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The NetWork for Better Futures

Final Evaluation Report for the Minnesota Department of Corrections

June 2009



CONTRIBUTING TO A SAFER MINNESOTA

Prepared by

the **ImproveGroup**



June 2009

The NetWork for Better Futures Evaluation: Final Report

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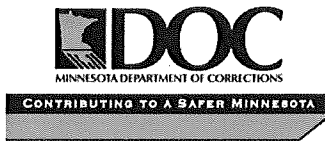
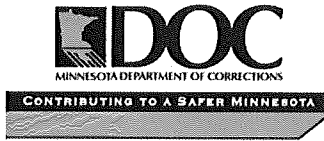


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Executive Summary

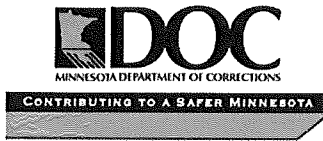
In 2007, the Minnesota State Legislature allocated a portion of the State Department of Corrections release program dollars to a demonstration project called the “High Risk Adult Demonstration Project” proposed by a new non-profit venture called The NetWork for Better Futures (the NetWork). The NetWork proposed a holistic, community-based approach to help a target group of offenders who are historically at high risk for re-offending. The NetWork project has an integrated approach addressing needs in five core areas: housing, behavioral health, health care, short term employment and family/community reengagement.

In addition to allocating dollars to support this demonstration project, the Legislature also required and funded an evaluation of the NetWork program. The Minnesota Department of Corrections (DOC) contracted for an independent evaluation with the Improve Group, to design and conduct the evaluation. The evaluation aims to assess the effectiveness of the High-Risk Adult Demonstration Project by examining the extent to which services were delivered to project participants and whether these services had an impact on outcome measures such as housing, employment, participation in treatment programs and criminal activity. This report is the final report for this evaluation.

The following summarizes the preliminary findings described in greater detail in this final report.

Enrollment

Most (7 in 10) participant referrals come from the Department of Corrections. The NetWork has a goal of enrolling and serving 180 DOC-eligible men by July 2009. Through June 1, 2009, the NetWork reported working with 180 current or former men who are DOC-eligible. Of the 149 participants who are the subject of this report (enrolled through the end of March 2009), NetWork records indicate that 55 participants (37% of participants) continue to be active with



the NetWork, while 94 (63% of participants) are now inactive.¹ The biggest single reason (34% of reasons recorded) for men becoming inactive with the NetWork is “self-termination” or leaving the NetWork.

Employment and Economic Contributions

Most (91%) of active participants are employed, according to NetWork records. About one-half of these participants work for the NetWork with the Better Futures crew. Both recent and longer-term participants of the NetWork work for Better Futures; the average length of time with the NetWork for those employed by Better Futures is 269 days, compared with 187 days for those employed by other entities. A minority of participants (38%) work 35 or more hours a week. Participants (both active and those subsequently reincarcerated) report that employment is a major challenge and pressure upon release, and the ability to get work through the NetWork’s Better Futures work crew is a vital resource.

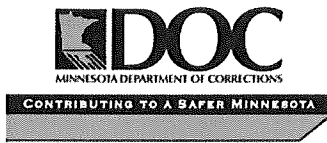
Housing

On surveys, 95% of participants said they lived in housing provided by the NetWork and three-quarters of these participants are getting help on their rent from the NetWork. NetWork data indicates that participants living in NetWork housing are paying 39% of their rent on their own, including those who have lived in the unit 6 months or more. Participants note that housing is another critical resource upon release; in interviews, many commented that the provision of housing was one of the main reasons they were initially attracted to joining the NetWork.

Health

Data is available about medical coverage for 94% of NetWork participants, of whom many (80%) have health care coverage. While NetWork records do not indicate if and when participants had their planned physical and behavioral health assessments, at least seven in ten participant survey respondents reported having a physical and behavioral health assessment after they enrolled with the NetWork. Medical records indicate that most participants have coverage through state programs. Chemical dependency and abuse is an

¹ One participant’s active status was confirmed after the analysis for this report was completed. The data for that participant is not included in this report in the sections in which we distinguish between active and inactive participants.



issue documented in Minnesota Department of Corrections records for nearly all NetWork participants, but there is limited record of participants attending Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous or treatment/aftercare through partner agencies. In interviews and surveys, participants say that the NetWork supports those with chemical dependency backgrounds and provides a sober environment.

Education/Training

NetWork records and participant surveys indicate that eight in ten participants do not have any education beyond high school. A minority of active participants appear to be participating in education or job training while with the NetWork. Participants self-reported at higher rates through the survey (about four in ten) that they are enrolled in such programs; whereas NetWork records indicate that only about 12-14% are enrolled in education or job skill training programs. Few NetWork participants have been active in the job skill training programs of partners. Participants do receive some job placement assistance and feedback about employer expectations while with the NetWork.

Community

This aspect of the NetWork is described as critically important to participant success by both participants and staff. NetWork data on active participants shows that less than one-third has good community meeting attendance; about one-half have poor attendance. Both active participants and those who are reincarcerated provided insights on the importance of the NetWork community in their interviews. Participants report that the NetWork community activities provide important structure in their lives, a positive environment and focus, a supportive group of true peers and positive social activities for them and their families. Both active participants and those who are reincarcerated provided insights on the importance of the NetWork community in their interviews.

Release Violations and New Offenses

This evaluation analyzed release violation and new offense outcomes for participants who joined the NetWork through the end of December 2008. As of the end of May 2009, participants had been in the community an average of 16 months; the minimum number of months that a participant has been in the community is five months. Of the 109 men possibly subject to a release violation, DOC records indicate that 38 men (35%) had their release revoked because of a violation. There was a statistically significant difference in release

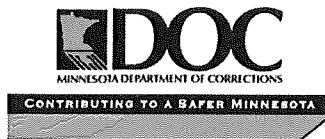
violation outcomes based on the kind of release supervision men had; those under Intensive Supervised Release had a higher rate of violation than those under Supervised Release. Twenty percent (20%, 26 men) of participants had a new conviction after joining the NetWork. In total, 55 of 129 (43%) men joining the NetWork by the end of December 2008 had had a release violation, a new conviction or both. In interviews, participants stress their own responsibility for staying out of the corrections system, but reported that the NetWork helps them to stay on the right path. Those who had been reincarcerated said the NetWork provides them with important resources that help with the pressures they faced during release.

The NetWork for Better Futures model addresses the major challenges that both researchers and participants agree are important to a successful release from incarceration. Moreover, the NetWork's community environment and identity as an enterprise, instead of a program, appears to offer a unique and empowering experience for some participants.

Recommendations include:

- **Data will help the NetWork.** It will help the enterprise know what is working, who is participating in what, as well as allowing periodic evaluation/reflection on how different factors impact success and the overall level of success. The NetWork will need to make sure its systems support consistent record-keeping in its own databases, ensure it has the proper releases to access data in partner records and pursue arrangements with other entities (i.e. the Bureau of Criminal Apprehension or the Department of Human Services) to gain access to data that can inform the enterprise about what it should continue or change in order to meet its goals. Data keeping could be improved by: (1) integrating record-keeping functions into the roll of those with direct access to information, for example by having direct-service staff keep electronic or consistent paper records of information they learn from participants; (2) having a consistent system that is the repository for all data, such as one enterprise-wide database that tracks information on housing, employment, recidivism and community participation; (3) support the continued contribution to high-quality, consistent data by making periodic use of findings and engaging staff and other stakeholders in learning from results.

- **Keep information (even if limited) about inactive participants and those who declined to enroll.** Even without a control group, the NetWork can understand how the enterprise is functioning and for what population if you have data available about the offenders for whom the program is not a good fit. Starting with a hypothesis (for example, that the program works best for single men) will help the NetWork determine what factors to track (in that example, marital status would be important) so that efforts are focused on collecting the most relevant data.
- **The NetWork model appears to be promising and offers a unique experience for participants.** The NetWork should continue to work with the Department of Corrections to understand release violations and learn strategies that have worked elsewhere to avoid these violations.
- **The NetWork will need to pay close attention to substance abuse issues** and may need to increase expectations of participation in partner or other community organization support programs so these issues do not derail participant progress. The NetWork may need to examine how to serve individuals with chemical dependency issues while still maintaining its commitment to a sober community.
- In order to increase participant self-sufficiency and job satisfaction, while continuing to ensure that the Better Futures work crew can accommodate new arrivals, **the NetWork can take more steps to support participant employment outside of the enterprise.** Expanding participation in education and job training programs would be one step the enterprise could take. The NetWork may also want to build partnerships with local employers who understand the criminal backgrounds participants carry. Finally, advocacy, such as letters of support, on behalf of individual participants, may help increase the number of men who are able to find employment outside of the NetWork.
- **The NetWork should continue testing and strengthening its model.** Future evaluation should consider the use of a comparison or control group, likely at the expense of the voluntary nature of joining the NetWork. Active participants self-reported that the factors that contributed to the model's success were the sense that they were among a community of men with similar backgrounds. This sense of community should be protected if the NetWork expands, with careful thought given to



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the community needs of a changing population if new geographic areas, population groups or women are served.

Introduction

In 2007, the Minnesota State Legislature allocated a portion of the State Department of Corrections release program dollars to a demonstration project called the “High Risk Adult Demonstration Project”, proposed by a new non-profit venture called The NetWork for Better Futures (the NetWork). The NetWork proposed a holistic, community-based approach to help a target group of offenders who are historically at high risk for re-offending. The NetWork project has an integrated approach addressing needs in five core areas: housing, behavioral health, health care, short term employment and family/community reengagement.

In addition to allocating dollars to support this demonstration project, the Legislature also required and funded dollars for an evaluation of the NetWork program. The Minnesota Department of Corrections (DOC) contracted for an independent evaluation with the Improve Group, to design and conduct the evaluation. The evaluation aims to assess the effectiveness of the High-Risk Adult Demonstration Project by examining the extent to which services were delivered to project participants and whether these services had an impact on outcome measures such as housing, employment, participation in treatment programs and criminal activity.

This report is the final evaluation report. It contains:

- A description of the NetWork program (as proposed to the Legislature)
- A summary of the evaluation approach
- A description of those enrolled through March 2009 in the NetWork
- Data on preliminary outcomes
- Information about program processes
- Feedback from participants, staff and partners on NetWork effectiveness
- Next steps in the evaluation

Program Description

The NetWork describes itself as an enterprise amongst partners who work with a common group of high risk adults. Many of these adults have been involved in the criminal justice system, and State funding for the NetWork supports service to those who have been released from the corrections system within the past twelve months. State funding was established through legislation effective July 1, 2007 (see Appendix B for the full language of the legislation). The target group of participants is primarily African-American men who face multiple barriers to stability that the NetWork partners have struggled to address within one program or service and in isolation from each other. NetWork partners have come together to oversee this new venture, with the intention to create a synergistic, effective response to the needs of this target population. The NetWork focuses on an integrated, comprehensive approach addressing the needs of participating men in five core areas: housing, behavioral health, health care, short term employment and family/community reengagement.

NetWork partners include:

- Job training organizations: Summit Academy OIC and Twin Cities Rise
- Substance abuse treatment organizations: Turning Point and R.S. Eden
- Health care provider NorthPoint Health and Wellness Center
- Health insurance provider Medica
- Affordable housing funder and advocate Family Housing Fund

The NetWork itself has a staff of 13 who are responsible for coordinating services for participants and providing leadership and structure around one of the key elements of the NetWork approach: building a positive community of participants.

The resources and skills of these organizations are a good fit with the five elements which define the NetWork approach:

- Immediate access to safe, affordable housing with a flexible (but time limited) rent subsidy calculated to match a participant's financial and social needs;

- Behavioral health services, including managing relapse and providing access to mental health counseling and services;
- Primary health care emphasizing prevention and early intervention;
- Employment and education consisting of short term work and access to job training and placement; and,
- Community building and renewal, including efforts to promote community and a sense of belonging, volunteer service, and re-engagement with family and friends.

The NetWork had an initial test phase, working with 50 men in 2007. The demonstration phase began in 2008, the implementation and outcomes of which are the focus of this evaluation. The previous 18 months (January 2008-June 2009) are the NetWork's demonstration phase, and in this period the size of the population served by the NetWork grew (from 50 initial participants to 83 active participants in May 2009). During late winter and spring 2008, the NetWork collaborated with the Improve Group, the Department of Corrections and several key partners to develop a logic model describing its program and approach particularly as it relates to the participants who meet the criteria described in the authorizing legislation.

Unanticipated results and challenges

The NetWork notes that during the demonstration phase of their enterprise, there was a steep learning curve to become knowledgeable about systems such as corrections, housing, employment, education and health. Some of the services they set out to provide were unexpectedly delayed. Three particular challenges reported by the NetWork were:²

- **Literacy.** Several of the men participating in the NetWork had low literacy and were not eligible for the training and education programs identified by the NetWork as partners. The NetWork continues to look for additional partners and to work with existing partners to determine if the programs can be modified to better meet the needs of their participants.

² Reported via email on June 19, 2009 and in-person on June 24, 2009.

- **Documentation.** The NetWork notes that several of their participants enrolled without proper paperwork to allow employment. In some cases, this paperwork took several weeks or even months to obtain, delaying the start of employment for several men.
- **Changing economy.** During the demonstration phase, the overall economy changed drastically, reducing the number of job opportunities for participants outside of the Better Futures work crew.

Evaluation Approach

This evaluation gathered data from a number of sources about the NetWork, its services, and outcomes from January 1, 2008 through the end of March 2009. Most data is available about those who participated in the NetWork and many of the outcomes included in this report reference these individuals. For some elements, data is available about men who considered the NetWork but chose not to participate.

The evaluation design began by collaborating with the NetWork, the Department of Corrections and several of the NetWork's partners to build a logic model that describes the main goals, outcomes and indicators of success associated the NetWork's proposal to the Minnesota Legislature and Department of Corrections. This logic model is included in Appendix A of this report. Table 1 below describes the data used to measure progress on these indicators. Instruments and protocols are available from the Improve Group upon request.

Table 1. Data Collection Methods

Method	Data Collection Time Frame	N	Sources
Program records	<p>Data on participants through March 2009 for the NetWork, its partners and counties</p> <p>Data on participants through December 2008 for the Department of Corrections and Medica³</p>	<p>Hennepin County N=156⁴</p> <p>Medica N=128</p> <p>Minnesota Department of Corrections N=129</p> <p>The NetWork N=149⁵</p> <p>NorthPoint Health and Wellness Center N=156</p> <p>Ramsey County N=156³</p> <p>R.S. Eden N=156</p> <p>Summit Academy OIC N=156</p> <p>Twin Cities Rise N=156</p>	<p>Hennepin County</p> <p>Medica</p> <p>Minnesota Department of Corrections</p> <p>The NetWork</p> <p>NorthPoint Health and Wellness Center</p> <p>Ramsey County</p> <p>R.S. Eden</p> <p>Summit Academy OIC Turning Point</p> <p>Twin Cities Rise</p>
Surveys	March - May 2009	<p>Staff N = 6 (100% of staff surveyed)⁶</p> <p>Participants N = 59 (75% of participants active at the start of surveying)</p> <p>Partners N = 5 (71% of partners surveyed)</p>	<p>Staff</p> <p>Participants</p> <p>Partners</p>
Interviews	August and September 2008, May 2009	10	Current and former participants

Program records were used for a number of important indicators in this report. Partners are able to provide data only on those participants with whom they interacted, so data is not available from all partners on all NetWork participants. The Department of Corrections and Counties provided data on all NetWork participants.

³ Data from the Department of Corrections focused on participants through the end of December 2008, since the Department's data on reincarceration or release violations would be most meaningful for those who have been in the community at least a few months. Medica provided data on participants through the end of 2008 as well. Because claims can take 2-3 months to process, including participants enrolled after December 2008 would have resulted in incomplete information on these participants.

⁴ Data from Hennepin and Ramsey Counties included a check on current county records, such as admittance into detox, for all men who had participated in the NetWork during the study period.

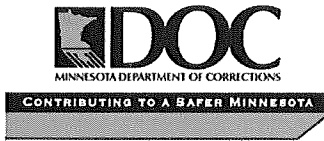
⁵ Data is provided on the same period from the NetWork as well as partners and counties; however, some individuals were removed from the NetWork data to align the records of individuals enrolled through the end of 2008 in NetWork and DOC records. These individuals removed from NetWork data, for whom there may have been some record-keeping errors on enrollment date, were included in original data requests to partners and counties. Partners and counties used this data request list to report on the presence of these men in their records; thus, the number of men on their lists is slightly larger.

⁶ Staff were asked to participate in the survey if they provide direct services to participants.

