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The InnerChange Freedom Initiative:

A Preliminary Evaluation of a Faith-Based Prison Program

by Byron R. Johnson with
David B. Larson

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The InnerChange Freedom Initiative:

A Preliminary Evaluation of a Faith-Based Prison Program

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The InnerChange Freedom Initiative: A Preliminary Evaluation of a Faith-Based Prison Program

In April of 1997, with the full support of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ), Prison Fellowship Ministries (PF) launched an unusual correctional experiment—a Faith-Based Pre-Release Program. The program was distinctive in that it was expressly Christian in orientation. The InnerChange Freedom Initiative (IFI), as it would later be named, was officially launched under the recommendation of then-governor George W. Bush. This unique public-private partnership between TDCJ and PF represented a first for Texas, if not the country. Technically speaking, IFI is a faith-based program operated by PF through a contract with TDCJ. IFI is a largely volunteer driven program that is different from other rehabilitation programs or prison ministries in some profound ways. It represents perhaps the first full-scale attempt to offer comprehensive programming emphasizing education, work, life skills, values restructuring, and one-on-one mentoring in an environment where religious instruction permeates all aspects of the prison environment.

Reanalyzing data previously compiled and analyzed by the Criminal Justice Policy Council of Texas, this study tracks the two-year post-release recidivism rates for those prisoners that entered the IFI program from April of 1997 through January of 1999, and were released from prison prior to September 1, 2000. In addition, this report summarizes the results of an intensive on-site, multi-year field study of IFI, including in-depth interviews with IFI staff and participants.

To allow for a two-year tracking period, IFI participants included in the current study are those who have had the potential to be out of prison for at least two years by September 1, 2002. A total of 177 participants met these requirements and thus formed the basis of the IFI study group. Comparison groups were selected from the records of inmates released during the evaluation period that met program selection criteria but did not enter the program. The comparison groups were matched with IFI participants based on the following characteristics: race, age, offense type, and salient factor risk score. A total of 1,754 inmates were identified as the main comparison group for this study.

Anchored in biblical teaching, life-skills education, and group accountability, IFI is a three-phase program involving prisoners in 16 to 24 months of in-prison programs and 6 to 12 months of aftercare following release from prison. In this ambitious correctional experiment, IFI is responsible for implementing, administering, and funding inmate programs, and TDCJ is responsible for housing and security matters. IFI and TDCJ are testing the proposition that by intentionally working together they will be able to achieve the civic purpose of recidivism reduction and thereby increase public safety.

Among the study's key findings are the following:

(1.) The IFI participants in this study include 75 prisoners who completed all phases of the program (called IFI Graduates), 51 who were paroled early, 24 who voluntarily quit the program, 19 who were removed for disciplinary reasons, 7 who were removed at the request of the staff, and 1 who was removed for serious medical problems. The total number of IFI participants comes to 177 offenders who were released prior to September 1, 2000. IFI participants were compared to a matched group of 1,754 inmates who met the IFI selection criteria but did not participate in the program.

(2.) 17.3% of IFI program graduates and 35% of the matched comparison group were arrested during the two-year post-release period. A program graduate is someone who completes not only the in-prison phases of IFI dealing with biblical education, work, and community service (usually lasting 16 months), but also includes an aftercare phase (usually lasting 6 months) in which the participant must hold a job and have been an active church member for 3 consecutive months following release from prison.
(3.) 8% of IFI program graduates and 20.3% of the matched comparison group were incarcerated during the two-year post-release period.
(4.) Considering all participants, including those inmates who did and did not complete all phases of the program, 36.2% of IFI participants were arrested compared to 35% of the matched group during the two-year tracking period. Among the total number of IFI participants, 24.3% were incarcerated compared to 20.3% of the comparison group during the two-year post-release period.
(5.) Mentor contact is associated with lower rates of recidivism.
(6.) Initial skepticism of the IFI program diminished over time with TDCJ staff eventually embracing the program.
(7.) Narratives of IFI members revealed five spiritual transformation themes that are consistent with characteristics long associated with offender rehabilitation: (a) I'm not who I used to be; (b) spiritual growth; (c) God versus the prison code; (d) positive outlook on life; and (e) the need to give back to society.
(8.) Spiritual transformation can best be understood as a developmental process marked by key turning points or events.
(9.) Completing the IFI program, and continued positive pre- and post-release mentoring are central to both the offender's spiritual transformation and rehabilitation.
(10.) Lack of post-release accountability via mentors and congregations, the decision of the IFI participants to isolate themselves from those that could most benefit them, and the tendency to not accept personal responsibility for poor decision-making, are factors associated with recidivism.

In January of 1996, Prison Fellowship Ministries (PF) introduced the concept of a Faith-Based Program to the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ). The concept was distinctive in that it described a program that was expressly Christian in orientation, "emphasizing restorative justice, in which the offender works through several phases of treatment to reshape his value system."[1] Shortly thereafter, the 75th Texas Legislature directed TDCJ to develop a rehabilitation tier of programs that would be evaluated on its success in reducing recidivism. Several existing as well as new programs were subsequently identified as meeting this legislative goal: In-Prison Therapeutic Community, Pre-Release Therapeutic Community, Pre-Release Substance Abuse Treatment, and the Sex Offender Treatment Program. The "InnerChange" Pre-Release Program, as it was originally named, became TDCJ's latest addition to the rehabilitative tier when it was officially launched in April of 1997, under the recommendation of then-governor George W. Bush.

Interestingly, this unique public-private partnership was commonly referred to by TDCJ as, "TDCJ-Prison Fellowship's 'InnerChange': Faith-Based Pre-Release Program." The collaboration between TDCJ and PF represented a first for Texas, if not the country.[2] Several months after the official start-up of the InnerChange Pre-Release Program, Prison Fellowship officially changed the name to the InnerChange Freedom Initiative (IFI). According to PF, IFI is a program different than other prison ministries in that it represents the first full-scale attempt to offer religious programs in a prison environment virtually "around-the-clock." As we will explain later in this study, observations of the program over the last six years show that IFI promotes adult basic education, vocational training, life skills, mentoring, and aftercare, while linking each of these important components in an environment permeated by faith and spirituality.

Do Secular Prison Programs Reduce Recidivism?

The question of whether or not secular treatment programs are effective was addressed in Robert Martinson's widely cited study, "What Works? Questions and Answers about Prison Reform." This study, or at least many of the subsequent interpretations of it, seemed to emphatically answer this question in the negative—nothing works.[3] However, subsequent research has more accurately answered the question this way—some prison programs do reduce recidivism for some offenders, in some settings.[4] Over the last two decades there have been a number of studies systematically evaluating the effectiveness of various correctional treatment programs to reduce recidivism.[5] These research reviews draw very similar conclusions about what is effective in reducing recidivism following release from prison. In general, rehabilitation programs that were most efficacious included at least one of the following components:

- academic skills training (e.g. adult basic education and GED)
- vocational skills training (e.g. acquiring and maintaining employment)

- cognitive skills programs (e.g. goal-setting, problem-solving, and self-control)
- drug abuse treatment

It should be noted, however, that the amount of recidivism reduction for those in secular programs when compared to prisoners not receiving the program, tends to be rather small (e.g., 5%–10%).[6] Unfortunately, evaluations of treatment programs are notoriously under-funded, and it is therefore, difficult to put in place more rigorously designed research methodologies, making interpretation of the findings less definitive. For example, some research only reports on program completers without consideration of matched or comparison groups. Such research presents insurmountable challenges to both validity and reliability. In sum, there is research evidence that some secular programs can reduce recidivism, but these reductions tend to be less than 10%.

Prison Fellowship and Religious Programs

As long as prisons have existed, religious ministries of all shapes and sizes have had outreach to prisoners, but no one ministry has had outreach as pervasive as that provided by Prison Fellowship.[7] At the core of Prison Fellowship's mission is the premise that crime is fundamentally a moral and spiritual problem that requires a moral and spiritual solution.[8] Interestingly, some of the earliest prisons in America were also based on the belief that crime was a moral and spiritual problem and that prisoners were much in need of religion. Consequently, intensive religious instruction and training was very much part of the fabric of some of America's earliest prisons. It should not come as a surprise, then, that a significant percentage of today's prison vernacular, as well as philosophy (e.g., corrections, penitentiary, reform, retribution), are drawn heavily from a religious perspective or basis.

Though IFI may indeed be a "revolutionary" correctional experiment, the belief that God can transform the life of even the worst prisoner is not new. Clergy and religious practitioners have proclaimed such a message to prisoners as long as prisons have existed. PF still believes that religion is the critical ingredient in rehabilitation and helping former prisoners go on to lead a crime-free life.

Prison Fellowship is concerned with reaching out to prisoners via a variety of in-prison programs. Through one-to-three-day seminars and weekly Bible studies, inmates are taught to set goals that prepare them for release. These programs teach concepts such as "surviving the prison environment, beginning a relationship with God in prison, overcoming obstacles, building better families, sharing the Gospel behind bars, and preparing for life on the outside."[9] The weekly Bible studies usually last an hour, and the one-to-three day seminars might be offered several times a year at a particular prison. The level of prisoner exposure to such religious programming, on an annual basis, would be a maximum of 50 hours of Bible study and several days of intensive seminars—a relatively modest correctional intervention.

There is, however, preliminary empirical evidence that high participation in PF-led Bible studies is associated with reductions in recidivism.[10] Johnson and colleagues found that prisoners from four different New York prisons attending 10 or more Bible studies during a one-year period prior to release, were significantly less likely to be arrested during a one-year post-release follow-up study. In a new study tracking these same prisoners for an additional seven years, findings reveal that high participation in volunteer-led Bible studies remains significantly

linked to lower rates of recidivism for two years and even three years post-release.[11] To observe such a significant effect over a three-year post-release period is noteworthy even for a substantial intervention, but is even more compelling considering the relatively minor intervention of volunteer-led Bible studies over the course of one year before release from prison.

An assumption widely held within PF is that if small doses of religious programs can have noticeable effects, then the consequence of significantly increasing the level of faith-based programs, coupled with educational, vocational, and cognitive programs, could lead to much more significant effects. PF leaders would argue there is a fundamental need to complement the traditional prison community with an unabashedly spiritual community. PF believes that if God can change the heart, rehabilitation can truly begin. Further, as prisoners mature spiritually, they believe the prison culture itself can be transformed. Realizing such a paradigmatic shift, PF faithful would contend, could lead to dramatic reductions in prisoner recidivism.

In essence, then, PF saw IFI as a move from small doses of intermittent Bible studies or seminars to a completely faith-based approach to prison programs. PF adherents, in fact, are not alone in this view. The concept of IFI has resonated with a number of correctional leaders and governors across the country, and similar IFI programs are now operational in Iowa, Kansas, and Minnesota.

Describing the InnerChange Freedom Initiative

IFI is a program different than other prison ministries in general, and even Prison Fellowship's own religious programs in particular (e.g. volunteer led seminars and Bible studies), in that it represents the first full-scale attempt to offer religious programs that connect inmate spiritual development with educational, vocational, and life skills training. Realistically, IFI is a "faith-saturated" prison program whose stated mission is to "create and maintain a prison environment that fosters respect for God's law and rights of others, and to encourage the spiritual and moral regeneration of prisoners."[12] According to the IFI promotional material, the program is a "revolutionary, Christ-centered, Bible-based prison program supporting prison inmates through their spiritual and moral transformation beginning while incarcerated and continuing after release."[13]

IFI was launched in April of 1997, at the Carol Vance Unit, a 378 bed prison in Richmond, Texas.[14] The Vance Unit, one of over 100 prisons located throughout Texas, was selected for the site of the InnerChange Freedom Initiative program because of its custody level as a pre-release facility and proximity to the Houston area—the focus of aftercare resources and volunteer recruitment. Only offenders from Houston or surrounding counties are considered for participation in the program.[15] Two-hundred beds in the Vance Unit, or essentially half the facility, have been reserved for participants in the IFI program.[16] The only distinguishing characteristic of the Carol Vance Unit from other pre-release prisons located throughout Texas, is the fact that it is located in the Houston area.

Simply stated, IFI is responsible for inmate programs and TDCJ is responsible for security and custody. Prison Fellowship currently provides IFI with funding to cover the costs for salary and benefits of program staff, costs associated with Bible-based instructional and educational materials for the program, staff and volunteer training materials and expenses.[17] The Texas Department of Criminal Justice covers the security and operating costs of the Vance Unit. Inmate support costs, such as food, medical services and clothing, are also paid for by TDCJ. Together, the Texas Department of Criminal Justice and Prison Fellowship have formed a unique public-private

partnership—one designed to test the proposition that this collaboration could achieve the civic purpose of reducing recidivism and thereby increasing public safety.

Anchored in biblical teaching, life-skills education, and group accountability, IFI is a three-phase program involving prisoners in 16 to 24 months of in-prison biblical programming and 6 to 12 months of aftercare while on parole. Phase I focuses on building a spiritual and moral foundation from which the rest of the program is based. The goal of Phase II is to test the inmate's value system in real-life settings in hopes of preparing him for life after prison. Commonly referred to as aftercare, Phase III is the reentry component of IFI and is designed to help assimilate the inmate back into the community through productive and supportive relationships with family, local churches, and the workplace.

Phase I of IFI lasts 12 months and focuses on rebuilding the inmate's spiritual and moral foundation as well as providing educational and survival skills. A heavy emphasis is placed on: (1) biblical education as well as GED, tutoring, substance abuse prevention, and life skills; (2) work (job assignments are similar to those of other prisoners in the general population at the Vance Unit); (3) support groups designed to increase one's personal faith (Survival Kit, Heart of the Problem, Experiencing God, and Masterlife [18]); (4) support groups for improving relations with family members as well as crime victims; (5) mentoring, and (6) peer groups (Community Bible Study).

Phase I is designed to transform the criminal thinking process and establish a new foundation for growth. Six months into Phase I, IFI participants are supposed to be matched with a mentor. Mentors are Christian men from the Houston community who meet with IFI prisoners one-on-one for a minimum of two hours per week. Rarely do mentors miss these meetings.

Phase II of the IFI program lasts 6 to 12 months and seeks to continue the educational, work, and support group aspect of the program. The main difference in Phase II is that IFI participants are allowed to perform community service work during the day at off-site locations, such as Habitat for Humanity. IFI members in Phase II continue with Christian-based education, Bible study courses, mentoring, and support groups, but with a special emphasis on leadership issues. Since IFI operates under the assumption that the program encourages spiritual growth, it is expected that in Phase II participants will begin to increasingly take on leadership roles within the program.

Evening programs are offered to IFI participants throughout the week with support groups focusing on a different topic each night: Monday night program focuses on Personal Faith, Tuesday night—Mentoring, Wednesday night—Substance Abuse, Thursday night—Family/Crime Victims, Friday night—Community Bible Study. Additionally, intensive spiritual weekend retreats are offered periodically through the auspices of Kairos, a nationally recognized prison ministry.

Phase III of IFI is the aftercare component of the faith-based program and lasts for an additional 6 to 12 months. The mission of the aftercare program is to assist IFI members in their reentry into society by helping with housing and employment referrals, facilitating the mentoring relationship, and making connections between the offender and local church communities that will provide a nurturing environment to continue the former prisoner's spiritual growth. Two full-time IFI aftercare workers currently monitor the progress of well over 300 former prisoners in the greater Houston area. Aftercare staff is involved in recruiting new churches and volunteers to assist in the mentoring of IFI participants, and to help with other critical reentry needs such as housing, transportation, and employment.

