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The American Guaranteed Income Studies: Durham, North Carolina

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The American Guaranteed Income Studies: Durham, North Carolina

Executive Summary

In March of 2022, the City of Durham, in partnership with StepUp Durham, launched Excel, a guaranteed income (GI) program spearheaded by then-Mayor Steve Schewel and Mayors for a Guaranteed Income. Championed by former Mayor Elaine O'Neal and current Mayor Leonardo Williams, the program provided \$600 per month in unconditional cash payments to 109 participants for a period of one year. Eligible individuals included those who had been released from incarceration within the 5 years prior to the program application's launch and had an income at or below 60% of the Durham-Chapel Hill area median income (AMI) in 2021. Given the well-known structural barriers to successful reentry after incarceration, including housing discrimination, limited job prospects, and cultural stigma, Excel was designed to shore up the financial lives of returning citizens, providing a stable income that could promote economic mobility.

The Center for Guaranteed Income Research (CGIR) conducted a mixed-methods randomized controlled trial (RCT) to evaluate the impacts of GI on various indicators of well-being. The study included the 109 participants receiving the GI and a control group of 138 that participated in research activities but did not receive the monthly payments. The sample was overwhelmingly male (85% in control and 75% in treatment), with just over 40% reporting having children at home. Most were non-Hispanic and African American or Black, and approximately two-thirds were single. Approximately 80% of the sample reported having a high school diploma or less, and the median household income prior to the program launch was approximately \$8,600 in the control group and \$10,500 in treatment.

The evaluation of Excel was guided by the following primary research questions:

1. How does GI affect participants' quality of life?
2. What is the relationship between GI receipt and sense of self?
3. How does GI affect income and through what mechanisms?
4. How does GI interact with the existing social safety net?

Throughout the study, CGIR administered compensated research activities consisting of four surveys that occurred at Baseline, midpoint, the end of GI payments, and 6 months after payments had ceased. Semi-structured interviews were conducted at the midpoint. A summary of the overall findings followed by more specific findings separated into research question subparts follow.



Summary of Findings

Whereas incarceration is defined by a near total lack of agency, including a loss of control over one's time, space, and body, Excel participants experienced the GI payments as a reinstatement of their dignity as community members, able to be trusted to make their own financial decisions, be a part of their family networks, and carefully weigh their chances for upward economic mobility in a system designed without formerly incarcerated people in mind. Though their annual incomes were profoundly low, preventing them from improving their overall financial well-being, the GI recipients:

- » trended toward an improved ability to cover an unexpected \$400 expense with cash or a credit card paid in full;
- » improved their ability to help friends or family financially;
- » saved significantly more than the control group;
- » had significantly higher food security than the control group;
- » were significantly less likely to stay in two places in the past month, an indicator of greater housing stability;
- » were significantly more likely to report staying in their own rental unit or owned home than the control group during the program; and
- » were significantly more likely to maintain full-time employment than the control group.

Financial stressors, coupled with the trauma of incarceration and social stigma, can create substantial mental and physical health complications that prevent returning citizens from connecting with family

or engaging with their communities. Several Excel participants suffered from physical disabilities related to their incarceration, and some shared their experiences of feeling like a burden, which caused stress and discord among family members. Over the course of the program, Excel participants experienced largely positive trends in their levels of stress, mental health, and family connections. Notably, compared to the control condition, participants:

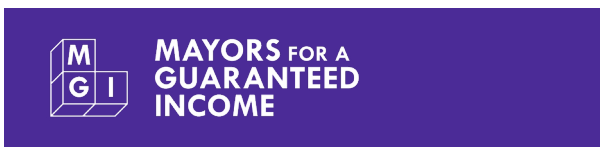
- » trended toward lower levels of stress, anxiety, and depression;
- » had significant positive increases in household organization and harmony; and
- » reported significantly greater physical health limitations, yet also reported significantly better general health.

The experience of the Excel program appears to have impacted the mindset of many participants. As financial pressures were attenuated, family dynamics were more peaceful, and stress lifted, participants thought more about their own goals, what they wanted to achieve, and how they wanted to show up in their families and communities. Participants were asked to consider how difficult it is to engage in a number of health and economic behaviors that could put them at risk of not achieving those goals. Those receiving GI reported higher hope for their futures than those not receiving GI. Both groups had low rates of recidivism which did not differ in a statistically significant way, but participants receiving the GI reported less difficulty in:

- » providing food for themselves;
- » having enough money to support themselves;
- » staying alcohol free;
- » staying drug free;
- » staying away from criminal activity; and
- » avoiding a probation or parole violation.

GI programs rest on tenants of self-determination and human dignity, trusting individuals to chart their own course. This is a distinct departure from traditional social safety net programs and the carceral system that operate from tenets of racism, paternalism, surveillance, and distrust. This difference was profoundly felt by Excel participants, one of whom said:

The first time I used the money from the pilot, it was fulfilling that I can be able to, to help, to help my family. It was really fulfilling. That time my daughter, um, was cheering ... I was able to buy their, to buy my daughter cheerleading clothes.... It was—I was so happy. I was, I was so in joy like, like I was able to do something, something.



Founded by Michael D. Tubbs, MGI is a coalition of mayors advocating for a guaranteed income to lift all of our communities and build a more resilient, just America. Since launching in 2020, MGI has grown its ranks from 11 to over 125 mayors, supported the launch of 50-plus guaranteed income pilots across the country, and delivered more than \$250 million in direct, unconditional relief to everyday Americans. MGI has also launched two affiliates, Counties for a Guaranteed Income and United for a Guaranteed Income Action Fund. MGI’s work has ensured that guaranteed income spreads from a single moment in Stockton, CA to a national movement—pushing the conversation forward in cities, state capitals, and Congress.

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Background

The City of Durham's historical evolution from a tobacco- and cotton-centric economy to a hub of medical and technical research is a tale of progress amid enduring challenges. Initially, cotton played a pivotal role in Durham's economic development, driving agricultural prosperity in the region and providing the raw material necessary for the burgeoning textile industry. Cotton was also primarily used for packing and shipping tobacco products, ensuring its quality and safety during transport. The agricultural and industrial synergy spurred Durham's growth into a significant commercial hub in the South. Despite the presence of cotton, the city was historically anchored by its tobacco industry, with the American Tobacco Company, once the world's largest cigarette maker, driving economic growth from the late 19th century (Porter, 1969). Later, as the detrimental health impacts of tobacco became evident, and the industry's prominence declined, Durham pivoted towards high-tech industries, driven by the development of the Research Triangle Park in the mid-20th century. Today, the city's urban core is a blend of education, healthcare, and technology institutions situated alongside its historical essence.

In more ways than one, it was the interplay between geology, geography, and socio-economic development that deeply influenced patterns of residential segregation and the emergence of the city's "Black Wall Street." The tobacco and cotton industries demanded substantial cheap labor, initially forced upon enslaved African people and later shifted to free but disenfranchised and segregated poor communities of color. Discriminatory housing policies entrenched residential segregation, confining African Americans to less desirable areas of Durham. Amid these broader economic shifts, the city's African American community carved out a four-block long corridor on Parrish Street, known as Black Wall Street, by the early 20th century. The district became a hub of Black entrepreneurship,

with landmarks such as the North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance Company, the largest Black-owned insurance firm in America at the time. It symbolized prosperity and self-reliance, validating African Americans' potential for economic independence despite racial segregation and discrimination (Bull City 150, 2018).

Discriminatory policies persisted well into the mid-20th century, imposing new challenges. Urban renewal and infrastructure projects targeting Black neighborhoods led to the destruction of Hayti, a vibrant center of Black cultural and economic life (Whittemore, 2018). The construction of North Carolina Highway 147, known as the Durham Freeway, strategically routed through Hayti under the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956, legitimized the displacement of thousands of residents under the guise of economic development. The impact was profound: the freeway not only physically cleaved the community, disrupting its economic and social fabric, but also dismantled the dense network of Black-owned businesses and services that had been the backbone of Hayti's economy. The legislative and planning decisions behind the Durham Freeway serve as an illustration of how urban planning under the aegis of infrastructural developments can perpetuate racial disparities and inflict lasting damage on minority communities (Bull City 150, 2018; Whittemore, 2018).

Today, the Raleigh-Durham Research Triangle Park (RTP), the largest research park in North America, is a center of academia, industry, and government encompassing multiple counties. Capitalizing on the synergies between top-tier universities—North Carolina State University, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and Duke University—and a highly educated workforce, the RTP has emerged as a center for innovation and economic development, with over 250 businesses ranging from multinational research and development firms to tech startups. At the same time, the legacy of economic and residential segregation has left a significant portion of the population behind, disconnected from the regional and national economy, lacking access to economic and social capital, and experiencing limited job growth. People who have endured incarceration are among those who feel this divide most heavily.

Mass Incarceration

Despite having less than 5% of the global population, the US has 20% of the world's incarcerated population, with nearly one out of every 100 people incarcerated in 2020 (Wagner & Bertram, 2020). The US incarcerates more people per capita than almost any other country in the world, with an estimated 614 people per 100,000 behind bars (Widra & Herring, 2024). Further, most individual US states have a higher incarceration rate than the majority of other nations. For instance, Turkmenistan has the fifth-highest national incarceration rate in the world, at 576 per 100,000, but this is still lower than that of 28 US states, including North Carolina, whose incarceration rate is 617 per 100,000 (Widra & Herring, 2024). Incarceration rates in the US were not always this high. In 1972, the incarceration rate was about 93 per 100,000 people (Nellis, 2024). This rate began to climb in the mid-1970s, growing 400% between 1970 and 2000 (Vera Institute of Justice, n.d.). Rates reached their apex in 2009, when 1,553,574 people were incarcerated in US prisons, reflecting a 700% increase since 1972 (Ghandnoosh et al., 2023; Vera Institute of Justice, n.d.). This trend resulted from policies and systems that more severely punished people for a range of criminalized behaviors, including non-violent drug-related offenses; the efficacy

of this system at incarcerating so many people, especially poor men of color, while not improving safety, is what has earned the practice the name mass incarceration (Alexander, 2010).

A range of historical and policy-driven factors, including mass incarceration, have contributed to persistent racial disparities in income, education, and employment opportunities within Durham. For instance, policies from the War on Drugs and tough-on-crime initiatives were adopted by many politicians to make them appear proactive about reducing crime and violence, but they disproportionately targeted communities of color, exacerbating the cycle of incarceration among these populations (Eisen, 2019; National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2014).

Racial disparities in incarceration are pronounced in both North Carolina and Durham, and resonate with national patterns. Despite African Americans constituting about 23% of the state's population, they represent a disproportionate 52% of those incarcerated in state prisons. An NC Central research study on those incarcerated in Durham County jail(s) over the period 2014–2019 determined that Black residents were disproportionately represented, making up 69% of jail admissions while only accounting for 37% of the county's population. In contrast, White residents, at 43% of the population, accounted for just 16% of admissions. The study also found that over 70% of bed days were attributed to Black individuals (Taylor et al., 2021). The dynamics of readmission also play a crucial role in the composition of the jail population. Of those released in 2014, 67% were readmitted by 2019. The demographic most likely to be readmitted was Black men aged 35 to 64.

Rates of incarceration have been in a slight decline since 2010, reaching their lowest level in 50 years in 2020 (Nellis, 2024). From the peak in 2009, overall incarceration rates dropped 25% and rates of imprisonment for Black men dropped 39% from 2002 to 2021 (Ghandnoosh et al., 2023). However, rates of incarceration remain among the highest in the world and, in some states, are rebounding as COVID-19 pandemic restrictions expire (Nellis, 2024).

Poverty and Incarceration

Many Americans believe that committing a crime is a personal choice, indicative primarily of a person's character, intelligence, and nature. In this mindset, a person had the opportunity to not commit a crime, so if they are arrested and incarcerated, they must have done something wrong and deserve this outcome. However, data shows that poverty continues to be a large driver, and even a predictor, of criminal justice involvement, heavily influencing who is most likely to be arrested, convicted, and incarcerated.

Mass incarceration in the US disproportionately targets and harms poor people and people of color (Alexander, 2010; Reiman & Leighton, 1995). It is critical to note that this does not reflect a higher incidence of criminal activity attributable simply and uncritically to race (Reiman & Leighton, 1995). For example, studies show that while White people use and sell drugs at a higher rate than Black people, about 90% of people incarcerated for drug-related matters are Black or African American (Taylor, 2021). Further, one study found that in 2014, the average income of people experiencing incarceration prior to their imprisonment was a mere \$19,185, with lower incomes for incarcerated Black men and incarcerated women of all races (Rabuy & Kopf, 2015).

Poverty increases the likelihood of poor outcomes at all stages of involvement with police, courts, and correctional facilities. Mass incarceration targets poor people before, during, and after detention. First, being poor increases one's likelihood of being arrested, because poor people and communities are policed much more heavily than middle-class and affluent communities. Being arrested on its own can cause significant financial hardship. A person experiencing incarceration can lose their job, housing, and transportation due to an inability to make payments from behind bars. In addition, hiring legal counsel or posting bail can exhaust a person's financial resources.

Second, being poor is a significant determinant of whether or not someone will be incarcerated and whether or not they will be found guilty of committing a crime. This happens in two ways. First, people living in poverty are more likely to experience pretrial detention because they cannot afford to post the set bail which would enable them to remain in the community while awaiting the resolution of their court case. In the US, money is literally a "Get out of Jail" card. The Bureau of Justice Statistics (Zang, 2024) reports that, in 2023 in the US,

70% of the jail population (467,600) was unconvicted and awaiting court action on a current charge or being held in jail for other reasons. The remaining 30% (196,600) was convicted and either serving a sentence or awaiting sentencing on a conviction.

A study by the Data Collaborative for Justice (Taylor et al., 2021) found that in Durham:

After adjusting for inflation, average bail amounts from 2014 to 2019 increased over the project period from \$7,051 in 2014, peaking at \$10,038 in 2016, and declining to \$9,581 in 2019. For all bail amount categories, length of stay increased, from 36% to 56% higher from 2014 to 2019.

Additionally, people living in poverty are more likely to be convicted and more likely to be incarcerated as a result of a guilty conviction, largely due to their inability to afford high-quality legal representation. However, it is also symptomatic of bias in the sentencing process, which often saddles poor people, especially poor people of color, with more severe sentences (Ghandnoosh et al., 2023).

Poverty continues to negatively impact people while they are incarcerated. Strained corrections budgets and increased privatization of prisons has forced incarcerated people and their families to spend significant amounts of money to maintain basic hygiene, contact each other and legal counsel, and access goods like clean socks and additional food items. The prices of these goods are not only often higher than the market price outside of prisons and jails, they have increased exponentially over the past few years as well, partially due to pandemic-era inflation. However, the prices also reflect privatization, in which private vendors establish commercial relationships with prisons and jails (Jallow, 2023). Often, incarcerated individuals must rely on friends and relatives to pay for these items—

the same friends and relatives who may be planning to provide housing, food, and other essentials upon their release. This not only causes immense financial strain for these supportive networks, but also generates feelings of guilt and indebtedness in returning citizens. Many prisons either offer or require incarcerated people to work while detained, on-site at the facility or in work release programs. However, these programs often pay pennies per hour, if they pay anything at all. In 2017 in North Carolina, people who were incarcerated could only earn between five and 38 cents per hour for their work assignment (Sawyer, 2017).

Finally, poverty significantly impacts people's ability to stay out of jail or prison after release. While being released from incarceration is a relief and a joy itself, the time period immediately following release is marked by immense precarity and scarcity, especially for poor people. Upon release from incarceration, returning citizens are given back whatever clothing and property they arrived with, and rarely anything else. If arrested in the summer and released in the winter, they won't have a winter coat or gloves. Without a car or often even money for public transit, people must either rely on a friend or relative for a ride. In rural areas or places without public transit, many may need to walk to wherever they are going next.

Reentry and Recidivism

Poverty also heavily influences a person's risk for recidivism, which the National Institute of Justice (2024) defines as "a person's relapse into criminal behavior, often after the person receives sanctions or undergoes intervention for a previous crime." This could include arrest and/or incarceration for a new charge or violations of the conditions of probation or parole following release from incarceration for a prior conviction. While incarcerated, many people lose the resources they had prior to arrest and consequently need to rely heavily on others for shelter, food, money, and transportation upon release. Often, they are leaning on the same relatives and friends who financially and emotionally supported them throughout their incarceration. Discriminatory housing and hiring policies, as well as landlord and employer biases, can make it extremely challenging for returning citizens to secure income and housing upon release, heightening the precarity of this already volatile time. The resulting stress can be enormous, especially if finding employment and housing are stipulations of probation or parole, as is the case in North Carolina (North Carolina Criminal Procedure Act [henceforth NCCPA], n.d.)

Moreover, release from incarceration does not always mean that one's sentence has been fully served. Upon release, many people are faced with a rash of fines and fees, many of which, in a cruel twist of fate, involve them paying for court costs incurred to convict them, restitution to any victim(s), and a monthly probation fee of \$40. In North Carolina, an estimated 70,000–80,000 people are on parole or probation, many of whom have already served time in a correctional facility (National Institute of Corrections, n.d.; Prison Policy Initiative, 2019). While fines and fees vary by state, offense, and the amount of time spent in court, it is estimated that 80–85% of those who were formerly incarcerated will have outstanding debts upon their release (Hunt & Nichol, 2017).

In North Carolina, failure to pay these fees can constitute a violation of probation that has its own additional harsh penalties including prolonging of probation, up to an 8% interest rate being added

on accrued unpaid fees, loss of public benefits like SNAP¹ and TANF,² suspension of a driver's license, loss of the right to vote or run for political office, and even reincarceration (NCCPA, n.d.). Further, a 2019 study by the American Civil Liberties Union, North Carolina chapter (ACLU-NC) found that "courts often do not appoint legal counsel for people who face incarceration for nonpayment of fines and fees. Many people are unconstitutionally sentenced to jail without being provided a lawyer or a meaningful process to voluntarily waive counsel." These penalties do nothing to actually collect payment for these fees, and in fact make it even harder for people to pay them. This frustrating cycle of debt and imprisonment leads many formerly incarcerated people to feel that the criminal justice system is a trap, profiting off of their poverty and powerlessness.

The ways in which mass incarceration continues to punish people perpetually lock them into a unique form of citizenship, never again granted membership in or access to society in the same way (Alexander, 2010). Miller & Stewart (2017) term this carceral citizenship, in which alternate standards of justice and basic rights apply to formerly incarcerated people than those which govern the rest of the society.

Indeed, recidivism rates remain high. Based on data from 8,000 people released from the Durham County jail in 2014, one study found that

From 2014 through 2019, 16% of this cohort was readmitted to jail once, 24% were readmitted 2–4 times, 12% were readmitted 5–7 times, and 15% were readmitted 8 or more times. Overall, 67% of the individuals in the 2014 cohort were readmitted to jail at least one time (Taylor et al., 2021, p. 10).

The City of Durham estimates that about 700 people return to Durham after release from state prison every year, and of these "25% re-enter the justice system within 100 days after release from the Durham County jail and 46% re-enter after one year" (City of Durham, n.d.). This seemingly unending cycle of recidivism is complicated, shaped by many social, political, economic, and even personal factors. However, decades of research demonstrate that poverty is one of the biggest predictors of who is incarcerated and re-incarcerated (Reiman & Leighton, 1995).

Incarceration and re-incarceration have a profound impact on individuals, as well as their families and communities. The National Institute of Justice estimated that in 2017, between 1.7 and 2.7 million children in the US had a parent currently or previously incarcerated (Martin, 2017). Other data suggest that number is even higher, with over 5 million children experiencing parental incarceration in their lifetime (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2016). Having an incarcerated parent has been shown to increase mental distress and depression, disrupt social psychological development, hinder educational

1 Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.

2 Temporary Assistance for Needy Families.



achievements, interrupt parent-child bonding, and increase the risk for childhood poverty (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2016; Martin, 2017). Incarceration uproots individuals and creates an immense amount of instability in their lives and those of their families and networks. People who are incarcerated may lose their jobs, housing, transportation, social connections, and more. Being incarcerated can lead to adverse physical and mental health outcomes. People who are incarcerated are significantly more likely to suffer from myriad chronic conditions including asthma, high blood pressure, hepatitis, tuberculosis, depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, and bipolar disorder (NIHCM, 2023). Research shows that one year behind bars can shave over two years off of one's life expectancy (NIHCM, 2023).

Context and Demographics

In Durham, the history and current state of mass incarceration contrast sharply with the city's image of prosperity, innovation, and progress. The industries that have allowed Durham to thrive economically have been the same ones that have pushed many, especially poor people of color, into poverty. Given the significant role that poverty plays in determining involvement in the criminal-legal system, GI programs may have the potential to alleviate some of the financial hardships that entrench people in the cycle of recidivism. To this end, the City of Durham launched the Excel GI program in partnership with StepUp Durham in March 2022 (StepUp Durham, n.d.). The program provided \$600 per month in unconditional cash payments to 109 formerly incarcerated people for one year. To be eligible, individuals must have been released from incarceration within the past 5 years and have an income at or below 60% of the 2021 Durham-Chapel Hill average median income.

