



NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR
WORK & LEARNING

Going the Extra Mile:

A Case Study of Rural Reentry in Arkansas

Amy Detgen and Sanskriti Thapa



Top photo: Mural from Monticello's downtown square; Bottom photo: Artwork in the abandoned town of Dermott.





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ABOUT FHI 360

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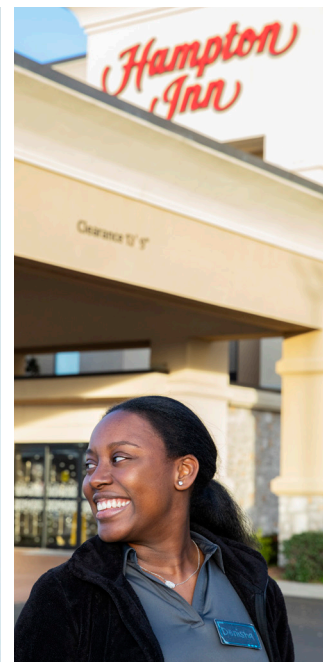
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Faces of the Phoenix community



Photos: © Jessica Scranton



GOING THE EXTRA MILE: A Case Study of Rural Reentry in Arkansas

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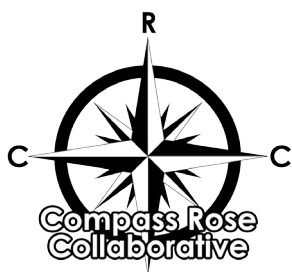
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▶ *“Growing up in these small towns, it is so easy to go down the wrong road. But Phoenix is here to help and lead us in another direction. To see what some of us were doing before being involved with Phoenix and to see where we are now... I haven't looked back since then.”*

—**SA'VIUN ROBERTSON,**
PARTICIPANT

▶ *“The Phoenix team is very involved with their participants. So, when I wanted to get into a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) program. Ms. Evelyn offered to give me a ride back and forth between college, work and my house. She also said that they would pay for my uniforms or whatever I need. They also then paid for my state exam to get me certified as a CNA. I just had to take the first step. After that, the Phoenix team followed. That's how I got my foot in the door with health care, and so that's how it all started for me.”*

—**DAI'BRINA ANDERSON,**
PARTICIPANT

Introduction

Going the extra mile: A case study of rural reentry in Arkansas, provides an exploration of a small rural community in Southeast Arkansas that takes a unique, individualized approach to reentering young adults ages 18-24.

The received wisdom on rural reentry is that it is generally more difficult than reentry in an urban setting. Phoenix Youth and Family Services, which serves a rural part of Arkansas, has excelled on key outcomes as part of FHI 360's Compass Rose Collaborative (CRC)¹, a project funded by the U.S. Department of Labor to improve the education and employment outcomes of young adults, ages 18 through 24, after involvement in the U.S. criminal justice system. Phoenix Youth and Family Services, known locally and abbreviated hereafter as “Phoenix,” provides wraparound support services to its participants to help juveniles, young adults, and families secure a safe, healthy and strong life.

The purpose of this study is to better understand and bring attention to Phoenix's success (see Table 1), highlighting distinctions in its work, staff and community. In addition, we hope to add to the reentry research by providing a rich, detailed exploration of the approaches of a successful rural reentry program. Our study involved 13 interviews with Phoenix current and former staff and community stakeholders to gather experiences, insights, stories, and examples which illuminate the Phoenix organization and the surrounding neighborhoods.

This publication begins with background and historical information on Phoenix and reviews the rural reentry literature. We then present our case study findings summarized by three aspects: the Phoenix **community**, the Phoenix **organization** and the Phoenix **people**. This discussion is followed by Phoenix's main challenges, a discussion of our findings, and our study conclusions.

1.The Compass Rose Collaborative is 100% funded by the U.S. Department of Labor in the amount of \$8,798,500. No other sources of funding support this program.



"The thing that stands out to me most about the people that serve the community through Phoenix Youth and Family Services is that there is not a barrier too large, nor challenge too complex for them to overcome. Even when faced with dire economic circumstances only magnified by the pandemic, they have leaned on their collaborative spirit, faith, and shared vision to support their community members and make a positive impact. They also do it with a big smile!"

—CAITLIN DAWKINS,
DIRECTOR OF JUSTICE
PROGRAMS, FHI 360 NIWL



"I had the honor of meeting Toyce Newton, the founder of Phoenix in 2000. Her passion and ability to highlight the challenges and opportunities in rural America continues to move me to partner and promote the excellence in rural partnerships, and to never leave rural youth out of the ecosystem of youth development. I remain inspired by the strength of Phoenix. They lead with heart, create an instant family environment, and customize support for each individual young person that walks through their doors."

—LISA JOHNSON,
DIRECTOR OF NIWL FHI360

PHOENIX'S PERFORMANCE

Phoenix has been a top performer in terms of meeting its goals throughout the Compass Rose Collaborative. For the grant that runs from 2018 -2022, Phoenix has exceeded all the goals that were set by the Collaborative. As shown in Table 1, Phoenix enrolled 73 participants. Of those, 60 participants completed occupational skills training, 34 attained an industry-recognized credential, 64 participants attained an employment and/or educational placement, and 100% of the participants received mentoring and wraparound supportive services. In addition, only 1 participant committed a new crime since enrolling in the program, resulting in a recidivism rate of 1.4%, well below the state's average i.e., 51.82% (Arkansas Department of Corrections, 2020).

Table 1. Phoenix Outcomes and Goals for Compass Rose Collaborative 2018*

	OUTCOME ACHIEVED	GOAL
Enrollment	73 participants	70 participants
Occupational skills training (OST)	82% of the participants	60% of the participants
Industry recognized credential attainment	77% of the participants	60% of those participants in OST
Employment and educational placement	88% of the participants	70% of the participants
Recidivism	1% of the participants	Below 20% of the participants
Supportive services	100% of the participants	100% of the participants
Mentoring services	100% of the participants	100% of the participants

*The outcomes are as of the date of the publication.



Photo courtesy of Phoenix Youth and Family Services

TOYCE NEWTON
Founder and former CEO,
Phoenix Youth and Family Services

PHOENIX YOUTH AND FAMILY SERVICES' HISTORY

In 1995, Toyce Newton founded Phoenix Youth and Family Services to fill a need. Working at a local mental health center, she felt frustrated from routinely seeking funding and “retrofitting” grants to the community. Instead, she envisioned developing programming based on the community’s needs. She strived to create an environment where “things weren’t done to people but with them.” She saw her role as serving as “a megaphone” to raise people’s voices. Having lived her whole life in southeast Arkansas, she witnessed inequities in education, employment and social services. Her hope was that through listening to the community, this new organization would help residents realize their strengths. She said, “The work was here to do and if it’s not me, then who?” Phoenix Youth and Family Services was born out of a vision to promote community, promote trust, and honor families.

With a grant from the Arkansas Department of Human Services, Division of Youth Services, Phoenix began its work serving young people who were being released from incarceration or detainment. While the project’s main focus was juvenile justice, Phoenix also provided ancillary services to families—including domestic violence and substance abuse prevention services, parenting classes, and post-secondary programming—working to build their capacity. Ms. Newton noted, “When families do better, children do better.” From there, Phoenix took on additional projects to further support families. Juvenile Justice Director Evelyn Prosper recalled that with the Youth Opportunity movement in 2000, Phoenix evolved from a focus on the justice system to working with all young people between the ages of 13-24. Current Phoenix CEO Christie Lindsey described how Phoenix continued to grow its youth and family support and prevention services and with U.S. Department of Labor funding, branched into workforce development. Battling such community issues as elevated high school dropout rates, lower educational attainment, and teen pregnancy, Phoenix provided connections to tutoring, mentorship, and childcare to assist young people in obtaining their GED or further education, as well as job placement to secure employment. Ms. Lindsey pointed out that Phoenix is successful because it has people “on the streets”—in the Boys and Girls Clubs, in school districts—and can both recruit and troubleshoot barriers and help young people and families “make their lives better.” Several of our interviewees described Phoenix’s work as **“going the extra mile”** for those in the community.



CHRISTIE LINDSEY
CEO, Phoenix Youth
and Family Services

According to Arkansas's Department of Human Services Division of Youth Services Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Unit, in 2018,

34%

of juveniles in the Arkansas justice system were incarcerated for reoffending.

Background

RURAL REENTRY CHALLENGES AND APPROACHES FROM LITERATURE

Young people reentering the community after incarceration face many challenges, and those in rural communities often face additional difficulties due to their remote environment. Often noted is the lack of employment opportunities in rural areas (Higgins, 2021; Miller 2019; Ethridge, Dunlap, Boston, & Staton, 2014), yet research shows employment to be one of the most critical factors in preventing recidivism (Williams et al., 2019; Staton, Dickson, Tillson, Webster & Leukefeld, 2019). A factor closely linked to employment is transportation, which presents a challenge in rural areas due to the lack of public transportation and the great geographic distances a person may need to travel to work (Kirkpatrick 2017; Staton, et al., 2019; Miller, 2017; Family Justice, 2009). Affordable housing can also be hard to obtain in rural areas, and young adults reentering the community often return to the same neighborhoods and negative influences they experienced prior to incarceration (Liu, 2021). With few alternative opportunities and peer criminality still active in their community, young people are likely to end up back in the justice system (Higgins, 2021; Hall-Williams, 2017; Staton, et al., 2019). Commonly in rural areas, a lack of health, mental health, substance abuse prevention, and counseling providers only exacerbates conditions that lead to justice involvement and recidivism (Ward, 2015; Staton et al., 2019). According to Arkansas's Department of Human Services Division of Youth Services Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Unit, in 2018, 34% of juveniles in the Arkansas justice system were incarcerated for reoffending.

A qualitative study of 54 people who returned to rural communities after incarceration in Indiana showed the importance of interpersonal relationships to a person's reentry success (Kirkpatrick, 2017). Acquaintanceship density, or the extent that community members know and interact with each other, is as Kirkpatrick notes, "a characteristic that defines social structure in rural communities" (Kirkpatrick, 2017; Cronin, 2008; Freudenburg, 1986). The positive effects of relationships in reentry are seen through social support networks such as family, supportive peers, faith-based groups, and the community overall (Kirkpatrick, 2017; Pettus-Davis, et al., 2019; Hlavka, Wheelock and Jones, 2015). Support, guidance and empathy have been reported as key elements in rural reentry service relationships (Higgins, 2021; Hutchins, 2015; McMahon and Pederson, 2020; Miller, 2017), and including families in reentry planning can lead to more successful reintegration (Pfeifer, 2018).



