



Caroline County Recovery Community Program: A cost-benefit analysis and examination of effectiveness

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Biggest Illicit Drug Market in the World

The International Narcotics Control Board has described the United States as “the biggest illicit drug market in the world.” According to Allen Beck, statistician for the Justice Department, currently drug offenders make up almost 60 percent of all inmates, in comparison to 25 percent in 1980. Furthermore, years of research has confirmed the strong correlation between drugs and crime, hence the increasing jail and prison population, as well as climbing recidivism rates. Research conducted by the U.S. Justice Department has revealed that two-thirds of drug offenders released from state prison facilities will be re-arrested within three years of release and almost half of released drug offenders will go back to prison because of a technical violation of their sentence (i.e. failing a drug test) or on a new conviction and sentence (Langan and Levin, 2004). There are also over a million more prison beds today than there were 20 years ago throughout the United States (Blakley et al., 2007).

Public safety is critical and justice must be served. Incarcerating those who break the law provides a sense of security as it relates to the safety of the community. Yet, incarceration has been proven not to work multiple times; it simply creates “better criminals” and after the offender is released the revolving door to the jail/prison typically continues.

A solution that costs less than building more jails and prisons and is more effective at reducing recidivism is needed. Fortunately, the solution already exists in some places, but these solutions and alternatives to incarceration need to be more widely explored as they are under utilized in many parts of our home state of Virginia and throughout the nation.

These alternatives to incarceration are critical for those who battle substance use disorders. Many of these individuals do not pose a threat to society, especially when they are not under the influence; they simply require assistance to manage a disease they battle. Incarcerating someone who battles addiction simply “arrests away the problem” for the time they are behind bars (this assumes they are not using while imprisoned), but most often does not do anything to establish a path of recovery and treatment. Instead of incarcerating an offender who has a history of drug and/or alcohol use, placing them in a reputable recovery program will most often assist them in becoming sober and beginning a lifestyle of recovery, thus ceasing future criminal activity. However, such alternatives must be delivered in the most effective method. Often alternatives are available, but they are not provided in the most effective manner.

Biggest Illicit Drug Market in the World continued....

Successful alternative programs have been adopted, costing less and yielding better results. The key emphasis seen in other states is “not getting soft on crime, but getting smart on crime” (Vratil and Whiremire, 2008). For the same amount it costs to incarcerate one person, four individuals (if not more) can be put through a reentry program, which most often has a larger impact on adjusting the criminal lifestyle. In fact, research has exposed recidivism rates being cut by 25 percent when implementing such programs (Vratil and Whiremire, 2008). Just as important as saving money on incarceration rates, these offenders then join society as productive citizens, contribute to society by paying taxes, and do not claim another crime victim.

Similar solutions have been established in other states, in order to reduce the costs associated with recovery and recidivism. Pennsylvania and Connecticut have implemented two different peer-based recovery support service models to improve long-term recovery. These have proven effective in reducing recidivism rates, all at a lower cost. Peer-based recovery programs are unique, in that services are delivered by ex-offenders and those who are living a successful recovery.

Utilizing the peer-based model is essential. The peer-based model is having someone with lived experience in recovery (often they have previously been incarcerated as well) administer the program and deliver the recovery programming. Someone in recovery is able to assist the 30-year heroin addict in going through withdraws; someone who has not experienced that would not be able to assist. The ex-addict has ‘been there, done that’ and walked in their shoes; as such, they are able to instill a level of hope and motivation. They are a living testimony that recovery is possible. Not only has the peer-based model proven to be effective in providing treatment to those who battle substance disorders, but “helpers derive significant therapeutic benefit from the process of assisting others: to get it, you have to give it away” (Riessman, 1990). According to White (2007), the recovery coach in a peer-based model has many roles to fulfill, including: outreach, motivator and cheerleader, ally and confidant, truth-teller, role model and mentor, planner, problem solver, resource broker, monitor, tour guide, advocate, educator, community organizer, lifestyle consultant/guide, and friend. In a study conducted by Dr. Scarbrough (2012) of Virginia recovery programs, evidence supporting the importance and effectiveness of using a peer-based model is strong. This was demonstrated in the results of both the qualitative and quantitative sections of her research.

