

EVALUATING EARLY INTERVENTION IN WASHINGTON STATE JUVENILE COURTS: A Six-Month Progress Report

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 1996 Washington State Legislature appropriated 2.35 million dollars for a juvenile court project. Twelve juvenile courts received funding for early intervention programs to target youth placed on probation for the first time and considered at high risk to reoffend. The goal of these programs is to prevent youth from becoming entrenched in the court system.

At the request of the Juvenile Rehabilitation Administration, the Washington State Institute for Public Policy is evaluating the program. The primary *outcome measure* is whether there is a *reduction in subsequent court adjudications* for those youth in the program. Additional measures include changes in parental control, school disciplinary problems, alcohol/drug use, and peer relationships. In order to test the program's effectiveness, a control group of youth who receive standard probation services have been identified, and their outcomes will be compared to program youth's. The program will be evaluated to determine the level of program success necessary for the state's investment to be cost-effective.

The courts have the following core elements in their early intervention programs:

- **Random assignment** of youth to the program or control group using a standardized risk assessment instrument. This instrument ranks youth by their likelihood to reoffend.
- **Reduced caseload** sizes to 25 youth per probation officer with the assignment of a case monitor for a team approach and increased supervision. Regular probation caseloads range from 30 to 100 youth per probation officer.
- Development of **individualized case plans** to hold youth accountable and provide services.

The program caseloads in this project began to fill in July 1996, and are currently at 90 percent of capacity.

This publication is a six-month progress report on program implementation in the twelve participating courts. It is too early to evaluate the effectiveness of the program in reducing criminal behavior. A one-year report will present early findings on program outcomes by July 1, 1997.

BACKGROUND

The 1996 Washington State Legislature appropriated 2.35 million dollars for a juvenile court early intervention project (EIP). The Juvenile Rehabilitation Administration (JRA) was directed to award contracts, on a competitive basis, to juvenile courts for early intervention programs. Sixteen courts applied and the following twelve received funding: Benton/Franklin, Chelan/Douglas, Clallam, Clark, Cowlitz, King, Kitsap, Pierce, Skagit, Snohomish, Spokane, and Whatcom. The Juvenile Rehabilitation Administration requested that the Washington State Institute for Public Policy evaluate the project.

This publication is a six-month progress report on program implementation in the twelve participating courts. It is too early to evaluate the effectiveness of the program in reducing criminal behavior. A one-year report will present early findings on program outcomes by July 1, 1997.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The program's goal is to prevent *high-risk, first-time* juvenile offenders from becoming further entrenched in the court system. The program will serve 500 youths sentenced to probation after July 1, 1996. Juvenile court administrators identified this population as amenable to treatment and at risk to continue reoffending, thus an excellent target group. The program is based on the premise that if youth take responsibility for their actions and are immediately held accountable for their choices, they will learn to make better decisions and reduce their criminal activity.

High-risk youth are identified by a scored instrument used by each court to evaluate certain risk and protective factors in a consistent manner. These assessments identify positive as well as problematic factors in the youth's life. Youth stay in the program during their entire period of juvenile court supervision, which lasts from three to twelve months.

The program concentrates on intensive supervision by a probation officer and case monitor team; the caseload size is 25 youth per team. Typical caseload sizes for normal probation services range from 30 to 100 youth. Youth in the program are initially placed on a level of supervision that involves close monitoring of school activity and home behavior, including a curfew. As the youth successfully meet the conditions of supervision, they are placed on less restrictive levels of supervision. If youths fail, they receive sanctions, including placement in a more intense level of supervision. In this way, the program is intended to teach juveniles to take responsibility for their actions, learn self-control, and to develop positive and pro-social alternatives to illegal behaviors.

EVALUATION DESIGN AND STATUS

The evaluation will determine whether the program reduces reoffending by its participants. The program will also estimate the level of success needed for the state's \$2.35 million investment to be cost-effective. The evaluation design involves the comparison of reoffense patterns of two groups of youth: the program youth and the "control group" youth. The groups have similar assessment scores and court records. The control group youth

receive normal probation services, while the program youth participate in the early intervention program. As a result, differences in the subsequent adjudication patterns of these two groups can be attributed to the program.

