OFFICE OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES
SHORT-TERM RESIDENTIAL PROGRAMS
2001-D-5

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Report 2001-D-5

Mr. John A. Johnson
Commissioner
New York State Office of Children and Family Services
Capital View Office Park
52 Washington Avenue
Rensselaer, New York 12144 2735

Dear Mr. Johnson:

The following is our report on the effectiveness of two short-term residential programs: the Henry Johnson Youth Leadership Academy and the Adirondack Wilderness Challenge.

This study was performed pursuant to the State Comptroller's authority as set forth in Article V, Section 1 of the State Constitution and Article II, Section 8 of the State Finance Law. We list major contributors to this report in Appendix A.

October 4, 2001
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

OFFICE OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES
SHORT-TERM RESIDENTIAL PROGRAMS

SCOPE OF STUDY

The Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) operates and maintains 43 facilities statewide for the care, custody and treatment of troubled youth whom the courts have placed in their care. The objective of OCFS' residential programs is to provide a variety of services that can help youth develop the social skills, positive attitude and appropriate behavior they need to succeed in their communities and to avoid re-offending (recidivism). OCFS is also responsible for providing youth with community-based, post-residential services to facilitate their reintegration into their communities.

In 1992, OCFS established two short-term residential programs: an innovative six-month program called the Sergeant Henry Johnson Youth Leadership Academy (YLA) and the Adirondack Wilderness Challenge (AWC), an experiential four-month learning program. The YLA, with a capacity of 60 youth, follows a cognitive-behavioral leadership model, uses military dress and protocol and teaches positive social skills. YLA youth enter City Challenge, an intensive aftercare program, after their stay. The AWC, with a capacity of 24 youth, is based on an Outward Bound model that promotes education, physical fitness and wilderness training. AWC youth are provided with a variety of post-residential services after release from residential care.

Our study addressed the following questions about these two short-term programs for the period April 1, 1998 through September 30, 2000:

- Do the YLA and AWC programs meet OCFS requirements for delivery of services to youth?

- Do the YLA and the AWC contain program elements that have been shown by current research to reduce recidivism among youth who complete the program?

- Has OCFS evaluated the YLA and the AWC to determine if these models could be used to successfully serve more youth?
STUDY OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Our study found that both the YLA and the AWC met certain OCFS requirements for delivery of services to youth and contain elements which research shows have proven successful in reducing recidivism. However, in many cases, after-care services fell short of OCFS standards. Since these short-term programs could be effective in rehabilitating youth, and also cost less to deliver than OCFS' standard residential programs, we believe these programs should be evaluated. If the evaluation results are positive, we encourage OCFS to consider expanding the YLA and AWC models.

Our review of case records for a sample of youth at both programs showed that both residential programs provide youth with more counseling than is required by OCFS standards. The State Education Department also rates YLA and AWC education programs as exemplary. However, documentation in the case records we sampled of youth released from both programs showed that aftercare contacts did not meet OCFS standards. Our review of records for the 50 youth in our YLA sample showed that City Challenge generally met aftercare standards for contacts with the youth (face-to-face meetings and phone contacts), but did not meet general aftercare standards for contacts with parents, employers and schools. In reviewing case files for the 25 AWC graduates, OCFS initially could not provide us with data for 10 cases; initial data for the other 15 cases showed that counselor contacts with youth and parents during the high intensity period when youth first re-enter the community did not meet OCFS standards. (See pp. 5-9)

One key measure of success for any youth rehabilitation program is the recidivism rate of participants after their release. A Division of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS) study showed that YLA youth discharged from other OCFS custody between 1991 and 1995 had similar recidivism rates (after three years) to other youth released from OCFS custody programs during the same period. However, a more recent research study showed modest recidivism rate reductions among YLA youth, and the results of a new DCJS study of YLA youth due in the fall of 2001 is expected to show continued improvement. Research suggests that the improved recidivism rate is due in part to improvements in the post-residential services provided to YLA youth at City Challenge. Wilderness challenge programs like the AWC have been widely used for many years, but there is little empirical data to evaluate their effectiveness. Researchers agree that such programs are well suited to some troubled youth, and that graduates initially have low recidivism rates. Studies also show that, over time, program graduates’ recidivism rates begin to rise, which may reflect an erosion of the program’s beneficial effects. Since AWC youth, like YLA youth, already spend a relatively short time in their residential program, we encourage OCFS to consider supporting AWC graduates with intensive and longer-term post-residential services which may serve, as City Challenge does, to ease their transition to, and stability in, the community. (See pp. 11-15)
OCFS is currently developing a new youth rehabilitation initiative called prescriptive programming, which focuses on treating those risk factors in a youth’s background that contribute to criminal behavior. OCFS hopes to use this new approach to reduce recidivism and the length of residential stays. However, research suggests that the YLA and the AWC, which are already in place, have the potential to reduce recidivism. Further, both programs require youth to spend significantly less time in a facility, and therefore cost less than traditional OCFS placements. We believe OCFS should evaluate the AWC program, and examine the results of the upcoming DCJS study of the YLA. If the evaluation results are positive, we encourage OCFS to consider expanding these programs to other youth in custody. (See pp. 17-19)

**COMMENTS OF OCFS OFFICIALS**

In their response to this report, OCFS officials questioned whether the study met its stated objectives. The response also questioned several of the issues raised in our study. Our specific response to these comments is addressed in the State Comptroller’s Notes in Appendix C. Overall, we are concerned that OCFS attempted to lessen the significance of the issues raised in this study rather than consider the benefits that may be derived from evaluating and, as appropriate, pursuing them.
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Introduction

