

# Findings from a National Survey on Women's Reentry

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*This report on findings from ANWOL's National Survey on Women's Reentry Needs – alongside the Documentary Narrative, Landscape Mapping Project, and Hope House Case Study – serves as a continuation of the second phase of the Replication Model Study. These efforts were made possible through the continued support of many dedicated staff at A New Way of Life (ANWOL). We would like to express appreciation for Susan Burton, Founder of ANWOL because this opportunity for expansion is only possible thanks to her vision, commitment, and leadership.*

*We also extend our appreciation to all of the staff throughout ANWOL who made this survey and its dissemination possible. We appreciate the leadership and staff's continued commitment to transforming the reentry process for women, families, and communities. And perhaps most importantly, we remain indebted to the women at ANWOL and commend their strength and courage as they experience reentry and transformation.*

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## Executive Summary

While it's easy to assume that reentry is an exciting and joyous time of regaining one's freedom, it is often full of as much uncertainty, instability and fear as incarceration itself. And most of the 115,000 women released from federal or state prisons each year face this reentry process alone, without support from the community or reentry programs. But an innovative organization with more than 20 years of experience working with women negotiating reentry is dedicated to changing this reality.

There are very few resources available to women reentering society. In order to document the “on the ground” reality and to understand the existing resources that are available (and necessary) to women experiencing reentry, A New Way of Life (ANWOL) developed a national survey aimed at currently and formerly incarcerated women throughout the United States. Reentry services must be designed to respond to the impact incarceration has on all facets of women’s lives, and this survey will highlight the complex needs of women and improve programming to better support their reentry.

This report compiles survey results from a sample of 418 respondents across the country. The survey was administered both online and on paper at targeted locations and events; it asked a combination of close- and open-ended questions related to participants’ demographics, incarceration and reentry experiences. Overall, 73% of the sample identified as a race or ethnicity other than white. The majority were middle-aged -- 80.3% of respondents were 35-years-old or older. More than half of all women reported either some college or a college degree. The majority of the sample had been incarcerated only one time (58.2%), while 6.2% noted 10 or more incidents of incarceration. Well over half of all survey participants (59.3%) disclosed three or more distinct traumas, including child abuse or neglect, domestic violence, or involvement with the foster care system.

Responses to open-ended questions about reentry experiences offered insight into women's reentry journeys and the availability of reentry supports, as well as their future goals and dreams and how to achieve them. The majority of women described their reentry experience as full of fear, trauma, or a completely lacking in support. When asked what the most effective supports were, women talked about the importance of family support and acceptance, the need for multiple types of support, personal motivation, and religion or faith. And when asked what was most needed in their reentry process, the women listed a variety of needs including housing, employment and education outreach or resources, access to financial safety nets, mentorship, recovery support, mental health treatment, transportation, and connection to family and friends. In terms of women's future goals and plans, one of the most striking findings was the extent to which women sought fulfillment through dreams and ambitions well beyond their own personal development or achievement. For example, many respondents voiced a desire to lead systems-level change for women and families impacted by mass incarceration.

While limitations inherent in the survey methodology are discussed, findings from this national survey of currently and formerly incarcerated women shed light on the many needs and challenges of women's reentry. By sponsoring this survey, ANWOL can continue to uplift formerly incarcerated women and work to change the institutional barriers that women experiencing reentry face.

## Introduction

The United States has higher rates of incarceration than any country in the world, and women are the most rapidly increasing segment of those currently affected. According to the U.S. Bureau of Justice, the number of women in state or federal prisons across the country was nearly nine times higher in 2018 than it was in 1980 (115,000 women imprisoned, compared with 13,000).<sup>2</sup> The incarceration of women creates trauma and disruption for families and individuals, as well as for the broader community.

The challenges do not end after incarceration. A majority of the 115,000 women released from state or federal prison in 2018 faced reentry alone, without the supports necessary to ease their transitions.<sup>3</sup> Women released from prison experience ongoing challenges with their mental and physical health as they reenter their communities and reunite with their families.<sup>4</sup> Most significantly, research shows that these women face unresolved physical and emotional difficulties that increase the risk of substance abuse, re-arrest and re-incarceration.<sup>5</sup> Women who have been incarcerated are also more likely to have been involved with government entities such as Children's Protective Services, which can make them feel they have no control or choice when it comes to their own lives and can create ongoing challenges in reuniting with and rebuilding relationships with their children. Unsuccessful reentry and the subsequent reincarceration of women have far reaching effects that include higher costs to community health and family stability.<sup>6</sup>

In order to determine what kinds of resources exist and are most critical for women to have a successful reentry, A New Way of Life (ANWOL) developed a national survey that would target currently and formerly incarcerated women throughout the United States. With 20 years of experience supporting the reentry needs of women, ANWOL

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<sup>1</sup> Prison Policy Initiative. (2018). Women's Mass Incarceration: The Whole Pie 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Bureau of Justice Statistics. (2015). *Prisoners in 2014* (No. NCJ-248955). U.S. Department of Justice.

<sup>3</sup> Prison Policy Initiative. (2018). Women's Mass Incarceration: The Whole Pie 2018.

<sup>4</sup> Van Wormer, K. (2010). *Working with female offenders: A gender-sensitive approach*. John Wiley & Sons.

<sup>5</sup> Falkin, G. P., & Strauss, S. M. (2003). Social supporters and drug use enablers: A dilemma for women in recovery. *Addictive behaviors*, 28(1), 141-155.

<sup>6</sup> Leverentz, A. M. (2014). *The ex-prisoner's dilemma: How women negotiate competing narratives of reentry and desistance*. Rutgers University Press.

helps returning women transform their own lives, while simultaneously championing systems level change. ANWOL is uniquely positioned to conduct outreach with formerly incarcerated women for purposes of this survey, as the organization has served over 1,000 women and is a respected, established organization in the field of reentry. ANWOL is truly an innovative, holistic reentry program that, in the words of its founder, is “*dedicated to helping women, families and our communities break the cycle and heal from the formidable experiences of incarceration.*”

This survey is yet another way that this program is helping to break down systems of mass incarceration throughout the country. By tapping in to its national network of community organizations serving formerly incarcerated women, as well as the ever-expanding ranks of its own alumni, this survey presents a unique opportunity to gather first-hand knowledge from directly affected women about their reentry needs and experiences. The leadership at ANWOL hope that findings from this survey can lead to solutions that will heal the damage incarceration has inflicted on women, as well as support best practices to prevent recidivism and guide the replication of their program model, SAFE Housing Network.

## Survey Methodology

ANWOL's national survey was launched in August 2018. The purpose of the survey is to assess the reentry process from the perspective of women who are formerly or currently incarcerated. It includes questions about the resources available in the reentry process, the supports that have been most effective, the supports that would have been most useful in the reentry process, the challenges of reentry, and the services they are still using. It was designed to quantify the reentry experience, as well as document the women's stories in their own words. The survey also included general demographic questions; questions related to the state in which respondents had been formerly (or are currently) incarcerated, their ages and record of incarceration; and demographic questions related to traumas women have experienced. Please see Appendix A for the complete survey.

### *Data Collection*

The survey was administered both online and via paper. Using an email database of current and former participants and stakeholders, ANWOL sent out a link to an online survey for eligible respondents. Paper surveys were distributed to partnering organizations that serve formerly incarcerated women, selected prisons and jails, and a conference in Florida for the formerly incarcerated and their families.<sup>7</sup> A total of 311 paper surveys and 107 online responses were included in the final analysis. Only online and paper surveys that were more than 50% complete were included in the analysis.

### *Data Analysis*

Data analysis is the process of cleaning, coding, and interpreting raw data – in this instance, survey responses – to develop a holistic narrative or comparative findings. In the case of survey results, findings are both analyzed and presented in multiple ways, depending on the type of question asked. For example, close-ended questions related mostly to demographics are analyzed and presented descriptively with aggregated (or grouped) percentages through graphs or charts. In contrast, open-ended questions allowed survey participants to provide written

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<sup>7</sup> The Formerly Incarcerated, Convicted People & Families Movement (FICPFM) is network of national organizations that conducts advocacy on policy issues related to criminal justice reform, such as restoration of civil rights, banning the box, and bail reform (<https://www.ficpfmmovement.org>).

responses. Methodologically, open-ended survey questions are designed to capture a robust number of responses from numerous participants, with the understanding that the feedback and information is not as detailed as open-ended questions that are used during a depth interview. While the majority of the open-ended responses were short – as is expected with survey data – the sheer number of responses allowed for data analysis that was based on themes that occurred frequently, indicating that respondents held shared attitudes or viewpoints. Therefore, findings from open-ended questions are not presented in a narrative manner, but rather organized with an overview of the dominant themes and followed by tables that present direct quotes from respondents validating each theme.

### *Limitations of Survey Data*

There are distinct benefits to survey research. Chief among them is the anonymity afforded by its design which allows for potentially more candid, truthful responses.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, the ease or limited cost of its dissemination allows for more extensive data collection than other qualitative methods.<sup>9</sup> Still, it is critical to note that there are inherent limitations within all methodologies, and survey research is no exception. While efforts were made to collect truly representative data – women from multiple reentry programs, from different geographies, with varied experiences or at multiple points in their reentry experience, and demographically mixed – some limitations persist. Namely, the very use of a survey – an instrument which requires a level of literacy – might self-select to produce a sample that is not entirely representative of all incarcerated or formerly incarcerated women. Limitations such as this are addressed and noted throughout the report, reminding readers that some findings should be interpreted with caution.

