

THE ALTO
REHABILITATION CENTER
AT THE
INDUSTRIAL INSTITUTE

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APR 2 1973

ADDITIONS

THE ALTO REHABILITATION CENTER AT THE GEORGIA
INDUSTRIAL INSTITUTE

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Abstract

This Rehabilitation Center has found a lower failure rate among its rehabilitants than has been reported from other criminal justice settings. A description of the Rehabilitation Center, its programs, and an evaluation of the likely reasons for the success of the rehabilitants are presented. These reasons include the high quality of services offered at the Center, the unusual cooperation among several state agencies at the Center, and the community of contact with the rehabilitant from the time he begins his rehabilitation program inside the prison until he actually is situated and working satisfactorily in a job on the outside.

The Alto Rehabilitation Center at the
Georgia Industrial Institute

In 1963 the State Division of Vocational Rehabilitation began a rehabilitation center for young adult public offenders at the Georgia Industrial Institute (GII) at Alto. Since the failure rate at this rehabilitation center has been lower than that reported in many similar settings, it seems worthwhile to describe the rehabilitation program and its setting in order to look at possible reasons for the lower failure rate.

Recidivism and Failure Rates

Recidivism as an index of the effectiveness of offender rehabilitation programs has been utilized for years. However, there have been many different definitions of recidivism (Martin and Barry, 1969). These differing definitions in part may account for the confusing but generally negative findings by Martinson (1974) on rehabilitation and recidivism in the criminal justice system.

Because of the confusion regarding the term "recidivism" and because of the large amount of missing information when attempts are made to follow up the public offender, we prefer to use the term "failure rate" to describe those former clients who return to jail. In a series of separate studies we have found lower rates of failure among

our offender rehabilitants from this Center than have been reported elsewhere. The recidivism rates reported at various times during the past fifteen years by the Georgia Department of Offender Rehabilitation for its system as a whole have varied from 53% to 67%. Five of our follow-up studies are described briefly below.

1. In a remarkable 1976 follow-up study of 80 inmates from a twelve county area in Northeast Georgia, geographically adjacent to the Alto Rehabilitation Center, only 16% had been imprisoned again during the five years after their release. Admittedly this was a special group of clients who lived sufficiently close to the Rehabilitation Center so that the counselors who worked with these clients inside the prison were able to continue to work with them on the outside.

2. In 1974 we followed up a sample of 224 clients who had completed our First Offender Rehabilitation Program during its first year of operation and had been discharged from GII. One year after discharge, 128 of these clients had been employed and 38 were still being worked with in the field by our staff. In only 25% of these cases had we been unsuccessful.

3. In a four year follow-up of 675 clients from Alto who were closed during Fiscal 1972, we found a 42% failure rate. While high, this rate is still lower than the recidivism rate cited by the Department

of Offender Rehabilitation, 60% at that time.

4. From a group of 689 inmates at GII in January 1973, 163 were followed up for one year after their release and the completion of their rehabilitation programs. Sixty-three percent of these were still employed at the time of follow-up (Barry, Becker, and Sonenshine, 1974).

5. In 1967, 153 inmates were provided an early release by Georgia's Governor Maddox. About half of these had been VR clients. Two years later less than 20% of this VR client group had been in trouble with the law, whereas about 50% of the rest of this group had had such difficulties.

Overall these follow-up and recidivism data suggest the usefulness of the rehabilitation programs at Alto. Alto prison inmates who receive VR services are less likely to return to prison than those who do not receive these services.

A Description of the Center

The Rehabilitation Center at Alto was begun in 1963 as a cooperative activity among several state agencies. A new building was built adjoining the academic school which was already on the prison grounds. This Rehabilitation Center building included a dining area, an evaluation area, a dormitory for 132 inmates, and a variety of offices and meeting rooms for the Rehabilitation Center staff. In 1968 a trade school was added to this rehabilitation complex and most recently a new dormitory for 80 inmates has been added.

While inside the prison fence, this rehabilitation complex is separate from the rest of the prison. The rehabilitation residence affords somewhat greater privacy (inmates share a large eight bed room with adjoining washing and toilet facilities) and in general has a more hopeful atmosphere than is afforded in the large dormitories in the main buildings of the prison. While the schools and the Rehabilitation Center serve all inmates at GII, the most promising and eligible inmates are moved to the Rehabilitation Center dormitory so that they may be more readily available to participate in their various rehabilitation activities. The census at GII has varied from 800 to 1500 inmates. The average census hovers around 1200.

Several state agencies cooperate in the work of this Rehabilitation Center complex. The Department of Offender Rehabilitation (DOR) is the host agency, responsible for feeding, clothing, medical and dental care, and providing the security for all inmates. They also operate a large treatment program for inmates not eligible for Vocational Rehabilitation Services. DOR is also responsible for maintenance of the complex, although much of it was built with especially designated monies coming through the State Division of Vocational Rehabilitation.

