

DISSERTATION

SOURCES OF CARE IN SYSTEMS OF CONTROL: UNDERSTANDING THE
PERSPECTIVES AND EXPERIENCES OF THOSE SUPPORTING LOVED ONES IN
COMMUNITY CORRECTIONS

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ABSTRACT

SOURCES OF CARE IN SYSTEMS OF CONTROL: UNDERSTANDING THE PERSPECTIVES AND EXPERIENCES OF THOSE SUPPORTING LOVED ONES IN COMMUNITY CORRECTIONS

This dissertation examines the perspectives and experiences of Primary Support Persons (PSPs) who support a loved one while serving a sentence through community corrections. While a growing body of research explores the experiences of incarcerated individuals and their supports, little is known about those who provide care and resources to people under community supervision, despite this group representing the majority of the correctional population in the United States. This study addresses that gap by centering the voices of PSPs to understand how they conceptualize the role of community corrections, navigate their relationships, and experience the symbiotic effects of their loved one's supervision. The study draws on qualitative interview and survey data collected in collaboration with a community corrections agency. Findings demonstrate that PSPs play an essential yet largely unacknowledged role in sustaining community corrections. They provide critical emotional, instrumental, social, and informational support that enables clients to comply with supervision requirements, yet they also bear much of the system's burden, experiencing stigma, financial strain, emotional exhaustion, and state presence in their relationships. At the same time, many PSPs frame their involvement as acts of care and responsibility, revealing deep ambivalence toward a system that depends on their unpaid labor while offering limited recognition or support in return. By situating PSPs' accounts within broader theoretical frameworks of social support, responsabilization, and carceral reach, this

research demonstrates how systems of control extend beyond those formally sentenced and into the lives of those who care for them. These findings complicate the boundaries between care and coercion in community corrections and underscore the need to recognize PSPs as key stakeholders in effective supervision and reentry practices.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

I invite you to join me in imagining a chilling alternate reality, where only two people read this dissertation. Of course, you can breathe a sigh of relief that the actual number is much closer to double that figure, but even in this hypothetical situation, it is quite likely that I would *still* be writing for a reader with a loved one who has been involved in the criminal justice system. My focus is on community corrections—forms of supervision that serve as an alternative to or a pathway out of prisons and jails—but it is virtually impossible to adequately describe the importance of carceral alternatives without first illustrating the magnitude of the carceral system. The US has the fifth-highest incarceration rate, and the single largest incarcerated population, *of any country in the world* (Fair & Walmsley, 2024). It is perhaps not surprising, then, that nearly half (45%) of all adults in the United States report having an immediate family member who is or was incarcerated (Elderbroom et al., 2018). That statistic alone is staggering, but consider, too, the fact that more people are currently under some form of community supervision than are in prisons and jails. In fact, only about one third of America’s total correctional population is actually incarcerated; about two thirds (more than 3.6 million people) are under community supervision (Buehler & Kluckow, 2024), making community corrections an even more extensive form of social control than incarceration. Therefore, given the incredible breadth of the correctional system in our country, we can assume that most people have a loved one who has experienced justice involvement, and a significant portion of those people have, in one way or another, had some interaction with community corrections.

Social scientists have produced important research on the experiences of people who are serving a sentence, both behind bars and in the community (Fields et al., 2008; J. M. Halushka,

2020; Piehowski & Phelps, 2023; Werth, 2012). But criminal justice involvement can create a ripple effect: friends and family with no direct justice involvement of their own can expect to be impacted in consequential ways when their loved one enters the system. To that end, researchers have made important contributions examining the experiences of support people for those serving prison sentences (Condry & Minson, 2021; Granja, 2016; Turanovic et al., 2012) and, from the perspective of justice-involved individuals, the forms of support they receive while serving sentences in community corrections (Denney et al., 2014; Luxton & Opsal, 2024; Schaefer et al., 2021). But a critical gap remains. Until now, criminal justice scholars have not studied the experiences of people who support someone under community supervision. That gap is problematic given that understanding these impacts can provide crucial insights to the practical function of community corrections, its effects on our society, and its contributions to our collective understanding of justice. This dissertation attends to that gap by honoring and illuminating the experiences of people who have supported a loved one on their journey through community corrections and who, by participating in this study, have dedicated their time and energy to helping others in similar situations.

This chapter provides a framework for understanding the purpose and significance of the dissertation study. I begin the literature review by providing historical context around the evolution of community corrections and its theoretical function in the criminal justice system. I go on to describe some of the specific challenges of being under community supervision today, explaining why people often need external support to successfully serve their community-based sentence. Next, I review relevant literature on the importance of social support in general, as well as what we know—and what we do not know—about social support in the context of corrections. Together, these bodies of work offer a rationale for the study, describing why it is important to

understand the perspectives of people supporting a loved one in community corrections. After establishing theoretical and empirical grounding for the dissertation, I introduce my research questions and briefly describe the study, culminating in an explanation of how and where this study fits, and which gaps it fills, in our existing body of knowledge.

Literature Review: Community Corrections

History and Philosophies of Community Corrections

Community corrections has been a popular criminal justice intervention in the United States for decades, and during that time it has taken on different forms, often shifting to reflect the current social and political climate. In this section, I trace the evolution of community corrections, but before doing so, I should note that (1) scholars do not necessarily agree on when or even whether the philosophies underpinning community corrections shifted, and (2) it is virtually impossible to precisely delineate the historical eras I identify here, which likely contributes to (1). Nevertheless, there is clear evidence that community corrections today looks different than it did 150 years ago, and our collective attitudes towards community corrections (as well as how we think and talk about its purpose) have undergone significant shifts as well (Lynch, 1998).

Rehabilitation and Responsibilization. One understanding of community corrections is that it functions to facilitate rehabilitation and reintegration. In fact, this was the philosophy underpinning the origin of American community corrections: probation. Probation refers to the supervision of people who are either charged with or convicted of a crime, with that supervision taking place in the community rather than in a prison or jail (Mallicoat, 2020). In the early 1800s, a shoemaker named John Augustus persuaded a judge to allow him, on a voluntary basis, to assist a man who was charged with being a “common drunkard” by supporting him in the

community with the promise of a return to court in three weeks (Wodahl & Garland, 2009). Although the defendant was a stranger to Augustus, he committed to providing support because of his belief that, “the object of the law is to reform criminals and to prevent crime, and not to punish maliciously or from a spirit of revenge” (Dressler, 1962, p. 17). The experiment was an unequivocal success: the defendant was fined one cent plus court costs and avoided incarceration entirely. Augustus eventually went on to supervise more than 1,000 people over the next 18 years, and many “volunteer probation officers” continued to use probation as a strategy for concurrent diversion and rehabilitation throughout the 19th century (Wodahl & Garland, 2009). It is worth noting that in this context, researchers use the word “rehabilitation” in a behavioral sense, as opposed to a medical or even moral one. It turns out Augustus was not alone in his rehabilitative aspiration for the criminal justice system: slowly, states began to individually assimilate probation programs, and in 1925, Calvin Coolidge established a federal probation system, marking the official beginning of sanctioned community corrections in the United States (Mallicoat, 2020; United States Courts, n.d.)

Despite becoming more centralized, however, community-based interventions did not necessarily become more standardized, and this was an intentional feature which aligned closely with the goal of rehabilitation. For example, another common form of community corrections, parole—early supervised release from prison—had existed for quite some time in Europe, but it became more and more common in the U.S. as the rehabilitative paradigm gained traction (Petersilia, 1997). Parole exemplified the rehabilitative paradigm in that it allowed for sentences to be tailored to an individual’s specific rehabilitative needs: the sentenced person would stay in prison until their criminogenic needs had been met rather than serving a sentence determined by the seriousness of the crime (Wodahl & Garland, 2009). With this framework in place, probation

and parole continued to flourish throughout the mid-20th century, and some scholars argue that rehabilitation continues to be (or is once again) the central focus of community corrections today. Perhaps so—and I will return to this idea later on—but the reality is that probation and parole were not nearly as successful in their rehabilitative efforts as many had hoped. Simultaneously and perhaps as a result, much of the public began to view rehabilitative interventions as “soft on crime” (Tonry, 2017). So, why did community corrections continue to expand?

Some scholars argue that community corrections did not just grow; its purpose fundamentally shifted. It is difficult to identify precisely when this shift occurred, but many criminal justice researchers hold that at some point in the mid-20th century, a second philosophy of community corrections took hold: responsabilization. Hackett (2013) argues that during this period, programs became less concerned with rehabilitating their clients and instead used therapeutic interventions to promote self-governance. There is a nuanced but important distinction from rehabilitation here: if rehabilitation refers to self-improvement for an individual’s own benefit, responsabilization refers to reforming an individual for the benefit of society. Take, for instance, parole. Foucault (1977) agreed that parole gained popularity in the U.S. because it allowed for indeterminate sentencing, but *not* because it allowed the correctional system to directly reform or rehabilitate its subjects through an individualized treatment plan. Instead, he argues that the prospect of returning to the community motivated incarcerated people to monitor their own behavior and thus internalize the role of supervisor. This process is now often referred to as responsabilization: the use of therapeutics as tools to enhance personal responsibility (Garland, 1997). In this process, justice-involved people are expected to meet specific, stringent criteria not because the criteria themselves are helpful to the person, *per se*, but

because placing responsibility and accountability on the individual promotes self-regulation of behavior (Wyse, 2013).

The rise of work and study release programs is evidence of this shift. In the 1960s and 70s, incarcerated people were often moved into these programs toward the end of their sentence, allowing them to leave prison or jail during the day to attend work or school in the community but requiring them to return at night (Mallicoat, 2020). This allowed clients to reintegrate into society, the economy, and the cultural climate. Around the same time, halfway houses enjoyed increased popularity, particularly for juveniles. Originally intended as living arrangements designed to facilitate the transition of incarcerated people back into the community, halfway houses—which had existed for quite some time—experienced unprecedented growth when advocates began to promote it as an alternative to prison as well (Wodahl & Garland, 2009). In work/study release and halfway house models of community corrections, the threat of more intense punishment (such as a full return to prison or jail), combined with a gradual decrease in supervision, is intended to motivate supervisees to engage in upright society of their own volition (Halushka, 2017).

Through responsabilization, clients are taught to follow rules and adopt behaviors that are acceptable in middle-class (typically non-criminalized) society, and the overarching goal is conformity to social norms (Turnbull & Hannah-Moffat, 2009). But the reality is that often, these social norms are shaped by numerous stratifying factors that—whether intentional or not—can serve to reinforce existing inequality. For example, Wyse (2013) suggests that men in community corrections are taught to take on economic roles and contribute to the workforce, while women’s emotional lives are scrutinized and relationships perceived by staff to be unhealthy are discouraged, perpetuating inequitable but entrenched gender norms. In another example, Werth

(2013) and Piehowski & Phelps (2023) argue that the responsabilization of community corrections clients necessitates emphasizing their socioeconomic precarity, and a broader body of sociological research suggests that precarity functions as a stratifying factor to limit the social mobility of members of the lower and lower-middle classes (Rank et al., 2021; Standing, 2016).

Retribution and Net-Widening. The following theories of the function of community corrections hold that it is a punitive measure which serves as a tool that can increase state surveillance and governance, ultimately *precipitating*, rather than reducing, recidivism (Halushka, 2020). The precise philosophy underpinning this function is rather contested though; as Wodahl & Garland (2009) point out, “It is easier to document the fall of the rehabilitative ideal than to describe what has replaced it” (p. 94S). The literature I introduce in this section, then, is wide-ranging—both in terms of when it was produced and what it asserts. Given the complexity of this body of research, I should point out that many of these scholars have produced distinct and nuanced theories of the philosophical changes driving the evolution of community corrections. This review serves as an introduction to these theories, but I develop them in more detail in chapter 3 of the dissertation, since they are central to the analysis I present there.

During the Reagan administration of the 1980s, community corrections took a decidedly punitive turn in the context of the emerging “tough on crime” rhetoric, becoming known as an “intermediate punishment” as opposed to a form of alternative sentencing (Byrne & Taxman, 1994; Tonry, 2017). This era of community supervision was much more rigid and regimented than the previous one, and it placed greater emphasis on surveillance through a variety of innovations which by the 1990s included GPS tracking, drug testing, home confinement with electronic monitoring, and boot camps, to name a few (Mallicoat, 2020; Padgett et al., 2006).

The political emphasis on fiscal conservatism, and the neoliberal turn more generally, produced broad support for interventions like these because, with the individual living and working in the community, the cost of justice involvement could become the supervisee's responsibility (Ruhland, 2024). The era of mass incarceration had begun, and for a number of reasons—including the removal of welfare safety nets and mandatory sentences for nonviolent crimes—incarceration rates continued to skyrocket (Tonry, 2016).

Even as more funding was allocated to the department of justice, taxpayers and lawmakers alike were happy to offset some of the exorbitant cost of the criminal justice system. In fact, Ansfield and colleagues (2023) argue that as the carceral state expanded, privatization and capitalist incentives seeped into the justice system such that sanctions may actually be applied solely to increase profits for shareholders rather than as punishment for a crime. While privatized corrections makes up only a small fraction of the U.S. carceral system, this perspective highlights how, according to some scholars, profit motives more broadly point to the existence of a “prison industrial complex,” where incarceration and supervision serve economic as well as penal functions. The idea of a prison industrial complex, popularized by Angela Davis (2003), refers to the web of relationships among government, corporations, and other institutions that sustain and expand systems of surveillance, policing, and imprisonment.

This perspective highlights the fact that cost reduction (or even profit) is not the whole story, though, nor is prison diversion. Instead, a third philosophy emerges: some researchers posit that a simple cultural shift toward retribution might explain this new wave of surveillance-oriented interventions (Tonry, 2017; Wodahl & Garland, 2009). Although the sociopolitical undercurrent precipitating that theoretical shift is beyond the scope of this literature review, it is sufficient to point out that studies analyzing criminal justice policies (broadly defined) in the

1980s and 90s suggest that retribution did in fact underpin carceral sentencing during that time (Bernard et al., 2017). It is also true that increased surveillance, combined with zero-tolerance policies for minor technical violations of probation, meant that rather than diverting people out of prison, many community corrections agencies actually funneled people *into* prison, regardless of the specific interventions used—a function clearly aligned with a retributive paradigm.

Without necessarily arguing for the existence of a retributive philosophy specifically, scholars point to evidence that even today, community corrections can be seen as a sort of revolving door that serves as both an exit from and an entrance to prison (Padgett et al., 2006; Piehowski & Phelps, 2023; Steen & Opsal, 2007). But unlike what analysis of criminal justice policy suggests, analysis of public opinion on criminal justice during this era does not necessarily support the existence of a retributive goal (Bernard et al., 2017). And, of course, if people are not actually being diverted from prison, then the associated cost of prison utilization does not decrease. So, what *is* the purpose of community corrections in this new punitive era?

Feeley & Simon (1992) argue that in this framework, the justice system is not retributive; instead, it is essentially a form of “waste management” because it is intended to “herd a specific population that cannot be disaggregated and transformed but only maintained” (p. 470). In other words, if community corrections is meant only to manage people—not to prevent crime, but to maintain the appearance that it is “under control”—then recidivism as a product of probation violation is actually evidence of the program’s effectiveness. And, of course, the idea that supervisees “cannot be disaggregated or transformed” sits squarely in the realm of anti-rehabilitation. Moreover, maintaining a larger group of “criminals” under state supervision may further bolster public trust in the justice system if there is a public perception that crime is

increasing or otherwise out of control. This has led criminal justice scientists to provide a fourth and final philosophy of community corrections: net-widening.

Net-widening refers to the idea that as novel practices are implemented, they result in an increase in the duration or severity of justice involvement in a person's life, the number of people in contact with the justice system, or both (Prichard, 2010). Community corrections can increase the duration and severity of a person's justice involvement for several reasons: community-based interventions are usually easier to implement and more cost effective than incarceration, and they tend to be characterized as a "lighter sentence," which may lower the threshold for how serious a crime must be to merit a criminal justice sanction (Padgett et al., 2006). As a result, some scholars posit that community corrections can enhance penalties for people who otherwise may not have been sentenced harshly, or it may serve as a "slow track" to prison given its increased level of surveillance (Padgett et al., 2006; Prichard, 2010). Indeed, the population under community supervision has far outnumbered the incarcerated population for quite some time, leading Phelps (2017) to theorize an era of "mass probation" that has existed in the U.S. for nearly three decades. Phelps points out that "the focus on imprisonment as *the problem* blinded observers to the reality of expanding probation totals" (p. 67), emphasizing that community corrections' net-widening effect has expanded state control not just within the lives of individuals, but within the context of society more broadly.

We also have evidence that community corrections can allow the state to assert control over people who are not themselves sentenced or even charged with a crime. Blomberg (1980) discovered that when clients are placed in family-oriented diversion programs, the behavior of parents, children, and siblings of the justice-involved person is scrutinized and sometimes even sanctioned by criminal justice personnel. Outside of family-oriented programming, there is little

research on the precise spillover effects that a person’s community supervision can have on friends and families. We do, however, have evidence that the supports of *incarcerated* people are more susceptible to police surveillance and searches, home raids, and other forms of criminal justice contact that place them at increased risk of direct justice involvement (Condry & Minson, 2021). Furthermore, symbiotic harms—a concept I discuss later in this chapter—are closely related to this idea of net-widening, though it is a distinct concept in the literature. Although these effects are not directly attributable to surveillance, social scientists have found that children with an incarcerated family member are more likely to experience poverty, mental health problems, substance use problems, disrupted parental bonds, and housing instability; this is relevant to the discussion of net-widening given that all of these contribute to a greater likelihood of future criminal justice involvement for children (Elderbroom et al., 2018; Murray & Farrington, 2008; Turanovic et al., 2012). We lack research to understand how these symbiotic harms may be similar or different from those experienced by the children of people serving a sentence in the community, but there is empirical grounding for the possibility that children of community corrections clients may be at risk of becoming justice-involved in the future—a reality that would eventually make the net of state control even wider.

Community Corrections Today: The Cure for a Multitude of Ills?

No matter the philosophy driving it, community corrections remains a large and important part of our criminal justice system today; with more than 3.6 million people under some form of community supervision, it is now an even larger component of the correctional system than incarceration (Buehler & Kluckow, 2024; Kaebler, 2024). Community service, day reporting centers, probation, electronic monitoring, parole, halfway houses, and countless other interventions—essentially any punishment other than jail or prison—are variously included

under the umbrella of community corrections today. Because of this incredible breadth, Phelps (2017) calls the current era “mass probation” and posits that one driving force behind this increase is community corrections’ growing connection to the provision of social services through community organizations.

In the 1990s, the federal government began to overhaul the welfare system by introducing punitive policies for both lawful and unlawful recipients and by reallocating funds from the welfare system into the criminal justice system; these measures were implemented to reduce welfare fraud and waste, though some scholars argue that they actually functioned to punish the poor, stigmatize poverty, and create a system of deterrence aimed at the middle class (Garland, 2016; Gustafson, 2009). This argument follows from the fact that because of slashed welfare funds, people struggling with poverty, mental illness, homelessness, and other structural harms were met with criminal justice interventions—incarceration and correctional supervision—as these were the only resources that remained available in federal and state budgets (Garland, 2002; Standing, 2016). Beginning around 2010, as sentencing reforms went into effect and incarceration rates began to fall from all-time highs, corrections—in particular, community corrections—began to informally take on some of the responsibility for welfare service provision due to a push for government agencies to follow evidence-based practices and “do what works.” (Blomberg et al., 2024; Cullen, 2022; Tonry, 2016).

One important element of this shift is that, in an effort to fill the wide gaps left in the social safety net, community corrections agencies adapted in form and function so that they could be more responsive to the needs of their immediate community. Ultimately, this has translated to a highly inconsistent and largely decentralized system of corrections that varies widely by state and sometimes even locality (Klinge, 2021; Phelps, 2017). Illustrating just how

piecemeal community corrections can be, Halushka (2020) points out that in some jurisdictions, community reintegration is “a process mediated by a variety of criminal justice and welfare bureaucracies, including parole, public assistance agencies, transitional housing facilities, and community-based service providers” (p. 234). In addition to the variability in the structure of community corrections itself, exactly which services clients receive (e.g., housing assistance, medical care, support finding employment) and how they receive them varies widely. In some cases, though, having the authority to adjust to local needs and resources can allow community corrections agencies to navigate service brokerage through collaboration with other agencies.

The collaborative approach to community corrections leverages the existing strengths and resources of social service providers outside the justice system. Although partnership with community providers is not the norm, research indicates that the scope of much of this sort of programming focuses on clinical treatment of mental health and substance use disorders (DeMichele & Payne, 2012; T. Opsal & Luxton, 2024; Phelps & Ruhland, 2022). In these rehabilitation-oriented programs, the focus is usually on clinical treatment—in particular, the treatment of mental health and substance use disorders—rather than the provision of welfare. The National Institute of Justice (NIJ) notes that the prevalence of substance use disorders among people under community supervision is between two and three times higher than the general population, meaning that nearly half of all individuals on community supervision are diagnosed with a substance use disorder. Community corrections clients also experience serious mental health problems at rates from two to four times that of the general population (Klinge, 2021). Thus, treatment of these problems is often seen as centrally important to ensuring client success in the rehabilitative framework.

But not all scholars agree that rehabilitation is the actual goal of these programs. In fact, researchers have identified elements of *all* the philosophies described earlier in this chapter—rehabilitation, responsabilization, retribution, and net-widening—across various community corrections interventions. Drug testing, for example, is a requirement across virtually all forms of community supervision. On the one hand, drug testing can be a tool used by treating professionals to assess for signs of relapse and need for more intensive treatment, consistent with a rehabilitative paradigm (Klinge, 2021). But Turnbull & Hannah-Moffat (2009) found that monitoring drug testing functioned effectively to evaluate a client’s “self-governance,” and a positive drug test indicated that the client was in need of further intervention to be able to make better choices, suggesting a goal of responsabilization. In another study, Piehowski & Phelps (2023) observed a net-widening effect of drug testing, offering a form of surveillance that sometimes had nothing to do with the crime committed and that occasionally resulted in deeper and longer-lasting justice involvement for supervisees. Finally, a 2022 study from Phelps & Ruhland suggests that drug testing can serve (at least in part) a retributive role, placing immense burden on people charged with non-violent crimes and often forcing them to forego basic needs like food and medical assistance. These effects, in addition to being punitive, can reinforce existing inequalities that are already magnified in the criminal justice system (*vis-à-vis* the general population).

For decades, marginality has pervaded America’s correctional system. Among the incarcerated population today, more than two thirds are people of color (Buehler & Kluckow, 2024); nearly two thirds did not complete high school (Ghandnoosh et al., 2024); and the median income of incarcerated people is about half of that of the general population (Rabuy & Kopf, 2015). The demographics of people under community supervision largely mirror these trends.

While Black people comprise about 13% of the general population, they make up 30% of the community corrections population, making them more than three times as likely as Whites to be under supervision (Horowitz & Utada, 2018). Women make up a larger proportion of the community corrections population than they do the incarcerated population, and the number of women under community supervision is growing faster than that of men (Kaeble, 2024). And, unsurprisingly given these associations with racial and gender marginalization, people in community corrections are more likely than members of the general population to be living in poverty upon sentencing (Ahlin et al., 2023). Still, community corrections continues to grow, and its benefits are important to consider in sentencing decisions.

Research provides evidence that a community corrections sentence, thereby avoiding or reducing time in prison or jail, is an appealing option for several reasons. Compared to incarceration, it is more cost-effective (Padgett et al., 2006; Tonry, 2017); it is at least as effective as incarceration in reducing recidivism (Cullen, 2022; Klingele, 2019); it poses fewer health and safety risks than a prison or jail stay (Binswanger et al., 2011; Ruhland, 2024); it reduces negative impacts on children and families (Elderbroom et al., 2018; Turanovic et al., 2012); and it is usually better-resourced to provide treatment and rehabilitation by leveraging existing community supports (Gleicher, 2020; Halushka, 2020). Scholars and advocates also consider community corrections to be more humane and less antiquated than traditional incarceration (Cullen, 2022; Kim, 2018; Morris, 2023; Tonry, 2017). But while the appeal of avoiding prison is obvious for people serving a sentence, these individuals quickly find that community corrections comes with its own set of challenges. As a condition of their supervision, people serving a sentence in the community often have stringent and numerous requirements. Obtaining employment; paying child support, court fees, fines, and/or restitution; finding housing;

completing court-mandated classes or treatments; attending appointments with child welfare representatives and health providers; coordinating child care; and accumulating savings are all common conditions of supervision (Klinge, 2021). Balancing all of these responsibilities would be difficult for almost anyone, but it is especially challenging for individuals who lack resources like transportation, money, or knowledge of local resources (Harding et al., 2014). People under community supervision tend to experience various forms of marginalization, including economic disenfranchisement (Ghandnoosh et al., 2024), meaning that when community corrections programs implement these stringent requirements, they are often asking their clients to do a lot with very little. As a result, individuals facing this immense pressure and responsibility often turn to members of their support system for assistance (Clone & DeHart, 2014; Goodson, 2018; Kjellstrand et al., 2022; Naser & La Vigne, 2006). In the next section, I describe the importance of these connections and how they have unique relevance to justice involvement. I begin by introducing seminal theories of social support in general before presenting a more nuanced discussion of social support in a correctional context.

Literature Review: Social Support

The Importance of Social Support

Researchers across a range of fields—psychology, sociology, medicine, social work, and more—have produced empirical evidence that social support, in a broad sense, is critically important in several ways. First, we rely on the people in our social networks to help us access the tangible resources we need as a means of survival. This is the basis of social resource theory (Foa, 1971), which holds that there are rules of exchange that govern these social interactions. For example, Stack (1974) found that resources like housing, food, money, childcare, and clothing—often referred to as “instrumental support” (Lin, 1999)—are commonly exchanged

among members of kinship and quasi-kinship groups, particularly when economic means are limited. Stack referred to these groups as “domestic networks,” noting that it was reciprocal obligations, rather than actual family ties, that defined these relationships. However, domestic networks are alone insufficient to meet most people’s needs for social support. In his seminal 1973 work, Granovetter also established the importance of “weak ties”: acquaintances who are more socially distant than the members of our domestic networks. Granovetter argued that although trusted friends and family can provide reliable access to tangible resources, weak ties are actually more effective at providing new information, opportunities, and ideas (like job options or problem-solving strategies), referred to as “informational support” (House & Kahn, 1985). Essentially, our close networks are often too redundant to give us access to these resources, and weak ties can provide a “bridge” to other social circles that we may not otherwise interact with.

Material outcomes are not the only important product of social support, though. A second function of social support is stress management through emotional and social support (House & Kahn, 1985): emotional comfort, guidance, and companionship, in addition to the instrumental and informational support described above. Because stress has significant impacts on both physical and mental wellness, our social relationships, too, have direct physiological impacts on our health. House et al. (1988) were among the first to document biological mechanisms underlying these associations, noting that social relationships mediate stress hormones, immune function, cardiovascular health, and neurological pathways. They found that not only were better-connected individuals more likely have their basic needs met (via broader access to resources), they had a stronger sense of belonging and purpose, as well as lower levels of loneliness and isolation.

Social support among loved is usually a reciprocal interaction. In other words, even if the forms of support exchanged are substantively different or even unequal, there is some implicit social expectation that people who receive support at some point will provide it at another (Gouldner, 1960). In fact, there is evidence suggesting that people who are both “overbenefited” and “underbenefited” in their social relationships report greater levels of loneliness and general social dissatisfaction (Rook, 1987). Up to this point I have discussed the importance of *receiving* social support, but there are important effects associated with *providing* support, too. Riessman (1965) called this experience “the helper principle,” arguing that people who offer support to others—whether professionally (as a therapist) or nonprofessionally (as a peer)—tend to find the experience gratifying. He pointed to evidence of improved self-esteem, renewed sense of purpose, learning through teaching, and having “a stake in the system” (p. 31)—that is, being personally committed to the success of the person receiving support—as potential positive outcomes of providing support. But providing support can be challenging, too, and the challenges that arise are usually specific to the type of support provided and the context in which the relationship occurs.

Support in Carceral Settings

In the following sections, I offer a more detailed review of support for justice involved people. First, I describe more generally some of the spillover effects, or “symbiotic harms,” of justice involvement on supports; in other words, these are the effects of being *connected* with someone in the carceral system. Then I review what we know about providing support for people who are incarcerated, followed by a review of research on support for people in community corrections, including those reentering the community after serving a prison sentence. These two sections are focused on the unique challenges of *providing support* to someone in the carceral

system; providing support to people in the justice system is itself challenging, and it can produce new challenges as well. I introduce this broad body of literature spanning correctional contexts because, since these are all components of the carceral system, they share important similarities. However, as the review on the history and philosophies of community corrections has revealed, community supervision is distinct from prison, and while reentry is often a component of community corrections, there are many other important elements of the community corrections experience that are unique in that they allow a person to reside in the community for the duration of their sentence. Still, this research is relevant to the discussion of support in community corrections for several reasons.

First, we can anticipate some similarities between support provided in the prison and community corrections contexts. Impacts on prison supports that are largely influenced by the perception of justice involvement more broadly might also apply to supports of people serving sentences in the community. This includes some of the harms I describe below such as experiences of stigma and emotional burden, the challenges of negotiating institutional rules and expectations, and PSPs' ambivalence toward the justice system. At the same time, we can anticipate important differences. Community supervision takes place outside the walls of the prison, which means supports are often directly involved in helping their loved one comply with the conditions of their supervision (Goodson, 2018). There is thus reason to believe that this proximity may intensify the material impact of the client's supervision requirements if they are at least partially subsidized by the PSP. Serving a sentence in the community may also enhance the sense of shared punishment as supports become entangled in the logistical and emotional demands of supervision. Still, unlike the separation imposed by incarceration, community corrections can allow for more frequent contact and opportunities to maintain family routines,

which may actually facilitate the process of rebuilding damaged relationships or maintaining healthy ones.

Second, the reentry process often happens in the context of community corrections: some modalities, like parole and halfway houses, are philosophically oriented toward facilitating reintegration after prison, meaning that typical barriers to reentry—like finding housing and employment, and maintaining sobriety—are explicitly addressed in these programs (Halushka, 2017; Tonry, 2017). Even if a person does not receive formalized support or community supervision in the reentry process, they are likely to face the same structural barriers as people in community corrections programs due to having a criminal record (Denney et al., 2014; Harding et al., 2014; Western & Pettit, 2010). The key difference, of course, is that people in community corrections must somehow overcome these barriers to be in compliance with the conditions of their supervision, or else they face additional sanctions. Other foci of community corrections programming, such as the experience of serving a full sentence in the community, are not captured in the research on reentry. Still, the majority of research on support for community corrections clients focuses specifically on the reentry process, so I review that literature—alongside a few pieces on unsupervised reentry—before discussing the limited research on support across the community corrections experience. All of this literature together provides context to frame the questions that have until now been unanswered about support in community corrections.

Symbiotic Harms: Connection with Justice-Involved Individuals. Research—which, again, is primarily focused on the supports of incarcerated people—has established that being connected to someone serving a sentence brings a variety of consequences, and the negative effects of justice involvement extend beyond the individual who is being supervised. For

example, family members of incarcerated people can face challenges like social stigma and ostracization, sometimes because people associate them with a “criminal” (Baldwin et al., 2013; Comfort, 2007) and sometimes because they are under supervision themselves in one way or another (Condry & Minson, 2021). Children of justice-involved people can face challenges in educational attainment and later employment as a result of disrupted parent-child attachments, behavioral problems, and lower family income (Martin, 2017). For these same reasons, and as a cumulative effect of these adverse childhood experiences, children of incarcerated parents are also at higher risk for developing mental health and substance use problems (Wakefield & Wildeman, 2011), and some studies have shown that adult family members of incarcerated people are at increased risk as well (Clear, 2007). Social supports can also face financial problems and housing instability, partly because people from lower-income backgrounds tend to be overrepresented in the justice system in the first place, but also because of lost wages while the loved one is incarcerated (Elderbroom et al., 2018; Geller & Curtis, 2011; Ghandnoosh et al., 2024).

These problems are variously referred to as “collateral consequences” of incarceration (Turanovic et al., 2012), as “secondary punishment” (Comfort, 2007), or as serving a “parallel sentence” alongside the justice-involved person (Granja, 2016). All of these terms underscore two important tenets of the concept: (1) that the effects of having a loved one involved in the justice system are tangible and identifiable, and (2) that the effects are either directly or indirectly attributable to the carceral state. These two points are both salient; however, all of these terms can undermine the seriousness of this phenomenon by dismissing the effects as incidental to—that is, an unfortunate but unavoidable feature of—criminal justice involvement. This critique is rather common in the literature, leading some scholars to prefer the term

“invisible punishments” (Chesney-Lind, 2011). Moreover, research also demonstrates that these harms function, perhaps deliberately, to enhance the state’s coercive power, pressuring justice-involved people to comply with sanctions to mitigate the harm that their loved ones experience (Bülow, 2014; Denney et al., 2014). For these reasons, I use the term “symbiotic harms” (Condry & Minson, 2021) to highlight two important concepts: first, that the harms experienced by justice-involved people and their families are necessarily enmeshed and reciprocal, and thus “symbiotic” as opposed to, say, “secondary”; and second, that the question of whether these harms are intentionally inflicted is ancillary to the actual damage they cause, meaning it is more accurate to refer to them as “harms” than as, say, “consequences,” even if the state is not deliberately causing them.

Providing Support to Incarcerated Individuals. In addition to most of this research focusing on support in prison and jail, it is also primarily focused on family members (usually, children and parents) who provide support, rather than friends or other non-familial contacts. Broadly, this body of research establishes three central concepts which I describe below: (1) that prison creates unique institutional and structural barriers to maintaining social ties; (2) that having a loved one in prison creates emotional distress for primary support persons (PSPs); and (3) that supports experience deep ambivalence toward the carceral system.

Being sent to prison disrupts social relationships in concrete ways. Being physically confined and isolated; having limited access to phone, internet, and other forms of electronic communication; and having little to no control over one’s schedule can all create barriers to maintaining relationships and providing emotional or social support (Comfort, 2007; DeHart et al., 2018; Granja, 2016; Halsey & Deegan, 2015). As a result, many PSPs have to find creative ways to maintain their involvement with their loved one. For example, in Granja's 2016 study,

family members of men and women incarcerated in Portuguese prisons brought food, clothing, and even photographs of their home to their loved one as reminders of their relationship on the “outside.” Sometimes these creative solutions become so cumbersome that PSPs can develop what Halsey & Deegan (2015) refer to as the “sublimation of self.” In this study, PSPs often reported feeling that, because of the rigid schedules and restrictions of the prison, they had to sacrifice their own free time, responsibilities, mental health, and aspirations if they wanted to maintain their relationship with their loved one. Eventually, this became untenable, and PSPs felt that they had no choice but to either sever the relationship or significantly reduce the support they were providing. This finding underscores the reality that, despite the incarcerated person being the one receiving “punishment,” they are often placed under such restrictions that they are unable to mitigate the institutional barriers that arise in maintaining relationships with people on the outside. If the relationship is to be maintained, it is largely the responsibility of the PSP to overcome these hurdles. And, as Turanovic et al. (2012) point out, some of these hurdles, like paying for childcare and missing work to attend visitation, are more structural in nature, and they necessarily affect PSPs differently depending on their individual situation and resource availability.

