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# PROSPER:

Effective Reintegration of  
Adults Facing Firearm-Related  
Charges in Ontario, Canada

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***“In the negative environment of being in jail,  
Prosper staff are like a bright light.”***

Prosper Participant

# ABOUT THE *RESEARCH*

Amadeusz is a charitable organization founded in 2009 in Ontario, Canada that provides programs and services in education, community support, mentorship, and exceptional care for people aged 18 to 35 who are incarcerated or returning to community (Amadeusz, 2024). The organization also advocates for policy change and systemic reform by conducting research and raising awareness about issues faced by individuals who are incarcerated in ways that are accessible (George et al. 2014; Eizadirad & Chambers, 2023; Woods et al., 2022). They work in collaboration with various stakeholders and partners such as government agencies, other community organizations, and academic institutions to achieve their vision of equitable access to education and community support for people impacted by incarceration.

In 2016, research was commissioned to review the existing evidence and collect data from young adults who have firearm-related charges to find out what makes people get a gun (City of Toronto, 2019; Gopal & Scott, 2018). Humber College partnered with Amadeusz, Laidlaw Foundation, and the City of Toronto Youth Equity Strategy (TYES) to conduct a research project titled "Look at My Life: 'Sparks' for Firearm Possession among Young People in Toronto" (Toronto Youth Equity Strategy, 2014; Gopal & Scott, 2018). The report included a literature review and interviews with youth who have multiple 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, and/or probation/release (City of Toronto, 2022).

# ABOUT THE *RESEARCH*

This study evaluates the impact of Amadeusz' Prosper program which supports individuals with firearm-related charges between the ages of 18 to 29. Prosper offers intensive case management through caseworkers who co-create tailored support plans with clients based on their immediate needs and long-term goals. Prosper was designed based on a throughcare approach, initially conceptualized and implemented in Australia, to support the reintegration of people who are incarcerated by providing comprehensive case management prior to their release from correctional institutions and throughout their transition back into the community (Australian Law Reform Commission, 2017; Borzycki & Baldry, 2003; Fox et al., 2005; Tubex et al., 2021).

The goal of the throughcare model is to identify the root causes that may gravitate the person towards violence and crime and mitigate it by connecting them with relevant wraparound support services (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022). Preparation for release is a critical period for intervention to prevent recidivism, making it necessary to begin intervention while they are still incarcerated. The model emphasizes intensive one-on-one support, intervention, service coordination, and a holistic community-led approach.

# METHODOLOGY

The research methodology employed a qualitative approach leveraging in-depth interviews with various stakeholders between October 2022 and April 2023. Ethics approval for data collection over a four-year period was obtained through the Humber College Research Ethics Board. Using interviews for data collection allowed for a rich and multifaceted exploration of the experiences, perspectives, and insights of racialized individuals in the Prosper program based on established trust. It provided flexibility to engage folks who were incarcerated and had to abide by restrictions in how they can communicate, such as limited time for phone calls or visitation.

A total of 58 participants were in the Prosper program from 2018 to 2023 with 35 active during the time of the research project. Non-active participants refers to people who do not have regular contact with their caseworker due to reasons such as unknown location, no contact information, deceased, or no longer needing service. It is important to note that there is an over-representation of Black and racialized identities within the sample, reflecting larger systemic barriers within the justice system.

Due to incarceration and COVID-19 restrictions, the data was collected via telephone interviews for all participants incarcerated. Participants received project information and informed consent through their caseworker. Participants were informed that they did not have to answer questions they were not comfortable with and could end the interview at any time without any consequences. It was also emphasized that responses are anonymized to ensure confidentiality. The interviews were audio-recorded to assist with transcription and thematic data analysis. The research participants were provided with a \$50 gift card as a token of appreciation for their time and for sharing their lived experiences.

