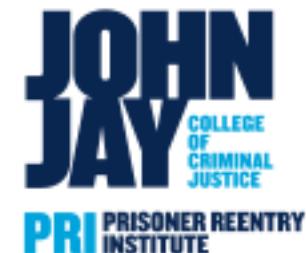


Reentry Research in the First Person

# THREE QUARTER HOUSES: THE VIEW FROM THE INSIDE



# Overview of Presentation

- Research Methods
- Background on Three-Quarter Houses
- Key Findings
- Implications of Research and Report

# Research Methods: Sampling the Population

- Population of interest: Three-Quarter House tenants
- Recruiting: flyers, direct outreach, relying on intragroup connections
- Sample: 43 unique individuals
- Eligibility criteria: 18 or older; current or recent tenant

# Research Methods: Collecting the Data

- Focus groups: total of four with 4 to 8 participants each
- Roundtable discussions: total of four with 4 to 6 participants each
- Individual interviews: 5 participants
- Questionnaire: filled out by all respondents

# Background: What are Three-Quarter Houses and Where Did They Come From?

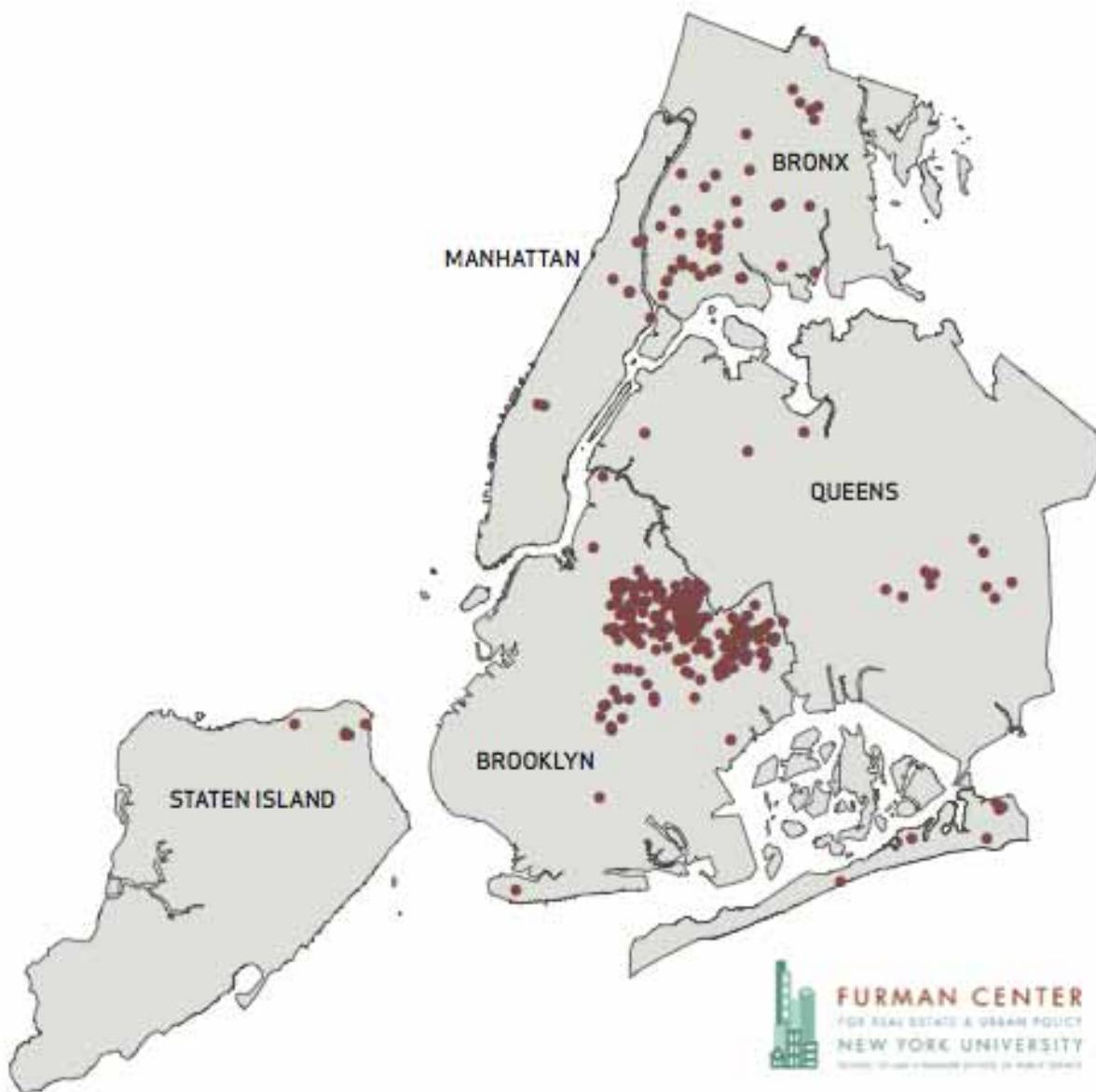
- Rent beds to single adults
- For-profit, unlicensed entities
- Do not provide in-house services
- Funded almost entirely by public dollars
- Lack of affordable housing

