

A Discussion on Recidivism Rates for a Juvenile Boot Camp

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Abstract

An examination of a juvenile boot camp program was conducted to establish the program's effectiveness. The examination revealed indicators for further research and possible direction for the deployment of additional resources. The examination demonstrated that the long-term benefits to juvenile boot camps should not be measured on recidivism rates alone, but in the immeasurable benefits gained by the implementation of the program.

Introduction

Juvenile boot camps are by their nature very controversial. Some juvenile justice practitioners believe that the programs are too expensive to operate and are too physically intense for juvenile offenders to withstand. Others believe these programs are responsible for long term behavior changes to juvenile offenders; additionally, they believe these programs offer many community benefits including deterrence and punishment.

Several arguments are presented by both opponents and proponents of juvenile boot camps. One area debated by both sides is the effectiveness of the programs. Opponents and proponents of juvenile boot camps argue (both convincingly at times) that boot camps are either effective or ineffective depending on their point of view. The effectiveness of these programs has become increasingly difficult to grade in the face of posturing between proponents and opponents to juvenile boot camps.

An objective examination of an existing program's recidivism rate should be a useful tool to evaluate the success, or failure of this style of program. The problem lies with how to measure a program's effectiveness? The methodologies to measure the effectiveness of these programs are plentiful. The selection of one is the main crux of this research project. However, prior to discussing methods (and the rationale for the selection of the methodology), it is important to discuss the background of the program examined.

Background and program description

The program studied has two specific components. The initial phase consists of a six-month residential component followed by a six-month conditional release element; each component is distinct in its design. The program accepts fifteen male juvenile offenders and organizes them in to platoons. The program is designed to train two platoons at a time, and up to four platoons a year. For the purpose of this research paper, the platoons will be

designated by year and number. For example, the second platoon from 1997 will be listed as platoon 1997-1.

The program begins with the acceptance of the fifteen juvenile offenders (candidates) into its secure facility. The program has several goals and objectives during the residential term. More specifically, the juvenile offenders are indoctrinated with a level of discipline they lacked prior to the program. Additionally, the juvenile offenders participate in mental health counseling, team building exercises, religious services, very rigorous physical exercises and an extensive educational program.

The conditional release component is best described as an intensive form of juvenile probation. The juvenile offenders are subjected to intense scrutiny by investigators who are responsible for a single digit caseload. The small size of this caseload allows each investigator the opportunity to visit program participants at school, home and work several times each week. This has been described as a key component to the success of the program.

Program success had been defined by the Department of Juvenile Justice's definition of recidivism (Department of Juvenile Justice 2005 PAM Report, p.4). The Department's definition adopted the following criteria:

1. The timeframe for evaluating recidivism consist of one year following the end of the conditional release component. This timeframe is designated as the post-commitment phase.
2. The juvenile must have been adjudicated or had adjudication withheld or had an adult conviction and
3. The adjudication, adjudication withheld or adult conviction must have occurred during the year following the post commitment phase.

Methods

This research project was conducted by a criminal history review of all the candidates for the first three years of the program. The sample included 165 youthful offenders from eleven platoons. The first platoon began the residential component of the program in April 1996; the final platoon (from this review) began residential training in December 1998. The criminal histories were obtained through 165 Florida Crime Information Center-National Crime Information Center (FCIC/NCIC) queries, one for each candidate. All references to arrests within this research paper were gathered from FCIC/NCIC queries.

Twenty bits of information were captured from the individual criminal histories of each candidate. The information was compiled into a spread sheet with space available for notes and comments. In addition the name of each male candidate their platoon number, race and their age as they entered the program were recorded.

The information gathered was separated into five time periods; those periods are: the time frame leading up to the beginning of residential training, the six months of conditional release, the year following the completion of conditional

release, a three-year period beginning with the completion of conditional release, and finally a five-year period beginning with the completion of conditional release.

In each period, the total number of misdemeanor and felony arrest(s) for each candidate was recorded. Those candidates arrested during the residential period of the program for crimes committed prior to entering the program were recorded as a prior statistic. The number recorded represented each individual charge listed within the criminal history. This number does not indicate that each candidate was convicted of each individual charge. This component of the research methodology will be discussed in further detail in the results section of this paper. Drug related arrests were notated during each period as well.

