

# New York City Housing Authority's Family Reentry Pilot Program

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September 2017

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# An Evaluation of the New York City Housing Authority's Family Reentry Pilot Program:

Final Report to the U.S. Department of  
Housing and Urban Development

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## About this report

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# Introduction

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For people returning to their communities from jail or prison, housing is not just shelter; it provides a critical foundation for success.

Stable housing and family support prevent homelessness, which often increases the likelihood that people will wind up back behind bars (known as recidivism). Having a secure place to live also helps reduce drug use—another known risk factor for recidivism—and is an important factor in getting and keeping a job.<sup>1</sup> For these reasons, safe and stable housing is essential for the approximately 636,000 people released from state or federal prisons and the approximately 11 million people cycling through jails annually across the nation.<sup>2</sup>

Often, people leaving jail or prison intend to live with their families, either because of preference or because they have no other place to go.<sup>3</sup> However, if their families live in public housing, this may not be possible because public housing authorities (PHAs) may temporarily or permanently bar people with criminal histories, including people convicted of misdemeanor crimes and with arrests. And these rules can be far-reaching. Although federal mandates only prohibit people who are on lifetime sex offense registries or have convictions for producing methamphetamines in federally subsidized housing, local PHAs have broad discretion to widen the net of excluded people to include those with criminal histories beyond these proscribed categories.<sup>4</sup> For example, the Newark Housing Authority in New Jersey imposes 99-year bans for certain violent convictions.<sup>5</sup> Other PHAs look not only at criminal convictions in assessing admissibility; counter to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) guidelines, they may also

consider an arrest on a person's record to deny admission.<sup>6</sup> For example, in various jurisdictions within California, Connecticut, Georgia, Maine, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and South Carolina, PHAs define criminal activity as an arrest within the past five years.<sup>7</sup> As a result of these rules, formerly incarcerated people who wish to be reunited with their families in public housing and have no other housing options often have a difficult choice to make: ask their families to move, which is often an unrealistic request; return home in violation of most public housing authorities' regulations and put their families at risk of eviction; seek alternate housing in the few under-resourced shelters or halfway homes that have open beds; or live on the streets.

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## The housing dilemma

Rising public concern about crime and public disorder during the last quarter of the twentieth century fueled a punitive turn in criminal justice policy. Besides enacting harsh new sentencing laws including mandatory minimum sentences and truth-in-sentencing policies that limit early release, policymakers also sought to widen the reach of these sanctions. They did this by expanding the number and scope of post-incarceration restrictions to exclude people with criminal histories from many aspects of mainstream life, including temporary or permanent ineligibility for life-sustaining social benefits such as public housing.<sup>8</sup> In particular, a series of federal laws addressed the growing concern about violent crime, as well as the role of drugs in violent crime in public housing communities. These included

- › the Anti-Drug Abuse Act (1988), which authorized the HUD Secretary to grant local PHAs funds for initiatives to eliminate drug crimes;
- › the Cranston-Gonzalez National Affordable Housing Act (1990), which allowed PHAs to use criminal records for admissions determinations;
- › the Housing Opportunity Program Extension Act (1996), which mandated federal and state law enforcement agencies to comply with PHA criminal background requests;
- › the Quality Housing and Work Responsibility Act (1998), which expanded the discretion of PHAs in determining admissions eligibility and established a permanent ban on lifetime sex offender registrants; and
- › the Independent Agencies Appropriations Act (1999), which barred households with any member who was convicted of producing methamphetamines in public housing.<sup>9</sup>

As access to public housing for people with criminal histories became increasingly limited in the 1980s, they had to look elsewhere to live. But the lack of affordable housing in the private market, the scarce supply and regulations restricting tenancy in subsidized housing, the lack of transitional housing including service-enriched supportive housing, and the shortage of bed space and often dangerous conditions at halfway houses have made this search extremely challenging.<sup>10</sup> An array of informal barriers rooted in the stigma of having a criminal record or being formerly

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incarcerated, and factors such as having poor credit or lacking the proper identification documentation further reduce the likelihood that this population will find stable housing.<sup>11</sup> Those who would like to return to their families may not be welcome, because family members may view them as negative influences or an additional financial burden to the household.<sup>12</sup>

### **Current New York City Housing Authority policies**

Following the federal mandate, the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) places lifetime exclusions on people who are registered sex offenders or

have been convicted of producing methamphetamines in public housing. It also has broad restrictions for anyone with a conviction history.<sup>13</sup> The length of exclusion varies according to crime class. As indicated below, people with a felony conviction may be barred for five to six years after leaving jail or prison, while people with a misdemeanor may be banned for three to four years. NYCHA revised its admissions policies in 2013 to calculate the exclusion period starting when a person is released from incarceration; previously, the exclusion period began when a person completed his or her sentence, which may have included probation or parole supervision.

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#### **NYCHA exclusions by conviction type**

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<b>Felonies: Class A, B, or C</b>	Six years from the date a convicted person has served his or her sentence (not including parole or probation), and has no further convictions or pending charges.
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<b>Felonies: Class D or E</b>	Five years from the date a convicted person has served his or her sentence (not including parole or probation), and has no further convictions or pending charges.
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<b>Misdemeanor: Class A</b>	Four years from the date a convicted person has served his or her sentence (not including parole or probation), and has no further convictions or pending charges.
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<b>Misdemeanor: Class B or Unclassified</b>	Three years from the date a convicted person has served his or her sentence (not including parole or probation), and has no further convictions or pending charges.
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## The housing dilemma (continued)

NYCHA also revised its criminal background check policy: It now conducts these checks only when a person's application comes to the top of the waiting list rather than at the time of application. Despite these policies, some people return to NYCHA housing against the rules because they have nowhere else to

go, need material assistance and emotional support from their families, or simply because they wish to reside with their families.<sup>14</sup> Such living arrangements that are unauthorized by NYCHA, are unstable for the returning person, and expose the entire family to the risk of eviction.

Faced with a persistently high recidivism rate among formerly incarcerated people, federal policymakers and those in some localities around the country have begun rethinking these policies. This shift is informed by a growing body of research on the correlation between unstable housing or homelessness and future criminal activity, which finds that housing stability and family reunification are factors in reducing the risk of reoffending, promoting successful reentry, and encouraging physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing.<sup>15</sup> Some of this research, for example, shows that stable housing is often critical in securing employment—an important factor associated with lower rates of future criminal activity.<sup>16</sup> And for nearly 80 percent of men and 90 percent of women with chronic health conditions who are returning home from prison, stable housing is critical in accessing and receiving treatment.<sup>17</sup> Coming home from prison can lead to stress, anxiety, and depression, which family support can help overcome.<sup>18</sup> Resuming a familial role—as a parent, for example—can have positive effects on a person's reentry to society, including increasing the likelihood of securing employment and reducing rates of recidivism and substance use.<sup>19</sup>

The weight of these findings has spurred various jurisdictions to consider and enact reforms and innovative practices to ease restrictions on public housing for those with a criminal record. At the national level, HUD issued a policy statement in 2011 urging all public housing authorities to take steps to increase access to public and federally subsidized housing.<sup>20</sup> Shaun Donovan, then-HUD Secretary, wrote to public housing authorities, saying, “People who have paid their debt to society deserve the opportunity to become productive citizens and caring parents, to set the past aside and embrace the future [and] part of that support means helping ex-offenders gain access to one of the most fundamental building blocks of a stable life—a place to live.”<sup>21</sup>

HUD released a second set of guidelines in 2015 urging PHAs to eliminate consideration of prior arrests when making admissions decisions.<sup>22</sup> In response, the Housing Authority of New Orleans reworked its screening processes so that criminal history is no longer used as an automatic bar to prospective applicants. Others have removed questions about criminal history from housing applications. Still other housing authorities have taken more incremental steps. For example, Baltimore, Cleveland, Chicago, Los Angeles, and Oakland have begun programs to help people with criminal histories apply or return to public housing and receive reentry case-management services.<sup>23</sup>

One such program is the Family Reentry Pilot Program (FRPP) in New York City, launched in November 2013. The Vera Institute of Justice (Vera) along with the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA), the Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH), the New York City Department of Homeless Services (DHS), the New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS), the New York City Department of Correction (DOC), and 13 reentry service providers joined forces to create the FRPP to address the barriers that formerly

incarcerated people face in gaining access to public housing. (For a list of the reentry service providers, see “FRPP design,” Appendix A.)

The pilot was designed to reunite 150 formerly incarcerated people with their families who live in public housing and test a simple theory: Providing formerly incarcerated people with a safe and stable living environment can improve their quality of life and reduce their risk of future justice-system involvement while improving public safety. To help pilot participants achieve this goal, they each received personally tailored case management and supportive services offered by reentry service providers who helped them address critical needs, including getting work, continuing their education, participating in substance-use counseling, and securing public benefits. If pilot participants complete the two-year program, remain free of any justice-system involvement within those two years, and their families continue to comply with their lease obligations, participants can be added on to the lease. As of May 2017, there are 108 people currently enrolled in the program. (See Figure 1 for characteristics of participants as of May 2017.)

**Figure 1**  
**FRPP participants (May 2017), N=108**

<b>Gender</b>		<b>Age (at time of application)</b>	
Female	11	18–24	10
Male	97	25–29	23
		30–34	18
		35–39	13
		40 ≥	44

# Overview of the FRPP evaluation

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Beginning in 2014, Vera began the evaluation of the NYCHA FRPP. This evaluation had two main goals: (1) to describe pilot participants' characteristics, their needs, experiences, and short-term program outcomes, and (2) to assess the pilot's design, implementation, and feasibility for scaling-up and replication in other jurisdictions.

The short-term, participant-level outcome study examined the experiences of the FRPP participants, non-participating applicants, and their families. The initial research questions were the following:

- › What is the demographic composition of pilot participants and their families?
- › What are the reentry needs identified by the pilot participants and their families and to what extent did the pilot program address these needs?
- › What are the perceived benefits and limitations of the pilot?
- › To what degree did participants find pilot participation helpful for securing and retaining employment?
- › How many of the pilot participants secured employment for six months or longer following enrollment in the pilot?
- › Is there a change in the pilot households' income between program enrollment and completion?

For the implementation and process study, Vera assessed the strengths and weaknesses of the FRPP's design and challenges to implementation by interviewing staff from reentry service organizations and applicants who were not accepted into the FRPP. Vera also analyzed estimates of people returning from incarceration who are affected by NYCHA's admission policies to determine the need for an expanded program. Through these research activities, Vera sought to answer the following research questions:

- › What are the strengths and weaknesses of the pilot design?
- › To what degree did implementation adhere to the original pilot design and what are the reasons for deviation (if any)?
- › What were the main challenges of implementation and how were these resolved or mitigated?
- › How many families are impacted by NYCHA's tenant selection criteria?
- › Could the pilot be scaled up or replicated in other jurisdictions and what are the key lessons for other jurisdictions interested in using public housing as a reentry resource?

Vera found that the FRPP succeeded in helping pilot participants meet their reentry needs. A majority of participants were able to get work, attend job training, go to school, and/or receive substance-use treatment while living at home. As of March 2017, the number of FRPP participants who were convicted of a new offense was very low. As Vera's study and assessment of the FRPP demonstrates, this success was in part a result of the collaboration and combined efforts of NYCHA, the

reentry service providers, corrections agencies, and implementation partners, ensuring that they addressed each participant's needs.

For people who did not participate in the FRPP, Vera found that most applicants struggled to find stable housing after not being selected for the FRPP. Others were apprehensive of being near NYCHA property and avoided visiting family members living in NYCHA. Vera also found that the level of communication could be improved between the organizations involved with the FRPP and program applicants throughout the application process.

The pilot was also hampered in several ways that prevented it from reaching its capacity of 150 participants. Vera's research uncovered that a major obstacle to FRPP enrollment was the widespread resident distrust of NYCHA generally, and skepticism around the pilot more specifically. In particular, some potential applicants and family members believed that NYCHA would never launch a full-scale program, such as the FRPP, that helps people with criminal histories, or that the program was a tactic aimed at identifying unauthorized residents and evicting families who were not complying with NYCHA rules and regulations.

Despite these shortcomings, the lessons learned from the FRPP—its components, successes, and challenges—are helping NYCHA inform its plans to expand the program and take it to scale. As Vera's analysis of New York City and New York State administrative data suggests, a scaled program has the potential to help many thousands of men and women released from New York State prisons or New York City jails. Indeed, NYCHA is working to expand the program's scope to allow more eligible people to participate. And already, the FRPP design has drawn the attention of other PHAs interested in establishing their own public housing-reentry program to create a sustainable path for formerly incarcerated people to reunite with their families.

The following report details the design of the FRPP evaluation and the findings and lessons learned from its implementation. Given the program’s implications for successful reentry, family reunification, and public safety, the pilot’s lessons can guide public housing authorities looking to start their own reentry housing programs.

## Methodology

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This section of the report describes the research methodologies used for the outcome as well as the implementation and process studies.

For each, details of the research design (including any revisions to the original research plan), sources of data, and the chosen analytic approach is explained. First, the original methodology for the outcome study—and the factors that caused it to be amended—is discussed. Following that, the methodology related to the implementation and process study is presented. It should be noted that, because some Vera staff participated in developing and implementing the pilot, a separate team of Vera researchers conducted the evaluation of the FRPP.

