

ARTICLE

# Rehumanizing Reintegration: Intensive Case Management Effectively Supporting Community Re-Entry Post Incarceration in Canada

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## Abstract

This article examines the effectiveness of intensive case management (ICM) as a rehumanizing framework for supporting racialized individuals transitioning from incarceration to community re-entry in Canada. The study focuses on the Prosper program delivered by the community organization Amadeusz (learn more at <https://amadeusz.ca/home>), which provides culturally responsive, relationship-centered supports for individuals facing firearm-related charges. Guided by Critical Race Theory and Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies, two focus groups with six racialized female caseworkers were conducted alongside examining archival interviews and program evaluation data. Thematic analysis identified three interconnected dimensions of effective reintegration practice: (1) building trust through relational accountability, (2) integrating culturally sustaining and trauma-informed care into services provided, and (3) navigating systemic barriers through advocacy and cross-sector collaborations. Quantitative program outcomes from 2018 to 2022 indicate that approximately 64% of 57 Prosper program participants did not re-offend, while qualitative findings highlight the importance of sustained relationships and culturally grounded care in facilitating stability and self-efficacy among participants. The findings contribute to filling in the research gap by highlighting the critical role of community-based organizations as intermediaries between marginalized populations and institutional systems, offering reforms for policy and practice for reimagining more effective reintegration frameworks in Canada and beyond.

**Keywords:** Reintegration; Incarceration; Trauma-Informed; Case Management; Recidivism

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Reintegration following incarceration remains one of the most pressing challenges within Canada's criminal justice landscape and internationally [26,34,37]. Despite substantial evidence demonstrating that community-based interventions reduce recidivism and enhance social outcomes [26,42] racialized populations, particularly Black and low-income individuals charged with firearm-related offences, continue to experience systemic inequities across the justice continuum [23,43]. These inequities manifest through structural over-policing and post-release barriers such as limited employment opportunities, housing discrimination, and stigmatization due to having a criminal record [4,10,13,17,19]. The present study situates these realities within the context of Amadeusz's Prosper program, an intensive case management initiative that adopts a holistic, culturally responsive approach to re-entry for racialized individuals with complex needs. The central research questions guiding this inquiry are: *How effective is intensive case management in supporting Prosper program participants with firearm-related charges transitioning from incarceration to community settings? What are the distinctive characteristics of a throughcare model of case management compared to traditional probation and parole approaches? In what ways do community agencies serve as critical liaisons between governmental institutions and incarcerated populations to help reduce recidivism and promote holistic well-being for incarcerated individuals?* These questions are vital within the Canadian context

where most empirical studies have emphasized punitive frameworks or underexamined the intersection of race, class, and care in case management within carceral settings [5,16,36]. Overall, the research addresses this gap by foregrounding the experiences of racialized caseworkers whose professional and personal lives intersect with systemic inequities as part of supporting incarcerated individuals. Their narratives offer insight into how culturally responsive and relationship-centred care can transform reintegration into a process of rehumanization where participants are seen as learners and agents rather than statistics or risks to be managed. The findings highlight the critical role of community-based organizations as intermediaries between marginalized populations and institutional systems, offering reforms for policy and practice for reimagining more effective reintegration frameworks in Canada and beyond.

## 2. CONTEXT AND RATIONALE

Prosper emerged from collaborative advocacy among Amadeusz, Humber College, and the City of Toronto's Youth Equity Strategy [47]. Funded by Laidlaw Foundation and the City of Toronto, Amadeusz in partnership with Humber College conducted a research project titled "*Look at My Life: 'Sparks' for Firearm Possession among Young People in Toronto*" [1,47]. The report included a literature review and interviews with youth who had multiple firearm-related charges. Based on the findings, the City of Toronto partnered with Amadeusz to fund Prosper as a pilot program to provide intensive case management to adults with firearm-related charges at all stages of their involvement in the criminal justice system including remand, bail, sentencing, incarceration, or probation/release [11]. Grounded in the principles of offering holistic supports, the program integrates mental health, housing, education, and employment assistance through intensive case management while prioritizing relationship-building, cultural humility, and non-judgmental care as foundational pillars of practice.

Intensive Case Management (ICM) represents a holistic, person-centred approach to supporting individuals with complex social, psychological, and economic needs, particularly those navigating reintegration following incarceration. Unlike conventional probation or parole which tend to emphasize compliance, supervision, and risk mitigation, ICM focuses on individualized support and guidance supplemented with advocacy navigating various institutions through relationship-building and service coordination [5,25,50]. Rooted in social work and community health paradigms, ICM is designed to ensure continuity of care, addressing not only criminal justice outcomes, but also broader social determinants of well-being related to housing, education, employment, and mental health [34,40]. As a throughcare model [2], ICM begins during incarceration and extends post-release to ensure a more smooth transition from incarceration into community settings with ongoing access to supports to address immediate and long-term needs of the individual and their circumstances [2,20]. This model contrasts sharply with fragmented systems where incarcerated individuals must navigate disconnected services upon re-entry. As Tubex et al. [48] emphasize, throughcare requires active coordination between institutional and community actors, acknowledging that reintegration is not a single event. Rather, it is an evolving process influenced by social structures, relationships, and cultural belonging.

