REALIGNMENT, RE-ENTRY & RECIDIVISM

A Mixed Methods Impact Evaluation of the Riverside County Probation Department's Day Reporting Centers

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THE ROBERT PRESLEY CENTER OF CRIME & JUSTICE STUDIES was established in 1993 by an act of the California State Legislature (California Penal Code, Section 5085-5088) and specifically sited at the University of California's Riverside campus. The Presley Center is committed to conducting rigorous empirical research that addresses pressing topics in California's criminal justice system in a manner that can help inform evidence-based practice and policy. Much of the Presley Center's research is supported through contracted work with county- and state-level agencies, as well as through private grants. The Center is non-partisan, independent, and interdisciplinary, with faculty affiliates and research collaborators representing the fields of sociology, public policy, economics, political science, psychology, and philosophy at UC Riverside and universities across North America. In addition to its research agenda, the Presley Center is active in developing opportunities for the next generation of criminal justice practitioners in the Inland Empire, including internal and external internship programs, student research opportunities, professionalization events, and scholarships for justice-impacted students.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. Plata* (2011) forced California's hand in immediately addressing the State's prison overcrowding. Ordered to reduce the population of state prisons by over 25 percent within two years, the legislature passed the Public Safety Realignment Act (AB-109) and Criminal Justice Realignment (AB-117), which vested California's fifty-eight counties with unprecedented responsibility, including physical custody of and post-custodial monitoring and tracking of non-violent, non-serious, and non-sexual offenders. Each county received funding from the State, but few stipulations were attached to these monies, which in turn granted counties near-unbridled discretion in developing their own custodial and post-custodial strategies. Day reporting centers (DRCs) emerged as an appealing alternative to traditional supervision or custody as their model of integrated service delivery should, conceptually, aid in re-entry and promote criminal desistance, in turn reducing prison and jail overcrowding. However, prior work on DRCs yields mixed findings in terms of both the effect of DRCs on future criminal activity and any potential cost benefit. This is, in large part, due to prior work's lack of methodological rigor.

This project evaluates the effect of attending a Riverside County DRC as an alternative to traditional custodial sentencing or probationary supervision and as a mechanism for reducing recidivism rates among felony offenders. Using a mixed-methods design, four questions are addressed:

1) Do Riverside County's DRCs reduce recidivism among AB-109 offenders when compared to those assigned to traditional supervision?
2) How do DRC clients assess these programs' strengths and weaknesses?
3) How can DRCs be improved?
4) Does DRC participation produce any specific skills and benefits for clients?

We use data provided by the Riverside County Probation Department and California Department of Justice to estimate the causal effect of attending a DRC on the likelihood of rearrest or reconviction for a new crime within two years of referral. We collect original data through surveys and interviews with DRC clients to provide insight into questions two, three, and four.

The quantitative portion of the study finds that participating in a DRC decreases the likelihood of being arrested for a new offense and decreases the likelihood of being convicted for a new offense, relative to the arrest and convictions of offenders who were referred but did not attend a DRC due to scheduling conflicts. The qualitative portion of the study highlights clients' perspectives on the strengths of the DRC experience, including support in attaining goals, navigating services post-release, accountability, and more generalized social support. Clients also report DRCs make re-entry easier than traditional supervision and they recognize specific changes in themselves and their environment that benefit their overall well-being. Potential areas for improvement—including enhanced vocational and employment services, and an environment that feels less like a traditional law enforcement setting—are also discussed.

Recommendations and areas for future research are included based on the analyses conducted.

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SCOPE OF WORK

The Riverside County Probation Department contracted the Presley Center to provide a causal, mixed-methods evaluation of the County's DRCs including an assessment of the impact attending a DRC has on an individual's likelihood of recidivating.

Research Questions

The Riverside County Probation Department and the Presley Center mutually agreed to three motivating research questions:

1) Do Riverside County's DRCs reduce recidivism among AB-109 offenders when compared to those assigned to traditional supervision?
2) How do different DRC services (e.g. substance abuse education versus workforce development, etc.) affect offender re-entry success?
3) How does the duration of services provided within DRCs affect offender re-entry success?

These questions were to be answered to the best of the evaluation team's ability based on the data available.

Methodology

This evaluation draws upon the expertise of principal investigators, Drs. Sharon Oselin and Ozkan Eren, and uses a mixed methods design that incorporates quantitative and qualitative analyses to identify the impact of Riverside County's DRCs on their clients' re-entry trajectories. This approach includes a review of the extant literature on DRCs and other similar programs, a causal inference analysis of secondary data related to probationer outcomes, surveys and interviews with DRC participants that generate original or primary data, and the description and thematic coding of the primary data.

Data

By special permission, the Riverside County Probation Department provided the evaluation team access to the universe of case records for offenders who were referred to a day reporting center between 2013 and 2017. These records were pulled from the Juvenile and Adult Management System (JAMS) and include basic demographic information, the date of referral to the day reporting center, level of supervision, and all prior convictions, among other details. Using the offenders' unique identifiers, this dataset was then linked with data from the California Department of Justice on arrests or convictions after an individual's referral to a day reporting center.

Surveys taken by DRC participants yielded open- and closed-ended responses about client experiences. The interviews with DRC clients were recorded, transcribed, and coded to identify key themes and patterns across client experiences.

Project Period

The Riverside County Board of Supervisors approved a Memorandum of Understanding between the County and UC Riverside Presley Center at the recommendation of the Riverside County Probation Department on December 11, 2018. The original project period was December 12, 2018 – March 11, 2021. An extension was granted in December 2020 as there were delays in the research team accessing the DRCs due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The final project period was December 12, 2018 – December 31, 2021.

SECTION I | LITERATURE REVIEW

A comprehensive reading of prior scientific work on realignment, day reporting centers, and recidivism was conducted in preparation for this project. Prior work provides critical background information that informed this evaluation's design and is helpful to review here for additional context. Key points from relevant literatures are summarized below; however, the reader should avoid generalizing the successes and failures of other systems to Riverside County.

KEY TERMS

The following are key terms, abbreviations, and acronyms that are used throughout this report for ease of reading.

AB-109 | California Assembly Bill 109, the Public Safety Realignment Act, was passed in 2011 and diverts N3 offenders from State to county supervision, thus decreasing the number of inmates housed in State facilities

CADOJ | California Department of Justice

County | Riverside County

DRCs | Day reporting centers

JAMS | Juvenile and Adult Management System, used by Riverside County for tracking probationer records

N3 Offenders | Individuals convicted of non-violent, non-sexual, and non-serious crimes

PRCS | Post-release community supervision

Probation Department | Riverside County Probation Department

Presley Center | The Robert Presley Center of Crime & Justice Studies at the University of California, Riverside

Realignment

Class action lawsuits, *Coleman v. Brown* (1990) and *Plata v. Brown* (2001), found California prisoners with serious mental and medical health issues did not receive adequate care while in custody in violation of their 8th Amendment protections against cruel and unusual punishment. When California had not taken remedial action by 2005, a court appointed Receiver was named to oversee the State's efforts and found the "continuing deficiencies" in the treatment of prisoners were due to substantial prison overcrowding.

In 2011, *Coleman* and *Brown* were consolidated into a single class action suit, *Brown v. Plata* (2011) that was argued before the United States Supreme Court. Writing for the majority, Justice Kennedy upheld a lower court's decision to enforce a 1995 statute that authorized the federal government to compel a state prison system to action. He affirmed, "the medical and mental health care provided by California's prisons falls below the standard of decency that inheres in the Eighth Amendment," and that, "this extensive and ongoing constitutional violation requires a remedy [which] will not be achieved without a reduction in overcrowding," (563 US 493, 48). Specifically, California was required to decrease the size of its prison population from nearly 190% to 137.5% capacity within two years.

Compelled by the Supreme Court and federal law, the California Legislature and Governor Jerry Brown authored and signed Assembly Bill 109, also known as the Public Safety Realignment Act. This legislation transferred the supervision of low-level felony offenders convicted of non-violent, non-sexual, and non-serious (N3) crimes from the State to local governments and required all parole revocations to be served in county jails as opposed to state prisons. These changes radically altered the structure of the criminal justice system and ultimately saddled counties with much greater responsibility for incarcerating and supervising offenders. In the first year alone, AB-109 drastically reduced the State's prison population by 27,000 and increased county jail populations by over 9,000 inmates. Thus, the total incarcerated population in California actually decreased, with alternative sentencing strategies—like split sentencing or community supervision—being used as an alternative to custodial supervision (Lofstrom and Raphael 2013). Each county was left to develop its own response to this influx and their strategies vary dramatically, with some counties allocating the majority of their

resources to their jails and other embracing community-based programs (Lofstrom and Raphael 2013; Petersilia 2014).

Day Reporting Centers

As part of its response to AB-109, the Riverside County Probation Department invested in DRCs as an alternative to traditional supervision. (Riverside County's DRCs are profiled in Section II.)

Prison and jail populations have ballooned across the U.S. over the past three decades, so community-based corrections programs—including DRCs—emerged as an appealing alternative to bridge custodial sentences and unsupervised release, while seemingly balancing cost and public safety concerns. In theory, DRCs provide an opportunity to rehabilitate the whole person through a one-stop model that addresses a range of individual needs – from criminogenic factors to housing and employment prospects. DRCs across the United States typically provide community-based programming to pre-trial released offenders, parolees, and probationers and are inclusive of a range of services/strategic interventions, including but not limited to: daily supervision, anger management, drug testing, educational and vocational training, cognitive therapy, job placement services, and general life-skills training (e.g. parenting classes). Referrals to DRCs are usually made on a case-by-case basis that considers both the individual's risk to public safety and needs during re-entry. For example, California's state- and local-criminal justice agencies adopted the Correctional Offender Management and Profiling Alternative Sanctions (COMPAS) instrument, which helps identify an individual's actuarial risk and needs prerelease. An individual's COMPAS score aids in planning for their field supervision and post-release referrals to correctional treatment (Zhang, Roberts, and Farabee 2014). Riverside County's Probation Department relies on COMPAS to help identify probationers' specific needs and risks during referral to DRCs.

Some of the programs and classes offered within Riverside's DRCs have been evaluated as standalone services with the potential to reduce recidivism. These include anger management classes, individual and family counseling, drug treatment education, workforce development, and vocational training, among other offerings. When evaluated individually, these programs deliver mixed results and do not consistently reduce recidivism. However, there is some evidence that programs focused on rehabilitating the individual (e.g. counseling, drug treatment, anger management, etc.) may be more effective than those focused on the individual's post-release opportunities (e.g. vocational training) (Visher et al. 2016; Drake 2013; Lipsey and Cullen 2007; Washington State Institute for Public Policy 2006; etc).

Studies of the efficacy of DRCs as one-stop re-entry shops that provide a menu of programs for probationary populations also yield mixed results. Though some evaluations champion DRCs as a low-cost, low-risk alternative to traditional custodial punishment (e.g. Craddock and Graham 2001; Lurigio et al. 1999, Martin, et al. 2003, etc.), others underscore this research is rife with methodological limitations and that positive evaluations of DRCs should be reviewed skeptically (e.g. Craddock and Graham 2008). To that end, studies with more rigorous research designs (e.g. controlled experiments) rarely find DRCs are linked to decreased recidivism or cost (e.g. Boyle, et al. 2013). Unfortunately, most studies to-date rely on conventional statistical methodologies, which are not sufficiently rigorous to push the extant understanding toward causality, so it remains unclear under what circumstances and contexts DRCs may reduce recidivism.

This evaluation corrects for the methodological shortcomings of prior work by using a causal inference design that accounts for unobserved biases. As a result, we assess the effects of Riverside County's DRCs on recidivism with a high degree of certainty.

Recidivism

Recidivism is the most common metric of success used to evaluate the efficacy of DRCs. It is an especially

important measure against the backdrop of California's decarceration because rehabilitation that leads to criminal desistance inherently decreases reliance on prisons and jails. There is not an agreed upon definition of recidivism, but most studies include measures of rearrest or reconviction for a new crime within two years of release.

The first few post-AB-109 studies found offenders realigned to counties for post-release community supervision (PRCS) had higher rates of rearrest and reconviction than those who were released to state parole, but that these outcomes were somewhat contingent on the county the offender was realigned to (Gerlinger & Turner 2015; Bird & Grattet 2016, 2017; Bird et al. 2017). However, these early studies typically focused on a very short period after AB-109 took affect and the authors acknowledge data and methodological constraints make it difficult to interpret the results for any period moving forward. A more recent and comprehensive study of recidivism post-realignment, which included an analysis of offenders released to twelve counties between 2011 and 2015, found a slight increase in rearrests, but slight decrease in reconvictions among realigned offenders (Bird, Ngyuen, & Grattet 2021). Rigorous empirical research takes time and there is often a lag due to the availability of data, but studies to-date suggest California's realignment is likely correlated with a modest increase in recidivism.

Outside the scope of California's prison realignment, the majority of recidivism research focuses on the effect of individual-level characteristics and interventions—like employment status and enhanced supervision—on the likelihood an individual will reoffend. The latter is particularly material to this project as DRCs combine a variety of interventions (e.g. employment services, counseling, drug treatment programs, etc.) as part of a one-stop-shop model.

The interventions literature provides a robust assessment of the efficacy of various treatment, penalty, and supervision strategies on an individual's likelihood of recidivating to somewhat inconclusive ends. Some research highlights that more intensive post-release supervision generally does not decrease recidivism and often increases detection of non-compliant actions/behaviors (Grattet, Lin, Petersilia 2011; Petersilia and Turner 1993). In cases where increased supervision does yield positive results, it is difficult to disentangle whether it is the supervision itself or other activities related to increased supervision, like greater access to supportive services and therapeutic activities, that drive outcomes (Mackenzie and Brame 2001; Solomon, Kachnowski, Bhati 2005). In this vein, the study of rehabilitative programs as an intervention has produced a broad literature focused on the success of specific strategies (e.g. risk-need-response assessments, the Good Lives Model) and has argued on behalf of individualized assessment and rehabilitation plans to deter future criminal activity (Ward and Willis 2016; Bonta and Andrews 2014).

Interpreting Prior Work

These studies are helpful in situating this evaluation within the broader study of DRCs and recidivism across the United States, but the findings should not be extrapolated to Riverside County as the context, sample, and design of each study varies dramatically and often in ways that make the findings difficult to generalize to another system. Furthermore, a practice that is evidence-based in one context may not produce the same positive results in another. For example, a DRC may generate positive outcomes in another state or county because of policy, demographic, or other characteristics unique to that region. Conversely, a DRC of the same model may prove ineffective in another region because it serves a population that is more difficult to rehabilitate or has other criminogenic needs. There are also methodological constraints in much of the prior work in this area, which makes it difficult to make causal claims about the efficacy of DRCs and similar programs even within the context they are studied. Indeed, these are some of the reasons Riverside County contracted an independent, causal evaluation of its DRCs.

SECTION II | A PROFILE OF DAY REPORTING CENTERS IN RIVERSIDE COUNTY

Members of the Presley Center evaluation team visited Riverside County's DRCs in 2019 to gain a better understanding of each center's model, including the types of services and staff available at each site.

Figure 2.1 Map of Riverside County and DRC Locations

Riverside County operates three DRCs in the cities of Riverside, Temecula, and Indio, which opened in 2012, 2015, and 2016 respectively. An average of 300-350 clients are served across all sites at any given point in time. Each site offers the same core services, typically provided by the same organizations, and are staffed by a roughly proportional number of personnel. Figure 2.2 lists the services offered by provider for each DRC since their first year in operation.

