

## SUCCESSFUL *Reentry Programs:*

### Lessons Learned From The “What Works” Research

By Christopher T. Lowenkamp and Edward J. Latessa

**F**or the past several years, almost 600,000 offenders per year have returned to the community from prison (Petersilia, 2000). While prison growth has recently slowed, prison and parole populations continue to grow (Glazer and Palla, 2004). When reviewing the number of offenders incarcerated or under some other form of correctional control, it is alarmingly clear that the return of inmates to the community is not likely to abate in the near (or distant) future.

While offenders, in some instances, are offered some programming while incarcerated, a good percentage of offenders are returned to the community ill-equipped for reintegration (Petersilia, 2000). For example, of nonviolent offenders returning to the community from prison, 40 percent have less than a high school education, nearly 66 percent indicated they had been using drugs during the month prior to their offense, 25 percent were dependent on alcohol prior to entering prison (Durose and Mumola, 2004) and unemployment is fairly high among this population (Petersilia, 2000). The social costs of inmates returning to the nation's communities are evident, and these social costs are above and beyond those associated with continued criminal behavior.<sup>1</sup> Given these numbers and the community concerns associated with offender reentry, it is no wonder why federal, state and local governments have recently been so attentive to this process. One way to facilitate successful offender re-integration is through reentry programming.

Reentry programs are promising for a number of reasons. First, they provide an opportunity to shape offender behavior while transitioning back to their natural environments, thereby reducing recidivism rates. They also offer the ability to proactively deal with violations of post-release supervision and reduce prison populations — as violators are making up greater percentages of the prison population

now than in the past (Cohen, 1995; Travis, 2000). Additionally, such programs can facilitate a successful reentry that, in addition to reducing recidivism, can lead to better and more functional lives for former inmates, their families and communities.

All of this optimism and potential must, however, be tempered with corrections' penchant to do the wrong thing (Gendreau, Goggin and Smith, 1999; Latessa, Cullen and Gendreau, 2003). In spite of sound empirical evidence to the contrary, correctional agencies continue to spend good money on the latest and greatest programming and assessment techniques (and the not-so-latest or greatest correctional interventions) in hopes that these novel attempts at correctional interventions will solve all of corrections' problems (panaceaphilia revisited).

The purpose of this article is not to rehash failed and botched attempts at implementing correctional programming. Rather, it brings to bear the research on some residential programs that served offenders during reentry, and should shape, to some degree, the development of reentry programs. The question “How should we design a good reentry program?” has already been answered. The components of an effective correctional intervention, including offender reentry programs, have already been enumerated a number of times (Gendreau and Andrews, 1990; Gendreau, 1996; Gendreau and Goggin, 1996; Andrews and Bonta, 1998; Gendreau and Goggin, 2000; Gendreau, French and Taylor, 2002). And while it is recognized that there may be special issues specific to reentry programs, the core of these programs should follow the basic tenets of effective correctional interventions.

The research discussed in this article, covering 38 residential programs that served parolees and offenders on post-release control in Ohio, can serve as a blueprint in the development or redesign of reentry programs. While the

empirical research is limited to programs in Ohio, the results reported here are consistent with research findings from studies conducted during different time periods, in different jurisdictions, in different countries, with male and female offenders, and with adult and juvenile offenders. The amount of evidence on what constitutes an effective correctional intervention is massive. This body of literature is so large and consistent that if operating or designing a reentry program, heed this warning: If the program does not embody a number of the characteristics discussed below, whether residential or not, the likelihood that the program will succeed in reducing recidivism is low. While reading through this article and the research findings, assess how well the program performs in these areas.

Prior to discussing the characteristics of effective correctional programs, and thereby the characteristics of effective reentry programs (and these characteristics should start to look familiar), the concept of evidence-based practice (EBP) will be discussed. There has been a sweeping movement across every jurisdictional level and many disciplines to shift to an EBP model. Basically, EBP is a decision-making process that requires a practitioner to make decisions based on empirical evidence (Sackett et al., 1996). For correctional practitioners, that requires assessment and profiling followed by a review of the research to determine the most effective course of action. EBP does not seek creativity in developing programs or a reliance upon clinical experience or professional opinion when a large body of empirical literature exists to provide direction. As a matter of fact, by definition, EBP requires a correctional practitioner to look at what has been done before, determine, based on available evidence, what is effective, and then follow that course of action.<sup>2</sup>

