.

In order to compare the treatment and control groups in terms of re-arrest, we must compare if they have gotten rearrested since their last time in jail or prison (since the control group did not have RealVictory classes, this is not a fair time table to compare with). Three members of both the control group and treatment group have gotten re-arrested since they were last out of jail or prison, while the remaining five have not. It is difficult to compare the two groups, however, since the control group members often were out of prison or jail for less time than the RealVictory participants. This is because the interviews were conducted 7-12 months

after the RealVictory classes, so treatment group members had been out of jail or prison at least since then, while the control group members did not have this standard. One of the control group members had only been out of jail for four months at the time of the interview and another had been out of prison for six. Jay, a control group member, was interviewed in jail and Bob, a treatment group member, was interviewed in prison.

The control and treatment groups appear to be fairly well-matched in terms of re-arrest. Even the reasons for the arrests are similar. One from each group was re-arrested for a drug charge, one for a previous charge and one for parole violation. However, due to the reasons listed above, it is difficult to compare the two groups in terms of re-arrest. While this quantitative measure is less useful in determining the effect of the RealVictory program, interview data show directly what participants themselves have to say about the effect of the program.

#### *How RealVictory Compares to Other Programs*

While some participants were more enthusiastic about it than others, overall participants valued the RealVictory program over other re-entry programs they have been a part of. Very positive feedback was received on all aspects of the program.

Six of the eight treatment group members mentioned how different it was from all the other programs they have been a part of. Jason's comment is typical of many others when he said, "They helped me look at things a little differently. It was something new that I had never seen before—that's why I liked it a bunch." Tyson elaborated, "It had a lot of new insight to it. It wasn't the same old go to AA, do your 12 steps... It was more thought out, more in-depth way of thinking. That's kind of why I enjoyed it a little bit more because you wouldn't just sit there; it actually made you use your brain." Speaking of other programs he said, "They can tell you

things, but if you've got common sense you can figure it out. This RealVictory program is the one that had me looking at different things.” Many mentioned how different the classes were from other substance abuse classes they were used to. Richard noted, “...that’s one thing I will say about the RealVictory program—they took a different approach to it. It was refreshing. I have been through so many substance abuse programs, so it felt like, ok here we go. We’re going to talk about this next... but [RealVictory] totally threw a curveball at you.”

Two participants said that the program should be offered to more than just parolees and probationers. “It’s like a life program,” suggested Tyson. Elliot commented,

I wonder if there would be a possibility in offering it to the open public instead of just to people that are involved with probation or DRC programs. There are all kinds of people out there that aren’t in trouble with the law that genuinely want help for themselves and it is highly possible that this program, this particular one, or one similar to it would be beneficial to them.

Since so many of respondents said that a re-entry program, no matter how good, could help a person who did not want to stay clean, perhaps one of the highest praises of the program came from Bob (who otherwise did not give very positive or detailed feedback throughout the interview), who said it would have helped him a few years ago when he was still at a point in his life when he did not want to stop. For many though, the program seemed to come at the right time in their lives when they were already seeking to stay clean.

#### *How to Change the Program?*

In answer to the question of how they would change the program, most did not offer any suggestions. Richard said the classes should last longer, and Tyson mentioned that it would be helpful if the same teacher could be there for every class instead of switching. Paul gave the

advice, “Don't tell anybody that you are giving them some nice free stuff until the program is over.”

### *Classes*

All eight RealVictory participants gave positive feedback about the classes. They all said they were helpful to them and different than other classes they have been a part of. Many offered appraising feedback for the teacher. Richard, who has been in and out of re-entry and rehab programs for the past 30 years, commented,

He came at it from a whole different aspect. It wasn't the same style of teaching. I mean it made you want to learn more whereas if it's the same repetitive, chemical substance abuse, blah, blah, blah. I think a lot of people are similar to me in that standpoint that they've been through a lot of chemical or substance abuse classes and you hear the same thing in there over and over and they just expect you to learn it through repetition, but I really liked [his] classes.

Even Paul who found it so important that a counselor or teacher of a re-entry program have experience with drugs said, “I'm sure [he] hasn't used, but when you find a counselor that cares about what he's talking about then you want to listen to him.”

Three participants remembered specific lessons or concepts from the classes that still help them.

Paul: What helped me the most is that window.

Interviewer: The belief window?

Paul: Yeah, that helped a lot because I've always thought foggy, so when he was talking about the belief window it helped a lot and I use it a lot still to this day.

Another participant mentioned the belief window from the class, as well. He said it is important to believe in yourself and that people like him need to know that addiction and learned behavior can be “unlearned.” He thought the program was beneficial to him and his classmates in this way.

Many said it changed the way they think (which is the goal of a cognitive treatment program). The following two quotes are indicative of common responses: “The program itself gave me an opportunity to reevaluate my thinking process and do a lot more thinking before I acted.” “The RealVictory program did do something for me; it gave me alternative tools to use to modify my thinking process and different routes I could take to handle certain situations and stuff.”

