

RECIDIVISM AND REENTRY EMPLOYMENT AGENCIES: A  
CASE STUDY OF OPPORTUNITY OREGON

by

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A THESIS

Presented to the Department of Sociology  
and the Robert D. Clark Honors College  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Bachelor of Arts

May 2025

## **An Abstract of the Thesis of**

Kaitlyn Tambur for the degree of Bachelor of Arts  
in the Department of Sociology to be taken June 2025

Title: Recidivism and Reentry Employment Agencies: A Case Study of Opportunity Oregon

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This study examines the impact of reentry employment agencies on individuals' lives post-incarceration, using Opportunity Oregon as a case study. To assess this impact, ten variables were identified and analyzed to determine their significance and potential correlation with an individual's likelihood to initiate and sustain contact with Opportunity Oregon. The findings aim to shed light on the types of individuals who are more likely to engage with reentry services and what that reveals about the accessibility and effectiveness of such programs.

## Acknowledgements

Writing this thesis has been one of the most challenging and rewarding experiences of my academic journey. This project is the result of relentless effort, dedication, and growth. I am incredibly proud of this accomplishment and of the person I have become through this process. Here's to a lifetime of learning, reflection, and continuous improvement!

However, this journey would not be complete without acknowledging the individuals who have supported and guided me along the way:

First and foremost, I would like to thank my father, **David Allen Tambur**. It is because of his unwavering belief in me and my goals that I have had the courage to pursue my own dreams. From a young age, he instilled in me a deep sense of self-worth and inner strength. Through his example—his integrity, sacrifices, and unwavering support—I have been able to grow into the person I am today. His mentorship has been both emotional and practical, and I will carry his lessons with me always. I dedicate my future to making him proud. I love you Dad, thank you for everything.

To my advisors: Thank you for helping shape this thesis and my academic growth.

**Professor Stephnie Wiley**, thank you for agreeing to be my primary thesis advisor. I know how much time and energy this role demands, and I am deeply grateful for your guidance and patience as I navigated my first major research project!

**Professor Raoul Lievanos**, your attention to detail and thoughtful feedback were instrumental in refining every stage of this work. Your mentorship truly helped transform this project into what it is today!

**Professor Michael Moffit**, thank you for your steady wisdom and kindness. From our very first conversations, you met me with understanding and offered exactly the guidance I needed. Your encouragement meant more than you know.

To **Nancy Pance** and **Michelle Ehlers**, the Opportunity Oregon team, thank you for welcoming me into your world. The work you do every day is not only inspiring, its transformative. I felt genuinely embraced by your community and learned invaluable lessons from you all. Your compassion, commitment, and belief in change continue to motivate me. Programs like Opportunity Oregon are proof that the world can, and does, change for the better—one life at a time! I hope to carry your example forward in my own career forever.

To my sister **Lindsay**: you are the kindest person I know. Your gentle spirit and empathy are contagious, and I admire you so much. Never change.

To **Big and Little**, thank you for the countless sacrifices you have made to ensure I have always had what I needed. You stepped up when I needed you the most, and I will be forever grateful for your unwavering support through everything. Thank you from the bottom of my heart!

To my **Mom, Aunt Kelly, Uncle Randy, Mimi, and Papa**, thank you for showing your love and support across distance. Our connection is unbreakable, no matter the miles between us.

To **Keoni**, thank you for always putting me first, for loving me deeply, and for showing me what it means to be truly appreciated, I love you!

To **Emily**, thank you for staying with me throughout all four years of college. You are smart, beautiful, and capable of greatness. We have had our ups and downs, but your willingness to always come back and work things through means the world. You are the best friend I could have asked for.

To **Hawkeye, Sage, and Aunt Nat**, your belief in me and your strength inspires me every day.

Thank you for everything, I can't wait to see you all grow and succeed!

This thesis reflects not just my own efforts, but the love, belief, and guidance of so many incredible people. I am endlessly grateful!

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

The United States' carceral system is among the largest in the world, with over 1.2 million individuals held in state and federal prisons as of 2022 (Carson & Kluckow, 2023). Despite its size and cost, the system consistently fails to fulfill its supposed purpose: preventing crime and promoting public safety. Instead, the modern American prison functions more as a mechanism for containment rather than rehabilitation, failing to address the root causes of criminal behavior and therefore creating a cycle of release and reoffending that devastates communities and drains public resources (Equal Justice Initiative, 2024; Prison Policy Initiative, 2023; Jones & Sawyer, 2019; Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2021). This cycle is referred to as recidivism, defined by the tendency of a convicted person to reoffend (Merriam-Webster, n.d).

Understanding this failure requires a look into the historical context of American punishment. The U.S. carceral model is deeply rooted in punitive traditions including corporal and capital punishment, public shaming, and exclusion (Miller, 2022). Though the formal objective of modern prisons may be rehabilitation, the current system continues to prioritize punitive responses over restorative ones. Failure to address the underlying causes of incarceration increases the likelihood of reoffending (Prison Policy Initiative, 2022; Equal Justice Initiative, 2020; James & Glaze, 2006).

People in prison are disproportionately likely to have experienced adversity before incarceration, including homelessness, addiction, or untreated mental illness (NAMI, 2024). For example, people with mental illness make up 41 percent of the prison population yet more than half of them report that they lost access to their medication during incarceration (Maruschak et al., 2016; NAMI, 2024). This leads to a systemic failure: the people who are most in need of care are often the least likely to receive it. Rehabilitation services such as educational programs,

therapy, or job training are often underfunded or unavailable, particularly to those deemed “noncompliant” or “high-risk”—the individuals who might benefit the most from this type of support (Cullen & Jonson, 2017). Instead of receiving support, many individuals are exposed to trauma while incarcerated through violent environments, the use of solitary confinement, and limited access to basic health care including critical mental health medication (Cloud et al., 2014; Haney, 2018; NAMI, 2024). Over time, this institutional neglect creates learned violence, hopelessness, and disconnection from society—conditions that make successful reentry nearly impossible (Kupers, 2017; Equal Justice Initiative, 2020).

The shortcomings of the U.S. carceral system carry significant consequences for individuals and society at large. Less than one percent of individuals under the age of fifty receive a prison sentence that exceeds their life expectancy (United States Sentencing Commission, 2023). The reality is that nearly all incarcerated individuals—around ninety-five percent—will eventually be released (Hughes & Wilson, 2010). Their ability to successfully reintegrate matters to their families, their communities, and the overall safety of the public. However, successful reentry is not possible without access to basic needs like housing and stability, both of which are often out of reach without employment.

Formerly incarcerated individuals are routinely excluded from job opportunities, especially those that require professional licenses, and may be excluded from housing assistance or food programs based on their criminal history (Russ et al., 2021). These barriers limit access to conventional opportunities, or the lawful avenues through which individuals can achieve stability and success. Without those pathways, returning to crime can seem like the only option.

Thirty-three percent of individuals released from federal prisons in 2010 remained completely unemployed for at least four years post release (Carson et al, 2021). Throughout the

2010-2014 study period, the jobless rate for the entire cohort remained consistently high—over 60 percent—with no more than 40 percent employed at any given time (Carson et al, 2021). These statistics can be explained by the barriers released individuals face when attempting to find and maintain jobs. They are expected to transition from the structured prison environment to independent living overnight, with minimal preparation or support (Taxman, 2004). Stable employment is a crucial factor in successful reintegration and reducing recidivism, yet it remains one of the biggest challenges for individuals reentering society after incarceration (Varghese & Cummings, 2012; Fitzgerald et.al., 2012).

