Outcome Evaluation of Interface Children and Family Services Core Connection Programs

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Overview

The County of Ventura's Community Corrections Partnership (CCP) contracted Interface Children and Family Services (ICFS) to manage a collective of community-based partners known as Core Connection that provide services to the County's AB 109 population. Core providers offer AB 109 clients referred by the Ventura County Probation Agency (VCPA) a range of programs, including Case Management, Moral Reconation Therapy (MRT), Restorative Justice Accountability Groups, Family Services, Trauma & Counseling Services, and Sober Housing. These programs are part of a larger, collective impact-based effort to reduce recidivism and improve outcomes among the AB 109 population in Ventura County. To promote successful program implementation, ICFS has been developing its data capacity for reporting on client outcomes. To support this effort, ICFS contracted Resource Development Associates (RDA) to conduct an evaluation of Core programs for the 2016-2017 fiscal year. The objective of this evaluation was to assess Core client outcomes and program fidelity.

Evaluation Questions

This evaluation seeks to address the following questions:

1) What is the relationship between Core service participation and recidivism?
   a. What percentage of Core clients recidivate?
   b. What types of charges are filed against Core clients?
   c. What is the relationship between the types of programs clients participate in and recidivism?
2) To what extent do client characteristics and demographic factors relate to recidivism?
3) To what extent are Core services delivered with fidelity to evidence based practices?

Methodology and Data Considerations

RDA examined data on Core clients (N=348) for the most recent fiscal year, from July 1, 2016 through June 30, 2017. Our analysis commenced with cleaning, matching, and merging data we received on Core clients from VCPA (justice outcome data) and ICFS (service utilization and demographic data). Descriptive statistics were employed to examine Core client demographics, service participation, criminal risk, and recidivism. Cross tabulations and significance testing examined differences between subgroups. We also analyzed the results of Core services' fidelity assessments, which measured several indicators of alignment with evidence-based practices. In addition, we identified a comparison group composed of AB 109 clients that had been referred to Core but were never actually enrolled in services at any point from the inception of the program through the end of the evaluation period.

For the purpose of this evaluation, recidivism is defined as a conviction of a new felony or misdemeanor offense after clients' Core program start date during FY16-17, or anytime during this period for the comparison group. While the California State Board of Community Corrections (BSCC) defines recidivism as a new criminal conviction received by an individual within *three years* of release from custody or

placement on probation/parole supervision, this evaluation calculates the rate of recidivism within the FY16-17 period in absence of available data that covers a longer time period. As such, results should be interpreted with the cautionary note that they cannot be directly compared to three-year outcomes. The constraints of a relatively short time window may underestimate recidivism over the long-term. It may also not capture arrests that result in convictions after the year mark. However, research shows that recidivism occurs largely during the first year after release from custody or placement on probation.[1] In contrast, use of arrest data tends to overestimate recidivism statistics since many charges are eventually dropped and do not conclude in conviction.

Finally, in terms of other methodological limitations, there were data that were unavailable for evaluation purposes that could have otherwise informed the findings. Risk scores were missing for almost a third of Core participants. In addition, data pertaining to service utilization and the dosage or duration of services that clients received were not accessible for this evaluation.

Findings

In this section, we report findings from each of the analyses conducted. The variation in total number of clients included in each of the analyses is a result of missing data.

Client Characteristics

Within the AB 109 population in Ventura County, clients have one of three probation classification types: Post Release Community Supervision (PRCS), Mandatory Supervision (MS), and California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation suspension (CDCR suspended). The majority of Core service participants are on PRCS or MS (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Breakdown of Core Clients' AB 109 Classification Type (N=348)

■ PRCS (N=241) ■ MS (N=88) ■ CDCR Suspended (N=19)