Background

The Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) operates and maintains secure, limited secure and non-secure facilities for the care, custody, treatment, housing, education and rehabilitation of troubled youth throughout the State. The youth OCFS serves are those whose problems are so significant that the courts have determined they need to be removed from their homes and communities. OCFS has the capacity to place and treat more than 2,000 such court-placed youth in its 43 facilities statewide. The objective of the programs at OCFS facilities is to provide a variety of services that can help youth develop the social skills, positive attitude and appropriate behavior they need to succeed in their communities. OCFS is also responsible for providing youth with post-residential, community-based services to facilitate their reintegration into their communities once they have returned home. Post-residential, community-based services can include general aftercare or more intensive day/evening reporting programs, electronic monitoring and an intensive program provided by a private contractor.

When a youth is placed in OCFS custody, intake counselors review court documents, school records, etc. to determine the youth’s history and to identify any special needs, including the need for substance abuse counseling, mental health services and special education services. The youth is then assigned to a residential facility at the appropriate security level and receives services, including counseling and education, to address his or her needs. A youth may spend his or her entire residential stay in one facility, spend time in multiple facilities or step down through a series of facilities at different security levels before being returned to the community. The average length of stay in a residential facility for youth released in 1999 was a little more than 13 months in limited secure residential facilities. During fiscal year 1999-2000, OCFS reported that they spent $171.8 million on residential programs and community-based services. Based on 1997 OCFS cost records, which are the most recent available, the annual cost to maintain a youth in a residential facility (including group homes) is at least $76,000. The cost of
community-based services varies from $6 per day for regular aftercare to $95 for more intensive day reporting programs.

In 1992, OCFS began an innovative short-term residential program in South Kortright, New York called the Sergeant Henry Johnson Youth Leadership Academy (YLA). The YLA program follows a cognitive-behavioral leadership model and uses military dress and military protocol to teach youth how to lead themselves and others in a positive social direction. The program equips the youth with a set of socially accepted values, focusing on four core values (self-discipline, affiliation, self-esteem and self-worth) and a subset of 25 component values. The YLA was originally designed for 30 youth, but OCFS doubled YLA's capacity to 60 in 1997-98. The program is merit-based, rewarding youth for positive behavior. Punishing or demeaning the youth is not allowed at the YLA. The youth and the staff must continually demonstrate the core values.

The YLA program is comprised of a six-month residential stay followed by up to a year in an intensive post-residential program called City Challenge which is located in the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn. YLA's post residential program is programmatically integrated with the residential program. Participants in the YLA program are youth from Brooklyn and from certain sections of Manhattan and the Bronx who can easily access City Challenge via public transportation. City Challenge is a day reporting program where youth receive education provided through the New York City Board of Education. Youth also receive counseling, vocational training and other services to facilitate their re-entry into the community. As youth demonstrate their ability to cope with community living, they can be enrolled in regular schools, GED programs, other training programs or employment, as deemed appropriate.

About the time the YLA was established, another short-term residential program, the Adirondack Wilderness Challenge (AWC), was also begun. AWC is a four-month experiential learning program based on an Outward Bound model and is located near Peru, New York. The Outward Bound model is a wilderness challenge program developed by German educator Kurt Hahn. Hahn's central premise was that certain experiences could spontaneously call forth positive social values. The wilderness experience places these youth in unfamiliar situations which they may perceive as unsafe or uncomfortable. Since the youth do not have previously learned coping skills to
deal with this new environment, they are forced to develop new abilities. The program provides the youth with guidance, encourages them to develop new thinking skills and helps them focus on solving problems. The participants must make choices, take risks, and expose themselves to the consequences of their actions.

Outward Bound and other wilderness challenge programs have been used throughout the world for the residential treatment of troubled youth. The AWC serves 24 youth at a time in cohorts of eight. The program provides youth with education, group and individual counseling, social skill development, wilderness training and improved physical fitness throughout its four-month duration. The AWC operates in three six-week phases, as described below:

- phase one introduces the youth to the outdoor experience with day hikes twice a week;
- phase two includes three-day weekend camping trips; and
- phase three (expedition phase) includes a 21 to 24-day camping and hiking experience.

This outdoor program operates twelve months a year, in all types of weather. At the end of the expedition phase, most of the youth return home and are assigned to any of a variety of post-residential programs. The AWC does not have an affiliated post-residential program.

**Study Scope, Objectives and Methodology**

We studied the YLA and the AWC, OCFS’ two short-term residential programs, for the period April 1, 1998 though September 30, 2000. The objectives of our study were to find out whether these programs meet OCFS requirements for delivery of services to youth, contain elements that have been shown by current research to reduce recidivism among youth who have completed the programs, and whether OCFS has evaluated the YLA and the AWC to determine if these models can be used to successfully rehabilitate more youth. To accomplish our study objectives, we interviewed OCFS central office officials, the managers and staff at each of the two short-term facilities, officials at City Challenge and researchers in the
field of rehabilitating delinquent youth. We selected samples of youth from both facilities and reviewed youth case files, facility counseling logs, attendance logs and education records pertaining to those youth. We reviewed OCFS directives and policy statements. We also reviewed conclusions reached by researchers as to the types of programs that have been shown to be effective in reducing recidivism and the elements contained in those successful programs. (A list of the resources we used for this study is provided in Exhibit A at the end of this report.) Further, we contacted officials from the New York State Education Department and reviewed their assessments of the quality of educational services at the two short-term programs and at City Challenge.