In discussing the potential of the program, the Mayor's office said:

Justice involvement comes with many collateral consequences. Individuals often struggle to find employment and stable housing. These financial hardships may also be

borne by family members and may place added strain on these important relationships. We believe a guaranteed income can help ensure a successful transition home by providing a much-needed additional source of income to give people time to build a new life and find a new way.

The average age of sample participants was 39 years in the control group and 41 years in the treatment group. The majority were male, comprising 85% in the control group and 75% in the treatment group. Racial and ethnic composition differed significantly between the groups: the control group was 88% non-Hispanic, 14% White, and 76% African American, while the treatment group was 96% non-Hispanic, 9% White, and 85% African American. Both groups had similar household sizes, averaging three members, and the average number of children per household was one. The majority of the households reported being single, at 66% in the control group and 61% in the treatment group. Nearly all households primarily spoke English at home. Over three-quarters had an education at or below high school level (79% in the control and 78% in the treatment). The control group reported an average household income of \$8,694 (Median=\$12,014), while the treatment group averaged \$10,575 (Median=\$13,877), both below the federal poverty threshold for a family of three (Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, 2021). Only half of the respondents in both groups received SNAP or other benefits.

Table 1: Participant Demographics

DURHAM, NC		CONTROL	TREATMENT
SAMPLE SIZE		138	109
AVERAGE AGE OF RESPONDENT (YEARS)		39	41
GENDER (%)	Male	85	75
	Female	14	24
	Other	1	1
AVERAGE HOUSEHOLD (HH) SIZE		3	3
CHILDREN IN HH (%)		45	41
AVERAGE NUMBER OF CHILDREN IN HH		1	1
ETHNICITY (%)	Non-Hispanic	88	96
RACE (%)	White	14	9
	African American	76	85
	American Indian/Alaska Native	0	0
	Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0	0
	Asian	0	0
	Other/Mixed	10	6
MARITAL STATUS (%)	Single	66	61
	Married	9	14
	Partnered/In-relationship	25	25

PRIMARY LANGUAGE AT HOME (%)	English	100	99
	Spanish	0	1
EDUCATION (%)	High school or less	79	78
	Associate's degree (Two-year college)	4	7
	Bachelor's degree (Four-year college)	4	2
	Trade or technical school	11	12
	Other	2	1
ANNUAL HH INCOME (\$)	Median	8,694	10,575
	Mean	12,030	13,886

Spending Data and Systems Involvement

In North Carolina, one in 12 adults have unpaid criminal court debt (Garrett, 2022); Black, Latinx, and other nonwhite populations as well as those in poverty have a higher prevalence of debt and associated sanctions with failure to pay them. One district court appearance in North Carolina carries a minimum fee of \$176, with additional potential fees ranging from \$75 for appointment of council to \$134.40 for a month of house arrest with electronic monitoring and \$600 per appearance of an expert witness (North Carolina Judicial Branch, 2024). If these fees are not paid within 40 days of conviction, a failure to comply is issued, causing a cascade of further fines and fees, potential probation violation, and/or license revocation, which only further entrap defendants in economic precarity.



Similar to many GI pilots, Excel participants largely spent the cash payments on retail sales and services, including big box stores that carry food and household items (44%). Food and groceries from supermarkets and restaurants was the second-highest reported spending category (24%); followed by housing and utilities (8%); and travel, leisure, or entertainment at 5%; financial transactions like loan or credit card payments at 3%; and healthcare, medical, miscellaneous, and educational expenses making up the remainder (Stanford Basic Income Lab, 2024). In addition to the spending tracked in the aggregate on a monthly pre-paid debit card, participants were asked to share the monthly amount spent on court-ordered obligations like fines and fees. The reported court-ordered obligations among both groups were substantial.

Theoretical Framework and Methods

All research methods were approved by the Institutional Review Board of the University of Pennsylvania and designed with input from those with personal experience of the criminal justice system.³ Given that criminalized people and their families undergo unique forms of marginalization and erasure from public life, their perspectives anchored the study's design and analysis. Although the broader body of work on unconditional cash is rooted in a theoretical framework that accounts for how chronic scarcity undermines decision-making, reduces cognitive capacity, disrupts coping (Mani et al., 2013; Shah et al., 2012), and generates a scarcity mindset (West et al., 2023), that framework is insufficient for understanding the myriad structural impediments facing formerly incarcerated people.

Therefore, this study builds on the broader theoretical framework of unconditional cash by incorporating critical approaches from Wacquant (2010), Sered (2021), Miller (2014), and Miller & Stuart (2017). More specifically, Wacquant and others have argued that the prisoner reentry field does little more than manage problem populations and extend punitive systems of containment into the community, thus perpetuating the problems that criminalized people face rather than eliminating them. Put another way, these punitive approaches extend the arm of the carceral state well beyond the conclusion of one's sentence, eroding people's humanity and diminishing possibilities for successful reentry. In this body of literature, scholars argue that criminalized people exist as a caste (Alexander, 2010), "diminished citizens" (Sered, 2021, p. 219), or carceral citizens (Miller & Stuart, 2017). Sered's concept of diminished citizenship, for example, relocates our focus from individual failings to a series of interdependent institutional processes that actively reduce the ability of subordinated groups to enjoy a range of rights and protections. Importantly, Sered conceives of diminished citizenship as an ongoing, dynamic process contingent upon a range of contextual and situational factors such as intersectional identities or institutional domains such as housing and labor markets that function as processes of exclusion, trapping a caste of diminished citizens outside the boundaries of deservedness, and leaving them governed by a shadow set of institutional arrangements rarely visible to those not experiencing the carceral state.

Miller & Stuart (2017) argue that people with criminal records do not simply suffer from weakened citizenship rights but are subject to an entirely distinct form of carceral citizenship altogether:

3 The City of Gainesville, Florida launched a similar GI program in tandem with Durham, and community members with personal experience as carceral citizens weighed in on how to approach the research in both locations.

subjecting them to unique laws (e.g., collateral consequences), responsibilities (reporting to probation officers, paying a symbolic debt to society, etc.), and providing them with access to new benefits such as reentry programming. Altogether, this body of research suggests that criminalized people live in alternate legal and socioeconomic realities that maintain their disadvantage while simultaneously contending with the stark financial picture facing everyone trapped by scarcity and material hardship.

This reality generates questions such as, “What can be done?” and, “What role can unconditional cash play?” Might a GI, even if temporary, provide a buffer for easing post-conviction/incarceration transitions? More broadly, could a GI act as a turning point in the lives of criminalized people (Laub & Sampson, 1993), creating new socio-economic trajectories or altering their carceral citizenship in ways that were previously unlikely? While research does exist on the role GI can play in reducing community violence (Calnitsky & Gonalons-Pons, 2020) and fear of community violence (Kim et al., 2024), those data do not capture the underlying mechanisms and accumulated disadvantages experienced by criminalized people receiving a GI. Therefore, this study, coupled with a similar one in Gainesville, Florida, presents the first opportunity to understand how cash may alter the shadow of carceral citizenship. To that end, the primary research questions are:

- » How does GI affect quality of life?
- » What is the relationship between GI and sense of self?
- » How does GI affect income and through what mechanisms?
- » How does GI interact with the existing safety net?
- » How does GI impact survival strategies?

Quantitative Methodology

An RCT was conducted to evaluate the impact of the GI program on the overall health and well-being of participants. The study sample comprised 247 participants selected from an initial pool of approximately 870 applicants. Eligibility criteria included individuals aged 18 and above, with annual incomes at or below 60% of the AMI, residing within Durham, NC city limits, and within five years of their most recent incarceration. Of these participants, 109 were assigned to the treatment group, receiving \$600 per month for 12 months, while 138 were assigned to the control group and did not receive any cash. Data collection occurred at four intervals: Baseline (January 2022), 6 months (August 2022), 12 months (February 2023), and 18 months (August 2023), which was 6 months after the cessation of cash disbursement. Participants were compensated for their time completing the surveys. Detailed response rates are provided in the Appendix.

A standardized framework for outlier detection and management was employed, using the winsorization method to minimize the influence of extreme values. Missing data were addressed using Multiple Imputation by Chained Equations (MICE), following Azur et al. (2011). This iterative imputation method is well-suited for complex data structures and patterns, providing accurate imputations in cases of missing data. The process involved multiple iterations ensuring a diverse range of imputed

results. Imputations were performed on specified outcome variables and selected demographics. Post-imputation, the accuracy and reliability of the imputed data were validated through distribution analyses, plausibility checks, convergence diagnostics, sensitivity analyses, and model fits. These steps resulted in a comprehensive set of imputed datasets, forming the foundation for subsequent analyses.

Given that Baseline equivalence was not established between treatment and control groups, robust regression techniques were utilized. Following imputation, a comprehensive analytical approach assessed the GI intervention's impact using both Generalized Estimating Equations models and regression-adjusted means analysis. This allowed for a rigorous examination of data collected at several time points. Regression-adjusted means analysis provided direct mean differences in outcomes, adjusting for potential confounding variables and enabling comparisons between the treatment and control groups at the four time points. Each outcome measure's regression model accounted for potential confounding due to initial imbalances in ethnicity, providing a detailed understanding by controlling for ethnicity. Data were structured in a long format, with each observation representing a participant's outcome at a specific time period. The model included fixed effects for treatment, time, ethnicity, and their interactions, along with a random intercept for each participant to account for within-subject correlations in repeated measures data. Cross-validation compared models trained on original versus imputed datasets, validating the effectiveness of imputation strategies.

Qualitative Methodology

At the pilot's midpoint, 30 participants were recruited to participate in semi-structured interviews; eight canceled at the last minute, yielding a sample of 22 respondents. Interviews lasted 1.5–2.5 hours, depending on how they answered the questions. Participants were compensated with a \$40 gift card for their time and each chose their own fake name for anonymity. Interviews were recorded on digital voice recorders (DVRs), professionally transcribed, and took place at a community location of the participant's choosing. DVRs were chosen to avoid potential data breaches through third-party apps. The prompts in the interview protocol were based on the theoretical framework noted prior and contained questions on health and well-being, family, relationships, decision-making, benefits interaction, systems involvement (criminal justice and family court), employment, and finances.

Structured, recursive memo-writing occurred throughout the entire data collection and analytic process following a “thick description” approach (Ponterotto, 2006, p. 538) to carry the theoretical and analytic thread throughout the entire research process. More specifically, memo-writing occurred after each encounter with participants and with their narrative data. After transcripts were de-identified, they were uploaded to Dedoose for coding by a team of six research assistants led by the co-PIs. All qualitative analysis was conducted by human beings without the use of AI. Analysis occurred on a semantic and latent level using a blended approach as documented in detail with the pre-analysis plan (ABT Associates, 2023). Thematic analysis followed Braun & Clark's (2012) approach on a semantic level to address decision-making pathways, well-being, and the architecture of overlapping systems involvement. Since these participants lived at the nexus of competing systems, we relied more on process coding at this site than in the remainder of the American Guaranteed Income Studies to understand the sequences behind decision-making when under overlapping auspices of the court



system (Saldaña, 2021). Latent analysis was heavily driven by the theoretical literature on criminalized people noted prior and followed Charmaz's (2014) approach to understand values, ideology, deservedness, and sense of self.

Excel in Context

National data demonstrates that formerly incarcerated people are disproportionately caught in cycles of poverty and imprisonment. In fact, almost 50% of individuals incarcerated by the age of 30 come from the bottom 20% of U.S. earners, and in the first full year after release, 45% report making no earnings at all (Looney & Turner, 2018). While (re) integration is often a stated goal of correctional institutions, very few provide the reentry support necessary to ensure economic incorporation and stability.

In North Carolina, most individuals exiting prisons receive less than \$50 in gate money, and those who have served less than 2 years behind bars receive nothing at all (Armstrong & Lewis, 2019). Figuring out how to survive (e.g. how to secure shelter, food, hygiene products, medical supplies, etc.) is therefore a significant concern among this population. Even where transitional resources exist, trying to find and navigate reentry-related supports can be a job in and of itself; a process Halushka (2019) refers to as "the runaround" due to the difficulties criminalized people face while attempting to secure post-incarceration assistance.

Making matters worse, criminal justice institutions often levy significant fees upon those who are accused or convicted of crimes. In North Carolina, the fees are particularly extensive: indigent defendants are charged attorney fees; the costs of lab tests and expert witnesses are passed on to defendants; anyone convicted of a crime must pay almost \$200 in court fees; conviction-related conditions and punishments such as jail incarceration, probation supervision, and community service all come with fees; and if one cannot pay their financial debts in full, they are forced to enter into an installment plan (Sparko et al., 2023). Furthermore, the broader American cultural milieu situates criminalized populations as the undeserving poor, who must continuously prove that they have transformed into law-abiding, productive citizens

despite significant structural barriers; their access to the rights and resources of traditional citizenship always remain in question.

It is within this context that participants in the Excel pilot program utilized and made sense of their monthly GI payments. In fact, many of the participants expressed a general pessimism that the program was real. Most US-based criminal justice interventions are punitive, paternalistic, and/or exploitive⁴ in nature; that a program giving unconditional cash payments to people with felony records existed was suspect—at least at first—to most participants. Often, credible messengers at local nonprofits or media outlets helped to validate Excel, but even then, some participants were skeptical that the money would ever reach their hands. Dana, a 50-year-old mother of two and a proud grandmother, had recently celebrated 18 months of sobriety and 15 months of release when she was selected for the Excel pilot program. As Dana explained:

You hear about stuff getting cut all the time. Like, being in recovery, like, when I tried to get clean, there were a lot of places that couldn't take me because they didn't have the beds or whatever. [It's] really hard to get clean as a woman. Like, a lot of places have resources for men. So I was just, like, you know, "They're not gonna have the money to pay everybody in this program." You know ... I felt like it might have been a scam, is just, like, nobody has these resources right now ... They promised us some money but they're not gonna give it to us, you know?

Participants began receiving GI payments in January of 2022, roughly 2 years into the COVID-19 pandemic and during a period of extreme economic volatility. Combined with the typical unpredictability of reentry-based resources (particularly for formerly incarcerated women), participants were unsure that the Excel program would actually come to fruition. Argus, who worked as a baker at a restaurant despite living with a degenerative disc condition and a recently broken ankle, described his astonishment that the money arrived in his account:

It was actually surreal, because um, I... I actually didn't think it was gonna happen ... So, when it did, um, I, uh, I was like, "Wow, now I can buy food." [laughs] ... Food and [sighs] my, uh, little wheelie thing, um, for my ankle so I could, like, roll around. Toiletries. Um, a coat. Some shoes. And my rent.

As Argus and others illustrate, Excel took the form of an almost unimaginable support: unconditional, unrestricted, direct cash transfers designated for those who are typically construed as the least deserving of financial support—the formerly incarcerated. Reporting on their experiences through surveys and semi-structured interviews, participants described a range of uses, potentials, limits, and meanings associated with the money. In the end, this report begins to uncover how a unique, yet simple form of support shapes the experiences and perspectives of people who have recently been released from prison.

⁴ See also North Carolina's use of "release cards," which often charge exorbitant fees for using one's own money after release from prison (Raheer, 2023).

Findings

1. GI and Financial Well-Being: Building a Foundation

Quantitative data from this study shows that the average annual household incomes at the beginning of the pilot were comparable: M=\$13,886 for the treatment group and M=\$12,030 for the control group. In other words, study participants reported incomes of just \$1,000–\$1,160 per month—far lower than the estimated \$3,800 per month needed to meet the basic needs of a single adult in Durham County (Glasmeir & MIT, 2024). As such, many participants utilized the first payment to purchase everyday necessities such as food, toiletries, and clothing. Without access to wrap-around services capable of addressing the many needs of people attempting to rebuild their lives, the flexibility of unconditional cash helped to fill the gaps. As Jack remarked about the first payment:

It felt good because when I first got it, I went to Walmart... got a bunch of hygiene, stuff we needed, you know? The little stuff we need for the house and it really helps out the whole bit. I was happy that first day.

Jack enjoyed being able to finally “do something ... especially [when] you don't be having it, you know?” As participants recounted their reactions to receiving the GI payments for the first time, they frequently described the money as a “blessing” or “lifesaver.” Many were struggling to get by, piecing together assistance from family members and inconsistent incomes to make ends meet. After receiving his first payment and realizing the program was not a scam, Tony described the money as a relief:

When that day came, you know, it was like, it was a relief, the day that I first got the money from y'all. It was like a relief, because I actually really needed \$600 to do something ... When I had received it, it was just like a blessing from God, yes. I had to have it and it came right on time and it was a big help. It was a big help.

When asked about how he spent the first payment, Tony explained that he used the money to help pay his rent: “So, that helped me out a whole lot.” In fact, nearly every participant used at least some of their GI payments to support housing costs and other bills, a theme discussed in greater detail later, demonstrating both the high cost of living and the pervasiveness of housing insecurity.

Eagle made a particularly strong case for financially supporting people immediately upon release from correctional facilities, a period where homelessness, mortality, and recidivism are high:

Stop letting people out of jail without nothing. Everybody don't have family support. Everybody ain't getting picked up by their family when they get out of jail. I'm saying, when they get out of jail, they just throw them out the street. Please let me have a check or some money waiting for 'em. You know what I'm saying. So when they get out

of jail, they don't have nowhere to go. "Hey, here's \$1,500" [to] stay in a hotel for a couple of nights or a week or two until you find better halfway house or shelter or somewhere to go. Just stop kicking people out of jail with no money after serving—I mean 2 years, 3 years, or whatever the case may be. I'm saying you gotta—it gotta be more, gotta be more. I'm saying, if not when they get out of jail, they don't got nothing, just kick me out. I just did 10 years—I need something to eat. I need somewhere to live. I need some money. I need some clothes. What you think they're gonna do? They're gonna go back to their old habits, and that's what they want you to do and that way they can lock your butt back up, and now you're back, you know what I'm saying? So it's a recycling thing. Then they wonder why people keep coming back to jail, man, you know what I'm saying?

When individuals are released from incarceration, having access to cash without restrictions can be the deciding factor as to whether someone has a place to stay upon release or is forced to sleep on the street. Overall, the data suggest that the first few payments from the Excel pilot were crucial in helping people attain at least some level of stability, albeit a fragile one, amid otherwise insecure circumstances.

Six months after the initial disbursement, the treatment group reported a significantly higher average income, with a mean difference of \$5,475, ($B = \$3,619$, $p = 0.05$), though income volatility remained similarly high for both groups (around 50%). Yet, this effect was not observed at later time periods. At 12 months, while the treatment group continued to report higher average annual incomes (mean difference = \$1,376), income volatility remained comparable at around 50%. At the 18-month mark and following the conclusion of the GI, the treatment group maintained a marginally higher annual income (mean difference = \$660) but also showed slightly elevated income volatility (60% vs. 50% control). These findings suggest a potential stabilizing effect of the GI on participants' earnings status, though not on income volatility for this specific group. There was no substantial difference in income between Hispanic and non-Hispanic households.⁵ Consistent with findings from the Prison Policy report on income disparities (Rabuy & Kopf, 2015), nearly one in seven participants in both groups reported incomes below the federal poverty level, indicating a severe and persistent poverty trap.

As the pilot progressed, recipients reported using the money to help them address everyday expenses within a context of rising prices and economic marginalization. For instance, Marcus struggled with the idea that he would ever be given a decent second chance in the labor market. Hours before his interview for this study, Marcus received a call from the person whom he thought was his new employer, informing him that his job offer was rescinded—likely due to a criminal background check. Stuck in what seemed like a repeating cycle of job offers followed by retractions, Marcus described the GI for people like himself as the difference between “having an emergency fund, you know, versus not.” He later explained that the money recently allowed him to purchase two used tires: “I needed them. If that [GI] wasn't available, I'd be on a donut right now.”

5 The race and ethnicity variables capture a whole range of structural processes and should not be interpreted simplistically as indicators of inherent individual or group-level differences.

Indeed, survey data suggests that financial resilience improved over time for the participants. At Baseline, a similar proportion of participants in both groups reported being able to cover a \$400 emergency expense (8% in the treatment group vs. 7% in the control group). This percentage increased at 6 months, with 20% of the treatment group and 11% of the control group indicating this ability. By 12 months, the treatment group’s ability to pay had slightly decreased, to 19%, while the control group showed a marginal increase to 14%. By 18 months, 17% of the treatment group still reported being able to cover an unforeseen financial emergency, compared to 13% in the control group. Overall, while the treatment group showed a consistent improvement in their ability to cover a financial emergency using cash or a credit card paid off in full, these trends were not statistically significant, suggesting that either the study was underpowered to detect the effects or that the observed increases in financial resilience may not be solely attributed to the GI.

