

# Utah: The Utah Day Reporting Center—Success With Alternative Incarceration

*This summary was adapted from the report The Utah Day Reporting Center: Success with Alternative Incarceration, which presents evaluation research conducted by Edward I. Byrnes and Russ Van Vleet, Social Research Institute, Graduate School of Social Work, University of Utah. The report A Review of the Salt Lake Day Reporting Center, by Jan Solomon, Utah Department of Corrections, Division of Field Operations, also provided information for the Program Activities/Components and other sections.*

Day reporting centers (DRCs) are a relatively new addition to the continuum of intermediate sanctions for criminal offenses. They began in the United States during the 1980s as a means of reducing rising jail and prison populations and the huge costs associated with those rising populations. The Utah Department of Corrections (UDC) opened its first DRC in Salt Lake City in 1994.

## Program Overview

The Utah DRC administers an intermediate sanction program geared to the offender in need of additional structure and assistance beyond normal probation or parole supervision. The program blends high levels of control with intensive delivery of services needed by the offenders in the program, who are referred from several sources for a variety of reasons. The program was designed to serve high-risk/high-need offenders with drug and alcohol problems who have committed a new offense or technical violation while on probation or parole. Offenders are served in a manner that reduces the likelihood that they will be incarcerated; by maintaining them in a community setting, the costs of corrections in Utah are reduced.

## Goals and Objectives

The goals of the day reporting center are to reduce offender recidivism and improve the ability of offenders to conform to community norms. Methods to achieve these goals include providing therapeutic intervention to offenders having difficulty succeeding on probation or parole and providing intensive community supervision.

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These methods are achieved for probationers and parolees by:

- Enhancing coping skills.
- Decreasing substance-abuse relapses.
- Increasing their ability to find work and stay employed.
- Structuring activities within the community.
- Providing increased documentation for their supervising agents.

## **Program Activities/Components**

The day reporting center offers probationers and parolees:

- Educational opportunities.
- Development of employable skills.
- Psycho-educational programming.
- Substance-abuse treatment.
- Intensive mental health therapy.
- Increased contact between the offender and UDC staff.
- Daily structure.

**No one set of services fits all offenders; services are rendered on an individual basis to meet the needs of the offender, increase the potential for success, and reduce recidivism.**

The DRC is open 6 days a week with flexible hours to accommodate both offender and programming needs. It is located in central Salt Lake City on public transportation lines and is near services offenders need. Transportation is provided for offenders residing in release facilities and halfway houses, and offsite outreach sessions have been conducted to accommodate offenders. No one set of services fits all offenders; services are rendered on an individual basis to meet the needs of the offender, increase the potential for success, and reduce recidivism. Some offenders are regularly or randomly tested for drugs. All offenders receive more services than they would under normal probation or parole, and the referring agent is kept informed of the offender's progress or problems. Although operations have changed only slightly since the inception of the program, additional treatment groups dealing with domestic violence and sexual orientation have been added.

## **Performance Measures and Evaluation Methods**

An evaluation of Salt Lake City's DRC was conducted to inform UDC staff about policy decisions regarding other day reporting centers. As part of its mission, the Division of Field Operations operates community programs that fall on a continuum between routine supervision and highly structured community residential programs. Since 1994 the Field Operations' continuum

has included a day reporting center for probationers and parolees in the Salt Lake City metropolitan area. The main questions to be answered by this evaluation were:

- ❑ How much does participation in the day reporting center program help reduce the number of criminal charges made against clients?
- ❑ How is the amount of participation related to reduced criminal charges?

As a theoretical framework for the evaluation, the restorative justice model (Bazemore and Malony, 1994) was employed. The three major elements of this model include public safety, accountability, and competency development:

- ❑ **Public safety** was assessed in two ways. In addition to the basic question of recidivism (i.e., whether program participants returned to criminal activity), the question of reduced criminal activity by individuals served by the program was addressed. The amount of criminal activity engaged in by subjects prior to and subsequent to receiving services was compared.
- ❑ **Accountability** was assessed through subjects' DRC discharge status and compliance with the substance abstinence requirements of the program.
- ❑ **Competency development** was assessed by examining the length of participation in the program and the frequency of participation in group intervention programming. The relationship between competency development and criminal activity outcome was also evaluated. Characteristics related to involvement with DRC, including parole or probation status, referral source, and recent incarceration history, were also inspected for their relationship to subject outcomes.

## Subjects

Subjects of the evaluation were 312 clients of DRC who were served and discharged between July 31, 1995, and July 31, 1996. Of these, 13 (4.2 percent) were excluded because of excessive incarceration during the followup period and 2 were unable to be located within the UDC database, leaving 297 subjects who were included in all data analyses. The male and female subjects ranged in age from the early twenties to the fifties. A total of 124 (41.7 percent) were probationers, and 173 (58.3 percent) were parolees. All data were collected from UDC and DRC archives; subjects were not contacted directly during the study.

## Data Collection

Arrest records were examined to determine the number of criminal charges for a period of 1 year prior to and subsequent to receiving DRC services. These data were used to calculate the recidivism rate within 1 year and to make pre- and post-DRC comparisons.

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Charges were categorized as being:

- Technical (e.g., probation or parole violations).
- Alcohol and drug related.
- Other victimless (e.g., solicitation).
- Property related (e.g., theft, burglary).
- Person related (e.g., assault, robbery).

Arrest records included UDC custody data, which were used to determine whether a subject had been incarcerated at the Utah State Prison (USP) within a year before or after receiving DRC services. Evaluators obtained information about dates of registration at DRC, referral sources, probation or parole statuses, and DRC discharge statuses (successful, unsuccessful, other, or referred). Data were also collected on the number of DRC intervention activities subjects participated in, the educational tutoring received, and urinalysis results.

## Program Evaluation Findings and Results

Of the 297 subjects included in the analysis, 133 were charged in some category within 1 year of receiving DRC services. This resulted in a recidivism rate of 44.8 percent, with 55.2 percent of subjects remaining free of any charges for 1 year after receiving DRC services. When recidivism is examined in terms of technical versus criminal charges, a different picture develops. Of the 133 subjects who had post-DRC charges, 34 (26.6 percent) had charges that were only technical, leaving 99 with criminal charges. Therefore, of the original 297 subjects, only 99 recidivated on criminal charges, resulting in a recidivism rate of 33.3 percent. Thus, two-thirds of all the subjects remained free of criminal charges for 1 year subsequent to receiving DRC services.

Study results indicate three main findings:

- Subjects displayed a statistically significant reduction in alcohol and drug use, property crime offenses, and overall criminal charges during the first year subsequent to receiving DRC services.
- The duration of DRC services was significantly related to the reduction in alcohol and drug and overall criminal charges during that period, though some of this effect decreased as DRC services duration increased beyond 120 days.
- The relationship between a subject's success at discharge from the DRC (as assessed by DRC staff at the time of discharge) and reductions in the number of his or her post-DRC alcohol and drug charges was statistically significant.

The statistically significant reduction in alcohol and drug use, property crime offenses, and overall criminal charges among subjects illustrates the achievement of the DRC mission and at least one requirement within the restorative justice framework. In this framework, public safety is a key element, and with the reduction in criminal activity that DRC clients demonstrated, the public safety requirement of restorative justice appears to have been met. Moreover, the expectations of the retributive model of justice, emphasizing public safety, were also met (Umbreit, 1989).

The relationship between competency development variables and reduced criminality initially appeared to be slight, as only duration of services significantly predicted reduced criminality. This may have been due to the different categories of duration of service to which offenders were assigned: less than or equal to 90 days; 91 through 120 days; 121 through 180 days; and greater than 180 days. The separate DRC groups that resulted were exposed to multiple rehabilitative themes; it may be that the staff who implement the different groups used an underlying process that is somewhat effective with their particular client population over the time period provided.

DRC services are equally effective with clients regardless of their probation or parole status, prior USP incarceration, or source of referral to DRC. These referral characteristics did not significantly determine the reduction in post-DRC charges; however, subjects' discharge status did significantly relate to outcome in terms of alcohol and drug use. This suggests that DRC staff do an exceptional job assessing the subjects' quality of program participation.

### **Study limitations and strengths**

The study's primary limitation was the absence of a control group, which limits the ability to make clearly causal statements from the data. The threat of regression to the mean, a statistical artifact in pre/post designs, also exists.

The study's primary strength was the outcome data—the presence or absence of criminal charges. This was a strength for two reasons: (1) the data are observations of actual behavior, which is less susceptible to inaccuracies that might occur were the data self-reports of behavior or measures of subjects' perceptions and (2) the occurrence of criminal charges is an easily understood variable that interests both policymakers and the public at large.

### **Summary**

DRC services appear to assist in reducing the number of criminal charges, particularly those for alcohol and drug use and property crimes, that subjects face subsequent to program participation. It also seems that DRC staff can be relied on to assess the quality of subject participation in a way that is useful for determining the likelihood of subsequent criminal charges for alcohol and drug offenses. Finally, the duration of DRC services appears to be the most strongly predictive among the competency development factors for alcohol and drug use, property, and overall offenses.

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The study recommended that the Salt Lake DRC increase its staff to improve the availability of services for offenders and that additional DRCs be opened in other areas of the state.