# METHODOLOGY

The interactive nature of interviews enabled probing for additional information and clarifications, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the participants' experiences. However, there are also limitations to the interview methodology. Interviews are inherently subjective and reliant on participants' recollection of events, which may introduce biases or inaccuracies. Furthermore, the sample size of the interviews may limit the generalizability of the findings to a broader population. Despite these limitations, the use of interviews provided valuable data, given generally this is a hard subpopulation to access, which offered insights into the experiences of people with firearm-related charges in the Canadian context.

# RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

44 people in total participated in interviews about their experience and role in Prosper through convenience sampling.

This included 29 active program participants out of 35 (see Table 1 for their age, race, and year enrolled in the program), eight (8) family members of program participants, four (4) community partners who supported clients through partnerships, as well as three (3) caseworkers providing direct supports to program participants.

Participant	Age	Race (Self-Identified)	Year Enrolled in the Prosper Program
1	34	Black	2019
2	23	Black	2019
3	31	Black	2019
4	25	Black	2019
5	27	Black	2019
6	25	Black	2019
7	33	European	2019
8	30	Black	2019
9	35	Black	2019
10	32	European & Indigenous	2019
11	26	Black	2019
12	31	Black	2019
13	33	Black	2019
14	38	Black	2019
15	27	White	2019
16	28	Black	2019
17	22	Black	2019
18	25	Black	2019
19	33	Black	2020
20	31	Black	2020
21	34	Black	2020
22	32	Latino	2020
23	25	Black	2020
24	30	Black	2020
25	25	Black	2020
26	30	Black & Indigenous	2020
27	24	Black	2021
28	26	Black	2021
29	33	Black	2021

Table 1. Demographics of Prosper Research Participants



# FINDINGS

## **Theme #1: Benefits of Intensive Case Management and Tailored Supports**

Intensive case management stands out as a critical tool in supporting individuals with firearm-related charges offering personalized care plans tailored to each person's complex needs and varying circumstances. As of May 2024, out of the 35 active program participants, 25 were released from incarceration at some point during the program. Among them, only nine were reincarcerated for various reasons reflecting the efficacy of the program. Top of Form Overall, participant insights emphasized the transformative impact of the support which differed from a one-size-fits-all approach to programming. Case management provided a range of tailored services including housing support, employment assistance, and mental health counseling to address the diverse needs of participants. This is important given that research shows preparation for release from jail and coordination of services to meet the needs of clients in different areas is critical to more effectively mitigate recidivism (McLeod et al., 2021; Pettus et al., 2021; Public Safety Canada, 2022; Tubex et al., 2021; Zaia, 2021). To implement an effective throughcare model, intervention must begin during the period of incarceration, continue throughout imprisonment, and extend to the point of release and into the community post-release. This continuity of care is required to comprehensively mitigate recidivism by meeting the unique needs of each individual relative to the risk factors they are exposed, the neighbourhood they are returning, and the systemic barriers impacting that community (Carter & Welner, 2013; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022; John Howard Society of Ontario, 2016; McMurtry & Curling, 2008; Public Safety Canada, 2022). This aligns with the logic model of the Prosper program and its implementation. Without adequate support, individuals may face challenges in their reintegration process, which if unaddressed, can contribute to a higher risk of recidivism.

# FINDINGS

## Theme #2: Barriers and Challenges Transitioning to Community

The interviews identified a series of systemic barriers that individuals with firearm-related charges encounter while incarcerated and during transition back into community (Roderique, 2019). These barriers include limited access to education, lack of stable housing options due to a housing crisis in Toronto, and lack of employment opportunities due to discrimination or stigma associated with having a criminal record (Block & Galabuzi, 2011; Colour of Poverty, 2019; Author 1, 2021; Author 1 & Author 2, 2021; Toronto Neighbourhood Centres, 2020). Participant quotes underscore the systemic barriers and reintegration challenges faced by participants (Canadian Civil Liberties Association, 2014) highlighting the critical need for support to start while incarcerated and continue post-release to navigate these spaces.