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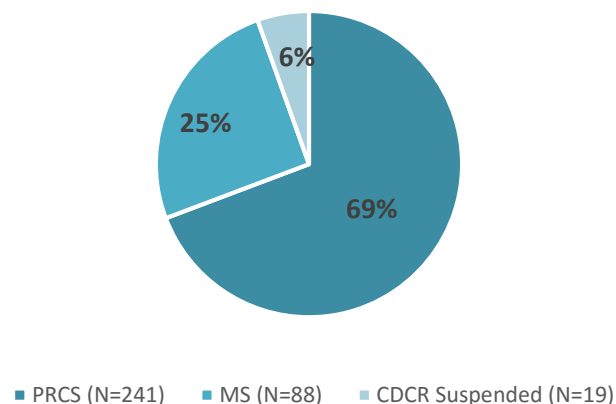
[1] Durose, M. R., Cooper, A. D., & Snyder, H. N. (2014). *Recidivism of Prisoners Released in 30 States in 2005: Patterns from 2005 to 2010* (pp. 1-30, Rep. No. NCJ 244205). US Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics., retrieved from: https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/rprts05p0510.pdf

In terms of demographic characteristics, the majority of Core clients are male. The racial and ethnic breakdown indicates that the largest proportion of program clients identify as Hispanic or Latino. With regards to age, the demographic most represented was middle-aged adults. These trends are consistent among PRCS and MS participants (Table 1).

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Core Clients

Characteristics	PRCS	MS
Gender (N=328)*		
Female	11%	24%
Male	89%	76%
Age Group (N=317)*		
18-25	7%	11%
26-35	42%	33%
36-50	41%	40%
51-65+	10%	16%
Race/Ethnicity (N=329)*		
Black	5%	2%
Hispanic/Latino	65%	49%
White	24%	42%
Other	6%	7%

*There were varying levels of demographic information available on Core participants.

The majority of Core clients with documented overall risk scores were identified as having moderate or high risk of recidivism according to the Ohio Risk Assessment System (ORAS) risk assessment tool (Figure 2).[2]

Figure 2. Breakdown of Core Clients by ORAS Overall Risk Score (N=229)


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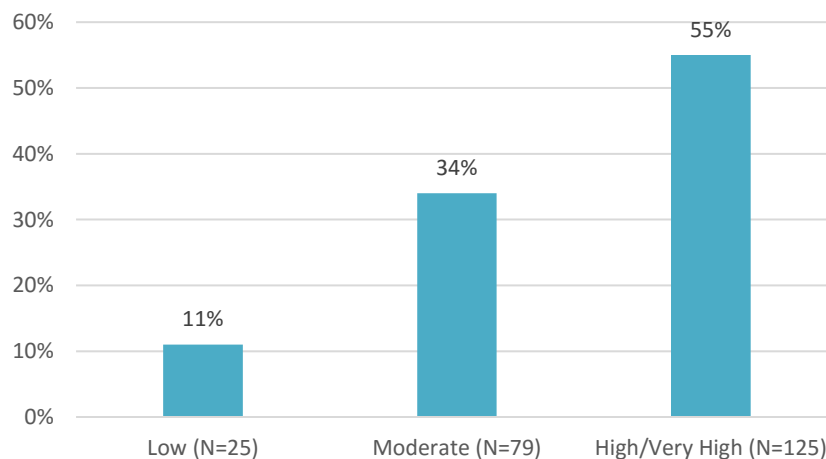
[2] "ORAS Training Overview." *University of Cincinnati*, www.uc.edu/corrections/services/trainings/offender_assessment/orastrainingoverview.html.

Recidivism

A majority of Core clients that participated in services over the course of FY16-17 did not recidivate during this one-year period (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Recidivism Rate of Core Clients during FY16-17 (N=348)

14%

86%

■ Recidivate(N=48)　■ Did Not Recidivate (N=300)
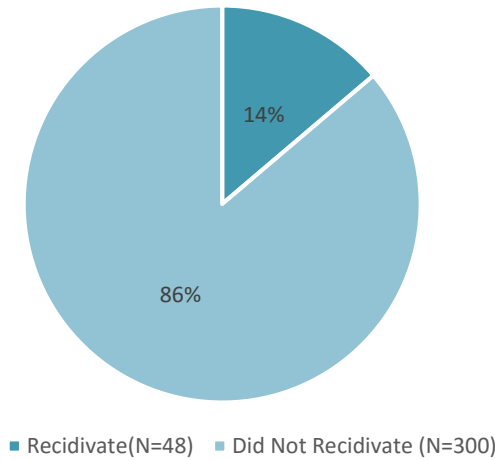
For the small fraction of clients that did recidivate during FY16-17, the majority of convictions were for misdemeanor offenses, as shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Level of Offense for FY16-17 Convictions (N=48)


