Community Reentry Programs and their Effect On Recidivism:: a Study of Life Skills Clients at the Denver County Jail

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COMMUNITY REENTRY PROGRAMS
AND THEIR EFFECT ON RECIDIVISM:
A STUDY OF LIFE SKILLS CLIENTS AT THE DENVER COUNTY JAIL

By
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A Proposed Research Project in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
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COMMUNITY REENTRY PROGRAMS
AND THEIR EFFECT ON RECIDIVISM:
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Abstract

Recidivism, or repeat offending, is prevalent among misdemeanants. Their sentences are usually short and become even shorter with mandates to keep county jails from overcrowding. These misdemeanants are then released from jail and go back to the same environments they were in before. Many of these people go on to commit the same or similar crimes and end up back in jail. Jails across the U.S. have begun implementing transitional programs in the hopes that providing repeat offenders with case management, counseling, and other services might enable them to break the habit of repeat offending and make better choices for their lives and their futures. This study researched one such program run by the Denver Sheriff Department at the Denver County Jail. Using a cross-sectional, quantitative approach, the current project measured recidivism rates for a sample of clients who participated in a transitional program at the Denver County Jail. This quantitative data is then combined with the Rational Choice Theory to provide an evaluation of the Life Skills program and its effect on recidivism.

Keywords: recidivism, criminology, community reentry, transition programs, inmates
# Table of Contents

Abstract iii

List of Figures v

Introduction 1

- Overview of the problem 3
- Purpose of the Project (Rationale) 4
- Research Questions 5
- Definitions 5
- Limitations 6
- Delimitations 6

Review of the Literature 7

- The Need for Reentry Programs 7
- Factors that Affect Recidivism 9
- Recidivism and Rational Choice 12
- Jail Community Reentry Programs 15

Methodology 18

- Research Design 18
- Sample 19
- Measurement 19

Findings 20

Discussion 25

References 29

Appendix 33

  a. Denver Multi-Party Release of Information Consent Form
List of Figures

Figure 1: Comparison of recidivism statistics at TJC sites 21
Figure 2: Comparison of Recidivists and Non-Recidivists Completing Full TJC Model 22
Figure 3: Comparison of Offenses between Recidivists and Non-Recidivists 23
Figure 4: Comparison of Recidivists' Original Charge and Re-arrest Charge 24
Introduction

The Urban Institute along with the National Institute of Corrections (NIC) selected six jails to participate in the Transition from Jail to Community (TJC) project in 2008 and 2009. This project implements a model for community to jail transition. The model includes systematic changes and collaboration between the jails and the local communities to improve a recidivist’s chance of reintegration. It incorporates programs inmates can participate in while incarcerated and after they are released into the community. One of the sites selected for this project was the Denver Sheriff Department’s (DSD) located in Denver, Colorado (Urban Institute, 2011).

The Denver County Jail (DCJ) officially launched the TJC model in January of 2010. The first phase of the Life Skills program involves selecting eligible inmates. Inmates are given an initial screening once entering the DCJ that includes a proxy score. This proxy score determines their risk of recidivism on a scale from one to eight: the higher the score, the higher the risk. Risk is determined by three factors: age of first arrest, number of lifetime arrests, and current age. Only inmates with medium to high risk of recidivism qualify for the program.

Inmates are informed of the Life Skills program by word of mouth, visits by diversion officers, or from deputies. Participation is voluntary and most Life Skills clients request access to the program. Other factors that affect eligibility are length of sentence, nature of crime (only misdemeanants are eligible), and housing in the jail. The DCJ runs a wide variety of projects including Rehabilitation in a Security Environment and mental health pods that have their own reintegration programs.

Once an inmate has been selected as a client they are enrolled in classes that include Job Readiness Training, Drug and Alcohol Education, Domestic Violence Education, Empowerment, Fatherhood and Parenting Skills, and Thinking for a Change, a cognitive behavior class. Classes
COMMUNITY REENTRY PROGRAMS

are all voluntary, as is the entire program. Clients also receive earned time (days off) their sentence for participation.

Life Skills clients receive case management throughout their stay at the DCJ. They also receive personally tailored resource information for whatever their needs may be. The Life Skills program has reached out to many social programs in the Denver area that provide housing, rehabilitation, counseling, social aid, clothing, spiritual services, etc. Diversion officers also have access to Veterans Administration contacts for those clients who have served in the military.

Clients are provided with a plethora of information and receive visits from the Community Reentry Project (CRP), the main transitional piece from the DCJ to the community, prior to release. CRP liaises with Life Skills to provide referrals for clients and also offers classes and counseling services once a client is released. Participation in CRP is also voluntary.

Life Skills Clients undergo an intake upon entering the program. They receive a Level of Supervision Inventory (LSI) score that aids in determining what services they will need upon release. The LSI is a quantitative risk/need assessment used to identify an offender's risk of committing criminal behavior and need for clinical services.

The Urban Institute has not received any quantitative evaluations from the six sites participating in the TJC model. Therefore, the current evaluative study is being undertaken at the DCJ to determine if this site's Life Skills program has had an impact on recidivism as compared to two of the other five sites as well as the national average. The studied population is small compared to overall client participation but it provided insight into several factors affecting recidivism as well as the impact of the overall project as it is undertaken at the DCJ.

