Boise State University – Ada County Sheriff’s Office
Inmate Video Visitation Program Evaluation

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements ................................................................................................................................. 2
List of Tables ............................................................................................................................................. 5
List of Acronyms ....................................................................................................................................... 6
Executive Summary ................................................................................................................................. 7
Introduction ............................................................................................................................................... 11
Chapter 1: Literature Review .................................................................................................................... 13
  Inmate Video Visitation ........................................................................................................................ 13
  ACSO’s Inmate Video Visitation System ............................................................................................. 13
  Advantages of Inmate Video Visitation .............................................................................................. 14
  Disadvantages of Inmate Video Visitation ......................................................................................... 16
  Summary .............................................................................................................................................. 18
Chapter 2: Inmate Video Visitation at Ada County Sheriff’s Office ......................................................... 19
  Interviews with Key Stakeholders ...................................................................................................... 19
  Data Analysis ..................................................................................................................................... 20
  Key Themes ...................................................................................................................................... 21
  Summary ........................................................................................................................................... 31
Chapter 3: Perceptions about IVVS: Interviews with Key Stakeholders & Sheriff’s Deputies ................. 33
  Interviews with Sheriff’s Deputies ...................................................................................................... 33
  Data Analysis ................................................................................................................................... 34
  Key Themes ...................................................................................................................................... 35
  Summary ........................................................................................................................................... 81
Chapter 4: Interviews with Inmates .......................................................................................................... 85
  Data Analysis ..................................................................................................................................... 85
  Key Themes ...................................................................................................................................... 86
  Summary ........................................................................................................................................... 109
Chapter 5: Inmate Surveys ....................................................................................................................... 113
  Research Design ............................................................................................................................... 114
  Survey Items and Variables .............................................................................................................. 115
  Survey Construction and Administration ......................................................................................... 116
  Survey Results .................................................................................................................................. 117
  Summary ........................................................................................................................................... 128
Chapter 6: Secondary Data Analysis ....................................................................................................... 131
  Results ............................................................................................................................................ 131
  Summary ........................................................................................................................................... 138
Chapter 7: Conclusion .............................................................................................................................. 140
  Recommendations ............................................................................................................................ 141
  Strengths and Limitations ............................................................................................................... 145
  Future Research ............................................................................................................................... 150
References ............................................................................................................................................... 155
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appendix</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix B</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix C</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix D</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Tables

Table 5.1: Sampled Housing Units.................................................................113
Table 5.2: Sample Characteristics.................................................................118
Table 5.3: Characteristics of Visits.................................................................120
Table 5.4: Purchase Additional Video Visitation Time.................................121
Table 5.5: Opinions about Free Visits............................................................122
Table 5.6: Opinions about IVVS: Scale Items..............................................124
Table 6.1: Frequency of In-Person Visits.....................................................131
Table 6.2: Frequency of Pre-Telmate Video Visits........................................132
Table 6.3: Frequency of Telmate Visits.........................................................133
Table 6.4: Inmate Demographics.................................................................134
Table 6.5: Disciplinary Violations...............................................................136
### List of Acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AA</td>
<td>Alcoholics Anonymous</td>
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<tr>
<td>ACJ</td>
<td>Ada County Jail</td>
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<tr>
<td>ACLU</td>
<td>American Civil Liberties Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>ACSO</td>
<td>Ada County Sheriff’s Office</td>
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<tr>
<td>CB</td>
<td>Cell Block</td>
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<tr>
<td>CCU</td>
<td>Close Custody Unit</td>
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<tr>
<td>DMV</td>
<td>Department of Motor Vehicles</td>
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<tr>
<td>FCC</td>
<td>Federal Communications Commission</td>
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<td>GED</td>
<td>General Education Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>IRB</td>
<td>Institutional Review Board</td>
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<td>IVVS</td>
<td>Inmate Video Visitation System</td>
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<tr>
<td>LDR</td>
<td>Learn, Do, and Review</td>
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<tr>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Narcotics Anonymous</td>
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<tr>
<td>SPSS</td>
<td>Statistical Package for the Social Sciences</td>
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<td>SRT</td>
<td>Special Response Team</td>
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Executive Summary

Visitation has been an integral component of correctional facilities for decades, as an inmate’s ability to maintain ties with their family and friends has been shown to improve their behavior while incarcerated, as well as upon release. While historically occurring in-person, visitation has fairly recently begun to be offered via video, which offers several advantages over in-person visitation, though there are some disadvantages as well. This report outlines the results of an evaluation of the inmate video visitation system (IVVS) at the Ada County Jail (ACJ) in Boise, Idaho. First implemented in 2010, ACJ was a pioneer in the use of remote video visitation in correctional facilities. Through a partnership between Ada County Sheriff’s Office (ACSO) and researchers at Boise State University, the evaluation began in July of 2015 and included interviews with nine key stakeholders involved in the development and implementation of IVVS, 10 Sheriff’s deputies, and 12 inmates who regularly use the system. In addition, a survey assessing use of, and perceptions about, IVVS was completed by a sample of 58 inmates and a secondary data analysis was conducted with visitation and disciplinary violation records that were shared with the researchers.

According to the key stakeholders, the goals of IVVS were to: prevent the desensitization of kids to the jail; increase jail security and order; promote public safety; reduce resource and space requirements; and increase access to, and frequency of, visitation. Additional themes that emerged through interviews with key stakeholders and Sheriff’s deputies included difficulties and successes with the implementation of IVVS; technological issues and training; improvements in jail security and a shift in resources; concerns about the cost of additional visits and access to the required technology for visitors; perceived benefits of the elimination of wait time for visitors, removal of children from the jail environment, and increased frequency of
visits; belief in the positive impact of IVVS on institutional behavior; and doubts about the impact of IVVS on recidivism. Some suggestions for improvement offered by these participants included additional training opportunities and installing a kiosk outside of the secure part of the jail for visitor use.

The interviews conducted with inmates revealed a number of strengths of IVVS, though some weaknesses were noted as well. Identified strengths included appreciation for two free 30-minute visits per week and the perceived positive effect on behavior to avoid the loss of the privilege, the ability to maintain ties with family and friends, the convenience of visitors not having to travel to the facility, and improved visits with children, including protecting them from the jail environment. Some of the weaknesses mentioned by the participants included the lack of discretion to choose between in-person visitation or video visitation, the prohibitive cost of purchasing extra visits (nine dollars for 30 minutes), the lack of privacy given the location of kiosks in common areas, and technological issues with IVVS although many of these were believed to be due to issues on the visitors’ ends. Last, some suggestions for improvement offered by the inmates interviewed included having the option to pick between in-person or video visits, implementing an incentive-based program to earn extra visits, and expanding the use of IVVS to include confidential visits with attorneys.

The findings from the inmate surveys were similar in some ways to the inmate interviews, but different in many ways as well. In terms of usage, most indicated they use the two free video visits per week to visit with a variety of family and friends, though very few purchase additional visits due to the cost. Those who have not used IVVS cited scheduling and accessibility issues (i.e., visitors not having the technology required to complete video visits) as the main reasons they have not used it. In terms of perceptions about IVVS, respondents clearly
prefer in-person visitation over video visitation, believing in-person visits would better help them to maintain social ties. A large proportion also noted some problems with the system and doubts about the positive impact of IVVS on their behavior in the jail or upon release. However, the majority of respondents agreed that video visitation is helpful for inmates. Some suggestions offered for improvement included having the option of in-person visits, installing kiosks outside the secure part of the jail for visitors, and reducing the cost of purchasing extra visits.

The last portion of the evaluation was a secondary data analysis of official records provided by ACSO in regard to visitation, both in-person and video, and disciplinary violations. The results of the analysis suggested that the implementation of IVVS has increased the frequency of visits despite a relative stable average daily jail population. In addition, a demographic analysis of users suggested that IVVS has specifically increased visitation for female and older inmates, though there are other factors, such as the characteristics of inmates at ACJ, which could have accounted for the observed changes. Although one of the goals of video visitation is to improve institutional behavior, an analysis of disciplinary violations from 2009-2015 revealed an increase in the number of violations. However, the severity of violations appears to have decreased over time. Again, there are several factors that could have impacted the frequency and characteristics of disciplinary violations aside from the implementation of IVVS. Further research is needed to more closely examine the relationship between visitation and inmate behavior.

Based on all of the data collected and analyzed for this evaluation of IVVS at ACJ, the following recommendations are offered:

(1): Install kiosk(s) for visitor use.

(2): Decrease the cost of purchasing additional video visits.
(3): Award extra free visits for good institutional behavior.

(4): Give inmates the option to choose between video visitation or in-person visitation.

(5): Provide a more private visiting space in the living units.

(6): Expand programming, training, and educational programming opportunities on the kiosks.

(7): Broaden the use of video visits to professional staff.

(8): Provide ACSO deputies with additional training opportunities on the Telmate system.

(9): Periodically hold focus groups or conduct surveys with inmates and Sheriff’s deputies to inquire about their opinions on the use of IVVS.

The final portion of this report includes a discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the research methodologies used in this evaluation, as well as suggestions for future research on video visitation.
Introduction

Researchers at Boise State University contacted then-Sheriff, Sheriff Gary Raney, of Ada County Sheriff’s Office (ACSO) with a proposal to evaluate the inmate video visitation system (IVVS) that was first implemented at Ada County Jail (ACJ) in March of 2010. Then-Sheriff, Sheriff Gary Raney, and current Sheriff, Sheriff Stephen Bartlett, approved the researchers’ proposal. The program evaluation was designed to achieve two over-arching objectives:

**OBJECTIVE 1:** Examine the implementation of the program.

**OBJECTIVE 2:** Assess whether IVVS is effective in achieving its intended objectives.

The researchers used a mixed-methods approach to collect the data and achieve these objectives. Data were collected during semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders involved in the development and implementation of IVVS at ACJ, Sheriff’s deputies employed by ACSO both during and since the transition to IVVS, and inmates detained at ACJ. Surveys were also administered to inmates detained at ACJ and secondary data analyses were conducted using data that ACSO shared with the researchers.

This evaluation report begins with a brief overview of the existing literature about inmate video visitation, including the various types of video visitation that exist and the reported advantages and disadvantages of the practice. The next chapter, Chapter 2, documents how ACSO created and implemented the first remote IVVS in North America and presents the objectives ACSO sought to achieve – as perceived by the key stakeholders who were interviewed for the study – when they designed and implemented the system. The key themes that emerged from the data collected during the interviews with the key stakeholders (aside from the objectives, which are presented in Chapter 2) and Sheriff’s deputies are presented together in

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1 Phase 1 implementation of IVVS started in March 2010, when it was deployed in Dorms one
Chapter 3 to avoid redundancy. Chapter 4 highlights the results of the interviews that were conducted with inmates detained at ACJ. Chapter 5 presents the results of the survey that was administered to inmates detained at ACJ. Chapter 6 succinctly highlights the results from the secondary data analyses that were conducted using the data provided by ACSO. Lastly, Chapter 7 presents a summary of the findings from each chapter of the report with specific attention to the similarities and differences in the data collected across the various methodologies. Additionally, Chapter 7 documents the strengths and limitations of the methodologies utilized in the study, identifies areas for future research, and highlights recommendations for the future use of IVVS at ACJ, as informed by the data.
Chapter 1: Literature Review

Inmate Video Visitation

The use of video visitation in correctional facilities started in 1995, when correctional administrators in Pennsylvania implemented the practice of regional video visitation (Fulcher, 2014). This practice involves visitors traveling to a regional video visitation facility that is more centrally located than the prisons in the region to use computer kiosks to video visit with their loved ones who are incarcerated miles away at the various state prisons. Another type of video visitation that correctional administrators have started to use over the past decade is on-site video visitation. This practice involves visitors traveling to a detention facility to use computer kiosks that are located outside of the secure part of the jail or prison (e.g., in a separate building) to visit with their loved ones who are using computer kiosks located in the jail or prison (e.g., in their cell or in their living unit). Another type of video visitation occurs when correctional authorities provide remote inmate video visitation where visitors are not required to travel to a correctional institution or facility to use the organization’s computer kiosks. Remote video visitation provides family and friends of inmates the opportunity to visit with their loved ones using their own computers or smartphones, or computers that are set up for general use in public places (e.g., libraries, churches, and companies/organizations, such as bail bond companies).

ACSO’s Inmate Video Visitation System

Then-Sheriff, Sheriff Gary Raney, collaborated with Jefferson Jewell of Blackfin Technology to create the first Internet-based, remote video visitation in North America. The objectives underlying the development and implementation of the inmate video visitation system (IVVS) at Ada County Jail (ACJ) are presented in Chapter 2 in the form of central themes that emerged from the data that were collected during interviews with the key stakeholders involved in the creation and implementation of IVVS at ACJ. The remaining themes that emerged from
the data collected during interviews with the key stakeholders, as well as the Sheriff’s deputies, are presented in Chapter 3.

Given that IVVS was initiated at ACJ, with corrections administrators across the nation incorporating similar visitation systems in the months and years that followed, it is fitting that ACJ be the focus of a program evaluation. Prior to presenting the results of this evaluation, it is important to provide an overview of the advantages and disadvantages of video visitation to situate the findings that emerged during this evaluation in the existing literature. It is also important to note that little academic attention has been devoted to the study of video visitation in jails, which is not surprising given that it is relatively new, and corrections research is typically conducted in prison settings (Sturges, 2002; Sturges & Al-Khattar, 2009). Much of the existing literature is anecdotal, or has examined the use of video visitation in prison settings (see for example, Digard, diZerega, Yaroni, & Rinaldi, 2016). Thus, the audience should be cautious when reading the following two sections and recognize the advantages and disadvantages presented hereafter may have been discovered using prison populations rather than jail populations, and/or using research designs that were not methodologically rigorous. It should also be noted that the advantages and disadvantages presented in the following sections compare video visitation to the use of in-person visitation.

**Advantages of Inmate Video Visitation**

Video visitation is believed to be beneficial for inmates, visitors, and corrections administrators. Inmates and their visitors are said to benefit from a correctional service’s decision to rely on video visitation because correctional services can increase the number and length of visitation hours (Anonymous, 2003a; Anonymous, 2006; Del Dago, 2012; Loper & Coleman, 2014; Mayorga, 2009) and increase the number of visitors an inmate can have (Grohs,
Another benefit of video visitation is that children and their parents may be able to play games with one another during video visits, which is something that can be prohibited during in-person visitation (Loper & Coleman, 2014). Female offenders in Hillman’s (2006) study reported that their participation in virtual visitation increased their self-esteem and resulted in stronger relationships with their children, which is beneficial for inmates and their families.

Visitors are said to benefit from the use of video visitation in many ways. Video visitation is said to reduce: visitors’ travel time (Johnson & Hesse, 2005; Loper & Coleman, 2014), and thus, visitors’ travel and lodging costs; wait times for visits (Anonymous, 2003; Anonymous, 2006; Grohs, 2013; Johnson & Hesse, 2005); the likelihood visitors will be turned away from visits due to long line-ups (Anonymous, 2003; Del Dago, 2012); and, the length of time it takes for individuals to receive security clearance to visit with their loved ones (Anonymous, 2003a). The use of video visitation also eliminates the necessity of corrections staff patting-down and searching visitors (i.e., with a metal detector; Del Dago, 2012; Grohs, 2013), which can be a stressful aspect of visitation, particularly for children (Phillips, 2012).

Corrections administrators are believed to benefit from video visitation primarily because it increases institutional security and order. The use of video visitation eliminates the need to take the public into secure parts of correctional institutions and thus, the practice reduces opportunities for contraband to enter institutions during public visiting hours (Anonymous, 2006; Del Dago, 2012; Grohs, 2013; Johnson & Hesse, 2005; Mayorga, 2009; Rogers, 2013). The use of video visitation also increases the ease with which correctional administrators can record and monitor visits (Loper & Coleman, 2014; Mayorga, 2009).

The provision of video visitation can also be used as an offender management tool to incentivize good behavior among the inmate population, as inmates are more inclined to follow
institutional rules to avoid losing access to one’s video visits. Other benefits for correctional administrators involve eliminating the need to create space for in-person visits (Anonymous, 2006) and reducing security clearance procedures and costs to process visitors, supervise visits, and move inmates throughout the institution (Anonymous, 2003a; Del Dago, 2012; Grohs, 2013; Loper & Coleman, 2014; Mayorga, 2009; Rabuy & Wagner, 2015). Given that the use of video visitation reduces staff time needed to complete tasks associated with in-person visitation, the use of this practice may result in staff having more time to engage with inmates during correctional programming activities (Johnson & Hesse, 2005). In addition to saving money on processing, supervising, and transporting costs through the implementation of video visitation, its use also creates the opportunity for correctional agencies to generate revenue by charging a fee to utilize the video visitation system (Fulcher, 2014; Grohs, 2013; Phillips, 2012), which unfortunately, can be to the detriment of inmates and their families. This, and other disadvantages, are discussed further in the next section.

Disadvantages of Inmate Video Visitation

The reported disadvantages of using video visitation are said to impact primarily inmates and the people visiting them, rather than the correctional administrators that implement the technology. As mentioned above, a potential disadvantage of IVVS is that inmates and/or their families may be responsible for paying for visits. Costs of video visits vary depending on the service provider; for example, Telmate (the current video visitation system at Ada County Jail) charges anywhere from 33 to 66 cents per minute, JPay charges between 20 and 43 cents per minute, and Securus charges anywhere from 50 cents to $1.50 per minute (Rabuy & Wagner, 2015); these are costs that may exclude economically disadvantaged inmates and their families from being able to visit. The cost of purchasing or owning the technology and Internet services
required to use IVVS may also preclude certain inmates and their families from using video visits (Loper & Coleman, 2014).

A major criticism of video visitation relates to the technical difficulties inmates and their visitors experience when using these systems. Technology can impede the quality of visits and result in impersonal visits (Sturges & Al-Khattar, 2009) when the images are grainy and/or delayed and/or when audio is delayed.

Another concern is that the majority of county jails ban in-person visitation services once the facility is equipped for video visitation (Rabuy & Wagner, 2015). This means prisoners and their visitors are cut off from human, face-to-face physical contact and exposure, which can prove challenging for inmates and their loved ones (Anonymous, 2003; Fulcher, 2014).

It is also possible that the regional visit facilities or remote locations (e.g., those in churches, libraries, and bail bond companies) may require visitors invest in significant travel time (Loper & Coleman, 2014) and possibly, gas and lodging costs. On-site and regional visitation does not seem as advantageous for visitors as in-person visits given they have already travelled to the institution or regional visiting facility for a visit.

One of the disadvantages that correctional administrators have expressed concern about with the development and use of video visitation is the potential for inmates to abuse the practice; for example, when visitors are not vetted properly by correctional services for security risks, or when measures are not in place to enforce no-contact orders (Rogers, 2013). While this disadvantage is very real, correctional agencies are able to counteract this disadvantage by engaging in sound screening, recording, and reviewing practices for inmate video visits.
Summary

Overall, the research that has been conducted on video visitation suggests that, in comparison to in-person visitation, video visitation offers a number of advantages such as the opportunity for increased frequency and length of visits, improved parent-child interactions, reduced travel and wait time for visitors, increased institutional security and order, and additional staff time for other important tasks besides processing visitors. However, it is important to note that these advantages vary somewhat in accordance with the type of video visitation (i.e., regional, on-site, or remote). In contrast, some of the disadvantages associated with video visitation include the financial cost of video visits for inmates and their families, visitors’ access to technology, technical difficulties such as grainy images and delays, the removal of in-person visitation, and concerns about inmate abuse of the system. As with the advantages, the disadvantages also vary depending upon the type of video visitation.

As noted earlier, the existing research on video visitation is quite limited as there have only been a handful of studies conducted on video visitation. The majority of this research is anecdotal, focused on prison settings, or lacking in methodological rigor. Thus, the evaluation of IVVS at ACJ described in this report makes an important contribution to the body of knowledge on the use of video visitation in a jail setting. The following two chapters outline the findings from the interviews conducted with key stakeholders and Sheriff’s deputies.
Chapter 2: Inmate Video Visitation at Ada County Sheriff’s Office

As previously mentioned, then-Sheriff, Sheriff Gary Raney, collaborated with Jefferson Jewell of Blackfin Technology to create the first Internet-based, remote video visitation system in North America. Ada County Sheriff’s Office (ACSO) began implementation of their remote inmate video visitation system (IVVS) in March 2010, which involved the inmates using mobile tablets for their video visits. Keefe Tech eventually bought out Blackfin Technology, the original IVVS provider. In November 2013, ACSO implemented a new system of video visitation that was provided by Telmate, which continues to operate to date. With Telmate, inmates use kiosks located in common areas to complete their video visits and they have access to use tablets for other activities (e.g., music and messaging) for a small fee.

This chapter presents what the key stakeholders viewed as the catalyst for the development and implementation of ACSO’s IVVS, as well as the objectives the nine key stakeholders who were interviewed said the organization was trying to achieve. Prior to presenting these two themes that emerged from the data, a brief overview of the interview methodology is provided.

Interviews with Key Stakeholders

One of the researchers conducted interviews with nine of the key stakeholders who were responsible for the design and/or implementation of IVVS at Ada County Jail (ACJ). The purpose of these interviews was to develop a greater understanding of IVVS, including how IVVS was implemented at ACJ, the objectives ACSO sought to achieve by introducing the technology, the challenges that arose during and following the implementation of IVVS and how ACSO addressed these issues, the strengths of IVVS, and lastly, any weaknesses of IVVS and suggestions for improvement.
Then-Sheriff, Sheriff Gary Raney, identified the key stakeholders who were involved in the design and/or implementation of IVVS at ACJ. Upon approval from Boise State University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) (documentation available upon request), these individuals were emailed copies of the combined recruitment/cover letter and informed consent documents to request their participation in the study. If they were interested in participating in the study, they contacted the researchers directly; all nine of the key stakeholders who were emailed participated in an interview.

Data were collected during semi-structured, in-depth interviews that were conducted in July 2015 with nine key stakeholders who, as stated, were involved extensively in the development and/or implementation of IVVS, and who were selected for participation using purposive sampling. The interviewer asked the participants 14 open-ended questions; the interviews were approximately 40-minutes in duration. Of the nine key stakeholders who were interviewed, eight were male and one was female. To protect the female stakeholder’s confidentiality, a male pseudonym has been assigned to all of the participants.

Data Analysis

The data collected during the interviews with the nine key stakeholders were transcribed in Microsoft Word before being analyzed using the qualitative data software program, NVivo10. Six key themes emerged from the data; two of these key themes (i.e., ACSO as a progressive agency and the objectives ACSO sought to achieve with the design and implementation of IVVS) are discussed in this chapter. The remaining four key themes are discussed in Chapter 3 given that they mirrored the themes that emerged from the data collected during interviews with ACSO deputies. It is important to note that due to the sampling strategy utilized – nonprobability

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2 See Appendix A for the list of questions the researcher asked the key stakeholders.
sampling – these interviews may not be representative of the opinions held by all of the individuals involved in the development and implementation of IVVS at ACJ.

**Key Themes**

Two key themes that emerged from the data collected during interviews conducted with nine key stakeholders are discussed in this chapter. The discussion focuses on how IVVS was envisioned from the outset (i.e., how progressive ACSO was to envision IVVS) and the objectives ACSO personnel sought to achieve with its implementation.

1. **Ada County Sheriff’s Office as a progressive agency.** Almost all of the key stakeholders explained how they view ACSO as a very progressive agency, an agency that is “not stuck in the dark ages; [as they’re] trying to be progressive and find ways to make things more efficient and more in with the times … [and] in a cost effective way” (Benjamin).

   Then-Sheriff, Sheriff Gary Raney, received many accolades for his role in conceptualizing and developing IVVS with Jefferson Jewel, the President of a local technology company, Blackfin Technology. For example, Erik stated, “Sheriff Raney really pioneered this model of internet visiting for the jails,” which was reiterated by Terrence who explained, “it really was the vision of Sheriff Raney.” Miguel described the Sheriff’s vision in greater detail:

   Sheriff Gary Raney actually came up with the idea and he, you know, he came to me and said, “I envision Skype, if we can Skype at home, why can’t we Skype in the jail?” So we did some research and we could not find a vendor that was doing pure Internet video visiting…No one, no vendor in the industry was doing it at that time. What they were doing was a secure-connect type of visit where they had visiting stations either on-site, or maybe across the street at a visiting facility. But the friends and family could come to that location and they would be connected via a kiosk, to a kiosk in the facility, and that wasn’t using an Internet connection. So he called up a local software company called Blackfin and had a

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3 Pseudonyms have been assigned to all of the participants; these are not the participants’ real names.
conversation with the president of that company and they both said, “Sounds doable, sounds like a great idea. Let’s see what we can make happen.” So we entered into an agreement with them for basically a trial, a pilot to see if we could build it, and that’s how it just basically all started.

(2) The objectives of developing and implementing inmate video visitation at ACJ.

ACSO personnel were said to be striving to achieve a variety of objectives when they created and implemented IVVS. The participants explained how these objectives aligned very closely with the pillars of the jail, which are “safety of staff, security of the facility, wellbeing of the inmates… [and meeting or exceeding] stakeholder expectations” (Christopher). Five key objectives emerged from the data during the content analysis:

1. Prevent the desensitization of kids to jail;
2. Increase jail security and order;
3. Promote public safety;
4. Reduce resource and space requirements; and,
5. Increase access to, and frequency of, visitation.

The quotes included below in sections 2(a) through 2(e) highlight some of the challenges that the old system of in-person visitation created for ACSO and illustrate how the ACSO personnel interviewed in this study believed IVVS was going to address them. Of additional importance to note here is that the participants indicated that ACSO personnel made the decision very early on to eliminate in-person glass visits with the introduction of IVVS, rather than being pressured by external companies to do so. As described by Erik, this decision reflected the organization’s desire to achieve the objectives outlined above:

We always intended for it to be an all or nothing, and the reason for that is, and we experienced it because we toyed with doing special visits, but it really comes down to the fundamental fairness issue, and if you allow any in-person visits, they are going to want
that over the video visits…Before the vendors were involved, that was our decision; an all or nothing. And if you look at our goals, I mean, why would it make sense half way?

2(a) Prevent the desensitization of kids to jail. The participants discussed how preventing the desensitization of kids to the jail environment was at the forefront of their minds when it came to developing IVVS. Dominic explained why ACSO personnel were concerned with the wellbeing of their inmates’ families:

Taking care of our inmates is also taking care of their families … and one of the big objectives in visitation is whether we’re taking care of that family, [by asking,] is this the right thing to do? Is the right thing having a three, four, five, six year old child … in the lobby, or in the inside of an institution on their parent’s birthday? Or on Easter Sunday? Or on Christmas Day?

Participants gave examples of how they believed the old system of in-person visitation was detrimental to children. As Terrence explained, “the dynamic of screening people who had a pretty serious criminal history standing next to small children … was pretty frustrating.” Christopher elaborated on how he thought jail could be normalized under the old process:

You have kids coming to see mom and dad in jail, they’re waiting an hour and a half to see mom and dad in jail, and kind of the belief and the thought process was … it almost normalizes being in jail.

Terrence also discussed the concern he thought many ACSO personnel felt when it came to kids and families traveling to ACJ for in-person visitation, and how IVVS was designed to counteract it:

We used to have visitors come into the jail, they’d have these little girls dressed in their Christmas dresses, and waiting to see their mom or dad, having to spend Christmas morning, spending an hour waiting around, waiting to go inside a jail on Christmas morning to go visit their family member. They wouldn’t have contact of course, it was behind a Plexiglas window, and they were talking on a phone system lined up with all these other people… So now the system is that these kids can actually stay home, stay by their
Christmas trees, show their parents the presents they got, and have that more of an opportunity to not just be, you know, institutionalized into that process.

Terrence also explained how distressing the actual visits could be for children:

It’s not *Orange is the New Black* where people see people in a big conference room, hugging each other; it’s not that at all. So yeah, there’s an impersonal method where you walk in down a hall and you’re sitting, literally 24 inches away from somebody else who’s talking, who’s sitting next to 24 others, and they’re emotional, you got people who are breaking up with each other, they’re yelling at each other because, “How dare you be in jail!” It’s not just everybody saying I love ya; you get screaming matches and then you have these little 9-year-old girls thinking, “What’s going on here?” …And they’re in a room that they can’t get out of. You’re in there for an hour, unless you hit the button and there’s a really valid reason, we’ll take you out of there. We were institutionalizing a whole bunch of kids to say it’s okay to go to jail and see mom and dad in their uniform.

Roy further explained why the inability for kids to leave the visitation room was problematic:

Little kids … need to use the bathroom. When we have the [in-person] visitation, there [are] no restrooms in the visitation [room] and you’re there for an hour… we would find puddles of urine from who knows where, probably kids, because they just couldn’t wait to get out. What’s kind of weird is sometimes that room was full of other people, so to do that, you’re doing it in front of everybody.

