

A Compendium on “What Works” in Offender Programming

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In Canada, the number of provincial/territorial prison admissions increased by 22.5% between 1990-91 and 1992-93 from 207,946 to 245,746. Similarly, federal admissions increased 21.4% between 1990-91 and 1993-94 (peaking one year later than provinces/territories) from 4,646 to 5,642. The increase in admissions contributed in large measure to the rapid growth of the Canadian federal/provincial/territorial prison population in the early 1990s. Moreover, the total actual-in prison population rose by 16% between 1990-91 and 1994-95 from 29,224 to 33,882.²

Because of this growth in the prison population, the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Ministers Responsible for Justice asked Deputy Ministers and Heads of Corrections to identify options to deal effectively with growing prison populations. A paper entitled ‘Corrections Population Growth’ was subsequently developed and presented to the Ministers in May 1996. An additional recommendation made in the *First Report on Progress*³ was “sharing research findings on offender program effectiveness”. This recommendation inspired the formation of an expert advisory group to design and develop a ‘Compendium on “What Works” in Offender Programming.’ This article provides the background and framework for this work. Other articles in this issue of FORUM on Corrections Research give a synopsis of selected chapters from the Compendium.

Background

The Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) was requested by the Federal, Provincial and Territorial (F/P/T) Heads of Corrections to convene an advisory group of international experts on effective correctional programming and develop a framework for a compendium on “what works” in offender programming. Subsequently, the Research Branch of CSC was approached to undertake a comprehensive review of the literature on effective correctional programs and evaluation methods. Accordingly, a leadership role was taken in assembling an expert advisory group, designing a compendium framework, compiling relevant program information and surveying best practices across the various jurisdictions in Canada.

The Expert Advisory Group

To create an expert advisory group, CSC identified and contracted with a number of well-known researchers/evaluators in the field of effective

correctional programming. From Canada, there was Don Andrews (Carleton University), Paul Gendreau (University of New Brunswick), Alan Leschied (University of Western Ontario), and Joseph Couture (Athabaska University). From the United Kingdom, there was James McGuire (University of Liverpool). From Germany, Freidrich Losel (Universtat Erlangen-Nurnberg) and from the United States, Douglas Lipton (National Development and Research Institute). In conjunction with CSC Research Branch staff, these individuals comprised the expert advisory group tasked with drafting a framework for a compendium on “what works” in offender programming.

The Framework

For the expert advisory group, potential impacts of the compendium were seen as the following: meeting the needs of multiple users, from practitioners to administrators; sharing best practices among various jurisdictions; providing reasonable measures of evaluating program effectiveness, and, where possible, making recommendations regarding specific tools or instruments to assist staff in this regard; developing innovations in correctional programming; conducting ongoing research into program effectiveness; and enabling different jurisdictions to embrace technology transfer.

In March 1998, a second meeting of the advisory group was held to finalise the compendium framework that had arose from earlier discussions. At this meeting, some new members joined the advisory group. They included Jim Bonta (Department of the Solicitor General), Nicola Epprecht (Research Branch, CSC), and Kelley Blanchette (Research Branch, CSC). Following that meeting, the framework for a compendium on “what works” in offender programming was finalised and presented to the F/P/T Heads of Corrections for approval in May 1998. Consequently, the task of compiling a five part ‘*Compendium 2000 on Effective Correctional Programming*’ was approved to move forward. While a massive research undertaking ensued, the sheer magnitude of it is beyond the scope of this article. However, an overview of the basic content of the two volumes is provided here.

- Volume 1** Part 1. Contributing to Effective Correctional Programs
- Part 2. Correctional Programs/Intervention
- Part 3. Evaluation

- Volume 2** Part 4. Inventory of Correctional Programs
- Part 5. Best Practices

Part 1 — Contributing to Effective Correctional Programs — In addition to introducing the initiative and purpose of *Compendium 2000*, Part 1 includes a chapter outlining various definitions of correctional programs by James McGuire (University of Liverpool). Then there is a summarised version of the contribution by Paul Gendreau with Claire Goggin (University of New Brunswick), Francis Cullen (University of Cincinnati), and Don Andrews (Carleton University) that situates correctional programs within the context of criminal justice sanctions, including alternatives to incarceration. In this issue of FORUM, Jim Bonta (Department of the Solicitor General) provides a synopsis of his chapter on offender assessment. There is also a feature article on treatment responsivity by Sharon Kennedy (Ottawa Parole, CSC) and another on treatment resistance by Denise Preston (Research Branch, CSC). Other chapters in Part 1, not presented here, encompass principles of effective correctional programs, obstacles to effective correctional programs, implementation and staff issues.

Part 2 — Correctional Programs/Intervention — This part of *Compendium 2000* is organized to provide up-to-date overviews of the treatment literature for specific program areas. The content areas were selected for their relationship to criminality, such that when the appropriate intervention is applied to meet the need it might reasonably be expected to reduce re-offending behaviour. In this issue of FORUM on Corrections Research, Dennis Stevens (University of Massachusetts) discusses education programming. Christa Gillis (Research Branch, CSC) concentrates on offender employment. Alan Leschied (University of Western Ontario) details the program factors contributing to effectiveness for institutionalised and non-institutionalised young offenders. Bill Marshall (Queen's University) and Sharon Williams (Regional Treatment Centre — Ontario, CSC) explore the assessment and treatment of sex offenders. Ralph Serin and Denise Preston (Research Branch, CSC) investigate programming for violent offenders. Lynn Stewart (Programs Branch, CSC) and Rob Rowe (Carleton University) examine the problems of self-regulation among adult offenders. Other chapters in Part 2, not

covered here, include programs for familial and intimacy violence, mentally disordered offenders, Aboriginal offenders, female offenders, and substance abusers.

Part 3 — Evaluation — This section of *Compendium 2000* provides evaluation guidelines for criminal justice policy makers, correctional administrators and program staff. For example, Gerry Gaes (United States Federal Bureau of Prisons) provides guidelines for asking the right questions and communicating results and Shelley Brown (Research Branch, CSC) examines cost effective correctional treatment. Part 3 of *Compendium 2000* also has chapters that look at a variety of other measurement issues.

Part 4 — Inventory of Correctional Programs — Using a standard protocol, the Research Branch surveyed the F/P/T jurisdictions regarding their correctional programs. The purpose of the survey was to provide an up-to-date inventory of all programs, both institutional and community-based, with an emphasis on effective programming. The survey incorporated program descriptions; development and evaluation; assessments of treatment need; and where applicable, outcome and/or financial data. This information can be used to determine the status of certain types of programs in different jurisdictions, to facilitate information exchange, and to assist in treatment planning for offenders throughout their involvement with the criminal justice system. As of April 2000, over 700 surveys from eleven (11) jurisdictions have been received.

Part 5 — Best Practices — Again, using a standard protocol, the F/P/T jurisdictions were invited to submit specific programs that they wished to highlight as a best practice. As of April 2000, 132 programs were nominated by their jurisdictions as a best practice.

The Deliverable

Compendium 2000 on Effective Correctional Programming provides a comprehensive and critical appraisal of the empirical literature in the field of corrections and behaviour change. More importantly, it provides new knowledge on program effectiveness, an overview of existing programs in Canadian correctional jurisdictions, and guidelines for evaluating operations and policy in the area of correctional programs. ■

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² Statistics Canada. (1996). *Adult Correctional Services in Canada 1994-95*. Ottawa: Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics.

³ Corrections Population Growth. (1997). *First Report on Progress for Federal/ Provincial/ Territorial Ministers Responsible for Justice*. Fredericton, New Brunswick.