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# WHO'S COMING HOME?

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How can Milwaukee prepare to meet the housing needs of our returning citizens?



P R O J E C T  
**RETURN**↑



**Project RETURN Data Dream 2020**  
Prepared by Data You Can Use  
January 2022

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# Who's Coming Home?

How Can Milwaukee prepare to meet  
the housing needs of our returning citizens?

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## Background and Introduction

Project RETURN was a winner of the 2020 Data Dream Award from Data You Can Use (DYCU) with sponsorship of the Siebert Lutheran Foundation. Project RETURN (Returning Ex-incarcerated people To Urban Realities and Neighborhoods) exists to help men and women make a positive, permanent return to community, family, and friends. Leadership of the organization was aware that each year thousands of people who served time in Wisconsin's prison system were coming home to Milwaukee County. They wanted to know more about the characteristics of those who would be returning so that they could better prepare and advocate for adequate resources to assure that those returning would be set up for success. Project RETURN identified housing as a primary need and studies show that stable housing is related to reduced recidivism.

## Housing Stability and Recidivism

In documenting the relationship between unstable housing and recidivism, studies have found that securing stable housing is crucial to successful re-entry. Several lessons from an extensive study from the Justice Policy Center at the Urban Institute can be drawn on here to supplement the data and incorporate the voice of those affected. The [Returning Home Study: Understanding the Challenges of Prisoner Reentry](#)<sup>1</sup> documented the challenges of reentry based on extensive interviews and focus group discussions with five groups of stakeholders: individuals who had returned to the community after imprisonment, their families, peers, residents of their neighborhoods and the broader community, and state policy makers and practitioners. With the cooperation of the state correctional agencies of Illinois, Texas, Maryland, and Ohio, the findings from this cross-state, longitudinal study document that securing stable housing is crucial to successful re-entry. This comprehensive body of work concludes that the importance of finding a stable residence cannot be overestimated. They provide evidence that:

- Finding stable housing within the first month after release reduces the chance of returning to prison during the first year out, and conversely,
- Individuals who entered a homeless shelter within the first two years after release faced a higher risk of re-incarceration, possibly due to needs in multiple areas.

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<sup>1</sup> For examples and references to the particular studies stemming from this effort see: <https://www.urban.org/policy-centers/justice-policy-center/projects/returning-home-study/publications-returning-home-understanding-challenges-prisoner-reentry>

The results of this national study document:

- The importance of prison programming: Most of those incarcerated participate in some programming but roughly a third express interest in a program unavailable to them.
- People who participate in an employment program or substance abuse treatment are more likely to avoid reincarceration within a year of release.
- Those who participated in substance abuse treatment are less likely to use drugs after release.
- Most former prisoners owe debt at release which few manage to pay during the year following release.
- Former prisoners who held a prison job, participate in job training while incarcerated, or earned a GED were more likely to participate in a job program post release.
- Family members are the greatest anticipated source of financial resources, housing and support before prisoners are released and provide the greatest tangible and emotional support after release.
- Roughly half of released prisoners return to different neighborhoods than where they lived before incarceration.

And, citing many of the Urban Institute studies noted above, the Housing Law Bulletin<sup>2</sup> concludes:

*“Stable housing is a vital component of effective re-entry. By working to reduce the barriers that prevent formerly incarcerated individuals from accessing stable housing, advocates can reduce recidivism and improve public safety and community wellbeing.”*

To reduce recidivism, improve public safety and promote the wellbeing of those returning and the broader community, it is essential to assure stable housing. Assuring stable housing requires an understanding of the people who are returning to the community. This report provides some initial data that permits a closer look at the numbers and needs of those returning. There were two components to this Data Dream.

The first was undertaken by students studying for their master’s degrees in the Sustainable Peacebuilding program at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. As a team project for the class, three students (see acknowledgements) worked to further clarify elements and causes of housing need. They provided a literature review and some initial data on identified barriers such as landlord perception, housing costs and barriers to accessing housing vouchers, and restrictions for those on the registrants list. The students prepared and presented their work to the Milwaukee Reentry Council, a subcommittee of the Milwaukee Community Justice Council and staffed by the Public Policy Institute of Community Advocates. It was further reviewed by the Regional Chief of Community Corrections and the final powerpoint presentation is included on the Data You Can Use website. Links are included in Appendix A.

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<sup>2</sup> The importance of stable housing for formerly incarcerated individuals, Housing Law Bulletin, Volume 40 page 60 [https://www.nhlp.org/files/Importance%20of%20Stable%20Housing%20for%20Formerly%20Incarcerated\\_0.pdf](https://www.nhlp.org/files/Importance%20of%20Stable%20Housing%20for%20Formerly%20Incarcerated_0.pdf)

The second component of the Data Dream was to acquire data from the Wisconsin Department of Corrections (DOC) about those people who would be returning to Milwaukee County. The request required review and approval of the DOC's Research Review Committee. The request was submitted by DYCU with specific information requested regarding purpose and use of the data and the process for attaining it. The request was approved in April of 2020 and specific elements of the data were requested. In addition to the data, the research proposal requested assistance in identifying a pool of people who have been recently released to supervision in Milwaukee County and agents who would participate in interviews to add context to the data. While originally approved, the response was amended in August. (See the data biography in Appendix B for additional information about the data and methodology.)

## Acknowledgements

This Data Dream was made possible through the generosity of the Siebert Lutheran Foundation. Data You Can Use also thanks the following individuals who contributed to the project.

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Conor Williams, Community Advocates  
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## Section 1. Who's Coming Home?

### Data in this report

The data presented here are based on those people who were released from Wisconsin prisons to supervision in Milwaukee County during a two-year period (2019 and 2020). In each case, we report on the annual number and the number and percent in each category who have been identified as having a “residential stability need.” The DOC reports that whenever possible, the assessment closest to release was used in reporting on residential stability need. Residential stability is one need identified in the assessment process and for these purposes the categories of “high probability” and “probability” were combined by DOC when they released the data. Overall, the data indicated that roughly half of those were considered to have a high need. In a follow-up conversation, DOC research officials confirmed that the mix in each category is roughly 50/50. That is, if 100 people were returning to Milwaukee, based on averages, roughly 42 of them would be identified as having a residential stability need. Of those 42, roughly half (21) would have been classified as having a “high possibility” of having a residential stability need and the other 21 would be classified as having the “possibility” of a residential stability need. It should be noted that this estimation has been carried throughout although it may differ in certain categories and an additional breakdown has been requested. Please see the data biography in Appendix B for additional detail.

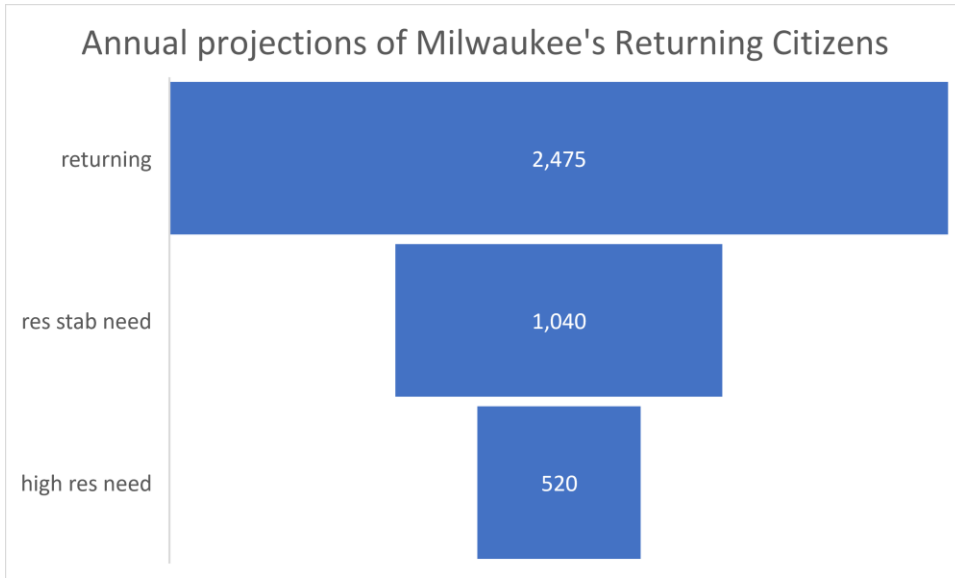
A breakdown by years follows in Section 2 and illustrates that, despite expected variance due to the pandemic, there is little variation in the data between the years.

