



Preliminary Evaluation of VADOC Faith-Based Programs

Introduction

Prisons today are operated as places of transformation. Institutional programming educates and trains offenders so that they might live productive lives once they re-enter society. In addition to educational, vocational, cognitive, and substance abuse programs, prisons provide faith-based programs to their offenders.

GraceInside is a privately funded Virginia prison chaplain service, serving the Virginia Department of Corrections' (VADOC) incarcerated offenders since 1920. The mission of the organization is "to pro-

vide full-time chaplains in all of Virginia's state adult and juvenile prison facilities". In recent years, the role of GraceInside has expanded beyond providing chaplains to VADOC facilities. The organization now coordinates and administers the residential faith-based programming to offenders at two VADOC facilities. Although faith-based programs are widespread across the United States, few states have empirically evaluated their programs to see if they actually are reducing recidivism. A preliminary evaluation was completed in 2012. This brief aims to further explore the faith-based programming that is present today in VADOC facilities and provide an outcome evaluation on its effectiveness.

Programs in Virginia

For the past seven years, GraceInside has been partnering with VADOC to provide the residential faith-based programming to confined offenders in Virginia. This program is offered free of cost to the agency. In 2008, James River Correctional Center (JRCC) became the first facility in Virginia to offer faith-based programming. This residential program covered areas related to substance abuse education, victim-impact awareness, life-skills development, cognitive skill development, educational attainment, community reentry, religious instruction, and moral development.

Participation in the program is voluntary, but those incarcerated for murder or rape/sexual assault are not eligible to apply. The program only accepted offenders who were about 18 months away from their release to the Metro Richmond ar-

ea. This eligibility criteria has since been relaxed. Because only twenty offenders at each facility may participate in the program at a time, not all eligible offenders are selected. Those eligible are interviewed, and the applicants deemed most committed to a moral lifestyle are chosen. Participants of the program are required to attend at least 90% of the program's scheduled meetings.

Faith-based programming in Virginia expanded in 2010 to female offenders at Central Virginia Correctional Unit for women (CVCU). In 2011 JRCC closed, and its program was moved to Deep Meadow Correctional Center (DMCC). In 2013, the program at CVCU was moved to Virginia Correctional Center for Women (VCCW). Both DMCC and VCCW continue to administer the residential program today.

What Are Other States Doing?

In a 2005 survey, the National Institute of Corrections Information Center (NICIC) found that 20 states had residential faith-based programming in at least one of their institutions (NICIC 2006). Virginia was not included among these 20 states because its first faith-based program did not start until three years after the survey was conducted—in 2008. Although many states offer faith-based programming, not all take the same approach.



Florida

Over the past several years, the Florida Department of Corrections (FDOC) has been operating a volunteer-staffed faith- and character-based initiative in 11 of its prisons. Inmates of all faiths are eligible to voluntarily participate, though the FDOC admits that offering programming to a religiously diverse population is a challenge. The program operates prison-wide in four of its 11 facilities. In a 2009 assessment of this initiative, researchers found that the programming was having a positive effect on institutional adjustment and security. They, however, did not see the programming having an effect on recidivism. (Source: Florida Office of Program Policy Analysis & Government Accountability)



Louisiana

Louisiana offers faith-based programming to its confined offenders in several different ways. First, each Louisiana institution has a chaplain working with volunteers to provide religious programming on a daily basis. Three facilities in the state house faith and character-based dormitory (FCBD) programs. These residential programs are aimed at strengthening personal faith and beliefs through mentoring. The New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary's "Angola Campus" at Louisiana State Penitentiary is, perhaps, unlike any other faith-based program in the nation. The seminary offers two college level degree programs: a two-year associate's degree in pastoral ministries and a four-year bachelor's degree in theology. About ninety offenders are enrolled at the Angola Campus at any given time. Some graduates of these programs are transferred to other institutions where they work under the chaplain to strengthen that facility's religious programming. (Source: Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections).