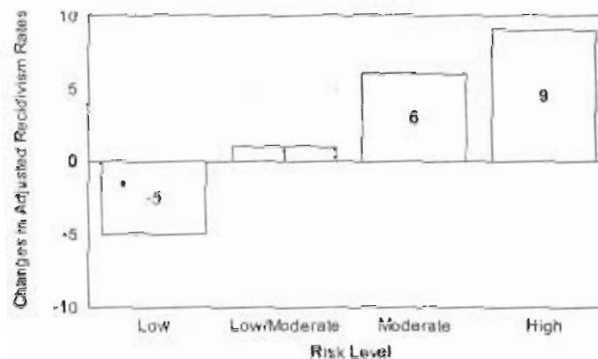
## Core Principles of Effective Correctional Interventions

The past 30 years has proved to be very important regarding research on correctional interventions. A substantial number of reviews of the research are available (Gendreau and Ross, 1987; Andrews et al., 1990; Gendreau and Andrews, 1990; Lipsey, 1992; Lipsey and Wilson, 1998; Andrews and Dowden, 1999; Dowden and Andrews, 1999a, 1999b and 2000). And while this research is not being reviewed in detail here, what this research has concluded regarding correctional interventions will be highlighted.

First, correctional programs should focus their resources on higher-risk offenders. The evidence on this is consistent and strong (for a review of this literature, see Andrews, Bonta and Hoge, 1990; Lowenkamp and Latessa, 2004 and in press). Second, correctional programs must target specific criminogenic needs (for a listing of those needs and their relative impact on recidivism when targeted, see Andrews and Dowden, 1999). Next, correctional programs must provide behavioral, cognitive-behavioral or social-learning-based interventions (Andrews et al., 1990). In addition, correctional agencies must tend to implementation issues, including staff training, evaluation and support. Finally, correctional programs must have program integrity, which includes the aforementioned principles but also includes quality assurance, evaluation efforts and overall attention to the intervention's fidelity to the principles of effective inter-

ventions. Fortunately, several instruments and processes exist for measuring program integrity, including: the Correctional Program Assessment Inventory (Gendreau and Andrews, 1994), the Correctional Practice Treatment Survey developed by the International Community Corrections Association (2004) and other methods (Lipsey, 1999). All of these processes measure, to some degree, a program's adherence to the aforementioned principles and focus on ensuring that a correctional program has both the content and capacity<sup>3</sup> to deliver a sound correctional intervention.

Figure 1. Effectiveness of Halfway House Participation by Offender Risk Level

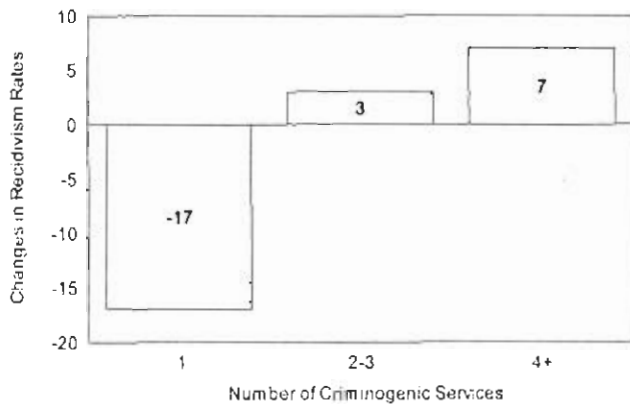


The study used in this article to illustrate the importance of these characteristics to reentry programs was conducted in 2002. As previously stated, the study involved 38 halfway house programs that provided services to parolees and post-release control offenders. This study included roughly 7,000 offenders with half in the treatment group (those offenders who participated in a halfway house program) and half in the comparison group (those offenders who received regular community supervision). The numbers illustrated in the figures in this article represent the difference in the recidivism rate between the treatment and comparison groups.

Figure 1 shows the reduction in recidivism associated with placement and successful termination from a halfway house. As indicated, participation in one of these halfway house programs by low-risk parolees is associated with an increase in recidivism rates, while participation and successful termination for high-risk offenders has a very different outcome (negative numbers indicate changes in recidivism rates that favor the comparison group whereas positive numbers favor the treatment group). This figure indicates that participation in and successful completion of a halfway house program by low-risk offenders is associated with a 5 percent increase in recidivism rates. Conversely, participation in and completion of the same halfway house programs was associated with a 9 percent decrease in recidivism for high-risk offenders. The one exception to this trend is with parole violators: All parole violators, regardless of risk level appeared to have benefited from placement in a residential program compared with similar parolees returned to prison on a parole violation and subsequently released without placement in a residential facility.<sup>4</sup>

Figure 2 illustrates findings regarding the need principle. The number of services each program provided that targeted criminogenic needs was counted. As can be seen in Figure 2, those programs that had one service targeting crim-

Figure 2. Effects of the Number of Criminogenic Services on Program Effectiveness



inogenic needs were, on average, associated with an increase of 17 percent in recidivism rates whereas those programs that had four or more criminogenic services reduced recidivism, on average, by 7 percent.

