

The Relationship between Incarceration in the Richmond City Jail and Stays in Local Homeless  
Shelters over a Five Year Period

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## Executive Summary

One of the goals of the *Ten Year Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness in the Richmond Region* is to transform the homeless services delivery system to focus on housing stability. In pursuit of this goal, one of the strategies is to support ex-offenders and current offenders in obtaining and maintaining housing stability by working with public safety, criminal justice, housing, and workforce officials to develop housing and related services.

In a prior study, Homeward, the Richmond region's coordinating agency for homeless services, in collaboration with the Richmond City Jail (RCJ), compared one year of inmate records from the RCJ and client records (for clients old enough to go to jail) from the Homeward Community Information System (HCIS). HCIS is a database that tracks the shelter stays of clients experiencing homelessness in the Richmond area. Overall, results showed substantial overlap between the two populations, with 7.4% of RCJ inmates having spent time in area shelters and 31.5% of those who had stayed in shelter having spent time at the RCJ – all during this one year period.

Based upon these findings, as well as work done by the Corporation for Supportive Housing, the Community Criminal Justice Board, Homeward, and the RCJ decided to explore this relationship over a longer period of time (five years), with a focus on those frequent users of both systems. The data included all inmates and clients who entered the RCJ or area homeless shelters that used HCIS between 2006 – 2010. In addition to the main questions asked in the previous study (i.e., among jail inmates, what percentage have experienced homelessness in the Richmond region? and among clients who have stayed in area homeless shelters, what percentage have been incarcerated in the RCJ?), the present study sought to examine the characteristics of those individuals deemed “frequent users” of one or both of these systems.

Specific analyses examined demographics including gender, disability status, veteran status, and family status.

For the present study, the RCJ data supplied 36,377 unique clients, and Homeward supplied 8289 unique clients. The number of clients who appeared in both datasets was 2685. From the jail data, 7.4% of inmates had stayed in an area shelter during the year. From the HCIS data, 32.4% of clients had spent time in the RCJ during the year. It is important to note that clients appearing in the HCIS dataset who were younger than the youngest inmate were deleted from the analyses.

Out of the 2685 individuals who had been in both systems during the five year period, 1623 were determined to be frequent users (with four or more stays) of at least one system. Out of these 1623 people, 730 were frequent users of shelter only; 528 were frequent users of jail only; and 365 were frequent users of both jail and shelter. Comparisons were made between frequent users of shelter and frequent users of both systems, as well as between frequent users of jail and frequent users of both systems.

Overall, no significant differences were found in gender, family status, or disability status between frequent users of shelter and frequent users of both jail and shelter. However, among frequent users of shelter, the percentage of non-veterans who were also frequent users of jail was significantly higher than the percentage of veterans who were also frequent users of jail. It is possible that veterans who stay in shelters are better able to follow the rules that are a part of congregate living and are less likely to commit offenses that result in serving jail time.

Between frequent users of jail and frequent users of both jail and shelter, significant differences were found in gender, family status, and disability status. Males, people unaccompanied by children in shelter, and people with disabilities were more likely to be

frequent users of both jail and shelter. Veterans who were frequent users of jail were marginally significantly more likely than non-veterans to be frequent users of shelter. These findings – that frequent users of both jail and shelter are more likely to be male, single adults, people with disabilities, and (marginally) veterans – seem to be in line with Metraux and Culhane’s (2006) suggestion that when people released from incarceration become homeless, it is indicative of “more general readjustment problems” (p. 506). While we do not know the order of events in people’s lives from a five-year cross-section of data, these adjustment problems could include lacking a social support or family network, as well as having a disability or possibly an injury that contributes to adjustment difficulties.

