

PROGRAMS

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FOR SERIOUS AND  
VIOLENT JUVENILE  
OFFENDERS



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ACQUISITIONS

CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF  
*Youth Policy*

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# PROGRAMS FOR SERIOUS AND VIOLENT JUVENILE OFFENDERS

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## FOREWORD

Preventing and controlling serious juvenile crime is one of the most difficult challenges we face as a nation. Each year hundreds of thousands of individuals under the age of 18 are arrested for having committed a serious property or violent crime. The cost to society runs into billions of dollars, not including the significant personal harm to victims and, in some instances, loss of life.

What evidence there is suggests that a relatively small group of juveniles in virtually every state or community account for a substantially disproportionate amount of serious juvenile crime that is committed. These youths are commonly referred to as chronic and/or violent juvenile offenders. It is these youth we hear about in the media and who command a significant proportion of time from our juvenile court judges, police, prosecutors, public defenders, juvenile corrections officials, and state and local elected public officials.

Due to the significant challenges these young people pose the Center for the Study of Youth Policy commissioned a series of papers on correctional programs that appear to be effective in working with this difficult population. The authors are well known and respected experts in juvenile corrections. The insights of these experts suggest that even chronic and dangerous juvenile offenders can be worked with in a humane and relatively effective way.

The three programs are representing quite different approaches. The first program that is described is an intensive probation in Wayne County (Detroit) Michigan that served as an alternative to the commitment of serious and chronic offenders in the State of Michigan. Many of these youths would have been incarcerated in one of the State's two large training school facilities or one of several large private youth correctional institutions the State contracts with.

The second program is designed for violent and chronic juvenile offenders who would otherwise be sentenced to Florida's adult prison system. The program is administered by the Associated Marine Institute (a respected private provider) and located in the Florida Everglades. The program has no fences, no locked doors, or lock-up units. The security is provided by the environment.

The last program is a small 30-bed high security treatment unit for violent and chronic juvenile offenders in Utah. The unit is a maximum security facility located in an industrial part of Salt Lake City.

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Our purpose in presenting these programs is to inform policy-makers, juvenile justice professionals, and the public at large that there are some promising options for chronic and violent juvenile offenders. We hope that the information in this booklet will be of assistance to officials in other states who are struggling to find solutions to the challenges this small but significant group of juvenile offenders present.

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# The Home Field Advantage: In-Home Programs for Juvenile Delinquents

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This research was sponsored by the Michigan Office of Criminal Justice, Michigan Office of Children and Youth Services, and the County of Wayne. The authors assume complete responsibility for the results and their interpretations herein. Portions of this paper was presented at the annual meetings of the American Society of Criminology in Chicago, November, 1988.

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## Executive Summary

The "get tough" mentality of the 1980s has prevented sustained implementation of the juvenile justice deinstitutionalization reforms launched in the 1970s. The perceived lack of evidence supporting community-based alternatives to incarceration has contributed to this policy retrenchment. This paper summarizes major findings from a randomized evaluation of intensive supervision programs in Wayne County (Detroit), Michigan that suggest that such programs can be a cost-effective alternative to incarceration for many delinquent youths.

The study followed 326 youths assigned to intensive probation as an alternative to commitment to the state and compared their outcomes with those of a control group of 185 committed youths. After two years, the recidivism and other outcomes of the intensive supervision youths and the control group youths were virtually identical. The intensive supervision programs cost less than one-third as much as the average state commitment.

These results are discussed in the context of public safety concerns and policy choices facing the juvenile justice community. Intensive supervision programs could prevent up to 40 percent of all institutional placements, saving millions of dollars without placing the public at undue risk.



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# Introduction

As we move into the 1990s, it is clear that the juvenile justice reforms heralded during the 1970s have not fully materialized. At the heart of the reforms was a move towards deinstitutionalization — removing youths from adult jails and restricting the use of training schools. States such as Massachusetts and Utah implemented the reform agenda and profoundly restructured their juvenile correctional systems by closing large institutions. Other states reduced the size of training schools or refrained from building additional beds.

The "get tough" mentality of the 1980s has prevented or reversed reforms in other states (Schwartz, 1989). Despite evidence to the contrary, many politicians and juvenile justice officials believe the public is increasingly disturbed by juvenile crime and demanding a tough response. As a result, a number of states are building more institutional beds, detaining more youths for longer periods of time, and making it easier to transfer juvenile cases to the adult courts. This policy retrenchment flies in the face of compelling evidence that "get tough" approaches such as selective incapacitation and deterrence do not work to reduce crime as their proponents would claim (Walker, 1989).

Schwartz (1989) has called for new research on the viability of various program options for delinquents. Prior studies have reported mixed results regarding the concept of community-based programs for juveniles (e.g., Austin, Krisberg and Joe, 1987; Kobrin and Klein, 1983; Murray and Cox, 1979; Ohlin, Miller and Coates, 1977; Lerman, 1975; Palmer, 1974; Empey and Lubeck, 1971; Weeks, 1958). Unfortunately, policy makers are often left with the impression that there is no evidence supporting the community-based alternatives. This paper summarizes the major findings from a randomized evaluation of home-based, intensive supervision programs for juveniles in Wayne County (Detroit), Michigan. The results of this study suggest that there is a home field advantage in working with delinquent youths in their own communities. Such programs could be a viable alternative to incarceration for many youths.

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# Background

## Too many commitments

In 1982, a total of 708 youths were committed to the Michigan Department of Social Services (D.S.S.) by the Wayne County Juvenile Court, reflecting a higher per capita rate than from any other county in the state. Short of transferring a case to an adult court, commitment to the state is the most severe disposition available to the juvenile court in its handling of youthful offenders. The great majority of committed youths are placed away from home in training schools or comparable private institutions at considerable cost to taxpayers. State and county officials alike were concerned that something be done to lower the rate of commitments from Wayne County. As of 1983, the state indicated that it would accept no more than 500 commitments annually from Wayne County. The county, thus, was faced with the necessity of developing program alternatives to handle its extensive volume of seriously delinquent youths.

## The in-home programs

Three separate experimental programs were implemented in early 1983 to provide home-based services to some of the Wayne County youths who would previously have been committed. While they differed in philosophical orientation, all three programs used a basic model of intensive probation involving small caseloads and frequent worker-client contact. One of the in-home programs, the Intensive Probation Unit (IPU), was operated by the juvenile court. The other two were run by private agencies under contract to the court: the Comprehensive Youth Training and Community Involvement Program (CYTCIP); and Michigan Human Services, Inc. (MHS).<sup>1</sup>

# Methodology

The primary objective in evaluating the three programs was to determine whether or not they were cost-effective alternatives to state commitment. The evaluation employed a randomized design to assign equivalent groups of youths to each program and to a control group of state wards. Each case was followed for two years. Data were obtained from several sources: the youths, their parents, program staff, and various court and agency records.