The impacts of the key indicators of treatment types are displayed in Figures 3 and 4. First, each program was categorized based on whether it was a cognitive-behavioral or "other" type of program. Figure 3 illustrates the effectiveness of those programs categorized as cognitive behavioral and the relative and absolute ineffectiveness of those programs that were categorized as "other" types of programs (a 10 percent reduction in recidivism for cognitive-behavioral programs versus no change for "other" types of treatment programs). Figure 4 shows the impact of programs that reported regularly using role-playing and regularly having offenders rehearse newly learned skills. As can be seen from Figure 4, programs that do not regularly use these techniques are associated with small (3 percent) reductions in recidivism. Those that regularly use one of these techniques are fairly effective (on average, an 8 percent reduction), while those that regularly use both are the most effective with an average reduction in recidivism of 15 percent.

In addition to targeting high-risk offenders and treatment type and targets, implementation is also of significant and substantial importance. Several factors related to program implementation were examined, and it was found that many of these factors were related to program effectiveness. Some of these important factors include: the program directors'

Figure 3. Impact of Treatment Type on Program Effectiveness

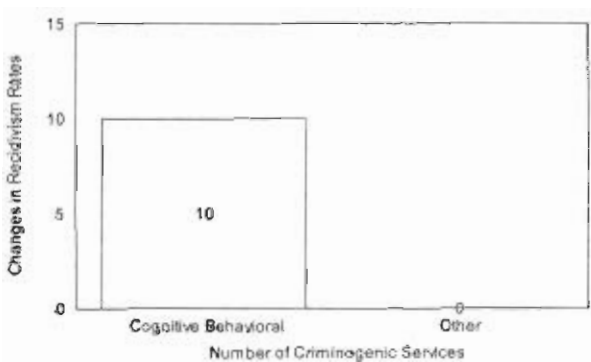
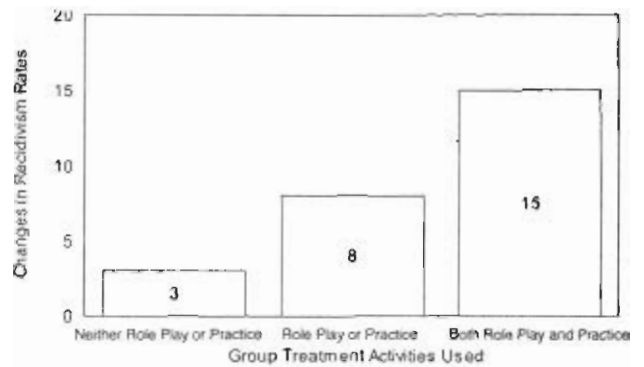


Figure 4. Impact of Role Playing and Offender Practice on Program Effectiveness



educational and experiential credentials, the program directors' involvement in the program, community support, criminal justice community support, staff training and qualifications, quality assurance and evaluation. Implementation should not be ignored or thought of as a sterile, one-time process. Failure to monitor implementation of programming can lead an otherwise promising program to failure (see, for example, Gendreau and Goggin, 2000; Gendreau, Goggin and Smith, 2001; Barnosky, 2004).

Finally, a strong relationship between program integrity and program effectiveness (correlation varies between 0.32 to 0.60, depending on the factors used to measure program integrity and the outcome measure used) was found. The highest scoring programs were associated with average reductions in recidivism of 10 percentage points or more (20 percent relative reduction). In contrast, the lowest scoring programs on the measures of program integrity were associated with average increases in recidivism of 19 percentage points.