Some methodological limitations are important to note. Perhaps the most substantial limitation is that the Richmond City Jail is not the only facility where individuals experiencing homelessness are incarcerated, and HCIS is used by most (but not all) shelters in the area. Further, HCIS does not contain information about people who live outdoors or in places unfit for habitation. The fact that experiences of unsheltered homelessness are not included in the data is a significant limitation. Frequent episodes of unsheltered homelessness are potentially more disturbing and serious (in terms of potential for victimization, experiences of inclement weather, and difficulty keeping possessions safe, for examples) for the individuals who stay outdoors. While these considerations limit generalizability of the present study, the findings inform the local community’s understanding of the relationship between incarceration in the RCJ and staying in the primary shelters for people experiencing homelessness in the Richmond region.

In spite of these limitations, the data presented here shed additional light on the relationship between homelessness and jail incarceration in the Richmond region. These findings address the prevalence of shelter stays among the RCJ population and therefore support

the need for housing-related services. Highlighting the incidence of frequent users and their characteristics will help the community advocate for the needs of these individuals who cycle between both systems at great personal and public expense (Culhane, 2008).

Practically, the results of this study support the idea that frequent use of both jail and shelter signify larger adjustment problems. It seems highly unlikely that people caught in this cycle of incarceration and homelessness will be able to break free without programs that provide support and case management that moves people towards permanent, stable housing. Programs directed at addressing the issue of people cycling in and out of shelters and jails might seek to decrease the number of people deemed frequent users and could use these numbers for a baseline. Future research might examine the effectiveness of programs designed to address the housing and service needs of people who encounter both the criminal justice and homeless services systems. Factors like substance abuse and mental health problems might also be incorporated to assess whether frequent users might be candidates for alternatives to incarceration.

## *Background*

The link between incarceration and homelessness is most often examined from the side of homeless service providers that seek to quantify the specific barriers individuals face in trying to obtain permanent housing (Greenberg and Rosenheck, 2008). Incarceration disrupts a person's ability to maintain social ties and employment, and experiencing homelessness may put an individual in situations that increase their risk of committing certain crimes (e.g., trespassing).

Homelessness, as defined by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), refers to a condition in which an individual or family “lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence” (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2012, p. 3) and includes shelters, institutions, and outdoors, as well as other places that are not intended to provide sleeping accommodations; more recently, this definition has been expanded to include families and youth who experience multiple moves during a short time period (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2012). Two requirements that HUD has for agencies that receive the agency's homelessness funds are that they periodically conduct a cross-sectional count of people experiencing homelessness and that they record information in a Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). In the HMIS, emergency and transitional housing sites can record information about people's stays in shelter.

One of the goals of the *Ten Year Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness in the Richmond Region* is to transform the homeless services delivery system to focus on housing stability. In pursuit of this goal, one of the strategies is to support ex-offenders and current offenders in obtaining and maintaining housing stability by working with public safety, criminal justice, housing, and workforce officials to develop housing and related services (Homeward, 2008).

Homeward, the community's planning agency for homeless services, administers the Richmond region's HMIS (referred to locally as the Homeward Community Information System, or HCIS), which tracks the shelter stays of clients at a majority of the local shelters available for people experiencing homelessness. Given that over 70% of adults experiencing homelessness in the Richmond region have a history of incarceration (see Appendix A for the most recent data), Homeward and the RCJ decided to examine the relationship between homelessness and incarceration over a one year period. Homeward matched data from the RCJ on people incarcerated during the year with data from the HCIS.

This data match revealed that 7.4% of inmates had also spent time in an area shelter during the year and that 32.4% of clients (with people under the youngest inmate's age deleted) in shelter had spent time in the RCJ during the same year. People with multiple episodes of homelessness were more likely to have spent time in the RCJ than were those with just one episode (Ackermann, 2010).

Based upon these findings, as well as work done by the Corporation for Supportive Housing, the Community Criminal Justice Board, Homeward, and the RCJ decided to explore this relationship over a longer period of time (five years), with a focus on those frequent users of both systems. The present study is intended to contribute to the community's efforts to understand and address the housing, service, and support needs of people who access both systems, particularly those whose cycle through both systems at great personal and public cost (Culhane, 2008).