Minnesota

The Minnesota Department of Corrections (MnDOC) started offering the InnerChange Freedom Initiative (IFI) administered by Prison Fellowship (PF) in the summer of 2002. The program is open to 40 male offenders who are within 18 to 24 months of their release date. All participants, therefore, must have a sentence of at least 18 months. As it is in Texas, the IFI is divided into three phases—the first two while the participant is in prison and the third beginning at release. The MnDOC completed an outcome evaluation by examining 732 offenders released from Minnesota prisons between 2003 and 2009. The average follow-up period was a little more than three years. Results indicated that IFI reduced the risk of re-offending by 26% for re-arrest, 35% for re-conviction, and 40% for new offense re-incarceration, especially among those who received a continuum of mentoring care following release to the community, but did not impact re-incarceration for a technical violation revocation. The study concluded that faith-based programs can be beneficial in reducing recidivism, but only if they utilize evidence-based practices that target each participant's criminogenic needs. (Source: Minnesota Department of Corrections)



Texas

In April 1997, the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) became the first state correc-

tional agency to implement the PF-sponsored IFI when it began the program in one of its units near Houston. PF funded the program with private dollars. The program accepted offenders who were 16 to 24 months from parole, and continued to offer 6 to 12 months of aftercare while the offender was on parole. The IFI works in three phases. The first phase provides a spiritual and moral foundation for the program. Phase Two tests the inmate's values in real-life setting to prepare him for life back in the community. The final phase occurs during the first 6 to 12 months of the offender's parole. This phase involves helping to assimilate an offender back into the community by developing relationships with family, co-workers, and local churches. Recent analysis suggests that IFI graduates in Texas are "significantly less likely to be arrested or incarcerated" in the two-year period following release from prison. The research, though, fails to explain why this cohort recidivates at a lower rate. (Sources: Texas Criminal Justice Policy Council and Byron R. Johnson)

Literature Review

Churches and other religious institutions have long recognized the need for ministries in prisons. According to one researcher, the first faith-based prison program began in 1488 and was sponsored by the Roman Catholic Church. In America, the Quakers greatly influenced prison reform, as did the Black Muslim movement of the 1960s and 1970s (Zimmer 2005).

Though religion has long been assumed to be beneficial to a prisoner's re-entry, this hypothesis has only recently been empirically tested. Some studies suggest that religiosity deters people from social ills (such as drug abuse or violence) regardless of whether that individual is in prison (Kerley, Matthews, and Blanchard 2005) or in the community (Jang 2008). The tendency for religion (regardless of the sect) to instill positive values and alter deviant behavior makes faith-based programming a viable option for today's prisons (Zimmer 2005).

Many studies of faith-based programs have recently been conducted with varied objectives, samples, analyses, and conclusions. One report examined the degree to which faith and spirituality are present in faith-based programming, and concluded that programs greatly differ in the extent to which they incorporate faith (Willison 2011). The study also found significant differences in the characteristics among programs that teach principles from the same faith (i.e. Christianity). Another study discovered that the religious involvement of prisoners (measured by frequency of attending religious service or a faith-based program) in one South Carolina maximum security facility was extremely varied (O'Connor 2002). Multiple studies found that there was a negative relationship between an offender's religious involvement and the number of disciplinary infractions he had while in prison (O'Connor 2002, Clear 2002).

Most research regarding faith-based programs evaluate the success of these programs by looking at recidivism. Some studies found that faith-based program participants were less likely to recidivate (Duwe and King 2013, Johnson 2012, Trusty and Eisenberg 2003). Other studies found the positive effects to be minimal or modest (Kerley, Matthews, and Schulz 2005; Johnson 1994; Johnson 2004). Though one study noted that faith-based programs have financial costs and require significant community involvement (Trusty and Eisenberg 2003), none of these studies found faith-based programming to have more costs than benefits.

Some literature suggests that program participants are not a representative sample of a prison's population. Several scholars argue that program participants are less likely to recidivate not because of the program's influence, but because they volunteered for the program, thereby showing their motivation and will to reform themselves (Camp 2006). Another study refutes this claim, though, citing that IFI graduates are much less likely to recidivate than IFI participants who do not complete the program (Johnson 2012).

Methodology

To evaluate the effectiveness of the VADOC’s faith-based program, all of the offenders were included who participated in a faith-based program and subsequently were released prior to January 30, 2012. This date was chosen because it allowed for a two-year follow-up of all of the released participants.

