

IMPACT EVALUATION - VOLUME I
THE EXPERIENCE OF PRE-RELEASE TRAINING

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FOREWORD

This study evaluates one program component funded under the "Special Impact-Corrections" grant (June, 1975 through May, 1976). Impact monies were targeted at MCI-Concord commitments providing for a variety of programs and services both unique and complementary to existing capabilities. The scope of these programs ranged from those serving the actual institutionalized Concord population, to street-based strategies. Briefly, these were:

1. New Line: a classification capability aimed at court commitments to MCI-Concord.
2. Lancaster: a pre-release/minimum security facility for returns to the Worcester area.
3. Pre-Release Training: training designed to reduce program non-completions at community-based facilities.
4. C.A.R.V.E.: employment project at the Fernald State School for the mentally retarded.
5. Supported Work: training and community work experience for pre-release clients and parolees.
6. Release Support: tri-phased program to facilitate transition for individuals released directly to the street.
7. Purchase of Services: funds for requests in such areas as education, medical costs, and vocational training.

Each of these components is analyzed in a separate study, since they differ in type of population served and objectives addressed. Hence, variables collected for each and desirable outcome measures will also differ. Each volume of the Impact studies should be incorporated as a segment of a comprehensive assessment of the Impact program.

The present study is an evaluation of the Pre-Release Training component of the Impact grant.

ABSTRACT

Pre-release training is a component of a multi-faceted strategy (funded by the "Impact" grant) aimed at broadening and complementing programs for commitments to MCI-Concord. The program's objective was to reduce the high non-completion rate of these men at pre-release facilities. Subcontracted to Today Not Tomorrow Workshops, Incorporated (TNT), eight training cycles were conducted at MCI-Shirley during the funding period. The goal of these workshops was to facilitate the potentially difficult transition from maximum security to pre-release status by dealing with areas directly concerning adjustment to community reintegration.

A total of 104 men participated; of these, 96 graduated, for a cycle completion rate of 92.3 percent. These TNT graduates were compared to a control group of Concord commitments who were released directly to a community facility during the same time period as TNT training occurred. Each group's inter-institutional movement was tracked for ten months subsequent to transfer to pre-release, which allowed for determination of program non-completion rates. Using the definition of a non-completer as anyone returned to a higher security level or declared escaped-at-large, we found that 32 of the 77 TNT graduates who were terminated from pre-release fit these criteria, for a non-completion rate of 41.6 percent. When compared to pre-release clients who did not receive TNT intervention, however, this rate was significantly higher (the program non-completion rate for non-TNT clients was 16.9 percent). When actual Concord commitments were isolated from the TNT sample, the same relationship was found. TNT graduates committed to Concord failed to complete pre-release at a rate of 40.0 percent, compared to 16.9 percent of the control group. Another finding highlighted a pattern demonstrated by TNT clients to continue as pre-release residents for prolonged periods of time.

The study concludes that although the pre-release training concept does not have a positive impact on community-based program non-completion rates, further study may be necessary. Issues such as the possibility of the existence of a selection bias in choosing high risk candidates for TNT, and the disproportionate number of TNT graduates still remaining at their placements as of ten months were cited. A strategy for addressing these questions by future research is outlined.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>PAGE</u>
Introduction	1
Methodology	3
The Sample	3
Research Questions	3
Section I: The Experience of Pre-Release Training	4
Findings	4
Cycle Completions	4
Time Spent Awaiting Transfer	4
Purchase of Services Participation	6
Section II: Completions at Pre-Release	7
Methodology	7
Findings	8
Program Completions of Graduates and Other TNT Commitments	8
Program Completions by Cycle	9
Program Non-Completions by Commitment Institution	9
Institutions Receiving Program Non-Completions	9
Time Served in Community-Based Facilities	12
Discussion	16

TABLE OF TABLES

	<u>PAGE</u>
Table I: TNT Participation & Cycle Completion Rates	5
Table II: Time Spent Awaiting Transfer from MCI-Shirley	4
Table III: Pre-Release Completion Rates for TNT Graduates and Non-TNT Graduates	8
Table IV: Program Non-Completion Rates by Cycle	10
Table V: Program Non-Completions by Receiving Institution	11
Table VI: Time Served in Community-Based Facilities	13
Table VIII: Time Served in Community-Based Facilities by Program Non-Completions	14

INTRODUCTION

Pre-release training is a unique strategy designed to reduce in-program non-completion rates at pre-release centers. The underlying premise is the assumption that a move from a maximum security facility to a pre-release setting may inspire problems of adjustment for the transferred individual. This move entails leaving the externally applied rigid structure of rules and regulations of a walled institution and immediately being faced with the more internally imposed behavioral norms. The transition is an abrupt one, which may present role conflict and other adjustment problems for the individual.

