



**The Juvenile Justice Commission's Stabilization  
and Reintegration Program:  
An Updated Recidivism Analysis**

Submitted by:

New Jersey Department of Law & Public Safety  
Juvenile Justice Commission  
Office of the Executive Director  
Research & Evaluation Unit

April 2001

*John J. Farmer, Jr.  
Attorney General and  
Chair, JJC Executive Board*

*Bruce D. Stout  
JJC Executive Director*

The Juvenile Justice Commission's Stabilization  
and Reintegration Program:

An Updated Recidivism Analysis

Michael Aloisi, Ph.D.  
Jennifer LeBaron, M.A.

Prepared with assistance from the staff of the  
JJC Research & Evaluation Unit.

New Jersey Department of Law & Public Safety  
Juvenile Justice Commission  
Office of the Executive Director  
Research & Evaluation Unit

April 2001

## Table of Contents

Executive Summary	i
Introduction	1
The Initial Research and 1998 Report	2
Updated Recidivism Analysis	3
The Study Sample	3
Offender Profiles and Comparability of the Samples	5
Measures of Recidivism	8
Recidivism Findings	10
Nature of Recidivism Offense	13
A Closer Look at the Comparison Group	15
Providing a Context for Recidivism	19
Risk Factors for Recidivism	19
Recidivism in Juvenile Boot Camp Programs	21
Recidivism Findings for Other Juvenile Correctional Populations	22
Conclusions	23
References	
<u>List of Tables</u>	
Table 1 Profile of SRP vs Comparison Group	6-A
Table 2 Recidivism of SRP vs Comparison Group	10-A
Table 3 Nature of Recidivism Offense (Adjudication/Conviction) for SRP vs Comparison Group	13-A
Table 4 Overall Recidivism for SRP, Residential Centers, & Institutions	16-A
Table 5 Recidivism of SRP vs Residential Group Centers at 6, 12, 18, & 24 Months	17-A
<u>List of Charts and Figures</u>	
Chart 1 Stabilization & Reintegration Program: Assessing Recidivism	8-A
Figure 1 Recidivism of SRP vs Comparison Group: Court Filing/Arrest	11-A
Figure 2 Recidivism of SRP vs Comparison Group: Adjudication/Conviction	11-A
Figure 3 Recidivism of SRP vs Comparison Group: Recommitment to JJC/ Commitment to DOC	11-A

## Executive Summary

The present report updates the recidivism component of the Commission's initial legislatively mandated report on the performance of New Jersey's first "juvenile boot camp" program. The Commission's Stabilization & Reintegration Program (SRP) provides to youth committed to the Commission a rigorous, discipline-oriented regimen of structured activities that include educational, treatment and skill building interventions, along with an aftercare component.

The recidivism and other outcome results in the initial report were positive, although they were identified as preliminary and tentative. The present research attempted to address shortcomings of the original study, and had the advantage afforded by the further passage of time. The updated recidivism results reported here continue to be favorable regarding SRP's role as an alternative to other Commission program settings (i.e., institutions and residential group centers). In addition, a review of recidivism findings in a number of other states suggested that New Jersey's recidivism rates are broadly comparable.

Despite a significantly longer period of time at risk, SRP youth performed somewhat better than comparison youth over the course of the full study period in terms of new court filings/arrests (72.4% vs. 76.9%), new adjudications/convictions (52.3% vs. 58.0%), and commitments (30.3% vs. 33.2%), although these differences were not statistically significant.

More notably, however, controlling for time at risk (i.e., comparing the recidivism of the groups within 6, 12, 18 and 24 months) revealed somewhat more pronounced differences between the groups on multiple measures of recidivism, and at various points in time. Several of these differences reached the level of statistical significance. For example, after having been released from custody for one year, SRP youth were less likely to be rearrested/returned to court (55.0% vs. 71.8%), adjudicated delinquent/convicted (41.5% vs. 53.2%), and recommitted to the State (25.2% vs. 30.1%); the first two differences are statistically significant, the third (recommitment) is not. At the two-year mark, the SRP youth continued to perform better than the comparison youth, although the differences failed to reach statistical significance.

<sup>\*\*</sup> Indicates that differences between groups were statistically significant at the  $p=.05$  level or beyond.

In comparison to the performance of “juvenile boot camp” programs in other jurisdictions, as reported in the limited number of available juvenile boot camp studies, the current recidivism findings for the Commission’s SRP are generally more positive. The report makes a comparison to a juvenile boot camp program that was like New Jersey’s in terms of population served. For the overall study period at this program in Cleveland, 72% of the boot camp group and 50% of the control group experienced a new adjudication in juvenile court. In comparison, for the full study period in New Jersey, 52% of the SRP group and 58% of the comparison group experienced a new adjudication/adult conviction. Notably, the Cleveland data did not include adult convictions – a substantial contributor to recidivism rate in the present study.

The report notes that recidivism rates for youth in the “deep end” of the system, both in New Jersey and nationally, underscore the difficult task faced by correctional agencies in their attempts to change offender attitudes and behavior. Placement in Juvenile Justice Commission facilities represents New Jersey’s “deep end.”

Most youth who enter the juvenile justice system are “turned around” by earlier efforts and never make it to the doors of the Commission. In fact, only 6% to 7% of those who enter the court on delinquency charges and are subsequently adjudicated delinquent get committed to the Commission. These youth have already failed in (and/or have been failed by) earlier juvenile justice and treatment system efforts. This difficult population is typically characterized by multiple personal and environmental problems and needs, “risk factors” that make future law-breaking likely. Despite the challenging task, the Commission is often able to help youth achieve rehabilitative gains while in its custody. However, as the present findings suggest, the gains frequently decay over time once youth have returned to the very neighborhood and family situations that may have contributed to their being placed with the Commission in the first place.

In an effort to reduce recidivism rates, the Commission has introduced new interventions and strategies by which it hopes to more comprehensively address the multitude of needs faced by this difficult population. These efforts take place both while youth are in custody, and during their period of aftercare supervision. A key component of the aftercare initiatives is to mobilize community efforts to get involved in the lives of youth. The hope is that community support will play an integral role in the effort to sustain positive change.

## INTRODUCTION

This report updates the recidivism component of the legislatively mandated 1998 report on the performance of New Jersey's first "juvenile boot camp" – the Juvenile Justice Commission's Stabilization and Reintegration Program (SRP). The initial report examined the implementation and operation of the program, assessing the program's performance during its first two years of operation through impact and outcome analyses, and offering recommendations for the SRP's more effective operation (New Jersey Juvenile Justice Commission, 1998). A more recent publication reported on the Commission's efforts to implement those recommendations (New Jersey Juvenile Justice Commission, 1999).

The Stabilization & Reintegration Program was established pursuant to N.J.S.A. 52:17B-181 et seq., to further the goals of the legislation. These goals were at both the individual and system levels. Individual level goals included reduced recidivism and personal growth (e.g., greater discipline; more positive, prosocial attitudes and orientations). System goals included reduction of costs by shortening stays of incarceration and alleviating overcrowding in juvenile facilities.

SRP serves as an alternative placement for youth committed to the Commission – an alternative to placement in an institution (typically the New Jersey Training School for Boys) or in one of the Commission's residential group centers. Initial placement decisions are made through the Commission's classification process shortly after a youth enters the Training School.

Consistent with its mandate, the Commission's SRP provides a rigorous, discipline-oriented regimen of structured activities that include an array of educational, treatment and skill building interventions, along with an aftercare component. The residential component for the program's cadets consists of a one month orientation and five month core program (both currently at the Wharton State Forest), although the stay may be longer for cadets who require an extended experience. The program opened its doors within the Wharton State Forest in the town of Tabernacle, Burlington County in February 1996.<sup>1</sup>

New Jersey shares many of its goals with other boot camps across the country.

---

<sup>1</sup> Refer to the initial report cited above for a thorough description of program components

Despite the initial broad appeal of boot camp programs, research on achieving various goals has been mixed. Significantly, there has been little evidence (among either juvenile or adult boot camp programs) of effectiveness in reducing recidivism. However, research has indicated that significant cost savings can be realized under certain conditions. There has also been some evidence of at least short-term gains with regard to prosocial attitudes and other indicators of personal growth consistent with the rehabilitative intent of many boot camp programs. Later in this report, some context for the updated current recidivism findings will be provided. This will include a discussion of recidivism findings from the small number of available juvenile boot camp program studies, as well as reported recidivism rates from other jurisdictions' juvenile correctional agencies.

