Reducing Community Supervision Absconding in Arizona

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Acknowledgements

Our heartfelt appreciation goes out to the following people for their time, energy and support throughout this project.

Tanner Brown - COIII Perryville
Alfred Oswald - COIII Perryville
Michael Colburn - COIV Perryville
Loredana Frazier - COIII Alhambra
Rodney Dear - COIV Alhambra

Michele Palmer Spring - Western Regional Parole Office Group Supervisor
Joseph Hinsberg - Warrants/Fugitive Services Group Supervisor

Paul O'Connell - Assistant Director of the Community Corrections Division
Sandi Hoppough - Community Corrections Manager (Reentry Centers and Reentry Initiatives)
Nikki Studer Frigon - Community Corrections Manager (Programs/Projects Manager)
Michael Percival - Community Corrections Manager (Field Supervision)
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Dr. Kevin Wright - Director of the Arizona State University Center for Correctional Solutions

Report Overview

Though reentry success is a community issue and community corrections alone should not be solely responsible for the outcomes of individuals on community supervision, community corrections is uniquely situated to have an impact on many of the barriers still standing in the way of increased reentry success. This report intends to establish a deeper understanding of the problem of absconding from community supervision so as to develop effective recommendations for how the Community Corrections Division could further support the success of Arizona parolees.

The Problem Summary (pages 5-7) highlights the relevant information pertaining to the problem of absconding overall, absconding by the numbers in Arizona and the root causes of the decision to abscond. This information was collected through literature reviews of available research, analyses of Arizona community supervision administrative data and an analysis of a reach-in survey administered to incarcerated men and women who were recently on parole.

The Summary of Main Findings - Strengths section (pages 8-9) details positive findings from the reach-in survey regarding strengths of the overall parole experience.

The Summary of Main Findings - Intervention Opportunities section (pages 10-24) highlights the barriers that people on parole still face in their reentry process which are ripe for intervention. Themes 4 through 10 each contain the associated survey results that led to the generation of the theme, a summary of the efforts currently in place within Community Corrections to address the area and additional opportunities for intervention to improve parole success and decrease absconding. Themes 11 and 12 deviate from this structure outlining instead additional areas for intervention based on the administrative data analysis and the authors' experiences attempting to collect and synthesize information regarding absconding in the current national context.

Problem Summary

Absconding Overview

Parole offers an important transitional stage between prison and the community, ideally giving people a gradual reentry process with additional support as they readjust to civilian life. Compared to incarceration, community supervision offers two main benefits. First, it requires fewer tax payer dollars.[1] Second, since the supervision takes place in the community, people spend less time away from their families, places of employment and community as a whole, increasing community stability and peoples' opportunities for involvement in positive social groups. Due to this, parole success is a critical goal for those invested in breaking the cycle of incarceration and preserving tax dollars for effective crime reduction strategies.

Absconding prevents a person from successfully completing parole and thus stands in the way of these priorities. An individual's decision to abscond can be understood as a failure to effectively reenter the community. This can be the result of a number of factors including, but not limited to, dependency on controlled substances, deteriorated relationships with family and friends, or even a misconceived belief that they can outrun their time on supervision and eventually be "free". Research finds that fear, lack of support, confusion, and feelings of defeat can all contribute to an individual's decision to abscond and their overall likelihood of failure on community supervision.[2] Further research has found that the best predictors of absconding are a lack of stability in living arrangements and employment.[3] Beyond these studies, there is limited research available around absconding and the reasons it occurs.

In the past year, absconding prevented 2,415 people from successfully completing Arizona parole (see Appendix A). It is difficult to estimate how this compares to other states in a broader, national context; not all states publicly report their absconding data. In addition, of the states that do make this information available, their legal definition of absconding often differs, complicating any potential comparisons. In Arizona specifically, absconding is understood as failing to report or maintain contact with one's assigned community corrections officer with warrants issued within 15 days of the absconding status determination.[4] In other states, the legal definitions are similar to this but vary primarily on 1) the specified length of time someone must have gone without reporting or 2) whether intention to evade parole must be proved to classify a person as an absconder. These definition variations affect how data is collected, defined and presented. And, again, that is *if* the data is presented at all - many states report reincarceration rates of their parolees but do not differentiate absconders from others who have been reincarcerated for other technical violations or new crimes.

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[1] Shinn, D. (2019). *FY 2019 operating per capita cost report*. Available at https://corrections.az.gov/
[2] Pyrooz, D.C. (2012). Absconding among juvenile parolees in Arizona: Constructing and validating a gender-responsive risk instrument. *Criminal Justice and Behavior, 39*(7), 923-937.
[3] Williams III, F. P., McShane, M. D., & Dolny, H. M. (2000). Predicting parole absconders. *The Prison Journal*, 80(1), 24-38.
[4] Arizona Department of Corrections. (2019). *Department Order Manual - Releases/Community Supervision*. https://corrections.az.gov/sites/default/files/policies/1000/1003-g_110119.pdf

Administrative Data Overview

In the past year, April 2020 through March 2021, 2,415 warrants were written for absconding in Arizona (See Appendix A for the full summary of the warrant data). These absconding warrants make up almost 74% of all warrants written in the past year with the second most issued type being 662 technical violation warrants. On average, people who absconded did so in the first 61 days post-release. On average, people had around 136 days left to serve on community supervision at the time an absconding warrant was issued. Most absconders were under a medium parole supervision level (51%), then minimum (29%), maximum (16%), and least frequently, absconders were under intensive parole supervision (5%). Further data regarding the breakdown of the population on each supervision level could help reveal any significant differences that might exist between the amount of absconding occurring at each supervision level.

The top 5 parole offices issuing the most absconder warrants in the past year were Western Regional (22%), Black Canyon (17%), Mesa Regional (15%), South Mountain (14%), and Tucson Regional (14%) offices. This statistic does not account for the overall population which these offices serve, meaning that offices serving larger populations likely issue more warrants than other offices each year. Further data regarding the caseloads of each office could help reveal any significant differences that might exist between the amount of absconding occurring at each office.

Looking beyond the past year, there are 1,003 absconders since 1985 that still remain at-large. Eighty percent of these people are male and 20% are female with most (46%) absconding from a medium level of parole supervision. The following are the last known zip codes that are associated with more than 5% of all absconders still at-large: 85017, 85705, 85006 and 85021. These zipcodes are portrayed visually in Appendix B, highlighting, in particular, their distance from the parole office.

Reach-In Survey Results Overview

To gain further insights into absconding behavior and the barriers people face to being successful on parole, a survey was issued within the first handful of days after intake in the women's Perryville prison complex and the men's Phoenix prison complex for 4 weeks in March-April 2021 (see Appendix C for the full results).

As with all self-report surveys, there are certain considerations that need to be accounted for when analyzing and summarizing the findings. These findings only represent the opinions and perspective of those who were on parole and did not successfully complete. These findings lack the perspective of the others in a parolee's life, such as friends, family or their community supervision officer, who may have a different perspective on the challenges that stood in their way of parole success. Additionally, responses were only collected from 2 prisons, one women's and one men's. The responses would likely differ if other and more populations had been surveyed. For example, transportation would likely appear as an even bigger challenge for parolees coming from more rural areas than the ones currently surveyed. These limitations should be kept in mind when reviewing the survey findings.

The survey had 113 participants of which 20 were from the women's prison and 93 were from the men's prison. All participants were returning to prison due to a parole violation. 75 participants (63%) were back in prison as a result of absconding, 17 women and 58 men. 32 participants (28.6%) were not back in prison as a result of absconding but due to a different parole violation, 2 women and 30 men. 5 participants (4.5%) were unsure if they were back in prison due to absconding, 1 woman and 4 men. Absconders reported mostly negative experiences on parole, highlighting the struggles they encountered: unmet universal needs (transportation, employment, housing), their officer's approach and communication, overwhelming parole expectations and substance use. Most of their recommendations for increasing parole success revolved around altering the parole officer approach and communication practices, as well as supporting access to universal needs.

The questions were analyzed for statistically significant differences between the reported experiences of absconders and other types of parole violators. The following two areas showed significant differences.

1. Absconders differed significantly from other types of violators on the types of barriers to parole success which they reported. Looking at the data, the barrier of **housing** is likely to be the biggest factor influencing this difference, meaning that people who absconded faced housing struggles at a higher rate than other types of violators.
2. Absconders also differed significantly from other types of violators in their responses to the question, "In your own words, why are you back in prison right now?" Looking at the data, the large number of absconders that took **personal accountability** for their incarceration is likely to be one the biggest factors influencing this difference.

These findings are discussed in more detail by theme below (see Theme 2 and 4).

Summary of Main Findings - Strengths

The following sections thematically summarize the findings that showcase the positive results from Community Corrections' efforts thus far.

Theme 1: Many absconders report positive or neutral experiences on parole.

Related Survey Findings

36% of absconders reported having overall positive or neutral experiences on parole using words such as understanding, good, excellent, easier and positive. This finding demonstrates three main points.

First, it shows remarkable success on behalf of the community supervision officers. Over one third of people who chose to abscond from parole still reported positive feelings about their experience. We would expect this population to almost all feel strongly negative about their parole experience, so this finding is a testament to the work that parole has been doing to help their clients successfully reenter. It does not go unnoticed, even by those who are unable to successfully complete.

Second, it highlights that even when the parole experience is everything it should be, some people will still struggle to successfully complete. There is a web of barriers to success outside of a person's experience with the parole office that influences the decision to abscond. Community Corrections alone cannot ensure that people will successfully reenter; this responsibility must be shared among numerous community and state actors committed to reducing the barriers to success.

Third, it reveals reasons to place increased trust in the opinions and observations of those who do not successfully complete parole. Much like a disgruntled employee, we might expect this population to report negative feelings towards the authority figures who held them accountable for their actions, regardless of their true experience overall. These results reveal that not all people who fail to complete parole feel negatively about their experience. Knowing this allows for an ever-so-slight increase in our trust in the validity of the responses as a reflection of the true experience.

Theme 2: Many absconders take responsibility for their reincarceration.

Related Survey Findings

39% of absconders took personal responsibility for their reincarceration, citing their absconse or a bad decision as the reason they are back in prison today. This response type was the most frequent answer, even among those who mentioned other struggles in their reentry process such as substance use, housing and transportation.