An all-encompassing theme that permeates throughout this project is the theory that recidivists continue to engage in the same behaviors due the Rational Choice Theory. Rational
choice presumes that anti-social behavior is not a pathological issue but is a situational matter. Crime is often a result of opportunity and lack of self-control (Siepel & Eifler, 2010). Many Life Skills clients go back to their same neighborhoods and engage in the same behaviors that led them to arrest in the first place. One of the main focuses of the Life Skills program is the Thinking for a Change class that helps clients understand that bad things do not just “happen”. They have a control over their actions. In essence, instead of employing the Rational Choice Theory to increase punishments, this paper proposes that the Rational Choice Theory can also be used to develop transition programs that increase an offender’s options when released in the hopes that they will make a choice not to continue to engage in anti-social/criminal behaviors.

**Overview of the Problem**

Mitigating or reducing recidivism through transition and community reentry programs has been a growing trend as United States (U. S.) jail population flow increases and cities/counties struggle to balance budgets. Since jails cannot be solely responsible for the transition to the community, new partnerships between jails and the local community must be forged.

Recidivism is defined as “the chronic tendency toward repetition of criminal or antisocial behavior patterns” (Recidivism, n.d.). Offenders rarely commit just one crime. Approximately 50 percent of all inmates are repeat offenders (Langan & Levin, 2002). A study that included Douglas County, CO found that 25 percent of offenders had multiple jail intakes. Recidivists made up 44 percent of U. S. jail intakes in 2008 (Janetta, 2009).

County jails in the U. S. house over 11 million men and women in the period of a year (Minton, 2012). Jail is a revolving door for many of these people. Over two-thirds have alcohol or drug addictions and over half do not have a high school diploma or GED. Local jails handle more people in a three week period that prisons do in an entire year. Overcrowding, limited
program resources, rapid population turnover (four out of five jail inmates are held less than a month) and the use of jail as a holding place for inmates awaiting trial or sentencing (approximately 60 percent of jail populations) make it difficult for jail to effectively prepare individuals for successful reintegration into the community after release. Few of these people have access to services or support once they leave the county jail (Urban Institute, 2011).

Local jails have contact with as many people in a three week period people as state and federal prisons do in an entire year. Frequent visitors to county jails have major hurdles to overcome: 68 percent have drug or alcohol problems; 60 percent do not have a high school diploma or GED; 16 percent have a serious mental illness, and 14 percent were homeless at some point during the year before their incarceration (Urban Institute, 2011). Short stays and the local nature of jail facilities mean that inmates are less removed from family, friends, treatment providers, employers, and other support. In spite of these challenges, the transition from jail to the community presents a unique opportunity for intervention.

Purpose of the Project (Rationale)

The purpose of this research project was to determine if the Life Skills program at the DCJ has helped decrease recidivism among its participants. There are two dependent variables in this study: participants are recidivists and they are long term life skills clients (more than one month in the program). The Life Skill program has been operating at the DCJ for just under three years and has taken in more than 450 long term clients. This study takes into account a small sample (approximately 8 percent) of the entire population but the sample is diverse enough in demographic variables to be relevant to the entire population. The recidivism findings of this study are compared to the findings at two of the other five county jails in the TJC project as well as the national average. Also, this project ascertains factors that differentiate between those clients that recidivated and those clients who did not. Many independent variables are measured
in this study and those variables and their significance are discussed in detail later in this research project.

**Research Questions**

Research has shown that statistically, previous actions are good indicators of future actions and so it is with recidivism. Therefore, this study sought answers the following research questions:

- **RQ1**: Does the DSD Life Skill Program reduce recidivism as compared the national average?
- **RQ2**: How does the DSD Life Skill Program compare to the five other test sites in the Urban Institutes Transition from Jail to Community Project?
- **RQ3**: What is the difference in recidivism rates between those clients who completed the TJC model (Life Skills and CRP) and those who just completed Life Skills?
- **RQ4**: Are there any significant differences in LSI scores, criminal history, and types of crimes committed between DSD Life Skills clients who recidivated and those who did not?

**Definitions**

The following definitions describe the terms and the variables used in compiling and analyzing the statistical data in this study:

- **Recidivism** as defined in this study is the re-arrest of a Life Skills participant in Colorado from the time the client was released until the date the Colorado Bureau of Investigation (CBI) was queried for arrest data.

- **Rational Choice theory** involves behavior that occurs when an offender decides to risk violating the law after considering his or her own personal situation and the factors of the situation at hand.

- **The Level of Supervision Inventory (LSI)** is a quantitative risk/need assessment used to identify an offender's risk of committing criminal behavior and need for clinical services. The
higher the score, the more in need an offender is of services and the more likely he/she is to reoffend after release.

Misdemeanant is defined for the purpose of this project as a DCJ inmate incarcerated on a misdemeanor charge. Inmates charged with felonies are not eligible for the program.

Completion of the TJC model is defined as having been both a Life Skills client while at the DCJ as well has a CRP client after release.

Limitations
The study had limitations to include size of the sample (roughly 8 percent of the entire population), the inability to reach outside of Colorado for participants’ criminal histories, and the relatively short period before recidivism data was collected. Recidivism is usually studied on a longitudinal scale but for the purposes of this study time was limited from seven to 15 months.

