

# EVALUATION OF OHIO'S RECLAIM PROGRAMS

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## Executive Summary

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In 1993, a House Bill was passed in the State of Ohio that created the Reasoned and Equitable Community and Local Alternatives to the Incarceration of Minors (RECLAIM Ohio) Program. The RECLAIM program was designed to divert youth from the Ohio Department of Youth Services (DYS) by keeping them in the community. In order to prevent youth from going to DYS, the availability of programming had to be increased at the local level (i.e. county level). RECLAIM funding would thus be used to create and implement local programs to target juvenile criminality and other antisocial behaviors.

An initial study conducted in 1994, and a subsequent evaluation study conducted in 2005, found that the majority of those participating in RECLAIM funded programs were adjudicated for lower-level offenses and overall, there was a significant decrease in the number of commitments to DYS facilities from the county courts.

Since the previous study, Ohio has implemented a statewide risk assessment system, the Ohio Youth Assessment System (OYAS), and has redesigned the DYS Subsidy Grant data system to track individual level data. With these advancements in mind, the current study updates and extends the previous evaluations of the RECLAIM program in several ways. First, the adoption of the OYAS allows for a common measure of risk to be used across settings. This provides an effective way to examine the impact that risk plays across settings. Moreover, since the OYAS provides assessments at each stage of the system, it allows for the comparison of youth across levels of care (e.g., community, residential placement, and DYS). Second, the use of the Correctional Program Checklist (CPC) allows for an examination of the programs most served by RECLAIM funding, including several probation departments. Third, rudimentary measures of dosage were collected and used to determine the benefit of higher dosage of services across risk levels.

DYS contracted with the University of Cincinnati (UC), Center for Criminal Justice Research (CCJR) to evaluate the RECLAIM funded programs, including an evaluation of recidivism rates of the youth served by such programs. The current study was designed to answer the following questions:

1. What is the recidivism rate of youth served by individual RECLAIM funded programs?
2. What is the recidivism rate of youth served by CCFs?
3. What is the recidivism rate of youth sent to a DYS facility?
4. Are there differences in recidivism rates between the different types of RECLAIM programs?
5. Do the programs and facilities have different recidivism rates by youth risk-level?

## **METHODS**

The current study used data on 10,679 youths terminated from RECLAIM programs (N = 9,314)<sup>1</sup>, community corrections facilities (CCFS; N = 516), or released from a Department of Youth Services (DYS) facility (N = 849) during fiscal year 2011 (FY2011). There were a total of 634 RECLAIM programs and 12 CCFs (DYS facilities were counted as one distinct “program” type).

Data were collected at both the individual and program levels. At the individual-level, youth’ characteristics (e.g., demographic information and juvenile justice history) and subsequent legal outcomes (e.g., new criminal behavior and new juvenile and/or adult commitments) were collected. Data were obtained through a number of databases, including the DYS felony adjudication database, the Ohio Community Corrections Information System (CCIS) database, the Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (DRC) intake database, and the Ohio

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<sup>1</sup> This study represents only those youth who received 100-level series programs. Those who received 200-level programs were not included in the analyses unless they received a 100-level series program also.

Law Enforcement Gateway (OhLEG) Portal. Program level data were collected through face-to-face interviews with staff at various RECLAIM funded agencies using the CPC Questionnaire. In total, 14 programs participated in the CPC process and face-to-face interviews.<sup>2</sup>

## **RESULTS**

The following findings can be summarized from this study:

### **Demographic Characteristics and Risk Levels**

- The majority of RECLAIM and CCF youth were white (approximately 71% and 62%, respectively), while the majority of DYS youth were youth of color (approximately 65%). Further, youth in the six largest urban counties (Franklin, Hamilton, Montgomery, Cuyahoga, Lucas, and Summit) served a significantly larger percentage of youth of color, compared to the remaining 82 counties. For all placement types, the majority of youth were male.
- The average age at release was fairly similar for all three program types. On average, youth released from RECLAIM programs were approximately 16 years old, while youth sentenced to CCFs and DYS facilities were slightly older at 16.5 and 17 years old, respectively.
- Based on results from the OYAS, predominately lower-risk youth were served by RECLAIM programs (approximately 81% were low and moderate risk). On the other hand, the majority of youth released from either a CCF or DYS facility were moderate or high risk (approximately 71% and 89%, respectively).