Finally, notations were made to each candidate who was arrested in property related crimes (burglary, thefts) and violent crimes (robbery, sexual battery), and those candidates who were sentenced to state prison. These final notations were captured as an overall snapshot and not related to any specific period.

Results

Candidate profile prior to entry into residential training: There were four candidates accepted for the program, who were still thirteen years old upon entry into the program, while two eighteen year olds were accepted. The average candidate upon entry into the program was 15.6 years of age and had been arrested for 1.3 misdemeanors and 3.9 felonies. Seventy-six percent were white; thirty-three percent were of Hispanic decent while twenty-one percent were black.

Candidate profile during the conditional release component: During this period, forty-two candidates (25%) were arrested for either misdemeanor or felony offenses. Eight of those arrests were drug related. The forty-two offending candidates who failed during this period were charged with nineteen misdemeanors and fifty-eight felonies.

Notables from this period: Candidate number one was involved in a New Years Evening drive-by shooting. The candidate involved was (and is) a documented street gang member as defined by Florida Statute 874.03 (Florida Criminal Law and Motor Vehicle Handbook, 2003) and fired approximately 30 rounds into the leader of a street gang's residence in retaliation for disrespecting the candidate at a party. The weapon used was a Tech-9 machine pistol, which had been stolen and stored prior to DRILL Residential. There were ten people (including four children) inside the residence during the incident; no one was injured. The candidate was sentenced to three years in state prison after a plea.

Candidate two from platoon 1997-1 was arrested the first day of conditional release for robbery. He has been arrested on a consistent basis and is currently in state prison. Candidate three (one of the thirteen-year-old candidates) was arrested for burglary during Conditional Release. Candidate three later drowned after consuming alcohol at a party in the woods with friends.

Candidate four (another of the thirteen year-old candidates) was arrested and charged with five felonies, including sexual battery and tampering with a witness. In 1997, the State Attorney's Office charged him as an adult. He later pled guilty and received five years probation. He is currently in state prison after several arrests and violations of probation.

Candidates five and six who were eighteen upon entry to the program were arrested during Conditional Release. Both have had multiple arrests throughout this study period, but neither has been sentenced to state prison.

One year after completion of Conditional Release: There were 123 candidates examined during this period (165 minus 42 failures during Conditional Release). Sixty-two of the 123 (50%) were arrested during the first year after conditional release. Twenty-four of those arrests were drug related. When totaled with the violators from the previous timeframe, the number of candidates arrested by the end of this period equal 104, or 63% of all candidates. Additionally, thirty-two of the 104 (31%) violators were arrested for drug related

crimes. The candidates were charged with 228 felonies and 148 misdemeanors during the year following Conditional Release.

Notables from this period: Candidate seven from platoon 1996-03 was murdered by a criminal acquaintance. Candidate seven and two of his “friends” were in the woods shooting targets with stolen firearms. During the day, the candidate’s friends robbed and shot him to death. They were later convicted. Prior to his murder, the candidate was arrested and charged with six felony offenses (including arrests for drug related crimes).

Candidate eight from platoon 1996-03 was arrested for two separate strong-armed robberies and grand theft. The State Attorney’s Office later withdrew charges because of trouble with the case and to facilitate the candidate’s desire to serve in the United States Marine Corp. Candidate seven serves to this day and has had several combat tours. However, he was arrested and convicted of DUI and sentenced to six months probation in 2001.

Candidate nine from platoon 1998-03 has had a similar circumstance. He was arrested during this period for possession of alcohol and violation of community control. One month later, candidate nine was arrested again for violation of community control. The latter occurred outside this timeframe. This candidate was later allowed to enter the United States Marine Corp and has served several combat tours. He is the brother of candidate eight.

Candidate ten from platoon 1996-1 was arrested in Georgia for a series of felony offenses including robbery, kidnapping and tampering with a witness, possession of explosive device and interfering with the flight of an aircraft; he was later sentenced to nineteen years in state prison.

