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In prison, a Drug Rehab That Pays Off Even Skeptics are impressed with treatment that uses brutally honest encounter groups and ex-offenders as counselors. Tax Payers save in the long run.

By DAN WEIKEL
TIMES STAFF WRITER

Captain Michael Teichner was thrilled with his promotion at Donovan State Prison except for one thing. His new duties included supervising the facility's privately run drug treatment program.

Teichner--known as "Iceman" around the prison yard--didn't much believe in rehabilitating criminals. During his twenty year career with the California Department of Corrections, he had seen plenty of reform-minded do-gooders come and go. When he met over lunch with Elaine Abraham of the non-profit Amity Foundation of California, which runs the rehab center, he lived up to his moniker.

"Quite frankly," the Iceman said of prison drug treatment programs, "I don't think they work." Four years later, Teichner is a changed man--like many of the convicts who undergo Amity's yearlong regimen and now lead productive lives. Today, he says the only problem with drug and alcohol treatment is that the exploding prison population can't get enough of it. Compared to the checkered performance of past substance abuse programs for convicts, Amity and similar projects around the country may offer corrections officials a powerful weapon to reduce crime, addiction and soaring prison costs. The latest research shows that by weaning convicts off illegal drugs--which are widely available in prison--and overhauling their lifestyles, such programs can significantly lower

re-incarceration rates, saving taxpayers millions of dollars a year. Consequently, prison officials grappling with unprecedented overcrowding due to the nation's war on drugs have started to rethink how they deal with addicted prisoners. The task before them is daunting.

Nationally, only one in six of an estimated 800,000 inmates involved with illegal drugs receives any treatment, most of it sporadic education classes or weekly counseling sessions that don't do much good.

Little in the way of treatment has been provided because many law enforcement officials and legislators believe that tough sentences are the best way to deal with the nation's drug problem. Academic research in the mid-1970s also fostered the long-

AN INMATE LEAVING PRISON GIVES A FRIEND STAYING BEHIND AN EMBRACE AT AMITY'S DRUG TREATMENT PROGRAM



held, some say mistaken, belief that nothing works when it comes to reforming criminals.

In California an estimated 100,000 state prison inmates have histories of chronic drug and alcohol use. But there are only 400 slots in the corrections system that offer treatment considered intensive enough to break the dangerous cycle of crime and addiction.

At Donovan, a medium security prison in an arid valley east of San Diego, hundreds of convicts apply for no more than 20 slots that become available every month. For those who get accepted, the treatment can rewire their lives.

The Amity program, which opened at Donovan in 1990, contracts with the Corrections Department for 1.5

million a year. It is a so-called therapeutic community, a style of intensive treatment thought to be most effective for felons with substantial criminal records.

For 9 to 12 months, 200 participants share a housing unit, dining facilities and recreational areas on the main yard. Upon release from prison graduating parolees can volunteer to continue taxpayer-funded counseling at Amity's residential off-site program nestled in a wooded hillside in north San Diego County.

At both facilities, convicts are required to attend a steady stream of seminars and encounter groups run by recovering addicts, ex-convicts and some of the most experienced substance abuse counselors in the field.

The routine is rigorous. No one gets time off their sentences for participating or reprieves from

prison work. Unlike with rehabilitation efforts at other penitentiaries, Amity enrollees are not isolated from Donovan's main yard, where there are temptations to use smuggled drugs everyday.

The goal is to teach convicts to deal with personal problems and to live life without drugs and crime.

But the job is difficult because inmates are among the hardest substance abusers to treat. Their complicated pathologies often include poverty, gang membership, mental illness and child abuse. Relapse is common, and change happens at a glacial pace over many months.

Much of the transformation, if it occurs, takes place in encounter groups that attempt to dissect--

with brutal honesty-- what caused the convict's substance abuse and criminal behavior.

The sessions are filled with discussions about trust, personal accountability, relationships with women, family problems,

substance abuse and the inner rage that leads to violence. By drawing inmates out, counselors say, they can help them understand their problems and find solutions.

Nothing Easy About Facing the Truth

"There is nothing easy about facing the truth about yourself," former cocaine addict and crack dealer Terry Ward says of Amity's group discussions.



AN INMATE WHO HAS JUST COMPLETED A YEAR IN THE AMITY PROGRAM AT R.J. DONOVAN IS WELCOMED BY FELLOW PAROLEES AT THE AMITY RESIDENTIAL FACILITY AT VISTA



“The badder you act the more they dig. It’s hard to keep up the facade. They just pick pieces out of your story and make you humble. The first few months will tear you apart.”

