

**WHAT WORKS WITH MINNESOTA PRISONERS:  
A SUMMARY OF THE EFFECTS OF CORRECTIONAL  
PROGRAMMING ON RECIDIVISM, EMPLOYMENT, AND COST  
AVOIDANCE**

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Since 2006, the Minnesota Department of Corrections (DOC) has completed more than 20 major research studies and program evaluations. Of these reports, 13 have evaluated programs that have operated within Minnesota DOC facilities. This report summarizes the impact of these programs on recidivism, post-release employment, and cost avoidance.

### Program Characteristics

The characteristics of the 13 programs that have been evaluated are shown in Table 1. Three of the programs (MCORP, PRI, and SOAR) were prisoner reentry pilot projects that are no longer operating. As noted in Table 1, however, five other programs currently operating in the DOC focus on prisoner reentry. Five of the programs evaluated provide participants with educational/ employment programming. Two of the programs offer cognitive-behavioral programming (chemical dependency and sex offender treatment), while another two are early release programs (CIP and work release).

The length of the programs ranges from a minimum of two months (work release and power of People) to a maximum of thirty (IFI). Seven of the programs deliver services in both prison and the community, while five offer programming only in prison. Work release was the only one evaluated that provides programming strictly in the community.

Offenders placed on supervised release were the target populations for all three of the prisoner reentry programs that were evaluated. Of the remaining 10 programs, five include recidivism risk in the offender selection process, while the remaining five tend to target offenders in general. Of the five that incorporate risk into the selection process, two focus on lower-risk offenders because they are early release programs.

Each of the 13 programs evaluated was designed to focus on one or more criminogenic needs (i.e., factors associated with recidivism). The most commonly addressed needs areas are anti-social cognition and education/employment (each of these needs areas is addressed by eight programs). Five of the programs target substance abuse, while three focus on anti-social associates.

### Program Evaluation Characteristics

The descriptive characteristics for each program evaluation are provided in Table 2. With 3,570 offenders, the work release program evaluation has the largest sample size to date. The MnCOSA sample, on the other hand, is the smallest with 62 offenders.

All but the chemical dependency (CD) treatment evaluation examined offenders released over a period of multiple years. At 9.3 years, the sex offender treatment evaluation had the longest average follow-up period. In contrast, the PRI evaluation had the shortest follow-up period (one year average).

Three of the 13 evaluations used a randomized controlled trial (RCT), whereas the remaining ten used a retrospective quasi-experimental design (RQED). Propensity score matching has been used in eight of the ten RQED evaluations to match offenders from the treatment and comparison groups. Of the 13 evaluations, 9 have been published in peer-reviewed academic journals.

**Table 1. Minnesota Department of Corrections Program Evaluation Summary: Program Characteristics**

<u>Program</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Program Length</u>	<u>Program Delivery</u>	<u>Target Population</u>	<u>Criminogenic Needs Addressed</u>
EMPLOY	Employment/reentry	15 months	Prison/Community	General	Education/employment
Chemical Dependency Treatment	Cognitive/Behavioral	6-9 months	Prison	High-risk, CD offenders	Substance Abuse, anti-social cog.
Sex Offender Treatment	Cognitive/Behavioral	18-24 months	Prison	High-risk sex offenders	Anti-social cognition
MnCOSA	Sex offender reentry	9-15 months	Prison/Community	Level 2 sex offenders	Anti-social associates
IFI	Faith-based reentry	30 months	Prison/Community	General	Anti-social associates/cognition
CIP	Boot camp/early release /reentry	18 months	Prison/Community	Lower-risk offenders	Anti-social cognition, substance abuse, education/employment
Work Release	Employment/reentry/early release	2-8 months	Community	Lower-risk offenders	Education/employment
AHP	Employment	Varies	Prison	General	Education/employment
Education (Sec./Post-Sec. Degree)	Education	Varies	Prison	General	Education/Employment
MCORP*	Prisoner reentry	9 mos. or more	Prison/Community	Supervised release	Anti-social associates/cognition, ed./employment, substance abuse
PRI*	Prisoner reentry	9 mos. or more	Prison/Community	Supervised release	Anti-social cognition, substance abuse, education/employment
SOAR*	Prisoner reentry	6 mos. or more	Prison/Community	Supervised release	Anti-social cognition, substance abuse, education/employment, family/ marital, leisure/recreation
Power of People	Life skills	8-10 weeks	Prison	General	Anti-social associates/cognition

