

# **Safer Communities Stronger Families:**

How One Community is Flipping the Script for  
Wayne County's Most-At-Risk Populations

June 2019



## Executive Summary

In the spring of 2019, Strategic Policy Consultants was hired by Goodwill Industries of Greater Detroit (GIGD) to review their *Flip the Script (Flip) Safer Communities Stronger Families* program. Specifically, Strategic Policy Consultants was asked to document the program's background, review existing program data, and conduct research regarding the program's efficacy, cost and community benefit.

In conducting this research, Strategic Policy Consultants divided tasks into three categories: (1) a literature and benchmarking review of reentry and diversion programs; (2) interviews with program partners; and (3) a review of program-specific data provided by Flip. In doing so, we reviewed numerous national studies on reentry and diversion programs, as well as state and federal and policy papers. We contacted program administrators, academic partners, judges and employers. And, we reviewed publicly available data, Flip-generated data and data provided to Flip by the Michigan Department of Corrections (MDOC).

While a formal cost benefit analysis or exhaustive program evaluation was outside the scope of this work, the research we conducted provides meaningful insight into the program's value as seen by those who work closely with Flip. The program is deeply embedded in a community that historically struggles to support at-risk men and women who are predominantly black and brown. It is established and respected within the administrative network of the courts including judges, probation officers and the MDOC officials who refer to Flip. It is respected by the employer network providing jobs, and it has earned the trust of program participants. Year-over-year, the program is meeting the majority of its benchmarking goals, and in instances where it was not able to do so, has worked with MDOC and program staff to develop strategies to address deficiencies. While there is always room for programmatic improvements, changes to the program's infrastructure including those that would affect funding or outcome measures should be carefully balanced against the strong community support and demonstrated successes that the program has shown.

## Program Background

Flip was developed in 2003 as a program to support the social and economic independence of young men in the City of Detroit. Designed by GIGD Administrator Keith Bennett, in consultation with researchers at the University of Michigan, the program's goal was to identify young men aged 16-30 who lacked foundational skills like relationship building, personal responsibility and accountability, and who needed remedial educational supports to gain access to entry-level employment. A first of its kind program in the city, Bennet and his colleague, Dr. Arthur Young believed that by providing a combination of behavioral and educational supports, delivered by men who looked, talked and shared life experience with program participants, they could help to redefine the cultural identity for a generation of young, black, at-risk Detroit youth. By "Flipping the Script" the program developers believed they could shift the mindset of young men from "bound for the big house" to bound for employment and self-sufficiency. At its inception, the program accepted referrals from community organizations, courts and the MDOC. In 2009, the program expanded to serve women as well as men.

During its sixteen-year history, Flip has received funding from numerous sources including the state and federal government and foundations. Flip serves approximately 1,300 clients annually across these funding sources which include competitive grants through the Department of Labor, the State of Michigan's Economic Development Corporation, an annual appropriation from the State of Michigan, and financial support from the United Way for Southeast Michigan<sup>1</sup>. Although the scope of Flip's programs differs slightly from funder to funder, the overall goals remain the same: Flip is a self-empowerment program designed to put Wayne County's at-risk men and women to work by breaking down employment barriers.

Since 2015, State of Michigan legislatively appropriated funds have supported Flip's *Safer Communities Stronger Families* (SCSF) program. SCSF is a community-based alternative sentencing diversion, reentry and educational remediation program serving men and women ages 16-39. Roughly half of SCSF clients are MDOC reentry clients and half are diversion clients from Wayne County's 3<sup>rd</sup> Circuit and 36<sup>th</sup> District Courts. Clients are first or second time non-violent but serious offenders, with an average COMPAS Score of Medium-High.<sup>2</sup>

According to SCSF referral partners in Wayne's 3<sup>rd</sup> Circuit, candidates are sent to SCSF because they need a wide range of social and emotional supports that cannot be found elsewhere. In their mid-year FY 2018-2019 Legislative Report, SCSF reported that 80% of participants arrived in the program lacking a high school diploma or GED. 60% had an average TABS<sup>3</sup> below a sixth-grade level.<sup>4</sup> The majority of participants lack any verifiable employment history, suffer extensive exposure to Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) and toxic-stress, and have long-term substance abuse, domestic violence and mental health histories. Many come from single parent homes, have upbringings rooted in extreme poverty and

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<sup>1</sup> Current Flip the Script funding partners include Goodwill Industries International/General Motors Grant – Automotive Technology Training, Community Ventures, United Way/LISC Center for Working Families, Goodwill Industries International/Department of Labor Young Adult Reentry Grant, Goodwill Industries International/Department of Labor Adult Reentry Grant, LISC/Department of Labor Adult Reentry Grant.

