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PAIRING COLLEGE STUDENTS  
WITH DELINQUENTS:



The Missouri Intensive

Case Monitoring Program

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AUG 9 1995

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By  
David Onek

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U.S. Department of Justice  
National Institute of Justice

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This report  
was funded by  
the Missouri  
Department of  
Social Services  
Division of  
Youth Services.

# PAIRING COLLEGE STUDENTS WITH DELINQUENTS: The Missouri Intensive Case Monitoring Program

By David Onek

## INTRODUCTION

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The purpose of this report is to describe the Missouri Division of Youth Services' (DYS) innovative Intensive Case Monitoring (ICM) program. The ICM program is a joint venture between DHS and state colleges and universities in which college students serve as intensive case monitors (ICMs), or trackers, for delinquent youths.

ICMs help DHS case managers care for their clients. They have two major roles. One is to literally "track" youths, to ensure that they are abiding by the program conditions, such as attending school every day and being home by curfew every night. The other is for ICMs to serve as mentors and role models.

The ICM program has proven to be extremely beneficial to all parties involved. Delinquent youths benefit from the frequent contact, attention, and mentoring given to them by the college trackers. College students receive real world experience in their field of study. State universities bolster their reputations in the community. DHS case managers are better able to manage their heavy caseloads. And DHS is provided with an extremely cost-effective alternative to out-of-home placements.

Missouri has been at the forefront of juvenile justice reform since the 1970s, when it joined states such as Massachusetts and Utah in closing large, ineffective, and expensive training schools. In their place, Missouri established a regional network of small residential-based facilities. While this was a crucial step forward for the Missouri juvenile justice system, it placed too much





emphasis on residential care. Consequently, the Division of Youth Services sought ways to develop non-residential alternatives for youths, and contracted two juvenile justice consultants to aid in this process. These consultants recommended that Missouri develop an ICM program using college students.

In 1989, the first Missouri ICM program was started at Southeast Missouri State University (SEMO) in the DYS Southeast region. Today, there are ICM programs in all five DYS regions in the state involving a total of ten colleges and universities. In Fiscal Year 1993, 133 intensive case monitors tracked 474 delinquent youths statewide. The program has approximately doubled in size since Fiscal Year 1991, when 75 ICMs tracked 215 youths.

Staff from the National Council on Crime and Delinquency (NCCD) conducted site visits to three of the ten operational ICM programs. The first site visited was the pioneer ICM program at SEMO, located in a rural setting. NCCD also visited two urban programs in the St. Louis region, one at the University of Missouri at St. Louis (UMSL) and the other at Harris-Stowe State College. The UMSL program was initiated in 1990 and the Harris-Stowe program in 1993.

## BENEFITS OF THE ICM PROGRAM

The ICM program benefits all parties involved in it: DYS, the universities, the trackers, and the clients. The foremost benefit to DYS is that the ICM program is extremely cost-effective. It saves DYS enormous out-of-home placement costs by making many residential stays unnecessary and by shortening others. Youths having difficulty at home, who would have previously been removed from the home (at great expense to DYS), can now receive tracking services and safely remain in the community. A case manager from the Southeast region stated that "in many situations I used to have to remove a client from the home; now I can use a tracker instead." In addition, the ICM program allows case managers to return clients placed in residential care back into the community more quickly. Using trackers during aftercare also decreases the chances of a client being removed from the home again. DYS Deputy Director Vicky Weimholt stated emphatically that "there is no question that we are getting our money's worth, and more, from the program."

In addition to conserving DYS resources, the ICM program provides DYS with a fresh pool of potential employees. DYS is able to observe students at work in the field to see if they would make suitable full-time employees. Several ICMs have been offered full-time positions with DYS after graduation. During the past year, 5 out of a total of 16 graduates who participated in UMSL's tracking program were hired by either DYS or the Division of Family Services, its sister agency. These trackers were well-trained and familiar with the DYS system, making it easy for the Division to assimilate them.

A final benefit to DYS is that the ICM program enables it to provide far better services to the youths under its supervision. DYS case managers must have an intimate understanding of the problems and needs of their clients in order to make the best possible decisions concerning them. Unfortunately, huge caseloads make it extremely difficult for case managers to gain this understanding. Case managers in both the St. Louis and Southeast regions have average caseloads of 25 to 35 youths. They simply do not have enough time to keep close track of all their clients, much less get out and visit them all on a regular basis. This is especially true in rural areas like the Southeast, where a case manager's clients may be spread over hundreds of miles. ICMs can greatly reduce the problems

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caused by large case manager caseloads by making frequent contact with clients and reporting client needs to the case manager. One case manager said that a good ICM "is really doing my job for me, as far as making contact with the client and sensing the client's needs." ICMs free up valuable time for case managers, who can then work with the most troubled clients, develop resources, and catch up on paperwork.