**Response of OCFS Officials to Study**

A draft copy of this report was provided to OCFS officials for their review and comment. Their comments have been considered in preparing this report, and are included as Appendix B.

In their response to this report, OCFS officials questioned whether the study met its stated objectives. The response also questioned several of the issues raised in our study. Our specific response to these comments is addressed in the State Comptroller’s Notes in Appendix C. Overall, we are concerned that OCFS attempted to lessen the significance of the issues raised in this study rather than consider the benefits that may be derived from evaluating and, as appropriate, pursuing them.

Within 90 days after final release of this study, we request the Commissioner of OCFS to report to the Governor, the State Comptroller, and the leaders of the Legislative and fiscal committees, advising what actions were taken by OCFS in response to the observations made and issues raised in the study.
Compliance With OCFS Standards

OCFS has numerous requirements for residential counseling, education and post-residential contacts. To determine whether the YLA and the AWC met these OCFS requirements, we selected a random sample of 50 youth who were released from the YLA during 1998 and 1999 and who attended the City Challenge. We examined the case records of these 50 youth for documentation that the program services met OCFS requirements and that minimal post-residential services were delivered. For the AWC, we examined the case records of 49 youth; 25 of these youth comprised a randomly selected sample of youth who were released from the AWC during 1998 and 1999 and also went to a post-residential program; the other 24 youth were still at the facility at the time of our review. To determine if the youth in the two programs received the mandated levels of counseling, we selected two weeks during each youth’s stay in the program and summarized the hours of counseling the youth received. Usually, the two weeks were from different phases or levels of the youth’s time in the program.

Our review of selected services provided to samples of youth at the YLA and AWC facilities concluded that both programs provide their youth with more counseling than is required by OCFS standards, and that both have exemplary education programs, according to State Education Department officials. The shorter residential periods at the YLA and the AWC also make these programs’ residential costs lower than those of the standard OCFS detention facility. However, we also found that neither YLA nor AWC youth received all the services and contacts OCFS supervision standards would normally require when the youth were released into their respective post-residential programs.

Residential Services

OCFS recognizes that a critical component in any rehabilitation program is counseling. OCFS mandates a minimum of two hours of counseling per week for any program resident. The counseling must also include certain core
elements such as Anger Reduction Therapy and Independent Living. In addition, programs must address special youth needs identified during the intake process. Within 30 days of a youth’s admission, programs are required to prepare a Youth Service Plan (YSP). The YSP details how the facility will address any special needs identified, as well as the basic programming the youth will receive. Within 180 days of admission or prior to transfer to another facility, programs must prepare a reassessment YSP. This YSP identifies which interventions have been successful with the youth and which issues still need to be addressed.

Based on our review of the 50 case files, we concluded that the YLA program does deliver the core counseling curriculum mandated by OCFS and the youth in our sample received well over the mandated number of hours of counseling. To form this opinion, we reviewed the counseling provided for two randomly selected weeks during each youth’s stay at the YLA. Records at the YLA show that the facility exceeds OCFS counseling requirements. Also, in nearly every case, the YLA did address the special needs of its youth. (We could not document that two youth received weekly substance abuse counseling in either of two weeks we reviewed.) We also found that YSPs were generally prepared timely, in accordance with OCFS requirements. The YLA treatment team staff meet regularly to discuss the progress being made by youth in the program. During our stay at the YLA, we observed the youth attending group counseling sessions, studying after the evening meal, participating in physical activity and military exercises and working on improvement projects around the facility. Overall, we concluded that the YLA program does adhere to OCFS mandates for those areas we reviewed; in some cases, the program exceeds OCFS requirements.

We also reviewed the AWC’s compliance with OCFS standards. Our review of the 49 case files and other counseling documentation showed that the AWC delivered the required core counseling curriculum and provided more than the minimum hours of counseling for 48 youth; there was no counseling log provided for the remaining youth, so we could not verify that he received counseling. The AWC delivers substance abuse and mental health counseling through private contractors, and has trained in-house staff to provide special education services to youth who need them. We found that
these providers addressed the special needs of the youth sampled in every case where special needs were identified.

The YLA and the AWC are both considered to be educational facilities, and are required to adhere to regulations established by the State Education Department (SED). Both programs employ certified teachers, and all youth receive instruction in core academic subjects, such as English, math, science, social studies and physical education. SED has determined that both the YLA and the AWC programs provide exceptional education programs. For example, SED’s recent review found the YLA education program was in compliance with all relevant education standards. Further, SED officials consider this education program to be outstanding among the programs at OCFS facilities. At the AWC, we observed classes and group counseling sessions, and we accompanied the youth on field trips, where we observed team building exercises and education that takes place in the field. SED officials did similar observations, and found that AWC teachers incorporated the day’s activity into math and science lessons. SED officials have complimented the AWC for its excellent educational program and for the dedication of its staff.

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**Post-Residential Services**

OCFS has established standards of supervision for youth in general aftercare. The general standards mandate the number of times an aftercare worker must meet with the youth, the parents, employers and school officials. The standards also mandate the number of phone contacts (such as curfew checks) the aftercare caseworker must make. The total number of required contacts is highest during the period when the youth is first released from residential care, and decreases the longer the youth is in aftercare, stays out of trouble and abides by contact obligations.

