

How to Use Participatory Research in Your Reentry Program Evaluation (and why you might want to) Transcript

Monica Sheppard: My name is Monica Sheppard, and I'm pleased to present this webinar on participatory research, what it is and how it can strengthen your reentry program. I just wanted to have a quick note here to say that our session is being recorded and wanted to make sure everyone is aware of that. This video will be made available to all who signed up. Then for presenters, so again, my name's Monica Sheppard. I'm from RTI International.

Also presenting today is Rachel Swaner, Swaner, excuse me, from the Center of Court Innovation, or CCI, who was a lead author for the research brief this webinar's based off of. She's going to get us started in the webinar today. Then in terms of our panel of experts, we have with us Mike Cannon from the Chicago Workforce Partnership, and Liz Johnston from the Family Services of Montgomery County, Pennsylvania. You'll be hearing more from both of them later in the presentation. Thank you all so much. I'll pass it back off to Rachel.

Rachel Swaner: Hi, everybody. Thank you for coming today to talk about participatory research and how you can use it in your reentry program evaluation. Just to give you an overview of what we're going to be talking about, we're going to talk about what is participatory research and define it, and then talk about what some of the benefits to the folks who you bring on as participatory researchers, and we'll define what that means, and some of the benefits that can bring to your program evaluation and your program.

Then we're going to think through some of the challenges that comes along when you're doing a participatory research project, and then who needs to be involved, when is the most appropriate time to do a participatory evaluation? Then finally, we would talk a little bit about how we can build off of the existing evaluations that are already in place and leverage some of the existing participatory work that you might already be doing that's not related to evaluation, and then we'll have our panel discussion, so it's the overview of how today is going to go.

What is participatory research? When you think about who is a researcher, sometimes you might think about people, scientists at a hospital, or researchers, or professors at a university. When we think about who is an expert, a lot of the images that might come to mind might be people doing work at an academic setting

like a university or a college, but when we are doing participatory research, we're also acknowledging that there are other forms of expertise, not just those that come from having academic training. There's knowledge that is built through cultural practices and community history over years. Then there's also knowledge that comes through personal experience or lived experience.

When we talk about lived experience, what do I mean by that? It means including people in your research and bringing them on as researchers on your evaluation team. They're hired staff that have personal and unique perspectives that come from having been affected by the research topic that you are studying, and understanding that those experiences and the knowledge gained from them are shaped by things such as race, and class, and gender. Participatory research is an approach to creating knowledge and recognizing these different forms of expertise that come from an academic setting, that come from community history, and that come from that personal or lived experience.

When you have participatory research, you're involving people with that lived experience in your research projects. When we're talking about reentry programs, this could mean involving and hiring as researchers former program participants, or other people who have been formerly incarcerated in jail or prison, or other people who are impacted by that issue, so it could be family members who have helped loved ones return home.

When you're doing participatory research, it means that you're involving those with lived experience as researchers throughout the whole research process. What does that research process look like? When we start, for any research project, we're thinking about what are the gaps in knowledge that we want to fill? What does our evaluation want to say? What questions are we trying to answer? Figuring out the major questions that we want to answer with our research is, and which gaps and knowledge we want to fill. Then designing our project and going out and actually collecting the data. That could be doing interviews with program staff, or former participants, or running focus groups, or getting surveys, or getting official data from the court system, or from other criminal legal system actors, so that's our data collection. Then analyzing that data, and synthesizing what we find and creating recommendations. Then finally, writing and disseminating our findings.

If we're talking about participatory evaluation, the participatory researchers, those with lived experience who have been impacted by the criminal legal system and incarceration, are involved in all

of these phases of the research process that has traditionally been the domain of more academic researchers. Those with lived experience are going to help determine which outcomes are most important to evaluate the program on and to measure success, which measures we're going to say would show that the program was successful. Going out and collecting the data. As I mentioned, you can go out and collect surveys from program participants. You can interview staff to find out what's working, what's not, what are some of the challenges that they've had. Then after you analyze and synthesize that data, you can present the evaluation results to funders, program staff, and other community members.

I'm saying this, I'm the research director at an organization called the Center for Court Innovation in New York City, and so I do a lot of research and evaluation. I'm going to talk a little bit about the power that evaluators have, not because I'm one myself, but because I think it's really important to understand as we are doing research on reentry programs and doing evaluations, in traditional evaluations, often the researchers are from research institutes or universities and they hold a lot of power. They determine whether a program works or not, and what the program has achieved and for whom, and what next steps could be. Evaluators are in the position of concluding of whether a program is successful or not. That could have longer-term implications for the program staff because they're doing the work.

Say, if the evaluators conclude that the program didn't work, it might mean a reduction in funding, so it could have an impact on staffing, and it could also take away essential services from community members who needed it, so we need to be really thoughtful about what outcomes and what measures of success we are looking at when we do an evaluation because it has a lot of longer-term consequences, so we want to be as thoughtful about which outcomes that we choose and which measures that we choose. You hold a lot of power in doing that because you're going to conclude whether a program is successful or not and what made it so based on what we choose. Having participatory researchers on the team helps us think through what matters most to affected community members that we, as more traditional researchers, might not think of.