Relationships between and across agencies in rural communities can also support successful reentry (Page, 2021; Pfeifer, 2018), particularly between reentry organizations, workforce development agencies and the local business community (Tanner, 2019). Research also supports the idea that community partners should routinely update reentry programming to meet the needs of different populations, taking a holistic perspective to target services to each individual (Rhyne-Swabek, 2017; Hall-Williams, 2017; Hlavka, Wheelock and Jones, 2015; Bowen, 2020).

Little research has been conducted to understand the factors unique to rural reentry (Staton et al., 2019; Kirkpatrick, 2017). This case study aims to contribute to the rural reentry literature by illuminating the work of one reentry organization that has consistently experienced successful outcomes with young adults in a rural setting. By examining the factors that are characteristic of this organization, its community and its people, the study offers examples of innovative and creative approaches to reentry challenges in a rural setting.

Methods

To learn about Phoenix Youth and Family Services, its work, its history, its people and the surrounding community, we conducted a case study comprised of interviews with 13 staff and stakeholders. This approach enabled us to gather rich detail and descriptive stories and examples. Through our analyses of these data, we identified common themes and distinctive qualities related to Phoenix and the community. This publication summarizes our findings and overall themes and highlights illustrative quotes and vignettes. While the descriptions and lessons learned in this study will not be universally applicable to other programs, the document will add to important scholarship and policy discussions about the critical topic of reentry.





PARTICIPANTS

In November 2021, we began preparing our study by contacting Juvenile Justice Director Evelyn Prosper at Phoenix Youth and Family Services and asking her to identify a purposeful sample of study participants—specifically Phoenix staff members, participants and community stakeholders who could help us learn about Phoenix’s work, its approach, and the community. Ms. Prosper identified herself and two staff members, the CEO, the former CEO and founder, two participants, and six community stakeholders. Because of Ms. Prosper’s relationships to these potential interviewees, she contacted them on our behalf, sharing a study description and consent form, and requesting their participation.

Table 2. List of Interviewees

INTERVIEWEE	TITLE
Brittany Sears	Employer at Mainline Health
Bishop Michael Jones	Pastor, Revival Church Center
Christopher Spencer	Family Support Specialist, Phoenix Youth and Family Services, Inc.
Christie Lindsey	CEO of Phoenix Youth and Family Services, Inc.
Dai’Brina Anderson	Program Participant
Dorissa Kaufman	Director of Adult Education, University of Arkansas
Douglas Williams	Special Projects Director, Phoenix Youth and Family Services, Inc.
Evelyn Prosper	Juvenile Justice Director, Phoenix Youth and Family Services, Inc.
Jerome Perez	Police Officer
Judge Teresa French	Circuit Judge, Tenth Judicial Circuit, Arkansas
Sa’viun Robertson	Program Participant
Tomeka Butler	Mayor of Eudora, AR; Former Youth Support Specialist and In-take Specialist, Phoenix Youth and Family Services, Inc.
Toyce Newton	Founder and Former CEO of Phoenix Youth and Family Services, Inc.



SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

We conducted semi-structured video conference interviews to gather perspectives on Phoenix as an organization, its approach to working with young people, the community surrounding Phoenix, and facilitating factors or barriers affecting its work. Our questions were designed to better understand what makes the staff, the organization, and the community distinctive, and what interviewees feel are the reasons for Phoenix's success in connecting young people to education and employment. The interview protocol allowed flexibility in question order and in tailoring questions to individuals based on their responses. Because of travel restrictions during COVID-19, the two authors conducted interviews jointly through Microsoft Teams, and each interview took approximately one hour.

DATA ANALYSIS

The authors recorded and transcribed all Teams interviews. We organized the data using Dedoose software and conducted a reflexive thematic analysis (Clarke et al., 2019; Nowell et al., 2017), using a deductive approach. We first coded to a pre-existing framework based on the interview questions and then conducted a second cycle of coding to examine the data for common themes and experiences as well as notable distinctive comments (Saldaña, 2016). The unit of analysis was a sentence or a paragraph, depending on what was sufficient to capture interviewees' complete thoughts. We selected quotes to highlight themes and describe unique ideas (King, 2004), and coded emerging sub-themes and new themes. The authors used double-coding in addition to peer debriefing (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) and multiple team meetings to discuss coding decisions and revisions, ultimately coming to agreement on a final set of codes and themes.



Dai'Brina Anderson's Story

When I started school, I was pregnant with my first baby and a lot of people did not think that I was going to make it. I wanted to go through the nursing program and had to meet certain requirements because my English ACT score was borderline. I remember what one of my teachers said, he looked at me and told me, "You might need to find a different occupation." It upset me and I went home, and this affected me, made me feel like I could not do it. I changed my goals, but I was not feeling anything else I was doing so I went back to nursing. I remember how I almost got off just because someone told me they didn't think I could handle nursing. But here I am, I made it. I have learned from my journey, and I always try to tell people that if there is something you want to do you should do it. Do not let anyone tell you that you cannot, you absolutely can.

Today, I have two daughters, a one- and two-year-old. I am all about my girls. I work hard for them because I want my girls to look up to me and be like, well, my mom did this while she was pregnant. So, if she can do it, I can do it. I have just always been big on family support because my folks didn't do that for me. Everybody in town was like you are just going to be like your mom but I did not like that label. I know it is not her fault because she did not have anything for her and was not motivated to do anything, but I wanted to bring that motivation for my daughters. I did all this to create some type of legacy and break the chain because no one in my family went to school. I wanted my daughters to have role models to look up to and relate. So, I try to set a good example for them because they always are mimicking and watching me.

I am currently going through a divorce and things have been tough for me and I know I could have fallen back on the wrong path. But throughout all this I have been staying strong for my daughters so they can understand that regardless of what someone is going through there is a way you can cope with things better than falling off on the deep end and doing bad things.



In 2018 when I was getting ready to graduate high school I got connected to Phoenix through my grandmother. My grandma had a Family in Need of Services (FINS)² petition because we were getting really hot headed and disrespectful, and she wanted to try to get some type of help before it got worse. So, we had to go through the FINS petition and Ms. Evelyn Prosper from Phoenix also works with the court systems and social workers, and she was always there. She is also a family friend, so she knew us, and everyone knows everyone in our community. She was the one who told my grandma about the Compass Rose Collaborative program and that is how Evelyn reached out to me and my little sister. So that's how I got started in the program. The people at Phoenix are so involved with the participants, they make sure to see how everyone and their families are doing. I like the fact that they first asked me, what I want to do, where I want to go. It was nice that I sat down and had a face-to-face conversation with them which just showed that they actually cared and that they really wanted to help me find my path.

Before I had a car, they gave me rides even if it was multiple times in the same day. Once I got a car and did not have money for gas, they helped me with gas so that I could go back and forth between my classes. When I needed help paying for my babies' diapers and wipes, they found help for me. When I got certified as a CNA and needed to pay for my shoes and uniforms, they bought me everything I needed so that I could go to work. They always called to make sure I was doing okay and I have everything I needed to be successful in what I was doing. **Phoenix went out their way, they always went the extra mile.**

2. Family In Needs of Services (FINS) is a lawsuit filed by a family member, guardian or other concerned person against a juvenile asking the court for help. The purpose of the FINS is to offer court assistance to the juvenile and the family. Helping an at-risk juvenile usually requires family participation.



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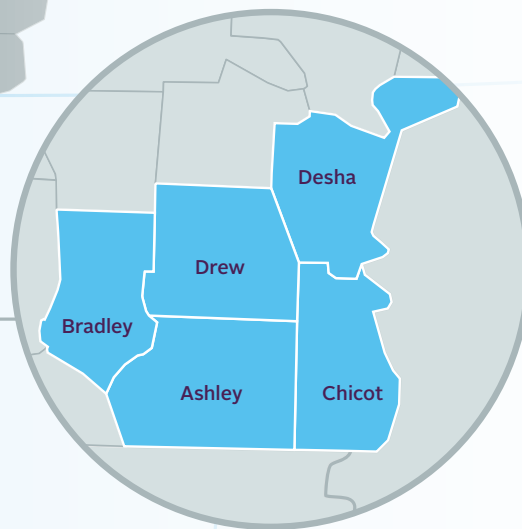
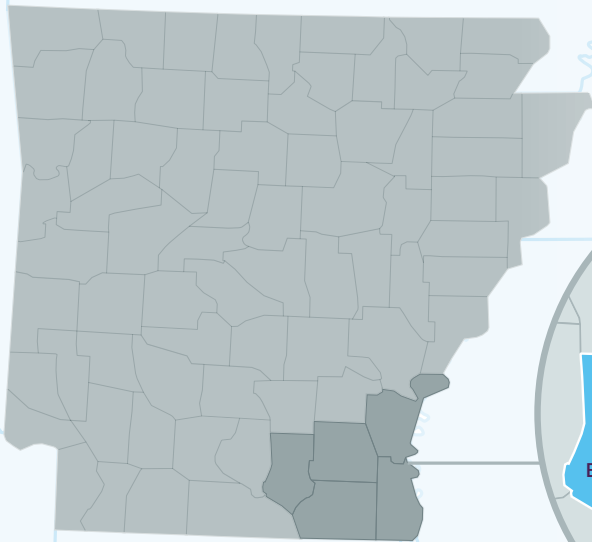


Southeast Arkansas Community

GEOGRAPHIC SETTING

This case study is specific to the lower delta/southeast region of Arkansas, where Phoenix works in five counties: Ashley, Bradley, Chicot, Desha, and Drew (see Figure 1). Most of the counties are situated close to the Mississippi River in the Arkansas Delta region. This region is approximately a one-to-two hour drive from the state capital of Little Rock, two to three hours from Jackson, MS, two to four hours from Memphis, TN and more than five hours from Dallas, TX.

The five counties are rural, made up of small towns and cities. As shown in Table 3, the largest cities in each of the counties range from less than 3,000 residents to just under 10,000 people.



