

MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS



An Outcome Evaluation of the InnerChange Freedom Initiative

February 2012

The Minnesota Department of Corrections (DOC) recently completed an outcome evaluation of the InnerChange Freedom Initiative (InnerChange), a faith-based prisoner reentry program. The evaluation assessed the impact of InnerChange on recidivism among 732 offenders released from Minnesota prisons between 2003 and 2009. The average follow-up period for the 732 offenders was a little more than three years.

KEY FINDINGS

- Participation in InnerChange significantly decreased the risk of reoffending by 26-40 percent. The reductions in recidivism were:
 - 26 percent for rearrest
 - 35 percent for reconviction
 - 40 percent for new offense reincarceration
- Participation in InnerChange did not have a significant effect on technical violation revocations.
- Beneficial recidivism outcomes for InnerChange are likely due to continuum of mentoring support some participants received in prison and the community.
- InnerChange is a cost-effective program for the State of Minnesota
 - The program exacts no additional costs to the state
 - Costs are privately funded
 - Relies heavily on volunteers from the community
 - Lowers recidivism, which includes reduced reincarceration and victimization costs

Developed and operated by Prison Fellowship Ministries, the InnerChange program was initially implemented in Texas in 1997. Five years later, the first male inmates entered the program at the Minnesota Correctional Facility (MCF)-Lino Lakes. Consisting of three phases, InnerChange is a 30-month long program that attempts to help participants successfully transition from prison to the community through the delivery of educational, faith-based programming. Although InnerChange programming is based on

values reflected in the life and teaching of Jesus Christ, inmates do not have to be Christian to apply to, or participate in, the program.

InnerChange programming covers areas related to substance abuse education, victim impact awareness, life skills development, cognitive skill development, educational attainment, community reentry, religious instruction, and moral development. InnerChange also strives to build community support for participants by not only involving local faith communities in religious events and activities, but also by matching each participant with a mentor while still incarcerated. InnerChange is privately funded, and the program depends heavily on volunteers from local churches and religious organizations for the delivery of many of the services provided. As a result, the operation of InnerChange exacts no additional cost from the State of Minnesota.

To evaluate the effectiveness of the InnerChange program for male inmates at MCF-Lino Lakes, the DOC examined recidivism outcomes among 732 offenders released from prison between 2003 and 2009. There were 366 offenders who participated in InnerChange, had their recidivism risk assessed, and had been released from prison during the 2003-2009 period. Offenders whose recidivism risk had been assessed and had been released during the 2003-2009 period, but did not participate in InnerChange, were matched to those in the InnerChange group on commonly-known risk factors. Multivariate statistical analyses were performed to further control for other factors besides InnerChange participation that may have had an impact on recidivism. These measures were used to ensure that any observed differences in recidivism between the 366 InnerChange participants and the 366 offenders in the comparison group were due strictly to participation in InnerChange.

Recidivism Results

The data in Figure 1 show that InnerChange participants had lower recidivism rates than the offenders in the comparison group. For example, 42 percent of the InnerChange participants had been rearrested for a new offense by the end of December 2011 compared with 51 percent of the comparison group offenders. The results also show that 25 percent of the InnerChange participants were reconvicted for a new offense compared to 34 percent in the comparison group. In addition, 9 percent of the InnerChange participants were reincarcerated for a new criminal offense compared to 13 percent of the comparison group offenders. Lastly, compared to the offenders in the comparison group, who had a technical violation revocation rate of 36 percent, InnerChange offenders had a rate of 33 percent.

The results from the multivariate statistical analyses, which controlled for time at risk and other rival causal factors, revealed that participating in InnerChange significantly lowered the risk of recidivism by 26 percent for rearrest, 35 percent for reconviction, and 40 percent for new offense reincarceration. InnerChange did not have a significant effect on returns to prison for technical violation revocations.

In an effort to better understand why InnerChange significantly reduced reoffending, mentoring data collected by program staff were examined. Analyses of these data showed that 173 (or 47 percent) of the 366 InnerChange participants met with a mentor, whereas the remaining 193 (53 percent) did not. Of the 173 who met with a mentor, 131 (76 percent of those who met with a mentor and 36 percent of all InnerChange participants) had a mentoring continuum insofar as they met with their mentors both in prison and in

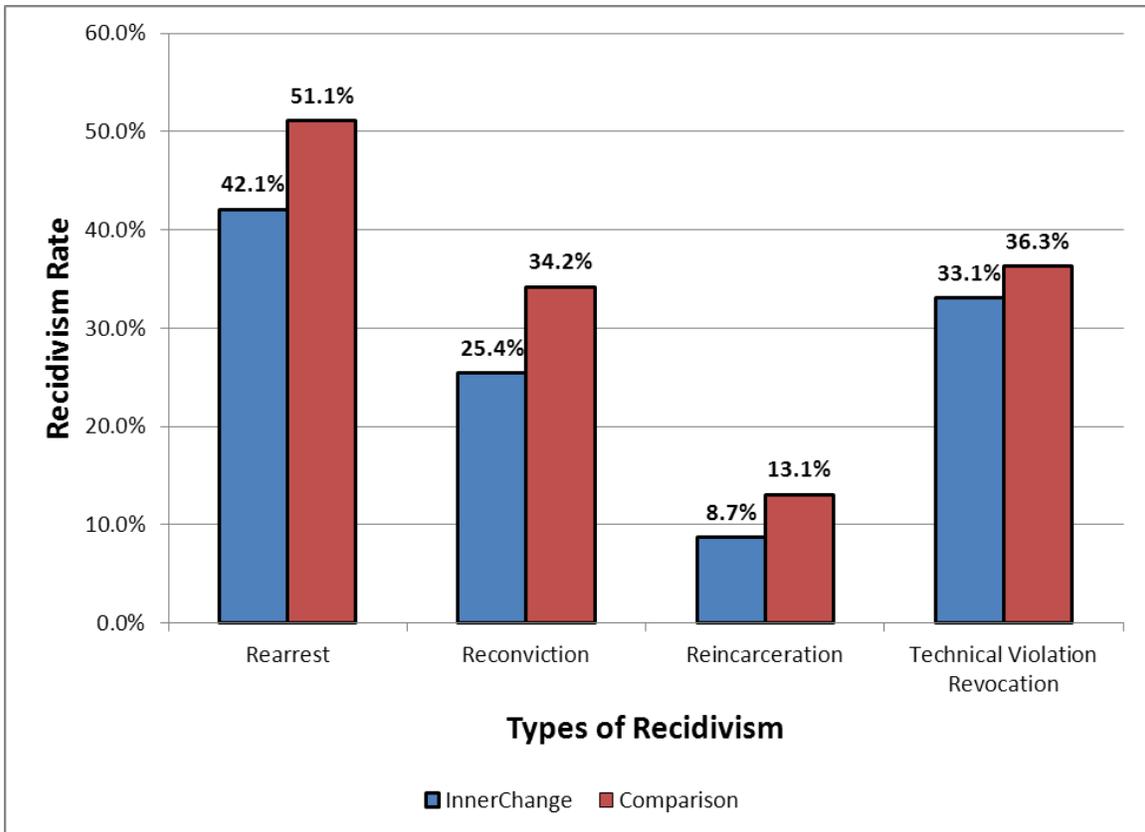


Figure 1. Recidivism Rates for InnerChange and Comparison Group Offenders

the community. The findings showed that a mentoring continuum significantly reduced all four measures of recidivism.

Summary

There are likely several reasons why InnerChange reduces recidivism. While traditional or mainstream Christian doctrine promotes a pro-social, crime-free lifestyle, InnerChange has attempted to mitigate the recidivism risk of those who participate by also focusing on issues such as education, criminal thinking, and chemical dependency. Similar to therapeutic communities, which have been found to be effective in reducing recidivism, InnerChange participants live in a separate housing unit. Further, InnerChange participants receive a continuum of care that connects the delivery of programming in the institution to that provided in the community. Lastly, InnerChange expands offender social support networks by providing them with mentors and connecting them with faith communities after their release from prison.

The findings suggest that faith-based correctional programs can work, but only if they apply what is known about effective correctional programming. Although the evaluation did not include a cost-benefit analysis, InnerChange appears to be a cost effective program for the State of Minnesota. Because InnerChange relies heavily on volunteers and program costs are privately funded, the program exacts no additional costs to the state. Yet, InnerChange provides a tangible benefit in the form of reduced recidivism, which includes fewer incarceration and victimization costs.