

**EVALUATION OF OHIO'S RECLAIM FUNDED PROGRAMS, COMMUNITY
CORRECTIONS FACILITIES, AND DYS FACILITIES**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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During 1993 the State of Ohio passed a House Bill that created the Reasoned and Equitable Community and Local Alternatives to the Incarceration of Minors (RECLAIM) program. This program was designed to keep youth in the local community rather than committing the youth to costly and overcrowded facilities operated by the Ohio Department of Youth Services (DYS). This goal, of reducing commitments and increasing the availability of programming, was to be achieved by the development of local programs that dealt with the needs of at-risk youth and juvenile offenders.

In 1994 the DYS implemented the RECLAIM program in 9 pilot counties around the state. The evaluation of the pilot county programs, indicated a 43% decrease in commitment rates for the participating counties. After the pilot phase, the DYS implemented RECLAIM in the remaining 79 counties within the state. A subsequent evaluation of the RECLAIM program indicated that the RECLAIM funded programs served a wide variety of youth, however, predominantly youth adjudicated for lesser offenses were placed in the RECLAIM programs. The evaluation also indicated that the use of RECLAIM funded programs might have been instrumental in maintaining, and decreasing, the number of commitments to DYS facilities from the county courts.

In 2004 the Ohio DYS contracted with the University of Cincinnati, Division of Criminal Justice to evaluate the RECLAIM funded programs, including an evaluation of recidivism rates of the youth served by the RECLAIM funded programs. The current evaluation was designed to answer the following questions:

1. What is the recidivism rate of youth served by the RECLAIM funded programs?
2. What is the recidivism rate of youth served by CCFs?
3. What is the recidivism rate of youth sent to a DYS facility?

4. Are there differences in recidivism rates between the differing types of RECLAIM funded programs?
5. Do the programs and facilities have differing recidivism rates by youth risk-level?
6. Are there characteristics of programs that are related to the recidivism rates of youth?

The current study used data on 14,496 youth terminated from a RECLAIM program (10,866), a Community Corrections Facility [(CCF), 348], released from a DYS facility [(to DYS aftercare), 2,110], or discharged from DYS [(aftercare terminations), 1,172] during fiscal year 2002. There were a total of 349 RECLAIM programs and 10 CCFs included in this study. In order to compare youth across the differing RECLAIM programs and dispositional placements (RECLAIM, CCF, DYS) a risk score was developed based on onset of delinquency, severity of past and current offense, and frequency of delinquent behavior (for details see page 14 of full report).

Data on youth were collected from databases maintained by DYS and through reviews of youth files maintained by the courts. Information collected from these files included age, race, criminal history, current offense data, and recidivism. Recidivism data were gathered using two sets of databases. The first measure captured new criminal behavior and included any new felony adjudications as a juvenile or entry into the CCISWEB database as an adult.¹ The second recidivism measure developed captured commitments to a DYS facility or an DRC facility. A final measure was developed which captured any contact with the juvenile or criminal justice systems.

Data were also collected on the programs serving youth. To collect this data a survey was completed by program staff that asked a number of questions about the programs operations

¹ The CCISWEB database was developed by the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction to track offenders placed under community supervision.

and content. This information was used to determine if there were any factors that related to a program's recidivism rate. The following findings can be summarized from this study:

- The analyses of the data indicated that approximately 80% of the RECLAIM and CCF terminations were white and approximately 50% of the DYS discharges and releases were white. The sample was 75% male with higher percentages for the residential/institutionalized populations. The average age of youth served by the RECLAIM programs was 16 years old. The average age of the CCF and DYS releases was 17 years old and the average age of DYS discharges was 19.
- Based on the measure developed for this research, predominantly lower-risk youth were served by the RECLAIM programs (75% were low or moderate risk), 76% of the CCF youth were higher risk (high or very high), and approximately 50% of the DYS releases and discharges were higher risk youth.
- The analysis of recidivism data using the adjudication measure indicates an important and expected trend. Lower risk offenders performed worse when placed in residential programs and/or DYS when compared to lower risk offenders placed in RECLAIM programs. The analyses for high-risk youth indicated that none of the placement types substantially outperformed the others when measuring success with the adjudication measure. However, when reviewing the success rates using the measure based on commitments it becomes apparent that high-risk youth sent to a CCF or DYS facility have lower success rates. Conversely, the very-high risk offenders perform better when placed in a CCF or DYS facility.
- Recidivism data and program characteristics data for 72 programs were matched. Programs were given a score that ranged from 0 to 24 and was related to the quality of the program. Analyses of the program characteristics data indicated that there was a relationship between the content and structure of the program and the program's recidivism rate. On average, programs that scored a 24 on the measure had a recidivism rate of 18% while those that scored 0 had a recidivism rate of 27%.
- There was a great deal of variation in the recidivism rates of the RECLAIM programs. In general, those program that offered more services and structure were more effective with higher risk youth, while programs that tend to be of shorter duration and were less intensive were more effective with lower risk youth.

Overall this research indicated that lower-risk youth have higher recidivism rates when placed in a CCF or DYS facility compared to lower-risk youth that were placed in a RECLAIM program. Higher risk appeared to have similar recidivism rates regardless of placement, while it became apparent that the very-high risk youth have lower recidivism rates when placed in a CCF

or DYS facility compared to very-high risk youth placed in RECLAIM programs. Analyses also indicated that the quality of the program is related to recidivism rates. The conclusions based on this data are tentative, but are supported by prior research, and indicated that higher quality programs have lower recidivism rates.

Based on this research, several recommendations can be made:

1. Although not a specific part of this study, there were substantial differences in type of disposition by race, even after controlling for offense severity (as measured by felony degree) and risk. It is therefore recommended that DYS commission a study to examine racial disparity in dispositions.
2. Placement in programming should be based, in part, on the risk of the youth. Lower risk youth should be placed in RECLAIM programs, and very high-risk youth should be placed in CCF or DYS facilities. With high-risk youth programming and intervention can start in the community, but that programming should be of sufficient intensity to be effective. For high-risk youth that do not respond to appropriate programming and/or have serious underlying charges, placement in a CCF and/or DYS facility would be appropriate. Using the measure of risk developed for this research, courts and other agencies making placements should screen youth and then determine their expected failure rates based on this research. The risk factors and scoring of the factors, as well as a table listing failure rates by risk, are included in the appendix of the report.
3. Outcome evaluations employing experimental or quasi-experimental designs should be conducted on a sample of programs from around the State of Ohio.
4. Based on the lack of risk and need assessments in use across the state, DYS should consider developing and supporting the use of a risk and need assessment. Related to this issue is the type and quality of data collected on youth referred to RECLAIM programs. Increasing the breadth and quality of data collected on RECLAIM youth can lead to more effective placements and more thorough research in the future.
5. Additional research on the relationship between program characteristics and program effectiveness should be pursued. Specifically, the State should consider conducting assessments of programs using the Correctional Program Assessment Inventory and determining if the assessments are strongly linked to outcomes. RECLAIM programs, CCFs, and DYS programs should be included in such a study. The current study and additional research should be used to develop program standards, which should lead to increases in the effectiveness of these programs.