Another challenge in having the kids in jail was that they could be disruptive in the visiting room:

The kids would run wild and they would bug everybody else, which would lead to those little arguments and discussions in between people and then you’d have to go back and just tell them, “Hey, I told you once, you have to keep a hold of your child, it’s a distraction to everybody else here that wants to visit. One more distraction and I have to come in and ask you to leave.” (Jordan)

2(b) Increase jail security and order. The next key objective the participants believed ACSO sought to achieve with the implementation of IVVS was increasing jail security and
order, which promotes staff safety and inmate well-being; all three of which are pillars of the jail. ACSO personnel believed IVVS would increase jail security and order in three ways: by reducing inmate movement, by eliminating the transportation of community members into secure parts of the jail, and by incentivizing inmates to follow institutional rules, which are elaborated on below.

2(b)(i) Reduce inmate movement. Terrence discussed how important it was to decrease inmate movement because:

Any time you take an inmate out of his living environment and put him in a hallway with other inmates that work, we have a bunch of ‘keep separate’ inmates, we have co-defendants, we have sex offenders, we have people that we need to keep safe and every time you put them out of their housing unit, and put them in the hallway, there’s opportunities for problems.

Erik explained how ACSO personnel had to move inmates throughout the jail under the previous in-person visitation system and that despite carefully constructing a multitude of visiting hours for different populations in ACJ, accidents can happen:

When you’re moving that many inmates for visits, you have got to really be careful not to mix enemies and you separate them out by the different housing units and when you look at that schedule, you see it’s complicated enough as it is, so even with this schedule, or the colors, or the groups we’re trying to move, you still have the potential of crossing enemies and yes, that’s dangerous.

2(b)(ii) Eliminate the transportation of community members into secure parts of the jail. As Benjamin stated, “moving people in and out of a secure facility is problematic” because as Miguel explained, visitors “were actually coming through a secure part of our jail to get to the visiting area and so the security of the facility was compromised every single time that we did in-person visits.” As Terrence described, video visits help to alleviate some of these issues in that when the visits:
are occurring, you know, through a video visit, as opposed to having someone in person, the chances of our staff having problems is reduced; the security of the facility, we don’t have people coming into our jail that we don’t know a whole lot about.

One of the concerns with transporting the public into ACJ was that the process created opportunities for the public to smuggle contraband in to the inmates; as Miguel stated, “more people equals more contraband.” Erik provided an example of how contraband was entering ACJ due to transporting visitors into the jail: “Tobacco and different things would be taped up under, to the little brown benches or seats, they’d tape that stuff up under there and we’d come find it later.” Quinton offered another example of how contraband entered ACJ under the old visitation system, “we’d find diapers with cigarettes rolled up inside them and stuff that they’d leave them behind, hoping we’d send the inmate in to clean it up before we checked it.” Similarly, Jordan described how difficult it was to prevent contraband from entering the facility:

You didn’t have much time in between visiting, so they could leave something and then you look through the place before, and you look through the place after the visiting, to see if there was any contraband, but sometimes if people didn’t get to it, and you sent workers in there, that was a great way of passing something to the inmates.

Quinton explained how contraband has the potential to affect the well-being of inmates in terms of medical health and the repercussions of a black market developing:

It’s definitely inmate safety and well-being because you know, if they’re taking a controlled substance we’re not aware of, there’s obviously those hazards of how it’s going to affect them. If they are affecting them, we don’t know medically what’s going on with them and things like that. Plus, that becomes then a current within the jail that leads to assaults and stuff like that, and so across the board, it’s a huge help in that department.

2(b)(iii) Incentivize inmates to follow institutional rules. ACSO personnel explained how they believed they could increase the security and order of the jail by incentivizing inmates to
follow the institution’s rules by providing video visits. This incentive comes from the ability to revoke an inmate’s video visits if they fail to adhere to the institutional rules, which is similar to the old practice of revoking an inmate’s right to in-person visitation for misbehavior. However, there was a belief that the inmates are more sensitive to losing the two free video visits they are allocated, as they are free and more convenient for their families, and further, the inmates have the option of purchasing additional visits to see their families. Benjamin explained how he believed providing inmates with access to their families on the outside would affect their behavior in the jail:

You have people in custody who, they obviously have rights … [and there are] things that you [can do to] make them serve time more effectively in the sense that if they never get to see their loved ones, if they don’t have any communication with the outside, that’s not healthy for them, which in turn will cause behavior problems. Then that in turn, can cause jail problems or staff problems, violence. So you have to balance the needs of being humane and giving them the things they rightfully deserve and have. Also, with your staff safety, to where you’re not putting them in a bad position.

Terrence explained further how, similar to in-person visitation, IVVS is:

A huge tool when inmates have the chance to assimilate and feel connected with their family, there are less problems in our jail… any time you can engage inmates in their housing environment, you’re going to have less problems; that idle minds, idle hands kind of thing.

2(c) Promote public safety. The participants also discussed how they believed ACSO was concerned with promoting public safety when they implemented IVVS. Benjamin expressed concerns about emergencies occurring while in-person visitation was happening:

Moving people in and out of a secure facility is problematic. You know you really need to try to limit how many people you have coming in, how many people you have going out. If you have an emergency in the facility, how many people you’re accountable for aside from all of the inmates you already know you have in there.
Promoting public safety was also discussed within the framework of reducing inmate recidivism upon their release from the jail. Christopher described the importance of visits from the perspective of ACSO and how it might be hard to measure the overall impact of providing inmates with access to their families – particularly with respect to recidivism – but that he believes their job:

is to return people to society better than when they came in. Whether that’s, you know NA, AA, programs, behavioral health programs that we have, parenting classes that we host, GED, all of those things. We, as an organization, we really try to make sure people leave our custody better than when they came in, and so from that family tie aspect, that ability to maintain a relationship with your children, maintain that relationship with your family members, that’s huge. I don’t know how you would ever measure that impact, but it can’t be bad.

Erik explained even further how he believed ACSO was concerned with “improving or increasing opportunities for inmates to visit because if they can stay connected with families,” speaking directly to the researcher, “you know from your research, that it helps with recidivism.”

2(d) Reduce resource and space requirements. Benjamin expressed how in-person “visitation was one of the most time consuming and manpower intensive issues in getting people in and out of the facility.” As Terrence explained, in-person visitation:

required our commissioned officers to screen all the people coming in to visit. It required staff to move them from our lobby down to the visitation area. It required monitoring of the visits, it required the movement of the people who were visiting our facility.

Erik shed additional light on the in-person visitation process:

There’s the whole sign-up component of people lining up, getting their IDs, logging them into the computer, all of that, so that’s one piece of the component. Then the security component was deputies would have to come up here in the lobby and we would run everybody through metal detectors and then of course, so you just
basically have staff tied up, getting everybody in, and then you got to escort them out.

There was even concern, as expressed by Christopher, that ACSO personnel “knew if the jail kept growing, that sooner or later, we were going to run out of visitation space and we would not be able to meet the Idaho jail standards.” In addition to time and manpower, in-person visitation took up a lot of space in the lobby of the jail. As Benjamin explained:

So you would have that whole lobby full of people and then that one window that’s at the corner used to be where they would check-in for the visit. That’s also the primary entrance point to the jail for staff, so you had this slider at the end, which we would funnel people through, and then you had a staff entrance that goes into our main control room, but you had this congregation of people at different times of the day and it was totally filling up the lobby and you would have to make an arrest right there in front of people and it just, logistically, was a nightmare and then philosophically, it was not conducive to a good environment.

Dominic described how:

The lobby would be just overpopulated, crowded, during that time we would have our concealed weapons crowd that would be coming in to get their license, we would have DMV that was coming in to get licenses, we would have just our regular people coming in to do their regular business at the records lobby here, and so all those people would be intermingled and we just couldn’t get everybody in the front door.

Having large groups accumulate in the lobby created challenges for ACSO personnel to complete their other tasks:

Well, it was just something that we didn’t like, because, you know, kids run around screaming while you’re trying to do business, so the window used to be right out front here, where you checked in, and we’re having a problem with when visitors were there, bondsmen would be trying to do their work, they’d be standing in line and be frustrated, attorneys would be trying to come in, they’d be standing in the line frustrated because they have to wait for us to take care of all the visitors. (Erik)
Given all of these above-mentioned concerns, it is not surprising that ACSO sought to reduce resource and space requirements, which would allow the organization to shift resources. Miguel explained the reallocation in simple terms: IVVS was designed to reallocate Sheriff’s deputies’ “attention to what matters most and that’s focusing on being a deputy instead of an escort basically.” And with that, Dominic said the elimination of in-person visitation was designed to give Sheriff’s deputies “the time to focus on [the] supervision of inmates.”

2(e) Increase access to, and frequency of, visitation. Christopher spoke about the pillars of ACSO, and how he believed providing inmates with access to their families reflects the need to ensure the well-being of the inmates in their care:

All the improvements for the family and the visits, and everything else, we really felt that the continued ability to interact with family, keep that connect, to keep them involved, to make sure that they don’t feel like they’re just in some warehouse someplace, that everybody on the outside forgot about [them].

ACSO personnel said they were striving to achieve a visitation practice that could increase the opportunity for inmates to connect with their loved ones in the community. As Christopher explained, ACSO was responsible for providing inmates with access to a predetermined number of visits per week, and this was not always easy to arrange under the old method of in-person visitation. Jordan explained the Idaho Jail Standards, “Jail standards, back then, used to say, “have an hour visit.” It used to be two one half hour visits… in a week but we used to have one hour in person.” Christopher explained the challenges he thought ACSO was experiencing in providing an hour visit for each inmate per week:

Idaho Jail Standards has a mandated language of how often inmates are allowed to visit, so we have some basically, legislative duties to fulfill so that inmates can visit. In doing that, as our facility grew, our visitation space was limited. We had 42 slots to visit and the institution kept getting larger, so to be able to afford all of the people, and all of the time, it becomes a math issue; we
Christopher explained the in-person visitation process and how it was conducted on a first-come and first-serve basis:

So families had to come down, they had to sign up, first come and first serve. We didn’t have a real, we didn’t really have a very good way to monitor that, so first come, first serve meant that only the first 42 got to come into the facility, and so what happened was, is that lines get longer and longer and longer and people start showing up sooner and sooner and sooner. So now we have a lobby full of people that would wait sometimes an hour or an hour and half for their 45-minute or hour-long visit.

Further, as Quinton explained, children and other unexperienced visitors could be turned away from visits under the old in-person visitation model:

[For the public] to come visit was probably, at least a two-hour process by the time they’d get there and it was always, you had this challenge of the experienced families versus the non-experienced families and who knew how to play the game, or how to get there. So non-experienced ones were not getting visits because the experienced ones knew how to get in and get checked in.

Due to the aforementioned challenges in conducting in-person visitation, the participants explained how they believed that ACSO designed IVVS to increase the inmates’ access to, and frequency of, visitation.

Summary

The key stakeholders who were interviewed spoke about the progressiveness of ACSO as an agency, led by then-Sheriff, Sheriff Gary Raney, who envisioned a system of IVVS that would prevent the desensitization of kids to jail, increase jail security and order, promote public safety, reduce resource and space requirements, and, increase the inmates’ access to, and frequency of, visitation. The data that is presented in Chapters 3 through 6 addresses the transition to IVVS at ACSO and the participants’ – inmates, Sheriff’s deputies, and key
stakeholders – perceptions of IVVS at ACSO. It is important to recall that the original system of IVVS that was operated at ACJ is no longer in existence, as ACSO switched providers in 2013 and currently contracts with Telmate.
Chapter 3: Perceptions about IVVS: Interviews with Key Stakeholders & Sheriff’s Deputies

Four key themes that emerged from the data collected during the interviews with key stakeholders and Sheriff’s deputies are presented together in this chapter to avoid redundancy in presentation given the similarities in the findings. In contrast to the themes presented in Chapter 2 that reflect the development of video visitation at Ada County Sheriff’s Office (ACSO), the four themes presented herein highlight the implementation, subsequent use, and operational realities of the inmate video visitation system (IVVS) at ACSO. Prior to presenting these themes, a brief overview of the methodological procedures that were utilized for the interviews conducted with ACSO deputies is presented, in addition to the data analysis techniques that were used (see Chapter 2 for the interview methodology and data analysis techniques for the data collected during interviews with key stakeholders).

Interviews with Sheriff’s Deputies

One of the researchers conducted the interviews with 10 ACSO deputies. The purpose of these interviews was to understand the Sheriff’s deputies’ perceptions about the use of IVVS at Ada County Jail (ACJ), focusing on their opinions about the day-to-day challenges in its use, including providing supervision to inmates, their opinions about strategies to strengthen/revise IVVS and/or inmate access to its use, and how the implementation of IVVS has affected their feelings of personal safety and efficiency at the job. Lastly, the researchers sought to understand the Sheriff’s deputies’ perceptions about the offenders’ use of IVVS and whether they believe it affects inmate behavior within the institution and upon their release into the community.

A lieutenant from ACSO identified a convenient day for the researcher to conduct the interviews with the Sheriff’s deputies. The lieutenant emailed copies of the recruitment/cover letter and informed consent documents to the Sheriff’s deputies prior to the scheduled interview.
date to request their participation in the study. The lieutenant scheduled an extra deputy to work
during the day of the interviews to ensure the Sheriff’s deputies could safely leave their posts to
participate in the interviews. The extra deputy floated from post-to-post to cover his/her peers’
posts if they wanted to leave to participate in an interview. The Sheriff’s deputies participated
voluntarily; if they did not want to participate in an interview, they stayed at their post and the
‘floater’ went to the next post to ask another colleague if they wanted to participate in the study.

Data were collected during semi-structured, in-depth interviews that were conducted in
October 2015 with 10 Sheriff’s deputies who were selected for participation using purposive
sampling. The interview script consisted of 11 open-ended questions, which resulted in
interviews that lasted approximately 30 minutes in length. Of the 10 Sheriff’s deputies who
were interviewed, nine were male and one was female. To protect the female Sheriff’s deputy’s
confidentiality, a male pseudonym has been assigned to all of the participants.

Data Analysis

The data collected during the interviews with the nine key stakeholders and 10 Sheriff’s
deputies were transcribed in Microsoft Word before being analyzed using the qualitative data
software program, NVivo10. Six key themes emerged from the data collected during interviews
with the key stakeholders whereas four key themes emerged from the data collected during
interviews with ACSO deputies; all four of the key themes that emerged from the data collected
during the two sets of interviews are presented in the subsequent section. It is important to note
that due to the sampling strategy utilized – nonprobability sampling – these interviews may not
be representative of the opinions held by all of the individuals involved in the development and

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4 See Appendix B for the list of questions the researcher asked the Sheriff’s deputies.
5 The two other key themes that emerged from the data collected during interviews with the key
stakeholders were presented in Chapter 2.
Key Themes

Four key themes that emerged from the data collected during interviews with key stakeholders and Sheriff’s deputies are presented in this chapter. The discussion focuses on the components that were required to develop the program (i.e., the transition from in-person visitation to inmate video visitation), the challenges – both initial and current – that arose with its use, the benefits resulting from the implementation of IVVS, and recommendations to advance the use of IVVS at ACJ. The report differentiates between perceptions that emerged from the data collected during interviews conducted with the key stakeholders versus ACSO deputies when it was deemed necessary for the purpose of interpretation, such as when the two groups did not share the same opinion about a particular recommendation for the future use of IVVS at ACJ.

(1) Transition components. The key stakeholders and Sheriff’s deputies identified a variety of key features that characterized the transition to IVVS, including educating the inmates, staff, and the public about IVVS, and finding a vendor that was capable of providing the service.

1(a) Inmate education. The participants explained how personnel at ACSO were concerned with the change from in-person visitation to video visitation negatively affecting the inmates, and so they actually piloted the program in certain dormitories to start off with to see how the inmates would react and function. Christopher explained how the process of piloting the project unfolded:

When we first started way back when, we did a trial run with select inmates in a select dorm, we actually went and explained what it was [and said], “this is what it’s gonna be.” We actually needed some incentives, so we had some commissary items. We’d say “hey, you wanna sign up and try this? You get a Coca-Cola, you get a Sprite”… something like that. Basically, some cookies to get
people to at least try it because there were inmates that didn’t want to have anything to do with it. They didn’t understand the change, they didn’t understand the benefit. To them, you know, change was bad. Frankly, it took off very quickly once they saw what it could do, and frankly, moms’ loved it. We started it in a female dorm on purpose because again, mothers could connect with their children, and they could see their kids and the kids weren’t here. The kids were in much more normal places, you said that word a lot, that normalized environment. They were in their own living room. So we intentionally started with a group we felt would be very receptive to it and it worked.

Terrence talked about how challenging inmate education initially was because the inmates did not understand how IVVS would work:

I think one of the biggest challenges was just [the] inmate[s] understanding that they were no longer going to have family members come see them. And I think, from my perspective, having men down there through some of the transitions and spending quite a bit of time talking to inmates, I think there was an initial sense that they were going to come from actually being able to see their family members, to some fuzzy screen that may or may not work, the technology, so there was, they were unsure about the usefulness or not usefulness; the ability for it to work correctly, and so education was one of the challenges.

Another challenge in inmate education pertains to inmate literacy because as Terrence explained:

There’s language barriers; there’s 10% of our population [that] is probably functionally illiterate. How do you do that in a way that’s fair to everybody, that everybody gets the same type of access? And so I guess, access [to] training is a continual challenge making sure nobody’s left on the sidelines once you utilize it.

After the initial successes in the dormitories, the program was rolled out across the jail, in combination with inmate education activities. One of these activities involved having some of the deputies train the inmates, as explained by Jordan:

They would go down there and we had a team of deputies that were involved in that, and they went down, and they trained the inmates and they showed them how to use it. And I remember they had a little, like, flyer that we educated them with; that this is coming up, this is what you’re going to do. Then we, and then
there was an instruction sheet that we had, and then deputies went down actually to different dorms and showed the inmates, we did it in one or two dorms, and then we kind of did a few more and we showed the inmates how to do it.

ACSO also installed signs to help inmates use the system:

In the dorm rooms we have put up bigger signs so the inmates can have a clearer understanding of what the steps are of how to use the system and so they can tell their family members better steps of how to use the kiosk and how to use the online system. And on the other side of it, we ask Telmate to really, when the family members call in and when they push one, or even when they call in, in the introduction, can you be, can you give it a more clear directive so they can really understand the system and it’s not so cumbersome, so they can help their family member a little bit more smoothly through the process. (Dominic)

Lastly, Christopher noted that the inmates actually helped – and continue to help – each other use the system, “you know, in any of our multiple occupancy cells, inmates, they’ll help each other out. I mean, that piece of it is huge [and] if they have problems, they’ll ask the deputies.”

1(b) Public education. The public also needed to be educated about the use of IVVS, particularly the family members of inmates who would have to use the system. As Christopher shared:

Frankly, [between the] inmates and [their] families … we knew that was gonna be an issue, we knew that was going to be a difficult sell. But like I said, once we kind of targeted and figured out who we should target, that pretty much went away. I don’t remember any public issue with it at all. I know that there were family members, now separating family members from the public, I know there were family members who didn’t like it at first. They liked to come down, be here face-to-face, and some of the pushback was, some of it was that depersonalized experience. But with Skype and FaceTime and all of those things, you know, they’re normal now [but] back then, those things weren’t very normal, and so there was a pushback saying, you know, it’s depersonalizing, I’m not gonna be able to understand him, those type of things. So some of the challenges that we overcame back then would not be a challenge now because now everybody knows what FaceTime is.
Once again, then-Sheriff, Sheriff Gary Raney, received praise for making “a very good argument and [being] very clear to the public about what just exactly it [was ACSO was] giving (Benjamin).” Sheriff Gary Raney and his colleagues at ACSO were said to have given considerable thought to how the public should be educated. One of the strategies the agency used was distributing information through their webpage:

We had information on video visits through our website and between the media, our website, you know, people who’d call and ask questions to our, almost like a help desk. Also, when we transitioned to Telmate, Telmate has their own help desk process and so we wanted to make it simple enough to where it didn’t take, it wasn’t excluding a segment of our population. (Terrence)

Miguel elaborated on the type of information that was available on the website, and the audience it was targeted towards:

Initially, it was press release. It was on our site, [where] we [also] had, we did videos, and so we did the how-to videos, one geared towards inmates [and] one geared towards the public. We posted those online and they could go and they could watch those visits and watch the instructions. We had a help page and step-by-step written directions and then we did the same for the inmates. So really, the key to any type of communication like that, is obviously, to target your audience and make it as simple as possible, and then give them the proper tools if they have issues. Telmate, they do, they follow the same type of concept; they have a help desk and they have the online videos and support on their site, but we left the public part up to Telmate, and then they went around and when we first launched, they spent time in every single housing unit showing the inmates the kiosks.

1(c) Staff education. Benjamin discussed how “The staff challenges were a little bit difficult because it was change and not everybody loves change.” Erik reflected on the logistical challenges of training staff:

There’s always challenges with training staff, how do you train 168 people? So if you look at our work schedule, they work 4 on and 4 off, 12.2 hours, and so any kind of training, you try to do for
staff and we’re staffed pretty tight, we don’t have extra staff running around, so any kind of training you do for staff is all overtime. So people have to come in on their day off. So yeah, training’s a challenge.

This sentiment was shared by Christopher:

Yeah, our biggest fundamental issue was that of training, because of the way that we staff the jail with 12 hour shifts. Every training we give, basically is overtime, and so that overtime cost can be prohibitive to making too many changes too quickly. Because frankly, you know, the deputies have to understand how it works so they can explain it to the inmates. And there’s always with computers, there’s always going to be issues so the downtime trying to get them fixed, trying to get them up, trying to figure out what was wrong with them. Again takes that away from their primary duties which is keeping inmates safe and making sure that nothing bad happens in the jail, but again, it’s a component of that, the system has to work.

The staff were trained in how to use the Telmate system using a ‘train-the-trainers’ model, which meant that some deputies were selected to learn the system before teaching their peers how to use it. As Benjamin explained:

We didn’t really have any resources other than just we picked people who [would] learn the system and who were technologically savvy, and then, if they really enjoyed it, we kind of let them dive into the system, maybe give them a little bit more access to the system to learn it better, and then spend a lot of time getting to know it while they’re on duty. So we would allow them, instead of working in an area where they needed to focus on the inmates, maybe they have some more free discretionary time to actually sit down and train in the system and then do training for other deputies. So we would schedule block days or briefing topics, or something to train everybody.

These ACSO deputies are thus more knowledgeable of the Telmate system than their peers, as they were selected for training in the system and the type of work they complete involves:

how to get investigative stuff but also how to report problems and how to find things within the system and stuff. And when you look at it, what this means and stuff, so they’re kind of the resource for the team, so if the team member doesn’t know something, they
should call them, “hey we’re having this problem, or the inmate’s claiming this,” and then they’ll usually check it and they’re the ones that will call Telmate and say, “hey, we need a ticket to repair the hardware, or we’re seeing this the network’s down,” or whatever the issue would be (Quinton).

Miguel described this process in greater detail:

We had a core team of deputies that were called the Telmate deputies and they still are, they were in charge of everything with that system, really trying to put the responsibility back on our deputies to manage the system. It’s a benefit to them and it’s a benefit to the inmates that they are managing and so they need to know how to get the best use of the system. So we put that responsibility on them and they went and provided training to the rest of the staff. Telmate also provides online tools, videos and tutorials, and help sheets, and so it was, there’s pros and cons always to doing the training trainer approach because people get pissed or they don’t take it seriously or they get 15 minutes in briefing, you know, it depends on the delivery and that is the part that left my hands and so I’m not quite sure how. But I know now I think they incorporated it into their LDR so when we have new hires in they train them on how to use the system once they get with their mentors.

Many of the Sheriff’s deputies expressed support for the Telmate deputies, viewing them positively and as a great resource. Todd explained briefly the role of the Telmate deputies and his reliance on them:

So there’s generally at least one on shift. I don’t know what kind of extra training they receive or anything like that. I don’t know what all goes into it, but they’re more familiar with the system than we are and they have access to more things than we do. When we originally moved to this electronic kite system, they were the only ones that could see it for about a week or two, kind of as a trial period, and then they opened it up to all of us. So they’re a little more specialized area, it’s kind of an extra duty that they take on. And so when we, as just regular housing deputies, run into a problem we haven’t dealt with before, we don’t understand, we can get a hold of them and then they also have more direct lines to Telmate. They know who to call so if there’s something that’s an issue with Telmate, they can get a hold of Telmate easier than we

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6 The kites that are referred to in this quote are inmate request forms.
can, so that’s kind of their function is to step in when we’ve exhausted our options as a housing deputy, they kind of take that slack on the end of it.

1(d) Capable vendor: Telmate. The participants’ emphasized the importance of having a capable vendor, which they feel as though they have in Telmate. As Benjamin shared, “Telmate has been great, we have a good relationship with them. They have been very responsive to any issues.” As was noted earlier, a separate system other than Telmate was initially used to provide inmates with video visitation. There were various issues with the earlier system of inmate video visitation used at ACJ, as discussed by Wade:

When we first started, a different company… came in and said we will provide you with a service for free and basically they were developing it and while they were here to support the system it worked pretty good. But then once the system got set up and they gave it to, I think we sold it to some commissary company, well once that commissary company took over they had no maintenance support people and it was terrible…So something that went from fairly good to we were always trying to fix a station or a computer. And then during that time too we were buying little $300 computers so the processor wasn’t, you know, they were the little teeny, they were like Internet machines that you’d buy at Wal-Mart or Costco… as time goes on, as people use them, as people hit different keys they just wore out… We’ve had some issues where, I don’t know how they do it, but some of these inmates have, they can break in to, or they’ll find gateways outside the computer to their own personal Facebook accounts. They can search anything on the Internet so that means they can communicate anywhere. So some people have knowledge, hacking knowledge that they were able to hack into the computer and go to areas that they weren’t supposed to.

Another concern with the first model is that inmates in the close custody unit were given netbooks to use for their visits, which created problems, as described by Quinton:

The biggest challenge, probably the biggest challenge was in the close custody unit because of the, especially with Blackfin, because we pass the computer into the cells which, it worked really well as far as the concept of hey, cause what Telmate did was Telmate put a kiosk in each one, so they’re locked in and they do
it. With Blackfin we let them schedule within a window of time and we would deliver the machine to them, which seemed really easy but it then turned out you have to remember to get the machine plugged back in. Staff gets busy doing something else, they don’t get the machine there, the inmate misses the visit. So that turned out to be way more difficult than we thought it would be. On paper it looked good, but in practice, it was pretty hard to accomplish that way, so the way it is with Telmate is a much easier solution.

It was these issues, among others, that the participants said contributed to ACSO eventually selecting Telmate to be their video visitation provider. The participants described a variety of perks to using the Telmate system, ranging from the installation of sturdier kiosks to reducing the deputies’ work tasks, as illustrated below:

In the beginning, it was all coming to us, and since it’s not really our system it was hard to answer their questions at first. But now it’s got[ten] a lot more streamlined. They can send messages to them, to Telmate themselves… that way they can get it done on their time and they’re not waiting on us to try and find an answer out. (Jeremy)

This was reiterated by Stanley, who said, “Telmate’s obviously a bigger company and they have service techs and people that are designed specifically to come in and stay on top of that stuff.”

Todd explained why he likes Telmate:

For the most part, it’s [been] pretty good because Telmate has it set up to where people can’t schedule visits over the top of each other, so it kind of runs itself in a lot of ways. We don’t really have to manage who’s going to visit and what not.

Another Telmate feature the key stakeholders and deputies discussed as assisting with their ability to achieve their jail pillars pertains to the reality that the Telmate system records every visit an inmate conducts with their visitors, meaning ACSO personnel can review the visits with ease to ensure the inmates are complying with institutional and legal rules. This practice is discussed further in the section, “Additional uses of IVVS kiosks.”
(2) Challenges of using inmate video visitation: Initial and current. The participants discussed a variety of challenges that arose – and some that continue to exist – following the implementation of IVVS at ACJ. The two challenges that were discussed most frequently, and in the greatest detail, are presented below.

2(a) Technology issues. ACSO personnel identified a variety of technological issues that arose with the use of the new video visitation system; however, as Benjamin reflected, that is the nature of change and growth:

It’s been a growing process, I think there were some major hiccups initially with implementing it, which when you’re starting something that no one else is doing, you totally expect that. Once it got up and running, and some of the computer issues, the IT issues, and that sort of thing were worked out, yeah I think it’s a very positive way to do visits and provide other services.