Elliot offered very specific feedback for the classes.

Researcher: So, were the classes helpful?

Elliot: Very.

Researcher: What did you find most helpful about the classes?

Elliot: Hands-on education, having an instructor there to say this is what you should do. He would propose situations to us ... I could hear everybody else’s feedback at the same time and see how my ideas differed from their ideas ... and then you get the instructor’s feedback as well. ... The setting in the room was always light. It wasn’t like we were under any kind of scrutiny; he kept it light. It was really nice.

Overall, the respondents offered very positive feedback on the class portion of the program. In fact, nothing negative was said about the classes. The older participants seemed to especially appreciate them. Perhaps this is because, like Richard, they have been through so

many and found a different approach to be very refreshing. Additionally, everyone had very positive feedback about the program instructor. Further research should be done in interviewing juveniles to see how their opinions of the classes differ from the adult participants.

### *Cell phones*

The cell phone aspect is one of the truly unique aspects of the RealVictory program. It is what makes the program's influence long-term, allowing for daily year-long contact, instead of just a six week intervention. Because of its uniqueness, I focused on what the participants had to say about these calls. Overall, the feedback was very positive for the cell phones as well. Most participants seemed to be as enthusiastic about the phones as they were about the classes. Everyone, except for Crystal, said that the calls were helpful to them. Because there were technical errors with Crystal's phone, her goals often weren't recorded and didn't play during her daily calls.

Respondents found the daily calls to be a good reminder of their goals, where they were and what they learned from the classes. Jason said, "It's a good reminder. It also reminds me of where I was too, so I don't go back. That's another big thing. Once you get out of treatment, you kind of forget where you were and then with those phone calls it helps you, like yeah I remember that." Bob commented, "A call would come at a certain time and I thought wow, I forgot. It would make me stop and think about things, about what I was doing."

Two participants mentioned that the phone added a new level of responsibility. Richard stated,

This might sound weird, but it's like because I had the phone, I felt like I had to be responsible. I couldn't let the phone down; I couldn't let these people down who were letting me have a phone. I mean it's kind of weird, kind of silly to

think of it like that, but that's really how I felt. I mean, these guys are providing me with a phone for a year. If you go get that account through Cricket it's going to be like \$35 a month at least, and they're just giving this to you even if you mess up.

Since participants receive up to two phone calls every day for a year from the program, a few mentioned that this got a bit tedious after a while. Crystal, who was getting two calls a day, thought once would be plenty especially if they are asking the same questions every time. Jon notes,

I liked the calling at first. I mean it was a big thing for me to just answer the phone every morning and monitor myself. I always counted my days too. I mean that phone call always helps. Then, after like two or three months, I got sick of carrying two phones so I always left that one at home... after two or three months I felt like it was long enough, I felt good enough that I didn't really need to answer all the calls. But yeah, I thought it was the most important thing [about the program]. Those phone calls helped me out the most I think.

I asked four of the eight participants if they would include the cell phone aspect if they were to create their own program. They all said that they would.

According to re-entry research, programs that are more involved in participants' lives, provide follow up after intervention and last more than a few weeks are more effective than those that don't include these elements (Listwan et al, 2006). On paper, then, the cell phone aspect of the program is crucial, but what would participants think? Overall, they too found the calls very helpful. However, this could also be because most admitted to being in a place in their lives before the program where they wanted to change. They then welcomed the daily reminders with

open arms. It would seem that if one was not ready for such a change, the calls would be somewhat of a nuisance. Unfortunately, no one in my sample readily admitted to being in such a state. All of the RealVictory class and phone participants claimed to be ready for a change in their lives, and the phone calls were advantageous in facilitating this change.

### *Commitment and Confidence*

When I asked participants how committed they were to the goals they set, all eight reported being very committed. Tyson said,

If I set a goal, I'm going to do it. There's no sense in just doing something for show. That's why I got into the program. If I got into the program when I was back to the way I used to be where I didn't really care, and then it would just be like ok, I'll play along, but when I actually decided, ok, I'm wanting to do this, well then I'm doing my goals.

Richard put it this way,

Interviewer: Describe how committed you were to keeping the goals you set during the program? Were you just making them because you had to? Or were you really committed?

Richard: No, I'm still committed to them.

Interviewer: Why do you think that is?

Richard: I want a better life.

When I asked respondents how confident they were in their ability to keep the goals they set, six said they were 100% or very confident, one reported being fairly confident, and one said 80%. The two that didn't report being 100% confident were Richard and Paul, who each said that in the beginning when they set the goals they hoped they could do it, but weren't entirely

confident. However, after they kept their goals for a few months, their confidence rose. Paul said, “I’ve always thought down on myself. Now, I’m more than 100% [confident]. I know I can do it. I know because I’ve done it the past year and a half now.”

