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A Preliminary Evaluation of
North Carolina's IMPACT Program

Executive Summary

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prepared by
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Introduction

This evaluation of the IMPACT program (Intensive Motivational Program of Alternative Correctional Treatment) was requested by the General Assembly (SB 150, Sec. 19(c)) during the 1994 Special Session. The General Assembly asked for a comparison of the program's effectiveness, cost, and recidivism rate to that of other corrections programs for offenders aged 16-25. This report, the first in a series of requested annual reports, presents a general review of the IMPACT program. Since the time of the request, an additional boot camp, IMPACT-West, opened on October 31, 1994. However, **this initial report refers only to IMPACT-East.**

Methodology

The Secretary of the Department of Correction directed the Office of Research and Planning to conduct the evaluation and established an oversight management team made up of representatives from the Division of Prisons, the Division of Adult Probation and Parole, and the Office of the Secretary.

The Research and Planning staff solicited research advice from other criminal justice professionals and agencies. As part of the study, staff spent approximately 100 hours on site at the IMPACT program observing and recording information about various aspects of the program and talking with both staff and trainees.

The Structure of this Report

This evaluation is modeled after the 1994 National Institute of Justice study of eight boot camp programs in other states conducted by Doris MacKenzie and Claire Souryal. The first part of this evaluation focuses on a description of the program, using official program materials, legislation, informal interviews with staff and trainees, site visits to the IMPACT program, a survey of North Carolina judges, and data from the Department and the Division of Criminal Information of the State Bureau of Investigation. The second part reports on an analysis of rearrest rates and cost estimates. Two additional measures are discussed: 1) a pre and post survey of the attitudinal changes of offenders during participation in the boot camp program, and 2) a survey of trainee expectations both during the program and following their release. A third part outlines considerations for, and specifies the initial content of this series of reports.

History of Boot Camp programs

History of National Efforts

From a 1983 beginning in Georgia with a 50-bed program, boot camps have expanded into 59 sites in 29 states. There is a nation-wide capacity of 10,065 inmates with program size

varying from 100 to 3,000 beds. Most boot camps are structured around a "core" of military-style basic training, precision drills, physical exercise, hard labor, and discipline. Most programs attempt to help manage increasing prison populations, reduce correctional systems costs and prison crowding by diverting offenders, and to reduce recidivism. Within this general model, there are variations by state, molded by correctional philosophy and needs. For example, New York initiated its boot camp program specifically for substance abusers in response to substantial increases in drug-related prison admissions.

Available research regarding the effectiveness of this type of incarceration is sparse: only two major studies have been done (General Accounting Office, 1993 and MacKenzie & Souryal, 1994). While some generalizations can be drawn, care must be taken in applying the findings too narrowly to the IMPACT program in North Carolina. However, the boot camp program here is generally similar to others found throughout the nation. These programs characteristically target young, non-violent, first time offenders and expose them to a period of "shock incarceration" followed by a subsequent term of probation.

History of North Carolina's Efforts

The history of North Carolina's efforts dates back to 1989 legislation creating a parole-based boot camp program in which inmates were selected by the Parole Commission and offered an early parole if they would agree to participate. In 1991, the program's target population was changed to a probation base with the aim of diverting these offenders from prison. The current eligibility criteria are: a) between the ages of 16 and 25 years, b) eligible to serve a prison sentence of six months or more, c) certified as medically fit, and d) not having served an active sentence in excess of 120 days.

Findings from North Carolina's Program

The IMPACT program is operating as planned. The elements needed to meet IMPACT objectives have been implemented. The mechanisms for a thorough process and outcome evaluation have been established and are being implemented.

Philosophy

The philosophy and operation of North Carolina's boot camp program is similar to those of national models. The mission of IMPACT is "...to instill self-confidence, discipline, and the work ethic by the administration of a strictly regimented para-military system which provides the opportunity for youthful offenders to develop positive, responsible behavior" (Standard Operating Procedures, IMPACT program 1994).

The general daily schedule reflects the stated philosophy: the ratio of work to school to other rehabilitative activities is roughly 6:2:2. Trainees spend approximately 60 percent of their

waking hours performing work and drill. The remaining time is divided, depending upon the program phase, between formal educational activities and other rehabilitative/educational activities.

