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The
READING TO REDUCE RECIDIVISM
Program

DEVELOPMENT, IMPLEMENTATION,
and
TERMINATION

Implications for Future Correctional Treatment

Criminal Justice Policy Council

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Summary Report: Evaluation of the Reading to Reduce Recidivism Program

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March 1992

Summary Report: Evaluation of the Reading to Reduce Recidivism Program

Note from the Director:

The Reading to Reduce Recidivism was developed in 1989 to provide computer assisted instruction (CAI) to inmates in prison. Four state agencies worked together to develop and implement the pilot program, commonly referred to as the 3R program. The intent of the program was to use the technology and information transfer capabilities of CAI to allow easy transfer of work in progress from prison to the community. The problem of the short time some offenders served in the institution was addressed through continuity of treatment and flexible service delivery. Later the pilot program was expanded to include offenders on probation and parole. Given the fact that 68% of inmates paroled and 44% of the felons on probation lack a high school diploma or GED, the program planners intended to facilitate the delivery of education services to this high risk and high need population.

This report presents the summary of the 3R program evaluation conducted by the Criminal Justice Policy Council under contract with the Texas Department of Commerce. The Texas Department of Commerce (TDOC) funded the pilot 3R program through the Job Training Partnership Act. Computer-assisted instruction proved an effective method to deliver education. Outcome measures such as the GED retesting pass rate for inmates in the program; the percentage of GED certificates earned; the large number of participants who continued 3R in the community; and the offenders' positive responses to CAI, indicate that the program was a success in terms of delivering education to a hard to serve population. Moreover, preliminary follow-up information shows that program participants in the community have a lower recidivism rate than those who did not participate, or those who dropped from the program.

The 3R program implementation, however, failed. The 3R program ended August 31, 1991, after more than 19 months of operation. Termination of the pilot program resulted from complex interagency interactions and lack of a cohesive planning structure that led to the placement of too few and the wrong type of offenders in the program. Although there were at minimum 540 inmates eligible for placement and transfer during the 18 months of operation, only 196 inmates were placed in the program (36%). Program administrators did not establish procedures during the diagnostic/classification process for early identification of eligible inmates. The low number of offenders placed in the institution slowed the implementation of the community component of 3R. Therefore, the program was expanded to allow direct placement of parolees and probationers into the community component. The field placement procedures resulted in 72 successful placements in more than 10 program months, although approximately 1,000 parolees and 1,700 probationers were added to the community supervision caseloads in 1990.

The lessons learned from the implementation of the 3R program are critical. In the 1990's effective programs in criminal justice will have to address the overlapping needs of offenders for education, employment, health care, and substance abuse. Programs will have to be designed and implemented from a multi-agency, and multi-level (federal, state, and local) perspective if offender needs are to be effectively addressed. It is important, therefore, to design effective multi-agency planning, coordination and implementation mechanisms for correctional treatment programs. As important, "action research" must be an integral part of program implementation. Action research is needed for the identification of the program population, and the development of assessment and placement procedures. Action research is also important in monitoring of the characteristics of the population placed in the program. Monitoring offender placement is an evaluative tool that can be used to adapt the goals or re-target the offenders to be placed in the program if necessary. Lastly, documentation of the processes and procedures of implementation will benefit planning and development of similar or different correctional programs.

Summary Report: Evaluation of the Reading to Reduce Recidivism Program

The Criminal Justice Policy Council was contracted to conduct a two year process and outcome evaluation of the Reading to Reduce Recidivism Program. This report contains the summary of the evaluation findings. The full report may be obtained from the Criminal Justice Policy Council, 201 E. 14th Street, Room 512, Austin, TX, 78701, (512) 463-1810.

Acknowledgments

The members of the 3R Council provided valuable support and advice to the research team throughout this project. The staff of the Criminal Justice Policy Council would like to recognize the efforts of the 3R Council members, especially David X. Young, Wes Boone Fields, Dr. Deborah Stedman, Dr. Cheryl Johnson, and Dr. Jack McMahon in bringing about a complex, innovative program.

This evaluation report would not have been possible without the help of the many individuals of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice, Institutional Division, Windham School System, and Pardons and Paroles Division. In particular we would like to express our thanks to the administrative staff at the Windham School System, Dr. Chris Tracy and Dr. Cheryl Johnson. The 3R teachers and counselors provided support for the research and did an admirable job administering the program. The 3R Administrative Counselor, Mr. Gregory Shipp, did an excellent job organizing a complex program.

The evaluation team would like to recognize the role of the Pardons and Paroles Division, Region Three staff members, especially Mr. Mike Lozito and Mr. Jay Moore, in conducting the research and administering the program. Mr. Tony Lyro of TDCJ-PPD Austin headquarters provided support and encouragement throughout the process.

Finally, the teachers, counselors, and parole officers gave much time and extra effort to this program, and should be commended for their work.

The 3R evaluation team wishes the best of luck to all offenders who participated in this program.

This research was sponsored by Contract # 08140 from the Texas Department of Commerce to the Criminal Justice Policy Council. Opinions expressed in this manuscript are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Texas Department of Commerce.

THE READING TO REDUCE RECIDIVISM PROGRAM

Development, Implementation, and Termination: Implications for Future Correctional Treatment Programs

INTRODUCTION

Developing programs and policies to improve the education levels of felony offenders is critical to rehabilitative efforts, especially given evidence indicating that lack of education and problem-solving skills can contribute to criminal behavior. Consider the following estimates presented by the U.S. Department of Education (1992) and the Texas Department of Criminal Justice:

Nationwide,

- 13% of American adults are illiterate;

Yet, considering only offenders,

- 60% of America's prison inmates are illiterate; and,
- 85% of juvenile offenders have problems reading (KET, 1991).

In Texas,

- 16% of adults are illiterate, making Texas rank number one in terms of illiteracy rate with 3 other states and the District of Columbia;

- 68% of prison inmates do not have a high school diploma or GED;
- 67% and 68% of the inmates released to parole in 1989 and 1990 (respectively) lacked a high school diploma or GED;
- 44% of the felons on probation do not have a high school diploma or GED.

These percentages represent approximately 130,000 offenders in need of an education in Texas. These offenders pose a substantial risk to recidivate, considering:

- Nationwide, parolees who have not completed high school have higher rates of rearrest, reconviction, and return to prison than high school graduates (Beck & Shipley, 1987; 1989).
- A recent Texas study showed that 37% of parolees who lacked a high school education returned to prison; compared to 24% of those who had a high school diploma or G.E.D. (Eisenberg, 1988).