Both commitment to goals and confidence in the ability to keep goals could play major roles in why this group of eight participants were so successful in the RealVictory program. If participants were not committed or confident, then the program would not help them since they are the ones ultimately responsible for their own success.

#### *Who does RealVictory Work Best For?*

Each of the eight respondents gave positive feedback about the program and reported that it helped them to stay out of crime. However, as the interviewer, it was apparent that some respondents were more sincere than others in their responses and enthusiasm. Bob, for instance, seemed pretty indifferent and apathetic toward both the interview and the program, often responding with one-word answers. The atmosphere during the interview was uncomfortable. His posture was slouched, and he seemed skeptical of why we were having an interview. Even though he reported that the program helped him out, he was back in jail within a year of starting the classes. Tyson, on the other hand, was very enthusiastic about the program. He was sincere in his responses, often waiting for a few seconds to think out a thoughtful response, particularly when we asked how he would improve programming. At the end of the interview, he expressed that he really hoped his responses would help us out. While these differences could be due to Bob’s and Tyson’s personalities, it may be worthwhile to get the interviewer’s insight on who the program seemed to work best for based on how the respondents acted in the interview and their level of sincerity.

One of the biggest factors in how effective the program is for someone is their level of personal commitment. While each of the respondents reported being committed, their level of desire to get over their addictions is the ultimate deciding factor in whether they will or not. It was rather apparent which respondents were really sincere and which were not. Elliot was very talkative and gave good responses, but there were many inconsistencies in his stories and answers. He was very comfortable in the interview and was a very smooth talker. He seemed to know just what to say, as if he were answering the questions of a parole officer or judge. Paul also had very inconsistent answers and, while he was enthusiastic, the truthfulness of his responses is questionable.

As far as demographics are concerned, those who seemed to be most affected by the program were younger (in their twenties) and did not have serious offending backgrounds (severity of crime level at a 1 or 2). Both evidence of arrest and the interviewer's outlook confirm this. Richard, Elliot and Bob were the ones who were re-arrested within a year of the program. Richard and Bob are in their 40s and all three have serious criminal records. This trend could be because older and more serious offenders have been through so many programs that it is increasingly difficult to break the cycle and habits of their criminal lifestyles. Their learned and practiced behavior can be difficult to unlearn (Bandura, 1977). The older offenders have also most likely been through many more programs than the younger, less serious offenders. Jason, for instance seemed very sincere about how the program positively affected him; and he is 25 and has only been to jail once.

This observation does not mean that the RealVictory program should solely focus on younger, less serious offenders, but rather should consider how to reach older and more serious offenders.

### *Summary of Evaluation: Participant Satisfaction*

The treatment group all gave positive feedback on the RealVictory program and found it helpful in staying out of crime; however, many did mention that they were already at this point in their lives where they wanted to change, and for this reason RealVictory was so helpful to them. Desire to change, then may be a confounding factor in understanding the effect of the RealVictory program on desisting from crime.

Another aspect of evaluation concerns the factors respondents found to be helpful and not helpful in re-entry programs. A family-like environment, good counselors, and new things to learn were all aspects reported to be helpful. Insincere students and unclean environments were not helpful. The extent of how close or family-like the groups are varies from class to class and is difficult to measure. Since no participants mentioned specifically that they felt especially close to their classmates, RealVictory can probably improve in this aspect by facilitating social bonds and activities among students. Most participants *did* mention how good the teacher was or how much they liked him. Additionally, all eight participants reported learning new things and the unique content of the classes. The sincerity of the students coming in is typically beyond the control of the RealVictory program. However, all participants interviewed reported being sincere about wanting to stay clean. This perhaps influenced the experiences of all participants for the better.

Overall, RealVictory scored well in achieving the aspects of programs participants find to be helpful and avoiding those they don't. A look into other factors outside of programming that participants find to be helpful or hurtful in the reintegration process can likewise be useful in improving the RealVictory program.

## **Key Criminogenic Factors**

In order to create an effective re-entry program or to improve one, it is of critical importance that the program population is fully understood. Questions such as how participants got started in crime, what makes them return to it once out of jail or prison and what helps them to stay clean are crucial for program directors, teachers and researchers to understand since the goal of re-entry programs is desistance from crime. This study seeks to understand why some participants desist from crime and are able to stay clean and why others do not. What are the leading factors contributing to success and failure? Once these factors are understood for RealVictory participants, the program can implement changes according to their population's experiences.

The leading factors that came up again and again in interviews are drug use, employment, family, friends, age and desire. These findings are consistent with other literature on criminogenic and recidivistic factors (Wright et al, 2004; Mednick et al, 1990).

### *Substance Abuse*

Drug and alcohol use were unsurprisingly found to be among the biggest factors. This could be because RealVictory gets its sample of adults largely from the Daily Resource Center, which is a center for substance abuse. However, it has been estimated that at least three-fourths of prisoners suffer from substance abuse problems (Petersilia, 2003), so drug and alcohol use is a common criminogenic factor for the prison population at large in addition to this RealVictory sample.