### *Procedure*

The RCJ and Homeward agreed to share data in order to learn more about the overlap in clients. Both entities produced a data set that included client Social Security Numbers (SSNs)

and birthdates. In order to be included in the analyses, clients had to have entered the Richmond City Jail or area homeless shelters (including both emergency and transitional housing) between 1/1/2006 and 12/31/2010 (i.e., data covering the five year period, 2006-2010). To ensure that clients of both systems were of comparable ages, individuals in HCIS with a birthdate later than the youngest person in the RCJ data were deleted ( $N = 1580$ ). In addition to data required for matching clients, the RCJ provided for inmates the date they entered jail and the date they were released (when available) for all stays that occurred during the five year period.

Homeward provided information on 1) shelter entry and exit dates 2) the individual's gender 3) disability status (yes/no) 4) veteran status (yes/no) 5) whether or not the individual was accompanied by a minor in shelter at any point.

The number of jail and shelter stays, as well as the number of days in both systems, was calculated based on the data provided.

### *Research Questions/Analysis Plan*

The initial research questions addressed by this study were “among RCJ inmates, what percentage have experienced homelessness in the Richmond region?” and “among people who have experienced homelessness in the Richmond region, what percentage have spent time in the RCJ?” Once these questions were answered, specific analyses focused on the people who deemed frequent users – those who had four or more stays in either jail or shelter. Comparisons on demographic variables were made between frequent users of shelter and frequent users of both systems, as well as between frequent users of jail and frequent users of both systems.

### *Measures*

There are two sources of information: inmate data from the RCJ and data on clients of homeless shelters in the Richmond area. Both data sets contain information on people who



entered jail or shelter between 2006 – 2010. The specific information used in the analyses and definitions of fields from each source are detailed below.

*Richmond City Jail data.* From the Richmond City Jail data comes information about:

- Commit and release dates. Dates on which inmates were committed to jail and released were provided for each stay. This information was used to calculate the total amount of time people had spent in jail during the five-year period, as well as the number of incarcerations.

*HCIS data.* HCIS contains information about client stays in area homeless shelters. It is important to note that HCIS does not contain data from all local shelters. Domestic violence shelters are not included in the data, and two local congregation-based shelters (i.e., Good Samaritan Ministries and the Richmond Outreach Center) that serve people experiencing homelessness are not included. From Homeward's HCIS data comes self-reported information about:

- Client gender. Client genders represented in this dataset were male and female.
- Disability status (yes/no). Clients answered the question of whether they have a disability of long duration.
- Veteran status (yes/no). Clients answered the question of whether they are a U.S. military veteran.
- Entry dates, exit dates, and providers. Information on entry and exit dates and service providers was used to determine the number of shelter stays, which was calculated by subtracting the number of contiguous stays with the same provider from the number of entry dates.

- Whether accompanied by children (yes/no). Although children are not included in the analyses, the original dataset from HCIS included children. Whether or not adults were accompanied by children in shelter at some point was calculated based on the existence of children with the same household identifier as an adult.

## Results

### *Participants*

Overall, RCJ provided information on 36,377 unique clients, and Homeward provided information on 8,289 unique clients. Two thousand six hundred and eighty-five participants appeared in both datasets. The table below summarizes demographic information on these 2,685 individuals who had spent time in both the Richmond City Jail and an area shelter between 2006 – 2010, along with details on those considered to be frequent users (with 4+ stays in jail, shelter, or both).

<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>Users of both jail and shelter (<i>N</i> = 2685)</b>
Gender	Male = 78.4% Female = 21.6%
Disability status	No = 40.4% Yes = 49.4% Don't know, missing, or refused = 10.2%
Veteran status	No = 84.3% Yes = 13.7% Missing = 1.9%
Whether accompanied by children in shelter	No = 91.9% Yes = 8.1%

### *Research Questions*

The table below summarizes details on those individuals deemed to be frequent users, or those with at least four stays in jail, shelter, or both. Note that a shelter stay was defined as a period of time in which an individual was continuously in shelter.