### Overall

This section summarizes the characteristics and numbers of those returning to Milwaukee County after being released from a Wisconsin state prison, based on two-year averages and identified residential stability need.

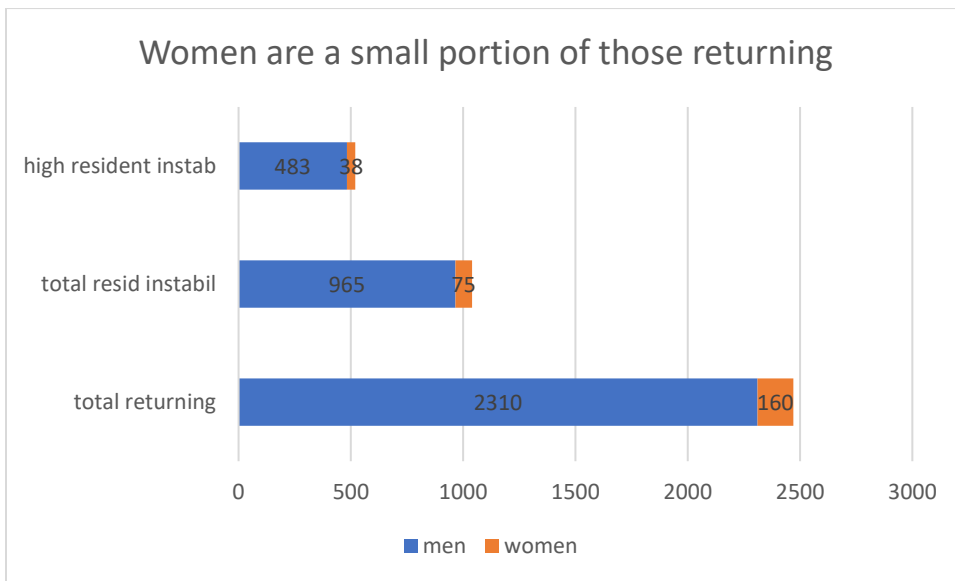
Based on simple averages, on an annual basis Milwaukee can expect roughly **2,475** people to return to our community after being released from Wisconsin prisons. With better information, we can be better prepared to meet the housing needs of our returning citizens and help to set them up for success in their return. To this end, the following breakdown is based on data provided by the Department of Corrections regarding the characteristics of those released to the community in 2019 and 2020. Using simple averages across the two years, estimates are provided to inform planning and preparation for this population.

Milwaukee County should prepare for 2,475 people returning home each year with roughly 1,040 (42%) of those having a “residential stability need.” Of those, roughly 520 would be expected to have a **high residential stability need**.



### Gender

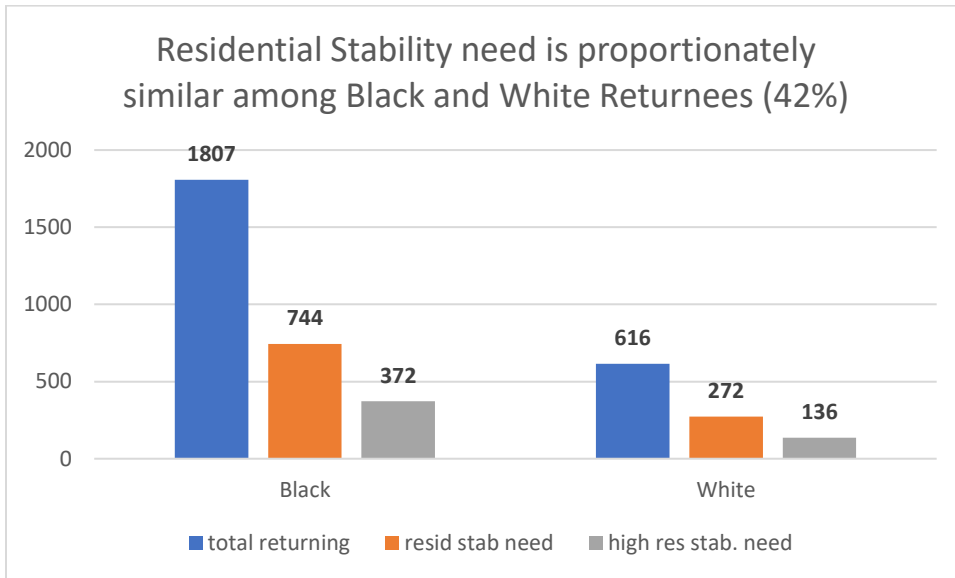
Milwaukee County should be prepared to welcome roughly 160 women and 2,310 men annually. Focusing on those with an identified residential need, there would be approximately 75 women and 965 men. Of those, about 38 women and 483 men would be expected to have a **high residential stability need**.



### Race

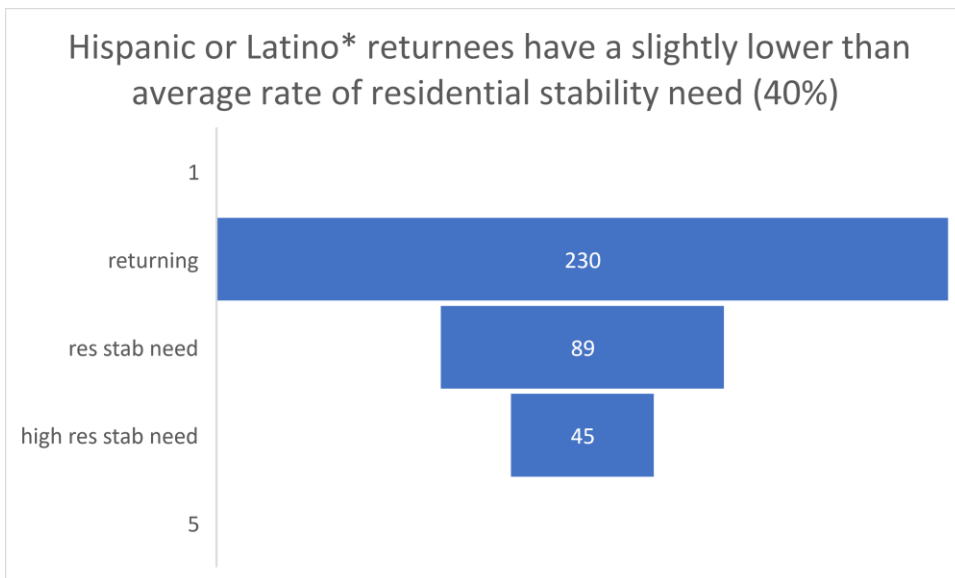
Of the 2,475 returning citizens, based on the previous two years, we would expect approximately 40 to be American Indian, 10 Asian, 1,810 African American and 615 White. Those identified as having a residential

stability need would include 18 American Indians, 5 Asians, 744 Blacks and 271 Whites. Focusing on those with **high residential stability need**, there would be 9 American Indians, 2 Asians, 371 Blacks and 135 Whites.