Almost all of the participants said that none of their major problems or criminal histories would have happened if it weren't for the influence of drugs and alcohol. When I asked the question, "On a scale from 1-10, 10 being the highest, 1 being the lowest, how would you rank

the influence of drugs and alcohol on your experiences with crime?” ten participants said a 10, two gave a 9, two gave an 8, one gave a 5 and one said zero. The participant who responded zero and said drugs and alcohol didn’t influence his experiences with crime was Marcus from the control group. While he does have some substance abuse charges against him, he admits that he is just rebellious by nature and loves to steal. Whether or not drugs and alcohol existed, he would have found some way to get in trouble with the law.

More common responses to this question, however, showed that if drugs and alcohol did not exist, respondents would not have committed the crimes they have. Most participants’ crimes are drug and alcohol-related with the most common charges being DUIs, possession of an illegal substance, violation of parole or probation with a dirty urine analysis or drug sales. For those who have theft, abuse or other types of charges, they admit that those crimes are committed either in order to obtain drugs or as a result of being high or drunk. Paul said,

98% of it I wouldn't have on my record if it wasn't for drugs or alcohol. I'm sure I would have gotten a few curfew tickets back then as a kid, but stealing a vehicle or going on a cop chase for 2 and a half hours high of my butt, if I were sober, I just wouldn't think of going and stealing a car and going on a cop chase.

Other common remarks include, “It's where the root of all my problems have come from—is alcohol.” “The things that are keeping me straight right now is: number one that I'm not heavily drinking or into drugs anymore...” “Almost 100% of my trouble was drugs and alcohol related. Without those, I wouldn't be where I was. The drugs was the biggest thing.” “All my crimes are either drugs or drug-related for sure.”

Since drugs and alcohol inhibit the senses and makes rational decision making near impossible, it makes sense that substance abuse would point toward repeating offenses even if

one is resolved not to get involved with criminal behavior while sober or clean. Reasons for crime desistance cited by the popular crime theories, such as deterrence theory or social control theory, are thwarted by the pervasive effects of substance abuse.

### *Employment*

Employment has been found in numerous studies to help lower recidivism (Sampson & Laub, 1993; Uggen, 2000; Wright, 2004), meaning that if an ex-offender has a job, he is less likely to return to jail. This study found that jobs do help in staying clean, however, they had little impact while participants were still using. All but two participants reported that they could hold a job and still be using (and all did report holding a job while they were using at some point). However, each seemed to agree that if they did not have a job, their situation and addictions would be worse. This study finds that employment helps those who are striving to remain clean and doesn't have much of an effect for those who are using. Desire could be a confounding factor here.

Elliot said that his job assisted his drug habit, "I got back into drugs... I kept a job all the time—a really good job working as a mechanic, so I always had lots of money and could buy me really fancy tools and lots of dope." For Paul, drugs did not have an effect on his job performance, but helped him get through his day.

Interviewer: So you had the same job when you were using and when you've been clean?

Paul: Yeah.

Interviewer: Was it hard to do your job when you were using?

Paul: No, heck no. I loved it, I was high!

Tyson recounts his experience,

If I got drunk the night before I'd wake up and do some cocaine or I'd do some meth or something to keep me up and going and when the stimulant worked off, I'd smoke pot or on lunch break go do a few more lines. I had a system of how to do drugs and stay going at work and not kill myself or hurt other people. It was scary. I look back on it now and go wow I'm surprised I didn't die.

Others said that employment really helps to stay clean and out of trouble as demonstrated by the following quotations. "Having money coming from an honest source gives me a way to support my family, and I don't have to look for alternative methods of doing so, like I was before selling drugs." "Employment always helps keep you out of crime 'cause if you've got a good job, you've got something you can look forward to everyday." Morgan expressed it in this way, "If I didn't have a job, I'd be bored to death. I'd be at the liquor store at 10 o'clock waitin' for it to open, so I can pass the day really quickly because time flies when you're incoherent."

Surprisingly, few participants reported serious trouble in finding a job on parole or after returning from prison/jail. Only one participant out of sixteen reported being currently unemployed. Tyson noted,

I think that's a bunch of crap, when felons go, 'oh it's so hard for me to find a job.' No its not. I mean it may not be that scientist or architect job that you wanted, you're not going to get that, but it's not hard for you to find a job. You can find one; you just don't want the job that is in front of you.

According to social control theory, the involvement and commitment a job requires should be a compelling crime deterrent. It is possible that employment was not found to be as strong a crime deterrent in this study as it has in other studies (Sampson & Laub, 1993; Uggen, 2000; Wright, 2004) due to the nature of the jobs of the participants

of this sample. Most of the participants are in the construction line of work. Not only is the atmosphere at these work sites conducive to substance abuse, but most respondents readily admitted that those they worked with were involved with substance abuse as well. Both strain theory and social disorganization theory explain how the environments where substance abuse is common can account for why someone immersed in these environments would engage in it themselves.