This participant group comprised 65 individuals. They included 41 program graduates and 24 participants who did not graduate, either because they were transferred to another program, moved to a new facility, or were dismissed from the program for violating that program’s requirements.

These 65 participants were matched to a control group of 65 non-participating offenders. Each offender in the control group had the same gender and race as a matching offender in the participant group. The matched pairs also shared the same crime type and release type. The difference in their ages at release was no more than four years. Their sentences were within 18 months of each other. Their total number of SR incarcerations was within one incarceration.

In order to discover re-arrest and re-conviction rates over different periods of time, criminal histories were collected from the Virginia State Police in August 2014 for the offenders in both participant and control groups. VirginiaCORIS data in August 2014 was used to determine 12-month re-incarceration rates for both groups. Sub-group analysis was also performed. For the participants, the rates were compared between graduates and non-graduates. The rates were also compared between graduates and their paired controls. A chi-squared test was performed to examine the difference of rates. An alpha level of 0.05 was used for all tests.

Offender Characteristics

Offenders in the control group had similar characteristics to offenders in the participant group. Because a female institution is currently one of two facilities in Virginia that houses a faith-based program, the gender ratio in the faith-based program is not representative of the prison population as a whole. About one-third of the program participants studied were female. Though similar in age with the participant group, the control group was slightly older. There were 53 black offenders and 12 white offenders in each group. Offenders serving sentences for violent crimes represented 43% of all offenders studied. The crime type for 38% of each group was non-violent and the remaining 18% were sentenced for drug crimes. Most (85%) of the offenders in each group were released on direct discharge. The remaining 15% were released on mandatory parole. The participant group, overall, had slightly longer sentences (with

		Participants		Controls	
		#	%	#	%
Gender	Male	43	66%	43	66%
	Female	22	34%	22	34%
Age Groups	Under 25	10	15%	10	15%
	25-40	36	55%	32	49%
	41 and Older	19	29%	23	35%
Race	White	12	18%	12	18%
	Black	53	82%	53	82%
Crime Type ¹	Violent	28	43%	28	43%
	Non-Violent	25	38%	25	38%
	Drug	12	18%	12	18%
Release Type	Direct Discharge	55	85%	55	85%
	Mandatory Parole	10	15%	10	15%
Total Sentence	Under 4 Years	22	34%	26	40%
	4-9 Years	31	48%	27	42%
	10-14 Years	0	0%	0	0%
	15 Years or More	12	18%	12	18%
Number of SR Incarcerations	One	36	55%	30	46%
	More Than One	29	45%	35	54%

¹Crime type of an offender’s current most serious offense.

an average of 89 months) than the control group (with an average of 86 months). More of the offenders in the control group had multiple incarcerations than those in the participant group.

Preliminary Outcomes

Participants vs. Controls

Although it is still premature to draw long-term conclusions, preliminary data reveals that re-arrest rates were consistently lower among program participants than they were among non-participants in the control group. Over time, the difference of re-arrest rates between participants and the controls started to shrink. Statistical testing showed the difference was only significant within 6 months

(8% of program participants compared to 20% of the non-participants in the control group). Within twelve months of release, the re-arrest rates grew to 22% among the participants and 35% among the non-participants in the control group. Within eighteen months, 32% of the participants were re-arrested, compared to 40% of the non-participants in the control group. Within 24 months, the re-arrest rates grew to 43% among the participants and 51% among the non-participants in the control group.

Because some releases may be arrested but not convicted for an offense, the preliminary re-conviction and re-incarceration rates for these offenders were also calculated because they serve as better indicators of adjudicated criminal behavior. Fifteen percent of the participants were re-convicted of an offense within twelve months of release. This compares to 28% of the non-participants in the control group. Only 3 participants (5%) were re-incarcerated within twelve months, compared to 2 non-participants in the control group (3%).

