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EVALUATION OF THE BETA PROGRAM:

A LOGICAL CONSEQUENCES MODEL IN JUVENILE CORRECTIONS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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INTRODUCTION

The Beta Program at the County Home School (CHS) represents a "logical consequences" or deterrence model for dealing with juvenile male property offenders. The program was established as a dispositional resource for Hennepin County's Juvenile Court in August, 1976.

The Research and Evaluation Unit in Hennepin County Court Services (HCCS) was asked to formulate an evaluation plan for Beta soon after the program design was in place. The resulting plan was keyed to providing HCCS decision-makers with information for (1) determining whether or not the program should be continued, and, (2) identifying facets of the program that may warrant change or correction.

As noted here in summary form and in the evaluation unit's April, 1978, report, the data collected to date indicate that operation and funding of the Beta Program should be continued for the foreseeable future.

This summary provides a brief description of the Beta Program, the research methods used in the HCCS evaluation study, the major evaluation findings, and the implications of the findings for administrative decision-making.

DESCRIPTION OF BETA PROGRAM

The Beta Program was developed in response to Court and community concern over the large number of juveniles involved in major property offenses. In recent years, major property offenders have constituted nearly one-fourth of all juveniles referred to the Juvenile Court in Hennepin County.

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Beta's target population is defined as juvenile males who are involved for the first time in major property offenses. This population group was selected because: (1) nine out of ten major property offenders referred to Juvenile Intake are male; and, (2) focused intervention with first-time offenders may prevent or deter them from more serious or chronic delinquent conduct and in turn more serious consequences (e.g., referral to the long-term Alpha Program at CHS or to the Minnesota Department of Corrections).

As with most programs in juvenile corrections, the primary goal of Beta is to reduce the probability of an offender committing a new petitionable offense. The "means" in this instance is a program design that is keyed to the principle of deterrence. The assumption underlying the design of the Beta Program is that many juveniles commit one or more property offense because they think there is little personal risk involved. Beta has been established to change this perception and the resulting offense pattern by providing consequences that are firm, fast and fair.

The basic design of the Beta Program is suggested by the following points:

- Location and Staffing -- Beta is housed in one of seven cottages at CHS. Program capacity is set at 20 residents.
- Referral Source -- Juveniles enter the program by way of a court disposition. This disposition may occur either on the day of an arraignment hearing or at a regularly scheduled disposition hearing.
- Length of Stay -- Juveniles are generally committed to the program for a determinate disposition of 21 days. At the same time, a "good time" point system has been established, whereby a juvenile can earn or reduce his stay in the program by one half-day for each satisfactory day in Beta. The maximum number of good-time days a resident can earn is seven, which would reduce his stay to 14 days.

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- Admission Criteria -- The admission criteria have been revised on several occasions. However, the primary target population has remained males between the ages of 12 and 18 who are first-time major property offenders.

- Activity Components -- The program consists of three primary activity or service components:
 - Work Projects Component. Daily work projects constitute the "heart" or keystone of the program. All juveniles referred to Beta are expected to participate in an adult work schedule of eight hours per day, five days a week. The work generally involves a group project where some form of manual labor is required. The worksite may be on or off the grounds of CHS.

 - Educational Evaluation Component. A SLBP (special learning and behavioral problems) teacher is assigned to the program. The services that he provides include: (1) liaison contact with the community school of each resident; (2) diagnostic skill assessment; (3) educational counseling; (4) remedial tutoring on an individual need basis; (5) specific referral implementation assistance; and, (6) selected follow-up service after release.

 - Social Service Component. A variety of counseling and supportive services are provided by school social worker that is assigned to the program. The services include: (1) family assessments; (2) family counseling and service referrals; and, (3) follow-up counseling after program termination. As with the Beta school teacher, the services of the school social worker involve the voluntary participation of residents and their families.

- Program Termination and Follow-up -- Most juveniles are released from Beta without systematic follow-up by program or probation staff. This is in keeping with the aforementioned notion of a determinate disposition.

