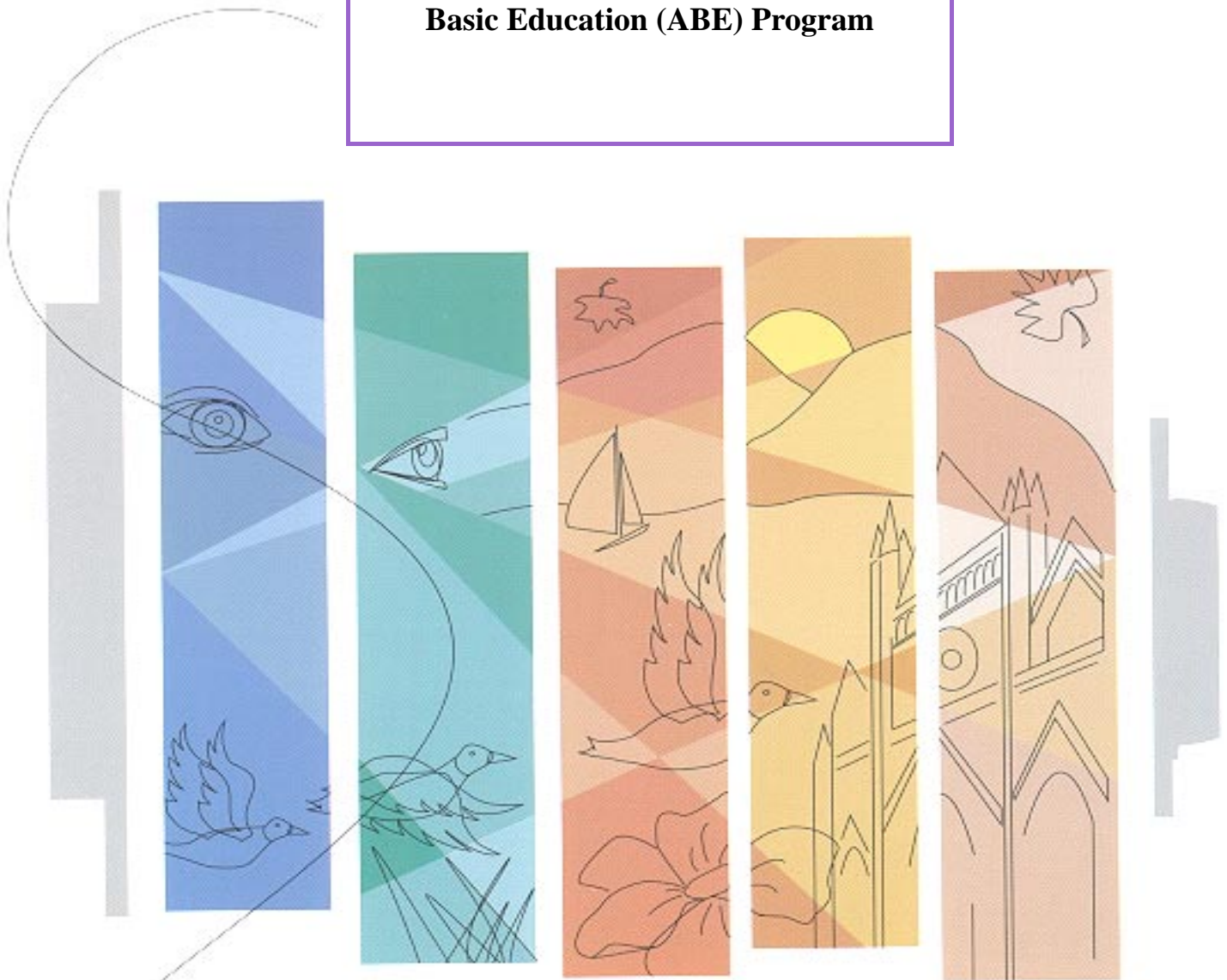




Research Branch  
Direction de la recherche

Corporate Development  
Développement organisationnel

**A Two-Year Follow-Up of Federal Offenders who Participated in the Adult Basic Education (ABE) Program**



**A TWO-YEAR RELEASE FOLLOW-UP OF  
FEDERAL OFFENDERS WHO  
PARTICIPATED IN THE ADULT BASIC  
EDUCATION (ABE) PROGRAM**

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Naturally, the views expressed here are those of the author, and may not necessarily reflect those of the Correctional Service of Canada.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### **I: Background**

Offenders admitted into the custody of the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) typically rank among our Nation's most poorly educated citizens. Nearly 2-out-of-3 offenders (64%) have not completed their high school diploma, of whom 30% have not even completed grade eight. Furthermore, inmates may actually lose some of their initial literacy skills if they make little active use of them.

Standard literacy testing of offenders entering federal custody confirms these statistics: 70% score below a Grade-8 literacy level; more than 4-out-of-5 (86 percent) test below Grade 10; the average inmate scores at approximately Grade-7.5.

Literacy scores among admissions to federal custody have not improved despite widespread adult literacy initiatives – the average entry scores of federal offenders between 1987 and 1994 have remained virtually static.

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 re-integrated.

An earlier study found that the ABE-8 program made a modest but significant contribution in terms of release outcomes. These results were based on a sample of ABE-8 participants released in 1988. Many things have changed since then, however, and a re-examination of ABE program outcomes is necessary to determine whether reasonable progress is still being made. For example, employment opportunities have decreased over the past decade, while formal

education requirements have been increasing. Do the ABE-8 and ABE-10 programs still meet the needs of offenders? Are they contributing in a meaningful way to offender reintegration? This is an opportune moment to re-examine these questions.

## **II: Methods and Data**

Many federal inmates participate in the ABE programs each year. This study presents a retrospective view of offenders who were enrolled between 1988/89 and 1993/1994.

About 36,000 offenders have registered in ABE-8 since 1986/87 (full-time equivalent), with a further 12,000 enrolled in ABE-10. A sample of 6,074 ABE participants was selected for this study. Each participant had a release date that allowed for a minimum 24-month follow-up.

Offenders selected in the sample were found to be: i) slightly younger than the general release population; ii) proportionally more likely to be serving their first federal term; iii) and more likely to have a sentence for a violent crime. In other words, they were slightly higher-risk than the average population. In this, their profile was very similar the 1988 sample used by Porporino and Robinson (1992). Apart from the characteristics just mentioned, offenders were otherwise very similar to the general offender population.

## **III: How Federal Inmates View ABE Programming**

When interviewed for a recent National Inmate Survey (1995), inmates generally indicated a very poor school background. A majority (63%) reported they had completed “some high school or less” – only 16% had actually “completed” a high school diploma or equivalent, 21% had completed some post-secondary education beyond high school; and approximately 45% of inmates indicated that they had participated in an ABE program at their current federal institution.

For inmates with Grade 8 or less, roughly 50% had been or were currently involved in ABE. These inmates were all generally positive towards their ABE participation.

Of inmates who completed Grade 7 or less, about 3-in-4 rated the usefulness of ABE as either “Good or Excellent” and nearly 80% of inmates who reported completing Grade 8 rated its usefulness in this way.

Inmate satisfaction with the ABE program was above average as compared with other CSC core programs. Inmates were more positive toward the intrinsic literacy aspect than with the skill training part, expressing greater satisfaction with the former. Nearly half of the inmates believed that not enough education programs were available at their current institution.

#### **IV: Program targeting, grade gains, and Readmission Data.**

##### ***Program Targeting***

Most offenders in the ABE programs had assessed literacy needs. The mean entry SCAT score for participants in ABE-8 was Grade 5.7, which is significantly below than the target outcome of ABE-8, and also lower than the average offender score of Grade 7.5.

##### ***Treatment gains***

Inmates who *completed* an ABE-8 program started with a score of Grade 6.6 and achieved a final level of Grade 9.4, an average gain of 2.8 grades – a 42% improvement.

The average starting score among those who *failed to complete* ABE-8 was significantly lower – e.g., Grade 4.9 versus Grade 6.6.

The average final score was also much lower - 6.1 versus 9.4. This produces a significantly lower grade-level gain – just 1.2 grades or a 25% improvement.

The largest literacy gains were for those who completed a course. However, fewer offenders complete a program than drop out, are released or transferred. Offenders with the poorest literacy starting base are the ones most likely to leave before completion.

### ***Grade-level gain and re-admission***

The participant's grade-level gain has a modest but significant impact on offender release outcomes.

ABE participants with below average grade gains (e.g., who improved their grade score by 1 Grade or less), had a re-admission rate of 40%.

The average grade improvement for all ABE participants was between 1 and 2 Grades, and these ABE participants had a re-admission a rate of 38% – an improvement over the below average group of 5%.

Finally, participants with an above average grade gain (e.g., more than 2 Grades), had a re-admission rate of 35% – an improvement of 12.5% over the below average group.

Aboriginal offenders in the sample did better than non-Aboriginals – 36% of Aboriginal offenders achieve above average grade gains as compared to just 32% on non-Aboriginals.

Those Aboriginal offenders who achieve above average gains show a reduction in re-admissions of 7-10%, a somewhat larger improvement than for non-Aboriginals.

The results indicate that the ABE-8 program provides a modest but significant re-integration benefit for offenders who complete the program, as well as a literacy improvement of almost 3 school grades.

## **V: Post-release recidivism outcome**

### ***Re-admissions by program participation***

Inmates in ABE programs have higher than average risk characteristics as compared to the general offender population (proportionally more younger, first term, violent offenders) so it is encouraging that the over-all rates of re-admission are similar:

Of the 6,074 released offenders, 34% (2,085) experienced a re-admission before their sentence expiry date;

Within the first 24 months following release; the re-admission rate was 33% (2,022).

Among the 4,726 Full Parole and Statutory Releases Cases, 35.6% (1,690) had a federal re-admission;

Full Parole cases had a slightly higher re-admission rate (i.e., 26% versus 24% than the general offender population, a difference of +2%);

Statutory Release cases had a lower re-admission rate than the general offender population (i.e., 43% versus 47%, a difference of -4%);

Neither difference in re-admissions is large and they partially offset each other. A small improvement resulted from ABE participation, and this accrued mainly to the Statutory Release group.



### ***Re-admissions by program completion***

For the ABE-8 program, Full Parole Cases releases that completed the program had a modest re-admission reduction (22.2% versus 23.5% for those who did not). This is an improvement of 5.5%;

The difference is much greater for ABE-10 participants who completed (18.9% versus 26.9% for those who did not). This is an improvement of nearly 30%;

Offenders who completed ABE-8 or ABE-10, had lower re-admissions than the federal benchmark for full parole of 24% (reductions of 2 and 5 percentage points respectively, or improvements of about 8% and 21%).

### ***Time to Re-admission Failure***

ABE-8 with a FP release had a longer crime-free period in the community than the benchmark population - offenders who had completed an ABE program show a small increase in crime-free months at all stages along the release-time curve while those whose program was incomplete matched the benchmark FP release trends.

The greatest reduction in re-admissions occurred for ABE-8 offenders released to Statutory Release, where crime-free performance was significantly better than the SR benchmark, particularly after 10-12 months.

### ***Re-admission by Risk Level***

Low-risk Full Parole cases had a re-admission rate of just over 16% – High-risk releases on the other hand had a re-admission rate of 42% (both rates depart significantly from the baseline – 24% – for Full-parole releases);

Offenders on Statutory Release, who were classified as low-risk had re-admission rates of just over 30% versus a 50% re-admission rate for those in the high risk category – these compare to the benchmark re-admission rate of 49% for all Statutory Releases.

These findings substantiate a previous observation that ABE participation had the greatest benefit for higher-risk cases.

To sum, 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 CSC'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 term 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."

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## **PART I: BACKGROUND**

### **A. Prison Literacy: A Longstanding Issue**

An important goal of the Correctional Service of Canada is to manage the safe re-integration of federal offenders after they have served their time in custody. Literacy and employment needs have been identified as major obstacles to this for a majority of federal offenders. The Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs and vocational/work programs were developed by the CSC to address these needs.

The need for the ABE literacy program is evident. In 1987, when the Government was developing new adult literacy initiatives, between 40% and 50% of all federal inmates were found to lack the basic writing and numeracy skills equivalent to a normal Grade 8 level of competency. For this reason, the Correctional Service of Canada was identified as a key federal player in the Government's battle against adult illiteracy.<sup>1</sup>

The poor level of literacy found among federal offenders was not the only issue of importance. As the report illustrates, the resulting literacy barrier created major challenges for successful community re-integration when offenders attempted to find a steady job upon release. Hence:

*The literacy barrier - among other things – can jeopardize the successful re-integration of federal inmates into society.*

A lack of basic literacy and formal qualifications in the general population are regularly associated with an increased difficulty in gaining and holding good jobs. A majority of federal offenders suffer significant problems related to literacy and employment. For example, the offender admission assessments obtained by the CSC on all new inmates indicate that a very substantial proportion have

identifiable employment and education problems.<sup>2</sup> These assessments also suggest that as many as 15-20% of offenders may suffer from some form of learning disability.