### Ethnicity

On an annual basis, Milwaukee should be prepared to welcome home roughly 230 people who identify as Hispanic or Latino. Focusing specifically on those with identified residential stability need, there would be approximately 90 people, with roughly **45 having a high residential stability need**.

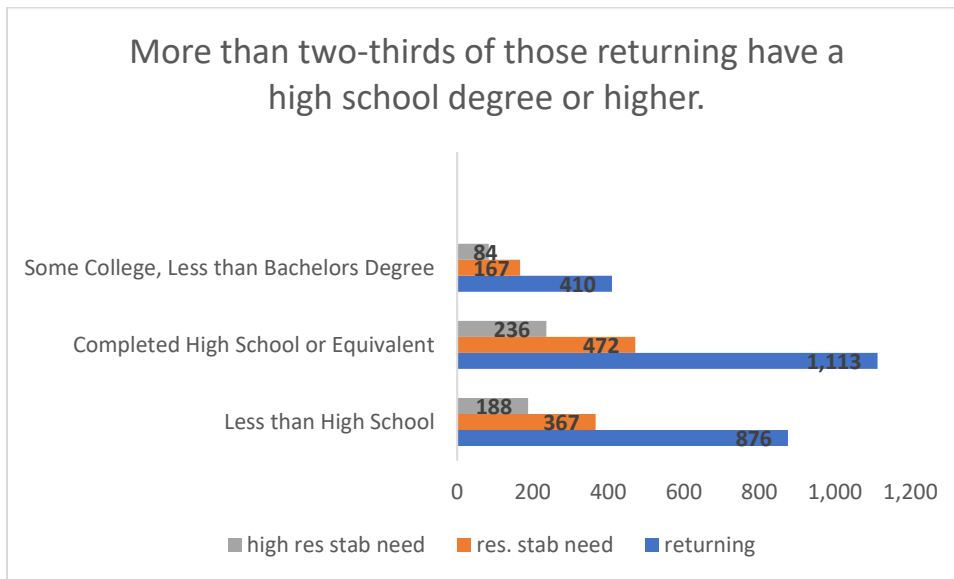


\*Ethnicity is reported as “unknown” for roughly a third of the population compared to less than 2 percent for most other categories.



## Education

Of the 2,475 returning citizens, more than two-thirds (65%) of this population can be expected to have a high school diploma or higher. Based on averages, 876 would have less than a high school education, 1,113 would have a high school diploma or GED, 410 would have some college, 23 would have a bachelor's degree and 13 would have post grad education. Breakdowns of those with identified housing instability are below. Focusing on those with **high residential stability needs** there would be roughly 183 people with less than a high school diploma, 236 with a high school diploma or GED, 84 who have some college, 4 who have a bachelor's degree and 2 with some post graduate training.



## Mental Health Needs

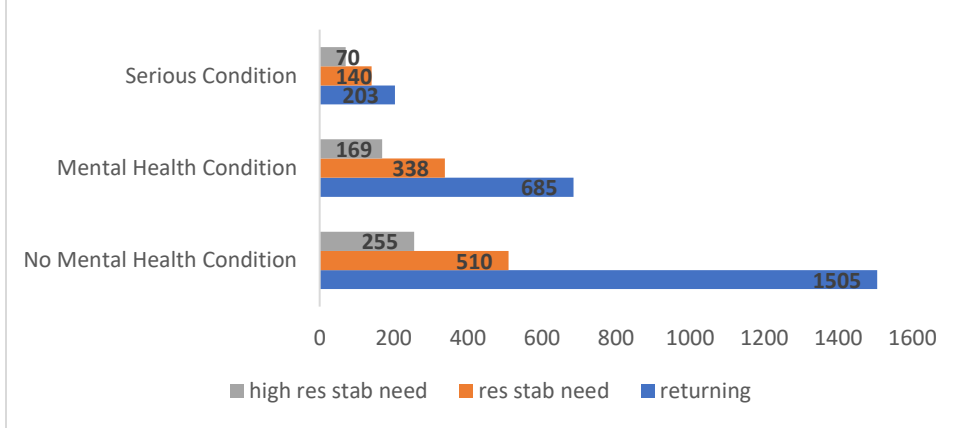
Milwaukee should be prepared to welcome roughly 2,475 returning citizen to the community. Nearly two thirds (62%) have no identified mental health condition, while just over a third (890 or 36%) may be needing assistance with their mental health condition. Of these, 685 (28 %) were identified as having a mental health condition while 8% were identified as having a serious mental health condition.<sup>3</sup>

Of those with a residential stability need (1,038), approximately 510 would have no mental health issues, 338 would have some mental health condition, and 140 would have a serious mental health condition. Of those with a **high residential stability need**, 255 would have no mental health condition, 169 would have some mental health condition and 70 would have a serious mental health condition. There are a higher number of unknowns in this category.

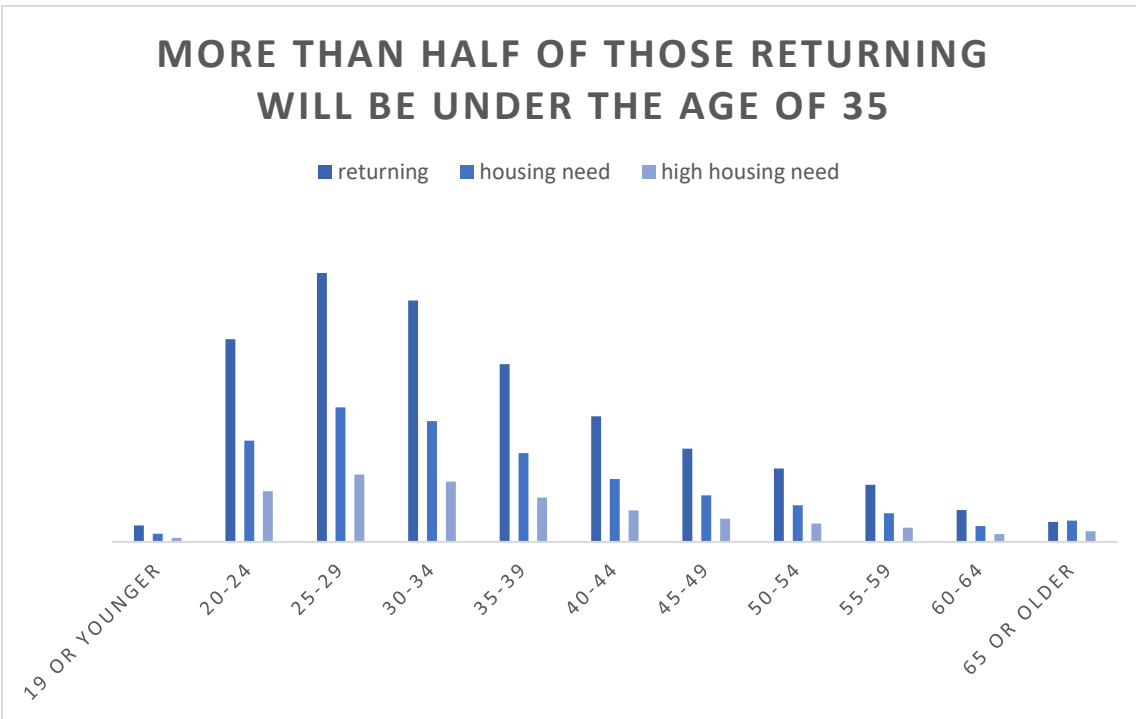
<sup>3</sup> An estimated 26% of Americans ages 18 and older -- about 1 in 4 adults -- suffers from a diagnosable mental disorder in a given year. Many individuals suffer from more than one mental disorder at a given time. In particular, depressive illnesses tend to co-occur with substance abuse and anxiety disorders.

