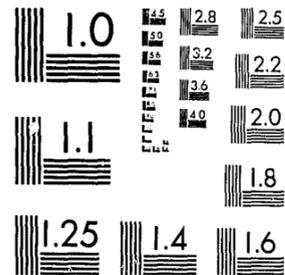


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X
FOLLOW-UP SURVEY OF
POST-RELEASE CRIMINAL BEHAVIOR
OF PARTICIPANTS IN FAMILY REUNION PROGRAM

The present report investigates the return rate of a sample of 540 Released Family Reunion Program participants to (a) determine the number of these program participants returned to Department custody by new sentence or Board action due to rule violation and (b) compare this actual return rate to a projected return based on overall return statistics.

Attached is a set of Highlights summarizing the findings of this report.

May 1980

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FOLLOW-UP SURVEY OF
POST-RELEASE CRIMINAL BEHAVIOR
OF PARTICIPANTS IN FAMILY REUNION PROGRAM

HIGHLIGHTS

1. Program Overview and History. One of the more innovative programmatic developments of the New York State Department of Correctional Services in recent years has been the establishment of the Family Reunion Program. The basic goal of this program is to enable eligible inmates and their families to meet in private on the grounds of the facility for extended periods of time.

This program was initially established under a Federal grant on a pilot project basis at the Wallkill Correction Facility in June, 1976. Based on the successful operation of this demonstration project, this Federal Project was incrementally expanded to Attica (July 1977); Bedford Hills (September 1977); and Great Meadow (September 1978). This program was subsequently assumed under State funding at the end of the Federal grant.
2. Program Objectives. The primary objective of the program is to aid eligible inmates in preserving and strengthening their family relationships while incarcerated and consequently to facilitate the adjustment of the program participants in the community after release and thus reduce the likelihood of further criminal activity.
3. Family Reunion Program Participants Released as of February 1980. A total of 540 program participants had been released as of February 1980.
4. Return Rate of Family Reunion Program Participants (4%). Of these 540 released program participants, only 4% (20) had been returned to the Department's custody by February 1980 with a new sentence or by the Board of Parole for a rule violation
5. Lower Than Projected Return Rate. Based on the overall return rate of Department releases, it may be projected that 59 of these 540 released program participants would have been returned to Department custody. As such, the number of program participants actually returned (20) was approximately 67% less than the expected number (59).
6. Significance of Findings. The primary implication of this finding is that the Department's family services are appropriately directed toward an area that appears to be related to reducing criminal recidivism.

FOLLOW-UP SURVEY OF
POST-RELEASE CRIMINAL BEHAVIOR
OF PARTICIPANTS IN FAMILY REUNION PROGRAM

One of the more innovative programmatic developments of the New York State Department of Correctional Services in recent years has been the establishment of the Family Reunion Program. At the time of this Department's initial planning survey of this area in 1976, only two other State correctional agencies (California and Mississippi) operated somewhat similar programs.

Program Objectives

The Family Reunion Program is designed specifically for those inmates who because of length of sentence or other reasons are ineligible for participation in the regular furlough program. The basic goal of this project is to enable eligible inmates and their families to meet in private on the grounds of the facility for extended periods of time.

Through the operation of the Family Reunion Program, this project addresses two interrelated objectives.

1. the primary objective of the program is to enable the involved inmates to preserve and strengthen their family relationships while incarcerated.
2. a second major objective is to facilitate the adjustment of the involved inmates in the community after release by improving their family relationships and thus reducing the possibility of further criminal activity.

Program Operation

Under the Department's Assistant Commissioner for Ministerial and Family Services, Division of Ministerial Services and Family Services has the day-to-day operational responsibility for the implementation and operation of the Family Reunion Program. Appendix A provides a detailed description of the program operations in terms of staffing, selection criteria and visiting procedures.

This program was initially established under a Federal grant on a pilot project basis at the Wallkill Correction Facility in June 1976. Based on the successful operation of this demonstration project, this Federal Project was incrementally expanded to Attica (July 1977); Bedford Hills (September 1977); and Great Meadow (September 1978). This program was subsequently assumed under State funding at the end of the Federal grant.

Previous Evaluation of Wallkill Program. An initial survey in this area (February 1979) sought to assess the degree to which the Family Reunion Program at Wallkill assisted inmates in maintaining family ties.*

Focus on Wallkill Pilot Project. This 1979 survey focused on the Wallkill program site since only this project component had been in operation for a sufficient period of time so that an adequate number of program participants had been subsequently released.

Preservation of Family Ties: Number of Program Participants Living with Family Members upon Release. In order to ascertain the program's assistance in enabling inmates to maintain and strengthen their family ties while incarcerated, information was compiled on the number of program participants who were released to living arrangements with family members.

