Barriers to Reentry Success Inventory

Third Edition

Administrator's Guide

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Introduction

The *Barriers to Reentry Success Inventory* (*BRSI*), Third Edition is a self-report assessment designed to measure the concerns and potential barriers faced by justice-involved individuals with regards to reentry. It is intended to be self-scored and self-interpreted without the use of any other materials, thus providing immediate results for the respondent and/or administrator. This brief guide is designed to assist counselors, administrators, and corrections personnel in administering the *BRSI*.

Theoretical Background

Nearly all justice-involved individuals are eventually released back into their community. Hopefully, these individuals will re-enter their communities and be successful, contributing members of society. Unfortunately, many returning citizens cannot make a successful transition and eventually return to prison. Liptak (2016) suggested that prisoners face many obstacles when they leave incarceration including employment, substance abuse, self-esteem, reconnecting with friends and family, and using new technology. Many returning citizens do not get an opportunity to think about and address their practical needs and concerns about reentering their communities. Instead, they simply rely on general ideas about the future and memories of their lives before being incarcerated.

According to the Centre for Justice and Reconciliation (2021) there are practical steps that could better prepare individuals for reentry. While these steps do not guarantee that returning citizens will succeed after release, this preparation will increase a returning citizen's chances for success upon reentering the community. These steps include helping returning citizens to:

Address Needs & Concerns:

Returning citizens face survival questions from the moment they leave prison, such as how to find food, where to go for lodging, and so forth. A clear plan gives these individuals time to settle into life outside of incarceration.

Make Plans:

Returning citizens face survival questions from the moment they leave prison, such as how to find food, where to go for lodging, and so forth. A clear plan gives these individuals time to settle into life outside of incarceration.

Locate Resources:

Identify resources available to returning citizens from non-governmental organizations, churches, government agencies etc. Make sure prisoners know the application procedures, hours of operation, location of offices, and qualifications for each.

Avoid Trouble:

Justice-involved individuals will confront familiar problems when they return to society. Help them identify friends, family members, locations, and circumstances likely to draw them into trouble, and develop strategies to avoid them.

Find Help:

Some problems require the help of people with special training. Help individuals who need it find treatment for mental health, addictions, medical conditions and so forth.

Costs of Unsuccessful Reentry

According to Nathan James (2015), recidivism is "the re-arrest, reconviction, or re-incarceration of an ex-offender within a given time frame." Because of systemic legal and societal barriers, once individuals are released, it is more difficult for them compared to the general populace to find gainful employment, secure a consistent source of housing, and generally function in society.

In the United States, after serving time in prison, individuals are released with significant and ongoing economic and societal obstacles that often prevent them from thriving, thus indirectly pushing them back to crime, and back into the prison system. While there are many organizations working to remove these obstacles, revisions in policy must occur before previously incarcerated individuals can have real opportunities that promote success and help to reduce recidivism.

The costs of unsuccessful re-entry and reincarceration negatively impacts communities, families, and individuals. Incarceration has disproportionately impacted minorities and individuals with low levels of education (Morenoff and Harding, 2014). For communities with high rates of removal and return of justice-involved individuals, this further produces immense social and economic disadvantages (Travis, Solomon & Waul, 2001). Evidence shows that the outcomes of corrections are not cost-effective and do not justify the costs to communities, families and individuals (Datchi, Barretti & Thompson, 2016).

Vishner and Travis (2003) suggested that there is a necessity for effective strategies which address the barriers that prevent previously incarcerated individuals from successfully reintegrating into their communities. Released individuals are disadvantaged educationally, economically and socially, which further perpetuates inequality. An approach to reducing recidivism and assisting previously incarcerated re-enter society successfully is corrections education, identification of needs and concerns about reentering society, and re-entry programming (Taliaferro, Pham, & Cielinkski, 2016). A focus on pre-release programs, which prepares individuals to be productive members of their communities, is essential. Providing incarcerated individuals with job and life skills, education programming, mental health counseling and addiction treatment will help overcome some of the challenges they face upon re-entering their communities. Research indicates that inmates who participate in correctional education programs are 43 percent less likely to re-enter prison (The U.S. Department of Justice, 2013).

Different efforts can be initiated to reduce barriers and improve re-entry of returning individuals. One way to do this is to address the concerns of returning citizens about to re-enter society. Individuals are burdened with a criminal record, no matter how minor the offense and face significant challenges reintegrating into communities. It is important that re-entry preparation begins on the first day of incarceration and continues without disruption into the community (APA, 2017). In order to ensure continuity of care, it is vital to prioritize information sharing between justice systems, communities, and physical and behavioral health providers (APA, 2017). It is important that services provided to incarcerated individuals specifically target their individual needs (Mallik-Kane, 2008). Effective re-entry practices recognize the important relationship that must be established between behavioral, physical, educational/vocational, and relational health (APA, 2017).

Early Release Planning Is Vital

Release planning fits into the broader process of reentry planning. Ideally, reentry planning should begin at the time of intake/admission and extends beyond the time of release to prepare individuals for long-term post-release success. Release planning represents a distinct component of the broader process of reentry planning, focusing on success at the moment of release and in the days and weeks that follow. Ideally, preparing for the moment of release will represent a natural phase in the progression from intake to reentry (Council of State Governments 2005; North Carolina Department of Corrections 2007).