<https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/wellness-and-prevention/mental-health-disorder-statistics>

Nearly two-thirds (61%) of those returning have no mental health condition. The majority with a residential stability need have no mental health condition (52%).



### Age at Release



Detail on housing need by age is provided on the following page.

Age	Total returning	Total with housing need	High housing need
19 or younger	31	16	8
20-24	383	192	96
25-29	508	254	127
30-34	456	228	114
35-39	336	168	84
40-44	237	119	59
45-49	176	88	44
50-54	139	70	35
55-59	108	54	27
60-64	60	30	15
65 or older	38	40	20

### Other COMPAS<sup>4</sup> Needs

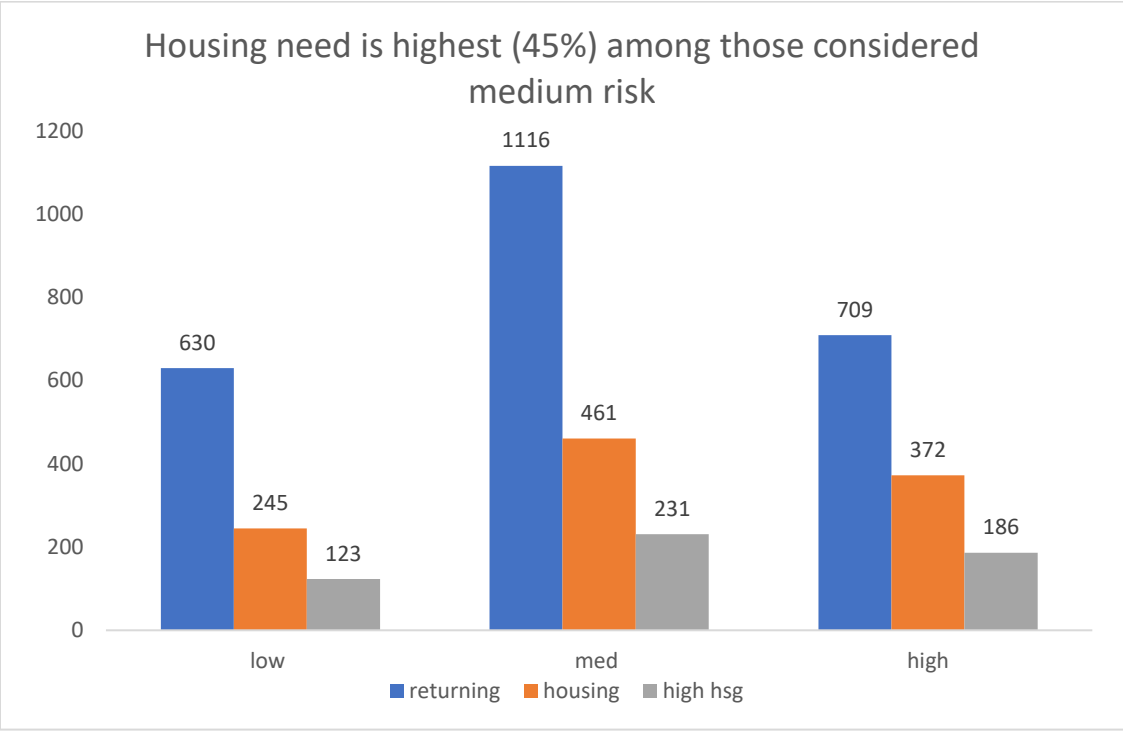
In addition to housing stability needs, COMPAS also identifies other needs such as vocational, financial, and cognitive behavioral needs. Based on averages of the two years, the COMPAS tool would be expected to identify an average of 6.4 needs per person (beyond housing stability).

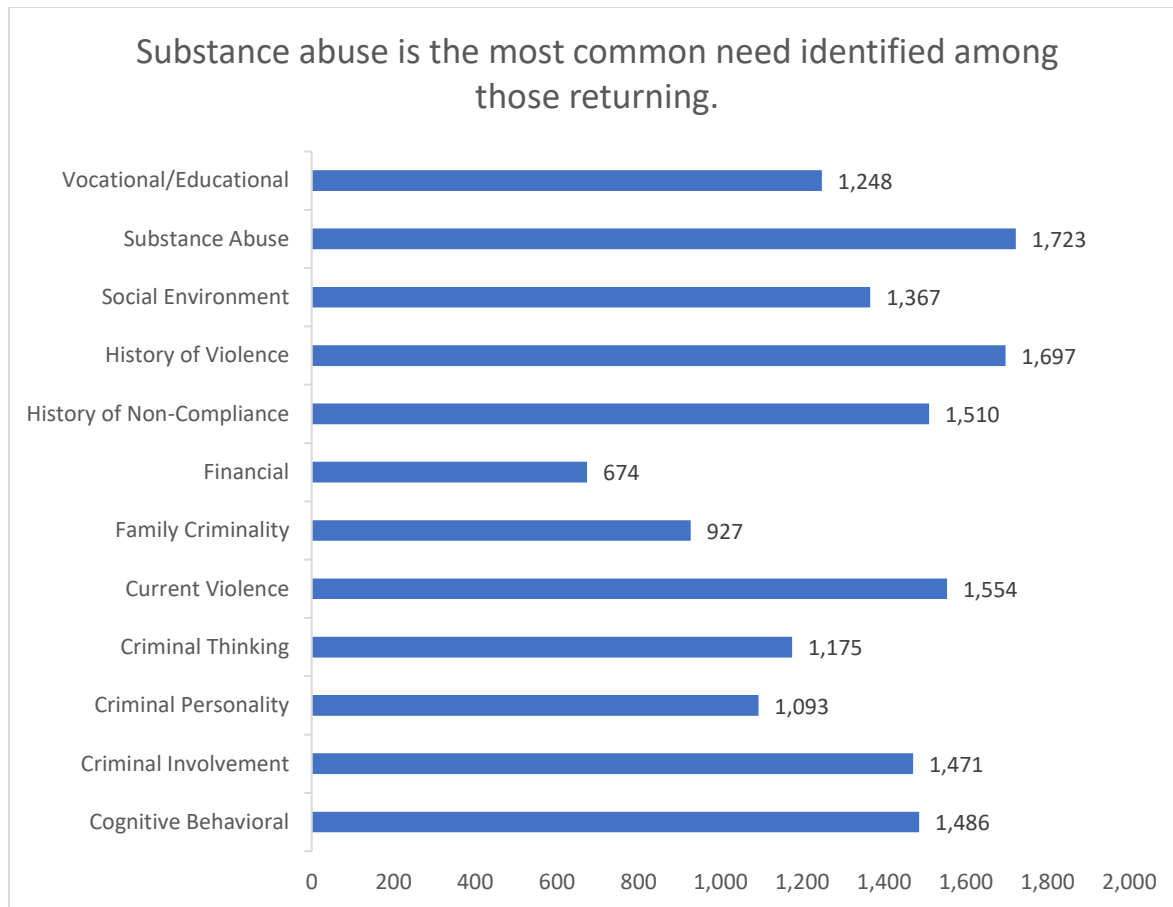
The need identified among the greatest percent of returnees is Substance Abuse (69%) followed by a history of violence (68%). Next most frequently identified are: current violence (62%), a history of non-compliance (61%), cognitive behavioral (60%), and criminal involvement (59%). Interestingly, the need identified least frequently is financial, with only 27% having that identified.