<sup>2</sup> COMPAS stands for Correctional Offender Management Profiling for Alternative Sanctions. It is a case management and decision support tool developed by Equivant to assess the likelihood of recidivism.

<sup>3</sup>TABS is an educational proficiency scoring tool, which in this case is used to measure literacy achievement

<sup>4</sup> SCSF mid-year report to MDOC, 2019.

lack any paternal male-relationship or positive behavior modeling influences. According to staff, they arrive at Flip fully immersed in a “criminal mindset”.

SCSF participants are expected to focus on personal growth, educational attainment and skills acquisitions. Participants arrive at the program on their own accord and are not under electronic monitoring surveillance. A selling point of the program as noted by both judges interviewed for this paper is that the program is based in the community where probationers must face and confront the same pressures that sent them to court in the first place. In addition to building this lifestyle resolve, participants must learn accountability for life’s demands like childcare, work, and schooling. The investment the probationer is required to make in their own success is seen as a compelling program differentiator for the judiciary.

Once enrolled, SCSF participants begin a formalized program that starts with twelve weeks of intensive coursework, coupled with the “Rites of Passage of Youth” counseling framework. Forty weeks of support and mentoring continue after participants receive their first job placement. Flip reports that many clients continue to return for educational and mentoring support after they have completed SCSF—some for up to as long as two years.

SCSF Service Profile				
Weeks 1-5	Weeks 6-8	Weeks 9-12	Weeks 13-52	Weeks 52+ (Not funded through SCSF)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individual and Group Case Management</li> <li>• Intensive Literacy Intervention</li> <li>• GED Attainment</li> <li>• Substance Abuse Therapy</li> <li>• Anger Management Therapy</li> <li>• Trauma Informed Services</li> <li>• Social Skills Counseling</li> <li>• Life Skills Counseling</li> <li>• Cognitive Therapy</li> <li>• State Identification/Birth Certificate and other Document Acquisition Assistance</li> <li>• Income Support</li> <li>• Center for Working Families Services (elements of)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individual and Group Case Management</li> <li>• Job training (skill specific)</li> <li>• Financial Literacy/GED Instruction</li> <li>• Cognitive Therapy</li> <li>• Social Skills Counseling</li> <li>• Anger Management</li> <li>• Financial Literacy Training</li> <li>• Drivers Training (if needed)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individual and Group Case Management</li> <li>• Job Training (skill specific)</li> <li>• Job Readiness Training</li> <li>• Group Therapy</li> <li>• Ready for Work Challenges/Barriers Assessment and Counseling</li> <li>• Financial Literacy Training</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employment Mentoring</li> <li>• Financial Literacy Training</li> <li>• Emergency Assistance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• GED Assistance</li> <li>• Employment Mentoring</li> <li>• Financial Literacy</li> </ul>

Services are delivered by an experienced direct service team whose average retention rate is approximately 70% year-over-year<sup>5</sup>. Staff provide a range of services and interventions for clients which are delivered using a culturally competent, trauma-informed, gender-specific delivery model. SCSF's direct services staff includes the following:

Safer Communities Stronger Families Staff Roles & Responsibilities	
Flip the Script Program Director	Oversees all Flip initiatives, responsible for program continuity, efficacy and accountability. Advocates for program in community.
Program Administrator/Women's Services	Oversees entry into women's program including liaising with judges, probation officers and potential participants. Ensures quality and appropriateness of programming documentation/files.
Academic Administrator	Responsible for academic and educational program design and delivery, academic scheduling, test scheduling and management of individual academic plans.
SCSF Project Coordinator	Responsible for management of all SCSF program including oversight of men's program workforce development design and outcomes. Liaises with judges, probation officers and potential participants. Ensures quality and appropriateness of programming.
Financial Services Coordinator	Assists in reducing participant financial barriers by managing community relationships, identifying and managing partnerships (food pantries, diaper banks, transportation partners, housing partners, etc.)
Community Reintegration Coordinators (3)	Works individually with participants to ensure program milestones are met. Provides one-one support for struggling participants.
Case Manager/Job Coach	Works individually with participants to identify and resolve employment barriers and coach participants toward job success. Identifies personal barriers and pairs participants with services and supports.
Counselors/Instructors (3)	Work individually with men and women's participants as well as in group settings to provide classroom module instruction, counseling and coaching.
Workforce Development Specialist	Works for with employers and Case Managers/Job Coaches to identify open positions, reduce barriers and promote participant success.
Income Supports Coordinator	Works with participants prior to and after obtaining employment to provide financial literacy coaching and available income supports including governmental assistance where needed.
Education Recovery Tutors (2)	Works with educational recovery participants to help advance grade-level attainment.

SCSF is also supported by a program administrative assistant, data technician and quality assurance technician.

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<sup>5</sup> As reported by Flip staff

## Program Data

By law, Flip is required to report to MDOC and the Michigan Legislature on program outcomes set by MDOC. These include program performance measurements like the number of individuals diverted from incarceration, the number of individuals served, and the outcomes of participants who complete the program. SCSF also collects participant data such as average starting wage and COMPAS scores.

### A. Employment Data

For the past three years, SCSF has reported the following employment data to MDOC:

			2015	2016	2017 <sup>6</sup>
	Min Target	Stretch Goal	Actual		
Completion of program objectives	50%	60%	72%	61%	66%
Retain competitive employment	50%	60%	72%	99%	85%
Retain competitive employment-90 Days	65%	75%	51%	57%	54%
Retain competitive employment-180 Days	60%	70%	33%	45%	43%

### B. Wage and Placement Data

In looking at the wage data provided by SCSF, the average wage for the men's program in 2017-2018 was \$10.31 with the majority of the jobs at \$10/hour but ranging from \$9.25-\$22/hour. In the women's program the average wage was \$10.13/hour, ranging from a low of \$3.25/hour (several were waitressing positions with tips not reported) to a high of \$23.00/hour. While on their face, these figures appear low, they create a verifiable work history and establish an employment basis that participants would not have otherwise.

### C. Recidivism Data

In 2017, Flip began to gather recidivism data on program participants. Because the original SCSF's contract with MDOC did not provide for a data-match between Flip and MDOC records, internal staff manually queried OTIS records <sup>7</sup>during the summer of 2017 for FY 2015-2016 participants. Although a large number of records were unverifiable (expunged from MDOC/incorrect case numbers, etc.) those that were matched revealed few participants returning as wards of MDOC or the Court.

<sup>6</sup> 2017 is the last year for which complete program data is currently available.

<sup>7</sup> OTIS is Michigan's Offender Tracking Information System

OTIS Results	SCSF FY15/16	%
Prisoner	15	6%
Probation Absconder	9	4%
No Record	101	43%
Discharged	47	20%
Parole	9	4%
Parole Discharged	3	1%
Probation	46	20%
Probation Discharged	5	2%
Total	235	100%

In 2018, MDOC provided Flip with a data feed to match FY 2016-2017 SCSF participants, allowing for a more detailed analysis of program completers and non-completers. Results of the more formal FY 2017-18 match were similar to the FY2015-2016 cohort match. **Ultimately, a small number of participants—in both cases approximately eleven percent of total participants, were shown to return to MDOC or the Courts—far below the state recidivism average of thirty percent.** This percentage was even smaller, eight percent, for participants who completed the program.

