

# Motivations and the Need for Fulfillment of Faith-Based Halfway House Volunteers



Andrew S. Denney<sup>1</sup> and Richard Tewksbury<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

This case study examines the motivations and personal benefits of individuals who volunteer for a Protestant Christian faith-based halfway house for recently released offenders. Drawing on eight in-depth interviews with volunteers from a faith-based ministry located in a Southern U.S. city, the study examines why volunteers arrive to their positions and what they perceive as rewards of their work. Typically, volunteers report receiving more benefits themselves than they perceive offender clients receiving. Chief among perceived rewards are a transparent community in which volunteers could more safely share personal aspects of themselves than what they could experience elsewhere. This study provided valuable information to scholars, legislators, and correctional professionals by showing that faith-based ministries do not necessarily emphasize the religious aspect of their program.

## Introduction

Halfway-houses continue to remain viable and fairly commonly used options for housing and accessing services for recently released criminal offenders. As of 2010,

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<sup>1</sup> University of Louisville, Louisville, KY, USA.

### Corresponding Author:

Richard Tewksbury, Department of Justice Administration, Brigman Hall, University of Louisville, Louisville, KY 40292

Email: [Richard.tewksbury@louisville.edu](mailto:Richard.tewksbury@louisville.edu)

Phone: (502) 852-0379

there were 2,266,800 estimated inmates housed in local jails, state prisons, and federal prisons with 95% of these inmates likely to eventually be released. Halfway-houses are designed to assist with the transition of re-entry by serving as a bridge between incarceration and release back into mainstream society. Unfortunately, there are not enough halfway-houses to meet the large demand for their services (BJS, 2011; ACA, 2002). This is especially true when it is estimated that 9% of inmates were homeless during the twelve months prior to their incarceration (ACA, 2002). Halfway-houses come in several forms, including state-sponsored and private (typically, faith-based organizations) facilities that vary greatly in their size, scope and programming focus (i.e. substance abuse, mental illnesses, providing a faith-based community, etc.). Although halfway-houses are common fixtures in society, and provide vital functions to the criminal justice system they have largely been absent from research.

The total number of halfway-houses that currently operate within the U.S. is difficult to assess due to inconsistent criteria used to classify an organization as a halfway-house. Some of these criteria range from the type of services that they offer to whether or not they are receiving state/federal grants. Just as halfway-houses vary in their size and scope, so too do they vary in their reliance on paid staff and/or volunteers. Very frequently volunteers fulfill numerous and critical roles in halfway houses, including doing basic facility maintenance and supervision, as well as staffing programming positions. However, despite their common and important roles, there is very little research available about such volunteers. What is available is both sparse and typically focused on volunteers working inside of prisons and with faith-based ministries that provide in-prison services. Therefore, the current study draws on this similar, yet critically different body of research in seeking to understand the experiences of volunteers in a faith-based halfway house. The goal of the present study is to examine the motivations of faith-based halfway house volunteers.

### *Religious Influence on the Development of the U.S. Penal System*

Religion and faith-based efforts have played significant roles in American correctional efforts since the first use of incarceration. The roots of religious influence can be traced back to the first modern penal system – the Walnut Street Jail – as it was developed by Quakers' Society for Alleviating the Miseries of Public Prisons towards the close of the 18th century (Depersis & Lewis, 2008). In the more than two centuries of American corrections since the opening of Walnut Street Jail religious principles and religious groups have remained influential.

Although religious ideals – primarily in the form of Christianity – declined in their overt presence and influence in American penal policy and practice towards the close of the 19th century, they have remained present and influential (Bosworth, 2010; Heath, 1963). Primarily seen in their influences on rehabilitative programming and an emphasis on penitence, faith-based principles waned in influence in American corrections until being re-invigorated in the last decade of the 20th century.

Today, while faith-based programming is common in correctional efforts the symbols and primary deliverers of religious messages – Chaplains and the services they provide (i.e. leading religious ceremonies, counseling services, etc.) – are disappearing from many institutions and systems, largely due to budget restraints of states and the federal government (St. Gerard, 2003). Removal or substantial reductions in institutional chaplains have been completed in numerous states, including South Carolina (St. Gerard, 2003), Texas (Grissom, 2011), Georgia (Gunn, 2008) and North Carolina (Sheridan, 2012). As a result, faith-based programming has been eliminated, substantially reduced, and/or become the responsibility of volunteer based faith-based organizations.

### *Benefits of Faith-Based Organizations*

Although they may be diminished in number and visibility, faith-based organizations are commonly believed to provide a number of benefits to both inmates and correctional institutions. One benefit commonly reported by inmates is that by being active within a faith-based organization it is perceived to increase their chances of parole; however, this has not been assessed nor supported in research (Beckford, 2001). Faith-based services have also been shown to be used by inmates as a coping-mechanism for the management of stresses that accompany prison life (Adler, Burnside, Loucks, & Tendayi, 2008). Common forms of faith-based programming activities found in prisons are Bible studies and counseling/mentoring. These faith-based activities help inmates place their past legal issues and other misdeeds into a more meaningful interpretation, perhaps giving a sense of purpose to their life that may have been absent prior (Kerley & Copes, 2008).