The State Department of Education staffs and operates the academic school and the trade school, which includes training opportunities

in twelve different trades: small engine repair, masonry, auto body and fender repair, auto mechanics, auto paint shop, barbering, electrical repair, food service, plumbing, upholstering, welding, woodworking, and air conditioning and heating. The combined staff of these schools number 54.

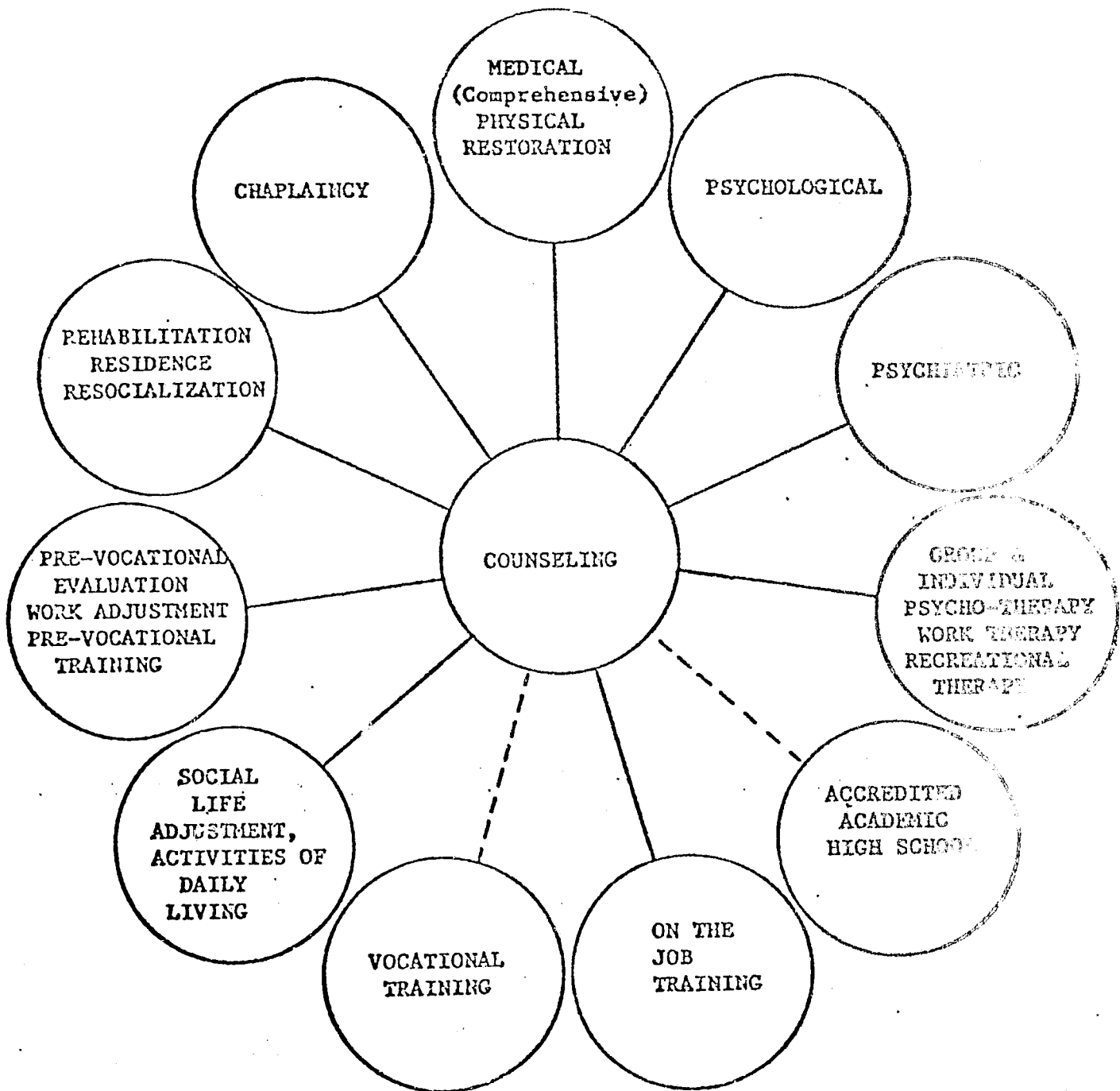
The Department of Labor provides counselors, some vocational evaluation, and up-to-date information about the current statewide job market. The Northeast Georgia Regional Library provides a wide variety of materials and equipment, including games, recreational materials, books, and other educational materials. All of these rehabilitation activities are coordinated by, and supplemented with, services by state Division of Vocational Rehabilitation personnel. The Rehabilitation Center complex and its programs, then, are the product of sincere cooperation among several state agencies whose staffs are housed and work together toward the rehabilitation of the inmate.