Judges' Survey

All trainees in the IMPACT program are on probation and are referred by a judge. As part of this evaluation, Superior Court judges were surveyed. Overall, the judges appeared to be enthusiastic about IMPACT, its use and potential benefits.

According to their answers, the judges' perception is that IMPACT does serve as a diversion program: the 26 judges who responded to this question said that over 60% of the offenders sent to IMPACT would, if the program were not available, go to prison while the rest would go on to probation.

Judges indicated that the current age range (16-25 years) was acceptable but that they would agree with allowing offenders to enter with a greater number of prior convictions and a wider range of felony classes. Some of the new classes would include crimes which are assaultive. A majority stated that a similar program for women should be developed.

Through other written comments, the judges provided key points to consider regarding the future direction of boot camp efforts. For example, it was suggested that traditional post-release supervision should be replaced by aftercare programs where offenders can go to improve educational and vocational skills.

Program Operation

There have been 1487 entries into IMPACT during the time period of January 1991 through August 1994. Ninety percent of all trainees entering the program graduate. Six percent are dismissed for disciplinary reasons, three percent for medical reasons, and one percent abscond.

IMPACT is comprised of three phases, each phase consisting of four weeks. The length of participation is normally three months. The program can be expanded to four months for trainees needing more attention by "recycling" them back into an earlier program phase. Information from the program indicates that about four percent of the graduates have been recycled.

Until recently, the annual capacity was 390. Admission procedures allowed for the entry of 30 offenders every four weeks. The program was expanded in January 1994 to allow 30 entries every two weeks. This change reduced the waiting time for admission and increased the annual capacity to 780. With the opening of IMPACT-West in October 1994, and the addition of 90 beds in early 1995, the program's total annual capacity will be 1560 participants.

Community Service Work

A major emphasis of the program is to build a strong work ethic for trainees, many of whom report that they either have never worked or have only maintained sporadic employment in menial, low paying jobs. The strict routine of community-based work during a 42 hour long workweek provides structure, simulates daily life on the outside, and allows the trainees to give back to the community in meaningful ways. Common to all work is the aspect of hard, physical labor.

All levels of government agencies are eligible to be selected as community work projects. Examples of projects include: building playground equipment and nature walk trails for schools in Moore and Richmond counties; clearing wooded sites for the protection of endangered species at Weymouth Woods State Park and Camp MacHall; cleaning up construction sites, and refurbishing buildings for other prison units; and remodeling buildings for the State Agricultural Extension service.

As of October 28, 1994, there were 19 projects on a backlog. According to program information, there has never been a time in which the program did not have projects for the trainees.

Value of Service Performed

IMPACT program staff maintain that community restitution service work performed by the trainees is worthwhile in two ways: 1) the trainees experience themselves as "givers" to the community and, 2) there is the financial value of the service performed.

During the time period that IMPACT has been a program for probationers (January 1991 - August 1994), trainees have worked over 550,000 hours on 87 projects. **The number of hours worked when multiplied by the minimum wage produced an estimated financial value of \$1,851,863.00 for these services to the community.** This averages \$14.77 per trainee per day. When multiplied by the days the average trainee spends at IMPACT, this projected restitution amounts to \$1,196 per trainee while in IMPACT.

Ceremony and Drill

Ceremony and drill are consistent with the military style orientation. These activities are occasions when all trainees are together and participating in the same formal activity. New trainees see how the program's "veterans" conduct themselves and, by receiving the honor of carrying the flag, gain additional benefits in teamwork and group participation.

Education and Rehabilitation

The goals of IMPACT encompass education and rehabilitation and there are three types of activities designed to reach these goals. The first category consists of formal schooling, the

High School Equivalency degree (GED), a compact version of a community college course, and the Chapter One program, all taught by Richmond Community College teachers. A second category consists of in-service classes taught by IMPACT program staff, including such topical areas as financial management, problem solving, self esteem, and conflict management. The third category consists of the role modeling by the predominantly male staff who are often viewed as being positive father figures for the trainees. This is perhaps the most qualitative and hardest to measure but, based on anecdotal evidence, it is the essence of IMPACT.