Table 2. Ability to Cover a \$400 Emergency Expense (% Yes Responses)

	BASELINE		6 MONTHS		12 MONTHS		18 MONTHS	
	TREATMENT	CONTROL	TREATMENT	CONTROL	TREATMENT	CONTROL	TREATMENT	CONTROL
Yes	8	7	20	11	19	14	17	13

The ability of participants to save also varied over time. At Baseline, the majority of participants in both groups (87% treatment, 90% control) had savings of less than \$200. Savings between \$200 and \$500 showed an increase over time in both groups, although the treatment group had a more perceptible rise from 9% at Baseline to 16% at 6 months, peaking at 13% by 12 months before dropping back to 9% post-intervention. The control group had smaller increases, from 5% at Baseline to 12% at both 6 and 12 months, with a slight rise to 13% post-intervention.

Table 3. Trends in Savings (in %)

TIME PERIOD	<\$200		\$200–\$500		>\$500	
	TREATMENT	CONTROL	TREATMENT	CONTROL	TREATMENT	CONTROL
Baseline	87	90	9	5	4	5
6 months	75	83	16	12	9	6
12 months	74	82	13	12	13	6
18 months	86	80	9	13	5	7

Savings above \$500 increased more significantly in the treatment group compared to the control group. Initially, both groups showed similar savings (4% treatment and 5% control). By 6 months, this increased to 9% in the treatment group and 6% in the control group. At 12 months, the treatment group continued to show improvement, with 13% reporting savings above \$500, whereas the control group remained stable at 6%. By post-intervention, savings for the treatment group had reverted back to the Baseline levels (5%), while the control group experienced a slight increase to 7%. Regression estimates for savings above \$500 align with these observed trends, suggesting a trend towards higher savings

for the treatment group at 6 months ($B=1.139, p=.020$) and marginally higher at 12 months ($B=0.909, p=.054$). The relationship between ethnicity and savings was not statistically significant at any point in time.

Table 4. Transition in Savings: Baseline to Endline (in %)

TIME PERIOD	IMPROVED		STABLE		DECLINED	
	TREATMENT	CONTROL	TREATMENT	CONTROL	TREATMENT	CONTROL
Baseline to 6 months	10	7	75	81	15	12
6 to 12 months	16	9	71	82	13	9
12 to 18 months	11	9	76	79	13	12

Although most participants were unable to develop long-term savings that persisted beyond the pilot, those in the treatment group frequently commented on their ability to cover unexpected costs while they were still receiving payments. While disappointed in her inability to save more, Keisha, the sole caretaker of three children (including one newborn), remarked that the money helped when she lost her job and had to provide for her family. She went on to say, “It’s almost time for [Excel] to end and I feel like I—I can’t save it now [laughs]. Kind of sucks, but at least something is better than nothing.” For Keisha, the money “made a big difference” in her ability to transport her kids to and from school and extracurricular activities, in addition to helping with food and clothes.

A few participants, however, were able to piece together the money from Excel with low-wage jobs and other supports—such as transitional housing—to build more significant savings and purchase larger-ticket items such as used cars. Dana, for example, was living in a substance use treatment facility when she began receiving the Excel payments. Dana completed the treatment program and moved into a sober recovery house, where her rent was partially subsidized through the drug court program that had originally ordered her to the treatment facility. Dana’s part-time job as a dog groomer allowed sufficient flexibility to continue earning an income while she attended daily recovery classes. Coupled with the money from Excel, Dana was able to save enough to buy her own car, which ultimately contributed to her self-sufficiency and financial independence from family members who had been helping her get by after release.

So getting that extra money, because I couldn’t work full-time ... It helped a lot. And I didn’t have to depend on my, I didn’t have to call my mom and be like “Hey, can you pay my phone bill for me?” ... And, I was able to save because I had the extra \$600. So, when I left the recovery house, I bought a car that day and I moved into the Oxford house that day.

The financial well-being of participants was measured quantitatively using the Financial Well-Being Scale of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (2015), which assesses individuals’ financial security and freedom of choice, ranging from high to low scores based on various financial behaviors and perceptions. The majority of participants in the sample fell into the Medium-Low range. Participants in this category typically have minimal savings of \$250 or more, with only 30% having savings of \$2,000 or

more. Almost all found it either somewhat or very difficult to make ends meet, and some experienced a credit application rejection or expressed heightened concerns about potential credit rejection. Overall, though, financial well-being improved over time for both groups. For the control group, mean scores increased from 39.18 at Baseline to 43.93 post-intervention. Meanwhile, the treatment group showed greater increases in mean scores at 6 months (mean difference=1.15) and 12 months (mean difference=1.18) compared to the control group. Although regression estimates revealed no significant difference between the groups, Hispanic participants reported significantly lower financial well-being scores ($B=-2.87, p=.027$) compared to non-Hispanic participants.

Based on the frequency distribution of data, three financial well-being categories were delineated for the sample: Low (≤ 37), Medium-Low (38–49), and Medium-High (≥ 50). At Baseline, both groups showed similar distributions across the score ranges. By 6 months, a higher proportion of the treatment group transitioned to the Medium-High category (26% vs. 21% in the control group). Six months after the conclusion of the pilot, the treatment group saw a slight decline in the Medium-High category (28%), and a corresponding increase in the Low category (37% vs. 27% in the control group). Overall, the initial improvements in well-being for the treatment group were not sustained long-term, as the immediate benefits of the GI diminished over time.

Overall, our findings around GI and financial well-being tell a story of reduced economic volatility amid severe marginalization. As carceral citizens, the participants in this study suffered from numerous barriers to economic security, yet receiving the money gave them the ability to navigate economic struggles, at least in the short term. As Jet noted when asked what he was doing without the money, “I was scraping every corner I could.” In this way, although participants were largely unable to accumulate significant savings, the GI acted as a buffer, providing participants with enough stability to weather unexpected economic storms in the short term.

Table 5. Distribution of Financial Well-Being Scores over Time: Treatment vs. Control

TIME PERIOD	LOW (≤ 37)		MEDIUM-LOW (38–49)		MEDIUM-HIGH (≥ 50)	
	TREATMENT	CONTROL	TREATMENT	CONTROL	TREATMENT	CONTROL
Baseline	46	46	40	40	14	14
6 months	35	36	39	43	26	21
12 months	30	31	32	36	30	30
18 months	37	27	35	45	28	28



Housing Security and Quality

Context

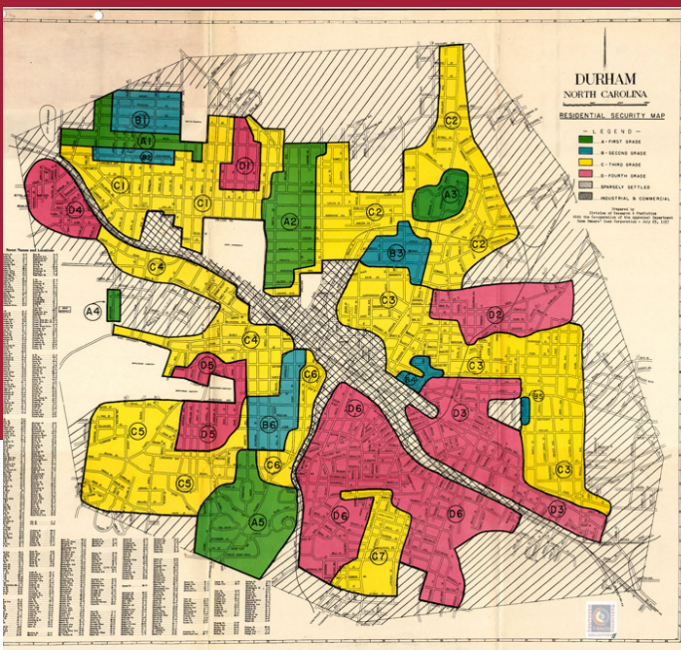
Housing is often the most fundamental concern for people exiting prisons. Unfortunately, those without access to pre-release planning, significant family support, or transitional housing are at significant risk of homelessness. A report from the Prison Policy Initiative underscores this reality, demonstrating that formerly incarcerated people experience homelessness at a rate that is roughly 10 times that of the general public (Couloute, 2018). In another analysis, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) estimated that roughly 50,000 people enter shelters directly from prisons each year, a figure that excludes those who go from prison to unsheltered homelessness across the country (Peiffer et al., 2020). Researchers have also documented that although homelessness is highest during the first month after release, a significant proportion of formerly incarcerated people experience spells of using homeless shelters years after their initial release, demonstrating the persistent problem of housing insecurity among this population (Remster, 2017).

Yet along with recognizing the unique housing disadvantages experienced by criminalized people, it is also important to take stock of the persistent housing crisis created by historical policies in the Durham area. Prior to the American Housing Act (AHA) of 1949, Durham had already seen significant developments in public housing with the construction of McDougald Terrace and Few Gardens, neighborhoods designated primarily for African American and White residents,

respectively. Initially intended as affordable housing projects, they reinforced racial segregation and set the stage for further economic stratification within the city. The subsequent disruption of the Hayti community through the construction of Highway 147, initiated under President Truman's Fair Deal and the AHA, marked a culmination of these racist policies. Instead of ameliorating housing conditions, these policies instead had several adverse impacts: they displaced over 4,000 families and 500 businesses (Bull City 150, 2018), facilitated extensive gentrification in the predominantly African American neighborhoods, and resulted in the creation of isolating superblocks that lacked the vibrant street life of the districts they replaced (Mertz, 2017).

REDLINING

Redlining and zoning laws, exemplified by the creation of the federal Home Owners' Loan Corporation's (HOLC) "Residential Security" maps, left a significant mark on the urban landscape, consequences of which are still felt today. In 1937, HOLC devised a color-coded mapping system for Durham, classifying residential areas according to their lending risk. Neighborhoods were ranked along racial lines from safest to riskiest: green ("Best"), blue ("Still desirable"), yellow ("Definitely declining"), and red, ("Hazardous") respectively. The criteria used to assess risk heavily weighed the presence of Black residents, immigrants, and economically disadvantaged individuals of any race. Consequently, obtaining a federally insured mortgage was virtually impossible for residents in the designated red zones. The enduring effects of these policies are visible today in the racial wealth gap, disparities in education, healthcare access, and the concentration of environmental pollutants in historically marginalized communities.



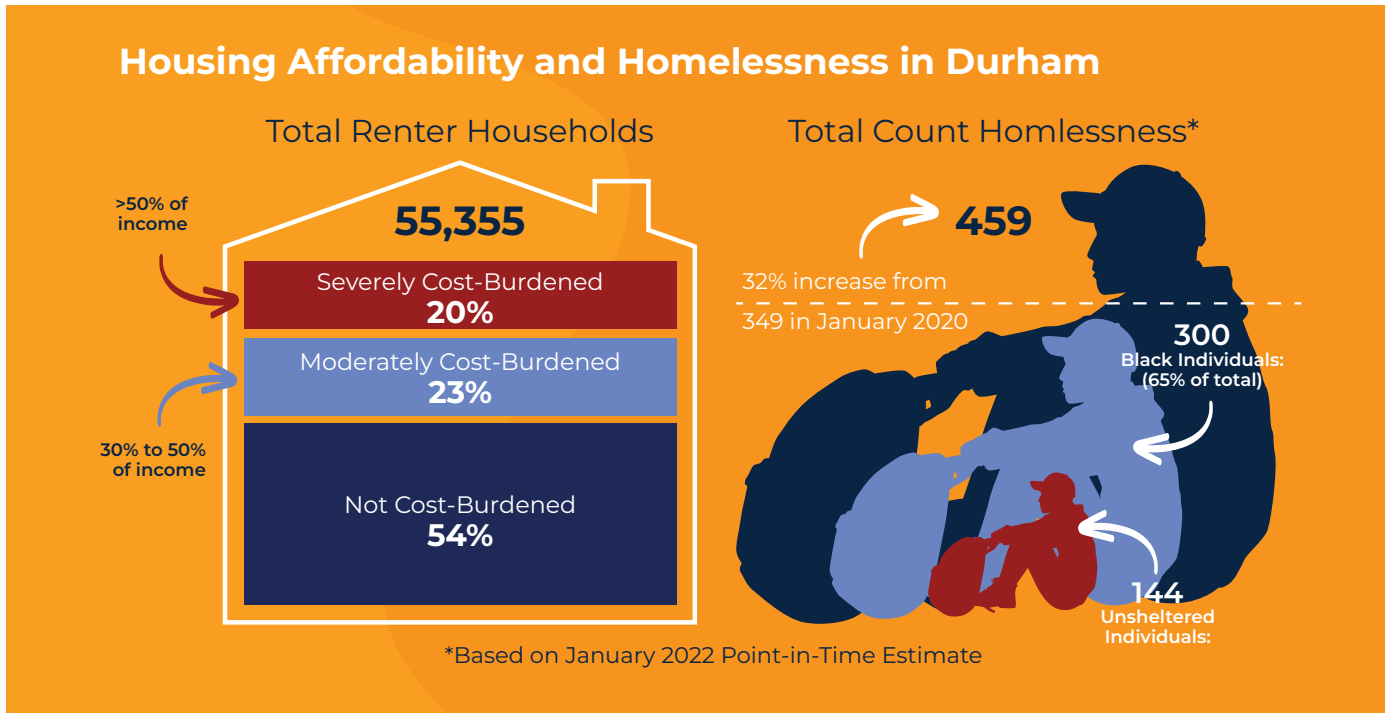
"If a neighborhood is to retain stability, it is necessary that properties shall continue to be occupied by the same social and racial classes. A change in social or racial occupancy generally leads to instability and a reduction in values."

– FHA Underwriting Manual, 1935

Another crucial moment in this story was the 1969 Supreme Court case, *Thorpe v. Durham Housing Authority*, in which Joyce Thorpe successfully challenged her eviction, establishing a nationwide precedent that residents could not be evicted without just cause. This case illuminated the ongoing struggle against systemic housing inequities, which continues to influence Durham's socio-economic landscape even today. Reflecting on the current situation, data from the HUD attests to the acute housing gaps that exist in Durham. Of the city's 59,862 rental units, only 4,925 are accessible to households at risk of homelessness, those earning less than 30% of the AMI. Essentially, the available units meet less than half the need of those at risk, with 8,255 renters identified as "at risk" due to their extremely low incomes. The severe cost burden complicates the ability to manage everyday expenses such as medical bills, rising food costs, and savings for unforeseen emergencies, thereby heightening their vulnerability to housing instability. This situation pinpoints the lacunae in policies that have consistently failed to address the needs of marginalized communities, perpetuating cycles of poverty and exclusion (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2023a). The most recent data from the City of Durham's Housing Department highlight severe ongoing challenges, as detailed in the Durham Housing Profile report (City of Durham, 2016). The report reveals a critical shortage of affordable housing for very low-income households, particularly renters earning less than 50% of the AMI, with only 79 rental units available per 100 such households. This shortage has resulted in approximately 27,000 low-income households being housing cost-burdened—spending over 30% of their income on housing—with 15,000 of these households being severely burdened, spending over 50%. The situation is most dire for extremely low-income families, with over 70% being severely housing cost burdened. Additionally, about 750 residents are homeless on any given night, impacted by various life crises beyond the traditional causes of untreated mental health issues or substance abuse. Population growth and processes of gentrification are routinely driving up costs, causing even traditionally affordable neighborhoods in central Durham to experience rapid price escalations, exacerbating the housing crisis.

In 2019, Durham introduced the Enhancing Housing Choices amendment, aimed at combating the enduring impacts of segregation and redlining by promoting diverse and increased housing production. The amendment facilitates densification through the approval of duplexes, townhouses, and small multifamily buildings in various residential zones, while also easing restrictions on accessory dwelling units and simplifying codes for better clarity. This strategic initiative not only broadens the range of housing options but also seeks to stabilize housing prices and mitigate displacement risks for vulnerable populations by harmonizing with policies like Durham's affordable housing density bonus (City of Durham, 2023).

The situation in Durham exemplifies the classic jobs vs. housing mismatch phenomenon, observed in many U.S. metropolitan areas experiencing rapid job growth. Despite a robust labor market, the housing supply in Durham has struggled to keep pace with escalating demand, resulting in tighter housing markets and increased rental and home prices. In conjunction with this mismatch and the persistent racist policies of historical segregation, restrictions on housing programs, such as Section 8, perpetuate cycles of criminal justice involvement and unstable housing experiences. Thus, any trajectory towards securing stable and affordable housing remains daunting: the lingering trail of a criminalized public record renders housing acquisition an almost insurmountable challenge, while concurrently criminalizing those unable to secure shelter (Howe, 2024)

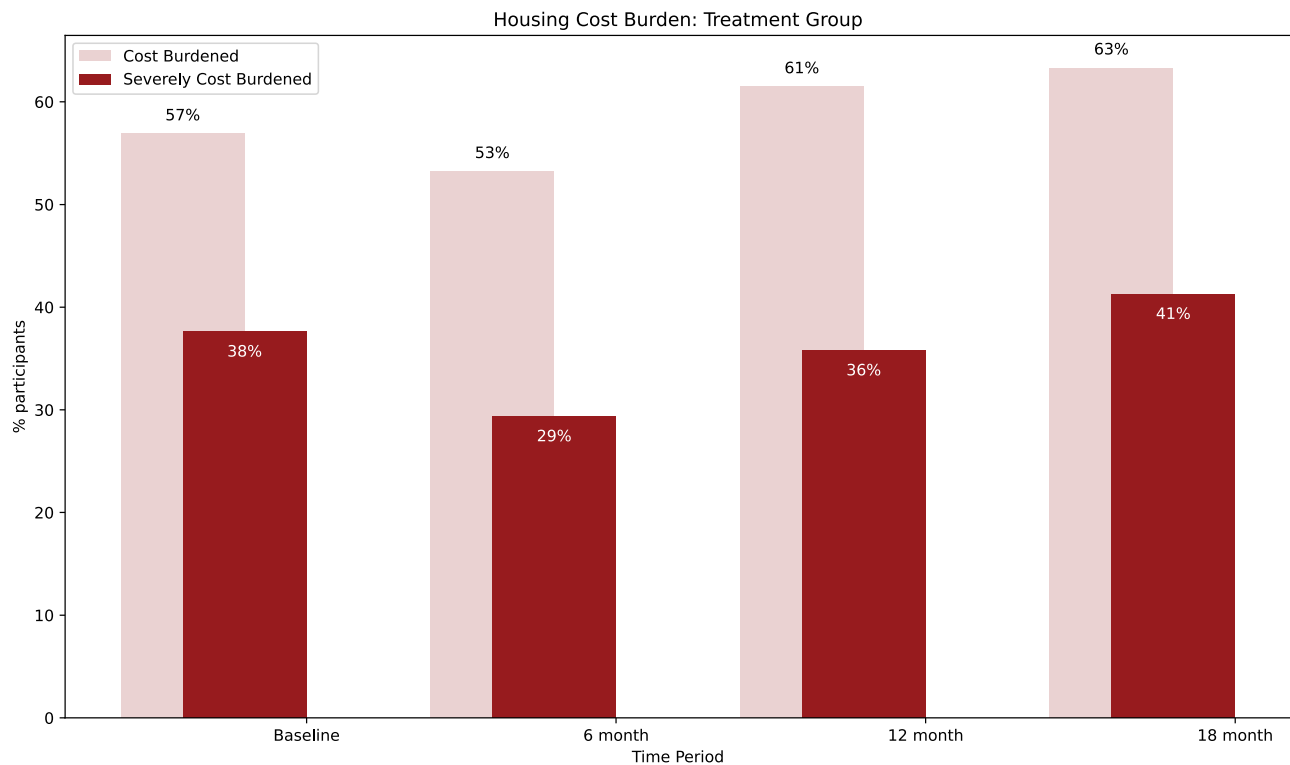
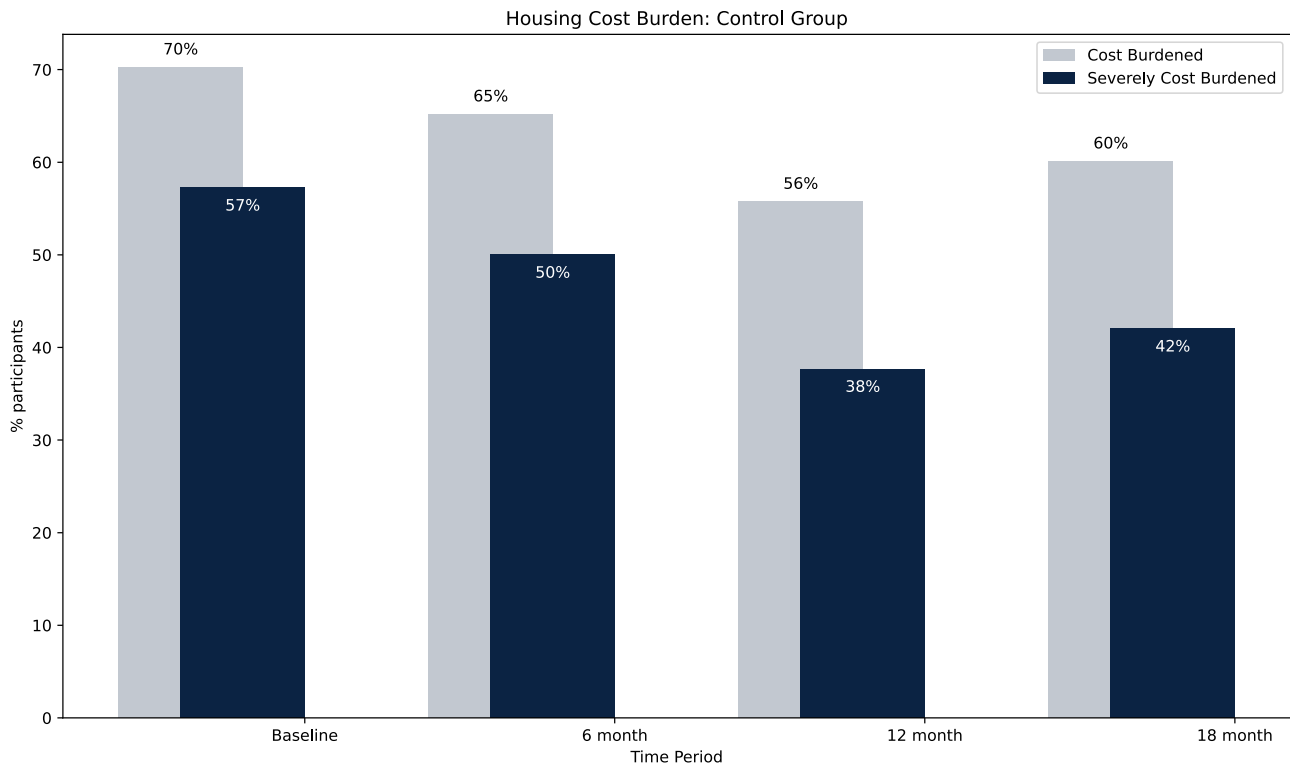


