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Amadeusz's Prosper: Effective Reintegration of Adults Facing Firearm-Related Charges in Ontario, Canada

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ABSTRACT

This study evaluates the impact of Amadeusz' Prosper program which supports individuals with firearm-related charges between the ages of 18 to 29 in Ontario, Canada. Prosper offers intensive case management through caseworkers who co-create tailored support plans with participants based on their immediate needs and long-term goals. The program supports individuals during incarceration and post-release once back in community. This study engaged 44 participants through interviews conducted between October 2022 and April 2023. Participants included program beneficiaries (n=29), family members (n=8), community partners (n=4), and caseworkers (n=3). Intersectionality and Critical Race Theory paradigms were applied as part of data analysis to uncover the program's impact, strengths, and barriers in implementation. Results showed a correlation between the program and positive outcomes in personal development, well-being, and reintegration of participants. Overall, the study contributes to filling in the research gap offering nuanced insights into how to support individuals with firearm-related charges in Canada as part of offering more effective reintegration supports and reducing recidivism.

Keywords: recidivism, case management, reintegration, firearm-related charges, and throughcare model

INTRODUCTION

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.

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.

Overall, the study contributes to filling in the research gap offering nuanced insights into how to support individuals with firearm-related charges in Canada as part of offering more effective reintegration supports and reducing recidivism. This is an area where there is limited literature available due to inaccessibility to such participants as well their lack of trust. Many are racialized and due to negative experiences within the justice system are cautious who and how they share their lived experiences.

Increased Violence Trends in Canada with a Focus on Homicides and Firearm Possession

This subsection provides an overview of the Canadian context with a particular focus on gun-related homicides and rates of violence. The Year of the Gun was particularly significant in Toronto in 2005 with a total of 232 shootings, 196 people shot, and 55 homicides (Crichlow, 2014; Eizadirad, 2016; James, 2012). This trend worsened in 2018 with 428 shootings. The average age linked to gun violence in Toronto was 25 between 2015 and 2020, but in 2021 that average dropped to 20 years of age (Carter, 2022). Yet, Toronto is not alone in experiencing gun violence (Khenti, 2013; Olivia, 2022; Sharpe, 2022; Waller, 2019). It is a problem in many urban cities in North America and internationally.

Data collected by Statistics Canada (2023) shows that racialized people, and by extension racialized communities, are disproportionately impacted by violence, particularly as victims of homicides (see Table 1).

Table 1: The number of homicides in Ontario by visible minority group, 2019-2022.

	2019	2020	2021	2022	Total homicide victims	
Racialized identity group	123	88	139	137	487	46%
Black	69	46	75	74	264	25%
Rest of the population	126	143	130	149	548	51%
Unknown racialized identity group	4	12	12	2	30	3%
Total number of homicides	253	243	281	288	1065	100%

Between 2019 and 2022, 487 out of 1065 homicides in Ontario occurred to racialized people. Furthermore, "among cleared homicides, police services reported that there were 90 youths

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accused of homicide in 2022 [nationally in Canada], compared with 33 in 2021 and an average of 39 over the previous 10 years" with many of the cases involving firearms (Statistics Canada, 2023, para. 9). It is important to note that homicide is by far the costliest offence ranging between $4.8 to $5.9 million dollars in direct and indirect costs to taxpayers based on 2014 estimates (Public Safety Canada, 2015).

Mitigating the Root Causes of Violence and Firearm Possession

The goal of Prosper is to reduce the person's involvement in future violence and crime by addressing the evidence-based risk and protective factors for crime and violence. To understand the root causes of violence and firearm possession, one must understand the terminology of risk factors. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2020), "Risk factors are characteristics linked with youth [and adult] violence, but they are not direct causes of youth [and adult] violence. A combination of individual, relationship, community, and societal factors contribute to the risk of youth violence" (para. 1). On the other hand, protective factors are conditions or people that "may lessen the likelihood of youth [or adult] violence victimization or perpetration" (para. 7) by deterring or mitigating the negative impact of risk factors. The extent that one is likely to become involved with violence and firearm possession is a game of probabilities involving the intersection of risk factors and exposure to protective factors.