### Initial plan: outcome study

For the outcome study, Vera’s initial plan was to conduct baseline interviews with a random sample of 50 pilot participants within three months of their enrollment into the FRPP. The goals of the baseline interviews were to assess pilot participants’ satisfaction with the program, the quality and usefulness of the services it provided, and their thoughts on other services that they believed they needed. Questions

based on a set of standardized scales (such as the Family Support Scale, the Relationship Quality Scale, and the Depression Scale) were to comprise a significant portion of the baseline interviews.<sup>24</sup> The purpose of including these scale items in the baseline interviews (and the planned follow-up interviews) was for the evaluators to identify and describe both individual- and familial-level changes over time. In addition, the intended baseline interviews were designed to explore respondents' living conditions after their release from incarceration as well as their experiences with the FRPP's enrollment process. The follow-up interviews with the same cohort of respondents were to occur within three months after completing the required six-month case management term. The intent of the follow-up interviews was to assess the degree to which the FRPP helped participants in the reentry process and to learn respondents' suggestions on how to improve the program for future participants.

Another facet of the original evaluation plan was to interview all pilot participants who were dismissed from the program or opted out of it voluntarily. If the participant could not be located or was incarcerated, Vera planned to interview the person's family member. Both interviews were designed to focus on the reasons that the primary applicant was no longer in the pilot and any challenges they and their families encountered as a result.

However, as the FRPP's implementation progressed, it became clear that the original plan to recruit a study sample was not feasible due to lack of participants—it took more than one year to enroll 10 people in the FRPP due to recruitment and enrollment challenges. (See “Weaknesses and implementation challenges” on page 48.) The utility of the baseline interviews hinged on obtaining a minimum number of follow-up interviews for comparison, the prospects of which were unlikely given the FRPP enrollment at the time.

Because of unforeseen challenges that arose during the respondent recruitment and data collection phases of this evaluation (e.g., the lack of eligible respondents enrolled in the program at the time), Vera determined that the initial research design of the outcome study needed to be revised to reflect the status of the FRPP at the time.

## Revised plan: short-term participant-level outcome study

The revised methodology for the outcome study involved the review of progress reports and administrative documents, as well as conducting a short-term, participant-level qualitative study with FRPP participants available at the time.

The revised research plan placed greater emphasis on assessing the FRPP participants' and family members' perceptions on how the program may have impacted their lives through an analysis of their narrative accounts. Thus, the changes in the research design enabled the researchers to partially address the original research questions. The modifications made to the research design examined:

- > the demographic composition of pilot participants and their families;
- > changes in the pilot households' income between program enrollment and completion;
- > the number of pilot participants who secured employment;
- > perceived benefits and limitations of the pilot; and
- > reentry needs identified by the pilot participants and their families, and the extent the FRPP addressed these needs.

Between January 2015 and February 2016, Vera conducted outreach to all 59 program participants enrolled within this timeframe. Ultimately, Vera conducted in-person interviews with a subset of 29 program participants using a semi-structured interview protocol. Additionally, the interviewees shared similar characteristics of those who could not be contacted or refused to respond. The interviews were recorded in writing and focused on individuals' experiences with the reentry process, their perceptions of the FRPP and the recruitment and application processes, the participants' level of satisfaction with the pilot program, their level of family support, service needs, and thoughts on case management—all intended to assess the program's early effects on the participants' lives.

As the number of program participants increased, Vera considered extending the data collection period to interview additional participants. However, the researchers determined that they had reached the point of data saturation—they received consistent responses and could not see any new findings emerging from subsequent interviews.

Vera researchers also interviewed 15 family members of participants between December 2015 and April 2016. (Researchers contacted 29 family members listed in the applications of the interviewed participants and 15 people agreed to be interviewed.) Family-member interviews focused on perceptions of the program and how it affected the family. The family members and participants who were interviewed received \$25 in exchange for their participation.

Vera conducted a structured content analysis of the interview responses using the qualitative analysis software, NVivo, and researchers coded the responses based on the study's objective and research questions to uncover pertinent themes across the interviews. In addition, Vera collected progress reports from the reentry service providers on a bi-monthly basis. Vera recorded the milestones and other

relevant information found in the progress reports throughout the course of the pilot. (See “Data sources” on page 22.)

In a subsequent phase of the outcome study, Vera recruited FRPP applicants who were *not* selected for the program, and their family members, for interviews. Initially, Vera proposed to interview people who left the program but—because there was not a pool of people who fit that criteria—Vera researchers concluded that the outcome study would benefit from inquiring about the experiences of applicants who were not accepted into the FRPP.

From February to April 2017, through the use of purposive sampling methods, Vera attempted to contact, either via phone calls or text messages, each of the 68 applicants (and their respective family members) who did not participate in the FRPP.<sup>25</sup> A total of 10 people were successfully recruited and participated in semi-structured interviews: eight individuals who applied to the FRPP and were not accepted into the program as well as two family members of such persons. Each of the applicants and family members interviewed during this phase of research received \$50 in exchange for their participation.

The main topics discussed during this round of interviews were motivations for applying to the FRPP, their perceptions of the application process, the nature of their lives in the time since they applied, and other aspects of reentering the community after incarceration. Further, due to their unique experience of having applied to the FRPP and not being selected, the interviews with this set of respondents also provided additional insights on the implementation and process portion of the study. (See “Respondents’ thoughts on improving the FRPP” on page 51.) Vera conducted a thematic analysis of the interview data whereby each interview transcript was manually coded.<sup>26</sup>

## The implementation and process study

To inform the implementation and process study, Vera employed a mixed-methods approach to this portion of the FRPP evaluation. In the qualitative phase of this study, 11 staff members from reentry service organizations were interviewed between March 2016 and May 2016, and seven additional staff members from six reentry service organizations (one interview included two staff members from the same organization) were interviewed between February 2017 and April 2017. These interviews all focused on the respondents' views of the strengths and weaknesses of the FRPP as well as any perceived barriers and challenges to the program's implementation. Interviewees in this respondent pool included program directors and direct-service staff. Also, information obtained during interviews with non-participating applicants as part of the latter phase of the outcome study, as described above, also lent insight into how the FRPP was implemented.

In addition, researchers used a series of quantitative techniques to conduct the first-ever estimate of the previously incarcerated population affected by NYCHA's current admissions policies—people who could potentially benefit from an expansion of the FRPP. From this estimate, one can get closer to addressing the question of how many families are impacted by NYCHA's tenant selection criteria. To arrive at this estimate, researchers utilized *probabilistic record linkage*—a technique typically used for merging two datasets that do not share a common record identifier.<sup>27</sup> The matching analysis was performed using two matching procedures: 1) matching New York Department of Corrections and Community Supervision person-release data to an exhaustive list of public housing addresses provided by the New York City Housing Authority, and 2) matching participants in the NYCHA Family Reentry Pilot Program to releases in the DOCCS records.

This matching analysis was conducted through the use of two Stata programs—*reclink2* and *matchit*—with the specific purpose of matching observations across and within data sets by a single (or set of) semi-discriminating variable(s). Both programs have a similar structure: observations within or across data sets are matched according to text-based variables, typically a name or street address, and are assigned a “similarity” score between 0 (perfect non-match) and 1 (perfect match) and both programs allow for each observation in the “master” and “using” dataset to be paired with multiple potential matches.<sup>28</sup>

## Data sources

**Interviews with participants, non-participating applicants, family members, and service providers:** Vera conducted in-person, semi-structured interviews with 29 participants, 15 family members of participants, and 11 reentry service providers between January 2015 and April 2016. Interviews during this timeframe with participants and family members explored the early effects of the FRPP on the lives of the participants and their family members. The interviews with the service providers explored the strengths and weaknesses of the program components, as well as any implementation challenges.

Between February 2017 to April 2017, Vera conducted semi-structured interviews with eight non-participating applicants, two family members of this group, and seven staff from six reentry service providers. The purpose of these interviews with applicants and family members was to understand the impact and consequences of not being selected for the FRPP and their experiences with the application process. The interviews with reentry service providers was aimed at assessing their views on factors that can influence FRPP application decisions and how the pilot program could better serve formerly incarcerated individuals in need of housing.

**Reports from reentry service organizations:** Every two months, Vera collected progress reports from the FRPP reentry service providers. Progress reports documented the first six months of a participant's progress in the FRPP and included the frequency of contacts between the participants and their case manager, progress toward completing milestones in the participant's action plan (i.e., an agreement between participant and case manager outlining the participant's goals during the six-month case management term, such as obtaining employment and securing health insurance), and any contact with the criminal justice system.

**New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS):** DOCCS provided data for all 93,874 people released from state facilities between January 2010 and December 2013. The data included demographic characteristics (such as gender, race, and age), charge and sentence characteristics, and address where people reported they were going to live upon release.

**New York City Department of Homeless Services (DHS):** DHS provided data on people who were released from a New York State prison or New York City jail between January 2010 and December 2013, had DHS shelter contact between January 2010 and March 2016, and who reported to DHS that they had lived in NYCHA at some point in their lives. The DHS shelter contact in this dataset was a person's most recent shelter stay—a person may have had more than one shelter stay upon release from prison or jail.

## Study limitations

There were several limitations to the study. First, although there were 108 FRPP participants as of May 2017, there were only 59 pilot participants out of a potential 150 at the time that Vera conducted the short-term, participant-level outcome study—the result of difficulties recruiting eligible applicants for the FRPP. Vera successfully contacted 31 people, but two refused and 28 were unreachable—one person was deported and 27 others did not have working phone numbers or were otherwise unavailable.

A second limitation of this study is its short-term time period. The original proposal for this evaluation stated that one of the goals of this project was to assess the effectiveness of this reentry program. While many of the FRPP participants were able to identify areas in their lives that improved because of their involvement in the program, Vera was unable to fully assess the FRPP's effectiveness on family reunification and the achievement of other initial action plan goals on the lives of the participants—the majority of participants did not complete the two-year requirement of program participation.

Third, locating many of the applicants who were not selected for the FRPP proved to be challenging. Some people had applied to the FRPP as far back as November 2013 and their contact information (such as their telephone numbers as well as family members') was outdated—many of the phone numbers on file were no longer in service or had been acquired by someone else. In some instances, service providers provided updated contact information, but in many cases, that information was also obsolete. When Vera was successful in reaching an applicant or a family member by phone, many of them were not interested in participating in the study. In several cases, some family members indicated that they were not familiar with the

existence of the FRPP or were unaware that they were involved or associated with any FRPP application that was submitted. When Vera made contact with applicants or family members, there were multiple instances when respondents failed to appear for scheduled interviews or were unavailable for the planned interview. As a result, only eight of the 68 people known to researchers as having not been accepted into the FRPP were interviewed, representing approximately 12 percent of eligible respondents. The eight non-participating applicants who were interviewed shared similar gender and race characteristics as the group of non-participating applicants who were not interviewed. However, given the small sample size, the findings from these interviews should not be used to make generalizations about the entire set of people who were not accepted into the FRPP.

Fourth, the nature of the FRPP's design and the program's evolution prevented the researchers from fully addressing the research questions related to participants' employment. The original research design sought to examine the *degree* to which people found their participation in FRPP helped them secure and retain a job. Unfortunately, the employment data obtained during this evaluation was not able to completely answer this question. However, the research findings were able to demonstrate that most program participants were receiving reentry services, including employment assistance, which would have been available regardless of one's participation in the FRPP. Further, at least one-third of the participants were referred from one particular service provider that primarily works with people returning to the community from a work-release prison. For these individuals, maintaining steady employment was a required condition of earning more time out of the work-release facility and into the community. In fact, more than half of the program participants that were clients of this organization were employed while

in the FRPP. Other FRPP applicants had jobs prior to incarceration that they were able to return to upon release from prison. Without the ability to empirically disentangle the effects of the FRPP from extraneous factors on employment outcomes, it is difficult to assess the degree to which people's participation in the FRPP may have influenced their ability to secure and retain employment.

Another limitation is the absence of a counterfactual (e.g., a comparison group) to determine the extent to which the outcome results described are attributed to one's program participation. Determining the degree of association between a program and its effects can be difficult to assess in outcome and impact studies without the inclusion of additional evaluation research methods.<sup>29</sup> In this case, assessing the impact of FRPP participation on one's successful transition back to the community after incarceration is difficult to state with certainty.

Additionally, the analysis estimating the number of formerly incarcerated people affected by NYCHA admissions policies also had limitations. Specifically, some people leaving New York State prisons may report returning to a non-NYCHA address upon release, but may actually go on to live in a NYCHA housing unit with family members or others. Thus, because the data on individuals released from state prisons who plan on returning to NYCHA housing was self-reported, the number of people known to researchers who fit this criteria may be an underestimate of the entire population that could benefit from the FRPP.