IFI made the decision early on that the target of aftercare services would be directed toward those offenders completing at least 16 months of the IFI prison program at the Carol Vance Unit. Therefore, those offenders who do not complete the program, for example, because of an opportunity for early parole, or who are asked to leave the program early by IFI (typically for disciplinary reasons), are not guaranteed reentry assistance from IFI's aftercare workers. The justification for this controversial decision is that IFI wanted to encourage and reward successful behavior (completing the program) with additional assistance beyond the prison walls. Arguably, those offenders most in need of aftercare may well be those who are not receiving aftercare since they did not complete the program. IFI leadership ultimately decided it was more prudent to "invest" already limited aftercare resources in only those program participants who had exhibited the most progress by completing the program; rather than investing in individuals who had not sufficiently progressed in the program.[19]

The 75th Texas Legislature not only directed the Texas Department of Criminal Justice to develop a rehabilitation tier of programs, but also required the Criminal Justice Policy Council (CJPC) to monitor implementation of these programs as well as measure the program outcomes. In particular, the primary focus of the CJPC evaluation would be to examine if these programs, including IFI, were able to reduce recidivism.[20] In addition to documenting outcomes like recidivism, PF felt it vital to commission an independent evaluation that would focus more on the IFI participants and the program itself.[21] The current evaluation, therefore, relies on the reporting of recidivism data and outcomes previously generated by the CJPC, with the IFI program, participants, and program impact, if any, being the focal point of this study.

The research team adopted an evaluation approach that combined both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. The quantitative aspect of the evaluation essentially focused on recidivism outcomes, namely arrest and incarceration of former IFI participants, while the qualitative component relied largely upon observational work and field interviews. This approach helped to document the workings of the faith-based prison program, the spiritual changes in the participants as well as the prison environment, and the experiences of IFI participants following release from prison. The evaluation team was assembled early enough to observe discussions and negotiations between TDCJ and PF at the earliest stages in the development of the IFI program. These observations afforded the research team an inside perspective that has helped to inform the evaluation research.

Selection Criteria for Admission to IFI

Since IFI is a Christian-based program, many have assumed that the program is open only to inmates with a Christian background. This is clearly not the case as inmates from various faith traditions (or no faith tradition) have both applied to and have been selected for participation in the program. Candidates simply must volunteer to participate and recognize that the program is pervasively Christian. In order to be eligible for consideration, inmates within the TDCJ population must be between 16 to 24 months from release on mandatory supervision or parole.[22] Only men are considered for the program and candidates must be able to speak English.[23] Sex offenders are excluded from IFI consideration as are inmates with significant medical problems. Adherence to the sex offender exclusion is strictly enforced, though offenders with fairly pronounced medical problems have been admitted into the program.[24]

The final two criteria (county to which the offender is slated to return following release from prison and custody status) drastically reduced the selection pool and created complications for the IFI program before it could even get started. Eligibility dictated that prisoners must be returning to Houston or an adjacent county. Both TDCJ and PF surmised that it was in the best interest of the future participant, as well as the IFI program, to limit the pool of potential participants to those who were from Houston. Because the Carol Vance Unit is located just outside of Houston, where volunteers, mentors, and aftercare services are based, it was logically expected that

offenders would fare better after release from prison if they were returning to family and other aftercare services in Houston. This criterion alone drastically reduced the size of the potential selection pool.[25]

The last criterion was even more restricting; prisoners had to have a "minimum-out" custody status in order to be considered for the IFI program. "Minimum-out" custody refers to "a designator used to identify those minimum custody offenders who have been approved to work outside the security perimeter with minimal supervision."[26] Minimum custody is reserved for prisoners who have been able to have their custody level reduced over time by exhibiting good institutional behavior or by not violating institutional rules. TDCJ policy stipulates that prisoners cannot work outside of the prison without minimum-out custody status.[27] Pre-release facilities throughout the TDCJ system rely heavily on inmates with minimum-out custody because of the cost savings associated with having them do work for the prison outside of the institution.

Since work and community service is an important feature of the IFI program and participants in Phase II have the opportunity to regularly work in a group outside of the prison in the community or what prisoners call the "free-world," it was critical for IFI to require a minimum-out custody criteria. Prisoners with minimum-in custody status are not allowed to work outside the prison unit.[28] Since prisoners with minimum-in custody levels far out number prisoners with minimum-out custody, there simply was an insufficient pool of eligible prisoners from which to draw. This dilemma caused both TDCJ and PF to make several critical concessions at the outset regarding the IFI selection criteria, namely, to consider prisoners with minimum-in status—a point we will revisit in the next section. To prevent misunderstandings about selection it must also be noted that minimum custody status is not determined by offense severity, rather it is based upon the inmate's institutional track record.

A Matched Design

Initial plans between TDCJ and PF called for sending eligible cohorts of 25 to 35 prisoners every four months to the IFI program. The plans also called for eventually capping the IFI population at 200. These IFI projections certainly seemed reasonable to all the relevant parties; especially considering the total inmate population in TDCJ in 1997 was over 138,000 and climbed to over 151,000 in 2000. The research team proposed and both TDCJ and PF agreed to the process of randomly assigning inmates from the pool of eligible applicants to participation in the IFI program. It was believed that there would be a sufficient selection pool meeting all the criteria and allowing for random assignment to IFI. The control group would be those individuals who applied, met the criteria, were selected for admission, but were randomly assigned to some other pre-release facility.

However, the initial selection process was not yielding enough inmates to fill the 25 to 35 member cohort or group. This obstacle not only made random assignment impossible,[29] it put the entire IFI project in jeopardy. TDCJ subsequently agreed to consider those applicants to IFI who had minimum-in status, if there was a high probability of reducing their custody status to minimum-out during the first phase of the program. Though this concession increased the pool size enough to send full cohorts to the IFI program, it did not, however, allow the luxury of assigning participants randomly to IFI or other pre-release facilities, as virtually every eligible prisoner who met all other selection criteria was sent to the IFI program.

Comparison groups were then selected from the records of inmates released during the evaluation period that met program selection criteria but did not enter the program.[30] As seen in Table 1, a total of 1,754 inmates were identified as the matched comparison group for this study. These inmates met IFI selection criteria but did not

TABLE 1.

IFI and Comparison Group Descriptions

GROUP	DESCRIPTION	POPULATION
IFI Group	Prisoners who met the selection criteria and entered the program between April 1997 and January of 1999, and were released from prison prior to September 1, 2000.	n=177
Match Group	Prisoners selected from the records of inmates released during the evaluation period that met program selection criteria but did not enter the program.	n=1,754
Screened Group	Prisoners selected from the records of inmates released during the evaluation period that met program selection criteria and were screened as eligible but did not volunteer or were not selected for program participation.	n=1,083
Volunteer Group	Prisoners selected from the records of inmates released during the evaluation period that actually volunteered for the IFI program, but did not participate either because they did not have a minimum-out custody classification, their remaining sentence was not between the required length (18-30 months) to be considered, or they were not planning to return to the Houston area following area.	n=560

participate in the program. A second comparison group of 1,083 inmates were screened as eligible for the program but did not volunteer or were not selected for program participation. A third comparison group of 560 inmates actually volunteered for the IFI program, but did not participate, either because they were not classified as minimum-out custody, their remaining sentence length was either too short or too long to be considered, or they were not returning to the Houston area following release.

The comparison groups were matched with IFI participants based on the following characteristics: race, age, offense type, and salient factor risk score.[31] As can be seen in Table 2, the comparison groups are generally similar to those prisoners in the IFI group in regard to race, age, offense, and risk characteristics. This risk score is based on factors associated with recidivism and consequently categorizes offenders into three categories for risk of recidivating. The IFI participants and comparison groups have similar distributions by risk score.

Since none of the comparison groups include prisoners actually entering the program, we decided to identify a fourth comparison group of prisoners actually admitted to IFI, but who received early parole and thus left prison before completing the IFI program. These early releasees make for a more appropriate comparison group since they were actually participants in IFI and removed from the program for strictly external reasons beyond the control of those administering program or those participating in the program. This comparison group will provide another vehicle for estimating if IFI completion is associated with a program effect.

IFI Participants—the Study Group

This study tracks the two-year post-release recidivism rates for those prisoners that entered the IFI program from April of 1997 through January of 1999, and were released from prison prior to September 1, 2000. To allow for a two-year recidivism window or tracking period, IFI participants included in the current study are those who have had the potential to be out of prison for at least two years by September 1, 2002. A total of 177 IFI participants met these requirements and thus form the basis of the evaluation group.

In order to avoid confusion, however, about what it does or does not mean to be part of the study group, it is important to make several observations. First, a two-year recidivism study like the current one actually means

TABLE 2.

Demographic Characteristics of IFI and Comparison Groups

CHARACTERISTICS OF OFFENDERS		COMPARISON GROUPS		
	IFI Participants	Match Group	Screened but Did not Enter	Volunteered but Did not Enter
Race/Ethnicity				
African-American	67%	62%	49%	66%
Hispanic	16%	12%	31%	15%
Anglo	18%	26%	20%	19%
Age Group				
≤35	48%	48%	48%	56%
>35	52%	52%	52%	44%
Offense Type				
Violent	12%	10%	18%	11%
Property	36%	34%	36%	38%
Drug	50%	53%	45%	48%
Risk Score				
High Risk	31%	33%	34%	32%
Medium Risk	54%	50%	50%	52%
Low Risk	15%	17%	17%	17%
Sample Size	177	1,754	1,083	560

that, at a minimum, all offenders in the study have had the opportunity to be on release from prison for at least two years. Second, this does not mean that all 177 were out of prison for two years. Some, in fact, were arrested within days of release and some were incarcerated within several months of release. Conversely, almost half of the evaluation group (n=85) was released from prison prior to September of 1999, and a substantial number of these (n=34) were released before September of 1998, meaning that a significant number of prisoners had the potential to be on release from IFI for as much as three or fours years.

Selection Bias

In the absence of conducting a study with randomly assigned cases to both experimental and control groups, we cannot eliminate all lists of selection bias. Acknowledging that we cannot refute the existence of selection bias, it is important to address a number of the most obvious related concerns.

A common concern raised in comparison studies like the current one, is that those receiving the intervention, in this case, a faith-based prison program, are selected in a way that increases the likelihood of successful outcomes for the study group. One might argue that since the program is "Christ-centered," that Christian prisoners might get preferential treatment in the selection process. Having observed the selection process, and having interviewed hundreds of prisoners eventually selected for the program, the research team saw no evidence to support such a conclusion.

A related concern is that the most devoutly religious prisoners in TDCJ would be the ones most likely to volunteer for the IFI program in the first place. Indeed, the argument goes, these individuals represent the "cream of the correctional crop," those who have already found God or who have been spiritually transformed and rehabilitated before arriving at IFI. If this concern were valid, the logical extension of this criticism is quite interesting. Namely, that if such individuals fare better on parole, it is not due to the IFI intervention, but rather the religious or spiritual change that took place before participation in this faith-based program.[32]

The best response to this concern is that the matched design utilized in this research provides three different comparison groups to the study group. As mentioned earlier, the matched groups look very much like the study group on key factors known to be associated with recidivism. Stated differently, the study group seems to resemble in important ways the matched comparison groups. It can still be argued, however, that these key predictive factors do not control for religious commitment or spirituality. Indeed, inmates volunteering for the program may well be more religious than the matched group, but this would be an invalid criticism of the third comparison group that also volunteered for the program or the fourth comparison group of those who were paroled early.

The research team interviewed many correctional officers, correctional administrators, and prison chaplains throughout TDCJ to learn what they thought about the inmates who would seek to participate in the IFI program. In general, there was skepticism, even among chaplains, about the motivation for participation in the IFI program. Many correctional workers were suspicious of prisoners volunteering for the program and believed they were simply trying to "con" the system and earn an early release on parole.

Interestingly, while chaplains believe there are those prisoners who are quite sincere in their religious or spiritual commitments, and that some of these may well find their way into the program, they were more likely to respond in ways that validated the response of correctional officers. A number of chaplains in TDCJ told us that some of the worst "cons" in the state would certainly be applying for the program. Indicating that such inmates are quick to try every program available in hopes of impressing prison personnel as well as the parole board, and that IFI would simply be the latest gimmick. In fact, one senior chaplain predicted that if the IFI program were to succeed with the kind of inmates it would certainly attract, it would work on any inmate in TDCJ. However, motivation for participation is always the Achilles heel of comparison group designs. The bottom line is that motivation is present and we do not know which way the bias goes.

Graduating from the IFI Program

In the current study, more than sheer length in the IFI program, we were particularly interested in comparing those individuals who had completed the program with those who had not. IFI made the decision that after having completed the three phases of the program a member is eligible to officially "graduate" from the program. Technically speaking, to qualify as a graduate of IFI a participant must: (1) complete 16 months in the IFI program at the Carol Vance Unit;[33] (2) complete 6 or more months in aftercare; (3) hold a job and have been an active member in church for the previous 3 months prior to graduation; and (4) verify that he has satisfactorily completed the aftercare requirements.[34] It is very common for researchers to compare recidivism rates for program completers and non-completers. However, IFI's requirements necessary for being classified a graduate are quite restrictive. When compared to non-graduates, IFI graduates are clearly the beneficiaries of preferential

treatment, on average, for three to six months post-release. We will revisit this problem in the findings section, as well as the likelihood that defining graduates in such a restrictive manner carries the potential for underreporting the actual recidivism rate.

Recidivism studies are based strictly on dates of the specified tracking period; they are not based on the length of program participation. For example, a number of the 177 IFI participants were only in the prison program for a matter of days, some for several weeks, and others went beyond 20 months. This does not indicate that recidivism studies are uninterested in the length of program participation. It simply means that lack of participation, no matter how minor, is not a factor for excluding such subjects from the evaluation group under study. In fact, we will examine whether length in the IFI program is or is not related to rates of recidivism.

Measuring Recidivism

Two commonly used recidivism measures are included in the current study. The first recidivism measure, arrest, is a broader less restrictive measure of recidivism. It is quite possible, for example, for an individual to be arrested and receive no other sanction, or a series of sanctions other than incarceration. The second measure of recidivism utilized in the current study is incarceration. It is a more restrictive measure and is the most often utilized measure of recidivism. Incarceration in the current study is based on the percentage of offenders returning to prison or state jail within two years of release due to a conviction for a new offense or revocation for violating conditions of parole.

Monitoring the Role of Mentoring

IFI was designed to incorporate aftercare as an essential part of program completion. After six months in the IFI program, in general, participants are matched with a church-based mentor from the Houston area. IFI staff believed mentors would play a critical role in the long-term success of program participants. It was hoped that the mentoring relationship that was developed while the offender was still in prison would continue during the difficult months following release from prison. Mentors are supposed to help with as many aspects of prisoner reentry as possible. For example, mentors are encouraged to accompany IFI members when they make regular visits to their parole officer. They are also asked to help with transportation, job referrals, and a host of other issues affecting prisoner reentry. Mentors tend to discuss almost anything the IFI participant wants to discuss. From family matters, to employment and housing, to various struggles they confront during the week, to spiritual issues, mentors and IFI members feel quite comfortable discussing any issue, problem, or obstacle. As stated earlier, however, the matching of mentors did not always happen on time or at all, since a significant number of prisoners were paroled early and before a mentor could be assigned. Surveys of parole officers were conducted in 1999 and 2001 to determine the level of contact between mentors and parole officers and the level of contact between mentors and IFI participants.[35]

Findings presented in Table 3 compare the measures of recidivism between the total sample of IFI participants and each of the three comparison groups. As can be seen, 36.2% of IFI participants were arrested during the two-year period following release. Similarly, 35% of the matched group, 34.9% of the screened group, and 29.3% of the volunteered group were arrested during the two-year follow-up period. Likewise, there is little difference between IFI members (24.3%) and the matched group (20.3%), the screened group (22.3%), and the volunteered group (19.1%) in terms of the percentage of former prisoners who were once again incarcerated in the two-year post-release period.

TABLE 3.