## Summary and Conclusions

The principles and characteristics that have previously been identified as important to correctional interventions in general seem to be applicable and important to programs that serve parolees upon reentry. More specifically, it was found that the residential programs were most effective with parole violators and higher-risk offenders. Further, the residential programs were associated with increases in recidivism for the lower-risk offenders (parole violators exempted). The study also found that services targeting criminogenic needs were related to effectiveness; the most effective programs were those that provided the greatest number of services targeting criminogenic needs. These data also indicated that programs categorized as cognitive behavioral were more effective, as were those programs that engaged in activities associated with theoretically sound programming (role-playing and practicing of newly learned skills). Finally, it was concluded that implementation and other issues captured by measures of program integrity were strongly related to program effectiveness (for a more detailed review, see Lowenkamp, 2004) with offenders during the reentry phase. Again it is stressed that these findings are consistent with previous research on correction-

*Continued on page 76*

al interventions — some of which have been around for more than 20 years now.

There is, and has been, a substantial body of research that investigates the effectiveness of different correctional interventions. While this collection of research is not entirely complete (investigating every detail and nuance of correctional programming and interactions with offender characteristics), it is complete enough to guide the development of correctional interventions. It is time that corrections staff increase the professionalism of the field and begin making evidence-based decisions by relying on, with appropriate consideration, the relevant research rather than spending their efforts refuting the research and continuing to do things that simply do not work.

### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> While it is certainly not the case that all inmates re-offend upon reentry, the statistics on the recidivism of inmates released to the community is staggering. For instance, Langan and Levin (2002), after following released inmates for three years, found a 67.5 percent rearrest rate, a 25 percent reincarceration rate for a new crime, and a 26 percent reincarceration rate for a technical violation. These rates are not all that surprising given the increased demand on community supervision resources and the reduced budgets for those same agencies. The expectation to do more with less, where adaptations are not quickly made, can easily lead to higher recidivism rates.

<sup>2</sup> To think, such correctional embarrassments as yoga and tai chi for violent offenders, dressing male offenders in female attire and having them walk around downtown, sentencing an offender to physical fitness for trying to outrun the police, and having offenders write 2,500 times, "I will not do stupid things" all could have been avoided if the judges would have consulted the empirical research rather than be "creative" in their sentencing decisions. Instead, these creative sentences were showcased by *USA Today* in February 2004 and probably served to feed the lack of confidence the general public has for the criminal justice system (for poll results on confidence in U.S. institutions, see Saad, 2004).

<sup>3</sup> Content includes the assessment and treatment activities of a program, or what Palmer (1995) refers to as programmatic factors, while capacity is concerned with a program's ability and resources available (staff, implementation, quality assurance) to deliver a correctional intervention (Palmer refers to these as nonprogrammatic factors. For a more detailed discussion and enumeration of these content and capacity factors, see Lowenkamp, 2004).

<sup>4</sup> While there may be other explanations for this finding, it is believed that it is because dynamic risk factors were present for the parole violators who were not included in the risk measure.

### REFERENCES

Andrews, D.A. and J. Bonta. 1998. *The psychology of criminal conduct*. Cincinnati: Anderson Publishing Co.

Andrews, D.A., J. Bonta and R. Hoge. 1990. Classification for effective rehabilitation: Rediscovering psychology. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 17:19-52.

Andrews, D.A. and C. Dowden. 1999. A meta-analytic investigation into effective correctional intervention for female offenders. *Forum on Corrections Research*, 11(3):18-21.

Andrews, D.A., I. Zinger, R.D. Hoge, J. Bonta, P. Gendreau and F.T. Cullen. 1990. Does correctional treatment work? A clinically relevant and psychologically informed meta-analysis. *Criminology*, 28(3):369-404.

Barnosky, R. 2004. *Outcome evaluation of Washington state's research-based programs for juvenile offenders*. Olympia, Wash.: Washington State Institute for Public Policy.

Cohen, R.L. 1995. *Probation and parole violators in state prison, 1991*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice.

Dowden, C. and D.A. Andrews. 1999a. What works for female offenders: A meta-analytic review. *Crime and Delinquency*, 45(4):438-452.

Dowden, C. and D.A. Andrews. 1999b. What works in young offender treatment: A meta-analysis. *Forum on Corrections Research*, 11(2):21-24.

Dowden, C. and D.A. Andrews. 2000. Effective correctional treatment and violent reoffending: A meta-analysis. *Canadian Journal of Criminology*, 42(4):449-467.

Durose, M.R. and C.J. Mumola. 2004. *Profile of nonviolent offenders exiting state prisons*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice Office of Justice Programs.

Gendreau, P. 1996. The principles of effective interventions with offenders. In *Choosing correctional options that work: Defining the demand and evaluating the supply*, ed. A.T. Harland, 117-130. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage.

