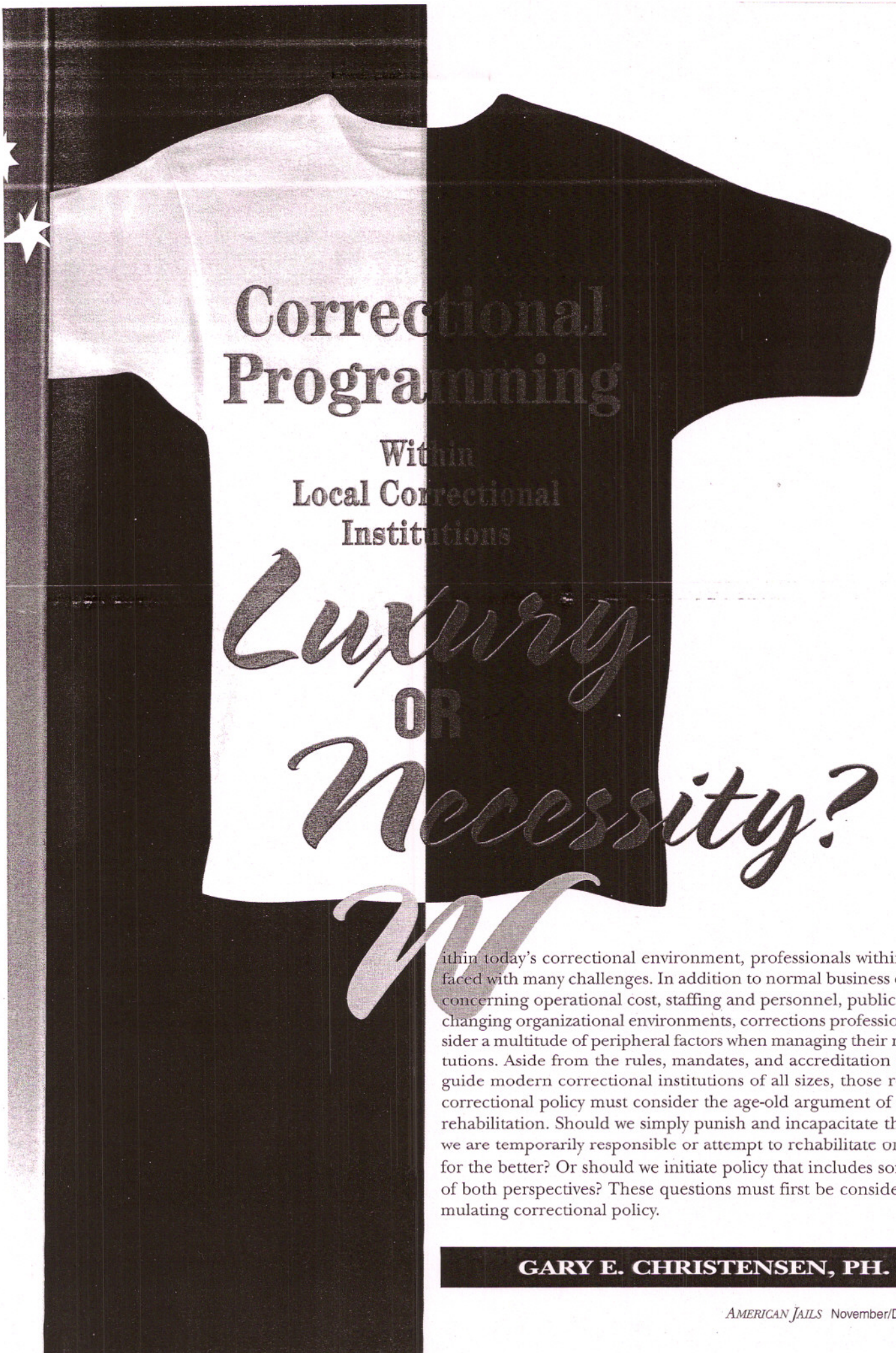

Correctional Programming Within Local Correctional Institutions

Luxury OR Necessity?

