

Employment and recidivism outcomes of an employment assistance program for prisoners and offenders.

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Abstract

International and Australian literature shows that employment prospects for ex-prisoners and ex-offenders are quite grim, that employment is a key element of successful reintegration, and that unemployment is associated with re-offending. The literature also suggests that ex-prisoners and ex-offenders are among the most disadvantaged job seekers and have comprehensive support needs in relation to gaining employment.

This paper reports on a comprehensive evaluation of the Corrections Services Employment Pilot Program (CSEPP). The CSEPP commenced in 2002 as part of the commitment of Corrections Victoria to reducing re-offending through investment in rehabilitation and prison diversion programs. The program provides direct employment assistance as well as referring clients into other relevant support services through a case management model. Some of the assumptions underlying the program include: need for long-term support; likelihood of slow and intermittent progress; need for basic skill development in relation to pre-employment preparation; and need for other services such as housing, health services, and personal support.

The program evaluation was conducted in 2004 by a team from Deakin University, led by Professor Joe Graffam. This paper reports on program employment and recidivism outcomes.

Introduction

The study described investigated employment outcomes and recidivism among clients of an employment assistance program for prisoners and offenders in Victoria, Australia. During the period of investigation (July, 2002 – October, 2004), the program operated out of seven prisons and ten community corrections locations. The program targeted clients at moderate to high risk of re-offending. Program participants were eligible to receive assistance for 12 months commencing pre-release for prisoner clients. Employment assistance provided included activities related to work preparation and placement into employment, but also included more general life skills and reintegration supports.

The core activities of employment consultants included, but not exhaustively: getting referrals from prison and community corrections personnel; assisting clients with life skills development (primarily by linking them into existing relevant services); assisting clients with work-related skills development (either through direct provision or by linking them into existing services); assisting with résumé preparation and job-seeking; organising and possibly funding enrolment in short training or certification/licensing courses (driver's licence, forklift driver's licence, OHS course, short courses, etc.); for some clients, ensuring that the transition from prison to community was successful; organising and providing material resources related to going for interviews or starting a job (phone, clothing or equipment, fares, short-term living expenses, etc.); and provision of post-placement support. In addition, in many cases consultants also served as advocates and made referrals to other needed services such as housing, drug and alcohol treatment, and financial counselling.

The program had a dual purpose of sustained employment and reduced re-offending. The comprehensive nature of the program and the 12 month eligibility was determined in recognition of the high level and complexity of support needs typical of the target client group. Design and implementation of the program was largely influenced by the emerging literature on reintegration, international advice, and a similar program operating in Queensland. In this paper, we report on client employment and recidivism outcomes.

Literature Review

Several studies have examined the inter-relationship between the numerous barriers to reintegration for ex-prisoners, including those relating to employment. As part of a larger study, Helfgott (1997) interviewed 16 prisoners approaching release and four ex-prisoners about their experiences. The ex-prisoners affirmed the many difficulties they faced upon release, indicating that their immediate needs related to getting a job, housing, education, medical care, counselling for substance abuse, auto and health insurance, clothing, transportation needs, and voice-mail access. As a group, they lacked support from friends and family and emphasised their need to develop more positive social networks. Employment was identified as a difficult need to meet, although obtaining adequate housing was their most pressing concern upon release. Finding meaningful employment was frequently mentioned as a short-term goal. Discrimination in employment, housing, and social relationships were also viewed as problematic. Given the small sample size, those results must be treated as only suggestive.

Further support for the complex support requirements of this group was reported by Nelson, Deess and Allen (1999) who tracked 49 adults over the first month of their release from prison/jail in New York. Affirming earlier studies, the main challenges for this group related to getting a job, finding a house, and gaining access to health care services. About one third of the participants (18 of 49) did get a full or part-time job within the first month, but this was usually secured through family and friends or ex-employers.

Relatively few ex-prisoners were able to find employment on their own because of limited job search skills, emphasising the need for specialist employment support. The average age of the 31 individuals who remained unemployed over the first month was slightly older at 37 years compared to an average age of 30 years for those who did find jobs. As well, most ex-prisoners were unemployed at the time of their arrest (23 of 31 participants), and 13 ex-prisoners had either not worked in a long time or never worked, indicating the need for intensive employment support. Some ex-prisoners did not search for a job because of more pressing concerns, typically related to obtaining insurance and medical attention because of HIV status. Virtually all of the ex-prisoners (46 of 49 participants) reported alcohol or drug use in the year prior to their incarceration, with half reporting daily drug use (Nelson et al., 1999).