We know that there's well-documented, long-time research that documents the negative impact that incarceration has on people's employment outcomes and their ability to get jobs. Oftentimes, there's a stigma associated with incarceration and there might be gaps in resumes that people, who have been incarcerated, might

face discrimination, employment discrimination. We know that incarceration has documented impacts, negative impacts on health, on physical health and mental health, on families, and relationships with partners and with children, and then the stigma of the criminal record. When we're thinking about power and the power that reentry program evaluators have, we want to think about, reentry programs provide necessary services for people who are returning home. We don't want them to go away because we chose the wrong measure, so thinking about all of those things as we are doing our reentry program evaluation. Having people with the lived experiences on our research team, who help us really critically think through those things, what is success and for whom is very, very important.

There are benefits to the program itself and the evaluation itself, as well as to the participatory researchers. The participatory researchers are those who are hired as part of the research team, and they're going to be trained to be researchers, who have been impacted in some way by the criminal legal system and incarceration. Again, that could be people who have been former program participants. It could be people who have been in jail or prison, and it could be family members who are helping their loved ones return home. Those people can be trained as researchers to be a part of your research team. The benefits that it brings to them is, as I mentioned, that there are often, there's stigma attached to having a criminal record and it's more difficult for some people to access employment in the mainstream economy, so providing them with meaningful jobs that are on a topic that's really important is one of the benefits, that it creates jobs and you train them in different skills so they build practical skills. They build analytic skills that researchers have.

In addition, it's building social capital. What I mean, what I say by that, it's giving them connections to people they might not have had connections with before, so some of those more traditional researchers, program staff, funders, policy-makers. It's building their own social capital and their ability to access those people in other ways for support around education or career development. It offers the opportunities for other skill development. As you become part of the research team, you'll get training on how to conduct research, how to do interviews, how to develop survey instruments, how to analyze the data, how to give presentations and present back, how to write effectively for a policy audience. It's promoting the skill development as well as the growth of leadership, that they can take these skills and transfer them after the research project and the evaluation of the reentry program is over to other areas and use those skills in other areas as well.

It also is greatly beneficial to the research and evaluation projects. I mentioned that when we think through what questions are important when we're evaluating program, those questions are usually coming from more traditional researchers and they're thinking, "What might be important to a policymaker or to a funder?" But let's, asking questions, maybe asking new questions that are really, "What's most important about this program and on the impacted population and the people that it served?" You might get different responses. You might say, "These other things are important," and not just, "Did we get rearrested?" But, "Did our families get reunited? Did we stay sober? Do we have connections to jobs or higher education?" We want to make sure that when we are evaluating our reentry programs, we want to be able to capture that full picture of the program's potential impact.

Creating more culturally responsive data collection materials. This means that people who have lived experience have the cultural knowledge of the population that the program is serving. Just as an example, I have done participatory research projects. My latest one was on trying to understand why young people in urban areas are carrying guns. In order to, when I was developing the interview guide, I talked to some of those young people and they were saying, "Oh, you can't ask this this way. You can't ask people if they're afraid. That puts them in a really vulnerable position," so I was able to reframe the questions to be able to get more accurate data. Including participatory researchers is going to help you get better data, and through the data collection instruments that you design, and it's going to improve the reliability of those measures as well because they're going to actually capture what we're really intending to capture. It's also going to capture, people are going to be answering it in a way that is meaningful to them because they'll understand the questions better.

Additionally, you might be able to gain access to people who you wanted to interview for your evaluation, but they were hard to access because maybe there was a lack of trust between the researcher and the former program participant. They felt that the researchers didn't understand them or, "Why would I talk to this person?" If you have people on your team who have that lived experience, they're more able to form those connections with former program participants or current program participants, and they're probably going to be able to elicit more honest responses from the research participants, meaning that your data that you're going to get is going to be more valid and higher quality.

Again, in that gun violence example that I was talking about, I originally had trained a bunch of former graduate students to go out and conduct these interviews. They were getting data, but the data that they were getting from the young people who were gun-carriers, that were trying to understand why these young people were carrying guns, they weren't answering honestly. They were giving answers that they thought that the researchers wanted to hear or that made them look good, but when we had participatory researchers going out and doing the interviews, there was more of a connection and there was more of like, "This person, the researcher now knows if I'm being honest or not," because they've had similar life experiences, so the data we were able to get was much richer and much more honest.

Then finally, one of the things that's important for the research is that the recommendations are going to be informed by the lived experience of those who have been impacted by incarceration, so it's more likely that the recommendations that come out, the analysis and the interpretation of the data is more likely going to lead to recommendations that more likely meet community needs.

Identifying other outcomes that matter to communities. As I said, having participatory researchers on the team, you might think through different research questions at that beginning stage of the research process and saying, maybe more traditional might say, "What is most important to measure to determine whether this program has been successful is whether or not participants got caught back up in the justice system. Did they get rearrested?" But rearrest could speak to a lot of things, not just they actually got caught back up in things that they had been previously doing. It could also speak to the over-policing of certain communities. Using only that as a measure of success, you might miss all of these other outcomes that might be really important to the program participants because they're facing a lot of challenges when they come out, including discrimination.