Since the passage of the Correctional Reform Act in 1972 which enabled community-based corrections in Massachusetts, this issue has not been dealt with adequately. Few substantive programs were offered to prepare the individual for a change in security levels. Coping appeared to be most difficult for MCI-Concord commitments, who evidenced extremely high non-completion rates at pre-release. Statistics attest to this; for example, 49 percent of all transfers to a community facility from MCI Concord during the first nine months of 1975 were program non-completers. This was the highest rate of any transferring institution.¹

Pre-release training was introduced as an intervening mechanism to better prepare an individual to assume pre-release status and facilitate community re-integration. This portion of the Impact grant was subcontracted to Today Not Tomorrow Workshops, Incorporated (TNT) with the stipulation that regular Department of Correction employees be trained to conduct similar workshops. This basic operation of TNT was as follows: selected MCI-Concord commitments who were bound for a community-based facility were first transferred to MCI-Shirley, the pre-release center serving as the training site. There they participated in an intensive three-week training cycle, led by two TNT "facilitators". The cycles dealt with such issues as goal-setting, seeking and maintaining employment, values clarification, and dealing with potential adjustment problems at pre-release. An eclectic strategy was utilized to accomplish these tasks. Transfer to the designated pre-release center was contingent upon successful completion of the cycle, as judged by the facilitators.

1 SEE Weiner, Ellen "Summary of Program Completion Statistics", (October, 1975) Massachusetts Department of Correction, Memo # 403.

This study will describe the pre-release training experience of individuals who participated in the first eight cycles. This time frame was selected since it represents the period of receipt of Impact funds by TNT (June, 1975 through May, 1976).

METHODOLOGY

The Sample

The first eight cycles included 104 participants. This formed the original sample for the study. Program-related data such as completion status, date of transfer, and receiving institution, was provided for each individual by the TNT staff. Additionally, a ten month follow-up was conducted on each graduate for whom this was feasible. This will be described in greater detail in Section II of the findings.

Booking and probation data, encompassing a standard set of criminal history variables, personal background characteristics, information about the current incarceration, and a thorough summary for all participants was generated by the Correction/Parole Management Information Systems. This data is generally utilized to distinguish differences and similarities between two groups; in the present study, these would be program completers versus non-completers. Due to the small number of non-completers in the sample, however, any variable breakdown, in the attempt to draw comparisons, would be meaningless. Therefore, this methodology was rejected for this report. It will rely instead on the program-related variables to provide a description of TNT participation in Section I of the findings.

In Section II, pre-release program completion rates of TNT graduates will be compared to completion rates of non-TNT graduates, using the Chi square test of association. This should enable us to draw some conclusion regarding the impact of this strategy upon reducing failure rates at pre-release. Other findings relating to post-cycle experience will be discussed in this section.

Research Questions

Two distinct issues will be addressed:

- (1) What was the general nature of the pre-release training experience as demonstrated by the first eight cycles? A careful examination of the program-related data will be presented to achieve this characterization.
- (2) Does participation in TNT significantly reduce pre-release non-completion rates? Comparisons will be drawn between two groups to answer this question. In addition, program non-completions will be analyzed by cycle, to locate any trends or possibilities of cycle-peculiar influence upon subsequent program non-completion rates.

SECTION I: The Experience of Pre-Release Training

FINDINGS

Cycle Completions

A total of 104 men participated in eight cycles. The overwhelming majority, 96 (92.3 percent) were cycle graduates, and continued the process of graduated release by going on to a pre-release center. Of the remaining eight individuals, four (3.8 percent) were considered neutral non-completions, since they could not participate in the training due to previously arranged treatment plans; and only four (3.8 percent) were negative non-completions. These latter were deemed unsuccessful by TNT facilitators and returned to their sending institution.