The rationale for studying intensive case management through Prosper program in the Canadian context is twofold. First, it addresses a persistent knowledge gap in Canadian criminology and education research where despite growing recognition of the importance of culturally responsive re-entry programs, Canadian scholarship on intensive case management for racialized populations remains limited [37]. Few studies examine the experiences of racialized caseworkers who mediate between marginalized program participants and state systems. Second, it explores the educational dimensions of case management to frame it as a site of transformative learning for program participants and practitioners. Caseworkers in Prosper engage in ongoing reflective practice- reading, journaling, and mentorship to cultivate emotional intelligence and cultural awareness. This aligns with Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies [38] which emphasize the importance of identity and sustaining cultural identities and community knowledge rather than assimilating individuals into dominant systems and worldviews. Furthermore, existing research has largely focused on risk assessment, cognitive-behavioral programming, or employment outcomes [16,28,37] with minimal attention to relational or cultural dimensions. Moreover, studies frequently overlook gendered and racialized aspects within the reintegration sector where women of colour disproportionately occupy frontline roles without

equivalent institutional recognition or support [22]. Therefore, this study addresses these gaps by foregrounding the perspectives of six racialized female caseworkers whose professional and lived experiences intersect with systemic inequities. The quantitative outcome referenced reflect the Prosper program during its pilot phase from 2018 to 2022 which supported a total of 57 program participants with firearm-related charges. It is important to note that for the purpose of measuring impact, recidivism was defined as any new criminal charge or return to custody during or after engagement with the program. Program follow-up with each participant varied depending on release timelines but it generally ranged from several months to multiple years. This allowed the research team to track patterns of re-offending and continued engagement with caseworkers.

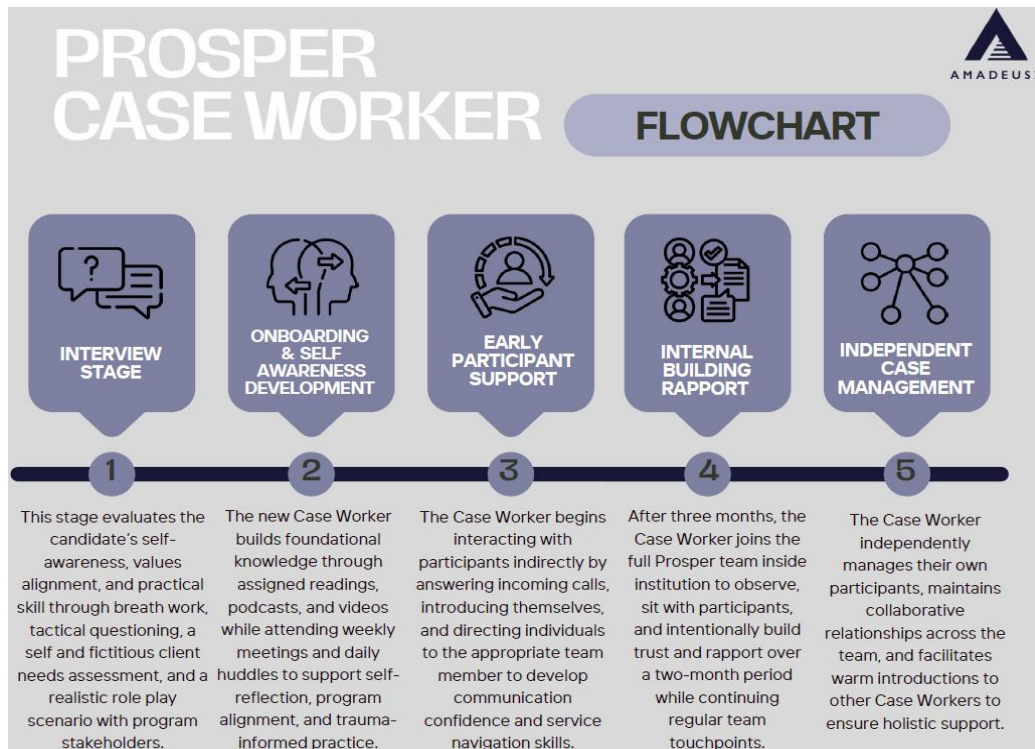
### **3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The study is grounded in Critical Race Theory (CRT) [9,29] and Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies (CSP) [29]. CRT enables an interrogation of how structural racism shapes incarceration and reintegration processes while CSP provides an educational framework for understanding how culture and identity inform care practices and effectiveness of accessing social service supports in ways that are identity affirming for racialized individuals impacted by incarceration. As a collective, these two frameworks emphasize the importance of culturally responsive and anti-oppressive approaches in community reintegration efforts. Under CRT, reintegration cannot be viewed merely as an individual's successful adjustment into community. It must be further understood within the broader matrix of racialized surveillance and systemic inequities in various sectors, particularly related to finding stable housing and employment [14,17,27,32]. Through CSP, intensive case management is conceptualized as part of effective service delivery and as a tool to help identities become their own self-advocates which is a relational process where caseworkers and program participants co-construct knowledge, strategies, and goals that reflect cultural identities and varied lived realities.

Qualitative inquiry allows for a deep exploration of lived experiences, meanings, and practices that cannot be captured through quantitative measures exclusively [15]. Therefore, CRT was supplemented with storytelling to honor narratives. This approach offers a lens to interrogate how structural racism and social inequities shape the experiences of justice-involved individuals and the professionals who support them [9,29]. Simultaneously, CSP provides a lens for understanding the cultural, affective, and pedagogical dimensions of case management as a form of relational support [39]. By emphasizing counter-storytelling and amplifying marginalized voices and perspectives through the caseworker, this study seeks to disrupt dominant deficit-based narratives that frame re-entry primarily in terms of compliance or risk management [13,32]. Instead, the research conceptualizes ICM as a process of co-learning, mutual reflection, and identity reconstruction between caseworkers and program participants. By examining this relationship and challenges involved, more effective processes for community reintegration can be created and sustained.