**PHOENIX YOUTH AND
FAMILY SERVICES**

AREAS OF FOCUS



Table 3. Population size of each of the five counties' largest city

COUNTY	LARGEST CITY	POPULATION OF CITY
Ashley	Crossett	4972
Bradley	Warren	5646
Chicot	Dermott	2810
Desha	Dumas	4173
Drew	Monticello	9508

SOURCE: U.S Census Bureau, 2019 ACS Survey

Agriculture has always led the area’s economy, but over time, the increased use of farm technology has displaced available jobs. Today, the area’s leading employers include Georgia-Pacific, LLC, Walmart, the University of Arkansas - Monticello, Clearwater Paper Corporation, local school districts and medical centers (see Table 4). Phoenix Founder and former CEO Toyce Newton told us that apart from the few cities that feature large employers, the five counties are made up of “small and struggling Delta towns.” For example, the town of Dermott used to be an area where local residents owned businesses; however today, no businesses are open, and most of the homes have been abandoned. What is in operation is the prison, Delta Regional Unit- Arkansas Department of Corrections.

Photos: © Jessica Scranton





Photos: © Jessica Scranton

Table 4. Top Three Employers

ASHLEY COUNTY	BRADLEY COUNTY	CHICOT COUNTY	DESHA COUNTY	DREW COUNTY
Georgia-Pacific LLC (2 locations)	Warren School District	Superior Uniform Group	Clearwater Paper Corporation	Monticello School District
Hamburg School District	Bradley County Medical Center	Chicot Memorial Medical Center	Dumas School District	University of Arkansas - Monticello
Ashley County Medical Center	Armstrong Hardwood Flooring Company	Lakeside School District	C.B. King Memorial School	Walmart Stores, Inc.

Source: Arkansas Economic Development Commission, 2018

Ms. Prosper explained that the Georgia-Pacific paper mill plant is the employer that pays high wages in the area. It is competitive to obtain a job there, and employees drive 50+ miles from surrounding areas to work. Recently, however, there have been substantial layoffs, and a considerable concern is the pollution from the plant, which may have links to cancer. In this situation, workers may be putting their health at risk in order to maintain good wages.



RACIAL DISPARITIES IN THE JUSTICE SYSTEM

According to a report on Young Adults in the Justice System by the National Conference of State Legislatures, 2019,

“Black males ages 18 to 24 are 12x more likely to be imprisoned than white males of the same age.”

University of Arkansas Monticello College (UAM) is the only institute of higher education serving these five counties. UAM has two satellite locations: University of Arkansas at McGehee College (Desha County) and University of Arkansas at Crossett College (Drew County). Crossett's School of Cosmetology (Ashley County) is no longer in operation.

The area also suffers from generational trauma. The Monticello downtown square sits directly in the middle of the town and has a colorful mural recently painted by a local artist. However, in the late 1800s and early 1900s, Black residents were lynched in this same square, and the Ku Klux Klan paraded around it in the 1920s (Holley, 2001; Arkansas Gazette, 1921; Encyclopedia of Arkansas, 2021).

Ms. Newton discussed how over time, employment has declined, the availability of housing has decreased, and the economy has gone downhill. Alluding to the community's location just west of the Mississippi River, she summed up the area's struggles with the phrase, “As the river flows, so the poverty follows.”

COMMUNITY DEMOGRAPHIC, INCOME AND CRIME DATA

In order to provide context for the community in which Phoenix works, this next section presents community demographics and crime statistics. The total population of the five counties that Phoenix serves is 60,007, which amounts to 2% of the state population. Twelve percent of the five counties' total population is young adults ages 18-24. As shown on Table 5, 28% of these young adults in the five counties are living in extreme poverty.

Table 5. Demographic Information about five counties served

	ASHLEY	BRADLEY	CHICOT	DESHA	DREW	TOTAL/ AVERAGE
Total population	20,092	10,780	9,944	11,541	17,352	60,007
Population (18-24)	1,812	758	810	883	2,690	6,953
Poverty (18-24) *	11%	29%	39%	29%	36%	28%

RACIAL BREAKDOWN** (TOP TWO CATEGORIES)

White	73%	66%	45%	50%	70%	61%
Black or African American	26%	29%	54%	48%	29%	37%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2019 ACS-5 Year Estimates Subject

* For the reentry programs, U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) considers 25% or above, exhibited through American Community Survey (ACS), to be high poverty.

** 2% identified as other races including Hispanic or Latino, Asian, American Indian and Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander. The total percentage does not equal 100 because respondents indicated more than one race.



RECIDIVISM AND YOUTH

“Statistics show young adults reoffend at a greater rate than the general population.”

According to the Arkansas Department of Public Safety in 2020, there were 5,454 total offenses in the five counties that fall under Phoenix's service area (see Table 6). As per the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), this incidence makes up 6% of the state's total violent and non-violent crimes committed in 2020. While the total population of these five counties makes up just 2% of the total state population, the crime rate is high at 6%. The majority of the crimes are non-violent, however, and reflect offenses such as drug violations and gambling. As shown in Table 7, the median income for Black households is on average (\$28,540) only 56% of the average white median income (\$50,611) in the area.

Table 6. Breakdown of offenses committed in Phoenix's service area, 2020

	ASHLEY	BRADLEY	CHICOT	DESHA	DREW	TOTAL
Crime Against Persons	157	94	114	107	170	642 (12%)
Crime Against Property Section A	249	148	195	77	297	966 (18%)
Crime Against Property Section B	218	115	131	67	282	813 (15%)
Crime Against Society	774	428	455	294	1,082	3033 (56%)
Total Offenses	1,398	785	895	545	1,831	5,454

Source: Arkansas Department of Public Safety, 2020

Crime against persons includes murder, manslaughter, homicide, kidnapping, rape, human trafficking etc.

Crime against property Section A includes arson, bribery, burglary, forgery, vandalism, embezzlement, blackmail, fraud etc.

Crime against property Section B includes vehicle theft, robbery, stolen property, theft etc.

Crime against society includes drug violations, gambling, pornography, prostitution, weapon law violations, animal cruelty etc.

Table 7. Median Household Income

	ASHLEY	BRADLEY	CHICOT	DESHA	DREW	AVERAGE
White Households	\$54,077	\$52,948	\$44,296	\$44,681	\$57,055	\$50,611
Black or African American Households	\$22,510	\$37,422	\$28,068	\$25,484	\$29,219	\$28,540

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2019 ACS-5 Year Estimates Subject



Case Study Findings


*In exploring the work of Phoenix and the surrounding community, our goal was to understand the distinctive characteristics and qualities that enable it to support young people reentering the community from incarceration. We organized our findings into three aspects: the Phoenix **community**, the Phoenix **organization** and the Phoenix **people**. The following section describes the study findings.*

THE COMMUNITY

As discussed in the last section, the five counties that make up Phoenix's community are comprised mostly of rural, southern small towns, struggling with a lack of employment opportunities. Churches are prominent, and people know their neighbors. We asked interviewees to describe the community they live and work in and tell us what makes it special. We heard that this is a close-knit, religious community, where people pull together to take full responsibility for their community members—often using exceptional creativity to overcome systemic problems to meet young people's needs.

CLOSE-KNIT COMMUNITY/RELATIONSHIPS

Phoenix Special Programs Director Douglas Williams told us that in this small community, it is easy to see people. He explained, "I mean, you go get gas and you might see five [Phoenix] participants...you can go to Walmart, which is like the mall, and you might see half the participants." Because of these regular opportunities to see each other, it's "kind of easy to stay in touch with people." Events, such as a Sunday church service or a football game, offer chances to connect with neighbors. Describing a high school basketball game, Mr. Williams said, "This whole town's pretty much there." Ms. Prosper echoed this idea saying, "We know the people that we live and work with." Phoenix Family Support Specialist Christopher Spencer said that they're able to "network" in a way that's helpful. If he is looking for a young person, he can reach out to parents or family members, and people can also find him. This closeness, or "acquaintance density," (Kirkpatrick, 2017; Cronin, 2008; Freudenburg, 1986) enables community members to feel comfortable calling on one another, and they know who to reach out to when there is a need.



"We know the people that we live and work with..we go to church with them, we're related to them or if I'm not, somebody is closely related down the line. So, we're able to call on those people and say, hey, this is what we have going on..or they know to call us."

—EVELYN PROSPER,
PHOENIX STAFF



The closeness of the community has benefited Phoenix because it is known and recognized as an organization that is there to help. Mr. Spencer explained, “With Phoenix being a part of the community, people reach out to us. Whether the kids are in trouble or not in trouble. They just want the kids to be a part of something positive.” Ms. Lindsey said Phoenix’s ability to connect with employers or other individuals in this close-knit community has been one of its great successes. She said, “We have open communications where we can go and speak to others about programs, or if we have a student that needs something, we’re able to go and say hey, this is what we need and they have been responsive. Community partners are willing to help each other.”



“The community pulls together to fill that need.”

—MAYOR TOMEKA BUTLER,
MAYOR AND FORMER PHOENIX
INTAKE SPECIALIST



“I think there’s a commitment to collaborate to see what’s best for the entire community.”


—BISHOP MICHAEL JONES, PASTOR

SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

Within this close-knit community, interviewees described a strong sense of responsibility for taking care of its youth and of each other. University of Arkansas Director of Adult Education Ms. Dorissa Kaufman described the people who work with reentering youth as “being dedicated to doing something that’s going to help your community.” She said that because of that, organizations pull together. Instead of competing for student clients, they help each other because their main goal is doing what’s best to benefit the young person. Police officer Jerome Perez told us his philosophy on working with young people is “Reach one, teach one.” Local pastor Bishop Michael Jones agreed saying, “I think there’s a commitment to collaborate to see what’s best for the entire community.”

Circuit Judge Teresa French described how her work in the community as a judge led her to realize how poverty, substance issues, lack of education, and family stressors all relate to juveniles and their behaviors. She explained, “Then you see it’s going to take partnerships and different agencies within the community to help make a difference...we are going to participate with the schools, the communities, the service providers, and the workforce to make a difference in their lives. As such my court staff provides a variety of services for families and youth such as taking them clothes from the clothes closet, prom dresses to wear for prom, if you are struggling with food, we are going to go to the food pantry and make sure you have food. You know we are going to help you with all these community resources.” She described a community effort to reduce the number of young people who were without proper beds to sleep in. Her team posted on Facebook the need for mattresses and asked for donations. By the next day, numerous people were calling in to help. Judge French summed up, “It’s a big community effort to pull the children up.” Similarly, Eudora Mayor Tomeka Butler described how she reached out to Phoenix, her former employer, when some of the families in Eudora lacked laptops and wanted to





"I think we all understand the struggle that juveniles today face. Those of us who work in the juvenile court system know that we have to work harder to understand that the youth have a voice too.. that we have a better chance of modifying their behavior if we are listening to them but yet pointing them in the right direction."