Some of the things that they might feel is important that they've received from the program, they might have increased their self-esteem. They might have gotten mental health support to decrease the trauma that they have experienced before and during incarceration. They might have made stronger connections with their families that they didn't have before. They might have people that they can go to and rely on when they have problems. They might have more stable housing. All of these things might need to be in place before we can see a reduction in incarceration. For those communities that have been impacted, they might identify different outcomes for the evaluation than

more traditional researchers or funders might be interested in knowing about.

When do we do participatory research and who is involved? Participatory research, as you can probably start to hear, is if you're taking people who have had, potentially, no prior research experience, it takes time to train them and acclimate them into a research environment. It does take a little bit longer than a more traditional research project would take, but as I mentioned, you're going to get richer and more valid data. You might look at different research questions. You might have a different picture or a larger and more nuanced picture of what's working, and what's not with your reentry program.

When is participatory research a good fit? When you have the time and the resources. Because remember, these folks are being hired so they're being paid to be a part of the research team, an equal member of the research team. You have to have time to be able to do that. If you have a really short-term project, it might not work, but if you have the time and you have the resources to hire more staff and to properly train them and give them the support, then that participatory research might be a good fit.

When it might also be a good fit is if you need to access that community that you're concerned that you might not be able to access otherwise. If you really want to understand the impact that it had on program participants and you feel that program participants might not give you honest answers, or they might not participate in the research at all because of historical trauma of researchers coming in on communities and doing research with them but not giving anything back, then participatory research might be for you because you might be able to access that population in a way that you wouldn't have prior. Then finally, if you feel like you need intimate knowledge that you don't have because you haven't been impacted in the same way and you haven't had that lived experience, bringing people on and acknowledging their expertise, and having their expertise inform the evaluation. That's when participatory research might be a good fit.

Who should be involved in a participatory research project? Again, I mentioned this earlier, but there is a lot of people who have been impacted by jail and prison. It could be people who have been incarcerated previously. It could be their family members who had to help them navigate coming home. It could be those who work with the reentry population. It could be faith-based leaders in a community that they're returning home to. It could be service providers that work specifically with this

population. Again, so it's recognizing all of these different forms of expertise as you put your research team together. Again, one of those expertise is academic expertise, so it could be academics who are interested in reentry programs. Having a team that covers all those different forms of expertise for your reentry program is going to make your evaluation stronger.

Okay. I just want to give you a heads-up that it's not always easy. The more traditional researchers who might say, "We think that a participatory researcher project is appropriate for our reentry evaluation," might be coming from a different position of power than those that we want to bring on as participatory researchers, so we need to be thoughtful about that. We need to be thoughtful about the differing life experiences and what types of staff support the different people on the team might need. We want to make sure that we're avoiding tokenism where we're just saying, "Okay. We want to claim participatory research, but we're really not going to involve those with lived experience in all the different aspects of the research project. We'll just have one person, and we'll claim participatory research when it's only just one person on the team, and they don't really have equal power."

Then, so again, participatory research takes more time because you have to do a lot of training, but it's also trust-building, especially with the reentry population who may have experienced extensive trauma while they were incarcerated, so you need to understand that there might need to be some time and activities that a more traditional research evaluation project and team, you might not need to build in these kind of community-building activities where you're having team dinners and you're getting to know each other, but it's very important for the participatory research process so that everybody trusts each other, and everybody trusts that they have equal say, and feel honest and comfortable sharing their expertise. You also need more time for training.

The joint decision-making process is very important, so something that I might feel is important for the evaluation, somebody on the participatory research side might feel something else is important, and we need to come to some consensus. It's not like the default will be, "Well, Rachel is the more traditional researcher, so her opinion counts more." It's not like that, so there needs to be time for working through all those things. That's also why trust-building is important. Then also, I'll flag that sometimes, when you're evaluating reentry programs, you're going back into some of these incarceration facilities, detention facilities. Sometimes, those places have restrictions on who can come in. If they say, if somebody was recently released,

they might not be able to come in to collect the data, so if you wanted to go and interview people that are still in detention, it might be harder for some of those participatory researchers.

If your evaluation is already underway, which may be the case for a lot of you because you might have been working on your evaluation for six months, for a year, for a couple of years, and you might say, "Well, this sounds great, but it's too late." I just want to let you know, it's not too late. You could always add on, if you have the time and the resources, another component to your evaluation. You might have three research questions that you were trying to answer, but I'm sure that there are others that could be answered. Here are just some examples of if you wanted to expand your research to include a participatory research team, and then you make it just a discreet participatory research project that's part of the larger evaluation.

You might want to look at why participants dropped out, and your participatory research team might give you access to that population, be able to elicit more honest answers about why they dropped out. You could look at, why has there been staff turnover? Why, if you have had staff turnover? You can think through, for your specific program, some of the additional questions that might have not been answered or might not be getting answered in your existing evaluation, so that could help and strengthen your program in the future. Even if you're underway, you could take some of your resources and create a smaller participatory research project to add to your evaluation. Okay. Monica, I'm going to turn it back to you.

Monica Sheppard: Great. Thanks so much, Rachel. Aside from the research and evaluation component, we know that many reentry programs are already engaging people with lived experienced as program staff. For our panel today, we'll be focusing our conversation on the benefits of the reentry program, to the reentry program, and the persons with lived experiences, as well as challenges and what programs can do to provide a more supportive working environment for someone with lived experience.