## THE INITIAL RESEARCH AND 1998 REPORT

For the initial study of the Stabilization and Reintegration Program, staff of the Commission's Research & Evaluation Unit developed and implemented a research design to rigorously examine the program's operation and performance in light of legislative goals. The research utilized various data collection strategies: standardized tests (to measure youth change over time), surveys, interviews and focus groups, interviews and informal discussions with staff, site observation and document review. Outside experts also observed the program early on, and made recommendations for change.

The initial research findings suggested a program in the process of change: progress had clearly been made since the program's early months. An evaluation of program outcomes was encouraging. Results suggested that the program was having the desired impact not only on overcrowding and costs but also on recidivism (defined as any new delinquency filing in family court or adult arrest) and measures of personal growth, as well.

For example, the recidivism of SRP graduates was compared with the recidivism of a *sample* of comparison youth released from other JJC institutions and programs. Recidivism was measured between release and November 1997. The recidivism rate for the SRP youth was 41%; their "time at risk" – the average time between release and

the cut-off date – was 303 days. The recidivism rate for the comparison group was 53%; with 222 days “time at risk.” The difference in recidivism between the two groups was statistically significant. The analysis, however, was not able to control for potentially confounding differences between the two groups. One significant difference was that the SRP group received the Commission’s aftercare supervision while most of the control group youth received supervision by the Department of Corrections’ Bureau of Parole. The report surmised that this fact *could have* partially accounted for the better performance of the SRP group in terms of lower rates of recidivism.

Due to the limited amount of time upon which the original outcome findings were based and due to other limitations on available information, the outcome findings were identified as, largely, preliminary and tentative. The passage of time since the initial report provides a broader perspective from which to gauge program success. As a result, the current report is able to provide a clearer picture of the effectiveness of SRP relative to alternate handling of committed youth in New Jersey’s Training School and community residential programs.

The focus of the current update is on the “bottom line” of any correctional program, i.e., recidivism. The significant question, then, is: Does a program reduce the likelihood that offenders will continue to offend and/or that they will once again be incarcerated? In addition to taking advantage of a longer average follow up period, the present study was able to control for certain factors that may have influenced the original recidivism findings, including variation in time at risk for recidivism among youth in the study, and the differential aftercare experience provided the two study groups.

## UPDATED RECIDIVISM ANALYSIS

### *THE STUDY SAMPLE*

As with the earlier analysis of outcomes, the study sample included only male offenders who had been committed to the Juvenile Justice Commission. The sample was split into two groups for analysis. The two groups included: 1) committed youth who graduated from the Wharton Tract residential phase of the Stabilization & Reintegration



Program – the experimental group; and 2) a sample of committed youth released from other Juvenile Justice Commission facilities (institutions or community residential programs) to supervision by the Commission’s Aftercare/Parole Services – the comparison group. Since juveniles were not randomly assigned to one of the two groups (placement in SRP is determined through the Commission’s classification process), it was necessary to assess the comparability of the two groups in order to determine whether meaningful differences existed between the groups. Such differences, if present, could partially or fully account for any differences found in outcomes.

### SRP Graduates

The SRP group was comprised of all youth who graduated/successfully completed the Wharton Tract portion of the Stabilization & Reintegration Program between February 1997 and early August 1999, a total of 323 youth. This included a total of 17 platoons (platoons 7 through 23). The first six platoons and the most recent graduating platoons were not included in the present analysis.

The initial study found extensive differences and growth in the program over time, particularly in comparison with cadets from the earliest platoons, who experienced SRP as the program was “gearing up.” Excluding the first six platoons provides some opportunity to gauge the performance of the program at a more recent stage rather than at its earliest stage of program development. In addition, excluding the most recent platoons ensured that all youth included in the study sample had a minimum of six months between release and a follow up date of January 31, 2000 (see below).

As the study was an attempt to measure the impact of SRP, the SRP group did not include youth who entered but did not complete the program at Wharton Tract (i.e., included only those who experienced the full residential component of SRP). Completion rates have been fairly constant over time. To date (through August 2000), 75.4% of those entering Wharton Tract graduated/successfully completed the residential component of SRP.

### Comparison Group

As noted earlier, a shortcoming of the initial SRP evaluation was that JJC Aftercare/Parole Services provided post-release supervision to the SRP group, while the Department of Corrections' Bureau of Parole supervised the comparison group. As a result, differences in recidivism between the two groups could have been influenced by differential supervision in the community following release.

In order to avoid the potentially confounding effect of differential aftercare/parole supervision, a new comparison group comprised of youth supervised by JJC Aftercare/Parole Services was selected. The new sample was drawn randomly from an automated file listing all male juveniles released to JJC Aftercare/Parole Services supervision from JJC facilities other than Wharton Tract. The list included youth released from the Commission's institutional settings and from its array of residential group centers between January 1997 and early August 1999 – a timeframe comparable to the release period for the SRP group. From this list of 1,425 youth, 375 youth were randomly selected for the comparison group. In order to further ensure the comparability of the SRP and comparison groups, individuals who had been adjudicated on sex or arson offenses, or whose commitment offenses included a 1<sup>st</sup> degree offense, were dropped from the comparison group, as these youth are precluded from participating in SRP. Also excluded were any youth with prior stays at Wharton Tract (both graduates and those who did not successfully complete the Wharton Tract experience). This resulted in a final comparison group of 286 youth (20% of all parolees, or 76% of the initial random sample).

### *OFFENDER PROFILES AND COMPARABILITY OF THE SAMPLES*

As noted above, there was no opportunity for random assignment into the two study groups. As such, the comparability of the two groups on factors that might relate (directly or indirectly) to subsequent recidivism was examined. These factors included the background variables of age at first release, race/ethnicity, and county of residence, along with the "legal" factors of most severe committing offense (both type and degree), and total number of adjudications (i.e., prior adjudications plus adjudications at commitment). The information needed for the comparability analysis was obtained through a review of the offense history reported for each juvenile in the Family Automated Case Tracking System (FACTS), and

supplemented by information from the Commission's Juvenile Information Management System (JIMS). Table 1 provides a profile comparing these characteristics for SRP vs. comparison group youth. The profile illustrates both differences and similarities between the two study groups.

#### Age at Release

The average age of youth at release from custody in the two study groups was virtually the same. Mean age for SRP youth was 17.6, and for comparison youth, 17.5. This slight difference was not statistically significant.

#### Race/Ethnicity

Youth in each of the samples were examined in terms of their race/ethnicity. The most common race/ethnicity for each of the groups was African American youth. African Americans comprised a total of 57.9% of the SRP group but a somewhat higher percentage (66.1%) of the comparison group. In addition, SRP youth were comprised of slightly higher proportions of Hispanic (26.3% vs. 22.4%) and white (14.9% vs. 11.2%) youth. None of these differences, however, were statistically significant.

#### County of Residence

Unlike the other background factors, there were statistically significant differences between the two groups with regard to county of residence. The meaningfulness of the differences, however, is not clear.

Passaic County, for example, accounted for 23.2% of the total study sample but a much higher proportion of SRP youth (28.8%) than comparison group youth (16.8%). A similar pattern was found in Middlesex (8.7% SRP vs. 4.2% comparison), and Mercer (8.4% SRP vs. 3.8% comparison). The reverse was true in Hudson (6.5% SRP vs. 16.4% comparison), and Essex (3.4% SRP vs. 12.2% comparison).

#### Nature of Committing Offense

The two groups were similar with regard to the nature of the offense for which the youth were committed to the JJC; this was so for the examination of offense type and for degree of offense. Despite some differences noted below, no statistically significant differences were found between the two groups on either measure.