Within today's correctional environment, professionals within the field are faced with many challenges. In addition to normal business considerations concerning operational cost, staffing and personnel, public relations, and changing organizational environments, corrections professionals must consider a multitude of peripheral factors when managing their respective institutions. Aside from the rules, mandates, and accreditation standards that guide modern correctional institutions of all sizes, those responsible for correctional policy must consider the age-old argument of retribution vs. rehabilitation. Should we simply punish and incapacitate those for whom we are temporarily responsible or attempt to rehabilitate or change them for the better? Or should we initiate policy that includes some semblance of both perspectives? These questions must first be considered when formulating correctional policy.

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Some years ago the rehabilitative movement was changed greatly by Martinson's (1974) protestation that "Nothing Works." Interestingly, after careful review, it is now clear that despite its misleading title, the study in which Martinson participated actually reported many successful correctional outcomes. In fact, Martinson (1979) himself recanted much of his earlier work and stated that correctional programs can yield an appreciable effect on criminal recidivism. Despite this, his legacy remains, and common among correctional professionals is the belief that in fact nothing does work. History aside, professionals working within the field of corrections are often skeptical about statistical analyses. We wonder if in the real world these programmatic applications can make a difference in our local recidivism rates; for we are all too aware that many of the people for whom we have been responsible return to our institutions at alarmingly high rates.

Today's Sanctioned Population: Statistics and Cost

By latest count, today's incarcerated population within this country stands at 1,965,495 persons.[1] In fact, due largely to rearrest rates exceeding 67 percent,[2] today's prison/jail population (1,965,495) exceeds the entire correctional population of 1980 (1,842,100 including probation and parole).[3] From 1980 through the year 2000, our overall sanctioned population (incarceration, probation, and parole) has increased from 1,842,100 to 6,467,200. Accordingly, the number of alternative sanctions excluding prison or jail has also increased dramatically. At year-end 2000, the 4,565,059 persons supervised by either probation or parole represented an increase of over 125,000 people from year-end 1999.[4] It seems by all accounts that despite reports of crime reduction, the sanctioned population within this country continues to grow.

High costs associated with incarceration have been well documented. Unfortunately, within crowded institutions these costs far exceed simple "hard-cost" estimates; for administrators deal with increased tensions (among staff and inmates) and associated liability, staffing, and budgetary problems related to overtime costs, and a general inability to offer needed programs and service.[5] From a societal standpoint, perhaps the inability to offer needed programs and services looms largest in terms of cost, for current "What Works" literature offers proof that appropriate correctional programming can make significant differences in offender outcomes.

Are we able to determine the societal cost of continued patterns of crime, beyond the conventional "hard-costs" that are so often reported? What does one felony "cost" in terms of quality of life? How many lives does one "simple" burglary, larceny, or robbery touch, change, or alter for the worse? Are we able to "cost out" some of the societal benefits of successful correctional programming?

Belenko, Peugh, Califano, and Foster (1996) reported that one active substance abuser commits as many as 191 property and violent crimes per year. Therefore, using a conservative estimate of 100-crimes-per-year-per-substance abuser, the turn around of just 10 substance-abusing offenders would result in a reduction of 1,000 crimes in any given locality. In terms of quality of life, it is difficult to put a dollar figure on the effect that 1,000 crimes have on a small county or town; however, it is not difficult to surmise that the effect is quite large. Within our correctional system, the possibilities are enormous, for 80 percent of our prison/jail population is characterized in terms of alcohol/substance abuse.[6] Given these data, it seems imperative that initiatives be undertaken to change the pattern of practice within this country's system of corrections to make way for up-to-date, evidence-based strategies. Regardless of ideology, political or otherwise, correctional practices that alter the manner in which offenders go about their daily lives not only make good sense, but seem to mandate change within our respective correctional systems.

Transitional Programming within a Local Correctional Facility

Often problematic in the formulation of correctional policy and treatment is differing opinions on how one should go about the task of changing offenders. Should they be *treated* for an "illness" or *trained* to respond to life's challenges differently than in the past? Should we assess and address offender risk/need or assume that mentally healthy offenders will change after they feel better about themselves? According to the literature, the answer is simple: criminogenic risk, need, and responsivity must be considered above all else.[7] In fact, in some instances where high-risk offenders have been simply treated for their "illness" and/or immersed in programmatic initiatives designed to enhance self-esteem, rates of recidivism have actually increased.[8] Without addressing directly criminogenic risks such as attitude/thinking, associations, relationships, and education (formal, vocational, and social) in a concrete, application-based manner, correctional programs will yield individuals who may feel better about themselves, but have no intention of changing their criminal lifestyle and thinking.

