

_____ **Research Brief** _____

**Programs Delivered at Reception
Centres: Do They Promote
Reintegration Goals?**

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**Programs Delivered at Reception Centres:
Do They Promote Reintegration Goals?**

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Executive Summary

This study examined whether the delivery of programs at the reception centres contributes to Correctional Services Canada (CSC) reintegration goals of timely delivery of programs without compromising staff, offender or public safety.

All offenders who completed a program in reception from 2000 to 2009 were compared to those who completed the same program at an institutional site. Groups were matched on the time period in which the program was taken (within one year) and for the site in which the program was taken (at an institution in the same complex as the reception centre or in the same region).

There were few differences between the two groups, however the offenders in the reception group were higher risk on the Statistical Information on Recidivism (SIR) scale and were more likely to be rated as having higher need on the substance abuse domain. The offenders taking the programs at reception centres also had shorter sentences and were less likely to be in on a current sentence involving a violent or sex offence.

The results demonstrated that offenders receiving the program at reception sites were more likely to complete their programs and get a conditional release prior to their full parole eligibility dates than those who received their programs at the institutional sites. Receiving their programs earlier was not associated with an increase rate of involvement in major institutional charges nor with increased failure on community release.

The results support the delivery of programs at reception centres as a strategy that promotes more efficient program delivery as measured by improved completion rates and more timely program delivery as measured by safe reintegration of offenders by their Full Parole Eligibility date. The results suggest that regions can promote reintegration goals by providing accommodation for program delivery at their reception sites.

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Introduction

Since the renewal of the correctional programs in 1998, Reintegration Programs in Correctional Services Canada (CSC) has developed and implemented a menu of correctional programs designed to address the criminogenic needs of federal offenders. Many of these programs were accredited by an International Accreditation panel and over the years they have demonstrated effectiveness in reducing criminal recidivism (e.g, CSC, 2009). Efficiently delivering programs nationally to a diverse group of offenders, however, poses challenges to an administration that continues to look for methods of improving on key outcomes. One of the markers of effective program delivery is that offenders are able to participate in the programs required on their correctional plans (now called intervention plans) prior to their parole eligibility dates so that the assessment of their dynamic risk status based largely on their participation in programs is completed and is available as part of the documentation used for decision making by the national parole board. One strategy that has been implemented to address the timely delivery of programs is to deliver some programs at the reception centres where offenders spend the first 90 days of their federal incarceration. Some regions have been able to implement this strategy for several years. This study examines the outcome of offenders who have participated in programs at the reception centres relative to a matched comparison who took the same programs in the institutions. This study will examine whether the delivery of programs at the reception centres contributes to CSC reintegration goals of timely delivery of programs without compromising staff, offender or public safety. The study will answer the following questions:

- 1) Does the delivery of programs at reception increase the likelihood that offenders will be granted release at or before their full parole eligibility dates?
- 2) Do offenders who take the programs at reception do as well as a matched group who take the program later in their sentences at the institutional sites (based on a number of outcome variables: institutional charges, returns to custody and returns to custody on a new offence).

Method

All federal offenders who took a correctional program since 2000 at a reception centre were identified through the corporate reporting system. Each region was represented although some regions were able to deliver more programs than others. The Prairie region does not have a centralised reception centre. The data from this region was amalgamated from the reception centres housed at various institutional sites. A comparison group of offenders matched by type of program, time of participation in the program (within one year of the reception group), and if possible, by site, was selected. If the reception centre did not have an institutional program site that was housed in the same complex then the offenders were matched with offenders who took the program in the same region within the same time period. These factors controlled roughly for risk and need (since both the groups met the referral criteria for participation in the programs), for the program delivery patterns of the site or region and for changes in policy that may have occurred over a period of time. There were, however, some differences in the characteristics of the offenders participating in the programs at the reception centres that were driven by regional and national program policy. In general, offenders who had shorter sentences were more likely to be given the option of completing their program at reception since they may otherwise not have received a program before their release.