**Table 1**  
**PROFILE OF SRP vs COMPARISON GROUP**

		<b>Comparison Group</b>
<b>Average Age at Release</b> (p=.461)	17.5	17.6
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b> (p=.176)		
African American	57.9%	66.1%
Latino/Hispanic	26.3%	22.4%
White	14.9%	11.2%
Asian	0.9%	0.3%
<b>County</b> (p=.000)**		
Atlantic	3.4%	5.2%
Bergen	1.9%	1.0%
Burlington	0.6%	2.4%
Camden	14.9%	17.8%
Cape May	0.9%	0.0%
Cumberland	2.8%	1.4%
Essex	3.4%	12.2%
Gloucester	0.6%	2.1%
Hudson	6.5%	16.4%
Hunterdon	0.6%	0.3%
Mercer	8.4%	3.8%
Middlesex	8.7%	4.2%
Monmouth	7.4%	5.2%
Morris	0.0%	0.3%
Ocean	2.8%	2.1%
Passaic	28.8%	16.8%
Salem	0.9%	1.4%
Somerset	1.2%	2.4%
Sussex	0.6%	0.0%
Union	5.3%	4.5%
Warren	0.3%	0.0%

**Table 1 (continued)**  
**PROFILE OF SRP vs COMPARISON GROUP**

		<b>Comparison Group</b>
<b>Commitment Offense: Type</b> (p=.157)		
Persons	18.0%	16.8%
Weapons	3.7%	2.8%
Property	18.3%	19.2%
Drug	30.7%	31.8%
Public Order	2.2%	6.3%
VOP (Technical)	27.2%	23.1%
<b>Commitment Offense: Degree</b> (p=.675)		
1 <sup>st</sup> Degree	0.0%	0.0%
2 <sup>nd</sup> Degree	20.7%	19.2%
3 <sup>rd</sup> Degree	37.5%	40.2%
4 <sup>th</sup> Degree	4.3%	5.2%
DP/PDP	10.2%	12.2%
VOP	27.2%	23.1%
Average Degree (p=.623) (higher numbers indicate more serious offenses)	3.1	3.2
<b>Average Number of Total Adjudications</b> (p=.965)	6.9	6.9

\* The figures in parentheses represent statistical probability levels. These figures basically identify the statistical probability that any observed differences between groups on the measure of interest occurred by chance alone. As the probability level approaches zero, the likelihood that the groups are in fact different, increases. Probability levels of .05 and beyond represent statistically significant differences between groups, and have been flagged with a double asterisk (\*\*). Note that cross-tabulations and the chi-square statistic were utilized in the analyses comparing percentages/proportions, and analysis of variance (ANOVA) and the F statistic were utilized in the analyses comparing means.

Offenses were grouped by offense type [i.e., persons; weapons; property; drug; public order and violation of probation (VOP)]. For both study groups, drug offenses were the most common offense type (typically involving sale of drugs); drug offenses comprised 30.7% of the total for SRP youth and 31.8% for comparison youth. The second most common offense type, again for both groups, was a violation of probation (with no more serious charge), comprising 27.2% of the total for SRP and 23.1% for comparison youth. In addition, SRP youth were slightly more likely to be committed for a persons offense (18.0% vs. 16.8%) or a weapons offense (3.7% vs. 2.8%). Comparison youth were slightly more likely to be committed for property (19.2% vs. 18.3%) and more likely to be committed for public order (6.3% vs. 2.2%) offenses.

Offenses were also grouped by offense degree. Remember that youth committed on first degree offenses were legislatively excluded from SRP (and therefore excluded from the entire study sample). The groupings (from high to low) were: 2<sup>nd</sup> degree, 3<sup>rd</sup> degree, 4<sup>th</sup> degree, disorderly persons/petty disorderly persons, and violation of probation. The most common offense degree for each group was 3<sup>rd</sup>, accounting for 37.5% among SRP youth and 40.2% among comparison youth. VOPs comprised the next largest category for both SRP youth (27.2%) and comparison youth (23.1%). In addition, SRP youth were slightly more likely to be committed for the more serious (2<sup>nd</sup> degree) offenses (20.7% vs. 19.2%), while the comparison youth were slightly more likely to be committed on 4<sup>th</sup> degree (5.2% vs. 4.3%) and DP/PDP (12.2% vs. 10.2%) offenses.

In a further attempt to examine comparability, numerical scores were given to each of the degree categories, ranging from a score of 6 for 1<sup>st</sup> degree offenses to a low of 1 for VOPs. The mean score for the groups was almost identical: SRP youth, 3.2; and comparison youth, 3.1.

#### Total Number of Adjudications

Extent of offense history is generally recognized as a useful predictor of future offense behavior. For this analysis, total number of adjudications was used as the relevant measure, combining the total number of prior adjudications with adjudications tied to the commitment. Note that each discrete court filing for which there is an adjudication of delinquency (whether the filing involved one charge or multiple charges tied to the same incident) is counted as one adjudication.

Significantly, the two study groups had an identical number of total adjudications. On average, each group had a total of 6.9 separate adjudications. Note, however, that in a small number of counties that became operational in the Family Automated Case Tracking System (FACTS) in recent years, full records of prior involvement were unavailable. As a result, the average number of adjudications for the entire sample, and for youth from these counties particularly, may be underestimated. An analysis of youth from the seven counties that became operational in FACTS most recently (i.e., during 1994 and 1995) indicates that a slightly larger proportion of SRP youth (46%) than comparison youth (38%) are from these counties. Consequently, the potential exists for SRP youth to in fact have a somewhat higher average number of total adjudications than comparison youth upon commitment.

### *MEASURES OF RECIDIVISM*

While the performance and effectiveness of a correctional program can be measured in numerous ways, the “bottom line” for the public, as for most researchers, is whether an individual continues to break the law or reenters the system – does the youth recidivate. Unlike the earlier report, recidivism is the sole focus of the present report. Even so, there are numerous ways in which recidivism can be defined and examined. In an effort to more comprehensively assess potential differences in performance between the two study groups, several distinct strategies were utilized in the current study. Chart 1 summarizes these strategies.

The three primary measures of recidivism considered in the study are listed in the first column of Chart 1. These measures address three distinct questions:

- 1) Do youth have a subsequent court filing or adult arrest?
- 2) Are youth subsequently adjudicated delinquent or convicted of a new offense?
- 3) Are youth recommitted to the Juvenile Justice Commission or committed to the Department of Corrections for a new offense?

**Chart 1**  
**STABILIZATION & REINTEGRATION PROGRAM:**  
**ASSESSING RECIDIVISM**

	Prevalence					Time to Failure	Nature of 1 <sup>st</sup> Offense		Comparison with Nature of Committing Offense	
	Overall	6 Months	12 Months	18 Months	24 Months		Type	Degree	Change in Severity Level	Change in Degree
New Court Filing/ Arrest	X	X	X	X	X	X				
<i>New Adjudication/ Conviction</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Recommitment to JJC/ Commitment to DOC	X	X	X	X	X	X				



Note that since the average age at release for youth in the study was 17.6, many youth turned 18 during the extended follow up period. As such, and as suggested by the three questions noted above, both juvenile and adult records were reviewed for youth in the study sample in order to assess recidivism. FACTS and JIMS served as the primary sources of data for subsequent justice system involvement as a juvenile, and the State Police Criminal Case History (CCH) database served as the primary source of data for subsequent system involvement as an adult.

As Chart 1 indicates, the three measures of prevalence (i.e., the proportion of youth in each study group characterized by each of the three factors – also referred to as ‘rates’ in this study) were examined for several periods of time. All youth were examined for the entire period between their release from custody through the “cutoff” date of January 31, 2000, to provide overall recidivism rates for these three measures.

In order to more accurately compare the recidivism of SRP and comparison youth, the study also standardized known differences in time at risk between groups by examining results after four set periods of time: prevalence within 6 months, 12 months, 18 months and 24 months. For each period, youth were included in the analysis only if they had been released for at least that period of time, and were then identified as recidivists if a new offense occurred within that period of time (i.e., the 12 month recidivism analysis included only those youth who had been released for at least 12 months, and identified as recidivists those with new offenses within 12 months of release). Additionally, time to failure was calculated for each of the three measures to identify whether youth from the two study groups differed regarding the time it took to “fail” or recidivate. For the three measures of recidivism, time to failure was calculated as the number of days between the date of release and a) the date of the first new arrest, b) the date of the first new arrest that led to a new adjudication/conviction, and c) the date of the first new arrest that led to recommitment.

Finally, additional analysis focused on the nature of the new charges at adjudication/conviction. This analysis attempted to answer the following questions:

- 1) What is the nature and seriousness of the offense leading to the first new adjudication of delinquency or conviction as an adult?
- 2) Do youth commit less serious offenses when they are subsequently adjudicated or convicted?