The participants described the challenges that occurred during the initial transition to the Telmate system, which Miguel described in detail:

When we switched from our system to Telmate, it was not the smoothest transition. Telmate did not set up their infrastructure correctly and so we had a lot of issues right off the bat with visits and the quality of the visits. The inmates were not happy, which then in turn caused a lot of tension. There’s a couple of things you just don’t mess with, it’s visits and food when it comes to inmates and so we were definitely messing with their visits and what would happen was, we said well Telmate’s their first line of support now contact them, they would contact Telmate and Telmate would say sorry, obviously it’s a problem on the friends and family side, they must have dropped, I’m not giving you a refund. Well there were so many issues it was clear that it was not friends and family, there was something going on. So for about 6 months it was very very difficult, we finally called in Telmate and had a very good meeting with them, positive meaning that this has to get fixed and you basically aren’t leaving until you fix it. So they took immediate action, they actually switched over to use our line that we had in place still and our connections, at a higher speed and as soon as they did that the quality of the visits went way up and then all the problems stopped, but for a while there it was a very very hard transition.
These challenges did not come as a surprise to the ACSO personnel, because as Dominic explained, “Telmate is still struggling with [the network connectivity] because a jail is concrete and metal and it’s really hard to do anything in there.” Christopher explained the challenges of implementing the technology in greater detail:

Well, there was a multitude of problems, obviously, jail is very difficult to change the structure of the jail, so when you have to run cable and when you have to run wiring, and you have to run and do the physical implementation of actually installing the units was very difficult and very expensive. Um, it’s just, it’s just hard in a solid concrete building to do that kind of thing and um, and in finding space in housing units was difficult because again most of the housing units, you know we have housing units that were developed and designed in 1977 up through, you know, current day and currently, designers understand that we have to understand cable, and understand that we need wireless but back in 1977, 1993, when some of these places were developed, they didn’t, there was no room, there was no physical space and that was a big problem in that area that was built in 1977. The CCU unit, the simple physical space to put humans is very difficult.

Over time, ACSO personnel said they believe the Telmate system has evolved, and is very reliable, resulting in few issues for the inmates using the system. When technology issues arise, the participants explained how they believe the issues are usually due to user error:

Eight out of 10 times, nine of that 10 times that disconnect is because the person on the other side did something on the computer, because the Telmate’s system is pretty much set all the time. Somebody hit a wrong button, somebody did something on the other side, and Telmate’s position is once you make a connection and you lose that connection, then you have to pay for another connection. Set up for another one, so [when] something happens, they think it’s Telmate’s fault. Most of the time, it’s the users fault on the other end; they did something that caused that deactivation to occur. (Roy)

The staff also indicated that errors are sometimes due to technological issues that arise in all settings – both in the community, and in the jail environment:
Sometimes the systems will freeze up, but our computers at home freeze up sometimes so it’s just trying to get them fixed on time. Getting in a work order possibly for it to make sure they come in and get it looked [at]. Or the phones, make sure they can hear out of it, sometimes after a while of use it’s hard to hear and they have to jiggle the wire and adjust here. But I mean that’s with any products like that. And they get a lot of wear. (Jeremy)

It seems like they’re very reliable, they’re probably having the same issues I would at home and that’s what I tell them, “hey, my cell phone wasn’t working the other day, just get over it,” and that seems to be fine. (Chris)

While the deputies viewed these technological mishaps as ‘normal’ given they experience similar issues on their home computers, some of the Sheriff’s deputies indicated the inmates do not always view the issues with such understanding. Craig actually suggested that when “issues come up with the Telmate system…it kind of puts the inmates in [a] frenzy.” Wade explained this in greater detail:

The kind of technical stuff that goes on with computers, things crashing, things not working right, software failures, just when they go down. One thing… the inmates’ love is predictability, and when you have anything that throws in a measure of unpredictability, that’s when they start getting all upset about things. So they can rely on that every time they go and log in and they’ve got their visits set up and they can have their visit then they’re just pleased as punch and then they get all upset when the consistency isn’t there with the machinery.

2(a)(i) Technology issues from a security perspective. A sub-theme that emerged within the category of technological issues reflects the concerns the staff had with respect to security issues that arose with the use of IVVS, particularly with the first system ACSO utilized (Blackfin). One example was provided by Quinton, who said the “very problems we ended up having were them accessing things beyond what we intended for them to have.” As he explained:

[The] computer savvy ones were able to trigger it to bring up the start bar, so then they could get into programs, so they would either leave messages for each other so they could pass messages. Or
once they got in, if they could get to a certain point they could override and go to other sites and get information. So yeah, they’re pretty good at and it was hard for us to figure out, because that wasn’t tracked anywhere, we had no record of it. So until we kind of heard and saw things and went back and investigated, we didn’t know it was happening. Telmate’s been better, they’ve had some issues but they’ve disabled features and come up with solutions and come back with it. We’ve been pretty happy with that part of it.

Quinton noted Telmate has been very responsive to these issues:

When we do find security flaws they’re pretty quick to fix them or disable it at least to say until they can find a solution for it. And that usually has to do with the webpages, somebody finds a way to link through something else. I, you know, we just call and say we’re having this problem and they’ll disable it and they’ll come back and say we have a fix in place.

Another security-related problem was described by Mathew, who said the portable laptops that ACSO used with the first video visitation system allowed inmates to show the public the inner structure of the jail:

In our previous [system] everything was pretty well done off of a laptop and that system basically had been compromised several different times…. it was because you’re handing somebody a portable item though too… that also kind of still created that safety concern. Security as well, because… it was [a] camera. You could spin it around and say, “hey this is what this room looks like; this is where this is actually located.”

While this was an issue with the first system, it is less of an issue with Telmate, as Telmate has installed kiosks throughout the jail that the inmates cannot move or manipulate.

2(b) Barriers to visitation for inmates and their families. The ACSO personnel that were interviewed for this study were sensitive to the challenges inmate families may experience in using IVVS. The concerns that the participants identified reflect the costs of using the system, including the costs of purchasing video visits (above the two free 30-minute video visits allocated per week), and purchasing the equipment necessary to use the Telmate system.
However, as noted below, despite the participants viewing the costs and required technology as being potentially prohibitive to inmates and their families, they justified the use of IVVS and the $9 fee for 30-minute visits past the two free visits per week.

The key stakeholders were asked about the challenges of IVVS, and in particular, whether they thought the cost of purchasing additional video visits was prohibitive for the inmates detained at ACJ. Benjamin talked about the fee seeming fair but that anything above $9 could be excessive given the socioeconomic status of many offenders and their families:

> You are in jail, so it’s hard to find that balance; the sheriff is an elected official, so it’s nice to be responsive to the people, in the sense of whether you’re an inmate or not, and Ada County specifically has had a pretty good reputation in the public about [the fact] it doesn’t matter if you’re an inmate, if you’ve been arrested, whatever, we’ll treat you fairly. So I really do draw the line in that it may cost some money to get extra, and everybody wants more for free. But the fact that you may not have been adjudicated in all cases, so things happen, but it is jail and so part of me says 9 bucks, I don’t know the cost on the back end or how much profit they make off of that, but I would think that anything above 9 would seem pretty excessive. But again, if I was informed and knew, like okay, it costs us 7 dollars just to make this happen, so we make a $1.89 of profit, then I would say okay, well, that’s what it costs and I would be okay with that. But off the top of my head, just hearing 9 dollars, if we were to go above that, I would think that would be excessive…I can’t imagine technology costing them that much once you have it all built in.

Erik understood why inmate families and the ACLU may not like the fees associated with IVVS; however, he noted these individuals may not understand the ‘bigger picture’ with respect to the costs:

> When we do these contracts with these vendors, phone, we really try to make sure that we have some control over the fees because we don’t want to gauge people. The part that I feel the public misses, and the ACLU, and others, is there is a big cost to maintaining this backbone for the security component to make sure that victims aren’t victimized further and crimes aren’t done, so there’s a cost and that’s part of what drives those fees.
Jordan further described:

Nothing in the world is free even though they’re Telmate is profit driven, there’s still fees associated with it, you know, we’re still giving them their free visits and anything on top would be that privilege, that inmate behavioral management portion, and somebody needs to pay for it. I think that because there’s all the maintenance and all of this infrastructure fee that they have to have, could it be excessive when you’re looking at 15/20 dollars a visit? Yes, but I believe it has to be a reasonable fee that they recoup something and we get something because we also have expenses.

Quinton also discussed the costs of providing this service, how he believes ACSO does not charge more than other jurisdictions, and how Telmate is a company, which necessitates the profit-making portion of the system:

Telmate obviously they’re a company to make profits, so they need to, they’re looking at, you know, I don’t know what all their back costs are, so they have their costs and stuff, so it’s finding that right balance and I know we have, because our contract, the commissary thing, when we originally contracted, kind of their base commissary had something about 25 cents an order or something like that, so when we had Aramark do the commissary, we sat down with them and said we don’t want you to charge this and so we were able to get that waved, so we do fight to kind of balance that out. You know, there’s places they’ll give a little bit and other places they’ll say we need this because this is what it costs in business. So I think industry-wide, I think, pretty close to what everybody else is charging for the same thing.

Although recognizing the need to charge for additional, enhanced services, Terrence discussed how he would like to see the amount lowered but that the agency has to find an appropriate balance:

From my perspective, I would like to see that amount lowered but the way I really do look at it is [that] we would be hard pressed to have inmates have that much access to their family members under the old system. So it’s really paying for an enhanced opportunity. So they’re getting visits but if they choose to have enhanced, there is cost to the system, it costs the system and so my, you know, we
look really hard, that was one of the defining, that was a marker for choosing Telmate cause a lot of other companies would charge more than that, and basically, [the] bottom line is we still have to be responsible for our tax dollars, the community. If I had 1,000 citizens sitting in a room and I said, “Do you guys want to pay, would you guys want to subsidize inmates to have contact?” I would say 80% would say, “Not on my dime.” So we’re finding that balance and so yeah, I’m comfortable with it.

Erik and Miguel also talked about the importance of holding offenders accountable for paying for services – video visits above their two free visits per week that are required under Idaho Jail Standards – while incarcerated given the public also incurs similar costs:

I fully recognize that a lot of the people that are in jail and their families are probably not the wealthiest people and so money is always a challenge for them, so yes, fees bother me in a sense because I know it’s hard for them to pay but I also think the users should pay their own way, so it’s finding that balance. (Erik)

You know we kept our cost low for [because] we wanted them to have the opportunity before we went to Telmate, we wanted them to have the opportunity to be able to visit more often, but there’s a cost associated with running the system and so what would be a fair amount to charge in order to support the system is how we looked at it. And since we were meeting the standard with the two free visits, we felt comfortable being able, charging them for the additional time. Now on the Telmate side, more services and more functionality means higher cost and I think it’s, it’s the same anywhere, right? Even if you’re not in jail and so in our, in my opinion, I think whether you’re in jail or not, you pay for services and just because you’re in jail doesn’t mean that you don’t pay for certain services. So we are required to provide them with the opportunity to visit in a certain amount of time, and we are upholding that standard and just like anything in life, anything above what’s free, usually will cost you. And so that’s my, I mean, that’s my opinion on it; is that what are we teaching them by allowing everything to be free, I think if they’re going to use the system to their benefit, that there has to be some kind of ownership in that, and that is a monetary ownership. (Miguel)

As mentioned earlier, many of the participants noted the financial burden additional visits place on inmates and/or their families; however, they noted, including Erik, that they believed
using IVVS may in fact be cheaper than the costs associated with the old system of in-person visitation:

It is, and if you look at families, because the flip side of that is what I’m thinking in terms of you know the people using the system should be responsible for paying, if you look at families going to an institution to visit, the cost of maybe taking time off work, transporting the kids, like there’s a lot of literature around that in terms of how going to visit actually costs families, so in this way maybe families are putting out the money, maybe they’re not, you know, but it’s 9 dollars as opposed to what was a normal visit costing to go out to the institutions

Some of the participants also explained that they believe it is easier for families to find Wi-Fi than it was for families to find transportation to travel to ACJ under the old in-person visitation system. The participants explained how there were families without the means to travel to the jail for in-person visitation, as described by Quinton:

You know, there were some inmates and I think a few families, that you know, were either like I don’t have access to a computer or something. So there was some of that, but you kind of balance that for every person who didn’t have a computer, there’s somebody that didn’t have a car, they’re out of state. So, you know, it’s kind of, no matter what you do there’s somebody that’s not going to have what they need to accomplish that. But I have seen visits from Boise Public Library, so I’ve seen them use those computers and stuff. And so, and just the number of visits that are occurring is significantly higher than what we ever could have provided on site.

As referred to in the quote above from Quinton, the participants discussed the reality that some families may not have Wi-Fi, or a computer to use IVVS. Some of the participants provided solutions for families who do not have Wi-Fi, or who do not know how to use a computer:

I tell them McDonald’s offers free Wi-Fi. Go to [an] Internet cafe, go to McDonald’s, libraries. So somebody who doesn’t have a computer, if you went to a library they’d have a more up to date [computer] and you can go check it out at a certain time, do your visit and that would be available to do it. (Roy)
I think it’s a lot easier for family members on the outside to find Internet if they don’t have it versus people who literally couldn’t come in person. ‘Cause every once and a while you’ll hear “my family doesn’t even have Internet!” That’s easy, go to the library, you know, there it’s way easy for people to find Internet. But I’m positive there’s way fewer people that are, or way more outside, that could not come. (Alan)

There was, so another challenge was do we provide the public a place to go? What do we do for those who don’t have internet and it was the, everybody kept bringing up grandma, what if grandma doesn’t know how to use the internet or know how to use a computer. That was one of those things that we just had to work through, we stood strong in our position that we’re not going to provide you a place, you need to, everyone knows someone that has an internet, or computer. And so our direction was you have a neighbor, do you have a friend or a family member that could let you use their computer? We reached out to libraries to see if they would be a site and they didn’t really want to, for reasons of scheduling and the whole video thing, they didn’t want the web cams and all that at the time. That was the most, the biggest challenge that we got, but after we got passed a certain point we didn’t get those phone calls anymore so I think it was just adapting to it. (Miguel)

Accessing free Wi-Fi at a local restaurant, at a public library, or at a friend’s home may seem like a logical solution for the staff but it is important to note that the families and friends of inmates may prefer an option that provides more privacy than that afforded in such communal settings.

One of the participants also reflected on the reality that as time has changed, and technology has become more commonplace in society, he believes families have, and will continue to experience, fewer problems accessing IVVS because “in the world, we see that more and more people have access to computers and Wi-Fi and internet, [so] I think that [the troubles accessing the system have] gone down” (Jordan).

Quinton indicated that despite the challenges outlined above, he believes the benefits of IVVS as a whole outweigh the disadvantages:
There’s people who could never do public, or in-person visits, that now can do that, so there’s always going to be somebody who can’t make one or the other or something, but when you really look at the cost, you know to the tax payers and the cost to that versus how much they’re getting out of it, and it’s still through glass, so whether it’s on a screen or through a window it’s that and when you look at what it does, especially to the kids and stuff like that, I think it’s really bad. And part of that look at it, our average stay is 35 days so you’re not talking, you spend 10 years in a prison where there may be more, a prison might be “hey we do monthly in person visits,” but for us to try to do weekly ones would be that. And the visiting space is so limited, just the physical plant, because the jail is so much smaller and compact that to provide that would be, you know, it’d be a huge cost to the taxpayers to do that without really much benefit to the inmates or anything like that.

2(c) The perceived challenges of reducing recidivism through the use of inmate video visitation. Recall that one of the perceived objectives of implementing IVVS at ACJ was to promote public safety by reducing offender recidivism. It is interesting to note that while the participants viewed IVVS as a great management tool (as discussed in the next section, “Benefits of using inmate visitation”), there was less agreement about whether the maintenance of family ties through the use of IVVS facilitates an offender’s successful re-entry into the community and a reduction in recidivism. Stanley did not see the connection between visitation and an inmate’s return to jail:

You know, I never really thought about them being released to the community. I think it mainly keeps them connected to those in the community instead of being kept out of the loop, I guess, and then feeling abandoned, or whatever. You know honestly, I never really think about that. We deal with so many people and a lot of them are already antisocial or they have other issues too, so I don’t know if that really helps. I mean, it might keep them a little bit grounded as far as being in here. You hear that a lot “oh I miss my kids.” You try to keep that separated, at least for me, but I mean, we’re in an institution for a reason. I guess it could, as far as when they get out, but I don’t know, honestly. (Stanley)
Some of the participants identified factors that contribute to future criminal behavior; Todd was concerned about the negative consequences of incarceration whereas Stanley was concerned about negative family connections:

> It’s really hard to say, because once they leave our custody, we don’t know anything more about them until they come back. It seems like people that have support systems do better, just on a very general impression basis than people that don’t. But a lot of the people we see that come in, and once they leave, they don’t come back because they’ve gone to prison, or they’re going someplace where they’re not going to get out for a while. We do see people though that come in that have really good support systems and they talk to their parents every day or they talk to their significant other every day, and it’s kind of a revolving [door] for them. They’ll come in, they’ll get out, they’ll come in, they’ll get out, and a lot of times what we see is an escalation of it; they’ll come in for a couple misdemeanors, they’ll come in for a couple more misdemeanors, and [then] they’ll get their first felony and next thing you know, it kind of snowballs until they lose that support system. And next thing you know they come back on a serious felony and they wind up going to prison and we don’t see them for a while. It’s very hard to say from our end of things if that actually helps them. I can see the logic behind why it would, but I can’t give you a definitive answer on it, it’s just not within our realm of study I guess. (Todd)

A lot of them are, well I shouldn’t say a lot, there’s a select few that come in that are always the same, but I think it’s just, it’s hard to break that. They have to want to break that cycle...But I think them having access to family members that are good role models in their life is probably the best thing they could have for that, so it is important. (Stanley)

Other factors the participants identified as being contributors to recidivism include the offender’s personality, the judicial system, and their substance abuse issues:

> Unfortunately, I mean, it’s more of a coincidence. I’ve been here so long, you always dial up what inmates you think might actually be successful and this is one of those years where I’ve seen almost everybody come back. So I would be really surprised on people that don’t come back these days. Unfortunately, I think it has more to do with Idaho and [the] judicial system. I’ve never lived in a
community like this before where people recidivate, recidivism is high. (Chris)

You can put a computer screen in front of grandma when she is in her wheelchair, you know, I mean that would help them see lots more people. Whether that’s going to make any difference as to whether or not they come back to jail I would say there’s like, there’d be no relation. ‘Cause they don’t care much about those folks when they’re out, spun out on drugs anyways because the drugs have taken over whatever they’re doing completely. (Wade)

That question, about them having to come back or not really depends individually to each person that comes in here. I don’t think you can put a blanket statement on everybody… So our population really is the same people over and over and over. I’ve worked here (over 10] years, most of the population that I interact with, I’ve seen them multiple times, and every once in a while you’ll get that person that’s never been in here before, and that still happens and that will happen, but [the] majority of the people that are in here, they just keep coming back … They were around a friend [they] probably shouldn’t of [sic] [been]. If they’ve got a drug problem, they’ll hang around with somebody, they’ll smell it, they’ll see it, urges will come back, they don’t have strong enough willpower to say no [to] it and they relapse; alcohol, same thing. I mean, I’ve seen people, the inmate workers, they’re good people, they’re off their alcohol and drugs, pretty decent people. And they know what right and wrong is and then six months later, I’m in booking, they come in, they’re high, they’re drunk and you’re just like (grabs head), and they’re a totally different person. I’m, angry is too strong, disappointed because you’ve seen the good side of them. (Roy)

Another participant, Alan, explained how access to one’s family might help inmates manage the negative emotions that result from being incarcerated:

The most important thing to most inmates is their connection with the outside, so just having that access is a powerful tool to just keep… It’s just a really good tool to just keep them content, you know, connecting with family is something that can just go from a bad day to a really good day or vice versa…even if it’s bad news, it’s still a connection and it still makes them feel like a real person. (Alan)
Stanley thought more critically about this and actually considered whether the ‘perks’, or the comforts of having access to IVVS and the additional uses the kiosks provide, may actually encourage an individual to re-offend upon their return to the community, as access to visitation makes one’s life in jail more comfortable:

> It probably has some effect; I mean, they’re doing it more. If they’re able to do it more often, but then again how comfortable does it make them? Easier for them to be incarcerated than make it easier for them when they get out to go back to do something bad? Knowing if they’re in they’re still going to be able to see their families, so really it could go both ways. And it kind of goes back to if we make things too comfortable, what’s really the punishment? “Oh, you’re going to send me to jail? I’m gonna [sic] hang out with my buddies, play cards, and watch TV, and talk to my wife or kids or girlfriend.” Whatever, it’s kind of like it feels that way, like they’re in camp. Do we make it too easy? I don’t know what the answer is.

**3(a) IVVS benefits families and their children.** As was described earlier in the objectives section of the report, the participants explained how they thought ACSO sought to prevent the desensitization of kids to the jail environment by implementing IVVS. The participants explained how they believe the use of IVVS has prevented the desensitization of kids to the jail environment because families, including children, no longer enter the facility, which produces many benefits. Terrence and Dominic illustrated these perceived benefits:
I think as a parent I wouldn’t, I would definitely want, if I were an inmate, I would want my kids to stay home, I would want them to stay behind the Christmas tree, I would want them to stay in their environment instead of having to come see me in a jail system, so I think there’s huge upsides to that maybe even inmates aren’t sharing, but if you really asked them, and they were really honest, they would say, “Yeah it’s better to have my kids stay home.” And a lot of these inmates, especially the female inmates, most of them do have kids and I think we’re offering a service that doesn’t, that gives them a little bit of an opportunity because our cameras are positioned so they’re not seeing a whole bunch of inmates, they’re angled up so they see the ceiling but they see their face and it’s clear, it’s a good picture quality. (Terrence)

Now this inmate gets to, for the first time ever, the inmate now gets to sit at the table at Thanksgiving with his 30 person family, he gets to open presents with his four year old daughter, he gets to look in the bag of his 10 year old daughter’s Halloween trick or treat bag and see all the candy. He gets to do all of those things that he could never do because his daughter doesn’t get to bring in her costume and Halloween bag, they don’t get to bring presents into the jail, they don’t get to bring a turkey into the jail, but now they do. The only thing they don’t get are the smells, but we bake them a turkey and so those are incredible opportunities that we’ve never had before. (Dominic)

Quinton believed the video visits are more private than the in-person visits, describing this, and other advantages of IVVS for families in greater detail:

The video visits are actually, even though they’re kind of in those common areas, they’re still a little more private than if we’re sitting side by side talking in the public, and you’d have issues where even if the inmates aren’t enemies, the families may not like each other. The public visits were for an hour, and honestly, [for] most of them, an hour is too long in one conversation for them to sit and you know, a half hour is a much better time frame because when you watch a lot of visits, around 20 minutes, they’re kind of running out of things to say. So two shorter visits are more beneficial than one long one was, especially for kids because I can watch a video visit and you know, four or five year old kid shows mom or dad, “hey here’s my drawing, here’s my favorite toy” and then they run off and play while the spouse and significant other can continue that visit. I think just as far as being more natural and stuff, it seems to be a lot better that way for them.
Roy also discussed the benefits of the shorter visits, and parents being able to direct their children elsewhere in the home:

I think it’s more comfortable for them. So they don’t, they have kids, if their kids are in their home environment, they can come in for 10 or 15 minutes seeing their loved one, their family member, and then they could be redirected to their [room]. Or they have toys or whatever else to preoccupy them if need be. If they need to use the restroom, it’s right there. (Roy)

Jeremy explained how he thinks families appreciate not having to travel to the jail for visits:

I actually think the families on the outside kind of like it because they don’t have to get all the kids together in the car to come here, plan it out, they can sit at home. They can be relaxed at home and do it from home, so they don’t have to go anywhere. (Jeremy)

Todd elaborated and explained how accessible he thinks the Telmate system is for families:

From the family’s point of view, I guess the strength of it is they can visit pretty much anytime and anywhere. They can access it on laptops; they can access it on their home computers. As long as they have a webcam, pretty much they can access those visits, so rather than having to schedule a time where they have to be down at the sheriff’s office, they can just kind of do whatever [is] available for them.” (Todd)

Roy and Quinton also expressed how they think visits are more comfortable for families:

If their kids are in their home environment, they can come in for 10 or 15 minutes, seeing their loved one, their family member, and then they could be redirected to their [room], or they have toys or whatever else to preoccupy them if need be. If they need to use the restroom, it’s right there. (Roy)

I think it’s a lot easier for the family to sit at home, go on a website, and actually engage them; whether it’s messaging or whatever, than it is to be like, “We have to go down to there.” And they’re intimidated because you’re going to have families that are 3rd or 4th generation criminals and you’re standing in line and you’re from Eagle and your son got a DUI and you’re coming out to visit him and there’s quite a cultural clash going on there, so I think this helps a lot for that kind of situation. (Quinton)
3(b) Increases jail security and order. The participants perceive their institution is more secure due to the change to IVVS, as IVVS decreased the amount of inmate movement at ACJ, in addition to providing incentive for inmates to behave. These sub-themes are discussed in the sections that follow.

3(b)(i) Reduces inmate movement. Erik explained how there is “less movement of inmates, [because] the inmates literally visit from their housing units, whereas before they had to move.” Quinton explained that moving fewer inmates increases staff safety and Wade explained that it is “much easier” for Sheriff’s deputies because “that’s one less group of people that we’ve got to round up once or twice a day to try and move them all through the halls and down to a visiting area.” Terrence reflected on how much the staff appreciates the reduction in inmate movement:

I know the staff appreciate not having to be tracking inmate movement, and inmate movement is huge. I think that was one of the benefits that we really didn’t come to realize just how much inmate movement has been reduced by this process and any time you take an inmate out of his living environment and put him in a hallway with other inmates that work, we have a bunch of keep separate, we have co-defendants, we have sex offenders, we have people that we need to keep safe and every time you put them out of their housing unit and put them in the hallway there’s opportunities for problems so that objective, that was an objective that was probably, we didn’t realize just how much benefit that would be.

The Sheriff’s deputies spoke about how IVVS has positively benefitted them; Wade described the process of inmate movement:

Oh man, it helps out the deputies immensely. Not having to mess with moving people around. Not having to mess with gathering them up. Not having to go wake them up because they’re asleep and they didn’t know they had a visit… Because they set up the visits, they know where they’re supposed to be… we can go “hey you missed your visit,” that’s their troubles.
Christopher elaborated on this and also discussed another public safety concern:

So all of those people were inside our facility, so not only is it unsafe, it increases the safety for staff because we don’t have to deal with that. But if we have an emergency, when we had 140 people on the inside of the security of our jail, how do we get them out of here if we have a fire, or have any of those things? Now we’re responsible for [up to] 150 people inside our facility, that frankly, don’t need to be inside our facility. So, it’s safety from the public standpoint, and from the officer-inmate standpoint. Because the other thing is, again, we have the ability, we put 42 inmates into visiting in this population, which is not a very big town, and you’ll get John Doe saying, “Wait a minute, why is she visiting him? That’s my girlfriend.” And we’ve had fights and other issues because of that kind of, I don’t know, cross-pollination, or whatever it is. That leads to family dynamics, or all of those things… Our old visitation system, it’s not a very good space, it’s a very small space and we had issues there and we don’t have to deal with that anymore.

Lastly, Jeremy noted that the responsibility to get inmates to their visits no longer falls on Sheriff’s deputies, as inmates are responsible for booking and attending their video visits:

That’s all their responsibility so if [the] other family [member] doesn’t show, or if they don’t show up over there, but the inmates are [there], I mean that’s what they look for, so typically they’re always there. The way, sometimes they’ll miss a visit, like sometimes, they’ll have a court date come up they didn’t know about, just a scheduling conflict and stuff like that.

Interestingly, although both the key stakeholders and Sheriff’s deputies discussed their concerns about visitors bringing contraband into the institution under the old in-person visitation model, neither group had much to say about contraband in the era of video visitation. This may reflect the simple fact that members of the public are no longer being transported into the facility, which means this group of inmate visitors is no longer capable of bringing in contraband.
3(b)(ii) Provides incentive for inmates to behave. When ACSO used in-person visitation, staff had the ability to revoke an inmate’s visitation privileges for poor behavior, which is a practice that remains today through the use of IVVS. However, staff suggested that the incentive to follow institutional rules is greater with the use of IVVS because inmates have greater access to visitation under the new system. As Erik explained:

By jail standards they get their free visits that you have to allow, but then they also have the ability to purchase additional visits, which they weren’t going to get that under the old system. You got no additional anything under the [old system] because it was all limited by space and time and resource, so now you can purchase additional visits, and have additional contact with your family so yeah, that’s an incentive… It teaches them responsibility because they got to learn how to manage their money, or have to manage their money, and if they, it can also be a disincentive because if they violate the rules, you have something more to take away from them.

As will be discussed later in this section, the Telmate kiosks also provide inmates with additional activities and resources, which as Erik explained:

The side benefit that came along with that technology is it gives us the ability to control access to the internet, so they now have access to some internet sites that they didn’t have before. They also now have the little tablets where they can purchase music, and so that’s all incentive-based and trying to help teach responsibility, or reinforce, not teach necessarily, but reinforce responsibility. So that all came as a side-benefit to the visiting package.

Roy talked about how an inmate’s poor behavior can lead to restrictions on their use of video visitation:

When someone breaks a jail [rule]… one form of discipline is taking away their visitation rights for hours, a few days, or a week, depending on the severity of the rule that they’ve broken. So for me, if I see someone and they’re always on Telmate [and] they do a lot of visitation… I know that’s important to them. So jail rules [are] important to me, [and] you broke [a] jail rule, [so] I’m going to take this privilege away from you for a couple days. You need to follow jail rules so you can have this privilege back and that
usually seems to work; in most cases it works very good. Because that is important for them, once they have that connection with their family.