Finally, beyond the scope of the FRPP, one goal of this evaluation was to measure the total number of *families* impacted by NYCHA's tenant selection criteria using the analysis of people released from New York State prisons who reported a NYCHA address. However, Vera determined the number would be an inaccurate proxy to estimate the number of families impacted by NYCHA's tenant selection criteria for

three reasons. First, the self-reported addresses do not reveal if a person who is being released from prison has a family member living in NYCHA or if it is a person of other relations. Second, if a family member does live in the address that is self-reported, the analysis would not determine if the returning person planned to join that household. Lastly, the analysis does not include the number of families who were denied admission to NYCHA housing and are living elsewhere. Given these limitations, this analysis was not possible.

## Findings

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This section details the demographic composition of the participants and the findings from both parts of the FRPP evaluation: the short-term, participant-level outcome study and the process and implementation study.

As of May 2017, there were 108 people currently enrolled in the FRPP program. A limited amount of details about this group's demographic composition are reported to protect the anonymity of the FRPP participants. Among these 108 program participants:

- > Ninety percent were male and 10 percent were female;
- > Thirty percent were under the age of 30 at the time of their application, 29 percent were between the ages of 30 and 39 at the time of their application, and 41 percent were 40 years of age or older at the time of the application;

- › Less than two-thirds of the participants identified as black, while a third identified as Hispanic;
- › The greatest numbers of participants returned to Manhattan (40 percent) and Brooklyn (35 percent);
- › Twenty-five percent were incarcerated at the time of their application;
- › Sixty-eight percent reunited with at least one of their parents; and
- › Fifteen percent were released to households with their children.

## The short-term participant-level outcome study

Vera organized its findings from the short-term participant-level outcome study into three categories: 1) initial outcomes of the FRPP (including changes in income for households with FRPP participants who completed the program, program participants' employment information, and other participant milestones), 2) effects of the FRPP on participants and their family members (including their perceptions of how the program addressed their reentry needs and on the beneficial qualities of the FRPP), and 3) the experiences of applicants who were not selected for the FRPP.

### **Initial outcomes of the FRPP**

Drawing on reports from service providers and NYCHA, Vera tracked the progress of FRPP participants. The reports revealed promising

initial outcomes. As of May 2017, 20 of the FRPP participants completed the two-year program requirement—representing less than one-fifth of the overall program participants. Among this subset of the FRPP participants, six have been added to their family’s lease, with another 10 in the process of joining the lease. Four people have decided not to be added to their family’s lease. The other program participants are at various stages of their participation in the FRPP. (See Figure 2 for program participation status.)

**Figure 2**  
**Program participation status (May 2017), N=108**

<b>Period</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>
Within first six months of program participation	16
Within six–12 months of program participation	20
Within one–two years of program participation	52
Completed two-year program requirement	20

Through an analysis of administrative data provided by NYCHA, Vera assessed whether there were changes in the pre-FRPP annual incomes and NYCHA rent amounts in 18 (of the 20 total) households that had a participant complete the FRPP.<sup>30</sup> Over this time period, 14 (78 percent) of these 18 households’ annual incomes increased by—on average—61 percent. Regarding NYCHA rent amounts, this figure also

increased in 14 of these 18 households over the same timeframe. Among them, the average increase in the NYCHA rent amount was 18 percent.

Nevertheless, this analysis cannot determine the degree to which one's FRPP participation may be correlated with the dynamics of household-level income and rent amount changes. For households who have added FRPP participants to their leases, this addition is just one of a number of possible factors (such as a household's subsequent move to a new NYCHA unit, a change in a resident's income, etc.) that may lead to adjustments in their annual incomes and NYCHA rent amounts.<sup>31</sup>

Beyond details regarding changes in FRPP enrollees' household income and rent amounts, researchers were also able to obtain information from reentry service providers on their employment status and other milestones such as education attainment and substance use treatment. Of the 108 FRPP participants, Vera found that 47 of them have found a job or maintained employment, 13 have attended employment training and workshops, 14 were receiving training toward certifications, 12 were attending school, and 16 were in substance-use treatment programs, as of May 2017.<sup>32</sup> However, the study's data could not explain the proportion of FRPP participants who were employed for six months or greater—follow-up interviews were not conducted given the recruitment challenges for the FRPP and the changes to the research plan for the outcome study. In addition, case management and progress reports from service providers were required only for the first six months of a person's participation in the FRPP.

Vera also obtained information on criminal justice system involvement for FRPP participants. In the time since the program's enrollment began, less than a handful of participants have been convicted of a new criminal charge while in the program (criminal background checks were conducted by NYCHA on all participants in March 2017).

## **The effects of the FRPP on the reentry process**

The following section will explore how participating in the FRPP impacted the lives of the program participants as well as their families. The findings were based on the sampled participants' perceptions of their experiences. In particular, researchers investigated how participating in the program helped to address participants' reentry needs and aid in the acquisition of housing. They further investigated the FRPP's ability to help participants reconnect with their families.

To understand participants' and families' perceptions of the pilot's effects, Vera researchers interviewed 29 pilot participants and 15 family members. (See "Methodology" on page 16.) Interviewees viewed the transition from incarceration to the community as overwhelming, describing reentry as a time of never-ending obstacles: managing crippling debt from past-due child support; homelessness; panic attacks on crowded trains; frustration with trying to find a job; and struggles against drug addiction were all cited as challenges for the respondents as they transitioned back to the community. However, during their interviews, many of the participants also described how the FRPP helped them to address some of these barriers and that, overall, they were extremely satisfied with the program. One respondent reported that the service providers partnering with NYCHA helped them to "overcome a lot of red tape."<sup>33</sup> The respondent went on to say that the program also gave a "sure sense [of] support." Another respondent said that the FRPP helped to keep the respondent's child from being "lost in [the] system" and that the respondent now gets to "see [the child] every day."

Nineteen interviewees responded with very positive or satisfied responses when asked how they felt about their current living arrangement. One participant who was reunited with family members responded, "[I am] happy to live with family without having to worry or

live in fear.” Another respondent who was reunited with a parent told researchers, “The pilot is a good program that came right in time when I didn’t have a place to live.” Another respondent who was living with an adult child had a similar experience. The respondent reported that the FRPP “was the best thing that could have happened to me... Things could not have worked out better.” The sibling of one participant stated, “It is an important factor to have family members involved” and that the people associated with the FRPP were in steady contact “referring them to new opportunities. That makes a big difference.” Another family member stated that the program “offers a sense of support” and added that the family member’s child “helps with the rent, groceries, and with cleaning around the house, in general.” The family member said that the FRPP “is a good way to put the family back together rather than separating [them].”

When interviewees were less enthusiastic about their current living situation, their responses were couched in terms of them having broader aspirations of independence and living space, not as critiques of the pilot itself. For example, one respondent’s enthusiasm for the pilot was tempered by the stigma felt by being associated with living in public housing. The respondent wanted to get a private apartment and was not interested in passing the public housing lease down to family members. Another participant living with a parent desired a larger apartment; the participant was sleeping on the couch, and a two-bedroom unit would allow for the participant’s own room and privacy. Another participant said, “It is comfortable, but I wouldn’t mind my own place... it feels cramped sometimes.” And finally, some of the participants discussed wanting to eventually “get on their own feet” and gain independence. A common refrain from men living with their mothers was summed up by one respondent who learned about the pilot through a prison newsletter: “It is OK for now, but no grown man wants to live with his mother.”

## Safe and stable housing

A common theme that emerged from the interviews was the importance of safe and stable housing. Nineteen participants mentioned safe and stable housing as being essential to the reentry process. Participants reported that being able to live in NYCHA housing with their family members was a safety net against precarious living arrangements and the possibility of homelessness. The significance of the stable housing provided by the FRPP became clearly evident when researchers asked about alternative housing options. Almost half of the interviewed participants stated that they would be homeless, living in a shelter, or in transitional housing, such as a halfway house or three-quarter house, had they not been accepted into the FRPP. One participant explained that almost all of the participant's family now live in another state—to go live with them would violate the terms of parole, which banned out-of-state travel. If the participant was not in the pilot living with family members in NYCHA housing, the participant would have to be in a shelter or a three-quarter house, often unregulated and illegal single-occupancy residences in New York City frequented by people in substance-use recovery and formerly incarcerated people.<sup>34</sup> Another participant reported that there were “no other options.” After some reflection, the participant added, “I guess I would be on the streets.”

Three participants shared their experiences living in three-quarter housing before being accepted into FRPP. They spoke of frequent arguments with roommates over boundaries and the presence of drugs and alcohol, with landlords offering little support. The conditions of these types of units was viscerally described by one participant, who said, “The living conditions [in three-quarter housing] are worse than in prison.” In light of the dire alternatives, they described the stable and safe housing provided through FRPP as essential to their wellbeing.

## Family reunification and support

The FRPP's effect on family reunification was another common theme, mentioned by 25 participants and six interviewed family members. One participant described the role the FRPP played in reuniting with his children. He was able to bring them to his home, where he was living with his parents. There, three generations of family were able to spend time together in a comfortable setting—something that he felt would be impossible had he been living in a homeless shelter. One participant living with his parent said that the best part of the FRPP for him was being able to “reconnect with loved ones.” Alluding to the restrictions on people with conviction histories being on NYCHA property who are not on the lease, another participant who was living with his parents said his family is very supportive and reported, “I’m grateful [for the FRPP]; it means I don’t need to be sneaking around to see my family.” Another participant joked, “My [child] was so happy [my child] posted it on Facebook...I didn’t even know what Facebook was!”

There were bumps on the road to family reunification. Some participants spoke of their anxiety about being a stress to their family. As an example, one participant living with his parent reported feeling “worried about being burdensome on my family because of my health problems,” despite being happy that the program has allowed him to stay close to his mother. Many participants also said that the first few months were hard—it took time for them to earn family members’ trust. For example, a participant reported that it took his children a little time to get used to having him back, but they now have a strong relationship. One participant living with his family reported that the reunification “was not hard for [my family] once they saw I was alright and felt more comfortable...they worried a lot when I first got back.” And finally, another participant said that now things with his family are “calmer

and happier,” but in the beginning it “was like walking on eggshells.” He reflected that with the passage of time, his family has become more trusting.

Participants and family members alike agreed that everyone benefitted from sharing the family home. Participants emphasized how the FRPP facilitated their contributions to the family and the reciprocal relationship they enjoyed in the household. For example, a spouse of a program participant said that the program had “saved [her] husband’s life.” She added that having her husband home was helpful because he took care of the house and did the laundry. One participant’s sister said that through the FRPP, “I got my brother back. I didn’t have him for half my life.” She also discussed how her brother contributes by “using his food stamps to help the family,” and that “if he relapses, he knows we are there for him.” A participant’s father reported that having his son back living with him is “beautiful” and that their close-knit family helped their son get a job when he came home. He was quick to say, “The family is supportive of him, but it is mutually supportive; it is a beautiful relationship.”

The mutually beneficial relationships were most evident when participants lived with elderly parents. Three participants became the primary caregiver for elderly parents, taking on daily responsibilities such as helping their parents get dressed, reminding them to take medication, and chaperoning them to their healthcare appointments. Another eight participants provided financial support for their parents. A participant living with his mother said, “The transition home has been beneficial for my mother, because now I can take care of household chores and take her to get dialysis.” He talked about how this positively affected his extended family as well. He said, “Me living here has relieved those responsibilities from my aunts and uncles who [now] do not have

to visit as often.” Another participant lives with his elderly mother and being at home allows him to care for her. She supported him through his incarceration by providing money and talking to him on the phone. He sees the FRPP as “a blessing”: he can now return the support she gave him. All of the participants who took on familial roles described family responsibilities as motivating, not burdensome. Many reported feeling empowered and purposeful once they were reunited with their families and being able to contribute in the ways they could—whether that was financially by offsetting costs or paying bills, or being there for their children to help with school. (See Figure 3 for additional responses from FRPP participants on family bonds and support.)

Overall, the sample of FRPP participants recognized how the program assisted them in their transition back to the community post-release. Narratives from this sample of participants starkly illustrated that housing was a significant reentry need and they described how the program helped to mitigate their housing concerns. Their accounts also highlighted the FRPP’s role in reuniting participants with their families. Their testimonies demonstrate how a program like FRPP can positively impact a person’s reentry process.

The next section of this report investigates the lives of FRPP applicants who were not selected for the program. The interviews with this group provided narrative accounts of their life experiences after it was determined that they would not be participating in the FRPP.

### **The experiences of applicants not selected for the FRPP**

Through analyzing the data from the interviews with FRPP participants, the experiences of those who also applied to the FRPP but were not admitted became of interest to the researchers. Vera was interested in this subset because—like those who were chosen to participate

Figure 3

**FRPP and family bonds: participant interview responses**

	<b>Participant responses (n=29)*</b>
<b>Primary social support to participant</b>	
Parents	18
Siblings	11
Other family	6
Children	4
Significant others	3
Friends and community	2
<b>Person offering financial support to participant</b>	
Parents	12
Siblings	3
Significant others	2
Others	17
<b>Those receiving social support from participant</b>	
Family in home	14
Parents	14
Children	9
Significant others	5

Figure 3 (continued)

**FRPP and family bonds: participant interview responses**

	<b>Participant responses (n=29)*</b>
<b>Those receiving financial support from participant</b>	
Parents	14
Children	9
Significant others	4
<b>Those offering support before incarceration</b>	
Parents (social, financial)	8
Siblings (social, financial)	7
Significant others (social)	3
Friends and community (social)	3
Themselves	11
Relationships with children	
Participants with children	16
Maintain close relationship with at least one child	14

\*Participants could give multiple responses.

in the program—they had acquired knowledge about the program, made the decision to apply, and had interactions with similar types of stakeholders. Vera gained helpful insights through understanding the experiences of non-participating applicants.

