

ELEMENTS OF CHANGE

Highlighting Trends and Issues in the Criminal Justice System



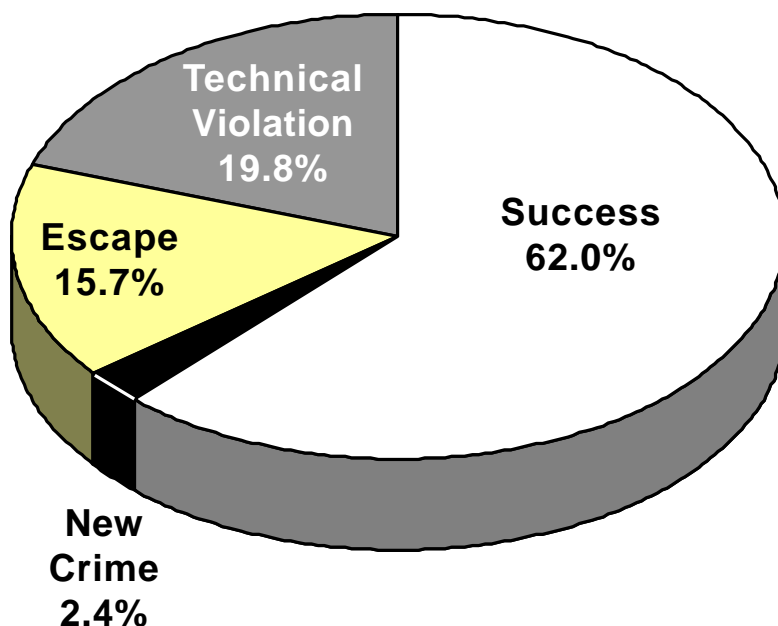
OFFICE OF RESEARCH & STATISTICS

Division of Criminal Justice
Colorado Department of Public Safety

Most Offenders Successfully Complete Community Corrections in Colorado

In a recent Office of Research & Statistics (ORS) study, researchers found that nearly two-thirds (62.0%) of offenders sentenced to halfway houses in Colorado successfully completed the program (see study description to the right). Of the 38 percent of offenders who failed to complete the residential program, less than three percent (2.4%) committed a new crime while in the halfway house. Approximately sixteen percent (15.7%) escaped and nearly one in five offenders (19.8%) committed technical violations.

COMMUNITY CORRECTIONS OUTCOMES, FY 1997-98



The STUDY:

Where Did the Findings in This Newsletter Come From?

The Office of Research and Statistics (ORS) analyzed information on all offenders (n=3,054) who terminated from 25 community corrections halfway houses during fiscal year 1998 (FY98) to explore why some clients failed community corrections while others succeeded. The ORS then tracked, for 24 months, nearly 2,000 cases that successfully terminated the programs to obtain information on any new arrests or filings. Researchers also conducted site visits to each of the facilities and interviewed 206 staff and offenders.

Throughout this newsletter, the terms **program completion** and **recidivism** are used. It is important to distinguish between these two terms as defined in this study:

- ➔ **Program completion** refers to successfully completing the residential placement in community corrections.
- ➔ **Recidivism** is defined as a new misdemeanor or felony court filing within 24 months of successful program completion.

Accurate and Adequate Delivery of Services Is Key to Community Corrections Success

Study findings indicate that participation in services is crucial to successful program completion. Offenders who participated in the following services were significantly more likely to complete the halfway house program successfully:

- Mental health services,
- Budget planning, and
- Substance abuse treatment.