### **4. IDENTITIES AND BACKGROUNDS OF CASEWORKERS AS RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS**

The Amadeusz Prosper program operationalizes ICM as both care and pedagogy. It views ICM as an ongoing dynamic process for program participants and caseworkers. The emphasis on small caseloads (15 to 17 cases maximum), real-time communication, reflective practice, and collective problem-solving amongst caseworkers distinguishes it from traditional bureaucratic social service reintegration programs (see Figure 1 which outlines the journey map of Amadeusz caseworkers from interview stage and getting hired to leading and managing up to 17 cases). Such design reflects what Cullen et al. [14] call the "rehabilitative ideal," that prioritizes human connection and social learning rather than punitive surveillance and control.



**Figure 1.** Journey Map for Amadeusz Prosper Caseworkers

The participants in this study were six current and former caseworkers in the Prosper program offered by Amadeusz which is a Toronto-based charitable organization (see [www.amadeusz.ca](http://www.amadeusz.ca) to learn more) supporting justice-involved individuals during incarceration and/or post-release. All six participants identified as women. The focus group demographic information outlined in Table 1 demonstrates diversity across age, ethnicity, and professional experience.

**Table 1.** Participant Demographics and Relevant Experiences

Age	Racial Identity	Relevant Experience	Gender	Time with Prosper
40	Black–Caribbean	23 years in the field; personal experience supporting loved ones through incarceration; social work background	Female	2019–Present
36	Black–Caribbean	8 years in social work; personal experience with incarceration in family	Female	2023–Present
37	Chinese	14 years supporting unhoused and precariously housed individuals	Female	2024–Present
28	Mixed (Black/Latina)	Bachelor of Arts in Psychology; graduate studies in Addictions and Mental Health; personal experience supporting loved ones in custody	Female	2025–Present
32	Black–Nigerian	12 years in community work; Master of Education, Master of Social Work, and a PhD student	Female	2019 to 2021
30	Black–Caribbean	10 years in casework and mental health; forensic psychology background	Female	2021 to 2022

All caseworkers had direct experience providing ICM to individuals incarcerated with firearm-related charges and their families. Their professional expertise was complemented by lived experience, fostering an insider perspective on systemic barriers and relational approaches to reintegration. This dual positionality of being both professionals and directly impacted by incarceration provided a unique

lens through which participants could articulate and navigate the emotional, cultural, spiritual, and structural complexities of their work [51].

## **5. DATA COLLECTION: FOCUS GROUPS**

Data collection occurred through two in-person focus groups with the caseworkers conducted in May and June 2025. Each focus group lasted approximately 90 minutes and was facilitated by a senior researcher experienced in qualitative interviewing and trauma-informed facilitation. The discussions were recorded, transcribed verbatim, and verified by participants for accuracy through a member-checking process to ensure that interpretations reflected intended meanings. The focus group was guided by research questions outlined below which were designed to elicit detailed narratives about the effectiveness, challenges, and philosophies underpinning ICM. Sample questions included:

- What are the most common challenges program participants face when entering the program?
- As a caseworker, how do you build trust with program participants who may be reluctant to engage?
- What makes your approach different from traditional probation or parole models?
- In what ways culture or lived experience influence how you support program participants?
- How do you measure success in your role?

In addition to the focus group data, the study incorporated archival qualitative materials from 25 interviews and 5 surveys conducted between 2018 and 2022 with program participants, community partners, and caseworkers as part of *Prosper's* evaluation [see 18 in references for more details about findings from the additional data]. This allowed for triangulation of data and historical comparison across the program's four-year pilot phase where it supported 57 program participants.

## **6. DATA ANALYSIS AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The qualitative data was analyzed using thematic analysis following the six-phase approach outlined by Braun and Clarke [6]: familiarization with the data (repeated reading and initial noting); generating initial codes; searching for themes; reviewing themes; defining and naming themes; and producing the report. Coding was conducted inductively to allow themes to emerge organically from the focus group data. Initial codes included terms such as "trust-building," "advocacy," "cultural responsiveness," "emotional labour," "relational care," "throughcare," "harm reduction," and "systemic barriers." The theoretical frameworks of CRT and CSP informed the analysis guiding the coding process. Specifically, the frameworks shaped how codes related to systemic inequities, cultural responsiveness, and relational care were interpreted and grouped into themes to ensure the analysis remained attentive to structural racism, identity, and culturally grounded practices within reintegration work. We also used ChatGPT for the purpose of supporting data analysis by comparing manually generated codes with AI-assisted suggestions. We also used AI to help identify relevant academic literature beyond the ones we were familiar with. All outputs were critically reviewed, verified, and edited by the authors and we take full responsibility for the accuracy of the conclusions presented in this manuscript. Upon finalizing the codes, we grouped them into three main themes reflecting the interconnected dimensions of ICM: building trust through relational accountability; importance of culturally sustaining and trauma-informed practice in service delivery; and mitigating systemic barriers through advocacy and collaboration. The analysis prioritized voice and nuance to preserve the linguistic and emotional texture of participants' narratives through direct quotations shared in the findings section.