The primary evaluation criteria is whether program participants have lower reoffense rates than youth who receive standard probation services. Adjudications for youth are recorded by the courts in the Office of the Administrator for the Courts' Juvenile Court Information System (JUVIS). Additional outcome measures include changes in parental control, school disciplinary problems, alcohol/drug use, and peer relationships that are recorded by court personnel on a termination form.

Many first-time probationers never return to court: the legal intervention is a powerful influence on their behavior. Approximately 40 percent of Washington State's juveniles sentenced to community supervision at the time of their first adjudication return to juvenile court.¹ In order for early intervention to be effective, the program must be targeted at those individuals who have higher risk factors, and are more likely to continue committing crimes.

An assessment instrument is used to identify these high-risk youth. For each youth sentenced to probation, a risk and protective factors' assessment is administered and only those youth with a risk score above seven (out of a possible 32 points) are allowed in the program. State juvenile court administrators chose this cut-off point because they felt that youth who score above seven should be considered high risk to reoffend. The control group is formed using offenders with the same cut-off score (seven) sentenced to probation for the first time prior to July 1, 1996.

The evaluation includes the following key features:

- *Random assignment* to program and control groups.
- *Formal screening* to ensure program and control groups are comparable.
- *Uniform tracking* of criminal behavior through the court system database (JUVIS).

Since all courts are implementing the essential program elements, the evaluation can assess whether the concept of early intervention causes more positive outcomes than the typical system response. The net result will be a stronger statement concerning program effectiveness than can be achieved by a program model where each court tries a different approach.

All twelve courts are participating in the evaluation and, as of December 1996, 90 percent (450 of 500) of their maximum program caseloads were filled. In addition to the 500 youths in the program, an additional 500 youth will serve as a control group.

¹ Washington State Institute for Public Policy, *First-Time Juvenile Offenders in Washington State: Where Do They Serve Their Sentences?*, February 1996.

APPLICATION PROCEDURES AND TRAINING

Sixteen courts applied for program funding. To receive funding for the Early Intervention Program, courts had to submit an application package outlining essential elements to their proposed programs. A subcommittee, appointed by the JRA, reviewed the application packages and approved funding for twelve programs.

Staffing for the program began as soon as funds became available on July 1, 1996. Youth were screened for the program and control group caseloads as soon as each EIP program and team were in place.

In addition to the youth's criminal history data, court personnel enter data such as the youth's living arrangement, ethnicity, and family income sources into the JUVIS database. The Institute obtains JUVIS data from the Office of the Administrator for the Courts (OAC) to track criminal history. Courts send completed risk and protective factors' assessment instruments to their regional Juvenile Rehabilitation Administrator along with their monthly billing. The regional administrator then forwards the instruments to the Institute. The Institute enters this information into a database along with JUVIS data.

In preparing for the program, court personnel went through training sessions with Institute staff. The training included instruction on the use of the risk and protective factors' assessment. In addition, the evaluation design was reviewed with each court to ensure appropriate screening and assignment of youth to program and control groups. Following a statewide training conference for participating EIP courts, additional training sessions were conducted at the local level. A training manual, with complete definitions for risk and protective factors, was provided to all participating EIP staff. This extensive training process and design review was intended to increase consistency among all participating courts.

The assessment includes questions that require probation staff to contact other agencies for information. In some instances, courts have experienced difficulties in obtaining information from local schools, mental health agencies, Child Protective Services (CPS), and other sections of the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS). In Snohomish County, EIP staff debated with their local CPS office over confidentiality issues on releasing information regarding abused or neglected youth. CPS staff were concerned that their information was confidential. An agreement between the two groups was reached, and EIP staff are now able to obtain information from CPS. Similar situations have occurred in other courts and caused probation staff to establish new working relationships with community and state organizations that are connected in important ways to their probation clients.