Gendreau, P. and D.A. Andrews. 1990. Tertiary prevention: What the meta-analyses of the offender treatment literature tell us about what works. *Canadian Journal of Criminology*, 32(1):173-184.

Gendreau, P. and D.A. Andrews. 1994. *The correctional program assessment inventory*. Ottawa: Carleton University.

Gendreau, P., S. French and A. Taylor. 2002. What works (what doesn't work)-revised 2002: The principles of effective correctional treatment. Unpublished manuscript. University of New Brunswick at Saint John.

Gendreau, P. and C. Goggin. 1996. Principles of effective correctional programming. *Forum on Corrections*, 8(3):38-41.

Gendreau, P. and C. Goggin. 2000. Correctional treatment: Accomplishments and realities. In *Correctional counseling and rehabilitation, fourth edition*, eds. P. Van Voorhis, M. Braswell and D. Lester, 271-280. Cincinnati: Anderson Publishing.

Gendreau, P., C. Goggin and P. Smith. 1999. The forgotten issue in effective correctional treatment: Program implementation. *International Journal of Offender Therapy*, 43(2):180-187.

Gendreau, P., C. Goggin and P. Smith. 2001. Implementation guidelines for correctional programs in the "real world." In *Offender rehabilitation and practice*, eds. G.A. Bernfeld, D.P. Farrington and A.W. Leschied, 247-268. New York: John Wiley and Sons Ltd.

Gendreau, P. and R.R. Ross. 1987. Revivification of rehabilitation: Evidence from the 1980s. *Justice Quarterly*, 4(3):349-407.

Glazer, L.E. and S. Palla. 2004. *Probation and parole in the United States, 2003*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice.

International Community Corrections Association. 2004. *The correctional practice treatment survey*. Lacrosse, Wis.: International Community Corrections Association.

Langan, P.A. and D.J. Levin. 2002. *Recidivism of prisoners released in 1994*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice.

Latessa, E.J., F.T. Cullen and P. Gendreau. 2003. Beyond correctional quackery: Professionalism and the possibility of effective treatment. *Federal Probation*, 66(2):43-49.

Lipsey, M.W. 1992. Juvenile delinquency treatment: A meta-analytic inquiry into the variable of effects. In *Meta-analysis for explanation: A casebook*, eds. T.D. Cook, H. Cooper, D.S. Cordray, H. Hartmann, L.V. Hedges, R.J. Light, T.A. Lewis and F. Mosteller, 83-127. New York: Russell Sage.

Lipsey, M.W. 1999. Can rehabilitative programs reduce the recidivism of juvenile offenders? An inquiry into the effectiveness of practical programs. *The Virginia Journal of Social Policy and the Law*, 6(3):611-641.

Lipsey, M.W. and D.B. Wilson. 1998. Effective intervention for serious juvenile offenders: A synthesis of research. In *Serious and violent juvenile offenders: Risk factors and successful interventions*, eds. R. Loeber and D.P. Farrington, 313-345. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage.

Lowenkamp, C.T. 2004. Correctional program integrity and treatment effectiveness: A multi-site, program-level analysis. Doctoral dissertation. University of Cincinnati.

Lowenkamp, C.T. and E.J. Latessa. 2004. Understanding the risk principle: How and why correctional interventions can harm low-risk offenders. *Topics in Community Corrections, 2004*, 3-8. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Corrections.

Lowenkamp, C.T. and E.J. Latessa, (in press). Increasing the effectiveness of correctional programming through the risk principle: Identifying offenders for residential placement. *Criminology and Public Policy*.

Palmer, T. 1995. Programmatic and nonprogrammatic aspects of successful intervention: New directions for research. *Crime and Delinquency*, 41(1):100-131.

Petersilia, J. 2000. *When prisoners return to the community: Political, economic and social consequences*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice.

Saad, L. 2004. *Military still American top-rated institution*. Princeton, N.J.: The Gallup Organization.

Sackett, D.L., W.M.C. Rosenberg, J.A.M. Gray, R.B. Haynes and W.D. Richardson. 1996. Evidence based medicine: What it is and what it isn't. *British Medical Journal*, 312:71-72.

Travis, J. 2000. *But they all come back: Rethinking prisoner reentry*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice.

---

*Christopher T. Lowenkamp, Ph.D., is assistant director of the Corrections Institute and The Center for Criminal Justice Research at the University of Cincinnati. Edward J. Latessa, Ph.D., is professor and head of the Division of Criminal Justice at the University of Cincinnati.*

---