Probation Department

Classes | Courage to Change Interactive Journaling; Social Values; Responsible Thinking; Self-Control; Peer Relationships; Family Ties; Successful Living; Recreation & Leisure

Vital Documents

Supportive Services | Bus passes; emergency food; clothing closest

Education | Community College & FAFSA Workshops (added 2017)

Riverside University Health System – Behavioral Health

Classes | Criminal Addictive Thinking; Wellness & Empowerment; Educate, Equip, and Support; Wellness Recovery; Anger Management

Counseling | One-on-one; relationship; family

Substance Abuse Education | In-house treatment (Riverside & Temecula); treatment referrals (Indio)

County Office of Education

Classes | GED / Diploma instructions; Vocational Training & Certificates (added 2017)

Workforce Development / Community Based Organizations

Classes | Intro to Workforce Services; Customers with Barriers

Riverside University Health System – Public Health

Classes | Health Education

Mobile Unit Testing

Medical Care Referrals

Department of Public Social Services

Eligibility Assistance | Medi-Cal, CalFresh, etc.

Referrals | Family resource centers; homeless services

Figure 2.2 Core DRC Services

There have been slight modifications to the types of services offered by the providing organizations since each DRC opened, but every individual referred to a DRC since 2012 has had reliable access to the programs in Figure 2.2. For example, community based organizations—like Goodwill Industries and Citadel—replaced County Workforce Development in providing job preparation and employment services during the 2017/18 fiscal year, so a DRC client in 2016 had access to the same workforce resources as a DRC client in 2019, but through a different provider. Most of these modifications are consistent across DRCs; however, the DRC in Riverside has experimented with additional programming, including an ongoing partnership with the Superior Court system to provide legal aid and a one year partnership with the Riverside County Sheriff's Department that provided therapeutic services. Each DRC has also intermittently offers peer-to-peer support, in which DRC graduates hold staff positions at the DRC.

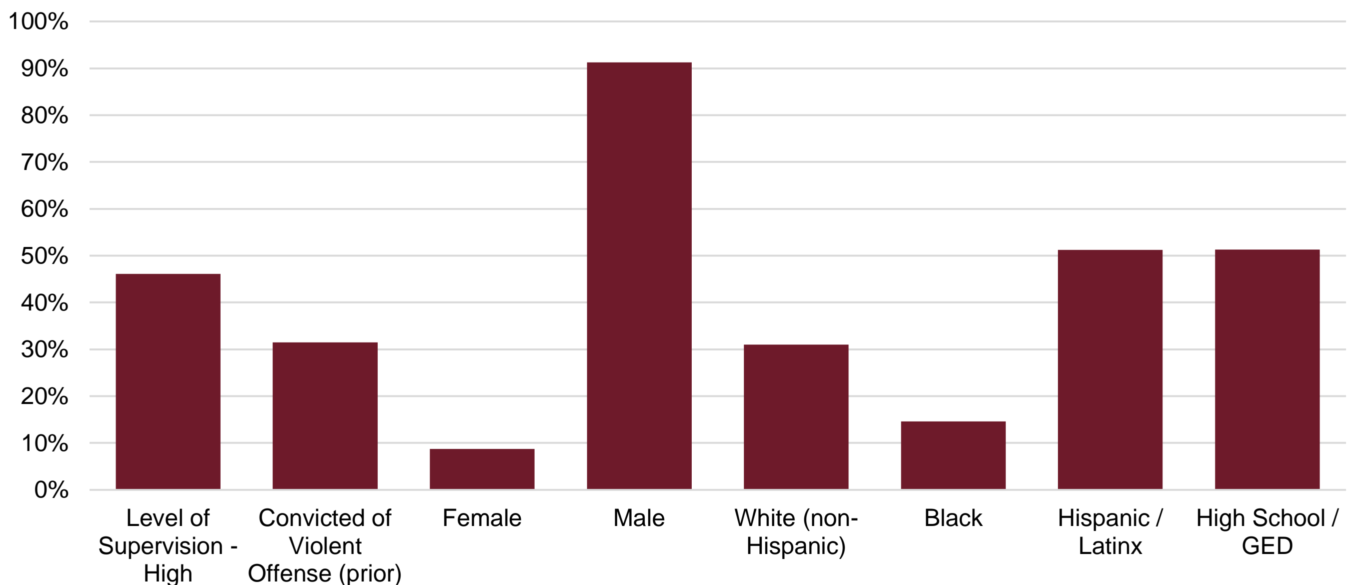

Figure 2.3. DRC Referral Demographics

All PRCS felony offenders who are on probation are referred to the DRCs via direct referral by their probation officer or at assessment by an assessment unit officer. After referral, PRCS offenders may a) attend a DRC, b) provide proof of employment or full-time student status as an exemption from attending a DRC, or c) not attend a DRC without providing a reason. There is no court order for PRCS offenders to participate in DRCs, so non-attendance or an unsuccessful discharge does not result in a violation of their probation terms. However, if an individual is referred to a DRC to obtain specific services by court order, failure to attend such services may result in a discharge from the DRCs and, indirectly, a return to court. DRCs also offer various incentives to encourage participation and reduce attrition (e.g. providing lunch, bus passes, etc.).

Figure 2.3 presents notable, observable characteristics of DRC clients as a percent of the total DRC population for 2013-2017, the years covered by this evaluation. The average age of a DRC client at referral is 40.73 years.

To simplify the distribution of programs provided by DRCs, services can be broadly aggregated into the categories mental health services, substance abuse services, employment preparation services, and other programs, like family counseling or anger management. Figure 2.4 plots the distribution of the percentage of

each service type provided during the period 2013 to 2017 at all Riverside County DRC locations by percentage of total services used by DRC clients. Mental health and substance abuse services are the most commonly participated in, with 60% of all services delivered falling into those two categories. DRC participants attend their DRC for an average of 187 days.

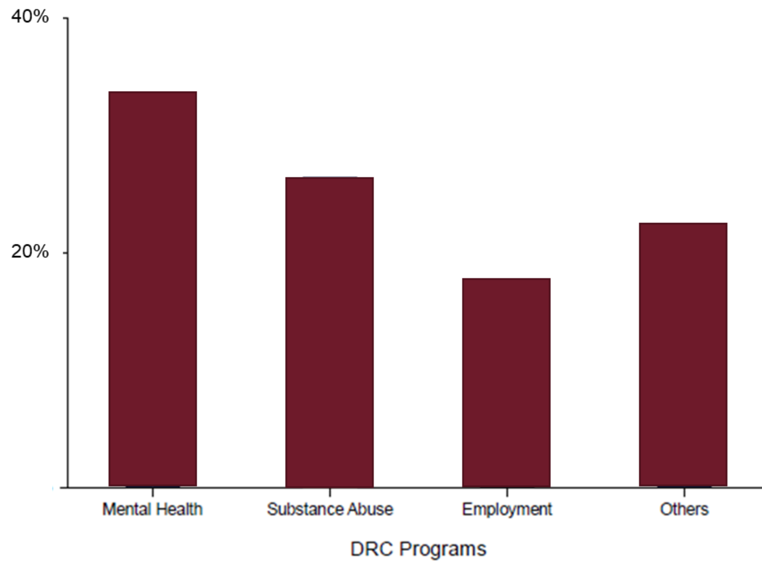

Figure 2.4. Programs Used by DRC Participants

SECTION III | A CAUSAL ANALYSIS OF THE EFFECT OF DAY REPORTING CENTER PARTICIPATION ON RECIDIVISM

In this section, we address the first research question.

1) Do Riverside County's DRCs reduce recidivism among AB-109 offenders when compared to those assigned to traditional supervision?

Data

The data for the causal analyses are compiled from the Riverside County Probation Department and California Department of Justice. By special permission, we obtained access from the Probation Department for the universe of case records that contain information on offenders who were referred to DRCs between 2013 and 2017. Each case record is pulled from JAMS and includes information on the offender (e.g. demographics like race, gender, and age) and case data (e.g. the specific statute for all prior convictions, level of supervision, the date of referral to the DRC, and DRC location). The CADOJ provided the universe of detailed arrest records in California from 2013 to 2019, which allows us to measure recidivism within two years of the last DRC referral date in our sample.[1] This includes data on arrests, offense dates, and disposition (i.e. whether the individual was convicted). The offender (JAMS) and crime (CADOJ) datasets were linked using the offenders' unique identification numbers.

Descriptive Statistics

Table 3.1 presents summary statistics across a variety of characteristics for all offenders in the dataset (full sample), as well as by DRC participation status. The second column, labeled 'DRC', includes data for individuals who were referred to and participated in DRC services. Moving forward, this will be referred to as the 'treated' group as these individuals received DRC services. Columns three and four include data for two potential control groups. 'Non-DRC (Conflict)' includes PRCS offenders who were referred, but did not participate because of work and/or education related scheduling conflicts. 'Non-DRC (Other)' includes offenders who were referred, but did not participate without providing a reason.

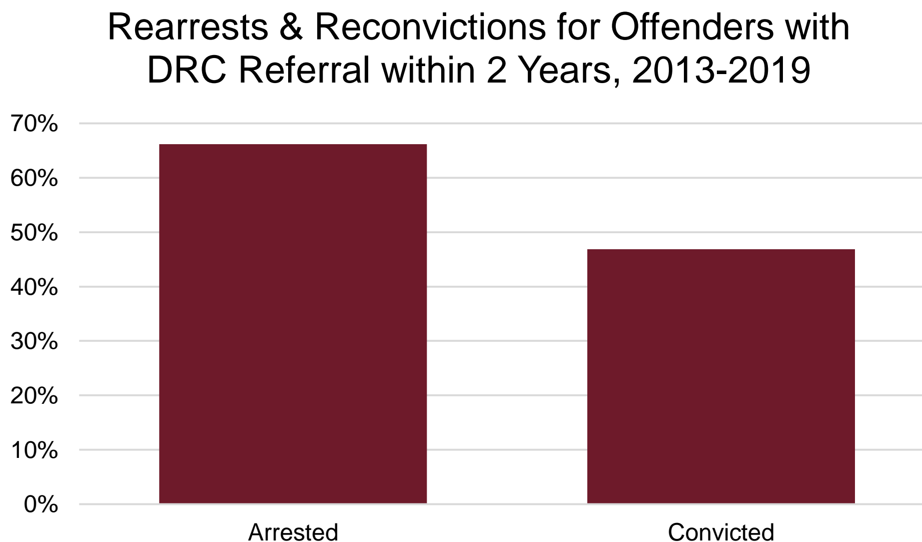

Figure 3.1. Recidivism Among DRC Referral Sample

[1] Because we were only able to obtain arrest and conviction data for California, we are not able to account for rearrests or reconvictions that occur in other states.

Table 3.1: Summary Statistics

	Full Sample	DRC	Non-DRC (Conflict)	Non-DRC (All Others)
	Mean (Standard Deviation)			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Arrested	0.662	0.413	0.577	0.739
	(0.473)	(0.493)	(0.494)	(0.439)
Convicted	0.469	0.274	0.428	0.521
	(0.499)	(0.447)	(0.495)	(0.499)
Level of Supervision-High	0.461	0.384	0.339	0.509
	(0.499)	(0.487)	(0.474)	(0.500)
Violent Offense	0.315	0.317	0.321	0.313
	(0.464)	(0.466)	(0.467)	(0.464)
Female	0.087	0.121	0.036	0.093
	(0.282)	(0.327)	(0.185)	(0.291)
White	0.310	0.302	0.268	0.323
	(0.463)	(0.460)	(0.443)	(0.468)
Black	0.146	0.167	0.110	0.151
	(0.353)	(0.374)	(0.313)	(0.358)
Hispanic	0.512	0.495	0.595	0.494
	(0.499)	(0.500)	(0.491)	(0.500)
High School or GED	0.513	0.525	0.533	0.505
	(0.500)	(0.500)	(0.499)	(0.500)
Age at Referral	40.73	44.49	38.22	40.56
	(10.27)	(11.32)	(7.91)	(10.34)
Sample Size	1,911	281	336	1,294

NOTES: The tabulations reflect our research sample which comprises offenders referred to the DRCs between 2013 and 2017. The full set of sample statistics is available from authors upon request.

Of the total sample, inclusive of all three groups, 66 percent were arrested and 47 percent were reconvicted for a new offense within two years of their referral.

A comparison between the DRC, Non-DRC (Conflict), and Non-DRC (Other) columns reveals these groups are similar and there are minimal differences in pre-determined observable characteristics, with one exception. The Non-DRC (Other) group has a significantly higher average (mean) supervision level than those in the DRC and Non-DRC (Conflict) groups. In an attempt to minimize confounders that may bias the results, Non-DRC (Other) is excluded from subsequent analyses as the group is observably and meaningfully different in a way that compromises its comparability to the DRC and Non-DRC (Conflict) groups. Such sample restriction arguably limits the extent of negative selection bias, as discussed further below.

Methodology

From a scientific perspective, the ideal way of assessing the efficacy of program treatments and interventions—like DRC participation—is through a randomized controlled trial. However, when analyzing treatments that predate a study's design, it is possible to leverage statistical methods of causal inference that attempt to replicate the random, controlled nature of experiments by accounting for observable and unobservable variables that might impact the results.

Individuals on PRCS are not randomly assigned to either a DRC or traditional supervision; instead, they are universally referred to DRCs, but their participation is not mandatory or court ordered. Everyone included in this study's sample was referred to a DRC between 2013 and 2017, but many self-selected out due to scheduling conflicts (e.g. education and employment) or for other unknown reasons. The 'unknown reasons' group is already excluded from the analyses for reasons discussed above.

Considering the two remaining groups (i.e. DRC and Non-DRC (Conflict)), it reasonable to assume the qualities that might make someone likely to opt-in to attending a DRC after referral are also the qualities that would make them less likely to recidivate. For example, it is possible that those who attend DRCs have a greater innate ability to successfully reintegrate into society or a stronger motivation to do so. These are two examples of *unobservable* characteristics that introduce endogeneity bias, in which the reasons someone is likely to opt-in to the 'treatment' (i.e. DRCs) are also the reasons they would be successful regardless of being 'treated' (i.e. their participation). Therefore, any causal evaluation of the effect of Riverside County's DRCs on recidivism must statistically correct for the potential bias introduced by self-selection into the program.

Innate ability and individual motivation are only two of many hypothetical, plausible reasons an individual might decide to attend a DRC. Because these characteristics that encourage self-selection are unobservable, there is no data we can incorporate into the model to capture these effects through a conventional statistical methodology. For these reasons, we use a two-phase strategy that builds upon a simple statistical design with a coefficient stability approach to assess the importance of the variables that are excluded or unobserved due to self-selection. This 'check' allows for causal claims to be made with a high degree of certainty as we are able to determine how important the unobserved or omitted variables would have to be to fully explain our findings.

Thus, the evaluation begins with a straightforward estimation of the effect of participation in DRCs on recidivism using an Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) model. Here, the relationship is modeled as:

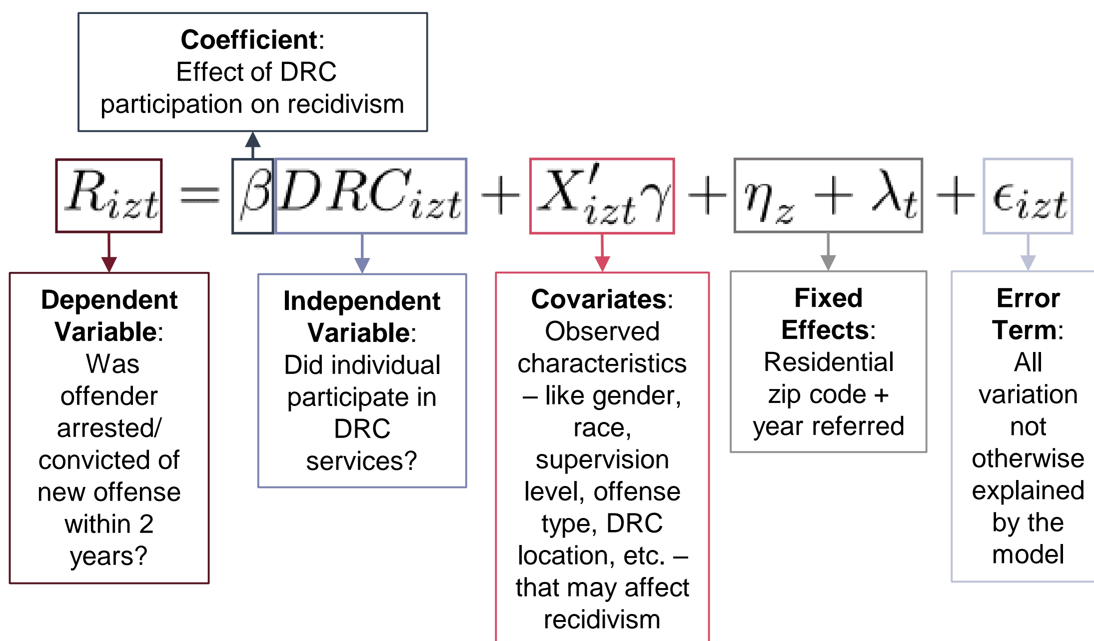

Figure 3.2. OLS Model & Key

We are interested in the size and direction of the effect (i.e. coefficient) of attending a DRC (i.e. independent variable) on recidivism (i.e. dependent variable), while controlling for observed characteristics that are known to be associated with recidivism (i.e. covariates) and the average, static difference between residential zip codes and the year of referral (i.e. fixed effects).