## *RECIDIVISM FINDINGS*

Below, findings are presented for each of the measures of recidivism, examining performance of SRP youth relative to comparison group youth. Initially, data is provided on the primary measures of recidivism for the total time period studied. Because time at risk varies both by youth (i.e., from six to 36 months) and by group (i.e., SRP average of 20.7 months vs. comparison average of 18.0 months), *and* because such differences can impact recidivism rates, the overall analysis is followed by an analysis of recidivism within 6, 12, 18 and, 24 months. Table 2 and Figures 1 through 3 summarize these recidivism findings.

### *Overall Recidivism*

The full recidivism analysis was completed for the total sample of 609 juveniles, including 323 in the SRP group and 286 in the comparison group. The SRP group included all youth graduating or successfully completing the Wharton Tract program from Platoons 7 through 23.

As noted, youth varied greatly with regard to the amount of time between their release from custody and the cutoff date, i.e., their “time at risk” of recidivism. All youth in the analysis had a minimum of 6 months time at risk, post release. Time at risk ranged from a low of 6 months to a high of 36 months. The average time at risk for the entire study sample was 19.4 months.

Of the entire sample of 609 youth, 74.5% had a new court filing/arrest and 55.0% had a new adjudication/conviction. Additionally, 31.7% were recommitted to the JJC or committed to the Department of Corrections. Average “time to failure,” the average number of days it took to recidivate, was also examined. Average time to failure for the three measures of recidivism was as follows: new court filing/arrest, 206 days; new adjudication/conviction, 221 days; and recommitment, 208 days.

For the SRP group, the average time at risk was 20.7 months. The prevalence of new court filing/arrest for this group was 72.4%. In addition, 52.3% of the SRP group was subsequently adjudicated/convicted, and 30.3% were recommitted to the JJC or committed as an adult to the Department of Corrections.

**Table 2**  
**RECIDIVISM OF SRP vs COMPARISON GROUP**

<i>SRP Group</i>	20.7	<b>Comparison Group</b>	18.0

	<b>SRP</b>	<b>Comparison</b>	<b>SRP</b>	<b>Comparison</b>	<b>SRP</b>	<b>Comparison</b>
<b>Overall Recidivism</b>	72.4% (p=.206)	76.9%	52.3% (p=.157)	58.0%	30.3% (p=.446)	33.2%
<b>Recidivism within 6 Months</b>	36.5% (p=.001)**	49.7%	25.7% (p=.027)**	33.9%	17.3% (p=.411)	19.9%
<b>Recidivism within 12 Months</b>	55.0% (p=.000)**	71.8%	41.5% (p=.011)**	53.2%	25.2% (p=.234)	30.1%
<b>Recidivism within 18 Months</b>	72.4% (p=.118)	79.9%	55.8% (p=.024)**	68.1%	32.6% (p=.357)	37.5%
<b>Recidivism within 24 Months</b>	80.3% (p=.306)	86.1%	68.0% (p=.215)	76.4%	36.9% (p=.074)	50.0%
<b>Time to Recidivism (in days)</b>	240.9 (p=.000)**	169.9	242.2 (p=.034)**	200.1	212.9 (p=.736)	203.7

\*\* Statistically significant at the .05 level or beyond.

For the comparison group, the average time at risk was 18.0 months, due typically to greater length of stay in custody. Even with a shorter average time at risk for the comparison group (statistically significant,  $p=.000$ ), the recidivism rates were somewhat greater than the rates for the SRP group. However, none of the differences were at a statistically significant level. For the comparison group, the rate for subsequent court filing/arrest was 76.9%; the rate for new adjudication/conviction was 58.0%, and for recommitment, 33.2%.

In addition to analyzing the relative prevalence of recidivism, the evaluation examined time to failure, i.e., the time it took to recidivate once released from custody. On all three measures of recidivism, SRP youth performed better, recidivating less quickly than comparison youth. For new court filing/arrest, time to failure was 241 days for SRP youth and 170 days for comparison youth (statistically significant,  $p=.000$ ). For new adjudication/conviction, time to failure was 242 days for SRP youth and 200 days for comparison youth (statistically significant,  $p=.034$ ). Finally, for recommitment, time to failure was again longer for the SRP group (213 days vs. 204 days), although this difference was not statistically significant.

#### *Recidivism within 6, 12, 18, and 24 Months of Release*

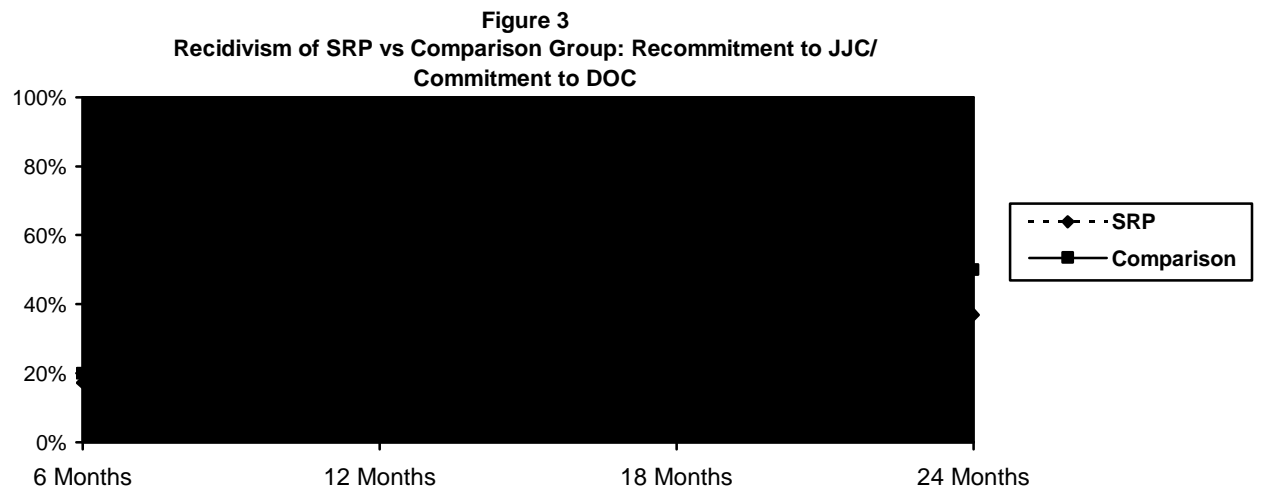
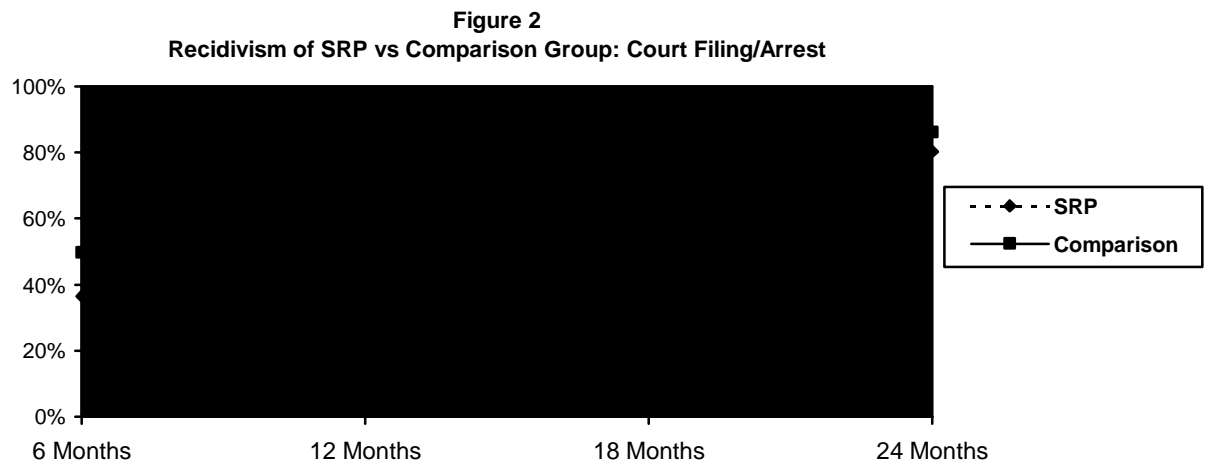
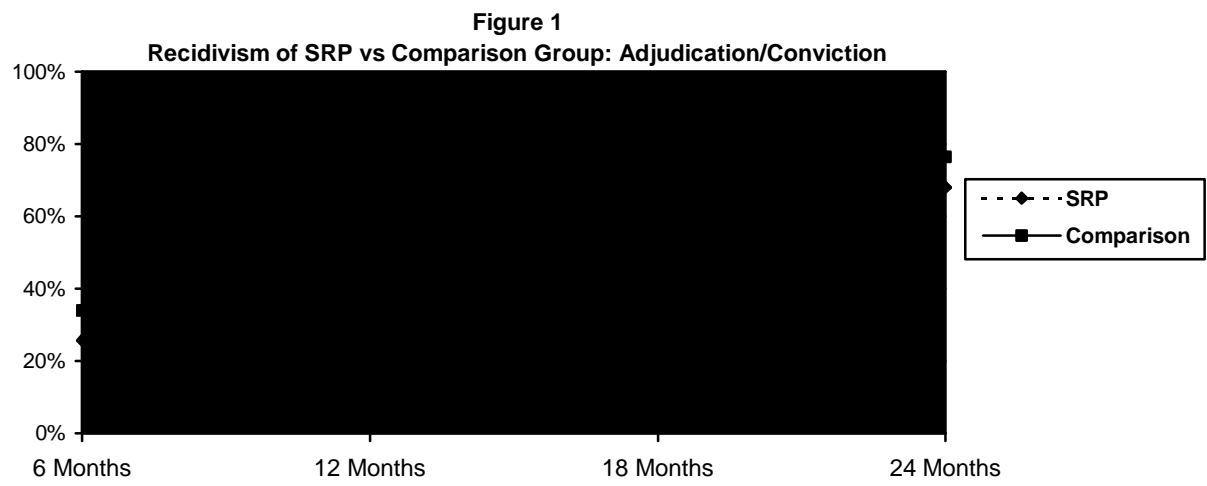
As noted earlier, time at risk for recidivism, i.e., time between release and the cutoff date of January 31, 2000, varied by youth and by group. The above analysis does not account for variation in time at risk, a factor known to influence recidivism.<sup>2</sup> In order to more accurately assess possible differences in recidivism between SRP and comparison youth, the researchers standardized time at risk, examining recidivism at four points in time. Upon standardizing time at risk, and in effect making the SRP and comparison groups more comparable, differences between the groups masked in the overall analysis became more pronounced for several measures of recidivism.