When YLA youth return home or to a suitable placement, they enter the City Challenge day program. The YLA has developed its own standards for supervision that are more stringent than OCFS general aftercare standards. For example, aftercare standards mandate two parent meetings per month, while YLA standards require weekly parent meetings. However, we reviewed City Challenge’s compliance with OCFS general aftercare standards, and not with YLA standards of supervision.
Our review of records for the 50 youth in our YLA sample showed that City Challenge generally met aftercare standards for contacts with the youth (face-to-face meetings and phone contacts), but did not meet general aftercare standards for contacts with parents, employers and schools. City Challenge officials claimed they did meet regularly with parents, employers and schools, but stated they did not document the meetings. These officials also noted, and our review of Board of Education enrollment records confirmed, that youth are normally enrolled in a Board of Education school on-site at City Challenge as soon as they arrive. SED also did a review of City Challenge's school program and found no compliance problems. We observed various classes in session when we visited City Challenge.

Youth released from the AWC program usually enter any of a variety of post-residential programs in their home or placement communities including general aftercare, day reporting programs and electronic monitoring. AWC officials said that they make recommendations for, but do not determine, the post-residential programs to which AWC youth are assigned. OCFS officials stated that they have not developed contact standards for the day reporting and electronic monitoring programs. However, these programs are more intensive than general aftercare programs and as such, should require more youth contacts than general aftercare programs. In the absence of any specific requirements for these programs, we measured compliance against the more conservative general aftercare standards.

In reviewing case files for the 25 AWC graduates in our sample, we found their files generally did not contain case contact information. We then requested such documentation from OCFS to determine the extent to which contacts complied with general standards for these cases. OCFS initially could not provide us with data for 10 cases; initial data for the other 15 cases showed that counselor contacts with youth and parents during the high intensity period when youth first re-enter the community did not meet OCFS standards. Subsequently, almost four months after the completion of our field work OCFS provided additional contact documentation. Even considering this additional information, only 2 of the 25 AWC youth would meet the minimal general aftercare contact standards during the first two months and one youth was AWOL for most of the period. OCFS officials stated that the study findings failed to
take into account extenuating circumstances. Examples of the extenuating circumstances include failed attempts to contact the youth or parents, uncooperative youth or parents, excessive counselor case loads, staff vacancies, counselor incompetence, disconnected telephones and the death of a counselor’s spouse. While these circumstances may pose some administrative, and even practical, difficulties for OCFS, we believe they do not mitigate the responsibility to maintain proper oversight of the youth, especially during the critical first months in aftercare. OCFS may need to pursue different or more innovative models or approaches to aftercare given its importance to overall outcomes.

The extent to which inadequate supervision of youth in aftercare contributes to recidivism is not well quantified or documented in research. However, as we discuss in the next section of this study, some research has shown that intensive aftercare is a critical element in the success or failure of youth who are at high risk of re-offending. Since the AWC does not have a specific aftercare component, as does the YLA, it is possible that any positive changes in behavior derived from the AWC program are being undermined by inadequate supervision in aftercare.

### Issues for Further Consideration

1. Should records of counseling and other required monitoring contacts with youth in City Challenge and in all types of aftercare programs be maintained so that OCFS can:
   - document the aftercare unit's compliance with OCFS standards for supervision;
   - show the course of the youth’s progress in aftercare; and
   - evaluate treatment services that work, or do not work, for individual youth or classes of youth, in OCFS custody?

2. Should youth contact standards for the day reporting and electronic monitoring programs be established?
### Issues for Further Consideration (Cont’d)

3. Should a mechanism be put in place to monitor that all youth receive the required number of post-residential contracts?

4. Should different or more innovative models or approaches be identified to increase the success of required contacts?
Program Evaluation

Recidivism rates, or the rates at which persons go on to re-offend after having completed a rehabilitation program, is regarded as the primary measure of the program's effectiveness. Rehabilitative programs for youthful offenders have long troubled policymakers, some of whom have concluded that nothing works. Previous studies of recidivism rates for youthful offenders in New York and other states have consistently reported recidivism rates near or greater than 70 percent. However, recent research indicates that some rehabilitation programs can be successful in reducing re-offense rates in some settings with some offenders. Policymakers need to determine which programs can succeed and how to implement them effectively.

A program evaluation system enables managers to determine the extent to which programs goals are being met, to detect negative trends requiring corrective action and to better allocate and manage resources. According to OCFS, the desired program result is an overall reduction in recidivism or re-offense rates. Recent studies have found alarmingly high re-offense rates among youth released from OCFS facilities, particularly in the first few months following release. To determine if the YLA and the AWC are successful in reducing re-offense rates, OCFS would need to continually monitor the behavior of program graduates and to evaluate the programs to identify those program factors that produce positive results on a long-term basis.

Youth Leadership Academy

At first glance, the YLA program might appear to be set up as a “boot camp” model, a popular rehabilitative program currently in use in over 30 states. Programmatic features of boot camps include rigorous physical conditioning, discipline, activities to bolster self-esteem, confidence, and leadership with an emphasis on military-like rules. Boot camps are viewed generally as punitive and have been popular in recent years and have maintained their appeal with policymakers, corrections officials, and the public in general. Recent evaluations of boot
camp programs, however, suggest that these programs' impact on recidivism is questionable at best. A recent study (U.S. Department of Justice, 1996) of three boot camps in Alabama, Colorado, and Ohio concluded that, despite some positive outcomes, none of the three boot camps appeared to have reduced recidivism. In fact, youth released from an Ohio boot camp had a higher recidivism rate than juvenile offenders in traditional juvenile correctional facilities.