One of the most significant challenges constantly mentioned was securing stable housing. Participants reported difficulties in finding stable housing due to the housing crisis in Ontario and the challenge of getting on the housing waiting list while incarcerated. Lack of stable housing can lead to a cycle of homelessness and involvement in criminal activities.

***"I think it's important to have someone who can help you navigate the system and provide you with the support you need. My caseworker has been really helpful in connecting me with resources and helping me find housing and employment."***

Prosper Participant

# FINDINGS

## Theme #2: Barriers and Challenges Transitioning to Community

Research shows that support for people leaving prison is crucial (Australian Law Reform Commission, 2017; Borzycki & Baldry, 2003; Fox et al., 2005; Tubex et al., 2021). When people leave prison, they are often exposed to similar risk factors compared to when they entered the system. A lack of coordinated and consistent support to help people transition into community increases the likelihood of (re)involvement in violence and crime which creates a cycle of (re)incarceration. In Canada, there is evidence that community-based solutions that address complex social problems rather than “tough on crime” strategies are more effective solution in reducing recidivism (Chan et al., 2017; City of Toronto, 2022; Cullen et al., 2011; Eizadirad, 2016; Latessa & Lowenkamp, 2006; Waller, 2019). Participants quotes underscores the challenges related to accessing mental health supports, and culturally responsive services, within incarceration facilities and post-release which not only impacts the person incarcerated but also their family and loved ones.

Overall, the interviews revealed the importance of education and mental health supports in empowering participants during the reintegration process. Without addressing these barriers, individuals may continue to face challenges in securing essential resources and support services, impacting their long-term prospects for successful reintegration and rehabilitation.

***“Significant in helping me stay grounded during stressful times.”***

Prosper Participant

# FINDINGS

## Theme #3: Program Evaluation for Data-Driven Systemic Reform

The importance of program evaluation and research emerged as another theme to facilitate data-driven systemic reform advancing equitable outcomes for people impacted by incarceration and having firearm-related charges. Program participants highlighted the importance of research in capturing their lived experiences to inform program development and policy change, as they felt many existing programs available to them are not practical or useful. This speaks to the importance of centering the needs and lived experiences of racialized people to create and sustain culturally reflective and responsive programs and services to improve reintegration and reduce recidivism (Roderique, 2019).

Overall, ongoing evaluation and research are essential for informing program development and policy changes to advance equitable outcomes, led by racialized voices who are disproportionately impacted by incarceration. Enhancing the types of supports available to individuals with firearm-related charges while incarcerated and continued post-release within community settings can contribute to more effective reintegration and in the long-term reducing recidivism.

***"The fact I am on house arrest, and I can actually go to work... There's no better. It's helped me and my mental health a lot. Getting out and then actually being able to 'get out', you know."***

Prosper Participant

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## **Recommendation #1: Strengthen Access to Case Management and Provide Funding and Resources for Program Sustainability**

The study revealed that the provision of intensive case management was instrumental in facilitating successful reintegration by addressing complex needs of clients and building trust between program participants and caseworkers. Therefore, there is a need for further investments to create access to case management including the provision of adequate funding, resources, training, and support for caseworkers. It is recommended that more long-term funding be allocated by all three levels of government in Canada (municipal, provincial, and federal) to support programs such as Prosper and make it an integral part of working with probation and parole officers in community settings to create caring conditions for more effective reintegration. Training of staff providing case management services should include specialized topics such as trauma-informed care, anti-Black racism, mental health support, and conflict resolution.