Delimitations
This research project moved forward with the full consent of the DSD. Data was readily available from the DSD Jail Management System (JMS) database. Personal interviews with the client were performed during routine case management performed for the Life Skills program. Finally, open source data was available from the CBI database (for a fee) enabling the inclusion of several datasets into this study.
Review of the Literature

This contextual literary review includes four areas pertaining to recidivism. The perceived need for transition reentry programs covers mainly statistical data pertaining to jail populations, their transience, and the general lack of reentry programs for misdemeanants. The second section discusses the many factors that affect recidivism to include demographic information, socioeconomic status, mental health, substance abuse, and neighborhood stability. A review of Rational Choice Theory and its relationship to recidivates and their reasons for reoffending is covered in the third section. Finally, several current jail recidivism studies and their results will be listed before moving on to the current study.

The Need for Reentry Programs

The U. S. admitted approximately 11.8 million people into jails from July 2010 – June 2011. The average daily population in all U. S. jails was 735,601 inmates as of mid-year 2011 and the average daily cost of housing an inmate in U. S. jails is $129 (Minton, 2012). The jail population has nearly doubled over the past decade and a half, from just over 400,000 in 1990 to nearly 770,000 in 2006 (Beck, 2006). The national average for recidivism among jail inmates hovers around 50 percent (Langan & Levin, 2002). Recidivists made up 44 percent of U. S. jail intakes in 2008 (Janetta, 2009). The U. S economy loses income tax, productivity, and the annual cost of housing inmates in jails around the U. S. costs over $47,000 per inmate (Owen, 2012).

These statistics represent the enormous flow of people in and out of jails throughout the U. S. Rarely do jails have the ability to monitor the enormous amount of releases and few believe it is their job to do so. Jails are generally not concerned with successfully integrating offenders (Solomon, 2008). The corrections system holds them, feeds and cares for them, and then releases them. Jails were not built or developed to help offenders reintegrate successfully
back into the community. The focus has been on keeping the public safe. Many deputy officers that work in county jails consider their jobs to be highly paid babysitters. Jails often provide some minor reentry services such as handing out bus tickets or temporary state identification, although few work with the community to provide true transitional services (Urban Institute, 2008).

Logic would have us believe that inmate populations decrease as crime increases and vice versa. This has not been the case. Crime rates climaxed and dropped sharply from 1990-2004 while jail populations increased steadily during this same period (Roman & Chalfin, 2006; Beck, 2006). There are several reasons for this growth in jail population. Jails are used for presentence confinement. They often house inmates from other correctional facilities. Felons with short sentences can now be housed in jails as prisons become overcrowded (Beck, 2006). Offenders released into the community on probation often violate the terms of their probation or choose to “do the time” instead of paying the money for probationary programs they cannot afford. A National Institute of Justice study noted that “…on any one day, half of the Nation’s jail population is the consequence of failure under community supervision” (Beck, 2006, p. 2).

Mitigating or reducing recidivism through life skills programs and community reentry programs has slowly been a growing trend as U. S. jail populations increase and cities/counties struggle to balance budgets. While reentry programs are active throughout the U.S. prison system, reentry programs for transitioning jail inmates back into the community has been slow to follow (Miller & Miller, 2006).

The U. S. has begun a slow return from a retributive form of justice to a rehabilitative model. The Second Chance Act of 2007 (P.L. 110-199) marked a shift to a more rehabilitative model to achieve successful community reentry for offenders, an undertaking in which social
workers can play a major role (Eckholm, 2008). Putting offenders in jails and then releasing with no form of support almost assures they will reoffend and end up back in jail.

Studies indicate that offenders with a strong support network at the community level fare better after reintegration (Kubrin & Stewart, 2006). Effective reentry begins at intake with assessment and continues through a seamless continuum of care during the incarceration period and following release (Miller & Miller, 2010). One-on-one case management to determine resources required and community visits the offenders has been shown to increase the likelihood that offenders will seek out those resources after release. Offenders given a plan of action prior to release are much more likely to seek help on the outside than those who are released into the community with no help at all (Beck, 2006).

Factors that Affect Recidivism

Offenders released into the community face a number of problems. Many Life Skills clients at the DCJ have no job, no housing, no food, and no clothes. Many suffer from substance abuse or mental health issues. The Bureau of Justice Statistics (2006) reported that 76 percent of jail inmates diagnosed with a mental disorder also had substance abuse problems prior to incarceration. Jail populations diagnosed with substance abuse problems and/or mental health disorders have an even more difficult time staying out of trouble after release. Statistics reveal that at least a third of offenders with mental disorders were using drugs at the time of their arrest (Miller & Miller, 2010). Without intervention of some kind, these at risk offenders suffer the highest risks of repeat offending.

Criminologists studying recidivism report that demographic factors such as sex, race, economic status, marital status, and age have all been predictors of recidivism. Individual factors are certainly necessary in the study of recidivism but there is reason to consider the role of neighborhoods in examining crime and recidivism. Neighborhoods with high rates of crime
experience a high rate of population turnover. This can adversely affect order within the neighborhood. Rates of crime tend to decrease and neighborhoods become more stable. In areas where population change is the norm, the more stable portion of the area move away and new, less stable populations move in. (Tillyer & Vose, 2011). Socioeconomic status is also an important predictor of recidivism. Neighborhoods with highly transient populations also tend to be of lower socioeconomic status. Recidivists often have very limited or no means of income due to their inability to maintain a job.

Lack of education is also an important factor in the discussion of recidivism. Several studies have examined the relationship between education and recidivism among adult offenders. These studies show that education does decrease recidivism. A study performed by Nuttall, Hollmen, and Staley (2003) found that offenders who obtained a General Educational Development (GED) during their incarceration were less likely to reoffend and return to jail or prison.