As I mentioned during our introduction, I'm really pleased to welcome Liz Johnston from the Family Services of Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, and then Mike Cannon from Chicago Workforce Partnership in Illinois. They're both going to talk us through their experiences working with their respective reentry programs. Without further ado, let's get started. Okorie, you can feel free to stop sharing now, thank you, so that we can see our panelists. I'd love for our audience then to just get us started with knowing a little bit more about you. Can you tell us more

about yourself, including your background and your role at your reentry program? Mike, we'll get started with you.

Michael Cannon: Sure. Thank you very much. Thank you all for having me today. My name is Michael Cannon. I am one of two reentry navigators for the Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership. The reentry navigator position is a newly-created position that began in 2020 with the Cook County Coordinated Reentry Council, who convened to reduce the recidivism rate in Illinois. In terms of my background, I am a returning resident directly impacted. I previously served 29 years in the Illinois Department of Corrections. July 31st of this year made the two-year mark since my release. Prior to my release, I was heavily involved here in Illinois in a lot of various reentry work within the Illinois Department of Corrections. I helped to ... Excuse me. I helped create the first restorative justice program in the Illinois Department of Corrections called Two Roads.

I helped to create an electronic magazine there with the Two Roads that went out to all 44,000 inmates and staff throughout the entire Illinois Department of Corrections inmate population and staff. With Two Roads, we also created a workforce development initiative called Go BLUE. You all heard of Go Green. We say, "Go BLUE." BLUE is an acronym that stands for businesses leveraging underutilized ex-felons. It is a workforce development initiative where we hosted job fairs and summits. We spoke to employers, business owners, city, state, and county agencies and organizations, non-profits, and politicians across the state came through that particular facility. We were able to interview them and talked to them about employing returning residents, while intentionally attempting to change the negative stereotype and remove the negative social stigma attached to returning residents.

I also created and directed the first workforce development video, promotional video in the history of the State of Illinois. All of this work, fortunately, it transcended upon my release. When I was released from incarceration, I became a member of the Cook County coordinated Reentry Council. The Cook County Coordinated Reentry Council is a diverse group of, basically, all the stakeholders here in Illinois and the decision-makers. What they did is provided recommendations on how to reduce the recidivism rate in Illinois by creating a seamless, effective reentry system for returning residents. My work and ongoing involvement with the Council led to my reentry navigator position here today. With that, I guess, we'll pass it to Liz.

Monica Sheppard: Great. Thank you so much, Mike. Liz, happy to hear about you, and tell us a little bit more about how you came to be at Family Services.

Liz Johnston: Okay. Thank you, Monica. I'm so happy to be here today. Well, my name is Liz Johnston. I work at Family Services in Montgomery County in the reentry department. I'm the housing specialist. Montgomery County is located in Southeastern Pennsylvania, adjacent to Philadelphia. My job as the housing specialist is to locate stable and affordable housing for individuals who are returning to the community after incarceration.

I started volunteering here in the summer of 2021, after I heard about the agency from one of my college professors. In January, I started as an intern here. I will be graduating next month. About a month and a half ago is when they offered me a job as a housing specialist, and I also am a certified peer support specialist, and a certified recovery specialist, which means that I've gone through formal training to offer support to individuals, and this is a great complement to use my lived experience. I also facilitate weekly peer support groups at the community college that I attend. Thank you.

Monica Sheppard: Thank you. I just want to say, before we move on, you both have really done tremendously and shown what reentry services can look like and are the product of that, so thank you so much for sharing that. Liz, we'll stay with you then. How would you say your lived experience has benefited you, has benefited actually the reentry program you're working for right now, Family Services of Montgomery County?

Liz Johnston: I would say my lived experience allows me to identify with the clients in ways that other staff cannot. I think this helps me build a rapport and trust with the clients. I have a different perspective than those without lived experience. I'm able to really connect with the clients and what they're going through. I can empathize with the clients in ways that case managers without lived experience cannot. For example, clients will ask me what it was like when I first came home. I'm able to be honest and tell them exactly how I was feeling about my anxieties within the first couple days of coming home. It was something that I could not prepare myself for. Just walking into a store and trying to pick out lotion for the first time was completely overwhelming. I would get dizzy and my chest would feel heavy.

Eventually that wore off, the newness of everything, but there was nothing I could do to prepare myself. I'm able to share my successes with them and let them know that I'm not doing

anything that they can't do. Sometimes, that's just what they need to hear. That makes me feel good too, so it's like a two-way street.

Monica Sheppard: Great, thank you. Mike, what about you? How would you say your lived experience has benefited the reentry program you're working with?

Michael Cannon: I would say this, first of all, Liz, yes, I think the relatability factor's absolutely vital. I appreciate the work that you are doing there in Pennsylvania. For me, here with the program that we created and designed, we're right now in the process of implementing it. I like to say that where I am, I'm used as what you can say, the connective tissue of the program. I'm the connective tissue between returning residents and the services that they need to remove all of the barriers that would prevent them from achieving a successful life and a successful future. In general, there is a general lack of coordination of services in Illinois, up until now, basically. When a person is released from prison, there are a lot of reentry needs, which require going to many different agencies and places to get the various services that they need.