This 1979 survey found that 58 (87%) of the 67 released program participants for whom information was available were scheduled to return to living arrangements with family members (generally their spouses) upon release. Another 7 program participants were initially released to a special halfway house program operated by the Division of Parole. Only 2 were scheduled to reside alone after release.

In view of the fact that 62 of these 73 program participants had served over 2 years, this finding is seen to be indicative of the program's contribution in assisting inmates in maintaining family ties during substantial periods of incarceration.

Present Survey of Recombitment Among Family Reunion Program Participants. As a follow-up to this previous report, the present report was designed to examine the post-release criminal behavior of Family Reunion Program Participants.

Purpose of Survey. As noted above, the purpose of this survey is to compare the post release "recommitment" rate of a sample of Family Reunion Program participants to an overall recommitment rate of Department releases.

Definition of Recombitment. For purposes of this follow-up study, "recommitment" is defined as a return to Department custody either (a) for a rule violation or (b) with a new sentence following conviction for a new felony.

Sample Selection: Expansion to All Four Program Sites. As previously discussed, the earlier follow-up study involved only a sample of program participants at the Wallkill Correctional Facility site.

* Follow-up Survey of Participants in Family Reunion Program, February 1979

The present survey expanded the sample to involve program participants at all four sites: Wallkill (including inmates from Woodbourne); Bedford Hills; Attica; and Great Meadow.

Determination of Number of Family Reunion Participants Released. The Division of Ministerial and Family Services requested that the Family Reunion Program Coordinators at each of the four sites submit a listing of all inmates who had participated in the program as of February 1980.

The Department's Division of Management Information services was then asked to provide information on the current status (under custody or released) of these 1,129 inmates as of February 1980.

In line with standard office procedure on recommitment studies, this analysis sought to determine the number of program participants released by Board action, conditional release or maximum expiration of sentence. Inmates released by court order or out-to-court for further legal action were excluded from consideration.

Program Participants Released and Not Returned as of February 1980. As of February 1980, a total of 520 program participants had been released and had not been returned. The table below indicates the year of release and the facility at which the inmate had participated in the program.

Facility	PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS RELEASED AND NOT RETURNED AS OF FEBRUARY 1980					
	Total Number	Release Date				
		1976	1977	1978	1979	1980
Wallkill (Wallkill Inmates)	279	2	25	90	149	13
Wallkill (Woodbourne Inmates)*	69	-	-	22	44	3
Attica	85	-	1	23	52	9
Bedford Hills	66	-	1	22	38	5
Great Meadow	21	-	-	1	16	4
TOTAL:	520	2	27	158	299	34

* Previously, one cycle every two weeks at Wallkill was reserved for Woodbourne inmates.

Program Participants Released and Returned as February 1980. The listing of program participants under custody was reviewed to determine the number released and returned as of February 1980 with a new sentence or by Parole Board action due to a rule violation.

The number of inmates returned due to a rule violation was ascertained by reviewing the Central office case folders of inmates whose most recent admission date was later than their Department ID Number. The number of inmates returned with a new sentence was determined by comparing the inmates' current Department ID numbers to their ID numbers while in the program to identify those individuals subsequently recommitted with a new sentence (and thus a new number).

This process identified a total of 20 of program participants who had been released and subsequently returned with a new sentence or due to a rule violation.

PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS
RELEASED AND RETURNED TO DEPARTMENT CUSTODY
AS OF FEBRUARY 1980

Wallkill	8
Woodbourne	1
Attica	8
Bedford Hills	3
Great Meadow	-
TOTAL:	20

It should be emphasized that the number of inmates returned by program site differ significantly due to the varying number released from each site as well as differences in the inmate populations at each site.

It should also be noted that there is a possibility that the preceding table on program participants released and not returned might include a very limited number (if any) of program participants who were released, returned and released again. However, this possibility is considered to be negligible due to the relatively brief time periods involved. Even at the initial project site of Wallkill, very few (27) program participants had been released before 1978, which makes it unlikely that a significant number of program participants were released, returned and released again by February 1980. In future follow-up studies, this possibility will be investigated in the research method.

Analysis of Recidivism Rate of Family Reunion Program Participants. Of the total 540 program participants released as of February 1980, (20) had been returned to the Department's custody.

PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS
PERCENT RETURNED AS OF FEBRUARY 1980

	Number of Total Released	Released and Returned		Number of Released and Not Released
		Number	Percent of Total Released	
Wallkill	287	8	3%	279
Woodbourne	70	1	1%	69
Attica	93	8	9%	85
Bedford Hills	69	3	4%	66
Great Meadow	21	-	-	21
TOTAL:	540	20	4%	520

Comparison Data: Overall Recidivism Statistics. In considering this low return rate for the surveyed program participants, it is logical to ask how this program recidivism rate compares to the overall return rate for Department releases.