For example, while the larger reentry plan may address long-term needs and concerns about employment, training and education, health and wellness, housing, and other post-release needs. Release planning often draws upon the assessments, resources and relationships developed during the course of a person's incarceration and in many respects, represents the bare minimum preparation that a Department of Corrections (DOC) and

other corrections agencies should engage in prior to an individual's release. For example, while New Jersey's reentry efforts (referred to as a transitional model made up of four phases) begin at intake, at six months prior to release prisoners engage in a series of workshops designed to prepare them for discharge. Several DOCs have implemented the National Institute of Correction's Transition from Prison to the Community (TPC) model to better prepare individuals for returning to the community. Under the TPC model, reentry also begins at intake (the institutional phase), but discharge planning, or planning for release, essentially begins after an assessment and classification have been completed and after the behavior and programming barriers have been outlined.

According to the National Institute of Correction's Transition from Prison to the Community, the three greatest needs and concerns of people leaving incarnation are housing, employment, and wellness needs like finding treatment programs. The task of preparing individuals for the challenges they will face outside of incarceration is a difficult one. While a comprehensive, holistic approach to reentry planning—addressing the needs of incarcerated persons from the moment of admission through the months following release—is clearly the "gold standard" toward which the field is progressing, a critical step in this process that has until now received relatively little attention deals with the preparation of an inmate for the hours and days immediately following their release from prison. A concerns-based approach appears to be crucial in successful re-entry to the community. Without access to food, clothing, shelter, transportation, personal identification, and other key necessities, formerly incarcerate individuals may see no other option than to return to illegal activities in order to meet their needs.

Needs and Concerns of People Returning to the Community

Corrections agencies must prepare returning citizens for life when they reenter their community and work hand-in-hand with community service providers and agencies to ensure that returning citizens receive needed resources and guidance after release. These efforts may make the difference between recidivism and successful transition to the community. Eight fundamental needs confronting exiting individuals, as well as the administrative challenges and opportunities facing corrections agencies in meeting these needs, are identified through a national survey of state correctional departments, a complementary scan of practice, and a literature review on the topic of release planning. Release planning must address the needs and concerns of people leaving incarceration and returning to the community. Some of these needs and concerns include the following:

Transportation

Help returning citizens evaluate whether they will have access to transportation to services, work, health and treatment facilities, and other locations mandated in their release plan.

Clothing, Food and Amenities

Help returning citizens identify sources of clean, appropriate clothing, and information regarding access to food resources.

Financial Resources

Help returning citizens access enough money to subsidize food, transportation, and shelter for life in the community.

Documentation

Provide returning citizens with a state-issued identification card and other necessary documentation.

Housing

Help returning citizens to identify safe, affordable places where they can stay in the days following release and verify that bed space is available.

Employment and Education

Ensure that appropriate assessments and referrals have been made to facilitate the process of finding and keeping a job. Ensure they have access to awards and achievements for any education and training completed while incarcerated.

Health Care

Conduct an assessment of an individual's mental and physical healthcare status and needs prior to release and provide the individual with contact information of a health care facility/provider in the community they plan to reside in to ensure continuity of care. For individuals with substance abuse or mental health barriers, schedule an appointment with a counselor in the community prior to release.

Support Systems

Provide returning citizens with a handbook listing community resources and contact family members (when appropriate) to notify them of the release date and release plan. For returning citizens without family members, community or faith-based organizations should be contacted to provide support at the time of release and in the days immediately following their return to the community.

A May 2018 U.S. Department of Justice report on state justice-involved individual recidivism followed a sample of the 412,731 individuals released by 30 states in 2005. Here are the results:

- The 401,288 state justice-involved individuals released in 2005 had 1,994,000 arrests during the 9-year period, an average of 5 arrests per released prisoner. Sixty percent of these arrests occurred during years 4 through 9.

- An estimated 68% of released prisoners were arrested within 3 years, 79% within 6 years, and 83% within 9 years.

- Eighty-two percent of prisoners arrested during the 9-year period were arrested within the first 3 years.

- Almost half (47%) of prisoners who did not have an arrest within 3 years of release were arrested during years 4 through 9.

- Forty-four percent of released prisoners were arrested during the first year following release, while 24% were arrested during year 9.

Men and women released from correctional facilities receive minimal preparation and inadequate assistance and resources, which makes their re-entry into communities challenging (Visher & Mallik-Kane, 2007). A criminal conviction limits employment prospects, public housing assistance and social services (Coates, 2015). Even having a minor criminal record creates substantial barriers and far-reaching collateral consequences. It is important to transform the current criminal justice system to shift the focus from reincarceration to successful re-entry into their communities. Socioeconomic factors play an important role in determining successful re-entry outcomes.

The Greatest Need – Hope

Liptak and Scallon (2021) presented a theory, called the Hierarchy of Hope, that can be used with citizens returning to their communities after being incarcerated. The theory suggests that it is to instill hope after turning points that force people to pivot and change directions. Turning points, also referred to as pivotal events, represent essential changes in your life. These are significant events that occur in your life that require you to turn, pivot, and think in new and innovative ways. Examples of turning points include returning to the community after incarceration, graduating from school, getting your first job, getting married or divorced, losing a loved one, having a child, getting promoted, global crises, and environmental emergencies. They suggest that you can successfully adjust to turning points by thinking flexibly, generating new possibilities, searching for alternative lifestyle habits to adjust to change, and generating hope.