Source: HUD 2023b and 2023c

Housing Costs

A quantile regression analysis was conducted to assess the impact of the GI on the median housing cost burden over the study period. The median cost burden is reported instead of the average because the data exhibited extreme variability, reflecting the sample population’s housing instability and financial vulnerability. At Baseline, the treatment group reported a significantly lower median housing cost ratio (Median= 39.55%) compared to the control group (Median=58.90%). This trend continued at 6 months (37.50% for treatment vs. 51.95% for control). However, at the conclusion of the GI disbursement, the median cost ratio for the treatment group increased to 40.41%, surpassing the control group’s 37.80%, and this difference was statistically significant (B=21.96, $p=0.04$). By post-intervention, this difference widened further (46.28% for the treatment vs. 42.54% for the control; B=23.09, $p=0.03$). The relationship between ethnicity and median housing cost burden was not statistically significant. These results align with existing research showing that the lowest-income households face a median cost ratio of 62.7% (Whitney, 2023). Furthermore, at Baseline, over half the households in both groups spent 30% or more of their income on housing, with a substantial proportion severely cost-burdened by spending over 50%. Although there was a slight reduction in burden at the 6-month mark, this was not maintained, and by 12 and 18 months, almost 60% of households were paying over 30% of their income on housing, with around 40% spending more than half. Finally, sensitivity analysis of housing cost burden across different quantiles revealed that while the treatment group started off with lower housing cost burden, their burden became more pronounced over time, particularly at lower and median quantiles. Taken together, these findings underline the ongoing challenge of housing costs outpacing wage growth, compelling households, especially at the lowest level, to allocate larger portions of their earnings to shelter and leaving less for other essential needs such as food, transportation, and childcare.

Figure 1. Housing Cost Burden



Guaranteed Income and Housing: Potential Pathways

Interviews with participants shed light on some of the potential pathways by which a GI may support housing stability. Specifically, the payments provided participants with an additional tool to demonstrate an ability to pay rent. For others, the money helped to ensure housing stability amid economic precarity. After breaking his ankle and being unable to work for 4 months, Argus noted that the money kept him afloat,

March, April, May, June, like, those were the months where that money really kept me from being homeless. You know what I'm saying? Like, because I was able to pay my rent, buy a little food, you know, use Uber and Lyft to get back and forth where I needed to go.

For Argus, who reported working since he was 14 years old to provide for himself, the unconditional cash functioned as a life raft that kept him afloat until he was able to return to work.

Another interviewee, Jet, remarked on how the GI helped to both improve and protect his living situation:

I'll tell ya, y'all blessed me because it, it's, like, i—, where I was living at before here, it's nothing like this. You know, this is peaceful. I couldn't even bring my son to where I was staying at, you know. I was living in a rooming house, and it was way down in the woods, but it's in the hood. [laughs] ... And during the time that I've been here, I actually lost my job and, uh... that money that y'all gave me, I swear, I wouldn't even be living here.

For recipients like Jet, the GI provided a means to improve their quality of life, while also acting as a safety net should unexpected setbacks—such as a job loss—occur. Still, even with the added financial support of the Excel program, losing his job meant that Jet also had to rely upon the leniency of his landlord⁶ to remain housed:

I hadn't paid him nothing [since last month]. And he was like, you know, "You, you got your car. You need your car for work. So, just pay for your car." But I didn't have a job. And, at that point, it was, like, you know, either just get what I could, grab it and put it in the car and pay for the car, or pay for the house and don't have the car. But that, that money y'all gave me, he, he actually told me, he was like, "Look, don't worry about it. You ain't gotta go. Pay for your car so you can get you a job and go to work. You can catch up later." Um, if it weren't for that, I wouldn't even have a car. And if it weren't for him, I wouldn't have a place to stay [chuckles]. You know?

⁶ See also Miller (2021), who illustrates how carceral citizenship forces criminalized people to rely upon the mercy (e.g. freely provided acts of goodwill) of employers, landlords, family members, and others in order to survive.

In this way, the data tell a story of both the promise and limitations of GI in the lives of criminalized people. The direct cash transfers—uninhibited by geographic, administrative, or behavioral constraints—provided participants with an increased ability to afford rent amid rising prices while also granting the flexibility to pool resources (e.g. paying rent to a family member or renting a room) or make alternative spending choices (e.g. paying a car note to indirectly support housing through future employment). Furthermore, no interviewees reported housing market stigma tied directly to their GI payments, suggesting an added benefit over contemporary housing supports such as vouchers.⁷

Table 6. Housing Utility Costs from Baseline to Endline: Treatment vs. Control (in %)

UTILITY AMOUNTS	BASELINE		6 MONTHS		12 MONTHS		18 MONTHS	
	TREATMENT	CONTROL	TREATMENT	CONTROL	TREATMENT	CONTROL	TREATMENT	CONTROL
<\$200	30	22	21	26	31	30	29	25
\$200–\$400	19	22	30	21	29	17	23	28
More than \$400	10	10	9	8	3	12	10	10
Included in rent	20	22	26	19	24	25	25	19
Someone else pays	18	22	14	26	13	16	13	18

Amid the broader context of the rental cost burden, utility costs also significantly strained household budgets, with expenses fluctuating from Baseline to 18 months for both groups. At the start of the pilot, 19% of treatment participants and 22% of control participants were paying between \$200–\$400 for utilities. By 18 months, these figures increased to 23% for treatment and 28% for control. Almost 40% of participants had utilities included in their rent or covered by someone else. Despite these heightened burdens, less than 5% of participants in both groups reported receiving any form of rental assistance.

SECURING AND MAINTAINING HOUSING

In the quantitative data, housing status among participants was analyzed over two distinct time frames—“in the past month” and “current housing status.” This provided a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and variability in housing stability faced by the participants. While there were signs of improvement, particularly in the treatment group, significant disparities persisted, especially between Hispanic and non-Hispanic participants.

7 The Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program is a federal rental housing assistance program to support low-income individuals and families in finding affordable housing. However, landlords have the ultimate discretion in selecting their occupants and many will refuse to rent to HCV holders. The Urban Institute’s 2018 evaluation of HCV acceptance found voucher denial rates to vary from 15% to 78% depending upon the city (Cunningham et al., 2018).

The precarious housing situation experienced by participants was evident throughout the duration of the study, characterized by frequent changes in their living arrangements. A majority of participants reported staying in one place during the past month, with 79% of the treatment group and 81% of the control group maintaining this stability at the 18-month mark. The percentage of participants who reported staying in their own apartment or house increased over time: from 40% at Baseline to 48% for the treatment group, and from 28% to 45% for the control group by 18 months. This trend suggests a gradual improvement in housing stability for both groups.

Conversely, a smaller proportion of participants reported staying in two places, with figures fluctuating between 8% and 17%, while a few reported staying in three places. The reliance on staying at family members' or significant others' homes decreased over time, dropping from 20% to 16% for the treatment group and from 33% to 23% for the control group at 18 months. Despite these positive shifts, homelessness remained a persistent issue, with the rates doubling by the end of the pilot: 9% in the treatment group and 11% in the control group reported living on the streets, indicating ongoing instability. Regression estimates indicate that homelessness rates were not significantly different between groups, nor were they different among Hispanic and non-Hispanic populations.

CURRENT HOUSING STATUS

Quantitative findings revealed significant disparities in current housing and living conditions based on group and between Hispanic and non-Hispanic participants. Overall, homelessness rates increased significantly from Baseline (4% for both treatment and control) to post intervention (10% for treatment vs. 14% for control). This increase was statistically significant ($B=1.996, p<0.00$). Additionally, Hispanic participants faced greater challenges compared to non-Hispanic individuals ($B=0.277, p=0.042$). However, the difference in homelessness rates between the treatment and control groups was not statistically significant. Rental and homeownership status also showed variability, with the treatment group reporting more stable housing outcomes ($B=3.341, p<0.00$); as did the non-Hispanic participants who reported more stable housing conditions compared to their Hispanic counterparts ($B=1.475, p<0.01$). There were also significant differences in friend/family support, with the treatment group ($B=3.329, p<0.00$), and non-Hispanic participants more likely to receive this support compared to Hispanic participants ($B=0.886, p=0.0347$).

Participants also expressed significant concerns about their housing stability throughout the duration of the study. At Baseline, 72% of the treatment group and 65% of the control group were worried about not having stable housing within the next two months. While these concerns decreased to around 40% at 6 and 12 months for both groups, they rose again to 50% for the treatment group and 41% for the control group by 18 months. These findings emphasize the persistent instability and precarious housing situations faced by the participants, a challenge compounded by the post-pandemic rise in rents and the lifting of the eviction moratorium. The GI seemed to have offset only some of the adverse effects of these policies for the treatment participants.

Data also suggests that by the pilot's conclusion, a greater proportion of the treatment group had transitioned into better quality homes (54% treatment vs. 50% control) and more desirable neighborhoods (45% treatment vs. 37% control). Despite these trends, evictions were frequent,

compounded by the expiration of eviction moratoria and emergency rental assistance measures post-pandemic.

In line with prior research, participants in this study identified criminal record discrimination as a primary barrier in attaining decent, safe housing. Eric, a man in his 30s who currently lives with his cousin, described the limited options available to people with records:

Okay so, so for me, it's a little harder for me because, like, I have, like, things on my record, like I, I, I cannot get an apartment. I cannot get an apartment because of my background. I, I cannot get an apartment anywhere. Like, and there's one place that I could, but they're, like, he's a slumlord. He, like, barely wants to come fix things and, you know, and just the, the property's gonna be in the hood. Yes, it's, like, \$600, \$700 a month, but ... it's gonna take a while. So, for me, like, it's hard for me to try to find something, like, with my background.

Eric noted that he did not have many options, but he did aspire to one day purchase his own home so that he would not have to worry about navigating the rental market with the stigma of a criminal record. Others, like Dana, used alternative strategies such as applying for apartments in the name of co-tenants, so that prospective landlords would not have access to their criminal background:

The house that we have is in my daughter's name ... so luckily, I have a friend that works in real estate department and she knew my history. She was like "[DANA], we're gonna run it with you and your daughter and we'll see what happens" ... But they pulled it up, and, and we were denied because of my background. But my daughter got approved ... We also offered to pay 3 months' rent up front, so that's another way the money helps. It's like, if, if, if we had to pay that money, we had it. Um, luckily our landlord didn't ask for it. They asked for a security deposit and 1 month because of my daughter.

Unfortunately, cash payments alone were not enough to shed the criminal label; interviewees still felt excluded from the majority of housing opportunities and were forced to resort to alternative strategies (such as applying in someone else's name, offering to pay rent up front, or co-housing with family members) in order to secure shelter. These results align with other work on private housing discrimination and suggest the need for direct policy-based remedies (Leasure & Martin, 2017).

Food Security and Agency

Along with housing, obtaining food is an important concern among individuals exiting prisons. Although existing research in this area is limited, recent analyses demonstrate that formerly incarcerated people disproportionately struggle with nutritional hardship and must often rely upon either the limited social welfare benefits they qualify for or family members to provide groceries and/or meals (Testa & Jackson, 2019). Unfortunately, some states such as North Carolina explicitly ban people with certain drug convictions from accessing nutritional assistance. Restrictions to nutritional

assistance programs were passed federally in the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, though the law also permitted individual states to opt out of or modify the ban (Love & Sibilla, 2023; Office of Family Assistance, 1996).

As a state with a “modified” ban, North Carolina prohibits anyone with felony drug convictions categorized as class G or above from receiving SNAP, for life.⁸ Additionally, anyone convicted of a felony drug crime in another state receives a lifetime ban from SNAP benefits in the state of North Carolina. Finally, those convicted of Class I or H felonies within the state must wait 6 months since their last release from custody, in addition to fulfilling substance abuse treatment requirements, to become eligible for SNAP benefits (NC Department of Health and Human Services, 2023).

For participants with felony drug convictions on their record, the SNAP ban stood out as a particularly pernicious policy. Fortunately, the monthly GI payments provided a means to both survive and gain greater control over their nutritional intake. As Fred explained:

I was convicted of [a] drug charge, for that reason they say in North Carolina, you cannot get a food stamp. You cannot get, you cannot get a government help because you got, you convicted of [a drug crime], that's the law. That's what they do here in North Carolina. So, for that reason, my own situation, I can't get no food stamps. I can't get unemployment. I can't get nothing. I can't get nothing. I can't get nothing ... what I'm gonna do, what can I eat, what I'm gonna do?

That people with felony drug convictions are restricted from accessing a form of public assistance

⁸ For example, an individual who was convicted of selling 4 g of heroin when they were 18 years old would receive a lifetime ban on SNAP benefits.



used to support a basic human need—sustenance—signaled to participants that they had been truly abandoned by the state. Fred's line of questioning, "What can I eat, what I'm gonna do?," underscored a broader theme around perpetual and pervasive punishment, leading to an intrinsic sense of uncertainty. As Marcus implied, to be criminalized and excluded from even basic state assistance means that you must fend for yourself:

There was no help, I couldn't get any assistance, any governmental assistance with housing, food stamps, I couldn't get nothing because of what I committed was a class B felony and I was still on probation ... basically just thrown out to the wolves.

Under these circumstances, the Excel program took on added meaning as one of the few supports available to criminalized people. Even those who were not excluded from SNAP commented on their improved ability to purchase food and other everyday items. Eagle, like other participants, said that he purchased food with his first payment and continued to use his GI to pay for basic needs and other important bills:

I went right to, um, Walmart and got me some food with it. [laughs]. I took that card right to Walmart, yes I did ... I paid a couple of bills, uh, went and got me a haircut, paid my cellphone bill, went and got me something to eat, yeah. At first when I got it I said "wow" ... That was the day I needed somebody, too. Yup, I got it. Every time I get it, though, I always go buy me some groceries and stuff and, um, like I said, I went and bought some food and my cable bill was done, my cell phone bill was due, I paid that and put some gas in my car and, you know, still got some change left over, you know. Got me some lunch meat and stuff, bread and stuff for my lunch for the week and, you know, my chips and, you know. Just, it helps out a lot. It helps out a lot.

Eagle noted that between food and bills, "there's always something to do with it." In fact, many of the interviewees noted that the GI payments were particularly helpful as record-setting inflation made meeting basic needs difficult. As Jay pointed out,

every time you turn around, like if you go to a grocery store ... the chicken wings, one week they increase the price, then the next day you go back they're more. Like, they just jump, like dang man, it is tough, and the food don't even taste the same.

Although Jay noted that the \$600 was not enough to cover all of his expenses, he mentioned that being able to provide, at least partially, for his family "made it a little easier."

Overall, the quantitative data show that households in the treatment group experienced significant improvements in food security over time, though Hispanic households reported worse food security outcomes at specific periods. Initially, a higher percentage of households in both groups worried about having enough food (59% treatment vs. 56% control) and struggled with food preferences due to a lack of resources (53% treatment vs. 58% control). Over time, the treatment group consistently reported lower levels of food insecurity compared to the control group. At the conclusion of the study,

fewer households in the treatment group were worried about having enough food (44% vs. 52%) and needing to eat less due to insufficient food (40% vs. 48%). However, concerns about paying utility bills were similar for both groups by 18 months (54%).

Regression estimates indicated significant differences between groups and ethnicities. Six months into the pilot, non-Hispanic households were more likely to report eating preferred food ($B=1.38, p=0.001$). At 12 months, households in the treatment group indicated an improved ability to eat preferred foods compared to the control group ($B=-0.58, p=.030$). The treatment group also showed a notable decrease in having to consume non-preferred food at 12 months ($B=-0.95, p<.001$). The most significant differences emerged in the GI's impact on "very low" food insecurity at both 6 and 12 months, with the treatment group indicating reduced food insecurity due to less consumption of food at 6 months ($B=-0.66, p=.019$) and at 12 months ($B=-0.80, p=.005$). Additionally, at 6 months, non-Hispanic households reported better outcomes in their ability to cover utility bills ($B=1.21, p=.023$) compared to Hispanic households. These results highlight the positive impact of the GI on reducing various aspects of food insecurity, particularly for non-Hispanic households, and in sustaining their ability to pay utility bills.

Table 7. Trends in Household Food Insecurity: Treatment vs. Control (% Yes Responses)

QUESTION	TIME PERIOD	TREATMENT	CONTROL
In the past four weeks, did you worry that your household would not have enough food?	Baseline	59	56
	6 months	40	48
	12 months	32	43
	18 months	44	52
In the past four weeks, were you or any household member not able to eat the kinds of foods you preferred because of a lack of resources?	Baseline	53	58
	6 months	37	51
	12 months	37	51
	18 months	50	46
In the past four weeks, did you or any household member have to eat some foods that you really did not want to eat because of a lack of resources to obtain other types of food?	Baseline	57	57
	6 months	43	50
	12 months	30	53
	18 months	47	52
In the past four weeks, did you or any other household member have to eat less in a day because there was not enough food?	Baseline	37	44
	6 months	27	43
	12 months	25	43
	18 months	40	48
In the past four weeks, did you worry that your household would be unable to pay a utility bill?	Baseline	61	65
	6 months	44	54
	12 months	47	50
	18 months	54	54

Along with making life easier, participants also discussed developing a greater sense of agency and dignity around the ability to make small purchases such as snacks and clothing. Jet, for example, recalled his thought process once he received his first GI payment while working on an assembly line: “I said, ‘I guarantee you one thing. I’m gonna take a good break today!’ So, I went and bought me some snacks and stuff ... I think I had spent like \$10 on snacks.” Another participant, Alexander, noted that his newfound ability to make small purchases put him at ease:

It relaxes me by [knowing] I got a dollar or two in my pocket. And if I want to walk and get a pack of cigarettes, I can get it ... If I see that new coat I want, “I, I want that coat, I want that pair of shoes.” Like, it just, it takes a lot off you.

These findings suggest that the GI improved food security by providing participants with additional buying power while also enhancing their ability to make “small” decisions that had added significance. Having spent time in prisons (where participants were told when to eat and sleep) and under community supervision (where they were told who they may interact with and where they could travel), in addition to experiencing the many collateral consequences of a criminal record (which limited the resources and opportunities available to them), the GI allowed participants to exercise some level of agency and feel dignified in doing so. As a resource, then, unconditional cash transfers among criminalized people help to promote both material survival and a fundamental sense of autonomy.

2. GI and Relationships with Others

Supporting Families and Fulfilling Roles

As an extensive body of research demonstrates, family support is crucial for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people (De Claire & Dixon, 2015; Laub & Sampson, 2001; Wang, 2021). Families pay bail and attorney's fees, they visit and send money during periods of incarceration, and they welcome home and provide for the needs of loved ones making the transition back into the community (Wang, 2021; Western et al., 2015). Valuable time, energy, and financial resources are thus spent on supporting carceral citizens due to their structurally vulnerable positions. Participants in the Excel program, however, commented on their enhanced ability to contribute meaningfully to the lives of their children, partners, and other family members. In this way, the payments were viewed as a resource not only to support their families economically, but also as a means of role fulfillment.

