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FOLLOW-UP STUDY OF SAMPLE OF  
PRE-RELEASE PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS

At the request of the Department's Deputy Commissioner for Program Services, this report examines the return rate of a sample of participants in facility pre-release programs.

The highlights of this report are presented in the following Executive Summary and illustrative graphics.

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FOLLOW-UP STUDY OF SAMPLE OF  
PRE-RELEASE PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS

HIGHLIGHTS

1. Purpose of Research

At the request of the Department's Deputy Commissioner for Program Services, this research report was designed to generate statistical data pertinent to the basic question, "Is completion of a pre-release program related to the participant's likelihood of return to the Department's custody following release?"

2. Research Design

A sample of participants in the established pre-release programs at Green Haven, Wallkill, and Fishkill Correctional Facilities was selected. For comparison purposes, this sample consisted of "Participants" who completed the program of classes and "Nonparticipants" who declined to participate in this voluntary program.

3. Comparison of Return Rates of Participants and Non-Participants

The return rate of the satisfactory program participants (19%) was considerably less than the return rate of the non-participants (26%).

4. Comparison of Return Rate of Satisfactory Program Participants and Overall Return Rate of Department Releases

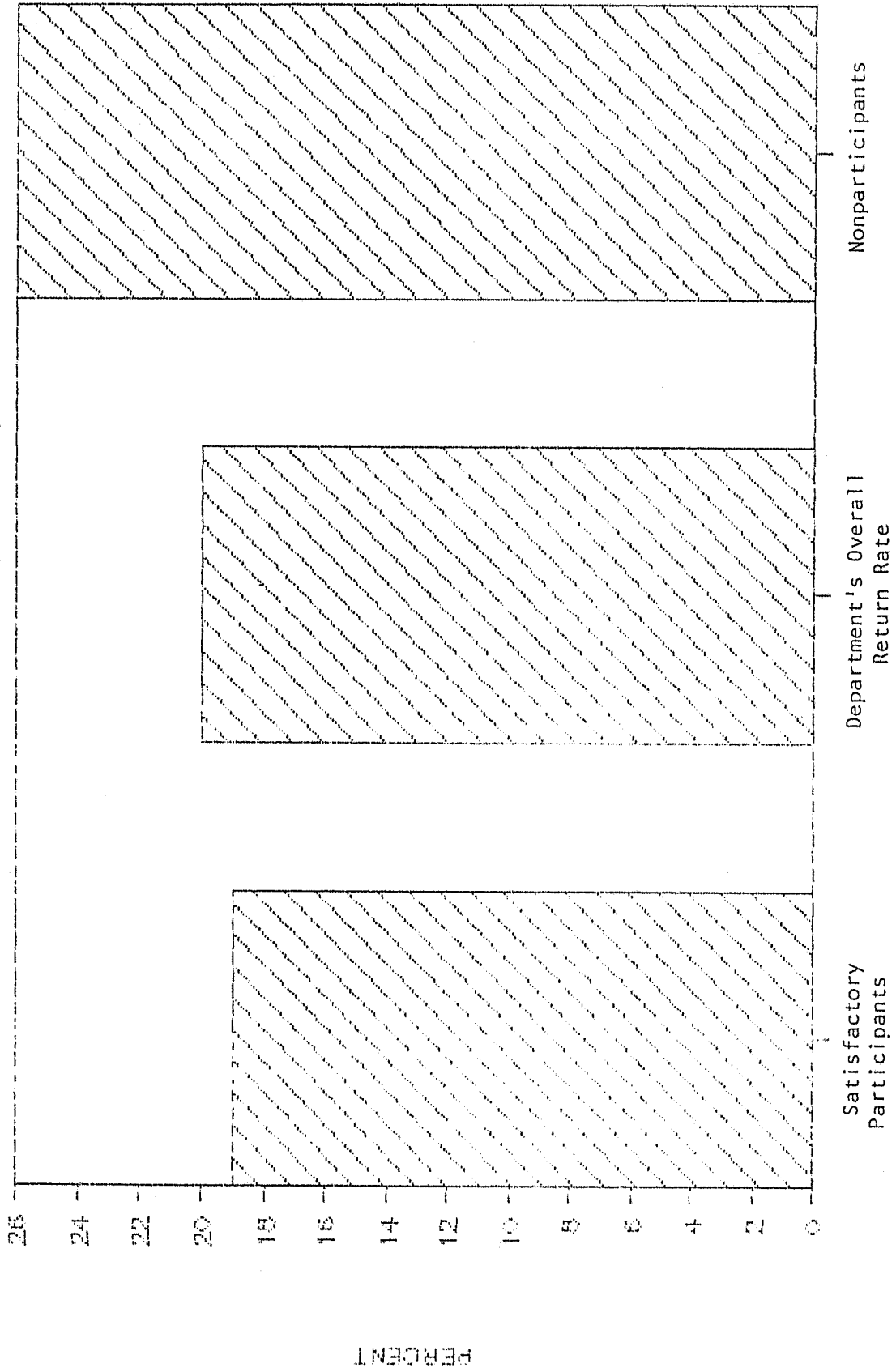
The actual return rate (19%) of this group was slightly less than their projected rate (20%) based on the Department's overall return rate.

