

Day Reporting Centers in New Jersey:

No Evidence of Reduced Recidivism

By Philip Bulman

Author's Note: Points of view expressed in this article do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.

Community corrections officials looking for alternatives to the traditional parole system for released prisoners have experimented with various programs. One alternative is the day reporting center, where offenders gather for various educational programs, referrals to psychological or substance abuse programs, and individual case management. Day reporting centers originated in the United Kingdom. Some American communities have experimented with them and have had mixed results.

The study. Thanks to research sponsored by the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) and the New Jersey State Parole Board, there is now evidence from a randomized controlled trial (i.e., one of the most rigorous scientific methods) about the effect of day reporting centers on recidivism.¹ The evaluation, funded by NIJ, compared seven day reporting centers in New Jersey with a traditional intensive supervision program, titled Phase 1. The evaluators randomly assigned parolees into two groups, each with about 200 people with similar criminal backgrounds. Participants were randomly assigned to either the day reporting center program or the traditional parole program. Data were collected for 18 months after the 90-day study period.

The outcome. Data show that parolees not only had lower recidivism rates in the traditional program, but the traditional program also cost less. The policy implication is that medium- and high-risk parolees can be managed just as effectively in the community at far less cost under the Phase 1 program when they have

appropriate referrals to services and additional conditions are imposed.

Day Reporting Center Profile

Day reporting centers have grown in popularity in recent decades. In 1990, only 13 were open in the U.S., but more than 100 were open by 1994. Reporting centers are nonresidential. Offenders typically go to the center during daytime hours and return home in the evening. The centers may require that offenders report daily, check in with counselors and take random drug tests. They may also offer educational, vocational and job placement services.

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In the New Jersey study, all but one of the seven participating centers was a private, nonprofit organization that provided services only to parolees. The centers are contractually required to provide services to referred parolees regardless of criminal history. Day reporting centers in New Jersey provide an intensive level of supervision to parolees who are deemed at high risk of recidivism and in need of services — particularly employment readiness and training. Participants are expected to attend programming every day and agree to regular drug testing

The underlying premise of day reporting centers is to provide clients with both surveillance and rehabilitative programming to decrease the risk of future offenses. Specifically, the centers stress skills that improve a person's chances of getting and keeping a job. At a minimum, the centers provide:

- Assessment and case management;
- Life skills training;
- Job skills development;
- Employment counseling and placement;
- Substance abuse counseling (typically off-site by other providers);
- Referrals to outpatient mental health counseling;
- Academic help, including GED preparation;
- Parenting skills;
- Stress and anger reduction;
- Money management; and
- Sessions covering physical fitness, nutrition and first aid.

With the exception of individual case management, most services are delivered in a group setting. When participants need individualized service, such as mental health services, parole officers provide referrals to programs in the community.

Parole officers still have regular contacts with day reporting center participants. This includes a home visit during the first month of day reporting center enrollment, with more visits if a participant has three successive days of unexcused absences from the program, or simply disappears. Parole officers must also verify a participant's employment weekly if the person gets a job. At least once a month, the parole officer performs state and national criminal record checks to ensure that parolees have not been rearrested. Parole

officers also give random drug tests for narcotics use and random alcohol tests to those participants who are required to refrain from alcohol use.

Nationally, there is no single definition of what constitutes a day reporting center. Such centers have varied programming. Also, these programs are known by various names, including community resource centers, day treatment centers, day incarceration centers and restorative justice centers. These centers also differ because they may serve people who are sent to them for various reasons, including pretrial detention sentences. Some participants may be sent to the centers as a condition of probation. Others may arrive as a halfway back sanction for probation or parole violators.

Findings: More Arrests, Fewer Jobs and Higher Costs

The researchers found that the seven day reporting centers have a significant short-term negative impact on parolee outcomes. They did not produce better outcomes than the traditional parole program, and during some periods, treatment effects were significantly worse. The outcomes favoring the traditional approach are even more noteworthy because the traditional program is less expensive than day reporting center programming. The researchers noted, however, that the findings should not be construed to say that individual supervision alone is sufficient, because parolees on traditional supervision were assigned additional conditions at the discretion of their parole officers. These conditions could include drug treatment, mental health treatment, educational training and others. Specific findings included:

- During the 90-day study period, men in the day reporting centers were twice as likely to be arrested for a new offense and were 41 percent less likely to get jobs than their counterparts on traditional parole;
- During the six-month period immediately following study participation, men in day reporting centers were 2.7 percent more

likely to be convicted of a new offense. They were also 80 percent more likely to test positive for drug use;

- During the longer term (between one year and 18 months after the initial study), men in the day reporting centers were 67 percent less likely to get jobs than their counterparts on traditional parole. Women in the day reporting centers were 92 percent less likely to get jobs than their counterparts; and
- The time to first rearrest (a measure of recidivism) for men was not significantly different for participants in the day reporting center compared to those on traditional parole. The cumulative failure rates of the two groups were not significantly different.

Another important overall finding is that parolees can be supervised at a lower cost using traditional parole than the day reporting center model. Average supervision costs for traditional parole ranged from \$7 to \$13.67 per day per parolee, whereas average programming costs at the day reporting centers averaged \$57 daily. The bottom line: The state was paying more for negative outcomes from the day reporting centers than for traditional parole.

ENDNOTE

¹ Boyle, D., L. Ragusa, J. Lanterman and A. Marcus. October 2011. *Outcomes of a randomized trial of an intensive community corrections program – day reporting centers – for parolees*. Retrieved from <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/236080.pdf>.

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