From this need the Reading to Reduce Recidivism (hereafter referred to as 3R) program was developed in 1989. The Office of the Governor, Criminal Justice Division; Texas Department of Commerce; Texas

Education Agency; and Texas Department of Criminal Justice worked together to develop and implement the 3R program. The program was designed to address the educational needs of offenders by providing G.E.D. preparatory, language, mathematical and life skills curricula delivered via a computer assisted system.

Too often, achievement gains made by offenders in prison education programs are lost upon release to the community. The original intent of the 3R program, and the main emphasis, was to provide continual education programming to the offender in prison and on parole, even though an offender could start and complete the program while in prison. Later (in September of 1990), procedures were

amended to allow offenders to begin the program in the community.

The 3R program combined competency based, individualized instruction with the "open-entry/open-exit" feature provided by computer software. The program planners intended to take advantage of this feature by providing for the program's continuation in the community. The technology and information transfer capabilities of computer-assisted instruction (CAI) were intended to allow easy transfer of work in progress from prison to the community setting (and vice versa). In this way, the problem of the short time served in the institution due to early release was addressed through continuity of treatment and flexible service delivery.

THE CHALLENGE OF CORRECTIONAL EDUCATION

Many challenges and obstacles exist when creating education treatment programs for offenders. Developing programs for adult offenders requires consideration of both the impact on service delivery of the criminal justice setting and the characteristics of the offender population. Consider that the primary purpose and overriding priority of the criminal justice system is to protect the public and sanction offenders. Educators argue that the custodial function of a prison creates a climate antagonistic to stimulating adult learning (see Bell, et.al., 1979; Goldin & Thomas, 1984; Horvath, 1982). Many items consistently identified as problematic in the correctional education literature involve issues indigenous to the correctional environment, such as conflict between administrators and treatment providers; low funding and scheduling priority of education programs (resource competition); and attitudes, both of staff and inmates, that devalue education programs (Goldin & Thomas, 1984; Horvath, 1982).

Within the Texas Department of Criminal Justice, the Windham School District provides vocational, adult literacy, G.E.D. preparatory, and English as a second language among the education programs for prison inmates. However, officials with the school district are vocal about the need to

provide transitional community education services to offenders. Most offenders spend very little time in prison, making significant progress toward their education difficult to achieve. This difficulty can lead to feelings of frustration on the part of educators and offenders.

The population of adult offenders also poses significant problems for education programs. Education of adults presents unique problems for educators. For example, participation in education programs in the community is low for most adults, because they perceive education as irrelevant to their primary and individualized interests in getting a job and having enough money to live (Johnston, 1987). Additionally, adults lacking a high school diploma may experience fear of failure and embarrassment at their situation. Regardless of the particular reason or reasons, nonparticipation in education programs and classes is a significant problem for adult educators.

The problems of educating adults are compounded for adult criminal offenders. The lifestyle adopted by most offenders is not conducive to the effort-reward mentality needed to perceive treatment programs, especially education, as valuable. Most offenders pattern their lives based on a history of failures.

THE CHALLENGE OF THE PROGRAM POPULATION

The analyses below demonstrate the challenges that the 3R population of offenders presented to adult educators, particularly through their:

- Lifestyle
- Past Failures
- Criminal Record

Data for the analyses were obtained from extensive self-report questionnaires administered confidentially to 3R participants; and from criminal history record information of all offenders who participated in the 3R program.

A total of 281 offenders participated in 3R: 209 in prison, 44 of whom continued on parole; and 72 on parole only. The majority of the participants were male (97%) and Hispanic (69%). Blacks composed 22% of the participants, and 9% were White.

The median Intelligence Quotient (IQ) for 3R offenders was 92, and the highest grade completed was 9th grade. The median age of the 3R participants was 26. These statistics are comparable to the general TDCJ-ID population.

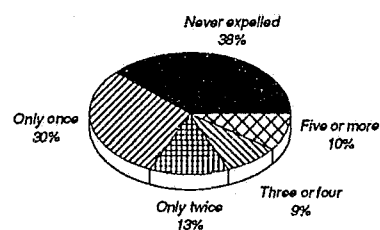
- *Lifestyle*

The lifestyle adopted by most offenders is not conducive to the effort-reward mentality needed to perceive education, as valuable.

School Behavior. An exhaustive study recently conducted in Illinois on education

and crime noted that many students who ultimately drop out of school pose significant behavior problems for teachers and administrators prior to dropping out (ICJIA, 1991). In Texas, 49% of the students who gave a reason for dropping out in the 1989-1990 school year did so due to poor attendance (42%), expulsion (6%) or drug use (1%) (TEA, 1991). As Chart 1 shows, the percentage of 3R participants who were suspended from school is high (62%), with a majority of those offenders suspended at least twice, usually for fighting. Additionally, most offenders (60%) reported having poor or irregular attendance when they were in school.

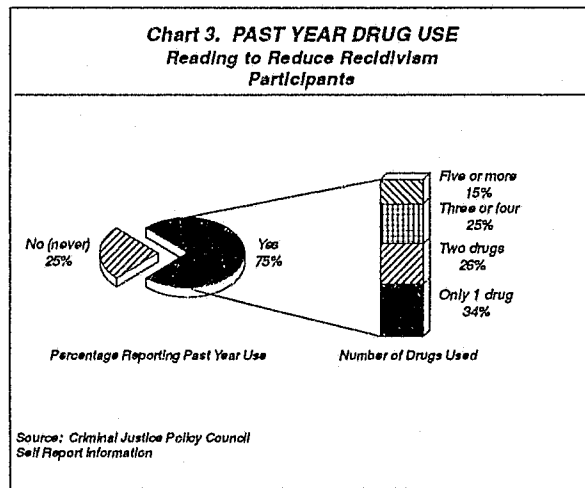
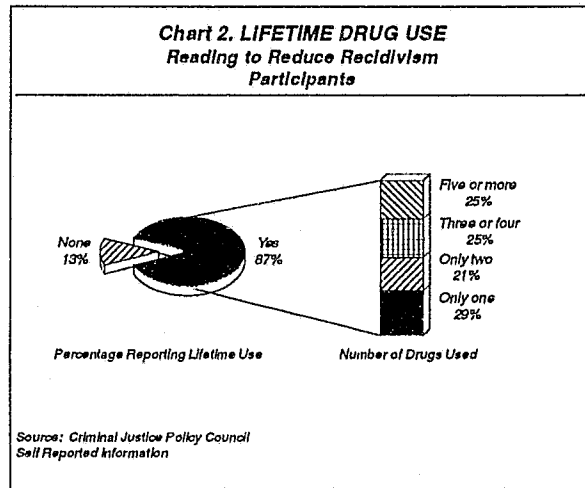
Chart 1. SCHOOL EXPULSIONS
Reading to Reduce Recidivism
Participants