Results

Table 1 presents the enrolment in each program delivered at the reception Centres and the region in which they were delivered over an eight year period. Most of the enrolments are for substance abuse programs and, especially in the Pacific region, the Living Skills programs (Anger and Emotions Management and Reasoning and Rehabilitation). Quebec, Prairies and Pacific regions were successful in consistently offering programs at their reception centres. Atlantic and Ontario rarely used this option although in the current fiscal year (2008-2009) the numbers have increased in Ontario.

Table 1:
Enrolment in Programs Delivered in Reception Centres by Region: 2000-2009.

Reception centres(s)	Program enrolment			Total
	Substance Abuse	Living Skills	Violence Prevention Program	
Pacific	259	903	4	1166
Prairies	421	89	2	512
Quebec	272	0	0	272
Ontario	51	0	4	55
Atlantic	13	0	8	21
Total	1016	992	18	2026

Table 2 provides descriptive information on the risk level as assessed by the SIR of offenders who participated in the reception programs relative to those who took the programs in the institutions. The table demonstrates that the program participants at reception centres had a higher risk rating than those who took programs in the institutions ($\chi^2(4) = 10.267, p < .05$).

Table 2:
Risk Level on the SIR for Offenders who by Program Site.

Statistical Information on Recidivism group (N=1732)										
	Very Poor (N=546)		Poor (N=286)		Fair (N=275)		Good (N=272)		Very Good (N=353)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Reception	348	33.5	172	16.5	170	16.3	162	15.6	188	18.1
Institution	198	28.6	114	16.5	105	15.2	110	15.9	165	23.8

$\chi^2(4) = 10.267, p < .05$

Table 3 provides information on the overall need rating (dynamic risk rating) of offenders who took the programs at reception relative to those who took the program at the institutions. There are no significant differences in overall need level. Those who took the programs in reception centres and those who took the programs in the institutions were equally rated as being at medium need or higher.

Table 3:
Overall Need Level of Offenders by Program Site.

Need Level (N=2019)						
	Low (N=68)		Medium (N=705)		High (N=1246)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Reception	50	3.7	478	35.8	806	60.4
Institution	18	2.6	227	33.1	440	64.2

Additional analyses of differences on the individual need domains were conducted. Only the ratings on the Substance Abuse domain were significant. The offenders who took the programs at reception centres were more likely to be rated as high or medium need on this domain. This result is presented in Table 4. It should be noted, however, that separate ratings of severity of substance abuse on the Computerised Lifestyle Assessment Inventory (CLAI) and the

Computerised Assessment of Substance Abuse (CASA) were not significantly different for the two groups.

Table 4:

Need Rating on the Substance Abuse Domain by Program Site.

Dynamic Factor – Substance Abuse (N=2019)						
	Low (N=199)		Medium (N=321)		High (N=1499)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Reception	118	8.8	205	15.4	1011	75.8
Institution	81	11.8	116	16.9	488	71.2

$\chi^2(2) = 6.035, p < .05$

Table 5 and Table 6 demonstrate the differences in current offences between the reception and institutional groups and the difference in their current aggregate sentences. The institutional group is more likely to have come in on a violent (armed robbery, assault, murder) or sex offence than the reception group and this is reflected in their longer average sentences. Almost 74% of those who took the programs at reception centres were serving a sentence of less than 3 years while only 44% of those in the institutions had sentences of this length.

Table 5:
Current Violent and Sexual Offence by Program Site.

Current violent offence ^a (N=2026)	No (N=1006)		Yes (N=1020)	
	N	%	N	%
Reception	708	53.1	626	46.9
Institution	298	43.1	394	56.9
Current sexual offence ^b (N=2026)	No (N=1894)		Yes (N=132)	
	N	%	N	%
Reception	1258	94.3	76	5.7
Institution	636	91.9	56	8.1

^a $\chi^2(1) = 18.263, p < .0001$

^b $\chi^2(1) = 4.292, p < .05$

Table 6:
Current Aggregate Sentence by Reception and Institutional Group.