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## Randomization

Between February 1, 1983 and March 5, 1985, all cases recommended by the juvenile court for commitment to the state were screened for program eligibility. Juveniles charged with extremely violent offenses, with a documented history of severe psychiatric disturbance, or with no potential home in the community (e.g., neglect wards) were automatically excluded from the study. Because very few females were committed, the evaluation study was limited to males.<sup>2</sup>

A total of 511 cases (about 40 percent of those screened) met the eligibility criteria and were randomly assigned to one of the three programs or to the control group. Those assigned to the in-home programs had their commitment orders rescinded and remained wards of the court on probationary status. Those assigned to the control group were committed to D.S.S. as they would have been in any event. In all, the three programs received 326 youths, while 185 state wards comprised the control group.

## The sample

The youths in the study were relatively serious and chronic, although not highly violent, offenders. Most of the youths were Black (68.7%) and from single parent households (67.2%) in which no adult was employed (58.3%). Their average age at entry was 15.4 years old. On average, they had been charged with three other offenses before their most recent court appearance. Many (23.5%) had five or more prior charges. The majority of the youths (78.1%) entered the study as a result of a criminal charge as opposed to a status offense and for about half (51.3%) that charge could be considered quite serious.

## Data sources

Each youth was followed for two years. Evaluation staff conducted personal interviews with the youths and parents as soon as possible after assignment to the study, upon program termination, and again two years after the initial assignment. Demographic and official offense data were obtained from juvenile court, adult court,<sup>3</sup> school and program records. The study examined program case files and collected questionnaires from program staff to assess the frequency and nature of contacts between program staff and the youths. Other D.S.S. and juvenile court records provided information regarding program costs, commitment rates and patterns in the juvenile court docket.

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# Results

## Program Activities

Each primary worker (called variously a probation officer, counselor, or family worker) had a caseload of between six and ten youths and their families. The workers made frequent individual supervision contacts and either provided or arranged for the provision of whatever other services were deemed necessary. Each program was designed to have a capacity of about 50 cases with an expected length of stay of about one year.

The programs were required to keep a record of all contacts made with and on behalf of each youth. The various types of contact were classified as: home contacts; program site contacts (e.g., group sessions and office visits); other agency contacts (e.g., at schools or other service agencies, sometimes called "collateral" contacts); and telephone contacts. The three programs averaged between 10 and 14 client contacts per month, or about three contacts per week. Although this may not seem especially high, it represents greater intensity than is typically found in regular probation programs.

The three agencies attempted to provide a variety of services to the youths and their families. Questionnaires completed by staff regarding each terminating case indicated the range of services provided to each case. Nearly every youth in all three programs received behavioral supervision and individual counseling. In other respects, the programs' patterns of service delivery reflected their different emphases. CYTCIP clients had the highest participation rates in youth groups, recreational activities and camping, while MHS, the most family-focused program, reported greater utilization of parent counseling, parent groups and tokens/rewards. Both CYTCIP and MHS utilized job-related components more often than did IPU, whose program resembled regular probation at a more intensive level.

## Outcomes

**Costs.** The primary question addressed by the evaluation was whether or not the intensive supervision programs were cost-effective alternatives to commitment to the state. An analysis of the relative cost of the programs and of commitment indicated that the programs were less than one-third as costly as commitment. In

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1986, for example, the in-home programs cost an average of \$26 per day for each youth while state per diem commitment costs averaged \$88.57.<sup>4</sup> Between 1983 and 1986, the intensive supervision programs enabled Wayne County to save nearly \$9 million.

**Recidivism.** The most critical test of the effectiveness of the intensive supervision alternatives involved an assessment of the programs' ability to contain or reduce the youths' delinquent behavior. Recidivism can be defined and measured in many ways. In this study, official records of charges incurred by the youths during the two-year study period were examined in conjunction with the youths' own reports of their delinquent behavior. Neither the official nor self-reported measures revealed meaningful differences between the intensive supervision youths and the control group.

*Subsequent charges.* The program youths incurred about twice as many charges as the control group (an average of 2.6 vs. 1.3) during the two-year study period, but many (about 30%) were for status offenses or technical violations of program rules rather than "criminal" behaviors. Furthermore, the control group youths had less opportunity to incur charges, as they were incarcerated for an average of 13 months during the two-year period compared with 6 months for the program youths. Finally, the control group's charges were significantly more serious than those of the program youths. When the analysis controlled for offense seriousness and time at large, the recidivism differences between the two groups disappeared. An estimate of the number of criminal charges that would have been incurred by the youths during a two-year period at large was nearly identical for the two groups (3.7 for the program youths vs. 3.6 for the control group youths).

Just under half of the youths initially assigned to the three intensive supervision programs were able to remain in the community and successfully complete the programs. They spent an average of about 13 months in the programs. The others were brought back to juvenile court and committed to D.S.S. or convicted in an adult court as a result of a new offense or program violation. Most of the successful program graduates (about 80%) continued to be free of charges during the remainder of the two-year study period. Thus, a substantial number of youths who otherwise would have been committed to the state were able to remain successfully in the community.

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*Self-reported delinquency.* An analysis of recidivism which relies upon only official records of subsequent charges is necessarily incomplete. Official charges result from the actions of many people in addition to the alleged offender — the police and court officials, and perhaps victims. Many delinquent acts are undetected or unsolved, and some youths may be falsely charged. In any event, one cannot assume that official charges directly mirror delinquent behavior. Researchers have found that when administered properly and collected under conditions of anonymity or confidentiality, as in the present study, information provided by youths concerning their own activities can be a reliable and internally consistent method of estimating delinquent behavior within some defined time span (Erickson and Empey, 1963; Kulik, Stein and Sarbin, 1968; Farrington, 1973; Hardt and Peterson-Hardt, 1977; Hindelang, Hirschi and Weis, 1979 and 1981).

At each wave of interviewing, youths were asked how often, during the preceding four months, they had engaged in each of 26 different behaviors, ranging from status offenses (e.g., "skipping school without an excuse") to serious crimes (e.g., "injured someone with a weapon"). The 26 behaviors were grouped into four indexes: *minor* offenses (running away, skipping school, trespassing, etc); *drug/alcohol* offenses, *property* offenses (theft, burglary, etc.); and *violent* offenses (fighting, injuring someone, carrying or using a weapon, etc.). Responses from the initial interview provided a profile of each youth's delinquent behavior in the four months preceding program entry. The follow-up interview yielded the reported delinquency for the last four months of the two-year study period.

Due to randomized assignment, program and control group youths did not differ initially in self-reported delinquency. The interview results indicated that two years after program entry the program youths still did not differ greatly from the control group youths in the overall level of self-reported delinquency. The program youths, however, reported committing significantly fewer *violent* crimes than the control group youths at the two-year follow-up.

