



**U.S. Department of Education
Grant Performance Report (ED 524B)
Executive Summary**

OMB No. 1890-0004
OMB Approved

PR/ Number # (11 characters) **Q255A030105**

(See Instructions)

Utilizing a strength-based supportive supervision approach, Vermont's Workforce Development Program, funded by Life Skills for State and Local Prisoners, sought to establish a single "corrections culture" that would explicitly identify, instruct, and positively reinforce the cognitive characteristics, known as Habits of Mind, most closely associated with success. The hypothesis was that recidivism rates for moderate to high risk offenders could be reduced by as much as twenty-five percent. To accomplish this, specialized training in strength-based supportive supervision principles and practices was provided to education faculty, industries foremen, correctional officers, and caseworkers in order to establish a single program culture with a common mission and shared principles, language, and practices across living units, work sites, and the school environment. During the period of the grant, two hundred and nineteen individuals across the three professional groups received, on average, thirty-six hours of training. As a result, the Workforce Development demonstration project can best be understood as a correctional strategy, as opposed to a traditional correctional program. The strategy called for utilizing a strength-based approach to create a system of correctional supervision that would immerse correctional staff, education faculty, industries foremen, and program participants in an environment that supports individual learning and development in everyday life – at home, at work, and in school. We've known for some time that the use of positive reinforcement is far more effective than negative reinforcement in bringing about actual changes in behavior. The challenge has been to identify the specific behaviors to be reinforced and the practices to be employed for doing so.

Three professional groups with three distinct missions, as well as sets of professional principles and practices were represented in the program. The education professionals were Community High School of Vermont (CHSVT) faculty. The school is a fully accredited independent High School administratively housed in the Vermont Department of Corrections. The mission of CHSVT is "to provide an accredited, coordinated, and personalized education that assists our students in their academic, social and vocational success," and so, not surprisingly, there was considerable congruence with the mission of the Workforce Development Program. This was not the case, however, with the two other professional groups representing work and home. Vermont Offender Work Programs (VOWP), as an independent, fully self-supporting manufacturing business, had traditionally defined their mission in a manner that emphasized profitability and accordingly employed only long term well-behaved offenders with the best work histories. To become a full partner in the workforce development strategy, VOWP had to shift its focus to the offender or worker as the primary product and employ short-term "problem offenders" with little or no work histories. There were initial difficulties in making this transition as the VOWP staff continued to be concerned about the "bottom line" and its implications for their own job security. Fortunately, the VOWP Director contributed to the program's design from its conception, and accordingly was a strong supporter. This was made most evident through his support of a successful formal upward reclassification of all of his direct service staff. As a result, he was able to provide the necessary consistent leadership to help resolve staff ambivalence and when the VOWP staff began to experience the intrinsic rewards of seeing people change and "actually doing corrections," the new mission of VOWP was broadly embraced. Transforming the traditional corrections institutional culture in the living units to one in which authority is expressed to establish positive behavioral expectations with the frequent use of positive reinforcement represented the primary challenge for this project. Through the use of treatment team meetings and end of shift reports, uniform and casework staff were also able to experience the intrinsic rewards of improved communication and participant performance. However, a sense of tension between the mission of the program and the underlying "safety and security" elements of the corrections mission remained throughout the period of the grant, and this was compounded by a lack of stability in key corrections leadership positions.

Maintaining consistent research conditions over time was difficult due to leadership changes within the three institutions and the Department of Corrections. For example, the chief institutional manager changed at least twice at each of the institutions during the three-year grant period, and the leadership of the Department of Corrections changed over the grant period with the appointment of a new Commissioner and an Executive Director of Programs. Instability of the organizational structure, especially at the leadership level, coupled with the instability of the correctional population management due to system overcrowding were variables that were consistently adjusted for by grant/research managers. Accordingly, considerable time and energy was expended throughout the period of operation to assure that the integrity of the research design was maintained. Within this context, the operation of the Workforce Development Program proceeded relatively smoothly at all three sites throughout the period of the project. The one exception being the need to downsize the program at our Northern State facility from fifty-six beds to thirty-four beds due to problems with overcrowding and population management. This issue of overcrowding with resultant problems regarding population management represented an ongoing concern for the project at both male facilities. It was perceived by program staff and participants to be a destabilizing influence on the workforce development culture that the program worked to establish.