—JUDGE TERESA FRENCH,
CIRCUIT JUDGE

stay abreast of their child's grades online. Phoenix was able to provide them with Chromebooks. She commented, "It takes the entire community in order for it to be effective and efficient and successful." She added that the community also supports Phoenix when it has a need. "Whatever the need is at the time, from Phoenix, they'll find out what the need is, and then the community pulls together to fill that need."

FINDING CREATIVE SOLUTIONS

As part of its shared responsibility for young people's wellbeing, the community surrounding Phoenix draws on creativity to develop solutions to problems. One community leader, Bishop Michael Jones, illustrated numerous examples of this creativity. Some years ago, after talking with young people in his congregation, he noticed that they lacked a plan for their future and lacked information about attending college. So, he scheduled a bus tour throughout the Delta, taking approximately 45 youth to visit colleges and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), to see what schools have to offer. He explained that many people have never left the community and asserted that "exposure is everything." After the bus tour, he recognized that many youths in the community lacked the basic necessities to go to school "on an even playing field." The community started a Back to School Extravaganza, partially funded by Walmart, to buy school supplies and backpacks. In addition, professionals from the community spoke to young people to encourage them. This Extravaganza grew into a summer camp featuring talks on topics such as financial literacy and etiquette to expose students to the information they wouldn't receive at school.

Another example of a creative solution was the community's response to the increasing number of expulsions from school. Community members saw that student expulsion was not only leading to kids' falling behind academically, but also to further behavior problems. Therefore, they enlisted the help of retired teachers. Bishop Jones remembered, "I mean, these were people that everybody knew in the community. You know, we could help each other." The community group presented the idea to the local school district which implemented it in school as an alternative to expulsion.

Bishop Jones has also spearheaded initiatives related to the police and justice system. The retired police chief had come to rely on his connection with Jones which began with being in the same high school graduating class. The chief's requests range from asking Jones to "talk down" a person in their custody. The current police chief expanded the community connection by including Jones in an annual racial diversity training for officers.



COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS TO IMPROVE THE LOCAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

SATURDAY MORNING BREAKFAST LIFTS UP THE COMMUNITY

Recognizing the negative effects that justice involvement has had for community members, Bishop Jones invited attorneys to a Saturday morning breakfast to help people through the process of clearing their records. He aims to help them improve their quality of life through helping them figure out next steps. "If we don't deal with that piece of it, then they can't find regular jobs and they end up getting back into activities."

ANNUAL SERVICE MEN APPRECIATION DAY BRINGS THE COMMUNITY TOGETHER

Jones emphasized that it's "major" for the community to understand that "police are people too." He worked together with the police chief to develop an annual Service Men Appreciation Day, as a way for community members and police officers to interact and get to know each other, instead of meeting for the first time during what could be a heightened situation. They obtained a list of the names of the police officers, firefighters and sheriff and gave everyone a certificate that said: We appreciate your service. He said people were a bit apprehensive to interact the first year but the second year, the police, firefighters and sheriff came and brought their spouses and their children, and it became more of a "bonding" situation.



Photos: © Jessica Scranton





COMMUNITY INPUT IMPROVES POLICE RACIAL DIVERSITY TRAINING

The police chief invited Jones and four other pastors to join an annual racial diversity training to talk openly about their concerns with the department's approaches. In addition, Jones explained that the Chief asked for input on the police department's discrimination policy. "You know, he ran it through us to get our OK on it before he made it official for the Police Department.

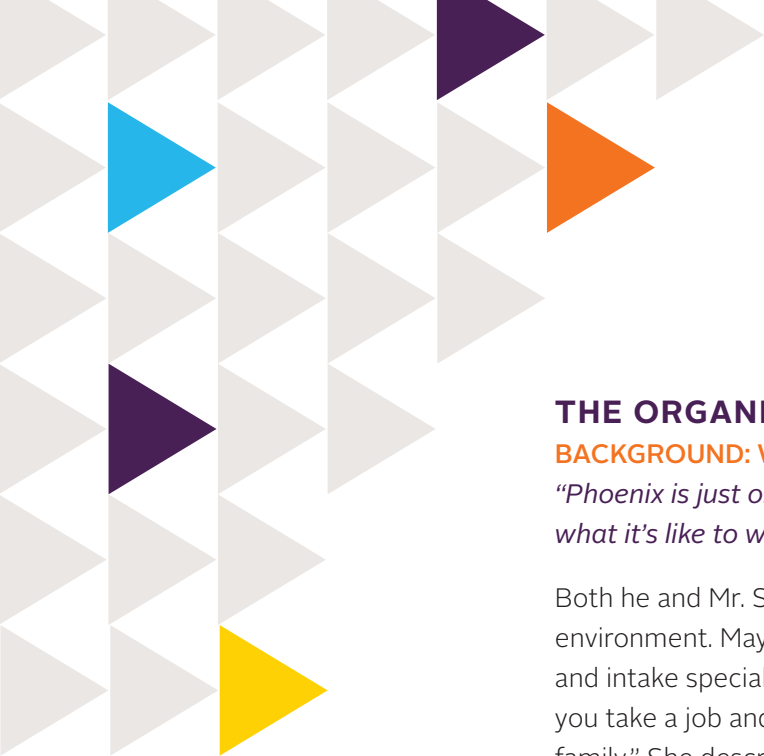


TRAINING PROGRAMS PERSIST DESPITE COVID-19

University of Arkansas Monticello Director of Adult Education Dorissa Kaufman described how a training program for individuals who were incarcerated was in threat of being disbanded due to COVID constraints. She and her staff collaborated with the prison and developed a train-the-trainer module—enabling a prison employee to continue the program with the same lessons and same tests until Ms. Kaufman's trainer was allowed back in the facility.

Photos: © Jessica Scranton





**COMPASS ROSE
COLLABORATIVE
CORE STAFF**

- 1999 **Christie Lindsey**
- 1997 **Evelyn Prosper**
- 2007 **Douglas Williams**
- 2018 **Christopher Spencer**

Phoenix has five office locations including: Main Office | Crossett; Ashley County office; Bradley/Drew County office; Chicot County office and Desha County office. Altogether there are 18 staff members across these locations. Ms. Prosper, Mr. Williams and Mr. Spencer are the main contacts with young adults who come into Phoenix.

THE ORGANIZATION

BACKGROUND: WORKING AT PHOENIX

“Phoenix is just one big happy family,” Mr. Williams remarked when asked what it’s like to work at Phoenix.

Both he and Mr. Spencer reported feeling grateful for their collaborative work environment. Mayor Tomeka Butler, a former Phoenix youth support specialist and intake specialist, explained, “There’s a world of difference between when you take a job and you’re an employee and when you take a job and you’re family.” She described staff participating in ice breakers and retreats to get to know each other outside of the office. Many Phoenix employees have been at the organization 10 years or more. Mr. Spencer pointed out that there is a lot of teamwork. “If you’ve got a problem, I mean, you can ask somebody or we all come together and then come up with the answer.” Ms. Lindsey also described the organization’s strong teamwork. She explained that she listens to the frontline staff to understand when certain approaches or activities need to change. She said, “I have all the thoughts with the pen and paper...but they’re the ones who are out there.” During quarterly programmatic meetings, frontline staff’s suggestions are brought to her and she will brainstorm with staff to figure out solutions.

Ms. Prosper explained that Phoenix offers competitive salaries and good benefits. There are opportunities for advancement, as shown through the number of long-standing employees whose roles have grown. Ms. Newton told us that Phoenix’s beautifully furnished office was “not by accident.” All of this leads to staff feeling valued. In turn, low staff turnover rates bolster long-term relationships with clients.

When asked how Phoenix finds such committed employees, interviewees talked about shared ownership in the organization’s mission.

Phoenix Youth and Family Services provides safe pathways and strong supports for young people in the Arkansas Delta to navigate historic and systemic inequities in resources, power and opportunity. When youth have what they need to be successful, the entire community can prosper.

►
"We always say the client comes first. And that has to be understood."

— **CHRISTIE LINDSEY,**
PHOENIX CEO

►
"I mean, it's just... it seems like we're brothers and sisters here at Phoenix."

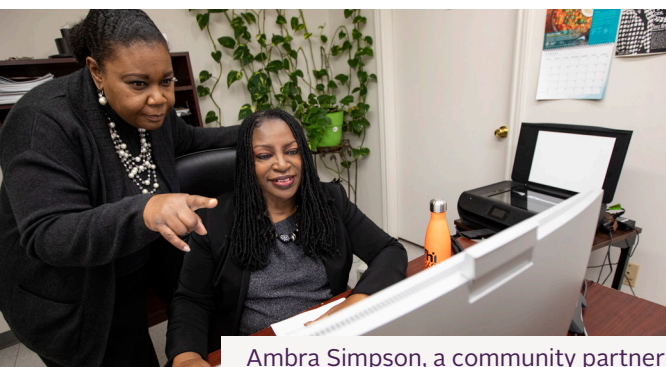
— **DOUGLAS WILLIAMS,**
PHOENIX STAFF

Ms. Lindsey explained that their interviewing process involves stressing the importance of the mission and the overarching goal of being helpers, improving the lives of any individual that they touch upon. She added, "We always say the client comes first. And that just has to be understood. And if that's something that you cannot grasp, then perhaps Phoenix is not the place for you."

Ms. Prosper explained that ownership of the mission extends beyond one's daily tasks to the organization as a whole. Staff understand the goals of each of the projects and step in to assist wherever needed. Ms. Newton described building a culture of individuals that have "an innate desire" to help others. She went on to say that while everyone gets paid, she'd like to think they'd do the work for free. Phoenix staff, and other stakeholders we interviewed, asserted that you have to love what you do and be passionate about helping youth. Mayor Butler referred to her time at Phoenix as, "You look forward to getting up and going to work, because in a sense it no longer becomes like work. This is my passion. This is what I love doing. I'm helping people. Not only am I helping people, I enjoy going to this place to work because my coworkers all have the same mission and the same goal in mind, and that just makes it altogether better."

The commitment to helping others starts from the top. Mr. Williams added that Phoenix benefits from having Toyce Newton's vision, leadership and continued involvement. Mayor Butler described Phoenix as being built on the firm foundation of Ms. Newton's principles and passion. Ms. Lindsey said that from herself, down to the supervisors and management, they try to maintain the Phoenix philosophy in their daily work.