Recidivism Data Among IFI Participants and the Match Group

RECIDIVISM	COMPARISON GROUPS			
	IFI Participants	Match Group	Screened but Did not Enter	Volunteered but Did not Enter
Percent Arrested Within Two Years of Release	36.2% (n=64)	35% (n=614)	34.9% (n=378)	29.3% (n=164)
Percent Incarcerated Within Two Years of Release	24.3% (n=43)	20.3% (n=356)	22.3% (n=242)	19.1% (n=107)
Sample Size	177	1,754	1,083	560

Since IFI was launched in early 1997, representatives of both IFI and PF have maintained that in order for the program to be effective in reducing recidivism, participants would have to complete all three phases of the program. This rationale is based on the premise that each phase of the program builds upon the previous phase. Stated differently, IFI participants will find it difficult to live a crime-free life and survive parole if they do not complete all three phases and graduate from the program. Table 4 documents that 75 of the 177 IFI participants (42%) completed all program phases and graduated from the program, while 102 members (58%) did not complete all three phases of the program. Hispanics are most likely to "graduate" from the program (61%) and African-Americans are least likely to complete all the components of IFI (37%). Prisoners over the age of 35 are more likely than those under 35 to have graduated or completed all three phases of the IFI program

TABLE 4.

Demographic Characteristics of IFI Non-Completers and Completers

CHARACTERISTICS OF OFFENDERS	IFI GROUPS		
	IFI Participants	Percent Completing Program ("Graduate")	Percent Not Completing Program
		42%	58%
Race/Ethnicity			
African-American	67%	37%	63%
Hispanic	16%	61%	39%
Anglo	18%	45%	55%
Age Group			
≤35	48%	35%	65%
>35	52%	52%	48%
Offense Type			
Violent	12%	46%	54%
Property	36%	41%	59%
Drug	50%	42%	58%
Risk Score			
High Risk	31%	42%	58%
Medium Risk	54%	47%	53%
Low Risk	15%	57%	43%
Sample Size	177	75	102

(52% vs. 35% respectively). Inmates with low salient factor risk scores were more likely than those with high salient factor scores to graduate from the program (57% vs. 42%).

Among the 102 who did not graduate from the IFI program, 51 (50%) were released via parole or mandatory release before they could finish all phases of IFI. Early release on parole was a significant problem for several of the first few cohorts or groups entering IFI, as the Texas Parole Board came under pressure in 1998 and 1999 to stabilize the size of the prison population. Not surprisingly, among the first to be paroled early were minimum custody prisoners, including those from IFI. The problem of early release on parole was subsequently minimized after the first several cohorts were admitted into the program. Another 51 prisoners were removed from IFI for the following reasons: 19 for disciplinary purposes, 7 at the request of IFI staff, 1 for medical problems, and 24 at the voluntary request of the applicant.

Does Participation in IFI Reduce Recidivism?

Table 5 presents the recidivism findings comparing IFI participants to various comparison groups. As mentioned earlier, there is no difference between the total IFI sample and the matched group on either measure of recidivism. Simply stated, participation in the IFI program is not related to recidivism reduction. Many of the IFI participants were paroled early by TDCJ and did not have the benefit of staying in the program. As one might expect, program graduates are much less likely than IFI participants who did not complete the program to be arrested within the

TABLE 5.

Results of IFI Texas Two-Year Recidivism Analysis*

	Full Sample (n=1931)		IFI Sample (n=177)		IFI Graduates (n=75)		IFI Non-completers (n=102)	
RECIDIVISM TYPE	(1a) IFI vs. (2a) Match Group		(1b) IFI Graduates vs. (3b) Non-Completers		(1c) < 16 months vs (3c) > 16 months		(1d) <16 months vs (3d) > 16 months	
	(1a)	(2a)	(1b)	(3b)	(1c)	(3c)	(1c)	(3c)
Arrest								
% Arrested	36.2%	35.0%	17.3%	50.0%	15.0%	20.0%	46.5%	68.8%
# Arrested	64	614	13	51	6	7	40	11
Sample Size	177	1,754	75	102	40	35	86	16
Chi-Square	0.09, p = .76		19.98, p < .0001		0.33, p < .5652		2.67, p < .1023	
Incarceration								
% Incarcerated	24.3%	20.3%	8.0%	36.3%	5.0%	11.4%	34.9%	43.8%
# Incarcerated	43	356	6	37	2	4	30	7
Sample Size	177	1,754	75	102	40	35	86	16
Chi-Square	1.57, p = .21		18.79, p < .0001		1.05, p < .3059		0.46, p < .4982	

*Note: All tests used the Pearson X^2 statistic with one degree of freedom for a 2 X 2 table.

two-year tracking period (17.3% vs. 50%). In a similar pattern, IFI graduates are significantly less likely to be incarcerated within two years of release than those IFI members not completing the program (8% vs. 36.3%).

IFI program graduates have significantly lower rates of arrest than the matched group (17.3% vs. 35%), or either of the two comparison groups—the screened group (34.9%), and the volunteered group (29.3%). Similarly, those completing the IFI program have significantly lower rates of incarceration than the matched group (8% vs. 20.3%), as well as the screened group (22.3%), and the volunteered group (19.1%).

The fact that IFI graduates are significantly less likely to be either arrested or incarcerated during the two-year period following release from prison represents initial evidence that program completion of this faith-based initiative is associated with lower rates of recidivism of former prisoners. As noted earlier, it is not unusual to observe 5 to 10% reductions in recidivism for inmates who complete various in-prison treatment programs. The recidivism reductions found in the current two-year post-release study of IFI, are over 17% for arrest, and 12% for incarceration. Though the number of offenders in the current study group is quite small (n=177), the results are nonetheless promising and considerably higher than most reported within the correctional literature.

Knowing that program completion is significantly linked to reductions in recidivism is an important observation. This finding, however, does not by itself reveal if it is program completion or merely the length of time in the program that is most related to recidivism reduction. In order to examine this issue more completely, we specifically focused on length of time in the IFI program for program completers. The findings presented in Table 5 indicate that those participants graduating from IFI with less than 16 months in the program had lower rates of arrest (15.0% vs. 20%) and incarceration (5% vs. 11.4%) than those graduates who remain in the program for 16 months or more. Similarly, non-completers with less than 16 months in the IFI program had lower rates of arrest (46.5% vs. 68%) and incarceration (34.9% vs. 43.8%), than those non-completers with 16 or more months in IFI. Though IFI participants (both completers and non-completers) with less than 16 months in the program have lower recidivism rates, the difference is not statistically significant. More research is needed to examine the intriguing question of

TABLE 6.

Additional Results of IFI Texas Recidivism Analysis*

	18 Month Recidivism Rates for IFI Participants (Excluding first 6 months following release)		24 Month Recidivism Rates for IFI Program Graduates and Non-Completers Paroled Early	
RECIDIVISM TYPE	(1a) IFI Graduates vs. (2a) IFI Non-Completers		(1b) IFI Graduates vs. (2b) IFI Non-Completers–Paroled Early	
	(1a)	(2a)	(1b)	(2b)
Arrest				
% Arrested	16%	42.2%	17.3%	62.7%
# Arrested	12	43	13	32
Sample Size	75	102	75	51
Chi-Square	13.81, $p < .0002$		27.27, $p < .0001$	
Incarceration				
% Incarcerated	8%	34.3%	8%	47.1%
# Incarcerated	6	35	6	25
Sample Size	75	102	75	51
Chi-Square	16.81, $p < .0001$		27.54, $p < .0001$	

*Note: All tests used the Pearson X^2 statistic with one degree of freedom for a 2 X 2 table.

optimum program length. Is it possible that after a certain time period in such an intensive program that there is a point of diminishing or even negative returns? As more program participants go through the program, a larger sample will make it possible to answer this question.

As mentioned earlier, we also decided to examine a fourth comparison group—those IFI participants who were paroled early before they could complete the IFI program. This comparison group is comprised of former prisoners who were not removed from the program for disciplinary reasons and may represent a more suitable comparison group than either of the three listed above. The only possible criticism of this comparison group is that by virtue of the parole board's decision to release them early, this group could be viewed as a prisoners posing less of a recidivism risk than other IFI non-graduates. As can be seen in Table 6, IFI graduates are significantly less likely than the comparison group of IFI non-graduates paroled early, to be either arrested (17.3% vs. 62.7%) or incarcerated (8% vs. 47.1%). Interestingly, the differences in recidivism between IFI graduates and IFI non-graduates leaving the prison early via parole are more dramatic than those found with the other comparison groups.

It is important to remember, however, that program graduates were defined as those who successfully complete the in-prison portion of the program as well as maintaining employment and regular church attendance for three months prior to graduation. For obvious reasons the comparison groups cannot be subjected to the same criteria and this distinction clearly favors the IFI graduates in the recidivism analysis. In other words, the difference in reported rates of recidivism would almost certainly be smaller if the definition of an IFI graduate did not include maintaining employment or regular church attendance for three months prior to graduation. To address this concern we conducted several additional sets of analyses. Since graduates are typically the recipients of resources that non-graduates may not receive during the first six months following release from prison, we reanalyzed the recidivism rates for IFI graduates and non-graduates from month seven through month twenty-four, providing for an 18-month tracking period. Stated differently, if the operationalization of graduates is indeed problematic, one would

TABLE 7.

Results of IFI Texas Two Year Recidivism Analyses*

RECIDIVISM TYPE	Mentor Known to PO vs. Unknown		Mentor Contact (IFI Sample) n=177 Regular vs. Little or No Contact	
	Known	Unknown	Regular	Little
Arrest				
% Arrested	19.8%	29.5%	16.7%	28.5%
# Arrested	18	26	9	35
Sample Size	91	88	54	123
Chi-Square	2.30, p = .13		2.79, p = .09	
Incarceration				
% Incarcerated	7.7%	17.0%	9.3%	14.6%
# Incarcerated	7	15	5	18
Sample Size	91	88	54	123
Chi-Square	3.63, p < .06		0.96, p = .33	

*Note: All tests used the Pearson X^2 statistic with one degree of freedom for a 2 X 2 table.

expect this new analysis to somewhat "level the field" and to substantially reduce the difference in recidivism between IFI graduates and IFI non-graduates. As can be seen in Table 6, however, rates of arrest for graduates and non-graduates during the 18 month tracking period (16% vs. 42.4%), closely resemble those reported for the entire two-year tracking period (17.3 vs. 50%). Likewise, the rates of incarceration for graduates and non-graduates during the 18 month follow-up period (8% vs. 34.3%) are almost identical to those found in the two-year tracking period (8% vs. 36.3%). Though the evaluation team still believes that IFI's definition of what it takes to be a program graduate is too restrictive, these additional analyses reduce somewhat our concern that the IFI graduate classification significantly skews the findings in favor of those IFI participants who complete the entire program.

Mentoring and Aftercare

After release from prison, IFI participants continue on parole in Phase III of the program for another 6 to 12 months. During this aftercare phase of the IFI program, it is expected that IFI participants, like any other offender released from prison, will meet regularly with their parole officer. What is different, however, is that IFI mentors are also encouraged to attend these meetings, especially during the critical weeks and months following release from prison. As can be seen in Table 7, when comparing those cases where the mentor was known to the parole officer versus those cases where the mentor was not known to the parole officer, the IFI participant was less likely to be arrested (19.8% vs. 29.5% respectively) or incarcerated (7.7% vs. 17% respectively). Further, if the parole officer had documented regular contact versus little or no contact between the mentor and the IFI participant, then the IFI member was also less likely to be arrested (16.7% vs. 28.5%) or incarcerated (9.3% vs. 14.6% respectively).

To summarize, the analysis yields the following recidivism findings: (1) There is no statistical difference between the total sample of IFI prisoners and the matched group on either measure of recidivism during the two-year tracking period; (2) IFI program graduates were significantly less likely than the matched group to be arrested (17.3% vs. 35%) during the two-year post-release period; (3) IFI program graduates were significantly less likely than the matched group to be incarcerated (8% vs. 20.3%) during the two-year follow-up period; and (4) Mentor contact is associated with lower rates of recidivism.

Why Do IFI Graduates Have Lower Recidivism Rates?

As previously demonstrated, we know that completing the IFI program is significantly linked to lower rates of arrest and incarceration during the two-year study period following release from prison. Knowing that recidivism rates are lower is obviously important, but it does not provide an answer to the rather obvious question of why recidivism in the IFI study group is significantly lower than the matched group. In this section we rely upon qualitative methods employed throughout the study, in order to shed light on this important question.

We begin by providing a qualitative description of the IFI program in hopes that the reader will understand more clearly the workings and nature of the program. The description to follow is based on hundreds of hours of observational work as well as interviews with relevant prisoners, correctional staff, IFI staff, volunteers, mentors, and others. The description of IFI is followed by a presentation of interview data broken down into observations of five major themes of spiritual transformation. The qualitative findings not only reveal important insights into the spiritual transformation and growth of IFI members, but provide narratives that help to show how spiritual development parallels and enhances the process of rehabilitation.

Describing the IFI Environment

In general, the environment of the IFI program has been and continues to be extremely open, supportive, upbeat, friendly, and nurturing. Days begin early and end late. In addition to daily work details typically associated with most prisons, inmates in IFI are expected to participate daily in classes (offered throughout the day and evening), worship and devotional times. IFI participants are given homework and are expected to do a considerable amount of reading outside of classes. Many get up as early as 4:30 in the morning to either complete class assignments or to do their own personal Bible study, often referred to as their daily "quiet time." Lights are usually out at 10:00 pm. Unlike the general population inmates, IFI participants do not have televisions in their living areas. This was an area of contention for some within IFI, at least initially, but many have stated that the program is so demanding, there would not be enough time to watch television even if it were allowed.

The research team has visited the program and has observed over the last six years consistency a number of program traits that many experts in the correctional treatment arena would deem essential for creating an environment that fosters rehabilitation. It is not uncommon to see inmates display affection toward each other, with the staff, and with volunteers that would seem reminiscent of an extended family gathering or reunion. "Brotherly hugs" are not only common they are essentially a basic feature of the program. IFI participants were routinely heard stating to volunteers or other first-time visitors to the program, "hey man, it's time to hug a thug."

Various obstacles had to be addressed to get the program launched and running smoothly. These include, for example, curriculum development, staff turnover, the lack of meeting space and the early parole of a significant number of IFI participants. These problems are not uncommon to implementation of most new programs within a correctional setting. Though each of the obstacles were seen at the time to be serious impediments to the IFI program, they did not in the eyes of the evaluation team seem to translate into a reduction in the morale of staff or the delivery of services to IFI participants. Though comments from IFI participants about the program tended to be positive, this does not mean that the program was without criticism as is obvious from the following statements of four IFI participants.

They don't let us watch television. They alter the program schedule with little or no notice. The IFI program director is a dictator trying to please others. I don't like the fact the program is making me stay in prison longer.

You know it is Bible study on top of Bible study. The schedule is too packed. Too many people are throwing too many things at us, and it makes me pull back and kind of rebel when they are trying to force their views on us. The more I pull back, the less I'm going to get out of the program.

Drop-slips (misconduct reports) are starting to cause confusion in the program. They are nitpicky. We don't do drop slips in the penitentiary. The program has some faults. You can't expect to change the penitentiary mentality over night.

The schedule is too tough. I get up at 4:00 am and go to bed at 9:00 pm. There isn't enough time to get all the reading done. I need more time.

Over the first year or so of its existence, the IFI program began to take on the identity of a "church community" within the confines of the prison. By design, IFI leadership and staff sought to create an environment that draws upon the best features of a church setting. Some IFI members are selected to assume roles of leadership not unlike those of deacons or elders referred to in scripture. Additionally, special religious meetings with outside speakers are a regular feature of IFI. Often referred to as "revival services" by IFI members and staff alike, feedback from participants who have attended was almost always positive. In particular, we have talked to inmates from non-protestant backgrounds about these meetings, and have heard similar reports.

The InnerChange staff really seem to care about us. I'm Catholic and they haven't tried to force me to become a Protestant. If people want to get something out of the program they will.

For at least the first year there was a concerted effort to largely segregate IFI members from the general prison population. Prison Fellowship believed very strongly that in order to create a healthy spiritual climate in the prison, you would need to keep these two prison populations apart. In other words, there was concern that if allowed to mingle, the general population inmates would hinder if not contaminate the spiritual progress being made with participants in the IFI program. TDCJ was more than happy to comply with this request, as they too felt this concern was a valid one.