### *Family*

Results show that the factor of family can either help or hinder in the process of desisting from crime. Parents can be supportive and a great resource for parolees to turn to for support, or they can merely provide the means for addicts to keep up their criminal lifestyle. Children similarly can help or hurt. For some, having children was the turning point that made them change their lives; for others the added responsibility overwhelmed them and did not change them.

Some blamed their current lifestyle on the way their parents raised them. Elliot reported,

The way I was brought up with my dad really strict... I think that may have had a major contributing factor of me being so rebellious and not really caring when I got older. I know that the way I was brought up contributes a lot to my mental status right now as I am on depression and anxiety medication that seems to be majorly contributed to the way I was brought up.

Others mentioned how helpful their parents are. Jason said, "Everyday my mom calls me and asks me how things are going, what my stress levels are. She's the first person I call when something stupid happens. There's been a few times when I've had her come get me because I

didn't like the situation I was in.” At some point during the interview, most participants mentioned family as a motivation to stay clean.

Several mentioned their children. Jon said, “I've got responsibilities. I've got children. I need to take care of my children, they're my #1 first and foremost responsibility and if I'm in jail, I'm not doing them any good. I want my kids to look up to me and be proud of what they have as a father.” Morgan mentioned that his son was the only thing that changed him, not necessarily out of love, but out of paranoia. “I got to thinking there's no way that he can find out that I'm doing this. It was kinda a paranoid thing. I didn't want him to know.”

Respondents also acknowledged that if you don't want to change, kids won't change you. Paul, who has eight children, said,

People were telling me, 'if you don't want to change, you're not going to change' and I'm like, 'no I'm going to change for my kids or I'm going to do this for my kid.' It didn't work, even for the love of my life, my kids. I still wouldn't change, still couldn't do it. I mean I couldn't honestly do it until I wanted to, until I was sick of looking at myself that way.

Some participants mentioned that they've seen that family can be a hindrance as well. Speaking about friends, Jason said, “Maybe their family helps them out too much so they don't feel the pain that a lot of us do. A lot of my buddies have escaped jail because their families would pay for really good lawyers. So their families were totally enabling them. But I don't think they tried to hurt him.” Tyson said that his mother used to enable his drug addiction before by giving him money, but after a while they just let him go to jail, which in his opinion was the best thing for him.

Two others mentioned that when their families gave up on them, they had to find another substitute family—in AA or in a group of friends. They needed that support. Richard, whose family lives in a different state said his family has totally given up on him. This was a major setback for him because when he would get out of jail or prison he always had to rely on his old friends for housing, food, support, and rides. He would want to become clean, but since he had to rely on his friends in the counter culture for resources, it was nearly impossible for him to get out of bad situations and resist temptations.

### *Friends*

Unsurprisingly, it was found that good friends have a significant positive influence and bad friends have a significant negative influence on staying clean. Most participants said that in the process of becoming clean, it is critical to not hang out with the same crowd you were in when you were using. “No matter what, stay away from all them old friends,” cautions Jason.

Interviewer: The friends you've seen that have stayed clean and out of trouble what changed for them?

Morgan: They just stay away from old friends.

After several attempts to quit and over fourteen years of coming in and out of jail, Paul said the only thing that got him clean was his girlfriend who said she'd kick him out if he ever used.

Avoiding old influences or “selective involvement” is a commonly referred-to risk reduction strategy for avoiding crime (Abrams, 2006). Social learning theory explains that one learns and patterns behavior based on observations of their associates’ behavior. Friends have such a pervasive influence because they often come with the territory and culture of using or not using. If offenders surround themselves in a clean environment all the time with people who stay clean, this will obviously help them. However, if they hang around situations, people and

environments of drug use and crime, it will be very difficult for them to resist temptations and abstain from their former addictions and habits. Peer pressure also plays a role in these temptations.

For these reasons, support systems, whether from family or friends, is found to be a primary criminogenic factor affecting successful reintegration for participants of this study. The importance of support systems was mentioned almost more than any other factor in participants' experiences.

### *Age*

All of the interviewees expressed that they are currently done with the drug lifestyle. A major factor playing into this "being done" is age. It is just time to be done for many of these adults. Whether it is due to the added responsibilities that come with age or just as a result of being sick of the cycle of substance abuse and its physical, mental and legal consequences, respondents repeatedly mentioned getting older as a factor of desistance from crime.

The following quotations demonstrate this notion. "The reason why I'm not wanting to get back into this criminal aspect of my life is because number one I'm too old for this shit." "I think it's because I'm getting older—I'm tired of going to jail, I'm tired of being in jail." "It's gotta be kept under control 'cause I'm not a little kid anymore." "It was just time. I made up my mind that it was time, and I was done."