Clearly, maintaining relationships with incarcerated people requires substantial material resources to overcome institutional barriers. But the experience of having a loved one in prison or jail is also emotionally taxing. Participants in Møllerhøj's (2022) study—caregivers for “mentally disordered offenders”—described feelings of loneliness, grief, inadequacy, and guilt as they navigated the carceral landscape. Sometimes this was the result of being unable to provide sufficient instrumental support to overcome barriers; other times, it was the PSP's desire to be a “carrier of hope” (p. 193) and thus shield their loved one from the burden and stress of their own

daily life. In another study, Dir and colleagues (2023) noted that caregivers of justice-involved youth often felt blamed by court and correctional staff, which not only created emotional distress but also created feelings of distrust towards the justice system. The same is true in the other direction: children of incarcerated parents, too, experience worry, uncertainty, and powerlessness (Poehlmann et al., 2010; Zhang & Flynn, 2025). Even when PSPs are optimistic about the potential benefits of their loved one's justice involvement, such as accessing treatment, they point to the substantial strain and emotional labor that relationship maintenance entails (Baldwin et al., 2013; Turanovic et al., 2012). Often, social supports experience conflicting feelings of relief that a dangerous or troublesome family member is locked away, and/or guilt or loneliness in the absence of a person they love regardless of relationship conflict, and these can lead to depression, social isolation, and other mental health problems (Hairston, 2022).

Perhaps the most consistent theme across research on the experience of supporting an incarcerated person is that the feelings it produces are complex. Ambivalence, tension, and internal conflict are all common experiences among PSPs. For example, Comfort (2008) reflects on the ambivalence of women supporting their incarcerated partners at San Quentin. These women recognized that although the prison exerted control and intrusion over their lives, it also provided some level of stability and indirect support by meeting their partners' basic needs and creating an environment where these men could be sober and emotionally present. The prison also provided a layer of safety for women who had victimized by their partner, but this was accompanied by loneliness and sometimes guilt related to their being incarcerated. Sometimes, PSPs feel that they are beholden to competing interests when they try to provide care in an environment that is inherently coercive. For example, in one study, parents of incarcerated youth described a deep desire for their child to attain sobriety, but a simultaneous discomfort with the

prospect of reporting his illicit substance use to authorities (Granja, 2016). Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that this ambivalence can lead to *improved*, as opposed to fractured, relationships between PSPs and their incarcerated loved ones. PSPs may be understandably hesitant to repair relationships with people who have harmed them, but they also recognize that carceral settings may provide a unique opportunity to rebuild trust through respite, treatment, behavioral coaching, and structure (McCarthy & Adams, 2019). Clearly, providing support in the context of community corrections creates a distinct set of challenges and possibilities for social supports.

Providing Support in the Community Corrections Context. For individuals reentering the community after serving a prison sentence—whether they are supervised through parole or in halfway houses, or whether they are unsupervised upon release—there are significant barriers to re-establishing stability, such as housing restrictions, difficulty securing employment, and general unfamiliarity with available resources (Brown & Ross, 2010; Kjellstrand et al., 2022; Naser & La Vigne, 2006). And for those who are serving a full sentence in the community, such as those on work release, in mandated treatment, or on probation, it can be challenging to adapt to the rigorous conditions of supervision (Goodson, 2018; Halushka, 2017). In other words, the time a person spends in community corrections—whether it is a transition from prison or a sentence served in the community—is usually a period marked by an increased need for support in a variety of domains. Unfortunately, despite the large population under community supervision, there is very little research on support in the context of community corrections, and that which does exist is focused on the needs and experiences of supervisees rather than those providing the support. Among that literature, the primary focus is on the reentry process specifically.

Much of the research on support during reentry is focused on its impact on the justice-involved person—more specifically, on their likelihood of recidivism. For example, Bales & Mears (2008) found that visitation leading up to release from prison is associated with a lower likelihood of recidivism, especially visits from spouses and significant others. This may be particularly relevant for forms of community corrections like halfway houses where people are indeed physically separated from their loved ones and can enjoy formal visitation. A 2014 study from Barrick and colleagues (2014) found that the impact of visitation on reducing recidivism is indeed important, but that it is mediated, and usually augmented, by post-release family support. Supportive relationships are usually—but not always—with family members (Valera et al., 2015), and some research suggests that family relationships may actually be more effective at reducing recidivism than support from non-familial friends (Barrick et al., 2014). However, there is a small body of research suggesting that family members also have the potential to produce negative outcomes or undermine progress through applying increased pressure or encouraging risky behavior (Kjellstrand et al., 2022). On the other hand, relationships with criminal justice personnel (like correctional/supervisory staff) can be perceived by clients as supportive (Gleicher, 2020; Halushka, 2020), and mentoring relationships with people who have successfully reintegrated can be highly effective at not only reducing recidivism, but also facilitating connection with community resources that are otherwise fragmented and difficult to navigate (Brown & Ross, 2010; Kjellstrand et al., 2023).

Reentry research aligns with broader research on social support by establishing the importance of unique forms or domains of support. Informational and instrumental support, especially with assistance finding and securing housing, are key factors in successful community reintegration (Denney et al., 2014; Geller & Curtis, 2011; Mowen et al., 2019). Kjellstrand et al.

(2022) established four key types of support—emotional support, instrumental support, informational support, and companionship (often called “social support”)—that justice-involved adults identify as integral to their success and social connectedness. These authors suggest the existence of layers of support—for example, primary networks of family members and secondary networks of peer supports or professionals—that work in tandem to create the resources a person needs in the reentry process. This returns to the importance of “weak ties” (Granovetter, 1973) and establishes the need to better understand how community supervision might shape these networks. Emotional and companionship support, too, are essential for being able to manage the (often sudden) pressures and responsibilities that a person experiences when they are released from prison *without* further supervision (Fahmy & Testa, 2025; Naser & La Vigne, 2006). It would be reasonable to infer that people serving sentences in the community, who might have even more stringent requirements, would need even more emotional support. The few studies that exist on support across the community corrections experience—not just the reentry process—support this idea.

Schaefer et al. (2021) conducted a qualitative study to better understand the forms of support people receive while they are on probation or parole. They found that emotional support was indeed one of the most common and important forms of support that people receive in these forms of community corrections. This kind of support can encourage continued positive progress by helping clients stay focused on their goals, helping them think rationally in challenging situations (“consequential thinking”), and instilling optimism and hope. On the other hand, they also found that support in this context—often from family members—could also have negative effects. Boundary-setting from supports was sometimes perceived by clients as depriving them of a meaningful relationship, and well-meaning PSPs sometimes used fear tactics as a strategy to

discourage reoffending (often with a paradoxical effect). In another study, Goodson (2018) found that instrumental support is perhaps the most important form of support a client can receive, but the reality is that—at least for the women on probation who participated in the study—less than half of the members of their social networks provided any meaningful support in helping them navigate the conditions of their supervision. This finding suggests that while layered networks (consisting of strong and weak ties) may exist, there are key players (PSPs) whose supportive relationships are critical to a client’s success in community corrections.

Many clients navigate relationships that are neither entirely supportive nor entirely negative; for example, in Goodson’s (2018) study, some clients received important instrumental and emotional support from PSPs who also had substance use problems of their own, and this could be a critical risk factor for the client. Luxton & Opsal (2024) refer to these relationships as “complex” rather than negative, because while there may be elements of the relationship that are unhealthy or unhelpful, the relationship also offers important opportunities for resources and support. In Luxton and Opsal’s study, which centers the perspectives of women in a residential community corrections facility, the authors found evidence that women are intentional and strategic in maintaining complex relationships, because having multiple sources of support across multiple domains is critical for success. A unique feature of the study is that it explicitly describes the role of peers—that is, other women serving a sentence at the same facility—in clients’ support networks. Unsurprisingly given their proximity, women in the study reported that peers served as critical sources of companionship (or “social support”).

In community corrections, companionship can be especially important. Bahr et al. (2010), in their study on the social supports of parolees, found that clients who had the opportunity to spend time engaging in enjoyable activities with friends were more likely to successfully

complete their parole requirements. There is an important distinction here between relationships that provide *distraction* (which is generally unhelpful, as established in by Bahr et al. as well as Schaefer et al., 2021), and relationships that provide healthy structure and practice using adaptive coping strategies. In the research from both Bahr et al. and Strauss & Falkin (2001), consistent engagement in substance use treatment—and encouragement from supports to complete it—was a key factor in clients’ success. Strauss & Falkin (2001) also point out the nuanced nature of this kind of supportive relationship: in their sample of adults in community-based, mandated drug treatment, it was easy for well-meaning supports to accidentally enable unhealthy behaviors (like substance use) that ultimately led to being unsuccessful in community corrections. They emphasize the need for treatment professionals and correctional supervisors to actively engage clients’ supports in their programming, which can help them provide support to their loved one without inadvertently jeopardizing their success.

Putting these studies in conversation with one another highlight several important points. First, people navigating community corrections in any form face significant structural and interpersonal challenges that heighten their need for support. Research shows that housing barriers, employment difficulties, and the pressures of supervision make this period unstable and complex. Second, most existing work focuses on the effects of support on clients’ recidivism rather than on those providing it, but studies consistently highlight that emotional, instrumental, informational, and social support are all crucial to successful outcomes. Family members are often central sources of help, though these relationships can also carry strain and even risk for PSPs. And third, a number of tensions exist for PSPs: emerging research underscores that supports can have both positive and negative effects on clients, with complex relationships playing a key role in clients’ lives. Moreover, involving PSPs necessarily means increasing

surveillance—a potential harm for family and friends—but increased involvement may also improve clients’ sense of support and their likelihood of success—a potential benefit for both clients *and* their loved ones.

With only a handful of studies on support in community corrections, there is still a lot we don’t know. First, none of this research has explained what kinds of strain it may place on supports to be expected to provide so many resources, so consistently. We know that relationships between community corrections clients and their supports are nuanced and complex, and we understand that there is often ambivalence around the role of the justice system for the supports of incarcerated people. But we do not know whether supports of community corrections clients share this ambivalence, and if so, how it is (or is not) informed by a surveillance or net-widening effect on the PSP. We also do not know how and whether supports conceptualize their role as an obligation or otherwise necessary component of the client’s supervision. In other words, with so many material resource needs while under supervision, would a client reasonably be able to meet their needs alone, or is the work of community corrections agencies essentially subsidized by PSPs? And, of course, there are broader unanswered questions about the appropriateness and efficacy of community corrections as a justice intervention, particularly given the tension between greater freedom for the client on one hand and greater resource strain on community members on the other. Therefore, a great deal of additional research is needed in this area.

The Current Study

Understanding the way people *experience* community corrections is key to understanding what it is actually doing—what purpose it serves in practice. The perspectives of PSPs are particularly important when it comes to community corrections for several reasons. First, clients

under community supervision are (as the name would suggest) living in the community, and this creates different opportunities for both connection and stressors to operate, versus those opportunities which might exist for clients living in prisons and jails. We can therefore infer that the experience of supporting someone in jail or prison is distinct from the experience of supporting someone in community corrections, and because of that, PSPs may illuminate the implications of decarceration that extend beyond justice-involved people. Second, PSPs have unique insights to both explicit and implicit functions of community corrections: on one hand, many PSPs (those that are “on the outside”) are not directly involved with the justice system and have no obligations to it. On the other hand, they have the opportunity to see exactly how the system operates and how it can impact the lives of both justice-involved people and the larger community. PSPs who are currently system-involved also have unique and important perspectives on the function of community corrections, as they intimately understand the experience of being under supervision as well as how this supervision might impact their ability to provide support to their loved one. Therefore, PSPs can help us understand the *practical* function (as opposed to the theoretical function) of community corrections.

Finally, as I have established, there are serious and consequential “symbiotic harms” (and other parallel effects) of justice involvement for the friends and family members of people who are serving sentences. As we continue to build our understanding of community corrections and its role in contemporary society, only PSPs can answer the question of how this particular correctional intervention affects their quality of life. This line of inquiry transcends the debate of whether community corrections is a unique intervention serving a distinct correctional purpose, or an alternative to incarceration serving to reduce the symbiotic harms that prison and jail can

create. Instead, it forces us to confront the tangible impacts of our country's reliance on community supervision.

Therefore, to address these gaps in our knowledge, I ask the following research questions:

1. *How do PSPs conceptualize the role of community corrections in the context of the criminal justice system?*
2. *How do PSPs experience symbiotic effects (harms, benefits, or neutral impacts) as a result of their loved one serving a sentence through community corrections?*
3. *How do PSPs navigate relationships with their loved ones in the setting of community corrections?*

To answer these questions, I collected interview and survey data from adults who self-identified as providing support to someone currently serving a sentence through a community corrections agency. This study makes significant contributions to the existing literature, given that, until now, there has been no research on the effects of community corrections sentencing on the individuals who provide support to their loved one who is serving a sentence. This gap in our knowledge is important for the many reasons I have described in this chapter—in particular, PSPs likely have different sets of pressures and experiences when their loved one is serving a sentence in the community rather than behind bars. However, beyond its contributions to academic literature, this study is intended to produce meaningful change in the lives of PSPs, their justice-involved loved ones, correctional staff, and anyone else who might interact with the community corrections system.

What's Next?

In this chapter, I conducted a broad review of relevant literature—in particular, history and philosophies of community corrections and the importance of social support in correctional settings—to provide context for understanding the foregoing chapters. I also described the rationale for this dissertation study, emphasizing the need for more insight into the experiences of PSPs with a loved one in community corrections. Finally, with this contextual framework in place, I introduced my research questions, provided a brief overview of the current study, and discussed its theoretical, empirical, and tangible contributions. Now, I invite you to join me as I share what I learned.

The methods chapter (up next) provides details about each step of the research process, from design to execution. There, you can expect to learn more about how these methods were developed, what challenges and opportunities they created, and what they meant for the community corrections agency. In chapters three and four, I present answers to the research questions I identified in this chapter. There, I explore how PSPs understand the purpose of community corrections, how they navigate relationships in the context of correctional supervision, and how providing support impacts their daily lives. There is no ubiquitous “PSP experience,” and as a result, these discussions are nuanced and point to the complexity of how community corrections shapes our broader understandings of justice. I conclude with a chapter on the implications of these findings, including how they contribute to gaps in our knowledge, how the study created real impacts for clients and their loved ones, and what direction they offer for future research in the field of community correction.

CHAPTER 2. METHODS

The current study allowed PSPs to shed light on the function and effects of community corrections. The study served both practical and theoretical purposes: it provided recommendations to improve policy and programming that can benefit community corrections clients, and it deepens theoretical knowledge of the relationship between social control and inequality—including for those individuals who are not actually arrested or prosecuted. In this chapter, I begin with an overview of my epistemological foundation, which provides rationale for my choice of PAR and grounded theory methodologies. Next, I describe the context in which this study took place, since the current study represents one part of a larger, multi-year project with the community corrections agency. Then, I describe my research design, including procedures for sampling and recruitment, data collection, and analysis. I close with a discussion of validity, limitations, and reflexivity. Before I begin, it may be helpful to reiterate my research questions here:

1. *How do PSPs conceptualize the role of community corrections in the context of the criminal justice system?*
2. *How do PSPs experience symbiotic effects (harms, benefits, or neutral impacts) as a result of their loved one serving a sentence through community corrections?*
3. *How do PSPs navigate relationships with their loved ones in the setting of community corrections?*

Study Overview and Theoretical Grounding

Context of the Study

The current study is part of a larger project, titled *Evaluating and Building Gender-Responsive Community Corrections Programming in [Redacted] County*. To avoid confusion, I

will use “PSP Project” to refer to the current study (that is, the dissertation project). Phase One of the larger study began several years before I became involved, and it primarily focused on experiences of community corrections clients and staff. Broadly, the goal of Phase One was to help the agency understand programmatic gaps with their gender-responsive women’s program, strengthen the program, and improve the experience and well-being of its clients. Phase One was developed and executed through a PAR framework, collaborating with staff and clients at the community corrections agency to design and conduct the study (for more detailed information on Phase One, see Luxton & Opsal, 2024; Opsal & Luxton, 2024).

Early iterations of certain elements of the PSP Project, such as an interview guide and a recruitment script, were thus already in place when I joined the study. However, these elements were intentionally designed to answer a broad range of research questions and underwent little revision before Phase Two; recruitment efforts for PSPs during Phase One were unsuccessful, and ultimately this component of the study was deferred. I joined the study as it prepared to begin Phase Two, which sought to assist the agency in implementing changes based on findings from Phase One, as well as to innovate new ways for PSPs to participate in the study. Thus, I was graciously given the freedom to develop the PSP Project within Phase Two of the larger study. For the PSP Project, I collaborated with the agency to develop specific research questions, and I was actively involved in reshaping the interview guide and recruitment script. I also developed a new research instrument (the survey) as well as new recruitment materials to ensure these research questions could be fully addressed.

Methodology and Epistemology

Grounded Theory. To answer my research questions, I elected to draw on grounded theory in designing the study. Broadly, grounded theory involves developing an explanation

(theory) for a social process inductively from data that has been systematically collected and analyzed (Creswell et al., 2007; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007). It emphasizes close engagement with participants' experiences and seeks to generate concepts that are “grounded in,” rather than imposed on, the data. Therefore, given especially the lack of previous research on the experiences of PSPs, one key strength of the grounded theory approach for this study is that it allows for flexible interpretations of the data. The grounded theory approach has taken on several diverse iterations since its inception by Glaser and Strauss in 1967, most notably by Strauss and Corbin (1998) and Charmaz (2005) (Creswell et al., 2007). Strauss and Corbin (1998) emphasize the importance of systematic analytic procedures aimed at generating a specific model of a core phenomenon from a large data set. They also advocate for the development of a “conditional matrix” that helps the researcher contextualize the model. On the other hand, Charmaz (2005) resists this systematic approach and argues instead for emphasizing individual participants' beliefs and assumptions over particular research methods. She criticizes earlier approaches (like that of Strauss and Corbin) for producing conclusions purporting to be final or complete. For the current study, I employ Charmaz's more interpretive approach to grounded theory because it can better preserve the unique contributions of each participant; it recognizes these contributions *as* expertise as opposed to using them to *generate* it. I believe this is more closely aligned with the egalitarian principles of participatory research, which is described in the next section.

There are several important critiques of grounded theory. First, some researchers argue that these multiple iterations of the theory—again, take for example those of Strauss and Corbin or Charmaz—are indications of a larger problem, which is that grounded theory does not actually refer to any special type of theorizing (Atkinson & Delamont, 2005). Basically, because these

different versions of the methodological approach are so distinct and even contradictory at times, scholars have raised concerns that the term simply refers broadly to the exploratory analysis of virtually any type of data. Another criticism of grounded theory is that it is impossible to approach a dataset without preconceptions, and that all observation and interpretation is necessarily influenced by the observer's own knowledge, beliefs, and theories (Thomas & James, 2006). Therefore, some critics argue, grounded theory approaches do not tend to “illuminate” or “discover” certain explanations for social processes, and instead the researcher “invents” an explanatory theory. Despite these critiques, I drew on Charmaz's approach to grounded theory because it is robust enough to inform a systematic analysis of the data without being restrictive or prescriptive, and because a reflexive approach to analysis resists positivism and carefully frames the results as interpretations rather than objective truth.

Participatory Action Research. In addition to its grounded theory underpinnings, this study is rooted in a participatory research framework. Broadly, participatory research involves researchers and participants working together toward a solution to an identifiable problem, and it criticizes positivist thinking which seeks an objective truth (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2018). Compared to grounded theory, the precise origin of participatory research is less clear, but its core tenets have remained steadfast across (at least) several decades of use. Proponents of participatory methodology argue that research is most useful when it is conducted *with* people as opposed to conducting it *on* them—that, to borrow a phrase from the Disability Rights movement, there ought to be “nothing about us without us” (Wilson et al., 2023). In other words, it challenges the history of research, especially on so-called “vulnerable populations”, as an extractive and exploitative practice that only provides direct benefits to the researcher and may in fact harm participants in the process. Thus, many scientists view participatory research as an

ethical practice and a form of social activism in addition to its being a methodology (Mikesell et al., 2013). The collaborative framework challenges traditional distinctions between researcher and participant, offering a new “participant-researcher” role that is available to all stakeholders in the study. To that end, the core tenet of egalitarianism permeates the entire research process and necessitates a constant commitment to collaboration.

Discourse around participatory research methodology includes a broad range of terms: community-based participatory research (Mikesell et al., 2013), collaborative action research (Bennett & Brunner, 2022), partnership research (Numans et al., 2019), community-engaged research (Wright et al., 2020), and—most commonly—participatory action research (Fine et al., 2021; MacDonald, 2012; and others). I have chosen to use this term (PAR) because it seems to be the most commonly used label for participatory research in criminal justice literature. For the purpose of this study, I define PAR as a research approach which includes study participants in design and execution throughout the research process, and which is being undertaken with the goals of fostering self-efficacy, empowerment, and social justice.

The concept of “participatory action research” is defined differently across the fields of sociology, anthropology, psychology, and others (MacDonald, 2012). All of these terms are nuanced and unique, but a key theme among them is the recognition that excluding “subjects” from the larger research process will necessarily limit and distort the knowledge that is produced through research. In sociological literature, PAR is considered a form of “public sociology,” a subfield of sociology aiming to elucidate research on social problems for the general public because that public is understood to be a primary stakeholder and, as such, has capacity for social change (Burawoy, 2005). Kleidman (2006) points out that this framework allows for a broader understanding of what constitutes knowledge by welcoming perspectives that have been

traditionally excluded from research findings, such as the expertise that stems from lived experience. He suggests that public sociology ought to create “a dialogue...rather than final pronouncements” (p. 76). This speaks, again, to the importance of collaboration (dialogue) throughout each phase of the project.

There are also some important criticisms of participatory methodologies. First, if participation is improperly implemented as tokenism or cooptation, it can actually entrench existing power dynamics rather than challenge them (White, 1996). This is part of the broader concern described above, which is that true “equality” of contributions is virtually impossible, although *equity* might be a more appropriate and realistic goal. Other critics have questioned whether the knowledge that is co-produced through participatory methods meets conventional standards of rigor (Greenwood & Levin, 2007). Particularly in positivist circles, there is concern that participatory studies lack standardized procedures and replicability, noting that resultant knowledge is too localized or context-bound to be considered scientifically sound. A discussion of the steps I took to ensure rigor and quality in this participatory study is included in the “Validity and Reliability” section below.

Fidelity to Methodological Frameworks. The larger study (beginning in Phase One) has employed a participatory methodology since its inception, and thus because the PSP Project is part of Phase Two, this is the methodological framework underpinning the bulk of the current study. Administrators and frontline staff at the agency, current and former clients, and employees of partnering community care organizations were all included across the development and execution of Phase One. Now, in Phase Two, there is an Advisory Board in place (with representatives from each of these groups) that supports the agency in steering and implementation, and it will continue to support the agency in continued self-evaluation and

improvement even after Phase Two concludes. The PSP Project specifically has involved agency stakeholders in almost every phase of the process, including:

- *Research design:* Meetings with administrators to develop research questions; Focus groups with clients to develop survey and interview questions; Brainstorming sessions with frontline staff to develop recruitment strategies
- *Recruitment:* Informational sessions to provide clients with recruitment materials for PSPs; Collaboration with administrators to incentivize attendance at informational sessions; Home visits with frontline staff to recruit participants
- *Dissemination and implementation:* Co-authorship of journal articles with key administrative staff; Collaboration with frontline staff to begin development of an online informational tool for PSPs; (Anticipated) integration of former clients into implementation processes

Unfortunately, research in the criminal-legal system often takes a piecemeal approach to its adoption of PAR, and the PSP Project was no exception: there were some parts of the research process—specifically, data collection and analysis—wherein researcher-participants outside the university were not directly engaged because of time limitations and concerns about confidentiality. Though there is some debate in the literature as to whether the conventional wisdom that participants want to remain anonymous is actually true (Wiles et al., 2008), most PAR studies, especially those involving justice-involved individuals, seek to maintain participant confidentiality since “PAR may be critical of existing...policies and practices of governments...As a result, research may legitimately entail negative consequences for some individuals” (Chevalier & Buckles, 2019:174). Indeed, participants’ concerns about a breach of anonymity were salient throughout the data collection process, and I suspect this was a central

reason that recruitment was so challenging (challenges with recruitment are described later). The raw data contained potentially sensitive information, such as anecdotes about interactions with clients and staff, and detailed demographic information about participants and clients. Still, it is possible to conduct analysis without access to raw data, and data can be collected collaboratively without compromising confidentiality—but these methods can be time-consuming. Ultimately, time for this dissertation project did not allow the data collection and analysis processes to be participatory, although we aspire to integrate participatory approaches later on in the project with broader themes.

Data collection and analysis were guided primarily by a grounded theory approach. That is not to say, of course, that elements of constructivist grounded theory (as proposed by Charmaz, 2005) were not present in other aspects of the study. For example, the study design, including formulating research questions and choosing specific methods, were consistent with my goal of developing an explanatory framework from a broad range of participant experiences (Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007). I wanted to develop an understanding of how certain phenomena, like evaluating the efficacy of an agency's practices or experiencing symbiotic effects of justice involvement, happen *in the context of* supporting a loved one in community corrections—again, the goal is explanatory theory. Although I did not subscribe to Strauss and Corbin's (1998) rigid system of collecting and analyzing data, I did rely on the data to generate emerging concepts as it was being collected. Therefore, I analyzed data as it was being collected to ensure it was able to answer my research questions, and I conducted multiple rounds of analysis to allow concepts to emerge organically. More detail about the data collection and analysis processes, and how they were informed by grounded theory, follows in the next section.

Research Design

This study relies primarily on qualitative data. Broadly speaking, qualitative research is more concerned with nuanced and descriptive understandings of phenomena alongside populations that are more difficult to reach, as opposed to the more generalized knowledge produced through quantitative methods which more typically rely on representative sampling techniques (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). As such, qualitative data is that which lends itself to thematic (as opposed to statistical) analysis, often involving text or language, to better answer questions of what, why, or how a certain phenomenon happens. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) explain that qualitative research is a “situated activity that locates the observer in the world” (p. 3). In other words, the purpose of qualitative research is to capture contextualized information through observing how individuals experience a certain phenomenon, as well as whether and how meaning is made (Carter & Little, 2007). Qualitative inquiry—and specifically, robust qualitative data—allows the researcher to develop what Clifford Geertz (1973) has famously referred to as “thick description,” or layers of meaning beneath social interaction, which he argues is essential for understanding patterns in human experiences. Importantly, though, qualitative research moves beyond simply *describing* social phenomena and prompts the researcher to think reflexively about their role in the knowledge production process.

In their seminal 1994 work, Guba and Lincoln point to several important strengths of qualitative research vis-à-vis traditional quantitative methods. They emphasize qualitative research’s ability to capture meaning and purpose; to let go of restrictive, theory-laden hypotheses in favor of discovery; and to reflect on the interactive nature between researcher and participant. They also argue that qualitative research is best suited to illuminate the nuance of individual experience because quantitative studies tend to strip away the context surrounding

focal phenomena. They explain that a related limitation of quantitative research is the “inapplicability of general data to individual cases” (106). In a model of community corrections that is supposedly responsive to clients’ individual risks and needs—like that used at this agency—we can assume that no two PSPs’ experiences with the community corrections agency will be the same. And, of course, this is in addition to the fact that individual attitudes, experiences, and beliefs shape people’s perceptions of the world around them. Ultimately, I am interested in the experiences and perceptions of PSPs: adults who provide important support in some form to a person who is serving a sentence through community corrections. Numerous studies point to the importance of interview data in criminological research, primarily because representation of justice-involved voices is so lacking in the literature (Dupont, 2008; Fields et al., 2008). Moreover, the use of qualitative interview data to support the illumination of knowledge derived from lived experience is aligned with the PAR framework underpinning this study. Thus, answering the research questions I have described will require nuance that can only be gained through qualitative methods, and these questions are best suited to the data collected through interviews.

In-depth interviewing is among the most commonly used methods of qualitative inquiry. Rubin and Rubin (2011) explain that because interviewing is a flexible and responsive process, the researcher is able to capture meaning that transcends the (textual) data being collected and which emerges instead through interaction. Interviewing is a preferred method of data collection in both PAR and constructivist grounded theory frameworks. In participatory methodologies, interviews are valued because they can support the egalitarian, dualistic nature of the “researcher-participants” engaging in conversation. MacDonald (2012) writes that in an interview, “both the researcher and the participant share and learn throughout the interviewing

process in a reciprocal manner” (p. 42). Similarly, grounded theorist Kathy Charmaz (2005) notes that interviews serve as collaborative spaces where meaning is co-constructed between the interviewer and the respondent. She emphasizes the importance of flexible interviewing techniques that can adapt to the participant’s context and allow rich, nuanced data to emerge. My research questions center on individuals’ beliefs about and experiences of community corrections; developing answers to these questions will necessarily involve understanding nuances and details about individual participants. Importantly, though, this study is explicitly meant to support and improve the lives of people who are involved (directly or indirectly) in the justice system. Therefore, means for answering my research questions should not be extractive and should instead allow me to co-construct meaning with participants, as opposed to simply imposing my own interpretations onto the data.

However, interview data—and qualitative methods more generally—is not without its limitations. Some researchers have called into question the validity and reliability of qualitative methods, suggesting that they are somehow inferior to quantitative (generally positivist) methods (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Morse, 2015; Tracy, 2010). And, of course, interpreting quantitative data tends to be more straightforward, so it is well-suited to answering research questions with quantifiable answers. In this study, I elected to supplement my primary source of data (qualitative interviews) with quantitative survey data. Broadly speaking, mixed methods is the intentional integration of qualitative and quantitative approaches within a single study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Perhaps the most obvious benefit of integrating methods is that it allows the researcher to offset the limitations of one method with the strengths of the other. Relatedly, it may also serve to expand both the breadth and depth of understanding when interpreting data. Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998) explain that mixed methods approaches can yield improved

validity, allow for triangulation (cross-verification of findings), and more comprehensively answer the research questions. Importantly, triangulating data—that is, comparing data collected through multiple methods to examine the same research question—does not simply enhance insight to the *credibility* of the findings. If triangulation reveals diverging conclusions across the two data types, this may illuminate the need for further research or theorizing to better understand the complexities of the phenomena being studied.

I elected to include survey data in the PSP project for several reasons. First, as previously discussed, survey data can be used to triangulate the information collected through interviews. Deterding & Waters (2021) have described the benefit of using survey data to more easily analyze person-level and treatment-level attributes. Quantitative methods can also enhance the study's accessibility by offering more ways to frame key findings. Haverkate et al. (2020) explain that many organizations (especially government) are more comfortable both collecting and interpreting quantitative data, so that combining surveys with interviews can leverage the knowledge and skills of stakeholders who are associated with these organizations. Quantitative data is also more commonly used in the development of new policy (Jasanoff, 1990), which is a central goal of this study—again, consistent with a PAR framework. Perhaps most importantly, combining a survey and interviews can make the study more accessible to a greater number of participants. Creswell et al. (2007) explain that some participants may not have time for an interview and/or may not be comfortable with that level of personal disclosure, while others may not have the skills or knowledge needed to take a written survey. The survey, which is anonymous, can not only offer greater confidentiality than an interview, but it can also serve as an important recruitment tool for potential interview participants. Thus, the study integrates data from an online survey and from in-depth interviews.

Ultimately, I used survey data to answer research questions more broadly (e.g., explicitly asking participants what they believed to be the purpose of community corrections), which informed my analysis of interview data by framing the detailed experiences and beliefs that participants shared. The survey also served as a tool to assess the validity of the interview instrument (a discussion of validity and reliability is included later in this chapter). Additionally, the survey provided attribute data about participants, since all but one of the interview participants completed the survey; this allowed for a more contextualized interpretation of interview data. Finally, the survey was critical to Phase Two of the larger study and was used to answer some of the research questions put forth by the community corrections agency through inferential analysis. However, that line of inquiry is beyond the scope of the PSP project, so I will not discuss the process of inferential analysis in detail here.

Inclusion Criteria

Participants in this study were adult “Primary Support Persons” (PSPs), the inclusion criteria for which include (1) being 18 years of age or older and (2) self-identifying as providing essential support to someone who is currently serving a sentence through the agency (“the client”). The client need not *reside* at the agency for the participant to be eligible. The only exclusion criterion was lack of reading skill or familiarity with English necessary to either complete the survey or engage in an interview. This was an unfortunate limitation, and one community-based support organization who assisted with recruitment asked if there was a Spanish flyer that they could provide to potential participants. I also met one potential participant during a home visit (described below in “Recruitment Strategies”) who only spoke Spanish. However, since no one on the research team was fluent in Spanish, we were unable to include

Spanish-speaking PSPs in our sample. Each participant was asked to confirm their eligibility for the study before they shared any data.

Approximately two-thirds of the way through data collection, an issue emerged wherein it became clear to the research team that a participant had misrepresented themselves as a PSP and spoke about their experiences as a client as if from the perspective of a PSP. This presented clear concerns about validity, and it challenged us to think critically about how and whether to verify participants' status as a PSP. Ultimately, we included a third eligibility question in the interview consent process, where we asked participants to provide the name of their loved one at community corrections. We explained that we did not record or analyze this data and that it was only for the purpose of confirming study eligibility. Responses were compared against a roster of current clients, and no participants expressed concern about sharing this information off record.

Recruitment Strategies

Consistent with a PAR framework, developing strategies for recruitment was an iterative process. Recruiting this population (PSPs) had proven to be quite challenging during Phase One, so for the PSP Project, I deployed strategies systematically so that I could make adjustments based on the specific barriers identified in each method. Basically, after utilizing one strategy for about a month, I would decide whether to keep employing that strategy while I implemented a new one. Recruitment was oriented toward survey participation, and surveys served as the primary pathway into qualitative interviews. For example, flyers indicated that PSPs were invited to “take a fifteen-minute online survey...at the end, we will ask if you want to share more about your experience in an interview with a member of our research team.” Participants who completed the survey were thus invited to provide contact information via the survey platform, and I reached out to participants directly via phone call, text or email (depending on their

preference) to schedule interviews. I collected contact information from the survey platform twice a week and reached out to participants on a rolling basis. However, participants were not required to take the survey before interviewing, and on all recruitment materials they were provided with researcher contact information in case they wanted to schedule an interview directly.

A note before moving on: In the following sections, I report the number of participants recruited through each strategy. In total, there were 54 study participants; 53 of these individuals completed the survey, and of those survey participants, 26 also completed an interview. There was one additional interview respondent who did not complete the survey. The counts provided in the following sections refer to participants from *any* data collection method (N=54), and they were obtained by including a survey question asking participants how they heard about the study. However, some participants reported recruitment through multiple methods (and are thus counted multiple times; n=4), and some participants did not report their method of recruitment (n=21). Finally, there were 6 participants who reported hearing about the study through some method not listed here.