This finding shows that when given the opportunity, many absconders hold themselves accountable for their reincarceration despite facing numerous barriers to their success. This is a promising finding as it suggests that energy towards interventions could be best spent on

reducing barriers to success (transportation, housing, etc.) rather than working to get parolees to accept responsibility for their actions, since many already do.

Theme 3: Most absconders clearly understood the expectations of parole.

Related Survey Findings

Most absconders (90.67%) understood what was expected of them while on community supervision. This suggests that the conditions are generally well-communicated and a lack of understanding is not a main reason for absconding. This finding serves as recognition of the work that parole staff have been doing to ensure that the parole process is well-communicated. Parole orientations are one example of this work, ensuring that parolees understand the expectations of their community supervision and are equipped with the information about resources and procedures they need to succeed.

Summary of Main Findings - Intervention Opportunities

The following sections 1) thematically summarize our findings regarding opportunities for intervention in no particular order, 2) highlight the current efforts being taken to alleviate the associated barrier and 3) detail recommended additional programmatic and policy actions that could aid with the key findings uncovered in the analysis.

Theme 4: Absconders' housing struggles are a significant barrier to parole success.

Related Survey Findings

Absconders differed significantly from other types of violators on the types of barriers to parole success which they reported. Over 45% of absconders noted that housing was a barrier to their parole success whereas only 12.5% of other violators struggled with housing. This suggests that housing struggles are likely associated with the decision to abscond. Seventeen percent of absconders even said that housing struggles were their biggest barrier to being able to successfully complete parole and almost 15% cited housing struggles as a direct contributor to their reincarceration. When asked what their community supervision officer could do in the future to help people be successful, 12% of absconders requested help with their housing arrangements. As mentioned previously in the problem summary, housing instability is one of the best predictors of absconding and therefore extremely important to address.[3]

Related Current Efforts

a. *Housing pilot study.* The Arizona Department of Corrections, Rehabilitation and Reentry was recently involved in a study examining the impact of housing support for those reentering the community after prison. This study, conducted by the ASU Center for Correctional Solutions, found that those who received housing assistance for the first 3 months of their reentry process saw more favorable reentry outcomes (reduced recidivism, increased employment) than those who received no support.

Recommendations

a. *Advance opportunities for parolee choice in housing placement.* Without buy-in from the parolee, their housing placement will not likely be successful. Responses to the reach-in survey showed that some parolees presented concern with their degree of influence on housing placement when they felt at risk. *"[My community supervision officer] wanted me to go to a halfway house where people are using drugs. I refused to go there, it was just a bad place."* Working to understand the concerns, needs and desires of each parolee in relation to housing and being honest with them about the options that are available will allow them to feel heard and autonomous. Additionally, taking the time to center the parolee's voice in these discussions will give community supervision officers an opportunity to collaboratively address concerns as they arise and encourage the parolee's continued success. The recommendations found under Theme 7 and 8 that work to foster a positive parolee-officer relationship, such as empathy training, would likely aid in improving the approach to the logistical problems that can arise with housing as well.

b. *Reassess and identify areas for improvement in the current housing process and housing options.* Absconders in the survey who experienced housing as a barrier to success commonly mentioned a need for improved quality and affordability of housing options as well as assistance in finding housing and getting their housing approved. The current housing processes should be re-examined for areas of improvement that can leverage the suggestions put forward by the US Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH).[5] For example, if Arizona is experiencing a lack of quality housing options for people reentering the community, the USICH offers a starting place for addressing this gap in resources and possible avenues for supplying housing options.

Theme 5: Absconders frequently struggle with substance use as a barrier to parole success.

Related Survey Findings

Substance use was the most frequent barrier to parole success mentioned by 53% of absconders. Twenty percent of absconders felt that substance use was their largest barrier to parole success and 30% cited substance use as a direct contributor to their current reincarceration.

Related Current Efforts:

a. *Rehabilitation opportunities.* Community supervision officers are trained to identify elements of risk, need and responsivity within each individual in order to adequately support their recovery from substance use. There are a number of rehabilitation opportunities in place and placement within each is typically based on a number of factors including, but not limited to, the individual's history of substance use, mental health diagnosis and whether their release was contingent on attending a mandatory treatment program. Officers are also trained to consider where an individual exists within the Stages of Change[6] when determining the best options for rehabilitation.

b. *No mandatory directive to send parolees back for drug violation.* The Community Corrections Division's current mandatory arrest directive does not include criteria for mandatory return for substance violations. This practice encourages opportunities for parolees to be directed toward treatment services rather than having their supervision revoked and being reincarcerated.

[5] United States Interagency Council on Homelessness. (2016). *Connecting People Returning from Incarceration with Housing and Homelessness Assistance*. https://www.usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset_library/Reentry_Housing_Resource_Tipsheet_Final.pdf

[6] LaMorte. W. W. (2019). The Transtheoretical Model (Stages of Change). Boston University School of Public Health. https://sphweb.bumc.bu.edu/otlt/mph-modules/sb/behavioralchangetheories/behavioralchangetheories6.html

Recommendations

a. *Eliminate drug testing requirements when possible.* Drug testing has been shown to have no effect on drug use[7] and can create more logistical (remembering to call in and scheduling to go drop) and psychological barriers (fear of unexpectedly dropping dirty or using and then being too afraid to report to parole) to parole success. When it can be eliminated from the parole expectations, it should be. Decreasing the amount of people who are required or who could be randomly requested to drop UAs as part of their supervision conditions could help lessen the anxiety and fear about violating terms of parole that can lead to absconding, as further discussed in Theme 10.

b. *Ensure positive reinforcement is a core element of communications with parolees.* Research shows that community supervision officer recognition of prosocial behavior, as opposed to only punishment for misconduct, results in significantly less offending and substance use among parolees.[8] Making community supervision officers aware of this fact, providing training on this method of communication and setting an expectation for its continued use in the department could help further leverage the officer-parolee relationship as an asset in the fight against chemical dependency.

c. *Reassess and identify areas for improvement in the current substance treatment options.* With 53% of absconders reporting substance use as a barrier to their parole success, it is important to dig into this finding a little deeper to understand the specifics of the problem and adjust the current course of action as applicable. Answering questions such as the below will provide better insights into how support around this issue can be improved by different actors in the community.
   (1) Are all parolees aware of the treatment services available to them?
   (2) What are the potential barriers to accessing these services (waitlists, eligibility)?
   (3) How effective are the currently available services?

Theme 6: Transportation is one of the top barriers that absconders said prevented them from being successful on parole.

Related Survey Findings

Forty percent of absconders noted transportation as a barrier to their parole success with 17% of absconders mentioning transportation as their biggest barrier to success. Of the 40 absconders who said they had a difficult time meeting with their parole officer, nearly 38% noted that this was because of transportation struggles. When asked, “In your own words, why are you back in prison right now?” four percent of absconders mentioned transportation struggles as a direct contributor to their reincarceration. To provide further context to these transportation

[7] The Pew Charitable Trusts. (2020). *Policy reform can strengthen community supervision: A framework to improve probation and parole.* https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/reports/2020/04/policy-reforms-can-strengthen-community-supervision

[8] Mowen, T. J., Wodahl, E., Brent, J. J., & Garland, B. (2018). The role of sanctions and incentives in promoting successful reentry: Evidence from the SVORI data. *Criminal Justice and Behavior, 45*(8), 1288-1307.

struggles, Appendix B provides a visual example of the last known zip codes that belong to more than 5% of absconders still at-large and highlights the distance from parole offices.

Related Current Efforts

a. *Uber for Jobs pilot program.*[9] In 2017, Arizona began a partnership with Uber to develop an initiative that offered rides to job interviews or the first-day of work for formerly incarcerated individuals. This program was offered exclusively to individuals in Maricopa County who recently graduated from Arizona Department of Corrections Employment Center. This initiative aided formerly justice-involved individuals in making productive connections to the community upon release. Though the program is no longer active, the effort put towards developing the partnership and implementing the pilot reflect high levels of innovation within the Department and dedication to addressing the barriers to reentry success.

b. *Virtual appointment options.* Community Corrections currently offers virtual appointments as an option for parolee meetings. Based on an individual's level of supervision, in-person meetings may still be a requirement of their supervision. However, once those in-person meetings have taken place, virtual appointments become an option for additional check-ins with the Community Corrections Officer. Virtual options help reduce the transportation burden on parolees.

Recommendations

a. *Offer/continue to offer virtual options for parole appointments*. For those with access to a phone or internet and an internet capable device, virtual options for complying with mandatory check-ins with the parole officer can help to alleviate the logistical and financial burden of transportation, especially for people who have secured stable housing or employment that is a far distance from the parole office.

b. *Meet parolees outside of the office.* While virtual options should be available, in-person options should not be removed. Some people face technological barriers or simply just know they will be more successful with in-person interactions and should be given the option to carry out their parole requirements in a way that will best help them to succeed. For the intersection of people who desire in-person appointments and face transportation barriers, community supervision officers could go to the parolee or set up their meetings for the day in a central location (somewhere with a high concentrations of their caseload in a certain zip code) by partnering with a church, nonprofit, transitional living facility or other community group, for example. There is already precedence for meeting parolees outside of the office with the current practice of home visits. Occasionally taking these meetings to a neutral location in the community would further leverage this practice by reducing the parolee's anxiety around always having to either enter the parole office or have an officer enter their home. Fear and anxiety as barriers to a successful parole experience are further discussed in Theme 10.

[9] https://www.abc15.com/news/region-phoenix-metro/central-phoenix/gov-doug-ducey-introduces-uber-for-jobs-pilot-program

c. *Offer public transportation vouchers*. Some people will not have access to the technology necessary to take advantage of virtual options. Vouchers for discounted or free use of public transportation could be offered to those that face transportation and financial barriers and are unable to meet with their officer virtually, or know that they will be more successful with in-person meetings. Depending on the funding for a program such as this, transportation vouchers could be offered for any combination of the following: traveling to and from the parole office, job interviews, work hours, doctor appointments, and child visits. Lack of transportation contributes to parole failure and absconding; support in this area could decrease the logistical barriers to parole success.

d. *Pursue partnerships with rideshare companies to offer discounted/free rides*. Rideshare companies, such as Lyft, have a history of developing programs to support transportation for people that have been previously justice-involved.[10] Seeking out further partnerships such as these could further aid in securing reliable transportation for people facing transportation and financial barriers to meeting with their parole officer.

