

Impact Evaluation of Correctional Programs in North Carolina

Work Release

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March 27, 2025

Barriers to successful reentry

Inability to maintain **gainful employment** (education, skills, work experience, licensure requirements, liability concerns, employer bias)

Financial strain and access to housing, transportation, and healthcare

Legal obligations (parole conditions/sanctions, court fees, restitution, child support)

Psychological and **social** factors (mental/behavioral health, addiction, trauma, peer pressure, social expectations)

...and many more

“What works?”

Research question

“Is **work release** currently preparing individuals for **successful reentry**?”

...or, more specifically:

“Do individuals who participate in **work release** have better **employment, wage-earning, and reincarceration** outcomes than those who don't participate in Work Release?”

Data and research method

Data source: NC Common Follow-up System (CFS)

- NC Department of Adult Correction: program participation, prison exit, and prison entry
- NC Commerce/Division of Employment Security: (formal) employment and wage-earning

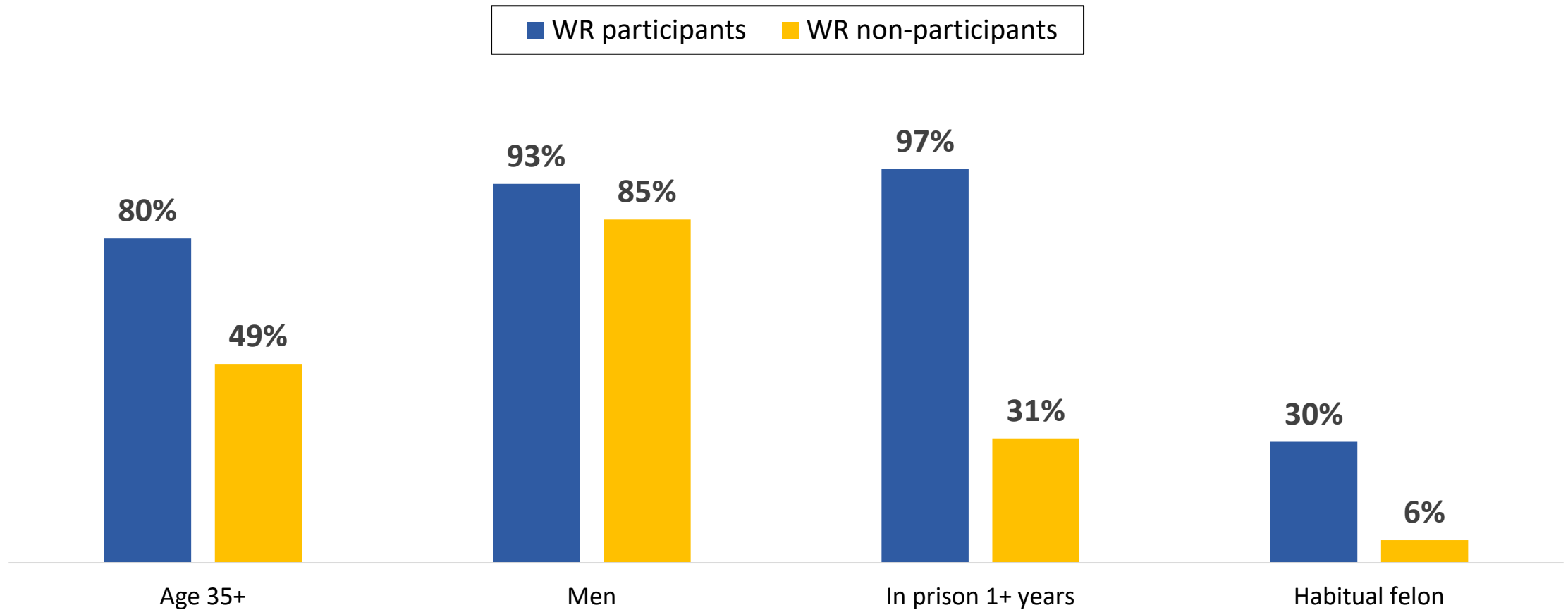
Main study cohort

- 30,842 individuals released from prison during 2018-2019
- 2,032 participated in work release (WR) within two years before release