On measures of change in self-reported delinquency between the initial and follow-up interviews most of the mean values were close to zero for both groups, suggesting very little overall difference at the aggregate level.<sup>5</sup> On every measure, however, the program youths reported a slight mean decrease while the control

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group youths reported a slight mean increase. Overall, program youths reported a decrease of about three delinquent acts while the control group youths reported an increase of more than four. On the violent behavior index, the difference between the groups was statistically significant. About 64 percent of the program youths reported reduced levels of delinquency at follow-up compared with 50 percent among those in the control group. On the relatively serious property and violent behavior indexes, more than 70 percent of the program youths reported reductions, compared to about 60 percent of control group youths.

**Other effectiveness indicators.** Program effectiveness, of course, involves concerns beyond recidivism. The programs were designed to have an impact on several factors commonly associated with juvenile delinquency, including family relationships, school performance and attitudes, peer group relationships, job skills, self-concept and other attitudes. Measures of these factors were obtained from the interviews. In addition, youths completed a short version of the Wide Range Achievement Test (WRAT) at the time of the follow-up interview. The results were remarkably consistent: the in-home program youths did not differ from the control group youths at the two-year follow-up. For example, the WRAT results showed that the grade levels of the program youths were 6.8 for reading, 5.5 for spelling and 4.8 for arithmetic. Comparable levels for the control group were 6.8, 5.6, and 4.6. Similar percentages of the two groups (79% of the program youths vs. 77% of the control group youths) were involved in educational or occupational activities at follow-up. Few significant differences were found between the groups on any of the attitudinal or relationship measures.

## Discussion

### Outcome Similarity

One of the most striking aspects of the study's findings was the similarity in outcomes between the in-home program youths and the control group. Given that the programs were only one-third as costly as commitment, these results provide strong support for the viability of intensive supervision as an alternative to state commitment for these youths. The longitudinal analysis of self-reported delinquency does not suggest that the in-home programs were

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dramatically successful in reducing delinquency. The programs, however, achieved a slight reduction in the level of delinquent activity over the two-year study period, while commitment to D.S.S. was accompanied by a slight increase in the average level of delinquent behavior. The two groups differed significantly only on the violent behavior index, a difference favoring the in-home programs.

These results are consistent with the findings regarding subsequent charges. When controlling for amount of time at large, the two groups did not differ significantly in the number of subsequent criminal charges during the two-year study period, although the control group's charges were more serious. Despite the programs' best efforts, small caseloads and retention of the youths in the community, the outcome was not much different from that of commitment and out-of-home placement. Yet, to achieve results no worse than commitment at a fraction of the cost can be considered a positive achievement.

### **Public safety concerns**

Recidivism, of course, is more than an outcome measure for program evaluators. While essential to a long range assessment of program effectiveness, the adjustment for time "at large" may be irrelevant in the short run. In the period immediately following the diversion/commitment decision, a major difference between the diverted and committed youths is the fact that the former were indeed "at large" with a continuing opportunity to commit offenses while the latter were not.

Not surprisingly, it was found that more charges were filed against the intensive probation youths than against the control group youths. From a public safety perspective, it hardly seems comforting to learn that this difference disappears when an analysis of recidivism controls for the groups' differing opportunities to commit offenses during some specified time period. The immediate concern is that some youths, initially headed for commitment, were instead returned to the community and, in many cases, committed additional offenses within the next few months.

Yet, what is really accomplished by incarcerating large numbers of youths, only to have most of them return to the community after a few months, relatively unchanged, to face a continued lack of opportunities for conventional success? At most, a short period of incapacitation is bought at great expense. This study has shown that



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intensive supervision programs can successfully retain many of these youths in the community. By no means can the findings of this study be used to argue that *no* youths should be placed away from home. They do suggest, however, that incarceration could be reserved for a much smaller proportion of juvenile offenders while providing less expensive, equally effective, community-based alternatives for the rest.

## **Making in-home programs more successful**

Although the results of this evaluation generally support the viability of intensive supervision alternatives, they also indicate room for improvement. The outcomes would have been even more favorable had the programs been implemented more consistently and with a greater array of supportive services. As in most programming, the key to success lies in the ability of program staff to establish strong relationships with the youths, to identify the specific services needed for each and to have an array of community resources upon which to draw. Educational and vocational components are obvious necessities; so, too, is an approach that involves other family members and allows staff the flexibility to do whatever is indicated for each case. In many instances, the programs' provision of material assistance to families in crisis (providing food, appliances, household repairs, transportation, etc.) is as important as more conventional "treatment."

Staff in such programs commonly struggle over what sanctions are available to reinforce compliance with the programs' rules. Frequently, their response is to bring non-compliant youths back to court with the intent of placing them out of the home, even if they have not committed a new law violation. Such a practice should be discouraged if intensive supervision programs are to function as true alternatives to incarceration. Other means can be developed to deal with such difficult cases. For example, a short-term shelter program can be used as a "time-out" for the youths or as a "respite" for some families in crisis situations. Alternatively, supervision levels can be further intensified, with the additional contacts provided by "trackers" instead of regular staff.

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## Future research

The Wayne County Juvenile Court is to be commended for its recognition of the value of a randomized evaluation of its intensive supervision programs. Such designs are rare, and require a strong commitment from the agencies involved. The strength of the results justify the efforts, and should encourage others to follow Wayne County's lead where feasible. Replications of this study in other jurisdictions would enhance the generalizability of the findings. Other studies of intensive supervision programs should monitor the range and intensity of the services actually provided and should be vigilant in the search for unintended consequences. For example, net-widening almost always accompanies the introduction of new programs, as it did in this case (see Barton and Butts, 1988).

## Policy Choices

The results from this study suggest that many juvenile justice systems may be able to reduce their reliance upon costly out-of-home placements by investing in cost-effective, in-home alternatives. States with a heavy reliance on incarceration could reallocate resources from institutional beds to in-home programs to provide more effective services to more youths. In other states, the development of such alternatives could prevent the costly construction and operation of new beds.

In this study, 40 percent of the Wayne County youths routinely headed for commitment were found to be appropriate candidates for the intensive supervision alternatives. While this rate may vary somewhat from state to state, such programs should be able to handle a sizable proportion of routinely incarcerated youths without jeopardizing public safety. Recent national data indicate that 61,399 youths were admitted to public training schools in 1987 (U.S. Department of Justice, 1988). Only about 20 percent of these were incarcerated for violent Part I felonies; another 33 percent for Part I property offenses. If 40 percent were diverted to in-home programs, nearly 25,000 of these admissions could be avoided. If even half that many were diverted, more than 12,000 placements could be prevented. If only half of those diversions were "successful" in the in-home programs, avoiding an average incarceration of nine months at a savings of \$50 per day, more than \$82 million could be saved each year. Were comparable data available to estimate the numbers of youths in private institutional facilities who could be diverted, the

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national impact of a policy favoring in-home, intensive supervision alternatives would be even more striking.