A recent examination of offender employment needs at admission found that more than 2-in-3 (69%) federal offenders had been unemployed at the time of their arrest (Motiuk, 1996). Motiuk divided the federal admissions according to their risk of re-offending and compared this with their unemployment status at the time of arrest. He observed a distinct pattern between higher levels of risk and the proportion of offenders who were unemployed at the time of arrest, with unemployment reaching 89% among the high risk cases (**Table I-1**).

**Table I-1: Unemployment of Offenders at Time of Arrest**

SIR Risk Level	Number of offenders Within a Risk Level	% Unemployed at Arrest Within Risk Level
very poor	2,974	89%
poor	1,732	82%
fair	1,921	76%
good	1,703	67%
very good	4,092	46%
Total	12,422	69%

Motiuk (1996) also found that offenders released to community supervision continue to face significant employment problems, although not to the same severity as at arrest. Forty-five percent of all offenders under community supervision have an identified employment need but the proportion rises to 64% for the higher-risk Statutory release cases (**Table I-2**).<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cited in **Interim Evaluation of the Adult Basic Education Program: Final Report**. Jamieson, Beals, Lalonde and Associates. CSC, November 1988.

<sup>2</sup> According to data obtained from a special Offender Intake Assessment (OIA) system analysis, 3 out of every 4 federal inmates at admission have "some or considerable deficiencies" with regard to their employment and/or education skills. As many as 1-in-5 may have some type of learning disability. Research Division, September 1996

<sup>3</sup> Larry Motiuk, "Targeting Employment Patterns to Reduce Offender Risk and Need." **Forum on Correctional Research, No.8, Vol. 1 (1996)**. Correctional Service of Canada.



**Table I-2: Employment Need Under Conditional Release**

Male Offenders Only		
Type of Conditional Release Granted	Number of Offenders Released	Percent Having an Employment Need
Day Parole	849	54%
Full Parole	3,394	36%
Statutory Release	1,395	64%
<b>Total</b>	<b>5,642</b>	<b>45%</b>

**B. How Extensive is the Prisoner Literacy Problem?**

Standardized school equivalency tests (e.g., SCAT, CAAT, etc.)<sup>4</sup> administered to new federal offenders at admission show that the average level of literacy and numeracy among offenders is very low. In fiscal year 1993/94:

- Seventy percent of federal admissions tested upon admission scored below the Grade-8 literacy equivalency while more than 4-in-5 new inmates (86 percent) scored below Grade-10;
- The SCAT literacy score for the average offender upon admission was equivalent to only Grade-7.5;

Furthermore, these entry scores have *not* improved over the past decade:

- The average SCAT score achieved by offenders in 1993/94 is virtually identical with the long-term average (i.e., Grade 7.4) for the past decade.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> SCAT – the School and College Ability Test, and CAAT – the Canadian Adult Achievement Test. Other tests are also used and I use the term SCAT to refer to them collectively.

<sup>5</sup> **Education Year End Report, 1993-94**, CSC. Standardized tests show that the average offender arriving in federal custody in 1994 achieved a score equivalent to Grade 7.5 - this was minimally higher than the average (grade 7.4) for the whole period, 1987 to 1994 (see Page. 6). See also: **Basic Facts about Corrections in Canada, 1994** (p. 38).

A recent survey of male federal inmates found that almost two-thirds (64%) had not completed their high school diplomas. Of these people, over 30% had not completed a grade 8 education. Overall, 16% reported obtaining their high school diploma and 8% stated that they had received a diploma at the community college or university level.<sup>6</sup>

### **C. The Re-integration Challenge**

Problems of adult literacy persist in Canada despite all efforts being made by different levels of Government to overcome them. The literacy level of new federal admissions is as low today as it was a decade ago. Employment opportunities have deteriorated considerably over this same time period.

#### ***i) Labour market deterioration***

The current labour market offers fewer opportunities to undereducated and/or unskilled workers than ever before, with younger workers (especially those without at least high school education) facing the greatest difficulty in finding a job.

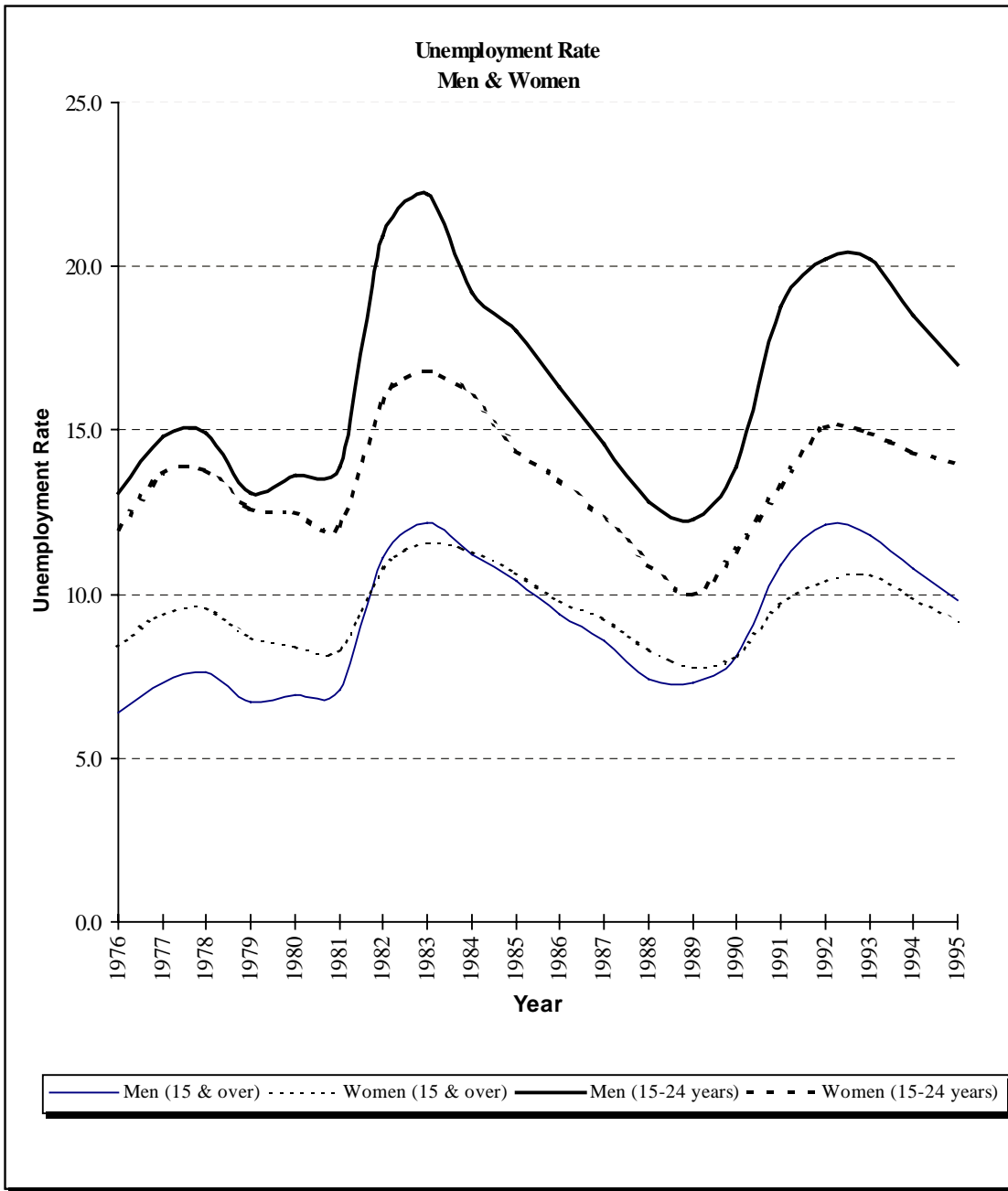
The annual rate of unemployment in Canada averaged 7.8% from 1988 through to 1990. In the five subsequent years, it rose to an average of 10.5 percent. The trend over the last three decades was also upward - the average unemployment rate rose from 3.9 % in the mid-sixties, to 9.5 percent by 1995.<sup>7</sup> The unemployment rate for young males (ages 15 – 24 years) has not fallen below 15% since 1990 (**Chart I-1**).

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<sup>6</sup> **1995 National Inmate Survey: Final Report.** Conducted and prepared by Price Waterhouse Ltd. Research Branch, Correctional Service of Canada, Special Report No. 02, 1996 (page 14).

<sup>7</sup> The causes of this are both cyclical (i.e., as in periodic recessions), and structural (the long-term problem since the sixties of the economy being unable to produce sufficient job growth to match population growth, leaving a larger proportion unemployed each year).

**Chart 1-1: Unemployment Rates for Men and Women**



Statistics Canada has adequately documented the marked deterioration over the past decade in the labour market demand for persons with less than a high school education.<sup>8</sup>

- In 1995, the unemployment rate for young males without a high school diploma was almost twice the national average of 9.5% unemployment;
- However, the unemployment rate for university graduates stood at only half the national average.

Deteriorating labour market conditions have affected workers of all ages and education levels, but has been particularly damaging to young people with little education.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, high youth unemployment has forced those youth with a high school diploma to stay in school longer. Many more are opting to “wait out” each recession by acquiring higher credentials.<sup>10</sup> In turn, this produces a “*qualifications spiral*.” As *minimum job requirements* rise, more youth with higher qualifications chase fewer “good” jobs, therefore those with the least qualifications tend to be “*bumped-out*” of traditional jobs.

Evidence has emerged of an increase in the number of “*double drop-outs*”, young people who have dropped out of *both* the school systems and the labour force.<sup>11</sup> A recent “school leavers” follow-up study (data collection was begun in 1991) estimates that the dropout rate among 20-year-olds was 18%. By 1995, when the respondents had reached age 24, this rate had declined to 15%, as some had returned to complete their high school. However, by 1995, there were

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<sup>8</sup> René Morissette and Gordon Betcherman, *Recent Youth Labour Market Experiences in Canada*. Statistics Canada, Analytical Studies Branch, Paper #63.

<sup>9</sup> René Morissette, *Getting a New Job in 1989-90 in Canada*. Statistics Canada, Analytical Studies Branch, Paper #57. The findings “...strikingly confirm the importance of education in individuals’ success on the labour market.”

<sup>10</sup> See Deborah Sunter, “Youths - Waiting it Out.” *Perspectives on Labour and Income*. 6, 1 (1994): 31-36. Statistics Canada.

<sup>11</sup> This phenomena was first observed in labour force data in 1977, when a fairly small group of youth (age 15-19) were identified “...poorly educated youths who have dropped out of both the educational stream and the labour force”. See: F.T. Denton, A.L. Robb and B.G. Spencer, *Unemployment and Labour Force Behavior of Young People: Evidence from Canada and Ontario*. Ontario Economic Council Research Studies, University of Toronto Press, 1980.

still over 160,000 youth aged 22 to 24 who had left high school without completing their diploma.<sup>12</sup>

The school leavers also showed evidence of having a higher risk of criminal involvement. Patterns of school deviance include significantly higher levels of criminal records. The criminal conviction rate, 16% for male school leavers, far exceeded that of the male high school graduates (4%).<sup>13</sup>

Other behaviour patterns among some school leavers (e.g., substance abuse, alcohol and soft drug use, hard drug use, criminal records, etc.) are echoed in the records one finds for young federal inmates. Many of these inmates are recent school dropouts, and now have a troubled history of crime and unemployment as well.

Not all – or even a majority of – school leavers will turn to crime, but most *will* encounter serious employability problems. The problem of high youth unemployment may someday solve itself as the baby boomers age through the social structure and free up spaces behind them. There will be significantly fewer 18-24 year olds in the population in the future. By the turn of the century the oversupply of young workers that began with the Baby Boom should be significantly reduced. Since crime risk rates also have a significant demographic component, this demographic trend should exert a dampening influence on the crime rates in the future.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Jeffery Frank. "After High School...Initial results of the School Leavers Follow-up Survey, 1995". **Education Quarterly Review**, Vol. 3, No. 4. Statistics Canada (cat. 81-003-XPB).

<sup>13</sup> The report notes: "Not surprisingly, since some of this [deviant] behavior is beyond the limits of the law and may lead to other illegal activities, leavers also had a higher rate of conviction than did graduates". See Chapter 7, Patterns of Student Deviance, in: **Results From A National Survey Comparing School Leavers And High School Graduates 18 to 20 Years of Age**. Public Enquiry Centre, Employment and Immigration Canada (cat. LM-294-07-93E).

<sup>14</sup> See: Roger Boe, *Unemployment and population aging: Contradictory trends effecting penitentiary populations*. **Forum on Corrections Research**, Vol. 8, No. 1, CSC, (1996). Note that the share of 18-24 year olds in the Canadian population peaked around 1981-82 but it was not until nearly a decade later – in 1991 – that the first systematic decrease appeared in the annual crime rates.