To develop an overall recidivism rate for comparison purposes, this report utilized the most current available three year return rate data as presented in a recent Division of Parole statistical publication. This Division of Parole report indicates the following return rates for 1975 releases due to rule violations or new sentences.*

Year of Release	Cumulative Percentage Returned
	5.5%
First Year After Release	19.9%
Second Year After Release	26.8%

While the above follow-up period of these 1975 releases (1975-1977) differs from the follow-up of the surveyed Family Reunion Program participants (1977-1979), these statistics offer the most current three year follow-up data available.

* New York State Division of Parole, 1977 Annual Statistical Report (September 1979)

These percentages were applied to the number of Family Reunion Program participants released in 1977, 1978 and 1979 to generate a projected number of anticipated returns.

	<u>Number of Family Reunion Participants Released</u>	<u>Anticipated Percentage Returned Based on 1975 Parole Data</u>	<u>Anticipated Number of Program Participants Returned (Approximately)</u>
1977	34	26.8%	9
1978	168	19.9%	33
1979	302	5.5%	17
TOTAL:	504	Total:	59

Lower Than Projected Number of Returns Among Family Reunion Program Participants. In comparison to the projected number (59) of returns among the released Family Reunion Program participants computed above, the number of these program participants who were actually returned (20) is considerably lower (roughly 67% less).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In view of this finding of a lower than projected return rate among Family Reunion Program participants, a number of questions may be logically asked about the significance and implications of this positive finding. This concluding section discusses a number of the major questions that can be raised about this finding in seeking to place the results of this research report in an appropriate perspective.

Question of Selectivity in Choosing Program Participants for the Family Reunion Program. A basic comment can be made that Family Reunion Program participants are carefully selected and thus it could be expected that they should have a lower return rate than the overall release population.

As presented in the early section of this report, Family Reunion Program participants are selected following a multi-phase screening process that involves a number of criteria. Certainly not the least important of these criteria is that the inmate must necessarily have family members willing to visit him or her, which indicates a certain degree of family cohesion.

As such, it may be rightly pointed out that the surveyed Family Reunion Program participants are not a representative sample of the inmate population.

In view of these selection factors, it might be suggested that a control group be created to assess the singular impact of this program.

According to the ideal research model, a control group should be identical to the experimental group in all ways except program participation. In view of this requirement, the control group for this study should resemble the surveyed Family Reunion Program participants in all ways except program participation.

The most feasible means of generating the control group described above would be to randomly exclude from program participation certain inmates approved for Family Reunion Program participation at the various project sites for the sole purpose of creating a comparable control group. While such an approach has been adopted at times by other human services delivery agencies, this Department has traditionally not refused eligible inmates the opportunity to participate in programs for research purposes due to moral (as well as legal) reasons.

While a rigorous control group approach does not appear to be possible, future studies in this area will compare the characteristics of Family Reunion Program participants to the characteristics of the overall release population to identify possible significant differences.

Research of Other Jurisdictions on Similar Family Programs. A final question might be what research on recidivism has been conducted (if any) by other jurisdictions with similar programs.

It is proposed that other jurisdictions be canvassed using this report as a reference point to explore possible methods that they have utilized in controlling for the selective nature of these programs.

Implications of Research. The basic finding of this report is that Family Reunion Program participants appear to have lower than expected return rate.

The findings of this report correspond with previous research finding in other jurisdictions that indicate strong family ties facilitate an offender's reintegration into the community. As such, the major significance of the findings of this report may be a further documentation of the broader premise that strong family ties decrease the probability of criminal recidivism.

The primary implication of this finding is that the Department family services are appropriately directed toward an area that appears to be related to reducing criminal recidivism. At the very least, the Department can argue that the Family Reunion Program (and its other family services) serve to maintain and improve family ties, which in turn appears to reduce post-release criminal behavior.

APPENDIX A
OPERATION OF FAMILY REUNION PROGRAM

Project Staffing

At each of the program sites, the program staff consists of one Correction Counselor (Family Reunion), SG-19, who coordinates the program at the facility level, and one Stenographer, SG-5, who handles the clerical work required for program operation.

In addition, the involved facilities provide the necessary security coverage and maintenance services.

