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RECIDIVISM  
IN THE  
JUVENILE DIVERSION PROJECT  
OF THE  
YOUNG VOLUNTEERS IN ACTION PROGRAM

FINAL REPORT

July 5, 1985

Richard G. Wiebush  
756 Jaeger Street  
Columbus, Ohio 43206

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is the final report of a study concerned with the impact on juvenile recidivism of a program conducted by the Young Volunteers in Action (YVA) in Columbus, Ohio.

YVA places referred youth into various community service agencies and monitors their progress in completing court-ordered community service work. The project provides a sentencing alternative to the Juvenile Court for minor offenders. It attempts to reduce recidivism by providing youth with 1) exposure to a positive environment and role models, 2) an opportunity to participate in various work experiences, and 3) the chance to keep their offense from becoming part of an official delinquency record.

This report presents data relative to YVA's primary goal -- the reduction of recidivism. Data was collected on the number of rearrests, during a one year follow-up, experienced by the 60 youth who were referred to the program during its first year (July 1983 to July 1984). Results of a six-month follow-up were presented in an Interim Report in January 1985.

The recidivism figures of the YVA group were compared with those of a matched group of juvenile offenders who did not participate in YVA, and who were not subject to any other intervention by the Juvenile Court. The relationship between recidivism and several basic variables was examined for both groups.

The findings presented below should be interpreted cautiously and conservatively. The small size of the sample populations, and the differences in outcome between the two groups, are such that no claims of statistical significance can be made about the findings, i.e., it is possible that the outcomes are a function of chance, rather than program performance.

The major findings of the study are:

- Almost one-half of the youth in each group -- YVA and the comparison group -- were rearrested within one year. Twenty-one YVA participants (41.1%) were rearrested, while 26 (44.1%) youth in the comparison group recidivated. Consequently, YVA appears to have only a slight, if any, impact on recidivism.

- The YVA recidivists accounted for a total of 40 arrests during the year (1.9 per youth), while the comparison group recidivists accumulated 44 arrests (1.7 per youth). However, a small number of youth in each group were responsible for a disproportionate number of the total arrests. Five YVA recidivists committed 19 (48%) of the total YVA offenses. Six of the comparison group recidivists accounted for 19 arrests -- or 43% of the group's total arrests.
- A slightly larger proportion of the YVA recidivists (5 or 24%) committed more serious recidivating\* offenses than their referral offenses, when measured against the comparison group recidivists (4 or 15%). Most of these youth were originally adjudicated for misdemeanor offenses and then went on to commit felonies. In addition, a smaller proportion of the YVA recidivists committed less serious recidivating offenses than the comparison group (24% vs. 27%). Participation in YVA then, does not appear to have the effect of reducing the seriousness of subsequent delinquent behavior.
- More than half (54%) of the comparison group recidivists were rearrested within 6 months. Only one-third of the YVA recidivists were arrested in this time period. Almost half (43%) of the YVA recidivists were not rearrested until at least 9 months after their original (referral) offense. YVA does appear to have a fairly strong suppression effect, i.e., participation significantly delays any subsequent involvement with the law.
- Examination of the demographic characteristics of the youth in relation to recidivism shows that in several demographic categories, YVA participants had less recidivism. Specifically:
  - YVA females of both races had the lowest recidivism figures for all sub-groupings;
  - Black males in YVA -- with a recidivism rate of 33% -- were much less likely to be rearrested than their black counterparts in the comparison group (50% recidivism), and white males from YVA (47% recidivism); and only slightly more likely to recidivate than white males from the comparison group (31%);

\*This measure compares referral offense to the first recidivist offense for each youth, not the most serious recidivist offense for each youth.

- Older YVA youth (16 and 17 year olds) were slightly more successful than their counterparts in the comparison group (36% recidivism vs. 46%). Fifteen year olds in both groups were rearrested at about the same rate, while 14 year olds in YVA failed at twice the rate of their counterparts (60% vs. 30% recidivism);
- Analysis of the relationship between court history and recidivism reveals only minor differences between the groups:
  - YVA youth with no prior convictions recidivated at a slightly higher rate than comparison group members with no priors (38% vs. 35%);
  - YVA youth with prior convictions were more successful than their counterparts in the comparison group (50% recidivism vs. 63%);
  - There were virtually no differences between the groups when comparing recidivism and the level of the referral offense (i.e., felony, misdemeanor, status);
  - YVA youth whose referral offenses were person related were somewhat more successful than person related offenders in the comparison group (33% vs. 42%);
  - Property offenders in YVA were less successful than their counterparts in the comparison group (48% vs. 35%). Those referred to YVA for public order type offenses were twice as successful as their counterparts (30% recidivism in YVA vs. 60%).

These findings need to be interpreted in the light of the central research questions and in an additional, broader context. In the first instance, the findings are mixed: YVA does not appear to effectively reduce either the number of recidivists or the seriousness of subsequent offenses, but it is effective with two key groups -- females and blacks. It also has an important impact on the length of arrest-free "street time."

Taking the broader perspective, YVA has been shown (in another study) to have important delinquency related impacts, especially in the areas of work experience, skill development and job acquisition. In addition, the YVA program is seen as one which provides a sanction which is more concrete than most and which consequently is viewed favorably by the community and the offender alike.