\* Pilot projects no longer operating

Notes:

MnCOSA = Minnesota Circles of Support and Accountability

IFI = InnerChange Freedom Initiative

CIP = Challenge Incarceration Program

AHP = Affordable Homes Program

MCORP = Minnesota Comprehensive Offender Reentry Plan

PRI = Prisoner Reentry Initiative

SOAR = Serious Offender Accountability and Restoration

**Table 2. Minnesota Department of Corrections Program Evaluation Summary: Evaluation Characteristics**

<i>Program</i>	<u>N</u>	<u>Release Period</u>	<u>Follow-up Period</u>	<u>Avg. Follow-Up</u>	<u>Design</u>	<u>Journal (Publication Year)</u>
EMPLOY	464	2006-2008	2.5-4.5 years	3 years	RQED	<i>Crime &amp; Delinquency (2012)</i>
Chemical Dependency Treatment	1,852	2005	3-4 years	3.5 years	RQED	<i>Journal of Experimental Criminology (2010)</i>
Sex Offender Treatment	2,040	1990-2003	3-17 years	9.3 years	RQED	<i>Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research &amp; Treatment (2009)</i>
MnCOSA	62	2008-2011	3-47 months	2 years	RCT	<i>Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research &amp; Treatment (2012)</i>
IFI	732	2003-2009	1-7 years	3.2 years	RQED	<i>Int. Journal of Off. Therapy &amp; Comp. Criminology (2012)</i>
CIP	2,902	1993-2002	3-12 years	7.2 years	RQED	<i>Crime &amp; Delinquency (2008)</i>
Work Release	3,570	2007-2010	2-6 years	4 years	RQED	<i>Currently under review</i>
AHP	448	1998-2005	3-10 years	5.9 years	RQED	<i>Criminal Justice Policy Review (2011)</i>
Education (Sec./Post-Sec. Degree)	3,114	2007-2008	2-3 years	2.5 years	RQED	<i>The Prison Journal (2014)</i>
MCORP*	630	2008-2010	2.5-5.5 years	4 years	RCT	<i>Justice Quarterly (2012)</i>
PRI*	330	2008-2009	6-18 months	1 year	RQED	DOC Publication (2011)
SOAR*	329	2003-2005	8-36 months	2.9 years	RCT	DOC Publication (2006)
Power of People	1,774	2006-2011	1-6 years	3 years	RQED	<i>Currently under review</i>

\* Pilot projects no longer operating

Notes: RQED = Randomized quasi-experimental design; RCT = Randomized controlled trial

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### Recidivism

Recidivism is often considered the “gold standard” by which to measure the effectiveness of correctional programming. All 13 program evaluations included at least two measures of recidivism. Nine of the evaluations contained four separate recidivism measures. Because the education programming evaluation separately assessed the effects of earning secondary and post-secondary degrees in prison on several outcomes, two discrete program effects were included in Table 3.

Of the 14 program effects examined, 9 were found to significantly decrease at least one measure of recidivism. For example, the results suggest that, relative to a comparison group of untreated offenders, participating in chemical dependency treatment significantly reduced the risk of rearrest for a new offense by 17 percent.

Each program was ranked by the magnitude of its impact on each recidivism measure. In developing program rankings for each measure of recidivism, statistically significant results were given priority over those that were not statistically significant. At 55 percent, EMPLOY had the largest effect size for new offense reincarceration. MnCOSA had the largest effect sizes for rearrest and revocation, while IFI had the greatest impact on reconviction. Overall, EMPLOY was the only program to significantly reduce all four recidivism measures.