5. Conclusion

The findings of this preliminary research suggest that satisfactory participation in pre-release programs is positively related to successful post-release adjustment (as measured by return to the Department).

# COMPARISON OF RETURN RATES

PRE-RELEASE PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS



## FOLLOW-UP STUDY OF SAMPLE OF PRE-RELEASE PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS

The present report examines the return rate of a sample of offenders who satisfactorily completed pre-release programs at three Department facilities.

### Background

In the past year, the Department has initiated efforts to improve pre-release program services for offenders approaching release.

One of the expressed objectives of this program is to reduce the likelihood of recidivism among program participants by facilitating their transition to their families and communities.

### Purpose of Present Research

In line with the expansion of the Department's pre-release program, the present report examines the return rate of participants in a number of the Department's more established programs.

### Program Description

In 1971, a group of inmates at Green Haven Correctional Facility, assisted by a New York City nonprofit organization, initiated a program in which inmates helped other inmates to prepare for release through referrals, services, classes, and peer counseling. The concept spread to several other facilities.

By 1977, Pre-Release was established as a Department program. The goals of the program are to assist inmates to use their period of incarceration productively and to make a successful transition to their families and communities upon release. Inmates who leave prison with employment or employment prospects, strong family relationships, an educational or vocational background, housing, and information about available support services have a higher probability of succeeding upon release. The Pre-Release Centers seek to assist inmates in achieving these goals prior to release in order to maximize their chances for success.

The Centers are administered by civilian staff but have the unique feature of being run by inmates for inmates. The program focuses on two areas:

- services to all inmates throughout their incarceration: assistance in obtaining documents (e.g. Social Security cards); referrals and information; peer counseling; and
- a program of classes held for inmates approaching release. The classes cover a wide variety of topics: job search strategies, interview skills, job retention skills, consumer skills, family relationships and parenting, legal rights and conditions of parole.

The ongoing services are available to all interested inmates. Classes are open to all inmates preparing to meet the Parole Board or to be released through conditional release or maximum expiration of sentence. There are no screening mechanisms for participation in this voluntary program. Traditionally, the Centers have provided a large portion of their services to inmates who have relatively few resources with which to prepare for release: those with limited education and vocational skills, weak family relationships, and lack of work experience. For these inmates, the Centers often play a major role in finding housing, obtaining employment, and accessing community services.

The Pre-Release Centers in the study (Fishkill, Green Haven, and Wallkill) have all been operational for a number of years. These Centers have been operated on an independent basis by each facility with relatively limited resources. Guidance Unit staff have been assigned supervisory responsibility for the Centers and supplies and space have been provided. Course content, program format, staff participation levels and coordination with facility Parole staff have been determined at the facility level. In mid-1985 the Department initiated efforts to strengthen, expand and standardize this program throughout the State. A directive has been developed, the number of Centers has increased significantly, the curriculum has been expanded, and resource materials have been developed.