## INTRODUCTION

This is a report on the effectiveness -- in terms of impacting delinquent behavior -- of the Columbus (Ohio) Young Volunteers in Action Program. The report focuses on one outcome measure -- recidivism -- and presents several findings relative to the success of youth in the YVA program along this one dimension. These findings are based on a comparison of the re-arrest rates of the YVA group with those of a matched group of delinquent youth who did not participate in the program.

This is a final report in that it reflects the findings of a one-year follow-up of program participants. An interim report -- issued in January 1985 -- presented results of a six-month follow-up.

Other reports in this series address several different measures of YVA program performance, including success in meeting level of service goals, and user satisfaction. The purpose of these reports is to provide feedback to YVA and the Juvenile Court and, by so doing, to serve as a management tool for further program planning and development. The reports are prepared by Richard G. Wiebush under a personal services contract with YVA.

### Background

Philosophy and Goals. Young Volunteers in Action seeks to promote personal and community development through the placement of youthful (14-22) volunteers in non-profit, public service oriented agencies. Initially designed to serve non-delinquent youth from low-income, high crime areas, the program expanded its focus in the summer of 1983 and, through a cooperative agreement with the Franklin County Juvenile Court, began accepting referrals of delinquent youth -- regardless of their economic status or neighborhood.

The objectives of the YVA-Court arrangement are, essentially, to divert selected adjudicated youth from the juvenile justice system and to provide them with a service which will hopefully alter delinquent behavior. Through placement in a community service agency, with a requirement that a youth complete a specified number of hours (an average of 45) of service work, YVA and the court hope to provide youth with:

- a sense of responsibility and accountability;
- exposure to structured work situations and various career options;
- exposure to positive role models;
- an opportunity to pay back their debt to society; and
- an opportunity to have their complaint dismissed upon completion of the community service assignment.

A key element of the program design was to target these services to the minor offender -- one who had no or minimal prior involvement in the juvenile justice system and who currently was charged with a misdemeanor offense. The intent was to identify those youth who were probably not headed for serious trouble but who nonetheless were felt to need the direction and positive influences that a supervised community service experience might provide. The critical assumption (and program goal) of course, was that such an intervention would reduce the likelihood of reinvolvement in delinquent acts.

The First Year of Operations. Because this study focuses on the delinquent youth who were involved in YVA during the first full year of the diversion program, some highlights of the first year's operations are presented.\*

Between mid-July 1983 and July 1984:

- The Juvenile Court referred 60 youth to YVA, all of whom were accepted for participation and 49 (81.7%) of whom completed the program.
- 85% of referrals were for misdemeanor charges, but an unexpectedly high percentage of felony offenders (11%) and repeat offenders (28%) also were referred.
- 88% of referrals were males and about half (47%) were black. The average age of referred youth was 16.08, with a range of 14-18 years. Two-thirds of the youth were 15 or 16 years old.

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\*For greater detail, see the Final Monitoring Report on the Juvenile Diversion Project of the Young Volunteers in Action Program, October, 1984.

- YVA utilized 27 different community agencies for placing youth, including several community centers, recreation centers, YMCA's, the Red Cross and the Columbus Zoo. YVA relied on 10 of these 27 sites for two-thirds of all placements.
- Once a youth was placed, the likelihood was that he/she would remain with the original placement. Only 4 youth (6.7%) had to be placed in 2 different sites.
- While YVA attempted to match clients' interests with available positions, almost half the youth ended up in maintenance jobs. Other often-used job categories included clerical, program assistant and animal care functions.
- Over 2,200 hours of community service work was actually performed, representing a contribution of over \$7,000 to various agencies.

#### STUDY DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

There are two basic questions which are the focus of the present study. First, does involvement in the YVA program reduce the likelihood of a delinquent youth becoming re-involved in the juvenile justice system? For those who do recidivate, does YVA appear to have any impact in terms of delaying re-involvement or reducing its seriousness? Second, are there any sub-categories of delinquents (e.g., males, first offenders, etc.) on whom the YVA program seems to have a more positive impact than on other types of delinquents? For both questions, the primary outcome measure used was that of rearrest within one year of the date of sentencing. Additional measures included time elapsed before rearrest and change in level of seriousness of new offense.

In order to test the research questions, a frame of reference for evaluating the outcomes of YVA group members was needed. That frame of reference is provided in this study through the use of a comparison group consisting of delinquent youth who have been matched with the YVA group in terms of a number of important characteristics. Through this matching, we can compare the outcomes of the YVA group with a group that is very similar to it, with one major exception -- the comparison group has not experienced the YVA program. Consequently, we should be able to attribute differences in outcomes between the groups to the YVA program.

Composition of the Groups. The YVA group members involved in the study were the 60 youth who were referred to the program during its first year of operations -- July 1983 to July 1984. The comparison group (n = 60) was drawn from the total number of youth who appeared in Juvenile Court between June 1982 and June 1983 and who were adjudicated delinquent, but for whom disposition of the complaint was held open for a period of six months. This disposition means that the court takes no action with respect to the youth, except to leave the threat of a more severe disposition on the instant complaint, should the youth be charged with a new offense within a six-month period. In most instances, there are no conditions (i.e., fine, supervision, etc.) attached to the eventual dismissal of the complaint after six months.