Regardless of the final sanction that lies in wait for offenders, many begin their interface with the correctional system through some local correctional facility. Operation of these facilities is quite different from prisons, for jails experience admission and release rates that far exceed those of prisons. In fact, it takes approximately two years for our nation's prison population to cycle once while our jail population cycles 20 to 25 times during the same time-period.[9] Given the reality of shorter, uncertain incarceration periods, the opportunity for immersion within comprehensive programmatic initiatives within jails is relatively short. This has led many to the assumption that comprehensive correctional programming is not suited for local correctional populations. According to the United States Department of Justice, only 43 percent of jails provide any form of substance/alcohol abuse treatment (68 percent of those referred only to self-help groups such as AA, NA, or peer counseling). More striking is the fact that only 12 percent of our nation's jails provided an array of strategies that could form the basis for a comprehensive correctional strategy.[10]

Is it possible to offer comprehensive, transitional programming within a local correctional facility? Will such an

application prove fruitful regarding future recidivism rates? How can such a venture be funded? These are but a few of the questions that must be considered when making policy decisions related to comprehensive programming within local correctional facilities.

The fact is, for relatively little in terms of expenditure, it is possible to administer a successful transitional program within a local correctional facility that has a positive effect on recidivism. The means by which such a venture must be accomplished is through the understanding that correctional officers are key in the application and delivery of services. Professional clinicians should be employed for the purpose of individual counseling and the facilitation of treatment groups; however, existing correctional staff can prove invaluable in the delivery, application, and follow-up of initiatives designed to facilitate successful offender transition or return to any locality.

The Dutchess County Jail Transition Program (DCJTP)

In Poughkeepsie, New York, the Dutchess County Jail (DCJ) houses between 310 to 370 offenders on any given day. Yearly admission rates are well over 3,000, the average length of stay is over 30 days, and over 90 percent of those admitted transition directly from the DCJ to the local community. These realities, coupled with local recidivism rates ranging from 48 percent to 70 percent (dependent on the group being measured), led to the initiation of a transitional program designed to clarify needs, challenge old systems of belief, manage criminogenic risks, link with existing/emerging community resources (formal and informal), and maintain contact with graduating offenders.

The DCJ Transition Program is offered within a 50-bed, direct supervision style unit that operates as a closed community with additional rules and requirements beyond those common to the general population. All aspects and exercises that comprise the DCJ Transition Program are designed to facilitate the development of a comprehensive, written plan for transition unique to each offender. Throughout an intensive five-week period, this individualized plan for transition is formulated through the joint efforts of each offender, specialized correctional program officers, and clinicians. This accelerated process was developed to respond to the rapid turnover that is common within local correctional facilities and to formalize a plan for transition as rapidly as possible.

Overarching program goals were developed to mesh with departmental objectives and are stated as follows:

The Dutchess County Jail Transition Program is designed to do the following:

1. Enhance public safety through the management of criminogenic risk factors, while considering the necessity for other types of interventions such as substance and/or alcohol treatment.
2. Facilitate the successful transition of offenders to our community.
3. Reduce recidivism.

In addition to meshing program activity with departmental objectives, program goals further focus the delivery of service on successful offender habilitation in the context of the greater public good. The term *habilitation* is used in lieu of the more common *rehabilitation*, for DCJTP efforts are designed to accommodate the learning of new skills and conditions rather than a return or restoration to a former state.

Professional practice within the DCJTP takes place within a social learning context; therefore, well-trained, prosocial correctional officers who have been trained in and practice the tenets of direct supervision are ideal for this environment. Often recognized within the DCJTP is the fact that *people change or influence other people, not programs.* As such, it is recognized as key that correctional officers, as well as other associated professionals, act in a manner that will enhance outcomes through their presence within the social learning environment. A mix of "firm but fair" with a directed, person-centered approach pervades the program environment from early assessment and interview through release and transition.