In-home, intensive supervision programs have the home-field advantage: substantial monetary savings, long term effectiveness outcomes that are at least no worse (and in some cases better) than those of commitment, and the less quantifiable value of simply keeping some youths together with their families in the community. Furthermore, with careful attention to case screening procedures, flexible program development, diligent monitoring of the programs, and court policies that curb net-widening, intensive supervision could become even more effective and take its place as a major component of the dispositional continuum in many jurisdictions.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Actually, CYTCIP inherited its program from another agency that was unable to fulfill its initial contract after several months of operation. CYTCIP gradually replaced existing staff and revised the program activities to its own specifications. Results regarding this program cannot be solely attributed to CYTCIP. In 1988, Michigan Human Services changed its name to Spectrum Human Services.

<sup>2</sup>Subsequently, one of the programs (MHS) opened a second unit for females, but they were not part of the study.

<sup>3</sup>Adult court records were obtained for those who turned 17 or were waived from juvenile court jurisdiction during the two-year study period.

<sup>4</sup>A more complete description of the cost comparison methodology can be found in Barton and Butts, 1990.

<sup>5</sup>The analysis of change scores adjusted for the regression to the mean artifact as detailed in Barton and Butts, 1990.

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# Accountability and Treatment for the Serious and Chronic Juvenile Offender

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# Introduction

Much has been written in the past several years about programs for the serious juvenile offender. Most of the literature has focused on housing our delinquent youths in community-based treatment programs which have proven more humane and effective than the large juvenile training schools. While movement from training schools to community based programs should be applauded, there is a small number of serious, violent and chronic juvenile offenders who can not be placed in the community without jeopardizing public safety. What kind of programming works with this difficult population, a group that typically had many opportunities to change their behavior in the past? How can juvenile corrections officials balance the needs of public safety with program and treatment needs for youths who have been described as "the worst of the worst"?

## **Maximum Security Treatment Facilities in Utah**

Utah faced these difficult questions when its single large juvenile institution the Youth Development Center, was closed in favor of a community-based approach to juvenile corrections. Much has been written about the "Utah Experience"<sup>1</sup> and its success in the de-institutionalization movement. Indeed, it has been very successful and many programs and services provided in Utah have received national acclaim.

How has Utah dealt with this small, volatile and highly visible group of violent and chronic youthful offenders?

Utah officials never assumed that all youths could be maintained in non-secure community based programs. Early in the planning phase of our new system it was determined that only the most violent and chronic offenders would need to be placed in locked facilities. The difficulty came in deciding what kind and what size facilities should be built and what type and level of programming would be appropriate.

These were some of the problems we faced in the early 1980's. By this time in my career I had been involved with large institutions for several years and was serving as the superintendent of the Youth Development Center. The key staff at the institution agreed that the large institutional approach was not working and probably never would — especially with hard core delinquents. Our conclusion



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was that we were creating good inmates. We got the youth out of bed every morning, taught them how to pick up a tray and go through a food line three times a day, how to line up and "march" to school, the cafeteria, and gymnasium, and we conducted head counts. When they left our facility we knew they would be able to adapt quickly to prison life. What we were not doing was teaching them to be good, productive citizens. If the youths were ever going to be successful in society (our real goal), we had to do a better job of preparing them for normal family and community life.

It became obvious that our goal of creating good citizens in any kind of large facility was not possible. The facilities had to be small — no more than 30 or 40 youth per facility — would have to be divided into units of no more than 10 or 12 youths. A family-like environment would require small living units (somewhat like a home) with individual bedrooms and common family areas. Meals would be eaten with youths serving themselves in the units at small tables, family-style. Carpet would be used liberally in the facility, including in the individual rooms, to soften noise and enhance the home-like appearance. Furniture would be livingroom style couches and chairs — institutional tough, but not institutional in appearance. Staffing the facility would be vitally important. The staff would be highly trained with treatment and crisis intervention backgrounds. The facility would provide the security so staff could concentrate on the youth and their individual problems. Each youth would have a highly individualized treatment plan involving individual, group, and family counseling as appropriate. Specialized services such as drug treatment, sex offender therapy, victim awareness classes, etc. would be available. A strong transitional program to reintegrate youth back into the community would be essential. The use of isolation to control behavior would be virtually unnecessary with properly trained staff.

The ideas flowed freely as we discussed the "ideal" secure facility for the violent and chronic offender. The challenge was not in coming up with ideas, but rather in developing a plan and putting it into place. We had to make the dream a reality.

From the beginning of the planning process there were those who said this approach would not work with the more serious offender. These skeptics indicated the youths would destroy the furniture, rip up the carpet, and take advantage of the liberal social workers, using well-honed manipulation skills. These youth were

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considered to have animal-like tendencies and hence needed to be treated as animals using sterile, cage-like surroundings to protect them from each other and to protect staff. There were also those who said that to hold the serious delinquent accountable for his behavior required punishment and punishment could not be accomplished in a home-like environment. Their theory was to make youth hate the facility and environment so they would "go straight" rather than commit another crime.

Accountability for criminal behavior also became an important part of our plan, however, to hold a youth accountable required having the youth deal with his criminal behavior effectively and productively. Bricks and mortar do not force accountability. Treating youth like animals made them act like animals — not productive citizens. Confrontation, victim awareness, restitution, education and goal-oriented treatment force accountability. One of the most supportive statements for this new approach to accountability came recently from several youth who are currently serving time in the Utah State Prison. (These youth had been incarcerated in our new secure facilities and subsequently returned to their criminal activities and were sentenced to the prison system.) Since these individuals had experience in both systems they were asked which facility they would rather be in, the adult prison or the youth secure facilities. The assumption was there would be a preference for the home-like youth facility rather than the crowded prison with its bars and sterile environment. To our surprise, all inmates agreed they would rather be in prison. When questioned further to understand their reasoning, they stated it was simple. In prison they did not have to do anything if they did not want to. They could smoke and as long as they followed a few simple rules they could get by. In the youth facility the staff were "always in our face," "making us deal with our problems, making us talk about life in the real world, pushing us to change, to be different, to be better. It was not a comfortable place to be. The surroundings were better, but it wasn't any fun."

### **Small Maximum Security Treatment Units**

With a great deal of planning, and an idealistic facility and rehabilitation approach we began to put the plan into effect. Two identical 30-bed secure facilities, to house both males and females, were constructed in two strategically located areas of the State.

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A regional approach was used so youth could remain close to home allowing families and communities to stay involved with the rehabilitation process.

The facilities consist of a central services area and a program area which include a medical/dental area, administrative office area, control center, central kitchen, school/classroom area, and gymnasium. Three separate and distinct 10 bed cottages are located in a semi-circle near the central services building. These units are designed to provide maximum security with the latest technology in glazing, hardware and electronic equipment. In fact, the entire facility was designed with maximum security as its goal. However, once inside the living units a soft home-like approach was used. We called it the "egg approach" to architecture — hard on the outside, but soft on the inside. Most of the living unit is carpeted including the individual rooms, which also have their share of security features (i.e., stainless steel toilets and security lights). This creates a curious mix of home-like and secure detention design, but with the right mix of paint and colors the desired effect seems to have been reached.

Meals are served in the living units. The furniture specially designed to withstand institution living, but maintain the appearance and comfort of livingroom furniture. The entire unit takes on an airy openness which approximates a home-like environment to the extent possible in a secure setting.