### **Recidivism Results for all Youth (RECLAIM, CCF, and DYS)**

- Recidivism data using a measure of “any failure” (i.e., new felony adjudications + DYS/DRC commitments) indicated that youth who were terminated from RECLAIM programs recidivated at a rate of approximately 16%, while youths released from CCFs or DYS facilities recidivated at considerably higher rates (approximately 40% and 50%, respectively).
- Recidivism results across risk level indicated that low risk youth performed better when served in the community by RECLAIM programs, compared to low risk youth released from CCFs and DYS facilities. Similarly, moderate and high risk youth who remained in the community reoffended at significantly lower rates than those placed in CCFs or DYS facilities.
- Males who were referred to RECLAIM programs recidivated at the lowest rates, compared to CCF and DYS males. Conversely, youth sentenced to DYS institutions recidivated at the highest rates, regardless of risk level.

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<sup>2</sup> The CPC assessment has been adapted for different correctional entities (e.g., residential facilities, community supervision agencies, and specific groups within a program/agency) across the criminal justice system.

## **Recidivism Results for RECLAIM Youth**

- Results indicated that regardless of risk level, youth who successfully completed a RECLAIM program(s) were less likely to recidivate compared to those who did not successfully complete a RECLAIM program.
- Males recidivated at a considerably higher level, compared to their female counterparts (approximately 25% versus 8%). Further, results indicated that at every risk level, males recidivated more than twice as much as their female counterparts at each corresponding level of risk.
- RECLAIM programs served youths between the ages of 9 and 21. Youths who fell in the 11 to 14 year age group, recidivated at considerably lower rates than those youths who fell in the 15 to 17 year age group and the 18 to 21 year age group.
- Results indicated that recidivism rates ranged considerably across type of RECLAIM program, as well as recidivism type.
- The majority of RECLAIM programs showed significant differences between recidivism rates for low, moderate, and high risk youth. While some programs appeared to have promising effects for reducing recidivism, other programs appeared to increase recidivism for low and moderate risk youth.
- Results indicated that low and moderate risk youth had lower recidivism rates when they were involved in programming for 0 to 3 months. Conversely, high risk youth were more successful when they were involved in programming for 13 months or more.
- Results indicated that low risk youth who participated in just one RECLAIM program had lower recidivism rates (approximately 4%). Results were similar for both moderate and high risk youth, in that the fewer number of services one was referred to the better the results.

## **Program Factors and Outcome: CPC Results**

### *Strengths*

- The agency/program directors were professionally trained in a helping profession and had a significant role in selecting agency staff.
- Staff were knowledgeable about the agency's/program's goals and mission statement.
- There was a collaborative process with all stakeholders. The agency/program had good relationships with partners and key stakeholders in the community.
- The majority of staff members was trained in a helping profession and had adequate experience in programs with offenders involved in the criminal justice system.

- Staff are selected and promoted based on skills and values.
- Many agencies/programs that served special populations (e.g., sex offenders) used specialized assessments tools to identify this type of population's risk/needs (e.g., J-SOAP).
- The vast majority of supervisors and staff supported the use of evidence-based practices.
- Ethical guidelines dictated staff boundaries and interactions with offenders.
- Many of the agencies/programs had established relationships with community providers to deliver services to offenders.