As shown, there is variation among the statuses of unsuccessful FRPP applications (as of May 2017):

- › Thirty-six applications were closed or withdrawn, which meant that the applicants withdrew themselves from the application process or they did not meet one of the program eligibility requirements.
- › Thirty-three were denied for various reasons. Reasons for denials can include 1) the NYCHA selection committee’s judgment that applicants had not demonstrated significant changes in their lives after incarceration, or 2) consideration of the victim of the crime who lived in the same housing development.
- › Sixteen applications were deferred for review at a later date (usually because those applicants had not demonstrated sufficiently that they were making strides towards improving their lives after incarceration) or are pending review.

To explore the experiences of applicants who were not selected for the FRPP, Vera interviewed eight applicants and two family members. (See “Methodology” on page 16.) Vera researchers asked about the application process, beginning with how they became aware of the FRPP, motivations for applying, and how their lives were impacted after not being selected for participation. Finally, Vera researchers inquired about ways the applicants’ thought the program could be improved,

given their experience with the FRPP process as applicants who were not selected.

The interviews with this group and their family members revealed themes that were relevant to the scope of the FRPP evaluation. Revealingly, many of these themes (e.g., housing stability and family reunification and support) were discussed in different contexts compared to the narratives of the participants. This section will illustrate the three prominent thematic results of the broad question: what has been the experience of those who were not selected for the FRPP? These themes related to learning about and applying to the FRPP, the nature of these respondents' quest for housing, as well as their stance on NYCHA and its properties.

### Variations in learning about the FRPP and motivations for applying

One prominent theme within the conversations with non-participating applicant experience were the diversity of experiences that these respondents had regarding being introduced to the FRPP. Initial knowledge about the FRPP came at different times for those who were not selected for the FRPP. Four of the applicants interviewed said that they first became aware of the FRPP while incarcerated through different kinds of case managers. One applicant learned about the program during a presentation by a reentry counselor from an external agency who was visiting the correctional facility where she was incarcerated. As a result of attending that meeting, the applicant formed a bond with the reentry counselor and started to work closely with the counselor's agency prior to the applicant's release—including submitting the FRPP application. The other four applicants learned about the pilot after they were released from incarceration. An applicant found out about the FRPP through a job training program he attended

after coming home. For him, adhering to the terms of his parole was his main priority immediately upon release, and enrolling in a housing program was an afterthought. Eventually, he started to seek the support of a specific reentry service provider in New York City, where he received job training and eventually learned about the FRPP.

For many of the applicants, the primary motivation for applying to the FRPP was to reconnect with and have the opportunity to support family members. An applicant who had been incarcerated for just over four years said that his priority once he returned to the community was to make up the time he lost with his family and support his mother financially. He said, “I was trying to get my name on the lease to help my mother out with the rent and stuff, but they wouldn’t allow it because of the fact that I have a felony.” Another applicant also mentioned his desire to support his family as the reason he chose to apply for the FRPP. When asked what the benefit of applying to the FRPP would be to him, he cited the chance to assist his ailing grandmother: “...my grandmother is sick, and I am the only one who will take care of her, but in and out, coming in and out of jail, I always lived close by to her...But now I have an opportunity to stay and live with her.” After his first application was deferred, the applicant decided to apply a second time—something several people have done.<sup>35</sup> One respondent was also inspired to pursue the FRPP as a means to rejoin the NYCHA lease. After his conviction, he was officially taken off of the lease of the unit where his mother was the primary leaseholder. He learned about the FRPP from his mother—who learned about the FRPP through the management staff at her NYCHA development—while he was still incarcerated. He stated that, “...my main goal is to get back in New York City Housing Authority with my momma so I continue to be [a] responsible, productive member of society, and support my momma in all areas of her life...”

Another factor that motivated some to apply for the pilot program was to reacquire or protect the right to live in their former NYCHA units. Three of the eight applicants indicated that they applied to the FRPP because they saw it as an opportunity to rejoin a NYCHA lease that they had been on prior to being incarcerated. According to one respondent, a resident of NYCHA for 30 years, NYCHA had been attempting to evict them and their children as soon as the individual was incarcerated. Fortunately, one of the respondent's children was also on the lease and was able to keep the apartment. Immediately after being paroled, the applicant entered a halfway house and heard about the pilot program from a visiting reentry service provider. At the time of the application, the respondent saw the FRPP as a legitimate mechanism for retaining the right to live in their NYCHA unit once again.

Despite the small number of narratives to analyze from people who were not accepted into the FRPP, their accounts revealed some of the different ways people became aware of and exposed to the FRPP. Some learned about the program through a reentry service provider, while others became aware of the program through other channels, such as in pre-release preparation and information sessions held at correctional facilities, via a family member, and from a parole officer post-release. This section underscored that there are multiple routes that people may take to learning about the program and an array of motivating factors that may lead to one applying to the FRPP.

### Unstable housing arrangements

Given the evaluation's focus on applicant-level outcomes, the interviews included questions on experiences securing housing once the FRPP was no longer a viable option. The analysis revealed that there were a variety of housing arrangements among the non-participating applicants at the

time of their interview. More often than not, the respondents described their housing status at the time as being temporary and less-than-ideal.

Once the applicants were informed of their application decisions, each had to find alternative sources of housing. While there were some exceptions, most of these respondents were in precarious housing situations at the time of their respective interviews. The nature of the non-participating applicants' housing arrangements included people who were either staying with friends or family members in non-NYCHA units, living in shelters, living in NYCHA as unauthorized residents, and living in non-NYCHA residences with a significant other.

Applicants viewed their current living situations as inadequate and unstable. One such individual was living with a partner (but not spouse) at the time of the interview, which was not this person's preferred housing arrangement. When asked if not being accepted into the FRPP had any negative impacts on their family relations, the respondent affirmed that it did: "If I could have gotten on my [parent's] lease, I would have been there helping out and...[now] I'm just living with somebody, and it's good one day, and it could be bad the next day." This person's experience—along with other applicants—exemplifies the reality of erratic housing arrangements after not being selected for the FRPP.

Also, there were applicants who were living in NYCHA units as unauthorized tenants at the time of their interview. After being released from incarceration, one applicant lived as an unauthorized tenant in the NYCHA apartments of multiple relatives and friends. When asked whether there was a sense of worry about the risk of this arrangement, this applicant responded by saying, "Do I worry about it? Yes. Do they worry about it? Yes, but they don't want to put [me] out."

For another applicant who was living with people they know in a NYCHA

unit as an unauthorized tenant, the situation was not ideal nor was it intended to be permanent. During the interview, this applicant claimed to have plans to move out of that apartment relatively soon thereafter to voluntarily stay at a shelter. In fact, the applicant was more confident in the prospect of acquiring permanent housing by taking that route: “I really am not dependent on [NYCHA], it could take years...but I know in the process of me being in the shelter...whether it takes a year, or two years, something will happen. [A person] that I was in the program with...left a month after I left, went to the shelter, and [they have their] own apartment already.”

### Aversion to NYCHA property

After being denied, some applicants were extremely leery of being on NYCHA property—limiting their opportunities to spend time with family. In some cases, this stemmed from the fear that they may jeopardize their loved ones’ housing situations if they entered the property. One applicant who did not participate in the FRPP said that they refuse to visit their parent’s NYCHA apartment. This respondent admitted that his parent was also worried about the potential consequences to them if they were to visit. The respondent said, “I can’t go in the house. I mean...I love my [parent] unconditionally, but I could also love [my parent] from a distance.” Another applicant who was living with family members was engaged at the time of the interview. But since this individual’s partner lives in NYCHA housing, this person will not stay at this person’s home, which affects their ability to see one another: “I mean, after all, [my partner] lives in NYCHA so...I stay with my relative and [my partner] has to come...see me.”

## The implementation and process study

The implementation and process study explored the FRPP's design, its strengths and weakness, and challenges of implementation. Further, this part of the study sought to assess the number of people impacted by NYCHA's tenant selection criteria and if the pilot should be taken to scale.

Vera organized its findings into four categories: 1) the program's adherence to its original design, 2) strengths and weaknesses of the FRPP (including challenges of implementation from the perspective of reentry service providers), 3) respondents' thoughts on improving the FRPP (and what they perceived as limitations), and 4) the unmet need for the FRPP (which analyzes the number of people that may benefit from an expanded FRPP).

### **FRPP's adherence to the original design**

Since the program's inception, NYCHA revised two components of the FRPP's original design to increase the number of people who may be eligible for the program. Originally, the FRPP was only open to formerly incarcerated people released from a prison, jail, or juvenile correctional facility within 18 months of their application. This 18-month post-release period was extended to three years in 2014 to increase the pool of eligible participants given the low intake numbers at the outset. NYCHA also revised its policy to allow people who were permanently excluded from its housing admission into the program as long as they met all other eligibility criteria. These changes enlarged the eligible pool of applicants, increasing NYCHA's efforts to minimize the negative impact of a criminal conviction and opening a wider door for more people to return home.<sup>26</sup> The program's broader eligibility criteria allowed service

providers to refer a greater number of clients. (See Appendix A for a detailed explanation on the FRPP design.)

## **Strengths and weaknesses of the FRPP**

To explore perceptions of the pilot's strengths and weaknesses amongst service providers who were involved in the FRPP, Vera researchers interviewed staff at 11 of the 13 participating reentry service organizations. Building on the first round of interviews and the service providers' responses about program weaknesses, Vera conducted follow-up interviews with staff at six of the 13 participating reentry service organizations to gain additional suggestions on improving the program. Their experience working with and assisting the reentry population, and their understanding of reentry needs, uniquely qualified them to assess the strengths of the FRPP, its core components, and ways the program could be improved.

### **Strengths of the FRPP's design**

All 11 providers interviewed described the program's design as thoughtful and collaborative between NYCHA and service providers. An example of the collaborative nature of the pilot was evidenced in NYCHA's willingness to revise eligibility criteria to include applicants who were previously permanently excluded. Prior to this change, providers faced challenges referring applicants who had a permanent exclusion. Based on the suggestion of the FRPP partners, NYCHA expanded eligibility, resulting in 39 people with permanent exclusions applying and 25 enrolling in the program.

The relationships among the FRPP stakeholders and their continued collaboration throughout the planning and implementation stages were critical to the program's success. During the planning stages,

NYCHA, service providers, Vera, and CSH hosted meetings with tenant associations for feedback on the program's design and model. Once FRPP was in the pilot stage, the partners met regularly to discuss implementation challenges, participant successes, and strategies to improve the program. CSH hosted monthly meetings, including representatives of NYCHA, DOCCS, DHS, and Vera, which focused on service provider updates and challenges. Vera and CSH led quarterly stakeholder meetings that included representation from the same partnering organizations as well as representatives from the Mayor's Office, the Department of Probation, and the New York City DOC. These meetings provided a space for information-sharing on the FRPP's progress. The quarterly meetings were also an opportunity to collectively examine any programmatic issues that arose and strategize about what the FRPP would look like beyond the pilot stage. These partnership meetings helped build relationships among people across various agencies and to open lines of communication. These connections played a vital role when the program faced implementation challenges. For example, the service providers helped to inform the changes to NYCHA's approach toward participants with permanent exclusions and the change in eligibility from 18 months to three years post-release.

The partners' varying expertise and experience also fostered creative problem-solving for certain applicants. For example, one participant applied for the reentry program while still incarcerated. Because of his gang involvement prior to his incarceration, he felt it would not be safe for him to return to the NYCHA housing where his mother lived. NYCHA interviewed him as well as his correctional counselor while he was in prison and determined he would be a good candidate for the program. NYCHA helped his mother move to another housing development, so that when he left prison, he could go directly home. He continues to do well

today thanks, in large part, to open communication among DOCCS, NYCHA, and the other FRPP partners.

The most important element to come from the interviews with service providers about the pilot was that it provided stable housing. Ten of the 11 providers interviewed reported that from their experience, housing was often the central reentry need, affecting people's ability to successfully reintegrate into society. They also said that by providing stable housing, the FRPP allowed participants to focus on other priorities, such as getting a job or rebuilding family relationships. They viewed the program as a catalyst for, and a bridge to, healing families. Critically, the service providers regarded the program's provision of stable housing as protecting participants from the risk of further justice-system involvement and their families from eviction.

### **Weaknesses and implementation challenges**

While service providers regarded the FRPP as a successful reentry-housing program for formerly incarcerated people, all noted the shortage of FRPP applicants who were accepted into the program. Vera identified four factors that impeded the number of successful referrals: widespread distrust of NYCHA among current and former NYCHA housing residents, difficulties enrolling youth, follow-through on applications, and rigid eligibility requirements.