The Rehabilitation Services

The wheel diagram in Figure I portrays the variety of available services, any combination of which can be provided as needed in rehabilitation. The rehabilitation services include physical restoration, medical evaluation, pre-vocational evaluation, work adjustment training, pre-vocational training, counseling services, chaplaincy services, recreation, the rehabilitation residence, Pre-release Program, First Offender Program, etc.

SERVICES RENDERED BY THE COMPREHENSIVE REHABILITATION CENTER
GEORGIA DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES
DIVISION OF VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION
GEORGIA INDUSTRIAL INSTITUTE
ALTO, GEORGIA

Figure 1



Each inmate is evaluated upon entering GII and his rehabilitation potential is determined by a team of specialists. At that time it is determined whether academic or vocational training might be helpful for this client. Unless some long term training program is called for, the client does not begin his rehabilitation program until several months before he becomes eligible for release. At that time a comprehensive rehabilitation plan is developed and the appropriate services are agreed upon by the client and his rehabilitation counselor. The specific kinds and combination of services for any particular client are selected and modified to fit the specific needs of that client.

All inmates participate in individual and group testing for educational, vocational, and psychodiagnostic purposes. Psychological tests and evaluation data are used at several points in the rehabilitation process. The evaluation record of the inmate is a continuing one. He receives some testing and evaluation when he is admitted to the institution. Almost immediately after admission, he participates in a more thorough survey-kind of testing of his reading and arithmetic skills, personality characteristics, self-concept, and certain biographical information. For those clients who are illiterate, or nearly so, the data are collected in ways which minimize this handicap.

The same assessment data are used by vocational counselors as a basis for prescribing further evaluations where more specific and vocationally oriented information is needed. A significant part of these data relate to evaluation for work through the use of work samples and standardized approaches such as the Singer and the TOWER programs.

Group and individual counseling are available to all inmates. Diagnostic evaluations by fully qualified psychological and psychiatric consultants are used to screen clients into the kinds of counseling experiences which they appear to need. Psychiatric consultation is also used to help the counselors understand and deal with some of the particularly difficult problems encountered in group and individual counseling. Both the counseling and the supervision are continuous. By-and-large the groups are open-ended. The same counselor often sees a client both in group and in individual counseling. Some of the groups are homogeneous by type of inmate or by the problem which clients present. Other groups may be quite heterogeneous.

A particularly unique group is one devoted to religious counseling. Several of the inmates actively seek Bible study in which they try to relate some of their own experiences to the Bible. In addition, the chaplains conduct a variety of worship services, pastoral counseling, and facilitate family contacts.

The rehabilitation residence has been mentioned in the past. It is being expanded from the present 132 bed facility to almost double in size. Clients who are being worked with (on a daily basis) are more likely to be housed in the residence whose safety might be threatened because of their emotional problems may also be housed in the residence. In addition, some inmates are housed in the rehabilitation residence in an effort to separate them from the rest of the institution. The living space is more comfortable and there is greater privacy in the rehabilitation residence than in the large dormitories in the main prison. There is a different attitude and a more hopeful spirit among the residents at the Rehabilitation Center. The whole prison, of course, is fully indoctrinated.

The First Offender Program provides intensive around the clock group experiences for young men who are considered first offenders. Since most inmates have had a series of difficulties with the courts prior to their being incarcerated, the meaning of the term "first offender" is not precise. However, in general these young inmates are less experienced and certainly have not been incarcerated for long periods of time prior to their present imprisonment. Considerable staff effort has gone into this First Offender Program, attempting to build group relationships and staff-inmate relationships within this

group. While our success with this group has been high, we recognize that this group is less likely to become recidivists than the more experienced offenders. The baseline for evaluating success or failure of this group differs from that of the more typical offender.

A recreation program operated by DOR is available not only during the usual staff working hours (from 8:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M.), but is also on weekends, holidays, evenings, etc. Both "intramural" within prison athletic competition is encouraged, and also a "varsity" team plays teams from other prisons.

Several educational release programs are operative. One involves day work in the nearby communities and returning to a barracks which is attached but separate from the prison at night. Other educational release programs involve transfer to other settings, such as a relatively large Hospital and Rehabilitation Center at Warm Springs, Georgia. Here the inmates work and learn under supervision during the day, but return to separate supervised barracks at night. Counseling, around the clock supervision, and on-the-job training are integral parts of this work release program. Participation in such programs is voluntary and is integrated into the total rehabilitation plan where appropriate.