The impact of what are wide-ranging barriers to employment for ex-prisoners and offenders is evident in employment participation rates of these groups. While it is difficult to estimate employment rates of ex-prisoners and offenders, what little we know suggests that these groups are very much disadvantaged. In the Bridging the Gap program in Victoria, only 11% of 198 participants were employed full-time at six months or at program completion, and 9% were employed on a casual basis, although these participants were identified as a group with high support needs and drug and/or alcohol issues (Melbourne Criminology Research & Evaluation Unit, 2003). In Britain, Mair and May (1997) found that more than half (60%) of the general population were employed compared to only 21% of over 1,000 offenders under probation supervision, while employment rates for ex-prisoners have been reported as closer to 10% (Sarno, Hearnden, Hedderman, Hough, Nee, & Herrington, 2000). In North America, employment participation rates of ex-prisoners were reported to be somewhat higher in New York at 40% in 1999 (Meredith, 2000, cited in Nelson & Trone, 2000).

Disadvantage in employment is also apparent in the disparity in wage earnings between these groups. There is some evidence that ex-prisoners who do find employment upon prison release earn substantially lower wages than convicted offenders who did not go to prison. Waldfogel (1994) reported that the employment rates of ex-prisoners who had been imprisoned for larceny and fraud were 5% to 12% lower than for offenders who were convicted of these crimes, but were not imprisoned. Likewise, the ex-prisoners had substantially lower incomes (16% to 28% lower) than the convicted offenders who did not go to prison. Employment options for ex-prisoners are largely restricted to low skilled jobs with no provision for benefit packages (Taxman, Young & Byrne, 2002), which may in part, be attributed to formal legal restrictions and informal corporate restrictions on hiring this group.

Given the range of difficulties experienced by these groups, it is unlikely that mainstream employment services such as Job Network can adequately prepare and support these clients in obtaining and maintaining employment. Rather, there is an urgent need for specialist support agencies that are more comprehensive in their

approach toward assisting and supporting these individuals into employment, and that are better suited to dealing with the full range of difficulties that may impact on job readiness and job retention.

There is a large body of research examining conditions that contribute to recidivism. A number of studies have examined the relation between personal characteristics and return to prison. Numerous factors in pre-prison life including employment history, substance use, social support, physical health, and mental health have been associated with recidivism. Lower recidivism has been associated with employment in a number of studies (Rahill-Beuler & Kretzer, 1997; Soothill & Holmes, 1981; Uggen, 2000). Gendreau, Little, and Goggin (1996) provided a meta-analysis of the literature on recidivism among adults and found that the strongest predictors of recidivism included criminal background and lack of education or employment skills.

Australian statistics support the relation between re-offending and employment. Rawnsley (2003) reported that throughout Australia, between 1993 and 2001, 32 percent of individuals who had been imprisoned once were employed prior to prison entry compared to 22 percent of prisoners who had been imprisoned on four occasions in that time period. In other words, chronic re-offenders were less likely to be employed than first-time offenders. Corrections Victoria estimates that approximately 60–70 percent of people who re-offend are unemployed at the time of re-offending (Victorian Department of Justice, 2000–2001), indicating that unemployment is a key factor in recidivism.

There have been at least 34 meta-analytic reviews of offender treatment or rehabilitation (Gendreau, Goggin, French, & Smith, in press) that have provided support for the efficacy of prison-based and community-based treatment programs in reducing recidivism (e.g., Andrews, Zinger, Hoge, Bonta, Gendreau & Cullen, 1990; Dowden & Andrews, 1999b, 2000, 2003; Lipsey, 1992; Lipsey & Wilson, 1998; Losel, 1995; Wilson, Gallagher & MacKenzie, 2000). Reduced recidivism has been associated with program participation in prison, including programs aimed at improving employment prospects and job skills, developing cognitive skills, and reducing substance abuse (e.g., Cullen, 2002; Gaes, Flanagan, Motiuk, & Stewart, 1999; Inciardi, Butzin, Hooper, & Harrison, 1997; Saylor & Gaes, 1997).

McGuire (2000) combined 18 reviews and provided a 'review of the reviews' comprising over 2,000 independent outcomes relating to various types of prison-based and community-based treatment programs. Results indicated reductions in recidivism of between 5 and 10 percent, although some individual studies produced larger effect sizes (McGuire, 2000).

The principles of risk, need, and responsivity of offender treatment programs have been examined, as well as therapeutic integrity of the program (Andrews & Bonta, 2003). Findings have typically confirmed that correctional treatment plays a key role in reduced recidivism; reduced recidivism associated with behavioural/social learning programs more than non-behavioural treatment programs

(e.g., Andrews, et al., 1990; Dowden & Andrews, 1999a, 1999b, 2000, 2003; Lipsey, 1995). As well, programs targeting criminogenic needs have been reported as more effective in reducing recidivism than programs focusing on non-criminogenic needs (e.g., Dowden & Andrews, 2000, 2003).

