

July 1997

**Assessing Risk:
Washington State Juvenile Court Early Intervention Program
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Juvenile Rehabilitation Administration contracted with the Washington State Institute for Public Policy to evaluate a juvenile court early intervention program funded by the 1996 Legislature. The goal of the program is to prevent high-risk, first-time juvenile probationers from becoming further entrenched in the court system. Eligibility is restricted to first-time probationers who are judged to pose a high risk of becoming chronic offenders. A formal risk assessment process is used to determine program eligibility and ensure that program youth are comparable across counties. An assessment of each youth's "protective factors," those positive strengths that counterbalance risk, is also completed.

The Institute's evaluation, when completed in July 1998, will compare re-offense patterns of youth randomly assigned to one of two groups: youth in the program and youth in a "control group." The groups are similar in terms of risk level, with the control group youth receiving normal probation services and the program youth participating in the Early Intervention Program (EIP). This design allows the state to assess the program's influence on recidivism. The Institute will also perform a cost-benefit analysis of the EIP, estimating whether the extra money spent on the program is offset by subsequent reductions in criminal justice costs.

This report summarizes the assessments of high-risk youth who have been screened for the program as of May 1997. It provides a descriptive portrait of these individuals, their characteristics, and family environments. A report scheduled to be released in December 1997 will describe preliminary findings on recidivism and other program outcomes.

It is important to understand that these data represent the judgments of probation staff as they completed the forms. Although training on the use of the assessment instruments was given to court personnel, accuracy depends upon the care taken and accurate knowledge of the juvenile's situation.

The following highlights describe the 1,381 juvenile probationers judged to pose a high-risk of re-offense.

Criminal History

- The majority of first-time probationers have previous referrals to juvenile court; the Early Intervention Program represents an early, but not the first, intervention with these youth. The previous referrals resulted in diversion and deferred prosecutions.
- Nearly half of the youth have a current or prior referral involving violence.