The Hierarchy of Hope helps people draw on their experiences of change to constructively identify new goals,

create new meaning and purpose, and avoid falling back into habitual, rigid thinking patterns. Scallon and Liptak (2021) suggested that hope is one of the most powerful feelings that people can possess. For most people, hope creates possibilities and options, instills a sense of expectation and anticipation that what you want can come true, empowers you, and provides you with the confidence to try and ultimately succeed. Scallon and Liptak say that people use a process that is based on satisfying specific needs and generating hope for the future.

Need for the *BRSI*

As can be seen from this short review of the literature, there is tremendous need for an assessment that helps correctional administrators and staff identify returning citizens' concerns about their reentry. Many reentry programs and initiatives use a wide variety of assessment procedures to help profile an individual's needs, including psychological batteries and aptitude tests. However, there has never been an assessment that helps individuals begin thinking about reentry when they are first admitted to prison, nor one that helps individuals in a pre-release status develop an individualized reentry plan. That is the main purpose of the BRSI.

The *BRSI* is designed to meet the need for a brief assessment instrument to help returning citizens identify the needs, barriers, and skills deficits they must overcome in order to successfully reintegrate into society. Some of the assumptions underlying the development of the *BRSI* include:

- Correctional programming should be designed to remove barriers to successful community reintegration.
- Returning citizens need to develop competencies for independent living upon release from incarceration.
- Reentry programs should be designed to help returning citizens live independently, find steady employment, secure and maintain housing, meet basic needs, maintain physical and mental health, use leisure-time effectively, assume family responsibilities, and become digitally literate.
- As is advocated by the United States Department of Justice, pre-release planning and reentry programming should start the first day of incarceration and should include an assessment of each individual's needs and concerns.

The *BRSI* is intended for use by correctional treatment specialists, correctional counselors, pre-trial services officers, probation officers, parole officers, juvenile court counselors, correctional facility administrators, rehabilitation counselors, pre-release counselors, residential placement counselors, and residential re-entry center counselors. No special training is required to administer or interpret the assessment.

Description of the *BRSI*

The *BRSI* has been designed for ease-of-use. It is simple to take and can be easily scored and interpreted. Each *BRSI* inventory booklet contains 72 statements that represent concerns about being released from prison and reentering the community in general, and the working world specifically. The *BRSI* also includes scoring directions, a profile guide, an interpretation guide, and a success planning guide for easy administration. Each of the items has been grouped into scales that represent a broad range of returning citizen concerns. The scales on the *BRSI* include:

Scale 1—Basic Needs:
High scores on this scale indicate that test takers need help meeting their basic needs. They may need assistance in finding a place to live after they are released, being able to afford food for themselves and their family, purchasing clothes for work, identifying affordable medical and dental care, making enough money to survive, and finding or affording reliable transportation. They may not be aware of government agencies available to help them meet their basic needs and the needs of their family.

Scale 2—Job Search:

High scores on this scale indicate that test takers need help planning their job search. They need help organizing an effective job search campaign, learning more about how to network for employment, learning how to talk about their incarnation in interviews, exploring occupations of interest, using technology and the internet in their job search, and learning how to market themselves effectively despite their history.

Scale 3—Family:

High scores on this scale indicate that test takers are concerned about being dependable and reliable family members. They are concerned about how their family and friends will view them and about making up for lost time. They may need to learn how to communicate more effectively with friends and family, how to resolve conflicts, and how to be supportive when necessary. They They may also need to become aware of counseling and therapy services that can help them and their family.

Scale 4—Wellness:

High scores on this scale indicate that test takers are concerned about their general well-being after their incarceration. They are concerned about managing their time, being able to make effective decisions, overcoming substance abuse problems, getting help for mental health concerns, managing and dealing with anger and stress, and maintaining their confidence and a positive attitude despite being incarcerated. They need to uncover their purpose and spark to reconnect and reentry the community as a whole person. They may not be aware of the government agencies and services available to help them.

Scale 5—Career Development:

High scores on this scale indicate that test takers are concerned about how to develop their career after being incarcerated. They may not have defined a clear career path or started to investigate potential careers. They may also not know much about occupations that match their interests, skills, and personality. They may need help in exploring educational opportunities, ways to finance further education, and identify schools and colleges that will enhance their career development. They may need to set career goals and identify ways to meet those goals.

Scale 6—Digital Literacy:

High scores on this scale indicate that test takers are concerned about how to use technology when they return to their communities. They often do not have a plan for learning digital technology. They may not understand social media's power in educational contexts and professional networking. They may not realize the importance of protecting their online identity by managing privacy settings and reading privacy policies. They may also need to best understand how to safely use technology in their daily lives to help overcome any fears, such as being re-incarcerated. They may need help in using basic computer skills for everyday activities like searching for resources, e-mailing, texting, and analyzing information and data.

The *BRSI* can be administered to individuals or to groups. Since none of the items is gender-specific, the *BRSI* is appropriate for all currently incarcerated juveniles and adults , those housed in community corrections programs, or those in post-corrections assistance programs.

Changes to the Second Edition of the *BRSI*

Following are the major changes between the first edition and the second edition of the *BRSI*:

- Some items were moved to different scales on first assessment to enhance the inter-scale reliability. For example, #33 on Scale 1 (Basic Needs) of the first edition of the assessment was moved to #51 on Scale 4 (Wellness) of the second edition of the assessment.

- The name of the fourth scale, Lifeskills, was not considered by many users of the assessment to be an accurate descriptor of the item content for that scale. Therefore, the name of the scale was

changed to Wellness.

- Some items were very similar and were replaced with statements that were not duplicates. For example, #1 and #36 in the first edition were very similar, thus #36 was replaced with a different item.