Studies have also examined inmate religiosity and its effect on institutional deviance. Johnson (1987) found that one's overall level of religiosity is not related to their likelihood for deviance within prison. However, Kerley, Matthews, and Blanchard (2005) found that participation in these activities contributed to a reduction in antisocial behaviors of arguing and physically fighting with other

inmates. Kerley, Allison, and Graham (2006) also found higher levels of religiosity reducing the number of arguments between inmates. This reduction in such antisocial behaviors, in turn, helps reduce overall levels of violence (Kerley et al., 2005). Specifically, inmates expressing belief in a higher power are 73% less-likely than those who do not believe in such to be involved in a physical altercation (Kerley et al., 2005). Similarly, Koenig (1995) reported that inmates who attend Bible study sessions in prison are more likely to be classified as lower security risk inmates. Furthermore, Kerley, Copes, Tewksbury, and Dabney (2011) found that those participating in religious services were less likely to engage in institutional deviance. Camp, Daggett, Kwon, and Klein-Saffran (2008) also found that those who participated in a faith-based program had a lower probability of being involved in serious misconduct, but no discernable differences existed for less serious misconduct. Benefits of faith-based programming have also been identified with offender reentry with Johnson, Larson, and Pitts (1997) finding inmates that were active in Prison Fellowship programming while incarcerated are less-likely to recidivate compared to those who were not active in Prison Fellowship. Although other benefits of faith-based programming for offenders remains unclear, it is clear that faith-based programming and organizations rely very heavily on volunteers in carrying out their ministries and functions.

### *Characteristics of Volunteers*

Little is known regarding the backgrounds of volunteers associated with corrections, including prison ministries. Studies of volunteers associated with correctional efforts are rare, but the available literature suggests clear patterns in demographic and background characteristics of such individuals. Tewksbury and Dabney (2005) reported that 65.5% of volunteers in one medium-security, Southern prison were men, with 71.7% of these being white males. Volunteers are also typically (70%) between the ages of 35 and 65 and highly educated -- 47% holding at least a 4-year college degree (Tewksbury & Dabney, 2005). Additionally while focusing specifically on volunteers with a prison-based chapel program, Tewksbury and Collins (2005) found 17% of volunteers reported having at least one prior criminal conviction.

Volunteers commonly report a high level of overall satisfaction with their faith-based, correctional volunteer work (Kerley et al., 2010; Tewksbury & Collins, 2005; Tewksbury & Dabney, 2005). Kerley et al. (2010) reported that the highest level of satisfaction is reported by volunteers contributing the most hours of time. Tewksbury and Dabney (2005) reported that nearly 40% of volunteers felt they had a direct hand in rehabilitating inmates.

Just as with knowledge about volunteers' demographics and role satisfaction, assessments of such volunteers' motivations for faith-based prison work is scant, and addresses only volunteers in prison-based programs. What is reported in the literature is that the most prominent motivation reported by volunteers is that they believe to be or have been "called by God" to their roles. Tewksbury and Dabney (2005) found one-half (49.2%) of prison volunteers report a religious calling as their reason for volunteering. Similarly, Tewksbury and Collins (2005) also reported fully 50% of faith-based programming volunteers felt they had been called by God into prison ministry. Kerley et al. (2010) summarizes the characteristics of a successful volunteer as someone who believes they have been called into the ministry, someone who feels safe and comfortable around the inmates, and someone with a personal connection to prison or offenders. However, the existing literature is silent on the issue of volunteers in community corrections settings. The present study seeks to address this gap.

## Methods

### *Halfway-House Background*

The halfway-house that is the focus of the present study was founded in 1995 as a non-profit faith-based organization with the purported purpose to cater to the needs of recently released offenders transitioning back into the community. The main expressed focus of this organization is to provide temporary housing (i.e., generally less than one year) to recently released offenders, but they also offer a wide array of services in addition to housing with emphasis being placed upon employment (e.g., job interviewing techniques, résumé development, etc.) and substance abuse treatment/management. This halfway-house operates four different facilities housing an average of 15 clients per facility. Three are male-only facilities and one housing only females.

Both male and female recently released offenders of any offense-type (i.e., homicide, aggravated assault, robbery, etc.) are eligible for services with only sex offenders being ineligible for housing/services.. The vast majority of clients are middle-aged Caucasian males. Between the years of 2002 and 2009, the organization served 257 total clients with a self-reported 18% recidivism rate. The organization reports total annual operating costs of \$328,000.

Recently released offenders are generally referred to these halfway houses through a parole officer. However, a sizeable minority has either gone through this organization on a previous release or has known someone who did. All interested individuals must go through a screening process that includes a drug test, criminal

background check, and an expressed interest of wanting to change their prior ways. Although this non-profit organization is faith-based with a Protestant Christian focus, they do not require potential clients or current clients to be/become Christian. They emphasize that such individuals need only be open to the idea of Christian faith in the process of rehabilitation and successful transition back into the community. One of the components with this is that they offer an optional weekly dinner and Bible study on Thursday nights. Bible studies are organized and facilitated by outside volunteers from area churches.

### *Participants*

Participants in this study were Bible-study volunteers affiliated with the non-profit, faith-based, Protestant, halfway-house referenced above and located in a southern state. Eight of the nine volunteers associated with the halfway house participated in the study. Seven of the eight volunteers are male, one is female; seven participants are white, one is African-American. Participants' average age was 56.3 years of age. All volunteers reported membership in a Protestant church. The average length of reported participation at the halfway house was 5.5 years. Three participants self-reported a criminal conviction, one having served a sentence in prison, two in jail. In the findings reported below, all participants are referenced by pseudonyms.