Characteristic	Frequent users of jail (N = 528)	Frequent users of shelter (N = 730)	Frequent users of both jail/shelter (N = 365)
Gender	Male = 75.2% Female = 24.8%	Male = 83.3% Female = 16.7%	Male = 86.8% Female = 13.2%
Disability status	No = 41.5% Yes = 47.9% Don't know, missing, or refused = 10.6%	No = 36.6% Yes = 57.8% Don't know, missing, or refused = 5.6%	No = 34.8% Yes = 60.0% Don't know, missing, or refused = 5.2%
Veteran status	No = 87.3% Yes = 9.8% Missing = 2.8%	No = 81.1% Yes = 18.8% Missing = .1%	No = 86.0% Yes = 14.0% Missing = 0%
Whether accompanied by children in shelter	No = 88.3% Yes = 11.7%	No = 97.5% Yes = 2.5%	No = 98.9% Yes = 1.1%

Research questions examined differences between frequent users of jail and frequent users of both jail and shelter, and frequent users of shelter and frequent users of both jail and shelter. Details on these analyses are provided below.

*Among frequent users of jail, are males or females more likely to also be frequent users of both jail and shelter?* Male frequent users of jail (44.4%) were more likely to be frequent users of shelter than were female frequent users of jail, (26.8%),  $\chi^2(1) = 18.31, p < .001$ .

*Among frequent users of jail, are people with disabilities or people without disabilities more likely to also be frequent users of both jail and shelter?* People with disabilities who were frequent users of jail (46.4%) were more likely to be frequent users of shelter than were people without disabilities who were frequent users of jail (36.7%),  $\chi^2(1) = 7.69, p < .01$ .

*Among frequent users of jail, are veterans or non-veterans more likely to also be frequent users of both jail and shelter?* Veterans who were frequent users of jail (49.5%) were marginally significantly more likely as non-veterans who were frequent users of jail (40.5%) to be frequent users of shelter,  $\chi^2(1) = 3.03, p = .08$

*Among frequent users of jail, are people in families or single adults more likely to also be frequent users of both jail and shelter?* Single adults who were frequent users of jail (43.7%) were more likely to be frequent users of shelter than were people in families who were frequent users of jail (6.1%),  $\chi^2(1) = 35.74, p < .001$ .

*Among frequent users of shelter, are males or females more likely to also be frequent users of both jail and shelter?* Males who were frequent users of shelter (34.3%) were just as likely as females who were frequent users of shelter (28.2%) to be frequent users of jail,  $\chi^2(1) = 2.35, n.s.$

*Among frequent users of shelter, are people with disabilities or people without disabilities more likely to also be frequent users of both jail and shelter?* People with disabilities who were frequent users of shelter (34.2%) were just as likely as people without disabilities who were frequent users of shelter (32.2%) to be frequent users of jail,  $\chi^2(1) = .41, n.s.$

*Among frequent users of shelter, are veterans or non-veterans more likely to also be frequent users of both jail and shelter?* Non-veterans who were frequent users of shelter (34.7%) were more likely to be frequent users of jail than were veterans who were frequent users of shelter (27.1%),  $\chi^2(1) = 3.97, p < .05$ .

*Among frequent users of shelter, are people in families or single adults more likely to also be frequent users of both jail and shelter?* People in families who were frequent users of shelter (18.2%) were just as likely as single adults who were frequent users of shelter (33.6%) to be frequent users of jail,  $\chi^2(1) = 2.32, n.s.$

#### *Additional qualitative data*

After analyzing the data, it was decided to look for more detailed information on three frequent user clients for illustrative purposes. These clients included one with the median length

of time in shelter (74 days), one with the median length of time in jail (146 days), and one with the median total length of time in shelter and jail combined (277 days). Shelter details were retrieved from HCIS, and the jail provided details on client charges. The table below summarizes details on these three clients.