Case managers from both the St. Louis and Southeast regions were unanimous in their enthusiasm and support for the ICM program. Two different case managers called the program "a godsend." Case managers praised the program for keeping them better informed about the needs of their clients and for allowing them to safely keep more clients in the community. They also stressed that the relationships that develop between trackers and clients have an extremely positive effect on the youths. "I wish I had a tracker for every one of my clients," said one case manager.

Students who become ICMs receive many positive benefits as well. First, students acquire practical, real world experience to complement their book learning, enabling them to better determine whether or not to pursue careers in social services. If they do decide to continue in the field, they may receive job offers from DYS upon graduation. In addition, students at some universities, including UMSL, can use the ICM program to fulfill internship requirements for graduation. All ICMs are paid for their work.

It was not these concrete benefits, however, that trackers most often spoke of when asked about the ICM program. Rather, it was the friendships and bonds they developed with their clients. Students viewed these relationships as the most important benefits of becoming trackers. "I learned as much from [my client] as she learned from me," stated one tracker. Another tracker said that the experiences he had through the ICM program "will last a lifetime."

Of course, the greatest beneficiaries of the ICM program are the clients themselves, many of whom come from extremely disadvantaged backgrounds, with dysfunctional families and few positive role models. ICMs can make a huge



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difference in the lives of these youths. One youth participating in the program described the role of a tracker in this way:

[Trackers are] there to help you out. Some family members don't have time for you. For someone who has a home with not that much caring, [trackers] make you feel you're not alone. Shows that someone care about you. They help kids when they need it and have fun with them.

Another youth with a tracker said that, although he knew that part of his tracker's role was to be a "snitch," he was still very thankful that his tracker was part of his life. In times of trouble, the youth called his tracker for help rather than "acting out." In this way, according to the youth, his tracker kept him from "slipping."

The importance of the stability, consistency, and caring that ICMs bring to the lives of DYS youths cannot be overstated. In addition, trackers provide vital services, such as driving youths to school, tutoring them, helping them look for jobs, taking them to doctors, teaching them to open bank accounts, and helping them apply to colleges. Trackers also provide recreational activities for youths, including playing basketball and going to baseball games, arcades, amusement parks, and movies. Finally, ICMs expose DYS youths to opportunities and experiences that the youths may not have realized existed. For example, an ICM may take a client to the college campus and explain the financial aid process to him or her, thereby exposing the client to the possibility of going to college. Case managers have seen dramatic changes in many of their clients after pairing them with ICMs. Youths develop strong, positive, one-on-one relationships with their trackers — often the first such relationship these youths have ever had. As one youth put it, "if it wasn't for my tracker, I don't know where I would be."

Universities benefit from the ICM program as well. Participation in the program greatly enhances a school's reputation in the community. In addition, social work and criminal justice departments are strengthened by the opportunity to offer their students field experience. Another benefit is that the program is operated at no cost to the university. In fact, university employees — professors and administrators — can earn extra money by coordinating the program.



## ICM PROGRAM EVALUATION

Unfortunately, there are very little evaluation data available for the ICM program. No recidivism data have been collected for any of the programs. SEMO is the only site with limited data on its ICM program. SEMO's data show that in Fiscal Year 1992, 52 youths were supervised at a total cost of \$54,298, or \$1,044 per youth. Of these 52 clients, only 9 (17 percent) were classified as unsuccessful. Although these data are encouraging, a far more in-depth evaluation study of the ICM program — which would include measures of recidivism and cost-effectiveness — is sorely needed. DYS is presently seeking the resources to conduct such a study.



## ICM PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

### Program Funding

The Missouri ICM program is funded by the Division of Youth Services through contracts with participating universities and colleges. Each university has a separate and slightly different DYS contract. Only public universities are eligible for the ICM program, allowing DYS to bypass a time-consuming bid process.

DYS funds the ICM program by contracting with each university for a certain number of hours of service at a set hourly rate. SEMO has a contract for 6,053 hours of service per year at \$10 per hour, for a total of \$60,530 per year. Harris-Stowe has a contract for 4,680 hours of service at \$13 per hour, for a total of \$60,840. UMSL has a total contract of \$59,010 for 4,215 hours of service at \$14 per hour.