Until the navigator position was created, the returning resident was left to navigate reentry all on his or her own, even after doing long-term prison, which could be very challenging. The navigators, what we do is we are guiding people through a seamless transition to those services, pre-release all the way through to unsubsidized employment, post-secondary education, or an approved apprenticeship. The relatability factor, again, is absolutely vital to the effectiveness and the success of our program. Those who are closest to the problem are closest to the solution. If given a fair chance, those with lived experience, we can without a doubt, bring a lot of effective solutions to the barriers that our returning residents have.

Monica Sheppard: Great, thank you. I'm not sure if you're having issues on your end. If you can still hear us, you're frozen, Mike. I wanted to flip that around a little bit and ask about how working at your reentry program has really benefited you personally.

Michael Cannon: Well, let me put it this way. Being incarcerated for a long period of time, I found my calling. It's another part of my calling to give back that I'm able to fulfill by working at this particular reentry program. During my 29 years of incarceration, as you can imagine. There was a lot of heartache, pain, loss, and suffering. Getting out and going through that experience, what I've learned being a part of these various committees and agencies, and now

working as a reentry navigator, I have a real voice. I never thought that I'd have a real voice that can make a real change in the system, and being able to utilize that voice as a tool to bring about positive, progressive change in the reentry community, a change that will actually significantly impact the lives and futures of thousands of men and women for decades to come is very rewarding. It makes all the difference in the world to me.

Just to clarify, when I say have a real voice, I mean being involved in everything with this program from the very beginning, including I assisted with the creation of the reentry program itself from its very inception. It was only a team of three. I helped create the project design and all of the required documentation. I personally selected all the program participants. I'm still in the process of doing that. I helped procure the agencies who provide the direct services to the participants, and I continue to oversee and monitor their involvement. I help to guide the program participants through a seamless transition back into the community. If a career coach from the direct service providers need me or a program, participant, him or herself needs me, I'm there for them. All of this, I must say, is very rewarding for me and I feel good about the contribution and the value that I bring as a reentry advisor.

I'd like to say too, that I'm also regarded here in the State of Illinois as a reentry subject matter expert. I provide recommendations to state agencies and organizations across the State of Illinois. Man, what it means for me is that men and women ... First and foremost, what it means to me is that men and women, for decades to come can, man, they can get that career-level employment, that post-secondary education, and all of the other resources needed to become successful and never have to recidivate and return back to prison ever again. This is the importance of having someone directly impacted in this position. I can say it with confidence because I helped to create this position. As a directly impacted person with lived experience, I know what those gaps are. I think that those in my position are uniquely situated to be able to address those needs very effectively.

Monica Sheppard: Great. Thank you so much, Mike. Liz, what do you think about this, and how this working at your reentry program has benefited you?

Liz Johnston: Countless ways. Working here has, well, it lets me know that the reentry staff really values me. I can't express that enough. My self-esteem has increased. I feel accepted by my colleagues, the community, the community partners. It's opened up a lot of doors

for me. I said earlier that I'm a certified peer support specialist and a certified recovery specialist. I was able to get the certified recovery specialist through one of our partners, and that door that was opened up for me through this, through the reentry program. I feel like my lived experience has, it's become something positive. It's just like my self-efficacy, my belief in myself, it's been great. I can't say anything but good things about it.

My new job as the housing specialist is difficult. Everybody who knows that, housing, that's involved in it and they'll say to me like, "Well, this is difficult." I don't let it discourage me, and I'm just like, "I know it's a challenge, and I'm up for it," because I've been through some challenges and I'm grateful. I'm just incredibly grateful. I am excited to come to work. I absolutely love it here. It's just provided a network of people, and of people who want to help other people. It's given me this hope for the future of there's really people out there that want to help other reentrants and that believe in us. Because I was incarcerated. I don't think I stated, I was incarcerated for 12 years and nine months.

That time can really wear you down, and when you're in there and you're thinking, well, nobody wants to help you, it can be very difficult after so many years. Then you come out and there's so many barriers, but then when you are on this side and you see that there's people fighting to help you overcome barriers, really, it's exciting and I want to be somebody who's helping other people overcome those barriers. I'm just really excited that we have organizations that are like, "Okay. We're willing to employ people with lived experience." Thank you.

Monica Sheppard: That is great to hear. I have to say, it just brings me joy that you have both had such a great experience at your agencies and have really been supported in the ways that you have, and been able to develop and move through the ranks there, so that's awesome to hear. Based on what you've shared today and other conversations we had, I know how positive your experience has been working within your agency. Thinking more broadly though, what challenges would say agencies might have incorporating someone with lived experience into a reentry program or similar program?

Liz Johnston: I would say transportation. Well, here in Montgomery County, it's huge, very spread out. There's clients are spread out throughout the county. Most clients are within 15 miles of the agency, but also you have to have reliable transportation. I know we have to have a driver's license to get to the clients. I know, also, Rachel

mentioned about accessing, the ability to access the jail. That's important for the work, the reentry work, because I know one of our case management model begin pre-release. It depends on the jail, but I'm not allowed to go into the jail quite yet. I've only been home for three years, so they want all these different checks before I'm allowed to go into there. I understand, but at the same time, that can be a barrier to get someone in with lived experience because not everybody along the way is accepting of the situation.