Several risk factors, at the individual and community level, contribute to the likelihood of obtaining and using firearms. These factors include issues with mental health, substance abuse, delinquent behaviours, academic performance, victimization, and lack of pro-social relationships (Canadian Civil Liberties Association, 2014; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022; James, 2012; Khenti, 2013; Toronto Youth Equity Strategy, 2014; Vitopoulos et al., 2019). Socioeconomic disparities, lack of access to opportunities, and exposure to community violence play pivotal roles correlating strongly with higher firearm involvement among adolescents and young adults (Block & Galabuzi, 2011; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022; Colour of Poverty, 2019; McMurtry & Curling, 2008; Roderique, 2019; Sharpe, 2022; Williams et al., 2013). Additionally, negative peer influences can significantly heighten the chances of firearm possession (Helpguide, 2022; Williams et al., 2013). Family dynamics, especially the presence of firearm access at home without proper storage or supervision, can also increase the probability of firearm involvement. Psychological factors such as a history of trauma, substance abuse, or mental health disorders contribute to the risk of gravitating towards firearms as a means of protection or expressing aggression as a form of resistance or wanting to be heard (Black Legal Action Centre, 2022; Olivia, 2022; Parsaud, 2021; Toronto Youth Equity Strategy, 2014; VoicEd Radio, 2023). Factors such as early childhood trauma, childhood adversity, maltreatment, and insufficient attention are also associated with an increased risk of criminal involvement, with the potential for intergenerational impacts (Eizadirad, 2022; Parsaud, 2021). Addressing these multifaceted risk factors through targeted interventions and community-based programs remains crucial in mitigating involvement with firearms and reducing recidivism (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022; Toronto Neighbourhood Centres, 2020).

Overview of Prosper and Its Development

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).

At the onset, two caseworkers were hired and trained by Amadeusz, who leveraged the work of existing networks to support young people who are most vulnerable to serious violence and crime. Caseworkers supported participants during three phases: court/sentencing, incarceration, and release back to the community. The caseworker also served as advocates for participants ensuring coordination of opportunities and access to relevant programs and services, particularly culturally reflective ones, to meet their needs. Caseworkers connected with participants weekly via phone or in-person from 2018 to 2022 which included navigating the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. Caseworkers facilitated continued support through transfers to varying institutions, recognizing that some members may be reincarcerated and it is important for the continuity of support to be available to them. See Appendix I titled "Journey Map for Amadeusz Prosper Program Participants" for more details and explanation of the specific project components.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK, METHODOLOGY, AND DATA COLLECTION

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 4-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 actives during the time of the research project. Non-active participants refer 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. 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 for their age, race, and year enrolled in the program), 8 family members of program participants, 4 community partners who supported clients through partnerships, as well as 3 caseworkers providing direct supports to program participants. 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 contributing to this trend (Owusu-Bempah & Jones, 2023).

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Table 1: Demographics of Prosper Research 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 and Indigenous	2020
27	24	Black	2021
28	26	Black	2021
29	33	Black	2021

Critical Race Theory (CRT) and intersectionality were employed as theoretical frameworks (Cho et al., 2013; Lopez, 2003) to analyze responses from interviews and provide a nuanced understanding of the lived experiences of racialized individuals with firearm-related charges. CRT, pioneered by legal scholars, posits that racism is not merely individual acts of prejudice but rather often embedded within the social fabric of institutions and structures (Delgado & Stefancic, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 2009). Intersectionality, conceptualized by Kimberle Crenshaw, highlights the dynamic and interconnected nature of social identities emphasizing how they intersect and diverge to shape individuals' lived experiences relative privilege, oppression, and power (Cho et al., 2013; Reece, 2020). By employing CRT and intersectionality, the study delves into the systemic barriers faced by individuals with firearm-related charges, acknowledging how race intersects with their experiences, leading to the overrepresentation

of Indigenous and Black identities at all levels within the justice system in Canada (Black Legal Action Centre, 2022; Canadian Civil Liberties Association, 2021; Chan et al., 2017; Colour of Poverty, 2019; Eizadirad & Chambers, 2021; Government of Canada, 2023; Government of Canada, 2022; Reece, 2020; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). As Reece explains it,