Theme 7: A punitive officer approach leads parolees to struggle.

Related Survey Findings

When asked, "overall, what is one word to describe your most recent experience on parole?" absconders mentioned negative experiences with community supervision 61% of the time. When asked, "why is that?" 45% of absconders noted struggles with parole staff, most often mentioning a lack of a supportive parole officer as a contributor to their negative experience.

For the question, "Which of the following acted as barriers to you successfully completing parole (please check all that apply)?", "My parole officer" was the 4th most selected response option. The 18 absconders who selected this option were then asked to expand on why their community supervision officer was a barrier. Respondents noted the following in descending order of frequency:

- Unhelpful (n=5)
- Communication issues (n=5)
- Threatening or deceptive (n=5)
- Lack of effective support or available resources (n=4)
- Unempathetic (n=3)

For the open-ended question, "Which was the biggest challenge you faced in being successful on parole?" 20% of absconders noted issues with the parole officer's approach. When asked, "How could your parole officer better help you to successfully complete parole next time?" 37% of absconders asked that the parole officer use a more coach-like or empathetic approach.

[10] Ehrmann, C. (2019, Nov. 6). Hartford first city to aid former inmates with Lyft rides. *Associated Press*, https://apnews.com/article/831d3b57c74443f7b3ca3f1da5321e48

Related Current Efforts

a. *Officer training.* Future Community Corrections Officers undergo extensive training within the new officer academy to prepare for their interactions with parolees. These trainings include but are not limited to ACCAT (risk/need assessments), motivational interviewing, "Getting to know your justice-involved individual", and "How to be a CCO". Field Training Officers and supervisors are also provided with on-the-job training resources to deliver to new officers or current officers who need additional refreshers. Community Corrections is currently in the process of developing specific CCO positions to assist with on-the-job training across the state. This will allow for a wider and more consistent impact in initial and on-going CCO training statewide.

Recommendations

a. *Use empathy skills and positive reinforcement.* Research shows that community supervision officer recognition of prosocial behavior, as opposed to just punishment for misconduct, results in less offending and substance use among parolees.[11] The results from the reach-in survey complement this finding, showing a desire among parolees for their officers to work with them when they encounter barriers to success and to try to understand their perspective and unique struggles. These are key traits of coaching with empathy, and while there are many ways to foster empathy, one program in particular has been tested out in a criminal justice setting with promising results. Empathy training for community supervision officers has been shown to reduce recidivism by 13%.[12] The relationship building elements that are foundational to this type of training lead us to believe that it could have an important impact on some of the specific underlying causes of absconding such as fear, lack of trust and an overall unsupportive experience.

b. *Further leverage pre-release contact processes to jumpstart an effective relationship.* The quality of the relationship between a parole officer and parolee can have real implications for parole success. As such, establishing a healthy and supportive relationship prior to the start date of community supervision could work upstream to help parolees overcome initial barriers to showing up to their first meeting such as fear or nervousness. Community Corrections Officers currently send an introduction letter to parolees as well as have a virtual meeting with them before their release. These already beneficial practices could be further supplemented to establish a solid foundation for the parolee-officer relationship. For example, instilling a standard practice of the officer working with the future parolee to get their state ID prior to release would serve a practical purpose in reducing a logistical barrier to success and would also serve to communicate to the parolee the officer's interest and ability in helping create a successful reentry experience. Strongly establishing this relationship prior to leaving prison may increase the chances that a parolee will show up to their first meeting rather

[11] Mowen, T. J., Wodahl, E., Brent, J. J., & Garland, B. (2018). The role of sanctions and incentives in promoting successful reentry: Evidence from the SVORI data. *Criminal Justice and Behavior, 45*(8), 1288-1307.

[12] Okonofua et al. (2021). A scalable empathetic supervision intervention to mitigate recidivism from probation and parole, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America,* 118(14)

than absconding due to fear of the unknown or mistrust. Leveraging a reach-in approach to begin establishing support before release has been supported by the Justice, Equality, Human Dignity, and Tolerance Foundation.[13]

c. *Wall of success.* It is critical for both parolees and community supervision staff to have visual cues of success. For parolees, using physical spaces to communicate the successes of others on parole sends the message that the Community Corrections Division is invested in parolee success. Clear visual examples and celebrations of success show that it is possible to succeed on parole and that the Division takes pride in such success. For community supervision officers and other staff, a prominent display of past successes can serve as a reminder of the payoffs from their hard work. A wall of success could be installed in parole offices with pictures and names of individuals who have successfully completed parole in the past year. This wall should be visible to everyone entering the office to create a positive first impression for parolees arriving at the office. Another show of success may be testimonials on materials given to parolees (such as a flyer or the front cover of an information packet) that tell the story of individuals who have successfully completed parole and were able to use the support of the Community Corrections Division to overcome adjust to life in the community.

Theme 8: Absconders face communication issues with their community supervision officer as a barrier to parole success.

Related Survey Findings

Forty-five percent of absconders had a difficult time meeting with their community supervision officer. Of the absconders who reported this, 26% noted that the difficulties were due to challenging communication with their community supervision officer. Twenty-four percent of absconders recommended improving communication from the officer to improve overall parole success.

Related Current Efforts

a. *Motivational Interviewing Training.* The Community Corrections Division is currently engaged in a collaborative effort with Arizona State University to train all community supervision officers on motivational interviewing (MI), a communication style that is centered around the client and uses directive approaches to explore behavior change by resolving ambivalence.[14] This communication strategy can be useful across all stages of correctional intervention and is particularly relevant to community corrections, as one of the eight principles of evidence-based practice in this field states that strong communication strategies which focus primarily on the client are a better alternative to using authoritarian styles of communication that express control. The National Institute of Corrections suggests that motivational interviewing may also combat burnout among

[13] Burke, P. & Tonry, M. (2006). *Successful Transition and Reentry for Safer Communities: A Call to Action for Parole*. JEHT Foundation. https://networkofcare.org/library/A_Call_to_Action_for_Parole.pdf
[14] U.S. Department of Justice National Institute of Corrections. Motivational Interviewing. https://nicic.gov/projects/motivational-interviewing

correctional staff as they will be better equipped to work with high-risk, challenging clients.[15] A study of parole success in Colorado following motivational interviewing training of parole officers found that recidivism rates were lower among parolees whose parole officer had been trained in MI.[16] Training all officers in motivational interviewing likely helps improve work efficacy and reduce staff burnout.

Recommendations

a. *Implement text message reminders.* People on parole are adjusting from a life of intense routine and supervision to one with a lot more variety and autonomy; many struggles come with this transition, time management being one. Many participants in the survey (18.9%) mentioned that they were challenged with remembering the dates of their parole meetings. This can be mitigated with automated case management technology. Text reminders for meetings or to call Averhealth could help eliminate forgetfulness and humanize the struggle of remembering responsibilities. This tactic has seen success in criminal justice spaces already where strategic text message reminders cut the failure-to-appear rate by 26% among New Yorkers summoned to appear in court[17] and reduced the no-show rate for community supervision appointments by 43% in Arkansas.[18]

b. *Standardize communication practices.* Standardized communication practices that are clearly explained to individuals on community supervision would allow parolees to rest easy knowing that their officer will get back to them, if not immediately, then within a pre-specified amount of time, and prevent officers from receiving an overwhelming number of calls from a parolee in panic that their officer is not responding to them. Standardizations to consider could include specified reply windows of time (e.g.Your officer will always get back to you within 1-2 business days) and clear directions on who to contact in case of an emergency or their officer not replying (e.g. If you need immediate support or haven't heard back from your officer in over 2 business days, please contact the parole office directly at (888)-888-8888 to be put in touch with someone who can help.) If these standard communication practices are already in place among staff, efforts can be focused on clearly outlining these practices to individuals on community supervision during orientation, possibly including this in their orientation materials and issuing reminders during any mandatory meetings.

[15] U.S. Department of Justice National Institute of Corrections. (2012). Exercises for Developing MI Skills in Corrections. https://s3.amazonaws.com/static.nicic.gov/Library/025557.pdf
[16] Lin, J. (2018). Program Evaluation in the Context of Supervision Regime Change: Motivational Interviewing in Colarado. *Justice Quarterly. 35*(5). 895-918
[17] Cooke, B., Diop, B.Z., Fishbane, A., Hayes, J., Ouss, A., & Shah, A. (2018). *Using behavioral science to improve criminal justice outcomes: Preventing failures to appear in court*. University of Chicago Crime Lab.
http://www.ideas42.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/I42-954_NYCSummonsPaper_Final_Jan2018-1.pdf
[18] https://messagemedia.com/us/case-studies/sms-reminders-reduce-parolee-no-shows/

c. *Implement a parole peer mentor program.* Peer mentor programs have been shown to reduce recidivism by providing extra support early on in the reentry process.[19] One specific benefit that the interpersonal support provided by peer mentors could contribute is lessening some of the communication burden on the community supervision officer's heavy workload, allowing officers to focus their time and energy on improved quality and availability of professional support that only they can provide. This increased focus on professional services would be beneficial as greater levels of parole officer support, in particular professional support such as directing the client to helpful resources, are connected with lower levels of reincarceration.[20] The National Reentry Resource Center recently produced a guide to aid organizations in establishing a successful mentoring program of their own,[21] highlighting different types of programs including ones that serve specific populations with a specific focus, such as formerly justice-involved women interested in higher education.[22]

Theme 9: Absconders understood parole expectations but felt overwhelmed and stressed by them.

Related Survey Findings

Most absconders (90.67%) understood what was expected of them while on community supervision. This suggests that the conditions are generally well-communicated and a lack of understanding is not a main reason for absconding. Absconders noted, however, that while they understood what they were meant to do on parole, they often felt the expectations and deadlines were stressful and unreasonable. This sentiment appeared nearly 30% of the time when survey participants described their negative experiences on parole in response to the question, “Overall, what is one word to describe your experience on parole? Why is that?”. When asked, “Which was the biggest barrier you faced in being successful on parole?” absconders noted struggles with the parole expectations 16% of the time.

