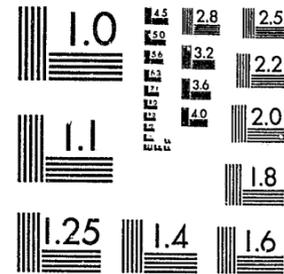


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Research Review

ALTERNATIVES TO INCARCERATION: The Community Correctional Center

Abstract

This report is about a pilot program initiated by the Federal Bureau of Prisons that provides alternative sentencing options. Federal prisoners who would normally be incarcerated in minimum security settings are placed in a community facility. The "typical" inmate in this program is described, and the functioning of the different program elements is briefly discussed. In addition, several issues that must be taken into account in designing alternative programs are addressed.

INTRODUCTION

The recent increase in the use of alternatives to incarceration represents both a practical approach to the problem of overcrowding in U.S. prisons and jails, and a shift away from the belief that incarceration is the most appropriate and effective sanction for criminal behavior. Overcrowding is one of the most pressing problems facing our criminal justice system today, and alternative dispositions that divert at least some offenders from imprisonment provide correctional administrators with options for more effectively utilizing the "scarce resource" of prison space. The current emphasis on alternative sentencing also reflects a trend toward increasing the sentencing options for judges who have traditionally been faced with only two alternatives—probation and incarceration.

In March of 1983, the Federal Bureau of Prisons instituted a sentencing program aimed at diverting inmates who occupy the lowest security level in the Bureau to residence in a contract facility located in Southeast Washington, D.C. This alternative sentencing option, the Community Correctional Center (CCC) program, combines the traditional approach of confinement and restriction of freedom with a number of innovations, including residence in the offender's home community; employment; mandatory community service work; intensive programming; and restitution, if ordered by the court. Residents are expected to pay a daily subsistence charge toward the costs of their confinement, with the amount paid based on their earnings.

Description of CCC Inmates

- To be eligible for CCC placement, an inmate must be:
- classified as a minimum security offender with commitment not to exceed one year;
 - recommended by the sentencing judge to be placed in the CCC program; and
 - a resident of the D.C. metropolitan area.

January, 1985

During its history, the Federal Bureau of Prisons has conducted, sponsored, or monitored a wide variety of correctional research on federal offenders. Unfortunately, due to the voluminous content and highly technical nature of many research reports, the results are not widely distributed. To overcome this shortcoming, the Bureau initiated the *Research Review*. The *Research Review* will consist of short, concise, non-technical summaries of correctional research conducted in the Bureau of Prisons.

The first topic concerns the evaluation of an experimental program that provides an alternative sentencing option for federal courts. The success of this program depends on its ability to meet the needs of a variety of participants in the correctional process, including judges, correctional administrators, the public, and the inmates themselves. An evaluation of how well the program is working, and whether it is addressing these needs, is the subject of the present report. Should this program prove feasible, its value lies not only in the potential benefits to the federal criminal justice system, but also in its capacity to serve as a model for states seeking alternatives to incarceration that are acceptable to both the criminal justice community and the public.

Norman A. Carlson
Director

Table 1 summarizes descriptive information concerning the 34 inmates who were incarcerated in and released from the CCC program during its first year of operation, from March of 1983 through the end of February, 1984. The typical CCC inmate in this group is a 32 year old, black, single male, with at least a high school degree, and with little or no prior criminal history. The group also had a stable job history, with most employed at arrest. The most frequent offenses were traffic violations, drug-related crimes and "white-collar" crimes, such as embezzlement, fraud, and forgery. The most common sentence length was six months.

Description of the CCC Program

Employment. A primary goal of the CCC is to maintain economic continuity in the offender's life while serving the sentence. This goal was successfully met for all but seven of the 34 inmates released during its first year of operation. Those employed full-time at commitment (23) maintained their employment during incarceration, and four that were unemployed at commitment found employment while at the

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CCC. Of the seven inmates who were unemployed at termination, two were full-time students, and the remaining five were eventually transferred to minimum security facilities as program failures.

Community Service Placement. The community service aspect of the program has largely been successful. Of the 34 CCC inmates, the total number of community service hours for 24 inmates totals 2,195, an average of 92 hours per inmate. There is a waiting list of community service placements, and it is clear that the community has benefited from placement of these inmates in agencies such as Goodwill Industries, the National Park Service, and the Capital Area Community Food Bank.

Program Participation. One goal of the CCC is to provide intensive programming opportunities for inmates, particularly for those with special needs, such as the unemployed, and drug and alcohol abusers. All inmates receive individual counseling, and those inmates with identified problems are required to attend appropriate programs. An examination of the 34 inmates' program activities while incarcerated reveals that inmates were, on the whole, actively involved in programs and life skills classes designed to help them cope with personal and incarceration-related problems. Five of the ten inmates who were unemployed at commitment attended job skills classes. Also, most of the inmates who showed evidence of past or current drug/alcohol abuse attended either Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous programs.