Focusing on those who are returning with a housing stability need, the numbers would be highest among those who have a substance abuse need (30% or 736 people), followed by those with a cognitive behavioral health need (29% or 730 people), a history of non-compliance (29%) and 28% with social environment, history

<sup>4</sup> Please see the Data Biography in Appendix B for additional information about COMPAS.

of violence and criminal involvement. Interestingly those with a financial need or family criminality are on the lower percentages of those needing housing (17% and 16 % respectively.)

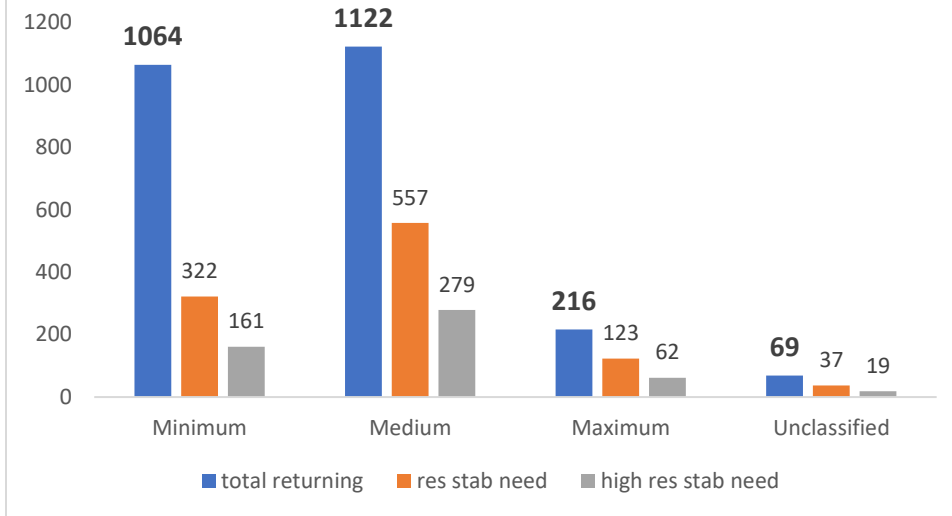




### Security Level

Of the 2,475 expected returnees, approximately 45% will be coming from medium security facilities, 43% from minimum security prisons and 9% from maximum security prisons. According to the data, residential stability need is highest among those coming from maximum security prisons while less than one-third of those coming from minimum security prisons are identified as having a residential stability need. It should be noted that where people spend their time in custody may be different than the place from which they are released. For example, it is possible that someone from Milwaukee spends the majority of their time in Oshkosh and then is transferred to a Milwaukee facility right before release.

More than half of the people returning will be coming from a medium security custody level. Those coming from a minimum security facility have the lowest percentage of residential stability needs.