The first strategy I implemented was a series of “recruitment sessions.” I held 16 short (~10-minute), in-person informational meetings held at the community corrections facility. In these meetings, clients currently living at the facility were invited to join me in a common area via an announcement over the loudspeaker. Attendance at the meetings was incentivized by offering “be-smart points” (the agency’s internal incentive system) to anyone willing to join the session regardless of whether they went on to invite a loved one to participate in the study. During the sessions, I described the project, handed out flyers for clients to give to their loved ones, and answered questions from clients. Client questions in early sessions helped me calibrate

the way I presented the project in future recruitment sessions so that I could communicate the project's purpose more clearly. For example, one client asked, "Why do you want to talk to [PSPs] anyway? If I applied for a job, they wouldn't interview my parents." I found it helpful to emphasize two points in these sessions: first, that participation was optional and anonymous, and second, that I was interested in PSPs' *personal experiences* of having a loved one at the agency, as opposed to merely asking PSPs about clients' levels of success.

I also visited some clients in their homes. Over the course of four non-consecutive days, I accompanied staff members on fourteen scheduled visits to non-residential clients' homes. Staff conduct routine home visits when clients transition from residential to non-residential programming, and these visits are scheduled with clients in advance. During these sessions, I would enter the home with staff and allow them to complete their visit. Afterward, I would stay in the home (with staff standing outside) to speak with the client privately to describe the study and ask them to provide recruitment materials to their loved ones providing support, noting again that participation was optional and anonymous. Because many PSPs expressed concern that their participation in the study could somehow jeopardize their loved one's success in the program, I found it important in these visits to explain that although I arrived with staff, I was not employed by the agency and that all data would remain confidential.

Case management staff at the agency also assisted with recruitment efforts. Case managers were asked to provide recruitment flyers to clients during home visits when I was not able to attend; however, it is unclear whether and to what extent this strategy was actually implemented by staff. Additionally, I met with case management supervisors to review the study and recruitment procedures, and I asked them to review these items with their staff and provide them with recruitment flyers to give to clients (who could then pass this information to their

loved ones). Supervisors later communicated to me that they relayed this information in an in-person meeting, and that they placed flyers in stacks of intake paperwork for new clients (with the option to place additional copies in case managers' offices). Two case managers I spoke with several weeks later stated they had seen the flyers in the building and among intake paperwork, but they had not heard about the study and did not know what it was or who was conducting it. So, it is unclear how many staff were present in the informational meetings with supervisors. Regardless of how *clients* learned about the study, 17 participants reported that they were recruited through their loved one.

Next, with invaluable support from a research assistant, we mailed 456 physical letters to PSPs, inviting them to participate in the study. Addresses were collected from property release forms which clients complete when they enter the program. These addresses were collected from clients' digital internal records at the agency (when available) or were pulled from confidential client files. We attempted to collect an address from every current client (residential and non-residential), although we were limited by whether the client had listed anyone on their property release form. Furthermore, most of these records were not kept up-to-date, and 101 letters were ultimately returned for failed delivery. Staff were not made aware of the (intended) recipients of these letters nor the clients with whom they were associated. Each envelope included: a letter to PSPs, printed on CSU letterhead and signed by the PI; a recruitment flyer; and a business card for the PI. Envelopes were clearly marked with CSU branding. Ultimately, 17 participants were recruited through this method.

Over the course of the study, I attended several engagement events, both at the facility (a client graduation ceremony) and in the community (a warrant clearance event and a resource fair), where I introduced myself to attendees as a student researcher at CSU, described the

project, and personally invited PSPs to participate if they were eligible. I also provided recruitment flyers to anyone interested (regardless of study eligibility) and asked them to tell their friends and family about the study. At the warrant clearance event, I had the opportunity to set up a table with free promotional items (CSU-branded key chains, stickers, etc.), and this improved engagement at the event but did not seem to affect the actual study recruitment. Two participants reported learning about the study through a community or agency-sponsored event.

Local support service providers outside the corrections agency were also supportive of recruitment efforts. I engaged community organizations who work with clients (and possibly PSPs) outside the context of the agency's programming by meeting with administrators (when possible) and either posting flyers myself or giving flyers to the center for them to post wherever they preferred. Examples include local mental health providers, faith-based support programs, substance use treatment providers, a housing resource center, an employment center, and a domestic violence advocacy center. Due to their internal policies, I was not able to promote the study at government agencies such as the post office or department of human services. I did, however, post flyers in other public spaces around town, such as bus stops and community bulletin boards (again with the help of a research assistant). Additionally, I routinely posted flyers in conspicuous areas around the community corrections agency (visitation rooms, lobby/front desk areas, etc.), and I left stacks of flyers in building entryways. 11 participants were recruited through this method.

PSPs were also contacted via the corrections agency's evaluation team. The evaluation team consists of a group of staff members who vet all referrals to the program through an intensive process, which often involves communication with the potential client's loved ones. I created an email template including all study information and investigator contact information,

and I asked the evaluations team to forward the email to any PSP whose loved one was in contact with the team when being considered for admission to the program. Though it is unclear if it was the evaluations team, case managers, or some other staff member, 4 participants reported that they were recruited by an employee of the community corrections agency.

Social media managers from the community organizations described above, as well as county departments for the community corrections agency and the local sheriff's department, posted digital versions of the flyer to their websites and/or social media pages. Unfortunately, I did not build this recruitment method into the survey question about how participants learned of the study, so it is unclear how many were recruited this way; I suspect this may account for some of the "other" responses (n=6) to this question.

Participant Reimbursement. Interview participants were compensated with a \$20 gift card to a national grocery store chain with multiple local locations. I informed participants that the gift card was "theirs" at the beginning of the interview; if we met in person, I handed the physical card to them, and if we interviewed virtually or over the phone, I sent the card in the mail. Unfortunately, due to university policy, we were not able to provide digital gift cards or cash compensation. The gifts cards seemed to be an effective incentive for some participants (for example, several potential participants emailed me asking what they needed to do to get a gift card), but this was not a ubiquitous effect. Two participants declined the gift cards (both asking me to "give it to someone who needs it"), and multiple others accepted the gift cards but made comments to the effect of "thank you, but that's not why I decided to participate."

Data Collection

Research Instruments. Data was collected through two research instruments: an online survey and in-depth interviews. The survey consisted of 31 questions (including demographic

questions) and took approximately 20 minutes to complete; the full survey instrument is provided in the appendix. The survey instrument was developed collaboratively with agency staff as well current clients to ensure that the content and language were relevant and appropriate.

The survey began with demographic questions about both the participant and their loved one (the client at community corrections). Next, participants were asked about the types of support they provide, reciprocal support from loved ones, and barriers to providing this support. Participants were then asked about their level of involvement with the corrections agency, including questions about visitation and plans for the client to re-enter the community. The final domain of survey questions was aimed at understanding participants' perceptions of the purpose of community corrections. At this point, the survey was "completed", and responses were saved. Participants were then asked how they heard about the survey, and they were invited to provide contact information if they were interested in being interviewed. As previously indicated, the survey was designed to address not only the PSP Project's research questions, but also those of the larger study (including questions posed by the agency). The survey domains most relevant to the PSP Project included questions about the purpose of community corrections (related to RQ2) and questions about support (related to RQ1).

Data was also collected through in-depth interviews. These interviews lasted about 1-1.5 hours and were semi-structured, offering the interviewer (me) flexibility in determining how and when to ask questions, as well as some discretion around what probing questions to ask and when to do so; the complete interview guide is included in the appendix. The use of probing questions is consistent with recommendations from Morse (2015), who explains that for smaller sample sizes, the use of probing questions can provide greater detail and "thick description," and they can enhance the validity of the data.

The interview guide identified broad domains of interest, individual questions aimed at understanding the conceptual domains, and potential probes for each question. I conducted interviews in a conversational style, so that the domains were addressed in whatever order flowed most naturally. The interviews usually began with general questions about the participant's relationship to their loved one, followed by questions about dimensions of support. Next, I invited participants to share their general perceptions of the agency, with specific questions about its purpose, its efficacy, and participants' level of involvement with the agency on the client's behalf. This included questions about the quality of relationships between PSPs and their loved ones. Finally, I asked participants to reflect more broadly on the experience of having a loved one in community corrections, including questions about impacts on day-to-day life and perceptions of surveillance. At the end of every interview, participants were given the opportunity to share anything else they felt was important for the researcher to know. As with the survey, the interview guide was developed to answer a broad range of research questions. The domains most relevant to the PSP Project include perceptions of the agency's purpose and its efficacy (RQ1) and dimensions of support and impacts on daily life (RQ2). However, it is important to note that information relevant to both research questions ultimately emerged from all domains of the interview guide.

Data Collection Timeline and Procedures. Recruitment began in March 2024, and survey data collection began in April 2024. Interviews began in May 2024. In June 2024, based on feedback from participants and current clients, we revised recruitment materials to clarify the purpose of the study and the methods for accessing the online survey. In September 2024, based on feedback from the agency, we revised all recruitment materials (letters, flyers, etc.), the eligibility questions, and the consent form to improve readability and ensure they were accessible

to individuals with lower literacy levels. Based on the Flesch-Kincaid readability test, we determined that the survey instrument and interview guide did not need revision. In January 2025, we revised the recruitment flyer one final time to change the graphic design (without changing any content). We made this change in hopes that it would catch the attention of more or newer potential participants (the old flyers had been circulating for nearly a year, and we suspected that new clients at the agency—and their families—may not have noticed them). Data collection (through both the survey and interviews) ended in June 2025.

The survey was administered through an online platform, Qualtrics, and was accessible to anyone with the link or QR code printed in all recruitment materials. The inclusion criteria questions, as well as the consent form, were built into the Qualtrics workflow so that the survey instrument did not display unless the participant met all inclusion criteria and provided their consent to participate. Survey results were exported from Qualtrics and reviewed on a regular basis to address logistical problems (for example, the random ID generator did not work properly at first), as well as trends in attrition/incomplete responses. Survey responses also served as the primary method of study engagement, asking the participant at the end of the survey whether they would like to share more in an interview, and if so, how to contact them. Frequent review of survey responses also allowed me to identify which recruitment strategies were most effective by including a question about how the participant heard about the study. Responses were collected from 76 participants, although after omitting incomplete and invalid responses, there were a total of 53 observations in the survey data set. My initial goal was 100 responses, but despite numerous recruitment efforts, I was not able to engage 100 participants. Still, after evaluating our needs based on ability to answer research questions, the 53 responses we collected were sufficient to achieve theoretical saturation (I discuss the concept of theoretical saturation below).

Interviews were conducted in person, virtually (via Teams or Zoom), and over the phone; all participants were invited to choose the format for their interview. At the start of each interview, I reviewed the informed consent document, provided a copy to the participant, and requested permission to record the interview (all but one participant agreed to having the interview recorded). Following the interview, audio recordings were transcribed using AI software, and de-identified copies of both the audio file and the transcript were stored securely in the cloud. For interviews recorded via Teams or Zoom, where recordings automatically include video, I extracted the audio from these files and deleted the video recording. To maintain confidentiality, participants were assigned a random numeric ID, and the “key” was a securely stored document with restricted access. All interview data (recordings and transcripts) were stored with random ID as the only identifier. Later, with invaluable assistance from two research assistants, we manually reviewed the AI-generated transcripts against the audio recordings to ensure accuracy before analysis began.

I conducted 27 in-depth interviews, which allowed sufficiently for theoretical saturation. The definition of “theoretical saturation” is contested in the literature, but for the purpose of this study I refer to Low (2019), who suggests sampling until the data can “address the core explanatory questions of how and why, not merely descriptive accounts of *what* questions” (p. 176). Low also points out that it would be virtually impossible to reach a point at which “no new information” is obtained or that “no new properties” of theoretical concepts emerge by collecting more data. This was indeed the case, as each new interview revealed unique experiences that shaped participants’ perceptions of the agency. However, the interviews I collected were sufficient to explain questions about *how* PSPs understand community corrections and *why* they

hold these beliefs, despite not providing a comprehensive analysis of every individual, meaningful experience that shapes these perceptions.

Sample Description

I collected data from 54 participants: 53 of these individuals completed an online survey, and of those, 26 completed an interview. One additional interview participant declined to take the survey and declined to provide demographic data; therefore, as you will see in the table below, although I conducted 27 interviews, only 26 interview participants’ demographic data is included in the table. Once a participant had confirmed their eligibility, all demographic questions were optional, and several participants abstained from responding to one or more demographic questions, but all of them answered at least 50% of the demographic questions (with the exception of the one interview respondent who did not take the survey). The figures in the table presented below do not include non-responses.

Table 1. Demographics of Study Participants

		Survey (n=53)	Interview (n=26*)
Age	Mean (SD)	45.2 (16.6)	48.7 (16.4)
	Median	41	44.5
	Range	19–83	25–81
Gender	Woman	77.4% (41)	80.8% (21)
	Man	22.6% (12)	19.2% (5)
Race	White	82.4% (42)	83.3% (20)
	Black or African American	9.8% (5)	4.2% (1)
	American Indian or Alaska Native	3.9% (2)	8.3% (2)
	Multiple	3.9% (2)	4.2% (1)
Hispanic or Latino/a	No	69.8% (37)	65.4% (17)
	Yes	30.2% (16)	34.6% (9)
Household Income	\$24,999 or less	58.0% (29)	56.0% (14)
	\$50,000 - \$74,999	24.0% (12)	24.0% (6)
	\$75,000 - \$99,999	10.0% (5)	16.0% (4)

	\$100,000 - \$149,999	8.0% (4)	4.0% (1)
Education	Some college	35.8% (19)	34.6% (9)
	High school diploma or GED	34.0% (18)	38.5% (10)
	Bachelor's degree	17.0% (9)	15.4% (4)
	Did not complete high school	7.5% (4)	3.8% (1)
	Master's degree or above	5.7% (3)	7.7% (2)
Employment	No	56.6% (30)	65.4% (17)
	Yes	43.4% (23)	34.6% (9)
Government Assistance	Yes	56.6% (30)	57.7% (15)
	No	43.4% (23)	42.3% (11)
Household Size	3+	43.4% (23)	30.8% (8)
	2	32.1% (17)	34.6% (9)
	1	24.5% (13)	34.6% (9)
Household Members Under Age 18	0	70.6% (36)	72.0% (18)
	2+	17.6% (9)	20.0% (5)
	1	11.8% (6)	8.0% (2)
Felony Record	No	67.3% (35)	61.5% (16)
	Yes	32.7% (17)	38.5% (10)
County Resident	Yes	73.6% (39)	73.1% (19)
	No	26.4% (14)	26.9% (7)
Relationship	Friend	22.6% (12)	23.1% (6)
	Spouse or partner	20.8% (11)	15.4% (4)
	Parent or legal guardian	18.9% (10)	19.2% (5)
	Sibling	17.0% (9)	19.2% (5)
	Other	15.1% (8)	19.2% (5)
	Child	5.7% (3)	3.8% (1)

As shown in Table 1, interview participants were demographically quite similar to survey participants. Individuals in both the survey and interview groups primarily identified as White (82% and 83%, respectively), non-Hispanic (70% and 65%), and Woman (77% and 81%) (all participants identified as either man or woman). 58% of survey respondents and 56% of

interview respondents reported a household income of less than \$24,999, which is particularly notable given that the median household income in the county was just over \$91,000 and most participants (74% and 73%) were residents of the county. Furthermore, 57% of survey respondents and 58% of interview respondents received some form of government support (such as Medicaid or SNAP benefits).

Still, there were some notable differences. While 43% of survey respondents reported a household size of 3 or more, only 31% of interview participants reported the same; instead, interview respondents were more likely to either live alone or with one other person (both 35%). And while 10% of the survey respondents identified as Black or African American, this group was underrepresented among interview respondents (4%). Regarding the participant's relationship to their loved one serving a sentence, spouses and romantic partners were underrepresented in the interview group at 15%, compared to 21% in the survey group. Finally, survey respondents were less likely to be currently employed (57%) than interview respondents (65%).

Coding and Analysis

Survey data. Analysis of survey data primarily served two purposes: triangulation and descriptive analysis. For example, demographic information from survey participants was matched with interview participants and coded as attributes, allowing me to perform a more nuanced analysis of interview data based on the situations and life experiences of respondents and their loved ones. General trends in survey data (e.g., results of questions around the purpose of community corrections) allowed me to triangulate interview data and look for congruencies or inconsistencies with survey data. Open-ended "other" responses, such as those about barriers to maintaining relationships with clients, helped me ensure that my interview questions were

thoroughly exploring the various effects of having a loved one in community corrections. I used Excel and R studio to clean survey data and run descriptive analyses.

Interview data. PAR as a methodology is “relational, cyclic, iterative, coinciding, reflexive, and emergent” (Numans et al., 2019, p. 10). In other words, the “phases” of research are less distinct, and in particular, the analytic process is conducted in tandem with the data collection process. Starks & Brown Trinidad (2007) suggest that “Ideally, each interview or observation is coded before the next is conducted so that new information can be incorporated into subsequent encounters. Themes identified through the coding of initial interviews may also be explored in follow-up interviews” (p. 1376). In other words, data generates codes, which inform data collection processes, and so forth in a cyclical fashion. I did not code each interview before the next, but I did conduct three cycles of open coding during the data collection process, which allowed me to better understand which themes and concepts were emerging, and—importantly—which questions remained and which concepts needed clarification. I refined the interview guide (approximately midway through data collection) to attend to these emerging themes, paying careful attention to areas where my data was not beginning to answer my research questions.

Coding took place generally in three stages: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007). The open coding stage involved “chunking,” a strategy that helped me organize the data into very broad topics. As indicated above, I conducted numerous rounds of open coding. Next, axial coding was used to describe the properties and dimensions of first-round codes and to explore how these relate to one another. Finally, selective coding (also referred to as focused coding) was employed in tandem with axial coding to determine which codes make the most analytic sense and could continue to inform emerging

themes. DeCuir-Gunby et al. (2011) emphasize the importance of creating a codebook that includes with each code name a full definition and an example. My final codebook included 45 codes.

Iterative coding approaches (like the one I took here) can highlight a tension between grounded theory and PAR. While both methodologies support flexibility, PAR emphasizes the need for a collaboratively structured process that includes things like shared coding frameworks and co-constructed categories. My approach, which is more traditionally aligned with grounded theory, places more emphasis on the possibility of theoretical emergence; frameworks and categories (for the most part) are not determined in advance. I reconciled this tension by treating the structure that PAR requires not as rigidity, but as scaffolding for iterative sensemaking. In other words, I entered the coding process with broad understandings of concepts that emerged from meetings with stakeholders during the development of the interview guide. Within that framework, I explored other categories as they emerged and made adjustments to the interview guide that could help shape these codes. Although I was the only person coding the interviews, I believe this process (along with consistent communication) would have been sufficient to support a more participatory coding process.

I used NVivo to manage and analyze interview data. Maher et al. (2018) provide a comparison of digital and manual (pen and paper) coding strategies. They find both methods equally valid but suggest that a combination of the two may be optimal because it allows the coder to engage deeply with the data (through pen and paper) while enjoying the data management capabilities that digital software provides. They point to limitations of such software, including restricting forms of learning/interaction and risking the de-contextualization of data. On the other hand, Deterding & Waters (2021) note that digital software is capable of

answering complex quantitative questions and that it makes possible the analysis of large amounts of data that would be virtually impossible to code by hand. I found manual coding to be tedious and time consuming, and, importantly, I did not find the limitations suggested by Maher et al. to be true: I was able to adequately interact with the data through the use of a touch screen and by re-listening to interview audio as I coded. I mitigated the concern about de-contextualization by using multiple monitors and adjusting the settings so that coded segments included several lines of context on either side. Furthermore, because I often functioned as both the interviewer and the transcriber, I felt intimately connected to the data and thus I did not see this as a limitation. Using NVivo helped me keep data organized, secure, and backed up, and it ensured that the quantitative information in my codebook (such as code frequency) was correct.

Validity and Reliability

Defining validity within the context of qualitative inquiry can be challenging because scholars disagree on the terminology that ought to be used. For example, Morse (2015) suggests that researchers ought to maintain adherence to the original terminology used within the field, because they align with markers of quantitative validity and thus lends credibility to qualitative research. Tracy (2010), on the other hand, argues that qualitative research is distinct from, and thus cannot be measured against, quantitative inquiry, and therefore it should have its own criteria for excellence. Despite this debate on terminology and semantics, the authors tend to agree that rigor and credibility are key components of validity. Additionally, reliability (another hallmark of rigorous research) is not necessarily focused on being able to reproduce the study with the same results (as it is understood in quantitative circles), but rather on transparency and consistency. Resonance, coherence, and ethics are among the criteria for qualitative research excellence outlined by Tracy (2010), while rich description, peer review, and clarification of bias

are among those recommended by Morse (2015). All of these have merit and have substantial overlap and are among the most important to achieving excellence in this study.

Regarding Tracy's (2010) criteria, stakeholders who may be interested in the results of this study include community corrections practitioners, policymakers, justice involved people and their families, and other community-based service providers; thus, despite a lack of generalizability (which is often not a goal of qualitative research) (Guba & Lincoln, 1994), the study can have far-reaching resonance among a variety of audiences. The PSP Project's coherence is underscored by its direct relevance to the partnering agency, who collaboratively designed and executed the study. Furthermore, the interview questions are directly tied to the research questions, meaning that data should therefore be tied to the initial justification of the study. Specific ethical concerns are discussed in the following section. Regarding Morse's (2015) criteria, rich descriptions were achieved through the use of probing questions and by including memos in my analysis. Peer review was emphasized throughout the project (not only at the time of publication) by continually discussing the project with my advisor, research assistants, and stakeholders at the corrections agency.

Limitations

The PSP Project had several important limitations to consider. First, recruitment was incredibly challenging, and this necessarily influenced the sample. Despite numerous recruitment strategies, we can assume that participation was likely skewed toward PSPs with more trust in the system or with greater levels of social connection (whether to their loved one, the larger community, or both). Furthermore, because participants self-selected, I did not collect data from a representative sample of PSPs. This is acceptable within my chosen methodologies, given that I am operating under the assumption that all the data is context-bound anyway, but it is important

that these results are not intended to be generalizable nor specifically replicable. A related issue is that my sample did not include Spanish-speaking participants. Literature on the experiences of Hispanic people who are justice-involved suggests that they may experience some aspects differently than non-Hispanics (Lanuza et al., 2023). Unfortunately, there is no such research on the experiences of PSPs. While I did include several participants who identified as Hispanic, there remains an important need for future research on this population.

Another limitation of the current study is its single-site context. The study is contextually bound to a single agency and its sample size is relatively small, and readers are cautioned against assuming transferability of findings to other community corrections settings. On one hand, this study offers grounding for future research on the experiences of PSPs, especially those in other jurisdictions with different policies, demographics, or correctional models. The experiences of PSPs are not, nor are they intended to be represented as, ubiquitous. On the other hand, given that the current study was designed to provide assistance to a specific agency, this study is actually better equipped to provide insight to agency stakeholders about the nuances of how their program impacts the lives of PSPs.

Another important consideration is the use of interviews and surveys to collect data. Both of these instruments rely on participants' recollections of past events, as opposed to observing social processes as they are taking place. Because my research questions are aimed at understanding the experiences that shape PSPs' views of the agency, observing these events as they happened (and thus interpreting them myself) is less important than understanding participants' perceptions and interpretations of these events. Still, interview and survey data are self-reported and retrospective, and so they are subject to limitations such as recall bias (or memory problems more generally) and social desirability.

Second, while the study was grounded in a PAR framework, full participation from non-university stakeholders in data collection and analysis was restricted by concerns around participant confidentiality. The importance of full fidelity to PAR remains contested in the literature (Haverkate et al., 2020; Mikesell et al., 2013; Numans et al., 2019). However, my experience was that stakeholders from all groups—agency staff, clients, and PSPs—were more concerned about collecting “good data” (that is, providing participants with a comfortable space to share honest insights and experiences) than they were about seeing or analyzing that data themselves. Bennett & Brunner (2022) point out that because PAR is by nature an iterative process, challenges to fidelity permeate the entire research timeline, and therefore solutions to these challenges are not simply “additional steps,” so to speak, that could be implemented at a single stage of the research. Instead, they require continuous attention to PAR principles at every stage of the research process. I did prioritize transparency throughout the research process, and specifically, around my rationale for restricting the data collection and analysis processes. For example, in each recruitment session, I explained that data would be de-identified before being stored, but that there may still be ways that this data could be linked to an individual (for example, through a unique story). For that reason, I explained, the data would remain confidential throughout the analysis process, and furthermore, the *results* of the study would not be shared with anyone until the CSU research team could take steps to ensure no one—clients, PSPs, or staff—could be identified. This consideration led me to think more critically about several potential ethical issues in the study.

Ethical Considerations and Reflexivity

Although it is impossible to anticipate every ethical issue which may arise, it is the responsibility of the researcher to avoid causing foreseeable harm. To that end, I will share here

some of the ethical concerns I considered in designing the study. In fact, this is one of the primary functions of the dissertation as I see it: to demonstrate not only methodological excellence, but ethical integrity. While the Institutional Review Board (IRB) has traditionally functioned as the “ethical gatekeeper,” some academics challenge this claim (Lincoln & Tierney, 2004; T. Opsal et al., 2016). In their 2004 article, Lincoln and Tierney argue that IRBs are primarily concerned with protecting the institution—rather than the participants— from damage. They argue that this is perpetuated by a rejection of qualitative methods as a legitimate form of research, and that it threatens to further undermine the legitimacy of qualitative inquiry if researchers do not pay special attention to ethical dilemmas and maintain a reflexive approach to their work. Neither reflexivity nor ethics as a whole is a “step” in the research process; I need to be aware of my own positionality, and all the biases that entails, as well as the consequences of my design choices, at every age of my research (Reyes, 2020).

One potential area of tension lies in what Clark & Sharf (2007) call “the dark side of truth.” They ask, “Is the truth always beneficial? No. Can it also be harmful? Yes. Furthermore, multiple conceptions of truth or ‘right’ may, at times, come into direct conflict” (p. 400). This applies directly to my study in the sense that I am asking participants about their perceptions of “justice” in the criminal-legal system—a topic where multiple conceptions of truth do indeed often come into conflict. Furthermore, questions around human relationships and the harm perpetuated within them are inherently messy, and these sensitive topics may simultaneously create “benefit” for me/the study itself while being quite painful to the participant.

The informed consent process is integral to a valid interview (Clark & Sharf, 2007). The issue of consent also arises in the context of describing risks and benefits to participants. As Opsal et al. note in their 2016 article, IRBs’ perceptions of risks and benefits often do not align

with those of participants. This is likely a result of IRBs' concern with protecting from institutional liability, as described by Clark and Sharf (2007; above), but the result is that consent forms tend to over-emphasize risk and under-emphasize benefits. Disclosing the risk of breaching confidentiality without discussing the subjective benefit of sharing lived expertise and valued personal experiences (T. Opsal et al., 2016) does not adequately (nor accurately) provide the participant with the information necessary to make an informed decision.

Another potential limitation of IRB requirements is participants' agency to determine whether they wish to remain anonymous. Traditionally, participants' identifying information is kept secure and separate from anonymized interview data, but recent studies have suggested that participants often want to be identified, as in Wiles et al.'s (2008) research. They note that there are situations requiring intentional disclosure (such as imminent participant risk of harm, or ethical dilemmas as described in the preceding paragraph), and there are frequently situations in which confidentiality is accidentally broken. But they note that participants who are interested in creating meaningful change by participating in the interviews might be dissatisfied with their representation if they are made anonymous. I want to respect participants' wishes as much as possible, but I also recognize that this has practical limitations: because this is a collaborative study, I will be sharing results directly with the agency to which participants are referring, and many participants still have loved ones under the agency's supervision. If one participant were to reveal their identity, it is unlikely that I would be able to protect the identities of other participants to an acceptable degree, and I would almost certainly be compromising the client's identity as well. The risks of revealing participants' identities are significant: in the interviews, many participants disclosed concerns about retaliation, embarrassment, or even litigation/prosecution if their loved one's identities were revealed. Therefore, at the admitted cost

of overriding participant agency on this matter, I decided to keep all information anonymous and confidential.

Protecting the interests of participants is necessary but alone insufficient for conducting an ethical study. Recently, scholars have begun to note the emotional burden undertaken by qualitative researchers, particularly when studying distressing and/or emotionally charged topics. Dickson-Swift et al. (2009) discuss the impossibility (and the undesirability) of staying “objective” throughout the interview process. They write, “An emotional ‘way of knowing’ has often been contrasted with an objective, scientific approach. However, we argue...that it is appropriate for qualitative researchers to see their emotional and cognitive functions as inseparable from each other and that emotions should be central to the research process” (63-64).

My emotional responses as a researcher are data points, and it is imperative that I reflect on how these shaped and filtered the information I collected. Rather striving to be “objective” by limiting/hiding emotional responses, I believe it is more authentic, effective, and valid for me to note these and reflect on them as data. Interviews were usually emotionally charged: not only was I asking participants to share sensitive information, like their loved ones’ criminal histories, but I was also asking them to be quite vulnerable, and topics like substance use, sexual assault, and suicide came up in these interviews. It was not uncommon for respondents to be tearful or angry during our conversations. The reality of asking people about their emotional experiences is that difficult subjects will necessarily arise, and it would be foolish to assume that this would have no impact on me as a listener. In addition to memo writing and reflexive methodology, I have tried to prioritize maintaining a self-care routine that includes, among other things, check-ins with my advisor and peers (to discuss how this might affect the research) as well as continued participation in my own therapy (to discuss how this might affect me as a human).

Finally, I should reflect on how my positionality influenced the research. First, I am a graduate student who is conducting research, and therefore I stand to benefit from the outcome of data collection regardless of what is shared with me; participants may not have this same experience. I was also working collaboratively with the corrections agency (that is, I was conducting research with them rather than on them), and many participants were quite critical of its practices, and so although I did not work *for* the agency (and I was careful to discuss this distinction in describing confidentiality), I can assume that some participants may have been trepidatious about sharing their criticisms with me. I also recognize that my personal experiences are necessarily different from those of each participant, and in particular my position is in some ways quite privileged. Varied aspects of my social location—for example, my apparent race, gender, and socioeconomic status, and even the language I use—all affect the way people (including participants, clients, staff, and members of the university-based research team) interact with me. Although I have been what I call “justice adjacent” throughout much my life (as a friend and family member of justice-involved people, as a correctional mental health provider, and in other capacities), I have never had direct justice involvement, and for that reason my understanding will always be limited. Thus, in light of these limitations, I want to be very intentional about how I present the findings of this study, which are ultimately my interpretation of my interactions with participants. To that end, I will close with this quote from Linda Alcoff (1991): “We should strive to create wherever possible the conditions for dialogue and the practice of speaking with and to rather than speaking for others. If the dangers of speaking for others result from the possibility of misrepresentation, expanding one's own authority and privilege, and a generally imperialist speaking ritual, then speaking with and to can lessen these dangers” (p. 23).

CHAPTER 3. PHILOSOPHIES OF COMMUNITY CORRECTIONS: PERSPECTIVES FROM PRIMARY SUPPORT PERSONS

Criminal justice scholars disagree on the central purpose of community corrections. Rehabilitation and reintegration, responsabilization, and retribution are all prominent theories of the philosophy underpinning community corrections, but it is also important to recognize that just because a community corrections agency has certain stated goals does not mean it is meeting them—in other words, the *intended* purpose of community corrections may not align with its *actual* function. Thus, people who have firsthand experience with community corrections can offer valuable insight to its practical function in the context of the justice system. The unique “insider-outsider” perspective that PSPs hold is especially useful in understanding the purpose of community corrections. In many cases, PSPs have direct contact or experience with the community corrections agency on account of their loved one’s involvement with it, but they themselves are not justice-involved. Therefore, given the debate in the literature over what function community corrections serves, I use this chapter to explore my first research question: *How do PSPs conceptualize the role of community corrections in the context of the criminal justice system?*

I begin this chapter by reviewing the philosophies underpinning community corrections that I introduced in chapter one. In particular, I describe theories of rehabilitation, responsabilization, and retribution, as these are the primary foci of the findings I present in this chapter. Next, I discuss the central findings relevant to Research Question 1: *How do PSPs conceptualize the role of community corrections in the context of the criminal justice system?* Here, I illustrate the nuanced and complex attitudes that many PSPs hold towards community corrections before presenting PSPs’ unique understandings of rehabilitation, responsabilization,

and net-widening. Carceral logics permeate these views, allowing PSPs to reconcile (at least to some degree) the harms and benefits that community corrections can produce for clients and their families.

Literature Review

As discussed in Chapter 1, several key explanations have emerged from research on the philosophy underpinning community-based justice interventions: rehabilitation, responsabilization, and increased social control. Proponents of the rehabilitative orientation point to programs centering mental health and substance use treatment as evidence of this philosophy (DeMichele & Payne, 2012; Phelps & Ruhland, 2022). Other programmatic elements, like welfare navigation, social support, educational opportunities, and assistance with job and housing searches, are less treatment-oriented but are nonetheless aligned with a goal of community reintegration, especially following a prison or jail sentence. But while the purpose might be to reintegrate or rehabilitate clients, research highlights unintended but critical consequences of these approaches—in particular, consequences that can include responsabilizing clients for their own reintegration or rehabilitation. When this happens, clients must overcome significant structural barriers with little formal support (Garland, 1997; Hackett, 2013; Wyse, 2013). At the same time, there is yet another body of experts who argue that community corrections serves primarily to allow the state to expand its surveillance of and control over people in and adjacent to the justice system via the process of net-widening (Halushka, 2020; Phelps, 2017; Prichard, 2010). Next, I expand on these concepts of rehabilitation, responsabilization, and net-widening, as these were the prominent philosophies that emerged from my analysis.

Rehabilitation and Responsibilization

Rehabilitation, often called “the rehabilitative ideal,” is a foundational aim of many community corrections agencies. Although today rehabilitative programs often focus on the treatment of substance use disorders and mental illness (K. D. Alexander et al., 2024), the history of the rehabilitative ideal is significantly more complex. The rehabilitative approach applies a medical model to corrections, with the assumption that criminal behavior is a particular problem or “illness” that can be resolved or “cured” (Cullen, 2013). (I use the words “illness” and “cure” metaphorically here; rehabilitation does not necessarily assume a mental or physical pathology.) Cullen (2013) points out that this is an enlightened, rational response to a longstanding public opinion in the U.S. that there is some set of conditions which separates “lawbreakers” from “law-abiders” (p. 309). Over the years, the rehabilitative ideal has shifted from a moral or spiritual need for reformation to a more clinical perspective on the needs of people who commit crimes (Davis, 2003). The concept of rehabilitation is therefore quite complex, but it is useful to briefly discuss how it is used in contemporary corrections.

There are many reasons a person may engage in criminal behavior, and thus the pursuit of identifying the problem is indispensable in the process of fixing it. The risk-need-responsivity model, a commonly-used rehabilitative approach, is a formal method of identifying criminological needs and responding to them accordingly (Viglione & Taxman, 2018). The other component, risk, relates to the client’s apparent threat to public safety, emphasizing the fact that today, most rehabilitative programs are simultaneously focused on reintegration when the assumption is that people will eventually leave the carceral system. Reintegration—the process of transitioning from prison or jail life back into the community—is a related but distinct goal often discussed in the literature. Because a reintegrative focus centers the idea that people under correctional supervision will eventually return to society, reintegrative programs often put

resources in place to ensure a smooth transition; this can include addressing problems (like substance use disorders and mental illnesses) that contributed to their justice involvement (C. Klingele, 2021). In this chapter, I discuss the two together both for ease of analysis and because reintegration often involves elements of rehabilitation such as finding economic and housing stability, connecting with community-based mental health professionals, and developing a social support system (Wyse, 2013).