The CCC and Community Corrections

Alternatives to incarceration became popular in the 1970s as a number of state systems experimented with various forms of sentencing options, including community service, fines and restitution, work-release programs, and halfway house placement. However, research on the effectiveness of these programs, and specifically on the superiority of community alternatives to incarceration, has been equivocal. Many believe that in order for alternative sentencing options to be effective, they must be gradually introduced and closely monitored. In reviewing several critiques of the current state of community corrections (Fried, 1983-1984; Schoen, 1983-1984; Smith, 1983-1984), certain issues emerge as important in determining both the success of these programs and their ability to gain widespread acceptance from the judicial community and the public:

- they must be *true alternatives* to incarceration, rather than diversions of offenders from probation;
- they should be able to demonstrate *cost-effectiveness* over traditional forms of incarceration;
- they must be perceived as *credible* alternatives, that is, as providing an appropriate level of punishment for offenders who would normally be sent to prison;
- there must be a system of *accountability* built into the program, such that offenders who do not conform to program rules and regulations face several levels of certain and clear sanctions before the final step of incarceration;
- they must address *incapacitation* concerns of judges and the community.

The extent to which the CCC has been successful in addressing these issues was examined.

The CCC as an Alternative to Incarceration. An examination of CCC inmates' recommended sentence lengths, based on their Salient Factor and offense severity scores,¹ shows that approximately two-thirds of CCC inmates were recommended to serve at least six months at a federal institution. The potential for incarceration is "questionable" for the ten remaining inmates.

Another way of assessing the extent to which the CCC is incarcerating prisoners who would have been placed in a traditional minimum security setting is to compare inmates in minimum security institutions with CCC inmates on relevant characteristics, such as offense type, criminal history, and demographics. Table 1 shows this comparison, using the 34 CCC inmates and a sample of approximately 100 inmates drawn randomly from all minimum security institutions in the Bureau.

Overall, the CCC group is comparable to the group of minimum security inmates with which it was compared on many important variables, especially criminal history. The most notable discrepancies involve offense type and sentence length, with more CCC inmates incarcerated for traffic violations and serving shorter sentences than the security level one inmates.

Apparently, the CCC is serving both a population composed of inmates whose offense severity and criminal history warrant incarceration in a traditional setting were the CCC not available, and a group who may have been diverted from probation, not incarceration. However, it is also possible that the CCC is being used for a marginal group of inmates that judges feel deserve more punishment than probation, but whom they hesitate to send to an institution due to the less serious nature of their offenses.

The Cost-effectiveness Issue. Payment by the inmate of all or part of the cost of confinement in the form of a subsistence fee is a mandatory element of the CCC program. The amount of the fee is determined by a sliding scale based on inmates' earnings, with inmates paying from approximately \$2.00 a day up to the full amount of \$34.43, which is the daily cost of confinement for one inmate. To the extent that inmates actually pay a substantial portion of their daily confinement costs, CCC placement should be more cost-effective than traditional incarceration.

Of the group of 34 inmates, subsistence was paid by 27. Of the 27 inmates who paid subsistence, the amount is known for 22, and for these, the total amount paid was \$8,430, or an average of \$383.18 per inmate.

The average payment per day for these inmates is \$5.49. Subtracting this figure from the average daily cost for CCC confinement of \$34.43 leaves \$28.94 as the daily cost for this group of CCC offenders. The average cost of confinement per day for inmates representing the eight minimum security institutions in the Bureau was \$22.68 in FY 1983. Thus, CCC confinement is slightly more expensive than camp confinement, although this comparison does not take into account "hidden" costs, such as transportation to a facility. It appears that most inmates are paying a

¹ The Salient Factor Score is a risk-assessment device used by the U.S. Parole Commission to classify inmates for parole purposes based on the offender's past criminal history, while the offense severity score is determined by circumstances surrounding the current offense (e.g., amount of drugs/money involved). Both scores are used in a grid to determine the minimum number of months that an offender should serve in a federal adult institution prior to becoming eligible for parole.

TABLE 1
COMPARISON OF CCC VS. SECURITY LEVEL ONE INMATES

		CCC Inmates	Minimum Security Inmates
AGE		32.0	33.19
RACE	White	29.4%	78.4%
	Black	67.7%	20.8%
	Other	2.9%	.8%
HIGHEST GRADE COMPLETED	No HS degree	39.4%	38.8%
	HS degree	33.3%	42.5%
	Beyond HS degree	27.3%	18.7%
MARITAL STATUS	Single	50.0%	26.4%
	Married	32.4%	48.8%
	Divorced	14.7%	13.8%
	Separated	2.9%	5.6%
CURRENT OFFENSE	Common-law	--	4.8%
	Fraud, etc.	23.5%	27.4%*
	Drugs	29.4%	21.9%
	Theft/Larceny	17.7%	8.6%
SENTENCE LENGTH	Traffic Viol.	23.5%	1.4%
	Assault	2.9%	1.8%
	Firearms	2.9%	5.4%
	3 mos. or less	35.3%	7.9%*
	3 - 6 mos.	5.8%	18.9%
NO. OF PRIOR ARRESTS	6 mos.	52.9%	38.7%
	1 year	5.9%	27.9%
	2.19	2.31	
	1.54	1.15	
NO. OF PRIOR CONVICTIONS	.26	.11	
NO. OF PRIOR COMMITMENTS	26.6	23.8	
AGE AT FIRST ARREST	31.2	29.8	
AGE AT FIRST COMMITMENT	29.2	35.0	
MONTHS ON JOB AT ARREST			
MONTHS PRIOR WORK EXPERIENCE	35.4	51.7	

* Percentages do not add to 100% because the categories presented here are not exhaustive.

subsistence fee, but the amounts being paid do not represent any substantial increase in cost-effectiveness over traditional confinement. However, the payment structure is currently being revised upward to more accurately reflect inmates' abilities to pay confinement costs. In the future, CCC confinement may prove to be more cost-effective.