Related Current Efforts

a. *Parole orientation*. Mandatory parole orientations started in 2019 at the Mesa Regional Parole Office and are now in the process of being implemented at other offices across the state. These sessions are facilitated by community supervision officers on a voluntary basis with the goal of sharing information with incoming parolees and dispelling myths about the parole experience. Since the implementation of the orientations, the data maintained both by the Northeastern Maricopa Parole Office and Mesa Regional

[19] Sells, D., Curtis, A., Abdur-Raheem, J., Klimczak, M., Barber, C., Meaden, C., ... & Emigh-Guy, M. (2020). Peer-mentored community reentry reduces recidivism. *Criminal Justice and Behavior, 47*(4), 437-456.
[20] Bares, K. J., & Mowen, T. J. (2020). Examining the parole officer as a mechanism of social support during reentry from prison. *Crime & Delinquency, 66*(6-7), 1023-1051.
[21] Umez, C., De la Cruz, J., Richey, M., & Albis, K. (2017). *Mentoring as a component of reentry: Practical considerations from the field*. The National Reentry Resource Center. https://www8.gsb.columbia.edu/socialenterprise/sites/socialenterprise/files/Mentoring%20as%20a%20Component%20of%20Reentry_CSGJC.pdf
[22] https://www.collegeandcommunity.org/uplift-recruitment

Parole Office has noted an increase in parole success and reduction in absconding warrants written. Since March 2019, the average number of absconder warrants written by the Mesa Regional Parole Office has reduced from 48-58 per month to 4-7 per month, according to an officer we spoke to with the recent numbers corroborated by the warrant data from the past year. Additionally, the overall rate of absconding for individuals who attended orientation at the Northeastern Maricopa Parole Office is 7.64% compared to 23.55% for those who did not attend orientation. These orientations likely improve people's understanding of parole expectations and this clarity can contribute to decreased stress.

b. *Reach-in parole orientations*. Community Corrections will begin administering in-prison parole orientations for higher risk individuals that are within 120 days of release. These orientations will focus heavily on addressing the fears and uncertainty associated with release into community supervision. There is an important focus on emphasizing the "new parole" practices that are aimed to help those actively on or entering community supervision. These orientations behind bars, as an extension of the existing orientations in the community, will allow community corrections to dispel the myths and gossip about parole that, according to our justice-involved contacts, run rampant in the prisons.

Recommendations

a. *Establish terms of parole in partnership with parolee using goal-based methods*. It is human nature to be driven and motivated by personal goals. By centering parole completion and success around the achievement of goals and completion of programs rather than only following rules, parolees may be more motivated to successfully complete their supervision.[23] These goals can be co-written between officer and parolee to reflect both case-related requirements (i.e., the completion of a drug treatment program), as well as goals the parolee aims to achieve such as receiving their GED or completing a vocational course. This practice allows for a degree of autonomy for the individual, allowing them to feel more personally responsible for their own success on parole. However, the more personal goals should not be used as mandatory conditions or as reasons for reincarceration should they not be completed. Additionally, in line with this shift, meetings with community supervision officers could address parolee successes and next steps rather than primarily or only focusing on rules and failures. This positive context of parole meetings promotes trust, success and an overall positive experience related to being on community supervision.

b. *Make some minor improvements to the existing parole orientation.* Since the implementation of orientations there has been a notable increase in parole success and reduction in absconding warrants written, as indicated by the data maintained by the Northeastern Maricopa Parole Office and Mesa Regional Parole Office. There are a few

[23] The PEW Charitable Trusts. (2018, September 25). *Probation and parole systems marked by high stakes, missed opportunities: 1 in 55 adults is under community supervision.* https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/issue-briefs/2018/09/probation-and-parole-systems-marked-by-high-stakes-missed-opportunities

ways in which the administration of the orientations could change that may increase their positive influence.

- *Utilize surveys.* In order to maximize the impact of the guest speakers and resources present during orientation, it may be beneficial to survey the attendees prior to orientation to better understand the resources desired. This can provide a better insight into who to invite to each orientation and can be done during an existent point of contact with parolees such as intake, when the orientation date is initially scheduled. On the back end, a survey could be administered to gauge which speakers the attendees are engaging with most by listing the speakers and asking people to rate each on a scale of 1 to 5 or, more broadly, asking 'what was most useful here today?'. This survey would acknowledge that there is variation within the orientations that impact its effectiveness and provide information for each parole office to modify their orientations accordingly.

- *Frontload testimonies.* Another potentially beneficial change would be to schedule the testimony of formerly justice-involved individuals and parole success stories at the beginning of orientation. This minor shift in the order of presentation has the potential to establish credibility for the orientation as a whole but also the individual community supervision officers who follow. While these officers have done a great job in working to establish trust, it is natural to believe that orientation attendees will find it easier to trust someone who was once in their same position.

- *Improve clarity around frequently asked questions.* Clarity, above all else, is arguably the most important component to orientation. One opportunity to advance clarity is with the information given about marijuana use. Recreational use of marijuana is a new reality to Arizona producing confusion and questions about the conditions of supervision. While orientation facilitators attempt to address the fine lines of this new reality, a visual graphic or informational pamphlet may be more effective in helping parolees to understand and remember this message. A flyer or infographic that depicts the specific details of who can use marijuana and important related topics to consider (i.e., employers may still drug test you, buying from a dispensary is safest, you are still responsible for any failed UA's as a result of laced product bought on the street, who qualifies for a medical card and how to apply for one, etc.) could help clarify this topic for attendees. Another topic for clarification would be that absconding causes the time-served on parole to pause. This fact does not seem to be clearly understood by parolees and according to our justice-involved contacts, some individuals who abscond do so because they believe they can outrun their time. Stating this explicitly in orientation could help clear up this misunderstanding.

Theme 10: Absconders' feelings of fear and anxiety contribute to their parole outcomes.

Related Survey Findings

Almost 7% of absconders mentioned emotional reasons, such as feeling scared, as a direct contributor to their reincarceration. This sentiment was supported by our conversations with our network of currently and formerly justice-involved contacts. They emphasized the fear and anxiety associated with going into the physical parole office and the constant fear and stress caused by worrying about accidentally violating a condition of parole. This fear can create a barrier to accessing support and succeeding on parole.

Related Current Efforts

a. *Parole orientation*. As mentioned above, the implementation of parole orientations is already seeing some success in parole completion and absconding reduction. Orientation likely lessens the fear and anxiety of adapting to the parole experience.

b. *Pre-release contact.* Community Corrections currently has three contact points with individuals being released from prison onto community supervision. The first occurs at 90 days to the gate when the individual receives a one-pager with general information about parole and FAQs. The second contact point is a personal letter from their assigned community corrections officer introducing themselves and the process. The third contact point is a virtual meeting with their assigned community supervision officer. Establishing this relationship prior to release promotes a strong foundation between the parolee and officer and also for the parolee's experience on community supervision as a whole.

Recommendations

a. *Focus on re-engaging parolees following a failure to report.* Several programs have been implemented across the nation that have seen success in reducing absconding by providing additional supports following a failure to report rather than issuing a warrant. The Safe Surrender Policy in New Mexico allows parolees the opportunity to take responsibility for their actions and can remain on community supervision following a period of absconding if they are not considered a risk to the safety of the community and a judge or parole board permits it.[24] Colorado implemented a program known as Parole Back on Track whereby second chances were granted for minor violations of parole (such as absconding without committing a new crime) as long as parolees check in with a community supervision officer to pursue the program.[25] There is even precedence for this approach in Arizona. In Maricopa County, a past project called Operation Fugitive Safe Surrender successfully saw 1,300 individuals turn themselves in after absconding

[24] New Mexico Corrections Department. (2018, June 28). *Probation/parole violations and absconders, preliminary revocation hearings, arrest of offenders and arrest orders.* https://cd.nm.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/CD-052800.pdf

[25] Colorado Department of Corrections. (2020, December 15). *FY 2021-22 joint budget committee hearing agenda.* https://leg.colorado.gov/sites/default/files/fy2021-22_corhrg.pdf

from probation and, in return, their arrest warrants were cleared.[26] A focus on re-engaging with parolees after a period of absconding may help them get back on track to successfully completing their community supervision term by providing additional support and showcasing that Community Corrections Officers want to see them succeed rather than go back to prison.

b. *Partner with local organizations to offer support services typically housed in the parole office in a different physical space*. Libraries could be further utilized to offer re-entry resources.[27] By locating these services in non-threatening, non-stigmatized, widely accessible locations, people on parole may have an easier time accessing resources from a logistical standpoint as well as an emotional one.

c. *Create opportunities to access resources virtually.* Resources may be more accessible if there is a way to take advantage of them virtually. Websites with contact information and frequently asked questions (FAQs) pages provide an easy way for people to get information on a resource and feel empowered to make use of the resource. One example of this might be a webpage where people can access job boards and read parolee-specific FAQs related to job eligibility restrictions and application support. This may also help ease barriers to accessing resources, such as transportation. Virtual access provides a benefit to staff as well because it empowers individuals to access resources on their own rather than through their community supervision officer thus offloading some case management duties.

Theme 11: Most people successfully complete 2 months of parole and have just over 4 months left to complete when they abscond.

This finding comes from our summary of the warrant data (see Appendix A).

Recommendations

a. *Incorporate small milestones into the supervision period.* Recognizing small wins, such as completing one month of supervision, can help encourage people to keep making progress towards a larger goal. Small milestones for recognition can be time-based or parolee-specific to make the supervision period seem less intimidating while showing that the community supervision officer is committed to their client's success at every step of the way. If successes are celebrated early and often, it may increase a parolee's motivation to keep making strides towards the larger goal of successfully completing parole.

[26] The Pew Charitable Trusts. (2020). *Policy reform can strengthen community supervision: A framework to improve probation and parole*. https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/reports/2020/04/policy-reforms-can-strengthen-community-supervision

[27] Ringrose, K. (2020). Libraries & reentry: The importance of public spaces, technologies, and community to formerly incarcerated patrons. *ALA Policy Perspectives*, *7.*

b. *Educate parolees about this critical time period in their supervision by circulating informational materials.* A flyer can be posted in parole offices or distributed to parolees to make them aware of the fact that most people who abscond do so after completing 2 months of supervision. This awareness could increase self-monitoring among parolees around their 2-month mark, which may result in them asking for additional support or resources if they need it.

c. *Schedule check-ins with parolees close to the 2 month mark.* Knowing when in the supervision term parolees are likely to abscond can help community supervision officers understand when more support may be needed. Requiring a meeting prior to this critical 2-month mark provides the opportunity for community supervision officers to check-in with clients and ensure that they have the tools and resources to be successful through the end of their supervision.