Research shows a relationship between employment and crime. The inability to find and maintain a job is associated with high rates of arrest for juveniles and young adults (Baker et al., 2006). Studies also suggest that employment, like education, significantly reduces recidivism among offenders. Gainful employment in early adulthood has been shown to reduce crime in recidivists (Bernburg & Krohn 2003). Offenders who earned a GED or some post-secondary education recidivated at a much lower rate and also had higher rates of employment. “The average odds of being employed upon release were 70% greater for offenders who participated in educational programming while incarcerated” (Baker et al., 2006, p. 60). A similar study on over 32,000 inmates in Texas found that offenders who were able to participate in education programs while incarcerated had less trouble finding employment and had lower recidivism rates
than inmates who did not participate in any educational programs during their incarceration (Fabelo, 2002).

Another important factor to consider with recidivism is that offenders often learn to be better criminals while incarcerated. Networking with other offenders is common in county jails. Networking is often used to find legitimate employment on the outside but offenders also network to find hookups for drugs, easy targets and areas for crime, establishments that will readily accept stolen goods, etc.

The only reliable way to measure how much criminal behavior is learned during incarceration to measure recidivism and whether or not recidivists’ repeat criminal behaviors were different or more advanced than their original offenses. Unfortunately, there is very little empirical research related to how much criminal behavior is learned while incarcerated. Anecdotal data seems to be the only way to truly measure an offender’s experience in jail or prison and what they learned.

A research paper written for the Clearwater Project, a therapeutic community program in Santa Barbara, CA has ample anecdotal evidence illustrating that incarceration lends itself to further criminal activity. They note that jails and prisons are the “colleges of criminal behavior.” While incarcerated, inmates interact with many other criminals who have been convicted of more serious offenses. One example describes an inmate who was incarcerated for writing bad checks. He learned drug smuggling and production techniques from another inmate while incarcerated and went on to set up a methamphetamine lab after his release. Another offender was a juvenile who eventually went into the adult system at 18 for a marijuana charge. While incarcerated he learned from other, more experienced inmates how to rob banks, which he was arrested for after his release. He is now serving ten years in prison for his crimes (Meloy, 2010).
Rational Choice and Recidivism

Rational Choice Theory long been used to explain criminal behavior and recidivism. Its basic premise is that offenders make a choice on whether or not to commit crime based on the deterrence factor of the possible consequences (Beccaria, 1963). The Rational Choice theory made the assumption that actors base decisions on "careful thinking and sensible decisions" (Felson, 1993, p. 1497). The original Rational Choice Theory has undergone changes in the last several years. The newer version of Rational Choice places less emphasis on the analysis of the decision processes an actor might engage in and more emphasis on the context of the situation and the desires of the individual at that moment (Ward, Stafford & Grey, 2006).

Rational Choice theory holds that an offender has the presence of mind and the free will to choose between conformity and non-conformity. One of the tenets of this principle is the deterrence theory. One assumes that an actor knows the consequences of his actions and incorporates that into his decision-making process. Beccaria (1963) argues that increasing the deterrent effects of punishment makes crime less rewarding than obeying the law. It is presumed that people weigh both the rewards and punishments for their actions before deciding whether or not to commit a crime.

The latest modification to the Rational Choice Theory supposes that individuals subconsciously weigh the risks and awards of their actions but because they processing the information "imperfectly", they will make the selection that is most satisfying at the moment. Consequences and their ability or inability to deter criminal activity are hotly debated with reference to Rational Choice Theory. Other criminological theories such as Merton’s strain theory and Bandura’s social learning theory are also used in conjunction with the new rational choice theory to provide a more well-rounded explanation for recidivism (Ward, Stafford & Grey, 2006).
Deterrence as a cornerstone of criminological theory has seen its fair share of empirical research. The information gathered on deterrence theory has mostly been concerned with the consequences of criminal behavior, especially the threat of punishment via incarceration. The perceived benefit of criminal activity has been largely overlooked in much of this research.

Baker and Piquero (2010) performed a statistical summary of 13 research projects since 1990 to determine if they could prove a relationship between benefits and criminal behavior. They measured two dependent variables for benefits: psychic (good feelings) and materialistic. Their findings showed that in 74 percent of the study recipients reported positive feelings associated with criminal behavior and 60 percent reported material gains as the overriding reason for criminal activities. This reveals that the benefits of offending are just as, if not more important than the costs to most offenders while they are committing the crime.

Anecdotal evidence also supports the new Rational Choice Theory. A journalist volunteering in a county jail Massachusetts had this to say about what offenders are thinking, or not thinking, at the moment they commit a crime.

When asked, they [offenders] usually agree that in the seconds in which they committed the crime, they weren’t thinking about how they wanted to go to college someday, or how their relationships with loved ones might change or how they might not get to see their child for the years they’re in jail (Owen, 2012, para. 4).

Despite the known consequences, especially in the case of recidivists, many offenders will choose that which is most available and most satisfying to them at that moment.

The Rational Choice theory has been most often used in criminal justice venues to justify tougher sentencing, boot camps, even public humiliation and harsh conditions such as those used by the Sheriff of Maricopa County, AZ (Bashir & Culhane, 2009). Cullen, Pratt, Miceli, and Moon (2002) argue that the Rational Choice Theory has been ineffective as the basis for
correction intervention strategies such as shock therapy, drug testing, home confinement, and electronic monitoring. They concluded that, “with few and isolated exceptions, the punishment-oriented correctional interventions that have been reported thus far have had no appreciable effect on recidivism” (p. 283).