With NetWork records as the most important source of data for this evaluation, the Improve Group took several steps to ensure accurate and complete information was available. Data requests were made over one year ago, in June 2008, after consultation with the NetWork about available data and the variables that were important to track for the evaluation, NetWork staff was provided with a sample spreadsheet and list of needed items at that time. The NetWork reported that much of this data was kept in paper records. The NetWork hired a staff person to create and populate a participant record database in July 2008. Several times throughout the year between June 2008 and June 2009, the Improve Group provided notice of the deadlines for this report, and the NetWork agreed to update the database as much as possible for this report. NetWork participant data provided in March 2009, and further updated through June 2009, provided information on between 50% and 100% of NetWork participants on most data points. Throughout this report, data availability is noted for each item. **Since the reason why some records are complete and others are not is unclear, items with less than 100% data cannot fully represent results for all active and inactive NetWork participants.** The NetWork has acknowledged in writing that record keeping has been a challenge during their first 18 months of operation. Throughout the report, the varying availability of data is acknowledged by explicitly reporting the sample size for which data is available.

High response rates were achieved for the surveys. With such small populations significant variance may be evident among survey responses from staff and partners, but all staff and most partner perspectives are represented in the survey responses received. Only the six (of thirteen) staff who work directly with participants were asked to take the survey. Participant response is sufficient for a +/- 5% confidence interval with a 95% level of confidence. All surveys were conducted online. The Improve Group attended two NetWork community events to survey participants for the final report; NetWork staff followed up with other participants, using instructions from the Improve Group. Staff and partners received an email invitation to complete the survey and completed it online.

The Improve Group conducted interviews with six active participants with the NetWork and four men who had been participating with the NetWork but are now reincarcerated. Interviews with active participants took place at the NetWork. Interviews with incarcerated individuals took place at correctional facilities.



Analysis methods included basic descriptions (frequency and mean) of quantitative data, in addition to statistical tests to investigate whether subgroups of participants differed in certain characteristics or outcomes. These tests included independent sample t-tests and chi-square tests, where the population size was appropriate to run such tests. For qualitative data, thematic analysis was used to identify key findings.

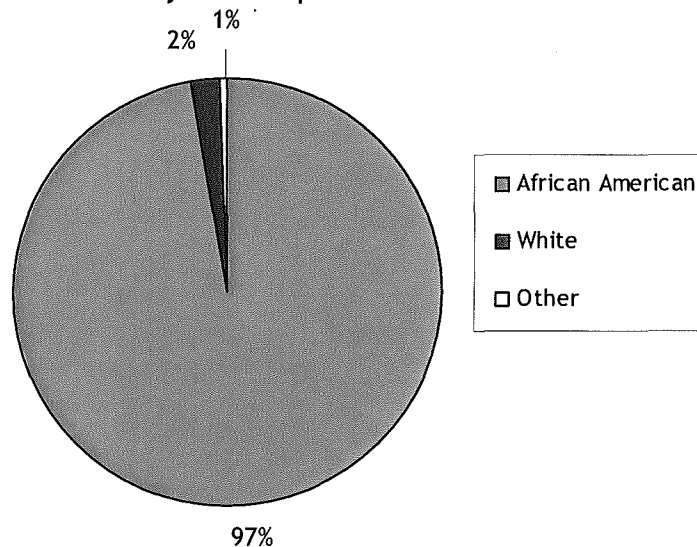
Throughout this report “participants” refers to any eligible⁷ individual who was enrolled in the NetWork between January 2008 and the end of March 2009; not all remain active with the NetWork at the time of this report. Active participants are those who are still with the NetWork; inactive participants had been participating with the NetWork but have since left. There were 54 active participants as of the end of March 2009.

⁷ State funding set certain parameters that define eligibility for participation in this demonstration project. The NetWork can and does serve other individuals, but cannot be reimbursed from the state for providing services to these individuals.

Description of NetWork Participants

The NetWork keeps records on the race and ethnicity of participants; data was available for 97% of current and former participants. The NetWork has targeted African Americans for services, and as anticipated, most (97%) of these participants are African-American⁸, as seen in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1. Race/Ethnicity of Participants



Source: The NetWork for Better Futures

Data is available from the Department of Corrections and the NetWork about a number of other variables that describe the program's participants. These are summarized in Table 2 below.

⁸ This category includes three individuals who were classified as Moorish or Moorish-American in NetWork records.

Table 2. NetWork Enrollee Characteristics

Characteristic	Source	# of participants for whom data is available (%)	Result
Chronically homeless, as defined by HUD ⁹	The NetWork	144 (97%)	67% of current and former participants were chronically homeless at time of enrollment
Education level	The NetWork	83 (56% of active and inactive participants)	The majority of participants do not have education beyond high school; specifically, 25% have a grade school education, 55% have a high school education, 12% have a vocational/technical college degree and 7% have a college degree. More active participants had a high school education (62%), compared to those who became inactive (49%). More of those who became inactive had only a grade school education (32%) compared to those who are still active (19%).
	Participant survey	59 (75% of participants active at the time of surveying)	83% of respondents said they had a high school diploma or GED 17% said they had an associate's or technical degree
Age	The NetWork	145 (97%)	Average age: 35 Youngest: 19 Oldest: 62

⁹ Long-term homelessness is defined as an "unaccompanied homeless individual with a disabling condition who has either been continuously homeless for a year or more, or has had at least four episodes of homelessness in the past three years." <http://www.hud.gov/offices/cpd/homeless/chronic.cfm>

Characteristic	Source	# of participants for whom data is available (%)	Result
Chemical dependency	Department of Corrections	107 (83%) ¹⁰	Of those 107 men with a chemical dependency assessment result in their records, 95% have a positive result in their chemical dependency assessment, meaning they struggled with dependency or abuse of chemicals. Of these, 26 (25%) entered chemical dependency treatment while in a correctional facility. Eight (8) men who entered these treatment programs completed the program, eleven (11) men had participation terminated by the program or discipline issues, four (4) quit and three (3) participated until released or were discharged by the administration. So, 8% of men with a positive chemical dependency assessment completed treatment while incarcerated.

The DOC also provided other background about NetWork participants. As seen in Table 3 below, sentences and length of stay in prison varied widely. About a quarter (27%) had no disciplinary incidents while incarcerated. The mean number of previous convictions was five, with three previous felony convictions. About one-half (54%) had no previous prison commitment. Table 3 shows that there was significant variance amongst participants on disciplinary incidents while incarcerated and prior convictions. Table 3 also presents the average Level of Service Inventory-Revised (LSI-R) score for participants.¹¹ The LSI-R is a needs/risk assessment conducted several months before an inmate is released. The highest score possible is 54, and a higher score indicates higher needs/greater risk of re-offending. As

¹⁰ Remaining participants were Short Term Offenders, so did not enter a DOC facility and thus did not have a chemical dependency assessment.

¹¹ The LSI-R is a quantitative survey of offender attributes and offender situations relevant for making decisions about levels of supervision and treatment. More information is available at <http://www.assessments.com/purchase/detail.asp?SKU=5212>

seen in Table 3, participants have an average score of 30, indicating a moderate level of risk/needs.

Table 3. Participant Incarceration Data

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Sentence Length (Months)	129	12	288	58	59
Length of Stay in Prison (Months)	129	0	195	21	31
Number of Discipline Incidents	121	0	88	9	14
Number of Prior Convictions	129	1	27	5	4
Number of Prior Felony Convictions	129	1	22	3	3
Number of Prior Prison Commitments	129	0	11	1	2
LSI-R Score	110	15	45	30	7

Source: DOC

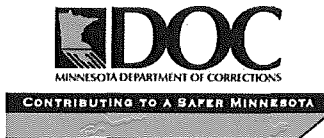
The DOC also provided data on the governing offense at the time of the participant's last release from prison before entering the NetWork. Table 4 shows that offenses against persons were the most common offense committed; please see Table 4 for more information.

Table 4. Governing Offense Committed by Participants

Type of Offense	Number	Percent
Person	69	54%
Property	27	21%
Other	18	14%
Drug	13	10%
Sex	1	1%
DWI	1	1%
	129	

Source: DOC

Surveys and interviews provided another opportunity to learn more about the relevant backgrounds of participants. About half (55%) of those completing the participant survey had completed job training before they joined the NetWork, while only 16% had never completed any job training. Survey respondents were also asked if they had had any job placement assistance prior to joining the NetWork. While about half of survey respondents had completed job training before joining the NetWork, fewer (38%) respondents had had job placement assistance before joining the NetWork.



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In interviews, participants said they had never participated in anything like the NetWork, in terms of comprehensiveness or support upon release. A few described other programs they had participated in, including:

- Job training (while incarcerated and at Goodwill Easter Seals)
- Release programs “Amicus” and “Emerge” (on previous releases)
- “Power of People” (anger management and critical thinking workshops while incarcerated)

Demonstration Project Outcomes

Participant Economic Stability and Contribution

Restitution and Child Support Payments

The NetWork endeavors to prompt participants to pay any restitution or court fines that they owe. However, staff described that it is often difficult to determine if and how much an individual may owe; sometimes the individual does not know. The NetWork has recorded whether or not participants owe any restitution for two-thirds of participants; this data is gathered by participant self-report and may underestimate the number who owe restitution. Of these, most (85%) do not owe any restitution, while 15% (15 individuals) do owe restitution. Just over half (53%) of the individuals owing restitution are still active with the NetWork. The NetWork has not documented whether the men are paying this restitution.

The NetWork has recorded whether or not participants owe child support for two-thirds of participants. Of these, 67% do not owe any child support, while 33% (34 men) do owe child support. Fifty-nine percent of these individuals who owe child support are still active with the NetWork. The average amount that men are paying towards child support is \$64/week.

Employment

The NetWork recorded the employer for 91% of their active participants (49 men). The NetWork reports that this item in participants' records best captures the employment rate for active participants. Thus, NetWork records indicate that 91% of active participants are employed. Of these men, 47% (23 men) are employed by the NetWork. Those employed by the NetWork have actually been with the NetWork longer than those employed by other entities. Those working on the NetWork's Better Futures work crew have been with the NetWork 269 days on average, compared to 187 days for those working for another employer. NetWork employment data (employment status, hours worked/week) are missing for the majority of participants who have become inactive. Thus, NetWork records data cannot reliably be used to understand the employment patterns of those who became inactive with the NetWork;

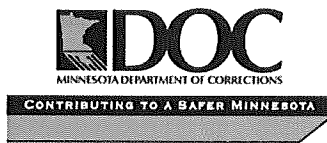
these participants may not have been employed or their employment data may never have been entered into the organization's database.

The NetWork has data about whether or not participants are engaged in regular job searching for 52 (96%) of its active participants. Many of these men (81%) engaged in searching for a job regularly. Staff has described that participant employment can be sporadic and their records may not be completely up to date. Nineteen percent of active participants reported on their survey that they were not employed; all of these respondents said they were spending time in job search activities, an average of 18 hours a week. While the nineteen percent of survey respondents indicated that they are unemployed is a higher percentage than recorded by the NetWork, NetWork staff notes that participants may self-report that they are unemployed if they have recently lost a job, are between jobs, or even if they are currently employed with the Better Futures Work Crew if they are continuing to seek other employment, because they may desire a different employment situation.

The NetWork has recorded the average number of hours worked per week for 89% of its active participants, or 48 men. They worked an average of 31 hours per week. Of these men, 38% or 18 men work 35 or more hours per week, and 54% (26 men) work between 15 and 34 hours per week. Four men (8%) worked between 8-12 hours in an average week. The highest average hourly wage earned for these participants is \$22.10/hour; their average wage was \$8.40/hour.

Interviewees noted that it can be very difficult to find a job upon release, and offenders can face a release violation if they are not able to find work. They cited difficulties in finding a job such as a having a felony background and having no money to look for work (i.e. to pay for bus fare to look for jobs). The Better Futures work crew provides them immediate employment, income and time to look for more permanent, full-time work. One added that it would be helpful if the NetWork could more actively advocate for men, if needed, as they sought work outside the NetWork. He felt that a more proactive recommendation about his commitment and reliability at the NetWork would help when potential employers have reservations about him because of his criminal background.

Finally, the Better Futures work crew has some more advanced, supervisory positions to which participants can advance, such as Driver, Team Leader or Crew Chief. The NetWork has



recorded whether participants achieved these advanced positions for 44 participants (81% of active participants). Three of these participants attained such positions in Better Futures. The available data does not allow determination of participants' patterns of job retention.

In surveys, NetWork staff reported that Better Futures employees receive coaching and feedback on their appearance, attitude, timeliness, cooperation and work quality on a daily or weekly basis. Staff felt that this kind of "soft skills" coaching was very important to participants' ability to find and keep a job. Through surveys, NetWork staff also listed other existing community services they felt help participants with various components of finding and keeping a job. The most common organizations mentioned were Emerge and the Minneapolis Urban League. Job training partners Summit Academy OIC and Twin Cities Rise were cited only once. NetWork staff listed the effective services that such community organizations provide which help participants with various components of finding and keeping a job: job training, search, resume building, application completion, the world of work orientation program, interviewing skills and etiquette, basic work expectations and job placement. Additionally, staff reported that the services provided by the NetWork including one-on-one coaching, resume and cover letter assistance, and specific training helps participants find and maintain work.

In participant surveys, one-half of respondents said they had received some job placement assistance while with the NetWork. Respondents also characterized their current job satisfaction. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being "Not at all satisfied" and 5 being "Very satisfied", participants had an average satisfaction rate of 3.5. As Table 5 shows below, participants reported in the survey that they receive feedback on employer expectations fairly regularly from a number of sources. Though "Other" was ranked highly, the responses to this item varied considerably and no clear themes emerged about who else provides feedback to participants.

Table 5. Sources of Feedback on Employer Expectations

How often do you receive feedback from the following people on what employers expect? (n=52-56)	Mean (1 = never; 5 = often)
Better Futures Team Leader	4.4
Manager at my work	4.3
Better Futures Crew Chief	4.1
Other NetWork staff	4.1
Job trainer	3.9
Job counselor/ job placement assistance staff	3.7
Other	4.8

Source: the Improve Group

According to NetWork staff, barriers to employment that continue to challenge NetWork participants include having a felony record, a lack of work experience and gaps in employment history, transportation issues, chemical dependency concerns, no education and illiteracy.

Financial Stability

The NetWork has recorded whether or not men have checking or savings accounts for about 93% of their active participants. Of these participants, 28% (14 men) have a checking account and slightly more (29%, 15 men) have a savings account. On surveys, about half of participants said they had checking or savings accounts; again, NetWork records may not be completely current and/or participants may have reported having these accounts on the survey at higher rates than they reported having them to NetWork staff.

Participant Physical, Behavioral and Chemical Health

Physical Health

Of the 51 active participants for whom the NetWork has data available (94% of these participants), 80% (41 men) have health care coverage. The NetWork encourages participants to select Medica as an insurance provider, as Medica is a NetWork partner. Medica was able to provide data for about 68% (86 men) of NetWork (active and inactive) participants¹² because they have been current or past members of Medica. Sixty-three (63) men were enrolled in

¹² Medica provided data on participants enrolled at any point through the end of December 2008.

Medica after their NetWork enrollment date. Twenty-nine men still have Medica insurance. Almost all of these men (27 men) have insurance through state public programs; the other two men have insurance paid for through a commercial (private) source.

One feature of the NetWork's program is that all participants are supposed to receive a physical examination and behavioral health assessment at the beginning of their participation with the NetWork. The NetWork encourages participants to go to partner NorthPoint Health and Wellness Center for these assessments. NorthPoint has a limited number of appropriate data release forms¹³ for NetWork participants, so was unable to report individual-level data on most NetWork participants. NorthPoint did report that 134 NetWork participants are or have been patients at NorthPoint (about 9 in 10 current or former NetWork participants). Medica records indicate that fourteen of the participants with Medica insurance obtained a physical exam after enrolling in the NetWork, 22% of those who had Medica insurance after being enrolled with the NetWork.

On the survey, most (85%) of participants reported they had a physical exam since joining the NetWork; of these, most (88%) had gone to NorthPoint for their physical. Of those that had a physical, many (80%) also indicated that the doctor had not told them that any follow-up appointment was needed. Of those whose doctor did tell them that follow-up was needed, all but one had scheduled and/or attended another visit. Information from NorthPoint records was limited about the follow-through of participants on any needed treatment (physical or behavioral health); for those for whom data was available (n=9), 3 of the 5 who needed follow-up services had those services. As Table 6 shows below, the participant survey respondents said that the NetWork has a positive influence on their efforts to be healthy.

Table 6. NetWork Encouragement of Participant Healthy Behaviors

Survey Question (n=58-59)	Respondent Mean (1=strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree)
The NetWork encourages me to be fit and healthy	4.6
The NetWork provides activities to keep me to be fit and healthy	4.1
I try to stay fit and healthy	4.3

Source: the Improve Group

¹³ Release forms allow NorthPoint to provide individual level data on 31 men.