For instance, when asked about how the money impacted her life, Keisha explained:

Hmm, made a big difference. Um, especially with gas ... um, I didn't participate as much with my son's sports this year, only for the simple fact that I had a baby. Um, but I at least got him there, and that was a blessing, even though I wasn't there as much as I wanted to be, but he got there. Um, also with school ... I just switched him to a different school, so transportation was horrible in the beginning of the school year. Um, they're at a year-round school, and the school that they go to does not—did not provide like, a regular bus schedule, they have like a group pickup, and it helped me get him to the bus stop and, you know, to or from school, to doctor's visits, and to eat when I was out all day. So yeah, it was very helpful to us.

Keisha noted that she wished her parents were more available when she was a child, which informs the way she parents her own children:

I am really big on my kids [laughs]. Um, I didn't have that when I was growing up, no—no offense to my dad or my mom, they were hard working, but I didn't have that. Like, and... when I said I wanted kids, that's where my mind was set on, making sure that I do make time for them.

For Keisha, the money allowed her to be present and economically stable enough to ensure that her children were able to attend school, extracurricular activities, and other important appointments—a sentiment expressed by other parents in the sample as well. Eric touched upon both the ability to pay for activities and the constant need to purchase everyday necessities for children, such as shoes and clothing:

Having two kids, man, it helps, because, you know, everything could be fine right now

and next week... “Oh, well, you know, your daughter grew. She needs more pants.” I’m like, “Damn, like, I just bought new pants six months ago.” ... Or when she needs shoes or for instance, like, my daughter’s just, um, going to do ballet or dance class, unexpectedly. So, guess what? That’s money right there.

Many of the participants noted that they made spending decisions primarily based on what their family, and particularly their children, needed. Eric later expounded upon how he allocated his money,

most of the time, like, that money that I receive, it goes towards my kids. Like, as long as my kids are happy, they have whatever they want, their wants and their needs. Like, I, I barely buy, I don’t buy myself anything, man. I really don’t.

Esmeralda expressed a similar sentiment: “That extra little income, it’s been doing my kids justice. So every time I get it, majority of the money I’ll send to my kids.”

Participants also described how the money benefitted other family members such as partners and siblings. Indeed, Tony’s experience exemplifies how a GI can support the needs and well-being of entire family units. When asked what he would be doing without the money, Tony explained that he would be,

out [working food delivery service] even longer. Like, you know, it’d be [food delivery service] from morning to evening, all day for me, because I gotta have rent paid. Gotta pay bills, you know, phone bills, car notes. My wife got a car note that she was backed up on. Oh, and that’s another thing, it helped me catch up on, her car note for her too, so we could have a vehicle to move around with.

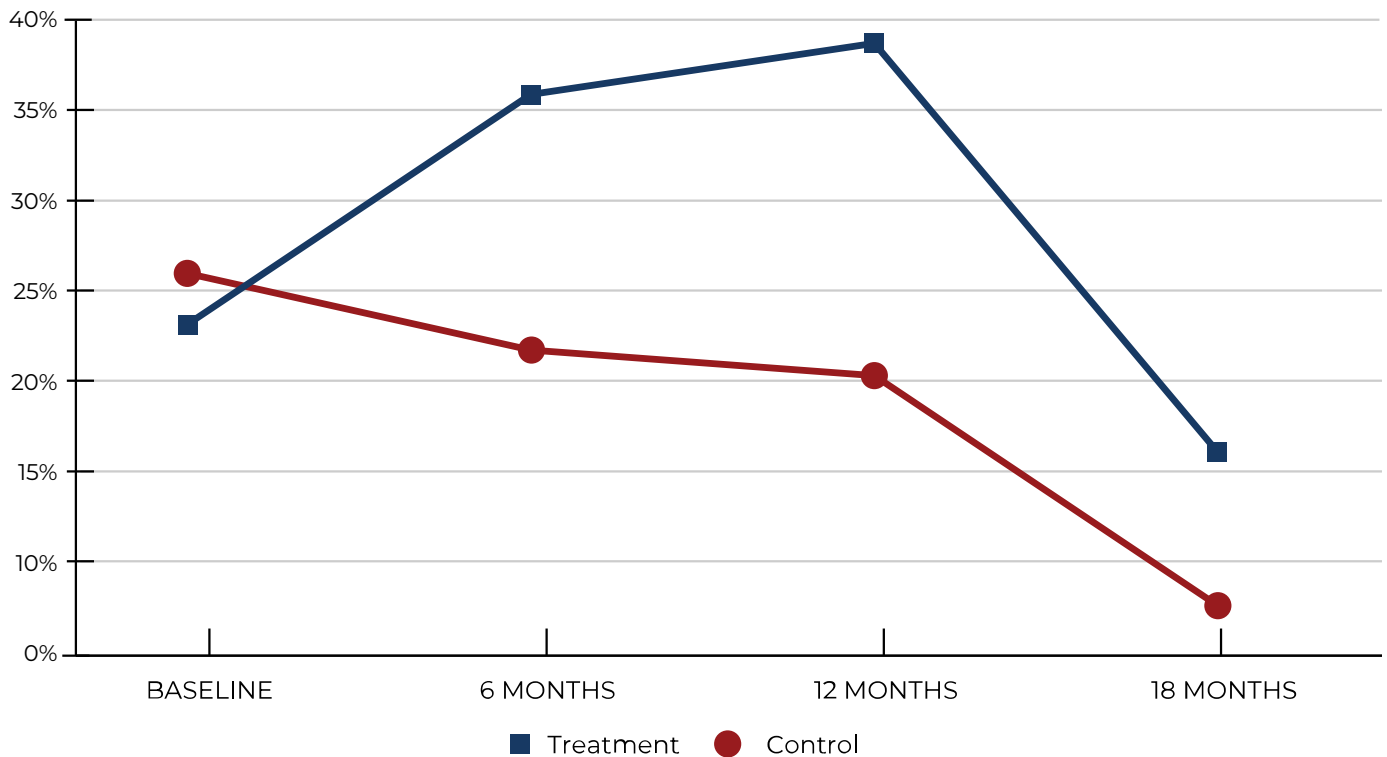
Unfortunately, Tony’s wife had been dealing with significant health issues and as he noted, “We’re constantly in and out of the hospital.” It was only because of the economic support and flexibility provided by the GI payments that Tony was able to support his family, which included a daily routine of getting the kids ready, bringing them to and from school, working in between, and then caring for his ailing wife. Tony continued:

Because like I said, she’s really down, bad, like it’s, it’s terrible, ma’am. We’re constantly in and out of the hospital. So ... some days we, we’ll be in the hospital, like some days I might have to take her to the hospital. So we’ll be there all day trying to find somebody to get the kids from school ‘cause she needs to have someone beside her... It’s kinda odd, because like I said, I’m used to working a lot, so I could never keep a job, like having to take off when she’s sick, you know?... Some jobs don’t approve of you taking off so much.

The Excel program gave Tony the supplemental income necessary to care for his wife, complete the daily tasks associated with parenthood, and attain at least some employment income through the gig economy. Although payments were disbursed to individuals, these insights help to provide a compelling case for the network-based impacts of unconditional cash transfers. In fact, while

approximately one in three participants in the study provided financial assistance to family or friends, those in the treatment group were more likely to do so. The most common forms of support included covering monthly bills (such as phone and utilities), housing expenses (like rent, mortgage, or security deposits), and costs related to medical care, transportation, and childcare.

Figure 2. Ability to Extend Help to Family (% Yes Response)



Participants reported that the Excel program allowed them to fulfill roles and pool resources to support their families' well-being while also freeing them from the rigidity of jobs that necessitate time away from unpaid care responsibilities. It is also important to note that participants conceptualized the GI as a resource to build and maintain relationships with kin in ways that would have been difficult otherwise. In 2004, Fred was given a sentence of 15 to 20 years for drug-related offenses at the same time as his fiancé discovered she was 2 months pregnant. When Fred was released for good behavior after 15 years, he walked out of the prison gate and was immediately detained by Immigration and Customs Enforcement for another 2 years. For Fred, who had been incarcerated for his daughter's entire life, the money provided a means to repair his relationship with his daughter:

I don't even know how to keep explaining about how helpful it is to me personally, because okay, you know, like I've been there, I came home and my daughter [was] already 17 when I came home... she a teenager. So, she had some kind of rebellious, like... I'm trying to do things with her, and doing things with her at least involve a little money anyway, so without this program right here, I wouldn't be able to do nothing, you

see what I'm saying? But now with this program, I [am] able to take my daughter to the movie so that we can bond, we can keep bonding because I missed all of, almost all of her life. So now, sometimes she will tell me when she was in cheerleading, everybody dad [would] come pick them up, I [would] not come. I'm in prison. You know ... I know she gets angry. Everybody's father will come pick their daughter up [from cheerleading], I'm not there.... It stuck with her, she's feeling some kind of way. So now that I'm out, trying to bond with her ... So maybe now, now and then you know, baby come on, let's go to the movie. You go into the movie, you can't go there and start looking at them in the eye and tell them you don't have no money [laughs], you don't do that. So but this Excel made it possible for me. Yeah, this Excel made all that stuff possible for me. So it's really, really a good program.

Fred described the money as a “lifeline” due to its ability to help him survive while being legally restricted from working and because it was helping to resurrect his relationship with his daughter. Despite facing systemic constraints in virtually all realms of his life, the cash allowed Fred a sense of agency while rebuilding a crucial relationship.

Finally, many participants described how the money provided a means to shed their previous identities as a burden and become a contributing member of their families. As Johnny noted,

like, if my siblings need something... Yeah, of course, why not? You know, so, it's, it's just a good thing to be able to say, “It's my turn.” You know, 'cuz all those years they sent me money through the mail and letters and posting cards, and, uh, send me even a 'lil Christmas packages every Christmas, so, so now I can do it... It's time for me to do it.

Rather than being a drain on their families' financial resources, participants commented on their ability to not only cover their own expenses, but also contribute to the lives of others. As Eagle explained about his relationship with his girlfriend:

She used to come get me, and all the way from Charlotte come to Durham, and come take me out and stuff like that. And I used to be embarrassed 'cause I had no money. [The transitional housing program] wouldn't let us have no money 'cause you know we addicts and stuff like that... So when she used to come get me and stuff, I can't even buy a hamburger or a soda or nothing—uh, we'd go to McDonald's and stuff, and it's time to pay for food, I don't have no money 'cause you know, I can't have no money. And she used to buy stuff man. I used to always tell her, you know— “Okay. I'm saying one day, you know when I get myself together and, you know, I better buy you a hamburger,” and stuff like that. So that's just cool, now, when we go out, she don't got to pay for stuff all the time.

Participants spoke at length about not having to be a burden on family members who previously provided food, shelter, and money for cell phone bills and other expenses, without reciprocation. Some, like Charlie Mac and Marcus, emphasized the importance of being able to purchase gifts for

others, to demonstrate how much they were valued. In fact, Marcus argued that the ability to give gifts made it possible to feel comfortable around others:

You're able to be there. When you don't have finances, and not just me, I've heard stories from other men, you have a tendency to shy away. If I don't have gifts to bring to the birthday party, I don't come. If I don't have anything for Christmas then, you know, I'll just call rather than show my face, so that relationship changes because it's a lot better to be there physically now. You know, especially the younger kids, they just want your, you know, your presence is great. But if you can have presents with your presence, you know, it's just outstanding, and a lot of people, including myself, can shy away. I mean, you don't have any need to be there.

The parents in this study pointed out how GI allowed them to navigate family responsibilities, contribute positively to the lives of loved ones, and fulfill roles they deem important. Put another way, Excel was used not simply to purchase material goods and services, but also as a resource to strengthen and/or repair familial relationships.



Case Study: Fred

Fred is a man from Nigeria who came to the US in 1991. He has two children, one 25-year-old son with autism who lives in a full-time care facility and one 18-year-old daughter who lives at home. However, when Fred was first arrested and sentenced in 2004, his now-fiancé was only 8 weeks pregnant. Fred's daughter exclusively knew her father in the context of his incarceration for the first 18 years of her life. Because of this, she developed resentment towards her father and struggled with his return, prompting their enrollment in family counseling.

Once he came home, Fred was unable to work due to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement restrictions around his legal work status. Since being released, Fred's application for a work permit has remained buried in an administrative backlog. Therefore, Fred had no means of earning an income, and his lack of financial contributions to the household severely undermined his sense of self as a provider and caretaker. This was further compounded by North Carolina law, making Fred ineligible for SNAP benefits due to his record involving drug-related offenses.

With the cash from the GI pilot, though, Fred noted that his relationship with his daughter and sense of self as a father began to change.

I'm trying to do things with her and doing things with her at least involve a little money anyway, so without this program right here [Excel], I wouldn't be able to do nothing, you see what I'm saying? But now with this program, I can be able to take my daughter to the movie so that we can bond, we can keep bonding because I miss all of, almost all of her life.

Fred conceptualized the cash as a means to strengthen his bond with his daughter from the very first payment.

The first time I used the money from the Pilot, it was fulfilling that I can be able to, to help, to help my family. It was really fulfilling. That time my daughter, um, was cheering, was she was doing a cheerleader. So, and a cheerleader at, the school don't buy their cheerleading clothes, but I was able to buy their, to buy my daughter cheerleading clothes... It was—I was so happy. I was, I was so in joy like, like I was able to do something, something.

Employment and Income

Securing employment is critical for the reintegration process; it provides a means to secure shelter and food, is often a requirement of probation and parole, and research suggests that it can facilitate desistance through routinization, identity development, reductions in economic anxiety, and improvements in one's sense of belonging (Laub & Sampson, 2001; Laub & Sampson, 2006; Western, 2018). Unfortunately, a wealth of existing data establishes that formerly incarcerated people struggle in the contemporary labor market (Finlay & Mueller-Smith, 2021; Looney & Turner 2018). In one study of employment outcomes among individuals involved with North Carolina's criminal justice system, almost half (45%) of those released from prison failed to secure employment in the 2 years following release, and of those who did find work, median quarterly wages came out to only \$2,293, or about \$750 per month⁹ (North Carolina Sentencing and Policy Advisory Commission, 2022).

Part of the problem facing this population is that individuals with felony records face occupational licensing (and other legal) restrictions on the types of jobs they may take. In North Carolina alone, there are over 600 employment- and volunteering-related legal consequences of a criminal record (Collateral Consequences Inventory, n.d.). Furthermore, audit studies (where job testers are sent out to apply for open employment positions) demonstrate that employer discrimination is pervasive; applicants possessing felony criminal records are 50–60% less likely to receive callbacks from employers compared to their non-criminalized peers (Pager, 2003; Pager et al., 2009; Agan & Starr, 2017).

Participants in this study often described a broad-based labor market stigma that resulted in exclusion from all but the worst jobs (e.g. the most insecure, irregular, low-benefit, dead-end positions) and, frequently, exclusions from those jobs as well. As Jack succinctly put it, "People don't understand once you get a criminal record, it's over... You won't be able to get no good job if you got a background." Keisha expressed a similar sentiment:

Really, most of the jobs that like, accept me is low paying jobs and... It's like, hey you did what you did, now you—you gotta stay in a certain type of area. Like I can't explain—I can't explain. But it's like, what I—how I see it, I learned my lesson. Please don't punish me and make me just have this \$12 job or whatever. Like, I do deserve to live the life that I wanna live.

Thus, interviewees felt locked into a subjugated labor position with little ability to achieve economic mobility.

Participants also noted that although much of their labor market disadvantage stemmed from formal organizational preferences, it emanated from more individual-level processes as well. Argus explained:

⁹ On the surface, the employment landscape in Durham appears rich in job opportunities. As of May 2022, the average hourly wage in metro Durham was \$34.48, accompanied by a low unemployment rate of 3.1%. Leading employers such as Duke University, Durham Public Schools, IBM, and Cisco Systems offer a variety of positions for job seekers. That said, the robust job market provides limited options for individuals with criminal records, complicating their efforts to reintegrate effectively. Formerly incarcerated job seekers must often contend with severe skill and credential challenges, which significantly hamper their employability and earnings potential post-incarceration. Many of these individuals are also dealing with untreated substance use and other health problems, further limiting their ability to secure work.

They'll give you the, a, an initial, like, [sighs] what's the word? Like, an initial...[sighs] greeting, and they'll end up liking you, but then they'll run your... criminal record. And they'll see what you were charged with and they're like, "Oh." You know, it's, like, completely different. So, you're just being judged, like, basically judging a book by its cover ... And another thing is that a lot of jobs that people think... you normally should be able to get, with a criminal record, you really don't, because it's, it's, because of the person that's actually hiring you. You see what I'm saying?

Argus argued that even if a company did not have a formal policy banning the hiring of people with criminal records, cultural stigma often induces hiring managers to discriminate against otherwise qualified candidates.

Quantitative trends demonstrated some improvement in labor market outcomes of participants over time; however, the data point to sustained difficulties in attaining full-time work. For example, although those in the treatment group were significantly more likely to be employed full-time at Baseline (36% vs. 21%; $B=0.76, p=0.008$), this advantage attenuated slightly by 6 months (30% vs. 36%; $B=-1.06, p=0.008$) and continued to diminish, settling at 30% by 12 months. However, at 6 months post-intervention, the treatment group reported a 3 percent point higher level of full-time employment compared to the control group. Part-time employment was higher among the control group at Baseline (24% vs. 12%; $B=-0.82, p=0.022$), fluctuated over time, and remained slightly higher at 18 months (13% vs. 10%). Unemployment rates for those actively seeking work declined from Baseline to post-intervention, with the control group decreasing from 35% to 13% and the treatment group from 26% to 19%. Stay-at-home caregivers and gig workers remained relatively stable, showing no significant differences between groups. However, non-Hispanic participants were 2.91 times more likely to be business owners/self-employed compared to Hispanic participants ($B=1.07, p=0.001$). Among those working, differences emerged in the occupational categories between the groups. The treatment group most commonly reported working in private, for-profit companies, followed by non-profits, the government sector, and being self-employed, whereas the control group predominantly reported working in private, for-profit companies or being self-employed.

The time-intensive, emotional rollercoaster involved in navigating the labor market as a stigmatized job-seeker is also worth noting. As Jet explained:

People will contact you and say, "You a good fit for our job," but at the same time they're gonna say, "We don't hire felons." So you end up investing your time and energy in it and travel to the place, uh, you haven't been approved because of your background.

Indeed, many participants described a somewhat under-accounted-for post-imprisonment barrier to economic success—time inequality (Halushka, 2019; Wang & Bertram, 2022). Criminalized people enjoy far less time in their everyday lives compared to those who have never been incarcerated. For example, along with probation and parole conditions mandating various interventions (e.g. anger management) or regular supervisory meetings, those with criminal records must spend far more time applying for jobs, considering the right strategy for garnering employer interest as a stigmatized

person,¹⁰ and explaining their history (compared to those without records) in order to have a chance at economic success.

Furthermore, many participants felt unclear on exactly how to interpret employer cues and navigate the hiring process. Eric recounted:

You know, the interview and stuff like that, it's like, hey, like, do I tell them what's going on? Or do I just let them run my background? And it's like, I had, I had, like, a, a good opportunity to get a job at, um, at [LOCAL HOSPITAL]. And, and, you know, like, uh, I had my, uh, interview and stuff like that. Set orientation date. Everything like that. And the next thing you know, "Hey, something caught up in your background"... And then they're asking, "Oh, so what's this on your background? What was that about?" Mm. Then, "We see this on your background, what was that about?" And it's like, they start asking all of these questions ... I, I kind of don't want to relive that past and think about it.

Forced to rehash difficult periods of their lives, and without a clear roadmap for navigating the ambiguity of labor market opportunities and barriers, most participants expressed a generally cynical view of their job prospects. Moreover, as participants reflected upon their exclusions from multiple domains such as housing, welfare benefits, and employment, they exhibited a sense of perpetual punishment. As Eagle explained, "Sitting in an interview and gotta explain something that happened in '95, and I don't even remember. They gotta tell me what happened—what happened again? ... come on, it shouldn't be like that." As participants described having to recall and explain old convictions, many argued that there was little cultural space to shed old identities and begin anew. Yet as Tony opined, "I don't think it's fair, because a lot of people do change, you know, for the better." Marcus further expanded upon this system of presumed guilt and judgment:

It is ... as if they think you are a felon always. And, you know, you're, you're guilty. So there's no, um, no corrections, there's nothing, nothing you can do. You're always being judged and... you will be held to a higher standard. You don't have the benefit of the doubt... you can't misspeak, you, you can't make a mistake. You have to walk a tight rope and a straight line, and if you deviate any, I told you, I told you, see, you know. And somebody else that had to do that, they get, they get kind of a whole lot of leniency and benefit of the doubt. You know, he just misspoke, he made a mistake, but not somebody that has been judged.