Grouping aggregate sentence length (N=2026)								
	Under 3 yrs (N=1287)		3-5 yrs (N=497)		>5 yrs (N=195)		Lifer (N=47)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Reception	984	73.8	295	22.1	55	4.1		
Institution	303	43.8	202	29.2	140	20.2	47	6.8

$\chi^2(3) = 18.263, p < .0001$

Offenders associated with a gang can find it more difficult to participate in programming since incompatibles are not able to associate with each other because of security concerns. For this reason, the potential differences between the reception and the institutional groups were examined. Table 7 shows that there were no differences between the two groups.

Table 7:
Gang Affiliation by Program Site.

	Gang Affiliation (N=1908)			
	No (N=1703)		Yes (N=205)	
	N	%	N	%
Reception	1137	89.4	135	10.6
Institution	566	89.0	70	11.0

$\chi^2(1) = 0.68, p = .794$

Table 8 provides information on the performance of the offenders during and after their participation in programs either at the reception centres or at the institutional sites. Table 8 presents the completion rates for offenders who participated in programs at either of the two sites. The completion rates for the violence prevention program were similar; however, offenders who participated in the Living Skills programs and the substance abuse programs while at the reception centres were more likely to complete the programs than those who participated at the institutional sites. The difference was significant for the Living Skills program and approached significance for the substance abuse programs.

Table 8:
Completion Rates per Program by Program Site.

Violence Prevention Program ^a (N=18)				
	Not completed (N=3)		Completed (N=15)	
	N	%	N	%
Reception	2	15.4	11	84.6
Institution	1	20.0	4	80
Substance Abuse Program ^b (N=1016)				
	Not completed (N=128)		Completed (N=888)	
	N	%	N	%
Reception	71	11.1	570	88.9
Institution	57	15.2	318	84.8
Living Skills Programs ^c (N=992)				
	Not completed (N=223)		Completed (N=769)	
	N	%	N	%
Reception	133	19.6	547	80.4
Institution	90	28.8	222	71.2

^a $\chi^2(1) = .055, p = .814$

^b $\chi^2(1) = 3.653, p = .056$

^c $\chi^2(1) = 10.586, p < .001$

Table 9 shows the differences in major institutional charges of offenders taking the programs at the two sites. Major incidents are offences within the institution that are associated with serious offences such as major assault on staff, major assault on other inmates, murder, hostage takings/forcible confinement, major inmate fights, and major disturbances. Offenders were assessed for the number of major incidents they were involved in after having participated in the programs. The table indicates that there are no differences in the number of major charges between the two groups.

Table 9:

Differences in Major Institutional Charges Incurred Post Program Participation by Program Site.

Major charge (N=1974)				
	No (N=1582)		Yes (N=392)	
	N	%	N	%
Reception	1033	79.9	260	20.1
Institution	549	80.6	132	19.4

$\chi^2(1) = .147, p = .701$

A key test of the efficacy of the strategy of delivering programs in reception sites is to assess the impact that timely program delivery has on discretionary release. Completion of required programs can prepare offenders for their release application to the National Parole Board (NPB) by their parole eligibility dates. Usually, the NPB would require that documentation demonstrating that offenders have addressed their dynamic risk factors be made available for review prior to a parole hearing. This would include final program reports on the offenders' participation in the programs recommended in their correctional plans. Table 10 provides the differences in the offenders' success in earning release by their Full Parole (FP) eligibility date between the offenders who took their programs at reception and those who took their programs at the institutional sites. Most offenders from both groups remained in prison beyond their FP dates; however, those who completed their programs at the reception sites were significantly more likely to be released by their FP date than those taking the program in the institutions. Because the sentences of the offenders from the institutional sites were longer than those from the reception sites, an additional analysis was conducted that compared rates of discretionary release only for those offenders with sentences of under three years from both groups. The analysis confirmed the same pattern. The offenders participating in programs at reception were more frequently released by their FP eligibility dates ($\chi^2(1) = 11.362, p = .001$).