29%

71%

■ Misdemeanor　■ Felony
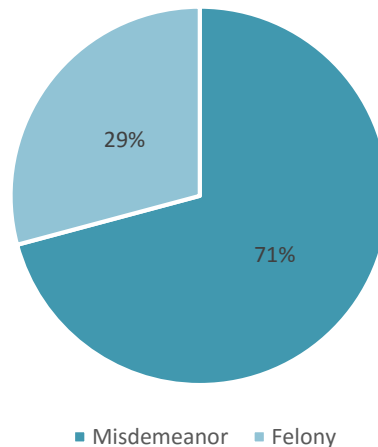
The most common types of offenses were drug possession and disorderly conduct (Figure 5). Violent crimes, including robbery and domestic violence, only accounted for 6% of all convictions. A complete list detailing client convictions is shown in Appendix A.

Figure 5. Breakdown of FY16-17 Convictions by Crime Type (N=48)
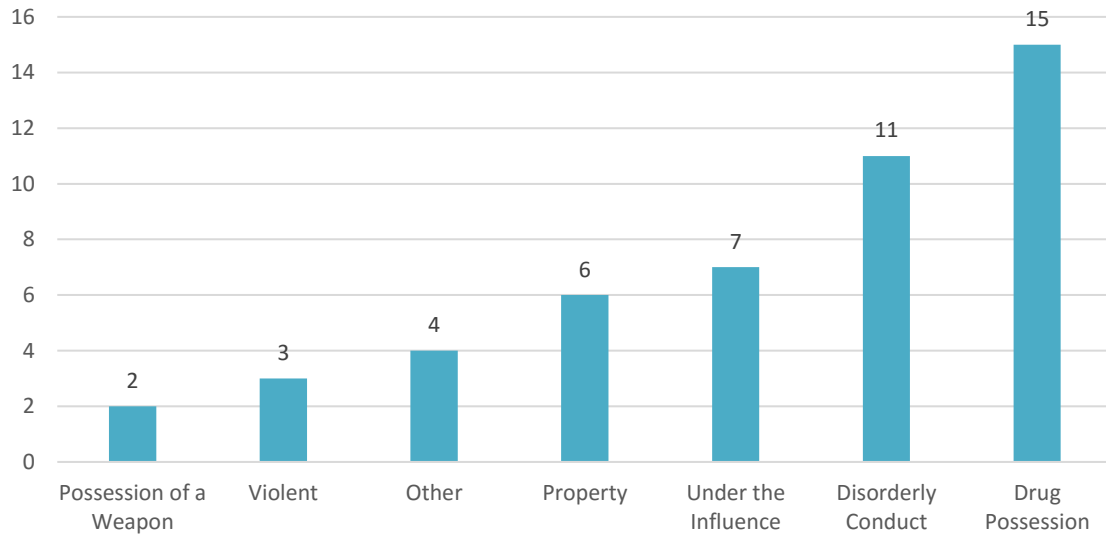
During FY16-17, Core participants had a lower rate of recidivism compared to AB 109 clients that were referred to Core services but never enrolled, as indicated in Figure 6.

**Figure 6. Recidivism during FY16-17 Among Core vs. Non-Core Clients**

■ Core Clients (N=348) ■ Non-Core Clients (N=127)
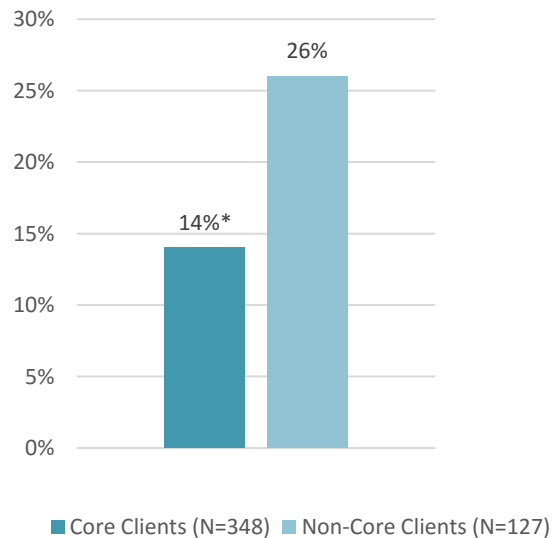
* Indicates statistically significant difference

Client Characteristics and Recidivism

Our examination of client characteristics and recidivism considered several factors that may be associated with recidivism. Figure 7 depicts that recidivism rates during FY16-17 did not vary significantly by race/ethnicity.