YLA officials point out that, unlike boot camp-style programs, the YLA is not punitive and its methods are based on the most current research. They state that the YLA program does incorporate the physical conditioning, rigid structuring and leadership activities featured in boot camps. However, they point out that it also includes other factors that some researchers (Antonowicz, 1992) believe are critical in producing positive outcomes: a sound conceptual model based on a cognitive behavior approach; multi-faceted programming; role playing and modeling; social-cognitive skills training; and the City Challenge, intensive aftercare program. Research has shown that cognitive behavior models (Leschied, 1993 & Antonowicz, 1992) produce the best results. YLA officials believe that their program offers the best chance of reducing recidivism among a high-risk population and is unique in the country.

In 1999, the Division of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS) released a recidivism study (Frederick, 1999) of 9,477 youth who were discharged from OCFS custody from 1991 through 1995. The report concluded that 81 percent of males and 45 percent of females were arrested within 36 months of discharge from custody. The report further concluded that there was no significant difference in recidivism rates by type of residential facility, residential movement pattern, type of nonresidential service or residential length of stay. The report did state that for male juvenile delinquents, an intermediate step down from residential centers to group homes was more effective in preventing short-term recidivism than direct release from residential centers to standard community care. The DCJS study found that the YLA program did not produce significantly different results than other residential programs. The researcher stated he was surprised at this result because he, too, believed the YLA program should have produced a lower recidivism rate than some less rigorous programs. However, he also pointed out that the YLA program had not yet evolved to its
present format (which includes an enhanced post-residential program for City Challenge and refinements to the residential program) during the period of the review.

A University of Maryland research group (MacKenzie, 1997) also issued a report on the recidivism rates of YLA youth compared to a control group of other OCFS youth with similar characteristics for the period May 1992 to February 1996. In an attempt to measure the impact of changes in the YLA program, the Maryland study used a sample comprising two groups, one prior to and the other subsequent to March 1, 1993, when various program changes had been put into place. While there was no significant difference between the YLA and control group recidivism rates for the overall sample, the later sample of YLA youth showed some modest reductions in recidivism. The somewhat better results for the later sample may indicate that, as the YLA program evolved, the expected improvements in recidivism rates started to become evident.

DCJS has recently undertaken a new study of YLA recidivism rates. This study will use data from the previous study as well as more recent data. The researcher is optimistic that the report, due in the fall of 2001, will show more positive results for the YLA program.

**Adirondack Wilderness Challenge**

Little is known about the therapeutic effectiveness of wilderness challenge programs on adjudicated youth in terms of reducing recidivism rates. For example, researchers at the Texas Christian University (Burns, 2000) believe that the potential of wilderness programs as an alternative to traditional placements remains largely unrecognized within the criminological community, in part because of the paucity of relevant empirical evaluative studies of the effectiveness of such programs. Our review of available literature and contacts with other states led us to the same conclusion. A number of states have used wilderness programs as a rehabilitative model for adjudicated youth (e.g., Massachusetts, Michigan and Illinois), but evaluations of these programs have either produced mixed results or have not been done.

A study (Kelly, 1971) of Outward Bound model programs in three states in 1971 concluded that, among youth released for
one year, the recidivism rate of wilderness program youth was 20 percent, which compared favorably to the 42 percent recidivism rate for youth from the control group. A study of Massachusetts youth in 1972 (Willman, 1973) produced recidivism rates almost identical to the 1971 study. A Texas study (Burns, 2000) yielded even better results, producing a 15 percent recidivism rate among wilderness program youth who had been released for six months. A 1992 study (Castellano, 1992) reported reductions in arrest rates for wilderness program graduates that lasted about one year. However, after two years, the recidivism rates of wilderness program graduates were about the same as those of the control group. Similarly, a Michigan study (Michigan, 1999) showed that, among youth who had been out of the program for two years, there was no significant difference in recidivism between the youth in that state’s wilderness program and youth in its other programs.

Overall, researchers seem to agree (Kelly, Burns, Minnesota, Willman) that wilderness challenge programs are a positive alternative to traditional settings and may be particularly well suited to some troubled youth (Willman, 1973). There is some consensus that the program is effective in reducing recidivism. However, the studies (Castellano, Burns) seem to indicate that the most beneficial results of wilderness programs are in the short term following the end of the program. Over time, the benefits seem to diminish. We could not locate any studies that explained why the positive effects wear off over time. Some researchers (Burns, 2000) believe the quality and duration of aftercare services may contribute to the eroding of rehabilitation program benefits. Since aftercare services were not the focus of this study, we did not examine the quality of the aftercare services AWC youth received. However, we did review aftercare standards and determined that AWC youth generally did not receive the number of aftercare contacts recommended by OCFS.

A prominent researcher (Altschuler, 1994) who has been used as a consultant by OCFS has developed an Intensive Aftercare Program (IAP) for the Federal Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP). His research has shown that, by providing an intensive aftercare model program to youth evaluated as being at high risk of recidivating, programs may be able to release youth earlier and still reduce recidivism among this group of juvenile offenders. This aftercare model plans for
a case management approach that provides continuous, consistent service provision, referral and monitoring for these offenders. The researcher states that, historically, transitioning youth from secure and highly regimented life in a institutional setting to a relatively unstructured life in the community has been a major problem. His report to OJJDP implies that without IAP, the high-risk youth is likely to re-offend.

Our review of case files at AWC showed that OCFS considers most of these youth to be at high risk of re-offending, at least at intake. OCFS does not currently evaluate the risk of re-offending when youth leave AWC. Since these youth are released after only four months in residential custody – significantly earlier than most OCFS youth, on average – it seems appropriate they receive some intensive aftercare services. Presently, such services are not available to many AWC youth. OCFS already provides graduates of the YLA with intensive aftercare services through City Challenge. A new substance abuse program in Middletown, New York also has dedicated intensive aftercare available. We believe that OCFS should consider such services for AWC youth.