### **Who Are Utah's Chronic and Violent Offenders?**

Facility design can certainly help in dealing with the serious offender, but most important is the offender himself. What does a serious offender in Utah look like and what program elements are being used in the treatment and rehabilitation process?

Because of the limited number of secure beds, the profile of an incarcerated offender in Utah is indeed that of a serious/chronic offender. Youths committed to the secure facilities during 1988 had averaged 30 prior convictions. Seven and one-half of that average was for felony convictions, remaining convictions were misdemeanors or infractions. Forty-nine percent of the youth had been convicted for a life-endangering felony. The Utah Juvenile Court has an excellent state-wide computer system which provides an accurate accounting of offenses and convictions. There is also very little plea-bargaining in the juvenile court. These two factors may account

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for an offender profile which appears more serious than is reported in many states. However, even with some adjustment the seriousness of the offenders in the secure facilities easily reaches the common definition level of the serious and chronic offender. Convictions range from homicide to burglary and repeated car theft. The average incarcerated youth is three to four grades behind academically, and has a history of substance abuse and family disruption. Most of the youth have been in foster care, on probation and in a variety of community alternative programs prior to being placed in secure confinement. They have demonstrated that the usual approaches to rehabilitation have not worked, or that they are a risk to public safety and can no longer be in a non-locked setting.

A more intense and specialized approach to change is needed for this select group of youth. The number of youth in any unit must be small to individualize treatment, and the number and quality of staff must be high to assure each youth is positively impacted during their stay. The minimum requirements for staff in our facilities is a bachelors degree in a social science related field. Each 10-bed unit is led by a master's level coordinator. In addition, each unit has seven bachelor degree level staff members to provide counseling and security. Staffing is heaviest between the end of the school day and bedtime. Staff are effective role models as well as supervisors and counselors, in both individual and group settings. Emphasis is always on the individual problems and needs of each youth. Programs within the facility emphasize a reality-based approach to becoming productive citizens. For example, in order to purchase items at the canteen youth need to use a checkbook. The proper balancing of a checkbook is taught and over-drafts etc. are handled just as they would be by a bank. Youths must also apply for work assignments, go through interviews, and be hired just as they would in the community.

Goal-oriented group treatment in the areas of victim awareness, substance abuse, life skills, anger management, socialization, male/female relationships, leisure time, sex offender counseling, as well as routine day-to-day problems are available for all youths based on individual needs.

Due to the staff-to-youth ratio coupled with the fact that staff are well trained, the number of aggressive incidents are minimal. Staff are able to perceive problems between youths before they become aggressive confrontations. There are no staff offices or control

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centers within the units, therefore, staff are unable to avoid dealing with the youths by retreating to an office when problems arise. Staff find it to their advantage to sit with youth and solve problems, rather than allow the situation to escalate to a crisis level. The use of an isolation room is virtually non-existent. Youths may be sent to their rooms to "cool off" for a few minutes — much like parents handle children in their homes — but the need for traditional isolation has disappeared. One secure facility has never used its isolation room, the other only on two or three occasions during the past five years.

Education programs at the facilities are operated by the local school districts. The education staff are part of the treatment team and attend a group counseling session with the staff and youth every day at the conclusion of school to discuss progress and problems. Facility staff often spend time in the classrooms to give support and to stay up-to-date on individual progress. Each youth has an individualized educational plan and each progresses according to their own needs. Classes are forty minutes each and the youth change classes as they would in a regular high school setting. The goal of the education program is to get the youth back on track for a high school diploma. A General Education Diploma (G.E.D.) would be a secondary goal if the high school diploma was not within reach. Since the teachers are tied to the local school districts it is much easier to get youth back into local schools when they leave the secure facilities. All of the youths are part of a state-wide educational program called Youth in Custody, which assures that youths will be able to return to school and that the school must make every effort to keep him/her in the classroom.

Youths are allowed to choose their own clothing and hair styles. However, discussions are held during group counseling sessions regarding the appropriateness of certain styles and how dress and hair styles project images to others. It is common during a youth's stay at the facility for them to voluntarily change their dress and hair style to one more closely reflecting community norms.

All youths are assigned a community based case manager when they enter the facility. The case manager works with facility staff and the youth throughout their stay in secure confinement. The case manager develops a parole release agreement in coordination with the facility staff, and this agreement is then presented to a citizen Parole Authority prior to release. The case manager works

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with youth during a trial placement phase and later a transition phase as youths are reintegrated into the community. In almost all cases youth receive a variety of services, from job training to a continuation of therapy sessions after leaving the facility. The first 90 days after leaving the facility is crucial and every effort is made to assure the youth is successful.

## Results

Several studies have been conducted on recidivism and suppression effects on youth leaving secure facilities. Since the facilities have only been in operation for slightly more than five years, comprehensive long-term studies have not been completed. However, studies which have been completed are quite consistent in their outcome. Two studies conducted by the Division of Youth Corrections in 1986 followed all youth paroled from secure facilities between July 1, 1984 and June 30, 1985. All youths were followed for at least one year. During the follow-up period 25 percent of the youth were crime free, 17 percent were convicted of a misdemeanor or infraction, and 58 percent were convicted of a felony. Most of the felony crime was property oriented. The most remarkable fact was that although 50 percent of the youth had committed a life endangering felony prior to commitment, none of the youth in the one year follow-up were convicted of a life endangering felony.

In a National Council on Crime and Delinquency (NCCD) study completed in 1987, similar results were found.<sup>2</sup> The NCCD study tracked youth from 1983 to 1987. One phase of the study evaluated the suppression effect of youth paroled from secure confinement. Their study looked at a 12 month pre- and post-intervention arrest rate for paroled youth. The pre-intervention rate of arrest was 8.7, the post-intervention rate 3.1 (a difference of -5.6). This equates to a suppression rate of 71.3%. A graphic representation of this information from the NCCD study can be found at the conclusion of this article (Chart A). This study also indicated that crimes committed during the post-evaluation period tended to be less serious than those committed prior to placement. Only six percent of these offenders were charged with violent crimes in the post-evaluation period.

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Our new secure facility system has not been in operation long enough to establish long term recidivism information. What we do know is that we are certainly doing no worse than we did under the old institutional system. The number of negative incidents in the facilities have been dramatically reduced. The contact with families, the transition into school and job markets has improved markedly. Judges have expressed surprise that youths remain crime free after leaving the facilities because they were serious offenders when committed.

Obviously, we have not found "the answer" to solving the problem of the serious and chronic offender. What we have found is a very effective and humane way of working with the offender which provides a real opportunity for them to become productive citizens. Staff feel safer and are more enthusiastic about their work because they know they can make a difference. Although staff realize they will not be able to rehabilitate all the youths, they sincerely feel those youths who leave their facility are better off than when they arrived — something that we could not say under the old system.