#### *Results Within Six Months*

As noted earlier, the six month analysis was completed on youth who had been released for at least six months (all youth), but examined their recidivism only for the first six months. SRP youth performed better, at a statistically significant level, than comparison youth in the examination of new court filing/arrest (36.5% vs. 49.7%;  $p=.001$ ). The same was

---

<sup>2</sup> In fact, in the present study, recidivists were characterized by significantly longer periods of time at risk than nonrecidivists for all three measures of recidivism ( $p=.000$ ).



true for new adjudication/conviction (25.7% vs. 33.9%;  $p=.027$ ). While the prevalence of recommitment among SRP youth was somewhat lower than that of comparison youth (17.3% vs. 19.9%) within the first six months, the difference did not reach statistical significance.

### *Results Within Twelve Months*

The analysis of recidivism within 12 months was completed on 474 youth, each of whom had been released for at least one year. The total included 258 SRP youth and 216 comparison youth.

Again, like the findings at six months, differences between the two groups were more pronounced at the 12 month point than in the overall recidivism analysis. SRP youth performed better, at a statistically significant level, than comparison youth in the examination of new court filing/arrest (55.0% vs. 71.8%;  $p=.000$ ). The same was true when it came to new adjudication/conviction (41.5% vs. 53.2%;  $p=.011$ ). Similar to the above, while a smaller proportion of SRP youth were recommitted (25.2% vs. 30.1%) the difference was not statistically significant.

### *Results Within 18 Months*

The analysis of recidivism within 18 months was completed on 325 youth, each of whom had been released for at least 18 months. The total included 181 SRP youth and 144 comparison youth.

Once again, differences between the two groups were more pronounced at the 18 month point than in the overall recidivism analysis. SRP youth appeared to perform better than comparison youth with regard to new court filing/arrest (72.4% vs. 79.9%), although the difference was not statistically significant. The difference, however, was statistically significant for new adjudication/conviction, with SRP youth performing better (55.8% vs. 68.1%;  $p=.024$ ). Finally, while a smaller proportion of SRP youth were recommitted (32.6% vs. 37.5%), the difference was not statistically significant.

### *Results Within 24 Months*

The analysis of recidivism within 24 months was completed on 194 youth, each of whom had been released for at least two years. This totals 122 SRP youth and 72

comparison youth, and is a large reduction from the original sample of 609 youth – a reduction that limited the ability to find statistically significant differences between the groups.

As the follow up period reached two years, the SRP group continued to perform better on all three measures. However, by this point the differences between groups do not reach statistical significance. Somewhat smaller proportions of SRP youth had a new court filing/arrest (80.3% vs. 86.1%), or a new adjudication/conviction (68.0% vs. 76.4%). In terms of recommitment, differences at the two year mark were larger than at any of the three other points post release. The total for the SRP group was 36.9%, compared to half (50.0%) of the comparison group. However, as noted above, the difference approached, but did not reach, statistical significance ( $p=.074$ ).

### *NATURE OF RECIDIVISM OFFENSE*

The study asked two basic questions regarding the nature and severity of the youth's first recidivism event.

- 1) What type and degree of charges were tied to a youth's first subsequent adjudication/conviction?
- 2) Do youth commit less serious offenses at their first subsequent adjudication or conviction?

In order to answer these questions, the study identified the type and degree of the first new adjudication/conviction, as complete recidivism information was available only for this measure. Table 3 summarizes the findings regarding the nature of the first new adjudication/conviction for SRP and comparison youth.

#### *Type of First New Adjudication/Conviction*

For the entire study sample of 609 youth, drug charges were the most common type of offense for which there was a new adjudication/conviction. Of the entire study sample, 43.6% had a drug offense as their first new adjudication/conviction. Drug offenses were followed by property offenses (25.1%). Least common among the entire sample were weapons charges (1.5%) and persons charges (14.0%).

**Table 3**  
**NATURE OF RECIDIVISM OFFENSE (ADJUDICATION/CONVICTION)**  
**FOR SRP vs COMPARISON GROUP**

<b>Recidivism Offense: Type</b> (p=.240)		
Persons	14.8%	13.3%
Weapons	1.2%	1.8%
Property	26.0%	24.1%
Drug	38.5%	48.8%
Public Order	19.5%	12.0%
<b>Recidivism Offense: Degree</b> (p=.260)		
1 <sup>st</sup> Degree	2.4%	1.2%
2 <sup>nd</sup> Degree	13.0%	12.7%
3 <sup>rd</sup> Degree	47.9%	48.8%
4 <sup>th</sup> Degree	11.2%	5.4%
DP/PDP	25.4%	31.9%
Average Degree (p=.410) (higher numbers indicate more serious offenses)	3.6	3.5
<b>Commitment Offense to Recidivism Offense: Change in Severity Level</b> (p=.322)		
Less Severe	38.8%	39.2%
Remained the Same	29.8%	36.9%
More Severe	31.4%	23.8%
<b>Commitment Offense to Recidivism Offense: Change in Degree</b> (p=.740)		
Less Serious	37.2%	40.0%
Remained the Same	34.7%	36.2%
More Serious	28.1%	23.8%



The groups differed somewhat in type of charge but not at a statistically significant level. For example, comparison youth (48.8%) were somewhat more likely than SRP youth (38.5%) to be readjudicated/convicted on a drug charge. On the other hand, SRP youth were somewhat more likely to be readjudicated/convicted on a public order offense (19.5%) than comparison youth (12.0%).

#### Degree of First New Adjudication/Conviction

For the entire study sample of 609 youth, nearly half (48.4%) had as their first new adjudication/conviction a third degree charge, while 28.7% had a DP/PDP charge. Only 1.8% of the entire sample had as their first new adjudication/conviction a 1<sup>st</sup> degree charge, and 12.8% had a 2<sup>nd</sup> degree charge.