RISK AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS

In developing the instrument to measure risk and protective factors, the Institute reviewed the instruments used in other states, particularly those with a research base.² State juvenile

² This instrument is based on models used in Wisconsin and Michigan, and S.C Baird, *Classification of Juveniles in Corrections: A Model Systems Approach*. Madison, WI: National Council on Crime and Delinquency, 1984, as described in the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention *Guide for Implementing the Comprehensive Strategy for Serious, Violent, and Chronic Juvenile Offenders*.

court administrators requested that additional factors be included, including family criminal history and the presence of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.

The Institute and the courts worked together extensively on definitions to ensure that the instrument could be reliably completed by their probation staff. As this evaluation proceeds, the validity of the instrument in assessing risk can be assessed. If found to be valid, all courts could use it to assess risk for juveniles in their caseloads. Low-risk youth could be diverted or assigned to minimal supervision while high-risk youth receive more intensive supervision or are incarcerated. The fiscal cost-effectiveness of this approach will be tested.

Items on the risk and protective factors' assessment include:

- **Prior referrals to the juvenile court**, including: age at time of first offense, number of prior times referred to the juvenile court, and referrals for a violent misdemeanor or violent felony offense.
- **Juvenile personal history**, including history of: physical or sexual abuse, neglect, alcohol or drug usage indicating that the youth should be referred for treatment, emotional/behavioral problems, and youth's current living arrangements.
- **Family environment**, including: annual income, sources of income, family history of alcohol or drug abuse, immediate family criminal history, level of parental/caretaker control over the youth's actions, prior out-of-home placements, and prior runaways.
- **Friend/companion influences**: measured by the youth's friends having a positive or negative influence, or the youth being a gang member.
- **School performance**, including grades behind, attendance (truancy), and misconduct.
- **Parental/caretaker support** of the program.
- **Positive personal relationships** that provide supportive role models.
- **Positive personal attributes**, such as intelligence, temperament, interests, and aspirations.
- **Sources for healthy beliefs and clear standards** that communicate firm guidance, structure, and a belief in the youth's innate strengths.
- **Opportunities to succeed** in school, social activities, recreation.
- **Skills to succeed**, given the opportunity.

Each risk factor has an associated score, ranging from 0 to 3. Upon completion of the assessment, item scores are totaled. Youth with scores of 0 to 7 are considered ineligible for the program or control group. Youth with scores of eight to 32 are eligible for program or control group inclusion.

COURT PROGRAMS

The twelve participating courts have implemented programs that share common characteristics. In addition to reduced caseload size, all programs share the following characteristics:

- *High level of contact* with youth and their families ranging from one to three in-person contacts per week.
- *Progressive levels of supervision*, with the initial levels being more restrictive.
- Programs, classes, and services for youth that *target needs* identified in the assessment.

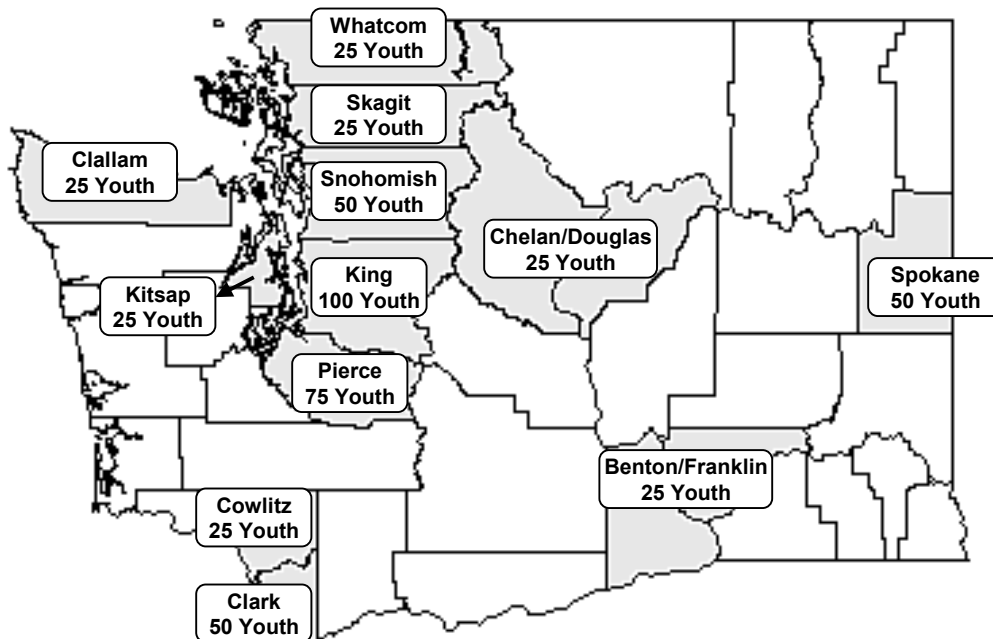
In addition, several programs emphasize close contact with family members (to reinforce parental authority and discipline) and schools (to monitor attendance and compliance with the court order).