#### **Applicants' distrust of NYCHA**

The most common theme about enrollment challenges expressed in the interviews with service providers was potential clients' and families' distrust of NYCHA. Nine service providers reported that several potential participants and family members failed to complete their applications because they were suspicious of NYCHA's intentions. Some family

members spoke of their fear that the application could expose them to eviction. Others believed that NYCHA completely prohibits people with conviction histories from living on their premises.

Service providers described NYCHA tenants' fear that the program would allow NYCHA to unduly investigate a family's lease. For instance, one service provider said, "If a family member has a problem with NYCHA, [tenants believe] it may hinder an individual's chances of getting into the program. If they are delinquent on rent, they are worried it would result in further investigations." Another said that families were frequently resistant to cooperate because they were unsure of the "extent of the invasiveness" of the program, wary that NYCHA administrators would frequently enter their homes. One provider said that family members were "worried that signing up for the program would be an entrapment," resulting in a termination of their lease.

### **Difficulties enrolling youth applicants**

Four service providers working with youth between the ages of 16 and 24 believed their clients' ages were a factor limiting the number of successful referrals. A provider serving both adults and youth said that the majority of the referrals they made were for adults. In one provider's experience, some youth who applied had existing or unresolved conflicts with their families that resurfaced at the time of their application. Even if the agency was able to mediate and convince the family and the youth to begin the application process, old tensions arose, with neither side willing to compromise. As of September 2016, only six participants were between the ages of 16 and 24. Several service providers also reported that some family members feared the youth's presence in the household would jeopardize their lease. Another service provider expressed the opinion that youth do not want to return home. One provider said that

youth recently released from incarceration often saw returning to live with their family members as relinquishing their newfound freedom. Youth may view their unstable living arrangements (such as bouncing between friends' or family's homes) as a period of liberation and freedom from family rules.

### **Lack of follow-through on applications**

Six service providers described their clients' unpredictable and disorganized life circumstances as factors that limited their ability to complete applications. Potential participants had trouble keeping appointments with service providers to complete the application process. Providers had difficulty maintaining consistent communication with their clients—citing frequent phone number changes. Providers recognized that their clients experienced the application process as long and tedious, particularly if they were also involved in parallel processes such as securing health and public benefits. These challenges underscore the often unstable and overwhelming nature of people's reentry process.

### **Onerous eligibility requirements**

Seven service providers also attributed the program's limitations to factors inherent in the pilot's design. They said that the initial eligibility requirements prohibiting people with permanent exclusions were overly stringent. Providers also described how other eligibility requirements early in the pilot phase, such as being released from incarceration for no more than 18 months, made the process of finding eligible clients a "constant struggle," and, ultimately, hindered the pilot's potential impact.

## Respondents' thoughts on improving the FRPP

Weaknesses and implementation challenges of the FRPP identified by the staff from the 11 reentry service organizations during the first round of interviews informed the questions asked during the second round of interviews with reentry service providers and those with non-participating applicants. The non-participating applicants' narratives also shed light on what they believed to be limitations of the FRPP—and also their thoughts on ways the program could be improved. The latter round of interviews revealed three main themes regarding possible strategies for NYCHA to improve the FRPP: redefine eligible family relationships, increase awareness of the FRPP, and improve communication with prospective program participants.

### **Redefine family relationships**

The reentry service providers suggested NYCHA could loosen the guidelines regarding eligible family relationships that are able to reunify as a part of this program. One service provider believed that NYCHA's definition of a *family member* does not correspond with the reality of many people's lives and is antithetical to the program's purpose. He explained his position by saying, "To me, if NYCHA wanted to do something, they need to come up with a system to help identify that people are family. So, if this is your cousin, right? And your cousin is [going to] allow you to stay there, and be on the lease, and be legitimate...why would we not want that?" Another service provider stated, "I think adding more people on the list [of eligible family members]... I mean, it says mothers, fathers, grandmothers, and maybe you could add an aunt, or an uncle, or cousin. Adding more family members to the list, maybe it could be helpful."

## **Increase awareness of the FRPP**

Overall, reentry service providers saw the need to improve the program's awareness. In their view, many people that could benefit from the program were unaware of its existence. One service provider said, "I'm shocked at the number of people that I know that are either living in NYCHA under the radar or have family residing in NYCHA, and neither one of them knows about the program yet." Another service provider thought that NYCHA should be the primary source for informing the public of this service: "There's nothing in regards to the marketing...they could market into the housing apartments, and to the people who are most impacted by it."

Several service providers thought that awareness of the FRPP should begin within correctional facilities prior to one's release from incarceration. One service provider suggested that NYCHA should send information to prepare people for the program: "They send their information to prepare those individuals to say, 'Do this, start taking advantage of some of the trainings in here, whatever it is, so that when you are preparing to come out, you can be a candidate for this.'"

Similar to the responses of reentry service providers, a common view among the non-participating applicants was that NYCHA could significantly boost its outreach and marketing efforts beyond what they have done thus far. Some applicants suggested increased advertising of the program, especially on NYCHA property. One person said, "Well, you gotta put it up on a bulletin board. Not only up on a bulletin board, but they have to, I believe, mail it to the residents in the housing units, to let them be aware of it...Just like how they send out the...complex newspaper...Or, when you go to pay your rent with your money order, it should be up on that board inside the management [office]." A different respondent made a similar point: "Put [it in] the newspapers as far

as like, I don't know how the ad situation goes, but like for the NYCHA pilot program, I don't think that it is available to everyone; I don't think everyone really knows about it.”

### **Improve communication with applicants and family members**

Many of the non-participating applicants who were interviewed were unaware that application updates were communicated through the reentry service providers who submitted their application. For these applicants, NYCHA was often the target of their frustration regarding the lack of updates on their application status and final decisions. Most of the applicants were adamant in their belief that those who are involved with overseeing the FRPP do a poor job communicating with applicants once their applications have been submitted. Some respondents indicated that they were not given any updates during the application process, nor were they offered information on how to directly contact NYCHA to inquire about the status of their applications.

Despite receiving notification that the FRPP application was denied, one applicant was not satisfied with how the decision was communicated to them. This person said that a reentry service provider called a relative to deliver the news. When asked if anyone spoke with them about the decision, this applicant said, “They didn't talk to me [about] anything. We didn't have a conversation. All he said [was] I was turned down. [My relative] asked him why, he said he didn't know. I was just turned down.”

One of the two family members interviewed was completely unaware that the applicant had even applied to the FRPP. In fact, this respondent said that the first time she had even heard of the program was when the interviewer from Vera called to recruit her for this study. When asked if they had received any correspondence about the FRPP, she said, “You [were] the only one that called me. And I wasn't aware of what was going on.”

## Factors that may influence FRPP application decisions

To explore what people believed to be factors that may influence decisions on whether to accept applicants into the FRPP, seven staff members from six reentry service providers were interviewed. In their view, case managers were divided as to believing the client's level of motivation and the extent and severity of the applicants' criminal records influenced the decisions.

Some reentry service providers believed that the primary deciding factor as to whether a FRPP applicant is successful at gaining entry into the program was directly related to the level of motivation that they demonstrate toward improving their lives post-incarceration. One service provider said, "I would say motivation, or lack thereof, is a big thing...If I get the impression that the client is not, you know, in this for the right reasons, and is trying to really take advantage of the system, and doesn't really want to better themselves, you know, that will be reflected in the application." Another service provider spoke about the level of determination and readiness of the applicants, especially about the difficulties engaging younger applicants: "They have to be ready to

do the things that it requires of them to get the things that they want."

However, there were other reentry service providers who thought that an applicant's criminal history was the main factor that determined whether they were accepted into the FRPP. One service provider stated, "The criminal history is strongly... in my opinion, the determining factor if a person is accepted or not." Another service provider echoed this sentiment, but went on to add that, based on the provider's experience, having certain types of crimes on one's record may make it more likely that an application would not be accepted. The service provider said, "The typical reasons are...the safety reasons, if the person had a domestic violence. I see that to be the greatest issue...[you] would think... the crime or the charge or if they did something on NYCHA [property], but it seems to appear to me that domestic violence is... one of the biggest factors...that could totally affect you." In this service provider's view, beyond having a criminal record, the nature of the crimes one has been convicted of could be especially problematic for one's application prospects.

## The unmet need for the FRPP

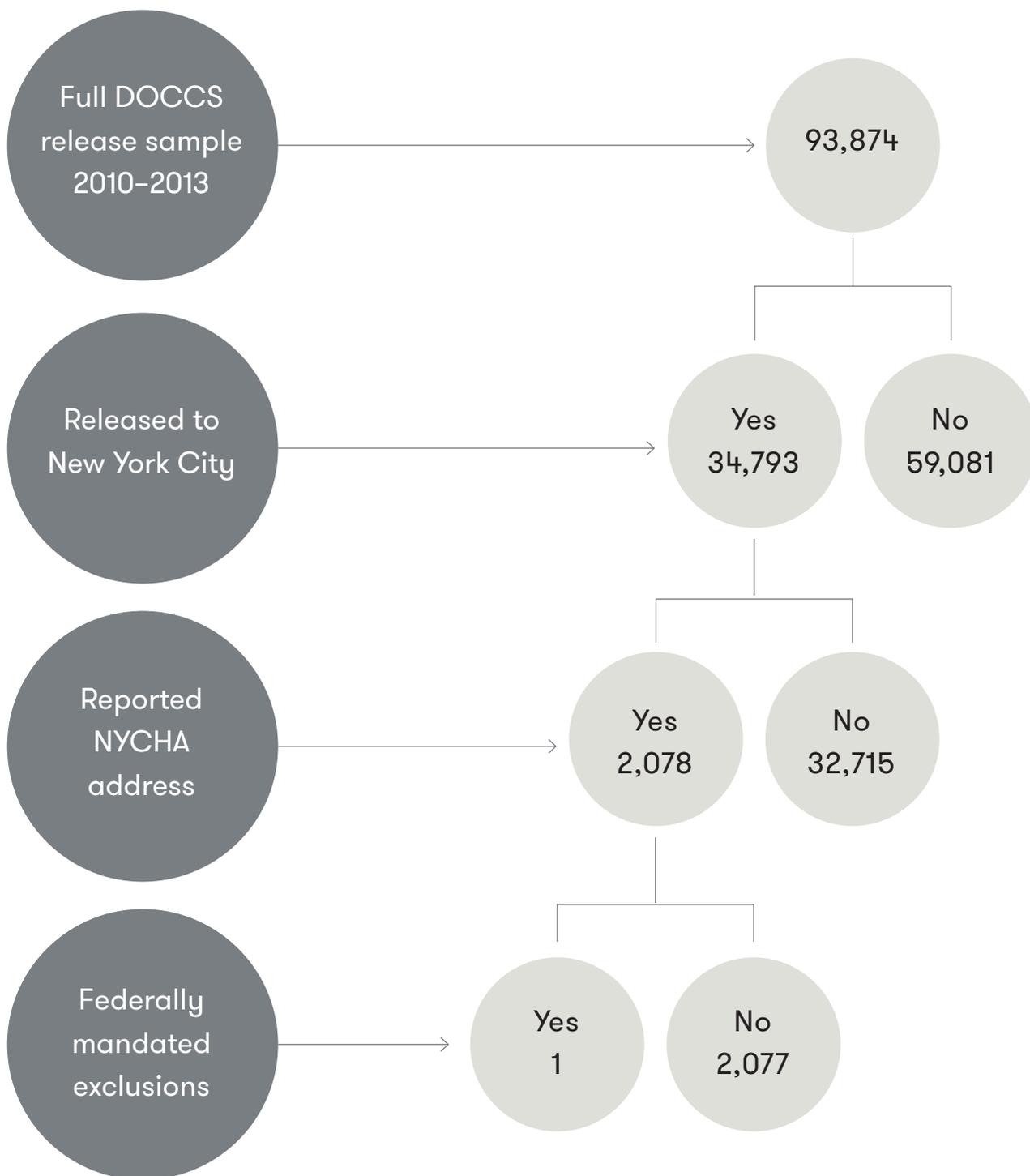
Despite recruitment challenges, the outcomes and results that were attributed to the FRPP reported by participants, families, and service providers highlight the importance of the program for people returning to their communities from incarceration. Vera produced estimates of the number of people who could benefit from an expansion of the FRPP based on analysis of administrative data—specifically, New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) data on releases from state prisons with reported return addresses to NYCHA housing and New York City Department of Homeless Services (DHS) data on releases from New York City jails with shelter contact and a history of living in NYCHA housing. Based on the analysis, Vera estimates that at least 500 people released from prison annually could reunite with their families if NYCHA expanded the size of the FRPP. Considering the large number of people admitted to and released from jails every year, this number may be an underestimate. DHS administrative data reveals an additional 2,255 people reportedly living in a NYCHA address who were released from a New York City jail between 2010 and 2013 and sought housing in a DHS shelter. This figure does not include people released from New York City jails who did not go to a homeless shelter, or people otherwise eligible for the pilot who were released from jail without a documented history of living in NYCHA housing.