Biggest Illicit Drug Market in the World

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According to a study conducted by researchers at the Justice Policy Institute (2004), treatment and recovery is more than having participants attend various self-help groups, such as Alcohol anonymous and Narcotics anonymous. While these 12-step and self-help groups have proven to be effective, additional factors are needed to ensure effectiveness in ceasing drug/alcohol usage and partaking in a criminal lifestyle. Not only do meetings not meet everyone's needs, but also they frequently do not narrow down to the root cause of the substance use and do not teach on other areas that are likely lacking. As such, programs should incorporate a full continuum of care, including educational development, financial literacy, job skill preparation and career readiness, life skill development, mental health assessment, parenting, transportation, and obtaining identification documents (birth certificate, social security card, identification card).

Not only have these alternatives that include the above-mentioned components proven to have better outcomes as it relates to lower recidivism rates and absence from substance use, but they also save thousands, if not millions, of taxpayer dollars. It is for these reasons that many communities have began partnering with programs that provide such alternatives to incarceration and recovery options for qualifying offenders. As a response to this research and evidence, the McShin Foundation located in Richmond Virginia, partnered with the Caroline County Virginia Commonwealth Attorney's Office and Commonwealth Attorney Tony Spencer to begin providing an alternative to incarceration for qualifying addicts.

Caroline County Recovery Community Program (CCRCP)

Trea was on PCP, a hallucinogen that alters mood in an unpredictable fashion and often causes aggressive behavior. While under the influence, Trea committed malicious wounding and was subsequently charged for the crime. Under the sentencing guidelines, four years is the minimum sentence to be served for malicious wounding. However, because of Caroline County's Recovery Community Program (CCRCP), which is available through the collaboration of the Caroline County Commonwealth Attorney's Office and the McShin Foundation, Trea entered a plea agreement orchestrated by the Commonwealth Attorney's Office and was sentenced to the CCRCP, where he has been enrolled since November 2013. Testifying about the miracle that came from the CCRCP sentence as opposed to jail/prison time, Trea shared:

"My life was in shambles, a son on the way, bills to pay, but in all of that all I could see was the next fix. I have been in and out of jails for the past three years because of my addiction. I had no sense of responsibility, no thoughts for anyone but myself, and nothing to show for it. I always thought "why me" and "they are just out to get me", but I couldn't see I was bringing these things on myself. Today, however, I see the err of my ways. The program has shown me how and why my train of thought was wrong, and helped me begin to correct it. Since I've been in the program I've learned how to be responsible and hold a job. I can take care of myself now as well as my son and girlfriend. It has taught me how to have fun without the drugs and partying. The program has taught me to have and enjoy life. This program saved my life."

By being sentenced to the CCRCP, Trea saved the county at least \$9,975, which would have been the minimum cost associated with his incarceration in Pamunkey Regional Jail. This does not include the cost savings that the Department of Corrections encountered by Trea not being sent to prison for a portion of his sentence. Trea's story is just one many success stories of those who have been sentenced to the CCRCP.

How the CCRCP Works

The CCRCP began in January 2011 as a means to an alternative sentence to jail and prison and is provided by the McShin Foundation at no cost to the taxpayers; McShin currently underwrites all program-associated costs. Such a program not only saves the county thousands of dollars annually, but it also provides participants with an opportunity to engage in authentic peer-based recovery that is typically not available to offenders while incarcerated, thus lowering recidivism rates and saving significant money.

Caroline County is fairly rural, with limited recovery resources. Additionally, there is not adequate access to public transportation, thus limiting the option of seeking recovery elsewhere. As a response to the dire need of the County, the McShin Foundation partnered with the Caroline County Commonwealth Attorney to offer the CCRCP in order to promote recovery in the local community while utilizing a peer-based model, which are people successful in their recovery delivering the recovery message. The mission of the program is to deliver a message of hope to recovering addicts and alcoholics and facilitate their journey to a healthier life.

There are a couple of ways to get sentenced to the program. Often, if it is the first time getting in trouble, the judge will sentence the individual to the CCRCP. After a year, if the program has been successfully completed, the judge will likely drop the pending charge(s). A second way of being sentenced to the program is through bond; the CCRCP is a term of the bond release. If the individual then successfully completes the program, a plea agreement will frequently be drawn and no jail time will be served. Other individuals voluntarily become a part of the program after hearing of the successes.