A new system has been instituted recently by the Department of

Corrections which involves an inmate's earning several benefits and privileges, including consideration for an early release through an elaborate point system. The system is based upon behavior theory and visible rewards. Thus an inmate by cooperating and participating enthusiastically in various educational and work programs and staying out of difficulty can earn extra rewards within the prison and also can earn consideration for early release (Good Time). This system is administered in part by the rehabilitation counselors and provides another vehicle of communication and contact between the client and his counselor. While it is quite new, the overall system has been integrated completely into the on-going rehabilitation programs and appears to be helpful in enhancing the goals of the program.

Once released from the institution the client is contacted by one of the state vocational rehabilitation specialists in the field. Many of these counselors specialize in serving only public offender clients. Through such efforts the continuity of contact is maintained between the client and the vocational rehabilitation system. The client's vocational rehabilitation records follow him out into the field. Sometimes the client's vocational plan may be adjusted to meet new employment opportunities in the community where the client decides to live. The important thing is the continuity of contact between the client on

the one hand and the vocational rehabilitation services both within and outside of the prison after release.

The Reasons for Success

There are several reasons for the success of this program. The continuity of contact with the client mentioned above is one of these reasons. Clients are not "lost" when they leave the institution, even when they are slow in initiating contact with the state services available to them. Counselors in the field are encouraged to search out recent client-discharges to offer whatever rehabilitation services are needed. This signals to the former inmate that we are still interested in him. Providing an opportunity for these former inmates to earn a living in an honest way is probably a major factor in the low failure rate of this system.

Related to this is the concerted strong effort by the state rehabilitation services which is focused on this group of clients, the public offenders. For example, the attitudes of the counselor who is willing to specialize in rehabilitating the public offender are generally more favorable to this group than are those of the man-in-the-street. However, counselors who less frequently come in contact with this particular disabled group sometimes have negative attitudes toward them (Gay, 1967). It should be noted that the statewide success of this program

has been in direct proportion to the numbers of staff who have been encouraged to work with these clients. While some of our general counseling staff (those who do not specialize in working with any one specific kind of disabled client) have been very successful in rehabilitating public offenders, some have not been successful. It seems likely that their negative attitudes toward this group of clients influences their failure rates.

Another major reason for the relatively low failure rate in this program is the high quality and variety of comprehensive services available to the client both inside of, and beyond the prison walls. Because of the large number of consultants available (physicians, psychiatrists, highly specialized teachers, psychologists, etc.) and because the specific services received by each client are carefully fitted to his specific needs, the overall rehabilitation experience of these clients is richer than that received by public offender clients in many other correctional settings. The Rehabilitation Center at Alto was the first one inside of a prison which was accredited by the Commission for the Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities which favorably evaluated the quality of services offered. In addition, 13 of our staff are Certified Rehabilitation Counselors, morale is high, and the turn over among all staff has been low.

Another major reason for the low failure rate is the sincere cooperation among the several state agencies involved which was described above. While it is not unusual to have two cooperating agencies, each providing their own services to clients in some public settings, this is not as typical in correctional settings. The degree of cooperation which has been achieved at GII among a relatively large number of agencies is certainly unusual. This cooperation among several agencies, each contributing what it is best able to provide, is one of the most unique aspects of this setting.

Does the Low Failure Rate Clearly Result
from the Rehabilitation Services?

In any service setting it is unethical to withhold needed services. Without some relatively careful control group studies, it is very difficult to show clearly and unequivocally that the low failure rate resulted from the rehabilitation services which are provided. Upon admission to the institution (GII), all inmates are evaluated and offered appropriate rehabilitation services. When any services are in short supply, those clients who are considered to have the greatest rehabilitation potential are more likely to receive the needed services than those with less potential. It may be that the low failure rates among those who have been offered and accepted rehabilitation services is a

reflection of the ability of the rehabilitation staff to identify the most promising prospects for rehabilitation, i.e., those least likely to get into trouble after discharge. In a sample of 163 clients, our counselors were able to predict eventual employment of their clients with a significant degree of success (75% accuracy) (Barry, Becker, and Sonenshine, 1974).

For example, only a small percent of the prison population can live in the rehabilitation residence and avoid the depressing and sometimes threatening conditions in the large prison dormitories. There are always more inmates who are interested in trade school training than there are training opportunities. Inmates are selected for these and other rehabilitation opportunities by their counselors in accordance with the counselor's expectation that the client can benefit from the experience. Those clients with the poorest prognosis for rehabilitation are less likely to be selected.

There have been no control group studies at GII, no attempt to select two groups of clients who are similar in rehabilitation potential to test the effects of the rehabilitation experiences by withholding them from one of the matched groups. This kind of research may be a needed next step but will require some modifications in staff and inmate attitudes since it may be both illegal and unethical to withhold rehabilitation services from those who might reasonably be expected to profit

from them. What we now can say about our program is that the selection of the most promising inmates for the best rehabilitation experiences which we can provide seems to result in a lower rate of failure (return to prison) than is typical for the prison population at large in the State of Georgia and in many parts of the country.

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Footnotes

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