In the short-term, however, rising education requirements coupled with reduced job opportunities and competition from better educated youth will ensure that employability remains a major issue in the successful re-integration of younger offenders.

***ii) Offender intake literacy has shown no improvement***

Despite a significant investment in Canada's adult literacy programs, the literacy of new federal prisoners has shown no improvement over the past decade. Therefore, this finding suggests either that the government initiatives may not be reaching the population that is at risk of incarceration.

Evidence suggests that prisoners are *far less* educated as a group than the general population. This conclusion has recently emerged from the American National Adult Literacy Survey (1992).<sup>15</sup> This survey of nearly 27,000 Americans was unique in that it included a special sample of prisoners. The prisoner sample included 1,150 inmates in eighty US State and Federal prisons randomly selected to represent prisons across the nation. It was discovered that critical literacy skills were very weak in a large proportion of the prisoner population.<sup>16</sup> Specifically, on a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being the lowest functional literacy level:

- Approximately one-third of prisoners performed at Level 1, while another one-third performed at Level 2 – in other words, 2 of every 3 prisoners performed at or below level 2;
- Only one in 20 prisoners were in Level 4, with none in Level 5;
- In the general population by contrast, more than half of all American adults were in the highest three levels.

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<sup>15</sup> Irwin S. Kirsch, Ann Jugeblut, Lynn Jenkins and Andrew Kolstad: **Adult Literacy in America**. The first report from the prisoner survey was published by Karl O. Haigler et al., as: **Literacy Behind Prison Walls**,

<sup>16</sup> Paul E. Barton and Richard J. Coley, **Captive Students: Education and Training in America's Prisons**. 1996.

These findings indicate a major literacy gap between the performance of prisoners and that of the average citizen. Although Canada also conducted an adult literacy survey, the special prisoner survey component was unfortunately omitted.<sup>17</sup> For the general population, however, comparisons of American and Canadian adult literacy levels appear very similar.<sup>18</sup>

In spite of literacy initiatives, the Canadian literacy picture has changed little since 1988. This remains so despite a continued influx of younger Canadians with significantly higher formal education qualifications than their parents or grandparents. Furthermore, illiteracy continues to be especially prevalent among the most socially disadvantaged sectors of the population:

“...an unemployed person is about three times as likely to fall in the lowest literacy performance level as someone who has a job. The higher the literacy level, the less likely an individual was to be out of work. It was also found that individuals who receive social assistance have lower literacy levels than those who did not. They also had a markedly lower literacy level than, for example, unemployment insurance claimants or the general population”.<sup>19</sup>

Judging by the offender profile from CSC’s Offender Intake Assessment (OIA) process, a majority of federal admissions are recruited from among the most disadvantaged socially groups.

### ***iii) Related consequences of inmate illiteracy:***

Adult literacy has other implications that may sometimes be overlooked. One example is the inability of those offenders who lack basic literacy skills to fully participate in correctional programs.

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<sup>17</sup> See the results of a major study of adult literacy among Canadians just released by Statistics Canada, which was part of a larger International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) conducted in 1994: Statistics Canada. **Reading the Future: A Portrait of Literacy in Canada** (89-551-XPE), September 1996.

<sup>18</sup> In: International survey on adult literacy. **Education Quarterly Review**, 1996.Vol.3, no.4, Statistics Canada (cat. 81-003-XPB). Chart 1 provides a comparison of U.s. and Canadian levels:

<sup>19</sup> **The Daily**. (Internet version). Statistics Canada, Thursday, September 12, 1996.

Without basic literacy skills offenders will find it difficult to benefit from other correctional programs or work opportunities. Written training or program material demands at least minimal skills in reading and comprehension. Inmates without an appropriate basis will become frustrated when confronted with material that is beyond their ability, and may have problems completing the program.

Similarly, standard correctional employment opportunities (CORCAN industries, apprenticeships and general work programs) often require literacy and numerical skills beyond what the most poorly educated inmates can offer.<sup>20</sup> For these reasons, it should be a priority to identify and direct inmates with inadequate literacy skills for programming or employment purposes into appropriate ABE programs early in their sentence.

#### **D. New Opportunities From Risk/Needs Assessment**

The CSC has recently implemented new risk/needs assessment strategies and systems. This assessment approach is intended to greatly improve the identification and targeting of offenders with education, employment and other known criminogenic needs.<sup>21</sup>

Two complementary systems are now in place: an Offender Intake Assessment (OIA) system, and a Community Risk/Needs Management system. The latter system has been operational since 1990, and there is a growing body of research on its effectiveness in contributing to offender re-integration.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> The potential mismatch in offender education with vocational program requirements has often been noted. See: **Correctional Service of Canada Vocational Training Programs Internal Audit Report No. 378-1-019, November 1990.**

<sup>21</sup> Don A. Andrews. *“Recidivism is Predictable and Can be Influenced: Using Risk Assessment to Reduce Recidivism.”* **Forum on Corrections Research.** CSC, Vol. 1, No.2 (1989). “The need principle asserts, that if correctional treatment services are to reduce criminal recidivism, the criminogenic needs of offenders must be targeted.” ( p. 15.)

<sup>22</sup> For further information on the “community risk/needs” system, see: Laurence L. Motiuk and Frank J. Porporino, **Offender Risk/Needs Assessment: A Study of Conditional Releases.** Research Branch, CSC (February, 1989). No. R-01; Laurence L. Motiuk and Frank J. Porporino. **Field Test of the Community Risk/Needs Management Scale: A Study of Offenders on Caseload.** Research Branch, CSC (December, 1989). No. R-06; Laurence L.



The OIS is more recent (November 1994) so its impact is only beginning to be felt. A preliminary analysis of the needs domain in the CSC OIA intake assessment database indicates that:<sup>23</sup>

- more than three-quarters of male and two-thirds of female inmates have some employment or education need at the time of their arrest;
- For males, 39% of those assessed had “some difficulty” and 38% indicated “considerable difficulty” with this domain.

These early findings are important as they shed light on the need to adequately identify offender needs. They also point to appropriate program targeting if efforts to re-integrate offenders are to improve.

## **E. Collateral Benefits of Prison Education**

Upgrading prisoner literacy skills is widely seen as a priority component of successful rehabilitation. Indeed, research has consistently suggested a number of important collateral benefits from prisoner education and literacy programming, in addition to those solely related just to recidivism.

In the United States, the US Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) found that prisoners who actively participate in education programs have a significantly lower likelihood of recidivating.<sup>24</sup> Participation in education programs was found to increase prison safety, to lower the risk of recidivism by reducing “prisonization”, (what Wormith<sup>25</sup> has elsewhere called “identification with the criminal sub-culture”), and to nurture pro-social norms that supported rule/law-

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Motiuk and Shelley L. Brown. **The Validity of Offender Needs Identification and Analysis in Community Corrections**. Research Branch, CSC (November, 1993). No. R-34.

<sup>23</sup> Research Branch: special runs from the OIA database, September 1996.

<sup>24</sup> Miles Harer, **“Prison Education Program Participation and Recidivism: A test of the Normalization Hypothesis”**. Office of Research and Evaluation, Federal Bureau of Prisons, Washington, D.C. (1995).

<sup>25</sup> J. S. Wormith, *Attitude and behavior change of correctional clientele*. **Criminology**, **22**, 1984, p.597.

abiding behavior. Indeed, the BOP emphasizes that the “normalization” benefit accrued to prisoners can be significant.

Other American studies reach similar conclusions. A review of 72 recent American studies on correctional education programs by Gerber and Fritsch (1993) identified a range of benefits resulting from prisoner educational and vocational programs.<sup>26</sup> The studies suggest that prison educational and vocational programs lead: i) to fewer disciplinary violations during incarceration, ii) reductions in recidivism, iii) increases in employment opportunities, and iv) an increased participation in education upon release. The results are categorized as follows:

- For basic and secondary education, 9 of 14 studies revealed a positive effect on reducing recidivism, and 3 of 4 studies showed a positive effect on post-release employment;
- For vocational education, 10 of 13 studies showed a positive effect on recidivism, and 5 of 7 studies showed a positive effect on post-release employment success;
- For college-level education, 10 of 14 studies showed a positive effect on recidivism and 3 out of 3 showed a positive effect on post-release employment success.

The CSC has also examined the correctional value of its basic adult education Grade-8 programming.<sup>27</sup> Porporino and Robinson (1992) address the issue: “Can Educating Adult Offenders Counteract Recidivism?” Results indicate that:

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<sup>26</sup> J. Gerber and E.J. Fritsch. **Prison Education and Offender Behavior: A Review of the Scientific Literature**. Sam Houston State University Criminal Justice Center, Huntsville, Texas, 1993. This study focused primarily on studies reporting empirical data, using control groups, controlling statistically for background differences if participants were not assigned randomly to control groups, and testing for statistical significance. The analysis considered the following outcomes: recidivism rates, enrollment in education programs after release, and disciplinary problems while incarcerated.

<sup>27</sup> Frank Porporino and David Robinson. **Can Educating Adult Offenders Counteract Recidivism?** Research Branch, CSC, Research Report No.R-22 (1992).

- 2-out of-3 ABE-8 participants released after completing the program remained in the community during the release follow-up period (this period averaged about 1.1 years).

They also found statistical associations between program completion and outcome success:

- Within the follow-up period, only 30% of the offenders who had “Completed” the ABE-8 program were readmitted as compared with the 36% of offenders “Released before Completion”, and 42% for offenders who “Withdrew” from a program before completion.

Offenders with “high risk” characteristics benefit more from completion of ABE-8 than lower risk offenders. Completion of ABE-8 has positively influenced post-release outcome for offenders released on Mandatory Supervision but not for offenders released on Full Parole.

Post-release interviews were also conducted, with 38 of the released offenders. The majority (79%) were employed full time and most had gained employment within the first month after release. When asked about the usefulness of their ABE-8 participation:

- One-third of the offenders felt skills gained in ABE were “very helpful” in their job search and one-half said that ABE skills continued to be “very useful” on the job.

However, offenders were also able to point to personal benefits, which fell outside the employment realm:

- Close to 90% said they read newspapers and a large percentage also read books and magazines;

- Thirty percent felt their ABE experience helped them in family matters, and about 3-in-4 said, they felt more in control of their lives.

These findings confirm that an increase in basic adult literacy can be an important factor in the successful community re-integration of offenders.

## PART II: METHODS AND DATA

A retrospective approach was employed for this study. In January 1996, we identified offenders who had participated in an ABE program since 1989. From this data a sample was developed of those participants who were subsequently released from federal custody. This release sample was tracked to identify all releases with a subsequent re-admission.

Other sources of information incorporated into this study include historical statistics from the Education Year-End Reports (CSC, annual), and inmate responses captured in the CSC's **1995 National Inmate Survey**. Each source is described below.

### A. ABE follow-up files

Construction of the follow-up files required several steps in order to capture the relevant information from several different information systems. An electronic list of participants in ABE programs was obtained from the Adult Basic Education - Program Monitoring System. This legacy system (dating from February 1988) contains information on inmates presently enrolled in an ABE program. Summary statistics from this system are provided each year in the ***Education Year-End Report*** (CSC, annual).

Enrollments were examined for ABE-8 programs since 1986/87, including for ABE-5 in the early years, and for ABE-10 programs in more recent years. The program completion status codes indicate: “Continuing,” “Withdrew,” “Transferred” (to another institution), “Released” (e.g., to Parole), and “Completed.” The records indicate approximately 48,000 full-time equivalent (FTE) enrollments in ABE programs since 1987, as is shown in **Table II-1A** (ABE-8 with 36,000 enrollments) and **-1B** (ABE-10 with 12,000 enrollments;

**Table II-1A: Education Year End Report: Summary Statistics**

<b>ABE-8 Program</b>					
<b>FY</b>	<b>Enrollments</b>	<b>Completed</b>	<b>Withdrew</b>	<b>Transferred</b>	<b>Paroled</b>
1986/87	3,519	1,070	701	715	1
1987/88	4,097	1,457	725	541	293
1988/89	4,293	1,574	778	569	307
1989/90	3,532	903	486	361	225
1990/91	3,652	923	496	488	258
1991/92	4,247	967	467	415	418
1992/93	4,376	993	669	389	519
1993/94	4,237	750	508	284	443
1994/95	4,256	737	619	367	513
<b>SUM:</b>	<b>36,209</b>	<b>9,374</b>	<b>5,449</b>	<b>4,129</b>	<b>2,977</b>
<b>Average:</b>	<b>8,046</b>	<b>2,083</b>	<b>1,211</b>	<b>918</b>	<b>662</b>

Source: Data for enrollments represents full-time equivalents, from Education Year End Report, CSC (annual, 1994/95; 1993/94; 1989/90; 1988/89; 1987/88). Those who withdrew or Transferred, but later re-enrolled are not double counted in these figures

**Table II-1B: Education Year End Report: Summary Statistics**

<b>ABE-10 Program</b>					
<b>FY</b>	<b>Enrollments</b>	<b>Completed</b>	<b>Withdrew</b>	<b>Transferred</b>	<b>Paroled</b>
1990/91	1,697	424	235	203	122
1991/92	2,295	500	228	256	282
1992/93	2,547	554	298	339	309
1993/94	2,743	567	256	269	271
1994/95	2,777	532	284	301	267
<b>SUM:</b>	<b>12,059</b>	<b>2,577</b>	<b>1,301</b>	<b>1,368</b>	<b>1,251</b>
<b>Average:</b>	<b>2,412</b>	<b>415</b>	<b>260</b>	<b>274</b>	<b>250</b>

Source: Data for enrollments represents full-time equivalents, from Education Year End Report, (annual, 1994/95; 1993/94). Those who withdrew or Transferred, but later re-enrolled are not included in these figures.