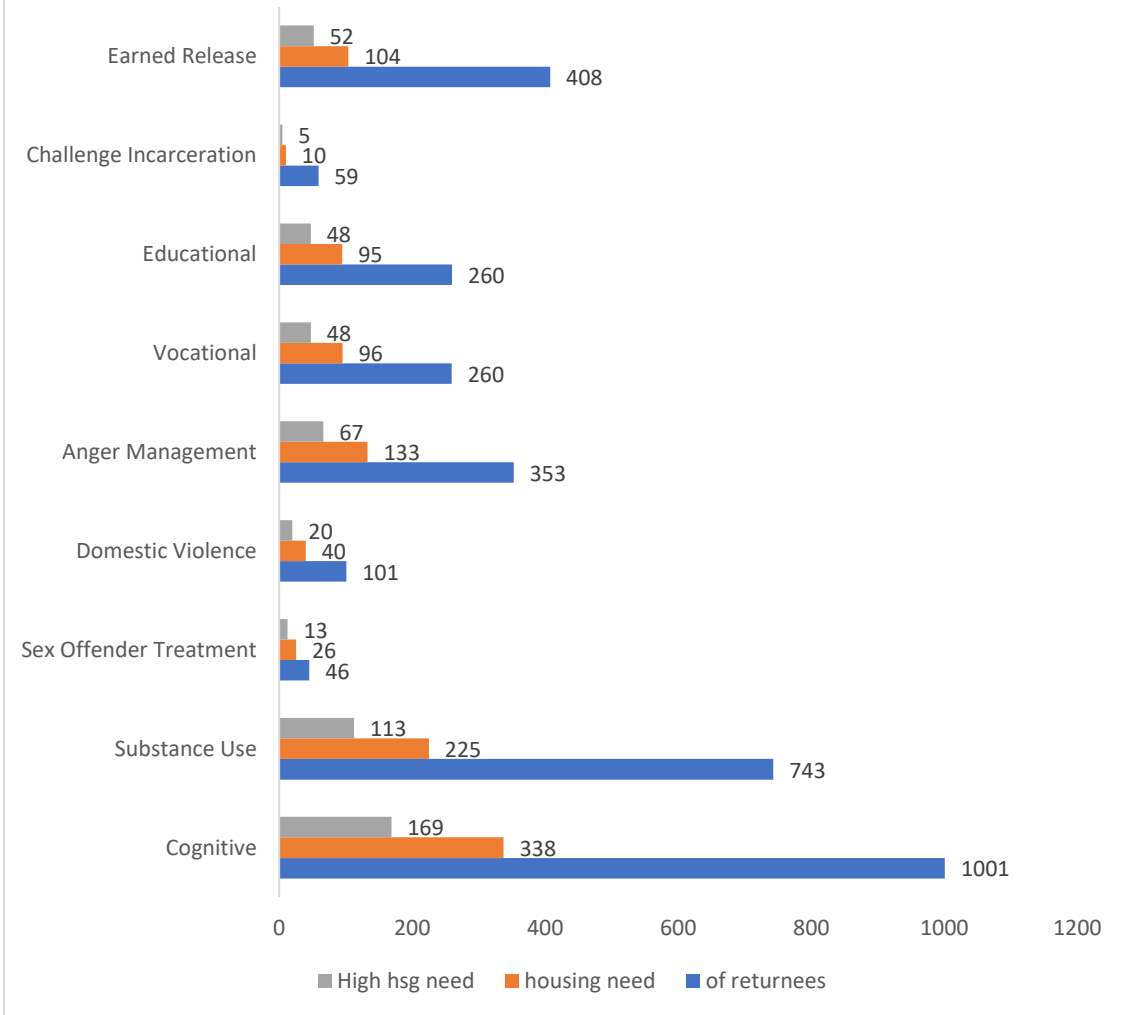


### Involvement in Programing of the Division of Adult Institutions

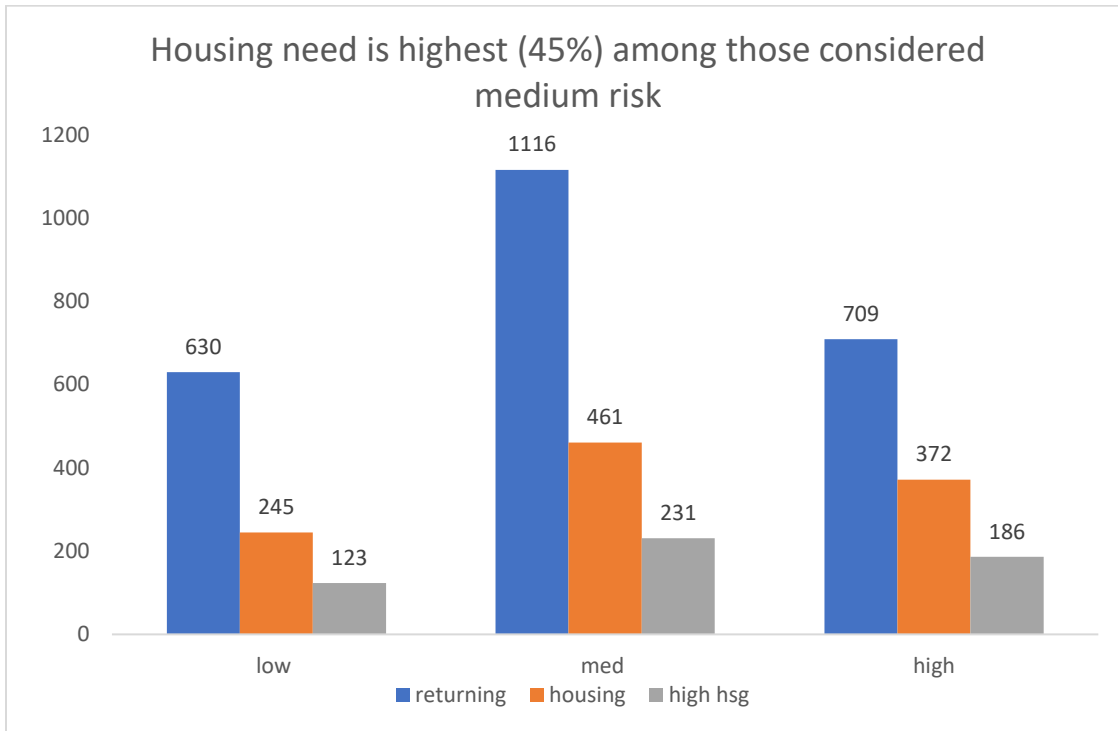
Based on the two-year averages, Milwaukee can expect that those returning from Wisconsin State Prisons will have participated in an average of one class offered by the Division of Adult Institutions. The class provided to the largest percentage (40%) is "cognitive." the next most frequent is on substance abuse in which less than a third (30%) will have participated. DOC reports that there are often waiting lists for classes and less than 15% of those returning will have participated in the other offerings. This is significant for those in need of housing in that landlords are often more willing to accept those returning as renters if there is evidence of participation in training or education programs. (See the reports referenced in Appendix B.)

The percentage of those with the highest housing instability need are those who have participated in sex offender treatment, followed by those who participated in domestic violence programs, have the highest shares of those with housing stability need (56% and 40% respectively).

## Returns' Participation in Programs while in Prison



## Risk level



Of the 2,475 people returning to Milwaukee, one fourth (630) will be considered a low risk, 45% (1,116) will be considered medium risk and less than a third (709) are considered high risk.

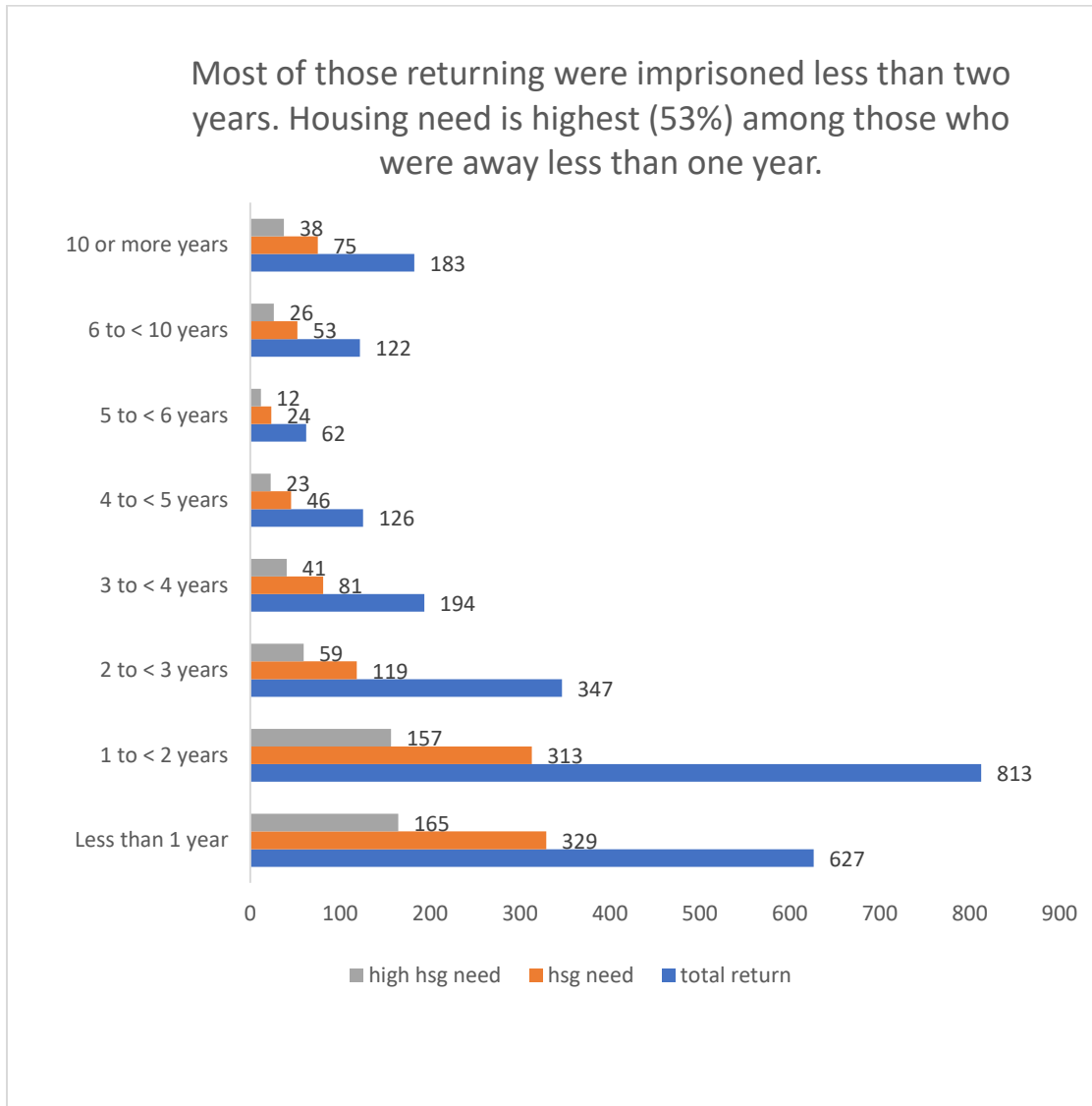
Of those considered low risk, roughly 25% will have a housing need (245). Of these, roughly half (123) will have a high possibility of housing need.

Of those considered medium risk, roughly 45% will have a housing need (461). Of these, roughly half (230) will have a high possibility of housing need.

Of those considered high risk, 29% will have a housing need (372). Of these, roughly half (186) will have a high possibility of housing need.



## Years served



Three-fifths (1440 people) of those returning will have been in Wisconsin prisons less than two years. Housing instability is expected for half (329) of those who have been in less than one year and nearly 40% (313) of those who have been imprisoned between one and two years. The lowest percentage of those with an identified housing need, but still over one-third, are those who were imprisoned for 2-3 years.

## Recommendations and Next Steps

- Share the data with advocates, policy makers, and resource providers so that people have an accurate view of who will be returning and what resources are needed to assure their successful reintegration.
- Review the data of projected need in relationship to resources. For example, if we know that roughly 2,475 people will be returning home and that approximately 42% of them will need assistance in

securing stable housing, the data can be used to work with the DOC and community groups to advocate for adequate resources to promote their success.