Another thing that I know has been a barrier for me also was about coming up against insurance companies, of course, liability of the individual depending on their background, depending on the actual charges that the person has. It's all about someone going to bat for you, someone believing in you, but also, I started here as a volunteer and then an intern before I became an employee. I worked up before. It was like, "Okay. Well, employee," so it's not like I'm just walking in the door and someone's going to be like, "Okay, we're going to employ you and trust you right away." I think that that also has something to do with it, but for an individual not to ... For someone with lived experience not to be able to go into the jail, back to that, there can be a disconnect between the participant and the individual being served.

Monica Sheppard: Thank you. Mike, what do you think are some of the main challenges agencies might encounter with incorporating someone with lived experience into their organizations?

Michael Cannon: For sure, it should be duly noted that formerly incarcerated people have experienced a lot of trauma, both before and during prison. That could be really tough, so reentry programs and others who have lived experience will need to work in an environment where staff are trained in trauma-informed care. As you can all attest, Liz spoke about her environment there where she works and how welcoming it was. I think that that is very important.

Another thing that's very challenging to just about all returning residents who have done any amount of time is digital and technological literacy. That is another major barrier for returning residents joining agencies and organizations. Everyday things like email, or parking validation, banking, shopping. Everything can present a significant challenge with someone who hasn't used them for quite some time. Even if they did short time, as you know, technology, it advances so much, we can get lost with the technology. If you don't have anyone there to help you, you can be what I call socially handicapped. You have to have someone

there to help you do anything. You can't even order anything online without a bank account or get direct deposit, which most employees utilize, so that's very important,

Monica Sheppard: Right. Well, thank you both again for that. As we wind up our time together on the panel, I do want to talk briefly about how lived experience could benefit the evaluations. Liz, we'll start with you. What new outcomes should researchers consider that are not currently captured in existing research. Then, what are the benefits of credible messengers conducting interviews and surveys?

Liz Johnston: People with lived experience can assist the evaluation staff with identifying alternative outcomes of success. I think Rachel mentioned before, different measures like increased trauma symptoms, the improved self-efficacy, the self-esteem, reunification with the families, the family supports, stable housing, about learning new life skills. Also, these are things that participants themselves will be able to identify. This would mean that, to them, to be successful in the program, what the participant themselves considers success. I think I had talked about, or I had discussed with our staff before, what does the participant consider success, or when do they consider completion of a program? I think that's really important because not everybody's measure of success is the same. My completion isn't yours. I think that's super important.

Oh, and the benefits? Some reentry program participants might be tempted to tell the evaluator what they want to hear. Then, having somebody be real with someone who is a reentrant, building a rapport with them, having someone with lived experience conduct the interviews, they'll be able to build the rapport, and based on their shared lived experience, and they're more a valued member of the data collection. I think they'd be able to get more honest answers out of a person, and they'll be able to open up to them more. I think that would definitely improve the surveys.

Monica Sheppard: Right, thank you.

Liz Johnston: You're welcome.

Monica Sheppard: Then for our last point then Mike, what different types of dissemination can researchers consider using?

Michael Cannon: Well, participatory researchers can also be engaged in disseminating the findings to various audiences. Evaluations are

very important to show the effectiveness of a program or the lack thereof. It gives agencies and organizations the ability to identify best practices to improve on their efforts. Also, showing the effectiveness of a program is very important to funders. Participatory research can speak to the media to inform the general public about reentry initiatives, and then most importantly, they can share evaluation results with the community where the reentry program is located. This will allow the greater buy-in among the community members and it will also allow them to see the returning citizens differently than they may have if it wasn't for the participatory research. Lastly, I would like to add that involving participatory researchers in evaluation may help the different stakeholders and clients understand the findings in new ways, or may even help the evaluation team reach new audiences. I think those are ways that they can disseminate.

Monica Sheppard: Great. Thank you for that. Well, as Okorie adds our last couple of slides back up, I just want to, again, provide another heartfelt thanks to you, Liz and Mike, for just really sharing so much about yourself and your personal story because it's not always easy. I thank you for your willingness to add your expertise to our research brief and our discussion today. Okorie, if you would like to add our last slides up, on slide 15, and we will be done shortly.

Okorie: Okay. I'm re-uploading now.

Monica Sheppard: Okay, great. Thank you. Great. Thank you. As we end our presentation, I'd just like to highlight some of the related resource briefs, which you can find on the National Reentry Resource Center's website. They include a brief on the topic we touched on today, participatory research, as well as cultural responsiveness, racial equity and recidivism, and the risk assessment and racial bias. Again, we thank you so much for joining us today. We know we only have a few minutes and there are a few questions in the chat that we could look at. If you have questions that we haven't been able to get to, please feel free to reach out to us. I believe our contact information is up on the slide. You can reach us at estta@rti.org. If we don't get an opportunity to answer your question today, Rachel and I will be sure to get back to you, and Mike and Liz, so thank you so much.

Michael Cannon: Thank you.

Liz Johnston: Thank you.

Rachel Swaner: I will drop in the chat the address for the National Reentry Resource Center, if anybody is interested. Do we have time? I can answer a couple of the questions that had come up or direct

some of the questions to others. One of the questions that I think was a great question around how to avoid tokenism. Not just checking off a box of saying, "We've employed somebody with lived experience," but having them have meaningful participation within the organization. I can happily answer that one. It's hard. When I was saying that you need to make sure that you have the time and the resources ... Mike brought up this great point about technology, and people who are returning home might not have had the same access to technology and it might be more of a struggle, so making sure that you have the time and the resources to support the staff is really, really important.