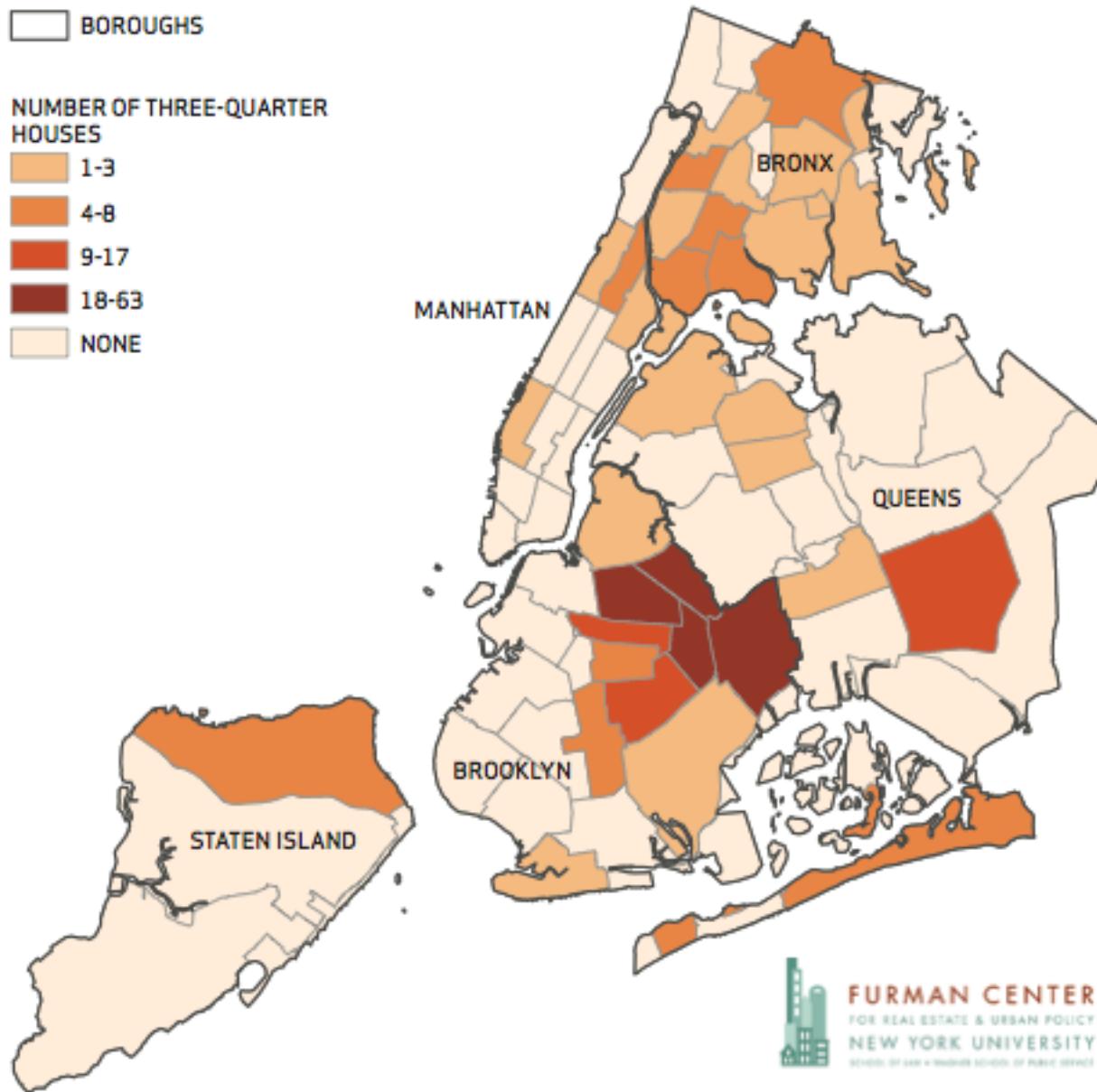
# Background: Who Lives in Three-Quarter Houses

- Diverse group in transitional phases of their lives
- Overwhelmingly subsist on public benefits
- Referral sources include substance abuse treatment programs, other houses, the courts, city shelters, parole, and word-of-mouth