> *In Canada, Indigenous people represent only about 5 per cent of the general population but as of January 2020, they accounted for 30.4 per cent of the overall federal prison population; even more startling is that Indigenous women account for 42 per cent of federally incarcerated women. Black people in Canada have not fared any better…..While making up 3 per cent of the general Canadian population, Black people account for 10 per cent of the federal prison population and are subject to nearly 15 per cent of all use-of-force incidents. (p. 3)*

By centering the research paticipants' racialized experiences, the narratives shed light on where there are existing gaps and how structural inequities and systemic discrimination have impacted the participant's lack of access to support services and gravitated them towards firearm possession.

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 do not have to answer questions they are not comfortable with and can end the interview 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.

Research participants were provided with a $50 gift card as a token of appreciation for their time and sharing their lived experiences.

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, 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.

EMERGING THEMES AND FINDINGS

Responses were transcribed and coded to examine the data through thematic analysis (Clarke & Braun, 2017; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Thematic analysis is a qualitative research method that involves identifying patterns and themes within the data, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of the experiences and perspectives of the participants. Participants were asked questions about the impact of Prosper on their wellbeing and success. This encompassed exploration of types of supports needed and how it facilitated their personal development, well-being, and transition back into community post-release. Other research questions centered on

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identifying the strengths of the program which included capturing perspectives of caseworkers, program partners, and family members. Lastly, some of the questions focused on identifying barriers experienced by program participants and other stakeholders with delivery of the program.

The responses were coded using key words related to incarceration, trauma, supports, wellbeing, education, program delivery, community transition, and mental health. The codes were then grouped and organized into meaningful interconnected categories that evolved into themes reflecting the big ideas that reoccurred through saturation (Clarke & Braun, 2017; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Secondary analysis occurred after reviewing frequency and context of identified codes to analyze if other key words and phrases emerged (Clarke & Braun, 2017). Themes that emerged included the benefits of intensive case management, barriers in program delivery and transition from incarceration to community, and evaluation for research and data-driven policy reform. In the following subsections, the themes are discussed with more depth supported with direct quotes from the research participants.

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 9 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. As one program participated explained, "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." Another participant highlighted the transformative effect of the support on their reintegration journey: "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." Other participants highlighted the importance of having a supportive caseworker who can provide guidance and assistance in navigating the challenges of reintegration stating, "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." These quotes underscore the vital role of intensive case management support, demonstrating the positive impact on the lives of participants including on their education goals and mental health while incarcerated and post-release as part of transition to community.

Development of trust between caseworkers and participants is critical in constructing a meaningful relationship, which is a process that can take time. This aligns with Critical Race Theory which centres the experiences of minoritized identities. Ensuring caseworkers are people with community connections helped facilitate meaningful rapport, respect, and relationships between caseworker and participants. One program participant explained the importance of trust by stating, "The caseworkers actually try to understand the situation and actually try to find the best way to solve it. Even a lot of the times better than I would have taken

it, and they're really supportive with lots of knowledge related to mental health and education supports" Participants repeatedly reported that their caseworkers were knowledgeable and approachable which helped cope or overcome challenges they faced. They appreciated the genuine relationships developed with caseworkers through consistent interactions on a weekly basis. One participant explained the impact as "Significant in helping me stay grounded during stressful times". Another person echoed similar sentiments stating, "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". Another participant explained the powerful impact of the relationship reiterating, "In the negative environment of being in jail, prosper staff are like a bright light."

Overall, as a reoccurring theme participant felt that Prosper case workers genuinely cared about them and their wellbeing. Many program participants emphasized the positive impact of accessing continuous support during stressful times. They noted that the program connects them to educational and employment services, helps develop their resumes, and assists in planning for their future related to housing and getting a job. One participant noted,

> *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.*

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.