Source: Criminal Justice Policy Council
Self Report Information

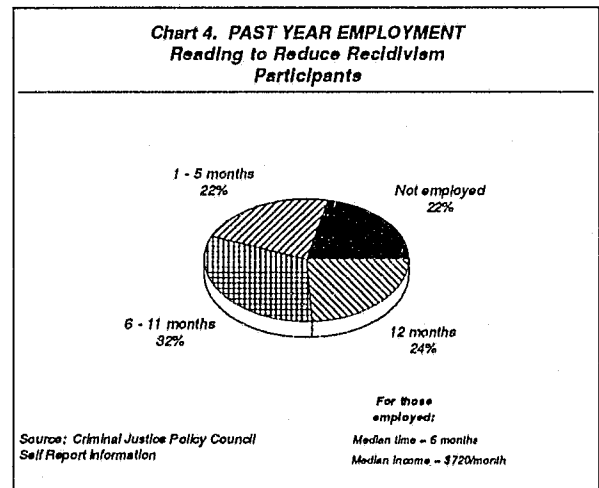
In addition to poor school behavior, offenders report a lifestyle of significant drug use. Charts 2 and 3 show the lifetime and recent drug use of 3R participants.

Overall, 87% of the participants reported using drugs at some point in their life, 50% of whom used at least three different drugs.



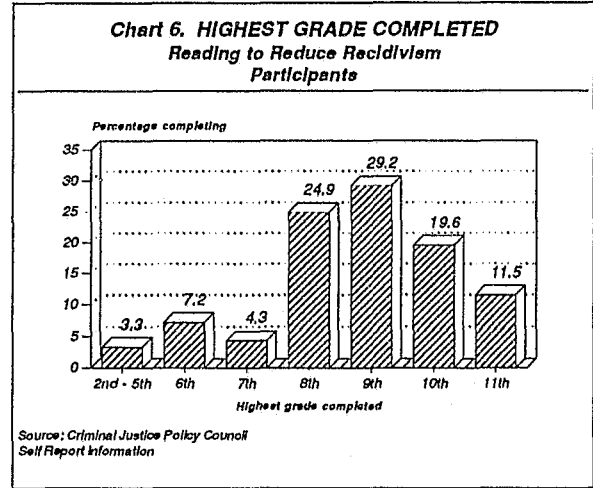
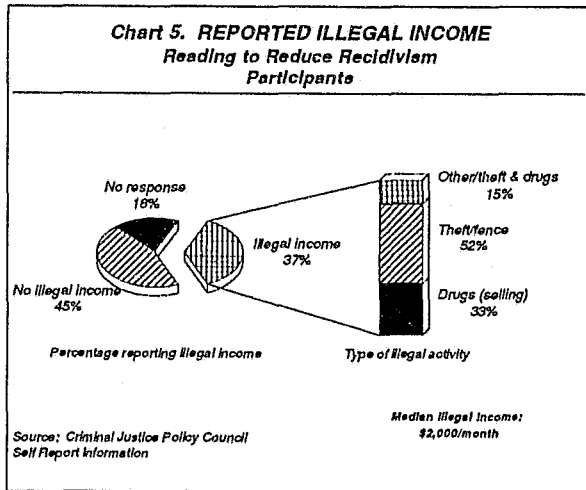
In the year prior to incarceration, 75% of the participants reported using drugs, 40% of whom used at least three different drugs. Additionally 62% of those offenders using drugs within the past year had used drugs within 24 hours prior to crime commission (45% of the total sample of 3R participants).

Employment History. The most startling statistics concern these offenders' reports on their employment and income. As shown in Chart 4, only 24% of the 3R participants were employed full time during the past year prior to their incarceration; with 32% employed for 6 to 11 months; 22% employed for less than 6 months; and 22% totally unemployed. Those employed earned, on the median, \$720.00 per month; and those employed for the full year prior to incarceration earned \$802.00/month, on the median.



Many offenders (37%) admitted having income from illegal activities (see Chart 5). The most common activities were theft and fencing of stolen goods, followed by selling drugs. Offenders earned an average of \$2000 monthly from illegal sources. A recent survey conducted by the Texas Commission on Alcohol and Drug Abuse corroborated this finding, with 37% of inmates surveyed reporting illegal incomes

of \$1600/month or more (Fredlund, Spence, Maxwell, & Kavinsky, 1990).



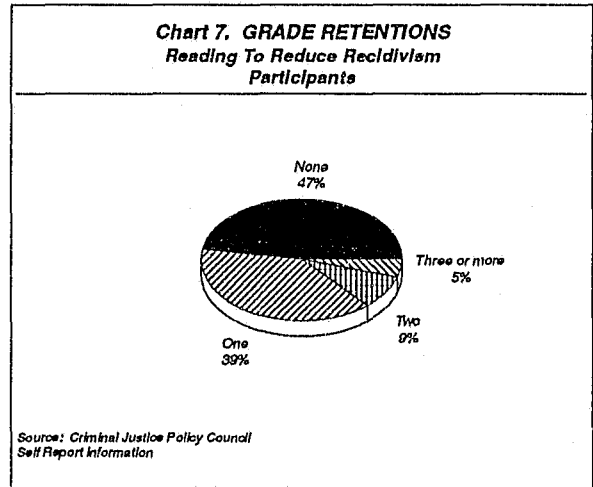
School retentions for 3R offenders were very high. As shown in Chart 7, 53% had failed at least one grade, with 5% failing three or more grades.

• *Past School Failures*

The majority of adult offenders have failed to gain the knowledge, attitudes, and values education is expected to impart.

Self-reported information collected from all participants who began the program while in prison shows that the majority of participants, approximately 70%, completed at best the 9th grade (See Chart 6).

Approximately half of the offenders cited the need to support themselves or their family as their primary reason for dropping out of school: very few reported dropping out because they were bored or didn't care about school. In all likelihood, the need to support themselves or others has not diminished, and in fact may have worsened in adulthood.