Client	Summary
Median length of time in jail: 146 days Time in shelter: 97 days	<p>Mr. A. is a 47 year old, single White male who has physical and alcohol-related disabilities.</p> <p>Has been <u>incarcerated 13 times</u> during this five year period, mostly for just one or two days. The one exception is one stay of about three months.</p> <p>During this same period, he has been in and out of shelter many times, with most stays being fairly short – a week or two. He has had <u>eight shelter stays</u> during this time.</p> <p>History of incarceration in RCJ goes back to 1997, with multiple convictions for drunk in public, trespassing, and petty larceny.</p>
Median length of time in shelter: 74 days Time in jail: 1140 days	<p>Mr. B. is a 52 year old, single Black male.</p> <p>He has drug and alcohol-related disabilities and has been <u>incarcerated 12 times</u> during this five year period. Although he has had some brief stays, he has also had several longer period of incarceration (e.g., 4-6 months).</p> <p>He has been staying in area shelters for the past seven years, usually just for a night, though he did try to get treatment for his substance abuse problems in 2008. It appears that he left the program and was arrested just a few days later. Overall, he has had <u>five stays in shelter</u>.</p> <p>Has had charges of trespassing, felony narcotics, drunk in public, disorderly conduct, and an old DUI, as well as a couple assaults on law enforcement.</p>
Median overall length of time in jail and shelter (overall: 277 days) Time in shelter: 41 days Time in jail: 236 days	<p>Mr. C. is a 36 year old, single adult Black male.</p> <p>Has been <u>in shelter four times</u>. Spent a few weeks in shelter in early 2005 and then returned a few more times in 2005-2006.</p> <p>When he first sought shelter, he had been homeless and living outdoors for at least a couple years.</p> <p>Beginning in May 2007 through August 2010, he <u>went to jail six times</u>. Once, he was released in the same day, but a few times, he stayed at least a month. The past two times he was arrested, he's only been in jail for a couple days.</p> <p>Has been in and out of jail since 1992, with a break in 1994-2001 when he was in prison.</p> <p>Usual charges: felony narcotics, felony forgery (often tied to false ID), larceny, and felonious assault.</p>

When jail personnel were asked for details on these three specific clients, it was revealed that all three had recently been released from jail.

### Discussion

Two sets of research questions were considered. First, comparisons were made between frequent users of jail and frequent users of both jail and shelter on gender, disability status, veteran status, and family status. Next, the same comparisons were made between frequent users of shelter and frequent users of both systems.

First, comparisons made between frequent users of jail and frequent users of both jail and shelter revealed a number of significant differences. These differences included the percentage of males, whether or not people reported a disability, and whether or not people were associated with children in shelter. Males who were frequent users of jail were more likely than female frequent users of jail to also be frequent users of shelter. Similarly, people with disabilities who were frequent users of jail were more likely than people without disabilities who were frequent users of jail to also be frequent users of shelter. Single adults followed the same pattern, with single adults who were frequent users of jail being more likely than people in families to also be frequent users of shelter. There were not quite significant differences between veteran and non-veteran frequent users of jail in whether they were also frequent users of shelter, though veterans were somewhat more likely than non-veterans to be frequent users of both jail and shelter.

These findings – that frequent users of both jail and shelter are more likely to be male, single adults, people with disabilities, and (marginally) veterans – seem to be in line with Metraux and Culhane's (2006) suggestion that when people released from incarceration become homeless, it is indicative of "more general readjustment problems" (p. 506). While we do not

know the order of events in people's lives since we looked at just a five-year cross-section of data, these adjustment problems could include lacking a social support or family network, as well as having a disability or possibly an injury that contributes to adjustment difficulties.

The comparisons made between frequent users of shelter and frequent users of both jail and shelter revealed just one significant difference: non-veterans who were frequent users of shelter were more likely than veterans to be frequent users of both jail and shelter. It is possible that veterans who stay in shelters are better able to follow the rules that are a part of congregate living and are less likely to commit offenses that result in serving jail time. No significant differences were found based on gender, disability status, and family status. These findings are aligned with the idea that the use of shelter signifies a certain lack of support networks.

Some methodological limitations are important to note. Perhaps the most substantial limitation is that the Richmond City Jail is not the only facility where individuals experiencing homelessness are incarcerated, and HCIS is used by most (but not all) shelters in the area. Further, HCIS does not contain information about people who live outdoors or in places unfit for habitation. While these considerations limit generalizability of the present study, the findings inform the local community's understanding of the relationship between incarceration in the RCJ and staying in the primary shelters for people experiencing homelessness.