Cycle participation and cycle completion rates are depicted in Table I on page 5.

Time Spent Awaiting Transfer

After having completed a cycle, graduates who were not designated to remain at MCI-Shirley often had to reside at the facility until a suitable transfer date could be arranged. Frequently, this occurred when several individuals were available to be transported to the same site at once. For 51.6 percent of the 64 men in this category, time spent at Shirley prior to transfer was less than a week. The entire breakdown of this variable is found in Table II below:

TABLE II

TIME SPENT AWAITING TRANSFER FROM MCI-SHIRLEY

<u>No. of Weeks</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
Less than 1 week	33	(51.6)
1 week	16	(25.0)
2 to 3 weeks	9	(14.0)
4 to 5 weeks	4	(6.3)
6 to 12 weeks	2	(3.1)
TOTAL	64	(100.0)

It might have been expected that individuals who spent greater lengths of time awaiting transfer from Shirley would have a higher rate of program non-completion than those with little or no transfer time. This assumption was made since during this transitory phase, no real program activity is provided. Analysis, however, revealed no association between the two factors.

TABLE I

TNT PARTICIPATION AND CYCLE COMPLETION RATES

Cycle #	Number in Cycle	Percent of Total	IN CYCLE:		Neutral Non-		Negative Non-	
			N	%	N	%	N	%
1	14	(13.5)	12	(85.7)	2	(15.4)	-	-
2	13	(12.5)	13	(100.0)	-	-	-	-
3	14	(13.5)	10	(71.4)	-	-	4	(28.6)
4	8	(7.7)	8	(100.0)	-	-	-	-
5	12	(11.5)	12	(100.0)	-	-	-	-
6	13	(12.5)	11	(84.6)	2	(15.4)	-	-
7	16	(15.3)	16	(100.0)	-	-	-	-
8	14	(13.5)	14	(100.0)	-	-	-	-
TOTAL	104	(100.0)						

Purchase of Services Participation

Pre-release training clients, as other Impact program component participants, were entitled to these funds for such purposes as education, medical expenses, and vocational training. A small proportion (15.4 percent) of the sample did utilize this capability, whereas 84.6 percent did not.

SECTION II: Completions at Pre-Release

METHODOLOGY

One of the most important variables to consider in terms of determining the extent to which the pre-release program succeeded in its objective was whether a client was returned to higher security after having been transferred to a community-based facility. Prior research has categorized a program non-completer as an individual who is returned to more maximum security from pre-release to complete his period of incarceration. A program completer, on the other hand, is released directly from the lower security setting.¹

In order to assess the status of TNT participants with regard to this variable, two samples were drawn. One consisted of all TNT graduates (N=96); the other, to be utilized as a control, included all Concord commitments who were sent directly to a community-based facility from August 18, 1975 through April 23, 1976 (N=82). This time frame was selected since TNT participants were released to Shirley for the eight cycles at intervals during this period.

A ten month follow-up was conducted on each group, tracking inter-institutional movement subsequent to the date of commencement of pre-release status. Completion rates were calculated on the basis of this tracking. A program non-completer was defined as anyone who was either returned to higher security or who was declared an escapee-at-large within the ten month parameter.

The program completion rates for the two groups were compared using the Chi Square test to ascertain if a significant difference existed. Statistical significance is assumed at the .05 level or beyond; that is the observed relationship could only be expected to occur by chance five times out of one hundred or less.

1 LeClair, Daniel P., An Analysis of Recidivism Among Residents Released from Boston State and Shirley Pre-Release Centers During 1972-1973 (August 1974) Massachusetts Department of Correction, Publication No. 100

FINDINGS

Program Completions of TNT Graduates and Other Concord Commitments

A total of 77 TNT graduates had been released from pre-release within the follow-up period. Of these, 45 (58.4 percent) were program completers, and 32 (41.6 percent) non-completers. Seventy-seven of the Concord commitments who had not received TNT intervention were terminated from pre-release status, completing the program at a higher rate than the TNT sample. The control group contained 64 completers (83.1 percent) and 13 non-completers (16.9 percent). The Chi Square test yielded significance at the .01 level ($\chi^2 = 11.334$, 1dg, $P < .01$).