Educational Activities

Formal educational activities, GED preparation, and Chapter One are a consistent and mandatory evening activity four nights a week for the duration of the program. Richmond Community College coordinates the program and provides the instructors for IMPACT-East. Preparing trainees to take the high school equivalency exam (the GED) is the primary goal. Trainees who do not demonstrate at least an eighth-grade competency are placed in Chapter One, a remedial literacy program.

Rehabilitative Activities

A Human Resource Development class taught in the community college system is provided, in a condensed version, by Richmond Community College staff. This 25-hour course is scheduled during the third and fourth week of the last program phase. The first week's material is focused on improvements within the individual. During the second week, the emphasis is on skills that improve relations with others and society.

Less formalized educational activities, classes and presentations in self esteem training and conflict management are taught throughout the length of the program. The program also has a "ropes challenge course" which instills self-reliance and promotes trust and teamwork. The three separate components dealing with substance abuse are directed towards screening and orientation rather than treatment. The Chaplain provides religious services in addition to being available for informal counseling sessions. Formal counseling is handled by referrals to psychological services at a nearby prison unit. Medical needs are handled on unit.

Trainee Attitude Changes

National researchers found that offenders showed a positive attitude change as a result of the boot camp experience. This evaluation has begun to replicate that study. **Preliminary results from the first few cases suggest that similar positive changes in attitudes are occurring in trainees over the course of the program.** Initial data suggest that the positive attitudes are related to the trainees' feelings about themselves and about the program.

Trainee Expectations

Ancillary to this evaluation, a graduate class of university students developed a survey to measure the expectations of trainees prior to their graduation and afterwards, when the trainees are back in the community. This survey was piloted on current trainees and is currently being refined. The goal is to find out whether the positive feelings trainees develop during IMPACT remain following graduation.

Recidivism

The legislation which prompted this evaluation requires the Department of Correction to compare the IMPACT program's recidivism rate to other programs for offenders aged 16-25 years. While all correctional programs hope to reduce recidivism, neither IMPACT's mission nor the enabling legislation mentioned the reduction of recidivism as a goal. The boot camp evaluation sponsored by the National Institute of Justice found no reduction in recidivism from the military/discipline aspects of the programs studied, but did find evidence that aftercare programs produced such reductions. In North Carolina, the recently funded aftercare program is still in the implementation phase.

This analysis measures recidivism by using rearrest rates, following the same general procedures as a study carried out for the Sentencing Policy and Advisory Commission by Stevens Clarke and Anita Harrison. IMPACT's rearrest rate, 39.8% within two years, is near the high end of the range reported by these authors (27% to 44% for an average 27 month follow up). Still, the rate for IMPACT was lower than those of two comparison groups: 44% for probationers and 51.6% for former prison inmates. These comparison groups were selected to match the age and felon/misdemeanant distribution of IMPACT trainees.

In comparing the recidivism rates for various correctional programs in existence at that time, Clarke and Harrison found that nearly all of the differences in rearrest rates among the programs could be explained by differences in the populations being treated. Certain groups of offenders are statistically more likely to commit new crimes than are others. An important issue is whether the program produces lower recidivism than those same offenders would have experienced under alternative treatments (prison or probation).

Two features of the IMPACT population -- that the clientele are all male and young -- indicate high risk of rearrest. Another feature -- the restriction on prior incarceration -- somewhat limits that risk but, generally, these population characteristics predict high failure rates. The current study used regression models, just as Clarke and Harrison did, to account for these differences in comparing IMPACT trainees with other offenders.

This analysis used all three groups: IMPACT trainees, the comparison group of probationers, and another of former prison inmates that "look like" IMPACT trainees on the basis of age and crime status. The regression models are comparable to those in other studies, especially that of Clarke and Harrison, and include many of the same potential risk variables:

Age at the beginning of the follow-up period; Number of prior fingerprinted arrests; Nature of current crime; Race (Black vs all other combined); Program assignment to IMPACT, rather than prison or probation; and Program assignment to prison, rather than IMPACT or probation

The rearrest rate for IMPACT trainees was not significantly different from probationers, when controlling for other known risk factors. However, the rearrest rate for IMPACT trainees was 4.7 percentage points less than prison's rate (adjusting for risk), or 10.6% fewer arrests. This is a hopeful result, but the difference would have to be greater -- 5.2 rather than 4.7 -- for one to have confidence that the difference was more than just what might occur from random differences between the two groups of offenders. The conclusion is that there is some evidence that IMPACT produces a lower rearrest rate than imprisonment does. Further analysis may clarify this and help determine whether certain types of offenders are more influenced than others.

