

Correctional Boot Camps: Fact or Fad

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Abstract

Crime in America and what to do about it continue to be an issue of unparalleled concern to citizens of this country. Although the statistics for criminals that are incarcerated continue to grow, there seems to be no relief from violent crimes committed by the youth of our country.

Changes in the way we handle youths who commit crimes are taking place right now. This research examines boot camps that are being placed into operation all over the country--their components, their effectiveness, and opinions of some experts on the subject are revealed. The research presents a model of the subject that can be adapted to plans of actual boot camp development and implementation.

Introduction

Crime in America and what to do about it continue to be an issue of unparalleled concern to citizens of the United States. At the close of 1993, almost 1.5 million Americans were incarcerated within local, state, and federal institutions throughout this country. Over 21 billion dollars are expended annually for more penal facilities and the housing, upkeep, and security of the offenders kept there. Billions of dollars more are dedicated to law enforcement and to the judicial system.

At times, America, the free, appears to be hostage to an unrelentless wave of crime that keeps law enforcement doing battle on all fronts, not for victory, but simply for survival. The Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics for 1993 reports millions of crimes for the year and over 14,000,000 arrests. It seems that each time the system repels an opponent, a new foe emerges and the battle continues. In the 1920's, it was organized crime and the prohibition of alcohol. In the 50's and 60's, it was the civil rights movement. In the 70's, it was the anti-war and anti-government protests that filled our streets and college campuses with violence and destruction. In the 80's, anti-abortion and pro-choice issues escalated into violent and costly encounters.

This trend continues into the 1990's with what may be the criminal justice system's most formidable opponent--the youth of this country. The cover of the August 2, 1993, edition of Newsweek magazine is entitled, "Teen Violence - Wild in the Streets". The introduction to the article emphasizes the problem by saying "the body count is rising, a series of brutal, senseless crimes by teenagers brings into the spotlight what law enforcement and public health officials have long known: there is a virtual 'epidemic' of youth violence spreading across the land from the inner cities to the suburbs". Violence, says one prosecutor, is becoming a way of life. The article reports that juveniles accounted for 17% of all violent crime arrests in 1991, and juvenile arrests for murder increased by 85% between 1987 and 1991. Attorney General Janet Reno further expounds on the problem by declaring, "Youth violence is the greatest single crime problem in America today". The lead article in the August 2, 1993, edition of Time magazine is "Big Shots, an Inside Look at the Deadly Love Affair between American Kids

and Their Guns". The story stresses the attraction that youths have with firearms and states that according to the National Education Association an "estimated 100,000 students carry a gun to school". The problems and dangers of this trend are further magnified by a report from the National Center for Health Statistics that "bullets killed nearly 4,200 teenagers in 1990". It seems that almost overnight the juvenile crime problem has positioned itself in the forefront and in the spotlight of newspapers, magazines, television specials, and foremost in the minds of American citizens. As this trend of violence, death, and crime by our youth continues to escalate, law enforcement, corrections, politicians, and others desperately seek solutions.

In Florida, the Department of Juvenile Justice has been established with the responsibility for the management of juvenile offender programs to include juvenile boot camps. On a national level, President Bill Clinton has committed billions of dollars to the nation's crime problem which includes funding for more police and for programs such as boot camps. Bruce Reed, a Clinton aide, and specialist in criminal justice, recently said, "boot camps done right can reduce prison overcrowding and, more importantly, ensure that young offenders don't get off scot-free". The President, himself, may have best summarized the urgency to appropriately respond to the nation's juvenile crime problem in his 1994 state of the union address when he said, "I ask you to remember that even as we say no to crime, we must give people, especially our young people, something to say yes to".