Since the target of TNT efforts was primarily Concord commitments, these men were isolated from the original sample. We wanted to determine whether participation in pre-release training significantly reduces the high program non-completion rates of Concord commitments.

The subsample fared somewhat better than did the TNT sample as a whole (40.0 percent non-completion rate) but again, not as well as their Concord counterparts who were sent directly to pre-release. The Chi Square in this case was lower, but still significant at the .01 level ($\chi^2 = 8.448$, 1df, $P < .01$).

These two relationships are depicted in Table III below:

TABLE III
PRE-RELEASE COMPLETION RATES FOR TNT GRADUATES
AND NON-TNT GRADUATES

	<u>NON-TNT</u>		<u>TNT (Concord Commitments only)</u>		<u>TNT (Concord & Walpole Commitments)</u>	
	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
Completers	64	(83.1)	28	(60.0)	45	(58.4)
Non-Completers	13	(16.9)	19	(40.0)	32	(41.6)
TOTAL	77	(100.0)	47	(100.0)	77	(100.0)

Program Completions by Cycle

Table IV on page 10 locates program completion rates of TNT graduates by cycle of participation. Rates were computed for clients actually released from pre-release (19 men remained at their pre-release placements as of the ten-month follow up). Several interesting relationships can be discerned. First, in three cycles, fifty percent or more of the graduates who went on to pre-release were subsequently returned to higher security or escaped. For Cycle 3, 50 percent were non-completers; Cycle 5 had a 54.4 percent non-completion rate; and in Cycle 2, this rate was 66.7 percent. Second, Cycles 2, 5, and 7 account for close to sixty percent of the total non-completers in the TNT sample, with Cycle 2 alone contributing a disproportionate 25 percent of this rate.

These findings suggest the possibility of factors specific to these training cycles that may have contributed to the overall return rate. This argument may be slightly strengthened by noting that Cycle 3, with a 50 percent non-completion rate for the cycle, and 12.5 percent contribution to the total rate, also contained all four negative non-completions.

Program Non-Completions by Commitment Institution

Concord commitments constituted the majority of TNT clients who could be followed for ten months. Whereas 61.0 percent (47 individuals) of the sample were originally from Concord, 39.0 percent (30 clients) had been committed to Walpole. Broken down according to completion rates, we found that both Concord and Walpole commitments had similar proportions of individuals who did not complete pre-release. For the Concord subsample, this rate was 40.4 percent, and for men from Walpole, 43.3 percent.

Institutions Receiving Program Non-Completions

Table V, on page 11, presents a distribution TNT graduates who failed to complete pre-release according to their receiving facility. As can be seen, returns to Concord comprised the largest proportion of these non-completers.

TABLE IV
PROGRAM NON-COMPLETION RATES BY CYCLE

<u>Cycle #</u>	<u>Number of Cycle Graduates Released From Pre-Release</u>	<u>Number Non- Completers in Cycle</u>	<u>Percent Non- Completers of Cycle</u>	<u>Percent Non- Completers of Total Non-Completers</u>
1	10	4	(40.0)	(12.5)
2	12	8	(66.7)	(25.0)
3	8	4	(50.0)	(12.5)
4	5	2	(40.0)	(6.3)
5	11	6	(54.5)	(18.7)
6	9	1	(11.1)	(3.1)
7	12	5	(41.7)	(15.6)
8	<u>10</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>(20.0)</u>	<u>(6.3)</u>
TOTAL	77	32		(100.0)

TABLE V

PROGRAM NON-COMPLETIONS BY RECEIVING INSTITUTION

(N= 32)

<u>Institution</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Concord	14	(43.8)
Walpole	11	(34.4)
Escapee-at-large	5	(15.6)
Bridgewater	1	(3.1)
Norfolk	<u>1</u>	<u>(3.1)</u>
TOTAL	32	(100.0)

Time Served in Community-Based Facilities

An unanticipated finding concerns the speed with which clients completed the process of graduated release. A substantial percentage of the TNT participants were still residents of a pre-release center or halfway house beyond ten months. This was not the case for other Concord commitments. Whereas 19 (19.8 percent) of the TNT graduates could not be included in the follow-up analysis since they were pre-release clients for longer than ten months, only five individuals (6.1 percent) in the non-TNT sample were in this category.

