

A two-year release follow-up of federal offenders who participated in the Adult Basic Education (ABE) Program (R-60, 1998)

Roger Boe

In Canada today, released offenders may lack the basic literacy skills and education qualifications to be competitive in the labour market, while at the same time the demand for workers with lower qualifications is seriously deteriorating. Research clearly indicates that without stable employment when released, offenders stand a much poorer chance of being successfully reintegrated.

The results of this study ($n = 6074$) indicate that the ABE-8 program provides a modest but significant reintegration benefit for federal offenders who complete the program, as well as a literacy improvement of almost 3 school grades.

In brief, the three areas measured by this study (positive inmate attitudes and experiences with the ABE program, literacy-gain and release outcome) all support a similar conclusion — ABE participation provides significant benefits for offenders and contributes to their safe reintegration to the community.

1. A majority of inmates surveyed report positive experiences with the ABE program and nearly 80% rated it Good or Excellent. Comparatively, the ABE program was rated above average among Correctional Service of Canada's core programs.
2. Literacy gains are also significant. The findings suggest that the ABE program is generally targeted at higher-need offenders. Inmates who completed their ABE-8 program gained, on average, nearly 3 grade levels. Similar patterns were indicated for the ABE-10 participants. In addition, there was a modest and statistically significant reduction (overall, about 5%) in release re-admissions associated with grade-level gains.
3. Finally, the follow-up indicates that ABE participants show measurable re-integration gains from participating educational programs. Overall, the study sample was a higher than average risk group, being somewhat younger, and more likely first time with a violent conviction. "For those who complete their program, improvements in their rate of re-admission ranges from 5-30%, which are modest but significant." ■