Ward, 40, was a violent hustler and convicted armed robber, known to denizens of South-Central Los Angeles as “Voltron.” He always carried two pistols, a knife and a cane that he used as a weapon.

Skilled with a razor blade, Ward could sculpt a \$5 piece of crack so it looked like it was worth \$15. On the street he would not hesitate to beat up someone at the smallest provocation. He once broke a man’s jaw for calling him by his given name.

Ward was paroled in 1991 after serving two years at Donovan. He stayed so long in Amity’s off-site volunteer program that he had to be told to leave. Today, he manages a Wendy’s restaurant and lives in Spring Valley, a rural community

east of San Diego. He has finally gotten to know his 19-year-old daughter, whom he abandoned more than 10 years ago.

“Volron was a bad person. He died in prison,” Ward said. “There are people who go through Amity and use again. I choose not to. I’ve been insane long enough.”

On one recent morning, 15 convicts, some just like Ward, gather for group therapy in the Robin Gabriel Room of Amity’s prison compound. Gabriel graduated from an Amity jail program in Arizona, where the organization got its start in the 1980s. She devoted her life to the foundation until she died of cancer in 1990.

Half the people here are doing time for violent offenses, including murder. All have histories of drug and alcohol abuse. Though prison is a place where revealing inner feelings can be interpreted as a sign of weakness, most are not afraid to talk.

“All my relationships have been built on lies,”

says one barrel-chested convict with corn-rowed hair. "I fall in love with a woman and then she is with my best friend. Women just play a man's heart and throw 'em to the curb."

"I've never been around a decent woman," another inmate volunteers. "I've been in crack houses a lot of my life, and you don't trust anyone, man or woman."

"On the streets, I was a predator. I preyed on women," says counselor Ernie Logan, an ex-convict and recovering addict whose father was an alcoholic. "I had a lot of trust issues too. My mother and father betrayed me as a child."

Logan's reference to childhood strikes a chord with a goateed inmate sitting across from him. He is doing eight years for robbery. Rejection has weighed heavily on his mind for years.

"I'm very conscious of the pain I feel," he says. "If Ernie won't say hello to me, I feel like, '--- Ernie.' Something that small makes me think back on when I was a kid, all the shame and grief of being abandoned by my parents. That emotion has energy. The power is hard to control."

"But," counselor Logan responds, "if you are in touch with what happened to you and the pain it has caused you, you shouldn't be doing the same things to someone else. You shouldn't be taking it out on somebody else."

Treatment Is 'Cheap and It Works'

If drug treatment advocates had their way, programs like Amity's would be available to every convict seeking help. Incarceration alone, they say, does not necessarily stop addiction or protect the public in the long run.

State figures show that the average drug offender in California, whether convicted of sales, distribution or possession, is returned to the street in 18 to 24 months.

Proponents say effective drug treatment programs can be provided at a fraction of the billions of dollars being spent on one of the longest building booms in the history of the state penal system.

If present trends continue, the California prison population will rise from 141,000 to more than 200,000 by 2000. Slightly more than 50,000

inmates will be doing time for drug-related offenses.

Assuming today's prices--which do not include the expense of building more prisons--drug related felons could cost taxpayers \$500 million to \$1 billion a year to incarcerate by the end of the century.

"We've taken the tough-on-crime approach to drugs. Now we have to figure out what to do with the increasing numbers of people in prison. Treatment is a good way to go. It's cheap and it works," said Harry K. Wexler, a researcher for the National Development and Research Institute, a New York-based think tank that specializes in criminal justice issues.

For almost two decades, Wexler has studied prison substance abuse programs nationwide. His findings show that the re-incarceration rate for Amity, including dropouts, is about 20% lower than for untreated convicts two years after release from prison. It is estimated that about 65% of untreated convicts are rearrested within the same time period.

The most dramatic reductions occurred among program graduates who received several months of treatment at Amity's outside facility. Of that group, 16% were rearrested.

The California Department of Corrections estimates that if Amity treats 2,100 inmates over seven years at a cost of \$1.5 million a year, taxpayers would recoup the program's expenses and save \$4.7 million in prison costs due to reduced recidivism.

Assuming that Amity-style programs were established in all 32 state prisons, taxpayers' potential savings could be as high as \$150 million over seven years if the current level of success were maintained.

And that does not reveal the total savings. Convicts who go straight no longer tax the police, court and social welfare system. The analysis also does not include other benefits to the corrections system, such as less violence and fewer violations of prison rules.

Amity "is doing better than I ever anticipated," said Donovan Warden John Ratelle. "If we had only a 10% reduction in recidivism, that would be a success. It is worth the money to do what we are doing."