Rehabilitation exists throughout the carceral system, but it is particularly prominent in community corrections. Scholars have argued that community-based substance use treatment (including medications for opioid use disorder and peer support) tends to improve substance use outcomes more reliably than criminal justice outcomes; however, when agencies can ensure that all of an individual's basic needs are met—as opposed to only treating a substance use disorder—the client is more successful (Graves & Fendrich, 2024). This suggests that treatment providers in the community corrections setting must pay close attention to the structural barriers their clients face. Unfortunately, this does not always happen.

Too often, community corrections agencies overlook structural disadvantage and instead frame clients as being responsible for their own success or failure in reintegration.

Responsibilization, aligned with a neoliberal framework, is the idea that clients can and should take accountability for their behaviors, and ultimately, their lives; they must pull themselves up by their bootstraps in order to transform themselves into law-abiding citizens (Ellis, 2021).

Halushka (2017) suggests that responsabilization is the result of pressure on community corrections agencies to pursue short-term, individualized approaches to rehabilitation. Other scholars, like Hackett (2013), argue that the purpose of responsabilization is to reinforce existing inequities, particularly related to gender and socioeconomic status. According to this argument,

through responsabilization, clients are obliged to conform to social norms like following rules and adopting acceptable—that is, non-criminal—behaviors consistent with middle-class lifestyles (Turnbull & Hannah-Moffat, 2009). These social norms reinforce existing inequality through their emphasis on several stratifying factors. For example, Wyse (2013) suggests that men in community corrections are taught to take on economic roles and contribute to the workforce, while women’s emotional lives are scrutinized and relationships perceived by staff to be unhealthy are discouraged, perpetuating inequitable but entrenched gender norms. Responsibilizing community corrections clients can also emphasize their socioeconomic precarity (Piehowski & Phelps, 2023; Werth, 2013), and this precarity can reinforce inequality by limiting the social mobility of members of the lower and lower-middle classes (Rank et al., 2021; Standing, 2016). This demonstrates the degree to which responsabilization aligns with a neoliberal paradigm, which promotes individual responsibility and diminishes the role of the state in ensuring the welfare of its citizens—success, stability, and wellness are assumed to be available to anyone who will put in the work to achieve them.

Net-widening, Retributive Logics, and the Reproduction of Inequality

Compliance requirements, like maintaining employment, adhering to curfews, abstaining from substance use, attending regular check-ins, and completing treatment or educational classes, can be difficult to juggle. This is especially true when the conditions are layered on top of other burdens, such as caregiving responsibilities, unstable housing, limited transportation, or mental health challenges—all of which are common experiences, given the intersecting marginalized identities of justice-involved people. When clients fail to meet these conditions, they may be penalized. This dynamic can make supervision a precarious experience for clients, creating what Steen & Opsal (2007) refer to as “punishment on the installment plan.” Basically, supervisory

staff have a large amount of discretion, and they have the power to make decisions that can mean further punishment for technical violations if clients are unable to meet the conditions of their supervision. Some scholars cite this trend as evidence that community corrections, while perhaps not entirely retributive, justifies surveillance via retributive logics (Tonry, 2017; Wodahl & Garland, 2009).

While proponents of community corrections often frame it as a more humane alternative to incarceration, some scholars argue that its function is deeply entangled with the logics of retribution (Wodahl & Garland, 2009). For example, Wacquant (2009) argues that the neoliberal shift from "helping the poor" to "punishing the poor" has transformed the penal state such that it now uses punishment not as retribution exactly (in an "eye-for-an-eye" sense), but as a method of social control and management. However, it has been able to persist and maintain its legitimacy by preserving retributive logics. Again, this idea is predicated on the assumption that clients are morally responsible for their own choices, and thus structural conditions are not precipitating factors of criminality. It follows that modern community corrections does indeed embody elements of both punitive requirements and rigid surveillance mechanisms, which together can produce and/or exacerbate the challenges of living with a criminal record because the client is alone responsible for navigating those challenges. Probation and residential programs, for example, frequently subject clients to intensive monitoring, drug testing, curfews, and financial obligations (J. Lin, 2010). These requirements create intense scrutiny for clients, and many return to prison for technical violations of their supervision (Steen & Opsal, 2007); this then leaves clients in a sort of revolving door, wherein technical violations become the mechanism by which community corrections programs can continually apply punishment and amplify clients' social exclusion.

Importantly, philosophies of punishment are not mutually exclusive; retributive logics can exist, at least on the surface, alongside other philosophies as well. Returning to the previous example, clients are often required to pay for the conditions of their supervision, including fees for things like drug testing (UAs), room and board, treatment classes, and other mandatory programs. Critics of community corrections argue that these costs, which fund interventions that may appear to be oriented toward rehabilitation, actually function to further disenfranchise justice-involved people and their families, thus magnifying their existing economic precarity. (Ansfield et al., 2023). When program fees are applied in the framework of retributive logics, the fees become punishment for both clients and their families. Therefore, in a *rehabilitative* program that is informed by *retributive* logics, fines and fees amplify the fact that the client—or, as the case may be, their family—is responsible for both their own “offending” and their own “rehabilitation.”

Given that research provides evidence that family and friends provide substantial financial support to their loved ones, PSPs are also likely to experience the consequences of the programmatic, policy, and philosophical choices that inform supervision requirements. Regardless of whether PSPs directly experience exploitation, the fact remains community corrections, while physically less restrictive than prison or jail, has the *potential* to serve as a form of control that is less visible than, but equally coercive as, prison. Still, an important caveat to all of these philosophies is that community corrections is highly variable in terms of the form it takes, how it is applied, and what its goals are. These variations across jurisdictions leave substantial room for unique experiences in the community corrections system.

In this chapter, I present the findings from this research that describe PSPs’ perceptions of the purpose of community corrections. In the last chapter of this dissertation, I put these findings

into conversation with existing literature. Before moving into these findings, it may be helpful to restate my first research question: *How do PSPs conceptualize the role of community corrections in the context of the criminal justice system?*

Findings

No Single Answer

Every PSP I interviewed made references to multiple goals or purposes of the community corrections agency. In fact, in my analysis of the interview data, all but one respondent (n=26) was represented in three or more distinct codes regarding the purpose of community corrections. Clearly, the answer to my first research question is complex. Although it is possible—and to some degree useful—to identify the specific philosophical orientations that emerged in our conversations, it is also important to recognize the complexity of these ideas. It would be misleading to suggest that any particular philosophy is the most true or the most important because, for PSPs, these disparate purposes coexist, and all have unique relationships with one another—sometimes synergistic and sometimes competing. For example, participants' narratives provide evidence that reintegrative features of programming may serve to reinforce retributive ones; or, responsabilization may bolster the net-widening effect of community supervision. On the other hand, some PSPs found that when clients are expected to meet competing goals, their punishment inevitably intensifies.

I begin by describing perceptions of synergistic philosophies. Melinda, a PSP who was herself a former client of the program described it this way:

I would explain [the agency] as a facility that is... helps women transition back into the community, that is there to um... help them get a job. Uh, not help them get a job, but make sure that they *have* a job before they go back into the community. It is kind of like... It's kind of like, uh, jail on a low level. [Laughs] You get to wear your own clothes, um, and you get to go back into the community slowly. That's how I would explain it. You have people there that that will support you if you're willing to do, if you're willing to do

the program and you're willing to take advantage of all the things that they have, then you're going to do great. But if you are not ready to get out and you're still wanting to live that same lifestyle? It's not going to be fun. That's how I would explain it [...] If you're not willing to change and you're not ready to change, it's not going to be a fun program. You're going to be in a, you're going to be in that facility all the time, they're going to put you on, on facility hold. They are not going to be nice to you.

Here, Melinda clearly points out that reintegration (helping clients transition back into the community) is a central goal of the agency, but she sees it as conditional on responsabilization. Opportunities for reintegration are available to clients who want to *change their lifestyle* if they are willing to *take advantage* of the community corrections programming. While clients' attitudes and levels of determination may well factor into their likelihood of success, the fact remains that this process burdens clients with the responsibility of overcoming structural barriers—like the challenge of finding a job with a felony record—on their own. And, of course, Melinda is acutely aware that the program is inherently coercive: it is “jail on a low level,” and if the client does not commit to success, “They are not going to be nice to you”—the client will receive additional sanctions and supervision, thus widening the net of state control. Here, Melinda illuminates how she understands the goals of reintegration, responsabilization, and net-widening as mutually necessary: in order for a client to successfully reintegrate, she must take responsibility for overcoming structural barriers, and she is obliged to take this personal responsibility because correctional organizations are, inevitably, coercive. Regardless of the agency's other goals, punishment remains at the center. At the same time, without the promise of reintegration—tastes of freedom, like wearing one's own clothes—the threat of punishment may be less effective. It is unclear whether contributing to the workforce (responsibilization) or simply returning to the community (reintegration) is more important, but—for Melinda—both appear to outweigh the importance of net-widening.

While Melinda saw responsabilization and reintegration as working in tandem with one another, some participants had a different take on the relationship. For example, Cassie is the mother of a man who had been in the community corrections program twice. She emphasized net-widening as a central goal, but again recognized that she was other purposes as well:

They get out of prison, they drop them off. They drop them off, homeless out here and expect them not to fall back into drugs [...] You know, I just - we've got to slow it down there. In somewhere in that, you know, letting them go, they've got to be able to pass some stages like a halfway house, you know? [...] My son couldn't hold a job, get to all these UAs. "You got to get there now. You got to be there within 30 minutes or we're coming to"- they come and got him once. I can't, I couldn't do it. I couldn't just leave my job to go get him to- *it's hard*. So how could somebody that didn't have me do it? You know, up on their own. They couldn't. They can't.

Cassie recognizes the importance of reintegration (and to some degree, rehabilitation) for community corrections clients, but she does not see this as the agency's only goal. Instead, she paints treatment interventions like drug screenings ("UAs", or urinalysis) as strategies for exerting control over clients—despite identifying addiction as a high-need area for people returning from prison. From Cassie's perspective, clients are given such stringent demands and placed under such intense scrutiny that it is impossible for them to succeed. When they inevitably fail, the scrutiny intensifies and expands, effectively widening the net of state control. While Melinda sees punitive measures as a tool to encourage reintegration and responsabilization, Cassie's perspective is different: she sees two requirements (holding down a job and taking UA tests) that are in conflict with one another. For Cassie, rather than reinforcing one another, the competing demands of responsabilization and rehabilitation create a catch-22 for clients: if they prioritize one requirement over the other—and it is impossible to do both—the consequence is increased sanction. Cassie's narrative also highlights *why* community corrections clients need support from a PSP, since her son was simply unable to complete the requirements on his own. Cassie saw her son's need for support, but she had her own responsibilities too, and

this placed her in the unenviable situation of having to determine which sacrifices she was willing (perhaps more accurately, able) to make for her son.

While these two participants may share similar ideas about the distinct *purposes* of community corrections, their perspectives reveal important differences in the way those purposes can interact with one another to shape the *impact* that the agency has on its clients and their loved ones. Nearly all of the participants (n=26) felt that rehabilitation and reintegration were central goals of the agency, and similarly, 25 participants identified responsabilization as a core purpose. At the same time, though, Melinda and Cassie offer two examples of just how complex the purpose of community corrections can be. This finding is in tension with some earlier research which suggests that these diverse purposes are mutually exclusive and *necessarily* in conflict with one another (Wodahl & Garland, 2009). On the contrary, some PSPs see these goals as dependent on one another.

Rehabilitating Victims of Structural Harm

Despite pointing out that community corrections served multiple goals, PSPs did see rehabilitation and reintegration as the most central to the work. early all PSPs (n=26) indicated that either rehabilitation or reintegration is a goal of community corrections. Unsurprisingly, PSPs whose loved ones were transitioning from prison into the community (as opposed to serving their full sentence in community corrections) emphasized the centrality of reintegration, while PSPs of direct-sentence (that is, prison diversion) clients focused more on the program's rehabilitative elements, in particular those addressing mental health and substance use. Among both of these groups, PSPs recognize the role of marginalization in criminal justice involvement, but some participants described the various unmet needs and/or maladaptive coping behaviors that *led* their loved ones to become justice involved, while others pointed to structural harms,

like poverty, that *kept* them there. PSPs whose loved ones struggled with substance use disorder were particularly attuned to the close relationship between structural harm, criminalized behavior (like addiction), and system involvement. For example, Hannah is a current community corrections client providing critical support to a peer who is also in the program. Her friend, she explained, had tried to get sober on her own before entering the program but was unsuccessful:

I think people kind of, they get the support of, they don't have to wonder where they're staying [when they are at community corrections]. And so they don't have all the stress of, you know, worrying about environment, like you have a place to keep your stuff, you have a place to sleep, and you have like, food to eat and your, all of your physical needs are taken care of so that you can focus on other stuff, which is, you know, hopefully getting back into society and, you know, getting a job or working on your addiction or working on like, you know, having different friend groups. And just pretty much like, so you can be a better person yourself so that then you can maybe contribute to the community, I guess is how I would see it.

In describing the incredible difficulty of overcoming a substance use disorder when basic needs—like food, shelter, and safety—are not met, Hannah highlights the utility of community corrections not just as a substance use intervention, but as a social safety net that mediates the impact of systemic poverty. Her optimism for her friend's sobriety underscores the importance of these welfare services, which her friend had not been able to access before entering the correctional program. Hannah is emphasizing here the fact that treatment for a substance use disorder requires a particular set of supports which must account for the realities of systemic poverty.

Importantly, many PSPs must also deal with challenge of having limited resources, as well as additional challenges like substance use disorders. Because of this, providing support can be exceedingly difficult or even risky for PSPs. Another participant, Perla, explains it this way:

I hope that they provide some kind of like transitional services. Umm, I think that would be my biggest concern, is that it's easier to stay sober when you've got a roof over your head, you've got meals, you've got some structure. But if you discharge us from the halfway house and he's homeless, that's a lot harder to maintain sobriety. And I think

that's his biggest relapse potential. That's kind of why I'm really hesitant too, to get too involved with him while he's at the halfway house because I'm like it could all go to hell in two months if you discharge to the shelter and then— You know? You don't like being there and, and so you need a place to stay, and the only person who says yes is your ex-friend who's still actively using.

Perla understood that several systemic challenges—housing, poverty, food insecurity—would make it difficult for her ex-boyfriend to maintain sobriety when he left, and this directly shaped her involvement with him. Perla was hesitant to offer support from her own limited resources because she feared that his failure could mean disastrous consequences for *both* of them.

Other participants spoke about their loved ones' pathways *into* the justice system, like this mother whose daughter was trapped for years in a violent, abusive relationship before she became justice-involved:

[My daughter] never even got ornery or did bad things, you know, like that until she was, until she was – until they took her kids away, you know. *Then* that started happening. *Then* she started self-medicating.

This PSP, too, recognized a relationship between structural harm, substance use, and justice involvement: her daughter's children were removed by the state, which led to self-medicating, which led her into the justice system. Participants had varying opinions on whether they believed their loved one's substance use was a maladaptive coping skill or simply a “bad choice.” Nevertheless, they consistently described substance use as a *response* to some kind of structural harm (in the cases above, housing instability, food insecurity, and state removal of children). A few participants applied this same logic to problems other than substance use, recognizing that justice involvement—and thus marginalization—can persist across generations if there is no support available. One PSP opined,

I just believe that [it's] the diagnosis and figuring out what's caused you to get in trouble to begin with. What caused you to go down that road, to steal the...you know? And does it run in the family? Is this something that your dad's dad did? Or, you know what I mean. I think that's kind of important in order to stop that.

Participants who understood justice involvement as an eventuality of marginalization did not use the language of “structural harm,” nor did they necessarily identify a particular system as being harmful. PSPs implicitly understand, however, that the social welfare system is not set up to support people with high levels of need and low levels of resources. And, importantly, most of the PSPs I spoke with made sure to specify that in the context of the criminal justice system, community corrections is unique: other carceral interventions, like prison, are not set up to offer meaningful support. Services received in prison—even therapeutic ones—cannot and do not create a system of support for marginalized clients once they are released. For example, Cassie’s son had served two prison sentences, and after the first one, he was released directly to the community rather than to the halfway house. She conceptualized that process as a total failure:

So it's that end of their program [in prison] that makes them fall right back in. Set them up, set them up. Fail. And it's like a [whoosh] drop off. Mhmm. That is exactly what they do. They drop them off. I think they give him a gift card or a card like with a hundred dollars or some shit on it. That doesn't even buy - all that buys is a sack of dope. And I hate to tell you that, but it's the truth. I've seen it time and time again. He'd get off the bus and see them dope dealerships just waiting at that hotel over there. He'd go to them and trade the hundred bucks for some first thing off the bat.

Cassie’s story emphasizes a second key finding related to rehabilitation and reintegration: Sometimes, the particular “problem” that community corrections helps to solve is actually structural harm that is *directly attributable* to the justice system. In Cassie’s son’s case, his prison sentence left him disenfranchised, with no hope of supporting himself (much less maintaining sobriety). Of course, the fact that a prison sentence can create these effects in the first place is the result of structural conditions *outside* the criminal justice system, too: systemic poverty, as well as a neoliberal state that lacks a robust social safety net, operate together to create a particularly precarious environment for justice-involved people whose criminal record is simply one more form of marginalization. Cassie, like other participants with this same perspective (n=10), had

overwhelmingly positive perceptions of community corrections, and she expressed feeling grateful for the support community corrections provided in recovering from that harm. Her narrative provides evidence that the criminal justice system has indeed become a pseudo-welfare response to social problems, given that the formal welfare system has been so stripped down in the neoliberal era.

Richard was another PSP who held a similar belief. Richard's son started the community corrections program after serving a lengthy prison sentence. While in prison, his son was "beaten unconscious," and he was subsequently diagnosed with PTSD. Importantly, Richard viewed the community corrections program as being almost as restrictive as prison, yet with a decidedly different goal. He explained that community corrections was also able to offer therapeutic services as soon as his son arrived:

I feel very good because recently he's really gotten his act together. I think it was the counseling and finally finding medication that that, that worked. I don't know the name of the medication, but it's phenomenal as far as his PTSD treatment.

Richard's perspective is important because it highlights an overlap between responsabilization and rehabilitation: his son has benefitted from medication and counseling (treatment services), as evidenced by the fact that he has "gotten his act together." In other words, community corrections can help its clients follow through on their personal responsibility to overcome structural harm, even when that harm is caused by the justice system itself.

Importantly, as with structural explanations for justice involvement, participants did not explicitly make the connection between carceral system-induced harms and the role of community corrections. In fact, PSPs with this perspective tend to view community corrections as having a positive impact: they are "glad it exists," to quote one participant. Allison, whose loved one had served numerous prison and jail sentences shared that,

[My friend at community corrections] has had a really hard life. And, and I don't know everything, but I know that, you know, this, this girl, she was just like—she didn't think she was anybody. And, and being there at [community corrections], they, they've helped her. Just changed her mind that she's, that she's important, you know? She's an important part of the world.

Regardless of the precise purpose of community corrections, PSPs see clear benefits for their loved ones, and they see evidence of success (like improved self-worth) that agencies cannot capture when they measure recidivism data. This finding is important because, as I explain in the next chapter, benefits to clients are directly tied to the impacts that community corrections has on PSPs. Moreover, PSPs' recognition that community corrections serves to mitigate structural harm adds nuance to the broader debate over what, exactly, rehabilitation means. In the next section, I discuss the ways PSPs notice responsabilization.

The Consequences of Responsibilization

One of the most prominent philosophies that emerged from the interview data was responsabilization. In fact, most participants (n=25) endorsed the importance of responsabilization as a focus of the agency. What also became clear in my analysis, though, is that PSPs often shoulder the consequences of this responsabilization, sometimes without necessarily realizing it. First, though, it is important to illustrate how PSPs understand responsabilization.

While PSPs recognize the structural factors that lead to system involvement, they also tend to express beliefs that marginalized individuals could (and should) learn to work harder to overcome these challenges—even when this has not been their own experience. Tony is a support for several friends who, like himself, are clients in the community corrections program. In fact, Tony has been in the program several times, but he has struggled to find stability in the

community when he leaves the facility. Nevertheless, he sees community corrections as an opportunity for people to take ownership of their lives, and he encourages his friends to do so:

If you cannot... If you, if, if a person cannot, um, stack their bread here and, and, you know, get, get a good head start here? Then they're bums. They're just, they're not trying. They're not, they're just... yeah. So, this is a great opportunity for somebody to get their foot in the door and go whatever direction they want, whether they want to go to school, whether they want to go to work, whether they want to go to school *and* work, whether they want to do peer support, just, there's... this is the launch path for any direction they want to go, and it is supported and backed, and it's official.

PSPs like Tony value the relative freedom that community corrections offers; compared to prison, community corrections allows more flexibility. They also emphasize the fact that the agency offers useful services and programs that can help clients achieve success in the community. But Tony also points out that this support is only temporary; clients must still face significant barriers when that support ends. Interestingly, though, Tony does not attribute a lack of success in reentry to structural harm or a lack of resources, but as a failure to successfully take responsibility for one's own life.

Other participants I spoke with emphasized the idea that the support community corrections provides is temporary. Many of them went on to explain, too, that once clients are burdened with the consequences of responsabilization, it is PSPs who must help to carry the load when institutional support is stripped away. Beth's story illustrates this well. Beth is the mother of Amanda, a community corrections client who has cognitive disabilities. Since her daughter was in kindergarten, Beth has known that she would need lifelong support. But Amanda has done well in the program, and Beth has enjoyed respite—for now—providing further evidence that PSPs view community corrections as a social safety net for individuals with specific needs like behavioral health treatment. She explains,

She's thriving in this - in the, in the structure. She's thriving in the routine. She's thriving in her responsibilities. She's - I mean, everything else is great. [...] I see Amanda just

thriving by where she's doing. And she didn't even need to be in there. But I could, I mean, I couldn't have done what they're doing with her now. You know, because she wouldn't get up and out, she wouldn't ride the bus. She was afraid of everything. And I couldn't make her. [...] But she's doing it. She's riding the bus. She's getting to places. She's had two jobs. She's, I mean, she's... I couldn't thank them enough.

[...]

I just think she's ready to be done. So, and she's done well. But this is where you got to be careful, I think, too. I told her, I said, "well, be patient." I said, "you've moved really fast. Make sure— we got to make sure you're ready. Mom needs a few more weeks. Mom needs a few more weeks till you're back." Because she comes back in and [*stressed grunting noise*], you know, you're like... [*deep sigh*].

Amanda has obtained stability and has overcome significant challenges, but not without help; in fact, community corrections has more or less taken over the caretaker role that Beth has been in for years. When Amanda finishes the program, Beth will go right back to battling the same structural barriers that she has encountered since Amanda was a child, in spite of the fact that Beth is herself economically disenfranchised. Beth's experience reflects the *consequences* of responsabilization, as the "gap" in supports that Beth usually fills is being temporarily filled by community corrections, making this gap temporarily visible to the state. Beth and Amanda illustrate this phenomenon clearly because of their unique situation: Amanda's disability precludes her ever being able to live independently, so the expectation that she could somehow overcome her disenfranchisement when she is released disappears. In other words, for clients who need support in order to "take responsibility" for their situation, the burden of care shifts away from the state and onto families when clients leave the justice system. And because justice-involvement both affects marginalized people disproportionately and creates further marginalization, most clients need this support.

Many PSPs described similar patterns of having no choice but to help their loved one shoulder massive burdens to ensure their loved one's success. Another participant reflected,

My life is on hold. I'm working and I'm caring for [my son's] two children, and I have to let him be the one that's employed, it's required for his program. I can't work full time. I've burned through my retirement because of this.

When responsabilization is the focus of community corrections programming, PSPs are tasked, implicitly or explicitly, with providing tangible support—like money, childcare, or housing—that will allow their loved one to comply with program rules and (hopefully) achieve success in the long term. Other participants pointed to institutional policies that underscore the consequences of a responsabilizing approach. For example, the agency's policies around “passes” (written permission to leave the facility for a set amount of time) are quite restrictive. Clients need passes to do things that are required of them, like attending a job interview, or going to the bank, but the passes are not long enough to accomplish these tasks without transportation. Bruce, who did not live in the town where the agency was located, described the headache this caused:

Even when he was on the six-hour passes we were bringing him over here, so. He was with us most of the time, other than the beginning when we only could do three-hour passes. We'd bring him here once in a while for a three-hour pass, but it was just... he'd barely get here and then you'd have to head back, because it's 35, 40 minutes, depends on traffic, from here to there. So, but once he got to six hours, we were doing them more, and then now it's really, once he got to level four it works really good.

Bruce's narrative highlights another tension, which is that although community corrections can *temporarily* fill the gap in the social safety net, it does not always do so completely; sometimes, PSPs must subsidize the support that community corrections offers. This happens when clients are tasked with responsibilities that they cannot realistically manage on their own, a reality that almost every participant identified.

Finally, about half of the PSPs I interviewed (n=12) reported that providing support had a substantial financial impact on their own life. As one participant explained,

You know, if- It would have been nice if I would have just been able to get him like toiletries, but he needed *everything*. So like when he was getting out and he was like, unsure, like I was scrambling to just get him stuff he needed. Um, I spent about four or

five hundred dollars getting him just the essentials, and then he came out and then we went to Walmart to get him some more stuff, he spent another \$400. Keep in mind that like, that's out of my pocket because he hadn't started working yet. He'd just got out of jail, or DOC. So the expense was like, the financial pressure was, I think, a lot.

No participants reported ever being *explicitly told* by the agency that they were expected to provide any kind of support, but many felt that their loved one's success hinged upon their ability to assist them in meeting their basic needs. Again, this burden did not necessarily create a negative perception of community corrections for PSPs, and participants did not necessarily see their involvement as a central purpose of the agency; in fact, participants saw their involvement as supporting the goal of the agency (to responsabilize clients). But the fact remains that, regardless of the *intended* purpose, one function of community corrections is to subsidize a social safety net through PSPs on an individual-level scale.

Retributive Logics: How Community Corrections Can Deepen Inequality

PSPs' feelings toward community corrections are understandably complicated, as I have described so far. While most participants had overall neutral or favorable attitudes toward the community corrections agency, about a third of participants stated explicitly that they believed community corrections was an institution that was set up, in one way or another, to serve the larger criminal justice system at the expense of clients. Some participants pointed to evidence that led them to believe the agency was setting their loved one up for failure. One mother, whose son had developed PTSD after serving a prison sentence, stated bluntly,

Sometimes I feel like they want them to fail. Like, that they let the wrong people out because they know those are the ones who will be back. They're banking on the repeaters.

This participant emphasized that her son had numerous, significant treatment needs as a result of his time in prison, and she was not optimistic about the prospect of his improving while in community corrections, because she saw rehabilitation as being in conflict with the agency's true

goal of maintaining its control over a certain subset of clients. Another PSP, Dominga, was frustrated by her fiancé's difficulty meeting the conditions of his supervision, even with her support. She reflected,

I feel like in, in some ways it, it just kind of sets them up to fail because they have these astronomical expectations that people getting out of prison I don't think can necessarily meet right away.

Dominga was not alone; while all participants agreed that the support they provided was useful to their loved one, ten PSPs stated explicitly that they did not believe their loved one could have been successful in the program without help from a friend or family member. Seven of those individuals went on to say that they believed their support had literally saved their loved one's life, usually because that person struggled with suicidal thoughts or substance use. PSPs disagreed on whether community corrections had also helped to address these issues, but regardless, they felt strongly that additional support was necessary.

I should also mention here that several participants (n=5) disclosed to me that their loved one was serving a sentence for a sexual offense, and these participants strongly emphasized the retributive and punitive elements of community corrections that their loved one experienced. Examples include near-constant surveillance, rules against talking to strangers on the sidewalk, limits on contact with the client's own children and grandchildren, and even verbal harassment from both staff and clients. These participants also emphasized that they felt stigmatized as a result of their association with their loved one, and this had profound effects on their personal lives—a phenomenon that I describe in greater detail in Chapter Four. However, I intentionally did not ask participants to disclose their loved one's charges or criminal history, and most did not volunteer this information. As a result, I do not have sufficient data to make any general claims

about how offense type might influence PSPs' perceptions of or experiences with community corrections.

Even among participants who *did* feel that community corrections had a positive impact on their loved one, some expressed a belief that community corrections also financially exploited them. One participant put it this way:

I think [my loved one is] just another...Just another body. [...] That's kind of how, yeah, how I've seen it. But that's also how he's expressed it, like, "Oh, I'm just another number here, they don't give a shit about, you know, any of us." It's just...the state getting money, basically.

This participant cited certain institutional factors that bolstered her belief in community corrections' exploitative function—for example, she, like many PSPs, discussed the agency's policy of taking clients' paychecks and managing a significant portion of their finances for them (paying fines and fees, and placing the rest in savings available to the client at release to the community). About half (n=12) of the participants reported that they were themselves financially impacted by providing support to their loved one. In chapter four, I discuss the impact of community corrections on PSPs in greater detail, but this finding is relevant here in that it creates significant tension in the way PSPs think about the purpose of community corrections. Cassie—who, as you may recall, had expressed strong support for the program's rehabilitative focus—conceptualized the financial burden this way:

You know how much the UAs cost? How you gonna get there? How—you know what I mean? It's, it's something. I think [my son] got in trouble a few times for just not going to do UAs. We didn't have the money. Yeah. We didn't have money for him to go take it. What are you supposed to do? Those things are like 20-some dollars now, apiece. So I was like [frustrated sigh]. And you know, a no-show is a hot, you know, just the same shit. Bullshit. [...] I know it's definitely a financial strain.

For clients with substance use disorders (like Cassie's son), UAs can serve a rehabilitative purpose by alerting staff to a client's need for support if they relapse. However, although Cassie's

son did get sober in the program, she specifically noted that UAs *did not* contribute to his recovery. Instead, she points out that while drug testing might be intended to support rehabilitation, it often ends up functioning as a tool that reinforces inequalities—including continued justice involvement regardless of actual use. Cassie’s perception of the agency was positive, generally speaking, but she—like all the PSPs I spoke with—recognized that, as part of the carceral system, community corrections necessarily has a coercive, punitive framework.

Carceral Logics: The Realities of Engaging with a Coercive System

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given that community corrections is part of the criminal justice system, carceral logics pervaded every single interview. Carceral logics are the punishment and surveillance methodologies that shape our correctional system, and many scholars argue that these same frameworks shape our response to many social problems beyond crime, including pervasive mental health and substance use issues (Lopez, 2022; Mondé, 2024). This conceptual point is important given that this community corrections agency focuses much of its programming on these two problems. It became clear to me that carceral logics do indeed permeate PSPs’ understanding of community corrections, but they engage with and understand these logics in diverse ways, highlighting the tension of providing care in a coercive system. In this section, I illustrate a few of the unique ways PSPs contend with this tension.

PSPs’ attitudes towards community corrections are obviously shaped by their perceptions of the justice system more broadly: why it exists, how people come into contact with it, and what purpose it serves in our society. In my interviews with PSPs, I found that participants often take for granted the coercive elements of the program, as they see these elements as inevitable. PSPs commonly talked about surveillance, micromanaging behavior, punishments/sanctions, and other

punitive interventions even in the context of treatment programming, underscoring the pervasive nature of carceral logics. However, they contended with these elements in very different ways.

Some participants were supportive of the punitive approach and felt it was useful. For example, this participant felt that her daughter would do better in the community if she learned to respect authority:

If they tell her to do something she gets very upset. It's like, okay, like for example, say they, say it's your time to get off the phone because you have certain times to be on the phone. And they'll say, "Hey, get off your phone." You know, "it's time to get off your phone." Or "you gotta put it in your locker." She's like [*forcefully*] "I'm on the phone. I need to talk." And they're like "you have to follow the rules." She doesn't like sometimes following the rules. It's like, "I can do what I want." And she gets upset with that. Um, and I try to explain to her, you have to follow the rules, because if you come out in society, once you transition into regular life, you have to follow rules. You can't just do what you want. So, and I tried to explain. And then she'll go, "they're treating me bad." It's, that's not treating you bad. That's trying to explain to you: follow the rules.

Another participant felt similarly that the retributive component was an important part of community corrections' purpose, stating, "It can't be a resort either. You can't expect like they're in a resort, they got to pay for what they've done." This perspective shaped the way PSPs offered support: for example, they offered informational support in the form of advising their loved ones to "follow the rules," and they avoided providing instrumental support that would create so much comfort that community corrections would feel "like a resort." These PSPs were careful to align their support with the agency's approach, perhaps because of its perceived authority and expertise on the subject of reforming its clients. This view was not necessarily uncommon, but the majority of respondents were critical of many of the agency's more punitive practices.

Rosa, whose brother was preparing to move into her house under supervision, recalled feeling uncomfortable during a home visit for this very reason. She explained that she largely disapproved of the agency's approach to her brother for several reasons—for one thing, she did not believe the restrictions they placed on him were helpful or therapeutic. But she recognized the

simultaneous inevitability of carceral logics and the authority of the criminal justice system, and so together, she did not feel confident in resisting; carceral logics thus shaped the way she provided support and interacted with the system. She explains:

They just kind of - they literally did a circle - walked a circle around the house. And, um, she just said, you know, basically “do you have any questions?” And I'm, you know, like I said I was pretty quiet, you know. I'm not really, you know. Don't have too many questions at all. And, and, you know, she would say things like, “Well, you know, he is aware of what he can and cannot do.” And that's the kind of stuff I was just like—So, yeah you're telling me this—what this grown—I mean I'm thinking these things. You know I, I think these not very nice responses, and so in order to...I just swallow it. I don't say anything, you know? “No, I don't have any questions,” you know. So um, yeah, and I don't know what to say to those folks, you know. I am very frustrated by what I hear.

Here, Rosa recognizes the power this staff member holds: not only is her brother expected to abide by rules that she does not feel are necessary or appropriate, but she sees community corrections as an authority, and this also influences the way *she* interacts with this staff member. She determines it is in her brother's best interest for her *not* to provide support in the form of advocacy, but that it is better to simply comply. Expectations about how one ought to interact with community corrections staff—that is, criminal justice authorities—pervaded most interviews. Richard, whose son was a client, lamented that,

I think he is, I can hear in his voice his tolerance levels are getting a little weaker. He's been, he's... having been through the multiple situations with law enforcement that he's been in, he's very respectful of that and other positions, and very tolerant of it. He may not like it, but he realizes, “this is where I am and this is how I must behave.”

Interestingly, PSPs from both of these groups—that is, people who support the punitive approach and people who are critical of it—gave similar advice to their loved ones: keep your head down and do what you are told. In the words of one PSP, “I learned that you can't say your piece. You just suck it up or they're going to make it worse for you. I told [my son] that, and that's what he did.” The difference, though, lies in how PSPs navigate the tension between care and coercion. PSPs who align with the punitive approach see coercion *as* care, and they provide support to that

end; for example, many of these individuals indicated that they viewed boundary-setting as an important form of support. For example, one PSP explained:

I make her get to me most of the time. I don't need to go, you know. I don't want to go get you, nor do I need to. I tell her, "My car is broken. It's not running real well." She still thinks that. So, I mean, *[laughs]* that's what I have to do with [my daughter], a little bit of psychological. I'm like, "My cars aren't running well. It's getting, it's hot out. You know, it's running hot. Can you just- you know?" She's like, "All right, I'll take the bus." You know what I mean? If you have to get somewhere, you'll get there. [...] She's known that bus system here since she was, since she lost her driver's license. I said, "Well, better get used to the bus system. You better get to know it." And she has. She has.