The criminogenic factor of age surprisingly was mentioned just as often by the younger participants as by the older. The youngest age in the sample is 25. Jay, Tyson and Jason are all 25 and have all been involved with crime since they were young teenagers. Even they report that growing up is a key factor in their decision to stay clean.

## *Desire*

Desire is a factor that has come up again and again in this study. It seems to influence all other factors. Patrick sums it up.

Interviewer: Out of your friends or the people that you've seen who are trying to stay clean, what's the difference between those who can do it and those who can't?

Patrick: Um, it's honestly just how bad you want it. I mean if you really want a better life, there's no class you can take, there's no program, there's nothing your PO or judges can say that's going to make you stay clean. It's just how bad you want it.

If desistance from crime really is dependent on "just how bad you want it," then the question becomes, how do you get to the point where you want it bad enough? Patrick continues, "I guess that comes down to how far you've sunk, how bad you've hit rock bottom. If it's completely broken you and you've decided that's enough." For others, programs, jail, children, family, friends or any number of other reasons have influenced them getting to that point. Whatever it is that gets criminals to the point in their lives where they want to change, getting there is a key element in the equation for changing their lives.

## Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusions

With so many offenders coming out of prison, effective re-entry programs are becoming increasingly important. This study sought to evaluate the RealVictory program and the experiences of some of its participants to understand what factors cause them to reoffend or stay clean.

Overall, participants reported that RealVictory is effective in helping to stay out of crime. However, at the same time they all admitted that you can't help those who don't want to be helped, or who are not ready for help. So it seems all participants were at the point in their lives already when they were ready to change when they entered the program. Another possibility is that not all participants were completely sincere in their interview—either about the program or about being clean. Getting re-arrested can be one indicator of sincerity since they are all on parole or probation; however this should not be the final or only measure of the effectiveness of the program.

Three out of the eight RealVictory participants I interviewed have been rearrested in the year since their classes, and three from control, so from a purely quantitative perspective the program doesn't look all that effective. However, since this study was a qualitative one, a little more depth shows that re-arrest may not be the best measure of effectiveness especially since arrest charges can often occur because of previous charges.

In this study, all sixteen participants expressed desire to avoid re-arrest and stay clean. They discussed many factors and programs that helped them to achieve these goals. The key criminogenic factors from the literature included employment, age, substance abuse and family (see Table 1). The findings from this study show that social support—be it from family or friends—and desire to change are two primary criminogenic factors affecting the recidivism of

participants of this study. Employment helps the reintegration process, but only once participants have achieved the personal desire to change. Age makes a difference, but there is no set age when a person desists from crime. Again, this is dependent on the individual's decision to change, which can happen at any age. As predicted, substance abuse is among the key factors affecting recidivism since all participants come from a drug rehabilitation center. Support systems and desire to change are key findings since all of the other factors assisting reintegration are contingent on the presence of these two elements.

### **Support Systems**

Social support was found to be essential to a successful reintegration process, whether the support came from re-entry programs or from family or friends. For instance, Jason's experience coming out of jail was greatly assisted by his mother's daily influence and constant support, while Richard's family rejected him and he was forced to rely on former friends for money, housing and transportation in his unsuccessful reintegration processes of the past. Jason was able to successfully reintegrate and stay clean, while Richard has gone through decades of relapse and re-arrest.

Support was mentioned again and again as a significant element of any re-entry program. Programs where participants feel like they have genuine friends in the program and support from counselors and fellow participants were reported to be more helpful than programs where participants and counselors were unsupportive or did not become friends. Considering the importance of support from family and friends in the reintegration process, it is logical that support is a key element for success in a re-entry program.

Other evaluations of re-entry programs have likewise found support to be paramount to the effectiveness of the program. Abrams (2006), in her qualitative study of therapeutic youth

correctional institutions and the transition period afterward, found that support systems are the key element to reducing recidivism among these youth offenders. She also found that old friends and influences presented the greatest challenges to successful reintegration.

Social control theory explains why support of family and friends would be so helpful. Attachment to pro-social people deters anti-social behavior. The stronger one's social bond is to a person, the stronger the influence that person will have.

### **Desire to Change**

Another factor that influences both successful reintegration and re-entry programs is individual desire or proclivity to change. The desire to change has been identified as the first stage of the desistance process from crime (Sommers et al, 1994). Whatever the catalyst for this desire to occur—be it jail time, friends, family or hitting rock bottom—the personal desire to change is a requisite step if desistance from crime is to occur long term. Once the decision to quit has been made by the individual, and not merely forced upon him, the other stages of desistance can begin (Giordano, 2002; Sommers et al, 1994).