Given the sensitivity of working with justice-involved populations and frontline practitioners, ethical rigor was central to the design of the study. All procedures adhered to the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans and approved by Humber College's institutional ethics review board. Participants were informed of the study's aims, how the data will be collected and used, and the extent of the confidentiality measures through written consent forms. Names were not used in the transcripts and publications to protect identities. Participants were also reminded that they could withdraw from the study at any time without consequences. Recognizing the emotional intensity of discussing incarceration and systemic trauma, the facilitators adopted a trauma-

informed and relational approach [49]. Sessions began with grounding exercises and debriefing supports were available after each of the two focus groups. This practice aligned with the study's broader commitment to care ethics to support participants' psychological and emotional safety. Reflexivity was also embedded in the research process. Both authors acknowledged their positionalities: Sheena as a program director and racialized caseworker for Amadeusz and Ardavan as a community-engaged researcher with expertise in equity and education. This dual perspective allowed for critical self-examination of power dynamics and mitigated researcher bias. Following Woods et al. [51], the research team approached data interpretation as an act of emotional vulnerability and ethical responsibility with the awareness that studying trauma and resilience demands humility, empathy, and constant self-reflection. Finally, the study followed data sovereignty principles. This meant data and findings remain accessible to Amadeusz to support their program and advocacy efforts. It is important to note that as a qualitative study grounded in one community-based program, the findings do not claim universal generalizability. However, the depth of insight derived from the lived and professional experiences of the racialized female caseworkers provides transferable lessons for programs seeking to humanize reintegration and be effective in reducing recidivism.

## 7. FINDINGS AND THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Thematic analysis revealed three interrelated themes that capture the lived realities and characteristics of ICM in the *Prosper* program (see Table 2 for more details). These themes reflect not only the "what" of case management associated with strategies and structures but also the "how" and "why" of its impact on reintegration particularly for racialized populations. It demonstrates that the Prosper model's success lies in its emphasis on relational care, introspection, and cultural responsiveness rather than compliance-driven approaches typical in probation and parole. To construct these themes, coding combined inductive and deductive strategies. Key words such as trust, relationship, advocacy, support, culture, healing, systemic, judgment, care, and belonging were grouped into clusters reflecting affective, structural, and pedagogical dimensions of practice.

**Table 2.** Themes Identified Through Coding from Focus Groups with Caseworkers

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Representative Keywords</b>
<b>Building Trust Through Relational Accountability</b>	Building trust through consistency, empathy, and presence.	trust, relationships, lived experiences, community connections, consistency, and accountability
<b>Culturally Sustaining and Trauma-Informed Practice in Service Delivery</b>	Integrating culture, self-reflection, and emotional awareness into care.	culture, healing, mindfulness, empathy, and reflection
<b>Mitigating Systemic Barriers through Advocacy and Collaboration</b>	Navigating systemic barriers through teamwork and persistence.	advocacy, collaboration, systems, and barriers

## 8. THEME 1: BUILDING TRUST THROUGH RELATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY

Racialization profoundly shapes incarceration and re-entry experiences in Canada [8,25,33,37]. Black and Indigenous populations remain disproportionately over-represented at every stage of the criminal justice system from arrest and sentencing to parole supervision [17,23,24,30]. Despite comprising less than 5% of Canada's total population, Black people account for approximately 9% of the federal prison population while Indigenous peoples represent over 32% [12]. These figures reflect the enduring legacies of settler colonialism, anti-Black racism, residential schools, and institutional neglect that continues to structure and impact the operations of the Canadian justice system [3,31,43].

For individuals from low-income and racialized communities, incarceration compounds pre-existing social vulnerabilities including unemployment, precarious housing, and limited access to education [4,10,13]. As Khenti [27] and Sharpe [45] outline, systemic disinvestment and the pathologization of racialized neighborhoods produce social conditions that elevate exposure to violence

and increase the risk factors associated with incarceration. These structural inequities are further entrenched by the “carceral continuum,” wherein policing, education, and social welfare systems intersect to reproduce racial hierarchies under the guise of public safety [8,19,43,45]. Upon release, justice-involved individuals from under-resourced communities face intersecting stigmas of race, criminalization, and poverty manifesting as barriers to employment, housing, and healthcare access [26]. As one caseworker explained during the focus group,

*Our program participants don't start from zero. They start from minus ten. They come out already being judged by their skin color, charges, and their address. The system says they've been given a 'second chance,' but it's really a smaller cage.*

This quote emphasizes the compounded nature of structural exclusion that renders reintegration far more complex than individual compliance. Traditional re-entry systems, primarily designed through risk-aversion frameworks, rarely address these layered inequities. Probation and parole officers typically operate within risk-based paradigms that prioritize surveillance and compliance over access to culturally responsive supports and continuity of care [25,36]. Therefore, traditional approaches emphasize behavior management and risk containment rather than relational healing or prioritizing socio-structural empowerment [14,28,44].