On their surveys, participants noted some chronic health concerns. High blood pressure was the most common issue (29% of respondents). Fewer said they had diabetes or asthma. About 6 in 10 participants responded that they had changed a behavior to improve their health; about 4 in 10 say they take medicine or see a doctor regularly to improve their health.

Medica records indicate that twenty-three NetWork participants visited the emergency room after their enrollment in the NetWork. Ten of these men had more than one recorded visit to the emergency room. Medica records indicate that three of the emergency-room visits were for inappropriate (non-emergency) services; another five were classified as potentially inappropriate. All visits were for medical reasons (as opposed to chemical or behavioral health emergencies).

Behavioral Health and Chemical Health

NetWork participants are also supposed to receive a behavioral health assessment at the beginning of their participation with the NetWork. The NetWork has indicated in their records whether or not participants have had this assessment for 85% of their participants. Of these men, 76% have had the assessment. In participant surveys, 73% of active participants said they had received a behavioral health assessment since enrolling with the NetWork; seven men said they were referred to follow-up treatment. Five of these men had scheduled the follow up visit; two said they had not, and one who had scheduled a visit said he did not plan to go. Only one participant reported using NorthPoint for follow-up behavioral health services; the other two who reported where they went, had gone to another clinic or doctor.

Medica and NorthPoint records indicate that most participants do not go to NorthPoint or any other clinic for their behavioral health services. The NetWork employs a behavioral health consultant; this individual may well be providing the bulk of initial assessments. Though NorthPoint could only release individual data on 31 men, a minority (26%) of these participants had been to NorthPoint for a behavioral health assessment after enrollment. Medica records indicate that fourteen (16% of those with Medica insurance) participants had behavioral health services after NetWork enrollment.

Participants provided some insight into their behavioral health on the survey (please see Table 7). Questions were structured so that respondents could reference a specific period of time in their life, either over the past year or past month. Of the survey respondents, 8%

participated in the NetWork for less than one month at the time of the survey, 14% had participated for 2-3 months, 19% had participated for 4-5 months, and 54% had participated for six or more months.

Table 7. Participant Survey Behavioral Health Item Responses

Survey Response (n=58-59)	Percent with this response
I was under more than usual stress or pressure within the last month	44%
I have felt so discouraged or hopeless within the last month that I wondered if anything was worthwhile	17%
I feel nervous, worried or upset most or all of the time	12%
I have felt sad most or all of the time within the last month	9%
I have thought about harming myself within the last year	3%

Source: the Improve Group

In surveys, participants and staff reported on the ease of accessing behavioral health services, as well as how culturally appropriate these services are. Participants who had been referred for follow-up services generally felt it was easy to find a place to go and get an appointment. They also felt that the doctor they saw understood them. Most (83%) NetWork staff indicated on surveys that they felt those participants who needed behavioral health care received that care. Staff also had positive feedback on the ease of access to services, and how culturally appropriate the services are, as seen in Table 8 below. Staff described barriers that participants face in accessing behavioral health and substance abuse treatment. These include finding time to go with a full-time work schedule, missing scheduled appointments and having a hard time accepting services or acknowledging a need for them. Staff felt that the NetWork ensures easy access to behavioral health and substance abuse treatment through partnerships with health organizations, education and community meetings, providing care coordination and assistance in completing necessary paperwork to ensure continuation of medical insurance.

Table 8. Staff Survey Responses on Access to and Cultural-Appropriateness of Behavioral Health and Substance Abuse Care

Question Item	Response Rating	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
Level of difficulty for participants to access needed behavioral health treatment	1=Very difficult, 7=Very easy	6	5	7	6
Level of difficulty for participants to access needed substance abuse treatment	1=Very difficult, 7=Very easy	6	5	7	6.2

Question Item	Response Rating	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
How culturally-appropriate is the treatment for mental illness that participants receive?	1=Not at all culturally-appropriate, 7=Very culturally appropriate	4*	5	7	6
How culturally-appropriate is the treatment for substance abuse that participants receive?	1=Not at all culturally-appropriate, 7=Very culturally appropriate	4*	5	7	6

*Two staff indicated they did not have an opinion on these items

Source: the Improve Group

As mentioned in the Description of NetWork Participants above, DOC data indicate that many NetWork participants struggle with chemical dependency. NetWork records indicate whether or not men have participated in treatment before for 65% (97 men) of their participants; 69% of these men had been to treatment before. On their surveys, fewer (42%) of the participants reported a history of chemical or substance abuse; 96% of them now consider themselves sober. Forty-two percent said they had been sober for more than a year; the remaining 58% said they had been sober for less than a year. Twenty-nine percent of participants said they had experienced a relapse since joining the NetWork; all said the NetWork had helped them find treatment or get help. No NetWork participants have been in Ramsey County detox facilities. In Hennepin County, two 2008 participants used the County's detox facilities in February 2009. Both of these men ended their participation with the NetWork earlier, in 2008.

On the survey, NetWork staff described the actions that the NetWork takes to assist those who face a mental health or substance abuse relapse. NetWork participants who relapse with chemical dependency and/or mental health issues are required to meet with the team leader and are placed on a corrective action plan. If there is a second incident, the case is forwarded to a treatment facility and the participant is required to complete one or a combination of the following: a Rule 25 assessment, aftercare, thirty Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous meetings in thirty days and/or a meeting with the behavioral health specialist.

Two NetWork partners deal specifically with chemical dependency issues: R.S. Eden and Turning Point. Turning Point was not able to provide any data for this report. R.S. Eden had referred 20 individuals to the NetWork, after they had completed the treatment program at R.S. Eden; the organization was not aware of any participants who had come to their organization from the NetWork. The number of men who have been referred to these services is unknown.¹⁴ Medica records indicate that one participant had chemical dependency out-patient visits after NetWork enrollment. Of active participants, 21% reported attending Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous in the previous 30 days. On surveys, 92% of participants said that the NetWork helps them to access aftercare or support groups they need to stay sober. Participants explained that the NetWork was a supportive place and a good resource for those with substance abuse issues. As one participant shared, “[The NetWork staff] work hand in hand and very hard to help all the clients to defeat their addictions.” Another stated, “They will stand by you if you fall, you won’t be alone.”

Overall, NetWork staff survey data indicates that 83% of staff felt that those participants who needed substance abuse or behavioral health treatment received it.

Chemical health may be an area the NetWork continues to examine and build upon in the future. The NetWork notes that many of their participants who choose to leave the program do so because they do not want to comply with the NetWork’s rules related to sobriety.¹⁵

Participant Housing

Most (95%) of participants reported on the survey that they live in NetWork housing; 75% of these participants said they are receiving help from the NetWork with their rent. A few (5 men) are receiving help with their rent from other sources and named public sources of assistance. Only one man reported losing his housing since he joined the NetWork; he lives in NetWork housing. The NetWork did not provide data about how many participants, either active or inactive, currently or previously lived in active housing.

¹⁴ The NetWork reported on June 19, 2009 that staff record data about referrals, however did not provide the data for this report.

¹⁵ Reported by NetWork staff at a June 24, 2009 meeting.

Several interviewees mentioned how a lack of income, criminal background and lack of rental history makes finding housing difficult upon release and that the NetWork housing is helpful for that. Interviewees added that being able to live on their own in an apartment is an important aspect of that housing as well. They describe that living alone helps them to focus on improving themselves and several showed pride in keeping their own place. As one interviewee said, "Living on your own, for the first time, you get yourself together, might look at life differently. This is mine now, [I] can build off this here."

As Table 9 shows below, participant survey respondents generally say they feel safe in their housing and community; their agreement is less strong that they can afford their housing.

Table 9. Participant Survey Responses about Housing

Survey Question (n=57-58)	Mean response (1=strongly disagree: 5 = strongly agree)
I feel safe in my apartment	4.4
I feel safe in my community	4.5
I can afford my housing	3.9

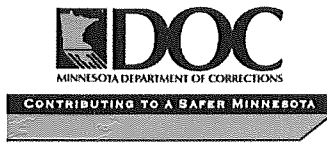
Source: the Improve Group

Rent Payment

On surveys, 95% of active participants indicated that they lived in NetWork housing; they had lived in this housing for an average of 6 months. Three-quarters of those living in NetWork housing said they are receiving help on their rent from the NetWork. NetWork data about rent payments is available for 56% of active participants. These participants are paying an average of 39% of their total rent on their own, including those who have lived in their apartment for 6 months or more.

Participant Education and Skill Building

As noted earlier, most NetWork participants do not have advanced degrees and may struggle with job-readiness skills. NetWork records indicate whether or not men are enrolled in school (data available for 94% of active participants) and in job training (data available for 96% of active participants). Fourteen percent of active participants are enrolled in school and 12% are enrolled in job training. Two of these men are enrolled in both school and job training.



The NetWork reports that men are attending Minneapolis Community and Technical College, Metropolitan State University, Summit Academy OIC, Emerge, Urban Initiative, Lehmann Center and Goodwill/Easter Seals.

On surveys, 23 participants (39% of respondents) said that they had started doing job skills training while with the NetWork, 7 are continuing with training and another 5 have completed training while with the NetWork. Only 9 (15%) survey respondents reported no job skills training. Seven men (12%) said they had received their high school diploma or GED while with the NetWork; three men (5%) said they had received an associate's or technical degree while with the NetWork. Forty-four percent (25 men) said they were working on earning an education degree now; usually this was an associate's or technical degree.

Two NetWork partners provide job training: Twin Cities Rise and Summit Academy OIC. Twin Cities Rise reported on referrals with the NetWork. One NetWork participant had completed a program at Twin Cities Rise prior to enrolling in the NetWork. Another man completed one program, Awali, before coming to the NetWork and is currently enrolled in another. Another former NetWork participant started but then dropped out of a Twin Cities Rise program. These men participated in either the Awali or "core" program at Twin Cities Rise. Twin Cities Rise describes its core program as a training and skill development program that includes classroom training, one-on-one coaching, outside training and supportive services as needed. Input from customer companies and adult educators frames the curriculum. Awali is a specialized program aimed at training incarcerated men with the soft and hard skills needed to earn and retain living-wage employment.

Summit Academy OIC reported that eight NetWork participants had been involved in their programs. Seven of these men participated in Summit programs while participating with the NetWork; five of them had started with Summit before starting with the NetWork. The other man had participated in Summit programs after he left the NetWork. All of the men participated in Summit's Hundred Hard Hats Construction Training Program. A majority (five) of these men did not complete the program; they withdrew or were terminated because of attendance issues.

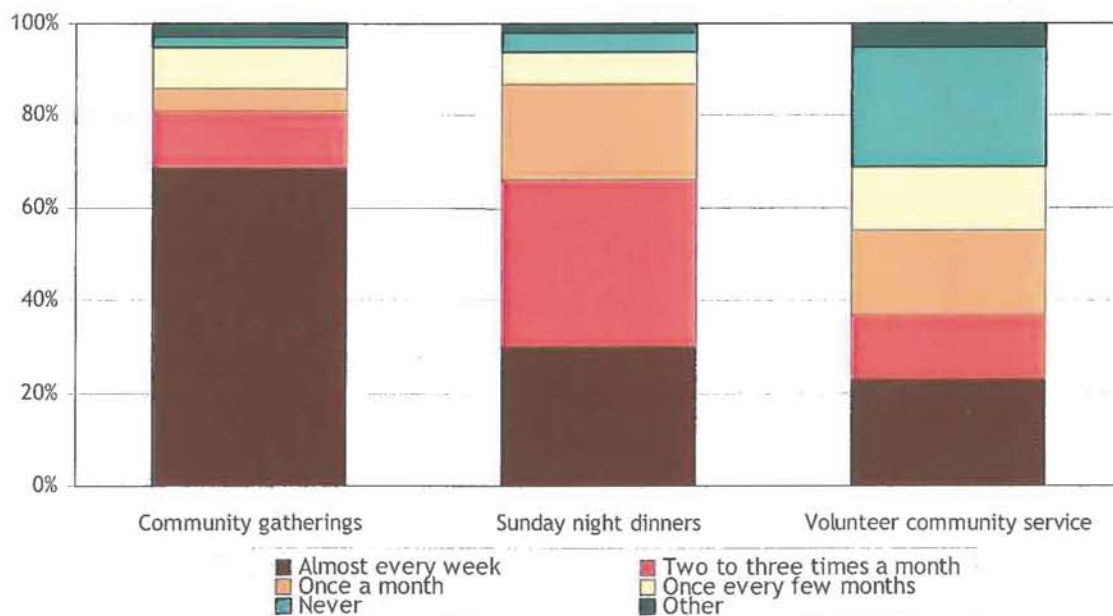
Participant Community

The NetWork uses several strategies designed to build a positive community amongst participants, including community meetings, Sunday night dinners, daily rituals and expectations of volunteer service. The NetWork has data on the attendance of many (87%) active participants at community meetings and dinners. Of these participants, 28% have good attendance, 26% have fair attendance and 46% have poor attendance. Team Leaders at the NetWork rank the attendance of participants, characterizing “poor” as missing meetings without an excused absence, “fair” as missing meetings but with an excuse, and “good” as attending most meetings.

In participant surveys, respondents indicated that they regularly attended community meetings and Sunday night dinners, as seen in Figure 2 below, but less frequently volunteer.

Figure 2. Participant in Community Activities

How often do you participate in the following activities? (n=56-58)



Source: the Improve Group

In interviews with active participants, men described the positive support of others around them as an important aspect of their experience with the NetWork. Interviewees assert that the support feels all the more relevant because participants have common backgrounds and

all have the same goals. This may be quite different than what participants have been surrounded by before. One interviewee described that some participants have only ever been around negativity and they have “gotten used to it”; the strong, positive atmosphere is different and provides motivation for participants to stay on their path. One interviewee described the NetWork as, “A community of men doing well, that’s what this is.”

Interviewees describe the feeling of being able to reach out to this community. One said that it is important that he can contact Team Leaders any time he has an issue. Another commented that there are “A lot of people to talk to, ask questions you normally wouldn’t ask.”

An aspect of community building is the consistent schedule and daily rituals. Interviewees commonly describe that the structure provided by the NetWork is helpful. Many spend most of their day there, as well as attending community meetings twice a week, Sunday dinners and other events. They describe that, though they all have their moments of not wanting to go to *another* event, this schedule and structure helps them stay focused. As one interviewee described:

Coming out of prison, you don’t know where you are going to go, don’t know where your next meal is going to come from. The NetWork gave me stability in my life, something to look forward to, to wake up to in the morning - this is what I do today. If I didn’t have it, I’d be like what am I going to do today? Now I have a schedule, get up and go to work in the morning. If I get off, look for a job.

Community meetings and Sunday night dinners are a key way of building community for many of the interviewees. Interviewees said they learned things in community meetings. They learn about banking or money management in some meetings; in others, they may learn about how to react in a negative situation. Interviewees used terms like “a breath of fresh air”, “enlightened”, “aware and refreshed” and “peaceful” to describe how they felt after community meetings. One interviewee said he felt people were often just saying what they thought they should say and not being real in community meetings, so that made the meetings feel like a waste of time. But, he added that one could take something away from the meetings if one is ready to change.

When asked specifically how such activities help them stay out of prison, active participants explained in interviews that the positive atmosphere in the community provides a constant reminder of an alternate path for them. As one interviewee put it,

[The positive community] shows people there is another route. A guy might not know how to communicate if they have a problem with something. Someone here might pull him to the side and talk to him, say [try to] be more assertive; it doesn't always have to be negative. There's always somebody here to help. If I went somewhere else might not be anybody there to remind you...

Another reflected on his previous release when he went to a Goodwill Easter Seals training program, but ended up violating his release. He said that once he left Goodwill, “[you are] on your own, back with yourself. You are around people so much here...” Another interviewee described,

Being an addict, [you] know you can't do it alone. You've got to surround yourself with positive people. I am kind of a secluded person, like to be to myself a lot, kind of quiet, but I could see I couldn't do it like that. I done cried in a couple [NetWork] meetings, talking about my life or whatever. It's good to get that stuff out; you try to hold it in and be macho and make bad decisions. People kind of know who you is if you around them all the time like we are, can tell when something is wrong, ask if everything is ok. You have people who can relate to you. [Question: You didn't feel like that before on the previous release?] No, it felt like me against the world.”

Other Milestones

The NetWork has set other milestones to help track participant stability and progress.

Driver's License and State Identification

The NetWork encourages participants to have or obtain a valid driver's license to help them with employment and general transportation issues; all participants need a valid state identification card. Twenty-nine percent of survey respondents said they had a driver's license; many (76%) said they had a state identification card. Three percent (two men) said they had neither. Most (95%) said they were working on getting a driver's license.