In conclusion, let me add one final comment about our system. A few years ago a national television network was doing a one-hour special on the serious juvenile offender. The producer visited one of our secure facilities and then told me they would be unable to use our facility in the program. Our staff were all "excited about their work and did not fit the image of a secure facility guard." The youth in the facility "did not look like serious offenders are supposed to look, they look too much like regular kids." We could not have received a higher compliment. Our goal is to help youth act and appear as normal productive citizens and, at least in this instance, we have succeeded.

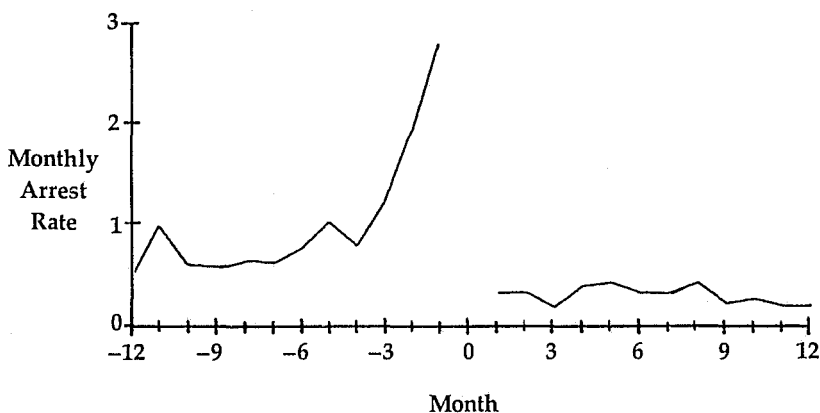
Certainly we are treating youth more humanely and more effectively in our secure facility system than we ever did in the past.

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Chart A

Secure Monthly Arrest Rates — Pre and Post Intervention





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# **The Last Chance Ranch: The Florida Environmental Institute Program for Chronic and Violent Juvenile Offenders**

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Robert S. Weaver  
Executive Vice President  
Associated Marine Institutes

**About the Author.** Robert Weaver has been the Executive Vice President of AMI since 1980. Mr. Weaver began his career with AMI in 1974 as a line staff. He is responsible for the operations and contracts of AMI's 23 programs in the states of Delaware, Florida, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, South Carolina, Texas, and Virginia.

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# Introduction

Each morning most of us wake up to a "play by play" account of violent crime. The morning news, radio shows, and the newspapers provide us with the latest updates on assaults, stabbings, murders, and rapes. We tune in to a major television network and get a summary at day's end. When a kid commits one of these crimes it's even bigger news.

The fact that juveniles account for approximately 30 percent of the serious crime is cause for concern. However, the media-fed public perception of rapidly increasing juvenile crime is not accurate. The rates of serious juvenile crime declined between 1979 and 1984. Nationally, we experienced an increase for the first time in six years in 1985 (Schwartz, 1989). What can be done about serious juvenile crime? This is the story of one successful program designed to serve this small but volatile portion of the delinquent population.

## Protecting the Public Safety

Public perception ultimately drives public policy. Protecting the public's safety is the first and most important issue in providing service to violent offenders. For six years the Florida Environmental Institute (FEI) has worked with some of the most serious and violent youthful offenders in Florida. This work has been accomplished without fences, lockdowns, or the restraints normally associated with maximum security programs. There have only been three successful escapes in the camp's six years of operation. Political rhetoric about "getting tough" is popular. However, in all but a handful of cases, youthful offenders will return to their respective communities. We propose that humane and effective treatment of tough juveniles is in the best interest of the public on both long and short term. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics (Criminal Justice Newsletter, 1989) 94 percent of young prisoners with extensive prior records were rearrested within three years. Clearly, it is in the best interest of our society and our economy to look at alternative methods of dealing with serious juvenile offenders.

## Program Description

The FEI was dubbed "The Last Chance Ranch" by the youths served. The program is located in a remote area of the northern reaches of the Florida Everglades. The ranch is surrounded by swamp, sloughs, pine and palmetto forest. The facilities are rustic,

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wooden structures built by students and staff. FEI has a capacity of 22 youths in residential care and 20 youth in non-residential or after-care status. The program began in 1982 and has served 173 youths since inception. The catchment area is the southern half of Florida, including the major metropolitan areas of Tampa, Orlando, West Palm Beach, Ft. Lauderdale, and Miami.

Each youth participates in three program phases with a total average length of stay of 18 months. The average length of stay in the non-residential community phase is six months.

When youths are referred, they arrive at a stage site approximately 10 miles from the camp. They then travel to the area of the camp and backpack into a remote, forested area for a three-five day orientation called "0 Camp." At "0 Camp" they work hard each day and learn the basic rules of the camp. Each manager and several senior students participate in the orientation. This process is designed to bond the youths to key staff, and student leaders in order to start them off on the right foot. The foundations of a case treatment plan are established and if all goes well, the youth will join the camp for the evening meal on the third day, becoming a part of a large and extended family.

## **Residential Phases I and II**

The first phase of the program emphasizes work and education. Each youth spends his day completing work projects at or close to the camp and attends education and safety-related classes. Phase I students live in an austere military-type dorm without air conditioning, television, or other amenities. Performance must precede reward as youth earn "points" and privileges towards graduation into Phase II.

Phase II focuses on continuing work in education and expanding work related activities into community and environmental work projects. Wherever possible, youths earn money for restitution and savings. The dorm is air conditioned and has a television and other amenities. The focus is on work, education, and preparing to return home. Towards the end of Phase II, students earn the right to return home with their community coordinator to find work, begin networking and rebuilding family relationships.

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## **Phase III and the Family**

Phase III is an intense, advocacy-based aftercare program. Community coordinators with case loads of approximately 6 to 1 assist youths in finding jobs, dealing with family issues and the myriad of other challenges they face in successfully adapting to their communities. Serving a small but widespread aftercare population poses many logistical problems which FEI community coordinators must overcome. Phase III is the community battleground where the skills and education learned at the camp are put to the test. Weekly parent visitations, an annual Thanksgiving rodeo and regular written and phone communications are focused on keeping parents informed and involved. Community Coordinators regularly visit families and get to know the strengths and weaknesses of each family unit. We do not believe it is helpful or effective to force youth into choosing between the value system of the family and that of the program. Our approach is to work with the conditions and problems the family presents in an affirmative way while helping each youth discern alternatives and choices. If we expose youth to a more effective value system without condemning their families, chances are they will make future decisions in their own best interest.

### **Personnel**

All key leadership personnel are talented veterans with successful histories of operating AMI programs. Due to the remote nature of the location, executive directors accept a "tour of duty" of approximately two years.

There are 22 direct service employees at the camp. Employees work five 8 hour shifts each week and the actual staff to student ratio in the classroom and on work projects is typically three or four to one. One of three managers is responsible for each of the 14 morning and evening shifts. One manager is on call for each night shift.

People create environments which encourage change. Good program design, effective administration, adequate funding and appropriate facilities all fall short without the right people. Serious offenders are typically gang members with a strong desire for affiliation. We believe the staff must offer a powerful alternative peer group to which offenders can relate and become part of.

