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DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

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SECOND ANNUAL REPORT

to

NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF LAW
ENFORCEMENT AND CRIMINAL
JUSTICE

on

NI - 71 - 142

THE EX-OFFENDER AS PAROLE OFFICER

August 1972

32822
READING ROOM

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This project was supported by Grant Number 101-71-142
awarded by the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, U.S.
Department of Justice, under the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe
Streets Act of 1968, as amended. Points of view or opinions
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THE EX-OFFENDER AS PAROLE OFFICER

Much has been written about the use of ex-offenders as a correctional resource, and several departments of corrections have established programs in which a variety of offenders work in professional and paraprofessional roles. It has been postulated that because of their experience as prisoners, ex-offenders would be able to empathize with other offenders and ex-offenders, and would thus possess special rehabilitation - fostering skills.

The ex-offender's first-hand knowledge of the problems, needs, and goals of other ex offenders is expected to compensate for any lack of training or educational requirements. Nevertheless, in spite of the interest in ex-offender programs, little has been done to determine whether ex-offenders actually do have special skills that can be valuable in correctional programs.

The Ex-Offender as Parole Officer Project of the D.C. Department of Corrections, funded by the National Institute for Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice, began August 3, 1970. This project is a controlled study set up to examine whether the special experience of ex-offenders makes them successful

parole officers when compared to professionals in the same roles. The project design includes an experimental group and a control group each with 50 parolees randomly assigned from a pool of recently released parolees. The experimental group is supervised by Bonabond, Inc., an organization of ex-offenders, while the control group is supervised by Department of Corrections Parole Officers as part of their regular caseloads.

Bonabond, Inc., was established in 1966 to provide surety bonds to men coming out of prison who had difficulty finding work because they were not bondable under existing circumstances. Since its inception, Bonabond, Inc. has performed other services for the criminal justice system. For example, it assumes third party custody of persons charged with crimes and seeks to rehabilitate them while they are awaiting trial or on probation, operates an in-patient and out-patient treatment program for young pre-trial narcotic addicts, and works with the courts on recommendations for probation. For the Ex-offender Project, Bonabond hired one new ex-offender from Washington and switched another New Jersey ex-offender from other duties in the organization. These two

Bonabond parole supervisors are not the first ex-offenders to have the full responsibility of parole officers. Other states have used ex-offenders to carry out some or all of the duties of parole officer.

The project was a form of controlled experiment since parolees were randomly assigned to one of the two groups. No special caseloads of project parolees were set up, and virtually every DCDC parole officer had one or two project parolees in his caseload while the Bonabond officers supervised only the experimental group. All of the parole officers operate under similar budgets and by Parole Board regulations. The project was not designed so that differences in performance variables could be exclusively related to whether the parole officer was an ex-offender or not. Instead, several characteristics of the two types of supervision may have affected the results: caseload size, technique of supervision, amount of parole officer experience, and organizational policy. However, these characteristics are immeasurable variables in terms of determining research data.

The main problem with the design that makes evaluation difficult is that caseload size varies for the two types of parole officer. Each Bonabond parole officer supervises 25 parolees, whereas Department of Corrections parole officers each supervise approximately 50 parolees. This discrepancy creates a problem for the researcher since any difference in parolee performance could be attributed to caseload size as well as to any of the other supervision variables.

The purpose of the project was to ascertain whether parole supervision by ex-offenders could be as effective as the traditional parole supervision by comparing the performance of parolees under each type of supervision. At the end of two years of operation, the Ex-Offender as Parole Officer Project appears to be successful when the overall performance of Bonabond parolees is compared to DCDC parolees.

Parole Performance

The ultimate goal of this project is to improve parole services. Because the generally accepted

standard of improvement is reduced recidivism rates, parolee performance data will be discussed first. Arrest records were obtained from the Major Violators Division of the Metropolitan Police Department. These records indicate that over the past years, August 1, 1971 through July 31, 1972, there were 39 arrests involving parolees in the Ex-Offender as Parole Officer Project. Of these arrests, 17 involved Department of Corrections parolees and 22 involved Bonabond parolees. Four of the DCDC parolees and four of the Bonabond parolees had multiple arrests so that there were 30 parolees in the Ex-Offender Project who were arrested during the last year, 13 for DCDC and 17 for Bonabond. A breakdown of the 39 arrests according to nature of the crime, i.e. personal, property, victimless, is given in Table I. As can be seen, these categories do not manifest any substantial degree of differentiation between the Bonabond and DCDC parolees. For both Bonabond and DCDC parolees who were rearrested, the majority of offenses fall into what we have termed victimless crimes, a category which includes all narcotics violations, gambling, and weapons charges. Second in the number of offenses are the property offenses, which are largely burglary and auto theft cases. When viewed in the perspective of the overall crime situation in the DC area these statistics accurately reflect the extensive role which narcotics