As part of assimilation to the program environment, inmates are asked to define their personal needs in writing, review rules, regulations, and requirements, and sign personal behavioral contracts related to the program environment. All participants are also asked to complete generic job applications and, for those who do not possess a high school or GED diploma, recognize the requirement to attend school on a daily basis. Recently, due largely to technical assistance obtained from the National Institute of Corrections, Community Corrections Division, a group of correctional program officers and clinicians were trained to conduct LSI-R/ASUS protocols (Level of Service Inventory—Revised Edition; Adult Substance Abuse Survey). Therefore, in addition to the existing structured interview process, correctional program officers and clinicians alike now perform LSI-R assessments to determine criminogenic profiles, assist in classification decisions, and assign group placement. The addition of this practice has also allowed for continuity in terms of program language for staff as well as participants. Discussions are held with each offender to explore the determinations and findings of the assessment/interview process. These discussions include review of risk/need assessments and predictions for recidivism, program requirements, mandatory group assignment, and early transition planning.

A variety of additional training and therapy that explores the application of life skills and associated difficulties is cofacilitated by professional clinicians and correctional officers. All such ventures are designed with the expressed intent of contrasting current thought processes of offenders with alternative ways of thinking that lead to prosocial behavioral outcomes. Central to the early efforts of transition program staff is the principle of exploring ambivalence regarding behavioral change and highlighting discrepancies between current and desired behaviors.[11] Then, as offenders become more aware of thinking errors, new skills or methods to approach old problems are discussed and practiced. It is hoped that this process will then lead to the day-to-day use of these new skills.

Daily, at 5:50 am, activity on the transition program unit begins when those who are involved in off-unit work details

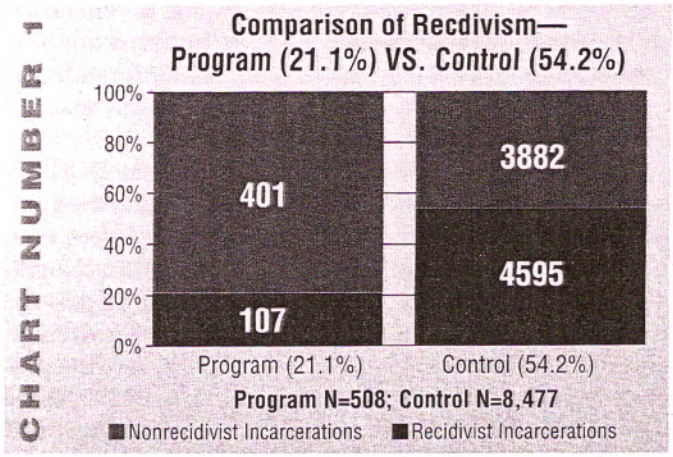
leave with specially assigned correctional officers. Those remaining are awakened at 6:30 am and asked to ready themselves for the morning exercise regimen. At 6:45 am, correctional program officers lead a moderate exercise routine lasting approximately 10 to 15 minutes; then inmates are allowed a brief period of time to wash up prior to breakfast. After breakfast, unit clean-up details begin and continue until 9:00 a.m. when all participants are locked out of their cells and routed to a program activity. For those who are not assigned specially at that time, the unit recreation yard is made available and telephones, television (news channels only), and computers are turned on. At various times, other mandatory activities include community meetings, small group discussions, work details, and participation in groups led by outside speakers. Throughout each week, a similar routine continues while offenders work through the various change issues that confront them.