Programs that have provided post-release support in employment and training as well as other reintegration support have shown reductions in recidivism (e.g., Sarno et al, 2000; Saylor & Gaes, 1997). Positive program effects were observed by Saylor and Gaes (1997) in a study of over 7,000 U.S. prisoners who participated in academic, vocational, and work experience programming (PREP). Twelve months after release, 72 percent of program participants were employed compared to 63 percent of those in a comparison group of non-participants. As well, prisoners who received work experience while in prison had lower recidivism rates following release than the comparison group.

To summarise, several variables including gender and personal history have been shown to affect recidivism. Assistance, particularly in terms of behavioural and social programs aimed at addressing criminogenic needs, has been associated with reduced recidivism. Employment and assistance with employment have been especially associated with reduced recidivism. The study reported here has focused on recidivism among participants of an employment assistance program operating in Victoria, Australia. The program has a dual purpose of placing participants into sustained employment and reducing re-offending. Given suggestions in the literature and the intensive nature of assistance provided, it was expected that placement into employment and sustained participation in the program would each be associated with lower recidivism. However, both employment and program participation effects were expected to be moderate for the program population as a whole, due to the risk status of the target group, the well-recognised high level and complexity of support needs, and an expected slow rate of progress.

Method

Participant Files

Analysis of employment outcomes was based on the total program client population. The total number of registered clients for July 1, 2002 – June 30, 2004 was 2,458, and in the analysis of July 1 – October 31, 2004 it was 576. There were 2,031 males (82.6%) and 427 females (17.4%) in the first two years, and 494 males (85.8%) and 82 females (14.2%) in the first four months of the third year. These proportions closely match proportions in the Victorian criminal justice system. In the first two years, 55.0% were prisoner clients and 45.0% were offender (community corrections) clients. In the first four months of the third year, 55.7% were prisoner clients and 44.3% were offender (community corrections) clients. These proportions differ somewhat from the proportions in the Victorian criminal justice system, with approximately 35% prisoners and 65% offenders in the corrections system.

Primary analysis of recidivism among the program's clients was based on the total program client population. The total number of registered clients for the period of the investigation (July 1, 2002 – October 31, 2004) was 3,034. There were 2,525 males (83.2%) and 509 females (16.8%). Of the total registered clients, 55.1% were prisoner clients and 44.9% were offender (community corrections) clients. As pointed out, these proportions differ somewhat from the proportions in the criminal justice system.

Data for the additional analyses of recidivism comprised two sets of randomly selected files: the files of 600 employment program prisoner clients ($M = 30.23$ years; $SD = 8.52$); and 600 non-program prisoner clients of correctional services ($M = 35.38$ years; $SD = 10.89$), provided courtesy of Department of Justice IT personnel. Although comparison samples, the two samples could differ significantly in terms of time since release, given that the program population from which that sample was drawn comprises relatively recently released prisoner clients, while the non-program population from which that sample was drawn has a much greater range of time since release. This is important because time since release is known to be a reliable predictor of re-offending. For this reason, we can only treat the results of the additional analyses as suggestive.

Procedure

In order to investigate employment outcomes, program records were analysed. Program records of referrals, registrations, placements, 13 week outcomes, and validations (confirmation of the outcome) formed the basis of the analysis. Records of program participants were obtained from the PIMS system, through the provider organisations, and through the Department. Data files were compiled from electronic reports. Because two separate analyses were conducted, one for the first two years of operation (ending June 30, 2004) and one for July – October 31st of 2004, two separate data sets were created.

In order to investigate recidivism, first, program records were analysed. Program records were obtained from the Prisoner Information Management System (PIMS) through the provider organisations and through the Department of Justice. Data files were compiled from electronic reports. Recidivism data were provided electronically from PIMS records. This database is password encrypted and was made unavailable to anyone except researchers. The database is stored on CD-ROM in a locked safe. One more important caveat: the Prisoner Information Management System (PIMS) records a person's activity through the prison system and is only a partial record of criminal activity. PIMS obviously cannot measure criminal activity in the community that escapes detection. PIMS also does not capture information about those offences where there is a non-custodial sentence involved because of its very nature. PIMS thus provides a partial snapshot of recidivism.

Data Analysis

Employment outcomes were investigated using several measures:

- number of referrals, registrations, placements, and outcomes (13-weeks of employment), together with percentages associated with males, females, prison and community locations – these measures allow analysis and discussion in relation to achievement of targets;
- proportion of referrals converted to registrations – this effectiveness measure gives an indication of ability to inform and engage clients in the program;
- proportion of registrations converted to employment placements – this measure gives an indication of effectiveness in employment preparation;
- proportion of employment placements converted to 13 week employment outcomes – this measure gives some indication of effectiveness of ‘job match’ (client-job suitability), as well as indicating ‘stamina’ of clients;
- proportion of registrations converted to 13 week outcomes – this measure gives an indication of overall efficiency of the placement and support process.