- Several items were reported to be difficult because they were nebulous in nature. These items were replaced with more specific statements. For example, #25 (Being able to do what I'm good at) was replaced with "Learning more about jobs available to me."

- The pictures on the front of the assessment were removed because they were considered stereotypical and they were all related to occupations, even though the assessment measures a variety of concerns.

- Some items were added to represent concerns that have become more prominent for returning citizens. For example, "Obtain a driver's license/identification card" was added.

- The language was updated to be more inclusive of changes in modern families. For example, #44 was changed to "Relating with my partner and/or children better."

- The paragraphs in Step 4 were eliminated to reduce the reading level and reduce the amount of reading that is required to complete the assessment. The paragraphs that were duplicates of the bulleted items were either eliminated or changed to a bulleted item. In addition, some of the items in Step 4 were updated or eliminated and replaced by more critical concerns.

- The items on the assessment were revised to be more representative of today's society, such as the inclusion of more technology resources. The items also represented changes in a review of the research literature related to the transition of individuals from prison to the community.

- The assessment was subsequently tested to ensure the accuracy of the changes to the second edition.

Changes to the Third Edition of the *BRSI*

Following are the major changes between the first edition and the third edition of the assessment:

- The assessment name was changed from *Offender Reintegration Scale* (*ORS*) to *Barriers to Reintegration Success Inventory* (*BRSI*) in order to recognize a social justice shift present in today's society. The second edition of the assessment contained outdated, hurtful, and stigmatizing words and phrases. These words and phrases were updated to include more inclusive language.

- There may be references in this Administrator Guide to the *ORS* first edition or second edition for data and information sharing.

- Many items were changed to reduce the assessment's overall reading level. Care was taken to ensure that the meaning of the items did not change.

- A new review of the literature related to recidivism, preparing citizens for re-entry, and the importance of release planning was conducted and added to the administrator's guide.

- The entire assessment was revised to reflect changes in society. Therefore, language was changed to be more inclusive and less biased. For example, the word "offenders" was changed to "returning citizens."

- In the identification section of the assessment, "Phone" and "E-Mail" were deleted. These sections provided no vital information needed in generating norming data.

- The assessment was changed from a fold-out to booklet format. This change was made to make the assessment more user-friendly.

- The introductory statement for the items was changed from "My main concerns upon/since being released from prison are:" to "My main concerns about returning to my community include:" This wording change is more positive and stresses the importance of looking forward to returning to the community.

- Each item was edited to remove words that appeared biased and stereotypical. These words were replaced with more neutral, less biased, and more positive words. For example, #52 on the Wellness Scale read, "Manage my anger." This was considered stereotypical and was changed to "Manage my negative emotions."

- The assessment was subsequently tested to ensure the accuracy of the changes to the third edition.

- A sixth scale was incorporated into the third edition titled Digital Literacy. This scale was added to represent concerns related to an increase in technology in society. The next section describes the need to include a Digital-Literacy scale on the third edition of the assessment.

- The order of the scales on the third edition of the *BRSI* were revised from Basic Needs, Job Search, Family, Wellness, Career Development, and Digital Literacy to Basic Needs, Wellness, Family, Digital Literacy, Career Development, and Job Search. This change allows respondents to move from basic barriers to more advanced barriers.

Need for a Digital Literacy Scale

As the use of technology has increased in society, the need increases for people returning to their communities from incarceration to have digital literacy skills. Technology has transformed the way we approach most daily tasks, search for information, plan activities, and make appointments. Technology plays a role in how we apply for and perform on a job, communicate with friends and family, access government and other services, manage our finances, and make purchases, such as entertainment, food, and other goods. Technology also enables learning and retention of information. Recognizing the positive impact technology can have on education, President Obama, with the support of the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Educational Technology, developed the National Education Technology Plan. It outlines how an education system could use advanced technologies to support student learning regardless of backgrounds, languages, and disabilities. Other items outlined include the instruction and professional development of teachers, data collection and analysis, and program improvement.

While barriers, like security, exist, there are advances and opportunities for correctional facilities to prepare students for life in twenty-first century communities. This puts incarcerated individuals at a disadvantage in truly acquiring skills to successfully reentry their communities. Davis, Steele, Bozick, Williams, Turner, Miles, Saunders, & Steinberg (2014) suggested that the policies and practices of federal, state, and local corrections agencies, including the juvenile justice system, severely hinder the ability of correctional education programs to enable learning through technology. They state that the primary reason for a great amount of recidivism is that returning citizens lack the knowledge, training, and skills to support a successful return to communities. Trying to reduce such high recidivism rates is partly why states devote resources to educating and training individuals in prison. For example, according to a 2013 survey of state correctional education directors, although most states \offer students limited use of computers while incarcerated, less than half reported that one or more of their prisons provided students with off-line access to internet content and even fewer allowed restricted internet access.

The primary concern about adopting educational technology in corrections is the potential for security breaches. Other reasons include, but are not limited to, insufficient resources and staff capacity to purchase, implement, maintain, and monitor advanced technologies. Despite these legitimate concerns, a sea change is occurring in corrections. As advanced technologies are integrated into other areas of correctional facility life (e.g., family communications via e-mail and video conferencing, and access to health and treatment services via telemedicine), a growing number of corrections agencies and facilities and their education partners are exploring ways to securely provide education and training in various technological modalities.

