

PROJECT DARE SECURE CUSTODY EVALUATION RESEARCH RESULTS SUMMARY

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A follow-up study of 52 graduates of the DARE secure custody program who had been admitted between July 1989 and October 1991 was conducted in the spring of 1992.

The youth who comprised this sample exhibited a high risk of recidivism. All had served prior dispositions. The majority had committed multiple property offenses (e.g., theft, break and enter) for which their secure disposition was served. Nine youth had committed violent offenses. The days served ranged from 60 to 311 (average 129 days).

The follow up period ranged from 116 to 848 days (average 223 days). It was found that 30 out of 52 youth (57.6%) re-offended during this time. Unfortunately, resource limitations and restrictions to broad-based access to Phase II client data made it impossible to conduct comparative follow-ups with the province's other secure custody facilities.

Nonetheless, project DARE's secure custody recidivism rate may be viewed in a positive light given the high recidivism risk posed by this group. Furthermore, although one recent estimate of the expected baseline recidivism rate among youth with 1 or 2 prior convictions is 59% (*Juristat*, January, 1992), this figure is an underestimate because it includes rates of re-offending following all types dispositions, thereby including many lower risk offenders, and many for whom prior offenses custodial dispositions were not given. Thus, the baseline rate of recidivism among young offenders similar to those found in the DARE secure custody sample is likely to be considerably higher than 59%. The rate may be as high as 75%, as found in the custodial sample reported in *Youth at Risk*, the MCSS Young Offender Risk/Needs study completed in August, 1992. If this is the case, DARE'S recidivism rate compares quite favourably.

Although very few factors discriminated between recidivists and non-recidivists, three findings are striking:

- Virtually all recidivism occurred within a year of release. In fact, two-thirds of those who re-offended were convicted within 6 months of their release.
- Recidivists tended to come from significantly more economically disadvantaged families than non-recidivists, as measured by Statistics Canada income, family size, and urban vs. rural area guidelines.
- Half of those who re-offended identified either substance abuse or negative peer association as factors contributing to their recidivism.

These findings support the view that intensive post-release support is critical for young offenders, particularly among youth who may lack sufficient material, educational or social resources to effectively cope with the challenges of post-release transition and community re-integration. Moreover, it is important to consider that this need may be most acute among youth living in small or remote rural communities where access to a variety of supportive resources may not be readily available.

In addition to the quantitative data obtained on recidivism, the present study gathered qualitative data through in-person structured interviews. Forty-four of 52 graduates (16/22 non-recidivists and 29/30 recidivists) were available and agreed to be interviewed.

Both recidivists and non-recidivists were able to recall many of the specific activities that comprise the DARE program. Generally, youth viewed their experience at DARE very positively. The most salient positive program features that were recalled by the program's participants most clearly reflected DARE'S uniqueness: a high degree of daily activity and physical challenge, experience of achievement enjoyed through overcoming barriers and hardship posed by the wilderness, the opportunity to acquire new physical and interpersonal skills, the guided self-discovery of latent abilities and interests, the accessibility of - and success in - the school program, and the formation of a close, supportive personal relationship with one or more DARE instructors (a relationship that was often heightened by the mutual trust and co-operation outdoor survival necessitated).

Two findings highlight differences in response to the program between recidivists and non-recidivists:

- Recidivists tended to identify slightly more aspects of the program that they disliked than non-recidivists.
- A significantly higher percentage of non-recidivists (93%) than recidivists (75%) reported having a close relationship with one or more DARE instructors who had had a significant effect on their outlook and behaviour.

In sum, the available evidence suggests DARE's secure custody recidivism rate compares favourably with what is likely the baseline rate for secure custody youth. Listening to those who experienced the program illuminates why the program is successful: DARE simultaneously challenges, guides, and supports. Indeed, it is clear that DARE's environment sustains therapeutically meaningful activities that no other facility in this province can offer.