

July 2002

## **Preliminary Findings for the Juvenile Rehabilitation Administration's Mentoring Program**

In June 1995, the city of Seattle obtained funding from the federal Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention for an initiative titled *Safe Futures: Partnerships to Reduce Youth Violence and Delinquency*. The initiative is designed to develop "a comprehensive community-wide partnership to prevent and reduce youth violence and delinquency." In 1996, the Seattle office of the Juvenile Rehabilitation Administration (JRA), within the Washington State Department of Social and Health Services, implemented a mentoring program as part of the Safe Futures initiative. JRA contracted with Judith McConnell, of the Seattle Community for Youth At Risk organization, to implement mentoring in JRA. The Washington State Institute for Public Policy (Institute) was asked to evaluate the mentoring program as part of our legislatively directed role to consult with JRA on ways to implement research-proven programs.<sup>1</sup>

The JRA program recruits and trains adults from diverse cultural backgrounds to serve as mentors for Seattle youth returning from a JRA facility. A mentor is a trusted adult who volunteers to assist a youth in setting and fulfilling educational and vocational goals, and to help the youth live a drug- and crime-free life.

Mentors are required to:

- Make a one-year commitment to the youth;
- Complete an application screening process, including a questionnaire and personal interview to determine interests and personality;
- Consent to a Washington State Patrol background check;
- Complete a one-day eight-hour mentor training program;
- Meet with the youth monthly during the last five to six months of the youth's confinement, and write or call weekly;
- Attend monthly meetings to enhance mentoring skills; and
- Meet with the youth weekly once the youth returns to the community.

**Recruiting Mentors:** Originally, mentors volunteered as a result of the JRA program manager speaking in churches and getting direct referrals from pastors. More recently, the program has recruited mentors by distributing posters, engaging local service groups, and using the internet.

**Finding Youth for the JRA Mentoring Program:** Shortly after they are committed to JRA, youth from Seattle are asked if they would like to participate in the mentoring program. These youth must have between five and six months remaining in their JRA stay of confinement and they cannot be sex offenders. Nearly all youth who are asked choose to participate. Each youth completes an application and has a personal interview with the JRA mentor program manager to determine interests and personality. When mentors become available, the JRA mentor program manager matches the mentor to a youth on gender; most mentors are female. The program manager then selects a youth whose ethnicity, personality, and interests closely match the mentor's.

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<sup>1</sup> ESSB 6387(203)(20), Chapter 371, Laws of 2002.

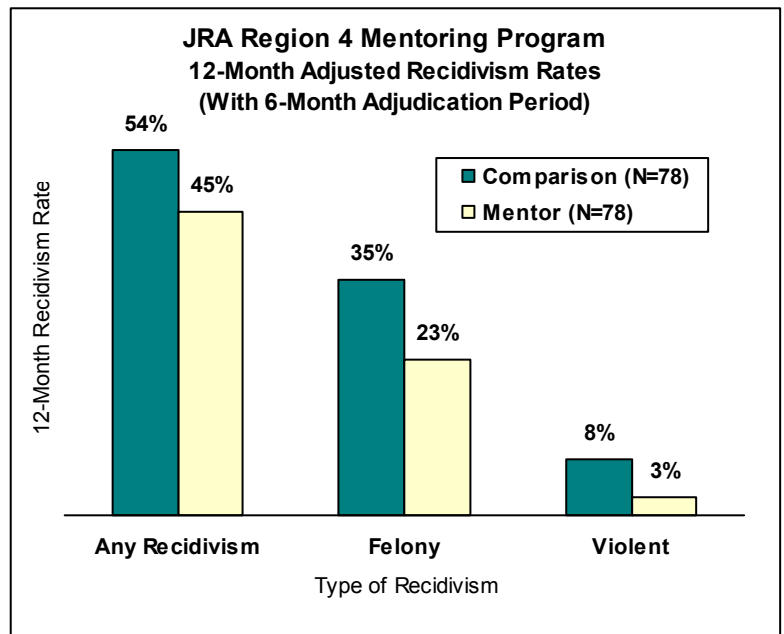
**How Much Does Mentoring Cost?** The taxpayer cost of the mentoring program includes the JRA program manager's salary and the cost of recruiting, training, and communicating with the mentors. On average, 25 youth per year participate and the average taxpayer cost per youth is approximately \$3,000.

**The Research Questions:** The two basic research questions for the JRA mentoring program evaluation are these: Does the program reduce criminal recidivism and, if it does, do taxpayers save more money (stemming from the reduction in recidivism) than the program's \$3,000 price tag? That is, is the program a wise use of taxpayer money?

**Evaluation Design:** JRA provided the Institute with a database that identified youth who completed an application to join the mentoring program. This study includes youth who were released to the community between February 1997 and September 2000. To assess whether the JRA mentor program reduces recidivism, a comparison group was created. The comparison group is composed of JRA offenders released to King, Pierce, and Snohomish Counties during the same period as the mentor group, and the comparison group members were matched to the mentor group by gender, JRA risk score,<sup>2</sup> and ethnicity.

This research design provides a reasonable test of whether the mentor program lowers recidivism compared with the matched group of youth who did not receive the program. In addition to the explicit matching process used to create the comparison group, we also applied multivariate statistical modeling to account for other factors that influence recidivism.

**Preliminary Results:** At this early point in the evaluation, the JRA Region 4 mentoring program appears to reduce recidivism. The chart shows that, after a 12-month follow-up period, recidivism rates of youth assigned to the mentor program are lower than the rates of the matched group of youth who did not receive mentoring. For example, 23 percent of youth who received mentoring were re-convicted for a new felony offense after 12 months, compared with 35 percent of youth in the comparison group. While this reduction appears to be large, it is not statistically significant, probably because the sample size is too small at this stage of the evaluation to detect the observed effect. However, the 34



percent drop in felony recidivism provides an encouraging early look at the results of JRA's Region 4 mentoring program. The Institute will update these results prior to the 2003 legislative session with a larger sample, and will include a cost-benefit analysis of the JRA program.

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<sup>2</sup> JRA's Initial Security Assessment is a validated predictor of risk for re-offense. See, R. Barnoski. 1998. *Juvenile Rehabilitation Administration Assessments: Validity Review and Recommendations* (Olympia, WA: Washington State Institute for Public Policy) <[www.wsipp.wa.gov/crime/pdf/JRA\\_Review.pdf](http://www.wsipp.wa.gov/crime/pdf/JRA_Review.pdf)>.