The comparison group was selected from among those youth receiving this disposition for three reasons. First, it is primarily used only with youth who are minor offenders. Second, because the juvenile court makes no intervention in the lives of those who receive this disposition, it allows us to construct a comparison group that is matched with the sole exception of the court intervention variable -- in this case the YVA program. Thus, we avoid the dispositional apples and oranges problem that would arise were we, for example, to compare YVA youth with those placed on probation. A much cleaner measure of any effects of the program intervention (YVA) is afforded through this approach (intervention vs. no intervention), than if we were to try to compare two different types of interventions.

The third reason for using this universe of youth for construction of a comparison group lies with the need to have both groups handled at the same level in the juvenile justice system. In this case, both groups -- YVA and the "hold open" group -- were adjudicated and received their dispositions at the juvenile court level by a judge or referee, rather than, for example, at the intake level.

Comparability of the Groups. The comparison group was matched to the YVA group according to the variables listed below. They are listed in order of importance afforded them in the matching process:

- sex
- race
- age

- instant offense (number and nature)
- prior convictions (number and nature)

The charts in the Appendix provide detailed descriptions of the comparability of the two groups along these dimensions. To summarize, both groups had equal numbers of males and females of both races, with males constituting 88.3% and whites 56.6% of each group. Mean age for the YVA group was 16.1, while the comparison group was somewhat younger (15.9). With respect to the nature of the referral offense, both groups contained more than 95% delinquency offenders and the same 5 offenses (petty theft, assault, criminal damaging, criminal trespass and disorderly) accounted for 54% of all complaints in the YVA group and 61% of all complaints in the comparison group. Each group had 13 youth who were responsible for more than one instant (referral) offense. A comparison of the prior records of youth in each group show that 17 (28.3%) YVA members had prior convictions, while 19 (31.7%) of the comparison group had been previously convicted. Each group had six youth with more than one prior delinquency conviction.

One note is warranted here on what is perhaps the major difference between the two groups -- the time period from which they were selected. As mentioned above, all members of the comparison group were selected for inclusion as a result of offenses for which they appeared in court during the year preceding the start-up of the YVA program. This time period was chosen because we assumed that the type of youth who went into the YVA program would be the ones who -- without the program's existence -- may have had their complaint held open for six months. Conversely, while it would have been desirable to choose youth for the comparison group from the same time frame as that during which youth were being sent to YVA, this would not be feasible inasmuch as those youth with comparable characteristics would probably also be sent to YVA. We would thus be left with a severely diminished pool of comparable youth for inclusion into a comparison group.

Data Collection and Analysis. Data collection for both groups took place during the Fall of 1984 (for the Interim Report) and again in the early summer of 1985 (for this Final Report). We relied almost exclusively on Juvenile Court records. In some instances, YVA program records were also utilized.

Calculation of the time period for including rearrest information was based on date of disposition on the instant offense to date of arrest for any new offense. Data presented on the nature of rearrests reflect any reductions in charges, not the original rearrest charge. However, ultimate disposition (e.g., withdrawal) of any new offense did not affect its inclusion as an arrest.

Data was collected and analyzed on selected, basic characteristics of youth and their juvenile records. Analysis was limited to the comparison of frequencies of single variables for each group and the relationship of two variables to each other (cross-tabulations) for both the YVA and comparison groups. It is the differences between the groups that formed the basis for tentative assertions about the relative success of the youth in each group on each of the measures. Because the differences in outcomes between the two groups were not drastic in the majority of cases, and because the samples were small, the Chi-square test reveals that there are no differences between the groups that are significant at the .05 level. Consequently, this is a reason for exercising caution in the interpretation of the findings. The differences between the groups could be a function of chance, rather than either disposition's success or failure.

A final methodological note concerns elimination of certain members in each group from consideration in the calculation of recidivism. First, since juvenile court jurisdiction ends at age 18, those youth who turned 18 during the follow-up period would not have their records reflect any new arrest after that milestone. We were not in a position to track the adult arrest records of these group members and, consequently, dropped all youth from the samples who were 17.7 years at the time of disposition on the instant offense. In this way, all members of the groups had at least six months in which to recidivate. To not adopt this procedure would have meant inflating the actual (known) success rates of both groups.\* There were four

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\*This procedure was not adopted in relation to the full-year follow-up. If it had been, all youth who were 17.1 years old at the time of referral would have had to be excluded. There were 5 YVA and 8 Comparison Group members who fell into this category. All these sample members, however, had at least six months in which to recidivate and all but 2 (one from each group) had at least 9 months).

youth in the YVA group and one in the comparison group who would not have been able to be tracked for the full six-month period. When these youth were dropped, the size of the YVA group for whom recidivism figures were calculated became  $n = 56$  and, for the comparison group,  $n = 59$ . The second step taken which had an effect on final sample size was the elimination of five youth from the YVA group who had no or minimal exposure to the program. The rationale for this was quite simple: our concern is to measure any difference that the YVA program makes in terms of recidivism. If a youth has not undergone the "treatment" afforded by YVA, it would be inappropriate to say that the program did -- or did not -- have an impact on that person. While there were eleven youth who did not complete YVA, six of these did complete a minimum of 10 hours. This was the "cut-off point" chosen for the inclusion/exclusion decision. Of the five youth excluded, four had no hours of program experience, while one had 7-1/2 hours.