Prosperity Plan

The NetWork asks participants to create a Prosperity Plan. The NetWork describes that this tool is "...developed with coaching and advice from a Team Leader and outlines a handful of goals that the participant wants to achieve over a six- to eighteen-month period. Typically, a participant defines goals and benchmarks related to work, family, personal development, and physical and emotional health."¹⁶ NetWork records indicate participant progress on their prosperity plan for 49 men (91% of active participants). Of these, many (88% or 43 men) are "on track". Three men (6%) are "off track" and three men (6%) are "not advancing".

Most (95%) of participants indicated on the survey that they had completed a prosperity plan. They also rated their own progress on their prosperity plan. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being "very little progress" and 5 being "a lot of progress", participants had an average rating of 3.6, showing that they did feel they were making progress.

In interviews with active participants, men added that it was important that the NetWork pushes them to set goals and checks in with participants often on their progress. In addition, some interviewees added that the fact that the NetWork believes in their potential was also powerful. Interviewees also shared some of the contents of their "Prosperity Plan":

- Have a place to stay
- Establish rental history
- Be self-sufficient
- Save money
- Build and/or repair family relationships (i.e. gaining custody, paying child support, visiting family)
- Pursue education/job training
- Set out career interests/goals (i.e. work with children, start a business)
- Maintain/improve health (i.e. do not smoke, work-out)

¹⁶ A Proposal to the Minnesota Department of Corrections: A Re-entry Demonstration Project for High-Risk Adults submitted by The NetWork for Better Futures to the Department of Corrections September 18, 2007.

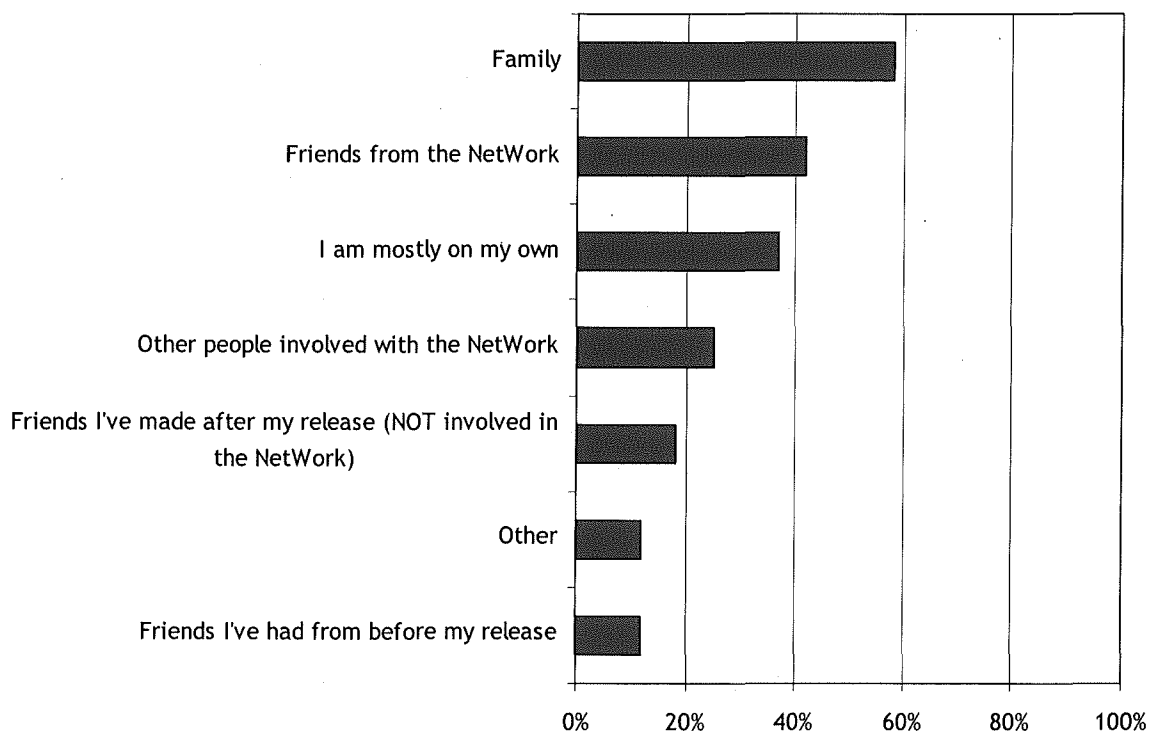
- Work at/find a full-time job
- Get a driver's license
- Gain membership in the NetWork

Family and Friend Re-engagement

Surveys and interviews provide some insight into participant re-engagement with family and friends. In surveys, participants indicated that they most often spend time with family in a given week, followed by spending time with people from the NetWork. Figure 3 below shows the percent of respondents selecting who they spend time with in a normal week (respondents could select more than one response).

Figure 3. Who Participants Spend Time With in a Normal Week

Who do you spend time with in a normal week? (n=57)



Source: the Improve Group

On surveys, most (96%) of participants said they had been in contact with family. Ninety-one percent felt this was a positive experience for them; 85% felt this was a positive experience

for their family. Many (78%) of respondents have children; 80% are satisfied with their relationship with their children. Fewer participants (72%) say they have been in contact with friends since their release, but most (76%) feel this was also a positive experience for themselves and even more (81%) feel it was a positive experience for their friends. Participants explained that getting back into contact with family members has been a positive experience for them. Participation in the NetWork positively impacted family relationships for several participants. As one participant stated, "I've had a big issue with trust in my family and my mom and I have had a much more positive relationship with her knowing that I am in the NetWork and the positive impact that it had on me as a person." Another shared, "Without the NetWork I wouldn't [have gotten] back in good with my family. And without my family I wouldn't still be free."

Participants had mixed feelings over their relationships with their children. The wide majority felt that the relationships are good and are improving. As one participant stated, "Being a part of the NetWork gives me the time to be a part of my children's lives in more ways than one; I mean I can really be there to raise them." A few participants said that they were not in contact with their children, mainly due to legal restrictions or by choice of the children's mothers.

Participants varied in their responses on whether it was helpful to get back in touch with friends. One participant stated, "Helpful; finding my friends again has been like gathering pieces of myself that have been scattered by the wind. The only thing that was difficult was seeking forgiveness for actual and perceived wrongs committed against a couple of them." Another stated, "The friends I am hanging around are proud of the position that I am in and wish me the best, but those that I let go was not in my best interest." On the unhelpful side of things one participant stated, "Seeing the things they do and I don't want to be involved in it anymore. It's good to see your friends but I don't want to be involved with it anymore."

Interviews with active participants reinforced that the family influence seems to be positive. Many interviewees want their families to be proud of them and the things they are doing. In participant surveys, most (94%) respondents said they had been in contact with family. Most (93%) of these men felt this was a positive experience for their family and either a positive (80% of respondents) or mixed (positive and negative) experience (20% of respondents) for

themselves. Participants also indicated on their surveys that many (71%) were satisfied with the relationship with their children. Fewer participants have been in touch with friends than have been in touch with family. About three-quarters of survey respondents had been in touch with friends, of whom 85% felt that the experience had been positive for their friends. The same percent felt the experience had been positive for them, whereas 15% reported having a mixed (positive and negative) experience. Some participants face difficulties with familial expectations. As one participant explains, "Sometimes people expect you to be the same way you were, being there for them financially and time wise, but I have restrictions and it's difficult and sometimes it doesn't help because I'm expected to be everywhere and do everything."

In surveys, NetWork staff presented varying viewpoints on the impact of participant re-engagement with family and friends. While it was recognized that reconnected can be a very positive experience for participants and can provide an important support system, it was also acknowledged that there are many factors to consider. Staff members stated that it can potentially bring up more issues as the family may provide an environment that is conducive to old habits and criminal behavior. As one staff member stated,

"I think it holds men back when the engagement is on their own, we are educating the men to change in their lives and they are in the early stages, but their family may not be changing and I don't think they are strong enough to promote change within the family, I think it might help to do some things with the family - somewhere further on up the road."

Participant Release Violations and New Offenses

Findings about recidivism should be understood in the context of the relatively short time that most offenders have been in the community. Data was requested from the Department of Corrections for all participants who enrolled in the NetWork before the end of December 2008, to ensure that this report's findings would focus on participants who had been in the community at least a five months at the time of reporting. As of the end of May 2009, participants had been in the community an average of 16 months; the minimum number of months that a participant has been in the community is five months.

DOC records indicate that 109 men had the potential to have a release violation while with the NetWork because they were formerly incarcerated and were under supervised release at the time they entered the NetWork. The remaining men were not under supervision when they entered the NetWork. Of the 109 men, 38 (35% of eligible NetWork participants) had their release revoked because of a release violation. Statistical analysis¹⁷ revealed a statistically significant association between the kind of supervision during release and whether or not a release violation occurred. Twenty-four percent of those on supervised release had a release violation; 46% of those on intensive supervised release had a release violation. (NetWork participants under supervision are evenly divided between those on supervised release and those on intensive supervised release.) NetWork records indicate that the NetWork was able to intervene in the cases of another 9 men who had release issues; the NetWork indicates that this intervention resulted in these men not returning to incarceration. Of the 38 men with a release violation, five had a violation while they were active with the NetWork. Their release violation occurred an average of 190 days after joining the NetWork.

The Department of Corrections also has data on offender arrests and convictions after enrollment with the NetWork through the end of May 2009. **Almost half (46%) of participants were arrested since entering the NetWork.** Half of the men who were arrested were active with the NetWork at the time of their arrest.

Twenty percent (26 men) of participants have been convicted of a new offense since entering the NetWork (these are included in the above count of men arrested). Twenty-four percent of those on supervised release had a new conviction; 16% of those on intensive supervised release had a new conviction--which is not a statistically significant difference in rates of new convictions. Felonies make up the majority (62%) of new convictions; remaining convictions were for misdemeanors (27% of convictions) and gross misdemeanors (8% of convictions). Nine of the 26 men with a new conviction were resentenced to a new prison term for the new offense. The minimum amount of time from NetWork enrollment to new arrests (for those resulting in a conviction) was 2 days. The maximum number of days was 447 and the average was 183.

¹⁷ Crosstabs with a chi-square test significant at the .05 level

Re-arrest and re-conviction data present different advantages and challenges to understanding recidivism rates. Arrest data is a more sensitive measure insofar as it captures those whose cases may still be pending a conviction decision. However, the arrest data will also include those who are never ultimately convicted of the offense for which they were arrested. Conviction data is a more conservative measure, since it will include only those whose cases have resulted in a formal conviction, but this number will miss those whose cases have not been processed to a conviction but will be with more time. **In total, 55 of 129 men (43%) who entered the NetWork by the end of December 2008 had had a release violation, a new conviction or both.** Using arrest data, a total of 77 of 129 men (60%) who entered the NetWork by the end of December 2008 had had a release violation, a new arrest, or both.

Statistical tests¹⁸ examined whether there were any differences (1) between those who were or were not resentenced to prison for a new offense, (2) between those who were or were not reconvicted or (3) between those who have or did not have release violations. No differences were found in these comparison groups on the basis of their length of stay in prison, the number of prior convictions, the number of prior felony convictions, the number of prior prison commitments or the number of disciplinary convictions while incarcerated. In addition, another statistical test¹⁹ showed that there was no relationship between the type of previous offense (personal, property, etc.) and whether or not the participant had a new conviction or release violation.

However, statistical tests²⁰ did show that those who were reconvicted, resentenced, or had a release violation had a lower mean age at release than those who were not, as shown in Table 10 below. **In addition, those with a release violation and those resentenced to prison had a lower mean time with the NetWork than those without release violations or a new sentence, as shown in Table 11 below.**

¹⁸ Independent t-test at .05 significance

¹⁹ Chi-square test with 95% confidence interval

²⁰ Independent t-test at .05 significance

Table 10. Revocations and Re-arrests by Age

Age	Revocation/release violation		Re-arrest	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Under age 25	11 (48%)	12 (52%)	13 (57%)	10 (44%)
Age 25-34	13 (31%)	29 (69%)	21 (50%)	21 (50%)
Age 35-44	8 (22%)	28 (78%)	16 (44%)	20 (56%)
Age 45 and older	6 (21%)	22 (79%)	9 (32%)	19 (68%)

Table 11. Revocations and Re-arrests by Time Participating with the NetWork

Time with the NetWork	Revocation/release violation		Re-arrest	
	No	Yes	No	Yes
Less than one month	13 (54%)	11 (46%)	12 (50%)	12 (50%)
1-2 months	7 (39%)	11 (61%)	8 (44%)	10 (56%)
3-4 months	3 (38%)	5 (63%)	5 (63%)	3 (38%)
5-6 months	10 (67%)	5 (33%)	11 (73%)	4 (27%)
7 or more months	36 (57%)	27 (43%)	54 (86%)	9 (14%)

On surveys, NetWork participants cited a need for better employment and better pay as the most important additional support they need to avoid future criminal activity. However, most participants said that the NetWork provides them with everything they need to avoid recidivism. As one participant stated, "If it wasn't for the NetWork, I don't think I would have made it to see the world the way I do now. Before I came to the NetWork I was lost in a desert of negativity, helplessness, and hopelessness. The NetWork is young and growing; to those that don't know the NetWork it might seem like a mirage. But, I'm here to tell you it is

really and truly an oasis - place for you to seek nourishment, get your bearings, and gather your supplies before you continue on your journey towards civilization.” The majority of participants echoed this level of appreciation for having the NetWork as a part of their lives, as another participant stated, “The NetWork works wonders, and there’s absolutely nothing like this enterprise. We finally have something that’s built for a community of men that wants to do well and make progress.”

Nearly every component of the services provided by the NetWork was mentioned by participants as being important in helping them to avoid criminal activity. In particular, having someone to talk to, the community support, the work, the community and weekly meetings and having somewhere to live were all mentioned. As one participant stated, “These weekly meetings give me hope and encouragement to believe in myself.” Another elaborated, “I’d say that a big one would be the fact that I’m working all the time and the Monday and Friday meetings. Plus when you get out and you have nothing and someone is willing to give you an apartment and a job and its all on your word you don’t want to mess something like that up. That’s how I feel.”

Though active participants often stressed in interviews the importance of their own responsibility for their actions, they almost always said that the NetWork helps them stay out of prison. One observed, “Without the NetWork, I would say [there is a] 60% chance that I would have relapsed or reoffended.”

The Improve Group conducted interviews with four men who had been reincarcerated. These men had been reincarcerated between two and eight months after being released. All of the reincarcerated participants interviewed participated in the NetWork for the entire duration of their release. When asked about the pressures faced while on release, two men highlighted that dealing with the requirements of Intensive Supervised Release (specifically, restrictions on seeing family members and spontaneous phone calls and visits) made them feel under a lot of pressure. Other challenges included finding housing, medical coverage and employment, and the pressures associated with getting reacquainted with children and other family members, or of going back to the same neighborhood and negative influences.

All of the reincarcerated participants interviewed felt that the NetWork helped relieve the pressures they were facing during release. In particular, having a sober and clean

environment, the information provided during community meetings, the one-on-one meetings with the team leader to discuss any problems or issues and the feeling of community were most helpful. As one participant stated, "I wouldn't feel whole if I didn't go to Sunday dinner with my family [at the NetWork]. We [my family] never did nothing together before. I'd go over there for dinner, but we never were out somewhere as a family." In addition participants felt that the work, housing and transportation they received through the NetWork were beneficial in relieving pressure in their lives. Jobs, work training, housing, medical coverage, transportation and the community were the most helpful aspects of the NetWork for reincarcerated participants. As one participant stated,

"It was a combination of things - medical, housing, transportation, community (we ran our own meetings), we gave each other feedback and held each other accountable. It is the only place I saw people, including Team Leaders, bringing their kids to dinners. It speaks volumes. We had new ways of speaking to one another - it was all positive. Plus having a place where you could bring your kids meant you didn't have to figure out child care for them. It is very rare to see any personal issues between men in the NetWork."

Other sources of support for reincarcerated participants included wives/ significant others, other family members, NetWork participants, spiritual centers and the Families in Focus program in Stillwater.

