

Colorado Probation Research in Brief

Habilitation or Harm: Project Greenlight and the Potential Consequences of Correctional Programming

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Summary/Conclusions

Project Greenlight was a joint demonstration project involving the New York State Department of Correctional Services and the State's Division of Parole. The project was designed to provide prisoners, nearing their release date, necessary skills for successful re-entry. The project was established to deliver special services to prison inmates, during the 8 weeks prior to their release. The program involved numerous types of training, counseling, and case management tools. The services were selected because of the research literature that indicated these types of services were related to improved outcomes. For example, Project Greenlight mandated cognitive-behavioral skills training because "this type of program shows the most consistent results in reducing offender recidivism." Unfortunately, Project Greenlight failed to achieve positive results.

Limitations of Information

This NIJ publication is a summary of the original, 169-page report. The original report can be found at: <http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/213714.pdf>. Although the study was conducted with prison inmates, the evidence-based programs and practices discussed can be used with probationers, as well.

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.

The Issue of Fidelity

Project Greenlight studied a sample of 735 inmates, who were divided into three groups: one group participated in all Project Greenlight activities, the second group received no services, and a third group participated in an existing transitional program. Project Greenlight utilized several evidence-based programs (EBP), as well as best practices, to develop a program for soon-to-be-released prison inmates in New York. The key elements of the project were:

- Cognitive Behavioral Skills Training—inmates received the Reasoning and Rehabilitation curriculum
- Employment—inmates worked with a job counselor and were matched to employment opportunities
- Housing—inmates without a residence were found short- and long-term housing
- Drug Education & Awareness—inmates attended education or relapse classes
- Family Counseling—some inmates received counseling with their families
- Practical Skills Training—inmates were trained on basic life skills and assisted in obtaining identification
- Community Based Networks—inmates were connected with social support
- Familiarity with Parole—inmates were introduced to their parole officer and familiarized with supervision prior to release
- Individualized Release Plans—inmates collaborated on plans to structure their parole time, with goals and tasks

The participants in Project Greenlight "showed worse outcomes for every type of recidivism at 6 and 12 months after release." The disappointing outcomes

led to an investigation of what went wrong. Here are some possibilities. The cog program, which is an EBP, is supposed to run 4-6 months with 10-13 participants. The project delivered it in 8 weeks with 26 inmates. EBP principles indicate high risk and low risk offenders should be treated differently, but no assessment was completed on inmates, so there was no targeted intervention.

Practical Applications

- √ If you facilitate a cog group, stick to the curriculum and implementation guidelines. Do not deviate from the script, avoid too many participants, and keep with the recommended duration and frequency of groups.
- √ If you refer to a cog group in the community, make sure you know what curriculum is being delivered.
- √ Ask your local treatment providers for their rates of completion. Be wary of agencies that cannot or will not provide the information.
- √ Don't assume programs that sound good will produce positive outcomes. Ask community agencies, which curriculums they follow and if they deviate from the implementation guidelines recommended by the author.
- √ Ensure assessments are completed accurately and then focus interventions on the highest risk offenders.
- √ Case plans must target the individual criminogenic needs of the client.
- √ Read the Cognitive-Behavioral Treatment Program Literature Review on Judicialnet to better understand which curriculums are available and what they include: <http://judicialnet/prob/Library/newindex.htm>.