Cullen and Gendreau (2000) came to three interrelated, empirically-based conclusions pertaining to the effectiveness of rehabilitation as opposed to punishment to deter crime and reduce recidivism: First, planned interventions can alleviate criminal behaviors. Second, transitional and rehabilitative programs reduce recidivism by 10 percent on average. Finally, not all rehabilitative or transitional programs are the same. Effective programs have shown to reduce recidivism by 25 percent. Determining what is effective and what is not becomes the pivotal question.

Reductions in recidivism are affected most by programs that are low or no cost, that prioritize treatment or resources based on offenders’ areas of greatest risk of recidivism (drug/alcohol treatment, employment, housing, etc.), provide cognitive behavior skills, and focus on those offenders that are most at risk of recidivism. Most importantly, successful programs take the individual into account when deciding on which portion of the program to administer and what resources to offer (Cullen, Pratt, Miceli, and Moon 2002).

It becomes apparent when reviewing the literature that there is a growing trend toward rehabilitation as opposed to retribution. The challenge lies in developing anti-recidivism programs at the jail level that include empirically-tested and proven methods of rehabilitation and are client-centered. Public opinion may be in favor of these programs but local jails are not generally enthusiastic. This may be the greatest challenge: convincing the deputies that oversee the daily operation of jails to change their mindset from that of merely “jailers” to advocates of programs that make their jails and communities safer.
Jail Community Reentry Programs

Recidivism and the reasons for it are a tenet of criminological study. Understanding the whys and hows of criminal behavior often make up a criminology researcher's bread and butter. The fact that recidivism occurs and makes up a quantitatively significant portion of the offending subculture is well established. Researchers have a unique opportunity to determine if these programs have any impact on recidivism as more and more anti-recidivism programs are integrated into county jails. Understanding these programs and their affect (if any) on recidivism will aid communities in deciding whether or not to invest in these programs in the future.

Yamatani and Spjeldnes (2011) performed a research study in 2008 of the Allegheny County Jail Collaborative (ACJC) in Pittsburgh, PA. The ACJC's two goals were to reduce recidivism and increase offenders' chances of successful reintegration into the community. The results included a 50 percent lower recidivism rate among inmate participants in the program. There were multiple benefits of this recidivism reduction. The results were similar across racial groups and participants were successfully reintegrated into community life. If continued, this reduced recidivism rate would save the county an estimated $5.3 million annually, primarily in increased public safety and lower victimization costs. The ACJC's intent was that its work would reduce criminal behavior and increase chances for offenders to have productive lives after incarceration and so far it has succeeded.

Miller and Miller (2010) studied the Auglaize County Transition (ACT) program run by the Auglaize, OH Sheriff's Office. Instituted in 2004, ACT provides a comprehensive approach to addressing inmate problems ranging from medical and mental health issues to drug and alcohol addiction. The ACT program serves as a link between offenders and community resources that are integral in ensuring offenders' successful reentry. Case managers provide one-on-one counseling. Inmates are provided with programs such as employment placement, drug
and alcohol treatment, mental health counseling, and educational support. Offender progress is monitored and advocacy is also provided by case managers. The ACT program was developed to reduce recidivism but progress is also measured by successfully meeting the conditions of the individualized reentry plans. Miller and Miller researched the effectiveness of the program in reducing recidivism 12 months post-release. They found that the ACT Program had a significant impact on recidivism. Recidivism for program participants was 12.3 percent as opposed to nearly 82 percent for the control group. The ACT program was able to reduce recidivism by almost 70 percent.

The New York Department of Corrections instituted a program in 2004 to provide discharge planning and reentry services for city-sentenced jail inmates returning to the five boroughs of New York City. The Rikers Island Discharge Enhancement (RIDE) program provides resources for inmates post-release. The process includes 90 days of services and is completely voluntary. The program focuses on putting inmates in contact with local nonprofit service programs. White, Saunders, Fisher, & Mellow, (2008) studied program participants at one year post-release. Their findings were that participants who completed the full 90 days of post-release services had a 30 percent lower recidivism rate (41 percent recidivated) than offenders who did not complete post-release services (72 percent recidivated).

The Boston Reentry Initiative (BRI) at the Suffolk County House of Correction in Boston, MA is a program developed to aid in the transition of violent adult offenders back into their Boston neighborhoods through counseling, social services, and educational development. The BRI was established in 2001 and coordinates the efforts of social service providers, faith-based organizations, and additional law enforcement agencies to help their most violent offenders from reoffending. Braga, Piehl, & Hureau (2009) evaluated the effects of the BRI on recidivism of program participants as compared to a comparable control group. Their findings
were that after one year post-release the difference between the rates of recidivism was a 15 percent decrease for the BRI participants. The two year post-release difference in recidivism was slightly decreased at 11 percent.

These reentry initiatives clearly illustrate the benefit of community reentry programs for misdemeanant community reintegration. No negative examples could be found for reentry programs and most were least modestly successful. Recidivism studies included in this proposal all documented significant reductions in reoffending. Decreases in recidivism were even great for those who completed both the pre-release and post-release portions of the program. The current research study on Life Skills participants at the DCJ displayed similar reductions in recidivism.
Methodology

This study incorporates an evaluative, quantitative, cross-sectional study on a sample of DCJ Life Skills clients. The statistical data is used to compare the DCJ’s recidivism rates with those of the other participating sites in the TCJ project. The data is also compared to the national recidivism average. Significant differences in the criminal history, types of crimes committed, and LSI scores between those clients who recidivated and those who did not is also reviewed. The results of completing the entire TJC model are analyzed and discussed.