On the other hand, PSPs who criticize the punitive approach see their role as providing care *despite* a coercive environment, and although they may or may not feel comfortable resisting agency staff directly, they provide care in different ways—often in the form of emotional support. For example, another PSP shared:

I mean, she's my best friend. She, you know, I was the first person she'd come to, and she'd burst up in tears, and you know she'd be crying on my shoulder for an hour, saying, "I can't do this. I want to relapse. I want to go get high. I want to leave," you know. And I'd say, you know, "This too will pass, this feeling will pass. Let's just work through that," you know, because it's - when you're in the moment, and you're an addict... I mean, they said once an addict, always an addict. I'm not sure if I agree with that. But I suppose when you're in recovery, it's hard. It's hard to work through that when you're, when you're pushed to your brink and you're crying and you're upset. I mean, it was hard. Sometimes it was hard to get her not to walk out that door and go use, you know? [...] I just don't believe in a program that tears people down like this.

Carceral logics are often embedded in PSPs' understandings of how we as a society address social problems, regardless of whether or not they think a punitive approach is useful in the community corrections context. Interestingly, beliefs about criminal justice and carcerality persist and inform beliefs about community corrections, *even when participants have not experienced those beliefs to be true*. This points to another tension in the data: PSPs can simultaneously embrace and resist carceral logics in order to rationalize their loved one's experience. For example, many participants made reference to an archetypal "criminal," yet they

recognized that their loved one—who is justice involved—does not fit the description. Carla, the mother of a client, illustrated this logic:

I said, “It's too bad that that particular section of people, from the very, very, very worst to the very, very, very un-... un-... Umm, not so bad, where he is...”[...] Anyway, he says, “I'm sitting two feet from a ‘Worst.’ And he said, “The character is liked and he's treated well and he's, he's even got the case managers jumping in these hoops, you know, whatever he wants.” And so it's, it's hard to know that that fella can get away with stuff that my fella can't. Yeah. My fella is so careful not to step over the line, he's so careful not to do anything that's gonna cause any ripples.

Carla is supportive of a punitive approach in general because of her belief that there are people whose behavior merits it; however, she does not believe that this kind of environment is healthy *for her son*. Similarly, some PSPs noted that they believed their loved one to be an exception to the norm in the carceral system, and this provided a rationale for their ongoing support. One participant stated bluntly,

Every time, he has proved, ‘I’m not the guy you think I am ... I would feel totally different, I would not help as much, if I thought he was guilty. He isn't. Anything I could take off his plate, I did. I paid off his restitution, just in case he messes up and loses all his money at the halfway house.

This participant believes that her son is being victimized by the criminal justice system, being punished for a crime he did not commit. Yet this error does not negate the need for the system; instead, she rationalizes its existence, explaining that for a guilty person, the punitive treatment he is experiencing would be appropriate, and she would withhold support. Still for both of these PSPs, their belief in the carceral system more broadly allowed them to work within it (as opposed to in spite of it) to provide support.

On the other hand, some PSPs who were critical of the punitive approach more broadly held this opinion alongside their belief that it did provide some benefits to their loved ones.

Perhaps because of all the positive impacts PSPs articulated, most PSPs were willing to accept

these more unsavory features of community corrections because it was better than a prison or jail sentence (all but one participant agreed that community corrections was a good alternative to prison for their loved one; the remaining participant was unsure). Still, PSPs often struggled to answer what, if anything, they would change about the way the agency responded to their loved one. This is likely due to the fact that carceral logics are so entrenched in our understanding of the criminal justice system; that, in the words of Angela Davis (2003), “The prison is considered so ‘natural’ that it is extremely hard to imagine life without it.”

Conclusion

The purpose of community corrections cannot be captured by a single philosophy or framework. Instead, the perspectives of primary support persons reveal a complex and often contradictory set of logics that coexist. PSPs recognize elements of rehabilitation and reintegration, particularly in the form of treatment services, structured environments, and basic supports such as food and housing. At the same time, they see how these opportunities are conditional: they require clients to take on extraordinary levels of responsibility, often in the face of profound structural barriers. Sometimes these philosophies depend on one another, but sometimes they create competing goals that can set clients up for failure.

Additionally, the philosophy of responsabilization extends beyond the client: If clients’ responsibilities are too great, PSPs offer support to help their loved one avoid further sanctions. In this way, PSPs can bear the consequences of their loved one’s responsabilization without ever being directly involved in the system. PSPs also identify retributive logics and net-widening elements of community corrections. Supervision requirements do not simply support rehabilitation but actively extend punishment into daily life. This led one participant to describe community corrections as “jail on a low level,” because she saw the freedom to live outside of

prison as diluted by the looming threat of sanctions. Community corrections may provide some important and beneficial services to its clients, but the fact remains that it is part of the carceral system, and as such, punishment is always a central goal.

The narratives I have presented in this chapter suggest possible ways PSPs' perspectives could influence how they interact with both the agency and their loved one. While the data here doesn't allow us to draw firm conclusions, it does point to areas worth exploring further. For example, PSPs' perspectives may shape their own interactions with both the agency and their loved one: if a PSP trusts community corrections as an effective intervention, regardless of its goal, they may be likely to align the support they provide with that framework. Moreover, PSPs' more nuanced understandings of the philosophy of community corrections can deepen and complicate our current understandings of its purpose. In the next chapter, I build on these findings to illustrate how PSPs interact with and are impacted by community corrections, and I explore some of their strategies for navigating relationships with their loved ones under community supervision.

CHAPTER 4. WORLDS COLLIDE: NAVIGATING COMMUNITY CORRECTIONS AS A PRIMARY SUPPORT PERSON

In chapter three, I established that regardless of the particular goals community corrections has for its clients, PSPs provide important support that allows their loved ones to achieve those goals. It is also clear that PSPs' individual experiences with community corrections shape their perceptions of the institution, its purpose, and its function in the justice system. However, the data has so far not answered the question of how providing this support affects the PSPs themselves; in other words, what *are* those experiences that shape PSPs' ideas about community corrections? Moreover, it remains unclear how those experiences might also influence the support that PSPs provide, as well as how community corrections might create a unique set of challenges in maintaining relationships with their loved ones. This chapter answers those questions.

I begin with a brief review of the literature I presented in chapter one, placing special emphasis on what we know about symbiotic harms as well as what previous research has suggested about the ways PSPs navigate relationships with their justice-involved loved ones. I then discuss findings from my analysis that answer the research question, *How do PSPs experience symbiotic effects (harms, benefits, or neutral impacts) as a result of their loved one serving a sentence through community corrections?* In this section, I explore the complex emotional impacts that clients' community supervision can have on the people who support them. I also illustrate some of the specific financial and social implications of providing support to a community corrections client, followed by a discussion of the ways some PSPs subjugate their own needs to those of their loved one. Next, I describe findings relevant to my final research question: *How do PSPs navigate relationships with their loved ones in the criminal*

justice system? Here, I describe the influence of what I term “state presence”—a concept similar to, but distinct from, surveillance—on the relationships between clients and PSPs. I then illustrate some of the contradicting role expectations that PSPs must navigate, with particular emphasis on the power of advocacy as a strategy of resistance. I close with a synthesis of these findings.

Literature Review

Symbiotic Harms

You may recall from chapter one that there has been very little research on the experiences of PSPs whose loved ones are serving a sentence in the community. Given that lack of research, I will focus primarily in this literature review on the experiences of PSPs whose loved ones are incarcerated. Symbiotic harms, often called “collateral consequences,” refer to the unique set of challenges that PSPs can face because of their relationship to their loved one in the justice system (Condry & Minson, 2021; Turanovic et al., 2012). First, supports often experience significant emotional impacts and even distress when their loved ones are sent to prison. For example, sadness and loneliness are common when PSPs are separated from their loved ones, and some caretakers (primarily parents of incarcerated children) have described feeling guilty that they were not able to provide more or better support (Dir et al., 2023; Møllerhøj, 2022). As I will later describe, the participants in my study identified loneliness, sadness, and guilt as emotional impacts. But PSPs can experience positive emotional impacts, too, and some studies point to the hope and optimism that PSPs feel knowing their loved ones are receiving treatment and support (Baldwin et al., 2013; Granja, 2016). However, the reality is that for many PSPs, the emotional experience is neither entirely positive nor wholly negative; it is actually rather complicated. For example, PSPs in a study of women supporting partners at a California prison

described ambivalence toward the justice system: it exerted control over their lives as PSPs, but it also afforded their loved ones the opportunity to heal (Comfort, 2008). The PSPs I spoke with pointed to a number of complex and conflicting emotions around community corrections; ambivalence toward the system was just one of these.

Providing support can entail significant monetary costs in addition to the emotional impact it creates. Numerous studies have established the importance of instrumental support—and in particular, housing—for clients returning to the community (Denney et al., 2014; Geller & Curtis, 2011; Mowen et al., 2019). Housing, as well as support with things like food, bills, transportation, and other expenses were all common among the participants I interviewed. This is particularly important given that people from lower-income backgrounds are overrepresented in the justice system, and their friends and family are often marginalized as well (Elderbroom et al., 2018; Ghandnoosh et al., 2024). Although many PSPs have relatively limited financial resources, they often shoulder a significant portion of the costs incurred by their justice-involved loved ones.

Finally, PSPs can also experience stigma and social exclusion as impacts of providing support. Research has shown that family members of incarcerated people, for example, may be ostracized or judged because they are associated with a “criminal” (Baldwin et al., 2013; Comfort, 2007). The effect of this stigmatization deepens significantly, too, when PSPs are justice-involved themselves (Condry & Minson, 2021). In my sample, however, the PSPs who reported being most affected by social exclusion were not those who were justice-involved. Still, they described various strategies for either confronting or avoiding this judgment, which I will detail in the *Findings* section below.

Navigating Relationships with People Serving a Community Corrections Sentence

In addition to creating symbiotic harms, existing research also provides evidence that justice involvement creates unique challenges for PSPs as they strive to maintain relationships with their loved ones serving a sentence. However, much of this research focuses on prison and jail as a specific organizational setting, with a few notable exceptions regarding parole and probation, and all of these settings are distinct from the community corrections model presented in this study. One limitation of relying on research on PSPs of incarcerated people is that prison and jail introduce specific disruptions to relationships which may or may not apply when a person serves their sentence in the community instead. However, some barriers to connection, such as being physically restricted, having limited phone access, and having limited control over one's schedule, are established in literature the literature and may apply to community corrections as well (Comfort, 2007; DeHart et al., 2018; Halsey & Deegan, 2015). Other disruptions to relationships, like having to miss work to attend visitation, can deepen existing inequalities (Turanovic et al., 2012). The PSPs in my study faced a wide range of challenges in maintaining relationships, two of which were state presence and tension in role expectations. However, as I will point out in the *Findings* section below, the organizational context shaped these challenges differently, creating a unique set of barriers for PSPs in community corrections.

Several studies have established the centrality that state control and surveillance play in the lives of PSPs in the case of prisons. For example, women supporting their partners in Comfort's 2008 study shared that they felt the prison exerted a substantial amount of control over their lives, and Condry and Minson (2021) describe a process by which innocent individuals can become "custodial citizens" as opposed to democratic citizens when their primary interaction with the state occurs in the context of the justice system. For custodial citizens, like some PSPs, both their understanding of government and their sense of social position are shaped by the

carceral state; essentially, the only time they interact with the state is in carceral (or otherwise punitive) contexts. PSPs in my sample also identified a number of ways in which the state's presence shaped their relationships with their loved ones, including creating a sense of liability for PSPs that sometimes limited, and sometimes expanded, the support they provided their loved ones. Again, though, PSPs in my study experienced this state presence in similar yet distinct ways compared to existing research on the prison context (described later in this chapter).

A final difficult tension that PSPs must contend with is the challenge of providing care in a coercive setting. Some studies have revealed that PSPs feel an obligation to take on a supervisory role over their loved ones, which produces competing expectations of caring for their loved one while also coercing them to behave a certain way (Granja, 2016). Providing care can also be emotionally, physically, and mentally taxing. Halsey & Deegan (2015) describe a phenomenon they refer to as “sublimation of the self,” wherein women in their sample reached a point at which they decided to place their own needs above their obligation to provide care. In my sample, I found the opposite experience to be more common: PSPs, and in particular, women, often neglected themselves and sacrificed their own stability, happiness, and safety to attend to the needs of their loved ones. I refer to this phenomenon as “subjugation of the self.” However, participants did not always take this approach, and in fact, many engaged in advocacy as a strategy of resisting the state's intrusion in their lives and relationships.

There is a relatively wide body of research on the experiences of people who support an incarcerated loved one, but none exist to illustrate the experiences of people who support a loved one in community corrections. The literature I have reviewed in this section offers context for understanding the findings I present in this chapter—that is, the experiences of people who support someone under community supervision—but it is important to keep in mind that

organizational setting creates important differences. To better understand how PSPs are impacted by community corrections, I now present my findings.

Findings

Symbiotic Effects of Community Corrections on PSPs

Wrestling with Complex Emotions. My research provides evidence that supporting a loved one while they serve a sentence in the community can create complicated feelings for PSPs. On one hand, PSPs describe positive emotions, like relief or even joy about the fact that their loved one is safe and well cared-for. One participant, Erin, summarized it eloquently: “When they're there, I know they're safe. I can sleep. I'm telling you, that's the truth.” Often, though, the relief that participants described was tempered by concerns that the care their loved ones were receiving was necessarily temporary.

Janice is the mother of a woman who had been through the program several times, and so far she had not been able to maintain sobriety once she left community corrections. Janice was happy that her daughter was receiving the support that she needed, but (because of previous experience) she worried about what would happen when that support disappeared:

I know they will not throw her out unless she messes up. And I know she'll have a bed to sleep in, as long as she returns. It's clean there. Very clean there. She has a shower. She says she has a shower, gets food. She'll have her medicines. Just, people to look over her. And that's what I'm happy about. And then she goes back to the community, she doesn't have that. You know what I mean? Who can guarantee she'll go to her recovery program? Who can guarantee she'll take her medicine?

Janice's concerns for her daughter appear to be shaped by her understanding of responsabilization as a central goal of the program—a goal that Janice fully supports. In fact, not only did responsabilization shape the way community corrections impacted her, but it also informed the way she navigated her relationship with her daughter. Janice explained that she had begun to set clear boundaries in their relationship because she wanted to encourage accountability. For

example, her daughter was looking for housing to prepare for moving back into the community, and it was important to Janice that her daughter did this on her own:

I'm there to help not hurt her. You know what I mean? And I'll do everything I can do if she needs help. I, you know, she's like—she said the other day to me, “I'm not good at making phone calls.” I said, “It's just picking up a phone and doing what you have to do,” and that was a hint for me to help her. “No, you need to do it yourself.” You know, “I can give you the numbers, but you need to do it yourself. That I'll help you with, but you need to do it.” You know what I mean? Because if I start doing *for* her, then that's—then that's over. But I like, I'll give her the numbers. I can look up numbers for her, I can give her the website. I can help her, but you only can lead a horse to water so much. And that's what I'll do for her.

Together, these excerpts from Janice's narrative suggest that PSPs may deal with the complex emotional impacts of being a PSP by aligning their support with their understanding of the agency's goal; for Janice, this meant taking a “tough love” approach and encouraging her daughter to take more accountability.

Other participants expressed a similar logic: they were happy that their loved one was safe, but they could not feel at ease until the program's goal, as they saw it—responsibilization—had been achieved. However, they sometimes used different strategies to reconcile this tension.

Erin, who expressed her relief that her daughter was safe, also had this to say:

I'm curious, since the girls that don't have a “me” that they could come live with—what are they doing? You know what I mean? They have to have four thousand dollars in the bank before they can get out. Well, big deal, you know, that's two months. What? Two months' worth of maybe, you know—and that's only if everything's included in your rent. It's hard to find, too. You've got the electric bill in your name, you've got a—I mean, *one slip up* for these girls if you really... they'll never get another place again if they get evicted. So I, I don't know.

[...]

Her on her own, I would worry a little bit. Who she's letting in her home. If she had a home, you know, like her own apartment. Who is she letting in? You know, what, what is she doing? [...] So I mean I just, I would worry she just would give you the shirt right off her back.

Erin was already making arrangements for her daughter to live with her after she left community corrections, because she worried that without her immediate support, her daughter would be in danger. From her perspective, it would be exceedingly difficult to try to navigate reentry without a PSP. So, unlike Janice's approach of bounding her support (the "you can make the phone calls" approach), Erin chose to step in and offer her daughter the support she knew she would need, a strategy that may serve not only to help her daughter, but to mitigate her own anxiety about community reentry as well.

Another emotional complexity that PSPs must contend with is the tension between the gratification and closeness that providing support can offer, on the one hand, and the sadness they feel about the limits of that closeness on the other. Melinda, the former client who now offers support to women in the residential program, was grateful for the opportunity to help others. She explained,

It's emotionally taxing sometimes, but in the end, it's all worth it. If they succeed, and you feel like you were a part of that? Like, that's the best feeling in the world. You know what I mean? I've seen a lot of girls, um, succeed that, uh- Like some of my sponsees, they succeeded in getting off of probation, getting out of drug court, you know, getting out of DUI court. And that's, God, that's the *best* feeling. You know what I mean? And then, I've had sponsees that have relapsed. And I mean, it's kind of sad, you know, but it, hopefully... Hopefully the seed has been planted. So, that's how I feel about it anyways.

Most PSPs described a similar feeling of gratification, and in fact, some of them endorsed positive changes in their own lives as a result of providing support. One PSP reflected,

I try to make good choices. You know, as far as like, you know, 'cause I'm a big drinker too, like not, you know, messing up [her] probation, not, you know, getting in trouble where I shouldn't be getting in trouble, just so that when she's done, she has a steady kind of foundation and she doesn't have to worry about like, you know, maybe relapsing because I'm relapsing, or not being stable because I'm not stable. So it's, you know, I try and put a lot of focus on making all of my places to come back to.

For this participant, the self-surveillance that she undertook to protect her loved one actually proved to be helpful (she was finally able to stop drinking), but it is worth noting that this sort of

behavior regulation may create an immense mental and/or emotional burden as well. And, finally, a third PSP described how deeply she resonated with her loved one's struggles, allowing her to achieve some personal growth as well:

I think it helps you, me, be confident as a friend, and that was something that I wanted to work towards when I sat in prison and thought of myself and places and areas I needed to grow in, and one of them was to reach out and be a good friend to somebody else. Because I sat in prison alone. I didn't have anybody to write to or call. And if I had friends while I was in there, I think my prison experience would have been different.

Clearly, providing support to a loved one in community corrections can have positive impacts on PSPs. All three of these participants describe deep, meaningful benefits that are directly tied to their involvement as a support, whether it be through sustained sobriety, increased self-confidence, or pride in having helped someone through a difficult time. However, other PSPs I interviewed also noted that the happiness or gratitude they felt was eclipsed by sadness associated with being separated from their loved one.

Angel's brother is serving a sentence at the community corrections agency, but she lives in a different state more than ten hours away. Angel and her brother have been best friends "our whole lives," and she describes their situation as bittersweet: although the program has offered him more freedom than prison, they are still unable to see each other because of the distance. While she is grateful that she can help support him financially, this does not alleviate the deep sadness she feels about being separated:

I give him money anytime, whatever he needs. I bought him clothes, I buy him everything. And he doesn't want to take it. My brother has never in his whole life asked me for anything. He's never asked anybody. We're all very independent in that way, and he'll, he goes, "Angel, no, you just do too much." [...] See, I don't know how else to help, and that's the only way I can help him. I can't, I can't visit him because I'm over here in [another state]. I can't, you know, that's why we talk every day."

[...]

It has tortured me so much. You have no idea. It kills me. If I could leave, I'd... It's kind of ruined my life for the past seven years. It really has. Because I worry so much, like I can't... I haven't been happy like I used to be in a long time. And like when holidays come, I sit there and I cry. I don't want Thanksgiving or nothing until my brother gets out of there. It does affect me *a lot*. It's turned my whole life around. That's why my brother calls me and says, "Angel, I want you to know, Angel, you're not gonna have to worry no more, okay?" And I told him, I said, "If you ever wind up back there, it's gonna kill me. I just, *[through tears]* I might as well get a gun and shoot myself because I won't be able to handle it."

Angel's narrative poignantly illustrates the immense emotional burden that PSPs experience; in fact, 20 of the participants I spoke with indicated that they experienced negative emotional impacts as a result of their loved one's involvement at community corrections. Throughout our interview, Angel emphasized her support for the program and her relief that her brother was being cared for there. Yet this was not enough to alleviate her own suffering due to his absence. Angel navigated this tension by offering support in the only way she could—sending money—to let her brother know she cared. For this particular participant, the powerlessness and loneliness she experienced (a result of physical distance) was quite similar to what existing research describes about the experience of supporting a loved one in prison; however, other participants who *did* live nearby experienced different kinds of emotional impacts.

Phil shared a similar experience. Despite the benefits of the program for his son, the disruption to their relationship was challenging for him as a PSP. Phil's narrative highlights a tension between the value of the support and limits on being able to provide it—and, as was the case with Angel, how those limits do not just impact the client, but their loved ones as well:

We call, I'll send him some texts and funny things. We've sent him different books to read, meditational books and motivational quotations, things like that. We've asked him if he wants other things. We consistently ask, and he said, "No, I have to be independent." But emotional... We listen to him, we support him. When we've driven places, you know, we have good heart to hearts and, you know, we tell each other we love each other. It works.

[...]

I guess it only affects us emotionally, perhaps. You know, we anticipate a phone call, perhaps, or if I think of him, I'll say, I'll send him a text. I sent him a text yesterday and didn't hear back from him, so it makes me wonder, "Gosh, I hope everything's OK." And that's retrospective to his past, because last time we didn't hear from him, he was in the infirmary, because he'd been beaten. [...] We got a text from him he was going to commit suicide. He was suicidal. And he'd pretty much hit bottom. But luckily, he said, you know, "Love of family brought me back. I couldn't do that to you guys or to myself. I'm better than that." That's a pretty strong road back from suicide. "I'm stronger than that." And that's what he told us.

Phil intimately understands the importance of providing emotional support to his son—in fact, it literally saved his life. Because of this, Phil continues to provide support in as many forms as he can. But the responsabilizing aspects of community corrections create a barrier: Phil's family wants to offer more support, but his son believes that he "needs to be independent." Notably, Phil's son's involvement at community corrections is entirely transition-focused; he has already finished serving his sentence in prison. Even still, like many PSPs, Phil does not question the carceral logic underpinning the community corrections approach (that is, the fact that he must be personally responsible for meeting his own needs).

Emotional impacts are not the only ways that community corrections affects PSPs, though. Participants also described other ways their lives changed when they began providing support to their loved one at the facility, and among those other impacts, social and financial burdens were the most salient.

Lifestyle Changes: Social and Financial Impacts. Providing support to a loved one in community corrections can be expensive. In fact, just under half (n=12) of the PSPs I spoke with reported financial hardship as a result of their loved one's community supervision. It is important to understand that PSPs often face structural barriers, such as poverty, and this particular sample was no exception: 56% of interview respondents (n=14) reported a household income of less than \$25,000. Considering the substantial cost of providing support to a community corrections

client, as I will illustrate here, PSPs often experience significant financial challenges when they become a support for their loved one.

Regardless of whether a client incurs *direct* costs through their community corrections program, other expenses can add up quickly. For example, Trish described feeling “shocked” by the financial impact of her son’s justice involvement. She recalled numerous unexpected costs: ankle monitors, UA drug screens, a landline, an interlock device (with frequent recalibration fees), and higher insurance premiums (presumably due to a car accident related to his sentence) were all direct results of her son’s community-based sentence. At the time of our interview, her son was living with her on non-residential supervision status, which meant he was able (and required) to work full-time, but his income was not enough to cover all of the expenses. To make ends meet, Trish also had to forego her social security checks and start working again to increase her income. Together, they pooled their money—and their time—to care for his two young children. She noted that, on top of these costs, they were also burdened with fees from a custody battle, which included paying for temporary placements when his children were restricted from living with them because of his justice involvement.

Even for PSPs of residential clients, costs created a substantial impact. For example, Erin—who, as you may recall, was preparing to have her daughter move into her home upon release—had been burdened by expenses ever since her daughter first became involved in the justice system:

Took all my savings with her. It's been three... or four? It'll be four years in March. Took everything I had. I don't have a pot to piss in or a window to throw it out of anymore. Because *I* had to take care of her. She's got no help. Not one victim's advocate, you know. Not one help from anybody. *Nothing*. Nowhere. Nothing. They said they would, and nothing ever came through.

Among many gaps in support that PSPs must fill (described in more detail in chapter three), what Erin's narrative reveals is that most PSPs are acutely aware of the way community corrections clients, and thus their loved ones, are economically marginalized. Financial strain is particularly salient because the stakes are high; when community corrections neglects to make sure clients are *financially* stable, PSPs suffer, and they recognize just how wide the gap really is. Sharon recalled the sudden costs that she became responsible for when her boyfriend arrived at the community corrections facility from prison:

It would have been nice if I would have just been able to get him like toiletries, but he needed *everything*. So like, when he was getting out and he was like, unsure, like I was scrambling to just get him stuff he needed. Um, I spent about four or five hundred dollars getting him just the essentials, and then he came out and then we went to Walmart to get him some more stuff, he spent another four hundred. Keep in mind that like, that's out of my pocket, because he hadn't started working yet. He'd just got out of jail, or DOC. So the expense was like, the financial pressure was, I think, a lot.

Financial hardship is intimately tied to other symbiotic harms as well. For example, some PSPs pointed out that their inability to fully meet their loved ones' needs created emotional impacts for them, similar to those described in the previous section. For example, Hannah explained:

My financial situation wasn't like the best this last time around, so I couldn't give him everything that he wanted. But, and then I took him like, hygiene stuff, pretty much just kind of... I don't know, the basics that you would provide for anybody that was in there, so [...] He really wanted some new shoes while he was there, and I couldn't really do that. And I guess they do go to [a local charity] while they're there, and um, and I think...I think the men have a donation closet, too [...] But I don't know how hard it is to actually get, get into it, you know. Like sometimes staff members are more likely to let you in there than others. But yeah, I really wanted to get him some shoes and I just couldn't get him any shoes. So that kind of... sucked.

Although this participant does not ascribe a particular emotion to her being limited in the financial support she can provide, she makes it clear that it did not feel good (it "sucked"), and moreover, she did not trust the facility to meet her loved one's material needs. This underscores

the sense of duty that appears to drive many PSPs to provide support. And unlike Angel, who (as described in the previous section) provided additional financial support—and thus created financial hardship—to alleviate her emotional distress, Hannah’s situation works in the reverse. Hannah’s financial hardship created emotional distress. This distinction is important because it illustrates the complexity of these interconnected forms of harm.

Financial support did not create emotional harm for every participant, though. On the contrary, some PSPs felt neutral about the cost, and/or they were not able to identify any particular hardship that it created for themselves despite recognizing the costs as potentially significant for other people (unsurprisingly, this was more common among PSPs with higher household incomes). For example, one participant recalled preparing for her brother to leave the facility and live with her under non-residential supervision:

That's another, yeah, financial support, that's been... I mean like he needed, um, some extra money to pay taxes. It was like, 200 bucks or something. Which is not a little sum, but not a huge sum. [...] And, well, this is another frustrating thing. So we thought he needed a landline to come home. Well, we get a landline. “Oh, well, we're not doing that anymore.” Okay, we just paid to have this landline put in and we're paying extra to have this landline. And now we don't need a landline. But they didn't take it out of their online book! [*frustrated laugh*] So I was just like, all right. I mean, and it's just like, it's not that big a deal. I mean, and luckily for us all, you know, it's an extra 25 bucks a month or something, but that could be hard for some people to do that.

In contrast to Hannah’s experience, this participant did experience a financial impact, but it was relatively minor; the degree of impact is tied, of course, to their available resources. However, two things are important in comparing these narratives: first, PSPs’ opinions about community corrections are influenced by the costs that community corrections passes onto clients and their families. And second, supervision-related costs can serve to deepen inequality among PSPs just as they can among clients, making financial hardship a symbiotic harm for some PSPs. (There is

a substantial body of research on fines and fees in the criminal-legal system; see, for example, Ahlin et al., 2023; Alexander, 2010; and Bing et al., 2022.)

Similar to economic impacts, another key experience that participants described is social exclusion. Research firmly establishes the impact of stigma conceptions of self for people who have a record (Feingold, 2021; Moore et al., 2018; Tyler & Brockmann, 2017) and some limited research provides evidence of its “stickiness” to friends or family (Baldwin et al., 2013). About a third of the participants I spoke with described changes in their social life as a result of their loved one’s involvement in community corrections. These changes were overwhelmingly negative, including loss of friendships, feeling uncomfortable in public situations, or experiencing some other form of social exclusion due to stigma or judgment. Ellen, whose brother was serving a sentence for a particularly stigmatized offense, explained that she was reluctant to engage with her friends at all while he was living with her, because she did not want to have to disclose his justice involvement:

One of the other things is that I'll have like a book group over here, and I have women come over and we do our book group thing. And especially when they were doing, um, when he was on probation, they [community corrections staff] just come in. Yeah, you don't know when they're coming. I mean, how embarrassing. You know, “Hey, I've got my whole book group here and there's the probation officer at the door.” I was very uptight about that. Like, you know, I just really don't want to post that. I don't want to have people—my neighbors—in my house anymore. I don't want to explain who this is, I don't want to lie to them either. So it's just, like, easier not to do it. So, It's hard. It's...it's very hard.

It is important to point out, too, the fact that Ellen’s brother serving his sentence *in the community* actually exacerbated the social harm she experienced. Had he served his sentence behind bars—which, to be clear, Ellen did not want—she may not have ever had to broach the subject of his justice involvement with her friends.

Other PSPs had similar experiences to Ellen, describing lost friendships as a result of their loved one's community corrections involvement. For example, Trish warned that "You have to be secretive. There is a target on your back." Trish went on to explain that she has lost numerous friends since her son began serving his sentence, and now, she does her best to allow new friends to form their own impressions before she discloses her son's justice involvement. Even still, she said, only some people will choose to continue the friendship.

Some PSPs did not necessarily indicate they had lost friends, but they did describe feeling unwelcome in public spaces. Bernice, whose son had spent most of his life in various parts of the justice system, reflected on one such experience while he was in community corrections:

I tend to reflect my own feelings on people back to myself, so I sometimes think that [I'm being treated differently]. But my thinking process is sometimes flawed that way. Um, yeah. I feel guilty that I wasn't a better parent. And, yeah... And so, I still feel, um, I feel kind of antisocial. Because... yeah. There's a, there's a social phobia against the kind of crime that he committed and it carries over to the family. Um, I, I went out to eat with a tenant that rented the other half of my duplex. And uh, we went out to eat, and somehow I think the people working in the kitchen, the cook, got word of who I was and said something to the effect of, "Well, [her son] will never work here." And it made me feel like I don't want to go to that restaurant ever again.

Bernice, Trish, and Ellen all describe feeling stigmatized or socially excluded as a result of providing support to their loved ones, but they contend with that exclusion in different ways. For Ellen, this means intentionally withdrawing from her social circle to avoid the embarrassment of having a loved one under correctional supervision. Trish does maintain ties with her friends and even attempts to make new ones, but because she feels targeted, she does so cautiously. Bernice tries to maintain a sense of normalcy, but she finds that social exclusion is still very present in her life when she is singled out in public places like restaurants; as she puts it, the "social

phobia” of her son’s crime “carries over to the family.” Together, these narratives illustrate important symbiotic harms that community corrections can create for PSPs.

Finally, like financial harms, social harms can create material impacts that deepen inequality. Cassie, whose son had been under non-residential supervision, worried that the stigma his justice involvement created could have devastating consequences for her, too, such as losing her housing. She illustrated this difficult situation in detail:

That's not a game you want to play with people on the street. You know? I seriously, like when they [community corrections staff] want to come in my house and stuff, you know, I was like, “Guys.” I was like, “Don't come. I live in the ghetto.” I said, “Don't come over here and come to my door.” I said, “Do you know what that does for me?” And you're like—and I was like, “They know you're cops or you're coming up in the vehicles, you're coming up with what they—street people know. They know. They know the way you knock, they know the way you look, they know the way you—they know that you're coming to my house.” I said, “Behave.” You know what I mean? “Don't be showing up here like that with your double-, with your, you know, with your uniformed officer and you both come in my door. Don't do that to us. It makes us ‘Oh, they had them over there the other day,’ you know? ‘They're probably, you know, watch out for them.’” It just does, and I never believed it either, but it's true. Even if you partly look like something like that, everybody's gonna start watching and talking. You know, so you just, you have to be careful.

(Interviewer) What are you afraid might happen?

I'll get kicked out. Or, “Oh God, she's going to cause problems.” And I don't know if I could get into another place. My credit's not good enough, you know what I mean? I mean that could be, I have one foot in the homeless section, you know? It's one bad move and then I could be right back there. You know, because you can't save enough money for a deposit, for the first month's rent, to move, you know, plus you have to pay, you know, the rest of your lease up at this place, but they're not going to give your money back from that deposit for that long. Do you know what I mean? It's, it's a sticky situation, you know?

For Cassie, social exclusion and stigma are not just consequences of her son’s justice involvement—they are risk factors for other, more serious consequences. What is so important about Cassie's narrative is that it demonstrates how the symbiotic harms that PSPs experience can actually interact with one another to cause even more damage. In her situation, she was

struggling financially because she had to support her son, when she was already economically disenfranchised; this put her in an even more precarious position as she navigated the social impacts of his living with her; and together, these created what is obviously an enormous amount of emotional distress—in her words, she is “one bad move” away from homelessness. While these consequences were unusual amongst my participants (n = 1), identifying this as a specific consequence is important because of the potentially devastating effects it may have on clients and PSPs alike. The fact that Cassie is forced to choose between her own stability and providing stability for her son is evidence of a final symbiotic harm: subjugation of the self.

Subjugation of the Self. Providing support to a loved one in community corrections can feel like a full-time job to some PSPs; in the words of one participant, “I’m on call constantly.” Not every PSP in my sample thought of their constant support as a harm or even as an inconvenience, and in fact, as I described in the *Complex Emotions* section, many expressed a sense of gratification from being able to help their loved one through a difficult time. But for some participants, being “on call constantly” had a significant impact on their quality of life. Beth, whose daughter has a cognitive disability, felt this responsibility acutely. She described what it was like not only to be burdened by constantly providing support, but to carry the psychological burden of feeling responsible for her daughter’s success:

Just wondering what I'm gonna have to do for her today. Not really, not knowing what they're gonna pop up and ask her to do, and if she can actually even make that happen without feeling discouraged. I'm feel—I'm like, I'm on call constantly, you know, to think, “Oh God, I could have to do this for you.” You know what I mean? [...] There was a time where I was not comfortable with her getting from work to the halfway house at midnight. [...] “It's midnight. I'm gonna have to come get you and get you, you know, over there. Could you please find something, you know, a different shift? Tell them you can't, tell them your situation.” [...] I'm not gonna make her do that because that's asking her something to do that I don't think I would do. So, you know, just having to be on call. It's like the support system. To be on call and ready to help so she doesn't fail. You know what I mean? And she's scared. She's scared like that. To me, that's my kid, and she has every right to be scared to get home at that time, you know?”