Despite the struggles and barriers people face after incarceration, recidivism is not inevitable. A shift towards a rehabilitative approach could be an effective solution. When individuals are given access to education, job readiness programs, therapy, and stable housing, their likelihood of reoffending significantly decreases (Davis et al, 2013; Metraux & Culhane, 2004; James & Glaze, 2006; Phelps, 2011). A 2024 report from the Justice Center of the Council of State Governments emphasizes that participation in rehabilitative programs during incarceration is one of the strongest predictors of post-release success. Such programs equip people with the tools and skills they need to reintegrate into society and build stable, crime-free lives.

Breaking the recidivism cycle requires more than reform behind bars; it also demands a shift in how society views and treats formerly incarcerated individuals. Programs that provide job readiness training, vocational certifications, and personal development both during and after incarceration offer a tangible path forward, signaling a move toward restoration and the recognition of human potential.

This thesis examines the impact that reentry employment agencies can have by using Opportunity Oregon as a case study. Opportunity Oregon is a reentry employment agency focused on helping individuals find careers after incarceration. By analyzing demographic characteristics alongside employment and recidivism outcomes, the goal is to better understand how access to job readiness and support services influences post-release success. In doing so, this research aims to demonstrate the value of reentry agencies, not only for formerly incarcerated individuals, but for the communities they return to.

The research questions this study aims to answer are: **(1a)** Who has contacted Opportunity Oregon after initially applying while incarcerated? **(1b)** What factors identified in prior literature are most consistently associated with applicants making contact with Opportunity Oregon? **(2a)** Of those who maintained contact with Opportunity Oregon, what was their employment status after going through the program? **(2b)** What factors identified in prior literature are most consistently associated with variation in employment status outcomes?

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **Recidivism**

Recidivism refers to the phenomenon of individuals returning to incarceration after previously serving a prison sentence. Some institutions define it strictly as any reincarceration, including violation of release conditions, while others include indicators of criminal relapse as measured by arrest or conviction for a new crime. For the purposes of this thesis, recidivism is defined as reincarceration.

The Bureau of Justice Statistics, in a 2021 report analyzing prisoner release data across 34 states, found that seven out of ten released state prisoners are rearrested within five years (Durose & Antenangel, 2021). This statistic begs the question: why do individuals continue to commit crime after incarceration? Recidivism is a complex social issue explained by a range of structural and personal barriers that are beyond the scope of this thesis. Mental illness, substance use disorders, and poverty are significant contributors to recidivism, yet incarceration often exacerbates these issues rather than addressing them (Jones & Sawyer, 2019). Upon release, individuals face a new set of barriers including limited access to stable employment, housing, healthcare, and other basic needs (Varghese & Cummings, 2012; Russ et al., 2021). These challenges are often compounded by the stigma of a criminal record, which can inhibit reintegration into society. The purpose of this literature review is to highlight employment as a way to reduce recidivism because it provides people with the resources and opportunities necessary to build the life they want after incarceration.

## **Theoretical Foundations**

Understanding the sociological frameworks of labeling theory and the mark of a criminal record can explain how strong social connections and a reduction of stigmatization can protect individuals from criminal activity, encouraging positive engagement with society and reducing the likelihood of recidivism.

Labeling theory explains how being labeled as deviant can lead to more deviant or criminal behavior. The lack of employment opportunities and stigma associated with a criminal record compound to create extra barriers individuals must overcome to break free from the cycle of recidivism. While deviance may initially arise from various causes, the stigma of the label can make deviant behavior more persistent (Bernburg, 2019). The theory originates from symbolic interactionism which is the belief that an individual's sense of self is directly formed by their interactions with the label society gives them (Bernburg, 2019). Lemert believed that "...the direct or significant factors of sociopathic behavior are sociological or sociopsychological in nature, expressible by such concepts as social structure, group, role, status, and symbolic interaction" (Lemert, 1951, pp. 20-21). Sociopathic behavior in this context represents deviant behavior: behaviors that break social norms or laws. Lemert (1951) claims that deviance stems from sociological factors such as individuals' social status or label rather than psychological factors such as personality or intelligence levels.

The idea of labeling theory is further articulated by Becker (1973, p. 9), who states, "deviance is not a quality of the act the person commits, but rather a consequence of the application by others of rules and sanction to an 'offender'. The deviant is one to whom that that label has successfully been applied; deviant behavior is behavior that people so label." Becker (1973) articulates how deviant acts themselves are not inherently wrong, but instead it is how

society reacts to the behavior that gives the deviant label. To clarify, someone who commits a crime is not inherently deviant, instead it is society's response through laws, sanctions, and stigmas that identifies the behavior as deviant. Labels such as "criminal" are what defines the person, not the act itself. Once this label is applied, individuals often internalize it which influences their self-identity and future behaviors. Understanding labeling theory in this context, particularly paired with the mark of a criminal record, illustrates the cumulative impact of societal responses and how they create barriers for those exiting prison, making it challenging to achieve successful and lasting rehabilitation and reintegration.

After incarceration, individuals have limited access to conventional opportunities such as employment, housing, education and stable social relationships due to the stigmatization surrounding criminal backgrounds (Pager, 2003; Bernburg, 2019). Bernburg (2019) goes on to explain that when one is labeled as a criminal, it often leads to exclusion from these opportunities through both external rejection and internal withdrawal. Community members such as teachers, employers, and landlords may avoid or mistrust individuals with criminal records, causing those labeled to internalize this rejection and feel shame, low self-worth, and social isolation. As identity becomes shaped by these stigmatized roles, access to prosocial roles begins to diminish and the cycle of recidivism is reinforced. The lack of conventional opportunities does not just limit resources; it deeply affects self-concept and shapes whether individuals can see themselves as capable of change and belonging in society. Over time, this pushes them toward deviant groups where they feel a greater sense of acceptance and comfort as they are treated as equals by others with similar experiences. In this way, stigma and labeling contribute to criminal persistence not just through practical barriers, but by reshaping the very identity and future paths of those affected.

In addition to the social and psychological consequences of being labeled deviant, this label also carries significant practical limitations on employment opportunities. Research has shown that the presence of a criminal record reduces the likelihood of receiving a callback from employers by 50 percent when compared to equally qualified applicants without a criminal record (Pager, 2003).

Theory serves as the foundation for criminological research, providing the necessary framework to explore and understand complex issues like recidivism. The studies I draw from in the next section are grounded in these theories, using them to identify and examine the demographic factors that contribute to recidivism. These frameworks also guided the selection of variables, methodologies, and the interpretation of findings throughout this study, offering insights into the factors that influence recidivism and participation in employment programs like Opportunity Oregon.

## **Employment and Recidivism**

Employment has a crucial role in reducing recidivism by providing both financial stability and strong social bonds for individuals reentering society post incarceration (Rakis, 2005). A steady job can encourage accountability as others begin to rely on the individual's consistency and performance. Employment also creates a structured daily routine, which reduces idle time and the likelihood of reoffending. In addition, holding a job creates financial stability, which is essential for securing housing and meeting basic needs—both key factors in reducing recidivism. Beyond the financial and structural benefits, employment can also increase social connectivity, helping formerly incarcerated individuals feel more included and less ostracized by their criminal history. Overall, meaningful employment serves as a powerful tool in breaking the cycle of incarceration and supporting long-term success after release.



A longitudinal study by Visser and colleagues (2008) found that, “[r]espondents who held a job while in prison and those who participated in job-training programs while incarcerated had better employment outcomes after release.” Employment provides the means to live a pro-social life yet securing employment after incarceration can be especially difficult for individuals who lack work experience, creating another barrier on top of their criminal record. Job opportunities and vocational training during incarceration can help build both the skills and confidence necessary to succeed in the job market post-release and ultimately support reintegration and help to break the cycle of recidivism.

Similar to working while incarcerated, earning certifications helps to reduce recidivism. Vocational training and the attainment of certifications while incarcerated provide individuals with tangible skills and qualifications that can improve their employability after release. Research shows that individuals who earn a vocational certificate while incarcerated experience a fifty-three percent reduction in recidivism, with the most significant impact seen among those who complete a full course of training and obtain a formal certification or qualification (Jalongo, 2019). These programs not only enhance practical skills but also contribute to increased self-efficacy and confidence. By offering clear pathways to employment, certifications can play a crucial role in breaking the cycle of reoffending.