Program Costs

Boot camp programs can produce a cost savings compared to prison if they have a lower reincarceration rate or if the length of confinement is shorter for boot camp participants, and if participants would otherwise have served a prison sentence. The only source of information for the latter is estimates from the judges that at least 60% of their IMPACT choices would otherwise have gone to prison. The prison comparison group (selected for the recidivism analysis) averaged six months in prison before release (this was among felons only, who comprised 62% of each comparison group).

The cost calculation is based on an entire sentencing "episode" (confinement as well as post-release supervision). On this basis, IMPACT costs \$5,284; prison \$10,463; and probation \$3,137. **If our conclusion from the judge's survey is accurate, with six of out ten IMPACT assignments otherwise prison-bound then, for felons, the average sentence to IMPACT may save \$2,200.** For the period of January 1991 through August 1994, this savings amounts to \$2,028,268. For misdemeanants, the picture is quite different, because the length of time they have recently served as regular inmates is much smaller, i. e., one month for those in the comparison group.

Future Considerations

Program Capacity and Need

When both IMPACT units are fully operational, the program will have a total annual capacity of 1560 trainees per year. For the time period of this report, the program capacity was half that size. Under structured sentencing, the extent of the demand for the program is yet to be determined. There is no longer a list of candidates awaiting entry, as there was when the program was much smaller.

Structured sentencing makes changes that affect recruiting for IMPACT in several different ways. For felons, the number eligible is likely to drop, because of how the sentencing grid restricts judicial options. Conversely, the program may become more attractive under the new law, because of those restrictions. In crime class H and the lowest prior record level, the only choices are between community and intermediate punishments. Boot camp is the most punitive of the choices available and could see high use in such cases. Among misdemeanants, who now make up 38 percent of trainees, the forecast is equally uncertain. Active sentence lengths under structured sentencing appear too short to make the IMPACT alternative a reasonable choice. Even today, however, the actual time served in prison by misdemeanants is so little as to make it unclear why these offenders currently accept boot camp.

Using Sentencing Commission estimates, nearly 2900 convicted felons per year are expected in the eligible categories. How many of those are both directed by the courts into IMPACT, and how many agree to go could not be estimated. Next year's project will report on how well the expanded capacity of the program is utilized and whether expanded eligibility standards should be considered.

Aftercare Programs

Aftercare programs will be another focus of future efforts. The period immediately following release from IMPACT is critical. Agreement on this point is seen in the judges' survey, research findings, and the General Assembly's funding of an aftercare program. The fragility of the enthusiasm and motivation achieved during isolation from the corrosive social environment to which these trainees are returning is self-evident.

The Department has received funding for a pilot program to provide aftercare services to IMPACT graduates in ten counties. Plans are now being completed and the program will start in early 1995.

Conclusions

1. The IMPACT program is operating well. The elements needed to meet IMPACT objectives have been implemented. The "core" components necessary for a thorough process evaluation are in place.
2. The Superior Court judges responding to the survey are, as a group, very supportive of IMPACT. The judges' responses and comments suggest that more communication between the courts and program administrators will improve IMPACT's ability to provide the correctional response sought by the judiciary.

According to their answers, the judges' perception is that IMPACT does serve as a diversion program.

3. There is preliminary evidence that the boot camp experience results in more positive attitudes. There is an abundance of anecdotal evidence that the program is providing both enthusiasm and motivation for a more positive lifestyle.
4. For felons, the use of IMPACT has led to cost savings. If our conclusion from the judge's survey is accurate, with six of out ten IMPACT assignments otherwise prison-bound then, for felons, the average sentence to IMPACT may save \$2,200.
5. The community restitution service work performed by the trainees seems worthwhile both by allowing the trainees to experience themselves as "givers," and by the financial value of the work performed. The 550,000 hours spent on 87 projects translates into an estimate of \$1,851,863.00 contributed to the community.
6. There is some evidence of a rehabilitative effect, based on lower rearrest rates, as compared to imprisonment.
7. The pool of offenders eligible for IMPACT may be smaller under structured sentencing than under the Fair Sentencing Act because the sentence for most misdemeanants will be 90 days or less in length.