Status: Probation/Incarcerated/ Discharged	Non Completer	%	Completor	%	Total	%
Absconder	11	8%	7	4%	18	6%
Discharged Sentenced to Jail	1	1%	0	0%	1	0%
DRC	2	1%	1	1%	3	1%
First Parole	1	1%	0	0%	1	0%
Incarcerated	0	0%	1	1%	1	0%
Intake/Probation	1	1%	0	0%	1	0%
Prison	8	6%	4	2%	12	4%
<b>Total: Returned to MDOC/Court</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>11%</b>

Status: Probation/Incarcerated/ Discharged	Non Completor	%	Completor	%	Total	%
Probation	78	55%	115	66%	193	61%
Reinstated on Probation	1	1%	1	1%	2	1%
Deceased	2	1%	0	0%	2	1%
Discharged	36	25%	38	22%	74	23%
Discharged from Probation	0	0%	1	1%	1	0%
Charge(s) Dismissed by Court	0	0%	3	2%	3	1%
Released to Court/WRIT (MRF)	1	1%	0	0%	1	0%
Parole/LCRRP	1	1%	0	0%	1	0%
<b>Total Maintaining Orders</b>	<b>119</b>	<b>84%</b>	<b>158</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>277</b>	<b>87%</b>
Total Participants	143	100%	175	100%	316	100%

Using the same data provided by MDOC, SCSF reviewed probation violations for FY 2015-2016, which revealed that over three quarters of all SCSF participants complied with the terms of their probation:

All SCSF						
Probation Violator	Non Completor	%	Completor	%	Total	%
No	101	72%	138	80%	240	76%
Yes	40	28%	35	20%	75	24%
Total	141	100%	173	100%	315	100%

#### D. Behavioral Profile Data

Flip administrators, judges and employers all commented on the level of difficulty that SCSF faces serving this population. When pressed to expand on this statement, all pointed to a lack of social acumen and accountability among participants. Several interviewees cited basic social skills as being a critical deficiency among participants, such as the ability to consistently attend classes or jobs, show-up on time, direct attention to a task, limit distractions from cell phones or peers, respond appropriately to criticism or maintain personal accountability such as timeliness and task completion.

In addition to court records and interviews, COMPAS scores are used to assess program fit for all participants prior to entry into the program, and again upon exit. Scores are reviewed to determine if patterns exist between program completers and non-completers. While COMPAS scores can provide helpful context about participant behavior and are an accepted marker for the likelihood of recidivating, they are not a panacea. Scores can mask behavioral characteristics that need or could benefit from intensive support to prevent future criminal behavior and focusing only on those with high risk scores may impede access to services for those with lower scores who could benefit from services. According to Flip, referral partners understand the limitations of COMPAS scores and frequently identify candidates with low scores as potential candidates. However, because SCSF is contractually required to focus on the highest possible risk, the vast majority of participants fall into the more difficult to serve COMPAS behavioral profile as noted below.

**All Safer Communities Stronger Families Violent Offenders**

COMPAS VFO Risk	Non-Completer	Completer	Total	%
Low	22	29	51	16%
Medium	64	98	162	51%
High	57	46	103	33%
Total	143	173	316	100%

**All Safer Communities Stronger Families Non-Violent Offenders**

COMPAS Non-VFO Risk	Non-Completer	Completer	Total	%
Low	9	13	22	7%
Medium	59	89	148	47%
High	75	71	146	46%
Total	143	173	316	100%

#### E. Cost Per Participant

For the past three years, SCSF has reported the following cost-per-participant to MDOC:

Cost Per SCSF Participant					
			2015	2016	2017
	Min Target	Stretch Goal	Actual		
Maximize cost per trainee	Less than or equal to \$4,865	Less than or equal to \$4,633	\$4,161	\$3,955	\$3,955

In their 2019 report to the Michigan House of Representatives, the MDOC placed these figures at \$3,450 per participant and a placement cost of \$5,495 per job placement.

In speaking with SCSF and other community corrections programs funded by MDOC, both noted that their programs rely on economies of scale—i.e., the more individuals referred to and enrolled in the program, the lower the average cost per participant. Flip administrators have reported high demand for the SCSF program which they are unable to meet due to contractual restraints by MDOC. These include the inability to serve candidates with low COMPAS scores as mentioned above (particularly women), and a restriction on taking probationers adjudicated in other counties. Given that many probationers from Oakland and Macomb live in Wayne County, this reduces a potentially eligible service population.