TABLE I

Classification of the Ex-Offender Project Parolee
Arrests during the Second Year of Operation

Type of Crime

	<u>PERSONAL</u>	<u>PROPERTY</u>	<u>VICTIMLESS</u>	<u>TOTAL</u>
Bonabond	5	8	8	21
DCDC	<u>3</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>18</u>
Total	8	13	18	39

violations play.

Table 2 presents the arrest information in standard terminology as established by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Out of the 39 charges for arrests, only eight fall into the classifications of the index crimes (murder, rape, burglary, robbery, aggravated assault, larceny over \$50.00, and auto theft). Here, as in the other areas studied, no valid differences appear between the Bonabond and DCDC parolees which could be factually substantiated.

Table 3 presents the disposition of arrests that occurred during the second year of the project's operation. This table gives an indication of the status of the arrest cases, and one may note that about half of the charges were dropped, one way or another. The reasons for dismissing or nolle prosecuting cases cannot be discerned from mere records, as they are based on decisions made by the prosecution (however, lack of evidence or witnesses, etc. are usually the reasons in these situations). It also should be mentioned that of the 16 total convictions, almost all were for misdemeanors, i.e. simple assault, disorderly conduct, and petit larceny.

In order to gain some idea of what has happened to parolees who have been supervised in the Ex-Offender as Parole Officer Project, the current status of the original

100 parolees was investigated. This investigation was conducted to provide some indication of the rapidity with which individuals are recycled through the criminal justice system as well as to compare the relative effectiveness of Bonabond and DCDC parole supervision techniques. Of the original 100 project parolees, 60 still remain as parolees with the Ex-Offender project. Therefore, 40 parolees have left the Project during the past two years with reasons ranging from revocation of parole to successful completion of obligated time. Table 4 shows the current status of these individuals. Of the 40 individuals no longer involved with the project, one-half are from Bonabond and half from DCDC. Of these men, 18 are presently incarcerated in a DCDC institution, 5 have been re-paroled, and 16 are in the community and have no connection to the DCDC system.

TABLE II

Breakdown of Charges in Term of the
FBI Index Crimes

<u>Index Crime</u>	<u>Bonabond</u>	<u>DCDC</u>	<u>Totals</u>
Robbery	2	1	3
Burglary	1	1	2
Agg. Assult	-	1	1
Auto Theft	<u>2</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>2</u>
Totals	5	3	8

TABLE III

Disposition of Arrests that Occured
During the Second Year

	<u>Convicted</u>	<u>Acquitted</u>	<u>Pending</u>	<u>Nolled, Dismissed, etc</u>
Bonabond	9	1	2	10
DCDC	<u>7</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>9</u>
Total	16	1	3	19

TABLE IV

Current Status of the Original 100 Parolees

	Bonabond	DCDC	Total
In Community	7	9	16
Re-paroled after another incarceration	1	4	5
Incarcerated	11	7	18
Still on parole with the project	30	30	60
Unknown	<u>1</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>1</u>
Total	50	50	100

EVALUATION: TWO VIEWS

With these statistics in mind, the Ex-Offender as Parole Officer Project can be considered successful in its attempt to integrate the ex-offender into a role that is not only beneficial to him but to other ex-offenders as well. Throughout the study, it has been made manifest that the statistics presented do not favor either the Bonabond or DCDC parole officers in their efforts to reduce recidivism. This fact exhibits two possible conclusions, either one of which may be substantiated: 1) that the Ex-Offender as Parole Officer Project is successful since their control group performed as well as the DCDC group, which is guided by trained, professional parole officers, or 2) that recidivism rates of parolees are not influenced to any great extent, even by those who have first-hand knowledge of the problems, needs and goals of those with whom they are dealing, an attribute which gave birth to the basis for the project.

Finally, one variable which must be given considerable weight in the evaluation of this project is the caseload size. The DCDC officers managed approximately twice as many parolees and proved just as

effective, statistically, as the Bonabond parole officers. This may be imputed to their training and experience, characteristics which by in large carry considerable importance in producing effective results. However, with time, the use of ex-offenders as parole officers has the potential to ripen into a fruitful enterprise which proves to be an effective means of engaging the ex-offender in a worthwhile role.

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