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## Costs

The cost per day of the residential components of the camp is approximately \$102. The cost per day of the non-residential components is approximately \$20. The average cost per case is \$40,000.

## Treatment Approach

The original program design for FEI drew heavily from AMI's previous work with over 10,000 delinquent youths. We believed that a program for violent offenders could be safely operated without the fences, lockdowns, and restraints characteristic of maximum security facilities. We knew that we needed to prepare participants for successful re-entry into the world of work. In all likelihood they would go to work in blue collar fields. Our own research had demonstrated a close correlation between educational level and recidivism. We knew the youths referred would be functioning at 5th grade level or below. Education would be a key component. We wanted to create an atmosphere that was family-like, stressing discipline, cooperation, and everyone having a job to do. Our plan included stressing a "performance precedes reward" format which would encourage youths to defer gratification and set long range goals. Lastly, we knew that the success of the endeavor would hinge on the effectiveness of the aftercare component.

These concepts were translated into five key elements of the original program design. A more in-depth look at each is as follows:

1. *Violent Offenders Without Hardware.* A cornerstone of the Associated Marine Institute (the parent organization that FEI is a part of) philosophy is to serve youths in the least restrictive environment possible. Our practical experience has been that unnatural constraints and security encourage unnatural behavior. AMI programs have always protected the public's safety through supervision rather than hardware. We believed this concept could be extended to serious offenders. Our strategy was to find a location so remote that the setting itself would discourage escape attempts and protect the public's safety. There is no fence surrounding this program, nor any hardware except a pair of handcuffs available for restraint of participants in an extreme emergency situation.

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2. *Hard Work as Therapy.* At AMI we believe that the single greatest weakness in the juvenile and adult systems is the lack of meaningful work for those incarcerated. By failing to provide offenders with a role, we clearly indicate their value to us and to their own communities. A cornerstone of the FEI approach is that every youth would work hard on projects in the camp and community. Staff and students work side by side on community and environmental projects providing taxpayers with tangible results. FEI students have completed over 75 projects allowing each youth the opportunity to give something back to the community surrounding the camp. Environmental projects often generate income for participants allowing students to pay restitution and save money for community re-entry.
  3. *Education Equals Lower Recidivism.* Our research indicates a close correlation between low grade levels and recidivism. Referrals to FEI typically read at a 5th grade level or below. The curriculum and schedule at FEI focuses on improving each youth's reading and math skills and, wherever possible, helping them earn a GED. Since inception, 24 youths have earned GED's. This focus on education, in itself, is not a distinguishing characteristic. The intensity with which we pursue each youth's improvement is.
  4. *Punishment and Rewards.* Youth perceive the removal of their freedom and control of activities as a form of punishment. We choose not to gloss over these facts. Punishment for inappropriate behavior is a cornerstone of effective discipline. At FEI, punishment is individualized wherever possible, and never corporal in nature. The continuum begins with removal of privileges at the camp and ends at removal from the camp to a remote location for one-on-one work projects with a staff member. To be effective, punishment must meet three important tests.
    1. Does the punishment fit the crime?
    2. Is the time frame one which the offender can relate to?
    3. Does the person doing the punishing have the best interest of the offender at heart?

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The third test is the most important. The most unfair discipline is that which treats individual youths with a wide range of problems and behaviors the same. Most human beings instinctively know whether our actions are conceived in their best interest. AMI staff training is designed to teach each staff to differentiate between those behaviors which control others and those likely to change the behavior of others. We believe punishment falls into the control category. When we use fear to motivate youths, they almost always return to the inappropriate behaviors if the fear of being caught or punished diminishes. Understanding this important but subtle distinction is what creates an atmosphere which encourages youths to change. Failing to understand this difference results in compliant offenders institutionalized for long periods, interrupted by release, recidivism, and subsequent reincarceration.

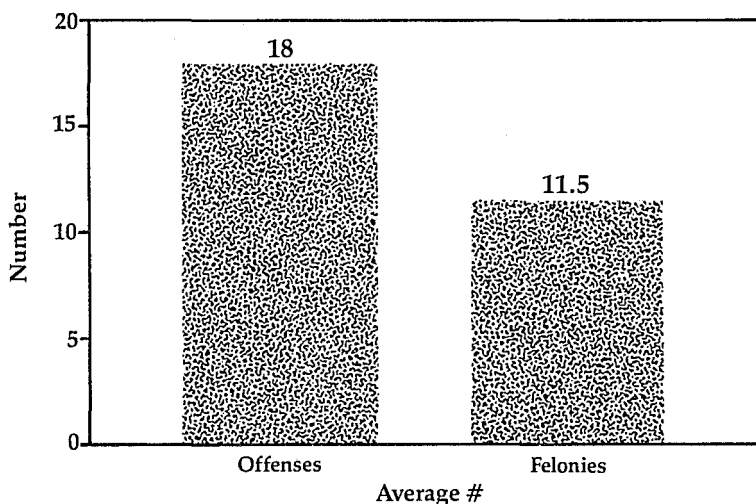
5. *It's a Sign of Progress that "Aftercare" Programs are Making Appearances in the Continuum of Programming in Many States.* Our AMI experience and research ten years ago indicated aftercare was the weakest link in residential programming for juvenile offenders. At AMI and in other programs we observed youths committing themselves to more effective behaviors only to regress rapidly upon return to the challenges of their communities and negative peer group back home. We resolved to assist our participants in making the transition back into the communities, with a wide range of services all built upon a bond between a community coordinator advocate and the youth.

## **Referrals to FEI**

Our approach has been to view violent offenders as youths who shared a commonality of deficits with their delinquent counterparts. Practical experience over six years has taught us that violent offenders have many of the same problems troubling their delinquent counterparts — fragmented families, single parents, greater education deficits, histories of abuse and neglect as children, and significant health and nutritional problems. A larger percentage of these referrals come from inner city minority families living below the poverty level.

Charts A, B, and C show characteristics of FEI referrals from January 1, 1988 to January 1, 1989. The criminal history of the youths included averaging 18 offenses and 11.5 felonies. Sixty-three percent of the referrals were for crimes against person, the remaining were for chronic property and drug offenses. Sixty-seven percent of the referrals were minorities.