Due in large part to the changes in leadership, the project experienced mixed results with respect to its impact on organizational culture. Most staff from all three professional groups reported greater job satisfaction, better relationships with inmates and other staff, feeling more effective at their jobs, and a greater ability to communicate effectively with inmates. Additionally, management at the facility level was able to work on staffing patterns and use existing staff training systems to train more than double the number of staff originally targeted. Conversely, the program has not realized its goal of changing the more formal aspects of the organizational culture relating to staff performance evaluation and supervision. However, as the result of a new one hundred thousand dollar appropriation from the Vermont State Legislature, the Workforce Development Program may have an opportunity to strengthen and move toward that goal with additional staff training and exploration of supportive supervision practices, especially in the community.

Over the period of the grant, the Workforce Development Program involved 355 participants, of whom 191 were female and 164 were male. Of those overall numbers, a smaller N was used to evaluate the effects on re-incarceration rates due to the need for participants to meet criteria regarding time on release status. The program has demonstrated the following results with incarcerated offenders, as measured in contrast to a specific group of controls. Both the comparison group and the experimental group were “high risk” offenders as measured by the Level of Services Inventory with an average LSI-R score of 26. For females that completed the program and were “out” for a minimum of three months, there was a 40% reduction in re-incarceration following release. For males that completed the program and were “out” a minimum of six months, there was a 20% reduction in re-incarceration following release. Although the grant proposal had established an objective for a 25% reduction in re-incarceration rates, the results for the male population are encouraging, given the conditions this research was conducted under. Most encouraging is the results that were achieved with the female population. In this regard, program staff have speculated that we may have found a fortuitous blending of the principles of evidence-based practice with those of gender responsiveness. The program was specifically designed to be responsive to the principles of evidence-based practices. As the program unfolded, we began to realize that “ strength-based supportive supervision” coupled with the strong relational aspects of the program as expressed in the work experience, and more particularly the workplace application groups, was very reflective of some of the emerging principles and practices associated with gender responsive treatment of female offenders.

Importantly, 91% of the males in the experimental group obtained employment within thirty days of release versus 64% of the controls. In addition, of the 91% who obtained employment, 95% retained that employment versus 86% for controls. Of the females, 68% obtained employment versus 30% of the controls, and job retention for the female program participants held at 92% versus 75% for controls.

If the above reductions in recidivism are applied to the need and cost for bed days in correctional institutions, it would demonstrate a cost savings or avoidance of well over one and one half million dollars to the state per year at the current level of program operation. In addition, the taxes paid by those men and women who left the correctional institutions and obtained and retained employment must be added to the analysis of economic benefit. The greatest benefit of all is the statistically significant reduction in the return rate to prison by the experimental group. Clearly, that is a public safety benefit for all.

To the greatest extent possible and with the full support of the leadership of the Department of Corrections, the activities associated with the above outcomes -- education, job training, and supportive supervision -- will be maintained and improved upon as a result of this work.

Finally, as part of the project design, the Workforce Development Program developed a Program Manual, as well as complete curricula and syllabi for the Habits of Mind course for participants and Strength-Based Supervision training for staff. The manual and curricula are available on line at <http://wdp.doc.state.vt.us/programs.html>.



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Project Status Chart**

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SECTION A - Performance Objectives Information and Related Performance Measures Data (See Instructions. Use as many pages as necessary.)