Theme 12: Absconding data is not widely available or uniformly reported making it difficult to measure and compare the occurrence of the problem and effectiveness of solutions between states.

This finding comes from the authors' experiences searching for national absconding data and information about effective programs and policies for this report.

Recommendations

a. *Publicly share absconding data.* Improving the flow of information publicly or at least between states can help establish a comprehensive understanding of best practices for minimizing absconding. With this information, other states can understand how they compare nationally and know which states to target to learn more about different programs and methods that can impact absconding rates. Additionally, other researchers could use data to provide knowledge and recommendations to other parole offices.

b. *Convene annually with other community corrections offices nationwide about absconding best practices.* An annual meeting to specifically discuss absconding rates as well as share ideas and effective solutions can create a better flow of information between states. Specific information regarding absconding rates and tactics to minimize absconding are not always publicly available, so a space that allows for open conversation can help all participating community corrections divisions implement new methods to address a nationwide challenge. This could be enacted as a coalition within the International Community Corrections Association of which Arizona is currently a member.

c. *Utilize a shared platform to increase the accessibility of effective practices.* A website where community corrections staff from different states could share information regarding absconding, best practices and even practices that were ineffective would increase the collective knowledge around this and other problems commonly faced by community corrections divisions. The Center for Problem Oriented Policing

(https://popcenter.asu.edu/), and in particular the Unpublished Documents: Case Studies page (https://popcenter.asu.edu/content/unpublished-documents-case-studies), provides a good example of a website that houses not only publicly available data, research and policy suggestions for a wide array of challenges faced by police departments, but also summaries of attempted strategies implemented by individual departments and their positive or negative results.

Appendix A: Full Warrant Data Summary

Data from the past year (April 2020 - March 2021)

Frequency of warrant types issued in the past year

Warrant Type	n	%
Absconder	2,415	73.92
Technical Violation	662	20.26
Immediate Action	86	2.63
Half-to-Deport	42	1.29
Emergency Entry	32	0.98
Interstate Compact	30	0.92

Frequency of violated conditions that led to warrants (April 2020 - June 2020)

**The conditions of supervision were updated recently with changes effective July 2020. The dataset contains warrants filed before and after the conditions were updated. They are broken up accordingly in the tables below.*

Condition #	Condition Description	n	%
7	I will not consume or use any form of alcohol, or any substance containing alcohol, at any time. I will not possess, use, distribute, sell, manufacture, or have under my control any illegal drugs, controlled substances, narcotics, toxic vapors (as inhalants) or prescription drugs not prescribed to me by a licensed physician. I will submit blood, urine, saliva, or Breathalyzer samples when requested by any Supervising Officer.	361	25.32
2	I will maintain contact with my Supervising Officer and follow all directives I am given, either verbal or written.	325	22.79
3	I will obtain approval from my Supervising Officer before changing my residence or mailing address. I will secure a written travel permit/waiver of extradition from my Supervising Officer before leaving the State of Arizona. I hereby waive extradition if I should be arrested in any other state and will not resist being returned to the State of Arizona.	251	17.60
5	I will obey all city, county, state, federal and tribal laws. I will inform my Supervising Officer, within (1) working day, of any contact that I have had with any law enforcement agency. I will not engage in assaultive, violent, or threatening activities of any sort.	200	14.03

Special	Special condition written by the Supervising Officer.	150	10.52
1	Upon release from custody and during my supervision, I will contact my Supervising Officer, or Duty Officer by personal visit within one (1) working day unless otherwise directed by a special condition.	96	6.73
4	I will seek, obtain, and maintain employment, if legally permitted to do so. I understand I will attend school, approved program or treatment as directed by my Supervising Officer and will participate in school or the approved programs or treatment as directed.	36	2.52
6	At no time will I own, possess, transport, use, or have under my control any electronic stun or control device, firearms, deadly or prohibited weapons, explosives or ammunition as defined in § A.R.S. 13-3101.	4	0.28
8	I will not have any contact with any victims; I will not knowingly associate with any person engaged in criminal activity, codefendants, or anyone under the jurisdiction of ADC or Probation or in the custody of any law enforcement agency without prior authorization or permission from my Supervising Officer.	3	0.21
15	If applicable, I will not remain in or return to the United States illegally if I am deported or processed through voluntary departure. Should I illegally return to the United States, I hereby waive extradition from any jurisdiction in the United States and shall not contest any effort by any jurisdiction to return me to the state of Arizona.	0	0
11	If applicable, I will pay fees, fines, and/or restitution as determined by the Board of Executive Clemency, the sentencing court or state statutes.	0	0
10	I will not enter into any agreement to act as an informant or special agent for any law enforcement agency without the written consent of my Supervising Officer.	0	0
9	I will submit to a search of my person, automobile or place of residence at any time, with or without a warrant by any Community Corrections Officer or Supervisor.	0	0

Frequency of violated conditions that led to warrants (July 2020 - March 2021)

Condition #	Condition Description	n	%
2	I will maintain contact with my Supervising Officer and follow all directives I am given, either verbal or written. I will keep my Supervising Officer informed of my residency.	1,070	33.28
5	I will not possess, use, distribute, sell, manufacture, or have under my control any illegal drugs, controlled substances, narcotics, toxic vapors (as inhalants) or prescription drugs not prescribed to me by a licensed physician. I will submit blood, urine, saliva, or Breathalyzer samples when requested by any Supervising Officer.	723	22.49
3	I will obey all city, county, state, federal and tribal laws. I will inform my Supervising Officer, within (1) working day, of any contact that I have had with any law enforcement agency. I will not engage in assaultive, violent, or threatening activities of any sort.	506	15.74
7	I will submit to a search of my person, personal property - including any electronic communication or internet enabled device, automobile, or place of residence at any time, with or without a warrant by any Community Corrections Officer or Supervisor.	484	15.05
Special	Special Condition written by the Parole Officer	422	13.13
1	Upon release from custody and during my supervision, I will contact my Supervising Officer, or Duty Officer in person or by phone as directed.	235	7.31
4	At no time will I own, possess, transport, use, or have under my control any electronic stun or control device, firearms, deadly or prohibited weapons, explosives or ammunition as defined in § A.R.S. 13-3101.	92	2.86
6	I will not have any contact with any victims; I will not knowingly associate with any person engaged in criminal activity, or co defendants without prior authorization or permission from my Supervising Officer.	31	0.96
10	If applicable, I will not remain in or return to the United States illegally if I am deported or processed through voluntary departure. Should I illegally return to the United States, I hereby waive extradition from any jurisdiction in the United States and shall not contest any effort by any jurisdiction to return me to the state of Arizona.	13	0.40
8	If applicable, I will pay fees, fines, and/or restitution as determined by the Board of Executive Clemency, the	12	0.37

	sentencing court or state statutes.		
9	I will secure a written travel permit/waiver of extradition from my Supervising Officer before leaving the State of Arizona. I hereby waive extradition if I should be arrested in any other state and will not resist being returned to the State of Arizona.	7	0.22

Absconder Statistics for the Past Year (April 2020 - March 2021)

Time Between Release and Warrant Issued

Mean: 100 days
Median: 61 days
Min: 1 day
Max: 4,282 days

Parole Time Left to Serve when Warrant Issued

Mean: 171 days
Median: 136 days
Min: 5 days
Max: 3,352 days

Parole Supervision Level	n	%
Minimum	695	28.81
Medium	1,221	50.62
Maximum	380	15.75
Intensive	116	4.81

Frequency of Absconder Warrants Issued at Each Parole Office

Parole Office	n	%
Western Regional	526	21.78
Black Canyon	417	17.27
Mesa Regional	374	15.49
South Mountain	349	14.45
Tucson Regional	326	13.50
Special Unit	129	5.34
Pinal County	45	1.86

Kingman	39	1.61
Tucson East	39	1.61
Yuma	36	1.49
Flagstaff	29	1.20
Prescott	20	0.83
Snowflake	19	0.79
Safford	18	0.75
Cochise County	17	0.70
Warrant Services Hearing Unit	16	0.66
Release Unit	11	0.46
Interstate Compact	4	0.17
Electronic Monitoring Unit	1	0.04

Absconders At-Large (since 1985)

Sex	n	%
Male	808	80.48%
Female	196	19.52%

Parole Supervision Level	n	%
Minimum	276	27.46
Medium	467	46.51
Maximum	244	24.30
Intensive	17	1.69

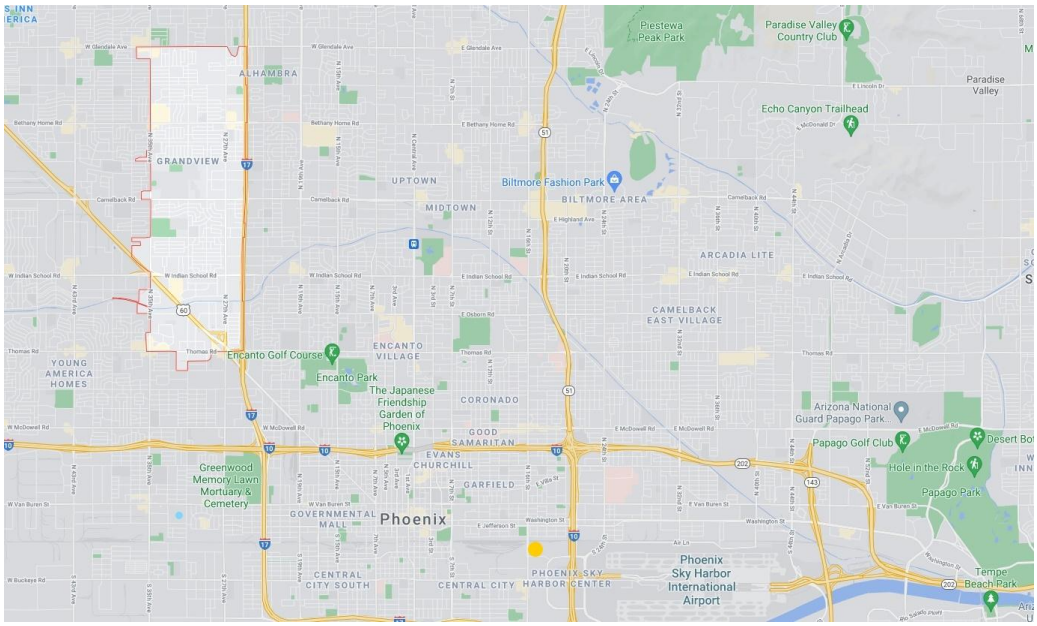
Last known zip codes of absconders at large (those associated with more than 5% of absconders at large reported here)