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<sup>8</sup> Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2017). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Sage publications.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

## Results

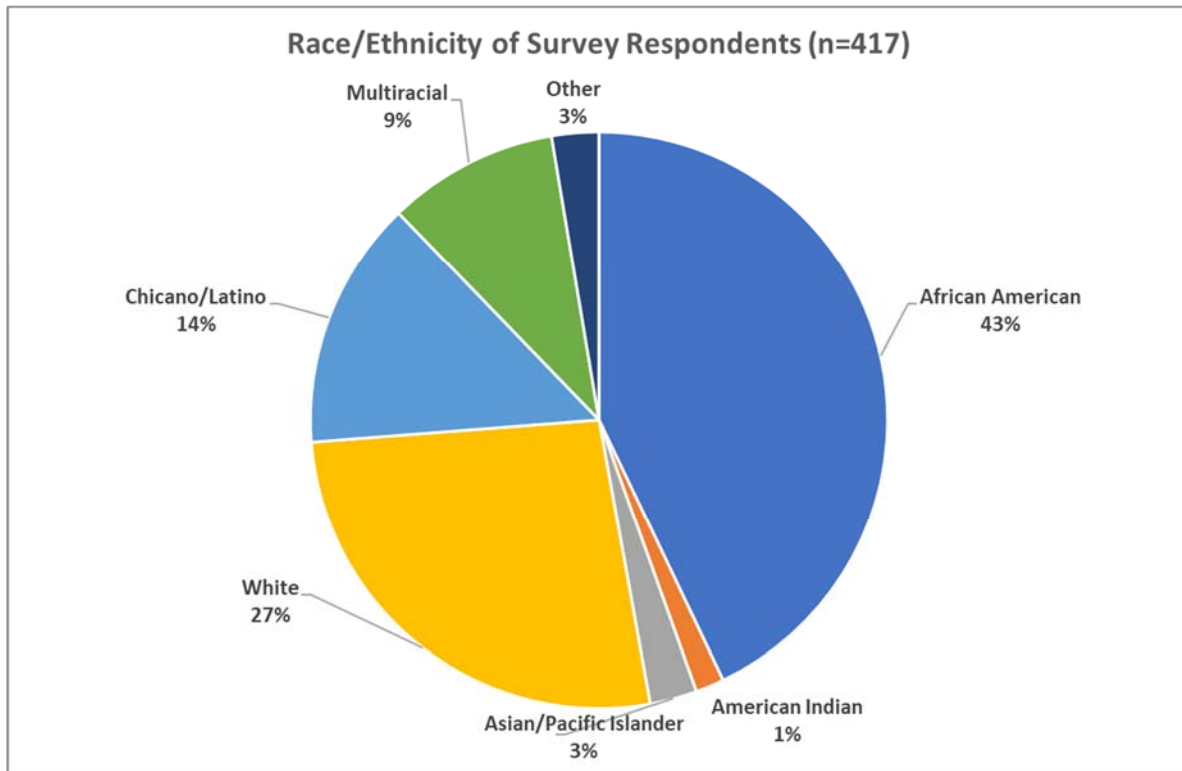
Survey findings are presented in three distinct sections throughout this report. The first section includes responses to close-ended questions related to participant demographics and serves to paint a portrait, or evoke an overview of the women who participated in the survey. The second section encompasses responses to close-ended questions related to participants' incarceration experience and provides an overview of women's involvement with incarceration and the criminal justice system. The third section highlights respondents' qualitative, open-ended feedback and experiences with reentry. Each of the three sections and correlating indicators are listed in Table 1 on the following page, and subsequent areas are presented throughout the report.

*Table 1. Organization of Survey Findings: Three Categories and Their Respective Indicators*

<b>Participant Demographics and Experiences Outside of Incarceration</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Race/ethnicity</li> <li>• Age</li> <li>• Education</li> <li>• Children</li> <li>• Trauma</li> <li>• Service Utilization</li> </ul>
<b>Participant Demographics Related to Their Incarceration Experience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• States where women were incarcerated</li> <li>• Total years incarcerated</li> <li>• Longest time incarcerated</li> <li>• Support from Parole/Probation</li> </ul>
<b>Qualitative Responses Related to Personal Reentry Experience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reentry experience</li> <li>• Most helpful supports</li> <li>• Goals for the future</li> <li>• Supports to achieve these goals</li> </ul>

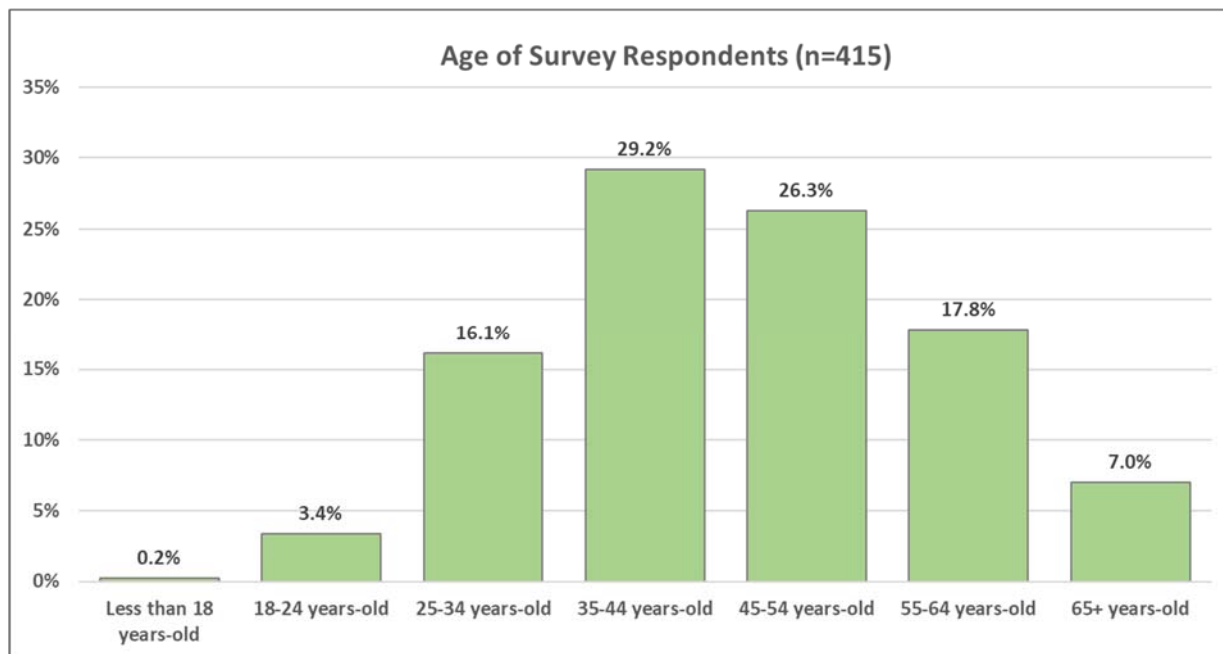
## Demographics

Figure 1. Race/Ethnicity of Survey Participants



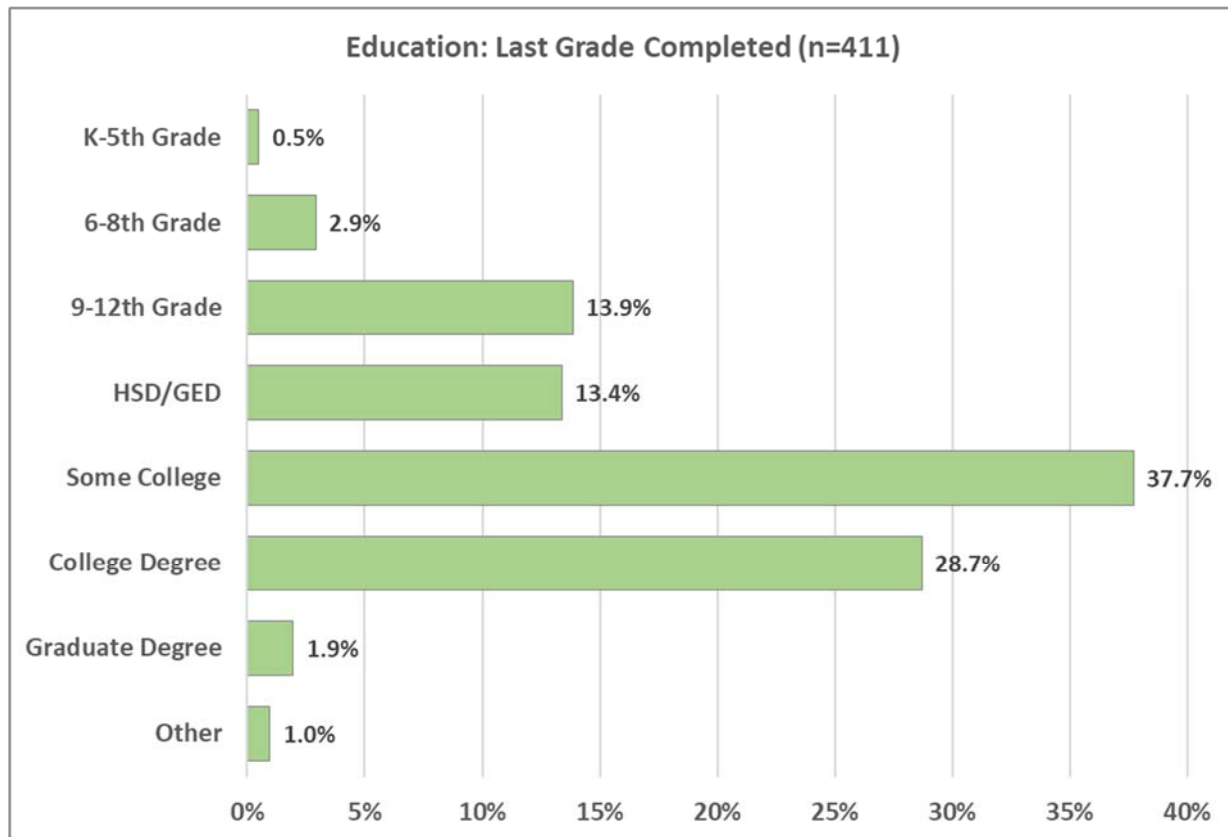
The majority of the sample constituted women of color, with nearly three-quarters (or 73%) identifying as a race or ethnicity other than white. At nearly half (43%), African American women represented the largest segment of the survey sample.