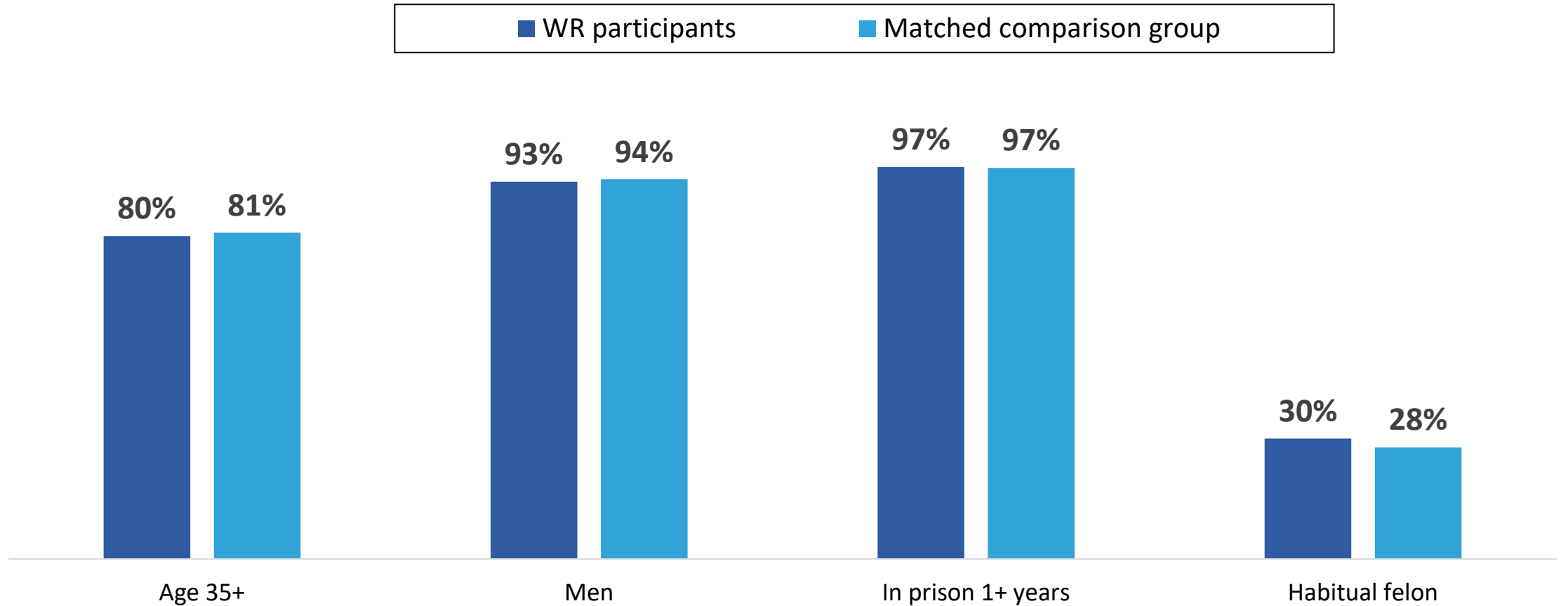
Main research method

- **“Apples-to-apples” comparison:** propensity score matching

“Apples-to-oranges” Raw comparison



“Apples-to-apples” Matched comparison group



Context and outcomes

WR is a **highly selective** program. WR participants are the types of people who would have had **better outcomes** than the typical formerly incarcerated person **regardless** of their programmatic participation.