The final sample sizes upon which all calculations were based -- and comparisons made -- was, for YVA,  $n = 51$  and, for the comparison group,  $n = 59$ .

## FINDINGS

### Youth Rearrested Within One Year, and Their Offenses.

The most basic question in this study is: "does participation in the YVA program reduce the recidivism of adjudicated, less serious offenders?" Tables 1, 2 and 3 present the broadest data relevant to this question. Shown in Table 1 are the number of recidivists in each group -- by level of offense -- and the percent of each group accounted for by the recidivating members. If a recidivating youth had more than one rearrest within the one-year period, the most serious was chosen for representation in Table 1. Table 2 shows the actual number of arrests -- by offense level -- for which the recidivating youth in each group were responsible. The percentage column in Table 2 reflects the percentage of all recidivating arrests accounted for by each offense level. Table 3 shows the distribution of number of arrests per recidivist.

TABLE 1. Youth Rearrested Within One Year  
(Most Serious Offense During Year)

<u>Level of Offense</u>	<u>YVA Group</u>		<u>Comparison Group</u>	
	<u>Number Youth</u>	<u>% YVA Group</u>	<u>Number Youth</u>	<u>% Group</u>
Felony	6	11.8	3	5.1
Misdemeanor	12	23.5	17	28.8
Status	2	3.9	2	3.4
Traffic	<u>1</u>	<u>1.9</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>6.8</u>
Total	21	41.1	26	44.1

TABLE 2. All Rearrest Offenses, by Level of Offense

<u>Level of Offense</u>	<u>YVA Group</u>		<u>Comparison Group</u>	
	<u>Number Offenses</u>	<u>% YVA Offenses</u>	<u>Number Offenses</u>	<u>% Group Offenses</u>
Felony	6	15.0	3	6.8
Misdemeanor	24	60.0	33	75.0
Status	8	20.0	2	4.50
Traffic	<u>2</u>	<u>5.0</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>13.6</u>
Total	40	100.0	44	99.9

TABLE 3. Distribution of Number of Subsequent Arrests

<u>Number Arrests</u>	<u>YVA Group</u>			<u>Comparison Group</u>		
	<u>Number Youth</u>	<u>% Group</u>	<u>Total Arrests</u>	<u>Number Youth</u>	<u>% Group</u>	<u>Total Arrests</u>
0	30	58.8	0	33	55.9	0
1	11	21.6	11	15	25.4	15
2	5	9.8	10	5	8.5	10
3 or more	<u>5</u>	<u>9.8</u>	<u>19</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>10.2</u>	<u>19</u>
Total	51	100.0	40	59	100.0	44

As is apparent from Table 1, a majority of youth in each group (59% YVA and 56% Comparison) had no arrests within the twelve-month period following their court appearance on the original charge. Of those youth who did recidivate, 55% were comparison group members. Within the groups, the 21 YVA recidivists constituted 41.1% of the total YVA group, while the 26 comparison group members rearrested made up 44.1% of the total number in that group. The difference in recidivism between the two groups is not statistically significant, and the data suggest that YVA may serve to reduce recidivism only slightly, if at all.

While Table 1 shows the most serious offense for which a youth was rearrested, Table 2 reflects all offenses committed by recidivists during the one-year follow-up. Here we see that the 21 YVA youth were responsible for a total of 40 arrests (1.9 per youth), while the 26 comparison group members were arrested on a total of 44 charges (1.7 arrests per youth). As would be expected for both groups, the majority of new arrests were for misdemeanor offenses. Note, however (Table 2), that although the number of YVA recidivists was smaller, there were twice as many recidivists in the YVA group who committed felonies than in the comparison group.

Table 3 shows that a small number of recidivating youth in each group were responsible for a disproportionate number of the total arrests during the year. In the YVA group, the 5 youth who had 3 or more arrests accounted for a total of 19 arrests -- that is, 24% of the recidivists were responsible for almost half (48%) of all subsequent arrests. The same pattern holds true in the comparison group, where just 6 members (23% of the recidivists in this group) accounted for 43% of all rearrests. This data also shows that there are no differences between the two groups in the number of youth who were subject to multiple arrests during the course of the year.

#### Changes in Offense Seriousness

Table 4 (following) shows changes in offense seriousness occurring between the referral offense and the first recidivating offense. This

measure is used because a program may have the effect of neutralizing any progression by participants into more serious crimes, even if it does not serve to reduce the number of recidivists. In the table, the category "Higher Offense Category" reflects movement such as from status offense to misdemeanor, or misdemeanor to felony. The "Lower Offense" category reflects movement downward in seriousness, such as from a felony referral offense to a misdemeanor recidivating offense.

TABLE 4. Changes in Seriousness of Subsequent Offense  
(First Rearrest After Referral)

<u>Nature of Recidivating Offense</u>	<u>YVA Recidivists</u>		<u>Comparison Recidivists</u>	
	<u>n</u>	<u>% Group</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>% Group</u>
Higher Offense Category	5	23.8	4	15.4
Same Offense Category	11	52.4	15	57.7
Lower Offense Category	<u>5</u>	<u>23.8</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>26.9</u>
Total	21	100.0	26	100.0

The majority of recidivist youth in both groups were rearrested for offenses that were comparable to the seriousness of their referral offenses. Between the groups, there was a slightly higher percentage of YVA youth whose first recidivating offense was more serious than their referral offense (24% vs. 15%). All 5 of these YVA group members committed felony level recidivist offenses. Three of the four comparison group members who moved into the "higher" category went from misdemeanor to felony offenses, while the fourth went from a status to a misdemeanor.