This design would provide an accurate, unbiased estimate of the effect of participation in DRCs on recidivism *if* all factors that impact an individual's success were included in the model or *if* assignment to DRCs had been randomized through a controlled experiment. However, as discussed above, there are other factors that are correlated with participation in DRCs (e.g. offender's ability; motivation), so a coefficient stability approach (Oster 2019) must also be incorporated to assess the importance of the unobserved variables that are excluded from the OLS due to self-selection.[2]

Concerns about omitted variable bias due to self-selection are common in non-experimental work and most studies will test for this bias by running their model with and without covariates. If adding the covariates to the model does not significantly change the coefficient (the size of the effect of the treatment on the dependent variable), then it is often assumed that unobserved characteristics do not need to be accounted for. For this logic to hold, the observable characteristics (covariates) would have to be able to proxy and tell us everything we need to know about the unobservable characteristics (omitted variables). This is a strong assumption to make and is very likely incorrect, so looking only at the movement of the coefficient before and after introducing covariates to the model is insufficient for adjusting for potential bias. If the unobserved characteristics have much greater variance than the observed characteristics (covariates), then excluding the unobserved and including the observed in the model will make the coefficient appear stable. This is because the covariates are less important to explaining the relationship in the model than the unobserved characteristics (omitted variables).

The coefficient stability approach, developed in Oster (2019) and used here, allows for the importance of omitted variable bias to be assessed by considering both the movement of coefficients and R-squared[3] values. By analyzing changes in R-squared before (uncontrolled) and after (controlled) the observable characteristics are added to the model, it is possible to calculate how large the effect of the unobserved characteristics would need to be to explain away the result we calculate.

Through a series of exercises, different hypothetical values of R-squared are used to calculate the selection ratio and bounding estimates for the coefficients. The bounded coefficient estimates are the product of the effect of the observed characteristics on the dependent variable, and the amount of variation in the dependent variable that these characteristics explain. If the bounding estimate for the treatment effect (coefficient) does not include zero, then there is evidence of a causal relationship. By calculating the selection ratio, it is also possible to determine how large the effect of the unobserved characteristics would have to be to explain away the effect of the observed characteristics that are included in the model. If the selection ratio is greater than or equal to one, it means the unobserved characteristics would have to be as or more important than the observed characteristics in the model. Together, this provides a layer of confidence in interpreting whether the results are likely causal.

[2] Riverside County Probation staff may recall we also considered utilizing a regression discontinuity design (RDD) that would exploit the natural variation in PRCS assignments between when AB-109 was passed and when referrals to DRCs began. This would create a control group (i.e. realigned pre-DRCs) and a treatment group (i.e. realigned post-DRCs) that would be comparable along observable characteristics. We did not pursue an RDD because the dataset does not include the date of release from prison and we were advised the supervision start date, which is available in the dataset, is likely to be different than that of prison release. Without confidence in these dates, we elected to use a coefficient stability approach, which was better suited to the available data.

[3] R-squared measures the proportion of variation in the dependent variable that is explained by the variables (independent and covariates) included in the model. An R-squared of zero indicates that none of the variation in the dependent variable is explained by the model, whereas an R-squared of one indicates the model fully explains the dependent variable (i.e. no variables have been 'left out').

A full model and more complete explanation of Oster's coefficient stability approach is included in Appendix A.

Findings

Table 3.2 presents the baseline results of the OLS for the relationship between attending a DRC and recidivating. The first column reports the point estimate, or likelihood, of being arrested for a new offense including only whether the individual participated in a DRC and referral fixed year effects in the model. Column two (2) incorporates observable offender characteristics (covariates), and column (3) reports the results if zip code fixed effects are also added to the model. Columns four (4) through six (6) present the same set of results using reconviction, as opposed to rearrest, as the measure of recidivism.

Table 3.2. The Effects of Participation in DRCs on Recidivism

	Arrested			Convicted		
	Coefficients (Standard Errors)					
DRC	-0.196***	-0.125***	-0.149***	-0.175***	-0.098**	-0.124***
	(0.042)	(0.043)	(0.048)	(0.042)	(0.038)	(0.039)
Sample Size	617	617	617	617	617	617
Controls:						
Year Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Covariates	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Zip Code Fixed Effects	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes

NOTES: The sample is restricted to DRC participants and offenders who were excluded from participation because of work/education related scheduling conflicts. Standard errors are clustered at the residential zip code level. Covariates include indicators for gender, race, supervision level, offense type, severity of the offense (felony and misdemeanor), and DRC location and offender's age at the time of DRC referral, education, weight, height and total number of convictions. Arrested (convicted) is an indicator variable that takes the value of one if the offender was rearrested (convicted) during the two-year period following referral to DRCs.
** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%.

The OLS estimates in Columns one (1) through three (3) are all negative and statistically significant. Focusing on the results of the most extensively specified model in Column three (3), participation in DRCs decreased the likelihood of being arrested for a new offense within two years of referral to a DRC by almost 15 percentage points. This represents a decrease of 26 percent relative to the arrest rate of offenders who were referred but did not participate due to scheduling conflicts. The findings are similar when the dependent variable is reconviction for a new offense. These associations are also all negative and statistically different from zero, which means there is evidence that participating in DRCs decreases an individual's likelihood of recidivating when compared to those who did not participate in a DRC because of educational or employment commitments.

Next, we conduct the coefficient stability approach exercises as a check to determine whether the relationships in Table 3.2 are causal. Table 3.3 presents the estimates of bounds of the impact of DRC participation on recidivism. Columns one (1) and two (2) of Table 3.3 reproduce the results from the uncontrolled (covariates excluded) and controlled (covariates included) regressions, along with their respective R-squared values for being rearrested. There is a non-trivial change in the explanatory power of the regression; specifically, adding the covariates to the model increases the R-squared from 0.21 to 0.30. This means adding data on observable

Table 3.3: The Biased Adjusted Effects of Participation in DRCs on Recidivism

	Arrested				Convicted			
	Baseline Effect	**Controlled Effect**	**Bounding Estimate**	**Proportional Selection Term**	**Baseline Effect**	**Controlled Effect**	**Bounding Estimate**	**Proportional Selection Term**
					Coefficients (Standard Errors)			
DRC	-0.218*** (0.049)	-0.149*** (0.048)	[-0.149, -0.080]	2.16	-0.196*** (0.045)	-0.124*** (0.040)	[-0.124, -0.052]	1.72
R^2	0.212	0.301			0.220	0.317		
R_{MAX}			0.390				0.414	
Sample Size	617	617	617	617	617	617	617	617
Controls:								
Year Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Covariates	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Zip Code Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

NOTES: The sample is restricted to DRC participants and offenders who were excluded from participation because of work/education related scheduling conflicts. Standard errors are clustered at the residential zip code level. Covariates include indicators for gender, race, supervision level, offense type, severity of the offense (felony and misdemeanor), and DRC location and offender's age at the time of DRC referral, education, weight, height and total number of convictions. The bounding exercise assumes that unobservable controls explain as much of the outcome as the observable controls. Arrested (convicted) is an indicator variable that takes the value of one if the offender was rearrested (convicted) during the two-year period following referral to DRC.
** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%.

characteristics (e.g. age, gender, supervision level, history of violent offense, etc.) explains more of the variation in recidivism outcomes than only including whether the individual attended a DRC in the model. Similarly, including the observable characteristics (covariates) decreases the coefficient estimate from the first column of Table 3.3 by more than 30 percent.

The bounding set was determined by assessing the value of R_{max}, as detailed in Appendix A. The interval of coefficient values reported in Columns three (3) and six (6) are [-0.149, -0.080] and [-.124, -.052], respectively. Because these bounding exercises excludes zero (i.e. no effect), there is evidence of a negative causal effect of DRCs on recidivism rates, measured both as a rearrest or a reconviction for a new offense in the two years after referral.

RESEARCH QUESTION | Do Riverside County's DRCs reduce recidivism among AB-109 offenders when compared to those assigned to traditional supervision?

FINDING | Yes. Participating in a DRC decreases the likelihood of being arrested for a new offense by 26% and decreases the likelihood of being reconvicted for a new offense by 29% relative to the arrest and conviction rates of offenders who were referred, but did not participate due to education or employment scheduling conflicts.

Finally, the proportional selection terms that would be necessary to explain away the entire results are also reported in this table. For rearrests, the proportional selection term is 2.16 and for reconvictions it is 1.72. Put differently, the unobservables or omitted variables would need to be more than twice as important as the observables (e.g. DRC participation, gender, age, etc.) for rearrests or nearly twice as important as the observables for reconvictions in explaining recidivism to negate the model.

Thus, it is with a high degree of confidence that we conclude Riverside County's DRCs have a causal, negative effect on recidivism.

DRCs' Social Benefit

Finally, we provide a simple back-of-the-envelope benefit calculation to put these impacts into monetary perspective. Donohue (2009) provides estimates as to the weighted average cost of crime, which incorporate measures of the elasticity of crime rates with respect to incarceration (i.e. the number of crimes avoided due to incarcerating one offender), the monetary value of crime avoided due to incarceration, and the social costs of incarceration (e.g. cost of offender incarceration, the loss of the offender's productive contributions if they were not incarcerated, and other longer-term costs imposed on the offender by society due to their incarceration). By combining Donohue's strategy with our upper bound estimate of reconviction from Column seven (7) of Table 3.3, we are able to estimate the social benefit of Riverside County's DRCs.

Using this most conservative estimate of the impact of DRC participation on recidivism (-0.052), DRC participation decreased the probability of reconviction by roughly 10 percent (-0.052/0.502, where 0.502 is the average reconviction rate for all non-DRC offenders). Taking the total number of convicted adults from Columns three (3) and four (4) of Table 3.1 as our benchmark, this 10 percent decrease translates to roughly 82 fewer adults being reconvicted as a result of DRCs over the sample period.

Further, by using Donohue's lower and upper bound estimates of the average cost of crime we calculate the potential social benefits of DRCs. The decrease in reconvictions calculated above corresponds to a benefit of between $337,000 and $1.98 million (in 2015 dollars). Considering that about half of incidents are reported to the police and only about half of those reported result in arrest (FBI 2012), the actual social benefit by DRCs is likely even larger than what is reported by our conservative estimate.

Other Potential Analyses

Ideally, we would take our analysis a step further and explore the effect of the intensity of treatment by defining participation in DRCs more continuously. To do this, we would use the duration of an individual's participation in the program as the independent variable of interest in the OLS equation, rather than using a binary classification (i.e. whether or not someone attended a DRC). However, this analysis is likely to be confounded because treatment dosage (i.e. length of time in the program) adds another layer of complexity by introducing additional, non-random selection into treatment. Analyzing the heterogeneity in the estimated effects by the type of services or classes used by an individual at a DRC is also likely to suffer similar biases. Because the length of treatment in a DRC and services used are not exogenously determined (i.e. there is a high degree of self-selection), it is not possible to causally model the effect of either. For these reasons [4], we are unable to causally address research questions two and three in the original scope of work. However, the qualitative analysis is able to shed light on the potential benefits of specific DRC services and the length of time an offender attends a DRC.

[4] It also bears mentioning that the data for DRC services completed is available for only 40 percent of participants in the sample. As a result, even in the presence of random assignment, our ability to make inferences regarding the effect of different types of services would be limited and not particularly informative.

SECTION IV | A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF DRC EXPERIENCE AND BENEFITS FROM THE CLIENTS' PERSPECTIVE

Building upon the quantitative analysis, we shift now to unpacking the experience of DRC participants– particularly as relates to the second and third questions in the scope of work. How do different DRC services affect offender re-entry success? How does the duration of services provided with DRCs affect offender re-entry success?

Without quantitative data to causally evaluate these questions, we are not able to offer definitive answers to either. However, we are able to glean substantial insight as to what services and DRC features positively affect offender re-entry based on DRC clients' recount of experiences in the program. To help direct our inquiry, while staying true to the intent behind the questions in the scope of work, we developed the following three questions that will be addressed in this section through our surveys and interviews with clients.

1) How do DRC clients assess these programs' strengths and weaknesses?
2) How can DRCs be improved?
3) Does DRC participation produce any specific skills and benefits for clients?

Methodology

We rely on data from surveys and interviews with DRC clients that were conducted between June 2020 and September 2021. Some of these surveys and interviews were carried out over the phone due to DRC shutdowns or restrictions related to COVID-19, while the remainder were done in person by researchers at the DRC facilities in Riverside, Temecula, and Indio. Overall, we conducted surveys with 46 clients across the three DRCs. We interviewed 39 of these survey respondents. Below we present the results of these survey responses and then use the in-depth interview responses to provide greater detail and insights about these trends.

Descriptive Statistics – Basic Demographics

Figure 4.1 presents the number of survey respondents by DRC location. The largest group of respondents completed the survey at the Temecula DRC (19 individuals; 43% of the sample), followed by Indio (14 individuals; 30% of the sample), and Riverside (13 individuals; 28% of the sample).

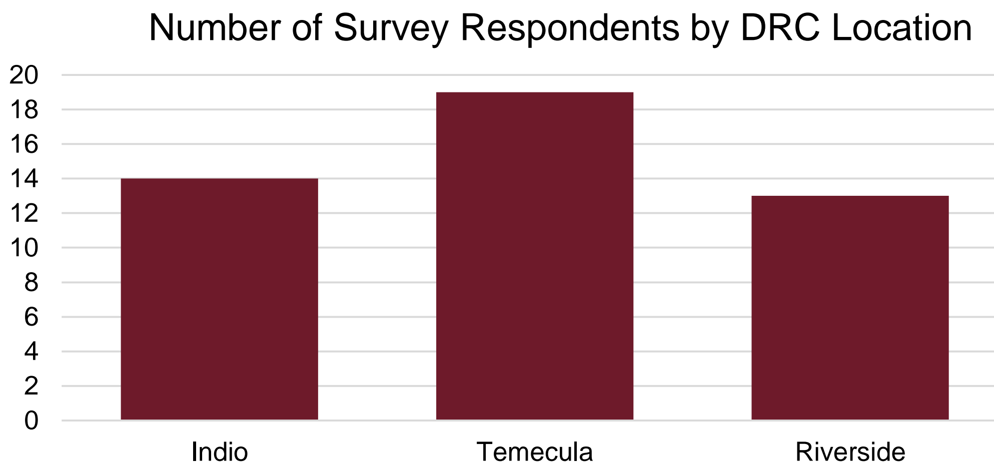

Figure 4.1. Survey Respondents by DRC Location

Figure 4.2 depicts the age, gender, and race/ethnicity of the survey respondents. Survey respondents all were above the age of 18 and below the age of 68. The largest group, 16 individuals or 35 percent of respondents, fell within the 38-47 age group. The overwhelming majority of respondents, 38 individuals or 83 percent of the sample, self-identify as male, while the remainder identify as female. No respondent self-identified as transgender or non-binary. Nearly 60 percent of the sample identify as Hispanic/Latina/o, while 30 percent identify as white (non-Hispanic). Individuals who self-identify as African American/Black, Bi- or Multi-racial, or Other each make up 4 percent of the survey respondent sample.