## Research on Reentry and Diversion Programs

Criminal justice reform programs are difficult to compare and contrast due to myriad factors, which include locally developed program designs, the level of sophistication in program implementation, community characteristics and, the ultimate “X” factor of participant behavior. Programs that appear to be highly effective in one community may flounder in others. In March of 2017, President Trump created the Federal Interagency Council on Crime Prevention and Improving Reentry<sup>8</sup>. Speaking before the Secretaries Innovation Group about the purpose of the Council, National Institute of Justice Director David Mulhausen, criticized the lack of rigor and evidenced-based research supporting many reentry programs. “We don’t have a strong understanding of what works and what doesn’t, and there’s a pressing need for additional research to help us better understand the dynamic process of reentry.”

The same is true for diversion programs. In their 2013 National Survey of Criminal Justice Diversion Programs and Initiatives, the Center for Health and Justice concluded that, “Relatively little true evaluation exists in national or local literature about the effectiveness of these types of programs overall, either in terms of cost savings or in reduced recidivism. This may be due, in part, to a lack of standard design or model, and also to scarce resources.”<sup>9</sup> In the absence of academic research’s gold standard, a randomized control trial (or even a quasi-experimental design study) it is hard to pinpoint which elements of programs are essential, evidenced-based and effective.

With that said, there are plenty of program evaluations that have documented best practices and studied the successes and challenges of specific reentry and diversion programs. A number of these studies were conducted as part of the United States Department of Labor Reentry Initiative program grants issued between 2006 and 2013. In 2008, the Urban Institute published a longitudinal study of returning citizens describing success factors for employment outcomes after prison. And, in 2018, research institute Mathematica published a series of briefs on *Case Management Models for Pre- and Post-Release Employment and Engagement of Participants in Workforce Services After Releasee from Jail*. While these studies are not perfect comparisons with SCSF (program criteria differ between all programs, and one program includes both pre-release and post-release services), by and large, the findings of their research is similar to the experiences of SCSF:

- Eight months after release, 65 percent of respondents said they had been employed at some point since their incarceration but less than half were currently employed.<sup>10</sup>
- A common challenge for American Job Center (AJC) programs was keeping participants continuously engaged in services. Once participants returned to their communities, they faced

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/federal-interagency-council-crime-prevention-improving-reentry/>, accessed May 20, 2019.

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[http://www2.centerforhealthandjustice.org/sites/www2.centerforhealthandjustice.org/files/publications/CHJ%20Diversion%20Report\\_web.pdf](http://www2.centerforhealthandjustice.org/sites/www2.centerforhealthandjustice.org/files/publications/CHJ%20Diversion%20Report_web.pdf), Accessed May 17, 2019.

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/32106/411778-Employment-after-Prison-A-Longitudinal-Study-of-Releasees-in-Three-States.PDF>. Accessed May 28, 2019.

financial struggles and were susceptible to influences and behaviors that could undermine their success.<sup>11</sup>

- Staff prioritized addressing barriers, such as unstable housing, lack of transportation, and history of substance abuse, that prevented participants from showing up for appointments after returning to the community;<sup>12</sup>
- Staff and participants viewed case managers as the strongest influence upon participants' likelihood of success. The most effective case managers treated participants as fellow "human beings" (rather than as inmates), showed a profound level of personal caring and dedication to participants' success, and had dynamic, inspiring personalities that engaged participants and laid important groundwork for post-release contact and engagement. The human component was particularly valuable from the participants' perspective.<sup>13</sup>

Mathmatica's research on the AJC also seems to suggest that programs that provide continuity between in-house prerelease counseling and post-release counseling are the most effective in serving this population. Because SCSF program model includes diversion participants, this is not a one-one match, but may be something worth considering for reentry clients.

In an effort to tackle the cost-benefit question, the Washington State Institute for Public Policy (WSIPP) has developed, and several states have adopted, a methodology for evaluating the effectiveness of reentry programs through a systematic review of research, literature and program costs. WSIPP uses a standardized methodology to calculate monetary benefits versus costs and conducts a risk analysis to determine which programs have consistent benefits that exceed their costs. Results of Washington programs are published regularly to influence policy and reform. While the Washington model provides a dollar and sense approach, it is unclear whether it has the capacity to value non-monetary community benefits such as the value of a paternal presence in a home, something that program's like SCSF have worked hard to accomplish.