As we scramble to find solutions to juvenile crime, one of the most popular approaches that has surfaced is boot camps. This project is an examination of boot camps and their value as a combatant of juvenile crime. Its basis is the resurrection of an old idea to develop and implement boot camps in response to the crime problem. The content of the project will include an historical look at boot camps from their beginnings to present day. Other important components will include boot camp design, participant selection, staff and staff training, programmatic content, evaluation, aftercare components, and viewpoints of both opponents and proponents. Several questions will be addressed: Do boot camps work, or don't they work? Are they fact or are they the most recent fad? The researcher hopes to draw together enough information to design a very basic model that might be useful to the many municipalities and agencies that may be planning a boot camp as part of their response to the wave of youth crime that is sweeping our country.

The methodology for this project consisted of scanning hundreds of newspaper and magazine articles, as well as reading other reports on the subject. All information from the National Criminal Justice Reference Service has been acquired. All existing articles from the Florida State University Library have been obtained. The researcher has purchased reports and video tapes on the subject. On site visits have been made to several existing boot camps including Manatee County which is regarded as a model facility. Interviews were conducted with boot camp administrators, staff members, and boot camp participants. Copies of standard operating procedure manuals for several existing boot camps have been obtained. Last, the researcher relied upon his 23 years experience as a correctional practitioner, correctional trainer, and administrator of a pre-trial facility, a sentenced institution, and a facility responsible for programmatic activities of a major correctional organization.

Historical Background

Boot camps are not a new idea in this country. They may have their roots as far back as 1888 at the New York State Reformatory at Elmira, New York. This prison operated until 1920 on a military training model emphasizing discipline and regimentation. In 1983, the Oklahoma Department of Corrections opened the nation's first boot camp. Later that same year, the Georgia Department of Corrections opened the Dodge Correctional Institution boot camp. The state of Mississippi opened the nation's third boot camp in 1985. Today, there are a number of boot camps for both adults and youthful offenders located throughout the United States, with many more being planned. As of this writing, there are six boot camps in the state of Florida with others on the drawing board.

The boot camp approach to the crime problem is attached to a concept known as shock incarceration which has been described by some as scaring someone into doing what is right. Shock incarceration is an intermediate correctional sanction that became popular in the United States after Ohio passed the first shock incarceration statute in 1965. The rationale behind this statute was to give the offender a "taste" of prison for a short period of confinement and release the offender back into the community under supervision. Depending upon the program being reviewed, the structure usually involves discipline, regimentation and drill, physical conditioning, hygiene and sanitation, work, education, treatment, and counseling. There are several models of shock incarceration that have evolved over the years.

The model that most criminal justice professionals and lay people are aware of is the scared straight model. A documentary film in 1979 focused on this model that was designed to give juvenile offenders a first hand look at the harsh realities of prison life by attending meetings with "lifers" at Rahway State Prison. The goals, or theoretical assumptions of scared straight programs include trying to give known delinquents a vivid and real life impression of the costs and consequences of crime. The program evolved around hardened career criminals invoking fear in youthful offenders by scaring them with stories about their past and warning them of perilous consequences if they did not change their ways. This program, or variations of the program, still exist in some institutions even though evaluations and studies of the program report marginal to negative results.

In addition to the scared straight model, there are four other models/theories: the shock incarceration boot camp model; the deterrence theory; the rehabilitation theory; and the integrated theory. This report will primarily address the integrated theory that combines all of the distinct orientations.

Before going any further, it is important and relevant to discuss the popularity of boot camps. If your city or state doesn't have a boot camp, chances are very good that one is being planned. Boot camps are being touted as the newest rage in corrections. The public is fed up with crime and fed up with criminals. The pendulum is swinging the other way and John and Jane Q. Public are demanding better law enforcement, harsher penalties, and punishment of offenders. They are tired of their perception that prisons and jails are country clubs and they want to know that inmates are serving "hard time". From their living rooms they watch the 6:00 p.m. news and observe this "new" tactic for

dealing with offenders. They like what they see--the yelling, screaming, marching, and the physical exercise. They like seeing the inmate being subservient to discipline. The public's endorsement of boot camps was perhaps best said by Keith Stranberg in the June 1994 edition of Law Enforcement Technology, "With boot camps, the public gets its pound of flesh".