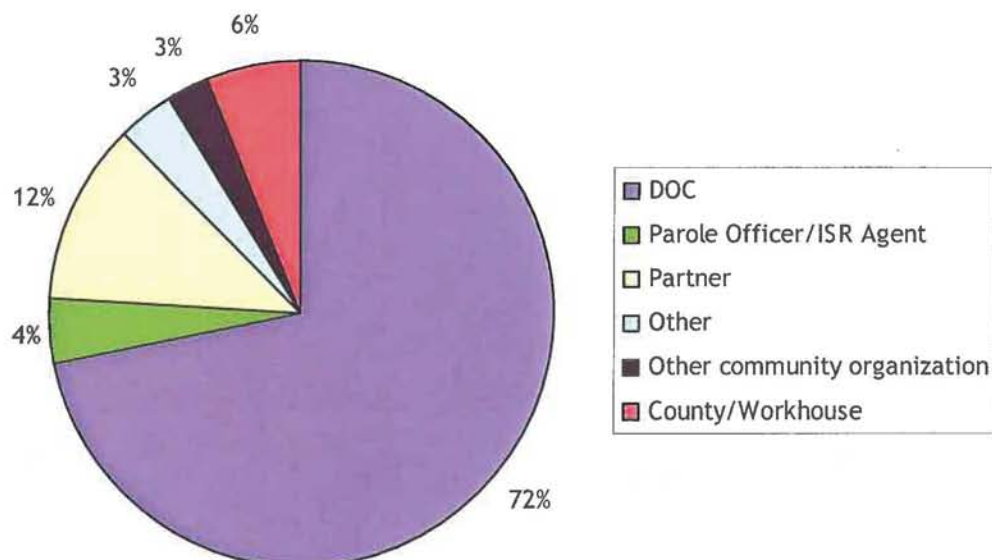
All of the reincarcerated participants interviewed said that the NetWork did everything they could to assist them with the pressures of release prior to the violation/new offense. The NetWork advocated for them after the violations/new offense had occurred, assisted them in making decisions and provided a source of encouragement. As one participant stated, "It is a sign of how deep they got in my head that I went to talk to Princess [NetWork team leader] when I had a warrant out for my arrest and was deciding about whether or not to turn myself in."

Program Processes

Referral, recruitment, assessment and enrollment

The NetWork for Better Futures receives referrals from a number of sources for men who may be a good fit for the NetWork. The NetWork provided data about the source of referral for 97% of the 149 men who were participants with the NetWork at some point through March 31, 2009. No data about source of referral is available for men who declined to participate in the NetWork. DOC-eligible NetWork participants were referred predominantly by the DOC, as seen in Figure 4 below.

Figure 4. Source of Referrals for Enrollees (n=144)



Source: the NetWork

In surveys, NetWork staff described that they recruit by going to correctional facilities and meeting with potential participants to give an overview of the NetWork and interview the interested men.

From their experience recruiting, staff described the top three reasons why individuals choose not to join the NetWork:

1. The NetWork requires too much structure

2. Individuals want housing for themselves as well as a significant other or family members
3. Individuals do not want to commit to sobriety/sober living requirements

Enrollment Status

Of the 149 participants who are the subject of this report (enrolled through the end of March 2009), NetWork records indicate that 55 participants (36% of participants) continue to be active with the NetWork, while 94 (63% of participants) are now inactive.²¹ (Status is not recorded for one participant.) Seven of the active participants became inactive at some point and then re-enrolled with the NetWork. The NetWork aims to have enrolled and served 180 men by July 2009. In data provided by the NetWork for enrollment through June 1, 2009, 180 men have been involved with the NetWork; 83 (46%) of these men remain active with the NetWork.

Using the data available from NetWork records for the 149 active or inactive NetWork participants through March 2009, Table 12 below provides more detail about the amount of time from enrollment to inactive status and from the time a participant became inactive to when he re-enrolled (and became active again).

Table 12. Summary of Time from NetWork Enrollment to Becoming Inactive and Time from Inactive to Re-Enrolling²²

Time until...	Becoming Inactive from Enrollment (n=88)	Re-enrolling from Inactive Status (n=5)
Minimum Number of Days	1	18
Maximum Number of Days	460	179
Average Number of Days	115	107

Source: the NetWork

Statistical tests²³ did not show any difference between those who were active or inactive in the NetWork on the basis of their age at their release, length of stay in prison, the number of

²¹ One participant's active status was confirmed after the analysis for this report was completed. The data for that participant is not included in this report in the sections in which we distinguish between active and inactive participants.

²² Enrollment and inactive dates were provided by the NetWork for 88 of the 94 men who became inactive; of these, five later re-enrolled.

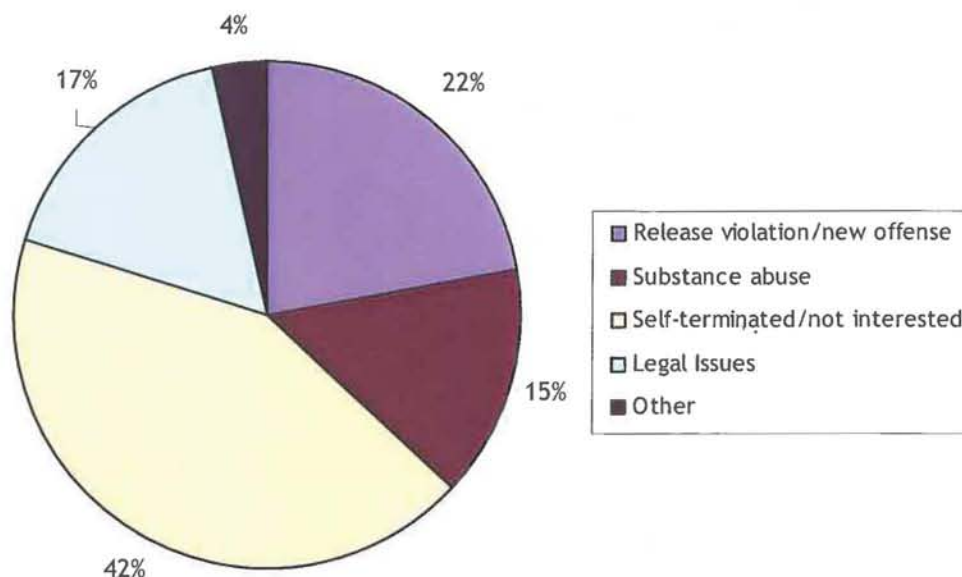
²³ Independent t-test at .05 significance

prior convictions, the number of prior felony convictions, the number of prior prison commitments or the number of disciplinary convictions while incarcerated.

Interviews with active participants provided some insight into what draws men to the NetWork, and what encourages them to stay. Housing is usually the biggest reason that offenders are initially drawn to the NetWork. For some, they did not have anywhere else to go, or were not approved for other housing options. Several interviewees said they want to stay for the positive relationships, motivation and inspiration. Several also said that they felt they wanted to stay because they wanted to help others who have been in their situation. Though some described having bad days at work or getting frustrated at times with a situation, all but one said they would not want to leave. One interviewee said he would leave when allowed by release conditions because he felt that people do not “keep it real”. This interviewee felt he had a positive relationship with one NetWork staff person and that the community could be beneficial, but he was bothered that he felt like other participants were not really saying what they thought.

NetWork records indicate a reason for leaving for 54 men (of the 100 men who temporarily or permanently left the NetWork through March 31, 2009). The most common reason for leaving the NetWork was classified as “self-terminated”. Please also see Figure 5.

Figure 5. Reasons for Leaving the NetWork (n=54)



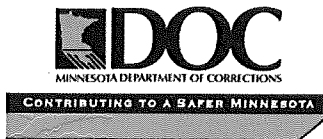
Source: the NetWork

Partnerships

Insight into the dynamics of NetWork partnerships is provided primarily through surveys and interviews. In participant surveys, a minority of respondents reported participating in partner programs with the exception of NorthPoint Health and Wellness Center, as seen in Table 13 below. The NetWork encourages use of NorthPoint for participant's initial physical and behavioral health assessments; just over half of participants reported using NorthPoint. Those respondents who went to a partner organization were generally positive about the helpfulness of services received (with an average ranking of 4 on a scale of 1-5, with 5 being "Helpful" and 1 being "Not helpful"). Participants also gave positive marks to the ease of accessing partners' services (with an average ranking of 4 on a scale of 1-5, with 5 being "Easy to access" and 1 being "Difficult to access"). Participants did not report widespread participation in programs of other organizations.

Table 13. Participant Survey Responses about Partner Organization Participation

Do you receive services from the following organizations? (n=59)	Yes	No
Summit Academy OIC	15%	85%
Twin Cities RISEI	17%	83%

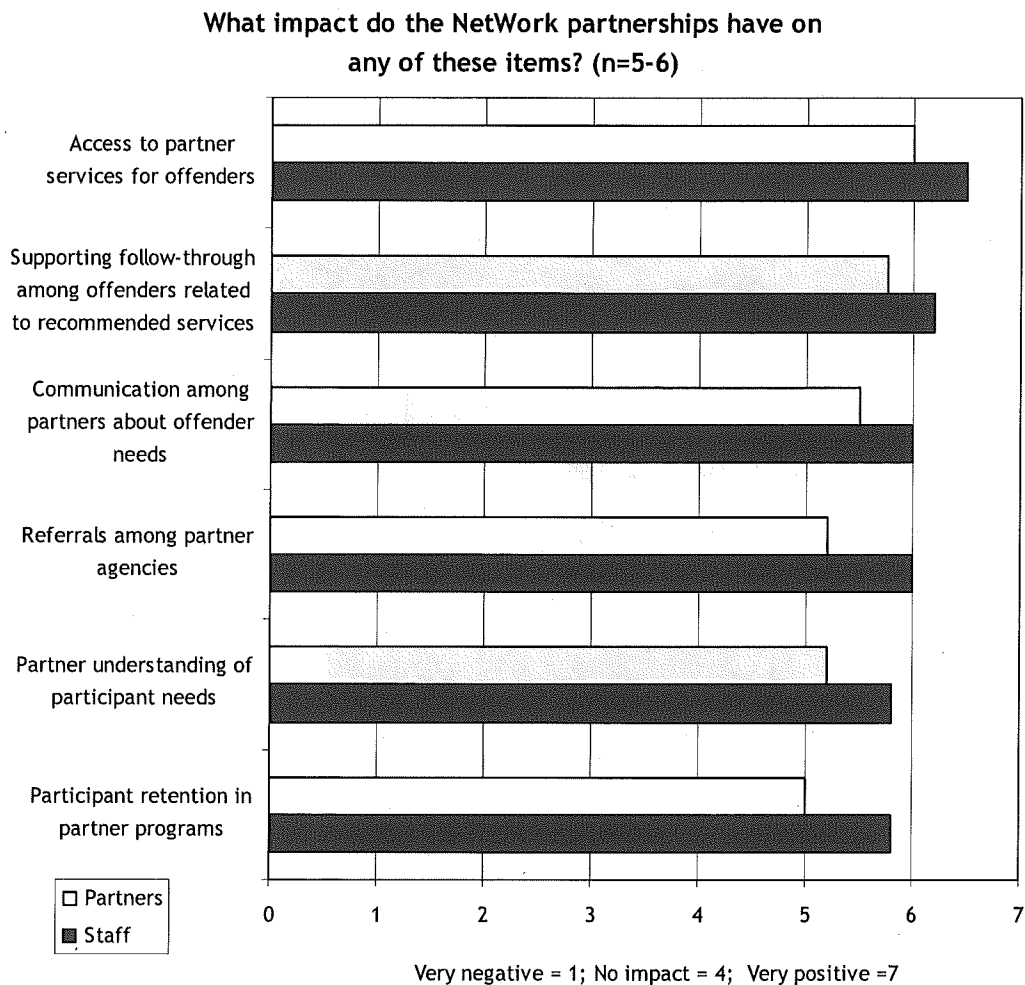


Do you receive services from the following organizations? (n=59)	Yes	No
Turning Point	14%	86%
RS Eden	12%	86%
NorthPoint Health and Wellness Center	54%	46%
Fairview	14%	86%

Source: the Improve Group

As Figure 6 shows below, NetWork staff members are generally more positive about the impact of partnerships than their colleagues at partner organizations; both see the largest impact of partnerships is in access to partner services. Across the board, staff and partners characterize the impact as positive, with the least impact on retention in partner programs. Through collaborating with the NetWork, partner organizations have experienced an ability to reach additional vulnerable populations, an ability to respond to the needs of individuals re-entering society and in times of personal crisis, an ability to provide an increased level of continuing care not normally accessible to this population and an increased understanding of the integrated level of care coordination that is needed in order to successfully provide medical services to this population.

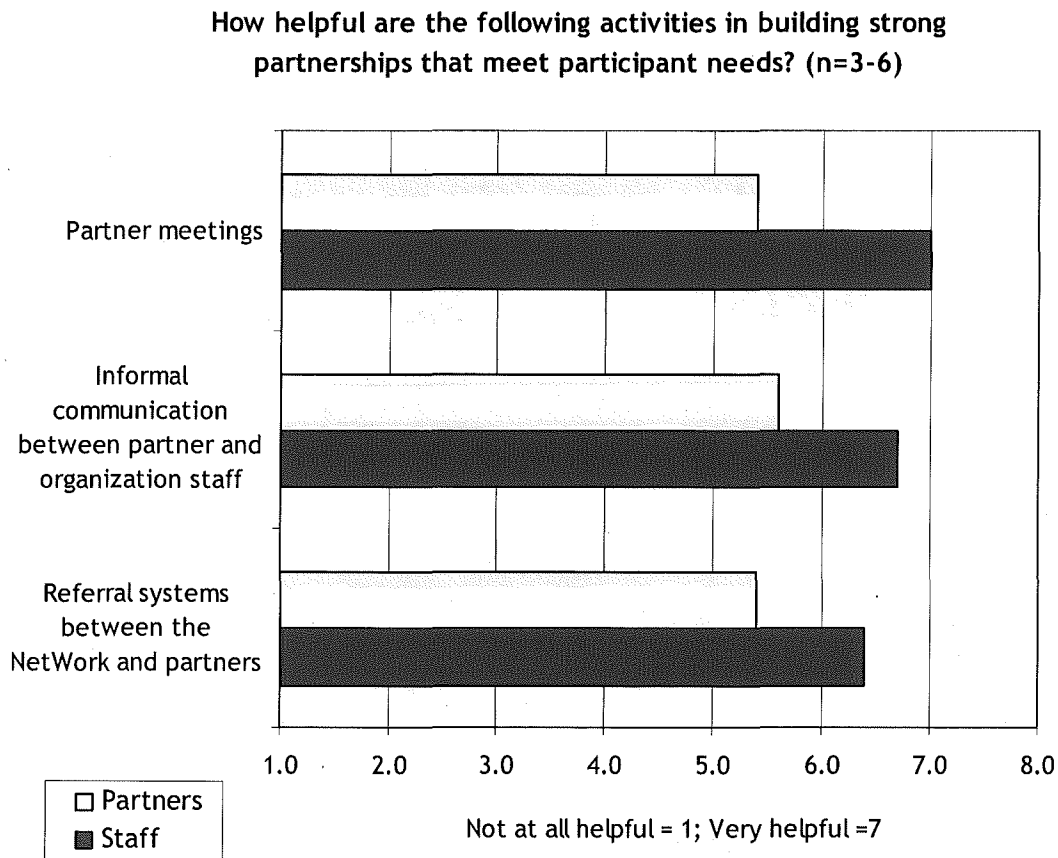
Figure 6. Impact of Partnerships in NetWork



Source: the Improve Group

Figure 7 shows that staff feel that partner meetings are the most effective method to help partners meet participant needs; referral systems are not ranked as highly by staff and partners.

Figure 7. Partnership Activities That Help Meet Participant Needs



Source: the Improve Group

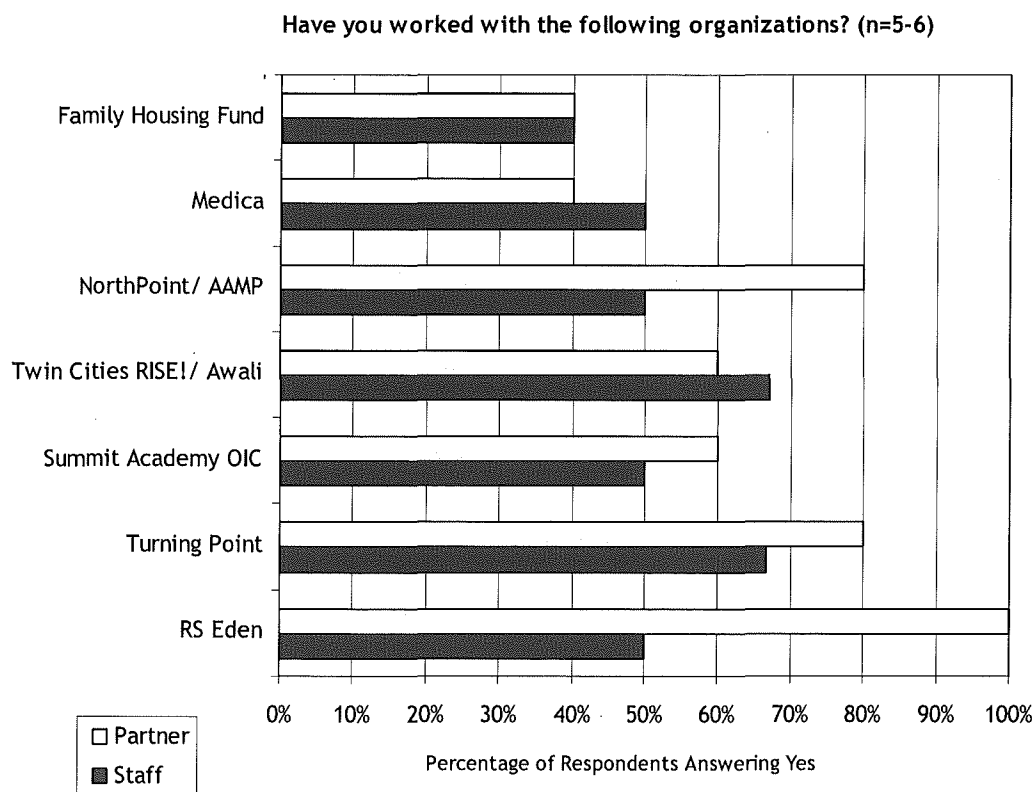
In surveys, partner organizations noted suggestions for how the NetWork could better serve participants, including: (1) continuing and adding funding and (2) refining the partner coordination model with an emphasis on communication between partners and greater accountability between partners for access to services (medical assessments and follow-up were mentioned in particular).