Stanley and Jeremy agreed with Roy and discussed how beneficial they believe Telmate is as a behavior management tool:

It’s definitely a management tool. We can take away their ability to use that… if they’re doing something they shouldn’t be doing we can say “look, if you get in trouble and I write you up for something, one of the punishments, or one of the things we can take away is this, because it is a privilege to be able to do that…” We try to be reasonable, at least I do. It’s like, you want them to be able to see their family… I think it keeps them preoccupied as well, as a tool. You know, we have, depending on where you’re at in the jail, you get access to television. You get access to stuff and the better you are, the more access you have with that, so it’s kind of a nice tool to have. You know, we joke about maybe, kind of like kids, you can take away their toys. It really is, you got 24 hours a day facility. They’re stuck in here 24 hours a day, if you don’t have those privileges… people will act out because they’re upset and angry and even though it’s their own doing, it’s still, you still need to have that stuff because otherwise it could be chaotic. Like I said, I think it’s a great tool and it gives them… other things to do… beside the face-to-face… you can [also] look up news articles and stuff like that. (Stanley)

They know that if they misbehave they can lose that privilege and that’s their number one privilege that they like. It’s almost to the point where they feel it’s a right, but a lot of times you lose that when you come to jail. [The] better the attitude, the better the privileges you will have, the worse attitude, the less privileges you have. It’s a tool we use to help keep their attitude in line and for [the] majority, over 90 percent of them they know that and it’s fine; they don’t have issues and [they] like using it, so it’s helped manage their time better too. (Jeremy)

Craig and Jeremy explained the types of factors they consider when deciding how long an inmate should be subject to restrictions on their visits:

[It] depends on their disciplinary history. It’s either going to be a level one or a level two. Level one would be maybe [a] loss of Telmate privileges for up to 36 hours, or if they have done it
multiple times it could be loss of Telmate privileges for up to 7 days. (Craig)

It depends on how frequently it’s happened; if they’re new and it’s never happened before you know, the write-ups that they get aren’t as bad I guess you could say. If it continues to happen, if they’re doing a ton of other things and getting in trouble here, here, and here, and they do something like that [then] yes, it progresses. It’s always a progressive scale that goes up on those, but yeah, you name it, we’ve seen, heard, and caught everything exposed. (Jeremy)

While the participants believed that many inmates will be incentivized to behave due to their fear that ACSO personnel will restrict their visitation privileges, as Todd explained, not all inmates care about their video visits:

It really kind of depends on the inmate because we have some people that have girlfriends, wives, families, things like that; they really live for those visits… they try and get as many of them as they can. Their family will pay to have them make more visits and things like that, and those people, if you take their Telmate account away they really don’t like it and it is a discipline measure for them. But we have other people that don’t have support systems, that don’t have family members in the area, or don’t [have] family members that care, and don’t want to visit with them and for that it’s sometimes difficult to really find a discipline that is actually effective. Because if you get somebody that doesn’t use the system at all, taking the system away from them isn’t really a discipline; they don’t really care. We’ve had people actually tell us that before, where you’ll write them up for something and you’ll say “I’m taking your Telmate away for four days” and they’ll flat out tell you “I don’t care because I don’t use it, so what’s the difference to me in my day to day functioning?” … We have other things we can do for discipline, but that does kind of complicate things sometimes. You really have to talk to the person and figure out what discipline is actually going to make a difference, it’s not so much to punish the person but to correct the behavior, and if they have no reason to correct their behavior, they just don’t.

Roy explained how the inmates may actually be incentivized to follow the institution’s rules because they could get into trouble from their loved ones for losing access to the visits, particularly the two free video visits:
There is a negative point where families aren’t blessed monetarily, so those two free visits are very, very valuable to them. And same thing on the phone, when they use the phone, it’s kind of expensive using the phone… and a lot of times families don’t have the money to. The wife is usually there trying to feed two kids, not sure if she’s getting money from family members. She may not have the best job because she is taking care of the kids…. [There are] many different issues that could be a hardship on the wife… she wants [to maintain] contact with her husband, she’s taking care of two kids. So sometimes… if they get in trouble here, they get in trouble from home because they want to make contact with them as well, and they can’t because they’ve lost their privilege.

3(c) IVVS shifts Sheriff’s deputies’ work responsibilities. The key stakeholders and the Sheriff’s deputies spoke about how IVVS has served to shift ACSO’s resources because Sheriff’s deputies have time to engage in different work responsibilities than before. As Benjamin explained, “visitation [in reference to in-person glass visits] was one of the most time-consuming and manpower intensive issues in getting people in and out of the facility.” This was reiterated by Erik who said that the agency was “struggling with staff shortages and processing visitors into the jail.” He went on to explain that:

There’s the whole sign up component of people lining up, getting their IDs, logging them into the computer, all of that, so that’s one piece of the component. Then the security component was deputies would have to come up here in the lobby and we would run everybody through metal detectors and then of course, so you just basically have staff tied up, getting everybody in, and then you gotta escort of em out, so all of that went away. So then that staff was freed up to do other stuff in the jail.

Christopher described the additional strains that were imposed on ACSO personnel during the actual visits:

Loading in 42 people, searching 42 people, loading out 42 people, was tremendous strain on our staff time. It usually took about, again hour and a half to get everybody in there and then you get everybody out. And again, it’s not just loading people in and then wait an hour for the visit to be done and then load em out. Kids have to go to the restroom, things happen you know. We have
babies start crying and disturbing everybody else that’s in there, so basically those deputies are running people back and forth, even though we’ve told people once you come in you can’t leave, that’s not realistic, so it tied up those two staff members for that entire time. Not an efficient use of staff at all.

The switch away from the in-person glass visitation is believed to have allowed ACSO to shift their resources, as the intensive manpower to process visitors into the secure part of the jail was no longer required. Quinton noted that newer deputies might not be able to speak to the differences between the two systems whereas older employees with more tenure will say, “you have no idea how much work that was and how much risk and everything else.” As Benjamin explained:

All it did was just shift where we can put our resources that were needed for something else. So yes, it helped that we shifted resources, but was our workload any lighter? Not necessarily because we had other things, and other things that are by-products of video visiting. So we now have to follow up and validate that they’re not committing crimes or that things are happening, so it shifts the workload, but it also shifts it to a point where we can do that at three am, but at three pm we had to have two deputies out there searching visitors and doing things, so it allows us to be more flexible, so yes it helped with staffing but we have so many things going on that I can’t say that it freed two deputies and now … we have less work.

Christopher believed the organization is more responsive to inmate needs and requests, as they do not have to dedicate as much staff time to visitation, and further, the new uses of the system decrease the amount of staff time that is required for other tasks:

I think by allowing other uses for the kiosks, commissary and everything else, again it minimizes staff time. We’re more responsive to the inmates when they file grievances and everything else. You know it’s a quicker turn around, things happen faster. And again, so every, you know every minute that we can minimize an officers involvement in mundane things is a minute that he can spend ensuring safety, ensuring, looking for contraband, doing all those things that ensure the safety of the facility. So the more efficient the kiosk is, you know the officers used to hand out the
commissary slips, and they’d have to make sure they got the right commissary slip to the right person and they’d, after handing them all out they’d have to go collect them all back. Now frankly they’re not involved. The inmate walks up to a kiosk. Same with visiting, we use to have to poll people, we’d have a list of people in the dorm, they’d have to pull those people out, they’d have to make sure they had the right people. They had to make sure they aren’t sending them with someone they got in a fight with before. Tremendous amount of staff time, on the back side people don’t see. They don’t do any of that anymore.

Miguel described this shift as reallocating “their attention to what matters most, and that’s focusing on being a deputy instead of an escort basically,” which was elaborated on by Dominic who said IVVS “actually gives[s] them time to focus on [the] supervision of inmates.”

3(d) IVVS increases inmates’ access to, and frequency of, visitation. Miguel explained how he believed that ACSO was “so limited by space and staff and just time in the day” under the old system of visitation that by “giving them the two free, we [ACSO] were actually able to give them more than [that], more opportunities.” Benjamin and Jordan explained how IVVS addresses the problems ACSO experienced with the first-come, first serve approach to in-person visitation:

It actually gives family members more flexibility because they’d have to sit and wait for an hour just to stand in line, and you know, schedule a visit, [and] there may not be enough space that day. So then the only option’s at 9:00 at night, they’ve got the kids, and they can’t bring the kids down because they need to go to bed. Here they can do it anytime, within reason. (Benjamin)

I think we felt that it was important to include the inmates to, you know, have it easier for them also because you had all this, we only had limited spots so there was some days that would have nobody here and the weekend nights, like Friday, Saturday, and Sunday night, Friday and Saturday especially were always crowded and they had to turn people away. So you had to be first come first serve and then other times you would be not. So it wasn’t convenient to the families and to then, so there was roles that we looked at. It matters to the inmates, it matters to the public because if they want to come in and see their loved ones then they
have to work, they might drive 40 miles because they’re outside that 50 miles limit, they come all the way from Ontario they may not get a spot, so it was important to also to gage the public’s response and the inmates response to it. (Jordan)

Many of the participants explained how they believe IVVS provides greater flexibility in scheduling, as illustrated in the quotes shared below:

When we had on-site visits there were very set times, and so with video visiting, within the time, you know we don’t allow it during meal times and chores and head counts and stuff like that, but outside of that we try to give them as much time as possible, so before, you know, people worked certain shifts [and] it was really hard for them to visit, where now it’s much easier to work. The visit has a more restrictive schedule than usually the inmate does, so it’s easier to set up. Like say ‘hey I’ll be off work Tuesday morning’ all the inmate has to do is get up, go over there and log in. It’s not oh I have to be there at 9:00 and check in early and stuff like that. (Quinton)

I think family members, especially that doesn’t (sic) live in the area, they would drive, you know, if you’re [a] family that drove from Twin Falls, you’d be driving two hours to stand in line for an hour, to wait for an hour, to go in for an hour, and so I think, I think, there’s a wide swath of the population of the visitors who came to really appreciate the technology and utilize it and recognize that they could schedule time. Because also when people came in to visit, it was on our schedule, it was on our visitation schedule. Now we have inmates who can, you know, visit morning, noon, and in the evening on their time. (Terrence)

As the quote shared by Terrence above alludes to, the participants believe IVVS provides additional convenience and accessibility for out-of-town visitors, including those serving overseas. As Christopher explained, “we’ve had visits with service members overseas who call in and talk to mom or dad or whoever’s in jail. So they’re in Iraq or Afghanistan and they’re having visits with their family members here.” Other participants spoke to the convenience of the system for those who are outside of Boise, Idaho:

We recognize that only people who are visiting these inmates were people who lived in our community and a lot of these inmates have
family members that are outside of our community, outside of our country so now we have people calling in from Frankfurt, Germany who can visit their family and have that connection and from an inmate behavior management that’s a huge tool when families have the chance to assimilate and feel connected with their family, there are less problems in our jail. (Terrence)

Well I guess it helps the inmates too if they have people out of state or if they’re from out of state and they get arrested here. Kind of a comfort thing, that they can actually have visits with family or a phone call… overall it’s more accommodating to more people. Just because there’s so many people arrested from out of state or people can’t make it to the facility, all sorts of people… or you know, a lot of people are disabled, or can’t make it here, whatever their situation may be. It keeps them wired in with the inmates. (Chris)

3(e) Additional uses of IVVS kiosks. Both the key stakeholders and the Sheriff’s deputies who were interviewed for the study discussed how they observe ACSO personnel and the inmates detained at ACJ “using it [IVVS kiosks] for many other things [than video visitation] in the institution” (Christopher).

3(e)(i) Additional uses of kiosks: Inmate messaging & request forms. The participants described how inmates can now use the kiosks to submit their commissary orders and inmate request forms, in addition to using the kiosks for less formal reasons, such as listening to music or emailing family and friends. Quinton talked about the shift to using the kiosks for tasks beyond their initial conceptualization:

We talked about, you know, because as we expanded and of course, and you know computer technology advances pretty fast so we started looking: what other things can we do that would save man power and provide better service? And some of them we’re just now starting to touch base on like inmate request forms and grievances. We eventually built an electronic grievance which we were going to incorporate into the video visiting, but that has not occurred yet. With the intent being instead of being the paper one we then have to transfer to a system we have to deal with. So right now we’re doing the request forms which is so far working really well. The turnaround for the answers are hours instead of a couple
INMATE VIDEO VISITATION PROGRAM EVALUATION

days, not having the paperwork around and stuff. The things
Blackfin didn’t offer that Telmate did and we start seeing,
sometimes you just don’t think about it, the messaging, which uses
an email server but it looks more like a text message. It deals with,
and the ability for inmates to take photos and post them, or a
family to post photos an inmate can see and stuff like that. And of
of course all the web services to visit websites and stuff like that.

Roy explained this messaging system:

So like, instant messages like we do on the phone. They can do the
same thing, where it’s kind of like a Facebook [message]. So they
can instant message a person one-on-one, or they can do a post and
just [write] “hey, how is everybody doing today?” And they can
have people sign up for those posts or go in and look at it and then
they can look [at] the message board and they’ll say “what’s up?”
or they can inform all their family members in one message. (Roy)

Quinton views the use of the messaging system as beneficial for the inmates; “it’s allowing for
you know, just a bigger menu of options for the inmates to stay in touch with people and do
stuff, and therefore, you know, I think it just keeps them more connected to their families.” This
bigger menu of options that Quinton referred to involves the inmates using the kiosks to access
websites, movies, music stations, and games, as discussed by Roy and Quinton:

A lot of them use the Internet, or they go to music sites and they’ll
listen to music, or they’ll play games, or they can go to the news
[sites]. Telmate restricts where they can go on the Internet, so they
don’t have free liberty to any site on the Internet, so it’s censored
where they can go. (Roy)

The tablets have been huge in the fact that one, Telmate charges
them less per minute for the tablet so they’re actually cheaper to
use for inmates and it really gives them access to music which is
the biggest thing that most people miss when they’re in jail, cause
we do TVs and stuff and we used to sell, inmate workers and stuff
could buy radios but those kind of would changing commissary
vendors I think they got phased out. But the tablets allow for, they
can pull up free video things, so they can get their music that way.
Probably have a little better control over what actually they get to
listen to, so that kind of a thing. You know, you want to provide
some things that keep them busy and engaged and stuff like that,
so it, oh and I guess one other thing we do through there too is we
do some inmate worker training for hygiene training and stuff like that. So it allows us to do that. (Quinton)

Further, the inmates can now submit inmate request forms and order commissary on the kiosks, as described by Craig and Todd below:

You can also submit inmate request forms on [the kiosks]. We used to have paper copies which was very time consuming. You’d go through them, sign, and then you have to run them through three different places. So that is kind of new to the Telmate system and that’s a big benefit because you’re able to look at their request online and actually respond back to them in a message. So when they log in to the Telmate station, they can see their response to their request. (Craig)

In my opinion, it’s been both beneficial and detrimental because it kind of necks them down because they have to go through a specific order of what they can request on there. So it focuses their request more so we’re not getting these vague kites that we’re not quite sure how to answer. But at the same time too they have access to the kiosk all the time, so… if they want to sit up all night and put in kites, [they can]… so we’ll see people that put in just these kites that, just because they have nothing else to do, so they’ll sit there and use them…for years we did bubble sheets for commissary. They had to go through and circle [what they wanted] and commissary would have to go through and collect all of them and now it’s all done electronic. They order all of their commissary on the kiosks which is a lot less work for us and a lot less work for commissary because they can just pull the report off the kiosk and fill the order, they don’t have to sift through all the bubble sheets. (Todd)

Quinton noted the benefits of using the kiosks for inmates to submit their inmate request forms and further, spoke about the benefits with respect to staff efficiency:

We want to provide services that help inmates be successful, so if we take the delays out of some of those things, we’re much more efficient at giving them the answer. Even if you tell them no, they see no, the answer is no, where as if it takes a week to get that answer back, and in the meantime they’ve submitted multiple requests because they haven’t heard back, so staff spends time answering the same question multiple times. The problem being that one staff member, and they go on days off and the same request comes in and another staff member has to research it. So
with the request forms that [was] a huge time waste, as far us looking at multiple ones. But then also the inmates when they get a response quicker, once they know it’s been addressed and looked at so they know it’s more valued because they’re, you know it’s like ‘oh okay they got it’. And on the request forms, you know we can see, we start with programs and usually within two to three hours they were getting answers back and with that system you can actually have a conversation, where if you need additional information you can send it back and say hey I need to know this and they can send it back. Whereas with the paper ones it’s kind of a one shot, like fill out another one and send it back. So the deputy has to take it out, route it somewhere, the person has to answer it, route it back, so what was a multi-day process is now just a few hours. (Quinton)

Quinton also emphasized what he perceives as an improvement in inmate-staff relations following the implementation of the online inmate request form process:

It’s more efficient, and if you treat people, if you respond to people quicker, they feel more valued, I think it’s better for the inmates. The actual dorms we started with was some of the programs dorms, so they actually told the staff to report back to me that they appreciate it because they were like, “hey, this is working really well for us, we feel like we’re getting answers really fast.” That part I think has been really valuable.

Todd also explained how the staff efficiency has allowed the deputies to focus on tasks other than paperwork:

It’s saved us a lot of paperwork time; of sitting there at a desk trying to sort through paperwork. It’s something now that is either taken care of by somebody else off site, or it’s something we can do immediately on a computer and that gives us more time to watch inmates, to go out and search, to do the things we need to do as security personnel.

Another use of the kiosks that is currently being developed is providing inmates with the means to submit electronic grievance forms, as described by Erik and Quinton:

We’re actually piloting that right now, grievances where inmates can file grievances electronically, which takes away the paper, which makes [it] a little safer for them. Or the ability to report something going on that they don’t necessarily want to. (Erik)
I’m happy with where we are, but I think we’re always looking for what’s next. So the grievances, whether we do it through Telmate, or we set up a web service in Telmate.... So we haven’t decided which one’s the best so we’re going to evaluate both sides of that and decide which way we’re going to go and then we’ll set up the technology. (Quinton)

3(e)(ii) Additional uses of kiosks: Staff investigative capabilities. The participants also discussed how ACSO can use the kiosks in ways beyond visitation and the additional features described above. As Erik succinctly noted, “when you computerize the visiting system and you start recording the visits, you now have more information, so with the information management, you’re able to have investigatory tools.” Alan explained how IVVS recordings are much better than the recordings ACSO made of in-person glass visits:

With the personal visits… it’s on camera but we’re not actually recording their conversations. You know, there are speakers there, but nobody is sitting there actively listening and it’s not being DVR’d like Telmate is, so this is so awesome. (Alan)

Telmate’s IVVS has thus allowed ACSO to engage in investigate activities that contribute to public safety and institutional security and order, as discussed by Quinton:

With Telmate, you can link, so if there’s person X, and we have an inmate and even another facility has an inmate, and they’re visiting this person, we can actually see all that in Telmate. So I can see if there’s guys in Canyon County, you know so, a lot of times you’ll see that with the gang guys where our Nortenos, and their Nortenos, are talking to a third person who has no record. You start realizing, “Okay, somehow this number, this email, or whatever, is associated their criminal activities and their things and they’ll pass messages and stuff…” We can select a person and click a button and Telmate will build a tree and say, “Here’s all the people who talked to this person.” Or on the phone thing, it’ll be like, “These people put money on or these people received calls.” So it’ll link all of that, so you can build it that way… What we try to do is have our deputies, especially the night ones, because after midnight, one o’clock, all the inmates are in bed, booking is busy but the rest of it’s not, so we do a lot. A lot of them focus on no contact order violations, usually phone calls for that but they’ll also investigate
things, or we’ll get a tip … So, they’ll go on and kind of start putting that together and share it with detectives or something.

Todd elaborated on the use of video monitoring as a management and law enforcement tool:

It also allows us to go back and monitor those visits because in a physical visit we can listen to a recording, or we can watch a camera but you don’t pick up on everything. This, with a face-to-face recording of both individuals, if we get somebody that’s attempting to, you know, send something in, or they’re talking about a crime that’s occurred, or something like that, we can take that and use it. We’ve even successfully used it in criminal prosecutions and things like that. So it’s another tool for us, as a management tool and as a law enforcement tool. (Todd)

The participants identified the most frequent type of inappropriate behavior they believe the officers see when monitoring the inmate visits:

What we see a lot of is actually nudity, that kind of thing… It specifically says in there that there is not to be any sort of sexual contact between the people on the visits and we’ll see it from both ends; we see visitors that do it and we see inmates that do it. It’s like I said, we can’t have eyes on them all the time so sometimes they expose themselves, things like that, and that’s mostly in-house discipline. (Todd)

The participants also discussed the importance of monitoring for no-contact order violations. Miguel explained how ACSO initially addressed no-contact orders and the use of IVVS:

Our philosophy has always been that it’s the deputy responsibility to know who in their housing area has a no contact order or protection order, it is their responsibility to monitor what that inmate’s doing whether it’s on the phone, whether it’s on visit, whether it’s through handwritten mail, it is that dorm officers responsibility. And so we weren’t filtering out no contact orders, what they would do is one, watch them live and then two, they would go through their list, they knew who had a visit that day, they would go through their list and go through and see which ones had no contact orders and actually watch those videos. And then get them on no contact order violations, file them in court, and so we never compromised [on] those no contact orders. It was a really good way to handle that; it’s a philosophy change.
Todd explained catching no-contact order violations and what happens after staff catch them:

A no contact order…we do catch them every once and a while and that is going to be a criminal prosecution normally. So we will forward that to a detective that’s working on the case because a no contact order is generally a misdemeanor or a felony prosecution and we’ll forward that on and that tape can actually be booked into evidence and used later in court. (Todd)

Although these investigatory capabilities exist and are always present, Mathew explained how deputies often review the recordings hours or days after they occur:

It’s not like it’s [a] live right on the spot type thing. And reviewing… I think there is still a lot of misappropriate actions… being taken by both sides… when you go back to review, this is something that took place hours, or possibly even days ago, and so you’re trying to play catch up after that…It can be quite tedious, reviewing, but day shift, we have other things going on, it may be that night shift, or even days after that items may be reviewed, so yeah… A lot of times it may be the evening individuals that are having [sic] to review the different videos throughout whatever time and that can be time consuming, especially at 3:00 in the morning.

Further, as Todd discussed, the deputies do not review all of the video recordings:

On average we have 800 to 900 inmates in the facility at any given time and almost all of them will use the video visiting at some point. So it’s impossible to review that many of them. It’s just with the manpower we have, we’d have to have somebody dedicated to sit down and watch every single one of them. But what it does allow is, if you have suspicions of something, if you have something that has led up to it, probable cause per say, to think there is something going on it allows you to review it through that method.

Deciding which recordings to review is sometimes random, and at other times, reflects deputies’ suspicions that an inmate has violated a rule, or committed an offense:

You just kind of randomly do it. Sometimes you get a gut feeling like “you know what, something during the day made me, or night shift, something they were doing, you know what I should check out those phone calls, or I should do this.” You kind of pick and
choose people according to something kind of looks suspicious or something like that. Or if they did have a no contact order that you knew, you could always review a lot of their stuff and sometimes you find more and more as you go along that you didn’t assume was going to be there. (Jeremy)

I try to if I have any down time, I mostly work days and a lot of times it’s easier to do on nights because they’re asleep and you have more downtime. But yeah, on occasion you’ll go back and you’ll review. You’re just looking for anything inappropriate. It’s just another tool for us to go “okay you can’t do this, here are the rules of the jail and you’re breaking the rules of the jail.” (Stanley)

In addition to investigating in-house rule violations and criminal misconduct, the deputies can use the recordings to check-in on the inmates if they notice a change in an inmate’s behavior:

Another positive for video visiting from a deputy standpoint, we can pull up any visit and we can monitor it… we check every once and while. If someone, if I have an inmate I’m watching and he’s stressed I can maybe go to that visit and find out why he is stressed. So having the ability to maybe check on somebody if they’re not, you get a vibe that’s something really… I can look at their video visitation, get a feel for them, do I need to call medical? Do I need to talk to them? Are you going to be okay? (Roy)

3(f) Revenue generation for jail services. The key stakeholders who were interviewed for the study explained how the use of IVVS allows the agency to generate revenue. However, the stakeholders were clear in explaining that the revenue goes back to the inmates, as Miguel, Terrence, and Jordan elaborated:

Within our contract, say that we want to recoup, want some of those costs, so that we can put it back to the inmates, and so from any inmate services, we get a certain amount of money back from the vendor that goes back into our commissary indigent funds that then goes back to the inmates. (Miguel)

We get revenue for inmates that choose to have more than two visits, and that, that revenue goes into a commissary fund and those funds can be used for, you know, we have honor dorms where we have larger TVs, ice machines, you know there’s other things, there’s programming that’s going on. We’re buying some
special tables for dorms where there’s games, so all of these things are kind of upsides to the ability to have these systems. (Terrence)

It’s just not pure profit for us whenever you do that, and that money still goes back to the inmates, that still goes and buys their uniforms and mattresses and TVs and all this other stuff that you need for the behavioral management piece, so I think that the public has to understand that money’s not going back to pay me or anybody else; it’s going back to the inmates for us to provide that stuff to better manage them because you when you warehouse them like animals, that’s how they’re going to act. There has to be a reasonable fee and that’s again, you have to figure out what is reasonable. (Jordan)

(4) Future development and use of inmate video visitation. The participants discussed how they envision the use of IVVS in the years ahead. The participants explained how they can see the expansion of the uses of the kiosks; from providing more programming and training opportunities to the inmates to providing them with the opportunity to visit with their attorneys and probation and parole officers. Some of the participants also described the importance of providing Sheriff’s deputies with additional training on the Telmate system, in addition to increasing the public’s access to visit their loved ones by providing a kiosk in the lobby of the jail.

4(a) Expand the use of the kiosks to provide programming and other information. Many of the participants explained the importance of expanding the use of the kiosks; Christopher thinks the kiosks should be expanded to provide training for inmates, as described below:

There’s things we could be doing that we’re not doing now; as an example, the inmate workers that work in the kitchen, when they leave here, they have a food handling card issued by Public District Health that allows them to basically walk into any restaurant and say, “I know the basics about temperature control,” and all of those things. So there’s some testing and some quizzes and some things that they could, that we should, have on the kiosk because now they do all that training in the kitchen, and frankly, there’s, I think
that there are educational opportunities that we’re not taking advantage of. We offer a GED program which is a different system, but very similar. It’s all computer based; they go to the classroom, they go through the GED program. But I’m not sure why we have to take them to a separate classroom to do that; they should be able to work on their GED in their dorm if they want to, and frankly, any educational opportunity.

Gregory elaborated on the importance of using the kiosks to provide programming for the inmates:

It still needs to be grown into really a recidivism reduction, online education, skill-building tool. That is not as profitable for those companies, so they don’t develop that. We as the industry need to push to have that expectation that you’re just going to provide everything for 1 dollar, you’re going to provide everything for a dollar, and online education in order for you to get that dollar, earn your way, the way I see it is we’ll have video visitation, I want to see it to develop to where in order to play that game, then you have to complete first three of chapters of a course. I think what didn’t play out was that phase two of really being able to get it to [be] a better online learning capability and how we can create the learning center, which maybe is better in the end. Outcomes might be better when you actually go to a learning center with a system and all that. But, using it for, that sort of education, recidivism reduction, that I knew was phase two. I thought it would play out a little bit more than it did, within the timeframe...

Gregory explained further that providing such opportunities for inmates does not add to the workload of staff, so even if the effectiveness of these online programs is low, the programs are still worthwhile for the few inmates whose behavior they might improve:

Being able to get their GED while sitting in their cell doesn’t take staff time…I’m an optimist, but this way, somebody can start their GED and when they leave the jail, they can continue on. Being able to deliver programming and education and programming isn’t very effective when you deliver it in an online format, but still…You might have a parenting style that maybe only is 1% effective, but once we put that in place, we’re relying on technology, we really have virtually no personnel time involved in that, so if it’s only 1% effective with really no expense for the return on investment, that’s okay.
Quinton also thinks the kiosks can be utilized better to provide inmates with online training, in addition to providing ACSO staff with a means to distribute information in a more timely manner:

So I think programs would probably be happy if we could expand that into some online training; whether it’s some pre-training prior to a program, or something like that … So with Telmate, I know I’ve talked to them, I don’t know what all we’d do on our end, but they could set up a landing, basically a website that they would have click on the handbook, click on the rules, and we could post notifications and stuff like that. So I would like to go that route because I think it’d make it easier for us to be more timely in getting information and stuff out.

Jordan thinks the kiosks can also provide inmates with other types of information, such as their legal resources:

I think humans don’t like to change and we find that because I was just involved in, I want to change our legal resource center to, a portion of it be virtual. Where the inmate would be able to request information and get the information from an outside source through a vendor for legal stuff without ever being picked up, chained, going to our legal resource center. So again, our legal advisor said I’m kind of skeptical because we’ve always used West Law which is computer based and CDs and books and now we’re going to go to a research service and I think that we as humans don’t like to change, you know, and that was the same way we had with our staff and the inmates.

