

LIFE AFTER PRISON: INTENSIVE SUPERVISED RELEASE

What does life after prison look like for some Minnesotans? For Connor, it has been a challenging experience of navigating the culture of punishment on intensive supervision

Connor's Story

Connor emerged from prison after spending over 20 years incarcerated for his involvement in a violent crime. While imprisoned, Connor maintained consistent employment, engaged in programming, and his score on the Minnesota Screening Tool Assessing Recidivism Risk recommended he be placed on standard supervision. **So how did Connor find himself on Intensive Supervised Release (ISR)?**



What is ISR?

In 1990, the Minnesota legislature created ISR during a period of tough-on-crime politics. The first goal of the program, stated in statute, is to “punish the offender.” Originally, ISR placement was based primarily on offense type but shifted in 2018 to a focus on recidivism risk.

People on ISR receive round-the clock supervision by a team of agents for a full year. Agents make unannounced visits at all hours of the day and require 40 hours a week of time spent in a mix of work, education, training, and/or treatment.

The Challenges of ISR

Based on his risk score, Connor did not expect to be on ISR. However, the culture of punishment baked into ISR from its inception has persisted: Connor's crime was a serious offense and county supervision officials likely determined he needed to be closely surveilled.

Anyone returning to the community after such a substantial period of time behind bars faces challenges and has certain things they must do to successfully transition back into their community. On ISR, though, Connor is expected to maintain a strict schedule that includes daily curfews and check-ins with an ISR agent, making it extremely difficult to accomplish the basic tasks of re-entry.

Each week, he gets one four-hour pass as unstructured time. “I understand that rigidity is needed for certain people,” Connor notes, “but at the same time, four hours in a week for somebody to have to survive to go out and about and do things is ridiculous.”

The conditions of ISR neglect vital aspects of the complicated reentry process, including making time to strengthen relationships with his family and friends, to run errands and take care of his health, and to pursue his own goals in establishing a positive life outside of prison.

ISR is intended for those at most risk of re-offending, yet paradoxically it has made reentry and reintegration much more difficult for Connor. Any misstep or failure to adhere to the myriad rules and procedures of ISR could result in Connor's reincarceration.

How Can ISR Be More Effective?

Research shows that those on ISR are less likely to be rearrested for and reconvicted of a new crime. However, people on ISR also experience a much higher rate of being sent back to prison for violating supervision conditions than people on standard release. Revocations contribute to the state's revolving door of incarceration: over 60% of prison admissions are due to supervision failures. These people are often warehoused for a short time without receiving services and then churned back into their communities, increasing the likelihood of reoffense.

In order for a program like ISR to be effective, the culture of ISR needs to shift from punishment to **intensive support**. The first goal of the program cannot be to punish the offender. A central problem with ISR is that it adds more rules and obstacles to individuals already feeling overwhelmed with the reentry process. When there is an oversized focus on monitoring and punishing people rather than supporting reintegration, ISR will continue to lead to high rates of revocation.

Connor's story, and the stories of so many like him, suggest that ISR should be a program that provides more services and supports instead of additional stumbling blocks. By making smart reforms to community supervision practices and policies, we can create safer communities for all.



In 2023, the Minnesota Justice Research Center initiated the "**Transforming Community Supervision**" project to improve public safety, promote better outcomes for people on probation and supervised release, and decrease the cycles of revoking people to prison and jail. As part of this effort, MNJRC Community Engagement Manager [Zeke Caligiuri](#) interviewed people currently on supervision and discussed the hurdles they are facing to successfully completing their terms. Connor is a pseudonym.



Figure 1. Reasons for Prison admissions