Figure 2. Age of Survey Participants



The majority of the survey respondents could be considered somewhat aged -- with more women identifying as middle-aged or older. In fact, almost one-quarter (24.8%) of the sample was 55 years old or older. Only one minor participated in the survey, and young adults (those between 18-24 years-old) constituted less than 5% of the sample. This is critical to note and highlights the possibility that survey findings are likely representative of a more established, older population rather than a recently reentering, younger demographic. This is perhaps attributable to the fact that many participants were sampled from ANWOL's networks and email databases, which includes women who have successfully completed reentry programming historically and are not presently enmeshed in the criminal justice system.

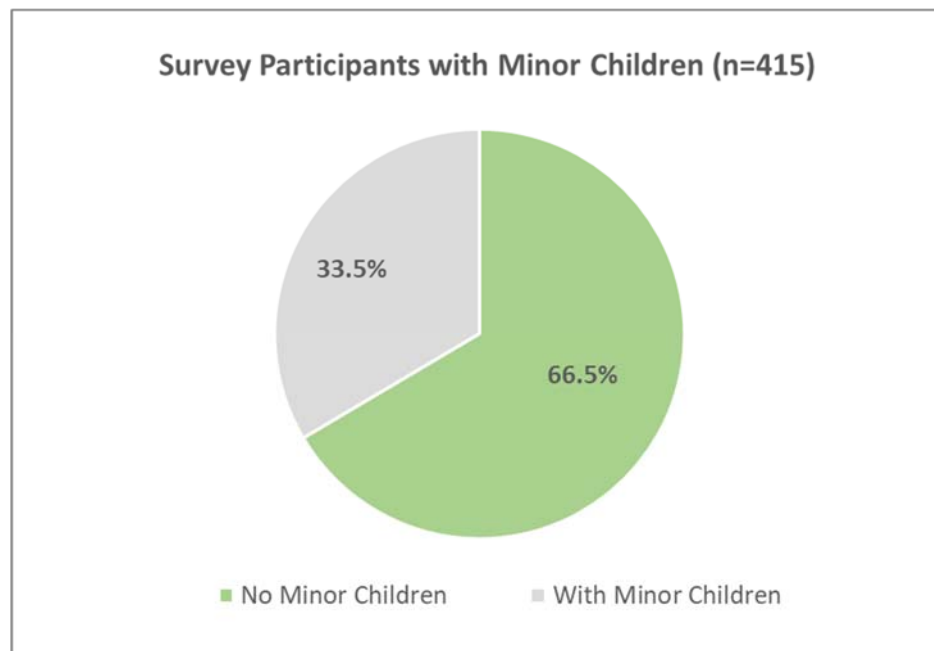
Figure 3. Education of Survey Participants<sup>10</sup>



The survey sample consisted of women who demonstrated higher than average educational outcomes. According to 2003 Bureau of Justice statistics, only 12.7% of incarcerated men and women had any post-secondary education, while nearly half (48.4%) of the general population had similar education (Harlow, 2003). In this survey sample, less than one-fifth of the women (17.3%) had less than high school education while considerably more than half (68.3%) had at least some post-secondary education. Aligned with age-related demographics noted in Figure 2, these survey results are again likely more representative of a better-established population of women. Moreover, given the nature of surveys – in terms of reading and understanding the questions and providing written responses – participants need to possess a certain level of literacy. It is possible that women with greater education were more likely to complete the survey than those with limited educational opportunities.

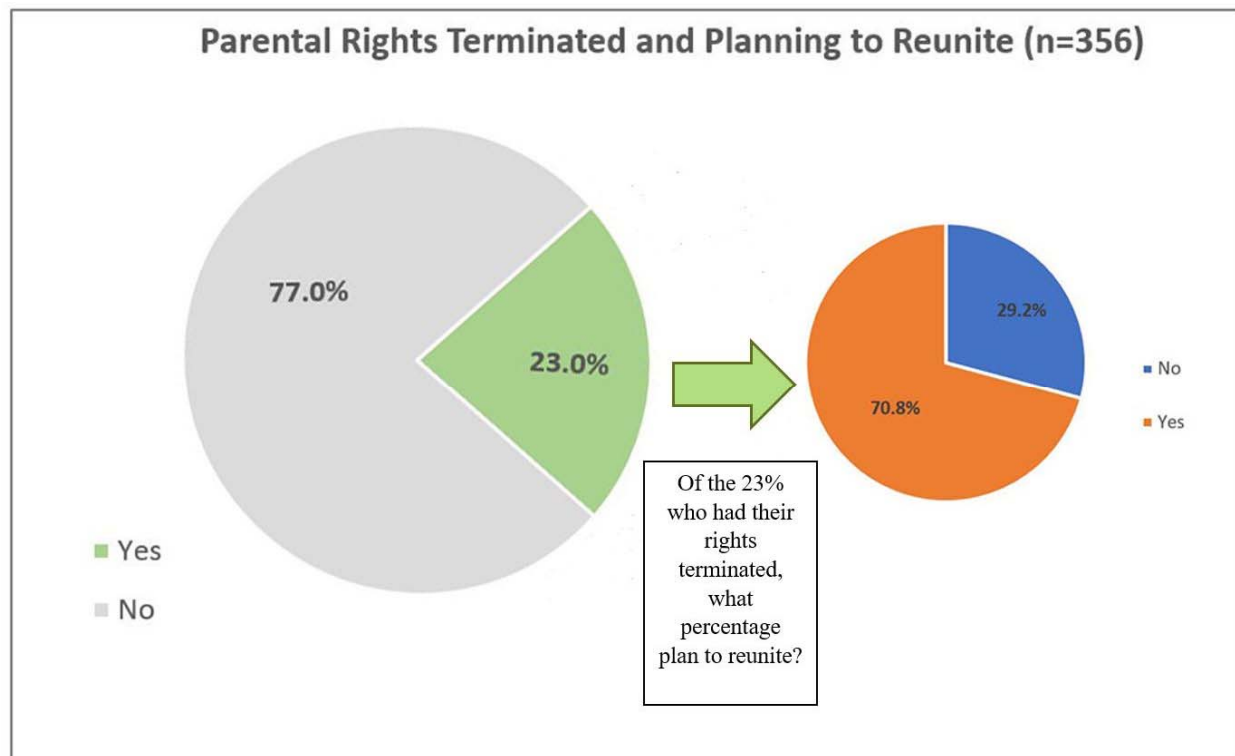
<sup>10</sup> Harlow, C. W. (2003). Education and Correctional Populations. Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report.

Figure 4. Survey Participants with Minor Children



Also reflecting that the majority of the sample was comprised of slightly older individuals, most of the women (66.5%) did not have – or were not responsible for – minor children. Moreover, the majority of women (68.1%) indicated that they had fewer than four children, and the age range of children was from 2 months to 54 years old. The mean age of the average child for each woman in the sample was approximately 16 years old. It should be noted that while nearly all of respondents answered the question about having minor children, fewer than half provided ages for their children; therefore statistics, related to children's ages are possibly unreliable.

Figure 5. Survey Participants Whose Parental Rights were Terminated Due to Incarceration and Those Planning to Reunite with Their Minor Children



Survey respondents were asked whether or not they had their parental rights terminated as a result of their incarceration. Of the 356 who responded, nearly one-quarter (23%) responded “yes,” their rights to a minor child had been terminated. Of the 23% with terminated parental rights, nearly three-quarters (70.8%) also noted that they were planning to reunite with their minor child upon reentry.