- Determine if efforts should focus on all those with an identified housing stability need or priority should be given to those who have been identified as having high possibility for housing stability need. Develop a plan using the data.
- Determine if any variation from the overall 50/50 split of housing need and high housing need identifies particular areas of focus. (This data has been requested.)
- Explore opportunities to secure de-identified data to geo-code (if only by ZIP) the neighborhoods where returnees lived prior to incarceration and the neighborhoods to which they are returning.
- Develop programming related to finding housing while in prison.
- Consider the requirements of those with multiple needs --substance abuse, mental health and housing.
- Explore methods to complete the qualitative interviews with those who have recently returned and those who provide supervision to supplement the numbers with narrative.
- Use the data to bolster resources in programming so that those returning have the best chance of success.

## Section 2. 2019-2020 Annual Breakouts

This section is included to provide the numbers for each of the two years and to offer language that might be useful in identifying any particular need. As noted previously, despite the pandemic, there was little variation between 2019 and 2020 but there may be subtle differences worth exploring.

### Overall

In **2019**, there were 2,484 people who returned to Milwaukee County from Wisconsin prisons. The majority of those released (56%) had no identified need related to residential stability. Status is unknown for less than 2% of the total. Overall, 42% were identified as having a housing need.

In **2020**, there 2,459 people who returned to Milwaukee County from Wisconsin prisons. The majority of those released (57%) had no identified residential stability need. Status is unknown for less than 1.5 % of the total. Overall, 41% were identified as having a housing need.

If efforts were focused on those with an identified need, it would be 1,059 in 2019 and 1,017 in 2020.

### Gender

Of the 2,484 people released in **2019**, 162 or 7% were female and 93% were male. Among the women, 70 or 43% were identified as having a residential housing need, the same proportion of men.

Of the 2,459 people released in **2020**, 159 or 6% were female and 2,300 (94%) were male. In 2020, among the women released, the proportion with residential stability needs increased to 50%, and for men it increased to 41% in 2020.

Based on gender, if efforts were focused on those with an identified need, it would be 70 women in 2019 and 989 males in 2019, and 79 females and 938 males in 2020.

In the overall analysis, those with a residential stability need are between 41% and 43% of those returning. In 2020 the percentage of females identified as having a residential stability need (50%) exceeded this range.

### Ethnicity

Of the 2,484 people released to Milwaukee in **2019**, 9% were Hispanic or Latino. Of these, 91 or 41% were identified as having a residential stability need.

Of the 2,459 people released to Milwaukee in **2020**, 10% were Hispanic or Latino. Of these, 87 or 36% were identified as having a residential stability need, slightly lower than the overall average of 41%.

It should be noted that the percentage of unknowns in the ethnicity category (31-35%) is higher than in other categories.

### Race

Of the 2,484 people released to Milwaukee in **2019**, 2% were American Indian or Alaskan Native, less than 1% Asian or Pacific Islander, 73% Black and 25% White.

Residential stability need is most likely to be identified among Whites (47%). Among American Indians released in 2019, 41% had a residential stability need, 38% of Asians, 41% of blacks.

Of the 2,459 people released to Milwaukee in **2020**, 2% were American Indian or Alaskan Native, less than half of 1% Asian or Pacific Islander, 73% Black and 25% white.

Among American Indians released in 2020, 51% had a residential stability need, 57% of Asians, 40% of blacks and 41% of Whites.

## Education

Of the 2,483 people returning to Milwaukee County in **2019**, nearly two-thirds had completed high school or higher. Just over a third, (34%) had less than a high school education. The percent of those with less than a high school education having an identified residential stability need was 43% roughly the same as the population overall.

Of the 2,459 people returning to Milwaukee County in **2020**, more than two-thirds had completed high school or more. More than a third (37%) had less than a high school education. The percent of those with less than a high school education having an identified residential stability need was 40%, slightly lower than the population as a whole.

Based on **education**, Milwaukee County should be prepared to welcome roughly 2,475 returning citizens annually. More than two-thirds (65%) of this population has a high school diploma or higher. Percentages of those with identified residential needs are similar to the general pattern (41-43%) in all categories except for those with post graduate education and “unknown.” Unknown is 2%, just slightly higher than average for education.

## Mental Health

Of the 2,484 people returning to Milwaukee County in **2019**, the majority (60%) had no mental health condition. Eight percent of the total are reported to have a serious mental health condition, and additional 28% are classified as having a mental health condition. The number of “unknowns” in this category (81) is higher than in other categories but still accounts for just 3% of the total.

Of the 2,459 returning to Milwaukee County in **2020**, nearly two-thirds (62%) had no mental health condition. Eight percent of the total are reported to have a serious mental health condition, and an additional 27% are classified as having a mental health condition. The number of unknowns in this category (78) is higher than in other categories but still accounts for just 3% of the total.

Those with a mental health condition are equally likely to have a residential stability need as not, although those with a serious condition are more likely to also have a residential stability need.

## Age at release

In **2019**, those returning to Milwaukee County ranged from under age 18 to over age 65. More than half (55%) are under the age of 35. Those most likely to have an identified residential stability need are those in the age range of 60 or older. Those between 25 and 29 showed the lowest percentage of residential stability need.

In **2020**, those returning to Milwaukee County ranged from under age 18 to over age 65. More than half (56%) are under the age of 35. Those most likely to have an identified residential stability need are those in the age range of 50 or older. Those between the ages of 20 and 24 showed the lowest percentage of residential stability need.

On average, Milwaukee County can expect to welcome 2,475 individuals back to their home community annually. Of these, more than half (56%) will be under the age of 35. Those with the highest residential stability need are generally those age 50 and up.

## Custody level

Of the 2,475 expected returnees, on average approximately 45% will be coming from medium security facilities, 43% from minimum security prisons and 9% from maximum security prisons. Residential stability need is highest among those coming from maximum security prisons while less than one third of those coming from minimum security prisons are identified as having a residential stability need.

Of the 2,484 residents returning to Milwaukee County in **2019**, 50% of those coming from medium security facilities had housing stability needs identified and 56% of those coming from maximum security facilities had housing needs.

Of the 2,459 residents returning to Milwaukee County in **2020**, 49% of those coming from medium security facilities had housing stability needs identified and 58% of those coming from maximum security facilities had housing needs.

## Years served

Of the 2,484 residents returning to Milwaukee County in **2019**, 60% had been imprisoned for less than 2 years. The percentage with an identified housing need was highest (50%) among those who had been in for less than a year.

Of the 2,459 residents returning to Milwaukee County in **2020**, the majority, 56% had been imprisoned for less than 2 years. The highest percentage of identified needs (55%) was among those who had been in prison for less than one year.

## COMPAS needs

See the Data Biography in Appendix B for additional information about COMPAS.

Of the 2,484 people released to Milwaukee County in **2019**, COMPAS identified 16,068 needs or roughly 6.5 needs per person (not including residential stability). The most commonly identified need is **substance abuse** (70% followed closely by a **history of violence** (69%). Recall that 43% were identified as having a residential stability need this year. Interestingly, the smallest percentage were identified as having a **financial need** (29%).

Of the 2,459 released to Milwaukee County in **2020**, COMPAS identified 15,779 needs or roughly 6.4 needs per person. The most commonly identified need is **substance abuse** (69% followed closely by a **history of violence** at 68%). Recall that 41% were identified as having a residential stability need this year. Interestingly the smallest percentage were identified as having a **financial need** (26%).

## Involvement in Programming of the Division of Adult Institutions

In **2019** the 2,484 returning citizens coming back to Milwaukee from Wisconsin prisons completed 3,110 Department of Adult Institutions (DAI) programs while imprisoned. That's an average of 1.25 programs per returning citizen. DOC staff were unaware of any housing related programs (e.g. preparing people to search for or secure housing, landlord/tenant relations, etc.)

Of the programs attended, **cognitive programs** were most common (32%) followed by **substance use** programming (22%). Of those completing programs, 1078 or 35% were classified as having a residential stability need (lower than the 2019 average for all.)