The individual universities have the freedom to spend this money as they choose. Thus, trackers are paid different wages by each school: SEMO trackers make \$6 per hour, Harris-Stowe trackers make \$6.50 per hour, and UMSL trackers make \$7 per hour. The universities use the rest of their hourly rate from DYS to pay their ICM program administrator and to cover overhead. At all three sites, student trackers may work no more than twenty-nine hours per week. (If students were to work thirty hours or more, they would be considered full-time employees and the universities would have to pay for benefit packages.)

### Program Administration

It is crucial to the success of the ICM program that strong, cooperative relationships are developed between the program administrators from DYS and the universities. Good working relationships between these administrators were found at all sites visited. The greatest degree of success in this area was found at SEMO. The SEMO tracker program is woven into a larger collaboration, entitled "Operation Involvement," between DYS and the university in which DYS operates two group homes and a day treatment center on the university campus. The DYS/SEMO relationship is further solidified because the DYS administrator for the tracker program is also a part-time SEMO professor.

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The ICM program is operated from a different department in each of the three sites. The SEMO program is based in its Criminal Justice Department, with a professor from the department serving as the university's ICM program administrator. The UMSL program is headquartered in its Social Work Department, whose internship coordinator is in charge of the program. The coordinator for the Harris-Stowe ICM program works in the college's Department of Sponsored Programs, which includes several other community programs.

### Client Eligibility and Selection

In order to be eligible for the ICM program, youths must be committed to DYS by the courts. Youths who participate in the ICM program fall into one of two distinctly different groups. The first consists of first-time and minor offenders. For these youths, the ICM program is used as a diversionary measure to keep them in the community rather than put them in out-of-home placements. The second group of ICM clients are youths returning to the community following a residential stay. The ICM program reduces the length of the residential stay for these youths and serves as part of their aftercare program. The typical ICM client from the community care group is 14 or 15 years old, is having problems in school or at home, and has had one or two minor offenses (such as truancy or shoplifting). The typical aftercare ICM client is 16 years old or older, has had 6 to 10 more serious offenses (such as assault, burglary, or theft), and has had at least one out-of-home placement. All three ICM programs studied serve both groups of youths. At SEMO and UMSL, the majority of ICM clients are in the aftercare group, while the majority of Harris-Stowe clients are in the community care group.

All three sites have risk and needs criteria determining which youths are eligible for the ICM program. However, the eligibility criteria used are so broad that they screen out few DYS youths. (For example, any youth who at least "occasionally abuses" drugs or alcohol is eligible for the program.) Case managers hold the real power in selecting clients for the ICM program. The decision whether or not to allow a youth to participate in the program is almost entirely at their discretion.



*B*

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The case managers' decisions are based on the needs of their clients. Case managers provide ICM services to those they feel will benefit most from them. Of the aftercare group, chronic and serious offenders are more likely to be tracked. Of the community care group, youths who lack supervision in the home or are frequently absent from school will likely receive ICMs. Other factors may figure into the case managers' decisions as well. For example, at SEMO, youths living in outlying rural areas which are difficult for case managers to get to are more likely to be assigned ICMs than youths who live close to campus.

### **Recruitment and Selection of ICMs**

How does a college student become an ICM? As with other aspects of the program, this varies from university to university. SEMO students are recruited primarily from the university's Criminal Justice Department. Criminal justice professors "nominate" their best students for the program. The students must pass a background investigation which includes a check for possible child abuse and neglect charges. Cleared students then interview with a DYS case manager. Although the criminal justice professor's recommendation is important in the selection process, the case manager makes the final hiring decision.

Until recently, only full-time SEMO students were eligible to be ICMs. However, DYS now allows both part-time students and SEMO graduates to serve as trackers. This increase in flexibility allows a student who is an excellent tracker to continue serving as a tracker after graduation.

UMSL recruits students for the ICM program primarily from its Social Work Department. Social work students must complete a practicum, or internship, in order to graduate. The university allows the ICM program to count as this practicum. Thus, there is great interest in the program on campus; by becoming trackers, students can earn credit toward their degrees and earn some money.

Interested UMSL students must pass a background check prior to being interviewed. Interviews are conducted by the DYS program administrator and two case managers, and are extremely thorough. One tracker described her

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interview as being "kind of like the inquisition." The final decision on whether or not to hire the tracker is made by the DYS program administrator, with input from his counterpart at the university.