With respect to movement into a lower offense category, the differences between the two groups are again small. Five (24%) of the YVA group members had a less serious rearrest and seven (27%) of the comparison group youth moved into a lower level offense category.\*

\*In YVA, 2 had been referred on felony offenses and recidivated with misdemeanors; 2 went from misdemeanor to status offenses, and the fifth youth had a traffic recidivating offense following a misdemeanor referral offense. In the comparison group, 5 of the 7 went from misdemeanor to traffic offenses and 2 went from misdemeanor to status offenses.

Although this data focuses on changes between referral offenses and first recidivating offenses, the picture does not change substantially (with respect to movement into more serious offenses) if we include any arrest during the one year follow-up. In each group there was only one youth whose first recidivating offense was not more serious than the referral offense, but whose second recidivating offense was.

The picture does change, however, if we ask the "movement" question in terms of felonies only: i.e., what number of youth from each group committed felonies during the one year follow-up who had had lesser level referral offenses? Referencing Table 2 once again, we see that 6 YVA youth were re-arrested on felony charges during the year, while only 3 comparison group members had such charges. All of these youth were referred for lesser level offenses. While these numbers are small, these differences -- and the data throughout this section -- clearly indicate that YVA does not serve to reduce the seriousness of subsequent delinquent behavior among its participants who do in fact recidivate.

Elapsed Time to Rearrest

Table 5 reflects the number of youth in each group who were rearrested for the first time within specified (3 month) intervals during the one year follow-up period. It shows, essentially, how long it took before recidivists got into trouble again.

TABLE 5. Elapsed Time to Rearrest, by 3 Month Intervals

<u>Rearrested Within</u>	<u>Rearrested Youth</u>			
	<u>YVA</u>	<u>% Recidivists</u>	<u>Comparison</u>	<u>% Recidivists</u>
3 months	5	23.8	8	30.8
6 months	2	9.5	6	23.1
9 months	5	23.8	7	26.9
12 months	<u>9</u>	<u>42.9</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>19.2</u>
Total	21	100.0	26	100.0

This recidivism measure is utilized because it can measure the short-term and long-term impacts of a program on recidivism, and help determine whether any short-term positive effects "hold" with the passage of time.

Table 5 shows that two different "time-to-rearrest" patterns emerge for the two groups. In the comparison group there is a roughly equal distribution (about 25%) of rearrests throughout the four time periods. In the YVA group, however, two-thirds of the recidivism occurred after 6 months and almost half (42.9%) after 9 months. It is this burgeoning of YVA recidivism in the fourth quarter (i.e., months 10-12) that eliminated the important differences in recidivism noted at 6 months between the two groups.

This data strongly indicates that participation in YVA does have an impact on delinquent youth -- but that the impact is diminished with the passage of time. At the same time, it also indicates the relative effectiveness of the YVA sanction in deterring illegal acts as compared to withholding disposition for 6 months. The threat of possible further court action does not seem to have affected the behavior of the comparison group members, since they recidivated at approximately the same rate whether that threat was hanging over them or not. In fact, more comparison group members recidivated within 6 months -- while nominally under court jurisdiction -- than after that jurisdiction ended. Conversely, it can be assumed that some element of the YVA program -- whether the concreteness of the sanction, the supervision, or other factors -- effectively delays or suppresses the commission of further illegal acts for a fairly long period of time. That this is an effect of the program -- and not that of a threat of court review -- is clear inasmuch as court jurisdiction for YVA youth ends after just three months.

#### Characteristics of Recidivists

In this section, we examine several characteristics of the youth in both groups as they are related to outcomes. By so doing, we hope to be able to identify the types of youth with whom the YVA program appears to have the most success.

Demographics. In Tables 6 and 7, the characteristics (sex, race and age) of recidivists in each group are compared to the total number of youth in each group having those same characteristics. We can then compare the

success/failure of different types of YVA youth with those having the same characteristics in the comparison group. For example, in Table 6, part "a," we see that in the YVA group there were 20 male recidivists out of 44 males in the group, and that the percentage of YVA males recidivating was 45.5%. This compares to a 38.5% recidivism figure for the comparison group males.

TABLE 6. Characteristics of Recidivists: Sex and Race

	<u>YVA</u>			<u>Comparison</u>		
	<u>n</u> <u>Recid- ivists</u>	<u>Total n</u> <u>In Group</u>	<u>%</u> <u>Group</u>	<u>n</u> <u>Recid- ivists</u>	<u>Total n</u> <u>In Group</u>	<u>%</u> <u>Group</u>
<u>a. Sex</u>						
Male	20	44	45.5	20	52	38.5
Female	<u>1</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>14.3</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>85.7</u>
Total	21	51	41.1	26	59	44.1
<u>b. Race</u>						
White	14	30	46.7	13	34	38.2
Black	7	21	33.3	12	24	50.0
MD	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0.0</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>100.0</u>
Total	21	51	41.1	26	59	44.1
<u>c. Sex and Race</u>						
Male/White	13	25	52.0	9	29	31.0
Male/Black	7	19	36.8	10	22	45.5
Female/White	1	5	20.0	4	5	80.0
Female/Black	0	2	0.0	2	2	100.0
Male/MD	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	0	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>100.0</u>
Total	21	51	41.1	26	59	44.1

Sex and Race. As is evident from Table 6, males accounted for the vast majority of recidivism in both groups, but those in YVA were somewhat less successful than the males in the comparison group (45.5% vs. 38.5%). YVA females -- with only one recidivist in their ranks -- were much more successful than their counterparts in the comparison group and males of both

groups. With respect to race, whites in both groups had approximately the same degree of recidivism, although it was slightly (6%) higher for the YVA group. Blacks in YVA were more successful than their counterparts and whites of either group -- with only 7 recidivists (33%).