A common theme reiterated by Prosper caseworkers was the importance of trust as the foundation upon which all effective casework rested. As one participant stated, “The first thing I tell my program participants is, ‘I’m not here to fix you. I’m here to walk with you.’ Once they feel that, everything changes. They start to show up differently.” Across both focus groups, caseworkers repeatedly emphasized that individuals transitioning from incarceration often arrive with profound mistrust of systems and their representatives. One worker summarized this sentiment by stating,

*Most of our program participants have been let down by the system their whole lives. They've seen programs come and go. So when they meet us, they don't believe we will stay. The first step is showing up consistently and patiently until they realize we're not leaving.*

Another caseworker further added,

*They've had a revolving door of caseworkers, POs [parole officers], or counsellors. We're different because we don't disappear. Even when they go back inside [being reincarcerated], we're still there writing, calling, and reminding them that they're not forgotten.*

The continuity of providing care reflects the Prosper program’s throughcare model where support extends before, during, and after incarceration [2,5,48]. Rather than terminating services upon re-offense or re-admission, Amadeusz Prosper caseworkers remain a consistent presence reinforcing the relational trust necessary for care despite dynamic and changing circumstances. Several caseworkers also highlighted the interconnection between trust and self-reflexivity for effective service delivery:

*We're always telling program participants to trust the process, but if we don't trust ourselves or our own instincts, we can't model that for them. Prosper taught me to slow down, to listen differently, and to be present.*

*You can't pour from an empty cup. We're encouraged to do our own healing through reading, reflection, and team debriefs, because how we show up matters. Program participants feel that.*

These reflections speak to the reciprocal process involved in building trust with the program participants where both caseworkers and participants engage in mutual learning and emotional growth. Within this paradigm, trust is pedagogical as it is built through consistency, care, and authenticity to create brave spaces of belonging that counteract and challenge systemic alienation and judgement rooted in deficit ideologies.

The relational work directly challenges the racialized distrust of institutional actors such as police, parole officers, and even some social workers that stems from centuries of surveillance and punitive governance over Black and Indigenous identities and communities [31,32,37,43,45,50]. The shared racial and community identities of Prosper caseworkers position them as credible messengers, with cultural capital and street currency, a term widely recognized in the community violence prevention literature [7,33,34,50]. As one participant articulated,

*When they see someone who looks like them, who talks like them, who's from their neighborhood, that changes everything. We can hold them accountable without making them feel criminalized.*

The credibility enables caseworkers to navigate dual roles of being advocates within systems and healers within communities. This facilitates bridging institutional distrust and personal transformation strategically. The resulting dynamic reflects what Freire [21] referred to as humanizing *praxis* which is a process through which individuals reclaim agency and dignity in the face of dehumanizing oppressive systems.

Quantitative outcomes reinforce the qualitative significance of the relational work led by racialized female caseworkers. As reported by Amadeusz, approximately 64% of Prosper participants did not reoffend during or after their engagement with the program, and even among those who did re-enter the system, all maintained active contact with their caseworkers [1]. This continuity highlights the distinction between *recidivism reduction* and *crisis prevention*: success is not solely defined by the absence of re-offense but by sustained engagement, emotional regulation, and connection to prosocial supports. One caseworker elaborated on this by emphasizing that,

*Even when someone goes back inside, it's not a failure. They'll say, 'Miss, I'm back in but I'm okay this time.' That's growth because they're not alone, and they're learning to handle things differently.*

The approach aligns with harm reduction and trauma-informed care principles recognizing that progress in reintegration is non-linear and deeply relational [40,49]. Through consistent care and emotional reciprocity, Prosper's model rehumanizes reintegration by centring trust as both method and outcome which is a pedagogical bridge between systemic accountability and personal healing.

## **9. THEME 2: PROVIDING CULTURALLY SUSTAINING AND TRAUMA-INFORMED PRACTICES IN SERVICE DELIVERY**

Across both focus groups, caseworkers emphasized that the ICM approach employed through the *Prosper* program differs fundamentally from traditional probation and parole frameworks. It prioritizes relationship-building, holistic care, and cultural responsiveness. It further repositions racialized caseworkers beyond bureaucratic service providers to critical agents of transformation to leverage shared lived experience, community knowledge, and cultural humility to rebuild trust with program participants who have been historically alienated from formal systems. Caseworkers repeatedly described how traditional supervision models often produce feelings of scrutiny, anxiety, and powerlessness among program participants. These systems, governed by risk assessment instruments and behavioral checklists, focus narrowly on monitoring compliance rather than supporting growth or facilitating healing from traumatic experiences, including traumas experienced while incarcerated [28,36,44,45]. As one caseworker summarized it, "Probation tells you what not to do whereas we ask 'what do you need to move forward?' There's a big difference between that approach" This distinction between *management* and *cultivating a rapport* was echoed throughout the focus group discussions. Several caseworkers emphasized that the language of control inherent in parole frameworks reinforces program participants' sense of criminalization whereas Prosper's model is grounded in cultural humility. As one caseworker described it,

*If you only see someone through a risk lens, you'll always miss their potential. The system keeps asking, 'How likely are they to reoffend?' We ask, 'What would it take for them to heal?'*

This approach reframes reintegration as a process of healing, trust, and self-determination aligning with CRT and CSP [38,39,50,51]. It challenges the punitive assumptions embedded in traditional correctional systems. It further recognizes that individuals from racialized and low-income communities experience incarceration not as isolated personal failure but in many cases as an accumulation of constant exposure to structural inequities and systemic barriers [13,27,32,43].

Caseworkers also outlined how strength-based language and mindsets are essential factors in developing strong rapport with program participants. Prosper caseworkers are intentionally trained on using affirmative language. During daily huddles, they are trained to use language like, "everything is always working out for our greatest good," or "I don't know how, but I know this is going to work out".