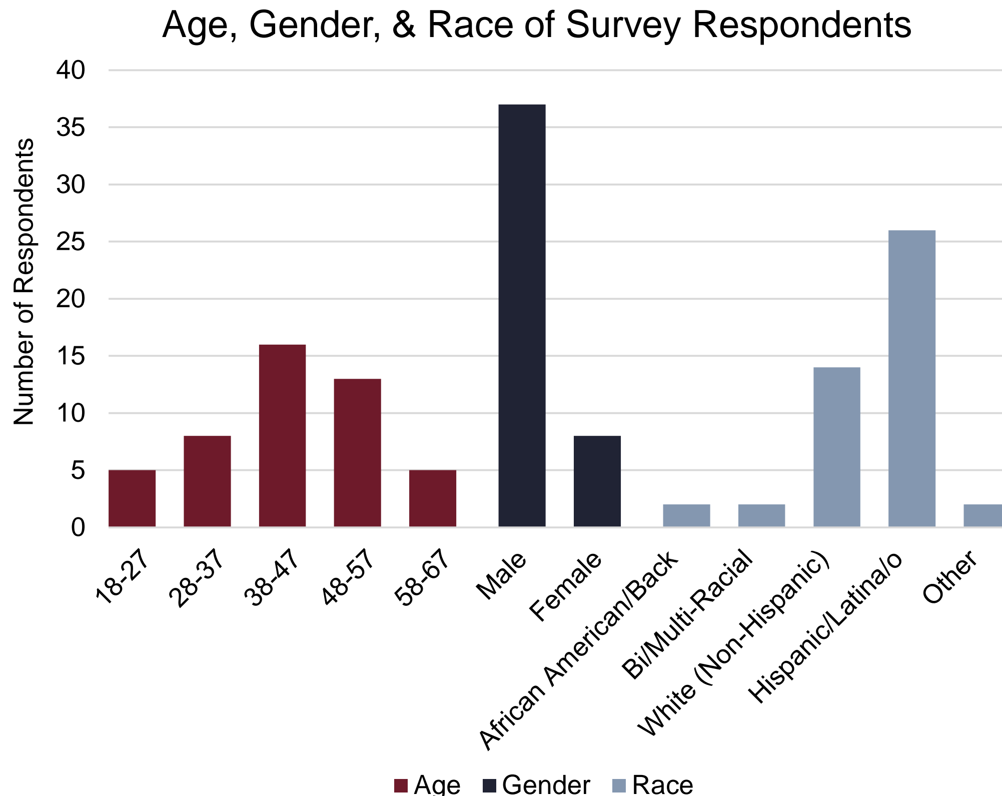

Figure 4.2. Survey Respondent Demographics

It is noteworthy that the age, gender, and racial distribution of the survey sample roughly approximates that of the quantitative sample, which included all PRCS offenders referred to DRCs between 2013 and 2017. Here 83 percent of our sample is male whereas 92 percent of the quantitative sample is male. Furthermore, 57% of our sample identify as Hispanic/Latina/o and 30 percent identify as white (non-Hispanic); whereas 51 percent and 31 percent of the quantitative sample identify as Hispanic/Latina/o and white (non-Hispanic), respectively.

Clients were asked if their referrals to the DRCs were mandatory, sanctioned, or voluntary. The survey defined a mandatory referral as, "No job or school – have to take three classes," a sanctioned referral as, "New arrest or non-compliant behavior – Specific class," and a voluntary referral as, "Eligible probationer requests the referral from their P.O." Figure 4.3 represents the distribution of responses. Most individuals stated they were mandatory (71%), followed by voluntary (24%), and sanctioned (4%). Survey participants were also asked if their probation status was under AB-109 or formal probation. Nearly two-thirds of respondents were AB-109 realigned offenders under PRCS, with roughly 40 percent identifying as being under formal probation, and 4 percent indicating they were unsure.[5]

Whereas the quantitative analysis included only AB-109/PRCS offenders, the qualitative sample also includes some individuals who would be under the jurisdiction of Riverside County's Probation Department regardless of realignment (i.e. under formal probation).

[5] Several respondents selected multiple probation statuses, thus the total exceeds 100%.

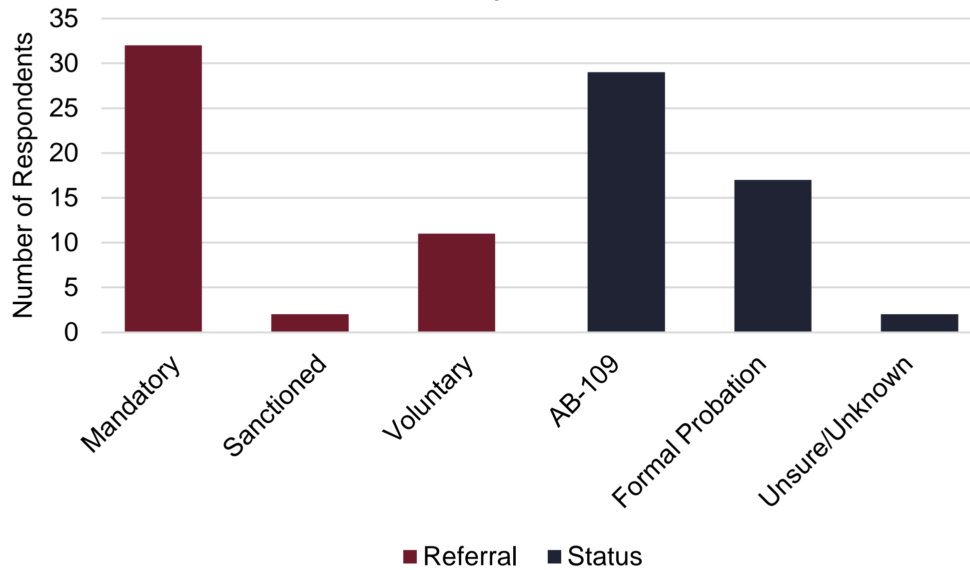

Figure 4.3. Referral & Probation Status of Survey Respondents

Descriptive Statistics – Lifestyle

The survey continued with questions about the respondent's lifestyle. We inquired about current housing status and the distribution of the responses are reflected in Figure 4.4. Nearly half of DRC clients reported they were currently staying with a family member, followed by 29 percent who indicated they were renting. 9 percent of respondents lived in a home or apartment they owned, 4 percent each were staying with a friend, couch surfing, or homeless, 2 percent answered "other" and indicated they were living in a shelter.

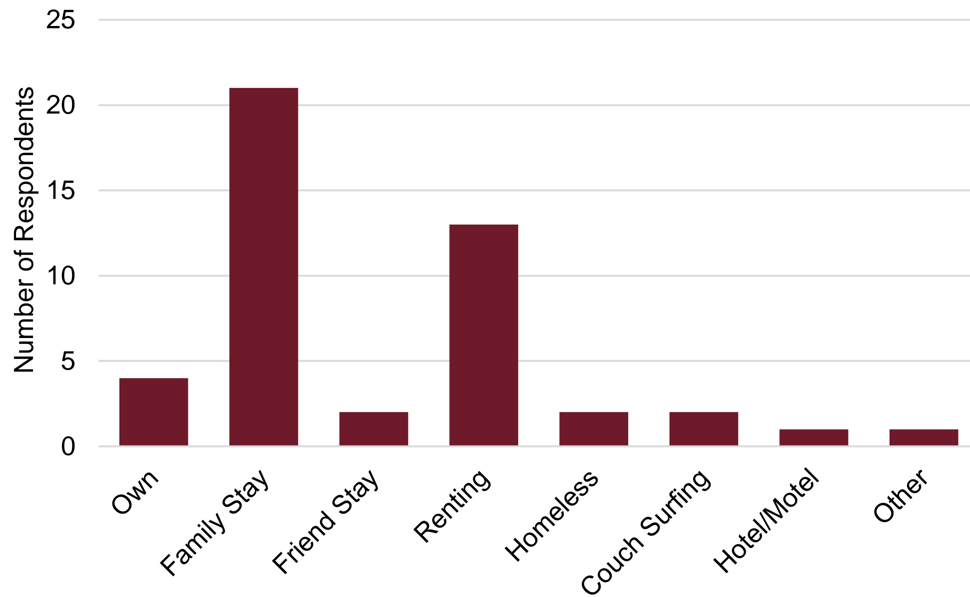

Figure 4.4. Housing Status of Survey Respondents

We also asked about current school enrollment status. Most respondents indicated that they were not taking classes currently (31 individuals; 67%). The rest had an 'other' school enrollment (4 individuals; 9%),

were enrolled in GED preparation classes at the DRC (3 individuals or 7%), were enrolled in part-time college classes (3 individuals; 7%), were enrolled in full-time college classes (3 individuals; 7%), studying for their GED (1 individual; 2%), or enrolled in GED preparation classes outside of the DRC (1 individual; 2%). For example, one white male at Temecula clarified, “I've already been in college for over six months and I've been getting straight A's and I'm very thankful for that.” Another stated, “[I’m] enrolled in college classes, full-time.”

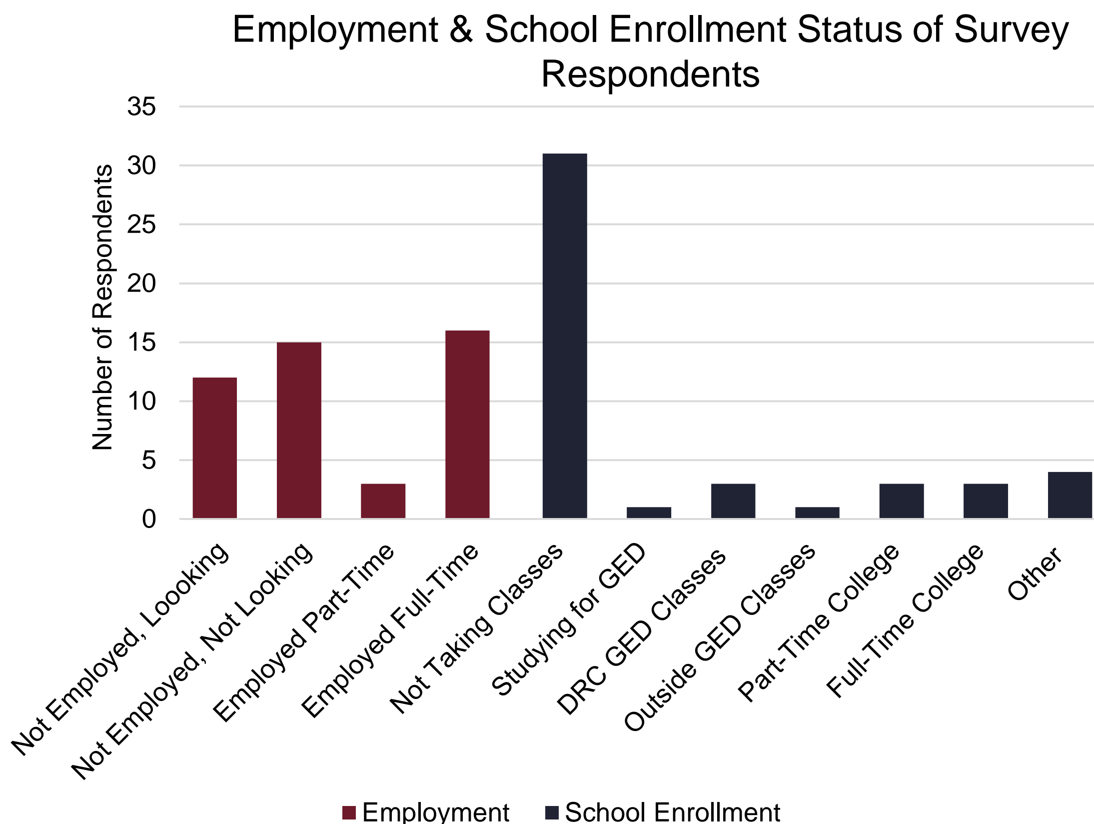

Figure 4.5. Survey Respondent Employment & School Enrollment Status

Descriptive Statistics – Participation in DRC Programming and Services

Finally, we asked each survey respondent about the length of time they had participated in DRC services and the specific programs they had used. Figure 4.6 depicts the length of time survey respondents had attended a DRC. These are comprehensive counts, meaning they could include gaps in attendance, but reflect estimates of total enrollment length. Slightly less than half reported attending their DRC for more than a year, while the remainder attended 9 to 12 months (15%), 6 to 9 months (11%), 4 to six months (13%), 1 to 3 months (11%), or less than one month (9%).

Finally, participants were asked to report all of the services or classes they currently use of have used at their DRC by selecting from a list of all available programs. Notably, clients make use of an average of 7 classes and/or services during their time at the DRC. The most commonly taken class was Substance Use Education, with 70 percent of respondents denoting their participation. Close behind was the Department of Public Social Services’ General Relief/CalFresh/Medi-Cal assistance, with 65 percent participation. Over 50 percent of respondents reported taking Criminal and Addictive Thinking, participating in behavioral health/individual/group counseling, and Workforce Development services. No respondents indicated that they had made use of Veteran’s Services of the Sheriff’s Inmate Training and Education Bureau (SITE-B). Figure 4.7 presents detailed findings for available services.