# Background: Where are They and How Many Are There in NYC?

- No way to obtain a total formal count
- Informal counts have resulted in a list of 317 addresses
- Tend to be located in the city's poorest areas, concentrated in low-income Brooklyn communities





# Background: Are They Safe and Legal?

- Complaints and code violations are common
- 90% of sample of 317 addresses had at least one recorded violation or stop-work order issued by the NYC DOB
- NYC housing codes outlaw cohabitation by three or more unrelated persons

# Findings: Safety and Health Issues

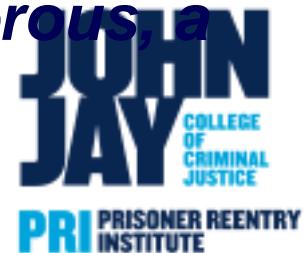
- **Severe overcrowding**
  - 2 to 8 people in small rooms; bunk beds in hallways and even kitchens
- **Major fire hazards**
  - Blocked windows; inadequate means of egress; lack of smoke detectors; jerry-rigged electrical wiring; overloaded circuits; illegal subdivisions of rooms
- **Unhealthy environments**
  - Infestations of bed bugs, rats, roaches; structural issues; repairs not made

## Findings: Safety and Health Issues

*“We went about a month with no electricity on the second floor, but then we got like a 50-foot industrial extension cord running from the first floor to the second floor so that I could have lights and heat and stuff in my room ‘cause we had power strips. Yeah, three of those. I worried because you got five different rooms up there with electric heaters in them. But they called an electrician and he rewired the building. Everything’s on one circuit now. There’s two circuit boxes, but the electrician cut an extension cord and ran the wire from one box to the other. That’s how we got lights in the whole house. I watched him do that, and I just said, ‘Lord please save us.’ It’s dangerous, a real bad situation.”*



**—55-year-old male tenant**



# Findings: Illicit Practices

- **Illegal evictions**
  - No regard for tenants' wellbeing; arbitrary reasons; especially problematic for parolees
- **House-mandated substance abuse treatment**
  - Treatment completion causes eviction; violates right to choice in treatment; incentivizes fabricated substance abuse histories and even intentional relapse
- **Potential abuse of Medicaid funds**
  - Collection of “slips”; kickbacks from programs

# Findings: Illicit Practices

*“That’s so important for them to have that pink slip. I wish I had a copy. It has the program’s name, the counselor’s name and your name, and the day you attended the program. Here’s one. It’s different colors every day. They stamp it at the program, so you give these slips to the house at the end of the day. If you don’t have those slips, you have to make it up. This is like law that you have the slip.”*

—46-year-old male tenant

# Findings: What Tenants Like

- **Fostering independence**
  - Dignity; practice of life skills
- **Balancing freedom and structure**
  - Helpful for transitions from more restricted environments; keeps recovery and reintegration on track
- **Promoting social support**
  - Tenants in similar phases of their lives; development of needed camaraderie

# Findings: What Tenants Like

*"When you live with people for a length of time, there's like that sense of family. You have somebody that you can complain about stuff with and they'll complain with you. You know what I mean? That's kind of good. I think about, you know, a couple of the barbeques we've had and Thanksgiving—how everybody pulled together and stuff like that. So even though it has its down sides, you know, there's a flip side to every coin."*

—44-year-old female tenant

# Findings: Impeding Recovery and Reintegration

- **Drug use in houses**
  - Open use by tenants; use by house managers
- **Probation and parole issues**
  - Drug use in house can result in reincarceration; threats to call POs in order to control tenants
- **Obstructing self-improvement efforts**
  - Rules hinder education and employment; evictions derail independent efforts

# Findings: Impeding Recovery and Reintegration

*“I saw people sit up at the kitchen table and sniff dope and crush up pills and sniff them, and I feel that’s endangering my recovery. One time, this man was standing at the stove with his stem, smoking crack off the burner. And some of the house managers even get high. I saw them sit in our house and get high with clients. I mean, they try to tell you to do the right thing, but it’s do as I say, not as I do.”*

*—31-year-old male tenant*

# Implications of Research and Report

- Wholesale closing of houses would be catastrophic
- Pathway to legality and improved living conditions needed
- Some type of minimum standards and formal oversight needed
- Innovative ideas to make houses financially viable needed

# Implications of Research and Report

*"I want to make a statement that Three-Quarter Houses are a needed housing situation, and you can get people from any walk of life living in them. I ended up there not because I didn't want to work but because I was living with my grandmother and she died and I couldn't afford the house anymore. We're still human beings, and money is being paid for rent. We deserve a decent place to live."*

—55-year-old male tenant