Understandably, Beth did not feel that she could say no to her daughter's request for help. At the same time, she also did not feel she could ask her daughter to request a different set of requirements that might alleviate some of the strain she was experiencing. This tension is structural in nature: it is exacerbated by economic marginalization (lack of transportation options), and it emphasizes the importance of working as a prerequisite for being successful in community corrections. Beth seems to view the conditions of supervision as non-negotiable, and so she subjugates her own wants and needs to respect the authority of the correctional agency.

Other PSPs described similar experiences. For example, Perla recalled what it was like to be her boyfriend's only source of support while he was in the program:

I felt like, um, this sense of, like pressure and urgency all the time, to get things that he needed. Because unfortunately, when he came back out, he had nothing. Like, I became his biggest, like— Well, I was his biggest support for sure. But the time that I had to invest in like, working around what *he* had going on was astronomical. Cause like he, of course, isn't familiar with the bus system [...] So I would try to schedule meetings in between like, him having to go to [the therapy center], just to get dosing, or dosage hours, you know, things like that. So in the beginning it just felt like, I would say... I'm not gonna even say from the beginning. From March to October, I put so many miles on my car because of just the back and forth. I was getting pretty stressed out about that.

Although Perla does allude to other impacts, like wear on her car or challenges keeping up at work, the most prominent stressor that she describes here is her perceived responsibility to place her boyfriend's needs above her own. From Perla's perspective, *she* was the person who was ultimately responsible for her loved one's success or failure. Her inaction, she believed, could cause him to fail by not being able to meet the conditions of his supervision (dosage hours). As with Beth, Perla views her own responsibilities as negotiable, while her boyfriend's are not. And, of course, devoting all of one's time and energy to someone else takes a psychological toll. Some PSPs recognized that subjugating their own needs to their loved one's created deep emotional pain. As one participant so eloquently put it:

I'm trying to control as much as possible, but you have to be available 24/7. This has caused... I wouldn't say resentment, but... Sadness in my spirit. I can't do what I want for myself. I can't take care of myself first.

Importantly, *all* of the participants who specifically articulated a responsibility to put their loved one's needs above their own were women. Although their relationships to their loved ones were different—wives, sisters, girlfriends, mothers, and friends were all represented—these women were willing to make incredible sacrifices for the people they supported, not necessarily because they *wanted* to (although some did), but because they felt they were *expected* to. One participant actually pointed to gender norms as a contributing factor; she had since separated from her then-boyfriend, and in looking back, the imbalance of responsibility in their relationship while he was serving a sentence became clear to her:

I think we also played traditional roles in our relationship, where like I really had like the natural role of, woman role, where I was managing like... his life. Literally. I was managing everything for him. Down to, you know, banking, to how his money management, giving him an allowance. Um, you know, I got a cell phone bill, I got a cell phone for him as soon as he got out. Um, uh, you know, making sure I was picking up his prescriptions in the middle of the day. All of it. Like I was managing all of his life, basically.

There is insufficient data to determine whether justice involvement actually deepened gender-based inequalities in PSPs' relationships or whether it simply illuminated them. In any case, for PSPs who subjugate their own needs to meet the needs of their loved one, navigating the relationship and meeting all the expectations within it can be exhausting.

Navigating Relationships with Loved Ones in Community Corrections

State Presence and the Perception of Liability. When I was developing the interview guide for this study, I included questions about whether PSPs feel surveilled because the literature establishes surveillance of PSPs as an important form of symbiotic harm that affects their personal lives (Chesney-Lind, 2011; Comfort, 2007). What I found, however, was that this

framing did not resonate with most of the participants I spoke with. In fact, most PSPs in my study *explicitly denied* feeling monitored or surveilled as a result of their loved one's community corrections involvement. They described various experiences that were similar to, yet distinct from, "surveillance" as I (a researcher) understood it—that is, as it is described in literature on the experiences of PSPs whose loved ones are incarcerated. As I will illustrate here, organizational context shapes the state's involvement in PSPs' lives. I eventually came to realize through my analysis that most PSPs do not conceptualize surveillance as a factor shaping their personal lives (though there were notable exceptions), but rather they recognize the role that the state plays in shaping their *relationships* with justice-involved loved ones. State presence—the phenomenon I describe here—is distinct from surveillance in three significant ways: first, it mediates certain interpersonal relationships, but not necessarily entire lives; second, it offers a greater sense of agency, given that PSPs retain aspects of daily life with no intrusion from the state; and third, it carries little to no consequence for the PSP herself, but rather a sense of liability wherein PSPs must self-monitor to avoid causing trouble for their loved one.

State presence can affect the type and amount of support that PSPs are able to provide their loved ones. For example, Hannah expressed feeling torn about whether she could allow her boyfriend to stay in her home because it would violate her lease:

Something about the sober living did not work out for him, so he's kind of homeless again slash staying... He stays with me when he can, but since I have a voucher, like I can't afford to get it taken away. And if you have like a guest more than three nights a week, then you can have them take it away. So that's kind of a struggle there.

Hannah's housing stability is already conditional on her compliance with government regulations. What is interesting about her experience is that, because her boyfriend would need to report his location to community corrections (the state), allowing him to stay with her would

invite greater state presence, and potentially more scrutiny. As a result, she must make the decision *not* to provide a form of support—housing—that she knows he desperately needs.

Another PSP, Carla, shared a similar experience: although she did not necessarily have to change the support she provided, she felt that she had to be extra careful about how she interacted with her son. She explains,

I'm not sure how it works. I know that he had to take his phone somewhere and they put a program on it that does monitor it, but I don't know who, who's... I don't know how they hear it or how that works exactly, if they can listen in. He did say to me once, he said, "We'll have to be a little careful what we talk about on the phone." Well, we don't talk about anything that's going to cause trouble, but they're so afraid that he'll go out and take pictures with that phone. [...] Like I said, we have to be a little careful what we say or do. Not that we've... I haven't really changed the things I've said to him on a text or phone, but it's just the... Thought that they think he has to be monitored. It's just... it's just dumb.

Notably, Carla reports that *he* (her son) has to be monitored; although her communications with him are under scrutiny, she does not conceptualize this as surveillance in her own life. It would seem that this monitoring does not affect her personal life (after all, her conversations with other people are not recorded) so much as it mediates her relationship with her son.

For other PSPs, state presence was so overwhelming that it made the relationship untenable. Gina's ex-husband is completing the community corrections program for a second time. Although she stays in touch with him and provides some limited support, she chose to end their relationship when he re-entered the criminal justice system. She shared that this decision was based, among other things, on the ubiquitous state presence in their relationship—an experience that she did not feel she could handle for a second time:

You know, like one of the survey questions was like, "Have you had a home visit and stuff?" Of course, for me this time, I'm like, no, no. Like I've checked out. Like I'm not, you know, like my walls are up. Like, that's not happening anymore. But prior, like [the community corrections] officer had to come over and do like a home inspection and then I had to sign like these multiple page documents that said that, like, my home can be searched at any time, which I mean, I didn't have anything illegal in my home, but it still

does kind of feel like, you know, like you lost all your privacy, that if you're gonna be in a relationship with this person, that you're treated the same way and that you're subject to all of these monitoring things. [...] And so it's so overwhelming because you just, at some point you feel like you've lost all of your power. That like, just everybody knows every dirty detail of your whole life. You have no control over everything, and I really dislike that feeling. Which is why this go-round, I'm like, I hope you do well at the halfway house. [Our daughter and I are] in the community, we can connect with you a little bit here and there and hang out, but I am not signing up for phone list and visiting lists and I'm not, you know, getting screened and I'm not getting patted down by an officer to be able to walk in a building. Like I'm not willing to do any of those things anymore.

Importantly, Gina gave a clear “no” when I asked if she felt she was being monitored or supervised. At the same time, she recalls feeling that she “lost all my power” by being in a relationship with her (now ex-) husband; unlike him, though, she had the ability to regain this power and escape a coercive state presence by ending the relationship. Therefore, one possible reason that PSPs do not conceptualize state presence as surveillance is that they recognize their ability to simply walk away.

This point underscores the centrality of carceral logics in PSPs’ perceptions of community corrections. Coercion and surveillance are an inherent part of the corrections experience; to maintain a relationship with a justice-involved person is to invite the state to mediate the relationship. Numerous PSPs emphasized the carceral logics that influenced not only their perceptions of the facility’s purpose (as described in chapter three), but also their relationships with their loved ones. Bernice, whose son had been justice-involved for quite some time, was acutely aware of this:

We don't worry about the privacy. They are monitored, but we don't worry about that. In 30 years, he's learned a lot about... Um, bending to the system. Um, and accepting... what liberties he can earn. [...] Um, but basically, having a son that's been in prison for 30 years, um, over those years I've become accustomed to having people use their authority over me and over him, you know? It's become so standard that I would be surprised if I were allowed extra freedom.

Bernice’s narrative highlights the distinction she makes between the surveillance of her son and the state’s presence in their relationship: *They* (community corrections clients) are monitored—not her—but the state has *authority* over both her and her son. In fact, even the community corrections agency itself recognizes its presence in PSPs’ lives, because surveillance (of the client) is simply inevitable. One PSP recalled a home visit from community corrections staff before her brother came to live with her under supervision:

You know, I mean it, it...you know, like we, we're not even sure we can have beer in our refrigerator. You know, and [the community corrections staff], they tried. I mean like when we, um, when they were here, you know, they're like, “Well,” you know, “we know this is your home.” We're like, (*sarcastically*) “Okay, thanks.” You know?

This participant’s narrative illustrates the impossibility of maintaining a relationship with a justice-involved loved one without some form of state presence. It would seem that carceral logic is so entrenched that the agency either cannot or does not mitigate the state’s presence in this PSP’s life despite recognizing it as potentially invasive (“We know this is your home”), because it is simply part of what is required for the client.

There were a few notable exceptions to the general trend of PSPs not conceptualizing state presence as surveillance. However, among those participants who *did* indicate feeling surveilled, their rationale for allowing it to continue was the same: carceral spaces are inherently coercive. Luis, whose best friend was in the residential program, reported that he felt “kind of” monitored as a PSP. To illustrate this, he reflected on his experience visiting and taking food to his friend at the facility:

I'm subject to, you know, have my car searched or whatever when I'm on their premise, but I don't do nothing bad. He doesn't do anything bad, so there's not really any need. This is that hanging over my head. It does kind of suck. And like if he does start taking passes over here, like if they like have to do a home check, you know, that is kind of invasive, but I get it. I understand it. [...] I don't know, if I were to go there and get my car searched, it would be a hassle. And I'd be like, “Dude, like, what the hell?” Because it's cold now, and no one wants to just sit there while their shit’s getting rummaged

through. [...] You got to think at the end of the day, like they're doing their job and there's a reason behind it. They're not just like, searching your car to search your car, you know, because you're [somewhere else in town], you know, you're at a correctional facility, picking up your loved one who broke the law.

Another common way that state presence impacted relationships was creating a sense of liability for PSPs. Most participants described being responsible, in one way or another, for their loved one's success. Though this was sometimes characterized by subjugation of the self (described above), this was not always the case. When PSPs view their loved one's success in the program as particularly precarious, PSPs can begin to fear that their actions could jeopardize that success. Therefore, some participants indicated that they did not feel surveilled because they saw their role as essentially invisible; community corrections would attribute their actions to the client. Just as PSPs' support would be seen as their loved one's success (e.g., the client gets credit for arriving at work on time, although the PSP arranged transportation), PSPs' unacceptable actions (or inactions) would be seen as their loved one's failure (e.g., the client gets sanctioned for having contraband because the PSP unknowingly brought them an item not allowed in the facility). For example, one PSP (who was on probation—a system distinct from community corrections) reduced the social support she provided to her boyfriend out of caution:

I never tried to set up the visitation though, because I've heard in the past that like if you're on, you can't have somebody visit that's currently also on probation. And so I didn't even try to set it up. [...] There were times when I probably could have met him, like at the Senior Center when he's on like his, doing his recreation hour or something. But I don't think you're really supposed to. And honestly, like, I didn't want to be somebody that got him in trouble.

In this narrative, the PSP does not want to break a particular rule, and so she calibrates the support she offers. More commonly, though, PSPs were nervous about breaking a rule that they didn't know existed. This was the case for Ellen, whose brother had lived with her before having his non-residential status revoked and returning to the facility. Ellen still does not know why his

status was revoked, but she wonders if she played a part in his failure to meet the conditions of his supervision:

Like I just really felt like those little petty things that I told you about, which he, because he was already living here, um, before he went there... I don't understand why, the need for him, for them to remove him from this home. It felt... I felt *insulted* in some, some way. Like, "What the heck?" You know, here we are, trying our best. [My partner] has grandchildren that are not coming here to this house because my brother had been here. And so we *were* trying to adhere to the rules. I don't know. It was really frustrating to me.

For Ellen, state presence meant significant lifestyle changes—going so far as not allowing grandchildren to visit—but she made these changes because she felt responsible for her brother's success, and ultimately, for his failure. Her relationship with her brother was characterized by following rules that she did not know; as another PSP put it, "You know that [community corrections is] going to see something that I don't see." Carla had a similar experience when she first realized that she was unfamiliar with the agency's rules:

I bought the pickup that my brother-in-law and sister were selling so [my son] would have a car, a vehicle. And I carried tools with me to take over there, for me to change the license plates. He says, "We can't go out there and do that. We can't be out." So even if I am there at [the facility], I'm, we're not allowed out on the grounds. And I guess that very first time I was there and they told me to get lost, that would be one of the times that we didn't realize that we were wrong.

Carla's experience was not uncommon. For many participants, this sort of ambiguous fear or anxiety pervaded their relationships. Dominga, whose fiancé was finishing his residential program at the facility, still felt uneasy about whether or not she had a firm grasp of all the rules and policies:

Um, I think when I like pick him up, I'm always kind of on edge of like, you know, what if he gets in trouble? Or like, what if we get a flat tire and like he's late and gets written up? So I think like I'm always kind of on edge when he's out.

Although Dominga is clearly nervous about her fiancé "getting in trouble," she indicated in our interview that she did not necessarily feel that the agency's monitoring or supervision him had

any influence on *her* life. Instead, the influence of state presence appears to be limited to influence in the context of their relationship. Other PSPs also made a distinction between surveillance and liability. Take, for instance, Phil: When I asked whether he felt that his son's monitoring or surveillance ever spilled over onto him, this was his response:

I wouldn't think so initially, no...No, I wouldn't think so, no. I don't feel that we're under any kind of scrutiny, or. No.

At another point in our interview, though, when we were discussing his son's opinion that the food in jail was better, Phil made this comment:

So I don't think, it wasn't his thing that "I want to go back to jail." In fact, I said, "Well, if it's too bad, pop somebody in the nose and maybe it could go bad!" We joked. (*stops laughing*) And please, I hope you know on record if he does anything, I don't want to be any, that's not premeditated. It's just a...Yeah.

Although these two statements might initially seem contradictory (essentially, *I am not being surveilled*, followed by, *In case I am being surveilled...*), they get at the nuance of how PSPs understand the state's presence in their lives and relationships. One possible explanation for this tension is that Phil does not necessarily feel the state is monitoring him; rather, he self-monitors his behavior because of the state's presence in his life, and because of his relationship with his son. PSPs are intimately aware of state presence in their relationships with their loved ones, and they understand that its authority can influence how they navigate their relationships. The fact that PSPs' support appears to be largely invisible to the community corrections agency contributes to their hesitation to engage more fully; at the same time, however, PSPs may not *want* to be more visible to the agency, given that their degree of separation from the state offers an important form of personal control and security. Together, these narratives suggest that some PSPs could be more willing or able to provide support if they felt more confident in their role expectations.

Tension in Role Expectations. Sometimes, providing support to a loved one in community corrections and following the agency’s rules can create conflicting expectations for PSPs: the client wants or needs something, but the agency doesn’t allow it or does not think it would benefit the client. Every PSP I spoke with made it clear that they want what’s best for their loved one, but some of them also noted how difficult it can be to know whose definition of “best” they ought to embrace. Some PSPs felt that it was impossible to please their loved one *and* community corrections—as one PSP put it, “I’m tired of being the bad guy. [...] If I support him, I’m ‘in cahoots’ with him.” Hannah, whose boyfriend was serving a sentence at the facility, explained that she felt tension between what her boyfriend expected from her, and what she believed the agency wanted from her:

Um, I, yeah, there were times when I was afraid. I didn't want to call too many times because I didn't want them to get mad at him for like, receiving phone calls on their line. And um... Yeah, I don't know. That was pretty much the main thing. I just didn't want them to think that I was like, somehow getting in the way of what they were doing or that I was like on a different team, you know? So I kind of tried to be a little bit more careful. I don't think it was like an actual, like fear, but it was just like, I don't know. I did try to be more careful. Yeah.

Even more commonly, PSPs described a tension between what they felt the client *wanted* them to do and what they felt the client *needed* them to do. For a couple of participants, this meant something like contending with their loved one’s request to buy them alcohol. But other disparate expectations between clients’ wants and needs were more difficult to navigate. For example, some PSPs felt uncomfortable giving a lot of support to their loved ones because they did not want to undermine their independence. Kate has an older brother serving a sentence at the agency. She knows him as someone who is ruggedly individualistic, yet she recognizes that because of structural constraints, he needs financial support while he is there. This has been a difficult tension for her to navigate:

I think, again, you know, sometimes I don't know how much to do and not do. You know? Like it's like, okay, do I step in and do more or say more, or do I not? And part of it is like, I don't want him to feel worse about himself or feel like... I don't want to hurt his feelings. And so I sometimes don't know, like how far do I push, you know? Like how much in somebody's business do you get into, even though, I mean, even though it's somebody close and somebody you love, it's like—again, he's a grown man. And I try to remember, you know, he's a grown man and he's like, lived his life and I don't, you know, I'm trying hard not to be like, you know, “You can't handle yourself.” Because that's not at all what he's like, you know? He's very proud and, you know, and so it's...you know? It's, it's one of those funny steps.

One way to interpret Kate's narrative is that when the agency's goals are unclear, PSPs do not know how best to support their loved ones. Here, she is torn between supporting his reintegration (providing money to establish stability) and supporting his responsabilization (encouraging by telling him that he is capable of making ends meet on his own). Yet not all PSPs feel this way; a few participants indicated that they appreciated the unified front that they could form with community corrections, establishing a team of people who could support the client *even if she did not want it*. This was Janice's experience after years of struggling to help her daughter stay out of the justice system:

[My daughter's new case manager] seems... not *stronger*; but I'll say stronger. He's not letting her get away with it. Like I think maybe she got to know the case manager too well and it's like she thought, “Oh, this is my friend now.” Now, this one's not her friend. He's not gonna put up with it.

[...]

I was more involved last time [my daughter was at community corrections] because I made sure *I* stayed on top of it. But this time I haven't really, because I see the case manager's a lot different this time. He seems to be more on top of her. So I'm not. [...] I don't know if she thinks we're trying to hurt her or we're trying to send her back or try to set her up for failure. I don't know what it is. I just don't know what it is with her. But we're not, we're trying. I'm trying to help her. Everybody's trying to help her that's in her life. But she needs to realize that sooner or later, she needs to stay straight and narrow, you know what I mean? She can't keep going on the run. She can't keep going.

[...]

I never did have boundaries with [my daughter]. I used to let her get away with everything, *everything*. I bailed her out of jail a couple of times, but no more. Yeah, no more. I'm done with that. No more. I'm nicely done.

(Interviewer) Have the staff ever given you any feedback on your relationship with [your daughter] while she's there?

The last lady did. Um, she did say, I was trying very hard and working with her and she just has that wall. That stubborn wall.

Janice positions herself squarely within the community corrections team, and it appears that they share the goal of rehabilitation for her daughter. Given that her daughter has not yet been able to successfully exit the cycle of justice involvement, taking a new approach—setting firm boundaries—is a logical move for Janice. Regardless of whether community corrections taught her this approach, it seems they have at least encouraged it, and Janice is happy to use this strategy because it alleviates some of the strain on *her* to rehabilitate her daughter. In other words, Janice relies on the authority of the institution to help her navigate the tension she experiences in her relationship with her daughter.

This was not a ubiquitous experience though; other PSPs had to navigate their relationships *in spite of* community corrections. In particular, PSPs who were personally justice-involved described a great deal of tension in meeting the demands of both their friends and the agency. Teri is a community corrections client who had been providing critical support to her friend in the program until just recently, when her friend relapsed and “ran” (left the program before completing it, leading to further sanctions). Eventually, Teri faced a difficult decision about whether to continue supporting her friend:

I mean she was, we were cruising along, cruising along, and things got a little bumpy, and then they just went (*whoosh*) for her. And I'm just still cruising along, you know. And I mean it's, it's hard. And gosh, you know, I mean I feel like a jerk having to say like, “I step back.” But I *had to*. Like at the end of the day, it's, it's my life and my freedom, or her friendship. You know, and I just... she was crossing some lines that I wasn't willing to cross. [...] The last couple of conversations I've had with staff haven't been good. Not

because of staff, but just because of the way *she's* been acting, and, you know I'm like, "Hey, like I, I care about her, but she's... I, I'm not trying to get an ankle monitor on."

PSPs like Teri who are currently justice-involved face dilemmas like this one that are difficult on a number of levels. On one hand, Teri disclosed during our interview that she had made progress finding a job, securing housing, and staying sober—this was important to her, and she felt she had to prioritize her own wellness. Continuing to provide support to her friend might jeopardize those things. But the decision is also complicated by the fact that she faces sanctions (an ankle monitor) if she continues her relationship with her friend.

Similarly, several participants who were currently in the program providing support to a peer described feeling uncomfortable with the way the agency expected them to monitor one another's behavior. One participant put it this way:

And they want us to like, police one another. But it's like, that's not our job to be like, "Hey, clean up your crap," you know? Like we just try to say, "Hey, everybody, make sure your stuff is put away. If you have something in a common area, just please move it." You know, that's all you can do.

The expectation for clients to "police one another" creates a challenging set of contradictory expectations for PSPs in the program. However, PSPs who are *not* justice-involved are in a unique position to actually alleviate some of this role strain for their loved ones. Some PSPs used their position as an external support to buffer the competing expectations their loved ones received—for example, Beth offered to take on her daughter's "responsibility" to police other clients, shielding her from being excluded by the other women in the program:

I said, "If you are uncomfortable snitching, then don't." Or, I said, right, you know, I said, "You have horrible handwriting." I said, "You tell me, I'll write a note, and you slip it to somebody," I said, "if you would like Mom to do that. Or I will call somebody and talk to them."

Beth is alluding here to an important strategy that PSPs use to navigate role tension: advocacy. As I have established in this chapter and the preceding one, PSPs understand clients to

be in a precarious situation: they must meet a rigid set of requirements or face further sanctions. One result of this precarity is that it can feel risky for clients to push back against unfair or unhelpful treatment. Between a third and a half of the participants I spoke with (n=11) described advocacy on behalf of their loved one as a critical form of support they provide. Participants had many strategies for accomplishing this, ranging from emails to the governor to phone calls with case managers to confrontations with other clients who were bullying their loved ones. One PSP explained it this way:

And I was mad, cause I knew she had to go, but I was mad. I wrote letters, I, you know, when I had to stick up for [my daughter], I showed her I had her support, I got her back, you know.

Similarly, Allison remembered feeling frustrated when her friend got “written up” without any explanation. She encouraged her friend to follow up, but this felt too risky, so Allison took matters into her own hands by calling community corrections management:

Well, they just said that, “You don't really need to know. It doesn't concern you.” I said, “Yes, I know, but I'm asking for a lady that's in your facility.” I said, “This doesn't make sense.” I can't remember what it was. There was something specific that happened and, and she was devastated. I said, “Well, let me see if I can find out.” And I called and they just said, “It doesn't concern you.” I said, “Well, you—” and, and I told them, I specifically said, “It was for [my friend].” I said, “Can you tell—if you don't wanna explain to me, can you at least explain to her?”

Interestingly, although some PSPs expressed feeling nervous that they might somehow cause trouble for their loved one (as I described above), some also felt empowered to stand up for them when they felt that staying silent would cause more harm. Jenna is a PSP who graduated from the program years ago and is now supporting a friend there. She explained to me that when her friend is treated unfairly, it resonates with her deeply. For example, her friend and another client were once found in violation of the same rule at the same time, but they had completely

different outcomes: among other things, Jenna's friend received a sanction while the other client did not. Right away, Jenna got on the phone with agency leadership:

And, you know, I told [my friend], I said, "If they were consistent across the board, then I would tell you tough shit." You know what I mean? [...] But it wasn't. It was two of the same women in the same room, that same instance. [...] So that's why I, you know, I'm going to bat for her as far as that goes, because I don't know what they think that's showing other than inconsistency and favoritism. But we'll see what happens.

Jenna's narrative highlights a powerful way that PSPs can navigate relationships with their loved ones in community corrections: buffering the power differential between clients and staff. In fact, numerous PSPs disclosed to me that they thought of their participation in this study as a form of advocacy for their loved one. Carla explained it this way:

He's the one that wanted me to do this [interview]. And he, I told him one day I got this note from you that you would like me to do this survey, and he said, "Well, I put your name down." So he knew I was going to do it. He wanted me to do it.

Angel had a similar rationale for joining the study:

I go, "I'm going to be perfectly honest with her [the interviewer] about everything." I said, "As long as it doesn't affect you." He goes, "Angel, you can say whatever you want to, as long as it's honest. That's all that matters." [...] Because I don't, I didn't know how he was gonna feel about me, you know, talking to you, because he tells me everything. [...] And I've been perfectly honest with you, that's why, that's why to me it was important to do the survey. Not so much even for my brother, cause he'll probably leave, but for other guys there.

Carla's and Angel's narratives illustrate how advocacy can be an important way that PSPs navigate relationships with their loved ones under community supervision. For Carla, despite the challenges that justice involvement created in their relationship, like having phone calls monitored or creating anxiety around rules, participating in the study was a key form of support that her son requested and that she was able to provide. And although Angel was geographically distant from her brother, participating in the study created a way for her to offer support beyond the financial and emotional support she was already providing.

PSPs can leverage their position as someone not under correctional control to resist some of the carceral logics that they recognize as harmful. Importantly, one key similarity among PSPs who were willing to advocate and push back against the agency was that they had positive perceptions of community corrections and of agency staff in general. This underscores a need for more research into PSPs' resistance strategies, so that we can better understand how trust-building between justice system actors and PSPs may actually create a pathway toward positive change.

Conclusion

The experiences of PSPs in this study reveal that community corrections creates complex effects for PSPs that are neither entirely positive nor entirely negative. PSPs navigate emotional distress, financial strain, and social exclusion, but they also find meaning, pride, and even personal growth in the act of providing support. These symbiotic effects—both beneficial and harmful—show that the reach of community corrections extends far beyond the clients it directly supervises. Moreover, the impacts that community corrections has on PSPs shapes their perceptions of the purpose and function of the institution more broadly, and that perception influences the type and amount of support that PSPs provide. All of the symbiotic effects that PSPs experience can be intertwined, which can result in deepened inequalities.

PSPs' relationships with their loved ones are profoundly shaped by the state's presence. They must constantly negotiate care and control, but, importantly, they do not necessarily conceptualize themselves as being under the state's supervision. PSPs abide intrusion from the state because they see coercion and impunity as inseparable from the criminal justice system, and thus from community corrections. But they also maintain an awareness that it is the client, not them, who will ultimately bear the consequences of failing to meet the conditions of supervision.

This can lead some PSPs to experience a sense of responsibility or liability for their loved one, but others are empowered by their separation from the state, and they leverage this separation by advocating for their loved one when they are not able to safely do so themselves.

In the next chapter, I synthesize these findings with those from chapter three, and I place them in conversation with existing literature. Because this study was conducted with the intention of producing positive change at the community corrections agency—and because that is the reason many participants joined the study—I also spend considerable time discussing the implications and recommendations this study has produced for community corrections organizations more broadly.

CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSION

This project began with a simple question: what does it mean to support someone serving a sentence in community corrections? The answer, as it turns out, is complex. Support is multifaceted; it impacts both clients and their loved ones; it is influenced by both organizational policy and personal experience; and it exists under a unique set of conditions that both constrain and facilitate connection. This chapter draws those threads together. It situates the experiences of PSPs within the larger landscape of community corrections and identifies how their stories challenge common assumptions about the criminal justice system.

I begin by summarizing the contributions this study has made to the literature—specifically, the ways in which PSPs understand, are affected by, and interact with, community corrections. Next, I discuss the theoretical and empirical implications of these findings: where my analysis aligns with our knowledge, where it contradicts or complicates it, and how this study establishes a new line of inquiry within criminal justice research. This project was designed in collaboration with the community corrections agency we studied, and one of the central goals was to improve conditions and programming there. Because theoretical findings can be difficult for organizations to translate into actionable insights, I provide concrete recommendations for community corrections based on my findings. Finally, given that there is so little existing research on the supports of community corrections clients, I then describe opportunities for future work that can answer some of the lingering questions that remain.

Summary of Research

Like most studies that rely on qualitative data, this study produced findings that are quite complex. I make this comment to frame the foregoing summary of my findings, which

necessarily simplifies some of the more nuanced concepts that the data produced. Therefore, the reader should bear in mind that there is no ubiquitous “PSP experience” or “PSP perception.” All that said, this study essentially produced three key findings. First, community corrections agencies may not serve a *single* purpose, but rather they appear to fill a number of gaps in both our correctional system and our social safety net, thus obscuring the boundary between the two. This functions to complicate the efforts of (typically under-resourced) PSPs to support their loved ones who are justice-involved. Second, PSPs—even those who have no direct justice involvement—are impacted by community corrections in significant, tangible ways that are neither entirely positive nor entirely negative. And third, PSPs must navigate difficult role tensions when they provide care in the context of carceral logics, but some PSPs—particularly those who are not justice-involved—resist these logics by advocating for their loved ones in the system.

In chapter three, I demonstrated that PSPs recognize elements of multiple philosophies during their loved one’s sentence, and these philosophies influence the way PSPs understand and interact with community corrections. Participants pointed to elements of both rehabilitation and reintegration—treatment services, structured environments, and basic needs like food and housing—as beneficial features. But they also pointed out that these services were only temporarily helping clients overcome enduring structural barriers and that, implicit in the programming offered, clients are expected to become accountable for their own stability when those supports disappear—a clear reflection of responsabilization. The conditions that clients are expected to meet are so stringent that they commonly require external support, and thus PSPs often bear the consequences of the responsabilization that community corrections promotes for its clients. Furthermore, participants’ narratives also revealed that some of the damage addressed

through rehabilitative programming, like substance use or institutional abuse, is actually the result of structural harm—harm that is sometimes caused by the criminal justice system itself.

PSPs also notice the retributive and carceral logics embedded within community corrections. Some elements of the program, like fees for drug screens, can actually deepen inequality: if clients are unable to pay these fees, they can rack up debt, creating consequences that entrench inequality far beyond continued justice involvement. Participants recognized that community corrections is part of a coercive system, and so while it might serve multiple purposes, punishment will always be a central goal. For example, some participants characterized the agency as “setting people up to fail” by implementing impossibly high expectations or enforcing seemingly arbitrary rules. Others described ways in which surveillance, micromanagement, and sanctions permeated even the rehabilitative elements of the program. PSPs are not necessarily averse to carceral logics in general, and in fact they contend with it in a variety of ways, from rationalization to resistance.

In chapter four, I described the complicated, sometimes bittersweet emotional impacts that community corrections can have on PSPs. On one hand, participants were happy to see their loved ones doing well, and some of them found the role of “supporter” to be personally rewarding. On the other hand, participants also described feeling lonely, anxious, and sometimes guilty that they were not able to do more to alleviate their loved one’s stress or suffering. Participants also reported facing social exclusion and experiencing financial hardship as a result of their loved one’s community supervision. Finally, among participants who identified as women, some PSPs expressed an obligation to sacrifice their own needs for those of their loved one, a phenomenon I call “subjugation of the self.” While we should not dismiss the emotional

benefits PSPs experience, all of these forms of harm and marginalization can deepen existing socioeconomic, gender, and other inequalities.

In addition to the personal impacts PSPs experience, they must also navigate relationships with people who are under state supervision. Importantly, most participants did not view themselves as being surveilled, but they described the state's intrusion in their interpersonal relationships. One reason PSPs do not conceptualize this as surveillance is that they do not believe they will be held liable for their actions or inactions; instead, the client will bear the consequence. Additionally, some participants described not knowing exactly how they ought to behave in the first place—that is, PSPs sometimes feel contradictory role expectations, as is the case when they are asked to provide care to their loved ones without undermining the state's coercive approach. PSPs contend with these tensions in multiple ways: some try to avoid making waves, while others use their “outsider” position to advocate for their loved ones who are disenfranchised. Advocacy—including participation in studies like this one—is a critical strategy that PSPs use not only to navigate relationships, but also to resist carceral logics.

Relevance and Implications

Part One: Theoretical and Empirical Contributions

Philosophies of Punishment and the Purpose of Community Corrections. The findings in this study suggest that community corrections does not serve one single purpose; instead, PSPs point to evidence of a variety of functions. This is unsurprising, given that, as I established in Chapter One, there is considerable disagreement over the precise philosophy (or philosophies) underpinning community corrections. More specifically, though, some PSPs perceived these philosophies as working in tandem with one another, an argument that is contested in the literature. For example, this aligns with some existing research: Werth (2013)

recognizes the inherent tension that exists for parole staff, who must contend with seemingly contradictory goals of rehabilitation and punishment. Building on the earlier work of Lynch (1998), he argues that staff make sense of these competing demands by applying a “tough love” approach to their clients, using the threat of sanctions to “encourage” clients’ rehabilitation (or at least maintain it as a potentiality). This is similar to that of several PSPs in my study, who observed, for example, that the threat of punishment is more effective because it is coupled with the promise of greater wellness or freedom (and, conversely, clients are obliged to follow through with treatment because they can avoid sanctions). In fact, some PSPs applied this same “tough love” approach to their relationships with loved ones. While they did not necessarily indicate that they learned this approach from community corrections, they explained that both boundary-setting (e.g., declining to make phone calls on behalf of their loved one and instead insisting that the client do it themselves) and warning (e.g., reminding their loved one of the sanctions they would receive if they did not comply with rules) were central ways they provided support to their loved ones.