Outcomes in first year after release

	WR participants	All non-participants	Matched comparison group
Employment rate	74%	44%	63%
Real average wage earnings	\$16,213	\$5,185	\$9,961
Real average wage earnings (employed workers only)	\$21,832	\$11,657	\$15,887
Reincarceration rate	5%	12%	7%

Impact estimates

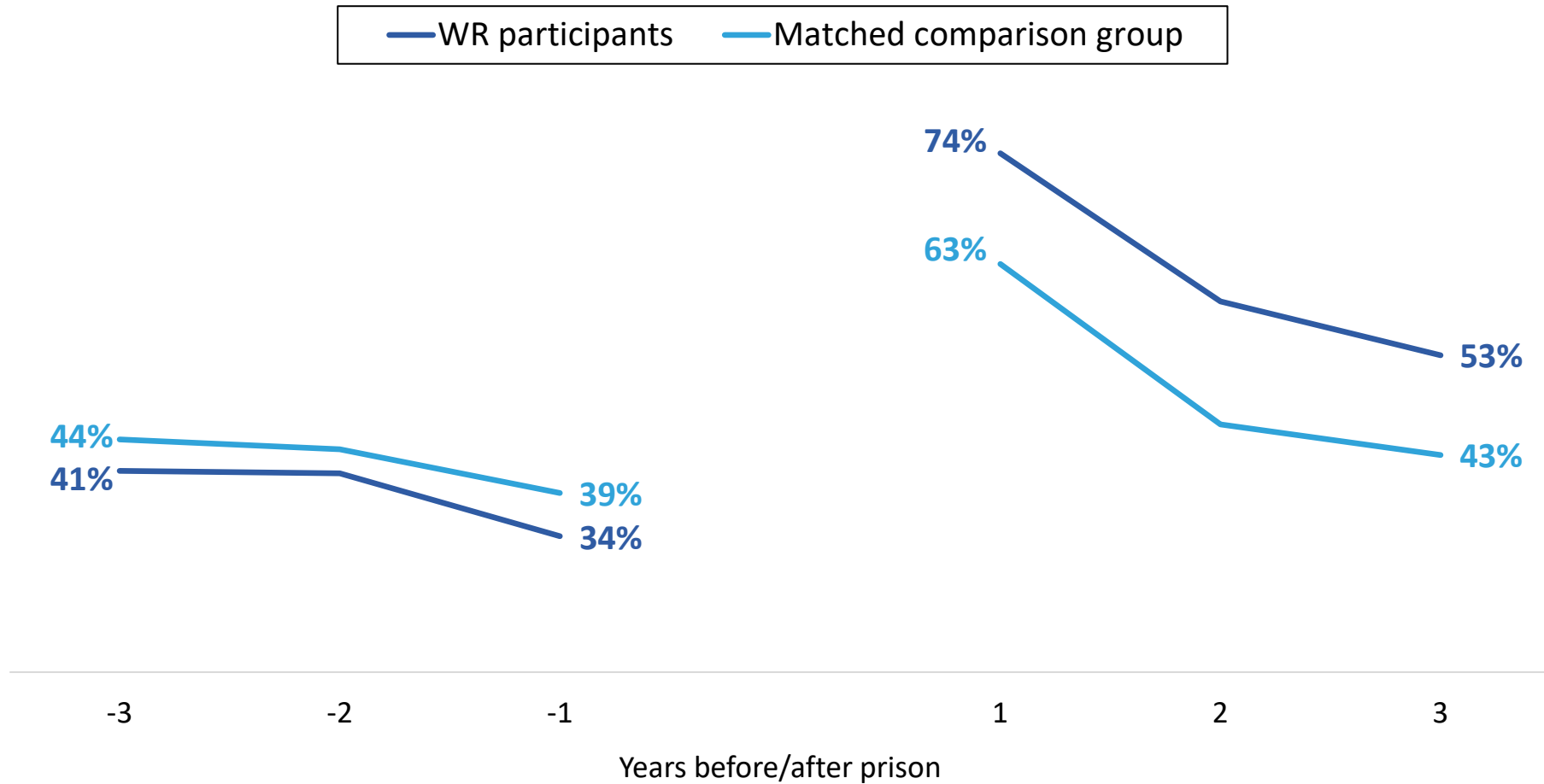
We find **robust evidence** that WR participants had better employment, wage-earning, and recidivism outcomes than the matched comparison group

- WR participation led to significantly **higher employment rates**
- WR participation led to significantly **higher wage earnings**
- WR participation led to significantly **lower reincarceration rates**