In **2020** the 2,459 returning citizens coming back to Milwaukee from Wisconsin prisons completed 3,348 DAI programs while imprisoned. That's an average of 1.4 programs DAI per person.

As in **2019**, of the programs attended, programs defined as “**cognitive**” were most common (30%) followed by **substance use** programming (24%). Of those completing programs, 1,053 or 31% were classified as having a residential stability need (lower than the 2020 average overall)

### Reincarceration

The one-year reincarceration rate is a percentage of individuals who were released in 2019 that returned within one year of their release date.

Of those released in **2019** who were re-incarcerated, a higher percentage (13%) had an identified residential stability need compared to those for whom no housing need was identified. (10%).

The Department of Corrections cautions that reporting on recidivism requires a “cushion year” on top of a follow-up year. 2019 releases cannot be reported until the end of 2021. No known studies have been undertaken specifically focusing on the reincarceration of those with identified residential instability needs.

## Appendix A. UWM Sustainable Peacebuilding Report

As part of this Data Dream, the following report was prepared by Jacqueline Renee Snethen Reyes, Jessica Mendez, Shannon Michael Ross Sr., for a course taught by Bree Spencer in the Master of Sustainable Peacebuilding program at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. The report was presented to the Re-entry Council and reviewed by the Regional Chief of Community Corrections. The full report is available here and on the Data You Can Use website.

Analysis of the Housing Gaps for the Re-entry Community in Milwaukee County 2021 (Slides)

<https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1zlcNPm7z42Nm-jecsvxGOiLCmM7N3M8155NHLQNGIAM/edit?usp=sharing>

## Appendix B. Data biography

**About the quantitative data:** The quantitative data for this study were provided by staff from the Department of Corrections (DOC) following approval of a research request by Data You Can Use. After providing the totals of those released and the number of those who had an identified “residential stability need,” a more detailed breakdown of the data was provided, including breakdowns for 2019 and 2020 by a number of additional demographic and other variables including gender, race, ethnicity, education, mental health, age at release, custody level, risk level, years served, and other needs as identified by COMPAS (see additional information below), Department of Adult Institutions’ program completion, and reincarceration. Each of these categories was broken out by those identified as having a residential stability need and those who did not. The annual data are summarized in Section 2 and based on the two-year averages, the numbers in each category are presented as a means of refining an understanding of the returning population in Section 1. Although it is assumed that the pandemic would have skewed the 2020 data, there was actually very little variation between the two years. The data was extremely well organized and contained very little missing or unknown data.

**About the research design:** The initial design of the study that was approved by the Research Committee included qualitative data to be gathered from interviews from people who had recently been released as well as a small number of agents who had familiarity with housing needs. A meeting to address questions and clarify data categories was held on August 2 and at that time it was learned that the initial letter of approval would be modified. DOC would not be able to provide names of people who had been released to permit interviews to supplement the quantitative data. Although it was clear that this would compromise the validity of the qualitative data, the Research Committee determined, based on their consideration of a subsequent request, that protecting the privacy of those released was the priority. DOC did affirm their ability to release the names of agents who may be recruited to participate on their own time. A revised letter of approval was sent in August.

**About the residential stability needs variable:** COMPAS is an acronym for Correctional Offender Management Profiling for Alternative Sanctions. It is described by its developers (Northpoint now Equivant) as a case management and decision support tool used to assess the likelihood of recidivism. It uses a proprietary algorithm to assess potential recidivism risk. According to the COMPAS Practitioner’s Guide,<sup>5</sup> the scales were designed using behavioral and psychological constructs related to recidivism and criminal careers. COMPAS is used in New York, Wisconsin, California and other jurisdictions. According to Wisconsin law, when the scores are used in sentencing, they are required to be used with warnings about the tool’s limitations and cautions.<sup>6</sup>

One limitation is the fact that it is proprietary software. This means the algorithm is a trade secret and cannot be examined by the public or affected parties. A 2016 study of the algorithm that was part of a ProPublica<sup>7</sup> investigation of the algorithm used in sentencing found that Blacks were almost twice as likely as whites to be labeled a higher risk but not actually re-offend, while whites were more likely than blacks to be labeled lower

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<sup>5</sup> A Practitioner’s Guide to COMPAS Core [https://assets.documentcloud.org/documents/2840784/Pratitioner’s\\_Guide\\_to\\_COMPAS-Core](https://assets.documentcloud.org/documents/2840784/Pratitioner’s_Guide_to_COMPAS-Core)

<sup>6</sup> Retrieved from [https://wikipedia.org/wiki/COMPAS-\(software\)](https://wikipedia.org/wiki/COMPAS-(software))

<sup>7</sup> Angwin, Julia and Larson, Jeff Pro Publica Machine Bias <https://www.propublica.org/article/machine-bias-risk-assessments-in-criminal-sentencing>



risk but go on to commit other crimes. The Pro Publica team’s findings were that only 20% of people predicted to commit violent crimes actually went on to do so.

A Washington Post study<sup>8</sup> published a more cautious interpretation of the racial bias imputed to the algorithm. Northpointe, the owner of the system, published a rebuttal to the ProPublica study questioning the methodology. The User’s Guide suggests AUC’s between .67 and .73. They state that the tool works well between genders, ethnicities, and those with various mental disorders. The rebuttal did not address race.

The other common criticism is that that the problem is not the algorithm itself but rather the data. A 2018 study by Ed Yong published in The Atlantic,<sup>9</sup> reported that the accuracy rate of COMPAS was 65%.

Because the classification system is proprietary, the rubric for classification was not provided by DOC however, a recent posting of the tool by the Pro Publica author was posted on Wikipedia and the housing related questions are included in Appendix C.

Department of Corrections officials report that they are exploring alternative systems at this time.

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<sup>8</sup> Sam Corbett-Davies, Emma Pierson et al. A computer program used for bail and sentencing decisions was labeled biased against Blacks. Its actually not that clear. Washington Post  
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/10/17/can-an-algorithm-be-racist-our-analysis-is-more-cautious-than-propublicas/>

<sup>9</sup> “A Popular Algorithm is no better at predicting crimes than random people”  
<https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2018/01/equivant-compas-algorithm/550646/>

## Appendix C. COMPAS Housing Stability Rubric

Although the COMPAS assessment methodology is proprietary and DOC officials were unable to share the rubric, a redacted sample of the tool was recently posted publicly.<sup>10</sup> The housing stability questions, and response choices, are listed below.

### Residence/Stability

54. How often do you have contact with your family (may be in person, phone, mail)?

No family never less than once/month once per week daily

55. How often have you moved in last 12 months?

Never 1 2 3 4 5+

56. Do you have a regular living situation (an address where you usually stay and can be reached)?

No Yes

57. How long have you been living at your current address?

0-5 mo. 6-11 mo. 1-3 yrs. 4-5 yrs. 6+ yrs

58. Is there a telephone at this residence (a cell phone is an appropriate alternative)?

No Yes

59. Can you provide a verifiable residential address?

No Yes

60. How long have you been living in that community or neighborhood?

0-2 mo. 3-5 mo. 6-11 mo. 1+yrs.

61. Do you live with a family-- natural parents, primary person who raised you, blood relative, spouse, children, or boy/girl friend if living together for more than 1 year

No Yes

62. Do you live with friends?

No Yes

63. Do you live alone?

No Yes

64. Do you have an alias (so you sometimes call yourself by another name)?

No Yes

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<sup>10</sup> Retrieved from <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/2702103-Sample-Risk-Assessment-COMPAS-CORE.html> see page 3 for the questions related to residential stability.