Marcus later noted that, "it's disheartening that a society is so unforgiving. You know, because you... do your crime, you do your time. But do you actually do your time, you know? It's ongoing." This theme of perpetual punishment ran throughout participant narratives but was strongest as they discussed their labor market experiences. In a society where so much of one's well-being depends upon work, it was clear that the economic domain delineated the enduring confines of their carceral citizenship.

¹⁰ For example, participants considered whether and when to reveal their criminal record: a difficult question to answer absent insider knowledge on the formal and informal stances, and background check practices, of organizations and/or hiring managers.

As such, diverse job search strategies were adopted by participants seeking employment after release, with over 90% in both groups making concerted efforts to secure employment. Participants in the control group more frequently consulted friends (72% vs. 61%) and relatives (59% vs. 50%) compared to those in the treatment group. Similar usage rates were observed for contacting a parole/probation officer (30% control vs. 28% treatment) and using newspaper ads (26% control vs. 27% treatment). The treatment group relied more on reaching out to a former employer (37% vs. 35%) and utilizing state employment agencies (27% vs. 20%) than the control group. Both groups showed low usage of yellow pages, school placement officers, and labor unions. Answering help-wanted signs and using temporary employment agencies were consistent across both groups, while a higher percentage of the treatment group used private employment services (17% vs. 13%) and sent resumes or called employers (50% vs. 43%). Online job applications were the most common method in both groups (72% for treatment vs. 78% for control).

It is also important to note that some participants conceptualized their GI payments as an indirect resource to help better navigate the labor market. For instance, when asked how the money impacted his approach of getting jobs, Jet noted that the extra income opened additional opportunities.

Interviewer: *I know you already talked about how difficult it's been to get jobs because of your record, so we're gonna skip that question. Um, has receiving the GI payments changed how you, like, approach getting a job at all?*

Jet Black: *Somewhat, because [clears throat] like, um... it's like, you know your means... How much you get per month, you know, and, and how much it's gonna take you to get from here to there. So, at some point in time, you know, I, I wouldn't take the job if I didn't have that money. I wouldn't take a job that was, like, in Raleigh, say, for instance. It's just too much driving for me. I gotta drive way over there and I ain't got the mon—, if I ain't making the amount of money I need to do that per week, then it's no reason for me to get that job. You know, it's like, I might as well work at McDonald's here for the same amount of money. Even though I hate working fast food. [both chuckle]*

Interviewer: *Yeah, it's not fun.*

Jet Black: *No, I don't like working fast food. So, yeah. I wouldn't do, I wouldn't do nothing like that, you know, if it wasn't for the GI, I wouldn't, um, certain jobs I wouldn't take because I didn't, I couldn't make it, you know. It wouldn't be feasible.*

Interviewer: *So now it's, like, expanded how far you can go to get a job*

Jet Black: *Mhm.*

Interviewer: *Okay.*

Jet Black: *So yeah, I work in [ANOTHER CITY IN THE STATE] now. So that's, like, 40 minutes, um, with the traffic in the morning.*

For Jet, the GI payments both expanded the opportunities available to him (by increasing the geographic distance of jobs he could afford to take), while also improving his ability to make choices around preferred places of employment. As such, GI may improve the quality of jobs available to otherwise disadvantaged job seekers.

Another participant, Johnny, also commented on the potential of GI to help navigate the job market with limited resources:

Excel has... kind of leveled the playing field. Okay, we, we, we understand that these individuals come out. Uh, people are closing doors in they face. So this is what we're gonna do. We're going to create something at least temporarily so that they can get up to par. So just to say, if I didn't have no job and I was getting 600 a month, see my plan will be different. Because I would take the 600, then I'll maybe take that and this is, this is just an example. I would set like maybe a 150 to put it away and make that 450 whatever the expenses is for the month.

Johnny viewed the money as somewhat of an equalizer. Recognizing that carceral citizens must spend more time than others applying for jobs in order to eventually secure one, participants expressed how those with criminal records could rely upon GI to get them through extensive periods of job searching.

Quantitative patterns also suggest that the treatment group reported more positive outcomes in overcoming employment barriers—such as avoiding parole and probation violation, drugs and alcohol, and criminal behaviors—compared to the control group throughout the evaluation period. Specifically, the ordered logistic regression estimates reveal that participants in the treatment group showed significant positive outcomes in their ability to provide themselves with food at 6 months ($B=-0.882, p=0.000$) and 12 months ($B=-0.820, p=0.001$); have enough money to support themselves at 6 months ($B=-0.489, p=0.038$); stay alcohol-free at 6 months ($B=-0.549, p=0.046$), 12 months ($B=-0.949, p=0.000$), and 18 months ($B=-0.851, p=0.001$); stay drug-free at 6 months ($B=-0.880, p=0.002$), 12 months ($B=-0.854, p=0.002$), and 18 months ($B=-0.644, p=0.018$); stay away from criminal activity at 6 months ($B=-0.804, p=0.006$) and 18 months ($B=-1.022, p=0.000$); and avoid a parole/probation violation at 12 months ($B=-1.005, p=0.001$) and 18 months ($B=-1.715, p=0.000$). Hispanic participants reported significantly lower ability to stay drug-free at 6 months ($B=-2.645, p=0.011$), 12 months ($B=-1.479, p=0.022$), and 18 months ($B=-1.142, p=0.047$) compared to non-Hispanic participants. These outcomes affirm that, beyond job training skills, the GI plays a crucial role in overcoming employment barriers for this vulnerable population: helping to address basic needs, reducing the stress of obtaining food and other essentials, and enabling individuals to abstain from harmful and risky activities, thus providing stability and agency to focus on gaining and maintaining employment.

Responses to the question “Why haven’t you looked for work since release?” were too sparse to yield meaningful insights. However, the few respondents who did provide answers to the survey question revealed ongoing struggles. Some accepted that their limited education and skills were significant barriers to employment, highlighting the failure of the system to equip these individuals with the necessary tools and support to improve their job prospects, leaving them at a profound disadvantage in the labor market upon release. Tanya, a working mother of three children, provided insight into her

struggles entering the labor market:

[For] people released from prison, like, there's not really a lot of help out there... your probation officer... They want to know, you know, where you're working, they, you know, you gotta get a job. You can't be on probation and not have a job, you know, 'cause you gotta, you know, I mean, you gotta be a working person in society, you know. But it's, like, they don't have the resources, you know, to help you go find a job, you know. It's just, like, well, if you don't, you know, you're gonna be in trouble. So, you kinda either figure it out yourself or you, you know, just know, like, you're gonna get back in trouble. [chuckles]

It is also worth noting that among the participants who did have access to further education before, during, and/or after incarceration, many expressed skeptical sentiments similar to those of Sirius:

Well long story short [chuckles], I, uh, got locked up when I was 18. I went to prison. That was in 1976. I didn't get out until 2019. So I spent almost half a century, to give some perspective—I went to prison about 13 months after the fall of Vietnam, the fall of Saigon, and uh, Apple II computers. I got locked up in the spring of '76. Apple II computers came out in the fall of '76. So I went to prison before personal computers. Early on, I ran across an old timer and he told me, he says, "You've got two choices." He says, "You can either do the time, or you can let the time do you." I chose to do the time. I kept up with technology. I learned computers, got GED, uh, didn't—I took college courses but I didn't go for a degree. Because I figured anything that I would need a degree for, I couldn't get because of my background, criminal background.

Similarly, Tanya expressed doubt about the utility of completing the remaining credits of her degree:

I went back to school as an adult, um, and I, I'm almost finished with my degree, but now, um, since I've gotten into trouble as an adult, now I don't really know if it's kind of worth even finishing. Because yeah, I can have a college degree, um, which I'm like six credits short of getting, but I'm also a convicted felon. So, I'm like, I don't know if it's even worth it, because a lot of jobs aren't gonna look past my conviction to even care, you know, to what kind of education I have. So, I'm kinda just in a stuck point right now... I don't know if it's worth finishing my degree.

Others, such as interviewee Keisha, mentioned caregiving responsibilities as barriers to work: "In the past, I really needed childcare. Now that I have childcare, it's actually, have been improving my, uh, ability to stay focused at work."

In the end, the data presented here suggests that although GI cannot fully address the significant structural barriers dislocating carceral citizens from good jobs, it may help individuals navigate such barriers in a more effective manner.

Figure 3. Employment Barriers

Participants were asked to rate how difficult or easy it was to do the following. The charts illustrate the percentage of people in treatment and control who said these tasks were not very difficult.

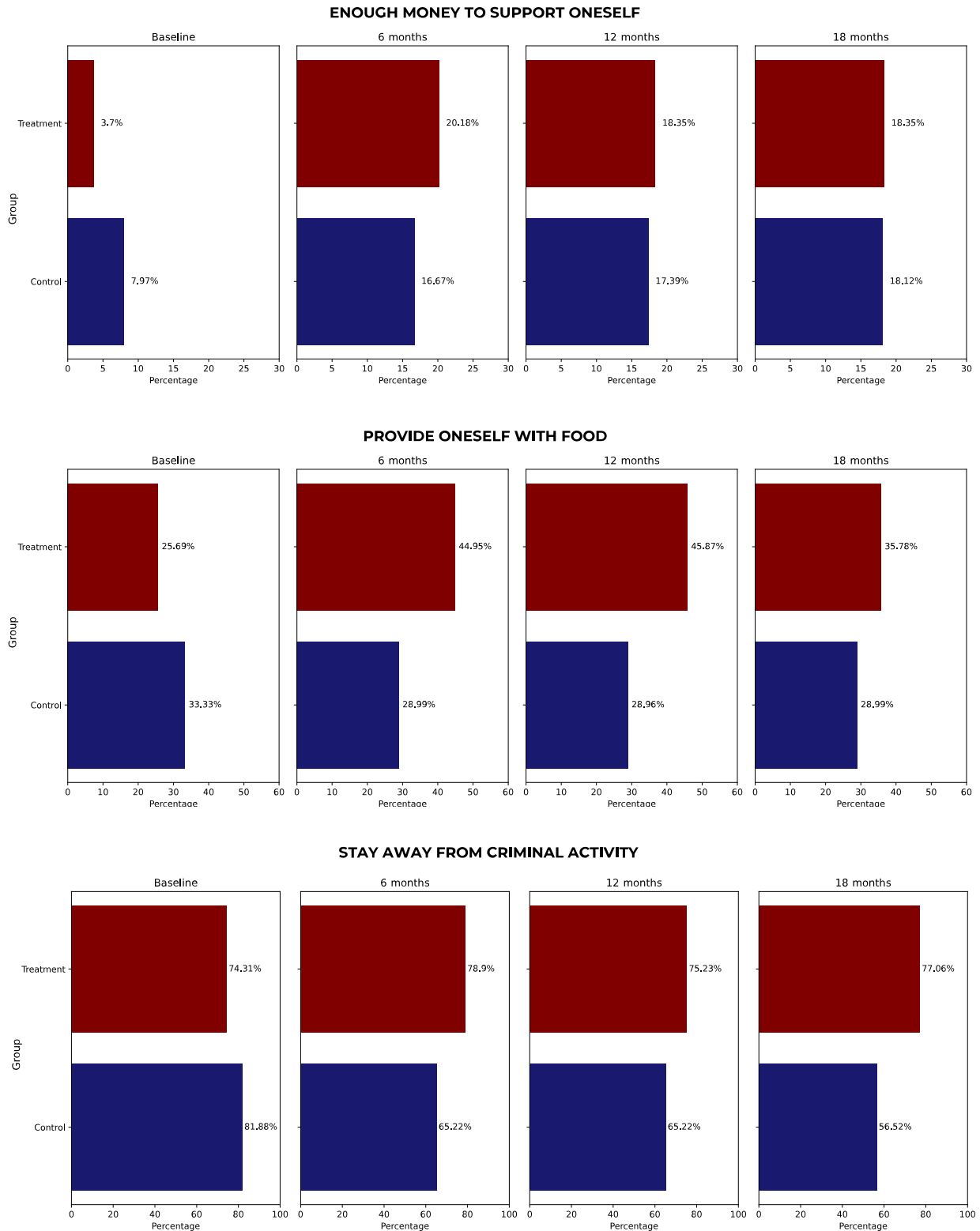
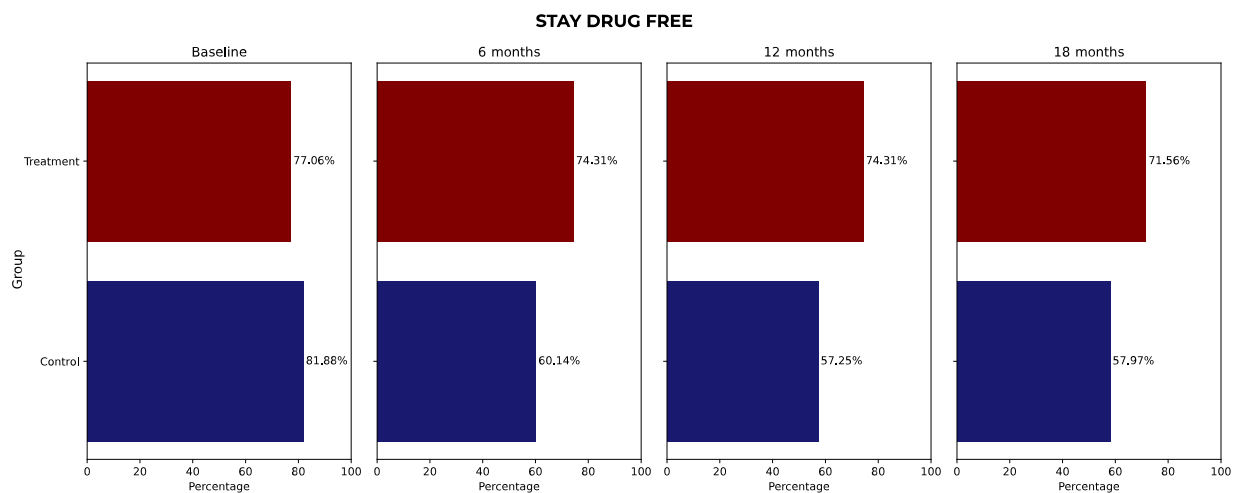
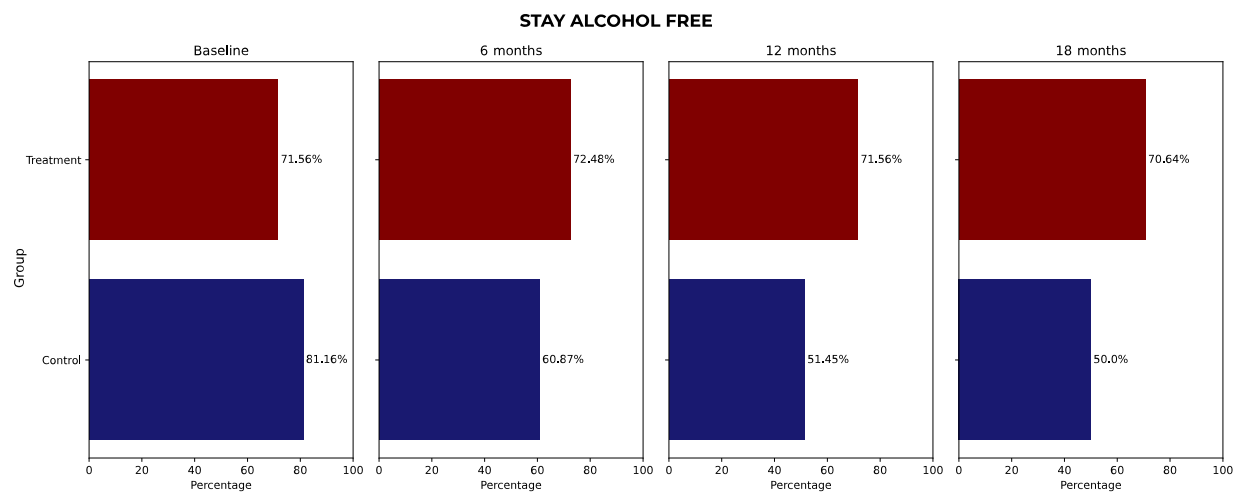
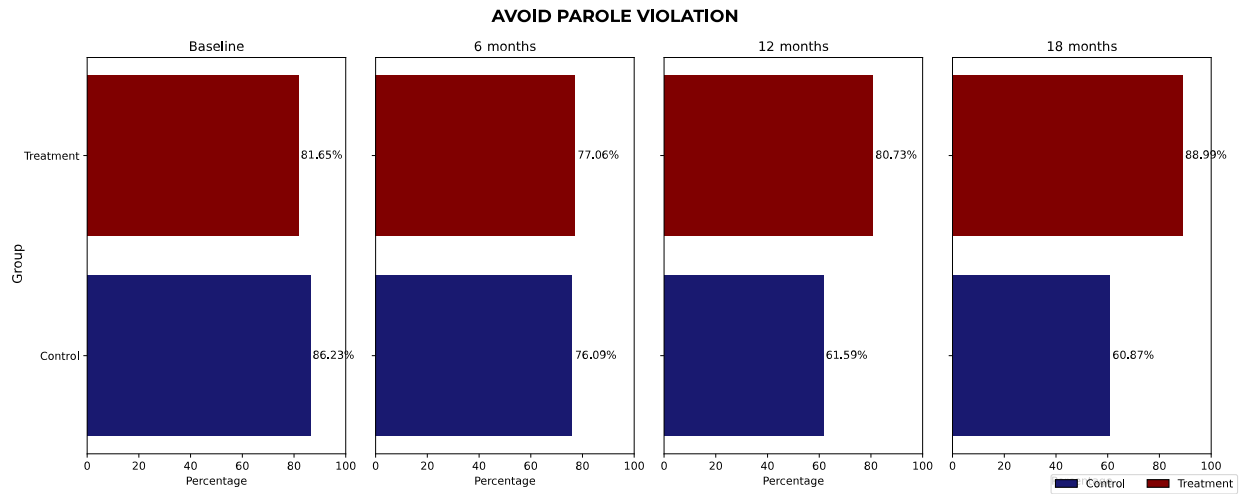


Figure 3. Employment Barriers (continued)

Participants were asked to rate how difficult or easy it was to do the following. The charts illustrate the percentage of people in treatment and control who said these tasks were not very difficult.



Case Study: Jack

Jack was first arrested while in middle school for trying to sell cocaine (to an undercover cop) so that he could feed himself. Jack's mother struggled with substance use herself, leading to a turbulent childhood and frequent moves, as they were "going from home to home, then from room to room, staying with our people." Due to constantly moving around, Jack changed schools nearly every year until he dropped out in the 10th grade; his frequently interrupted and eventually discontinued formal education resulted in Jack never fully developing the ability to read. Since his first arrest in middle school, Jack has been in and out of prison for various sentences, ranging in length from a few months to 2 years at a time. This cycle of incarceration, release, and reincarceration has meant extensive homelessness for nearly all of his adult life, further compounding the challenges he has faced in securing gainful employment.

Most recently, Jack made strides towards stability and economic security. He has been out of prison for nearly 2 years and was no longer on probation or parole at the time of his interview. He secured stable housing by pooling resources and living with his girlfriend, her mother, his own mother, and his son. Jack reported having a job with a moving company, though he only gets part-time hours and work slows down considerably in the winter season. While the job is not ideal and the income is variable, Jack feels locked into his socioeconomic position due to both his record and his skillset. "I'm an under-the-table working kind of guy, you know, that's all I can do, and I hate it."

Jack had previously secured a job at a general retail store, though it lasted for only a day.

I got this job at [a store] a few months ago... I was so happy... I had to go in the back, and she put me on a damn computer. You know, I felt so small... I felt real small because I didn't know what I was looking at, you know? ... I'm looking at all these words. I don't know what the hell they say... I'm crying, and I ran out, I jumped in my car, and came home. I put the cover over my head and start crying like a baby. That's what I did. It's like a big chip on my shoulder.

Jack desperately wanted a decent job, but was cognizant of the multiple forces working against him. Without the ability to read and with the negative credential of a criminal record, Jack felt relegated to an inconsistent, under-the-table job and a lifetime of economic marginality. Although the GI provided an important economic supplement, he struggled to envision a future in which he enjoyed economic mobility. Unfortunately, Jack's story is unlikely to be unique. According to the U.S. Department of Education, an estimated 29% of individuals who are incarcerated do not meet contemporary literacy standards (Rampey et al., 2016). Absent an ability to read and digest text or basic quantitative figures, many criminalized people are burdened with overlapping labor market disadvantages—a fact that both highlights the need for income support and one that demands additional educational resources.