**Figure 7. Recidivism Rates by Race/Ethnicity during FY16-17 (N=347)**
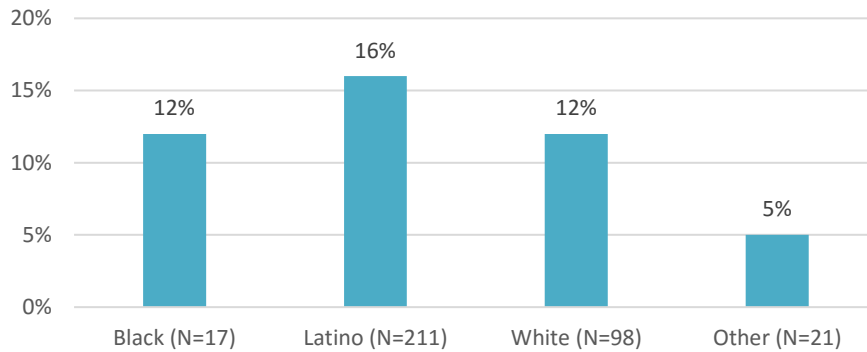
As shown in Figure 8 below, the four age groups did not have statistically significant differences in their recidivism rates during FY16-17.

Figure 8. Recidivism Rates by Age Category during FY16-17 (N=336)
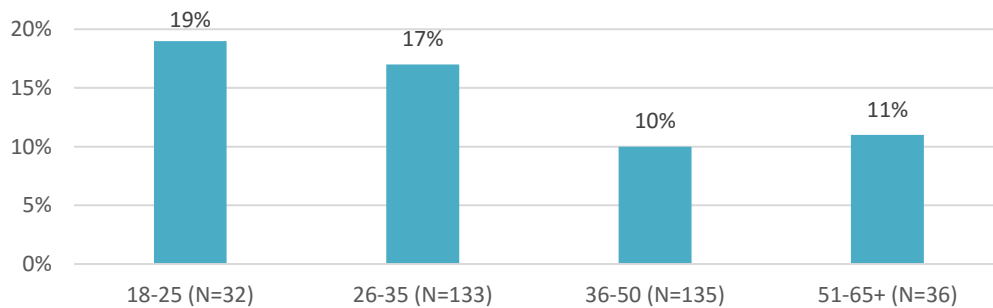
As expected, recidivism during FY16-17 was lowest amongst individuals categorized as "low risk" according to the ORAS risk assessment tool (Figure 9). As risk increased, so did the associated FY16-17 recidivism rate. These differences amongst groups of varying levels of risk were statistically significant. This is an important finding because risk is a dynamic indicator that has the capacity of being altered by programming.
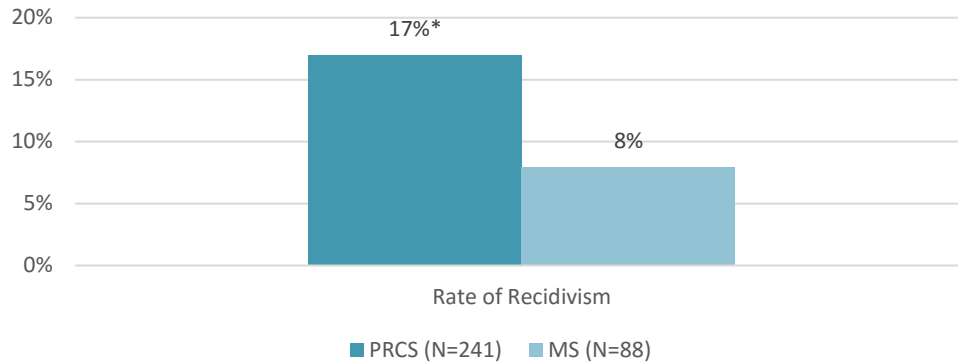
Figure 9. Recidivism by Risk Level during FY16-17 (N=229)
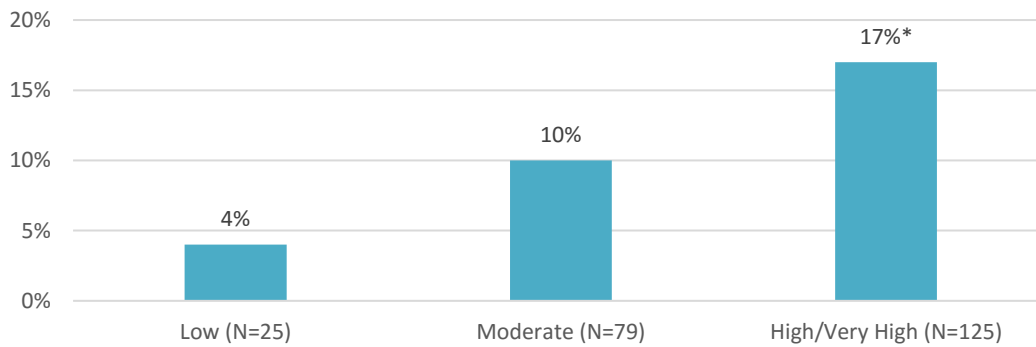
* Indicates statistically significant finding

