EVALUATION OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT FOR ADOLESCENTS

Submitted to:

Henry Street Settlement
Supported Employment for Adolescents Program
301 Henry Street
New York, New York

Submitted by:

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the findings and recommendations of Alfred J. DiBernardo Management Consultants evaluation of the Henry Street Settlement Supported Employment for Adolescents Program. The evaluation effort commenced on October 15, 1976, whereas the first clients had entered SEA as early as May, 1975. However, by reconstructing client data records, DMC was able to address all 103 SEA clients who had entered the program between its first operational month and August, 1977.

PRINCIPLE ISSUES ADDRESSED

The principle issues addressed in the evaluation effort were:

- Definition of SEA Target Population
- Extent of SEA's Basic Effectiveness (defined as SEA'a ability to engage clients, maintain client program participation and obtain a "positive" client termination).
- Effectiveness of SEA's Resources and Specific Methods of Service
- SEA's Impact on:
  - Anti-Social Behavior (recidivism)
  - Pre-Vocational and Personal Social Development
  - School Engagement and Participation
- SEA's Costs vs. Costs of Institutional Care

FINDINGS

Target Population

Case study and statistical data indicated that SEA's clients

constituted a highly disadvantaged population. This group was, however, a heterogeneous one comprised of Blacks, Hispanics, Whites and other races, both male and female. An even distribution of client age at intake within the program's eligibility criteria (14 through 16 years) contributed to client diversity. Similarly, clients evidenced an array of dysfunction in critical areas of arrest histories (37% with 0 or 1 prior arrests; 38% with 2 or 3; 25% with 4 and up to 14 prior arrests); truancy/school achievement; prior placement out of home, and so on.

SEA Basic Effectiveness

As of August, 1977, 63 of the 103 SEA clients had terminated from the program. Of this group, 4 clients had "graduated" with an expectation that an additional 9 clients would graduate in the near future. Graduation from SEA implied that the program had been effective in terms of engaging and maintaining client participation to obtain requisite improvement in functioning (anti-social, pre-vocational and related personal/social behaviors). Short of graduation, an additional 13 clients were terminated for "positive" reasons such as the client's desire to find a full-time job. Forty of the terminations were not positive, but rather resulted from failure of clients to attend the program and similar problems.

Underlying these termination outcomes were various lengths of client stay and monthly attendance patterns. With respect of length of stay, 30% of SEA's clients terminated rapidly

(within 3 months), and 56% within one year. Contrarywise, 29% of SEA's clients were in the program over 22 months. Attendance varied widely, but certain patterns were discernable. Generally, a client's first month in SEA was well attended (average of 75%). Attendance dropped, however, on the average of 30% over the next few months, but then rose steadily to a level slightly above the first month's performance. Of course, clients who terminated for reasons of failure to participate evidenced drops in attendance in the month(s) prior to termination.

In summary, these various measures indicate that the program was basically effective for one-third of the population and engaged and maintained participation of a second-third for about one year. However, the program was not able to engage a final third of its clients.

This variation in program effectiveness may be explained in part by characteristics of the target population prior to SEA intake. Specifically, there appears to be a strong negative correlation between SEA's ability to maintain client participation and extent of client prior court history. Data which compares client termination rates to the number of clients SEA attempted to serve over the months also indicates a (less clear) trend between caseload size and termination rates.

Effectiveness of SEA Resources and Service Methods

The service resources utilized by SEA included:

- supported work projects
- group and individual counseling

- educational counseling and tutoring
- referral and advocacy
- family liaison

The method by which these resources were drawn upon was basically a team approach, with the members of the team consisting of the crew member's "project leader", the program's counselor, and the SEA educational liaison. The activities which defined the team approach consisted of ongoing observation of the youth by team members and a weekly case conference and periodic (i.e., monthly) assessments.

An extensive analysis of SEA's resources and methods was not attempted in this evaluation. However, anecdotal data supported a limited set of observations.

Clients reported that they found certain SEA work projects (e.g., park and sanitation work) to be boring or disagreeable, and conversely expressed interest in projects involving carpentry, electronics and similar efforts. A number of clients expressed the view that the SEA stipend, while initially attractive, was not ultimately viewed as sufficient and should be increased.

Clients described SEA's efforts very favorably, often crediting counselors for supporting changes in behavior or attitudes. Clients were particularly apt to favor counselors (and staff generally) perceived to have had "street backgrounds" similar to their own.

SEA's efforts in educational counseling and tutoring were perceived to be effective by educational staff and many clients. However, the level of resources available was viewed as insufficient.

The most frequent referral/advocacy role of SEA was support of clients in the family court system. Clients reported that such support was a contributing motive to maintaining program participation.