• *Criminal Record*

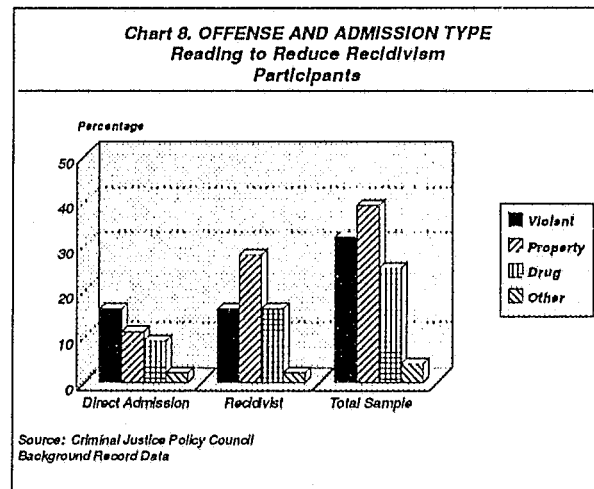
Texas currently has over 20,000 felony offenders under state supervision, approximately 180,000 of whom are supervised in the community.

Instant Offense and TDCJ-ID Admission. Examination of the type of crime committed by the 3R participants

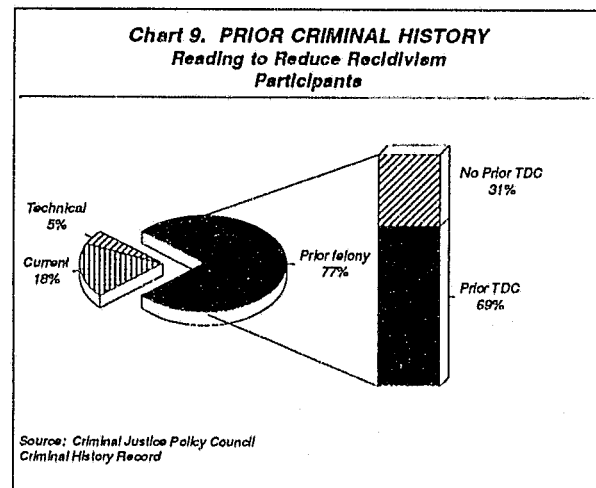
(institutional and field) shows that 39% of the offenders were serving time for a property offense, followed by 32% serving time for a violent offense and 25% for a drug offense.

Chart 8 shows the breakdown for offense category by type of admission. Direct admissions accounted for 38% of the participant admissions, typically for more violent crimes and more crimes carrying mandatory calendar time requirements due to the aggravating nature of the crime (i.e. "3G"); whereas recidivists had a higher proportion of property offenses. Recidivists were considered offenders under probation or parole supervision at the time they were sentenced for the current offense. Of the 62% of offenders who were recidivists, 61% were returning to TDCJ-ID as parole violators; 39% entering as probation revocations. Approximately 71% of the offenders admitted for violations of probation were revoked due to commission of a new crime; 91% of the parole violators were returned for a new crime.

A large majority of 3R participants were serving time in TDCJ-ID for multiple offenses (71%). Of those with multiple offenses, 47% were sentenced for more than one case during their last sentencing event. Of this group of offenders with multiple "instant" offenses, 85% had multiple offenses that were part of separate criminal episodes. In other words, they committed crimes at different points in time, but all were sentenced in one event¹.



Prior Criminal History. Approximately 77% of the 3R participants had received a felony conviction prior to the conviction for which they were currently placed in prison (See Chart 9). Of this group, 69% had at least one prior prison stay. A small percentage (5%) had no prior felony conviction but were placed in TDCJ-ID as a result of a technical probation violation.



Self-reported information collected from the 3R participants revealed extensive criminal backgrounds for the majority of

offenders: 22% reported committing² at least 50 drug related crimes; and 23% reported committing at least 10 property crimes. The reported age of first arrest was

16 (median), and 48% reported a juvenile conviction, with 22% having served time in a juvenile correctional facility.

PROGRAM RATIONALE AND STRUCTURE

Rationale and Goals

Planners with the 3R program intended to develop an educational program that would allow the learning experiences developed in prison to be transferred to the community with the greatest possible ease to the offender and overburdened prison and parole personnel.

By meeting the objective of continuing treatment, the program could possibly overcome some challenges imposed by the correctional setting, namely, too little time for treatment and the resultant frustration due to lack of continuity throughout the system. Later the 3R program was expanded to facilitate the same integration of educational services for offenders on probation or parole.

The basic program rationale were:

- * Education can reduce the recidivism potential of offenders;
- * Computer-assisted instruction is an effective means of delivering education to offenders, given system and population constraints.

The stated program goals were:

- Positively impact the recidivism of offenders who participate in the program. This goal was to be met by:
 - Providing an educational credential for offenders (G.E.D. certificate);

- Improving educational level, and problem-solving skills of offenders; and,
- Coordinating delivery of services to offenders as they make the transition from the institutionalized arm of the correctional system to "free world" supervision.

Along these lines, some broad goals were to:

- Develop the mechanism to achieve consistent information transfer and to provide effective service delivery between each component of the correctional system (probation, prison, parole).
- Bring together the resources and commitments of various agencies in cooperation and shared commitment - a unified focus that forms the basis for future cooperative efforts.

Additionally, some long-term social benefits derived from meeting the above goals included:

- Reduced costs for reincarceration;
- Reduced intangible costs to victims;
- Increased literacy rates;
- Reduced social welfare costs;
- Increased tax base by increasing incomes for successful participants;
- Provision of role models for peers, other offenders, and families of the participants;

Program Structure

The structure of the 3R program was designed for offenders to begin the program while in prison, and continue in the community as they parole. The Wynne and Clemens Units of the Institutional Division of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice were selected as the two institutional sites, and a computer classroom was installed in each unit. Each classroom had 19 work stations, 1 teacher station, and a main file server. While in the institution, offenders would receive intense exposure: 3 hours a day, 5 days a week of class. Two groups of students participated in each unit, for a maximum program capacity of 76 - 80 inmates.

Inmates could complete the program and receive a G.E.D. while still in prison, but the original intent was for offenders who had relatively little incarceration time remaining to be placed in the program, and paroled to the community component.

San Antonio (Bexar county) was selected for the community component of the program. Similar computer classrooms were installed at two sites in San Antonio, each in close proximity to a district parole office. In September of 1990, the program was expanded so that probationers³ and parolees who had not begun the program in prison were referred to the community sites as well. In the community, the class schedule was flexible and offenders could use the site at any open hours after a schedule was developed between the site's

counselor, the offender's parole officer, and the offender. The community sites were originally scheduled to be open 60 hours/week (Monday - Thursday, 9am - 9pm; Friday 9am - 5pm; Saturday 9 - noon) to allow students ample opportunity to attend. Funding for transportation and G.E.D. testing fees was provided. Additionally, all offenders who obtained a G.E.D. in the community received a stipend of \$200. Planners decided to offer the \$200 stipend to offenders who obtained a G.E.D. in prison after 30 days of community participation.