In terms of client's probation classification, we found that PRCS clients had significantly higher FY16-17 recidivism rates than MS sentenced individuals, as depicted in Figure 10.

**Figure 10. Recidivism by Client Type during FY16-17 (N=329)**

* Indicates statistically significant finding

Service Participation and Recidivism

As depicted in Figure 11, during FY16-17, there was consistently a low level of recidivism among clients who participated in Core's various programs. Case Management is usually the first service that clients participate in, and those who show the capacity to participate take part in additional programs such as MRT and Trauma Services and Treatment. Since program participation varied and some programs had as low as 4 participants, meaningful recidivism rates were calculated for programs with 20 or more participants. Any clients who received an intake were included in the analyses but the extent of services they received was variable and dosage information was not available for this evaluation.

Figure 11. Recidivism by Program Type during FY16-17 (N=304)*
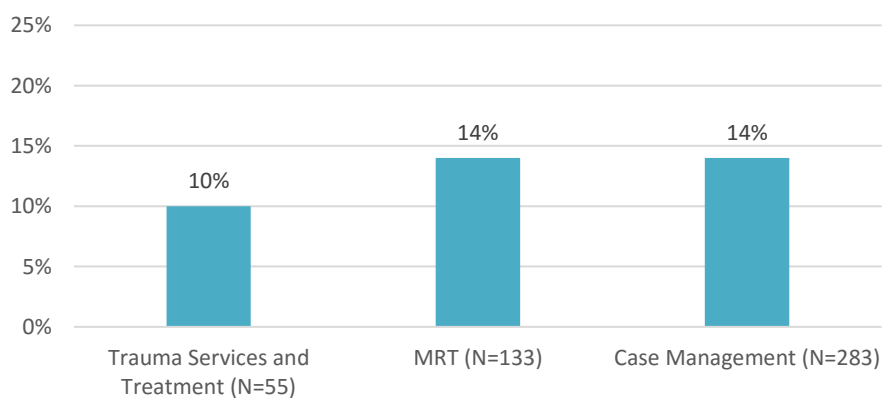
*Clients included in this analysis may have participated in more than one service

Core Service Fidelity Monitoring

ICFS staff evaluate implementation of evidence-based programs on a biannual basis. The assessments look at multiple indicators of program fidelity on a four-point scale (do not do, completes some of the time, completes most of the time, or completes all of the time). Example of indicators assessed include:

1. Case manager asks open-ended questions when interacting with client
2. Facilitators use the curriculum as prescribed
3. Facilitators focused the discussion on safe coping skills

As shown below (Table 2), Core programming was largely implemented as intended. The staggered assessments indicate consistently high fidelity and/or gradual improvement.