Before too long, however, IFI and TDCJ had to reconsider the practice of segregating IFI inmates from the general population. IFI members began asking if they could interact with general population inmates. Conversely, many general population inmates, though initially suspicious of the program, began inquiring about potential involvement

in the program. Many within IFI were eager to share their new found faith, while general population inmates were more than a little curious about the special programs that regularly took place within IFI. At the request of IFI, TDCJ agreed that the restriction to keep the two populations segregated at all times would be removed. Consequently, where possible, there has been an effort not to deprive general population inmates from some of the spiritual components of the program. This has afforded the opportunity for some IFI inmates to "witness" (i.e. to share their faith) to general population inmates, and to even involve some of them in Bible studies independent of those taking place within IFI. The following quote from a prisoner in the general population captures the way many perceive the IFI program:

> *They (IFI members) have an advantage over us. They have something to fall back on that we don't have. We have a big X on our back when we walk out into the free world… Their chance is zero to come back if they stay with it. I wish I could be in it. I've seen a change in a bunch of them. Several are playing a game, but most of them are for real. I'm a five-time loser—I know I need help to stay out. We all need the InnerChange program.*
>
> (General Population Inmate)

The environment of the IFI program is bolstered by the ongoing presence of volunteers, facilitators and mentors. Without exception, IFI participants have indicated the critical impact volunteers have made in their lives. The sincerity and time commitment of volunteers has simply overwhelmed program participants. Some inmates have indicated that the presence and dedication of the volunteers has had the effect of shattering stereotypes they have held of free-world people (i.e. non-prisoners). These stereotypes often carry views of people in society as harsh, punitive, racist, and self-serving individuals.

Interviews with various members of the custodial staff at the Carol Vance Unit confirm that IFI participants are not only doing well, but that the inmates and the IFI program seem to be influencing the entire prison.

> *I have been here since InnerChange started. Some people have it and some don't. You can see the difference. Some of them just come here to get close to home. Instead they get close to God… I would say that 85 to 90 percent of those who are gone, have left out of here with a completely different perspective. I have noticed that they are even trying to change their families… They learn to take blame for themselves; to face reality. I have heard them say 'I brought myself here and I need to accept responsibility.' That's not typical.*
>
> (Correctional Officer, 5 years with TDCJ)

> *Many of the general population inmates envy the InnerChange inmates because of the special classes, the mentors, the volunteers, and the air-conditioning (IFI program rooms are air conditioned). The general population inmates can't believe all the free-world people that come in here. All the time and attention they (mentors/volunteers) give, and the snacks and refreshments they bring. It's easy to see why general pop inmates would envy InnerChange inmates… It's interesting though, I've seen the InnerChange inmates share the food given to them with the general population inmates. I think that has really won over these other prisoners.*
>
> (Correctional Officer, 3 years with TDCJ)

The difference between InnerChange and for example, the drug treatment programs I have observed over the years, is the family and community emphasis of InnerChange. There's a lot of involvement from the outside. And the free-world people are seeing what we're seeing—change. It's a great program. It's intensive. I expect them (InnerChange inmates) to do a lot better than general population inmates when they are released… The program is so open now, it is beginning to help the general population. People thought there would be a conflict between the two; instead, the general population wants it. Some of these special programs are also open to the general population and they are really helping—it's kind of a "spill-over" effect. General population inmates are attending various activities and programs and are asking, "How can I get in?" In fact, as an example of this spill-over, the general population has organized an official Bible study of their own… What I would like to see happen, is for InnerChange to take over the entire Unit. I'd say that 80 percent of correctional officers would say that the InnerChange program is legitimate (not a con). I've interviewed a lot of them (IFI members) and some of them told me they were in it for the free ride, but now God has changed them and is even changing their families. You know prisons often times help create monsters. InnerChange gives hope. These guys can truthfully say that they have a chance to make it.

(Major, 18 years with TDCJ)

Numerous observations and interviews based on visits to the program during day and evening hours as well as aftercare visits, confirmed a growing confidence among staff and prisoners alike in the effectiveness of the program. Conversations that have taken place and observations that have been made of all IFI staff reveal that the staff remain very positive about the program, their IFI colleagues, and in general, the progress of the inmates in the program.

Spiritual Transformation—A Developmental Process

A paramount goal of IFI is to utilize a biblically-based program[36] with an overt emphasis on spiritual growth and moral development. The expectation is that this will substantially enhance achieving the secular and correctional goal of rehabilitation. As inmates proceed through the IFI program, therefore, we should expect to observe changes in attitude and behavior to be evident among program participants and those who interact with them.

A key evaluation goal, then, was attempting to gauge the spiritual development of IFI participants. Even though most observers of IFI are ultimately interested in only the outcome of recidivism, it is critical to have some sense of the spiritual transformation among inmates as they proceed through the program.

Since the inception of IFI, the evaluation team has focused on observations of program members in various settings such as classes, free-time, inmate-mentor sessions, and during individual and group devotionals (e.g. Bible study, prayer, or personal reflection). Direct discussions and interviews with individual IFI members as well as interaction and dialogue in various group settings have also provided valuable feedback to the evaluation team. Finally, interviews with program staff and volunteers have provided additional insights into the spiritual progress or growth of these members over time.

Augmenting our ongoing observational efforts, we conducted unstructured interviews with IFI members from different groups and different stages within the program. Rather than having inmates respond to a structured questionnaire with fixed responses, the interviews were intentionally unstructured since the intent was to provide the

least threatening environment for the respondent, in hopes they would respond candidly about their experiences. IFI participants were simply asked to share any thoughts they had about the program or their experience in the program. Though responses covered a number of different topics, inmates overwhelmingly offered remarks that dealt with their spiritual transformation. Narratives of IFI members reveal five spiritual transformation themes: (1) I'm not who I used to be; (2) spiritual growth; (3) God versus the prison code; (4) positive outlook on life; and (5) the need to give back to society. To follow is a presentation of extracted excerpts from a sample of these interviews.

Spiritual Transformation Theme 1: *I'm Not Who I Used to Be*

IFI participants consistently verbalized themes indicating they are thankful to have the opportunity to start their life over again. One of the common statements expressed by IFI participants was that "I'm not who I used to be" (54% of the 125 recorded interviews contained statements reflecting this theme). Their new found faith or the rediscovery of a lost faith from their childhood has made it possible to begin not just a new life, but a life where they are genuinely loved by God and others and can view themselves as good people who have been forgiven for their past mistakes. They have been given another chance or a new lease on life. Their current positive self-accounts represent a dramatic departure from their often bleak past. According to research on British offenders, Shadd Maruna states this process of "willful, cognitive distortion" helps offenders desist from crime and to "make good" with their lives.[37] For those who have been in prison before, maybe multiple times, this time they feel like they are on a mission as they prepare to leave prison. They now have a sense of meaning and purpose they have not known before. For many, there was a Christian conversion experience in IFI that marked a turning point in their life. A spiritual awakening or reawakening that was foundational for them.[38]

> *Before InnerChange, I was kind of at a fork in the road, not knowing which way to go. I had a bad attitude and a hard time getting along with people. I used to get in fights all the time. I remember telling myself I didn't want to live like this anymore and I prayed for God to take control and I gave my heart to the Lord. I'm beginning to control my thoughts and my anger. I'm beginning to find peace for the first time. Something that used to get me into a fight, I will now laugh at. I don't curse anymore. Instead I try to share God with people. It's nice to hear positive things being said about me for the first time in my life. When someone tried to help me before, I would deny it. I didn't think anyone cared—I see now they really do.* (Len)

> *The program has awakened me. It has birthed a new me. It has made me who I am. I'm learning to get along with others and to understand why people do what they do. I am learning more by listening. IFI has made me feel like I am somebody and that I have potential. I have a whole lot more discipline and self-control than before. Being able to be obedient to not just authority, but to everyone. And I'm learning to control my anger. Things out of my control have always bothered me. I struggled with this everyday. Change is not overnight and it's not easy to change, but God is changing me. God has shown me what I used to be about and what I'm about now.* (Gale)

I have discovered a lot of flaws in myself in the last nine months—flaws in myself, not the InnerChange program. I used to always have a lot of anger, but things just don't upset me like they used to, you know. Now I'm trying to turn spiritual knowledge into wisdom. (Stan)

Previous research on active offenders (persisters) as well as inactive offenders (desisters) has found that the differences between the two groups were partly related to the way they defined themselves within their social worlds. Maruna calls this process "rebiographing," and suggests that in order for chronic offenders to refrain from crime, they need to make sense of their past. In rewriting the narratives of their lives, desisting offenders often look to instances in their pasts when their "real" selves showed and when respected members of conventional society recognized their talents and good qualities. Eventually, Maruna argues, these narratives become the building blocks of reform and desistance from crime. Without this rebiographing, or rewriting of one's now reformed identity the ex-offender will always be an ex-offender.

The experiences of IFI members seem to very much resonate with the experiences Maruna describes for crime desisters. In the current study, however, it would seem more accurate to refer to this process as "spiritual rebiographing." In fact, IFI members are taught that spiritually speaking, they are new creations, that God has given them a new identity. Past behaviors are not something they have to deny or blame on someone or something else, it is simply something tied to the "old" person they used to be. The new person they have become is the focus of the present and future. The emergence of the new self allows the IFI member to make sense of his past, while looking forward to the future.

In order to live crime-free lives they must receive affirmation and validation of the truthfulness of their claim to have changed. Ceremonies and testimonials of respected individuals acknowledging the change in the desister are critical to the strengthening of this new identity and can be a real turning point in societal reintegration. Especially at the early stages, they need outside validation to convince themselves of the authenticity of their conversion. While affirmation from just about anyone helps, those from public officials are the most compelling. Indeed, both Maruna and Wexler[39] believe that graduation ceremonies and other "redemption rituals" should be commonly used in the criminal justice system. These public ceremonies reinforce and contribute to the desister's ability to rebiography their past. IFI not only encourages regular testimonials, they recognize through various public ceremonies the accomplishments of IFI members.

Spiritual Transformation Theme 2: *Spiritual Growth*

When IFI participants were asked to share whatever was on their mind, the most common response dealt with their spiritual growth. Indeed, 69% of those interviewed indicated that they had grown spiritually as a result of participation in IFI. They spoke of their life in terms of a spiritual journey, a journey that had benefited from important turning points or events that had a profoundly positive impact. For some, the journey was just beginning, for others it was a long journey but with new found direction. For most, it was a journey that was very much a work in progress. Spiritual growth, then, was something prisoners within IFI very much viewed as a developmental process that was well underway, but was far from where it needed to be. In order to transform their deviant histories into the present good, desisters employ "redemption scripts."[40] This process establishes the goodness of the individual and marks the emergence of the desisting self.

I have learned what life is about since being here. I have learned that life is about helping others to grow like I'm growing. I have found peace for the first time. The change came over me when I saw that other people loved me. Then I wanted to do the same to others. That's when my whole life began turning around. (Lawrence)

I'm becoming stronger in the word of God. You're more into God type activities here. Instead of a little religion here or there—you're surrounded by it. The program builds your knowledge and hopes. One can never quit growing and I know I have a long way to go. Church will be a very important part of my life when I get out. My mentor will be a help to me too. (Dan)

I had to go to church as a kid. I was in the choir too. I quoted scripture, but when I got older I phased out of church. Now, I'm a Muslim. I have the fear of God in me. I'm anxious to get out of here and tell people about God's Word. Some laugh at Islam out of ignorance—I just laugh it off. I'm glad to go through this program. It has been uplifting and mind awakening. I didn't know how to apply things to my life before. If you stay around something positive long enough, it will rub off on you. And that's what has happened here. It's a spiritual thing. (Bernie)

For the first time I have respect for others. I even try to encourage others, and pray for them. The books we use here and the Bible have really helped. Praying has helped. When I stumble, now I repent. When I get out of here, the church is going to be a big part of my life. (Juan)

Spiritual Transformation Theme 3: *God Versus the Prison Code*

We know from the corrections literature that inmates are profoundly influenced by a unique prison subculture. The existence and adopting of a distinctive prison culture, what has been referred to as "prisonization" or as some of the IFI members called it, the "penitentiary mentality" or "prison code" is widely acknowledged by those who live and work in prisons.[41] The existence of gangs, other racially motivated groups, violence, sexual aggression, and other antisocial behavior represent just some of the widely known aspects of the prison culture. There are others. Displays of machismo are often considered acceptable—showing love, affection, or compassion, can be viewed as signs of weakness and are not acceptable. The prison culture provides fertile ground for the breeding of a mentality that supports the notion of rehabilitation or reform as something very much needed by the prison—not the prisoner. The issue of trust, or more precisely the lack of trust, is a central feature of the prison code. For example, a new prisoner learns very quickly that outside a select group of prisoners, inmates should not trust other people. This is especially true when referring to prison staff or others who work in or represent some aspect of the criminal justice system.

Further, the prospect of "opening-up" or becoming transparent about one's needs, or shortcomings—a major feature of the IFI program, can be problematic because it not only shows weakness, but it may require one to trust in something or someone else—a prospect that may well run counter to the prison code.

Many correctional experts agree that one of the biggest obstacles to more regularly achieving successful outcomes in various treatment programs is the inability to counteract the deleterious effects of the prison culture. At the core of IFI is the premise that a faith-based program will eventually erode the negative or harmful tendencies of the

"prison code" or "penitentiary mentality." In essence, IFI's approach is based on the assumption that the prisoner's spiritual transformation and spiritual growth will help to provide an antidote to the present prison subculture. Thus a spiritually transformed prisoner will be more likely to choose a prosocial response over an antisocial response when faced with a moral dilemma. The IFI program is based on the belief that spiritually transformed prisoners will, in fact, accept good over evil, or God over the prison code.

How does spirituality counteract the influence of the prison culture? A prime example within IFI is the issue of inmates filing "drop-slips" (misconduct reports) on other inmates. The "penitentiary mentality" says you never snitch on another inmate. Prisoners are supposed to mind their own business. For inmates who have been in prison multiple times (and many in IFI have) this is a deeply-embedded rule. However, the philosophy of IFI is just the opposite of that promoted via the prison code. Namely, IFI members are taught they have the responsibility to hold each other accountable for various kinds of rule infractions. The issue of trust, therefore, is something that does not come easy for many inmates, since "the code" teaches otherwise—especially when and where staff is concerned. Particularly among the newest IFI members, there is still the firmly held belief that "snitching" on another inmate, regardless of the situation, violates the code. However, among members who have been in the program for a longer period of time, they are better able to deal with the tension between these two extremes, often times with faith trumping the code. We found that in 34% of our interviews, statements were made indicating an offender's decision to respond in a way that prioritized faith or spirituality rather than the prison code. The following are excerpts that capture the struggle between following one's faith or the prison code.

> *I didn't trust anyone before I came here. I thought I knew everything, that I had all the answers. Now I know I don't have anything figured out. And at the same time I'm at peace today with myself. It's changed how I view the world. I'm learning to have more patience. I have found that when I humble myself, I get closer to these guys.* (Lowell)

> *God is pulling everything back together. I know God's in control. I have to deal with the inmate mentality here, where guys don't want to be confronted about sinful behavior… I now value accountability. I think this is where Christians blow it. They don't want to correct someone else even though they know they're in sin.* (Ricky)

> *The prison system says that you must play tough. But that's not real. Confession is good for you according to the Bible. I've come to realize that the inmate code is really nothing but a facade. I can be myself now.* (Neal)

Spiritual Transformation Theme 4: *Positive Outlook on Life*

The longer IFI participants are in the program, the more positive their outlook on life, their current situation, and their future prospects become. Many tend to see the "silver lining" even when they are the recipients of bad news. They are delighted about their new life, who they have become, and what the future now holds for them. Because many now believe that they are God's children and that God is in control of everything, they report having developed a new confidence they have not known before. They possess an assurance that they are accepted and loved by God and draw peace from the belief that one day they will reside with God in heaven. Interviews revealed that 32% of

respondents viewed their circumstances positively. Noted criminologists Robert Sampson and John Laub, who work on factors that contribute to the desistance of crime, discuss "transformative action" and "subjective reconstruction of the self," concepts they found to be quite common among people who develop new commitments and find purpose and meaning in life and consequently stay out of trouble.[42]

Along the same line, Maruna found that persisters had a much more pessimistic or fatalistic outlook on life and that they tended to attribute this feeling of doom and gloom to a lack of opportunities and hardships stemming from various forms of past social and economic disadvantage. Desisters, on the other hand, like many IFI participants, had a much more positive outlook on life.