The following table depicts the number of participants in individual court programs as of December 1996:

JRA Region	County	Number of Caseloads³	Number in Program	Number in Control	Program Cost
1	Chelan/Douglas	1	25	15	118,707
1	Spokane	2	44	50	247,712
2	Benton/Franklin	1	25	25	132,835
3	Snohomish	2	50	50	238,082
3	Whatcom	1	12	24	105,000
3	Skagit	1	25	25	111,297
4	King	4	81	78	558,754
5	Pierce	3	67	75	294,500
5	Kitsap	1	25	25	136,210
6	Clallam	1	21	25	76,200
6	Clark	2	50	50	136,945
6	Cowlitz	1	25	25	76,258
Washington State Institute for Public Policy Evaluation (5% of total funds):					117,500
Total	12	20	450	467	\$2,350,000

³ The maximum number of youth per caseload is 25. One probation officer and one case monitor are assigned to a caseload. This column represents the number of program caseloads per court.

Participating Early Intervention Courts



In addition to common features, each court program contains individual characteristics. The following descriptions are taken from the court's grant applications.

Benton/Franklin

The Benton and Franklin County Early Intervention Program, entitled Family and Community Early Intervention Network (FACEIN), employs one probation officer and one case monitor.

During the first two weeks of the program, participants receive intensive assessment to determine the problems facing the youth and family, and identify and coordinate culturally relevant resources. FACEIN uses an individualized treatment plan for each participant. Youth in the program receive a minimum of one in-person contact per week. The FACEIN team meets regularly with family members and school personnel; close and intensive contact allows tracking of the youth's progress. Emphasis is placed on working with the youth in the context of their families and maintaining the youth in a regular school program.

Services provided to youth in the program include: the REACH Middle School Project, an alternative education program; the Substance Abuse Coalition's Ropes Challenge Course, which helps to build trust between families and FACEIN staff; the Boys and Girls Club which provides prosocial activities; anger management training and counseling; drug/alcohol treatment programs; and other counseling services.

Chelan/Douglas

The Chelan and Douglas County Early Intervention Program, entitled Immediate Positive Accountability and Treatment (IMPACT), employs one probation officer and one case monitor. Case plans are completed by the Probation Counselor within 15 days of assessment, relying on information from the assessment to set goals and action steps. IMPACT uses a three-level system, allowing parents to impose more restrictive curfews if desired and providing incentives for reaching higher levels. Youth receive two in-person contacts per week, and schools and parents are contacted at least once per week. Weekly EIP staff meetings are held to discuss upcoming events and to acknowledge those youths who have successfully completed the program.

IMPACT offers a wide variety of classes and group activities, such as anger management, self-esteem building, cultural awareness, job skills training and job search, and family counseling. Recreation also plays an important role in building team spirit in the IMPACT program (bowling, putt-putt golf, hiking, and swimming).

Clallam

The Clallam County Early Intervention Program, entitled First-time/Minor/Middle Offender Currently Under Supervision (FOCUS), employs one probation officer and one case monitor. The goals of the FOCUS program are to increase educational attendance/performance, completion of probation requirements, understanding by the juvenile of his/her offense and its impact on the victim and community, the reduction of new offenses, and an increased participation by the parents/guardians. A four-level system including curfew and other restrictions is applied to all participants. Youth in the program are contacted a minimum of twice per week.

