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ANNOTATION:

The Restorative Resolutions program operating in Winnipeg, Canada is unusual for a couple of reasons. First, it is operated by the John Howard Society of Manitoba which is an offender oriented agency. And, second, a key goal of the program is providing alternatives to incarceration for custody bound offenders.

The major criteria for acceptance into the program is that the Crown is recommending a custodial stay of at least six months (initially the criteria was a recommended nine month custodial stay, but that was decreased to allow for more potential referrals). In addition, the offender must enter a guilty plea and be motivated to follow a community-based plan such as attending programs and meeting with a victim.

Two hundred and ninety-seven offenders were referred from October 1, 1993 through May 9, 1997. One hundred and seventy-four were accepted in the program and of these, 99 offenders had their plans accepted by the Court. Of those accepted, the average age was 27.8 years; 43.7% were first offenders. The most serious offense for two-thirds of the offenders was a property offense. Twenty-two percent were Aboriginal/Metis and 77.5 percent were male. The majority of offenders accepted had prior experience with the criminal justice system and averaged three prior incarcerations.

Once an offender was accepted, staff spent considerable time developing a community management plan which included such components as community service, restitution, meeting the victim, and participating in counseling programs. The court rejected 18 of the 120 plans presented to them. Offenders who had committed a crime against a person were less likely to have their plans accepted. Average length of probation for those whose plans were accepted was 28.5 months.

Very few victims had an interest in meeting with the offenders. Only 10.3% (25) of the 243 victims the program had information about actually met the offender. Over 40% were businesses, 30% were individuals, and 16% owners operating their own businesses.

Rates of restitution and community services were higher for the program participants than for probationers in general. Fifty-six percent of these offenders had restitution and 96% had community service compared to 25% and 14% respectively for the general probationer population. The average amount of restitution paid was also greater: $2,563 compared with $1,517.

As to the goal of being an alternative to incarceration, 91.4% had a Crown recommended custodial stay of six months or more. Approximately ninety percent received medium to high risk scores. And for 18 of the offenders the Court gave a custodial sentence along with the placement to Restorative Resolutions.

Analysis of recidivism was conducted using two measures and matched comparison groups. Significant reductions in recidivism were found in all but one analysis. The authors conclude that "a 13% to 22% reduction in recidivism can be expected."

KEYWORDS
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