Graduates vs. Participating Non-Graduates

Of the 41 program graduates, 3 (7%) were re-arrested within six months, compared to 2 (8%) of the participating non-graduates. Within twelve months, 4 (10%) of the graduates were re-arrested, compared to 10 (42%) of the participating non-graduates. Within 18 months, 9 (22%) of the graduates were re-arrested, compared to 12 (50%) of the partici-

	Participants (N=65)		Controls (N=65)		P-values
	#	%	#	%	
Re-arrest					
within 6 months	5	8%	13	20%	0.0422
within 12 months	14	22%	23	35%	0.0802
within 18 months	21	32%	26	40%	0.3614
within 24 months	28	43%	33	51%	0.3796
Re-conviction					
within 12 months	10	15%	18	28%	0.0879
Re-incarceration					
within 12 months	3	5%	2	3%	0.6483

	Graduates (N=41)		Non-graduates (N=24)		P-values
	#	%	#	%	
Re-arrest					
within 6 months	3	7%	2	8%	0.8820
within 12 months	4	10%	10	42%	0.0025
within 18 months	9	22%	12	50%	0.0196
within 24 months	13	32%	15	63%	0.0155
Re-conviction					
within 12 months	3	7%	7	29%	0.0185
Re-incarceration					
within 12 months	0	0%	3	13%	0.0205

Preliminary Outcomes *(continued . . .)*

pating non-graduates. Within 24 months, 13 (32%) of the graduates were re-arrested, compared to 15 (63%) of the participating non-graduates. Of the 41 graduates, 3 (7%) were re-convicted within twelve months, compared to 7 (29%) of the 24 participating non-graduates. Although none of the graduates were re-incarcerated within twelve months, 3 (13%) of the participating non-graduates were re-incarcerated. The tests found statistically significant differences in the 12-month, 18-month, and 24-month re-arrest rates, also in 12-month re-conviction and re-incarceration rates.

Graduates vs. Paired Controls

When the 41 graduates are compared with their 41 paired controls, the graduates continue to have the lower recidivism rates. Graduates consistently had lower re-arrest rates than their paired controls. The difference of re-arrest rates varied across 24-months follow-up period. The significant difference occurred within 12 months. The 12-month re-conviction rate among the graduates was 7% compared to 32% re-conviction rate among the graduates' paired controls. The difference was statistically significant. No graduates and only one paired control was re-incarcerated within 12 months.

	Graduates (N=41)		Controls (N=41)		P-values
	#	%	#	%	
Re-arrest					
within 6 months	3	7%	8	20%	0.1052
within 12 months	4	10%	15	37%	0.0040
within 18 months	9	22%	16	39%	0.0931
within 24 months	13	32%	19	46%	0.1744

Re-conviction					
within 12 months	3	7%	13	32%	0.0053

Re-incarceration					
within 12 months	0	0%	1	2%	0.3143

Preliminary Recommendations

The VADOC should collect data on all offenders who have ever applied to a faith-based program in Virginia. By doing this, the impact of self-selection and age effect could be tested. Secondly, these groups should continue to be studied and reported regularly so the outcome measures may be expanded to include longer follow-up periods as data fully matures. Then, if the programs are found to be effective, the VADOC should consider expanding them to populations with special reentry challenges such as geriatric offenders, violent offenders, or offenders with mental health issues.

Where Are They Now?

At the end of August 2014, among 41 faith-based graduates in the participant group, three (7%) were incarcerated in either a state prison or a local/regional jail, six (15%) were being supervised in the community, and 32 (78%) were at liberty. Of the 24 faith-based participants who did not graduate, five (21%) were incarcerated in either a state prison or a

	Graduate	Non-graduate	Control
Incarcerated	3	5	15
Community Supervision	6	8	20
At Liberty	32	11	30
Total	41	24	65

local/regional jail, eight (33%) were being supervised in the community, and 11 (46%) were at liberty. Of the 65 offenders in the control group, 15 (23%) were incarcerated in either a state prison or a local/regional

jail, 20 (31%) were under community supervision, and 30 (46%) were at liberty.

Future Study

VADOC plans to continue to study a faith-based program over the coming years. First, the agency will continue to follow those offenders represented in this study to determine their long term outcomes. In addition, newer program participants will be studied in a similar way. VADOC will also collect data on all offenders who apply to the programs to help determine if the desire to participate in the program (and modify their behavior) serves as the impetus for change, or if the program itself is responsible for that change.

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