

**EVALUATION OF OHIO'S CCA FUNDED PROGRAMS<sup>1</sup>**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

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In 1979, Ohio became the sixth state to pass a community corrections act (Harris, 1996). This act was designed to divert felony offenders from the prison system. The original legislation created Community-Based Correctional Facilities (CBCFs) and prison subsidy programs, and in 1990, the act was amended to allow for jail diversion programs as well. Ohio has commissioned several studies of the Community Corrections Act (CCA) programs beginning in 1989 (Austin), again in 1996 (Latessa, Travis, and Holsinger), and more recently in 2002 (Lowenkamp and Latessa) with a comprehensive study of halfway houses and CBCFs. In early 2002, the Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (ODRC), at the request of Governor Bob Taft, commissioned a comprehensive study of halfway houses (HWHs) and CBCFs to determine the effectiveness of these state-funded alternatives to prison. This study provided much direction in the development of sound programming in Ohio. The success of the HWH and CBCF research, coupled with a collaborative partnership with community-based program stakeholders to develop a blueprint for change, suggested that similar opportunities could be found through a study of Community Corrections Act Programs.

Ohio Community Corrections Act (CCA) jail and prison diversion programs are funded by DRC through the Bureau of Community Sanctions. This program is a partnership between the State of Ohio and the Local Community Corrections Planning Boards. During Fiscal Year 2002, over 160 CCA subsidy programs in seventy-nine Ohio counties received funding appropriations of \$22,377,966 to divert more than 9,000 offenders from prison and more than 20,000 offenders from local jails.

Given these expenditures and the size of the CCA program, DRC contracted with The University of Cincinnati, Division of Criminal Justice to evaluate these programs. Specifically, the evaluation focused on the following questions:

- Overall, how effective are CCA programs compared with alternative sanctions for similar offenders?
- What characteristics of the CCA programs are associated with higher rates of post-program success?

Sound supervision practices were identified in a number of CCA programs, which were found to significantly impact recidivism. This research also identifies some programs needing improvement so that recidivism objectives can more effectively be achieved. Through a collaborative partnership between CCA programs and the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction, Ohio is now better equipped to move forward with duplicating and expanding successful programs and to re-design or enhance other programs so that offender, community and budgetary needs are best addressed.

This research employed a quasi-experimental design using CCA terminations from FY99. The comparison groups used were matched with CCA participants on sex, county of supervision, and risk, and included parolees/PRC releases (prison diversion), jail inmates (jail diversion) released back into the community, and regular supervision probation offenders where such data were available. A total of 14,543 unique offenders were included in the matched-samples research. Outcome measures include any new arrest for jail diversion cases and any new incarceration in

prison (for a technical violation or new criminal behavior) for prison diversion cases. The follow up time period was two years.

The results of the analyses indicated that the CCA programs, when compared to jail and prison releases, demonstrated a small, non-significant, reduction in recidivism. When compared to regular probation supervision, the programs were associated with a moderate and significant increase in recidivism rates. This finding is very important and indicates that the State and CCA programs need to ensure the programs are admitting offenders that would not have otherwise been eligible for regular probation supervision and are true prison diversions. There were no differences in the effectiveness of the CCA programs across program type (e.g. day reporting versus work release) or diversion type (prison versus jail).

Analyses of program characteristics indicated that there are some trends in the data that help to identify those programs that are more likely effective in reducing recidivism. A total of 31 factors were determined to relate to program effectiveness. A total of nine programs (n = 9) had 0 to 19% of the identified factors and were associated with a 15-percentage point increase in recidivism rates. Programs (n = 37) that scored between 20-39% on the measure of program quality were associated with a 2-percentage point reduction in recidivism, while those programs (n = 17) that scored 40-59% were associated with a 12-percentage point reduction in recidivism. Finally, three programs (n = 3) those programs that scored 60% or higher on the measure of program quality were associated with an average reduction in recidivism of 16 percentage points.

When considering the specific information provided in this report, some strong recommendations can be made for policy and procedure changes:

- The CCA programs should focus on higher-risk cases. This conclusion comes from the analyses that indicated programs were more effective when 75% or more of the sample was higher-risk.
- The CCA programs should be used for true prison and jail diversions. While a marginal treatment effect was observed when CCA cases were compared to parolees/jail releases, iatrogenic effects were noted when compared with offenders that were similar in risk but supervised under regular probation supervision. To ensure that proper offenders are targeted for inclusion into these programs, the State may need to develop guidelines based on the sentencing practices of each jurisdiction. These guidelines should also take into account the risk level of the offender.
- The State should facilitate and support the development of sound correctional interventions through funding policies, training, and other activities. Perhaps the ODRC can provide workshops that assist agencies in shifting from existing practices and policies to new policies and procedures based on this research.
- The programs should ensure that more services are being provided to the higher-risk cases and that the higher-risk cases stay in the program for a longer period of time.

- The programs and the State should work to develop programs that are three to nine months long with exceptions for sex offenders. In this research, programs that fall outside this range were found to be ineffective.
- The programs should develop standardized completion criteria to determine when an offender successfully completes the program. Such a process will likely lead to successful termination rates in the range that was associated with the more effective programs.
- If a program provides groups or refers offenders out for services, offenders should be separated by risk-level. Although many correctional programs do not adhere to this policy, following this practice recognized as having a strong impact on program effectiveness. This might be difficult to do in non-residential settings, but programs should strive to meet this criterion as mixing offenders of different risk levels can have detrimental effects on program effectiveness.
- Programs that are more effective employ program directors with appropriate qualifications. These qualifications would include experience working in a treatment setting with offenders and having a bachelor's degree or higher in a helping profession.
- Program directors should make efforts to hire staff based on their values and skills and should ensure that they have practical and meaningful experience and meaningful training opportunities.
- A quality assurance process for the programs and external service-providers to which offenders are referred should be in place.
- The programs should adopt a sound treatment model such as cognitive-behavioral or behavioral based programming. At the very least, this model should shape staff's understanding of behavior and behavioral change.
- Finally, the State should audit how closely the programs meet the criteria of effectiveness and provide feedback and direction for program change.

This research has demonstrated that CCA programs have the ability to impact the recidivism rates of offenders under community supervision especially when compared to offenders of similar risk levels that have been sentenced to prison. However, to realize this impact, the programs must adhere to specific principles and engage in certain practices. Therefore, the authors of this report recommend that the ODRC develop policy and procedure to guide the placement of offenders into the CCA programs. This policy should focus on the identification of

true jail/prison diversions and higher-risk offenders. The authors also suggest that the ODRC develop a protocol for the assessment of the CCA programs for adherence to the policies and procedures recommended in this research.

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<sup>1</sup> One major difference between the CBCF/HWH and the CCA study should be noted: In the CBCF/HWH study only successful terminations were used whereas in the CCA study both successful and unsuccessful terminations were included.