Facility programs can have a critical role in reducing recidivism by equipping individuals with the tools they need to successfully reintegrate into society. A study by Bryne (2019) evaluated research on general Bureaus of Prison program types such as substance abuse, employment, education, mental health, and other prison-based initiatives like mentoring and social support. The study found a significant reduction in recidivism among people who participated in the program, providing evidence that engagement in programs can directly lower

the likelihood of recidivism three years post-release. This supports the idea that individuals must be given the opportunity to build skills, stability, and self-efficacy to find employment outside of prison and reduce recidivism.

Vocational preparation programs have significant potential to enhance inmates' financial, personal, and professional success while simultaneously contributing to lower recidivism rates. A study conducted by Fitzgerald et.al. (2012) analyzed the effectiveness of OPTIONS, a group counseling intervention aimed at improving inmates' employment skills and career readiness. The OPTIONS employment intervention was designed to help incarcerated individuals prepare for reentry into the workforce by focusing on career exploration, resume building, interview preparation, and developing problem-solving and goal-setting strategies. Results from the study showed that OPTIONS participants experienced significant improvements in career search self-efficacy, problem-solving ability, and hopefulness from before the intervention to immediately after. These improvements were maintained at a one-month follow-up, suggesting the program's benefits were lasting. In contrast, individuals in the control group who did not participate in OPTIONS and received treatment as usual showed no significant changes in any of these areas. When comparing the two groups, those who participated in OPTIONS consistently scored higher in job-search confidence, problem solving skills, and overall hope. These findings highlight the importance of targeted employment-focused programs in supporting formerly incarcerated individuals as they transition back into society.

Although the research shows employment, certifications, and vocational programs are tools for reducing recidivism, some inmates may be barred from participating as a form of punishment for misbehavior. Disciplinary reports are intended to be used to ensure safety and order throughout prisons by deterring and punishing misconduct. If an individual receives a

disciplinary report, their participation in programs and services may be interrupted or revoked. In practice, prison discipline often operates as a system of arbitrary authority and excessive punishment where correctional staff frequently sanction individuals for minor behaviors or basic survival strategies (Nam-Sonenstein & Haney, 2025). Research has nonetheless found a relationship between confinement in disciplinary segregation and increased odds of recidivism (Butler et al, 2019). This pattern can be explained through the lens of labeling theory, which suggests that repeated punishment for minor, non-harmful behaviors can create confusion around what constitutes right and wrong—ultimately reinforcing a criminal identity (Butler et al, 2019). When disciplinary systems operate without accountability, incarcerated individuals are held solely responsible for negative outcomes, and the “common sense” response can be the escalation of harmful sanctions, reinforcing recidivism patterns (Nam-Sonenstein & Haney, 2025).

### **Demographic Factors and Recidivism**

Recidivism and rehabilitation are multifaceted issues with no universal solution. People’s lives differ in many ways, and what may work for one individual in terms of rehabilitation may not be effective for another. This is why understanding the role of demographic factors in predicting recidivism is crucial. By recognizing these predictors, more targeted and effective rehabilitation programs that address the unique needs of those most at risk could be created and supported, leading to better outcomes for individuals and society.

Academics consistently have found significant gender-based differences in recidivism rates. The 2009 Florida Recidivism Study conducted by McNeil (2010) examined factors influencing recidivism for the purpose of helping allocate correctional resources effectively. The study found that female inmates have significantly lower recidivism rates than male inmates. It

takes six years for the female recidivism rate to reach 33.2 percent, roughly the same as the male recidivism rate after just three years (34.7%). In general, the study found male inmates are 50.6 percent more likely to recidivate than female inmate when all other factors are held constant. Although multiple studies have confirmed that men recidivate at higher rates than women, there is still no unified explanation for why (Brennan et al., 2012; Daly, 1994). Research has identified certain types of crimes that are more predictive of recidivism for each gender—property and drug offenses among women, and violent offenses among men—but a clear underlying cause behind the gender gap is still missing (Salisbury & Voorhis, 2009).

Age can also be a predictor of recidivism, with some studies claiming that age is one of the most powerful variables in predicting recidivism (Onsando, 2012). Research shows that criminal behavior tends to rise sharply during adolescence and declines quickly in adulthood (Sweeten et al., 2013). Additionally, older offenders are consistently less likely to recidivate than younger offenders, even when they have served similar sentences (Hunt & Easley, 2017). Research shows that this phenomenon can be explained by various criminological factors. Social learning processes like associating with antisocial peers and experiencing peer pressure to engage in deviant behavior are major influences on younger individuals and help explain why crime is more common during adolescence (Onsando, 2012). Additionally, as individuals mature, they encounter less strain, develop better impulse control, perceive fewer rewards from crime, and experience major life changes such as completing education, starting careers, and forming stable relationships, all which contribute to the overall decline in criminal activity with age (Onsando, 2012).

Education is widely recognized as a key factor in reducing recidivism. Magee (2021) found that education not only reduces the likelihood of first-time offenses, but also significantly

reduces recidivism among individuals who pursue further education while incarcerated. Obtaining a GED or a higher degree while incarcerated is strongly associated with lower recidivism rates. This can be traced to an increase in potential wages after release, which provides individuals with greater incentive to live a pro-social lifestyle where lawful employment offers more financial reward than criminal activity. Further, as the education level earned rises to associate or bachelor's degrees, recidivism levels continue to decrease.

The relationship between race, ethnicity, and recidivism is complex. Race is a social construct that includes physical traits like skin color, while ethnicity refers to cultural factors like nationality and language (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). This distinction is not always clear to the general public. Nonetheless, research shows that Black and Hispanic offenders are more likely to recidivate than White offenders (McGovern et al, 2009). Further, Black court clients have significantly lower odds of recidivating compared to White clients, while ethnicity has no significant impact (Atkin-Plunk et al, 2019). However, it is important to note that these findings are correlational, not casual, and that race is often intertwined with systemic factors such as socioeconomic disadvantage and limited access to conventional opportunities, which can create additional barriers and increase the likelihood of recidivism.

Length of incarceration can also be an indicator of recidivism. Cotter's (2022) study of the relationship between length of incarceration and recidivism for federal offenders found that those who received prison sentences longer than sixty months had lower odds of recidivism compared to a comparable group who served shorter sentences. The study found no statistically significant differences in recidivism among federal offenders sentenced to sixty months or less. Similarly, Salisbury & Van Voorhis's (2009) study hypothesized that the longer individuals are incarcerated, the more they value their limited freedoms upon release, which can deter future

criminal behavior. However, there is no clear answer to why this trend can be seen. In fact, Brennan and colleagues (2012) even claim that extended prison terms may lead to institutionalization, leaving individuals ill-prepared to reintegrate into society and therefore increasing the likelihood of reoffending after release. Ultimately, while some claim longer incarceration may reduce recidivism, the relationship is complex and influenced by various factors with no single explanation fitting all individuals.

There is limited research specifically analyzing the relationship between individuals with disabilities and recidivism. However, mental health disorders have been studied extensively in this context and are consistently associated with higher rates of recidivism. In fact, 41 percent of all state and federal prisoners have had a history of mental health problems (Maruschak et al, 2016). Intellectual disabilities have also been identified as a risk factor for recidivism, potentially due to individuals not receiving appropriate medical and social services once released (Okamura et al, 2023). Additionally, individuals with multiple arrests in the past year are three times more likely to have a serious mental illness than people who have no arrests (Jones & Sawyer, 2019). Overall, mental and intellectual disabilities appear to be strong predictors of recidivism, largely due to the lack of adequate resources and support available for these people both during and after incarceration. Based on this, it may be reasonable to hypothesize that individuals with other forms of disabilities may follow a similar trend driven by similar systemic gaps in care and support.