1. Project Objective Check if this is a status update for the previous budget period.

Reduction in recidivism

1.a. Performance Measure	Measure Type	Quantitative Data					
Participants will have lower rates of re-incarceration than will comparison subjects.	PROGRAM	Target			Actual Performance Data		
		Raw Number	Ratio	%	Raw Number	Ratio	%
			/	25%	25%	27 / 46	59% (M)

1.b. Performance Measure	Measure Type	Quantitative Data					
		Target			Actual Performance Data		
		Raw Number	Ratio	%	Raw Number	Ratio	%
			/				/

Explanation of Progress (Include Qualitative Data and Data Collection Information)

Fifty-nine percent of the male participants were re-incarcerated as compared to 74% of the comparison sample, yielding a 20% reduction in re-incarceration rates.

Thirty-eight percent of the female participants were re-incarcerated as compared to 60% of the comparison sample, yielding a 37% reduction in re-incarceration rates.

Figures for both genders were based on a minimum of six months in the community.



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2. Project Objective Check if this is a status update for the previous budget period.

Employment within one month of release.

2.a. Performance Measure	Measure Type	Quantitative Data					
Employment within one month of release.	PROGRAM	Target			Actual Performance Data		
		Raw Number	Ratio	%	Raw Number	Ratio	%
			/	90%	90%		42 / 46 30 / 42

2.b. Performance Measure	Measure Type	Quantitative Data					
Employment retained for at least three months.	PROGRAM	Target			Actual Performance Data		
		Raw Number	Ratio	%	Raw Number	Ratio	%
			/	90%	90%		40 / 42 26 / 30

Explanation of Progress (Include Qualitative Data and Data Collection Information)

Ninety-one percent of the male participants were employed within one month of release as compared to 64% of the comparison sample. Ninety-five percent of male participants retained employment for at least three months as compared to 86% of the comparison sample.

Seventy-one percent of the female participants were employed within one month of release as compared to 30% of the comparison sample. Eighty-seven percent of female participants retained employment for at least three months as compared to 75% of the comparison sample.



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3. Project Objective Check if this is a status update for the previous budget period.

Acquisition of life skills.

3.a. Performance Measure	Measure Type	Quantitative Data					
Based on the results from the Habits of Mind questionnaire, participants will report an increase in the acquisition of activities, attitudes and beliefs consistent with the Habits of Mind.	PROGRAM	Target			Actual Performance Data		
		Raw Number	Ratio	%	Raw Number	Ratio	%
			999 / 999	90%	90%		/

3.b. Performance Measure	Measure Type	Quantitative Data					
.		Target			Actual Performance Data		
		Raw Number	Ratio	%	Raw Number	Ratio	%
			/				/

Explanation of Progress (Include Qualitative Data and Data Collection Information)

Ninety-three percent of the male participants demonstrated acquisition of the Habits of Mind. Average scores on the Habits of Mind questionnaire increased from 86 at pre-test to 142 at post-test.

Ninety-six percent of the female participants demonstrated acquisition of the Habits of Mind. Average scores on the Habits of Mind questionnaire increased from 110 at pre-test to 164 at post-test.



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SECTION B - Budget Information (See Instructions. Use as many pages as necessary.)

Overall, the project was able to proceed as planned. Spending for payroll and benefits, as well as contractual services, exceeded initial expectations, however, both Corrections and CHSVT were able to absorb a sufficient percentage of the training costs to allow for a reallocation of funds within the grant. Fundamentally, the costs associated with the two program administrator positions were more than anticipated due to applicants coming from higher than anticipated pay grades within state government, and, similarly, their benefits packages were at the upper end of the available continuum. Spending also exceeded the original plan for contractual services. However, the Department was able to commit to a state match to fill the gap. In this regard, it was felt that the increased expenditure was necessary to assure the quality of both the research and the products needed for program replication. The amount of state match for this purpose is explicitly referenced in item 8.c. of this report (\$61,478.92).

SECTION C - Additional Information (See Instructions. Use as many pages as necessary.)

1. Utilizing your evaluation results, draw conclusions about the success of the project and its impact. Describe any unanticipated outcomes or benefits from your project and any barriers that you may have encountered.

The success of the program in achieving its objectives can be attributed in large part to the power of positive reinforcement, creating high expectations of success for the participants within the programs that supervise them, and the fundamental clarity of the Habits of Mind.