### *Data Collection*

Data were collected via both interviews with volunteers and participant observation at weekly dinners and Bible study sessions lead by volunteers. A semi-structured interview guide was used to guide the face-to-face interviews. All interviews were conducted in person, at one of three locations: coffee-shops, restaurants, and a private office inside the halfway-house. Interviews lasted between 30 and 45 minutes. Included in the interview guide are multiple themes including: how and why the volunteer came to this halfway house, the perceived effectiveness of the ministry, how the volunteer is involved in tasks at the halfway house and how they feel about their role at the halfway house. In addition, demographic information including: age, sex, race, Christian denomination, present/past occupation, total years of volunteerism specific to the ministry, prior criminal conviction(s) (if applicable), and prior incarceration time (if applicable) was collected. All interviews were digitally audio-recorded, transcribed in full, and analyzed for any overarching themes.

Additionally, for a period of 5 months one author attended and participated in weekly two-hour dinners and Bible study sessions. Each evening began at approximately 7:00 P.M. with a dinner provided by volunteers on a rotating basis. At roughly 7:45 P.M., the dinner would transition into a Bible study lasting until approximately 9:00 P.M. These events were voluntary for residents. On a typical week an average of three residents and seven volunteers were present for the dinner and Bible Study. The author participating in these events did so as a full participant, and took field notes only after the conclusion of the evening's activities with an emphasis being placed upon volunteer-client interaction. Observations will be provided as support to key themes found through interviews and will be directly referenced to when appropriate.

### *Data Analysis*

Transcript data was organized for analysis by grouping each volunteer's response according to thematic categories of the interview guide (i.e., attractions of the program, effectiveness of the program, etc.) as part of the interview guide. A content-analysis through multiple readings was then performed on all topic responses. These multiple readings were conducted by the researcher with each reading having a particular focus of a specific theme (i.e., motivations for involvement, personal benefits of volunteering, etc.). Fieldnotes from weekly observations were used to supplement interviews. All findings reflect both the concepts and the themes that emerged from this data -- both interview transcripts and participant observation field notes.

## **Findings**

The goals of this study are to identify and understand the motivations and experiences of the volunteers in one faith-based halfway house. The findings center on issues of organization/program-specific attractions, recognition of Christian principles as secondary to other goals, perceived questionable efficacy of the ministry, and identification of personally derived benefits of volunteering.

### *Organization-Specific Attractions*

A number of the volunteers stated that they believe they are able to make certain connections and positive relationships with clients in the halfway house. It is this component – a strong personal connection/relationship – that many volunteers

believe helps distinguish this religious organization from other ministries. In response to what characteristics about this program attracted them to it, Heather, who is the one employee of the organization overseeing the halfway house and who volunteers outside of her job responsibilities in the female-only Bible study, expressed having a special connection with a client when discussing a young woman that was a part of the women's program that had alcohol addiction issues by saying:

*...we had nothing in common, but we had everything in common. She was a young woman who was a mother, and I had been a mother. She had dreams and hopes but they had been dashed and destroyed by her own choices. So, I had a heart for her...for you know brokenness and whatever.*

The previous statement shows how volunteers are able to make a special connection with individuals who are actively suffering with an issue to which they can in some way relate, such as family issues or personal issues that are similar. Heather reported that she had a daughter with alcohol addiction issues, a son who had a good friend in high school who had been involved in a DUI accident where several people were killed and that she herself also had alcohol issues during adolescence. Nathan, a convicted drug offender and the newest volunteer, also discussed the special relationships he experiences by saying, "...there's just a certain amount of comfort getting in, going down, talking with the guys...interaction." While special relationships between volunteers and clients occur, more common is for a strong and perceived as special relationship to develop between volunteers themselves.

During weekly Bible study sessions, volunteers would almost exclusively sit next to one another during the meal and often discuss work or church related matters. Oftentimes, some of the volunteers would socialize with one another outside of the Thursday night Bible study, and would gather for coffee, lunch or to attend local sporting events together. These are relationships that were born and developed through their volunteer work at the halfway house; and in all probability would not have developed without the shared experience of volunteering. Rather clearly, the social aspects that volunteering provided to these individuals served as a key attraction point for volunteers.

### *Transparency*

A second theme that emerged when volunteers discussed what attracted them to this volunteer opportunity was that this setting provided a sense of transparent community for them that was perceived as unavailable elsewhere. As it is used



here, transparency refers to individuals feeling as if they can openly discuss all aspects of their lives with others without either the need to conceal any particular information or to be judged. In addition, individuals also expect others present to feel comfortable to discuss both good and bad parts of their lives without the fear of judgment or any negative sanctions. Transparency also includes religious components that reference personal struggles that individuals may be experiencing in their Christian faith. This feeling of community was often described by using the word "fellowship," referring to the ability of being open or "transparent" with a group of others centered on their Christian beliefs. Nathan, explained his sense of affinity with the experience as a key attraction to the halfway house when he stated, "I like actually, the interaction, the fellowship is good...and again, I can appreciate the fellowship." A second volunteer, Sean, that has been volunteering for nearly five years reiterated this idea of the transparent interaction as a primary attraction when saying:

*So, I started going every Thursday, or as much as I could, and the benefits for me, I really miss it now if I don't get there on Thursday night and stuff. I think the guys realize I'm sincere about being there, they've opened up...they are more willing to share if you are sincere about it.*