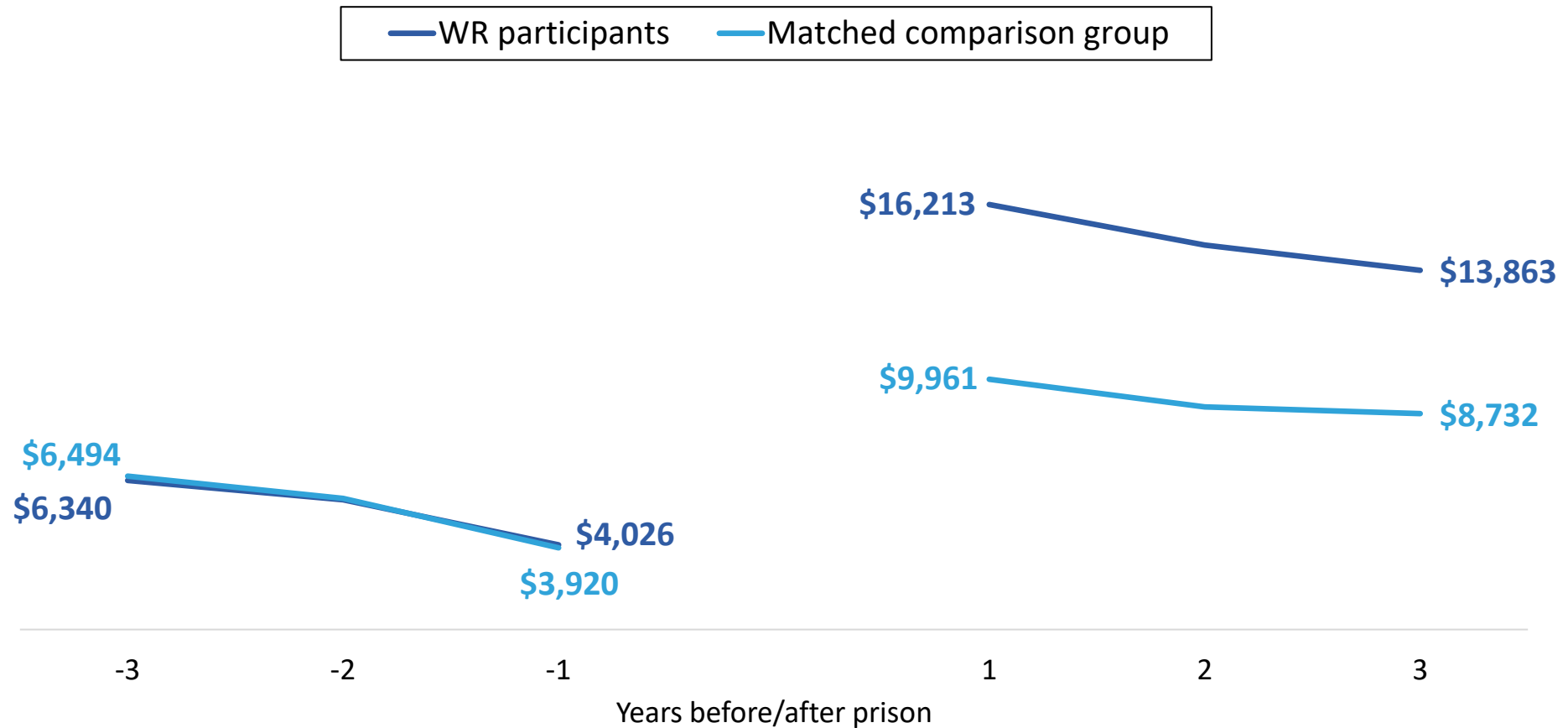
These findings were generally consistent across all the models we ran

- One exception: reincarceration impacts were statistically insignificant for the 2020-2021 cohort, likely due to small sample size