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<sup>11</sup> Engaging Participants in Workforce Services After Jail, Mathmatica Issues Brief, published May 2018.

<https://www.dol.gov/asp/evaluation/completed-studies/Engaging-Participants-in-Workforce-Services-after-Release-from-Jail.pdf>. Accessed May 23, 2019.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid

<sup>13</sup>Case Management Models for Pre-and Post-Release Employment Services, Mathmatica Issues Brief, May 2018.

<https://www.dol.gov/asp/evaluation/completed-studies/Case-Management-Models-for-Pre-and-Post-Release-Employment-Services.pdf>, May 23, 2019.

## **Discussion**

For almost twenty years, Flip the Script has provided programs and services for Detroit's most at-risk men of color. Building on experience and lessons learned from two decades of program refinement, SCSF has impacted over 1,000 individuals since the program officially launched in 2015.

On an annual basis, more than half of SCSF participants complete the intensive 12-week program, in their community. On average, each year, 175 completers willingly attend 12 weeks of intensive cognitive behavioral counseling, substance abuse therapy, educational remediation and job readiness training.

According to 3<sup>rd</sup> Circuit referral partners, SCSF is the only program of its kind operating in Wayne County, and without which, no option would exist for diversion candidates. The courts strongly support SCSF as an established, reliable and effective partner who is willing to meet participants, "where they are at" providing quality services in an environment where case managers, instructors and counselors bring racial, economic and socially shared experiences to program participants. When asked to compare the scope of services provided by SCSF to other reentry or diversion programs, court officers could not cite a similar program in Wayne County, again noting the unique self-directed and voluntary program reporting as a differentiator between SCSF and in-house correctional programs.

Recently, MDOC has raised concerns about SCSF. On a programmatic front, MDOC has expressed dissatisfaction with participant completion rates, job retention and wage attainment. They have expressed frustration with the cost per-participant and cost per-placement, as well as the program's success in reducing recidivism. From an administrative standpoint, questions have been raised about the number of staff assigned to the program, and if the state could find better value if the SCSF contract was bid competitively versus legislatively appropriated.

Ensuring accountability of public dollars is an important responsibility of the MDOC. Holding contractors to high programmatic and fiscal standards is also an extremely important function of the state's top corrections agency. However, the concerns that MDOC raises are not unique to SCSF, nor are the benchmarks selected by MDOC necessarily reflective of the full range of impact that SCSF has in the city of Detroit.

For example, it is true that SCSF average starting wages are low, as reported by both SCSF and employers. Lack of practical work history is cited as the number one reason, as very few candidates have any verifiable work experience prior to entering the program. Even those who have received training through SCSF or an in-house corrections program lack practical experience "on the shop floor". Because of this, employers apply an experience-tiered wage scale for most SCSF participants and start them at entry-level wages. After demonstrating reliability, accountability and skills, many do attain higher wages.

As for the cost to administer the SCSF program, and the cost per job placement, Flip and their supporters readily acknowledge that the program appears costly when compared to other community corrections programs. However, it is difficult to know if the types of populations served are comparable. For example, since starting SCSF, the average participant TABBS score has declined from a 9<sup>th</sup> grade reading level to an average of a 6<sup>th</sup> grade reading level. And, according to Flip, participants are more difficult than ever to prepare for employment. During the initial SCSF roll-out, as many as 45% of SCSF participants received their first job placement at GIGD. This number is now closer to 15%--due to the decline of job-readiness and social skills needed to meet even the basic requirements of GIGD subsidized employment. It is not surprising, therefore, that SCSF participants often require 2-3 placement

opportunities if they are able to maintain consistent employment. These disruptions are costly to administer (requiring intensive case management efforts and counseling), significantly increase the cost-per-placement and also negatively affect participant wage growth. SCSF also provides ancillary services to participants, such as emergency housing vouchers, food, transportation assistance and clothing—costs, which can vary dramatically by community. Comparing SCSF to a county-run program in rural Michigan quite likely lacks complexity of comparability. More specifics, including the complete program descriptions, dosage and duration of services and community characteristics for comparison jurisdictions need to be clearly defined to arrive at an accurate county-county cost-comparison.