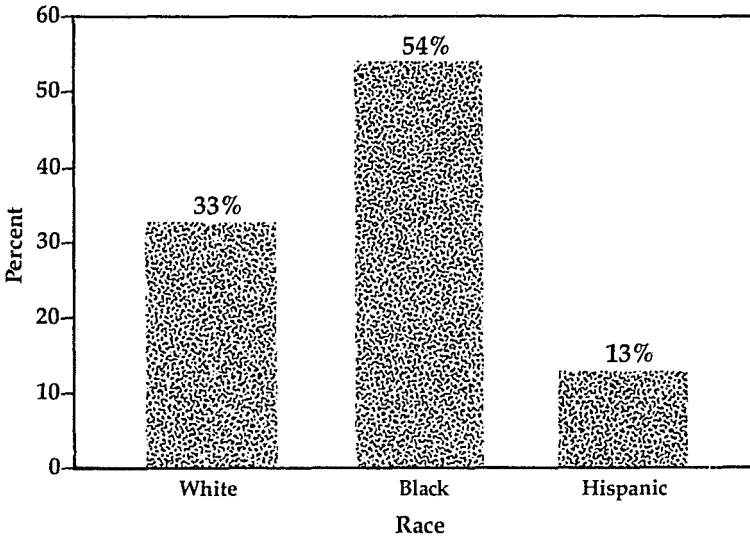
*Table A*  
**CRIMINAL OFFENSE HISTORY**  
**FEI Youths**



There is little evidence indicating specialization by individual youths in violent crime. Rather, serious juvenile crime is likely to be a part of a wider, very active pattern of delinquency (Greenwood and Zimring, 1985). FEI referrals reinforce this pattern and have typically been seen by the juvenile court at a relatively early age, accumulating 20 or more adjudications prior to enrollment in the program.

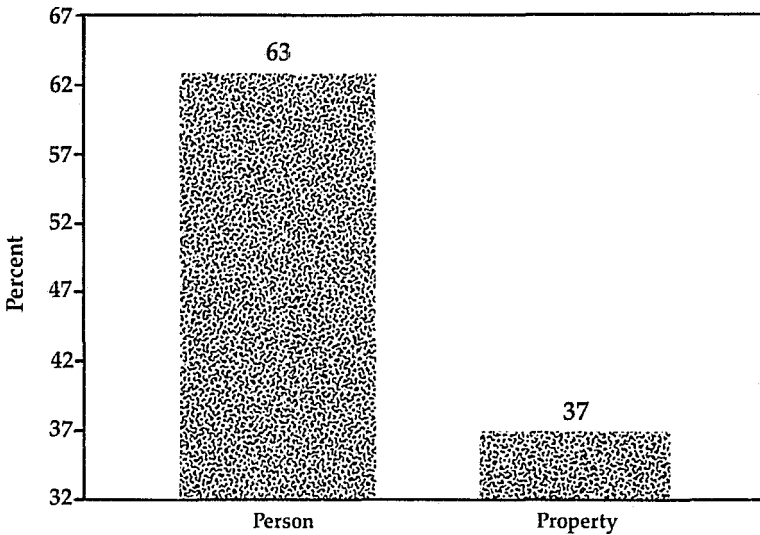


*Table B*  
**DEMOGRAPHICS**  
June — 1988



Sixty-seven percent of the FEI referrals came from the adult system. Under Florida law, a juvenile who has been found guilty as an adult may be returned to the juvenile system for treatment. Typically, these youths will have to complete the program or a prison sentence. The State of Florida provides four separate paths from which a youthful offender may be tried. As an adult if over 16 years of age, the state attorney's office may elect to file criminal charges. If less than 16, the state attorney may file a petition for waiver of the juvenile to adult court. As a result of the state attorney's right to direct file, Florida ranks first in the nation in prosecuting juveniles in adult court.

*Table C*  
**CRIMINAL OFFENSE HISTORY**  
**FEI Students**



## Results

FEI is a proven success in protecting the public safety. Of the three successful escapes, only one resulted in a serious new law violation and it did not involve injury to the victim. We believe that FEI's remote location has been a significant advantage allowing us to avoid the physical security measures and restraints which provide offenders with powerful negative messages about their self worth. These youth are potentially some of the societies most dangerous and volatile members. FEI provides a structured learning environment and an intensive education while protecting the public during the high crime period of 15-18 years of age.

We have shown that this can be done at a cost per day and per case below that of many large juvenile institutions. The high cost of building prison beds and maximum security units makes programs like FEI a bargain. The average national cost for building a prison bed is over \$50,000. An entire FEI type facility can be built for under \$300,000. Small intensive programs for violent offenders make sense. They are cost effective in both the short and long run for society.

*Table D*  
**RECIDIVISM COMPARISON**

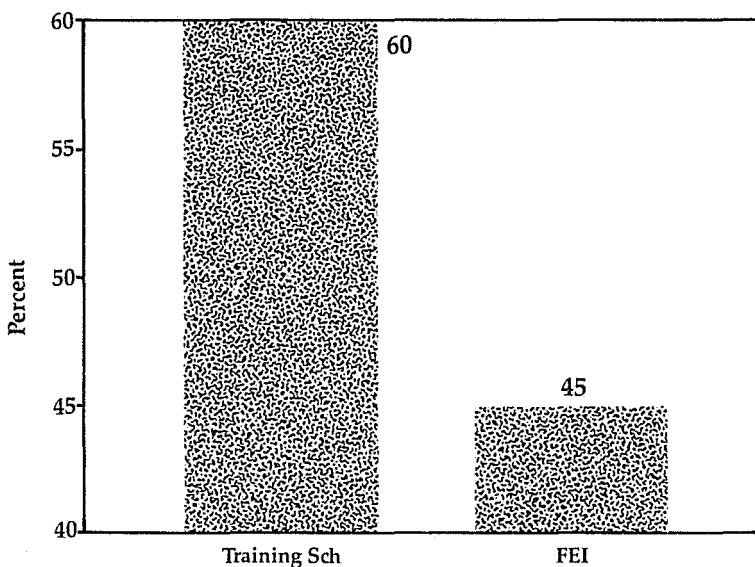


Chart D uses Florida Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services Outcome Evaluation Component statistics to compare FEI recidivism to that of the Florida training schools. Forty-five percent of the FEI participants recidivated as compared to 60 percent of the training school population. At the time of the study, 80 percent of the training school population had criminal histories less serious than youths enrolled at FEI.

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# Making It Happen!

Juvenile offenders are not a constituency. If progressive legislation and new opportunities are made available, it is always because a person or persons steps forward to champion their needs. The 300 member Board of Trustees of the 23 AMI programs are among those acting in the interest of troubled youth. In 1980, juvenile court Judge Bill Gladstone, a founding member of Dade Marine Institute in Miami, Florida, took a special interest in the youths in his court who posed the greatest risk to the public. These same youths represented those delinquents most resistant to intervention by the juvenile court. Like all complex projects, FEI received help and support from many individuals. However, without Judge Gladstone's interest and commitment, this program would never have become a reality.

The Florida Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services has provided the funding for this program since inception. Technical assistance, adequate funding and a willingness to try new and different approaches have characterized the state CYF's partnership with AMI in this endeavor.

## Summary

As Americans we live in a land of unrivaled opportunity. However, abundant opportunity is not equal opportunity. The underpinnings of our society are threatened by a growing and increasingly bitter underclass. Kids grow up without extended families and opportunities to learn the values our prosperity has been built on. Kids who are unable to find work, go home to watch *Dynasty* and *Dallas* on television and wonder who left them out of the picture.

Putting troubled kids back into the picture is a good investment. Helping our most troubled youth is not a lofty goal, it is an achievable objective. We're working hard to do our part at the "Last Chance Ranch."

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