Overall, existing research consistently demonstrates a strong connection between recidivism and carceral experiences—such as involvement in facility programs or working while incarcerated—as well as demographic factors, offering valuable guidance for the development of more effective rehabilitation programs. By tailoring support to the specific needs of individuals

who are most at risk, programs like Opportunity Oregon can improve outcomes and reduce the likelihood of reoffending. My analysis of Opportunity Oregon will explore whether incarceration experiences and demographic trends identified in previous studies align with those in the program's participant data. I will examine how two key outcomes—contact with Opportunity Oregon and employment status—relate to recidivism. Contact reflects an individual's willingness and ability to engage with available resources, while employment status serves as a key indicator of successful reintegration. Because securing stable employment is a well-established protective factor against recidivism, I expect to find that individuals who maintain employment share characteristics with those previously identified as less likely to recidivate. By addressing these connections through my four research questions, this study aims to provide actionable insights that can help shape Opportunity Oregon's as well as other reentry agencies policies and procedures to better serve its participants and reduce recidivism more effectively.

### **Chapter 3: Opportunity Oregon**

Opportunity Oregon, created in 2021, is a non-profit reentry employment agency located in Springfield, Oregon. Opportunity Oregon was founded by Nancy Pance and her brother Joseph P. Carmack. Ms. Pance was incarcerated herself, and experienced immense struggles when attempting to find employment after her release. Through determination and perseverance, she eventually secured employment, an experience that brought her both joy and a renewed sense of purpose. Motivated by her own transformation and relief she felt when she finally secured a job, Ms. Pance decided to dedicate her life to help others achieve the same success. With the support of her brother, she created Opportunity Oregon to guide formally incarcerated individuals toward meaningful employment and a better life.

In January of 2025, Opportunity Oregon welcomed its newest team member, Michelle Ehlers. Ms. Ehlers was the first student to graduate from the Higher Education in Prison Program (HEP), earning her bachelor's degree just twenty-seven days before her release from prison. She now works full-time at Opportunity Oregon, managing the office and intake appointments, which allows Ms. Pance to focus more on outreach efforts such as career fairs. This recent addition to the team has sparked upward momentum for Opportunity Oregon, enabling the organization to expand and assist more individuals upon their release.

Opportunity Oregon's mission is to, "...find employment for justice-involved individuals through prison outreach, employer education, and business development services" (Opportunity Oregon, 2021). The program focuses on collaborating with the Oregon Department of Corrections and community partners to provide resources, training, and job opportunities for justice-involved individuals. It engages employers by educating them on the benefits of hiring individuals with criminal history, understanding their needs, connecting them with qualified



candidates, and arranging job interviews with contracted employers. The program also emphasizes reintegration through outreach, peer mentorship, and sharing lived experiences to encourage behavioral change during incarceration.

The process of Opportunity Oregon is unique in that it assists program participants even before the job search process begins. A major part of its success comes from beginning outreach while individuals are still incarcerated. Through career fairs and motivational presentations held inside Oregon's prison facilities, Opportunity Oregon establishes a strong presence early on. These events are created by inviting employers and partners to speak directly with incarcerated individuals about their work and opportunities. Career fairs play a crucial role in breaking down the barrier of fear and uncertainty. This proactive approach not only spreads awareness of the program but also offers a sense of hope and possibility by connecting participants with realistic, supportive employment pathways, Opportunity Oregon increases the likelihood of long-term success and reduces the frustration that can lead to recidivism.

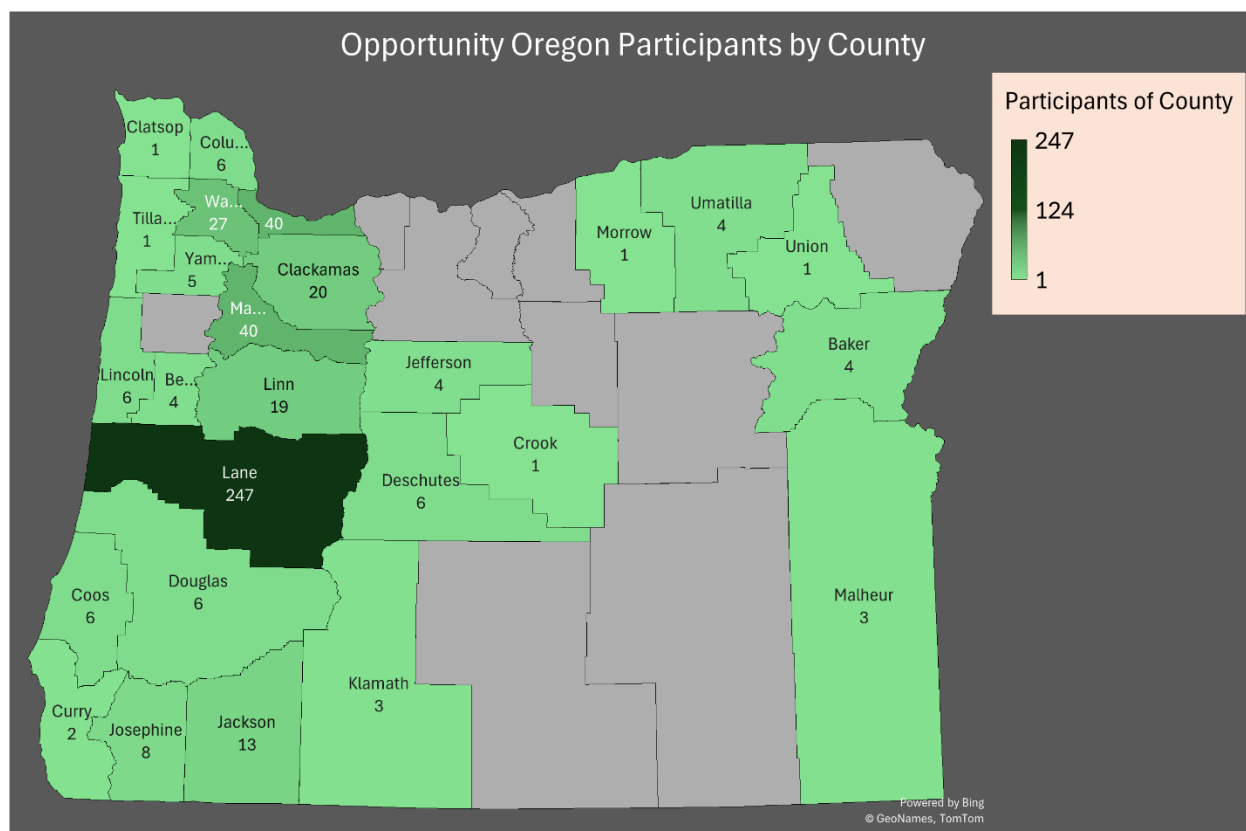
Individuals can apply for the program while still incarcerated, allowing them to be helped immediately upon release. Once released, participants can schedule an appointment to receive one-on-one guidance in creating resumes, filling out job applications, and navigating online job platforms. Assistance with technological literacy is also provided, which can be a major hurdle for formerly incarcerated individuals as their access to technology is extremely limited while incarcerated. Also, Opportunity Oregon encourages people to engage directly with hiring managers by going into the physical location and dropping off cover letters after applying. This is a skill that can greatly improve job prospects—especially for those with a criminal background.

These skills are essential in finding employment opportunities, yet many incarcerated individuals do not have them. Basic job-seeking knowledge such as where to look for jobs, learning how to write resumes, and understanding what employers are looking for are often unfamiliar to this population. The lack of job preparation skills and knowledge have serious consequences for many of those released from prison, as researchers have found “In the decade leading up to incarceration, less than half of subsequently incarcerated individuals were employed in any given year...” (Looney & Turner, 2018). Opportunity Oregon provides tools and training that can be truly life-changing for participants, giving them the skills they may never have had access to.