Figure 6a. Trauma Experienced and Disclosed by Survey Participants

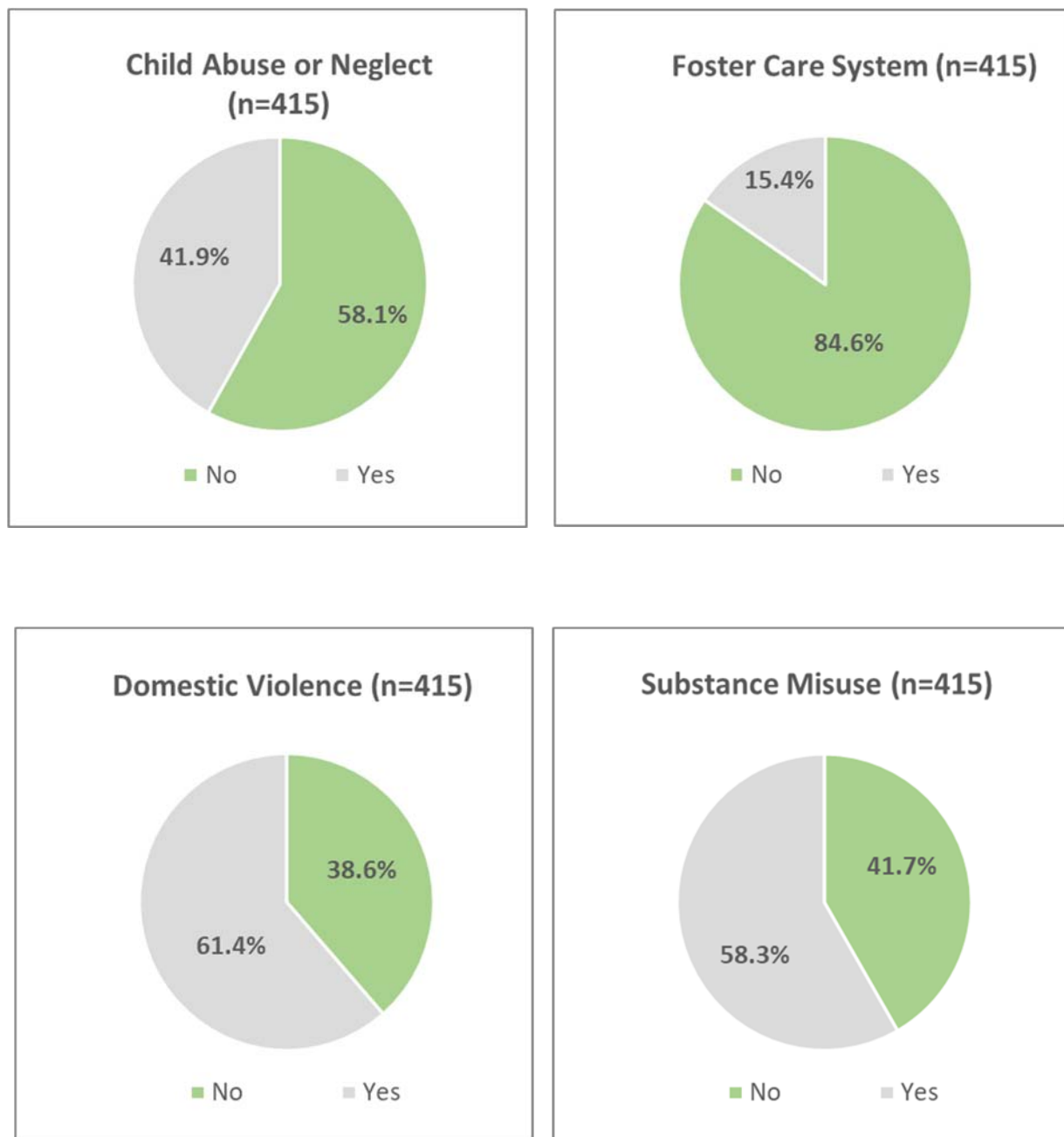
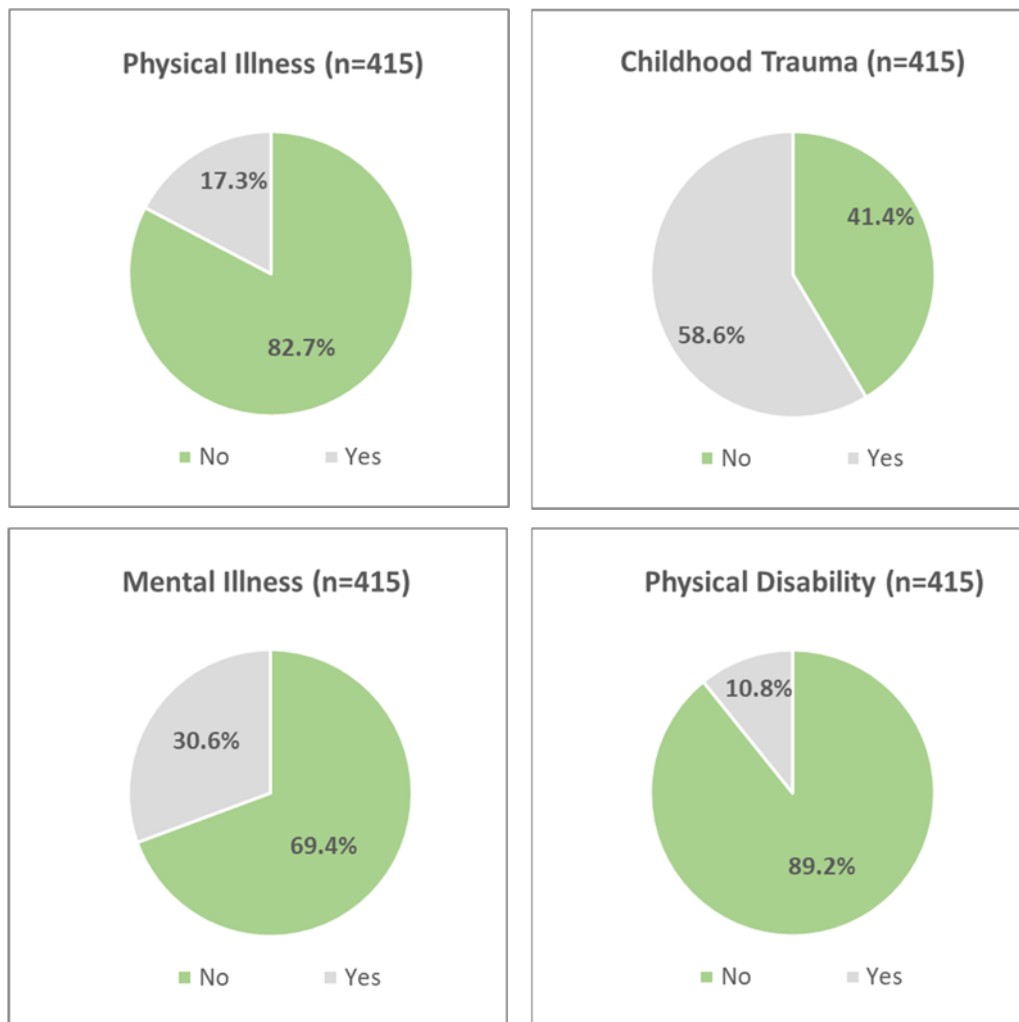
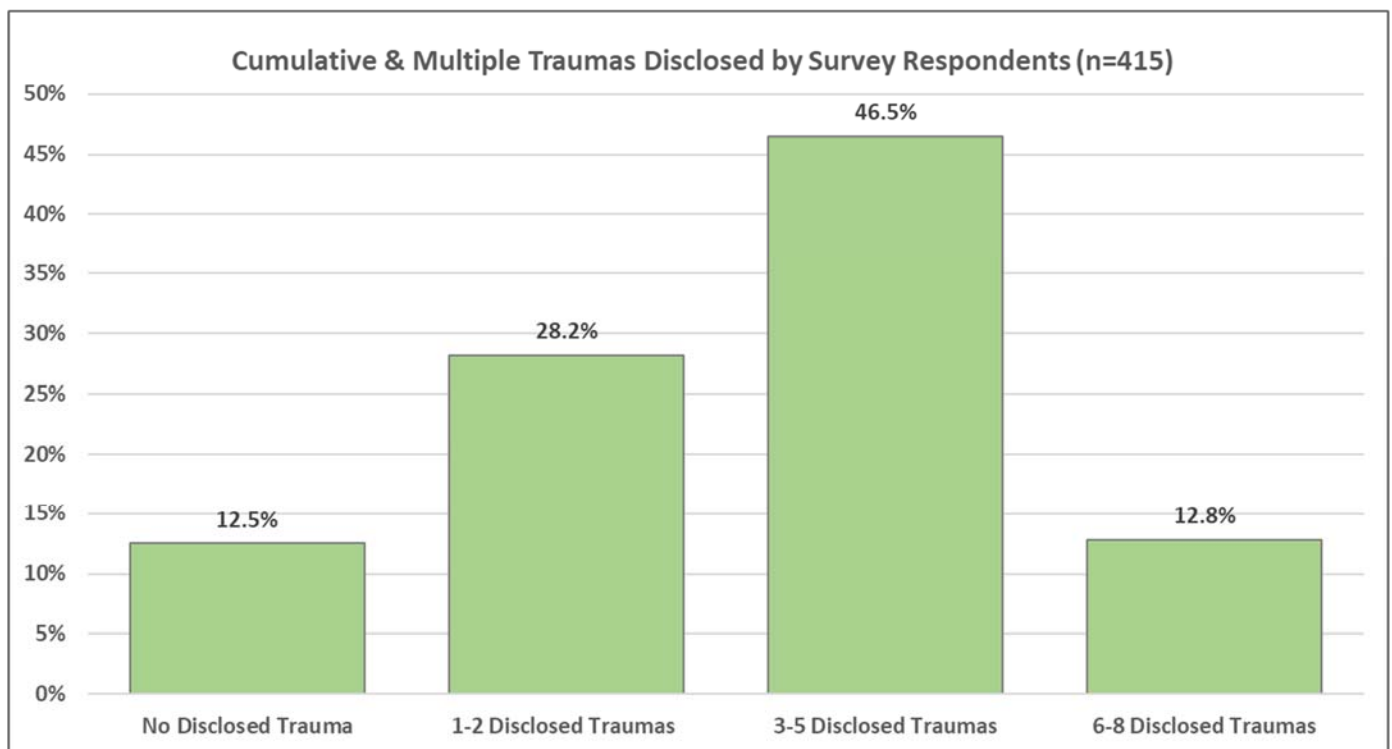


Figure 6b. Trauma Experienced and Disclosed by Survey Participants (continued)



Women were asked to disclose information about the traumas they had experienced during their lifetime, such as domestic violence, child abuse or neglect, involvement with the foster care system, or other childhood trauma (such as sexual abuse or witnessing domestic violence in the home). Figure 6 above and on the preceding page clearly illustrate the extent of trauma endured by this sample of women. For example, well over half of women had been victims of domestic violence (61.4%) or childhood trauma (58.6%). Nearly half (41.9%) had endured abuse or neglect in childhood. And nearly one-third (30.1%) indicated that they are currently experiencing a mental health illness or have mental health concerns. On the following page the incidence of multiple traumas, and the cumulative impact of these individual traumas, will be addressed.