Another major factor that has influenced the popularity of boot camps is the military experiences of millions of Americans. Veterans can identify with the boot camp philosophy. They say it made men and women out of boys and girls and gave them maturity and confidence. It instilled valuable ethics and served as an important transition in their life. The conclusion reached by many is that if it did these things for me, it will also influence the offender in a positive way.

Finally, the issue of politics cannot be overlooked. It is an expected reaction that elected officials will take advantage of most popular issues and boot camps are no exception. If it's popular with the public, it will most likely be embraced by the politicians. When Georgia Governor Zell Miller was told that research indicated that boot camps might not be as effective as some might think, the governor proclaimed, "Nobody can tell me from some ivory tower that you take a kid, you kick him in the rear end, and it doesn't do any good". Miller told the New York Times, "I don't give a damn what they say."

To conclude, boot camps possess the essential ingredients to guarantee their survival: They have the attention of the media, the support of the public, and the endorsement of politicians. It's probably a safe bet that boot camps will be around for a long time to come. With that thought in mind, it then becomes the responsibility of the corrections profession to put the right pieces together and make them work.

Boot Camp Goals

The establishment of goals is generic to the development and implementation of any human services program. It is the first place to begin. The word "goal" is very simply defined as "an object or end that one strives to attain; an aim". One common pitfall related to goal setting is establishing goals that are unrealistic and cannot be achieved. In contrast, some goals can be too shallow, vague, and don't represent what the organization is attempting to achieve. Before too much planning occurs in the development of a boot camp, the organization's planners should sit down and decide precisely what is wanted and what results they hope to achieve. Once that is done, pen should be put to paper and the goals of the boot camp drafted. These goals will form the nucleus of the program around which the major components such as procedures, staffing, programs, etc., will be developed. The goals must be measurable.

Research revealed a number of different boot camp programs around the country. All of these programs had goals by which to operate, but none were identical to another. There were, however, certain commonalities that existed when the sets of goals were compared to each other:

- Divert offenders from long terms of imprisonment.
- Deter offenders from future criminal activity.
- Reduce crime by incapacitation.

- Teach life (survival) skills.
- Reduce time inmates serve in segregation.
- Provide rehabilitation through education, training, and treatment.
- Reduce cost by short term incarceration.
- Reduce violence in the correctional facility.
- Reduce the number of disciplinary infractions.
- Teach self respect by instilling self discipline and physical conditioning.
- Reduce the number of complaints and grievances.
- Punish by the use of rigorous and active exercise.
- Improve jail operations and community relations.

There were other goals besides those listed, but the above represents the majority. Some facilities had several goals while others had four or five. There is no rule, or magical formula concerning goal setting. The key is to identify the need(s) and establish goals to meet them.

Boot Camp Facility Structure

In designing the actual structure of the boot camp housing area, several things should be considered. It is not necessary to utilize high-tech construction, but it is important that the facility be designed to meet the concept of the military boot camp philosophy. The military barracks appearance will lend credibility to the boot camp structure. It is also important that before construction, the builders must ensure that the design plan meets requirements of any applicable building codes. Be sure and check with the Department of Juvenile Justice if planning a juvenile facility, or the Department of Corrections if planning an adult boot camp. Manatee County has an excellent facility and is planning a second. The Manatee facility was constructed using inmate labor and low cost materials, thus making the structure very cost effective.

Individual sleeping cells, or rooms are recommended. This provides privacy for the boot camp participant and interferes with the possibility of detrimental peer pressure. The individual rooms promote personal responsibility for living quarters, and are conducive to individual counseling. They also provide a place for immediate segregation for participants who need corrective action. The individual rooms should be furnished and equipped exactly the same. Personalization of the rooms should not be allowed at the boot camp as personalization such as photos, different paint, etc., threaten the concept of group co-habitation which is necessary when the participant is released. Personalization also risks the possibility of hierarchy with the "haves" over the "have nots". Each of the individual cells should be equipped with a sink and toilet. A common shower will alleviate additional expenses.