### **FRPP-eligible pool of people released from prison and jail**

Vera found that between 2010 and 2013, 2,077 DOCCS releases, or 1,953 unique people released from DOCCS, reported returning to a NYCHA housing development and did not have either of the two federal offense restrictions—convictions for producing methamphetamine in federally subsidized housing and people who are on lifetime sex offender registries

Figure 4

New York State DOCCS releases eligible for NYCHA FRPP 2010–2013\*



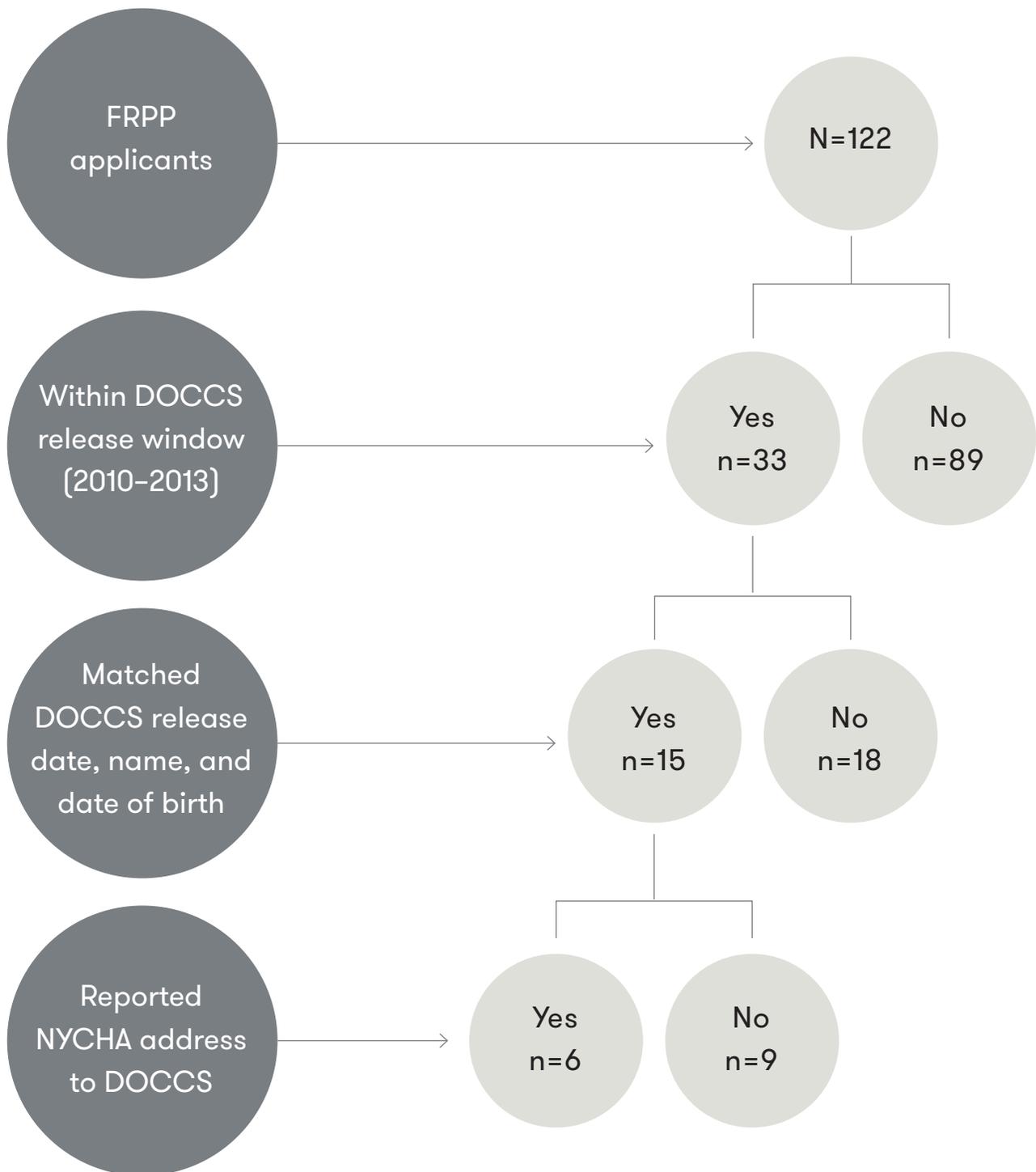
\*The 2,077 is the number of releases during this period. There were 1,953 unique people in this dataset; 116 have multiple releases (two or three) in the data.

(See Figure 4).<sup>36</sup> This number represents 6 percent of all people released from state prison to New York City, or at least one in every 17 DOCCS releases.

Measuring the need for the FRPP based solely on self-reported addresses likely underestimates the number of people who could be eligible for the pilot program. For example, people may not report a NYCHA address as a return address because they may believe that NYCHA policies prohibit people from ever living in public housing after a criminal conviction. To learn more about the potential scope of this underestimate, Vera researchers conducted an additional analysis of the applicant pool to estimate the number of people who have ties to NYCHA housing and do not report a NYCHA address upon release but eventually return there from prison. Data on the 33 people who applied to the FRPP who were released between 2010 and 2013 was matched to the DOCCS dataset. The search used three criteria—name (first and last), date of birth, and release date—and this provided 15 strong matches out of 33 (See Figure 5).<sup>37</sup> Of the 15 matches, only six people had a NYCHA building as their return address. This suggests there is a higher percentage of people released from prison that are potentially eligible for the program but were not associated with a NYCHA address. Based on this analysis, Vera estimates the number of people released from prison with NYCHA ties annually could be as high as 1,250—much larger than the 500 estimated on the basis of reports of a NYCHA last-known address.

Figure 5

Flowchart for a subset of FRPP applicants found in DOCCS matches\*



\*The 122 applicants in Figure 5 represent the number of applicants as of April 2016.

# Recommendations

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The findings from this evaluation indicate mixed results of the FRPP. The pilot program’s implementation followed its design, and service providers, participants, and family members responded to it positively. However, enrollment challenges hampered its effectiveness. In addition, reentry service providers need to provide clearer expectations to applicants about how the FRPP application and the ensuing communication process will unfold; there is a disparity among the providers regarding the breadth and depth of information and attention that they give to applicants. The analysis of the administrative data also demonstrates the need for an expanded program in New York City.

While existing challenges affected enrollment, the FRPP provided opportunities for NYCHA to interact with public housing community members to dispel concerns, build relationships, and serve as a medium to bring families together. And despite enrollment challenges, the pilot helped participants as they reintegrated into the community and it allowed families to live together. If the program is able to overcome the challenges related to its enrollment and communication efforts, an expanded reentry-housing program within NYCHA, commensurate with the need for it, has the potential to help thousands of people and their families.

Through this evaluation and as an implementation partner, Vera learned that the key factors that contributed to the FRPP’s success were its design and effective partner collaboration. Vera also learned that some of the program’s challenges were related to how information is disseminated and how some of its policies play out in practice. The FRPP is rooted in NYCHA—it is a housing program, first and foremost,

serving formerly incarcerated people. Through the pilot, NYCHA focused on fostering the success and safety of its tenants, while the reentry service providers and the law enforcement agencies each contributed in their capacity to support participants and their families. NYCHA and its partners had various roles in the application and selection processes, allowing for each to be held accountable, while facilitating constant communication among the partners, promoting transparency. A design that deliberately promotes transparency, communication, and partnership was essential in the successful implementation of the FRPP.

Significant literature has documented the importance of secure, stable housing, and family support for formerly incarcerated people. Yet only a small number of PHAs nationally are currently considering programs for the reentry population or changes in policies to allow formerly incarcerated people to return to their families in public housing. The lessons learned from the FRPP's implementation yielded the following recommendations for PHAs as they consider implementing their own versions of the FRPP or revising their policies to allow more family reunification. Vera is currently working to produce a comprehensive guide to implementing public housing reentry programs and reforming public housing policies for formerly incarcerated people drawing on lessons learned from PHAs across the nation.

### **1) Consider broad eligibility requirements.**

When designing a public housing-reentry program, it is important to keep applicant eligibility criteria as broad as possible. Rigid eligibility guidelines leave no room for discretion on the part of the program administrator, and therefore, programs may have difficulty finding eligible applicants. Once identified, NYCHA took steps to address this issue. As described earlier, NYCHA extended the 18-month post-release period to three years in 2014 to increase the pool of eligible applicants,

and the agency revised its policy to allow people who were permanently excluded to apply for the FRPP. Moving forward, it may be worthwhile for NYCHA to reassess the family leaseholders' eligibility requirements, chiefly concerning the definition of "family." It is not uncommon for individuals to have close, familial-like relationships that extend beyond the definition for "family" that NYCHA adheres to (e.g., cousins, aunts and/or uncles, or other distant relatives).

## **2) Foster collaboration and partnership among diverse stakeholders.**

A key factor in the success of the program was the collaboration and partnership of the diverse group of stakeholders. The partners' varying perspectives, roles, and expertise lent the program the ability to address a wide range of reentry needs at different junctures. The willingness of agency leaders, parole officers, and corrections staff to problem-solve, talk through various housing options, and find the right balance between facilitating a person's successful reentry and considering the community's safety has been central to the program's success. PHAs interested in implementing similar reentry-housing programs should consider following this model of diversity and frequent communication among the partnering agencies.

## **3) Educate public housing residents on housing authority policies and opportunities.**

A reentry-housing program's success is tied to residents believing in and legitimizing it. Lack of trust or understanding about the public housing agency can adversely affect its success. In the case of the FRPP, NYCHA residents' distrust of the agency negatively influenced the pilot's implementation. It often came from misperceptions and the lack of knowledge around NYCHA's admissions policies. As the FRPP partners became aware of this issue, they devised strategies to educate

residents on current policies and to dispel myths about NYCHA's practices, sometimes through the assistance of community organizers and legal service providers. PHAs interested in implementing a similar program would do well to consider including resident leaders and tenant organizations in a campaign to educate residents. By highlighting the housing authority's positive strides to assist formerly incarcerated residents and their family members, they could go a long way to diffusing tensions.

#### **4) Ensure active and consistent communication.**

NYCHA and the reentry service providers would benefit from laying out clear expectations with applicants and their families around the level of communication that they can expect to receive during the application review and decision processes. Inconsistent and inadequate correspondence among stakeholders can become a significant drawback to a reentry-housing program. Thus, it may be beneficial for PHAs to be mindful as to how they inform and update its partners and applicants. It would be prudent for PHAs to have some form of direct contact with prospective and current applicants as a supplement to what reentry service providers offer.

Further, for marginalized populations such as people who have been formerly incarcerated and who also may be transient, individual-level contact information (like telephone numbers) can quickly become outdated. PHAs should consider greater usage of e-mail and other modes of communication with applicants and everyone else involved in the FRPP process. In addition, PHAs should consider creating a dedicated hotline or an e-mail-based "help desk" where prospective or current applicants, their family members, and reentry service providers can easily inquire about any concerns that they may have—and expect to receive a response in a reasonable amount of time.

Recruitment efforts for reentry-housing programs may prove to be more effective and efficient if PHAs are creative, consistent, and comprehensive in their strategy for advertising and educating the public and their own staff about their programs. This could be especially fruitful if PHAs develop a systematic way of informing incarcerated people about their reentry-housing programs prior to their release.

## Conclusion

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For people with criminal records, public housing exclusions present a formidable obstacle to gaining a firm footing when they return to their community from jail or prison. These stringent rules took root in a period of rising public concern about drug-related violent crime and aimed to improve safety for public housing residents. But they have added a heavy burden to the other residual effects of incarceration, making a successful transition into the community close to impossible for large numbers of people who have nowhere else to turn except to their families in public housing.

Because a significant body of research has shown the correlation between unstable living conditions, homelessness, and the risks for reoffending, the federal government since 2011 has urged local housing authorities to loosen their restrictions on allowing people with criminal records to rejoin loved ones in public housing. In New York City, NYCHA piloted the FRPP to see what a multi-agency collaboration could achieve in widening the opportunities for people returning home after incarceration.

By offering a stable living environment with family members and a wide array of services to help people get on their feet, the FRPP pilot has shown promise in reducing the risks for recidivism and launching participants toward productive lives, while also maintaining public safety. Vera's estimate of the number of formerly incarcerated people excluded from public housing in New York City because of their criminal history points to the need for an expanded program, which could potentially benefit thousands.

Further research is needed to better understand aspects of the program and its broader context. For example, examining a larger pool of formerly incarcerated people with family in public housing could provide a better estimate of how many are affected by existing NYCHA admission policies. Other avenues for future research could include:

- > research that assesses program participants' outcomes vis-à-vis a comparison group;
- > an evaluation with a larger number of participants over a longer period of time;
- > a study covering multiple cities, as more jurisdictions replicate the FRPP model;
- > an investigation of the housing experiences of people who elect not to apply to a program such as the FRPP (but would otherwise be eligible to participate) and their reasons for not applying;
- > research assessing the impact of reentry housing programs on a person's ability to secure employment that controls for various factors (e.g., employment services provided by

partners) to accurately evaluate the program's effect on such milestones; and

- > a study measuring the impact of admissions criteria on families by examining NYCHA records on the number of people who applied for housing with a criminal record and, of those, the number of people who were denied.<sup>38</sup>

Formerly incarcerated people do not constitute a protected class under the federal Fair Housing Act. Nevertheless, public housing exclusion policies fall most heavily on communities of color, whose members disproportionately populate the nation's jails and prisons. Recently, the national public debate about reducing the numbers of incarcerated people has begun to include the question of whether these housing practices amount to discrimination against already marginalized people. If New York City and other jurisdictions around the country are to reduce incarceration rates and level the ground for racial equity, they must remove the bars to safe, decent housing for this returning population.