Opportunity Oregon’s strong community partnerships are a key component of its success, particularly through its focus on job connections and employer partnerships. By maintaining a state-wide database of employers who are open to hiring individuals with a criminal record, Opportunity Oregon helps to eliminate one of the most significant barriers to reentry: employment discrimination. Many of these employers offer full-time positions with benefits and are concentrated in the trade field and other industries that value skill, reliability, and growth potential. Opportunity Oregon also partners with unions, reentry organizations, and service providers from across the state. Some of these partners include WorkSource Oregon, Oregon Housing and Community Services, Changing Patterns, Legacy Stoneworks, Sponsors, Oregon Department of Human Services, Union Pacific Railroad, Lane Transit District, Oregon Department of Corrections, Dave’s Killer Bread, and many more.

Because Opportunity Oregon has resources state-wide, they can help all individuals released in the state of Oregon. Figure 1 shows the number of participants who have applied to Opportunity Oregon by county. Opportunity Oregon hosted its first career fair in eastern Oregon

in April of this year at Snake River Correctional Institution, showing promising potential for future growth.



**Figure 1:** Number of Opportunity Oregon applicants per county.

A total of 487 participants are represented in this data. A total of 26 counties are shown.

Reentry employment agencies represent a promising solution to the issue of recidivism. While they may not resolve every challenge, they offer a crucial step toward positive change by providing individuals with the tools and support necessary to secure stable employment. Demonstrating the effectiveness of such initiatives could garner greater support for Opportunity Oregon and similar programs, ultimately transforming more lives.

## Chapter 4: Methods

The research questions for this study relate to two specific outcomes, program contact and employment status. Based on a review of the prior literature related to carceral experiences, recidivism, and reentry success, the four research questions guiding this study are: **(1a)** Who has contacted Opportunity Oregon after initially applying while incarcerated? **(1b)** What factors identified in prior literature are most consistently associated with applicants making contact with Opportunity Oregon? **(2a)** Of those who maintain contact with Opportunity Oregon, what was their employment status after going through the program? **(2b)** What factors identified in prior literature are most consistently associated with variation in employment status outcomes?

This study uses participant data collected by Opportunity Oregon from applicants across the state of Oregon. The data was obtained through mailed-in applications submitted to Opportunity Oregon. Since its establishment in 2021, Opportunity Oregon has recorded a total of 990 applicants. However, the sample that was analyzed for this study was limited to the 540 individuals who were not incarcerated at the time of the analysis. This exclusion was necessary because individuals who were still incarcerated had not yet engaged with the program outside of the prison walls, and therefore could not provide relevant data for assessing program outcomes.

I reviewed the existing physical applications stored in the Opportunity Oregon office to ensure all information was accurately inputted into the Monday.com Software system that Opportunity Oregon uses to track participants. Where information was missing or incomplete, I manually inputted or updated the data as needed. Once the data set was verified and completed within the platform, I exported it to Microsoft Excel to remove all personally identifiable information and proceeded with further cleaning, organization, and analysis.

## Dependent Variables

| Category                                | Participants        |
|-----------------------------------------|---------------------|
| Total Released Participants             | 543                 |
| • 0–No Contact                          | 212 (7 Recidivated) |
| • 1–Contact                             | 331                 |
| Participants Who Have Made Contact      | 331 **5 other**     |
| • 0–Received Services, No Contact Since | 76                  |
| • 1–Actively Seeking Employment         | 66                  |
| • 2–Employed                            | 184                 |

**Table 1:** Dependent variable breakdown

The initial sample for addressing research questions 1a (Who has maintained contact with Opportunity Oregon after initially applying while incarcerated?) and 1b (What factors identified in prior literature are most consistently associated with applicants making contact with Opportunity Oregon) consists of 543 released participants who have applied to Opportunity Oregon. The dependent variable for this analysis is a dichotomous outcome, labeled “contact” (see Table 1: “Dependent Variable Breakdown”). This variable is coded as “0” for the 212 Opportunity Oregon applicants who have applied for the program but have had no further contact with the program since their release—205 of these participant’s status remains unknown while 7 have been reincarcerated. In contrast, the variable is coded as “1” for the 331 Opportunity Oregon applicants who made contact and experienced a range of employment outcomes. This coding scheme allows for determination of the demographic and incarceration factors that are associated with making contact with Opportunity Oregon.

The second dependent variable for this study is based on the research questions 2a (Of those who made contact with Opportunity Oregon, what was their employment status after going through the program?) and 2b (What factors identified in prior literature are most consistently

associated with variation in employment status outcomes?) Thus, employment status is a dependent variable based on the 331 applicants who made contact with Opportunity Oregon after their release (see Table 1: “Participants Who Have Made Contact”). This nominal variable is coded into three different categories: “0” representing the 76 participants whose status is unknown, “1” representing the 66 participants who are actively seeking employment, and “2” representing the 184 participants who are employed, in college, or on social security benefits. This coding scheme allows for a comparison of the employment success of individuals who contacted Opportunity Oregon to determine if contact with the program is associated with better employment outcomes. Five out of the 331 participants who made contact with Opportunity Oregon after their release were fired or are deceased which will not be included as an employment status category in the analysis, giving us a total sample size of 326.

### **Independent Variables**

For this study, I have identified ten independent variables to analyze for Opportunity Oregon: gender, age, presence of disabilities, education level, race/ethnicity, length of incarceration, whether they received any disciplinary reports while incarcerated, participation in facility programs while incarcerated, certifications earned while incarcerated, and jobs worked while incarcerated. See Table 2 for a complete list of these variables.

The demographic variables include a dichotomous variable, gender which has two categories of male and female. Two non-binary and transgender were excluded from the analyses due to the small number participants who fell into those categories. Age is a continuous variable that captures the age of participants when they initially applied for the program. Race/ethnicity is a nominal variable that includes Caucasian/White, Hispanic, African American, Native American, and Asian. Education level is an ordinal variable that includes some high

school, GED, high school diploma, and college. Due to the small number of participants who completed some college, an associate’s degree, or bachelor’s degree, these three categories were combined for analyses. Disability status is a dichotomous variable with “yes” reflecting the presence of a disability and “no” reflecting no presence of a disability.

Other independent variables capture information about experiences while incarcerated. Length of incarceration is a continuous variable that captures the most recent sentence length for each participant ranging from 3 months to 480 months. Several additional dichotomous variables were coded as “0. No” or “1. Yes” based on the absence or presence of the particular variable. Disciplinary reports reflects whether the participant indicated they received at least one disciplinary report during their incarceration. Participation in facility programs, jobs worked, and certifications earned each were coded as “1. Yes” if the participant responded affirmatively, and “0. No” if they did not indicate they participated in the activity.