### Post-Release Employment

Given that not all correctional programs are geared towards improving post-release employment outcomes for offenders, a little more than half (seven) of the evaluations have assessed program effects on at least one measure of employment. Of these seven, six evaluations utilized multiple measures of employment data from the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED). The results in Table 4 show that EMPLOY, work release, educational degrees, MCORP and IFI have each produced significant, positive findings regarding post-release employment. AHP and PRI did not yield significant, positive employment outcomes.

Overall, work release and EMPLOY produced the best employment outcomes. For example, work release participants were roughly eight times more likely than a comparison group of offenders to find employment. EMPLOY participants, meanwhile, were 72 percent more likely to obtain post-release employment than a comparison group of offenders. Compared to their counterparts in the comparison groups, EMPLOY and work release participants worked, on average, 211 and 497 more hours, respectively, during the follow-up period. EMPLOY participants earned roughly \$5,400 more, on average, than offenders in the comparison group. Work release participants earned about \$4,800 more than those in the comparison group.

**Table 3. Minnesota Department of Corrections Program Evaluation Summary: Recidivism**

Program	Recidivism							
	Rearrest		Reconviction		Reincarceration		Revocation	
	Effect Size	Ranking	Effect Size	Ranking	Effect Size	Ranking	Effect Size	Ranking
EMPLOY	-35%**	2	-32%*	2t	-55%**	1	-63%**	2
Chemical Dependency Treatment	-17%**	6	-21%**	4t	-25%**	4	NM	
MnCOSA	-62%*	1	-59%	8	-69%	7	-72%*	1
IFI	-26%**	4	-35%**	1	-40%*	2	-11%	5
CIP	-32%**	3	-32%**	2t	-35%**	3	+7%	8
Work Release	-16%**	7	-14%**	7	-17%*	6	+78%**	10
AHP	-14%	10	-20%	9	-20%	8	NM	
Education								
Secondary Degree	-1%	11	-2%	10	-18%	9t	+11%	9
Post-Secondary Degree	-14%*	8	-16%*	6	-24%*	5	-13%	4
MCORP	-20%*	5	-21%*	4t	-18%	9t	-25%*	3
PRI	+17%	13	+42%	13	+92%	13	-9%	6
SOAR	NM		+34%	12	+35%	12	NM	
Power of People	+7%	12	+10%	11	+14%	11	+2%	7
			<i>Rearrest</i>					
Sex Offender Treatment	<u>General</u>		<u>Violent</u>		<u>Sex</u>			
	-12%*	9	-18%*		-27%**			

\*\* Statistically significant at .01

\* Statistically significant at .05

Notes: NM = Not Measured

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**Table 4. Minnesota Department of Corrections Program Evaluation Summary: Post-Release Employment**

<i>Program</i>	<b>Employment</b>							
	<i>Obtained Employment</i>		<i>Hours Worked</i>		<i>Hourly Wage</i>		<i>Total Wages</i>	
	<u>Effect Size</u>	<u>Ranking</u>	<u>Effect Size</u>	<u>Ranking</u>	<u>Effect Size</u>	<u>Ranking</u>	<u>Effect Size</u>	<u>Ranking</u>
EMPLOY	72%*	4	210.92**	2	+0.59	5	\$5,432**	1
Work Release	810%**	1	497.38**	1	+0.68	4	\$4,869**	2
AHP	+44%	6	452.36	4	+0.92	3	\$5,663	5
Education								
Secondary Degree	+59%**	5	116.60	6	-0.44	7	\$1,363	6
Post-Secondary Degree	+21%	7	176.39*	3	+0.25	6	\$2,649*	3
IFI	+134%**	2	210.61	5	+2.34**	1	\$6,244	4
PRI	-68%**	8	-211.80**	7	+1.50	2	-\$2,140**	7
MCORP	+91%*	3						
Chemical Dependency Treatment					Not Measured			
CIP					Not Measured			
MnCOSA					Not Measured			
SOAR					Not Measured			
Power of People					Not Measured			
Sex Offender Treatment					Not Measured			