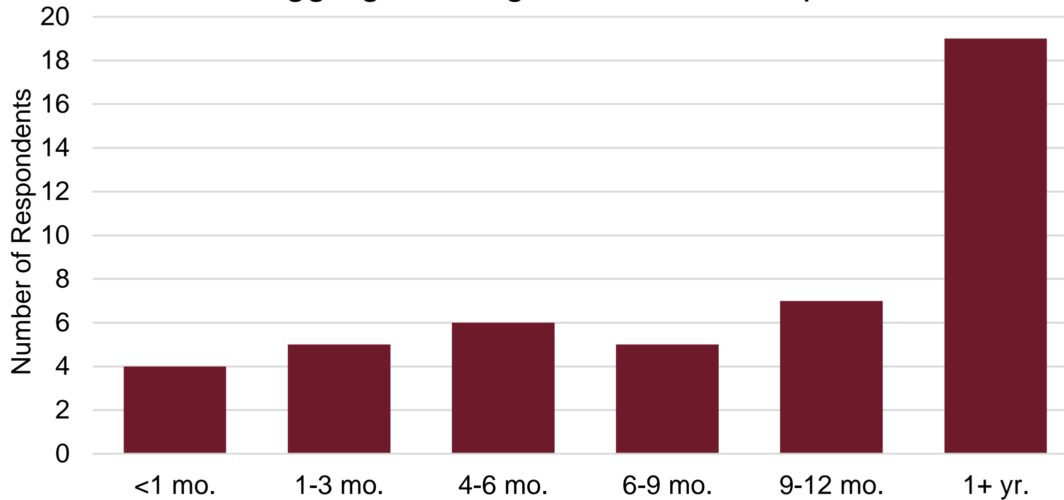

Figure 4.6. Aggregate Length of DRC Participation

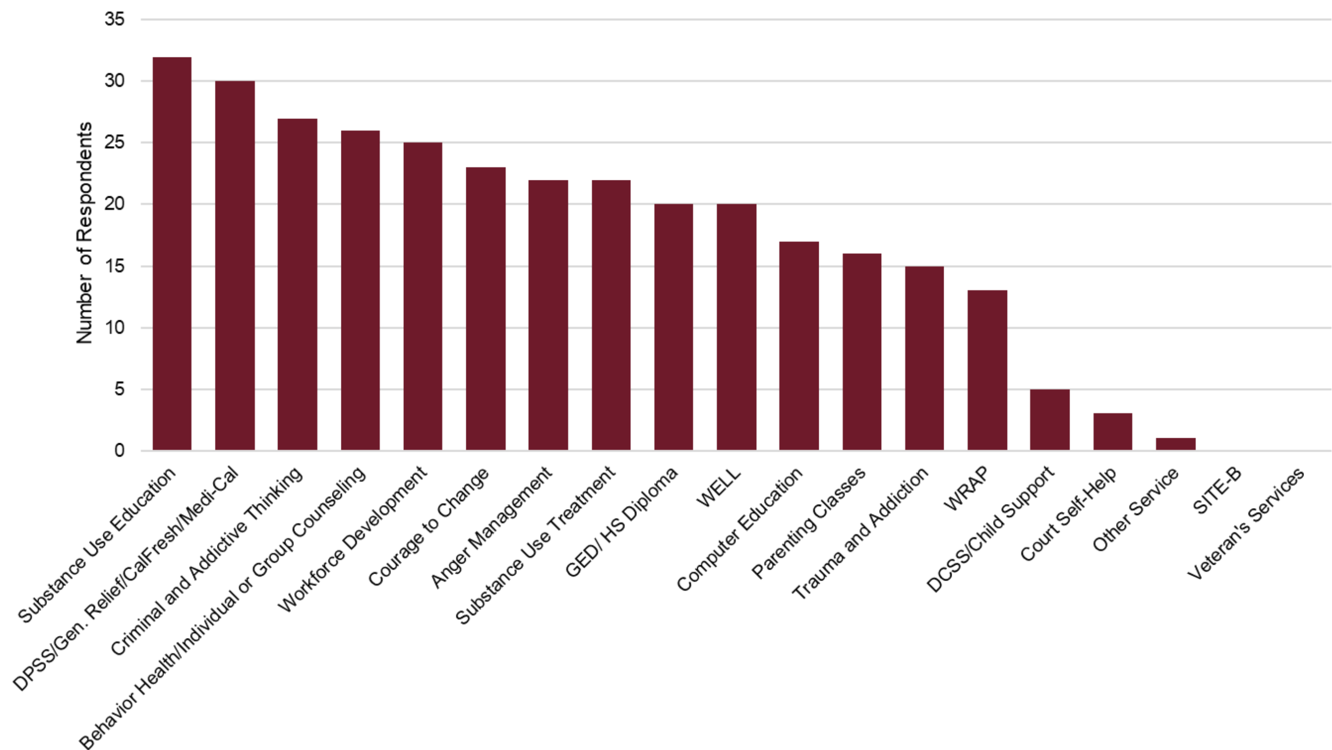

Figure 4.7. DRC Services Used by Survey Respondents

Client Evaluations of Day Reporting Centers – DRC Strengths

In this section, we report on clients' evaluation of the DRCs' strengths. Our findings include both fixed survey responses and open-ended interview responses, which provide greater detail. The assessed DRC strengths include peer support, staff support, having a wide range of services, teaches valuable skills, helps establish accountability and routine, and other benefits. Within each broad category, we draw on our interview data

to provide more specificity about how clients view these as strengths, and note the various aspects that comprise such strengths. Note that some responses may conceivably fit within multiple broad strength categories.

In the surveys, clients were asked, “What are the biggest strengths of the DRC?” As displayed in Figure 4.8, the most popular answer was staff support and encouragement (35 individuals; 76%), followed by other (open responses) (14 individuals; 30%); the wide range of services offered (13 individuals; 28%); peer support and encouragement (12 individuals; 26%); the services teach valuable skills (11 individuals ; 24%); and DRC helps establish routine (7 individuals; 15%). By drawing on our interview questions, we provide greater details regarding the ways in which clients experience support from staff.

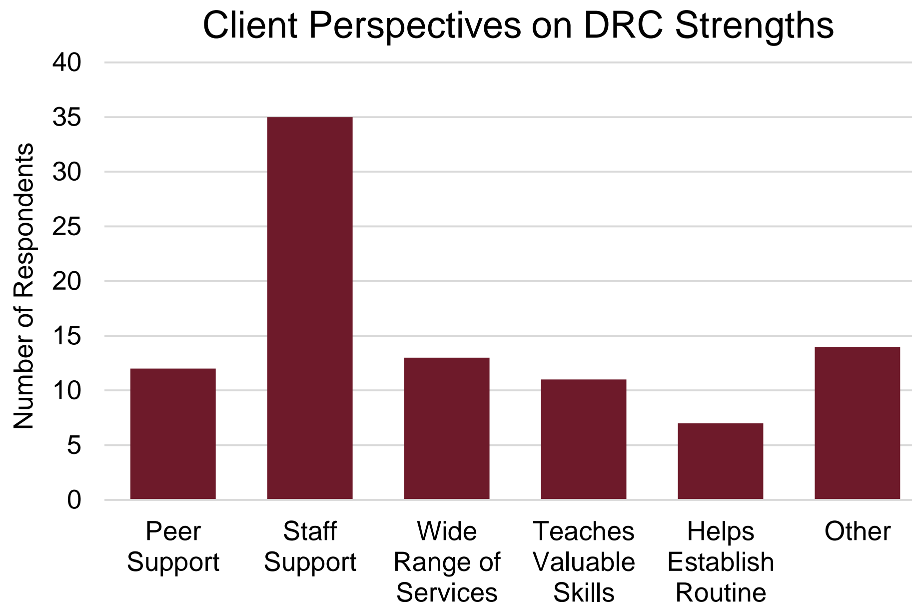

Figure 4.8. Client Perspectives: DRC Strengths

<u>Staff Support</u>
When asked to provide more details about staff support, four main themes emerged: Emotional Support, Goal Attainment, Accountability, and Guidance through Social Services.

One way that clients experienced staff support was based upon emotional connection. For example, one 32-year old white female from Indio provided a concrete illustration of how a staff member supported her after a traumatic event. She explained, “[when] my car was stolen out of my driveway I wasn’t able to make it to DRC. I thought that I was going to get in trouble but they were very understanding. I would say very supportive. They were willing to hear me out. They were willing to listen to other students patiently, let them finish and then give them their advice to help. So, I think just all of them are really willing, they really wanted to help us from my impression.” A middle aged man from Riverside offered this assessment of the emotional support he received: “It's different here at the DRC because it's a place where people are actually concerned about your well-being and everybody is always encouraging. They want to interact with you and see how you are doing.” In a final example, a 57-year old Hispanic man from Indio praised DRC staff for helping him through a very difficult time. He recalled, “When my wife died, they were there for me. They listened to me, talked to me. Not one time did they seem like they were tired of me talking, you know. They wanted to hear me, they wanted to be there for me.”

In their assessments of emotional support, a number of clients specifically referred to staff as “friendly” and “comforting.” One white man in his early forties summarized his experience: “I'm going to say that they

always have the doors open and just the people that work there. I mean they're probation officers and none of them act like probation officers [but] more like friends. When you go in there it's more family oriented. I think that helps a lot because when you go to a probation department there are more strict … but these people are there to help you. A Hispanic woman in her late thirties in Temecula also felt emotionally supported by DRC staff: "They're very supportive and very welcoming. When you come in it's like, there's some people that work just because they have to work but these people, they're actually there. They're very sincere and they make you feel welcome. They definitely make you feel safe. I just thought it was very comforting and it made me always want to feel free to come back and I actually went there. It was not even mandatory for me to go there but I go there like three or four times a week just because of the energy."

While the survey data in Figure 4.8 show staff support garnered the highest number of responses, we asked clients additional survey questions to further gauge their perceptions of staff support. To that end, we asked them to indicate how much they agreed or disagreed with various statements:

1) I have at least one DRC staff member I can talk to if I have a problem;
2) I receive comforting and caring communication from DRC staff;
3) I receive advice and guidance from DRC staff.

Statement 1 attempts to gauge how accessible clients found the staff and their comfort level in seeking them out for support. While the second question also focuses on social support, it specifically tries to examine client assessments of the degree of emotional support provided by staff. The clients' responses are displayed in Figure 4.9. Over half of respondents strongly agreed with Statements 1 and 2.

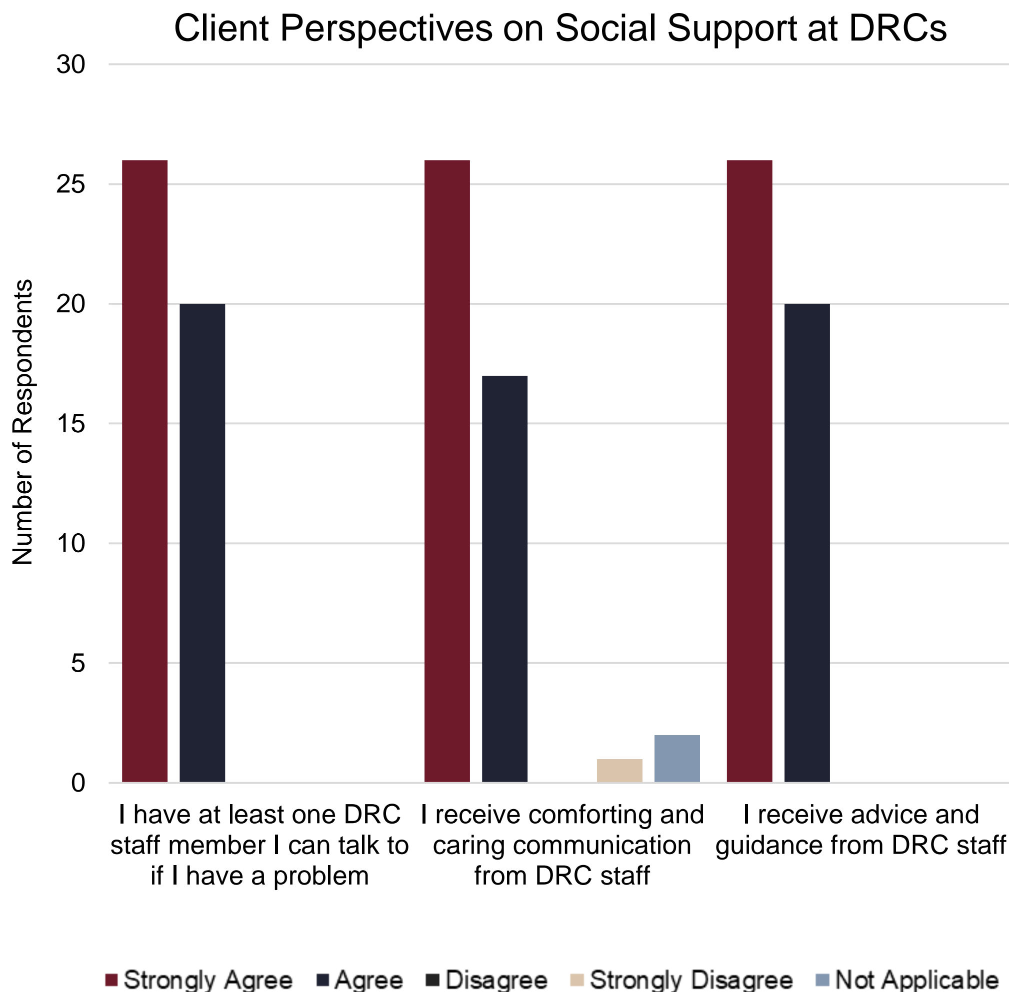

Figure 4.9. Client Perspectives: Social Support at DRCs

Another strength identified by clients is that DRC staff support their goal attainment, specifically regarding educational attainment and employment. In Figure 4.9, a majority of clients strongly agreed (26 individuals; 57%), and the rest agreed (20 individuals; 44%) that staff provided advice and guidance about both of these goals. One male client from Temecula confirmed, “They are very supportive. It’s because of them that I am able to finish my GED. Even though I am a felon, they made me feel like I am allowed to have a second chance at life.” A Hispanic man from Indio remarked, “When I wanted to go back to school the lady here supported me by helping me fill out my FAFSA. There was a lot of support here.” A Black woman at Temecula similarly noted how staff supported her educational goals: “Getting my high school diploma [is the most helpful]. I didn’t know that they offered that. I thought this was strictly like a probation office.”

Other clients felt staff supported their employment efforts, as well. A client in his mid-thirties described staff support surrounding finding a job. He recounted: “DRC staff are very supportive. The way that I was going through my probation and then I got assigned and I had to take time to find something while I was unemployed. They worked with me and then as I was getting jobs there were some people that didn’t want to pay me. They were very understandable and supportive.” A Riverside client also highlighted this support, noting it was a team effort that involved staff and peer mentors: “They have an employment component there, EDA or EDD I believe. Everybody was involved in it, like when I got my first job, it wasn't only that person that helped me with probation, it was my peer mentor and I remember when they asked me to fill out when I got my first full-time job, it was like a team effort. Everybody helped me and we got my resume ready and they got me ready. I went to my interview and I got the job and it was like a whole team thing.” A man in Indio, identified staff and a peer mentor as they helped him prepare for a job interview. He explained: “I talked to two people about a job. The peer mentor helped me in the responsible thinking and with my resume. They [staff] also printed out job fairs and hotels that needed to hire people with their location and phone numbers. And they also helped with the interview part. He would interview me and helped me to find the right words. I got to practice so I wouldn’t get nervous.”

The third theme centered on how staff provided accountability for DRC clients, who viewed this as desirable and beneficial to their overall well-being. A white man at Riverside nearing 50 said, “The way they help you sometimes is they stop you and pull you to one side to talk one on one with you if you need it.” Another man at Riverside suggested accountability was important: “They real supportive man. What you need or what you want and what they got to offer, they’ll give it to you. As long as you're doing what you need to be doing.” One Temecula client likewise highlighted the accountability when staff keep in regular contact with them. He explained, “I want to say their commitment to help people. I know that they are doing their job but they're also there to provide assistance and guidance as well. They follow through once in a while. They give me a call to ask me how I'm doing. They just say that we are just checking up on you to see how you are doing or that there is this service coming up, if you were interested in it.” A woman at Temecula felt supported because staff contacted her: “They are pretty supportive. They would just call me and just be like hey how's everything going, we just want to make sure if you need any help or if you don't like the work there you're more than welcome to come back. If you're not happy with your job we can help you find another or even with my education. Those group of people and the type of support they provide. So yeah, the support system there is pretty good and is rooted in there.”

The final theme was that staff ushered clients through bureaucratic processes related to social services, how to manage daily tasks, and help them to obtain resources. One 55-year old Riverside client said, “Man them people out there, they run to help you. It seems like, yesterday I wanted to get my food stamps so I came on a day that I don’t usually come. They had me at a desk talking to somebody within minutes from the county. By the time I left I had like $280 on my food card. I’m like wow that was tremendous. Real quick, too.” Another Hispanic man from Indio also found this extremely valuable: “Yeah, they point me in the right direction. For housing, [staff] pulled some strings for me because I needed to get the paperwork to the Riverside County Social Services for section 8. I had to enroll my kids in school and the mail would have been late and I wouldn’t get the paperwork to them. So she did a magic trick and she helped me out.” A Temecula client

mentioned that staff helped him navigate the bus system so he could attend his college class: “If you are waiting for the bus, they will actually look up the schedule for you and will tell you the time when the buses are running. I was going to college they would tell me if you take the bus from here, you would be able to get to the school at this time and they would even give me a printout of the route so that you don't miss your bus schedule. They will help you out as much as they can. I thought that was great.”

Wide Range of Services

About a third of clients mentioned the wide range of DRC services as a strength. One client from Temecula stated: “The WELL and the WRAP. It was the criminal thinking class. The GED classes. There were a lot of them that were very beneficial. They constituted mostly group interaction. You were able to get feedback from people. Even though we look like we came from the same background and what not, we all live life differently. You got experiences from each individual and everybody reflected on everybody else’s thoughts.” A different Temecula client mentioned the classes he found particularly helpful: “The drug rehabilitation one, the GED, the math course and stuff. So, the math, the rehabilitation, the drug rehabilitation ones.”

Peer Mentor Support

About a quarter of the clients mentioned peer mentor support as a strength of the DRC and specifically identified the following as key components of that support: Relatability, Trust and Rapport, and Accountability.