***i) ABE release sample***

Using the first release date following the program, cases were sampled for a release between 1989 and 1994. In January 1996 a release follow-up file was developed. The end date was selected to ensure that everyone in the follow-up sample would have a minimum release eligibility period of at least 24 months following their first release date.

A sample of **6,074** offenders matched the above criterion (**Table II-2**). There were 5,509 offenders with either a Full Parole or Statutory Release status. The remaining 565 cases in the sample had a “Day Parole” or “Other” status – these cases unfortunately had to be excluded from the follow-up analysis since Day Parole releases did not exist prior to November 1992 (including them would introduce a systematic bias).

**Table II-2: Distribution of Releases by Year**

<b>Released ABE Participant's by Highest Program Completion Status</b>						
Fiscal Year of Release	CEGEP/GED All	ABE-8 Complete	ABE-8 Incomplete	ABE-10 Complete	ABE-10 Incomplete	Total
1988/89	49	211	229	...	...	489
1989/90	27	442	331	...	...	800
1990/91	31	384	285	...	...	700
1991/92	10	282	430	...	2	724
1992/93	83	252	677	56	180	1,248
1993/94	86	177	510	94	224	1,091
June-1994	43	101	192	44	77	457
Totals	329 (6%)	1841 (34%)	2646 (48%)	194 (3.5%)	483 (8.8%)	5,509 (100%)
N= 6,074 P <.001, (In addition to these 5,509 cases, there were a further 565 cases where data on one of the three criteria was missing, or who were Day Parole releases that are counted only since November 1992).						

***ii) Inmate attitudes sample***

In order to examine inmate attitudes towards ABE programming, we obtained inmate responses to the CSC's **1995 National Inmate Survey**. This survey questioned 4,283 federal inmates, representing all male offenders in 44 Federal institutions.<sup>28</sup>

***iii) General offender benchmark statistics***

Two special research files were developed to provide a benchmark against which the ABE re-admission rates could be compared:

<sup>28</sup> Complete methodological details are available by contacting Dave Robinson, Senior Research Officer, Research Division, CSC.



1. One benchmark was a file for all CSC releases (about 19,000 cases) covering the period 1990-91 through 1992-93. This file provided comparable offender profile characteristics for the general population and the ABE follow-up sample.
2. A second benchmark file contained all FP and SR re-admission admission for the general population follow-up, within two years following their original release date (about 3,500 cases). This represented the period 1989 through 1993. These provided benchmark re-admission rates and "Time to Re-admission" for all Full Parole and Statutory Release/Mandatory Supervision re-admissions.<sup>29</sup>

## **B. ABE participant profiles**

Once release follow-up files were developed, we compared the characteristics of offenders in the ABE release sample with the CSC's general release population, and with the sample used by Porporino and Robinson (1992).

The ABE follow-up sample and the general offender release population were found to be very similar, with a few notable exceptions. The major exceptions concerned age, the number of prior federal terms, and violent convictions. Porporino and Robinson (1992) have also noted similar differences in their sample. *Table II-3* provides detailed comparisons:

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<sup>29</sup> See: Brian A. Grant. *Inmates Referred for Detention (1989-90 to 1993-94): A Comparative Analysis*. CSC, Research Report No. R-45, 1996.

**Table II-3: Characteristics of ABE Participant versus General Releases**

Offender Characteristics	1989-94 ABE Release Sample (n 6,074)	All Releases: 1990-1993 Totals (n 18,991)*
Sentence Length (% 3 years and over)	43%	45%
Previous Federal Term (% with more than one)	14%	49%
Age at release: (% under 25 years)	35%	17%
% of offenders with a Violent Conviction	66%	42%
% Non-Aboriginal	86%	87%
<b>RELEASE TYPE</b>		
Day Parole	9%	NA
Full Parole	35%	35%
Statutory Release (Mandatory Supervision) and Other	51%	65%
*Source: OIS system Custody Releases for the period April 1, 1990 through March 31, 1993. (Excludes Indeterminate sentences, and Day Parole releases prior to November 1992).		

- ABE participants are younger than the general population -- 35% of the participants are 25 or under at release, as compared to only 17% of all releases during 1990-1993 who were under 25 years;
- Second, ABE participants are significantly more likely to be on their first federal term -- only 14% were on their second or higher term versus 49% of the general releases.

Younger, first federal term offenders typically have a higher risk of recidivism and there are a disproportionate number in the ABE sample:

- First term federal offenders under 25-years of age at admission represented 42% of the follow-up sample, and 35% were still under 25 years of age at their release.

Age distributions for the ABE follow-up sample at admission and release are provided in **Table II-4**.

**Table II-4: Ages of ABE Sample at Admission and First Release**

By Federal Term		Term =1 (n 5,238)		Term >1 (n 836)	
Age At Admission	Under 25 years	2,193	42%	275	33%
	25 - 34 Years	2,139	41%	432	52%
	35 and Older	906	17%	129	15%
P < .001					
Age At Release	Under 25 years	1,844	35%	267	32%
	25 - 34 Years	2,311	44%	416	50%
	35 and Older	1,083	21%	153	18%
P <.01					

- A significantly larger number of offenders in this sample have a violent conviction (66% versus 42%).

This latter fact may reflect a trend where the proportion of federal admissions with a violent offence is increasing (in particular the marked increase in the proportion serving robbery and sexual offences).

There is no difference in the average length of sentence - 43% are serving sentences of 3 years or more, versus 45% of the general release population.

These comparisons suggest that the ABE participant follow-up group is at higher than average risk of recidivism. Therefore, all other things being equal,

we would anticipate a higher than average re-admission rate of the ABE participants over the general offender population re-admission rate.

### **C. Summary**

There have been approximately 48,000 full-time equivalent quarterly enrollments for ABE programs since 1986/87. Of these, approximately 12,000 offenders had an eligible release date, and just over 6,000 offenders were selected in the release follow-up sample.

The ABE follow-up sample proved to be somewhat younger than the general release population, proportionally more likely to be serving a first federal term, and to have been sentenced for committing a violent crime. They are also likely to be higher than average risk of recidivism as compared to the general population. Therefore, they have a profile that is quite similar to Porporino and Robinson's 1992 ABE-8 follow-up.

## **PART III: HOW FEDERAL INMATES VIEW ABE PROGRAMMING**

### **A. INMATE EDUCATION NEEDS**

The views of federal inmates regarding ABE programs bring a distinctly qualitative dimension to the follow-up results. We focus here on two main topics:

- a) self-reported inmate literacy needs and b) inmate satisfaction with ABE and related educational and vocational programs.

The inmate responses to these issues were obtained from recent interviews conducted for the CSC's 1995 "National Inmate Survey." Among the questions posed were several that asked each inmate about his attitude (there were no females in the survey) toward the ABE programs taken while at their current institution. The views of the over 4,200 male federal inmate who responded in this survey are fully representative of male inmates in 44 federal institutions. Inmate responses to the education attainment questions confirm the low average educational attainment for this population:

- Two of every three inmates questioned in the survey (63%) reported that they had completed only "some high school or less";
- Only 16% of the inmates report having "completed" a high school diploma or equivalent;
- Only 21% report completing "some post-secondary education" beyond high school;
- Finally, about 45% of inmates reported that they had participated in an ABE program at their current federal institution.

### ***i) ABE program involvement***

Inmates who reported completion of “Grade 8 or less” indicate a significant ABE program involvement at their current institution:

- Approximately 50% had involvement in ABE at their current institution – as compared to a 40% involvement by inmates with “more than Grade 8”;
- Only 16% had involvement in any other (e.g., non-ABE) education programming (compared to the 35% involvement of inmates who had completed more than Grade 8).

It was previously stated that inmates who lacked basic literacy skills might find this to be a barrier (both real and psychological) to their participation in other CSC programming. These above responses may reflect that barrier.

### **B. ABE Program Satisfaction**

Although the CSC offers many institutional courses, these may impart little long-term positive effects unless inmates are convinced that the courses are useful and provide lasting skills. In order to evaluate ABE programming, inmates were asked directly about their experience with various programs:

*“Was the program useful to you, and do you think you learned something that was valuable to you?”*

### ***i) Program usefulness***

When questioned directly on the usefulness of the programs, inmates responded with an overall rating of “good” (a rating of “3”, on a scale of 1 to 4, where 4 was “excellent”). Inmates who had completed higher program levels were found to be slightly more positive:

- For inmates who reported completing Grade 7 or less, about 3-in-4 rated the usefulness of ABE as Good or Excellent;
- For inmates who reported completing Grade 8, nearly 80% rate ABE usefulness as Good or Excellent.

### ***ii) Comparisons with other inmate programs***

To put these responses into perspective, the survey also asked about inmate involvement with other CSC programs. Program Involvement by inmates was found to have been above average in CSC’s four core offender programs – Cognitive Skills, ABE, Anger Management and Substance Abuse – as ranked by inmates in that order.

Inmate satisfaction, however, was above average for four programs: the Other Vocational, ABE, Other Education and Cognitive Skills programs – order as ranked by inmates. On both these indicators, the ABE programs scored higher than average. This ranking can be seen in ***Table III-1***.

**Table III-1: Inmate Program Involvement**

Program Involvement:	n.	Offender involvement in area? (% Yes)	If yes, How helpful was it? (1 Poor - 4 Excellent)
CORCAN	2,319	24%	2.54
Other Vocational	2,270	25%	2.7
ABE	2,441	45%	2.96
Other Education	2,353	37%	2.94
Cognitive Skills	2,692	48%	2.89
Anger Management	2,472	40%	2.87
Substance Abuse	2,496	38%	2.89
<i>Average</i>	<i>2,435</i>	<i>37%</i>	<i>2.87</i>
Source: 1995 National Inmate Survey.			

Inmates were more positive toward the intrinsic literacy benefits of ABE programming than with the skills training aspect, expressing greater satisfaction with the former:

- When asked if "...[they] thought the literacy programs are successful in helping inmates read and write?", 67% agreed, only 12% disagreed, and 21% were undecided;
- However, when asked if "...[they] believe the education courses offered have provided them with the skills that they will need to get a job after they are released?" 44% disagreed, 18% were undecided, while only 38% agreed.



Inmate views towards the job skills learned in the vocational/training course are similarly mixed. Findings were similar to those regarding the job skills obtained from the education courses taken:

- When asked if "...[they] think the vocational/training courses here have provided them with the skills they will need to get a job after they are released?" 39% disagreed, 25% were undecided, while 36% agreed.

Following from this, a majority of offenders (56%) agreed with this statement that CSC does *not* have "...enough education programs available to meet [their] needs at this institution" (24% disagreed, and 20% were undecided).

Inmates were also asked how CSC, if it had more dollars to spend, could best use that money. Fifty-three percent of the inmates thought the money should go towards "Improving the institution's accommodations (more or larger cells)", but only a slightly smaller proportion (47%) believed it should be used to "Increase the number/availability of programs for inmates."

### **C. Summary**

A significant majority of the inmates interviewed for the 1995 National Inmate Survey reported that they had completed a very low level of education. A significant number of these offenders also report that they were taking advantage of the available ABE programs. They are generally quite positive about their experiences with the ABE programs, especially the literacy component. However, they were less convinced that the vocational/training aspects of their courses would lead to real job opportunities on the outside. A major complaint among inmates (along with double bunking) was that not enough education programs were available at their institution.

## **PART IV: PROGRAM TARGETING, GRADE GAINS/ AND READMISSION RATES**

According to the inmate survey cited above, inmates with poor literacy skills are participating in prison ABE programs, and are reasonably satisfied with their experience. These self-reports can be confirmed by other data which is analyzed in the following section.

Inmates typically complete a standardized school achievement test when they are initially admitted to a federal institution (there are only about 8% refusals<sup>30</sup>), and again after they complete an education program. These tests have variously consisted of the SCAT or CAAT Tests. Pre- and post-program test scores can be used to estimate the grade-level “gain” (sometimes called the “grade level advancement”) associated with ABE participation. These gains provide a window through which to view the issues of program targeting and effectiveness.