Eligibility

- A. Inmates are eligible for consideration to participate in the program if they:
 - 1. Are considered to be of the same security status as the program site.
 - 2. Have exhibited a pattern of good institutional adjustment.
 - 3. Have a record of successful program participation and have not had any recent major or chronic disciplinary problems.
 - 4. Are not eligible to participate in the Department's Temporary Release Program.
- B. Inmates are not eligible to participate in the program if they:
 - 1. Are eligible and approved for furloughs as authorized by Departmental Policy and Procedure Directive 7001.
 - 2. Have been found guilty of heinous or unusual crimes.
 - 3. Have exhibited a pattern of chronic disruptive behavior in the facility.
 - 4. Inmates with warrants will be reviewed on an individual basis.
- C. Inmates may be considered for participation after special review, if they;
 - 1. Have outstanding warrants.
 - 2. Have been charged or convicted with a sex offense involving forcible compulsion
 - 3. Have been convicted of escape or absconding offense defined in Article 205 of Penal Law
 - 4. Have been denied permission to participate in the Department's Temporary Release Program.
 - 5. Have been removed from participating in the Department's Temporary Release Program.
- D. The following family members are eligible to visit an inmate:
 - 1. Legal Spouses - persons who are legally recognized as wives or husbands of inmates.
 - 2. Children - If under 18 years of age, they must be accompanied by the inmate's legal spouse, parents, their legal guardian, or approved designated escort. In addition to the inmate's children, this provision will apply to any approved visitor under 18 years of age.
 - 3. Parents, step-parents or other relatives who have acted in the parental role for the inmate and grandparents.
 - 4. Brothers and sisters.
 - 5. Uncles and aunts. Nieces and nephews (when under age 12 must be accompanied as per D-2 above).
 - 6. Foster parents - with the approval of the Superintendent and when chaperoning an inmate's underage child or children.

SELECTION PROCESS

Processing an Application

An inmate who thinks that he is eligible to participate in the program must submit an application to the program coordinator. Upon receipt of an application, the coordinator prepares an acknowledgement receipt which is forwarded to the applicant, he then sends the application to the inmate's counselor and the Deputy Superintendent for Security for their recommendations. With these and his own recommendations the coordinator then forwards the application to the Superintendent of the facility who enters his own recommendations and then sends the entire package on to the Ass't. Commissioner for Ministerial and Family Services, for final approval or disapproval. The Program Coordinator is notified of the final decision.

Processing of an Approval

The Coordinator of the Program forwards a notice to the family members listed as desired visitors informing them that a Community Chaplain will contact them. The Community Chaplain meets with family members in their home to obtain verification of their relationship to the inmate, their desire to visit; to explain the program to them and to obtain any information requested by the Coordinator. This information is returned to the Program Coordinator who approves or disapproves the family members for a visit.

Once the initial application has been approved, the family contact made and the visiting list approved; the Coordinator schedules a date with the inmate and then informs the family and verifies their availability. Once the date is confirmed, the family and inmate are sent a list of instructions.

Processing Disapprovals

Should an inmate's application be disapproved, the Program Coordinator meets with him to state and explain the reason for denial and the necessary steps to be taken to obtain approval in the future.

If a family member is disapproved, that individual and the inmate are notified as to the reason "why".

All disapprovals are encouraged to reapply. There are no limits to the number of applications that an inmate may submit. A re-application does not assure approval for a visit, but it does assure reconsideration.

Scheduling Visits

Once an application is approved, visits are scheduled on a first come - first serve basis, i.e., applications received at the earliest time will be given first consideration in selecting a date. However, approvals for initial visits will be given priority over approvals for a subsequent visit.

The Visit

When family members arrive at the facility, the same inspection standards are used as for regular day visitors. The family is then escorted to the mobile home area. Inmates arrive at their designated mobile homes prior to their families arrival to make last minute preparations such as an inventory of accommodations for which the inmate and family will be responsible. During the course of the visit, the inmate and family are instructed not to leave the mobile home area. Normal security precautions will be maintained when the visiting area is within facility grounds. At Wallkill where the mobile home area is separate from the main facility unit, perimeter security is maintained.

Accommodations are provided by the Department without cost, but visitors will be responsible to provide transportation and meals which shall be prepared on equipment supplied in the mobile homes. For those unable to secure funds necessary to meet travel and food expenses, the Department will make an effort to assist in providing finances.

Upon completion of a visiting cycle, the family members are escorted to the gate and inmates stay at the site to clean up and check over the mobile home inventory. The upkeep of the program site is the responsibility of the inmate and family. Finally, the inmate is returned to the facility.

Housing Arrangements

The mobile homes are self-contained units that include two to three bedrooms, full kitchen facilities, bathroom and living room with furniture included. Each unit has its own separate plumbing, heating and electricity. Play areas are provided for the children.

Overview of Program Operation

The Department initially established the Family Reunion Program as a demonstration project at Wallkill. in June 1976 after an extensive planning phase.

Based on the successful operation of the Wallkill program, additional programs were initiated at Attica, Great Meadow and Bedford Hills. The set of project guidelines developed at Wallkill served as a model for these two new programs.

This incremental expansion plan has allowed the Department to gradually formulate set of operational procedures described above which are based on the experience of this program at various sites.

END