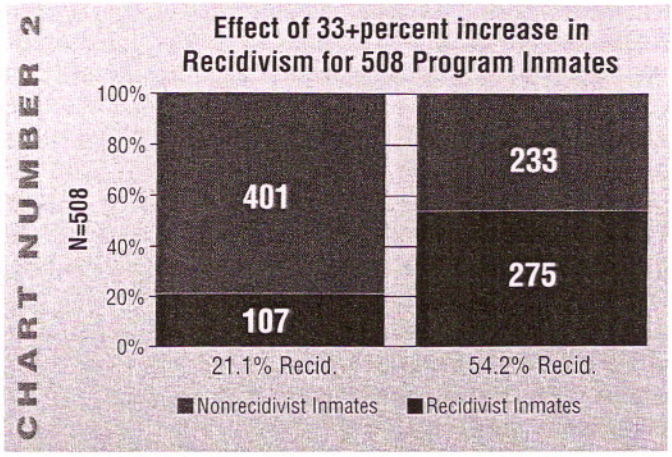
Follow-up is a unique component of Dutchess County Jail Transition Program. All DCJTP participants agree to be tracked by correctional program officers for one year postrelease. This component of the Dutchess County Jail Transition Program was developed in response to the reality that 80 percent of all recidivism takes place within six months of release. Therefore, using the plan for transition as a basis for discussion, correctional program officers make contact with all program graduates and/or their families two-times-per-month for the first six months and once-per-month for the remaining six months. These contacts offer correctional staff the opportunity to "check-in" and see if the plan for transition is being carried out or if further assistance is needed. They are further intended to enhance prosocial family and personal networks that are likely to employ informal social controls.

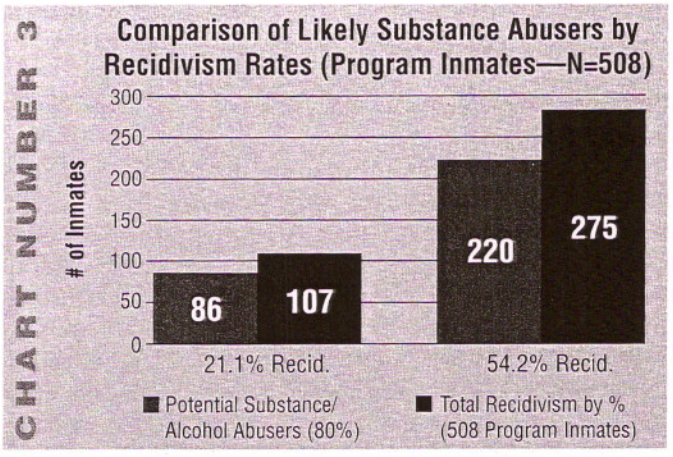
While in-depth analysis of the workings of the DCJTP is beyond the scope of this writing, it is posited that the combination of simple direct supervision management coupled with the application of "What Works" methodologies and community/family networking accounts largely for the successes that have been realized through this strategy. However, without the effort and personal buy-in of the professionals who have been associated with the DCJTP, these successes would be mitigated significantly. The degree of belief in both the process and people in general held by this group of professionals, officers and clinicians alike, is central to the success of the overall effort.

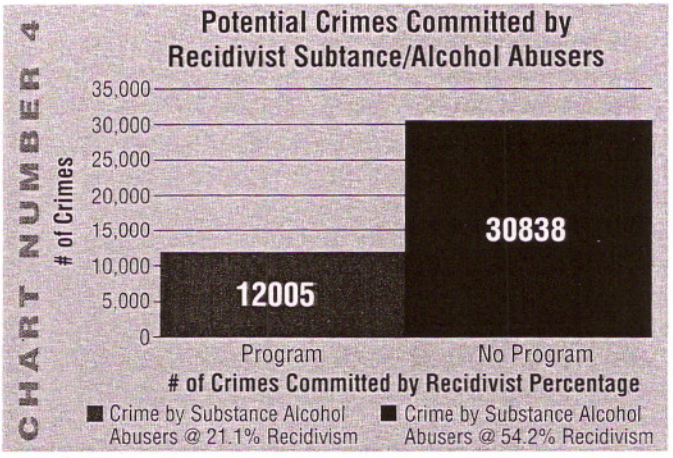
Outcomes of the Dutchess County Jail Transition Program Strategy

For the three-year period beginning November of 1998 (initiation of DCJTP) through November of 2001, the DCJTP strategy has realized over a 33 percent in reduction of recidivism for the inmates who elected to participate within this effort. To test the significance of these results, the Dutchess County Office of Computer Information Service (OCIS) was asked to provide information regarding other Dutchess County inmates from the same time period, who by all accounts looked like DCJTP inmates, yet









did not undergo transition initiatives. Chart 1 depicts graphically comparisons of recidivism leading to reincarceration between this group of inmates, which accounted for 8,477 incarcerations, and the DCJTP group, which accounted for 508.