Zip Code	n	%
85017	66	6.57
85705	54	5.38
85006	53	5.28
85021	51	5.08

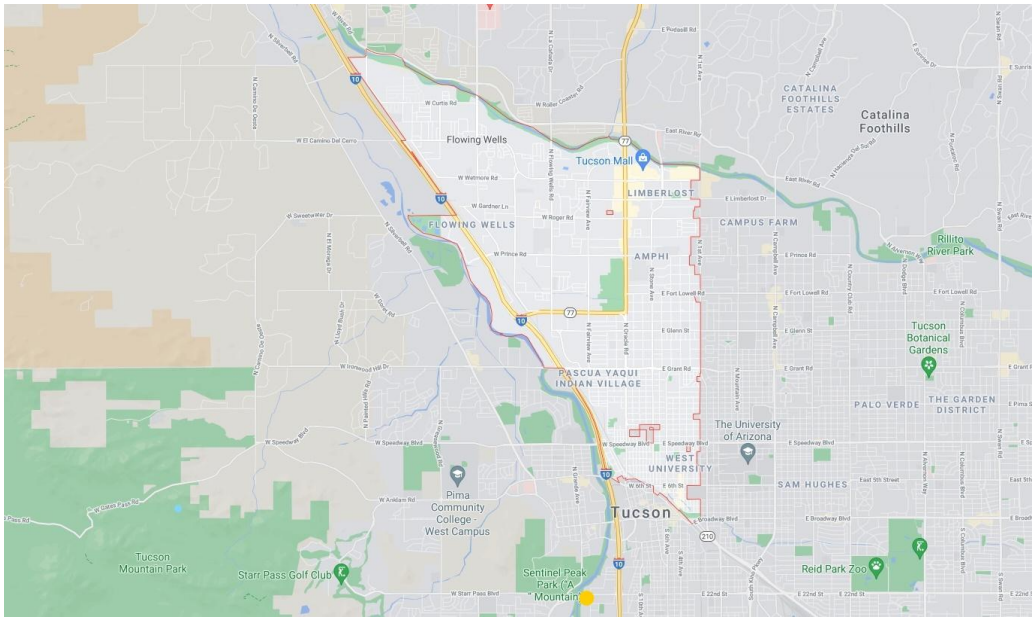
Appendix B: Last Known Zip Codes of Absconders At-Large

The zip code area is outlined in red and shaded. The nearest parole office is highlighted with a yellow dot.

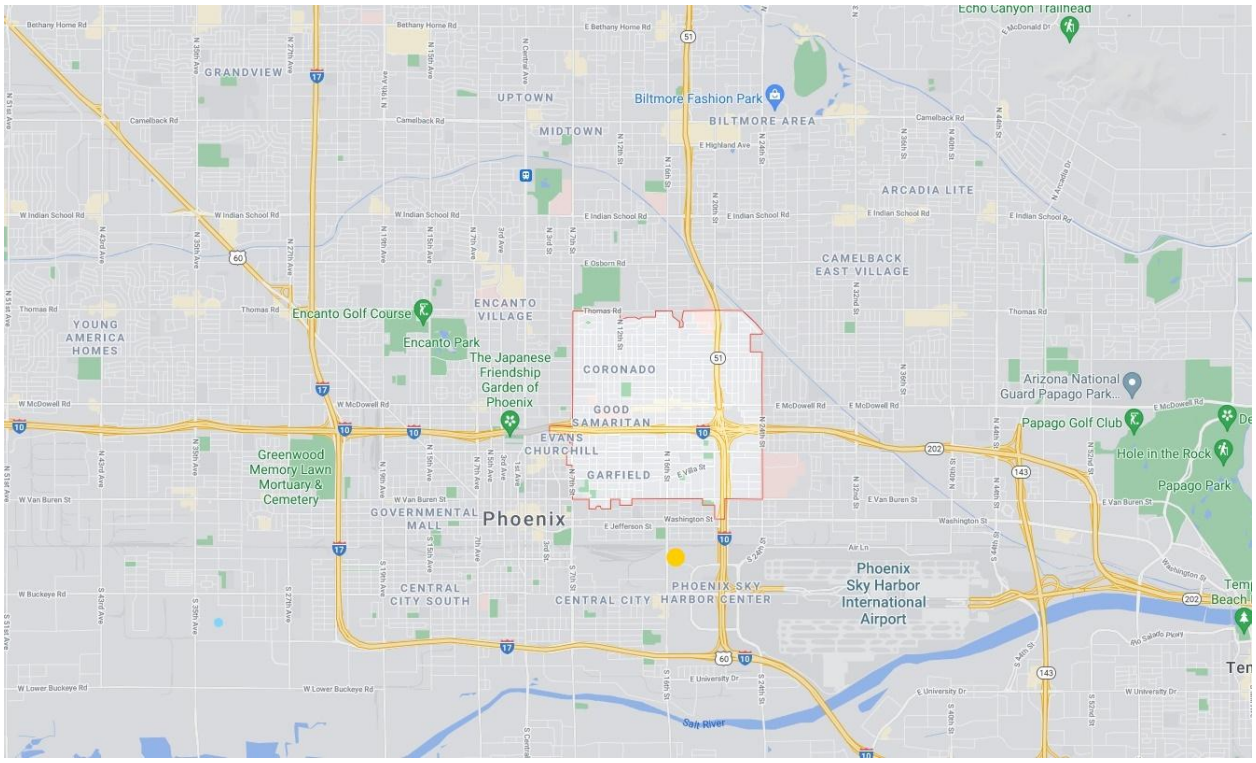
Zip code: 85017 (6.57% of absconders still at large)
Distance from parole office: about 10 miles; 1 hour and 20 mins via public transit



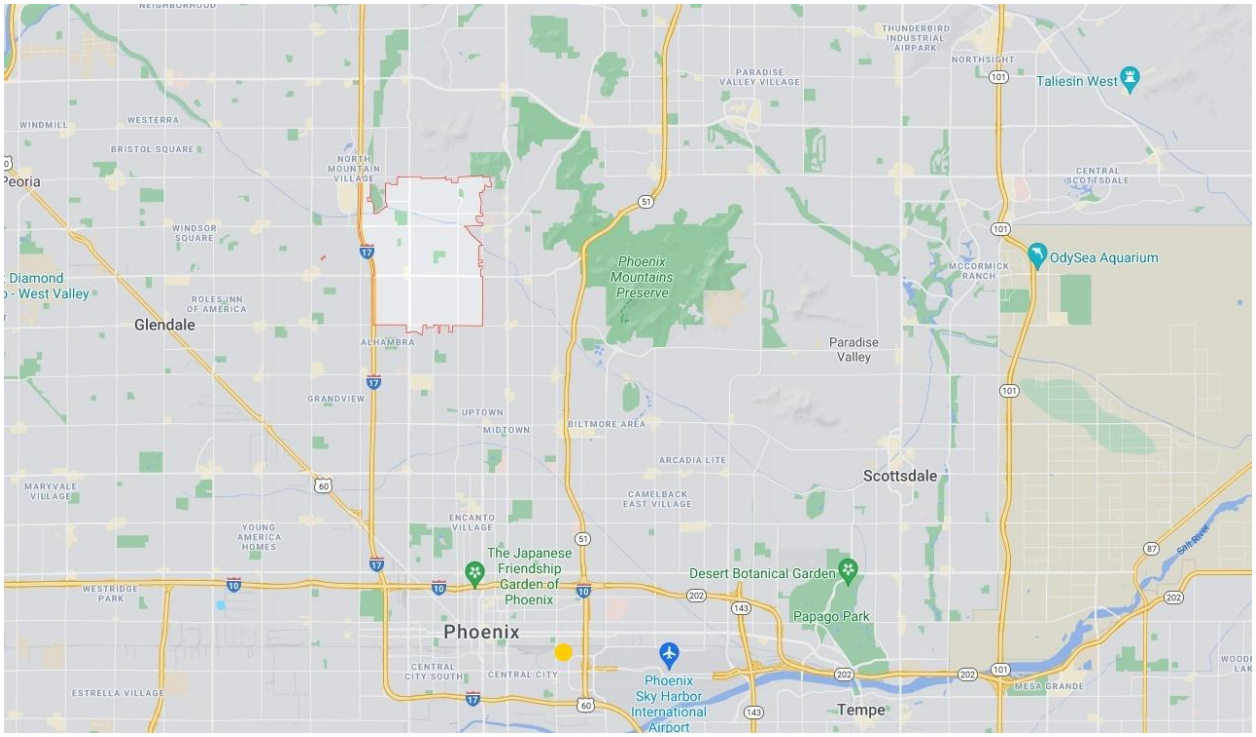
Zip code: 85705 (5.38% of absconders still at-large)
Distance from parole office: about 7 miles; 1 hour and 20 minutes via public transit



Zip code: 85006 (5.28 of absconders still at-large)
Distance from parole office: about 3 miles; 20 minutes via public transit



Zip code: 85021 (5.08% of absconders still at-large)
Distance from parole office: about 15 miles; 1 hour and 25 minutes via public transit