4(b) Provide additional staff training. An important theme that emerged from the data collected during the interviews with the Sheriff’s deputies is that they would like to receive more training on the Telmate system:

I wish we had a little more training on it, where somebody would sit down and show us, walk us through how to do exactly what the system can do so we can utilize it to its full potential. Because I feel like sometimes we only use 10 percent of the entire system because we just don’t know about the other 90 percent. (Todd)

I am horrible with technology. I am not computer savvy. I am terrible at everything like that. We were given basically like a ‘how
to’ thing that we can relate to the inmates of how to work it, but I would almost like my own tutorial because the inmates ask me questions constantly and I’m like “I don’t use it, you use it!” I seriously, like just a simple tutorial, even if it was just like a PowerPoint or a link that they could give us, just “here’s the basics of how it works.” ‘Cause we’re given some information but they’re kind of assuming that we’re good at stuff like that. I’m not, I’m not, I’m horrible. I can barely use my own cell phone. (Alan)

Even though some of the deputies identified the importance of receiving more training, a couple of those deputies understood why the training was limited, and how challenging it is for training to be provided given the dynamics of staffing in a jail setting:

It would be nice if we could get some more training on it, but with several hundred deputies in the jail, that’s kind of hard to fund; again, getting all those people, hav[ing] them sit down through like a three-hour class and go through how to use it. (Todd)

Other Sheriff’s deputies said additional training was not necessarily required given the ease with which they can contact Telmate for assistance, as Danny said, “If something major goes wrong, then you just let someone know and they call Telmate and it gets fixed eventually.” Wade also mentioned that providing Sheriff’s deputies with up-to-date and timely information about who the Telmate deputies are would negate the need for additional training:

It helps if we know who our Telmate deputies [are] because a lot of times it’s like well, this guy was on my team last time and he’s [a] Telmate deputy, but that was two rotations ago and I’m not sure who our Telmate deputies are on this team. That would, yeah, that would be kind of a handy thing just to flop in some place and, you know, like, maybe your team rosters or something. Some things say SRT (Special Response Team) officer behind them, you know. So we should just have Telmate, I don’t know they might actually have that somewhere, but I don’t know if that’s been done. So on occasion it’ll come out in an email, “hey, these are the Telmate deputies on the shift,” but that doesn’t seem to be updated as much… Yeah, know[ing] who it is you actually need to contact.
4(c) Expand the use of the system to professional visitors. The ACSO personnel that were interviewed during this evaluation expressed their desire to expand IVVS to facilitate visits between inmates and their professional visitors:

With video visiting, to have probation and parole and have attorneys, they’re looking at doing video visiting [so] they won’t have to come in. But, I think [one of] the long term goals [for video visitation], [so] attorneys can stay in their office [and] probation and parole can stay in their office, so they don’t have the drive time, [and] they can be more productive, [not] fighting traffic for an hour just to get here [for] a five minute meeting, ten minute meeting. So they can be more productive, way more productive if they can use the video visiting option. (Roy)

As the key stakeholders described, ACSO is currently in the midst of expanding the use of video visitation to facilitate these visits:

We have a second stand alone system that’s gonna allow for that. So I think the biggest issue for that on the, on the kiosks, is the confidentiality and so where they’d be located. But we’ve actually built, in our old medical unit which had some single cells, there’s actually a video visiting system that will allow for that, so they’ll schedule like it’s a visit, but the attorney won’t have to come down here. So we’ll still be doing the movement and stuff but we won’t have to process the attorneys in, and that’ll be better for them. So that’s probably a better security solution for us than trying to figure out how to do this, and then that guys like, “I’m talking to my attorney” and this guy’s listening over his shoulder. (Quinton)

Terrence elaborated on the convenience of the video visitation system for professional visitors, and why they have not yet implemented the system:

Inmates love to have the lawyers come down, so it’s really for the attorneys to have the convenience of sitting in their office and having those conversations. But the benefit, I think that there might be the upside if the attorney says “okay, I have twenty minutes, I don’t have an hour to drive out to the jail…” [but] I’ll take that interview with the inmates.” And we have the technology in a room down there, we just still have some manpower issues for inmate movement, but we’re getting there, so that’s the next phase.
4(d) Install a kiosk in the lobby for visitors to use. Some of the Sheriff’s deputies who were interviewed recommended ACSO install a kiosk in their lobby to ensure families and friends that do not have access to the technology required to use IVVS can still visit their loved ones, which is reflected below in the quotes shared by Stanley and Alan:

We don’t really have a place where they can come in and use a video station. I know some facilities have a couple of booths or stations where they could use it on site, because some people don’t have the Internet. That’s really, I think, the only drawback is we do have, some people that are maybe not as fortunate and don’t have the ability to say, have a computer that’s accessible to them and so they can use video visit[ing]. I think that might be the only one. But like I said, I don’t know if we even have, just thinking about it when I worked up there, I don’t know if we’ve ever had the space that can accommodate that, but maybe in the future. (Stanley)

One thing that we could do better is, I know some other jails in the state of Idaho have a Telmate kiosk, like in their lobby area for family that, like I said doesn’t have the Internet. I get the pros and the cons of that, but I kind of see how that would be nice to offer. (Alan)

Although some of the deputies recommended the installation of a kiosk to improve the existing system, some recognized the financial challenges of doing so, as explained by Stanley:

At this point realistically, we probably can’t do that [because we] just don’t have the space, don’t have the funds and obviously, everything’s on a budget. But you know, in realistic terms I’m assuming that down the road that might be something that’s on the table.

Although the Sheriff’s deputies supported the installation of a kiosk in the lobby, this was not a sentiment shared by the key stakeholders who were interviewed, as these individuals really perceived a strength of IVVS as removing children and families from the jail lobby, as was described in the previous section, “Benefits of using inmate video visitation.”

While the current section includes a number of proposed improvements to the current system, as a whole, the ACSO personnel who were interviewed believe the switch from in-
person to video visitation at ACJ has been a major success and that the system has “come leaps and bounds” (Mathew). Further, as explained by Jeremy:

If there’s an issue that arises or whatever, Telmate is really good with taking that and trying to improve on it. There’s always room for improvement, but so far, I think it’s getting better all the time, so I think that it pretty much meets a lot of the objectives we have…Right now, I can’t think of anything off the top of my head that would, they’ve done a really good job of improving.

Summary

The data that were collected during interviews conducted with the key stakeholders and Sheriff’s deputies highlight a variety of important findings regarding the transition to IVVS at ACJ, the initial and persistent challenges in its use, the perceived benefits of having implemented IVVS, and recommendations for the future use of video visitation by ACSO. As noted earlier, given the use of purposive sampling and the smaller than preferred sample size of Sheriff’s deputies, caution should be exercised in generalizing the results collected during these interviews to all Sheriff’s deputies employed by ACSO. Further, it is possible that not all of the individuals who were involved in the design and implementation of IVVS at ACSO were identified by upper management for participation in this study; thus, their voices may be missing from the analysis.

ACSO employed a variety of strategies to educate the inmates, staff, and public as they transitioned to IVVS at ACJ. The agency piloted the use of IVVS in certain dormitories prior to rolling out the system across the jail to slowly introduce the new system to the inmates and to demonstrate what the staff thought the inmates would perceive as benefits of IVVS, among other reasons. There were some initial challenges with inmate education, as the inmates did not immediately understand what IVVS would entail and ACSO needed to overcome language barriers. In addition to pilot activities, ACSO deputies trained the inmates and ACSO installed
‘how-to’ signs to assist the inmates as they adapted to the use of video visitation. Furthermore, the inmates assisted one another with the use of IVVS.

Staff education and training was also identified as an important component of the transition to video visitation, as change is difficult in correctional environments. ACSO management experienced challenges in educating their staff due to the nature of shift work. They overcame this challenge by using the train-the-trainers approach whereby some Sheriff’s deputies were selected to learn the system before educating their peers, which was a training approach that was viewed positively by the ACSO deputies that were interviewed in the study.

ACSO educated the public by explaining IVVS in a press release and through information that was posted to the agency’s website (e.g., how-to videos). Additionally, someone answered telephone calls from visitors that had issues with the program operated by Blackfin Technology, and currently, Telmate operates a Customer Care line for its users. Another important component of the transition from in-person visitation to video visitation was identifying a capable provider, which was initially Blackfin Technology (which was bought out by Keefe), and is now Telmate. Both the key stakeholders and Sheriff’s deputies who were interviewed for the study view Telmate as a capable provider of the service, as they offer a user-friendly system that provides investigative capabilities and reduces the deputies’ workload, among other important factors.

The key stakeholders and Sheriff’s deputies who were interviewed spoke about the initial and ongoing challenges ACSO has experienced with IVVS. Over time, some of the initial technological challenges – such as issues pertaining to its reliability and security – have been resolved with the transition to the Telmate system. Other challenges persist, including the barriers for visitation that exist for families, which reflect the cost of acquiring the technology
required to use IVVS and the cost of purchasing additional video visits. Despite noting these issues, the staff that were interviewed acknowledged that the inmates are paying a fee for a service, that they would have to pay for Internet use on the outside, and that the program is not free for ACSO and Telmate to operate. Further, many of the key stakeholders and Sheriff’s deputies who were interviewed believed that family members likely experience fewer challenges accessing Wi-Fi than they did finding transportation to travel to ACJ under the old in-person visitation model and that video visitation may still cost inmates and their families less than the cost of traveling to the jail. Another perceived challenge of the system is whether IVVS is actually contributing to a reduction in recidivism, as the key stakeholders and Sheriff’s deputies explained that many of the inmates’ lives are characterized by negative family and peer relationships, substance abuse issues, poor decision-making, and a judicial system that does not adequately meet the inmates’ needs, which are all factors that may contribute to continued recidivism no matter how accessible video visitation is for the inmates.

A variety of perceived benefits to using IVVS at ACJ emerged from the data; the first set of benefits addresses the experiences of inmates’ families, who under the new system of IVVS, no longer have to travel to, and get processed into, ACJ, which means kids are no longer kept in the visiting room for a full hour, as they can visit from the comfort of their own homes. The key stakeholders and Sheriff’s deputies also said they think IVVS offers more private visits and increases an inmate’s access to, and frequency of, visitation, as their visitors are no longer constrained by a rigid visiting schedule, out-of-state residence, or a lack of transportation options. Another perceived benefit is that IVVS increases security and order in ACJ, as inmates are no longer transported around the facility for the purpose of visitation and inmates are incentivized to behave due to greater access to visitation. IVVS is also believed to shift Sheriff’s
deputies’ responsibilities so the deputies can spend more time addressing inmate needs and requests and providing supervision, rather than transporting inmates and screening, processing, and transporting visitors. The key stakeholders and Sheriff’s deputies who were interviewed for the study also believe the additional uses of the Telmate system serve the inmates well; for example, because they can send messages, listen to music, receive quicker responses when they submit Inmate Request Forms, and because revenue that is generated from the Telmate system is said to go back into the inmate commissary fund to assist indigent inmates, among others. Lastly, ACSO can use the recording features of the Telmate system for investigative purposes (e.g., to monitor no-contact orders).

The key stakeholders and Sheriff’s deputies who were interviewed explained how they anticipate the use of the kiosks will expand with time; from providing more programming and training opportunities to the inmates, to providing them with the opportunity to visit with their attorneys and probation and parole officers. The Sheriff’s deputies who were interviewed suggested additional training on the Telmate system would be helpful, in addition to installing a kiosk in the lobby of the jail to assist families who do not otherwise have access to the technology that is required to use IVVS.
Chapter 4: Interviews with Inmates

A single researcher interviewed 12 inmates detained at Ada County Jail (ACJ) who were identified by Ada County Sheriff’s Office (ACSO) personnel as experienced users of the inmate video visitation system (IVVS). The purpose of these interviews was to develop a greater understanding of the offenders’ opinions about IVVS and their beliefs about the effects of utilizing this program.

A sergeant with ACSO identified inmates who were experienced users of IVVS and provided them with copies of the recruitment/cover letter and informed consent document for their review. The inmates were instructed to notify a deputy on their living unit if they were interested in participating in the study. Sixteen inmates voiced interest in participating in an interview although only 12 inmates were ultimately interviewed for the study because two inmates were released the morning of the interviews, one inmate declined to participate on the day of the interview, and the researcher decided not to interview an inmate who she believed was experiencing significant mental distress.

Data were collected during semi-structured interviews that were conducted in July 2015 with 12 inmates who, as stated, had substantial experience using IVVS at ACJ. The interviewer asked the participants eight open-ended questions, which resulted in interviews that lasted between 10 and 40 minutes in length. Of the 12 inmates who were interviewed, 10 were male and two were female. To protect the female inmates’ confidentiality, a male pseudonym has been assigned to all of the participants.

Data Analysis

The data collected during the interviews with the 12 inmates were transcribed in Microsoft Word before being analyzed using the qualitative data software program, NVivo10.
Five key themes emerged from the data and are presented in the subsequent section. It is important to note that due to the sampling strategy utilized – nonprobability sampling – these interviews may not be representative of the opinions held by all of the individuals who were detained at ACJ in July 2015.

Key Themes

Prior to discussing the participants’ overall satisfaction with the system, their perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages of IVVS, and their recommendations to strengthen IVVS at ACJ, a brief overview will be given about the participants’ use of IVVS.

(1) Inmate use of IVVS. As the information in sub-sections 1(a) through 1(c) will show, the participants indicated they used IVVS often, and in a variety of ways. Further, the participants indicated that the system was easy for them to learn to use although it was not always as easy for their visitors in the community.

1(a) Frequency & nature of use. All but one of the participants said they schedule two video visits every week to utilize the free visits provided by ACSO. Although they schedule two video visits per week, they may have only one, or no visits, if their visitor is a ‘no show’. Eleven of the 12 participants visit primarily with their family members and significant others (e.g., parents, siblings, children, nieces, nephews, partners, and ex-partners) while one participant said he typically visits with his long-term friend rather than his family.

The majority of the participants said they like having 30-minute video visits; for example, as Joshua explained, “30 is optimum because before there was hour visits in here and it almost seemed too long. Anything less than a half hour, 20 minutes, is too short, 30 minutes is pretty much perfect.” While most of the inmates indicated they are happy with the 30-minute video
visits, they said having the option to do either 15- or 30-minute visits might be beneficial for some people. As Andrew explained:

> Sometimes in 30 minutes, it’s kind of, you’ve already said a lot of things you’ve wanted to get off your chest, and then you know, by the time you get your second, third visit, you’re like, at the end of it, it’s just silence; you’re just looking at each other…So the shorter visits would probably be better for me, but maybe not for everybody.

**1(b) Learning to use the system.** Nearly all of the participants expressed how easy it is for them to use the Telmate system. Nicholas says it is because “It’s like on a smartphone. You’ll have just like everything you can do right there; schedule a visit, you know, everything, and so it’s pretty basic and if somebody doesn’t understand it, you know they can ask.” Joshua mentioned inmates can ask other inmates and staff questions if they have difficulties using the system.

While the majority of the participants said they found the system to be user-friendly, they indicated that some of their visitors did not always find the system easy to use. Joshua shared how his grandmother is an “octogenarian” and she was quite upset when they cancelled the “glass visits” particularly because she could not get her computer and microphone working to schedule video visits with her grandson. Michael’s wife experienced major challenges trying to communicate with him over the Telmate system:

> It was horrible! We were on the phone, and I was like, “I don’t know, I’ve never used it either.” So you know, I had to talk to someone else and say, “Okay, and how does she set it up?” So you know, I had to go person-to-person and then I’d call her and then be like, “Okay, try this this time.” And even like, I guess on the Telmate unit, they have messages, she can receive them, but she cannot for the life of her figure out how to send me back a message.
In contrast to the experiences noted above, the majority of the other participants said their visitors have not experienced difficulties using the system; for example, Brandon shared that he “heard that some people struggle with it but [his] parents are pretty competent on the computer,” so he did not have any negative experiences to share. Samuel knew he was in trouble with the law, so to ensure his “lady” and his children could contact him easily while he was detained at ACJ, he bought and set up a computer, large monitor, and webcam before he was arrested, so his “lady” has not experienced any challenges using the Telmate system.

1(c) Alternative uses of IVVS. As described in Chapter 3, the Telmate kiosks provide inmates with access to various applications (e.g., video visitation, commissary, music, ‘email,’ and approved websites). The participants explained how they use the system in diverse ways, including ordering commissary, listening to music, submitting Inmate Request Forms, and using the Internet. Joshua referred to the system’s capacities as “incredible” and expressed his satisfaction with being able to submit Inmate Request Forms electronically through the Telmate kiosk, as it is “quicker and a lot easier” than the paper process ACSO used before. Brandon appreciates having access to the ‘email’ function because:

It’s cheap and it’s right away and even though they keep track of what you’re saying and stuff, it’s nice if you really need to get a message to your people, and that does go up to your phone, or most people’s smartphones you know, because it goes right to their emails.

Raymond spoke about the benefits of having access to music:

Yeah, like ahhh, February, well like, March and April, I was in umm, I had a lot more time because I’m in classes right now, and umm, so, I was in a different dorm and I was able to listen to music, so I used somebody else’s headphones and listened to music and it was awesome. Ummm, just helped me get out of the fact that I’m in jail, umm, that I’m incarcerated, umm, helped me, I just closed my eyes and kind of meditate for a minute.
Nicholas was housed in an area of the jail where the inmates were not permitted to use the music function; however, inmates in this area of the jail could use other additional functions:

Yeah, well where I’m at, we don’t have exactly, we don’t have music, but we have like internet, you know, and you can search things on the internet, which kind of passes time you know, and if you’re bored or whatnot, they have little games you can play and stuff, so some people, I don’t really do it. Some people do and it passes their time and helps out a little bit but umm, like commissary, you see the commissary on one day and if you forgot something, you know, you don’t get it because you only have the orders set for one day but with the kiosks, you can do it every day, and so if I forget something, you can go back and order it again and you have three, you can order three times in a week, so, I mean, that’s a benefit to it.

The participants’ use of these additional resources varies, as there is a cost associated with using these functions, and further, as noted above, certain applications are not available to all of the inmates, as they are privileges. Zachary explained how the additional resources are not “as important for me to use, the music and stuff because of the costs” and Morgan said he only used the additional applications because his “friend accidentally put $60 on his” account.

(2) Satisfaction. While some of the participants expressed concerns about IVVS (as presented below), all of the participants discussed their overall satisfaction with the Telmate system and their appreciation for ACSO’s willingness to provide two free 30-minute video visits per week. Raymond expressed how the system is helping him maintain contact with his young son and spoke about their recent video visit: “He seen me this last video visit and he got all excited, which made me kind-hearted; yeah, it made me really appreciate the video visits that they give us to use for free.”
A few of the inmates also described how having access to the Telmate system – kiosks and tablets – is a privilege afforded by ACSO. The quote shared below by Rodney explains his perception of IVVS as a privilege, which makes him appreciate it:

I mean, it’s got a couple of things here and there, but overall, for, I mean, it’s not like they, I don’t know, it’s not like they owe us, you know? Video visits, or you know, the stuff we do get to access on the computers, on the kiosks, so I mean, that’s why I’m just happy with it, just because, you know, they give us something that you know, we don’t even need, so that’s kind of why I like it.

Michael also discussed how access to the kiosks and tablets is a privilege, recognizing that the inmates at ACJ are “getting these privileges that a lot of people don’t even have on the out.”

(3) Advantages of IVVS. This section highlights what the participants perceive to be the advantages of IVVS at ACJ, which reflect some of the themes that emerged from the data collected during the interviews with key stakeholders and Sheriff’s deputies.

3(a) ‘The carrot and the stick’: Incentive to behave. All 12 of the participants said that access to IVVS contributes to their desire to abide by the rules in the jail because they value visits with their families and friends. Timothy shared, “It’s always good to see my kids and my sister and my nephews you know, so, it’s always positive not to get into trouble.” Further, as Morgan and Nicholas explained, their happiness is connected to visiting with their families. Nicholas stated, “I like talking to my people on the outside, so you know, if I lost that, I would, you know, I wouldn’t be too happy about that” and Morgan explained, “losing my video visits would suck…[so] I just mind my own business.” Scott also explained how not wanting to disappoint one’s family likely influences an inmate’s decision to behave because if an inmate loses their ability to contact their family, their parents might say, “Make sure you’re staying good, so you get to see us” (Scott).
Inmates detained at ACJ have to pay to make telephone calls, which as Andrew explained, he believes means inmates are careful to maintain their access to the free video visits: 

I’ve seen a lot of people who try to stay straight so that they don’t lose those visits because that’s all they have. A lot of them can’t even use the phone system because of the money situation or whatever it is, so they, you know, they try to do great.

Two of the inmates explained how it took them losing their video visits due to misbehavior to realize they need to behave in the institution, with Zachary stating, “I’ve lost my visits twice for one week and it sucked,” and Raymond sharing:

I have been disciplined a couple of times since I’ve been here. My video visits got taken away on my birthday, so nobody could contact me and tell me happy birthday, so I was like, “I better stay out of trouble.”

Michael explained how he views video visits as a privilege that should be taken away for misbehavior, which is captured in the quote below:

You already broke the rules to be in here in the first place. Why would you continue to…I mean, they have tablets here. It’s like, I don’t even have a tablet when I’m at home, and I mean, I’m free, you know what I mean? That is something that, you don’t understand is, is a privilege, and if you don’t, you know, if you’re already in here for messing up, you’re going to continue to be destructive and, and, messing up even more and getting these privileges that a lot of people don’t even have on the out, like you know? That’s just like, I mean, I think that to me, that’s very disrespectful, it’s like, ungrateful because really, you’re in jail and you have a tablet… so it’s, I think the way you behave should, should take you to what you’re doing. Like, your actions will have consequences that are bad.

While most of the inmates acknowledged the provision of video visitation contributes to their adhering to the institution’s rules, Samuel explained how it changes how he goes about misbehaving. As Samuel described, having his visits taken away is “in the back of [his] mind
sometimes” so he’s been “trying to be more discreet about what [he’s] doing” when he chooses to misbehave to avoid losing the privilege of visiting.

3(b) Convenience. The participants spoke about the convenience of IVVS. Samuel explained how “It’s easier to get everyone together at the house” whereas other inmates spoke about the convenience for out-of-state family and friends, or family members who are traveling the world. Brandon explained how he can visit with friends who reside in California who he does not normally see, and Andrew explained that if he did not have access to the video visits, he would not have contact with his son or father who reside out of state.

Despite having families that live near the jail, many inmates explained how they value IVVS because it makes the visiting experience more convenient for their families. Brandon explained how visitors were processed on a “first-come, first-serve basis” when ACSO provided in-person, glass visits and his family would travel to the jail for a visit and “sometimes, they had to come back for the next scheduled visit time when it was too full,” which was frustrating and a waste of time for his family.

Joshua also described a challenge of scheduling in-person, behind the glass visits in terms of the convenience of scheduling, but also in terms of the stress of his visitors having to travel to the jail:

With the video visit system, you’re able to schedule at a most convenience and you have a whole day and evening to do that. The problem with the in-person, the glass visits, is that there’s so many inmates here, that there’s always certain scheduled hours set up, which makes that a little more difficult plus the family members have to come here to the facility and we know that that can be a headache, especially if there’s two, three kids, you got to pack up on a cold winter night, bring them in here… For them to come down here and spend an hour, signing up, waiting, getting processed, umm, coming in here you know and seeing us behind glass, you know in our, in our uniforms. So I mean, it was, it was, we had a scheduled day and a scheduled time, you know, and so if
like, if you know, a loved one, a Mom wants to pack up three kids
and bring them down here, it can be emotional you know?

Similar to Joshua, Morgan appreciates IVVS because it is so convenient and also, because his
visitor does not have to travel to the jail:

The advantage is that you get to pick when, you know what I
mean? So you can like schedule what works with them, that’s
probably the good thing, and they get to be in their comfort zone. I
think that she [his Mom] likes the video visitation system better
just because she can be at home and like, I don’t know, like
drinking a beer while visiting with me, or whatever, you know
what I mean? Or smoking a cigarette or something and she just
like, gets really nervous when she’s around all those people
coming through and so, it just makes it easier because she’s at
home, you know, sitting in her pajamas or whatever.

3(c) Visiting with kids is much easier. Inmates with children spoke about many benefits
of IVVS, including keeping their kids from visiting the jail. Samuel talked about how his kids
had visited him in jail on previous occasions and how he “just thought it was, gross. Kind of, I
mean. I felt bad you know? My kids had to hold their hands up and get wands over them and
things.” Timothy explained how his “daughter told me it’s scary when she comes to jail when
she used to visit me in another county” and how he feels better knowing his family is more
comfortable doing video visits. Andrew said he does not want his kids:

Seeing me through glass, or a cage, or anything, having to hold the,
the phone receiver, it’s…it’s just not, good for them. You know? I
don’t want them going to any kind of jail unless it’s something
they’ve done wrong.

Joshua discussed how challenging the old in-person, glass partition visiting system could be for
the inmates and their families, focusing on the issues in the visiting room:

Yeah, for the, for the kids because well, if, especially if they’re not
like, if it’s not their time, you know to hold the phone and be able
to talk, they’re going to be wanting, they’re going to be restless,
they’re going to be kids, so they’re going to be running around,
and there’s other kids, other families, other people, you know. It’s pretty wild - it’s like being in a super market!

Joshua explained further how he thinks IVVS is easier than the old in-person system for the inmates’ significant others who would otherwise have to transport children to the jail:

So, and, it increases mood, you know, I mean, it’s, it’s just better...it’s easier on the Moms you know, the significant others because, you know, like they can just take turns running in front of the camera, you know, like, they when you do it at the home. I noticed that being on, with the visiting, you, there’s still that same, ahhh, like experience of, you get to forget for that half an hour, that you’re in jail basically. So, and, it increases mood, you know, I mean, it’s, it’s just better, yeah.

This point was reiterated by Andrew who said he values IVVS because it means his wife does not have to pack up their disabled child to drive to the jail for a visit. Even though Michael described the challenges his wife experienced in setting up the system, he still saw the advantages of IVVS to ensure the family did not have to be packed up to visit him in the jail:

I think it’s really cool you can visit from home because you know, he doesn’t have to load up the four kids and then come, so I mean, in that perspective, it’s really good. For the number of people and then just for the fact you don’t have to load up all the kids and we have a 5-month old and then a one-year old, so then, you know, you know the 7 year-old, and the 9 year-old, it wouldn’t be so bad for them but still, having to load up everybody, keep track of everybody, baby’s crying, and it interrupts other visits, because I know even when I visited people in Canyon County, like through the glass, like, they still would bring their babies, and it’s just, it’s very disruptive, whereas here you get personal time.

Joshua also discussed how it is “better for the families because you know, it’s more entertaining and it’s like, “hey, here’s Daddy on TV!” You get it?” Timothy elaborated on this, stating video visits are easier than phone calls because with a telephone call, “her [his four year old daughter’s] attention span goes right away [but when] she sees me, she’ll stay right there and talk to me.” Michael explained how much he thinks his family benefits from the ability to partake in
the video visits in terms of increased access to see him but also in terms of what his kids can show him:

My wife literally moved out the couch and they showed me this new dance they’re doing and I thought that was really cute, and I just think it’s a lot, like I got to see my Mom yesterday - she went to the house, it’s just, it’s better, it is better in that perspective because you get to visit with whomever goes, you know what I mean? Like you don’t have a limit, like, “Oh, you can’t visit.” So I think that’s pretty cool too and I wasn’t expecting my Mom to be there, so it was really nice.

3(d) Facilitates the maintenance of family ties, which contributes to inmate well-being.

The inmates identified maintaining contact with their loved ones as a major advantage of IVVS; some of the inmates spoke about the importance of maintaining contact in terms of their connectedness with the outside world while detained at ACJ. For example, Timothy shared these sentiments about visitation:

You know no matter what, you know where everybody puts on a front on or whatever, but again, to talk to your family, you know that’s, that’s always a big step, in help, you know, and getting some kind of outside civilization, then letting us know that we’re humans too and that’s always a plus, not feeling like a caged animal all the time.

Brandon talked about how visits can improve his emotional well-being:

To not feel forgotten, or that people are willing to show up for your visits because there’s plenty of people in there that they book their visits and someone accepts and then it’s just a black screen for the whole half hour and I mean, that would be depressing. I’ve been blessed and ah, haven’t had to deal with that yet. It could happen but ahh, yeah, it’s just nice to know that your people still care enough to take some time out of their day to visit with you, you know?

Michael also talked about the importance of the visits in terms of addressing his emotional well-being, in addition to helping pass the time:
I’ve never been away from my family this long and without the visits, um, you know, not knowing what’s going on at home, not knowing if everybody’s okay, that’s what was really getting to me through the first week or so and then I started doing regular visits and then I was okay. The visits made the time here go by a lot quicker.

Zachary also thinks IVVS contributes to his more positive emotional state, explaining how:

It helps me maintain relationships with my family, especially my baby who crawls and walks now. She was only three months when I first entered. It helps me keep in touch. It helps me knowing things are good at home.