3. GI's Impact on Health and Well-Being

Mental Health

Navigating life after incarceration can be an extraordinarily stressful experience. In fact, interviewees reported that most correctional facilities did little to facilitate reintegration, resulting in abrupt and/or unsupported reentry experiences defined by bureaucratic burdens (e.g. obtaining valid identification, reporting to the parole office, etc.) and unaddressed needs (e.g. Where will I stay? How will I earn income?). Adding to these concerns is the weight of criminal stigma and collateral consequences, which limited participants' access to resources and opportunity structures while also contributing to their economic precarity. Furthermore, the constant barrage of implicit (and sometimes explicit) messages informing participants that they do not qualify or do not belong—because of a conviction that they have already been formally punished for—engendered heightened levels of stress and anxiety in the everyday. When asked what it is like to have a felony record, Fred's response elucidates the resulting mental strain:

Um, to have a have a felony. Uh, you see, I don't even know how to explain it. It's something, it's a nightmare, I'll put it that way. It's a nightmare because once you have a criminal record, a felony, it affects you for the rest of your life, is a nightmare. Some people, some schools say they can't take you because of your criminal record ... I don't even know how to explain it, because it will make your life miserable in the future... If you go anywhere, they say they have to pull your criminal record. Anywhere you go, go get a job, go even to go buy a car, they start checking criminal record ... And the problem on that issue right here is not only physical—it affects you mentally and emotionally, you see what I'm saying? Because once you go to get a job, if they don't give you that job, it gets your a stress level some kind of high, then from there your blood pressure might go high, from there it affects your total being. Yeah, it affect your total being.

As participants told countless stories of exclusion, they reported the toll that discrimination and poverty take on mental and physical health. Eagle described the hopelessness and strain of living in poverty with an addiction, and without any support:

I was homeless and you know, eating out of trash cans and you know, waiting 'til McDonald's closed and I knew they was gonna throw all the uh, leftovers in the dumpsters, and stuff like that, man. And you know, I was sleeping outside, sleeping in abandoned houses and, you know, anything. Anything I needed to get my next fix or, you know, just didn't have a care in the world, you know. I was suicidal a lot in life and I think the only reason I didn't, um, kill myself—I remember I was over in Jersey—I wanted to jump off the bridge, I never forgot that—I wanted to jump off the bridge and I just wanted to end my life. And only thing that stopped me from doing it, 'cause I was scared that I wouldn't, uh, kill myself. I thought, if I jump off this bridge and I hit the water, I'll

probably break my body up, but I'll still be alive now, being a wheelchair. So that's why I didn't jump that day. And one day, I had a gun and I put the gun to my head and I said, damn, I said, I'm gonna pull the trigger, and the bullet don't kill me, now I'm gonna be braindead or whatever, and stuff like that. That's one of the reasons, I, um, um, I didn't commit suicide, man. But I thought about it a lot, like stuff got so bad for me then. Like I said, I lost my family and homeless and on drugs and hungry and dirty, stinking and like, just, you know. It was just—it was just—it was just—it was just a bad time. You know what I'm saying? It was just, I had—I had no hope. And like I said, I didn't care about myself and I didn't love myself and, you know, a whole lot of stuff come with that, man. That's it. Now that, you know, I got the help that I got and, you know, now I'm living the way I'm living, and you know, when I see other people like that just—it just touches me, 'cause like I said, I was once them.

Eagle was fortunate to eventually get access to a residential drug treatment program, which he credited for helping to turn his life around, but he also argued for addressing the immediate economic destitution of those exiting prisons:

I'm saying, when they get out of jail, they just throw them out the street. Please let me have a check or some money waiting for 'em. You know what I'm saying? So, when they get out of jail, they don't have nowhere to go. Hey, here's \$1,500, let you stay in a hotel for a couple of nights or a week or two until you find a better halfway house or shelter or somewhere to go. I just did 10 years—I need something to eat. I need somewhere to live. I need some money. I need some clothes.

Eagle noted that because he was lucky enough to be receiving the GI payments, “I don't have to worry about nothing,” a sentiment shared among other participants who felt as though the money reduced the daily stress of trying to figure out how to survive.

Quantitative findings suggest no significant detectable differences between groups in the levels of psychological distress, depression, and anxiety at Baseline, though on average, the mean scores for the treatment group ($M=22.62$) were generally higher than the control ($M=21.25$). At 6 months, a small but improved effect of the GI on mental health was detected, with the treatment group showing a steeper reduction over Baseline scores in distress (mean difference=-0.18), anxiety (mean difference=-0.11), and depression (mean difference=-0.07) relative to the control group. These differences, however, were not statistically significant. Psychological distress for the treatment group further attenuated at the conclusion of the GI at 12 months (mean difference=-0.50). This downward trend was sustained 6 months post-intervention, as a statistically significant difference emerged in both psychological distress ($B=-2.46$, $p=0.039$) and anxiety ($B=-1.06$, $p=0.032$) levels. Overall, based on regression estimates, the treatment group exhibited a predicted 7.91% reduction in psychological distress from Baseline to the 6-month follow-up, while the control group showed a marginal increase of 3.14% during the same period. The analysis also indicated that the relationship between ethnicity and mental health scores was not statistically significant. Despite these positive trends, the mental well-being scores of both groups at no point fell below the global cut-off for moderate levels of psychological distress.

Overall, stress levels attenuated for the treatment group but remained relatively stable for the control group. Results indicate high levels of stress for both treatment ($M=7.69$) and control ($M=7.58$) groups at the outset, as the sample was attempting to reintegrate into society. At every time point thereafter, the treatment group reported lower mean stress levels relative to the control: 7.02 vs. 7.20 at 6 months, 6.80 vs. 7.13 at 12 months, and 6.85 vs 7.36 at the conclusion of the study, though the differences were not statistically significant. Regression estimates revealed Hispanic participants were more likely to report higher levels of stress compared to non-Hispanic participants ($B=1.32, p=0.03$). Importantly, since mental health and stress issues are closely intertwined with economic vulnerability and labor market outcomes, even marginal reductions in stress can go a long way in ameliorating living standards—a fact made visible as interviewees discussed their experiences.

For example, Jack, who reported that he did not know what he was going to do after release from prison, conceptualized the Excel payments as a form of stress reduction: “It ease your mind a whole lot. Uh, you have less stress, you know, you know you got that money coming to take care of that bill, you know?” Similarly, Eric noted that “it helps just more in general... If I ever came short on something it’s like... well, don’t stress yourself out.” When asked what she would be doing without the money, Keisha responded with a brief but poignant answer: “Stressing.” As Keisha continued after being asked to say more: “I would be behind on everything. I would be stressing. So when I say I’m thankful, I’m thankful.” Keisha emphasized the word “stressing,” signaling the importance of the GI in reducing her economic anxieties around trying to provide for three children.

Importantly, most participants linked the GI payments to crime reduction, through improvements to their psychological well-being. As economic stability and mobility improved, participants argued that they would have more time and space to think clearly, and less of a need to engage in criminal acts of survival. Tony explained such pathways in detail:

What’s helpful with this program is, um, basically, you know, some people be depressed when they don’t have, you know, nothing, nothing at all. So I’ll also say it, it’s keeping down a lot of stress when they receive some type of income coming in you know, because some people do not have nothing at all. So it makes them do things out of their comfort to go get money. So when they’re getting this type of income, you know, it’s, it’s enough to hold them over for a little second, man, you know? You shouldn’t really have to get out here to do bad options, you know?

Interviewer: *You’re saying you have more ideas ‘cause you don’t have to worry; is that what you’re saying?*

Tony: *Yeah. You know, when you don’t have money coming in, you, you know, it’s stressful. So when you got income coming in like, you know, it’s, it’s, it’s, it’s keeping down, like, your, your attempts and your do’s and don’ts, ‘cause you got people that go back to their old ways when they don’t have money. So when they got money coming in like some type of income, it’s kinda like keeping down their stress levels as far as making them make bad decisions, you know?*

Participants argued that many of the crimes committed by themselves and others were, on some level, rooted in their economically unstable positions. Jet, who lamented that he was once given \$65 in gate money after an 8-year prison bid, said:

When you got a person that's coming out of prison or out of jail, you gotta realize, if we don't help this person, they're probably going back. But the fact is, it's deeper than that. Let's just say this person is a struggling... or he or she is struggling in life, and they just wanna get some money so they can get their head above water. So they robbing people. It might be that they been robbing people before that, but it could be you they rob the next time. So if you got the chance to get this person's mindset together so they don't have to do all of this stuff, the world would be a better place.

Participants argued that providing a GI to people exiting prisons would help “get their head above water,” a necessary precondition for being able to “breathe” and think during a difficult transitional period. Without the financial support, participants noted that the everyday stressors of post-incarceration life actively push individuals to engage in (criminalized) behaviors they would prefer to stay away from.

GI Effects on Recidivism

To further evaluate the GI's effectiveness in reducing recidivism, this study conducted a longitudinal analysis calculating the recidivism rates during and for the 6 months immediately following the pilot, comparing recidivism rates between the treatment and control groups. Recidivism was defined as any criminal act resulting in rearrest, reconviction, or return to incarceration during the post-intervention period, excluding technical parole violations that did not result in new convictions. Data were missing for 24 participants' post-intervention parole status or incarceration records (14 from the treatment group and 10 from the control group). Expanded efforts including searches of sex offender registries and criminal justice databases in adjacent counties, yielded no additional information for these cases. Sadly, two participants from the treatment group passed away over the course of the pilot. These cases were coded as 0 during the recidivism analysis so as not to skew the findings in either direction.

The analysis employed a Generalized Linear Mixed Model (GLMM) with a logit link function and incorporated random intercepts for participants to account for within-subject correlation in the repeated measures design. Fixed effects included treatment, time point, and their interaction term. The interaction term served as the primary parameter of interest, indicating whether changes in recidivism rates from pre-intervention to post-intervention differed significantly between treatment conditions.

To address potential bias from missing data, the study used two complementary analytical approaches:

- » Complete case analysis, restricted to participants with complete data for both time points
- » MICE to address uncertainty in missing values

Table 8. Comparative Analysis of Results Using Complete Case Analysis and MICE

TERM	ODDS RATIO (COMPLETE CASE)	ODDS RATIO (MICE)	CONFIDENCE INTERVAL (COMPLETE CASE)	CONFIDENCE INTERVAL (MICE)
Intercept	2.718	2.718	[0.085, 86.450]	[2.659, 2.779]
Group Effect	1.000	1.000	[0.005, 182.699]	[0.967, 1.034]
Time	0.000	0.381	[0.0, 0.039]	[0.370, 0.394]
Group: Time	0.004	1.000	[0.0, 6.189]	[0.954, 1.049]

Overall, the recidivism rate for both the treatment and control was 4%. The treatment-by-time interaction (OR = 1.000, 95% CI [0.954, 1.049]) indicated no statistically significant differential effect of the intervention, and the GI did not generate an incremental effect on recidivism.

The very low recidivism rate for both the treatment and control groups is perhaps reflective of the eligibility criteria for the study; participants had to have been released from incarceration within the last 5 years. However, as discussed earlier in this report, the risk of recidivism is often highest in the months immediately following release from incarceration; an estimated 25% of people released from the Durham County Jail re-enter the justice system within 100 days (City of Durham, n.d.). Individual recidivism is influenced by numerous personal, social, organizational, and environmental factors, but it is possible that these participants were generally at a lower risk of recidivism due to the length of time since their release. While GI did not significantly impact recidivism, it did help address a myriad of other challenges that affect formerly incarcerated people. Additionally, since these results demonstrate that participants within the treatment group did not exhibit increased recidivism rates relative to the control group, assumptions around the potential misuse of direct financial support among this population are largely unfounded.

General Health

The SF-36 General Health measure was used to assess study participants' overall health and perception of their own well-being (RAND, n.d.). Initially, the treatment group reported lower general health scores (M=63.26) relative to the control group (M=68.01), though this difference was not statistically significant. However, their scores improved more rapidly than those of the control group as the study progressed: at 6 months, the mean difference was 1.49 (B=6.24, $p=0.01$); at 12 months, the difference was 0.06 (B=5.36, $p=0.01$); and by post-intervention, the difference was 1.76 (B=6.51, $p=0.00$). The impact of the GI on participant's role limitations due to physical health was varied. The treatment group (M=55.28) reported lower physical health scores at Baseline compared to the control group (M=69.88), and this difference was statistically significant (B=-13.69, $p=.01$). Yet, the scores for the treatment group improved over time: at 6 months, the mean difference was -0.52; at 12 months, the difference was -0.34 (B=14.26, $p=0.01$); and by post-intervention, the difference was -1.10. The relationship between

ethnicity and the average general health or role limitations was not statistically significant between groups. However, the extent to which health limited an individual's physical activities yielded varied outcomes. The treatment group ($M=74.45$) had lower physical functioning scores at Baseline compared to the control ($M=83.42$), and this was statistically significant ($B=-7.97$, $p=.02$). At 6 months, the mean difference between the groups attenuated ($B=6.82$, $p=.01$), but diverged again at 12 months (mean difference= -9.67) and 18 months (mean difference= -3.88). Additionally, non-Hispanic participants reported better physical functioning ($B=11.57$, $p<0.001$) compared to Hispanic participants. The treatment group's improved general health and reduced role limitations may be due to better housing, decreased food insecurity, increased access to health services facilitated by the GI, or their enhanced resilience in adjusting to life after incarceration.

Chaos

The proximal effects of poverty, housing instability, and mental health manifest in various domains, including disrupted routines, organizational challenges, and increased noise levels. These outcomes were quantitatively captured by the CHAOS scale (Matheny et al., 1995), which assesses the extent of environmental instability and disorganization on household dynamics.

Initially, both groups had comparable scores on the CHAOS scale ($M=29.03$ for treatment vs. $M=28.10$ for control), indicating similar levels of household instability and disorganization. Six months after the first disbursement, an attenuation in chaos was observed in the treatment group ($M=27.40$) compared to the control group ($M=29.85$), which was statistically significant ($B=-3.37$, $p=0.00$). This trend of lower household chaos was sustained at 12 months ($B=-3.71$, $p=0.00$). Although the average chaos increased marginally for the treatment group 6 months post-intervention ($M=29.42$), the control group showed a significantly higher increase, with a mean of 32.51 and a statistical difference of $B=-4.01$ ($p=0.00$). The relationship between ethnicity and household environment was not statistically significant. Additionally, the proportion of participants reporting High levels of household chaos saw a 15 percent point increase for the control group between Baseline and post-intervention, compared to only 3 percent points for the treatment group. Together these findings illustrate the effectiveness of the GI in improving household stability and reducing environmental chaos.

Case Study: Dana (and Other Anecdotes)

For Dana, a 50-year-old woman working as a dog groomer in Durham, cash from the GI program filled a crucial gap that ultimately allowed her to reach 18 months of sobriety, secure stable housing, and meet important health goals.

Dana was most recently incarcerated for 90 days in jail for a drug-related offense. She was then mandated to attend an intensive recovery program upon her release. Dana recognized the judge's sentencing as a pivotal moment in her recovery, but she did not immediately have the financial support necessary to take care of herself prior to the GI.

Like other times she had been released, Dana relied on financial support from family members in order to get by. Between the recovery programming being roughly 6 hours each day, Dana's lack of access to transportation, and the facility-mandated curfew, it was virtually impossible to have even a part-time job.

Once Dana began receiving the cash from the GI, she was able to save money to purchase a car, which then allowed her to start returning to work part-time as a dog groomer. While still living in the sober house, Dana was able to develop her own financial independence and cease relying on her mother for support. Instead, Dana was now able to support her own daughter, who was going through a divorce and needed a new place to live. Dana used the cash from the GI to secure a new place for both her and her daughter to live, just as Dana was preparing to move out of her recovery house. Like other participants, Dana also used some of the cash from the GI to address outstanding health concerns. For example, Dana was able to make dental appointments for the first time in years, facilitated both by her sobriety and financial security.

Another recipient, Argus, who lives with a degenerative disc disease, was able to buy a mobility aid to support a poorly-healed broken ankle. After having to quit his previous job due to the toll it took on his ankle, Argus said the scooter he purchased with the GI has allowed him to maintain his current employment as a baker. Charlie Mac, who struggles with several chronic health conditions, used some of the cash from the GI to purchase additional doses of his asthma medication for a reduced price in the underground market. Being able to afford his medicine has allowed Charlie Mac to avoid going to urgent care or the emergency room to seek treatment for his asthma attacks, which were more frequent prior to him being able to purchase an adequate amount of daily medication.

Case Study: Esmeralda

Esmeralda is a Black woman and mother of four children ranging in age from 14 to 36. Although Esmeralda lost custody of her three youngest children after being convicted of drug offenses, she continues to be a significant source of support in their lives: “The majority of the [Excel] money, I’ll send to my kids, because I still have to be a mother and take care of my kids.” Esmeralda mentioned that it “hurt” to be away from her children, but that she needed to “get myself together before I can be better for them.”

At the time of the interview, Esmeralda was out of work after slipping and fracturing a bone on the job. Receiving less than \$200 from her last worker’s compensation check, Esmeralda was struggling to get by based largely on the income from Excel. Still, she endeavored to support her children in any way possible, recounting a time when she split the last \$4 she had in her Cash App account so that her daughter could purchase a snack at school.

Esmeralda also described a history of housing insecurity since being released from prison. In fact, Esmeralda was homeless when she received her first payment, so she used it to purchase a room after sending her children \$25 each. She explained,

I was homeless, living from five, six, to seven different couches since I’ve been in Durham this past year. Um, I’m getting tired, like my body can only take so much. Um, it’s hard, I don’t want to cry, but it’s hard. [pauses, starts to cry and her voice cracks] To be without what you normally have, you can’t call nobody to pick you up. My mama, since she’s been gone, I’ve really had nobody.

At the time of the interview, Esmeralda was living at her sister’s home, where she felt uncomfortable: “I can’t sleep like I want to sleep, because I’m in somebody else’s house. You have loud people, babies running around all day, and just crazy stuff.” She continued:

Sometimes I’ll just call my friend and be like, I ain’t got no money until the 15th, but I will pay you \$50 just to take me home to my kids, and I stay down there for a couple of days. And I come back.

Esmeralda stated that she would rather sleep in a car if she were able to afford one. Looking back on her life since her initial arrest, Esmeralda felt isolated and largely unsupported:

I’m fighting a big war by myself. Being an ex-con, a single mother, went from having a house and a car to nothing, and now I have to start, um, at rock

bottom and I never had to be that way. But I dealt the cards and this is the life I came out with.

Esmeralda described being tired down to her core—the kind of tired that comes from losing everything without an ability to get it back: “I lost my kids, I lost my house, I lost my cars, clothes, everything personal pertaining to everything, I’ve lost. And never got back since I’ve been home.” After describing all of the exclusions she faced as a person with a criminal record (including being told that she could not even volunteer at her daughter’s school), Esmeralda expressed a frustration with how people viewed her:

Never been in trouble a day in my life and get caught up behind one person, and my whole life changed... And everybody is mad at me, “But why she ain’t got no crib yet, why she ain’t come and get them kids yet?” For one, I’m not financially stable. For two, can’t afford it. For three, how am I supposed to survive?

Feeling stuck, depressed, and alone, Esmeralda explained, “like, I’m tired of, I’m not to the point where I want to harm myself, I just, I just want relaxation and just this weight off my back.”

Although Esmeralda acknowledged that the GI payments were beneficial, she expressed a greater need for additional material assistance for people with felony records: “Yeah, the extra money is good, but further assistance like housing, uh, reliable transportation,” “broadening horizons on job opportunities,” and later, “programs for felons who can’t get food stamps.” Although it can be tempting to view GI as a catch-all solution, Esmeralda’s story demonstrates its limits. On the one hand, the money did help Esmeralda survive (albeit marginally) and contribute to the lives of her children. Yet, on the other, Esmeralda remained locked into carceral citizenship; structurally dislocated from welfare state supports, excluded from employment and other opportunities, and made to feel alone.

It is here, at the intersection of extreme marginalization and guaranteed income, that we are best able to clarify the impacts of unconditional cash in the lives of criminalized people. Specifically, Esmeralda’s story suggests that GI must be part of a broader package of policies and programs that help individuals attain economic stability and shed their status as stigmatized, degraded subjects of the carceral state.

4. GI and Sense of Self

The tension between carceral citizenship and future-oriented optimism permeated nearly all of the interviews. As recipients described the steady flow of job and housing denials, exclusions from state assistance, and a lack of meaningful transitional supports, they made legible the bleak reality of life after prison. In fact, some participants recounted getting to a point so low that they considered giving up altogether. What do you do when every door is shut in your face and you feel like you have nowhere to turn?