Program services include: drug/alcohol counseling, anger management, family/parent therapy, urinalysis, electronic monitoring, education/work experience coordination, recreational programs, peer relations, and adult mentoring. The FOCUS program uses the Clallam County Safe Policy Committee, which includes law enforcement, schools, and juvenile courts working together on high-risk chronic offenders. This committee assists in tracking, accountability, and providing services to FOCUS youth.

Clark

The Clark County Early Intervention Program is an extension of the Special Intervention Program, which began in 1991. Two probation counselors are assigned to the program, as well as two part-time case aides. An individualized case plan is prepared to address the specific needs of the youth and build on their strengths. EIP youth are contacted in person weekly by program personnel. Parents are an integral part of the process and are encouraged to be active participants throughout their child's term of supervision. Staff are attempting to teach parents to take a more active role in supporting and disciplining their child. House rules, curfew, and school expectations are addressed routinely, and if parents need further assistance, contracts are made with the child to adhere to specific conditions.

Community service programs include anger/impulse control counseling, shoplift prevention workshops, alcohol and drug programs, and sexual assault awareness education. In

addition to these community programs, EIP staff facilitate classes and activities designed to address identified needs of participants.

Cowlitz

The Cowlitz County Early Intervention Program employs one probation officer and one case monitor. After the initial assessment, treatment plans are developed by the youth, parents, and probation officer. All program youth begin their supervision with a high level of restricted activity. Program youth continue restrictions until they earn their freedom, gradually being allowed more unsupervised activity as they maintain probation requirements as well as agreements with parents, school, and the probation officer. Personal accountability for the youth's time and whereabouts is required. Youth are contacted at least once per week by EIP staff.

Skill development groups are offered throughout probation and are required as needed. Therapy is also required of selected participants. Regular contact is maintained with all local school districts and the social service agencies involved with the youth. Recreational rewards are provided utilizing the Cowlitz County Juvenile Department's Volunteer Program and by recruiting support from local citizens and organizations.

King

The King County Early Intervention Program employs four teams of probation officers and community surveillance officers; 25 youth are assigned to each team. Youth are assigned to either the program or control group on a randomly alternating basis. Program staff conduct risk and protective factors' assessment to determine client needs and identify strengths. The youth and their families jointly participate in setting supervision goals and plans for complying with court conditions. The individual supervision plan includes paying restitution, completing community service, improving functioning in school or work, and other court-ordered conditions. Program youth are entered into a time-based level system designed to tie positive behavior to progressively increased responsibility and freedom. Youth in the program are contacted by EIP staff, in person, a minimum of once per week.

Services provided to youth include: victim awareness, anger management, drug and alcohol counseling, juvenile justice information, dealing with peer pressure, boundaries clarification, teenage stress, empowerment to make choices, and problem solving. The program team works with each youth's school to establish working relationships with the local schools. In-home counseling is also provided to youth and their families.

Kitsap

The Kitsap County Early Intervention Program employs one probation officer and one case monitor. Kitsap County's EIP uses a level system with graduated sanctions for immediate accountability for the youth's actions. The curfew assigned to each level is monitored either by the probation officer, case monitor, or service provider. Youth in the program are contacted at least three times per week.

The Kitsap County Early Intervention Program begins with a home visit by EIP staff. A service delivery agency is then assigned to the youth. Kitsap County contracts with Home

Builders, P.O.W.E.R. (People Organized Working for Ethnic Reality), and the Olympic Educational School District. These agencies offer individual and family in-home counseling, mentoring, tutoring, assistance with job search, community service sites, community involvement, general support and positive role modeling, drug/alcohol assessments and recommended treatment, and assist in facilitating random urinalysis.

Pierce

The Pierce County Early Intervention Program employs three probation officers and three case monitors, 25 youth are assigned to a probation officer and case monitor team. The probation officer develops an offense-specific case plan. As an incentive, a time-based level system of curfews and recreational rewards is used. Youth in the program have been receiving an average of six in-person contacts per month. Contact is also maintained with the parents/guardians, schools, employer, and service providers to make sure that the juvenile is complying with his/her probation court order.