Davis et al. (2014) found a 2013 survey of state correctional education directors was designed to assess the status of correctional education and the challenges states are facing. In addition to asking about the use of technology in correctional education, it documented programmatic concerns and trends. The survey was part of a larger, landmark study that found that individuals who participated in correctional education were less likely to recidivate and more likely to find employment upon release than non-participants. Also, the study found that for

every dollar spent on correctional education, there was a four-to-five-dollar cost savings.

Specifically, they are cautiously adopting advanced technologies to:

- Help prepare learners to join our globally networked society by developing and improving their computer and digital literacy skills, making educational gains around the clock through computer-assisted instruction, accessing college courses, and preparing for employment.

- Provide learners with access to online assessments (e.g., online high school equivalency tests and industry-recognized certification exams), and instructors and administrators with the ability to measure learner progress for program improvement purposes.

- Expand the professional development resources available to instructors and equip them with technology-based instructional tools (e.g., open educational resources [OERs], learning management systems, and flipped classrooms) to enhance the classroom experience.

- Support an education continuum for incarcerated individuals through data sharing, and aligning correctional-based education and training programs with those in the community; and

- Expand the reach of correctional education services to provide more incarcerated individuals with the knowledge and skills needed to obtain living wage employment, become productive members of society, and exit court supervision upon release.

- Help correctional education programs have a greater impact on recidivism rates. As documented by a recent meta-analysis of the effects of education on recidivism and post release employment outcomes for incarcerated adults, inmates who participated in correctional education programs were 43 percent less likely to return to prison than those who did not enroll (Davis et al. 2014). Advanced technologies could provide the means to expand correctional education services—to reach more students and to offer broader, more diverse curriculum—thereby further lowering recidivism rates.

- Ease the reentry process by allowing incarcerated individuals to prepare for release by researching employment opportunities; applying for jobs, financial aid, and benefits; enrolling in college; addressing outstanding legal issues; searching for and securing housing; and maintaining or developing personal relationships with their community support networks. Most, if not all, of these prerelease activities require some form of computer or telecommunication device and internet access.

According to Castek, Jacobs, Pendell, Pizzolato, Reder, and Withers (2015), there is a tremendous impact of digital literacy programs in correctional settings:

- Seeing themselves in a new light: Interviews with learners and mentors indicate that the impact is about more than learning how to create a resume or write a cover letter. It was also about discovering a new way of seeing oneself and seeing a future previously unimagined.

- Building courage: Many learners were initially fearful of computers and the internet. The program director suggests that going online allows these men to do things they otherwise would not be able to do, but the first step involves overcoming their fear.

- Developing self-efficacy and self-confidence: Through successes experienced with the support of mentors, the learners were able to see that they are capable of learning and using computers and the internet. They began to see themselves as competent individuals with potential.

- Becoming empowered: The mentors not only assisted by answering questions about the content being learned, they also offered encouragement and patience which helped the learners feel motivated and comfortable in their learning environment. The self-paced, online learning platform gave learners autonomy to choose the content they wished to engage with. They were empowered to cover the materials at their own pace within the framework of the one week they were in the computer lab.

- Building new relationships with family: Participants began to see how their newly gained knowledge of digital literacy could help them build relationships with members of their family,

and especially their children. As part of this, the learning extends to their families who experience pride, hopefulness, and the belief that their loved one is on the right track. The learners could see themselves as full members of their family who were loved, respected, and had something to contribute.

- Reduced recidivism: There has been a 47% reduction in recidivism since the reentry process was implemented at OPP. How much of this is a result of the digital literacy acquisition program is unknown.

Administration and Interpretation

The *BRSI* is self-administered, and inventory booklets are consumable. A pencil or pen is the only other item necessary for administering, scoring, and interpreting the print inventory. It is highly recommended that administrators take the assessment themselves ahead of time to better understand how to complete and score it.

The first page of the inventory contains spaces for normative data including Name and Date. Specific instructions for answering items on the *BRSI* are also included on the first page. Read the directions on the first page while all respondents follow along. Test administrators should ensure that each respondent clearly understands all of the instructions and the response format. Respondents should be instructed to mark all of their responses directly on the inventory booklet. Steps 1-3 of the *BRSI* profile can be completed in as little as 25 minutes. Steps 4 and 5 can be completed at the individual's pace in order to get the most out of the full assessment.

The *BRSI* uses a series of steps to guide the respondent. Responses are marked in Step 1. Respondents are asked to read each statement and then circle the numerical response that represents how concerned they are about the particular statement. Responses range from Great Concern (4) to No Concern (1). Step 2 provides instructions for scoring the assessment. Respondents simply add the total of the numbers they circled for each of the six color-coded sections. Step 3 helps respondents to profile and better understand their scores. Step 4 allows respondents to further interpret their scores on the *BRSI* and provides activities that can be used to help respondents overcome their barriers on each of the six scales. Step 5 helps respondents develop an action plan to ensure their success upon reentering their community.

Calculating and Profiling Scores for the *BRSI*

With the print version, the *BRSI* was designed to be scored by hand. All scoring is completed in the consumable inventory booklet. No other materials are needed to score or interpret the instrument. Respondents are asked to total the numbers they circled for each of the five sections in Step 1. These scores will range from 12 to 48. Respondents then will put that number in the box marked "Total" for each section. In Step 3, respondents transfer their scores from the six sections to the profile by circling their total score in each of the sections. This will allow respondents to easily compare their scores.

