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FY23 OJP CORRECTIONAL EDUCATION EVALUATION



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**U.S. Department of Justice
Office of Justice Programs
Report on Correctional Education Evaluation**

The Department of Justice (DOJ) provides this report on Correctional Education Evaluation responsive to language in the Joint Explanatory Statement accompanying the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023 (Public Law 117-328), which requires the Department to “continue following . . . the directives and reporting requirements in the joint explanatory statement accompanying Public Law 117-103 regarding ‘Correctional Education Evaluation.’” The Joint Explanatory Statement accompanying the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2022 (Public Law 117-103) directs the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) to:

Establish a public-private partnership with research and correctional institutions to collect and evaluate data and continue to advance the research on the impact of correctional education on recidivism. The NIJ is directed to report on the status of this project within 60 days of the date of enactment of this Act.

Background

The Joint Explanatory Statement accompanying the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021 (Public Law 116-260), first directed NIJ to complete the Correctional Education Evaluation. Consonant with that directive, NIJ awarded a competitive grant ([15PNIJ-21-GG-00139-NIJB](#)) to the University of Chicago in 2021. This competitive grant is examining whether re-orienting key aspects of the prison experience towards rehabilitation – by investing in education, mental health, and physical health while individuals are incarcerated – can reduce prison re-entry rates.¹ The project involves a collaboration with the Illinois Department of Corrections.

Description of the Project

NIJ awarded \$585,726 to the University of Chicago for this project. The three-year project performance period is January 1, 2022, through December 31, 2024.

The project will use a randomized controlled trial (RCT) to examine the prison re-entry rates of individuals incarcerated at the Illinois Department of Corrections’ Kewanee Life Skills Re-entry Center (LSRC) to those incarcerated at comparison correctional facilities in Illinois that do not offer similar educational programming or health access to determine if investments in education, mental health, and physical health while individuals are incarcerated reduces prison re-entry rates. Administrative data from the Chicago Police Department, the Illinois Department of Employment Security, and the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority will be used to evaluate the impact of the intervention on recidivism, arrest rates, and reentry-related outcomes, including employment.

The Kewanee LSRC invested an additional \$29,120 in programming per individual annually in the years leading up to their release. This investment is a significant outlier in terms of educational programming, health access, and perceptions of humane treatment, as reported by prison administrators and inmates themselves. Further, the facility only admits men considered to

¹ The award to the University of Chicago was made under the [Research and Evaluation on Promising Reentry Initiatives, Fiscal Year 2021](#) solicitation. Details about the award are available online: <https://nij.ojp.gov/funding/awards/15pnij-21-gg-00139-nijb>.

be at medium or high risk of recidivating post-release, which allows the examination of whether carefully designed, intensive programming can benefit even the most at-risk prison populations. Factors determining risk ratings include:

1. Severity of instant offense, or if the individual was arrested/convicted of a violent crime;
2. Age;
3. Age at first contact, or when the person first became known to police (however, this may be subject to inherent bias), and the number of prior offenses; and
4. Antisocial attitudes (clinicians refer to this as the “Central Eight” antisocial indicators).

FY 2023 Update

After two years, approximately 550 individuals have been randomized into the study. It is premature to report conclusions from the preliminary quantitative analyses as findings are subject to change as additional participants are released and included in the analysis samples. Preliminary quantitative analyses do not show a statistically significant impact of Kewanee participation on the prison re-entry rate at 1-, 2-, or 3-years post release. However, relationships may be difficult to detect at this stage because prison re-entry rates decreased generally during this period due to COVID-related slowdowns in court procedures. Preliminary qualitative data indicate that participants report generally positive experiences in Kewanee compared to other institutions in which they have resided, particularly noting a healthier atmosphere and the absence of the need to “constantly watch their backs.” However, more data and analyses are needed to understand the mechanisms behind these relationships. In the next phases of the project, the team will continue to collect and analyze outcome data and conduct qualitative interviews and analysis.

By the end of the project period, the University of Chicago expects that it will be able to estimate the impact of the intervention on three-year re-incarceration rates for 84 percent of the study sample and collect and analyze complementary qualitative data to better understand mechanisms driving the quantitative results.

Additional Efforts

To further support efforts to advance the research on the impact of correctional education on recidivism, NIJ will solicit research proposals from qualified applicants on initiatives to improve outcomes for incarcerated individuals. NIJ’s FY24 Research and Evaluation on Corrections² solicitation released on February 6, 2024, “encourages the submission of applications that propose robust evaluations of one or more promising interventions to improve outcomes for incarcerated individuals.” Promising interventions include, but are not limited to, “educational programming and its impact on individual and system-level outcomes. This can include programs delivered in prison, in jail, or in the community. NIJ is especially interested in studies that measure outcomes beyond misconduct and/or recidivism alone.” The application deadline for this solicitation was May 14, 2024. NIJ hopes to have available funding and receive rigorous proposals that focus on correctional education in order to support this priority.

² See <https://nij.ojp.gov/funding/O-NIJ-2024-171970.pdf>.