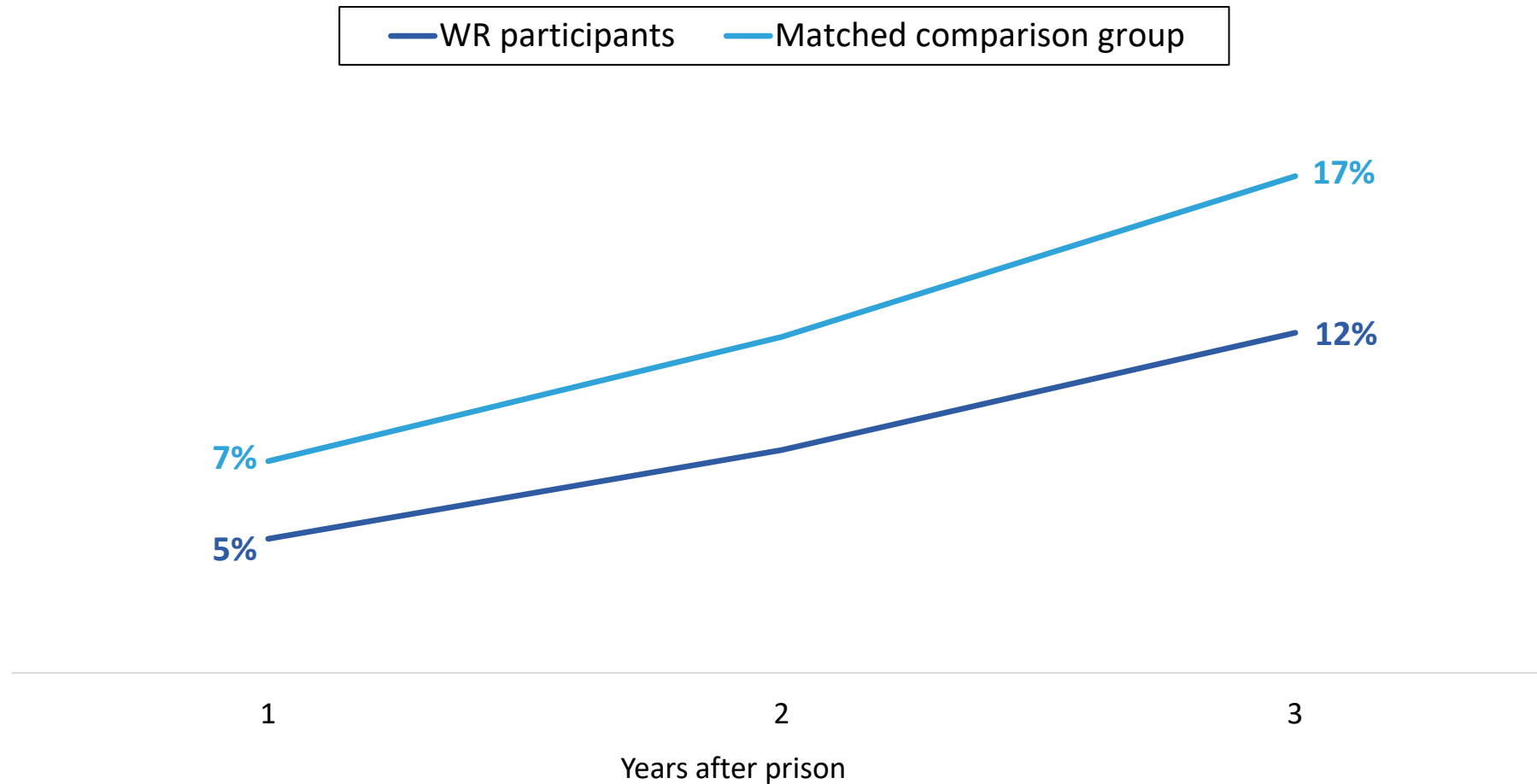
Employment rate



Real average wage earnings (2023 dollars)



Reincarceration rate (cumulative)



What's next?

Follow-up research: **Work Release**

- Process evaluation / implementation studies
- What can we learn from the success of WR? How can we apply these lessons to other correctional programs?
- Are these findings generalizable? Can WR scale up to serve more participants?

Ongoing research: “**what works?**”

- Which DAC programs/services are most effective?
- How can we address the complex and multi-dimensional barriers to successful reentry?