Figure 7. Trauma Experienced and Disclosed by Survey Participants

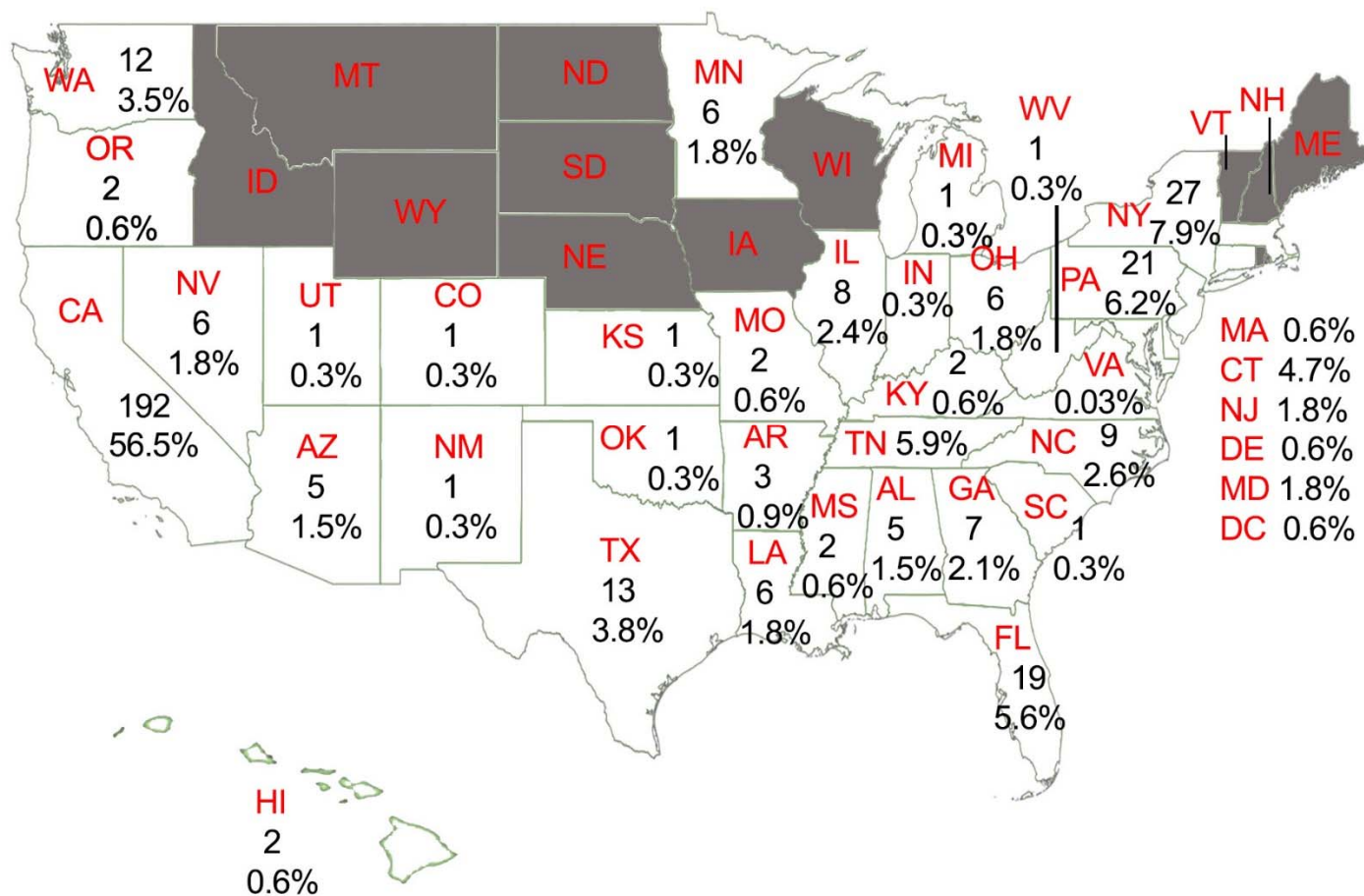


While Figure 6 delineates the specific traumas experienced by the sample of women, Figure 7 illustrates the extent to which women have experienced cumulative or multiplicative traumas throughout childhood and adulthood. ***Astonishingly, well over half of all survey participants (59.3%) who responded to the series of eight questions had experienced three or more distinct traumas.*** It should be noted that an additional segment of women also provided write-in responses disclosing specific traumas that were not included in the questions – such as sex trafficking, abuse in prison, or gang violence. This would suggest that these findings likely underestimate the extent of trauma this sample of formerly incarcerated women have endured.

### *Demographics Related to Incarceration Experience:*

The following figures (Figures 8-11 and Map 1) reveal detailed information about survey participants related to their incarceration experience. Providing an overview of women's involvement with incarceration and the criminal justice system, questions such as number of times incarcerated, or total years incarcerated, or longest single stay in prison are displayed. Survey participants were also asked to indicate the specific states within the United States where they had been previously incarcerated and were able to provide up to four different locations in their open-ended responses. The first figure (Map 1 on the following page) is a map of the United States that provides a visual representation of where women in the survey sample had been incarcerated. Three critical pieces of data are presented on Map 1: 1) the abbreviated name of each state in red font, 2) the total number of women from the survey who were incarcerated in each state, and 3) the percentage of the survey sample that each state represents. As an example, the majority of the sample had been incarcerated in California (192 or 56.5%) while only 3.8% (or 13) of the sample noted incarceration in Texas. All but 12 states (including Alaska, not pictured on Map 1) are represented in the survey findings and those states without data are shaded in gray.

Map 1. Survey Respondents by State<sup>11</sup>



<sup>11</sup> Areas shaded gray indicate states without survey respondents.