This program strongly contrasts with more traditional “what works” quasi-clinical programs in corrections that utilize social learning theory and cognitive behavioral methodologies to reduce re-incarceration rates through a focus on what not to think and what not to do. The Habits of Mind provided new dispositional knowledge to assist participants in navigating and reflecting on the situations and relationships encountered throughout the day. The importance of having new “tools” to work with, as opposed to being told what “tools” to throw out, soon became abundantly clear.

As noted in the Executive Summary section of this report, the blending of evidence-based practices, as currently defined in the corrections research literature, with the strength-based supportive supervision practices and strong relational components of the program produced particularly significant outcomes with regard to the female population. Program staff have speculated that it constitutes a marriage of evidence-based and gender responsive practices. Whatever the case, the results were sufficiently significant to warrant further exploration and research.

The importance of a single organizational culture of shared purpose, values, and language across professional disciplines and between staff and participants cannot be overemphasized. In this regard, the use of “treatment team” meetings to enhance communication and facilitate cross-training for the three professional groups was of particular value, as was the emphasis on supportive supervision and positive reinforcement.

Although the program was designed to instill the participants with important life skills, it was interesting to note the impact of those skills in the work setting in particular. One of the industry sites had been experiencing quality and production problems prior to the programs implementation. With the startup of the program and, more specifically, the use of weekly Habits of Mind application groups, a complete turnaround in production and production quality began to occur. The emphasis on positive reinforcement coupled with the use of the Habits of Mind provided an outstanding methodology for total quality management and continuous improvement in the work setting and it became apparent that its application need not be limited to the corrections setting.

It was soon apparent that changes in the organizational culture were easier to achieve at the direct service level where the impact of the program could be felt and appreciated almost immediately. Effecting change higher up in the organization was more difficult to realize and this tended to retard the change at the direct service level.

A strong experiential component in which the Habits of Mind can be applied, reflected upon, and positively reinforced is critically important. In this regard, it is important to remain flexible in your thinking and look for real world opportunities to reinforce this experiential component. Although the enhanced communication techniques and the use of intentional interventions can be very useful for line staff, we were pleasantly surprised by the power of positive reinforcement of the Habits of Mind in the workplace application groups.

The inability of the Workforce Development Program to support activities in the community to respond to the aftercare needs of the program participants was a significant barrier to success. With the conclusion of the research, the Department is attempting to focus on this issue as it makes plans for program continuation and possible expansion.

As was noted in the Executive Summary, system overcrowding and the problems it creates with regard to population management and movement represents a serious barrier to maintaining program integrity. Thus, although our outcomes were very positive, it is difficult for system administrators to consider program expansion and this fact can be confusing and disheartening for line staff that have directly experienced the benefits of the new approach.

Finally, as was noted in the Executive Summary, frequent changes in leadership at the local and central office levels created an unanticipated barrier to the maintenance of the program culture, as each change in leadership brought with it a period of uncertainty for participants and staff alike.

3. If applicable, describe your plans for continuing the project (sustainability; capacity building) and/or disseminating the project results.

In acknowledgement of the program’s significance, the Department of Corrections requested and the State Legislature appropriated one hundred thousand dollars to sustain and, where feasible, expand upon the activities of the Workforce Development Program. Accordingly, the Community High School of Vermont and Vermont Offender Work Programs have maintained their commitment to sustain program activities and the Department’s Human Resources Division is currently working to expand the application of the curriculum developed for staff training in strength-based supervision practices to Probation and Parole staff.

Over the period of the grant, the grant manager and program administrators have conducted workshop presentations at three regional professional conferences and hosted a number of site visits in an effort to disseminate program practices and results. Additionally, program staff have been working with the National Institute of Corrections to support the possible publication of an article to be disseminated nationally that will describe the programs design, practices and outcomes. Finally, as referenced in the Executive Summary, the program has produced what we believe are high quality products in the form of staff and participant training curricula and a program manual which are readily available electronically for use by others who might be interested in replicating our work.