#### Development of Research Design

At the request of the Department's Deputy Commissioner for Program Services, this preliminary research was conducted in concert with the Department's Coordinator of Pre-Release Services using information from a limited number of sites. Subsequent research involving a larger sample drawn from additional facilities is planned.

#### Sample Selection

A threshold issue in follow-up research is the selection of an appropriate study sample.

In selecting a sample for this study, an effort was made to select participants in established pre-release programs (rather than recently implemented programs). For this reason, the Coordinator of Pre-Release Services contacted the Pre-Release Coordinators assigned to oversee the established programs at Fishkill, Wallkill, and Green Haven to obtain participant data.

An effort was also made to balance the need to select relatively recent program participants (who are reflective of the current program services) with the need for an adequate follow-up period. It is the standard Department policy in recidivism research that a follow-up period of at least one year is necessary. In view of this consideration, the three involved facility pre-release centers were asked to submit data on inmates who had Parole Board hearings in early 1985.

### Distinction Between Satisfactory Program Participants and Nonparticipants

Previous Department research on the return rates of participants in various programs has consistently highlighted the importance of distinguishing between satisfactory and unsatisfactory program participants. Satisfactory participants in various programs from work release to alcohol programs have been found to have notably lower return rates than comparable inmates who failed to participate satisfactorily in these programs.

In light of this consistent research finding, the involved pre-release centers were asked to distinguish between "satisfactory" and "unsatisfactory" program participants. For purposes of this research, a "satisfactory" program participant was defined as an inmate who attended and successfully completed the facility pre-release program. On the other hand, an "unsatisfactory" program participant was an inmate who declined to participate in the pre-release program. These cases are thus more appropriately labeled as "nonparticipants". It should be noted that pre-release programs encourage participation of all inmates approaching release and does not screen potential participants with respect to other factors. The program does not administratively terminate inmates (except for disciplinary reasons). With respect to this program, this distinction between satisfactory and unsatisfactory program participation largely relates to the inmate's willingness to actively participate in the program. As such, the satisfactory program participants and nonparticipants may be seen as roughly comparable groups distinguished primarily by whether or not they participated in the facility's pre-release program.

### Follow-Up Period

As noted above, it is the Department's standard policy in recidivism research that a follow-up period of at least 12 months is required for valid analysis based on return rates. For this reason, a cut-off date for release from Department custody of August 31, 1985 was set to insure a follow-up period of at least 12 months as of September 1986.

### Follow-Up Procedure

The Department's computer file was then utilized to determine (a) the number of satisfactory program participants and nonparticipants who were subsequently released before September 1985, and (b) the number of released program participants who were returned to Department custody.

### Number of Sampled Cases Released Before September 1985

The necessary information on an aggregate total of 342 inmates who had Parole Board hearings in early 1985 was expeditiously submitted by the involved facilities at the request of the Department's Coordinator of Pre-Release Services.



Of this total, 166 were released before September 1985. Of these 166 released offenders, 119 were satisfactory program participants, and 47 were categorized as nonparticipants.

Comparison to Overall Return Rate of Department Releases

For general comparison purposes, the average return rate of Department releases is used in Department recidivism studies.

This average return rate of Department releases can be utilized to compute the projected return rates among the satisfactory program participants and nonparticipants.

The approach permits a comparison of the return rates of the satisfactory participants, nonparticipants, and the Department's overall return rate.

Development of Projected Return Rate for Comparison Purposes

The Bureau of Records and Statistical Analysis tracks all Department releases for a five year period to generate return rate statistics. Using the average return rate of all Department releases in 1980, a projected return rate can be developed for the program participants based on the number of months since their release.