Analyses of recidivism have included simple frequency and percentage of re-offending among registered clients, as well as analyses of variance. Rates of re-offending for registered clients, those clients placed in employment and clients registered but not placed in employment, have been calculated and analysed further to determine overall program recidivism rates, and whether there are differences related to gender and prisoner/offender client status.

More advanced analyses of recidivism have also been conducted, based on the sample of 600 program client files and 600 non-program client files. For the more complex analysis, three measures of recidivism have been used:

- ‘rate of re-offending’ - the number of re-offences per day, calculated by tallying the number of PIMS offence entries for each client, divided by the number of days between first and most recent offence;
- ‘seriousness of re-offending’ – the ascribed score of each client’s most serious re-offence, scores attributed using the following scale: 5 = ‘very serious’/offence involving death or very serious harm to other people (e.g., manslaughter, murder, attempted murder); 4 = ‘serious’/offence where harm to others had occurred or where federal crimes had been committed (e.g., assault or rape); 3 = ‘moderately serious’/offences where no harm had come to other people, but weapons were involved or potential for harm existed (e.g., robberies, burglaries, crimes involving intention to cause harm); 2 = ‘low seriousness’/offences that involved breaches of public trust or violations of others’ rights, but no involvement of weapons or threat of harm, (e.g., thefts, lesser drug-related crimes, forgeries); and 1 = ‘minimally serious’ crimes were those with no potential for harm to others or for less serious violations of trust (e.g., parking fines, minor road infringements or breaches of parole);

- ‘poly-recidivism’ - the total number of different kinds of re-offences recorded.

Results

Employment outcomes for clients of the program are reported in terms of the number of clients referred, registered, placed into employment, and achieving 13 weeks of continuous employment. Client progression through the program is also reported, in terms of the conversion of referrals to registrations, registrations to placements, and placements to 13 week employment outcomes. Overall program effectiveness is reported in terms of the conversion of registrations to 13 week employment outcomes. These outcomes are examined in relation to client gender, status as a prisoner or offender client, and total program outcomes. Recidivism outcomes for clients of the program are reported in relation to overall rates of re-offending for program clients, rates for those placed into employment and those unplaced, by gender and by client status as prisoner or offender. Reported results of more advanced analyses include comparisons between program clients and non-program corrections clients and re-offending of program clients pre and post program registration. Those results are reported in relation to frequency, severity, and variety of re-offending.

Number of Referrals, Registrations, Placements, and Outcomes

The most basic employment outcome investigated was number of registrations, placements, and outcomes (20 hours of work per week for 13 weeks). The program target for the first two years was 450 clients placed into employment for 20 hours per week or more for 13 weeks, so that served as the best indicator of success in achieving targets. However, participation in and progress through all phases of the program have been evaluated. Table 1 presents results for the whole of the program, 2002–2004. Table 2 presents those results for July 1st – October 31st, 2004. Results are presented in relation to gender, client status as a prisoner or offender, and total program outcomes.

Table 1: Number of referrals, registrations, placements, and outcomes (July, 2002 – June, 2004).

	Referred	Registered	Placed	13 weeks
Males	3105	2031	729	348
Females	642	427	101	53
Prisoners	1429	1351	219	90
Offenders	2318	1107	611	311
Total	3747	2458	830	401

Through the first two years, the program:

- Averaged 156 referrals per month and 102 registrations per month.
- Averaged 34.6 job placements per month.
- Averaged 16.7 outcomes per month (clients achieving 13 weeks of continuous employment).

- Achieved a total of 401 outcomes over the two years, 89% of the target.

It is apparent from the table that patterns are very different for males and females and very different for prisoner and offender clients. Of the total registered clients, 82.6% were male and 17.4% female (the split is approximately 80% – 20% in the corrections system). Males also comprised a large proportion of clients placed into employment and those who achieved outcomes as well. The numbers convert to 87.8% of clients placed being males and 12.2% females, and 86.8% of clients achieving 13 week outcomes being males and 13.2% females.

There were differences in the pattern of participation for prisoner and offender clients as well. Of the total registered clients, 55.0% were prisoner clients and 45.0% were offender clients (the split is approximately 35–65% in the corrections system). Prisoner clients comprised 26.4% of clients placed, offender clients 73.6% of clients placed. Prisoner clients comprised 22.4% of clients who achieved 13 week outcomes, offender clients 77.6% of clients who achieved 13 week outcomes. So, prisoner clients were over-represented compared with the corrections system. Despite being greater in number of registrations, they accounted for fewer placements and fewer 13 week outcomes. Clearly, providers did not shy away from working with more difficult-to-place clients; and it is clear from the results, as well as from the literature, that prisoner clients are more difficult to place in employment.