Program Methodology

One tenet of the 3R program was that the use of computer-assisted instruction (CAI) was more amenable to the offender population than the traditional pedagogical teaching method. CAI was seen by program planners as enabling offenders to be served with the same curriculum and programs regardless of setting. Information transfer from prison to community could be done by modem, rather than complex, time consuming, and often ineffective paper transfer. CAI was also seen as one answer to many of the issues and problems related to educating adults. CAI offers benefits to both the educator and the learner if properly implemented. CAI is flexible, allowing learners to work at their own pace within their own schedule, on tasks designed to meet their specific needs and abilities. This, in effect, frees the teacher to devote more

time as needed to each student. The computer may also be very effective as an instructional tool. Some experts argue that a computer forces the student to think because it will not think for the student; consequently the student must use a higher order of thinking skills (Sieland-Bucy, 1988).

The hypothesis for the 3R program was that CAI would be an effective teaching tool for offenders because it will encourage them to discover, use, and improve personal skills. Moreover, a computer-assisted classroom does not diminish the importance of traditional one-to-one instruction. In fact, the use of computer technology allows each student to receive individual attention from the instructor without interrupting the entire class. All teachers hired to work in the 3R program were certified by the Texas Education Agency and had extensive experience working with adults. Most of the teachers had worked with adult offenders.

Software Selection. The software used in the program was selected following a detailed review of computer-assisted instructional programs marketed for adults. Several sites with established CAI classrooms were visited in order to gather information about user-friendliness, student and teacher adaptation, technical support, and integration into other curricula. Based on these visits, vendor presentations, and field testing, the Josten's Prescription Learning System was chosen as best meeting specifications. Later modifications

of the Jostens system resulted in the INVEST software, an upgrade of the Prescription Learning System focused totally on the needs of adult learners. The Josten's INVEST system has since been installed in classrooms throughout the TDCJ-ID Windham School System. The software is also being used in a computer laboratory for probationers in Houston and in several other correctional agencies throughout the nation.

Curriculum. The selected software program was specifically designed and written for adults who have not acquired necessary basic skills. The program has three levels of learning: the literacy tier (grade equivalency 1.0 - 4.0); the adult basic education tier (4.0 - 8.0); and the G.E.D. tier. Students can enter the program at any level. Each tier covers reading and vocabulary building, language experience, and writing skills, and mathematical and computational skills. The program also contains a life skills component and specific G.E.D. instruction. These components are well integrated so the information and skills learned in one lesson or area can be used in another. The computer lessons are delivered in small sequential steps using multisensory presentations (sound, graphics, and repetition) and focus on topics of adult concern and interest.

The literacy tier incorporates instruction for the nonreading or limited-reading adult. The primary focus at this level is on expressing ideas on paper and acquiring

basic word recognition skills rather than studying rules of grammar and punctuation. The exercises involve word recognition and word meaning. Students learn a core vocabulary that will be used throughout the program.

The adult basic education tier has essentially the same basic components as the literacy tier, but with a wider variety of topics covered in greater depth. Critical thinking is emphasized through an approach which integrates the areas covered. Students are taught a variety of other skills such as referencing, using the library, using graphic resources, and developing personal learning and reading strategies.

The G.E.D. tier is designed for persons who read at least at an eighth grade level. There are four major areas of concentration: reading/comprehension; language/writing skills; mathematics/problem solving; and an emphasis on specific G.E.D. preparation.

Testing and Placement. As offenders entered the 3R program, they were tested in

order to be placed in the appropriate level of instruction. The Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) was administered as a baseline measure of educational achievement prior to beginning the program. Once in the program, participants were given the Basic Skills Inventory (BSI), a placement tool integrated in the computer software. The BSI determined proficiency levels in mathematics and reading. The BSI took approximately 60 minutes of computer time to place students in appropriate starting levels. Final placement was made by the teacher, based on test results and assessments of students' skills.

Progress was measured by tests after each lesson. Pre-G.E.D. tests were administered to measure progress and readiness to take the G.E.D. test. Additionally, instructors monitored students' work on the computer through reports generated by the system indicating level of learning, mastery of subjects, and problem areas.

PROGRAM POPULATION

Inmates Targeted

The 3R pilot program targeted only a portion of the potentially eligible offenders in the criminal justice system. This was done to test the efficacy of the program and work through any implementation problems prior to recommending expansion. A second phase of the program was later implemented targeting probationers and parolees who did not participate in the program while in prison.

One goal of the 3R program was to target offenders who could be served in the community without substantial risk to public safety. These offenders are primarily serving short sentences (5 years or less) for property or drug crimes, and have served time in a penitentiary only once before (if at all). Ultimately, these "low safety risk" offenders have a high risk to recidivate (based on type of crime) given no intervention.

The criteria imposed for selecting inmates to participate in the first phase of the pilot program were: 1) parole plan to Bexar county (or small neighboring counties Guadalupe or Comal); 2) Educational Achievement score (EA) greater than or equal to 6.0; and 3) Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) eligible. Each criterion is discussed in detail below. An estimate in the reduction in the targeted population due to the adopted criteria is also presented.

Institutional Selection Criteria

- Parole plan to Bexar County - Since the pilot program was located in Bexar county, inmates participating in the program needed to have a proposed⁴ (preferably verified⁵) parole plan to Bexar county. Approximately 4.4% of the admissions to TDCJ in 1990 were from the San Antonio MSA.
- Educational Achievement Score (EA) greater than or equal to 6.0⁶ - This criteria was based on the goal of providing education services to offenders who may not otherwise benefit from these services. Offenders under supervision of the state who have an EA below 6.0 are required to participate in an education program. Approximately 58% of the offenders admitted to TDCJ-ID have an EA of 6.0 or above.
- Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) eligible. The funding source for the 3R program was JTPA, and eligibility requirements for receipt of JTPA funded services are established by the U.S. Department of Labor. These requirements are that the recipient be a U.S. citizen, registered for the draft if applicable, and economically disadvantaged. Additionally, the offender must agree to participate. Most offenders (approximately 97%) met the criteria for JTPA eligibility by virtue of their unemployment while incarcerated. Any problems with eligibility were due to failure of the offender to have registered for the draft.