Additionally, Amadeusz caseworkers do not use traditional language when referring to program participants. They use the term “Brother” when referring to a male participant. Likewise, the case workers at Amadeusz refer to each other as “Sis” or “Sister”. This language is used in all communications within the team whether it is verbal, written, or in email correspondence. It contributes to creating a familial experience and embodies another example of Prosper directly and strategically humanizing program participants and co-workers.

Another major element distinguishing Prosper’s approach is its depth of engagement. Participants explained that smaller caseloads allow them to invest time and energy in each program participants’ broader life context in areas such as family, housing, education, and emotional well-being. One caseworker shared,

*Our caseloads are smaller because we go deeper. We might spend three hours one day just helping someone get an ID [identification card] or reconnect with their mom. It doesn’t sound big but those small wins change lives.*

Furthermore, program participants have a single point of contact to support their needs. This mitigates and reduces the stress of retelling one’s story, including past traumatic experiences over and over to different social service providers, to secure access to services. Such micro-level acts of care accumulate into long-term transformation. The literature on throughcare emphasizes how sustainable reintegration requires continuity of care, cross-sector collaboration, and individualized attention to intersecting needs [5,40]. Prosper’s model operationalizes this by applying a throughcare philosophy to ensure continuity of support before, during, and after incarceration. Caseworkers described maintaining active contact with program participants across multiple institutions including situations where persons were transferred to other facilities or provinces. One caseworker noted,

*We start working with program participants inside Toronto South or East Detention, sometimes even before their release date. When they’re moved to another province or facility, we don’t close the file. We keep writing, checking in, connecting them with services in that new place.*

This practice addresses a key gap in traditional reintegration systems which often terminate services once the individual leaves an institution or jurisdiction [26]. By contrast, Prosper’s ICM model prioritizes relational consistency to ensure that program participants experience continuity even amidst instability or disruptions in their circumstances [2,48].

In addition to providing various types of support to program participants and each other as colleagues, caseworkers highlighted the emotional and reflective dimensions of their work. Prosper’s onboarding process for the caseworkers include structured opportunities for self-reflection, emotional regulation, and mindfulness which draws inspiration from thinkers such as Florence Scovel Shinn, Neville Goddard, and Dr. Joe Dispenza. These influences encourage caseworkers to cultivate self-awareness and emotional resilience which in turn shapes how they engage with program participants around their identity and trying to empower them about who they are and their potential. As one caseworker explained, “We’re encouraged to work on ourselves and to be self-aware, to understand our triggers, and to process our emotions because if we’re not grounded, we can’t hold space for others.” The encouragement for constant reflexivity transforms case management into a reciprocal pedagogical process where both program participant and caseworker engage in mutual growth and healing. It resonates and reflects Mezirow’s [35] theory of *transformative learning* in which individuals reframe their worldviews through critical self-reflection and dialogic engagement. The emphasis on personal development and emotional safety positions caseworkers beyond service providers to facilitators of healing and empowerment which bridges therapeutic, educational, and advocacy roles simultaneously [51].

Cultural humility is another defining element of Prosper’s model. Cultural humility is a lifelong process of self-reflection, self-critique, and a commitment to understanding and respecting the beliefs, customs, and values of others. Caseworkers described the necessity of adapting interventions to reflect program participants’ unique cultural and spiritual identities as part of affirming their identities and needs. As one caseworker shared,

*We don't assume what's best for them. We listen. For some, that means connecting with faith. For others, it's music, art, or just having someone who speaks their language. Culture isn't an add-on. It's the foundation.*

This approach contrasts with mainstream systems that often universalize Western frameworks of rehabilitation [22,39]. Through identity affirmation associated with cultural referents, caseworkers re-establish program participants' sense of dignity, belonging, and self-recognition which are core prerequisites for effective reintegration [37,45,49]. Finally, caseworkers emphasized the importance of redefining success within reintegration work. Prosper's ICM model positions reintegration not as a binary between freedom and incarceration but as a continuum of care that values human connection, resilience, and agency beyond risk mitigation. By addressing the structural, emotional, and cultural dimensions associated with incarceration and reintegration simultaneously, Prosper disrupts traditional correctional paradigms and provides a replicable model that rehumanizes justice.

### 10. THEME 3: MITIGATING SYSTEMIC BARRIERS THROUGH ADVOCACY AND COLLABORATION

Caseworkers emphasized the important intermediary role that community agencies such as Amadeusz play in supporting marginalized individuals navigating intersections of incarceration, racialization, and reintegration. Positioned between governmental institutions and the communities they serve, organizations like Amadeusz act as bridges of trust, communication, and advocacy to translate bureaucratic processes into relational and culturally responsive practices. Caseworkers described this role as intentional in mediating systemic barriers and restoring a sense of humanity and belonging to those criminalized by the justice system. As one caseworker succinctly put it, "We're not just caseworkers. We're translators between two worlds. The system speaks policy but our program participants speak survival. Our job is to make sure both are heard." This aligns with the literature emphasizing the bridging function of community-based organizations within justice and social service ecosystems [5,40]. Community agencies frequently serve as "connective tissue" between state institutions such as correctional facilities, courts, and parole boards and marginalized populations who have historically experienced systemic exclusion [19,22,43].