Rodney also spoke about how he thinks the video visits make his family happy, explaining that “just being able to see each other, makes us happy, makes us, because we’re able to talk, and then, yeah, I mean, if I wasn’t able to talk to them or anything, they wouldn’t be thinking of anything good.”

Michael spoke about the importance of visits for his future, as it helps him stay focused knowing his family is waiting for him to get out:

Just being able to keep in touch and being able to see their faces on a weekly basis I think it’s just, it’s helped so much because I know what I have to look forward to when I get out, I know that they’re waiting for me.

Scott also thinks IVVS helps you plan for your future, as it “definitely helps to foster those relationships [with family members] for when you get out.” Timothy explained how IVVS has allowed him to connect with his family members: “I never talked to my family that much when I was out there but, yeah, now that I’m in here, they’re trying to help me stay positive.” Raymond had a huge smile on his face as he told the researcher IVVS has allowed his family members to see him sober and how this is a positive of the system:

It’s helping me out because of the fact that, umm, my ex and my son get to see me sober, my Dad gets to see me sober, that’s all they wanted and ahh, they get to see it before I get out and I seen
how happy it made them to see me sober, so I’m going to continue it when I get out.

Two of the inmates also spoke about the emotionally challenging nature of visits. Joshua spoke about the differences between in-person glass visits and video visits, and how video visits make it easier for him to manage his emotions:

There’s a lot going on in the one-on-one visits, umm, or the glass visits excuse me, because yeah, like you said, there’s people everywhere, there’s kids running around in there, umm, yeah and one of the big problems is, because they’re more intimate, they can be more emotional, which has disadvantages. So, you might find yourself being a little more depressed going back into the unit, you know after even a good visit, or you could find yourself being angry, you know after a negative visit. With the video visiting system, if things start going, you know, bad, you know, either party can just hang up. And then you have the freedom of you know, processing the information of what just happened and then the freedom of re-scheduling another visit.

Interestingly, even though Samuel spoke about the benefits of IVVS, he spoke about the emotional aftermath of even good visits:

It’s hard, it’s sometimes it’s good for me, and sometimes it’s bad for me in here. Sometimes even a good visit, I want, I miss them, I want more, and then I hate everyone in here even more than I already do.

(4) Disadvantages of IVVS. This section highlights what the participants perceive to be the disadvantages of IVVS at ACJ. Nearly all of these themes, with the exception of concerns about privacy, reflect concerns that emerged from the data collected during the interviews with the key stakeholders and Sheriff’s deputies.

4(a) The cost of purchasing additional visits. Eleven of the 12 inmates who were interviewed relied solely on the two free weekly video visits that were provided by ACSO to visit with their families; just one participant indicated he routinely purchases additional video visits. The participants said the cost of purchasing additional video visits is high, which Joshua
was concerned about because he, and many other inmates, are “indigent.” Brandon questioned the cost of purchasing additional video visits based on the service that was being provided by ACSO; “it seems a little like, a little excessive for a simple connection.” Michael, who is a father, explained that he does not even let his wife put money on his account for telephone calls, which are cheaper than video visits, saying, “Don’t put no more money on it. I’ll use the two free visits, like, we don’t have that type of money!” Andrew, who also said he does not use additional video visits, explained:

I tell my [wife], don’t send me money, I’m fine, it’s just a couple of weeks … I’d prefer to have more visits and the cost, I mean $9 for 30 minutes is kind of high. You know? I mean, $20, nearly $20 for an hour, you know? But, I guess it makes sense in a way with the free visits and then the, the fee on top for extra visits. I don’t know.

The quotes shared by Andrew and Michael – both parents – capture the reality that paying for additional visits (or telephone calls) may not be an option for inmates’ families, which demonstrates the value of ACSO providing inmates with two free video visits.

Some inmates made suggestions for pricing video visits; for example, Samuel, who viewed the cost as prohibitive, said he would schedule more video visits if it cost the same as a phone call. Zachary explained that “the price is too high for 30-minutes. If it was only $10 to $12 an hour, I’d probably use it more.” Scott was the only participant who indicated he purchases additional visits every week. He said he regularly purchases two additional video visits per week, which he explained costs him approximately $20, so he would like the visits to cost less although he is still very appreciative for the system:

$20 a week, on top of the phone time, which is $4.20 a call, so it’s definitely very expensive, so it’s definitely, it’s definitely a deterrent. I would definitely do it a lot more if it was cheaper. They definitely are making really good money off of it… I think even $5 for a 30-minute visit, I mean, that’s still, you know, that’s still
really, pretty adds up, but, umm, I mean, I’d definitely do more
visits if it was cheaper but umm, you know, I mean, I’m thankful
for being able to use it, so I don’t want to be complaining about it,
but they’re definitely charging a lot for people to do it.

Although critical of the cost of purchasing additional video visits, Scott was also very
appreciative of how ACSO gives inmates two free video visits, as it helps inmates who cannot
afford to purchase their own:

I think for people who are indigent, I think being able to do two
visits a week, I think that’s really, really, reasonable. I mean, once
you start, you know, $10 for a 30-minute visit on top of that is
pretty expensive, so I don’t know if it would make more sense to
not give you the free ones and make ‘em cheaper. Although I do
think it’s cool that people that don’t have money can use them too.
So, umm, I think you know, that’s pretty fair.

Unfortunately, as explained by Samuel, some inmates may have a hard time receiving
visits because their families do not have the means necessary to utilize IVVS:

I’m fine with them but that for other people, it should still be an
option to just come down here, people aren’t technology savvy, not
everybody is, and a lot of people in here, come from a lower, like
a, not poverty or whatever, but they don’t have all those things, the
high-speed internet, technology and all that. A lot of them don’t
even have vehicles, so they can’t get to the library to use the
system. I feel bad for them. A lot of people just can’t get visits
period.

4(b) The lack of visitation options. Many inmates expressed their desire to have physical
contact with their family members and often spoke about in-person, contact visits as being
preferable to the video visits and the glass visits. Samuel explained his preference for contact
visits, “I think contact is important. I mean, they can monitor those effectively, the prison does;
there’s no reason they can’t do it here as well. The glass isn’t any better than the video visits.”
While Samuel does not think the glass visits are better than the video visits, as the quotes that are
INMATE VIDEO VISITATION PROGRAM EVALUATION

presented in this section reveal, this is contrary to how many of the inmates who were interviewed felt about this issue.

Many of the participants indicated that they would prefer to have a choice to schedule in-person glass visits or video visits rather than having to utilize only video visits. Raymond explained how his preference depends on who he is visiting:

    Well, with my umm, with my son, I’d much rather the glass. Umm, so I can just see him and ummm, I’d be able to do more stuff instead of aiming towards the camera when I’m making faces and umm, but with my Dad, so like, with my son, I’d rather the glass, but with my Dad, it doesn’t really make any difference because I’m not trying to make faces at him.

Scott said that in general, he would prefer in-person glass visits but that if he had to pick between the two options, he would pick Telmate video visits to maintain contact with his girlfriend who lives out of state. The quote he shared illustrates how having a choice to pick between visitation types may be beneficial for some inmates:

    I mean, I definitely appreciate the video visits for having the option but if I had the choice to be able to do face-to-face with the glass partition, I mean, that would definitely be, I would like to do that more… if it was one or the other, then I might choose the Telmate just so people like [said girlfriend’s name] that are far away … but if they, if my Dad and sister could come down with the glass partition, I’d definitely like that.

Zachary expressed a similar preference for glass, in-person visits but explained how his circumstances – being incarcerated in a different state than where his family resides – influences his current preference for video visitation:

    I prefer the glass, in-person visits but like to have the video visits available so I can visit with family in California because my family lives there. I’d prefer the glass if my family was local, so I could see my family.
Brandon expressed the same sentiments about how video visits are not as personal as glass visits (and certainly not contact visits) but that using video visits allows him to visit with family members who would be unable to travel to the jail for glass, in-person visits:

> Even through glass here, it’s a lot more intimate and stuff, and ahh, it’s better and definitely with contact visits, but I can’t see them doing that here with the amount of work for staff, but it’s definitely better. But umm, for the Telmate things, I mean, at least, like people that have families, that aren’t from here, like, there’s a few benefits you know. I have my people in California, so I can see people I wouldn’t normally see, people I wouldn’t see while I’m locked up, so there are a few benefits.

The participants explained why they prefer the glass, in-person visits more than video visits. Morgan explained how he prefers glass visits because they are more personal:

> I say glass visits just because like you see the person real, like, you really see ‘em. And the other way, like, I mean, it’s more convenient the other one, to be on a screen but you know, at home, doing whatever, but, it’s just like, more personal than like, I mean, you can’t touch them but you can still see-see them, you know what I mean?

Scott also thinks in-person, behind the glass visits are more intimate and explained why:

> If given the choice, I would definitely rather do, you know through the glass, like sitting like we are, with a sheet of glass between us, it would be more intimate than on a video screen with the screen kind of pixelated and the sound kind of delayed, so it would be nice to sit physically with somebody.

Brandon also said his family has “voiced that they prefer the glass, through the glass ones, being able to come down here and actually see me face-to-face.”

**4(c) A lack of privacy.** Some of the participants spoke about their concerns when it came to the use of IVVS and their privacy. Zachary explained how “there’s not much privacy due to “sharking” [that occurs] when people are trying to look at your video visit, when they’re being nosy.” Rodney said he does not like it when other inmates shark on visits with his Mom:
I would definitely prefer more privacy because you’ll always see people who will come up to me and ask me who I was visiting. Like if I’m visiting my friends, I don’t really care but when you have like, 30, 40-year old dudes coming up to me, asking me about my Mom, how old she is, it’s really annoying. I don’t like that at all, it means the whole time they were walking by staring at my Mom. You know, I don’t know what they’re thinking about my Mom or anything like that and yeah, I don’t like that.

Brandon explained his frustration with people sharking on his visits with his girlfriend:

You can see people stop and stare if you’re visiting with your girlfriend, so that’s uncomfortable but nothing that I’m going to make a big deal about it…It probably wouldn’t bother me as much but we have that little screen and you can see people stop and, and I don’t think they should take that away or anything, but that’s just what, but you want to turn them around and tell them to “bugger off.”

Raymond explained how he was not bothered by the sharking that occurs during his visits but that it bothered the person he was visiting with in the community:

I was talking to my Dad and ahh, god bless his heart, he’s trying to hook me up with his girlfriend’s roommate or something, so she got on and then ahh, somebody behind me like’s, “who is that?” Then my brother got mad and he’s been in prison and he’s like, “he’s sharking on your visit, you know!” I said, “Don’t even worry about them.” I was just really happy because I was on my first or second visit that I had with my Dad, so I was just having fun with it, you know? If she didn’t like it, I don’t know if she did or not but ahh, if she didn’t like it then we could just wait to…you know, talk or whatever? I was just talking, you know? And then, well, people were, ahh, seeing my ex, my baby’s Mom, and kept on getting, walking by and giving me high fives or whatever, and I just take it as a compliment, it doesn’t really bug me.

Scott explained how he has had to let other inmates know that sharking is not okay although he says most people know better than to be nosy during visits:

I’ve had a couple of times, I see people that are staring at my visit and have to say something like, “Hey, screw off!” But ahh, mostly people you know, respect it and they aren’t standing there looking at it, but everywhere you’re going to be, there’s going to be those
guys, and you’ll have to tell them what’s up and after that, it’s not really an issue.

Nicholas reiterated the point that most inmates know not to be nosy during visits, as it is a matter of respect:

They are behind you but, I mean, you kind of have this respect policy, you know, you might pop in and you know if you’re friends with somebody or whatnot, wave to the family or whatnot but they give you your space and give you your privacy, it’s just kind of a respect thing that every inmate has for each other and if you don’t, you know, you kind of get chewed out for it and you know ratted out for it and it won’t happen again usually.

Timothy also said “there’s usually nobody just like staring at you.”

Joshua talked about the size of the dormitories and how hard it is to have privacy in that environment, which makes him apprehensive to use IVVS:

In a facility, there’s 92 bunks in the dorms, you know, 80 people at random, and you know, you don’t really know, you know, what’s going on with these other people, and frankly, I don’t care to know. Umm, I have hesitated with like, wanting to see my kids, you know because of, that doubt and that fear, you know and because yeah, it is, I mean it’s, it’s right there in the unit.

Andrew also talked about his kids and said, “I don’t want them seeing all the other inmates and you know, they’re still young.” Further, Andrew offered a solution, for the kiosks to be “turned facing the wall or something, so people can’t interrupt, or something like that.” Michael also spoke about the challenges of video visiting with nosy people in the vicinity and how having a separate visitation room might be beneficial to prevent sharking from occurring:

They can’t really hear what the other person’s telling you, but everyone can hear what you’re saying, and although you’re not supposed to be around, there are still people, there are people in your visit, people in your visits, walking back and forth, there’s people within a certain area, they can hear you unless you’re whispering, so then your person can’t hear you and then you have to speak up. So I think it’s just, I think it possible, they had the visit in another room, that would be like, perfect. But yeah, ‘cause
you still get a lot of nosy people and like, hmmm, what are they talking about?

While Michael thinks it would be nice to have more privacy while connecting via the video visits, he also saw the advantages of his children being able to see his living quarters in the jail:

I think it’s a great learning experience for them to realize that’s not where I want to be, that’s not what I want to do, and I tell them all the time you know, if you learn, if you listen, and you follow the rules, you won’t be in here, you know. Daddy did wrong, Daddy broke a rule, he has to, I have to you know pay my consequences, just like when you guys break a rule, you get grounded, stuff taken away, it’s the same thing. So I think it’s really good for them to say that, I mean not that Daddy’s in jail, it’s horrible but, it’s a good way for me to show them, you know, this is not where you want to be. Like they’ve seen the back and they’re like, “Well, where do you sleep?” because you can see the bunks and I’m like, “Well, I have to sleep on there” and they’re like, “well that’s not a bed!” And I say, “Yeah, you don’t want to sleep on here.” You know? But you know, the little tables and they’ve seen other inmates, and they ask, “Do you have to be there with other people?” “Yeah, I do, you know, I have to go to the bathroom in front of other people”…I think I’m able to show them, if you do right, you don’t have to be in here, you know?

4(d) Technology issues. The participants identified technology issues as a major disadvantage of IVVS although some of them indicated that the technology issues have gotten better with time. Morgan explained the technology issues he has experienced:

Just to be able to see her is good but ahh, I don’t know, it, it just sucks sometimes cause like no matter how good their camera is, the pixilation is still really, you know what I mean? Like she went and bought like a $150 little set-up thing and she’s all excited about it but then it was still pixelling and she took it back and got like a $20 one and it was the same.

Nicholas explained how “there’s been a wiring problem with the phone, so I mean, you kind of have to smack it a little bit and then you can get it to work usually” and added “but that’s the only issue I’ve ever had with the visits.” Scott said the technology issues he has experienced make him wish he could do in-person, glass visits:
The only thing with the, with the system, like, if I’m talking, I can’t hear what they’re saying and vice versa, and it’s kind of delayed, so if you’re talking, you kind of have to wait for them to finish and then talk, otherwise it kind of cuts them off, so that and the pixilation. Otherwise, the video visits are really nice... If given the choice, I would definitely rather do, you know through the glass, like sitting like we are, with a sheet of glass between us, it would be more than intimate than on a video screen with the screen kind of pixelated and the sound kind of delayed, so it would be nice to sit physically with somebody.

Some of the inmates, including Morgan, said “it’s gotten a lot better over time.” Nicholas also discussed how technological problems were more frequent in times past and described how the screen going blank or freezing without loading the next page is “rare, I mean it used to happen more often and I think they went through and maintained something, I’m not sure. But it happens every now and then but it’s rare so sometimes when that happens you’re like, “Ahhhh!””

Timothy said he has also experienced issues with the technology but he did not seem bothered by the issues he identified, as he thinks the problems could stem from the visitors’ side:

I’ve seen it, you know, where people get the freezes, and but, the quality of the picture, I think it could be a little better but I mean, it’s, it’s not all our end, it could be hers, you know? She does a, a, I don’t, laptop, so, you know what I mean, it could be a pixel on the laptop, and my father-in-law’s got an older computer, so you know what I mean? It’s not all on, all on, on Boise’s end…

Raymond, Andrew, and Rodney also explained how the technology issues are likely attributable to the resources their visitors have access to; for example, Raymond said that in the “.1% [of cases] that it will freeze up, usually it’s the other person’s computer” and added, “other than that, I don’t really have any problems with it.” Andrew talked about the image quality being fine at ACJ but stated, “my [spouse] has trouble with the, there’s a lag time sometimes, a pretty big lag, and by the time I’m saying something, [they’re] just answering my first question, but that could
just be my internet then too.” Similar to Andrew thinking the lag time was attributable to his family’s internet connection, Rodney also said that the “backtalk” he experiences during video visits may reflect his parents’ internet server:

I’ve had a couple of visits drop before but I, it might have been on my Mom’s end, my parents’ end, like their server wasn’t working or something like that. I know when I’m talking into it, I can hear a lot of backtalk into my ears. Like when I talk, I can hear myself, I don’t know, it’s kind of weird, I don’t know how to explain it…It’s hard for me to go on with the conversation when it’s back talking in my ear. I’ve just said that and now I’m trying to say this.

Michael explained the technology challenges his wife experienced in trying to connect with him using the Telmate system but that even with the technological issues, he is grateful to have video visits to maintain contact with his wife and his children:

Last week I didn’t get any visits, like, the computer, the laptop she was using, as soon as she clicked on to visit me, it crashed, and I’ve, I’ve heard that it happens a lot, like, when trying to get into the Telmate system…once they try to connect, it crashes and that happened last week, twice. So I didn’t get to see them or talk to them and it was just like, for me being in here, it was just like, worrying, like I don’t know what’s going on, like I don’t know how they’re doing, and you know when I finally talked to them yesterday, they were just so happy, and they, they were, they were even sad that we didn’t get to talk the week before and so, I think you know, even though there are still technological problems with it, if it’s still crashing, if it’s still really hard to get into, umm, I think it’s just, it’s easier to be in here and have contact and be able to see people than to just be in here alone.

Samuel did not share the same experience of poor quality visits due to his family members lacking adequate technology for video visitation, as he had set up the video visitation system in his home before he was arrested:

They have everything just right for everything. Like the high-speed internet, the big monitor, and the, the CPU, the laptops, so for me, I’m, they have everything like, so it’s really easy for them, and that took me, I feel bad for others cause a lot of them don’t get, their
visits are screwed up, or they can’t see them, or hear them, so I feel bad for them a lot. I have it way better than them.

4(d)(i) Addressing technological problems with the Telmate system. Although almost all of the inmates explained how easy the Telmate system is to use, problems with the technology sometimes arise (as discussed above), which require the inmates seek help. Some inmates, such as Nicholas, rely on other inmates, “you just ask another inmate, you know, there’s so many inmates around, you just have to turn around, and “hey…” and you get helped.” Joshua elaborated on this, saying that requesting help from other inmates is:

Actually building relationships within the facility, within the dorms because the guys are asking you know, asking how do you do this? How do you do this? So you walk them through the process, it kind of gets people out of their cells a little bit, it’s definitely helped me.

Joshua explained how he asks staff members his questions and how “some [staff] are a little more informed than others” but that you can also message Telmate directly through the system to voice your concerns. However, not everyone feels as though Telmate is easy to access when you have a problem:

If you get cut off, or your visit stops, it’s really, like I’ve had family members and people try to call and try to get, “Hey you know, I got cut off, or it got dropped” and it’s just, umm, really hard to get a hold of like, their customer service. Like awhile ago, their, their wire was cut, my girlfriend was trying to call because we had two video visits that dropped within the first five minutes and ahh, it took a month to finally get a hold of customer service because they were having an issue with their customer service line... They have a monopoly [in ACJ] and I think they kind of know that so that’s my only issue I have with them. (Scott)

(5) Recommendations. Most of the participants offered at least one recommendation to improve the use of IVVS at ACJ, which are presented briefly below. The recommendations are
stated briefly, as the lengthy quotes shared throughout this chapter provide ample context for these suggestions.

5(a) Broaden use of video visits to attorneys. Joshua suggested that ACSO could expand their use of IVVS to the inmates’ attorneys because:

Not only are our attorneys busier than all heck, but umm, they would have to come here check in with the jails, and, yeah and then be able to have a visit with us and then you’re trying to cover everything in that one visit. You know?

5(b) Provide incentive-based visits. Brandon and Timothy suggested ACSO could provide inmates with additional, free video visits for good institutional behavior. Timothy questioned, “Maybe they could throw one more free visit in?” telling the researcher it “would be awesome” if there was an incentive-based visitation system. Brandon explained this idea in further detail:

Personally, I’d probably behave, because I pretty much behave the same way all the time, but I think if there is a positive, like if you could earn an extra video visit if you were good for two months or whatever, I don’t know, if there was positive, what’s the word? Like, confirmation, or positive reinforcement, I’d say that ahh, I think it would be helpful.

Jordan elaborated by saying, “I think it would have some benefit for the jail, for the staff as well.”

5(c) Decrease costs. Many inmates identified the cost of purchasing additional video visits as a disadvantage of the system, so it is unsurprising that decreasing the costs of purchasing additional video visits is a suggestion for improvement.

5(d) Provide a private visitation space. As discussed in the previous section, the lack of privacy afforded to inmates who use video visits was identified as a disadvantage of IVVS, so a couple of the inmates suggested a more private space could be provided. Rodney recognized the
challenge of transporting inmates to a separate area for a visit, so he made a suggestion with that in mind:

They wouldn’t want to have to move a bunch of people from a unit to a separate room for that visit, [so] maybe just move them to the back somewhere, you know, by the bunks or something, that could be a little more private.

Brandon expressed his overall satisfaction with IVVS, which is referenced in his quote below, although he did suggest ACSO could provide a more private room for the video visits:

I don’t know technically, what they could do to make the video visits better. Maybe have it in another room, a private room would be nice, although that’s probably too much to ask but they used to have it when it was on the computers, they had a little room that you would go and sit in, it would be nice, it would be quieter, you wouldn’t be dealing with people looking at your visits and stuff.

5(e) **Provide the option to have in-person, glass partition visits.** As the discussion above revealed, the inmates interviewed would prefer to have the choice between using video visits or glass, in-person visits, as dictated by the person they are visiting with and/or their perceptions as to which one is more personal, among other factors. Brandon spoke about providing this option:

I hope they could maybe figure out bringing back regular visits, but I don’t really see that happening though, so maybe some sort of reward system with the video visit system would be awesome. But once again, I don’t see that happening either.

**Summary**

The data that were collected during interviews conducted with the inmates highlight a variety of important findings regarding their perceptions about IVVS and their beliefs about the effects of using this program. Given the use of purposive sampling and the smaller than preferred sample size of inmates, caution should be exercised in generalizing the results collected during these interviews to all inmates who were detained at ACJ in July 2015.
All 12 of the inmates who were interviewed said they make use of the two free 30-minute video visits that ACSO provides by scheduling two 30-minute video visits per week. Just one of the 12 inmates that was interviewed said he purchases additional video visits. The inmates said they find IVVS easy to use although they indicated some of their visitors have struggled to use the system. The inmates described how they use the system beyond IVVS, including for example, to order commissary, submit Inmate Request Forms, and to listen to music. The 12 inmates who were interviewed also expressed their overall satisfaction with the system, viewing it as a privilege they receive from ACSO.

The inmates who were interviewed discussed what they perceive to be the advantages of IVVS, including how the provision of two free 30-minute video visits serves as an incentive to behave at ACJ, as they are happy to visit their families and they do not want to disappoint their loved ones by losing access to their visits. Another perceived advantage is the convenience of IVVS for the inmates and their visitors. Many inmates noted that they have visitors who live out of state, or have other barriers that would prevent them from traveling to the facility, which means if IVVS did not exist, they would not receive visits of any kind. Another reason the inmates’ view the video visits as being convenient is that their visitors no longer have to travel to the jail to be processed on a first-come, first-serve basis with the potential to be turned away.

The inmates also discussed how much easier it is to visit with kids using IVVS because it is easier on their family members and friends who no longer have to pack the kids up to travel to the facility, and further, kids can visit for all, or part, of the video visit (whereas under the old in-person visitation system, kids had to remain in the visiting room for a full hour, which created issues, as discussed earlier in the report). Some of the inmates that have children also explained that they appreciate how their kids no longer have to travel to the jail, wait in the waiting room,
or be screened for visits. They also noted the novelty of IVVS; their children seem to remain more entertained during video visits than they did with in-person visits. Another perceived benefit is that IVVS gives inmates the opportunity to maintain ties with their family members, which they said contributes to their emotional well-being, as they do not feel forgotten or like a “caged animal.”

While the inmates who were interviewed for the study identified a variety of perceived advantages of IVVS, they also identified a variety of disadvantages of IVVS. As stated earlier, only one of the 12 inmates that was interviewed for the study had purchased additional video visits due to the cost. Some of the inmates explained how they tell their spouses not to deposit money for video visits on their accounts, as their families simply cannot afford it.

Even though all of the inmates expressed their satisfaction with video visitation, the majority said they prefer in-person visits because they are more intimate and more personal, even though they are separated from their visitors by a piece of glass. Thus, the disadvantage of IVVS is not so much the system itself but rather the inmates’ lack of ability to choose between scheduling in-person visitation versus video visitation.

Another perceived weakness of IVVS is the lack of privacy the system provides inmates and their visitors given the location of the video kiosks. A few of the inmates said that other inmates’ “shark” on their visits; however, it should be noted that not all of the inmates who were interviewed said this was a problem. One of the parents also noted he would prefer his kids not see the other inmates walking around in the background, which is why he suggested the creation of a more private visiting space.

An additional perceived disadvantage of the system is technological issues, which some of the inmates explained have gotten much better over time, particularly with the Telmate
system. Examples of the technological issues the inmates have experienced include pixilation of images, dropped calls, and back talk when the inmates can hear their own voices in the telephone receiver. Interestingly, the majority of the inmates said they did not think Telmate or ACSO was at fault when these issues occurred; they blamed the technological issues that arose on their visitors’ computers or Internet connections. They also said that when issues occurred, they could usually get assistance to address the problem from other inmates, the staff, or Telmate directly.

Based on their reflections, the inmates made a variety of suggestions for improving or revising IVVS at ACJ. They suggested broadening the use of IVVS to their busy attorneys, in addition to providing incentive-based visits where the inmates could earn additional free video visits for good behavior. Another suggestion they had is decreasing the cost of purchasing additional video visits, which is unsurprising given that only one of the 12 inmates who was interviewed could afford to purchase extra visits every week. Another suggestion for improvement is to consider the location of the video kiosks to provide the inmates with more privacy during their visits. Lastly, the inmates suggested ACSO provide them with the option to conduct video visits, or in-person, glass partition visits because they would rather visit with some people using video visits and other visitors using in-person, glass partition visits.
Chapter 5: Inmate Surveys

The purpose of the inmate survey was to gather primarily quantitative data to further examine opinions about the inmate video visitation system (IVVS). Survey items measured a variety of relevant variables including use of IVVS at Ada County Jail (ACJ), perceived effects of IVVS on behavior, ease of use, preference for video visitation over in-person visitation, use of video visitation at another institution, and demographics.

The original plan, agreed upon by Ada County Sheriff’s Office (ACSO) personnel and the researchers, was to administer an online survey to collect inmate survey data. Given the ease of online survey construction and data collection, this was deemed the most efficient way to gather the most data. In addition, this method would have allowed for a census of the population. That is, the online survey would have been administered to all inmates to complete on the kiosks that are used for video visitation. As such, the survey was created by the researchers in Survey Monkey and the link was forwarded to Telmate to be posted. Unfortunately, there were several technical difficulties in getting the link to function, most notably that completed surveys were not appearing in the researchers’ Survey Monkey account. After communication among the researchers, ACSO, and Telmate, the choice was made to remove the survey link and administer a paper survey instead. This section describes the complete methodology used to gather this survey data collected during October of 2015.

Sample Selection

Since paper surveys incur additional costs over online surveys (e.g., printing), the decision was made to gather a sample rather than survey the entire population. Sampling is very common in survey research, and in many cases, samples can be used to make generalizations
back to the population of interest (i.e., ACJ inmates). In this case, stratified sampling was used to gather a random sample of housing units, comprised of both male and female inmates.

Information about the various housing units was made available by ACSO for the researchers to draw the sample. Three of the housing units were excluded from the sampling frame because they housed infirm or mentally ill inmates who would not have been able to complete the survey. Thus, the remaining 10 units (Dorms 1-6; Cell Blocks (CB) 7 and 8; Maximum Security Unit; and Close Custody Unit) comprised the sampling frame. In order to ensure the final sample included both male and female inmates, the sampling frame was stratified by sex (three female units, seven male units). Next, a computer-assisted random sample was drawn from each stratum (one female unit, two male units) for a desired sample size of at least 200 inmates. Table 5.1 displays the final sample of housing units.

_Table 5.1_

_Sampled Housing Units_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Housing Unit</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Security</th>
<th>Capacity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dorm 2</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Minimum</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dorm 5</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Minimum</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CB8</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All inmates in the selected housing units were invited to complete the survey. Although the capacity of the three selected units totaled 290 inmates, the count on the day the survey was administered was slightly lower. Instead, 259 inmates were invited to complete the survey (78 females in Dorm 2, 84 males in Dorm 5, and 97 males in CB8).

