



# THE BTC REVIEW

STOPPING DRUG USE:  
STOPPING CRIME

*The Newsletter of The Breaking the Cycle Initiative*

Issue 3

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## THIS ISSUE:

### *The Breaking the Cycle Research Design*

Breaking the Cycle is sponsored by the Office of National Drug Control Policy and the National Institute of Justice, in partnership with other Justice Department and Federal agencies. It is a systemwide intervention strategy designed to identify, supervise, and treat all drug users in the criminal or juvenile justice system. Its hypothesis is that a system of integrated testing, treatment, graduated responses, and supervision will reduce drug use in a defendant population. This, in turn, will reduce recidivism, improve social functioning and health status, and promote more effective use of system and treatment resources.

The Breaking the Cycle model is being implemented in the adult justice systems of Birmingham, Alabama; Jacksonville, Florida; and Tacoma, Washington; and the juvenile justice system of Lane County (Eugene), Oregon. Additional information about the initiative is available through:

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PROGRAM BRIEF

## *The Breaking the Cycle Research Design*

Breaking the Cycle tests the idea that early drug-use screening and systemwide drug testing and treatment—augmented by intensive supervision and the court’s coercive powers—can reduce drug use and crime. If this hypothesis is true, there should be significant behavioral changes within the targeted defendant and offender populations, including (1) reduced drug use; (2) reduced recidivism and delinquency; (3) improved social functioning, including family and community relationships, work, and school performance; and (4) improved physical and mental health. The justice and treatment systems implementing Breaking the Cycle should experience improved case processing, more efficient use of available resources (such as treatment funds), better supervision placements, and less demand for detention space.

To measure Breaking the Cycle’s effect on drug users and the jurisdictions in which it is tested, the initiative includes a rigorous multi-site evaluation component. Evaluators will document planning and implementation in the demonstration sites and compare behavioral changes among drug users in the initiative to an appropriate comparison group. Evaluators also will help the sites develop and manage the initiative’s “model” by providing feedback data on these processes and assisting in tracking various performance and outcome indicators. (See the sidebar, *The Breaking the Cycle Evaluators.*)

## THE PROCESS EVALUATION

The process evaluation will:

1. Describe the justice and treatment systems in place before Breaking the Cycle began.
2. Detail each site’s implementation of Breaking the Cycle’s “critical elements” such as early drug-use screening, intensive supervision, and judicial oversight.

3. Identify implementation problem areas and how the sites addressed them.
4. Provide feedback to the sites and NIJ for improved program development and management.
5. Critique the quality of Breaking the Cycle policies, procedures, and services to defendants and offenders.
6. Present a planning and implementation “blueprint” for other jurisdictions interested in the Breaking the Cycle model.

Given Breaking the Cycle’s systemwide nature, data for the process evaluation will come from a variety of sources, including justice and treatment system information systems, the courts, the local department of corrections, and pretrial and postsentence supervision agencies. Process evaluation data also will come from the evaluator’s onsite contacts, for example, planning and management meetings and interviews and discussions with key staff of the initiative’s partner agencies. Onsite contact will permit the evaluators to document the formal and informal agency procedures in place, verify data quality and adherence to agreed-upon protocols, and gauge impressions on key functions such as data exchange, service and resource availability, and partner agency collaboration.

Besides providing a “history” of planning and implementation, the benefit of the process evaluation will be the knowledge to the site about how well the BTC model is implemented. Through Breaking the Cycle’s collaborative research design, site managers will identify problem areas in implementation sooner and address them with appropriate changes in policy or procedure. This helps ensure that the Breaking the Cycle model is indeed in place in each participating jurisdiction and can be evaluated properly for effectiveness.

## THE IMPACT EVALUATION

The impact evaluation will measure the quantitative and qualitative changes to the drug user and the local justice and treatment systems under Breaking the Cycle. Questions to address here include:

## THE BREAKING THE CYCLE EVALUATORS

Breaking the Cycle uses a collaborative research design, with evaluators and practitioners working together as partners. This collaboration gives practitioners immediate feedback on how well they develop the Breaking the Cycle model and helps them to better identify and solve problems. Researchers can better ensure that there is actually something implemented in the site to measure and apply their knowledge to real-world settings.

Breaking the Cycle’s evaluation partners are the Urban Institute, Treatment Research Institute, Research Triangle Institute, and the Northwest Professional Consortium, Inc.