When you're thinking about trying to avoid tokenism, you need to have those resources, and you need to be able to dedicate the time to training people properly. If you don't, you're more likely to fall into that, even if it wasn't, your intention, is to fall into just checking the box. One of the things that I like to do in my research projects is, I think, for instance, I did a project for the National Institute of Justice a bunch of years ago about trying to understand pathways into the sex trade, and in order to help support people staying out of the sex trade or preventing trafficking. I put together a research team. It was a participatory research project. The number of traditional researchers on the team was three, and then the participatory researchers was eight. That was the first thing is that it wasn't just one person, is the team was comprised, it wasn't mostly traditional researchers and one or two participatory researchers. They had, the amount of people on the team was dominated by participatory researchers.

The role of the person who is maybe the more traditional researcher that's bringing everybody together is to become more of a facilitator and just one voice in the team of many, so you would want to set out clear expectations of how the group is going to make decisions together and how participatory researchers' input is going to be linked to action, and make that clear at the start. If you're hiring folks, you want to be able to tell them right at the start so it doesn't fall into, "Well, they gave all this great feedback, but the more traditional researcher didn't take it and defaulted to what she really wanted," so I think thinking through, "Do I have the resources to support the team in the ways that they're going to need support? If not, maybe participatory research isn't the right approach for me right now because I can't give that, and I don't want to fall into tokenism."

Then the other thing is making sure that, thinking through the composition of your team, and it's not just one person to check a box, and everybody has equal say and equal power. That's why I

was also saying it also takes extra time because you need to work out some of these issues that ... Conflict when you're trying to develop survey instruments, or interview guides, or understanding the findings and figure out the best recommendations that are going to most likely meet community needs, it's okay if there's disagreement. I think sometimes, that's where the magic happens, when there's disagreement and you have a process in place to work through those disagreements in a respectful way where everybody's voice is heard equally, and everybody has equal access to that information. Those are just some strategies that I have employed in the past.

There's another question that I'm going to punt maybe to Liz or Mike. It says, "What supports did you receive while incarcerated that may have assisted in being better prepared to take on the roles that you're in now?"

Michael Cannon: Could you repeat that please? I'm sorry.

Rachel Swaner: Sure. Did you receive any supports while you were incarcerated that may have assisted you in, once you returned home, being able to take on the roles that you're working in now at your reentry programs?

Michael Cannon: Well, I would like to say that I got where I am, I would say, in spite of what they didn't provide. I did a lot of preparing for myself. I didn't get much preparation while there other than what I did for myself, so I just took care to do all of the preparing that I could for this position. Again, like I said, I learned what my calling was. I pursued my calling, and here I am.

Liz Johnston: I would say that I did go through a number of programs. I took advantage of as many programs as I could while I was in there. I took vocational programs, and betterment classes, and I went through a drug modality program towards the end of my incarceration, and I went to work release. I feel that those did prepare me to come home. Especially my last 24 months, I went through the modality program, which was considered their transition program. I wouldn't say it specifically prepared me for this, but it helped me work through everything that I had gone through pre-incarceration, so yeah, I would say that.

Rachel Swaner: Thanks, Mike and Liz. There's another question. I think, Liz, maybe you mentioned getting a PSS, a peer support certification. Do you know where you got that from? Do you know the training entity that provided that?

Liz Johnston: Yes. Well, I was trained through Recovery International, so it was through Montgomery County because I was in a grant program through them, but I believe that that's my state certification, so I'm certified through the state. I believe each state does it differently and they have their own organizations that they have, so each state would be run differently. That's just the way Pennsylvania does it, is through Recovery International. That's their vendor, so I'm not sure whichever state that Elizabeth Stone is in. I'm sorry. Then they would check with that state, because in Pennsylvania, it's a certified peer support specialist, so the Pennsylvania Certification Board basically says, "Well, these are the people who will say will educate our peer support specialists." Does that make sense?

Rachel Swaner: Yeah, thanks. It seems like you would have to check with your state.

Liz Johnston: Yeah.

Rachel Swaner: [inaudible 01:00:22]

Liz Johnston: You would have to check with state.

Rachel Swaner: Great. Okorie, there's actually a question for you here. The presentation, will it be made available? Do you know where people will be able to find that?

Okorie: Yes. Folks will be able to get access to the presentation on NRRC's website. It won't be available until mid-May, but we'll let folks know when the resources are posted onto the website.

Rachel Swaner: Okay, great. Thank you. Then there's a question, Mike, you had mentioned that technology is often a big challenge for folks who get hired and who have been incarcerated. Have you found a style or a type of training that works best for teaching new staff members or returning staff members around technology, or is it something that still needs to be created?