Combining sex and race provides a more refined -- and somewhat different -- picture of the relative success of the subgroups. Females of both races in YVA had the lowest recidivism of any other group. However, the white males in YVA had the largest percentage of recidivism of any other group. The results for black males -- who had only one recidivist at six months -- have now more closely approximated the results of the other male subgroups. Nonetheless, this group did far better than white males in YVA and somewhat better than black males in the comparison group, and had only a slightly higher recidivism rate (6%) than the white males in the comparison group.

While these findings are mixed and present no clear overall endorsement (or indictment) of YVA, this type of analysis makes clear the differential effects of the YVA program. First, we can say with confidence that YVA is a "good thing" for female offenders. While the numbers in the sample are small, the discrepancy in outcomes -- both between YVA females and comparison group females and between YVA females and all males -- warrants such a conclusion. Second, YVA also appears to be particularly effective with blacks. While the differences in outcomes are not as strong as between YVA females and other groups, the finding that race is positively associated with success contradicts accepted knowledge about the impact of race on outcomes and highlights YVA's success with this group. Unfortunately, the level of analysis here is such that we cannot go beyond noting these successes to some explanation for them. The same is true for the two groups who did particularly poorly, i.e., white males in YVA and females in the comparison group. These differences in outcomes deserve further study and thought.

Age. Table 7 provides a comparative picture of the recidivism of youth in the two groups by age at the time of disposition.

TABLE 7. Characteristics of Recidivists: Age

Age	YVA			Comparison		
	n Recidivists	Total n in Group	% Group	n Recidivists	Total n in Group	% Group
13	0	0	0.0	2	2	100.0
14	3	5	60.0	3	10	30.0
15	9	21	42.9	6	15	40.0
16	7	17	41.2	10	19	52.6
17	2	8	25.0	3	9	33.3
MD	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0.0</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>50.0</u>
Total	21	51	41.1	26	59	44.1

Comparison of the groups by age shows no striking differences, except perhaps the failure rate among 14 year olds in YVA, which was twice that of those of the same age in the comparison group. In all other age categories, YVA youth were more successful than their counterparts, although the differences are slight among 15 and 17 year olds. YVA appears to be comparatively more successful with those in the 16 year age range where the recidivism was some 12% lower than that of the comparison group.

Within YVA, it appears that the older a youth is, the greater the likelihood of success. The recidivism rate drops progressively from 60% of the 14 year olds to 25% of the 17 year olds. It may be the case that as youth approach 16 and 17, many are thinking in terms of getting a job. Involvement in the structured work setting of community service may be seen as a stepping stone to a job and thus creates a greater investment -- and inducement to stay out of trouble -- for the older YVA youth.

Court History. In Tables 8, 9 and 10, the court history characteristics of the members of the two groups are presented. As in the preceding section, the recidivists in each group are compared to the total number of youth in each group, by the identified characteristics. The thrust of this section, like the preceding one, is to determine whether certain types of youth -- defined by their prior records and nature of the referral offense -- do relatively better or worse in the YVA program. Table 8 compares the

two groups by the recidivists in each who had prior records vs. those who did not. Table 9 presents the comparison by the nature (offense category) of the offense for which youth were sentenced to either YVA or the "hold open" disposition. Table 10 also compares the referral offenses of the two groups, but here we are concerned with differences in outcomes by whether the referral offense was person, property or public order related.

TABLE 8. Characteristics of Recidivists: Prior Convictions  
(Convictions Prior to The Referral Offense)

<u>Prior convictions</u>	<u>YVA</u>			<u>Comparison</u>		
	<u>n</u> <u>Recidi-</u> <u>vists</u>	<u>n in</u> <u>Group</u>	<u>% Group</u>	<u>n</u> <u>Recidi-</u> <u>vists</u>	<u>n in</u> <u>Group</u>	<u>% Group</u>
No Prior	15	39	38.5	14	40	35.0
Prior	<u>6</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>50</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>19</u>	<u>63.2</u>
Total	21	51	41.1	26	59	44.1

TABLE 9. Characteristics of Recidivists: Referral Offense Level  
(Most Serious Referral Offense)

<u>Referral</u> <u>Offense Category</u>	<u>YVA</u>			<u>Comparison</u>		
	<u>n</u> <u>Recidi-</u> <u>vists</u>	<u>n</u> <u>in Group</u>	<u>% Group</u>	<u>n</u> <u>Recidi-</u> <u>vists</u>	<u>n</u> <u>in Group</u>	<u>% Group</u>
Felony	2	7	28.6	0	2	0.0
Misdemeanor	19	43	44.2	25	56	44.6
Status	0	0	0.0	1	1	100.0
Traffic	<u>0</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>0.0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0.0</u>
Total	21	51	41.1	26	59	44.1