Interpreting *BRSI* Scores

The *BRSI* yields content-referenced scores in the form of raw scores. A raw score, in this case, is the total score of responses to each of the statements. The performance of individual respondents or groups of respondents can only be evaluated in terms of the mean scores on each of the scales.

For the *BRSI*, scores between 12 and 23 are LOW and indicate that the respondent is not very concerned about the items on that scale. If this is the case, the administrator may want to address issues related to these scales last. Scores between 24 and 36 are AVERAGE and indicate that the respondent is somewhat concerned about the items on that scale. Scores between 37 and 48 are HIGH and indicate that the respondent is very concerned about the items on that scale.

Respondents generally have one or more areas in which they score in the high or high-average categories. These are the areas that the respondent should begin gaining additional skills and getting the most assistance. In Step 4, respondents should complete the activities in those sections on which they scored the highest. Step 5 will help

reinforce those actions respondents need to engage in to be successful as they develop a personal plan for reentry.

The *BRSI* and its interpretations are based on self-reported data. The accuracy and usefulness of the information provided is dependent on the honest information that participants provide about themselves. Based on the interpretation of the *BRSI*, participants may verify some information that they already know or may uncover new information that might be keeping them from successfully reintegrating. Whatever the results of the assessment, encourage participants to talk about their results.

When counselors and administrators make initial contact with their clients, the client's greatest concerns should largely determine the focus and course of counseling. Assessment through the use of the *BRSI* will encourage the identification and verification of individual characteristics and attitudes. Then the results can be used to look beyond the participant's profile in order to facilitate meaningful learning experiences that will enhance self-awareness and lead to a more successful reentry.

The *BRSI* should be used to determine which barriers the participant is most motivated to overcome. Respondents who recognize their most pressing concerns are likely to participate actively in all phases of preparing for release. Respondents will feel like a part of the reintegration planning process, will be more motivated, and will feel better about achieving the desired results.

Illustrative Case Using the *BRSI*

James is a 41-year-old male finishing a five-year sentence in a state prison and is nervous about his release. His scores on the *BRSI* can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1: Profile Results for James	
Scale I: Basic Needs	41
Scale II: Wellness	32
Scale III: Family	31
Scale IV: Digital Literacy	35
Scale V: Career Development	35
Scale VI: Job Search	40

As can be seen from his results, James scored in the "High" range for the Basic Needs (41) and Job Search (40) scales. These are the areas in which James has the most concern. This is where his counselor, case worker, or parole officer would begin working with James.

Looking at Step 5 of the *BRSI*, Basic Needs, James wrote that he needed a job that had benefits so that he could stay healthy and get help for his depression. He also said that his family was living in low-income housing, and he would like to purchase a home. He said that he needed to learn how to manage money better and that he wanted to join a church upon release.

The counselor helped James to identify agencies in his community that he could contact after being released. The counselor also helped James develop better budgeting and money management skills and provided him with information about first-time home ownership, credit reports, and mortgages.

James also said that he was nervous about having to search for a job. He did not understand the use of technology in searching for a job, did not have a resume, and was unsure how to react in job interviews. The counselor helped James start to think about organizing a job search for when he leaves prison. The counselor also helped James with some instruction in effective interviewing skills and self-marketing techniques. The counselor provided examples of how to write an effective resume so that James could begin working on one. He also demonstrated how to access jobs on the internet and begin examining social media sites for job seekers.

James scored in the average range in the other four areas on the *ORS*. The counselor decided to initially help James in the areas he had the most concern and then move to the four areas where James had less concern.

When to Use the *BRSI*

The notion of pre-release programming beginning the day individuals are admitted to prison is a relatively new one. However, it is important that justice-involved individuals be allowed the time and resources necessary to prepare for a successful transition back into their community. With many current pre-release programs, the identification of barriers to reintegration and the need for assistance with these barriers comes too late in the process, often only 30 to 90 days before release.

Thus, the *BRSI* should ideally be completed when returning citizens are first admitted in the intake process. By completing the *BRSI*, counselors will be better able to develop an individualized release plan for each returning citizen. This release plan can then be used during the citizen's incarceration to help in the rehabilitation process. It can help counselors identify the programming that would be most helpful to each individual person. In a more traditional pre-release program (conducted just before the citizen is released), the results of the assessment can be used to help people confront their most pressing concerns. Therefore, rather than treating all people systematically, instruction can be individualized to meet each person's needs.

Citizens in work release programs may find the assessment especially useful as they can practice some of the skills emphasized by the *BRSI*. The *BRSI* can be administered upon the returning citizen's admission to the work release facility, and the results can be used by counselors to help returning citizens overcome their concerns and barriers in "real-life" situations. Work release programs provide an opportunity to overcome some of their barriers as they interact with community members. Again, the barriers that citizens are most concerned with should be the first that are addressed. For people on probation or parole, the *BRSI* can be used to track an individual's progress in attempts to reintegrate. Probation and parole officers can monitor a citizen's progress in overcoming barriers on the *BRSI*, or they can administer it and use it as an individualized post-release plan.

Finally, people in post-release status can use the results of the *BRSI* as a method for monitoring their own progress toward successful integration back into their community. They can use the results to ensure that they are taking the steps necessary to be successful.

Research and Development

This section outlines the stages involved in the development of the *BRSI*. It includes guidelines for development, item construction, item selection, item standardization, and norm development and testing.