> *I was just fortunate to get into the program. Before the program I didn't pray, I didn't read the Bible, and I didn't know God. In March of 1997, I prayed in my cell and gave my life to Christ… You know, I just found out that I won't get out in February as planned, but instead November. But that's okay because God wants me to stay in this program longer.* (Stuart)

> *I'm a stronger believer in God, I have grown in patience, I have a peace of mind that I never had in the world. I have joy. I stopped asking God for parole. Whenever He wants me out is OK, I'm willing to stay in prison another year. My father passed while I was here, but this program has helped me deal with his death.* (Phil)

> *You know I was so disappointed to get a serve-all (instead of early parole) because it was going to put me back an extra six months, but all-in-all I really do think it has been worth it. During that time my confidence has really been boosted-up and it has forced me to get up in front of people—its been great. The extra time here has helped me to learn to lean on God, because I know I can't make it by myself.* (Gene)

Spiritual Transformation Theme 5: *The Need to Give Back to Society*

In order to rationalize their situation, inmates commonly state that they are in prison not because they deserve to be, but because the criminal justice system is either unfair or corrupt all together. Their incarceration, therefore, can be viewed as an indictment on society rather than on them personally. It is the system, many prisoners have contended, that is in need of reform and rehabilitation.

Conversely, instead of feeling that society owes them, many IFI participants feel an overwhelming need to give back to society and the community when they get out of prison. Many view themselves as people who were down-and-out until someone cared enough to help them up. Now that they have turned their lives around and have a new and positive identity, they express an unusual sense of gratitude for this new life and they feel compelled to give back to a society that they have never helped before. They feel an overwhelming desire, if not obligation, to make a positive contribution to the community. They believe their experiences of going "to hell and back" especially qualify them to reach out and help others not to make the same mistakes they have made.

> *I've always believed in God. But I got away from God as I got into my teens. This program has brought me back to my Christian roots. My feeling and thinking is different from when I got here. I see a big change in myself,*

I don't see things the way I used to. I used to be a loner, and didn't care about much else. I'm finding myself being more sociable and trying to help others. That wasn't true of me before I got to InnerChange. Helping others find purpose in their life through God, has been a real blessing. (Lou)

I was a halfway atheist when I came into the program. I came here just to get close to home (Houston), I didn't come here for spiritual reasons. But about two months ago I gave my heart to Jesus. Everything has changed since then. I know He's real. I don't want the classes to end now. If this program can help somebody like me, it can help anybody. I'm from the streets. But I know now that God is real…I want to share my testimony with other TDCJ cellmates I have had before I came here, because I wasn't a Christian then. (Harold)

I wish everybody could go through InnerChange. I came to the program to learn about the Bible. It has taught me that prayer is important. I wish my dad could go through InnerChange. He's serving 25 years in prison… I didn't come up in a spiritual life, but God has done a real work in my life since coming here. Sharing my faith with my family is important to me. Now I have a better relationship with my family too. (Kerry)

The Role of Spiritual Transformation in Prisoner Rehabilitation

Several observations from these interviews are worth noting. In general, comments tended to be very positive and supportive of the program. Almost without exception, members indicated they have grown spiritually since coming to IFI. Interestingly, although many indicated they were Christians and had been involved in chaplaincy (i.e. religious programs in prison) prior to IFI, a significant number indicated that they had not experienced a spiritual transformation until IFI. This is a very important point that may be consistent with Prison Fellowship's belief that the level or intensity of involvement is the critical factor in the spiritual transformation of prisoners. Many of these inmates indicated that they had become believers during their youth, but that they quickly followed a different path after leaving church during adolescence. Further, they indicated that the IFI program had brought them back to God and caused them to reevaluate their lives.

Focus groups with prisoners entering IFI seem to support Prison Fellowship's contention that length of time in the program would be associated with spiritual growth. Interviews revealed that the newest members were much more likely to respond negatively to the program. A common set of criticisms consistently emerged from some of the new IFI participants. For example, the feeling that the environment at InnerChange is negative, resulting from accountability conflicts, favoritism displayed by staff, and staff selection of leadership council members. The "leaders" were referred to as "show ponies" or "poster boys" as well as other members that new IFI participants claimed were "faking it." After having been in the program for several months, however, focus groups revealed that most members thought the environment was positive and that there were many opportunities for change at InnerChange. Most realized that positive and negative aspects exist but the newest program participants seem to be most likely to dwell on the more restrictive aspects of the IFI environment. The newest groups had much more of a negative assessment of IFI staff. New members complained not only about staff favoritism, but what they perceived as the constant changing of IFI rules. On the other hand, members who had been in the program for at least three months, generally reported having positive experiences with the staff and claimed that IFI staff affirmed and supported them. Finally,

the members diverged regarding their views on the correctional officers. IFI members new to the program often felt that correctional officers and other TDCJ staff were harsh or tried to provoke them. IFI members with more time in the program felt that TDCJ staff tended to treat them in a more positive way than correctional staff in other prisons where they had served time. These observations are consistent with a point made earlier, namely, that spiritual transformation tends to be a developmental process.

Each of the five spiritual transformation themes discussed above not only correspond to but can be seen as providing the impetus for various characteristics and attributes often associated with the process of rehabilitation.

Theme 1 *I'm not who I used to be,* is important because it carries a recognition on the part of the offender that their previous behavior was justifiably unacceptable to society. In fact, the person they have become actually condemns their previous behavior because the new person now appreciates and promotes prosocial rather than antisocial behavior.

Theme 2 *Spiritual growth,* is important because it recognizes that the person is very much a work-in-progress. While many report they have made a great deal of progress in putting their life back together, most acknowledge they still have a long way to go. Importantly, they are quite surprised and encouraged about their own spiritual growth, and this progress is confirmed and validated by staff, volunteers, and mentors—further strengthening their resolve to continue this path of spiritual development. Particular events like being "born again" or the recognition that God and others actually love and care for them appear to be critically important turning points in their spiritual development.

Theme 3 *God versus the prison code,* is particularly significant since many correctional staff concede that the penitentiary mentality or prison code is so pervasive and strong as to be beyond the possibility of reclaiming. As stated earlier, the prison code runs counter to the various components of offender rehabilitation programs. To be able to successfully oppose or even reverse the influence of the prison code is a significant achievement. We have found evidence in this research that would suggest that the IFI environment successfully opposed if not reversed the prison environment at the Vance Unit.

Theme 4 *Positive outlook on life,* is important because it reflects a paradigm shift for many offenders typified by hope and purpose. Instead of viewing their life in a fatalistic way, where offenders might relapse or decide to commit crime due to a minor setback with a friend, family member, or employer, those with a positive outlook are much more likely to be resilient in the face of adversity during their societal reentry. Believing that their life now has meaning and knowing that they are loved and accepted by God and others, they are much more likely to view their life and circumstances in an upbeat rather than negative or hopeless way.

Theme 5 *The need to give back to society,* is something many seemed to be overwhelmed by. They simply report feeling compelled to give back, to make a contribution to society in a way that improves the situation of others, especially others who come from similar backgrounds and experiences as their own. In sum, all five spiritual transformation themes reflect behavior and attitudes consistent with those one would hope for in achieving offender rehabilitation.

In general, interviews of IFI participants offer subjective evidence that many of the members are progressing spiritually. In free-flowing conversation, inmates responded in ways that indicated their lives were changing through involvement in the IFI program.

Mentors Matter But It's Hard To Do

As we have indicated previously, the role of mentors in the vulnerable period following release from prison is absolutely critical. Focus groups with IFI participants who have been released from the program confirm the struggles faced by former prisoners as well as the centrality of mentors and spiritual growth in surviving reentry.

The men shared how the IFI program has helped them in a number of ways—from bringing them to salvation, to preparing them for the outside, to resolving their questions about God. The group shared that they had been transformed during their time in the IFI program and that the spiritual growth has been invaluable to them on the outside. Overwhelmingly, the men shared how, through InnerChange, they have discovered a new way to live and a new way to look at things. The program has also helped some men to realize that people on the outside do care about them, rather than believing that society as a whole has rejected them. Some of the releasees said that they learned how to be a leader at IFI, how to be held accountable, and even accept responsibility for their words and deeds. These attributes seemed to be helpful during the difficult transition back into society.

IFI releasees do not see much of each other aside from the mandated support group meetings. For most, these meetings are beneficial times of sharing trials and encouraging one another. Without exception the parolees indicated that they miss the fellowship they enjoyed with the others while in prison and wished it were possible to get together more often. This is where the significance of mentors becomes magnified. Without the constant support from others in the program, the mentoring relationship, if it is active and productive, can make the difference toward successful reintegration.

Releasees indicated that the time immediately following release from prison is a honeymoon of sorts for many of the men. But this honeymoon period dissipates as trials and responsibilities arrive, thus making it more difficult to keep God as a priority in their life. Such trials include temptations from old friends, fatigue, employment difficulties, transportation problems, adjustments to a new environment (e.g., finding their way around again), "little things," impatience, relational issues with family members and girlfriends, and financial struggles.

To follow are excerpts of conversations with IFI mentors that reflect a wide range of perspectives, both positive and negative, on the significance of mentoring in a post-release environment.

BJ: How's the mentoring going with D?

Tim: *D is doing fine. He joined the church the second Sunday of July. I'm the pastor of this church. D's mother, brother, and sister are all members and attend regularly. D has been faithful to the church since his release. I have visited his home on two occasions and have visited his parole officer once or twice as well. And obviously we see each other at church too. I have always wanted to do prison ministry but never had the opportunity until InnerChange. Rev. B approached me and I was very impressed with the prospects of working with the InnerChange program. The church has been very supportive of D; some know he's been in prison and some don't. On Tuesday nights I also mentor another IFI member at the prison, and have been doing this for the last two months. I really thank God for the opportunity to be part—I wish I could do more.*

BJ: Have you been able to meet regularly with S since he's been out?

Gil: *I live in Rosenberg and S lives on the other side of Houston. Therefore, we have not been connecting. I think he is doing fine, but it is just difficult to connect when you are geographically so far apart.*

BJ: I understand that you and J have not been meeting regularly?

Kim: *J and I have not interacted that much and I cannot say for sure how well he is doing. I contacted J by phone several times and I have made one home visit. J is attending a different church now, and that has made it certainly less convenient for us to see each other. The real problem is that I was assigned to J after he left prison and we never had a chance to bond at InnerChange. He has made several calls to me and clearly has not tried to avoid me, I just think it is more difficult when you don't have that relationship established.*

BJ: What have you observed since M's release a year ago?

Joe: *M has continued to grow spiritually. We have, like a list of scriptures that we keep track of and share. If he has questions, you know, we can have a good exchange and good dialogue as we discuss it, because I don't have all the answers. Even though I'm there to teach him, I have tried to stress to him that he has got to get to know the word of God for himself. What I noticed was, that he really took that to heart and started to study. There were times when I would come in, and of course, I would have my notes and I was prepared and I would go on into a discussion and kind of lead our talk and quite often I found he would take the discussion over and then he would really start teaching me the way, you know, just really a blessing. So I watched him from the inception of our talking and there was a little bit of initial resistance, but as we continued to meet and started to pray. I'd say, after the first 90 days I really started to see that transformation, that change in him. More of a shift toward his really getting into the Word (Bible) and starting to grow.*

BJ: How often do you see N now?

Sam: *We talk anywhere from 3 to 4 times a week and we see each other at least once per week.*

BJ: How did you get involved in this whole InnerChange thing?

Sam: *I'm a minister and I got involved in prison ministry in the past when I lived in Dallas and I really enjoyed it. When I moved to Houston, the church I joined really wasn't involved in prison ministry, but Rev. B came to our church and did a presentation on InnerChange. He mentioned too that they were looking for mentors for the program because that's part of what they do—identifying mentors who teach and have a spiritual walk and are interested in being involved in a biblical-based mentoring program with inmates. After he and I talked a little, he mentioned InnerChange had a couple of guys that we need mentors for and he mentioned the names. And it turns out that I knew N because I had gone to school with N's brother. He and I grew up together. I told Rev. B that 'I knew this guy' and he said, 'well great, that's even better because we like to have mentors from the area that they are going to go back into.' As it turns out, N's church and my church are right around the corner from each other. So it all worked out great, that fact that I could work with a person that I know, even made me want to do it more so.*

Based on interviews held with mentors and IFI participants, the pattern of the mentoring typically follows two different paths. First, almost all the mentors said that the two men hit it off during the Tuesday night sessions at the prison. They talked together, prayed with one another, discussed future plans, talked about personal problems, and became friends. However, it is on the outside that the two divergent paths come into view. For some IFI participants the contact with their mentor has continued and even thrived. Their relationships are reciprocal and a strong bond has formed. However, for other IFI members, the relationship with their mentor has diminished with

time. Immediately following release from prison, they continued to keep in touch with one another. Yet, over time the contact has not been maintained.

Most of the mentors interviewed said they feel comfortable confronting the IFI participant when they are headed down the wrong path. However, one mentor noted that he does not always know when the IFI member is headed down the wrong path. Another mentor said that he shows concern and prays for the former prisoner when he knows he is making poor decisions, but ultimately believes it is the former prisoner's own choice. Because of the lack of contact, some mentors did not always know whether the IFI participant was attending church or Bible study or about other aspects of their spiritual journey. Still, many of the mentors were able to describe struggles the IFI participants faced since they have been released, including professional, financial, relational, and emotional problems.

The mentors offered valuable information concerning IFI expectations of them as mentors, as well as their level of preparedness going into the mentoring relationship. Most of the mentors shared that they did not know what was expected of them as mentors. Moreover, several of them did not feel trained or prepared to mentor, especially for the mentoring that takes place on the outside. One mentor noted that it is on the outside where the real problems arise. Although they had attended the training offered by IFI, they still did not feel properly equipped. In sum, the relationships appear to be strong on the inside, but are severely weakened on the outside.

As stated before, the impact of the volunteers and mentors on IFI participants has been critical. To follow are excerpts of interviews with IFI participants that capture the significance of these relationships.

BJ: Can you describe some aspect of your relationship with your mentor?
Ron: *My mentor is great. We're talking about school and work. I'm getting a lot of encouragement and love. I now find myself talking about my past, which I normally don't like to do because it was just too painful.*

BJ: What has been your reaction to the free-world people who come to IFI?
Dan: *The volunteers have been extremely helpful to me. The example set by the volunteers has been unbelievable. A lot of volunteers have been victims themselves. They share their own struggles and pains. The first day I met my mentor (big smile comes to inmate's face), we bonded immediately. I 'm planning to go to my mentor's church when I get out.*

BJ: Has your mentor been helpful?
Andy: *My mentor has really helped and wants to help me when I get out of here. That makes me feel great. I'm only two months from the completion of my GED. And the volunteers have been very important in my spiritual growth.*
BJ: What do you think about the IFI volunteers?
Wil: *The volunteers have really helped. One volunteer had a wife dying in the hospital and he still came to visit me on Tuesday night.*

BJ: Any thoughts on the volunteers who come in on Tuesday evenings?
Pat: *The volunteers stand out. The quality of these people is unbelievable. One of the volunteers that works with me moved from Houston to Austin and still drove back to Houston for the Tuesday night meeting. He has done so much for me. I couldn't let him down for anything.*

BJ: What do you think about the volunteers and mentors?