- i. Are ABE programs appropriately targeting high-need cases?
- ii. Do the ABE programs lead to meaningful literacy grade-level gains?
- iii. Do the ABE participants generally succeeding in completing their programs?

### **A. Targeting High-Needs Offenders**

The average SCAT scores for federal offenders at admission was Grade 7.5. The average score of offenders in the ABE study was found to be significantly lower than this (**Table IV-1**). Starting SCAT scores were available for 5,898 offenders (97%) in the follow-up sample, and final scores could be obtained for somewhat fewer (5,526 offenders or 91%):

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<sup>30</sup> Tests administered to date total 23,666, with 1,920 (8%) refusals according to the **Education Year-End Report, 1993/94**.

**Table IV-1: SCAT Entry Scores for ABE Participants**

Starting Scores	Average SCAT Score
A: Initial Assessments - All ABE Participants:	5.7
SCAT Assessment - Language component	5.7
SCAT Assessment - Mathematics component	5.8
(n 5,526)	

- The mean entry score for participants in the ABE study was Grade 5.7 (i.e., Grade 5.7 on the SCAT Language component, and Grade 5.8 on Mathematics). This is nearly two full grades lower than the average entry score for the general offender population;
- This score is also significantly lower than the target of Grade 8 equivalency for the ABE-8 program;

These scores indicate that the typical ABE participant is significantly less educated than the average federal offender - this certainly qualifies them as in high need of ABE programming.

The ABE program appears to be reaching its intended high-need offender target group.

### **B. ABE Program Grade-level Gains**

The second issue is ABE program grade-level gains. Final SCAT attainment scores are available for offenders who participate in ABE programs. These can be compared with their initial scores to estimate program treatment

effectiveness (what is referred to in the annual **Education Year-End Report** as “average grade level advancement”).

It is important to examine the grade-level gains according to the program completion status, since we expect a much higher gain where the program was completed.

***i) Grade gains with ABE-8 Completion***

Looking at standardized scores of ABE participants (**Table IV-2**), we see that:

**Table IV-2: Start versus Final SCAT Scores**

ABE-8 Only:	Initial Score	Final Score	Grade Improvement
ABE-8 Program Completed (language)	6.6	9.4	2.8
ABE-8 Program Completed (Mathematics) (n 1,974)	6.5	9.4	2.9
ABE-8 Program Incomplete (Language)	4.8	6.1	1.3
ABE-8 Program Incomplete (Mathematics) (n 2,887)	5.0	6.1	1.1

- Inmates who completed an ABE-8 program began with an average SCAT score of about Grade 6.6 (i.e., a score of 6.6 on the Language component, and 6.5 on the Mathematics).
- The average final grade attainment for ABE-8 participants was 9.4.

- This difference yields an average grade-level gain for ABE-8 participants who completed the program of about 2.8 grades (a 42% improvement).

### ***ii) Grade gains with ABE-8 Incomplete***

For ABE-8 participants who did not complete their relevant program, substantially lower grade-level gains were found:

- The average starting score among participants who failed to complete the ABE-8 program is significantly lower to begin with - e.g., Grade 4.9 versus Grade 6.6;
- The average final score attained by these offenders is also much lower - 6.1 versus 9.4;
- Findings suggest a significantly lower average grade-level gain for ABE-8 participants who did not complete the program – only 1.2 grades or 25% improvement (versus 2.8 grades for those who completed).

In summary, these results show an average gain of 2.8 grade levels (or 42% improvement) for offenders who complete their course. Offenders who do not complete their program gain a modest 1.2 grades (or 25% improvement). Fewer participants complete their ABE-8 program (1,974 versus 2,887 who had not completed), and offenders with the very poorest starting base are also more likely to drop out of the ABE-8 program.

### ***iii) Grade gains for ABE-10 completed***

We examined the grade-level gain for ABE-10 participants, and found the general patterns to be the same. Unfortunately, the smaller number of

participants in the follow-up sample (129 cases) causes these results to be statistically too unreliable to report.

### C. Grade-Level Improvement and Re-admission Rates

Grade-level literacy gains have a modest but statistically significant effect on offender re-admission rates. ABE participants who realized above average grade-level gains have a re-admission rate that is modestly lower than average and *vice versa*. This is shown in *Table IV-3*:

**Table IV-3: Re-admissions by Grade-Level Gains**

Level of Grade Improvement:	ABE-8: % RE-ADMITTED	ABE-10: % RE-ADMITTED	ALL ABE: % RE-ADMITTED
Below Average - i.e., Gained 1 Grade or Less	38%	48%	40%
Average - i.e., Gained between 1 and 2 Grades	37%	44%	38%
Above Average - i.e., Gained Greater than 2 Grades	34%	38%	35%
	(P<.05)	(n. s.)	(P<.01)

- ABE participants with a final grade-level gain below the average (e.g., those who improved their level by 1 Grade or less), had a re-admission rate of 40%;
- The average improvement for all ABE participants was between 1 and 2 Grades, and ABE participants in the average group had a re-admission a rate of 38% (an improvement of 5% over the below-average gainers);

- Finally, participants with an above average grade gain (e.g., who improved more than 2 Grades), had a re-admission rate of just 35% (an improvement of 12.5% over the below-average gainers);
- The difference in the re-admission rates between the three grade-level gain groups is statistically significant ( $P < .01$ ) for the entire follow-up sample, and ( $P < .05$ ) for the ABE-8 participants.

In summary, we found a modest level-by-level improvement in the proportion of offenders re-admitted at each level of grade gain, ranging from 5% for the average gainers to 12.5% for the above-average gainers. The same pattern of rate improvement also holds when we examine just the ABE-10 participants, although the sample is too small to give statistically reliable results.

***i) Aboriginal Grade Gain and Re-admission Rates***

Aboriginal offenders achieve a greater grade-level gain from the ABE program than non-Aboriginals. As the following table shows, proportionally more Aboriginal offenders achieve an average or above-average grade level gain than non-Aboriginals, with a smaller proportion achieve below average gains:

Grade Level Advancement	Aboriginals	Non-Aboriginals
Below Average - Gained 1 Grade or Less	43%	49%
Average - Gained 1 to 2 Grades	21%	19%
Above Average - Gained 2 Grades or More	36%	32%
$P < .01$	840	5,234

- 36% of Aboriginal offenders achieve above average grade gains as compared to just 32% on non-Aboriginals;
- Only 43% of Aboriginal offenders do worse than average in ABE programs, versus 49% of non-Aboriginal participants (these difference are significant  $P < .01$ ).

Aboriginal offenders who achieve the greatest grade improvement also have a slightly lower risk of re-admission. Unfortunately, this difference is not statistically significant (this is partly due to the small sample size but also because only the group with Above Average gain shows an improvement).

**Table IV-3A** provides detailed re-admission rates by grade gain, for Aboriginals and non-Aboriginal participants.

**Table IV-3A: Re-admissions by Grade-Level Gain – Aboriginal Offenders**

Level of Grade Improvement	Non-Aboriginal Re-admission Rate	Aboriginal Re-admission Rate	Non-Aboriginal Re-admission Rate	Aboriginal Re-admission Rate
	All ABE		ABE-8 Only	
Below Average - Gained 1 Grade or Less	867 38%	172 54%	614 36%	133 52%
Average - Gained between 1 and 2 Grades	324 35%	87 54%	265 34%	75 53%
Above Average - Gained Greater than 2 Grades	506 33%	129 47%	440 32%	100 43%
Number	1,697 $P < .01$	388 $P = n.s.$	1,319 $P < .05$	308 $P = n.s.$



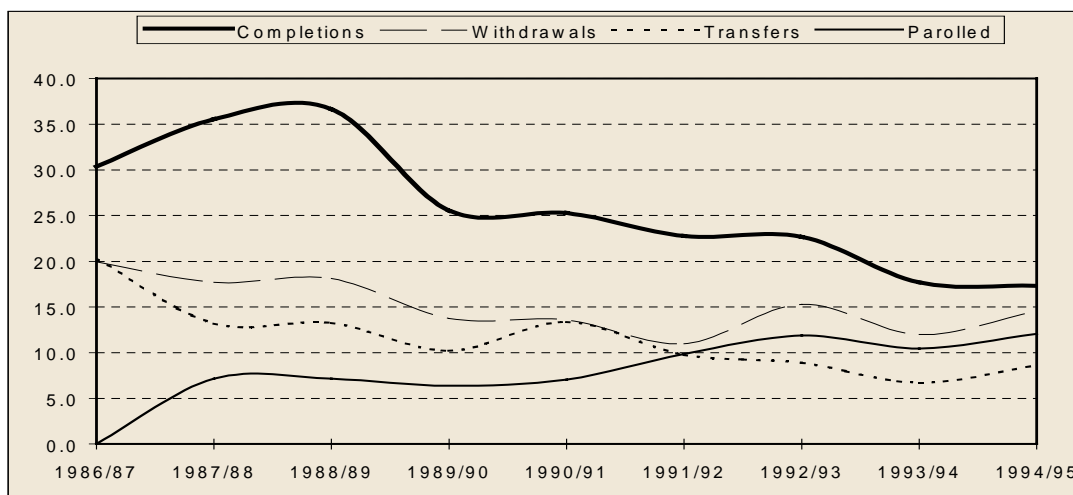
- Only the Aboriginal offenders who achieve above average grade-level gains show a reduction in re-admissions.

Although the reduction was 7-10%, this was not statistically significant as the gain occurs only for the single category. Aboriginal high achievers actually show a larger gain than non-Aboriginals.

#### D. ABE Program Completion Rates

The final issue in this section concerns completion rates for ABE programs. This is a traditional measure provided annually in the Education Year-End Report. Completion rates are important in themselves and - as we have seen - are also an important factor in literacy grade-level gains. Excluding offenders with a “Continuing” status at year-end, the completion and drop-out rates are illustrated in **Chart IV-1**. The trend shows that completion’s have declined each year since 1989/90, with a slight decline in “Withdrawals”. There has been an increase in those “Paroled” while enrolled in a course. However, the largest category each year remains to be those who are “continuing” in their program. A tabulation of these trends for the ABE-8 and ABE-10 program is shown in (**Table IV-4A** and **B**):

**Chart IV-1: Historical Rates of Completion & Withdrawal for ABE-8**



**Table IV-4A: ABE-8 Historical Withdrawal Rates**

ABE-8 Only	% Completed	% Withdrew	% Transferred	% Paroled
1986/87	30.4	19.9	20.3	0.0
1987/88	35.6	17.7	13.2	7.2
1988/89	36.7	18.1	13.3	7.2
1989/90	25.6	13.8	10.2	6.4
1990/91	25.3	13.6	13.4	7.1
1991/92	22.8	11.0	9.8	9.8
1992/93	22.7	15.3	8.9	11.9
1993/94	17.7	12.0	6.7	10.5
1994/95	17.3	14.5	8.6	12.1
Average:	26.0	15.1	11.6	8.0

Source: Data is from Education Year End Report, (annual, 1994/95; 1993/94; 1989/90; 1988/89; 1987/88).

Note: Because of the number of "Continuing" statuses (not shown), row totals will not sum to 100%.

**Table IV-4B: ABE-10 Historical Withdrawal Rates**

ABE-10 Only	% Completed	% Withdrew	% Transferred	% Paroled
1990/91	25.0	13.8	12.0	7.2
1991/92	21.8	9.9	11.2	12.3
1992/93	21.8	11.7	13.3	12.1
1993/94	20.7	9.3	9.8	9.9
1994/95	19.2	10.2	10.8	9.6
Average	21.7	11.0	11.4	10.2

Source: Data is from Education Year End Report, (annual, 1994/95; 1993/94; 1989/90; 1988/89; 1987/88).

Note: Because of the number of "Continuing" statuses (not shown), row totals will Not sum to 100%.

- For ABE-8 programs, the average annual proportion of Completion's is about 26%, the Withdrawal rate runs at about 15%, the Transferred drop-out rate is about 12% and the Parole drop-out rate averages 8% annually.
- The ABE-10 program has had similar results - the average annual Completion rate over the past 5 years is 22%, with a Withdrawal rate of 11%, a Transferred drop-out rate of 11% and a Parole drop-out rate of 10%.

Not completing a program has a significant impact on offender literacy gains, therefore high dropout rates are unfortunate. We can only speculate on how many dropouts (e.g., among the Transfers and Parole losses) could be reduced by changes in program assignment and sentence management.

However, a fairly high withdrawal rate could be anticipated for this population, since most arrived in prison without having achieved much education success in their schooling. A significant proportion, as we have already mentioned, suffer from some type of learning disability that may preclude significant achievement. We could also anticipate some dropout due to unexpected transfers or early parole and TA grants. In general, however, if high-need cases are identified early enough in the sentence, perhaps some of this number who are lost to Withdrawals, Transfers and Parole release could be reduced.