Teacher Kimberly Pounds with program participants Tristian Polson and Aleighsha Bowers studying for GED Exam at Phoenix



Ambra Simpson, a community partner provides support around supportive services, transportation and tuition. (Right Photo) Christie Lindsey and Evelyn Prosper at Workforce Training Center in Monticello office location. (Left Photo)



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▶
“That’s what it’s all about. It’s just improving one part of [a young person’s] environment so they will have a better chance of being successful. I try to tell the parent.. I’m there just as much for you as I am the juveniles. Even though I am a Circuit Judge assigned to hear juvenile cases, I am here to help the parent as well. I have ordered parents to various self help classes such as substance use treatment and parenting. As a matter of fact, Phoenix has handled some of the parenting classes for me.”

— JUDGE TERESA FRENCH,
CIRCUIT JUDGE

THE PHOENIX APPROACH IS A HOLISTIC APPROACH

Phoenix staff have a shared understanding that supporting a young person requires taking a holistic approach. This means considering the young person’s total environment, including his or her family’s needs as well as the individual’s needs. For example, Ms. Lindsey discussed how a large portion of the youth they work with are struggling because of a lack of structure and boundaries in the home. She said that as a result, Phoenix has to teach the skill of setting limits...“teaching not only the child but having to go in and teach the parents.” Judge Teresa French has ordered parents to Phoenix parenting classes because in her view, “It’s just improving one part of their environment so [young people] will have a better chance of being successful.”

Phoenix participant Dai’Brina Anderson talked about how Phoenix staff was always calling and checking up on her and her sister, and that once Ms. Anderson was part of the program, the staff persisted in trying to reach her sister. They regularly asked Ms. Anderson how her sister was, if she had found a job, and insisted that if she ever needed any help, she could call.

In addition to looking at a young person’s family situation, Phoenix takes a holistic view of the myriad factors that contribute to an individual’s success. Finding a job placement for a participant is one step. Another is making sure that person has transportation to get there. Because of the rural environment, Phoenix participants often have commutes of 30 to 60 or more minutes to jobs or school. Phoenix owns vans to transport participants to training, classes or work, and staff arrange their schedules around these commutes. Ms. Newton shared a story of a recent Phoenix participant who completed her GED and was accepted into Arkansas State University in Jonesboro, AR.



“One of the pluses for [Phoenix] has been valuing every contact and relationship as a strong link in the chain.”

— TOYCE NEWTON,
PHOENIX FOUNDER

Phoenix staff donated bedding, a microwave, and a refrigerator and also took her to Walmart to purchase additional things she would need. Then, because she knew that this young woman lacked family support, Ms. Newton reached out to a contact she had from years ago in Jonesboro to serve as a mentor to her. Ms. Newton explained, “That’s our reentry philosophy. It’s not prescribed... we’ve got our manuals but it’s more from a human basic needs [perspective]. So not a physiological need as much as it is just...somebody. So, you can’t say I had nobody.”

Ms. Prosper also fills this role by checking in with participants regularly. Talking about Phoenix participants who take training classes at the University of Arkansas Monticello, Ms. Kaufman remarked, “Ms. Evelyn does a really good job. She keeps up with her students. She basically is calling them to make sure they’re going to be there and they’re not going to forget because she’s gonna call them 20 times to make sure they remember it’s on this day at this time. So, she is really good about encouraging them.” Mr. Spencer summed up the wide perspective Phoenix takes by saying, “Phoenix does bring all of it to the table.”

INTERAGENCY COLLABORATION

A key factor in Phoenix’s success is its extensive collaboration across local agencies and organizations. As discussed earlier, the small community environment facilitates this because of the connections among people. However, Ms. Newton explained that she was intentional in establishing relationships with the business community, police departments, vocational technical schools, employers, and others. With the limited number of employers in southeast Arkansas, she stressed that partnerships make sense. She said, “[They’ve] got a need and we’ve got a supply. We stand in the middle ready to assist.” At job sites with 10 or 12 Phoenix participants, Phoenix might send a staff person to support their success. Ms. Newton added that given the small number of employers, “Even if they’re difficult, they matter. We try to work it out. That’s been helpful for us.” This approach reflects the literature which shows that relationships across agencies in rural communities can support successful reentry (Page, 2021; Pffeifer, 2018).

Mr. Williams and Mr. Spencer described collaborating with the courts and with mental health facilities. Mr. Spencer said, “We reach out to each other ‘cause it might be something each one of us might not know or might know but can lead the right person to the right place.” Mayor Butler told us that constant communication among Phoenix staff, police and courts is important in sharing individuals’ plans of action. Accountability is key in keeping young adults on the right track.



►
"It's gonna take you. It's gonna take me. It's gonna take your parents. It's gonna take your family. It's gonna take this employer... it's community oriented. It takes the entire community in order for [a young person's plan] to be effective and efficient and successful. Yeah, it takes the entire community and once again building rapport is key. And that's how this organization has always been. Phoenix realized they can't do it on their own."

— **TOMEKA BUTLER,**
MAYOR AND FORMER PHOENIX
INTAKE SPECIALIST

One powerful connection for Phoenix has been with the University of Arkansas Monticello. UAM has several centers throughout each of the five counties that work with young people on remediation, job skills, obtaining a GED, and short-term training such as Certified Nurse Assistant, phlebotomy, welding, forklift driving. Phoenix refers students to Ms. Kaufman, and if a Phoenix participant is looking for training that doesn't currently exist, she will work to create a class to fulfill that need. Ms. Lindsey pointed out that the university has been "awesome" at developing programming based on the needs of Phoenix participants. Other times Ms. Kaufman will reach out to Ms. Prosper at Phoenix, "I refer my students to [Ms. Prosper], especially if they've got a new program going on, because there may be times that she's got something going on that I do not have going on at that time."

In this small community, word of mouth has a big impact. When Mr. Spencer or Mr. Williams helps a person, the positive news often spreads. Mr. Williams commented, "Being a small town, it doesn't take a lot for it to circulate around." Ms. Lindsey also pointed to Phoenix's reputation as a key factor in partnerships. She stated that partnerships and collaborations are the main reason for the organization's success but then went on to elaborate, "But...even before partnership and collaboration, I would have to say trust because if I don't trust you, I'm not going to collaborate with you. So historically I think our reputation speaks first and foremost, that this is an organization that is going to do right by its participants." Ms. Prosper stated that Phoenix occasionally does some community activities at events to talk to young people about their programs but that most of their referrals just came through the relationships they have in the community and people's familiarity with their work.

Mayor Butler emphasized that a young person's plan requires the involvement of Phoenix staff, the individual's family, the employer and the community. She sees a young person's success as community oriented, adding "It takes the entire community and once again, building rapport is key. And that's how this organization has always been. Phoenix realized they can't do it on their own." Ms. Lindsey echoed this idea. She talked about natural collaborations that have evolved when agencies are working towards the same goal. University of Arkansas Monticello College (UAM) School of Technology, McGehee Campus offers the ACT WorkKeys National Career Readiness Certificate, and Ms. Lindsey called their partnership a "marriage made in heaven" since Phoenix has the population for which UAM provides training. Ms. Lindsey explained that the two organizations figured out what their strengths were and where they could collaborate.




State-level Factors that Support Phoenix's Collaboration with the University of AR

FINDING FUNDING

Ms. Kaufman said the university's ability to develop classes to meet community needs is bolstered by flexible and supportive leadership at the state level. Dr. Trenia Miles, Deputy Director for Adult Education with the Arkansas Department of Career Education, makes herself available to listen to Ms. Kaufman and consider new program ideas. Ms. Kaufman said she can call Dr. Miles on her cell phone with program suggestions: "She would tell me to write up a budget and a narrative...and Dr. Miles would try to get a special projects budget set up." Ms. Kaufman said that if it is something that Dr. Miles believes in or can see the positive in, she will try hard to find funding.

CO-LOCATING SERVICE DELIVERY AGENCIES

Ms. Kaufman informed us of an innovative idea that came out of the Arkansas Department of Human Services (DHS). Approximately five years ago, there was a state-level effort to house service delivery agencies together in the same location. Many of these organizations support young people reentering the community. Ms. Kaufman said, "In the rural areas where one agency may be 20 minutes away from the other...we basically opened up satellite centers in all the little bitty towns so that people wouldn't have to travel as far to get everything done." She remembered that at first, these organizations were concerned about their work becoming competitive, as in "Those are my clients. Those are my numbers." However, she continued, "We're not scared to share our clients because we need what's best for our clients, and we need them to be successful." The state DHS handled the arrangements and helped the organizations implement the change. Now, as Ms. Kaufman describes, she can walk a young person down the hallway to check about a service he or she might need, and she said this makes her work, "completely different." In the University's Crossett location, she can walk to the Phoenix office.





PARTICIPANT-FOCUSED

Talking about her initial meetings with Phoenix, Ms. Anderson continued, “There’s a specific place that I’m trying to get to, and you know, it was nice that I sat down and had a face-to-face with him so it just showed that he actually cared and that he really wanted to find me a place to work.”



“I like the fact that he first asked me...you know, what do I want to do? Where do I want to go?”

— **DAI’BRINA ANDERSON,**
PHOENIX PARTICIPANT

As Ms. Prosper explained it, a key piece of Phoenix’s initial work with participants is finding out what they want to do and where they see themselves. “We don’t try to make everybody feed into a cookie-cutter model. It’s really based on what that young person has a desire to do. If it is available in this area, we try to make it happen.” Sometimes the person needs some supportive services—a voucher for transportation, childcare, or just a ride to school or work. Then Phoenix provides follow-up services.

Mayor Butler explained that listening to participants was the most important skill in her job. She felt it was her responsibility to take time to get to know the individuals and then help the case manager devise a plan based on what the young person told her. She commented, “Here’s what they’re revealing to me. This is what they need. To me, that’s the blueprint for successful planning, individualizing those plans. Catering a plan to fit a young person only enhances

and increases the likelihood of them becoming successful.” She added that Phoenix would regularly walk through the plans with young people to see if everything was still working and if not, they would make adjustments to keep them on task and on course.

Ms. Kaufman talked about the rapport that Ms. Prosper has with the program participants and that she “does a really good job at finding out what the students want and then setting it up with her connections.” Ms. Kaufman said she can offer a class, but it has to be what the students want. If UAM does not have a relevant class/training, she and Ms. Prosper work together to develop one. This helps with accountability because the students know they have to show up and be involved. Ms. Kaufman added that Phoenix staff are realistic with the participants—“They’re not going to send a student to a four-year school who will not complete it.”





"We don't preach religion but it's ingrained in us, and it's filtered out through all of the work that we do."