Michael Cannon: Actually, since working here for the Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership and trying to shore up my training, I was exposed to some training that I felt was excellent, and it's called NorStar. It deals with all of the technological difficulties that I faced and that I know that others face. Usually, when you talk about digital literacy, the first thing someone will bring up is, "Do you know how to do Word? Do you know how to do Excel?" It's the everyday things that I mentioned earlier that a person don't know how to do, like to send an email, or a bank, or something as

simple as parking your car and being able to pay for it. Those things that we take for granted are difficulties. NorStar, they addressed all of those issues that I had very effectively and I encourage anyone who are having those problems, whether they're a returning resident or a senior, a lot of seniors have that problem, I think that that's a very excellent tool to use to get yourself digitally literate.

Rachel Swaner: Great. [inaudible 01:02:51]

Michael Cannon: That's about it as far as what I found that could help us in that area.

Rachel Swaner: Okay. North Star was that one that folks might want to check out.

Michael Cannon: [inaudible 01:03:02]

Rachel Swaner: I think-

Michael Cannon: Excuse me. It's Nor without the T-H. NorStar.

Rachel Swaner: Oh, NorStar. Okay.

Michael Cannon: Yeah.

Rachel Swaner: Thank you. For folks who are interested in hearing more, or reading more about the participatory research and how you can use it in your reentry program evaluation, Monica just dropped in the chat the direct link to the resource brief that is available that accompanies this webinar, so it's there in the chat. Okay. Sorry, I'm just scrolling through other questions that have come up. I don't know if there's any ... Mike or Liz, if you want to take this. What qualities to look for when hiring peer navigators, so people who, for the program part, maybe less so the research, but trying to help people navigate. Mike had mentioned there's lots of different services that people might need and they're all different places, so is there any specific qualities that you think make for a really strong peer navigator?

Michael Cannon: Do you want to take that one first, Liz?

Liz Johnston: Sure. I think I mentioned this before to Monica about I think lived experience is great. I think what accompanies with lived experience is that education piece and that training piece, and being able to use your lived experience strategically, especially learning how to strategically disclose certain parts about your past. Like Mike mentioned, we've all been through trauma, and to

talk about that, you don't want to re-traumatize yourself, let alone participants, so learning to use that is super important to me. The CPS training, the peer support training, the recovery specialist training that I've been through taught me how to do that, the classes I'm talking at college. All of that has done me ... It's helped me so much because without that, I could have hurt myself.

I've done a lot of talks where I've talked about my experience, and I've walked away, and I've just broken down, and this hasn't been good. I've had to learn the hard way that I need to learn to strategically talk about things where I'm not going to hurt myself. I think that education and training piece is important, so looking for somebody who is motivated to do that training, or just that willingness, where somebody with lived experiences, definitely valuable that insight, but also that motivation to learn more. I think that's vital.

Michael Cannon: What I would say, again, we can't emphasize the relatability factor enough. Of course, all of those with lived experience, they have that but everyone isn't able to articulate as well so, like Liz mentioned, the education is very important. Trauma-informed is extremely important. A lot of people had a lot of trauma even before coming to prison, and so when you add the trauma on top of that, and if it's a number of years that they have been incarcerated, it could be very challenging, to say the least. Again, I can't emphasize enough the digital literacy factor.

Had I not had access to computers maybe the last year and a half of working in Two Roads, the electronic magazine, that gave us access to use the computers. The average inmate in Illinois doesn't get that opportunity, so after serving 29 years, just giving me that little bit of time ... They were really old computers, like 1999 computers, but it enabled me to be able to get up to speed, at least with the basics. Had I not been able to do that, I probably wouldn't be in this position here because I just wouldn't have known how to navigate this digital technology, no matter how much schooling that I've gained throughout the years.

Rachel Swaner: Thank you both for that. I do want to say that the technology thing is not just for older folks. I mentioned that research study, that participatory research study I did on young people and gun-carrying. Even the young people, lot of them did everything on their phones, and as part of their job as researchers, needed to do some things of data entry, data entering surveys, and navigating computers, and just Microsoft Word, and some of the programs that are usually on computers. We needed to set aside time to do training just on that too. In addition to the

understanding research and conducting research, there was the technology training that we needed to do. I think it's a really important point that Mike had brought up around that.

We are almost out of time. There's one question that Tara has asked around recommendations for putting together a process to work through disagreements when you're developing your participatory research project. As I mentioned, you have lots of different experiences, people coming from different positionalities. It's not necessarily a bad thing to have disagreements, and your final product might be really stronger, but you do need a process for working through them in a healthy and respectful way. Tara, if you want to ... I'm going to put my email in the chat. If you want to send me an email, I can link you to some of those resources.

There's somebody with a question of, those who were only able to hear a portion of this presentation, can hear the recording again? Okorie, if you can just mention again how they'll be able to access this presentation.

Okorie: Sure, yeah. The resources, the presentation, all the materials, information on our presenters will all be posted to the Second Chance Month NRRC website. That's going to happen mid-May, but we'll let folks know when the resources are available. We will be posting this on the site at some point, yes. I just can't give you an exact date.

Rachel Swaner: Great. Thank you. Thank you, everybody, for joining us today. Okorie, is there anything else that we need to do to close out?

Okorie: No. Just thank you, guys. We really appreciate the time, and expertise, and the presentation. No, just a thank you, and it was wonderful working with you guys today.

Monica Sheppard: Thank you, everyone.

Rachel Swaner: Thanks, everybody.

Monica Sheppard: Bye-bye.

Liz Johnston: Thank you.

Michael Cannon: Thank you, everyone.