The CCRCP is a day reporting program that requires participants to not only report to the center daily, but also participate in multiple meetings throughout the week (i.e. Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, 12-step, etc.) and educational programming (life skills, job preparation, etc.). Each participant must have a sponsor and is also provided with a recovery coach mentor from the McShin Foundation. Although the CCRCP does not have a residential component, there are rules that must be followed when not in the center, such as daily curfew. The program has four phases, each lasting 90 days. In order to complete and graduate from the program, the individual must have a full year of sobriety; if during the last month an individual relapses, they must start from the beginning and commence their year of sobriety again.

Graduation and Recidivism

Since the CCRCP's beginning in 2011, there have been four graduating classes. The first ceremony included 7 individuals who successfully completed the program in April 2012, the second in September 2012 graduated 12, the third in April 2013 graduated 14, and the fourth in October 2013 graduated 11. Of the 44 individuals who have graduated from CCRCP over the past two and a half years, only two have returned to jail – one from the second graduating class and one from the third. **This reflects a success rate over 95 percent;** in other words 95 percent of the individuals who go through the program do not get reincarcerated. **This also equates to a 4.5 percent recidivism rate - an extremely low, and almost unheard of, rate.**

It is difficult to compare recidivism rates in order to determine absolute effectiveness. The reason for this is because while the Virginia Department of Corrections states their rate is 29 percent, this *only* includes if the offender goes back to prison – if the offender is sentenced to time in jail (and not a Virginia prison), it does not count as them being reincarcerated and recidivating. As such, it can absolutely be said that the **CCRCP rate is at least 24.5 percent lower than the statewide prison average**, yet, if the statewide rate included jail incarcerations, the number would be much higher. Recidivism rates produced by the Bureau of Justice Statistics¹ reveal that 70.7 percent of individuals were arrested for a new crime within 3 years of release – these individuals are arrested and go to jail. Of this number, 27 percent then went to prison. While an exact correlation between these national numbers and the jail and prison rate in Virginia cannot be drawn, it does reveal the stark difference between those who spent their sentence in jail and those who are charged with a larger crime and are sentenced to prison. Thus, the almost 25 percent variance among recidivism for those who go through the CCRCP is likely an extremely low estimate of the difference among rates.

“The CCRCP has helped to continuously motivate me to maintain my sobriety while achieving my long term goals in a safe manner. This center is located in a safe environment that I call my home away from home that I can walk to. This program has the tools I need along with internet access and telephone usage. I am proud to be a part of the CCRCP. I have met quite a few great people that I can relate to and helps me to better understand my disease of addiction.”

~~ Veronica

Cost Savings

Serving time begins at the Pamunkey Regional Jail, costing the facility approximately \$47.50 daily (\$17,337.50 annually) to house one individual. Typically, if an offender is sentenced to prison for over two years, the offender will be transferred to the Virginia Department of Corrections (DOC) after approximately seven months. However, if the offender receives a prison sentence of less than two years, they will typically spend their entire sentence at Pamunkey.

As such, cost savings can be calculated. After the calculation of the time associated with the minimum sentencing guidelines (18.25 years) and time actually served by the 21 individuals (5.5 years) was determined, the remainder of time they would have spent in incarcerated in Pamunkey or a Virginia prison if not for CCRCP was calculated.

These calculations revealed that the program made available 4,654 bed nights (4,654 days is equivalent to 12.75 years) for other offenders. In addition to the thousands of bed nights available due to the decrease of individuals frequenting Pamunkey, **Caroline County experienced \$221,053 of direct cost savings due to the 21 current participants.** Bear in mind, this number is associated with the current 21 participants. The cost savings from the four previous classes is comparable, thus **it can be assumed that close to a million dollars in savings directly to Caroline County has been experienced since the CCRCP began in January of 2011.**

The almost quarter million dollars of cost savings to Caroline County does *not* include the savings encountered by the Department of Corrections. Of the 21 current participants, there were two individuals who would have received over 2 years of prison time (one 4.5 years and one 4 years), hence spending time in a Virginia prison. Collectively, these two individuals would have spent at least four and half years in prison. Each year, it costs approximately \$25,000 to house an offender in a Virginia prison. As such, **DOC experienced a savings of at least \$112,500** by having these offenders sentenced to the CCRCP instead of receiving a typical sentence, which would have sent them to prison.