Because the effects of various disruptions were experienced up to the end of the initial two-year pilot period, it was decided to include a separate analysis of results for the first four months of the third year. For the period July – October, 2004, performance was even stronger.

Table 2: Number of referrals, registrations, placements, and outcomes (July, 2004 – October, 2004).

	Referred	Registered	Placed	13 weeks
Males	585	494	215	101
Females	94	82	17	10
Prisoners	295	321	81	50
Offenders	384	255	151	61
Total	679	576	232	111

Although only a 4 month period rather than 2 years (16% of the two year period), the program achieved 18.1% of the total two year referrals, 23.4% of the registrations, 28.0% of the placements, and 27.7% of the 13 week outcomes for the two year period. The number of clients receiving assistance and the number of outcomes achieved definitely increased into the third year of funding. In the four month period, the program averaged 170 referrals per month (9% above the two year average) and 144 registrations (41% above the two year average). The program averaged 58 job placements per month (a 68% improvement). The program averaged 28 outcomes per month (also a 68% improvement).

In the four month period, 85.8% of clients registered were male and 14.2% were female (a slightly higher proportion of males than in the first two years). Males comprised 92.7% of clients placed, females 7.3% of clients placed. Males comprised 91.0% of clients who achieved outcomes, females 9.0% of clients who achieved 13 week outcomes. Again, relatively fewer females progressed from registration to placement, but relatively more of those who did achieved 13 week outcomes compared to males.

Of the total clients registered, 55.7% were prisoner clients and 44.3% were offender clients (virtually the same as in the two year period). As in the initial two year period, although there were far more prisoner clients than offender clients, they accounted for fewer placements and fewer 13 week outcomes. Prisoner clients comprised 34.9% of clients placed, offender clients 65.1% of clients placed. Prisoner clients comprised 45.0% of clients who achieved 13 week outcomes, offender clients 55.0% of clients who achieved 13 week outcomes. The percentages of prisoner clients placed into employment and who achieved 13 week outcomes were much higher in this four month period than in the first two years of the program, indicating increased success in working with the prisoner client group.

Program Progression and Achievement of Outcomes

Beyond looking at the number of clients assisted and outcomes achieved, it is important to consider the effectiveness of the program in terms of its success in clients progressing through the 'steps' of the program. The measure of this effectiveness is in terms of the proportion of clients moving from referral to registration, registration to placement, and placement to a 13 week outcome. Table 3 presents those results for the whole of the program, July 1, 2002 – June 30, 2004. Results are presented in relation to gender, client status (prisoner or offender client), and total program outcomes.

Table 3: Progression: Referrals / registrations / placements / outcomes (July, 2002 – June, 2004).

	Reg/Refr	Place/Reg	13wk/Place	13wk/Reg
Males	65.4%	35.9%	47.7%	17.1%
Females	66.5%	23.7%	52.5%	12.4%
Prisoners	94.5%	16.2%	41.1%	6.7%
Offenders	47.8%	55.2%	50.9%	28.1%
Total	65.6%	33.8%	48.3%	16.3%

The progression of clients in terms of conversion rates over the two year initial pilot period are similar to intensive support Job Network provider performance, and the percentage of registrations converted to outcomes nearly achieved the target of 18% (450 outcomes from 2,500 registrations). A slow start and disruptions to the program can explain the slight shortfall.

Results indicate that the program converted approximately two-thirds of referrals to registrations, indicating relatively good performance in engaging clients and 'selling' the program to them.

Slightly more than one-third of registrations resulted in the client being placed in employment. Although the percentage might seem low, it reflects the comprehensiveness of support needs, the low 'starting point' of many clients, and the labour intensiveness of the work. Of those who were placed in employment, almost half achieved the 13 weeks of continuous employment outcome. Clearly, keeping clients employed proved almost as difficult as getting them employed. Taking all of this into account, the proportion of clients who registered and later achieved 13 week outcomes was approximately one-sixth.

Results in the table suggest that patterns were very different for males and females and very different for prisoner and offender clients. The percentages are the rates of conversion or progression from one phase to the next in the program. The table shows virtually equal percentages of male and female clients progressing from referral to registration, but a relatively lower percentage of females being placed in employment. However, of those who were placed, a relatively higher percentage of females achieved 13 week outcomes compared to males. Overall, females had a lower conversion of registrations to outcomes as well; approximately one-eighth for females and one-sixth for males.