The sampled program participants released in March through August 1985 would have been in the community between 13 and 18 months as of September 1986 depending on their respective release dates. Based on the Department's average return rate, it may be projected that 20% of these individuals would be returned to Department custody for a parole violation or with a new sentence by September 1986.

This projected return rate can then be applied to the number of program participants released in this period to generate the number of expected returns.

<u>Release Date</u>	<u>Number Released</u>		<u>Return Rate</u>		<u>Projected Number Returned By September 1986</u>
Satisfactory Program Participants					
3/85-8/85	119	X	20%	=	24
Nonparticipants					
3/85-8/85	47	X	20%	=	9

It can be projected that 24 (20%) of the 119 satisfactory program participants released from March through August 1985 would have been returned by September 1986.

Similarly, it can be projected that 9 (20%) of the 47 non-participants released during this period would have been returned by September 1986.

Comparison of Actual and Projected Return Rates

The following table compares the actual and projected return rates of the two groups.

As illustrated by this table, the actual return rate of the satisfactory program participants (19%) was considerably lower than the return rate of the nonparticipants (26%).

	<u>Projected Return Rate</u>		<u>Actual Return Rate</u>	
	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Satisfactory Program Participants	24	20%	23	19%
Nonparticipants	9	20%	12	26%

It is noteworthy that the return rate of the satisfactory program participants (19%) was slightly less than their projected rate based on the Department's overall release population (20%).

On the other hand, the return rate of the nonparticipants (26%) exceeded the overall return rate of the Department's release population.

Type of Return: Parole Violation or New Sentence

A higher percentage of the non-participants (58%) were returned with new sentences than the satisfactory program participants (39%).

	<u>Total Returned</u>	<u>Parole Violation</u>	<u>New Sentence</u>
	Satisfactory Program Participants	23 (100%)	14 (61%)
Nonparticipants	12 (100%)	5 (42%)	7 (58%)

However, the limited number of cases involved precludes the generalization of these sample statistics to the overall population of pre-release program participants and nonparticipants.

### Conclusion

In brief terms, the two major findings of this survey may be summarized in the following fashion:

1. This sample of satisfactory pre-release participants at Green Haven, Wallkill, and Fishkill, correctional facilities returned to the Department's custody at a notably lower rate than the comparison group of nonparticipants.
2. The sample of satisfactory pre-release participants had a slightly lower return rate than their projected rate based on the Department's overall release population.

In reviewing these findings, however, it may be argued that those inmates who successfully completed pre-release programs were more motivated than those who did not participate in these programs and that this factor is related to their future satisfactory adjustment on parole. As such, it could be contended that these individuals might be expected to do well on parole (whether or not they completed a pre-release program).

On the other hand, it should be noted that the possible existence of this self-selection bias does not logically lead to the conclusion that the provision of pre-release programs to these motivated offenders is unnecessary or uneconomical. On the contrary, it may be argued that it is the appropriate correctional policy to offer such individuals with opportunity to maximize their potential for successful reintegration into the community.

In view of this possible self-selection bias, this research was designed to analyze the relation of pre-release program completion and post-release recidivism without attempting to attribute any observed differences wholly to the impact of the program. As such, the lower return rate of the sample of offenders who completed pre-release programs may be jointly attributed to the offenders' motivation and capabilities and the impact of the program.

The finding that the return rate of satisfactory program participants approximates the Department's overall return rate may raise questions for certain readers. These readers may argue that pre-release programs are thus unnecessary or uneconomical because participants do not have significantly lower return rates than the overall population. However, this argument ignores the previously discussed finding that unsatisfactory program participants have a return rate that is notably higher than the average. Based on this research's findings, an alternate argument could be reasonably made that without pre-release programs, the motivated potential participants would not be able to secure needed services and thus have a higher return rate.

In conclusion, these research considerations and the preliminary nature of this study caution against any definitive conclusions concerning the impact of the pre-release program. However, the findings of this report do suggest a positive relationship and highlights the value of continued research in this area.