TABLE 10. Characteristics of Recidivists: Nature of Referral Offense

<u>Offense Category</u>	<u>YVA</u>			<u>Comparison</u>		
	<u>n</u> <u>Recidi-</u> <u>vists</u>	<u>n in</u> <u>Group</u>	<u>% Group</u>	<u>n</u> <u>Recidi-</u> <u>vists</u>	<u>n in</u> <u>Group</u>	<u>% Group</u>
Person Related	3	9	33.3	5	12	41.7
Property Related	15	31	48.4	11	31	35.5
Public Order Related	3	10	30.0	9	15	60.0
Status	0	0	0.0	1	1	100.0
Traffic	<u>0</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>0.0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0.0</u>
Total	21	51	41.1	26	59	44.1

Prior Convictions. The data from Table 7 show that youth in both groups who had no prior convictions prior to the one which resulted in their being sent to YVA or the hold-open status were much less likely to be re-arrested after their referral than those who did have a prior conviction. Among those with no convictions, both groups recidivated at approximately the same rate, but YVA youth in this category experienced slightly higher recidivism than the comparison group (38.5% vs. 35%). Among those with priors, however, YVA recidivism was substantially lower than the comparison group -- by about 13%. We would speculate that the differences between the two groups may have something to do with the imposition of a constructive sanction on the YVA members, as well as any program specific effects. The higher recidivism rate of the comparison group members with priors speaks to this issue: the members of this subgroup have had at least 2 convictions (prior and referral offenses), yet the court has chosen not to intervene other than to hold the disposition open. It may well be that this "hands-off" response sends a "nothing will happen" message to certain youth.

Nature of Referral Offenses. Examination of recidivism by the category of the referral offense (e.g., felony, misdemeanor, etc.) shows very few differences between the groups. The bulk of offenders in both groups had committed misdemeanor referral offenses and the failure rate in each group is virtually identical -- 44.2% for YVA and 44.6% for the comparison group. We noted at 6 months that none of the felony offenders from either

group had recidivated. That has changed. Two of the YVA felony offenders subsequently recidivated, albeit with less serious offenses.

With respect to the type of referral offense (Table 10), the results are mixed, but show somewhat important distinctions between the groups. Youth who had committed offenses against the person and were referred to YVA, recidivated somewhat less than person offenders in the comparison group (33.3% vs. 41.7%). In addition, there is a fairly substantial (13%) difference in outcomes between the two groups among property related offenders, with comparison group members having the lower recidivism rate. The sharpest distinction between the groups occurs in the public order offender category, where YVA recidivism was half that of the comparison group.

These findings are somewhat surprising, especially in relation to property offenders. Because community service is closely linked with the notion of restitution, we would have expected that YVA success, if any, would be strongest among property related offenders where the "pay back" message from the court would be conceptually most clear to an offender. At the same time, the relative success of the public order offenders in YVA is difficult to explain, unless the structure and discipline required by fulfilling the community service requirement might have some impact on the "rowdy" type behavior associated with public order offenses.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This study was designed to examine the impact on juvenile recidivism of the community service diversion project of the Young Volunteers in Action and the Franklin County Juvenile Court. Data was collected on the number of YVA youth rearrested during the one-year period following their referral to the program. The recidivism figures of the YVA group were compared with those of a matched group of juvenile offenders who did not participate in YVA, and who were not subject to any other intervention by the juvenile court. The relationship between recidivism and several basic variables was examined for both groups.

Caution is urged in making hard conclusions from the findings because the number of youth involved in the study is too small a sample for any statements to be made about the statistical significance of the findings. Because of this, it is possible that the results are a function of chance, rather than a true measure of program effectiveness.

Given this caveat, how should the findings presented here be interpreted? The initial context for interpretation must be that of the central questions posed at the outset of the study. First, does involvement in the YVA program reduce the likelihood of a delinquent youth becoming re-involved in the juvenile justice system? Our findings indicate that -- at this broad level -- the answer is probably no. YVA does not apparently reduce recidivism -- either in terms of number of youth rearrested or in the seriousness of their their recidivating offenses. The answer, however, must be qualified because of the nature of the question. Research on program effectiveness in criminal and juvenile justice has demonstrated that no single program "works" for all participants. This knowledge is the basis for our second -- and more refined -- research question: does the program seem to have a positive impact on certain types of youth? The findings are clear:

- white males are not very successful, but
- females of both races are very successful, and
- black youth are more successful than whites in YVA and their counterparts who weren't in the program, and
- older youth are more successful than younger ones in YVA and their counterparts not in YVA.

These findings necessitate a revised answer to the original question: no, YVA doesn't reduce recidivism for all youth, but it does have an impact on key groups. This revised answer is especially significant precisely because of the groups YVA does effectively serve. In the first instance, many "traditional" programs are not designed to specifically deal with females and often cannot accommodate them effectively. YVA does. In the second case, black youth have frequently had significantly higher recidivism rates -- across a variety of programs -- than white youth. In the YVA program, the reverse is true.