Within the criteria for selection into the 3R program there were institutional constraints that affected selection. These "default" criteria are inherent in the operational structure of the correctional

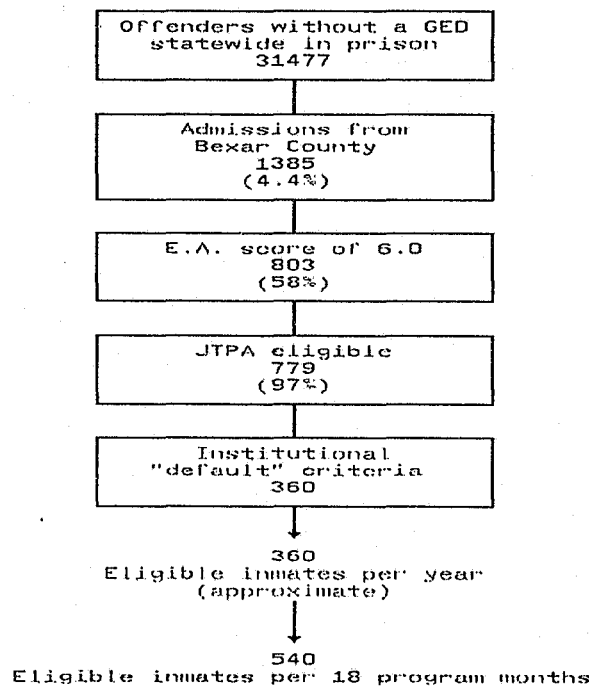
system, and necessary to ensure efficient, safe functioning of the prison system. The major default criteria are listed below.

- 3R units were for males only. The 3R program criteria did not exclude females (who participated in the field). The units that housed the 3R pilot program were units for male offenders. Approximately 92.% of the TDCJ-ID admissions in FY 1990 were males.
- Classification status of inmates. Inmate unit assignment and classification is important in terms of public safety, inmate safety, and management of the units. When a request for transfer is made, the classification committee must approve transfer based primarily upon the custody classification of the inmate, as well as gang affiliation, physical or mental problems, and availability of appropriate housing. Custody level is related to disciplinary history and institutional performance, so the more

severe the classification, the less likely an inmate will be transferred. In the first 4 months of operation, the majority of inmates requested for transfer (57%) to 3R were denied due to custody and management considerations. However, as the program progressed, fewer inmates were denied transfer.

In order to determine any long term positive impact of this program on variables such as recidivism and educational attainment, there must be sufficient numbers of offenders served. Indeed, the need for education services was one reason the Bexar county area was chosen as the pilot site. Chart 10 summarizes the number of institutionalized offenders targeted, after considering the impact of each specific and default criterion.

Chart 10. Inmates Targeted by the Pilot Reading to Reduce Recidivism Program.



Field Offenders Targeted

The original intent of the program was for offenders to participate while on parole as a continuation of the program from the prison component. Planners anticipated that the program would eventually expand to allow participation of probationers and parolees who did not begin in prison. The programmatic expansion occurred in September of 1990, due to the need to capture enough participants in the community component of the program.

The basic criteria for participation were the same as those for institutional 3R, except the custody and housing requirements did not pertain in the community (this allowed participation by females). Additionally, many parolees and/or probationers did not have a current EA score, so the EA grade equivalent was assessed by the officer based on self reports from the offenders. Offenders were tested upon entry into the program.

Charts 11 and 12 provide a breakdown of the potentially eligible probationers and parolees from the Bexar county area, based on estimates of education levels. *These estimates do not consider the percentage of offenders ineligible based on JTPA criteria or competing supervision requirements.*

As shown in Chart 11, approximately 3,848 probationers from Bexar County are in need of a diploma⁷, 1700 of whom were added to the probation caseload in FY 1990.

Chart 11. Probationers Targeted by 3R

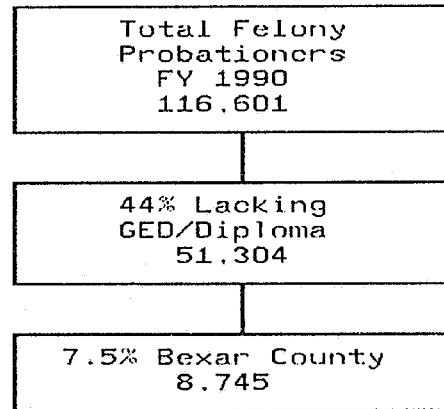
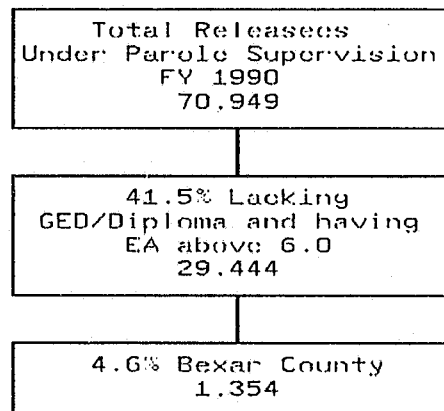


Chart 12 shows approximately 1,354 parolees⁸ are in need of a diploma, 934 of whom were released in FY 1990. The subset of new additions is presented since supervision requirements change after offenders have been on parole or probation for six months. Offenders who have been added to the caseload within the year may be easier to place in the program than offenders who have been under supervision for a longer period of time.

Chart 12. Parolees Targeted by 3R



EVALUATION RESULTS

The 3R program ended August 31, 1991, after more than 19 months of operation. The last offenders were placed into the program in early July of 1991. Termination of the pilot program resulted from a combination of factors, namely: too few offenders served; complex interagency interactions; and lack of a cohesive planning structure to oversee the program's implementation.

The Criminal Justice Policy Council (CJPC) was contracted to conduct a process and outcome evaluation of the 3R program. The CJPC is a state agency created in 1983 by the 68th Legislature to determine the long range needs of the criminal justice system. The role of the CJPC has been refined and expanded in the eight years since its creation to include strategic planning and empirical evaluations of programs and policies affecting the criminal justice system in Texas. The points below summarize the major findings of the process and outcome evaluations.