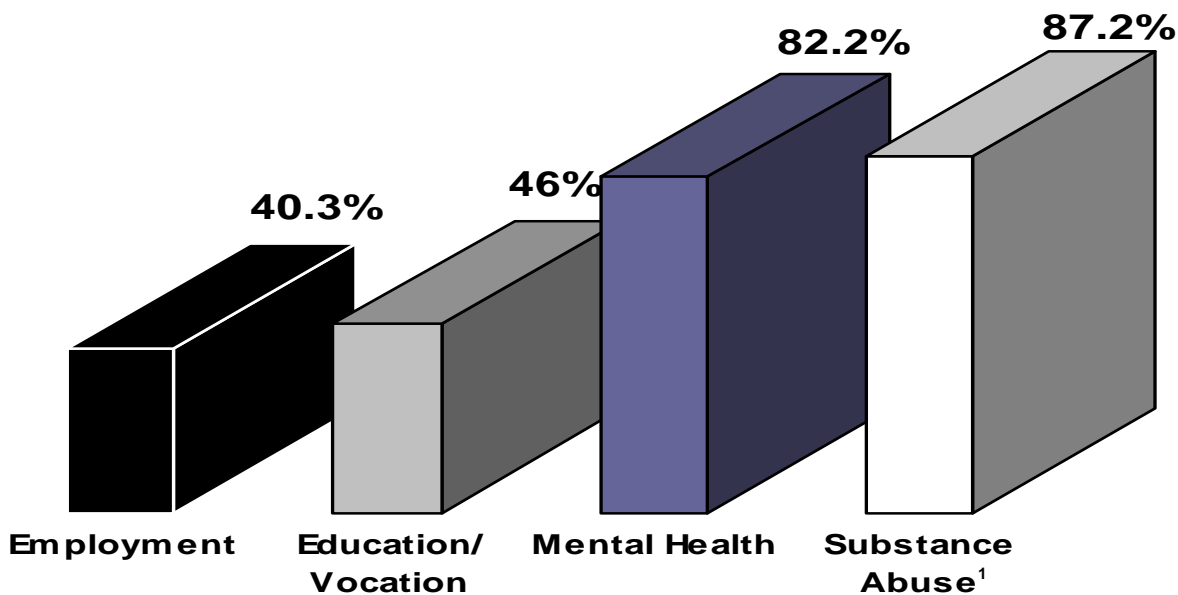
Moreover, both transition and diversion offenders who participated in multiple services were more likely to successfully complete the halfway house program than offenders who did not receive multiple services during their residential placement.

Unfortunately, offenders' needs and services received were not always well matched. The statewide averages reflect a disparity in needs and services in certain facilities. The graph below shows the proportion of offenders who received the services they needed.

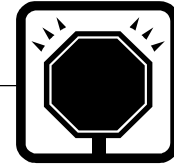


How do Special Populations Fare in Community Corrections?

Proportion of Offenders that Received the Services they Needed



¹ Services may include cognitive or educational substance abuse programming. Also, we did not study the quality of services delivered or the level of participation by clients. Participation in substance abuse programming increased the probability of an offender's success.



Important Finding: Significant program variation exists

There was significant variation both within and across halfway house facilities. At a minimum, the 25 programs varied by the following:

- ✓ The seriousness of the criminal history of offenders accepted into the halfway house,*
- ✓ The proportion of diversion versus transition offenders each program housed,
- ✓ Availability, cost, and quality of services accessible to offenders in the community,
- ✓ Staff qualifications, prior experience and training
- ✓ Program philosophy, size, and location,
- ✓ Program completion rate,
- ✓ The extent to which offender assessment information was linked to program participation, and
- ✓ The extent to which the programs accepted and managed special populations.

** Criminal history seriousness was determined by the ORS Criminal History Score. The Criminal History Score is an index of past adjudications, convictions, placements, and revocations. Collapsed scores range from 0 to 4, with 0 representing virtually no prior involvement in crime and 4 reflecting very serious offending histories. The mean criminal history score across programs was 3.05, and program-specific mean scores ranged from 1.5 to 3.2 .*

Special Populations Require Specialized Services.

Special correctional populations reflect the need for halfway houses to ensure that specialized services are delivered appropriately. Special populations identified by researchers include the seriously mentally ill, female offenders, sex offenders, substance abusers, the elderly, offenders who are physically disabled, and non-English speaking offenders. Many of these special populations overlap. Data were available to analyze women, sex offenders, substance abusers and offenders with mental health problems, and some of the findings are presented below.

- **Women.** Women recidivated at a lower rate (24.8%) than men (32.4%). Previous research conducted in 1994 by the ORS found that women were significantly less likely to succeed than men in community corrections. This new finding may indicate an increased availability of female-specific services which may increase the likelihood that women will succeed in community corrections.
- **Sex offenders.** Half (50%) of the group of sex offenders failed to complete community corrections programs. This finding may reflect management approaches for sex offenders in which precursor-to-assault behaviors are treated as serious, dangerous acts and are the subject of revocation petitions, in which case lower program completion rates would be expected. Another study by the ORS found that 50 percent of sex offenders on probation and parole received technical violations during the 12 months following placement in the community.²
- **Substance abusing offenders.** One-third (32.0%) of offenders with substance abuse treatment needs failed after release from community corrections facilities, compared to 23.4% of offenders without documented substance abuse treatment needs.
- **Mental health treatment needs.** Nearly one-third (30.7%) of offenders with documented mental health needs recidivated after 24 months. The difference in recidivism rates between those with mental health needs and those without was not statistically significant. Note that this classification is not a proxy for serious mental illness (SMI); SMI and other diagnostic information was not available.