On the basis of this finding, it was decided to investigate whether or not graduates of the TNT training did, in fact, spend disproportionately prolonged periods of time in pre-release. A distribution was plotted, for both TNT clients and non-TNT clients, which portrayed this variable. Individuals who had not been released or returned to higher custody at ten months were included in this analysis, and followed until April 25, 1977 (an arbitrary cut-off date). If, at that point, the individual remained at a community-based facility, time served was computed to this date. Table VI on page 13 depicts this distribution, including all categories of completion status, for both the TNT and non-TNT samples. Table VII describes this for program non-completions only.

TABLE VI

TIME SERVED IN COMMUNITY-BASED FACILITIES

	<u>TNT CLIENTS</u>			<u>NON-TNT</u>		
	<u>N</u>	<u>(%)</u>	<u>Cum (%)</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>(%)</u>	<u>Cum (%)</u>
Less than 1 month to 2 months	15	(15.6)	(15.6)	26	(32.5)	(32.5)
2 to 4 months	22	(22.9)	(38.5)	18	(22.5)	(55.0)
4 to 6 months	18	(18.8)	(57.3)	14	(17.5)	(72.5)
6 to 8 months	11	(11.4)	(68.7)	11	(13.7)	(86.2)
8 to 10 months	11	(11.4)	(80.1)	6	(7.5)	(93.7)
10 to 12 months	6	(6.3)	(86.4)	4	(5.0)	(98.7)
12 to 14 months	7	(7.3)	(93.7)	1	(1.3)	(100.0)
14 to 16 months	6	(6.3)	(100.0)	0	(0.0)	(100.0)
TOTAL	96	(100.0)	(100.0)	80*	(100.0)	(100.0)

* Data on two individuals was unavailable for this analysis.

TABLE VII
TIME SERVED IN COMMUNITY-BASED FACILITIES
BY PROGRAM NON-COMPLETIONS

	<u>TNT CLIENTS</u>			<u>NON-TNT</u>		
	<u>N</u>	<u>(%)</u>	<u>Cum (%)</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>(%)</u>	<u>Cum (%)</u>
Less than 1 month to 2 months	11	(33.3)	(33.3)	7	(50.0)	(50.0)
2 to 4 months	8	(24.3)	(57.6)	3	(21.5)	(71.5)
4 to 6 months	5	(15.2)	(72.8)	2	(14.3)	(85.8)
6 to 8 months	4	(12.1)	(84.9)	1	(7.1)	(92.9)
8 to 10 months	4	(12.1)	(97.0)	0	(0.0)	(92.9)
10 to 12 months	1	(3.0)	(100.0)	1	(7.1)	(100.0)
TOTAL	33*	(100.0)	(100.0)	14*	(100.0)	(100.0)

* Note that this figure includes the program non-completions that occurred subsequent to the ten-month follow-up date.

It is obvious from the column labelled "cumulative percent" in Table VI that a significant disparity did exist between the two groups regarding length of time residing in a community facility. By the end of four months, 55 percent of the non-TNT sample had completed their pre-release experience in some manner, compared to only 38.5 percent of the TNT group. This pattern remains consistent throughout, with the greatest difference occurring at the end of eight months, when 86.2 percent of the non-TNT sample and 68.7 percent of the TNT participants had been terminated from their programs. The TNT group included individuals remaining in community facilities for as long as sixteen months after assuming pre-release status, whereas the comparison group did not.

A program non-completion generally transpired much earlier for pre-release residents who had not participated in TNT. As can be seen in Table VII, fifty percent of all returns to higher custody in this group occurred by two months. Only 33.3 percent of the TNT clients was declared to be program non-completions during this time period. Once again, this relationship holds constant until eight to ten months, when a larger proportion of the TNT sample was returned from pre-release.