Table 2.Core Services Fidelity Results (N=29)

Program	Evaluation Period	Average Fidelity Score (0-3)
Case Management (Motivational Interviewing)	Quarter 1	2.7
	Quarter 3	2.6
MRT	Quarter 2	2.5
	Quarter 4	2.7
Trauma Services & Treatment (Seeking Safety)	Quarter 3	2.7
STEP	Quarter 1	2.6
	Quarter 3	3.0

Summary of Key Findings

- The majority of Core participants did not recidivate during the one year evaluation period
- Most Core clients that recidivated were charged with non-violent crimes
- Clients with higher ORAS risk scores had higher rate of recidivism
- Core's evidence-based programs are administered with high levels of fidelity

Recommendations

ICFS has made tremendous strides towards increasing data capacity to support outcome reporting and long-term evaluation of Core program outcomes. The following recommendations are intended to assist ICFS in continuing to strengthen data capacity.

- **Maintain and build on level of data sharing with Probation and service providers:** Increased data exchange with Core Partners would allow ICFS to obtain more complete data on clients, especially with respect to service utilization. Maintaining this year's data sharing capacity between ICFS and VCPA, which enabled use of a conviction-based recidivism rate and discovery of control group, in particular, would allow ICFS to continue reporting more accurate recidivism rate calculations.

- **Address issues related to missing data:** There were variables of interest that were missing or incomplete in this year's evaluation, e.g. ORAS risk score and programming dosage, which limit the scope of the findings. Training and technical assistance should be offered to providers to ensure more thorough and systematic collection of client data for inclusion in evaluations, as well as, to support service delivery.

- **Measure client risk level on an ongoing basis:** Best practice suggests having a baseline of risk levels/scores, as well as, on-going measurements of client progress with respect to their risk-need responsivity at six-month intervals.

- **Start quantifying programming dosage:** Since the extent of participation with services is a variable of interest, a more precise dosage entry protocol among Core providers should be implemented to support analysis of the relationship between the amount of service received and client outcomes.

- **Identify additional client outcome measures:** Although the primary goal of Core programs is to reduce recidivism in the AB109 population, collecting data on additional outcome measures would allow ICFS to gain a more complete understanding of the impact of Core programs on clients. These outcomes may include factors, such as educational attainment, housing status, progress towards employment, family relationships, criminogenic factors, and behavioral health indicators. Once selected, validated data collection tools should be used for assessing these outcomes, and case managers should be trained to collect and enter these data into the Tier database at regular intervals.

- **Integrate qualitative methods into future evaluations:** As a complement to current methodology, the addition of the following set of qualitative data collection activities will support identification of strategies for improving program implementation and client outcomes. Moreover, adding qualitative data analysis will enable us to highlight facilitators of success and challenges associated with Core programs, painting a more complete picture of how programs are operating, what impact programs are having, and how programs could be strengthened and achieve continuous improvement. Furthermore, asking open-ended questions of clients regarding their experiences in Core programs will contribute to an in-depth understanding of individual circumstances that influence client participation and success.
    - Focus Groups with three key groups of stakeholders: Core clients, VCPA Probation Officers that supervise AB 109 clients, and Core program service providers.
    - Key-Informant Interviews with leadership from ICFS, VCPA, and Core service providers.

Appendix A

Category	Offense(s)
Drug Possession	• Possession of methamphetamine (9) • Possession of a controlled substance (4) • Possession of drug paraphernalia (2)
Under the Influence	• Under the influence of a controlled substance (6) • Drunk in public (2) • Driving under the influence (1)
Property	• Petty theft (1) • Unauthorized use of a vehicle or vehicle theft (5) • Burglary (1)
Other	• False identification to a police officer (1) • Violation of restraining order (1) • Conspiracy (1) • Offering/preparing false evidence (1)
Disorderly Conduct	• Resisting arrest (7) • Contempt of court laws (2) • Resisting an executive officer (2)
Unlawful Possession of a Weapon	• Unlawful possession of a firearm (2)
Violent	• Domestic violence (2) • Robbery (1)