Cost Savings

Continued...

There are many other areas of likely savings, but the figures were not readily available for this study. As previously mentioned and as research has proven, there is a strong likelihood that the 44 individuals who have graduated from the program would have been reincarcerated at some point because of their addiction; each person reincarcerated would cost tax payers over \$17,000 a year to house in Pamunkey or \$25,000 in a Virginia prison. However, in large part due to the program, 42 of the 44 graduates have remained out of the system. As such, this relates to a savings related to not being reincarcerated; however, the exact savings of this cannot be calculated at this time. Future and more in depth studies can determine the probability each individual faces in recidivating before and after the program.

By utilizing various regression models in future studies, the difference between the rates of days between incarcerations before and after participating in the program can be determined, thus the associated cost savings could then be calculated. A 2012 study of a Richmond based program that was started by the McShin Foundation used this statistical method and found that program participants that did recidivate had an increase of six months between incarcerations after they went through the program.¹ At a cost of \$25,000 annually to incarcerate, this saved \$14,500 per offender. This multiplied by all of the men in the program over the study period, resulted in a savings of \$7.2 million (Scarborough, 2012). While the savings associated with CCRCP would be less than this because of the sheer number of individuals who are a part of each of these programs, cost savings would reflect a similar pattern.

Future studies of the CCRCP will examine and report on these areas, which will likely reveal additional significant cost savings.

¹ Using this model reviewed over 20 years of arrest data for each of the program participants; almost 500 individuals were in this study. The paired t-test looked at the average amount of time between incarcerations before going through the program and then after the program. Through statistical analysis using SPSS, it was determined there was a 6 month increase between incarcerations after going through the program.

Budget for CCRCP

Since its beginning in 2011, CCRCP has been fully funded by the McShin Foundation of Richmond, Virginia – there has not been any cost incurred by the taxpayers, Caroline County, or Pamunkey Regional Jail.

Annually, the budget for the CCRCP is approximately \$63,000. This includes a facility in Caroline County to house the CCRCP, staff, drug tests, supplies, events/graduation, and other related costs. With an average of 25 graduating clients annually, this equates to costing \$2,520 to serve one person each year. This is significantly lower than the annual cost to incarcerate one person in a Virginia prison or at Pamunkey Regional Jail (\$22,480 and \$14,817 cheaper respectively). Not only is it significantly cheaper to place an addict in CCRCP, but also the outcomes are much more successful than simply incarcerating them. In addition, there are many items that simply cannot be measured, including the effect on law enforcement, fewer victims, children whose parents no longer are strung out on drugs/alcohol, and jobs obtained by these individuals thus paying taxes.

Conclusion

The high level of success found with the Caroline County Recovery Community Program as it relates to recidivism rates among the graduates, as well as the large amount of cost savings experienced, cannot be ignored. The partnership developed between the McShin Foundation and the Caroline County Commonwealth Attorney's Office and the Commonwealth Attorney Tony Spencer is a unique one. The CCRCP provides results and numbers on paper, but more importantly it saves lives. Speaking on this, a program participant stated:

“To me the program has helped me see that I can do the positive things in life. I have been clean 2 years in March and grateful for this. I learn that no matter how you feel you have to learn as family that once you start staying clean it makes your life a blessing. With the support from your peers, lawyers, judges, and counseling you will understand the blessing. I am very grateful for the program and coming back helps me stay clear. It took this time to see that you can be a better person if you allow yourself the opportunity. I just want to thank the program and all the support that I have in my life. That's what making my dreams a reality. I love being clean and the man above, I can't let myself and others down because you all gave me that second chance to believe in something and that's the Program.”

The continuation of this program will enable even greater results and many more lives changed and saved. It will result in many families being restored and children getting their mothers and fathers back. Our community will continue to become safer and more drugs will be off the street. Citizens will be more educated and obtain jobs, thus increasing tax revenue. The jail population will decline as more people discontinue the lifestyle that previously kept the jail's revolving door in motion.

With additional funding and an expand program, these results will be significantly increased. Additional funds for the CCRCP will directly contribute to more lives saved, greater cost savings, and a decrease in the jail's population and recidivism rate.