In spite of these limitations, the data presented here shed additional light on the relationship between homelessness and jail incarceration in the Richmond region. These findings address the prevalence of shelter stays among the RCJ population and therefore support the need for housing-related services for ex-offenders. Highlighting the incidence of frequent users and their characteristics will help the community advocate for the needs of these

individuals who cycle between both systems, as great personal and public expense (Culhane, 2008).

Practically, the results of this study support the idea that frequent use of both jail and shelter signify larger adjustment problems. It seems highly unlikely that people caught in this cycle of incarceration and homelessness will be able to break free without programs that provide support and case management that move people towards permanent, stable housing. Programs directed at addressing the issue of people cycling in and out of shelters and jails might seek to decrease the number of people deemed frequent users and could use these numbers for a baseline. Future research might examine the effectiveness of programs designed to address the housing and service needs of people who encounter both the criminal justice and homeless services systems. Factors like substance abuse and mental health problems might also be incorporated to assess whether frequent users might be candidates for alternatives to incarceration.



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*Appendix A*  
January 2010 Snapshot of Ex-Offenders

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**Experiencing Homelessness in the Richmond Region**

The following data were collected in Homeward's twelfth winter (January 21, 2010) count of individuals and families experiencing homelessness in the Richmond region. A total of 881 adults and 131 children were counted, and 77.2% of adults completed the Homeward point-in-time survey. The statistics reported below represent the 469 individuals who indicated that they had spent time in jail or prison.

- 83.3% of ex-offenders are males, 16.5% are females, and .2% are transgendered. Most are single, never married adults (51.9%). 6.9% are married, and 48.1% have been in families, including those who are married, as well as those who are widowed, separated, or divorced.
- 6.0% of ex-offenders have children living with them.
- A majority of ex-offenders report that they are African-American (65.7%), followed by White (28.8%). 3.6% indicated that they are Hispanic.
- The average age for adult ex-offenders is 44.8 years.
- 52.5% have only a high school education or GED. 20.0% attended some college, and 9.7% have a college degree or higher.
- 17.2% are veterans.
- A majority of ex-offenders have served time in jail (64.6%). 4.3% indicated that they served time in prison, and 31.1% reported that they had served time in both jail and prison. 62.0% reported having felony convictions. 36.2% reported being homeless before incarceration, and 51.1% indicated that they were homeless upon release.
- 33.0% experienced domestic violence in their lifetime. Of those experiencing domestic violence, 5.0% had experienced it in the past month, and 29.5% had experienced it in the past year.
- 54.3% report having a problem with alcohol sometime in their lifetime. Of those reporting a problem with alcohol, 79.1% are currently in recovery.
- 60.0% report having a problem with substance abuse sometime in their lifetime. Of those reporting a problem, 80.6% are currently in recovery.
- 34.2% report having a mental health problem sometime in their lifetime. Of these, 57.2% are currently being treated and 53.5% are taking medication for mental health problems.
- 45.9% report having a long-term disability. Of those reporting a long-term disability, 69.4% indicated that their disability was drug or alcohol abuse, and 50.0% indicated that their disability was a mental illness. (Note that respondents could select both or neither of these options.)
- 19.1% are employed. Of those who are employed, 34.1% work full-time, 45.1% work part-time, and 20.7% do day labor or temp work.
- 49.9% of respondents have lived in Greater Richmond for 10 years or more; 43.0% have lived in the area for 17 years or more.
- Most (55.1%) reported having their last housing in Richmond. Others indicated previous housing in Henrico (9.1%), Chesterfield (5.6%), and Hanover (1.9%). 16.0% of respondents last lived elsewhere in Virginia, and 11.4% lived in other states.
- In the past three years, most homeless ex-offenders have been homeless once (60.7%) or twice (23.2%); 16.1% have been homeless three or more times during this time period.
- A little less than half (45.8%) have been homeless for 5 months or less. 49.0% have been homeless for more than 6 months.