There were different patterns for prisoner clients and offender clients in terms of their movement through the program measured by conversion rates. Prisoner clients had twice the registration rate of offender clients, with almost all prisoner referrals converting to registrations. Conversion of registrations to placements, however, was much lower for prisoners, with less than one-sixth of registered prisoner clients being placed in employment, compared to more than one-half for offender clients. Prisoner clients also had a lower conversion rate of placements to outcomes (41%) than offender clients (51%) and much lower conversion of registrations to outcomes (6.7%) compared to offender clients (28.1%).

Progression through the program during the first four months of the third year has also been calculated in terms of the conversion of referrals to registrations, registrations to placements, placements to 13 week outcomes, and registrations to 13 week outcomes.

Table 4: Progression: Referrals / registrations / placements / outcomes (July, 2004 – October, 2004).

	Reg/Refr	Place/Reg	13wk/Place	13wk/Reg
Males	84.4%	43.5%	47.0%	20.4%
Females	87.2%	20.7%	58.8%	12.2%
Prisoners	108.8%	25.2%	61.7%	15.6%
Offenders	66.4%	59.2%	40.4%	23.9%
Total	84.8%	40.3%	47.8%	19.2%

Progression through the program in the first four months of the third year was substantially improved:

- The program as a whole converted almost 85% of referrals to registrations, an increase of almost 20%.
- Prisoner client progression from referral to registration was over 100% due to substantial and increasing self-

referrals. This result suggests that the program is accessible as well as attractive to prospective clients.

- Slightly more than 40% of registrations resulted in the client being placed in employment, an increase of 7%.
- Of those who were placed in employment, almost half achieved the 13 weeks of continuous employment outcome; this percentage is unchanged really from the two-year performance.
- The proportion of clients who registered and later achieved 13 week outcomes has gone from 16% to 19%, a 3% overall increase, but that 3% equates to a 18.75% improvement in program performance.

Results in the table suggest that patterns are very different for males and females and very different for prisoner and offender clients. Results indicate that improvements in the conversion ratios are consistent across clients by gender and prisoner-offender status with a few notable exceptions.

Male and female patterns remained the same during the first four months of the third year, compared with the first two years of the program. Although the pattern was the same, conversion rates of referrals to registrations and registrations to placements increased substantially. However, conversions from placement to 13 week outcome did not change substantially for either group, and the conversion of registrations to outcomes did not change (remaining fairly low) for females. Overall, females again had a lower conversion of registrations to outcomes; approximately one-eighth for females and one-fifth for males.

During the first four months of the third year, prisoner client progression from referral to registration was over 100% due to substantial and increasing self-referrals as the program became well known. This result suggests that the program is accessible as well as attractive to prospective clients. Conversion of offender client referrals to registrations also increased substantially. Prisoner clients also had large increases in conversion of registrations to placements (16.2% to 25.2%) and placements to outcomes (from 41.1% to 61.7%), as well as a large increase in conversion of registrations to outcomes (from 6.7% to 15.6%). Offender clients had a notable decline in conversion of placements to outcomes (down approximately 10%) and a decline in conversion of registrations to outcomes (down approximately 4%).

Re-offending among program clients

Recidivism results are reported first for the whole program, with specific reference to clients placed into employment, gender, and client status. The numbers and percentages of program clients re-offending are reported, as well as variances in re-offending. Next comparison results for program clients versus non-program clients of correctional services are presented. These results are reported in relation to the three measures of recidivism described above (rate of re-offending, seriousness of re-offending, and poly-recidivism). Mean scores are reported together with advanced analyses of differences between program and non-program clients.

Finally, results related to recidivism of program clients before and after their registration in the employment assistance program are presented, also in terms of the three measures of recidivism. Again, mean scores are reported together with advanced analyses of differences between pre and post registration in the program.

Number and Percentage of Program Clients Re-offending

The most basic measurement of recidivism is the rate of re-offending among the program client population as a whole. Re-offending was investigated in relation to registered clients, distinguishing between clients placed into employment and those not placed. Table 5 presents those results for the whole of the employment assistance program July 1, 2002 – October 31, 2004. Results are presented in relation to gender, registration as a prisoner or offender (community corrections client), and total program outcomes. It is important to note that the timeframe for program involvement (12 months) is shorter than the two-year timeframe used in many studies of re-offending. However, it is also clear from the research literature and must be recognised, that a high proportion of re-offending occurs within 3 – 6 months of a prison release.

Table 5: Re-offending rates of program clients.