Accountability is immediate if the court order is not being followed. Progressive discipline is used as an accountability tool and as an alternative to detention when appropriate. Every juvenile submits to a full drug and alcohol evaluation, random urinalysis testing also occurs. The services provided to the youth and family include: victim awareness and decision making classes, tutoring programs, and family counseling.

Skagit

The Skagit County Early Intervention Program employs one probation officer and one case aide. Based on factors identified in the assessment, a case plan is developed by EIP staff. Youth in the program are required to progress through a level system with four-phases, with the initial phases the most restrictive. Youth in the program are contacted three times per week.

The services provided to the youth and family include: substance abuse evaluation/treatment, family intervention, individual/family counseling, and participation in the Skagit County Offender Re-education Program. Based upon identified needs, additional services include anger management programs, substance abuse programs, and educational services. Family participation is a high priority and is a continual goal and expectation of the Early Intervention Program. Parents are asked to sign the probation plan and participate in the assessment and exit interviews. The EIP team maintains regular contact with the youth's school to support the youth's educational process.

Snohomish

The Snohomish County Probation Early Intervention Program (SCOPE) employs two teams of probation officers and case monitors. Prior to assignment to SCOPE, an assessment interview is performed with the youth and their families. Based on the interview, a case plan is developed with youth and parents. Parental participation is seen as integral to the program plan. Probation plans include four graduated levels of home restriction, with the initial phase the most restricted. Youth in the program are contacted a minimum of once per week by program personnel.

Core services include family intervention therapy and victim awareness education/information. Based upon identified needs, additional services include anger management, substance abuse, and educational/learning concerns. The SCOPE team maintains regular contact with the youth's school. School attendance is a condition of every community supervision order for youth in the program. The program is designed to provide a balance between accountability and those services seen as necessary to reduce the risk of reoffense.

Spokane

The Spokane County Early Intervention Accountability Program is staffed by two teams of probation counselors and trackers. Youth are assigned to either the program or control group on a random basis. A case plan is formulated based upon the needs identified through the risk and protective factors' assessment. A three-tiered level system is used to provide curfews, rules, and responsibilities, with the youth gradually gaining more independence as they progress. Youth in the program are contacted by EIP staff two times per week. Probation counselors visit the youths' schools to facilitate regular attendance, positive behavior, and improved academic performance.

Spokane offers a variety of alternative educational programs that can be accessed by program staff. The agencies contracted to provide services in the community include Breakthrough, Communities That Care, and the Spokane Community Network.

Whatcom

The Whatcom County Early Intervention Accountability Program employs one probation counselor and one case monitor. Identified risk and protective factors are addressed in an individual case plan. All youth participating in the program progress through supervision using a level system which rewards success and growth. Youth in the program are contacted in person at least once per week.

The juvenile court participates in the County's Direct Service Network. The Network brings together representatives from schools, courts, social service agencies, drug/alcohol counselors, mental health, and the families of referred youth to collectively develop a case plan with each participant taking responsibility for their respective role. The services provided by these agencies include educational alternatives, drug/alcohol services, and a variety of racial minority outreach programs.

OUTCOME EVALUATION

The Washington State Institute for Public Policy will produce a report, by July 1997, on the one-year outcome evaluation of the early intervention program. This report will include findings on early program outcomes, including an analysis of reoffense rates in the program and control groups. The report will also measure changes in parental control, school disciplinary problems, alcohol/drug use, and peer relationships. The report will assess the fiscal cost-effectiveness of the state's \$2.35 million investment in the program.

EVALUATION SCHEDULE

January to February 1997

- Begin receiving termination reports from program and control groups.
- Continue monitoring projects.
- Conduct statewide meetings to ensure consistent approach.

March to June 1997

- Obtain JUVIS data for program and control groups to assess reoffending.
- Conduct initial analysis of reoffending behavior during the program.

July 1, 1997

- Interim report completed.

1997-99 Biennium

- If program is refunded by 1997 legislature, continue evaluation for the twelve participating courts (monitor new program youth and follow previous program and control group youth's criminal activities).
- If additional courts are added, train new courts in evaluation procedures and continue evaluation of all programs.

For further information, call Robert Barnoski or Scott Matson at (360) 866-6000, ext. 6380.