_Research Design_

This research was designed as a non-experimental, cross-sectional paper survey of a sample of inmates at ACJ. It was primarily descriptive in nature with the goal of describing
inmate opinions about IVVS. The research design, however, did not allow for the establishment of causality among any of the variables. An experimental design, which would have been required in order to establish causality, was not possible since IVVS was implemented prior to the start of this study.

The survey included a variety of questions to ascertain experiences with, and opinions about, the use of IVVS. In order to encourage participation and honest responses, respondents were assured anonymity. That is, there was no way for the researchers to determine who completed the survey. All of the required elements of informed consent were clearly described to participants (discussed below) and approval was received from Boise State University’s Institutional Review Board to conduct this survey. Since inmates comprise a protected population, full board review was required for this study. Additional information about the research design including validity and reliability is discussed in Chapter 5 of this report.

**Survey Items and Variables**

Given the paucity of research on video visitation in correctional settings, an existing, validated survey was not available for this study. Instead, the survey was created based on the researchers’ expertise in both corrections and survey research, and it was tailored specifically for the video visitation program at ACJ (e.g., two free 30-minute sessions per week).

The survey contained a total of 30 items, the majority of which were closed-ended (see Appendix D). The first section of the survey assessed participants’ use of IVVS at ACJ beginning with whether the inmate had ever used the system. Those who indicated they had not used it were instructed to progress to another section in the survey asking about why they had not used it, if they had used a similar system at another institution, and if so, their opinions about it. Those who indicated they had used IVVS at ACJ were next asked about the last time they used
it, how often they use it in an average week, how long most visitations last, their opinions about
the two free 30-minute sessions they receive each week, questions about their purchase of
additional video visitation time, and with whom they visit most frequently. These questions were
intended to gauge overall use of the system.

The next section of the survey included 10 Likert scale items (with responses of strongly
agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree) to assess opinions about IVVS. These
included opinions about the effect of IVVS on staying in touch with family, institutional
behavior, and recidivism. Opinions about the ease of use of the system and preference for video
visitation in comparison to in-person video visitation were also measured. These 10 items were
combined to create an index in which scores ranged from 10 to 50; higher scores indicated more
positive opinions about IVVS. Next, participants were asked several demographic questions
including sex, age, education-level, employment status prior to incarceration, and participation in
inmate programs at ACJ. The final question of the survey thanked respondents for their
participation and provided space for any qualitative feedback they wished to leave.

Survey Construction and Administration

Dillman, Smyth, and Christian’s (2009) Tailored Design Method was used as a guide for
survey construction, which involves a variety of considerations including the order of the survey
items, language used, spacing, and formatting. All of the recommendations are intended to
increase the ease with which respondents can complete the survey, thereby increasing response
rates. Care was taken to abide by Dillman et al.’s (2009) recommendations where possible. Each
section contained its own set of instructions, items were clearly delineated from response
choices, and the language used was believed to be appropriate for this population to facilitate
participation, ease of completion, and validity in survey responses. In addition, respondents were
clearly instructed how to proceed for contingency items (i.e., items based on responses to earlier questions).

In September of 2015, survey packets, which contained a cover letter, informed consent document, and the survey, were delivered to ACJ by the researchers (see Appendix D). The informed consent document contained all of the required essentials including the voluntary nature of the study, privacy, possible risks and harms, and how to withdraw from the study. Inmates in the three selected housing units were invited to participate by ACJ staff. Those who were interested were given a survey packet. After reading through the cover letter and informed consent document, those who consented to participate were asked to complete the survey and return it to ACJ staff in a blank envelope. Implicit consent for participation, rather than a signed informed consent document, was utilized to maintain anonymity. Once the envelope was checked for contraband, it was sealed and set aside for the researchers to retrieve. The only information tracked was the housing unit of the inmate who completed the survey. Neither the inmate’s name, nor any other individually identifying information, was recorded or made available to the researchers.

**Survey Results**

The collected survey data were compiled and analyzed using *Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS)* software. This section reports the results of the inmate survey including characteristics of the sample, use of IVVS, and opinions about IVVS.

**Sample characteristics.** All of the inmates in the three randomly selected housing units were invited to participate in the survey. On the day the survey was administered, there were 78 females in Dorm 2, 84 males in Dorm 5, and 97 males in CB8, resulting in 259 inmates being invited to complete the survey. Unfortunately, the response rate for this survey was low as only
60 surveys were returned. Out of those, two were entirely blank, resulting in a final sample size of 58. As such, the response rate for this survey was approximately 23% which is a potential concern for generalizability due to the possibility of non-response bias (i.e., differences between those who chose to complete the survey and those who did not). Caution should be taken in generalizing these findings to any other group.

The demographic characteristics of the sample are displayed below in Table 5.2. In terms of sex, the sample was disproportionately female. While this is not representative of the population of ACJ inmates in which about 22% are female (Ada County Sheriff’s Office [ACSO], 2015), it is common in survey research for samples to be overrepresented by females (Dillman et al., 2009). Almost three-quarters of the sample reported having earned a high school diploma/GED or higher which is slightly lower than the population in which about 78% have a high school diploma/GED or higher (ACSO, 2015). The sample ranged in age from 19-58 years with an average of 32 years (Median=31.00). This is similar to the population in which the average age at booking is 33 years old (ACSO, 2015). Just over half of inmates indicated they had full-time employment before being incarcerated whereas a little less than one-quarter were unemployed. Those who selected ‘other’ indicated they were on disability, received social security income, or were self-employed. Two questions were also asked about current or past participation in jail programs. The most frequently indicated program was Active Behavioral Change (ABC), followed by Substance Abuse Program (SAP), and other (e.g., worker dorm, church).
Table 5.2

Sample Characteristics (N=58)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Descriptives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>22 (37.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>36 (62.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education Level</td>
<td>8th grade or less</td>
<td>2 (3.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9th grade</td>
<td>2 (3.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10th grade</td>
<td>4 (6.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11th grade</td>
<td>7 (12.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High school diploma/GED</td>
<td>21 (36.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>14 (24.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>College degree</td>
<td>7 (12.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1 (1.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>30 (51.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Part-time</td>
<td>9 (15.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>13 (22.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>6 (10.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Age in years</td>
<td>Mean = 32.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Median = 31.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>SD = 9.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Currently in program</td>
<td>ABC</td>
<td>2 (3.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GED</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SAP</td>
<td>1 (1.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2 (3.6%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Completed program</td>
<td>ABC</td>
<td>11 (19.3%)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GED</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SAP</td>
<td>5 (8.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2 (3.6%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Use of IVVS. Several questions were asked about the respondents’ use of IVVS at ACJ. Almost three-quarters (74.1%) indicated they had used the system before. Those who had not were taken to a separate portion of the survey for additional questions (discussed below). Next, respondents were asked about the frequency and duration of their use of IVVS (see Table 5.3).
The majority indicated they had used the system within the past week, the previous day, or that
day. Only about 20% had used it more than one week prior. An open-ended item asked
respondents to indicate how many times they usually use IVVS in a normal week. The average
was around two times per week which was not surprising given the fact that inmates receive two
free visits per week. When asked how long most of their visits last, almost 70% indicated 21-30
minutes, which again, is consistent with the two free 30-minute visits per week allotted to each
inmate. Last, respondents were asked with whom they have had video visits. The most frequent
responses were their parents, friends, and children; followed by romantic partner, spouse, and
other relatives. When asked with whom they visit most frequently (not shown), the most frequent
responses were spouse or parents; followed by friends, romantic partner, children, other, and
other relatives.
Table 5.3

*Characteristics of Visits (N=43)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Descriptives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Last use</td>
<td>Today</td>
<td>6 (14.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yesterday</td>
<td>6 (14.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Within the past week</td>
<td>22 (51.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>About 1-2 weeks ago</td>
<td>2 (4.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>More than 2 weeks ago</td>
<td>7 (16.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly usage</td>
<td>Average number of times per week</td>
<td>Mean = 1.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>SD = 0.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average length</td>
<td>Less than 10 minutes</td>
<td>2 (4.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11-20 minutes</td>
<td>3 (7.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>21-30 minutes</td>
<td>30 (69.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>More than 30 minutes</td>
<td>6 (14.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2 (4.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who Visit*</td>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>18 (31.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>17 (29.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Children</td>
<td>15 (25.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Romantic partner</td>
<td>12 (20.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spouse</td>
<td>11 (19.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other relatives</td>
<td>10 (17.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3 (5.2%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Does not total 100% as the item indicated to check all that apply.

As noted earlier in this report, inmates at ACJ are permitted to purchase additional visitation time each week at a cost of $9.00 for 30 minutes. Several questions were asked about this feature (see Table 5.4). When asked if they were aware of their ability to do this, 83.3% responded affirmatively. However, when asked how often they purchased additional time, almost 80% indicated they had never done so. The cost appears to be one of the primary reasons for this as 90% responded that the cost of purchasing additional visitation time prevents them from doing so. Many of the qualitative comments left at the end of the survey (discussed below) support this
finding. For those who do purchase additional video visitation time, it is most frequently purchased by the inmate or a family member.

Table 5.4

*Purchase Additional Video Visitation Time (N=43)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Descriptives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Know about</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>35 (83.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>6 (16.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How often</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>34 (79.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>About once or twice per month</td>
<td>8 (18.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>About once per week</td>
<td>1 (2.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>More than once per week</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost prevent</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>36 (90.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>4 (10.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who pays*</td>
<td>Inmate</td>
<td>4 (44.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>4 (44.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Friend</td>
<td>3 (33.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1 (11.1%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Does not total 100% as the item indicated to check all that apply and was only completed by those who had purchased additional visitation time.

As noted earlier, inmates who indicated they had not used IVVS at ACJ were asked a few questions about why they had not used it and if they had used a similar system at another facility. Fifteen respondents indicated they had not used the system before. When asked why they had not used it, the most frequently indicated responses were: the difficulty of scheduling visits (N=6), the hours it can be used do not work for the inmate (N=5), the inmate does not know anything about it (N=2), there is no one to visit with (N=1), and the technology is too difficult to use (N=1). There was also an ‘other’ category chosen by seven respondents with space to fill in their answer. All of these responses related to accessibility issues (i.e., friends and family do not have
the required technology). One respondent indicated they had used a similar system at another facility and that it was favorable except for lagging. Overall, it appears as though the majority of those who have not used IVVS have not done so because of scheduling difficulties or because the friends and family with whom they wish to visit do not have the required technology.

**Opinions about IVVS.** One of the most important variables measured in the survey was inmate perceptions about IVVS. The first question asked opinions about the frequency and duration of free visits (see Table 5.5). Almost half of the respondents indicated that the current structure of two free 30-minute video visits per week was their preference. Six would prefer four free 15-minute sessions per week and only one would prefer one free 60-minute session. However, over one-third of respondents selected ‘other’ and inputted their suggestion. The most frequent responses were three 30-minute visits (N=5) and in-person visits instead of video visits (N=4). Some of the other responses indicated by one respondent each included two 50-minute visits, six 10-minute visits, four 30-minute visits, two 45-60-minute visits, two unlimited visits per day, and more kiosks. As will be discussed in more detail below, the desire for in-person visits and more kiosks was captured in other parts of the survey as well.

*Table 5.5*

**Opinions about Free Visits (N=43)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response Choice</th>
<th>Descriptives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Would prefer 4 free 15-minute visitations</td>
<td>6 (14.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two free 30-minute visitations is about right</td>
<td>19 (44.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would prefer 1 free 60-minute visitation</td>
<td>1 (2.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>17 (39.5%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The next section of the survey included a 10-item scale to measure a variety of perceptions about IVVS. Each statement was followed by Likert scale responses that were
numerically coded for analysis: strongly agree (5), agree (4), neutral (3), disagree (2), and strongly disagree (1). Two of the items were reverse-coded. Responses to these 10 items were coded and summed to create a total scale score ranging from 10 to 50 in which higher scores indicated more positive opinions about IVVS. Before running descriptive statistics on the scale, an analysis was conducted to examine its reliability. The analysis revealed a Cronbach’s alpha of .800, which suggests the scale is internally consistent (i.e., the items on the scale are measuring approximately the same concept).

While possible scale scores ranged from 10 to 50, scale scores among the sample ranged from 10 to 44 with an average of 26.15 (Median = 27.00) and a standard deviation of 7.230. Assuming a mid-point of 30 (i.e., answering Neutral to every item), the sample mean was significantly lower ($t(40) = -3.413, p = .001$) suggesting somewhat negative perceptions about IVVS. In addition to examining total scale scores, the individual scale items were also analyzed. Each scale item is displayed below in Table 5.6 with collapsed response categories (strongly disagree and disagree collapsed; strongly agree and agree collapsed).
Table 5.6

*Opinions about IVVS: Scale Items (N=44)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The video visitation program is very helpful for inmates.</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(35.7%)</td>
<td>(42.9%)</td>
<td>(21.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is pretty easy to use the video visitation program.</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(47.7%)</td>
<td>(33.3%)</td>
<td>(19.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The hours when video visitations are allowed work for me and the people I visit with.</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(48.8%)</td>
<td>(18.6%)</td>
<td>(32.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think there are some problems with the video visitation program.</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(81.4%)</td>
<td>(11.6%)</td>
<td>(7.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The video visitation program helps me stay in touch with my family.</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(61.9%)</td>
<td>(14.3%)</td>
<td>(23.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being able to have video visitations with my friends and family has made me want to improve my behavior when I am released from jail.</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(37.2%)</td>
<td>(34.9%)</td>
<td>(27.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The fact that video visitation privileges can be taken away has made me behave better in the jail.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(27.3%)</td>
<td>(34.1%)</td>
<td>(38.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think the video visitation program will help to stop me from committing another crime when I am released from jail.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(11.6%)</td>
<td>(32.6%)</td>
<td>(55.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I prefer video visitation over in-person visitation.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(6.8%)</td>
<td>(9.1%)</td>
<td>(84.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think in-person visits would help me to stay in touch with my family better than video visitations.</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(86.0%)</td>
<td>(7.0%)</td>
<td>(7.0%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In terms of overall opinions about IVVS, about one-third of inmates agreed that it is very helpful for inmates while over 40% were neutral and just under one-quarter disagreed. The next two items assessing ease of use suggested that about half of inmates find IVVS relatively easy to
use and another half find the hours and scheduling to work for them and those with whom they visit. About one-third expressed some discontent with visitation scheduling. Last, the majority of inmates (81.4%) agreed that there are some problems with IVVS. Given the broad nature of this question, it is difficult to determine if those problems relate to ease of use, scheduling, the number of free visits, or some other aspect of IVVS. The remaining items in the scale assessed specific opinions about the effect of IVVS on staying in touch with family and friends, behavior in the jail, recidivism, and preference in comparison to in-person visitation.

One of the goals of any visitation program is to foster the ability of inmates to maintain prosocial ties with their family and friends in an effort to improve their behavior while incarcerated, as well as upon release. Video visitation is no different and is thought to offer additional benefits beyond maintaining prosocial ties (e.g., increased institutional security). The majority of the sample agreed (61.8%) that IVVS helps them to stay in touch with their family while just under one-quarter disagreed. Whereas most believe IVVS does help them to maintain ties, the majority were skeptical about the extent to which that has made them want to improve their behavior upon release. In fact, only 37.2% agreed that it has while another third were neutral. Similarly, when asked if IVVS would help to reduce their chances of recidivism, only five inmates agreed and over half of the sample disagreed. It is important to note, however, that only opinions about reoffending were assessed in the survey, not whether the use of IVVS actually reduces recidivism. The last item to assess the perceived effect of IVVS on behavior asked about whether the threatened suspension of video visitation privileges improved their behavior while in the jail. Surprisingly, only about 28% of inmates agreed and the remainder was split almost evenly between neutral and disagree. It is possible that this finding is a function of the fact that most inmates are in the jail for a short amount of time. In fact, the average stay at
INMATE VIDEO VISITATION PROGRAM EVALUATION

ACJ is about 37 days and over half of inmates are released within 24 hours (ACSO, 2015). As such, a similar question asked at a prison could yield very different findings.

The last two scale items assessed opinions about video visitation versus in-person visitation. When asked if they prefer video visitation over in-person visitation, an astonishing 84.1% disagreed, suggesting they would instead prefer in-person visitation. Similarly, 86% believed that in-person visitation would help them to stay in touch with their family better than video visitation. It was expected that some inmates would prefer in-person visitation over video visitation, but the substantial proportion of the sample that indicated a preference for in-person visitation was surprising. There are of course other factors to consider (e.g., staff time to process in-person visits, institutional security), but the percentage of inmates who indicated a preference for in-person visitation is an important finding. In addition, some of the reasons for this preference are crucial to consider as it is possible that the current video visitation program could be slightly altered to increase inmate satisfaction. The final item on the survey, which allowed for qualitative feedback about IVVS, elucidated some of the reasons for their preference and ways the current system could be slightly amended.

The majority of inmates left some additional qualitative feedback at the end of the survey. The most frequent suggestion was to have the option for in-person visits. Many of the inmates explained that their friends and family do not have the technology required for video visits. Several suggested installing kiosks outside the jail, or at another appropriate location, for visitors to use. While there are certainly cost and space issues to consider, installing kiosks for visitors should not affect the improvements in institutional security afforded by video visitation, but would likely increase accessibility for the friends and family of some inmates. A suggestion left by one of the inmates was for Telmate to create a mobile application for visitations which
could ameliorate accessibility issues for those with smart phones, but not computers. Since a Telmate mobile application already exists, perhaps efforts could be made to ensure inmates and their loved ones are aware of it. A handful of inmates also suggested adding more kiosks for their use within the jail. Last, a number of inmates noted technical difficulties with the system such as dropped calls and poor video quality and several commented on the prohibitive cost of additional visits.

**Summary**

Despite the low response rate and smaller than desired sample size, the results of this survey revealed many important findings in regard to inmates’ use of, and opinions about, IVVS at ACJ. In addition, comparisons between the sample and the population revealed several demographic similarities in regard to age and education-level. However, the sample was disproportionately female which should be taken into account. As noted earlier, given the low response rate and overrepresentation of females, caution should be taken in generalizing these findings to any other group.

Of the 58 inmates that completed the survey, over three-quarters indicated they had used IVVS. In fact, most had used the system within the past week. The majority indicated they usually use IVVS two times per week for about 21-30 minutes, which is consistent with the two free 30-minute visits they receive each week. Inmates video visit with a variety of people including their parents, children, friends, spouses or romantic partners, and other relatives. Although most are aware of their ability to purchase additional visits, few do so as they find the cost to be prohibitive. Of the 15 respondents who had not used IVVS, the most common reasons were scheduling difficulties and accessibility issues to the appropriate technology for friends and family.
In terms of opinions about IVVS, responses were somewhat mixed. About half agreed that the structure of two free 30-minute video visits per week is about right, whereas some prefer longer visits and others prefer shorter, more frequent visits. While just over one-third agreed that IVVS is helpful for inmates, over 80% indicated some problems with the system. In regard to maintaining ties with family, over 60% agreed that IVVS helps them to do so. However, the majority were doubtful about the extent to which that would impact their behavior in the jail or upon release. Again, this survey assessed inmates’ opinions about these things, not the actual impact of IVVS on behavior. Video visitation is a privilege that can be taken away, which is thought to incentivize good behavior. Nonetheless, only about one-quarter agreed that the threat of losing those privileges has improved their behavior in the jail.

One of the most important findings of this survey is that the majority of inmates in this sample clearly prefer in-person visitation over video visitation. This preference can be attributed to a variety of factors including: lack of access to the required technology for their friends and family, the loss of human contact and being in the physical presence of their loved one, scheduling difficulties and technological issues with the system, and the cost of purchasing additional visits. Given the potential benefits of video visitation over in-person visitation from staff and administrator perspectives (e.g., increased security, decreased contraband, increased staff time for tasks besides processing visitors), returning to in-person visits is unlikely.

However, the results of this survey suggest a number of ways IVVS could be improved to increase inmates’ use of, and satisfaction with the system, while still maintaining the benefits of video visitation. These include: more kiosks inside the jail, additional kiosks located outside of the jail or in another setting for family and friends, awareness about the Telmate mobile
application, more flexibility with the free visits, fewer technological issues, and reduced cost for purchasing additional visitation time.
Chapter 6: Secondary Data Analysis

Upon the request of the researchers, Ada County Sheriff’s Office (ACSO) provided several datasets to supplement the interview and survey data discussed in Chapters 2-5 of this report. The data included information about in-person visits, video visits prior to the implementation of Telmate (i.e., Blackfin, Keefe Tech), Telmate video visits, and disciplinary records. These data were inputted into Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software for analysis. The following sections report the analyses including examinations of daily jail population averages, in-person and video visit frequency, inmate demographic characteristics, and disciplinary violation records.

Results

Frequency of visits. One of the goals of video visitation is to increase inmates’ access to and frequency of visits with their family and friends. The three datasets containing the number of annual in-person visits, pre-Telmate video visits, and Telmate video visits were compiled to examine any changes in the frequency of visits. Table 6.1 below displays the number of in-person visits each year, in addition to the average daily jail population, which was retrieved from ACSO’s publicly-accessible annual reports for 2008-2014, and from ACSO personnel for 2015. It is important to note, however, that information on whether the in-person visit was completed was not contained in the dataset. As such, the number of visits may not account for those that were cancelled, missed, etc.
Prior to discussing the number of visits, it is important to first examine the average daily jail population as significant population variation would likely have an impact on the number of visits (e.g., a larger population would likely result in more visits). Since 2008, the average daily jail population has fluctuated somewhat between a low of 787 in 2013 to a high of 892 in 2011, with an average of 862.63 (SD = 32.24) between 2008 and 2015. Excluding the substantial drop in 2013, the average daily jail population has remained relatively stable with an average of 873.43 (SD = 11.12).

In terms of annual in-person visits, Table 6.1 reveals an upward trend from 15,910 visits in 2008 to 28,132 visits in 2010. The number of in-person visits decreased to 18,025 in 2011 and dropped off significantly after that to only a few hundred visits or less per year. This trend is not surprising given the first implementation of video visitation in 2010 (i.e., Blackfin) and the discontinuation of in-person visits for all but professional visits in late 2011.

The next dataset analyzed included information about video visits prior to the implementation of Telmate (i.e., Blackfin and Keefe Tech). Average daily jail populations across the years, the number of scheduled video visits, and the number of confirmed visits, are
displayed below in Table 6.2. The various statuses for visits in this dataset included confirmed, scheduled, and cancelled. As such, confirmed visits may not necessarily be completed visits.

Table 6.2

* Partial Year

The first year, 2010, includes 10 months of data. Between March of 2010 and the end of 2012, an upward trend in the number of scheduled visits was observed from 15,270 in 2010 to 108,766 in 2012. Although the number of scheduled visits increased from 2010-2012, the percentage of confirmed visits gradually declined from 47.2% in 2010 to 42.3% in 2012. The number of scheduled visits dropped down a bit in 2013 as this was also a partial year’s worth of data, as did the percentage of confirmed visits.

The final dataset analyzed to examine the frequency of visits included information about Telmate video visits. Average daily jail populations across the years, the number of scheduled visits, and the percentage of completed visits are displayed below in Table 6.3. The various statuses for visits included in this dataset were completed, cancelled, missed, terminated, invalid, and confirmed.
Table 6.3

*Partial Year*

Since Telmate was implemented in late 2013, the number of scheduled and completed visits only covers November-December of that year (see Table 6.3). However, it is important to note that in those first few months of the new system, over 66% of visits were completed, which is a much higher proportion than the percentage of confirmed visits with the previous IVVS. In 2014, for which a full year of data were available, there were 43,745 scheduled Telmate visits, of which just over 65% were completed. Only nine months of data were available for 2015 though 36,882 visits were scheduled over the first nine months of 2015, of which 67.1% were completed. Since the data included the majority of visits for 2015, a projected total for 2015 was calculated. In 2015, the average number of monthly visits was 4,053 (not shown). Using that figure to supplement data for October, November, and December, the estimated number of scheduled visits was 49,038, of which almost 33,000 were completed. Thus, these data also reveal an upward trend in the number of both scheduled and completed visits.

**Inmate demographics.** The in-person and pre-Telmate datasets included some demographic information about the inmates who requested the visits. In an effort to determine if the switch to video visitation had any effect on the demographic characteristics of inmates using visitation, these two datasets were further analyzed. The two demographic variables that were
consistent across the two datasets were inmate sex and age at the time of the visit. The results are displayed below in Table 6.4.

Table 6.4

*Inmate Demographics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>In-Person</th>
<th>Pre-Telmate Video</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sex</strong></td>
<td>81.4% Male</td>
<td>74.8% Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18.6% Female</td>
<td>25.2% Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td>R = 14-80</td>
<td>R = 14-76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M = 29.90</td>
<td>M = 31.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SD = 9.61</td>
<td>SD = 9.14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen in Table 6.4, there were some slight demographic changes between in-person and video visitation in terms of the inmates who requested visits. Between 2008 and 2011, 18.5% of those who requested in-person visitation were female inmates. An analysis of each year (not shown) revealed gradually increasing percentages of female inmates: 17.1%, 17.4%, 19.3%, and 20.1%. In comparison, between 2010 and 2013, 25.2% of the inmates who requested video visitation were female. An analysis of each year (not shown) revealed percentages of: 39.8%, 24.7%, 25.5%, and 23.1%. Though there are a number of factors that could influence these figures (e.g., the percentage of males and females at the jail), these data suggest that, in comparison to in-person visitation, video visitation has increased female inmates’ frequency of visitation and decreased male inmates’ frequency of visitation.

There were also some changes in age, though not in the expected direction. Since video visitation requires the use of technology, it could be surmised that some older inmates may not be adept at using the technology. However, as can be seen in Table 6.4, the average age of inmates requesting visitation actually increased from 29.90 with in-person visitation to 31.99
with video visitation. An analysis of each year (not shown) of in-person visits indicated average inmate ages of 28.73, 29.79, 30.43, and 30.36 between 2008 and 2011. Between 2010 and 2013, average annual inmate ages for video visitation included 31.67, 31.89, 31.80, and 32.38. Again, there are a number of factors that could impact these statistics (e.g., the average age of inmates at the jail), though these findings seem to contradict the assumption that older inmates would be unable or unwilling to use video visitation.

**Disciplinary records.** As stated previously, video visitation is thought to offer several benefits over in-person visitation, including increasing inmates’ access to, and frequency of, visits. Ideally, this increased visitation would result in improved institutional behavior as inmates are able to maintain prosocial ties with their friends and family. In order to examine the impact of video visitation on inmate behavior, the characteristics of recorded disciplinary violations were analyzed. The three types of disciplinary violations included in the dataset were: Level 1 Citation, Level 2 Minor, and Level 3 Major. Thus, the frequencies and types of disciplinary violations were used as a proxy for institutional behavior. However, it is important to note that these analyses are aggregate in nature. In other words, inmates are not matched up between the visitation and disciplinary violations datasets so there is no way to know if the inmates who had disciplinary violations used, or did not use, in-person or video visitation. The results, including average daily population counts are displayed below in Table 6.5. The percentages of Level 1, Level 2, and Level 3 violations in each year do not necessarily total 100% due to missing data.
Table 6.5

*Disciplinary Violations (N=13,453)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Average Daily Population</th>
<th>Disciplinary Violations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1,067</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Level 1: 140 (13.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Level 2: 660 (61.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Level 3: 254 (23.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>879</td>
<td>1,672</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Level 1: 365 (21.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Level 2: 1,039 (62.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Level 3: 264 (15.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>882</td>
<td>1,696</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Level 1: 428 (25.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Level 2: 1,052 (62.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Level 3: 211 (12.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>892</td>
<td>1,864</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Level 1: 593 (31.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Level 2: 1,144 (61.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Level 3: 120 (6.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>865</td>
<td>2,082</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Level 1: 502 (24.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Level 2: 1,371 (65.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Level 3: 203 (9.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>787</td>
<td>2,323</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Level 1: 577 (24.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Level 2: 1,607 (69.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Level 3: 131 (5.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>865</td>
<td>2,323</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Level 1: 535 (23.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Level 2: 1,642 (70.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Level 3: 139 (6.0%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen in Table 6.5, the number of disciplinary violations has steadily increased from a low of 1,067 violations in 2009 to 2,323 in 2014. In 2015, the frequency remained the same as the previous year with a total of 2,323 recorded violations. Although there are several factors that could influence changes in the number of disciplinary violations (e.g., characteristics
of the jail population such as the percentage of high-risk inmates, the likelihood of disciplinary violations being detected by jail personnel, changes in reporting practices), the data provided for 2009-2015 suggest that video visitation did not decrease disciplinary violations at the jail. However, it is important to note that the severity of disciplinary violations appears to have changed over the years. Whereas 23.8% of the violations in 2009 were major, by 2015, only 6.0% of the violations were major. Thus, while the data indicate that video visitation has not necessarily decreased the number of annual violations, it is possible that it did impact the severity of those violations, though again, there are several factors that could affect the frequency and severity of disciplinary violations.