Other Facilities

There are several other facilities that accommodations will need to be provided for. A multi-purpose room is needed for classes and can also serve as a dining room and visitation area. This can also be constructed, but a modular arrangement such as lease to own could be more economical. Arrangements for food service preparation and

serving will also need to be considered. If there is already a common kitchen that serves other inmates, the food can be prepared and delivered in a food cart using insulated trays. Provisions will also need to be made for laundry services and medical services.

Another very important feature of the boot camp is the recreational and physical conditioning component. Physical conditioning helps build self respect. There should be a recreation field large enough to allow for running exercises, group calisthenics and other recreation related activities. An obstacle course is recommended. Such a course can be constructed for \$3,000 - \$4,000. The obstacle course helps instill confidence, ability, agility, and teamwork. It should also be noted that staff should participate in the physical conditioning component of the treatment. This sets an example to the inmate participants, and reduces the possibility of complaints of abuse.

Selection Criteria

The selection criteria should be directly related to the boot camp goals. What is the boot camp trying to achieve? Is it first offender intervention in non-violent substance abuse cases? Is it the boot camp's intent to reduce overcrowding, or reduce the cost of traditional incarceration? Once it has been established as to what the goals are, then the selection criteria can be put into place.

The single most important element in the success of the boot camp program is cooperation. A coalition should be formed that involves all entities with an interest in the offender. The local law enforcement agency, the court of jurisdiction, the public defender, the prosecution, the private bar, and the correctional agency that will administer the boot camp program should all be members. Others, such as the school board and probation and parole, can be included based upon the needs of the coalition. It is this group that will establish the selection criteria for the boot camp participants. Some of the things that should be considered as part of the selection criteria are past criminal history, medical/mental status, current offense, anticipated length of sentence, record of institutional behavior, willingness to participate, and age and sex. Pre-entry testing may also be considered as well as exit testing to determine the effects of the training.

The next step in the process is program placement. According to the National Institute of Justice there are two basic processes by which an offender is selected and admitted (placed) into the boot camp program. The first process involves the court referring certain offenders to the correctional programs staff for screening to verify that the offender meets placement criteria. Once that has been established, a recommendation is made to the court that the inmate be sentenced to the program. A model commitment order should be designed that specifically outlines the conditions of the sentence as it relates to program participation and consequences for non-compliance.

The second process involves the correctional programs staff having unilateral authority to admit an offender to the boot camp independent of the court's recommendation. In this situation, the correctional staff conducts its own recruiting, screening, and placement of candidates. Other means of program participation are

derived from attorney referral, family referral, staff recommendations, or volunteers for the program.

The ideal situation concerning court ordered placements is that the offender is returned to the court upon completion of the program, successful or not. For those who fail the program, the court has the option to resentence the inmate to a longer term. Those who successfully complete the program are either discharged, or begin a period of probation supervision, or home detention.

The selection process can have important consequences for keeping the program filled with appropriate clientele. In those jurisdictions that rely upon the court, intake may be less than anticipated if disagreements develop between a prosecutor and the defendant's attorney on whether an application to the boot camp is an acceptable alternative sentence. Several jurisdictions with boot camps have cited this as being one of the reasons for reduced program participation. For this reason, it cannot be emphasized enough how important cooperation is among the involved parties. It is also the strong recommendation of the researcher that the user correctional agency assume the leadership and responsibility for recruiting qualified candidates for the boot camp. Failure to take the lead in this aspect of the program may very well result in low numbers of participants.