DISCUSSION

The contention that participation in a pre-release training workshop reduces subsequent program non-completion rates was not supported by the findings. In fact, the reverse seemed to be true; individuals transferred directly to pre-release without intervention experienced significantly lower program non-completion rates than did TNT clients. Two distinct issues should be addressed here, however, which may refine and serve as further elucidation of the findings.

The first set of questions concerns the possibility of a selection bias operating during the initial screening process for TNT clients. The intake policy of the program administration was predicated on the selection of individuals who, by possessing certain characteristics, were adjudged high risks for not successfully completing a pre-release placement. Underlying TNT workshops' orientation, therefore, would be strategies aimed at this offender type.

This policy has two implications, both of which can be subjected to statistical analysis. First, the possible selection of greater risk-potential clients may account for the higher program non-completion rates of TNT clients, as compared to other Concord commitments. In order to control for this possibility, future research will develop and utilize a predictive device for pre-release completions, similar to the application of base expectancy to recidivism. A determination can be made as to whether, in fact, individuals participating in TNT were high risks in terms of program non-completion. If this is verified, the expected rates of non-completion for the TNT group can be computed and compared to the actual rates obtained. We will then be in a position to assess the impact of pre-release training upon lowering the program non-completion rates of high-risk individuals.

Second, the ostensible selection bias may explain the extreme difference between the non-completion rates of the two samples studied here. If one acted in the direction of populating TNT with high risks, thus defaulting the good risks into the comparison group, we have a viable explanation for the low rate of non-completion demonstrated by the non-TNT sample, as compared to the historically high rates of Concord commitments. This finding would constitute a logical outcome of excluding a number of potential non-completers (TNT clients) when calculating these rates for Concord. The result would be an artificially lowered statistic. Of course, one cannot overlook the likelihood that either no selection bias existed, or that it functioned in the opposite direction from that which is assumed here. Once again, a detailed examina-

tion of high risk characteristics and a determination of its applicability to these samples is necessary for clarification.

The second issue pertains to the quality of the pre-release experience, and is, in some ways, related to the first question. A pattern was observed indicating that graduates of TNT tended to reside in a community-based facility for more extended periods of time than other Concord commitments. Although the reason for this is not readily apparent, several plausible explanations can be offered. It is possible that men chosen for TNT workshops had a longer time to serve on their current sentence before becoming eligible for parole than did their counterparts in the comparison group. This might represent a sensible decision, since participation in TNT signifies at least a three week hiatus prior to assumption of pre-release status. An alternative explanation may be that TNT graduates are denied parole, thereby continuing as correctional clients for a greater length of time. A related interpretation is based on the possibility of the original selection bias. If clients referred to TNT are assumed to be at greater risk at pre-release, this belief may be generalized as relevant to their behavior upon release to the community. As a result, there may be reluctance to terminate the client from the facility until he has "proven" himself capable of functioning in the community beyond the point that would be expected of a regular pre-release client.

An inference that can be drawn from these considerations has a bearing on program non-completion rates. The observation that TNT clients are spending more time in pre-release may itself be associated with higher risk in that the longer the individual is a resident, the more vulnerable he may be to not successfully complete the program. A correlate of this involves the theory of optimal expectations. It is argued that after a prolonged period of time, the resident's expectations that he will be released become lowered, due to such factors as the contradictions inherent in maintaining an incarcerated status while participating in non-inmate activity (as work and education release); or not being granted a release while other pre-release contemporaries have been successfully terminated. Consequently, the potentially frustrated resident may be more at-risk to be returned to higher custody.

An exposition of the second issue would entail an analysis of the parole eligibility dates of releasees to community-based facilities at the time of this transfer, and an examination of parole hearing outcomes. Both sets of data could provide some explanation for the disparities in length of time served. In

addition, the analysis of parole hearings may shed some light on the question of optimal expectations. If TNT residents are denied parole with greater frequency than a non-TNT group, the level of frustration may be raised, with a possible consequent association with increased program non-completion rates.

In conclusion, it is the opinion of the researcher that further evaluation of this type merits more elaborate investigation beyond the scope of the present study. As is obvious, preliminary steps have been taken toward this end. The questions and issues raised here should be borne in mind when assessing the role of pre-release training as a component of the correctional practice of graduated release.