In addition, when looking at data provided by MDOC, SCSF performs well against recidivism benchmarks. Initial results show that only a small number of participants return to MDOC or the courts, representing an overall cost savings to the county and the state. With several years of program data now available, taking a closer look at recidivism, how it is measured, and how program costs compare to program cost-avoidance would be well worth the effort.

Finally, in response to the assertion that SCSF should be competitively bid versus legislatively appropriated, there are a number of factors that merit consideration. Historically, earmarked programs are easy targets for administrators looking to trim program budgets. Unfortunately, this approach often overlooks compelling factors that supported the initial appropriation in the first place. For Flip and the SCSF program this includes an extensive network of relationships with the court, probation officers, employers, service providers and other partners. Establishing these relationships has taken time, money and talent, and a new program would duplicate and likely replicate many of these efforts. Second, SCSF has earned the trust of participants. This is a key factor in participant engagement and success and one which requires above all, time and experience. Last, SCSF has built a reliable network of employers who are willing to take a chance on SCSF participants, and who are willing to continue taking that chance on SCSF referrals—even when placements do not work out. Maintaining this level of commitment and resiliency among employers requires a strong bond of trust and commitment between organizations.

## Conclusion

SCSF is an established program operated by a well-known and respected organization in the City of Detroit. While there is certainly opportunity for program improvement and refinement, preliminary research indicates strong community support, a high level of trust among participants, solid employer engagement and promising outcomes.

**SCSF is a stable entity with strong community support.** The program is well known and highly respected among prosecutors, judges, probation officers, community officials, employers and participants. There is demand for this type of diversion and reentry service, as evidenced by consistent referrals of eligible participants as well as the more than two-dozen annual requests to serve participants who are outside the scope of SCSF's service profile. These include women with low COMPAS scores, and requests from neighboring counties who have probationers living in Wayne. The SCSF staff is stable, knowledgeable about the community they serve and invested in the outcomes of their participants.

**SCSF is serving a difficult to reach population and showing promising outcomes.** SCSF is serving one of urban America's most difficult to reach populations and having reasonable success in producing outcomes. The young men and women who enter the program face multiple barriers to success including lifelong trauma. They typically enter SCSF reading between the third and sixth-grade level, have comparable social and emotional skills and mental health issues. Many have been witnesses to or victims of violent crime and have lost a close family member to violence. Many have at least one felony conviction on their own record. They are despondent, have a feeling of abandonment and as a result lack motivation and present issues for authority figures. Most have never held verifiable employment, and many come from homes where role models failed to complete their high school education or maintain regular employment.

Successfully transforming these life experiences into consistent and measurable outcomes is a monumental undertaking. Even incremental gains require intensive coaching, counseling and support. In order to succeed, even at entry-level employment, the average SCSF participant must make considerable social and emotional gains within the 12-week training period, and many must layer onto that practical educational attainment (such as reading and writing) and job specific skills. Not surprisingly, some participants simply don't make it.

**More data is needed to fully understand the SCSF strengths and challenges and to accurately compare outcomes to other programs.** Like many other diversion and reentry programs, SCSF would benefit from an in-depth program review to gain a better understanding of what is working, what is not working and to arrive at a substantiated cost-benefit analysis. These evaluations are often costly, require extensive amounts of data (which SCSF may or may not currently have) and would require the full cooperation of both Flip and MDOC. Committing to such an undertaking, could provide useful information that could be used to inform all of Flip's programs, as well as a consistent methodology from which to evaluate cost-benefits for other MDOC funded initiatives.

Although anecdotal, the data presented indicates that SCSF is making an impact in Detroit and that the program is an important tool for the courts. Careful consideration of best practices and a thorough review of program data should be conducted prior to making sweeping changes that could negatively impact the long-term viability of either the SCSF program or Flip's presence in Detroit and Wayne County.