Deterrence theory can be useful in deciphering this phenomenon. It holds that humans seek to augment pleasure and avoid pain—to maximize benefits and minimize risks. Decisions are made on the rational basis of weighing costs and benefits. Once the anticipated benefits of desistance from crime are seen as more advantageous than the potential benefits of continuing to commit crime, a person will cease in their criminal behavior. According to this theory, this personal weighing of costs and benefits is the way behavior or a change in behavior is generated. When an offender is forced to do something, either by the courts, a family member, counselor or a parole officer, this process of personal decision making is bypassed. Once the forced behavior is no longer in effect, the offender will return to the behavior he sees as maximizing his benefits.

Thompson (1992) confirms this with his research, which found that the probability of desisting from criminal behavior increases as an individual's expectations for receiving rewards, such as prestige, social networks, money or autonomy, via crime decreases.

Determining the catalyst that gets an offender to the point where they are ready to change is a question that many people would like answered. However, what exactly gets a criminal to that point differs from person to person. For many it is their age, but there is not one specific age threshold where people cross from being not ready to ready. Unfortunately there is not one program that can get all participants to the point where they desire to change either. Certainly programs can help and it is the goal of all programs to get offenders to that point, but what helps is often such a personal matter that one program can't expect to accomplish this for all participants. RealVictory and other programs can certainly prepare people to alter behaviors and assist in their paths of really desiring to change their lives by helping offenders realize that desistance from crime maximizes their personal benefits and minimizes their risks.

### **What Does This Mean for the RealVictory Program?**

Feedback from the participants interviewed in this study reveals RealVictory to be an effective program in assisting offenders to stay out of crime. All participants expressed that both the cell phones and the classes helped them in their reintegration process. Participants particularly seemed to appreciate the teacher and unique curriculum of the classes as well as the added daily element of the cell phones to follow up with individual goals. The goal of this cognitive-behavioral program—to change the mindset and consequently the behavior of participants—seemed to have been met for those participants interviewed.

The study of how participants feel about other re-entry programs and their reports of key criminogenic factors, however, points to several important issues that the RealVictory program

should consider and implement in order to effectively cater to their population. RealVictory should take what participants feel to be helpful and unhelpful aspects of re-entry programs into account. For example, they should be careful to always incorporate caring counselors, a clean environment, and new things to learn into the classes. Also, counselors should do what they can to provide opportunities for group interaction to make the group feel like a family.

One thing that came up over and over again in the interviews about re-entry programs was how damaging it can be to participants who are sincere in their desire to change to be placed in programs with people who do not want to be there and are still using. Something RealVictory could do to try to prevent this would be to initiate a sort of filtering process for participants entering the program. RealVictory employees could attempt to initially gauge a participant's interest and sincerity by contacting their parole or probation officer or holding interviews with potential participants before the program begins to try to assess interest level. Different interest or sincerity levels could then be placed in separate classes so that those who truly want to change would not be placed with those who are not yet at that point.

While according to the feedback on the classes and cell phones, RealVictory is achieving positive results for participants, the program should take the suggestions for change into consideration. Making class periods longer, not switching teachers, and not mentioning the phones until the last class so students will be there because they really want to not because of a free phone are each valid suggestions.

The assessment of criminogenic factors this study provides can be useful for the RealVictory program since it conveys what kind of people are entering the program and what kind of successes and temptations they encounter most often. Obviously RealVictory should be

cognizant that the major problem most of their participants are dealing with is substance abuse. Class lessons and material should be created with this potential impediment in mind.

It also should be acknowledged that in order for participants to succeed, they must have a strong support system (such as family and friends) and the personal desire to change. Providing a friendly and family oriented environment would prove beneficial. Activities that encourage participants to interact and trust each other may facilitate these friendship bonds. The teacher could divide the class into groups of two or three to discuss certain issues or participate in problem-solving activities together. Participants should be encouraged to interact with each other as much as possible each class period to make RealVictory a support system for them. This would be particularly important for those who are lacking support systems outside the program. Support and hope should be pervasive elements of the program.

In order to encourage personal desire to change, the program should help participants to see and understand the costs of their criminal behavior and the benefits a clean, sober life can offer them. RealVictory should also be aware that they are currently most helpful to younger and less serious offenders. Measures should be made to additionally cater to their older, more serious offenders.

### **Limitations**

The small sample is perhaps the most obvious limitation of this study. Findings could be more broadly applicable to the RealVictory population if the sample of RealVictory participants were larger. Additionally, only one interview was conducted with each participant in the study. More interviews would provide more detail and depth in the research.

The findings of this study rely upon self-reporting. As discussed earlier, self-reporting does not always provide the most factual results, particularly when dealing with criminal

populations. It is possible some of the reports are not accurate either due to lapses in memory or a desire to represent personal faults or mistakes in a better light. Offenders are often accustomed to presenting themselves in the best light to probation and parole officers, judges, counselors, etc, and this best light may not always be the true light. Supplementing these self-reports with reports from participants' parole or probation officers or urine analyses may provide a more accurate representation of participants and their stories.