\*\* *Statistically significant at .01*

\* *Statistically significant at .05*

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### Cost Avoidance

Correctional programs can reduce costs in several ways. Most notably, programs that lower recidivism can generate costs avoided by decreasing victim costs, criminal justice costs (including police, courts, and prisons), and lost productivity of incarcerated offenders. Those that improve employment incomes can create a benefit by increasing income taxes that employed offenders pay to the state. And programs can also reduce costs by providing graduates with early release from prison to correctional supervision.

The cost avoidance estimates for each of the 13 programs are shown in Table 5. Five of the programs (CIP, AHP, MnCOSA, work release, and MCORP) contain estimates that were developed at the time the program was evaluated. For the remaining eight program evaluations, cost avoidance estimates were calculated specifically for this report. The results indicate that 10 of the 13 programs evaluated have produced a cost avoidance to the state.

The total costs avoided, however, are based, to some extent, on the total size of the sample. Costs avoided per participant, on the other hand, provides a standardized metric in which comparisons can be made across programs. The results show that AHP produced the largest costs avoided per participant. As noted in that evaluation, however, the vast majority of the costs avoided came from employers paying lower wages to AHP participants. EMPLOY had the next highest benefit per participant, followed by sex offender treatment, CD treatment and MnCOSA. Each of these programs generated an excess of \$10,000 in costs avoided for every participant in the program.

Table 5 also estimates the costs avoided that each program produces on an annual basis. Annual cost avoidance estimates were calculated by multiplying each programs' costs avoided per participant by the number of offenders who participate in the program each year. Given the large number of participants, coupled with the relatively high amount of costs avoided per participant, CD treatment produces more than \$22 million in estimated costs avoided each year.

Although education programming yields one of the lower costs avoided per participant (ninth out of 13), it can be delivered relatively inexpensively (\$874 per participant) to a large number of offenders (approximately 1,350 earn a secondary or post-secondary degree in prison each year). As a result, education programming produces the second-highest annual costs avoided with an estimate of \$3.18 million.

At \$2.86 million, sex offender treatment generates the third-highest annual costs avoided, followed closely by EMPLOY with \$2.84 million. CIP yields nearly \$2 million in estimated costs avoided each year, as does AHP. Overall, the ten programs producing costs avoided to the state combine for more than \$36 million each year. CD treatment thus accounts for more than 60 percent of the total estimated annual amount.

**Table 5. Minnesota Department of Corrections Program Evaluation Summary: Cost Avoidance**

<i>Program</i>	<b>Cost Avoidance</b>							
	<i>Total Costs Avoided</i>		<i>Costs Avoided Per Participant</i>		<i>Annual Participants</i>		<i>Annual Costs Avoided</i>	
	<u>Amount</u>	<u>Ranking</u>	<u>Amount</u>	<u>Ranking</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Ranking</u>	<u>Amount</u>	<u>Ranking</u>
EMPLOY	\$5.5 M	5	\$23,687	2	120	8	\$2.84 M	4
Chemical Dependency Treatment	\$11.45 M	3	\$12,368	4	1,800	1	\$22.26 M	1
Sex Offender Treatment	\$14.6 M	1	\$14,311	3	200	5t	\$2.86 M	3
MnCOSA	\$363,211	10	\$11,716	5	8	13	\$93,728	10
IFI	\$3.0 M	6	\$8,291	6	90	9	\$746,190	7
CIP	\$6.2 M	4	\$4,600	7	400	4	\$1.84 M	5
Work Release	\$1.25 M	9	\$699	10	500	3	\$349,500	9
AHP	\$13.1 M	2	\$58,491	1	30	12	\$1.75 M	6
Education (Sec./Post-Sec. Degree)	\$3.58 M	7	\$2,352	9	1,350	2	\$3.18 M	2
MCORP*	\$1.80 M	8	\$4,300	8	140	7	\$600,000	8
PRI*	(\$262,866)	12	(\$1,593)	12	80	10	(\$127,440)	12
SOAR*	(\$3.9 million)	13	(\$4,371)	13	70	11	(\$305,970)	13
Power of People	(\$33,067)	11	(\$37.28)	11	200	5t	(\$7,456)	11

\* Pilot projects no longer operating

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## Discussion

Nearly 40 years ago, a review of correctional program evaluation research infamously concluded that “nothing works”. In the four decades since that claim was made, a body of research, which has come to be known as the “what works” literature, has shown there are effective interventions that can be used with offenders.

In summarizing the recent findings from Minnesota’s own “what works” literature, this report reveals there are programs that generate public safety benefits, improve employment outcomes and, above all, reduce costs to Minnesota taxpayers. The programs that generate the greatest benefits are those that achieve positive recidivism/employment outcomes while delivering relatively low-cost programming to a large volume of offenders.

This report also shows there are several common threads that tend to run through the DOC’s effective correctional programs. First, the programs that successfully addressed anti-social associates by providing offenders with pro-social sources of support yielded strong recidivism findings. In particular, MnCOSA and IFI produced some of the larger recidivism reductions observed among the 13 programs evaluated.

Second, programs that targeted anti-social cognition (i.e., criminal thinking patterns) were typically successful in reducing recidivism. Most notably, CD and sex offender treatment provide programming within a cognitive-behavioral framework, and both yielded positive recidivism outcomes.

Third, nearly 90 percent of Minnesota prisoners are chemically dependent and/or abusive. Given the prevalence of this criminogenic need area among offenders, programs that targeted substance abuse were largely successful in reducing recidivism.

Fourth, programs that attempted to address education and/or employment generally produced positive outcomes, especially those related to employment. The EMPLOY program is particularly notable due to the beneficial effects it had on recidivism, employment, and cost avoidance.

Finally, programs are more likely to produce positive outcomes when they provide a continuum of care (or service delivery) from prison to the community. In other words, programs increase their chances of success when programming is provided to participants not only while they are incarcerated (typically toward the end of their confinement period), but also in the community following their release from prison. For example, among the programs evaluated that targeted offenders’ education/employment needs, the only one that provided a continuum of service delivery from the institution to the community was EMPLOY, which yielded some of the best outcomes presented in this report.

## Conclusion

Program evaluation research is critical to the use of evidence-based practices, which dictate that correctional agencies employ interventions that have been shown to be effective with offenders. Yet, programming resources within Minnesota's prison system are limited, as the need, or demand, exceeds the supply. For example, nearly 90 percent of Minnesota prisoners are chemically dependent and/or abusive, but only about one-third are able to participate in CD treatment in prison, primarily due to the limited availability of CD treatment beds.

The "what works" literature suggests that correctional interventions are used most effectively when they target the risk, needs, and responsivity of offenders. Because correctional programming resources are often scarce, the risk principle holds that these resources should be concentrated on the higher risk offenders so as to maximize the benefits that effective programs produce. By determining whether programs work (and to what extent), program evaluation research facilitates the prudent allocation of limited resources by helping identify which programs should be reserved for higher risk offenders. In addition to determining program effectiveness, program evaluation research is also important for identifying strategies to further improve the quality and delivery of programming.

Although this summary focused only on the programs that have been evaluated to date, efforts are underway to assess the effectiveness of other programs offered within the Minnesota DOC that have yet to be evaluated. In addition, the programs discussed above may be subject to re-evaluation at a later date. As such, it is anticipated that some of the findings presented here will change as new program evaluations are completed and existing ones have been updated.

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