Given their unique role and past shared history with clients, peer mentors could put clients at ease since they were relatable. One Indio male client shed light on how these individuals are one of the biggest strengths of the program:

> [One of the biggest strengths of the DRC] having somebody here, having a peer mentor. When I walked in here as a client, the first person who met me out in the lobby was the peer. This guy walked out and he had tattoos everywhere and I could tell he had been in prison. Me being from that culture, that background, right away I had a different perspective of the DRC. Right, because it’s not just probation, you know, it’s somebody who really understands what I’m going through. I just got out of jail, you know? I got butterflies in my stomach—I don’t know what’s going to happen—and somebody greets me with the same background as me. I don’t know how to explain it man, it’s like if a probation officer would’ve went out there and he had a badge and all this stuff, we get resistant. We back away. We put up a wall. But when it’s somebody you can relate to there’s no wall and it just changes your mindset. It makes you more receptive to what they have here.

A Riverside client in his twenties also considered peer mentors a strength of the DRC. He lavished praise on his peer mentor: “My peer mentor was awesome. He was the one who motivated me and encouraged me. I had never been employed prior to that. Never had I tried to stay clean. I did over 22 years in prison and the peer mentor that was there, we had the same experience, maybe not to the extent of mine but I could understand him because he has also been there, and he could understand how I felt. So, that’s where I connected with as far as the peer goes.” It was this shared history and experiences that encouraged this client to be open to change. A different Riverside client offered a similar assessment: “[peer mentors] they were all great. I loved talking [to them] more than to the regular staff. They would go out of their way to help you. They would stop with what they're doing and would give you time and help you out. They would say we have been where you have been. So, it feels more like a connection with somebody who has experienced something similar.”

Relatability is important because it helps establish trust and rapport between clients and peer mentors. For example, a 42-year old Hispanic client at Riverside revealed that his comfort level increased with the peer mentor based upon their shared background. When asked to explain why this occurred, he remarked: “Just the way he talks to people. He talks to me like I’m part of the team in a sense, part of the family. He makes me feel comfortable and it eases my guard down. I don't have to put up a defense or lie or be something that I don’t want to be … especially in the environment that I’m in.” Finally, peer mentors, like staff, generate

accountability for clients by regularly communicating and offering to help out when needed. A number of clients appreciated this extra effort, which increased their motivation to succeed. One white woman in her early thirties enumerated the ways the paper mentor in Indio offered support, and, in doing so, accountability for her: "He supports me. He tells me, 'whenever you need to talk to somebody, whenever you need anything.' He comes get me from places, he comes to talk to me. He will tell you what time [things are], he'll remind you, he'll let you know, he'll come around. Go out of his way to say, 'Good morning,' or 'Good afternoon.' A 56-year-old Riverside client especially emphasized how the peer mentor provided accountability for him to keep his commitments to the program: "He's always out there reaching out to everybody. When I don't show up they call me, hey what's going on? Why aren't you here? Oh, I got sidetracked. I show up and now I feel bad, like now they're calling me. You know they do call me when I don't show up and where are you going, where are you? Usually, I'm here, [or I'll say] I'm running late or I'll be here later on and I'll make up my class. But you know they're always reaching out." Another Indio client offered similar strengths of the peer mentor, which he associated with his regular attendance: "He's always suggested, you want me to go pick you up or if you don't have a ride they'll go pick you up. He tells me we'll get someone to pick you up. I say that's okay, I'll make it. Sometimes I will. Sometimes I won't. But they support me. They give me a bus ticket, a monthly bus ticket. So how can I miss?"

RESEARCH QUESTION | How do DRC clients assess these programs' strengths?

FINDING | Four key themes emerged in respondents' answers about DRCs' strengths, including that DRC staff provide:

1) emotional support;
2) support in attaining their goals;
3) accountability that benefits their overall well-being;
4) guidance with day-to-day tasks.

Respondents also find peer mentors to be relatable and particularly helpful in providing key social support that aids in achieving their re-entry goals.

Certain clients who struggled with drug addiction highlighted that peer mentors also gave them accountability regarding their sobriety. For them, this was a very valuable tangible program benefit, especially if the peer mentor had a history of drug use. A female client in Indio noted this helped her remain honest about her sobriety: "There used to be a peer mentor who used to talk to us and he was an ex-heroin addict. So, he kind of knew where we were coming from. He knows and relates with us so that's nice. I couldn't lie to him or be confused because he knows where we come from. To me, that's good guidance, good counseling because they know what I'm going through. If you've never done drugs, you don't know what it's like for a drug addict." A different Indio client stressed this type of accountability from the peer mentor. In this case, they were previously incarcerated together and the client witnessed the mentor change his life with the help of the DRC: "I kind of talked to the peer mentor about it. He's been a big help in my sobriety. He can kind of relate to me. I've been incarcerated with him so, you know, I know him really good from before we got sober. He's kind of been a lot of help in my sobriety, my work life, and all that stuff."

Client Evaluations of Day Reporting Centers - DRC Weaknesses

We inquired about client perceptions of DRC weaknesses to be able to identify potential improvements. These included barriers to attending DRCs and the close association of the DRCs with police and the criminal justice system.

Barriers

In the survey, we specifically asked about barriers to accessing DRCs. Figure 4.10 displays these survey results, which indicate that most clients (32 individuals; 70%) did not experience any barriers to accessing DRC services. Of the remaining 30 percent, the biggest barrier was reported lack of transportation (8 individuals), cannot afford transportation (3 individuals), services were too far from residence (4 individuals), was busy

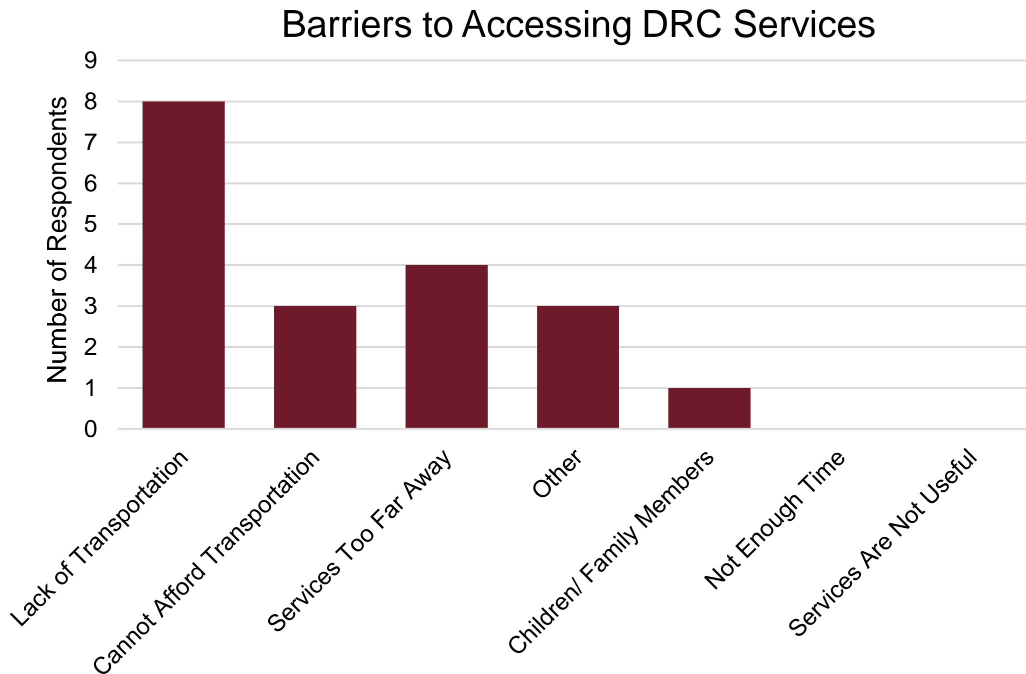

Figure 4.10. Client Perspectives: DRC Barriers

taking care of family (1 individual), and other unspecified issues (3 individuals).

The interview comments provide greater detail about how after experiencing a barrier to attend DRC, certain clients overcame it. When they could not attain a ride to the DRC, a few clients rode their bikes or found alternative solutions. In one example, an Indio client noted a lack of transportation could present a difficulty but he found ways to still show up, "Sometimes I don't have no ride, but I get here. I would walk or ride my bike." A Hispanic woman also cited transportation as a barrier to her attendance. She used a variety of methods to overcome it: "Transportation part was hard, but I got that settled. They, with regards to not having a ride and all that, at one time they picked me up... They also give you RTA tickets to take the bus, but then I ended up getting a vehicle so it was fine."

Negative Environment

A few clients felt DRC staff at times acted unfairly, or simply associated staff (and specifically probation officers) with police. These negative associations or encounters created distrust and weakened their confidence in overall treatment at the DRC. One Riverside client provided the following anecdote:

> I remember one time as soon as I came in they told me he had a bottle and I was like I'm not going to piss in that. They were like, oh yeah you're going to piss in it, and I was like no I'm not. I just finished peeing for my PO. I got to pee again? And so they were like, it's up to you if you want it or not. And they tried to make it sound like a good thing and it didn't work for me. So the teacher was like, you just going to walk out of class? And I was like yup. I don't know why you guys are testing me again. So I just got my stuff and I just walked out. And they were like come back, I was like nah, I'm going to call my PO right now. Let him know I just finished piss testing for them and you guys want me to do it again. Don't make no sense so I took off. I made sure I called my PO though and let them know what happened. And he was like I don't know why they're testing you, you just finished testing 2 days ago. He was like to go back to class next week. That was it. I understand if I was late all the time or not coming and things like that but if I just finished peeing for them why should I do it again?

Although he did not provide specific examples, another Riverside client felt the overall climate at the DRC was similar to a probation setting rather than a learning environment: "Everyone in here has got the probation mentality and that's not really helpful because it's not a probation, it's a class. So, probably I think that's the only downfall. If you look at it in the long run, we are all convicts and they don't like to talk to cops and many would say probation officers are still cops."

Miscellaneous

Two clients offered different critiques of the DRCs; they were the only ones to raise these issues. A white man from Temecula complained there was not adequate communication between the probation department and the DRC. He placed blame primarily on probation and felt they lacked an understanding of clients' problems. He explained, "I don't think it's on the DRC part but I think it's on the probation part. They need to try to work more with the DRC and communicate and understand the part of people's problems." An Indio client in his 50s believed the scheduling and hours of the DRC could better accommodate those who work. He cited this as the biggest weakness, "The timing, the scheduling and all. I have to get off work and come to the DRC. Like right now, I was working till 3. I didn't even realize it till 15 minutes ago." This makes it a challenge for him to arrive and use services prior to closure.

No Weaknesses

Interestingly, most clients did not name any weaknesses and explicitly stated there were none. We pressed them to think of anything that could apply but still there were minimal responses to this question. A white male client at Riverside exemplified this stance, despite asking him to identify program weaknesses: "I haven't seen anything [negative] yet. You know it's been really good. It helps everybody, well if you want help, it's there. If you don't want help, you are mandated here, that's different. I mean, my whole deal is voluntary here. I don't have to be here at all. It helps me get back in touch with my family and everything." Similarly, an Indio client in her twenties who struggled with a long term drug addiction praised the program when asked about its weaknesses: "I don't see no weaknesses. I could tell you, for me as a person in solitary for 35 years on drugs, unless I'm in the hospital or in jail I'm using drugs all day. You know? And I come to a place like this where I relax, where I feel comfortable because it's hard to get comfortable when you're uncomfortable. It's very hard. This is an uncomfortable place when you're under the influence of drugs, but still I felt comfortable coming here and relaxing, you know, for an hour and go home. And I enjoyed it."

RESEARCH QUESTION | How do DRC clients assess these programs' weaknesses?

FINDING | The two most common critiques of DRCs are:

1) barriers to access make it difficult to participate;
2) the environment can be negative and compromise trust in the services due to associations of probation officers with law enforcement.

Notably, most clients do not identify any weaknesses. This could be because they do not perceive weaknesses or because clients are reluctant to share criticisms for fear of repercussions.

It is important to note that this trend could be an accurate reflection of clients' generally positive experiences at DRCs *or* it could stem from reluctance to disclose criticisms for fear of repercussions. Despite our efforts to assure them of full confidentiality, it may be that clients were still wary to identify DRC weaknesses over concerns it would be reported to DRC staff and/or the belief it would affect their access and services within the program. Thus, the minimal reporting of DRC program criticisms should be met with some caution.

Client Evaluations of Day Reporting Centers – Potential DRC Improvements

Another way to assess DRC weaknesses was to inquire about ways the DRC could be improved. This is a less direct way to gauge clients' perceived shortcomings regarding DRCs. In the surveys, we asked clients to select

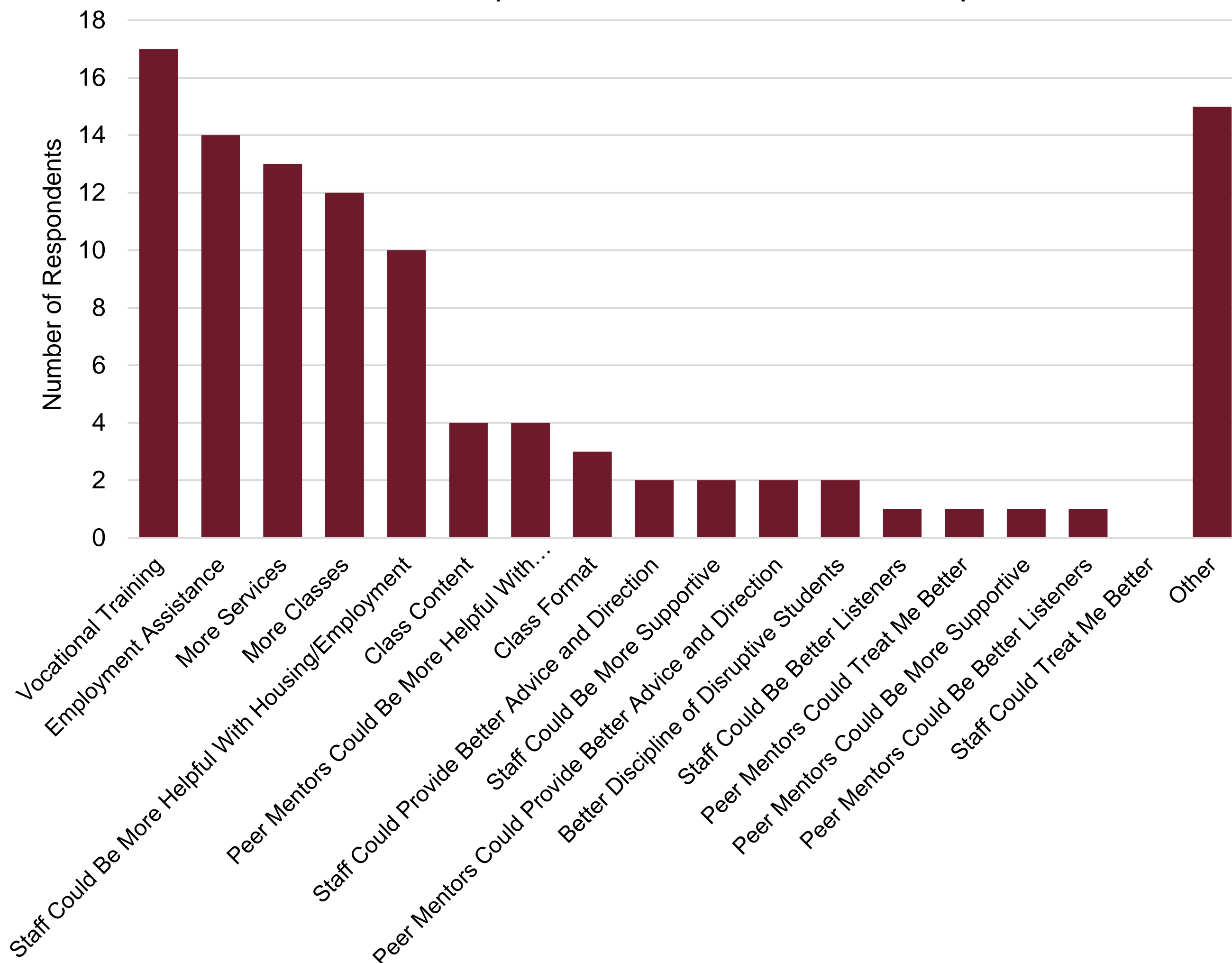

Figure 4.11. Client Perspectives: Areas for Improvement

from a list of ways that the DRC could be improved (as many items as they wanted). While it is not a fully comprehensive measure of possible improvements, these questions provide some guidance about clients' sense of what is missing in the DRC or what could be enhanced. Their responses are shown in Figure 4.11. The most popular answer was vocational training on site (17 individuals; 37%), followed by other responses that were not clarified (15 individuals; 33%); assistance with employment (14 individuals; 30%), more services offered (13 individuals; 28%); more classes offered (12 individuals; 26%), DRC staff could be more helpful in housing/employment (10 individuals; 22%), peer mentors could be more helpful in finding housing/employment (4 individuals; 9%), DRC staff could be more supportive (2 individuals; 4%), DRC staff could provide better advice and direction (2 individuals; 4%), peer mentors could provide better advice and direction (2 individuals; 4%), better discipline of disruptive students (2 individuals; 4%), DRC staff could be better listeners (1 individual; 2%), peer mentors could treat me better (1 individual; 2%), peer mentors could be more supportive (1 individual; 2%), and peer mentors could be better listeners (1 individual; 2%). Of note, no respondents selected the "DRC staff could treat me better" option.