Figure 8. How Many Times Participants Were Incarcerated

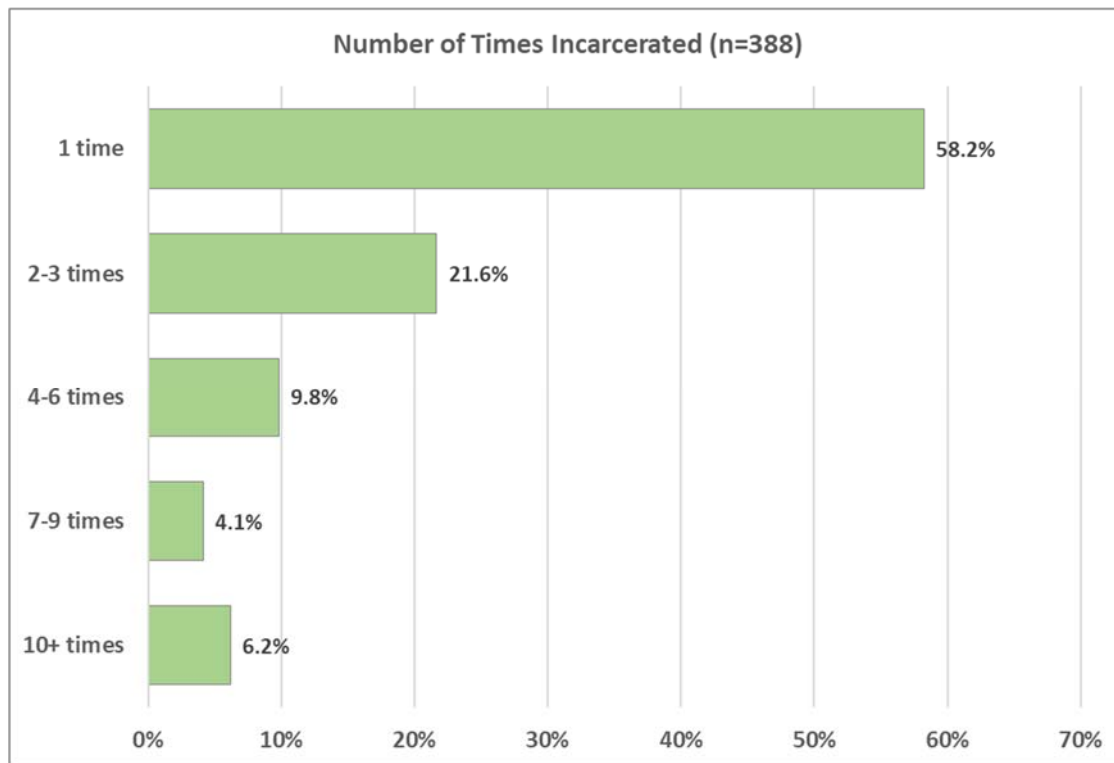


Figure 9. Total Years Participants Were Incarcerated

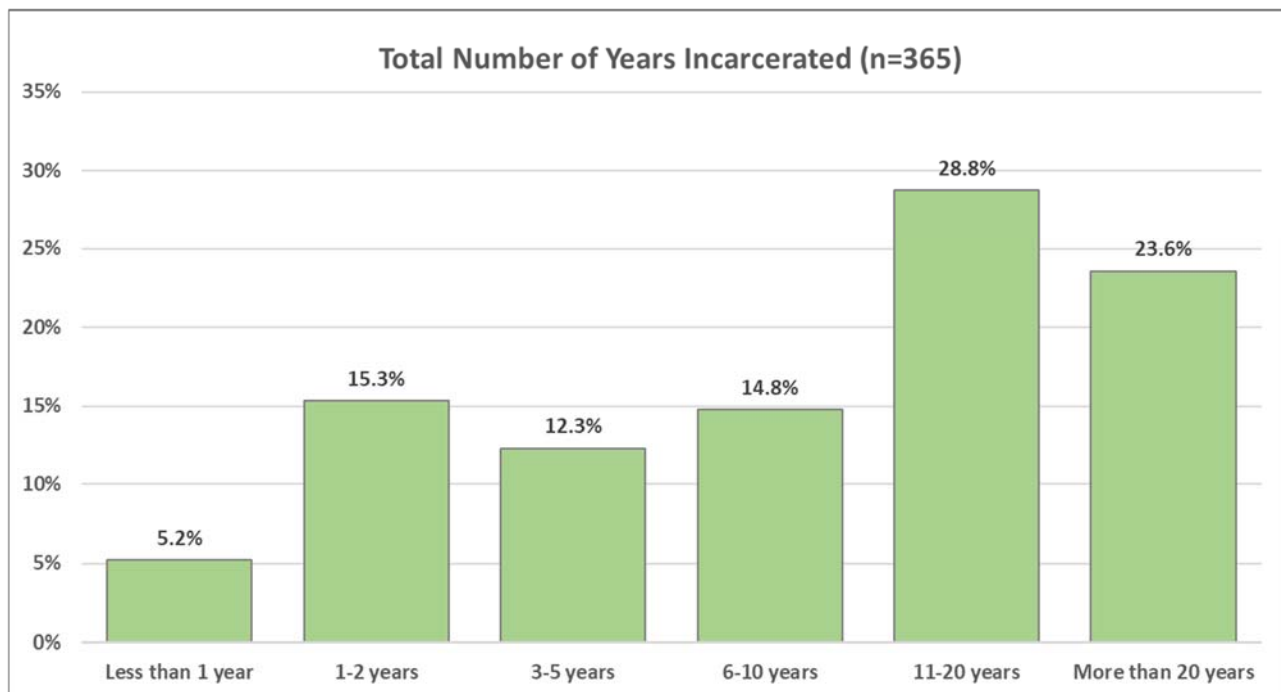
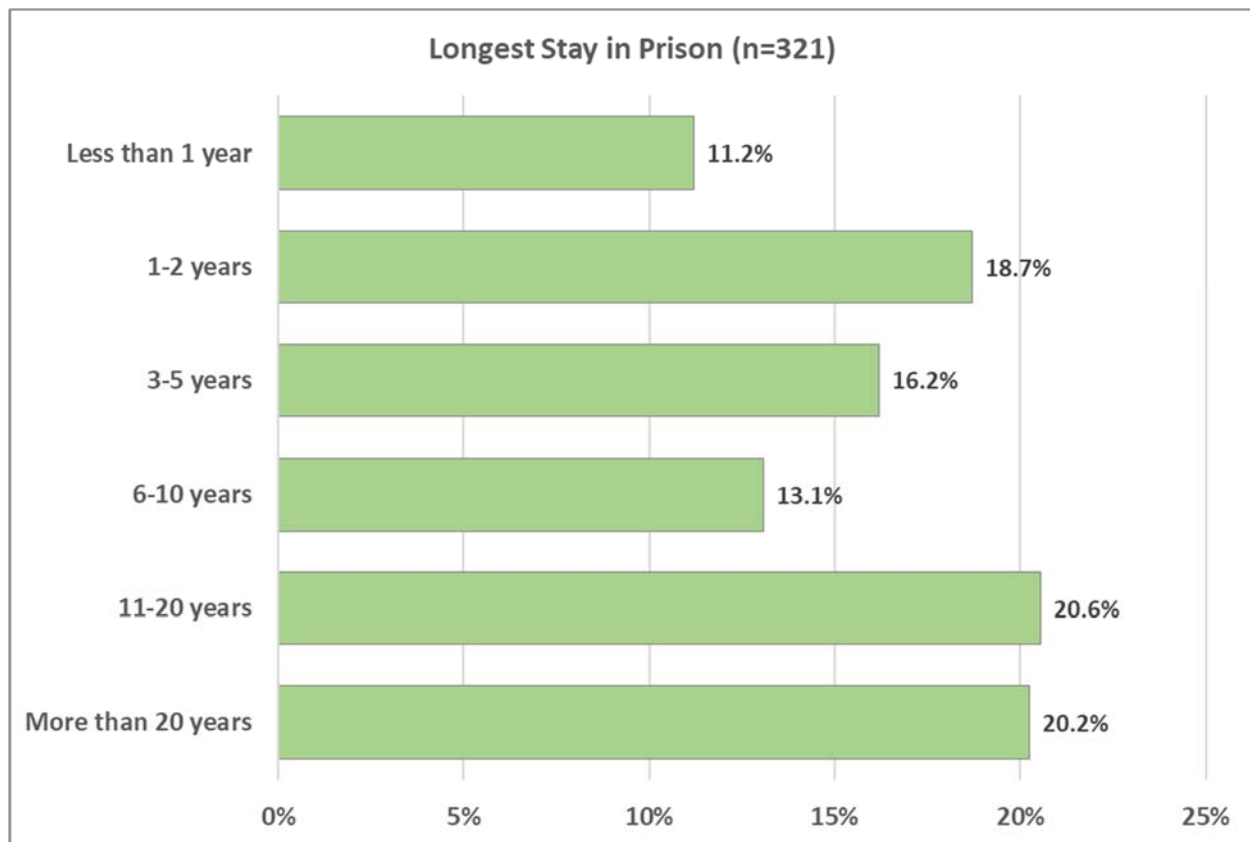
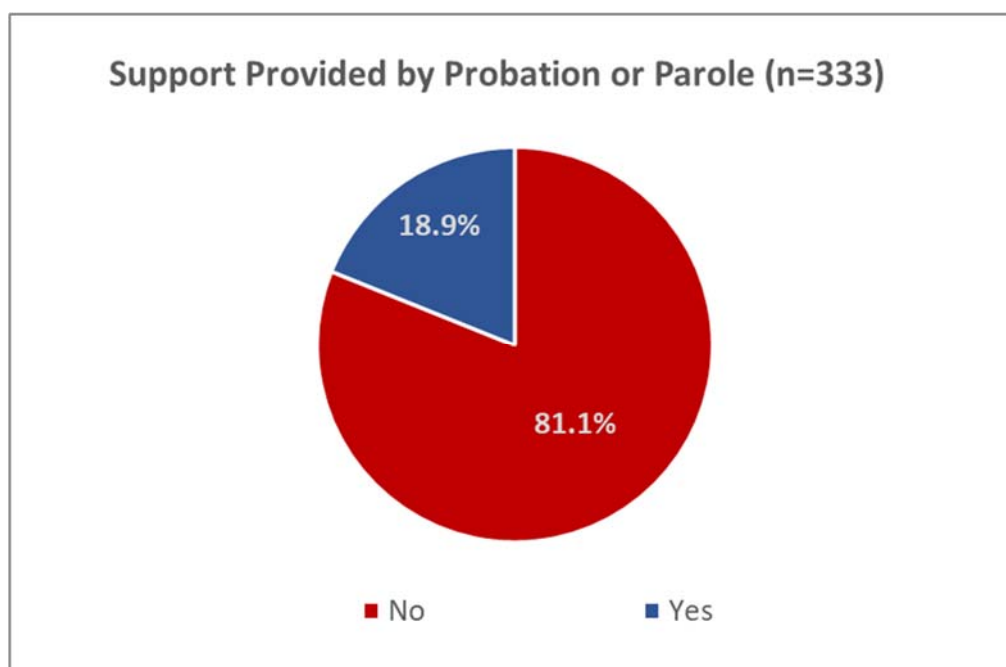


Figure 10. Longest stay in prison



Figures 8-10 provide context about survey participants' incarceration demographics. The vast majority of women – 58.2% of the sample – indicated that they have only been incarcerated one time. Chronic reoffenders, or those noting incarceration of 10 or more times, were a very clear minority (6.2%). While the majority of women indicated that they had only been incarcerated once, the total number of years spent incarcerated was relatively high, with 67.2% spending six or more years in prison or jail. This is consistent with Figure 10 above in which it appears that many women were serving a lengthy sentence – as 40.8% of the sample served a single sentence of 11 years or more.

Figure 11. Support Provided by Probation or Parole



Participants were asked whether or not they had ever received support from Probation or Parole to assist in their reentry process. Approximately four-fifths (81.1%) indicated that they had not received any form of support from either entity. Of those who stated that they had received support, the following means of assistance were most frequently cited:

- Access to public assistance programs
- Linkage to community-based programs
- Educational support
- Referral to transitional housing

## Open-Ended/Qualitative Questions Related to Reentry Experience:

Survey participants were asked four qualitative, open-ended questions that allowed them to write in a response (or type a response if completed online) in their own words. These questions related specifically to experiences and expectations women have had with reentry and included the following prompts:

- What was your reentry experience?
- What were the best supports?
- What are your plans and goals?
- What help can you use in accomplishing these goals?

As previously noted, the majority of the responses were short, with most lacking both the context and nuance often achieved through depth interviews. Therefore, findings are not presented in a narrative manner, but rather organized by themes derived from the frequency with which respondents held shared attitudes or viewpoints. In an effort to retain the integrity of the accounts of the women themselves, results are presented in tables – one table for each question. Within each table the overarching themes are noted in bold. Then, direct quotes from survey respondents themselves – and the feedback that they provide for each open-ended question – are listed to validate and support each theme.