Finally, family liaison activities, though limited, were viewed as effective by those clients whose family related problems could be addressed by changes in their own behavior. However, there were numerous examples given by staff and clients of more serious family problems which appeared to require attention by a comprehensive family service, rather than via SEA's (limited) family liaison activities.

Impact Recidivism

Based upon a variety of evaluation measures, it was ascertained that SEA generally acted to reduce client anti-social behavior and arrests for clients while in the program. However, the extent of SEA's impact was found to relate to the degree of client court involvement prior to SEA intake. Not surprisingly, the extent of reduction in arrests which SEA obtained was less for the serious (prior) offender than for the clients with few prior arrests. There were, however, a handful of exceptions to this trend.

An interesting finding was that SEA's impact on recidivism appeared (particularly for "high risk" groups) to be transitory in two ways. First, while the arrest rate for clients dropped dramatically in the early months of program participation, it rose again after long program stays. Secondly, arrest rates were found to rise for clients after they terminated from SEA.

The possibility of changes in the relative severity of offenses for which clients were arrested (prior to and during SEA involvement) was also examined, but no clear pattern was discernable.

While these findings were derived from small samples, they parallel those reported under Program Effectiveness. Namely, SEA appears to work well for certain clients, but to be of much less value to others.

Pre-Vocational Skills

Attendance data for SEA clients indicates that the program was able to positively impact work attendance for most clients. SEA's policy also called for impact on a variety of behaviors other than attendance (e.g., preparation for work, following instructions, etc.). An attempt to utilize a behavior observation record for evaluation in these areas did not succeed. However, anecdotal (interview) data indicates that clients credited SEA for increased ability in general socialization skills related to work. Accordingly, such negative behaviors as verbal abuse, backtalk and inappropriate responses to supervision were reported to have been ameliorated, at least in sample cases.

School

SEA's policy vis-a-vis education was to increase client enrollment and/or school attendance. Unfortunately, the educational deficits of many of SEA's clients were staggering including functional illiteracy and long truancy histories. Concommitantly,

data by which to assess SEA's impact in education was limited. Basically, it was found that SEA was able to pursue the desired impact in certain cases through rekindling interest in reading and math through tutoring, advocating for client placement in special or appropriate classroom settings, preparation of clients for GED's (equivalency diploma exams), etc.

However, SEA's impact vis-a-vis educational status was certainly not generally sufficient to overcome the large educational deficits of the population. It should be noted that the primary responsibility for addressing clients educational needs rests with the educational system and not SEA. The limited supportive activities in which SEA was engaged are dependent for effectiveness upon a linkage with responsive school systems. But, for may SEA clients, the appropriate educational resources simply could not be identified within the current system.

Costs

The daily cost for SEA clients was determined to be about $24.00. This cost is less than half of the costs of institutional care for juvenile offenders.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Typically, program evaluation recommendations take the form of specific suggestions for changes in program design or level of effort.

Unfortunately, the amount and quality of data available for the SEA evaluation does not permit DMC to make recommendations

of a specific nature. Rather, the intent herein is to review the most interesting trends in the evaluation findings and to offer alternative explanations for these trends. While these discussions may suggest methods for improving the SEA strategy, an underlying need exists for continuing and extensive research.

With these caveats in mind, DMC "recommendations" will be presented under the headings of recidivism, work, and education.

Recidivism

The findings indicated that SEA's greatest impact was upon clients who entered SEA with modest prior arrest histories (less than 4 offenses). In part, this impact appeared to be due to a parallel phenomena of SEA effectiveness. Specifically, SEA's ability to engage and/or maintain clients through a "positive" termination was greater for clients with modest arrest histories.

Hence, it appears as if SEA's effectiveness and impact could be improved by focusing the program on clients who have not yet become "hard core" offenders.

With respect to the more serious offender groups, the data can only support a cautious statement that programs such as SEA should not hold high expectations for dramatic reduction in recidivism rates. The sustained participation of such groups for extended periods is difficult to maintain. While there were individual SEA clients with extensive prior arrest histories for whom dramatic reductions in arrest rates and long program stays were achieved, further research would be required to

determine whether or not sub-groups of such high risk clients (which are likely to benefit from SEA) could be identified or whether modifications to the SEA strategy would increase program impact and effectiveness for such clients.

The recidivism findings were somewhat complicated, however, by the data which showed an idiosyncratic "jump" in arrests for clients in SEA over 22 months, and a general trend to increased recidivism once clients left SEA. Hence, in aggregate SEA's impact appeared to be short lived. However, it must be remembered that such aggregate data masks the fact that individual clients did remain arrest free past SEA termination. Given the small number of SEA graduates (N=4), analysis to determine whether there was a relationship between client status at termination and post program arrest rates could not be meaningfully attempted.