— EVELYN PROSPER,
PHOENIX STAFF

THE PEOPLE

As mentioned earlier, Phoenix employs people who are committed to helping others and who love their work. As part of our interviews, we asked interviewees what Phoenix staff's unique qualities are that enable them to succeed in their work with young people. We heard that their faith underlies who they are and how they live. That faith enables them to meet people where they are, without judgment, and to go the extra mile for their community. Phoenix staff take the time to build trust with their participants and believe that when a community member is lacking something, it is their job to try their best to provide it for them.

FAITH

When we asked Ms. Prosper about how the Phoenix culture seemed to include going the extra mile for Phoenix participants, she responded by saying, "First of all, you have to realize we are in the Bible Belt." She explained that faith is a significant part of life in southeast Arkansas and their community and therefore, is a common thread at Phoenix. When the majority of staff members consider themselves people of faith, the overarching perspective to the work is, "It's not just about my responsibilities...but it's about the relationships and actually serving other people." Founder and former CEO Ms. Newton quoted the Bible and said, "Faith without good works is dead," explaining that Phoenix staff leave their congregations and spread good work. She added that faith may be the most important part of their work because it enables staff to enhance the lives of others at the same time as they are enhancing their own lives.

Ms. Newton also described how faith plays an important role at the organizational level and in Phoenix relationships. She said the support of faith leaders in the community has benefited Phoenix in a few different ways—for the services they provide such as mentoring, and for their influence in the community, the "strong arm" as Ms. Newton called it. She recalled how ministers have gone to the Governor to advocate on certain issues. Bishop Jones informed us of a group of pastors who work together to advocate with the school board for students who were expelled or are at risk of expulsion.

Faith also brings the community together through common activities. Community members see each other regularly at church and church events and get to know each other through these occasions. Mr. Spencer talked about how Phoenix participants see him and Mr. Williams on Sundays and at church activities. He added, "I just think that some of the (participants) get a touch of success and that's when the ball starts rolling. And they see good things happening here and there, and life gets better."



GOING THE EXTRA MILE

Ms. Anderson explained that if Phoenix staff hadn't driven her to work, she might have engaged in negative behaviors—in the “next thing that caught my attention.” She said, “If I know I don't have a ride then, what's the point?” Phoenix made it possible for her to maintain employment, which enabled her to stay out of trouble, earn wages, and stay on track with her goals.

► *“Evelyn went out of her way to pick me up in her own personal vehicle and was taking me back and forth to work. So, she went the extra mile.”*

—**DAI'BRINA ANDERSON,**
PHOENIX PARTICIPANT

In taking a holistic approach, Phoenix staff consider the full picture of a young person's needs. This goes beyond helping them to find jobs and confine their future to the fundamental necessities in life. When Ms. Anderson enrolled in school, she had her own car but paying for gas each week was expensive. Phoenix helped support her by ensuring she had money for her commute. She explained that it was just a matter of six weeks or so but it was enough to help her “get things lined out and together” in order to make it to school while paying for diapers and her children's needs. Similarly, when she became certified as a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA), Ms. Prosper reached out to her to ask if she had the clothes and shoes that she needed. Ms. Anderson said, “Ms. Prosper called and was like...do you need work shoes? And is there a specific uniform that you have to have on?” Phoenix was able to provide six pairs of scrubs and a pair of shoes to help Ms. Anderson start work prepared.

A story we heard from multiple interviewees was that for a period of time, Mr. Williams drove Phoenix participant Sa'viun Robertson to truck driving school early each morning, and Mr. Spencer picked him up in the evening. Mr. Williams said, “If you're doing the best you can, we don't mind helping...I'd get up at four in the morning just to get him in his seat. And it never bothered me. I didn't ever feel like oh man, I gotta do this. He never was late. He never missed a day. Because we were gonna do our part.” Police officer Jerome Perez was familiar with this story and added, “Phoenix staff go above and beyond when they're trying to help kids.” Ms. Lindsey explained it more as a



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► *"What did you need to help you become who you are? You needed some patience. You needed some help. You needed some guidance. So they need the same thing. I've never seen a plant grow any different from any other plant. They need water, sunlight. Right? So that's the same thing they need."*

— **CHRISTOPHER SPENCER,**
PHOENIX STAFF

► *"I think the success of any program is you've got to meet people where they are because everyone has their own story.. Without shame, without guilt, this is where you are, but this is what we're going to do to make it better for you".*

— **CHRISTIE LINDSEY,**
PHOENIX CEO

matter of fact. She stated that Phoenix tells participants to let them know if they need commuting help so that staff can plan accordingly. She said, "And if that means rearranging staff schedules, then that's what we'll do."

Ms. Prosper discussed how other organizations will call Phoenix when they are unable to meet a person's needs because Phoenix will do whatever they can to assist. She added, "I think it just has a lot to do with the character of the South in one sense. And then the character of the people that we employ."

MEETING PEOPLE WHERE THEY ARE

Through the examples interviewees shared with us, we heard descriptions of Phoenix staff bringing unwavering respect and a lack of judgment to their work. Ms. Lindsey explained the culture at Phoenix and said, "We hold in high regard honoring our families." Mr. Spencer also referred to this saying that he treats all participants like they're his own children. He said, "They didn't ask to come here...I always treat the next man with respect no matter what."

Mr. Williams explained his perspective that a lot of the difficulties young people have are due to not knowing any better. He added, "if you have someone point you in the right direction, it keeps us from making some of the same mistakes. So that's what I like to do." As a Phoenix participant, Ms. Anderson experienced their assistance in that very way, "They just look at you like you know, yes, you have a few problems and we're here to help set you straight, but not forcibly. You know, they always, you know, let us know that we have options." When we asked Ms. Kaufman if there is anything unique about the people working in reentry in the community, she said they have to be dedicated and forgiving. "You cannot be judgmental. Everyone makes mistakes." Ms. Lindsey pointed out how meeting people where they are is critical to Phoenix work, saying, "I think people are more responsive to you when they feel that you understand their story."

Mr. Robertson talked about this similarly. He said, "They let us talk...I feel like they try to understand because you know, they were our age at one point. You've got a person basically, being a mentor to you, they actually understand you. They push you to want to do better."





TRUST IS THE FOUNDATION

Phoenix CEO Christie Lindsey emphasized that trust is the foundation of Phoenix's work. She explained that through trust, Phoenix has been able to connect with individuals to get them jobs and to get them to post-secondary education. Developing that trust starts with the Phoenix staff. Ms. Lindsey is intentional about hiring people who live in the five counties where they work. She said, "You come in to Phoenix and somewhere in the mix, you'll find yourself." She aims to create an environment where people feel comfortable and understood.

"They did everything they said they would do."

SA'VIUN ROBERTSON,
PHOENIX PARTICIPANT

"If I trust you, then I'm willing to come to get the services that you have to offer. If I trust you, I know that you have my best interest at heart. If I trust you, I know that if you tell me you're gonna do this, then I know that it will be done. So, trust is the foundation."

— CHRISTIE LINDSEY,
PHOENIX CEO

"In the south and in rural areas, it's driven by trust. They've seen us, we're there. You come in [to Phoenix] and somewhere in the mix you'll find yourself."

— CHRISTIE LINDSEY,
PHOENIX CEO

Mr. Spencer explained that even when he first started working at Phoenix, he knew a lot of the participants from his former job at the Boys and Girls Club. He knew them from an early age and knew their families. He grew up in the community and "knows a lot of people...from the grandparents, brothers, sisters, mothers, fathers, and so on." He acknowledged that as a good thing about a small-town environment. He also talked about how some community members witnessed him mature over time. Referring to some negative behavior in his youth, he said, "I grew up away from that. I transferred that to something else." And as a result, he serves as a role model, "So they know it's the ability to be more than what's around them."

Mr. Williams did not grow up in the community, but he talked about trust as "keeping it real with them." He explained that he and Mr. Spencer don't say anything that isn't true. He sees this as crucial to trust because as he described, "Once you let them down, you've lost them...Once they see that you are really trying to help them, they try to accept anything that you say and move forward." Mr. Robertson talked about how Phoenix staff stressed that they would do whatever it took to support him in completing his program. He recalled, "They were right there, like the entire time, and nothing that I ever needed they didn't supply. They did everything they said they would do."





“... in life, we all need a little bit of lifting sometimes..you can't always walk by yourself. Everybody needs a blessing.”

— **CHRISTOPHER SPENCER,**
PHOENIX STAFF

BELIEF THAT “EVERYBODY NEEDS A BLESSING”

Part of meeting people where they are is believing that everyone deserves to succeed in life, no matter their circumstances or mistakes. Often times, Phoenix staff work with young people who have had difficult upbringings. Ms. Butler stated that a lot of youth who come to Phoenix lack support at home and don't have role models. Mr. Spencer explained that many of the homes in the community are single-parent homes, and kids are often raised by their grandmothers. He emphasized how important it is to have a positive person in your home to raise you and guide you, especially a father figure. He commented that it makes such a difference, it's like “having the answers to the test.” Ms. Lindsey explained that many of the individuals they encounter never had that person. She pointed out, “in life, we all need a little bit of lifting sometimes..you can't always walk by yourself.” Mr. Spencer explained this sentiment as, “Everybody needs a blessing.”

Building on these beliefs, the Phoenix approach, as Mayor Tomeka Butler explains it is, “When you see a need, fill it.” Mr. Spencer acknowledged that often times, “the bottom is the best place to build from because it's the hardest place.” Reflecting on the support she received from Phoenix staff, Ms. Anderson said, “That's what I appreciated the most from them because they don't give up; it's like they're there when you need it.”

Sa'viun Robertson's Story

Phoenix is like my family. I have been with Phoenix since I was 13 even before I was a participant and today, I am 22 and a part of the Compass Rose Collaborative. I officially got into the program when I was 20 and they (Phoenix) were basically my transportation back and forth to school. They made sure that I completed my goal of getting my Commercial Driver's License (CDL) license because that is what I wanted to do. It required me to get up every morning to get to my classes and they would get up early to make sure that I had

everything I needed to get to my goal. They were with me the entire time providing me rides to school, picking me up from school, checking-in on me to see how I was doing, made sure I was eating in between my classes etc. And this went on for months and months until I completed my session.

Phoenix has been a part of my life since a really young age because they care about their community which is why they kept in touch with me even before I was part of the program. They checked in with me to see if I needed any help to start my career. At the time I wanted to get a barber's license and they helped me achieve that. They stayed in contact to ensure that I was going down the right path.