Given the data, it is clear that the application of the Dutchess County Jail Transition Program strategy has reduced recidivism among inmate participants within Dutchess County. While the effect is clear as it relates to recidivism, perhaps the most important benefit that is realized by the citizens of Dutchess relates to overall public safety. It has been estimated that, on average, one active substance abuser commits an average of 140 crimes per year.[12] It has also been found that alcohol abusers are responsible for a disproportionate percentage of violent crime.[13] Locally, as well as nationally, this group of offenders accounts for 80 percent of our total incarcerated population. Therefore, aside from the actual crime for which a given inmate is incarcerated, eight in ten recidivists commit an enormous amount of crime *before being apprehended.* In fact, if active for one year, these eight offenders would likely commit 140 crimes each or a combined 1,120 crimes. It is therefore extremely important to consider the volume of crime that might have been committed otherwise by former offenders who have become nonrecidivist or prosocial.

Chart 2 examines recidivism in the context of the 508 DCJTP inmates. Using this group of 508 offenders, compared is the amount of recidivist behavior that was actually recorded (21.1 percent) to what might have been without the program application (54.2 percent—control group).

Chart 3 utilizes the data contained within Chart 2 and shows the likely number of substance/alcohol abusers contained within each recidivist group (actual number of program recidivists @ 21.1 percent vs. 54.2 percent—control).

Chart 4 translates the data contained within Chart 3 and, in terms of potential crime per offender, displays the effect on public safety of a 33.1 percent reduction in recidivism (21.1 percent DCJTP vs. 54.2 percent control).

As can be verified by the information contained on Charts 1, 2, 3, and 4, the amount of potential crime increases dramatically as the rate of recidivism escalates. In fact, *using the same sample size* of 508 offenders, a 33.1 percent increase in recidivism (Program 21.1 percent vs. Control 54.2 percent) exposes the community to 18,833 additional crimes. In other words, for the group of DCJTP inmates (N=508) a 33.1 percent increase in recidivism actually exposes the local community to a 257 percent increase in crime. Certainly, in the name of public safety alone, these realities should compel a proactive movement in correctional practice.

The Future of Local Correctional Facilities—Jails

Comprehensive, up-to-date correctional practice is no easy task. The array of demands on correctional officials of all ranks and responsibilities has increased dramatically. The number of offenders that are incarcerated or super-

vised continues to grow. Local correctional systems cope with a far higher volume of offenders who move rapidly through their networks. The general public tends to lack confidence in the ability of correctional systems to promote prosocial change. While these limitations and difficulties are significant, evidence-based correctional strategies do yield appreciable effects on offender rearrest and incarceration and therefore must be considered. The question of whether such efforts should or should not exist must not be bound in arguments regarding issues such as offender deservedness. Nor should local efforts proven to yield an appreciable effect be stalled in the debate of punishment vs. rehabilitation. These tired, age-old arguments simply do not recognize the problem in a larger context.

Proof continues to be offered that comprehensive correctional strategies that adhere to evidence-based principle and practice offer a means to alter the manner in which offenders go about their respective lives. Public safety must move to the forefront in the consideration of local correctional strategies, for offender outcomes impact dramatically the well-being of the public. A positive, prosocial change in just *ten* substance-abusing offenders results in the noncommission of over 1,000 crimes in a given locale. This reality alone should be sufficient to mandate that "what works" strategies be utilized. No longer should we limit ourselves to a perspective that considers only the offender in his or her own "personal vacuum" and negates the bigger picture.

We as correctional professionals must bear the responsibility to educate our public and practice in a manner that best serves our populace. No longer should evidence-based correctional practice be deemed a choice or a luxury. Nor should it be limited by the perspective that jails offer no opportunity for the implementation of a comprehensive transition program. Rather, transition programming must become part of our everyday business so that lives can be changed for the expressed purpose of enhancing public safety. Proactive correctional officials must realize the enormous possibility for crime reduction and consider the amount of crime that might have otherwise been committed if not for their efforts. Recognition of the all-important role that proactive correctional officers play in the safety of our communities should lead someday to a perspective that finds the job of correctional officer reaching far beyond "the walls." Perhaps then recidivism will decrease to a manageable level and allow for a system of correctional classification that best serves our public.

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