Guidelines for Development

The *BRSI* was developed to fill the need for a quick, reliable instrument to help individuals identify their concerns about being released from incarceration and reintegrating into their community. The inventory consists of six scales, each containing 12 items that might be of concern after being released from prison. It also provides counselors, correctional treatment specialists, prison administrators, and rehabilitation specialists with information that they can use to help returning citizens develop a comprehensive reentry plan upon release. The *BRSI* was developed to meet the following guidelines:

- The instrument should measure a wide range of concerns. To help individuals identify their concerns about reentry, six scales were developed that were representative of the concerns returning citizens have about transitioning from prison back into society identified from the literature related to these individuals. A sixth scale, digital literacy, was later added to reflect the following societal changes:
    - Increased use of technology in society.
    - Increased need for people leaving prison and returning to society to be able to access and utilize this technology.

- - Increased concern by people leaving prison to learn effective digital literacy skills.
  - Increased concern by people leaving prison to learn effective digital literacy skills.
  - The instrument should be easy to use. The *BRSI* uses a four-point Likert question-answer format that allows respondents to quickly determine how concerned they are about a particular item. The format makes it easy to complete, score, and interpret the assessment.
  - The instrument should be easy to administer, score, and interpret. The *BRSI* utilizes a consumable format that guides the test-takers through the five steps necessary to complete the *BRSI*, identify scores for the six scales, learn more about their concerns about reentering society, and develop a comprehensive reentry plan for success in life and career.
  - The instrument should contain items that are applicable to returning citizens of all ages. Norms developed for the *BRSI* show an age range from 20-67. They reflect testing of individuals in both a pre-release and post-release status.

Scale Development

The author's primary goal was to develop an inventory that measures and identifies a returning citizens' concerns about their release and reintegration to be used as a means of developing an effective reentry plan. To ensure that the inventory content was valid, the author conducted a thorough review of the literature related to the topics of returning citizens, reentry, returning citizen reintegration programs, and barriers to returning citizen success. A variety of both academic and professional sources were used to identify the six areas of concern that make up the scales on the *BRSI*. Table 2 shows a comparison of the *BRSI* scales with critical release-planning concerns identified by the National Institute of Corrections.

Table 2: Six Areas of Individual Concern		
BRSI Scales	**Andrews & Banta (1994)**	**National Institute of Corrections**
Basic Needs	Community Resources	Transportation, Food, Clothing
Wellness	Life Skills	Health Care
Family	Family Issues	Support Systems
Digital Literacy	**	Education
Career Development	Career Planning	Financial Resources and Career
Job Search	Employability	Employment

**In the creation of the first edition of the *BRSI*, digital literacy was not considered a critical area of concern. With changes in society and the increasing use of technology, it is now considered a critical area of concern for people reentering society.

Item Selection

A large pool of items that were representative of the scales on the *BRSI* was developed and later revised. This enabled the elimination of items that did not correlate well. In developing items for the *BRSI*, the author used language that is currently being used in the literature written about returning citizen rehabilitation, reintegration, and programming. After the items were developed, they were reviewed and edited for clarity, style, and appropriateness for identifying concerns of these individuals. Items were additionally screened to eliminate any reference to sex, race, culture, or ethnic origin.

Item Standardization

The author identified adult prison populations to complete the *BRSI*. These populations completed drafts of the *BRSI* to gather data concerning the statistical characteristics on each of the items. From this research, a final pool of 12 concerns was chosen that best represented each of the six scales on the *BRSI*.

This initial research yielded information about the appropriateness of items for each of the *BRSI* scales, reactions of respondents concerning the inventory format and content, and reactions of respondents concerning the ease of administration, scoring, and profiling of the *BRSI*. Experts in the field of corrections were used to eliminate items that were too similar to one another. The data collected was then subjected to split-half correlation coefficients to identify the items that best represented the six scales on the *BRSI*. The items accepted for the final form of the *BRSI* were again reviewed for content, clarity, and style. Careful examination was conducted to eliminate any possible gender or racial bias.

Reliability

Reliability is often defined as the consistency with which a test measures what it purports to measure. Evidence of the reliability of the *BRSI* is presented in terms of reliability coefficients and interscale correlations. Tables 1 and 2 present both types of information. As can be seen in Table 3, the *ORS* showed very strong internal consistency validity with split-half correlations ranging from .87 to .94.

Table 3: Internal Consistency (Split-Half Correlations)	
Basic Needs*	.87**
Wellness*	.91**
Family*	.93**
Digital Literacy***	.89**
Career Development*	.88**
Job Search*	.94**

* N = 48 Adults (Original five scales)
***N = 35 Adults (Scale added to third edition)
** Correlation was significant at the 0.01 level

Table 4 shows the correlations among the *ORS* scales. The ORS showed very strong interscale correlations with the largest correlation being between the Job Search and Career Development scales (.564). This was expected because both of these scales deal with employability. The other interscale correlations were smaller, adding to the independence of each of the scales on the *ORS*.

Table 4: *ORS* Interscale Correlations (N=48)					
ORS Scales	**Basic Needs**	**Job Search**	**Family**	**Life Skills**	**Career Development**
Basic Needs	1	.386**	.063	.336*	.465**
Job Search		1	.392**	.116	.564**
Family			1	.501	.277
Wellness				1	.059
Career Development					1

*Correlation was significant at the 0.05 level
**Correlation was significant at the 0.01 level

Validity

Validity is often defined as the extent to which a test measures what it purports to measure. Evidence of validity for the *BRSI* is presented in the form of means and standard deviations for three different groups of individuals: those currently incarcerated, those in work release programs, and those recently released from prison. Table 5 shows the scale means and standard deviations for individuals currently incarcerated who completed the *ORS*. Current justice-involved individuals showed a great deal of concern in each of the five areas; all of their scores were in the "High Concern" range. They tend to be most concerned about Basic Needs (M = 42.27), followed by Family (M = 41.68) and Job Search (39.14). While incarcerated, individuals are less concerned about career development and wellness issues. This is different from the first edition when individuals currently in prison were most concerned about Family issues. It appears that now, these returning citizens are most concerned about meeting their most basic needs, getting medical care, housing and transportation.

