

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/publications/rikers-adolescent-behavioral-learning-experience-evaluation>

Policy Issue Resources

Publication

In 2012, New York City launched the Adolescent Behavioral Learning Experience (ABLE) program, a large-scale initiative serving 16- to 18-year-old youth held at the Rikers Island jail complex. The ABLE program provided Moral Reconation Therapy to young people with the aim of improving individual outcomes and reducing the number of youth who were rearrested and returned to the jail. Notably, the program was the first initiative in the U.S. to be funded using a social impact bond (SIB)an innovative form of pay-for-success contracting that leverages private funding to finance public services. The investment bank, Goldman Sachs, provided initial funding for ABLE with the understanding that they would be reimbursed if the program reduced recidivism by at least 10 percent. The City of New York agreed to provide Goldman Sachs a return on their investment if the program reduced recidivism by 11 percent or more, based on savings associated with incarcerating fewer people at Rikers.

The Vera Institute of Justice evaluated ABLE using a quasi-experimental design to assess whether the program led to reductions in recidivism for youth passing through the jail. The results of the evaluation determined whether the program met its contractual benchmarks.

While the ABLE program reached the majority of 16- to -18-year-olds in the study cohort, it did not lead to reductions in recidivism and therefore did not meet the programs pre-defined threshold of success. Based on the findings of Veras evaluation, the ABLE program was discontinued on August 31, 2015

Veras evaluation used an innovative design to compare recidivism for ABLE participants and a historical group of young people admitted to the jail before the program was established (from 2006 to 2010).

The program was successfully taken to scale, with 85 percent of those in the study cohort attending at least one ABLE session.

The evaluation found an upward trend in recidivism for 16- to 18-year-olds and 19-year-olds, suggesting that shifts were the result of other factors not associated with the ABLE program.

PUBLICATION

Transformative change, sent to your inbox.

Vera Institute of Justice. All rights reserved.