	Overall	Placed	Unplaced	Prisoners	Offenders
Males	8.38%	7.61%	8.66%	5.82%	11.5%
Females	5.97%	2.56%	6.65%	5.21%	7.69%
Prisoners	5.69%	4.59%	5.87%	X	X
Offenders	10.98%	8.22%	12.74%	X	X
Grand Total	7.46%	6.40%	7.73%	X	X

Overall, the rate of re-offending by registered program clients was low (7.46%). This is well below re-offending rates reported in the literature. It is low for both clients placed in employment (6.40%) and those not placed (7.73%), suggesting a positive program effect in addition to any employment outcomes that may be achieved. The re-offending rate was lower for clients placed in employment, an expected program result. It shows a relationship between employment and reduced recidivism. There were differences between male and female clients in terms of rates of re-offending. Females had an overall lower re-offending rate compared with males, regardless of whether they had been placed into employment. However, for both males and females, employment placement had a positive effect on the re-offending rate. The effect of employment placement on recidivism was much greater for females than for males.

Prisoners had slightly more than half the re-offending rate of offenders overall, irrespective of whether the prisoners were placed in employment or not. Male prisoners in particular had a low re-offending rate compared to male offender clients. This difference may be confounded somewhat by location differences in service provision. It is important to note that prisoners, upon release, may

relocate to any one of the community corrections locations. In any case, for both prisoner clients and offender clients, employment placement had a positive effect on re-offending rate.

The effect of employment placement on recidivism was much greater for offender clients than for prisoner clients, but unplaced prisoner clients had a very low rate of re-offending, a lower rate than offender clients who were placed into employment, in fact. This result indicates that the program has worked very well for prisoner clients, and that there is an overall 'program effect' in addition to the positive effect of employment on re-offending. It has also obviously worked well for offender clients as well, in that their rates of re-offending were also very low, well below non-program statistics within the corrections system and reported in the literature.

Recidivism of Program vs Non-program Clients

Additional analyses of recidivism were conducted to investigate more fully program effects on re-offending. The measures of recidivism included 'rate of recidivism' (number of offences per day), 'seriousness of re-offending' (rated severity of offences), and 'poly-recidivism' (number of different offences) recorded. Table 6 presents those results, showing differences between the program client sample and the non-program client sample on those three measures.

Table 6: Re-offending rates of program clients and non-program clients.

	Program Clients	Non-program clients
Number of offences per day	0.0065	0.0089
Rated severity of offences	2.78	3.29
Number of different offence types	2.32	2.49

Number of offences per day was expected to be small. It is a useful measure because it allows us to standardise the unit of time. Results revealed that program clients committed fewer offences per day ($M = .0065$), compared with the rate of re-offending for non-program clients ($M = .0089$). The difference between program clients and non-program clients was found to be statistically significant, $F(1, 1508) = 5.98, p < .05$.

Results revealed that the average seriousness of program client offences was 2.78, indicating an average just below 'moderately serious' (e.g., robberies, burglaries, intention to harm). The average for non-program clients was 3.29, somewhat greater than 'moderately serious'. The difference between program clients and non-program clients in relation to seriousness of re-offending was also found to be statistically significant, $F(1, 1508) = 23.69, p < .001$.

Of the program clients in the sample who had re-offended, the average was 2.32 different kinds of offences, while re-offending non-program clients averaged 2.49 different kinds of offences. The

difference in relation to this poly-recidivism, was also statistically significant, $F(1, 1508) = 7.31, p = 0.01$.

Recidivism of Program Clients Pre and Post Registration

In addition to comparisons between program clients and non-program clients, we also investigated pre and post registration offending within the program client sample. That investigation included the three recidivism measures: rate of recidivism; recidivism seriousness; and poly-recidivism. The results are reported and presented in the table and text that follow.

Table 7: Re-offending by program clients pre and post registration.

	Pre-Program	Post-registration
Number of offences per day	0.011	0.002
Rated severity of offences	4.35	1.21
Number of different offence types	3.87	0.77

There was a definite reduction in number of offences for the sample of program clients following their registration in the program. The difference in number of offences per day before and after program registration was statistically significant, $F(1, 586) = 61.10, p < .001$, indicating that the difference could not be a 'chance' result. The decline in number of offences per day equals a decline of 82% in offending ($.002/.011 = .18$).

There was also a reduction in seriousness of re-offending following program registration. That difference too was statistically significant, $F(1, 586) = 594, p < .001$, indicating that the difference could not be a 'chance' result. The decline in seriousness of offences equals a decline of 72% in offending ($1.21/4.35 = .28$).

For poly-recidivism as well, the number of different offences committed, there was a reduction in offending by the sample of program clients following their registration in the program, and that difference was also statistically significant, $F(1, 586) = 1156, p = 0.01$. The decline in number of offences per day equals a decline of 80% in the range of offences ($.77/3.87 = .20$).