### *Overall Recommendations*

- Delivery of evidence-based practices: Agencies/programs should require the use of evidence based practices (EBP) when working with community partners and have measurable performance indicators for all service providers. The agencies/programs should ensure that youth' criminogenic needs are being targeted and prioritized. Furthermore, criminogenic factors should be addressed using cognitive behavioral interventions.
- Need to be active in promoting EBP: Agencies/programs should leverage their influence on local providers to deliver EBP. There should be an action or strategic plan in place concerning the implementation of EBP. The plan should organize and prioritize the agencies/programs' planning activities in regards to implementing EBP throughout their departments.
- Training: Training based on EBP was significantly lacking from a majority of the agencies/programs we visited. Thus, the agencies/programs would benefit from implementing training efforts to ensure that staff are trained in EBP. Staff should receive formal training on EBP and at least 40 hours of ongoing training per year.
- Formal evaluations: It is recommended that agencies/programs implement at minimum, an annual performance evaluation that includes direct practice skills.
- Adoption of a risk/needs assessment: The majority of the agencies/programs that were assessed during the CPC processes did not use a validated, standardized, and objective risk assessment instrument. It is suggested that agencies/programs incorporate a tool to objectively measure risk and need factors (e.g., OYAS).
- Intensity of services and reassessment: Because the agencies/programs do not assess risk on all offenders, they were unable to provide more intensive services for higher risk clients. The agencies/programs would benefit from adopting a structured risk assessment and use it to determine contact standards, dosage levels or days in treatment, amount and type of services, etc.

- Treatment modalities: There were a mix of treatment modalities being used by the agencies/programs. The agencies/programs, as well as the other agencies/programs providing services to youth should utilize approaches and interventions that have been deemed effective in changing offender behavior.
- Matching services: At the time of the CPC evaluations, it appeared that youth received the same programming regardless of their risk and/or responsivity factors. The agencies/programs would benefit from considering risk, need, and responsivity factors when assigning participants to programs.
- Completion criteria: Agencies/programs should develop clearly outlined completion criteria that youth must complete before they have successfully completed the program or group. Termination should be defined by progress in acquiring prosocial behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs, and not engaging in other illegal behavior.
- Incentives and rewards: Agencies/programs would benefit from adopting a set process of incentives/rewards to encourage client participation and motivation. Positive progress should be continually identified and discussed with the offender.
- Quality control and measuring performance: Agencies/programs should ensure that there are quality control elements defined, collected, and measured on a regular basis.

**Based on this research, several recommendations can be made:**

1. Placement in programming should be based, in part, on the risk of the youth. Specifically, courts and other agencies making placement decisions should screen youth using the OYAS instrument to determine risk to reoffend. Lower risk youth should be placed in RECLAIM programs, while higher risk youth should be placed in CCF or DYS facilities. For those higher risk youth being served in the community, treatment and programming must be of sufficient intensity and duration in order to be effective. For youth who are high risk that do not respond to sufficient treatment/programming in the community and/or have serious underlying charges, CCF or DYS facilities might be appropriate.
2. Experimental or quasi-experimental studies should be conducted focusing on several RECLAIM programs. One of the benefits of conducting a state-wide evaluation is the ability to examine the effects of RECLAIM funded programming across a range of settings; however, we were not able to explore specific types of treatment and their effectiveness at reducing recidivism. As such, future studies should begin to explore these relationships through the use of a comparison group.
3. The state should continue to support the use of the OYAS, as this study confirmed once again that it is an accurate instrument for predicting recidivism. Further, the state might want to explore tying the use of the instrument to funding for agencies/programs who continue to support and use the risk assessment system.

4. The original OYAS validation study was conducted with UC researchers who were highly trained and supervised. As such, it would be beneficial for the state to conduct a revalidation study using data collected from juvenile justice staff.
5. Ohio has made significant changes over the past 5 years. It is clear in the data that the number of youths receiving deeper end placements has significantly decreased. It may be beneficial to explore the impact of these changes on the youth in Ohio and to fully understand how the changes have affected Ohio's juvenile justice footprint.