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RESEARCH METHODS

The Beta evaluation effort consisted of several sub-studies, including:

- A Study of Program Utilization and Cost -- Administrative records on the first two calendar years of program operation (1976 and 1977) were examined to determine the percent of program capacity utilized and the cost per day per resident.
- A Study of Client Characteristics and Needs -- Case description and assessment data on 244 program residents were collected and analyzed.
- A Study of Program Output -- Data on 244 Beta residents were examined regarding the number of program completers and the number of juveniles receiving specific program services.
- A Study of Program Outcome -- Recidivism data on a sample of 150 Beta participants were analyzed and compared with similar data on a pre-Beta sample and a parallel sample of major property offenders; consumer satisfaction and school outcome data were collected on a small sample of Beta residents; and, Juvenile Intake data were analyzed to determine the possible value of the program with regard to community deterrence.

MAJOR FINDINGS

The findings of the evaluation study are highlighted below as they pertain to program utilization and cost, client characteristics, program output, and program outcome.

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Program Utilization and Cost

CHS population records show that a total of 268 juveniles were admitted to Beta during the first two calendar years of program operation (from August, 1976, through December, 1977). The average number of juveniles admitted per month was 16.

The percent of program capacity utilized fluctuated greatly during 1976 and 1977. The range was from a low of 16 percent in October, 1977, to a high of 70 percent in November, 1976. The monthly average for the first two calendar years was 44 percent.

The per diem cost for Beta was \$51 in 1976, and \$60 in 1977 (an increase of 18 percent). The case cost, based on an average stay of 17 days, was \$867 in 1976, and \$1,020 in 1977. The increase in per diem and case cost was due primarily to the reduction in program utilization in 1977. (It should be noted that if the Beta Program had maintained an optimum utilization rate of 75 percent, the per diem and case cost would have been \$34 and \$578, respectively, for both 1976 and 1977.)

An attempt was made to develop comparison cost figures for "Beta eligibles" placed on regular probation. Unfortunately, the Department's present information system does not permit an accounting of Beta eligible juveniles who are not served by the Beta Program. The best that could be done was to calculate the average case cost for all juveniles under probation supervision during 1976 and 1977. The resulting case cost estimates were \$350 in 1976 and \$425 in 1977.

Client Characteristics

Descriptive data on a sample of 244 program participants suggest the following profile of a typical Beta case:

- Individual Characteristics -- A 15-year old white male.

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- Court Contact and Disposition -- At the time of his referral to the Juvenile Court, the juvenile had no prior experience on probation or with a court continuance; his most serious presenting offense was a burglary; he was represented in court by a public defender; and, he received a determinate Beta disposition (with no restitution or probation).
- School Status and Behavior -- The juvenile is enrolled in either the 9th or 10th grade; in the most recently completed quarter or tri-mester he had an attendance problem (either truancy or erratic attendance); his classroom performance has been below average (a D average and/or one or more failures); and, based on the use of standardized tests and professional judgment, the Beta school teacher has determined that he is capable of working to grade level with regard to school demands and tasks.
- Family Status and Behavior -- The juvenile's permanent living arrangement is a two-parent household; significant adults in the juvenile's home environment are judged by the Beta school social worker as being supportive; and, the juvenile is judged by the school social worker as being capable of coping with his present home situation.

Program Output

The following list accounts for some of the "products" of the Beta Program during 1976 and 1977:

- Program Completers -- Of the 266 individuals admitted, 262 (98 percent) completed the program. The average length of stay in residence was 17 days. During the first two calendar years, there was one escape and three attempted escapes.

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- Community Work Projects -- Beta residents completed a variety of work projects for the Hennepin County Park Reserve and local municipalities. Most of the projects related to the removal of diseased elm trees and park beautification.

Assuming that each program completer contributed approximately 100 man-hours to community work projects during an average stay of 17 days, the total number of man-hours would be approximately 26,200. At a minimum wage of \$2.65, this total would translate into \$69,430.

- Educational Evaluations and Referrals -- The Beta school teacher completed educational evaluations on approximately 80 percent (190 of the 244 member study sample) of all Beta juveniles; and, approximately 45 percent (111/244) were referred for follow-up services.
- Family Assessments and Referrals -- The Beta school social worker completed assessments on approximately 75 percent (183 of the 244 member study sample) of the Beta juveniles; and, approximately 42 percent (103/244) of the juveniles and/or their families were subsequently referred for follow-up services. For 16 percent (38/244) of the cases the social worker himself served as the primary follow-up resource.