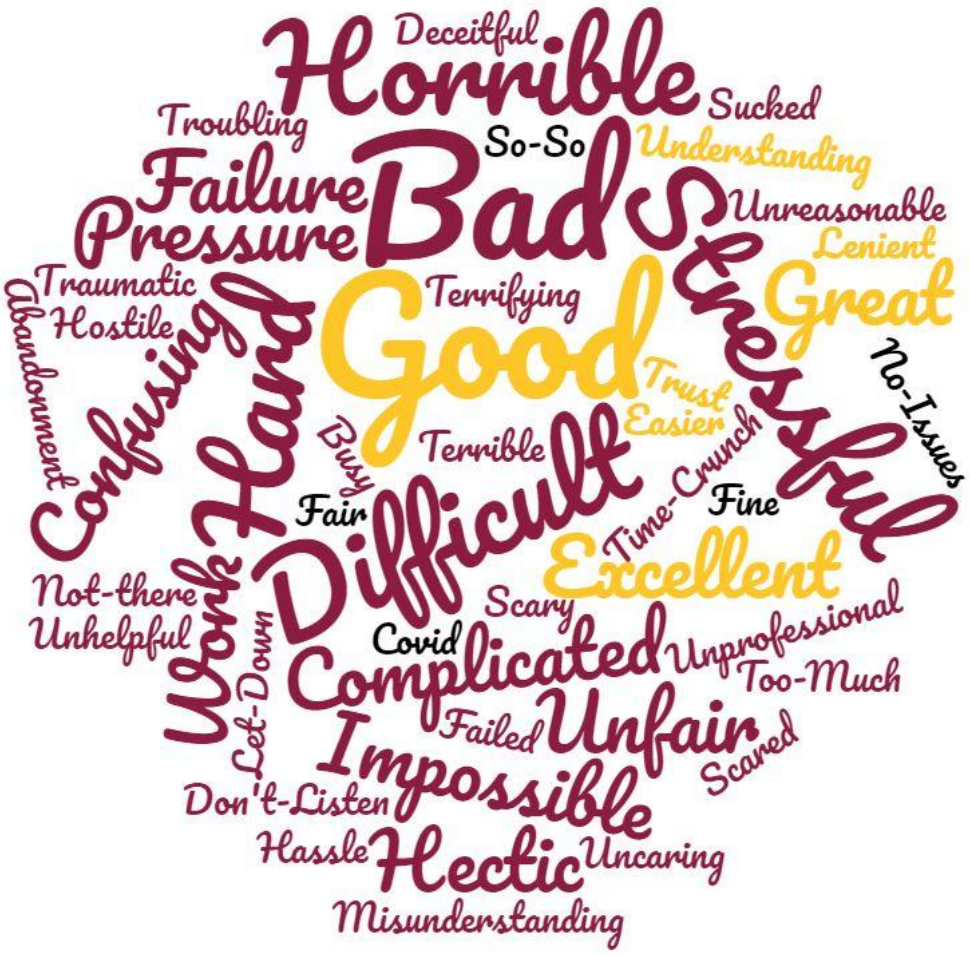
Appendix C: Full Summary of Reach-In Survey Results

To gain further insights into absconding behavior and the barriers people face to being successful on parole, a survey was issued within the first few days after intake in the women's Perryville prison complex and the men's Phoenix prison complex for 4 weeks in March-April 2021. The survey had 113 participants of which 20 were from the women's prison and 93 were from the men's prison. All participants were returning to prison due to a parole violation. 75 participants (63/%) were back in prison as a result of absconding. 32 participants (28.6%) were not back in prison as a result of absconding but due to a different parole violation. 5 participants (4.5%) were unsure if they were back in prison due to absconding. The following sections list the survey question followed by a summary of the themes that emerged from the corresponding responses.

Question 1: Overall, what is one word to describe your most recent experience on parole?
[short answer response]

Type of Response	Response Freq.: Abscond	Response Freq.: Other	Total Response Freq.
Negative	46	18	64
Positive	15	8	23
Neutral	12	5	15
Other (e.g., did not report)	2	0	2

The following word cloud depicts the most commonly used words by all participants to describe the overall community supervision experience in answer to the above question. The larger the word is in the word cloud, the more often it appeared in the responses.



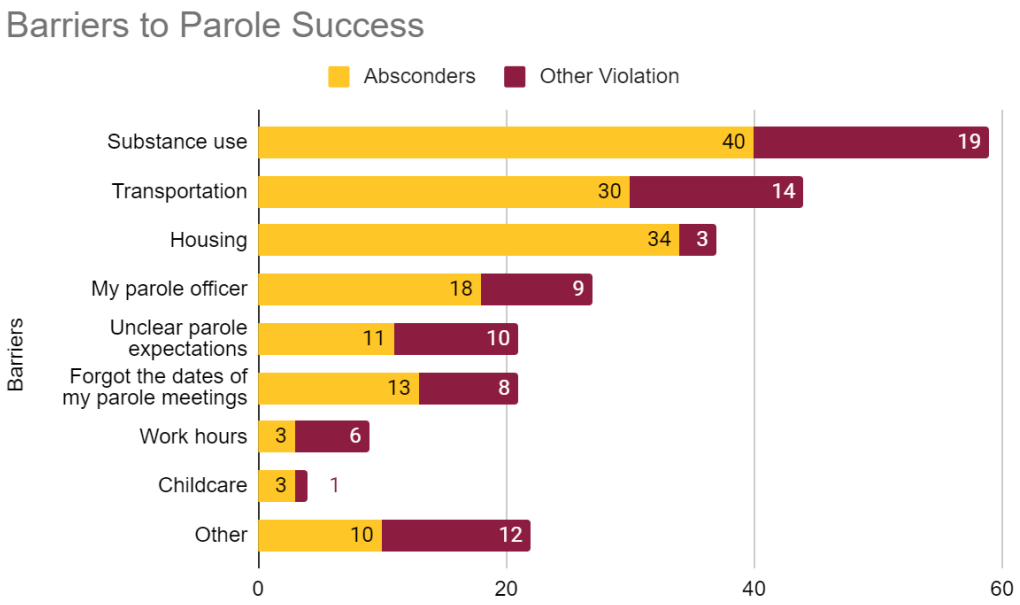
Question 1a: Why is that?

[short answer response]

Response Category	Subcategory	Subcategory Freq: Abscond	Subcategory Freq.: Other	Category Freq.: Abscond	Category Freq.: Other
Negative experiences with parole staff	Issues with parole administration staff	1	0	**34**	**10**
	Unsupportive parole officer	26	7		
	Poor communication from parole officer	7	3		
Overwhelming parole expectations	**---**			**27**	**8**
Struggles with universal needs	Housing struggles	5	1	**11**	**3**
	Transportation struggles	3	2		
	Employment struggles	2	0		
	Struggles obtaining needed IDs	1	0		
Personal choice	Never reported	3	0	**7**	**0**
	Preferred to serve remaining sentence in prison	4	0		
Personal failure (admitting to making bad choices or not taking responsibility)	**---**			**5**	**2**

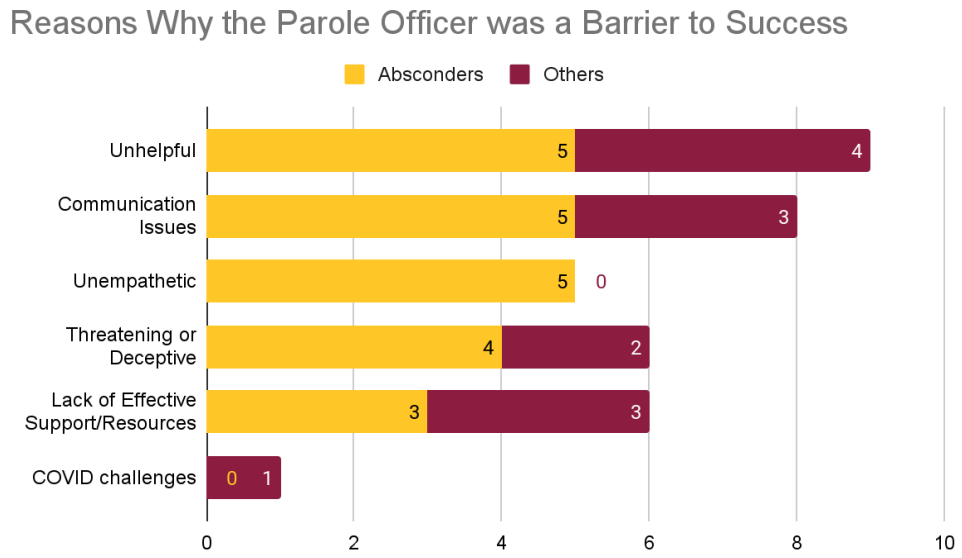
Substance use struggles	**---**			**5**	**1**
Personal struggles (fell back in with bad peers, lack of family support, struggled to ask for help)	**---**			**4**	**0**
COVID Struggles	**---**			**2**	**0**
Positive/ Neutral Experiences	Positive experience with parole process generally	14	4	**32**	**7**
	Positive parole officer interactions	9	3		
	Reasonable expectations	2	0		
	Stable housing	2	0		
	Stable employment	4	0		
	Positive experience with programming	1	0		

Question 2: Which of the following acted as barriers to you successfully completing parole? Please check all that apply.
[checkbox options with a write in “other” option]



Responses in the “Other” category included struggles related to not having a phone, not having an ID, COVID, physical and mental health problems, finding employment, as well as problems with family, sponsors, and friends.

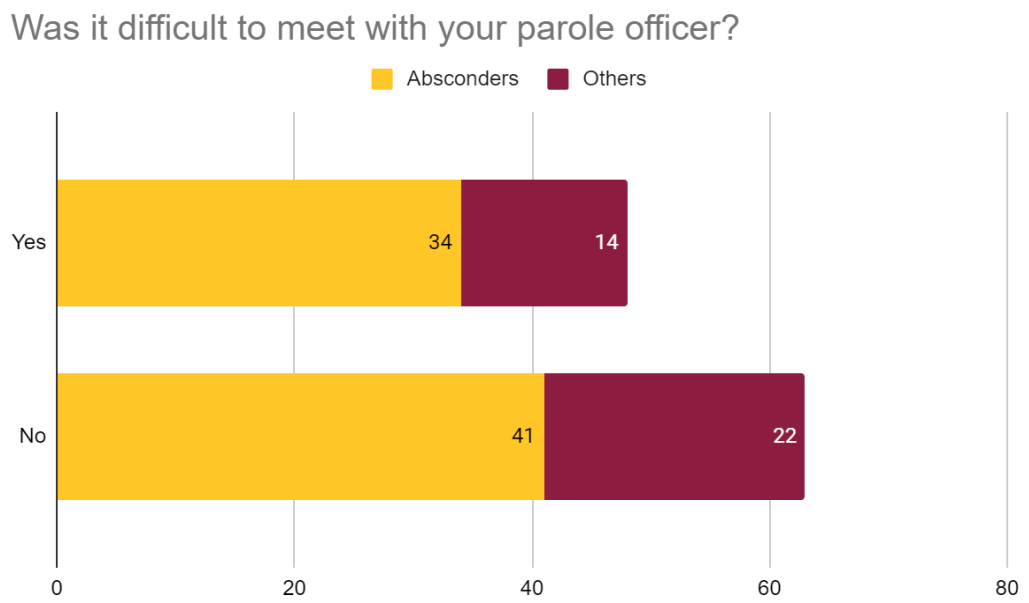
Question 2a: If you said “My parole officer” in the last question, please briefly explain why.
[short answer response]