***"I feel like my caseworker has a lot of knowledge on mental health and as a result I am coping better with my anxiety. I see her like a godmother, kind of, you know."***

Prosper Participant

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## **Recommendation #2: Mitigate Systemic Barriers in Accessing Housing, Education, and Employment Opportunities**

The research project highlighted various systemic barriers that individuals with firearm-related charges face when attempting to transition to community. These include limited access to stable housing, education upgrading, and employment opportunities. This was further perpetuated by stigma of being incarcerated and discrimination from having a criminal record. These systemic barriers hindered the successful reintegration of participants leading to a higher likelihood of recidivism. It is recommended that Prosper works in partnership with other organizations, stakeholders, and all three levels of government to advocate for policy changes and systemic reforms. The creation of a coalition related to creating pathways for more effective access to stable housing, education, and employment would be a good starting point. The respective coalitions made up of leaders from various sectors would advocate for systemic changes to ensure people with criminal records are not discriminated against and can get better access to opportunities.

***“My caseworker hooked me up with John Howard Society [community agency], which is amazing because I now have access to stable housing, which I didn’t think I was going to be able to do before, or I thought it was going to take years. They also supported me with grocery shopping and stuff once I was out.”***

Prosper Participant

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## **Recommendation #3: Invest in Program Evaluation through Coordinated Data Sharing between Institutions**

While Prosper has been successful in supporting participants, there is a need for ongoing research to identify long-term outcomes associated with effective reintegration practices and correlations with recidivism, with considerations for race and socio-economic status (Government of Canada, 2022; Public Safety Canada, 2022; Rudin, 2008; Sharpe, 2022). This would require commitment from the institutions themselves to work with community agencies and various levels of government to share data to track recidivism over time and identify root causes associated with criminality and firearm possession (McMurtry & Curling, 2008).

***“Usually when you’re in jail, you’re very stressed out because of things that are going on. Definitely caseworkers helped me by just having someone to talk to.”***

Prosper Participant

# LEARNING & NEXT STEPS

Prosper has been successful in effectively supporting individuals with firearm-related charges in Ontario since 2018 through its throughcare model. Findings from interviews reveal a compelling positive correlation between participation in the program and enhanced well-being and more effective reintegration among individuals with firearm-related charges. The high percentage of clients who were released back into community who did not reincarcerate speaks to the efficacy of the program (9 out of 25 were reincarcerated representing a 64% efficacy rate). Moreover, the program's personalized support structure facilitated a smoother transition back into the community post-release, empowering participants to navigate complex systems with greater ease and confidence. Through tailored interventions and ongoing assistance, Prosper not only addresses immediate needs but also equips participants with the skills and resources necessary for long-term success and integration into society. The themes explored highlight the complex and multifaceted nature of the challenges faced by individuals with firearm-related charges, emphasizing the need for tailored and comprehensive supports provided by caseworkers with community connections. Additionally, the systemic barriers and challenges identified highlight the need for sustained advocacy and policy reform to create better access to stable housing, education, and employment opportunities.



# LEARNING & NEXT STEPS

Overall, the findings not only contribute to the larger literature around supporting people with firearm-related charges in the Canadian context, which is very limited, but it also identifies systemic gaps where tangible actions and interventions can be implemented to reduce recidivism. Prosper and its components can serve as a best-practice model in Canada and internationally to support individuals with firearm-related charges to facilitate their reintegration, personal development through capacity building, and overall well-being. The findings have significant implications for policymakers and practitioners working in the field of criminal justice, sociology, education, and public health as they highlight the need for more comprehensive and coordinated support systems to address challenges faced by individuals during incarceration and post-release as part establishing continuity of care through culturally reflective and responsive programs and services.

*“I mean it’s important because when you’re in jail, you’re surrounded by your thoughts 24/7, you know, it’s not like you can’t talk to the other people cause they’re going through their stuff as well like mental health. So, the caseworkers show up for you. They visit you or answer your phone calls and help by just talking it out and support you with coming up with positive ways to deal with your problems.”*

Prosper Participant

Thank you to the 29 active program participants, eight family members of program participants, four community partners who supported participants through partnerships, as well as the three case workers who took the time to share their experiences with Prosper.

**THANK YOU.**