Staff suggestions for ways to improve the NetWork's ability to serve participants include: adding a spiritual component, adding NetWork-owned housing, increasing the number of Better Futures customers, and increasing staff to intensify the level of involvement with participants.

Staff ideas on additional partners that could prove helpful to the NetWork included: Minneapolis Community and Technical College, Minneapolis Urban League, Amicus, Goodwill Easter Seals and Volunteers of America. Partners' ideas included an additional clinic system and temporary employment services. One partner felt that the program is new enough that the kinks should be worked out within the current partner circle before it expands to other organizations.

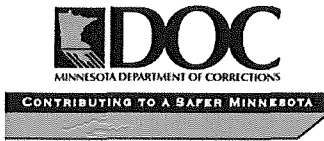
Figure 8 shows that staff most commonly works with Twin Cities Rise and Turning Point. Family Housing Fund does not provide direct service to participants, so that may be why interactions are not regular with staff. Partner involvement is greatest with chemical dependency partners, as well as NorthPoint Health and Wellness.

Figure 8. Staff and Partner Interactions



Source: the Improve Group

Staff and partners were also asked in surveys to rank partner participation, how easy it was to work with other partner organizations and how helpful partners' services were in meeting

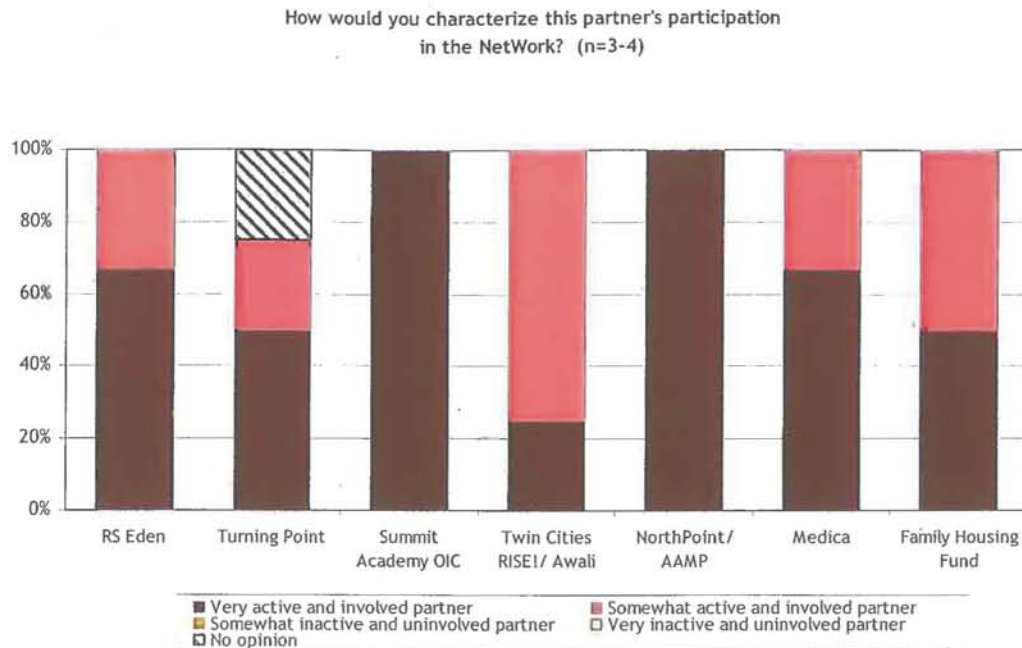


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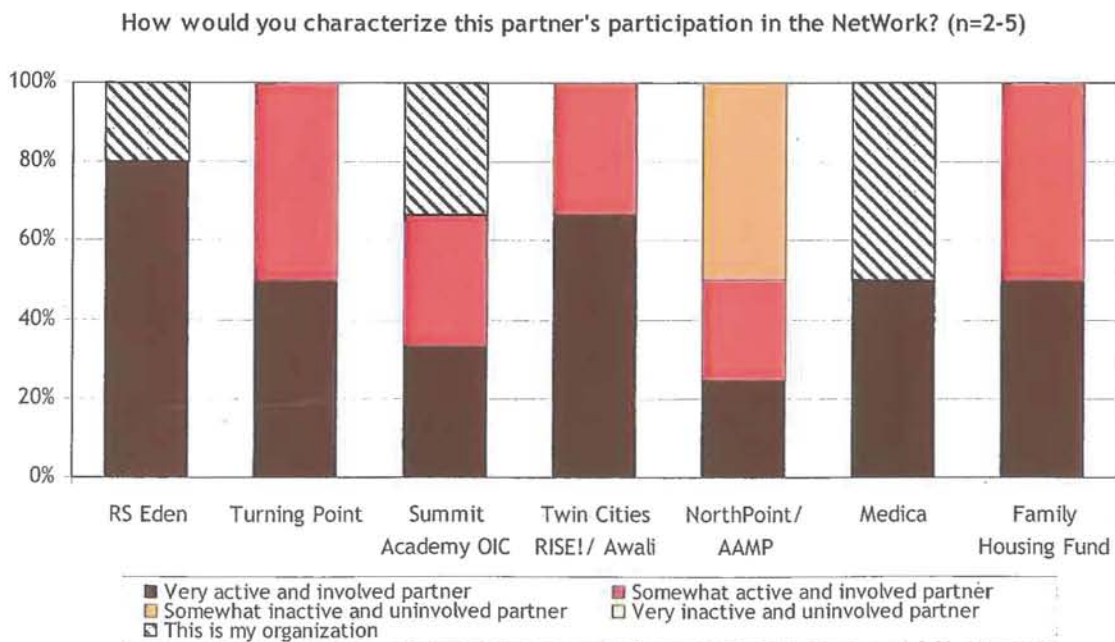
participant needs. Staff and partner responses on these items are shown in Figures 9 - 14 below. Staff and partners were mostly positive about the extent of one another's engagement, the ease of working with one another and the helpfulness of one another's services, though some variation is evident in Figures 9 - 14. Staff was positive about the involvement of partners; reviews of Twin Cities Rise were slightly less positive than others. Partners were also mostly positive about one another's involvement, with the most concern expressed about NorthPoint's involvement. More staff reported that it was somewhat difficult to work with Twin Cities Rise and NorthPoint, when compared to other partners. Some partners reported some degree of difficulty in working with Summit Academy OIC, NorthPoint, Medica and the NetWork. Staff and partners were mostly positive about the helpfulness of partners' services.

Figure 9. Staff Responses about Partner Participation



Source: the Improve Group

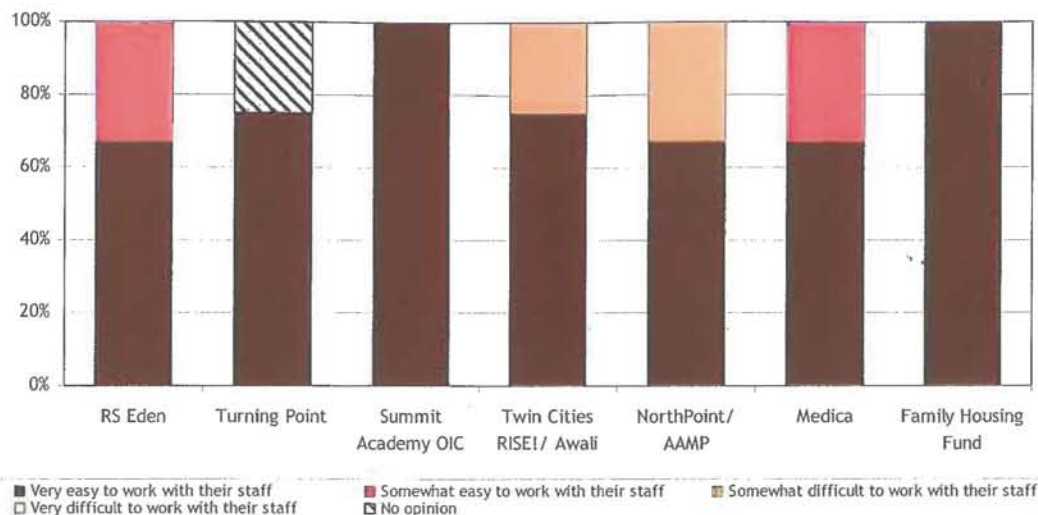
Figure 10. Partner Responses about Partner Participation



Source: the Improve Group

Figure 11. Staff Responses to Ease of Working with Partners

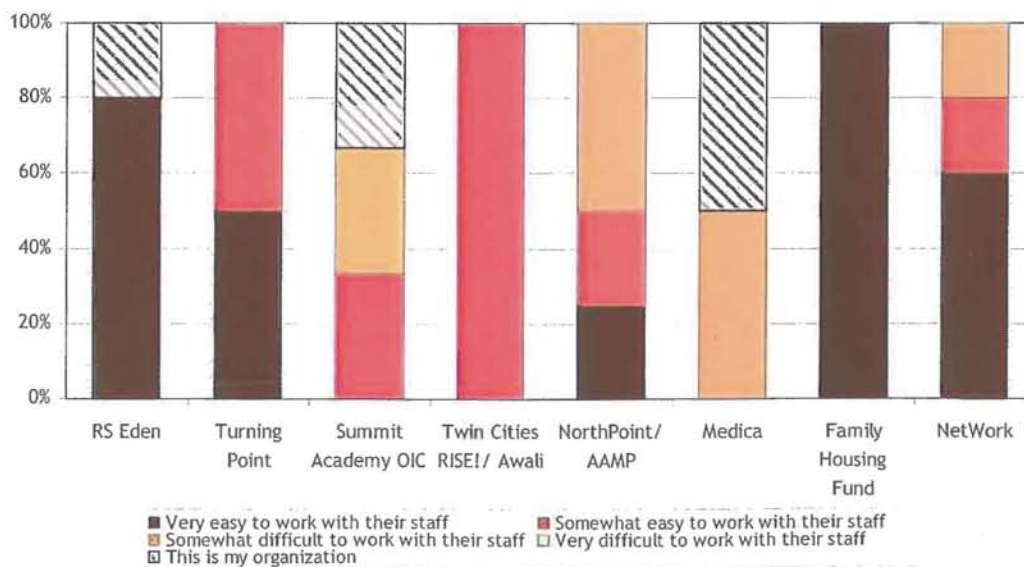
How easy is it for you to work with this partner? (n=2-4)



Source: the Improve Group

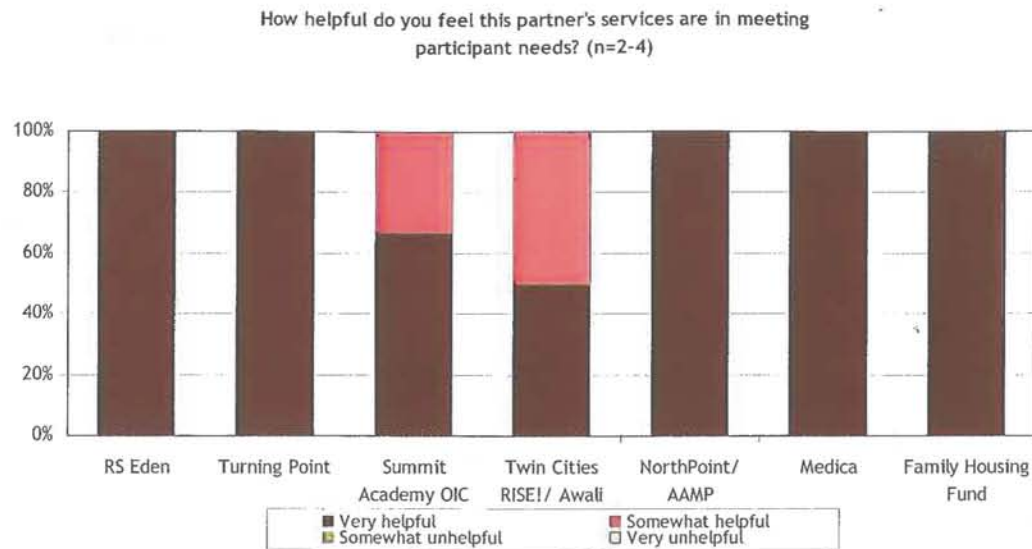
Figure 12. Partner Responses to Ease of Working with Other Partners

How easy is it for you to work with this partner? (n=2-5)



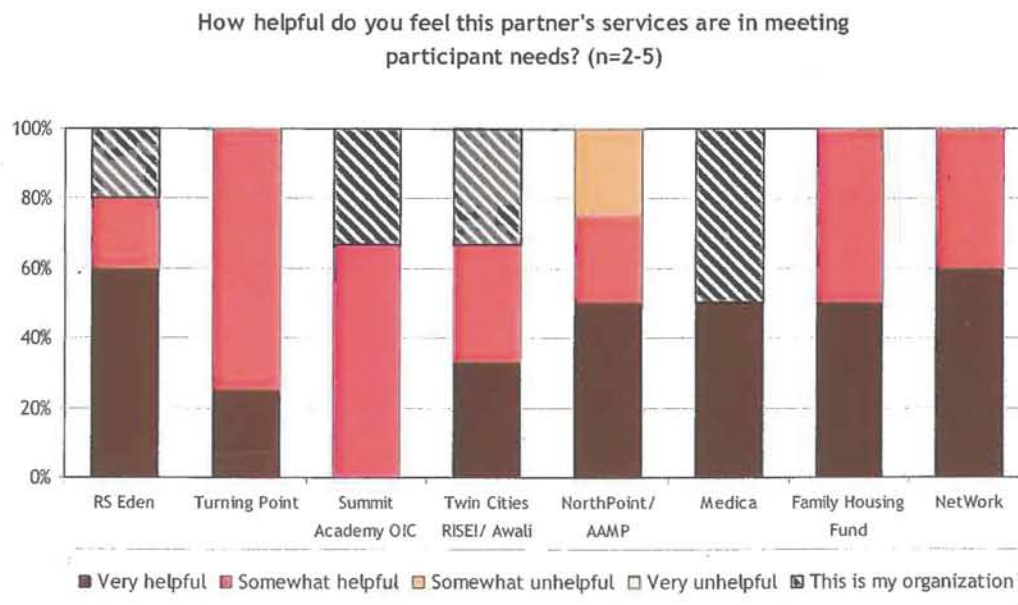
Source: the Improve Group

Figure 13. Staff Assessment of Helpful Partner Services



Source: the Improve Group

Figure 14. Partner Assessment of Helpful Partner Services



Source: the Improve Group

In interviews with active participants, men commented on the use of partner services. A couple interviewees planned on going to a Summit training program. If any of them had received medical services, they had gone to NorthPoint. Interviewees did not describe any problems with referrals or follow-up with Summit or medical care at NorthPoint. One interviewee described that he is delaying enrolling in a program at Summit because he needs to get full-time work or will face release violation. He had also gone to NorthPoint to seek out some behavioral health treatment (with a psychiatrist). He said that when they saw he had a sensitive offense, they referred him to Lutheran Social Service. He felt put off and has been unable to follow up because he has been focused on trying to find a job. He felt like the NetWork would help or provide advice if he talked to them about the situation, which he planned to.

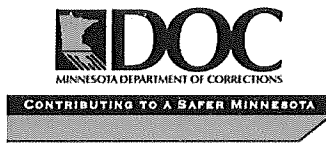
Building a Positive Community

In interviews, participants provided some thoughts on how the community is important, and why and how they feel connected as a community. Interviewees often referred to NetWork participants as a “brotherhood”, “brothers” or a “family”. They are empowered by the similarities they see in each other, including similar desire for achieving positive goals. One interviewee said,

I feel good because they are me and I'm him. We are struggling for excellence, we are not here to put each other down, and we are here for each other. We're here to go up. Every time I walk in that door, there's a smile on my face, every time.