Table 10:
Released Before Full Parole Eligibility Dates (FPED) by Program Site.

Released (N=1614)				
	Release before FPED (N=266)		Release after FPED (N=1348)	
	N	%	N	%
Reception	209	19.2	882	80.8
Institution	57	10.9	466	89.1

$$\chi^2 (1) = 17.515, p < .0001$$

Another key test of the strategy to deliver programs at reception is to be certain that a more timely release for offenders who complete their programs earlier does not compromise public safety. Table 11 shows that there is no statistical difference between the community outcomes of offenders who either completed their programs at reception or at the institutional sites, despite the fact that the reception group was comprised of offenders at a significantly higher risk as rated by the SIR (see Table 2) and their average number of days at risk in the community (the follow-up period) was significantly longer, with a difference between the two means of 71 days ($t(690) = 2.38, p < .05$).

Table 11:
Community Outcome of Offenders by Program Site.

Return to custody ^a (N=1614)				
	No (N=928)		Yes (N=686)	
	N	%	N	%
Reception	621	56.9	470	43.1
Institution	307	58.7	216	41.3

Return with offence ^b (N=686)				
	No (N=506)		Yes (N=180)	
	N	%	N	%
Reception	339	72.1	131	27.9
Institution	167	77.3	49	22.7

^a $\chi^2(1) = .458, p = .499$

^b $\chi^2(1) = 2.057, p = .151$

Discussion

Since 2000 one of the strategies regional program managers have used to address the need to provide timely programs to offenders is to offer programs in the reception units shortly after their admission to the federal system. In particular, this has become a viable option for offenders serving shorter sentences. Delivery at sites that are not designed for this purpose poses logistical problems. Case management policy requires offenders to be transferred from reception units to their home institution within 70-90 days of admission, depending on sentence length¹. During this period, in-depth physical and mental health assessments as well as a detailed assessment of their static and dynamic risk must be completed and, based on the results, a correctional plan must be developed laying out the requirements to address the factors related to the individual offending pattern. Apart from dealing with interruptions in order to complete these assessments, the physical space in reception units for program delivery is not always appropriate. Nevertheless, since 2000, 2026 offenders have participated in programs at the reception units; the majority of these have been substance abuse programs.

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of delivering programs at reception units, this study compared program participants from reception units to program participants from the institutional sites on program completion rates and the extent to which they were granted release by their Full Parole Eligibility dates. The results demonstrated that participants who received the programs at reception were more likely to be released by their full parole eligibility date and had better program completion rates. These efficiencies were realised without compromising offender, staff or public safety. For shorter sentences, offering programs at reception may be the only opportunity offenders will have to participate in a program since their release dates may pass before an appropriate program is scheduled to be offered at their receiving institutions. The evidence suggests that creating conditions for the delivery of programs at reception units to offenders with shorter sentences promotes reintegration goals by increasing the availability of program spaces, improving on completion rates and saving on incarceration days for offenders

¹ Current policy requires that the assessment process be completed within 70 days of admission for offenders serving four years or less; and 90 days for offenders serving sentences of longer than four years. The practise is to place offenders within 70 days of admission (CD 705-6).

who qualify for release. Based on the analysis it appears that offering programs to offenders with shorter sentences at the reception units is a preferred alternative to waiting to attend the program at a regular institution. To promote this strategy, it may be necessary to amend current policy to permit an increased number of days offenders can remain in reception if they are completing a program there.

References

Correctional Services Canada Evaluation Branch (2009). *Evaluation Report: Correctional Services Canada Correctional Programs*. Ottawa, ON: Correctional Services Canada.