The study participants were selected randomly from a list of Life Skills clients. Life Skills clients are only accepted if they already have a history of recidivism. Therefore, any reduction in recidivism shows promise for the program. The study incorporated information gathered from the clients during their intake and further case management meetings. All clients signed waivers in order to participate in the Life Skills program. Their records from the JMS, case management information, and the CBI database were used to gather data pertaining to their criminal history and whether or not they were rearrested after release from the DCJ.

Research Design

This project is an evaluative study of the Life Skills program at the DCJ and its effect on recidivism for the 35 study participants. The evaluative research method is used to determine whether or not a “social intervention has produced the desired result” (Babbie, 2010, p. 363). This study incorporated quantitative data taken from JMS as well as the CBI. JMS data was utilized to gather demographic data pertaining to the clients such as race, age, gender. JMS also provided release dates and the offenses committed. CBI data was used to review arrest data for participants and to determine if they had been rearrested after their release from the DCJ.
Sample

This project utilized probability sampling – a random selection from a much larger population (Babbie, 2010). The sample consists of 35 offenders who became Life Skills clients in late 2010 and early 2011. The sample was selected to be of efficient size and demographic variance to provide a valid measure of recidivism. The sample includes 16 males and 19 females, the three major ethnic groups (white, black, and Hispanic) and one Native American.

Measurement

Quantitative analysis reflects the percentage of clients who reoffended, their charges, how many in the full TJC model, along with several other variable analyses. Recidivism studies are usually performed longitudinally and this study does take into account the time between the inmates’ release dates and the date of the CBI data pull. Therefore, it is both a cross-sectional (the re-arrest data was collected on a single date) and longitudinal study (participants had been released from jail from seven to 15 months). Statistical analysis was performed to determine rate of recidivism, difference in criminal behavior between recidivists and not recidivists, difference in LSI scores, as well as demographic information deemed pertinent to the study.
Findings

This study explored the recidivism rates and other factors of 35 Life Skills clients at the Denver County Jail. Demographically the participants were diverse enough to provide a valid sample of the entire jail population. The following provides a demographic makeup of the sample: 54 percent female (N=19) and 46 percent male (N=16); 43 percent white (N=15), 26 percent black (N=9), 29 percent Hispanic (N=10) and 2 percent Native American (N=1). The average age of the participants was 37 years.

It is important to make some components of the study more clear. First, the clients were all recidivists with an average of 15 arrests in their adult life. Secondly, all study participants were long-term Life Skills clients meaning they were part of the program for more than one month while serving time in the DCJ. Finally, not all clients included in this project completed the full TJC model which includes the Life Skills program at the DJC and continuing with CRP upon release from jail.

The primary research question addressed the national jail recidivism rate as compared to this study. The national recidivism rate for local jails is approximately 44 percent (Janetta, 2009). The current study determined that the recidivism rate for the study participants was 37 percent (total N=35, recidivists N=13).

Research question two proposed comparing two of the other five TJC sites' recidivism rates with the current study's rate of recidivism. The other sites are Davidson County, TN; Douglas County, KS; Kent County, MI; La Crosse County, WI; and Orange County, CA. Recidivism data was received from two of the sites. Douglas County, KS reported a recidivism rate of 22 percent (N=15 of 67) and Orange County, CA had a 44 percent recidivism rate (N=94 of 215).
There were some differences in sample size and recidivism definitions between these programs. Douglas County, KS and Orange County, CA defined recidivism as any participant returning to their respective jails after release. Denver County recidivism was determined as any study participant arrested anywhere in the state of Colorado. Orange County performed their study six months post release. Douglas County performs recidivism studies per annum and their information includes the entire year of 2011.

Twenty-nine percent (N=10) of the current study participants completed the TJC model. TJC model completion was a significant factor in whether or not clients recidivated. Recidivists who completed the TJC model made up 23 percent (N=3) and non-recidivists who completed the TJC model accounted for 32 percent (N=8). This data reveals that completing the TJC model by utilizing the CRP upon release decreases the risk of recidivism by nine percent.
Recidivists in this research project were also compared against those who did not recidivate for the following variables: LSI score, criminal history (total number of arrests), and types of crimes committed. LSI scores, which measure the quantitative risk/need assessment used to identify an offender's risk of committing criminal behavior and need for clinical services. The LSI score ranges from 0 to 54. The higher the LSI score, the more in need of services and the more at risk a client is. The LSI has been widely researched and found to be an effective tool to determine offender's risk of recidivism; "offenders defined by the LSI as high risk were consistently more likely to fail on release than were low-risk offenders" (Coulson, Ilacqua, Nutbrown, Giulekas, & Cudjoe, 1996, p. 427). The LSI comparison from this research found that non-recidivists had an LSI score average of 22 and recidivists' LSI score averaged 26.

Recidivist and non-recidivists in this study did not differ significantly in the total number of adult lifetime crimes they had been arrested for. Recidivists averaged 18 crimes per lifetime.
while non-recidivists averaged 14. There was also no difference in the average age of first adult arrest (23 years) between recidivists and non-recidivists.

