National Juvenile Justice Network

New Research Shows Community-Based Alternatives as Effective as Institutional Placements for Curbing Re-arrest in Youth with Serious Offenses

Findings from a longitudinal study on serious youth offenders offer guidance for state policymakers concerned with over-reliance on expensive youth incarceration.[1]

Community-Based Supervision Is as Effective as Incarceration for Youth with Serious Offenses.[2]

- Comparisons of similar youth who were either placed in institutions or under community supervision show that institutional placement provided no benefit in terms of rates of antisocial activity.[3]

Most Youth Who Commit Serious Felony Offenses Will Stop Offending, Regardless of the Intervention.[4]

- 91.5 percent of the youth in the study reported limited or decreased illegal activity within three years following their court involvement.
- The study identified three groups of youth with initial low levels of offending and two groups of youth with initial high levels of offending. Youth in all five groups received a variety of interventions from institutional placement to community-based supervision.

[1] The "Pathways to Desistance" study is a large, multi-site, collaborative project following 1,354 juvenile offenders ages 14-18 for seven years after their conviction. The research incorporates monthly data collection of significant life events and extensive interviews with the youth, family members and friends at specific time points. The youth are serious offenders many with multiple prior court cases and all with convictions for serious felonies including murder, robbery, aggravated assault, sex offenses, and kidnapping. Nearly 20 percent were tried as adults. The research is funded by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the U.S. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, the National Institute of Justice, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the William T. Grant Foundation, the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency, the Arizona Juvenile Justice Commission, and the National Institute on Drug Abuse. For more information go to *http://www.modelsforchange.net* and click on Research on Pathways to Desistance.

[2] Loughran, T., et al. (2009). "Estimating a Dose-Response Relationship Between Length of Stay and Future Recidivism in Serious Juvenile Offenders." *Criminology*, 47, 699-740.

[3] Recidivism is measured both by re-arrest and by self-reported offending.

4 *Ibid*.

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- Only one high-offending group of youth (about nine percent of the sample) continued at a high rate of offending over three years.

Longer Stays in Juvenile Institutions Do not Decrease Recidivism.[5]

- The research indicates no decrease in recidivism from longer institutional stays for lengths of stay from three to 13 months.

Institutional Placement Can Actually Raise the Level of Offending for Some Youth.[6]

- According to the study, placement in institutions raised the level of self-reported offending by a small, but statistically significant, amount by the group of youth who had the lowest level of offending.[7]

Substance Abuse Treatment Can Decrease Recidivism.

- Substance use goes hand-in-hand with illegal activity for serious youth offenders. When there is more substance use, there is more criminal offending.[8]
- Drug treatment significantly reduces substance use for approximately six months.[9]
- Drug treatment that included family involvement also produced reductions in non-drug, criminal offending.[10]

Aftercare Services Do Make a Difference.[11]

- In the six months post-release, youth who received community supervision and were involved in community-based services were more likely to attend school, go to work and avoid further offending.
- Increased duration of community supervision decreased further system involvement and increased engagement with school and work.
- Involvement in community-based services reduced the likelihood of further system involvement during the six month aftercare period.

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[5] Loughran, T., et al. (2009).

[6] *Ibid*.

7 Mulvey, E.P., et al. (in press). "Longitudinal Offending Trajectories Among Serious Adolescent Offenders." *Development & Psychopathology*.

8 Mulvey, E.P., Schubert, C.A., Chassin, L. (in press). "Substance Use and Offending in Serious Adolescent Offenders." Washington, D.C.: United States Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

9 Chassin, L., et al. (2009). "Substance Use Treatment Outcomes in a Sample of Male Serious Juvenile Offenders." *Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment*, 36(2), 183-194.

10 *Ibid*.

11 Chung, H.L., Schubert, C.A., Mulvey, E.P. (2007). "An Empirical Portrait of Community Reentry Among Serious Juvenile Offenders in Two Metropolitan Cities." *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 34 (11), 1402-1426.