In the Canadian context, the role of community agencies are particularly vital particularly the ones that offer culturally responsive and reflective programming for Black and Indigenous identities, because of the country's fragmented correctional and social service landscape. Individuals released from custody often face overlapping bureaucracies in housing, employment, health, and parole systems without coordinated case management [26,42]. In response, Amadeusz intervenes in this gap through its Prosper program to offer consistent, cross-sectoral holistic supports rather than leaving program participants to self-navigate these disjointed services. One caseworker explained the process as such,

*A lot of what we do is coordination. We'll call the shelter, the job program, and the lawyer. Whatever it takes. Because if we don't do that, they fall through the cracks. And once someone falls, it's hard for them to climb back.*

This testimony illustrates the throughcare orientation of the Prosper program where continuity and consistency are prioritized [2,20,48]. Through sustained engagement with program participants to meet their various needs, involving systemic navigation across different institutions, Amadeusz ensures that program participants remain connected to supportive networks even amid transitions between incarceration, community supervision, and freedom. Participants also emphasized that Amadeusz's liaison role is not just logistical but also advocacy-oriented to create more equitable reforms. Caseworkers described instances where they acted as mediators or advocates in interactions between program participants and institutional actors such as correctional staff and parole officers. As one caseworker explained,

*Sometimes we're the only ones who can speak on their behalf without judgment. We've sat in meetings where the system sees a 'risk factor' and instead we see a person trying their best. That's where our advocacy comes in.*

Examples of such everyday advocacy embodies what Freire [21] refers to as *conscientization* which involves developing critical awareness of structural oppression and acting to transform it. Through such

advocacy, caseworkers reposition program participants as agents of their own reintegration. As another caseworker expressed, “Our program participants have voices but the system often talks over them. We make sure they’re part of every conversation about their lives.” Empirical research corroborates the significance of such relational advocacy. Studies show that justice-involved individuals who maintain sustained connections with community-based caseworkers experience lower rates of reoffending and higher rates of employment and housing stability [28,40]. Furthermore, the Mental Health Commission of Canada [34] reports that culturally responsive community partnerships are more effective in promoting long-term reintegration outcomes for people with complex needs.

Caseworkers also emphasized how their community-based roles allows them to challenge systemic inequities from within. Unlike probation officers or institutional staff constrained by bureaucratic policies, Prosper caseworkers have the flexibility to prioritize human connection and cultural safety. As one caseworker explained,

*We can name what’s wrong in the system because we’re not bound by it in the same way. We can push back and say, ‘This policy doesn’t make sense for our program participants.’ We’ve had real change happen from those conversations.*

The capacity to challenge policy frameworks reflects what Lopez [29] terms the *racially conscious politics of education* referring to the practice of interrogating and reimagining institutional systems to advance equity and social justice. Prosper caseworkers engage in micro-level interventions of supporting program participants while advocating for macro-level systemic reforms through their dual role as caregivers and advocates,

Importantly, caseworkers described collaboration as an institutional requirement but even more significantly as a collective ethics of care. The Prosper team meets weekly to debrief cases, share strategies, and support one another emotionally which is a practice that embodies relational professionalism described in social work literature [51]. As one caseworker shared,

*We’re constantly learning from each other. When a case gets tough, we bring it to the team. No one works in isolation. That’s how we stay grounded and keep showing up fully for the program participants.*

Collaborative reflection strengthens both caseworker well-being and service quality which mitigates burnout and promotes consistency in care delivery. This is an element often absent in overstretched institutional systems where rates of burnout are high [40,49]. Beyond internal collaboration, Prosper’s success also depends on strategic partnerships with external organizations including schools, housing agencies, and mental health services [34,46]. These partnerships reflect broader trends in community safety planning such as Toronto’s *SafeTO Implementation Plan* [11] which emphasizes the importance of multi-sector coordination and prevention-based strategies. By aligning with public health, education sectors, as well as private funding entities, Amadeusz situates reintegration as a community well-being and equity concern [7,46]. Participants frequently linked this holistic, partnership-based approach to the tangible success of the program. As one caseworker proudly stated,

*When people ask why Prosper works, it’s because we don’t work alone. We’re connected to the community, to each other, and to the people we serve. It’s not just a program. It’s a network of care.*

The “network of care” model echoes what Pettus et al. [40] describe as the *well-being development model* referring to an approach to reintegration that frames social supports as interdependent systems of care rather than isolated interventions. Ultimately, Prosper bridges the disconnect between formal institutions and lived realities to transform reintegration from a bureaucratic obligation into a process of rehumanization and community healing.

## 11. IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES AND PRACTICE

The Prosper model aligns with global evidence emphasizing the importance and effectiveness of throughcare and continuous support before, during, and after incarceration to reduce recidivism [5,48]. This approach reduces service fragmentation and ensures that individuals impacted by incarceration have consistent advocates who understand their histories, lived experiences, and aspirations. The

caseworkers' narratives reveal how throughcare operates as a public health-informed practice which holistically addresses social determinants of well-being in areas such as housing, food security, and access to education. Several caseworkers described instances where program participants voluntarily reached out for support to prevent crises. This demonstrated that relational trust acts as a protective factor against recidivism and perpetuation of further community harm. From a systems perspective, the Prosper model exemplifies intersectoral collaboration which brings together community organizations, correctional institutions, and social service providers to build a cohesive network of care that can offer holistic supports. The City of Toronto's SafeTO Implementation Plan [11] and Public Safety Canada's [42] *Federal Framework to Reduce Recidivism* both highlight the need for such coordination to reduce cycles of incarceration by increasing communication between systems that often work in silos without sharing much information. Prosper operationalizes these frameworks by placing community actors, particularly racialized women as caseworkers at the centre of the intervention design and its service delivery, which has shown promising results.