As these comments suggest, it is vital that an individual is or portrays themselves as being sincere. Other volunteers also discuss that sincerity/transparency serves as one of the primary attractions of this opportunity for them. As one of the founders of this ministry, Ted, explains this attraction:

*I can see God working in guy's lives. That's really fun in a social environment in here, as well as at our church. Everybody looks pretty cool, they've got it together, but that's not really true. These guys (clients), you can really see what's going on in their lives. One of the things about prison is that all of their sins are laid bare, their lives destroyed...Everybody knows everything about everybody, and it is easy to see God work in a life when you can see that they've changed as a result of a process where they become familiar with the Gospel.*

Similarly, another volunteer, Robert, states that within this environment, "...you can also see failures...but you know, you can help them through those too." He goes on in response to questioning about what attracts him to this volunteer opportunity, saying:

*...because of the Bible study...in that environment we develop a connection that is personal, but is also faith-based. And you...you learn a lot about each other in the context of doing that, you know. There is something about studying the Bible together and talking about it, you develop a trust in one another. You open*

*up and become a little more transparent about your own life. So, in the context of doing all of that, you develop a relationship that's got some depth to it.*

Statements such as this demonstrate how one of the primary components that draw volunteers to volunteering with this program is the sense of community that is fostered within this group. It is understood by these statements that individuals see both other volunteers and clients within the group as being more genuine than those persons they encounter in other, including faith-centered, gatherings. This sense of genuineness is attributed to individuals feeling free to discuss any past personal issues that are on their minds, including substance abuse or other addictions, criminal convictions, or other emotional, potentially stigmatizing issues. Common across the volunteers is the belief that what they share in the context of the halfway house will remain free from the judgment from others; this is something the volunteer's report they have not found in other faith-based settings.

Throughout the observed sessions, questions were often asked of the group regarding what issues/addictions that both clients and volunteers have struggled with previously or in the past. Also, all weekly Bible studies provided the opportunity at the closing prayer request session where individuals could discuss certain personal issues that they may need help with in their life. Both volunteers and clients often used this opportunity to share extremely personal details about their life that volunteers reported were either absent in other settings or not as genuine feeling elsewhere. As a result, transparency is a primary intrinsic benefit that volunteers associate with this organization (this will be discussed in more detail below). Although it is important to understand what traits present within this setting serve as attractions for volunteers, it is also important to understand what volunteers see as the primary goals of the work that they are doing and that the religious goals are secondary.

### *Spiritual/Religious Goals as Secondary*

How volunteers define the goal(s) and overall purpose of the halfway house provides a lens for understanding the collective actions of volunteers. Having the volunteers define what they see as the primary goals and overall purpose of the organization allows for an examination of what volunteers see the goals being and if and how they are actively pursuing the achievement of these goals in the role(s) they are fulfilling. Responses from volunteers highlighted similarities through the emergence of common themes and components, as well as some differences in what individuals see as the organization's primary purpose. The most common goals expressed for the halfway-house include provision of positive relationships

for offenders, assistance with offenders' transitions back into society, connecting offenders with encouraging community resources, helping offenders to avoid negative experiences and community contacts, providing stability (i.e. employment and housing) to offenders' lives, and some form of spiritual relationship with Christ. Although each of these components is important as part of what volunteers see as the goals of their role(s) within the organization, it is interesting that the religious/faith component was only mentioned by one-half (n=4) of the volunteers. It would be logical to assume that the primary goal of faith-based organizations is the sharing of faith aspect; however, this does not seem to be the case among this population.

There are a number of possible explanations for why the Christian component was only mentioned in some form by half of the volunteers. The first explanation is that volunteers see the real-world aspects of tasks such as finding employment and stable housing as being more crucial than the spiritual/religious aspect. Employment issues are also the focus of many conversations among volunteers, both with offenders and other volunteers. Those volunteers that did mention the spiritual/religious component as a goal typically stated it only after listing other perceived goals for the organization, and in a couple of cases more or less as an afterthought. In response to what he perceived as the goals of the organization, Robert says, "So, the ministry tries to assist in some of the social issues they face, some of the work issues that they face...and the causes of a faith-based kind of ministry. (pause) Spiritual aspects as well." Another example is where Nathan parallels his personal story to a current client in the house's situation within the context of what he perceives the organization's purpose to be by saying, "He is learning to have rapport and relationships when he is not in the penitentiary setting. He's trying to have a positive, Christian spin on that. Where we can show people the relationship they need with the Lord."

Building on this, Scott, an African-American with a record for a felony aggravated assault, extends this idea of the Christian aspect of his work being only secondary to his other tasks and perceived goals by saying:

*I would say it's to give people a sense of worth once they're outside the prison walls. People that don't have family or any place to stay. We give them a sense of worth before they move on...I think the Christian aspect of it helps prepare them to get back into society.*

Statements such as this show how the Christian aspect of this effort is not necessarily perceived by volunteers as essential to the work of themselves and the organization, but it certainly is considered to be helpful for an individual to return successful to society. Another way to see this is that the Christian teachings

perhaps provide clients with a sense of purpose in their lives that may have been absent prior to their arrival at this halfway-house. Also, volunteers may believe that the Christian aspect allows clients to have an added big-picture perspective that may have been absent previously by forcing individuals to examine their daily actions in a long-term sense instead of a short-term sense. The volunteer that served as one of the founders of this ministry, Ted, emphasizes this secondary nature of Christian and religious principles when discussing what he perceives as the goals and purpose(s) of the organization by explaining:

*...there's no requirement that you've (a client) got to be a Christian, but he (client) has got to be very accepting of a Christian approach to it and all of that sort of thing. We try to address the basics of the faith...what it is being a Christian – grace and mercy – how we establish a relationship with Christ...*

Such a statement demonstrates how Christian basics are there for clients if desired, but they are not believed to be vital to the “success” of an individual for community re-entry. Consequently, it may be possible to have “success” if an individual maintains a job, has steady housing, and has the ability to provide for oneself. However, it is the religious aspect of Christianity that gives them a sense of purpose and meaning to their life that may have been absent prior to their participation in this ministry. Therefore, Christianity and its principles are not the focus of this faith-based halfway-house, but the program and its volunteers theoretically serve as ambassadors of this religion in order to influence clients to live a certain way.

### *Perceived Effectiveness*

The overall level to which volunteers perceived the halfway house to be effective is vital for understanding how volunteers recognize their own contributions and their value. Interestingly, the majority of the volunteers do not express a strong belief in the efficacy of the halfway house program. Todd stated that he felt the program was extremely effective when saying, “Extremely, extremely...I’m thinking there should be more places like that around town. I realize it costs money, but I’d say it’s real effective.” Almost all of the remaining volunteers stated that the program was fairly or moderately effective with providing offenders necessary tools, but almost universally volunteers added the caveat that it was up to clients to put those tools to use. A clear example of this is when one longtime volunteer, Robert, states:

*I feel it's very effective for the people that are wanting to take and put some energy and effort into it. Some people that are going through the motions just trying to, not really trying to walk-the-walk and talk-the-talk, but just doing what they feel like their probation officer or what they have to do to live here.*

*Somebody that is putting energy and effort they are going to get something out of it they've never gotten. God's going to bless them, their life is going to change.*

Such a sentiment reiterates the previous point in regards to the program providing the tools that an individual needs to succeed, but that it is up to that individual in order to make the best of their situation. Another volunteer provides a comparable statement that suggests he believes the program is fairly effective and that there are some success stories and also some stories of failure. Sean illustrates his point of examples of success and failure from the house and ends his statement by saying:

*So, there's been some great success stories. Unfortunately, there is some...I don't know, I'd like to think it's better than the 66% that normally happens. I don't know what the stats are; you know you can see some real changes in the lives of these men.*

Although clearly expressing uncertainty regarding the degree of effectiveness of the program such a view does emphasize a belief that this program is better than having nothing at all. Ted, a program founder, related the effectiveness to if the client's life has shown some improvement during their stay in the house when he says, "...the effectiveness of it...to answer that you've got to say what the objectives are...But if they look at that period of time as being a good time, I think that's the objective." This view suggests the belief that any improvement while staying and participating in the activities of the halfway house should be considered a success, thus declaring the program to be effective.

Scott was the most steadfast in his belief that the effectiveness of the program was the responsibility of the individual that wants to change. He explains his view saying:

*I think that the program is designed with designations, but basically the effectiveness of it is a matter of the person, the individual and the desire to just want to attempt to change or make a change within their life so that they can do better and not return to bad habits.*

Other volunteers offer suggestions that the halfway house does achieve positive outcomes, but they also stress the program as it currently operates could be improved when responding to its overall effectiveness. In the words of Robert:

*Well...I really feel that it's effective. You know...I think it's got a huge upside that is yet to be realized. I do think there is a need for expanding it to be more inclusive to when these guys move out and are on their own. All of that is...you know...going to be determined by the resources available, but right now it doesn't seem like we have enough to take care of what we've got.*

Even though Robert sees the program as being effective and providing valuable resources, he also expresses the belief that there are areas of the organization's efforts that can be improved upon. Another volunteer, Ray, previously convicted for a felony sex offense with a minor, who had been through similar programs after his release from prison, provided a similar view on the program's efficacy.

*There is no questions that it is more effective than what I would call the standard, maybe non-Christian programs that are out there. I've read some figures about the guys going back and what not. In fact, today there was a story on the news about the offenders who have been released, early released, through the I think the Governor...They released I think 900 and some odd guys just in the last month, and 75 are back in...so yeah, (ministry) has a better ratio of keeping guys from re-offending and going back in...*

This example nicely summarizes the theme found throughout the majority of volunteers' beliefs in regards to the effectiveness of the halfway house program: the program provides offenders with the tools necessary for success, and this is a superior option when compared to programs currently being offered by state and federal governments.

The true motivations of volunteers re-emerge when one considers that the volunteers do not express a strong belief in the success of this program. The question that arises, then, is if individuals do not fully believe that the program is effective, then why do they continue to volunteer their time and resources? The answer, as outlined in the next section, is that volunteers perceive a number of valuable benefits they derive from their volunteering.

### *Personal Benefits for Volunteers*

The self-identified personal benefits reported by volunteers inform our understandings of the motivations of volunteers. When examining the list of issues that volunteers offered as realized benefits of their association with the halfway house three themes emerge. These themes are building relationships (i.e. platonic and familial), helping boost their own self-esteem, and humbling them to realize that their own life circumstances are not as bad as others'.

