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SVORI Evaluates the Effectiveness of Re-Entry Programs

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In 2003 the U.S. Departments of Justice, Labor, Education, Housing and Urban Development, and Health and Human Services provided funds through the Serious and Violent Offender Re-Entry Initiative (SVORI) to 69 grantees to implement re-entry programs for prisoners. This funding supports 89 programs nationally that are currently being evaluated by RTI International and the Urban Institute.

The goal of the evaluation of these programs is to determine whether they have accomplished the overall purpose of increasing public safety by reducing recidivism among the populations served by the programs and determining the relative costs and benefits of the programs.

The evaluation of the programs has been designed to answer the following research questions:

- To what extent has SVORI led to more coordinated and integrated services among partner agencies?
- To what extent have SVORI participants received more individualized and comprehensive services than comparable, non-SVORI offenders?
- To what extent have SVORI participants demonstrated better outcomes in employment, health, and daily functioning, and less recidivism than comparable, non-SVORI offenders?
- To what extent have the benefits derived from SVORI exceeded the costs?

To address these questions, the SVORI evaluation includes an implementation assessment, an impact evaluation, and a cost-benefit component.

Implementation Assessment

The objectives of the implementation assessment are to characterize all 89 SVORI programs and address the extent to which these programs increase access to services and promote system change. The primary source of data for the implementation assessment are three surveys mailed to the SVORI program directors.

Data from these surveys characterize the individual programs, providing information on the target population(s), program elements, timing of programs and services, agencies participating in SVORI, and the degree of coordination among agencies.

Impact Evaluation

The overall objective of the impact evaluation is to assess the effectiveness of SVORI by

comparing key outcomes (employment, housing, family and community involvement, mental and physical health, substance use, and criminality) for those who participate in SVORI programs and comparable individuals not participating in SVORI. This evaluation component is based on a longitudinal study of adult males, adult females, and juvenile males released from prison in a subset of sites.

The data collection consists of four in-person interviews (1 month prior to release and 3, 9, and 15 months post-release) and two oral-swab drug tests conducted in conjunction with the 3- and 15-month interviews. In addition, the impact evaluation will use administrative data from state correctional and law enforcement agencies to examine rearrest and reincarceration outcomes.

Sixteen programs in 14 states are included in the impact evaluation. For adult programs, the states are Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Maine, Maryland, Missouri, Nevada, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, and Washington. These adult sites are in states that, at the end of 2003, incarcerated 20 percent of all adult state prisoners and supervised 25 percent of all adult state parolees in the United States. The juvenile programs are in Colorado, Florida, Kansas, and South Carolina.

Baseline interviews were conducted from July 2005 through November 2005 in approximately 150 prisons and juvenile detention facilities across the country. These interviews were designed to obtain data on the respondents' pre-incarceration history and experiences and services received since admission to prison, as well as to document the respondents' post-release plans.

Preliminary analyses of data from 2,682 baseline interviews identified few differences between the SVORI groups and comparison groups. Follow-up interviews (at 3, 9, and 15 months post-release) are conducted in the community or, for those reincarcerated, in prison or jail when possible. The interviews cover topics such as housing, employment, education, family, peer relationships, community involvement, physical and mental health, substance use, crime and delinquency, supervision, service needs, and service receipt. The 3-month interviews were completed in April 2006, the 9-month interviews will be conducted through December 2006, and the 15-month interviews will be completed in April 2007.

Cost-Benefit Component

The cost-benefit/cost-effectiveness component includes the following subset of impact programs: Florida juvenile, Iowa adult, Maryland adult, Ohio adult, Pennsylvania adult, and South Carolina adult and juvenile. The economic analysis is intended to determine the return on the SVORI investment and will include both a cost-benefit and cost-effectiveness analysis. This component will compare the total costs of providing services and programming to SVORI participants with the costs of providing services to the comparison subjects in relationship to the benefits (monetized positive outcomes) that accrue for each group.

Evaluation Products

The SVORI Multi-Site Evaluation web site, www.svori-evaluation.org, houses a variety of information that is being produced by the evaluation team. The site provides an overview of SVORI, as well as state-by-state descriptions of the programs. The team also is creating a series of Reentry Research in Actions (RRIA), which are topical briefs on key issues (e.g., the involvement of the faith-based community in SVORI and a description of enrollment issues). As of June 2006, there are eight RRIsAs. The web site also provides various presentations given at conferences. Initial outcome results based on data from the three-month follow-up offender interviews will be available in late 2006.

If you would like more information about this initiative, please contact me at lwinterf@ui.urban.org. You may also contact either of the Principal Investigators: Pamela Lattimore, Research Triangle Institute, at lattimore@rti.org, or Christy Visser, Urban Institute, at cvisser@ui.urban.org.