All interviewees said they would talk to NetWork staff or participants if they had a problem or were struggling with an issue. Two mentioned only Team Leaders or other NetWork staff as people they would talk to, but the rest said that they would definitely talk to other participants about worries. Interviewees mostly described that they would hang out with other NetWork participants during the week. This provides opportunities for socializing and entertainment without exposing participants to possibly negative situations. One participant explained,

[I would hang out with] these guys. We're on the same level. We're not going to let each other get knocked off our square. Why would I mess with somebody out in the street when I know what they are doing? I know what these guys are doing; they are doing the same thing I am doing; it's all positive. I'm not



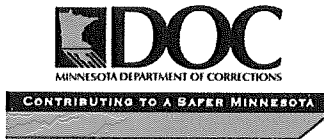
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saying people not here are all a negative influence, not at all. When [you are] out there, there could be more negativity around somewhere and these guys are not going to let it come our way. This is a force, a machine. Protective in a major way.

NetWork participants build relationships through day to day interactions, but many have also known each other for years. And this can be an additional strength in the relationships. One interviewee described,

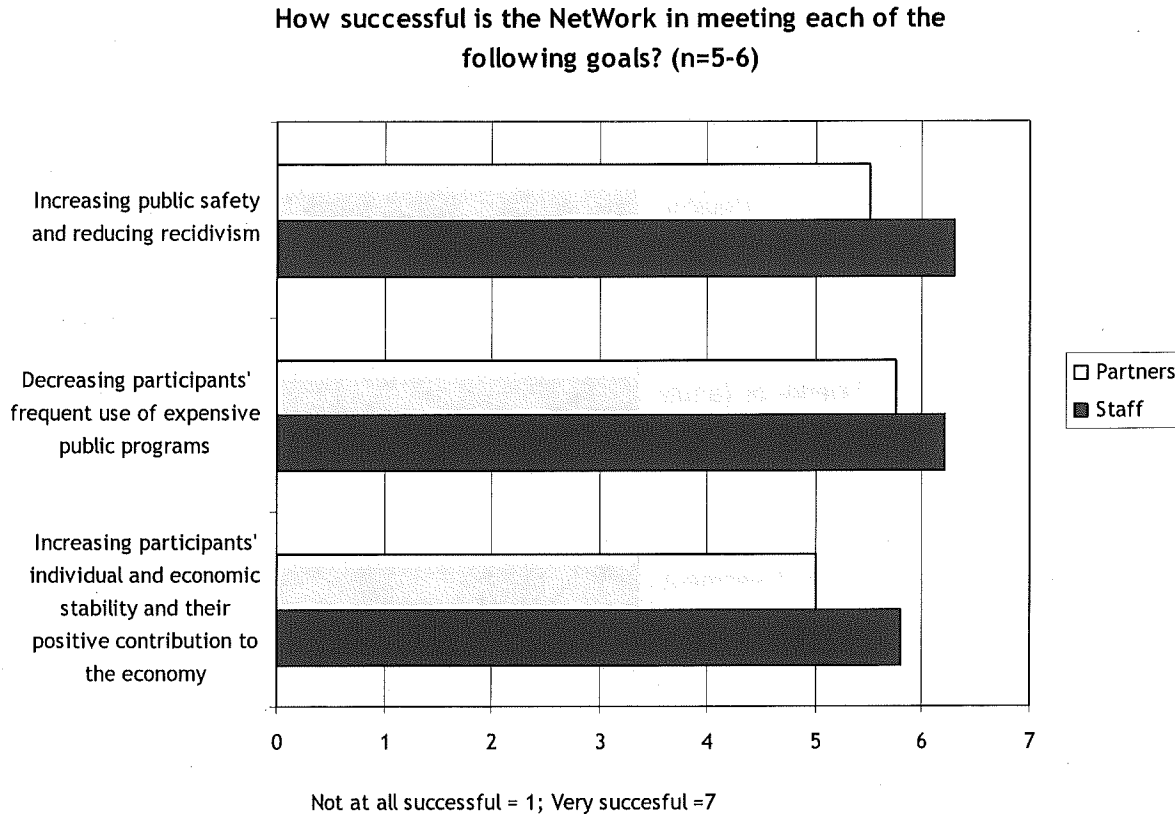
Most of brothers in the NetWork I've been knowing for years. We critique our relations, make it better than it used to be. We know how we are, we know how each other is; if we see a brother down, we're like 'What is wrong? Is you alright? Want to talk about it? Maybe my opinion might help you; maybe someone else's will.'



Overall Feedback on the NetWork

In surveys, partners and staff commented on the NetWork's progress towards its main goals. Figure 15 below shows that partners and staff are generally positive about the NetWork's progress to meeting its goals, though partners are less positive than staff. This Figure shows that staff cites the NetWork's greatest success as reducing recidivism while partners rank decreasing use of public programs most highly. Both agree that the area of lesser success is increasing participants' economic stability.

Figure 15. Partner and Staff Views on NetWork Success

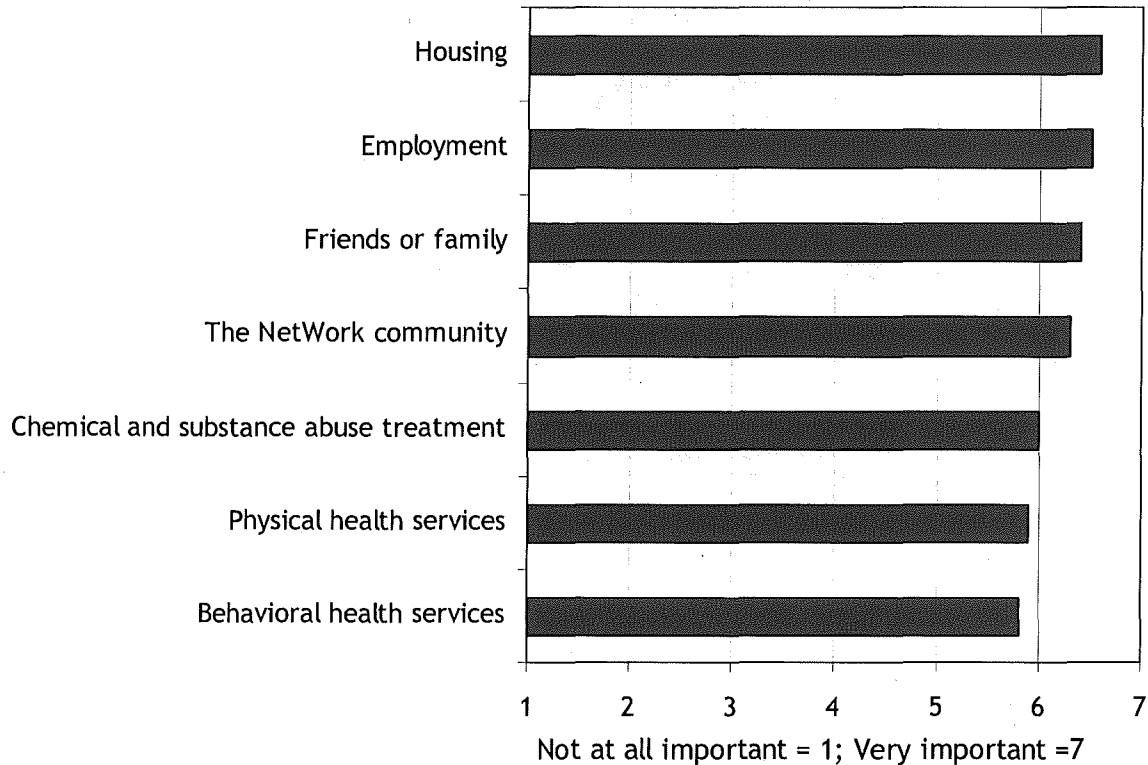


Source: the Improve Group

In their surveys, participants also commented on the NetWork's impact on their recidivism. Figure 16 shows that participants feel that housing and employment are the most important contributors to avoiding criminal activity, though participants ranked most of these elements as at least somewhat important. Community and family support are ranked more highly than services to address chemical, physical or behavioral health.

Figure 16. Participants' Assessment of NetWork Effect on Criminal Activity

How important have the following been to helping you avoid criminal activity? (n=21-58)



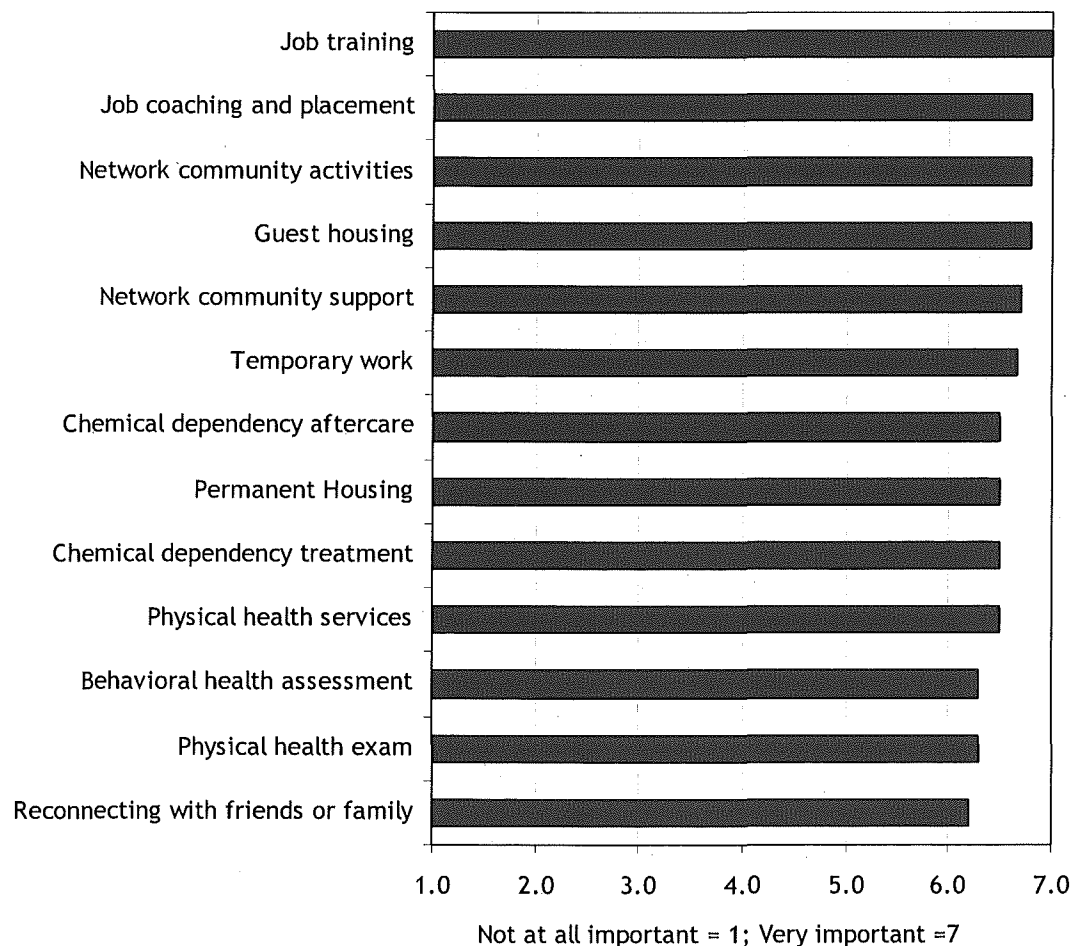
Source: the Improve Group

According to several of the participant interviewees, having a program or schedule is also helpful because otherwise people don't know what to do when they are released. The schedule provides positive activities for the men to be involved in, and limits opportunities for them to find themselves in negative situations. One interviewee said, "I don't have time to be running around and hanging out in the street. I'd find stuff to get into; now I have something to get into." Another recounted his story of a previous (unsuccessful) release. He violated his release by drinking with a cousin, who he acknowledges is a bad influence. Though his cousin may still visit from time to time, it makes it easier for this interviewee to say no to going out with him at night because the interviewee has to get up early for work. Interviewees also enumerated the challenges with finding housing and a job, as described above.

All of the active participant interviewees stressed that it is not up to the NetWork to meet all their needs. They said that participants will be successful if they WANT to change, that the responsibility lies with the individual.

Staff also commented in surveys on what was most important to help participants with re-entry. Staff placed the greatest importance on activities related to employment and creating a community within the NetWork; however, all activities are ranked as at least somewhat important. Please also see Figure 17.

Figure 17. Staff Perspectives on What is Most Important to Help Participants with Re-Entry
How important are the following in helping NetWork
participants with successful re-entry? (n=6)



Source: the Improve Group

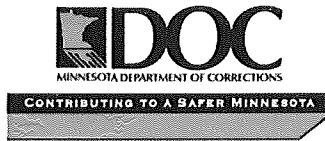
In surveys, staff felt that coaching, community building activities and gatherings, empowerment training and weekly meetings with staff all contribute to the success of the NetWork in serving participants. Additionally, housing, the creation of Individual Prosperity Plans, behavioral and physical health exams and the dedication of NetWork staff members were mentioned as success factors for the program. Staff felt that the comprehensive support services provided, the high level of accountability and the high level of moral support were the most important aspects that set the NetWork apart from other organizations. As one staff member stated, "We smother them with appropriate supportive services, assist with reengagement with their family and the community, and we don't accept their previous adopted failure mentality."

NetWork partner organizations felt that a sense of community, the offering of integrated services (housing, jobs, services, health care, treatment, treatment and community service), the accountability and engagement of participants and a positive focus are all factors that contribute to the success of the program. When asked what makes the NetWork different from other organizations that serve released offenders the partner organizations cited the integration of services and the focus on meeting the needs of the whole person as the main differences.

Suggestions for Improvement

Interviews with active participants yielded few suggestions of any changes they would make to the NetWork. One said that additional assistance with getting better paid jobs would be good. Another expressed that he wished the NetWork would more often ask participants for ideas on how to do things.

Several interviewees did comment on an aspect of the NetWork they would like to see changed. They felt that some participants did not commit themselves to the NetWork and take it all seriously. Interviewees said the NetWork was "too lenient" or should do more screening of participants or ask men who are not serious to leave the program. These interviewees described that it can be distracting to them and detract from the positive community when people are being negative or not taking the honesty and commitment to one another seriously. A couple interviewees mentioned that a new internal committee or council



was being started. This body would be made up of participants and help the NetWork make decisions about whether participants should stay.

Staff members expressed concern that severe mental illness needs, the needs of less engaged participants (because of a lack of staff capacity for outreach) and the need for self-sufficiency were participant needs that are not currently being well met. Staff suggestions for improvement in serving participants include:

- Adding a spiritual component
- Having more purposeful outreach to family, partners or children
- Employing additional team leaders
- Getting more buy-in from participants on the importance of behavioral health assessments
- Obtaining NetWork-owned housing
- Enforcing rental policies
- Increasing Better Futures customers

Partner organizations felt that improvements could be made in affordable housing, work opportunities including part-time evening and weekend work, long-term security in terms of support and access to medical care. Partner organizations felt that the NetWork could better serve participants through continued and additional funding and through continuing to refine the partner coordination model with an emphasis on communication between partners and greater accountability between partners for access to services (medical assessments and follow-up were specifically mentioned). Additionally, partners felt that the NetWork needs to work harder to distinguish itself from other programs in the minds of those who are not familiar with the inner-workings of the program. Finally, one partner noted that the NetWork may be overly concerned with ensuring that a consistently positive/successful image of the initiative is presented in this demonstration phase, at times at the expense of acknowledging opportunities for improvements. This partner also suggested that the NetWork increase focus on building support by acknowledging the effectiveness of other approaches to release programs and reaching out to other community activists.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The NetWork for Better Futures model addresses the major challenges that both researchers and participants agree are important to a successful release from incarceration. Moreover, the NetWork's community environment and identity as an enterprise, instead of a program, appears to offer a unique and empowering experience for some participants.

The NetWork is not a good fit for men in the target population. For those who had enrolled before the end of March 2009, 36% remain active; the biggest single reason for becoming inactive is "self-termination" as participants are no longer interested in being part of the NetWork or no longer feel the model is a good fit for them.

The timeframe for this evaluation captures only a snapshot of participation and outcomes for this new initiative, and focuses on a period of time in which this demonstration project was getting to capacity and refining its approaches. The NetWork's outcomes on major goals during this time can be summarized as follows.

Recidivism: Fifty-five of the 129 (43%) participants who had joined the NetWork before the end of December 2008 had had a release violation, reconviction or both. If you include those with a technical violation, 77 (60%) of men have had their supervised release revoked.