Due to the potentially positive results troubled youth can achieve through participation in wilderness programs, we believe there is a need to better understand and recognize the AWC’s effectiveness as a therapeutic resource. Unfortunately, the new DCJS study of YLA results will not include the AWC program. The DCJS researcher said that due to time constraints and other factors, he could not include AWC youth in his current study. OCFS has been operating the AWC program for nearly ten years without having done an evaluation of its effectiveness in reducing recidivism. We believe OCFS should consider doing such a study to determine how effective this program is, and whether it should be expanded to include other youth.
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<td>5.   Should a formal evaluation of the recidivism rates for the AWC program be conducted?</td>
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<td>6.   Should an intensive aftercare program for youth who complete the AWC program be developed and implemented?</td>
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Future Direction

O CFS is presently embarking on a major new initiative for rehabilitating troubled youth called prescriptive programming. Prescriptive programming is based on the theory that the risk of the youth re-offending after release from custody can be reduced by treating those factors in each youth’s background that contribute to criminal behavior. Examples of these risk factors are poor family relations, drug abuse/addiction, poor consequential thinking and alienation from mainstream socialization. OCFS officials hope that prescriptive programming will not only reduce recidivism, but also lead eventually to shorter out-of-home placements. This should reduce the overall cost to rehabilitate delinquent youth.

For the past several years, a number of OCFS facilities have been in the process of testing prescriptive programming, but no test facility has fully implemented the program. At some point, OCFS will begin to monitor each youth’s progress after release in an effort to evaluate the effectiveness of the new approach.

Prescriptive programming operates on these guiding principles:

- there is a need to provide effective programs;
- children can un-learn criminal behavior;
- youth must have a safe and secure environment;
- risk factors producing criminal behavior must be known for each youth;
- resources should be focused on high risk youth; and
- the most effective programming is done in the community.

The mechanics of prescriptive programming would include an evaluation of each youth’s risk factors at intake and a determination of the overall risk level. Programs would periodically re-evaluate the risk level as services are delivered, and make the youth eligible for release to the community when the risk level has fallen to some predetermined point. At some time in the future, officials envision facilities specializing in treating certain risk factors, and risk assessment driving placement. OCFS officials do not have a set date for full implementation of prescriptive programming. However, given
the length of time it has taken to set up the pilot facilities, it would appear that full implementation is years away.

In the meantime, the YLA and AWC programs are already in place. Research suggests that both programs have the potential to reduce recidivism. In addition, the YLA program includes risk based programming in its present mode of service delivery. In our opinion, expanding or duplicating these programs might be an expeditious way to increase the number of youth who would benefit from better programs. Of course, any expansion should be contingent on the results of the DCJS study that is in progress and an evaluation of the AWC program. At this time, OCFS has no plans to expand either the YLA or the AWC.

We believe there may be other youth who might also benefit from these two programs. For example, OCFS officials reported that, as of July 2000, there were 598 youth in custody who were eligible for these two short-term programs: 185 youth were eligible for the YLA, and 413 youth were eligible for the AWC. According to an OCFS official, most limited-secure youth would be eligible for the YLA program if it were not limited to the Brooklyn area. If this program were expanded, it might be able to serve areas other than Brooklyn. However, this type of expansion would require OCFS to set up other intensive aftercare programs similar to City Challenge.

Expanding the AWC is limited by current security considerations. OCFS places only lesser level offenders in the AWC program since the program operates in a non-secure environment when the youth are on camping or hiking trips. However, some research articles (Willman) claim that wilderness programs have been effective with certain, more serious offenders. Other articles (Warren, Mitten, Porter) have explored experiential programs for female offenders. While these authors strongly advise against placing female offenders in wilderness programs designed for males or in co-ed programs, they claim female offenders can benefit from such programs that are specifically designed for them.

One of OCFS’ goals in implementing prescriptive programming is shortening the length of time troubled youth must spend in overall treatment, specifically the residential portion of treatment. The traditional 13-month stay represents significant time out of the home and the community. By comparison, both
The YLA and the AWC are shorter in duration: the average lengths of stay in the YLA and the AWC are, respectively, 206 days (less than 7 months) and 4 months. The YLA and the AWC are also less expensive to run than traditional residential treatment, principally because they are relatively short-term programs. For example, it costs OCFS $208 per day to maintain a youth in a traditional 13-month residential treatment program. According to OCFS calculations, it costs $215 per day to keep a youth in the residential YLA program, and $248 per day to treat a youth in the AWC. Thus, the average cost per placement in the three residential programs is as follows: $84,357 for traditional programs; $76,323 for the YLA program; and $64,161 for the AWC program.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue for Further Consideration</th>
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<td>7. Should OCFS examine the feasibility of expanding or duplicating the YLA and the AWC, possibly to serve all eligible youth and/or expand to different populations than are currently served by the programs?</td>
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Bibliography of Study Sources


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September 5, 2001

FAX and MAIL

Mr. William P. Challice, Audit Director
NYS Office of the State Comptroller
Division of Management Audit
123 William Street – 21st floor
New York, New York 10038

Re: OSC Draft Audit #2001-D-05
"Short-Term Residential Programs"

Dear Mr. Challice:

The Office of Children and Family Services has reviewed the above-cited audit report and offers the attached response for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Kevin D. Robinson
Director
Audit and Quality Control

Cc: Commissioner John A. Johnson
M. Flaxman
file

Appendix B
Response to OSC Audit #2001 – D - 5
Short Term Residential Programs

Following is the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) response to the above-cited audit report.