Currently, I drive local trucks like log trucks for personal owners. My goal this year is to drive for big businesses, cross country and things like that. This is something I feel obligated to do also for them for all the sacrifices they have made for me—from getting up early in the morning to giving me a ride to supporting me in every way to make this possible. They had other participants to work with, they had other things to do so they did not really have to do it, but they made sure I had everything I needed to get to my goal. **I owe them for always going the extra mile with me.**



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Our community is small, mostly everybody knows everybody. So, there aren't many opportunities around here. Because there is not much to do, young people get into bad things. It is so easy for them to get involved into those types of things versus getting employed or going into the workforce center.


As a matter of fact, before Phoenix helped me with my CDL, it was hard for me to get a job around my area. Still to this day I've never had a job in my area. We have to go to surrounding towns to get a job, that are at least 30 minutes away. Therefore, we are very thankful for the support we get from Phoenix. There is also the aspect of being able to make a decent amount of money which is why I got into driving trucks because this was like the closest thing that would help me bring in a stable income in the area. And Chris and Douglas were my mentors and I want to let other young people know to listen to your mentors and whatever they say do not take it in the wrong way. They may say things you do not agree with and sometimes you have to take things with a grain of salt. But the bigger thing is that it is not always about being right because if you were right all the time you would not be in this situation. So, little things like comprehension and communication.





Challenges to Reentry in Southeast Arkansas

Even given the strong community and committed staff, Phoenix faces some significant challenges in providing reentry services in its area. When we asked interviewees to reflect on the challenges, we heard that the influences on young people today can be a challenge, as are transportation, employment, housing, substance abuse, and family dynamics. This section discusses those challenges and how Phoenix relies on its individualized approach, community relationships, and creative solutions to meet them so that the young adults in the community can prosper.



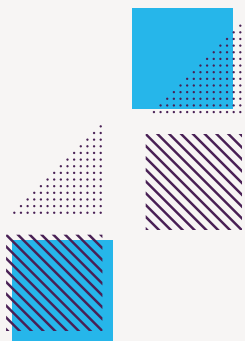
“They look for instant outcomes, fast. A lot of them do not want to put in the work to get to where they need to be.”

— DOUGLAS WILLIAMS,
PHOENIX STAFF

INFLUENCES ON YOUTH

When we asked Mr. Williams about the challenges the community faces, he reflected on what people see when they drive around the area. He said, “One thing I think too that hurts us is, being in the Delta, we have a lot of correctional facilities. And you know, like when you’re in New York and you see skyscrapers? Here, driving by, you see penitentiary, penitentiary, penitentiary. Do you see

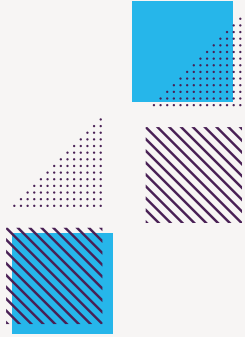
Systemic Barriers



Collateral Consequences often impact a young person’s ability to find employment and certain charges may place limitations on a person’s desired career path. According to National Inventory of Collateral Consequences of Conviction (2022), there are approximately 45,000 consequences that limit or prohibit people convicted of crimes from accessing employment, business and occupational licensing, housing, voting, education and other rights, benefits and opportunities.

Phoenix works to confront these collateral consequences by meeting with each individual to figure out their needs and struggles and connect them with tailored supports in the community.

Systemic Barriers



Funding is a challenge that all the partnering organizations in the community face. Judge French stated, “If we had more funding, we could provide better services.” Judge French helped start a residential treatment facility for this district in the year 2000, she was instrumental in bringing two residential mental treatment facilities and a drug detox facility to south Arkansas to help juveniles and their families in these small rural communities.



“Transportation has been and was a challenge for me. I did want to work but I did not have a ride, so what is the point?”

— **DAI’BRINA ANDERSON,**
PHOENIX PARTICIPANT

what I’m saying? In kind of a way some of these young men feel like this is their right to being a man...because that’s where their uncles, their fathers, their brothers are going.” Similarly, Ms. Anderson added that young people in her community lack role models. When asked about challenges she faced in her journey she said, “Support from my family. Because none of them went to college and they didn’t understand. So, I always had to find outside people to try to help me or break it down and tell me what I needed to do.” Lacking that support system from her family, she relied heavily on Phoenix and its staff.

Mr. Williams talked about another challenge in working with youth—the influences on young people today. He expressed, “We have a lot of youth, they look for instant outcomes, fast. A lot of them do not want to put in the work to get to where they need to be.” He explained that often young adults expect progress to happen overnight. However, from the time a young adult exits the justice system, to being willing to seek support from community members, to being connected to the right resources takes time. But Mr. Spencer explained, “They watch television and different shows where they see that it doesn’t take too much time...Everybody wants their instant stardom. I go to work today I am supposed to be rich tomorrow, but it does not work like this, at least not for everybody.” When working with young adults reentering from the justice system, Phoenix staff work on learning each participant’s vision and setting expectations so that youth has an understanding of the process. Similarly, Mr. Williams said that, “We are also trying to figure out what catches their attention.” He explained how in the past, money used to be a big motivating factor. However, this generation seems uninterested in stipends or incentives. “It is not eye-catching” he added.



"A lot of times it is rare for our students to come to class. Sometimes they have a vehicle. If not, they are having to bum a ride from a family member, a friend and then they have to pay that family member or friend money to transport them. It's those little things."

— **DORISSA KAUFMAN,**
DIRECTOR OF ADULT EDUCATION



Peer behavior and negative activities are further challenges for young people. Ms. Kaufman explained that a concern of hers is young adults going back to old friends and old bad habits. She said, "They can't find a way out. So, they are kind of stuck in the same environment." Ms. Lindsey also added that having nothing to do is a big challenge for the community. "The community is not responsive in having available activities for young adults to be involved in."

TRANSPORTATION

Transportation continues to be one of the major challenges faced by rural communities. While talking about the community, Mr. Williams said, "There aren't a lot of facilities like shopping complexes, malls, restaurants, gas stations etc...We have no public transportation in this area. We have no Ubers." Other interviewees echoed this issue. Ms. Lindsey explained that you either have a vehicle or someone has to take you where you need to go, and she added that

Systemic Barriers



Driver's License: An Arkansas state law allows a court to revoke, suspend or not renew the driver's license or registration of a person who does not make arrangements for the payment of court-ordered fines. The Free to Drive website states that, "These sanctions can make it extremely difficult for many of the one in three American adults with a criminal record to meaningfully pursue second chances as the loss of a license can cripple the ability to provide for one's family, meet the requirements of probation and parole, become an engaged citizen and neighbor, and actually pay back court debts."

Phoenix provides supportive services to young people ranging from trips to the Department of Motor Vehicles to assistance with obtaining a learner's permit/license.



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Phoenix has been “fortunate enough” that its case managers have been able to provide some transportation for participants. Phoenix obtained a shuttle van to provide rides for participants, running a few times each day to popular destinations such as the community college, university, employers, clinics, or other locations the young adults need to go. Because of the rural nature of the community, many locations are miles apart.

When we asked Phoenix staff about how they tackle this challenge, Ms. Lindsey said, “Because we plan.” Participants tell Phoenix about their needs, and Phoenix staff arrange their schedules to accommodate driving individuals back and forth to school or work. Phoenix also provides transportation vouchers to assist with gas purchases. Ms. Lindsey added, “We try to remove as many barriers within the parameters so we’re able to operate and be efficient.”

EMPLOYMENT/ECONOMIC MOBILITY

“I think the biggest challenge is to find [a variety of] employers because we’re so limited in our communities.” - Christie Lindsey, Phoenix CEO

Ms. Lindsey emphasized that a lack of employment opportunities is Phoenix’s biggest challenge. She also added that the lack of higher-paying jobs hurts young people reentering the community, saying, “Because in order for them not to recidivate, they need to be able to take care of themselves and their families.” Unlike urban areas, there aren’t large businesses or complexes for residents to choose from which limits overall economic mobility. Judge French added, “It’s such a rural farming community. There’s not a lot of industry in this area to bring money and jobs and to reduce that poverty. So, if we had more industry in our area, I think that would bring more money for the better education and the job skills for more employment. If we could bring some of that from North Arkansas to South Arkansas, it would help.”

►
“For the longest time before Phoenix helped me get my Commercial Driver’s License (CDL), it was actually hard for me to get a job around my area. Still to this day, I’ve never had a job in my area. Like you know, we got to go to surrounding towns to get a job.”

— SA’VIUN ROBERTSON,
PHOENIX PARTICIPANT

As a front-line worker, who works directly with young adults at Phoenix, Mr. Spencer explained that “The only thing helps this area is the minimum wage is higher than anywhere else. It is \$11.00 versus \$9 at other states around us.” Young adults who are entering the workforce want to earn a standard living. But “If you’re not working in the prison or a factory, or wood plant or something like that, it is hard,” Mr. Spencer added. He also explained that some young adults are compelled to either drive a truck or become a nurse to achieve a \$50,000 a year lifestyle. To find this, some leave the area; others, however, don’t want to leave and would “rather stay around and struggle.” Mr. Robertson mentioned how challenging it was for him to get a job in his community. He commented, “For the longest time before Phoenix helped me



“Housing is a challenge not just for the reentry community but for the entire community.”

— CHRISTIE LINDSEY,
PHOENIX CEO

“Substance abuse and mental health is a huge challenge, often times we are having to get them cleaned up to get them into the job because you are going to be tested to go to work.”

— EVELYN PROSPER,
PHOENIX STAFF

get my Commercial Driver’s License (CDL), it was actually hard for me to get a job around my area. Still to this day, I’ve never had a job in my area. Like you know, we got to go to surrounding towns to get a job.”

HOUSING

When we asked Ms. Lindsey if housing was a challenge for reentering youth in the community, she explained that affordable housing for low-to-middle income individuals or families is “almost nonexistent.” She also added that the community does not have transitional housing to help a young adult coming out of the justice system. Young people often rely on their family or friends for shelter, and not everyone has that support. Without stable housing, rural youth have difficulties accessing the additional support services they need.

Ms. Prosper added that, “Home ownership is a problem” in the community. She mentioned that there are apartments available, and the rental assistance program helps young people obtain apartments. Owning a home is a greater challenge. She talked about how that relates to a lack of financial literacy. Phoenix offers financial education, literacy and coaching as a part of its wraparound services for its participants to enable them to make smart decisions in managing their finances.