Table 5: Means and Standard Deviations for Individuals Currently in Prison (N=167)		
Scales	**Mean**	**SD**
Basic Needs	42.27	7.2
Job Search	39.14	7.9
Family	41.68	6.2
Wellness	38.75	8.2
Career Development	37.24	7.7

For comparison, Table 6 shows the means and standard deviations for individuals currently enrolled in work release programs. They had similar concerns as the individuals who were currently incarcerated, but they still tend to be more concerned with Career Development (M = 43.78), and then Wellness (M = 41.24) and Family (M = 40.69). It could be generalized that since they were now in the workforce, career development issues came to the forefront. However, since they were currently engaged in a job-release program, job search was their least concern. These three High scores were the same three High score areas on the first edition of the *BRSI*.

Table 6: Means and Standard Deviations for Individuals Currently in Work Release (N=136)		
Scales	Mean	SD
Basic Needs	37.48	7.8
Job Search	37.72	8.5
Family	40.69	6.7
Wellness	41.24	7.2
Career Depelopment	43.78	6.9

Table 7 shows the means and standard deviations of individuals who had been recently released from prison. This population still tends to have the least amount of concern among the three groups. Their area of greatest concern was still in the Job Search area (M = 39.86) and Basic Needs (M = 38.74). This follows logically as these individuals are working to find steady employment in their communities, as well as reconnecting with family members and dealing with family issues. Interestingly, the biggest jump in areas of concern for this group was in the Family area.

Table 7: Means and Standard Deviations for Individuals Recently Released (N=129)		
Scales	Mean	SD
Basic Needs	38.74	6.9
Job Search	39.86	7.9
Family	37.14	8.1
Wellness	34.76	8.5
Career Development	35.18	7.6

The means and standard deviations for all returning citizens taking the *BRSI* can be seen in Table 8. Scores for all five scales were in the "High" concern range. The two highest areas of concern for individuals are Family Concerns (M = 39.84) and Family (M = 39.84). The lowest area of concern for returning citizens was in Wellness (M = 38.25).

Table 8: Means and Standard Deviations for All Returning Citizens (N=432)		
Scales	**Mean**	**SD**
Basic Needs	39.50	7.3
Job Search	38.91	8.1
Family	39.84	7.0
Wellness	38.25	8.0
Career Development	38.73	7.4

Table 9 shows the means and standard deviations for all people completing the third edition of the assessment. Scores for two scales were in the "High" concern range. The two highest areas of concern for people completing the assessment are Basic Needs M = 38.66) and Job Search (M = 37.96). These scores suggest that people leaving prison and returning to their communities are most concerned about basic needs. They are concerned about finding agencies to assist them, finding transportation, and finding a place to live. They are also concerned about their job search, networking, learning effective interview skills, and preparing a resume and cover letter. The lowest area of concern for people leaving prison was Career (M = 33.92).

Table 9: Means and Standard Deviations for All Returning Citizens (N=202)*		
Scales	**Mean**	**SD**
Basic Needs	38.66	4.5
Wellness	35.23	7.0
Family	34.51	7.3
Digital Literacy	34.64	6.8
Career Development	33.92	7.3
Job Search	37.96	5.5

*Using the third edition

Additional Resources

Paradigm Education Solutions provides a wealth of resources to support justice-involved individuals with reentry, career development, and industry-specific skills building. Visit ParadigmEducation.com to learn more.

Acknowledgments

About the Author

John Liptak, EdD, is one of the leading developers of quantitative and qualitative assessments in the country. His business, The Center for Career Assessment, Inc., researches, develops, and creates assessment-based educational materials. Dr. Liptak has written over 100 life skills workbooks, 10 books, and 12 e-books for Bookboon.com. In addition to *BRSI*, Dr. Liptak has created the following assessments for Paradigm Education Solutions (JIST Publishing): Interview Style Inventory (ISI), Transferable Skills Scale (TSS), Career Exploration Inventory (CEI), Transition-to-Work Inventory (TWI), Job Search Knowledge Scale (JSKS), Job Survival and Success Scale (JSSS), Barriers to Employment Success Inventory (BESI), Job Search Attitude Inventory (JSAI), and College Survival and Success Scale (CSSS).

Dr. Liptak has over 30 years of experience. Most recently, he was the Associate Director of Career Development at Radford University in Radford, Virginia. He started working in 1990 at the Federal Correctional Institution in Lexington, Kentucky, as a counselor. In this position, he helped justice-involved individuals develop release plans and counseled them on career planning and job search issues related to their release. After five years of service, he began working in Delaware as the statewide director of their LifeSkills Program. There he developed curricula, trained counselors, gathered release statistics, and coordinated services among five state prisons in Delaware. After three years there he accepted a position as the Educational Director of Delaware Correctional Center, a medium-maximum level state prison for violent offenders, where he coordinated all aspects of educational programming including prerelease services.

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