GENERAL COMMENTS
The following statements contained in the audit require comment.

The stated purpose of the OSC audit was to address the following three questions about two short-term residential programs: YLA and AWC:
- Do the YLA and AWC programs meet OCFS requirements for delivery of services to youth?
- Do the YLA and AWC contain program elements that have been shown by current research to reduce recidivism among youth who complete the program?
- Has OCFS evaluated the YLA and the AWC to determine if these models could be used to successfully serve more youth?

The audit found that both programs provided youth with more counseling than required and that they were both rated as exemplary by the State Education Department. Both program models had research to support their efficacy in recidivism reduction. However, of the seven issues the audit raised for agency consideration:
  5 were related to post-residential services,
  I suggested an evaluation of the recidivism rates of AWC, and
  I suggested examining the feasibility of expanding YLS and AWC programs.

It appears that the focus of the audit was on aftercare and not on the primary purpose of the audit, i.e. YLA and AWC. In addition, inconsistent standards applied between City Challenge and aftercare bring into question the objectivity of the auditors.

Audit Statement (page 8)
"OCFS officials stated that they have not developed contact standards for the day reporting and electronic monitoring programs. However, these programs are more intensive than general aftercare programs and as such, should require more youth contacts than general aftercare programs. In the absence of any specific requirements for these programs, we measured compliance against the more conservative general aftercare standards."

Agency Response:
Youth in day programs are not subject to aftercare standards. It is therefore not appropriate to evaluate their supervision according to these standards. Youth in day programs are expected to report to these programs six days per week. If a youth does not report to the program the counselor contacts the family immediately. On the second day a warrant is issued if the youth is absent without permission.

* See State Comptroller's Notes, Appendix C
While youth on electronic monitoring are subject to regular aftercare contact standards, the counselor has information on a daily basis as to whether the youth is adhering to curfew conditions of release. This type of contact is not reflected in aftercare standards.

Audit Statement (page 9)
"...it is possible that any positive changes in behavior derived from the AWC program are being undermined by inadequate supervision in aftercare."

Agency Response:
There is no basis for drawing this conclusion.

First: The audit fails to substantiate its claim that post release supervision of youth released from AWC is inadequate. The audit did not adequately consider the intensive supervision function of the day reporting programs (6 extensive face to face contacts per week) and electronic monitoring programs. Almost three quarters (72%) of the cases reviewed received these intensive post release services. Of the 25 cases reviewed, 12 went to ERC/HBIS programs and 6 went to the Electronic Monitoring program. Only 7 went directly to aftercare.

Second: In the same paragraph that the audit speculates that the benefits derived from AWC are undermined by inadequate supervision in aftercare, is the following statement: "The extent to which inadequate supervision of youth in aftercare contributes to recidivism is not well quantified or documented in research." The audit supplies no evidence to support its conclusion except for an unsupported statement from the consultant used by OCFS to develop an intensive aftercare program. Whether or not the Intensive Aftercare Program makes a difference will be determined by the results of the evaluation of this demonstration program.

Audit Statement (page 15)
"Our review of records at AWC showed that OCFS considers most of these youth to be at high risk of re-offending, at least at intake. OCFS does not currently evaluate the risk of re-offending when youth leave AWC. Since these youth are released after only four months in residential custody - significantly earlier than most OCFS youth, on average – it seems appropriate they receive some intensive aftercare services. Presently, such services are not available to many AWC youth."

Agency Response:
With agency-wide implementation of the Residential Behavior Assessment (RBA) component of Prescriptive Programming, the agency now measures re-offense risk at the time of release and assigns appropriate levels of community supervision based on this information.

Audit Statement (page 17-18)

* See State Comptroller's Notes, Appendix C
“The mechanics of prescriptive programming would include an evaluation of each youth’s risk factors at intake and a determination of overall risk level. Programs would periodically re-evaluate the risk level as services are delivered, and make the youth eligible for release to the community when the risk level has fallen to some predetermined point. At some time in the future, officials envision facilities specializing in treating certain risk factors, and risk assessment driving placement. OCFS officials do not have a set date for full implementation of prescriptive programming. However, given the length of time it has taken to set up the pilot facilities, it would appear that full implementation is years away.”

Agency Response:
With the exception of automation, all components of the Prescriptive Programming Case Management System will be operational by September 2001 in all facilities except boys secure. Selected aspects of the new case management system will be in place system-wide by December 2001. Once implemented, the system will be continually monitored and refined.

ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

1. Should records of counseling and other required monitoring contacts with youth in City Challenge and in all types of aftercare programs be maintained so that OCFS can:
   - Document the aftercare unit’s compliance with OCFS standards for supervision;
   - Show the course of the youth’s progress in aftercare; and
   - Evaluate treatment services that work, or do not work, for individual youth or classes of youth, in OCFS custody?

Agency Response:
In order to address this issue comprehensively, the agency has designed, piloted, and is in the process of implementing components of its Prescriptive Programming initiative. An essential component of Prescriptive Programming is an automated case management system that supports individual case planning, service documentation, progress tracking, system management, and program evaluation.