As seen in Table 2, the sample used for this study were mostly male (79.7%), between the ages of 30 and 39, White (63.7%), received a GED (50.7%) or high school diploma (32.9%), and did not report a disability (91.7%). In terms of experiences while incarcerated, most spent 37 to 96 months in prison and more than half did not receive disciplinary reports (58.6%). Most of the sample (91.5%) participated in work while incarcerated, such as skilled trades, food service, or janitorial/laundry positions. The sample was also heavily involved in programs while incarcerated (87.4%) and received certifications (61.8%) like food handler’s, flagging, and forklift operation.

| <b>Variable</b> | <b># Available</b> | <b>Total #</b> | <b>Percentage</b> | <b>Mean/Mode</b> |
|-----------------|--------------------|----------------|-------------------|------------------|
| <b>Gender</b>   | 295                |                |                   | Male             |

|                                |            |       |                    |
|--------------------------------|------------|-------|--------------------|
| Male                           | 235        | 79.7% |                    |
| Female                         | 58         | 19.7% |                    |
| Other                          | 2          | 0.7%  |                    |
| <b>Age</b>                     | <b>103</b> |       | <b>44.5</b>        |
| 20-29                          | 18         | 17.5% |                    |
| 30-39                          | 39         | 37.9% |                    |
| 40-49                          | 24         | 23.3% |                    |
| 50-59                          | 12         | 11.7% |                    |
| 60+                            | 10         | 9.7%  |                    |
| <b>Length of Incarceration</b> | <b>153</b> |       | <b>68.3 Months</b> |
| 0-12 Months                    | 29         | 19%   |                    |
| 13-24 Months                   | 32         | 20.9% |                    |
| 25-36 Months                   | 13         | 8.5%  |                    |
| 37-96 Months                   | 54         | 35.3% |                    |
| Over 96 Months                 | 24         | 15.7% |                    |
| <b>Education Levels</b>        | <b>152</b> |       | <b>GED</b>         |
| Some High School Credits       | 4          | 2.6%  |                    |
| General Education Degree       | 77         | 50.7% |                    |
| High School Diploma            | 50         | 32.9% |                    |
| Some College Credits           | 7          | 4.6%  |                    |
| Associate's Degree             | 9          | 5.9%  |                    |
| Bachelor's Degree              | 5          | 3.3%  |                    |
| <b>Race/Ethnicity</b>          | <b>110</b> |       | <b>White</b>       |
| Caucasian/White                | 74         | 63.7% |                    |
| Hispanic/Latinx                | 19         | 17.3% |                    |



|                                                         |           |              |      |
|---------------------------------------------------------|-----------|--------------|------|
| African American/Black                                  | 5         | 4.5%         |      |
| Native American                                         | 7         | 6.4%         |      |
| Asian/Pacific Islander                                  | 5         | 4.5%         |      |
| <b>Received Disciplinary Reports While Incarcerated</b> | 169       |              | No   |
| Yes                                                     | 70        | 41.4 %       |      |
| No                                                      | 99        | 58.6%        |      |
| <b>Participated in Facility Programs</b>                | 167       |              | Yes  |
| Yes                                                     | 146       | 87.4%        |      |
| No                                                      | 21        | 12.6%        |      |
| <b>Disabilities/Barriers</b>                            | 168       |              | None |
| Yes                                                     | 14        | 8.3%         |      |
| No                                                      | 154       | 91.7%        |      |
| <b>Worked While Incarcerated</b>                        | 164       |              | Yes  |
| Yes                                                     | 150       | 91.5%        |      |
| No                                                      | 14        | 8.5%         |      |
| <b>Receival of Certifications While Incarcerated</b>    | 165       |              | Yes  |
| Yes                                                     | 102       | 61.8%        |      |
| <b>No</b>                                               | <b>63</b> | <b>38.2%</b> |      |

**Table 2:** Descriptive Statistics of Sample

## Analysis

The software, Stata (version 18.5), was used to analyze the relationships between independent and dependent variables. Chi-square goodness-of-fit tests were used to analyze nominal variables (gender and race/ethnicity), dichotomous variables (presence of disabilities, receipt of disciplinary reports, participation in facility programs, certification earned, and job worked), and ordinal variables (education levels). A chi-square goodness-of-fit test checks

whether the distribution of a categorical variable in a sample matches expected proportions (UCLA: Statistical Consulting Group, n.d.). Because chi-square tests assume cell sizes are greater than zero, test results were replicated using Fisher's Exact Tests when cell sizes fell below five. Statistical significance for these tests was determined if p-values were less than .05.

T-tests were used to examine the relationship between continuous variables (age and length of incarceration) and the first dependent variable, contact after release. A two-sample t-test is used to compare the means of two independent groups (if participants made contact or not after release) to see if there is a statistically significant difference between them (UCLA: Statistical Consulting Group, n.d.). A one-way ANOVA test was used to test the relationship between continuous variables (age and length of incarceration) and the second dependent variable, employment status after participating in Opportunity Oregon. A one-way ANOVA tests whether there are significant differences in the mean of a continuous variable across two or more groups defined by a categorical independent variable (UCLA: Statistical Consulting Group, n.d.). In this case, there are three categories of employment status among individuals who contacted Opportunity Oregon after their release. Statistical significance for these tests was determined if p-values were less than .05.

## Chapter 5: Findings

### Stata Results

The first set of research questions relate to which variables are significantly associated with the outcome variable that captures whether participants contacted Opportunity Oregon after they were released from incarceration. The second set of research questions relate to which variables are significantly associated with the outcome variable that captures the employment status of individuals after they have utilized Opportunity Oregon's resources.

#### *Significant Findings: Research Questions 1a and 1b*

The first research question, "Who has contacted Opportunity Oregon after initially applying while incarcerated?", can be answered with a descriptive overview of the data. Table 3 provides descriptive statistics for those who made contact with Opportunity Oregon following release. By comparison, those who made contact with Opportunity Oregon appear similar to those in the initial sample (Table 2). They are predominantly male, received a GED or high school diploma, White, and had work experience while incarcerated.

| Variable           | Subsample n | Mean/% | SD    |
|--------------------|-------------|--------|-------|
| Gender (male)      | 141         | 85.1%  |       |
| Age                | 33          | 41.67  | 11.83 |
| Education          | 48          |        |       |
| Less than HS       |             | 4.2%   |       |
| GED                |             | 39.6%  |       |
| High School        |             | 39.6%  |       |
| Any College        |             | 16.7%  |       |
| Race               | 41          |        |       |
| White              |             | 68.3%  |       |
| Black              |             | 7.3%   |       |
| Hispanic           |             | 17.1%  |       |
| Native American    |             | 2.4%   |       |
| Asian              |             | 4.9%   |       |
| Disabilities (yes) | 60          | 11.7%  |       |

|                                  |    |        |       |
|----------------------------------|----|--------|-------|
| Length of Incarceration (months) | 52 | 79.23% | 83.28 |
| Discipline (yes)                 | 55 | 34.5%  |       |
| Facility Program (yes)           | 55 | 90.9%  |       |
| Certifications (yes)             | 55 | 69.1%  |       |
| Worked (yes)                     | 55 | 92.7%  |       |

**Table 3:** Descriptive Statistics of those who Contacted Opportunity Oregon

| gender | contact       |               | Total         |
|--------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
|        | no            | yes           |               |
| female | 37<br>24.18   | 21<br>14.89   | 58<br>19.73   |
| male   | 116<br>75.82  | 120<br>85.11  | 236<br>80.27  |
| Total  | 153<br>100.00 | 141<br>100.00 | 294<br>100.00 |

Pearson  $\chi^2(1) = 3.9985$  Pr = 0.046

**Figure 2:** Chi-Square test examining the association between gender and post-release contact with Opportunity Oregon.

The first sub-row on this table represents the n value, or the number of participants, and the second sub-row represents the percent.

The second research question, “What factors identified in prior literature are most consistently associated with applicants making contact with Opportunity Oregon?” relies on statistical tests to examine significant differences among those who contacted Opportunity Oregon and those who did not. There is a statistical difference between genders when comparing whether participants contacted Opportunity Oregon after they were released because the p-value is 0.046, which is less than 0.05 (Figure 2). Of those who contacted Opportunity Oregon, 14.89 percent were females and 85.11 percent were males, indicating males are more likely to contact Opportunity Oregon than females.

### *Non-Significant Findings: Research Questions 1a and 1b*

For the dependent variable that captures whether participants made contact with Opportunity Oregon upon release, nine out of the ten independent variables showed no significant difference: education levels, ethnicity/race, the presence of disabilities, age, incarceration length, presence of disabilities, receipt of disciplinary reports, if a certification was earned while incarcerated, and if the individual worked while incarcerated. These results, especially regarding participation in work and programs while incarcerated, may not be surprising given the lack of variability in these measures seen in Table 2 and Table 3.