Insights from community partners and family members interviewed echo the benefits of intensive personalized case management, emphasizing the importance of tailored supports facilitated by sharing of critical information. One partner highlighted the ease of collaboration with the caseworker stating, "By getting someone that's already on the inside, it makes it easier to communicate more effectively with the client, due to the trust and rapport already established". Another partner stated, "When I needed some documentation that was critical to the report for the courts to support the client and their sentencing, the caseworker assisted me and enhanced my ability to obtain that information on behalf of the client". Furthermore, one partner explained the benefits of clients having access to a caring caseworker and how the courts perceive that: "It definitely helps for bail to demonstrate that the person has access to supports and not just left to be on their own to figure things out". Similarly, family members also emphasized the pivotal role of caseworkers. One family member stated, "The caseworker

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has been amazing and greatly contributed to my son coping better with incarceration." These quotes highlight the positive impact of the caseworker's involvement in the family's life and on the participants 's mental health. Without adequate support, individuals may face challenges in their reintegration process, which if unaddressed, can contribute to a higher risk of recidivism.

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). From a CRT perspective, it is important to listen to the narratives of racialized identities which speak to where there are systemic barriers and consequentially explore how they can be mitigated for system improvements (Owusu-Bempah & Jones, 2023). 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). One participant explained the struggle to find affordable housing stating, "It is hard to find a place to live, especially when you have a criminal record. A lot of places don't want to rent to you, and if they do, the rent is much higher. It's a struggle." Other participants expressed similar challenges associated with the stigma of having a criminal record expressing, "It's hard to find a job. People judge you and don't want to give you a chance when you have a record," and "A lot of employers won't even consider you, even if you are qualified for the job." These 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. As one caseworker explained,

> *We don't have the ability to say 'Ok, here, like we have housing services ready for you'. I find that access to stable housing is a major issue. We can provide the most intensive care for them, connect them to employment services, all of these things, but if they have nowhere to call home when they get out, a lot of times they revert back to the lifestyle that they were in, because that's all they have to rely on to survive.*

Another caseworker echoed similar sentiments explaining that, "It is a major challenge getting people on housing waiting lists when they are incarcerated. Incarceration a barrier within itself."

Prosper's emphasis on employment assistance was also frequently mentioned by program participants and greatly appreciated. As one participant explained, "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 employment." The participants acknowledged the efforts of caseworkers in reaching out

to them, even when they were unable to seek help themselves, highlighting the caseworkers' commitment to providing essential support during challenging circumstances. This proactive engagement helped built trust between the caseworkers and the program participants echoing the earlier theme. One participant emphasized the importance of having someone who can listen to their concerns and help them navigate their fears:

> *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.*

The caseworkers also acknowledged that one of systemic barriers for reintegration are societal stereotypical labels placed upon individuals who are incarcerated or people with criminal records. The caseworkers emphasized that although they are not able to immediately solve many of the challenge's participants are facing such as immediate access to housing, they show up for them as their advocate and provide a consistent source of support, which many of them have never experienced before. As one caseworker explained, "I feel like it's important to show them that we care because society has turned their back on them and has placed labels upon them."

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). Community partners echoed how the caseworkers help coordinate various entities that often work in silos. As one partner explained, "One of the things that is critically important is the coordination of service providers and supports as they often work in isolation. They're not joined and they're not working in partnership". One mother spoke about how the lack of coordination of support services failed in supporting her son with their mental health needs contributing to multiple suicide attempts: "He's tried to commit suicide twice and there was not enough help out there for him. The system failed him with supporting his needs". This quote 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.

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

The importance of program evaluation and research emerged as another theme to facilitate

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data-driven systemic reform advancing equitable outcomes for people impacted by incarceration and having firearm-related charges. One program participant emphasized the significance of continuous evaluation by stating, "It's important to always be evaluating the program and looking for ways to improve it. There's always room for improvement, and I think it's important to be open to feedback and suggestions from participants." Furthermore, a program partner interviewed stressed the importance of research to measure the program's effectiveness: "It's important to do research on programs like this to see if they're actually effective in helping people. It's important to know what works and what doesn't, so that we can help more people by ensuring the program receives funding and resources that they need." 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. As one participant explained, "It's important to look at what works and what doesn't work in terms of reintegration programs. There is often a long waiting list for programs while incarcerated and many programs that exist are not that good or a one size fits all". 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).