Rae: *These volunteers mean a whole lot to me and this program. They aren't paid. Bad weather and all they show up, they have a strong commitment. We get so much out of it. I told my mentor I can't believe you'd come into a prison when they have a job, family, and kids. We've become very close and share personal things. We are brothers. We will work together when I'm out, no matter where we have to meet.*

BJ: What can you tell me about your mentor?

Bob: *My mentor stopped by here last night on his way home from Virginia. His wife picked him at the airport and brought him straight here on Tuesday night before going home. Can you believe that? And then, his wife waited in the prison parking lot for two hours while he was in here mentoring me. I can't understand how someone could care that much.*

The following narratives capture an extended dialogue with IFI participants about their relationship with mentors and general observations about the program.

BJ: Has your mentor been pretty faithful to this relationship?

Nat: *Yeah, yeah. I think he has missed one Tuesday, the week of Thanksgiving. Other than that he has been here every single Tuesday. He has also brought several mentors in with him on extra nights. He has really hung with it. He has volunteered to come get me in Huntsville this weekend.*[43]

BJ: So, there's no doubt in your mind that the two of you will connect once you're released.

Nat: *Oh, no doubt, no, no! We're already buddies, you know.*

BJ: When are you going to meet on the outside, do you already have a regular plan?

Nat: *Yes. I got a scheduled date in the parole office for twice a month and my mentor has already indicated he would like to attend those meetings and be involved with that. You know, he wants to be there with me at the parole office. He's going to buy me a suit when I get out. So, we're going to go to the Men's Warehouse and these are the things he wants to do and I'm like, 'sure, okay.' He wants to do it. And he has said, 'hey, I want you to be like part of my family.'*

BJ: Is this your first time in prison?

Nat: *No, it's my third time.*

BJ: Have you ever experienced anything like IFI before?

Nat: *Oh, no. I have had some supervisors who have given a compliment as I was leaving that unit, saying something like I was above average with some of the guys they had seen come through and to take care of myself. It was good encouragement, but no, nothing like this. I have never set any goals before. Goals are fine, but if you don't have an awakening in your soul, in your spirit, in your heart, then you're not free from the things that kept you there before and I never was free from my alcohol addiction. You know, I could never even imagine that I wouldn't, you know, be drinking again. Now I can't even imagine drinking again.*

BJ: Did you go through any alcohol treatment programs before coming to InnerChange?
Nat: *Oh, sure.*

BJ: Did they have an impact on you?
Nat: *Sure they had an impact on me. I stayed sober for a while, you know. I learned a lot about alcoholism. I learned a lot about the AA program and it was pretty spooky. I learned that I was pretty much helpless and bound to it—a pretty hopeless situation. It always led me back to drinking again or being dry and miserable, I mean I could be sober but not happy. It didn't have anything to it. Until I gave that problem to Jesus Christ, it was still a problem. Now it's something I have to be real careful with. It is something I have to manage. You know I have to stay away from alcohol and the situations that tempt me, but I don't have to worry about drinking again, because that has been relieved—the worry of that and the fear that I might (relapse) is gone. You know, people want to know, 'how can you say that?' Personally, the load or the weight has just been lifted off of me so that I don't have to worry about it anymore. People all the time say, 'I don't understand how you can tell me, without being out there and you're not facing the temptations, how you can say all this stuff.' But I say, 'well, it started by just saying it. You know, just saying it.' Once I started saying it, and asking Jesus Christ to help me make it through, and now it feels good to say it. You know, you get that hooray feeling. I get more power each time I declare that that is just not me anymore and give the glory to God, I feel charged about it. I don't have to worry about it. The times I am tempted, I have the right answer now. And if I should even think about saying anything different then the conviction should just swoop down on me. You know when you say something to God and you mean it and you make a pact with God and he gives you some peace over it, I don't think you are going to break that pact and be very comfortable.*

BJ: Do you feel the same way about your release and your success on release as you do about the whole issue of alcohol and your possible relapse?
Nat: *Oh, well, alcoholism has always been my problem. You know, all my employers and everybody have always said that I was a great guy that shouldn't drink. Anything that ever held me back was related to alcohol. Now, not only do I feel like I don't have to rush out there and warehouse money and things to hedge against. I've got the rest of my life to build something and I'm not fearful of it disappearing because I'm going to get in trouble again or because I'm going to get drunk. So, now I kind of have a calmness of spirit that says, 'hey, you can go out there and do the little things and by doing them the right way, taking the time and effort to do the things you're supposed to do, the big things will take care of themselves.' I can see that now, but I could never see that before. Somehow it seemed like I had to push extra hard before and everything was now, now, now! I just don't feel that way now. And so, things have come right on time. I've got a job when I get out of here. I've got a place to live, I just found out this weekend that I've got a vehicle from the employer. The drivers license I was worried I wouldn't get, I wrote them again and that's all cleared up. You know, I mean, just one, two, three in due time things are coming together. Right down to my shoes. God is good. Things are happening just right on time. You don't get these assurances that everything is going to be just fine and that you're going to get all these answers a year ago, cause somehow I don't think that's faith if you know that you have got everything lined up way in advance. But my mentor and I have prayed for each and everything that we figured could be a need, and I mean each and every one of them plus a few we didn't even pray for—have all lined up.*

BJ: Tell me about your mentor.

Paul: *R is a very strong Christian and our relationship has grown. And I know that just as him and I were matched-up, it was what God had designed, because he was very strong in the Word. We set there and share about our personal life, but we are always sharing about our struggles and encouraging one another and we pray for each other every week. It's just a very, very strong spiritual relationship, which is what I needed—another man that understood where I was. R's just real with me, you know? He enjoys seeing all the things going on in my life, but him and I are just regular ole pals every week. We laugh and cut-up, and we cry about situations in our lives. He encourages me.*

BJ: Will you stay in touch with him?

Paul: *Oh yeah! And he's excited too, that I'm not wandering off. That was one of the things that we talked about when I was telling him I might be moving. Even then, we would have stayed in touch by email and phone, but it's still not the same as being able to walk into a room with him and sitting down and talking. And he knows all the struggles that I have in my life. He keeps me honest with those, you know. Sometimes we'll be crying, and sometimes we'll be laughing, sometimes we cut-up, but he's always there. To me, I couldn't have asked for a better mentor.*

BJ: As everybody around here knows, you wrote the parole board to turn down a chance to be paroled early, in order to stay locked-up for an additional year so you could complete the IFI program. There were IFI members who told you that you were a fool to turn down parole. Have those same people realized why you did it?

Paul: *Most of the guys that were here with me in Group 2, before they left, have said that they realized I was just real and that I was just doing what God called me to do. And that God called each of us here for a reason and to deal with ourselves and what we had become. Especially one of them I remember, I mean he had very, very negative things to say the day we were talking about me staying during class. Then about a week before he left IFI, he said, 'you know, I really understand you and appreciate what you did.' And now when he calls in (to InnerChange) since I work in the office, I get to talk to a lot of the guys from time-to-time, we talk and he shares his struggles, and yet, at the end of our conversations we always end up with, 'hey, I love you.' And to me, that's really neat, because that's what it's all about. It's staying in tune with God, and in tune with God's love, and not being afraid to tell another man, 'hey, I love you.'*

BJ: Had you ever done that before coming to prison?

Paul: *Not really. Over all the years, I may have had a friend or two that I could have told them that I loved them. But now, it's almost, I mean, I love every guy that has gotten out of here. Even the ones I didn't necessarily like, I love them because I have God's love in my heart for them. That doesn't mean I always like the way they behave or what they tell me, but I know that I'm kind of like a little indicator to them of what God's love is like. Even though I may tell them they are crazy and that they need to straighten up today, I'm still going to be there for them tomorrow. I'm not going to let them down. And it's certainly not me, because if I did things the way I wanted to, sometimes I'd just write them off. I'd say, 'man I've got nothing for you no more.' But I know that's not the way. God made it evident that he had a lot of love for me. You know, I turned my back on Him and run away from Him for a lot of years and He was still there for me, so that's the least I can do.*

BJ: It has been about a month since I last chatted with you, how's it going?

Cal: *Everything's going great. My kids are doing well. Matter fact, I found an extra kid I didn't know was mine, a 14 year old girl. I've seen the pictures and she sure does look like me. I could have been upset when I first found out, but I wasn't. You know this little girl could have been praying for 14 years for her dad and now God is giving her her daddy. If that's so, so be it. I wrote her mom last night and was letting her know this is not no jailhouse religion and that I'm not trying to be no jailhouse preacher or Bible freak. I'm just making better choices now and I'm doing positive things. Basically, that's what the Bible is. You don't have to be no preacher to understand the Bible, it's basically positive things. The Bible's not going to tell you to do anything negative. So, if you think positive and make positive choices, basically you going to be alright. That's basically what InnerChange is about. I been here nine months now and I understand that it's not about being a good Christian, it's about changing your attitude toward life. The devil was saying don't write her (my daughter's mother) just leave it alone. But I knew that wasn't right. So, I wrote her and told her that I had changed my life and whatever we need to do to work it out. Then she wrote me back last night and told me she had been to hell and back, and that she has multiple sclerosis and that she had gone blind for two weeks but has her eyesight back, and has three kids.*

BJ: It sounds like maybe you're feeling better about the program now than the last time I interviewed you.

Mic: *Well, I guess at that time I hadn't quite got over the initial shock of getting a serve-all you know, and it was kind of tough to get over, because I was thinking I was going to make parole. But as I have had time to get into the program and get focused on it, this has really been a blessing, you know. Learned a lot about myself—it has helped build me up. No complaints.*

BJ: Tell me what has been going on recently?

Mic: *Yeah, I participated in Kairos and that was a real blessing. All those people from the outside come in and it really touched my heart. To see people who do not even know you and to just come out and shower you with love. It wasn't so much all the cookies and stuff they brought in, but just them coming in and hugging you and they genuinely seemed like they wanted to be here and fellowship with you—to show you their love, that was something.*

BJ: Tell me about your plans, are you in school, what are you doing right now besides your work assignment?

Mic: *Right now, uh, I'm doing a computer training program—Windows 95 training plan. And I've been working on trying to become computer literate. I don't know if it's going to get me a job on the outside, but I know for a warehouse clerk everything's got to be computerized now-a-days. And I think it is really going to benefit me, so I'm really training in that. And I really want to get into the travel agent area and I know I'm going to have to have some kind of computer training for that.*

BJ: Tell me, how are things going?

Zoe: *Well, uh, just a lot of Bible studies and Rev. W has been teaching us Bible doctrine Monday through Friday, from 12 to 3. That right there has been pretty good. He's a real good teacher, teaches us about the Bible, about Jesus, the Word of God.*

BJ: How are you feeling about the program now that you've been here about six months?

Zoe: *I think it's great personally. You know I enjoy it, and it feels good to hear the word of God everyday and have people that come in from the free-world and have a lot of revivals, and lives getting saved. All the teaching of Rev. W and P has been helpful. Like skills, Bible doctrine, and Bible studies have been a real good learning experience. It's helping your mind and the way you think and seeing the way that God wants you to live your life.*

BJ: Are you thinking differently than the way you used to think?

Zoe: *Yeah, well, I used to think when I was out there about nothing but money and women. But now I find myself thinking about nothing but family, freedom, and heaven. The ultimate goal now in my life is to make it to heaven.*

BJ: Are people in your family seeing a change in you?

Zoe: *Well, I wasn't really a bad person, but I was a person who thought more of worldly and materialistic things. I thought that was what was important. You know, nice clothes, nice house, nice stuff, you know, I thought that was real important, but I found out that's not real important at all. What's important is to have a relationship with God. To try to be out there with your family, not put yourself in a position to ever be put in this kind of a situation. Life's too short to be incarcerated and to waste it and then you're going to burn in hell if you haven't give your life to God and to live by His Word. There's really no other choice. You either live by His Word or if you don't live by His Word, chances are you will sin, and if you sin after sin, and you know, a lot of the time, crime comes along with it, you can wind up incarcerated. I don't see that as being very smart, a very good alternative, I would much rather live by the Word of God and just put my life in His hands. You know, see if He can guide me in the right direction, to stay out there with my family and to eventually end up in heaven.*

BJ: Is this your first time down?

Zoe: *This is my first time incarcerated, sure is, I'm 32 years old, and got incarcerated in October of 1995. I've been in prison for 38 months, and I've got 12 more to go. And I've given my life to God, and I pray that I never, ever get put in this kind of situation again. I really want to live my life the way the Bible tells you you are supposed to live it. You know, love one another, share, and care for people. I simply want to be like, uh, those guys in the free-world who work their 40 hours a week and come home to their one wife. I used to call them suckers, you know, because I used to want to have a bunch of girlfriends and go to clubs all the time. I thought I was smarter than everybody, but now I find myself incarcerated and away from my so-called girlfriends and they're still out there with their wives you know, just living an honest life and going to church and all that. I simply want to be like that now. I just want to work a 40 hour per week job, cut-out my coupons, and be free—go to church and praise the Lord. This program is a wonderful program and I pray that it continues. I'll be out of here in 12 months, but I know there will be other people in here and hopefully it can make an impact on their lives as it has mine. I've really seen a different way. I'm ready to close that chapter in my life where I was not very successful. I wouldn't care how much money you make or how many women you have. If you wind up incarcerated and you live in sin everyday—I don't think you're a very successful person.*

BJ: Has your family noticed any changes in you?

Ben: *My mother and my daughter really know me and when they seen me in visitation they said they noticed a difference in me. They said I must have changed a lot because my conversation had changed and was real strong about God and things like that.*

BJ: Tell me about Ben six months ago, and Ben today.

Ben: *Well, I think I've changed a whole lot. I've come a long way, but I'm not at the point where I want to be. I've learned to put God first in everything I do, in all the problems and tribulations that I go through. My friends couldn't understand a lot of the things that was going on here, like all the hugging, and people trying to help their brother out. And I had just never seen this before in other prisons. They show a lot of love here. People sharing personal things about their family and what's going on with their family and was asking the others to pray for their family.*

BJ: You haven't seen that before?

Ben: *Oh, No. Through the power of prayer I've seen God answer prayer. And I've seen a lot of people come to InnerChange and give their lives over to Jesus Christ. In the scripture it says, I used to act like a child and talk like a child, and now I've put away childish things since I've become a man. And then it says, the old man has passed behold the new—increasing in Christ.*

BJ: Tell me about the program here at InnerChange.

Ben: *Well, I'd have to say that the best thing they done for me, is to let me know about the Holy Bible—through reading it, it strengthens you. Before coming here I didn't really know how to pray. I used to get on my knees and just say something, you know, like 'God just look out for my family, don't worry about me, I done already messed my chance up.' But I guess he was hearing my prayers and give me another chance by sending me to InnerChange. He sent me here to wake me up, and now I'm awoke. Now I'm trying to get where He has already gone—the gates of heaven.*

BJ: You mentioned something earlier about trying to share your faith with others.

Ben: *I be trying to witness to my father and my little brother too, trying to let them know about Christ and that He's good. Through Him, He'll make anything possible. I know that's right. And it's in the Bible too. And I'm not all the way strong about the Bible, but I say, if you pick Jesus, you'll pick the best thing you've ever picked in your life. You know, every night I try to get a couple of guys that younger, I ain't but 24 years old myself, and go into prayer. And I pray for their families and that touches their hearts to know that someone cares, because they're lonely just like I'm lonely too.*

What Do We Know About IFI Recidivists?

The descriptive narratives to follow are useful in identifying patterns and trends associated with a sample of IFI members who were unsuccessful after release and ultimately returned to prison.

Wayne

Wayne was paroled from TDCJ after completing 15 months in the IFI program. He had served eight years of a 13 year sentence for Burglary of a Building with Intent to Commit Theft. Wayne had served four previous prison sentences (three of these for the offense of robbery) prior to this most recent commitment. A warrant was issued nine months later for Possession of Cocaine and Wayne's parole was subsequently revoked. According to his parole officer, he was mandated by the parole board to attend substance abuse treatment.