Candidate eleven from platoon 1998-2 was arrested for three property related felonies during the year following conditional release. He had not been a violator to that point. However, those cases never made it to court because he died in a traffic crash while speeding in a stolen vehicle. Finally, candidate twelve from platoon 1998-4 was arrested for misdemeanor possession of marijuana; he later died of a drug overdose.

Three years after completion of Conditional Release: There were sixty-one candidates examined during this timeframe (165 minus the 104 violators). Of the sixty-one candidates examined during the three-year period following Conditional Release, forty-five previous non-violators were arrested during this period. This represents 74% of the candidates for this period and brings the total number of candidates arrested by the three-year mark to 149, or 90% of the original 165 study sample. Of the forty-five candidates arrested during this period, twenty-three were charged with drug related offenses. When added to our previous drug related arrest sample, the total number of candidates arrested for drug related offenses total fifty-five, or 37% of the violators.

The candidates arrested this period were charged with 146 misdemeanors and 154 felonies, or 6.7 crimes per candidate. In total, the 149 candidates who were arrested prior to the three-year mark were charged with 474 misdemeanors and 645 felonies by the end of the three-year mark.

Notables from this period: Candidate thirteen from platoon 1996-3 was arrested in a series of drug and property related crimes. He would eventually be sentenced to prison on two separate occasions. In 2001, candidate thirteen was sentenced to prison for manslaughter for his participation in a drug overdose. He and two friends were using heroin and one died. Candidate thirteen and the other friend were revived by EMS. Both survived.

Candidate fourteen from platoon 1998-02 was arrested in an alcohol related incident. Although he pled to the charge, the judge withheld adjudication and the record is now expunged. Candidate fifteen from that platoon was arrested out of state for contributing to the delinquency of a minor. He was found guilty and sentenced to 30 days in jail. He had not offended prior to or since this incident.

Candidate sixteen from platoon 1998-04 was arrested for violation of probation. This was his only arrest or contact with law enforcement. The record is not clear as to when he was placed on probation however, it appears that the onset of probation followed his participation in the DRILL program. Candidate sixteen was killed in a traffic crash while driving home from the business he created.

Candidate seventeen from platoon 1998-4 was arrested and charged with nine felonies including lewd sexual battery, possession of cocaine (on two separate occasions), and aggravated battery. He was eventually sentenced to three years in state prison as a result of a plea agreement.

A member of platoon 1996-3, candidate eighteen was involved in several shootings over this timeframe (he was both the perpetrator and victim of a series of drive-by shootings). Candidate eighteen was the leader of a violent street gang, and he participated in drive-by shootings where two rival gang members died and several were injured. He was charged with nine felonies including murder. Candidate was acquitted in one murder trial and State Attorney's Office was unable to file on a host of other felonies because of witness problems. Eventually, he committed another drive-by shooting and pled out to manslaughter and was sentenced to six years in state prison. This candidate was originally sentenced to the DRILL program for his participation in a drive-by shooting where two people were shot.

Five years after completing Conditional Release: There were sixteen candidates examined from this timeframe (165 original candidates minus the 149 candidates that had offended in the previous time periods). Of the sixteen candidates examined during this period, eleven were arrested. Those eleven candidates were arrested and charged with 10 misdemeanors and five felonies. Five of the candidates were arrested for drug related crimes.

At the end of this time frame, a total of 160 candidates out of the original 165 were arrested (97%). Those candidates were charged with a total of 965 misdemeanors and 1120 felonies or an average of thirteen charges for each candidate. With the addition of the five drug related offenders this period, the total number of drug related offenses reached sixty candidates (38%) of the original number of candidates.

Notables for this period: Candidate nineteen from platoon 1997-1 was arrested in 2002 for first-degree murder. He had been arrested in each of the study timeframes. His murder charge (along with related offenses) has yet to be resolved.

Candidate twenty from platoon 1998-3 was arrested for one count of grand theft. This was his only arrest since participating in the program; he was sentenced to thirty-three months in state prison.

Candidate twenty-one from platoon 1998-4 was arrested two months before the five-year mark of this study. He reached a plea agreement with the State Attorney's Office related to a felony and misdemeanor drug offense. He was sentenced to six months probation.