Since these were closed-ended answers (yes or no only), we were unable to gain additional information about why clients felt these services were lacking at the DRC, especially if they were offered. Our interviews helped provide more detailed responses about some of these issues but not all, and additional items for improvement emerged from this data as well. We specifically asked clients, "How can the DRC be improved?" Their responses included DRC facility and program improvements, housing and transportation improvements,

employment and vocational training improvements, and fewer client restrictions and screenings.

<u>Facility and Program Improvements</u>
A few individuals noted that the facilities or program could be improved in various ways: better lunch options, air conditioning, longer times of operation, and having the facility be closer to their resident. A Riverside client focused on how the lunch options were not to his liking and could be better than peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. A male client in Temecula complained that the air conditioning was broken and not working properly. This made it physically uncomfortable for the client. A Latina in Temecula desired a DRC with more expansive hours. She explained: "[It would be better] I would say maybe to offer wider time ranges. Yeah, if this was like a 24-hour facility or something like that where you could actually have an opportunity to get more services ..."

A Hispanic man in Indio expressed that a DRC closer to his residence would be beneficial for him. He suggested a Palm Springs office since he would "feel [more] comfortable because my daughter is closer over there. We're like, we live over there in Palm Springs. So, basically, I'd rather have another office over there." A bi-racial Temecula client offered a similar recommendation due to gas costs: "If it was closer to the house. Yeah, because spending gas in my gas guzzler is kind of tough but I do it because it's required and because there's maybe something good that can come out of it. You just have to apply yourself to see what's going to happen."

<u>Housing and Transportation Improvements</u>
Certain clients answered this question by recommending that DRCs help them more to secure housing (also reflected in the survey responses shown in Figure 4.11), and improve transportation to receive DRC services. While some clients pointed out that DRCs helped overcome transportation barriers, a few still felt more could be done on the part of the DRC, although specific suggestions were not offered. In an example, a Temecula area man who had been attending for close to one year explained, "I know they had ways for the buses to get you to and from but some don't run all the way. So, wherever your stop is, that's your stop. I would literally have to go 2 miles to go to the bus station. It's kind of trying to find a way to the bus station and so if there was a way to get to- and from- [the bus station]." An Indio client offered a similar suggestion: [they could have] better transportation. That's really about it. That would really help because some guys can't make it."

<u>Employment and Vocational Training Improvements</u>
As reflected in our survey results, greater assistance from DRCs to obtain vocational training or secure jobs were among the most popular requests. As one mixed race man who attends the Riverside DRC commented, "They could have more things where you can be certified, maybe like a welder or a mechanic or different type of certifications. So, it gets a lot better if you have stuff like that." One white man in Temecula also requested more job training: "Maybe offering just a different variety of classes … more geared toward job training. I think that's a big thing since employment is a hard thing [to get]." Another Riverside client wanted the DRC to, "Figure out about employment services and what kind of companies would take us in."

<u>Fewer Client Restrictions and Screenings</u>
The interviews revealed another concern voiced by some DRC clients - that staff adopted postures of law enforcement and enacted too many restrictions that they considered unnecessary. Although not a predominant complaint, a few clients specifically mentioned metal detector wands, pat downs, staff uniforms, and drug tests as contributing to an excessively punitive culture at DRCs. A middle aged client at Riverside provided significant feedback emphasizing this point and discussed how these measures contributed to a stressful environment for him. He elaborated:

> What they can improve is walking in the front door and they hit you with that wand. That's not necessary. You aren't in custody. You don't need to be treated like that. [It's like] You are walking

into a jail, you know what I mean? And all that stuff just gets people upset. It gets me upset. When you walk in that door, they're behind you and search you. You're like coming into a facility. I might as well get butt naked, bend over, and cough, you know? I come in stressful as it is and then she comes at me with that wand, with that, "What do you got in that pocket?" I'm free. I'm out there you know what I mean? If they got rid of that it would make it a little better for me and put me at ease.

Also, there are people here that take their job too seriously. They can leave their bulletproof vest at home … don't need to bring it to work. Come on, there's no need for that. You don't need to act hostile towards us. People come here to learn. We don't come here to be given a hard time.

RESEARCH QUESTION | How can DRCs be improved?

FINDING | When presented with a menu of potential improvements, DRC clients who were surveyed emphasized the need for additional vocational and employment services.

When interviewed, DRC clients emphasize the need for:

1) improved facilities and locations;
2) housing and transportation support;
3) additional vocational and employment related services;
4) an environment with fewer restrictions and law enforcement posturing.

He clarified it was the initial screening portion that bothered him the most. An Indio client provided a similar critique:

> What I have to go through puts your mind in a whole different mindset. Who wants to come in and be searched? Where they start off with a cop and search you and then we'll get friendly. I don't like being searched no more. I am on Parole. I understand they have to do it but it's just there's got to be a different way cuz it makes me not want to come back.

A final example comes in the form of a complaint about drug testing at the DRC. One Riverside client recommended the DRC could "Ease on the restrictions about substance abuse. People are going to do what they do there's no reason to be down their throats about it. Cuz that just creates a distance and resistance and they just don't come in here. They end up pushing your people away [through testing].

The Effect of Day Reporting Centers on Community Transition & Self-Improvement

In this research, we attempted to assess clients' perception of their successful community transition and overall self improvements as influenced by the DRC. Based upon the interview responses, reflected in Figure 4.12, a vast majority stated enrollment in a DRC made their re-entry easier compared to traditional supervision without DRCs (31 individuals; 82%), followed by the DRC made no difference compared to only traditional supervision (4 individuals;11%), no response or other response (2 individuals; 5%), and, for one participant, harder (3%).

Re-entry Success

When asked about how DRCs specifically contributed to their re-entry success, clients identified a multitude of factors, such as obtaining basic necessities with the aid of the DRC (e.g. housing), acquiring more confidence due to socialization at the DRC, and the structure the DRC provides in their daily lives. For example, one Hispanic man in Temecula characterized his re-entry as "really successful" due to the DRC: "Everything is going good for me. We have already found a place and this is getting better as it goes. I would say all is [due to the DRC]." A white woman in her early thirties at Indio offered a similar assessment: "[my re-entry has] been pretty good because before I was homeless. I have my own place. I had my own car, but I am going to get a new one. I mean, it's gotten me this far."

Other clients directly acknowledge a boost in confidence since attending the DRC, which they consider a

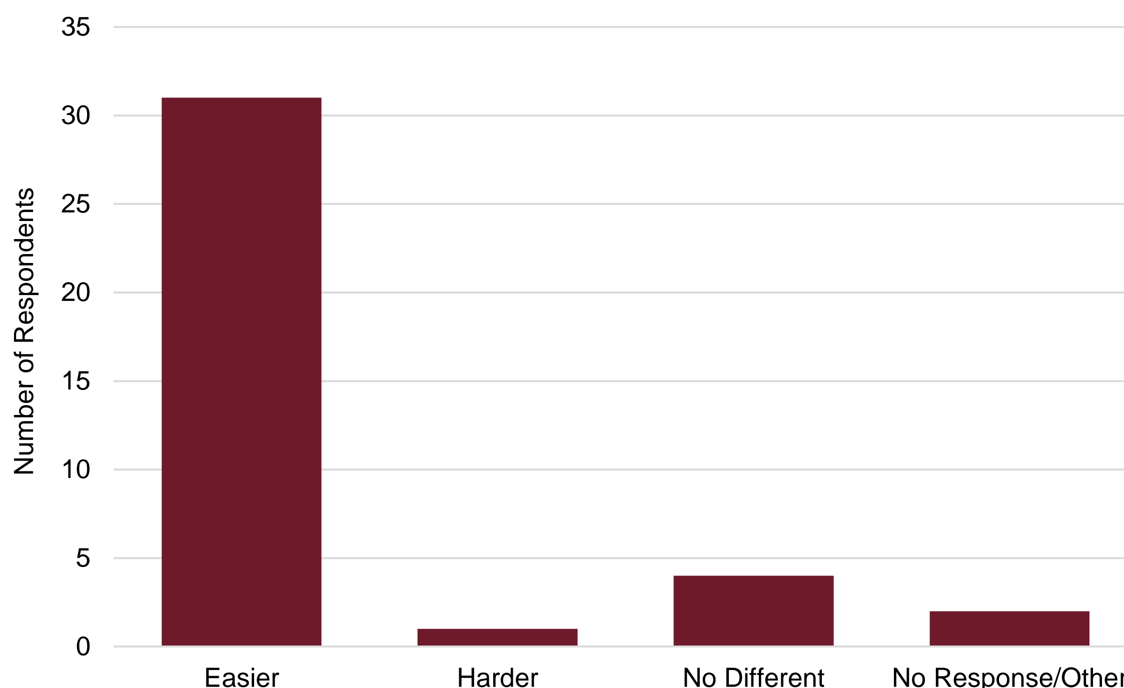

Figure 4.12. Client Perspectives: DRCs v. Formal Supervision

marker of success. When addressing his re-entry, a 60-year old Hispanic client at Indio stated: “A lot better because I used to be worse. I used to mess up too much. Now, I’ve been hearing and learning more. I didn’t like to hear nobody and didn’t even like to talk to people. Now I do, I talk more, and all that in the classes. Well, that helped me out. To talk to people because I never used to talk to people a lot.” A different Indio client also described his elevated confidence as a sign of success: “[I’ve been] pretty successful. I’ve been coming here and everything. I’ve been sharing, talking in class, and I never did that before. I open up now, I am comfortable, I am okay. I am not going to be judged.”

Certain clients identified the structure of the DRC as integral to their re-entry success. For example, a Temecula client explained, “They are very helpful because when I got out of the prison, we have a structure. So, DRC provides that structure for you. They make you feel that it’s ok to begin things again.” An Indio Hispanic man agreed: “Here everyone is respectful and there is structure.” One Hispanic client at Temecula in his mid-forties praised the structure as benefitting his community reintegration. He stated, “Really helpful because at first it seems like a bummer that I have to go to this place every week. But it was actually really good as it gives me something to do, took my mind off of everything else, and I was focused on handling myself. I think it's good for everybody because when they get out, they should have that otherwise they're just left on their own with no guidance.”

A few clients downplayed the DRCs contributions to overall re-entry success and instead emphasized any positive results were attributed to the individual’s choices and determination. A white Riverside man offered this view: “It has been good, but I would say it depends on the person. If you have to screw up you will screw up; it has nothing to do with the DRC. You need to change your surroundings. You need to change everything you do, or you are going to right back where you were.” A Temecula client, nearing age 60, likewise noted the DRC has some impact but mostly individuals drive these outcomes: “[my re-entry has been] really good.

Maybe 25% of that is due to DRC, and the rest… The person has to apply themself. If you're not going to apply yourself, you're a waste of time. That's really how it goes."

Biggest Re-entry Obstacle

We asked clients to identify any impediments to their re-entry success. Their responses included criminal background checks that thwart employment prospects, ongoing family conflicts, housing insecurity, and addiction and other health issues.

Certain individuals lamented the difficulty they faced in securing employment, largely due to their criminal histories. A Temecula client noted this challenge: "I think just having a criminal spot on my record would probably be my biggest obstacle. I have struggled with that most of my life. I mean to me it's always going to be there. So that's something that I have to deal with." A different Temecula client, in his mid thirties agreed: "Finding a job. I applied for a job at an app called Instacart where people order their groceries, even they denied me because of my background. That's the biggest obstacle I have."

Others listed negative family dynamics that generated stress and conflict, which could derail their positive reintegration trajectory. As one 39-year old Riverside client who lived with his mother remarked, "Getting along with my mom [is the biggest threat to my success]. Just back and forth back and forth arguing. But I just try to stay out of the way." In another example, an Indio Hispanic man struggled with rebuilding his relationships with his daughters, citing this as his biggest obstacle. He elaborated: "I want to get a solid relationship with my daughters. That's harsh. They're really resentful because I've been out of their life for over 20 years yet I'm trying to build a relationship. That's my hardest thing because they're really resentful. Well, two of them are already talking to me, they have their kids and everything. They're going to include me in their life, so that's one step at a time."

While some successfully secured housing with the assistance of the DRC, other clients listed housing insecurity as one of their ongoing biggest concerns. A white male client in Temecula cited this issue: "Well, the biggest challenge originally was obtaining a place to stay. You know, after that, I'm fine. The DRC did not help with that." A Hispanic client in Indio also cited this worry when discussing his re-entry: "It's been okay. I left my wife and kids. We was in an apartment, when I come out [of jail], she lost everything. She was struggling by herself, single household. So, I come home to being on the streets."

The last noted obstacle to re-entry success was health issues. One white man in his early thirties who attended Temecula DRC detailed his deteriorating health and its rippling effects on his life: "I'd have to say my disability and being epileptic. Not being able to drive. Not being able to work." Another Temecula client, a white man in his early sixties, cited both mental and physical health problems. His issues took some time to diagnose and required him to visit many different specialists, which contributed to this depression: "My biggest stumbling block was I got really depressed for a little bit. I got some medical issues going and I'm getting it all sorted out. After I come out, they say I have congestive heart failure and that's why I gained all this weight. I went to a different doctor, but he said no you don't have that. He asked me what you do for work and then he said well you're in construction, there's a chance you have mesothelioma. So, now you have to go see a pulmonary doctor. Finally, now it's getting resolved. I am not tripping on it. I'm losing weight. I'm just going to go to see the lung pulmonary guy every three months and he's going to monitor it and they can't do anything for it, but I'll deal with it." He stated that he was trying to adopt a positive attitude.

As part of health challenges, some clients cited addiction as a looming threat to their overall success. For example, one woman in Indio, asserted: "Not drinking. Staying sober. Staying off drugs. Drinking and driving is like the biggest hard one for me. I try not to do that anymore." A Riverside client in his mid fifties had a similar struggle with maintaining sobriety, but noted doing so facilitated reunification with his family: "When I get out I don't mess with nobody until I start getting bored and then I venture out. It seems like I can always find a good connection. Finally I got clean and I just stopped it. It was hard but I did it. I'm going to keep on doing it. Now I'm back in touch with my mom, back in touch with everything. Coming here makes me not

want to do drugs more but get clean more cuz it puts me back in touch with my family."

Self-Improvement

In the surveys, we instructed clients to evaluate the degree to which DRC enrollment influenced their behavior and perseverance related to self-control, which some criminologists argue is integral to prevent future re-offending. To do so, we provided three statements and asked them to select one of five responses: strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree, or not applicable. These statements and responses are shown in Figure 4.13.