Program Outcome

The assessment of program outcome was keyed to the measurement of recidivism for Beta participants. Recidivism data were collected on the first 150 juveniles released from Beta. The source of data was the Juvenile Alpha (a running case record generated by the on-line Juvenile Court Information System). The follow-up time frame was six months after program release. The basic findings include: (1) 53 (35 percent) sample members were

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involved in a new action at intake; and, (2) 33 (22 percent) sample members subsequently received a court disposition that resulted in a continuation or renewal of court-ordered supervision.

The analysis of Beta recidivism data also included an examination of possible relationships between client outcome and selected variables regarding client characteristics, etc. Three variables proved to be significantly associated with recidivism -- race, prior court contact, and school attendance pattern. The specific conclusions drawn are as follow:

- Beta participants from a racial minority group are more likely to recidivate during the first six months after their release than their white counterparts.
- Beta participants with a history of prior court contact (continuance and/or probation) are more likely to recidivate during the first six months after release than those with no prior contact.
- Beta participants with a school attendance problem (erratic attendance/truancy) prior to entering the program are more likely to recidivate during the first six months after release than those with no attendance problem.

Finally, attention was given to a comparison of Beta recidivism data with similar data on a 100 member pre-Beta sample and a 94 member parallel-Beta sample. The comparison focused on first-time offenders involved in major property crimes. The Beta sample was further qualified to include only juveniles with a Beta only disposition (Beta residents with a probation disposition and/or restitution were excluded). The resulting Beta sample numbered 77 juveniles. The basic findings are summarized in the table

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below. The table shows that the Beta sample had appreciably fewer (about 10 percent) individuals involved in a new action at intake and only one-third as many recidivists as the pre- and parallel-Beta samples.*

COMPARISON OF RECIDIVISM DATA

Sample		New Action At Intake		Recidivist	
1. Beta Sub-sample	N = 77	18	23.4%	9	11.7%
2. Pre-Beta Sample	N = 100	34	34.0%	29	30.9%
3. Parallel-Beta	N = 94	33	35.1%	30	29.9%

IMPLICATIONS OF EVALUATION FINDINGS

The evaluation findings support the continuation of the Beta Program. Particularly noteworthy are the data which show a more favorable outcome for Beta participants than for the pre- and parallel-Beta comparison groups on the measure of recidivism. Additional support for program continuation can be found in the following findings:

- In the consumer satisfaction survey, approximately 80 percent of both the juvenile respondents (14/18) and the adult respondents (18/22) reported that their experience with the Beta Program made a positive difference with respect to the Beta juvenile's involvement in new delinquent behavior.

* Note the recidivism rate for the remaining 73 cases in the Beta Sample (essentially those juveniles with a prior court history and/or a disposition of Beta plus probation or restitution) was 32.9 percent.

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- In a follow-up phone survey of 54 sample members who were enrolled in school after termination from Beta, a 15 percent gain (from 35 before Beta to 43 after Beta) was recorded in the number of juveniles with no attendance problem.
- There is a suggestion of a deterrent effect in data which show that the number and percentage of male burglars referred to Juvenile Intake have steadily declined during the period of program operation: from 826 (or 16 percent of all males referred to Intake, in 1975, to 670 (15 percent) in 1976, to 671 (12 percent) in 1977.

At the same time, decision-makers cannot disregard the low program utilization rate for Beta and the concomitant problem of high case cost. However, these factors should be viewed with the following considerations in mind: (1) that the average percent of program capacity utilized has increased to 61 percent during the first three months of 1978; and, (2) that the prospect of a lower recidivism rate for Beta clients ultimately means a reduction in costs for court, correctional agency and community.

With regard to program development, the findings that race, prior court contact and school attendance are significantly associated with recidivism suggest that Beta staff should explore the possibility of modifying the program to better deal with juveniles who:

- are from a racial minority group;
- have a history of being placed on probation or a court continuance; and/or,
- have had a significant attendance problem (e.g., truancy, erratic attendance) in the quarter or tri-mester before entering Beta.

END