In addition, we have seen that YVA effectively increases the amount of arrest-free "street-time" for most youth who do recidivate. From a public policy perspective, any increases in the time periods between arrests should be viewed as a next best alternative to complete desistance from delinquent behavior. Such reductions in frequency of arrest mean not only an overall cost savings for those institutions and agencies which process offenders, but also mean (for most juvenile offenders) moving closer to that developmental stage where maturation alone dictates (or facilitates) the cessation of delinquency.

There is an additional, broader context within which the findings presented here also require interpretation. That context is one which looks beyond -- while not ignoring -- the value of recidivism measures as the sole criteria for assessing a program's merit. Taking this broader perspective, we note two factors which help provide a more balanced picture of YVA outcomes.

The first issue raised in this broader context is that of program outcomes which, while perhaps not preventing recidivism in the short run, may help to improve some of the conditions that are often thought to be associated with crime. A recently completed study\* on the experiences of YVA youth in the community service setting shows that a majority of youth believe that it was a positive experience and that they gained valuable

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\*See "A Quarter Mile of Baseboards: Perceptions of Community Service Work Among Delinquent Youth," June 1985, by this author.

work experience, marketable skills and/or an actual job. This type of "secondary" outcome should not be ignored, particularly given the conventional understanding of the relationship between youth unemployment and crime.

Finally, the perspective of the larger community's notions of justice needs to be taken into account. Many of the criticisms leveled at the juvenile justice system focus on the perception that "nothing happens" to youth who come before the court. Consequently, even if there were no other positive outcomes of the YVA program -- and we have seen this is not the case -- it at least provides a verifiable, measurable and constructive sanction for delinquent behavior. In so doing, it can only enhance the public's evaluation of the juvenile court and provide a sense -- for the public, the offender and the victim alike -- that some measure of justice has been done.

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APPENDIX

Comparability of the Two Groups: Original Sample  
(n = 60, each group)

	<u>YVA</u>		<u>COMPARISON</u>	
	<u>Number</u>	<u>% Group</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>% Group</u>
<u>A. Demographics</u>				
<u>1. Sex &amp; Race</u>				
Male/White	29	48.3	29	48.3
Male/Black	24	40.0	23	38.3
Female/White	5	8.3	5	8.3
Female/Black	2	3.3	2	3.3
Male/MD	<u>0</u>	<u>0.0</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>1.7</u>
Total	60	100.0	60	100.0
<u>2. Age</u>				
MD	0	0	4	6.7
13 yrs.	0	0	2	3.3
14	7	11.7	10	16.7
15	21	35.0	15	25.0
16	19	31.7	19	31.7
17	12	20.0	10	16.7
18	<u>1</u>	<u>1.7</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0.0</u>
Total	60	100.0	60	100.0
Mean = 16.149		Mean = 15.904		

APPENDIX - continued

Comparability of the Two Groups: Original Sample  
(n = 60, each group)

	YVA		COMPARISON	
	<u>Number</u>	<u>% Group</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>% Group</u>
<b>B. <u>Referred Offenders</u></b>				
<b>1. <u>Most Serious Offense by Offense Category</u></b>				
Felony	7	11.6	2	3.4
Misdemeanor	51	85.0	57	94.9
Status	1	1.7	1	1.7
Traffic	<u>1</u>	<u>1.7</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0.0</u>
	60	100.0	60	100.0
<b>2. <u>Youth with Multiple Referral Offenses</u></b>				
	13	21.7	13	21.7
<b>3. <u>Youth with Prior Convictions</u></b>				
	17	28.3	19	31.7
<b>4. <u>Youth with Multiple Prior Convictions</u></b>				
	9	15.0	7	11.7
<b>5. <u>Youth with Prior Probation Status</u></b>				
	7	11.7	3	5.0
<b>6. <u>Youth with Prior Incarcerations</u></b>				
	1	1.7	1	1.7

APPENDIX - continued

Comparability of the Two Groups: Original Sample  
(n = 60, each group)

	YVA		COMPARISON	
	<u>Number</u>	<u>% Group</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>% Group</u>
<u>C. Referral Offenses</u>				
<u>1. Offense Category</u>				
Felony	7	9.4	2	2.8
Misdemeanor	<u>56</u>	<u>75.7</u>	<u>66</u>	<u>90.4</u>
Sub-Delinquency	63	85.1	68	93.2
Status	10	13.5	5	6.8
Traffic	<u>1</u>	<u>1.4</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0.0</u>
Total	74	100.0	73	100.0
<u>2. Most Frequent Offense</u>				
Petit Theft	10	13.5	13	17.8
Assault	10	13.5	14	19.2
Crim. Damage	4	5.4	6	8.2
Crim. Trespass	7	9.5	6	8.2
Disorderly	<u>9</u>	<u>12.2</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>12.3</u>
	40	54.1	45	61.6

APPENDIX - continued

Comparability of the Two Groups: Original Sample  
(n = 60, each group)

	YVA		COMPARISON	
	<u>n</u>	<u>% Delinquency Offenses</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>% Delinquency Offenses</u>
3. <u>Delinquency: Person/ Property/Public Order</u>				
Property	35	55.6	35	51.5
Person	14	22.2	18	26.5
Public Order	<u>14</u>	<u>22.2</u>	<u>15</u>	<u>22.0</u>
Total	63	100.0	68	100.0