Once again, differences by study group were not statistically significant. There was practically no difference between SRP youth (47.9%) and comparison youth (48.8%) with regard to subsequent 3<sup>rd</sup> degree adjudications/convictions. However, comparison youth were somewhat more likely to be subsequently adjudicated on a DP/PDP offense (31.9% vs. 25.4%), while SRP youth were somewhat more likely to be adjudicated on a 4<sup>th</sup> degree offense (11.2% vs. 5.4%) and, although not frequently, a 1<sup>st</sup> degree offense (2.4% vs. 1.2%).

The study also examined possible differences in degree of subsequent adjudication/conviction by devising a mean, or average, degree seriousness, as discussed earlier in this report. Mean seriousness of degree of the first new adjudication/conviction was practically the same: SRP group, 3.56; comparison group, 3.46, a difference that was not statistically significant.

#### Comparison between First New Adjudication/Conviction and Commitment Charge

The evaluation also considered, for those juveniles adjudicated/convicted on a new offense, whether the recidivism offense was more or less serious in nature than the original commitment offense. On average, both study groups were subsequently adjudicated or convicted on a less serious offense than the one for which they were committed (see Table 3). Differences between the groups were generally small (with the comparison group appearing to make somewhat better improvements), and were not statistically significant.

With reference to severity of charge, 39.0% of the entire study sample had a less serious charge at subsequent adjudication/conviction while 27.5% had a more serious charge. For the SRP group, 38.8% of the new adjudications/convictions were for less serious charges (vs. 39.2% for the comparison group); and 31.4% were for more serious charges (vs. 23.8% for the comparison group). The difference between the groups was not statistically significant.

With reference to degree of charge, 38.6% of the entire sample had a less serious charge subsequently adjudicated while 25.9% had a more serious charge. For SRP youth, 37.2% of the new adjudications/convictions were for less serious charges (vs. 40.0% for comparison youth); and 28.1% were for more serious charges (vs. 23.8% for comparison youth). This difference between groups was not statistically significant.

Finally, the study also examined whether any shift away from or toward offenses against the person (i.e., violent offenses) occurred. The overall shift for the entire study sample was a small move away from persons offenses. A smaller proportion of youth in the full study sample recidivated with a new adjudication/ conviction for a persons offense (14.0%) than the proportion initially committed on a persons offense (17.4%). This was true both for the SRP group (a decrease from 18.0% to 14.8%) and the comparison group (a decrease from 16.8% to 13.3%).

#### *A CLOSER LOOK AT THE COMPARISON GROUP*

As noted earlier, the Stabilization & Reintegration Program provides an alternative placement for juveniles committed to the Commission – an alternative to both institutional placements and stays in Commission residential group centers. As such, youth released from both JJC institutions and residential group centers were included in the comparison group. Additionally, since the SRP group only included youth who successfully completed the residential component of SRP, the comparison group only included youth released from custody via parole, since being granted parole (as opposed to “maxing-out” from commitment) is the release mechanism most comparable to SRP “graduation.”

While all youth in the study were granted parole, it is possible that some youth in the comparison group might be different than youth released from SRP in terms of their ability to successfully complete a structured program such as SRP. This difference, if real, could influence recidivism. In an attempt to control for this possible difference between the SRP and comparison group, an analysis examining subsets of the comparison group was completed. This analysis compared the recidivism of SRP youth to the recidivism of two distinct comparison groups: juveniles released from JJC institutions, and juveniles released from residential group centers. Youth released to aftercare/parole from residential group centers are likely to be most comparable to youth graduating SRP, as these youth, like SRP youth, have successfully completed a stay at a program considered an alternative to placement in a secure institution.

#### *SRP vs. Institutions vs. Residential Group Centers: Overall Recidivism*

The overall recidivism analysis (see Table 4) compared the 323 SRP youth, to 175 institutional youth and 111 residential youth. Beginning with time to failure, while the pattern differed somewhat by recidivism measure, the groups varied substantially with regard to the time it took to recidivate. In fact, the difference between the three groups was statistically significant for each of the measures. For subsequent court filing/arrest ( $p=.000$ ), SRP youth had the longest time to failure, 241 days, followed by residential youth, 195 days, and institutional youth, 156 days. For new adjudication/ conviction ( $p=.013$ ), SRP youth again had the longest time to failure, 242 days, followed closely by the residential youth, 237 days, and then the institutional youth, 178 days. For recommitment ( $p=.004$ ), residential youth had by far the longest time to failure, 291 days, followed by SRP youth, 213 days, and institutional youth, 158 days.

With regard to prevalence of recidivism, for subsequent court filing/arrests SRP youth and residential youth were nearly identical (72.4% vs. 72.1%), with a somewhat higher prevalence for institutional youth (80.0%), although the differences were not statistically significant. For new adjudications/convictions, SRP youth had the lowest prevalence (52.3%), followed by residential youth (55.9%) and institutional youth (59.4%); the difference between groups was not statistically significant. Finally, with regard to recommitment, prevalence was practically the same for both SRP (30.3%) youth and residential youth (29.7%), with a somewhat higher figure of 35.4% for the institutional group; again, the difference between groups was not statistically significant.

**Table 4**  
**OVERALL RECIDIVISM FOR**  
**SRP, RESIDENTIAL CENTERS, & INSTITUTIONS**

<b>Average Time at Risk in Months</b> (p=.000)**	20.7	19.8	16.9
<b>Court Filing/Arrest</b> (p=.146)	72.4%	72.1%	80.0%
<b>Average Time to Failure:</b> <b>Court Filing/Arrest in Days</b> (p=.000)**	240.9	194.8	155.7
<b>Adjudication/Conviction</b> (p=.308)	52.3%	55.9%	59.4%
<b>average Time to Failure:</b> <b>Adjudication/Conviction in Days</b> (p=.013)**	242.2	237.4	177.9
<b>Recommitment to JJC/ Commitment to DOC</b> (p=.450)	30.3%	29.7%	35.4%
<b>Average Time to Failure:</b> <b>Recommitment to JJC/ Commitment to DOC in Days</b> (p=.004)**	212.9	290.6	157.5

\*\* Statistically significant at the .05 level or beyond.

Note however, that in the overall recidivism analysis, time at risk once again varied both by individual, and by group. As Table 4 indicates, SRP youth had the longest average time at risk (20.7 months), followed by residential youth (19.8 months). Institutional youth had the shortest time at risk (16.9 months). The difference between groups was statistically significant ( $p=.000$ ).

#### *SRP Youth vs. Residential Youth: Recidivism within 6, 12, 18 and 24 Months*

Since the above analysis does not account for variation in time at risk, an analysis standardizing time at risk was again completed in order to more accurately assess possible differences in recidivism between groups. Since it appeared that SRP youth and residential youth had similar outcomes with regard to overall prevalence of recidivism during the full study period, the analysis at 6, 12, 18, and 24 months compared the SRP youth to the residential youth only (see Table 5). Note, however, that by including only residential youth in the comparison sample, the size of the comparison sample has been significantly reduced, and is substantially smaller than the SRP sample, especially at the 12 month mark and beyond. As noted earlier, such a reduction in sample size generally limits the ability to find statistically significant differences between groups.

Additionally, it should be noted that a comparability analysis of the SRP and residential groups indicated that the two groups were in fact different in terms of total number of adjudications, a factor generally recognized as predictive of future offending. SRP youth averaged 6.9 adjudications, a total significantly higher than the residential group's average of 5.9 ( $p=.016$ ). Given this difference, SRP youth might have been expected to be more likely to reoffend.

