

Colorado Probation Research in Brief

Recidivism Findings for Washington's Juvenile Mentoring Program

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Juvenile Mentoring

Summary/Conclusions

The Washington State Institute for Public Policy conducted a preliminary analysis of the Juvenile Rehabilitation Administration's juvenile mentoring program in 2002. The program assigned a mentor during the juvenile's commitment, who then met weekly with the juvenile upon release to the community. In the 2002 study, researchers found the program participants had a recidivism rate of 45% one year after release to the community; whereas, non-participants had a recidivism rate of 54%. Recidivism was measured as any conviction for a felony or misdemeanor. The current study follows the outcomes 24 to 36 months post-release.

Limitations of Information

Although the comparison and treatment groups were extremely well-matched, the small size of the sample may have limited the statistical significance of some of the results. While matching well on demographics, the geographic location of the participants was not similar and had to be controlled through multivariate regression. Of note, participants had to apply for the program, so the degree to which motivation may have influenced the outcomes is unknown.

Caveat: The information presented here is intended to summarize and inform readers of research and information relevant to probation work. It can provide a framework for carrying out the business of probation as well as suggestions for practical application of the material. While it may, in some instances, lead to further exploration and result in *future* decisions, it is not intended to prescribe policy and is not necessarily conclusive in its findings. Some of its limitations are described above.

Researchers at the Washington State Institute for Public Policy studied the State's Juvenile Rehabilitation Administration's mentoring program. The program uses adult volunteers to mentor juveniles who are returning from placement. The mentors are well-trained and must make a one year commitment. Additionally, the program has established guidelines for regular contacts with the juvenile, so implementation is consistent in all locations. The mentors were trained to assist the juveniles in "setting and fulfilling educational and vocational goals, and to help the youth live a drug- and crime-free life."

The current study was a follow-up to an earlier investigation, which determined recidivism rates for 12 months post-release from placement. The initial study found that the participants in the mentoring program had a recidivism rate of 45% one year after release to the community; whereas, non-participants had a recidivism rate of 54%.

Both studies reviewed the outcomes for 78 juveniles who participated in the program and 78 juveniles who did not participate. There were "no differences between the two groups" in regard to demographic and criminal justice measures; however, the researchers did have to statistically control for the locations of the juveniles' residences.

Although the mentoring groups had a lower recidivism rate at the 12 month follow-up period, there was no difference in the mentoring group and the comparison group at the 24 and 36 month follow-up periods. "It is possible that recidivism rates were lower at the

12 month follow-up period because that is when youth had a mentor." It is also possible that the small sample size was not large enough to allow researchers to distinguish a difference between the mentoring group and the comparison group. It should be noted that the mentoring program was focused on fulfilling educational and vocational goals, in addition to helping the juvenile be more pro-social. It appears the program was able to meet these goals as long as the mentor was working with the juvenile but the influence was not long-term.

Practical Applications

- √ If using mentoring programs, it may be helpful to ensure the juvenile can participate for a lengthy period of time.
- √ Use mentors to assist in establishing social networks, so the juvenile will have one or more pro-social people on whom the juvenile can depend upon once the mentor is no longer involved.
- √ It may be beneficial to have the mentor follow-up with the juvenile, after the mentorship ends, so the separation is not sudden. By stepping down the number of contacts, the transition may be more successful.
- √ Ensure that the juvenile is in need of the services, which the mentoring program offers. Referrals should always be appropriate for the individual juvenile's needs.
- √ Communicate regularly with mentors, so you can reinforce the juvenile's progress in areas such as good decision making or regular attendance.