### Question 1: What was your reentry experience?

While one might assume that reentry marks a time of freedom, in fact, it is full of as much uncertainty, instability, and fear as incarceration itself. Open-ended feedback from survey respondents illustrated this reality. When asked about their reentry experiences, the majority of women provided responses that were heartbreaking and characterized by a complete lack of support – and expressed in participants' own words on the following page. Others cited barriers such as the inability to obtain employment or housing as particularly difficult. Table 1 on the following page details the most frequently cited themes or findings compiled from the 303 survey participants who responded to this question about their reentry experiences.

Table 1. “What was your reentry experience?”

Fear and Despair	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “It was scary.”</li> <li>• “My first was a nightmare.”</li> <li>• “A little scary not knowing what to do and how to adjust to things.”</li> <li>• “Scary and hectic.”</li> <li>• “Failure.”</li> <li>• “Was lost with no hope.”</li> <li>• “Hopeless.”</li> </ul>
Traumatic, Emotional, and Isolating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Traumatizing.”</li> <li>• “Grief.”</li> <li>• “Nervousness.”</li> <li>• “Isolating.”</li> <li>• “It’s been hell.”</li> <li>• “Lonely.”</li> </ul>
Overwhelming and Demoralizing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Very overwhelming.”</li> <li>• “A total disaster.”</li> <li>• “Brutal.”</li> <li>• “Discouraging.”</li> <li>• “Challenging.”</li> <li>• “Overwhelmed, needed direction</li> <li>• “Demeaning.”</li> <li>• “Degrading.”</li> <li>• “Emotionally, financially and mentally challenging.”</li> </ul>
Lack of Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Lacking support or knowledge of programs.”</li> <li>• “Did not have any support.”</li> <li>• “Lacking in resources.”</li> <li>• “Never got the help. I need it.”</li> </ul>
Specific Barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “A very hard struggle to find housing and job.”</li> <li>• “Difficultly finding housing, employment, education, legal services and tattoo removal.”</li> <li>• “Disrespectful correctional officers.”</li> <li>• “Employment opportunities are limited for anyone with a criminal record.”</li> <li>• “My reentry was very challenging because I relocated to a new city I knew nothing about and my children were in another county. I had to drive hours for a 1-hour visit, I struggled with finding work and navigating through the county resources.”</li> <li>• “Denied food stamps when I applied.”</li> <li>• “Difficulty finding jobs, clothes, etc. no ID.”</li> </ul>

## Question 2: What were the best supports?

While the majority of women described a difficult reentry process, a few disclosed experiences that were not characterized by hardships. This limited handful of positive experiences appeared to result from women having dedicated supports – from programming, family, friends, or mentors – that helped ease the reentry process. When asked about her reentry experience, one survey participant noted: *“My experience went well. I had a supportive family who accepted me in their home.”* Another disclosed: *“If my family wasn't supportive, I wouldn't have had anyone...everything was a struggle.”* Yet another echoed the importance of family support while also acknowledging the personal, hard work involved: *“I had family support and worked really hard while incarcerated to connect with the people to help make my vision come true.”*

Table 2 on the following page details the most useful reentry supports that were identified by survey respondents. These findings give critical insight into the supports that are most likely to help women have a successful reentry. More than 320 women provided open-ended responses to the question: What were the best supports? The majority of women noted multiple supports. And while most listed positive reentry supports, it is important to acknowledge there was still a significant portion of women who indicated that they did not have any supports. For example, one respondent candidly stated: *“I don't receive any support whatsoever from anyone.”* Another woman disclosed: *“I have never found a support system as of yet. Everyone seems to fall off over time.”* Others offered brief but descriptive feedback highlighting a similar sense of abandonment or isolation: *“Had none”* or simply *“none.”*

Table 2: “What were the best supports?”

Reentry Experiences: Successful Supports	
Family Support and Acceptance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “My family has been the greatest support.” – the word family was noted in 218 individual responses</li> <li>• “My mother, she never gave up on me.”</li> <li>• “Only my spouse helped me.”</li> <li>• “Sister and son.”</li> <li>• “Children.”</li> <li>• “Uncle.”</li> <li>• “Siblings.”</li> </ul>
Multiple Sources of Supports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Many hands have helped me.” – more than half of all respondents noted two or more supports</li> <li>• “Professors, family, old employees.”</li> <li>• “Reentry staff, family, friends, and church.”</li> <li>• “My job, school, and positive people who are out and doing awesome.”</li> <li>• “New friends, strangers, church, chaplain, good counselors who care.”</li> </ul>
Specific Programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A New Way of Life</li> <li>• AA</li> <li>• Barrios Unidos</li> <li>• 12 Step Meetings</li> <li>• “nonprofit organization”</li> <li>• “staff and legal team”</li> <li>• Time for change foundation</li> <li>• The Serving Spoon</li> <li>• Sledge Group Mentoring Program</li> </ul>
Personal Motivation, Responsibility, and Initiative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Myself was the best support besides God, I did everything on my own to support myself and living.”</li> <li>• “My inner strength.”</li> <li>• “MY personal drive and stick-to-it-ness.”</li> <li>• “My own research.”</li> </ul>
Religion and Faith	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “My spiritual relationship with God.”</li> <li>• “It would be a synagogue.”</li> <li>• “Pastor.”</li> </ul>
Peers with Similar Lived Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “People I met while incarcerated.”</li> <li>• “Friends who I met after recovery.”</li> <li>• “Woman who I met in here [while incarcerated].”</li> </ul>

Question 3: What are your plans or goals after release and what have you achieved since your release?

Women were also asked to disclose their goals, plans, and accomplishments following release from prison or jail. A considerable number of women mentioned selfless, community-level goals over individually focused plans. Many respondents articulated a desire to give back to others, engage with their community, and lead systems-level change for women and families impacted by mass incarceration. The fact that a significant portion of women described selfless goals revealed the character and strength of the women, as well as the potential power of advocacy as a tool in the reentry process.

As would be expected, many women also described the need to become established by finding housing, maintaining sobriety, reuniting with family, and obtaining employment or education. Women described a broad range of educational experiences, both during incarceration and reentry. They also expressed clear goals for their future in terms of how they were planning to further their education. Some women described how they had completed high school or college-level credits, while others were able to complete an associate's degree program while incarcerated. Several women disclosed dreams of attending graduate school. In addition to voicing specific goals that were forward-thinking and related to creating long-term stability post-incarceration, some women also articulated the need to simply slow down, calm and center themselves, and try to embrace or enjoy life after incarceration. Table 3 on the following page illustrates the varied nature and complexity of the plans, goals, and dreams of women facing reentry.

Table 3: “What are your goals and plans after release or what have you achieved since your release?”

Give Back to Others, Engage with their Community, and Change the System		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Contribute to my community.”</li> <li>• “Assist incarcerated and previously incarcerated adults/ youth.”</li> <li>• “By the grace of God, I will start up safe houses for women who are being abused. I will feed the poor and give jobs to the poor. I will receive a Nobel peace prize. I am going to be a world changer--a pastor.”</li> <li>• “Change the system.”</li> <li>• “Keep organizing until they are all free.”</li> <li>• “Work to end incarceration.”</li> <li>• “To support those that have gone down the path I have experienced.”</li> <li>• “To advocate for the women I left behind.”</li> <li>• “Give back to community by volunteer work, and being a mentor to future generations.”</li> <li>• “Connecting with society and advocating for change.”</li> <li>• “To open a transitional home for all people.”</li> <li>• “Help my neighborhood and people.”</li> <li>• “Help other men and women and create safe places.”</li> <li>• “My vision is to open a group home for young women who are struggling with overcoming trauma and also transition housing for women coming home.”</li> </ul>
Work to Become Established on the Outs	<b>Reunite with Family</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “I want to reunite with my family upon my release.”</li> <li>• “My first plan I would like to be with my mother after all these years, 20 years, apart.”</li> <li>• “Go home and get my family together.”</li> </ul>
	<b>Maintain Sobriety</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “I will go to AA meetings.”</li> <li>• “Stay clean and sober.”</li> <li>• “I really plan on living a clean and sober life full of positive energy.”</li> <li>• “To go to a treatment program.”</li> </ul>
	<b>Nurture Mental Health</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Keep up with my mental health.”</li> <li>• “Individual counseling and hopefully family counseling</li> <li>• “Establish a mental health provider.”</li> <li>• “I’d like to take classes to learn coping skills.”</li> </ul>
	<b>Supportive Housing or Programming</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “I’d like to be in a transitional house program, where I can reenter society slowly and learn everything I need to know to survive on my own.”</li> <li>• “To get to the halfway house.”</li> <li>• “I plan to use reentry program support.”</li> <li>• “To parole to either a program or home.”</li> </ul>