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## Appendix A

### FRPP design

## Initial FRPP eligibility

The FRPP is open to 150 formerly incarcerated people released from a prison, jail, or juvenile correctional facility within three years of their application who are seeking to reunite with their families (as defined in NYCHA policy) in NYCHA apartments.<sup>a</sup> Those who are nearing their release date can apply while still incarcerated. Applicants must be at least 16 years old with convictions that fall outside the two statutory exclusions mandated by federal law. Applicants who are seeking to reunite with family members who live in a building for seniors must meet the age requirement of 62. If applicants meet these initial eligibility criteria and are interested in applying for the FRPP, their application is submitted to NYCHA for further screening.

The pilot is based on NYCHA's pre-existing temporary permission to join a household policy, which allows a tenant to ask permission from the property manager for any family member (regardless of their criminal history) to live in his or her apartment for up to one year.<sup>b</sup> Under temporary permission status (TP), the income of the person granted TP is not considered for the purpose of rental calculation. TP was extended to two years to fit into the pilot design. If accepted, both the leaseholder and the pilot participant must sign agreements stating that a participant expelled from the program must vacate the family's NYCHA apartment within 30 days. A participant's further criminal justice system involvement does not jeopardize the household's tenancy.

For the purposes of the FRPP, NYCHA changed standard housing eligibility requirements to include people who were previously ineligible

because they were permanently excluded.<sup>c</sup> Starting in December 2014, NYCHA gave a two-year suspension to participants who were permanently excluded from public housing because of the nature of their previous convictions or behavior but were otherwise eligible for the pilot program. Upon successful completion of the program, participants' families can apply to have the exclusion lifted and can then apply to add their loved one to their lease. Notably, the NYCHA Screening Committee reached out to all applicants who had permanent exclusions and had applied prior to Fall 2014 to assess whether they were still interested in the pilot. For those who remained interested, NYCHA reevaluated their applications and several were accepted.

## Referrals

The 13 service providers listed below refer potential FRPP participants to NYCHA. These community-based organizations, which work with formerly incarcerated people, offer the range of services pilot participants typically need, including mental health services, substance-use treatment, family counseling, and job training. In turn, partnering agencies, including the New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS), the New York City Department of Correction (DOC), the New York Office of Children and Family Services, and the New York City Department of Homeless Services (DHS), connect clients to the participating providers.

- › Center for Alternative Sentencing and Employment Services (CASES)
- › Center for Community Alternatives (CCA)
- › ComALERT at the Kings County District Attorney's Office

- › Exodus Transitional Community
- › Fortune Society
- › Friends of Island Academy
- › Getting Out and Staying Out
- › Harlem Community Justice Center
- › Housing Works, Inc.
- › Osborne Association
- › Services for the Underserved (SUS)
- › STRIVE International
- › Women’s Prison Association

## Application and screening process

In the application, partnering agencies assess applicants to determine whether applicants can succeed in the FRPP. Indicators of potential success included attendance at or completion of a job training program, a treatment program, or an internship; employment; or a good disciplinary record while incarcerated.

A screening committee made up of representatives from NYCHA’s Family Services Department, Applications and Tenancy Administration Department, and Property Management reviews all applications.

The committee reviews application packets that include the reentry provider's assessment of the applicant and family and a criminal background report provided by NYCHA's Law Department. It weighs factors that include:

- › the victim(s) of the crime and whether the victim(s) live in the same development as the applicant's prospective housing;
- › where the crimes occurred;
- › whether tenants are in good standing (which includes a review of the family's rent payment record);
- › whether NYCHA would consider helping to solve the problem (for example, by helping families resolve or lower the amount of overdue rent), if the family is not in good standing; and
- › whether the family is under an order to terminate its tenancy, or has a pending eviction case in the housing division of civil court.

In some cases, a person and his or her family may be a good fit for the FRPP, but the placement could violate other NYCHA occupancy rules on age and crowding. In such instances, NYCHA finds a solution so that the participant may move back home. For instance, if a person moving into the home will make it overcrowded under HUD's occupancy standards, the family will be allowed to live there for two years, unless the additional person would make the home "extremely overcrowded."<sup>d</sup> At the end of two years, if the participant completes the FRPP and remains a member of the household, NYCHA will arrange for the family to move into an appropriately sized public housing unit.

If an application progresses past the initial screening, NYCHA staff meets with the applicant and with the family in its apartment to assess the living environment. Screening of pre-release applicants takes place at the correctional facility. Once NYCHA makes a determination, it e-mails a letter of acceptance or rejection to the referring agency.

## Program requirements, action plan, and completion

Those accepted into the pilot sign a contract stipulating the FRPP requirements, and then move into their family's unit. A family accepted into the FRPP signs a two-year temporary permission form, which allows the participant to live in the unit. Upon acceptance, participants develop an action plan with their case manager at the referring agency that outlines goals for the next six months and steps to achieving them. The action plan may be refined over time as the participant's circumstances change, and the case manager and participant revisit it on an ongoing basis.

In addition to participants' individual and family goals, action plans may include the following program requirements:

- › Within six months of entry into the pilot and as determined by the participant and case manager, the participants must be engaged in a job or job-training, in school, or in a treatment program.
- › Participants must meet the terms of their parole or probation, including meetings with their probation or parole officer. The case managers will check in with the probation and parole officers to ensure participants are in compliance.

- › Participants are expected to participate in other activities that were agreed upon with their case manager (such as job-training workshops or substance-use counseling).

Participants risk disqualification if they violate the terms of their action plan. In addition, termination from the pilot will result if the participant:

- › is convicted of any felony or misdemeanor;
- › is incarcerated while in the program based on a violation of the terms of parole or probation;
- › fails to meet any of the other FRPP requirements; or
- › commits any other act which, in NYCHA's judgment, warrants termination from the program.<sup>e</sup>

However, if a participant is arrested during his or her participation in the program and acquitted of all charges, the period from arrest to acquittal will count toward their program participation.

After completion of the pilot program, the family member who is the primary leaseholder, or the head of the household, can request that the FRPP participant be added to the household on a permanent basis. NYCHA will perform a criminal background check to verify that the participant has not been convicted of any offense while in the program. In determining whether to grant permanent permission, NYCHA will not consider crimes committed before the participant enrolled in FRPP. Once NYCHA grants permanent residency permission, the agency will include the newly added person's earnings in the household income calculation and the family's rent will be adjusted accordingly.

## Appendix B

### Descriptive statistics for DOCCS and FRPP-eligible releases, and FRPP applicants, as of July 2016

	<b>DOCCS release cases (2010–2013), n=34,793</b>	<b>FRPP- eligible matches, n= 2,077</b>	<b>FRPP applicants, n=122</b>	<b>FRPP participants, n=62</b>
<b>Characteristics</b>				
Age (at release)	37.6	35	37.5	37
Male (percent)	94.7	95.1	87.7	90.3
Female (percent)	5.3	4.9	12.3	9.7
<b>Race/Ethnicity (percent)</b>				
Black	55.5	63.1	63.9	64.5
Hispanic	-	-	30.3	29
Other	44.5	36.9	5.8	6.5
<b>Returning county (percent)</b>				
Bronx	28.2	25.1	13.1	11.3
Brooklyn	29.5	32.9	39.4	35.5
Manhattan	24.7	27.8	37.7	40.3
Queens and Staten Island	17.6	14.2	9.8	12.9

	<b>DOCCS release cases (2010–2013), n=34,793</b>	<b>FRPP- eligible matches, n= 2,077</b>	<b>FRPP applicants, n=122</b>	<b>FRPP participants, n=62</b>
<b>Offense for most recent incarceration (percent)</b>				
Type				
Violent	41.7	43.2	45.1	51.6
Other	10	10.9	-	-
Drug	33.5	32.5	-	-
Property/Other	14.4	13	-	-
<b>Offense class (percent)</b>				
A Felony	4.6	3.3	11.7	15.7
B Felony	29	26.6	27.7	31.4
C Felony	20.2	21.4	20.2	23.5
D or E Felony	46.2	48.7	25.5	19.6
A/B Misdemeanor	-	-	14.9	9.8
<b>Sentence (in months)</b>				
Minimum	48.7	46.3	-	-
Maximum	76.8	70	-	-
Actual time served	43.5	42.4	-	-

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## Endnotes

- 1 For a discussion of stable housing and its impact on recidivism, see Demelza Baer, Avinash Bhati, Lisa Brooks, Jennifer Castro, Nancy La Vigne, Kamala Mallik-Kane, Rebecca Naser, Jenny Osborne, Caterina Roman, John Roman, Shelli Rossman, Amy Solomon, Christy Visher, and Laura Winterfield, *Understanding the Challenges of Prisoner Reentry: Research Findings from the Urban Institute's Prisoner Reentry Portfolio* (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, Justice Policy Center, 2006), 8; Katharine H. Bradley, R.B. Michael Oliver, Noel C. Richardson, and Elspeth M. Slayer, *No Place Like Home: Housing and the ex-prisoner* (Boston: Community Resources for Justice, 2001). For a discussion of the impact of stable housing on homelessness, see Stephen Metraux and Dennis Culhane, "Homeless shelter use and reincarceration following prison release," *Criminology and Public Policy* 3, no. 2 (2004): 139–160.
- 2 In 2014, state and federal correctional facilities released 636,300 people. See E. Ann Carson, *Prisoners in 2014* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2015), 9. In 2013, 11.7 million people were admitted into jails. See Ram Subramanian, Ruth Delaney, Stephen Roberts, Nancy Fishman, and Peggy McGarry, *Incarceration's Front Door: The Misuse of Jails in America* (New York: Vera Institute of Justice, 2015), 7. For a discussion of immediate challenges of securing housing faced by people returning home from prison, see Baer et al., 2006, 8.
- 3 For this study, 72 percent of respondents reported expectations of living with a family member upon release. See Christy Visher, Nancy La Vigne, and Jill Farrell, *Illinois Prisoners' Reflections on Returning Home* (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2009), 6.
- 4 The Quality Housing and Work Responsibility Act of 1998 established a permanent ban on lifetime sex offender registrants; the Independent Agencies Appropriations Act of 1999 barred households with any member who was convicted of producing methamphetamines

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- in public housing. See Lahny R. Silva, “Criminal Histories in Public Housing,” *Wisconsin Law Review* 5, no. 24 (2015): 375–397.
- 5 Newark Housing Authority, “Admissions and Continued Occupancy Policies” (Newark, NJ: NHA, July 2012), 149, <https://perma.cc/J5VN-CSFL>.
  - 6 On November 2, 2015, the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development announced guidance to public housing authorities on using criminal arrests for denying admissions to public housing. See U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Public and Indian Housing, “Guidance for Public Housing Agencies (PHAs) and Owners of Federally-Assisted Housing on Excluding the Use of Arrest Records in Housing Decisions,” Notice PIH 2015-19 (Washington, DC: HUD, November 2, 2015), 1–7, <https://perma.cc/UP78-DVSH>.
  - 7 For an in-depth look at admissions restrictions for public housing authorities across the nation, see Marie Claire Tran-Leung, *When Discretion Means Denial: A National Perspective on Criminal Barriers to Federally Subsidized Housing* (Chicago: Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law, 2015), vii.
  - 8 These also include temporary or permanent loss of certain civil rights (such as the right to vote or hold public office); employment or occupational licensing restrictions; restrictions on certain aspects of family life (such as the ability to adopt or retain custody of one’s own children); and for non-citizens, deportation. See Ram Subramanian, Rebecka Moreno, and Sophia Gebreselassie, *Relief in Sight? States Rethink the Collateral Consequences of Criminal Conviction* (New York: Vera Institute of Justice, 2014), 8.
  - 9 For additional information on federal public housing policies, see Silva, 2015, 380–382.
  - 10 Some of the housing options for those returning home from prison are 1) community-based correctional housing facilities; 2) transitional (service-enriched) housing (non-corrections-based and not HUD-funded); 3) federally subsidized

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and administered housing; 4) homeless assistance supportive housing; and 5) the private market. See Caterina Gouvis Roman and Jeremy Travis, *Taking Stock: Housing, Homelessness, and Prisoner Reentry* (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, Justice Policy Center, 2004), vi. For a thorough discussion of housing options and related barriers, see Roman and Travis, 2004. Also, some halfway houses have been cited as profit-driven, concerned only with filling beds, and indifferent toward residents' outcomes. See Sam Dolnick, "Pennsylvania Study Finds Halfway Houses Don't Reduce Recidivism," *The New York Times*, March 24, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/25/nyregion/pennsylvania-study-finds-halfway-houses-dont-reduce-recidivism.html>.

11 For a discussion of informal barriers related to housing, see Roman and Travis, 2004, 31.

12 For more on familial barriers to returning home, see Bradley et al., 2001.

13 New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA), "New York City Housing

Authority's Tenant Selection and Assignment Plan," (New York: NYCHA, January 22, 2016), <https://perma.cc/LYR5-7XW9>.