### **Suggestions for Further Research**

While this study is bound in relevance by a limited sample, the principles realized by the experiences of participants can be utilized and further explored. Future research should continue to investigate the critical reintegration process and examine the criminogenic factors associated with successful re-entry. Re-entry programs should realize the critical nature of the transition period and be evaluated in accordance with what participants feel is most helpful and most hurtful to their success in desisting from crime. More research needs to be done in order to further determine the effectiveness of the RealVictory program. Long-term research and follow-up is needed in order to track the success and determine the sincerity of participants.

Interviewing participants' probation or parole officer would provide a good check of the sincerity of participants. Urine analyses would also prove if a participant is actually clean or not regardless of what they report. Both qualitative and quantitative measures are valuable and should be used in future studies to measure the scope of impact of the classes and cell phones.

### **Conclusions**

Based on participants' responses, the RealVictory program has been found to be effective in its goal to ease the re-entry process and help participants achieve their own goals. Everyone

interviewed from the experimental groups said that RealVictory is effective in helping to stay out of crime.

We have also assessed two of the main catalysts for returning to crime for RealVictory participants—lack of support systems and personal desire. The factors that most helped successful reintegration then are *strong* support systems and personal desire. The RealVictory program should be cognizant of these and other criminogenic factors since they affect the success of their participants and consequently the success of the program.

According to the first-hand experiences of the participants of this study, the RealVictory program is effective in its objective to help offenders keep their goals and desist from crime. If implemented, the information discovered in this study can help to better understand the experiences, desires and backgrounds of the RealVictory population and thus improve the RealVictory program and other programs like it.

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## Appendix A

### Interview Guide

Interviewer:

Name of interviewee:

Date:

Time:

Location:

About the interviewee:

Age:

Sex:

Ethnicity:

Place of Birth:

Religion:

Occupation:

Purpose of interview: The purpose of the interview is to get an insider's opinion on re-entry programs and the RealVictory program, so that we can improve them. Also, we want to see what helps offenders most to not get re-arrested.

This interview will be completely confidential

## A. Background

### 1. Family

1. Tell me about.... your parents, siblings, what was like growing up in your family.
2. Tell me about your family situation now. (Married? Kids?)

### 2. Upbringing

1. Where did you grow up? What was your house/neighborhood like?
2. What did you spend your time doing as a child/teenager?
3. What did your parents do for a living?

### 3. Schooling

1. Tell me about the schools you went to.
2. What were your experiences there? (how well they did, did they fit in? etc)
3. Tell me about your friends. Who were/are the most influential?

## B. Crime

1. How old were you when you first got arrested?
2. Was that your first experience breaking the law?
3. Explain how you got started in crime.
4. What/who else influenced your first criminal act?

5. Describe your criminal activity since then. Arrests? Felonies? Misdemeanors?

C. Prison/jail experience

1. Have you been to jail/prison? How many times?
2. Tell me a little about your experiences in jail/prison.
3. Does jail/prison deter you from crime? Why/why not?
4. Tell me about your experiences with programs in prison (drug, employment, education, etc).
5. How helpful were they to you? Explain.

D. Experiences coming out of jail/prison

1. How long has it been since you've been in jail/prison?
2. What was it like to come out? Explain the transition process.
3. Explain your biggest challenges in transitioning back to normal life.
4. What were the things that helped you the most?
5. Did you have any turning points either in jail or coming out? What were they and what caused them?
6. Have you been re-arrested since? Why/Why not?
7. How much do you want to stay out of jail? What would you be willing to do to stay out?

E. Re-entry programs

1. What programs have you been a part of? (rehab, DRC, AA, anything else)
2. What were the most helpful aspects of the programs?
3. What aspects were not helpful? Why/why not?
4. If you had to create your own program for people coming out of jail or who just kept getting arrested, what would that program be like?

F. RealVictory

1. How did RealVictory compare to the other programs you've been a part of?
2. Describe its strengths and weaknesses.
3. How helpful were the cell phones?
4. How helpful were the classes?
5. What would you change about the program?
6. How helpful was it to you in making you want to stay out of crime?
7. Describe how committed you were to keeping the goals you set during the program. Why?
8. How confident were you in your ability to keep those goals? Why?
9. Have you been re-arrested since you ended the RealVictory program?

G. Experiences with drugs and alcohol

1. Describe the role of drugs/alcohol in your experiences with crime.

2. How has using drugs affected your personal goals?

#### H. Employment

1. Describe briefly your employment history

2. Explain how helpful your job is/has been/ in helping you stay out of crime?

#### I. Solutions

1. There are many problems to the criminal justice system. What do you think the biggest problems are and how would you solve them? (ex- prison overcrowding, most prisoners are there on drug charges, etc)

2. What would it take for you to never return to crime/drugs?

J. Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your experiences that may help us understand your situation?

## Post-interview

### Describe:

- The setting:
  
- The interviewee:
  
- Difficulties:
  
- Feelings about the interview:
  
- Any other comments: