

Ontario's strict discipline facility is not just another "boot camp"

by Stephen Wormith, Jeffrey Wright, Isabelle Sauve and Paul Fleury¹

Ontario Ministry of the Solicitor General and Correctional Services

The Government of Ontario established a Task Force on Strict Discipline for Young Offenders in 1995. Its mission was to develop a strict discipline program for young offenders. The Task Force defined strict discipline as "an orientation that uses a structured and consistent learning environment to teach high-risk, repeat young offenders the advantages of socially acceptable behaviour."²

After extensive consultation with professionals and practitioners in the field and a number of site visits, the Task Force proposed that a pilot project be undertaken to evaluate the strict discipline concept. It suggested that procedures developed in the pilot project could then be expanded to all young offender secure and open custody facilities in Ontario.

Over the last decade, there have been many reports on US boot camps, also referred to as "shock incarceration."³ The movement began in Oklahoma and Georgia with adult offenders in 1983 and then moved to include youth by the late 1980s.⁴ These programs are characterized by a strong militaristic regime including drills, physical labour and a highly structured schedule.⁵ Consequently, they are generally perceived as being part of the "get tough" punishment approach to the reformation of the offender.⁶ As such, controversies about them abound.

Whereas some studies have shown that boot camps can result in a positive, prosocial attitude change on the part of offenders in voluntary boot camps that devote some time to rehabilitation,⁷ others have argued that there is nothing inherent about military training that makes this so. They suggest that staff commitment, program integrity and the timing of program delivery are the key issues to any positive attitude change, if it occurs at all.⁸ Regardless, there is no substantial evidence indicating any difference in recidivism rates for this type of regime.⁹ Therefore, it was not surprising that Ontario's first privately run strict discipline facility, Project Turn around (PT), opened in July 1997 amid considerable controversy and media attention.¹⁰ The following is a brief description of PT, its development and the plans to submit it to various levels of evaluation.

Young offender screening and selection

To be eligible for PT, young offenders must meet a set of objective screening criteria. These include:

- being male;
- having no current or previous convictions for homicide, arson or sex offences;
- being from 16 to 19 years of age;
- being medically fit and free of a major physical disability that would prevent program participation;

- o having 4 to 10 months remaining in a secure custody disposition; and
- o having no serious mental disorder (i.e., no affective or psychotic disorder, including depression, not currently suicidal and not on psychotropic medication).

Selection teams have been established in each of the province’s youth facilities to identify prospective candidates for placement at PT. They comprise a unit manager, a clinician and a staff representative from PT. The selection teams are guided by the initial objective screening criteria and work closely with a placement coordinator attached to the Ontario Ministry of the Solicitor General Correctional Services. The placement reviews nominees from the selection teams and establishes a pool of eligible young offenders. They are then assigned to PT or a control condition that has been established to conduct an outcome evaluation of PT.

Table 1

Daily Schedule for Squad 1 (Entry-level) Cadets			
Weekday		Weekend	
Time	Activity	Time	Activity
06:00	Reveille	06:00	Reveille Washroom parade
06:05	Prep. for inspection	06:15	Prep. for inspection
06:45	Washroom/inspection parade	06:45	Shower parade
07:15	Breakfast parade	07:15	Breakfast parade
07:45	Hygiene parade	08:00	Inspection parade
07:50	Inspection parade	08:15	Deep cleaning parade, incl. Kitchen, laundry, gym, rotunda, admin, dorm, classroom, sumpoom, washroom
08:00	Mess hall cleanup parade	09:30	Movie/discussion
08:10	Drill & ceremony parade	11:30	Performance guide
09:15	Phys ed. (Mon, Wed, Fri)	12:30	Lunch parade Vocational (Tue, Thu)
10:45	PPC groups/core program	13:00	Sports parade
11:30	PPC groups/core program	15:00	PPC
12:15	Prep. for lunch	16:00	Drill
12:30	Lunch parade	17:00	Supper parade
12:55	Hygiene parade	17:30	Dorm time - reading, homework

13:00	School parade & physical ed. 13:00 English classroom B 15:50 Math classroom A 15:40 Break 15:50 Personal Life Management Health (Wed)	18:10	Telephone calls, privilege Parade incentives — guitar, radios, games, magazines
17:00	Supper parade	19:10	Sports parade
17:25	Hygiene parade	20:00	Area cleanup — showers Last laundry
17:30	Dorm time — reading, homework	20:30	Evening snack parade
18:15	Telephone calls	20:45	Bunk area parade — medication Performance guide, prep for next day, cleaning
19:15	Sports parade	22:00	Lights out parade
20:15	Dorm time		
20:30	Evening snack parade		
20:45	Hygiene parade		
21:00	Mess hall, rotunda, bathroom cleanup		
21:45	Lights out — kit lockup		

Program description

PT is designed to introduce the best practices of our youth justice system into the context of a military structure and, therefore, it consists of many components. The military milieu establishes a structure where the youths' attention may be focused on positive activities and progress may be assessed and rewarded by promotion.

The military model is evident by the dress and titles assigned to staff and youth (i.e., sergeants and cadets). Each day begins with reveille, followed by washroom, breakfast and inspection parades. The daily schedule, which allows for little free time, also follows military precision. However, great care has been taken to ensure a wide range of activities (Table 1).

In addition to military activities, PT offers the academic, vocational and recreational programs that are common to most young offender facilities, as well as specialized treatment in four specific areas (cognitive skills, substance abuse, anger management, and values and moral reasoning), a behaviour-based reward system, a general group milieu program and an aftercare program.

The Cognitive Skills Program is a 12-session, compulsory program for all cadets. The program premise is that one's problem-solving behaviour is preceded by what one thinks about the situation. The program teaches cadets to develop a problem-solving framework that supports non-criminal thinking and acting.

The Substance Abuse Program consists of 12 sessions over a four-week period. The first part of the program deals with drug awareness. Specifically, participants learn about drug terminology, various types of drugs and their short-term and long-term effects. They also explore and gain an understanding of their drug use through self-assessment. The second part of the program focuses on goal setting, decision making and skill development.

The Anger Management Program is a 24-hour, compulsory program for all youths who attend PT. The emphasis is on learning to express anger in a helpful way, thereby changing destructive patterns of behaviour. The cadets are provided with tools to develop basic anger-and tension-reducing strategies, along with the opportunity to practise these skills on an ongoing basis.

The Values and Moral Reasoning Program is a 20-session, compulsory program for all cadets. Participants learn how to identify the attitudes, values and beliefs that rationalize, justify or minimize criminal behaviour.

The Behaviour Management Program specifies appropriate or desired behaviours, as well as antisocial or inappropriate behaviour. Staff rate cadet performance daily on a 5-point scale in seven domains: routines and chores, relations with peers, relations with staff, group program participation, academic performance, physical fitness, and dress and deportment. Movement through the ranks is structured by the Cadet Performance Guide. This guide specifies tasks that must be completed to move from Level 1 through Level 4 of the behaviour system. The military aspects of PT are evident in some of the specific tasks such as “memorize the cadet motto” and “perform drill movements/ proper saluting.” However, the tasks are wide ranging and also include “open and positive contributions in group counselling” and “prepare a letter to your probation officer outlining your goals and plans.”

A Positive Peer Culture (PPC) program, developed from the general delinquency treatment literature,¹¹ is offered twice a week to each of the four squads and is run by the staff sergeants. It gives the cadets an opportunity to air their concerns and to express their personal or group requests up the chain of command to the administration. A designated chairman structures the meeting by asking each participant to identify either a “positive” or “negative” piece of information to convey to the group. In addition, each youth is assigned a case manager (counsellor) and a primary worker (sergeant) who are available to monitor progress and provide individualized services. Finally, for greater continuity of service for the cadets, an aftercare program is provided to cadets who have completed the secure custody portion of their disposition and have “graduated” to the community. It includes PT staff who work in outreach in the community, as well as subcontracted counsellors who provide the service in more distant locations. These services, which include client advocacy, counselling and supervision, are all done according to the plan of care that is prepared at discharge.

Program evaluation

The Ontario Ministry of the Solicitor General and Correctional Services has contracted private, external organizations to conduct independent process and outcome (recidivism) evaluations of PT. Additionally,

PT is part of a large, multi-site environmental evaluation of strict discipline and boot camp programs across North America. The process evaluation will assess PT, focusing on the rehabilitative potential of the program. The Correctional Program Assessment Inventory (CPAI)¹² examines program descriptions and operations in relation to what research literature suggests are more promising approaches to reducing reoffending.

The CPAI has now been administered over three separate occasions (April and September 1998 and January 1999), with the results of the first two reviews now available (see Table 2).¹³ After the first administration of the CPAI, the process evaluator concluded that PT fell in the low range of the Very Satisfactory classification. According to CPAI norms, this rating was very promising for promoting public safety through reduced reoffending. On the second administration, PT fell well into the Very Satisfactory range, so much so that its rating was one of the highest in the history of the CPAI.¹⁴ The community portion, which has only recently been introduced to the program and is still in its implementation phase, scored in the Satisfactory range in its first review.

Table 2

Assessment of Project Turnaround on the Correctional Program Assessment Inventory				
	First Assessment		Second Assessment	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Program implementation	8/11	73%	9/11	82%
Client preservice assessment	11/11	100%	11/11	100%
Program characteristics	10/18	56%	16/19	84%
Staff characteristics	4/7	58%	6/7	86%
Evaluation	4/5	80%	4/5	80%
Other	5/6	83%	6/6	100%
Total Score	42/58	72%	52/59	88%

As part of the outcome study, other contracted researchers will assess the recidivism of PT cadets and compare it with youths from the Ontario control group. They will also examine whether the reoffending young offenders had successfully completed all phases of PT, whether the new offences were more or less severe than the original offence, how much time lapsed until the new offences occurred, and what in-program changes were related to success in the community. The multi-site evaluation compared the milieu of 25 strict discipline facilities to traditional programs for juvenile offenders. Although the findings of the multi-site evaluation are not broken down by individual facilities, such as PT, the general pattern of results is noteworthy. Youth in boot camps perceived their environment to be more controlled, active and structured. They also felt boot camps are less dangerous and provide more therapeutic and transition programming than traditional youth facilities.¹⁵ Similarly, staff in boot camps reported that they felt their facilities were less dangerous for themselves and residents, their work environment was more satisfying, and they enjoyed better communications with management than did their counterparts in traditional youth facilities.¹⁶

Summary

It is premature to determine the impact of PT on young offender recidivism. However, the process evaluation has shown that the key indicators of meaningful correctional programming are present, probably because great care was taken in establishing a balanced, evidence-based combination of services. Moreover, preliminary results from a multi-site evaluation environment assessment of youth facilities in North America suggest that there may be several favourable features of strict discipline facilities in comparison with traditional youth centres (i.e., increased activity, structure, control and feelings of safety reported by staff and youth).

Once the outcome study of PT is completed, the Ontario Ministry of the Solicitor General and Correctional Services expects to have a clearer sense of whether traditionally accepted methods of program delivery (staff commitment, program integrity and appropriate content) are related to positive correctional outcomes when delivered in a military-style context.

-
1. Box 4100, 200 First Ave. W., North Bay, Ontario P1B 9M3
 2. G. Carr and J. Ecker, Recommendation from the Task Force on Strict Discipline for Young Offenders (Toronto, ON: Ministry of the Solicitor General and Correctional Services, August 1996).
 3. D. L. MacKenzie, "Boot camp prisons: Components, evaluations and empirical issues," *Federal Probation*, 54 (1990): 44–52.
 4. M. Correia, "Boot camps, exercise and delinquency: An analytic critique of the use of physical exercise to facilitate decreases in delinquent behavior," *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice*, 13 (1997): 94–113.
 5. D. L. MacKenzie and R. Brame, "Shock incarceration and positive adjustment during community supervision," *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, 11 (1995): 111–142.
 6. P. Gendreau, C. Goggin, F. Cullen, D. Andrews and J. Bonta, "The effectiveness of 'get tough' strategies on offender recidivism" (undated), paper submitted for publication, Centre for Criminal Justice Studies, University of New Brunswick, Box 5050, St. John, NB, E2L 4L5
 7. D. MacKenzie and C. Souryal, "Inmates attitude change during incarceration: A comparison of boot camp with traditional prison," *Justice Quarterly*, 12 (1995): 501–530.
 8. R. McCorkle, "Correctional boot camps and change in attitude: Is all this shouting necessary? A research note," *Justice Quarterly*, 12 (1995): 365–375.

9. D. L. MacKenzie, R. Brame, D. McDowall and C. Souryal, "Boot camp prisons and recidivism in eight states," *Criminology*, 33 (1995): 326–357.
10. See, for example, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, "Electronic monitoring bracelets," *As It Happens* (CBC Radio, January 8, 1997). See also John Howard Society of Ontario, "Boot camp for young offenders," Fact sheet 8 (Toronto, ON: August 1996); and see Ontario Public Service Employees Union, "Just say 'no' to boot camp prisons," A special report to the Ontario Public Service Employees Union (Toronto, ON: 1995); and see S. Reid-MacNevin, "Boot camp for young offenders: A politically acceptable punishment," *Journal of Contemporary Criminology*, 13 (1997): 155–171; and see J. Rimore, "Boot camps no solution to crime," *Sudbury Star* (January 9, 1997).
11. H. Vorrath and L. Brendtro, *Positive Peer Culture*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: Aldine De Gruyter, 1985).
12. P. Gendreau and D. A. Andrews, *1996 Correctional Program Assessment Inventory (CPAI) Answer Form*, 6th ed. (St. John, NB: University of New Brunswick, 1996). See also D. A. Andrews, "Assessing Program Elements for Risk Reduction: The Correctional Program Assessment Inventory (CPAI)," paper presented at the International Association of Residential and Community Alternatives (Ottawa, ON: October 1995).
13. D. A. Andrews, *CPAI Project Turnaround — Report One* (Ottawa, ON: Carleton University, April 1998). See also D. A. Andrews, *CPAI Project Turnaround — Report Two* (Ottawa, ON: Carleton University, September 1998).
14. Andrews, *CPAI Project Turnaround — Report Two*.
15. G. Styve, D. MacKenzie, A. Gover and O. Mitchell, "Perceived conditions of confinement in juvenile correctional institutions: A national evaluation of boot camps and traditional facilities," paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Society of Criminology (Washington, DC: November 1998).
16. O. Mitchell, D. MacKenzie, A. Gover and G. Styve, "National evaluation of juvenile correctional facilities: Staff perceptions of the environment and working conditions," paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Society of Criminology (Washington, DC: November 1998).