### *Relationships*

Positive and rewarding personal relationships were the most frequently cited personal benefits realized as a result of being involved with the halfway house.. The relationships noted were described using both platonic and familial terms, most

typically son and brother. In response to received benefits of her involvement with this ministry, Heather explains:

*And in all honesty, the benefit of the relationships. Like I would have never known this guy here (referring to a former client in the room) if I weren't here. I don't think I would know anybody that I know now that I consider to be the most important people in my life...*

Such is a strong statement, and clearly a great benefit. It is also important to note that volunteers consistently report feeling that the relationships they have built in this environment have replaced many other relationships they may have in their life. Ted continues this theme when responding to perceived benefits of volunteering when he states that:

*Just the benefit of knowing good Christian guys, volunteers, and guys that...you know, just talking to some of the guys. One thing that I think that...that I believe...there is no such thing in any way as racial differences between whites, blacks, Hispanics. It's all culture, and I don't have any more in common with a black guy that grew up in Western (city) than I do with (current client's name) that grew up in the (state) mountains. There are enormous cultural differences between me and both of those guys. It's sort of fun to figure out those differences, why they're there, why they exist, all of that stuff. Those are all personal benefits, just learning about people. Learning how God works in their life.*

In this volunteer's mind building relationships is not only a personal benefit, but it is a relationship that may have not even occurred if it was not for his involvement at the halfway house. Such a view further suggests that the benefit of access and exposure to individuals outside of one's own culture, social class or other social circles that they would probably not associate with if it were not for their present involvement. In continuance with the theme of relationships as a reported benefit, Robert compares the relationships he has made with clients in the house to raising children when he says:

*I'm just blessed...I'm blessed...by knowing these guys. They're like new friends, and it's amazing how quickly that seems to happen. You know, one thing that helps me is I'm retired, I have time. It's like raising kids, you know, you can talk about quality time. You can't get quality time unless you get volume of time...It's hard for somebody that has a job, family, and that sort of thing to do that. It's not easy to do that. It takes away from other parts of their responsibility as a husband and father...it limits how close they can get.*

In this example we see an elaboration of the theme regarding how volunteers feel as if the personal relationships that they are able to make by their involvement are seen as the primary benefit of their involvement. This particular volunteer was the only one to compare his relationships in a father-son relationship; however, the idea of familial terms being used to express one's feelings about relationships formed in the halfway house program is common across the volunteers. In essence, for most of the volunteers the relationships they have made via their involvement are seen as an extended or almost surrogate family. Interestingly, all of the volunteers reported having an intact nuclear family, and none indicated any significant sense of isolation or alienation from biological families. Yet, even as middle-aged men with jobs, families and other obligations they come to see the relationships they make in their faith-based halfway house volunteer time as strong, familial and perhaps the most important relationships in their lives.

### *Self-Esteem*

The second most commonly reported personal benefit identified by volunteers was that involvement with the halfway house has boosted their self-esteem. This enhancement in self-esteem appears to originate from volunteers hearing tragic stories from clients when they discuss past/present personal issues discussed at the weekly Bible studies, and feeling good about oneself for being involved and helping others. This increase in self-esteem often comes indirectly from comparisons volunteers make between their own lives and that of a client. However, some volunteers blatantly state that they receive an increase in their self-esteem from just being involved with the halfway house program. One example is when Sean summarizes his benefits of participation by saying:

*It's an eye-opener for me to see what as bad as my day has been or situation may be that I'm in, it pales in comparison to a lot of these things. You know, I might think I've got it bad some days, and I hear about something like the case of (name of current client) that we were talking about earlier. He didn't know his wife had passed away for a year, his first week in the house he planned to have a reconciliation meeting with her. The day or two after we had the Thursday night study, he found out that she had been dead for a year. Yeah...I think I might have something bad at work that day, but that's nothing compared to something like that.*

Rather clearly this volunteer engages in active comparisons between his own experiences and those of the clients in the house. As a result, both he and others can see in the comparisons how others' (most notably the halfway house clients)



personal situations are more stressful, disorganized and/or tragic than their own lives. Scott expands upon this theme when summarizing what he perceives as benefits of volunteering when he says:

*Just my self-esteem, that's the biggest thing, my self-esteem. Feeling that I'm doing something, I am helpful. There is no doubt in my mind that I'm helping somebody, and I look forward to helping them. I see and I feel the positivity that I'm sharing with them, they return it. It's just like anything else...in...when you're familiar with anything or anybody, either you want to be bothered with them or you don't...That makes me feel like it is something, only because when I'm familiar with a person you just throw yourself out...So, they've got to want it and you've got to want to get it. So, you come together on one accord and you've got to do what you've got to do.*

Self esteem is built through the realization that one has provided a positive impact on someone else's life. To realize one has helped another person, and most likely someone for whom one has positive feelings and a sense of community, makes the volunteers feel good about themselves and their volunteering of their time and services. Ted elaborates upon this concept when he says, "I think anytime you're involved in other peoples' life, that's positive. That's positive for me. You know, Thursday night's heading home, I'm blessed because of the guys that are there." Even the newest volunteer in the ministry, Nathan, recognized this and expressed the notion when he says:

*I feel like I've been blessed considerably. You see someone that has been able to get on their feet, change their lives. Be able to be, a small part of that through prayer, contact that we've had with them, just for support. I think that's something we are all commanded by being Christians to do, to give back. That's something that I've gotten from it.*

To reiterate, the volunteers in this faith-based halfway house program express that by being involved in others' lives they derive significant perceived benefits. By way of volunteering these men report feeling better both building strong and unique relationships and coming to feel better about themselves. A third, related, benefit expressed by these volunteers is that through their relationships with halfway house clients and their increased recognition of their own privileges and blessings in life, they find a humbling experience which is also experienced as a positive reward of being a volunteer.