MENTAL HEALTH/ SUBSTANCE ABUSE

Talking about substance abuse in the community, Ms. Anderson explained, “It is a quiet college town. A lot of people get bored. There are not many activities to do or places to go to have fun. College students want to party but there are only a couple of things they can really do.” She then pointed out the problem exists for high school students too. She sees this as a continual problem. “This is how people fall into the wrong things because most of the people in the community do bad things. They get bored and want to try to fit in with other people who don’t have much going on for them.”



Phoenix not only connects young adults to counseling services but also provides youth with services if needed. Phoenix front-line staff serve as a bridge for all the participants. Mr. Spencer said, “We serve as counselors in so many ways. It starts with us.” He then gave an example of one of the program participants who was “going through a lot,” and when Mr. Spencer started working with him, he found out that the participant just needed someone to talk to without any judgement. After working with the participant for some time, Mr. Spencer connected him to Delta Counseling, he got a place to stay, he got a job, and he is getting a check every month. Mr. Spencer reflected, “They just need a person they can trust and talk to.” Mr. Williams added, “A person who can give them good advice.” There are also some participants who having grown up going through the system and have known the Phoenix staff, are still reaching out to the same agency counselor for services.



“They just need a person they can trust and talk to...A person who can give them good advice.”

— **DOUGLAS WILLIAMS,**
PHOENIX STAFF



“It is the struggles that young people go through with their families; broken families, unstable home settings and lack of employment.”

— **JUDGE TERESA FRENCH,**
CIRCUIT JUDGE

Mayor Butler explained that Phoenix has fostered and promoted relationships with organizations that provide mental health and substance abuse recovery services. She added that, “Phoenix should take pride in itself for their partnerships with mental health services agencies.” All the participants at Phoenix have an individualized support plan (ISP) which helps the case managers and their partners understand participant needs. She explained the impact mental health and generational trauma may have had on the participant, “Because Phoenix doesn’t just do a program to say it’s reentry, it’s for the overall wellbeing of the client.”

FAMILY DYNAMICS

When asked why young adults in the community get involved with the justice system, Judge French explained that the root of the problem is often that the parents need parenting, because they are sometimes young adults. Family dynamics play a major role in the development of a young person. When Phoenix staff are working with a youth, they are working with the entire family as well as the trauma resulting from family issues the youth may be carrying

Ms. Anderson is a living example of someone taking a step forward to break the cycle of poverty. She said she found out a month after she got into the Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) program that she was pregnant and said, “I want my kids to look up to [me] and be like, my mom did this while she was pregnant. So, if she can do it, I can do it.” She emphasized that she wanted to bring that motivation to her children because she did not receive that from her family. “I want to create some type of legacy for my girls and break the chain. I wanted to have something that will last.” She now works as a nurse for one of the healthcare providers in the community.



Phoenix staff work to bolster participants who need that extra encouragement missing from their support system. As Mr. Robertson commented, when asked what motivated him to get his CDL, “I did it because I felt obligated to do it for them Phoenix staff too. Sacrificing, getting up early in the morning, taking me back and coming, picking me up from school. Like I said, they didn’t really have to but they made sure I had everything I needed to succeed.”

COVID-19

One additional challenge we heard from the Phoenix staff was the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced them to shift their programming. Phoenix staff mentioned that there were some challenges related to hiring staff during the pandemic, the ability to maintain face-to-face contact with the participants, finding a medium to connect with the participants since not everyone has access to the internet, etc. But during this difficult time, the community pulled together resources for their participants including masks, sanitizers, health screenings, jobs, shelter, food, etc. Ms. Anderson said, “Mr. Spencer was sending us a message to see how everybody was doing during COVID. He used to ask if we were wearing a mask, sanitizing our hands. He always stayed in touch to make sure everyone was doing well and they had everything they needed.”

STUDY LIMITATIONS

This case study was designed to explore the work and community of Phoenix Youth and Family Services and offer an in-depth, detailed look at its approach and perspectives. We used a purposeful sample, selecting interviewees who had great familiarity with Phoenix and who could offer stories and examples. The information here is presented as one story, and it is not meant to be generalizable to other reentry programs. Our study reflects a small number of viewpoints, and the interviewees had positive interactions with Phoenix. A survey or focus groups might have drawn a larger and more varied pool of perspectives. Another limitation was that we could not meet in person with interviewees due to COVID-19 restrictions. Researcher bias is inherent in qualitative research. The two authors aimed to limit the bias by double-coding data and holding ongoing coding discussions, in addition to having a peer review and study participant review of the findings. Areas for future research might include case studies of reentering young people to better understand individual struggles, needs and experiences, and a quantitative study in this region that collects data connecting reentry services to education and employment outcomes.



Conclusions

Rural reentry is typically understood as difficult given challenges such as lack of employment, lack of transportation, lack of housing, and substance abuse issues. The community surrounding Phoenix is no different. However, its strong relationships and the deep shared responsibility its members have for each other support true collaboration and problem solving. Our findings reflect the literature that highlights the positive effects of relationships in rural reentry, and of the support and guidance given to people reentering the community. Phoenix staff talked repeatedly about relationships being integral in their work. Phoenix staff both intentionally and inherently meet people where they are, work to develop trust with participants, believe that everyone deserves a blessing and/or second chance, and are willing to go the extra mile for participants. Some of these actions are due to the staff's strong faith and religious background, and some are due to a deeply held passion for helping young people to succeed.

While this case study was not meant to be generalized to other reentry organizations, there are several findings from each of our three sections (the Community, the Organization, the People) that suggest promising approaches.

COMMUNITY-LEVEL FACTORS

Opportunities for collaboration – Brainstorming community issues together may lead to the discovery of common needs and goals. As in southeast Arkansas, the common ground may be a shared desire to support its young people.

Creative solutions/funding – Drawing on and across community relationships may support awareness of funding opportunities and the development of innovative solutions to combat reentry struggles.

ORGANIZATION-LEVEL FACTORS

Holistic approach – Considering the supports needed by each person in a young person's environment may lead to improved outcomes for all.

Personalized approach – Drawing on each young person's needs and wants to develop plans may lead to greater participant satisfaction and better likelihood of success.

Hiring the right people – Finding people who are passionate about working with young people, believe in second chances, and who have lived experience with the challenges young people face may lead to stronger and effective client relationships.

Strong leadership – An organization's mission may be exemplified and disseminated through a committed leader and dedicated management.

Alignment of policy and practice – Small reentry organizations may benefit from working with a larger intermediary to build capacity, gain resources to expand and support their work, and increase knowledge from peer organizations.

PEOPLE/STAFF-LEVEL FACTORS

Trust/rapport – Developing trust with program participants may strengthen relationships and provide openings for meaningful conversations.

Commitment to organization mission – Understanding and buying into a rural reentry organization's mission may lead to collaborative professional relationships and encourage working across programs/sharing caseloads.



Appendix A

PHOENIX YOUTH AND FAMILY SERVICES, INC. AND FHI 360

Phoenix Youth and Family Services, Inc. and FHI 360 began their relationship through a convening of Communities Collaborating to Reconnect Youth (CCRY), a national learning community of leaders working across systems to help young people reconnect to education and career pathways. FHI 360 and The Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) together run this collaboration to facilitate semiannual convenings designed for the CCRY communities to learn from each other.

As an intermediary, FHI 360 takes the lead role in writing, applying, planning, monitoring, evaluating, and executing the grant with help from the sub-grantee partners. As a sub-grantee, Phoenix works with young adults by recruiting and enrolling potential participants, conducting intakes of new participants, building their Individual Support Plans/Work and Learning Plans, exploring education and/or workforce pathways, ensuring access to supportive and wraparound services, and providing a year of follow-up services until the young adult has settled back into the community.



WHY A COMPASS ROSE?

A compass rose is a circle showing the principal directions printed on a map or chart. Sailors have used it to find their way for generations. The Compass Rose Collaborative will guide young people out of the justice system and into productive employment or higher education, helping them reach their full potential.

FHI 360'S ROLE AS AN INTERMEDIARY

FHI 360's NIWL leads the Compass Rose Collaborative as an intermediary. NIWL provides an innovative model that fosters a sense of collaboration across the partnering communities by promoting promising and comprehensive approaches. To foster a successful transition into the community, youth require wraparound supportive services and assistance navigating the education, justice, and workforce systems. There are few organizations at the local level that are equipped to act as a broker for comprehensive services and provide youth with a caring adult and navigator. The intermediary model incorporates supportive program infrastructure and formalizes partnerships among corrections systems, community-based education providers, and workforce training providers; reflects human-centered and trauma-informed approaches; and incorporates positive youth development and adult education principles. As an intermediary, FHI 360 strives to partner with small organizations.

Black people have been disproportionately represented in the U.S justice system (Kovera, 2019). Black youth are more than **4X** as likely to be detained or committed in juvenile facilities as their white peers.

The Sentencing Project, 2021



In 2019, the Compass Rose Collaborative incorporated a **Young Adult Leadership Council (YALC)** into its reentry programs. The council consists of currently enrolled and alumni participants who are vital partners in developing strategies, methods, and approaches for the program. Dai'Brina Anderson is a YALC alumna.

41% of youths incarcerated in juvenile facilities are Black, even though Black Americans comprise only 15% of all youth across the United States.

The Sentencing Project, 2021



ABOUT COMPASS ROSE COLLABORATIVE (CRC)

FHI 360's Compass Rose Collaborative (CRC) was launched in 2017 as a three-year program funded by the United States Department of Labor (DOL). Since then, NIWL has won two additional rounds of this grant as an intermediary serving over 1500 young adults in 10 cities across the country with high rates of poverty and crime. In doing so FHI 360 has collaborated with 11 organizations. CRC seeks to improve the education and employment outcomes of young adults, ages 18 through 24, after involvement in the U.S. criminal justice system. CRC supports young participants in partner organizations by implementing a program model that provides youth with support services; creates lasting community-based partnerships; and documents and promotes effective and promising practices. FHI 360, completed the first (2017) round of the grant, is currently wrapping up the second (2018) and is conducting the third round (2020) of the grant.

The CRC addresses one of the most pressing consequences of our nation's incarceration problem: the unemployment challenges and economic instability young people encounter as a result of interaction with the criminal justice system. These challenges persist whether young people are returning from incarceration or detention or are on probation or parole, in a rural or urban environment. The CRC connects young adults (primarily young people of color) with employment and education pathways.

The CRC provides critical resources and safe spaces, mentors and staff, and supports young people on their transformation journey by helping them to navigate systemic barriers and aiding communities in creating lasting partnerships for systemic change.

To know more about the Compass Rose Collaborative please [contact us](#).

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