## **E. Summary**

The results indicate that the core ABE-8 program provides a satisfactory outcome for offenders who complete the program. The average grade-level gain (average grade level advancement) was about 2.8 Grades, starting from a base of about Grade 6.6. ABE-8 participants who do not complete their program typically start

from a much lower base (e.g., Grade 4.9), and realize a much lower gain (just 1.2 Grades).

Unfortunately, a large proportion of participants drop out before completion and these dropouts outnumber those who complete the program. This significantly reduces the overall program benefit.

The average SCAT score for offenders starting an ABE-8 program is much lower than the average score for all general admissions, which indicates that the ABE programs are being targeted to high need offenders.

Incremental grade-level gains indicate significant improvements for ABE-8 and ABE-10 participants, with the largest gain occurring for those participants who complete a course (some gain is found even for inmates who drop out). The effectiveness is less conclusive for the ABE-10 participation because of the small sample size.

## PART V: POST-RELEASE OUTCOMES

Post-release outcomes for the ABE enrollees are the final focus of this report. For this analysis we have used the re-admission rate of all federal offenders released to full parole or Statutory Release between 1989/90 and 1993/94 as a benchmark, in order to place the ABE follow-up results in an appropriate context.

Re-admission rate comparisons benefit from a known benchmark – note however that offenders in the ABE follow-up sample will also appear in the general population results, so the comparisons are not as clean as we might have liked.<sup>31</sup> A standardized (24-month) follow-up period was used, which strengthens the comparisons. Comparing for a fixed period illuminates both the *absolute contributions* (e.g., failures versus non-failures) as well as the *relative contribution* (e.g., estimates of time to failure) which can be attributed to the program.

### A. ABE Re-Admission Rates

The sample re-admission statistics for the ABE release follow-up are shown in the table below:

Type of Re-admission:	Total Re-admissions	Re-admitted within 24-months
Total release sample:	6,074	...
Re-Admitted:	2,085 (34.3%)	2,022 (33.3%)
Suspension or Interruption	350 (17%)	342 (17%)
Revocation – without new offence	1,254 (60%)	1,214 (60%)
Revocation – with new offence	481 (23%)	466 (23%)
Revocations only	1,735 (28.6%)	1,680 (27.7%)
Re-admission rate	<b>34%</b>	<b>33%</b>

<sup>31</sup> Because of changes between the previous OIS database and the OMS database introduced in September 1993, it was not possible to match individual offender identifiers back and forth across time and information systems, so the ABE participants could not reliably be removed from the general population file for a more strict comparison of the two groups.

- Of the 6,074 offenders initially released, 34% (2,085) experienced a re-admission sometime within the follow-up period.
- Within 24-month following release, the failure rate of offenders was slightly lower at 33% (or 2,022 re-admissions).
- There are 63 more offenders (about 1%) in the total re-admissions count versus those re-admitted within just 24-months of release. This reflects the fact that most re-admissions typically occur within the first 24 months following release.

These data indicate that the proportion of re-admissions for the follow-up sample (one-in-three) is very similar to that experienced by the offender population as a whole.

#### ***i) Re-admissions by Release type***

There are typically significant differences found in the re-admission rates for offenders released on Full Parole (FP) versus Statutory Release (called Mandatory Supervision before November 1992). This is because Full Parolees are typically low- or medium-risk offenders. Statutory Release is for offenders judged too risky to receive Full Parole. Day Parole grants are more complex – DP is granted to low risk offenders in anticipation of full parole but also to high-risk offenders as a means of managing the transition to Statutory Release. In any event, Day Parole releases were not classify as “custody” releases by the CSC prior to November 1992.<sup>32</sup> Therefore we are only able to examine re-admissions for FP or SR releases over the entire time period (these two release types account for about 85% of all releases in the sample).

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<sup>32</sup> Day Parole was redefined in the Corrections and Conditional Release Act (November, 1992) to be a custody release. There are DP releases in the sample before 1992.

By examining the type of release in **Table V-1** we find:

**Table V-1: Failure Rates of ABE Releases by Releasing Type**

Release Type:	Total Released	Percent of Releases	Re-admitted Within 24 Mo.(N)	Re-admitted Within 24 Mo. (%)
Full Parole	1,948	41%	509	26.1%
Statutory Release	2,778	59%	1,181	42.5%
Total	4,726	100.0%	1,714	35.8%
P< .001				
Excluded from this table are GED/CEGEP participants and offenders released on Day Parole.				

- That 4,726 ABE participants had either an FP or SR release, and the total number re-admitted within 24-months of their release was 1,690 (35.8%).
- The proportion re-admitted for each group was 26.1% (509) for FP and 42.5% (1,181) for SR releases.

These differences are statistically significant ( $P < .001$ ). Brian Grant (1996) provides re-admission rates for all CSC FP and SR releases over a similar historical period. Using a fixed 24-month re-admission follow-up period, the overall CSC re-admission rate for FP releases was found to be 24%, and nearly 47% for SR releases (**Table V-2**):

**Table V-2: Release Statistics for the General Population, 1989/90 to 1993/94**

Release type by Readmission	Total Released	Re-admitted within 24-months (N)	Re-admitted within 24-months (%)
FP Readmitted 24months	8,324	2,003	24.0%
SR Re-admitted 24 months	10,067	4,689	46.6%
Total Re-admitted	18,391	6,692	36.4%

B. Grant (**Inmates Referred for Detention**), p.33. For purposes of this table, we have combined his “SR & Other” and “SR-Only” categories into one group.

- Comparing the benchmark re-admission estimates and the ABE sample, the total re-admission rate for the ABE was slightly lower (36.4% versus 35.8% or a 2% improvement).
- The difference arises mainly from the reduction in re-admission rates for SR releases – the re-admission rate for ABE offenders released on Full Parole was slightly *higher* rate than for the general population (i.e., 26.1% versus 24%, a reduction of -2.1 points) whereas ABE participants released on Statutory Release have a *lower* re-admission rate than the general population (i.e., 42.5% versus 46.6%, an reduction of 4.1 points or an improvement of nearly 9%).

Neither difference is large and the overall results are very similar but the combined improvement in the ABE follow-up sample is about 2%.

***ii) Re-admissions by Program Completion***

Roughly half of all ABE participants in the sample had not completed their program at the time of their release – the full benefits from ABE participation would therefore not be anticipated. Tabulations of release outcomes for ABE-8 and ABE-10 participants by program completion status are examined in **Table V-3**.



These re-admissions take account of the release type. Looking first at Full Parole releases, we find:

**Table V-3: ABE Release Outcomes by Program Completion Status**

Release Type and Program Completion	Re-admitted (N)	Re-admitted (%)	Not-Readmitted (N)	Not-Readmitted (%)	total
Full Parole Release					
ABE8 Completed	160	22.3	558	77.7	718
ABE8 Incomplete	202	23.5	658	76.5	860
ABE10 Completed	14	18.9	60	81.1	74
ABE10 Incomplete	42	26.9	114	73.1	156
Total Full Parole	418	23.1	1,390	76.8	1,808
P<.01					
Statutory Releases					
ABE8 Completed	385	41.0	555	59.0	940
ABE8 Incomplete	577	41.1	827	58.9	1,404
ABE10 Completed	41	48.8	43	51.2	84
ABE10 Incomplete	108	47.6	119	52.4	227
Total Statutory Releases	1,111	44.5%	1,544	58.2	2,655
P= n.s.					
Total ABE-8/10	1,529	34.3%	2,934	65.7%	4,463

- The overall re-admission rate for ABE-8 and ABE-10 was just over 34%, with FP releases exhibiting a significantly lower re-admission rate than SR releases (i.e., 23% versus 42%);

However, considerable variation was found in the re-admission rate(s), depending upon the program completion status and program level:

- For the ABE-8 program, FP releases that completed the program had a modest re-admission reduction (22.2% versus 23.5% for those who did not). This is an improvement of 5.5%;

- The difference is much greater for ABE-10 participants who completed (18.9% versus 26.9% for those who did not). This is an improvement of nearly 30%;
- Offenders who completed ABE-8 or ABE-10, had lower re-admissions than the federal benchmark for full parole of 24% (reductions of 2 and 5 percentage points respectively, or improvements of about 8% and 21%).

These differences are statistically significant ( $P < .01$ ). There is an overall improvement for FP releases who completed an ABE program, and even for ABE-8 participants who did not complete. Only ABE-10 participants who failed to complete their program experienced a higher re-admission rate (26.9%) than the FP benchmark.

Offenders released on SR fared differently:

- The average failure rate for all ABE participants released on Statutory Releases was 42%; and this was found to be significant ( $P < .001$ );
- ABE-8 participants on Statutory Releases did better than the federal benchmark (i.e., 41% versus 47% or an improvement of nearly 13%) whether they had completed their program or not;
- ABE-10 participants on SR release rated slightly lower than the benchmark rate (i.e., 48% and 49%, versus 47%).
- ABE-8 participants did better on SR than ABE-10 participants, irrespective of completion status, and the difference in re-admission rates were not statistically significant.

In summary, offenders who participated in the ABE programs and were later released on Full Parole had lower re-admission rates overall compared to the general offender population (23% versus 24%). Completing an ABE-8 or ABE-10 program

before release improved re-admission rates by between 5.5% and 21% respectively. For Statutory releases, ABE-8 participants improved their re-admission rates on SR by 13%, whereas ABE-10 participants had a very slightly higher re-admission rate.

## **B. Time to Re-admission Failure**

Re-admission rates have been standardized for this analysis. The period chosen is the *first 24 months following release date*. The 24 month period facilitated comparisons with the benchmark rates, and 24 months is an adequate amount of time to identify about 90% of federal re-admissions.

Benchmark estimates show the cumulative percentage of federal offenders re-admitted within 24-months of their release date, for all offenders re-admitted between 1989/90 and 1993/94<sup>33</sup>.

There were too few ABE-10 releases in the sample to adequately track cumulative re-admissions over 24 months. The analysis is therefore restricted to results for the ABE-8 population only.

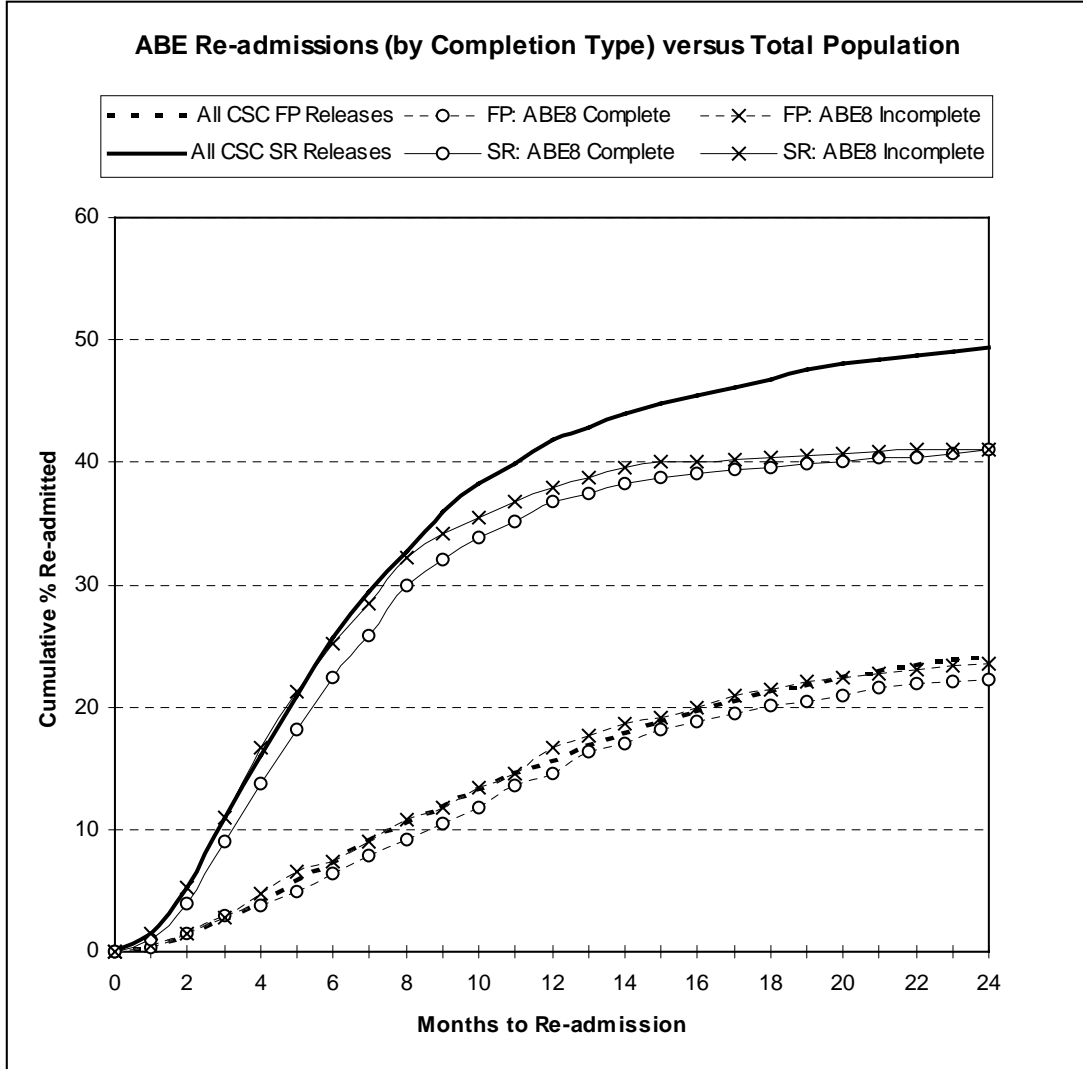
### ***i) ABE-8 cumulative re-admissions***

ABE-8 was the highest completion status for over 3,700 of the participants. Releases for this group were compared with the benchmark re-admission rate. Cumulative re-admissions are plotted for each month of the 24 month follow-up in **Chart V-1**, from the data shown in **Table V-4**:

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<sup>33</sup> Time to Re-admission rates were calculated by Brian Grant for the detention study. These rates, for all re-admissions between 1989-90 and 1993-94, provide a good benchmark. See: Brian A. Grant. **Inmates Referred for Detention (1989-90 to 1993-94): A Comparative Analysis**. CSC, Research Report No. R-45, 1996.

