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Washington State's Implementation of *Aggression Replacement Training* for Juvenile Offenders: Preliminary Findings

In 1997, the Washington Legislature passed the Community Juvenile Accountability Act (CJAA), originally proposed by Governor Gary Locke. The primary goal of the Act is to reduce juvenile crime cost-effectively by establishing "research-based" programs in the state's juvenile courts.

The specific CJAA programs implemented in Washington were selected after the Washington State Institute for Public Policy (Institute) conducted a thorough review of the existing national research literature.¹ Based on this review, the juvenile courts and the state Juvenile Rehabilitation Administration (JRA) determined that, given the structure of Washington's juvenile justice system, four particular programs had the best existing research evidence that they could lower the recidivism rates of young offenders.

- *Aggression Replacement Training*, from New York.
- *Multi-Systemic Therapy*, designed in South Carolina and Missouri.
- *Functional Family Therapy*, developed in Utah.
- *Interagency Coordination*, originated in Tennessee.

The legislature then funded the four CJAA programs in subsequent budget-writing sessions. To receive state funding under CJAA, each juvenile court chooses the program(s) that best matches its own local needs. The state JRA oversees the funding process and provides statewide training in the four programs to ensure faithful adherence to each program's design.

The CJAA legislation directed the Institute to evaluate whether the programs work in Washington. The previous research on these programs—small-scale experimental studies conducted in other states, often by the person who developed the program—found that they lower recidivism rates. The real question, however, is whether they would actually work in Washington when applied statewide in a "real world" setting. This report summarizes the preliminary outcomes for *Aggression Replacement Training* (ART). The early results for the other three CJAA programs will be described in separate reports. More complete findings will be released prior to the 2003 legislative session, with a final report by June 2003.

What Is *Aggression Replacement Training*? ART is a 10-week, 30-hour intervention administered to groups of 8 to 12 juvenile offenders three times per week. It can be implemented by court probation staff or private contractors, after they receive formal ART training. A juvenile offender is eligible for ART if it is determined—from the results of the formal assessment tool administered by the juvenile courts—the youth has a moderate to high risk for re-offense and has a problem with aggression or lacks skills in pro-social functioning. Using repetitive learning techniques, offenders develop skills to control anger and use more appropriate behaviors. In addition, guided group discussion is used to correct anti-social thinking that can otherwise get a youth into trouble. ART costs about \$800 per juvenile.

Between January 1999 and September 2001, 20 of Washington's 34 juvenile courts implemented ART, and about 1,500 juvenile offenders participated in the program.

¹ S. Aos, P. Phipps, R. Barnoski, R. Lieb (2001) *The Comparative Costs and Benefits of Programs to Reduce Crime, Version 4.0*, Washington State Institute for Public Policy, available at: <www.wa.gov/wsipp/crime/pdf/costbenefit.pdf>. The four CJAA programs, including citations to the relevant research studies, are discussed more fully in the report.

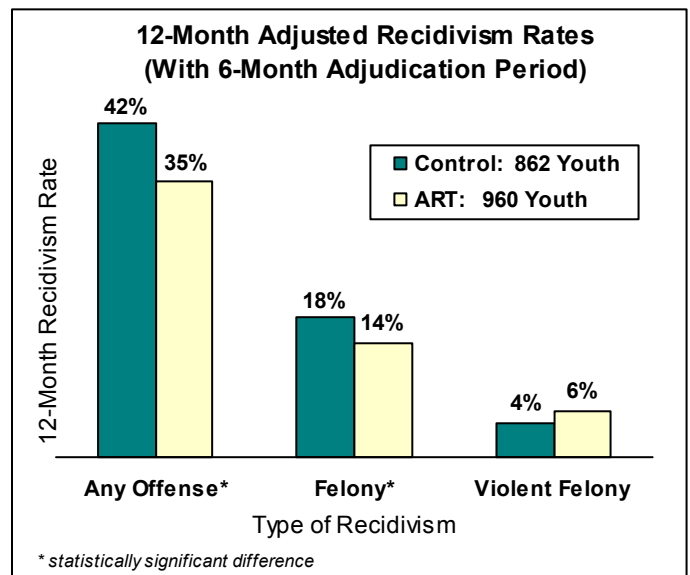
The Research Questions: The two basic research questions for the ART evaluation are these: Does ART reduce recidivism and, if it does, do taxpayers save more money (stemming from the reduction in recidivism rates) than the program's \$800 price tag? That is, is the program a wise use of taxpayer money?

Evaluation Design: To assess whether ART reduces recidivism, we selected a comparison group of juvenile offenders who did not receive ART, using a "waiting line" approach. This method takes advantage of the fact that CJAA resources were not sufficient to allow every eligible youth to enter a CJAA program. In the waiting line approach, all youth are assessed for CJAA program eligibility. Youth who meet the selection criteria are assigned to an ART program. When the program reaches capacity, remaining eligible youth are assigned to the comparison group and never participate in the ART program. Instead, they receive usual juvenile court services.

This research design can provide a fairly strong test of whether ART lowers recidivism rates compared with youth who do not receive the program. It is not a perfect research design, however, since it is possible for the treatment and comparison groups to not be strictly comparable at the time the program starts. Fortunately, the assessment tool administered by the courts contains enough information to allow for rigorous statistical modeling to adjust for any systematic differences that might exist. All results reported here take advantage of these adjustments, since we found differences between the ART and the comparison groups.

In addition, as part of Washington's CJAA program, JRA and the courts set up a quality assurance process to ensure the ART program is faithfully implemented according to the ART manual. This process found that six of the 20 courts either were not following the ART model or had instructors who were not competently delivering the model. Therefore, data from these courts are excluded from the results presented here. Analyses revealed that courts not following the ART model did not lower recidivism rates. As in any business, maintaining quality is a key to success, and the implementation of ART is no exception. Since the "quality control" issue carries budgetary implications, we will discuss this finding further in our next report on ART.

Key Results to Date: At this early stage of the evaluation, the bottom line is this: **When the ART model is adhered to, the program appears to reduce recidivism significantly and to save more money than it costs.** The chart shows that, after a 12-month follow-up period, recidivism rates of youth assigned to ART are generally lower than the rates of comparable youth who did not receive ART. For example, 14 percent of youth who received ART were re-convicted for a new felony offense after 12 months, compared with 18 percent for youth in the control group. This 28 percent reduction in recidivism is statistically and economically significant. There is, however, no statistically significant difference for *violent* felony recidivism at this time; longer follow-up periods are usually needed to detect significant differences in these more rare crimes. In short, while these results are preliminary and may change when 18-month follow-up data become available, they provide an encouraging preliminary look at the results of Washington's ART program.



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