Caseworkers often elicited feedback from program participants through their weekly meetings, demonstrating a commitment to program enhancement. One participant was very pleased with the process stating:

> *I couldn't really come up with anything negative, like criticism, even though I'm sure you guys would like anything that could build it better. It's a pretty good program. You help facilitate with school and with outside resources which is very helpful.*

Caseworkers also highlighted the impact of institutional barriers on the reintegration process explaining, "Communication and visits are sometimes a challenge as they are impacted by lockdowns leading to losing momentum on building trust and relationship with your clients." Another caseworker explained how the operations of incarceration facilities often creates extra layers of barriers for communicating with program participants: "The context of working in an institution is a barrier within itself. Institutional restrictions often control when you can meet clients, where, and how long you can communicate which has its challenges." Yet, caseworkers adapted to changing circumstances to support participants. For example, during COVID-19 caseworkers prioritized supporting participants more remotely as well as supporting their families due to visitation restrictions. It was a time where having someone to talk to was very important to support their mental health, especially for incarcerated participants.

Program partners and family members interviewed also shared a desire to invest in data-driven evaluation to measure Prosper program impact and and its long-term efficacy with considerations for adequate resource allocation for sustainability. As one community partner stated, "We have to collect data to inform how we provide service and ensure it is sustainable". Another program partner stated the importance of listening to people who are directly impacted by incarceration to identify where improvements can be made and in what ways: "We have to listen to the incarcerated population more. Many service providers are saying they're

doing things for their clients but sometimes there are gaps between what they say and what they do." 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.

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, ant-Black racism, mental health support, and conflict resolution.

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.

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).

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CONCLUSION AND 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.

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.

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Appendix I- Journey Map for Amadeusz Prosper Program Participants

Prosper participants will not all follow the same paths in a linear progression. The table below outlines a general guideline for participants who are part of the program for approximately one year and how they are supported in different ways to meet their needs and long-term goals.

Outputs	Short-Term Outcomes (during project)	Medium-Term Outcomes (1 to 12 months post-release)	Long-Term Outcomes (1-year post-release)
Initial stage - Needs assessment - Co-construct plan of support - Relationship building - Provide tools, resources, and activities to manage emotions and positively cope with stressor e.g. books, inspirational text etc. - Emotional support - Family support - Education	Participants start to develop relationship with an adult ally as a caseworker. Participants have increased resources to manage mental health needs. Participants have increased access to education.	Participants have access to a positive support system. Participants have increased access to community supports to help them make a successful transition to their community. Participants achieve academic success. Participants are connected to relevant community programs	Participants have consistent, caring adults in their lives. Participants are physically, mentally, and spiritually healthy. Participants have healthy family relationships. Participants have increased education potential. Participants have increased employment potential and working towards gaining
Middle stage	Participants gain life skills (e.g. goal		

- Review plan of support and update accordingly - Life skills e.g. goal setting and emotion regulation - Provide tools, resources, and activities to manage emotions and positively cope with stressor e.g. books, inspirational text etc - Emotional support - Family support - Provide information on programs and services inside the institution -Education opportunities - Advocating for issues the participant may be dealing with - Offer peer mentorship	setting and conflict resolution). Participants learn about services and supports available to them in their community and beyond. Participants have increased access to education. Participants have more hope for the future.	and services for employment, training, and/or housing. Participants know about and easily navigate resources in their community.	the skills and resources needed to develop a successful career or business. Increased economic opportunity and attachment to the workforce. Participants have stable housing. Participants have established and maintaining positive community connections.
Approaching Release - Review plan of support and update accordingly - Seek housing opportunities if required - Provide information on accessing any other basic needs (e.g. food, transportation, and medicine) - Connect to relevant organization and agencies for income - Connect to employment - Connect to training - Coordinate peer mentorship - Connect to relevant community programs and services	Participants have increased access to employment or training. Participants have increased access to housing. Participants have increased access to basic needs. Participants have increased access to relevant community programs and services. Participants have increased access to education.		