#### *Results Within Six Months*

The six month analysis was completed for 434 youth, each of whom had been released for at least six months, and examined their recidivism only for the first six months. This included 323 SRP youth and 111 residential youth. For recidivism within six months, prevalence of new court filings/arrests for SRP youth was somewhat lower than for residential youth (36.5% vs. 45.9%); the results approached statistical significance ( $p=.079$ ). Prevalence of new adjudications/convictions was also slightly lower for SRP youth (25.7% vs. 30.6%), though the difference between the two groups

**Table 5**  
**RECIDIVISM OF SRP vs RESIDENTIAL GROUP CENTERS**  
**AT 6, 12, 18, & 24 MONTHS**

	<b>SRP</b>	<b>Residential</b>	<b>SRP</b>	<b>Residential</b>	<b>SRP</b>	<b>Residential</b>
<b>Recidivism within 6 Months</b>	36.5% (p=.079)	45.9%	25.7% (p=.312)	30.6%	17.3% (p=.162)	11.7%
<b>Recidivism within 12 Months</b>	55.0% (p=.087)	65.5%	41.5% (p=.268)	48.3%	25.2% (p=.395)	20.7%
<b>Recidivism within 18 Months</b>	72.4% (p=.555)	76.2%	55.8% (p=.399)	61.9%	32.6% (p=.407)	27.0%
<b>Recidivism within 24 Months</b>	80.3% (p=.930)	81.0%	68.0% (p=.870)	66.7%	36.9% (p=.889)	38.1%

was not statistically significant. Finally, with regard to recommitment, prevalence was somewhat higher for the SRP group (17.3% vs. 11.7%) but the difference did not reach statistical significance.

#### Results Within 12 Months

The 12 month analysis was completed on 345 youth, each of whom had been released for at least 12 months. This included 258 SRP youth and 87 residential youth. For recidivism within 12 months of release, prevalence of new court filings/arrests was again somewhat lower for SRP youth (55.0%) than for residential youth (65.5%); the difference approached statistical significance ( $p=.087$ ). Prevalence of new adjudications/convictions was also somewhat lower for SRP youth (41.5% vs. 48.3%), though the difference was not statistically significant. For recommitment, prevalence was again somewhat higher for the SRP group (25.2% vs. 20.7%) but the difference was not statistically significant.

#### *Results Within 18 Months*

The analysis of recidivism within 18 months was completed for a total of 244 youth, each of whom had been released for at least 18 months. This included 181 SRP youth and 63 residential youth. For recidivism within 18 months of release, prevalence of new court filings/arrests continued to be lower for the SRP group (72.4%) than for the residential group (76.2%), though the difference was not statistically significant. For subsequent adjudications/convictions, prevalence was again lower for the SRP group (55.8%) than for the residential group (61.9%); again, the difference was not statistically significant. For recommitment, prevalence for SRP youth was again slightly higher (32.6% vs. 27.0%), though not at a statistically significant level.

#### *Results Within 24 Months*

Finally, the analysis of recidivism within 24 months was completed on a total of 164 juveniles, including 122 SRP youth and 42 residential youth. For recidivism within 24 months of release, prevalence for all three measures was virtually the same for the two groups; none of the differences between the SRP group and residential group reached statistical significance. For new court filings/arrests, prevalence was 80.3% for SRP youth and 81.0% for residential youth. For subsequent adjudications/convictions,

prevalence was 68.0% for the SRP group and 66.7% for the residential group. Finally, for recommitment, prevalence was 36.9% for SRP youth and 38.1% for residential youth.

## PROVIDING A CONTEXT FOR RECIDIVISM

### *RISK FACTORS FOR RECIDIVISM*

The juvenile and criminal justice literature reports that juveniles and adults placed in state correctional programs across the country (and even placed in alternatives to state incarceration programs) return to offending, and return to the correction system, at high rates (and often very quickly). In part this is not unexpected, particularly for youth. Young offenders who have made it to this “deep end” of the juvenile system are typically beset with numerous “risk factors” identified as predictive of continued involvement in delinquency and crime. While some risk factors are related to offending (e.g., number of prior arrests or adjudications; early onset of offending), most are related to a complex interplay of environmental and personal problems – deficits and “needs” that play a part in subsequent decisions to continue offense behavior. These latter factors are sometimes called “criminogenic needs,” and are often those areas targeted by correctional agencies for treatment intervention. They include such factors as substance abuse, poor family supervision and control, abusive family situations, poor academic performance and school behavior problems, impulsivity, antisocial attitudes, poor frustration tolerance, and negative peer relationships.

A recent analysis by the Commission provides a portrait of the “criminogenic needs” of committed youth in New Jersey. The research found that, indeed, large portions of the JJC’s committed youth have multiple personal and family problems that serve as risk factors for continued offending. The analysis examined the following specific problem areas: past/current DYFS involvement; prior expulsion from school; not attending school at point of arrest; known child study team classification (e.g., emotionally disturbed; neurologically or perceptually impaired); half or more of friends arrested; daily drug/alcohol use; parental arrest history; parental drug/alcohol abuse



history. The proportion of youth identified as experiencing problems in these areas was as follows (in order of prevalence):

?? Daily drug/alcohol use	69.0%
?? Half or more of friends arrested	65.0%
?? Parental arrest history	61.5%
?? Parental drug/alcohol history	58.0%
?? Child Study Team Classification	51.0%
?? Not attending school	44.5%
?? Past/current DYFS involvement	41.9%
?? Expelled from school	41.6%

Significantly, the findings support the notion of widespread multiple needs. More than two-thirds (68.2%) of the youth recently committed to the Commission experienced four or more of the above problems.

While this recent analysis of criminogenic needs examined the prevalence of both personal deficits and family problems among the JJC's committed youth, it did not include an examination of the risk factors presented by the communities to which these youth return upon release from custody. Practitioners and researchers alike have increasingly recognized the role played by community risk factors in the onset and continuation of delinquent and criminal behavior. Included among such risk factors are neighborhood instability, widespread disadvantage, a lack of employment, educational, and recreational resources, and the community-wide availability of illegal substances and weapons. While a statistical analysis of the communities to which JJC youth return upon release from custody has not been conducted, JJC staff, particularly parole officers, are certainly aware that many of these youth return to neighborhoods characterized by an array of such problematic risk factors.

The extent of the personal, family, and environmental risk factors faced by the Commission's committed youth underscores the challenge faced by the JJC, and by juvenile correctional agencies nationally. It is clearly a difficult task to successfully change the behavior of youth who 1) often have lengthy offense histories, and 2) frequently experience an array of personal problems. Moreover, it is perhaps an even greater challenge to *maintain* any positive changes that are achieved in youth when

they ultimately return to the same environment that influenced the negative behaviors in the first place.

### *RECIDIVISM IN JUVENILE BOOT CAMP PROGRAMS*

Available research studies that examine recidivism in juvenile boot camp programs (comparing boot camp youth results with a control/comparison group) are limited. Recidivism results are available from a study of three OJJDP demonstration programs (juvenile boot camp programs in Mobile, Alabama; Cleveland, Ohio; and Denver, Colorado), utilizing random selection (see Peters et al., 1997). None of the three programs showed statistically significant improvements in recidivism by the boot camp program when compared with a control group. In fact, for two of the programs, recidivism was higher for the boot camp youth than the controls. Of the three programs only one (Cleveland) served youth bound for incarceration, exclusively or nearly so; the other two programs included a number of youth who would have been placed under probation supervision. Specific findings are provided here for the Cleveland program only, as it is the most comparable program in terms of population served.

Recidivism was measured as a court-adjudicated offense, *and did not include adult convictions*. Time in the community – or time at risk – ranged from nine to 32 months. For the entire study sample at the Cleveland site, the overall rate for new adjudications over the entire follow up period was 61%. The recidivism rate was 72% for the bootcamp group, and 50% for the control group (Peters et al., 1997). For comparison, in the present study the overall combined adjudication/adult conviction rate was 55.0% for the entire sample. The rate was 52.3% for the SRP group, and 58.0% for the comparison group over the entire follow up period. Note that the search for recidivism as an adult contributed substantially to the overall recidivism figures in the present study – a search that was not undertaken in the Cleveland study.

Research results are also available for the LEAD juvenile boot camp program in California, run by the California Youth Authority. Youth were randomly assigned to the boot camp and a comparison group. Recidivism results are provided for a one year follow up. While several recidivism measures were provided, the measure most comparable to any measures used in the present study was new arrest for a law violation (either as a juvenile or adult). For this measure, as for most other measures of

recidivism in the LEAD study, there was no significant difference between the groups. For the entire study sample, the overall arrest rate for law violations within one year was 59.5%. The rate was similar for the two groups: LEAD, 60.7%; control group, 58.0% (California Department of the Youth Authority, 1997). For comparison, in the present study the overall figure for court filing/arrests within 12 months was 62.7%. The rate was 55.0% for the SRP group and 71.8% for the comparison group.