On the other hand, not all participants agreed that these multiple purposes were synergistic; some believed that competing purposes set clients up for failure. You may recall that Cassie, whose son had to choose between going to take a UA drug test and getting to work, did not feel the goals of rehabilitation and responsabilization were compatible. But Cassie was in the minority; most participants felt that both goals were feasible and important. Why? I argue that these goals are made to *seem* compatible by introducing the logic of responsabilization: if you try hard enough, you will make it work. Other research has produced similar findings, in particular with regards to drug testing. These studies suggest that while programs may *appear* to have rehabilitative elements—for example, UA drug screens—these elements are actually mechanisms

of responsabilization for clients whose lives are pathologized (Hackett, 2013) or whose marginality is viewed as a risk that must be managed (Opsal, 2009; Phelps & Ruhland, 2022). In this framework, community corrections “misreads structural precarity as the result, rather than the cause, of individuals’ choices” (Piehowski & Phelps, 2023). In other words, relying on coercive power to generate clients’ motivation for treatment is necessarily predicated on the idea that individuals’ choices can allow them to circumvent precarity altogether; this is, in essence, the logic of responsabilization. Participants commonly shared sentiments echoing this idea that personal accountability could overcome structural barriers and would improve clients’ quality of life. In fact, even PSPs who had not found this to be true in their own lives were still convinced of the possibility that things could go differently for their loved one—take, for example, a participant who worked multiple jobs and still feared housing insecurity, and who was thrilled that her daughter was also working two jobs while under community supervision because it promised a better future. This may underscore the criminal justice system’s authority to establish narratives about what is “best” and most effective for justice-involved people to reshape their life trajectories; it seems some PSPs accept these narratives as true regardless of whether it is supported by anecdotal experience. What is also notable here is the power of individualism in the narratives of those who are least likely to actually be able to exercise it.

Participants did point to responsabilization as a singular goal as well, though. Again unsurprisingly, this aligns with existing research on community corrections that establishes responsabilizing elements of programming, such as the requirement to get and keep a job, or the expectation to conform to middle-class cultural norms (Turnbull & Hannah-Moffat, 2009; Wyse, 2013). But participants placed less emphasis on the process of responsabilization for the client, and instead they focused on the tendency for PSPs to shoulder the consequences of clients’

responsibilization. This aligns with existing research on PSPs of incarcerated and post-release loved ones, which provides evidence that supports (primarily families) often bear the burden of meeting basic material needs like food and housing, although most of this research centers client perspectives (see, for example: Bahr et al., 2010; Barrick et al., 2014; Clone & DeHart, 2014; Harding et al., 2014; Kjellstrand et al., 2022; Naser & La Vigne, 2006). However, this dissertation deepens our understanding of that phenomenon in two important ways: first, it establishes that PSPs of loved ones *in community corrections* experience this same financial strain; and second, it ties that strain directly to a goal—responsibilization—of the criminal justice system.

This study also deepens our understanding of rehabilitation in the context of community corrections. To explain, I must introduce several key concepts: First, there is a substantial body of research establishing a rehabilitative orientation within community corrections (for example, see: Klingele, 2021; Opsal & Luxton, 2024; Petersilia, 1997; Wodahl & Garland, 2009). Many criminal justice scholars argue that when neoliberal politics took hold in the U.S. and social safety nets were largely dismantled, corrections—and eventually, community corrections specifically—became the *de facto* broker of welfare services (Garland, 2016; Gustafson, 2009; Standing, 2016; Wacquant, 2009). Second, it is well-established that marginalized, structurally-impacted people are overrepresented in the criminal justice system, as is the fact that justice involvement more broadly can *create* structural harm for clients (Ghandnoosh et al., 2024). And third, some scholars argue it is structural harm which often leads people to become justice-involved, and thus rehabilitative options—like some forms of community corrections—may serve as a more effective and more humane alternative to prison that can aid in reducing mass

incarceration (Cullen, 2022; Kim, 2018; Morris, 2023; Tonry, 2017). This dissertation ties these threads together.

PSPs recognize rehabilitative elements of community corrections programming, and they point to those elements as beneficial, in part because their loved ones did not have access to support services or treatment before they entered the criminal justice system (and according to most participants, before they came to community corrections specifically). Some PSPs felt their loved ones were already in need of support when they entered the justice system, but a significant portion of participants pointed out that the harm that needed ameliorating—that is, the rehabilitation that their loved one required—was the direct result of criminal-legal system involvement. Examples I have highlighted in this dissertation include PTSD developed from a beating in prison; a substance use disorder that began when a woman’s children were removed by the state; assistance finding a job, the barrier to which was a felony record; and homelessness precipitated by being released from prison with no resources, support, or possessions except a \$100 gift card. Therefore, *in some cases*, community corrections may function to temporarily mitigate on an individual level, but ultimately perpetuate on a system level, harmful functions of the criminal legal system—including the carceral system. For that reason, I argue that community corrections does not function as an alternative to prison so much as a complement to it.

Symbiotic Effects and the Experience of Supporting a Justice-Involved Loved One.

Researchers have done quite a bit of theorizing on the philosophy and purpose of community corrections, but there is substantially less research on PSPs. While there are a handful of studies on the types of support community corrections PSPs provide (usually from the perspective of the client), studies regarding the *experiences* of PSPs—how providing support can impact one’s day-

to-day life—are limited to the supports of incarcerated people. There are no such studies on the PSPs of community corrections. Therefore, one of the most substantial contributions this study makes is highlighting the impacts of community corrections on PSPs.

In the literature on PSPs of incarcerated people, scholars broadly agree: supporting a justice-involved loved one can produce complex feelings (Comfort, 2008; Granja, 2016; McCarthy & Adams, 2019). This was true, but slightly different, for the community corrections PSPs in my study. For example, many participants pointed to the gratification that offering support can provide, and they were happy their loved one was safe and cared for, but this positive experience was tinged with sadness and loneliness related to the limit of that support. Riessman (1965) was the first to describe the “helper principle,” which holds that people who support others can experience benefits like having a renewed sense of purpose or being personally committed to their loved one’s success. Most PSPs I spoke with did in fact embody the helper principle; for example, one participant—a former client—stated that watching clients succeed, “if you played a part in that,” was “the *best* feeling.” This aligns with research from Comfort (2008) and Granja (2016) suggesting that PSPs of incarcerated people may experience some personal benefit. Participants in my study explained that this gratification manifested in numerous ways. For example, many participants felt their relationships with loved ones had improved while they were in community corrections—sometimes this was because they were able to spend more time together or communicate more often than in prison; sometimes it was because their loved one had finally achieved sobriety and/or taken on more personal accountability; and sometimes participants were not entirely sure *why* they felt the relationship had improved, but they could point to an enhanced sense of emotional closeness. While PSPs do

also describe a number of symbiotic harms (as I will illustrate in a moment), it is imperative that we not overlook the symbiotic *benefits* of community corrections for PSPs, too.

Community corrections creates nuanced and complex emotional impacts for PSPs. The benefits of community supervision notwithstanding, my participants also pointed to the emotional pain of missing their loved one, which is again consistent with literature on PSPs of incarcerated clients (Hairston, 2022; Møllerhøj, 2022; Turanovic et al., 2012). However, organizational context appears to shape this emotional experience. The guilt and loneliness that community corrections PSPs experience is compounded by an anxiety that they will unintentionally jeopardize their loved one's success. PSPs feel personally responsible for their loved one's success (and failure), and as I established in the preceding section, PSPs often do a great deal to ensure their loved one meets the program's requirements. Therefore, the "helper principle" is rather complicated for these PSPs: while providing support might feel gratifying, it also feels risky. Sometimes this risk is specific to the client: for example, one participant worried that if she got a flat tire while driving her loved one back to the facility, he might receive a sanction. Sometimes, though, the PSP may also put *themselves* at risk. Another participant described facing housing insecurity if she allowed her son to move into her home while under supervision, because the frequent home visits from correctional supervisors "looking like cops" could cause distrust from her neighbors and lead to being kicked out of her apartment.

Risk created a palpable tension for participants in my study: while many felt lonely and sad about missing their loved ones, they were grateful for their being in the community as opposed to being behind bars. The symbiotic benefits that I described are rather precarious and usually predicated on the client *remaining in the community*. Thus, the risk to PSPs is material as well as emotional/psychological: if they *do* cause their loved one to fail, not only will their loved

one suffer; their own emotional pain will increase as well if their loved one is sent back to prison or otherwise restricted. Providing support is risky, but so is *not* providing support. While almost all participants denied feeling like the agency had explicit expectations for them to support their loved one, many were caught in a catch-22 that transferred risk to the PSP regardless of their level of involvement. In other words, the precarity that community corrections clients experience (see, for example: Klingele, 2021; Steen & Opsal, 2007; Turnbull & Hannah-Moffat, 2009) appears to create a set of coercive conditions not only for clients, but for their friends and families, thus reifying the power and authority of the state.

One way this coercive power shows up in PSPs' lives is through what I refer to as self-subjugation, a term I borrow from psychology's *schema theory* (Baroncelli et al., 2025; Young, 1994). Some—but not all—PSPs in my study felt that they had no choice but to sacrifice their own needs, happiness, and/or wellbeing to ensure that they could be “on call 24/7,” in the words of one participant. This is related to the phenomenon I described in the preceding section, wherein PSPs shoulder the consequences of responsabilization, though subjugation of the self is more extreme. In my sample, the PSPs who experienced subjugation of the self were all women. In psychological literature, there is evidence that self-subjugation is more prevalent among women, likely due to internalized gender norms (Calogero & Jost, 2011). However, Halsey & Deegan (2015) describe a similar phenomenon among their participants—women supporting currently and formerly incarcerated men—but there is an important difference. They note that although these women felt pressured to sacrifice their self-care, *they ultimately did not do so*. They refer to this phenomenon as the *sublimation* of self.

In Halsey and Deegan's study, sublimation of the self primarily took place among women whose loved ones were incarcerated as opposed to being under community supervision.

Although the phenomenon of self-subjugation was unique to women in my study, Halsey and Deegan's sample *only* included women and thus the data is insufficient to make inferences about gender here. Organizational context is one possible explanation for the contradictory ways in which PSPs contend with the pressure to self-sacrifice (sublimation vs. subjugation). I argue that the client's presence in the community creates a deeper sense of liability for the PSP, as I described in the previous paragraph, and that PSPs in this situation do not feel that self-sublimation is a viable option. In prison, while social support is critical, clients' basic material needs are usually being met. This is not necessarily the case in community corrections, according to some participants, which begs the question: if the PSP does not attend to their loved one's needs, who will? Furthermore, I would argue that the threat of increased sanctions *in* prison may not be as salient as the threat of being sent *to* prison, whether for the first time (for a client serving a diversion sentence) or as "failed" transition client who must return. While incarcerated people do have certain expectations they must meet, the reality is that the conditions of community supervision are much more demanding and often require additional support (Clone & DeHart, 2014; Goodson, 2018; Kjellstrand et al., 2022; Luxton & Opsal, 2024; Naser & La Vigne, 2006). While all of the participants in my study denied having been given explicit expectations by the agency to provide support to their loved one, they clearly felt obligated to do so.

Importantly, while PSPs in my study underscored the (sometimes coercive) presence of the state in their relationships with loved ones, they did not conceptualize this presence as surveillance, and indeed their experience appears to be something substantively different than "surveillance" as it is described in the literature. Across several studies, PSPs of incarcerated people (and recently released people) report feeling surveilled as a result of their loved one's

justice involvement (Comfort et al., 2005, 2016; Goffman, 2009; Schmidt et al., 2024). While individual experiences obviously vary, participants in these studies described surveillance in their living arrangements, prison visits, finances, romantic relationships (with justice-involved partners) and caregiving responsibilities (to non-justice-involved children). However, most participants in my study rejected the idea that the state monitored their lives in a broad sense, and instead they recognized a coercive state presence—though not a surveilling one—in their relationships with their loved ones in community corrections. For example, many participants described the stressful experience of having to provide reliable transportation to their loved ones: getting them to various appointments on time, taking them to check in at the agency, etc. While the *client* was necessarily being surveilled (the agency needed to know where they were at all times), this was not as salient for PSPs as the fact that it was *their responsibility* to make sure their loved one was in compliance with the state’s demands. No one cared where the PSP was, but the state’s presence in their relationship, in part because of the client’s surveillance, created a coercive environment for the PSP.

It would not be accurate to say, however, that PSPs simply bow to the coercive environment the correctional system creates. First of all, PSPs who are not justice-involved value their relative distance from the system; in other words, they recognize that their involvement in it is informal and voluntary, and this allows them to retain an important sense of agency. This does not necessarily align with existing literature on PSPs of incarcerated clients: the research emphasizes the coercive elements that PSPs experience (Baldwin et al., 2013; Comfort, 2008; DeHart et al., 2018; McCarthy & Adams, 2019), but it does not necessarily suggest that PSPs feel detached or otherwise insulated from these elements. Again, this discrepancy may highlight key organization-level differences that make the experience of supporting a loved one under

community supervision different than the experience of supporting someone who is incarcerated. On the other hand, participants in my study who were justice-involved (including those who were currently serving a community corrections sentence) did not report this same feeling of independence, and—understandably—their experiences may be more similar to those of the PSPs of incarcerated people.

Second, and perhaps more centrally, participants in my study did not simply remove or insulate themselves from the coercive environment. Instead, some PSPs pointed to advocacy as a strategy not only for relationship maintenance and support provision, but also as a way to confront and resist carceral logics. This contribution is important for several reasons. First, the limited research that exists on forms of support for community corrections clients establishes four main dimensions of support: emotional, instrumental, informational, and social (or sometimes, “companionship”), all of which are integral to client success (Goodson, 2018; Kjellstrand et al., 2022; Luxton & Opsal, 2024; Schaefer et al., 2021). It does not, however, conceptualize advocacy as a form of support, nor does advocacy (as my participants described it) appear to fit into any of these other categories. Instead, PSPs in this dissertation study recalled calling and emailing state officials, meeting with facility staff, and even confronting other clients for bullying when they felt their loved one had been wronged or mistreated. The focus of these complaints was almost always related to a punitive intervention or approach: limited access to medical care, unequally applied rules, restrictions on home-cooked food, or some other issue related to the way the agency responded to clients. Participants who provided advocacy support emphasized that they were doing so because their loved one was not in a position to advocate for themselves or push back against the agency’s policies and practices. However, two of the 11 participants who advocated for their loved one were clients themselves. This may suggest that

serving as a PSP offers a sense of empowerment—or it may underscore the obligatory nature of support that so many participants described.

One way to conceptualize advocacy is through the buffering theory of social support. Cobb (1976) introduced the “buffering hypothesis,” which holds that social support (broadly defined), while not a health benefit in and of itself, can mitigate the harmful effects of stress and in turn weaken the association between stress and poor physical and mental health outcomes. From this perspective, the effect of any form of social support is most pronounced when stress levels are high. PSPs in my study consistently reported that clients were under immense pressure and stress, consistent with existing research. It would be reasonable, then, to believe that advocacy as a form of support is particularly beneficial to community corrections clients, given their high stress levels. Relatedly, some proponents of social buffering theory argue that social support is particularly critical for individuals who experience structural and systemic inequality, as their levels of chronic stress tend to be higher (Thoits, 1995); again, this supports the argument that community corrections clients may benefit from advocacy in particularly meaningful ways. There is also evidence to suggest that social support for individuals facing discrimination (in the case of my participants, bullying, unequally applied rules, etc.). Ajrouch et al. (2010) found this to be partially true in their study, where emotional support was negatively associated with discrimination-related stress for Black women. However, it is important to note that this association disappeared for individuals experiencing very high levels of discrimination. In any case, there is considerable need to develop a better understanding of advocacy as a form of social support through future research.

Future Directions. Given that this study is the first to explore the PSPs’ experiences of providing support to loved ones in community corrections, there is still a great deal of research

needed, and certain questions remain unanswered. Furthermore, as I pointed out in Chapter Two and consistent with grounded theory and PAR methodologies, this study is constrained by its particular organizational context: community corrections as a whole is highly variable in terms of how it is structured and how it operates. At the agency I collaborated with, clients complete some programming on “residential” status (living in the halfway house) before transferring to “non-residential” status (living in the community but remaining under correctional supervision, similar to parole or probation). But even at another organization with this same general model, other differences—policies, enforcement protocols, organizational culture, broader community culture, leadership style, jurisdictional/legal differences, client and staff demographics, the agency’s size, age, and countless other factors—would almost certainly influence the way PSPs and clients interact with and experience community corrections. The fact that this study is so specific offers unique and relevant insights to the agency I worked with, thus creating more opportunities for positive change. However, this also means that the results and associated recommendations are not necessarily generalizable to other agencies. More research is needed to explore how the distinguishing features I listed may influence PSPs’ experience with community corrections. Diversifying research contexts in this way can help complicate and deepen the findings I have presented here.

This study explored the personal experiences of PSPs, but it did not get at the ways PSPs interact with one another and what this might illuminate about the experience of providing support to someone under community supervision. More than 65% of my participants (n=17) lived in a household of two or more, and about 28% (n=7) had at least one child in their household under age 18. More research is needed to understand how these relationships might influence, and be influenced by, PSPs’ commitments to their loved one in community

corrections. This study describes the financial, logistical, and emotional burdens that PSPs carry, and these likely interact with the substantial financial, logistical, and emotional demands of caring for children. Furthermore, several interview participants found the experience of providing support to feel isolating or exhausting, and one actually expressed a desire for some sort of support group. Future research should explore whether creating solidarity among PSPs (perhaps through a support group, an online forum, or some other vehicle) might help to mitigate these social and emotional impacts.

This study produced some preliminary but very limited evidence that the particular crime for which a client is serving a sentence can shape PSPs' experiences in important ways. Specifically, as I briefly discussed in Chapter Three, PSPs with loved ones serving sentences for sexual offenses emphasized retributive and punitive programmatic elements that did not necessarily apply to other clients, and they described social stigma as having a particularly damaging effect on their daily lives. The same was true for the PSP of a client whose crime was highly publicized but was not a sexual offense. However, there was insufficient data to draw meaningful conclusions about the significance of the crime itself, given that this subsample of participants was so small and I did not collect data on offense type from most participants. Especially given that community corrections clients are in the community, and thus potentially spending time in public (or in private) with their loved ones, future studies should take into account whether and how high-profile cases, stigmatized offenses, and other social dimensions of crime might influence PSPs' experiences.

Another direction for future inquiry is the question of how women (and people from other marginalized groups) might experience community corrections differently as PSPs. For example, as I pointed out in Chapter Four, all of the participants whose narratives suggested "subjugation

of the self' were self-identified women. While this may be related to socialized gender norms (wherein women are expected to provide care under any and all circumstances), this study did not have sufficient data to explore the possibility further. In another example, previous literature has suggested that Hispanic people who are justice-involved experience corrections differently than non-Hispanic people (Lanuza et al., 2023). However, there is no research on whether the same might hold true for PSPs, particularly in community corrections. Although about a third of the participants in this study identified as Hispanic, none of these individuals were Spanish-speaking, and this is important as a potential source of disparity in terms of bias, access to information, and other issues. Given that this study has established several ways in which serving as a PSP can reinforce existing inequalities, future studies should interrogate whether and how specific groups may be differentially impacted.

Finally, future studies should seek to better understand the purpose and prevalence of advocacy as a form of support that PSPs provide to community corrections clients. For example, what are the factors that determine whether PSPs feel comfortable advocating for their loved ones, given that some fear they may become a liability and cause trouble for the client? What are the specific advocacy strategies that PSPs use to support their loved ones? And how might these strategies differ between PSPs who are currently justice-involved and PSPs who are not? These questions are critically important: understanding advocacy as a form of resistance to carceral logics is central to the project of abolition and bottom-up transformative change.

Part Two: Practical Implications

One of the biggest barriers to research-driven policymaking is that researchers (especially from academic institutions) often fail to provide clear, actionable recommendations for practitioners; for a number of reasons, researchers tend to be hesitant to make specific policy

recommendations (Blomberg et al., 2024; Pesta et al., 2019; Rodriguez, 2018). Instead, criminal justice research tends to remain theoretical, is not consumed by practitioners, and ultimately, sits on a shelf. This study was designed specifically to improve practices at the community corrections agency, and so while it is a bit unusual for a dissertation, I feel it is important to describe the practical implications and policy recommendations this study has produced as part of the larger discussion on its theoretical and empirical contributions. Additionally, translational criminologists and implementation scientists have also pointed out that researchers and practitioners can have different skillsets, vocabularies, and foci, and so it can be easy for recommendations to feel misaligned or irrelevant if researchers do not explicitly state core shared values (Jasanoff, 1990; Pesta et al., 2019; Rapport et al., 2022). Therefore, the framing in this section is slightly different: rather than focusing exclusively on how community corrections affects PSPs, I focus on how PSPs shape clients' success at community corrections, as client success is ultimately the agency's central goal. Through this framework, I provide four central recommendations, which I then ground in relevant findings and operationalize through discrete steps.

1. **Revise policies and enforcement protocols to align with the clear programmatic goals already established through forward-facing messaging.** While most PSPs agreed that the program is meant to help clients be successful, they also pointed to rigid rules, punitive enforcement practices, and certain programmatic elements that undermined client success.
 - a. Use a participatory process to review the program's rules and policies for client conduct and facility security, and ensure that each rule is clearly stated in the client handbook.

Rationale: Participants felt that rules were ambiguous and not well communicated. PSPs also expressed concern that some rules (such as requiring that clients' belongings be brought to them in a trash bag) seemed overtly punitive or degrading, undermining their trust in the organization's client-centered approach.

- i. Establish a task force of staff, PSPs, and clients that will review rules together and come to a consensus on which rules should be retained. Ensure that all stakeholder contributions are valued equally; leadership should not “override” the group's decisions about rules. The review process should take place at regular intervals (e.g., every two years).
 - ii. Use this same democratic process to produce written explanations of each rule. Ensure that *all* staff—even those not represented in the task force—understand the purpose of each rule and can explain this purpose clearly to clients and PSPs.
 - iii. Limit the number of directives to approximately ten, consistent with recommendations from Phase One of the study.
- b. Establish consistent enforcement policies and ensure that these policies are clearly stated in the rulebook.

Rationale: Many PSPs believed that rules were applied inconsistently, creating distrust of staff among clients and PSPs and potentially undermining client success. According to PSPs, indirectly informing clients of rule violations (that is, notifying them through the kiosk) also created a sense of fear and anxiety among clients.

- i. Explaining the purpose of a rule should be paramount in the enforcement process. Encourage staff to refer to the descriptions established by the collaborative task force in item (1).
 - ii. Enforcement policies should minimize sanctions for first violations. Establish a clearly defined grace period for new clients as they adjust to the program, as well as an enforcement protocol that issues warnings (rather than formal citations) for first violations after the grace period has ended.
 - iii. Staff should *directly* inform clients, as soon as possible, which rule they have violated and the purpose of that rule.
- c. Increase transparency around clients' financial obligations and find ways to offer clients greater autonomy in managing their finances.

Rationale: PSPs repeatedly criticized the organization's practice of managing clients' finances for them. Some participants saw this as an indication that the organization is financially exploiting clients by "taking their paychecks." More commonly, though, PSPs reflected that clients were left feeling unmotivated and discouraged when they did not receive all of their earned income.

- i. Integrate regular, personalized financial counseling into programming. For example, staff can guide clients in understanding paystubs, creating a balanced budget, and setting personal savings goals *other than* those required by the agency.
- ii. Create more opportunities for clients to set their own budgets. Be transparent about which costs are beyond the organization's control (legal

fees, UA testing costs, etc.), and allow clients to allocate the remaining portion of their income based on their personal situation (for example, supporting family at home or offsetting transportation costs for PSPs).

2. **Recognize and mitigate the financial and logistical burdens on PSPs.** The support that PSPs provide to clients is critical for their success, but providing this support has significant impacts on PSPs' daily lives. Financial and logistical burdens, coupled with emotional exhaustion, can lead to burnout, which may impact client outcomes. Many PSPs feel largely responsible for the client's success in the program, and as a result, they fear being a liability and jeopardizing clients' success through either inaction (failing to provide a certain kind of support) or accidental rule violations.

- a. Articulate common impacts on PSPs and the signs of burnout during orientation and proactively offer resources for financial assistance and emotional/mental health support.

Rationale: Many PSPs reported that they were “a lot more involved” than they expected to be, and a number of these individuals felt they were unable to prioritize self-care because of the expectation to support their loved one first. The organization may be able to help keep PSPs from becoming overburdened and help reduce the shame or stigma associated with reaching out for help by assuring PSPs that it is normal to experience these things.

- i. Ensure that this resource guide remains easily accessible to PSPs throughout the client's time in the program (e.g., on the website). Consider communicating with community partners in the resource list ahead of time to explain why PSPs may need their support.

- b. Explicitly dispel misconceptions that PSPs may cause their loved ones to “fail,” and instead, ensure PSPs that their involvement with the client is welcome.

Rationale: PSPs fear that they will accidentally break rules (e.g., give an over-the-counter medication to their loved one without knowing it was contraband) or otherwise create trouble for their loved one (e.g., calling too often and creating an annoyance for staff). This sometimes limits the support PSPs are willing to provide.

- i. Hold hybrid orientation sessions for PSPs at neutral locations, such as a public library. In these sessions, provide copies of the handbook and review the organization’s goals, its policies, and—importantly—the value it places on external support. It is important that PSPs have a virtual option (or have access to a video for later reference), as some do not live locally.
 - ii. Clearly explain the rules during orientation and describe the democratic process through which these rules were established, (referring to item (1.) of these recommendations).
 - iii. Clarify that the organization does not expect PSPs to be responsible in any way for clients’ ability to meet their requirements, and if certain requirements or program elements are creating hardships for PSPs, the program is *not* working as intended. Encourage PSPs to communicate openly with staff and explain how to utilize established communication channels.
- c. Reallocate funding to improve the quality and availability of food, hygiene products, and transportation options.

Rationale: These are the three primary sources of financial strain that participants identified in interviews. PSPs feel these needs are not being sufficiently met by the organization.

- d. Rather than using one-size-fits-all rules for visitation and passes, work with clients and PSPs to develop individualized plans that balance accountability with minimized strain for PSPs.

Rationale: Connection is critical to maintaining strong relationships between clients and PSPs, and these relationships often facilitate client success. Common sources of logistical strain (barriers to connection) are scheduling visitation and managing clients' pass time requirements (e.g., taking the client back to the facility at the end of a three-hour pass to "check in" before immediately bringing the client back out on another three-hour pass).

3. **Train staff to recognize the structural barriers (longstanding, big-picture challenges) that often exist for clients and PSPs, such as poverty, felony history, housing instability, food insecurity, or racial or gender discrimination.** PSPs are grateful for the support their loved ones receive while they are in community corrections, such as a sober living environment, assurance of food and shelter, and assistance finding employment. However, they also express concern that while the supports end when the client finishes the program, some barriers remain. PSPs also point out that certain big-picture challenges, like lack of reliable transportation, make it particularly difficult for clients to successfully meet the program's requirements.
 - a. Encourage staff to speak explicitly with clients and PSPs about these challenges and to be mindful of how they may impact clients' ability to meet program

requirements.

Rationale: Participants did not feel that staff understood (or in some cases, cared) that clients are unable to meet certain requirements without additional help. Some PSPs reported feeling like clients were being “set up to fail” because expectations were unrealistic (for example, being denied additional pass time to get to a job interview on time, therefore running late and not being offered the job, preventing the client from meeting the requirement to find employment).

- i. Support staff in creative problem solving to mitigate these barriers proactively, or offer them discretion to adjust the requirements so that they are more realistic.
 - ii. When clients fail to meet requirements, staff should approach the situation with curiosity rather than impunity, understanding that many factors are out of their control.
- b. To the extent possible, connect clients to community support before they leave the facility.

Rationale: PSPs worry that when the supports available at community corrections are no longer available to clients, they (PSPs) will shoulder this burden, despite often having limited themselves. About half of the participants indicated that they either did not know or did not feel confident in their loved one’s transition plan.

- i. Transition certain services (like health care) from in-house to community-based providers while the client is still living in the facility to establish relationships and troubleshoot any barriers.

- ii. Help clients to establish supports like food stamps and housing vouchers before moving out, as these applications can be confusing and time-consuming and approval can sometimes take a while.

4. **Create opportunities for PSPs to formalize their involvement with community corrections, both in client treatment planning and in organizational processes.**

Emphasize, however, that this type of engagement is neither required nor expected from PSPs. PSPs care about their loved ones' success in the program, but sometimes they feel unsure about how to best support them. Some participants explained that advocating for their loved ones' needs is a critical form of support they provide.

However, participants also explained that retaining control over whether, when, and how to be involved with community corrections is very important to them.

- a. Establish easily accessible communication channels (phone, email, etc.) and invite PSPs to express both concerns and positive feedback about their loved one.

Rationale: Some PSPs indicated that they were frustrated by a lack of communication with staff. However, participants who did have contact with staff had generally positive interactions.

- i. Educate PSPs on issues around confidentiality and explain that staff may not be able to provide specific information about clients, but this does not indicate a lack of trust in or appreciation for the PSP.
- ii. Invite PSPs to attend hybrid town hall-style meetings at regular intervals (e.g., quarterly) at a neutral location, such as a public library. These meetings should focus on organization-level feedback rather than individual clients. Provide brief, relevant organizational updates, followed

by ample time for questions and comments from PSPs. Consider allowing PSPs the opportunity to anonymously submit questions or comments ahead of time (all submissions are subject to screening).

- b. Create a position on the organization’s advisory board for a current or former PSP.

Rationale: Given that PSPs can be both heavily impacted by their loved one’s community corrections involvement *and* can provide critical support that ensure clients’ success, their perspectives should be represented when the organization evaluates its processes or prepares to make changes.

Conclusion

PSPs’ narratives show that the reach of community corrections extends beyond the individual client to shape the daily lives of those who love and support them. This project complicates existing understandings of community corrections by showing it can have multiple functions, which may be synergistic or competing. It also extends prior scholarship on responsabilization, demonstrating that it is not only clients who are “made responsible” for their own stability, but also their loved ones who shoulder the costs—both material and emotional—of that responsibility. And although the rehabilitative elements of community corrections provide clear and concrete benefits to clients (and sometimes to PSPs), these benefits are tempered by the fact that support is necessarily temporary.

This study has made important contributions to literature on social support, symbiotic harms, and experiences of people supporting justice-involved loved ones. PSPs understand, are affected by, and interact with, community corrections in unique and important ways that deepen our understanding of how the justice system can produce ripple effect—not just for clients, but

for their loved ones in the community. In this final chapter, I have discussed theoretical and empirical implications of these findings, in addition to highlighting what we still do not know. Given that this study is the first to focus on PSPs' experiences of supporting someone under community supervision, there is a great deal of research that is still needed. However, this study holds significance for community corrections agencies, in particular the one with whom I collaborated on this study. I have also used this chapter to detail some of the specific recommendations associated with my findings.

PSPs are in a unique position to see the justice system both as it presents itself and as it actually operates—they are impacted by it in many ways despite not having any formal involvement. Community corrections, while quite variable, has unique elements that shape the experiences of people in and around it into something substantively different than what they may experience in and around prison. But without hearing and understanding the stories of people who have experienced community corrections in some way, it is impossible to know exactly how this system functions—in individuals' lives, in the community, and in the broader criminal justice context. I am indescribably grateful to the participants who shared their stories with me and who trusted me to represent their perspectives in this dissertation in hopes that they might make a difference. Every person in the criminal justice system is connected, somehow, to the outside: they are someone's brother, aunt, friend, mentor, child. As we continue to build a more equitable and humane justice system, keeping this perspective centered—the PSP perspective—will ensure that we balance accountability with humanity and hope.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A. VERBAL RECRUITMENT SCRIPTS

Direct recruitment of PSPs, for use at family events or home visits

In conversational style, ...

Hello, my name is Anne and I am a researcher from Colorado State University in the Sociology department. We are conducting a research study on the programs at [NAME OF AGENCY]. Our goal is to help [NAME OF AGENCY] evaluate and improve the programming they offer to justice-involved people. The title of our project is *Evaluating and Building Gender-Responsive Community Corrections Programming in [NAME OF COUNTY]*. The Principal Investigator is Dr. Tara Opsal, professor of Sociology and I am the Student Investigator, Anne Uhlman, a Ph.D. student in the Sociology department. This study is funded by a Justice Assistance Grant offered through [STATE'S] Division of Criminal Justice.

We would like you to take an anonymous survey about your experience of knowing and supporting someone who is a client at [NAME OF AGENCY]. Participation will take approximately 20 minutes. After the survey, you will have the opportunity to share more about your experience by setting up an interview with a member of our research team. Your participation in this research is voluntary. If you decide to participate in the study, you may withdraw your consent and stop participation at any time without penalty.

Would you like to participate?

If yes: Provide flyer with link to survey.

If no: Thank you for your time.

Recruitment of PSPs *through clients*

In conversational style, ...

Hello, my name is Anne and I am a researcher from Colorado State University in the Sociology department. We are conducting a research study on the programs at [NAME OF AGENCY]. Our goal is to help [NAME OF AGENCY] evaluate and improve the programming they offer to justice-involved people. The title of our project is *Evaluating and Building Gender-Responsive Community Corrections Programming in [NAME OF COUNTY]*. The Principal Investigator is Dr. Tara Opsal, professor of Sociology and I am the Student Investigator, Anne Uhlman, a Ph.D. student in the Sociology department. This study is funded by a Justice Assistance Grant offered through [STATE'S] Division of Criminal Justice.

One part of this study involves learning more about the people outside of [NAME OF AGENCY] who care about someone who's serving a sentence here—perhaps a parent, a spouse, or a friend. This person would need to be at least 18 years old and provide some kind of support to you. We would like them to take an anonymous survey about their experience of knowing and supporting someone at [NAME OF AGENCY]. Participation will take approximately 20 minutes. After the survey, they will have the opportunity to share more about their experience by setting up an interview with a member of our research team. Participation in this research is voluntary and is not required by [NAME OF AGENCY] in any way. If they decide to participate in the study, they may withdraw their consent and stop participation at any time without penalty.

Do you have a loved one who might want to participate?

If yes: Provide flyer with link to survey, and/or provide envelope that they can address to PSP.

If no: Thank you for your time.



Colorado State University

Do you have a loved one at Com Cor?

We want to know about your experiences with [REDACTED]

What is this study about?

Researchers at CSU are conducting a study to understand the experiences of people with a loved one at [REDACTED]. Your participation will help improve the programming [REDACTED] offers justice-involved people and their loved ones.

What will I be asked to do?

You will be asked to take an online survey, which takes about 15 minutes. Afterward, you will have the opportunity to tell more about your experience by talking to a member of our research team.

Who can join this study?

You can participate in this study if you:
+ Are an adult (aged 18+), and
+ Provide some kind of support to a person serving a sentence at [REDACTED]

Questions?

Contact CSU IRB
970-491-1553
CSU_IRB@colostate.edu

Compensation

Participants who complete an interview after taking the survey will receive a \$20 gift card.



Evaluating and Building Gender- Responsive
Community Corrections Programming in [REDACTED]
County

Ready to join?
Go to [REDACTED]
or scan this code:

Please contact us for more information!

Anne Uhlman, MA (Student Investigator)
PhD Student, Department of Sociology
Anne.Uhlman@colostate.edu

Tara Opsal, PhD (Principal Investigator)
Associate Professor, Department of Sociology
Tara.Opsal@colostate.edu



APPENDIX C. RECRUITMENT FLYER – FINAL IRB AMENDMENT

Know someone at
Community
Corrections?



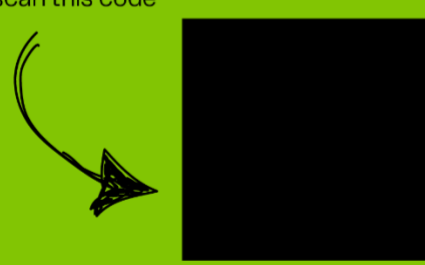
Tell us about your experience and earn a \$20 gift card!