Question 2b: Which was the biggest challenge you faced in being successful on parole?
[short answer response]

Response Category	Subcategory	Subcategory Freq. Abscond	Subcategory Freq. Other	Category Freq. Abscond	Category Freq.: Other
Struggles with universal needs	Transportation	13	2	**30**	**6**
	Housing	11	2		
	Finding employment	4	0		
	Financial struggles	2	2		
Struggles with parole	Accessing resources (programming etc)	5	2	**41**	**18**
	Parole officer	15	4		
	Parole expectations	16	4		
	Conflicts with work hours	2	0		
	Communication issues with officer	3	8		
Substance use struggles	**---**			**15**	**8**
Other personal/ family struggles	**---**			**4**	**4**
Mental health (stress/ anxiety)	**---**			**2**	**3**
COVID	**---**			**1**	**1**
N/A	No challenges	1	1	**4**	**1**
	Never reported	3	0		

Question 3: Was it difficult to meet with your parole officer?
[yes/no response]



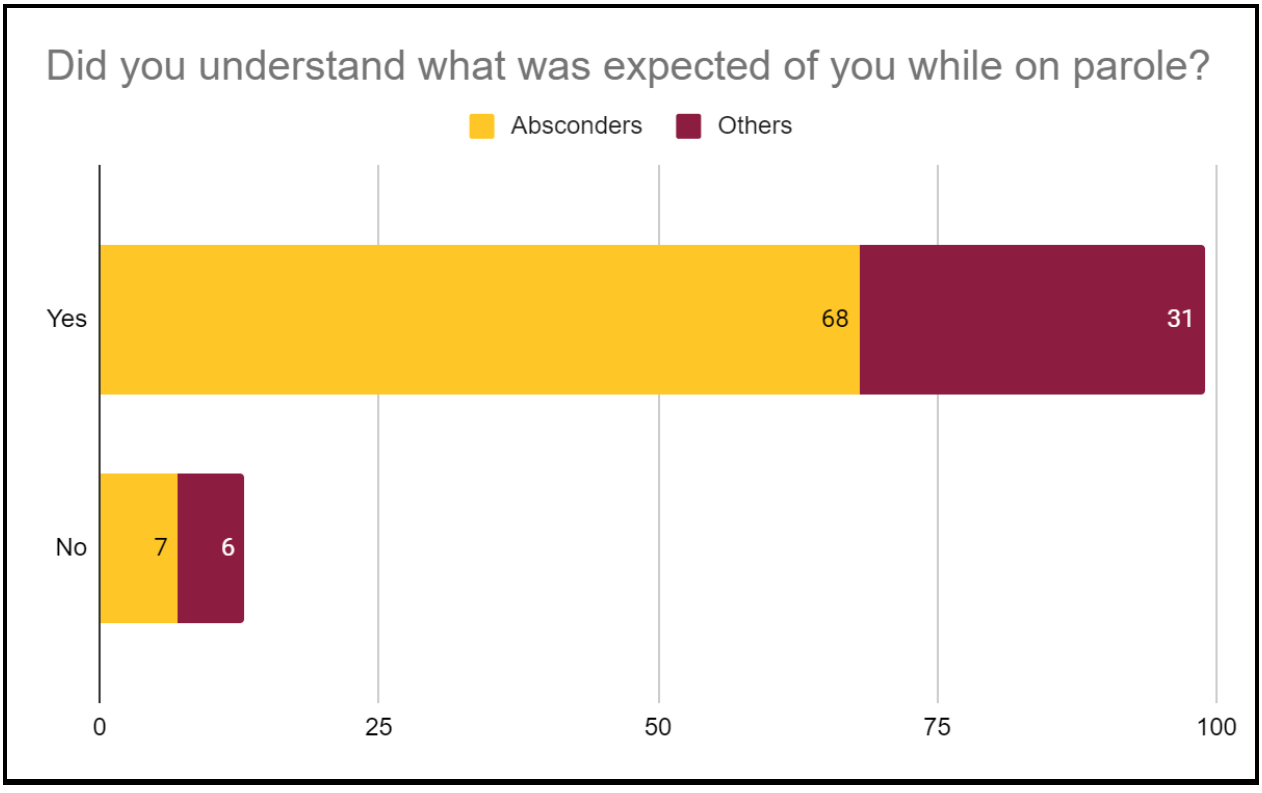
Question 3a: If yes, what difficulties did you face?
[short answer response]

Response Category	Subcategory	Subcategory Freq.: Abscond	Subcategory Freq: Other	Category Freq.: Abscond	CAtegory Freq.: Other
Parole	Parole expectations	0	1	**15**	**5**
	Unsupportive parole officer	6	1		
	Poor communication from parole officer	9	3		
Transportation	**---**			**15**	**4**

Other logistical issues	No working phone	3	1	**6**	**1**
	Couldn't find office	2	0		
	Conflicting work hours	1	0		
Other personal issues	Financial struggles	0	2	**1**	**4**
	Trouble adjusting post-release	1	1		
	Family issues	0	1		
COVID	**---**			**1**	**2**
Substance use	**---**			**2**	**0**

Question 4: Did you understand what was expected of you while on parole?

[yes/no response]



Question 4a: If no, why not?
[short answer response]

Response Category	Response Freq.: Abscond	Response Freq.: Other	Total Response Freq.
Misunderstood/was confused by the conditions	**5**	**4**	**9**
Communication issue with parole officer	**2**	**1**	**3**
Parole officer acted confusingly (differently than what was explained in the orientation or kept changing expectations)	**2**	**1**	**3**
Personal choice to not take the time to understand them	**1**	**1**	**2**
Not in the right mental or emotional state to understand them	**0**	**1**	**1**

Question 5: How could your parole officer better help you to successfully complete parole next time?
[short answer response]

Response Category	Subcategory	Subcategory Freq.: Abscond	Subcategory Freq.: Other	Category Freq.: Abscond	Category Freq.: Other
Communication	Increase accessibility/ frequency of communication	10	4	**18**	**10**
	Improve quality of communication	8	6		

Parole officer approach	Use a more coach-like/ emphatic approach	28	13	**30**	**13**
	Be more strict	1	0		
	Establish the relationship with the parolee while still in prison	1	0		
Support universal needs	Housing help	7	2	**14**	**5**
	Employment help	3	3		
	Transportation help	4	0		
Offer more programming opportunities	**---**			**8**	**8**
Offer more time to complete parole requirements/more reasonable or flexible conditions	**---**			**7**	**0**
No suggestions	Personal choice/failure	5	2	**9**	**7**
	There won't be a next time	1	2		
	I don't know	2	1		
	Nothing (general)	1	2		

Question 6: In your own words, why are you back in prison right now?
[short answer response]

Response Category	Subcategory	Subcategory Freq.: Abscond	Subcategory Freq.: Other	Category Freq.: Abscond	Category Freq.: Other
Personal accountability	Absconding	19	2	**41**	**6**
	Personal choice/bad decision	22	4		
Substance use	**---**			**23**	**9**
Struggles with parole	Communication issues with parole officer	7	7	**18**	**13**
	Unsupportive parole officer	5	3		
	Unclear expectations	2	1		
	Parole (officer/ process) was deceitful or misleading	4	2		
Struggles with universal needs	Housing	9	2	**13**	**15**
	Transportation	3	0		
	Employment	1	0		
Personal reasons	Emotional reasons (scared, overwhelmed)	5	4	**11**	**6**
	Family reasons	6	2		
Don't know	**---**			**0**	**2**

Appendix D: Example Quotes

The following quotes were pulled from the reach-in survey to provide additional context around the common themes that emerged during the analyses.

Theme 1: Many absconders report positive or neutral experiences on parole.

"[My experience on parole can be described as] excellent"

"[My experience on parole can be described as] lenient and understanding"

"[My experience on parole can be described as] great"

Theme 2: Many absconders take responsibility for their reincarceration.

"[I am back in prison right now because of] my own fault"

"[I am back in prison right now because] I was given multiple chances to get right, but didn't."

"[I am back in prison right now because] I was given chances, but I did not follow through."

Theme 3: Most absconders clearly understood the expectations of parole.

This was derived from a yes/no question so no quotes are available.

Theme 4: Absconders' housing struggles are a common barrier to parole success.

"The halfway house was filled with drugs, people using all the time. The fire truck would show up every other day."

"[My parole officer] wanted me to go to a halfway house where people are using drugs. I refused to go there, it was just a bad place."

Theme 5: Absconders frequently struggle with substance use as a barrier to parole success.

"[My parole officer] gave me chances, but it was hard for me as a drug addict to follow through..."

"[I am back in prison because I was] peer pressured to use drugs. I did not want to break the law."

Theme 6: Transportation is one of the top barriers that absconders said prevented them from being successful on parole.

“I absconded because I had transportation issues…”

“[It was difficult to meet with my parole officer because I had] no car available.”

Theme 7: A punitive officer approach leads parolees to struggle.

“I cannot read & write, my PO did not care, they need to listen,... work with me.”

“I was not given the proper resources & guidance to succeed.”

“... My PO would threaten me to go back to prison all the time, which made me feel anxious, gave me a lot of anxiety.”

Theme 8: Absconders face communication issues with their community supervision officer as a barrier to parole success.

“For the 1st time in 46 years I was sober and we just had a communication issue.”

“ [My parole experience was] troubling because my PO told me to call him on Monday to check in for rehab, but when I called [and] he was off [with] no one covering for him, I went back to drugs.”

“[My parole experience was] traumatic because of the lack of communication...”

Theme 9: Absconders generally understand parole expectations but feel overwhelmed and stressed by them.

“ [I] can't keep up with everything”

“Too many things needed and expected to do in [a] short time.”

Theme 10: Absconders’ feelings of fear and anxiety contribute to their parole outcomes.

“I used, left home, and got scared of coming back to prison so I ran”

‘[My experience on parole was] stressful [because I was] always afraid of violating”