A member of platoon 1997-3, candidate twenty-two was arrested in Alabama on two separate occasions for misdemeanors. The record is not clear as to the disposition of the cases. One case was a DUI; the second case was related to domestic violence.

Candidate twenty-three from platoon 1996-1 had been arrested throughout this study. During the last timeframe examined, he was arrested and charged with two misdemeanors and fifteen felonies (all of which were either drug or property crime related). He eventually secured a plea agreement with the State Attorney's Office and received multiple five-year sentences.

Three candidates died during this timeframe. Two were a result of drug overdoses, the third drowned while under the influence of several drugs (it was reported by the Medical Examiner that the candidate was overdosing when he drowned).

Overall results: Nine candidates were confirmed to have died since they participated in the program. One was murdered, two died in traffic crashes (one was in a stolen car), two drowned while using drugs and alcohol and four overdosed while using multiple narcotics.

Fifty-one candidates were sentenced to a term in state prison. A prison term defined as a sentence greater than one year. This represents thirty-one percent of all of the program participants. All but one of the prison sentences occurred within the first three years following conditional release (although some have been sent back to prison since).

Of the five candidates who were not arrested during this study period, four were white and one was Hispanic. Two were fifteen, two sixteen and one was seventeen years-old upon entry into the program. They averaged 1 misdemeanor and 3.2 felony arrests prior to entry into the program. Four of the candidates were from platoons started in 1998, while the fifth started in 1997.

Discussion

This research project highlighted both the successes and failures of the one-hundred and sixty-five youthful offenders who participated in the program. The data is clear; overall, 160 out of the original 165 (97%) program participants were arrested over the five-year period of this study. Interestingly, 60 program participants (38%) were arrested for drug related offenses. I was not able to confirm if program participants were arrested for other crimes to support a drug habit.

The data suggest that this boot camp may be effective when measured over the short term (25% recidivism during conditional release). However, when examined at the three year mark, troubling statistics emerge. A ninety percent recidivism rate coupled with fifty-one candidates sent to prison is alarming. Further out, the recidivism rate is a staggering ninety-seven percent at the five-year mark.

I examined the forty-two candidates who were arrested during the conditional release component of the program. Thirty-nine of those offenders were either arrested on several different occasions, or were sentenced to prison and did not have the opportunity to commit additional crimes. Of the three who never re-offended again, one died soon after his first arrest, and the other two have successfully inculcated themselves into society. For the sake of discussion (later near the end of this segment), I would include these two candidates as successfully modifying their behavior.

Another interesting statistic related to the forty-two candidates that offended during the condition release phase is that twenty-four of them (57%) were eventually sentenced to a state prison. In addition, two others from the eighteen who did not go to prison died during the study; they were still committing offenses when they overdosed on drugs. This is interesting because the overall percentage of candidates who were sentenced to prison was 31% and this pool of candidates was much more likely to be sentenced to prison.

The increased rate of prison sentences among those candidates who offended during the conditional release component is profoundly relevant for two main reasons. First, it is an important indicator for how likely a candidate who continually re-offends ends up in prison by fifty-seven percent. Secondly, this statistic implies that greater attention should be given to those candidates who quickly re-offend. This may be an area in need of greater research.

Conversely, the percentages of drug offense arrests were nineteen percent of the pool of candidates; the final tally of drug related offenses equaled thirty-eight percent. This group of candidates was arrested for drug related offenses at half the rate of the total offender list.

As discussed during the introduction section of this research project, the Department of Juvenile Justice designated the year following Conditional Release as its benchmark for compiling recidivism rates. The research places the overall recidivism for this period at sixty-three percent.

The results from this research project raised more questions than were answered. My expectation for the results of this project was to provide guidance

to improve an existing award-winning program. By far, the most useful product from this research suggests that if boot camps are to continue, we need to target those offenders who violate during conditional release.

One final note of discussion, I would like to replicate this research project in each of the boot camps in Florida. In addition, I would like to study the recidivism rates for all of the programs of the same level (this boot camp is designated as a moderate risk program). I believe that ultimately, the viability of boot camps should be measured with each other and then compared to different programs. This is the only way to truly gauge the effectiveness of all programs.

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