There were minor differences in types of crimes committed by the two groups. Offenses were separated in to five different categories for the purpose of this study: violent crimes, sex offenses, driving under the influence (DUI) or driving under revocation (DUR), drug crimes, and prostitution. DUls and DURs were by far the most prevalent, closely followed by drug offenses. Violent crimes consisted mostly of misdemeanor assault usually committed while under the influence of drugs or alcohol. Recidivists did not have the preponderance of violent crimes or DUI/DURs, an interesting finding. This may be due to the small sample size or the random nature of the participant selection.

Figure 3: Comparison of Offenses between Recidivists and Non-Recidivists
A comparison of the five crime categories was also used with recidivists alone to determine if there was any marked difference in the crimes they were in the DCJ for as Life Skills clients and the crimes they were arrested for after their release. Drug crimes increased by eight percent from 15 to 23 percent while DUIs decreased by seven percent. Violent crimes increased by seven percent and sex crimes increased by eight percent.

*Figure 4: Comparison of Recidivists’ Original Charge and Re-arrest Charge*
Discussion

The DSD develops an annual report on the average daily number of offenders housed in the DCJ. The average for 2011 was 1,906 inmates. 2010 had an average daily inmate population of 2,105. There were no reasons posted for the decline in daily population but the DSD expects it to continue for the foreseeable future (DSD Annual Report, 2010; DSD Annual Report, 2011). The DSD expects this downward trend to continue through the next three forecasted years. There was no reason supplied for this reduction in daily population but one can only speculate that it may have something to do with Life Skills program which became operational in January of 2010.

The primary findings of this research project with respect to the original research questions were not surprising given the findings of similar programs. The Life Skills program admits only recidivists and yet the sample yielded seven percent reduction in recidivism from the national average. This project found that participants had a 37 percent recidivism rate. This is a 63 percent decrease in recidivism overall for participants in the Life Skills program. This is a significant finding and combined with a 12 month average since release from jail it reveals that the Life Skills program had a positive impact on reducing recidivism in the Denver area.

The DSD program's recidivism rate as compared to two of the five other sites involved in the original TJC project showed similar results (22 and 44 percent, averaged to 33 percent), revealing that the TJC project as a whole has been successful in reducing recidivism in several different jurisdictions. The two other TJC sites had a much narrower definition of recidivism that included only offenders returning to their jails. This research project had a broader definition that included arrest anywhere in the State of Colorado. This definition of recidivism is believed to be more accurate as there are many counties in the Denver Metro Area and the chance of getting arrested in a nearby county is greater. Further refinement of the definition of recidivism is required to accurately compare statistics from one jail to another. Study in this area
is also very sparse. Further research and long term studies of the TJC model and its outcomes is imperative to truly understand if the help and resources provided to clients is effective in reducing recidivism in the long term.

A small difference in LSI scores was noted between recidivists and non-recidivists. The difference (4) was not extremely diverse but does indicate that Life Skills clients who recidivated were more at risk and in need of services than those who did not. The data also revealed a slight upward trend in crime escalation for recidivists in this sample. The recidivists in this study had fewer violent crimes and DUI/DURs than the non-recidivists, perhaps due to the sample size or the randomness of participant selection.

Finally, there were no significant differences in number or types of crimes committed between recidivists and non-recidivists in this study. This finding is not particularly notable because all participants are recidivists with an average age of 37, plenty of time to have accumulated a healthy arrest record. All Life Skills clients are recidivists so it was not surprising that both groups had a significant number of adult lifetime arrests.

Life Skills has had over 2,500 clients since its inception. Only a small number are long term clients. All other participants are short term (one month or less) and have not been included in recidivism studies although they may also utilize CRP and its programs upon release. Research that includes short-term Life Skill clients is an area that requires further study and may provide more definitive answers as to why daily jail population at the DCJ has been decreasing.

The new Rational Choice Theory provides a good working explanation for recidivism in that it includes the Deterrence Theory along with the Strain and Social Learning Theories to explain an offender’s choices and actions. Life Skills clients left the DCJ with more “tools in their toolbox” than they entered the jail with. Cognitive behavior classes enabled them to better understand their habits and gave them alternative ways to manage their behaviors. Alcohol and
drug classes gave them tools and resources to aid them in managing their addictions. One-on-one counseling provided clients with a personal connection in the jail with someone who cared about their wellbeing. Outside agencies such as CRP, religious organizations, and myriad of other nonprofit social agencies provided clients with resources to use upon release. The hope is that with their newfound skills they will be able to make choices that better their lives in the future.

Humans make choices based on past experiences and knowledge. Rational choices are very rarely made based on punishments and this fact has been proved via research time and time again (Cullen & Gendreau, 2000; Cullen, Pratt, Miceli & Moon, 2002). Therefore, it would make sense both practically and fiscally to provide offenders with knowledge so that they can create new experiences with which to base decisions on. TJC programs and the like have a record of reducing recidivism mainly because they provide one-on-one case management and resources that are tailored to the individual (Miller & Miller, 2010; Roman & Chaflin, 2006). These programs are not one-size-fits-all. The personal interaction between the caseworker and the offender is crucial and programs that are able to provide more personal interaction will be more successful.