It should be further noted that the findings do not indicate how or why SEA reduces recidivism, irrespective of different degrees of success with different client groups. For example, it might be that SEA reduces recidivism simply by "occupying" youth who would otherwise devote their time to street life. This possibility might be viewed as supported by the drop in arrests found to occur as soon as clients entered SEA and the concommitant rise in arrests following termination. On the other hand, SEA's impact may be based upon more complex dynamics such as effects on client motivation, affect, goals and similar constructs. These effects are suggested by client interview responses such as "SEA taught me I don't have to be tough and

looking for trouble"; "I was stupid to take the risk of being caught"; "street life gets you nowhere"; etc.

In the absence of an explanation of how SEA effects reduced recidivism, it is difficult to fashion further recommendations for the program. If SEA's impact is due primarily to occupying youth, then obtaining long length of client stay would be critical. Concommitantly, strategies for increasing the attractiveness of SEA to clients should be explored (e.g., higher pay, more "interesting projects"). This might imply less emphasis on developing pre-vocational skills and behavioral change unless such goals were clearly perceived to be important by clients.

On the other hand, to the extent that changes in motivation, affect or similar phenomena underlie SEA's impact, the current focus on personal/social adjustment and pre-vocational skill is highly appropriate. It might be found (through further research) that clients who in fact acquire these attributes (i.e., graduate) make long lasting gains against recidivism.

Work

The findings vis-a-vis work raise two interesting issues--the relationship of the SEA work strategy to program effectiveness and the relationship of pre-vocational skill acquisition to client status after termination.

The relationship between program effectiveness and work was suggested by client comments on the content of SEA work projects and the SEA stipend (i.e., the content became perceived

as "boring" and the stipend as insufficient). These comments suggest that SEA might increase the length of client participation by developing projects viewed by crew members as interesting and/or by increasing the stipend.

A related issue is the relationship of pre-vocational skill acquisition to the SEA client's future. While SEA may succeed in developing such skills, it does not command the availability of training or entry level job slots in the community. Accordingly, it is highly possible for a SEA client to obtain "graduation readiness", but for there to be a lack of work opportunities to which the client could in fact graduate. In such situations, clients could be viewed as "stymied" in SEA, which may explain derrogatory comments on SEA work projects and stipend made by long stay clients and program dropouts.

In short, SEA's efforts with respect to work may be nullified in the absence of a system of youth supports to which former clients can transition smoothly. Moreover, should clients graduate from SEA or terminate in the hope of securing training or employment and not locate these resources, SEA's impact on recidivism may be lost. This would clearly be the case if SEA's effect on recidivism is via "occupying youth", since the unemployed SEA terminee would be at risk of return to street life. Similarly, should SEA's impact obtain through effect on client motivation, affect and similar phenomena, these benefits could be lost in the face of prolonged unmet client expectations for training or employment.

Education

A parallel problem to the lack of a responsive vocational system to which SEA could relate was found with respect to education. Specifically, although SEA obtaining incremental gains in client interest and engagement in education, an appropriate "educational slot" could not be found for many clients.

Necessary recommendations for basic changes to the educational system per se are clearly beyond the scope of this evaluation study. What can be recommended is that planners of projects such as SEA anticipate the demands which will be placed on staff time to attempt to broker the educational (system) for clients. Similarly, further research is required to determine the relationship between client's educational status and needs, and the addressing of these needs vs. program success in reducing recidivism. It should be recognized that many clients terminate from SEA with educational in addition or opposed to vocational objectives. Accordingly, gains against recidivism may be lost if terminated clients find educational resources unavailable.

CONCLUSIONS

Clearly, the SEA strategy evidences impact on reducing recidivism even if the most demonstrable change is for clients with modest arrest histories and the recidivism impact is limited to the period of program participation. As noted, however, there were positive exceptions to these trends in the form of 'high risk" clients with reduced recidivism and gains against recidivism

which persisted post termination. Further research is required to explain these exceptions and fashion supportive SEA strategies.

The trends which were discovered, however, indicate that programs such as SEA cannot be viewed as a total response to the problem of delinquency. Rather, a system of youth supports (particularly vocational and educational) appear to be required into which SEA efforts could be integrated.

Accordingly, it appears that demonstration and research of an integrated youth service model for juvenile offenders hold the promise of addressing many of the outstanding issues from the current evaluation, as well as providing for a comprehensive analysis of the relationship of vocational and educational services to reduced recidivism.

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