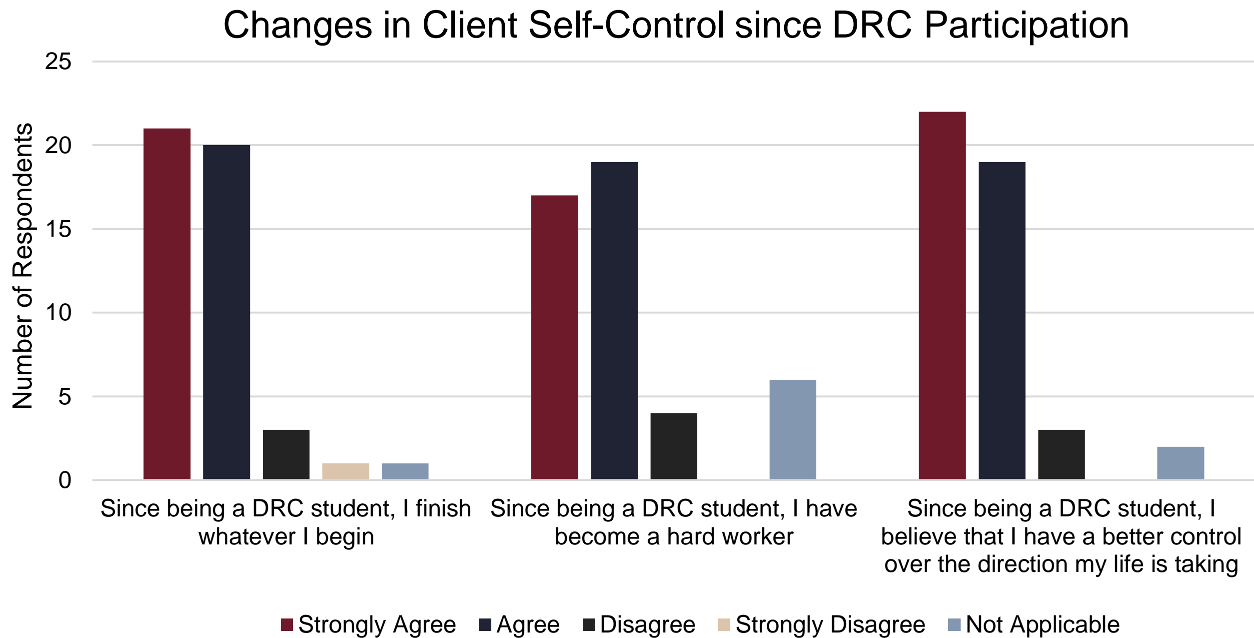

Figure 4.13. Changes in Client Behavior

RESEARCH QUESTION | Does DRC participation produce any specific skills and benefits for clients?

FINDING | The overwhelming majority of clients surveyed indicate DRCs make re-entry easier than traditional supervision. Clients also identify several areas of specific personal improvement that they credit to their DRC attendance, including:

1) increased self-confidence;
2) structure in day-to-day life
3) behavioral changes like improved self-control, work ethic, and perseverance.

Clients also identified persistent barriers, some of which could be addressed through DRCs (e.g. employment, housing, etc.).

The first statement was: "Since being a DRC student, I finish whatever I begin." Client responses were as follows: most strongly agreed (21 individuals; 46%) or agreed (20 individuals; 43%), while the remaining clients disagreed (3 individuals; 7%), strongly disagreed (1 individual; 2%), or claimed this statement was not applicable to them (1 individual; 2%).

The second statement was: "Since being a DRC student, I have become a hard worker." Client responses were as follows: most agreed (19 individuals; 42%), then strongly agreed (17 individuals; 37%), while the remaining clients either disagreed (4 individuals; 9%) or claimed this statement was not applicable (6 individuals; 13%).

The third and final statement was: "Since being a DRC student, I believe that I have a better control over the direction my life is taking." Client responses

were as follows: most strongly agreed (22 individuals; 48%) or agreed (19 individuals; 41%), while the remaining either disagreed (3 individuals; 7%) or claimed the statement was not applicable (2 individuals; 4%).

During our interviews, certain clients also specifically mentioned that the DRC enhanced their self-esteem, attitude, and confidence. For instance, one 60-year old Black man who visited the Indio DRC explained: "They pretty much stabilized me as far as about thinking negative and help me with what I can do to make myself better, just trying to help me overall." A different Indio client provided similar comments: "I just got to meet a lot of positive people and they just wanted to hear my story. They made me feel worthy. If I wouldn't of came here, I probably wouldn't be here today talking to you guys. Probably be back in jail, honestly. But, just coming here and seeing a different way of living and seeing my classmates looking up to me, like when I would speak in my classroom, then they would ask me, 'Hey man, how did you do it?' and 'How do you stay sober?' Because there's people who come here who knew me from prison and I see that they're looking up to me. They wanted something different too. So they would ask me, 'Hey, maybe I could go to a meeting with you or something." These kinds of interactions within the DRC provided affirmation for these clients and boosted their self worth.

Interpretation of Findings

Qualitative research is helpful in eliciting a deeper, more layered understanding of the outcome of interest. Here, this portion of the study was able to provide a more nuanced perspective of the DRC experience and addressed three motivating research questions regarding potential benefits and weaknesses, as well as the helpfulness of specific DRC services.

These findings may provide insight as to potential mechanisms driving the causal relationship between DRC participation and decreased recidivism, as established in the quantitative portion of this study. DRC clients cited the social support they receive—particularly from peer mentors—as being an especially noteworthy feature of their DRC experience. Specifically, this support is described as helping clients achieve their re-entry goals, providing accountability and guidance in taking care of day-to-day needs, achieving their re-entry goals, and fostering self-esteem. The importance of these themes as features of a successful DRC experience is supported by prior studies that compare the effects of program interventions that center on cultivating individual well-being versus those that focus on the individual's post-release prospects (e.g. employment services); the former is typically found to be more effective in reducing recidivism than the latter, so it is possible that Riverside County's DRCs' success in decreasing rearrests and reconvictions could be because so many of the services offered contribute to the individual's sense of self as opposed to just addressing the mechanics of everyday life. However, additional research on this is necessary to determine any causal relationship.

Irrespective of causal outcomes, clients report largely positive experiences with Riverside County's DRCs. While there are noted areas for potential improvement—like enhanced employment services, more housing services, and an environment that feels less like it is overseen by law enforcement—DRC clients appear to recognize the benefit of their attendance while in the program, with some even enjoying their participation. This is an important finding as having an offender's 'buy-in' is, unsurprisingly, linked with decreased program attrition and increased treatment acceptance and retention (Hiller et al. 2002, 1999; Simpson 2004).

SECTION V | FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS, & AREAS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Findings

This evaluation began with the three motivating research questions articulated in the Scope of Work. These questions were further clarified based on data availability and the spirit of the original questions to include:

1) Do Riverside County's DRCs reduce recidivism among AB-109 offenders when compared to those assigned to traditional supervision?
2) How do DRC clients assess these programs' strengths and weaknesses?
3) How can DRCs be improved?
4) Does DRC participation produce any specific skills and benefits for clients?

Using OLS regression and a coefficient stability approach, our evaluation determined that a PRCS offender's participation in a DRC decreases their likelihood of being arrested for a new offense by 26% and decreases their likelihood of being reconvicted for a new offense by 29%, relative to the arrest and conviction rates of PRCS offenders who were referred, but did not participate due to education or employment scheduling conflicts. We have confidence this is a causal relationship because of our calculation of the bias adjusted treatment effects. Additionally, the calculation of the social benefit based on a conservative estimate of the number of reconvictions avoided because of DRCs estimates Riverside County saw a benefit of between $337,000 and $1.98 million (in 2015 dollars) for the period covered in our analyses. Due to underreporting of incidents, the actual social benefit of DRCs is likely larger than our conservative estimate.

Interviews and surveys conducted between June 2020 and September 2021 at the Riverside, Temecula, and Indio DRCs addressed questions two, three, and four by focusing on the client's perspective of their experience. Regarding the DRCs' strengths, four key themes emerged around the importance of DRC staff in providing emotional support, support in attaining clients' goals, providing accountability that benefits their overall well-being, and guidance with day-to-day tasks, like navigating bureaucratic benefits processes. During the interviews, clients spoke especially highly of the social support they receive from peer mentors who may be more relatable than other DRC staff. When asked about DRCs' weaknesses, clients were hard pressed to volunteer negative experiences - which could accurately reflect the reality of their time at the DRC or could be due to concerns about retribution if DRC staff were to learn of their answers. A less aggressive way of asking explicitly about weaknesses is to reframe the questions to focus on potential areas of improvement. Clients provided more feedback in these sections, noting that barriers (e.g. additional DRC hours) make it difficult to participate, the need for improved facilities and locations, additional housing and transportation support, additional vocational and employment related services, and an environment with fewer restrictions and law enforcement posturing. Finally, when asked about the effect of DRC participation on their lives, clients credited DRCs with helping meet their basic needs, increasing their self-confidence, providing structure in day-to-day life that supports their well-being, and behavioral changes like improved self-control, work ethic, and perseverance.

Recommendations

<u>Address Reported Barriers to DRC Participation</u>

While the qualitative portion of the study yielded evidence of predominantly positive interactions, lack of transportation or the lack of affordable transportation was revealed as a top barrier to DRC participation by clients at each DRC site. If additional DRCs in more convenient locations are cost prohibitive, the expansion of the existing bus pass program or more targeted transportation solution (e.g. creation of a vanpool) may increase DRC participation, decrease attrition related to accessibility, or otherwise allow for greater stability in DRC participation. Housing insecurity is another barrier that was frequently raised by clients across DRC sites and some clients specifically stated the DRC did not provide them support in this area. If the Probation Department could lend their network of community-based organizations who work in the housing/re-entry space to DRCs

or cultivate new connections with housing providers, DRC clients may experience reduced housing insecurity and the stressors that accompany it that could ultimately affect their overall re-entry success.

Expand Services that Cultivate Social Support

Social support and an encouraging environment emerged as critical components of Riverside County's DRCs. In particular, clients report peer mentors as important to their overall social support, but peer-to-peer staff are not as consistently available at the DRCs as other staff positions. Prior research on the relatability of 'lived experience' supports these clients' experience and engaging formerly incarcerated individuals who are credible examples of re-entry success is known to improve re-entry outcomes (e.g. Matthews 2021; Reingle Gonzalez 2019; etc.). Hiring additional, or minimally ensuring there is one peer-to-peer mentor employed at all times, may improve DRC outcomes through increased social support and a relatable example of success.

Improve Employment Services and Vocational Training

Vocational training and employment services were the top two areas of improvement reported by DRC clients. During the interviews, clients reported persistent issues with finding a job due to their criminal history and lack of job-transferrable skillsets. Expanding vocational training opportunities through existing service providers—like Goodwill Industries and Citadel—or developing new partnerships with community colleges or other community-based organizations that can offer these trainings in-house at the DRCs could help better equip clients to be competitive applicants for quality jobs. Additionally, DRCs could attempt to partner with local employers who are able to hire the formerly incarcerated and place clients in positions while they continue to participate in DRC services. This model could also help to mitigate employers' concerns about hiring the formerly incarcerated as they would know their employees have been vetted by the DRC, that DRCs decrease recidivism, and that their employees are continuing to receive the type of services that support criminal desistance (e.g. general social support, drug treatment education, counseling, etc.) and make them better, more reliable employees.

Reevaluate the Environment

Although the majority of clients did not volunteer that their DRC experience felt overly restrictive, those who did provided detailed explanations of interactions that made them feel like they were under strict surveillance by law enforcement. Given DRCs focus on rehabilitation and staff support has emerged as a major driver of positive experience, the Riverside County Probation Department may want to audit its practices within DRCs to see if there are areas where the approach to service delivery and/or supervision could be softened to promote a more trusting, encouraging environment.

Future Research

Effect of Specific Services and Length of DRC Participation

During early discussions with the Riverside County Probation Department, it was our hope there would be sufficient data available to estimate the causal effect of each DRC service and the length of DRC participation on recidivism. An impediment to our doing so as part of this evaluation is that this data was only reliably collected for roughly 40 percent of the offenders in the total sample and there is a substantial self-selection bias, so any inferences would be very limited. If this data was collected for all participants, it might be possible to conduct a causal evaluation of both the effect of services and length of participation on recidivism, which could allow the Riverside County Probation Department to more efficiently and effectively concentrate its resources without compromising program efficacy and public safety impacts.

Effect of DRC Participation on Other Populations or Subgroups

The quantitative portion of this study focused exclusively on PRCS (realigned) offenders. While the qualitative portion focused primarily on PRCS offenders, there are some individuals in the sample who identified as being on non-AB-109 probation. As DRCs are opened to a wider range of offenders, a subsequent analysis could parse out whether the program is as beneficial for other offender populations. As well, there may be differences

in efficacy within the AB-109 sample. For example, there was substantial variation in the average level of supervision for each offender and whether there was a history of prior convictions for violent crimes. To enhance targeted service delivery, it could be helpful to disaggregate the average effect of participation.

Further, in light of the Riverside County Board of Supervisor's Resolution No. 2020-179 declaring racism and inequality a public health crisis, it could be timely to proactively explore potential disparities in outcomes and experiences across participants of different racial/ethnic backgrounds. An analysis on this topic could be designed to identify potential latent or systemic biases that may result in differential outcomes based on an offender's race/ethnicity. This could take the form of a quantitative evaluation of the effect of DRC participation—including the effect of specific services and length of participation—on recidivism or other metrics of success or an audit of client experiences focused on issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion, among other designs.

The Riverside County Probation Department's commitment to evaluating their own programs and implementing evidence-based practice is commendable. These are only a few examples of areas for future analysis that stand to inform targeted service delivery that has the potential to reduce costs without reducing results and ensure Riverside County's offender population is provided equal opportunity to rehabilitate and successfully re-enter society.

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Appendix A | Oster's (2019) Coefficient Stability Approach

Absent quasi-experimental variation, we rely on coefficient stability approach, developed in Oster (2019), to assess the importance of omitted variable bias. The proposed method hinges on movements of coefficients and values of R-squared and constructs bounds for β. More precisely, Oster (2019) shows that bias-adjusted treatment effect can be approximated by

$$\beta^* = \tilde{\beta} - \delta[\mathring{\beta} - \tilde{\beta}] * \frac{R_{\max} - \tilde{R}}{\tilde{R} - \mathring{R}} \tag{1}$$

where $\tilde{\beta}$ and $\tilde{R}$ are the coefficient estimate and value of R-squared from a regression including covariates and $\mathring{\beta}$ and $\mathring{R}$ are the coefficient estimate and value of R-squared from the uncontrolled regression. $R_{\max}$ is the R-squared from a hypothetical regression of the outcome on treatment and both observed and unobserved controls. Note that $R_{\max}$ is equal to one if the outcome can be fully explained by the treatment and full set of controls. It is immediate that $\tilde{R}$ is a lower bound on $R_{\max}$ such that $R_{\max} \in [\tilde{R}, 1]$. Finally, δ is the proportional selection term which is generally assumed to be $\delta = 1$, meaning that unobservable and observables are equally related to the treatment (Altonji et al. 2005; Oster 2019).

In this setup, one can then define bounds for β. One bound is $\tilde{\beta}$ which is the value of β when $R_{\max} = \tilde{R}$ (or $\delta = 0$). The other bound is $\beta^*(R_{\max}, \delta = 1)$ which can be obtained for different values of $R_{\max}$. Thus, we can define a bounding set as $[\tilde{\beta}, \beta^*]$. Exclusion of zero in this identified set for the treatment effect provides evidence on the existence of a true causal relationship.

In many empirical settings, it is reasonable to assume that $R_{\max}$ is bounded below one because of, say, variation resulting in the outcome from choices made after the treatment is determined. One such value of $R_{\max}$ is based on a simple parametrization $R_{\max} = \min\{\Pi * \tilde{\beta}, 1\}$, where Π is empirically estimated to be around 1.3.[1] Another conservative upper bound value for $R_{\max}$ is based on the assumption that unobservable controls can explain as much of the outcome as the observable controls, i.e., $R_{\max} = \tilde{R} + \{\tilde{R} - \mathring{R}\}$ (Bellows and Miguel 2009). It bears noting that the movement in R-squared, after the inclusion of controls, needs to be sizeable for this proposed upper bound to be informative.

[1] Oster (2019) uses a sample of randomized control trial papers to derive a cutoff value Π which would allow 90 percent of all randomized results to survive.