Staff Selection and Training

The average staffing ratio for boot camps around the country is 1 officer to 3 inmate participants. The juvenile offender boot camp in Manatee County has 30 offenders participating. The staffing level for that facility is 12 officers, 1 sergeant, and 1 lieutenant. This staffing level allows for a minimum of 2 officers on duty at all times. This staffing level seems appropriate for a boot camp of that size. Other staff members include educators and counselors who are responsible for the academic and therapeutic components of the program. Collectively, all staff members comprise a team approach to the training, education, and treatment that the participants receive.

Enough emphasis cannot be put on the importance of staff selection. It is recommended that staff candidates for boot camp positions be interviewed by supervisors of the boot camp. A careful background review is also very important. Employees whose backgrounds suggest a propensity for physical and verbal encounters may not be good choices for the positions. It is also a common misconception that military experience is a necessary prerequisite for drill instructor positions. In the July/August 1994 edition of American Jails magazine, Manatee boot camp Commander Lee J. Vailier states, "We are extremely selective for the drill instructor positions. Most of the instructors have military experience. I think that's helpful, but not a requirement". While Vailier stresses the importance of military style discipline, he says the program is much more than drill instructors barking orders. It is important to select staff members who recognize and subscribe to the programmatic philosophy that physical fitness, discipline, education, and counseling are all equal partners in the boot camp program.

There are no additional training requirements in Florida relating to staff assigned to adult jail boot camps. There is specialized training for staff working in juvenile offender boot camps. Although there is no mandate, most jurisdictions require special training for

their staff. The curriculum at Manatee and other locations involves training and education in human relations, communications and problem solving, rational emotive therapy, group dynamics, behavioral management, restraining procedures, crisis intervention, and youth rights and responsibilities. During my visit to Manatee County, it was very obvious that the staff had been well equipped with people skills. The young inmate recruits were vocal about how well the staff cared for them.

Policies and Procedures

Policies and procedures to guide staff must be written and in place before beginning operations. This document must cover every aspect of the boot camp's operation and staff members must know and understand its content thoroughly. It is recommended that part of the staff training curriculum incorporate training on the boot camp's policies and procedures.

Program Schedule and Curriculum

A survey of existing boot camps around the country indicated varied lengths of duration. One boot camp in Ontario, New York was for 5 days. The extreme was 300 days in Orleans, Louisiana. The average for most boot camps is 90 days. The Manatee County Juvenile Offender Boot Camp is 120 days.

The boot camp is structured and intense. Because the boot camp is relatively short-term, it is important that every minute of the day be dedicated to good use. From the time the participant wakes up in the morning, until lights out in the evening, the participant is involved in a structured activity. Keeping the boot camp participants busy is part of the boot camp philosophy. According to Commander Vallier, "We don't want them sitting around talking about how they break into homes, steal cars, and glamorize crime".

The boot camp curriculum is combinational. It involves discipline, physical training, education, and therapeutic counseling. Some of the curriculum content should include high school completion or adult basic education, prison literacy, AIDS awareness, drug and alcohol counseling, stress awareness, life skills, and spiritual guidance.

Most programs allow a gradual shifting from the physical training and work assignments to education, counseling, and community service activities as the offender progresses through the program. Military drill, physical training, and work assignments are emphasized during the initial month. The number of privileges increases as the participants progress through the various stages of the program. For example, in several programs, neither television, visits, or phone calls are allowed in the first 30 days. Thereafter, privileges are increased to reward the participant's performance.

This researcher had the opportunity to privately ask questions of three boot camp participants during a visit to the Manatee County facility. Each was asked what he considered to be the most important part of the daily schedule and curriculum. One young man said the computer lab and school, another said church, and the third said his weekly visit from his family. If these answers are indicative of the values instilled by the Manatee program, it is easy to understand why Manatee is regarded as a model program.