He grew even more convinced that the program was making progress when he ordered surprise urine tests at the treatment unit in 1991. The random testing was conducted on a Monday because prison drug use is often heaviest on weekends. Authorities expected that 25% of inmates tested would test positive, but only one did--for marijuana.

Even the Unwilling Get Drawn Into the Process

In many ways, prisons are perfect settings for drug treatment. There is a large captive audience. Inmates are often motivated by many factors from sheer boredom to measures that have increased sentences for repeat offenders, such as California's three-strikes law.

Even the unwilling get drawn into the process despite themselves, such as Rocky R. Reeder, a heroin addict and habitual criminal who applied to Amity just to stop his transfer to a prison in Northern California.

Reeder, 41, of San Diego, had been a one-man crime wave. By his own estimate, he stole more than 70 vehicles, and each week burglarized two or three houses for much of his career. If someone was sleeping on the sofa or taking a shower when he entered, the bigger the thrill.

He went to juvenile hall and the California Youth Authority more than a dozen times. He has been sent to prison seven times, the last to Donovan in 1992 for possession of stolen property.

"At first, I didn't care about treatment," he said. "But I started listening to the leaders in group therapy. They were just like me. It made a difference. The person had been there, and I could relate."

Reeder, who has been off drugs since May 1992, works with his son as a technician for a water purification business. He realizes he can never apologize to his victims, so he occasionally visits Amity's parolee program and counsels those in treatment.

"Many convicts are amenable to changing their behavior," said Lewis Yablonsky, an expert on residential treatment programs and professor emeritus of sociology and criminology at Cal State Northridge. "Amity is a small program even in

Donovan, but it is a significant demonstration of what can be done."

He predicts that well-run treatment projects in every state prison could significantly reduce the inmate population.

Substance abuse treatment has been added to two other prisons since Amity arrived at Donovan. The Correctional Institute for Women in Frontera opened the Forever Free program for 120 inmates several years ago. An 80-bed facility called Walden House has begun at the California Rehabilitation Center in Norco.

This fall, the first 1,056 beds of a 1,456-bed facility will open at Corcoran. The Corcoran program will more than triple the statewide capacity of treatment for convicts--a crucial test to see if drug rehabilitation can work on a large scale.

"I don't think we have seen a serious effort at prison treatment until the last few years," said John Erickson, director of substance abuse programs for the Department of Corrections. "There is now an all-out effort to refine treatment strategies."

He said adding large numbers of treatment beds to the prison system has gone slowly because reliable research has not been available in California until the last few years.

Whether drug treatment will be expanded on a massive scale is hard to predict, even with more positive research. Legislators, government officials and correctional officers worry that a broad expansion might compromise the quality of smaller, successful programs like Amity.

"People need to be convinced that this is more than an aberration," said Rod Mullen, president of the Amity Foundation. "They need to see this as something as normal as a prison industry program, or a religious program or a high school education program. But that kind of shift in attitude does not happen overnight."

Indeed, it hasn't. The first drug and alcohol programs for convicts were established in the 1930s at two federal prisons in Lexington, Ky., and Fort Worth, Texas. Because such efforts were poorly administered and ineffective, criminal justice experts came to believe that little could be done to rehabilitate convicts.

That attitude did not begin to change until the

early 1980s, when a substance abuse treatment program called Stay 'N' Out reported some substantial success at the Arthur Kill State Prison on Staten Island, N. Y.

As more positive results emerged from a program in Oregon, the federal government began to fund pilot projects across the country. Since then, encouraging findings have been reported in California, Delaware and Texas.

Still, many public officials approach the issue with caution. Craig L. Brown, California finance director, said many legislators and bureaucrats would be more encouraged about prison drug treatment if the improvements could be demonstrated at five years after release, instead of two years now used for research purposes.

"There are some people who think drug treatment has marginal impact and is not long-lasting enough," Brown said. "On the other hand the existing projects have been well-researched with good scientific methods. Everything looks very promising, but you can't say its a slam-dunk winner right now."

Among those who are now believers is state Senate Democratic Leader Bill Lockyer of Hayward. He introduced legislation in March that would add 4,000 treatment slots to the corrections system by 2002. The proposal has some bipartisan support.

The state legislative analyst's office estimates that the expansion might save taxpayers \$36 million a year in addition to a one-time savings of \$85 million by avoiding the construction of facilities for 2,000 inmates.

"The current policy of building more prisons wastes money and doesn't rehabilitate those in situations where it might work," Lockyer said. "I don't consider myself a do-gooder or a liberal on the issue. If this can help a convict, improve public safety and save money, that sounds like a winner to me."