Harris-Stowe is a small college and thus recruits ICMs from its entire student population. Students are recruited by the Harris-Stowe program administrator, who posts notices throughout the campus and sends letters requesting applications to all juniors and seniors. Applications are screened based on the following criteria: each applicant must be a junior or senior, be a full-time student, have a minimum grade point average of 2.5, and pass a background check. Students who meet these criteria are subjected to a rigorous interview by the program administrators from DYS and Harris-Stowe. These administrators make all hiring decisions.

Last year, 340 letters requesting applications were sent out to Harris-Stowe students, 43 of whom submitted applications. The DYS program director was "pleased and amazed" at this high level of response. The initial screening process eliminated 18 of the 43 applicants. The remaining 25 students were interviewed, and 15 of them were accepted as ICMs.

### ICM Training

It is essential to the success of the ICM program that trackers receive adequate training before receiving their assignments. All three ICM programs studied provide such training. At SEMO, new ICMs are trained for two days (16 hours) by the case managers. The first training day provides an overview of both DYS and the ICM program; the second day focuses on practical situations that will be encountered in the field. These training sessions for new staff are scheduled quarterly. In addition, new trackers are often "shadowed" by experienced trackers for their first few weeks. All trackers receive ongoing training from case managers at biweekly staff meetings and at mini-workshops held throughout the year.

Harris-Stowe ICMs are trained by program administrators from DYS and the college. They receive ten hours of initial training. Topics covered include an orientation to DYS, the role of case management, and details about case

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monitoring — roles, responsibilities, safety issues, and home visits. In addition, all trackers meet on a bi-weekly basis for ongoing training sessions.

Like their counterparts at Harris-Stowe, UMSL trackers are trained by program administrators from DYS and the university. They receive approximately twenty hours of initial training, which includes units on communication skills and crisis intervention and involves role-playing exercises. The program administrators are now developing a tracker manual to be used during the training sessions. This manual will be a valuable resource for trackers once they are in the field. Case managers are also involved in the training of new trackers: they accompany new ICMs to their first few meetings with the client and the client's family. All trackers receive ongoing training at meetings held approximately every three weeks.

#### ICM Roles and Responsibilities

The role of ICMs is, essentially, to help case managers care for their clients. Each youth committed to DYS is assigned a case manager at intake, and the same case manager stays with the youth until discharge. Case managers are responsible for all key decisions concerning their clients. It is imperative that case managers and trackers develop strong working relationships. Trackers must report all relevant information learned about their clients to the case managers.

ICMs have the same two basic goals in all three programs studied. One goal is for ICMs to conduct surveillance of youths; the other is for them to serve as mentors. The degree to which each of these goals is emphasized varies from program to program and, within each program, from case to case. However, participants from all three programs stressed that control elements alone will not succeed.

The Harris-Stowe ICM program has both a strong control component and a strong mentoring component. The control component is based on multiple daily contacts between the tracker and the client. Trackers are responsible for placing wake-up calls to their clients every weekday morning to ensure that they get up and go to school. If a client does not have a telephone, the tracker must go to the



client's home to wake him or her up. Within the next two hours, the tracker makes a follow-up call to the client's school to confirm that the youth has arrived. If the youth has not arrived after two hours, the tracker must go to the home and escort him or her to school.

In addition to making these two telephone calls every morning, the tracker must have daily face-to-face contact with the youth. This usually occurs in the afternoon or evening, when the youth returns home from school. It is here, and on weekends, that the mentoring aspect of the program comes into play. On some days, the tracker and youth may simply sit and talk. On other days, they may engage in an activity such as attending a baseball game, seeing a movie, playing basketball, or going to an amusement park. An effort is made to expose youths to new experiences and to make them aware of opportunities they previously did not know existed. For example, trackers may take their clients to some of their classes or for walks around campus.

Because of the intensive nature of the services at Harris-Stowe, most ICMs have a caseload of only one client, and none has more than two. Trackers

*HS*  
Harris-Stowe

*trackers must  
meticulously  
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face-to-face contact,  
telephone contact,  
and auxiliary  
contact, and provide  
the program  
administrator with  
this documentation  
on a weekly basis.*

average 7 face-to-face contacts with their clients per week, and 7 to 14 telephone contacts. In addition, trackers make two to four auxiliary contacts per week (either by telephone or face-to-face) with the client's parents, teachers, and employers. Harris-Stowe ICMs spend approximately twenty-five hours per week with each client.

Harris Stowe ICMs meet individually with their case managers at least once per week, and talk to them by telephone almost daily. In addition, a mandatory meeting of all ICMs and case managers is convened biweekly. Trackers must meticulously document every home visit, face-to-face contact, telephone contact, and auxiliary contact, and provide the program administrator with this documentation on a weekly basis.