### *Significant Findings: Research Questions 2a and 2b*

The third research question asks, “Of those who maintain contact with Opportunity Oregon, what was their employment status after going through the program?” As seen in Table 1, the majority of participants who made contact with the program—55.5 percent—were employed ( $n = 184$ ). While 66 or 19.9 percent were still seeking employment, another 76 participants (23%) did not work with Opportunity Oregon since their initial post-release contact.

| disabiliti<br>es | unknown      | actively     | employed     | Total        |
|------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| no               | 17<br>89.47  | 9<br>64.29   | 27<br>100.00 | 53<br>88.33  |
| yes              | 2<br>10.53   | 5<br>35.71   | 0<br>0.00    | 7<br>11.67   |
| Total            | 19<br>100.00 | 14<br>100.00 | 27<br>100.00 | 60<br>100.00 |

Pearson  $\chi^2(2) = 11.4460$  Pr = 0.003

**Figure 3:** Chi-Square test examining the association between the presence of disabilities and post-release employment status among Opportunity Oregon participants.

The first sub-row on this table represents the n value, or the number of participants, and the second sub-row represents the percent.

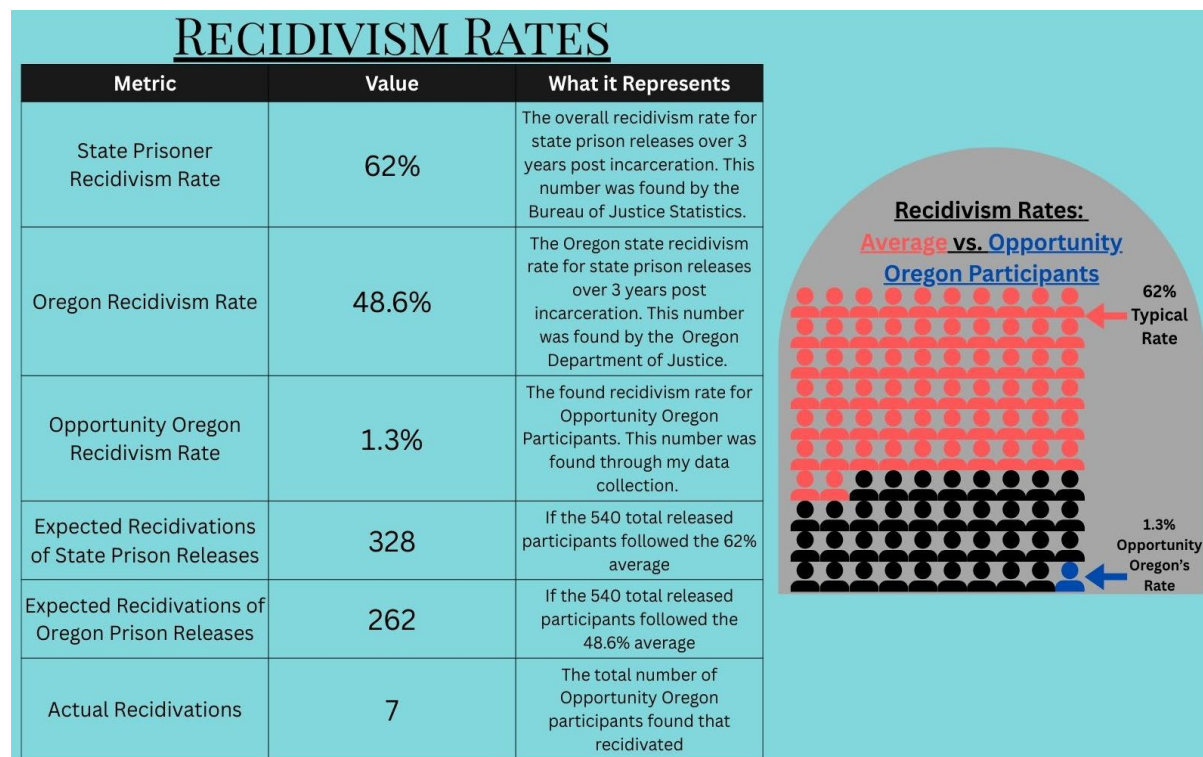
The fourth research question is, “What factors identified in prior literature are most consistently associated with variation in employment status outcomes?” There is a statistical difference between participants with and without disabilities when comparing employment status because the p-value is 0.003 which is less than 0.05 (Figure 3). All participants who have been employed with the help of Opportunity Oregon did not have disabilities, and only 11.67 percent of participants who have made contact with Opportunity Oregon have had a disability. Because chi-square tests assume non-zero cell sizes, these results were verified with Fisher’s Exact Test, which allows for smaller cell sizes, and the significant findings hold.

#### *Non-Significant Findings: Research Questions 2a and 2b*

For the second dependent variable of employment status among the participants who made contact with Opportunity Oregon after their release, nine out of ten independent variables showed no significant difference by status: gender, education levels, ethnicity/race, receipt of disciplinary reports while incarcerated, participation in programs while incarcerated, receipt of certifications while incarcerated, if participants worked while incarcerated, age, and

incarceration length. Again, these null findings are not surprising given the lack of variability within the sample across these measures.

## Recidivism Rates



**Figure 4:** Recidivism rates found among Opportunity Oregon participants compared to the overall recidivism rate found among general state prison releases and specifically Oregon state prisoners.

Both the general state prisoner recidivism rate and the Oregon state recidivism rate includes all people post incarceration who have been arrested within 3 years of their release (Durose & Antenangeli, 2021). The Opportunity Oregon recidivism rate is of participants who have been reincarcerated. Interestingly, every individual identified as having recidivated had no recorded contact with Opportunity Oregon after their release, meaning they fell into the category of ‘In Community/Status Unknown.’ Figure 9 provides a comparison of national and state recidivism rates against the recidivism rate identified among Opportunity Oregon participants.

It is important to note, there were three participants from the sample of 331 participants who maintained contact with Opportunity Oregon after release and successfully found employment but were fired. This could be considered as recidivation as well, which would bring the number of actual recidivations to ten.



## **Chapter 6: Limitations**

### **Missing Data**

Missing data posed issues particularly for demographic variables and those related to incarceration experiences. For example, only 103 respondents indicated their age. Meanwhile, 540 were missing information about disciplinary records. The demographic variable, gender, had the least amount of missing data, where 295 participants provided information to be used in the analysis.

Missing data could be the reason for the limited number of significant findings. With fewer complete data points available for analysis, it becomes more difficult to detect meaningful relationships or patterns, even if they do exist (Schafer & Graham, 2002). This may be the case for the variables that did not yield statistically significant results. As Opportunity Oregon continues to grow, it is likely that their capacity for recordkeeping and data collection will improve as well—a shift I have already begun to witness with the addition of Michelle to the team. Also, with the creation of new columns in the Monday.com recruitment database to capture the independent variables I identified, it has become easier to track this information, significantly improving data consistency moving forward. If this same analysis were conducted a year from now, the sample sizes could potentially double, reflecting the organization's ongoing expansions and the increasing number of individuals it serves—possibly leading to a greater number of significant findings.

### **Population Lifestyle**

Another major limitation of this study lies in the nature of the population being examined. My research questions aim to understand why reentry agencies are effective for some

individuals but not for others. It would be much simpler if the world operated in such black-and-white terms—if demographic factors alone could explain why some people choose to engage with Opportunity Oregon while others do not. However, the reality is far more complex. Many overlapping and compounding factors must be considered in order to fully answer these questions.

Individuals who are incarcerated represent a unique and often disconnected community—one in which conventional ties to work, society, and community may not hold the same influence. There are countless reasons why someone might not reach out to Opportunity Oregon after their release. They may lack access to a phone, forget the organization’s contact information, return to an unsupportive environment, or secure a job elsewhere on their own, among many other possibilities. There is no single, clear explanation for why a person does or does not maintain contact with Opportunity Oregon post-release, and this uncertainty is not the fault of either the organization or the individual.