Aftercare Supervision

One component of the boot camp program where there is very little disagreement is that there must be some form of aftercare for the participant upon release from the boot camp program. In fact, most observers consider aftercare essential to the success of the program. The participant will need support and guidance as he/she attempts the transition back into the community. There will be housing issues, a need for a job, restitution, and a whole array of issues that the participant will need assistance in managing. Some boot camp programs provide aftercare by the local probation office. Some programs do not provide aftercare services at all. For agencies planning a boot camp program, it is strongly recommended that an aftercare component be included in the plan. Several programs allow graduates to return to the program on a volunteer basis to attend group counseling or support groups.

Program Evaluation

Human services are expensive. It's important that the boot camp be evaluated to determine if the results are consistent with the goals that have been established. The National Institute of Justice recommends, as a minimum, that process evaluations be conducted to assess whether the program is accepting the types of offenders it wants, delivering the types of services it should, maintaining an acceptable program completion rate, and effectively working within the allotted budget. Once these issues have been addressed and satisfied, a more comprehensive evaluation can be developed.

The Verdict

Perhaps the most important question that has yet to be addressed in this research is, do boot camps work, or don't they work? In the search for an answer, the experts were pursued to get their opinion. In a November 30, 1993, Jerry Springer talk show, Doctor Jerome Miller, President of the National Center on Institutions and Alternatives in Washington, D. C., said, "To think that bringing someone into a facility and getting them to mouth back at you with what you want to hear for four months or six months or eight months is going to change anything in any dramatic or permanent way is just nonsense". Florida Department of Corrections Secretary Harry Singletary said in the February, 1994, edition of Time magazine, "Look, I'm not a bleeding heart liberal, I'm a realist, but the cure for our crime is not prison beds and juvenile boot camps. We need to do something about juveniles at the school level before they get here". Mr. Walter Dickey is a law professor who used to run Wisconsin's prison system. He recently published a study on boot camps and described them as "costing too much and hardly make a dent in the crime rate". Last, there is the man who is credited with "inventing" the boot camp system, Larry R. Meachum, currently Connecticut Commissioner of Corrections who said in part, "I found it was a false promise, however, all the programs are designed to escalate punishment and harshness. The theory is that you can be so bad and so hard on somebody you can make them good. It's a false assumption from the beginning".

The boot camp proponents present just as convincing arguments that boot camps do work. American Jails magazine in its July/August 1994 issue profiled the Manatee County Boot Camp which is the first of its kind in Florida and one of a handful in the

United States. Charlie Wells, Sheriff of Manatee County said, "We're excited about the camp. The juvenile justice system is not working so maybe this will be a turning point". Sheriff Wells goes on to say, "The one lesson we must all take from it is any action is better than no action". Manatee Boot Camp Commander Lee J. Vallier said in the same article, "I think it's going better than my highest expectations. We've had officials coming in here from all over the state and the nation, everyone seems to think we're on to something". In the June 1994 edition of Law Enforcement Technology, John F. Wertz, Commander of Quehanna Boot Camp, Pennsylvania, says, "We've graduated 90 and only 4 have come back to jail, that's outstanding". Michigan State Senator Jack Welborn stated in a 1989 Corrections Today article, "I don't want to wait until the researcher completes his study before taking meaningful steps toward rehabilitation".

Conclusion

The answer to the empirical question of boot camps and whether they work, or not work is, "Yes they do and no they don't." The key is to identify those components that have been proven to be of value to the boot camp and avoid those that have been identified as hindrances. The researcher believes that the jury is still out as to the effectiveness of boot camps. Not until valid research and evaluation is conducted will the effectiveness of the boot camp "rage" be really answered.

Perhaps a thought provoking way to end this project is to repeat a Florida Times Union article that appeared on October 18, 1993. Sixteen year old Terrence "Bozo" Howell and a 17 year old friend tried to rob a man outside a Hollywood bar last month. When the man attempted to roll up his car window and get away, police say, he was shot three times and killed. The two juvenile murderers were arrested and both confessed. After giving his statement, Howell turned to detectives, shrugged and inquired, "Do I start serving my 21 days now?" Think about it!

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