UMSL trackers, like those at Harris-Stowe, mix surveillance-type duties with mentoring. The services provided by UMSL trackers vary according to the needs of the clients. A tracker may transport a client to and from school, check to see if a client has met curfew, or take a client to a medical clinic. Trackers may also tutor clients, help them apply for jobs, or engage them in recreational activities. Most importantly, a tracker is there when a client needs someone to talk to.

Initially, UMSL trackers have just one youth on their caseload; more experienced ICMs usually have two or three. They have face-to-face contact with their clients almost every day — an average of five or six times a week. The fact that many UMSL clients do not have telephones makes this face-to-face contact critical. In addition to the regular client contacts, ICMs make two or three auxiliary contacts each week, spending an average of 10 to 15 hours per week with each youth on their caseload.

UMSL trackers meet with their case managers on a weekly or bi-weekly basis, and speak to them on the telephone once or twice per week. Approximately every three weeks, they attend a mandatory meeting with all ICMs, case managers, and program administrators. Trackers are required to submit detailed documentation of all contacts to their case managers on a monthly basis; some ICMs turn in their documentation more frequently.



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SEMO's tracker program has some noticeable differences from the Harris-Stowe and UMSL programs. SEMO trackers place less emphasis on the control components of the ICM program than their St. Louis-area counterparts, have less frequent client contacts, have higher caseloads, and devote more time to group outings. The main reason for these differences is that SEMO clients are dispersed over a vast rural area while UMSL and Harris-Stowe clients live in a relatively compact urban zone. Some SEMO clients live as far as one hundred miles from campus. If SEMO trackers were required to have daily contact with these clients — to "track" them as closely as St. Louis youths are tracked — the ICMs would have to spend several hours per day on the road.

SEMO's rural location also causes its trackers to have higher caseloads than their urban counterparts. Case managers who have multiple clients living in the same remote rural area will often assign one tracker to all of these youths. This way, one tracker can visit all of the clients on a single trip, which is far more efficient than having four separate ICMs make four separate trips to the same area. If a tracker is going to visit multiple clients on one trip, he or she will often take them on a group outing, such as hiking, playing basketball, or going to a movie. Thus, there is less one-on-one contact with these rural clients.

While new SEMO trackers have caseloads of just one or two youths, experienced ICMs average from four to eight. The number of face-to-face contacts varies depending on the needs of the youth, and ranges from one to five per week. Telephone contacts occur almost daily, and are essential to keeping in touch with youths living in rural areas. SEMO trackers average one to two auxiliary contacts per week. The average number of hours spent with a client also varies greatly depending on the needs of the youth, and may range from three to fifteen hours per week.

SEMO trackers meet with their case managers on a weekly basis and speak to them on the telephone at least once per week. Every two weeks, there is a mandatory meeting of all trackers and case managers. ICMs must give documentation to their case managers once per week.

## CONCLUSION

States across the nation are seeking to reduce their residential populations and the associated costs by developing effective alternatives to incarceration for juvenile offenders. The Missouri ICM program is clearly one of the most innovative alternative programs for delinquent youths in operation today. The program provides distinct benefits for all parties involved: DYS, case managers, universities, trackers, and delinquent youths. DYS is currently seeking funding to complete an in-depth evaluation of the program. If such a study finds the expected positive results, the ICM program should be replicated in jurisdictions nationwide.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to all those who took the time to be interviewed for this study: DYS staff; SEMO, UMSL, and Harris-Stowe staff; SEMO, UMSL, and Harris-Stowe students; and DYS youths.

In particular, I would like to thank DYS Deputy Director Vicky Weimholt for coordinating my site visits and providing valuable follow-up information. I would also like to acknowledge Jim Davis at SEMO and Lew Mueller and Rondall Johnson in St. Louis for their hospitality and cooperation during my site visits.

A special acknowledgement goes to NCCD President Barry Krisberg, who conceived of the idea for this report and provided invaluable advice and insight. Finally, I would like to thank Sonya Rudenstine and Gregory Pearce for their helpful comments and suggestions, and Frances Terry for overseeing the production of the report.

## CREDITS

*Design:* Rosa Lane

*Editor:* Jennifer Hammer

*Photos:* Robert Hulsey

*Printing:* Hart Printing Company

NATIONAL COUNCIL  
ON CRIME AND DELINQUENCY

Headquarters Office

685 Market Street, Suite 620  
San Francisco, California 94105  
(415) 896-6223

Midwest Office

6409 Odana Road  
Madison, Wisconsin 53719  
(608) 274-8882