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Ester's Release Program: A brief review

## **Release Program at the Ester Unit**

According to the deputy director of programming, the Release Program (i.e., Re-Entry Life Skills) is a 12-week reentry intervention at the Ester Unit for incarcerated individuals within 16 weeks of their TE date. Program participants spend 12 hours a week on “social and life skills with leisure time.” Additionally, they are provided “resources for stable housing [and] job readiness skills.” To better understand the program and participants, we explored data collected since its advent in July 2021. We also examined data related to driver’s licenses and state identification cards as a proxy measure for resources for housing and employment. Although the data are inconsistent and wanting, we were able to make some conclusions. Below, we highlight our main findings. Afterward, we discuss the data issues. We also make recommendations to improve the data and program.

### **Release Program Participants**

Based on the “program status” data for the Release Program, 429 people were “released” ( $n = 428$ ) or “completed” ( $n = 1$ ) the program between July 2021 and February 2024. Upon closer examination, we found that the “released” option under program status is primarily used when someone is released from incarceration, not the program.<sup>1</sup> To better identify the number of program completers, we excluded the 243 people who spent less than 12 weeks in the 12-week program. This means that 186 people of the 429 had time to complete the Release Program. However, only 43 of the 186 had a program achievement date. Of these, 38 people were released from incarceration<sup>2</sup> (see Figure 1).

The way data are currently collected suggests that between 43 and 186 people finished the program. Due to the small sample and problematic and unclear data, calculating the recidivism rate is futile. Once better data are captured, and more people complete the program and are released, the QI/PE team can conduct an impact evaluation. Most people enrolled in the program did not complete it because they were released within 12 weeks of their enrollment. Placement should be well thought out and reserved for people with enough time to complete the program.

### **Driver’s License and State Identification**

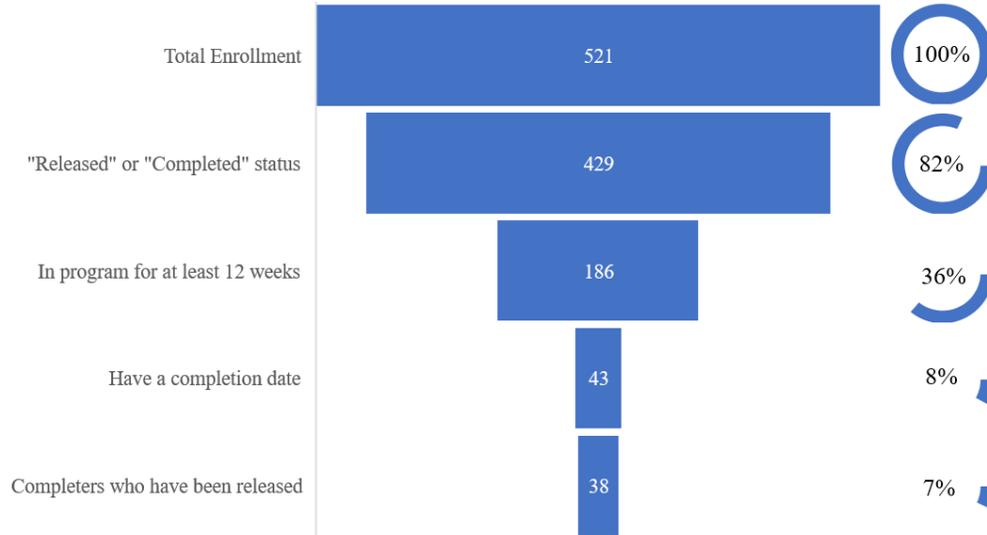
One of the program's aims is to provide “resources for stable housing [and] job readiness.” We examined data related to driver’s licenses and state identification cards as a proxy measure for these resources. We found that of the 429 people who participated in the Release Program, 410 were released from incarceration. Of those, 375 left with some form of identification.

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<sup>1</sup> We found that 229 people enrolled in the program participated for less than 12 weeks. Namely, their program status date matched their release from incarceration date. This means that the “released” program status is misused most of the time. This makes the data difficult to comprehend and arguably unusable.

<sup>2</sup> We relied on monthly Board of Corrections reports to calculate the proportion of program completers among those released from the ADC between July 2021 and November 2023 (see Figure 3).

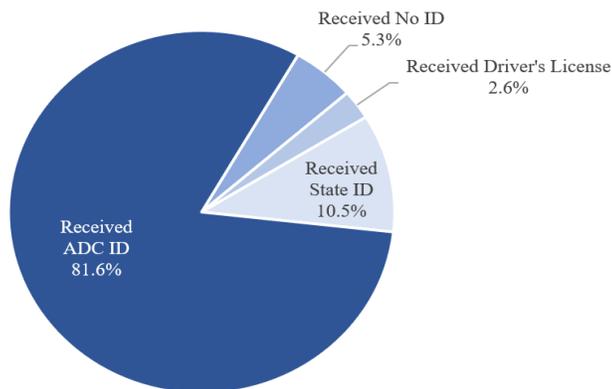
Figure 1  
*Frequencies and Percentages of Participation in the Release Program*



More specifically, we found that 83.2% (341) were released with an ADC identification card, nearly 6% (23) with a state identification card, and almost 3% (2.7%, 11) with a driver's license. Among the 38 individuals with an achievement date who were released, 10.5% (4) left with a state identification card, and nearly 3% (1) with a driver's license (see Figure 2). Employers and landlords typically require applicants to have a driver's license or state identification. Reintegration programs should aim to reduce the barriers common among formerly incarcerated individuals.

In concert with the department's records staff, the program administrator plans to develop a reentry process that will better ensure incarcerated individuals are released with a social security card, birth certificate, and a state identification card or driver's license.

Figure 2  
*Identification Cards for Released Program Completers*



## Data Collection and Entry Issues

Data are fundamental to research and our collective understanding of our programs, services, and population. That said, data are not created equal. Data collection methods must be purposive and data entry – consistent. Staff should have a codebook for quantitative data entered so the variables and attributes are consistent, meaningful, and usable. Even qualitative data entered in the case notes should use similar verbiage and have established requirements for specific information. For example, of the 166 case notes in the dataset, many referred to the program by different names, referenced different points in the program, and some were unrelated to programming. The data for the Release Program are fraught with error. We recommend that staff talk with the eOMIS or Quality Improvement teams before any data related to a new practice or program are collected and entered. We also recommend that the training academies incorporate data collection, entry, and usage training in their rotation.

Figure 3

*Release Program Completers among ADC Releases from July 2021 through November 2023*