**Chart V-I: ABE Participants Re-admitted Within 24-Months**



**Table V-4: Cumulative % Re-admitted Within 24 Months of Release**

General Population Compared With the ABE-8 Sample						
Months before Failure	All FP Releases	FP: ABE8 Complete	FP: ABE8 Incomplete	All SR Releases*	SR: ABE8 Complete	SR: ABE8 Incomplete
1 or less	0.3	0.3	0.5	1.5	1.0	1.5
2 mo.	1.3	1.5	1.4	5.3	3.9	5.2
3 mo.	2.6	2.9	2.7	10.9	9.0	10.9
4 mo.	4.0	3.8	4.7	16.1	13.7	16.6
5 mo.	5.8	4.9	6.6	20.9	18.1	21.2
6 mo.	7.2	6.3	7.4	25.7	22.4	25.1
7 mo.	9.0	7.8	9.0	29.5	25.9	28.5
8 mo.	10.4	9.2	10.8	32.7	29.9	32.2
9 mo.	11.7	10.4	11.7	35.9	32.1	34.1
10 mo.	13.2	11.7	13.4	38.2	33.8	35.5
11 mo.	14.5	13.5	14.5	39.9	35.2	36.8
12 mo.	15.6	14.6	16.6	41.8	36.8	37.9
13 mo.	16.9	16.4	17.6	42.9	37.4	38.7
14 mo.	17.9	17.0	18.6	44.0	38.2	39.5
15 mo.	18.8	18.1	19.2	44.8	38.7	40.0
16 mo.	19.6	18.8	20.0	45.4	39.1	40.1
17 mo.	20.5	19.4	20.9	46.1	39.4	40.2
18 mo.	21.2	20.1	21.4	46.8	39.6	40.4
19 mo.	21.8	20.5	22.0	47.5	39.9	40.5
20 mo.	22.4	21.0	22.4	48.0	40.1	40.7
21 mo.	22.9	21.6	22.7	48.4	40.3	40.8
22 mo.	23.4	21.9	23.0	48.7	40.4	41.0
23 mo.	23.8	22.0	23.4	49.1	40.7	41.1
24 mo.	24.1	22.3	23.5	49.4	41.0	41.1
Not Failed	75.9	77.7	76.5	50.6	59.0	58.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

The general re-admission statistics are from B. Grant (see: *Inmates referred for Detention*, p.33). The re-admission rate (within 24 months) for the 4,782 cases released to "Statutory Release-Only" was 49.4%, and the re-admission rate for the 5,285 "Statutory Release & Other" releases was 44% (giving a combined rate of 46.6%).

- ABE participants released on FP have a very similar cumulative re-admission trend – whether they completed their program or not – as the benchmark re-admission rate for the total FP release population (Chart V-1: *Appendix*);

- SR releases have a significantly lower re-admission rate – whether they completed their program or not – compared to the benchmark rate for the total SR release population. However, the trend is very similar over the first 8-10 months of release. By the end of the 24-month period, there is very little difference in the re-admission rate for those who completed their ABE-10 program and those who did not;
- About 65% of all Full Parole re-admissions occur within the first 12 months following release, and this is very similar to the FP benchmarks. For SR releases, this rises to about 85% re-admissions within the first 12 months;
- The ABE-8 participants on FP release fared just slightly better than the benchmark population - those offenders who had completed the program show a slight but consistent improvement all along the curve while those whose program was Incomplete matched the benchmark FP release trends.
- The greatest reduction in re-admissions occurred for ABE-8 offenders released to Statutory Release, whose release performance was significantly better than the SR benchmark, particularly after 10-12 months.

These findings substantiate Porporino and Robinson's (1992) observation that ABE participation had the greatest benefit for the higher-risk (e.g., SR) cases.

### C. Re-admission Rates by Risk Level

Since the evidence so far supports the view that higher re-admission rates are found for higher-risk offenders, we have calculated a SIR score (Statistical Information on Recidivism score <sup>34</sup>) for each of the participants in the follow-up sample (for these purposes, a binomial high/low indicator only).

“Low risk” offenders do much better after release than “high risk” offenders, whatever the release type (Full Parole or Statutory Release).

Referring to **Table V-5A (Appendix)**, we see that offenders in the sample are about evenly divided between low (48%) and high risk (52%) cases, whereas FP SR releases are represented approximately 41% - 59%:

**Table V-5A: ABE Participants Released by Risk Level**

SIR Risk Level by Release type	Full Parole	Statutory Release	Total
Lo-Risk	1,212 25.7%	1,060 22.4%	2,272 48.1%
Hi-Risk	736 15.6%	1,718 36.4%	2,454 51.9%
P<.001	1,948 41.2%	2,778 58.8%	

- Low-risk participants released on Full Parole account for just over 25% of the sample and Statutory Releases accounted for slightly fewer low-risk cases (22%);

<sup>34</sup> The technique used here is the same as that developed by Robinson. For details, see: David Robinson, **The Impact of Cognitive Skills Training on Post-Release Recidivism among Canadian Federal Offenders**. Correctional Research and Development, CSC, Research Report No. 41 (1995), page. 26.

- Slightly less than 16% of the released offenders were high-risk Full Parole releases, whereas just over 36% were high-risk Statutory Releases.

Looking at re-admissions by category, we get the distributions shown in **Table V-5B**. Re-admission rates differ significantly according to level of risk (P<. 001):

**Table V-5B: ABE Participants Re-admitted by Risk Level**

Risk - Release Type		Re-admitted (N)	Rate (%)	Not Re-admitted (N)	Rate (%)
Low-Risk	FP Release	197	16.3	1,015	83.8
	SR Release	322	30.4	738	69.6
Hi-Risk	FP Release	312	42.4	424	57.6
	SR Release	859	50.0	859	50.0
p<.001					

- Low-risk Full Parole releases had a re-admission rate of just over 16% – High-risk releases had a re-admission rate of 42% (both rates depart significantly from the baseline for Full-parole releases – 24%);
- Offenders classified as low-risk who were released on Statutory Release had re-admission rates of just over 30% versus a 50% re-admission rate for those in the high risk category – these compare to the benchmark re-admission rate of 49% for all Statutory Releases.

#### **D. Re-admissions With and Without New Offence**

We next examine whether ABE programming has influenced the type of failures that lead to re-admissions - that is, i) whether the failure occurred with or without a new offence, and ii) if there was a new conviction, whether that



conviction was for a violent or non-violent offence. The tabulations for this analysis are shown in **Table V-6**. The results we found are statistically significant ( $P < .002$ ). Comparative results for the general population are also provided in **Table V-7**:

**Table V-6: ABE Re-admissions With and Without New Offence**

Re-admissions Type:	Total Sample		ABE-8 Completed	ABE-8 Incomplete	ABE-10 Completed	ABE-10 Incomplete	GED CEGEP
Not Re-admitted	3,989	65.7%	66.7%	66.4%	68.3%	60.1%	61.2%
With a Technical Re-admission	965	15.9%	14.1%	16.4%	18.5%	18.4%	15.8%
With a New Conviction	1,120	18.4%	19.2%	17.2%	13.1%	21.5%	22.9%
Total Re-admissions:	2,085	34.3	33.3%	33.6%	31.6%	39.9%	38.7%
With a Violent Conviction	160	2.6%	2.7%	2.4%	3.1%	3.8%	2.2%
With a Non-Violent conviction	960	15.8%	16.5%	14.8%	10.0%	17.7%	20.7%
N	6,074	100%	1,974	2,887	259	549	405
P < .002							

**Table V-7: General Population Re-admissions Within 24-Months of Release**

Release Type	Number Re-admitted	Percent Re-admitted	Total Releases
Total Technical Re-admissions	4,802	26.1%	18,391
Total Re-admissions with New Offence	1,890	10.3%	18,391
Total Re-admissions	6,692	36.5%	18,391

Note: We have combined the two groups which B. Grant terms “Statutory Release and Other” and “Statutory Release Only” (these latter are those whose first release was to Statutory Release, as opposed to offenders who had a Day Parole or Full Parole prior to Statutory Release. *Inmates referred for Detention*, p.33). The combined rate of 46.6% is the product of the re-admissions for 4,782 cases released to “Statutory Release-Only” (49.4%), and the 5,285 re-admissions for “Statutory Release & Other” (44%).

- Of the total sample (6,074 cases), 2,085 released offenders (34%) were re-admitted, and 3,989 (just over 65%) were not re-admitted following release;
- In the release follow-up the number of “Technical” failures was quite low – 965 cases or about 16%. There were also 160 (2.6%) offenders re-admitted with a new violent offence, and 960 offenders (about 16%) with a new non-violent conviction;

The general patterns of release-outcomes for the ABE participants in the sample are as follows:

- About 18% (1,120 out of 6,074) of ABE participants were re-admitted with a new conviction, but fewer than 3% (159 out of 6,074) were re-admitted with a new violent conviction. These distributions are all quite statistically significant ( $P < .002$ );

- However, little variation is introduced by examining Program Level or Completion Status. Furthermore, the variation that does exist does not have a clear direction (for example, re-admissions with a new violent conviction is 2.6% overall, 2.7% for ABE-8 Completer's, 2.4% for ABE-8 Incomplete's, 3.1% for ABE-10 Completer's and 3.8% for ABE-10 Incomplete's).

In summary, ABE participation clearly has an impact on lowering the overall rate of re-admissions, but does not contribute to reducing re-admissions with new offences.

## **E. Female Re-admission Outcomes**

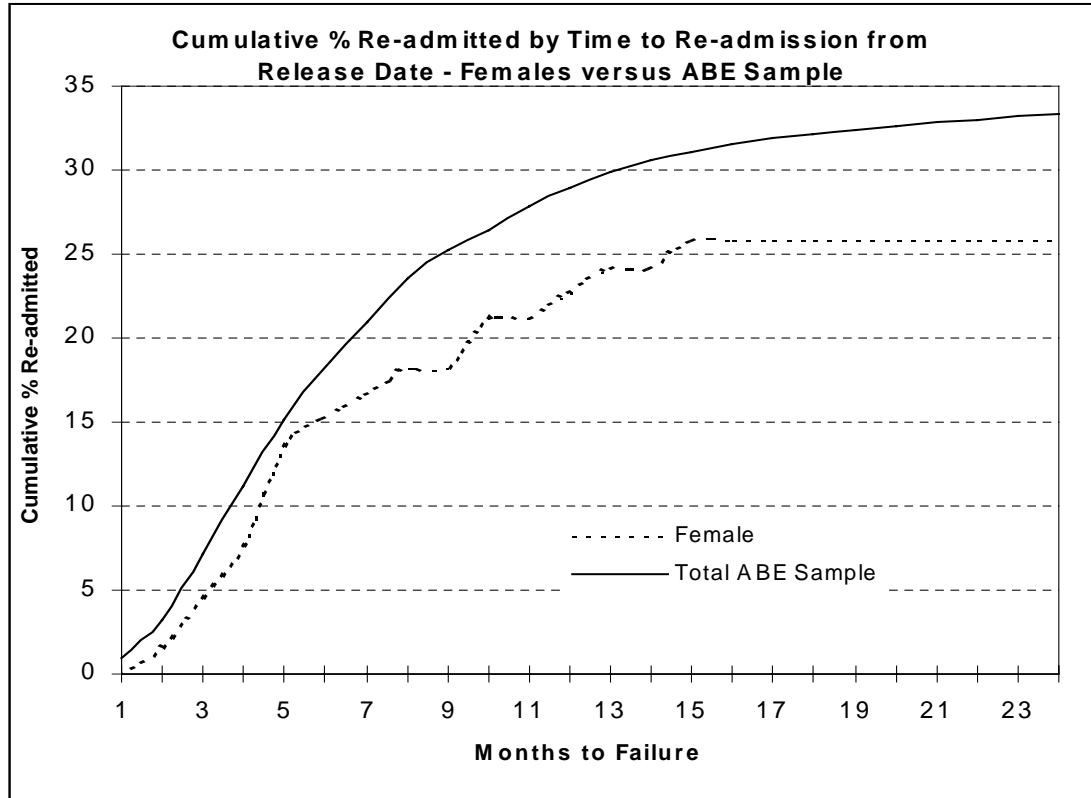
There were 66 female federal offenders in the study, just slightly more than 1.3% of the total sample. Female offenders comprise approximately 2.3% of the federal incarcerated population, therefore females are under-represented in the ABE survey.