Fortunately, most interviewees were able to eventually secure at least some assistance from a friend or family member, convince an old employer or a landlord to give them a break, or to find a rehab program with enough resources to offer help. The problem is that relying upon the goodwill of others can be an inconsistent game, and, as legal scholars Miller and Alexander (2016) imply, the question becomes: what happens when the goodwill runs out? Those who benefitted from receiving the GI could at least guard against the feeling of being a complete burden upon others and, in some cases, develop a sense of optimism about the future. Speaking on his most recent experience of being released—without having been convicted—from jail after 3 years, Jet demonstrated this potential:

I had got out and, you know, I was struggling. I was sleeping in my car. I had got put out after a month being with my aunt and uncle. And it was December, so. It was c—, freezing. The night I got put out, it was sleeting. So, you know, I was, like, I, I was really on, on the verge of just saying, you know what, I, I just don't wanna do it no more. Life ain't worth it. And, um, I had approached, um, the [COUNTY NAME], asked them could they um, give me some type of reparations for holding me for 3 years. I lost my job... but they, they just won't hire me. So, yeah, I was looking for some type of reparations, but they won't give me nothing... I was ready to give up completely, you know?

Jet went on to explain that in addition to struggling economically, he was also dealing with being separated from his children. The culmination of it all put him in a negative state of mind, but things began to change when he heard about Excel:

I seen y'all on the news ... And it was like, well, maybe I can get into this and maybe they can help me out, so. And, I mean, it's been a help. I ain't saying it, it took me out of the hole and got me clear of everything. But it's been a big help, you know, because sometimes I still say right to this day, I can just give up. [laughs] But I don't want to, because I see that, um... there are things in life that you just gotta go through... And, like I said, without, without y'all help, you know, I don't know where I would be at right now. I'd probably be still out there struggling, but thank God, I ain't did nothing to myself. [laughs]

For Jet, the money opened new possibilities and pathways, which improved his sense of hope about the future. Practically, the money allowed him to secure shelter in a rooming house and later an

apartment, while also giving him the ability to make payments on a used car that allowed him to get back and forth to work each day. As mentioned previously, Jet still struggled to afford life's expenses, including his rent, but his story suggests that a GI of \$600 per month may, at least in the short term, provide individuals with a positive outlook on the near future.

The quantitative results tell a similar, moderately positive story. While the treatment group showed a trend of enhanced hope over time, these differences were not statistically significant. At Baseline, comparable scores were observed in the Agency sub-scale (Snyder et al., 1991) between the treatment (M=21.25) and control (M=20.81) groups. Six months after the first disbursement, the treatment group reported marginally higher scores (M=22.16) with a mean difference of 1.15. This trend continued at 12 months, with the mean difference between groups being 1.23. By post-intervention, the scores for both groups attenuated, though the treatment group reported marginally higher mean scores relative to the control group (mean difference=0.07). Both the Pathway and Total Hope scores followed a similar trend. Additionally, the relationship between ethnicity and hope was not statistically significant.

Quantitative findings also suggest a significant, sustained increase in the percentage of treatment participants reporting High levels of hope. This indicates a potential shift towards deeper levels of hopefulness among treated participants over time. At Baseline, the treatment group reported lower



levels of High hope (12.68%) compared to the control group (19.78%). Similar trends were observed at 6 months (17.07% for treatment vs. 19.10% for control). However, the dynamics shifted by 12 months, with a higher proportion of the treatment group transitioning into the High hope category (23.68%), surpassing the control group's 21.51%. This trend continued post-intervention, with 23.19% of the treatment group reporting High levels of hope compared to only 14.46% in the control group.

Looking separately at Awareness, Importance, and Reliance (Elliott et al., 2004), the analysis revealed no meaningful differences between groups attributable to either the treatment or ethnicity. The average Awareness scores showed minimal differences between groups or across time periods (with mean difference being -0.18 at Baseline, -0.16 at 6 months, 0.28 at 12 months, and 0.03 at 18 months). For Importance, a declining trend was perceptible for the control group, with average scores declining from 36.09 at Baseline to 35.95 at the end of disbursement relative to the treatment group, which experienced an increase from 35.50 to 36.45 during the same time frame. At the 6-month post-intervention follow-up, a near-significant difference was observed (mean difference=1.01, B=1.61, $p<0.09$). The scores for the Reliance domain were generally higher for the treatment group at every time period: 22.36 vs. 22.16 at Baseline, 22.72 vs. 22.20 at 6 months, 22.26 vs. 21.99 at 12 months, and 22.17 vs. 21.88 at 18 months.

Yet, while the quantitative results show little difference between groups on these measures, interviews with recipients suggest potential pathways between GI support and self-oriented conceptions. Argus, for example, describes the importance of the economic support and its ability to improve one's sense of self:

Argus: *I believe that, uh, the Excel program is, like, brilliant.*

Interviewer: *Is what, what did you say? Brilliant?*

Argus: *Yeah. [laughs]*

Interviewer: *Yeah, okay, say more. Say more.*

Argus: *Yeah, like it, at the time, when, like, it was, it literally, it literally got me out of a situation where I did not want to be. At all. And, like, it literally changed the dynamic of my life at a time where not many things were going well... at a time where I did not want to be where I was, and it gave me a lot more hope for the future. Like, wow, somebody actually gives it, you know, cares, you know, somebody gives a crap, you know what I mean?*

Interviewer: *Yeah. Yeah.*

Argus: *And it, it basically gave me another chance. Because it was a hole I couldn't see myself, myself out of, honestly. Without any help. And that was at a time where, like, most of my family was, like, not doing well... So it was like, there was no, um, there was no, there was no help. There was no safety net or, you know, somebody to come and be like, "I got you."*

Interviewer: Did it, um, did the payments impact how you think about yourself at all?

Argus: Um... yeah, actually, it did. It, uh, it really helped my self-esteem because, like, people might not know it, but people in general, like, not having pocket money, or just any money in general, to do or take care of things you need to take care of. Just, during the day, like walking down the street and being able to get something to drink or, like, a snack or something.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Argus: That really, that really, like, it takes a hit to your self-esteem, like, you know, you feel kind of less than. And as a man, you feel less than a man. Not being able to, you know, contribute, take care, or give your children anything, you know?... Just, sucks.

Argus described how the money came at a time when he felt stuck and unable to see his way out. Without any other support, the Excel program provided both a means of economic survival and a sense of dignity in the everyday. Tying the ability to make economic decisions to manhood, Argus also illustrates how the Excel payments helped people achieve valued roles such as father or provider.

Limitations

While this study provides valuable insights into the impacts of GI on individuals' health and overall well-being, several limitations must be acknowledged to appropriately interpret and generalize the findings.

First, this study's participant pool comprised 247 individuals, selected from approximately 870 applicants, all residents of Durham, NC. These participants had been released from incarceration within the previous 5 years and had annual incomes at or below 60% of the AMI. The specific demographic focus of this study inherently limits the generalizability of the findings to other populations or regions, particularly those with diverse socio-economic backgrounds. Moreover, the inclusion criterion requiring recent incarceration with a felony record introduces a unique variable. Although this provides valuable insights into this demographic, it may not be generalizable to individuals who were convicted but whose charges did not result in a carceral sentence. Additionally, the inability to establish baseline equivalence necessitated control for ethnicity across all outcomes. Despite the use of robust regression techniques to mitigate this issue, the precision of the findings may be impacted.

Second, the recruitment criterion of release from prison within the last 5 years presents yet another limitation. Research indicates that most recidivism occurs within 1 year of release, so including participants released up to 5 years ago may impact the outcomes. This extended timeframe could potentially dilute the recidivism-related findings, as the likelihood of re-offending typically decreases over time.

Several key limitations must be acknowledged in interpreting the recidivism findings. The analysis was constrained by both sample size and data quality issues. The small sample size reduced statistical

power to detect potential intervention effects, while missing and incomplete administrative data further complicated the assessment of recidivism. The available administrative data had gaps - some participants were entirely absent from the database, court involvement documentation was often incomplete, and police interactions that did not result in booking were not captured. Additionally, the binary coding of recidivism oversimplified a complex phenomenon. These data constraints, combined with limited variability in recidivism rates both pre- and post-intervention, impacted the model's ability to detect significant treatment effects.

Further, the study utilized the MICE technique to address missing data. Although MICE is recognized for its robust approach in managing missing data, it is crucial to acknowledge that all imputation methods, including MICE, introduce some level of uncertainty. Despite validation checks, the imputed data might not flawlessly reflect the true underlying distributions and patterns, and the inherent limitation of data imputation should be considered in the interpretation of the results. Additionally, the availability of recidivism data was limited due to missing information, particularly the frequency and duration of incarceration, which made imputing the data challenging since recidivism is related to both variables.

Finally, it is important to note that this study was conducted as the country was emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic. The residual impacts of the pandemic, such as pervasive uncertainty, grief from loss, and the withdrawal of social safety net policies, likely influenced participants' mental health and stress levels. Moreover, the economic recovery phase post-pandemic introduced additional stressors, including changes in employment and income levels, which could have affected participants' responses and perceptions. These factors were not directly controlled for in the study design and could significantly influence the applicability and relevance of the findings to different times or settings, limiting their generalizability.

Discussion

The findings in this report detail an unprecedented experiment with providing unconditional \$600 monthly payments to formerly incarcerated individuals over the course of 1 full year. As a population that is largely—and legally—excluded from a range of opportunities and resources, our premise began with the idea that GI may work to smooth income volatility, improve individuals' ability to reintegrate, and provide a foundation for socioeconomic mobility. Our findings, based on a longitudinal, mixed-methods, quasi-experimental design, speak to both the potential and pitfalls of relying upon direct cash transfers as a form of post-incarceration support.

In particular, the Excel payments were crucial forms of support for recipients surviving on the margins. Early payments helped individuals find temporary living quarters, and purchase food, toiletries, and other personal items, while also catching up on bills and other debts. Almost all participants commented on their improved ability to afford and maintain housing, often pooling their income with that of family members to make ends meet. Importantly, whereas many participants felt like a burden on others prior to receiving the payments, Excel provided a resource to engage in mutual exchange; they could now contribute to rent, purchase groceries, or even take a child to the movies.

This newfound economic agency allowed recipients to better integrate into, and fulfill roles within, family settings, offering participants an improved sense of self and more hope for the future.

The payments were also linked to important mental health benefits, such as reduced stress and anxiety. Having experienced severe economic instability, institutional exclusion due to their criminal records, and insufficient or difficult-to-access reentry supports, participants valued the direct, unconditional, and flexible cash assistance that Excel reliably provided. Although the money was not enough to address all of their expenses, participants valued the supplemental income for its ability to provide a certain level of breathing room amid otherwise tight financial conditions. Further, many recipients commented on the crime-reducing potential of cash assistance. The stress of poverty, interviewees argued, may induce individuals to commit crime even if they would prefer to do otherwise. Receiving a GI, then, may support desistance by reducing economic anxieties and thus the impetus to engage in criminalized acts of survival. Self-reported data on both criminal activity and parole/probation violations further supported this thesis.

Along with these positive benefits, our study also uncovered the limits of GI for this population. Specifically, allocating (in this case, \$600) cash to those who are legally confined to an über-stigmatized status, one that concretizes their structurally subordinate position, aids in the daily navigation of that status but does not eliminate it. Recipients clearly valued and benefitted from the stabilizing effect of Excel; however, the legal and extra-legal forces of discrimination and exclusion remained important concerns in their daily lives. That many of the positive effects of Excel diminished post-intervention also speaks to the limited power of money amid multiple structural disadvantages.

Yet, while the limits were clear, the data overwhelmingly tells a story of great promise. Providing formerly incarcerated people with money clearly improves their financial well-being, food security, and housing stability, while also improving mental health, social bonds to others, and sense of self. As Marcus explained:

It is an absolute necessity for ex-offenders, because there's such scrutiny, uh, being back in society. There are no programs for reentry. You don't have housing set up, you don't have, you know, guaranteed employment. It's nothing, nothing for the ex-offender. So it is an absolute essential.



Center for Guaranteed Income Research

The Center for Guaranteed Income Research (CGIR) was established in 2020 at the University of Pennsylvania School of Social Policy & Practice with the aim of developing a shared body of knowledge on unconditional cash transfers.

At CGIR, distinguished academics and professionals in this field lead pilot guaranteed income programs and oversee the planning and implementation of research initiatives. CGIR is led by two Founding Directors: Dr. Amy Castro, Associate Professor of Social Policy & Practice at the University of Pennsylvania, and Dr. Stacia West, who holds a faculty fellowship at the University of Pennsylvania in addition to her primary role as an Associate Professor at the College of Social Work at the University of Tennessee-Knoxville.

CGIR conducts applied cash transfer studies and pilot designs that contribute to the empirical scholarship on cash, economic mobility, poverty, and narrative change. Our investigations build upon existing literature on cash transfers and incorporate evaluation practices and lessons learned from our previous research on guaranteed income and the gender and racial wealth gap.

All of our research is grounded in Durr's (1993) fundamental question: "What influences policy sentiment?" With this in mind, we are committed to conducting public science that challenges prevailing narratives surrounding poverty, deservedness, and economic mobility, utilizing diverse approaches such as multi-site ethnography, politically-driven sampling, and data visualization.

Our dashboards, created in partnership with Stanford Basic Income Lab, feature filters at the pilot level, allowing individuals to access and compare information while obtaining detailed insight into our investigations.



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Appendix A

Table 9. Comparative Analysis of Select Outcome Measures: Treatment vs. Control Groups

OUTCOME	CONTROL GROUP	TREATMENT GROUP	ESTIMATED IMPACT	95% LOWER CI	95% UPPER CI	STANDARD ERROR
FINANCIAL WELL-BEING						
Baseline	39.18	38.51	-0.67	-3.05	1.71	1.21
6 months	41.72	42.87	1.15	-1.00	4.62	1.43
12 months	43.40	44.58	1.18	-1.30	5.00	1.61
18 months	43.93	41.98	-1.95	-4.62	2.06	1.71
PERCEIVED STRESS LEVELS						
Baseline	7.58	7.69	0.11	-0.68	1.12	0.46
6 months	7.20	7.02	-0.18	-1.19	0.6	0.46
12 months	7.13	6.80	-0.33	-1.39	0.51	0.48
18 months	7.36	6.85	-0.51	-1.59	0.35	0.49
KESSLER PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS						
Baseline	21.25	22.62	1.37	-0.8	3.85	1.19
6 months	20.99	20.81	-0.18	-3.59	0.49	1.04
12 months	20.82	20.32	-0.50	-3.96	0.23	1.07
18 months	21.92	20.83	[-1.09]*	-4.78	-0.13	1.19
CHAOS						
Baseline	28.10	29.03	0.93	-0.92	2.87	0.97
6 months	29.85	27.40	[-2.45]***	-5.2	-1.54	0.93
12 months	31.43	28.65	[-2.78]***	-5.77	-1.65	1.05
18 months	32.51	29.42	[-3.09]***	-6.19	-1.83	1.11
AVERAGE GENERAL HEALTH						
Baseline	68.01	63.26	-4.75	-10.51	1.68	3.11
6 months	65.62	67.11	[1.49]**	1.58	10.91	2.31
12 months	65.91	66.51	[0.60]**	1.42	9.30	2.01
18 months	66.27	68.03	[1.76]***	2.09	10.93	2.25
SF-36 HEALTH LIMITS						
Baseline	83.42	74.45	[-8.97]*	-14.8	-1.15	3.48
6 months	76.74	74.59	[-2.15]**	1.36	12.28	2.79
12 months	80.31	70.64	-9.67	-6.52	5.14	2.97
18 months	77.07	73.19	-3.88	-1.78	11.97	3.51

OUTCOME	CONTROL GROUP	TREATMENT GROUP	ESTIMATED IMPACT	95% LOWER CI	95% UPPER CI	STANDARD ERROR
SF-36 PHYSICAL						
Baseline	69.88	55.28	[-14.6]**	-23.64	-3.73	5.08
6 months	67.30	60.15	-7.15	-3.61	18.27	5.52
12 months	64.22	63.88	[-0.34]*	3.35	25.18	5.57
18 months	67.39	62.79	-4.60	-0.65	20.66	5.44
ADULT HOPE - AGENCY						
Baseline	20.81	21.25	0.44	-1.14	1.99	0.80
6 months	20.61	22.16	1.55	-0.31	2.60	1.54
12 months	21.42	23.06	1.64	-0.18	2.65	1.71
18 months	20.96	21.42	0.46	-1.41	1.54	0.09
ADULT HOPE - PATHWAY						
Baseline	22.15	21.66	-0.49	-1.89	1.03	0.74
6 months	22.51	23.28	0.77	-0.47	3.00	0.89
12 months	22.68	22.73	0.05	-1.13	2.22	0.86
18 months	21.69	21.54	-0.15	-1.12	1.81	0.75
ADULT HOPE - TOTAL						
Baseline	43.00	42.91	-0.09	-2.75	2.73	1.40
6 months	43.12	45.44	2.32	-0.40	5.23	1.44
12 months	44.10	45.79	1.69	-0.84	4.40	1.34
18 months	42.64	42.96	0.32	-2.07	2.89	1.26
ADULT MATTERING - AWARENESS						
Baseline	30.54	30.36	-0.18	-1.83	1.53	0.86
6 months	30.96	30.80	-0.16	-1.69	1.73	0.02
12 months	30.60	30.88	0.28	-1.17	2.09	0.55
18 months	30.43	30.46	0.03	-1.38	1.80	0.26
ADULT MATTERING - IMPORTANCE						
Baseline	36.09	35.50	-0.59	-2.69	1.57	1.09
6 months	36.38	36.90	0.52	-0.86	3.10	1.01
12 months	35.95	36.45	0.50	-0.99	3.19	1.07
18 months	35.08	36.09	1.01	-0.23	3.45	0.94

OUTCOME	CONTROL GROUP	TREATMENT GROUP	ESTIMATED IMPACT	95% LOWER CI	95% UPPER CI	STANDARD ERROR
ADULT MATTERING - RELIANCE						
Baseline	22.16	22.36	0.64	-1.03	1.49	0.20
6 months	22.20	22.72	0.69	-1.03	1.68	0.52
12 months	21.99	22.26	0.68	-1.27	1.41	0.27
18 months	21.88	22.17	0.73	-1.34	1.52	0.29

Footnotes:

Baseline Mean: Adjusted average score prior to any intervention

6/12/18 month Mean: Adjusted average score at the respective time mark

Mean Difference: The Mean difference between the treatment and control groups

Standard Error: Indicates the precision of the impact estimates

95% CI Lower/Upper: Bounds of the 95% confidence interval for the impact estimate

*** Indicates statistical significance:** * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Appendix B

Table 10. Sample Attrition

TIME PERIOD	TREATMENT	CONTROL	OVERALL ATTRITION (%)	DIFFERENTIAL ATTRITION (%)
Baseline	109	138		
6 months	94	86	27.13	23.92
12 months	91	74	33.20	29.86
18 months	86	72	36.03	26.73

Appendix C

Table 11. Percentage Distribution of Housing Status for Current Month: Treatment vs. Control

HOUSING STATUS	BASELINE		6 MONTHS		12 MONTHS		18 MONTHS	
	TREATMENT	CONTROL	TREATMENT	CONTROL	TREATMENT	CONTROL	TREATMENT	CONTROL
Homeless/ on the street	4	4	3	2	7	14	10	14
Own Apartment or house	41	26	39	29	41	29	40	33
Family member's house	19	41	25	36	18	29	22	31
Boyfriend's/ Girlfriend's house	14	11	14	15	13	7	10	10
Friend's house	5	3	3	4	9	11	6	2
Other non- relative's house	1	2	1	1	0	1	1	1
Residential treatment facility/rehab	1	0	2	0	1	0	4	2
Transitional housing or halfway house	7	7	7	6	3	4	2	1
Shelter or rooming house	6	3	4	1	5	1	3	1
Hotel/motel	2	2	1	4	1	2	1	3
No set place/ moved around a lot	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	1
Shared time between two places	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Table 12. Percentage Distribution of Housing Status for Past Month: Treatment vs. Control

HOUSING STATUS	BASELINE		6 MONTHS		12 MONTHS		18 MONTHS	
	TREATMENT	CONTROL	TREATMENT	CONTROL	TREATMENT	CONTROL	TREATMENT	CONTROL
Homeless/ on the street	5	3	3	5	5	4	9	11
Own Apartment or house	40	28	46	37	46	46	48	45
Family member's house	20	33	18	25	13	10	16	23
Boyfriend's/ Girlfriend's house	14	12	8	7	14	15	9	7
Friend's house	4	4	6	5	7	8	6	2
Other non- relative's house	3	2	3	2	2	2	0	0
Residential treatment facility/rehab	2	1	2	0	2	0	2	0
Transitional housing or halfway house	7	7	5	7	4	6	2	2
Shelter or rooming house	3	1	5	1	4	0	1	0
Hotel/motel	3	2	1	3	2	4	2	7
No set place/ moved around a lot	1	6	3	7	1	1	2	0
Shared time between two places	0	1	0	1	1	4	3	3