² English, K. (June 1999). "Adult Sex Offender Risk Assessment Screening Instrument: Progress Report 1a, Pursuant to CRS 18-3-414.5. Colorado Division of Criminal Justice, Denver, Colorado.

Recidivism Data: What Happens After Clients Complete Residential Placement in Community Corrections?

Within 24 months of leaving the program successfully, 69.0% of those who completed community corrections remained crime-free.



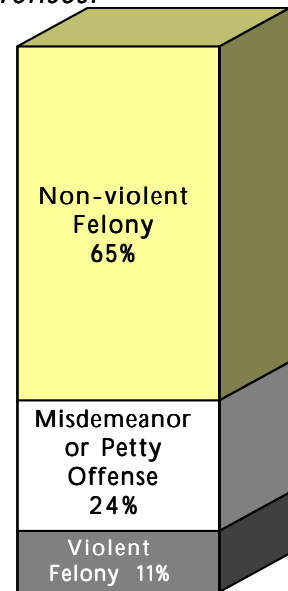
Of offenders who recidivated after completing community corrections, most committed nonviolent offenses.

Drug crimes drive failure rates. Nearly 38% of all recidivating events were alcohol and drug offenses. The most frequently occurring re-filing offense was for a new drug felony, accounting for 23.6% of new crimes. The second most frequent re-filing offense was DUI/DWAI, accounting for an additional 14.1%.

Nearly sixty percent (59.6%) of new drug crimes were committed by offenders not originally convicted of drug offenses. This reflects the considerable interplay between criminal behavior and drug activity and stresses the importance of addressing substance abuse as a multidisciplinary issue.³

Offenders with high scores on the Level of Supervision Inventory (LSI), the Alcohol and Drug Survey, and DAST⁴ were significantly more likely to recidivate within 24 months with a drug or alcohol offense. The statewide standardized assessment for substance abuse,⁵ mandated under Article 16-11.5 of the Colorado Revised Statutes, appears to appropriately identify individuals at high risk for severe and lasting substance abuse problems. This serious offender group continues to challenge current intervention protocols.

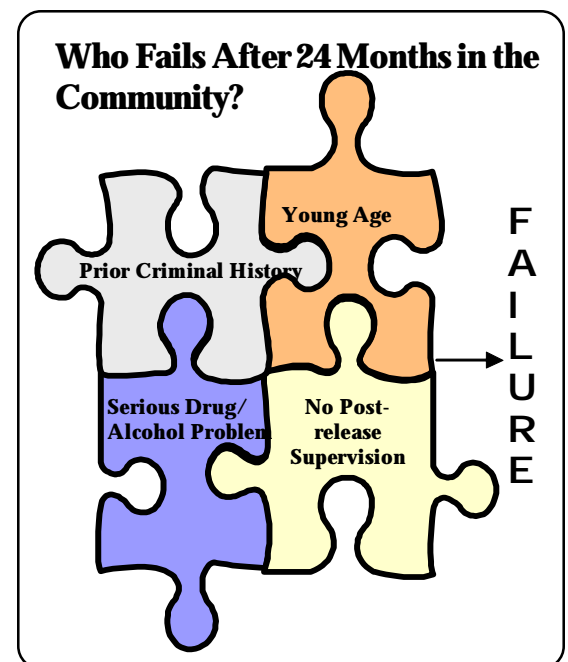
Together, prior criminal history, young age, high Level of Supervision Inventory (LSI) score, and lack of post-release supervision statistically predict recidivism. High Criminal History Scores and young age have traditionally predicted failure among criminal offenders. The relatively recent (mid to late 1990s) statewide introduction of LSI assessments into the criminal justice intake process provides officials with important information that, over time, may serve to improve intervention strategies for offenders with high LSI scores.



³ A wide range of psychological, social and economic incentives can combine to produce serious drug use and crime patterns that become firmly established in some individuals. In such cases, viewing drug use as a simple cause of crime oversimplifies their relationship. The two activities reinforce each other. Some drugs, due to their power to induce compulsive use, are more likely to precipitate criminal activity than others. Cocaine and heroin are especially notable for their addictive power. (From Drugs, Crime and the Justice System, Bureau of Justice Statistics, December 1992).