Program Credibility. In order to be successfully used, alternative dispositions must be *credible* alternatives; they must "have teeth." Judges must be assured that the offender they would ordinarily have sentenced to incarceration is receiving a sentence that is harsh enough to satisfy both the judge's and the community's desires for appropriate punishment. The failure of community programs to gain acceptance by judges and the community is often due to the perception that criminals placed in these programs are being treated too "softly." The CCC was therefore envisioned as a place in which community residence, and the benefits it entails for inmates (primarily, maintenance of

family ties and employment) could be available, but which would also provide appropriate punishment.

As with all new programs, the CCC began slowly, with a total of 50 commitments during its first year. This can be attributed in part to a low number of appropriate cases, a lack of publicity about the program, and the fact that judges may have at first equated the program with the Community Treatment Center program, a less restrictive pre-release program for federal offenders. However, 36 new commitments have been made in the six month period from March to August of 1984, and a second CCC program has been started in Detroit. At this point, it appears that judges are perceiving the program as a credible alternative to incarceration.

Inmate Accountability. One reason for the increased use of the CCC and its perception as a credible sentencing option may be the system of inmate accountability that is built into the program. As in all federal institutions, CCC residents are issued a list of rules and regulations at admission, and are made aware of potential offenses and the types of sanctions imposed for offenses. The sanctions used for misconduct at the CCC range from extra duty or restriction of privileges for milder offenses, to forfeiture of good time for more severe offenses, with a transfer to an institution being the ultimate step in the case of repeated or severe violations.

In addition to this system of increasingly severe sanctions, the CCC has instituted a weekly urinalysis program. The finding of repeated positive urines is considered severe enough to warrant a disciplinary transfer.

The extent to which this system of urine surveillance and sanctions applied for misconduct is being used appropriately can be seen from a comparison of those who failed in the program with those who succeeded. The ten inmates who failed in the program received both a disproportionate number of positive urines and incident reports, with most of these incident reports concerning drug usage. Additionally, five were transferred for repeated positive urines, two for absconding from the program, one for a lack of motivation to find employment, and two for severe or continual violation of program rules.

The rate of failure (approximately one-third of all inmates committed to the program) has continued until the present, with 10 of 31 inmates who were discharged from the CCC from March through August of 1984 receiving disciplinary transfers to level one institutions. This failure rate is high, and suggests that the CCC may not be able to accommodate some types of inmates, e.g., those with extensive histories of drug use/abuse. However, it is encouraging that those inmates who continually violate program rules and seem incapable of functioning in a less restrictive setting are being detected and routed to more appropriate placements in institutional settings.

Incapacitation Concerns. One argument for imprisonment and against community alternatives for offenders is the incapacitation argument, that at least while they are incarcerated, offenders are not free to commit other crimes. In the case of the CCC, an offender's behavior is restricted and monitored, but since CCC inmates are allowed into the community during work hours and when performing community service, the possibility exists for abuse of these freedoms.

Of the 34 offenders who have been committed to and released from the facility during its first year of operation, only one offender was known to be involved in any criminal behavior in the community. In this incident, a warrant was issued for a CCC resident allegedly involved in an assault which occurred during his community service hours. In addition, there have been two walkaways (both of whom returned to the program within one day) which resulted in disciplinary transfers for the inmates involved.

Thus, although the CCC setting does not involve a total restriction of freedom as with institutional confinement, the fact that only one incident involving criminal conduct has occurred over a one year period, and only two walkaways have occurred during this time, indicates that concerns centered around the lack of incapacitation of CCC inmates are not warranted.

CONCLUSION

The CCC program appears to be addressing the major concerns about community programs. In the majority of cases, it is serving as an alternative to incarceration,

although some inmates may have been diverted from probation. While the cost-effectiveness of CCC placement over institutional confinement is questionable at this point, it may be too early in the program to make this judgment. In addition, it appears that the program is being perceived as a credible alternative to incarceration by judges, who are using it more now than during its first year of operation. The CCC is based on a system of accountability, in which inmates who fail to conform to program rules are given appropriate sanctions and eventually transferred from the program. And finally, there was only one instance of criminal behavior by a resident in the program during its first year of operation; thus, the program is serving an incapacitative function as well.

The CCC program will continue to be monitored closely in order to detect problems and make any changes necessary to ensure its success. Future evaluations will center on the cost-effectiveness issue and on a comparison of CCC inmates with a group of inmates incarcerated in a traditional camp setting.

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