Major Findings

- * *Placement of too few and the wrong type of offenders effectively nullified any program successes.*
- The identification and selection procedures used to place eligible offenders in the institutional component of the program did not maximize the number of offenders placed. Of 540 potentially eligible inmates during the 18 months the program lasted, only 196 were served (36%). *Given sufficient time (18 months) and numbers of eligible offenders in need of an education (540), the placement of so few offenders must be attributed to poor selection techniques.* The selection procedures targeted inmates who had a verified or proposed parole plan to Bexar county and met all the criteria. Upon identification, these offenders were requested for transfer to a 3R unit⁹.
- The institutional program operated at an average capacity of 73%, and cost an average of \$3,106 per offender. Given that capital outlay accounted for approximately 30% of the total costs for the program's duration, serving more offenders would have reduced the cost per offender substantially.
- Program administrators failed to establish procedures during the diagnostic/classification process for early identification of eligible inmates. As a result, the offenders targeted for the program - offenders who had short sentences for property or drug crimes - paroled prior to being placed into the program. The offenders with shorter sentences for property or drug crimes comprise the highest proportion of prison admissions, and would benefit most from the intervention provided by the 3R program. These offenders could begin the program in the prison and quickly parole to the community component. However, the inmates who were placed in the program had a median sentence of 15 years, and many were serving time for violent offenses (40%). Approximately 22% of the inmates placed in the program were

serving time for an aggravated offense, and therefore serving at least two (calendar) years in prison. *Therefore, the outcome of providing intervention to offenders serving short sentences for property or drug crimes cannot be measured, since these offenders were not served in the institution.*

* *Direct placement of parolees in the community component of the program increased participation by 34%. Direct placement of parolees also increased the number of GED certificates awarded by 53%. However, the low motivation of eligible parolees to participate in the program was a problem affecting placements.*

• The failure to maximize institutional placements, both in terms of numbers of offenders placed and type of offenders placed (those with a short time to parole), slowed the implementation of the community component of 3R. Therefore the program was expanded to allow direct placement of parolees and probationers into the community component. The field placement procedures resulted in 72 successful placements in more than 10 program months, even though up to 1,354 parolees and 8,745 probationers could have been eligible for the program.

• A key reason for the inability to place offenders was the competing demands placed on offenders while under supervision. Many offenders have several conditions on their parole plan, including supervision level, substance abuse or mental health treatment, employment, and other requirements and restrictions. Therefore, competing demands were critical factors affecting the motivation to participate in the program. Of 164 referrals to the community component of the 3R program, 45.7% were "no-shows", and another 10.4% were ineligible based on

the established JTPA eligibility criteria (usually income).

• In spite of the difficulty in motivating offenders to participate in the community, the community component of 3R was more successful in securing G.E.D. certificates than the institutional component. Of the total number of participants in the community, 29.2% received a G.E.D. compared to 24.4% of those who were correctly placed in the institution and received their G.E.D. while in prison or upon transitioning to the community (20.4% received the G.E.D. in the institution and 4% in the community).

* *The administrative and operational structure of the 3R program was ineffective in program implementation.*

• The administrative structure of the 3R program consisted of a council of managerial level staff members from the agencies involved in the 3R program: Office of the Governor, Criminal Justice Division (CJD); Texas Department of Commerce; Texas Education Agency; and Texas Department of Criminal Justice, Institutional Division, Pardons and Paroles Division, and Windham School System. The task of the council was to plan much of the program, guide it through the implementation phase, and coordinate expansion of the program. However, although the 3R Council operated well as a planning body, it was not successful in impacting critical implementation issues since there was no manager or director for the program with the authority to direct all components of the program. The lack of a designated manager of the program paralyzed many of the staff members who attempted to work through problems among themselves but were thwarted within their own agency's hierarchy, or within the management structure of the program. Moreover, the

design of the 3R Council did not provide an infrastructure for the administration of the program to continue given changes in leadership.

- The ineffectiveness of the 3R Council for monitoring implementation was also affected by the flow of information between the structure and management of the agencies involved. Electronic transfer of information (via modem) never occurred, so student status and progress reports were transferred from the institution to the community by mail or telefax. Often, the institutional 3R classroom teachers and counselors would discover that a participant had paroled when the community teachers requested the offender's information. In the community component, on the other hand, there was more effective communication. The 3R counselors and teachers submitted monthly progress reports to the parole officers, documenting the attendance, progress, and any special needs of the participants.

* *Computer-assisted instruction (CAI) and the transitional methodology of the 3R program appeared to be an effective treatment delivery option for offenders, and may be effective in reducing recidivism.*

- In spite of the problems in the implementation of the program at the institution, the transitional methodology that was the rationale for the program seemed to have worked. Approximately 73% of the participants who paroled to Bexar County while still enrolled in the program without a G.E.D. attended 3R in the community. This percentage is high, compared to 15-20% attendance for parolees in other programs. Of this group of transitional participants, 18% received a G.E.D. and 27% remained in the program when it was terminated.

- Computer-assisted instruction proved an effective method to deliver education to the adult offender. The 3R institutional participants showed a significant improvement in passing rate for the G.E.D. exam after spending more time in the program (28% initial pass rate compared to 41% re-testing pass rate) (WSS, 1992). Additionally, the G.E.D. exam retest pass rate for the 3R inmates was higher than that of Windham School participants (41% vs. 36%). Based on the retesting pass rate; the percentage of GED certificates earned overall (23%); the number of participants who continued 3R in the community (73%); and offender responses to questions pertaining to CAI, a general conclusion would be that CAI was an effective method to achieve the educational goal of the program. Offenders reported that it was easier to concentrate when they were at their own work-station completing lessons at their own pace; and many offenders noted that repetition helped them learn, especially math lessons.

- Only preliminary information is available to determine the impact of the program on recidivism. Due to the problems in implementing the program, and selecting and placing offenders, there were difficulties in selecting comparable samples. Still, preliminary reports of the number incarcerated show some promise in terms of recidivism of successful participants. Only 5% of the transitional offenders who actively participated in the program had returned to prison or jail after a median time on parole of 14 months, compared to 45% of the 3R institutional participants who paroled from the program but did not participate in the community. None of the field participants who received a G.E.D. or participated until program termination had returned to prison or jail after a median of 18 months on parole, compared to 9% of the field control group and 19% of the field participants who were dropped from the program.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE PROGRAMS

The Reading to Reduce Recidivism program was a highly innovative education program that made use of technology offered by computer-assisted instruction to provide continual service to offenders, regardless of sanction. Prison crowding and increasing probation and parole caseloads demand that treatment programs be developed within the "continuum of sanctions." The lessons from the 3R program can help in the process of developing new, innovative, and successful treatment programs. Some of the recommendations to consider in future program development are listed below.