Researchers at Colorado State University want to learn about what it's like for people who have a family member or friend at [REDACTED]. Your help can make programs better for people at [REDACTED] and for their families.

WHAT WILL YOU DO?
You will take an online survey that takes about 15 minutes. After that, you can talk to a researcher about your experiences if you want.

COMPENSATION
If you do an interview after the survey, you'll get a \$20 gift card.

READY TO TAKE THE SURVEY?
Go to [REDACTED] or scan this code



WHO CAN JOIN?
You can join if:
+ You are 18 or older, and
+ You have a friend or family member serving a sentence at [REDACTED]

QUESTIONS?
Contact CSU IRB
970-491-1553
CSU_IRB@colostate.edu

WANT MORE INFO? EMAIL US!

Anne Uhlman, MA (Student Investigator) PhD Candidate, Department of Sociology Anne.Uhlman@colostate.edu	Tara Opsal, PhD (Principal Investigator) Professor, Department of Sociology Tara.Opsal@colostate.edu
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Study title: Evaluating and Building Gender- Responsive Community Corrections Programming in [REDACTED]

APPENDIX D. RECRUITMENT LETTER – FIRST IRB PROTOCOL

My name is Tara Opsal and I am researcher from Colorado State University in the Sociology department. I am part of a CSU team conducting research on the experiences of women who have been involved in the justice system through [NAME OF AGENCY]. The project is called “Evaluating and Building Gender-Responsive Community Corrections Programming in [NAME OF COUNTY]” and one of the most important goals we have is to work with [NAME OF AGENCY] to make improvements to their programming so they can better meet the needs of people who are serving out a sentence there.

I am contacting you because I’d like to invite you to participate in this study. You’re being invited because you have a friend or family member who is serving out a sentence at [NAME OF AGENCY] and they have identified you as an important person in their lives who provides them with critical forms of support. This means that you bring a unique perspective to our research because you have important insight about your loved one’s experience in the justice system, at [NAME OF AGENCY] more specifically, as well as their concerns and excitements about finishing their sentence.

Would you like to participate? If so, participation means talking with me or another member of our CSU research team for no more than two hours at a location we agree on—we could also talk via phone or virtually. If you decide you would like to participate, you will be compensated for your time with a \$20 Visa gift card.

As you consider whether you’d like to participate, keep in mind these things:

- First: Participating is completely voluntary and brings no consequence or benefit for your loved one who is serving time at [NAME OF AGENCY]. If you decide to participate in the study, you can stop participating at any time and there will be absolutely no consequences—these decisions are 100% up to you.
- Second: Everything you share with the CSU research team during these interviews are completely confidential. This means that when I share the results of the research study, all individual names of participants are removed as well as any other information that could identify you. No reference will be made in written or oral materials that could link you to this study.
- Finally: There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this study; however, the research findings will help to inform the new women’s program model at [NAME OF AGENCY] as well as programming in community corrections more broadly and therefore your input is very valuable. There are no known risks associated with participating in this study.

If you have any questions about this research or would like to participate, please contact me at 970-491-5438 or Tara.Opsal@colostate.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, you can also contact the Colorado State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) at: 970-491-1381, or e-mail RICRO_IRB@mail.colostate.edu.

Thanks for considering the request.

APPENDIX E. RECRUITMENT LETTER – FINAL IRB AMENDMENT

My name is Tara Opsal, and I'm a researcher at Colorado State University in the Sociology department. My team is conducting a study on people's experiences with [NAME OF AGENCY]. The study is called "Evaluating and Building Gender-Responsive Community Corrections Programming in [NAME OF COUNTY]." We want to help [NAME OF AGENCY] improve their programs to better meet the needs of people serving a sentence there.

I'm reaching out to invite you to be part of this study. You were chosen because someone you care about is serving a sentence at [NAME OF AGENCY], and they said you are an important person who supports them. This means you have a special point of view that can help us understand what people go through at [NAME OF AGENCY] and how this might affect their loved ones.

Would you like to participate? If so, you can start by taking an online survey that takes about 15 minutes. At the end of the survey, it will ask if you would like to be interviewed by a member of our research team to share more about your experience. If you complete an interview, you will receive a \$20 gift card as a thank-you for your time.

Here are a few important things to know:

1. Joining the study is 100% your choice. It will not affect your loved one's time at [NAME OF AGENCY]. If you join, you can stop any time and there will be no consequences.
2. Everything you tell us is private. No one at [NAME OF AGENCY] will know whether or not you participate, and when we share the results, we won't use your name or any details that could identify you.
3. You won't get direct benefits from this study, but your input will help improve programs at [NAME OF AGENCY] and other community corrections programs.

To take the survey, visit [SURVEY LINK] or scan the code on the flyer that's attached. If you have any questions, please contact me at 970-491-5438 or at Tara.Opsal@colostate.edu. You can also contact the Colorado State University Institutional Review Board at 970-491-1553 or CSU_IRB@mail.colostate.edu if you have questions about your rights as a volunteer.

Thank you for considering this invitation!

Tara Opsal
Professor of Sociology
Colorado State University

APPENDIX F. RECRUITMENT EMAIL TEMPLATE FOR AGENCY STAFF

This message is from researchers at Colorado State University who are not affiliated with [NAME OF AGENCY]. Please do not reply directly to this email. Instead, contact Anne Uhlman (Anne.Uhlman@colostate.edu) or Tara Opsal (Tara.Opsal@colostate.edu) for more information.

Do you have a loved one at Com Cor? We want to know about your experiences with [NAME OF AGENCY]!

What is this study about?

Researchers at CSU are conducting a study to understand the experiences of people with a loved one at [NAME OF AGENCY]. Your participation will help improve the programming [NAME OF AGENCY] offers justice-involved people and their loved ones.

What will I be asked to do?

You will be asked to take an online survey, which takes about 15 minutes. Afterward, you will have the opportunity to tell us more about your experience by talking to a member of our research team.

Who can join this study?

You can participate in this study if you:

- Are an adult (aged 18+), and
- Provide some kind of support to a person serving a sentence at [NAME OF AGENCY]

Compensation

Participants who complete an interview after taking the survey will receive a \$20 gift card.

Title of study: Evaluating and Building Gender- Responsive Community Corrections Programming in [NAME OF COUNTY]

Ready to join?

Go to: [SURVEY LINK] or scan this code:



Please contact us for more information!

Anne Uhlman, MA (Student Investigator)
PhD Student, Department of Sociology
Anne.Uhlman@colostate.edu

Tara Opsal, PhD (Principal Investigator)
Associate Professor, Department of Sociology
Tara.Opsal@colostate.edu

APPENDIX G. CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE (INTERVIEW) – FIRST IRB PROTOCOL

Title of Study: Evaluating and Building Gender-Responsive Community Corrections Programming in [NAME OF COUNTY]

Principal Investigator: Tara Opsal, Associate Professor, PhD, Colorado State University

Student Investigator: Anne Uhlman, MA

Sponsor: Justice Assistance Grant, Bureau of Justice Assistance

What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of this research is to help [NAME OF AGENCY] evaluate the work that they are doing with clients and help them make improvements so that they can better meet the needs of people who are serving out a sentence there.

What will I be asked to do?

For no more than two hours, at a mutually agreed upon location, we will talk about your experiences with and attitudes towards [NAME OF AGENCY]. More specifically, the interview will involve questions about existing programming at [NAME OF AGENCY], your experience with having a loved one in the program, and opportunities for resources and support for justice-involved people in [NAME OF COUNTY]. If you don't want to answer any of the questions that I ask, you can just request that we move on. With your permission, I will audiotape the interview. I prefer to record the interview because it helps me ensure that I accurately record the information you provide. I expect to conduct only one interview; however, there is a small chance I may request a follow-up with you to clarify or hear more about something we talk about today.

Do I have to take part in the study?

Your participation in this research is **completely voluntary** and in no way associated with your loved one's sentence that they may be serving through [NAME OF AGENCY]. If you decide to participate in the study, you may withdraw and stop participating at any time and there will be absolutely no consequences—these decisions are 100% up to you.

Why am I being invited to take part in this research?

You are being asked to participate in the study because you provide support to someone who is serving a sentence at [NAME OF AGENCY]. Because of this, you have an important perspective about the services [NAME OF AGENCY] provides and how they can improve.

What are the possible risks, discomforts, or benefits of participating in this research?

There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this study; however, the research findings will help to inform the new program model at the [NAME OF AGENCY] and therefore your input is very valuable. There are no known risks associated with participating in this study; however, as with all research, there is a chance that confidentiality could be compromised. As outlined next, though, I am taking several precautions to minimize this risk.

Who will see the information that I give?

All the information we talk about will be kept in the strictest confidence. When we share the results of the interviews with [NAME OF AGENCY], individual names will be removed as well as any other information that identifies you. This means that no reference will be made in written or oral materials that could link you to this study. Additionally, we will assign a number to your data, and this replaces your name in our records so that the only place your name will appear in our records is on this consent form and in our data that links you to your code. All of the information we collect from you will be kept in a password protected and secure cloud-based storage system. It's possible that we may be asked to share the research records with CSU Institutional Review Board which is a committee who regularly reviews research to help ensure the protection of the people who choose to participate.

Will I receive any compensation for taking part in this study?

You will be compensated for participating in this research. Specifically, you will receive a \$20 gift card at the beginning of your first interview.

What if I have questions?

Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the study, please ask any questions that might come to mind now. Later, if you have questions about the study, you can contact us at 970-491- 5438 or Tara.Opsal@colostate.edu. If you have any questions about your rights or treatment as a research participant in this study, please contact the Colorado State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) at: 970-491-1553, or e-mail CSU_IRB@mail.colostate.edu .

Participant Consent:

Your signature acknowledges that you have read the information stated and voluntarily wish to participate in this research. Your signature also acknowledges that you have received, on the date signed, a copy of this document containing 2 pages.

Do you consent for your interview to be audiotaped?

Yes

No

Signature of person agreeing to take part in the study

Date

Printed name of person agreeing to take part in the study

Name of person providing information to participant

Date

Signature of Research Staff

APPENDIX H. CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE (INTERVIEW) – FINAL IRB AMENDMENT

**Title of Study: Evaluating and Building Gender-Responsive
Community Corrections Programming in [NAME OF COUNTY]**

Principal Investigator: Tara Opsal, Associate Professor, PhD, Colorado State University

Student Investigator: Anne Uhlman, MA

Sponsor: Justice Assistance Grant, Bureau of Justice Assistance

Why are we doing this study?

We want to help [NAME OF AGENCY] understand how they are helping people. This will help them make changes to do a better job helping people who are finishing their sentence there.

What are you asking me to do?

We will talk for up to two hours at a place we both agree on. We will talk about your thoughts and experiences with [NAME OF AGENCY]. I will ask about the programs they have, your experience with someone you know in the program, and what help is available for people involved in the justice system. You don't have to answer any question you don't want to. Just let me know, and we will move on to the next question. I would like to record our talk with your permission. Recording helps me keep track of everything you say. I think one interview is enough, but I might ask to talk again later if I need to understand something better.

Do I have to join the study?

No, you do not have to join the study if you don't want to. It is your choice. Your choice will not affect your loved one's sentence. You can also change your mind and stop at any time without any problems.

Why was I asked to join the study?

You were asked because you support someone serving a sentence at [NAME OF AGENCY]. You have an important view on how the program works and how it can improve.

Are there any risks or benefits to joining the study?

There are no direct benefits to you. But the information you give could help improve the programs at [NAME OF AGENCY]. There are no known risks. However, we will keep your information private to reduce any chance of it being shared with others.

Who will see my information?

Everything we talk about will stay private. When we share what we learn with [NAME OF AGENCY], we won't include your name or anything that identifies you. Your data will have a number instead of your name. We will store everything securely in a password-protected cloud system. Colorado State University might check our records to make sure we are protecting everyone who joins the study.

Will I get paid for joining the study?

Yes, you will get a \$20 gift card at the start of the interview.

What if I have questions?

If you have any questions now or later, please call us at 970-491-5438 or email Tara.Opsal@colostate.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, you can contact Colorado State University's Institutional Review Board at 970-491-1553 or email CSU_IRB@mail.colostate.edu.

Do you agree to have your interview recorded?

Yes

No

Signature of person agreeing to take part in the study

Date

Printed name of person agreeing to take part in the study

Name of person providing information to participant

Date

Signature of Research Staff

APPENDIX I. CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE (SURVEY) – FIRST IRB PROTOCOL

**Consent to Participate in a Research Study
Colorado State University**

**Title of Study: Evaluating and Building Gender-Responsive
Community Corrections Programming in [NAME OF COUNTY]**

Principal Investigator: Tara Opsal, Associate Professor, PhD, Colorado State University

Student Investigator: Anne Uhlman, MA

Sponsor: Justice Assistance Grant, Bureau of Justice Assistance

What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of this research is to help [NAME OF AGENCY] evaluate the work that they are doing with clients and help them make improvements so that they can better meet the needs of people who are serving out a sentence there.

What will I be asked to do?

We would like you to take a survey about your experiences with and attitudes towards [NAME OF AGENCY]. More specifically, the survey will involve questions about your interactions with [NAME OF AGENCY], your experience with having a loved one in the program, and opportunities for resources and support for justice-involved people in [NAME OF COUNTY]. If you don't want to answer any of the questions we ask, you may skip them. The survey will take approximately 30 minutes. At the end of the survey, we will ask if you would like to meet with a member of our research team to tell us more about your experience in an interview.

Do I have to take part in the study?

Your participation in this research is **completely voluntary** and in no way associated with your loved one's sentence that they may be serving through [NAME OF AGENCY]. [NAME OF AGENCY] will **not** know whether or not you have participated in this study. If you decide to participate in the study, you may withdraw and stop participating at any time and there will be absolutely no consequences—these decisions are 100% up to you.

Why am I being invited to take part in this research?

You are being asked to participate in the study because you provide support to someone who is serving a sentence at [NAME OF AGENCY]. Because of this, you have an important perspective about the services [NAME OF AGENCY] provides and how they can improve.

What are the possible risks, discomforts, or benefits of participating in this research?

There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this study; however, the research findings will help to inform the new program model at the [NAME OF AGENCY] and therefore your input is very valuable. There are no known risks associated with participating in this study; however, as with all research, there is a chance that confidentiality could be compromised. As outlined next, though, I am taking several precautions to minimize this risk.

Who will see the information that I give?

All the information you provide in this survey will be kept in the strictest confidence. We will not collect any information in this survey that identifies you, including your name. All of the information we collect from you will be kept in a password protected and secure cloud-based storage system. It's possible that we may be asked to share the research records with CSU Institutional Review Board which is a committee who regularly reviews research to help ensure the protection of the people who choose to participate.

Will I receive any compensation for taking part in this study?

No, we are not able to provide compensation for completing this survey. If you choose to meet with us for an interview at a later date, you will receive a \$20 gift card at the beginning of your interview.

What if I have questions?

If you have questions about the study, you can contact us at 970-491- 5438 or Tara.Opsal@colostate.edu. If you have any questions about your rights or treatment as a research participant in this study, please contact the Colorado State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) at: 970-491-1553, or e-mail CSU_IRB@mail.colostate.edu .

Participant Consent:

By clicking "I agree," you acknowledge that you have read the information above and voluntarily wish to participate in this research. You also acknowledge that you have had the opportunity to save and print, on the date signed, a copy of this document containing 2 pages.

Note: If participant clicks "I do not agree," they will not be able to access the survey, and they will instead see a message stating "Thank you for your time."

APPENDIX J. INTERVIEW GUIDE

As the interviews are designed to be semi-structured, these guides serve as just that—guides.

Background Questions

I'd like to begin by talking about you and your connection with _____.

Tell me about your relationship with _____

Potential probes:

- How are you connected to them?
- How long have you known them?
- How would you describe the quality of your relationship today?

Understanding the dimensions of support

Today, we're going to chat a lot about your opinions about _____ experiences at [NAME OF AGENCY]. We'll also chat a lot about YOUR experiences supporting _____ while they've served out their sentence there. But, first, just a couple of general questions.

- What kinds of support have you provided to _____ while they've served their sentence?
 - Ask specifically about: emotional (expressions of love, caring, trust); informational (advice and information about resources, jobs, housing); instrumental (tangible and material resources like providing a car, a house, money); and social (companionship and fun)
 - What kinds of challenges have you experienced providing these kinds of support?
 - Do you feel like you've been able to meet _____ expectations?
- In turn, what kinds of support has _____ provided to you while they've served their sentence?
 - Ask specifically about: emotional (expressions of love, caring, trust); informational (advice and information about resources, jobs, housing); instrumental (tangible and material resources like providing a car, a house, money); and social (companionship and fun)
 - What kinds of things have made it challenging for _____ to provide support to you?
- Where else do you think _____ is receiving support from that has been important to them while they've been serving their sentence? (probe for who and types of support)
- What about you? Supporting someone going through a lot can be a lot. Where do you receive support that you think is most helpful to you?

General Perception of [NAME OF AGENCY]

Now I'd like to hear about some of the things that you think are the strengths and weaknesses of [NAME OF AGENCY]. This might be things that you've heard about through your loved one or, alternatively, opinions you've developed on your own—I'd like to hear about both of these.

Based on your observations of _____ experiences and your own experiences with [NAME OF AGENCY], how would you describe its overall purpose?

- So, let's start with what you think has gone well for your loved one at [NAME OF AGENCY].
 - Probe for specific examples and probe specifically across these areas: (staff; other client interaction; transition planning; programming; addressing needs)
 - Probe quite deeply around: visitation (what have internal and external visitation looked like; what was it like getting permission to visit; what challenges arose; what made things easy; have you had enough time?)
- Now let's chat about what things [NAME OF AGENCY] got wrong or missed.
 - Probe for specific examples and probe specifically across these areas: (staff; other client interaction; transition planning; programming; addressing needs; visitation)
 - For non-res clients: Probe around PSP's feelings about client "readiness"

Transition Planning

- Non-residential clients
 - What did the transition back to the community look like?
 - What needs of you and your loved one were addressed?
 - What needs of you and your loved one were unaddressed?
 - What connections did _____ make in the community to help with the transition?
 - How could the staff better supported YOU during this transition time?
 - Probe specifically for non-res clients: Probe around PSP's feelings about client "readiness" to transition (how were they ready/not ready, what resources were missing)
- Residential clients
 - What is your understanding of the transition plan in place?
 - What needs do you think need to be addressed prior to transitioning out of the facility?
 - What needs do you think have been addressed?
 - Do you feel like _____ has been well-connected to community resources they need (which ones)?
 - How do you hope that staff helps make the transition smoother for you and for _____?

I'm curious if you've noticed any changes to _____ experience in the program over time?

- Did it get easier? Harder? Why?
 - Probe specifically around this for non-res clients (did leaving make things harder/easier how and why)
- Did your loved one ever express concerns about safety to you?

What about your relationship with _____. Has it changed over time (specifically: gotten better or worse and why/how/when)?

What about _____ relationships with other family members or friends? Do you believe these relationships have gotten better or worse since _____ has been in the [NAME OF AGENCY] program?

- Probe at length around children (how has the relationship changed or not-how and why; do you think the client was able to engage with their children enough? How?)

Based on everything we've talked about, if you could change one thing about how [NAME OF AGENCY] has responded to _____ what would you change and why?

Your own direct experiences with [NAME OF AGENCY]

Tell me about your own involvement with [NAME OF AGENCY] during _____ sentence.

Potential probes

- What kinds of communication have you had with staff?
- What kind of expectations has [NAME OF AGENCY] had of you?
- How do you believe your involvement as a support person affects _____ experiences at [NAME OF AGENCY]?
- How has or does _____ involvement in [NAME OF AGENCY] affect your own day-to-day life?
- One of the purposes of [NAME OF AGENCY] is to help _____ be successful in the community. Do you feel like [NAME OF AGENCY] has provided you with any help or resources that have made your life better?
 - What kinds of resources have they offered to you? Did you use these resources?
Were the resources accessible?
- One of the purposes of [NAME OF AGENCY] is to supervise or monitor _____. Has this supervision had impacts on you?
- Do you think [NAME OF AGENCY] has been a good alternative to prison for your loved one? Why/not?
- Have you had experience with community corrections in the past? If so, how has your experience interacting with staff and the program been different?

What else would you like to share with me today about your loved one, your own experiences, or [NAME OF AGENCY]?

APPENDIX K. SURVEY INSTRUMENT

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

First, we have some questions about you.

1. How old are you?
2. What is your gender? (*select all that apply*)
 - Woman
 - Man
 - Transgender
 - Non-conforming
 - My gender is not listed here (please describe)
3. What is your race? (*select all that apply*)
 - White
 - Black or African American
 - American Indian or Alaska Native
 - Asian
 - Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
4. Do you identify as Hispanic or Latino/a?
 - Yes
 - No
5. What is your primary language?
 - English
 - Spanish
 - Other (please describe)
6. Please estimate your annual household income:
 - \$0-\$24,999
 - \$25,000-\$49,999
 - \$50,000-\$74,999
 - \$75,000-\$99,999
 - \$100,000-\$149,999
 - \$150,000+
7. What is your highest level of education?
 - Did not complete high school
 - High school diploma or GED
 - Some college
 - Bachelors degree
 - Masters degree or above
8. Are you currently employed?

- Yes
- No

9. Do you receive any government assistance, such as TANF, WIC, food stamps, Medicaid, disability payments, or housing support?

- Yes
- No

10. How many people live at your home, including yourself?

11. How many of the people who live at your home are less than 18 years old?

12. Have you ever been convicted of a felony?

- Yes
- No

13. Do you live in [NAME OF COUNTY]?

- Yes
- No

Now we have some questions about your loved one who is serving a sentence at [NAME OF AGENCY].

14. How old is the person you are helping to support while they are serving a sentence at [NAME OF AGENCY]?

15. What is the gender of the person serving a sentence at [NAME OF AGENCY]?

- Woman
- Man
- Transgender
- Non-conforming
- My gender is not listed here (please describe)

16. What is the race of the person serving a sentence at [NAME OF AGENCY]? (*select all that apply*)

- White
- Black or African American
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander

17. Does the person serving a sentence at [NAME OF AGENCY] identify as Hispanic or Latino/a?

- Yes
- No

18. Please describe your relationship to the person serving a sentence at [NAME OF AGENCY]. I am the person's:

- Parent or legal guardian
- Sibling
- Spouse or partner
- Child
- Grandparent
- Friend
- Coworker
- Other

19. Approximately how long has your loved one been at [NAME OF AGENCY]?

- Less than one month
- Between one and six months
- More than six months
- I don't know

20. My loved one is currently serving a

- Residential sentence
- Non-residential sentence
- I don't know

Now we have some questions about your personal opinions and experiences with [NAME OF AGENCY].

21. What kind(s) of support do you provide to the person serving a sentence at [NAME OF AGENCY]? (*select all that apply*)

- Financial support (some examples include putting money in commissary, providing cash)
- Instrumental support (some examples include providing childcare, giving rides to get some place, providing meals)
- Emotional support (some examples include providing supportive listening, offering advice, sending notes of encouragement, etc...)
- Social support (some examples include having fun, hanging out, spending quality time together)
- Spiritual or religious (examples include praying for or with the person, studying spiritual/religious texts with the person, observing spiritual/religious practices or holidays with the person, etc.)
- Something not listed here (please describe)

22. How difficult do each of the following items make it for you to support the person serving a sentence at [NAME OF AGENCY]?

	Very difficult	Somewhat difficult	Moderately difficult	Slightly difficult	Not difficult at all
Financial strain/burden	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Emotional strain/burden	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Time commitment or scheduling problems	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Judgement, discrimination, or unfair treatment from other people	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My difficulty attending work or school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My struggles with mental health or substance use	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lack of support from [NAME OF AGENCY]	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Another reason not listed here (please describe)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

23. What kinds of requirements have you received from [NAME OF AGENCY]? *(select all that apply)*

- Home visits/inspections from case managers
- Signing a sponsor agreement
- Getting a landline
- Agreeing to a background check
- Going to couples/family counseling with the person serving a sentence
- Other (please describe)
- I have not received any requirements from [NAME OF AGENCY]

24. If you have received requirements from [NAME OF AGENCY], how much are you/were you involved in deciding what is required from you?

- I was not involved at all- [NAME OF AGENCY] made all the decisions
- I was a little involved
- I was moderately involved
- I was very involved
- I made all the decisions

25. In your experience, how difficult do you believe each of these items make it for the person serving a sentence at [NAME OF AGENCY] to successfully transition back home? *(select all that apply)*

	Very difficult	Somewhat difficult	Moderately difficult	Slightly difficult	Not difficult at all
[NAME OF AGENCY]'s restrictions or disciplinary processes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
[NAME OF AGENCY]'s requirements of me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
[NAME OF AGENCY]'s requirements of the person serving the sentence	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

[NAME OF AGENCY]'s visitation policies	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Dangerous or unhealthy relationships between the client and people in the community	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
[NAME OF AGENCY] not being supportive of my relationship with the person serving a sentence	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Unstable housing, employment, or basic needs for the person serving a sentence once they are on non-res status	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Another reason not listed here	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

26. What kinds of services or support would be helpful for YOU to receive from [NAME OF AGENCY]? *(select all that apply)*

- Assistance finding housing
- Family counseling or therapy
- The opportunity to participate in the client's program or treatment plan
- Individual mental health or substance use support for myself
- Referral to community services (SummitStone, Larimer Co. Food Bank, Medicaid etc.)
- Informational session(s) about [NAME OF AGENCY] and its requirements
- Something not mentioned here (describe: _____)
- I do not want services or support from [NAME OF AGENCY].

27. I believe the central purpose of [NAME OF AGENCY] is to: (rank order)

- Provide treatment services.
- Control the actions of the person serving a sentence.
- Supervise or keep tabs on the person serving a sentence.
- Help the person sentenced come back successfully to the community
- Care for the person sentenced during a challenging time

28. I get to visit the person serving a sentence at [NAME OF AGENCY] as much as I want to.

- Completely agree
- Mostly agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Mostly disagree
- Completely disagree

29. How difficult do each of these items make it for you to visit the person serving a sentence at [NAME OF AGENCY]?

	Very difficult	Somewhat difficult	Moderately difficult	Slightly difficult	Not difficult at all
The available times for visits don't work with my schedule	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The person serving a sentence does not want me to visit	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I do not have reliable transportation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I do not understand how visitation works	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I struggle to find child care	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I cannot afford to miss work	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
There have not been opportunities to visit	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Another reason not listed here (please describe)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Two final questions!

30. How did you hear about this survey?

- [NAME OF AGENCY] staff member
- The person serving a sentence at [NAME OF AGENCY]
- CSU research team member
- [NAME OF AGENCY] home visit
- [NAME OF AGENCY] family event (holiday party, gift exchange, etc.)
- A flyer I received in the mail
- Warrant clearance event
- Other

31. Do you have more to share about these topics? If so, we'd love to have the opportunity to chat with you! We are recruiting participants to tell us more about their experience with [NAME OF AGENCY] in a private interview with a researcher from Colorado State University (either in person or via phone/Zoom). [NAME OF AGENCY] will not be

made aware of whether or not you have participated in this study. Participants who allow us to interview them will receive a \$20 gift card to a local store.

- Yes, I am interested in talking to a researcher to share more about my experience.
 - Please enter the phone number or email address you would like us to use to contact you: _____
- No, I do not want to share any more about my experience.

If you have any questions about this study, including what to expect from an interview, please contact Dr. Tara Opsal (Principal Investigator) at Tara.Opsal@colostate.edu OR Anne Uhlman (Student Investigator) at Anne.Uhlman@colostate.edu

APPENDIX L. CODEBOOK

Name	Description
Dimensions of Support	Descriptions of the support exchanged between the PSP and the client, as well as support received from other sources. This includes type of support, how (logistically) it is provided, and anything else related to support or the lack thereof.
Other support-related things	Aside from specific forms of support, this code refers to anything else the PSP mentions regarding support.
Other sources-client	Sources OTHER THAN THE PSP from which the client receives any type of support. Also includes references to the lack of other sources of support (i.e., the PSP is the only source of support for the client).
Other sources-PSP	Sources OTHER THAN THE CLIENT from which the PSP receives any type of support. Also includes references to the lack of other sources of support (i.e., the client is the only source of support for the PSP, or the PSP does not receive support from anyone).
Peer influence	PSPs' perspectives on whether the client's peers at ComCor are helpful, harmful, both, or neither.
Support provided	Types of support that the PSP provides to the client. This includes any reference to what the type of support looks like, why they give it, don't give it, what they wish they could give, what's easy/hard about it, etc.
Emotional	Emotional support (some examples include providing supportive listening, offering advice, sending notes of encouragement, etc...) that the PSP provides to the client.
Boundary-setting	Supporting the client by setting clear, consistent boundaries in the relationship (i.e., explaining what the PSP will/can and will not/cannot do for the client). The boundary-setting is seen as benefitting the client or the relationship even if it is uncomfortable for one or both parties.
Financial or instrumental	Financial support (some examples include providing cash, helping with expenses) or instrumental support (some examples include providing childcare, giving rides to get some place, providing meals, clothing, or hygiene products) that the PSP provides to the client.
Informational	Informational support informational (examples include giving advice and information about resources, jobs, housing) that the PSP provides to the client.
Social	Social support (some examples include having fun, hanging out, spending quality time together) that the PSP provides to the client.
Support received	Types of support that the PSP receives from the client. This includes any reference to what the type of support looks like, why they give it, don't give it, what they wish they could give, what's easy/hard about it, etc.

Name	Description
Emotional	Emotional support (some examples include providing supportive listening, offering advice, sending notes of encouragement, etc...) that the PSP receives from the client.
Financial or instrumental	Financial support (some examples include providing cash, helping with expenses) or instrumental support (some examples include providing childcare, giving rides to get some place, providing meals, clothing, or hygiene products) that the PSP receives from the client.
Informational	Informational support informational (examples include giving advice and information about resources, jobs, housing) that the PSP receives from the client.
Social	Social support (some examples include having fun, hanging out, spending quality time together) that the PSP receives from the client.
Dissertation themes	Findings relevant to dissertation research questions
RQ1 Purpose of Comcor	Findings that relate to RQ1: How do PSPs conceptualize the role of community corrections in the context of the criminal justice system?
Carceral logics	Illustrations of carceral logics in community corrections or in the CJ system more broadly, which shape the PSP's understanding of how and why ComCor functions the way it does. Specifically, this includes: punishment as solution (to harmful behaviors and social disorder); state control and authority; and criminalization of non-conforming behavior.
Rationalizing through archetypes	PSPs rationalize or defend the existence of the justice system by identifying a "criminal" or type of person who needs to be controlled by it. This is almost never the PSP's loved one and may also reference the fact that the PSP has not seen these people firsthand.
Rehabilitation and reintegration	ComCor exists to help people overcome problems (rehabilitate), often recognizing that those problems led to justice involvement. Or, it exists to help people reintegrate into the community after serving a prison/jail sentence. Sometimes it helps them reintegrate by addressing problems directly caused by their justice involvement.
Responsibilization and intermediate punishment	ComCor functions to encourage clients to take accountability for their lives, choices, and behaviors, with the understanding that doing so will decrease criminal behavior and increase a productive/industrious presence in the community. Sometimes this is communicated directly, or sometimes it is done through threatening harsher treatment (i.e., intermediate punishment as deterrence).
Sabotage, profiteering, and retributive logics	ComCor is meant to either set clients up to fail or make money for the CJ system. This may not be an explicitly stated goal of the system. The goal of setting clients up to fail is often, but not necessarily, punitive.

Name	Description
RQ2 Symbiotic Effects	Material relevant to RQ2: How do PSPs experience symbiotic effects (harms, benefits, or neutral impacts) as a result of their loved one serving a sentence through community corrections?
Emotional impacts on PSP	Descriptions of the way PSPs are emotionally affected by providing support to, or maintaining a relationship with, their loved one in ComCor.
Support is life-saving	The PSP is emotionally impacted by knowing that the support they providing is literally saving the client's life (usually, this is an explicit reference to believing that the client would intentionally or unintentionally kill themselves without external support).
Support is necessary for success	PSPs are emotionally impacted by knowing that the support they provide is necessary for the client to succeed. This can create negative emotional impacts (e.g., stress or guilt), or positive impacts (e.g., gratification or pride).
Financial impacts on PSP	Describes the PSP's experience of being financially affected by the support they provide to the client.
Social impacts on PSP	How providing support affects the PSP's social and professional life, relationships, and interactions with others. This includes but is not limited to feelings of stigma, judgment, and shame.
Time burden and subjugation of the self	Providing support to a ComCor client requires a significant time commitment, or it requires compliance with a rigid schedule that otherwise interferes with the PSP's life. This may lead the PSP to feel that they cannot prioritize their own needs, they lack control, or they have to "put their life on hold."
RQ3 Relationships	Codes relevant to RQ3: How do PSPs navigate relationships with their loved ones in the criminal justice system?
Relationship changes	Any reference to or description of how and whether the relationship between the PSP and the client has changed during their time at ComCor. This can include barriers of support that directly affect the quality of the relationship.
Surveillance and liability	Any reference to or description of monitoring or surveillance on the PSP, even if it does not directly impact the PSP. Includes the idea that the PSP is some sort of liability for the client or that the PSP could do something to jeopardize the client's success at ComCor.
Tension in role expectation	The PSP expresses feeling uncomfortable with the expectations of them as a support. Sometimes this is due to competing/conflicting expectations from different stakeholders (e.g., the client vs. ComCor staff). It may also be due to the fact that they do not believe the expected support/relationship to the client would be beneficial to the client.

Name	Description
Advocacy	Direct or indirect support that the PSP provides to their loved one by articulating, communicating, and "fighting for" the client's needs, without directly meeting that need themselves. Example: Calling a case manager to explain that the client needs transportation to medical appointments is advocacy. Providing transportation to appointments is not. This includes more general advocacy for people in the client's position, such as participating in the study to improve the lives of others.
Impact of support on client	How supporting at LCCC affects the client's experience of community corrections and/or how it affects their life more broadly, from the PSP's perspective. Sometimes this is framed as how things might look different if the PSP were not providing support to the client. DOES NOT INCLUDE references to the fact that support is life-saving or necessary for success-- those are coded in "Emotional impacts on PSP"
LCCC rules, policies, and procedures	Anything related to the practical and logistic functioning of LCCC, as well as any reference to "community corrections" broadly that is actually specific to LCCC. **Data within these codes may be multiply coded elsewhere, but I am keeping them here to facilitate compiling the agency report.**
PSP involvement with LCCC	Anything related to PSPs' relationship with, involvement in, or requirements from LCCC.
Strengths of LCCC	Outside of facilitating support or connection, any reference to a quality, program offering, etc. that is working well or that is a strength of LCCC.
Support, connection, and visitation	Anything related to how support, connection, or visitation at LCCC.
Transition planning	Anything related to the process of preparing for community re-entry.
Connections	Social or community support connections that were intentionally made as part of the transition planning process.
Elements of the transition plan	Anything related to PSPs' understanding of the plan for the client to re-enter the community (or the lack of a plan).
Support during transition	Anything related to support that is provided during the transition process (to PSP or client; from anyone).
Weaknesses of LCCC	Outside of facilitating support or connection, any reference to a quality, program offering, etc. that is not working well or that is a weakness of LCCC.