Wayne had a long and even violent criminal history, as well as a series of institutional violations. He read at a fourth grade level and had an IQ of 66. By any definition, these elements would place Wayne in a high-risk group for re-offending. Even at IFI, there were documented cases of his anger and impulsiveness causing problems.

James was a mentor to Wayne and worked with him over the course of eight or nine months at the IFI prison program. James believed they had established a solid relationship during this time, reporting that they had "bonded for life." After release from prison, things were going well and Wayne's mentoring relationship was progressing nicely. James reported that he meets Wayne at the aftercare meetings on Tuesday and/or Thursday evenings. Furthermore, Wayne became a member of his mentor's church. James reported having contact with Wayne's parole officer. Mentor James told the parole officer that he had instructed Wayne to contact him at anytime, day or night, and that he would take him to church.

After a period of time, Wayne began attending a different church located in his own neighborhood. Though it never seemed obvious to James that Wayne was using drugs, James remembered during our interview that Wayne had admitted using marijuana. Wayne justified his drug use by arguing that he was mad at his employer. James confronted and counseled Wayne, but he responded "I don't care." Later, James saw Wayne carrying a six-pack of beer and confronted him about this. By this time Wayne was no longer attending church regularly.

Wayne initially lived at his sister's residence, but was asked to leave the residence after he and his brother-in-law "got into it." Wayne then moved across town into a neighborhood where Wayne did not find positive support. Indeed, according to his mentor, his new girlfriend was anything but a positive influence in his life, enticing him into an unstable and drug-using lifestyle. Wayne's parole officer agreed that "challenges" at home were the beginning of his downfall. The parole officer also remembered that the other IFI parolees and Wayne's mentor James were praying for him during one of the evening parole meetings when a number of his difficulties were discussed before the group. James stated that if Wayne had stayed involved in church and had not moved, the outcome could have been different.

Kenny

Kenny was released after completing 18 months in IFI. He had served approximately 8 years on a Robbery conviction. Kenny has one previous prison commitment for Robbery. Ten months after release, Kenny was arrested on Theft charges.

With regard to IFI, Kenny was an active participant in the program. He held a leadership position for 10 months and was noted as a positive role model. He achieved quite a reputation during his stay in the IFI program; he was outgoing and very popular with the other program members. However, toward the end of his time in the IFI program, he had become apathetic toward the program. Despite his popularity and initial enthusiasm, he never won the confidence of the entire IFI program staff and other inmate leaders within the program. For this reason, the program director decided that Kenny would not receive a graduation certificate despite the fact he was one of the first to actually complete the entire 18 month program. The consensus seemed to be that he was a typical "con" who was never really sincere in his religious commitment. Chester began mentoring Kenny as a volunteer with the Kairos ministry. He felt their relationship only grew stronger and better during those 13 months prior to Kenny's release. Chester stated that he believed his role as a mentor was "to be a friend and encouragement to Kenny, not to crack-the-whip; he would leave that to the InnerChange staff. We both enjoyed the time together and both looked forward to it."

Chester acknowledged that Kenny was quite smart, but that he was a "carnal Christian" and wanted to have feet standing in both worlds. In fact, Kenny admitted he wanted to live life on the "high side" and that he liked to party. Chester remembers Kenny saying, "Let's stay away from the spiritual stuff and just talk." Spiritually speaking, Chester said that Kenny wanted to keep things at arms length. In fact, he said that when the IFI environment began to more intentionally resemble a church, "Kenny just checked-out. It got too personal. If it had been me, I would have kicked him out of the program. Maybe I should have told him that."

Although Kenny seemed to being doing okay after his initial release, it didn't take long for things to turn bad. Initially, Kenny lived with his mother and was attending church, a men's Bible study and attended a few IFI parole meetings. But within two months, he had moved out, was living in a hotel and was taking cocaine. Kenny and Chester talked by telephone virtually every day, and therefore Chester was very knowledgeable about Kenny's behavior. Kenny then tried to reconcile with his former wife and was living with her parents. This living arrangement didn't last too long as he moved back in with his mother, though that living situation didn't last either. He eventually moved to north Houston near Intercontinental Airport, separating him geographically from his mentor who lived in Sugarland.

Kenny had a long history of both alcohol and drug abuse and was active in the drug recovery program while incarcerated. According to mentor Chester, Kenny wanted to live by his own abilities. He stated that Kenny's focus has always been on money more so than even his family.[44]

Harold

Harold was released from prison after completing only 3 months in the IFI program. He had served approximately 4 years of a 15-year sentence for Possession of Cocaine. He served at least one previous prison sentence for Sale of Controlled Substances.

Due to his short stay in the IFI program before being paroled, he was not assigned a mentor. According to his Region 7 parole officer, Harold never really had a chance. The parole officer indicated that Harold did not have a good support system in place when he was released and that he had not really "plugged in" to the IFI program. Consequently, he failed to keep some of his scheduled appointments and did not regularly attend group meetings with other IFI parolees. Further, his parole officer stated that Harold was not regularly attending church. The fact that he incurred a new charge quickly did not surprise his parole officer, "you could see it coming."

Peter

Peter was released after completing 11 months in IFI. He was serving a 17-year prison sentence for a Theft conviction. Peter has a long criminal history; it includes six previous prison sentences for convictions such as Forgery, Burglary, and Possession of Drugs.

Peter had been out of prison for 19 months when he was arrested. He was caught selling drugs to an undercover cop and was subsequently charged with Manufacturing/Delivery of a Controlled Substance—Cocaine.

Peter was interviewed at the Harris County Jail. He explained that he had a mentor, Gerald, but only for a short period at IFI. Peter stated that their interaction was very brief and they certainly did not establish any kind of a meaningful relationship. He never saw his mentor after leaving prison. The research team was unable to locate Gerald for an interview. Both telephone numbers listed for him were disconnected. Peter indicated that he attended church regularly for three months after leaving prison. He says transportation problems plus his work schedule at Church's Chicken caused him to begin to miss church—essentially cutting his church attendance in half. At this point Peter moved from the southwest to the southeast side of town, continued to live alone and began attending a different church. Peter felt that it wasn't the same because apparently, at the first church he attended, the pastor had taken a special interest in him. Peter never became a permanent member of this second church.

Peter claims he was let down by IFI since he was never given a real mentor and he indicated that a close mentor would have helped him greatly. During the interview, Peter stated he had tried to go out and do things on his own and that was his biggest problem. Although he admits to making some mistakes, such as using drugs after his release from IFI, he was reluctant to accept full responsibility for the behavior that ultimately led to his arrest. Peter reported he is still doing Bible study in the Harris County Jail.

JR

JR was released after completing 12 months in the IFI program. He had served 7 years of a 15-year sentence for Delivery of Controlled Substance—Cocaine. He had served four previous prison sentences (Auto Theft, Credit Card Abuse, Theft, Delivery), and has accumulated some 20 institutional violations.

Initially, JR was noted for being quiet, but eventually he opened up to IFI counselors and became more involved in the program. He spoke highly about his family and expressed a desire to teach children that crime is not the way to go. Before release from prison, JR was described as "having done everything that we have asked of him" by the IFI program director.

According to mentor Roger, he and JR had established a good mentoring relationship. Roger picked up JR every Sunday and took him to his Baptist Church. This regular church attendance lasted from his release in April until June. Around this time JR moved out of his parent's house because he wanted to start doing things for himself. But upon moving, JR left no new telephone number for Roger, and thus began by his own admission distancing himself from his mentor.

By September, JR's boss had told him to clean-up his act and in response, JR just quit. JR was now using drugs and after leaving a "dirty urine," his parole officer told him he should turn himself in—he didn't. His parole officer stated she "wasn't surprised," and tried to intervene on his behalf and did what she could to encourage JR to seek help. She even got him a bed at a drug treatment facility. Unfortunately, when JR finally agreed to come in, it was too late—he was arrested for Possession of Cocaine the evening prior to his entry to the treatment center.

When interviewed back in prison, JR stated that his mistakes were his own fault. He went on to say that the church was indeed helpful and that he was made to feel as though he was a part of the church. He also explained that his mentor was very important to him, in fact, even more important than the influence of his church. JR described his mentor, Roger, as someone who supported him and "stayed in the Word."

Jose

Jose was paroled from TDCJ after completing 10 months in IFI. He had served approximately 4 years of a 6-year sentence for Burglary. Jose had been arrested numerous times before for various crimes, such as Criminal Mischief, but had never been incarcerated.

Initially, Jose was described as committed to the program and cooperative, though he was also noted for failing to participate meaningfully. But 4 months into the program, problems were cited. Jose was described as hostile and unfocused, creating disturbances and sleeping during class. Although Jose's attitude improved he was still viewed as a recidivism risk by IFI staff.

According to his mentor, Fred, they were matched up three months prior to his release. Fred indicated that Jose was not supposed to get out of prison until after the summer and therefore Fred and his wife made plans for a summer trip to Honduras. Jose's early parole took place while Fred was out of the country. When Fred returned from the trip, he tried to reach Jose by phone, but with no success. "He just wouldn't return my phone calls." Fred stated that Jose originally lived with his mother, but then moved to another area of Houston and began living with his girlfriend. Fred continued calling Jose, but was only able to reach him on the phone one time. In that conversation, he indicated that he had not been attending church. Fred maintained that Jose was not interested in being held accountable.

Mentor Fred indicated that he had never met Jose's parole officer and felt like this type of communication would have been beneficial for both the parole officer and himself. Jose's parole officer stated that she never heard him mention a mentor and as far as she knew they were never in touch with each other. She indicated that the apparent absence of a mentor was at the heart of Jose's problem.

Frank

Frank was released on parole after completing 12 months in IFI. He served more than 8 years of an 18-year sentence for Forgery. Frank has a long criminal history including four previous prison commitments (two for Forgery and two for Burglary).

According to his parole officer, Frank was initially reporting in regularly, but by December, four months after being released, he had started using drugs. He was ordered to complete an inpatient treatment but failed to continue attending classes after the program ended. Progress reports in his parole file indicate he was doing poorly and twice tested positive for cocaine use.

Frank's mentor, Bobby, has hired a number of parolees over the years and has provided transportation as well as financial support for these former inmates. Bobby stated that he saw Frank everyday because he took him to and from work. Together, they were regularly attending services at Lakewood Church, weekly Bible studies (sometimes both Tuesday and Thursday nights), and IFI parole meetings. Bobby claims Frank was doing fine for a while, but then things began to change. First, Frank was not completely happy at Lakewood and started attending church elsewhere. Then Frank openly admitted to having two girlfriends, and bragged about the fact that neither of the women knew about the other relationship. Then his mentor began to notice a change in Frank's attitude and appearance; he started using excuses for missing church, IFI parole meetings and Bible study. In addition, his clothing began to take on more of a "street" look. According to his parole officer, Frank was in complete denial in regard to his drug problem. Although he was doing very well at the beginning, she says he went down fast.

Bobby has helped many former prisoners and has seen other cases similar to Frank's. Like other former prisoners that Bobby has employed and supported, there was certainly potential for a successful reentry into society. However, Bobby contends that many former prisoners fall prey to a common foe—idleness. He claims that unless former prisoners are occupied with constructive activities, such as work, church attendance, or volunteerism, they will eventually relapse in some way. When asked if the idleness could be replaced by regular church attendance and Bible study, mentor Bobby quickly responded in the negative, "These guys need to be occupied all the time. They can't handle free time. Church and bible study only account for several hours out of the entire week."

Bobby reported that he gave Frank many opportunities to make things right, but Frank never did. In addition to making excuses, Frank began to lie to his mentor and eventually Bobby decided that his time would be better spent with other former prisoners. Bobby feels that things might have been different if he had been able to mentor Frank for a longer period of time before Frank left the prison because establishing a strong relationship is of paramount concern.

Sam

Sam was released from prison after completing only six months in the IFI program. He was arrested five months later on a new charge of Forgery.

Sam was interviewed back in prison. Sam indicated that he left prison without a mentor. He lived at home with his wife and daughter and attended church. He stated that he attended church weekly until August. His wife stated that Sam was attending church regularly when he first got out of prison, and would even attend when she could not. However, his adjustment to the free-world was difficult because he was so impatient. Minor arguments or problems were difficult for him to handle.

Sam stated that problems at home caused him to quit attending church and go back to living on the streets. However, when asked about the problems at home, he was never clear as to what the struggles were about. When asked where he moved to after leaving home, he responded, "I was motel hopping." When asked about his church, he indicated that there was more of a spiritual feeling at IFI than the church he was attending in the free-world. In other words, the church on the outside didn't measure up to the church behind the prison bars. He stated that nobody knew him at church and that he never really was "plugged in."

Sam stated that he left home, church, and his job, all at the same time. When asked if he knew he was throwing it all away when he left, he responded "yes." He also stated that if he had stayed at IFI for the full 18 months, he would have been much better off. His statement, "I didn't have anybody to turn to," is troubling since it appears he turned away from exactly the people who could most help him.

According to his wife, "he didn't have support from a mentor. There were times he needed someone else besides me." She stated that Sam needed more patience, and that eventually he was just looking for an excuse to snap. She indicated a mentor could have made a difference. She further stated that he had a job at Holiday Cleaners, and she had even found him a truck to purchase. Unlike many of Sam's IFI colleagues on parole, money was not an issue as his family was quite stable financially.

Summarizing Lessons Learned from IFI Recidivists

As is clear from the accounts of recidivists presented above, the relationship between the mentor and the IFI participant is pivotal in prisoner reentry. Initially, a number of IFI participants enjoyed frequent contact with their mentor; however, the contact seemed to diminish over time as parolees changed jobs, residences or phone numbers. This made it difficult for mentors to maintain contact. Indeed, a number of mentors described the severe contrast between constant supervision on the "inside" and virtually no supervision on the "outside." This contrast makes it very difficult for parolees to adjust to life outside of prison. Without frequent contact and supervision by the mentor, parolees have too much idle time. Simply stated, frequent contact between mentor and offender is important to post-release success, and infrequent contact is the first step on a path to post-release failure.

We observed that as parolees experience difficulties, there is an attempt to distance themselves from those most likely to hold them accountable for their behavior. Decreasing church attendance and Bible study seem to be associated with reduced mentor contact and a deteriorating of the mentoring relationship. We believe one reason for this is the fact that few of these mentors saw their role as holding parolees accountable and would rather be seen as a friend who supports rather than confronts inappropriate behavior.

A number of the mentors mentioned that the IFI member went to a different church. Absent a mentor to facilitate or negotiate a connection with the congregation, few churches are able to provide the much needed support network. In the absence of a supporting congregation, it is doubtful that houses of worship can provide the kind of assistance former prisoners need to be successful in societal reintegration.

What distinguishes IFI recidivists from those IFI participants that managed to survive in society without recidivating? IFI recidivists in some respects resemble what Maruna referred to as "persisters"—those who continue to commit crime over time. A number of characteristics emerge when reflecting on these IFI participants who were clearly unsuccessful following their release from prison. First, the failure to build and sustain consistent contact with churches seems to be a common feature. The social support network and positive role models that many had indicated as being critical to their post-release success remain largely untapped resources.

Second, the diminishing role (or outright absence) of mentors seems to be a shortcoming shared by a number of the recidivists. Coupled with the absence or lack of mentoring is the declining significance of accountability. Though many struggled with accountability early in the IFI prison program, most came to recognize that accountability would be central to their long-term success during the aftercare phase.

Third, is the tendency of recidivists to begin to isolate themselves from those most likely to provide them with assistance? For example, instead of being able to confide in mentors and gain assistance with their struggles, by isolating themselves recidivists may be showing a lack of trust or fear associated with the discovery of their unacceptable behavior. Fourth, a number of the recidivists are either in denial about their current problems, or have a pessimistic outlook on their situation and tend to blame their struggles on the IFI program, and especially on the inability of the IFI aftercare component to adequately provide for them. The issue of personal responsibility, a hallmark of the IFI program, is minimized by a number of the recidivists. These four factors not only are central to their return to criminal activity, but run counter to the five spiritual transformation themes discussed earlier. Rather than exhibiting attributes associated with spiritual transformation or rehabilitation, recidivists more closely resemble a return to the features earlier identified with the "penitentiary mentality" or "prison code." Lessons learned from IFI recidivists are a rude reminder of why, inevitably, any prison intervention will affect only some of those who volunteer for it.