### *Humbling Experience*

The last major theme that was reported as a personal benefit perceived by the volunteers was that being involvement in the halfway house -- and especially with the clients -- was a humbling experience. Being around clients helped keep volunteers grounded by reminding them on a continuous basis to always be grateful for what one has. Such interactions and relationships were also reported as helping the volunteers to stay focused on important components in their lives. Ray explained this feeling as a response to his perceived benefits of participation when saying:

*Well...for me, I guess it helps keep me focused on what's important. It helps...I struggle with pride. So, coming down there always helps me...reminds me of who I am and that I'm not better than any of those guys. I've been locked up before, and that just brings that reminder back to me. So, it helps me in that capacity.*

Or, in the words of Ted when responding to his perceived benefits of participation:

*You know, sometimes you think guys in prison may not be well-educated, well read, may not know the Bible. It just impresses me with the knowledge that these folks have. It's kind of humbling sometimes, I've been in church my whole life, and sometimes these guys run circles around me on these Bible stories and stuff. It's kind of cool and everything.*

This volunteer's preconceived notions of prisoners and/or former offenders as being illiterate and not very intelligent was shattered through his work in the halfway house. This led him to reassess his own experiences and his own values, which served to humble him. Another volunteer that became involved because of harsh feelings he had towards a neighbor that was a registered sex offender, Todd, discussed the humbling properties he receives from being involved with the halfway house and its residents when he says that:

*I guess I considered myself to be too good to have somebody that had been in prison living next door to me. I had just decided that it wasn't the right thing to do, the right way to feel. I had it pointed out several times through the scripture. What did I tell you? Romans 12 or whatever? That we're no better than anybody else. Justice is the Lord's... I don't know, there's just a certain amount of comfort getting in, going down, talking with the guys.*

Being involved with the clients, whom many volunteers initially see as very different from themselves, leads to a number of self-revelations, including some that shatter many of the volunteers' preconceived notions about who they are and how they perceive offenders. Consequently, the shattered preconceived notions serve as a force that humbles volunteers. The persistent shattering of their pre-involvement

ideas and beliefs completes the circle of experiences and contributes to the sense of a transparent and/or genuine environment that volunteers report as one of the primary attractors for them to be involved in the halfway house.

While most volunteers report coming to their involvement for selfless reasons and as a way of contributing to the greater good of the community, it also became apparent through some of the interviews that not all of the volunteers were drawn to this setting and volunteer activity for completely selfless reasons. However, as explained below, at least for those volunteers who come for less than selfless reasons and do remain involved, the humbling experiences that arise from getting to know the halfway house residents develop and lead to a bond between the volunteer and the program. A first example of this is when Sean elaborates upon his perceived benefits of involvement when he says:

*Initially, I looked at it more as an obligation. You know, we said we'd do this and I was going. I was just going on Thursday night we'd do the dinner. Finally, I just had this moment where I said I either need to quit doing this and focus on something else, or I really need to buy into it and go every Thursday and make a relationship with the guys, show I was sincere about it. So, I started going every Thursday, or as much as I could, and the benefits for me, I really miss it now if I don't get there on Thursday night and stuff. I think the guys realize I'm sincere about being there, they've opened up...they are more willing to share if you are sincere about it. I get more out of it now I think, then I provide.*

The experience of this volunteer shows how what began as an "obligation" has come to be redefined as a beneficial experience. And, whereas this may have been in part the result of a conscious decision to "buy into it . . . and make a relationship with the guys", that act led to him having a positive, rewarding experience. Or, as related by Todd, "What I've noticed is a transformation in my own life whenever I show up on Thursday nights. I truly feel like I'm getting more out of the Bible study by being down there than the guys do." One of the primary attractions apparent throughout these interviews was that this environment provides a Bible study experience that is not available elsewhere. In continuation with this theme, Ray stated as a benefit of his involvement that, "It's neat to see some of the guys open, this transparency and humility that is honestly difficult to find in a men's group with men who have not been locked-up before. So, that's an encouragement to me." Across the board, these volunteers relate that in this setting they feel they can share anything and everything, which is unlike what they have found to be available in other faith community activities. Ted, provides a summary for this theme as a reported benefit when he says:

*...I can see God working in guy's lives. That's really fun in a social environment that in here, as well as out at our church. Everybody looks pretty cool, they've got it together, but it's not really true. These guys (clients), you can really see what's going on in their lives...Everybody knows everything about everybody, and it's easy to see God work in a life when you can see that they've changed as a result of a process where they come familiar with the Gospel.*

Here can be seen what others reported above only hinted or pointed at: volunteers in this halfway house believe that this is an atmosphere unlike anything these men have been able to find at their respective churches, or elsewhere in their lives. This Bible study experience provides a transparent community where everyone knows everything about everyone. There are no people present that are considered to be "fake," and people do not receive a benefit from being "fake" within this environment. The Bible study is what serves as the primary attraction point for volunteers due to not being able to find a similar genuine atmosphere elsewhere where they can share and discuss their own and other's personal struggles. In addition, volunteers may be attracted to this environment because they can share aspects of their life without clients being in a perceived position to judge, therefore, providing an environment and community not available elsewhere. Thus, the volunteer is the one being fulfilled and not necessarily the client for whom volunteer activities are intended to benefit.