14 Tony Hebert, *Invisible Tenant: Living in Federally Assisted Housing After Prison* (New York: Family Justice, 2005, NCJ 233273).

15 A study of people returning from prison to Cleveland found 17 percent of the study's participants were living with those who have also been to prison and 23 percent were residing with others who used alcohol and drugs, which may conflict with parole stipulations forbidding contact with formerly incarcerated people and being in the proximity of drugs and alcohol. For more on this study, see Christy A. Visher and Shannon M.E. Courtney, *One Year Out: Experiences of Prisoners Returning to Cleveland* (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, Justice Policy Center, 2007), 3. In New York City, 11 percent of people released from the state corrections system between 1995 and 1998 have experienced a stay in a homeless shelter; shelter use, before and after incarceration, is associated

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with a higher risk of incarceration. See Stephen Metraux and Dennis Culhane, “Homeless Shelter Use and Reincarceration Following Prison Release,” *Criminology and Public Policy* 3, no. 2 (2004): 139–160. People with a history of shelter use prior to incarceration were also much more likely to use shelters post-incarceration. See Stephen Metraux, Caterina G. Roman, and Richard Cho, *Incarceration and Homelessness* (Washington, DC: National Symposium on Homelessness Research, 2007), 5–7. A recent study in New York City revealed street and homeless people were more likely than people who were not homeless to be rearrested within one year of release after a prior arrest. Those who were homeless in the street and shelter were also more likely to be rearrested for a felony than those who were not homeless, revealing the cyclical relationship between homelessness and incarceration. In a 2013 sample, 60 percent of street homeless people and 50 percent of shelter homeless people were rearrested in a year, compared to 29 percent of those with

housing. See Richard R. Peterson, *Re-arrests of Homeless Defendants in New York City* (New York: New York City Criminal Justice Agency, 2016), 3.

- 16 For a discussion on the relationship between stable housing and employment, see Baer et al., 2006, 4. Unstable housing may disrupt a person’s application during the process to secure employment, as prospective applicants will be required to present a stable address, and studies have shown those living in transitional housing upon release from prison found it difficult to secure employment. See Amanda Geller and Marah A. Curtis, “A Sort of Homecoming: Incarceration and the housing security of urban men,” *Social Science Research* 40, no. 4 (2011): 1197; Bradley et al., 2001. Marta Nelson, Perry Deess, and Charlotte Allen, *The First Month Out: Post-Incarceration Experiences in New York City* (New York: Vera Institute of Justice, 1999), 16.
- 17 For more on the health of formerly incarcerated people, see Kamala Malik-Kane and Christy A. Visher, *Health and Prisoner Reentry: How*

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*Physical, Mental, and Substance Abuse Conditions Shape the Process of Reintegration* (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, Justice Policy Center, 2008), 12–13. For a discussion of treatments and stable housing, see Geller and Curtis, 2011, 1197.

- 18 For more on family support for formerly incarcerated people, see Rebecca Nasner and Nancy La Vigne, “Family Support in the Prisoner Reentry Process: Expectations and Realities,” *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation* 43, no. 1 (2006) 93–106; Nancy G. La Vigne, Christy Visher, and Jennifer Castro, *Chicago Prisoners’ Experiences Returning Home* (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2004), 7–8.
- 19 Positive post-release outcomes were reported among fathers with increased involvement with their children. Fathers who had lived with their children pre-incarceration and kept regular contact while incarcerated were more likely to be involved in their children’s lives immediately following release. Strong father-child involvement immediately after release was

significantly associated with those men working more hours per week and reporting lower rates of recidivism and substance use. People on parole with strong family ties were more likely to be employed, and those who were employed and had strong family ties were less likely to reoffend. See Christy A. Visher, “Incarcerated Fathers: Pathways from prison to home,” *Criminal Justice Policy Review* 24, no. 1 (2013): 9–26. Formerly incarcerated people who were living in transitional housing were found to be more likely to abscond from parole, and parolees who changed addresses increased their likelihood of being rearrested. Thirty-eight percent of the respondents who stated they were going to live in shelters upon release absconded from parole, compared to 5 percent who did not report living in a shelter upon release. See Nelson, 1999, 9. The likelihood of arrest increased by 25 percent for Georgia parolees each time they changed their address. See Caterina Gouvis Roman and Jeremy Travis, “Where Will I Sleep Tomorrow? Housing, Homelessness, and the Returning

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- Prisoner,” *Housing Policy Debate* 17, no. 2 (2006): 395.
- 20 HUD Secretary Shaun Donovan and Assistant Secretary for Public and Indian Housing Sandra B. Henriquez, Letter to Public Housing Authority Executive Directors, (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, June 17, 2011), <https://perma.cc/TBW4-ES6C>.
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Public and Indian Housing, “Guidance for Public Housing Agencies (PHAs) and Owners of Federally-Assisted Housing on Excluding the Use of Arrest Records in Housing Decisions,” Notice PIH 2015-19 (Washington, DC: HUD, November 2, 2015), 2, <https://perma.cc/UP78-DVSH>.
- 23 National Housing Law Project, “Innovative PHA Programs for Formerly Incarcerated,” <https://perma.cc/A658-QW3E>.
- 24 RAND Corporation, “Social Support Survey Instrument,” [http://www.rand.org/health/surveys\\_tools/mos/social-support/survey-instrument](http://www.rand.org/health/surveys_tools/mos/social-support/survey-instrument).
- html; Ralf Schwarzer and Ute Schulz, “Berlin Social Support Scales,” [http://www.midss.org/sites/default/files/berlin\\_social\\_support\\_scales\\_english\\_items\\_by\\_scale.pdf](http://www.midss.org/sites/default/files/berlin_social_support_scales_english_items_by_scale.pdf); Center for Substance Abuse Treatment, *Managing Depressive Symptoms in Substance Abuse Clients During Early Recovery*, Treatment Improvement Protocol Series 48, “Appendix B—Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale,” (Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2008, DHHS Publication No. 08-4353).
- 25 In qualitative research, purposive sampling is the selection of research subjects to answer specific research questions based on the subjects’ characteristics and the information they may be able to provide that cannot be elicited from other groups. See Charles Teddlie and Fen Yu, “Mixed Methods Sampling: A Typology With Examples,” *Journal of Mixed Methods Research* 1, no. 77 (2007), 77.

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- 26 Vera chose to employ a thematic analysis because the aim was not to explore and quantify the content of the dataset, but to identify and describe repeated patterns of meaning across the entire dataset related to the research questions and certain aspects of the findings. Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, “Using thematic analysis in psychology,” *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, no. 2 (2006), 77-101; Mojtaba Vaismoradi, Hannele Turunen, and Terese Bondas, “Content analysis and thematic analysis: Implications for conducting a qualitative descriptive study,” *Nursing & Health Sciences* 15, no. 3 (2013), 398-405.
- 27 Nada Wasi and Aaron Flaaen. “Record linkage using Stata: Preprocessing, linking, and reviewing utilities” *Stata Journal* 15, no. 3 (2015), 672-697; Julio Raffa, “MATCHIT: Stata module to match two datasets based on similar text patterns,” *Statistical Software Components* (Boston: Boston College Department of Economics, 2015).
- 28 One notable difference between the two programs is that “reclink2” allows for matching to be conducted across numerous variables, while “matchit” restricts users to matching on just one variable at a time. In practice, however, this limitation is countered by linking several text/numeric variables in one concatenated field.
- 29 Elizabeth M. King and Jere R. Behrman, “Timing and Duration of Exposure in Evaluations of Social Programs,” *The World Bank Research Observer* 24, no. 1 (2009), 56-57.
- 30 Administrative data was available for 18 out of 20 households. A tenant’s gross annual household income is what is submitted to NYCHA during the application process. However, NYCHA has standard deductions that are applied to the gross annual household income when calculating rent (such as payment for childcare, medical expenses, etc.). This adjusted net income (minus the deductions) is what NYCHA uses to calculate rent amounts.

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- 31 As of May 2017, information was not available for one household (out of six) that added a participant to their lease.
- 32 Documented achievements and milestones were for 61 unique people of the 108 participants, indicating that several participants achieved multiple goals. At the time of this report, several participants were recently accepted, and service providers had not yet submitted progress reports for them. Other participants were being supported through workers' compensation or existing disability benefits, and had no milestones to account for in their progress reports. Further, the progress reports reflect only the first six months of program participation. Additional milestones beyond the first six months were not recorded.
- 33 All names and other identifying information associated with FRPP participants, non-participants, and their family members in the report were removed to protect their identities.
- 34 For a report on three-quarter housing in New York City, see Robert Riggs, *Three Quarter Houses: The View from the Inside* (New York: Prisoner Reentry Institute, 2013).
- 35 Deferred applications are those that the screening committee decides to review at a later date for various reasons. Those reasons may include: applicants may have not demonstrated sufficiently that they were intending to break earlier patterns of committing crime by enrolling in programs or pursuing employment goals, or they may have a release date that is pending and not confirmed.
- 36 In interpreting this number, it is important to bear in mind that DOCCS release records data sometimes include multiple records for one person—meaning that an individual may have multiple releases in any given period. The extent to which repeat releases occur is largely a function of the size of the observation window—shorter windows (for example, one month) will be unlikely to contain any repeats, while longer windows (for example, a year or more) will be increasingly likely to have multiple

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records per person. Within these 2,077 eligible cases, there are 1,953 unique persons—116 of whom have multiple records (two or three) in the data.

37 Since, in principle, FRPP applicants may not (in the first instance) have been released to New York City (but arrived there later), the DOCCS matching sample was opened to all DOCCS cases (n=93,874) as opposed to only those who were released to a New York City borough (n=34,793). This ensures that an FRPP applicant can still be matched even if their first address post-release is not in New York City, but elsewhere in the state. A second round of matching used only name and date of birth, yielding an additional four matches who are clearly represented in the DOCCS data. Their release date was not an exact match and was not included in the analysis.

38 One such study analyzed administrative records of the Oakland Housing Authority to determine the number of people with criminal records who were accepted into the Housing Authority and the

number who were denied admission, see Afomeia Tesfai and Kim Gilhuly, *The Long Road Home: Decreasing Barriers to Public Housing for People with Criminal Records* (Oakland, CA: Human Impact Partners, 2016).

## Endnotes for Appendix A

- a Categories of relationships that NYCHA considers as familial include: husband, wife, son, daughter, stepson, stepdaughter, father, mother, stepfather, stepmother, brother (including half-brother), sister (including half-sister), grandfather, grandmother, grandson, granddaughter, son-in-law, daughter-in-law, father-in-law, mother-in-law, and registered domestic partner of the tenant. See New York City Housing Authority, “Resident Policies and Procedures: Occupancy and Succession (Remaining Family Member) Policy Overview,” <https://perma.cc/4RGK-KFA6>. The eligibility window was extended from 18 months to three years in 2014 to increase the pool of eligible participants. NYCHA made the modification after discussions with the reentry service providers, informed by research that

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demonstrates that it can take up to three years for formerly incarcerated people to fully acclimate back in society, find housing, and get work. See Jeremy Travis, Amy Solomon, and Michelle Waul, *From Prison to Home: The Dimensions and Consequences of Prisoner Reentry* (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2001), 6.

- b For more on temporary permission to join a household, see New York City Housing Authority, “Resident Policies and Procedures: Occupancy and Succession (Remaining Family Member) Policy Overview,” <https://perma.cc/4RGK-KFA6>.
- c A person is permanently excluded from a NYCHA apartment when they have been proven to have engaged in “undesirable activity,” a wide category that includes conduct or behavior that constitutes: a danger to the health and safety of residents, conduct of a moral offense on NYCHA property, a source of danger to employees, premises, or property, a danger to peaceful occupation of other tenants, or a common law nuisance. New York

City Housing Authority (NYCHA), “Grievance Procedures,” (New York: NYCHA, August 1997), 4, <https://perma.cc/YL8Q-FNR9>. Upon being permanently excluded, the excluded person jeopardizes the resident’s tenancy by even stepping foot on the premise of the apartment where he or she has been excluded. In order for a household to apply to remove PE, an application must be based on a “substantial change” including new employment, education, or other community activities that have been demonstrated and sustained by the person over at least five years. See New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA), “Guide to Fair Hearings (Trespass)” (New York: NYCHA, 2013), 2–3, <https://perma.cc/ZC9U-Q8Y4>.

- d NYCHA defines “extremely overcrowded” as an apartment with more people than the standard occupancy limit and the overcrowded occupancy limit. The standards vary by the number of rooms, bedrooms, number of people, and the familial relationships between residents. See New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA), “Tenant Selection and Assignment Plan,”

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(New York: NYCHA, 2016), <https://perma.cc/43HV-FUFT>.

- e Factors NYCHA will consider when deciding whether to terminate participation for violations that do not result in a criminal conviction include 1) whether the participant committed an offense against a NYCHA housing resident or employee; 2) whether the offense was drug-related or alcohol-related;

3) whether the offense involved violence, including domestic violence; 4) the likelihood that the offense could adversely affect the health, safety, or right to peaceful enjoyment of NYCHA housing premises; and (5) whether he or she engages in actions that would have resulted in permanent exclusion from the household if he or she were a permanent, authorized household member.

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