Further their Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“Complete my educational goals, degrees in culinary arts.”</i></li> <li>• <i>“Plan to go to college when I finish my GED.”</i></li> <li>• <i>“I want to further my education and become a web coder.”</i></li> <li>• <i>“I want to get a Masters in social work.”</i></li> <li>• <i>“I want to go to school to get my barbers license.”</i></li> </ul>
Employment and Careers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“Welding as an occupation.”</i></li> <li>• <i>“I want to find a good job so I can take care of myself.”</i></li> <li>• <i>Job in the petroleum industry</i></li> <li>• <i>I like animals and like to work with people [too], [wants to work with] therapy and animals.</i></li> <li>• <i>I want to be successful in obtaining a career</i></li> <li>• <i>I want to be a braille transcriptionist.</i></li> </ul>
Establish a Self-Owned Business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“Opening my own business (as pastry chef) within 5 years.”</i></li> <li>• <i>“I want to own my own coffee and bookstore. I want to reach out the youth and afterwards I want to have an open mic session. Rap, songs, poems and people expressing themselves.”</i></li> <li>• <i>“Operate my publishing company.”</i></li> <li>• <i>“I’d like to open a bakery after getting some additional training in bakery.”</i></li> <li>• <i>“Own my own business (hotel).”</i></li> <li>• <i>“I want to own a daycare/preschool. A loving place for children to feel comfortable.</i></li> <li>• <i>“To continue operating my nonprofit organization.”</i></li> <li>• <i>“I plan on writing a book and doing speaking engagements. I also want to start my own skincare line and mobile salon.”</i></li> </ul>
Embrace the Calm and Appreciate Life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“Be around positive people and get all the help I can to be a better person.”</i></li> <li>• <i>“To slowly re-enter my way back into society.”</i></li> <li>• <i>“To be a better person.”</i></li> <li>• <i>“Make an honest living and enjoy every day to its fullest.”</i></li> <li>• <i>“Work, get a small house and be happy.”</i></li> <li>• <i>“To attempt to live a proactive peaceful humble life.”</i></li> <li>• <i>“My plans are to go home and enjoy my family.”</i></li> <li>• <i>“Take one day at a time.”</i></li> <li>• <i>“Be a regular citizen again.”</i></li> </ul>

#### Question 4: What can help – or has helped – in assisting you in accomplishing these goals?

Women were invited to provide feedback about what supports have been or continue to be most critical in achieving their goals. Though fewer than three-quarters of the 282 women surveyed responded to this question, several themes did emerge. Women appeared to understand the importance of linking in to a reentry program, and many described the desire to do so. For example, women wrote that “finding a program” or “getting accepted to a program” or simply “a reentry program” would help them achieve their goals. Others were much more targeted about specific supports – such as housing, employment, transportation, or mental health treatment – that would be helpful. Reflecting the reality that reentry needs are complex, varied, and numerous, the vast majority of women conveyed the need for multiple forms of support. Table 4 on the following page highlights the support that women most frequently indicated as being able to help them accomplish their goals.

Table 4. What help can you use – or what has been most helpful to you – in accomplishing these goals?

Supports to Become Established on the Outs	<b>Housing (Supportive, Transitional, or Independent)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “A place to live.”</li> <li>• “I will need suitable housing.”</li> <li>• “Stable living.”</li> <li>• “Shelter.”</li> <li>• “Transitional housing.”</li> </ul>
	<b>Employment Resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “On the job training.”</li> <li>• “Job counseling.”</li> </ul>
	<b>Education Resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Grants for college.”</li> <li>• “Finding a good school.”</li> </ul>
	<b>Access Financial Safety Nets</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Public assistance.”</li> <li>• “Government assistance with food, housing, medical.”</li> </ul>
	<b>Mentor</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “People. People are the best, asset, resources, and help people have.”</li> </ul>
	<b>Sponsor and Maintaining Sobriety</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Drug rehab facility.”</li> <li>• “Ways to stay sober.”</li> <li>• “Support in my addiction.”</li> </ul>
	<b>Support with Mental Health</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Therapy and counseling.”</li> <li>• “Support groups.”</li> </ul>
	<b>Transportation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Trips to doctors.”</li> </ul>
Encouragement and Guidance		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Encouragement on how to start it.”</li> <li>• “Encouragement that I will achieve my goals and never to give up. Feels good to be reminded how far I’ve come.”</li> <li>• “Stability, guidance, structure.”</li> <li>• “A bigger support system.”</li> <li>• “Patience, support and direction.”</li> <li>• “Just simple encouragement and direction if needed, with whoever actually cares.”</li> <li>• “Just people that can give me moral support and perhaps guide me a little.”</li> <li>• “Work with counselors who believe in me.”</li> <li>• “Support from people who look like me and have my experiences.”</li> <li>• “Just someone to keep me focused and on my toes.”</li> <li>• “For people to stay in my life, just be here for me.”</li> </ul>
Connection to Family and Friends		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “The love and support from my family and friends, also my teachers.”</li> <li>• “Talking to my family.”</li> <li>• “Support from family and positive people.”</li> <li>• “Supportive people and networking.”</li> </ul>

## Conclusion

Findings from this national survey of currently and formerly incarcerated women shed light on the many needs women have during reentry. Unsuccessful reentry or reincarceration of women has far-reaching effects that include higher costs to community health, along with short- and long-term consequences for the emotional and physical well-being of women, their families, and their communities. We must learn first-hand, from the experts themselves – women experiencing reentry – to truly understand the services that will most effectively help them on their journeys.

Through the survey, women have shared their reentry experiences, hopes, and dreams. They have also disclosed instances of extreme and cumulative trauma throughout their lives that further illustrate the complex needs of formerly incarcerated women. Taken together, results from the survey clearly support the concept that reentry services must be designed to respond to the specific impact incarceration has on all facets of women's lives. Yet perhaps most importantly, the lived experiences of these more than 400 women underscore the resolve, dedication, and deep commitment these women have to finding their own path out of incarceration.

ANWOL uplifts the value of formerly incarcerated women and is deeply committed to changing the institutional barriers that women experiencing reentry face, while cultivating individual change. The leadership at ANWOL believe that findings from this survey will further advance the fight against the damage incarceration has inflicted on women and support best practices to prevent recidivism. Their commitment to this research and applying it to make meaningful change serves as the ultimate example of sustained leadership and altruistic programming.

## Appendix A: ANWOL National Survey

*A New Way of Life (ANWOL) is conducting a national survey to learn more about the needs and experiences of women who have been incarcerated. This survey will help ANWOL learn what women who have been incarcerated need when they reenter their lives. All answers are unidentified and confidential. Your help is deeply appreciated and will be used to guide the development of the replication of the ANWOL model and new safe houses across the country.*

Age \_\_\_\_\_

City/Town and State in which you live: \_\_\_\_\_

Race/Ethnicity (Check all that apply):

<input type="checkbox"/> African American	<input type="checkbox"/> Chicano or Mexican American
<input type="checkbox"/> American Indian or Native American	<input type="checkbox"/> Latino
<input type="checkbox"/> Asian American/Pacific Islander	<input type="checkbox"/> Other _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Caucasian or White	

Education (Mark highest grade completed):

<input type="checkbox"/> Grades K-5 _____ (grade completed)	<input type="checkbox"/> Some College/Technical School
<input type="checkbox"/> Grades K-8 _____ (grade completed)	<input type="checkbox"/> College Degree
<input type="checkbox"/> Grades 9-12 _____ (grade completed)	<input type="checkbox"/> Other

Do you have any minor children? \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No

Have your rights been terminated due to incarceration? \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No

If yes, do you plan to reunite? \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No

Please list their ages: (1) \_\_\_\_ (2) \_\_\_\_ (3) \_\_\_\_ (4) \_\_\_\_ (5) \_\_\_\_ (6) \_\_\_\_ (7) \_\_\_\_ (8) \_\_\_\_

Is this your first time incarcerated? \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No

If no, how many times have you been incarcerated?

<input type="checkbox"/> 2-3	<input type="checkbox"/> 7-9
<input type="checkbox"/> 4-6	<input type="checkbox"/> 10+

What state(s) have you been incarcerated in? \_\_\_\_\_

How many total years have you been incarcerated? \_\_\_\_\_

How long was your longest stay in prison? \_\_\_\_\_

What was your reentry experience? \_\_\_\_\_

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What were the best supports (friends, family, church, others)? \_\_\_\_\_

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Has the Department of Corrections/Prisons offered supports to you upon release at any time?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_

No \_\_\_\_\_

If they did, what were those supports? \_\_\_\_\_

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Which of the following have you experienced? Check all that apply.

<input type="checkbox"/> Child Abuse, Neglect	<input type="checkbox"/> Drug Addiction/Substance Misuse
<input type="checkbox"/> Childhood trauma and exposure to violence	<input type="checkbox"/> Mental Illness
<input type="checkbox"/> Foster Care	<input type="checkbox"/> Physical Illness
<input type="checkbox"/> Domestic Violence	<input type="checkbox"/> Physical Disability
	<input type="checkbox"/> Other _____

Have you received any of the following services for the problems you identified? Check all that apply.

<input type="checkbox"/> Hospitalization	<input type="checkbox"/> Drug Rehabilitation
<input type="checkbox"/> Medications	<input type="checkbox"/> Counseling and Therapy
<input type="checkbox"/> Foster placement	<input type="checkbox"/> Other _____

Do you take any medications? \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No. If yes, please list.

- |          |          |
|----------|----------|
| 1. _____ | 4. _____ |
| 2. _____ | 5. _____ |
| 3. _____ | 6. _____ |

What are your plans and goals for your life after release? \_\_\_\_\_

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How do you plan on accomplishing these goals? \_\_\_\_\_

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What help can you use in accomplishing these goals? \_\_\_\_\_

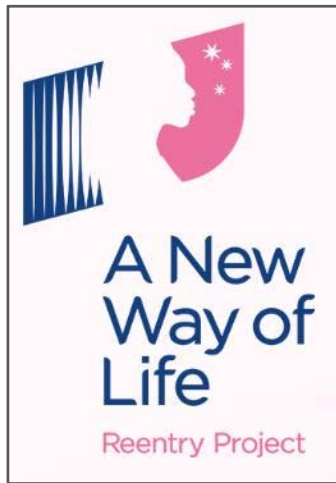
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Anything else you want to share? \_\_\_\_\_

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## **Findings from a National Survey on Women's Reentry**