## Conclusion

This case study has examined the backgrounds and motivations of volunteers for one Protestant Christian faith-based halfway-house. Findings highlight that Christian principles were not the focal point of this organization or its activities, and that such often took a secondary role to traditional societal benchmarks of success including stable employment and, housing. The background characteristics identified here show that in terms of demographics these volunteers are primarily white, middle-aged, educated males, similar to that reported by previous studies (Tewksbury & Dabney, 2005; Tewksbury & Collins, 2005). Also, fully one-third of the volunteers in the present study report having at least one criminal conviction, again similar to that reported in previous studies (Tewksbury & Collins, 2005).

Central to the findings here is that volunteers see the Christian aspect of the services provided by the halfway house as being secondary to traditional societal achievements of obtaining/maintaining a job, finding a permanent residence, and perhaps establishing a long-term, committed relationship. Volunteers believe that if clients can avoid having to focus on basic necessities they can instead focus on the

spiritual aspects of their lives. The halfway house in this case study provides the basic necessities, and in turn is perceived by volunteers to therefore facilitate offenders' long-term form of thinking that will contribute to a productive and crime-free life. By supplementing basic necessities with Christian teachings, volunteers believe they are providing offenders with opportunities and the ability to analyze their actions and behaviors. This is similar to that reported by Kerley and Copes (2008). Although perhaps surprising, the fact that the Christian/religious component is not the primary goal of the organization's efforts suggests that direct and objective social achievements are the primary emphasis of the program and volunteers, not proselytizing to offenders. This is not a completely new or unique finding; Duwe and King (2012) have previously reported that a religious emphasis is only a minority of the focus of Prison Fellowship's InnerChange Freedom Initiative. Although Christian in nature, and perhaps even name, faith-based programming need not be exclusively nor even primarily focused on religious principles.

Another major finding of this study was that although committed to their roles and efforts, volunteers were not entirely convinced of the effectiveness of the halfway house program. This brings into question serious concerns regarding the motives of the vast majority of the volunteers. For the most part, volunteers believed that the success of the halfway house depended not only on their own efforts and the messages/services provided by the faith-based organization, but also upon the individual client. Commitment to the effort is evidenced by volunteers' belief that what they provide is the best option available to recently released offenders.

The personal benefits reported by the volunteers stands as perhaps the most important finding of this study. The two primary personal benefits reported were that volunteers experienced a boost in their own self-esteem and their volunteer activities provided them with a humbling experience. These volunteers reported that by volunteering and being a part of the weekly Bible study they were able to place their own experiences into a more comprehensive context and recognized that others (the halfway house clients) have it much worse than they do. Volunteers stated that by seeing others in "bad" situations helped them feel good about their own situations that they once themselves perceived as bad. This recognition in turn reinforces volunteers' commitment and motivation to continue with their volunteer efforts. This is not surprising, as Vecina, Chacon, Sueiro, and Barrón (2010) have previously reported that satisfaction is a primary reason for volunteers to continue volunteering with a particular organization. What this suggests is that while volunteering, in this case with a faith-based halfway house, can be seen as a "selfless" act there are important "selfish" components to such actions.

Another important personal benefit reported by volunteers in this study is that this volunteer opportunity provides volunteers with a genuine sense of community. Rated as one of the most attractive aspects of the organization in this study was both the perceived authenticity and transparency existing among its members. As such, volunteering is motivated by not only the perceived benefits of helping others and recognizing one's own blessings, but also by involvement in what is perceived a "genuine community" that has not been identified elsewhere in the volunteers' lives. The fact that volunteers experience personal benefits by accessing and enjoying positive, personal relationships in the course of their volunteer activities echoes the findings Boezeman and Ellemers (2009) when they discuss that making a relatable, secure, and respectful relationship with those involved in charitable organizations is essential for continued volunteerism. The fact that the volunteers return to the halfway house week after week is evidence of Barraza's (2011) contention that continued volunteer activities are dependent on volunteers experiencing positive relationships in the course of their volunteer activities.

While informative and valuable for understanding why volunteers come to and remain involved in a faith-based halfway house program, this study is not without limitations. As a case study, this study may or may not be generalizable to other faith-based programs or halfway houses. Additionally, the halfway house at the center of this case study is a relatively small operation, with a limited number of volunteers, hence the sample of eight is small. A third limitation is that only one researcher was involved with the collection and initial coding and interpretation of data. Consequently, this introduces one's potential biases that accompany one's worldviews. Even though these limitations are important to consider, it is also important to acknowledge that this study is the first of its kind to examine the backgrounds and motivations of faith-based halfway house volunteers. Although an exploratory study and case study, research provides a context for future research to build upon in continuing the examination of who volunteers with faith-based programs, and why they are motivated to do so.

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## About the Authors

**Andrew S. Denney** is a graduate student in the Department of Justice Administration at the University of Louisville. His research focuses on institutional corrections and the intersection of correction policy/practice and faith-based programming. His email address is: [andrew.denney@louisville.edu](mailto:andrew.denney@louisville.edu).

**Richard Tewksbury** is Professor of Justice Administration at the University of Louisville. His research focuses on issues of correctional culture, criminal victimization risks and sex, gender and sexuality. His email address is: [richard.tewksbury@louisville.edu](mailto:richard.tewksbury@louisville.edu).