- * The primary focus in the successful implementation of a program should be the following:
 - Definition of the population to be targeted;
 - Identification and development of selection, assessment, and placement procedures. For institutional programs this includes procedures for immediate identification of offenders (during the diagnostic process).
 - Monitoring of placement of targeted offenders and overall numbers of offenders placed;
 - Monitoring of characteristics of population placed, to adapt goals or re-target offenders to be placed.
- * Implementation of multi-agency programs requires a strong "council", with a legislative or executive mandate, to enable cohesive program planning. The council must:
 - Provide unique solutions to problems, combining each members (and agencies) specific expertise;
 - Communicate problems and successes to policy makers to allow program continuation and expansion.
- * A multi-agency council usually cannot function with direct authority and responsibility for program operation or implementation. Therefore, the following positions are essential:
 - The position of program coordinator/director, with clear authority and accountability for the program, is imperative to working through many day to day implementation problems.
 - Within each agency, a coordinator/contact person with some authority to respond to problems from the agency perspective should be designated.
- * Future policies should be derived from the information obtained from program evaluation, giving agencies the mandate to make necessary

changes and successfully develop innovative correctional treatment.

** Interactive "action" evaluation should be an integral part of every new program.*

- Documentation of the processes and procedures of implementation will benefit planning and development of other correctional programs.

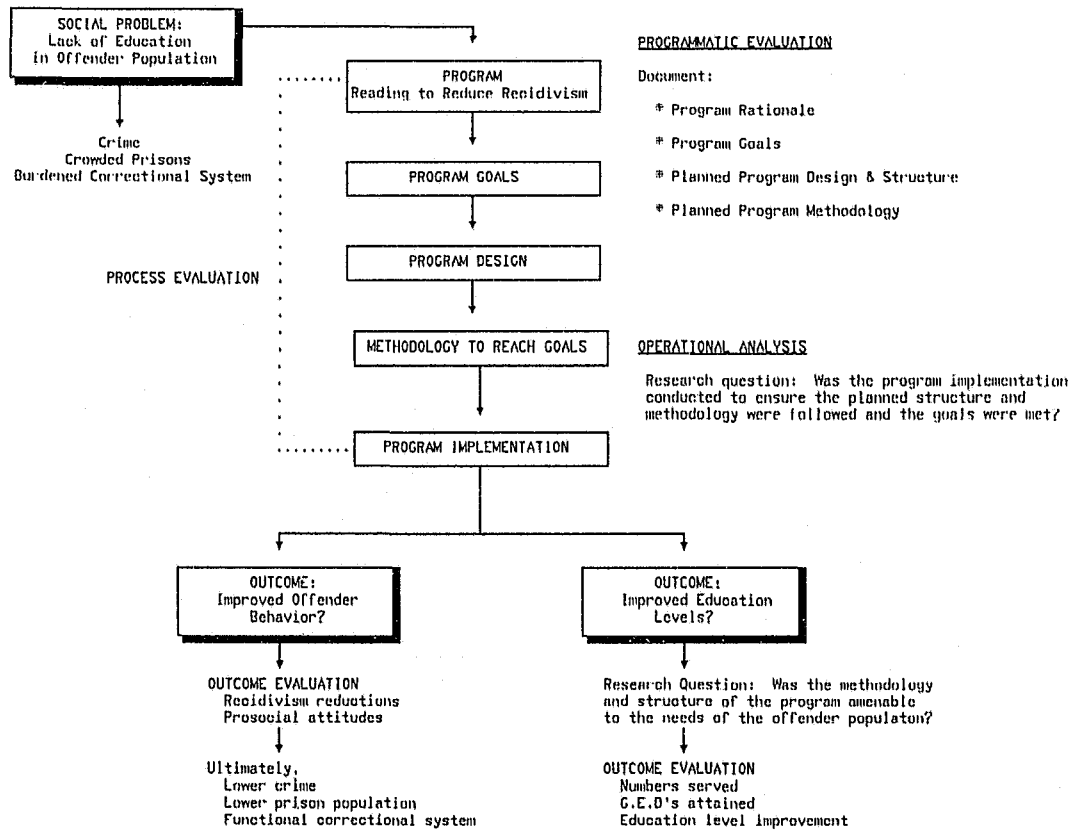
- Operational research will allow a program's procedures to be amended as problems are identified.

- Outcome research will provide information as to the relative costs and benefits of a program, for informed policy decisions.

ADDENDUM: THE EVALUATION PROCESS

Detailed below is the process of the evaluation of the Reading to Reduce Recidivism program. As shown by the findings of this report, documentation of the

process of evaluation is critical to understanding - and if appropriate duplicating - the outcome.



NOTES

¹ Separate criminal episodes are those criminal offenses committed on different days, or, if on the same day, at different addresses and at times distinctly different and unrelated to each other. For example, if an offender commits a robbery at a convenience store, and in the process robs two customers (in addition to the store cash register) this offender would most likely be charged with 3 counts of robbery, but have committed these crimes in only one criminal episode. In contrast, if an offender robs three separate convenience stores on the same day, he or she may be charged with 3 counts of robbery, but each count stems from a different criminal episode. This distinction can be important in terms of severity of criminal conduct, and sentencing decisions.

² Offenders were asked how many crimes they had committed as an adult - including any for which they were not arrested - to the best of their recollection.

³ The amended procedures also included direct referral of probationers. However, the probation office in Bexar County was in the process of implementing an education program for offenders with an EA of 6.0 or below. Therefore, less emphasis was placed on probation, and only 2 probationers were referred. These probationers were not included in the analyses, however both received a G.E.D.

⁴ A proposed parole plan is developed when an inmate is within three years of parole eligibility. For the proposed plan, an inmate states his/her proposed living arrangements upon parole, including where and with whom he will reside.

⁵ Verified parole plan - When an inmate is within one year of release, parole officers in the area he/she has chosen to reside verify the parole plan. Interviews with friends or relatives are conducted, and the inmate's residence plan is confirmed. If a relative with whom the offender wants to reside disagrees, an alternative plan is formed.

⁶ Educational Achievement can be determined through several tests measuring progress. The Test of Adult Basic Education was used for this program (and is the instrument used for JTPA programs and by TDCJ-ID). A score of 6.0 or above is the grade equivalent score, meaning the student places at or above the 6th grade level. The grade equivalent score is determined from the interval level scale score.

⁷ No estimate for EA level is available for probationers. Based on the differences in high school education between the probationers and parolees a larger proportion of probationers than parolees should have an EA above 6.0. Approximately 61% of parolees have an EA of 6.0 or above (TDCJ-ID, 1991).

⁸ Includes parole releasees, parole-in-absentia, and mandatory supervision releasees.

⁹ The institutional placement procedures and default criteria are discussed fully in the Management Information Report: Formal Selection Procedures published by the CJPC in September of 1990.

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