### *RECIDIVISM FINDINGS FOR OTHER JUVENILE CORRECTIONAL POPULATIONS*

In order to provide further context for the recidivism findings reported in the present study, recidivism analyses conducted by a number of other states' juvenile correctional agencies were reviewed. Representatives from several states were contacted for both recidivism results and for further clarification regarding those results. The exploratory review resulted in some useful comparisons, which have led to the conclusion that the recidivism results for the Commission are broadly comparable with those of other states.

Several "caveats" should be noted. One is that it is difficult to meaningfully compare results across jurisdictions due to frequently differing methodologies (e.g., what is included as an arrest or court filing). The differences (often unknown or hard to interpret) can lead to either more or less favorable conclusions in making comparisons across jurisdictions. A primary difference between the current findings and the other states' figures is that the SRP study did not set out to analyze overall recidivism for the Commission's institutions and residential programs. The comparison group was a sample of (non-SRP) youth released to aftercare/parole supervision. As with the SRP group, the comparison group does not include types of offenders that would be included in a jurisdiction's overall recidivism study. Those excluded from the present analysis were 1<sup>st</sup> degree offenders (predominantly person/violent offenders), females, and those committed on sex and arson offenses. Prior research suggests that these groups generally recidivate at lower rates than the remaining correctional populations. The result is likely to be an inflated view of recidivism for Commission youth as compared with the figures reported by other jurisdictions.

Because the findings reported by other states are for set periods of time (e.g., one, two or three years time at risk), the researchers compared the findings with the 12 and 24 month recidivism figures provided earlier for the SRP study. The review of recidivism

reports/data yielded information for the following states: Florida, Maryland, Minnesota, New York, Texas, Washington, and Wisconsin. Typically, useful information was available for only one time period, and for one or two measures of recidivism (i.e., new arrest/filing, new adjudication/conviction or recommitment).

Within 12 months, the Commission's study sample (SRP + comparison group) had recidivism rates as follows: new court filing/arrest, 62.7%; new adjudication/conviction, 46.8%; and recommitment, 27.4%. For the same follow up period, other states' recidivism results for new court filing/arrest ranged from a high of 62.1% (64.7% for males only) in Florida, and 57.2% in Maryland, to a low of 48.9% in Texas. For new adjudication/conviction, recidivism ranged from a high of 58.8% in Washington, to lows of 31.2% in Maryland and 42.3% (44.4% for males only) in Florida. Results for recommitment were limited to Texas, with a recommitment rate of 28.9% within one year of release.

Within 24 months, the Commission's study sample had recidivism rates as follows: new court filing/arrest, 82.5%; new adjudication/conviction, 71.1%; and recommitment, 41.8%. Relevant data were less frequently available for the two year follow up. For that period, other states' recidivism results for new court filing/arrest ranged from a high of 72.8% in Maryland to a low of 65% in Minnesota (of the two deep end facilities, the one with the lower rate; the other was 71%). Results for new adjudication/conviction ranged from a high of 67.9% in Washington to a low of 48% in Minnesota (of the two deep end facilities, the one with the lower rate; the other was 62%). Results for recommitment were limited to Wisconsin, with a recommitment rate of 42.4% within two years of release.

## CONCLUSIONS

The research set out to update earlier recidivism results for the Commission's Stabilization & Reintegration Program. The results reported in the initial evaluation comparing SRP cadets to a comparison group were positive. However, they were considered preliminary and tentative, as the follow up period for assessing recidivism was relatively short, and because the study could not control for certain extraneous factors suspected of exerting an influence on recidivism, such as the type of parole supervision provided the two groups.

In the present study, however, the follow up period increased substantially. Average length of time at risk in the initial study was 10 months for SRP youth and 7.4 months for comparison youth. In the present study, average time at risk increased to 20.7 months for SRP youth and 18 months for comparison youth. By increasing time at risk, the present study was also able to control for variation in time at risk – a factor known to influence recidivism – comparing the recidivism of the two groups at 6, 12, 18, and 24 months.

Finally, a new comparison group was randomly selected for the present study. Like the SRP group, and unlike the comparison group in the earlier study, the new comparison group was supervised by the Commission's Aftercare/Parole Services. As such, the present study avoided the potentially confounding effect of differential parole supervision present in the earlier evaluation.

The research findings reported here continue to be favorable toward SRP as an alternative to placement in other Commission settings (i.e., training school and residential group centers). For almost all of the analyses, the SRP group performed better than the comparison group in terms of prevalence of recidivism, and time to recidivism. In several analyses these differences reached statistical significance. Specifically, analyses at 6, 12, and 18 months demonstrated statistically significant differences in favor of the SRP group on one or more measures of recidivism.

While at 24 months SRP youth continued to perform better than comparison youth on all three measures of recidivism, the differences failed to reach statistical significance. This might be due, in part, to the significant reduction in sample size that occurred by 24 months. However, it is equally likely that the positive impact that SRP has on youth completing the program begins to fade with time, especially in light of the earlier discussion regarding community risk factors for recidivism. It is possible that SRP leads to positive change in youth in terms of *personal* risk factors for recidivism (e.g., substance abuse, antisocial attitudes, academic deficits). However, SRP cannot change the environment to which youth return upon release from custody. As such, it may be that the positive change imparted by the SRP experience ultimately, with time, succumbs to the negative pressures of the environment to which these youth return.

Despite the generally favorable findings, caution must still be exercised. The fact that there was no random assignment to the "experimental" and comparison group leaves open

the possibility that differential characteristics of the two groups could partially or fully account for the differences in recidivism. Since the comparability analysis was not able to compare the two groups on all possible factors that might influence recidivism, we cannot be certain that the two groups were not different in some important way. However, of those factors examined, only one exhibited statistically significant differences – county of residence. It is possible that subsequent offense behavior and justice system response could be tied to the county in which youth reside. It is not clear, however, what the causal link might be.

Finally, the rates of recidivism found in New Jersey (as elsewhere) point to the need to further strengthen programming within all Commission facilities, including SRP, institutions, and residential programs. Moreover, they underscore the need to strengthen the Commission's aftercare/parole component, which is responsible for helping young offenders make a successful transition back home. Strengthening aftercare resources, and linking youth to effective services while on aftercare, seems critical if we are to maintain any positive changes achieved with youth during their stay in JJC facilities. Given the multitude of problems experienced by young offenders, comprehensive rehabilitative efforts both while in custody, and while on aftercare, are clearly needed if youth are to be empowered with the skills and strengths required for them to withstand the pressures faced upon return to the community.

This needed program enhancement is high on the JJC agenda, in part as an implementation response to strategies contained in the Commission's Juvenile Justice Master Plan. Efforts have begun to identify the best courses of action to achieve optimum impact on youth under the care and supervision of the Commission. As noted earlier, the task is experienced by all correctional and juvenile justice agencies as a difficult one. The recent juvenile justice literature abounds with discussions of risk factors and related "criminogenic needs," and calls for correctional and other agencies to do a better job at *identifying and adequately addressing* those factors and needs. There is increasing evidence provided in the research literature, in recent years, that certain practices and treatment approaches work better than others in changing the behavior and attitudes/orientations of young people. None of these approaches is a panacea, with generally small gains attributable to these approaches that are deemed to "work" compared with traditional approaches and practices. Still, implementing better programs should translate into lower recidivism – a gain for both youths' future welfare and for public safety.

## References

- California Department of the Youth Authority (1997). *LEAD: A Bootcamp and Intensive Parole Program-The Final Impact Evaluation*. State of California, Department of the Youth Authority.
- New Jersey Juvenile Justice Commission (1998). *A Report to the Governor and Legislature on the Operation and Performance of the Juvenile Justice Commission's Stabilization & Reintegration Program*. New Jersey Department of Law & Public Safety, Juvenile Justice Commission.
- New Jersey Juvenile Justice Commission (1999). *Implementation Update on the Recommendations of a Report to the Governor and Legislature on the Juvenile Justice Commission's Stabilization and Reintegration Program*. New Jersey Department of Public Safety, Juvenile Justice Commission.
- Peters, M., D. Thomas, C. Zamberlan & Caliber Associates (1997). *Boot Camps for Juvenile Offenders: Program Summary*. Washington DC: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Office of Justice Programs, US Department of Justice.