To date, a Project Charter specifying the scope, requirements and organizational responsibilities necessary for the development of the automated case management system has been developed and is serving as a blueprint for system development. As a first step in implementing the Charter, a facilitator will be contracted to develop technical specifications for the automated case management system. These technical specifications will provide the basis for a RFP to develop an automated case management system that will be integrated into all agency programs, from intake through aftercare/post-residential care.
2. Should youth contact standards for the day reporting and electronic monitoring programs be established?

Agency Response:
Standards exist for day reporting and electronic monitoring programs. Youth in day reporting programs are expected to report to these programs six days a week and are under supervision during program participation. The number of required program days may decrease over time, if appropriate. Youth in the electronic monitoring program are subject to aftercare contact standards. They also are subject to daily monitoring for curfew compliance.

3. Should a mechanism be put in place to monitor that all youth receive the required number of post-residential contacts?

Agency Response:
A mechanism is in place to monitor required number of non-day program contacts. The aftercare monitoring process includes a semi annual review of youth contact logs by central office to monitor compliance with program standards. While the standards are the goal, it is understood that 100% compliance is difficult to achieve over time due to numerous circumstances, therefore, exceptions to meeting aftercare contact standards are dealt with on an individual basis. Attendance is continually monitored at day programs.

4. Should different or more innovative models or approaches be identified to increase the success of required contacts?

Agency Response:
The agency has identified and is piloting two aftercare program models that have a high likelihood of success with OCFS placed youth: Multi-Systemic Therapy (MST), and Intensive Aftercare Program (IAP). The agency is conducting evaluations of both of these models.

The agency is in the second year of a DCJS funded effort to evaluate MST’s effectiveness. This evaluation effort involves random assignment of eligible youth to either MST or to a control group. This research design allows the agency to compare MST outcomes with those of standard aftercare service. Program fidelity will be assessed as will both short term and long term outcomes; i.e., recidivism.

In anticipation of a positive outcome of the MST demonstration project, the agency has located funding, pending re-appropriation legislation, to expand the program by adding three MST treatment teams.

In addition, the agency has implemented an IAP model. This model is operating in four counties. The program is being evaluated by an outcome study that will compare the recidivism rates of youth assigned to IAP with those of comparable youth assigned to a

* See State Comptroller's Notes, Appendix C
control group that did not receive intensive aftercare. In addition, there will be a process study to describe and analyze the implementation and operation of the IAP.

ISSUES FOR FURTHER CONSIDERATION

5. Should a formal evaluation of the recidivism rates for the AWC program be conducted?

Agency Response:
The agency has no plans to conduct a recidivism study of AWC. OCFS, however, values information generated from the evaluation of all of its programs. In this regard, the agency will be continually monitoring the effectiveness of AWC, as well as all other facilities, as part of the management of Prescriptive Programming. This broader assessment will provide useful information about what factors contribute to effective program intervention.

6. Should an intensive aftercare program for youth who complete the AWC program be developed and implemented?

Agency Response:
Intensive aftercare is practicable only if all youth released from AWC came from the same geographic location. Since there is no geographic requirement for AWC admission, this suggestion is not feasible. However, Prescriptive Programming will afford all youth released from OCFS facilities appropriate levels of post residential supervision.

7. Should OCFS examine the feasibility of expanding or duplicating the YLA and the AWC, possibly to serve all eligible youth and/or expand to different populations than are currently served by the programs?

Agency Response:
It is too early to make the decision to expand YLA or AWC. Based on the agency's experience with Prescriptive Programming, the most cost effective program interventions will be identified and expanded. These programs may, or may not, be YLA or AWC.

* See State Comptroller's Notes, Appendix C
1. This report does not solely focus on aftercare and clearly answers the questions raised in the audit scope and objectives. Aftercare is a key component in the rehabilitation process. The report does identify some deficiencies in aftercare, (see Post-Residential Services section on pages 7-9 of the report.) The standards used to measure compliance between City Challenge and aftercare are OCFS standards. Accordingly, to the extent OCFS believes the standards to be “inconsistent,” we suggest OCFS revise them as appropriate.

2. During the audit, we had asked OCFS officials to provide written standards for day reporting and electronic monitoring; they did not do so. In the absence of such standards, we used the general aftercare standards which we believe are more conservative than what should be required for day reporting and electronic monitoring.

3. We requested aftercare documentation for the 25 AWC youth from OCFS on several occasions, to show that the youth had received the minimum required supervision contacts. OCFS provided such documentation for only 2 of the 25 youth. This is clearly stated on page 8 of the report.

4. This is not an unsupported statement. The consultant used by OCFS is a prominent researcher in the field of juvenile justice. The fact that OCFS hired him to assist it in developing an Intensive Aftercare Program speaks to their recognition of his qualifications and expertise.

5. During the course of this study, OCFS officials never told us that they have such a mechanism. Furthermore, if there is a mechanism in place to monitor post-residential contacts, it clearly is not working as only 2 of the 25 AWC reviewed met the minimum requirements for aftercare contacts.

6. Recidivism is a primary measure used to determine a rehabilitative program’s effectiveness. OCFS has been operating the AWC program for nearly 10 years. It is unfortunate that OCFS is not willing to conduct a recidivism study of the AWC program.

7. We believe OCFS should be able to work around this restriction. All intensive aftercare programs do not require that youth come from the same geographic region. As noted in the “Program Evaluation” section of our report, research has shown that providing intensive aftercare to youth evaluated as being at high risk of recidivating can be effective in lowering recidivism rates.

8. AWC has been in existence for nearly 10 years and YLA for more than 8 years. In our opinion, OCFS needs to evaluate the outcomes and merits of these programs to determine if they should be expanded.