Discussion

There were several important findings in this study. The program numbers suggest that it took some time to get program management and service delivery processes in place before the volume of clients began to produce the 'flow through' required to achieve target outcomes. That is probably due to normal establishment issues and compounded by intermittent disruptions that were the result of Corrections Victoria restructuring. Once 'bedded down', the program appears to have surpassed expected performance. Certainly, over the first four months of the third year, there was a substantial increase in the volume of clients coming into and progressing through the program, and the program was performing well above the original target rate.

Another suggestion derived from the numbers is that there is a strong emphasis on assisting prisoner clients who have comprised

55% of the total client population, while comprising approximately 35% of the criminal justice system population in Victoria. This commitment to assisting prisoners is consistent with the program objective of focusing on clients with a high risk of re-offending.

Males and females have had nearly equal rates of registration, fewer females were then placed in employment, but a higher percentage of those who were placed achieved 13 week outcomes; females also had a lower rate of conversion of registrations to 13 week outcomes than did males. Prisoner clients have had a lower rate of placement in employment and a lower rate of converting registrations to 13 week outcomes than offender clients, although having a higher rate of registration than offender clients.

Across gender and client status, rates of converting registrations to placements were highly variable, probably due to individual differences in 'work readiness' and rates of progress and variable employment opportunities across locations, while conversions of placements to outcomes showed very little variation and quite good conversion (overall, nearly half of placements became 13 week outcomes), and conversions of registrations through to 13 week outcomes were also highly variable (due to the registration-placement variability). Conversion rates tell us that it is quite easy to 'sell' the program to prisoners (they had a much higher rate of referrals converting to registrations than did offenders). However, it was harder to achieve outcomes with prisoner clients.

The process of a client progressing from registration to placement to outcome is quite resource intensive (relatively small percentages of registered clients have achieved outcomes, especially prisoner clients). In the four month period of the third year, however, more than 61% of prisoner placements converted to 13 week outcomes, with 15.6% of prisoner clients progressing from registration through to a 13 week outcome, a very encouraging sign. Even at the rate that has consistently been achieved (slightly less than 50%) the program must be considered economically viable because of the economics of reduced recidivism and the social costs to everyone when clients continue a criminal lifestyle.

The employment outcome results compare well with outcomes achieved for other high support needs client groups in specialist and in mainstream employment assistance programs. The program had an overall employment placement rate of 34% in the first two years and 40% in the first four months of the third year. The program had an overall 13 week outcomes rate of 16% in the first two years and 19% in the first four months of the third year. A review of Job Network provider performance in working with disadvantaged and intensive support clients (including anyone unemployed for more than 3 months) suggests a rate of 13 week outcomes just below 30% (DEWR, 2003). A referent 'four star' Job Network 'intensive assistance' provider has reported a 31% success rate in achieving 13 week outcomes. High program retention and rates of employment were reported for a supported employment program in the US (Finn, 1998), but that program is very different from the open employment focus of the program investigated here.

The Queensland Department of Corrective Services employment assistance program has reported a 31% success rate in placing clients into supported employment. The program investigated in this study had a placement rate of 33% in the first two years and a placement rate of 40% in the first four months of the third year. The contracted target for the program over the two year pilot period was 450 outcomes from 2500 registered clients, a rate of 18%. That was almost achieved in the two year period, and was exceeded in the first four months of the third year. Although program 13 week outcome rates were not as high as the Job Network figures cited, the client group is undoubtedly one, on the whole, with extremely intensive support needs, particularly when one considers the high proportion of prisoner clients.

Recidivism outcomes associated with the program have been even more impressive. Rates of re-offending while registered in the program were extremely low by any standards (less than 7.5% overall). Prisoner client re-offending was approximately half the rate of offender clients, indicating that the support provided especially benefited prisoner clients. Re-offending was lower for those placed into employment than those not placed. This indicates an employment effect that goes beyond the program effect that is indicated by low recidivism for program clients not placed into employment.

Comparison samples of program and non-program corrections clients indicate significantly lower re-offending by program clients in terms of frequency of offending, severity of offending, and poly-recidivism. Although there may be inherent sample differences, these results are very encouraging. Comparison of client offending before and after registration in the program indicates significantly lower offending in terms of all three measures as well (frequency of offending, severity of offending, and poly-recidivism). The extent of reduction was substantial in all three measures as well. Clearly, program participation has had a powerful effect on re-offending for clients of the program.

In summary, the employment assistance program has been very successful, both in terms of employment and recidivism outcomes. It is not possible to comment on longer term effects of program participation, but additional analyses not reported here do indicate that more general positive effects have been associated with program participation from 9 months into participation onward. It is important to consider this and other such programs as 'starter programs' that facilitate reintegration rather than 'cure all' programs that effectively address all of the issues associated with reintegration. Longer term, even intermittent ongoing program support is likely to prove necessary for a significant proportion of prisoners and offenders to achieve successful outcomes and ultimate reintegration within the community.

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