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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.