Of the female offenders who participated in the ABE program sample:

- 16 female offenders (or 24%) were re-admitted within the first 24 months of their release date, versus 50 (76%) who were not re-admitted.
- The re-admission rate for females is significantly lower than the overall rate for male offenders (24% versus 33%);

This difference between the re-admission rates for females and the total ABE sample are shown in **Chart V-2**. Note from this chart that all release failures for female ABE participants in the survey occurred within about 15 months of release.

**Chart V-2: Female Offenders Re-admitted Within 24-Months**



Although the number of failures is quite small in this sample, we also looked at those who were re-admitted, by their SIR security risk score and whether or not they had completed their program. The patterns are shown in **Table V-8**.

**Table V-8: Female Re-admissions by Risk and Completion Status**

N (%)	Low-Risk / ABE Completed	Low-Risk / ABE Incomplete	High-Risk / ABE Completed	High-Risk / ABE Incomplete
Not Re-admitted	29 (91%)	11 (73%)	14 (78%)	5 (83%)
Re-admitted	3 (9%)	4 (27%)	4 (22%)	1 (17%)
Total	32	15	18	6 (100%)

There are proportionally fewer re-admissions for Low risk offenders who complete ABE than who do not, and High risk offenders have a higher re-admission regardless of the completion status of their ABE-8 program (except for the high-risk, incomplete category which has 1 failure, out of only 6 total cases);

- The re-admission rate for women in the low risk category who had completed their ABE-8 program was 9%, versus 22% for those in the high-risk group;
- For female offenders in the high risk group who had withdrawn from the program only 1 was re-admitted (from a population of only 6 cases);

In summary, ABE participation appears to benefit women in much the same manner as men. The sample, however, is too small to provide statistically significant results.

#### **F. Aboriginal Offender Re-admission outcomes**

The outcome of ABE programming for Aboriginal offenders raises two specific issues; i) do Aboriginal offenders take advantage of the opportunity for ABE programs to the same degree; and ii) do they receive the same level of benefit as non-Aboriginals?

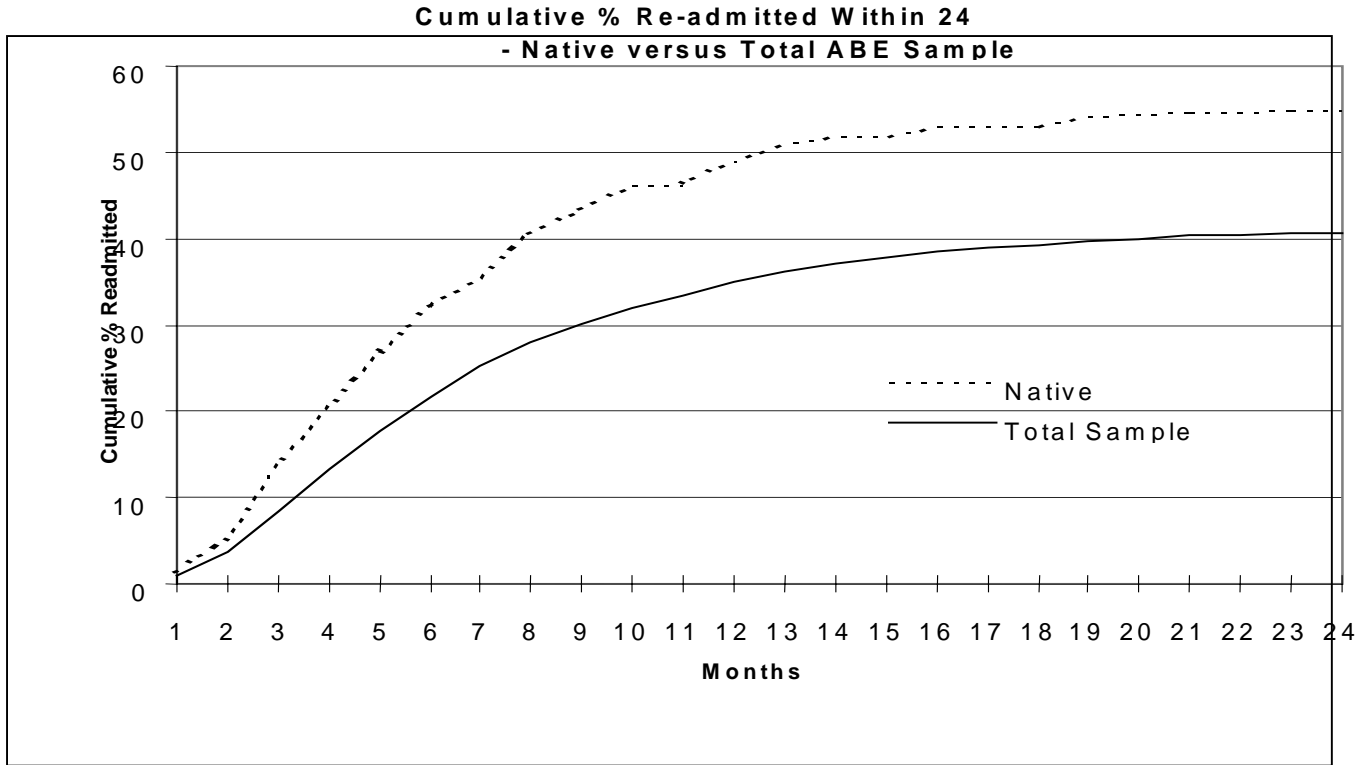
It has previously been established that Aboriginal offenders are represented in the ABE survey in a similar proportion as they are in the general release population (see: Table II-3). We also found that Aboriginal participants tend to benefit slightly more than non-Aboriginal participants, in that they tend to achieve grade gains above the program average (see: Part VI - Section 3).

These findings notwithstanding, re-admission rates for Aboriginal offenders in general have tended to be higher than for the non-Aboriginal offender population. For example, Grant (1996) found that the re-admission rates for Aboriginal offenders between 1989/90 and 1993/94 were significantly higher than for non-Aboriginals. Indeed, whatever the release type, it seems that:

*“Aboriginal offenders have a re-admission rate that is more than 12 percentage points above the rate for non-Aboriginal offenders” (ibid. p.48-49).*

This pattern appears also to hold true for Aboriginal offenders who participate in ABE programs. **Chart V-3** shows a comparison of re-admission rates of Aboriginal ABE participants versus those of the general release population during the first 24-months after release. It reveals a difference of 22% (i.e., 55% re-admissions for Aboriginal ABE participants versus 33% for the total release population).

**Chart V-3: Aboriginal Offenders Re-admitted Within 24 Months**



The re-admission rate of Aboriginal ABE participants actually exceeds the 12-percentage point) difference found by Grant (1996). It is apparent that the cumulative percentage re-admissions in any month are higher for Aboriginal than non-Aboriginal participants.

***i) Aboriginal Re-admissions by Type***

However, we also discovered an interesting pattern in the type of release failure associated with the Aboriginal ABE participants. **Table V-9**, which provides a comparison of the re-admission rates of the Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal ABE participants by type of failure, shows this pattern clearly:

**Table V-9: Aboriginal Re-admissions by Type**

Re-admissions by Type 24-Month Fixed Follow-up	Non-Aboriginal ABE Sample		Aboriginal ABE Sample	
Not Readmitted	3,056	64.3%	368	48.7%
Readmitted - Technical	738	15.5%	227	30.0%
New Violent	127	2.7%	33	4.4%
New non-Violent	832	17.5%	128	16.9%
Total New Offence	959	21.8%	161	21.3%
Total Re-admissions	1,697	35.7%	388	51.3%
Total All Releases	4,753	100%	756	100%
P <.001 5,509	86.3%		13.7%	

The overall re-admission rate for Aboriginals (within two years following their release date) is significantly higher than for the non-Aboriginal ABE participants. The difference is about 15 percentage points (i.e., 51%, versus 36% for non-Aboriginals);

However, virtually all of this difference can be attributed to a higher re-admission for “Technical” failures (i.e., 30% versus 15%). Otherwise, Aboriginals re-admitted with new offences are roughly in the same proportion as non-Aboriginals (e.g., 21.3% versus 21.8%)

The higher overall re-admission rate that we found reflected in **Chart V-3** is almost exclusively due to a higher rate of “technical” revocations, and these results are statistically significant ( $P < .001$ ).



**ii) Aboriginal Re-admissions by Risk Level**

The second point to observe is that risk-level is as determining factor for the Aboriginal ABE participants as it is for non-Aboriginals. **Table V-10** indicates that the re-admission rates for low-risk offenders of both groups is significantly lower than for higher-risk offenders (e.g., 26 points lower for low-risk Aboriginals versus 25 points lower for low-risk non-Aboriginal participants).

**Table V-10: Aboriginal Re-admissions, by Risk Level**

	Low-risk (SIR Score)		High-risk (SIR Score)	
	Non- Aboriginal	Aboriginal	Non-Aboriginal	Aboriginal
Not Readmitted	78%	61%	53%	35%
Readmitted	22%	39%	47%	65%
N	2,235	400	2,518	356
%				
P < .001				

**iii) Summary**

In summary, Aboriginal offenders are represented in the ABE sample in proportion to their representation in the inmate population. Except for those who achieved above average grade gains, however, their re-admission rates remain higher than for the non-aboriginal participants,. These differences in re-admission rates between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal participants are almost wholly the result of higher rates of “technical” revocation. Although re-admission rates remain higher for Aboriginal participants in the survey (confirming Grant’s findings of the general release population), success in ABE appears to confer about the same relative benefits as it does the non-Aboriginal participants.

## CONCLUSIONS

The following are some general points that arise from this study, which might be considered for further action or research.

On the positive side:

1. The majority of offenders who are admitted each year into federal custody have serious literacy and educational deficits. Many may also have learning difficulties or disabilities. CSC's ABE-8 and ABE-10 adult literacy programs are relatively successful in addressing the first set of deficits while the second set need further study.
2. Responses of offenders to the questions in the National Inmate Survey suggest that a majority of offenders have found the ABE programs very useful, they participate in ABE programs at a relatively high rate, and relatively high marks are awarded to the ABE programs.
3. The results of ABE programming suggest that ABE participants who complete the programs are realizing good literacy (grade-level) advancements; even offenders who withdrew prior to completion realized modest gains.
4. A collateral correctional benefit was that offenders with above average grade-level gains from the program also experienced a modest (but significant) reduction in re-admission rates.

A number of less positive features were also observed:

5. Many of the benefits of ABE participation, for example, are foregone due to a high dropout rate. This is especially problematic as offenders with the weakest literacy base are those most likely to withdraw from the program. It may be worthwhile investigating ways to boost completion and retention rates.
6. There are operational benefits for the CSC which were not examined in this report. For example, ABE programs promote constructive activity in the institutions (supporting what the Americans call “normalization”), and may promote more positive long-term attitude changes in offenders. It would be worthwhile to try and measure some of these benefits.
7. The campaign for Literacy in Canada has clearly not reached some segments of the population – especially those (like new federal admissions) who are dropouts from both the schools and labour force. Perhaps we need to investigate new partnerships with literacy and other community service groups.
8. The benefits of ABC notwithstanding, prison ABE programs cannot solve the larger social issues. The Canadian labour market has been unable to create jobs for all its young people. With many well-educated young persons chasing a diminishing number of good jobs, there are ever fewer jobs that remain for people with less than a high school education. Graduating from an ABE program provides basic literacy, but an ABE-8 or –10 level is not very competitive in the real job market. This situation is unlikely to change for the better anytime in the near future, so we perhaps need to explore other ways of providing marketable job skills, and alternative forms of delivery (community programs along with partnerships with vocational and other institutions, etc.).

In the final analysis, education for basic literacy will continue to be a necessary but not a sufficient condition for the successful re-integration of offenders.

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