That said, Opportunity Oregon can continue improving by tracking individuals’ engagement and identifying overall trends in who is making contact and utilizing services. Tracking more specific information about the types of services participants access can also provide Opportunity Oregon with details on where people slip through the cracks. Doing so could help them better allocate attention and resources to those most in need, while also providing a clearer picture of what outreach strategies or supports are most effective in encouraging ongoing engagement.

### **Selection Bias**

The final major limitation of this study is the potential for selection bias among participants of Opportunity Oregon. Individuals who choose to engage with the program may

already be highly motivated to change their lives post-incarceration, which could partially explain the extremely low recidivism rates observed, as well as the high rates of successful employment. These participants may also have greater access to personal resources and support systems, further distinguishing them from the general population of formally incarcerated individuals.

To address this limitation and test whether Opportunity Oregon's success is truly attributable to the program rather than participant self-selection, further research and analysis are needed. One approach would be to conduct a comparative study involving two groups randomly assigned to different conditions: individuals mandated to participate in Opportunity Oregon and individuals who do not receive any services from the program. Comparing the employment and recidivism rates of these two groups could help determine whether the program's effectiveness holds independent of participant motivation.

Notably, Opportunity Oregon is already participating in a program with this kind of design. Through the Pathway Homes initiative, which involves participants required to receive support from Opportunity Oregon upon release. If Opportunity Oregon wishes to investigate and potentially refute the role of selection bias in its outcomes, it could analyze and compare the recidivism rates of Pathway Home clients with the remainder of its voluntary participants. Such an analysis would provide a more robust understanding of the program's impact.

## Chapter 7: Discussion

This study aims to explore the relationship between ten demographic variables and initial as well as sustained contact with Opportunity Oregon. The purpose of this project is to provide Opportunity Oregon with data and resources that can support future grant applications and funding opportunities. Four research questions are driving my project: **(1a)** Who has contacted Opportunity Oregon after initially applying while incarcerated? **(1b)** What factors identified in prior literature are most consistently associated with applicants making contact with Opportunity Oregon? **(2a)** Of those who made contact with Opportunity Oregon, what was their employment status after going through the program? **(2b)** What factors identified in prior literature are most consistently associated with variation in employment status outcomes?

### *Gender*

For my first dependent variable of contact, gender yielded a significant result suggesting that males are significantly more likely to contact Opportunity Oregon after release than females. Previous literature claims that men recidivate at higher rates than women, which could explain why more men need the resources provided by Opportunity Oregon. These results may reflect broader gendered patterns in social support and caregiving. Research from the Pew Research Center (2025) shows that women tend to maintain stronger support networks than men, which may help them navigate reentry differently. Additionally, women are more likely to take on primary caregiving roles. Studies have found that this caregiving responsibility often leads to reduced work hours or withdrawal from the workforce (Pacheco Barzallo et al., 2024; Lerner Center, 2021). As a result, women may prioritize caregiving over traditional employment after incarceration, influencing both their needs and outcomes.

Although no significant relationship was found between gender and employment status, this suggests that gender does not significantly influence continued participation in the program. The key takeaway is that both men and women appear equally successful in securing employment with support from Opportunity Oregon.

### *Presence of Disabilities*

The presence of disabilities showed no significant findings regarding initial contact after release, but did show significant findings for employment status, indicating people without disabilities are more likely to continue contact with Opportunity Oregon, actively seek employment, and become employed with Opportunity Oregon's assistance after their release. This is consistent with previous literature which predicts that people with disabilities are more likely to recidivate due to gaps in adequate care and support (Maruschak et al, 2016; Okamura et al, 2023; Jones & Sawyer, 2019). While Opportunity Oregon may be able to fill certain gaps for individuals with disabilities, these individuals may also need support in areas beyond the organization's scope. Looking ahead, if Opportunity Oregon chooses to expand its services to better support people with disabilities, this data could help inform the development of future operations.

### *Non-Significant Findings*

This study found only one of the ten independent variables examined was significantly associated with post-release contact, and only one independent variable was significantly associated with continued engagement with Opportunity Oregon. Prior research suggests vocational training programs while incarcerated improve employment outcomes and reduce recidivism (Fitzgerald et al., 2012; Jalong, 2019; Visser et al., 2008). The current study found no significant effects related to employment, certifications, and program participation while

incarcerated on making contact with Opportunity Oregon or employment outcomes. The lack of significant findings reported here may suggest that Opportunity Oregon is universally accessible and beneficial, regardless of a person's background or circumstances. This points to a key conclusion: the most important factors in program engagement may not be demographic or structural, but rather an individual's motivation and readiness to succeed. As noted previously, this potential confounder can be addressed through a randomized design and evaluation of Opportunity Oregon.

Many individuals reentering society after incarceration lack the necessary tools and support systems to thrive. What they need is a real opportunity to change. Employment is a crucial component of successful reentry, yet it remains one of the most challenging hurdles to overcome. This is where Opportunity Oregon plays a critical role—by providing support, structure, and access to meaningful employment. The program helps bridge the gap between incarceration and reintegration.

### *Next Steps*

The next steps in this research could involve tracking the types of certifications and jobs held by participants to identify any statistically significant relationships. For example: Which certifications are most obtained among participants? Which certifications or job types are most strongly associated with post-release employment? How many participants found work in fields they were trained for or worked while incarcerated? These are all important questions that could be explored through similar analyses, provided more detailed participant data is available. As Opportunity Oregon continues to grow, the scope and richness of its data will expand as well, opening the door for deeper insights and stronger evidence of program impact.

## **Chapter 8: Conclusion**

Ultimately, my findings lead to the conclusion that reentry employment agencies such as Opportunity Oregon can be part of a solution for reducing recidivism rates in America. The data suggests that individuals who remain engaged with Opportunity Oregon and access its services are more likely to secure employment post-release. These outcomes align with existing research that links stable employment and access to resources with lower rates of recidivism (Pager, 2003; Sampson & Laub, 1993). While more comprehensive data and larger sample sizes are needed to confirm these trends, this analysis provides promising evidence of the role reentry agencies can play in supporting successful reentry post-incarceration.

One of the most surprising and significant findings from this analysis was the lack of significant differences across the ten variables examined in predicting post-release contact and participation. This suggests that the most powerful factor influencing involvement with Opportunity Oregon may not be tied to a specific background characteristic, but rather to exposure to the program itself and the sense of hope it instills. By entering facilities and meeting individuals where they are, Opportunity Oregon offers a rare and meaningful message: there are real opportunities after incarceration and people are capable of building successful futures. This is ultimately a very encouraging outcome. It implies that Opportunity Oregon's impact is not limited to any one demographic—it can benefit anyone, regardless of age, background, or prior experience. What seems to matter most is a person's willingness to engage and believe in their own potential.

Given these insights, Opportunity Oregon might consider strengthening their post-release outreach efforts. Implementing a system that automatically notifies staff when individuals are released—perhaps prompting a congratulatory message or phone call—could be a simple yet

powerful way to maintain momentum and encourage continued engagement. Even a small gesture could be the push someone needs to walk through the door and begin the next chapter of their life.

This study positions Opportunity Oregon as a potential model for other reentry employment programs across the country. If further research continues to demonstrate that Opportunity Oregon effectively supports participants in securing employment and successfully reintegrating into society, it could pave the way for similar organizations to adopt its methods. By highlighting the program's structure, outcomes, and participant demographics, this research can contribute to a broader conversation about best practices in reentry support. Ultimately, Opportunity Oregon has the potential not only to transform the lives of its participants, but also to inspire a shift in how reentry services are designed and delivered, helping more individuals nationwide find stability, purpose, and meaningful employment after incarceration.



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