⁴ The ADS and DAST scores were related to substance abuse recidivism and not recidivism generally. Higher scores on the LSI predicted general recidivism.

⁵ The standardized assessment tools include the LSI, ADS, DAST, SUHM, and SSI.



Post-release supervision is key.

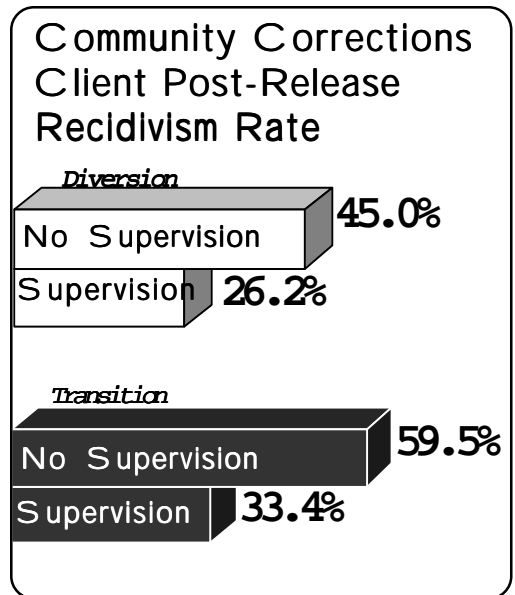
Offenders who were released from the halfway house and placed on probation, parole, or non-residential community corrections status were more likely to stay crime free during the 24 months following release from the halfway house. **Nearly twice as many offenders failed when they did not receive post-halfway house supervision compared to those who received post-release supervision:** 45.0% compared to 26.2%, for diversion clients and 59.5% compared to 33.4% for transition. Further, on average, transition offenders who did not receive post-release supervision *failed more quickly* (failure occurred at six months versus ten months). This difference was not present for diversion clients.



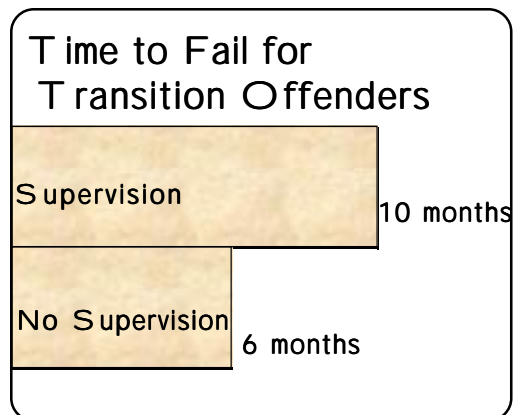
Post-release supervision allows the offender to experience a gradual reduction of program structure over time. During interviews, both staff and offenders described the difficulties of moving from prison, where all decisions are made for the inmates, to the community, where choices can become overwhelming.

Gradual reintegration seemed to enhance the likelihood that offenders successfully acclimated to life in the free community. Gradual reintegration may mean that offenders continued to participate in programming and services that addressed their individual needs and risk factors. Interview data suggest that this continuum of care helps stabilize offenders as they move to a less structured environment and face the challenges of life on the street.

Facilities varied in the degree to which programming for release and post-release preparation was implemented. According to interviews, when offenders return to their original environment and social structure, they are at high risk to re-offend. Staff and offenders at nearly every facility stressed this factor during interviews. Given these findings, it appears that post-prison and post-community corrections services are vital to the successful, pro-social reintegration of community corrections offenders.



* Post-community corrections supervision = probation, parole, or non-residential community corrections.



Women in Community Corrections

Coed facilities. In FY98, two halfway houses served women only. Women housed in the eleven coed facilities were far outnumbered by men, usually 10 to 1. According to interview data, coed halfway houses can lead to relationships between male and female offenders, and these relationships can distract from the goal of successful program completion. In addition, some women in coed houses reported personal safety concerns, and these concerns coincided with the location of the bedrooms allocated for women. Some facilities located women's bedrooms near the security desk to enhance safety.