Summary of Findings

The findings presented above dovetail with the recidivism findings presented earlier in this study. To review, we earlier found that:

(1.) The IFI participants in this study include 75 prisoners who completed all phases of the program (called IFI Graduates), 51 who were paroled early, 24 who voluntarily quit the program, 19 who were removed for disciplinary reasons, 7 who were removed at the request of the staff, and 1 who was removed for serious medical problems. The total number of IFI participants comes to 177 offenders who were released prior to September 1, 2000. IFI participants were compared to a matched group of 1,754 inmates who met the IFI selection criteria but did not participate in the program.

(2.) 17.3% of IFI program graduates and 35% of the matched comparison group were arrested during the two-year post-release period. A program graduate is someone who completes not only the in-prison phases of IFI dealing with biblical education, work, and community service (usually lasting 16 months), but also includes an aftercare phase (usually lasting 6 months) in which the participant must hold a job and have been an active church member for 3 consecutive months following release from prison.

(3.) 8% of IFI program graduates and 20.3% of the matched comparison group were incarcerated during the two-year post-release period.

(4.) Considering all participants, including those inmates who did and did not complete all phases of the program, 36.2% of IFI participants were arrested compared to 35% of the matched group during the two-year tracking period. Among the total number of IFI participants, 24.3% were incarcerated compared to 20.3% of the comparison group during the two-year post-release period.
(5.) Mentor contact is associated with lower rates of recidivism.

Interviews and observations of IFI participants (pre- and post-release), IFI staff, TDCJ employees, and mentors, help to explain the reductions in recidivism associated with IFI participants who graduate from the program. To summarize, we found:

(6.) Initial skepticism of the IFI program diminished over time, with TDCJ staff eventually embracing the program.
(7.) Narratives of IFI members revealed five spiritual transformation themes that are consistent with characteristics long associated with offender rehabilitation: (a) I'm not who I used to be; (b) spiritual growth; (c) God versus the prison code; (d) positive outlook on life; and (e) the need to give back to society.
(8.) Spiritual transformation can best be understood as a developmental process marked by key turning points or events.
(9.) Completing the IFI program, and continued positive pre- and post-release mentoring are central to both the offender's spiritual transformation and rehabilitation.
(10.) Lack of post-release accountability via mentors and congregations, the decision of the IFI participants to isolate themselves from those that could most benefit them, and finally, the tendency to not accept personal responsibility for poor decision-making, are factors associated with recidivism.

Discussion of the Findings

Over 600,000 prisoners were released to local communities throughout the country in 2002, and the number of ex-offenders coming out of prison will increase in 2003, as well as in subsequent years to follow. Such overwhelming numbers represent an unprecedented and disturbing trend in U.S. history. These figures are troubling for many because of the fact that so few of these former prisoners will have been involved in prison programs designed to address well-known problems like substance abuse, poor education, and skilled vocational training.

In order to manage this now widely recognized prisoner reentry crisis, noted corrections expert, Joan Petersilia, has identified several major prisoner reintegration practices in need of correctional reform.[45] First, Petersilia argues it is necessary to alter the in-prison experience and essentially change the prison environment from one fostering antisocial behavior to one promoting prosocial behavior. This shift in philosophy would call for fundamentally changing the prison culture so as to teach skills and values that more closely resemble those found in society at large. Second, it is critical that relevant criminal justice authorities revise post-release services and supervision while targeting those with high-need and high-risk profiles. In other words, provide closer supervision and assistance to those most likely to recidivate. Third, there is a need to seek out and foster collaborations with community organizations and thereby enhance mechanisms of informal social control. Stated differently, there is a need to establish partnerships that will provide a network of critically needed social support to newly released offenders facing a series of reintegration obstacles.

Interestingly, the InnerChange Freedom Initiative incorporates all three of these correctional reforms. This unique faith-based program not only attempts to transform prisoners, but as Petersilia suggests, attempts to change the prison culture from one that tends to promote antisocial behavior, to one that is both conducive to and promotes prosocial behavior.

Additionally, IFI provides critically needed aftercare services to prisoners following release from prison. Employment and housing are just two of the main areas where IFI aftercare workers provide invaluable assistance. As Petersilia has noted, it is important to prioritize need and risk, such that those most likely to recidivate are given closely needed attention and assistance. This is exactly the role IFI aftercare workers have assumed is most prudent for them to play. Indeed IFI aftercare staff place a great deal of their energies on parolees comprising their "critical care" list. Central to this process of aftercare is the role of IFI mentors. Mentors are clearly an asset to the long neglected issue of prisoner reentry.

Finally, IFI has made a concerted effort to partner with both parole officials and congregations throughout the Houston area. Collaborating with parole has been important because it has allowed both parole and IFI to pool their resources in supervising parolees. Partnerships with churches have made it possible to recruit scores of volunteers who teach a wide variety of classes in the IFI program. Similarly, these congregations have been the place IFI has targeted for recruiting mentors and indeed entire congregations, to agree to work with these prisoners and former prisoners. Without the partnership with these faith-based organizations, IFI would not exist.

Petersilia claims there exists promising in-prison and post-prison programs that help ex-convicts lead law-abiding lives. She argues that community-based organizations, local businesses, and faith-based organizations are showing themselves to be critical partners in assisting offenders with the transition back into society. The key word in this observation, however, is the reference to *promising* rather than *proven* programs. The current study contributes preliminary but important evidence that a faith-based program combining education, work, life-skills, mentoring, and aftercare, has the potential to influence in a beneficial way the prisoner reentry process.

John Braithwaite argues that Americans are quick to apply degradation ceremonies to offenders and thus help "certify deviance," but are often reluctant to embrace programs whose goal it is to "decertify deviance."[46] The controversial decision in the state of Texas to embrace a faith-based program that claimed it could in fact "decertify deviance," is supported by preliminary research findings linking spiritual transformation to rehabilitation and subsequently to reductions in recidivism in a two-year post-release study.

According to Michael Eisenberg of the Texas Criminal Justice Policy Council, programs implemented in correctional settings typically require 2 or 3 years to address start-up problems and institutionalize the program into day to day operations.[47] We agree. IFI certainly experienced a number of significant start-up problems during the first several years of its existence. Interestingly, it is exactly those IFI participants, the initial members who had to deal with the problems associated with a new program, that make up the study group in this research. Stated differently, IFI is not being evaluated on those prisoners who have gone through the program after all the program problems and shortcomings were remedied, rather it is being assessed on the first offenders to participate in and leave from the program.

This study underlines the need for additional statistical research on recidivism rates beyond the two-year tracking period, as well as additional methodological refinements to compensate for the limitations of quasi-experimental research designs. Further research is needed that more intentionally studies the dynamics of the aftercare phase of the IFI program, the social and spiritual support provided for former prisoners during this last program component of IFI, and the differences between the effectiveness of mentoring found in the prison versus the value of mentoring in the community following release from prison. Finally, we need additional ethnographic research to be able to more fully understand the linkages between spiritual development and rehabilitation, and the ways in which both of these phenomena may be related to prisoner reentry.

ENDNOTES

[1] From the TDCJ Feasibility Study for monitoring and tracking participants in "InnerChange."

[2] Prison Fellowship was awarded the contract after responding to a competitive grant solicitation from TDCJ.

[3] Robert Martinson. 1974. "What Works? Questions and Answers about Prison Reform." *Public Interest* 35: 22-35.

[4] See John J. DiIulio, Jr. (1990). No Escape: The Future of American Corrections. Basic Books.

[5] See for example, Steve Aos, Polly Phipps, Robert Barnoski and Roxanne Lieb. 2001. *The Comparative Costs and Benefits of Programs to Reduce Crime*. Seattle: Washington State Institute for Public Policy; Francis T. Cullen. 2002. "Rehabilitation and Treatment Programs." In *Crime: Public Policies for Crime Control,* edited by James Q. Wilson and Joan Petersilia, 253-91. Oakland, CA: Institute for Contemporary Studies; Gerald Gaes, Timothy J. Flanagan, Laurence L. Motiuk, and Lynn Stewart. 1999. "Adult Correctional Treatment." In Prisons, edited by M. Tonry and J. Petersilia, 361-426. Chicago, Ill: University of Chicago Press; Sarah Lawrence, Daniel Mears, Glenn Dublin, and Jeremy Travis. 2002. *The Practice and Promise of Prison Programming*. Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute; Doris L. MacKenzie and Laura J. Hickman. 1998. *What Works in Corrections? An Examination of the Effectiveness of the Type of Rehabilitation Programs Offered by Washington State Department of Corrections*. College Park: University of Maryland.

[6] See Joan Petersilia, When Prisoners Come Home: Parole and Prisoner Reentry (p. 177). Oxford University Press, 2003.

[7] PF is easily the largest organized prison ministry in the United States. According to Prison Fellowship's most recent Annual Report, the ministry is supported by the efforts of over 300,000 volunteers. With an annual budget of 47 million dollars, some 200,000 prisoners per month participate in either Bible studies or seminars led by PF-trained volunteers in over 1,300 of the country's 1,850 state and federal correctional facilities (See God at Work in Prison Fellowship: Annual Report Fiscal Year 2001-2002. Prison Fellowship Ministries, 1856 Old Reston Ave, Reston, VA. www.prisonfellowship.org.

[8] Prison Fellowship identifies itself as a not-for-profit, volunteer-reliant ministry whose mission is to "exhort, equip, and assist the Church in its ministry to prisoners, ex-prisoners, victims, and their families, and to promote biblical standards of justice in the criminal justice system."

[9] See www.ifiprison.org.

[10] Byron R. Johnson, David B. Larson, and Timothy G. Pitts (1997). "Religious Programs, Institutional Adjustment, and Recidivism Among Former Inmates in Prison Fellowship Programs." *Justice Quarterly* 14: 145-166.

[11] Byron R. Johnson (forthcoming study). Religious Programs and Recidivism among Former Inmates in Prison Fellowship Programs: A Long-Term Follow-Up Study.

[12] Finding Common Ground: 29 Recommendations of the Working Group on Human Needs and Faith-Based and Community Initiatives. Search for Common Ground: Washington, DC 2002.

[13] See www.ifiprison.org.

[14] Technically, IFI was launched at the Jester II Unit, which was renamed the Carol Vance Unit in 1999.

[15] Initially, only offenders from Harris County were considered, and then surrounding counties were added in order to increase the potential pool size. In order to further increase the pool of potential applicants to the program, as of 2002, prisoners eventually returning to the Dallas-Fort Worth area have been added to the IFI selection process. This has increased significantly the number of participants currently in IFI, though it has no bearing on the current study sample.

[16] The Texas Department of Criminal Justice and Prison Fellowship have agreed to increase the IFI population at the Vance Unit. As of April 2003, the IFI program houses over 200 prisoners, and with the increasing size of cohorts coming into the program, plans are to fill the entire 378 bed facility with IFI participants sometime in 2004.

[17] For example, Prison Fellowship's costs to operate IFI in fiscal year 2000-2001 alone were $1.45 million.

[18] These books are all Christian books dealing with the basics of Christianity and progressing to more advanced concepts and understandings of Christianity and spiritual growth.

[19] This decision was not uniformly supported by either IFI institutional staff at the prison or those workers in aftercare.

[20] The CJPC is an official Texas agency independent of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice or other criminal justice agencies. Headed since 1984 by Dr. Tony Fabelo, the agency's mission is to generate thorough research, planning and evaluation to help the Governor and Legislature develop and monitor policies for improving the effectiveness of the adult and juvenile justice systems.

[21] Because of his track record in publishing scholarly research examining the impact of religion and spiritual commitment in relation to delinquency, criminality, prisoner adjustment, and recidivism, PF approached Professor Byron Johnson about conducting a second independent evaluation of IFI. Johnson subsequently secured the expertise of David B. Larson, a research psychiatrist known for conducting and publishing many empirical "faith factor" studies.

[22] In order to increase the pool size, this criterion was eventually changed to 18-30 months from release or mandatory supervision or parole.

[23] For those prisoners interested in participating in IFI, each inmate's prison file is examined for disciplinary records, release plans to halfway houses, pending detainers, and other relevant criteria prior to being selected for the program. Next, each inmate must complete an IFI 30-day self-study program as the first step to be considered for placement in the InnerChange program. Upon completion of the self-study, a committee of TDCJ and IFI staff reviews the inmate's readiness and eligibility for participation in the IFI program. Eligible prisoners are then transferred to the Vance Unit.

[24] See the following publication for additional information on the selection process developed in 1997—*Overview of the InnerChange Freedom Initiative: The Faith-Based Prison Program within the Texas Department of Criminal Justice*, Michael Eisenberg and Brittani Trusty, (2002). Criminal Justice Policy Council, Austin, Texas.

[25] To further increase the pool of potential offenders to choose from, counties adjacent to Harris also became eligible for consideration.

[26] *Classification Plan*, Institutional Division, Texas Department of Criminal Justice (1998).

[27] Conversely, violation of prison rules or other inappropriate behavior can lead to increases in one's security or custody classification.

[28] Minimum-out refers to "a designator used to identify minimum custody offenders who have not been approved to work with minimal supervision outside the security perimeter. *Classification Plan*, Institutional Division, Texas Department of Criminal Justice (1998).

[29] The loss of random assignment, while a methodological setback to the evaluation team, did not cause concern for those tasked with completing the CJPC evaluation, as they routinely use matched group designs in their evaluations of TDCJ programs.

[30] While comparison groups are widely used and commonly accepted in evaluation research, it is important to note that a program's impact on participants can only be measured accurately if one knows what would have happened to the participants had they not enrolled in the program. For a more thorough explanation see: See Jean Grossman and Joseph P. Tierney, "The Fallibility of Comparison Groups," *Evaluation Review*, (5): 556-571, 1993.

[31] Salient factor risk score is a correctional assessment tool commonly used in most prisons to help predict the level of risk that prisoners pose to correctional authorities.

[32] In either case, such a criticism implies that religious programs or experiences do reduce recidivism—the only problem is unraveling which spiritual intervention is responsible for the effect.

[33] Initially IFI required 18 months in the prison program, and then reduced that number to 16 months. However, if one completes fewer months and then essentially makes up the difference in Phase III (Aftercare), the Aftercare staff can still choose to "graduate" the person.

[34] Such verification tends to be established with either the IFI member's parole officer, mentor, or IFI staff.

[35] This survey was undertaken by TDCJ and the Parole Division.

[36] Biblically-based refers to the idea that all program components can logically be based on scripture.

[37] Shadd Maruna. 2001. Making Good: How Ex-Convicts Reform and Rebuild Their Lives. Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association.

[38] In order to protect the identity of mentors, volunteers, staff, or prisoners, pseudonyms are used in the dialogue.

[39] See David Wexler (2002). "Therapeutic Jurisprudence: An Overview." Retrieved at: www.law.arizona.edu.

[40] See also the description of "differential anticipation" in the classic work of Daniel Glaser. 1969. *The Effectiveness of a Prison and Parole System*. Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill.

[41] See the *Prison Community*, by Donald Clemmer, 1963.

[42] John Laub and Robert J. Sampson. 2001. "Understanding Desistance from Crime." In *Crime and Justice*, edited by M. Tonry and Norval Morris, 1-70. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

[43] All inmates in the TDCJ system are transported to Huntsville and go through this prison when officially released on parole.

[44] Chester continued as Kenny's mentor during his next prison commitment and is still mentoring Kenny today.

[45] A fourth area in need of reform, changing prison release and revocation practices, is a reform presently beyond IFI's authority.

[46] John Braithwaite (1989). *Crime, Shame, and Reintegration*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

[47] See Michael Eisenberg, "Implementation of the TDCJ Rehabilitation Tier Treatment Programs: Progress Report," Criminal Justice Policy Council, Austin, TX, April 1998.

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