Insights from this research carries significant implications for theory and practice. Beyond social outcomes, the findings highlight the economic efficiency of intensive case management models. According to *Public Safety Canada's Corrections and Conditional Release Statistical Overview* report [41], incarcerating one person costs approximately \$159,000 annually compared to \$41,500 for community supervision which is a 74% cost reduction. If ICM models like Prosper can achieve a 64% non-reoffending rate, the fiscal implications are profound. Reducing re-incarceration translates into millions of dollars in savings that can be reinvested into housing, education, and community programming which would further address upstream causes of criminalization. However, the true return on investment extends beyond financial metrics. As caseworkers described, when program participants maintain contact and emotional stability even after setbacks due to further life challenges, the system avoids secondary crises such as emergency hospitalizations, family breakdown, or further violent incidents, all of which carry additional economic and social costs. Waller [50] in his book *Science and Secrets of Ending Violent Crime* similarly outlines how investments in prevention and relationship-based supports yield measurable reductions in crime and long-term public expenditures.

The findings also emphasize the importance of relationship-based interventions that humanize justice-involved individuals and build long-term resilience that effectively reduces recidivism. The experiences of Amadeusz caseworkers provide an illustrative case of how racialized practitioners transform service delivery through empathy, advocacy, and community-rooted knowledge. These practitioners draw upon their lived experiences and professional training to challenge deficit-based narratives and instead enact a model of throughcare grounded in love, empathy, and self-reflection. It serves as a counter-narrative to punitive paradigms that dominate the Canadian criminal justice system. By centring relational care, Prosper reframes reintegration and community re-entry beyond simply avoiding re-offense. It positions it as cultivating stability, affirming identity, and facilitating belonging and well-being in the face of systemic barriers [17].

It is important to note that the study also has several limitations. The research focuses on a single community-based program and includes a relatively small sample of six caseworkers which limits the generalizability of the findings. Yet, the qualitative design prioritizes depth of experience rather than causal measurement of program effectiveness. While program outcome data were used to contextualize findings, longer-term longitudinal data on participants' trajectories would provide a stronger assessment of sustained reintegration outcomes over time. Future studies should expand the sample across multiple programs and jurisdictions to further examine the scalability and long-term impacts of intensive case management models.

## 12. RECOMMENDATIONS AND FUTURE AREAS FOR RESEARCH

Based on the findings, the following five recommendations are outlined to strengthen community-based case management and reintegration policy frameworks across Canada:

- It is highly encouraged for provincial and federal justice systems to formally integrate ICM frameworks that prioritize throughcare, relational consistency, and cultural responsiveness. Funding models should reflect the long-term cost savings associated with investing in

prevention and culturally responsive intervention initiatives which contributes to reduced recidivism rates.

- Community organizations like Amadeusz function as critical intermediaries between state institutions and marginalized populations. Cross-sector partnerships that identify gaps between corrections, health, housing, and education sectors should be prioritized to ensure continuity of care across different geographies. This would include creating greater access to trauma-informed social supports that are culturally affirming and sustaining for identities and communities disproportionately impacted by incarceration (e.g. Black and Indigenous identities) [34].
- Training modules should embed CRT and CSP principles to enable staff who work with incarcerated individuals to navigate issues of race, power, and cultural identity with humility, empathy, and competence. Reflective practice, peer mentorship, and self-care strategies can be institutionalized as part of on-boarding and on-going professional development to prevent burnout and sustain compassionate engagement.
- Policymakers are encouraged to adopt broader qualitative and quantitative success indicators that capture the complexities associated with effective reintegration, community attachment, and well-being. These metrics would benefit from alignment with the public health and educational models of well-being rather than punitive accountability discourses.
- Longitudinal studies should track program participants' trajectories over multiple years to examine sustained impact of programming on employment, education, mental health, and community safety. Comparative analyses across jurisdictions could further validate the scalability of ICM approaches.

### **13. CONCLUSION: TOWARD REHUMANIZING REINTEGRATION**

This research study contributes to a growing body of scholarship advocating for rehumanizing service delivery and approaches to reintegration and community re-entry. Prosper illustrates how intensive case management rooted in culturally responsive and sustaining approaches, transcends its administrative function to become a transformative educational process. The program redefines success and care by prioritizing relational accountability, cultural humility, and advocacy for systemic reforms. Prosper reimagines justice beyond punishment and as a healing and evolving partnership. The program's outcomes both quantitatively and qualitatively demonstrate that when individuals are seen, heard, and supported holistically it leads to cycles of incarceration being disrupted more effectively. In an era of mounting social inequities and systemic overrepresentation of racialized identities in Canada's prisons, particularly Black and Indigenous identities, the Prosper model stands as evidence that community-led, culturally grounded care is more humane but also more effective. Its lessons extend beyond the justice system to education, social work, and public policy. It reminds us that the path to safety and equity lies not in control and compliance but in cultivating connections and networks of care to help people overcome risk factors in their lives. Overall, this study affirms that reintegration when approached through the lens of care, culture, and community becomes more than a transition from incarceration to freedom. It becomes an act and process of empowerment, restoration, healing, and resistance. By centering relational trust and cultural humility, Prosper transforms individual impacted by incarceration and offers a blueprint for reimagining justice in Canada: a justice system that educates, heals, and rehumanizes. In the words of one caseworker, "We're not saving people. We're walking with them until they can save themselves. That's the real work."

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