Physical, mental and chemical health: Most participants appear to have insurance coverage and report having physical and behavioral health assessments after they enroll with the NetWork. Despite many having positive assessments for chemical dependency while with the Department of Corrections, a minority appear to be participating in partners' or other organization's treatment or aftercare. Participants (both active and those reincarcerated) reported in interviews and surveys that the NetWork provides a supportive environment for being healthy and sober.

Economic contributions and self-sufficiency: Many of the active participants are employed, with half working for the Better Futures work crew. It does not appear that those working for Better Futures are those who are newer to the NetWork; the average time with the NetWork

for those working for Better Futures is 269 days, compared with an average of 187 days for those working for other employers. Most participants are living in NetWork housing and three-quarters are receiving help on their rent from the NetWork. Few NetWork participants have been active in the job skill training programs of NetWork partners; a minority of active participants report enrollment in education or skill-building programs. Medica data indicates that most participants, at least those with Medica as a provider, are accessing health insurance through state programs.

Finally, partnership synergy was anticipated to be an important element of the NetWork model. Partners appear to be supportive of and positive about the NetWork; they do provide some referrals to the NetWork and some services for NetWork participants. However, there is little evidence of widespread NetWork participant use of partner services in chemical dependency and job skill training, though these would appear to be critical issues for most NetWork participants.

Three factors make placing these results in proper context particularly important. First, as described above, the NetWork was in a demonstration phase during the evaluation period and getting up to speed in staffing and systems. Second, although the evaluation used several sources of data for this study and verified results across different data sets, it did not use a scientific design to determine impact; the relationship between different factors affecting each of the participants could be explored better through use of a control group and random assignment.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the issue of missing data makes interpreting findings particularly challenging, and this report cautiously highlights findings that are supported by more than one source of data. To site one example, those who remain active with the NetWork, and for whom the most data is kept in the organization's records, are those for whom the model is working, and it is difficult to determine what factors make the NetWork appropriate for some offenders but not others.

Recommendations

- **Data will help the NetWork.** It will help the enterprise know what is working, who is participating in what, as well as allowing periodic evaluation/reflection on how different factors impact success and the overall level of success. The NetWork will

need to make sure its systems support consistent record-keeping in its own databases, ensure it has the proper releases to access data in partner records and pursue arrangements with other entities (i.e. the Bureau of Criminal Apprehension or the Department of Human Services) to gain access to data that can inform the enterprise about what it should continue or change in order to meet its goals. Data keeping could be improved by: (1) integrating record-keeping functions into the roll of those with direct access to information, for example by having direct-service staff keep electronic or consistent paper records of information they learn from participants; (2) having a consistent system that is the repository for all data, such as one enterprise-wide database that tracks information on housing, employment, recidivism and community participation; (3) support the continued contribution to high-quality, consistent data by making periodic use of findings and engaging staff and other stakeholders in learning from results.

- **Keep information (even if limited) about inactive participants and those who declined to enroll.** Even without a control group, the NetWork can understand how the enterprise is functioning and for what population if you have data available about the offenders for whom the program is not a good fit. Starting with a hypothesis (for example, that the program works best for single men) will help the NetWork determine what factors to track (in that example, marital status would be important) so that efforts are focused on collecting the most relevant data.
- **The NetWork model appears to be promising and offers a unique experience for participants.** The NetWork should continue to work with the Department of Corrections to understand release violations and learn strategies that have worked elsewhere to avoid these violations.
- **The NetWork will need to pay close attention to substance abuse issues** and may need to increase expectations of participation in partner or other community organization support programs so these issues do not derail participant progress. The NetWork may need to examine how to serve individuals with chemical dependency issues while still maintaining its commitment to a sober community.
- In order to increase participant self-sufficiency and job satisfaction, while continuing to ensure that the Better Futures work crew can accommodate new arrivals, **the**

NetWork can take more steps to support participant employment outside of the enterprise. Expanding participation in education and job training programs would be one step the enterprise could take. The NetWork may also want to build partnerships with local employers who understand the criminal backgrounds participants carry. Finally, advocacy, such as letters of support, on behalf of individual participants, may help increase the number of men who are able to find employment outside of the NetWork.

- **The NetWork should continue testing and strengthening its model.** Future evaluation should consider the use of a comparison or control group, likely at the expense of the voluntary nature of joining the NetWork. Active participants self-reported that the factors that contributed to the model's success were the sense that they were among a community of men with similar backgrounds. This sense of community should be protected if the NetWork expands, with careful thought given to the community needs of a changing population if new geographic areas, population groups or women are served.

Appendix A: The NetWork for Better Futures Evaluation Logic Model

Inputs/ Activities	Overarching goals			Outcomes	Indicators of success	Measures
Integrated services efficiently and consistently delivered across multiple agencies to ensure that upon release from incarceration, participants have access to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Safe, affordable housing; □ Behavioral health services; □ Primary health care; □ Short-term employment and education; and □ A positive community created by and supporting NetWork participants. 	Increase participants' individual economic stability and their positive contribution to the economy	Decrease participants' frequent use of expensive public programs		Pay court-ordered restitution or fines (if required)	% of participants required to pay restitution or court fines that have a plan for making payments	-NetWork records, if possible -Court/DOC data
					% of participants required to pay restitution or court fines that are in compliance with a payment plan	-NetWork records, if possible -Court/DOC data
				Consistently pay child support	% of participants required to pay child support that have a plan for making payments	-NetWork records -State agency data (DHS)
					% of participants required to pay child support that are in compliance with a payment plan	-NetWork records -State agency data (DHS)
				Maintain physical health	% of participants that obtain medical insurance	-NetWork records -County records
					% of participants receiving physical exams	-NetWork records -Partner data (Medica and healthcare providers)
					% of participants requiring follow-up from the exam that obtained treatment	-Partner data (Medica and healthcare providers) -Participant surveys
					% of participants with chronic diseases in active treatment for chronic diseases	-Partner data (Medica and healthcare providers) -Participant surveys
					% of participants that have made behavior changes to improve their health	-Participant interviews -Participant surveys

The NetWork for Better Futures Evaluation: Final Report

Inputs/ Activities	Overarching goals			Outcomes	Indicators of success	Measures
<p>Integrated services efficiently and consistently delivered across multiple agencies to ensure that upon release from incarceration, participants have access to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Safe, affordable housing; □ Behavioral health services; □ Primary health care; □ Short-term employment and education; and □ A positive community created by and supporting NetWork participants. 	Increase participants' individual economic stability and their positive contribution to the economy	Decrease participants' frequent use of expensive public programs	Increase public safety and reduce recidivism	Maintain physical health (cont.)	Minimal use of emergency room, detox and crisis services	-NetWork records, if possible -Partner data (Medica) -County data
				Establish stable, adequate housing that is paid partially or fully by participants	% of participants in stable housing	-NetWork records -Participant surveys
					Average rent paid by participants in program 6 months or longer	-NetWork records -Participant surveys
					% of participants (in program 6 months or longer) paying full rent	-NetWork records -Participant surveys
					Find and keep stable, adequate employment	-NetWork records -Participant surveys
					% of participants working on Better Futures work crews	-NetWork records -Participant surveys
					% of participants with a full-time job (35+ hours/week)	-NetWork records -Participant surveys -DEED (wage levels)
					% of participants with a part-time job of 15 - 34 hours a week	-NetWork records -Participant surveys
					The 'multiplier effect' of wages earned by participants	-NetWork records (income) -Surveys (income) -DEED data (income) -Imputed multiplier
					Average months working the same full- time job (for participants in the program 6 months or longer)	-NetWork records -Participant surveys
					% of participants receiving a rent subsidy who increase earned income each quarter	-NetWork records (through end rent subsidy)
					% of participants that are satisfied with their jobs	-Participant surveys -Participant interviews
				Enhance job readiness	% of participants with a GED or higher degree	-NetWork records -Participant surveys

Inputs/ Activities	Overarching goals			Outcomes	Indicators of success	Measures
<p>Integrated services efficiently and consistently delivered across multiple agencies to ensure that upon release from incarceration, participants have access to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Safe, affordable housing; □ Behavioral health services; □ Primary health care; □ Short-term employment and education; and □ A positive community created by and supporting NetWork participants. 	<p>Increase participants' individual economic stability and their positive contribution to the economy</p>	<p>Decrease participants' frequent use of expensive public programs</p>	<p>Increase public safety and reduce recidivism</p>	<p>Enhance job readiness (cont.)</p>	% of participants in the process of earning a GED or higher degree	-NetWork records -Participant surveys
					% of participants completing a job skills training program	-NetWork records -Participant surveys -Partner data (Summit Academy OIC and Twin Cities RISE!)
					% of participants with a valid driver's license or a valid ID	-NetWork records -Participant surveys
				<p>Become financially independent</p>	% of participants with a checking account	-NetWork records -Participant surveys
					% of participants with a savings account	-NetWork records -Participant surveys
					% of participants who have maintained a checking account for 3 months (of those in the program over 3 months)	-NetWork records -Participant surveys
					% of participants who have maintained a savings account for 3 months (of those in the program over 3 months)	-NetWork records -Participant surveys
					% of participants with at least \$1,000 in a savings account	-NetWork records -Participant surveys
					% of participants (in program 3 months or more) that are making progress on their personal prosperity plan	-NetWork records -Participant surveys -Participant interviews
				<p>Form supportive community</p>	% of participants that participate in community gatherings	-NetWork records -Participant surveys
					% of participants with no more than 3 unexcused absences from community gatherings	-NetWork records -Participant surveys

Inputs/ Activities	Overarching goals			Outcomes	Indicators of success	Measures
Integrated services efficiently and consistently delivered across multiple agencies to ensure that upon release from incarceration, participants have access to: ❑ Safe, affordable housing; ❑ Behavioral health services; ❑ Primary health care; ❑ Short-term employment and education; and ❑ A positive community created by and supporting NetWork participants.		Decrease participants' frequent use of expensive public programs	Increase public safety and reduce recidivism	Experience few barriers in navigating systems/services	% participants that report ease of use across systems and services	-Participant surveys -Participant interviews
				Build positive relationships	% of participants in contact with family and friends after reentry, as appropriate	-Participant surveys -Participant interviews
					# of supportive relationships participants have with family or friends	-Participant surveys -Participant interviews
					% of participants avoiding acquaintances, friends or family who are negative influences	-Participant surveys -Participant interviews
				Volunteer to serve the community	% of participants that have participated in voluntary community service	-Participant surveys -Participant interviews
					% of participants that have participated in voluntary community service at least one time per month	-Participant surveys -Participant interviews
				Serve as mentors to one another	% of participants serving as a Peer Mentor	-Participant surveys -Participant interviews
					% of participants that have served as a Peer Mentor for at least 3 months	-Participant surveys -Participant interviews
		Comply with all supervised release or probation requirements	% of participants in compliance with all supervised release or probation requirements	-DOC data -NetWork and county agent records (if negotiated terms)		
		Reduce criminal activity	% of participants/members arrested	-NetWork records -County data -DOC data		

Inputs/ Activities	Overarching goals			Outcomes	Indicators of success	Measures
<p>Integrated services efficiently and consistently delivered across multiple agencies to ensure that upon release from incarceration, participants have access to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Safe, affordable housing; <input type="checkbox"/> Behavioral health services; <input type="checkbox"/> Primary health care; <input type="checkbox"/> Short-term employment and education; and <input type="checkbox"/> Positive community experience among NetWork participants. 			Increase public safety and reduce recidivism	Reduce criminal activity (cont.)	% of participants/members with new criminal convictions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -NetWork records -County data -State agency data (DOC)
				Complete treatment for chemical dependency (if needed)	% participants with chemical dependency that are in compliance with aftercare treatment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Partner data (Turning Point, RS Eden, Fairview) -Participant surveys
					% participants with chemical dependency with at least 6 months sobriety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -NetWork records -Partner data (Turning Point, RS Eden, Fairview) -Participant surveys
					% relapses successfully managed by getting participant into treatment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -NetWork records -Partner data (Turning Point, RS Eden, Fairview)
				Receive treatment for behavioral health issues, such as medication or counseling (if needed)	% of participants receiving behavioral health assessments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -NetWork assessment -Partner data (Medica)
					% of participants requiring follow-up from the behavioral health assessment that obtained treatment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -NetWork records -Partner data -Participant surveys
					% of participants that have improved their behavioral/mental health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Participant interviews -Participant surveys -LSIR and/or NetWork records as available
					% of participants with chronic behavioral health issues in active treatment for their issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Participant interviews -Participant surveys -NetWork records -Partner data

Appendix B: Authorizing legislation

Subdivision 1. **Definition.** For purposes of this section, "high-risk adult" means an adult with a history of some combination of substance abuse, mental illness, chronic unemployment, incarceration, or homelessness. High-risk adults are considered to be very likely to enter or re-enter state or county correctional programs or chemical or mental health programs.

Subd. 2. **Establishment.** (a) The commissioner of corrections shall contract with one nonprofit entity to conduct this demonstration project and document the effectiveness of this model. Initially, the demonstration will operate in the Twin Cities metropolitan area.

(b) At a minimum, the contractor shall meet the following criteria:

(1) be an incorporated, nonprofit organization that is capable of managing and operating a multidisciplinary model for providing high-risk adults with housing, short-term work, health care, behavioral health care, and community re-engagement;

(2) demonstrate an ability to organize and manage an alliance of nonprofit organizations providing services to high-risk adults;

(3) have organizational leaders with a demonstrated ability to organize, manage, and lead service teams consisting of workers from multiple service providers that deliver direct support to high-risk adults;

(4) have experience with providing a comprehensive set of housing, work, health care, behavioral health care, and community re-engagement services to high-risk adults; and

(5) be a recipient of foundation and other private funds for the refinement and testing of a demonstration of this type.

Subd. 3. **Scope of the demonstration project.** The contractor undertaking this demonstration project shall do the following, as part of this project:

(1) enroll eligible high-risk adults over the demonstration project period, starting December 1, 2007;

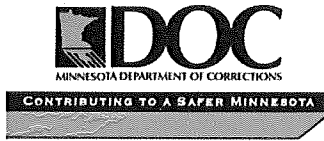
(2) using best practices derived from research and testing, provide or assist in arranging access to services for high-risk adults enrolled in the demonstration project, including, at a minimum, housing, behavioral health services, health care, employment, and community and family re-engagement;

(3) maximize the performance of existing services and programs by coordinating access to and the delivery of these services; and

(4) define conditions under which enrollees are considered to be in good standing and allowed to remain in the demonstration project.

The conditions under clause (4) may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- (i) living in stable and safe housing;
- (ii) working and earning an income;
- (iii) paying child support, if appropriate;
- (iv) participating in treatment programs, if appropriate; and
- (v) having no arrests.



Subd. 4. **Eligibility.** The following types of individuals are eligible for enrollment in this demonstration project:

- (1) high-risk adults;
- (2) high-risk adults in the process of being released from state correctional facilities, county detention facilities, community-based treatment or detoxification facilities, community corrections halfway houses, or other similar programs, or on probation; and
- (3) high-risk adults willing to accept the requirements imposed on enrollees in the demonstration project, including, but not limited to, maintaining steady employment; paying child support, if applicable; remaining drug-free and alcohol-free, if applicable; and no criminal activity.

Subd. 5. **Payment.** To the extent funds are appropriated for the purposes of this section, the commissioner of corrections shall pay to the entity under contract a monthly fee of \$1,600 for each enrollee who (1) had been in the custody of the commissioner of corrections within the preceding year, and (2) is in good standing in the demonstration project.

Subd. 6. **Report.** (a) By January 15 of each year, the entity under contract shall submit a report to the commissioners of corrections, human services, employment and economic development, and housing finance, and the legislature. The report must include the following:

- (1) the number of participants who have been enrolled and the number currently participating in the demonstration project;
 - (2) a description of the services provided to enrollees over the past year and over the duration of the demonstration project to date;
 - (3) an accounting of the costs associated with the enrollees over the past year and over the duration of the demonstration project to date; and
 - (4) any other information requested by the commissioners of corrections, human services, employment and economic development, and housing finance, and the legislature.
- (b) The report must include recommendations on improving and expanding the project to other geographical areas of the state.
- (c) The report must include an update on the status of the independent evaluation required in subdivision 7.

Subd. 7. **Independent evaluation.** An independent evaluator selected by the commissioner of corrections shall conduct an evaluation of the project. The independent evaluator shall complete and submit a report of findings and recommendations to the commissioners of corrections, human services, employment and economic development, and housing finance, and the legislature. This independent evaluation must be developed and implemented concurrently with the demonstration project, beginning on December 1, 2007. The final report is due upon completion of the demonstration project and must be submitted to the above-named entities.