Summary

The analysis of data shared by ACSO provided important information about visitation to supplement the interview and survey data discussed earlier in this report. In terms of increasing inmates’ access to and frequency of visitation, which is one of the goals of video visitation, the data suggest that the implementation of IVVS has increased the frequency of visitation while average daily jail populations have remained relatively stable over the years. However, as noted earlier, the status of the visits (e.g., completed, scheduled) was not the same in each dataset so direct comparisons may not be appropriate. Even with these limitations, the data do indicate an increase in the frequency of visitation with the implementation of IVVS. In regard to the characteristics of inmates that request visitation, the data indicate that the implementation of IVVS increased the average age, and the percentage of female inmates requesting visitation. Importantly, there are other factors that could have impacted these demographic trends as well.

Another goal of video visitation is improved institutional behavior due to the increased frequency of visits with friends and family. As such, the frequencies and types of disciplinary
violations were analyzed to examine any significant changes following the implementation of IVVS. Unfortunately, the frequency of violations increased across the years analyzed suggesting IVVS has not decreased disciplinary violations in the jail. However, the analysis also revealed that the percentage of major violations dropped substantially between 2009 and 2015. Thus, while there are many other factors to consider, the data suggest the possibility that IVVS has not decreased the frequency of disciplinary violations, but has impacted the severity of violations.
Chapter 7: Conclusion

The goals of this program evaluation were to examine the implementation of inmate video visitation at Ada County Jail (ACJ), which began in March of 2010, as well as to examine whether it has been effective in achieving the objectives it was designed and implemented to achieve. According to the key stakeholders who were interviewed for the current study, Ada County Sheriff’s Office (ACSO) implemented their inmate video visitation system (IVVS) to prevent the desensitization of kids to jail, increase jail security and order, promote public safety, reduce resource and space requirements, and increase access to, and frequency of, visitation (see Chapter 2).

The data collected during the interviews with key stakeholders and Sheriff’s deputies highlight the participants’ perceptions about the transition to IVVS at ACJ, the initial and current challenges of using inmate video visitation, the benefits of using inmate video visitation, and how they envision the use of the system will advance in the years ahead. The data collected during the interviews with the inmates document their use of IVVS, their overall satisfaction with the system, what they perceive to be the advantages and disadvantages of video visitation at ACJ, and their recommendations for the future use of IVVS at ACJ. The inmates who were interviewed were overwhelmingly positive in their views of IVVS whereas inmate responses to the survey questions about IVVS were more mixed (see Chapters 4 and 5). The survey data reveal the participants’ characteristics and their use of IVVS, opinions about IVVS, and recommendations to improve video visitation at ACJ. Perhaps the most striking finding from the inmate surveys is that the majority of the inmates in this sample prefer in-person visitation rather than video visitation (see Chapter 5). The analysis of the data shared by ACSO indicates that the implementation of IVVS has increased the frequency of visitation at ACJ. Further, the data also
suggest that while the implementation of IVVS has not decreased the frequency of disciplinary violations, it might have impacted the severity of the violations (i.e., decreased the percentage of major violations). However, there are many other factors that could account for these changes (see Chapter 6).

As was noted in the Literature Review (see Chapter 1), the existing research examining video visitation in correctional settings is limited, and further, the majority of this research is anecdotal in nature, has been conducted in prison settings, and/or is lacking in methodological rigor. Therefore, the results from this evaluation of IVVS at ACJ make a valuable contribution to the body of literature on the use of video visitation in a jail setting. Based on the results from the analyses undertaken across the interviews, survey, and secondary data, the research team has developed recommendations concerning the ongoing use of IVVS at ACJ, which are presented in the following section.

**Recommendations**

The research team has developed recommendations concerning the ongoing use of IVVS at ACJ, which are grounded in their analysis of the data.

**Recommendation #1: Install kiosk(s) for visitor use.** One of the oft-cited concerns with IVVS is that prospective visitors do not have Internet access, or access to the technology required to use the Telmate system (e.g., a computer with a camera and microphone). While some Sheriff’s deputies suggested that visitors go to local restaurants to use their Wi-Fi, these settings lack privacy and continue to preclude individuals who do not have the computer or smartphone technology that is required to use Telmate. Should ACSO choose to install a kiosk in the lobby of their jail, the agency may want to consider an online sign-up scheduling system to manage the visits to ensure there is no crowding in the lobby, which was a concern with the
previous in-person visitation system. Alternatively, ACSO could pursue partnerships with community agencies to provide kiosks, free Wi-Fi, and private visitation space in various community locations. Having kiosks in various community locations would also address the concern that visitors do not always have the ability to travel to one centralized location (i.e. ACJ), which was a concern noted with the old in-person visitation system.

**Recommendation #2: Decrease the cost of purchasing additional video visits.** Very few of the inmates who were interviewed and surveyed said they purchase additional video visits, as the cost is prohibitive for most inmates and their visitors. It should be noted that the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) might eventually regulate the cost of purchasing video visits, including additional video visits above any free visits provided by correctional agencies.

**Recommendation #3: Award extra free visits for good institutional behavior.** The key stakeholders who were interviewed explained how they thought one of the objectives of implementing IVVS at ACJ was to increase jail security and order by reducing inmate movement, eliminating the transportation of community members into secure parts of the jail, and incentivizing inmates to follow institutional rules. As a whole, ACSO personnel who were interviewed for the study believe the provision of two free 30-minute video visits serves to incentivize inmates to behave, thereby promoting institutional security and order. Further, the analysis of the data collected in the inmate interviews and surveys reveal the inmates see value in being awarded extra – in addition to the two free 30-minute video visits currently provided – free visits for good institutional behavior. Therefore, the researchers recommend ACSO provide inmates with the opportunity to *earn* free visits to further incentivize good behavior among the inmate population at ACJ. For example, ACSO might consider giving inmates the opportunity to
receive one extra free 30-minute video visit for every two weeks they are held at ACJ without a recorded disciplinary violation.

**Recommendation #4: Give inmates the option to choose between video visitation or in-person visitation.** The interview and survey data collected from the inmates suggest that they would like the choice between scheduling in-person visits or video visits, depending on whom they are visiting (e.g., video visits are preferable for out-of-state visitors). The data reveal that various barriers exist for visitors wanting to see their loved ones at ACJ; as noted above, this includes a lack of access to Wi-Fi and/or the technology required to use Telmate. Thus, having the option to travel to the jail for an in-person visit may be preferable for those who experience these barriers. While many other factors may have caused the increase in disciplinary violations noted in the secondary data analysis from 1,067 violations in 2009 to 2,323 in 2014 (the frequency remained the same for 2015 at 2,323 recorded violations), it is possible that inmates are ‘acting out’ because they are unhappy with the mandatory use of IVVS. However, further research is needed to more closely examine the relationship between video visitation and inmate behavior (see the Future Research section below). Nevertheless, based on the findings that emerged from the data, the research team believes ACSO may benefit from providing inmates with the choice to conduct their visits in-person, or over video. In order to increase efficiency and limit the number of in-person visit requests, ACSO could require inmates to provide valid justification for why they require access to in-person visitation.

**Recommendation #5: Provide a more private visiting space in the living units.** Some of the inmates who were interviewed suggested that a more private visitation space is desirable, as other inmates occasionally “shark” on their visits. However, providing a separate visiting space may create additional issues for ACSO in terms of the enforcement of nudity and non-
contact order violations (see Chapter 3). Thus, rather than provide a separate room altogether, ACSO should simply consider reminding the inmates they are not permitted to “shark” on other inmates’ visits, and increase enforcement on the issue. Further, if any additional kiosks are installed, ACSO should be mindful to ensure the cameras face areas that are low-traffic spaces.

Recommendation #6: Expand programming, training, and educational programming opportunities on the kiosks. The research team received diverse feedback from ACSO personnel with respect to the programming, training, and educational opportunities that ACSO currently offers inmates through the Telmate system. The general consensus was that the kiosks are not being used to their full potential, so the recommendation is for ACSO to pursue even more diverse uses of the kiosks beyond video visits, music, Inmate Request Form submission, commissary orders, and the Internet. Examples for ACSO to explore include parenting skills and vocational programming (among others) and activities where parents can connect with their kids while engaged in video visits (e.g., by simultaneously playing games or drawing).

Recommendation #7: Broaden the use of video visits to professional staff. Two of the inmates suggested broadening the use of video visitation to their lawyers to improve their access to these professionals. Some of the ACSO key stakeholders who were interviewed noted they are considering expanding the use of video visits to professional staff, and that they are currently working this out with respect to ensuring the privacy of such visits (i.e., ensuring the video visits are not recorded to guarantee attorney-client privilege). The analysis of the data shared by ACSO suggest that the implementation of IVVS has increased the frequency of visitation at ACJ while the average daily jail populations have remained relatively stable over the years. Therefore, the research team recommends ACSO continue to pursue the option of expanding the use of video
visitation to professional visitors, as it should also result in increased frequency of visitation for inmates and their lawyers, while also alleviating some of the manpower hours required to process professional staff into the facility and transport inmates to the visitation rooms.

**Recommendation #8: Provide ACSO deputies with additional training opportunities on the Telmate system.** While some of the ACSO deputies that were interviewed recommended additional training on Telmate, not all of them supported this recommendation, as they (as well as the key stakeholders) recognized the challenges inherent in training many staff members who work shifts. There are two logical alternatives to providing mandatory, additional training for deputies in excess of the initial training that ASCO provides. First, and as was suggested by a couple of the participants, ACSO should simply ensure deputies are always aware of who the Telmate-deputies are on their shifts, so they can direct their questions and concerns to those individuals. Second, ACSO should consider providing *optional*, rather than mandatory training sessions for those who are interested in completing extra training.

**Recommendation #9: Periodically hold focus groups or conduct surveys with inmates and Sheriff’s deputies to inquire about their opinions on the use of IVVS.** Given the insightful feedback shared by both ACSO deputies and the inmates, the research team sees value in ACSO conducting focus groups or surveys with these populations in the future. The two groups supervise or use the system most frequently, and as such, have diverse opinions and insight to share. ACSO can use this insight to further develop, improve, and expand upon IVVS.

**Strengths and Limitations**

This study of IVVS at ACJ makes a valuable contribution to the existing, and quite limited, literature examining video visitation in correctional settings. The paragraphs that follow
highlight the strengths of the methodologies that the research team used in completing the evaluation, in addition to noting the limitations.

**Interviews.** This program evaluation was designed to assess two objectives: first, to examine the implementation of IVVS; and second, to assess whether IVVS has been effective in achieving its intended objectives (see Chapter 2). These objectives required the research team to speak directly to those responsible for the design and implementation of IVVS at ACJ (i.e., the key stakeholders) and those who supervise or use the system most frequently in their day-to-day activities in the jail (i.e., the Sheriff’s deputies and the inmates). Thus, the research team considered it most appropriate to conduct semi-structured interviews with three populations of people – key stakeholders, Sheriff’s deputies, and inmates – to elicit their perceptions about the transition to, and use of, IVVS at ACJ.

By using the semi-structured interviewing technique, the researchers were able to gather rich data, clarify misunderstandings, and probe for additional information. As a result of using this strategy, the research team collected “thick descriptions” (Geertz, 1973, p. 3) from the participants, which have been presented throughout this report to ensure the participants’ voices are heard, and to support the researchers’ interpretation of the data.

Given that the interviews were retrospective in nature, the key stakeholders, Sheriff’s deputies, and inmates might have had a difficult time recalling their experiences with IVVS, resulting in the exclusion of valuable events and experiences. This was believed to be less of a problem for the inmates who were asked about their experiences with IVVS, as they had used the system many times in the days and weeks leading up to the interview. In contrast, some of the questions the key stakeholders and ACSO deputies were asked pertained to the creation and initial implementation of IVVS, which occurred years prior to the evaluation. Another issue with
the interviewing technique is that the researcher’s presence may have altered what the interviewees discussed due to their concerns about ACSO learning what they had shared. However, the researchers that were responsible for conducting the interviews believe they mitigated this concern by interviewing the participants in a private room and by reiterating that ACSO would not be privy to individual interview data, as the data would be presented as general themes in the final report and any subsequent publications.

While interviewing the three populations was believed to be the most appropriate technique for the purpose of addressing the two objectives of this program evaluation, each of the three interview methodology components involved the use of nonprobability sampling (i.e., purposive sampling), which necessitates a discussion of the weaknesses inherent in the use of this sampling technique. The researchers’ use of purposive sampling means that the interview data lacks representativeness, and as such, the results of the interviews cannot be generalized to other populations, including for example, all ACSO deputies, or Sheriff’s deputies in other jurisdictions that have implemented remote IVVS. The data is also not generalizable because the participants chose to participate in the study and it is possible they did so because they have had mostly positive experiences with the system (see Chapters 2-4). People who held negative views of the system may have been less inclined to participate due to their fear of the potential repercussions from sharing negative thoughts during a face-to-face interview with an external researcher. This means that those who volunteered to participate may have shared vastly different opinions and experiences than those individuals who were not interviewed. Another factor that contributes to the lack of generalizability of the data is the small number (nine key stakeholders, 10 Sheriff’s deputies, and 12 inmates) of individuals who were interviewed for each component, and further, the even smaller number of women who were interviewed (there
were just four in total across the three groups). All of these factors – having focused only on ACJ, using nonprobability sampling, and having small sample sizes in each participant group – mean the study lacks external validity.

While some may view the lack of representativeness and ability to generalize the findings as weaknesses, these were not the guiding principles of the current study, as the purpose was to examine the implementation of IVVS at ACSO and whether IVVS is achieving its intended objectives at ACJ. Thus, the research objectives were best met by using the purposive sampling technique given that generalizability was not a goal the research team sought to achieve by using qualitative interviews.

**Survey.** While the survey methodology was deemed the most appropriate for the purposes of the study, there are some strengths and limitations to consider. First, probability sampling (stratified sampling in this case) and Dillman et al.’s (2009) *Tailored Design Method* were employed in order to enhance the generalizability of the findings back to the population of ACJ inmates. Unfortunately, however, the response rate for this survey was low (23%). Although this suggests the possibility of non-response error (i.e., significant differences between those who chose to participate and those who did not), recent research indicates that a low response rate is not necessarily indicative of non-response error and that response rates at low as 10% can yield valid estimates in some cases (Wright, 2015). Additionally, the sample was comparable to the population in regard to age and education-level. Nevertheless, caution should be taken in generalizing these findings to any other group.

The non-experimental, cross-sectional design of the survey limits internal validity. That is, causality among the variables cannot be determined due to the inability to establish time order and non-spuriousness. However, the methodology was deemed most appropriate for the purposes
of this descriptive study in which one of the primary goals was to describe ACJ inmates’
experiences with, and opinions about, IVVS. External validity (i.e., the extent to which the
findings can be generalized to other populations) is also an important consideration. Given the
fact that this survey was conducted in only one jail in Idaho, caution should be taken in
generalizing the findings to other localities and to other types of correctional populations.

Although the design limits the internal and external validity of the findings, the use of an
anonymous, paper survey offered several benefits. First, the guarantee of anonymity encouraged
respondents to be completely honest in their responses as they were assured neither their name
nor any identifying information would be linked to their responses. In addition, the paper survey
format afforded participants ample time to complete the survey. That is, respondents had plenty
of time to read through the survey items and carefully consider their answers. Although the
original plan was to administer an online survey for this study, the paper survey was an
appropriate alternative.

As noted earlier, the researchers were not able to employ a previously validated survey
instrument for this study due to the paucity of research on the topic. While this represented a
potential limitation, it also posed an opportunity to develop an instrument specifically for IVVS
at ACJ. To that end, content validity was used to evaluate the extent to which the measure
covered all aspects of the concepts intending to be measured. This was achieved by having the
instrument reviewed by the researchers, as well as ACSO staff. In terms of measurement
reliability, portions of the survey were assessed for internal consistency, which is discussed in
more detail in Chapter 3. Given the cross-sectional design of this survey, internal consistency is
the most appropriate measure of reliability. Although the survey was designed specifically for
IVVS at ACJ, it could still be used by other researchers with some slight adjustments.
Secondary data analysis. There are a number of strengths and limitations to consider when analyzing already existing data. One of the main strengths is the availability of the data in that it has already been collected and put into a format appropriate for analysis. In this case, the data were shared with the researchers in Microsoft Excel format, which is easily transferable into SPSS, the software program used for the analysis. Additionally, the data utilized for this report came directly from ACSO’s official records, which bolsters its validity. The researchers were grateful to have access to this data to supplement the interview and survey data gathered.

Although secondary data analysis offers several benefits, there are some weaknesses as well. Missing data is often an issue and it was a minor issue in this analysis, primarily in regard to the disciplinary violations dataset. There were a number of cases for which the type of violation was not included. In addition, inconsistencies in operational definitions can be a concern. This presented an issue in regard to visitation logs. Whereas the Telmate dataset included detailed information on the status of the visit (i.e., completed, cancelled, missed, terminated, invalid, confirmed), the pre-Telmate dataset only included categories of confirmed, scheduled, and cancelled, and the in-person visit dataset did not include any information on the status. As such direct comparisons among these three datasets are problematic. Similarly, the in-person and pre-Telmate datasets included demographic information about the inmate requesting the visitation though the Telmate dataset did not.

Future Research

The results of the evaluation outlined in this report make an important contribution to the body of knowledge on the use of video visitation in correctional institutions, specifically IVVS at ACJ. However, given the paucity of empirical research on this topic, additional research is needed. This section includes recommendations for future research on this topic at correctional
institutions that are currently using a video visitation system, those that are considering implementing video visitation, as well as recommendations specifically for future research of IVVS at ACJ.

As noted in Chapter 1 of this report, there are three main types of video visitation: regional, on-site, and remote. This evaluation examined the use of a remote system where visitors are able to virtually visit with their incarcerated loved ones from any location. In contrast, regional and on-site programs require visitors to travel to a regional center or to the correctional institution for video visits. As such, future research should examine the differential use and impact of the various types of video visitation. In addition, it would also be important to examine the components of the video visitation program. For example, IVVS at ACJ allows inmates two free 30-minute visits per week whereas other institutions may only offer one free visit or none at all. The differences among these various system characteristics should be closely examined to determine the most efficacious program from the perspective of institutions, inmates, and their loved ones.

The importance of investigating the impact of video visitation programs in various settings cannot be overstated. This evaluation examined IVVS at one jail in a relatively urban area in the state of Idaho. Future research should examine video visitation systems at other jails, as well as prisons, both state and federal. Since the average incarceration period at a jail is short (i.e., usually one year or less), it would be important to examine the impact of video visitation in various prison settings where average stays are typically much longer. Additionally, video visitation programs in both rural and urban settings should be compared. In combination with the type of video visitation (i.e., remote, regional, on-site), the rurality or urbanity of a location could have a significant impact on the use and impact of video visitation. For example, an on-site video
visitation program in a rural area may result in considerable travel difficulties for family and friends to visit their incarcerated loved ones. Travel may also present an issue for those visiting female inmates since there are fewer correctional facilities for females (i.e., visitors would likely have to travel farther for on-site, regional, or in-person visitation).

This study gathered samples of key stakeholders, Sheriff’s deputies, and inmates for the interviews (see Chapters 2-4), and a sample of inmates for the survey (see Chapter 5). Future researchers should continue to examine these populations at other facilities, in addition to collecting data from inmates’ visitors. It would be important to examine perceptions about video visitation from the perspective of inmates’ family and friends, both at ACJ and other correctional institutions. This could include perceptions about the costs of video visitation, ease of use, maintenance of social ties, and effects on children of incarcerated parents. Comparisons among facilities utilizing in-person only, those using both in-person and video visitation, and those using only video visitation would likely reveal important nuances to be considered for all types of visitation programs.

In terms of sampling design, this study utilized nonprobability methods to gather the samples for the interviews, which are appropriate for qualitative research designs. For the survey, probability techniques, which are more appropriate for quantitative methodologies, were used to enhance the generalizability of the findings. Thus, future researchers should carefully consider the sampling techniques they utilize in accordance with the research design and goals of generalizability. In addition, recall that the interview samples were overrepresented by male participants whereas the survey sample was disproportionately female. Future researchers should attempt to obtain samples that are more equally represented by male and female participants. Another important characteristic to consider for sampling inmate populations is parental status,
particularly for inmate mothers who are more likely to be primary caregivers. A comparison of
perceptions about video visitation between inmates who are parents and those who are not would
likely reveal important similarities and differences in opinions and usage.

The research designs used for this evaluation included cross-sectional interviews,
surveys, and secondary data analysis. While these methodologies were deemed the most
appropriate for the current study, future research should employ the use of quasi experimental
designs where possible in order to enhance internal validity (i.e., the ability to make causal
statements about important variables). For example, at correctional facilities considering the
implementation of a video visitation program, a before-and-after quasi experimental design
would be ideal. Such a design would allow for an examination of important outcome variables
such as institutional behavior, recidivism, security, and users’ opinions about visitation before
and after the implementation of video visitation. In addition, this would also allow for a
prospective implementation evaluation. The evaluation described in this report was retrospective
in nature as IVVS had already been implemented at ACJ, which presents some concerns in
regard to respondent recall and data collection. A prospective evaluation would alleviate these
issues and allow for an examination of the implementation of the system as it occurs through the
analysis of carefully designed data collection and management procedures.

For facilities that have already implemented a video visitation program, such as ACJ, an
ideal approach would be a nonequivalent control groups design. More specifically, if inmates
had the option between in-person and video visitation, the two groups could be matched on
important variables to enable comparisons between them. This would allow for more accurate
examinations of the effect of visitation type on institutional behavior, security, perceptions about
visitation, and recidivism. Last, for facilities that have already implemented video visitation, but
do not allow for in-person visitation, a longitudinal design would be appropriate in which data on important variables such as video visitation usage, disciplinary violations while incarcerated, and recidivism upon release could be gathered over a period of time. Additionally, opinions about the use of the system, from both inmates’ and visitors’ perspectives, could also be gathered using anonymous surveys, and possibly part or all of the survey used in this study. Though not as rigorous as the quasi experimental designs noted above, a longitudinal design would enable identification of associations among these variables across time to more accurately examine the impact of video visitation on inmates, their visitors, and the institution.
References


Appendix A

Key Stakeholder Interview Questions

1. In your opinion, what are the objectives of the inmate video visitation system?

2. Do you believe these objectives are being met?

3. What dynamics did you experience in the creation phase of the inmate video visitation system?

4. What dynamics did you experience in the implementation stage of the inmate video visitation system?

5. How did these dynamics affect how the program was designed?

6. What challenges did you experience in the creation phase of the inmate video visitation system?

7. What challenges did you experience in the implementation stage of the inmate video visitation system?

8. How did these challenges affect how the program was implemented?

9. Do you have any final comments or thoughts you would like to share?
Appendix B

Sheriff’s Deputy Interview Questions

1. In your opinion, what are the objectives of the inmate video visitation system?

2. Do you believe these objectives are being met?

3. In your opinion, how can ACSO revise the video visitation system to better meet its objectives?

4. How does the use of video visitation affect you in the completion of your day-to-day activities?

5. In your opinion, how can ACSO revise the video visitation system to better meet the needs of ACSO personnel?

6. What types of challenges, if any, do you experience in managing the inmate video visitation system?

7. Do you have any concerns about the process of inmates accessing the video visitation system?

8. Do you think inmate access to the video visitation system results in more desirable inmate behavior in the institution and in the community?

9. Overall, what do you perceive as the strengths of using the video visitation system?

10. Overall, what do you perceive as the weaknesses of using the video visitation system?

11. Do you have any final comments or thoughts you would like to share?
Appendix C

Inmate Interview Questions

1. How frequently do you use the inmate video visitation system operating at Ada County Jail?

2. Do you prefer in-person versus video visits?

3. How has the use of video visitation affected your ability to maintain contact with your family members who reside in the community?

4. Do you believe maintaining contact with your loved ones will contribute to your success upon release in the community?

5. Who pays for your video visits (outside of the two free sessions provided by the Ada County Jail)?

6. In your opinion, what are the advantages of the inmate video visitation system utilized at Ada County Jail?

7. In your opinion, what are the disadvantages of the inmate video visitation system utilized at Ada County Jail?

8. Do you have any final comments or thoughts you would like to share?
Appendix D

Inmate Survey

*Instructions:* Please answer the following questions about your use of the video visitation program at Ada County Jail. Choose your answer by placing an “x” in the circle next to your answer or writing it in the space provided.

1. **Have you ever used the video visitation program at Ada County Jail?**
   - ○ Yes
   - ○ No (If you have not used it, please skip to Question #22)

2. **When was the last time you used the video visitation program?**
   - ○ Today
   - ○ Yesterday
   - ○ Within the past week
   - ○ About 1-2 weeks ago
   - ○ More than 2 weeks ago

3. **In a normal week, about how many times do you usually use the video visitation program?**
   
   __________ times (*please write the number of times in the space provided*)

4. **How long do most of your video visitations last?**
   - ○ Less than 10 minutes
   - ○ 11-20 minutes
   - ○ 21-30 minutes
   - ○ More than 30 minutes
   - ○ Other ____________________________
5. Each week you are allowed two free 30 minute video visitations. Which of the following best describes your opinion about this?

○ I would rather have four free 15 minute video visitations
○ I think two free 30 minute video visitations is about right
○ I would rather have one 60 minute free video visitation
○ Other _______________________________________________________

6. Did you know you (or your family or friends) can buy more video visitation time at a cost of $9.00 for 30 minutes?

○ Yes
○ No

7. How often do you (or your family or friends) buy additional video visitation time?

○ Never (If you have never bought additional time, please skip to Question #10)
○ About once or twice a month
○ About once a week
○ More than once a week

8. When you have more than your two free 30-minute sessions per week, who usually pays for the extra visits? Check all that apply.

○ I pay for them
○ My family pays for them
○ My friends pay for them
○ Other _______________________________________________________

9. Does the cost of buying additional video visitation time ever stop you from doing it?

○ Yes
○ No
10. Who have you visited with using the video visitation program at Ada County Jail? Check all that apply.

- My husband or wife
- My boyfriend or girlfriend
- My parents
- My children
- Other relatives
- Friend
- Other ______________________________

11. Who do you visit with most often? Please choose just one answer.

- My husband or wife
- My boyfriend or girlfriend
- My parents
- My children
- Other relatives
- Friend
- Other ______________________________
**Instructions:** Please read the following statements about the video visitation program at Ada County Jail. Tell us how you feel about each statement by placing an “x” in the circle next to your answer. Your answer should reflect your opinion about each statement; there are not any right or wrong answers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>The video visitation program helps me to stay in touch with my family.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>The fact that video visitation privileges can be taken away has made me behave better in the jail.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>I prefer video visitation over in-person visitation.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>It is pretty easy to use the video visitation program.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>The video visitation program is very helpful for inmates.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>I think the video visitation program will help to stop me from committing another crime when I am released from jail.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>I think there are some problems with the video visitation program.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>I think in-person visits would help me to stay in touch with my family better than video visitations.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>The hours when video visitations are allowed work for me and the people I visit with.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INMATE VIDEO VISITATION PROGRAM EVALUATION

21. Being able to have video visitations with my friends and family has made me want to improve my behavior when I am released from jail.
   ○ Strongly agree  ○ Agree  ○ Neutral  ○ Disagree  ○ Strongly disagree

Instructions: Please answer Questions #22-24 only if you have not used the video visitation program at Ada County Jail. If you have used it, please skip to Question #25.

22. Please indicate why you have not used the video visitation program at Ada County Jail. Check all that apply.
   ○ I don’t know anything about it.
   ○ I don’t have anyone I want to visit with.
   ○ I’m not allowed to use it.
   ○ The hours I can use it don’t work for me.
   ○ It’s too hard to schedule visits.
   ○ The technology is too hard to use.
   ○ Other ___________________________________________________________________

23. Have you ever used a video visitation program at another jail or prison?
   ○ Yes
   ○ No (If you have not, please skip to Question #25)

24. What did you think of the video visitation program you used at another jail or prison? Please tell us what worked well and what did not.
25. What is your sex?

○ Male
○ Female
○ Other ____________________________________________________________________

26. What is your age?

_________ years (please write your age in years in the space provided)

27. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

○ 8th grade or less
○ 9th grade
○ 10th grade
○ 11th grade
○ High school diploma/GED
○ Some college
○ College degree
○ Other ____________________________________________________________________

28. What was your employment status before being at Ada County Jail?

○ Employed full-time
○ Employed part-time
○ Unemployed
○ Other ____________________________________________________________________

29. Which programs are you currently participating in at Ada County Jail? Check all that apply.

○ Active Behavioral Change (ABC)
○ Substance Abuse Program (SAP)
○ General Education Development (GED)
30. Which programs have you completed at Ada County Jail? Check all that apply.

○ Active Behavioral Change (ABC)
○ Substance Abuse Program (SAP)
○ General Education Development (GED)
○ Other ____________________________________________________________________
○ None

31. Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey! If you have any other comments about the video visitation program, please write them in the space below.

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________