Female-specific services. Women and many staff in coed facilities consistently reported that services were tailored to men. One woman told us she paid for outside services rather than participating in free in-house services where she would have been the only woman in an all-male group. Some staff in coed facilities reported that they did not have female-specific programming because the number of women they serve was too small to warrant special programs. A lack of services for women was reported in the following areas:

- Medical care specific to women, including prenatal care, contraceptive/pregnancy assistance, annual gynecological examinations;
- Parenting classes (for all ages of children, not only young children);
- Vocational training and job skills;
- Life skills (doing taxes, finding community resources, filling out job applications, creating a resumé, managing a budget);
- Victimization (sexual, emotional, and physical abuse) classes;
- Relationship building;
- Health and wellness;
- Eating disorders; and
- Self-esteem.

Lack of female-specific needs assessments. Assessment tools are typically designed and tested on male offenders and do not address needs specific to women. Consequently, women may not receive services they need. One facility that provides comprehensive, female-specific programming to serious offenders had a 69.0% program completion rate, and 85.0% of these women remained crime free after 24 months. These success rates are notably higher than the statewide averages for completion and no new filings (62.0% and 69.0%, respectively).

Women lacked financial opportunities. According to interview data, women lacked adequate job skills and opportunities to make salaries comparable to men. As a result, it was more difficult for women to pay for rent, restitution, and treatment while in the halfway house. Low wages likely make it financially difficult for women to reintegrate into the community. The lack of adequate compensation for work undermines women's efforts to succeed within any criminal justice placement.

Some women reported safety concerns. Interview data revealed that some women participating in community corrections felt unsafe because of the location of the facility. In one location, the route from the bus stop to the facility is long and lacks adequate streetlights at night. Construction and warehouse workers employed in the neighborhood intimidate many women in one halfway house. But the location of these facilities frequently meets with considerable resistance from local residents. This lack of acceptance can become part of the problem when for women, feeling unsafe may interfere with their program completion and successful integration in the community.

Staffing Issues Make Handling a Community Corrections Population Difficult

High staff turnover. The average employment period of security and line staff across the 25 halfway houses is approximately six months. While a few programs have low turnover rates, in those that do not, inconsistency and inefficiency in programming and supervision is experienced by both staff and offenders. During interviews, administrators and staff attributed staff turnover to low salaries.

Significant variation in skill level. Given the typically low salaries, it is not surprising that some facilities have difficulty finding qualified staff. Rural areas may experience more hiring challenges since the pool of candidates is small. The variation in skill level across facilities means that offenders have very different experiences in community corrections depending on the facility in which they are housed. Often, few qualifications are required for line staff positions. Yet these individuals have the most contact with offenders and are responsible for managing house incidents. Where turnover is low, the constancy of line staff presence gives them the ability to impact client motivation and morale.

Lack of Training. Some halfway house staff persons did not receive a core curriculum of training, especially on the topic of special populations. In some facilities, initial staff orientation plus the 40 hours of annual training required by the state standards consisted of on-the-job training. According to interview data, new staff were sometimes unaware of proper relationship boundaries and tried to become friends with clients. In addition, a common reply to interview questions about staff turnover was “They don’t know what they are getting into.” Further investigating revealed that new employees were not prepared to work with the dynamics of an offender population, and issues related to security and contraband. In fact, some interviewees described the benefits of having staff who were “recovering,” and who fully understood offender issues. According to interviews, staff with a recovery background were less likely to leave and seemed to view the job as a commitment rather than a learning experience to serve future career goals.



Training is the foundation of professionalism. It guards against abuse of power by staff. Training increases the likelihood that staff understands the larger mission of their work and, in turn, may feel a stronger investment in their job, and may stay employed longer in the facility. Administrators who emphasize training communicate that they value and respect the important work of line staff. Administrative support for training reinforces the need for consistency in programming within each facility and across the statewide halfway house system.

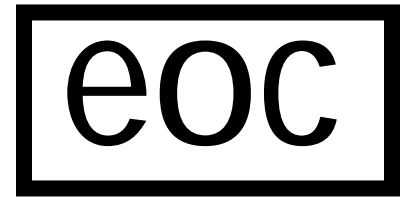


Money Earned

Community corrections offenders earned \$16.2 million and paid \$344,942 in state taxes, \$841,712 in federal taxes, and \$4,517,212 in room and board in FY98. Many offenders generated first and last months' rent in savings accounts and paid child support and restitution while in community corrections. During focus groups, many offenders reported that earning money and learning to budget in the halfway house improved their self-esteem and gave them confidence to succeed in the community.

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<http://dcj.state.co.us/ors>**



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