The Urban Institute (UI) is a nonprofit policy and research organization established in 1968 to investigate social and economic problems and the policies and programs designed to alleviate them. UI’s Program on Law and Behavior is responsible for all phases of the adult Breaking the Cycle evaluation. Besides the process and impact evaluations, this will include an analysis of Breaking the Cycle’s effect on criminal justice, health care, and public assistance costs, and a substudy of the effect of sanctions and incentives on treatment participation and compliance with court requirements. UI staff also will be the principal authors of the adult Breaking the Cycle research and site reports, including: (1) a baseline report on the initiative model to document planning objectives and strategies, (2) an interim process report on implementation and progress, (3) a final process evaluation, and (4) a full technical final report with impact findings, research methods, and conclusions.

The Treatment Research Institute (TRI) is a nonprofit corporation founded in 1991 and dedicated to applying proven research methodologies to the practical tasks of selecting, purchasing, managing, and evaluating clinical services for substance abusers and the mentally ill. Under a contract with UI, TRI’s Section on Criminal Justice Research is conducting the client-impact assessments for the three adult sites. TRI recruited each site’s comparison and treatment groups and will assist UI in gauging Breaking the Cycle’s impact on self-reported substance use, recidivism, employment, medical and psychiatric symptoms, family and social conflicts, and HIV-risk behaviors.

The Research Triangle Institute (RTI) oversees the juvenile Breaking the Cycle project evaluation. RTI was established in 1958 and conducts research and provides technical services in health, public policy, survey research, advanced technologies, environmental protection, and pharmaceuticals. The RTI-led research design will focus on whether juvenile Breaking the Cycle improves integration and delivery of services, outcomes for program participants, and juvenile justice and substance abuse outcomes for the community. The design also will include an economic analysis using Cost Offset and Cost Effectiveness approaches to compare the cost of juvenile Breaking the Cycle with the cost savings that result from the initiative. RTI staff will be the main authors of the juvenile Breaking the Cycle process and impact evaluation reports.

Northwest Professional Consortium, Inc. (NPC) is RTI's evaluation partner under juvenile Breaking the Cycle. NPC was formed in 1990 as a network of skilled professionals to produce research and evaluation designed to aid public policymakers in reaching research-based decisions. NPC has been conducting an ongoing evaluation of services to a similar population of youth with the Lane County juvenile system under the Center for Substance Abuse Treatment's Youth Intervention Network. Similar to that effort, under juvenile Breaking the Cycle, NPC will have research staff members on site to coordinate various components of the evaluation. In addition, NPC staff located in the Portland, Oregon, area collaborate with RTI staff on measure development, data collection, and research design.

For more information on the adult and juvenile Breaking the Cycle evaluations, contact:

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1. Did Breaking the Cycle reduce drug use and crime?
2. Did Breaking the Cycle promote more positive social functioning, such as gains in legitimate employment, family cohesion, and residential stability?
3. How did certain services and sanctions received—the type, duration, and intensity—affect client outcomes?
4. Were some types of defendants and offenders helped more by Breaking the Cycle than others?
5. Did Breaking the Cycle promote a sense of fairness in its procedures among clients?

The evaluation framework starts with collecting data on persons ordered into Breaking the Cycle (the treatment group) and a similar group of drug users not exposed to the intervention (the control group). Evaluators will measure each group on characteristics such as demography, substance abuse history, criminal history, employment and education status, family and social functioning, and physical and mental health. They will then measure differences in client outcomes and system changes between the two groups following the treatment group's exposure to Breaking the Cycle. Client outcomes will compare (1) drug-use patterns, (2) criminal activity, (3) recidivism and time to rearrest, (4) economic well being, (5) family and social functioning, (6) health, and (7) perceptions of fairness in criminal justice proceedings. System changes would include (1) level of supervision before and after disposition, (2) compliance to court conditions, (3) warrants issued and served, (4) sentences imposed (community versus detention based), (5) days in jail, and (6) recidivism. Controlling for other relevant factors within the jurisdiction, evaluators will catalogue the differences between the two groups and determine whether the Breaking the Cycle intervention made any significant differences in these outcomes or changes.

NIJ and the Office of National Drug Control Policy developed Breaking the Cycle to advance our knowledge of “what works” to reduce drug use and crime. What will determine if this promising initiative should be adapted and adopted elsewhere is the research component, consisting of a scientifically based, objective, independent assessment of each Breaking the Cycle site. If these evaluations are favorable, Breaking the Cycle can become a practical, national model to address one of the most difficult problems facing our local justice systems.

## *Next Issue*

A conversation with the Breaking the Cycle Project Directors on their experiences planning, implementing, and managing the initiative in their jurisdictions.

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