Case management performed on Life Skills clients at the DCJ has really expanded the author’s knowledge and understanding of misdemeanants and their habits and behaviors. Personal time spent with clients has proven invaluable in understanding their needs and how to help them make better decisions and stay out of jail. This research study provided no surprises; TJC programs reduce recidivism, more so for those who complete the entire TJC model. Moreover, reentry programs that provide case management along with resources are even more successful.
The Urban Institute and the NIC began the TJC project in 2009. Most of the original sites implemented their TJC program in early 2010. The three year mark is coming up and it is expected that statistical analyses for the sites will be provided in order to determine the effectiveness of the program. It is hoped that the program will prove successful at all six sites. In order ensure the data is compared equitably, a standard definition of recidivism must be established. Also, each site must have a comparable program in place providing similar classes, case management, and resources. Finally, the Urban Institute and NIC should review these sites and their reentry programs carefully for best practices. These practices can be passed along to new TJC programs so that they can expect to see similar or even great reductions in recidivism over time.

The benefits of reducing recidivism are wide and far-reaching. Recidivism costs not only the offender but the offender’s family, the criminal justice system, and the community. Providing recidivists with personal case management and resources tailored to their needs will reduce recidivism. Certainly, there will be those offenders that cannot or will not be helped (the TJC programs are all voluntary). An officer in the DCJ commented that the Life Skill program was a waste of time and it did not matter what we did, these people were going to keep coming back to jail. We argue that it is not our job to eradicate recidivism, but only to stop it one person at a time. In this endeavor, the Life Skills program at the DCJ has definitely proven successful.
References


Appendix A

Denver City and County Release Form

DENVER MULTI-PARTY RELEASE OF INFORMATION CONSENT FORM
FOR THE RELEASE OF CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION ABOUT MEDICAL HEALTH
AND MENTAL HEALTH AND ALCOHOL OR DRUG TREATMENT

The purpose of this consent is to facilitate referral(s) for treatment, case management, treatment planning, coordination of medical care and other services. By checking the boxes below and signing this form on page 2, the types of information listed below can be disclosed.

Print Name ___________________________ AKA ___________________________ DOB ___________________________
I hereby consent to communication about me between (agency requesting the release):

☐ Life Skills Program, 10500 Smith Road, Denver, CO 80239

and the following (check all that apply):

☐ Denver Health (DHHA), 777 Bannock St., Denver, CO 303-436-6000 (includes Denver Cares and OBHS)
☐ Mental Health Center of Denver (MHCD), 4141 E. Dickenson Pl., Denver, CO 303-504-6500
☐ Colorado Coalition for the Homeless (CCH), 2111 Champa St., Denver, CO 303-293-2217
☐ Denver City Attorney, 720-913-8050, 201 W Colfax, Dept1207, Denver, CO
☐ Denver Sheriff Dept., 720-337-0195, 490 W Colfax, Denver, CO
☐ Denver County Court, 720-865-7800*
☐ City Public Defender, 720-337-0407
520 W Colfax, Denver, CO
☐ State Public Defender, 303-620-4999, 1560 Broadway, Suite 300, Denver, CO
☐ Denver District Court, 720-913-9001*
☐ Denver VA, ECHCS 303-399-8020 1055 Clermont Street, Denver, CO
☐ City and County Building, 1437 Bannock St, Denver
Other:
☐ Community Re-Entry Project, 655 Broadway Suite 450, Denver, 80203

I give my permission for information in the following areas to be disclosed (check all that apply):

☐ Pre-Sentence Information
☐ Legal Issues
☐ History and Physical Exam
☐ Assessments and Treatment Plans
☐ Treatment History
☐ Progress Reports
☐ Discharge Summaries
☐ Medication Records
☐ Risk Assessment Investigation/scores
☐ Probation Compliance
☐ Psychological/Neuropsychological Evaluations
☐ Alcohol and Drug Treatment (attendance data, referral information, clinical progress data, education/termination data)
☐ Psychiatric Evaluations

Final effective 3/2011
Other:
I understand that my alcohol and/or drug treatment records may be protected under the federal regulations governing Confidentiality of Alcohol and Drug Abuse Patient Records, 42 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Part 2 or Colorado C.R.S.27-81-113 & 27-82-109 pertaining to the records of persons using alcohol or drugs. Other treatment information may be covered under the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA), 45 CFR, Parts 160 and 164. This release does not prevent other agencies from releasing information otherwise authorized by law.

The purpose of this disclosure is at my request. I understand that any disclosure of information carries with it the potential for re-disclosure and once the information is disclosed, it may no longer be protected by federal HIPAA confidentiality rules; however, if this information is protected by the Federal Substance Abuse Confidentiality regulations, 42 C.F.R. part 2, the recipient may or may not re-disclose such information without my further written authorization unless otherwise provided for by state or federal law.

I also understand that I reserve the right to revoke this Release of Information at any time, except to the extent that action has been taken based on this release. I understand that I have a right to a copy of this release. This release expires one year from today’s date, termination of the case, or if I revoke my consent.

I understand that law enforcement cannot use any information obtained from drug/alcohol treatment as the basis for a subsequent criminal prosecution. Signing this disclosure of information form is voluntary. The health care provider will not condition treatment, payment, enrollment in a health plan, or eligibility for benefits on whether or not you sign this form for the requested use or disclosure.

[Client Signature] [Printed Name] [Date]

[Medical Proxy/POA/Guardian Signature (if applicable)] [Printed Name] [Date]

[Witness Signature] [Printed Name] [Date]

*******************************************************************************

Please send records by mail or secure fax to:

[Printed Name]

[Agency]

[Address] [City] [Zip] [Fax Number]

Final effective 3/2011